

Indianapolis school district is now privatized. Other large cities throughout the state of Ohio and the Nation school take close heed.

A recent blog by Nigel Long communicated the 20-year game plan for the privatization of the Indianapolis school district. School districts, nearly all of which are operated by elected boards of education, have been targeted for extinction by some groups for at least the past half-century.

Subsequent to President Reagan's bogus Nation at Risk report, misguided education reformers floated the idea that the problem could be laid at the feet of teachers' unions, inept teachers, bloated administration and even the elected schools boards. Authors John Chubb and Terry Moe, in their book, Politics, Markets, and America's Schools, published in the early 1990s, proffered that school boards are incapable of advancing reform efforts because they operate through democratic management processes. Of course, Chubb and Moe had no real comprehension as to how public schools could better serve students. They were looking for a scapegoat to blame for the perception that public schools were failing.

In the mid-1990s, David C. Berliner and Bruce Biddle published The Manufactured Crisis, which debunked the notion that public schools were in crisis.

However, since the 1990s the American public has been fed a steady diet that public education is generally failing and that it must be privatized. In some cases, the privatizers promote school vouchers. In other cases, they promote privatization of entire districts, Indianapolis is a recent example of the private takeover of the entire school district.

Guest Blog – How to Steal a Public School System: The Indianapolis Playbook

by Nigel Long | Apr 18, 2026 | Charter Schools, Innovation Schools, IPS, Privatization, Property Taxes

How to Steal a Public School System: The Indianapolis Playbook

By Nigel Long

I want to talk about what happened in Indianapolis recently, not just for us, but for every city in America.

The Indianapolis Public Education Corporation board was announced. An unelected body now controls school closures, buildings, property taxes, and transportation across the entire boundaries of Indianapolis' largest and oldest school district.

David Harris, the man who founded the Mind Trust in 2006, chairs the board. Janet McNeal leads Herron Classical Schools, a network the Mind Trust incubated. Edward Rangel runs Adelante Schools, another Mind Trust launch. Dexter Taylor leads Paramount Brookside, same ecosystem. The IPS board members included were elected with the same dark money that's been buying school board seats since 2012. And Micheal O'Connor, the consultant the city paid over half a million dollars in public money to design the process that produced this board is now its acting executive director. This board didn't emerge from the community. It was assembled by the people who funded the takeover.

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This is the final chess piece in a 20-year game. And I know that because I was there for the first one.

I was a 9th grader at Shortridge High School when the Mind Trust brought John Legend to Indianapolis. I remember being on that field trip, sitting in that room, caught up in the excitement of a global superstar telling us that the future of our schools was bright. I didn't know then that I was watching the beginning of the end of IPS as we know it. I was a kid. I didn't know what any of it meant.

I graduated from Shortridge 13 years ago. And I have spent the years since watching that moment slowly reveal itself for what it was.

John Legend wasn't there for us. He was there to give community cover to the privatization of Indianapolis public schools: a coordinated decades-long effort involving the Mind Trust, Stand for Children, RISE Indy, the Walton Family Foundation (Walmart), Bloomberg Philanthropies, Reed Hastings (Netflix), John Arnold (Enron), and the political allies who carried their water at the statehouse. [The money trail is all public record](#). You don't raise \$134 million and fly in a Grammy winner because you're running an education experiment. You do it because you need people to stop asking questions.

Since 2006, the Mind Trust has raised over \$134 million (their own number, from their own website) working toward this exact moment. They used dark money to purchase school board seats. They ran a legislative process that was designed from the beginning to land exactly where it landed.

The cruelest part of this privatization agenda is that real parents with real concerns were recruited, conditioned, and in some cases compensated to be the public face of something they were never given the full picture on. Their frustration was real. What was done with it was manipulation. They took the pain of Black and brown families navigating a broken system, pointed it in the direction that served them, and called it community engagement. That's not parent voice. That's manufactured consent with a marketing budget.

And long before any institution took an official position, there were everyday people in this city, parents, teachers, neighbors, who saw exactly what was happening and said so out loud. They got dismissed. They got ignored. They got outspent. The community has been screaming about this for years. What happened recently is what it looks like when nobody in power listens or cares about the community they are tasked to serve.

When nearly twice as many people testified against this plan as those who supported it, it didn't matter. The votes were already lined up. The legislation was already written. The board members were already chosen.

That's not democracy. That's the performance of it.

My grandmother had a saying: ***fat meat is greasy***. It means learning a lesson the hard way after ignoring advice that was right in front of you.

A lot of us have been saying this for years. The receipts have been public. The Mind Trust got exactly what they came for. Now all of us — students, parents, educators, communities — have to live in whatever comes next. If this is the first time you're hearing it, I hope today is the day it becomes impossible to ignore.

I want to be clear about where accountability lives here because this is not a partisan story. State Republicans wrote the legislation and pushed it through. Local Democrats, on the city council and beyond, had every opportunity to protect democratic governance in this city and chose not to. Mayor Hogsett convened the very process that produced these recommendations and appointed the board that will now run our schools. There is no version of this story where the spineless performance of our local elected officials doesn't deserve to be named directly.

Both parties failed Indianapolis. Full stop.

IPS spent years being held up as a broken system that needed fixing. What actually happened was a live demonstration of how to take a public school system apart and replace democratic accountability with private control without firing a single shot. The enrollment flight that became the justification for this takeover was engineered by the same organizations now running the solution. And everyone in that room when the final vote was cast knew exactly where it was going.

I say this as someone who cares about every child in this city, Black, brown, white, charter school, public school, all of them. Every student in Indianapolis will feel this. Charter families included. This was never about kids versus kids. It was always about who controls the institution.

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We are living through modern day colonialism dressed up in innovation language. And the proof is in the outcome. Our schools are more segregated today than they have ever been. That's not an accident. That's by design.

The IPS that shaped me — that shaped generations of Indianapolis kids — has potentially changed forever. That matters beyond politics because schools are not just buildings and test scores. They are where communities build identity, pass down culture, and figure out who they are. This city has a documented history of coordinated institutional action against Black communities that most people were never taught. [Crispus Attucks was built in 1927](#) to keep Black students out of white schools, segregation dressed up as institution building. [Indiana Avenue](#), once a thriving Black cultural and economic district, was deliberately destroyed between the 1950s and 1970s through highway construction, IUPUI expansion, and eminent domain. Over 12,000 people were displaced. 400 acres of Black history erased. Coordinated by universities, hospitals, city leaders, and state government. [Busing in 1981](#) put the burden of desegregation on Black children while white families simply moved further out. And now this. One day this moment will be remembered alongside all of those — another decision about Black children where the outcome was predetermined before the community ever had a real say. Different decade. Different language. Same intention.

IPS was first. This sets a dangerous precedent for every district in this state. The Indianapolis-Marion County townships, the rural districts, the suburban districts. Any community that powerful people decide isn't capable of governing itself is vulnerable to exactly what happened here. That's the part that should terrify everyone regardless of where your kids go to school. This isn't just about Black and brown communities anymore. It's about who gets to decide that a community isn't smart enough or capable enough to make decisions about their own children's education, and then build the infrastructure to take that power away from them. Indianapolis just showed them how.

The only chance we have going forward is making sure our next mayor isn't full of shit. And it means holding every elected official, Democrat and Republican, local and state, accountable for what they did and didn't do when it mattered.

Here's what I know. The ability to elect the people who make decisions about your children's education is not a bureaucratic detail. It is democracy's most basic promise. When you erode that at the school board level and nobody stops it, you have established that it can be done. And if it can be done with education, the institution we trust most with our children and our future, then nothing is off the table.

This feels like a loss because it is one. But public schools have survived worse because the communities behind them refused to quit. That community is still here. It has always been here. No appointed board can change that. The fight doesn't stop today.

Show up for our school boards. Know who represents us. Demand better from our mayor, our city council, our state legislators. ***Get involved in our local elections like our kids' future depends on it, because it does.*** The people making these decisions are counting on our exhaustion. We can't give it to them.

Nigel Long is a cultural organizer, event producer, and community builder based in Indianapolis. He is the Founder of SoundOff and serves as Chairperson of BLACK: A Festival of Joy. He is a proud graduate of Shortridge High School and an IPS parent.