

John Marshall Closure Community Meeting: Where Were They?

By Shawnta S. Barnes – July 21, 2017



On Thursday, July 21st, I had to attend a day-long professional development on the west side of Indianapolis that ended at 4:30 p.m. When it ended, I drove to the northwest side of Indianapolis to pick up my sons from summer camp. Then, I drove clear across the city to the northeast side to attend the community meeting where people could give public comment about the recommendation to close John Marshall Community High School at the end of the 2017-18 school year. If

this recommendation is approved John Marshall will close as a middle school since it is being converted into one during the 2017-18 school year.

Due to rush hour traffic, my sons and I arrived late. We walked up to the door and were greeted by two gentlemen. "Sorry, but the meeting is over." I looked down at my watch and it was 5:40 p.m. The meeting began at 5:30 p.m. They shared there couldn't have been more than 15 people at the meeting. I later read in *Chalkbeat Indiana*, that only one person spoke even after the board president Mary Ann Sullivan opened up the floor to anyone in the audience. On Tuesday, I attended the meeting at Broad Ripple. It took an hour to get through the comments of people who had signed up and the board president allowed people who did not sign up to give comments for the remaining 30 minutes. Why did one school have almost 90 minutes of public comment and another barely had a few minutes? A lady who arrived shortly after I did provided a possible answer. When she was told as I was the meeting was over and the board decided to begin their action session early she said, "I knew nobody was showing up. They're not going to change their minds; the decision has been made."

Since I had driven all the way across town, I decided I might as well not waste the trip. I spoke to the two gentlemen that greeted me for about 40 minutes as my children ran around in the grass. The one gentleman had a sign-up sheet for people to receive information from The Concerned Clergy of Indianapolis about their views of IPS' plans for the future. The other gentleman was an IPS teacher and he had lots to say.

The IPS teacher told me he did not speak tonight because he had spoken publicly at the meeting held at Glendale Library before the closures were announced. He said at that meeting he raised concerns about teachers not being part of the taskforce that helped IPS come to its decision. He also told me he has been displaced three times during his employment at IPS including when the over Thomas Carr Howe Community High School, which is now operated by Charter Schools USA. He shared a few concerns with me based on his experiences in the district and his understanding of the district's plan:

1. **What is the transition plan for staff?** He had been displaced many times and shared the district's poor communication led to talented teachers exiting the district and seeking a employment elsewhere where there was more stability.

2. **What about the 2017-18 9th graders?** He believed 9th graders at schools that have been recommended to not be high schools during the 2018-19 school year should have been given the option to switch schools for the upcoming school year so they could have a consistent high school experience for four years.

Although, many of the speakers at the Broad Ripple meeting shared sentimental thoughts about the wonderful experiences they had at the school, not one person shared their positive experiences at the John Marshall meeting. No, sentimental statements will not sway the board, but it is important for people to have the opportunity, on record, to express what their school meant to them. I wonder why not one person came to share what John Marshall meant. Do those positive stories not exist or did people believe as the lady I encountered that it did not matter because the decision won't be changed?

If you would like to voice your opinions about the recommendation to convert to two IPS high schools into middle schools, you will have the opportunity next month.

Arlington Community High School

4825 N. Arlington Avenue

Indianapolis, IN 46226

Tuesday, August 29, 2017 at 5:30 PM

Northwest Community High School

5525 W. 34th Street

Indianapolis, IN 46224

Thursday, August 31, 2017 at 5:30 PM