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## Let's Not Rush This High School Closure Thing

By Shawnta S. Barnes – April 28, 2017



At Glendale Library on Wednesday, April 27, 2017, Indianapolis Public Schools (IPS) held the first of four scheduled meetings to engage the community and stakeholders in conversation about closing three high schools at the end of the 2017-18 school year. Currently, there are seven high schools in IPS: Arlington Community High School, Arsenal Technical High School, Broad Ripple Magnet High School for the Arts and Humanities, Crispus Attucks Medical Magnet High School, George Washington Community High School, Northwest Community High School

and, Shortridge High School an International Baccalaureate World School. Two other high schools: Emmerich Manual High School and Thomas Carr Howe Community High School, currently operated by Charter Schools USA, are not being considered for closure and John Marshall Community High School will be converted into a middle school fall 2017.

After Superintendent Dr. Ferebee welcomed attendees which included: parents, grandparents, high school alumni, current high school students, former and current IPS employees, members of various organizations and community groups, IPS school board, and various media outlets, IPS Operations Officer David Rosenberg briefly explained the IPS Facilities Utilization Taskforce Report that details why the task force has recommended closing three high schools. He stated resources were being stretched thin across schools and many high schools are projected to enroll a small fraction of its capacity. Rosenberg also shared families are leaving center township once their children reach school age and many students who begin their schooling in IPS do not go on to attend high school in the district. The district will also save \$4 million per year once the schools close.

	Projected 2017-18 Enrollment	Capacity
Arlington	690	2,175
Arsenal Tech	1,808	3,000
Broad Ripple	666	2,400
Crispus Attucks	699	1,375
George Washington	403	1,900
Northwest	739	2,125
Shortridge <input type="checkbox"/>	347	1,475
TOTAL	5,352	14,450

Next, attendees were divided into groups. Each group was provided with one copy of the taskforce report, questions to discuss, and paddles with topics. When a group member held up a paddle such as academics, a district representative who works directly in that area would come to the group to answer questions. Taskforce members, IPS school board members, IPS district

administration, and Dr. Ferebee circulated the room to listen and respond to questions and concerns.

After the break-out conversations, one representative from each group shared key concerns and questions for the district.

Some questions shared were:

- Let's not rush this thing! Why is the district moving so fast to close schools? You're going to decide in only a few months which schools will be closed.
- Where will this money go from the closed schools?
- Five years from now, where does that money go? What does that school look like after money is invested?
- Why are parents taking their children out of the district once they become school age or before they enter high school?
- Will the district consider the historical and cultural factors of each school before making the decision?
- If the building closes, does the program at the building end?
- You suggest schools are being closed to make the remaining high schools equitable. If that's the case, why is race not addressed in the taskforce report?
- What did you learn from the state takeover of schools in 2011 in regards to maintaining the school and supporting the staff until the transition happens?
- You've closed schools before and then reopened them. Will we be here ten years from now reopening these schools you want to close?
- Were teachers included on the taskforce?

Some comments shared:

- This is a new form of Jim Crow. You're just trading in our schools for charter schools.
- When schools close, students don't necessarily attend the new school; many just drop out.
- Move the district's administration offices to one of the high schools you plan to close.

- You need to bring back an alternate high school. Maybe it can be housed in the same building, as it was suggested earlier, the administration offices could be moved to.
- I think it would be sad if they closed our high school. It's the only high school (Crispus Attucks) with a museum in it.
- We think the decision has already been made and you are just using these meetings just to get our buy-in.

Dr. Ferebee addressed a few concerns after feedback was shared. Many attendees were concerned about programs ending if the district closed the school where the program is housed. "If a building were to close, the program would move to another location." Many attendees also seemed to have a lack of faith in the district's decision making; they felt the community meeting was just a show and believed the district had already decided which schools it is going to close especially since some schools have historical significance. Dr. Ferebee reemphasized, a statement he previously made, "No decisions have been made at this time." Which was immediately followed by a man in the back of the crowd saying, "We don't believe you."

At the heart of this story are the students. Students who are currently freshmen and sophomores will be impacted by this decision. I had the opportunity to speak to two young ladies from Broad Ripple High School who attended the meeting.



“I don’t know how to feel right now. I don’t want my school to close. What they are doing – well it’s causing us to lose hope. Teachers are giving up. They think our school will close and they are giving up on us and going somewhere else. They need to do more for the kids who want to be there. The stuff they used to do like they took us out around Christmas – that’s what they should do to motivate us. Kids are already saying they are going to drop out. We’re just losing hope.”  
“I’m a senior this year, but I don’t want my school to close. They need to do something about the bad kids at the school. Those kids make it tough for everyone.”

Students who are currently juniors might not have the best senior year next year if teachers leave over this summer or during the school year once the district announces its final decision.

Although it is not clear which high schools will close, it is clear, by the size of the crowd, that people are invested and interested in the future of IPS. IPS has a tough choice ahead and many stakeholders concerns to address.

The next three meetings are:

May 1, 2017	6:00 p.m.	<b>Ivy Tech Culinary Center</b> 2820 N. Meridian Street Indianapolis, IN 46208
May 11, 2017	6:00 p.m.	<b>Zion Hope Baptist Church</b> 5950 E 46th St. Indianapolis, IN 46226
May 15, 2017	6:00 p.m.	<b>Haughville Library</b> 2121 W. Michigan St. Indianapolis, IN 46222

If you cannot attend these meetings, IPS has provided a [link](#) on its website where you can submit feedback.