

# Indianapolis Classical Schools Show How Choice Can Create Diverse Schools

By [Shawnta S. Barnes](#) - January 25, 2018



In their final essay of the first semester, students in Luke Dennison's English 9 class at Riverside High School used *The Odyssey* and Edith Hamilton's *Mythology* to analyze archetypes in the texts and investigate the theme the archetype revealed. As Mr. Dennison circulated around the room offering feedback, students helped each other and held their peers accountable for

staying on task. One student rewrote her introduction multiple times to ensure she had a strong opening.

When asked to describe her school, a Riverside student shared, “The teachers are awesome! And I also love that we’re a small school with big possibilities!” This National School Choice Week, we’re featuring her school and its sister, school, Herron High School as examples of charter schools and choice focused on creating and fostering diversity.

Two high schools, but one excellent classical education is what Indianapolis Classical Schools provides through its two charter high schools authorized under Indianapolis Mayor’s Office of Education Innovation. While nearby students receive preference in admissions, the schools have made a commitment to diversity and students across the city can attend.

Herron High School founding board member Joanna Beatty Taft, who stepped down in December, led the charge to create a public, tuition-free high school that offers a world-class classical, liberal arts education that could meet the academic needs of all students, including those from diverse backgrounds. The founders hoped this school would produce college-ready students who would be prepared to lead and serve.

Herron opened its doors fall 2006 and its student body is comprised of almost 40% students of color. It has received an A rating every year since Indiana Department of Education (IDOE) moved to the A-F school rating system and it met the requirements to be deemed an IDOE Four Star School. Not only is Herron a top-rated high school in Indiana, it has been identified as a high performing school nationally by *Newsweek*, *U.S. News*, and the *Washington Post*.

Indianapolis Classical Schools is taking new steps forward in order to serve more students, especially those from diverse backgrounds. Its Riverside campus opened in August 2017, with a founding freshman class comprised of 75% students of color. The school is currently occupying a church owned by Marian University. Next year, the school will move into its newly renovated permanent location in the former Heslar Naval Armory.

Moreover, both Herron and Riverside have joined Indianapolis Public Schools (IPS) Innovation Network. This arrangement allows Indianapolis Classical School to have access to IPS' resources and allows IPS to count Herron and Riverside's performance under its school district.

Bonnie McNeely previously taught math at Herron, but moved to the Riverside campus this year as a founding staff member. She can support all students to achieve at high levels because she has been supported as a professional every step of the way, as she shared with me here:

*At Riverside High School, I was given an opportunity to be a part of building a school from the ground up, but with the support and resources offered by Herron High School, which has a proven record of success. Riverside High School has brought together a diverse group of students from a variety of economic and cultural backgrounds, many of whom were looking for a fresh start in a new school. Teachers provide opportunities for students to receive feedback in nearly every class period, maintain websites that provide academic support outside of school hours, and offer office hours before and after school for students who need one on one help. All students have a structured study hall time called a seminar with classroom teachers available to provide help. Our high expectations and high level of support combine to make my class time feel sacred to both myself and my students.*

*More personally, I feel respected as a professional. The administration maintains an open door policy; I am often asked for my thoughts and I always feel heard and respected. The focus in the building is always about what is best for our students, and all ideas are welcome. I am also given the freedom to teach my subject matter the way I think best, but there is a culture of collaboration among the staff. Teachers collaborate within content area groups as well as across content areas, sharing lesson plans, instructional ideas, and classroom management strategies. As a group, we are constantly growing as professionals.*

Indianapolis Classical Schools has provided the city of Indianapolis with two great high school campuses. Students who attend these high schools come from various public schools, private schools, parochial schools, and

homeschool. This organization strives to have a diverse student population where at least 50% of the student body is not white. From their results, it is clear they have offered a great option where students can achieve regardless of their background.

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