

## Redefine the purpose of schools located in the circumstances of poverty

"The purpose of education for urban students is not to get them out of poverty, but to get rid of it."  
~ Prof. Jeff Duncan-Andrade

Today's model of urban education reform makes the mistake of attempting to replicate the schooling ideology of the middle class, emphasizing a "college-going culture." In so doing, these principles all but

- ignore the material conditions of urban communities.

B&LPI agrees with Prof. Duncan-Andrade that the purpose of urban schools is not to get students out of poverty, but to get rid of it. Yet, the implication is that Black American students must endure the anger, poverty, and other social toxins experienced daily until they can "escape" the neighborhood. Here are examples of social toxins in this [Urban Conditions and Social Toxins Chart](#).

This is why B&LPI is promoting a curriculum that respects urban schools as sites to contest and eradicate inequalities like poverty and other social toxins such as fear, alienation, housing, violence, dislocation, or jobs. Review: [Urban schools as sites to contest inequalities](#)

### ***Proposed Action Item***

An initiative will be organized by AACI that includes the [Indiana Poor People's Campaign](#), Christian Theological Seminary's Faith & Action Project (Lindsey Rabinowitch ([lrabinowitch@cts.org](mailto:lrabinowitch@cts.org)), the Indianapolis NAACP, the IUPUI School of Social Work, Community Action of Greater Indianapolis (<https://www.cagi-in.org>), the Indianapolis Urban League, the Center for Interfaith Cooperation, labor union representatives, and the Salvation Army to develop a 10 year plan to eradicate poverty.

Central to the effort will be involving students and their schools--situated in circumstances of poverty--in an anti-poverty curriculum which will challenge the [limitations of a "going to college" culture in schools](#) which reflects a middle-class ideology that ignores poverty. Here, poverty is something to "escape" not eradicate. Yes, students do get out, but they leave the neighborhood in the same shape for those having to remain.

**Schools where banners or pennants of universities are placed above classroom doors will instead have, for example:**

- Poverty
- Housing/gentrification
- Employment
- Food & Diet
- Police Relations
- Education
- Mental Health
- Violence
- Gangs
- Worker own businesses#

# [The Columbia Conserve Co.: A southeast Indianapolis business owned and managed by workers](#)

With an anti-poverty curriculum, students will learn to read, write and compute, meet Indiana standards, use higher order thinking skills, research, and use what they learned to affect policy—preparing themselves of career, college, and citizenship all while improving their neighborhood.

These particular classrooms will act as the “headquarters” for student efforts to tackle social issues. In grades where students stay in one classroom, the various disciplines (math, reading, writing, art, science, social studies) will all be studied for example through the lens of a classroom’s theme of “housing.” For example the class curriculum will focus in the intersectionality of math and housing, reading and housing, writing and housing, art and housing, science and housing, and social studies and housing. All this activity will have the purpose of analyzing the class’s research in order to affect public and private policy issues around housing for the poor. To the extent the school year’s efforts do not culminate in solutions, the “project” will be carried on by that classroom’s next year students.

In 7-12 schools, where students go to different classrooms/teachers for different subjects, the scenario will be somewhat the same. For example, a particular English III class with a sign over the door saying “Violence” will read essays, novels, other literature, and social science research publications to understand violence. Group and individual projects will form around the various aspects of violence. Writing assignments will range from personal essays and research papers to creating official policy papers and statements that will be used to communicate with local organizations, non-profits, foundations, and Indiana government policy/legislative officials regarding reducing neighborhood violence.

English Teacher: Would you like to study police brutality, why it happens, and be able to do something about it, or study adverbs?

Student: Study the police.

English Teacher: What if we do both?

Student: That’ll work!

### **Intrinsic motivation**

To iterate, while simultaneously challenging and solving important community/neighborhood problems, the anti-poverty curriculum of these classrooms and courses will also have students

- meet all the IDOE state standards
- use all the high-order thinking skills
- prepared students for college, career, and citizenship
- know and appreciate why they are studying what they are studying—their own survival and their community’s sustainability

Here are some examples from Canada as educators and schools worked with students to get rid of poverty:

- [Canada Keep the Promise Campaign A Call to Action Booklet](#)
- [Canada: Involving students in high-poverty schools to ease and eradicate poverty](#)
- [Canada Keep the Promise Campaign: Anti-poverty Curriculum](#)
- [Canada Keep the Promise Campaign: What is it? A discussion booklet for grades 5-8](#)