



Many Questions Bubble Up In Response to the IPS Rebuilding Stronger Proposal

September 22, 2022 by Educator Barnes

Last week, IPS released its [Rebuilding Stronger Proposal](#) to the community. WFYI reporter Eric Weddle shared highlights of the plan in the article "[IPS would close 7 schools under expansive restructure proposal.](#)" I encourage readers to read his thorough article.

Weddle shared that the proposal includes:

- Closing seven elementary school buildings next summer, including three on the city's northeast side.
- Reconfiguring grades at nearly three dozen schools to offer preschool or kindergarten up to fifth grade, and end the K-8 school design for district-run schools.
- Establish 6-8 grade middle schools to offer International Baccalaureate, STEM, arts or other programs, including two new schools opening at buildings formerly home to the closed Broad Ripple and Thomas Carr Howe high schools.
- Construct two new elementary school buildings and improve 14 school facilities.
- Add one Montessori and two Center For Inquiry programs at current neighborhood schools, in addition to expanding seats for these and other programs at existing schools.
- Purdue Polytechnic North charter school would permanently remain in Broad Ripple High School building.

The part of the proposal that seems to upset some community members is the closing of school buildings. In September 2017, the IPS Board of School Commissioners approved the closing of some school buildings as high schools, shrinking the number of IPS traditional public high schools to four: Arsenal Tech, Crispus Attucks, George Washington, and Shortridge. I was a district employee who was a multi-classroom leader (high school literacy coach and English teacher) at Crispus Attucks at the time of that announcement. In addition to the high school consolidation, all teachers employed at all high schools (not just the ones that closed) had to reapply for their jobs. After that school year, I returned to another district where I used to work. I explained the reasoning behind my exit in two Indy K12 pieces (we were called Indy Ed when those pieces were written).

As a former IPS employee and former member of Dr. Johnson's superintendent advisory council, I have thought much about this proposal and its potential impact on the community.

First, I believe the proposal will be approved when put to a vote. It might undergo some updates before approval, but it will probably be approved.

Next, I think there is no way to close a school building and have all families on board. School buildings are part of the community's history, so closing them will always be painful for some.

Consolidating some schools into one school leaves some questions about what will happen with some innovation schools. Paul Miller School 114 will merge with Frederick Douglass

School 19. Currently, the innovation school SUPER School is located in School 19. The proposal notes that School 19 will no longer be an innovation school. Additionally, Center for Inquiry (CFI) School 2 will close and merge with Washington Irving School 14, and School 14 will become a CFI school. Currently, URBAN ACT Academy (UAA) is housed in School 14.

What happens with SUPER School and URBAN ACT Academy? In full disclosure, I attended School 14 as well as my father and some of his siblings. I also currently have an education consulting contract with UAA, where I am supporting a couple of grade levels.

Do these innovation schools move into another IPS building, or do they completely disappear? If the school moves to another location, will that impact the families who have children currently enrolled? Will another location make the schools out of reach for families who want to continue at those innovation schools?

Laura Henderson, who is an IPS resident who lives within the boundaries of School 14 which houses UAA, has concerns about the plan. On Wednesday, September 21, she attended an IPS Rebuilding Stronger meeting at School 14.

Four 7th grade students from URBAN ACT attended as well. They had a lot of concerns about their school being closed, including feeling like the other school didn't want them because they are Black ... if the intention is equity in education, then it seems a basic starting point is that no child is put in a situation to feel compromised, othered, less than disposable. Unfortunately, we're just remaking the same history in another way and the same children, families, and educators who have been pushed out time and again in the history of this country and IPS are put in situations to feel that way again, regardless of what is intended.

It is not clear all the steps that will occur for schools to merge, but it is clear that much attention should be on that area.

Next, I believe the grade bands need to be standardized across the district, and I support that part of the proposal. In the ten other school districts in Indianapolis, there are not multiple grade configuration models. For example, in Wayne Township, all middle schools are grades 7 & 8 only, and in Washington Township, all middle schools are grades 6-8, unlike IPS, where the middle school could be in a K-8 setting.

It makes it hard for teachers to collaborate effectively across the district when some middle school teachers are in a building with elementary teachers and some middle school teachers are in stand-alone middle schools. I do dislike that the innovation charter schools will not have

to match, which means there could still be an IPS innovation school where the grade level bands do not match the district's proposed bands. I do not believe that asking these schools to match would interfere with the autonomy they have with their unique school models.

Also, middle school students in the IPS K-8 setting are not getting access to all of the same programming and curriculum that students would typically have in a stand-alone middle school, such as a robust athletic program and the option to take high school classes such as Algebra I.

Last, I am glad that two new schools will be built and many will undergo renovations. As a former employee and a current IUPUI ENL student teacher coach, I have been in several IPS buildings, and I can share that the physical building quality is not the same from building to building. This part of the proposal is necessary because all students deserve to be in safe, updated, and aesthetically pleasing school buildings.

I believe the public would better receive this proposal if they believed this would be the last time school buildings closed or programming gets switched around. For example, if there are current 4th grade URBAN ACT Academy students who have attended school at this location and had been there since kindergarten, they have experienced the school being a traditional public school, an innovation school, and if these students remain at the next school year, they will experience it as a CFI school in 5th grade. Even though many parents champion the CFI model, it is not clear the impact it will have on students who have already been through two previous models in elementary school.

The district plans to have meetings to obtain community feedback. I strongly suggest that impacted IPS families attend these meetings to share what they like about the proposal and what they wish was changed.