Is Your School District Graduating All Students at a High Rate?

By Shawnta S. Barnes – January 19, 2018

Last Friday, January 12, 2018, the Indiana Department of Education <u>released</u> high school graduation rates. I first viewed the graduation rates when Dr. McCormick, Indiana Superintendent of Public Instruction, included a link in her weekly newsletter. Later, I saw the 2017 graduation rates in the *Chalkbeat Indiana* article, "<u>Find your school's 2017 graduation rate</u>." Within the article you can search for the high school in your district and compare the 2017 graduation rate to the 2016 graduation rate. Shortly after this information was released, schools began boasting about their overall graduation rate. As a parent of two black sons, the overall graduation rate is not enough for me. I don't care how well the district is doing as a whole, if children who look like my sons aren't achieving at the same rate.

In 2017, 79,116 students were in the 2017 Indiana cohort count, which means if they met all requirements they could have graduated in 2017. But last year, only 71,371 students graduated from high school, a rate of 87.19% which is a decrease from the 89.10% of students who earned diplomas in 2016. This means 10,486 students did not graduate in our state. Who were those students? The subgroups with the lowest graduation rates were black students, English language learners and special education students and these were the same subgroups with the lowest graduation scores in 2016. What's even more disappointing is the 2017 graduation rate for these groups in the state of Indiana is lower than the 2016 graduation rate.

IDOE 2017 Graduation Rate Data				
Student Demographic	**2016 Graduates**	**2016 Graduation Rate**	**2017 Graduates**	**2017 Graduation Rate**
Black	7,207 out of 9,058	79.57%	7,489 out of 9,616	77.88%
Special Education	988 out of 1,317	75.02%	936 out of 1,541	60.74%
English Language Learner	6,677 out of 9,136	73.08%	6,793 out of 9,472	71.72%

Since I reside in Indianapolis, I was curious to learn how these subgroups fared in the capital of the state.Within Indianapolis, there are 11 different school districts. Included below are the graduation rates for black students, English language learners and special education students in those districts.

IDOE 2017 Graduation Rate Data for Indianapolis School Districts								
	Black			Special Education			English Language Learner		
School District	Cohort Count	Graduates	Grad Rate	Cohort Count	Graduates	Grad Rate	Cohort Count	Graduates	Grad Rate
M S D Decatur Township	53	46	86.79%	56	34	60.71%	16	11	68.75%
Franklin Township Com Sch Corp	33	31	93.94%	82	66	80.49%	***	***	***
M S D Lawrence Township	547	513	93.78%	138	97	70.29%	32	24	75.00%
Perry Township Schools	63	58	92.06%	100	83	83.00%	94	88	93.62%
M S D Pike Township	451	418	92.68%	86	63	73.26%	21	21	100.00%
M S D Warren Township	434	391	90.09%	132	85	64.39%	19	15	78.95%
M S D Washington Township	361	308	85.32%	99	66	66.67%	36	24	66.67%
M S D Wayne Township	391	351	89.77%	124	82	66.13%	59	40	67.80%
Beech Grove City Schools	19	18	94.74%	16	13	81.25%	***	***	***
Indianapolis Public Schools	647	544	84.08%	178	108	60.67%	48	32	66.67%
School Town of Speedway	23	23	100.00%	13	7	53.85%	***	***	***

***Due to federal privacy laws, student performance data may not be displayed for any group of fewer than 10 students

The first Indianapolis school district I am concerned about is Washington Township because that's where my sons attend school. The graduation rate for black students in this district is 85.32%. Black students had the 10th lowest rank out of the 11 districts. What is going to happen to those 53 black children who didn't graduate from Washington Township? Do any of these students live on my street? What could have been done differently to help them? I live on the border between Washington and Pike Township and I looked at their black student scores and they had a graduation rate of 92.68% and 100% of their English language learners graduated. Is there something my district could learn from our neighbors?

Could these graduation rates be worse? Yes, but they could also be much better for these subgroups. I can't be comforted by, "Well it could be worse."

If you are a parent of a black child, a parent of a special needs student or a parent of an English language learner, make sure you look at the data for students who are like your children. We can wait around until graduation to start asking these questions. Ask them now! Don't be afraid to ask your children's principal for the subgroup data. For example, you could ask:

- How many black students are reading on grade level in the elementary school?
- How many English language learners are in honors classes in middle school?
- How many special education students are on track to graduate from high school?

Principals have access to tons of data, so they know the answers to these questions. You just have to be bold enough to ask and be ready to take action if the results are dismal.