

"This is not about education at all. It's about power." ~ James Baldwin

Oseye Boyd,

Good afternoon. Congratulations on your position as Public Engagement Editor for the *Star*.

With the team of new "investigative" journalists such as Ko Lyn Cheang, Brandon Brenon, Alexandria Burris, Caroline Beck, and now you, the current Gannett run paper is not your father's *Indianapolis Star*.

I am writing to discuss the shrinking of democracy. It's under attack. Most of your readers will be aware of the global rise of totalitarian governments, e.g. Hungary, challenges to voting rights in the US, and the influx of money in elections created by the atmosphere of Citizens United.

A community of IPS parents, students, educators, and citizens are represented by this e-mail. And, in this case, we cannot separate the IPS community and what goes on in the schools from how this affects the larger community making up our city.

We want a fair democracy in that larger community because we don't now and won't have it in the future due to the politics of money. Here in Indy, this is particularly prevalent in regard to the IPS School Board races, not Indiana's governor or senator, or Indy's mayoral elections. Yes, I said, IPS elections.

Starting in 2012 and on to 2014 and to 2016, large donations filled the campaign chests of those candidates supporting corporate school reform in IPS. This trend has culminated in large amount of funds from billionaires and millionaires influencing the 2020 IPS election where it was reported, for example, that current IPS Commissioner Kenneth Allen's campaign chest held \$266,000. Who needs \$266K to run a school board campaign in a district with <25,000 students? Note too, the large donations feeding the campaigns of Commissioner Pritchard (\$91K) and Commissioners Arnold (\$84K) and Moore (\$95K). According to WFYI's 2020 IPS election analysis, Pritchard's opponent, Brandon Randall had \$12,779. Arnold's competition, Christina Smith has \$12,510. Moore's challenger, Daqavise Winston, had \$3,069, and Allen's opponent, then Commissioner Liz Gore, had just \$12,185.

Because it's about the children and the purpose of public education, maybe IPS candidates get the same amount of campaign funding from the district?

The irony here, IPS commissioners make just over \$6,000/year. So, why all the money and fuss for such a low paying position? "It's about power," Baldwin would say.

We know there's an election coming up Nov. 8, and 3 IPS seats are at stake. How much will donors pour into the candidates coffers? We can say one thing and that is most likely those supporting corporate school reform will win adding to the 4 corporate School Reform supporters already on the board. Currently as you may know, Commissioners Collins and Slack seem to support traditional public schools. These candidates won in 2018, surprising the [corporate reformers](#) who were [ready](#) for the [2020 IPS election](#).

And with the possibility of a super-majority control of IPS, a repeat of 2020 is assured. Why? Those in town who want to privatize public education know that if they win in Nov., the board that controls the second most privatized district in the nation, will be completely pro-charter or Innovation schools. This is in spite of a.) Louisiana State Sen. Joe Bouie noting we are morally bound to [end the failed 16-year charter experiment in New Orleans](#)--must Indy have to wait 16 years to know better?; and, b.) those asking, [Does Indianapolis actually want an entire privatized school system?](#)

In fact, we could say that those who support corporate school reform will control the Indianapolis school board for the next 40 years, outspending the teachers unions and other supporters of traditional public schools. Then, there will be no need for past [IPS "bait & switch"](#) tactics.

If you know your IPS history this is not new. It has happened in the past. In the early 1920s, Indy's [white male establishment](#)--a status quo of business leaders and politicians organized to help segregate IPS high schools. From 1921-1925 and then from 1930 to 1968, the [Citizens School Committee \(CSC\)](#) controlled IPS, unopposed!

The [CSC](#) perpetuated a segregated Indianapolis. It also continued a segregated IPS school caste system based on race and class, [one that still exists today](#). [CSC](#) lost in 1968 to the [Non-Partisans for Better Schools](#) group that pushed for integration.

Such a move toward integrated schools was soon countered by UNIGOV in 1970 which enabled the white flight of parents to the townships and the start of IPS losing 80,000+ students: 108,743 in 1968 to today's +\- 25,000 students.

To return to the issue: Can we call an IPS election, where one side, due to the **large amounts of private and dark money** have much, much more contributions than their opponents, a democratic election? Under Citizens United, the answer is yes.

Here's what Amos Brown said in Oct. of 2014, just before the IPS election in his *Recorder* column titled: "**Is Stand for Children buying IPS School Board election?**" Amos implored, "Most important, IPS residents should rise up Nov. 4 and in the words of Scripture 'smite' down Stand for Children and the influence of big money education rustlas. If you don't, you'll send IPS down a path that in the short and long term would be extraordinarily detrimental to our children and our African-American community!" And here we are today, looking at this prophetic plea because indeed this is what we are facing.

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But we also know that something is not right about this hegemony. And we know that something is not right especially in regard to the education of our children. These children and youth expect school elections to be fair.

What's interesting educationally is that the Mind Trust (MT) has to support "**whiteness**" (standardization). It also has to practice "othering" which is inherent in MT's DNA because **without the "other" there would be no reason for the Mind Trust to exist.**

Finally, because of the predominance of corporate reform's financial influence (notably via dark money and especially from outside of Indiana) that maintains the political support of various state/city leaders, certain local charter high schools can **finagle their grad rates** or **make favoristic deals with IPS** to get access to district resources as IPS adds high-performing high schools to its portfolio.

How can our public school district which represents fairness to children as well as the democratic life and how it might be led, allow itself to be controlled by big money, both "light" and dark, from outside the district?

The above question is asked because all this money has made IPS develop an Achilles heel. By supplying money and students for charters to thrive, it's caused its own traditional IPS schools to close. But, is this what [national billionaires Bloomberg, Hastings, and Walton](#), and [local millionaires Hubbard and Klipsch](#) want?

Now with obvious proof that past and possibly future IPS elections will be predictable; and with the decade-old hegemonic control of IPS by local and national interests; and that IPS has the support of a super-majority of local (Mayor Hogsett) and state politicians, Black organizations (IUL, NAACP, ICSSBM), businesses (Indy Chamber)/corporations (Eli Lilly), media (including the *Recorder*, *Star*, *IBJ*), and privatizing public ed initiatives (Marian U./Teach for America, Stand for Children, [RISE Indy](#), and the Mind Trust), are fair local school board elections simply passé?

So the question is: Are you willing to start some "good trouble" by exposing your *Star* readers to the threat to local democracy posed by the upcoming likely purchase of IPS school board seats?

John Harris Loflin
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p.s.

Without the conscientious reporters and journalists, our Indianapolis may start to return to the past, continuing to hide behind, not reveal, its true segregated self.

Thus, I look forward to communicating with you more. I hope I've offered enough research/data/information to support my concerns. I am available for open, honest dialogue about these matters.