



A Final Ask: Please Acknowledge the Indianapolis Teachers Society

By Educator Barnes – July 26, 2019

Fierce student advocate and IPS resident La Meca Perkins-Knight has had enough. She resigned from the district where she has served for 13 years, an action she didn't anticipate taking but believes is a necessary step to move her work forward.

While in IPS, she served as a vice president of the Indianapolis Education Association. This union was rocked by a scandal when an investigation was launched into the finances. Earlier this month, former IEA president Rhondalyn Cornett pleaded guilty to embezzling over \$100,000 from the union. Cornett faces up to 20 years in prison for this crime. Perkins-Knight was disappointed with how IEA chose to move forward. “They should have cleaned house. What’s worse is Rhondalyn continued to receive a salary paid for through IEA after the investigation was launched.”

Her frustration led her to create the Indianapolis Teachers Society with Lora Elliott, Cary Patterson, and a fourth teacher (who requested not to be named in this article) to bring new union representation to Indianapolis Public Schools. It has been an uphill battle. Her team started with listening tours to hear from teachers. Since these meetings were public, IEA leadership and the Indiana State Teachers Association (ISTA) representatives were in attendance to check out the potential competition. Not only were members’ union dues misused, but many teachers had concerns about IEA continued contractual fulfillment of paying Cornett as a teacher on leave. Perkins-Knight further elaborated, “The benefits are not good and neither is the teacher contract. Teachers, like me, who live in the district were hit with tax increases because of the referendum and the union negotiated salary did not provide enough compensation to keep up with the cost of living.”

Unfortunately, due to a paperwork error, Indianapolis Teachers Society had to withdraw its petition to challenge IEA as the union for IPS teachers. For Perkins-Knight, this is a temporary roadblock. Her team intends to move forward which is why she had to walk away from IPS as an educator. Some of Perkins-Knight’s opponents believe she is union buster by creating another union to challenge IEA. Perkins-Knight said:

Being called a union buster hurts. After all my financial contributions to IEA and ISTA, the volunteer hours I put into IEA building membership, sitting on ISTA boards, and last trying all of 2017 to convince IEA leadership to turn over a budget without talking to the public. I felt used, disrespected, and unappreciated for my 13 years of service.

Based on these concerns, Knight-Perkins sent an email to former IEA president Rhondalyn Cornett, the second vice-president, and treasurer to express concerns about the IEA budget not being shared and to request her name be removed from the financial accounts.

September 15, 2017

Good evening executive board,

Per our conversation this evening on August 22, 2017, I spoke with Teresa Meredith President of ISTA about two concerning issues. First Issue the MOU: the high school teacher \$5,000 stipend. I voiced my concern that this MOU was never approved by the executive committee, even though it had a four day deliberation period. After reading the bylaws this was allowed.

Second Issue: Lack of Financial Documentation: We spoke about my repeated attempts to receive financial reporting and the lack of a financial Budget produced by the President or Treasurer for IEA. I voiced my concern that I was not comfortable signing checks without being provided a budget to review. Per our conversation, I'm requesting a fiscal budget and for my name to be removed from the IEA account. I will not be signing any more fiscal checks for IEA.

Most appreciative,

LaMeca Perkins-Knight
1st Vice President of IEA

At the IPS school board meeting on July 25, she spoke to inform the public she is transitioning from an IPS teacher to a part-time employee of the Indianapolis Teachers Society. She also asked the school board to recognize her group's existence and allow her group access to union-only committees. Time will tell which union will come out on top in IPS.