EVERY CHILD, EVERY NEIGHBORHOOD
A Parent Vision for Excellence in IPS
To the leaders of our Indianapolis Public Schools:

As IPS parents, community leaders and members of Stand for Children Indiana, we are here to support you as you shape the next strategic plan for IPS.

As you know, education is the key that unlocks the doors of success for our children. Without a great education, the chances decrease for our kids to find good jobs and become productive citizens, while the likelihood of them entering our criminal justice system increases. Tragically, data show that thousands of children in IPS still do not have access to a high-quality education. With nearly half of all IPS children in D or F-rated schools—more than 15,000 students—it’s clear that significant action is needed to improve our schools and ensure EVERY child is given a fair shot at educational success.

To be clear, there are some great things happening in some of our IPS schools. From the success of the home-grown school turnaround model, Project:RESTORE, to the solid performance of schools like Carl Wilde School 79 and Ernie Pyle School 90, to the highly-rated magnet programs, there are clear examples of what’s possible when the fundamentals of quality education come together. Unfortunately, great schools are not in every neighborhood. In fact, it’s typically the highest-poverty neighborhoods in Indianapolis that lack quality schools options. We want to work with IPS leaders to address the fundamental unfairness that exists in our school system – where children in lower-income neighborhoods lack the same educational opportunities as students in more affluent communities.

This is why we’ve put together this vision for IPS, entitled “Every Child, Every Neighborhood: A parent vision for excellence in IPS,” which contains a series of recommendations for your consideration to include in the new IPS strategic plan.

On March 14, Stand for Children Indiana held a member summit focused on improving the quality of education in IPS. At this event, we learned about the research performed by award-winning Harvard economist Roland Fryer.\(^1\) He identified five key areas in education that lead to improved student achievement when implemented. Based on this research by Mr. Fryer, and also drawing from our own personal experiences as parents and IPS community members, we thought through steps the district could take to improve student learning and dramatically turn around our lowest-performing schools. This document is the result of our work.

While we are not education professionals, we are the customers of the IPS system. It is our hope that our input will be valued, and that you see this document as a request for help. Please help us save our children from going down a path of crime and incarceration. Please help ensure our children have the quality education they need and deserve. Please help us in standing up for Every Child in Every Neighborhood.

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1. Roland G. Fryer, Professor of Economics, Harvard University, Injecting Charter School Best Practices Into Traditional Public Schools: Evidence from Field Experiments
Stand Indiana members discuss the findings of Roland Fryer’s research on the main tenets of quality schools.
1. A GREAT PRINCIPAL LEADER IN EVERY SCHOOL

- Every school must be a place of high expectations, and these expectations must be applied fairly and equally to every child, regardless of their race or economic status.

- Children have a tremendous ability to learn, even with the challenges that come with poverty. Any attempt to lower student expectations to account for the perceptions or stereotypes that follow children in poverty must be identified and corrected immediately.

- We believe the best way to ensure each child in every school experiences high expectations is to provide every school with an excellent principal. As leaders in our school buildings, principals are the ones who set the tone and create the environment for learning to take place.

“Every school should be led by a great principal, where their leadership and direction promotes high standards, academics and cultural development. A great principal would be a positive visionary with a great focus on quality education & teachers, motivated students and high parental involvement.”

– Eugenia Murry, IPS School 93 Parent

“Having outstanding leaders who show accountability is essential to the success of IPS as a district. If it doesn’t start from the top, there’s no way it will have a positive effect on the students.”

– Shaneice Robinson, Community Stakeholder

To accomplish these goals, we recommend the new IPS strategic plan include:

A) A detailed strategy to grow, attract and retain the best principals.

B) A focus on expanding a district program created in 2014 that provides incentive pay for high-quality principals to accept leadership roles at low-performing schools.

C) A new principal evaluation program that allows parents to evaluate their child’s principal twice a year.

- These evaluations should make up a portion of a principal’s performance review, and we request that IPS seek parent input in shaping the principal evaluation.

D) A clear commitment and detailed plan to give great principals the freedom to manage and lead their school as they see fit, including controlling their budget, setting their organizational chart and hiring their own staff.
2. A GREAT TEACHER IN EVERY CLASSROOM

• Research shows that teachers have the most direct impact on student achievement. While there are many great teachers in IPS, it’s clear from school performance (see Appendix 1) that too many students are still not getting access to great classroom instruction.

• However, we also recognize—and have witnessed—that many teachers are not getting the support or professional development they need to succeed, despite the fact they are dedicated and working hard every day.

• Every summer right before school starts, IPS continues to lose dozens upon dozens of teachers who apparently leave for other teaching opportunities. This is evidence of IPS’ struggles to be a school corporation where teachers want to stay and grow.

• Despite having one of the most important jobs in our city, teachers continue to get paid much less than employees in other career fields. And in IPS, most educators have gone five years with no substantial pay increase.

• IPS must address these challenges in order to ensure every child in every classroom is being taught by an excellent educator.

Stand parent Evelyn Barrueto discusses idea for improving IPS at Stand Indiana member summit in March.
A GREAT TEACHER
IN EVERY CLASSROOM (continued)

To accomplish these goals, we recommend the new IPS strategic plan include:

A) A specific strategy to grow, attract and retain the best teachers.

- This strategy should include a plan to strengthen the teacher talent pipeline and ensure new educators are well-prepared to succeed in an urban school setting.
- The district should make sure some of IPS’ best teachers are part of the process for creating this talent strategy.

B) A thorough review of the budget to identify opportunities where money can be shifted from administration to fund significant teacher raises.

- This review should be shared with parents and the public.

C) Support for creating career ladders for teachers, improving professional development and paying more to our high-quality educators who take on leadership roles.

D) Adding student surveys as part of future teacher evaluations, and ensuring these surveys are part of determining teacher raises.

“I recently learned that my children attend what is one of the few high performing schools on the east side of Indianapolis at IPS 88. I see the difference that great teachers make in the lives of kids. We need to be certain that we have quality teachers in all the schools of our city. We need to support and offer resources to our teachers so that we are able to recruit and retain the best educators in the world.”

– Evelyn Barrueto, IPS School 88 Parent
3. A GREAT SCHOOL IN EVERY NEIGHBORHOOD

- As the school letter grades note, there are many neighborhoods being served by low-performing IPS schools. In contrast, some communities in parts of the IPS district do have access to great schools, creating a gap in education quality that continues to allow thousands of children—mostly in neighborhoods of poverty—to fall through the cracks.

- To be clear, this is an opportunity gap—not an achievement gap—impacting our students. Our schools are failing our children and not the other way around. There are examples in IPS of high-performing schools that have high-poverty populations. (See Anna Brochhausen School 88 and Arlington Woods School 99.) There are also examples of public charter schools located within the IPS boundaries that serve large numbers of at-risk children, yet still get excellent results in the classroom.

- We know our children can succeed academically if they attend a school with quality teachers, a great principal and high expectations. Our concern is these critical success factors are coming together in only a few schools, leaving dozens of low-performing schools in Indianapolis’ most challenged neighborhoods.

“IPS must be a district that provides equitable access to quality education for every child in our community, regardless of the zip code they are living in. IPS can only be as strong as its lowest performing school. Indianapolis can only be as vital as its least educated neighborhood. Children and parents served by IPS must be able to walk into any IPS school building and expect a consistently high standard of teaching, leadership and results, regardless of the school they are standing in.”

– Tracy Butler, Community Stakeholder and Parent
A GREAT SCHOOL IN EVERY NEIGHBORHOOD (continued)

To accomplish these goals, we recommend the new IPS strategic plan include:

A) A clear and aggressive approach to turning around struggling schools and creating new high-quality school options through the use of the Innovation Schools Law (P.L. 1321).

- The IPS strategic plan should set goals for the number of high-quality schools that will be established under this law over the next four years.

B) A strategic approach to identifying and replicating existing high-quality school programs and models so that they can be expanded to serve more children.

- An example of this would be developing a strategy to grow the successful east side turnaround model, Project:restore, among others.

C) Plans to support the full implementation of the proposed Transformation Zone, which includes six low-performing schools on the west and northwest sides of the district.

- The IPS strategic plan should also include the option of expanding the zone to the eastside of IPS if results are positive for the first six schools.

D) In connection with the Transformation Zone, we request that any school assessment and/or report detailing challenges and improvements for those schools is made public so that parents and the community can gain greater insight into the factors holding back our low-performing schools.

“Every neighborhood should provide quality performing schools for families to access for their children’s education. Great school choices and options should be standard and easily within reach for students and their families.”

– Anna Murry, IPS School 93 Grandmother

Stand Indiana parents advocate for expansion of teacher-led turnaround model, Project: RESTORE, in spring of 2014.
4. A GREAT SUPPORT SYSTEM FOR EVERY PARENT AND GUARDIAN

• A student’s legal guardians—be they parents, grandparents or other caregivers—are a child’s first and most important teachers.

• As such, parents have the responsibility of being the chief education advocates for their child, working daily to ensure a student is getting what he or she needs to succeed in the classroom.

• It’s the responsibility of IPS to support parents in their role as their child’s education advocate, providing them with the necessary information, access and customer service to empower parents and assist them in making the best educational choices for their child.

• While some schools in IPS have solid parent outreach and support systems—including Stand University for Parents—to aid parents in being their child’s chief advocate, too many schools are falling well short of this responsibility.

• Too often, academic progress is not adequately communicated to parents, with updates being solely relegated to standard report cards.

• Too many schools fail to offer welcoming environments for parents and families.

• There is a lack of transparency around schools’ records of academic performance, with inadequate communication with parents regarding a school’s state accountability grade, as well as a lack of communication detailing school plans or strategies to turn around low-performing schools.

• While IPS-sponsored events, like the school magnet fair, have helped educate parents about school options available for their children, too many parents in IPS don’t know they have options for schools outside of their neighborhood schools.

• If and when parents understand they can exercise school choice, navigating a school selection process and researching those options remains a challenging and confusing process.

“As parents we need to know that the doors of our school our welcoming. Our schools are part of our community and as such we need to make them a place that is inviting to all. Parents need to have resources and data easily available in a variety of ways. We need to know how to partner with our schools to be certain that our kids are receiving the best possible chance to succeed.”

– Graciela Aguilar, IPS School 88 Parent
A GREAT SUPPORT SYSTEM FOR EVERY PARENT AND GUARDIAN (continued)

IPS parents and stakeholders celebrate at December 2014 Stand UP graduation.

To address these concerns, we recommend the new IPS strategic plan include:

A) A vision to simplify the school enrollment process. As part of this, we request that a one-stop-shop for school data and program information be created and be easily accessible to parents to help them in making informed school choices within IPS.

  • The district should put together a parent working group to provide input on what information would be most useful to parents in making decisions on school enrollment.
  • This one-stop-shop should include data on IPS special education programming so that parents of special needs children can make informed school choices too.

B) A requirement for IPS schools rated D or below to provide written notification annually to parents about the school’s performance every year.

C) A goal of having 50 percent of IPS schools reach “Family Friendly” status over the next four years utilizing the state program created under IC 20-19-6.2.

D) A strategy to expand initiatives, like Stand University for Parents (Stand UP), dedicated to educating and empowering parents. Set a goal for having a program similar to Stand UP in every elementary school by 2020.
APPENDIX 1:
More than half of IPS’ 30,000 students attend D or F schools

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<th>School Name</th>
<th>2014 State Grade</th>
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Source: Indiana Department of Education