

Tomorrow's Public Education
Transformational Community Schools
Advancing the Community Schools model:
Increasing its democratization while enabling its decolonization

"For the master's tools will never dismantle the master's house. They may allow us temporarily to beat him at his own game, but they will never enable us to bring about genuine change." ~ Audre Lorde

Summary This broad analysis, with recommendations and commentary, tries to reason with supporters of today's Community Schools model about a conceptualization of its advanced form, Transformational Community Schools (TCS). Read more at [Transformational Community Schools--2013](#). TCS seek to further democratize, as well as decolonize, the current concept.

Contents

<< Democratization: Transformational Community Schools >>

- Local School Councils p. 2
- Student councils: What can TCS students do to help run their school?
- TCS will recognize the global human rights of children p. 3
- Civic Literacy: Education for critical citizenship and IDOE's new civics standards
 - TCS will prepared students for College, Career, and Citizenship
- 1st Amendment Schools: Helping students be active citizens in their schools p.4

<< Decolonization of the Community Schools concept >>

- Naptown's colonial mindset p. 5
- A model to follow: Roses in Concrete Community School in Oakland, CA
- Decolonizing Special Education Pt I Special Ed students and charters p.
- Decolonizing Special Education Pt II There's no disability without normalcy p. 6
- Transformational Community Schools: Places to contest inequalities
- An anti-poverty curriculum: Getting students out of poverty or getting rid of poverty p.7
 - What an anti-poverty curriculum looks like
 - Financial literacy: Having the economic power for self-reliance and self-sufficiency p. 8
- What is a high quality education for TCS students? An education for liberation p. 9
 - An education for liberation and school discipline
- Adding the political to the social, emotional, physical, and cognitive needs of the whole African American child p. 10
- Critical Self-awareness: Ethnic studies and academic and social success in school
- TCS's teaching will be culturally relevant and culturally sustaining, and will include hip hop p. 11
- Literacy at TCS: Learning how to read is a political act p. 12
- Literacy with an attitude: Powerful, Functional, and Media Literacies
- Digital literacy: COVID-19 and exposing the lack digital literacy actions for IPS students p. 13
- Analyzing the issue of rigor vs. vigor for TCS African American students
- Why mandatory school uniforms won't improve IPS and student voice will
 - School uniforms reflect the dominator, not the partnership model of human sustainability p.14

<< Democratization: Transformational Community Schools >>

To the extent that charter schools/Innovation schools have boards that are selected not elected, to the same extent our very own Community Schools concept must counter that image and policy. *TCS is that counter-narrative.*

So, to the extent TCS is proposed as an even more democratic option to the Community School model, an authentic and fully democratized TCS becomes an even better option to charters and Innovations for families. This is true for those who see TCS as democracy's laboratory, democracy's finishing school, preparing students for critical citizenship.

Indy's TCS will be under the auspices of the IPS school board; and, this is a situation where we will be dealing with the fox that's guarding the charter and Innovation hen house. Nonetheless, we have to put forth a concept that is democratic via school/community board elections.

"Elected school boards are the bedrock of American democracy." ~ Thomas Ultican

Local School Councils

What is being proposed here is that each TCS has a Local School Council (LSC): 4 parents, 2 community members, 1 non-teacher representative (e. g., school secretary, janitor, foodservice worker), 2 teachers, 1 student, and the principal.

Each is selected the first year. The 2nd-year members, except the principal, are chosen through community-wide/school-wide elections which then take place every 2 years. The LSC hires/fires the principal, and has say over the school's budgets, policies, and curriculum.

To understand, deeply analyze Chicago's LSC program: [Local School Councils](#). This will, for example, make it clear how the LSC concept is what Community Schools need to be transformational--providing a *publically elected* board option to the anti-democratic *privately selected* charters/Innovation boards.

This also makes sure the school's board members are from the school's community. Many charter or Innovation board members are not. Having local and immediate neighborhood control over securing and maintaining the educational, cultural, political, public health, and economic self-determination of the school's community is what characterizes TCS.

To iterate, we who critique charters/Innovation schools for not being democratic, must provide an advanced democratic school example.

Student Councils

As well, to the extent charters/Innovations have no viable student councils, TCS will have student councils. The UK has had them for years in its elementary, middle school, and high school. To illustrate, see how England creates civic-minded students who learn the democratic way of life by practicing it in democracy's "finishing school" and laboratory, the UK public schools: <https://home.smartschoolcouncils.org.uk/>.

Here each TCS will ask: **What can our student do to help run their school?** TCS staff and students can be put in contact with staff/students in UK schools.

The paradox of education is precisely this--as students begin to be educated, they begin to examine the society in which they are being educated. ~ paraphrased from James Baldwin

- **Meaningful Student Involvement (MSI)**

Another example of student participation in school related decision-making is [Meaningful Student Involvement](#) (MSI). For example, MSI is the process of engaging students as partners in every facet of school change for the purpose of strengthening their commitment to education, community, and democracy.

- [Letting student voice lead the way](#)

To increase well-being in school, read here how TCS can use school-wide plans for voice and empowerment: listening and engaging student as full and active partners in school and community transformation via student voice, engagement, and meaningful participation.

TCS will recognize the Global Human Rights of Children

TCS will recognize the global human rights of its students. Although the US is 1 of 3 out of 197 countries not signing the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC), TCS will organize to prepare, over time, a TCS version of the UNCRC.

It will be recognized by TCS staff, faculty, administration, and board, validating that each student has global human rights and so each student will know they have global human rights which are recognized by their community, peers, and school adults.

Here are illustrations of global (UK) and USA efforts to reason with adults and educators as to the advantages for student engagement in their schools and communities when their global human rights are validated:

- [Children's rights: United Nations Convention of the Rights of the Child.](#)
- [Educating children in a socially toxic environment.](#)

"We must remove the contradictions in our culture that embrace democratic ends for its schools, but resists the actual practice in schools of democratic means from which the ends cannot be separated." ~The Institute for Democracy in Education

Civic Literacy: Education for critical citizenship and IDOE's Civics Standards

Cui bono? Who benefits when TCS students do not learn the American political system and how it works by being able to practice citizenship in their own public schools? This will take analyzing and adapting [IDOE's middle school civics standards](#). For instance, 6th grade TCS students can deconstruct the new IDOE Civic Standards: Role of Citizens (6.6.16-6.6.23). TCS staff and students can view and analyze the [proposed grade 6 civics standards](#) and see which ones can be practiced through classroom, school, and neighborhood citizenship activities. In light of this, grade 6-12 TCS students will be taught [how to community organize](#). This is an

important democratic skill because community organizing is the actual “on the ground” practice of the democratic life. It is by both study and practice TCS students become good citizens.

“We need to treat students like citizens now, not citizens in the future.”

~ Sheldon Berman, Superintendent of Hudson Public Schools

- **Combining rites of passage and citizenship education** Being from “the neighborhood,” TCS community leaders know instinctually that once urban youth experience puberty, they must show the world they are no longer children. They also know youth will “prove” this status one way or the other—most likely in anti-social actions and attitudes. Leaders also know that this new status can be the doorway to becoming a responsible member of society—adolescence as an introduction to life in the *polis*.

To enrich community activism, a TCS curriculum will [combine rites of passage and citizenship education](#). Initiation will take place into adult status with whole community ceremonies that also welcome youth as a citizen of the neighborhood with the rights and responsibilities of adulthood and critical citizenship in both the school and community.

Literacy and numeracy are each fundamental for participation in our community, but so is the knowledge and capacity of citizens to make sense of their democratic society. Since the democratic way of life is built upon opportunities to learn what it is about and practice how it might be lead, civic literacy is the capacity of students to experience democracy.

As an illustration, analyze pages 11-13 in [Civic Literacy: Education for Critical Citizenship](#). Here will be found what America’s constitutional democratic republic requires of its public schools. What’s important, the research supporting democratic school climate shows attendance, relationships, and academic performance improves when students are involved in school-related decision-making. *There is no research, none, showing when students are treated as citizens in their own public schools, school climate gets worse.*

“Freedom and justice, however important, can never be enough; learning about democratic citizenship must be more than an academic exercise.” ~ *First Amendment Schools*, p.21

1st Amendment Schools: Helping students be active citizens in their schools

The notion students should learn more about the Bill of Rights and the First Amendment is not new. What is new is education where student actually practice, in their classrooms and schools, the 5 Freedoms: speech, assembly, press, religion, and petition in for grievances. Review [First Amendment Schools](#) to understand how this is done. TCS will be First Amendment schools.

<< Decolonization of the Community Schools concept >>

Not a lot is here because it’s already explained above in the paper: [Transformational Community Schools--2013](#). In summary then, in order to promote sustainability via self-sufficiency and self-reliance, those professionals and providers who work in a community school, will from the

beginning of their employment, strive to work themselves out of a job by finding someone in the school or community to eventually take their place. This way the community school stays truly community-driven.

Naptown's colonial mindset

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

A model to follow: Roses in Concrete Community School in Oakland, CA

Fortunately, there is a challenge to the inherent colonial mindset of Naptown: Oakland, CA's [Roses in Concrete Community School](#). To illustrate, Roses in Concrete school leaders show how students are encouraged to acquire higher education and return to the community to help their families and neighbors become self-determined through self-sufficiency, and self reliance.

Here is an analysis of the school, "Seeding Transformation for Seven Generations: A Case Study of Roses in Concrete Community School." It shows a counter-hegemonic schooling project that responds to the community's demand for self-determination in education. The implications of this case study are a model for TCS teachers and school leaders who seek to pursue a social justice educational agenda. See even more here: <https://escholarship.org/uc/item/9sh0f94h>.

Decolonizing Special Education, Pt. I Special Education and charters

It is well known charter schools, in particular, have important issues with meeting the needs of special education students and their families. Thus, charters are seen as unwelcoming to the disabled child. Note, charters are looking to others for help. Read how this happens here: [Charter/Innovation schools turn to traditional public schools for help with special education](#).

Yet, this is most likely not because charter school people dislike special ed children and their families. You see, in the business/market-driven world of charters, it's just not "profitable."

So, to the extent that charter schools are not welcoming to special ed students and their families, to that same extent TCS will be particularly welcoming. In fact, TCS will take this to the next level and decolonize the concept of special education.

What is mentioned here will be basically easy to understand for us Hoosiers because in 1907 Indiana passed the world's first eugenics law practically legalizing white supremacy. What the eugenics law did was to basically make it legal to sterilize the "unfit." The law also promoted the

propagation of the "fit." What this did was to create the world of "normalcy." So, normalcy creates "disability" and the "differon" (the one who is different), and thus "special" education.

Decolonizing Special Education, Pt. II There is no disability without normalcy

"The problem's not the student with learning disabilities; it's the way normalcy is constructed to create the 'problem' of the learning disabled child." ~ reworded from L. Davis, "Constructing Normalcy"

What TCS will do to decolonize this eugenics concept of disability is take the Individualized Education Plan (IEP) and advance it to a [Strength-Based Learning Plan](#) (S-BLP). Here normalization (aka, standardization) would not be the only goal of the plan. Self-actualization will also be the purpose of the S-BLP.

Special ed students would be helped to meet state standards for their age/grade level, working on what they need to do to make them "normal" by IEP standards. Under the S-BLP concept, differences would be the norm. Here, special ed students would also develop their strengths: what makes them unique, using their talents, interests, and passions--that in most cases are not a part of the IDOE curriculum or standards.

Learn more of the history of disability and the details here: [In 1907 Hoosiers legalized normalcy. In 2017 Hoosiers discredited and abandoned normalcy.](#) This story starts with colonizing America and socially constructing "the other." It goes through to the present and shatters "The myth of the normal child." Finally, Eli Lilly's Strattera drug for treating children with "sitting disability" (ADHD) is critiqued.

Also, see how *normalizing difference is a way to reduce bullying* as it validates: 1) the differon, 2) self-actualization, and 3) social-actualization, while meeting the human need for recognition: [The "differon" and bullying: Accepting difference as a way to reduce violence.](#)

Transformational Community Schools: Places to contest/eradicate inequalities

TCSs will combine student voice with community change and empowerment:

- [5 strategies to integrate civil discourse and civic action in schools](#) With Black Lives Matter, COVID-19, CRT, or "Don't say gay" issues, freedom of speech in the classroom is challenging to teachers who use discussions of critical topics to promote thinking. Here are 5 ways to help students "grapple with living in a tense and jarring reality."
- [From community service to community change: TCS students transforming their neighborhoods](#) The process has 3 phases: 1) students identify shared and important values as a group; 2) students identify community issues in conflict with those shared values; and, 3) possibilities for action are explored through various levels of involvement in social change activities--leading to planning, implementation, and evaluation of their chosen projects.
- [Student voice or student action?](#) See here how moving from student voice to student action inside schools and enabling students to shape their neighborhoods create a better education and a more sustainable society.

An anti-poverty curriculum: Getting out of poverty or getting rid of it

In general, many community schools are located in pockets of poverty: urban economic deserts. The term food desert is not used here because food deserts are actually economic deserts.

Currently, many schools located in these economic deserts are under the influence of the "going to college culture," a culture that inherently avoids discussions around poverty:

- here the students are engineered to think the purpose of their school is help them [rise out of poverty not get rid of it](#);
- here students are told they have to put up with social toxins and not see their [urban schools as sites to contest inequalities](#); and
- here schools lack a [comprehensive vision of urban school transformation](#). TCS believe that in the absence of a long-range strategy to foster self-determination, cultural empowerment, and to challenge and eradicate the underlying causes of poverty and other social toxins, heroic attempts to restructure schools or to introduce new teaching and learning techniques in the classroom will be difficult to sustain.

"There is solid agreement on the basic proposition that conventional education is totally inadequate to address the special problems of the urban poor. Something quite different is needed, something that deals not only with reading, writing, and arithmetic, but with the environment that shapes these students' lives and determines their educational needs."

~ Chief Justice Weilantz, New Jersey Supreme Court, 1990: Abbott v. Burke

Read more about the [limitations of a going to college culture in schools, a middle class ideology which ignores poverty](#) and the other pertinent problems many TCS students will constantly face in their neighborhoods.

How the anti-poverty curriculum will work

TCS will be sites for social-economic justice. Instead of TCS classrooms having various college pennants over their door ways as a means to get students to go to college, these entrances will have the words of the various social toxins students, their families, and neighborhoods face on a daily basis such as jobs, housing, mental health, police relations, gangs, poverty, or child care.

Each classroom will be the center of efforts to study and come up with solutions to the community problem for which their classroom is responsible. Students will use all the higher order thinking skills, meets state standards, and be prepared for career, college, and critical citizenship--all while solving community problems

In the process, TCS students will learn and use [problem solving skills](#): (define problem, brainstorm solutions, pick a solution, test it, and review the results) and [techniques](#). These skill are especially vital around using [project based solution to solve real-world/existential problems](#) students, their families, and neighborhoods face daily.

To help TCS staff, students, and community members, an [urban conditions and social toxins chart](#) explores the various urban conditions such as unemployment that create social toxins both Impersonal (violence, shame) and Structural (poverty, child care). The chart identifies healing that's radical (gaining agency, solidarity with others via community actions) and what "wellness" looks like for communities of color (liberation, community empowerment, freedom to create). In essence, radical healing involves [healing through social justice](#). Here personal and collective actions promote living a life with dignity and respect. Radical healing incorporates strategies that address the root causes of the trauma by building on the strengths of individuals and engaging the general and culture-specific practices of their community that promote resilience and wellbeing. View and unpack this video on [Radical Healing](#) with Shawn Ginwright where he goes into more detail on how and why such psychologically deeper and socially wider healing is needed.

This is generational. At the end of the school year when students have to go to a different home room or grade level, students new to the situation will start the next semester where the other students left off in their work.

Now students know why what they're learning and doing is so important: the long-range goal is to eradicate the social toxins from their community.

Financial literacy: Gaining economic knowledge for both personal as well as community self-reliance and self-sufficiency

Financial literacy is seen as foundational to the socio-economic self-determination of students, families, and neighborhoods which characterizes TCS. Analyzing insights in the [IGotYoBlack](#) video will especially help students of color understand the 5 levels of Black power: Stage 1: Economics—all other stages depend on an economic base; Stage 2: Politics; Stage 3: Courts and Police; Stage 4: Media; and, Stage 5: Education. As illustrated, the top 4 levels depend on economics before formal education can even be utilized.

TCS will have students, its board, and community leaders study [IDOE's Financial Literacy curriculum](#) and apply what they learn about building the foundation of economic power to both their personal finances and wealth building as well as to the community's finances and wealth building. The IDOE course for 8th graders and for 12th graders are based the following areas: Financial Responsibility and Decision Making; Relating Income and Careers; Planning, Managing Money; Managing Credit and Debt; Risk Management and Insurance; and, Saving and Investing.

What's a high quality education for TCS students? An education for liberation

[What is a high quality education for urban students? Education for liberation: Education as the practice of freedom](#) reveals the large amounts of money used to support charters and vouchers. Published on ResearchGate, the paper currently has 808 reads from 49 different countries.

School reformers talk about a "high quality education" provided by "great schools" with "great teachers." Yet, no detailed definition of an education of high quality beyond test scores and school accountability measure is offered.

Unfortunately, "School choice" justifies the kind of individualism and competition undermining the common good that cultural and racial minorities need to thrive. It also dodges the chances of a 3rd alternative engaging those that neither public nor charter schools can reach--students and families who resist and reject schooling, even to their own detriment.

They know that the level of conformity required by school success gives unfair advantage to the mainstream and those cultural and racial minorities bamboozled into a subservient assimilation. For those not confusing domestication, indoctrination, or colonialism with education, here are examples of quality teaching and education for urban students: an education for [liberation](#).

An education for liberation and school discipline

Not all school discipline issues extend from "bad behavior." Disruptive behavior can be resistance to colonization--assimilation into the mainstream. [Dr. Akom's re-examination of resistance as oppositional behavior](#) explains how Black Americans, who are seen as being in America involuntarily as a result of slavery, are disadvantage as the result of a Black culture that discourages academic effort by branding it as "acting white." (Think: [The Hate U Give](#) movie where the lead actress lived in the inner-city and went to school in the suburbs. She had to act and talk "white" while at school, but became a home girl when she returned to her neighborhood.) This orientation helps Black students reason their resistance to schooling, yet are then labeled "behavior problems." Akom illustrates that when 7 Black female high school students were tutored by Nation of Islam (NOI) tutors, they began to question their school's curriculum in such a way that was not disruptive. This shows that when Black American students understand and practice how to critique traditional schooling and teachers in political ways that can be seen by both their peers and other teachers as liberatory, it creates a "Black achievement ideology" other Black students copy and so the resistance is transformative.

"Why would marginalized students be discipline problems in schools trying to liberate them?"

Also, it's vital to appreciate just what TCS will do to engage its disaffected students and teachers. For example, reading "[How to make urban schools work for disengaged students and critically conscious teachers](#)" will enable TCS staff to see that students do not need to reject what makes them literate, self-sufficient, community oriented, and politically active for a socially just world. This is education seen as the practice of freedom. For example, students must have critically conscious teachers who help them use their school experience to improve their present and future neighborhoods while gaining academic skills and knowledge for career, college, and citizenship.

TCS will **not** ask students to trade the culture of their home and community for the "higher culture" of formal education in exchange for access to college. This reduces the life choices of students into a false binary, that of choosing between staying behind as a failure, and "getting

out" as a success. TCS know that when faced with the prospect of leaving their communities behind to be successful, many will just quit. They choose to retain an urban and cultural identity they perceive to be in conflict with the expectations of schools, even if the cost of that choice is school failure. To be effective, TCS will develop partnerships with communities that provide young people the opportunity to be successful while maintaining their identities as urban youth.

Adding the political to the social, emotional, physical, and cognitive needs of the whole African American child

This counter-narrative to the charter/Innovation school model asserts that schools are political sites. Going to school is a political act—truly, for some, an existential act. Note, standardized testing and the concept of disability are political concepts having nothing to do with education. These two concepts simply sort and rank students based on the eugenics concept of normalcy.

Thus, TCS will advance the whole child concept. Click on the "Video of the presentation" in this summary [The Black & Latino Policy Institute Report: The 3rd Annual Indiana Whole Child Summit](#) to see that the political aspects of developing a whole Black American child are vital.

For example, current educational fad of "grit" shows courage and resolve are vital. Though true, [students must have the political power of agency too](#) in order to identify and conquer structural barriers that can limit student success even if one has grit. Grit can hide systems of power rather than the transformational and disruptive potential of the personal politics of agency needed to navigate systemic barriers while also critiquing them. Therefore, TCS will dismantle ideologies that suggest merit and hard work will always lead to success. TCS students will not just put up with, but practice eradicating social toxins previously discussed on pages 7-8.

Critical Self-awareness: Ethnic studies and academic and social success

TCS are built on appreciating how hard it is to advance academically and socially in education if you don't know who you are. The education students get at TCS is intertwined with [Indiana's new approach to ethnic studies going beyond stereotypes](#). Ethnic Studies is a 1-semester IDOE history/sociology course emphasizing the perspectives of minority groups while allowing students from all backgrounds to better understand and appreciate how race, culture and ethnicity, and identity contribute to their experiences.

At TCS this is supplemented by the nationally acclaimed [The Historic Journey](#). This history, which covers Mother Africa to America today, is foundational to the well-being and healthy identity of African American students, families, and communities. And to the extent it covers a completely contemporary and complex review of human history, it's foundational to the well-being and identity of **all** Americans and **all** humanity. What makes the volume unique is its curriculum with multi-faceted approaches to teaching, learning, and assessment.

Dealing with race and social class Appreciating the intersectionality of race, class, and identity is important to TCS. Our schools will be successful through [keeping urban students in school by adding a History of Labor course to the curriculum](#). Now students will have a sense of

pride and affirmation about who they are as they learn what their grandparents did to get child labor out of factories and coal mines, have safe working conditions, and a 40 hour work week.

TCS is recognizing the needs of our white working-class urban students. TCS respects the challenges the "College or die" vs. "Not everyone needs to go to college" question is having. This is why TCS [propose a compromise to the debate](#): foster a school/classroom climate that empowers all students regardless of what they plan to do after graduation. This climate normalizes self-respect, self-realization, critical self-consciousness, and intellectual capacity centered in community change and enabling working-class students to become: 1) more critical consumers of all information they encounter daily; and 2) more critically conscious citizens due to an empowering education using a curriculum valuing the intellectual potential in all students.

TCS's teaching will be culturally relevant and sustaining, and include hip hop
Respecting the culture of students makes sense. This is easily done when the home culture the students brings to school is the same as the school's culture. This is not the case for most bi-cultural students, who may be told to leave their culture "outside" of school. Still, there's not enough emphasis on the languages and literacies and other cultural practices of communities marginalized by systemic inequalities to ensure the valuing and maintenance of our multiethnic and multilingual society. Thus, an intentional [Culturally Sustaining Pedagogy](#) (CSP) is called for.

CSP seeks to perpetuate and foster—to sustain—linguistic, literate, and cultural pluralism as part of the democratic project of schooling. This [video](#) will help make this intent clear.

If TCS are to have culturally competent teachers, curriculum, and pedagogy, then along with Indy's African American, Latino, white urban working-class cultures, global youth culture (bka "hip hop") must become one of the cultures taken into account in the school and classroom.

Indeed TCS teachers and staff will be culturally competent. Through knowledge of and respect for the culture students bring to school, TCS will also validate the significance of [global youth culture](#), or hip hop, to school success. Using the [hip hop version](#) of Maslow's [Pyramid of Human Needs](#), TCS will regard the inseparable relationship between youth identity and hip hop culture—thus viewing this global youth culture as an asset, not a liability,

TCS will endorse 2 hip hop principles to engage students: 1) "Keepin' it real" or a commitment to self-awareness in the form of authenticity: being who you say you are. This leads to [self-actualization](#), the realization or fulfillment of one's talents and potentialities which is the ultimate goal of human development; and, 2) "Keepin it right" or resistance to social injustice. Therefore, a primary challenge to TCS centers on how to tap into not reject the oppositional culture of hip hop so that hip hop might revive new and more inclusive forms of schooling, student buy in, and consequently the democratic possibilities of American society.

Literacy at TCS: Learning how to read is a political act of radical commitment

Whether it's admitted or not, our public schools are political sites. With IPS under the sway of neo-liberal corporate reform (privatization), education has a business-economic purpose to create workers. Its purpose is not self-discovery or critical citizenship. IPS high schools are career-oriented. There's no sustainability, social justice, or anti-poverty high schools.

"Whoever controls the schools controls the future." ~ Anonymous

The "political" is more than how/who gets reliable banks, decent parks and maintained sidewalks, handy food markets, viable hospitals, or police who protect/serve. In fact, according to Prof. Lewis R. Gordon, the "political" is an act of radical commitment. When you act politically it's not about "What's in it for me," but because of the collective responsibility of us, an "us" that transcends the present. This us includes the ancestors, descendants, and it includes the idea of life that may even be radically different from us. Here, every political action ultimately reaches the anonymous. In the end, that committed act translating into political responsibility, addresses the anonymous even though we ourselves are not anonymous to ourselves.

To Gordon, libratory acts are political acts, linking love and politics, and radicality and politics. So, for students, literacy becomes a political act committed to the life and freedom of others.

What is needed is making the purpose of literacy political for students on the margins. In fact, for African Americans, learning how to read is an existential act, and act of survival.

Literacy with an Attitude: Functional, Powerful, and Media Literacies

Functional literacy is what working-class students get: the ability to meet the reading and writing demands daily life--making a person productive and dependable, but not troublesome.

Powerful literacy leads to positions of power and authority. It is the critical literacy skills the children of upper- middle-class students get. This enables: thinking for oneself, understand how the system works, how to critique and change it, and how to acquire power/authority in it.

The book, [*Literacy with an Attitude: Educating working-class children in their own self-interest*](#) by Patrick Finn sees literacy as a political act. Here's what he says, "Literacy is a powerful right of citizenship." This video explains more: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=laS1y4f_U2E.

[*Media literacy is the 4th R and a way to engaging all students*](#). Media literacy can be defined as: how to read and write text; how to give and receive communications in all forms of the arts; how to discern, appreciate, and critique all forms of the arts, and commercial and political advertisements, and government communications including laws, policy, legislative and public events; how to evaluate teachers and how they teach; how to research and evaluate political, economic, social-cultural issues; and, how to present arguments and debate a variety of issues with other community members and elected officials. Here songs, novels, sculpture, conversations, statues, pictures, movies, quilts, etc. are also considered media texts.

Digital literacy: COVID and exposing the lack digital literacy in IPS students

[Digital Literacy](#) is an individual's ability to find, evaluate, and communicate information through typing and other media on various digital platforms. It is evaluated by an individual's grammar, composition, typing skills and ability to produce text, images, audio and designs using technology.

From the standpoint of traditional public school advocate Alan Schoff, the best thing to happen to students in IPS over the past decade was COVID-19. The irony is that it took one of history's deadliest plagues to move IPS from 1 in 3 students having access to technology to having a device for every single student. Digital literacy is essential today as any other literacy, and while the district apparently focused on converting public schools to charters as quickly as they could, IPS leadership ignored the most obvious top priority to help educate the poorest students in the state: ensuring access to computers and teaching them how to use them. TCS will provide a computer for each child and make teaching digital literacy a top priority.

The question of rigor vs. vigor for TCS Black American students: Which of the two approaches is more academically appropriate and culturally relevant?

Charters are known for being market-driven, and thus competitive. In doing so, charters emphasize rigor—rigorous curriculum, study habits, testing schemes, etc. Yet, according to educator Augusta Mann, vigor is more culturally relevant to her, "Nine Recurring African American Cultural Themes." In *all* themes, Spirituality, Resilience, Humanism, Communalism, Orality/Verbal Expression, Realness, Personal Style/Uniqueness, Emotional Vitality, and Musicality/Rhythm, vigor not rigor supports Black children's education.

For example, analyze the chart [contrasting the relevance of rigor vs. vigor to African American cultural themes](#). The themes can also apply to family/community-oriented Latino and poor white communities which are not as individualistically-oriented as the American white middle-class.

Why mandatory school uniforms won't improve IPS and student voice will

Since 2007, IPS requires school uniforms. Charters require them. The case for uniforms centers on behavior and grades. Most township schools do not want uniforms. Why? Are township district students smarter and less oppositional compared to IPS?

The TCS concept asserts that compulsory school uniforms take the place of real relationships. *If teachers and administration had authentic relationships with students, uniforms would not be needed to control whatever school adults think uniforms control.*

Uniforms replace authentic relationships: Why a pedagogy of recognition is needed

As a counter-narrative to IPS and charter policies, TCS will not require students to wear a costume in order to get a free public education. TCS will involve all students in determining school climate, school governance, and learning through a [Pedagogy of Recognition](#).

Through this pedagogy, all aspects of the experiences of TCS students will be recognized around a relationally-driven pedagogy that aims to facilitate identity-formation and consciousness-raising for students. To engage in this way of teaching, TCS educators and staff will name, know, respect, and celebrate each student as recommended in, ["They say we are prone to violence, but it's home sweet home" The Praxis of Hip Hop, Self-Actualization and Democratic Education for Addressing the Roots of Violence.](#)

A pedagogy of recognition reflects 3 areas of validation by teachers through these questions:

- *Contextualizing recognition* The question here is, "In what ways does the social context help me understand the lives and schooling experiences of the students I serve?"
- *Pedagogical recognition* A teacher using this approach to pedagogy asks: "In what ways does power influence the learning and relational environment of the classroom?"
- *Transformative recognition* is a constant process where questions are forged about the purpose of recognition and education. Teachers must question: "In what ways do all aspects of the educational endeavor live up to principles of justice, transformation, and freedom?"

Student voice and authentic relationships: TCS and the great shift to a sustainable society

Oddly, the success of IPS and charters can depend on following the research; yet, when it comes to policy, there is no high quality peer-reviewed research supporting school uniforms. Now, there is lots of anecdotal evidence, but no consistent peer-reviewed research showing that when a student wears some sort of standardized "outfit" their attendance and grades go up, and behavior improves. So, the question is what's really behind the IPS and charter policy?

Perhaps it's because various urban legends say school uniforms benefit the bottom line for districts and charters--influencing test scores and, dropout and grad rates of mainly urban districts with a majority of under-served students of all colors.

Requiring students to wear uniforms in fact can behaviorally, socially, and politically cleanse a district or charter of those students and families most likely to following America's rebellious spirit of those who are nonconformist, and/or who are more likely to question authority.

A partnership with youth, not a one-way coercive top-down mandatory uniform policy reflects this enlightened and forward-looking global perspective put forward in "[School Uniforms: A 20th century response to 21st century challenges: Why mandatory school uniforms won't improve IPS and student voice will.](#)" TCS will follow the guidelines in "School Uniforms" which argue that in the long run mandated school uniforms are detrimental.

Compulsory school uniforms reflect the dominator, not the partnership model of global human sustainability. This is why the current Indianapolis Public Schools dress code is well-meaning, nonetheless misguided—otherwise, each and every district in the country would have dress codes mandating uniforms: [https://myips.org/students-families/uniforms/.](https://myips.org/students-families/uniforms/)

David Korten's, *The Great Turning: From Empire to Earth Community*, names the essential adventure of our time. Its powerful framework helps educators understand the critical choices we must make as we turn from an industrial growth society to a life-sustaining civilization.

All societies are patterned on either a dominator model—in which human hierarchies are ultimately backed by force or threat of force—or a partnership model, with variations.

Student voice and authentic relationships are examples of a traditional public school district that enables a great shift needed to sustain our society. This is the great shift:

- from competition to cooperation;
- from domination to democracy;
- from growth to sustainability; and,
- from assimilation to self-actualization.

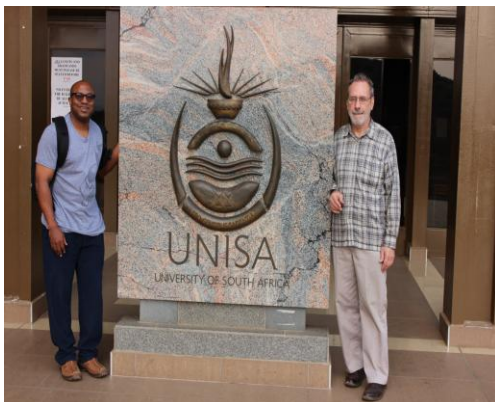
John Harris Loflin
johnharrisloflin@yahoo.com
Indianapolis, IN USA

Director
Education and Youth Issues
Black & Latino Policy Institute

© May 20, 2022 B&LPI

Resources

<http://vorcreatex.com/wp-content/uploads/2021/05/Resources-John-H.-Loflin-02.24.21-3rd-Annual-Indiana-Whole-Child-Summit.pdf>



The above photo shows Jose Manuel Evans, president of the Black & Latino Policy Institute, and John Harris Loflin, the institute's director of education and youth issues, standing at the entrance to the University of South Africa. John has presented on 6 continents on issues of alternative, democratic, and urban education. Here is the link to [The "Super 6" Urban Education Fundamentals](#), a presentation he was asked to give during the First Annual South African International Conference on Education sponsored by the African Academic Research Forum (AARF) in Pretoria, SA, September 23, 2014.