

The Unintended Consequences of Opportunity Culture

By Shawnta S. Barnes – February 22, 2017



Photo credit: Chalkbeat

Last school year IPS decided to bring to the district a new model called opportunity culture based on a program started in North Carolina. Six IPS schools: Lew Wallace School #107, Louis B. Russell Jr. School #48, Wendell Phillips School #63, William Penn School #49, George Washington High School and Northwest High School

spent last school year designing how opportunity culture would be implemented in their schools this year.

Teachers chosen to be part of opportunity culture have a track record of student success. These educators are paid \$6,800-\$18,300 on top of their base salary depending on the opportunity culture model designed and implemented in their school. The most popular model is the multi-classroom leader (MCL). MCLs coach, co-teach, lead professional learning communities, plan lessons, analyze data and work with students. Schools must use funds within their budget for the additional pay MCLs receive. As noted in the Chalkbeat Indiana article, "Indianapolis is experimenting with a new kind of teacher – and it's transforming this school" one school chose to eliminate vacant positions which included a media specialist, gym teacher, and music teacher to be able to support this model.

The additional pay has also caused conflict. A teacher, who works in a school who has implemented opportunity culture this school year shared, "Our MCLs make more money than our assistant principal and some staff do not think this is right." Another teacher in a different opportunity culture school said, "There are many roles where people don't have their own classroom in the district, but the role support students. A colleague in one of these roles looked up my salary and told me exactly how much more I was making (in comparison to this colleague). I know this is public information, but it seemed to be a real issue for this person."

Next school year the opportunity culture model will grow from six schools to sixteen. The expansion also has another unintended consequence – traditional school coaches are being displaced. Displaced coaches can choose to take on a different role in the district including returning to the classroom or applying for an opportunity culture position, but some are choosing to leave the district.

I am one of those displaced coaches. My school, Wendell Phillips School #63 implemented opportunity culture this school year. Last school year I was the K-6 literacy coach and this school year I am the K-2 literacy coach. We have a MCL who coaches literacy and math for 3rd and 4th grade and teaches a reading intervention group and another MCL who teaches 6th grade English/language arts and coaches 5th and 6th-grade literacy and math. Next year, my school is implementing the opportunity culture position for all grades and this is why I am being displaced. Based on the model my school is using where MCLs coach two subjects,

I cannot apply for an opportunity culture position in my school because I do not currently have an elementary teaching license. I have a P-12 reading license which allowed me to be the literacy coach, but I could apply for an opportunity culture position in a secondary school since I also have a 5-12 English/language arts license. I could also pursue an English a new language position or a media specialist position since I also hold licenses in those areas or I could return to the classroom. At this point in time, I have not decided what my next step will be, but I believe I will find the right position.

Although I will miss the teachers and students I served at my school, I believe opportunity culture is working because our students are improving academically, but I still have a few questions. Should MCLs make more money than administrators? Should students special area classes be eliminated? Should traditional coaching roles be a thing of the past? I do not have the answers, but I cannot overlook that the most important thing – the reason I do this work is to ensure students are successful academically. For the sake of our students and our community, I hope this model brings about desired results for IPS and they are not searching for a new program a few years down the road.