

A deconstruction of the closing of Indiana Math & Science Academy–South

Dear Chairperson Mr. John Mutz and members of the Indianapolis Charter School Board

I went to IPS Harry E. Wood High School in the mid-1950s with my peers from Barrington. Since those days until now, I have had an interest in that neighborhood. As an IPS teacher and amateur IPS historian, I followed the history of IPS 64 and that community's proud support of their Harriet Beecher Stowe Elementary School. Consequently, I was intrigued when I read in the *Star* that Indiana Math and Science Academy South (IMSAS) (<http://south.imsaindy.org/>) closed. <http://www.indystar.com/story/news/education/2017/02/07/low-enrollment-leads-indianapolis-charter-schools-closure/97585552/> Please note the comments from readers.

I went online to take a look at the school's data to see if it gave any insights on why the school, which opened in the fall of 2013, closed. The IDOE'S Compass site has no records for IM&S South. IDOE told me they take defunct schools off the site.

<https://compass.doe.in.gov/dashboard/overview.aspx>

Therefore, I am writing to get information about the closing so I can share it with my peers, and other concerned residents on the Southside and around our city. I know each would like all the details about the closure of the public school their tax dollars supported.

I would appreciate receiving all missing data that would normally be on Compass and that is not already on the OEI's very thorough collections of data <http://oei.indy.gov/indiana-math-science-academy-south/>. Please send me data that would be present on Compass under the following categories: the teacher count by ethnicity and years of experience, average teacher salary, educator ratings, and Expanded Annual Performance Reports--covering the 2013-2017 school years of each category.

Also, please send the names of Barrington residence and parents who were on the IMSAS Board and the Internet links to school's financial records and its 501c3 status records.

Without this information how can we citizen voters analyze the status quo and make informed decisions about how the Office of Educational Innovation's bevy of charters are fulfilling the purpose of public education: critical citizenship?

Please appreciate that public concerns about quality, and issues of accountability and transparency will be minimized as the community learns of the details of the IMSAS story.

Money Matters: From \$20,000 to \$1,868,400

This information will also be shared because of my concern with the finances surrounding the IPS No. 64 Harriet Beecher Stowe/Indiana Math & Science South (IMSAS) scenario.

No. 64 was originally located at 3000 Cottage Ave., opening around 1913. In 1953, the school was relocated in a brand new building, costing an estimated \$452,801 ("Two new schools open," 1953), at 2710 Bethel Ave. in the same Barrington neighborhood. IPS began considering closing No. 64 in late 2010.

<http://www.indianaeconomicdigest.net/main.asp?SectionID=31&ArticleID=56345>

IPS sold No. 64 to Mr. Ron Merrill and Mr. Bill Thomas, the owners of Euclid Machine Co., (2575 Bethel Ave.) for just \$20,000 in June of 2011. IPS also sold a lot next to the school for only \$100. This was so stunning, the *Indianapolis Business Journal (IBJ)* titled their story on the transaction, “New owners aim for big profit after buying IPS school on the cheap.”

According to that Sept. 2011 *IBJ* story, Ron and Bill put No. 64 on the market for \$395,000--or a nearly 2,000% return. As well, *IBJ* noted local appraiser Traynor & Associates Inc. pegged the fair-market value of School 64 as \$420,400. <https://www.ibj.com/articles/29352-new-owners-aim-for-big-profit-after-buying-ips-school-on-the-cheap>

At this time, according to Resource Commercial Real Estate (<https://rcre.com>), the 2 story brick 46,710 sq. ft. school on 2.02 acres on Bethel is going for almost a whopping \$2 million (\$1,868,400.00)! See: Indiana Commercial Real Estate Exchange <http://www.icrex.net>

This inspires the questions: Was the Concept Schools/IMSAS buying or renting No. 64? In either case, what were the monthly amounts and to whom was it paid?

Urban school reform and land development

The selling of schools “on the cheap” by the school commissioners is especially problematic since our IPS is in constant financial trouble. The public have been aware of these types of real estate deals for awhile. Note the 2013 article, “Urban school reform is really about land development (not kids).”

https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/answer-sheet/wp/2013/05/28/ed-school-dean-urban-school-reform-is-really-about-land-development-not-kids/?utm_term=.2b9c4210bcd1#comments

Two timely 2017 articles show that this continues to be a major concern of voters: note the “How Charter School Operators Enrich Themselves In Real Estate” (April 30, 2017) <http://www.nationalmemo.com/charter-school-operators-enrich-real-estate/> and “Charter Real Estate” (August 4, 2017) <http://curmudgucation.blogspot.com/2017/08/charter-real-estate.html>.

Two other current news stories by investigative journalists question the real estate dealings of the Gulen Movement associated charter management organizations like Chicago’s/Indy’s Concept Schools which manage the Indiana Math & Science Academy schools. Review what happened in New Jersey, “Turks create big footprint in New Jersey charter schools: Taxpayers contribute more than \$60 million to charter school network in 2016” (February 2, 2017) <http://www.democratandchronicle.com/story/news/watchdog/2017/02/15/fethullah-gulen-charter-schools-islamic-cleric-new-jersey/94574618/> and “Related-party charter school deal generated healthy profit for developer from public funds” (December 9, 2017) <http://www.democratandchronicle.com/story/news/2017/12/09/terra-science-and-education-profits-rochester-academy-charter-school-deal-fethullah-gulen/919916001/>

In light of such national concerns and especially due to the present controversy over the closing/selling of our IPS high schools, all of this is worrisome. Again, transparency is vital and very important considering the recent poor showings on Indy’s charters (Elliot, 2016) and the NAACP (2017) critique which are reflected in the plummeting popularity of charters

around the country (Borsuk, 2017). <https://edsources.org/2017/charter-schools-take-a-hit-in-nationwide-poll/585949>

The Barrington community: In context

That few in town--except for perhaps long-time southsiders like I am--can appreciate Indy's south east side shows how historically marginalized the Barrington area has been.

Thus, it is necessary to place the concern of this deconstruction of the IMSAS situation over/upon the historical/cultural/political context of the Barrington neighborhood.

Here's the story: Although the area of town called Barrington has been around for over a century, According to Mr. Joe Smith Sr., Barrington grew significantly in the mid-1950s. As the government opened its Ft. Harrison Army Finance Center in 1953 (Ft. Harrison Fact Sheet, n.d.), Barrington was built up to provide housing for the center's employees (Smith, 1980)—most likely custodial, maintenance, and food service workers.

“Up south” Naptown

Taking into account the insight of local and nationally acclaimed activist Mari Evans in that, “Many Black folk thought of Indianapolis as urban, ‘Up South.’ It was better than being ‘down South,’ but it retained many of the negative propositions of the deep South and was not yet enlightened or ‘progressive’ as the West or East Coast counterparts. Conservatism and racism were alive and compatible” (Loflin, 2007). *Barrington was already down south in an historically “Up South” Naptown.*

Our city's Southside and its relationship with our city's Northside African Americans

As a lifetime Indianapolis resident of over 7 decades, I can't remember a time when the members of Indy's North side African American community were welcomed south of Washington St. This comes from 2 facts:

1. *Our Southside has a legacy of racism and segregation that continues today.* Ask a majority of Black folks who live on Indy's Northside (where most do: see point 2 below) and they will tell you they do not come south of Washington St. that much. Or, put it this way: you do not see Confederate flags flying on the Northside—you will on the Southside. This is not without reason. Read UIndy's Dr. Michael Cartwright's essay, “Rich local Southside heritage lives on in forgotten areas.” <http://kinumedia.org/vorcreatex2/wp-content/uploads/2012/12/Rich-local-Southside-heritage-lives-on-in-forgotten-areas.pdf>
2. *Indianapolis is one of the 21 most segregated cities in America* (Baird-Remba & Lubin, 2013). What makes Indy even more “unique,” it is not only segregated by race, but also by class. Washington St. (US 40) and the parallel railroad tracks divide the city north and south. www.flickr.com/photos/walkingsf/5560477952/in/album-72157626354149574/ Note on the map, the super majority of red dots (white people) below Washington St. In the past, as today, these citizens are majority working class.

The point here is that the Southside, Greenwood north to downtown, has historically not “cotton to black folks” adding to the cultural and economic isolation of Barrington and contributed to its speciality—a uniqueness, I argue in this analysis, was not respected and

validated, and so unfortunately went unappreciated by the charter board, OEI, and the Concept Schools organization.

**Due to the Attucks documentary, we can now openly discuss the history of our IPS:
From Attucks (1922-1927) to IPS 64 (1953) to IMSAS (2013-2017)**

Now that *Attucks: A school that opened a city* is public for all to see, we know the Klan did not create Attucks. The organizations/persons who did in late 1922 were the Indianapolis Chamber of Commerce, the Citizens School Committee, and the Federation of Civic Clubs <https://www.wfyi.org/programs/attucks/television/attucks-the-school-that-opened-a-city>, or what is called “the Mind Trust of 1922” (Loflin, 2016).

Manual opened at 501 S. Meridian in 1895. In 1953 it moved to 2405 Madison Ave. Manual basically moved to stay white racially though also avoiding the poor white families moving in some near Southside neighborhoods where Manual student lived (Loflin, 1980). The changes in demographics, which also brought more Black families from the South into the established community around Shapiro’s and the Concord Center (and Barrington) resulted from the Second Great Migration (1940-1970).

It was the 1950’s

As our near Southside changed, its German community moved farther south and its Jewish community moved farther north. The suburbs were developing and Indy shopping malls (Eastgate, 1957 and Glendale, 1958) opened.

Between 1927 and 1949, Manual had no African American students. By 1951, due to Indiana’s 1949 School Desegregation Law, Manual had, in number, 100 black students. A decade later, in 1961, it still had, in amount, 100 black students (Loflin, 1980). In fact, the ’49 law panicked some white parents who being afraid their child/ren would be sent to No. 64, filed a lawsuit against IPS (“Naptown Nonsense in the Schools,” 1952).

The 1953 openings of both No. 64 and Wood enabled IPS to get around the 1949 law (and *Brown vs. Board*). This helped keep Manual white—keeping Barrington’s African American students in Barrington and at No. 64—and sending Barrington’s 9th-12th grade students to the more distant Wood instead of west down Raymond St. to the new Manual.

Coincidence or a plan? Three “new” Southside schools open on August 31, 1953

As mentioned above, No. 64 was originally located in the early part of the 20th century at 3000 Cottage Ave. In **1953**, the school was relocated in a brand new building at 2710 Bethel Ave. in the same Barrington neighborhood.

As also mentioned, the new Manual opened in **1953**. In the old Manual building, Harry E. Wood HS opened in **1953** too.

We can’t forget, our IPS circumvented/circumscribed *Brown vs. Board* until 1970 when, with the anticipation and threat of a federal court desegregation order, the segregationist school board began to fully integrate the district. 1970 is the same year UNIGOV was enacted: *Coincidence or a plan?*

Also, this is the 1970s when white IPS families began leaving the district (i.e., “white flight”) and our IPS enrollment went from about 110,000 to today’s +/- 30,000 students.

The ethnic/cultural/political disconnect at IMSAS

“For a span of my memory this has been a city of opposing wills, two faces firmly set toward different directions—one covertly determined to maintain the status quo, to continually block any access to power, or to parity; the other advocating an active morality and its right to inclusion as an equal entity rather than a colonized one. This has been a city of perpetual confrontation, however cloaked, between the powerless and those who influence, control, and engineer the city’s movement in the inexorable and often ruthless march toward ‘greatness’...”

~ Mari Evans, a local nationally acclaimed poet, writer and activist

Seeing support for the benefits of African American school leadership on the all-around success of urban schools where the majority of students in those schools are African American (Delpit, 1995), it makes sense to mention the factors of ethnic/cultural/political background of a schools leadership as a possible contributor to the failure (Howard, 1999) of a school like IMSAS.

This raises the question: Was the ethnic/cultural/political disconnects between the Concept School’s leadership team and the ethnic/cultural/political characteristics of the Barrington families and their community a factor in low enrollment and thus closure?

A poor decision

First of all, let’s not forget Southeast Education Task Force member Terri Garcia told the City-County Council charter subcommittee at a January 9, 2013 meeting that the Southside had not been informed enough about IMSAS. Yet, this caution from the grassroots was ignored. While Councilor Robinson suggested postponing the decision, the proposed charter was approved and passed on to the whole council where it passed later in the month by a majority vote.

<http://www.indy.gov/eGov/Council/Meetings/Committees/Minutes/Documents/ComAff%20Minutes/comaff01-09-13min.pdf>

Though the Concept Schools model is struggling here (Elliot, 2016), the IMSA North (7435 N Keystone Ave) and IMSA West (4575 W. 38th St) schools are not as bad as IMSAS. The decision to find general and prime locations on major streets for these 2 IMSA schools was smart. Through the lens of this analysis, placing an IMSA off the beaten path in a small marginalized/segregated community with a distinct culture like Barrington was a poor decision.

I am sure Mr. Mustafa Arslan, superintendent of Indy’s Concept Schools, is well educated and cares about children very much. In retrospect, Concept Schools’ picks of school leaders for IMSAS were poor choices.

IMSAS’s first principal, Ms. Cathy Sparks, was well educated in science as a Purdue graduate and so prepared for the IMSA’s STEM orientation. I assume she was trained well as a school leader at Marian and IMSA West where she was able to show her care for students as vice-principal. At IMSAS she raised the schools IDOE grade from F to D.* What was as important, she raised the 3-year net income sub-indicator from a -\$163, 555 to a +\$130,228. That’s a big difference. <http://oei.indy.gov/indiana-math-science-academy-south/>. Nonetheless, her ideas and the school climate she initiated were not sustainable.

In addition, I am sure Mr. Hasan Akkaya, the second principal of IMSAS, is a fine person, and is also well educated and cares about children. Regrettably for Barrington families, he was unable to sustain the momentum of school improvement set by Principal Sparks.*

This fact is an issue and raises the question: Is having a non-Black school principal of Turkic ethnicity and Turkish nationality (Mr. Akkaya) both culturally (Howard, 1999) and politically inappropriate for:

- a predominately African American urban school,
- located in a unique community like Barrington,
- on the Southeast side of an “Up South” city like Indianapolis--which Mari Evans notes is where African Americans have to
 - “...advocate an active morality and [their] right to inclusion as an equal entity rather than a colonized one,” in order to counter those European American elites who are
 - “...covertly determined to maintain the status quo [and]
 - to continually block [African Americans] from any access to power, or to parity...”?

In light of the inclinations of this analysis, the answer to the question is *yes*. It’s inappropriate. The next question is: *What was the Indianapolis Charter School Board thinking?*

Then, add on top of this the bad press that seems to accompany the Concept School program: <http://horizonparentstruth.blogspot.com/2014/09/> . In Mr. Akkaya’s case, he was to be the principal of Chicago’s Horizon Science Academy-Clay Evans (http://www.buzzfile.com/business/Concept-Schools-847-824-3380_no:13817560), but his Concept School’s team was unable to establish (<http://progressillinois.com/news/content/2014/08/21/cps-pulls-planned-opening-south-side-concept-charter-school>) the controversial Clay Evans school. See: <https://chicago.everyblock.com/politics/may14-horizon-science-academy-clay-evans-campus-good-bad-6138925/>

Locally, the Concept Schools program was not without issues: <http://charterschoolscandals.blogspot.com/2010/08/indiana-math-and-science-academy.html>

Nationally, Gulen Movement associated charter school management groups like Indy’s Concept Schools are under scrutiny. See: “Are some U.S. charter schools helping fund controversial Turkish cleric’s movement?” (March 29, 2017). <https://www.cbsnews.com/news/is-turkish-religious-scholar-fethullah-gulen-funding-movement-abroad-through-us-charter-schools/>

*Why didn’t Concept Schools keep Ms. Sparks? Research supports the positive effects of consistent school leadership for urban schools. As well, remember, after she left the sub-indicator lowered to - \$129,797 and IMSAS dropped back to an F ranking.

The Concept Schools model is good, but good for assimilation, not liberation

Mari Evans, Indy’s voice of conscience, adds more context to the situation. She notes this about our city and its mid-west conformist nature: “...though what is more acceptable, more comfortable [in Indianapolis], is a high level of acculturation” defined as “to alter ... through a process of conditioning” (Hoppe, 1989; Evans, 2006).

Indeed, the Concept Schools model--at least on the surface--has potential: STEM focus, personalized learning, college readiness for all, longer school days, community partnerships, even home visits. See: <http://www.conceptschools.org/concept-model/>

Still, from the stand-point of this analysis, it is culturally and politically inappropriate for IMSAS to perpetuate the acculturation of African American students in a *school that was even named after a European American* (Harriet Beech Stowe) by an all-European American IPS board around 1913.

The school's name, in itself, epitomizes the past to present story of #64: the marginalization and subordination of an authentic identity of an American minority and their community to one seen more politically and economically appropriate by the local dominate culture.

"Indianapolis, I tell my friends in other places, is a city where the preservation of Euro-American cultural traditions and the enhancement of those traditions has been consistent."
~ Mari Evans

Yet, the DNA of the IMSAS school ideal does not promote a critical awareness of Indy's colonizing ethos about which Mari Evans warns is a mindset hindering critical citizenship.

"Education is never neutral, Paulo Freire informs us; it either colonizes or liberates. Education either functions as an instrument which is used to facilitate the integration of the younger generation into the logic of the present system and bring about conformity, or it becomes the practice of freedom, the means by which men and women deal critically and creatively with reality and discover how to participate in the transformation of their world."
~ Patrick Finn on Paulo Freire

Simply put, the Concept Schools' model lacks a political consciousness via a critical pedagogy (Duncan-Andrade & Morrel, 2008) which their black and brown, and poor white students need in order to look out for their own self-interests and the self-interests of their communities. Inherently, STEM curricula promote critical thinking; it's just not about power and the political reality marginalized urban students face daily. Cultural competency is not enough. Advancing culturally relevant teaching as politically relevant teaching (Loflin, 2008) is what is needed for IMSA students like those living in Barrington.

"Education is a political act. Teaching is political work. In this respect, building a knowledge base about the community is a central part of working in schools: it gives you a better understanding of the students and shows you value their background and are on their side."
~ Prof. H. R. Milner IV (2017).

Directly, the approach does not prepare its staff to have an "attitude" (Finn, 1999), a "political act" where students know you "...are on their side." It is this disposition that is needed for an education that is experienced as emancipatory by oppressed minorities. To consider what an education for liberation looks like, see:

<http://vorcreatex.com/wp-content/uploads/2016/03/What-is-a-high-quality-education-for-urban-students.pdf>

Who's responsible when a charter school closes?

The recent NAACP (2017) critique of charters for Black children raises the question of the possible effects of school closings on Black children.

"Black students are particularly susceptible to being impacted by school closures. From the year 2000 to 2012, Black students were 29% of all students enrolled in U.S. charter schools, yet 45% of all students in charter schools that closed during those years were Black." The report goes on to assert, "...but beyond the disruption they create for students, families, and communities, a study of three cities found that students in closed charter schools do not typically move on to higher performing schools." (See p. 18).

This examination of the IMSAS situation appreciates the fact that, "Many Mayor-sponsored charter schools are serving student populations from chronically low-performing schools." This critique also understands that it takes time for an OEI, "...school to reach a high level of student proficiency on standardized assessments," and that most are successful in developing good test takers. *Yet, when an OEI charter does fail, who is accountable and in what way/s is this responsibility accepted, and both the resulting lessons learned implemented and measured?*

A personal commentary:

IMSAS was an experiment, plain and simple; it was also a failed experiment

From my personal perspective and opinion, even the men at the barber shop can see this was a failed experiment enabled by an initial well-meaning, yet misguided decision. I sense IMSAS was created as a result of outside forces. This was a top down decision.

Did the families of Barrington's children self-organize to close No. 64 in 2010? Did they self-organize to search the nation for a charter school entity, deciding on and inviting Concept Schools to come in and start an IMSA at No. 64? I can only assume that this did not happen. I say this because if the Barrington folks had been allowed to co-establish their own authentic neighborhood school and co-administered to meet the self-interests of Barrington, *there would have been absolutely no way the community would have let their school fail and be shuttered.*

Regardless, the Concept Schools' approach did not work at IMSAS. They were unable to engage the children and win the hearts and minds of the families of the African American working class. This failure simply extends the years of political manipulation, i.e., using No. 64 to postpone the mandates of the 1949 Indiana Desegregation Law ("Naptown Nonsense in the Schools," 1952), continuing local Jim Crow schools into the 21st century--and thus years of educational neglect by IPS, and now the mis-calculations of our Indianapolis Charter School Board and Office of Education Innovation.

Today, we have a tale of two "Barringtons," one with a new problem built on top of old unsolved problems...This is not the leading-edge "New Indianapolis" as city fathers claim.

John Harris Loflin
Harry E. Wood High School
Class of 1961
www.vorcreatex.com

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