



Indiana Association of School Principals 2019 Awards are #SoWhite

By Educator Barnes – November 29, 2019

Sunday, November 24, 2019 was the Indiana Association of School Principals' Annual Principal of the Year Banquet. Social media was buzzing with pictures of the event. What caught my attention were three images. There were three poster boards displaying the winners for elementary, middle, and high school principals for 2019...and every winner appeared to be white.

IASP 2019 Principal of the Year Winners

Note: No candidates were listed for district 4.

District 1

Lisa Stoelb, Lake Prairie Elementary School

Rebecca Pavich, Lowell Middle School

Dr. Chip Pettit, Duneland School Corporation

District 2

Christopher Alber, Riley Elementary School

Susan Mishler, Wawasee Middle School

Alissa Schnick, Westville Middle/High School

District 3

Kim Clark, Butler Elementary School

Tim Wilson, Norwell Middle School

Travis Heavin, Angola High School

District 5

Eric Schill, Pendleton Elementary School

Brett Davis, Northwestern Middle School

Thomas Harmas, Carmel High School

District 6

Jacob White, Eastwood Elementary School

Keith Burke, Marion High School

District 7

Brook Wessel-Burke, Acton Elementary School

Steven Samuel, Ben Davis Ninth Grade Center

District 8

Jennifer Nickel, Hoosier Prairie Elementary School

Patrick Cooney, Plainfield Schools

Jason Chew, North Putnam High School

District 9

Krista Nelson, Center Grove Elementary School

Scott Johnson, Center Grove Middle School North

Kevin Rockey, Edinburgh Community High School

District 10

Amy Linkel, South Ripley Elementary School

Destiny Rutzel, South Ripley Jr. High School

Curtis Chase, Southwestern Jr./Sr. High School

District 11

Ashlee Bruggenschmidt, Sharon Elementary School

Lacey Wade, Loogootee Elementary School

Stephen Combs, Vincennes Lincoln High School

District 12

Mindy Dablow, Clarksville Elementary School

Amber King, East Washington Middle School

Richard Manns, Scottsburg High School

These images immediately took me back to 2016 and the [#OscarsSoWhite](#) controversy where actors of color pointed out the lack of diversity in award recipients. It does not matter the profession, it seems that black people are always fighting to be seen and heard.

I shared the image of the high school winners poster board across my social media accounts with the caption, "I find this image frustrating." Below are some of the responses.

"Not one of us, so the message is clear."

"It's so...white. and male."

"Me too!!! It's frustrating on so many levels. If no one can guess what they are then that's even more frustrating!!"

This is not to say that IASP has never recognized a black principal. The organization has. Just like black actors were angry in 2016, black educators have the right to be angry and frustrated about this in 2019.

Any administrator, teacher, or parent can nominate an administrator. According to the IASP [website](#), the nominee must be a member of IASP for at least one year prior to the nomination, served as a principal for three years, hold a valid administrator's license, and does not plan to retire at the end of the year. Of course, there are some desired characteristics listed such as evidence of community involvement, implementation of successful school programs, and positive student and staff morale. All this seems simple enough, but we know the reality. People tend to nominate who is in their circle.

I have been asked to conduct professional developments about being culturally responsive. During my last session, this past summer, I had participants label who is in their circle. What participants discovered is most of the people close to them look like them. This is why there is no surprise when a school gets a black principal that all of a sudden there tends to be an increase in black educators at that particular school. I'm not saying black people only hire black educators solely because they are black, but I am saying that talented black educators tend to surround themselves with other talented black educators. So, maybe the nominators don't have black excellence in their circle.

What about membership? I'm guessing with an administrator's salary that any administrator, regardless of race, could afford the membership dues. Are black educators choosing not to participate in this organization? If so, why? Is the percentage of the black award recipients in the past the same percentage as the black IASP educator membership? You can't win the award even if you are nominated without being a member for at least a year.

Honestly, I am a school administrator right now. I don't fall into the category of a principal or assistant principal, but as an academic dean (who does have an active administrator's license despite working in a public charter school), I do supervise and evaluate teachers like a principal or assistant principal. It never even crossed my mind to join this organization. Maybe I should...but after writing this piece, will I even be welcomed?

Then, of course, I had this response to my post on one of my social media accounts:

I love y'all but don't be too frustrated considering... Instead, let's focus on supporting one another and not allow our Caucasian brethren, with the financial capital and less experience, control the narrative around our blackness, worth, and effectiveness.

I understand the heart of this response, but systems of power that are rooted in white supremacy and white privilege continue when people allow them to function unchecked. I refuse not to express my frustrations or views about problematic issues in education. Change won't happen through silence.

This response also reminded me of the sentiments of actress, writer, director, and producer Issa Rae when she said at the 2017 Emmys, "I'm rooting for everybody black." That is what most black educators try to do; we attempt to push each other forward. We share advice and help with networking.

I also appreciate other efforts that have been made to uplift black educators such as the African-Americans Excellence in Education Awards which held its third ceremony this year. However, I only heard about this awards program this year because I was the recipient of two recognitions. I agree we do have to uplift each other, but unfortunately, a few black educators in Indy close the door behind themselves as they climb the ladder or decide they need to compete as if there is not enough room for all of us. A few people know this already, but I attended that awards program with another recipient who questioned my ability to be a leader and who would later go on to take action to thwart potential opportunities for me...it didn't work; my reputation as an educator speaks for itself and cannot be diminished by one person. It is hard enough being black without other black people trying to hold you back.

This issue is multi-facet. IASP did provide suggested criteria for recipients, but is that criteria enough? I wonder about Chris Stewart's call to action, "How are the children?" Every time I hear this brother ask this question, I say to myself, "How are the black children?" Not only am I a black educator, but I am also a black mom. A school having an A rating or the principal receiving accolades means nothing to me if the black children are not okay.

I decided to look at I-STEP+ scores for the elementary and middle school recipients and I-STEP+ grade 10 scores for the high schools for the recipients. As an educator, I understand this test is only one of many ways to show how a school is doing, but these standardized tests do show data important to black parents. As a black parent, I want to know how large the achievement gap is between black and white students.

For example, if you look at Carmel High School's data, 70.7% of white students passed I-STEP, but only 45.9% of black students passed, a gap of 24.8% At Washington Middle School, 39.7% of white students passed I-STEP+ and only 19.8% of black students passed, a gap of 19.9.

All the award recipients were not principals. Two were superintendents, Dr. Chip Pettit, Superintendent of Duneland School Corporation, and Patrick Cooney, Assistant Superintendent of Student Learning of Plainfield Community School Corporation. In Duneland School Corporation, 63.3% of white students passed and only 40.9% of black students passed, a gap of 22.4%. In Plainfield Community School Corporation, 79.3% of white students passed, and 55.4% of black passed, a gap of 23.9%.

As you get farther away from the capital city, Indiana is less diverse in some places. When schools do not have enough black students enrolled, for privacy purposes, the data is suppressed from public access. A couple of schools, such as Putnam High listed no black

children taking I-STEP+. Also important to note about Putnam High School is 76.5% of students failed the assessment. The rest of the schools had suppressed data for black children. Ben Davis Ninth Grade Center is the only school with no data since 9th-grade students did not take that assessment. Although many award recipients' data was publically suppressed for black students, they know how black children are doing. They can answer if those children are alright.

I don't have immediate answers. I'm not saying that any of the recipients should lose their awards, or they aren't talented educators making a difference. However, research has shown the impact black educators have not only on black children but on all children. Too many times, we are brought in to handle difficult students when white educators can't get the job done. It's not just about discipline. I'll never forget when one of my fellow colleagues, who worked with mostly white students in the high ability program, told me there was no way she could get results working with the students I had in my classes.

Sharing that photo generated conversation online and offline. Many educators have reached out to me to discuss this situation further. I'm still processing this all and will follow up with another piece once I have had an opportunity to sit down with all the educators who have reached out to me for a meeting or conversation.

I didn't become an educator for the income or the awards, but if I'm busting my chops and getting results, it would be nice to believe I actually have a real shot at being recognized by my peers.