



INDIANA STATE BOARD OF EDUCATION

INDIANA STATE BOARD OF EDUCATION COMMITTEE ON SCHOOL TURNAROUNDS MEETING MINUTES

October 9, 2014
8:00 a.m.

Indiana Government Center South
Room 5
402 West Washington Street
Indianapolis, IN 46204

Board Members Present: Committee Chair Daniel Elsener, Sarah O'Brien, and Tony Walker. Additionally, Special Assistant to the Governor Claire Fiddian-Green, Board Executive Director Robert G. Guffin, and Board General Counsel John Snethen were present.

I. Call to Order/Meeting Minutes Approval

Mr. Elsener called the meeting to order and gave a brief history of the turnaround statutes in Indiana. The committee voted 3-0 to approve the minutes from the September 19, 2014 meeting.

II. Public Comment

Mr. Elsener opened the floor to public comments. He invited James W. Jackson to speak first, and announced that the committee would welcome and review any written comments submitted as well. Mr. Jackson spoke about John Marshall and the improvements they are making. He also discussed the positive effect a change in culture can have, as well as the benefits of involvement of the community and stakeholders. Mr. Walker commented on how much better Roosevelt is in Gary as the result of the intervention. He wanted to make clear the benefits interventions can have on schools. Mr. Elsener added that most of the Board members have visited these schools and there have been improvements in safety, culture, and instruction.

III. Presentation by Tindley

Mr. Elsener stated that no one from Tindley was available to come to the meeting today.

IV. Presentation by IPS

Dr. Ferebee gave a presentation on the Arlington transition. Dr. Ferebee referred to PowerPoint slides that can be viewed at http://www.in.gov/sboe/files/IPS_Presentation_Arlington_Options_LF.pptx. He talked about current enrollment not being aligned with building capacity, efficient operations, school community engagement, and choice versus traditional neighborhood schools. Dr. Ferebee also discussed the importance of school leadership and a revitalization of the instructional program. Dr. Ferebee then moved on to the issue of grade configuration; he commented on the potential legal issues of changing the configuration as recommended by Charter USA ("CSUSA").

Dr. Ferebee gave some recommendations. He said Recommendation A is to combine student populations, preferably combining John Marshall's students into Arlington. Recommendation B, he said, is to implement Public Law 1321; this would involve a transition of approximately 700 students into the existing Arlington population in 2015-2016. He stated Recommendation C is to employ a transition year model where Arlington would be closed for 2015-2016 to engage the community in a planning year. IPS would then implement a new community-vetted instructional focus in 2016-2017. He said his preference is recommendation A, which would provide a benefit to both Arlington and John Marshall. Dr. Ferebee also stated that IPS will work with EdPower to ensure a good transition in Arlington.

Upon inquiry from Ms. O'Brien, Dr. Ferebee clarified that in Recommendation A all the students would be transitioned to Arlington and John Marshall would be closed because the Arlington facility is far superior to John Marshall. Dr. Ferebee went on to speak about the 7-12 model in Recommendation A. He stated that IPS could have two schools within the same building given the space they have. This would allow for enough separation between grades 7-8 and 9-12.

V. Presentation by Community Stakeholders

Carol Craig, with the NAACP, took the podium to discuss Arlington on behalf of stakeholders. She said the stakeholders believed there should be a stronger accountability system with respect to the turnaround schools. She also spoke about bringing together stakeholders to support Arlington. Ms. Craig stated the stakeholders are not addressing transition plans. She said what they are recommending today is more programmatic. She said their proposal includes all the components of the coalition community schools national model. Ms. Craig also said Arlington has gone through 3 principals since the intervention and this has been disruptive. She commented on the importance of strong, stable leadership. Ms. O'Brien expressed an appreciation for the input of the stakeholders and said that this kind of input is vital and necessary.

VI. Presentation by CSUSA

Jon Hage addressed the committee, referring to a presentation that can be found at http://www.in.gov/sboe/files/CSUSA_TSO_Committee_October.pptx. He said the topics of discussion are 1) enrollment stabilization, 2) early intervention, and 3) financial sustainability. Mr. Hage spoke about laws that need to be redefined and the importance of intervening earlier for the benefit of students. He made it clear that intervening earlier is much more effective. Mr. Hage stated intervention must be broader, community based, family centric and more than just 7-12 grade.

Mr. Hage moved on to discuss the importance of feedback, and that feedback should be provided directly to the Board. He also stated that oversight should be centralized. Mr. Hage then outlined recommendations to the committee, separated into components. He said Component 1 is to extend the contract for another 5 years. He said this is important for stability and continuity for students, and for sustained academic progress. Component 2 is to allow expanded grade levels, he said. He commented on the importance of establishing a feeder pattern and a comprehensive K-12 system for CSUSA's academic model to be fully implemented.

Component 3 is a recommendation to allow flexibility to re-configure grade levels served in each building. Mr. Hage said this is especially important for Emma Donnan because of the high turnover rate. He also spoke about transition at the end of the 5 year period based on performance. Upon inquiry, Mr. Hage discussed the establishment a feeder system in more detail. One specific issue discussed was the

creation of a CSUSA feeder school. Mr. Hage said there is disagreement among lawyers about the legality of this action; Mr. Hage stated he believed the Board has the Broad discretion to allow this but that further legal review would be required. Mr. Hage said, based on financial concerns, the recommendation would be to expand grades within existing facilities and then if there is additional demand for a CSUSA feeder school or expanding grades those options could be looked at down the line. Mr. Hage said those options could be done in collaboration with IPS as well.

Ms. O'Brien asked Board staff whether it would be ok to extend the contract for another 5 years. Ms. Fiddian-Green stated that once a school is under Board intervention, the Board has a lot of discretion, including extension of contracts. Mr. Elsener added that it was clear after the hearings that continuity is important for sustained success in these schools. He said the Board can't keep going in and out of these schools, he said it has to be done right for a successful transition. Mr. Elsener made a few comments for the record: 1) he said when there is transition to an intervention, he said he would like to know what the law says now and if it should be changed, 2) he said the IPS district transition should be looked at closely so it is not repeated, and 3) when a turnaround operator is selected, Mr. Elsener commented that the operator must have a capital and resources to deal with turmoil if it arises.

Gary Holland, President of GHolland and Associates, LLC, made some comments to the committee. He stated GHolland and Associates is a community based organization committed to educational parity. Mr. Holland commented that over the past 2 years they have partnered with CSUSA. He said CSUSA has shown a genuine interest in improving instructional practices for students from urban areas and also students with socially and economically deprived backgrounds. He said they support CSUSA without reservation. Mr. Hage then made a final comment that CSUSA would consider taking over management of Arlington if the Board believed that would be best, but that they would like a 5 year contract in place. The committee took a short recess.

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VII. Presentation by Indianapolis Mayor's Office

Mr. Elsener thanked the Mayor's Office for their hard work and dedication, and introduced the Mayor's Office Director of Turnaround Schools, Tamra Wright, to address the committee. Ms. Wright used a presentation that can be viewed at: http://www.in.gov/sboe/files/OEI_PresentationTurnaround_Committee_10_9_14.pdf. She began by outlining the oversight by the Mayor's Office. She said they started oversight in June of last year because of clear vision alignment, local control, and stakeholder support. Ms. Wright stated their oversight includes monitoring, data analysis, and reporting. Ms. Wright explained that they assess the schools on 4 core questions: 1) whether the educational program is a success, 2) whether the organization is in sound fiscal health, 3) whether the organization is effective and well-run, and 4) whether the school is providing the appropriate conditions for success. In addition, she said they developed a monthly template to report information to the Board. Ms. Wright said this template includes student enrollment and suspension and expulsion data month to month.

Ms. Wright stated that the schools have made progress in a number of areas. She commented that they have seen improvements in academics, safety, and culture. She said CSUSA has done a great job with the curriculum and the teachers are invested in the success of the students. She also said the culture is more positive and hopeful. Ms. Wright said IPS does want to see more progress though. She mentioned student recruitment, staff retention, and parent and family engagement as examples of areas that can

be improved. Mr. Elsener asked if there is any data that would show the parents are happy with the trajectory of their schools under these operators. Ms. Wright responded yes they conduct parent focus groups and the parents liked what they were seeing in these schools.

Brandon Brown, Director of Charter Schools at the Mayor's Office was the next presenter. He spoke about recommendations going forward. He said one main issue is that oversight must be streamlined so there is one oversight entity. Mr. Brown said the Mayor's Office lacks access to a lot of the data and does not hold the contract. They have a memorandum of understanding, he said. Mr. Brown then discussed the following additional recommendations (beyond the streamlined oversight recommendation): 1) there must be community engagement, 2) collaboration and communication with the district to ensure efficient use of resources and services, 3) assessment of the facilities to determine capacity and utilization of space, and 4) a funding model that will allow the schools to sustain and continue the progress made. Mr. Brown said there needs to be changes in the turnaround law or implementation to allow for a better operation of these schools. Mr. Elsener expressed concern about funding buildings that are not full rather than funding the students.

Ms. O'Brien asked about an initial survey looking at facilities, finances, and the other components that would limit the type of turnaround that could be implemented in each building. Mr. Brown responded that there was a Chamber of Commerce report that came out recently that took a deep dive into the issue of facility utilization in the district. He said the schools operate in an ecosystem where decisions in one school will affect other schools in the district. Mr. Brown added that schools can't be in a constant state of turnaround. Mr. Elsener said that report could be an addendum to the committee's report. Mr. Elsener said it has become clear that sometimes turnaround causes less economic viability, resulting from lower student enrollment and students leaving the school. Ms. Fiddian-Green commented that the law is structured the way it is because property taxes on the facilities and the 30 year bond instruments can't keep up with population shifts and other changes in how we are educating children in the communities. Mr. Brown added that CSUSA has not been operating under good financial conditions, but there have been good results.

Mr. Brown said the Mayor's Office supports what CSUSA has been doing and would support extending their contract. He said the issue with Arlington is much more challenging because the operator is leaving. He said from an efficiency standpoint they would support a merger, but they would also like to look at it like they look at their charter applications. This would mean looking at strategies and detailed plans for success before making a decision. Mr. Walker asked if the Mayor's Office would support transitioning Arlington back to IPS now. Mr. Brown responded that they would want to see the plan first. He said one strategy is to allow for IPS to have more ownership of the process but work with an operator to run the school in some sort of a hybrid model. Mr. Walker said at some point districts need to be more involved in the operation of the school to help the transition that will eventually occur.

Mr. Elsener asked if there is an assurance that in a hybrid model the operator will be free to operate. Mr. Brown responded that the law is general. He said the proof will be in the contract. Ms. O'Brien asked how a hybrid model would differ from the lead partner relationship, in terms of the difficulties that have arisen from that relationship. Mr. Brown said the operator would have autonomy akin the autonomy a charter has within a district. It would be similar to the lead partner relationship but the final say would be with the operator, he said.

VIII. Facilitated Committee Discussion

Mr. Walker commented that out of the 5 schools subject to turnaround now, he has not yet heard any substantial plan to assure that the progress being made at these schools will outlast the turnaround. He said the current law restricts the Board in making permanent solutions. Mr. Walker said the focus must be moved beyond just turning around a particular school. He expressed concern about schools going right back to the way they were before the intervention once operator leaves. Mr. Walker said the only way for sustained success is to allow for district-wide intervention. This will allow for improvement on a systemic level, not just in a school by school basis. Mr. Elsener agreed it's an ecosystem, not just a school. He said accountable decision-making by those closest to the school is best.

Ms. Fiddian-Green reminded the committee that they must also deliberate on the lead partner structure, since schools with a lead partner are turnaround schools. Ms. Fiddian-Green said Public Impact will assist with recommendations, and that Public Impact is currently gathering information from all stakeholders. She said they will present recommendations to the committee in November.

IX. Adjourn

Mr. Elsener thanked everyone involved in this meeting for their hard work and adjourned the meeting.