

## Principal of Arsenal Tech Removed

By Shawnta S. Barnes – September 14, 2017



“Have you heard?” Quite a few conversations and text messages I received yesterday began with those three words. After six weeks into the school year, Julie Bakehorn is no longer the principal of Arsenal Technical High School in Indianapolis Public Schools. According to *Chalkbeat Indiana*, Ms. Bakehorn is now a, “principal on assignment.” Lloyd Bryant who was previously the director of principal development for IPS will now lead the school as interim principal.

What happens to a school’s climate when you remove a fierce leader capable of turning failing schools around from their leadership role? According to some teachers in IPS, not only are they disappointed but they simply don’t know what’s next for Arsenal Tech or potentially their school. Many are asking, “What does principal on assignment even mean? Is the district just making up roles now?”

Ms. Bakehorn is known around IPS as someone who was able to get the job done. I first heard her speak during the Mind Trust's Educational Bus Tour which highlights excellent schools in Indianapolis. At the time, Ms. Bakehorn was the principal of Brookside Elementary School #54, a school I attended in first grade. She was a focus point on this tour because the school's grade went from F to A under her leadership. After she improved Brookside, she was named the principal of Arsenal Tech. In 2016, she was one of the recipients of the Hubbard Life-Changing Educator Award. Why has an educator with a track record of success been removed from the helm of her school?

The timing also seems odd. Next week, IPS Board of School Commissioners will address and vote on the plan to close two high schools and convert two high schools into middle schools. As a person who attended multiple meetings, there were people who shared publicly or with me privately, they did not understand the district's decisions. This sudden change will probably join the list.

Another time I heard Ms. Bakehorn speak was when she addressed my educational leadership cohort at Marian University. What she said then applies today more than ever. She said, "Don't think it isn't political." She wanted us to know as potential future administrators, you should not ignore the political climate of education and that you can get caught in the crossfire. Is that what this is? Was she caught in the crossfire? Because the district has released very little details, we won't know.

I wonder how will this change affect the teachers and students at Arsenal Tech? At one of the high school closure community meetings, I spoke to a current Arsenal Tech teacher who shared how much Ms. Bakehorn supports the school staff and how stress was removed because she allotted time for teachers to plan lessons and activities together. I also wonder how does this make current IPS administrators or educators who are potentially considering applying to the district for an administrative position feel? Six weeks in and the district could remove you no matter how talented you are. Who would sign up for that when anything can happen?

What is clear is changes are coming to IPS. What is not clear is what the long term effects will be.