

# Northwest High School Community Meeting: Why Do You Want to Bus Us Across Town?

By Shawnta S. Barnes – September 1, 2017



Thursday, August 31 at 5:30 p.m., Indianapolis Public Schools (IPS) held its last meeting at Northwest High School to hear feedback on their recommendations to close Broad Ripple and John Marshall at the end of the year and to convert Arlington High School and Northwest High School into middle schools next school year. Feedback was also shared about IPS' plan to reinvent the four remaining high

schools: Crispus Attucks, George Washington, Shortridge and Arsenal Tech with different career academies on each campus where students would select the high school that best aligns with their post-secondary plans.

Northwest High School, located on the west side of the district, serves a diverse population; the school is majority minority. White students comprise 5.4% of the student population. The school's population is almost 25% English language learners some who are refugees and a little over 20% are special education students. Before comments were given, IPS Board President Mary Ann Sullivan reminded the audience of three points: the board will not take formal action on the recommendations until the September 18 meeting, if the recommendations are approved they would not take place until next school year and no current programs will be eliminated even if the school it is currently housed in is closed.

Below are some of the comments from the meeting which have been shortened and edited for clarity.

**Dountonia Batts, IPS Community Coalition**

*Why are we constantly busing our brown, our black and our poor students? We bused to desegregate and now we are busing to save a couple of dollars, two percent of your overall budget. It just doesn't make sense. Not to mention, as the district consolidates, your expenditures are increasing. Things just don't add up...We are replicating programs for families who are affluent, but were taking away programs from families who aren't.*

**Northwest student**

*I'm a student athlete. When I heard the school is going to be shut down and become a middle school, I was kind of hurt. I have been here since 7th grade...Even though I am graduating this year, what about everyone else? Kids will have to go to a new school. I think this school should stay open as a high school because if you have all high schools in the center of Indianapolis, it will be crowded.*

**Virginia Cantrell, Northwest parent**

*To close Northwest would be a huge disservice to our community and to our children. The administration and teachers have worked hard to gain the trust of students and help kids graduate and achieve their dreams. In 2017, over 80% of the seniors at Northwest graduated. Every senior in the graduating class was accepted to college and over \$2 ½ million of scholarships were received by students. This doesn't happen without caring, loving, hardworking teachers. Why punish the teachers and administrators for doing their jobs well? It's not fair to make children get on buses and go to school away from their teachers who care and are invested in their future sometimes more than their parents are. I get phone calls when my son is having a bad day or when he is not doing his assignments. I think if he you put him in a classroom that is full to capacity, kids are going to slip through the cracks and I won't receive those phone calls. Closing Northwest means that many students won't be able to participate in extracurricular activities; there's not transportation. Even if there are buses, lots of the parents don't have cars. Kids walk to school and walk home after football games, after practices. Their parents don't have cars and won't be able to come watch them play because they won't be able to get there. Late buses often don't get some kids home until after 8-8:30 p.m. Parents won't be involved. IPS will lose students when there are no schools in the community. They will move or go somewhere else; they won't be here anymore. It makes no sense for kids to choose a career path when they are 14. Who knows what they really want to do in 8th grade. This will not have an impact on you who are sitting up there, but closing Northwest will have a huge negative impact on the lives of the students.*

**Andrea Newson, Northwest Class of 2001 and Northwest parent**

*I am here because I love Northwest. I am here because I am a single mother and Northwest is an intricate part of the business that it takes to raise my child. I am here because of the work Michelle Watts does. I'm simply here to ask you to reconsider whatever decisions you have made for Northwest high school. We have lived in this community for over 20 years and Northwest has always been a safe place for myself and my son as well...My son is more successful now in his high school career than he has been and this is only his second year of high school. It is my hope that he can walk across this stage for the graduating class of 2020. Northwest is needed on this side of town. We do not want to bus our children to the other side of town. We don't want to have*

*to figure out transportation. Whatever my son needs throughout the day, I can go to work and not have to worry about his safety. I don't have to worry about if he is being disciplined correctly. I came today on behalf of alumni, on behalf of my son – he doesn't want to go anywhere else next year. For as long as we have Michelle Watts in this building, we know that she is capable leader. We know that she loves our children.*

### **Richard Curry, True Tried Missionary Baptist Church Senior Pastor**

*I'm the senior pastor of True Tried Missionary Baptist Church congregation who serves the families and the students that attend this very school. I am also a 20 year resident. In addition, I have been employed for 26 years with the Indiana Department of Corrections. I am a former superintendent of Marion Superior Juvenile Detention Center and a proud graduate of Broad Ripple High School. Because of my close ties with the community and different lenses, it's hard not to be sentimental in my thoughts as we consider closing multiple high schools in the IPS district specifically the mission change of the Northwest High School. Both of my children graduated from this school and my grandson currently attends here. Instead of being sentimental, I would like to take a sensible approach here to explain why we should not close or alter the mission of this school. We have been down this road before with little return on our investment to the community. I think it would be safe to say the current plight of IPS has its ties and foundations in the mass movement of inner city children to the township schools beginning around 1983. My of us in the room can remember the impact of what we call the soul train. It was the nickname of the buses that transported our kids to Perry Meridian, Decatur Central, and other township schools that began suck the life out of IPS especially in the area of sports. While education is of utter importance, sports play a major role in the educational process and provide a way for inner city children to escape a life of poverty. What busing accomplished was taking student athletes from inner city schools and it put township schools on the map. Ben Davis would not have as much success, if it were not for the closing of Washington. I can safely say that Warren Central and Lawrence North have benefited from the mission changes of Arlington and John Marshall. Why is this important? It's important because it created a divide and conquer system that does not allow our inner city kids to win.*

## **Latashiana Garrett, Northwest Junior**

*Hi, I'm a junior at Northwest Community High School and I have been here since my sophomore year. To me, this is more than a school. This is memories. This is staying up late studying and group chats with friends. This is sports; I'm an athlete. I just don't think it's right and then you are transferring hundreds of kids all to schools downtown. What's the real reason? I don't get it. I'm just a kid; I'm just a teenager, but this is a lot to me...I just don't think it's fair. They are going to be sent to a school where they're are not welcome because you're changing boundaries. I don't think you should do it. Let's keep Northwest.*

## **IPS Alum**

*You assembled an incorrect task force and asked the wrong questions. The questions that should have been asked, the ones that are the most pressing is why has IPS been unable to attract students and provide them with a quality education? There is no reason to get rid of these wonderful public institutions If the problem is low enrollment, why are children drowning on waiting lists? When people go in to enroll their children, they are turned away. I don't understand, if you are having an enrollment problem, how are you not enrolling students who come to you.*

## **David, Northwest Class of 67**

*I was part of the first four year graduating class of Northwest. Let's change the school calendar. You could start the last two weeks of August or the day after Labor Day and get your 180 days in. Have six weeks of summer schools like I did in the sixties. People will come back to IPS and you'll get more enrollment. Dr. White's plan didn't work too well and now he's out of the picture. A lot of people left the IPS district because they didn't want their kids going here. They want to be with their kids during the summer. The state fair is in town, a lot of activities and that's one way of bringing everyone back to IPS. Then you won't have to consolidate schools.*

## **Zhy'yon Hoover, Northwest student since 8th grade**

*What you hear on the outside doesn't reflect what's going on in the inside. I want to stay here. I want to graduate here. This is love. You see the love from these teachers. Yes, as a high school student, you're going to be like I don't want to go to that class; I don't want to see this teacher, but we are students. Don't take everything that is on the news. This place has history. My grandmother graduated from here. My mother graduated from here and I want to be the next graduate. I can't do that if I leave here; I don't want to leave here. All of my family have been made here. My memories have been made here. This is my high school.*

### **Northwest student**

*Closing down Northwest – I'm so upset, sad and frustrated that ya'll trying to move my home. I've been here for three years and hands down this is the most caring high school I have ever been to. I don't think you understand how much this school is improving. Year after year, we are becoming better, stronger and closing down this school – you are not going to be able to see the full potential. Family is the word for this school.*

### **Leslie Jackson, Northwest parent**

*This school is very important to the community. To me, this is a better high school for the west side. I understand that change is needed. I'm not against it, but we have to be smart. This is about our future. The people that we are working to help fight for and educate are going to be the decision makers. Twenty, forty years later, these guys will be making decisions and we have to get them educated. Moving them around and disrupting them is harmful. I want you to rethink, reconsider because initially you said this school was going to stay and this was going to be the high school. What happened?*

### **Melvin, Broad Ripple parent**

*First and foremost, I am extremely concerned because looking at the board of you guys, you look like this is just one more meeting. I have my daughter coming home every day asking, "What am I going to do? What am I going to do? I got these people deciding what school I'm going to go to and if I wanted to go to that school, I would have chosen that school from the very*

*beginning.” IPS’ low and failing standards is the reason we are losing so many kids who are going to township schools. My daughter came and told me at Broad Ripple, the principal left, the vice principal left, the dean left and three of her teachers have left. These guys are jumping ship like a boat on fire. Now, I have second hand teachers teaching my children. You give me three minutes, but my children need four years. It is a travesty and an injustice, not only to the city, but also to our demographic. You guys are talking about closing historically strong schools. These schools have such a long tradition. These neighborhood schools are vital because due to our demographics, if you watch the news, we have 16, 17 year olds kids killing each other. An educated kid is not going to pick up a gun and go shoot someone. I’m not only losing my school, but I’m losing my kids to the streets because they don’t have a viable option and you’re cutting their options in half.*

Passionate comments were shared at this last meeting. As a child who was bused out of IPS to Lawrence Township, I understand the concerns of parents who would like a school close to their home. I understand their concerns about the neighborhood diminishing because families might move because they want to live in a neighborhood where the school is close. It happened in my childhood neighborhood where my parents still reside. Don’t get me wrong, I love Lawrence Township and received an excellent education, but the cost was my neighborhood being broken apart as people and businesses moved away. I don’t regret I attended Lawrence North instead of Arlington. Some students from my neighborhood who weren’t bused out and attended Arlington went on to college as I did, but they had to retake courses, wasting money and time, because they did not obtain the necessary skills from their IPS high school. Some finished on the five or six year plan and some dropped out, so I also understand the district’s concerns about taking action to reinvent and improve the high schools that remain. Soon, we will know if the recommended plan will be approved.