

Indy's education "gangstas" rule 2020 elections The "Billionaire's School Board" now rules IPS

"The crisis is not about education at all. It's about power." -- James Baldwin

The 2020 IPS school board race is over. Yet, the story of a campaign where corporate school reform candidates with campaign contributions from "super donors" outspent their pro-public school opponents is not over.

The 2020 IPS election reminds me of the historic issues in traditional politics where voters have concerns about "political corruption" or the power politics of "special interest groups."

Slogans like "Curb billionaire and corporate money in political campaigns" also apply to regular elections. However, things have changed. Now this warning applies to school board elections.

In fact, other terms like power, or greed, or even "ganstas" come to my mind when taking an honest look at the IPS election scenario.

First things first: The big pictures

A. The Perfect Storm: The why, who, how, and implications of privatizing public education

Back in the 2015, Ed Eiler of Lafayette, IN published "[The Perfect Storm](#)." His distinctly thorough investigation with analysis covers the big picture. Eiler connects the dots around the why, the who, and the how of the so-called "Education Reform Movement." He explains its history and helps citizens see where and why a local [Political Action Committee](#) (PAC) like [RISE Indy](#) gets so much money.

Now we see how hedge fund managers, foundations, and other wealthy investors, some of which are the same "big-cash investors" who gave to other local PACs, are out to control the IPS board.

B. The City Fund: What's behind charters? Connecting the dots from a national perspective

[The City Fund](#) is a wealthy national group where The Mind Trust's [David Harris](#) took the IPS scheme.

- **Goals of Teach for America: Get Teach for America graduates into positions of power**
Having a "Billionaire's Board" fits with the plans of [Stand for Children](#) (SfC) and [Teach for America](#) (TfA) to get parents to choose to leave and not [stay with and better their own public schools](#).

- **Compounding power: Now TfA runs Indy's education scene**
Note, both Supt. Johnson and [Mind Trust](#) leader Brandon Brown are TfA grads; and, consequently, both are making sure IPS is absorbed into their TfA family and its worldview. Please read: [Why we don't want Aleesia Johnson as IPS superintendent: Connecting the dots around TfA's hidden influence on educational politics in Indianapolis](#).

Fairness is bought off by the power politics of millionaires and billionaires.

"When one candidate for a school board seat is able to vastly outspend another so as to over shadow the substance and issues of the campaign regarding what's best for children and wins the election, their opponents are not the losers, fairness and democracy are the losers." -- Anonymous

RISE Indy as neo-colonial gangstas: "If you can't get it legitimately, hey... just buy it!"

Though buying elections is not new, what is new are elections around public schools where it seems children are on an auction block. This is not only political corruption, its ethical corruption.

"In prison, if you can't get respect or what you want, we just buy it." -- Mr. "K. A." an ex-con

In fact, local groups like RISE Indy are what can be viewed as sort of neo-colonial "gangstas." Hey, you don't have to be a criminal or gang-banger to be a gangsta!

In the *Urban Dictionary*, "[gangsta](#)" is, "One who willfully promotes and participates in a destructive and self-serving culture in an effort to project a particular image...or to make oneself intimidating."

“Gangsta” is a term used to describe mainly urban criminals or a rap genre’. It also has connotations for the general public meaning any person or organization that tries to impress and/or manipulate others or the populace with status and a big “money wad.”

Racial capitalism and the neo-liberal assault on Black children

What is [racial capitalism](#), [neo-liberalism](#), and what’s meant by [The neo-liberal turn in Black politics](#)?

“Education reform...in Indianapolis was this idea that the urban core was broken and was in need of a tax base to increase the aesthetics. So the foundation of education reform... [here] is centered around the fundamental idea about bringing a tax base [Fishers, Greenwood, Plainfield] that has left [Indy’s] urban core and bring them back.”

-- Dr. Nate Williamms, from “Racial capitalism and a neo-liberal assault on Black children”

Other neo-colonial (e.g., neo-assimilationist) organizations like The Mind Trust are also gangstas. The Mind Trust is actually a [Trojan Horse](#) holding sway and buying allegiance from an un-informed public. They use power as well as big money from billionaire donors to get what they want.

Lilly Endowment	2013-2020	\$22,716,000
Gate Foundation	2011-2012	\$1,959,334
Walton Family Foundation	2013-2019	\$9,615,473
Arnold Ventures	2013-2017	\$11,075,000
Richard M. Fairbanks	2013-2018	\$5,998,000
The City Fund	2018-2021	\$18,000,000

* The City Fund Giving from their independent report.

According to charter critic [T. Ultican](#), between 2011 and 2021, the Mind Trust has collected \$70M in donations from entities like Eli Lilly, Bill Gates, and the Walton family.

Along with TfA’s so-called “[Parent University](#),” the Mind Trust promotes and participates in the destruction of traditional public education as it bamboozles and gaslights IPS parents and their families via “self-serving” transactional relationships: [The Mind Trust's neo-colonial war on parents](#).

Mind Trust’s addiction big money mandates they support standardization (aka whiteness) and consequently standardized testing. Please read the essay, “[The Mind Trust as Whiteness](#).”

Both Mind Trust and TfA practice what can be seen as simply enabling none other than [racial capitalism and a neo-liberal assault on Black children](#).

Both tout “a high quality education” without [explaining what that means](#) other than test scores.

The tragedy is this is the corporate takeover of IPS and is the continuation of the legacy of local business interests like the Indy Chamber in manipulating IPS. We can’t forget it was the chamber that helped enable a Jim Crow school district and city in the early 1920s. Historically, the influence of the Indy Chamber (and the city’s corporate community) [has been in the background of IPS](#).

Discarding America’s representative democracy: Disenfranchisement 2.0, James Crow and the Pipeline to Corporatocracy

“Elected school boards are the foundation of American democracy.” -- Tom Ultican

US citizens want the right to control public education by electing school boards. People went to jail and others died for the right to vote for those who represent them. This current school governance

scam, allowing boards of charters/Innovation school to be selected not elected, is nothing more than a power grab to transfer control of public education, its funding, and IPS properties to the private interests—namely, corporations. Please read: [Urban school reform is really about land development](#).

Using “James Crow”--a more sophisticated form of Jim Crow--charters/Innovations disenfranchise the very citizens and parents they claim to help. Here the same person who can vote in/out members of their traditional public school board, can't vote in/out members of the very charter/Innovation school boards who spend their taxes. Taxation without representation is tyranny. It's a step away from democracy towards corporatocracy.

IPS: Home of “The Billionaire’s School Board”

Indeed, now that the pro-choice IPS administration has a 5-2 majority, the board can carry out its plans. Opponents have good reason to simply follow along.

Yet, when Indianapolis fully wakes up to what's behind the stark difference between the roughly \$400,000 raised by the 4 IPS pro-choice candidates compared to the roughly \$41,000 raised by the 4 local candidates, citizens will be concerned. Due to the past, people naturally know such a funding disparity in political campaigns is cause for alarm.

This is notable because the \$400,000 raised by local pro-charter groups is comparatively outrageous for a school district with 31,000 students.

Unwittingly, yet deservedly, due to the concepts arising from local street epistemologies, the new IPS board will be forever stigmatized as the “Billionaire’s Board.”

Critically conscious citizens need to investigate what the IPS board has to do for all the support from local millionaires and national billionaires who [purposely target school board elections](#) around the US.

Why all the big money?

IPS follows New Orleans: Privatize all public schools

What started out as a push for a few local charters (given freedom from certain traditional public education policy requirements) the number of Indy charters has grown. Now, [Indy is home of America's 2nd most privatized public school system!](#) New Orleans Public Schools (NOLA) is ranked first where every school is privatized.

Here are examples of how corporate culture, not democracy, influences public education

Both NOLA and IPS use [business language](#) and Wall Street investment practices: [Portfolio models: private ways of running public schools](#). Check out the [IPS Portfolio Management](#) scheme here.

The IPS pipeline to corporatocracy: Does Indy really want a fully privatized school district?

Society has schools to socialize students. Indy's religious denominations own their schools. Cathedral and Hasten Hebrew Academy are examples. The wealthy own Park Tutor. Indy's corporate and business communities own IPS.

Corporate over-funding of school board candidates will keep the pipeline to privatization filled-up. However, the stark difference in donations (\$430,000 to \$41,000) [reported by WFYI](#) will have repercussions and turn out to be self-defeating for the new IPS majority—a backlash by critically conscious voters, teachers, and students who rightly suspect some deals were made.

The imbalance of campaign donations will raise consciousness and help raise the question, “[Does Indianapolis really want a fully privatized school system?](#)”

Selling children to the highest bidder: Legislative oversight on school board campaigns

Finally, I argue that the larger IPS community will now be open to legislation guaranteeing school board races stay fair, authentic, and yet competitive by making sure we don't have the [nationalization of local school board elections](#) where the super-wealthy have "outsized influence" on local elections. Indiana needs bold democracy reforms regarding campaign finance and corruption of school board elections that build on the historic 2019 ["For the People Act" \(H.R. 1\)](#).

This legislative proposal is supported by what just happened in LA's Unified School District (LAUSD) where [billionaires poured money](#) into the school board election and LA "...probably experienced the [most expensive board elections ever](#), with combined reported spending nearing \$17.5M. Supporters of charters, backed by a relatively small number of wealthy donors, vastly outspent the other side. L.A. school board races show the split between union- and charter-backed candidates."

"The good, the bad, and the ugly": School board elections in Oakland, LA, and Indianapolis
Tables in Tom Ultican's current commentary, ["The good, the bad, and the ugly"](#) show what happened with campaign finances in board races in Oakland, LA, and Indianapolis. Analyze Ultican's Table 5.

LAUSD: Millions for school board races? What's going on here?

"[Table 5] shows almost \$12M dollars in independent expenditures spent to sway the [LAUSD] election with nearly \$10 million promoting school privatization. In the Dist.3 race, almost \$3,586,443 was spent by pro-choice's Marilyn Koziatek to defeat the winning candidate Scott Schmerelson, who was supported by the teachers union. In Dist. 7 race, a whopping \$6,387,455 went to ensure pro-charter [and incumbent] Tanya Franklin topped union-backed Patricia Castellanos."

IPS: Indianapolis PAC's had money to burn

Ultican's IPS table shows the large "money to burn" totals spent on the IPS election by SfC: \$121,597; RISE Indy: \$136,638 (RISE Indy PAC has \$559,995); Indy Chamber \$54,014; and, Hoosiers for Great Public Schools: \$30,000. Ultican's total for IPS candidates was \$342,250.01.

How many thousands of dollars did SfC's glossy, color, and perforated [tri-fold campaign mailer](#) cost to design, print, and send around the city?

Table 5

Table 5: Political Action Campaign Spending on Indianapolis School Board Races

DISTRICT 1						
Candidate	Stand for Children	Indy Rise	Indy Chamber	Hoosiers	I-Pace	Total
WILL PRITCHARD	\$38,605.99	\$39,644.02	\$27,264.44			\$105,514.45
BRANDON RANDALL					\$11,000.00	\$11,000.00
DISTRICT 2						
Candidate	Stand for Children	Indy Rise	Indy Chamber	Hoosiers	I-Pace	Total
VENITA J. MOORE	\$21,524.17	\$7,500.00	\$7,250.00			\$36,274.17
DAQAVISE WINSTON						
DISTRICT 4						
Candidate	Stand for Children	Indy Rise	Indy Chamber	Hoosiers	I-Pace	Total
DIANE ARNOLD	\$22,213.92	\$15,293.13	\$7,250.00			\$44,757.05
CHRISTINA SMITH						
AT LARGE						
Candidate	Stand for Children	Rise Indy	Indy Chamber	Hoosiers	I-pace	Total
KENNETH ALLEN	\$39,253.34	\$74,201.00	\$12,250.00	\$30,000.00		\$155,704.34
Elizabeth Gore					\$18,200.00	\$18,200.00
	Stand for Children	Rise Indy	Indy Chamber	Hoosiers	I-pace	Total
Totals Pro-Privitization	\$121,597.42	\$136,638.15	\$54,014.44	\$30,000.00	\$0.00	\$342,250.01
Totals Pro-Public Schools					\$29,200.00	\$29,200.00

When billionaires say "Jump" winning nominees Pritchard and Allen have to say "How high?"

Winning candidate Will Pritchard accepted \$105,514.45 in contributions. Since his opponent, Mr. Randall, had a mere \$10,000, Pritchard didn't have to take all that money, but he did. Some came from big money donors. What's he expected to do for this? And, Kenneth Allen accepted \$155,704.34 (\$174,000 [reported by WFYI](#)). Question: Now that you are a member of the Indianapolis Black reform establishment, are you [being real with who you are and whose interest you represent](#)?

Conclusions

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Democracy Deficit Disorder

- Isn't it time for IPS to realize it's suffering from a bad case of "Democracy Deficit Disorder"?
- Isn't it time to reign in the "show me the money" election spectacle and realize the hundreds of thousands of dollars spent on such political extravagance could be better used by IPS?
- Isn't it time to replace Indy's "gangsta campaigns" and replace them with fair and balanced elections that are about students and the democratic project that's public education, not...power?

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