

Is CTAS a dropout factory?

A preliminary report and commentary on the graduation rates and promoting power of Charles A. Tindley Accelerated School

It is tragic to have to say that there is no need to prove urban public education in America is in trouble. We only have to look at local television to see the negative outcomes associated with urban school failure. We also know that when urban students are graduated on time ready for careers, college and citizenship, chances of being involved in crime or violence are reduced.

The Pushout Crisis

The Schott Foundation (2012) report "The Urgency of Now" introduces a new factor to the discussion: "The pushout crisis." Evidently, nearly 17% of African American students and 7% of Latinx students were suspended at least once in 2009-10, compared to 5% for White students. The section of the report concludes that disproportionate use of out-of-school suspension for Black and Latinx children at all levels is the first step toward pushing them out.

This Schott report defines a "pushout" as a student who leaves their school before graduation through the encouragement of the school itself.

The challenge now is a new one: trying to persuade the "Unconvinced Generation" (Evans, 2006) to stay in school while trying to keep school officials from pushing them out (Loflin & Evans, 2015).

The "pushout crisis" reflects situations where many schools try to get rid of (dump or "shed back"/"counsel out") students who may tarnish the school's statistics (Lewin & Medina, 2003) when they score low on state standardized tests, or fail to graduate on time.

During recent national hearings, an NAACP task force found, "...many participants testified about students with special needs, those perceived as poor test takers, or those who pose a behavioral challenge are either not accepted, or once enrolled, disciplined or counseled out of many charter schools" (NAACP, 2017).

This trend of manipulating students' educational lives like pawns or stick pins on a map by "hiding" students in "alternative learning experiences" (Spring, 2016) to keep the "bottom line" of academic outcomes and grad rates with other "quick fixes" is widespread (Turner, 2015). It reflects the shady underbelly of a market ideology's system of competition and choice applied to, of all things, the lives of children (Winerip, 2011; Miller, 2015; Taylor, 2015; Wolfe, 2015; Brown, 2017).

As well, whole districts are not above throwing some students under the bus to get/maintain high grad rates (Spring, 2016; Koran, 2017).

Pushing students out is especially tempting for urban charter schools which are **under intense scrutiny and pressure to perform**. Taking into account the past economics of educational politics (i.e., school choice) in Indianapolis, this is especially the case for Mayor Hogsett's bevy of charters.

Particularly relevant to issues regarding “pushing out” students is the December 19, 2015 *Indiana Business Journal (IBJ)* story on events at the Charles Tindley Accelerated School (CTAS): “Charter star Tindley in cash crunch as CEO’s expenses questioned” (Columbo, 2015). Though the story raises concerns, *IBJ* joins other local media in validating the “star” status of the Tindley brand (www.tindley.org). Note, both Indy’s local establishment (Pulliam, 2013) and Black community (Perry, 2013) hold CTAS up to everyone and praise the school as a model for other urban charters.* In fact, CTAS is recognized nationally as one of the “highest-scoring schools” by *US News and World Report* (2015).

A scrutiny of this blend of concern and praise suggests a public discussion. A deeper review of factors behind the school’s graduation rates, which are in the lower 90% for the classes 2013 and 2014, will promote dialogue and clarity.

Introducing “Promoting Power”

In order to open a conversation about the “success” of CTAS, fostering a clear view of the school’s graduation rates (or those of any Indiana public school) is needed. The concept of Promoting Power (holding power) is being used because it can provide a quick way to determine how a school is doing. Promoting Power also circumvents certain graduation rate formulas which can *hide* the inability of schools to keep students in school and graduating.

Promoting Power takes the number of 9th graders and divides that by the number of these students who make it to 12th grade. It does not determine graduation rates--those 9th graders (cohort) who actually graduate. A Promoting Power of <60% is weak Promoting Power. High schools with weak Promoting Power are called “dropout factories.” The term was used in the *Indy Star’s* 2005 “Left Behind” series: http://rishawnbiddle.org/RRB/Starfiles/leftbehind/Dropout_factories.pdf To understand more about Promoting Power and the dropout factory term see: http://web.jhu.edu/CSOS/images/FAQ_Dropout_Factories_final_version_nov_2007.pdf

Comparing graduation rates and promoting power: Is CTAS a dropout factory?

Linking both the Promoting Power concept and “pushout crisis” factors will bring another possible explanation of the “success” of CTAS. Contrasting Indiana Department of Education (IDOE) graduation rates for CTAS with the school’s Promoting Power percentages reveals CTAS as a dropout factory in all but 1 of the graduating classes for the 2007-2008 to 2017-2018 school years. See Table II.

To illustrate, the graduation rate for CTAS for 2012-2013 was 90%. A closer look at the data shows only 27 of the 2009-2010 9th grade cohort of 61 graduated. The 90% rate was determined by dividing the number of seniors (30) into the number who actually graduated (27). In other words, the class of 2012-2013 had 30 seniors of which 27 graduated. Even though the cohort lost over half of its members after 3 years, it still had a graduation rate of 90%. See Table II.

The Promoting Power formula measures the ability of CTAS to hold on to its 9th graders. Comparing the 61 freshmen who started the 2009-2010 school year with the 30 who made it to their senior year, CTAS has a Promoting Power of (30/61) 49%--making it, for that class, a dropout factory. See Table II.

An Indiana public school both traditional or charter can lose over half its freshman class after 3 years and still have a graduation rate of 90%

How does this happen? According to IDOE guidelines, a school's graduation rate will not be affected by students who leave a high school and are enrolled elsewhere. With regard to determining graduation rates, the "home school" does not have to count these students among those in that year's cohort. For example, a particular public high school could have 20 9th graders and 4 years later have 5 (seniors) left in that cohort due to 15 students leaving and enrolling in another high school. If all 5 graduate, and even though the school lost 75% of its freshmen class after 3 years, the school's grad rate for that year will be 100%.

This raises the question and thus the rub: what if the student/family is counseled out or persuaded to "self-select"--pushed away from *their school before they are graduated, through the encouragement of the school itself?*

Also, what about a school coaching a student/family to choose homeschooling as an alternative to expulsion? In this way, these negative marks do not appear on the student's or school's record, and does not count against the school's graduation rate. However, are there drawbacks to the home schooling option for the student/family? See Appendix B

On the surface "self-opting" makes sense and appears fair to all parties: schools, and students and their families. Yet, the issues brought to the surface by the Schott report on the national "pushout crisis" raises questions as to whether these students left "on their own" or were they "pushed" out.

As stated above, "The 'pushout crisis' reflects situations where many schools are trying to get rid of (dump/'shed back' or 'counsel out') students who may tarnish a school's statistics (Lewin & Medina, 2003) such as by scoring low on state standard tests, or failing to graduate on time."

Commentary: Why is weeding-out students disguised and excused by the status quo

All of this is worrisome. A closer look at the January 2013 commentary about Tindley, Russ Pulliam (2013) is needed. Here Pulliam quotes Brian Payne, the president of the Central Indiana Community Foundation who said, "I think it's human nature that people generally rise to the level of expectations." Payne went on, "When you create a culture of high expectations, people generally will self-select out of that culture if they are not committed. They have this culture at Tindley that you will work hard. If you aren't ready to work, you may not want to be there."

Respecting the school in light of graduation rate vs. Promoting Power percents, CTAS and its supporters attempt to "spin" the pushout phenomenon as one where

the student and their family leave on their own accord. So, the school is left free of responsibility: We didn't push the student out, she/he "self-opted" out.

Again, the "self-select out" concoction is endorsed by Indy *Star's* distinguished political pundit Mr. Pulliam who is plainly pushing the idea that this rationale makes sense. Perhaps local media and the CTAS board want the public to believe that such a covert "self-select out" masquerade is justified in order to keep up the school's reputation.

Even in some cases regarding disciplinary action/s, a student/family may be offered "a deal you can't refuse." In this situation, a school intends to suspend or expel a student, but proposes not to if he/she leaves (supposedly) by their own choice and then enrolls in another school. Perhaps for certain students, such "counseling" is used to help them realize they "...may not want to be there."

Due to this "trade-off," neither the school nor the student will have a suspension or expulsion on their record and the school unapologetically gets rid of a student they can label as one who just wasn't a good "fit."

And, most likely those students/families that pick a Tindley-type charter will go to another school, thus removing that student from the cohort. Now, she/he will not be counted toward determining the graduating rate of that group/class.

Another obvious concern involves schools with high test scores—and the efforts of these schools to maintain such status. How is it fair and equitable when schools, can under the cover of the "self-selection" alibi, actually "weed out" poor test takers?

Our "pushout crisis" and the Promotion Power idea call for transparency

Indeed, the above report/commentary is presumptuous and even accusatory. Still, with over 20 years of pressure on certain high schools (notably urban charters), and in this case the very contentious, over 10-year local and state-wide debate over school choice, this level of suspicion simply cannot be avoided.

To the extent that Mayor Hogsett is the only mayor in the United State of America who can charter a school, to that same extent tremendous political-economic pressure is put on the mayor's charters to perform. Thus, he cannot afford to have any of his schools fall below the norm--let alone be suspect of any deceptions exposed by the pushout emergency and a Promoting Power analysis.

As Indianapolis, Indiana, and the country praise the Charles Tindley Accelerated School for having high expectations for its students, families and staff, the Tindley board must maintain credibility by virtue of transparency and public accountability, practicing the same level of expectancy it holds for the school.

*This was especially the case when Mayor Ballard closed The Project School (TPS) charter over financial issues. TPS also had low test scores—which was why the Mind Trust's David Harris said the school must be closed (Peg with Pen, 2012). Yet, many believe the closure happened because 28 students opted-out of ISTEP. In the wake of the closing, CTAS was presented to the public as the blueprint to follow—the opposite of TPS (RTV Channel 6, 2012).

TABLE I

Charles A. Tindley Accelerated School
(IDOE school #6208)

Enrollment numbers per 9th grade 4-year cohort for 2004-2015

	04-05	05-06	06-07	07-08	08-09	09-10	10-11	11-12	12-13	13-14	14-15	15-16	16-17
9	66	59	29	40	46	61	69	62	68	93	135	94	89
10		44	34	26	30	28	52	52	48	54	79	87	80
11			15	22	23	23	22	43	32	41	42	44	64
12				14	19	22	13	18	30	30	32	35	40

<https://compass.doe.in.gov/dashboard/enrollment.aspx?type=school&id=6208>

TABLE II

Charles A. Tindley Accelerated School
Enrollment numbers, graduation numbers and rates,
and Promoting Power percentages for 9th grade cohorts

<i>School Year</i>	<i>9th</i>	<i>10th</i>	<i>11th</i>	<i>12th</i>	<i>IDOE * # grads</i>	<i>Class of</i>	<i>IDOE * Grad %</i>	<i>Promoting Power <60%</i>	<i>Weak/ Strong</i>	<i>Dropout Factory</i>
04/05	66	44 (-22)	15 (-29)	14 (-1)	12	12/19	2007-08	63.2%	14/66=21.2%	W Yes
05/06	59	34 (-25)	22 (-12)	19 (-3)	15	15/25	2008-09	60.0%	19/59=34.5%	W Yes
06/07	29	26 (-3)	23 (-3)	22 (-1)	15	15/19	2009-10	78.9%	22/29=75.8%	S No
07/08	40	30 (-10)	23 (-7)	13 (-10)	12	12/16	2010-11	75.0%	13/40=32.5%	W Yes
08/09	46	28 (-18)	22 (-6)	18 (-4)	15	15/19	2011-12	78.9%	18/46=39.1%	W Yes
09/10	61	52 (-9)	43 (-9)	30 (-13)	27	27/30	2012-13	90.0%	30/61=49.1%	W Yes
10/11	69	52 (-17)	32 (-20)	30 (-2)	29	29/32	2013-14	90.6%	30/69=43.4%	W Yes
11/12	62	48 (-14)	41 (-7)	32 (-9)	24	24/28	2014-15	85.7%	32/62=51.6%	W Yes
12/13	68	54 (-14)	42 (-12)	35 (-7)	32	32/36	2015-16	88.9%	35/68=51.5%	W Yes
13/14	93	79 (-14)	44 (-35)	40 (-4)	35	35/38	2016-17	92.1%	40/93=43.0%	W Yes
14/15	135	87 (-48)	64 (-23)	61 (-3)			2017-18		61/135=45%	W Yes
15/16	94	80 (-14)	72 (-8)							
16/17	89	77 (-12)								
17/18	91									

APPENDIX A
Breakdown of Graduation Rate Calculations
Charles A. Tindley Accelerated School

<p><i>Class of 07-08</i> IDOE # in 12th grade =14 Grad rate # of grads 63.2% 12 GED 5.3% 1 SiS 10.5% 2 DO 21.1% 4</p> <hr/> <p style="text-align: right;">19: 12/19=63.2%</p>	<p><i>Class of 12-13</i> IDOE # in 12th grade =30 Grad rate # of grads 90.0% 27 DO 10.0% 3</p> <hr/> <p style="text-align: right;">30: 27/30=90.0%</p>
<p><i>Class of 08-09</i> IDOE # in 12th grade =19 Grad rate # of grads 60.0% 15 SiS 40.0% 10</p> <hr/> <p style="text-align: right;">25: 15/25=60.0%</p>	<p><i>Class of 13-14</i> IDOE # in 12th grade=30 Grad rate # of grads 90.6% 29 SiS 6.3% 2 DO 3.1% 1</p> <hr/> <p style="text-align: right;">32: 29/32=90.6%</p>
<p><i>Class of 09-10</i> IDOE # in 12th grade =22 Grad rate # of grads 78.9% 15 SiS 10.5% 2 DO 10.5% 2</p> <hr/> <p style="text-align: right;">19: 15/19=78.9%</p>	<p><i>Class of 14-15</i> IDOE # in 12th grade=32 Grad rate # of grads 85.7% 24 SiS 10.7% 3 DO 3.6% 2</p> <hr/> <p style="text-align: right;">28: 24/28=85.7%</p>
<p><i>Class of 10-11</i> IDOE # in 12th grade =13 Grad rate # of grads 75.0% 12 SiS 18.8% 3 DO 6.3% 1</p> <hr/> <p style="text-align: right;">16: 12/16=75.0%</p>	<p><i>Class of 15-16</i> IDOE # in 12th grade=35 Grad rate # of grads 88.9% 32 SiS 11.1% 4 DO 0.0% 0</p> <hr/> <p style="text-align: right;">36: 32/36=88.9%</p>
<p><i>Class of 11-12</i> IDOE # in 12th grade=18 Grad rate # of grads 78.9% 15 SiS 10.5% 2 DO 10.5% 2</p> <hr/> <p style="text-align: right;">19: 15/19=78.9%</p>	<p><i>Class of 16-17</i> IDOE # in 12th grade=40 Grad rate # of grads 92.1% 35 SiS 2.6% 1 DO 5.3% 2</p> <hr/> <p style="text-align: right;">38: 35/38=92.1%</p>

SiS=Still in School students are expelled students, yet are still "enrolled" & expected to return. Until that happens or not, this is counted against a school's graduation rate.

www.mvsc.k12.in.us/its/sds/Docs/SectionExpelledStudentFollow-UpProc.pdf

DO=Dropout

Appendix B

The limitations of homeschooling as an alternative to expulsion: Why high schools benefit, but students, families, and society may not

The language of “counsel out,” “self-select out,” “shed-back” (Lewin & Medina, 2003) and now “de-selection” and “Got to Go” lists (Miller, 2015), even “thrive or transfer” bullying (Winerip, 2011) become alarming as analysis shows public school administrators have the option to offer parents and students the use of home-schooling as a “transfer” over expulsion.

- Is this a good choice for low-income, marginalized families living in poor neighborhoods, characterized by crime and violence?

This is noted because Indiana home schooling guidelines are non-in-forcible by the state. Indiana has no accountability for record keeping for students and/or families who select this expulsion option. This worries some important local and national community vitality and public policy groups (Fiddian-Green & Bridgeland, 2017).

- What happens to those students being “homeschooled” without adequate or little or no parent involvement, or formal supervision?
 - What about situations where the parent/s works during the day and the student, who is normally in school, is left unsupervised?
 - What if parent/s do not have the level of education needed to home school adequately?

This led to speculation that there is a possible correlation between the Indiana home schooling guidelines and the school to prison pipeline.

- Are high schools inadvertently placing students in jeopardy by counseling families to choose this alternative?

The homeschooling choice is popular because it can benefit both parties: neither the student nor the school has the expulsion mark on their official school records.

	Does count against a school’s grad rate	Does not count against grad rate
A student leaves a high school and drops out completely and does not enroll at another school	✓	
A student is expelled though counted as “Still in School”	✓	
The student/family “self-selects” out or is “counseled” out, or is just “pushed” out. The student leaves and then enrolls in another school.		✓
A student/family chooses homeschooling over expulsion		✓

Grasp the analysis of Appendix B via the discussion about the homeschool option which resulted from an analysis by the National Council on Educating Black Children, the Black & Latino Policy Institute, and Indiana University’s School of Social Work. It was presented 02.17.16 to the Indiana Advisory Committee to the U.S. Commission on Civil Rights.

- <http://www.usccr.gov/pubs/Civil-Rights%20and-the-School-to-Prison-Pipeline-in%20Indiana.pdf> See *Homeschooling* p. 31-34

Other information

Office of Education Innovation 2013-2014/2014-2015 reports on CTAS

http://oei.indy.gov/wp-content/uploads/2015/02/CTAS.Core_Question.1.2013.2014_final2.pdf

http://oei.indy.gov/wp-content/uploads/2017/04/CTAS.Core_Question.1.2015.2016_FINAL.pdf

Chalkbeat 10.21.16 CTAS as one of the better local high schools regarding ISTEP

<http://www.chalkbeat.org/posts/in/2016/11/21/indianapolis-high-schools-struggled-on-the-2016-istep-test-but-these-10-were-on-top/>

CTAS 2017 2nd Best Charter HS Out of 19 in Indy Metro Area

<https://www.niche.com/k12/rankings/public-high-schools/best-charter/m/indianapolis-metro-area/>

- Overall *Niche* Grade is a B
- 288 Students
- 99% Free or Reduced Lunch
- 55% Female
- 45% Male
- 93.45% African American
- 92% Proficient--Reading
- 95% Proficient--Math
- 85% Average Graduation Rate
- 1080 Average SAT composite score out of 1600

2017 *US News & World Report* on CTAS <https://www.usnews.com/education/best-high-schools/indiana/districts/charles-a-tindley-accelerated-schl/charles-a-tindley-accelerated-school-7107>

2017 *Indianapolis Star* Of the Indiana high schools reporting data since 2014, CTAS was 1 of only 16 enrolling at least 90% of their students in some sort of post-secondary education in Indiana or elsewhere as well as attaining a 90% readiness rate at Indiana public colleges. Of the 16 schools, 12 are private. (Herron, 2017). <http://www.indystar.com/story/news/education/2017/07/30/how-well-indiana-high-schools-preparing-students-college/453616001/>

Links to IDOE* Compass website data on CTAS

- <https://compass.doe.in.gov/dashboard/overview.aspx?type=school&id=6208>
- <https://compass.doe.in.gov/dashboard/enrollment.aspx?type=school&id=6208>
- <https://compass.doe.in.gov/dashboard/graduates.aspx?type=school&id=6208>

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