It's time to re-invent special education: From normalcy to diversity
Hours after I posted, "The untold story of IPS and Special Ed." (Sept 1), Dr. Eric Cooper, (National Urban Alliance) posted, "It's time to end the over-representation of African-Americans in special education." This was no coincidence: our special education system definitely needs a 21st century overhaul!

- African Americans are 17 % of US students, yet 33% of those classified mentally retarded (MR). (NAS)
- Over-placement in Special Ed. creates a "ghetto with in a ghetto…creating a bad situation in an even worse one…and a direct link to jail." Many Black students (58%) with emotional/behavior labels drop out; 73% are arrested within 3-5 years. (Orfield)
- Half of all children placed in Special Ed. are labeled LD; and, it's not due to intelligence, most (80%) simply aren't reading at grade level. (Finn)

Indiana and Indianapolis are uniquely positioned with special national/global obligations:
- Tragically, IPS is a national leader in over-diagnosing Black males as MR. See Pt 1 of this series at http://vorcreatex.com/wp-content/uploads/2016/08/Special-Ed-Pt-1-The-untold-story-of-IPS-and-Special-Ed.-Sept-1.pdf
- Early 1900s Hoosiers created/perpetuated global human inequality. Our 1907 Eugenics Law based on *normalcy** judged/sorted, even sterilized, humanity by how supposedly "normal" they were. See Pt 3 at http://vorcreatex.com/wp-content/uploads/2016/08/Special-Ed.-Pt-3-Indiana-and-Indianapolis-1900-2010-Still-2-systems-separate-and-unequal.pdf

If we can discredit and abandon normalcy, as well as shine the light of public awareness on IPS, we can affect over-representation.

"The problem's not the person with disabilities; it's the way normalcy is constructed to create the 'problem' of the disabled person."   ~ L. Davis, "Constructing Normalcy"

My recommendations:
- Validate the many skilled/caring teachers who work tirelessly to help special education students succeed.
- Demand fully funded pre-K/full day kindergarten.
- Support all Rep. Porter's Cultural Competency legislation—help teachers see cultural, racial, gender, physical, intellectual, language, learning, and assessment differences as actually student strengths.
- Intervene early in reading: though 20% of all children may experience difficulty, 70% can benefit from early intensive help.
- Realize over-representation in IPS has become institutionalized (normal). Explore who benefits commercially/financially and politically. (Brantlinger) Educate parents to be fully informed regarding placement.
- Understand schools as political sites upholding/enforcing society's dominant beliefs. View Special Ed. as a political, not an educational concept. Otherwise, we'd have no over-representation. Special Ed. maintains segregation, dis-empowers students, and helps exclude people of color from full citizenship. (Kavele & Forness)

- Contest/abandon "one-size-fits-all" normalcy--its deficit model describing certain human differences as disabilities.
  - Realize intelligence is not fixed. It changes/grows through life.
  - Realize where there's normalcy (ableism), there's dis-ability; and, disability is used to justify racial exclusion.
  - Realize the issue is *access to equitable educational opportunities to learn.*
  - Expand what it means to be intelligent: Expanding the range of abilities we test for expands the range of students we identify as smart. (Skromme)
  - Use assessments as opportunities to identify/build upon strengths. Use multiple assessments to provide options for student success.
- Promote both equity/excellence for all students.
  - Enable schools to function as democratic systems.
  - Use the Effective Schools research of Ron Edmonds.

"We propose a shift from high standards for uniformity to high standards for diversity."
~ L. Stoddard, Educating for Human Greatness

Our challenge is to create a fluid system where difference is a "taken for granted" attribute of every child who enters a Hoosier classroom. Only them can we reverse the over-representation of children of color in special education. The nation and world are watching.

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*Normalcy: A social/political concept of eugenics (scientific racism) concerning the so-called "normality" of the body (shape, 5 senses, physical abilities, looks), intelligence (IQ), race, or gender identity.

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