



We Don't Need a Classical Private School

December 20, 2022 by Educator Barnes

I live on the northwest side of Indianapolis in Washington Township, and I live close to the Fitness Farm. It is a place I go to walk and hang out with neighbors. My neighborhood is diverse. We lived in our first home for over a decade. One of our next door neighbors was an Iranian family. On the other side was a white family. Behind us, at one point, was a Latino family, and across the street was a Black family. It was common for us to hear a variety of

music and languages and for the air to be filled with the aroma of ethnic cuisine. At the end of 2019, we moved four streets over into our current home. Our move was so small that our children did not have to switch schools. The street we live on now is just as diverse.



We feel like we are part of the community and part of our community is the Fit Farm. It is located at 2525 W. 44th street. Neighbors can buy produce, see the farm animals, and engage in outdoor activities on the property. The property known as Fitness Farm was Joan Servaas, daughter of Beurt and Cory SerVaas, childhood home. According to the Fit Farm Facebook page, upon her mother's death in 2020, the home on the property was gifted to Children's Better Health Institute (CBHI), a division of Saturday Evening Post Society (SEPS), a 501(c)(3) nonprofit charitable organization. The fields part of the property had already been gifted to CBHI.

Now, there are plans to rezone the home to turn it into a classical school. Many of my neighbors told me about the school information meeting that happened in November, but I simply wasn't available to attend. Today at 7 p.m. there is another meeting about part of the property being rezoned for the school, but they have stated they would not answer any

curriculum questions. Instead, people have been directed to email information@TCSIndy.org with other questions.

As a Black educator who enjoys visiting the Fit Farm with my husband and sons, I'm disappointed. Who asked for a classical private school? I'm not necessarily against having a school on the property, but I am against having a school like this. Washington Township did not have to participate in the desegregation busing in Indy because it was diverse. I love the diversity of my neighborhood, and this school set up in this way would be a blight in our neighborhood.

My family has grown food for generations, and we currently garden. When Big Green (formerly known as The Kitchen Community) supported school gardens across Indianapolis, I helped with gardens at three schools. It was not just about gardening; it was also about connecting kids to nature and learning in nature.

If I had the opportunity to wave a wand at the property to make a school there, I would center outdoor spaces, agriculture, gardening, cooking, and learning from nature and learning in nature.

I was an English teacher for years, and I have never been against the classics. Poe is my dude, and Dickens and Will Shakes aren't half bad either; however, you don't have to ditch them to bring in more diverse stories. Let me give y'all one example from my home. My sons love Greek mythology. I even had an after-school Greek mythology club at a previous school. My sons have read many Greek myths, and it probably doesn't hurt that Mom stored her classroom set of Greek myths in one of her kids' bedrooms when she shifted into being a school administrator. They read the Percy Jackson series, and then I recommended the Tristan Strong series, which focuses on African American folklore (John Henry, Brer Rabbit, etc.) and African gods like Anansi, Mami Wata, etc.) My sons didn't have to choose.

Right now, the divisiveness, when it comes to curriculum, tells us we have to choose. We don't!

I don't want to send in an email to get answers; I would rather have a conversation to learn more, and our neighborhood deserves more than a one-and-done public meeting about what the school will be about.

The Hillsdale curriculum featured on the website is problematic. When people started questioning the curriculum on Facebook, Joan Servaas responded in the comments and said, "it is not affiliated with or controlled by Hillsdale. They have a license to use their curriculum. They are using University of Chicago curriculums, too." I can't accept the daughter's comments that they are only licensing it but will use the University of Chicago Great Books curriculum. As a former school administrator, I'm telling all of you that you don't license materials for kicks.

I am pro-school choice. However, I continue to be disappointed by the choices available in Indy, whether that is private school or charter. Bottom line: Washington Township is not perfect, but I don't see anything better out there for my sons. This classical curriculum is not what I would want for my Black boys. My sons are currently in honors English and math, and I appreciate the well-rounded approach their English teacher has taken with the curriculum. Why would I want my children or anyone else's children to have less? Also, don't we have enough private schools on the NW side of Indy anyways?