

IPS Innovation Restart: Heart to Heart

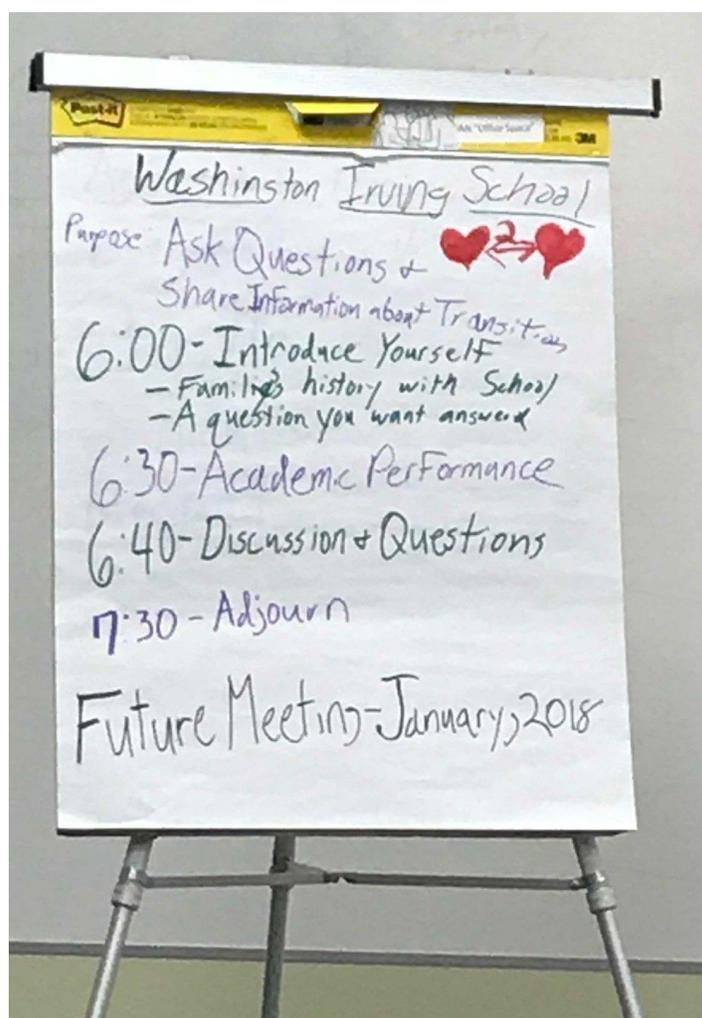
By Shawnta S. Barnes – December 19, 2017



On Wednesday, December 13, 2017, at 6 p.m. at the John H. Boner Community Center, Indianapolis Public Schools (IPS) held a Heart to Heart meeting with families from Washington Irving School 14, one of two schools recommended for innovation restart. The boundary for Washington Irving School 14 is large; it includes six homeless shelters and approximately only $\frac{1}{3}$ of students return each year. So far, IPS has restarted four schools: Riverside 44, Elder Diggs 42, Joyce Kilmer 69 and Francis Scott Key 103.

The Heart to Heart meetings is a new component of the restart process. The purpose of these meetings, which are held multiple times in order to hear from as many parents as possible, is to engage families before a school is restarted. Upon entering the meeting parents were given a survey which asked:

1. Name some things you think are great and you would like to keep at #14.
2. Name three things you would improve about #14 if you had the opportunity.
3. Feel free to share anything else.



Although IPS Innovation Officer Aleesia Johnson was present, a community representative facilitated the dialogue which was tense at times. At the beginning of the meeting, people in attendance were asked to share who they were, their connection to the school and a question they would like

answered. Twelve families were represented and several community partners and a few IPS employees were present. One family had just moved to Indianapolis from Columbus, Ohio and their children started attending the school after Thanksgiving Break. “When we moved here, I talked to families and they said it was a good school, but now it seems like you (IPS) are saying it’s the worst.”

Even though meetings were held with families and staff prior to this meeting to inform them that Washington Irving was recommended and approved to be considered for restart and why, families present at the Heart to Heart were still unclear about how Washington Irving was chosen. One community partner stated, “Based on some of the data I reviewed I feel like there are other schools that are worse that could have been chosen.” After the facilitator finished writing the questions people wanted answered on the board, Innovation Officer Alessia Johnson explained how Washington Irving was chosen for Innovation.

Washington Irving was selected to receive a school quality review. This was a new process the district put into place this past year. Previously, we only looked at letter grades from the state. What we weren’t considering was, “What were the stories behind the letter grade?” We needed to have more information than just looking at the letter grade to inform decisions. That’s why we decided to launch a school quality review. The state of Indiana Department of Education also does school quality reviews. They call it the exact same thing and it works in a very similar way. When schools aren’t performing well, a team goes into the school and observes classrooms, talks to the principal, talks to teachers, talks to students, talks to families and then makes some recommendations about what should happen next. That’s pretty much how our process works as well.

Washington Irving was selected to receive a school quality review based on two things. We looked at how all the IPS schools did on I-STEP. First, we looked at proficiency. We looked at the percentage of students that were on grade level and passed their I-STEP test. We looked at the schools who were in the bottom 25%. Then, we said of that bottom 25%, which of those schools showed low growth meaning the kids didn’t grow

as much as we expected them to grow compared to the rest of the school district. It is one thing if your kids aren't at grade level, but if you are growing them; that means they are moving and going up in the right direction. We didn't want to identify schools who were moving their kids even if their performance level was low. Any school that received a school quality review were schools who were in the bottom 50% in terms of how much they grew their students year over year on I-STEP. Performance was the first bar, the bottom 25%. Then of that bottom 25%, we looked at who had the lowest half in terms of student growth. There were seven schools who met that criteria and Washington Irving was one of them.

We identified those schools last spring. We shared that with our board. We sent out letters telling you about the school quality review. Principal Hastings talked about it in her state of the school. Those things happened and then we conducted a SQR in September. When we looked at the scores and did our school quality review, we came back together as a district internal team which included people from special education, curriculum and instruction, the school supervisor, myself, people who do community engagement and our literacy coach. We all looked at the data: attendance, discipline, teacher effectiveness, I-STEP, conversations we had, classroom observations and ultimately made a recommendation to our district leadership team around restarting the school. Our district leadership team reviewed our recommendation and approved us taking our recommendation to the Board of Commissioners which we did in November. Last month, I presented to our IPS Board of Commissioners and I walked them through what I just walked you through and I made the recommendation and they gave us the ability to continue to move forward in this process with that recommendation. That's how we got to where we are tonight.

After bringing attendees up to speed about how Washington Irving was chosen for restart, Johnson answered questions written on the board, but started with this:

There will be some concrete questions that I won't be able to answer so I just want to name that right now. We haven't gotten to who the

organization will be who will run the school. We are in this gray space right now. We know something is coming, but we don't yet have a concrete person to stand in front of us to answer exact questions about how they are going to operate.

Below are the questions that were asked and a summary of Johnson's responses:

Q: What will happen with the teachers?

A: Teachers are employed by the school district. They can apply to work at school 14 under the new operator, but their employment would move from IPS to the operator. Historically, most teachers have not chosen that option.

Q: Will the boundaries change? Will the proposed changes displace students currently at the school?

A: The school boundaries will not change unless IPS redraws boundaries for the entire school district.

Q: Will there be an onsite nurse?

A: We understand there are needs that have to be met of our current students. This is something the chosen operator would agree to or they wouldn't move forward in the process.

Q: Why can't IPS innovate within? Why do outside partners have to come in to make this change? Can't you replicate a successful program already happening in IPS?

A: To replicate a program in IPS, it takes a long time. We would have to move teachers from that program to help start the program in the school and then we would have to find a leader who could lead the program. At this time, this option seems unlikely.

Q: Do the proposed changes mean this is a bad school?

A: The proposed changes means we want the outcomes for students to improve.

Q: How will the transition affect current community partnerships?

A: Historically community partnerships have remained, but the operator will reach out to families to ensure they still would like to continue the partnerships.

Q: What does IPS stand to gain by making school 14 innovation?

A: Better outcomes for children is what IPS stands to gain.

The following questions could not be answered. Johnson stated these were questions the operator could answer when chosen.

- My kids are having a hard time now, how will the changes affect them?
- How are the special circumstances of school 14 children taken into consideration during this transition?
- What will be done with the students who have behavior problems?
- What will the after-school programming look like?
- What will happen to my son's friends who are still at the school?
- What will happen to the lunch buddy program?
- What guarantee can the partner offer about improving the academics?

There will be another Heart to Heart meeting for Washington Irving families scheduled the week when students return from winter break. Once this information is available this piece will be updated. Following the next Heart to Heart meeting, the operator will have an opportunity to present its education model to Washington Irving families and answer questions.

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