



IPS East Side Students Failed Yet Again

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School turnaround work is the hardest work any educator can participate in whether they are an administrator, a teacher, or part of the support staff. The Neighborhood Charter Network (NCN) believed it was up to the task of turning around schools. Its motto is "all children can and will learn." Unfortunately, children didn't learn.

NCN has two schools in its charter portfolio, Enlace Academy on the west side, and Kindezi Academy on the east side. NCN was given the opportunity to restart Joyce Kilmer School #69 as an IPS innovation charter school called Kindezi Academy. Years prior to the takeover, student outcomes were dismal. The school was rated an F for years, and the school takeover failed to move the needle on academic outcomes. Only 3.8% of students passed both the English and math portions of ILEARN in 2021.

Families were recently informed that NCN is closing Kindezi June 2022, and IPS plans to recommend the building be closed which leaves families scrambling to find another school for the 2022-2023 school year. The building is in dire condition, and renovations are needed. On top of not learning academically, students had to attend school in a subpar physical learning environment.

Although IPS gives priority to families in the school lottery system if their school closes, unfortunately the announcement was made after the first lottery round for families to apply for their children to attend another school in the IPS school portfolio. Not only were students failed by not receiving an education that allowed them to learn, but their families also were not informed in enough time to find a better school. This means they may find themselves attending a school that other families did not want their kids to attend. Kindezi has poorly served a little over 400 students. When will anyone serve them well and make them a priority? When will these children finally have someone who will put them first and not subject them to leftovers or a subpar education?

IPS and the school operators it contracts should ensure this does not happen again. School closures should be announced before lotteries are held especially if the school is closing due to poor academic outcomes. Those students should be the first in line for a better school and education.

Additionally, a few NCN employees (who asked to remain anonymous due to fear of consequences from their employer) said there had been conversations the summer before this school year began about Kindezi and Enlace being consolidated into one school with Enlace Academy being the campus where the consolidation would take place. It is not clear why families were blindsided with the news at the last minute.

Additionally, NCN has not had a permanent leader at Enlace Academy for the majority of the school year. Enlace staff was informed on Zoom that Leah Kuruzar, former principal, would no longer be the leader of the school a few months into the school year. As long as Enlace does

not close, it is possible that Shanae Staples, principal of Kindezi Academy, will return to Enlace and take on the principal role. Although this is possible, this might not be the best move for students whose families still choose to have their children served by the network since Staples' leadership did not result in positive academic outcomes for the students at Kindezi Academy.

As reported by [Chalkbeat Indiana](#), Kevin Kubacki, NCN executive director, said Kindezi created a safe space and strong relationships even though the majority of students showed little evidence of learning.

One way students and staff built a strong culture was through the Kindezi Creed:

I am somebody.

I was somebody when I came.

I'll be a better somebody when I leave.

I am powerful and I am strong.

I DESERVE the education that I get here.

I have things to do, people to impress, and places to go.

I am a Kindezi leader.

Although Kindezi families are in the process of figuring out where their children will attend school next school year, Candice Hope Washington, Kindezi Academy K-1 Dean, has high hopes for the students and wants them to know she believes they will have a great future.

Stand firm that these words are forever true to the person that you are. For the past six years, I have been a witness to the immeasurable growth every scholar in our building has made. Don't let anyone tell you otherwise. Your presence, your passion, and your eagerness to love, lead, and learn makes our school feel like a home. It will forever be ours and will live in our hearts. As I recall the countless memories of listening to our babies recite the creed, I hear the voices of future educators, doctors, entrepreneurs, lawyers, political figures,

athletes, scientists, and creative artists lift up the room. Always remember that when you entered through our doors, you were already destined for greatness. I only championed and rooted for you. I will always be your biggest advocate and support. Love is an action, and I truly hope that scholars could not only feel, but see, the amount of love each staff member in our building has poured into each of you. I have been proud to work alongside all the scholars in our building.

We have made strides but the work doesn't stop here. As our creed states "I was somebody when I came; I'll be a better somebody when I leave." In this moment, though we are saddened by the closing of this chapter, just know that you have been equipped with powerful tools that you get to continue to use. Continue to walk in your leadership. Show up as your genuine, authentic selves. Use your words and actions to advocate for yourself and for others. The city of Indianapolis will know each of your names because you will continue to be the change makers that this city needs. I appreciate the families that entrusted us with their most treasured gift; YOU.

Love you now and forever. I am proud of all my Kindezi leaders. – Ms. Candice Hope Washington

Having a safe place to attend school with a strong culture does not matter much if students are sent into the world with minimal academic skills to survive. Seventy-five percent of Kindezi Academy students are Black. Although Rep. Bob Behning stated that he believed Black students do not have "respect for learning," and that's why they have poor academic outcomes, this is not true. Black students can and will learn if they have a decent school building, adequate resources, appropriately trained teachers, and strong leadership.