
Innovation Restart: Potential Partner Presentation

By Shawnta S. Barnes - January 12, 2018



Innovation Partner Presentation at Wendell Phillips School #63 on January 4, 2018

On Wednesday, January 4 at 6 p.m., Matchbook Learning presented its education model and potential plans they would like to implement at Wendell Phillips School #63 if the IPS Board of School Commissioners approves them as the restart partner. In the audience were parents, grandparents, current middle school students, community partners including Stand for Children Indiana, current Wendell Phillips staff and two heads of charter schools that will be opening in the area next school year, Robert Marshall, Vanguard Collegiate and Rick Anderson, Allegiant Prep Academy. The meeting was facilitated by community member Jackie

Garvey who helped guide the dialogue and kept notes of questions asked and answers given.

Matchbook Learning is a non-profit charter management organization founded by its Chief Executive Officer Sajan George in 2011 to turn around chronically failing schools. The management team is rounded off with Dr. Amy Swann, Chief Academic Officer and Al Motley, Chief Technology Officer. George and Swann are 2017 Innovation School Fellows through The Mind Trust and they relocated their families to Indianapolis last summer. The Matchbook team wanted to make it clear to parents why they were a good fit for Wendell Phillips even though the two schools they previously operated closed. In a handout given to parents this note was included:

In both our last two charter schools, Merit Prep (Newark, NJ) and Michigan Technical Academy, the State did not “restart” the schools under Matchbook which meant the school’s historical performance (its “F” status or bottom 5% rating) was not reset with a clean slate and so these schools closed due to the historical performance prior to Matchbook and not because of Matchbook’s double digit gains in proficiency and strong growth since takeover. This led to our relocation to Indianapolis where a true long-term restart contract could be pursued.

If granted the opportunity to restart Wendell Phillips, Dr. Swann would become the school’s principal where she would implement Matchbook’s personalized blended learning model. Under this model, students will receive whole group instruction, small group instruction, conferencing with the teachers and with peers, and learn through the Spark platform. Spark is the technology platform that will house each student’s playlist. This is a list of learning opportunities students choose to help them master content. Not only is the personalized model used for students, it is also used for teachers and staff. Dr Swann shared, “Teachers will be brought in two weeks before the school year begins for professional development and they will receive year-round coaching. Every week, teachers are observed by an administrator and every two weeks, they will have a goal setting meeting.” George chimed in and added, “the kids won’t experience personalized learning unless the adults experience personalized learning in the way they are developed. Every staff member, the janitor, the secretary will receive 1 on 1 coaching sessions.”

Below are the questions asked by attendees the responses given by Dr. Amy Swann (AS), Sajan George (SG), and IPS Innovation Officer Aleesia Johnson (AJ).

Note: Responses have been edited for clarity and organized based on topic not by the order questions were asked during the meeting.

MATCHBOOK'S PRIOR PERFORMANCE

How are previous Matchbook schools doing and are they still using your model?

AS: Some schools we contracted into have been switched from the EAA to Detroit Public Schools and they have all new administration, so we have no idea. The last schools we were in are now longer in existence...the very first school we were in, which was the first school in the city to implement a personalized learning model under us, became a model for the district. The principal we worked with got promoted in the district to become a regional superintendent in charge of personalized blended learning district-wide. Many of the concepts we talked about here, they began to implement district-wide into schools that opted in and the original school is still implementing a version of this.

ENROLLMENT

Is Wendell Phillips becoming a private school?

AS: It will be an innovation school, a public charter school. There is no tuition and open enrollment. We just have more freedom to do innovative things.

AJ: Wendell Phillips will still be part of the IPS family. We are working with the IDOE to show that our innovation schools are part of how we define IPS.

Will current Wendell Phillips students be able to attend the school?

SG: Wendell Phillips will continue to be a neighborhood school. Any student who lives within the boundary of Wendell Phillips will continue to have a seat at the school.

What will happen to current Wendell Phillips students who are enrolled, but don't live within the school's boundaries?

AJ: There is a district-wide special transfer process and policy. Let's say your childcare is closer to here than your neighborhood school, in most cases our enrollment office has said that makes sense. Then, it is approved for the child to go to this school although it is not their neighborhood school. I anticipate we would have the same system working for those situations. If they are currently here, the intent is that they can stay. We are currently evaluating the whole special transfer process for the district right now. There's a chance this process could shift some, but if it did, it would not just be shifting for Wendell Phillips, but for the district at large.

SUMMER SCHOOL

Will Matchbook provide summer school summer in 2018?

AS: It depends on when the contract ends and shifts over. We are going to need some runway time to get changes and to get staff before we can do that. Likely, summer school with us would be the next year.

SCHOOL UNIFORMS

Will the uniform change?

AS: We want to do a parent survey on that.

BUSING & SCHOOL SCHEDULE

Will the school schedule change?

AS: We will be following the IPS calendar. We will be contracting with IPS for the busing, so we will need to find out the bus times from IPS. That will drive the start and end times.

What is going on with IPS transportation?

AJ: The district has a proposal. Right now, we are on three tiers. We have some schools starting at 7:20, some at 9, and some somewhere in the middle. We are proposing moving to two tiers. Depending on how that falls out, will depend on how they will be able to decide what to do next.

Do you have the timetable for the transportation changes?

AJ: For transportation, I don't. Our transportation director gave a preliminary presentation to the board in December, so if you are interested you can go online to the board documents to look at that [board presentation](#). The board has given leadership direction on wanting the high schools to start later. That's what transportation is trying to solve for us. How can we have a later start for our high schools? That means elementary schools are going to be impacted because they are going to all have to start earlier.

When there are school closings for snow days, should parent follow IPS on the news?

AJ: Typically the partners follow our closings especially if they are using our transportation.

MIDDLE SCHOOL

Which grades will be considered middle school?

AS: Grades 7 and 8 will be considered middle school?

What will the middle school experience be like?

AS: Middle schoolers will be changing classes and it will be a bit different than the elementary. There will be a high level of rigor, high level of science engagement and labs. They will also have a time built in where they'll be following their career tracks. They will also be tracking towards what they want to be when they grow up and setting their job goals. They go out into the community and have different experiences. Eighth graders will also do some college visits.

Will students be able to set their schedules?

AS: It's going to depend on enrollment and staffing. They should be able to select which elective they want. They should at least have one selection in that.

SPECIAL EDUCATION & ENGLISH LANGUAGE LEARNERS

How will Matchbox ensure a smooth transition for special education students and English language learners?

AS: If students are in special education or if they are an ELL student, we will be contacting and reaching out to families to work on transition plans. We know a lot of these kids have become really bonded to the teachers that are here who have helped them with specific needs and we want to make sure we do the best we can in transitioning them forward.

CLASSROOM DISRUPTIONS AND INCENTIVES

What is your plan for dealing with classroom disruptions?

AS: Teachers will be coached on positive interventions. They will also be coached on trauma-informed care. We will have a social worker/counselor on staff. That's going to be the first person that is going to talk to a kid that's maybe having a meltdown or having a disruption in the classroom. Instead of when a kid is acting up going straight to an administrator, they are going to go straight to counseling to find out what the root of the problem is...Students will also learn respectful ways to earn badges which are housed in our Spark platform. (It was noted by Garvey that Wendell Phillips has partnerships with Gallahue and Midtown and Swann stated she was open to continuing that partnership.)

Will there be incentives for honor roll students?

AS: I can't tell you what they will be right now, but I have always had them in my schools.

EXTRACURRICULARS

What about sports?

I couldn't tell you what sports we should have or should add; I need you guys to help me with that. We need to survey the kids, staff, and parents to find out what do we have that we definitely want to keep and what can we expand on.

Will you keep current after-school activities?

AS: We have spoken to several community partners. We plan to keep Reclaim the Village for our boys and would like to add a program for our girls. We learned that 54 students are in Boy Scouts, so we will keep it and Girl Scouts.

NEXT STEPS

What about the current teachers?

AS: We are hoping to finalize contracts, if we are chosen, soon. We plan to be in the school and meet with teachers so they can get to know us and we can go deeper on our model to see if they do want to be part of us and if they do, we hope they will apply. It will be the teachers' choice whether they want to apply; they may want to stay with IPS.

AJ: It is changing their employment from IPS to the partner and no one wants to be forced into a new job. Teachers will have to understand this is what I will gain and this is what I will be giving up. We will have a meeting where teachers can ask these questions. They are employees of the district, so as long as they have an effective evaluation, they would be able to remain an employee of the district. They would just be interviewing to move to a different school.

What are the next steps in the restart process?

AJ: In terms of next steps, the goal will be either at the January or February board meeting to make a recommendation to the board around the selection of a partner. Once that's done, then we'll have an actual agreement the board will review and vote on and that's generally the next month. In all of those agreements, a standard has been that the partner is given a space, a physical space, in the building so that at pick up or at drop off, there's an opportunity for you to get to know them better and for them to get to know you better as well as for engagement with the current teachers and students.

Do you see the board saying no?

AJ: They have not historically said no to our recommendation.

When will parents be notified of Matchbook possibly taking over the school?

AS: Parents will be notified as soon as the board approves the recommendation.

As stated by Innovation Officer Aleesia Johnson, a partner could be approved during the next board meeting. The next school board action session will be held Thursday, January 25 from 6-7:30 p.m. at the John Morton-Finney Center for Educational Services located at 120 E. Walnut Street, Indianapolis, IN 46204.

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- [Innovation Restart: Heart to Heart](#)
- [IPS Innovation Restart](#)
- [Recommendation: Convert IPS schools Wendell Phillips and Washington Irving into Innovation Schools](#)