
Legislation and Funding of Innovation Schools

By Shawnta S. Barnes – March 6, 2017



Indiana legislators approved a law in 2014 that allowed school districts to create innovation network schools. On Thursday, February 16th from 5:30-7:00 p.m. The Mind Trust in collaboration with the UNCF held a community discussion about legislation and funding of innovation network schools at Cold Spring School who converted to innovation status this school year. Panelists included: Alessia Johnson, IPS Innovation Officer; Carrie Scott, Cold Spring School Principal; Kameelah Shaheed-Diallo, The Mind Trust Sr. VP of Strategy and Community

Engagement and Ahmed Young, City of Indianapolis Director of the Office of Education Innovation.

Panelists shared their perspective on innovation network schools and audience members had the opportunity to ask follow up questions. Some stakeholders in the audience seemed to be confused about what an innovation school was and the different types of innovation network schools.

IPS Innovation Officer Alessia Johnson clarified the four different types of innovation schools.

- An existing district school like Cold Spring can convert to innovation. The school has to present a plan to the district. Once approved, the school is allowed to convert to innovation status. When an existing district school converts, it becomes a nonprofit 501(c)(3).
- The district could also choose to restart an existing chronically underperforming school. Johnson stated, "Schools underperforming for three years or more are eligible for innovation restart." Teachers in a restarted school are displaced and have to reapply for their jobs if they would like to continue at the school under the new leadership.
- Another option is for a school to partner with a charter organization.
- The last option is to create a new school that does not exist.

Currently, there are eight innovation network schools operating in IPS this school year with more joining the portfolio next school year.

Ahmed Young shared, "There are 51,000 kids attending 41 charter schools in Indianapolis." He also explained that the money follows the child. The amount the state would pay for a child to attend his or her boundary school would follow him or her if the child's parent changed enrollment to a charter school. The downside, Young pointed out, for charters is they do not receive property taxes like traditional schools to help pay for facilities and capital expenses. Alessia Johnson explained the district is moving to student based allocations. Instead of being told what positions a school could have by the district, schools receive a pot of money and then determine how they would staff their buildings. When a school becomes innovation, the money goes from the state to the district and then directly to the innovation school. Becoming an innovation school within IPS allows the school to

contract district resources such as transportation or food service instead of trying to figure it out on their own in a typical public charter school.

Carrie Scott, Cold Spring School Principal, shared she decided to convert to innovation status because her staff supported the change and she wanted the flexibility to create her school's curriculum. Her school serves 312 students and has an environmental studies focus. Right now, Cold Spring is working towards becoming an IDOE STEM certified school. Ms. Scott said becoming innovation is not easy. There is heightened accountability because she is not only accountable to IPS but also to the board of her school. If an innovation school also has a charter, it is also accountable to the charter organization and to the mayor's office.

This school year is the first school year of the innovation network schools in operation. A few stakeholders in the audience were concerned with how quickly innovation schools seemed to be expanding in IPS. One audience member challenged Ms. Johnson about innovation schools taking another slice of the state's already strained education pot of money. Ms. Johnson asserted the pot could be bigger.

In theory, giving educators the freedom and flexibility to make the best decisions for their students sounds like a good idea. Now, we have to wait patiently for the results to see if the innovation schools are working.

The Mind Trust and UNCF is holding another event, "School Finance: Where does the money come from? Where does it go? – A Conversation with Education Leaders" on March 8th from 5:30-7:00 p.m. at Ivy Tech Culinary Center.

The panel will include:

- Melissa Ambre

Director, Office of School Finance, IN Department of Education

- Emil Ekiyor

Sr. Director of Community Outreach, Providence Cristo Rey

- Kelli Marshall

Chief Executive Officer, Tindley Accelerated Schools

- Weston Young

Chief Financial Manager, Indianapolis Public Schools

Click [here](#) to RSVP.