



You Don't Need Mind Trust Money to Make a Difference in Education

By Educator Barnes – October 15, 2021

The 8 Black Hands Podcast filmed a live show in the historic Madam Walker Legacy Center theater on Tuesday, October 5, 2021. The day before the show, the Indy K12 crew was able to have dinner with three 8 Black Hands members. Days after the show, I was still processing the conversation we had at dinner and the conversation the fellas had on the Walker stage.



Indy K12 writer Andrew Pillow, Brightbeam CEO Christopher Stewart, Indy K12 writer David McGuire, and Indy K12 Editor-in-Chief Shawnta Barnes

The show was titled “State of Emergency” due to the dismal 2021 ILEARN data. For the 2021 ILEARN assessment, the Associated Press reported “just 8% of Black students in Indiana passed both the English and math sections, compared with 46.5% of Asian students, 34.7% of white students, and 15.6% Hispanic students.”

I wondered if some people attended the live show for entertainment only. The 8 Black Hands are entertaining, but their main goal is getting people to take action. I am not convinced that everyone who attended in person, streamed the live show, or listened to the show later was moved to action.

The number one excuse I kept hearing for a lack of action was The Mind Trust, the organization responsible for bringing the 8 Black

Hands to Indy.

“They are privatizing education.”

“They only focus on IPS. What about the other 10 districts?”

“The schools they support aren’t all showing improvements even with Mind Trust money.”

To all that, I say, so what? What does the Mind Trust’s actions or inactions, have to do with our actions?

During the show, Chris Stewart, CEO of Brightbeam said, “No one escapes this work, this heat that I’m about to give you right now. Illiterate children in any city is a failure of everybody.”

Instead of assessing our own failures, it is easier to blame the Mind Trust or any other person or organization than to look at ourselves and determine what we could do better.

If you follow my social media, you know that I have both praised and criticized the Mind Trust. When I was in my school administration program, I was recommended to apply to the Mind Trust school innovation fellowship. Because I was recommended, I was able to skip the first part of the process. After a couple of rounds, I was eliminated. At my debrief, I was told I was eliminated because I didn't have administrator experience. I was told that my school model was liked but they wanted someone who had been an administrator.

That was the worse feedback I had ever received because it was known before I applied that I was **completing** my admin program, didn't have an admin license yet, and had not had an admin role. I know it is possible in the charter world to lead without a license, which I find problematic, but I never wanted to take a job that I wasn't properly licensed for. I was told to try again after I had admin experience.

In March 2017, the same month I was eliminated, a Chalkbeat [article](#) stated, "Over the last three years, four of the 12 school leaders the Mind Trust supported through its innovation fellowship – which provides fellows with salaries and support as they develop schools – abandoned their plans before opening schools." I applied because someone thought that I could do it, but I couldn't lose sleep over not getting picked. Getting picked did not equal success, and every experience adds to my journey and teaches me something.

I have talked to other educators, who I believe are way more talented than me, who had successful admin experience who had also applied and were not successful. Like me, they didn't crawl into a ball and leave education. They got to work making it happen. Sharif El-Mekki, CEO of the [Center for Black Educator Development](#), said "There are a lot Black kids that come to school whole. They leave broken." Criticism has its place; however, being angry or bitter at anyone or an organization is time that is wasted from ensuring Black kids are not leaving school broken.

Dr. Charles Cole III, [CEO of Energy Convertors](#), said "Do I feel like we love Black kids? Love is an action ... it has to be reflected in the results." If our only action is calling out other people, then we are not helping Black Hoosier students collectively be more proficient in English and math than 8%. Money helps but not having money doesn't absolve us from trying to make a difference.

I am the descendant of enslaved Africans. My great grandparents could not read, but all of their children could. You do not have to have all the resources or all the knowledge to make a difference. In spite of their circumstances, my great grandparents had high expectations for their children and made sure those expectations were accomplished.

You just have to care and be willing to try no matter the consequences. Dr. Cole III said “If you are not willing to be fired for what is right for these kids, then you probably should have never been hired.” He also said, “Y’all got to come together. Y’all got the power, man. We met with a powerful group of people. ‘We ain’t got enough people’ and We said, ‘This is enough people. ***This is enough people.***” I am enough. You are enough. We are enough to make a difference.

El-Mekki said “What evidence will they (students) be able to look back and say, yes, me and my community, we were cared for, we were loved, we were protected, and we were safe academically, intellectually, culturally, socially, emotionally, spiritually?” When I die, I want the children in Indiana who had the opportunity to cross paths with me to be better because they did. I want them to be successful. I want them to be able to tell a good story. I don’t want a legacy of failure rooted in excuses or blame.

Join me in rolling up your sleeves and getting to work. Even if you don’t have a grant, a fellowship, Mind Trust money, or two pennies to rub together, you can still make an impact and help students achieve academically.