

# School Choice Week: Stop Shifting the Focus from Great Schools for All

By [Shawnta S. Barnes](#) - January 26, 2018



As I think about School Choice Week, I am often reminded of the *issues* that shift us from our focus of every child receiving a great education. A few weeks ago, social media was all abuzz over *The 74* article, "Are Charter schools a Cause of – or a Solution to – Segregation?" I found these lines in the article interesting, "It is clear that many charter schools are highly segregated. But so are many traditional public schools. And charters are predominantly located in urban areas where school makeups mirror high degrees of housing segregation." Schools, whether they are traditional public or public charter, are segregated because their communities are and many parents would like their children to attend a school near their home.

I wonder if the same people who are complaining about charters schools being predominantly one race were complaining about this *issue* when the traditional public schools the students left had the same demographics. The article goes on to highlight, "National research has also found that the desegregation efforts of the 60s, 70s, and 80s — many brought about by court order — led to long-term benefits for African Americans in the form of greater income, better health outcomes, and lower incarceration rates." What wasn't mentioned is what happens when desegregation orders and busing ends; the pseudo-integration fades away and the schools in the segregated communities many times become the haves and the have-nots.

My husband and I were part of desegregation busing in Indianapolis. We both lived within the boundaries of Indianapolis Public Schools and a couple streets in our neighborhood were bused out to the MSD of Lawrence Township. Yes, we received a great education in Lawrence Township and are proud alumni, but our communities and neighborhood schools were destroyed in the process. When we rode the bus out of IPS into Lawrence Township, we would ride past cornfields but over time, the cornfields turned into subdivisions with a low enough cost for people in our neighborhood to move out of IPS into the boundaries of Lawrence Township. Some of the families with the means to leave did, leaving behind many families who were struggling. Our parents, who could afford to leave, chose not to move and still live in their same homes today. When so many stable families leave the community, the community begins to change and fall apart.

The high school I should have attended was Arlington if I wasn't bused out. This school has been failing for years. The state eventually took it over and now it has returned to IPS, but the status of the school never changed from failing and I believe the desegregation busing played a part. It wasn't just that some of the families who were bused out moved out of our neighbor; some families that weren't *lucky* enough to have their children bused out moved into Lawrence Township in hopes of receiving a better education for their children.

The other downside to forced integration, which doesn't change the fact that students are returning to their segregated homes each day, is the trauma many of us endured who were bused out.

- Do you know what is it like to be the black kids who rode into school on those buses?
- How about, what it is like to invite your white friends over to your house and they make tons of excuses about why they can't come?
- The worse – how do you cope when your white friend agrees to let you come to her home but says, “I know we hug at school, but please don't hug me in front of my family.”

When my husband and I speak to other friends who were bused out, some of them have similar stories.

- Was this education worth the trauma and racism we faced?
- Are integrated schools really better?
- Are people suggesting that an all black school or an all latino school can't perform at the same rates as an integrated school?

The history of Crispus Attucks High School, the school where I currently work, holds the answer. My grandmother attended this school when it was segregated. White people in Indianapolis did not want black students to attend school with their children, so they built the black students their own school. Their teachers were college professors and the students in this all-black school performed well.

So, stop it. Segregation is NOT the issue; it is just a distraction to push other agendas. Please stop trying to find different ways to discount charter schools

and tear down families who choose other options such as taking a voucher to attend a private school, leaving their neighborhood school for a public charter or doing what families in my neighborhood did – buying or renting cheap property in another district.

The answer is simple: fix the schools they are leaving. When you are ready to have that conversation, I will be here willing to engage and work towards a solution.