

The Public Policy  
and Civil Society

S E R I E S

# DOES EDUCATIONAL PLURALISM BUILD CIVIL SOCIETY?

A CASE STUDY OF INDIANAPOLIS, 2001-2019

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The R Street Institute's Public Policy and Civil Society Series is a collection of case studies that demonstrate how policy can be used to energize non-governmental bodies. Each report will spotlight how government leaders turned to a diverse array of individuals, community-based organizations, nonprofits and/or local businesses to solve a social challenge, which differs from the traditional approach of creating a new centralized initiative run by a government bureaucracy. In total, these studies show how a variety of policy tools—including reduced regulations, new enabling language, tax credits and competitive grant programs—can be used to activate non-governmental bodies, which create an array of solutions tailored to local conditions. We would like to thank the Walton Family Foundation for its support of this series.

# FOREWORD

In a series of policy moves over the course of a decade, the state of Indiana significantly expanded the role of non-governmental bodies in the provision of K-12 education in Indianapolis. In this case study, Dr. Ashley Berner explores how these pluralism-friendly school-choice policies engaged with civil society. Though the causal effects are difficult to confirm, Berner finds that these policies might have improved student attainment, encouraged parental engagement in civic activity, fostered the growth of nonprofits in the city, inspired city leaders to serve on civic boards and led businesses to engage more fully in schools. In total, Berner's report helps us see that when government hands power to civil society, a wide-ranging set of remarkable social benefits can result.

— Andy Smarick



# INTRODUCTION

Political theorists agree that democracy requires a differentiation of roles between the individual, the state and civil society. In this paper, “individual” refers to an independent and morally responsible human actor<sup>1</sup> and the abstract “state” indicates the realm of governmental power. The notion of “civil society” as its own domain developed in the eighteenth century,<sup>2</sup> and indicates the cluster of voluntary activities in which free citizens engage, such as the synagogue, the church, community food banks, philanthropies that support tutoring and AIDS research, and local softball leagues. Writing in the 1830s, Alexis de Tocqueville considered the voluntary sector to be both a hallmark of American democracy and a crucial, protective buffer against both the isolated individual and the totalizing state.<sup>3</sup>

Many democratic school systems reside within civil society rather than exclusively with the state. To name a few: the Netherlands funds 36 different kinds of schools on equal footing;<sup>4</sup> Hong Kong’s government funds public education, but the voluntary

<sup>1</sup> This is a general term that is not intended to diminish those circumstances in which particular individuals, for mental or cognitive reasons, are deemed not to be morally responsible for their behavior.

<sup>2</sup> See, e.g., Boris deWiel, “A Conceptual History of Civil Society: From Greek Beginnings to the End of Marx,” *Past Imperfect* 6 (1997), pp. 3–42.

<sup>3</sup> See, e.g., Alexis de Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*, ed. J.P. Mayer, tr. George Lawrence (Harper Collins, 1988), pp. 506, 507 and 510.

<sup>4</sup> See, e.g., Charles Glenn, *Contrasting Models of State and School: A Comparative Historical Study of Parental Choice and State Control*, 1st ed. (Continuum, 2011).

sector delivers it;<sup>5</sup> in Alberta, Canada, numerous non-governmental entities provide education, including Inuit, Jewish and secular schools.<sup>6</sup> Note that in each case, the government holds such schools accountable for academic results; educational pluralism is not libertarian. It is the democratic norm.<sup>7</sup> By definition, such models bolster the voluntary sector by funding it—and trusting it—to deliver public education.

The United States used to be educationally plural but chose a uniform delivery model in the late nineteenth century, wherein the school district became the sole carrier of public education until the 1990s.<sup>8</sup> In other words, America—unlike most other liberal democratic nations—decided around the Progressive Era that every geographic area should have one government provider of public education instead of many non-governmental providers. In the last three decades, however, many United States school systems have become more plural through laws that enable more educational options. As a result, charter schools, education tax credits, vouchers and education savings accounts have changed the landscape.<sup>9</sup>

The replacement of the traditional, uniform-delivery district with alternative schools—whether charter or private—is not an unqualified gain; research on school closure suggests that the loss of an anchor institution such as a neighborhood school (or a Catholic school) is often accompanied by a grieving period, and sometimes with academic learning loss—except when students transfer to higher-performing schools in the process.

Nevertheless, a strong body of research shows that attending schools with distinctive missions and rigorous academic programs generates positive academic and, critically, civic outcomes for students. But, what specific impact does expanded access to such schools have upon the local voluntary sector? That is, how does educational pluralism affect not only students' success, but their community's wellbeing? By studying one of the most educationally plural cities in the country, Indianapolis, we find the effect upon civic life can be positive.

<sup>5</sup> See, e.g., Mona Mourshed et al., *How the World's Most Improved School Systems Keep Getting Better* (McKinsey & Company, 2010).

<sup>6</sup> Amy von Heyking, "Alberta, Canada: How Curriculum and Assessments Work in a Plural School System," Johns Hopkins Institute for Education Policy, June 2019.

<sup>7</sup> For more details on educational pluralism, see Ashley Berner, *Pluralism and American Public Education: No One Way to School* (Palgrave MacMillan, 2017); Ashley Berner, "The Case for a Pluralist Education System in America," Manhattan Institute, July 3, 2019.; Ashley Berner, "Pluralism in American School Systems," *Johns Hopkins Institute for Education Policy Brief*, January 2018.

<sup>8</sup> See, e.g., Charles Leslie Glenn, *The Myth of the Common School* (University of Massachusetts Press, 1988); Philip Hamburger, *Separation of Church and State* (Harvard University Press, 2002).

<sup>9</sup> For a round-up of research on positive and negative outcomes of school closures, drawing in particular upon the work of the Research Alliance for New York City Schools and the Chicago Consortium on School Research, see Ashley Berner, "When Schools Close: Lessons from Two Urban Districts," Johns Hopkins Institute for Education Policy, March 2019. On the negative impact of Catholic-school closure, see Margaret F. Brinig and Nicole Stelle Garnett, *Lost Classroom, Lost Community: Catholic Schools' Importance in Urban America* (University of Chicago Press, 2016).



# EDUCATIONAL PLURALISM IN INDIANAPOLIS: AN OVERVIEW

Indianapolis represents one of the country's most pluralistic school systems. In its 2015 report, "America's Best (and Worst) Cities for School Choice," The Thomas B. Fordham Institute measured the choice-positive conditions in thirty U.S. cities ("selected for their size and geographic diversity"), according to three indices: political support, policy environment, and quantity and quality.<sup>10</sup> Indianapolis placed fourth on the list, and was "the only city that ranks in the top ten in all three areas."<sup>11</sup>

<sup>10</sup> Priscilla Wohlstetter et al., "America's Best (and Worst) Cities for School Choice," Thomas B. Fordham Institute, Dec. 9, 2015, p. iv.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid., p. 17.



## ENABLING CONDITIONS

The policy context at both the state and local level make pluralism possible. The state legislature legalized charter schools in 2001, tuition tax credits in 2009 and a voucher program in 2011.<sup>12</sup> These programs currently serve approximately 39,000, 9,800 and 36,000 students statewide, respectively.<sup>13</sup> In Indianapolis, this translates to approximately 26,000 students in district schools, 5,000 in district-sponsored Innovation Schools and almost 20,000 in charter schools.<sup>14</sup> In 2018, approximately 3,750 Indianapolis students used tax-credit or voucher scholarships to attend private schools.<sup>15</sup>

Several other factors, unique to Indiana, render the landscape still more amenable to pluralism. First, well before the school-choice legislation, the state required private schools to participate in annual state assessments and to be given a letter grade by the state as a condition of state accreditation, itself a gateway to student participation in the state's athletic leagues. This created a foundation upon which to build public accountability in return for public funding of independent schools. Currently, private schools that receive state funds under these various choice programs face accountability that is not dissimilar to district schools; voucher schools must administer the I-Step state assessment and receive letter grades of A-F.<sup>16</sup>

<sup>12</sup> IC 20-24, Art. 24, Charter Schools; IC 6-3-222, Ch. 2, Deduction; unreimbursed education expenditures; IC 20-51-4, Ch. 4, Choice Scholarship.

<sup>13</sup> See, e.g., "School Choice in America," EdChoice, April 9, 2019.; "Measuring up to the Model: A Ranking of State Public Charter Laws," National Alliance for Public Charter Schools, January 2019.

<sup>14</sup> See, e.g., "Innovation Network Schools," Indianapolis Public Schools, 2019.; Office of Education Innovation, "Mayor-Sponsored Charters," City of Indianapolis, 2019. Indeed, "competition" for students has become so acute in Indianapolis that the charter board rejected two new applications in May 2019. See Dylan Peers McCoy, "Amid Enrollment Concerns, State Charter Board Rejects Two Indianapolis Schools," Chalkbeat, May 14, 2019.

<sup>15</sup> Office of School Finance, "Choice Scholarship Program Annual Report: Participation and Payment Data," Indiana Dept. of Education, February 2019.

<sup>16</sup> Dale Chu and Ben Scafidi, "Indiana's Property Tax, Choice, and Accountability Reforms: Their Consequences for Funding and Student Achievement," Johns Hopkins Institute for Education Policy, December 2019.

Another distinguishing factor: under the leadership of Governor Mitch Daniels (governor from 2005 to 2013), the legislature passed substantial tax legislation that made schools less reliant upon local property values. The new law placed responsibility for local district-school funding with the state. An unanticipated result of the property-tax legislation was to make inter-district transfers (students enrolling in schools outside of their home districts) much easier. As Dale Chu and Benjamin Scafidi wrote in a 2019 white paper:

*The reforms made inter-district school transfers easier. It had been the case that parents who wanted to enroll their children in schools outside their districts, were charged transfer tuition. Once the state assumed 100 percent of the General Fund contribution, even many low-income students could enroll outside their neighborhoods and districts because the tuition bill dramatically dropped as the district share of funding decreased.*<sup>17</sup>

At the local level, Indianapolis has experienced consistent bipartisan leadership from educational innovators in government, business and the philanthropic sector. Mayor Bart Peterson, a Democrat, supported the first charter legislation—as did his successor, Mayor Greg Ballard, a Republican.<sup>18</sup> State law allows the Mayor of Indianapolis to serve as a charter authorizer, and most of Indianapolis’s charter students are enrolled in mayor-authorized schools.<sup>19</sup>

According to 2016-17 data, the academic performance of Indianapolis’s charter schools is strong, adding the equivalent of 77 days more growth in reading and 100 more days in math to student scores than matched peers in Indianapolis Public Schools (IPS).<sup>20</sup> State-wide performance for voucher students has been lackluster (in ELA) to negative (in math) on state test scores in the first few years post-transfer,<sup>21</sup> which some choice advocates attribute to regulations that made high-quality

<sup>17</sup> Ibid.

<sup>18</sup> See an account of multi-agency bi-partisanship in the early 2000s under Mayor Bart Peterson’s leadership in David Osborne, “An Educational Revolution in Indianapolis,” *Progressive Policy Institute*, December 2016, p. 4. See also Ashley Berner and Katherine Klosek, “How Can City Leaders Expand Access to High-Quality Schools? A Conversation with David Harris and John Elcesser,” Nov. 28, 2017.

<sup>19</sup> Osborne, p. 4.

<sup>20</sup> See, e.g., “City Study: Indianapolis,” Center for Research on Education Outcomes, 2019.; Beth Hawkins, “Stanford’s CREDO Releases First Academic Study of Indianapolis’s Innovation Schools, Finds Strong Growth,” *The 74*, Jan. 17, 2019.; and “Urban Charter School Study: Report on 41 Regions,” Center for Research on Education Outcomes, 2015.

<sup>21</sup> R. Joseph Waddington and Mark Berends, “Impact of the Indiana Choice Scholarship Program: Achievement Effects for Students in Upper Elementary and Middle School,” *Journal of Policy Analysis and Management* 37:4 (2018), pp. 783–808.

private schools less willing to participate.<sup>22</sup> Some observers note that the program's accountability structure exerts enough of a positive effect upon participating private schools that low-quality options must improve or close.<sup>23</sup>

Indianapolis Public Schools—the traditional district—is also becoming more entrepreneurial. It currently offers 18 magnet programs in two dozen schools, including International Baccalaureate, Spanish immersion, Montessori, visual arts, STEM-focused, and career and technical pathways.<sup>24</sup> Under the leadership of former Superintendent Lewis Ferebee, the district also pioneered Innovation Network Schools (discussed in more detail below). Dr. Aleesia Johnson, the first director of IPS's Innovation Network Schools, is now the district superintendent.

But, what has been the effect of this educational innovation upon the civic infrastructure of the city?

<sup>22</sup> See, e.g., Yujie Sude et al., “Supplying Choice: An Analysis of School Participation Decisions in Voucher Programs in Washington, DC, Indiana, and Louisiana,” *Journal of School Choice* 12:1 (2018), pp. 1–26.

<sup>23</sup> Dylan Peers McCoy, “How Indiana Holds Private Schools Accountable,” *The Atlantic*, May 12, 2017.

<sup>24</sup> “Academic Options Flyer,” Indianapolis Public Schools, 2019.



# IMPACT OF CIVIL SOCIETY

Research suggests that “schools of choice” (whether religious, secular or pedagogically distinctive) often exercise an outsized, positive effect upon graduates’ civic knowledge, civic skills, civil tolerance and habit of volunteering. This line of research is extensive, robust and international.<sup>25</sup> One recent study also found that many private schools in the United States exert a long-term, positive influence upon alumni giving and volunteering.<sup>26</sup> Another found that attendance at a specific, high-performing charter network, Democracy Prep, boosted graduates’ voter participation.<sup>27</sup> Based upon this, we might believe, with some confidence, that educational pluralism benefits civil society *in the long run*, through the graduates of schools with distinctive cultures.<sup>28</sup>

<sup>25</sup> See, e.g., James S Coleman et al., *High School Achievement: Public, Catholic, and Private Schools Compared* (Basic Books, 1982); Anthony S. Bryk et al., *Catholic Schools and the Common Good* (Harvard University Press, 1993); David Campbell, “The Civic Side of School Choice: An Empirical Analysis of Civic Education in Public and Private Schools,” *Brigham Young University Law Review* 2 (2008), pp. 487–524. Pennings, “Cardus Education Survey,” Cardus, 2011.; Ray Pennings, “Cardus Education Survey,” Cardus, 2014.; Patrick J. Wolf, “Civics Exam: Schools of Choice Boost Civic Values,” *Education Next* 7:3 (2007), pp. 67–72; David E. Campbell, “The Civic Implications of Canada’s Education System,” in *Educating Citizens*, ed. Patrick Wolf et al. (Brookings Institute, 2004), pp. 186–220; Charles Glenn, “*What the United States Can Learn from Other Countries*,” in *What Americans Can Learn from School Choice in Other Countries*, ed. James Tooley and David Salisbury (Cato Institute, 2005), pp. 79–90.

<sup>26</sup> David Sikkink and Jonathan Schwartz, “The Lasting Impact of High School on Giving and Volunteering in the U.S.” Notre Dame University, February 2017.

<sup>27</sup> See, e.g., Brian P. Gill et al., “A Life Lesson In Civics: How Democracy Prep Charter Schools Boost Student Voting,” *Education Next* 19:3 (Summer 2019).

<sup>28</sup> It cannot be overstated that pluralism requires accountability for academic quality. This is the hallmark of high-performing systems.

With respect to the impact of educational pluralism upon civil society *in the present term and upon adults* rather than students, the scholarship is fairly new terrain, with suggestive rather than causal evidence.<sup>29</sup> We do know, however, that around the world, parents who are empowered to choose their children's schools become more engaged in the process. For example, in some countries (such as England), parents engage in creating new schools to meet contemporary needs.<sup>30</sup> In the United States, parent activism on behalf of school choice can flip elections, as some analysts say happened in Florida's 2018 gubernatorial race.<sup>31</sup> One (causal) study, conducted by David Sikkink at Notre Dame, even found a positive impact of enrolling one's child in Catholic school upon parents' participation in (non-school) voluntary activities. Sikkink attributes this new engagement to the social-capital building experiences of joining an intentional community.<sup>32</sup> Another promising correlation is found in Sarah Reckhow's social network analysis *Follow the Money* (2013), which found an increase in the number of educational nonprofits that correlated to education reform in general (not educational pluralism in particular) in Los Angeles and New York.<sup>33</sup>

In Indianapolis, one must rely upon public data, websites, news articles and personal interviews to assess the impact of educational pluralism upon civic participation. In so doing, we find that educational pluralism has created new opportunities for Indianapolis's citizens to engage in the public square; that the mosaic of schools was inspired and is sustained by overlapping networks of civil actors; and that the resulting ecosystem is both generative of new initiatives and also highly responsive to neighborhood-centered needs. Because of the mutually reinforcing nature of these activities, the sections below are artificial; they serve merely to provide modest organization to the panoply of civic engagement inspired by a more inclusive, divested educational structure in the city.

<sup>29</sup> Indeed, it is difficult to consider how a meaningful, causal study—or even a strong correlational one—might be designed, given the number of variables involved. Very few reforms occur in a vacuum.

<sup>30</sup> Peter Wilby, "James Tooley: A Champion of Low-Cost Schools or a Dangerous Man?", *The Guardian*, Nov. 12, 2013.

<sup>31</sup> William Mattox, "'School Choice Moms' Tipped the Governor's Florida Race," *Wall Street Journal*, Nov. 20, 2018.

<sup>32</sup> See, e.g., David Sikkink, "Public Schooling and Its Discontents: Religious Identities, Schooling Choices for Children, and Civic Participation," *Dissertation Abstracts International, A: The Humanities and Social Sciences* 59:12 (1999).

<sup>33</sup> Sarah Reckhow, *Follow the Money: How Foundation Dollars Change Public School Politics* (Oxford University Press, 2013).

# NEW ORGANIZATIONS

Created explicitly to support the development of high-quality schools in Indianapolis, the most important new organization is The Mind Trust, which was founded in 2006 by a former mayor and his chief deputy and serves as a “quarterback” of sorts for the city’s educational innovations. The organization aims to expand the number of high-performing schools in Indianapolis, to generate community activism, attract talent, build educator pipelines, support innovation and train the next generation of leaders. In other words, it exists to build up the social infrastructure of the city. The chart below captures its impact.<sup>34</sup>

## MEASURING IMPACT

Since 2006, The Mind Trust has worked to transform Indianapolis into one of the best-positioned cities in the country to give every student access to a great school.

24

We’ve supported the launch of 24 schools serving 8,448 students. These include 16 Innovation Network Schools and 8 Independent Charter Schools.

1,400

We’ve supported the placement of over 1,400 educators in Indianapolis through Teach For America and TNTP’s Indianapolis Teaching Fellows.

50

We’ve hosted over 50 community events and countless meetings to elevate important education issues to the Indianapolis community.

\$108M

We’ve raised over \$108 million to support education in Indianapolis.

11

We’ve built an ecosystem of 11 education nonprofits that support schools in Indianapolis.

100

We’ve provided over 100 schools with expert supports.

**FIGURE 1: THE MIND TRUST: IMPACT SINCE 2006**

**Source:** [The Mind Trust](#).

<sup>34</sup> [“About Us: Impact,” The Mind Trust, 2019.](#)



It would be difficult to overstate the influence that The Mind Trust has had on the educational ecosystem in Indianapolis. David Osborne's 2016 report, *Educational Revolution in Indianapolis*, describes its contributions:

*The Mind Trust convinced Teach For America (TFA), The New Teacher Project (now TNTP), and Stand for Children to come to Indianapolis, in part by raising money for them. Since then TFA has brought in more than 500 teachers and 39 school leaders (the latter through its Indianapolis Principal Fellowship); TNTP's Indianapolis Teaching Fellows Program has trained 498 teachers; and Stand for children has worked to educate parents about school reform, and to spearhead fundraising for school board candidates. The Mind Trust has also raised millions of dollars and offered start-up space, grants, and other help to eight nonprofit organizations and 17 new schools, with more to come.*<sup>35</sup>

In 2008, the Mind Trust "recruit[ed] Teach for America and TNTP to Indianapolis and [...] launch[ed] its Education Entrepreneur Fellowship to support the development of new education support nonprofits."<sup>36</sup> Two of many examples of The Mind Trust's effects are its fellowship for school leaders and its community-engagement initiatives.

The Mind Trust's fellowship recruits, trains and supports young leaders to design and operate new charter and innovation schools.<sup>37</sup> Critically, and in keeping with The Mind Trust's commitment to the city, the program is not only about equipping individuals with specific skills, but also about connecting them with the financial and social resources that sustain their efforts. Put simply, it's about community.

For Mariama Carson Shaheed, the founder of the dual-language Global Preparatory School, The Mind Trust's fellowship proved invaluable. As she stood up the dual-language model, she was able to visit campuses across the country—and abroad. Carson recalls: "Going out on my own was a very scary process—I couldn't have done it without The Mind Trust [...] They helped introduce me to my board of directors and to financial support in the community, and helped put options and possibilities in front of me."<sup>38</sup>

<sup>35</sup> Osborne, p. 5.

<sup>36</sup> "Our History," The Mind Trust, 2019.

<sup>37</sup> "Growing Great Schools," The Mind Trust, last accessed March 5, 2020.

<sup>38</sup> Christine Patterson, "Indianapolis Building Stronger Schools through Innovation," Walton Family Foundation, Aug. 2, 2018.



## INNOVATION SCHOOL FELLOWSHIP

The Mind Trust currently supports a variety of school creation pathways, including our Innovation School Fellowship, Charter School Fellowship, and Educator Empowerment Awards. The Innovation School Fellowship was created in 2014 in partnership with Indianapolis Public Schools and the Mayor's Office to launch Innovation Network Schools within Indy's largest district. This initiative has resulted in growing the Innovation Network to over 20 schools that collectively serve more than 9,000 students. Innovation School Fellows have gone on to launch unique educational models that serve Indianapolis students in out-of-the-box ways, including a study abroad high school, experiential industry-based learning, blended learning, and more.

### FIGURE 3: THE MIND TRUST: INNOVATION SCHOOL FELLOWSHIP

**Source:** [The Mind Trust](#).

The Mind Trust has also come to emphasize community engagement as a core activity. Brandon Brown, its CEO since 2018, put it this way:

*Long term, it's important to us that this work is being driven by folks who are most closely impacted by the reforms. There has never been a civil rights movement that hasn't been led by the people most directly affected by the work. While it's hard sometimes to relinquish control, it's actually our moral responsibility to make sure the families we're serving not just have a voice but have the power and the agency to lead this work over the long-term.*<sup>39</sup>

To this end, The Mind Trust partners with other nonprofits (e.g., Indianapolis Public Schools, the United Negro College Fund, 100 Black Men of Indianapolis, La Plaza and the Expectations Project) to conduct educational bus trips for parents and community leaders. It also hosts regular neighborhood conversations that feature the city's nonprofit and educational leaders engaging in topics both practical (Why do children need to play?) and difficult (How does inequity affect the youth of the city?).<sup>40</sup>

<sup>39</sup> Stephanie Wang, "The Mind Trust's New CEO Pledges to Listen to Critics and Look to Parents to Lead Changes," *Chalkbeat*, May 17, 2018.

<sup>40</sup> "Engaging the Community," *The Mind Trust*, last accessed March 5, 2020.

In June 2019, the organization awarded a two-year Entrepreneur Fellowship to a community activist and mother of three children, to design an independent nonprofit that will train families to become advocates for improving educational quality and access. The fellowship includes salary and benefits, meetings with national experts across the country and training to support the successful launch of an organization that will exist to empower families in Indianapolis.<sup>41</sup> Such opportunities for engagement and service simply did not exist before education pluralized.

The Mind Trust's board of directors reads like a "Who's Who" of Indianapolis and includes a national news anchor, local corporate principals and educational innovators,<sup>42</sup> a fact that attracts negative attention from traditionalists but likely contributes to its efficacy.<sup>43</sup> An announcement in August 2019 that a Wabash College Dean and the Senior Vice President of Corporate Affairs at Eli Lilly had joined the board illustrates the "wealth of experience across multiple sectors" that The Mind Trust attracts.<sup>44</sup> Would such individuals have served on a district school board in years past? Possibly. However, the sheer number of Indianapolis's educational initiatives makes civic participation more likely, having multiplied the opportunities for service. For instance, Indianapolis's 24 charter schools have their own governing boards, and charter schools are required to demonstrate community involvement as a precondition of being authorized. Here again, we see that educational pluralism can generate civic activity and new collaborations. Ascend Indiana is an initiative that develops talent to meet the state's workforce needs through analysis, trainings and support, to ensure that "every Indiana employer will have access to the skilled workforce necessary to thrive, and every Indiana citizen will have the opportunity to pursue a meaningful career path."<sup>45</sup> Jason Kloth, its President and CEO, emphasizes the collective nature of innovation in Indianapolis, noting that: "Nothing gets done without collaborations."<sup>46</sup>

<sup>41</sup> The Mind Trust, "The Mind Trust Selects Far Eastside Community Leader to Launch Independent Education Advocacy Nonprofit for Families," Press Release, June 27, 2019.

<sup>42</sup> "Our Board," The Mind Trust, 2019.

<sup>43</sup> Thomas Ultican, "The Mind Trust Attack of Public Education Is Led by Democrats," *Tultican Blog*, Jan. 4, 2018.

<sup>44</sup> The Mind Trust, "Steven Jones and Leigh Ann Pusey to Serve on The Mind Trust Board of Directors," Press Release, Aug. 19, 2019.

<sup>45</sup> "About Us," Ascend Indiana, 2019.

<sup>46</sup> Author interview with Jason Kloth, President and CEO, Ascend Indiana (telephone), Aug. 7, 2019.





## NEW COLLABORATIONS AND INVESTMENTS

It is important to note that Indianapolis has also supported excellence and civic involvement in the district schools. For instance, in 2014, Mayor Greg Ballard and then-IPS Superintendent Lewis Ferebee successfully lobbied the legislature to permit new school models within IPS: Innovation Schools. Innovation Network Schools constitute “a blend of charter partners, restart schools, conversions, or new schools,” and now numbers 20 schools across the city, serving 25 percent of district students.<sup>47</sup> They are district schools with significant autonomy to depart from district regulations and to partner with non-district entities, such as charter management organizations.<sup>48</sup>


The Center on Reinventing Public Education (CRPE) describes such partnerships as a hybrid of charter and district models: schools have more authority over hiring practices (“talent flexibility”) and enrollment policies (“open enrollment,” i.e., not bound by zip code) than district schools, but operate within the district’s authority. Hence, they are less politically contentious. As CRPE’s 2017 report on such partnerships illustrates, in this way, Indianapolis’s model provides more flexibility than those in other cities.<sup>49</sup>

The Innovation Network illustrates the overlapping commitments of the Mayor’s office, the district and prominent nonprofits, and it has led to community leadership in generating schools that reflect community priorities. For example, the Purdue Polytechnic High School literally brings the business community into the school. The school exists to provide a pipeline to post-secondary success for underrepresented minority students, for whom rising graduation rates do not equal workforce participation. The founder, Scott Bess, designed the school in partnership with the STEM-related drivers of Indiana’s economy under IPS’s Innovation Network. Currently, the school’s original campus enrolls 400 freshmen, sophomore and junior students, whose program is both academic and practical. Indiana-based companies design “challenges,” which students solve (often in teams) and present to industry leaders.

<sup>47</sup> Indianapolis Public Schools, “Innovation Network Schools,” *Innovation Semi-Annual Reports*, Feb. 19, 2019.

<sup>48</sup> “Innovation FAQ Flyer,” Indianapolis Public Schools, 2019.

<sup>49</sup> Brian Gill and Christine Campbell, “Partnership Schools: New Governance Models for Creating Quality School Options in Districts,” Center on Reinventing Public Education, October 2017.



The process is collaborative, responsive and seems transformational for students: 55 percent score at the college-ready standard on PSAT assessments, which is above the state norm of 40 percent. The school aims for community impact, as well, by working with and through community centers and neighborhood associations, and including “passion projects” within the community, in which students prototype solutions to problems of food availability, transportation and healthcare access in their immediate environments. For business partners, the six-week or year-long engagements in which employees serve as resource experts to the students offer concrete ways to engage in their communities. According to Bess:

*Almost every business partner says to me, “We’ve always wanted to help in K-12, but we didn’t know how. We were asked to join advisory councils, attend breakfasts, give inputs – but never to engage. Now, we have students as part of our work flow and we are part of the school, not just an adjunct to it.”<sup>50</sup>*

In other words, the structure of educational pluralism is creating space for voluntary activity that is immediate and concrete.

<sup>50</sup> Author interview with Scott Bess, Head of Purdue Polytechnic High School, Indianapolis (telephone), Aug. 15, 2019

## NEW NEIGHBORHOOD AND FAMILY-FOCUSED SCHOOLS

The proliferation of charter and innovation schools has meant more opportunities for parents and community members to provide input and leadership, through serving on charter school boards or designing new neighborhood schools to replace low-performing ones. One example is the Thomas Gregg Neighborhood School, formerly School 15. The school grew from the efforts of the local community center and local churches, and now serves as an anchor institution for the neighborhood. Other neighborhoods are following suit, and some participants view their work as a “neighborhood revitalization plan.”<sup>51</sup>

Another example is the Paramount School network. Founded in 2010, the first school partnered with the neighborhood association and now includes two other branches. Working with the neighborhood takes concrete and specific forms, such as community clean-up days and meetings in local churches. It also brings new resources to bear, such as an innovative relationship with East Side Hospital’s Community Health Network that provides an early-warning indicator of students’ distress by monitoring visits to the school nurse to draw a “direct correlation between the social determinates of health and academic risk,” and to initiate increased academic supports where warranted. While the impact upon the neighborhood cannot be measured, Paramount’s Director, Tommy Reddicks, notes changes such as a decrease in crime, lower drug arrest rates and rising home prices.<sup>52</sup>

A final example is Tindley Accelerated Schools, a charter network that primarily serves African-American students, and is explicit about drawing parents into the daily process. Former CEO Kelli Marshall notes that they are “unapologetic about holding parents accountable to being involved in their child’s education, and when we have the extended day and the mandatory Saturdays, or we’re saying to a parent, ‘I need you to sit in with your child,’ what we’re saying is, ‘I need you along on this journey.’”<sup>53</sup>

Tindley has an open-door policy, in which parents are invited into the school and classrooms every day. Marshall has also been at the center of The Meadows neighborhood’s revitalization, with the higher-quality schools attracting new housing and a new YMCA.<sup>54</sup>

<sup>51</sup> Author interview with Brandon Brown, CEO, The Mind Trust (telephone), Aug. 2, 2019.

<sup>52</sup> Author interview with Tommy Reddicks, Director, Paramount Schools (telephone), Aug. 13, 2019.

<sup>53</sup> Laura Fay, “‘It’s All About the Relationship’: What One Indianapolis School Leader Says She’s Learned About How School Choice Empowers Parents to Engage With Their Schools — and Hold Them Accountable,” *The 74*, Nov. 29, 2018.

<sup>54</sup> See, e.g. *Ibid.*; and Brown interview.



## NEW RESOURCES

Educational pluralism has also brought new resources into the city. For instance, Teach for America's program in Indianapolis is supported by local and national foundations and public entities including Head Start, Eli Lilly and Company, and the Lumina Foundation.<sup>55</sup> The Walton Family Foundation and the John and Laura Arnold Foundation have both supported the educational infrastructure in Indianapolis through their city-wide support strategies.<sup>56</sup> For example, in 2015, Indianapolis signed a Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation-funded compact of collaboration between district and charters.<sup>57</sup> Even more recently, in 2018, Walton provided three years of funding to the district to train principals for leadership.<sup>58</sup> In August 2019, Walton gave \$4.6 million to The Mind Trust to fund—among other things—the newly established Relay Graduate School of Education Teaching Residency, one of the nation's "largest and most diverse educator residency programs."<sup>59</sup> Such partnerships contribute to the longevity of the educational reforms and gesture toward a world without school-sector competition.

Another investment has come through national membership organizations such as Chiefs for Change, which provides resources and support to commissioners and superintendents who seek meaningful change in the structure and content of education, and offers training to up-and-coming leaders in the field, particularly leaders of color. Both former Superintendent Ferebee and his successor Dr. Aleesia Johnson are Chiefs for Change members who can draw upon peer mentorship and best practices from across the country.<sup>60</sup>

<sup>55</sup> "Support Our Work," Teach for America-Indianapolis, 2019.

<sup>56</sup> See, e.g., "2016 Annual Report," Arnold Ventures, 2016.

<sup>57</sup> Gill and Campbell.

<sup>58</sup> Dylan Peers McCoy, "Walton Gives Indianapolis Public Schools \$1.7 Million to Increase Principal Power," Chalkbeat, March 8, 2018.

<sup>59</sup> The Mind Trust, "The Mind Trust Receives \$4.6 Million from the Walton Family Foundation to Support High-Quality Teachers, Leaders, and Schools," Press Release, Aug. 16, 2019.

<sup>60</sup> "Our Members," Chiefs for Change, 2019.

## NEXT-GENERATION LEADERSHIP

The educational nonprofits that respond to educational pluralism, in turn, provide vision for the next generation. Teach for America (TFA) was founded (nationally) in 1989, but it opened offices in Indianapolis only in 2008, following The Mind Trust's invitation and the blossoming of educational options. TFA currently offers a pipeline to nonprofit entrepreneurship,<sup>61</sup> and Corps members who serve in Indianapolis often stay, with a 2016 report noting that 1 in 6 IPS principals is a former TFA corps member.<sup>62</sup> Former TFA-ers lead many of the city's educational nonprofits, from Enroll Indy—a new open enrollment model—to the Mind Trust.<sup>63</sup> A *Chalkbeat* interview with Brandon Brown, appointed CEO of The Mind Trust in Spring 2018, noted that he “came up through the paths that The Mind Trust forged, first through Teach for America in Indianapolis, then by overseeing charter schools for the mayor's office, and most recently working for The Mind Trust as senior vice president of education innovation.”<sup>64</sup>

Another example is Ascend's Jason Kloth, who served as the founding director of TFA-Indianapolis before becoming Deputy Mayor of Indianapolis (2012-15). In a recent initiative, for example, Ascend Indiana began partnering with the state's independent colleges and universities to match young graduates with more than 250 employers.<sup>65</sup>

<sup>61</sup> “Alumni Paths: Nonprofit Careers,” Teach for America, last accessed March 5, 2020.

<sup>62</sup> Al Passarella, “Moving the Needle: Five Cities That Shape the Educational Landscape,” Johns Hopkins Institute for Education Policy, Nov. 7, 2016.

<sup>63</sup> Scott Elliott, “Hannon's Goal: Help Parents Make Choices and Give Schools Useful Data,” *Chalkbeat*, Aug. 13, 2015. This is not unique to Indianapolis; a 2011 study by Harvard researchers found that TFA's alumni have an outsized impact upon educational entrepreneurship. See: Monica Higgins, “Why Does Teach for America Spawn So Many Entrepreneurs?,” *Harvard Business Review*, March 29, 2011.

<sup>64</sup> Wang.

<sup>65</sup> Alex Brown, “‘Strategic Alliance’ Targets Job Connections,” *Inside Indiana Business Journal*, July 24, 2019.



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Attending schools with distinctive missions and rigorous academic programs generates positive academic and, critically, civic outcomes for students.



# CONCLUSION

Educational pluralism—at least, the charter and innovation schools—seems to have had a positive effect upon students’ academic achievement.<sup>66</sup> What has been its effect upon the fabric of Indianapolis? The movement toward pluralism has not been without controversy, and change of any kind brings inevitable loss.<sup>67</sup> But, it is clear that the pluralization of educational options has created new civic opportunities that simply did not exist before 2001. Indianapolis has prioritized a local approach to education reform that has eschewed national charter management organizations in favor of neighborhood leadership; core institutions such as The Mind Trust intentionally orient toward incubating rather than controlling initiatives. And, so far, the result seems to have generated a mutually reinforcing network of institutions that create new voluntary activities—even while honoring old ones.

One striking area of opportunity remains to extend formal collaborations and greater support to the private-school sector, such as can be found in the Boston Educators Collaborative, an initiative of area nonprofits that convenes district, charter and Catholic school leaders. A foundation of trust is certainly present and could be leveraged to good effect. As John Elcesser, Executive Director of the Indiana Non-Public Education Association, explains:

*As we looked at education reform in its broadest sense in Indianapolis, at that table were not only political leaders and educational reformers, but there were charter folks and private school folks all at the same table. Talk about being unique; that’s pretty unique to Indianapolis as I discuss with my colleagues around the country, where there is not that kind of collegiality and cooperation going on between the charter sector and the private sector.* <sup>68</sup>

Indeed, even as Indianapolis’s population has steadily risen since 1990, the city regularly appears on “top ten” lists for desirability, quality of life and cost of living.<sup>69</sup> And, based upon the conditions that enable civic participation from families and leaders alike, we should expect this trend to continue.<sup>70</sup>

<sup>66</sup> “City Study: Indianapolis.”

<sup>67</sup> See, e.g., Matt Barnum and Shaina Cavazos, “Eight Things to Know about Lewis Ferebee, D.C.’s next Schools Chancellor,” *Chalkbeat*, Dec. 3, 2018.; and “When Schools Close: Lessons from Two Urban Districts.”

<sup>68</sup> Berner and Klosek.

<sup>69</sup> “No Mean City - Moving? Put Indianapolis on Your Radar,” *No Mean City*, 2015.

<sup>70</sup> “Indianapolis, Indiana Population 2019,” *World Population Review*, July 11, 2019.

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