

A parent vision for a more

Just and Equitable IPS



To Indianapolis Public Schools Superintendent Aleesia Johnson and the Board of School Commissioners:

As IPS parents, we formed a committee and met over several months to draft this document because we believe in a more just and equitable future for our children. We want our children to have access to a quality public education that is at the foundation of any just and free nation.

Over time, strategic and intentional racism has formed much of our society. The pandemic has highlighted these inequities and shortcomings in our education system, and now is the time to fix them. It's an assignment long overdue. Our children receiving a high-quality and relevant education is instrumental in breaking generational bondages attached to poverty and tearing down walls built by racism in our communities.

We know our children can succeed academically if they attend schools with strong leaders and teachers who are dedicated to student success and support high levels of parent partnership and engagement. Our children are ready to achieve greatness, but they need fair discipline policies that tackle the root challenges and offer the supports and services they need to thrive.

While this district has taken steps to dismantle racism and has progressed towards a more equitable future for children like ours, there is much more work to be done. We believe this begins with district leaders and parents collaborating to ensure your commitments to achieving equity are met with specific, measurable, attainable, realistic, and timely results.

We're in this together – *empowered together* – and we hope the ideas and recommendations from parents in this document can set the stage for a strong, collaborative partnership between families, teachers and education leaders to achieve a truly just and equitable IPS.

Thank you,

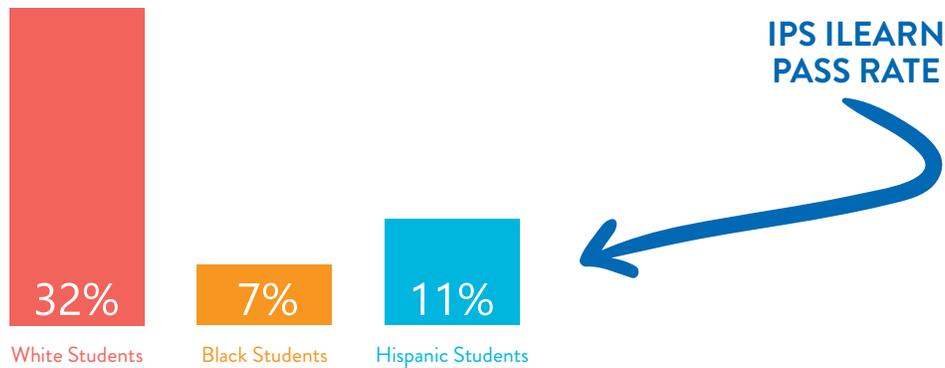
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Bold goals that meet the moment

Addressing systemic racism and injustices that have been built up over generations in our schools requires **bold goals**. We can't settle for incremental improvement that may allow for a goal to be met so we can feel good about accomplishing some form of progress. Small improvements are not going to address the education emergency we're in when it comes to Black and Brown students in IPS. For instance, less than 7% of Black students in IPS passed both sections of ILEARN, while 11% of Latino students reached that benchmark. This compares to nearly 32% of white students passing ILEARN in English and math.¹



The “fierce urgency of now,” of which Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. spoke is how we must approach meeting this moment in IPS. That’s why we as parents are suggesting that the IPS board sets clear, transparent and bold goals to dramatically improve student achievement for kids of color relative to their white peers.



“ District-wide, children that look like mine are more likely to be disciplined. That is simply not right. District-wide, children that look like mine are less likely to have a teacher they can relate to. This has to change. District-wide, children like mine are less likely to have a curriculum they relate to. Curriculum can inspire our kids or shrink them. We need to inspire our Black and Brown kids—and expand the horizons of all the kids in the district. ”

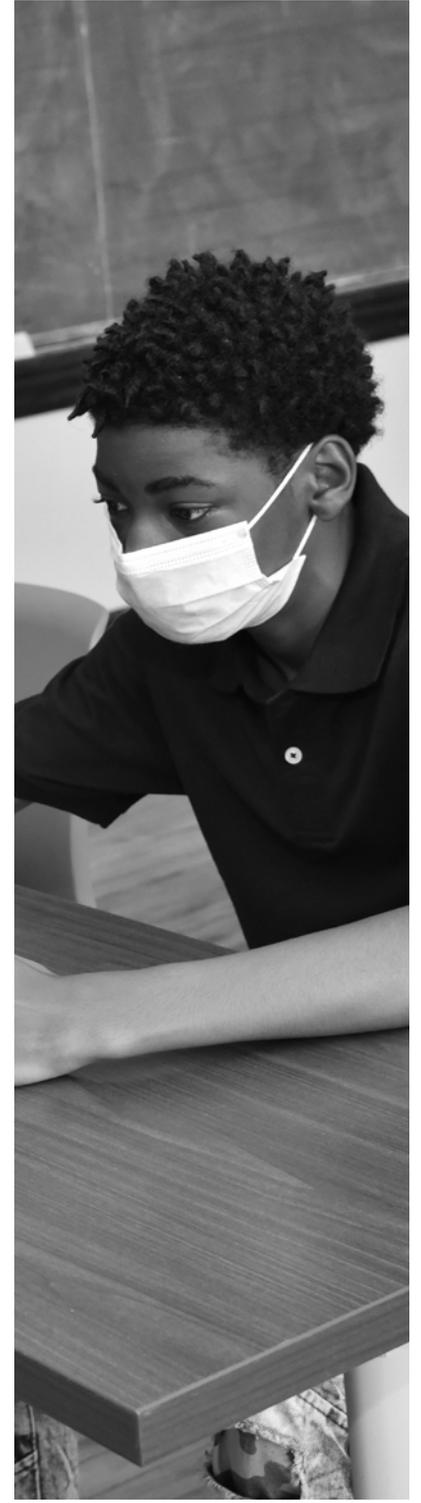
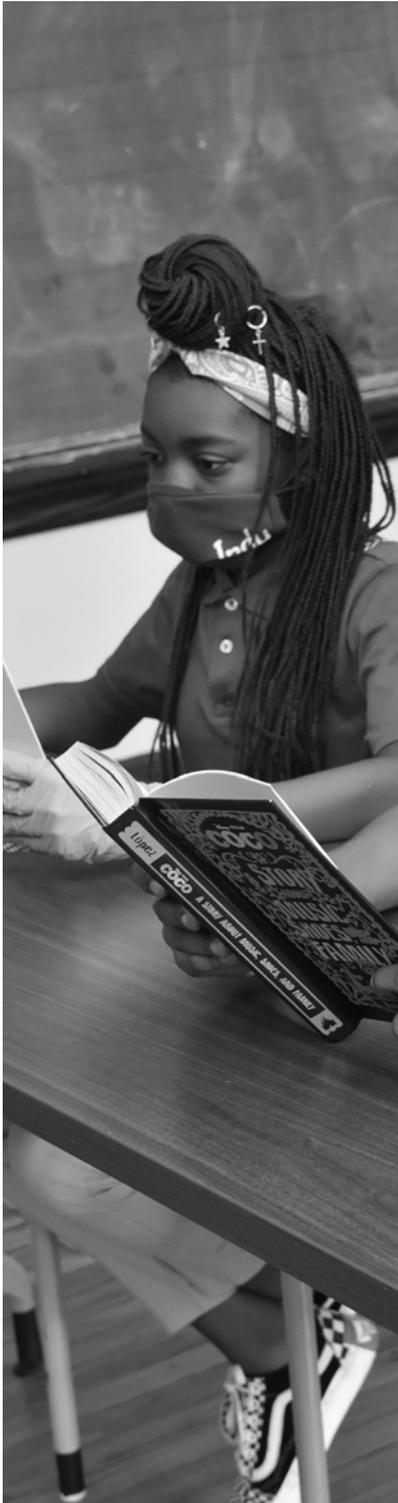
—Sherry H.

¹<https://www.doe.in.gov/accountability/find-school-and-corporation-data-reports>

Bold goals that meet the moment

1. The IPS board needs to establish aspirational goals district-wide specifically for Black and Brown student achievement, with the focus on dramatically cutting the opportunity gap by 2027.

- ✓ With less than 7% of Black children passing ILEARN in IPS, we request that the IPS board approve organizational goals calling for proficiency for Black students to triple over the next six years to 21%. For Latino students, the proficiency goal should reflect doubling the passage rate in that six years to 22%.
- ✓ Over this same period of time, we encourage the IPS board to establish a goal of cutting the opportunity gap by at least 10% for both Latino students and Black students. This would mean there would be a 15-percentage point difference between white and Black students (down from 25%), and a difference of 11% when comparing Latino student proficiency to white students (down from 21%). It's important that these gains in closing the opportunity gap for children of color not be achieved through a reduction in white student achievement (meaning minority children would gain ground only because white students are seeing a dip in academic performance).
- ✓ With high school graduation rates declining in 2020 to 72%, we're calling on the IPS board to set clear goals of having a non-waiver 90% graduation rate by 2027.
- ✓ With IPS prioritizing having all graduates enrolled in college or enlisted in the military or employed in a well-paying job, we're requesting that the district measure student success following graduation. We would like IPS to report the percentage of students who are meeting this mark for enrolled/enlisted/employed. This data should be broken down by race and the high school where students attended.



An action plan to meet these **bold goals**

GROW WHAT'S WORKING

There are some schools in Indianapolis making tremendous progress in closing the educational opportunity gap according to state data. Paramount School of Excellence, IPS' own George Washington Carver and Phalen Leadership Academy all have ILEARN passing rates that are at least four times the proficiency rate for Black students in IPS overall.

1. We must grow what's working for our kids of color, so we're calling on the IPS board to pass a policy requiring the IPS administration to grow or replicate local schools and models that have dramatically improved results for kids of color. This policy should include exploring the expansion of quality charter, traditional and innovation schools in Indianapolis
 - ✓ The board should ensure that the growth of any successful schools or programs occurs in underserved communities that do not have a high-quality public school option.
2. While IPS focuses on the schools that are closing the opportunity gap, the district should also be looking into schools that have large gaps in student achievement between students of different races and ethnicities. The IPS board should request that the district regularly reports on opportunity gaps in every school, highlighting the best performing schools, as well as the worst when it comes to student achievement for kids of color.
 - ✓ We hope that these public reports will lead to constructive feedback for schools that need to improve how they are supporting the education of kids of color.

“There are large gaps in the opportunities for our Black and Brown children in some of these schools. Schools with consecutively low test scores that struggle with basic benchmarks need to look at schools that are thriving in these areas and try to replicate the methods that are proving to work.”

—Sashah F.



An action plan to meet these bold goals

TRULY EQUITABLE FUNDING

IPS has made progress on equitable school funding through its student-based allocation formula. But the fact is several schools — some of which serve a majority Black and Brown student population — are going without basic services and programs that are provided in schools serving more privileged populations. For example, some IPS schools do not have an open and functioning library, and others go without a nurse even though health outcomes have been shown to correlate with improved student performance.² In the case of some Innovation Network Schools, they have not benefited equitably from the operating referendum that was passed by IPS voters three years ago. Many of these innovation schools serve a student population that is more diverse than the average IPS school.

Equitable education begins with resources being distributed in ways that focus on meeting the needs of students. This approach should be taken with Innovation Network Schools too, which are part of the IPS family of schools serving our district's children. If the data shows a school of any type in IPS is not receiving adequate and equitable funding, then action needs to be taken to bring funding more in line with the needs of children in that school.

1. We recommend that the IPS board should hold a hearing annually on equitable funding. This meeting should provide data on per pupil funding for all IPS schools, including Innovation Network Schools. The IPS board should use this hearing to inquire about whether schools serving the largest populations of underserved children are receiving more funding per student.
 2. The IPS board should act quickly on a resolution requiring the equitable sharing of referendum funding with all types of Innovation Network Schools. The goal should be for innovation schools that are being shortchanged to receive additional funding in the upcoming school-year budget.
 3. Equitability must be the focus when considering how substantial federal stimulus dollars will be utilized in the months ahead. We believe the best, most equitable use for a substantial portion of these federal dollars is a bold, detailed plan to address the learning loss suffered by thousands of students affected by COVID-related disruptions to schooling.
- ✓ We're requesting the IPS board ensure substantial federal stimulus dollars distributed to IPS are directed toward a plan to accelerate learning for children hardest hit by the pandemic. This plan should include evidence-based approaches like extending the school year or school day, curriculum-aligned tutoring, or a rigorous summer learning program where outcomes are measured.³
 - A plan of this scope will require utilizing all of the talent across the district to ensure enough children are being supported. For this reason, we hope that any effort to address learning loss involves collaboration with all schools in the IPS family. This could require tapping into the district's best teachers from all school types to run summer learning programs or thinking of other creative ways to get the kids who need the most help connected with high-quality educators.

“I believe we need to make sure there are more support and funds for schools and families that need it. An A-rated school may not need what an F-rated school does.” —Irma P.

²www.cdc.gov/healthyyouth/health_and_academics/pdf/health-academic-achievement.pdf

³https://annenberg.brown.edu/sites/default/files/EdResearch_for_Recovery_Brief_1.pdf

An action plan to meet these **bold goals**

A TALENT PLAN THAT PRIORITIZES STUDENTS OF COLOR

An intentional approach in IPS is needed to ensure great principals and great teachers are the ones leading schools that have long struggled and need the most help in IPS. This approach should build on and be complementary to The Mind Trust's Innovation Fellowship, which has shown that low-performing schools can benefit from new quality leaders and a new academic vision.

Data tells us that low-income kids and children of color tend to be exposed to less effective classroom instruction compared to their more privileged peers.⁴ Also, as parents in the district, we can speak firsthand to the revolving door of educators in some of our schools. In some instances, our children have had three or more teachers in one school year. Nothing makes a bigger difference in the education of a child than their classroom teacher. And we know the best teachers are backed by great principals who help them grow and create a positive, supportive school culture.

We want the IPS board to ensure there is a teacher and principal talent plan that addresses these inequities.



An action plan to meet these **bold goals**

A TALENT PLAN THAT PRIORITIZES STUDENTS OF COLOR

1. The IPS board should request regular updates during the school year on teacher vacancies lasting longer than 30 days, and special attention should be paid to the student demographics being impacted by those vacancies. Also, the IPS board should call for the administration to provide semiannual updates on teacher turnover so that schools facing the highest are required to have a plan to solve the problem.
2. As part of the IPS equity policy, the board should add a bold goal to increase the number of teachers of color in the district by 2027. While students of color make up 73% of the IPS population, only 27% of teachers in the district are diverse.⁵ Studies show that Black and Brown students learn better from teachers who look like them.⁶
 - ✓ To help improve diversity in the teacher ranks, one recommendation made by experts in the field like TNTP is a “grow your own” approach,⁷ where the district works with a higher education partner to design a teacher preparation program that would recruit graduating high school students to stay in the district and teach. We know Crispus Attucks has an education career pathway for its students, so there could be an opportunity to shape talented IPS students into the teachers of tomorrow (along with diversifying the teacher pool).
3. IPS should establish a principal fellowship with the specific goal of attracting and training leaders to manage schools that have historically struggled. These principals would train and prepare over the course of a year or more to step in and improve schools that have consistently underperformed.
 - ✓ IPS should look to partner with an organization that has a proven track record for preparing school leaders for school turnaround, as well as tap into an existing leader who has guided effective school turnaround work to guide this fellowship.



“IPS faces teacher turnover and a lack of Black and Brown staff, which is valuable for our children. Thinking back to how my first Black teacher impacted my life, I think it’s important for our children to see school staff who look like them and who share or understand their life experiences.”

—Swantella N.

⁵<https://inview.doe.in.gov/corporations/1053850000/educator>

⁶<https://learningpolicyinstitute.org/product/diversifying-teaching-profession-report>

⁷<https://tntp.org/publications/view/teacher-training-and-classroom-practice/a-broken-pipeline>

An action plan to meet these **bold goals**

MAKING PARENTS TRUE PARTNERS IN IMPROVING SCHOOLS

Parent involvement is very different than parent engagement. We want the latter. As parents, we want to be true partners in helping teachers and principals meet the needs of our children. This requires positive and proactive communication between parents and schools. It means teachers being open to understanding the circumstances and challenges that our children carry with them every day when they walk into the classroom. And it means ensuring that parents who do not speak English can still communicate effectively with teachers and staff at all times.

We would like IPS to consider the following in building and maintaining partnerships with parents:

1. The IPS board should require the district to create a teacher home visit policy as a best practice. Educators would be encouraged to spend time in the home of a child to get to know parents, as well as get to know the community the child lives in. These visits could be held virtually as we all still navigate through the pandemic.
 - ✓ Data on these home visits should be tracked and reported by schools as part of the IPS data dashboard that was announced late last year.
 - ✓ Other school communities that have grown a teacher home visit program have started with a small pilot in a few schools. We believe this approach could work in IPS, but we also would want to ensure emphasis is placed early on increasing home visits in schools that serve predominantly children of color. These are the schools that could benefit the most from better understanding and partnership between teachers and parents.

“ I truly feel the right people are in a position at IPS to listen to and be inclusive. It’s important IPS leaders know what IPS families have to say and what we have experienced because I believe anything done for us without us is done to us! ”

—LaToya T.



An action plan to meet these **bold goals**

MAKING PARENTS TRUE PARTNERS IN IMPROVING SCHOOLS



2. Using the principles of language justice, the IPS board should review district policies and expectations around addressing language differences for every school serving non-English speaking families. These policies should then be amended to reflect a goal of parents, regardless of their language difference, being able to easily communicate with their child's school (both receiving and providing information).
 - ✓ The facts are that too often parents who speak another language are unable to engage in their child's education at a high level. Language is power, so when parents can't communicate with schools, their power and influence are lessened dramatically. While some schools have bilingual staff and can accommodate non-native English speakers, others simply do not have the resources to ensure clear communication with families who don't speak English.
 - ✓ For a district as diverse as IPS, this equity in language recommendation is not a nice to have – it's a must if we're truly serious about giving all students an opportunity for success.
 - ✓ These principles related to language justice also must be employed at the board level for public meetings and testimony. Speakers should be able to speak in their native language and have it received by the board members through an interpreter.

3. While we as parents applaud the district's School Quality Review (SQR) process and its aim of improving schools, we are calling for the process to be overhauled to ensure it treats parents as partners in the process of improving low-performing schools.
 - ✓ For instance, many more parents should be involved in giving feedback during an SQR about a school's culture and performance. The current process typically limits feedback to a few parents who are hand-picked by the school principal. This narrows the perspective and opportunity for input from parents.
 - ✓ The timeline of the SQR, which lasts for a few short weeks, also needs to be addressed. The process to review a low-performing school should involve months of fact gathering and community input. If a significant decision is made to restart a school, that recommendation should not be a surprise to the school community or families.



An action plan to meet these bold goals

ENDING DISCIPLINE DISPARITIES AND ADDRESSING THE SCHOOL-TO-PRISON PIPELINE

As parents in IPS, we acknowledge the work that has been done to begin addressing inequitable discipline practices. But more improvements must be made as too many schools continue to suspend our Black and Brown students, who then have their education disrupted by missing days of school. Also, while we appreciate IPS undergoing a review of the school police department, we believe the IPS board should call on that review to include the fundamental question of what role, if any, should police have in schools.

1. We believe the current review of the IPS Police Department should include studying whether the presence of police in schools feeds the school-to-prison pipeline by exposing children, especially Black males, to the criminal justice system. With a police budget of nearly \$3.5 million, we want IPS to openly explore the question of whether that money would be better used for counselors and supportive services, while still maintaining safe school campuses. There are schools in other parts of our country that are making this shift away from law enforcement to prioritize programs and staff positions that focus on improving behavior.
 - ✓ As parents, we have differing opinions on the benefits of IPS maintaining its police department. But we all agree that IPS should engage in a community process that is open to multiple changes — including greatly reducing the police force and looking at whether that funding could be better utilized for positions that deal with the underlying trauma that cause kids to act out.
2. Similar to the IPS board requesting frequent data on teacher vacancies and turnover issues in schools, we request that the board receives quarterly public updates on discipline, with a focus on reviewing data for schools that are suspending children at a high rate (well above the state average). Schools struggling with high suspensions — especially of kids of color — should be required to present a plan to the IPS board and administration for addressing the issue.
 - ✓ While maintaining confidentiality, this discipline report should include arrests of IPS students made by IPSPD on school grounds. The IPS board has spoken about a goal of ending arrests of students. Follow up reporting is needed to determine if this goal is being met.

“Even with the good intentions of these policies, there are discipline issues in this district. Kids like mine shouldn’t be at a greater risk of being suspended or expelled.” —Dontia D.

We stand ready to be partners in action

These requests and recommendations come from a place of love and respect for all of the administrators, teachers and board members in IPS. We love IPS, and we want to see this district become the best in the nation. To achieve this, we need everyone working together and being willing to expect more from every person involved in educating our children – especially our Black and Brown students. This includes expecting more from parents like us. We're ready and willing to do the work to support the ideas in this document. If the district or IPS board members have different or better ideas to achieve the same bold goals, then we're ready to listen and support any idea that can close the opportunity gap.

We thank Superintendent Aleesia Johnson and the board for their work so far to call out racism and make racial equity a true priority. This document was inspired in part by IPS leaders passing the racial equity policy this past summer. We can all agree we have so much work to do, and we hope these ideas can help achieve a more just and equitable IPS for all children of color who attend the family of IPS schools.



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Just and Equitable IPS



Stand for Children is a non-profit education advocacy organization focused on ensuring all students receive a high quality, relevant education, especially those whose boundless potential is overlooked and under-tapped because of their skin color, zip code, first language, or disability.