



INDIANAPOLIS PUBLIC SCHOOLS

From the Bottom Up



Five years ago, Indianapolis Public Schools (IPS) was at the bottom. Enrollment was declining. The district received an F on the state's accountability report card and was put on academic probation. Less than a third of students (32.1 percent) passed on their first try the end-of-course assessments in English 10 and Algebra I that were required to graduate high school. But in just a few years, the district has begun to climb out of the bottom rankings in the state.

In 2014–15, 45 percent of students passed the English 10 and Algebra I assessments. Almost 40 percent of students are now taking AP exams, giving them a chance to get a jumpstart on college credit. And last year, 93 percent of high school seniors graduated with a concrete plan to pursue one of what the district calls “the three Es:” enroll in a two- or four-year college, enlist in the military or get a job earning a living wage.

How is the district moving from the bottom up? IPS is letting go of its traditional top-down approach to push more decision-making to local schools—a bottom-up approach that empowers principals and teachers. And teacher leaders have been helping shape landmark new collective bargaining agreements and strengthening implementation of the district's new teacher evaluation, feedback and support system.

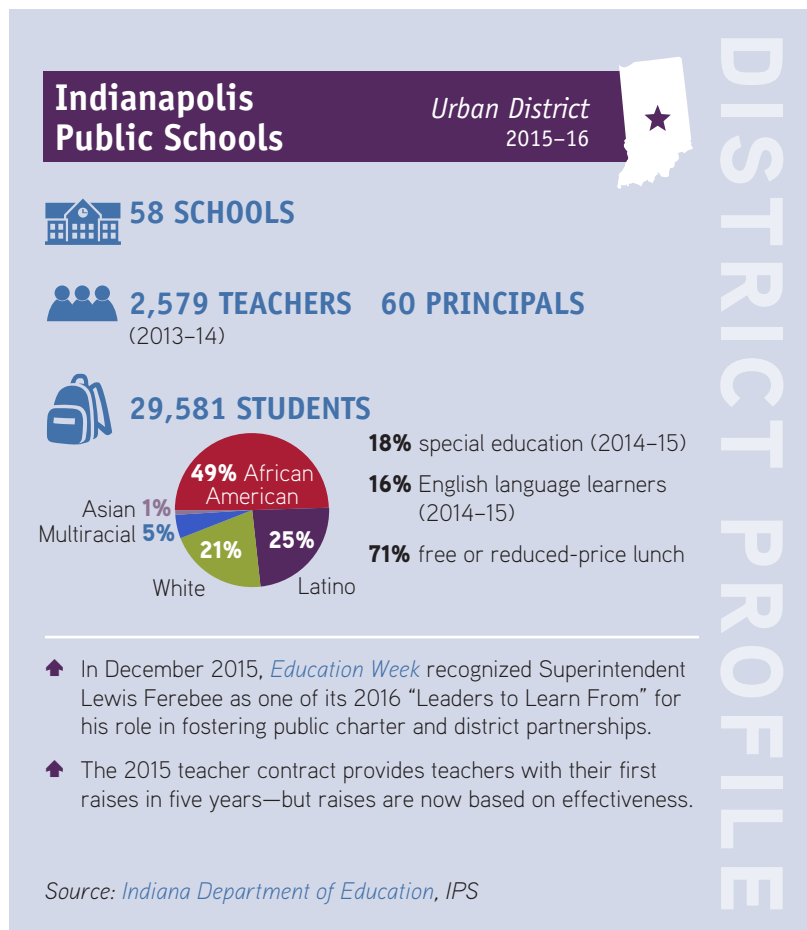
“A traditional educator who years ago wrote his doctoral dissertation on the limitations of school choice, [Superintendent Lewis] Ferebee is now leveraging partnerships with high-performing charters in Indianapolis to boost academic outcomes for students in some of the lowest-performing schools, reverse a decades-long trend of enrollment loss, and revive the city's entire public school system.”

Education Week

Focusing on talent and autonomy

For the past few years, a central priority for IPS has been to create structures and policies to attract, nurture and retain top talent. Indeed, school autonomy and accountability is the first of four cornerstones in the district's new [strategic plan](#).

For example, Innovation Network Schools, which are managed by outside partners, have complete autonomy. To become part of the Innovation Network, a school must apply to the school board and can be a public charter school housed in a district facility, a conversion initiated by the school, a restart initiated by the district or a new school. Unlike most charter schools, however, Network



Schools' enrollment and academic performance count as part of the district's overall accountability. Charter schools now enroll about 30 percent of the city's students. Indianapolis is just one of the several urban districts that are using this kind of “portfolio” approach to providing quality school options for every child, regardless of school type.

To date, five schools are part of the Innovation Network and off to an encouraging start. One of the first five schools is a restart, operated by a charter partner—Phelan Leadership Academy. “In the restart school, we had planned on 300 students, but 380 ended up enrolling. We had to add kindergarten, third grade, and fifth grade classes,” says Aleesia Johnson, the district's innovation officer.

"Parents who live in the area had been sending their kids to other schools but now are coming back to their neighborhood boundary school."

Aleesia Johnson, Innovation Officer,
Indianapolis Public Schools

Even traditional public schools are given more flexibility. Principals in all schools receive Title I funding directly and have significant control over hiring. And in 2016–17, principals in four to six IPS schools will pilot IPS' new Autonomous School initiative, giving them control over instruction, how time is allocated in the instructional day, content and funding for professional development, and student-based budgeting allocations.



Modernizing the teacher contract

Major reforms to the teacher contract are helping make such autonomy possible. In 2010, the district and local union agreed to change "Last In, First Out" (or LIFO, for short) seniority-retention policies in which the newest teachers always were laid off first, regardless of performance. Now, factors such as teacher effectiveness, attendance and leadership roles also count.

The 2015 [contract](#) continues this progress. It provides teachers with their first raise in five years, but raises are no longer automatic. Only those teachers rated "effective" or "highly effective" are eligible for a raise. The new compensation system is based not on years of experience or advanced degrees but instead on "effectiveness steps" where teachers earn raises based on demonstrated performance and earn additional dollars for teacher leadership roles.



"The new IPS teacher contract is another example of our district listening to the voices of classroom educators and making sure they are valued for the hard work they do each day," says Mary Ann Sullivan, IPS Board of School Commissioners. "The contract creates pathways for current IPS teachers to expand their leadership in our schools and allocates our biggest expenditure of resources, teacher salaries, more strategically than ever before."

Another feature of the new contract: By far, new and mid-career teachers received the largest percent pay increases. Effective and highly effective teachers get an average 2.9 percent bump, but new teachers could make 12 percent more and mid-career teachers could earn 5–10 percent more next year. That decision was partly based on research by Teach Plus-Indianapolis showing that those teachers most likely to leave the district were teachers with 6–11 years of experience; many were bolting to one of the dozen neighboring districts where they could make an additional \$12,000. Teachers can now reach the top of the salary scale in 15 years; it used to take 24 years.

An intensive community organizing campaign involving 200 teachers complemented the research and helped create the conditions for the final agreement. "Teachers pushed the union and district to spend money where it was most needed, in the early years," says Caitlin Hannon, a Mind Trust fellow and previously a member of the IPS School Board and leader of the local Teach Plus chapter. "Teachers created the space for the contract to happen," adds Patrick McAlister, director of policy at Teach Plus-Indianapolis.

Extra pay for highly effective and effective teachers only



Source Indianapolis Public Schools

"The Indianapolis Education Association (IEA) appreciates that the district recognizes the importance of teacher compensation. Our teachers feel like the new contract is a great start to show that our profession and daily work for students is valued," says Rhondalyn Cornett, president of IEA.

While the new evaluation and support system is part of the contract, implementation has been challenging. A major barrier: Mid-course, the state changed its policy on using the Common Core State Standards and the aligned Partnership for Assessment of Readiness for College and Careers test. While the standards remain largely unchanged after a well-publicized [revision](#), switching to a McGraw-Hill test has been more problematic. As of mid-December, Indiana school districts still had not received scores from the [spring 2015 tests](#), which not only inhibits public reporting and school accountability but also means that IPS cannot yet identify the effective and highly effective teachers who are eligible for raises.



Teacher leadership is growing

The campaign for the teacher contract is but one example of the expanding role of teacher leaders in the city—both in IPS and public charter schools. A formal role for teacher leaders was bargained into the current contract and is budgeted between \$1.5 million and \$2 million a year. “The only way that autonomy will work is if you build your teacher leadership pipeline. School leaders can’t do it alone, they need hybrid roles,” says McAlister.

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Patrick McAlister, Director of Policy,
Teach Plus-Indianapolis

About 70 teacher fellows now have received policy training from the [Indianapolis chapter of Teach Plus](#), the first expansion site for the national nonprofit that has empowered 22,000 experienced teachers to take leadership over key policy and practice issues. [TNTP](#)—which offers a rigorous alternative certification program that recruits and trains talented career changers and recent college graduates to be outstanding teachers in high-need schools across the country—also has a major presence in the city, having trained 440 fellows to date. And [Teach For America](#) currently has 170 teachers working in the city’s schools.



Promoting an Opportunity Culture

In addition to the funding for teacher leaders in the current contract, schools will be able to use the [Opportunity Culture](#) model developed by North Carolina-based Public Impact to design ways for the best teachers to assume additional teaching and coaching roles. For six schools participating in the first year, the design process is happening now, with a plan to hire and compensate new teacher leadership roles in 2016–17.

Participating teachers may supervise other teachers, thus taking responsibility for additional students—sometimes reaching up to 100 students a day rather than the standard 25. Teachers with the additional responsibilities will receive extra pay of up to \$18,000 per year—but they are held accountable for the results of not only their students, but also the students of the teachers they lead. Key to the program is that any associated costs are paid for out of a school’s existing budget by giving principals flexibility in how they fill existing teaching vacancies. It is the first such Opportunity Culture program in the country embedded into a collective bargaining agreement.

“The Opportunity Culture provides us the flexibility to put effective teachers in the right places and provide teachers support,” says Paul Wirth, principal of Wendell Phillips School 63. “This can only lead to improved student achievement.”

Opportunity Culture expands reach of excellent teachers



Source: [Opportunity Culture](#)

Results

In just three years, the district has made encouraging progress in student achievement and on other measures:

- ▲ The percentage of students in grades 3–8 who pass both the English language arts and math state tests increased 7 percentage points since 2010–11, rising to 51.6 percent.
- ▲ The percentage of students passing end-of-course exams on their first try increased dramatically, rising from 32.1 percent in 2010–11 to 45.0 percent in 2014–15.
- ▲ AP exam passing rates almost doubled, from 3.8 percent in 2010–11 to 6.8 percent in 2013–14, even as the percent of graduates taking an AP exam has increased 11 percentage points.
- ▲ Graduation rates are up since 2007.
- ▲ The number of schools designated by the state as failing has decreased by 40 percent since 2012.
- ▲ After three years, in 2013–14 the district rid itself of its F rating on the state accountability report.

Conclusion

When Superintendent Ferebee took office in September 2013, the state rated more than half of the district's schools as D or F. Turning them around remains a top priority. IPS focused initially on the 11 schools that had received a failing grade and over time had shown no growth. Disaggregating data, replacing principals, offering more targeted professional development and increasing access to AP courses already have produced results. Yet while the number of failing schools has decreased, the state still rates 34 of the district's 68 schools as D or F. "We have a long way to go," admits Ferebee.

Much of the recent work has focused on triage and putting in place the elements needed for the district's new initiatives. Implementing the new teacher and support system is a high priority, along with strengthening operations and improving family and community engagement. Business leaders, among others in the community, are hopeful. "We are very encouraged by the direction of the district and what IPS progress means for our city," says Michael Huber, president and CEO of the Indianapolis Chamber of Commerce.

"This work has allowed us to transform the conversation in Indiana from 'takeover and state intervention' to 'transformation,'" says Superintendent Ferebee. "It has allowed us to own transformation."

Since 2010–11...



% passing English
language arts and
math state tests



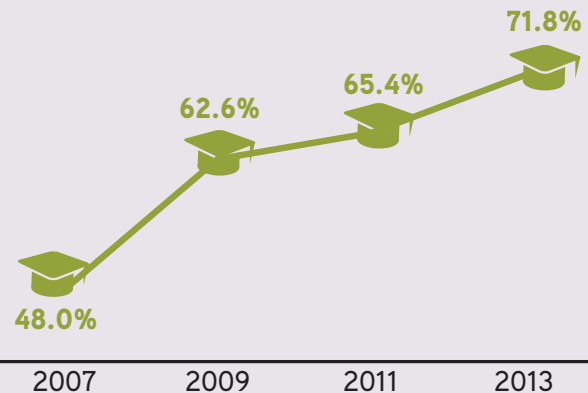
% passing
end-of-course
tests



% passing
AP exams

Source: *Indiana State Department of Education*

Graduation rates are up 24 points since 2007



Source: *Indiana State Department of Education*

