



[INSIDE]

## BOOKS FOR KIDS

Young readers can enjoy a variety of subjects, from the life of an Afghan girl to bird-watching, in a selection of new releases. [E6]

# Indiana's hidden crisis: Dropping out

**LEFT BEHIND**

A STAR EDITORIAL BOARD SERIES

Alarming, each year more than 20,000 students leave high school before graduation, representing nearly three in 10 young people. Today through next Sunday, The Star Editorial Board focuses on what this means for them, the communities in which they live, the state's economy — and what we must do to convince them to stay in school.

**STAN JONES / INDIANA COMMISSIONER FOR HIGHER EDUCATION**

Enrollment at Indiana's college campuses is at an all-time high. Our high school seniors are going on to college at an unprecedented rate. These students are better prepared than ever before with 65 percent of high school grads completing Indiana's Core 40 curriculum. It is clear to many Hoosier families that the path to economic and social prosperity is college.

However, for a substantial number of young people, this prosperity will be a distant and bitter dream.

Each year, more than 20,000 of Indiana students drop out of high school. The result: Almost 30 percent of 19-year-olds are trying to make it without a high school diploma. In the past Indiana, like other states, used a flawed formula for reporting high school graduation rates. This formula made it appear as if nearly 90 percent of Hoosiers graduate from high school. More accurate calculations show that only about 70 percent finish

See Jones, Page E5

**GEORGE LYLE / IU SENIOR AND TECH HIGH SCHOOL GRADUATE**

Most Indianapolis school systems are middle to upper class, mostly white, and have comparatively newer facilities than does Indianapolis Public Schools. This doesn't mean that each school district is without problems, but those problems are outliers in otherwise stable social systems.

IPS, an environment of extremes, doesn't have that luxury. The district encompasses some of the richest and poorest neighborhoods in the city. IPS includes the area where Broad Ripple, Cathedral and Bishop Chatard are located, as well as all of the Near Westside and most of the industrial Southside. A lot of the Meridian-Kessler neighborhood is within IPS limits as well.

The few affluent kids who attend IPS share classroom space with an amalgam of kids from other social situations. The last I heard, my alma mater, Arsenal Tech-

See Lyle, Page E5

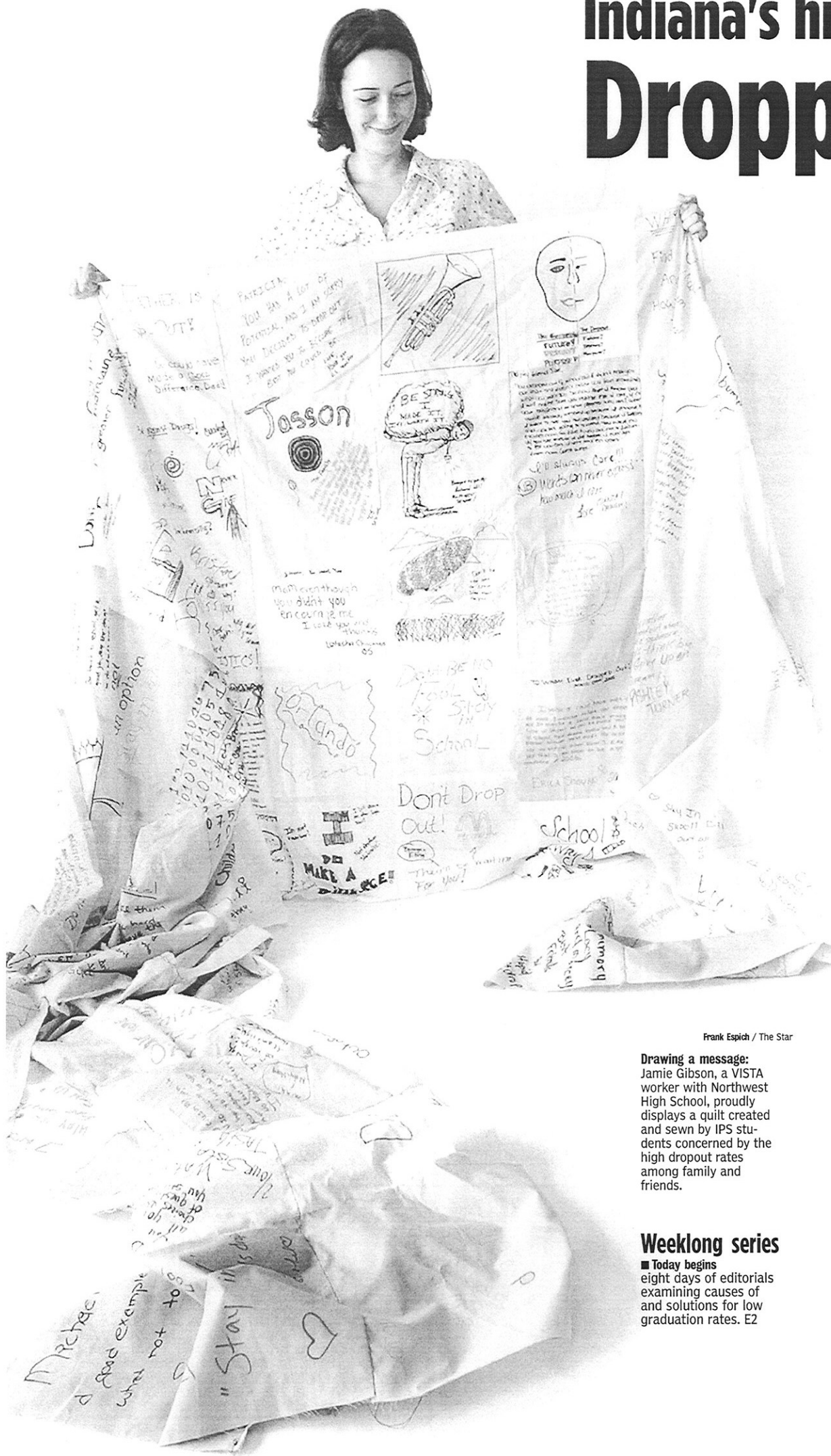
**ANITA SILVERMAN / PRINCIPAL, IPS PACERS ACADEMY**

Almost 20 years ago, I graduated from high school. Yes, you can guess about how old I am, but do you really know? Most people assume that high school graduates are 18 years old, unless, of course, they just made the cutoff date for kindergarten and may be 17.

The reality is that there are many potential high school graduates who drop out simply because they are too old to be in high school. They don't want to be 19 or 20 or 21 when they graduate. It's a shame, too. These are future teachers, accountants, hotel managers and the like, but they drop out because they're too old.

I wish I could get the message out that nobody will ask you how old you were when you graduated from high school. The question will be, "What year did you graduate from high school?" or, "Did you graduate?" but never about age. We need to focus on youth graduating, period. If our youth fall into the young adult age, it is still

See Silverman, Page E5



Frank Espich / The Star

**Drawing a message:** Jamie Gibson, a VISTA worker with Northwest High School, proudly displays a quilt created and sewn by IPS students concerned by the high dropout rates among family and friends.

## Weeklong series

■ Today begins eight days of editorials examining causes of and solutions for low graduation rates. E2

## Farmers market experience joins food and community

I'm switching my usual menu this week, turning to two favorite non-journalism topics — food and community.

With summer's onset I'm eagerly awaiting the resumption of what's been an annual tradition of mine for more than a decade — the farmers market.

For several years, my wife and I have grown a few herbs, tomatoes and peppers out back. But there's nothing that can top the experience of a farmer's market.

It's partly the food — crisp salad



Dennis Ryerson

greens, free-range chickens, fresh meats, baked goods, fruits, vegetables and other produce sold by the farmer whose hands and hard work produced it.

It's partly the direct exchange — getting to know some favorite vendors, talking to them about their farms and gardens, asking their recommendations about recipes and how to order goods during winter months when markets are closed.

It's also the social experience. In cities past, I've strolled with thousands of others walking block after block, listen-

ing to musical groups and smiling at children reacting to jugglers and clowns or riding a market train as it meandered down the street. These events are shared experiences that blend urban living with the abundance of rural life.

In the summertime, it's that experience that I miss most in Indy.

Sure, there are more than a dozen farmers markets in Central Indiana. But in a state with such a rich agrarian tradition that is made all too real at State Fair time, I find it surprising that the farmers markets here lack the critical mass necessary for a larger-than-life experience. By critical mass, I mean markets with a hundred vendors or more, artists selling their wares, ready-to-eat

food stands offering everything from barbeque to egg rolls, strolling musicians and other entertainment.

Anybody who's walked Capitol Square in Madison, Wis., or the Court Avenue district in Des Moines, Iowa, or under the Burnside Bridge in Portland, Ore., or through the Ferry Plaza in San Francisco knows what I'm talking about.

The size of the large crowds alone is enough to make you sense you are missing out on something if you don't show up at these events on Saturday mornings. The celebrations are open to all, rich or poor (many vendors participate in federal food subsidy programs). You don't have to spend any money to

enjoy the experience.

Growing up on an Iowa farm, I regarded food as work, a commodity to be planted, weeded and harvested.

Only as an adult did I become more fully appreciative of what fresh-grown produce could do for the table, and of the role food plays in our social lives.

The best way to grow farmers markets is to use them. Check out the one nearest you. A list of Central Indiana markets is posted on The Star's Web site, [IndyStar.com/living](http://IndyStar.com/living).

Thanks for reading The Indianapolis Star.

■ Ryerson is editor of The Star. Contact him at [dennis.ryerson@indy.com](mailto:dennis.ryerson@indy.com) or at (317) 444-6169.



# IN Touch

A sampling of the best comments of the week from the Editorial Board's online readers' blog.



## Stealing innocence

**Karen Celestino Horsemann**  
lawyer and construction company president

What do 5-year-old Samuel Moore, 4-year-old Aiyana Gaurin and 7-year-old George Rawls have in common? All are from Indiana and died a terrible death at the hands of their parent's boyfriend or girlfriend. In Illinois, the natural father of an 8-year-old girl stabbed his daughter and her friend to death, abandoning their bodies in a park. Earlier this year, the headless body of a baby identified as Precious Doe was finally identified, and her stepfather and mother have been charged with murdering her and dumping her body along the roadside four years ago.

Society is appalled at murder, but killing small children twists our stomachs and ties knots in our hearts. We can only imagine the last moments of a child who desperately looks to the warm protective embrace of a parent but instead must fend off blows and kicks and other horrific punishments.

Worse yet, what about all the children who remain alive bearing the scars of terrible things that have been done to them? We revile most particularly those who injure, brutalize or kill our children because in doing so they steal something that can never be replaced — the innocence of childhood. If a child survives the attack, how can he or she overcome the scars of being beaten or abused while a trusted parent stands by doing nothing? How indeed.

**"Society is appalled at murder, but killing small children twists our stomachs and ties knots in our hearts."**

Karen Celestino Horsemann

## IPS needs are ignored

**Mel Pfeiffer**  
IPS teacher

On May 8, I read Indiana House Speaker Brian Bosma's view of the recent legislative session. I was appalled at his comment that the House Republicans had responded to concerns around the state by increasing statewide education funding by 2.5 percent. That is like telling a teacher with 40 students in class that the system average is only 22. Perhaps the statewide average is 2.5 percent, but Indianapolis Public Schools will actually lose money.

Bosma simply doesn't understand that the services provided by a large urban system are more expensive than in a suburban or rural setting. For example, IPS provides "special needs" services to more than 25 percent of its population. That is a far higher percentage than other school corporations surrounding Indianapolis.

Bosma would like to claim credit for what is an unreasonable position regarding educational funding. Speaking on behalf of all the young teachers who will lose their jobs, I will remember this past legislative session as one that showed exactly how much the leaders of our state value public education.

## The only true bad guys

**Pamela Taylor**  
fiction writer who works in development

I went to see "Kingdom of Heaven" this week. I have to admit, despite reviews that said it was fair to Muslims, I was pretty apprehensive. After all, this is a movie about the Crusades, told from the point of view of a Crusader.

And Hollywood is infamous for its stereotypical portrayals of Arabs and Muslims as mindlessly violent, backward, dirty misogynists. Good or bad, I felt I had to



Taylor

rates at arms are men possessing both honor and humor.

My only wish is that he had been given a soliloquy to parallel Balyean's stirring speeches about protecting the townspeople. "Our way teaches us not to kill women and children, and those who do not fight. We have vanquished those who took our lands and attack our caravans, the innocents are free to go," he could have said.

As it stands, his decision to give them safe passage to Christian lands seems a personal one, not a teaching of his faith.

## Quran desecration

**Betty Meluch**  
Carmelite sister and writer for www.praythensnews.com

Whatever occasioned the desecration of the Quran at the Guantanamo Bay prison, those responsible for it are to be pitied. For to reach adulthood without achieving the least sense of respect for another person's belief is to be impoverished indeed.

More important, at our current state of consciousness the fabric of the human race cannot afford this sort of wounding. As never before, religions throughout the world are reaching out to one another in dialogue rather than confrontation. For example, as Ewert Cousins asserts, "The Christian does not look on the other religions merely from his own theological perspective; rather he enters into the very structure of consciousness of the

other religion and grasps its distinctive values from its own perspective."

Unless we continue to move forward with this same attitude, not only about religion but about differences in race, sexual makeup and types of government, we risk going backward and becoming an array of dissenting tribes.

One or a few have desecrated the Quran. I, for one, apologize to all who hold it holy.

## Controlling tobacco

**Dick Huber**  
retired physician

Tobacco is not under control of the Food and Drug Administration. If the FDA regulated tobacco, we would know what the tobacco companies are adding and manipulating.

Larger warning labels would be more effective.

A proposed FDA regulation would not require tobacco companies to prove that a new product is actually safer, only that they "anticipate" advantages. Then the FDA would affix its stamp of approval. The tobacco companies are going to have a heyday promoting cigarettes that have not been proven less harmful yet have the FDA stamp of approval.

The proposed FDA regulation would prevent individual states from setting higher standards and would prevent banning the sale of tobacco at sites such as pharmacies. Much of this regulation appears to have been written by Phillip Morris, which should give us some clue whether it would be good for citizens or good for tobacco companies.

The FDA should know what is in a consumer product and changes made to it, set standards to make products less hazardous, verify that claims made are truthful and prevent tobacco from being marketed to children.

For more comments, go to [Indystar.com/opinion/intouch](http://Indystar.com/opinion/intouch)

## Jones

■ A flawed formula made graduate rates appear high.

From E1

high school.

I hope we all find this alarming. In some Indiana communities, more students drop out of high school and join the ranks of the unemployed and underemployed than walk across the stage at graduation.



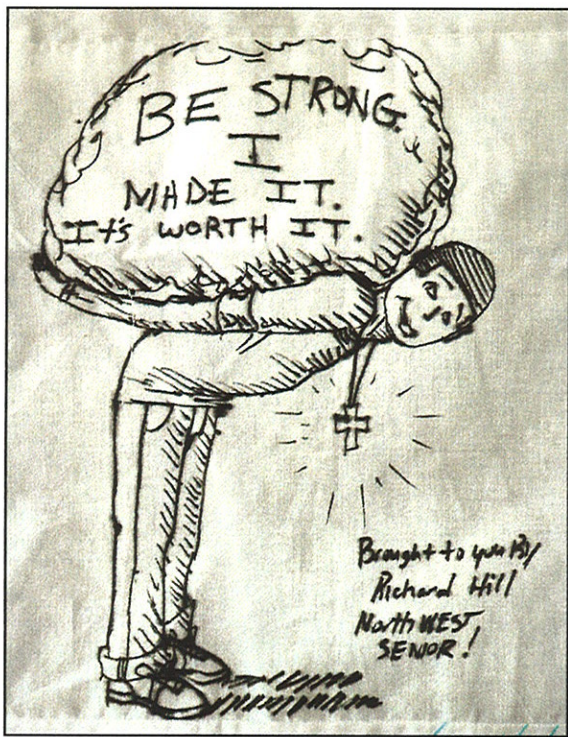
**Jones is Indiana commissioner for higher education.**

A specific and startling example of this can be seen at one Central Indiana high school where only 155 of 570 students who were enrolled as ninth-graders four years prior actually graduated.

The consequences for the individual student, local communities and the state are many. A high school diploma can be worth at least half a million dollars over a lifetime in earnings. High school dropouts make up more than 80 percent of state and federal prison populations. Over 30 years, one dropout can cost a community a half a million dollars in welfare, health care and incarceration costs.

Indiana is beginning to take action to change these results.

Recently, Gov. Mitch Daniels signed legislation sponsored by



**Group effort:** Detail from the dropout quilt sewn by students from IPS high schools. The quilt is about 20 feet long and 5 feet wide.

Sen. Teresa Lubbers, Rep. Luke Messer and Rep. Greg Porter that strengthens Indiana's current dropout laws. First, the law requires a true accounting of who drops out and who graduates. Additionally, students who drop out without the permission of their parents and principal face the loss of a driver's license and work per-

mit.

The legislation also provides more flexibility in allowing students to work and go to school through a School Flex program.

This legislation signals not the end of the discussion, but the beginning.

At the core of this important issue is our economy. How can In-

diana build a strong economic engine when almost one-third of our young people attempt to enter the work force without a high school degree? Is this the economic backbone that we can depend on in a globally competitive marketplace? How will these individuals pay their share of taxes and contribute to the social infrastructure? Can we rest easy in our retirement years depending on them to support Social Security? While many will be good solid citizens, how will we support the high numbers of dropouts who end up in bankruptcy, welfare, jail, crime and homelessness?

And just who are these dropouts?

They were those bright, eager, energetic 5-year-olds so full of promise when they started kindergarten. They are the same children that over time became increasingly disconnected and disillusioned. Many were not troublemakers or necessarily poor students. When asked, these young people will tell you they did not drop out because the tests or the classes were too difficult; they dropped out because they were bored, unchallenged, did not have anyone who believed in them and did not see the connection of what they were learning in high school to their real world.

It's time for a wakeup call on this issue.

The real numbers of students choosing to drop out of high school every year should greatly disturb us all. There are no simple solutions. We must learn more about what we can do and take action to engage every one of our young people in a meaningful education that leads all of them to high school graduation with the opportunity for college.

## Lyle

■ Poverty is root cause of problems for IPS students.

From E1

nical High School, had more than 80 percent of its students eligible for free or reduced-price lunch programs. For some of these students, the meals they get at school are the only food they eat that day.

Poverty is the root cause of other afflictions that plague IPS students.



**Lyle graduated this month from Indiana University Bloomington with a degree in journalism. He is a graduate of Arsenal Technical High School.**

Some parents work long hours for little pay. That keeps them from monitoring homework or attending PTA meetings. A sizeable number of students live in single-parent households, and when that parent is always working, there isn't anyone around to monitor progress.

Students themselves may work long hours to make their own ends meet or even pay household bills. Needless to say, after all that work and inattention, homework and school projects tend to take a backseat to economic sustenance.

Poverty can often breed hopelessness. One of the kids who sat next to me in middle school is now serving a long stretch for armed robbery and murder.

The other end of the spectrum for IPS students is seeing the kind of success that their suburban peers take for granted. My 2001 class had only 200 graduates out of more than 1,000

freshmen. Out of those 200, a few went to college. Our three valedictorians went to St. Mary's College, the Massachusetts Institute of Technology and the U.S. Military Academy at West Point. Obviously, the system didn't fail them, right?

The disclaimer is that those three, and the rest of us who made it to college from that class, were able to take advantage of magnet programs — specialized learning communities in all five IPS high schools. Without the magnet programs, I doubt that more than a few of us would have made it to college. But at the same time, the magnet programs fall victim to the new segregation.

Skin color, economic power and intelligence level are entwined in a vicious cycle. Students can't get into the magnet programs without showing intelligence and potential, but students don't get those things by themselves. They need attention, but when the parent is working all hours to just feed the child, where will the attention come from?

It's been said before, and I will say it again: It takes a whole village to raise a child. IPS can be fixed, but it will require the attention of everyone, not just the people who have to deal with it by virtue of their zip codes. And it has to start early. High school students aren't passing the Graduation Qualifying Exam because they come into high school not being able to read and do basic math.

When kids are reached at an early age, the results will improve. A well-fed first-grader who actually learns his letters will be much more successful than the neglected kid who is sent to the principal's office every day.

Some might argue that IPS kids fail because they don't care. Well, to you, village, I say this: We all know kids do as they see, so if they see you not caring, why would they care?

## Silverman

■ No one asks how old you were when you graduated.

From E1

our responsibility to see them graduate. It is a disgrace the amount of youth we allow to become dropouts and often the latest population on welfare and in prison.



**Silverman is principal of the Pacers Academy, an IPS alternative school.**

all I have to do is ask students. Their reasons are always the same. Kids drop out because they don't feel they belong, they are too old, the teachers don't care,

they have home responsibilities, they can make money elsewhere, too many rules, or they are sick of school and they have talked their parents into it.

Never have I heard that they don't want to graduate. It is a mix of a high level of frustration by youth, parents (if they are involved) tossing their hands in the air, and a school making life simpler for educators. Let's face it, the student hanging on every word a teacher says is easier to educate than one considering dropping out who needs to be pulled back into academic knowledge.

I am not naïve. I know how difficult it is to reach some of our youth. As an educator, that is my job. My job is to educate children — all children — not just those who want to learn. There is an old saying that says, "They don't care how much you know until they know how much you care." This is so true.

I have witnessed students who hate school begin to love it because of the teachers they see every day. The student may never become a mathematician, but he or she will become a high school graduate with the right mix of love and understanding along

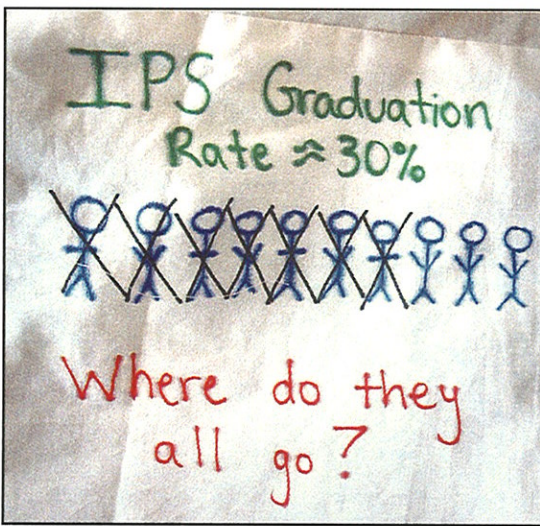


with consistency and emotional strength given by the educator.

Educators no longer just instill knowledge. We are also social workers, substitute parent, a bank account around lunch hour. This is our job, and we have to accept it. For those who don't, please let me help you find another place to work. Our dropout rate is far too high. With budget cuts, GED programs are being cut. If we let youth leave without a diploma, what will they do? How will they find a job to feed their children? Of course, there is always prison or welfare.

I was one of the lucky ones. Mr. Bob from North Central High School kept me encouraged when I was a high school mess. He built a relationship that encouraged me to keep going. I wanted to be a teacher like Mr. Bob.

I am now a school principal who encourages teachers to build relationships with students so they have a purpose behind school. Dropping out isn't an option. Failing is not an option. Walking across a stage with a diploma in hand is worth the time. Success doesn't have an age limit. Besides, nobody ever asked.





## OPINION &amp; COMMENTARY

## THE INDIANAPOLIS STAR

A GANNETT NEWSPAPER

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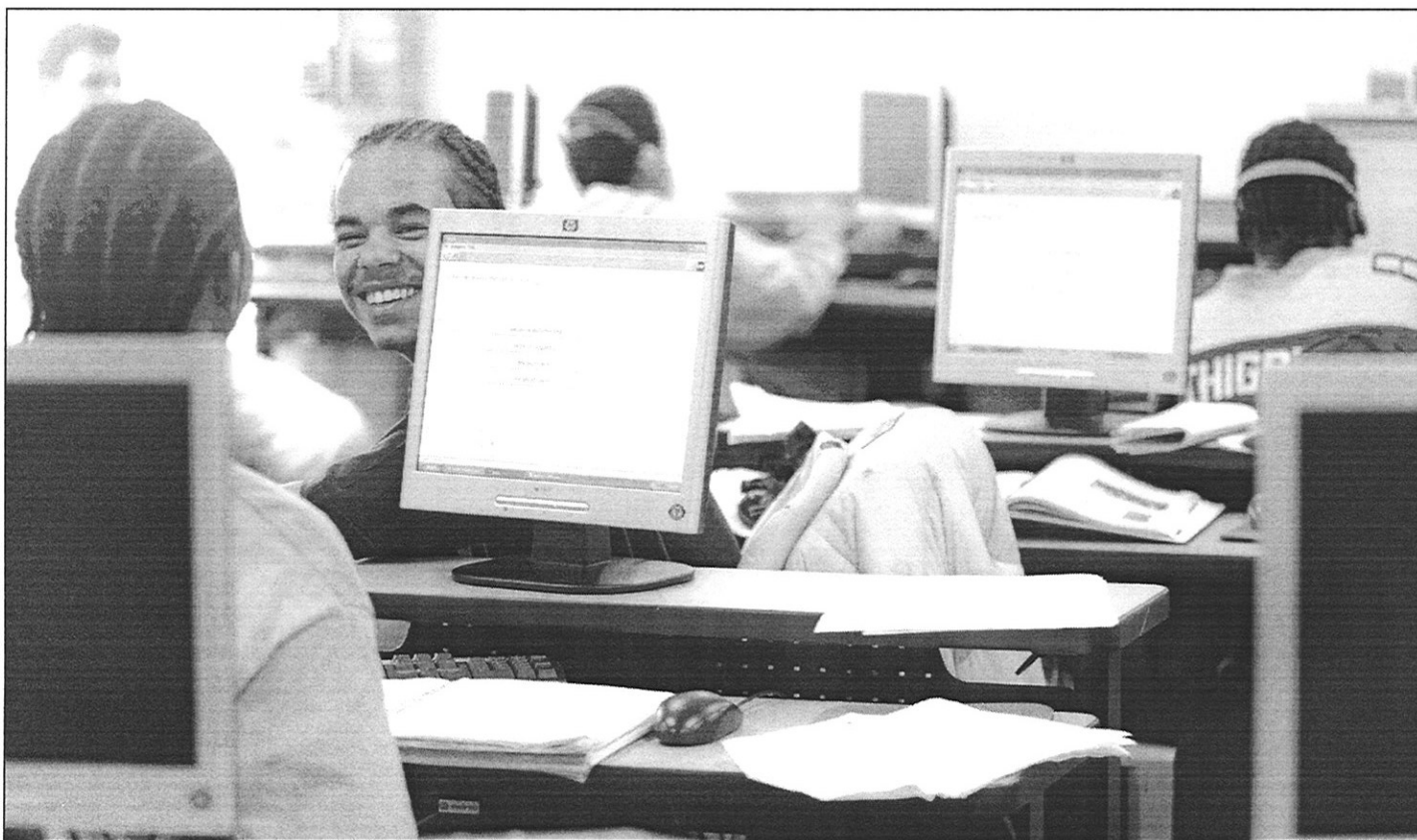
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# Missing in action

Indiana claims 90 percent of students graduate from high school.  
The real numbers should shock you.



Adriano Jaecckle / The Star

**Screen time:** Pacers Academy 10th-grader Quinton Snow grins at a fellow student in a special class where students complete a computer-based curriculum that lets them condense a school day into three hours. The IPS alternative school has been successful in keeping at-risk kids in school.

**J**arrell Garrett watched five older siblings quit school. He saw his brothers go to prison. He's witnessed children in his neighborhood make easy money selling crack cocaine and "wets" — marijuana cigarettes soaked in embalming fluid.

Jarrell, a 14-year-old sixth-grader at Indianapolis Public Schools' Pacers Academy, says he is determined to become the first child in his family to graduate from high school.

The odds are against him.

The state Department of Education, in documents sent to the federal government and its communication with the public, claims 90 percent of students in Indiana graduate from high school. IPS, the state's largest district, also touts a 90 percent graduation figure in records it sends to the state.

Reality is far more dismal.

An analysis by The Indianapolis Star Editorial Board shows that nearly two-thirds of students in IPS do not graduate from high school on time. The completion rate for the IPS class of 2004 was only 35 percent.

About three of every 10 students drop out of Indiana high schools. According to a Manhattan Institute study, Indiana's graduation rate ranks 30th in the nation.

Graduation rates in some suburban Marion County school districts also are unacceptably low. In Decatur Township schools, only 53 percent of eighth-graders in the class of 2004 graduated on time, according to numbers obtained from the state Department of Education.

State and local educators' failure to report realistic graduation

rates has obscured the extent of the dropout epidemic in Indiana. Every year, more than 20,000 students quit high school before earning a diploma. They are, in all likelihood, condemning themselves to lives of poverty, drifting from one dead-end job to another. Many will land in prison or in homeless shelters.

Students in Indiana are moving in opposite directions. More students are taking Advanced Placement classes, and standardized test scores are slowly rising. Yet, according to the Manhattan Institute study, Indiana's graduation rate declined from 76 percent in 1991 to 72 percent in 2002.

"We have more students in Indiana going to college," says Stan Jones, the state commissioner of higher education. "We also have more students dropping out."

On the state and national levels, the problem falls disproportionately on black males. A 2004 study by the Schott Foundation for Public Education found that in Indiana only 38 percent of black males in the class of 2002 graduated from high school. Indiana's graduation rate for white males was 70 percent. Nationally, the figures were 43 percent for black males and 71 percent for white males.

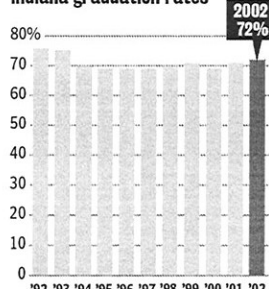
At The Star's request, researcher Robert Balfanz of Johns Hopkins University analyzed graduation numbers from the IPS class of 2002. Balfanz and his team found that only 25 percent of black males graduated with their classmates. Unlike national and state figures, the number was even worse for white males in IPS — a mere 23 percent earned diplomas in 2002.

Balfanz uncovered another startling fact. IPS, according to the Johns Hopkins research team, was the only large school district in the nation in which every high school ranked poorly

## A DOWNWARD TREND

The percentage of students graduating from high school in Indiana has declined since the early 1990s, ranking 30th in the nation, according to a Manhattan Institute study released this year.

### Indiana graduation rates



Source: Manhattan Institute, Education Working Paper No. 8 Feb. 2005

Jennifer Imes / The Star

### Graduation rates by state

Rank	Rate
1. New Jersey	89%
2. Iowa	85%
3. Wisconsin	85%
4. North Dakota	85%
5. Nebraska	83%
10. Ohio	78%
16. Michigan	78%
24. Illinois	74%
30. Indiana	72%
35. Kentucky	68%

## A question of numbers

Educators and researchers disagree on the best method for determining graduation rates.

In reports to the U.S. government and in communications with the public, the Indiana Department of Education claims that 90 percent of students graduate from high school. Indianapolis Public Schools and other local districts make similar claims.

Educators say those statistics are based on a federally approved formula, but they also acknowledge that the official numbers are inflated because they don't track all dropouts.

Starting with the 2005-06 school

year, state law will require districts to use a revised formula to determine graduation rates. Educators expect the state's official rate to drop 20 percentage points or more.

In preparing this series, The Star Editorial Board used eighth-grade enrollment as the base line for computing completion rates for IPS and Marion County township schools. Education officials say eighth-grade numbers give a more accurate picture of graduation rates because ninth-grade enrollments are inflated by students from previous classes who have not progressed academically.

in an index called "promotion power" — the rate by which freshmen complete high school four years later.

IPS administrators point to students transferring out of the

could be behind some of this," he said. "Overall, we do note declines in enrollment, but they are happening in all grades, including eighth, which means that migration can't really be used to explain away these findings."

Why are so many students dropping out at a time when a high school diploma is merely the starting point for earning a livable income?

Dropouts themselves cite many reasons. Drugs. Crime. Poverty. Pregnancy. Little or no support from parents. Poor grades. Too few credits to graduate on time. Failed graduation exams.

"I was a troubled child," Terri Coleman says bluntly. She dropped out of Pike High School in 1996, a 17-year-old senior who had earned the academic credits of a freshman. She was pregnant with her first child.

Coleman, now 26 and out of work, recently enrolled in Ivy Tech State College's GED program. She went back to school because of a question she couldn't answer. "My 7-year-old son came home from school and asked me, 'What's an adjective?'" Coleman says. "I knew I needed to learn more to help him. I've been doing well in class. I thought I was stupid, but I guess I'm not."

The first step in persuading more young people like Coleman to complete high school is for educators finally to acknowledge the extent of the dropout problem.

Inflated graduation numbers have lulled the public into believing that dropping out is rare. It's not. And thousands of young people are suffering the consequences.

**Next: Indianapolis Public Schools operates some of the worst dropout factories in the nation.**

## LEFT BEHIND

A STAR EDITORIAL BOARD SERIES

## Why you should care

Indiana's dropout epidemic affects every Hoosier. Consider: Dropouts on average earn \$7,000 a year less than high school graduates, according to the U.S. Department of Commerce. With about 30 percent of students dropping out every year in Indiana, the loss of income means a heavier tax burden on higher-paid and better-educated Hoosiers.

## Let's talk

What can the community do to reduce the number of students who drop out of school? What can the schools and the students themselves do?

State and local educators as well as community activists and students will discuss answers to those questions and others during a community town hall at 7 p.m. May 24 in the auditorium at Ben Davis High School, 1200 N. Girls School Road. To register call 444-6170 or send e-mail to kim.mitchell@indystar.com.

**"It makes me want to throw up. It makes me so mad. They don't get the word out."**



Toya Cosby, Northwest High School sophomore, on claims that 90 percent of students graduate from Indianapolis Public Schools.

## About the series

**Today:** State and local educators claim 90 percent of students graduate from high school. Reality is far more dismal.

**Monday:** Indianapolis Public Schools operates some of the worst dropout factories in the nation.

**Tuesday:** Graduation rates are low in several suburban Marion County school districts.

**Wednesday:** In Indianapolis, and across the nation, more black males are dropping out of high school than graduating.

**Thursday:** IPS hopes to turn around its failing high schools by adopting a small schools strategy. But the achievement gap begins to develop early, and by the time students are in high school many believe they can never catch up.

**Friday:** More than 20,000 students who drop out every year in Indiana are an economic drain on the state and its cities.

**Saturday:** Educators say the challenge of turning dropout factories into centers of excellence falls heavily on teachers.

**Sunday:** Community leaders must engage in honest discussion about how to remedy the dropout epidemic.

## ONE PERSON'S STORY

## 'I wanted to graduate'

Life was a hard climb for Kelly McDermott long before she began living on her own at age 16. Now she's pregnant, due in June. She's living with her 17-year-old boyfriend, who dropped out of high school but is working to support his new family.

Kelly is determined to attend her high school graduation May 31. And she's determined to deliver a speech as class valedictorian at the Pacers Academy, an IPS alternative school.

Kelly plans to attend Ivy Tech State College in the fall, studying for a career as an X-ray technician. She's set to become the second person from her family to graduate from high school. Her brother dropped out, and she quit once herself. Why did she come back?

"I wanted to graduate," she says quietly but with fire in her eyes.





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# Dropout factories

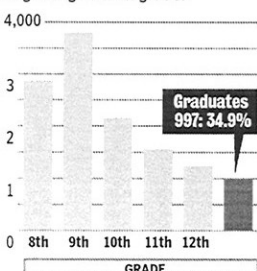
IPS high schools are among nation's worst in producing graduates.

## WHERE DID THEY GO?

The number of students in the Indianapolis Public Schools class of 2004 declined precipitously from eighth grade until graduation.

### IPS Class of 2004 enrollment

Total IPS students enrolled at the beginning of each grade:

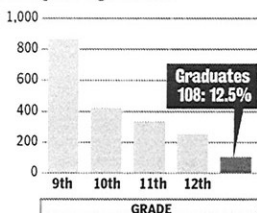


Note: Completion rate based on eighth-grade enrollment

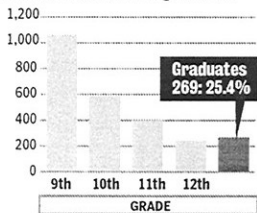
### IPS graduates by high school

Total students enrolled at the beginning of each grade in the district's five major high schools:

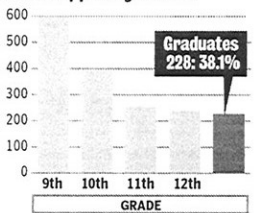
#### Arlington High School



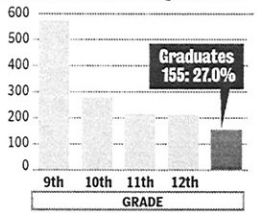
#### Arsenal Technical High School



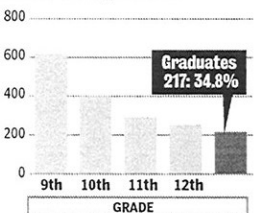
#### Broad Ripple High School



#### Emmerich Manual High School

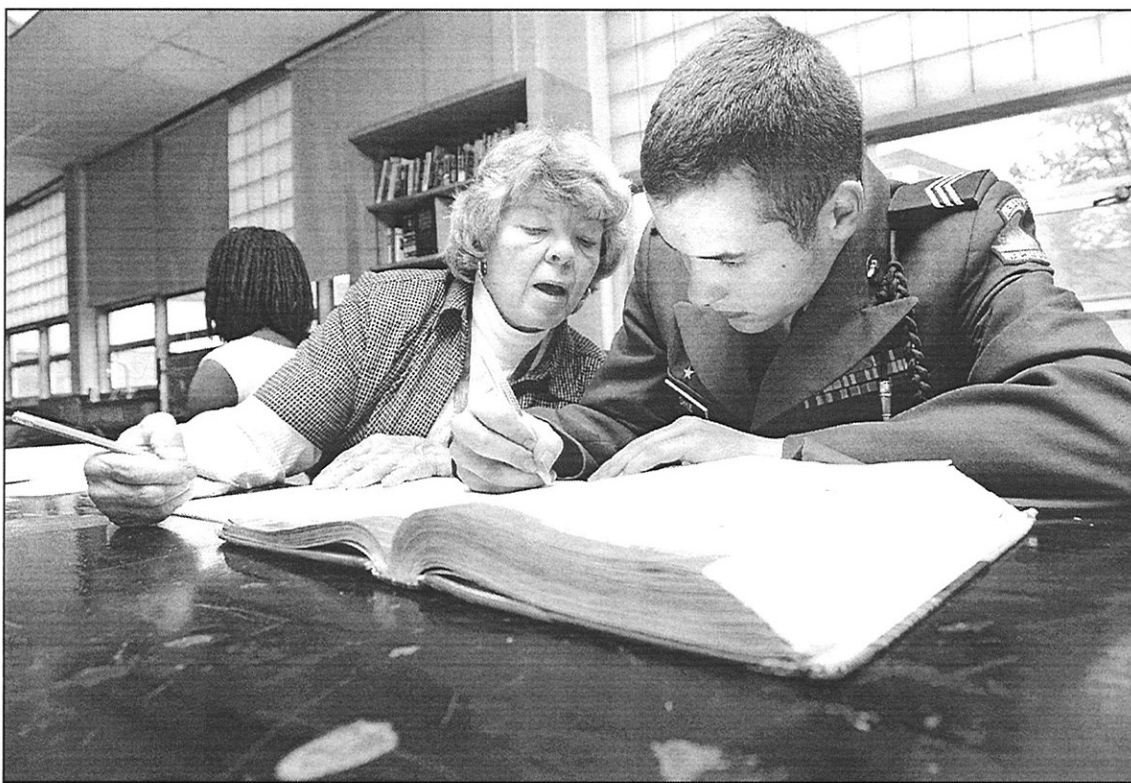


#### Northwest High School



Note: Completion rate based on ninth-grade enrollment  
Source: Indiana Department of Education

Jennifer Imes / The Star



**One on one:** At Manual High School, freshman Andrew Dyke gets homework help from media center director Lucille Koors, a former math and chemistry teacher. On average just 125 of the 450 freshmen who enter Manual in a typical year progress to their senior year on time.

Indianapolis Public Schools operates some of the worst dropout factories in the nation. Hundreds of students each year quit school, most landing in dead-end jobs or prisons. In some families, dropping out has become a way of life with neither parents nor children completing high school.

IPS claims an official graduation rate of 90 percent. District administrators, however, admit the number is lower — shockingly lower.

IPS Board President Kelly Bentley, in a meeting with editorial writers, pegged the district's graduation rate at 28 percent. A Star Editorial Board analysis found a 35 percent completion rate for the class of 2004. National and local researchers report IPS graduation rates ranging from 28 to 47 percent, depending on the formula used.

Manual High School Principal Ken Poole admits that "what we're doing right now is not working."

It's not for lack of trying. Manual freshmen who didn't make it out of middle school until age 16 — and other at-risk students — are put under the watchful eye of Shiril Miller-Smith, who keeps tabs on their grades and attendance as the "mother hen" of the Alpha Program.

To keep students from skipping class, they're put to work tending children in Manual's all-day kindergarten.

Social workers scour neighborhoods to find students who haven't shown up for class. Occasionally, they pick them up and drive them to school.

Yet, on average just 125 — 27 percent — of the 450 freshmen

who enter Manual in a typical school year progress to their senior year on time. One freshman, David Kline, who turns 16 this month, already declares, "I'll finish this year out and then that'll probably be it."

Manual's "promotion power," or ninth- to-12th grade attrition rate, is the worst in the state.

In fact, all five IPS high schools promoted less than 60 percent of their freshmen to seniors on time. IPS fares worse than school systems in New York City, Detroit and Chicago. "This is the first district I have seen where all high schools are doing this poorly," said Robert Balfanz, a Johns Hopkins University researcher who analyzed the data for The Star.

IPS Superintendent Pat Pritchett says dropping out is so prevalent that eighth-grade graduations — the only commencement many students will ever experience — have become major celebrations at some schools.

Yet, IPS officials also claim that many of the lost students transfer to other school districts. Balfanz, however, notes that IPS' enrollment has declined in all grades. He says migration "can't really be used to explain away these findings."

IPS' dropout crisis reflects the woes of the neighborhoods the district serves. About 81 percent of IPS students qualify for free and reduced-priced meals, a prime indicator of poverty. Manual High Guidance Director Janet Huck says 75 percent of this year's senior class worked an average of 27 hours week "to put food on the table."

The temptation to make money on the streets also pulls students from school. "You wouldn't believe how many young people are selling drugs," says Reda Stewart, a senior at the Pacers Academy, an alternative school. "It's crazy."

The seeds of failure sprout well before high school. Only 50 percent of Manual's incoming

freshmen for the 2005-06 school year passed the eighth-grade ISTEP exam. That number, although still low, is significantly better than in previous years when a mere 20 percent of incoming students passed the state's test of basic skills.

The district's high suspension and expulsion rates also contribute to students giving up on school. Two IPS middle schools — Coleman and Longfellow — were among the top 20 in the state in the rate of expulsions last year.

Expelled students, by IPS policy, generally are not allowed to attend alternative classes or enroll in another district. A year out of school means troubled students fall farther behind, or into more trouble.

As Joseph Matthews III, president of the Indiana Opportunities Industrialization Centers State Council, notes, in "a year ... you can disappear. Your life can go to hell in a hand basket."

District leaders like Bentley are beginning to acknowledge the scope of the dropout epidemic. IPS' new small-schools strategy, scheduled to roll out next school year, is designed to help more students earn diplomas.

The true test of whether IPS can improve, however, will come in how the community reacts to finally hearing the facts about the high dropout rate. Outrage? Yes. Blame? Let's not waste much time there.

The greater need is for Indianapolis' political, business, academic and religious leaders to rally together to begin confronting a problem that will not easily pass.

**Next:** Graduation rates are painfully low in several suburban Marion County school districts.

## LEFT BEHIND

A STAR EDITORIAL BOARD SERIES

### Why you should care

About three out of 10 students in Indiana quit high school before graduating. Many become an enormous drain on taxpayers because they land in prison or require extensive social services. The dropout rate also hinders economic growth. Employers increasingly demand a well-educated work force. But Indiana is 46th in the nation in the education attainment level of the population. The high dropout rate means a loss of human capital that makes Indiana far less economically competitive.

### Let's talk

What can the community do to reduce the number of students who drop out of school? What can the schools and the students themselves do?

State and local educators as well as community activists and students will discuss answers to those questions and others during a community town hall at 7 p.m. May 24 in the auditorium at Ben Davis High School, 1200 N. Girls School Road. To register call 444-6170 or send e-mail to kim.mitchell@indy-star.com.

**"We don't want to lose a generation that's about to be lost."**



Luke Kashman, Arsenal Technical High School sophomore

### About the series

**Sunday:** State and local educators claim 90 percent of students graduate from high school. Reality is far more dismal.

**Tuesday:** Indianapolis Public Schools operates some of the worst dropout factories in the nation.

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**Friday:** More than 20,000 students who drop out every year in Indiana are an economic drain on the state and its cities.

**Saturday:** Educators say the challenge of turning dropout factories into centers of excellence falls heavily on teachers.

**Sunday:** Community leaders must engage in honest discussion about how to remedy the dropout epidemic.

### ONE PERSON'S STORY

**'Everybody has their blinders on'**

Toya Cosby is outraged. The Northwest High School sophomore has seen friends drop out after being caught up in the street life. She's watched girls quit school after getting pregnant. What she has not witnessed, at least not on any large scale, is an honest discussion about the dropout epidemic in Indianapolis.

"It seems everybody has their blinders on," she says. "They either don't know or don't want to know."

Toya is determined to make people listen. She recently created three

panels for a quilt designed to raise awareness about the dropout epidemic and helped conduct a student-led research project on problems in IPS schools.

Toya is driven in part by her own family's experiences. Her mother quit school before returning to earn a degree when Toya was in kindergarten.

She speaks with the bluntness of a teenager — but also with the passion of someone who has seen too many friends leave school. "We're in a system that's designed for us to fail," she says.





## OPINION &amp; COMMENTARY

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A GANNETT NEWSPAPER

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# Suburban epidemic

Growing enrollments may mask the extent of dropout rates in suburban districts, where social and economic issues often mirror urban problems.

**T**axpayers have given all the best to students at Ben Davis High School. A first-class fieldhouse, tennis courts and athletic fields pack the sprawling campus. The award-winning marching band has its own lighted outdoor practice area. Champion athletes train at the indoor swimming pool, indoor track and mammoth weight room. Young broadcasters hone skills in state-of-the-art TV and radio studios.

Is there really a dropout crisis in Indianapolis' well-groomed suburbs? Yes.

At Ben Davis, based on the school district's eighth-grade enrollment, about four out of 10 students in the class of 2004 did not graduate on time. And Ben Davis is not alone.

An analysis of Indiana Department of Education statistics shows almost half of the students in Decatur Township's class of 2004 didn't make it from the eighth grade to high school graduation four years later. Yet the district, using the state-approved but deeply flawed formula, reported a 95 percent graduation rate for 2004.

About three of 10 students in the class of 2004 disappeared between eighth grade and graduation in Beech Grove city schools and Pike, Perry and Warren township schools.

Johns Hopkins University researcher Robert Balfanz found that Southport and Perry Meridian high schools, both in the Perry Township district, were among 22 schools in the state in which 60 percent or fewer students in the class of 2002 failed to progress from their freshman to senior year.

Unlike with Indianapolis Public Schools, high school enrollment in each of those districts is growing. Transfers can't be used to explain the steady decrease in the numbers as classes move through suburban school systems. Dropouts can.

Derek Redelman, an educational consultant from Indianapolis, says growing enrollments may mask the extent of the dropout epidemic in suburban districts.

Marion County's suburban districts increasingly must confront the same social and economic issues that are battering IPS. Poverty rates are rising (almost 60 percent of students in Wayne Township schools now qualify for free lunches and textbooks, up from 53 percent in the 2001-02 school year). Family breakdowns, criminal records and pregnancy also are driving teens to quit school.

Some students just give up. Matthew Kortz dropped out of Southport High School in 2003 because he had too few credits to earn a diploma with his peers. "I wasn't going to graduate until I was 21," he said.

Ben Davis principal David Marcotte says his school is caught in two contrasting trends. The percentage of students taking Advanced Placement classes doubled in two years. More graduates are earning Core 40 and honors diplomas, and more are advancing to college. The same is true at Decatur Central High School.

But many students also are failing to meet rising expectations. The state's Graduation Qualifying Exam, which students take the first semester of their sophomore year, is a harsh reminder to more than half of the students at Ben Davis and Decatur Central that they have fallen behind.

For the most discouraged students, dropping out becomes a tempting way out. Yet, all the perils of life without a basic education — low-paying jobs, homelessness, crime and punishment — are waiting.

"We hear inmates say, 'I flunked (the GQE) for the third time, so why the hell should I stick around,'" says John Nally, a veteran educator with the Indiana Department of Correction.

Eliminating the GQE, or replacing it with another test, isn't the answer. The problem is more with the preparation than the measurement. As in IPS, many students in township schools fall behind early. And never catch up.

"Large urban and diverse high schools across the country are having the same problems as Ben Davis," Marcotte says. "The upper end is doing well, but we've not done a very good job of reaching the bottom. The gap is growing."

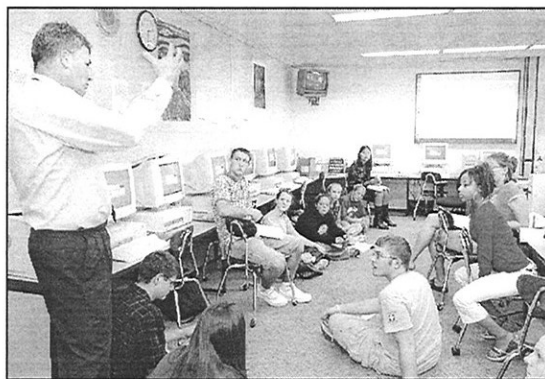
As the gap grows between educational haves and have-nots, the implications for society are profound. Well-educated and well-paid workers will be asked to shoulder the increasingly higher costs of social services for the underclass. The middle-class flight from the inner city will become a flight from the inner suburbs. The community will become further divided along economic, racial and ethnic lines.

Indianapolis isn't there yet. But the cracks are widening.

**Next:** More than half of the black males in Indiana and the nation do not graduate from high school.

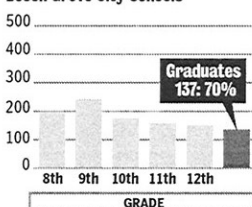
## DROPOUTS IN THE SUBURBS

The number of students in the class of 2004 dropped significantly in several suburban township high schools from the 8th grade to graduation.

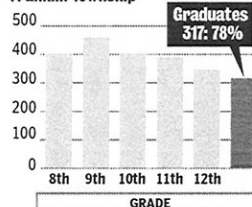


**Right track:** Decatur Central High School principal Joe Preda (left) discusses SATs with seniors at the start of the school year.

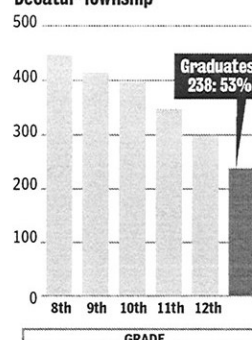
### Beech Grove City Schools



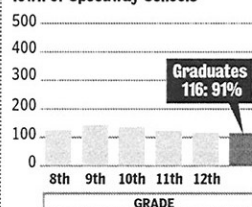
### Franklin Township



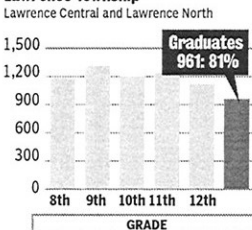
### Decatur Township



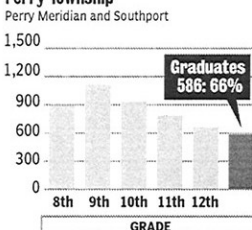
### Town of Speedway Schools



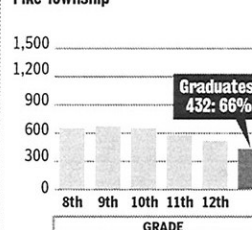
### Lawrence Township



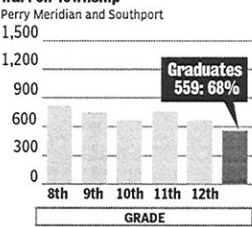
### Perry Township



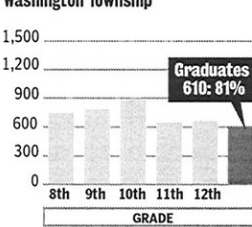
### Pike Township



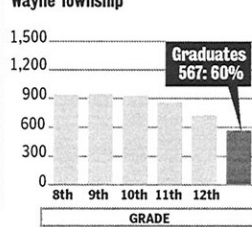
### Warren Township



### Washington Township



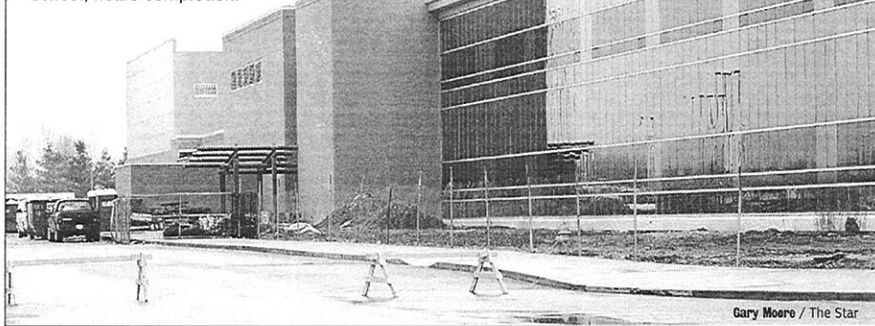
### Wayne Township



Source: Indiana Department of Education

Jennifer Imes / The Star

**Focus on freshmen:** Ben Davis Ninth Grade Center, an addition to the high school, nears completion.



Gary Moore / The Star

## ONE PERSON'S STORY

### 'I was slacking'

Matthew Kortz started working with his father as a roofer when he was 13 years old.

Now 21, Kortz is still climbing atop roofs, two years after he dropped out of Southport High School.

Kortz's problems in school started early. He was held back in the seventh grade and struggled with English in high school. He quit

after realizing he had not earned enough credits to graduate on time. "I was slacking," he admits.

Kortz dreams of a career as an auto mechanic. He recently enrolled in Ivy Tech State College's GED program. And says his father is encouraging him to progress.

"I'm looking for a job where I'm not busting my ass so hard," he says.



## LEFT BEHIND

A STAR EDITORIAL BOARD SERIES

### Why you should care

Dropouts' incomes are falling in terms of real dollars. According to a recent report by the Educational Testing Service, "One-Third of a Nation: Rising Dropout Rates and Declining Opportunities," male dropouts' incomes declined 35 percent from 1971 to 2002. The reason? Employers increasingly need skilled workers.

Dropouts' inability to find work — or at least work that pays decent wages — means a heavy burden on taxpayers who must help meet their needs.

### Let's talk

What can the community do to reduce the number of students who drop out of school? What can the schools and the students themselves do?

State and local educators as well as community activists and students will discuss answers to those questions and others during a community town hall at 7 p.m. May 24 in the auditorium at Ben Davis High School, 1200 N. Girls School Road. To register call 444-6170 or send e-mail to kim.mitchell@indystar.com.

"We hear inmates say, 'I flunked ISTEP for the third time, so why the hell should I stick around.'"



John Nally, longtime educator with the Indiana Department of Correction

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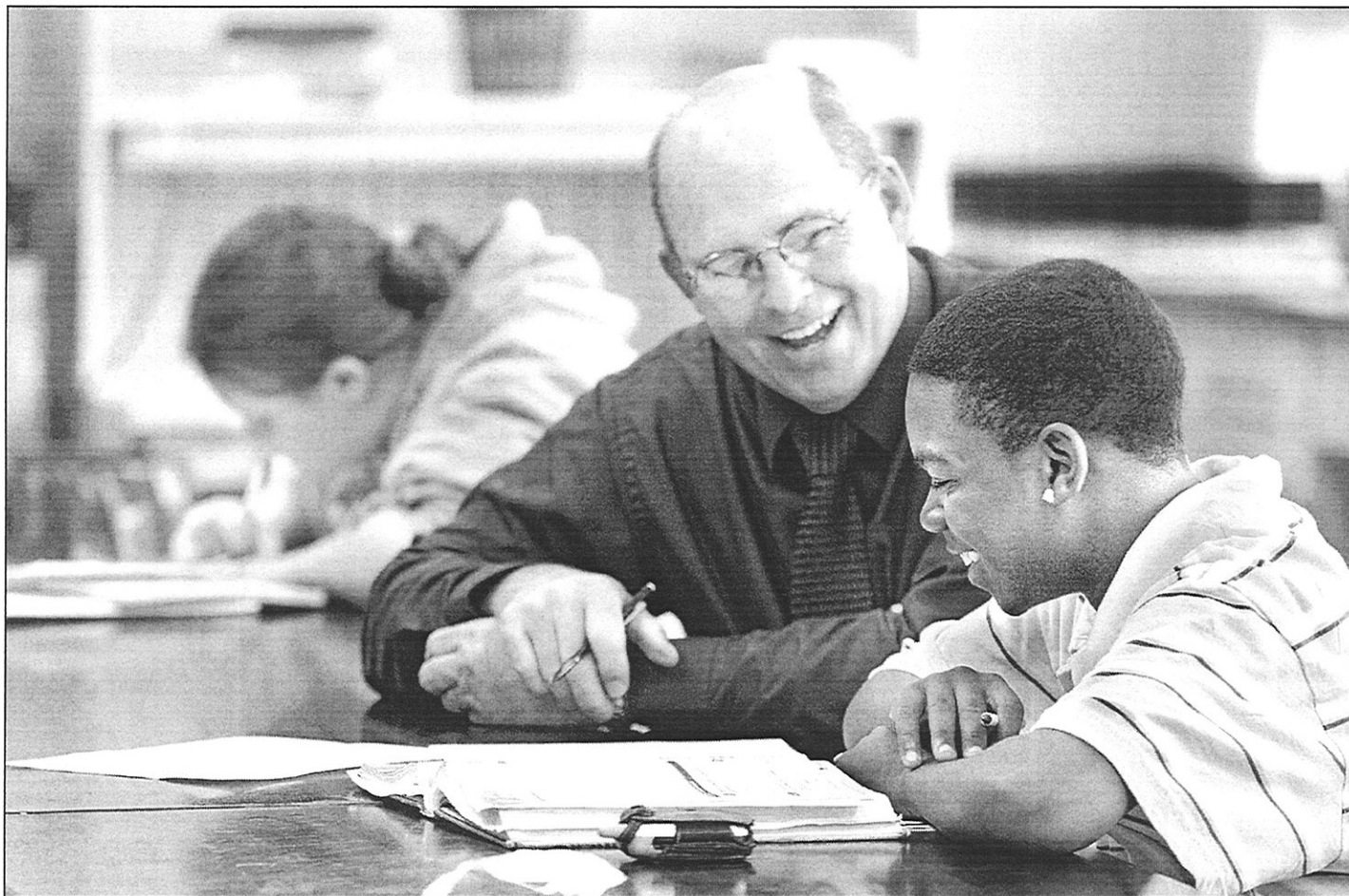
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# 'Educational genocide'

Males — especially black males — aren't keeping up with the girls.



**Adding up the numbers:** Math teacher Don Weaver helps freshman A.J. Powell with his Algebra I homework after school at Manual High School. Throughout the Indianapolis Public Schools District, only about 25 percent of the black males who started high school as freshmen in 1998 graduated from IPS four years later.

## LEFT BEHIND

A STAR EDITORIAL  
BOARD SERIES

### Why you should care

Rosa Smith, president of the Schott Foundation for Public Education, notes that more black males receive their GED in prison than graduate from college. Smith also points out that more black males are in prison. For every 100,000 white males under age 18, 105 are in prison. The rate for young blacks is 350 per 100,000.

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**J**ames Johnson isn't sure if his father ever finished high school but thinks "he probably didn't." Johnson himself dropped out of John Marshall High School (now a middle school) after ninth grade. Why? "Girls. Baby. Fast money. Hard-headed. I'm only telling the truth."

As for Johnson's 18-year-old son? He just dropped out, too, after finally reaching his senior year.

Johnson now is obtaining his GED at age 41. From what he can tell, when it comes to finishing high school, "All the men don't."

Yes, the men don't. More black males are dropping out than graduating from high school.

Just 326, or 25 percent, of about 1,300 black males who entered IPS high schools in 1998 graduated four years later.

Perhaps the 1,000 or so young black men who left moved to other school districts. More likely, they dropped out.

Indianapolis Public Schools is the fifth-worst in the nation in graduating black males, trailing only Cincinnati, New York City, Cleveland and Chatham County, Ga., according to a 2004 study by the Schott Foundation for Public Education.

Only 38 percent of black males graduated from Indiana's high schools in 2002. Just 42 percent of America's black males in the class of 2002 earned diplomas.

Those numbers help explain why only 603,000 black males were attending college while nearly 800,000 were serving prison time in 2000.

As Schott Foundation President Rosa Smith says, this is "educational genocide."

In Indiana and the rest of the nation, white males graduate at significantly higher rates than blacks. That's not true in IPS.

Only 183 white males — or 23 percent of the freshmen entering IPS high schools in 1998 — graduated in 2002. About 600 young white men probably dropped out.

They're like Manual High School freshman David Kline, who says, "None of my family has graduated."

David, like his father and brother, has had a run-in with the law and landed in juvenile hall. He expects to follow their example by dropping out.

His plans? "I'm in a band. I'm a lead vocalist. We've already played at (venues). I mean, our band's already getting big."

Here's the reality: White male dropouts are five times more likely to serve prison time than the national average, according to Bruce Western of Princeton University. About 37 percent of black male dropouts are likely to end up incarcerated.

The academic gap for males, both blacks and whites, appears to be widening. Men made up 43 percent of the college student population in 2000 versus 58 percent 36 years ago, according to Pell Institute senior scholar Tom Mortenson.

## BLACK MALE GRADUATION RATES

Indianapolis Public Schools has one of the lowest black male graduation rates in the nation. Other school districts with the lowest graduation rates for black males:

	Black male enrollment	2001-02 GRADUATION RATE	Black males	White males	Difference
Cincinnati	14,629	18%	38%	20%	
New York City	180,093	24%	51%	27%	
Cleveland	25,561	25%	32%	7%	
Chatham County, Ga.	11,443	25%	37%	12%	
<b>Indianapolis</b>	<b>12,312</b>	<b>25%</b>	<b>23%</b>	<b>- 2%</b>	
Rochester, N.Y.	11,504	26%	44%	19%	
Pinellas County, Fla.	11,274	26%	52%	26%	
Oakland, Calif.	11,298	27%	60%	33%	
Milwaukee	29,440	28%	50%	22%	

### A gap in achievement

Researchers from Johns Hopkins University found that black females and Hispanic males were the groups of students most likely to graduate from Indianapolis Public Schools, based on class of 2002 statistics.

#### Graduation rates for IPS based on ninth-grade enrollment:

Black male	25%	Hispanic male	43%	White male	23%
Black female	39%	Hispanic female	28%	White female	24%
<b>Total black</b>	<b>32%</b>	<b>Total Hispanic</b>	<b>36%</b>	<b>Total white</b>	<b>24%</b>

Note: Based on systems with 10,000 or more black males.

Sources: "Public Education and Black Male Students" study (2004) by the Schott Foundation for Public Education, Robert Balfanz, John Hopkins University

Jennifer Imes / The Star

For growing numbers of college-age women, it means more difficulties in finding equally educated — and financially stable — men.

How did we get here? Indiana's economic dependence on manufacturing helped create a culture in which education was considered to have little

practical value. Longtime educators say factory managers in some Indiana towns used to recruit workers in high schools, promising boys steady work if they quit school.

Times have changed. Mind-sets haven't. In many Indiana families, education still isn't viewed as the

gateway to a better life. Which helps explain why the state ranks 46th in the nation in the educational attainment rate of its population.

Schools haven't done their part in helping males adapt to the reality of a knowledge-based economy. Boys find few male role models in schools; nationally, women make up 75 percent of the teaching ranks.

The fact that teachers are almost always white contributes to cultural differences that keep students and educators from connecting. Cultural and racial differences also factor into the higher rates of suspensions and expulsions of black males.

Males are twice as likely as girls to be diagnosed with attention deficit hyperactivity disorder; 73 percent of the learning disabled population are males. Yet some researchers say the ratio of boys to girls classified with learning disabilities should be about 50/50.

All this ultimately shows up in high schools in the form of dropouts.

Males accounted for 425, or 59 percent, of the freshmen entering Northwest High in 2001. Four years later, they made up only 48 percent of the 2005 senior class.

Three-hundred thirty-five young men at Northwest High never made it to their senior year. And the story is consistent across the city.

Something is terribly wrong. **Next: IPS is banking on a small-schools strategy to save its failing high schools. It may not be enough.**

**"Girls. Baby. Fast money. Hard-headed. I'm only telling the truth. I didn't want to wake up to make the ride to go to school."**

James Johnson, on why he dropped out of school.



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### ONE PERSON'S STORY

## 'I honestly think I can'

Switching houses and schools meant that 16-year-old Jeremy Buccì never had much educational stability. Since starting his freshman year at Manual High School last fall, he has cut 29 of his world history classes, had run-ins with a teacher and been suspended once.

Cut one more class or miss another day of school and Buccì will be packed off to New Beginnings alternative school. Three of Buccì's cousins already attend there, and,

he says, "they don't like it."

Buccì says he realized he must "watch what I do. Pay attention to what my actions are."

But he's not certain if he will stay in school or follow his father's path by dropping out. "Some days, some point in time, I think I can make it, I think I can do it," Buccì says. "Then there's other times when people tell me I can't do it and I might as well stop. Well, I think I can do it. I honestly think I can."





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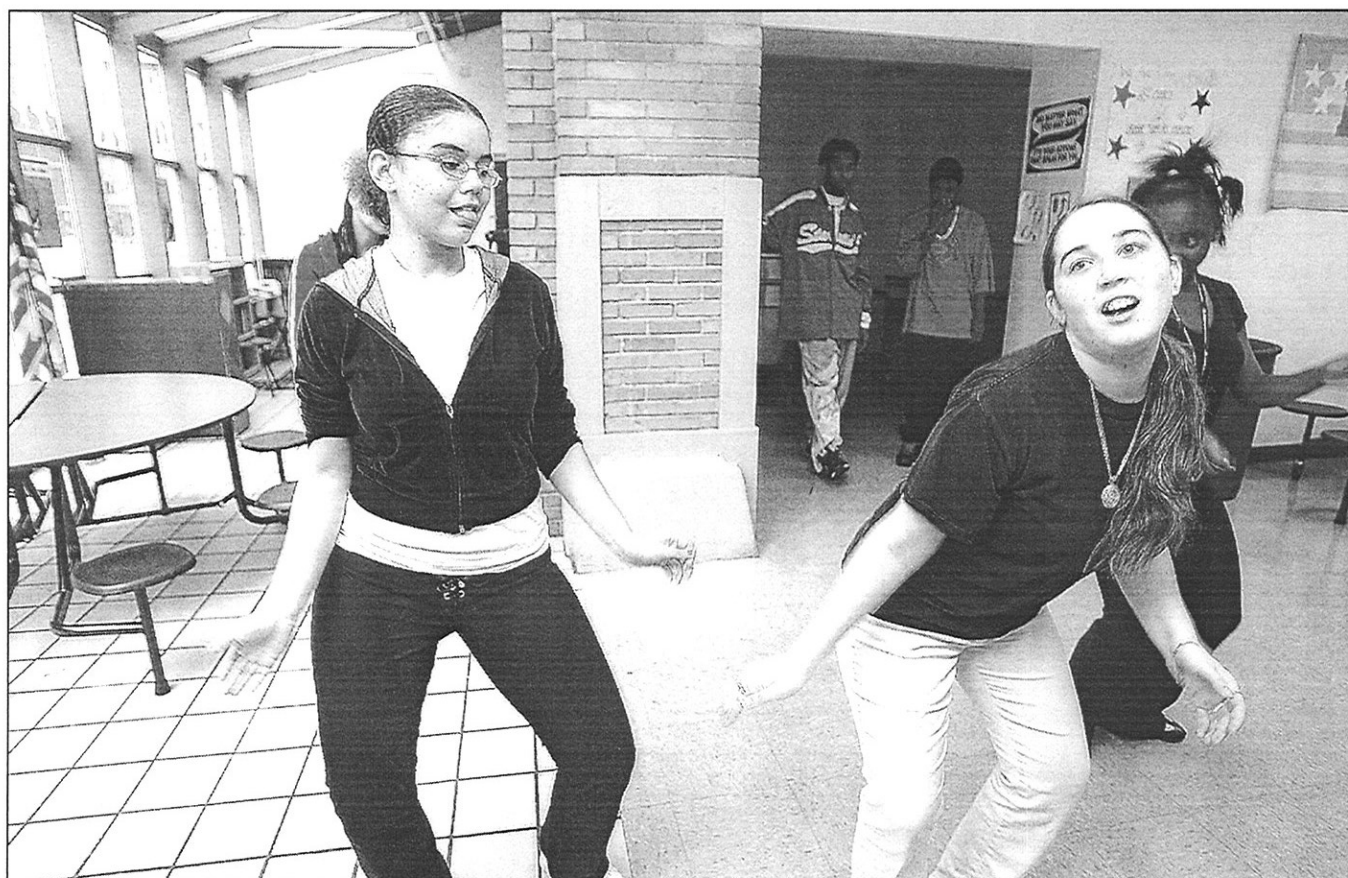
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# Early warning signs

IPS looks to smaller high schools to keep kids involved, but the damage often is done before then.



Adriane Jaecle / The Star

**Dance time:** Eighth-graders Eva Jenkins (left) and Justina Ballesteros practice with the Diamond Divas dance team at the Pacers Academy. The IPS alternative school at Union Station Downtown serves kids in grades 6 through 12 who are at risk of dropping out and those returning to school after dropping out.

## LEFT BEHIND

A STAR EDITORIAL BOARD SERIES

### Why you should care

Bruce Western of Princeton University notes that high school dropouts, regardless of race, are five times more likely to be sent to prison than high school graduates. He also points out that one in six black males went to prison each year in the late 1990s. But less than 1 percent of college-educated black men served prison time in the late '90s.

### Let's talk

What can the community do to reduce the number of students who drop out of school? What can the schools and the students themselves do?

State and local educators as well as community activists and students will discuss answers to those questions and others during a community town hall at 7 p.m. May 24 in the auditorium at Ben Davis High School, 1200 N. Girls School Road. To register call (317) 444-6170 or send e-mail to kim.mitchell@indystar.com.

Indianapolis Public Schools Board President Kelly Bentley admits that "30 percent are graduating, if that," from the district's high schools.

She concedes "teacher A isn't talking to teacher B" about at-risk students. And once students drop out, Bentley says, "We don't know where the kids go."

What's the solution? Bentley and other IPS leaders think the answer partly lies in converting five main high schools into 16 smaller learning centers in September.

It's a strategy other failing districts are adopting, including schools in New York City, Los Angeles, Baltimore and Boston.

Backing the small-schools movement are such big-name education reformers as Microsoft Chairman Bill Gates, whose foundation poured \$11.3 million into the initiatives at IPS and other Indianapolis schools.

Gates argues that "our high schools — even when they're working as designed — cannot teach our kids."

The number of students left behind is staggering. Each year more than 20,000 students drop out of Indiana high schools. Roughly 100,000 students have quit so far this decade.

Educators once thought modern high schools, with their teeming populations and sprawling campuses, were the height of efficiency and effective teaching. What they actually do: allow students to fall out of sight, out of mind and out of school.

Vanessa Smith remembers Arlington High as "more like a hangout" than an actual school.

"Teachers and the class volume were ridiculous. Sometimes people were standing up," Smith says. She eventually dropped out.

Angelique Twyman says Arsenal Tech's campus is "too open for someone who's not focused."

By her sophomore year, "I had just skipped. Then I skipped a week. And then I didn't go back."

As envisioned by IPS and the University of Indianapolis' Center of Excellence in Leadership of Learning, teachers at small schools will be able to brainstorm about future Angeliques because enrollment will be capped at 400 students. The small learning centers will be housed at high schools but will have their own teams

## OUT OF SCHOOL

The five major high schools in Indianapolis Public Schools reported high suspension and chronic absentee rates for the 2003-04 school year. A total of 189 students were expelled.

High school	Chronic absenteeism	Students suspended	Number of expulsions
Arlington	31%	28%	11
Arsenal Technical	43%	10%	68
Broad Ripple	25%	53%	37
Emmerich Manual	41%	28%	45
Northwest	63%	48%	28

Note: Chronic absenteeism is defined as 10 or more unexcused absences in a single school year.

Source: Indiana Department of Education

Jennifer Imes / The Star

of teachers and administrators.

Yet nobody's certain small schools will help. A study of one small-school concept — First Things First in Kansas City, Kan. — proclaims the program decreased the likelihood of dropping out by more than 90 percent. The study, however, was based on snapshots of raw data, not enough to prove long-term results.

Small schools also don't confront the reality that students are damaged long before high school.

Problems begin at home. Research indicates that poor parents on average devote a mere 25 hours of reading time to their children from birth until they reach first grade. Middle-class parents, in contrast, spend as much as 1,700 hours reading to their children.

Schools can alleviate that skills gap — and better prepare a child for tough schoolwork ahead — through early, intense remediation.

Harlem's Children's Zone, the community education and charter school outfit run by teaching guru Geoffrey Canada, offers a model. At its "baby college," parents are taught about child development and given books to read to their children.

Preschoolers attending its "Harlem Gems" program

are put through a rigorous course of reading-related exercises.

But Indiana doesn't pay for or require full-day kindergarten, much less preschool education. IPS offers full-day kindergarten, but only to 230 students on a lottery basis. Most children lose out on needed intervention.

The problems continue in elementary school classrooms. As Indiana University researcher Russ Skiba points out, "The longer kids are in school, the less we can say their problems" are attributable to bad parenting.

Schools place less emphasis on reading skills development just as it's needed most in subjects such as math and social studies. Weak readers get weaker still.

Social promotion, in which students are passed on despite their performance, exacerbates the problem. Yet leaving them back won't work unless the student gets intense remedial education. And most don't.

Pacers Academy Principal Anita Silverman and Ken Poole of Manual High both say that the old way of standing in front of students to lecture them doesn't work anymore. Yet many teachers resist change.

The fact that most teachers are white and female can set up cultural clashes, especially for black males.

Those conflicts often lead to suspensions and expulsions, which contribute to students giving up on school.

Indiana ranks number one in the nation in the rate of suspensions and among the top 10 in expulsions. Blacks account for 18 suspensions per 100 elementary students, six times that of whites, according to a study by IU's Skiba and M. Karega Rausch. By middle school, the rate of suspension for blacks is five times that of whites.

For failing students, there aren't many places to turn. Alternative schools such as IPS' Pacers Academy can help some students. Yet a 2003 University of Minnesota study points out that there are few data on alternative schools' performance.

All of this has severe consequences, not only for students but the state itself. Stan Jones, Indiana's commissioner of higher education, can't see "how we can move forward" until the dropout crisis is abated.

He's right. Indiana can't.

**Next: The state's failure to keep students in school damages Indiana's economy.**

## ONE PERSON'S STORY

### 'Like almost a passport'

Dropping out runs in Julie Johnson's family. Her father left school at age 12 to take care of his family. Husband James dropped out after his freshman year. And none of her four children finished high school; one son left despite having reached his senior year at Cardinal Ritter High School.

Johnson herself went to Northwest and Arsenal Tech, but "my interest wasn't in school" and so she left after her sophomore year. The next decades, she struggled as a housekeeper at a Courtyard by Marriott, clocking in bus drivers for IndyGo and tending bar at

the Westin Hotel Downtown.

Now entering invoices for Burlington Coat Factory, Johnson, at age 41, realizes an education is "like almost a passport" to better jobs. So she attends GED prep courses with her husband at the Indiana Opportunities Industrialization Centers State Council.

A better job isn't the only reason why she's back for her GED. She also wants to motivate her eight — soon to be nine — grandchildren to stay in school. Says Johnson: "At least if I have something to show for it, it keeps them going."



**"If a student goes to an IPS high school, they're forced to attend a dropout factory. By sending them there, it's almost guaranteed they'll fail."**



Jose Evans, Director, Black and Latino Policy Institute

## About the series

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**Sunday:** Community leaders must engage in honest discussion about how to remedy the dropout epidemic.



## OPINION &amp; COMMENTARY

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A GANNETT NEWSPAPER

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# A heavy burden

Indianapolis and Indiana are paying a hefty price for failing to deal realistically with the dropout epidemic.

## Disparity in Incomes

Below are the average annual incomes that workers can expect, based on education:

Professional degree	\$81,500
Doctoral degree	\$70,700
Master's degree	\$52,300
Bachelor's degree	\$42,200
Associate's degree	\$33,400
High school graduate	\$26,200
High school dropout	\$19,000

## Where dropouts end up

By dropping out of high school, young people greatly increase the odds they will land in prison or on the streets.

## Local, state and federal prison inmates

Adults younger than 25: 372,665  
Number with no regular high school diploma: 298,700

**80% percent have no high school diploma**

## Active-duty military personnel, 2001

Adults younger than 25: 589,000  
Number with no regular high school diploma: 46,530

**8% percent have no high school diploma**

Sources: U.S. Department of Commerce, Manhattan Institute

Jennifer Imes / The Star



**Sandwiched:** Dorian McMiller, who dropped out of Arlington High School, earns \$6.50 an hour making sandwiches at Subway in Downtown Indianapolis. Average incomes for male dropouts have fallen 35 percent (in 2002 dollars) since 1971.

**J**oseph Matthews III knows where the dropouts go.

They're slinging burgers at fast-food joints for "eight to 10 bucks an hour." Or working as full-time customer service reps for \$18,000 a year, says Matthews, president of the Indiana Opportunities Industrialization Centers State Council.

They're also showing up inside prisons for drug dealing or other felonies. Some are wearing ankle bracelets, for which they pay \$84 every week, as a condition of their home detention. How do they get the cash to pay for the bracelet? Don't ask, Matthews says.

They're seeking shelter at the Julian Center from abusive lovers. Applying at a local welfare office for food stamps. Or trading food for drugs.

In any case, "they are not emerging as your productive Hoosier," says Matthews, whose program helps dropouts earn a GED.

Indianapolis and Indiana are paying a heavy price for failing to deal realistically with the dropout epidemic. At a time when an educated work force is essential to economic development, almost three of 10 students in Indiana are not graduating from high school.

Two facts are closely linked: Indiana was 44th in the nation in job creation last year, and it's 46th in the educational attainment level of its population. The first number won't rise until the second is confronted.

Traditional manufacturing, where past generations of Indiana workers with a high school diploma or less often found employment, is in steady decline. Construction accounts for only 5 percent of all jobs. A student who leaves high school today without a diploma finds few opportunities waiting.

The result: Average incomes for male dropouts have fallen 35 percent (in 2002 dollars) since 1971; wages for female dropouts fell 14 percent during the same period.

Former Arlington High student Vanessa Smith dropped out during her junior year after landing in a day adult class with other pregnant teens. She now makes \$10.50 an hour as a certified nursing assistant, "a lot more than I can make anywhere else without a GED." Yet she admits she needs "a little more than that" to support her 3-year-old son.

Most dropouts are condemned to chronic unemployment or underemployment. Only 35 percent of black dropouts between ages 16 and 24 are currently employed. Sixty percent of all dropouts were unemployed last year.

Prison also snares many, especially

the men. About 37 percent of black male dropouts have done a stint in prison, according to Princeton University researcher Bruce Western. Sixty-eight percent of state prison inmates — including 27 percent of whites — were dropouts, according to a 1997 survey by the U.S. Department of Justice.

"Roosevelt said in the Great Depression that we as a society are losing the human resource. We're losing the human resource today," says Harry Sykes, supervisor of education at Plainfield Correctional Facility.

Sykes says the typical inmate enrolled in the prison's GED program dropped out at age 15.

Somewhere on life's downward trajectory, Tawnya McCrary encounters many of the men and women who've suffered through low pay, lost jobs and prison.

McCrary helps teach job and life skills to dropouts who attend the OIC's Indianapolis training center. She's something of a mother figure, calling to make sure they attend class and lecturing on how to dress for a job interview instead of showing up in a "T-shirt, jeans and house shoes."

She tries to teach the GED students a new way of thinking about life. "They're in crisis mode day to day," she says.

Yet, despite the hard work invested to obtain it, the General Equivalency Diploma, really isn't equal to graduat-

ing from high school. A 1998 U.S. Department of Education summary of research on the GED concluded that on average recipients earned less than high school graduates, although they took home wages 5 to 11 percent higher than dropouts.

More bad news: Fewer dropouts are pursuing a GED. In Indiana, the number of people earning a GED declined 9 percent from 1995 to 2004. In Indianapolis Public Schools, the number dropped 16 percent from 2002 to 2004.

GED students also tend to be younger than in the past. Joseph Matthews notes the fastest-growing group of Indiana OIC's students are from 16 to 20; they now make up one-quarter of the program's 635 GED students. As Johns Hopkins researcher Robert Balfanz points out, many haven't passed 10th grade, which means they're ill-prepared for the GED's academic challenges.

Drive along Capitol Avenue near 38th Street in Indianapolis and you'll see the young men hanging out. No jobs. Few prospects.

Indiana is losing, as Harry Sykes says, the human resource.

And all Hoosiers are bearing the cost in higher taxes, fewer jobs and lower incomes.

**Next: Business, educational and community leaders must rally together to confront the dropout crisis.**

## LEFT BEHIND

A STAR EDITORIAL BOARD SERIES

## Why you should care

Employers increasingly say that a well-educated work force is more important to them than tax breaks or other government incentives.

Yet, with about three out of 10 students in Indiana failing to complete high school each year, the state's work force is unattractive to businesses deciding whether to relocate or expand here.

## Let's talk

What can the community do to reduce the number of students who drop out of school? What can the schools and the students themselves do?

State and local educators as well as community activists and students will discuss answers to those questions and others during a community town hall at 7 p.m. May 24 in the auditorium at Ben Davis High School, 1200 N. Girls School Road. To register call (317) 444-6170 or send e-mail to kim.mitchell@indystar.com.

"If you were able to track by name a lot of these individuals,



they're going to show up inside of your prisons. And they're going to still carry the baggage that they are underperformers."

Joseph Matthews III, president of the Indiana Opportunities Industrialization Centers State Council

## About the series

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## ONE PERSON'S STORY

**'I'm learning to be a man'**

Dorian McMiller ran into trouble early in life. At 14, he was arrested for armed robbery. At 16, he stole a car.

"I wasn't really thinking about school," says Dorian, now 18 and a dropout from Arlington High School. "I was thinking of trouble."

Dorian now lives on his own, trying to pay his bills by working long hours at a variety of jobs. He earns \$6.50 an hour making sandwiches at a Subway

restaurant Downtown.

He dreams of becoming a writer and reads whenever he has the time. Maya Angelou is a favorite author.

Dorian hesitates, however, when asked if he'll go back to school. Night classes seem daunting for someone struggling to survive day to day. He's too busy fighting to make it on his own.

"I'm learning to be a man," he says.





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# The challenge ahead

Confronting the dropout problem with honesty is the first step among many that educators, government and the public must take.



Frank Espich / The Star

**Getting back on track:** Some dropouts head to the Indianapolis training center of Indiana Opportunities Industrialization Centers State Council to earn their General Equivalency Diploma. GED students are younger than in the past, with 16- to 20-year-olds making up one-quarter of the Indiana OIC's 635 GED students.

**J**acqueline Anderson began to turn her life around after coming to this realization: "I've never completed anything."

Anderson, who dropped out of Arlington High School, enrolled last year in Job Corps and has earned her GED. Hard times have not passed, however. She lost her \$8-an-hour job at Washington Inventory Services last month.

How can educators, state government and local communities reach the more than 20,000 Hoosiers who every year, like Anderson, quit school?

No easy answers exist. The dropout crisis is deeply rooted in societal problems such as poverty, drug and alcohol abuse, family turmoil and parts of the Indiana culture that do not place a high value on education.

Yet, there are crucial moves educators, state government and community leaders can — and must — make to keep more children from following the desperate paths of high school dropouts.

## Educators

1. The first step is to tell the truth. Education officials like state Superintendent of Public Instruction Sue Ellen Reed have known for years that the graduation rates they report to the public are grossly inflated.

Their failure to speak out about low and declining graduation rates has masked the extent of the dropout epidemic and kept the public in the dark.

2. Local school boards and superintendents, especially in Indianapolis Public Schools, should write community contracts that set benchmarks for improvement. Business leaders, community organizations and the teachers union should set goals for their participation in

## Indiana's graduation rates

**72%** of all Indiana students graduated in 2002

**53%** of black students in Indiana graduated in 2002

**50%** of Hispanic students in Indiana graduated in 2002

**75%** of white students in Indiana graduated in 2002

Sources: The Civil Rights Project at Harvard University, the Urban Institute, Advocates for Children of New York, and the Civil Society Institute.

Jennifer Imes / The Star

helping improve schools. All should then communicate regularly with the public about the expectations set and progress achieved.

3. Teachers who are able to help at-risk students succeed should be better compensated than those working in less demanding environments. Teachers unions should allow administrators greater flexibility in rewarding teachers who take on the greatest challenges.

Also, the practice of intentionally dumping the least-experienced teachers into the most difficult classroom settings needs to end. It sets up both teachers and students to fail.

4. School districts and university schools of education need aggressively to recruit more black, Hispanic and male teachers. All teachers need improved training in working with students from different cultural backgrounds.

5. School superintendents, principals and teams of teachers should meet regularly with at-risk students, especially black males, to hear their concerns and recommendations for improvement. Listening can go a long way in persuading

students that someone cares about their future.

6. Districts, especially suburban schools on building binges, should reduce the frills and divert more dollars to remediation, tutoring and other programs that target at-risk students.

Mixing capital and operating budgets isn't allowed officially, but school administrators could expect few objections if they were to ask to divert construction dollars to pilot programs aimed at improving classroom instruction.

School officials argue that sports and other activities help engage students. That's true. But football teams can still take the field without schools erecting palaces like the \$4.3 million stadium built at Franklin Central High School last year.

## State leaders

1. Indiana must place much greater emphasis on early childhood education. Money is undeniably tight, but Gov. Mitch Daniels and state legislators must give priority to full-day kindergarten and preschool opportunities for at-risk children.

The achievement gap among children begins to widen by the third grade. Early intervention, especially reading remediation, is essential to close the gap.

2. State lawmakers should allow for the creation of additional alternative schools, including charters.

Indianapolis Public Schools Pacers Academy is an alternative school helping to rescue a small number of students. Its methods, built around high-energy teachers and close relationships with students, should be expanded to other schools and districts.

3. Indiana needs a vocal leader to confront the challenge of its low graduation rate. Sue Ellen Reed is in the right position to do it. She must, however, be more forceful and consistent in pointing out the educational system's problems.

## Community

1. Volunteers are wanted. VISTA volunteers like Jamie Gibson and Kathy Souchet are helping turn at-risk students into leaders in IPS high schools. Tutors and mentors, many from the business world, are helping students learn to read.

But more are needed.

An important piece of reversing the dropout rate is finding individuals who can build strong relationships with students. Someone to ask about home life and homework.

Community groups, including churches and synagogues, have an important role in organizing volunteers and building bridges with schools and students.

2. Business involvement is critical. Executives need to work with educators in setting expectations and measuring outcomes. The business community has long complained about failing schools, but it must become a better partner in finding solutions.

3. Hoosiers must place greater value on the importance of education. Star editorial writers, in researching this series, encountered a startling number of students and dropouts from families in which no one had graduated from high school.

In other families, education has become secondary to sports and other activities that consume children's time. The importance of education appears for some to be slipping exactly when it's needed most for the health of the state and its young people.

Indiana's schools must improve. Its educators must adapt to change. Its political leaders must make targeted investments in education. Its community leaders and families must be better engaged in educating their children.

No less than the future of a generation is at stake.

## LEFT BEHIND

A STAR EDITORIAL BOARD SERIES

### Why you should care

Each of the roughly 60,000 Indiana high school students who have dropped out since 2002 cost taxpayers on average \$4,433 in education funding. So \$266 million walked out of school doors with them, never to return. That figure doesn't count the millions of tax dollars that will be spent on many of them as they go through the welfare system and prison.

### Let's talk

What can the community do to reduce the number of students who drop out of school? What can the schools and the students themselves do?

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**"I know there are tired teachers. Do you know what tired teachers need to do? Tired teachers need to quit."**



Anita Silverman, principal of the Pacers Academy, an Indianapolis Public Schools alternative school.

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## ONE PERSON'S STORY

### 'I'm trying to stop the cycle'

By the time a letter from the Family and Social Services Administration directed her to take a GED class, Swaquana Anderson was, in her words, "a hot mess."

A mother at age 14, the Illinois native dropped out of Indianapolis' Howe High School two years later. By 18, she stopped taking GED prep courses when she got pregnant again. At age 21, she was a mother of four scraping by with jobs at Subway and Rally's. She said she was "getting nowhere doing fast food."

GED prep and job-training courses at the Indiana OIC's Indianapolis office led to an internship and then a job there as a receptionist. Now 26, she may earn her GED after taking the test for a second time.

Anderson, the daughter of a dropout, aspires to be a nurse. She also wants a better life for her 12-year-old daughter. "I'm trying to stop the cycle of dropping out," Anderson says. "I'm trying my best for my kids to not repeat the same cycle."





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# Beating the odds

Some students overcome dire situations to earn a diploma. The key?  
Relationships with caring teachers and mentors.

## We've got answers to your questions

**R**eaders responded passionately to The Star Editorial Board's series on high school dropouts, which ends today. Here are a few of the more common questions:

**Q.** Why are we hearing about low graduation rates now?

**A.** The Star's series was spurred by the release of national studies in recent months by the Schott Foundation for Public Education, the Educational Testing Service, the Civil Rights Project at Harvard University and the Manhattan Institute. All found that either Indiana's or Indianapolis Public Schools' actual graduation rates were much lower than claimed, based on data from the 2001-2002 school year. The federal government's No Child Left Behind act is triggering the release of the data.

**Q.** Why did The Star use eighth-grade enrollment figures to determine the high school completion rate for school districts?

**A.** We used eighth-grade numbers as the baseline because students who do not earn enough academic credits to progress to their sophomore year are still listed as freshmen no matter how long they are in school. That tends to inflate ninth-grade enrollment.

To look at individual high schools, however, in a large district such as IPS, we had to use ninth-grade enrollment.

Researchers disagree on which numbers are best to use as the baseline. Schott Foundation and Johns Hopkins University researchers relied on ninth-grade enrollment. Manhattan Institute researchers used an average enrollment between eighth, ninth and 10th grades.

Depending on the formula used, graduation rates for Indianapolis Public Schools vary from a low of 28 percent to a high of 47 percent.

**Q.** Why wasn't this series on the front page?

**A.** Although grounded in thorough research and fact, the series was an Editorial Board project that contained opinion throughout the daily pieces.

**Q.** Why is the community town hall at a township high school rather than in IPS?

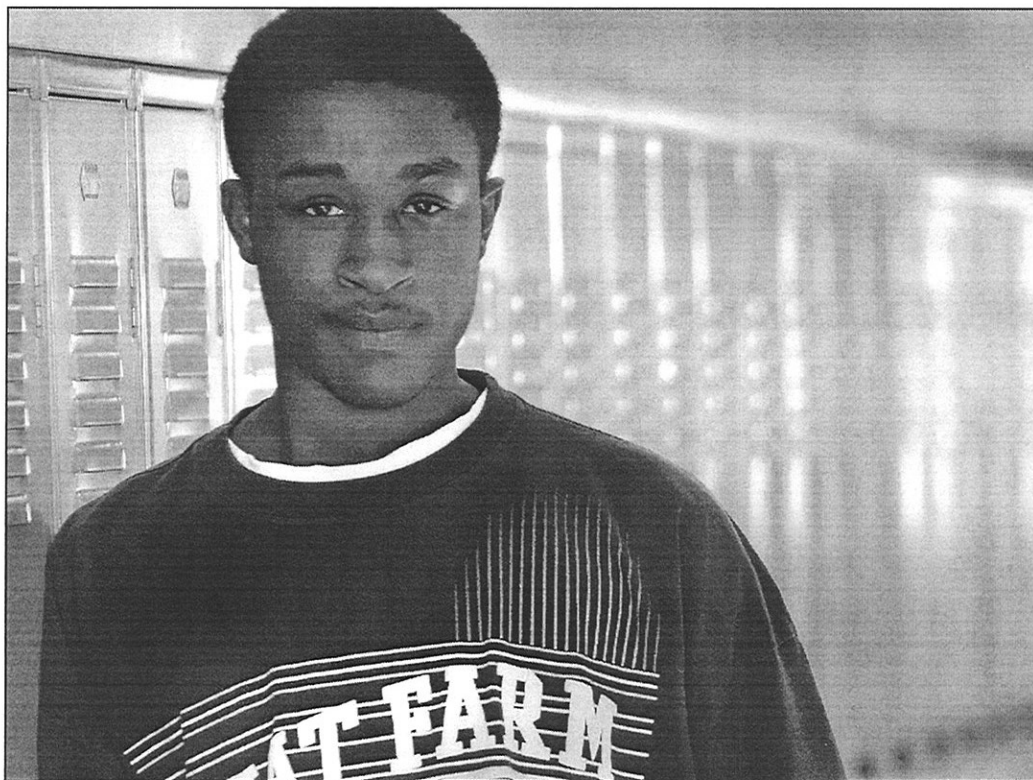
**A.** We debated this one internally but after listening to community input decided to stage the town hall at Ben Davis High School on the city's Westside. Our advisers' thoughts were the dropout epidemic is a communitywide, not just an IPS, problem. By taking the event to a suburban high school that is struggling with its dropout crisis, we hope to underscore that point.

**Q.** What happened to Gary and George?

**A.** Gary Varvel and George Will, that is, Varvel, The Star's cartoonist, was on vacation much of the week. But, we're happy to say, he has returned to work and his latest creation is on the facing page. We reduced the number of syndicated columns published last week to accommodate the series but will return to the normal format Monday.

**Q.** Where do you go from here?

**A.** First there is the forum. Please attend at 7 p.m. Tuesday at Ben Davis. Beyond that, we're committed to returning to this subject frequently in coming months through editorials and other commentary.



Charlie Nye / The Star

**A family first:** Terrell Parker's mother and father quit school. His brother did as well, and many of his friends. But Terrell, a 16-year-old sophomore and student leader at Washington Community School, is determined to graduate in two years.

**T**he dropouts aren't hard to find. They're making your sandwiches, fixing your roof, changing the linen on your elderly parent's nursing home bed.

Amid despair over so many young people falling behind, however, there is hope. Some students are bound for success despite fierce adversity. Their stories can help explain what the community and schools must do to help others:

### 'The best thing I can do'

Terrell Parker could have become a number, another young black male who dropped out of school and into trouble.

Terrell's mother and father quit school. His brother did as well. When Terrell graduates in two years — and by every indication he will graduate — he'll become the first member of his family to complete high school.

Many of Terrell's friends also have dropped out. He says some must find work to help support their families. Others, he says, simply don't care about education in schools where they don't feel they belong. "The school system isn't designed for us," he says.

Terrell has become a leader as a sophomore at Indianapolis Public Schools' newly reopened Washington Community School. He's on the student council and is a force behind a student diversity club he helped create to ease racial tensions at the school. He and other council members also helped start an after-school tutoring program at Washington.

What makes Terrell different from the 20,000 students who drop out of school every year in Indiana?



Tim Swarens / The Star

**Alternative success:** The Pacers Academy saved 18-year-old Reda Stewart.

"I realize (dropping out) is not the life I want to have," the 16-year-old says softly. "I realize graduating is the best thing I can do if I want to better myself."

Terrell had help in learning that lesson. Teachers noticed his leadership skills and commitment to education while he still was in middle school. In seventh grade, he participated in a summer science program at Purdue University. He has returned each summer. If he completes the program and decides to pursue a degree in science at Purdue, the cost of his education will be covered.

Terrell also formed a friendship with Kathy Souchet, a VISTA volunteer at Washington, who acts as a mentor. "He has a drive to succeed," she says.

Encouraging teachers. An adult mentor and friend. Help from a program aimed at at-risk students that builds long-term relationships. All are crucial pieces to the puzzle of keeping more students in school.



**A guiding hand:** VISTA worker Kathy Souchet (right) has been a mentor to Terrell Parker. "He has a drive to succeed," she says. An adult mentor and friend can be vital to keeping kids like Terrell in school.

### 'I got to see everybody else drop out'

Reda Stewart does the sad math. Of her 30 or so friends in middle school, four are still in school. Only three, including herself, will graduate from high school on time.

What happened to the rest?

"Three are dead. Ten to 12 are in jail," Reda says. "Others quit school and disappeared. I got to see everybody else drop out."

Life has kicked Reda hard in 18 years. The drug trade and other crimes are rampant in her Southside neighborhood. She has a strained relationship with her father, referring to him only as "the donor." Her sister dropped out and Reda once asked for the papers that would mark her own official exit from school. "Everything was closing in on me," she says of the dark days.

But she decided to stick it out, and she'll graduate from IPS' Pacers Academy this month.

Reda is convinced the alternative school was a key difference in her outcome. "I wouldn't have graduated in a normal high school," she says.

She plans to attend college in the fall, studying business management. The state's 21st Century Scholars Program, available to low-income students who meet academic standards and avoid legal trouble, will pay her college costs.

The alternative setting and the promise of state financial aid were important factors in helping Reda overcome a harsh background.

But Anita Silverman, principal of the Pacers Academy, says there was something even more essential. "The key to reducing the drop out rate is relationships," she says.

Silverman places much of the responsibility for building those relationships on teachers, the frontline warriors in the trenches every day with students.

Students and educators repeatedly told Star editorial writers who researched this series that good teachers are crucial to keeping students in school. "Would you want a mediocre brain surgeon? You don't want a mediocre teacher teaching your children," Silverman says. "Teaching is harder than being a principal."

Good teachers and good schools, people and institutions willing to do whatever it takes to reach troubled students, are essential to increasing unacceptably low graduation rates.

Yet, if Indiana and Indianapolis are finally to confront their dropout epidemic, state and local leaders must avoid the temptation of asking the schools to solve the challenge alone.

The dropout epidemic is not solely an IPS problem. It's not just a school problem. It's a community crisis that must be confronted honestly and boldly by a range of political, community and educational leaders.

Terrell and Reda will make it. The future of far too many other children in Indiana remains in doubt.

## LEFT BEHIND

A STAR EDITORIAL BOARD SERIES

### Why you should care

Wonder why you sometimes receive poor service in a fast-food shop? Or why college-educated black women talk about "marrying down"? Or even why there are so many more women than men on your daughter's college campus? It's the dropout crisis that creates those difficulties. Which in turn lead to higher social costs for all of us.

### Let's talk

What can the community do to reduce the number of students who drop out of school? What can the schools and the students themselves do?

State and local educators as well as community activists and students will discuss answers to those questions and others during a community town hall at 7 p.m. May 24 in the auditorium at Ben Davis High School, 1200 N. Girls School Road. To register call (317) 444-6170 or send e-mail to kim.mitchell@indystar.com.

**"It's not that they don't care. It's that they don't know how to help."**



David Marcotte, Ben Davis High School principal, speaking of many low-income parents' struggle to assist their children's academic success

### About the series

**Sunday:** State and local educators claim 90 percent of students graduate from high school. Reality is far more dismal.

**Monday:** Indianapolis Public Schools operates some of the worst dropout factories in the nation.

**Tuesday:** Graduation rates are low in several suburban Marion County school districts.

**Wednesday:** In Indianapolis and across the nation, more black males are dropping out of high school than graduating.

**Thursday:** IPS hopes to turn around its failing high schools by adopting a small schools strategy. But the achievement gap begins to develop early, and by the time students are in high school many believe they can never catch up.

**Friday:** More than 20,000 students who drop out every year in Indiana are an economic drain on the state and its cities.

**Saturday:** Educators say the challenge of turning dropout factories into centers of excellence falls heavily on teachers.

**Today:** Community leaders must engage in honest discussion about how to remedy the dropout epidemic.





[BOOKS]

## Testament to greatness

Biography of legendary jazz musician Dizzy Gillespie probes the man and his music. [E6]

# A word of advice for young black males — graduate!

The education system and the black community are failing young black males, whose high dropout rates are a national disaster, charges Phillip Jackson of the Black Star Project.

School reform requires addressing the relationship between black male youth identity and hip-hop culture, says Jose Evans of the Black and Latino Policy Institute. The pair explain how educators and the community must reach out to young blacks to offer them a better future.

**LEFT BEHIND**  
A STAR EDITORIAL BOARD SERIES

## Without a diploma, futures look bleak

By Phillip Jackson

Everyone encountering a young black man should give him the most important gift he will ever receive. That gift is not money, clothes, video games, cars or tickets to the latest basketball game. The most important gift for a young black man today is the advice to do what it takes to graduate from high school and develop a career plan. Without a high school diploma and more, young black men become obsolete.

Between 45 and 55 percent of urban black males 20 to 24 years old are out of school and out of work, according to a 2004 report by Northeastern University's Center for Labor Market Studies. Dropout rates for young blacks are increasing, even though leaving high school without a diploma is economic suicide, according to Dr. Neeta Fogg, one of the study's authors.

Without a diploma, there are few legal jobs that a young black man can have that pay enough money to support a family.

Young black men who are out of school and unemployed are more

susceptible to illegal activities that lead to incarceration. So far, the black community has not responded sufficiently to this catastrophe involving its young black men. In fact, this problem is not even on the radar screen of many black churches, businesses, elected officials, media outlets, civil rights and social service organizations.

Without an adequate response from the black community, more young black men are sentenced to lives of drugs, gangs and violence. Ultimately, prison and death claim far too many.

The high school dropout rate for young black men is a national disaster. Bill McNary, president of Citizen Action, calls it "unsound, obscene and absurd." We can no longer say that we do not know. Now the question is: Do we care?

The massive failure of schools and the black community to successfully educate black males, and their disproportionately high rates of unemployment and incarceration, are complex issues, but they are still solv-

See Jackson, Page E5

## Hip-hop defines black urban youth

By Jose Evans

I am a product of the early "old school" hip-hop generation. Born in the early 1970s, I had the opportunity to experience the birth of an entire culture. During the 1970s, '80s and early '90s, this culture had an understanding about the civil rights movement, racial identity and political and social injustice.

Just look at the artists who influence both my way of thinking and living. Artists such as KRS 1, Public Enemy, X-Clan and, yes, even 2Pac and NWA understood that this new hip-hop generation was hungry for someone to speak out against the struggles, injustices and racism found in the community and in our schools.

Today's hip-hop culture, represented by 50 Cent, The Game and T.I., have a different approach. Like their predecessors, these artists speak to black youth; however, their lyrics focus on quick money, getting rich and living beyond the rules.

In "Locating the Dropout

Crisis," Johns Hopkins researchers flagged 2,000 high schools as "dropout factories." Between 1990 and 2002, other than Stockton, Calif., Indianapolis Public Schools was the only district where students had, and continue to have, no choice but to go to a dropout factory.

In his book, "Black in School," Shawn Ginwright discusses the inability of educators to connect with, inspire and move black urban working-class students. He argues that the cultural disconnect between the civil rights and hip-hop generations is an obstacle to reaching urban black youth, who are simply not motivated or inspired by reform efforts in which their urban identities are not represented.

While multicultural reform tries to balance culturally biased and racist curricula by infusing West African principles, they are rarely connected to black urban experiences — marginalizing hip-hop and replacing one form of cultural mismatch with another. Obviously, with low graduation rates, success with multicultural reforms has been limited.

In the 1970s and '80s, multicultural and Afro-centric educa-

See Evans, Page E5

## Lessons on important issues are worth repeating

Newspapers teach. Do we teach well? Do we teach the right "courses"? Those questions come up frequently, as I was reminded last week in an e-mail from Judith LaFour-est, who teaches English composition and related courses at Ivy Tech.

LaFour-est suggested that The Star run a "grammar tidbit," a poem — complete with analysis — and other such educational items each day.

Other readers have suggested that we teach automobile drivers about the rules of the road, or that we educate families about nutrition and health care,



Dennis Ryerson

or about civility and respect.

We do some of these things. I wish we could do all of them and more. But first we have to be true to our core mission, which is to report about and help readers understand important news events in our community, state, nation and world.

Some "teaching" is involved in that. Through The Star, I want you to learn more about who we are as Hoosiers and the key influences — cultural, economic and environmental — that shape us.

We have an obligation to teach readers about the workings of our gov-

ernments, schools and institutions, from hospitals to churches.

I frequently quote a wise elementary principal who once told me newspapers didn't do a very good job of teaching. She told me something that every good teacher knows: If you're going to educate you must repeat the lesson.

Her gripe about newspapers was this: We pick up on an important issue, but too often let it go, failing to repeat the lesson.

We need to do better. The current opinion page series about high school dropouts, which concludes today in this section, is an example of what I want more of in The Star.

Rather than writing one brief editorial about the topic and then not get-

ting back to it for weeks or months (if that), Editorial Page Editor Tim Swar-rens and his colleagues decided to dig deeply into this issue, explain it on several levels, and repeat the lesson for eight days.

The topic will be discussed further during a community meeting Tuesday evening at Ben Davis High School.

I don't want the opinion pages to stop with that community meeting. I want us to revisit this topic again and again. By doing that, I hope readers — parents, educators, lawmakers and others — will finally understand this lesson: Indiana cannot afford to let so many of its citizens waste their lives, either under- or unemployed or in jail, at a huge cost in terms of social services and lost human capital.

Indiana has shown that it can improve if it wants to. Two years ago, The Star focused on Indiana's economic decline. I think that played a key part in the state's focusing more resources on economic development.

In recent years we've written story after story, and editorial after editorial, about child abuse and neglect. This year, lawmakers approved the hiring of 600 new social service caseworkers.

I hope this week's special series, and follow-up comment on these pages, forces similar attention on another area of neglect — high school dropouts.

Thanks for reading The Indianapolis Star.

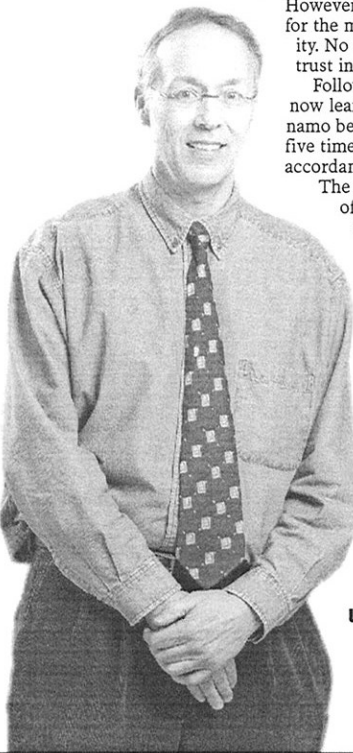
Ryerson is editor of The Star. Contact him at dennis.ryerson@indystar.com or at (317) 444-6169.

Angela Edwards / The Star



# IN Touch

A sampling of the best comments of the week from the Editorial Board's online readers' blog.



## Too quick to print

**Rick Bentley**  
curriculum developer and trainer

The Quran desecration story illustrates just how quickly journalists will print anything negative about the U.S. military, no matter how flimsy the evidence. Newsweek ran this highly inflammatory story based solely on the memory of one anonymous source. As a result, people died in riots across the Islamic world and al-Qaida was handed a major propaganda coup.

We are served well by a vigilant press. However, the media's profound distrust for the military undermines its credibility. No wonder we hear of declining trust in major news sources.

Following Newsweek's retraction, we now learn Muslim prisoners at Guantanamo benefit from open access to prayer five times per day and meals prepared in accordance with Islamic dietary laws.

The media often ignore our tradition of religious tolerance, as well as the many acts of individual kindness by our soldiers.

In the aftermath of Newsweek's grievous error, it's ironic how the media are underplaying Newsweek's responsibility to make things right.

**"We are served well by a vigilant press. However, the media's profound distrust for the military undermines its credibility."**

Rick Bentley

## The real Guantanamo story

**Pamela Taylor**  
writer who works in development

Did soldiers at Guantanamo flush pages from the Quran down the toilet or not? Did Newsweek abandon responsible journalism in its haste to publish a hot story? Frankly, I don't care. These are secondary issues, a distraction from what should be the focus when it comes to Guantanamo — the gross human rights violations that are taking place there.

The U.S. government refuses to declare the men held at Guantanamo either prisoners of war (which would afford them protections under international law) or criminal defendants (which would afford them protections under American law). As a result, they have been held for years with no charges and no chance to prove their innocence. Some of them, it turns out, were indeed innocent bystanders. When released after four years, they told tales of prisoner abuse, inhumane and sexually abusive interrogative techniques, and the use of religion as a tool to break down their resistance not so dissimilar from what happened in Abu Ghraib. Government documents confirm that "torture techniques" have been used against the men in Guantanamo. Humans rights, torture, due process of law — these are what we should be worrying about, not a few sheets of paper.

## Joint dropout efforts

**Mel Pfeiffer**  
IPS teacher

Indiana is facing a problem regarding high school dropout rates. Unfortunately, I meet children in the sixth grade who have already figuratively dropped out.



Pfeiffer

room behavior. Just how do they propose the teacher accomplish that? I have made well over 1,000 parent contacts this year and have seen far too few changes in student attitudes and behavior.

Parenting is a difficult job, but without it, teaching can become almost impossible. Parents and teachers must work together from the very beginning to ensure that students don't drop out of school mentally long before they do physically.

## The cords of restraint

**Chris Douglas**  
financial planner and manager

In columns and banisters of government buildings around the world there is a decorative image whose meaning is lost on most observers: a bundle of rods

wrapped with a cord. The rods represent the ancient Roman "fasces" which, when unbound, were used on behalf of consuls to administer punishment in the streets. The bundle of fasces became an apt symbol for authoritarian regimes in the 20th century.

In American democratic architecture, however, the same bundled rods carry a very different meaning. While it was the worst nature of fascists to value the absolute power of the rods, it is the better nature of Ameri-

can democracy to value the image of the cords that act as the restraint on that power.

In our country today, the legislative and executive branches of government are under the control of just one party, so the restraint upon that party's power must come from an independent judiciary and the filibuster, both of which are now under extremist attack. These are the cords of restraint that even Republicans should fight to preserve.

## The people behind the runners

**Jennifer Rea**  
education publishing company editor

On May 7, I did something I never thought I could do: I participated in the Mini-Marathon. A self-admitted non-athlete, I have never participated in such an event and did not know what to expect. And with a finishing time that was nothing to write home about, I had plenty of opportunity along the route to take in the Indianapolis tradition that is nothing less than an event.

From the sea of heads bobbing in front of me to the family I met afterward who traveled from Florida to run together in the world's largest half-marathon, I was amazed. But I was most impressed by those who gave up their Saturday morning to support the runners and walkers of the Mini-Marathon and 5K: the people who handed out water and Gatorade, musicians and cheerleaders along the route, friends and family of participants, people who gathered to watch, especially children who held out their hands for high-fives. They were the true champions.



Rea

For more comments, go to [indystar.com/opinion/intouch](http://indystar.com/opinion/intouch)

## Jackson

■ A large part of the solution is a return to the basics.  
From E1

able.

A large part of the solution is a return to the basics, with parents and communities taking primary responsibility for educating black males. This starts with the family in the home and continues in school and communities. The extent to which black parents become actively involved in the education of their male children is a measure of how successful their sons will be in life.

While many individuals and institutions, including administrative, legislative and judicial branches of government, have a powerful role to play, this initiative must be driven by the black community. That means it must redirect attention and prioritize efforts and resources toward difference-making endeavors. The survival and success of the entire community demands it.

These efforts include:  
■ Heavy involvement of black parents, families and community with education.  
■ Institutionalizing strong, nurturing, effective, child-centered two-parent families.  
■ Reconnecting black fathers with their children.

■ Providing them with positive, strong, accessible role models.

Every time anyone encounters a black male child or teenager, ask him: How are you doing in school? What college do you plan to attend? What are your career interests? Take every opportunity to reinforce the importance of education.

■ Reinventing a strong culture of academic success for young black men.

■ Enhancing principled community structures with activities that augment young black males' social and emotional development.

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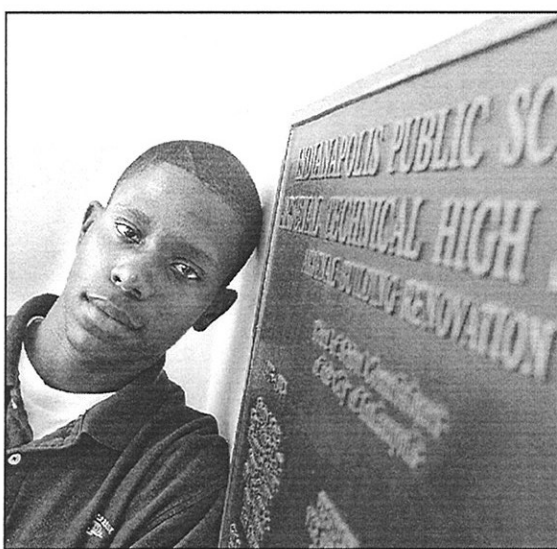
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Star file photo

**IPS success story:** Thomas Reives, Class of 2004 valedictorian at Arsenault Technical High School, studied hard to graduate with a 3.97 GPA. He is completing his freshman year at Rose-Hulman Institute of Technology and will intern for the second summer in a row at Rolls-Royce Corp.

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## Lowest black male graduation rates

"Public Education and Black Male Students: A State Report Card," a 2004 study by The Schott Foundation for Public Education, identified public school districts with the lowest black male graduation rates in the United States in 2001-02:

Cincinnati, 18 percent  
New York City, 24 percent  
Cleveland, 25 percent  
Chatham County, Ga., 25 percent  
Indianapolis, 25 percent  
Rochester, N.Y., 26 percent  
Pinellas County, Fla., 26 percent  
Oakland, Calif., 27 percent  
Milwaukee, 28 percent  
St. Louis, 29 percent  
Duval County, Fla., 30 percent  
Richmond County, Ga., 32 percent  
Chicago and Detroit, 33 percent.

**"Every time anyone encounters a black male child or teenager, ask him: How are you doing in school? What college do you plan to attend? What are your career interests? Take every opportunity to reinforce the importance of education."**

While this is a tough problem now, it will become insurmountable unless action is taken immediately. Young black men want and deserve a place in America.

Who is going to tell them that because they don't have good academic skills, because they have dropped out of high schools that failed to sufficiently engage them, because they can't find a job, because they have been to jail, they cannot participate in mainstream America?

When they realize they have become obsolete, are we ready for their response?

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## Evans

■ Hip-hop validates urban blacks' everyday experiences.  
From E1

tion reforms attempted to expose the Eurocentric bias found in urban schools and connect African values and classroom practices. These reforms aimed to reclaim, reconstruct and reposition black youth identity.

Today, black youth identity is often defined by this hip-hop. It rises out of a context of struggle and is expressed in unique cultural forms of an urban esthetic of music, art and dress that redefines, reasserts and constantly re-establishes what it means to be urban and black.

Black youth of the post-civil rights era are politically savvy. They see the corruption and shallowness of society. This perspective is key to understanding the experiences, motivation and aspirations of these youth. Hip-hop is more than a voice; it is a form of political resistance. Hip-hop calls attention to their struggles and validates their everyday experiences, providing a vision of social justice.

Indeed, Afro-centrism exposed racism. Yet alone it has little meaning for youth at the bottom of the economic ladder. Simply celebrating students' culture is not enough while failing to challenge or even acknowledge the effects of poverty on school success.



**Evans, of Indianapolis, former director of the Indiana State Commission of the Social Status of Black Males, is director of the Black and Latino Policy Institute.**

Hip-hop culture emerged from tremendous economic, social and cultural pressures on black urban youth. By validating this culture, their struggle for racial and economic justice is also affirmed. The civil rights generation and the new black middle class must tap into the oppositional culture of hip-hop to revive new and more inclusive forms of schooling and democratic possibilities.

Afro-centric strategies came to influence academic outcomes through affecting racial identity. Yet, the "new" hip-hop generation's identity is more than race. In a global village, it now includes class, religion, language, neighborhood, multiracial background, politics, gang affiliation, music and dress.

Ginwright suggests multicultural educators validate black youth identity. Some educators are critical of students who see being black as speaking ebionics, braided hair, sagging pants and skewed hats. They say that blackness is knowing black history and appreciating African values, not dressing like a gangster. Right or wrong, this disconnects hip-hop from older generations.

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## A legislative scorecard on public access

MY VIEW

Steve Key

Completion of the 2005 General Assembly raises the question of whether new leadership in the Indiana House and governor's office will live up to pledges of a more open government.

The jury is still out. There were positives and negatives on the access

front in decisions within Gov. Mitch Daniels' administration and the House Republican caucus led by Speaker of the House Brian Bosma, R-Indianapolis.

On the positive side, House Republicans and Daniels' staff accepted amendments to HEA 1003 creating a private Indiana Economic Development Corp. The amendments brought the new entity clearly under the state's Open Door Law, Access to Public Records Act and audits performed by the state Board of Accounts.

On the negative side, the initial language creating an inspector general and modifying the state ethics commission process increased secrecy in the investigatory process.

On the positive side, Bosma authored one amendment making the process more open and an attorney/policy director in the governor's office, Jason Barclay, worked with public access advocates to further open the ethics commission process prior to passage of HEA 1501.

On the negative side, public access language to close two loopholes in the Open Door Law died in the House after unanimous 49-0 passage in the Senate.

SB 310, authored by Sen. Bev Gard, R-Greenfield, would have made it harder for "serial meetings" to occur in efforts to skirt the Open Door Law. It also would have clarified that participation in the decision-making process of governing bodies required the members' physical presence. The bill died for lack of a committee hearing in the House. It is unclear whether the decision reflected the will of a committee chair or House leadership.

On the positive side, the House approved SEA 529, which reinforces that records of a child's death caused by ne-

glect, abuse or abandonment held by child protection agencies will be open to inspection. This would allow the public to better understand how these deaths occur and might lead to ways to curtail the number of children dying.

On the negative side, efforts by Daniels to broker a deal on financing a new Colts stadium and expansion of the convention center included a meeting with Indianapolis-suburban county councils that the Hoosier State Press Association believes violated the Open Door Law. HSPA does not believe the action was intentional but was incorrect.

I believe the hearts of Daniels and Bosma are in the right place when it comes to open government, but the impact decisions will have on public access are not always fully understood until pointed out to them.

Part of the problem may lie in the attitude of some decision-makers that they are doing what is best for Hoosiers to make government more efficient, and taxpayers should

trust them as government is being refashioned. Daniels intentionally tapped nonpolitical individuals to head major initiatives in the new administration. Many of the new faces are pros in the business world, but that arena does not operate under the same level of public scrutiny as government agencies do. The public's right to know may be only a second thought or not even appear on the radar screen of these former corporate executives.

They may operate with the highest levels of ethics, but government processes must be designed to withstand future leaders whose ethics, judgment or competency may be lacking.

The 2005 legislative session presented a learning curve for the new Statehouse leaders. It is important that open government advocates remind Daniels and Bosma to drill into their team that an open process works to their benefit, not only in the short term, but in the long run.

■ Key is general counsel of the Hoosier State Press Association.

On the positive side, Bosma authored one amendment making the process more open and an attorney/policy director in the governor's office, Jason Barclay, worked with public access advocates to further open the ethics commission process prior to passage of HEA 1501.

On the negative side, public access language to close two loopholes in the Open Door Law died in the House after unanimous 49-0 passage in the Senate.

SB 310, authored by Sen. Bev Gard, R-Greenfield, would have made it harder for "serial meetings" to occur in efforts to skirt the Open Door Law. It also would have clarified that participation in the decision-making process of governing bodies required the members' physical presence. The bill died for lack of a committee hearing in the House. It is unclear whether the decision reflected the will of a committee chair or House leadership.

On the positive side, the House approved SEA 529, which reinforces that records of a child's death caused by ne-



## OPINION &amp; COMMENTARY

## THE INDIANAPOLIS STAR

A GANNETT NEWSPAPER

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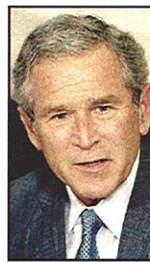
## Kudos

Attending schools where all but 35 percent of students drop out by senior year doesn't exactly inspire success. Yet students such as Manual High's Ron Capuyan, Coralyn Lowe of Arlington High, Pacers Academy's Kelly Ann McDermott and the valedictorian of Arsenal Tech not only managed to finish high school, but to rise to the head of their respective classes and attend college. Congrats.

## Outrage

One might think state Rep. Phil Hinkle would have recanted his opposition to Indy Works when the week's delay in opening city pools was announced to save money. But no, Hinkle dared to complain that Mayor Bart Peterson was taking away "little Johnnie's right to swim." The nerve.

## Overheard



"The rapid advance of science presents us with the hope of eventual cures for terrible diseases, and with profound moral and ethical dilemmas... so we must aggressively move forward with medical research while also maintaining the highest ethical standards."

President Bush, announcing his opposition to a bill allowing embryonic stem-cell research

# Town hall prompts questions about the dropout epidemic

## Our position is:

After Tuesday's town hall, many questions remain about solving the dropout problem.

They were educators and parents, students and community leaders, each frustrated and passionate about the challenges posed by Indiana's dropout epidemic. More than 200 people gathered at Ben Davis High School last week to discuss why each year nearly a third of Indiana's young people don't complete high school on time.

After 90 minutes of questions and answers, many queries still were not addressed. Following are a few of the more common questions with answers offered by The Star Editorial Board:

**Q.** How are the achievement gap and the dropout rate interrelated?

**A.** Many students noticeably fall behind their peers by the third grade. The Indiana Department of Correction has even used third-grade test scores to forecast plans for prison construction.

Key to narrowing the achievement gap is early-childhood education. Indiana needs to offer more preschool opportunities for low-income children. Full-day kindergarten also must become a priority.

Both moves would be expensive but far cheaper than the costs now associated with high school dropouts, who are a drain on taxpayers because of their increased need for social services and higher risk for prison incarceration.

**Q.** Does school size affect the dropout rate? Are schools too large?

**A.** Indianapolis Public Schools is banking on smaller high schools to help increase its graduation rate. Nearly two-thirds of IPS students do not graduate on time. Other large urban school districts around the country are employing the same strategy.

Research on the effectiveness of the small-schools approach is inconclusive, but educators say a key aspect of keeping students in school is building stronger relationships among teenagers and adults. Small schools, at least in theory, help teachers and students get to know each other better and make it less likely a child will simply drift away from school with hardly any one noticing.

**Q.** What percentage of the burden falls to the parents for our children's failure?

**A.** It's impossible to quantify, of course, but parents must accept a large slice of responsibility for their children's outcomes.

Parents are, or at least should be, the first teachers their children know. Parents also must make learning a priority



Adriane Jaecle / Indianapolis Star

**Comments, please:** Eighth-grader Kiara Gaines was among the more than 200 people who gathered at Ben Davis High School last Tuesday to discuss The Star Editorial Board's series on the state and local high school dropout problem. Each year nearly a third of Indiana's young people don't complete high school on time.

for their kids, which means ensuring they attend school regularly, complete homework and set academic goals for themselves. And parents can insist that school doesn't take a back seat to sports, entertainment or temptations on the street.

Parents also need to be advocates for their children in school, helping make sure that any extra services they need such as tutoring are provided.

Not every child has parents who are able to meet his or her needs. That's where tutors and mentors from the community can make an enormous difference in children's lives. Re-member relationships are key. Mom and Dad build the primary relationships, but others can step in to help bridge gaps.

**Q.** What efforts are being made to recruit and retain African-American male teachers?

**A.** Minority teachers, especially males, are in great demand. But talented black males also are recruited heavily for other professions that typically pay more than teaching.

The Indiana Department of Education offers \$1,000-a-year scholarships for minority students who major in education. But far more must be done by school dis-

tricts and university schools of education to recruit minority teachers.

**Why?** Role models and relationships. In IPS, where about two-thirds of students are minorities, well over half live in single-parent families, most without a father at home. Male teachers can help young boys learn how to think, how to behave and how to channel their energies.

**Q.** The children of today have adult responsibilities, including jobs and caring for children. What concessions are made in those areas for students on a path to drop out?

**A.** IPS and other districts offer alternative schools for some students. But greater flexibility is needed in scheduling, including more programs that allow students to work and attend school.

Extending the school day, or simply starting and ending later, also could help. With parents working, many older elementary and middle-school-age children are alone for several hours each weekday afternoon. Those can become prime hours for trouble.

Year-round schooling is another alternative that could help students better retain what they have learned and also reduce the risk of crime and other problems in the summer months.

**Q.** Has the graduation qualifying

exam contributed to the dropout problem?

**A.** Think of it this way: Does the scale make you overweight? Some dropouts say they quit school after failing the GQE. But the test, which measures skills that should have been acquired by the ninth grade, is simply a reflection of academic problems that have built over time.

The challenge is to help those students, through tutoring and remediation, before they reach high school.

For some students, especially those with disabilities, taking the test can pose challenges they're not capable of meeting despite their academic abilities. In those instances, waivers are available. But the state does need to ensure that the granting of waivers is more uniform among districts.

**Q.** What is IPS doing to solicit and organize community volunteers to help reduce dropout rates?

**A.** Many volunteers already are active in the schools. Businesses are sending workers into classrooms to help teach reading. Retired men and women are tutoring children during and after school. But more are needed.

Solving the dropout crisis is a challenge for the schools. But it's also a call to action for the community.

## LEFT BEHIND

## A STAR EDITORIAL BOARD SERIES

## Hispanics spice up the bland world of politics

SAN DIEGO — Almost 20 years ago, San Antonio Mayor Henry G. Cisneros — then one of the country's most prominent Hispanic officials — jumped the gun and proclaimed the 1980s "The Decade of the Hispanic."

OK, my people are not known for their punctuality. But eventually they arrive where they need to be.

Now, a half-generation later, a lot of people are saying that Hispanics have finally arrived. They serve in the top tier of the Bush administration — among them, Attorney General Alberto Gonzales, Surgeon General Richard Cordona, Treasurer Anna Cabral and Commerce Secretary Carlos Gutierrez. And the prospect of a Hispanic on the Supreme Court seems closer than ever, especially if President Bush sticks to his promise to put one there before he leaves Washington.

Latin flavor has seeped into music, food, fashion, sports, film, television and popular culture.

About that, a former editor of mine couldn't be more pleased. While she isn't Hispanic, she has received a cultural transfusion. Raised in west Texas, she takes pride in the fact that the area produced the Grammy-winning Latin group, Los Lonely Boys. And it's not lost on her that so much of what is new and



Ruben Navarrette

innovative in the music world has Latin roots.

"C'mon," she told me. "When was the last time you had a successful band come out of New England?"

Now, with two Hispanics in the Senate and with Hispanics among the most sought-after swing voters, America's largest minority is spicing up the normally bland world of politics.

Look at what happened in Los Angeles, a city that is now more than 47 percent Hispanic and where Hispanics outnumber every other ethnic group. Antonio Villaraigosa is soon to be sworn in as the first Hispanic mayor of the city in 133 years.

Given that this is the nation's second-largest city we're talking about, that means the 52-year-old former speaker of the California Assembly has just arrived on the A-list of Hispanic political talent.

For Villaraigosa, who defeated incumbent Mayor James K. Hahn, getting

there was half the fun. The candidate pulled together an impressive coalition of blacks, Jews, labor, and progressive whites. That was an improvement over Villaraigosa's failed bid for the same office four years ago, when a black minister famously joked that African Americans shouldn't vote for "someone whose name they can't pronounce." This time around, Villaraigosa got half the black vote.

But it was Hispanics who made the difference. The mayor-elect walked off with 84 percent of the Hispanic vote. That added up in a hurry, given that Hispanics accounted for one in four votes cast.

Note to Democrats: This is the same group of voters that your party complains doesn't turn out often enough.

Democrats miss the point. It's not that Hispanics don't care enough to vote. It is that they don't care to vote for white liberals who take their votes for granted. Democratic Party leaders should look toward Los Angeles and take note. The party of John F. Kennedy had better get used to running more candidates like Villaraigosa — or get used to coming in second.

For now, it's fiesta time for Hispanics in Los Angeles. And why not? They earned it. The last time a Hispanic sat in the mayor's office in what was then a

town of less than 10,000 people, Ulysses S. Grant was president and there were still plenty of Mexicans in California who, in the aftermath of the Mexican War, thought of their new living arrangement as the occupation.

Don't expect Villaraigosa to say anything that cheeky. Within hours of his victory — by a 20-point spread, no less — the former campus activist, civil rights lawyer and union organizer was mainstreaming it. Continuing a theme that he sounded in the campaign, he told reporters that he intended to be the mayor "for all of Los Angeles."

That's exactly what the mayor-elect should say, and it's a lovely sentiment. But it's also exactly what many non-Hispanics in Los Angeles were hoping he would say. In fact, according to one report in the Los Angeles Times, after the votes were counted, a white Democratic assemblyman was out reassuring his supporters of the same thing, that the new mayor, while Hispanic, would not simply use the office to serve only his own people.

That's the weird thing about trail-blazers. They're always under pressure to maintain the status quo — even as they shatter it.

■ Navarrette is a San Diego Union-Tribune columnist. Contact him via e-mail at ruben.navarrette@uniontrib.com.



Russ Pulliam

## Making the ride smoother for cyclists

Commuting to work by bike is a great idea in theory. But just filling some chuckholes won't be enough to smooth out those rides to work.

Several state officials took part in a recent Bicycle to Work Day set up by the Indiana Bicycle Coalition. They took note of the benefits of commuter biking — reduction of air pollution and traffic congestion and a practical way to get some exercise.

Regular bike commuters applauded the special day, but the occasion highlights a need to make commuting practical for more than a dedicated few. The city's greenways bike trail system provides an excellent foundation for commuting. Yet few people live close enough to a bike trail to use the system.

The exceptional few commuters are ingenious.

Bob Tavel, for example, commutes from 60th and New Jersey Street to work at 20th and Capitol. He rides down Pennsylvania to 30th Street, goes west on 30th, then south on Illinois, where he uses the sidewalk. "In my neighborhood, riding anywhere south of Kessler is relatively good because there are sidewalks and the streets are wide enough to allow parking on them," he says. "But when you get north of Kessler, where those streets used to be country roads, city developers assumed nobody would commute any other way than with a car. It's really just a plain nightmare to commute."

Tavel gives the city a four out of 10 for bicycle friendliness.

From another direction of town, Jonathan Juillerat makes an even more elaborate commute of about 22 miles. He rides from Irvington on the Eastside to the Nebo Ridge Bicycles store where he works, at 106th and Michigan Road on the Northwestside.

He rides toward Downtown on one-way Michigan Street, heads north through Woodruff Place, and then catches the Monon Trail at 10th Street. The trail takes him safely north to 91st Street, where he goes west to Ditch Road. "Basically I cut through neighborhoods after that," he says.

He makes the ride two or three times a week and has found the commute to be easier than he had originally anticipated. "In Indianapolis our greenways are world class," Juillerat says. "I've been here 10 years, and it's gone from virtually nothing to an entire system."

What is still needed, though, are bike lanes on streets, to give more safety and options so more people might consider commuting by bike. "We're way behind in that regard," says Juillerat. "We have virtually none."

The city is looking at a pilot project for bike lanes on Michigan and New York streets on the Eastside; that's a step in the right direction.

Another broader approach is called "Complete Streets," which has been adopted in a few states and cities.

"What I'd really like to see is Indianapolis embrace the concept of complete streets, so that when roads are redesigned or reconstructed, they are designed to accommodate all users," says Connie Schmucker, executive director of the Indiana Bicycle Coalition.

"On some streets you wouldn't need bike lanes," she adds. "It's just like you wouldn't design every road like an interstate."

Now bicycle commuting appears confined to a dedicated few riders with a pioneering spirit. What are needed are bike lanes to open the door for safe commuting for the many. The Monon Trail and other greenways get lots of use. That suggests that plenty more people are ready to bike when it's safe and convenient.

■ Pulliam is associate editor of The Star. Contact him at (317) 444-6001 or via e-mail at russell.pulliam@indystar.com.



## THE INDIANAPOLIS STAR

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## EDITORIALS

Dropout deception  
delays action

Our position is:

Indiana's failure to report accurate graduation rates has muted vital public conversation about dropouts.

**T**he failure of Indiana's educational leaders to report accurate high school graduation rates continues to mask the severity of the state's dropout epidemic.

The Indiana Department of Education claims 90 percent of students graduate from high school. In reality, about three of 10 students leave school before earning a diploma.

The problem is even worse in some urban districts. In Indianapolis Public Schools, about two-thirds of students in the class of 2004 did not graduate on time.

The costs of such widespread academic failure? A poorly educated work force that is unattractive to employers. A heavy burden on taxpayers who must provide for more prisons and expanded social services. Young lives condemned to poverty and dead-end jobs.

## LEFT BEHIND

A STAR EDITORIAL  
BOARD SERIES

Indiana educators aren't alone when it comes to touting grossly inflated graduation rates. A new study by the Education Trust — "Getting Honest About Grad Rates: How States Play the Numbers and Students Lose" — asserts that "most reported rates look deceptively high when compared to the results of multiple independent analyses."

Indiana, like several other states, is in the process of changing how it tracks graduation rates. But more accurate numbers aren't scheduled to be released for nearly two years. Hoosiers can't afford to wait that long to start an honest conversation about the extent of the dropout problem.

Two states, Alaska and Washington, already have acted, even though, like Indiana, they are continuing to build systems for collecting data.

In Alaska, the official graduation rate dropped from 85 percent for the 2001-02 school year to 67 percent the next year after the state adopted a more realistic definition for counting dropouts.

Washington state reported similar results after tightening its methods for reporting dropouts.

As the Education Trust notes: "The states that are reporting inaccurate graduation-rate data are doing themselves a huge disservice. They're depriving educators, policymakers and advocates of crucial information necessary to create a sense of urgency for high school improvement."

A sense of urgency. It's precisely the mind-set parents, students and educators in Indiana must adopt.

Convention center  
draws a crowd

Our position is:

Local benefits of hosting large national conventions are on display this week.

**F**orgive us for mixing religion and politics, but we just can't resist the temptation.

You see the Church of the Nazarene convention is in town, and the witness that the 40,000 participants are providing stretches well beyond the doors of their churches. By the time they finish work today, more than 2,200 Nazarenes will have helped repair 110 homes in the city. Other volunteers will have fixed up more than 20 city parks.

But not even those good deeds measure the extent of the convention's benefits to the city. Participants are filling hotels and restaurants, on course to spend about \$40 million in Central Indiana by the time the convention ends July 1.

The gathering is filling the convention center and the RCA Dome, using every room available in both. And that's where the politics enter in.

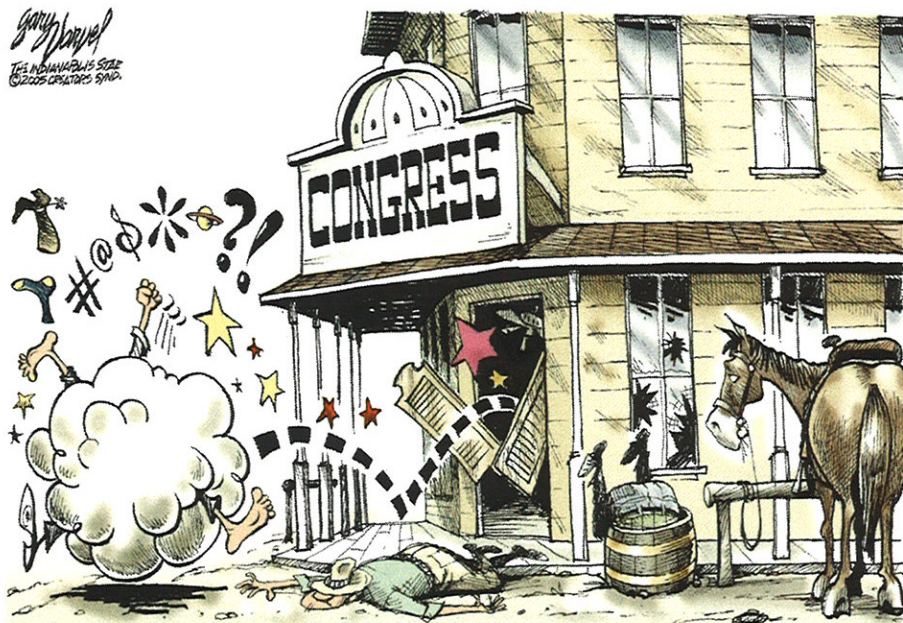
The city and state are ready to spend about \$900 million to expand the convention center and replace the RCA Dome, in part to keep groups like the Nazarenes coming back. Indianapolis has recently lost out on other large conventions because they've outgrown the convention center's capacity.

Much of the public debate about whether to build the stadium has centered on the city's desire to keep the Colts. But perhaps even more important economically is the city's ability to land and keep major conventions.

It's good news that 40,000 Nazarenes are visiting the city for the next week. It's even better news that the city is on track to keep them and other larger conventions coming back.

Check out IndyStar.com/opinion for The Star's daily Web logs: Expresso, by Star Editorial Board members and local columnists; InTouch, by local panel members; and Fresh Thoughts, by a panel of college and high school students.

## OPINION&amp;COMMENTARY

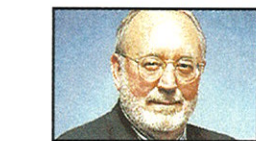
Verdict in Mississippi fails  
to douse burning embers

**W**hen my friend Jim Concannon learned I was going to Mississippi to cover the trial of the three murdered civil rights workers, he said, "Goodman, Schwerner and Chaney. That case is like laundry hanging out of America's suitcase."

He is right. This was unfinished business for the country, especially for Mississippi and most particularly for Neshoba County, where the murders took place. Last week in Judge Marcus Gordon's courtroom was part trial, part exorcism. In his closing argument, District Attorney Mark Duncan told the jury that for 41 years, "It's been Edgar Ray Killen and his friends who have written the history of Neshoba County. You can either change the history Edgar Ray Killen and the Klan wrote for us, or you confirm it."

Again and again that theme resonated from the courthouse to the editorial pages of state and national newspapers. As much as this small-town preacher and sawmill operator was on trial, so were the White Knights of the Ku Klux Klan. Testimony revealed how deeply the Klan had penetrated the churches and law enforcement authorities of Mississippi. Preacher Killen was the chief recruiter for the Klan in this part of the state. He described the organization as a white, Christian, patriotic organization, anti-communist and pro-segregation. Killen told his new initiates they weren't joining the Boy Scouts; there might be some rough work, beatings, church burnings and maybe even "elimination."

In the jury box was an authentic collection of Neshoba citizens, a mixture of ages, men and women, black and white, laborers and pro-



Ken Bode

fessionals. Essentially, the defense attorneys told the jurors it was not their job to ease the reputation of racial injustice from the county and the state, nor was it to render a verdict about the Klan. An 80-year-old man in a wheelchair breathing through oxygen tubes was on trial for three murders. Edgar Ray Killen and only Killen was their job.

In closing arguments, defense counsel James McIntyre gave the jury a set of bullet points reflecting the reservations I heard expressed in conversations with locals at the gas station, the vegetable stand, the pawn shop and in letters to Mississippi newspapers.

He attacked the news media. "This is a case to pull back the curtains for the TV cameras," McIntyre said, adding, "The news media has already found Killen guilty. Every story is slanted."

He cast doubt on the prosecution's case and its motives. "The state has hired a consultant to help pick a jury that will find Killen guilty," he charged. Also, he noted that all the informants who testified had taken money from the FBI. "If you pay for it," McIntyre argued, "you get the testimony you bought."

Finally, no one ever placed Killen at the scene of the crime or even suggested he fired the shots. Why, if there are seven others still living who were involved with this event,

did they selectively prosecute only Edgar Ray Killen? McIntyre leaned into the jury box and whispered: "Because he is a preacher."

McIntyre was aiming to deadlock the jury and in the first vote, 6-to-6, it seemed he had done his job. This jury was not prepared to convict a man for murder just to alleviate the collective guilt of Neshoba County and Mississippi.

The tipping point in the case came when the prosecution team asked the judge to allow a finding of manslaughter as well as murder: "in case jurors believe the Klansmen didn't initially intend to murder the three civil rights workers." And the jury chose manslaughter, a negligent act, not purposeful.

Hearing the evidence and arguments on both sides, it is hard for me to conclude that Edgar Ray Killen was guilty of anything but murder. He assembled the lynch mob; he laid out the plan; he passed on the order from the Grand Wizard for "elimination"; he located the burial site and found a bulldozer operator to shovel the bodies into the graves; he even instructed his Klan cronies to buy rubber gloves for the wet work ahead. Trial testimony was strong and unrefuted on all these points. Is this not pre-meditation?

Still living are those seven other Klansmen who were involved in the murders on June 21, 1964. All were offered immunity to testify in this trial. The attorney general told them to be witnesses today or defendants in the future. All continued to stone-wall. One consequence of this verdict is the strong probability that none of them will ever be prosecuted.

■ Bode, a former senior political analyst for CNN, is the Pulliam professor of journalism at DePauw University. Contact him at kenbode@depauw.edu.

## 'Can I Live?' hits mark

**R**apper and actor Nick Cannon has just completed an interesting hat trick. He landed a show on MTV this fall, "Nick Cannon Presents: Wild 'N Out." In the April "Q&A" he told guys "Five ways to sex up your style."

In cyberspace, he's been celebrated on "pro-life" e-mail lists. That combination doesn't exactly happen everyday.

Cannon's new music video "Can I Live?" tells a tale that's very different from the gangsta's paradise of dirty dancing and booty calls. In the song, the hip-hop pop star tells his life story — or at least the beginning of it and his mom's close call with abortion.

Cannon, 24, appears in the video as a ghost and sings, "Mommy, I don't like this clinic. Hopefully you'll make the right decision, and don't go through with the knife decision."

A scared teen, his mother was on a gurney — that's how close the call was — but got up and, at least in the video version, ran.

He points out to his mother something she got on some level, or she wouldn't have gotten up: "That's a life inside you, look at your tummy. What is becoming Ma, I am Oprah bound. You can tell he's a star from the Ultra-sound."

The video images tell a stirring, gripping story regardless of where you fall in the abortion debate.

Abortion is an intimately, intensely emotional decision, full of fear, doubt and pain. According to typical hype, the mother views what she's aborting as little more



Kathryn Lopez

than a clump of cells.

But the Cannon song also speaks to something beyond the abortion debate. There's always conversation now and again — at least in my dorky circles — about how conservatives can have a voice in Hollywood. "Can they?" is the question.

Groups start up. Books are written. Just this month "The Hollywood Reporter" published a piece titled "Right fights back" about Republicans in Hollywood who are producing political documentaries to counter the likes of "Fahrenheit 9/11."

But, you know what? I'm not holding my breath. But that's all right because Nick Cannon has found the answer. And it's much better than a well-meaning ideological low-budget documentary.

Nick Cannon wanted to send a supportive word out to scared teen mothers, a grateful word to those "strong women" who choose life. He didn't have to start a "Rappers for Life." He didn't have to be heavy handed or compose a political rant. He's just offering an honest story, as he does what he does. That's how you send a message people will listen to.

I love to retell the story of Sen. Rick Santorum, R-Pa., who spent a

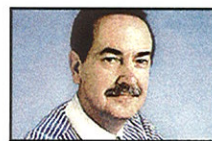
late evening in 1998 in empty Senate chambers talking about partial-birth abortion, even though he knew President Clinton was going to veto the prohibition bill he was arguing for. It was a wasted night as far as he knew — until he heard from a couple who saw him on C-SPAN and, to make a long story short: She didn't have the abortion she had scheduled, unbeknownst to her boyfriend, the next day. They have a child today and are grateful to Santorum for their child.

On an online message board off Cannon's Web site (www.ncannon.com) — where you can watch the video, by the way, one woman wrote, "I have spent years trying to make the same point you made in minutes."

Nick Cannon will never know how many late-night debates or changes of heart he'll prompt when someone is surfing and runs into "Can I Live?" but at least one mother is already grateful to Nick Cannon. With a scheduled abortion a few days away, she called the Rachel's Vineyard crisis-pregnancy hotline (877-HOPE-4-ME). After many conversations, a counselor sent her a link to the video.

According to Theresa Burke, founder of the group, the mother's reaction was, "Well, now I know I can't do it." It's a tough road, but this mother, relays Burke, saw "the gift and value of human life" this "survivor" sings about in "Can I Live?" Instead of the abortion, she went for an ultrasound, and saw her twins.

■ Lopez is editor of National Review Online (www.nationalreview.com). Contact her at klopez@nationalreview.com.



Cal Thomas

Bias runs  
deep  
at PBS

**A** battle is raging between Kenneth Tomlinson, chairman of the Corporation for Public Broadcasting, who believes that PBS and NPR slant too far left and need to be brought into balance, and Bill Moyers and his ideological soul mates, who think public broadcasting is fine as it is.

Rather than debate the bias issue, lefties have taken to trying to smear Tomlinson. The New York Times carried a front-page story June 21 that said evidence assembled by Tomlinson that produced his charge of bias was gathered by a researcher who once worked for the American Conservative Union. The story was meant to divert attention from the content of PBS and NPR programs onto the political pedigree of the one who gathered the evidence. Nice trick if you can get away with it.

Moyers, former host of the PBS series "NOW," wrote an essay published as a two-page ad in The Washington Post by an organization called "Free Press," which defines itself as a "non-partisan citizens organization working for a democratic and accountable media in America."

OK, how about some accountability? How do you know something is biased? You can count the ways.

According to a newspaper for PBS insiders called "Current" (not a conservative publication), writer Louis Barbash watched the "NOW" program and found that of the 19 segments Moyers did on the Iraq war, only four included a guest or interview subject who supported it.

In one nine-minute segment about the burden the war has brought to military families, the contrary point was just a 41-second sound bite from Rep. Duncan Hunter, California Republican, saying that hard-pressed families receive help from neighbors and family members, as well as government. In only one of those 19 segments, writes Barbash, did anyone offer a substantial defense of the war.

It was the same with other topics on the show. According to Barbash, of the 75 segments he monitored over a six-month period that addressed controversial issues like the Iraq war, the condition of the economy and the corrupting influence of corporate money on politics, just 13 included anyone who took a view contrary to the thrust of the show.

In the Washington Post ad, Moyers wrote, "Deep down the public harbors an intuitive understanding that for all the flaws of public television, our fundamental assumptions come down on their side, and on the side of democracy."

Does this statement by Moyers on his Nov. 8, 2002, "NOW" program sound like it comes down on the side of the public? "The entire federal government — the Congress, the Executive, the Judiciary — is united behind a right-wing agenda for which George W. Bush believes he now has a mandate. That mandate includes the power of the state to force pregnant women to give up control over their own lives. It includes using the taxing power to transfer wealth from working people to the rich. It includes giving corporations a free hand to eviscerate the environment and control the regulatory agencies meant to hold them accountable. And it includes secrecy on a scale you cannot imagine. ... And if you like God in government, get ready for the Rapture."

If Moyers thinks he represents the public, let PBS and NPR be 100 percent privately funded by people who want to hear and see his ideas and those of his like-minded colleagues.

Tomlinson is addressing the bias that inhabits the minds of those who believe liberalism is truth. If PBS is to continue receiving public money, it should be required to do a better job of presenting diverse viewpoints on a more than token basis.

■ Write Thomas c/o Tribune Media Services, 435 N. Michigan Ave., Suite 1400, Chicago, IL 60611, or visit his Web site at www.calthomas.com.



## Kudos

Plenty of people will take Indiana Black Expo's theme of "Summer Celebration" seriously as they enjoy Babyface at a free concert this evening. Yet this year's Expo, like all others, is about much more. Activities such as much-needed exams for breast and prostate cancer at the Black and Minority Health Fair and tales of success from such big names as author E. Lynn Harris are reminders that the goal ultimately is to eliminate the quality-of-life issues still plaguing many of Indiana's communities.

## Outrage

Apparently, Percy Bronson didn't want to pay the price for killing Joshua McAtee this spring. Why else would he allegedly have conspired earlier this month with 19-year-old Shaun Matthews to shoot Christopher Bridges, who told police he saw McAtee's murder? Once again, the blood of the young is spilled needlessly on Indianapolis' streets.

## Overheard



**"Our youths are being slaughtered in the streets of Indianapolis this summer in unacceptable numbers. What are we going to do as a city?"**

Olgen Williams, executive director of Christamore House. Four males, ages 15 and 16, were shot and killed in little more than a month.



Russ Pulliam

# Township black male dropout rates are unacceptably high

### Our position is:

*Stemming the dropout crisis among black males in Indianapolis suburbs is crucial to the community's economic and social health.*

**A**s program coordinator at the Indiana OIC State Council, Tawnya McCrary has worked with dozens of black male dropouts from Indianapolis Public Schools.

But she didn't realize suburban township schools also were mired in a black male dropout crisis until she and her husband moved their son out of North-west High to Pike High School.

By the time Michael Harrison left Pike after his junior year, he was still 21 credits shy of graduation. He witnessed almost a fight a day at the school. His own class-clown antics hurt his academic progress. He and his mother also objected to faculty members' attitudes toward black students.

Although Harrison thought "it would be almost impossible" to stay in school, he did eventually graduate, after transferring to North Central High School in Washington Township.

Hundreds of other black males in township high schools, however, are dropping out.

An analysis of graduation data by Johns Hopkins researcher Robert Balfanz for The Star Editorial Board reveals that high schools in four Marion County township districts are as much dropout factories — graduating less than 50 percent of black males — as those in IPS.

■ Just 31 percent, or one of every three, black males who entered Perry Township's Southport and Perry Meridian high schools as freshmen in 1998 graduated four years later. Only IPS, with one in four black males in its original class of 2002 earning a diploma, performed worse.

■ Only 61 of the 143 black males who entered Warren Central High School in 1998 graduated in 2002. Six of every 10 black male freshmen dropped out.

■ Only 41 percent of black male freshmen entering Franklin Central High School in 1998 graduated in four years.

■ Pike Township's black male graduation rate was 49 percent in 2002.

Black males fare better in districts such as Washington Township, until recently run by new IPS Superintendent Eugene White. Yet, even there gaps persist. Three of every 10 black males entering North Central High School in 1998 eventually dropped out. Just one in 10 white males failed to graduate on time.

Franklin Central Principal Kevin Koers can rattle off all he has done to improve the school's black male promotion power rating (an index developed by John Hopkins researchers to track students' progression) of 52 percent. The school has offered cultural sensitivity training for teachers; kept students who didn't finish homework after school to complete it; and encouraged black males to become leaders in community service activities such as a charity basketball tournament.

Yet former students such as Chris Carter say teachers "just try to teach what their lesson books say and get out of there." Which is one reason Carter



Rich Miller / The Star

**Set him straight:** Michael Harrison almost dropped out of Pike High School before his mother, Tawnya McCrary, program coordinator with the Indiana OIC State Council, and her husband transferred him to North Central, where he finally graduated. Hundreds of other black males in township high schools, however, are dropping out.

says he decided to quit school this year.

The suburban problem in graduating black males is reflective of overall national and state achievement gaps. A mere 38 percent of black males graduated from Indiana's high schools in 2002; just 42 percent of America's black males in the class of 2002 earned diplomas.

Boys of all races tend to graduate at lower rates than girls. Yet black males bear the heaviest toll for dropping out. About 37 percent of black male dropouts will likely land in prison, according to Princeton University Professor Bruce Western; it's one reason why only 603,000 black males were attending college while nearly 800,000 were serving prison time in 2000.

The woes of urban districts have attracted considerable attention from researchers, political leaders and the news media. But Schott Foundation researcher Michael Holzman, whose report on black male graduation rates identified IPS as the fifth-worst in the nation, has found that suburban schools

nationwide are "not doing much better by and large."

One reason is poverty. Perry Township Superintendent H. Douglas Williams notes that the district pulls students from the same poor Southside neighborhoods as IPS' Manual High, the worst-performing high school in the state. Many of Perry's black students come from Martindale-Brightwood, one of the city's most poverty-stricken areas.

Cultural differences also keep students and educators from connecting, a problem Marion County schools have been wrangling with ever since the 1971 court-ordered desegregation plan brought more blacks into suburbia starting in 1981. Ten years ago, the Indianapolis Commission on African-American Males found that suspensions of black males in township districts — a contributor to dropping out — were disproportionately higher than for other groups, according to Director Lyman Rhodes.

Population growth in the suburbs is continuing to bring more diversity. Franklin Central's enrollment has increased 45 percent — from 1,450 to 2,100 — since Koers took over the school five years ago. The district was once almost exclusively rural and white.

## Township rates

Four Marion County township school districts recorded black male graduation rates below 50 percent based on statistics from the class of 2002.

Male graduation rate		Overall
<b>MSD Perry Township</b>		
Black	31%	
White	52%	52%
<b>MSD Franklin Township</b>		
Black	41%	
White	67%	67%
<b>MSD Warren Township</b>		
Black	43%	
White	63%	55%
<b>MSD Pike Township</b>		
Black	49%	
White	70%	71%
<b>MSD Decatur Township</b>		
Black	57%	
White	67%	65%
<b>MSD Wayne Township</b>		
Black	61%	
White	58%	66%
<b>MSD Washington Township</b>		
Black	62%	
White	76%	76%
<b>MSD Lawrence Township</b>		
Black	68%	
White	77%	77%

Source: Johns Hopkins University Center for the Social Organization of Schools

The Star

Now, blacks make up 14 percent of Franklin Central's enrollment.

Suburban schools can begin to find solutions to the black male dropout crisis in the work of the Cheltenham School District near Philadelphia.

Cheltenham Superintendent Christopher McGinley says districts tend to "work around the edges" of the achievement gap. But a complete overall is needed.

Cheltenham, which is 38 percent black, began transforming itself four years ago. One step involved better communicating to black parents what courses students need to take to get into college. A sign of progress: The number of black students in Advanced Placement classes has doubled in the past three years.

Help also can come from the grass roots. In Minneapolis, hospital administrator Gary Cunningham and others increased community involvement in the schools and raised awareness about the black male achievement gap.

Parents also must be involved. McCrary helped put her son back on the path to graduation by making sure he took night and online classes, along with his normal courses at North Central, to regain lost ground.

The tragedy of black men dropping out of school — and into prison and poverty — carries a high price for all Hoosiers, whether they live in the suburbs, on farms or in cities. Confronting that tragedy is essential to preserving Indianapolis' — and Indiana's — economic destiny.

## Reporter seeks justice for victims and for God

**J**erry Mitchell breaks the mold. The Mississippi newspaper reporter doesn't fit conventional categories or stereotypes.

He's an investigative reporter who's broken big stories on the Ku Klux Klan and corruption in the criminal justice system in Mississippi. But he does it in a polite, non-confrontational manner opposite the stereotype of an ambush interviewer.

He's worked for justice for African Americans in the spirit and tradition of the civil rights movement of the 1960s. But his foundation is not in his own good intentions. He sees himself as a humble instrument in the hands of God.

In an age of relativism, he believes in absolute truth and standards of justice that don't shift according to someone's subjective preferences of the moment.

The award-winning reporter for the Jackson Clarion-Ledger is visiting Indianapolis this week to speak to the Pulliam Fellowship summer interns at The Star. Though accustomed to writing the news, Mitchell has become the subject of stories in recognition of his investigative reporting. His stories have prompted a series of new investigations and trials for crimes that were never brought to justice. Edgar Ray Killen, for example, was recently convicted for his part in the 1964 slayings of James Chaney, Andrew Goodman and Michael Schwerner.

Mitchell has attracted substantial praise. He's won the Sigma Delta Chi Award for Public Service and the Heywood Brown Award, among others. But critics accuse him of trying to sell sensational stories by bringing up old wounds from Mississippi's past.

Mitchell might fit one stereotype of a typical investigative reporter. "His cubicle's a mess," says Sherry Ricciardi, who teaches journalism at Indiana University Purdue University at Indianapolis. She recently authored an in-depth profile of Mitchell for the American Journalism Review. "When you walk into his cubicle area, it's overflowing with stacks and stacks of newspapers and files and everything else."

Though seemingly disorganized at the desk, his stories carry weight with prosecutors in Mississippi and have prompted them to take another look at a number of old crimes because of the new evidence he has uncovered.

Sometimes he thinks of himself as a dinosaur, because he is trying to follow a journalistic tradition of "muck-raking."

"The original concept was that people did really tough investigative reporting trying to change society for the better," he says. He prefers the long, diligent search for the facts, rather than an emphasis on celebrity news and gossip. He comes to that approach by way of his Christian faith, which is not found in abundance in the mainstream news media.

He doesn't like to be put in a spiritual or political mold either, in an interesting contrast to conservative Christians aligning with Republicans and helping them win Congress and the White House in recent elections. "If you look at Jesus' apostles, he had Matthew, who worked for the government, and Simon the Zealot, who was for the overthrow of the Roman government. That's as far apart politically as you can get. As Christian disciples we are all under that umbrella."

What he gets from the Bible is not so much a partisan political agenda as the principle of justice. "What made these killings in the 1950s and 1960s more egregious is the fact that everyone knew they were getting away with murder," he says. "Justice is important to God, and that's why it's important to me."

■ Pulliam is associate editor of The Star. Contact him at (317) 444-6001 or via e-mail at russell.pulliam@indystar.com.

## LEFT BEHIND A STAR EDITORIAL BOARD SERIES

## EXPRESSO

*A quick shot of opinion from The Star Editorial Board and local columnists*

### Heavy reading

I was happy to read the first four Harry Potter books aloud with my son, who went on to devour them several more times alone. But when book five, "Harry Potter and the Order of the Phoenix," came in at 870 pages, he was on his own. Doesn't J.K. Rowling have an editor, I wondered. The first book was perfect at 309 pages. Someone got the message. The new one, "Harry Potter and the Half-Blood Prince," is "only" 672 pages.

The length of the books also makes it



Murphy

tough for visually impaired kids to tote around a copy. The National Braille Press is printing "Half-Blood Prince," and its version runs 1,100 pages in a nine-volume package that weighs over 11 pounds. Previously, blind children had to wait three months or more for a Braille copy. But NBP got permission to start printing "Half-Blood Prince" earlier; it should be in kids' hands just three days late, Newsweek reports.

Thanks to NBP and a generous donor, a Braille edition that costs \$62 to produce will sell for the standard \$29.99. NBP says such a literary phe-

nomenon as Harry Potter encourages more blind kids to read. And even if they need a suitcase to carry it around, blind readers get to experience Harry mania this time while the book is still fresh.

— Beth Murphy

### Ah-nold

Gov. Ah-nold Schwarzenegger is in the media crosshairs for accepting millions of dollars from fitness magazines for being a consultant.

I just spent an evening with Ah-nold in June. Well, not really an evening. It was more like 20 minutes as he gave a speech to a group of cartoonists at a convention in Sacramento.

Ah-nold reminded us cartoonists that he doesn't take his \$175,000 a year



Varvel

salary as governor because he already has enough money. So what is the problem with the consulting money, which amounts to \$5 million over five years? The magazines get a lot of their profits from advertising for performance-enhancing supplements. Last year, Ah-nold vetoed a bill cracking down on the use of these supplements in high school sports. He says the bill focused erroneously on dietary supplements rather than on steroids. To the media it looks like his decision was based on pumping up his bank account.

— Gary Varvel



## OPINION &amp; COMMENTARY

## THE INDIANAPOLIS STAR

A GANNETT NEWSPAPER

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(317) 444-6168When the teachers are away,  
students suffer the consequences

## Our position is:

Stemming teacher absenteeism and better pay for hard-to-fill teaching spots are keys to improving IPS students' academic performance.

Crispus Attucks eighth-grader Rebecca Green spent much of seventh grade wondering "why they didn't get someone who was educated" to teach her classes.

For two months, a substitute taught her English class. She says students were often told to sit down when they asked questions. In all, five substitutes rotated in and out of the class because the regular teacher was "out most of the time." Sometimes, she says, the "substitutes didn't even show up."

For students of Indianapolis Public Schools, Green's experience is all too common. The district's heavy reliance on substitutes means students often are taught by less-qualified, ill-prepared educators. Learning decreases. Discipline problems increase. And the risk rises that many of IPS' hardest-to-reach students will eventually drop out.

On any given day last school year, at least 14 percent of IPS' 39,000 students attended classes without a regular teacher. Substitutes filled 275 classrooms on an average day. At least 5,500 students a day — based on the lower end of IPS' student-to-teacher ratio — were without regular teachers.

An average of 8.5 percent of IPS teachers were absent from class each day last school year, according to a Star Editorial Board analysis of school district data. That's higher than the average teacher absentee rates for school systems in Seattle, St. Paul, Omaha and Minneapolis — all of which have slightly larger student populations. Private sector firms experience a 2.4 percent average absentee rate.

IPS' average of 11 days absent per teacher is higher than all the districts surveyed except for Minneapolis.

The absenteeism is especially astounding considering the built-in time off that comes with teaching.

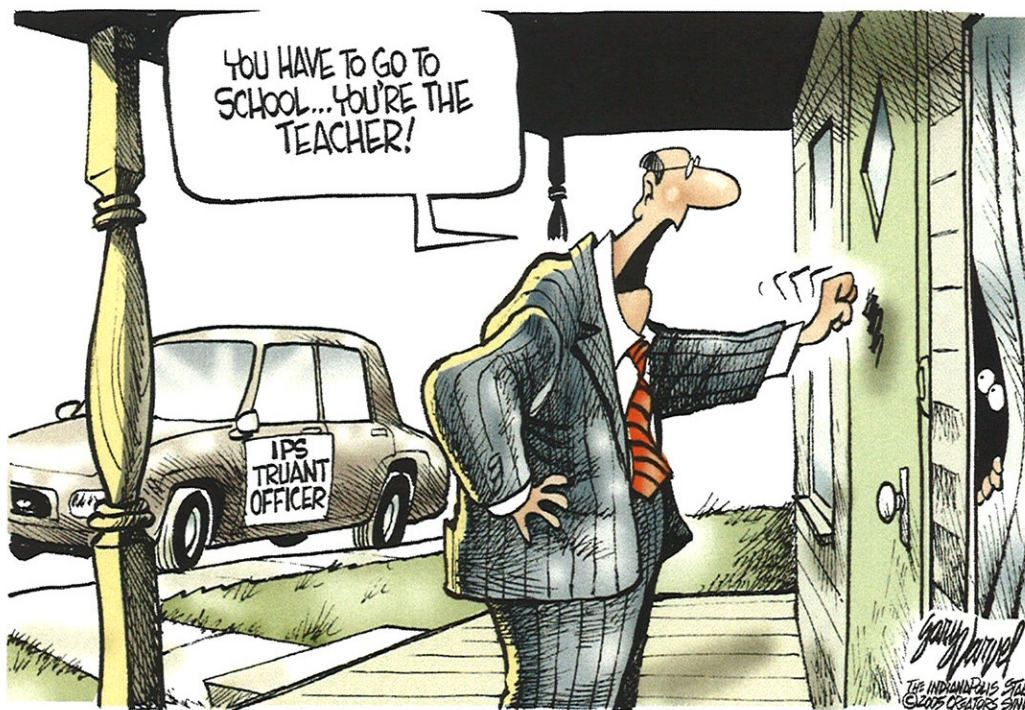
IPS also relies heavily on substitutes to fill open positions. With the start of a new school year only 11 days away, IPS still has 29 teaching positions vacant, nearly all in hard-to-fill areas of math, science and special education, according to Jane Hart-Ajabu, the district's interim human resources chief. She thinks most of those spots will be filled.

But a rash of abrupt departures often occurs in September. Sixty-six teachers resigned or retired in the opening weeks of last school year.

IPS' pool of substitute teachers has grown by a third, to 1,100, in the past five years. The job requirements are low — just 60 college credits and the ability to pass a criminal background check. Few substitutes meet the standard of "highly qualified teachers" called for in the federal No Child Left Behind Act.

Longtime IPS substitute Stephanie Patterson says subs often aren't told if they're simply filling in for a regular teacher or are joining a revolving door of replacements. If lesson plans haven't been laid out, Patterson says, "you go in and do the best you can."

For some students, having a substitute may be seen as a chance to relax



and watch movies. But many understand they're missing out on the opportunity to learn. "They're quite concerned and rightly so," says Patterson, because "they like the accountability and the discipline."

As Education Trust Director of Policy Research Kevin Carey, a former adviser to the late Gov. Frank O'Bannon, points out, teachers have to know and understand their students to improve their academic performance. Absenteeism short-circuits academic success.

A study by state education officials in Massachusetts showed a correlation between teacher absenteeism and low test scores. UCLA Professor James Bruff found the same thing three years ago. Two decades earlier, a team led by Cornell education researcher Ronald Ehrenberg linked high teacher

absenteeism to high levels of skipping school by students — a harbinger of a student becoming a dropout.

The consensus among education scholars and reformers is that for the poorest and lowest-performing students, a high-quality teacher can make the difference between graduating and dropping out.

Absenteeism and teacher shortages are by no means limited to IPS. Students in high-poverty urban districts, according to the Education Trust, are 77 percent more likely than those in more affluent school systems to end up with teachers leading courses in subjects for which they were neither trained nor certified.

Why are teachers absent so often? As with any employees, illness, jury duty and family leave account for some days. As does training, which in IPS often

must operate on a risk-analysis basis. The job has always been about public safety, weighing getting the bad guy against keeping everyone else safe.

And keeping themselves alive, too. Last month a Flint, Mich., police officer was killed and two other officers critically injured after they chased a car that was being driven erratically.

Anger- and adrenaline-fueled chases put a wide swath of innocent people at risk. Let's find out what Los Angeles and Orlando know that we don't.

— Beth Murphy

## Asleep at the wheel

The Hummer started out as a war wagon, and it really hasn't changed, even when it's being used to drop the kids off at dance class.

The \$50,000 monster truck, along with the swelling pack of armored SUVs and full-size pickups punishing America's pavement, is a driving force behind foreign-oil dependency.

A new report from the Environmental Protection Agency says the average fuel economy of our vehicles has

## NOT SHOWING UP

Filling classrooms with fully qualified teachers is a problem for IPS and other urban school systems.

District	Full-time teacher staff	Average subs used daily	Percent of teachers absent daily	Average absentee days per teacher
IPS	3,231	275	8.5	11.1
Omaha	3,643	191	5.2	N/A
Minneapolis	3,884	206	5.3	12.5
Seattle	4,557	98	2.1	1.9
St. Paul	3,401	169	4.9	8.7

Source: Indianapolis Public Schools, Omaha Public Schools, Minneapolis Public Schools, Seattle Public Schools, St. Paul Public Schools

Chris Johnson / The Star

takes place during the school day.

Generous leave policies also are a factor. IPS teachers receive between 11 and 13 sick and personal leave days each school year. Unlike in many private businesses, IPS teachers are allowed to accumulate unused sick days year after year. School principals also can grant teachers an unlimited number of days for personal development.

Poor working conditions in the district's antiquated buildings — and the lack of air conditioning — mean teachers are more apt to take sick days or quit altogether. Peggy Hattix-Penn, president of the Indianapolis local of the Indiana State Teachers Association, complains that, "You're swatting flies. You're swatting bees. You know, these aren't the best conditions."

IPS and other urban districts also must battle a mind-set that they're merely gateways into teaching. A rookie, according to the Education Trust's Carey, can "make their mistakes on IPS students, they learn from their mistakes and take those lessons" to suburban

schools.

What can be done to keep teachers in class? Offering higher salaries for hard-to-find math and science teachers could help alleviate shortages. But it's a move teachers unions have fought vigorously.

New IPS Superintendent Eugene White has committed to move training sessions from school days to keep more full-time teachers in class.

Capital improvements, paid for with last year's \$200 million bond issue, should help IPS improve teacher morale.

Yet, more must be done, including better tracking of how much time is spent on professional development and ending the ability to roll over sick days. Incentive pay for teachers willing to accept the challenge of instructing at-risk students also is critical.

Most IPS students have the ability to learn. But they won't if full-time teachers aren't in classrooms more often. Reducing the high teacher absentee rate is one more essential step in closing the wide achievement gap and lowering the dropout rate.

## Overheard



"With no tracking system or safety net to know where the babies resulting from surrogate contracts are being placed or by whom they are being adopted, the potential for human trafficking is terrifyingly real."

Marion County Superior Court Judge Marilyn Moores, in a letter to U.S. Attorney Susan Brooks, asking for a review of an Indiana company that arranges surrogate pregnancies.



George Will

## Getting emotional about cars

DEARBORN, Mich. — Commuting to and from work must be a blast for William Clay Ford Jr. in his gorgeous green, fully loaded version of the new Mustang that his company is selling as fast as it can make them. But being at work is a lot less fun these days for the entire domestic auto industry.

Henry Ford, the founding father of that industry and this company, grew up in this suburb contiguous to Detroit. Today, his great-grandson, 48, the company's CEO, says "the business model really hasn't changed in 100 years" — internal combustion engine vehicles, sold through dealerships — but the industry faces "a very different kind of future."

Much better informed customers will increasingly buy on the Internet, or surf it for information enabling them to arrive at dealerships "much better informed than the person they are talking to." Soon they may be talking about vehicles powered by hydrogen.

Furthermore, Ford says, because "nowhere else do you have 90 minutes of people's undivided attention each day," Silicon Valley wants to equip cars to feed information to drivers — reading them their e-mails, etc. But should drivers' attentions be so divided? "You do hit the 'tilt' sign at some point," he acknowledges.

The way to get to a glistening future may be to get back to the chrome-covered 1950s, when each autumn boys mounted their balloon-tire Schwinn and rode around to dealerships to savor the excitement of the curtain rising on a new model year. The loss of theatricality — today's seemingly random arrival of too many models, too many of them boring — is central to the domestic industry's decline.

Robert Lutz, head of GM's product development, says, "We're not in the transportation business, we are in the arts and entertainment business." Ford, perhaps with his Mustang in mind, emphatically agrees: "There's a high emotional component to buying decisions."

And, he insists, there still is a unique emotional facet of working — from the assembly line to the executive suites — in the automobile industry. Assembly workers, he says, "take it personally if their vehicle" — the one they assemble — "isn't selling."

But their relatives worked for a company that was much more in the automobile business than it now is. Today, in America, it is a truck manufacturer — F-150s and SUVs — with just one vibrant niche in the automobile market: that Mustang, the scarcity of which, Ford says, fuels the excitement about it.

Detroit, which in 1955 was the nation's fifth-largest city, recently fell, for the first time in a century, out of the list of the 10 largest, replaced by San Jose. Detroit is America's saddest city: Cattle could be grazed in vast swaths of depopulated neighborhoods.

Reversing the decline of "Detroit" — shorthand for the once-muscular domestic auto industry — requires two things. One is the trimming of some benefits the United Auto Workers won when the Big Three were the world's three largest automobile companies. As recently as 25 years ago they had a 76 percent share of the American market and the ability to pass along to consumers the costs of the settlements made with the UAW. Last year Toyota earned \$10.9 billion, more than the Big Three combined, and Detroit's market share was an all-time low, at 58.7 percent.

The other ingredient of revival must be better products. Meaning, among other things, cars that better express the emotional rather than just the utilitarian aspect of cars. Meaning products like the chairman's green Mustang in the garage downstairs.

Will is an ABC commentator and Washington Post columnist. Contact him at georgewill@washpost.com

## EXPRESSO

A quick shot of opinion from The Star Editorial Board

## In pursuit of advice

Anyone who points the finger at Leonard D. Moss Jr. for his death — and that of his passenger, Kelly Baker — as he sped away from police early Wednesday is absolutely right. And Moss' relatives aren't now instant experts in the argument against high-speed police pursuits. However, if I were a law enforcement honcho in Marion County, I'd be calling the police in Los Angeles or Orlando to inquire about how their policies to eliminate or restrict pursuits are working.

Chases, just like any police action,

must operate on a risk-analysis basis. The job has always been about public safety, weighing getting the bad guy against keeping everyone else safe.

And keeping themselves alive, too. Last month a Flint, Mich., police officer was killed and two other officers critically injured after they chased a car that was being driven erratically.

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A new report from the Environmental Protection Agency says the average fuel economy of our vehicles has



Carpenter

The EPA delayed release of that report until after the congressional vote on the energy bill, which passed with \$14.5 billion in subsidies to the energy industry and virtually no automotive fuel economy measures.

President Bush is eager to sign it. He knows patriotic Americans are ready to roll. How many yellow ribbon magnets can you fit on a Honda Civic, anyway?

— Dan Carpenter

## Lesson learned

Though I would never deliberately insult or upset a person with disabilities, I learned a few days ago that



Lichtenberg

thoughtless words could do just that. My reference to the "disabled" in a July 27 column about the 15th anniversary of the Americans With Disabilities Act brought a gentle rebuke from Judith R. Duncan, president and CEO of the Muscular Dystrophy Family Foundation in Indianapolis.

Instead of "handicapped" or "disabled," she urged saying "person/people with disabilities." Other suggestions: Use "He has a learning disability," not "He's learning disabled;" "kids without disabilities or typical kids," not "normal/health kids;" "She has a physical/mental disability," not "She's crippled or retarded;" "He's a wheelchair user," not "He's wheelchair bound."

In other words, don't define a person only by his use of a wheelchair. We all like to be appreciated for who we really are, not stereotyped for what our limitations might be. That's only normal.

— Jane Lichtenberg



## OPINION &amp; COMMENTARY

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## EDITORIALS

Nothing beats  
a regular diploma**Our position:**  
GED isn't a substitute for skills  
learned while earning a high school diploma.

**G**ary native and high school dropout Leroy Smith earned his General Educational Development diploma in 1995, at age 29, during a 15-year prison stint. Two years later, John Lane, who dropped out at the age of 15, obtained his GED while serving time at the state's Boys School.

Was the GED a first step in turning their lives around? Not exactly.

On Tuesday, Smith, 38, received a 545-day prison sentence after pleading guilty to striking his ex-wife, Lane, 25, faces trial next month for his alleged role in the murder of Marcus Gibbs. Both Smith and Lane are taking up precious space in the crowded Marion County Jail.

Certainly, most GED students are law-abiding, and earning the diploma has improved their lives. But Smith and Lane are sobering reminders that achieving an alternative diploma is not an equal substitute for staying in high school until graduation.

Developed in the 1940s to help World War II veterans gain admission to college without a diploma, the number of students receiving GEDs rose

185 percent between 1971 and 2001.

Yet the perception that the GED is, as comedian Chris Rock once called it, a "good enough diploma" isn't reality.

Nobel Prize winners James Heckman and Stephen Cameron determined in a 1991 study that GED recipients' economic performance was "indistinguishable" from dropouts'. A 1998 U.S. Department of Education summary of GED research concluded that although recipients took home up to 11 percent higher wages than dropouts, they earned less than traditional grads.

The fact that GED students spend at most 100 hours preparing for the test (versus 410 hours devoted by high school pupils to core classes) means most don't overcome their poor academic skills. Since it's mostly self-study, test takers don't benefit from traditional classroom instruction, which looms especially large in college readiness; GED grads are only half as likely to gain an associate degree (and far less likely to earn a bachelor's degree) as traditional grads.

GED students also miss the socialization that comes with attending school. As a result, many don't learn important lessons about prompt and regular attendance and appropriate grooming and dress. Thus, they're less prepared for the expectations of the job market.

State and federal officials should stop counting GED recipients in graduation statistics. Expanding night school options so more dropouts can attend live classes and earn a traditional diploma also would help. More important, to reduce the number of GEDs — and dropouts — improving education in the early grades, where the seeds of quitting school are sown, is critical.

Follow the Fever  
into playoff mode**Our position:**Indiana Fever's journey into  
the WNBA playoffs should capture city's attention.

**A** hot August night is a perfect time to catch the Fever.

For only the second time in the team's history, Indiana's WNBA franchise, the Fever, have advanced to the playoffs. They take on the New York Liberty Tuesday night on the road before coming home to Conseco Fieldhouse Thursday. The Fever have earned home court advantage in the best-of-three opening series.

Fervent Fever fans undoubtedly will show up in full force for this exciting team, which established franchise records for the most overall wins and home-court wins in a season. But the playoff series also is an excellent opportunity for the rest of the community to discover why some basketball purists think the women's league plays the most interesting and exciting basketball around.

And now, our Top Ten Reasons to follow the Fever through the playoffs:

10. The entire WNBA playoff lasts only three weeks — not all spring and half the summer, unlike those fellows in the NBA.

9. Tamika Catchings is one of the most versatile basketball players in town since Oscar Robertson.

8. If the game gets dull, there's always the Indiana Fever Inferno Dance Team, a mixed gender variant of the Pacemates.

7. Shaquille O'Neal isn't allowed in the WNBA.

6. Discover the lost art of defense, passing, screens and playmaking.

5. Bill Walton doesn't cover the WNBA.

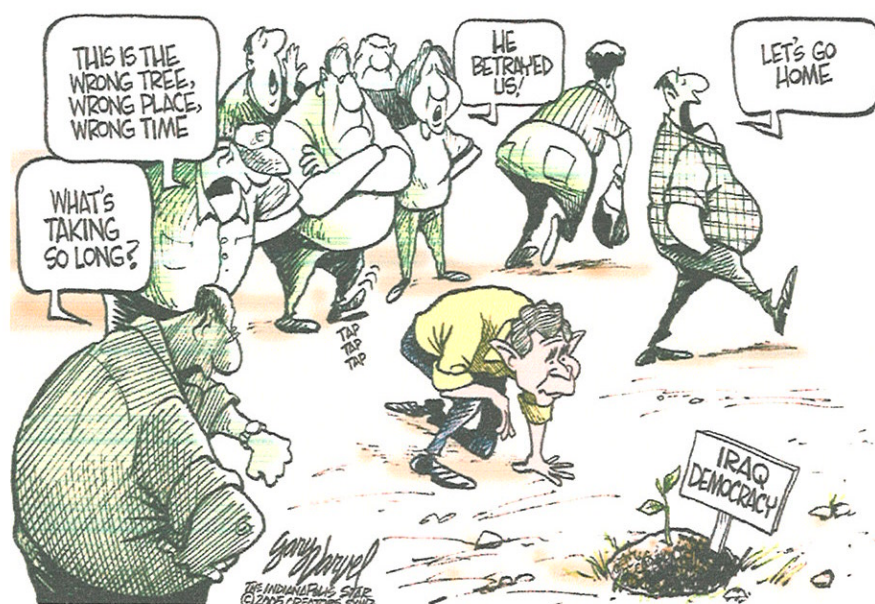
4. Tell grandchildren you saw an Indiana basketball team make the finals.

3. Good seats for a playoff series at Conseco Fieldhouse without a home equity loan.

2. If Ron Artest shows up, he'll already be in the stands.

1. Bernie Ecclestone runs Formula One, not the WNBA.

Check out IndyStar.com/opinion for The Star's Web logs: Expresso, by Star Editorial Board members and local columnists; IN Touch, by local panel members; and Fresh Thoughts, by a panel of college and high school students. Also read My Indiana, short articles by readers about life in the Hoosier state. Online comments about each blog item are welcome.

Terrain of war changes,  
so must Bush's message

**"I**nsanity," goes a popular old saw attributed to both Albert Einstein and Ben Franklin (so it must be right), "is doing the same thing over and over again and expecting different results."

As a corollary, it seems to me that saying the same thing over and over again, regardless of the results, should be a similar kind of crazy.

For the past few years, we've been told that George W. Bush has, by fighting the "wrong war, in the wrong place, at the wrong time," "created more terrorists" and "isolated America" by inflaming passions in the Middle East.

Cindy Sheehan has amplified this perspective, calling President Bush, among other things, an "evil maniac" and the world's "biggest terrorist." In the process, she's become a hero to those who see pathos in her protest and a sham to those who see bathos in her stunts.

But as Sheehan's rhetoric exceeds even the heat of the Crawford sun, and as Democrats openly ponder whether she's the visionary who will lead them out of the wilderness, facts on the ground are changing. If the war has created more terrorists and made the world hate us more, why exactly has Muslim and Arab opinion of the United States improved?

According to the massive Pew Global Attitudes Survey, views of the U.S. have been improving. The share of people with a favorable view of America went up in Indonesia by some 23 points, in Lebanon by 15 points, and in Jordan by 16 points. Trends in France, Germany, Russia and India have been moving our way, too.

But the news gets even better. Support for terrorism and Osama



Jonah Goldberg

bin Laden has been plummeting across the Arab and Muslim world (save for in Jordan, where the large Palestinian population plays a big role). Support for democracy, meanwhile, has improved. According to Pew, "nearly three-quarters of Moroccans and roughly half of those in Pakistan, Turkey and Indonesia see Islamic extremism as a threat to their countries." The share of those supporting suicide bombings and the targeting of civilians has fallen by more than one-third in Lebanon — where democracy is on the move, by the way — and by 16 and 27 points in Pakistan and Morocco, respectively. Similar declines in support for bin Laden, al-Qaida and the like have been recorded.

No doubt these numbers are imperfect and hardly speak to a single cause. In Indonesia, our generous tsunami relief helped a great deal. In Lebanon, terrorism isn't just something that happens to Israelis and Americans; it's something that could snuff out the rebirth of democracy there. And across the Arab world, opinions have been shifted by images of Iraqi "insurgents" slaughtering innocent men, women and children while Americans are trying to build schools and hospitals.

But here in the U.S. opinions remain fixed. Opponents of the war are convinced that every day we are in Iraq we are making things worse

for America and the world. One could certainly argue that we're making things worse for America, in that the war has not gone as well as many of its supporters had hoped or expected. But even if you could prove that the war was a mistake in every way, to say that it never should have happened is not a good argument for abandoning the project.

There is an important lesson for President Bush in all this. The message of his recent speech to the Veterans of Foreign Wars was that we need to "stay the course." That has been his talking point for a very long time. And, in fairness, if your policy is to stay the course, then saying "stay the course" has a certain irrefutable logic to it. But on any long journey, even if the course remains the same the terrain may change.

Much has changed in Iraq. The Iraqi army is progressing, even as bombers target recruiting stations. The marshlands have been restored. There's an enormous car-buying boom in Iraq, which is surely a sign of confidence. Morale is still very high among U.S. regular troops (less so among National Guardsmen). And the messy process of constitution-writing is unfolding before our eyes.

For reasons so imponderable that a cottage industry of West Wing Kremlinologists has sprung up, Bush seems incapable or unwilling to make his case in light of the new realities. One may stay the course and cross mountains and valleys. Let's hear less about the destination and more about crossing the mountains and valleys.

■ Goldberg is a contributing editor to National Review and National Review Online. Contact him at jonahcolumn@aol.com.



Leonard Pitts

Missing  
in action:  
real news

**A**nd then Bob Costas said no.

Maybe you didn't hear about it. There's so much news to keep track of, after all, what with Paris Hilton maybe or maybe not getting married, Angelina Jolie maybe or maybe not sleeping with Brad Pitt and Sean "P. Diddy" Combs announcing to a breathlessly waiting world that henceforth he will be known simply as "Diddy," because the "P" was "getting between me and my fans."

So maybe you missed Costas' modest stand for principle. He was scheduled to guest-host Larry King's program on CNN on Thursday before last on a night when the agenda included yet another discussion of Natalie Holloway, the Alabama teenager who disappeared in Aruba.

When he found out the program's planned focus, Costas asked the producers if they would find another topic. They refused and Costas declined to do the show.

"I didn't think the subject matter of Thursday's show was the kind of broadcast I should be doing," he said in a written statement. That's as specific as Costas has chosen to be in explaining why he wouldn't do the show, which leaves plenty of room for conjecture. You'll pardon me if I take advantage of it.

See, I like to think Costas was mindful of the racial and sexual bias inherent in the news media's recent fascination with missing persons cases. If you are not white, young, female and pretty, you can go missing all you want, CNN won't come looking for you. There will be no anchorpersons setting up camp at the place you were last seen, no morning show interviews with your tearful parents, no urgent updates even when there is nothing to update.

But most missing persons don't fit the media's preferred pretty-white-damsels-in-distress profile. Most are men, a large percentage are black and the majority, like the majority of any group, are of average appearance.

LaToya Figueroa is the exception that proves the rule. She's the pregnant Philadelphia woman — later found murdered — whose disappearance received a measure of media attention after Internet bloggers pressured media to address the institutional bias of their missing persons coverage. Figueroa was, glory hallelujah, black. She was also young, female and pretty.

You might call that progress. I'd choose other words.

But for all that, I hope Costas was thinking about more than bias when he declined to do the show. I hope he was also passing judgment on the movie of the week mentality that has overtaken TV news, this obsession with news as story arc, complete with thrilling premise, attractive protagonist, surprising plot twists and satisfying denouement.

It has always been part of the news business, I suppose, this thing of making people's miseries into soap operas for the rest of us. But it feels as if it's reached a suffocating zenith in recent years, as if between Laci Peterson, Elizabeth Smart, Jon-Benet Ramsey, the runaway bride and dozens of others made famous because they were victims or fools.

"Pure white sugar, addictive and without nutrition." That's what Marty Kaplan, associate dean of the University of Southern California Annenberg School for Communication, called it last year in The Washington Post. I can't improve on that.

Hey, I like an occasional Twinkie as much as the next guy. But can we really live on them? Shouldn't the news be about the things that affect us, instead of just those that titillate us? Shouldn't it satisfy more than our need to gape at car wrecks?

I like to think Costas would say yes and that's why he told CNN no. Not that it made a difference. They got another host and the show went on as planned.

■ Pitts is a columnist for The Miami Herald. Write to him at lpitts@herald.com.

## Fenced in on vacation

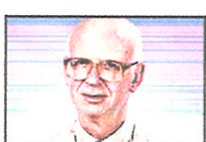
**B**EAVER ISLAND, Mich. — The outside world, I'm sorry to say, keeps intruding on this pastoral paradise, where once again this summer several of our grandchildren enjoyed the legacy left by their great-great-grandfather, Uriah Hoffman, when he built his family cabin here 91 years ago.

Last summer, as I reported at the time, it was the blighted presidential campaign that marred our tranquility, in the form of a yard-sign war between the Bushies and the Kerrys. Kerry narrowly prevailed, as he did in the actual November voting on the Island and in Michigan. Much good it did him.

This summer, it is homeland security that has laid its clammy hand on us. When you step off the car ferry in St. James, instead of the familiar line of storefronts, what you first see is an eight-foot-tall steel fence whose sharp-pointed spears bend outward at the top, surrounding the dock area to thwart any intruders.

The fence and its twin in Charlevoix, the port city on the mainland that is the other terminus of the Beaver Island Boat Co., were built this spring at a cost of \$127,000, divided between the debt-ridden federal government and the dead-broke state of Michigan.

As Harbormaster Margo Marks explained to me, the Maritime Security Act of 2002, passed after 9/11, required that any ports served by vessels carrying 150 passengers or more must be secured against trespassers or terrorists by



David Broder

mid-2005. "It was either hire security guards 24/7," she said, "or put up the fence."

Now, Beaver Island, with a year-round population of about 500, may seem an unlikely target. But who knows?

The new protective measures have been handled with good grace. After the London bombings, passengers on the two-hour voyage between Charlevoix and Beaver Island had their packages examined as they boarded the Emerald Isle. But the dockworkers were efficient and pleasant, the surveillance cameras unobtrusive and no one has complained.

This, despite the island's very different tradition when it comes to law enforcement. Time was, when a lawman was aboard the ferry from Charlevoix, the captain would give an extra toot on the whistle as he entered the harbor here. Any folks who were reluctant to be interviewed by the law would jump into their boats and spend a little time on one of the neighboring islands until the coast was clear.

But now we have this big fence and often a deputy sheriff watching people board the ship. And for what? When a crisis came on Sun-

day, Aug. 14, the new security measures were unable to cope with it. The drawbridge in downtown Charlevoix carrying traffic over Pine River Channel, the narrow waterway connecting Lake Michigan to Round Lake, where the Beaver Island docks, would not go up, meaning that the boat could not leave the dock.

An electrical surge in the municipal power plant had knocked out switches in the bridge controls, and no one knew how to repair them — until a highway department technician could drive up from Lansing. That meant that the 8:30 trip from Charlevoix didn't leave until 1:15 in the afternoon.

On most Sundays, this would have bothered only a few. But this was the Sunday of Homecoming Weekend. All the visitors and island folks throng to the Holy Cross Parish Hall for a charity dinner.

The bridge problem in Charlevoix discouraged some people from making the trip and delayed others. As a result, the last return trip did not go until 10 p.m. And when it reached Charlevoix, damned if the bridge didn't balk again.

Now, I ask you, is it just a coincidence that things went haywire around the time the fence went up, or is there a message for those Homeland Security bureaucrats in Washington?

As Ronald Reagan might have said, "Tear down this fence, Secretary Chertoff!"

■ Broder is a Washington Post columnist. Contact him via e-mail at davidbroder@washpost.com.



## OPINION &amp; COMMENTARY

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# The faces of dropouts

**M**et Adrian, an aspiring entrepreneur. Here's DeJuan, a singer and dancer. There's Mary, a young mother of two; Shirley, an advocate for the disabled. And Kimberly, who is searching for work.

All of these very different people have one thing in common: They're high school dropouts.

The numbers associated with Indiana's dropout epidemic are startling. High schools in the state are on pace to produce 200,000 dropouts this decade. About three of every 10 students in Indiana quit school before

**LEFT BEHIND**  
A STAR EDITORIAL  
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earning a diploma. The graduation rate for Indianapolis Public Schools, the state's largest district, was 35 percent in 2004.

About one in four males — blacks and whites — graduated on time from IPS in 2002.

Beyond the numbers, however, are people, of all races, ethnic groups and family backgrounds. Each is burdened by a lack of education, fighting to secure a decent job and a better way of life.

Their struggles, and the corresponding drain on Indiana's economy, underscore why it's critical for the state to confront its dropout crisis.

## ADRIAN JOHNSON

Adrian "Ace" Johnson was finally about to graduate from high school. But he almost didn't make it — again.

Johnson was sitting in a barbershop hours before his graduation ceremony when the phone rang. He was needed at Zion Hill Missionary Baptist Church, where he works as a janitor, to clean the building before a funeral. Then the phone rang a second time. He needed to complete one last test at the charter school he had attended, Flanner House Higher Learning Center.

Nine years earlier, Johnson had dropped out of Broad Ripple High School — after attending senior prom.

He loafed around his sister's house for the first few months after quitting school. Then an older brother helped him land a job at a pizza joint. A string of jobs followed — at a grocery store, video store and detailing cars. He didn't earn much, but he still managed to "blow my money, most of it anyway, going out clubbing."

Johnson, now 29, didn't give much thought to finishing school until a girlfriend's pregnancy (he turned out not to be the father) led him to Wishard Hospital's Father Resource Program, which helped him reassess his future and led to the creation of his own auto-detailing business. Meeting the woman who would become his wife also gave him a sense of purpose.

But a series of failed General Education Development diploma tests left him wary before his stepmother told him about Flanner House, a charter school for former dropouts. Despite two jobs, auto-detailing gigs and taking care of his growing family, Johnson made up the 14 credits he needed to earn his diploma.

By the way, the church found someone else to set up for the funeral. The test? "Some odd reason, I passed," Johnson says. And he made it to the Madame Walker Theatre just in time for graduation.



**Better late than never:** Adrian "Ace" Johnson, 29, went back to school and earned his diploma nine years after dropping out of high school.

Danese Kemm / The Star

## DEJUAN DANIELS

DeJuan Daniels once dreamed of starting his own record label. He tried to do it, he says, by "heading in the wrong direction."

Daniels, who dropped out of Broad Ripple High School, managed to form a musical group. But he spent much of his money bailing out the group's members from jail. His ambitions fell

apart when one member was sentenced to 70 years in prison for shooting a police officer.

Today, Daniels is dreaming again, this time "totally legit."

He buses tables at a restaurant, teaches dance classes and places phone calls to GED students who have missed classes at the Indiana OIC State Council.

His workdays sometimes don't end until past midnight.

Daniels also is taking classes at Ivy Tech State College while helping raise two of his three children (the eldest lives in Florida).

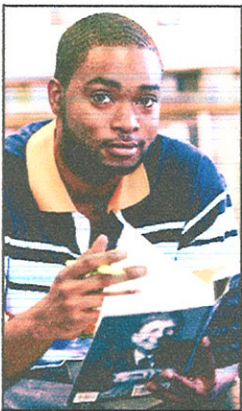
Daniels acknowledges that his life didn't have to be so hard.

At 16, he had his first daughter. The fast money his brothers' friends made on the street "started to look cool."

By 18, Daniels had dropped out of Broad Ripple. "When other kids were getting up to go to school in the morning, I was already standing outside," Daniels says. "When their moms told them to come in for the rest of the day, I was still outside."

Young female students standing outside the OIC's offices caught his interest one day. He later earned his GED there. A four-month stint in the Hamilton County Jail also grabbed his attention, prompting him to begin turning his life around.

"I'm still struggling, but I'm better," Daniels says. "I don't have nearly as much money as I used to have. But I've never been better."



Rob Goshel / The Star

**'Never been better':** DeJuan Daniels still is dreaming.

## SHIRLEY RICE

School always was hard for Shirley Rice. Born with spina bifida, she climbed three flights of stairs — on crutches — to attend classes at a junior high school in Connersville. In high school, other students tormented her, at times tripping her on the way to class.

Now 35, Rice faces an even harder climb: finishing high school 17 years after dropping out her sophomore year.

The last two decades have been rough for Rice. She assembled car kits at a disabled industries workshop; moved with her parents to Indianapolis in 1990; lived for a time in St. Vincent New Hope, a center for people with disabilities; landed and then left a job at the local veterans hospital; married and divorced.

Now she volunteers at a nursing home and searches for work.

Rice admits "things would have been much different" if she had stayed in school. But, in 1988, when she realized she wouldn't graduate until age 23, she dropped out of Connersville High.

Why is she finally pursuing a high school diploma now? While serving on a state panel dedicated to improving the quality of life for the disabled, she met with the Indianapolis Public Schools Board. The encounter changed her thinking. "I'm going back," she told herself.

Rice expects to take classes at Flanner House for the next 2½ years. "I'll continue struggling until I get that high school diploma and college degree," she says.



**I'll continue struggling until I get that high school diploma and college degree.**

## KIMBERLY WEBB

Not all of Kimberly Webb's friends have dropped out of school. But many have. To those considering the same path, the 18-year-old says, life after dropping out is "harder than you think."

Webb knows the consequences all too well.

Most days the Arlington High School dropout arrives at an outreach center operated by Aftercare for Indiana through Mentoring to start her search for work. She later jumps on a bus to visit fast-food restaurants and other businesses looking for a job. Her lack of a diploma makes it tough.

With no income of her own, Webb depends on her mother, herself a dropout, for food, clothing and shelter.

When not looking for work, Webb is preparing to take the test to earn a GED; instead of taking two classes a week, she's attending four because "I'm not ready."

Webb says she never expected to drop out of school, but admits, "I didn't care if I got locked up and get into trouble, got suspended, expelled, that kind of stuff."

At 14, she ran away from home, spending six weeks with a sister. "I had them terrified and I didn't care," she says. She took up drinking, popped ecstasy and smoked marijuana.

Once a member of the Arlington High band, Webb became one of the school's troublemakers. She also made trouble at home: After forging her mom's checks, she was arrested and



served nine months in the state Girls School.

A three-month stint at the Ladoga Academy, along with a caring caseworker, led Webb to sobriety. Yet it took another stay at the Girls School — for five weeks on a parole violation in May 2004 — to finally straighten out her behavior. She's been off parole for more than a year.

With so many high school credits to make up, Webb, who would have graduated with the Class of 2005, decided dropping out was best. But now, she says, "I would do anything to have that opportunity to go back."

## MARY DUNCAN

Some obstacle always stands in the way of Mary Duncan completing high school.

As a teenager, she moved from Tacoma, Wash., to Indianapolis to Gaston, Ala. — all within three weeks. When Duncan moved back to Indianapolis to attend Warren Central High School, she was told she had to wait a semester to enroll.

She dropped out, at age 17, instead. Duncan enrolled in Job Corps to earn her GED, but quit to return to Tacoma to take care of an ailing grandfather. An attempt to home school at her future father-in-law's Bible college ended when she became pregnant.

Admits Duncan: "I let my problems get in the way of my education."

Now, it's the birth of a second child three weeks ago that's keeping Duncan out of school. She says she'll pursue a diploma again once her doctor says it's all right — if she can find a babysitter.

She says her husband's example inspires her to pursue an education. He took a night job so she could attend school during the day.

Another motivation: The dream of opening a group home for troubled young women.

She also wants to avoid the embarrassment of one day having to tell her children she didn't finish school. "My daughter's not going to graduate before I graduate," she says.



**My daughter's not going to graduate before I graduate.**