

# TOGETHER

## *We Thrive*

A SHARED VISION FOR STUDENT  
SUCCESS IN INDIANAPOLIS



# 2025

"ONE OF MY  
BRIGHTEST  
STUDENTS TOOK  
THREE BUSES  
AND WALKED  
25 MINUTES TO  
SCHOOL—AT JUST  
13 YEARS OLD. HE  
HAD A DREAM,  
BUT THE SYSTEM  
DIDN'T SUPPORT  
HIM. TOO MANY  
KIDS LIKE HIM  
ARE HELD BACK  
BY BARRIERS THEY  
CAN'T CONTROL."

—BONY G., TEACHER



# CONTENTS

Intro Letter	5
Our Why	7
Our Vision	9
Recommendation #1	11
Recommendation #2	13
Recommendation #3	15
Recommendation #4	17
Seizing the Moment	19





## OUR LETTER



As parents, students, teachers and community members who care deeply about the future of Indianapolis, we've come together to speak with one voice. We come from different neighborhoods, backgrounds and school experiences — but we are united by a shared hope: that every child in our city has access to a high-quality public education.

We've all felt the impact of division—whether in public meetings, on social media, or in conversations about our schools. Too often, these divisions mirror the broader political climate, but we must also acknowledge our local role in allowing these divides to grow. The debate around public education in Indianapolis has become too polarized, and it's our children who suffer most when adults can't come together.

Many of us have spoken up at school board meetings or community forums, only to be dismissed or disrespected because our perspectives didn't align with others. We've seen how the long-standing debate between traditional public schools and public charter schools has created unnecessary tension. In reality, we all want the same thing: great schools for our kids.

That's why we've come together to offer the recommendations in this document. Through the work of the Indianapolis Local Education Alliance (ILEA), we believe this is a moment to reimagine what's possible. We envision a public education system that puts student outcomes first and focuses on equity, not school type.

We imagine a city where families have real choices because transportation is available to nearly every school. We see a system that uses data to make smart decisions and isn't afraid to make tough calls when programs aren't working. And we believe in a future where resources are directed to classrooms, and funding is fair and sustainable across all schools.

We believe in a strong and thriving IPS. We also recognize the value that high-quality public charter schools bring to our city. Many of us have attended both types of schools or have children who have. We know firsthand that great schools exist in both sectors—and that our children benefit when we stop fighting and start working together.

Our children are not "charter kids" or "IPS kids." They are our kids and each of them represents the city's future. And they deserve a school system that puts their needs above politics. The opportunity to build something better is right in front of us. Let's meet this moment — together.



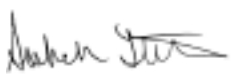
Dontia Dyson, parent



Ada Lemus, parent



LaToya Tahirou, parent



Sashah Fletcher, parent



Swantella Nelson, parent



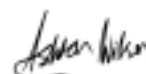
Shawanda Tyson, parent



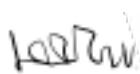
Bony Georges, teacher



Noemi Olivia, parent



Ashton Wilson, student



Joel G., student



Virginia Ramos, teacher

# WHY WE'RE SPEAKING OUT:

THE CHALLENGES WE THINK ABOUT EVERY DAY



As parents, students, and teachers, we recognize that the ILEA has many important challenges to address. Based on our shared experiences, we've come together to highlight four key areas that we believe present the greatest barriers for families and have the most potential to improve academic outcomes for students. All of these topics are within the bounds of the law that created the ILEA.

# WHY WE'RE SPEAKING OUT:

- 1. Transportation:** We know educational opportunity is limited to the schools we can access. With several schools within the IPS boundary – mostly charter schools – not offering transportation, school choice is more of a myth than reality. The significant funding gap between charter schools and traditional schools (nearly \$8,000 per child less for charters) is a key reason why some charter schools lack a transportation option. We have hope that the [change to state law allowing for the sharing of property taxes](#) will nearly close that gap as the fund-sharing is phased in over time, which could then create the resources to re-think transportation. But sharing dollars alone will not fix a system that is fractured across lines that divide school type.
- 2. Governance/system leadership:** We deeply value strong public schools and appreciate the quality choices available through both IPS and the charter sector. But trying to navigate two separate systems—and four different governance structures when you include innovation schools—can be overwhelming. It's confusing, time-consuming, and often leaves us unsure of who to turn to when we have questions or concerns. This complexity makes it harder for us to advocate for our children and ourselves. We believe the ILEA has a real opportunity to help simplify and clarify school governance so families can be more informed, engaged and empowered.
- 3. School performance and accountability:** As advocates, we've pushed for a school system that uses real student achievement data to make smart decisions — especially when it comes to growing and replicating school models in neighborhoods that need better options. We've spoken up for stronger accountability across all types of schools because we believe no school should be allowed to keep failing our kids without a clear, evidence-based plan for improvement. As we think about the future of public education in Indianapolis, we believe every idea should be rooted in real results and a commitment to using data to drive change.
- 4. Financial health and sustainability:** From our perspective, a system living in the shadow of a financial crisis is one that cannot plan for the long-term success of students. IPS is [on the cusp of a fiscal cliff](#) – one that could leave the district unable to operate after 2026 unless a significant referendum is passed. While we support a financially strong IPS, we also have concerns about the size of a future referendum that could fall disproportionately on the backs of low-income families in the district. And with the percentage of students within the IPS boundary attending autonomous innovation schools and charter schools — more than 57% are enrolled on campuses not managed directly by IPS — the data should lead the ILEA to explore what administrative support looks like in a system where most schools are not under the day-to-day oversight of the IPS central office.





## OUR VISION:

A NEW IPS FOR THIS GENERATION THAT IS  
MORE SUSTAINABLE, MORE EQUITABLE AND  
MUCH MORE STUDENT-CENTERED





We're asking the ILEA to help reimagine a school system that brings people together and makes sure every student in IPS — whether it's the 42,000 in K-12 or 46,000 including adult learners — has a real chance to reach their full educational potential. Let's not be constrained by the system that is, but let's focus on the system we need to serve ALL children and families. This is our chance to challenge the status quo — across both charter and traditional schools — and break down the walls that keep us from working together. We need to give IPS and charter leaders more reasons to team up around one shared goal: helping all students succeed.

As parents and students who've been pushing for change in Indianapolis schools for a long time, we approached these recommendations with a focus on the future. We know some of these ideas might make people uncomfortable — they're a big shift from how things are done now. But it's our belief that unless we are feeling some discomfort in this process, then we're not being bold enough or thoughtful enough to truly meet the challenges presented by K-12 education in Indianapolis.

# RECOMMENDATION #1

CREATE A UNIFIED IPS DISTRICT THAT  
STREAMLINES COMPLEX GOVERNANCE  
STRUCTURES AND REFLECTS THE  
STUDENTS IT SERVES



We believe it's time for IPS and the charter sector to become one unified district that truly reflects the 46,000 students it serves — including those in charter, innovation, and traditional schools. Right now, most students in IPS attend autonomous schools, but the system doesn't fully recognize or support that reality. This framework of multiple systems is too complicated, with too many layers of governance and not enough collaboration between the people who impact our children's education.



We're calling for a new vision for IPS—one that keeps what's working (like school-level autonomy) and fixes what's not (like the confusing governance structure across both sectors). Here's what that could look like:

- ✓ All public schools within the district boundary — independent charters, innovation schools and traditional schools — are overseen by a new IPS board that maintains elected membership and also includes appointments made by the city's Office of Education Innovation.
  - We believe the appointed members should bring expertise — like experience as educators, or understanding facilities management or accountability systems — so they can add to the elected board's experience and support the collective in making informed decisions in the areas that matter most. Any changes to state law that create this new IPS board should detail the experience and roles expected for the appointed members.
  - All public schools under the new IPS board's jurisdiction should gradually transition to autonomous status. We see the innovation schools law as offering multiple pathways to autonomy — meaning not every school needs to be a charter, but each school or non-profit charter network should have its own board. That board should include community members and parents. Having family and community voices serve on the nonprofit boards that guide schools gives neighborhoods a stronger role in how their IPS schools are run. We believe this approach deepens democratic participation and makes schools more transparent. It also creates more direct opportunities for parents and guardians to get involved in their child's education.
- These changes – from autonomy for all schools to the requirement for community voices on the boards of schools – should be outlined in detail in state law.
- ✓ To ensure the new IPS board is the only decision-maker over public schools within its boundary, we recommend all charter authorizing be overseen by the newly-configured IPS board. This would mean that all independent charters that are authorized by other entities would, over time, transition to holding charters authorized by the IPS board.
- ✓ We see the new IPS board staying focused on the most important decisions required to improve student outcomes — like opening or closing schools, hiring a superintendent, setting transportation plans, and managing district budgets and referendums. Decisions outside of these areas should largely remain with individual schools, in keeping with the goal of school autonomy.



# RECOMMENDATION #2

## ENSURE ALL SCHOOLS OFFER TRANSPORTATION, ENDING THE UNFAIR PATCHWORK SYSTEM OF TODAY

As all public schools come under the new IPS board, expanding transportation should be a top priority.

- ✓ The expanded transportation system would be a core service offered by the IPS central office.
- ✓ All schools would be required to provide transportation, though we recognize the system must be efficient and financially sustainable. This could mean a plan that is focused on offering transportation service within a certain distance from each school.
- ✓ While schools would be autonomous, the IPS board would need to exercise decision-making authority on school start times and pick up times in order to keep routes manageable.





"I KNOW HOW VITAL  
TRANSPORTATION IS—  
BECAUSE I'VE LIVED IT. LIKE  
SO MANY PARENTS, I'VE  
HAD TO PICK SCHOOLS NOT  
BASED ON WHAT'S BEST, BUT  
ON WHAT'S REACHABLE.

SCHOOL CHOICE IS A  
POWERFUL PROMISE—BUT  
IT ONLY MATTERS IF KIDS  
CAN ACTUALLY GET THERE.

AS SOMEONE WITHOUT A  
DRIVER'S LICENSE, I FEEL  
THAT TRUTH EVERY DAY."

—DONTIA D., PARENT

# RECOMMENDATION #3

REQUIRE A PERFORMANCE FRAMEWORK  
AND ACCOUNTABILITY SYSTEM FOR ALL  
SCHOOLS THAT GUIDES DECISIONS ON  
SCHOOL OPENINGS AND FACILITIES





# RECOMMENDATION #3

**“I WANT TO SEE REAL  
ACCOUNTABILITY IN ALL OUR  
SCHOOLS—AND SMART  
COLLABORATION BETWEEN IPS  
AND CHARTERS—SO EVERY  
CHILD HAS ACCESS TO WHAT  
WORKS.” —SWANTELLA N., PARENT**

Although this is our third recommendation, we urge the ILEA to treat this section as a top priority in their final plan. A system that doesn't use data to grow successful schools — and allows any school to struggle for several years without improvement — is failing our children. As parents, educators and students, we have been advocating for a clear strategy to replicate school models that are closing achievement gaps, yet no plan in IPS exists to-date. This is despite clear data showing public schools in IPS that are helping Black and Brown students achieve results more than four times the state average on ILEARN. That's why we're calling for:

- ✓ The ILEA to ensure that any collaborative system is built on the foundation of school accountability and clear performance goals for

schools and their students.

- ✓ This performance framework should apply to every school and help guide the IPS board's decisions about facilities. This means prioritizing space for school models that are shown to be successful using data, and the new IPS board being willing to make a hard decision to roll back school programs that are not getting results.
  - We believe accountability should include multiple measures — not just test scores — and that schools should have time to improve before any board action is taken.
- ✓ We encourage the ILEA to review [a study conducted by the University of Colorado](#), which looked at how students benefited from Denver Public Schools using academic data to guide facilities decisions.



## RECOMMENDATION #4

### REIMAGINE THE IPS CENTRAL OFFICE TO REFLECT THE DISTRICT'S NEW VISION

With all public schools — including charters — governed by a single IPS board and operating autonomously, the district must rethink how the central office is structured and staffed. Today, the IPS central office directly manages 42 schools serving about 18,000 students — while nearly 13,000 students attend IPS schools not run by the district, making up over 40% of the total IPS district population. Despite this high percentage of non-IPS direct run schools, the size and cost of the central office have not been reduced

meaningfully to reflect the smaller number of schools directly overseen by the IPS administration.

- ✓ The ILEA should clearly define which functions the new IPS central office should manage in a system of autonomous schools—and identify which roles are no longer needed or cost-effective.
- ✓ Any future referendum should follow a transparent process that clearly shows the community how funds will be used. The referendum should be



“right-sized” to account for this new vision of IPS where more funding will flow directly to schools and less money will be needed for administration.

- ✓ We encourage the ILEA to review [an article from The 74 that investigates how teacher salaries have kept pace with school spending](#). The article found that in IPS, per student revenue increased by 50% between 2020 and 2022 while teacher salaries decreased by 14% on average. More analysis is needed, but this data suggests that too little funding is reaching our most important resource: teachers.



# SEIZING THE MOMENT TO SHAPE AN IPS FOR THIS GENERATION



"WE DON'T HAVE CHARTER KIDS AND TRADITIONAL SCHOOL KIDS. THEY ARE ALL OUR CHILDREN. IT'S TIME THE SYSTEM HONORED THAT BY PUTTING ENERGY AND RESOURCES INTO A PLAN THAT GROWS HIGH-QUALITY SCHOOLS AND HOLDS THOSE THAT ARE STRUGGLING TO ACCOUNT." — LATOYA T., PARENT

Before any recommendations come from the ILEA, this task force must begin with questions for our community. Do we want an IPS that continues to struggle to maintain its enrollment (after many years of steep declines)? Or do we want to see a more inclusive IPS that increases to 46,000 students and offers a pathway to grow even larger? Does this community want to see two public education sectors – IPS and independent charters – remain in silos that create more competition than collaboration? Or do we want to break down barriers and ensure all public schools within IPS are working together to serve every child under a system that is unified behind the same purpose? Do we want to keep a broken transportation system that shuts out families who can't drive their kids to school? Or should we make sure transportation is never a barrier to choosing a great public school?

The ILEA gives us a chance to seize this moment and to imagine the public school system our children truly deserve. At the very least, we hope these recommendations spark conversations – among ILEA members and the community – about how to break down barriers, simplify the system for families, and hold all schools accountable for results, no matter their type. We're grateful to the ILEA and the community for considering these ideas to strengthen public education in Indianapolis. We hope these ideas inspire all of us who care about opportunity for every child to think differently – and act boldly. Let's seize this moment, together.



"OUR FAMILY RELIES HEAVILY ON SCHOOL TRANSPORTATION. IF WE HAD MORE OPTIONS, I WOULD HAVE SENT MY SON TO A SCHOOL THAT COULD HAVE SUPPORTED HIM EARLIER—BUT WE DIDN'T HAVE THAT CHOICE. WITHOUT A CAR AND RELIABLE TRANSIT, WE'RE FORCED TO SETTLE FOR WHAT'S CLOSEST—NOT WHAT'S BEST."

—ADA L., PARENT





"THIS IS AN EMERGENCY. WE CAN'T  
ALLOW YEARS TO PASS WHILE WE THINK  
ABOUT HOW TO HOLD ALL SCHOOLS  
ACCOUNTABLE. LET'S WORK TOGETHER AS  
A UNITED COMMUNITY AND EFFICIENTLY  
FIND SOLUTIONS FOR ALL OF OUR  
BABIES". —SHAWANDA T., PARENT

# TOGETHER

## *We Thrive*

### A SHARED VISION FOR STUDENT SUCCESS IN INDIANAPOLIS

This vision was created by a diverse group of parents, students, educators, and neighbors from every corner of Indianapolis—united by a shared commitment to better public education for all. We are part of Stand for Children Indiana, and while some of us have been advocating for years and others are just beginning, we are all deeply invested in our city's future.

We represent a wide range of experiences: some of us attend or have children in traditional public schools, others in innovation or public charter schools. Over the course of several months, we came together to listen, learn, and collaborate—discussing the challenges and opportunities in our education system. The recommendations in this vision reflect our collective hope and determination to build a stronger, more unified public education landscape—one that serves every student, regardless of school type.

We believe a better future for Indianapolis students is not only necessary—it's possible.