



Background and Context

The educational landscape in Indianapolis has undergone a significant change during the past five years. Indianapolis Public Schools (IPS) has seen a progressive shift in the makeup of its Board of School Commissioners with the resulting hiring of a new superintendent, Dr. Lewis D. Ferebee in September of 2013. In addition, consistent educational leadership from the Mayor has continued the expansion of charter schools in the city.

Indianapolis has a history of adversarial relations between IPS, the state's largest district serving over 30,000 students, and charter school operators largely concentrated (92% of Mayor-sponsored charter schools) within the boundaries of IPS; Mayor-sponsored charter schools serve approximately 17,000 students. Indicating a perceived threat from charter schools, previous IPS leadership resisted the competition for student enrollment and elected not to pursue opportunities for collaboration and engagement.ⁱ In 2011, Indianapolis hosted representatives from the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation for a meeting with district and charter school leaders to explore the possibility of establishing a District-Charter Compact. At that time, a decision was made that such a concept should not be implemented in Indianapolis due to the lack of willingness by officials to collaborate in meaningful ways.

The relationship between IPS and charter school operators in Indianapolis has improved dramatically. The City of Indianapolis is now poised to be a national leader in implementing innovative cross-sector collaborations to best serve students. With new school board leadership and a fresh approach by a new administration, the IPS relationship with the charter sector and State Board of Education has experienced a dramatic shiftⁱⁱ; relations are now characterized by mutual respect and burgeoning collaboration.ⁱⁱⁱ

The IPS administration has demonstrated a spirit of partnership and a novel approach by entering lease agreements with charter operators to best utilize district-owned facilities; lobbying for legislation designed to provide unprecedented collaboration between IPS and charter schools and the creation of Innovation Network Schools; and entering agreements with five Innovation Network School partners for the 2015-16 school year, all of whom are charter operators. IPS continues to be committed to collaboration with charter schools to provide educational opportunities to all students residing in the district, regardless of sector.

Progress to date, and the strategic direction of district/charter collaboration in Indianapolis can best be understood by considering three pillars of partnership:

- 1) Restructuring to organize the district as a service provider for schools
- 2) Planning for implementation of a Unified Enrollment (UE) system
- 3) Development of a Common School Performance Framework (CSPF) and financial analysis of cross-sector resource use through equity reports

District As Service Provider

The IPS transition to a district as service provider model is evident through consideration of organizational structure, projects in process, and partnership agreements with charter and innovation network schools.

Reorganization of IPS central services eliminated a top-heavy management structure, reducing central office salaries over \$1.2 million annually to create a leaner administration. Principals' interactions with the district now have a single channel of support and accountability in the form of an Academic Improvement Officer (AIO). AIOs help principals navigate central services divisions to get the support their schools need while monitoring school performance and holding principals accountable for effective leadership and student outcomes. Innovation

Network Schools are the most dramatic manifestation of this model, with the IPS Innovation Officer developing pathways and structures for fully autonomous school management. Innovation Network Schools' have full budgetary and staffing control while operational services and performance accountability are defined by a contract with the district.

An additional example of the transition to a service provider approach is the district's technology refresh project using a per-pupil funding rate to provide principals a technology budget. Principals were then empowered to select from a wide range of supported products and providers to spend technology funds best suited to school needs. This initial project provided valuable insight into the operational structures needed to realize the benefits of scale while providing maximum flexibility for school-based resource allocation decisions. IPS plans to scale this approach district-wide and to provide charter and Innovation School partners access to IPS central services offerings.

Although not as comprehensive as the technology refresh, IPS has also demonstrated a service-provider approach through charter and innovation network school partnerships. Five such partnerships exist with charter and innovation operators contracting with IPS for key operational services including:

- facilities leases
- food-service
- transportation
- custodial and facilities maintenance and management (e.g. carpentry, masonry, landscaping, snow-removal, electrical, HVAC, and technology infrastructure)

Importantly, contracted services extend beyond operational elements with IPS and charter/innovation partners entering contracts for essential educational and wrap-around services that the district is best positioned to provide including:

- special education
- school nursing
- social work
- media and library management
- school police
- career and technical education courses
- alternative education programming

The district's commitment to transitioning to the role of service provider is further demonstrated by the IPS Board of School Commissioners Core Commitments and Beliefs which state, in part "[t]he IPS Central Administration exists solely to support the work of teachers and schools, and must be a high-performing organization. All district functions are aligned to support and empower a system of autonomous schools that are held accountable to clear performance metrics."

Unified Enrollment

Coordinated efforts are already underway and significant philanthropic funding has been granted for unified enrollment (UE) planning in Indianapolis; a steering committee of district and charter leadership meets bi-weekly to drive development of a unified enrollment proposal. A UE system would provide parents with a single place to explore, research, apply to, and enroll in schools across sectors. This project will also create an invaluable and unprecedented source of data to inform annual school staffing plans and longer-term school closure, creation, expansion and intervention decision-making.

Project objectives include:

- development of an information and enrollment portal for IPS and Mayor sponsored charter schools, creating a one-stop shop for families making school choices;
- inclusion of more robust school quality measures including family, student and staff feedback on school performance;
- analysis of school quality metrics and supply/demand data to inform long-range school planning across sectors.

As the unified enrollment system continues to be developed, key questions remain. The governance, funding and leadership of a UE system must still be determined as planning proceeds. While district staff members and several charter representatives are guiding the work, IPS Board approval and more comprehensive charter participation are essential to successful implementation.

Common School Performance Framework

Twenty IPS schools and twenty Mayor-sponsored charter schools are engaged in planning to assess school performance in novel and profoundly informative ways. While the IPS administration and charter partners believe a focus on measured student achievement is paramount, we also assert that the success of our schools is defined by more than state letter grades and standardized test scores. We also believe that families deserve important school climate and culture information that is not captured by current accountability assessments.

To that end, IPS has partnered with the Mayor's Office, philanthropists, and local advocacy groups to pilot a research-based tool to capture quantitative and qualitative data on schools. This tool will communicate school success in a way that meaningfully informs school improvement and provides family-friendly information. IPS and charter school operators are excited about the potential this initiative holds to capture previously unmeasured instances of school excellence, to transparently identify areas for improvement, and to provide holistic intra-district and cross-sector comparisons of school quality. A common school performance framework naturally aligns with a unified enrollment system. The framework results will allow apples-to-apples comparisons of school performance across sectors, enriching the information available to families and improving the ease of enrollment in chosen schools.

Conclusion

With the establishment of productive relationships between IPS and Indianapolis charter schools, the prospects for successfully implementing the district as service provider, unified enrollment and common school performance framework are both promising and potentially transformative. Indianapolis is thus poised to witness a very significant change in the quality of schools and educational experiences for all Indianapolis students.

This work also requires the financial resources necessary to maximize the possibilities for success. It is for this reason that the Indianapolis educational community of district and charter leaders are submitting this proposal to the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation for the provision of District-Charter Compact implementation funding in the amount of \$100,000. The district and charter leaders listed below pledge their support to work together to continue to deepen partnership in service to Indianapolis students and families. Charter compact funds will provide critical support to capitalize on the initiatives that are currently being developed as described above and to explore additional opportunities to collaborate for the benefit of our students.

The newly elected Indianapolis mayor, the state legislature, and the governor are supportive of, and encouraged by, the current level of collaboration between district and charter schools in Indianapolis. A District-

Charter Compact will serve as additional validation of the collaborative efforts to improve educational opportunities for Indianapolis students.

Taking our cue from the lessons learned by other cities that predate this Indianapolis proposal, the District-Charter Compact implementation funding would be administered by a project manager hired by the district. The project manager may elect to enlist the services of a third-party liaison with strong relationships in the district and charter sector to help coordinate enhanced collaboration.

District-Charter Compact implementation next steps include defining clear success measures, routine reports to the district and charter boards and development of a work plan defining project goals and leadership responsibilities. Communication between the parties of the compact as well as with identified stakeholders and the general public will be critically important. Regular convenings of the participating district and charter representatives will continue and awarded funding will contribute critical administrative support of coordination structures. Compact leaders will also seek to expand participation by additional entities in compact activities once the momentum for successful collaborative practices has been established.

Indianapolis has proven to be a community willing to support education innovation and is now leading the way in novel district/charter partnerships. As parties to this compact, we commit to continuing to build on the strong foundation of collaboration already in place in Indianapolis. We believe that working together is our best opportunity to enhance the educational opportunities available to our children.

ⁱ Shella, J. (2011, October 24). Dr. White Accuses Charter Schools of Breaking the Law | Blogs | Indianapolis | Indiana – WISHTV.com. Retrieved April 2, 2015, from <http://blogs.wishtv.com/2011/10/24/dr-white-accuses-charter-schools-of-breaking-the-law/>

ⁱⁱ Elliott, S. (2014, January 21). Supporting two charter school bills, IPS signals a new direction (updated). Retrieved April 2, 2015, from http://in.chalkbeat.org/2014/01/22/supporting-two-charter-school-bills-ips-signals-a-new-direction/#disqus_thread

ⁱⁱⁱ Columbo, Hayleigh. (2015, March 4) IPS Chooses Struggling School 103 as Phalen 'innovation' School. Retrieved November 25, 2015, from <http://in.chalkbeat.org/2015/03/04/ips-chooses-struggling-school-103-as-phalen-innovation-school/#.VIY1uHarRhF>

Proposed 1-year budget:

| Function/Item | Cost |
|---|------------------|
| Full time project manager salary | \$75,000 |
| District-charter liaison consulting fees | \$10,000 |
| Meeting and travel expenses | \$10,000 |
| Printing, materials, supplies, and technology | \$5,000 |
| <i>Total budgeted amount</i> | <i>\$100,000</i> |

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