

Is Charles A. Tindley High School a dropout factory?
A preliminary report and commentary on the
graduation rates and promoting power of
Charles A. Tindley Accelerated School

Although this report is about the Charles A. Tindley Accelerated School, it serves as a call for transparency regarding graduation rate figures for all Indiana public schools. It is the hope that this analysis will spark due diligence on the part of the public to hold both our traditional school boards and our charter boards accountable.

We must especially find ways to make clear what goes on in schools especially before/after "count day" when each public school tallies the number of the students attending. The number of students present that day add up to direct funding for the school. Issues arise after count day. Do certain schools begin to "council out" certain students, suggesting other schools as a better option/"fit"? Is this done to help the enrollment numbers/reputation of these certain schools though at the expense of these certain students/families as well as clear responsible and authentic graduation rates?

Is Charles A. Tindley High School a dropout factory?

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 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 divides the number of 9th grade students who make it to 12th grade by the original number of students in that same 9th grade cohort. 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 grad 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."

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

A closer look at the January 2013 story on Tindley by *Indy Star* commentator 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."

What "self-select out" means in a general context, and then in the context of charter schools

It appears the "self-select out" concept came out of the business world explaining why someone may not have applied for a job (they didn't think they were qualified), or after applying, decided on their own not to follow through on the normal steps to being hired. For example, though they made it through to the final

stage of the hiring process, the applicant decided (on their own) to “self-select out” and not to go to the final interview.

This also may occur with certain charters as Mr. Payne noted, “When you create a culture of high expectations, people generally will self-select out of that culture if they are not committed.” In this case however, due to the local/national education politics associated with charters and the present national “push out” crisis used to introduce this report, a critical stance is needed to analyze this situation.

“Self-select out” is a coin with 2 sides

A review of the research shows the “self-select out” concept is a coin with 2 sides. This is not just a simple act of a student or family deciding to attend a certain school or not--notably in this case, a school with “high expectations.”

On one side of the coin is the “self-select out” scenarios described above and by Brian Payne. On the other side of the coin is a trio of related scenarios: the **Self-Selection Bias**, **Select Marketing Strategies**, and the **“Bum Steer.”**

Originating from the world of statistics, when applied to charter school scenarios, the concept of **Self-Select Bias** explains how some charters like Tindley or KIPP are influenced by this predilection, and so can benefit from the bias in that it can be implied their applicants are motivated to attend there. Many traditional public schools are not influenced by this special intent, giving charters “advantage” some see as unfair. The “bias” inherent in self-selection is also another way to explain the “self-select out” situation referred to by Brian Payne.

Due to the pressure to perform (high letter grades [from IDOE], test scores and graduation rates) some charters are not above using strategies to influence who considers their school or applies in the first place. Some charters, as a matter of policy, also have their own **select marketing strategies**: they organically target particular parts of the market with their public/private advertising and recruiting.

Plus, they have elaborate application processes or the **“bum steer”** where some charters “drive away” ELL and special needs students from applying via their high standard mentality.

- Here is a look at the “self-select bias” regarding charters:
<http://commons.trincoll.edu/cssp/2015/04/14/a-smarter-charter-self-selection-biases-in-charter-school-studies/>
- Here is a link that challenges the marketing idea that charters are a better way of educating minority students; yet, opponents say charters are able to educate only “some” of these students:
https://www.huffingtonpost.com/peter-greene/the-word-charter-schools_b_12223168.html
- See how marketing/the “bum steer” ploy help charters maintain their “edge” over traditional schools:
<http://commons.trincoll.edu/cssp/2015/05/11/the-not-so-dirty-dozen-plus-a-few-2/>

Other tactics: “Flunk or leave,” “A deal you can’t refuse,” “No backfill rules” and recruiting “good test takers”

Now that we’ve started a discussion about what happens before enrollment, we have to unpack what some charters use after enrollment to keep grad rates high. For example, certain “high standards/high expectation” charters make use of the **“flunk or leave”** angle where school officials threaten to hold the student back a grade if they remain in the school.

- See: <http://commons.trincoll.edu/cssp/2015/05/11/the-not-so-dirty-dozen-plus-a-few-2/>

Even in some cases regarding disciplinary action/s, a student/family may be offered **“a deal they 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 or home schools (See Appendix B). 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 say “...just wasn’t a good fit.”

Plus, 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.

And then we need to talk about the importance of the **“no-backfill rules”** in operation in many charter markets, guaranteeing that no new students ever come in during the middle of a multi-year program. One can read this plainly when reviewing each year of Tindley’s enrollment numbers. With traditional schools, in many instances, a school’s 10th grade enrollment numbers are larger than the 9th grade. This is not the case with Tindley. 10th grade enrollment is smaller than 9th grade, 11th grade enrollment is smaller than 10th grade and senior enrollment is smaller than 11th grade. This is because they do not “backfill.”

“It’s a deeply divisive issue within the charter sector. When transient students (those most likely to be low-performing) leave charter schools and are not replaced, it potentially makes some charters look good on paper through attrition and simple math: Strugglers leave, high performers stay, and the ratio of proficient students rises, creating an illusion of excellence that is not fully deserved.”

- See: <https://edexcellence.net/articles/charter-schools-and-backfill-the-debate-were-not-having>

Another obvious concern involves schools with high test scores—and the efforts of these schools to maintain such status by **recruiting “good test takers.”** Here, charters recruit/cultivate students from families with more resources who can perform on standardized test while “weeding out” more challenging students through their application process and school policies--like ones demanding volunteer time from parents. How is it fair and equitable when schools, can under the cover of the “self-selection” alibi, actually “weed out” poor test takers?

- See how/why charters can say their students of color do well on tests: “Charter students, especially minorities, score better on Florida tests, report finds.” <http://www.miamiherald.com/news/local/education/article148915414.html>
- Here’s link to why some charter schools have better test scores: <https://www.motherjones.com/politics/2016/03/charter-schools-suspend-more-black-students-disabilities-test-scores/>

Respecting the school in light of graduation rate vs. Promoting Power percents, CTAS and its supporters may attempt to “spin” what’s going on at the school as one where the student and their family select the school or leave on their own accord. In either case, the student/family is gone. The school is left free of responsibility and the school’s graduation rates and test scores remain high.

The concern of this study is the problems which arise when these rather “boutique” charters, that see themselves quasi-private schools, hold “high standards” mindsets for students/families, but not themselves.

In summary: The CTAS story calls for transparency in graduation rates

Indeed, the above report/commentary can be seen as presumptuous and even accusatory. The study is not so much about CTAS *per se*. As research reviewed and compared the various enrollment numbers and grad rates of local high schools, the CTAS data stood out because the school did not backfill and it was easy to follow the 9th grade cohort through to graduation. Such cohorts are hidden in most schools, getting lost in the increasing enrollments in 10th and 11th grades.

CTAS is just the canary in the coal mine inadvertently warning voters and tax-payers that some of their public schools' performances aren’t what they appear.

Nonetheless, 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

	2004 – 05	2005 – 06	2006 – 07	2007 – 08	2008 – 09	2009 – 10	2010 – 11	2011 – 12	2012 – 13	2013 – 14	2014 – 15	2015 – 16	2016 – 17	2017 – 18	2018 – 19
9th	66	59	29	40	46	61	69	62	68	93	135	94	89	91	62
10th		44	34	26	30	28	52	52	48	54	79	87	80	77	56
11th			15	22	23	23	22	43	32	41	42	44	64	72	59
12th				14	19	22	13	18	30	30	32	35	40	61	55

<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

School year	# 9th grade	# 10th grade	# 11th grade	# 12th grade	IDOE # grads*	Class of	IDOE Grad %*	Promoting Power <60%	Weak or Strong	Dropout Factory
04/05	66	44 (-22)	15 (-29)	14 (-1)	12	07-08	63.2%	14/66=21.2%	Weak	Yes
05/06	59	34 (-25)	22 (-12)	19 (-3)	15	08-09	60.0%	19/59=34.5%	Weak	Yes
06/07	29	26 (-3)	23 (-3)	22 (-1)	15	09-10	78.9%	22/29=75.8%	Strong	No
07/08	40	30 (-10)	23 (-7)	13 (-10)	12	10-11	75.0%	13/40=32.5%	Weak	Yes
08/09	46	28 (-18)	22 (-6)	18 (-4)	15	11-12	78.9%	18/46=39.1%	Weak	Yes
09/10	61	52 (-9)	43 (-9)	30 (-13)	27	12-13	90.0%	30/61=49.1%	Weak	Yes
10/11	69	52 (-17)	32 (-20)	30 (-2)	29	13-14	90.6%	30/69=43.4%	Weak	Yes
11/12	62	48 (-14)	41 (-7)	32 (-9)	24	14-15	85.7%	32/62=51.6%	Weak	Yes
12/13	68	54 (-14)	42 (-12)	35 (-7)	32	15-16	88.9%	35/68=51.5%	Weak	Yes
13/14	93	79 (-14)	44 (-35)	40 (-4)	35	16-17	92.1%	40/93=43.0%	Weak	Yes
14/15	135	87 (-48)	64 (-23)	61 (-3)	56	17-18	84.8%	61/135=45.2%	Weak	Yes
15/16	94	80 (-14)	72 (-8)	55 (-17)		18-19		55/94=58.5%	Weak	Yes
16/17	89	77 (-12)	59 (-18)			19-20				
17/18	91	56 (-35)				20-21				
18/19	62									

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 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 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.% 10 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 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 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 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 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 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 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 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/>

According to 2019 niche.com site, CTAS is the 2nd best charter HS in the Indy Metro Area. Herron is 1st. CTAS was 3rd out of the 25 best Indiana charter HS.

<https://www.niche.com/k12/charles-a-tindley-accelerated-school-indianapolis-in/>

- Overall Niche Grade is a B
- 260 Students
- 85% Average Graduation Rate
- 1070 Average SAT out of 1600

According to the 2018 US News & World Report, CTAS received a Bronze medal

<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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