**A Current State Assessment of
Public School Enrollment in Indianapolis**

Prepared in May 2015 by

The Institute for Innovation in Public School Choice

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- Miriam Acevedo, La Plaza
- Scott Bess, Goodwill Education Initiatives
- Stephanie Bothun, Mayor's Office of Education Innovation
- Brandon Brown, Mayor's Office of Education Innovation
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The content of this report is shaped by those interviews as much as it is by anything else.

Executive Summary

Indianapolis families can now choose to enroll their children in public schools of many types, including comprehensive schools and magnet schools administrated by Indianapolis Public Schools (IPS), over 35 charter schools authorized by 3 institutions and, as per state law, schools outside of their township of residence. While more options now exist for families, the process of selecting a public school has become far more complicated to navigate, especially for low-income families.

In October 2013, Teach Plus Indianapolis published *Musical Chairs: Teacher churn and its impact on Indianapolis Public Schools*. The report found that teachers in Indianapolis experienced a high rate of mobility from school to school early in their careers. One of the root causes of this teacher mobility were the often-flawed enrollment projections in schools across Indianapolis. In the report, teachers recommended that Indianapolis explore a unified enrollment system for parents and students in order to improve enrollment projections for both districts and charters. They argued this unified system would better stabilize the teaching force and create greater equity for families.

For these reasons, Indianapolis education leaders have been working together to review various choice and enrollment reform ideas, including the design and implementation of a Unified Enrollment (UE) system modeled on those now in place in Denver, New Orleans, Newark, and Washington DC.

In November 2014, Teach Plus Indianapolis retained The Institute for Innovation in Public School Choice (IIPSC) to conduct an independent, third party assessment of the current state of enrollment and choice in Indianapolis. IIPSC approached this work with three key objectives: 1) To engage with a range of stakeholders and describe the current processes students and families use to access the various schools in Indianapolis; 2) To compare these processes to national best practices using the guiding principles of efficiency, equity and transparency; 3) To work with stakeholders to identify and consider the feasibility of the key potential solutions, including a UE system.

Please note the findings in this report deal exclusively with IPS and the charter schools located within its boundaries. However, the recommendations could be expanded to include additional townships within Marion County. There would be great value in exploring the findings with administrators in the other townships.

The following report presents the findings that came out of IIPSC's engagement with Indianapolis stakeholders.

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Methodology:

An Advisory Group was formed to guide IIPSC through the process of engaging stakeholders and to advise and support in analyzing the material gathered during research. The Advisory Group met three times in an official capacity during this engagement at intervals of approximately one month.

Gabriela Fighetti of IIPSC held over 30 meetings with Indianapolis stakeholders - leaders from schools, school systems, community, civic and advocacy organizations. In addition, 2 parent focus groups were held, with the assistance of Stand for Children Indiana and La Plaza. Stakeholders were promised privacy during these meetings – no one's name is attached to any quote or idea without that person's permission. Stakeholders were asked to describe their experiences and thoughts about public school enrollment and choice, to explain the challenges they face or see others face, to offer their ideas for potential reforms, and to consider the feasibility of a UE system. There is a strong collective commitment to improving the current state of enrollment and choice in Indianapolis. It is important to note that this report represents only an initial effort at stakeholder engagement, which should be supplemented should this work move forward.

Findings:

There are many challenges with the current state of public school enrollment and choice in Indianapolis, and all stakeholders agree actions must be taken to improve the situation. **There is consensus about the following issues**:

1. There are significant barriers that can prevent families from participating effectively.

2. Schools and school systems in Indianapolis are engaged in an intense competition to enroll students and the competition is loosely regulated, producing negative side effects.

3. There is little transparency around enrollment and choice in Indianapolis.

4. School leaders and district administrators across Indianapolis want a data sharing and management system.

5. If Universal Enrollment is to be implemented in Indianapolis, it could be complimented with efforts to create common public transportation services, and to upgrade communications and guidance services. All of this is important to families when making school choices.

6. There is a need for a coordinated and strategic approach to school management in Indianapolis.

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Recommendations

A) Make it easier for families to participate in choosing a school for their child:

    i. Indianapolis education stakeholders are to be commended for publishing a school guide and website in partnership with Great Schools. However, the Guide's content and reach must be improved in future years if it is to fulfill its promise of being a comprehensive resource for families.

    ii. Establish a set of school fairs/expos at which all of Indianapolis' public schools – *both traditional public and charter* – are represented so families only have one place to go to meet with school administrators.

    iii. Create a universal application families can use to list all of their public school choices, in the order of preference.

B) Bring transparency to the annual cycle of public school enrollment and choice.

    i. Allow ample time for families to go to school fairs and open houses and to receive guidance on making choices before running a lottery at schools.

    ii. Use a centralized clearinghouse to match students and public schools in Indianapolis, adhering to student preferences, school capacities, and prioritization policies, while employing a strategy-proof student assignment algorithm.

    iii. Audit the inputs and outputs of the matching system and allow any interested and authorized party to track results.

    iv. Collaborate to recommend policies that would govern mid-year transfer from one public school to another, mid-year enrollment of students who are new to Indianapolis or who come from a non-public school or from another district, and enrollment of students who have been expelled from a school.

    v. Produce reports that use quantitative data to demonstrate capacity by grade and by school, detailed demand data for each school, matching results at each school, mid-year transfers and mid-year enrollment.

C) Build a state-of-the-art data management system for all public schools to use in their enrollment and choice operations.

D) Explore options for collaboration in related areas, including transportation services, information sharing and guidance services, and the intentional coordination of school opening and closure decisions using transparent mechanisms.

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Findings

Finding 1. There are significant barriers that prevent families from participating effectively in school choice.

Participation in school choice is more than the opportunity to apply to schools that are not the local neighborhood school. Effective participation in school choice is possible when all of the following are readily available to all families:

> 1) Easy-to-understand information about all public school options, the choice policies and admissions criteria that help to determine enrollment opportunities at each school, and a published list of important admissions calendar dates.

> 2) A series of citywide school fairs and a published schedule of open houses at schools so families have the opportunity to interact with school staff, see buildings and campuses, and make informed selections.

> 3) Supports in identifying schools that best fit their children's needs, including some form of independently derived objective measurement of school quality, and access to an enrollment or guidance counselor.

> 4) A simple process for applying to and expressing preferences for schools.

> 5) A notification system that offers families the assurance that their application(s) have been received and will be processed, and informs them promptly of results.

The current state in Indianapolis falls short in all of the above areas, and as a result there are many families – particularly those who are most vulnerable – facing significant barriers to effective participation in school choice. We met with and interviewed many parents and education professionals in Indianapolis over the past several months and almost universally, people expressed regret and frustration over these problems.

Following is an assessment of the current state in Indianapolis against the above benchmarks:

1a) Indianapolis needs one guide that lists and describes its schools, and is easily accessible to families. The partnership with Great Schools[1] was a big step forward in providing families with information about their school options in Indianapolis and the education stakeholders who worked to create the guide should be commended. That

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[1] http://www.greatschools.org/indiana/indianapolis/
[2] http://crpe.org/publications/making-school-choice-work
[3] http://schoolchoice.dpsk12.org/

being said, the vast majority of the parents IIPSC spoke to (albeit a small sample size) did not know of the Great Schools website or of the free print guides dispersed in the community. Even given the partnership with Kroger stores and public libraries, where guides were made available to families at no cost, parents were unaware. This does not mean the guide is a failure. It simply means it will be very important to consider ways to improve the reach of the guide in future years.

Therefore, it is still skilled, labor intensive, and time consuming work for families to make themselves aware of all of the public school options, resulting in several basic problems:

a) There is no way to guarantee families know about and can consider all of their options before choosing a school for their child.

b) A system that places responsibility for identifying and selecting schools entirely in the hands of parents is inherently unfair, despite best intentions. This sort of system inadvertently perpetuates the challenges faced by Indianapolis' most at-risk families.

Consider the following quotes from a **group of parents who attended a focus group** hosted by Stand for Children in downtown Indianapolis:

"Am I to understand that I can send my child to school anywhere? Even if I live in a certain place?"

"I have twin daughters. They have two more years in their elementary school. The boundary middle school just isn't an option for them given some of the things I've heard about it. I just have no clue about where to start to understand what other options are out there beyond someone telling me, 'This is your address and here's where you go for middle school.'"

"At IPS school 69, one of the parents took the initiative to go to the Mayor's Office to get a box of the Great Schools books. We're not getting this information. We need to have a place where we can go to get this information. At public school 93, I didn't get a book."

Finally, consider a quote from **Nathan Ringham, a parent of an IPS elementary school student** who recently went through the magnet school application process:

"There was no obvious place on the IPS website, or any other website, where we found all of the information we needed. I shouldn't have had to go to the state department of education to figure out the birthdate cut off for kindergarten. I

shouldn't have to go to one page to see how we enroll as a new student and then another to see how to enroll in a magnet."

A report entitled "Making School Choice Work" published in July of 2014 by The Center on Reinventing Public Education (CRPE)[2] finds that parents site simply understanding which schools their children are eligible for as the most important barrier making it harder to choose a school for their child. This is certainly a problem families are facing in Indianapolis, as the systems of schools in Indianapolis are not doing enough to ensure families understand their options.

In some respects, this is not surprising; it is merely the natural outgrowth of a decentralized system. There is no incentive for IPS, for example, to tell parents about charter schools. Or for Ball State University to ensure families understand the IPS magnet school application. In both cases, doing so would not be in their best self-interest. For families, though, the distinction between authorizers is less important. Parents are looking for the best school for their child, regardless of who runs it. For them, not having the information in one easy-to-access place doesn't make sense.

Indianapolis Public Schools (IPS) website has a lot of information about its schools and how to access them. IPS created a single application for its magnet schools, where families can list schools in their order of preference. Furthermore, IPS publishes information about its magnet schools on its website, including information about the magnet program and how to apply. Via this website families can find extensive information about their magnet options, with links to each school's individual website. The application is also available on-line, and can be translated into Spanish. IPS should be commended for taking these steps. It is not clear, however, how this information would be accessible to families who do not have access to the Internet.

Families new to IPS must also go to the Office of Student Assignment to "pre-register" for IPS before their magnet application will be accepted. The location of the Office of Student Assignment was listed within the magnet program FAQs, but it is not listed on the application itself. The net result is that families who are new to Indianapolis may have a particularly hard time accessing IPS' Magnet school options.

The IPS website also provides enrollment information for families new to the district, including a phone number to call to confirm their neighborhood school. In addition, each neighborhood school has a website. Individual school websites are geared to current students and families, as well as prospective students and families, and generally contain a lot of information. However, it was not readily apparent to IIPSC whether the websites include data on student achievement or school culture – both are metrics prospective

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[2] http://crpe.org/publications/making-school-choice-work

parents have indicated are important to them. There is no information about charter schools on the IPS website.

The Mayor's Office has a website that includes a list of the charter schools it authorizes, with basic information about each school. In addition to providing links to each school's website, the Mayor's Office provides information on how the school measures against its Performance Framework. The Mayor's Office is to be commended for making this information available and for its attempt to provide important information to families as they make school choices. That said, the information included in the reports is fundamentally challenging to understand, and for some, particularly parents with lower levels of education and literacy, most likely impossible to process and utilize in making decisions. More guidance is necessary. In a departure from the other governing entities in Indianapolis, the Mayor's Office website does link to the Great Schools website, which includes information on all schools in Indianapolis.

Ball State University, another authorizer of public charter schools in Indianapolis, also includes information about its charter schools on its website, but it is not easy to find. The website seems to be geared more towards prospective charter school applicants than to prospective charter school parents. There is a list of currently operated charter schools, but the only information available is their address and phone number. There is virtually no information available for families interested in enrolling in a charter school and there are no links to the Great Schools website, IPS' website, or those of other authorizers.

The Indiana State Charter School Board (ICSB) is another authorizer of public charter schools in Indianapolis. The ICSB website has some information for prospective families, including basic information about the schools and links to their individual websites. They also have a section that explains how to apply to a charter school, as well as how parents may file a complaint. Although there is a page entitled, "ICSB charter school performance," and a sample of a robust and detailed Performance Dashboard, there are no completed performance dashboards for any school, nor any indication of when they will be available. Similarly to the others, there are no links to Great Schools, IPS' website, or those of other authorizers.

Here are several school and enrollment guides we suggest should be considered as among the most effective at gathering and presenting information about schools in a city:

- Denver Public Schools publishes a "School Choice Enrollment Guide[3]" that explains the school choice process, offers advice on selecting schools, and lists and briefly describes every public school.

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[3] http://schoolchoice.dpsk12.org/

- My School DC publishes an online guide[4] to the public schools that participate in the Washington DC common enrollment process. The guide explains in great detail the application and choice process, the enrollment process, the mechanisms by which applicants are prioritized for admission to schools, and briefly describes all participating public schools, including statistics on school quality and data that is updated weekly on seat availability at each grade level. The website also includes links to Washington DC schools that do not participate in the common enrollment process.
- The New Orleans Parents' Guide publishes an annual Guide to Public Schools[5] that explains the application process, offers advice on selecting schools, and lists and briefly describes every public school, including those few that do not participate in OneApp, the common enrollment process used in New Orleans.
- The New York City Department of Education offers several publications meant to inform families about their school options and about the choice process, including The Directory of New York City Public High Schools, and High Schools at a Glance.[6]

1b) Indianapolis needs a set of citywide school fairs and a single source for information on enrollment and admissions calendars. This year, IPS held a school fair, called the School Showcase, for families interested in attending an IPS school. While it is a step in the right direction from previous efforts of IPS, the parents we spoke to were not aware of the school fair and did not know there had been an opportunity to see school representatives in one place. IPS should be commended for organizing this fair and for marketing it as broadly as they could. As with the Great Schools guide, it will be important to improve the reach of these efforts in future years. It is also critical that charter schools be included in order for this fair to be a true one-stop-shop for a parent interested in understanding their options. Currently, a person who wishes to meet school staff and students must visit the school to do so. This poses a real barrier for any Indianapolis family lacking the requisite resources to do so.

In addition to the IPS School Showcase, there are neighborhood associations that also had school fair events for the families and schools in their neighborhood. It is wonderful that these opportunities existed for families. It would be far more powerful, however, for stakeholders to work together and unite their efforts to bring these opportunities to families.

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[4] http://www.myschooldc.org
[5] http://neworleansparentsguide.org/files/NOPG2014.pdf
[6] http://schools.nyc.gov/NR/rdonlyres/E70B2B88-ABF2-4644-BAF6-E552D6A5D362/0/HSAAGCompiled_071213.pdf .

Consider that this also presents difficulties for individual schools trying to attract families. **Emily Pelino, Executive Director of KIPP Indianapolis** said:

> "We're wrestling with whether we hire a person to do recruitment. Right now, literally everyone spends a lot of time on recruitment: sending mailers, going to community fairs, partnering with non-profits, like the Boys and Girls club. Last year we hired a parent team of recruiters to go out in the streets – community centers, beauty parlors, put up yard signs, etc."

Even when a parent knows about a school option it can be difficult to get the information they need to decide whether it is the right school for their child. There can be a low level of customer service at individual school sites and it can be hard to reach school staff by phone. It is important to note that a low level of customer service can be due to real barriers at the school level: insufficient staffing, time constraints, etc. Unfortunately, to a parent who is seeking information, a bad customer service experience at a school may be enough to lead them to move on and abandon their efforts. **Stephanie Bothun, Director of Education Initiatives at the Mayor's Office for Education Innovation** said:

> "When they go look at schools, it's incredibly difficult to get into a school to figure out how to apply. Maybe they have to call the school 3-4 times, then they need to figure out whether they can make an appointment and who to talk to, the timing is challenging for parents who work. Even if they can get an appointment they then need to figure out how to get there."

1c) Families are largely left to their own devices in determining the subset of schools that represent *good* choices for their child. Choosing the right school for a child is a complex endeavor and involves consideration of factors such as safety, distance from home, education quality and content, availability of services for language learners and/or students with disabilities, and more. Many families would benefit from support in determining the subset of schools that represent a good fit for their child, and this help should be available in all forms, including, but not limited to: written materials, technology aids, and access to an enrollment counselor. Currently, there is little or no access to these supports in Indianapolis.

> "As a mother, and someone who is pretty involved and aware, I did all I could to follow IPS' process. I still couldn't get information from the system about when open houses were, where the magnet fair was, when the applications were due, etc. The application process was a mess. There was a lack of clarity and not a lot of outreach to the community." **An IPS parent**

Consider the experience of a recent immigrant with a school-aged child:

> "I went to what I thought was my neighborhood school, but they didn't accept me. So I went to another school and the same thing happened. Finally, at summer school, a teacher helped me get my child into a magnet school. I didn't know what a magnet school was. The information didn't come home to me. If she hadn't helped me, I wouldn't have known. It was frustrating, to not get information and to have no one speak your language."

The Great Schools website is the only resource that allows a family to search for schools based on their chosen set of criteria. The criteria offered is fairly limited and dependent on whether individual schools have updated their school profile pages. Our research and our meetings with stakeholders allow us to conclude that families rely primarily on each other and on site visits for basic information about school safety and climate.

Until recently, there was no information available containing a single objective measurement of school quality for all schools in Indianapolis. Great Schools offers a single 1-10 rating for each school in Indianapolis, but the methodology used to create the rating is unclear, and it is also unclear if and how this rating differs from the state's A-F rating. As referenced earlier, the Mayor's Office provides information about its charters based on its performance framework. It was not readily apparent whether performance information is available for those schools authorized by Ball State University or by the Indiana State Charter School Board.

As a result of our conversations and meetings with parents and organizations, it is apparent that word of mouth, not these various ratings, are how families learn about whether or not they want to send their child to a school.

> "A lot of it is word of mouth. I know a kid who went there and the next statement is, 'it was awesome,' or, 'you don't want to go there." **Scott Bess, President, Goodwill Education Initiatives**

> "It's hard to say you have school choice when you don't have a system that provides information and provides a level playing field, for parents to have the options in front of them to make the best choices for their kids. It's not very simple and it's not friendly to parents." **Justin Ohlemiller, Executive Director, Stand for Children Indiana**

1d) In most instances, families must appear in person at the school in order to apply to that school. This is burdensome to families, particularly those who do not own a car. Public transportation in Indianapolis is not exhaustive in its coverage of neighborhoods and service is intermittent, at best. This issue inconveniences all Indianapolis families, but it has an outsized impact on some of Indianapolis' most vulnerable children and has

led to a system where socio-economic status has an outsized impact on a family's ability to participate in school choice.

> "Each school we looked at had different enrollment procedures. I hand delivered applications so that I could get them stamped. The charter school applications were online, but you need to provide the documentation in person. My god, I was so afraid that I'd mess something up or miss a step." **An IPS parent**

> "The fact that you physically have to go to a charter school to enroll, particularly if you don't have access to the Internet, makes it hard on families. The forms to fill out look different, the process looks different, and the documentation they require might be different." **Brandon Brown, Director of Charter Schools, Mayor's Office of Education Innovation**

> "You've got parents that are middle to lower income that are working jobs that literally don't allow the flexibility to visit schools. The insinuation that if a parent just cared about their kid they would make an informed choice, that just doesn't take into account the fact that some families literally don't have that opportunity. That's just not what we see with the parents we work with at Stand." **Justin Ohlemiller, Executive Director, Stand for Children Indiana**

None of this is to say that families are not participating in school choice in Indianapolis. Despite these barriers, there are thousands of families navigating these systems and enrolling in schools outside of their neighborhood school. The concern administrators in Indianapolis have is about the families who are left out of choice. There is a widely held perception that choice in Indianapolis is only for a segment of the population.

> "Even here in the city, we have schools that started off with a free-reduced priced lunch percentage in the 60s, and just by natural selection, their free-reduced priced lunch percentage moves to the low to mid 30s, their special education percentage is almost none. It's a great school but it's not an urban school." **An Indianapolis Education Advocate**

> "Parents often don't have a car, public transit is horrendous, to say the least. And then resources, even if they could take a bus, they could probably better spend that money somewhere else." **An Indianapolis Education Advocate**

> "The reality is that a system can't just work for the middle income parent that has the resources to do the research and make an informed choice." **Justin Ohlemiller, Executive Director, Stand for Children Indiana**

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Finding 2. Schools and school systems in Indianapolis are engaged in an intense competition to enroll students and the competition is loosely regulated, producing negative side effects.

The decentralized nature of enrollment in Indianapolis, where each charter school and district is responsible for developing enrollment procedures, recruitment plans and marketing materials can be as difficult for schools to manage as it is for parents to navigate. There are no figures on exactly how many public school seats there are in total, but it is accepted among Indianapolis education professionals that there are more seats than there are students who use them. This imbalance, coupled with the lack of a common policy framework, leads to fierce competition among schools. Unfortunately, this results in as many challenges for families as it does for schools.

2a) The management of enrollment typically comes with vast inefficiencies at the school level, requiring a lot of time, staffing and funding on the part of individual schools. Although there are Indianapolis schools that are highly sought after, many school leaders report that fully enrolling their school requires a lot of time, money, and staff hours. They say hiring teachers is difficult because of the uncertainty over their enrollment numbers. This was reflected in the Teach Plus report[7] that began this work. The majority of education professionals we spoke with assert that it is their perception that there are more schools and seats in Indianapolis than are needed. This uncertainty particularly impacts the IPS neighborhood schools that have the responsibility to enroll any child living in their boundary regardless of the time of year they enroll, in part because they are seen as a child's default school rather than as a school of choice.

We argue that these inefficiencies are a symptom of a decentralized school choice market in which many entities are competing for students, and in which no entity is accountable for citywide enrollment and planning (again, please see the CRPE July, 2014 report Making School Choice Work, page 13, for a more detailed description of the accountability problem).

> "You have high quality charters with empty seats. On the other hand, you have other charters with massive waiting lists because they have the reputation and the marketing plan. So you end up with parents on a waiting list at one school that could go to another high quality school right now that has space." **An Indianapolis Education Advocate**

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[7] http://teachplus.org/news-events/publications/musical-chairs-teacher-churn-and-its-impact-indianapolis-public-schools

"Schools think they are full in May, but families are choosing to submit several applications at different charters and magnet schools. Because of this, schools are marketing themselves even more, spending money to recruit more kids, and building up their waitlists because they don't know which students will show up the first week of school." **Brandon Brown, Director of Charter Schools, Mayor's Office of Education Innovation**

These inefficiencies can make it very difficult for schools to plan, program, and staff appropriately for the school year. When schools do not hire appropriately, it is students that get impacted. When school administrators are unable to create student programs in a timely manner or estimate class sizes with any degree of confidence, it is students that are affected.

"I scheduled based on who got rolled over in the student information system and then the school year started and it was like boom, boom, boom, boom. Students kept walking in the door and enrolling. Two days ago, I created my master list of who was testing, and I compared it to today's roster, there were 6 kids who were on my list and not on the roster, and 5 new kids on the roster. It's worse this year and I'm not sure why." **David Brunsting, Vice Principal, New Tech High**

"It affects a school's ability to hire staff and know how many teachers they need. You have teachers that bow out of their IPS contracts three or four weeks before school because they have finally gotten jobs at charter schools or township schools and then IPS, annually, has dozens of positions to fill. If we had a stronger system of schools that had a fair choice system, we'd have data to help plan for that." **An Indianapolis Education Advocate**

We always set our budget 10-15 percent below what our enrollment target is. This year, we just didn't hire for a couple of fifth grade positions based on where we were tracking mid-June. Which is hard, because we start staff recruiting in the fall." **Emily Pelino, Executive Director, KIPP Indianapolis**

"They project a number of students and then it's 'see what happens'. This year we had three kindergarten teachers, but only two classes worth of students, so we had to close a class after the first few weeks. That is really hard, for parents and children, to have them start with one teacher and then have to change. We also had to split a fourth grade class, make it a fourth grade / fifth grade class, because there were too many fifth graders and not that many fourth graders. It can be difficult for teachers, because how do you teach fifth grade standards to fourth graders? In first grade we had to open up another class, so the kindergarten teacher went to first grade. Next year, it might look different, depending on who comes." **An IPS principal**

"Last year, we were busting at the seams, so they gave us 5 kindergarten teachers. But this year, we had to lose a teacher well into the school year. So I had to communicate to parents and move kids into new classrooms in October. That was hard for families, but it was also hard for that teacher, who had to go to a different school." **Tihesha Guthrie, Principal, IPS School 99**

There is also a perception that parents, knowingly or unknowingly, contribute to these inefficiencies by simply taking part in school choice. Given the decentralized system, parents can hold seats across multiple schools, with no clear mechanism for declining the seats they will not use. While this behavior is challenging from a school's perspective, it is perfectly rational on the part of the parent to delay the decision when faced with multiple choices.

"The overwhelming sense that I get is that families are applying to more schools at once than ever before. So charter schools have more uncertainty around enrollment than ever before, which leads them to spend more resources on recruitment." **Brandon Brown, Director of Charter Schools, Mayor's Office of Education Innovation**

"If you're on a bunch of waiting lists and you get in, then you're not notifying the other schools that you're not sending your child there." **An IPS parent**

"I think parents play the game, they'll enroll in a number of different schools and then make their decision." **A charter school principal**

"A parent is waiting for another parent to say that they don't want that spot. I know a parent who literally called in sick for her daughter for two weeks because she was waiting for a seat to open up somewhere else but she didn't want to lose the spot she had." **An IPS parent**

2b) When school officials are independent actors, each working on their own to recruit students, they treat their colleagues as competitors. This can undermine efforts to best serve students and families and to improve school quality across the system of public schools. Schools have the incentive to enroll kids using any means necessary and the risk is families are choosing schools based on their marketing prowess, not based on measurements of school quality.

"I do think if families really had a way to understand what makes each school different, and figure out what really is the best for their child's needs and their family's needs, that would be amazing. Schools need to learn how to craft that message. Who are you? What makes your school different from other schools?" **Kevin Kubacki, Principal, Enlace Academy**

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"It hurts because people become competitors, which isn't why they started this. They started this to make sure that all kids have access to a great school." **Kameelah Shaheed-Diallo, Vice President of Strategy and Community Engagement, The Mind Trust**

"Every school, with few exceptions, needs enrollment. Once you get a parent in the door you're going to tell them that this school is the best fit for their child, even if you don't really believe it. This school over here might be a great fit, but I need numbers. Everybody is doing that, trying to drive enrollment." **Scott Bess, President, Goodwill Education Initiatives**

"When I started working in charter schools, many would ask, "How big is your waitlist?" Everyone was all into that. But who does that serve? It serves the schools. It serves their budgets. It allows schools to control enrollment. Waitlists don't serve families, and they certainly don't serve poor families, who, like it or not, are often making decisions with a totally different set of priorities and timeline in mind." **Charlie Schlegel, Superintendent, Community Charter Network**

This problem also manifests itself in a lack of coordination among system administrators. Educators who would otherwise collaborate and use their collective ability to support families in finding the best school fit for the needs of children are not communicating, so a lack of improved school options for families exists.

"Would IPS tell a parent about charters? No, absolutely not." **A charter school principal**

"When a student withdraws, I try to do my best to find the best fit for them. I'll work back channels. The system will not do that; it will just put them back in their neighborhood school. So we try to counsel and help families. We don't have a collaborative feel, typically between charters and IPS." **IPS school principal**

There is also concern around lack of accountability for system-wide planning decisions. The perception is that decisions are made to suit individual needs and not to best serve Indianapolis' families. The choice of one governing body to increase or decrease the number of seats available in a grade, or to close or open a school, impacts the other schools around it. Although the governance systems work independently, the truth is the impact of their decisions has ramifications beyond their own system.

"In kindergarten, for the first time ever, we exhausted our lottery waitlist. We went through 30-40 kids. Last year, IPS dramatically expanded the magnet seats available." **Carey Dahncke, Chief Academic Officer, Christel House Academy**

Finding 3. There is little transparency around enrollment and choice in Indianapolis.

Transparency is a necessary feature of a healthy enrollment and school choice system. Parents, school leaders, administrators of school systems, and leaders at partner organizations all have a right to clarity on the process inputs and results they produce. Cities that maintain fully transparent enrollment and school choice systems are characterized by the following:

1) Data indicating capacity and seat availability at all public schools is readily available throughout the school year.

2) Results data from previous years is published and readily available, including numbers of students admitted to schools, how many applied but were rejected, and what sorts of priorities were used to break ties among applicants and admit students.

3) Families can access the story of their child's application results – if their child is rejected from a school(s) they can access data that explains this result.

4) School leaders have easy access to reports that describe the exact nature of demand for their school – numbers of applicants at each preference level, what types of applicants they are getting (neighborhoods of origin, services required, feeder school of origin, for example). These reports are updated rapidly, especially during the peak application season.

5) School leaders have easy access to the story of their admissions results – the number of matches made to their school by grade level, data on the group of students admitted to their school, and the group that applied but were not admitted (should that be an issue).

6) System administrators and partner organizations have easy access to system-wide data that allows for comparative analysis of demand for each school, and to see up-to-date results at each school.

7) System administrators can explain any and all results, and relate them to operations within the annual cycle of enrollment and choice. For example, if a child is enrolled at a public school, system administrators can explain how and when that child came to enroll at that school.

8) System administrators are held accountable for ensuring that published policies are adhered to, and that the results of enrollment and choice reflect this.

The above are features of the enrollment and choice systems in Denver, New Orleans, New York City high schools, Newark, and Washington DC. Our research shows none of the above currently exists in Indianapolis.

In Indianapolis there is little transparency when it comes to how students enter and leave schools. This has led to distrust among and between the district and charter sector and the organizations that support them. None of this distrust is rooted in fact because there is no data to prove or disprove a person's assertions. That, in itself, is part of the problem.

Following is a discussion of Indianapolis enrollment and choice transparency issues and their implications.

3a) There is little trust across the different school sectors (charter school, neighborhood school, magnet school) and among other education professionals, that enrollment processes and admissions policies are being fairly implemented. The decentralized structure of the enrollment and choice process in Indianapolis leads to opaque admissions in general - applying for a seat is a transaction conducted between family and school, without oversight. Beyond the basic structural issues, there are mechanisms that allow, and in fact *encourage* schools to do their enrollment without any transparency. This, in the end, allows administrators at schools to have essentially complete discretion regarding admissions. Families are in a compromised position – there are no guarantees that admissions decisions are made justly and there is no accountability mechanism for families to access.

> "We lack information – we have macro information about the first count day and the second count day – but we don't know who left, or the number of students who left, versus the number of seats that were back filled." **Brandon Brown, Director of Charter Schools, Mayor's Office of Education Innovation**

In Indianapolis, the idea that there is a "grey market" for seats, or a way to game the system, at highly coveted schools is as much perception as it is reality. It is without question that the "grey market" benefits families that are more connected at the expense of those families that are not, a fact that is concerning to those education stakeholders to which IIPSC spoke. This is a logical outgrowth of the lack of transparency around enrollment at schools, whether they are district magnet schools or charter schools.

> "Theoretically charter schools are supposed to release all of their capacity at the time of the lottery, but it's impossible for the authorizer to know that is being managed efficiently." **Brandon Brown, Director of Charter Schools, Mayor's Office of Education Innovation**

"We were at a meeting at our office with some people who do work for us, and we had another person with us, and they were like, 'Call us if you want to get your kids into CFI and we can get you in.'" **Miriam Acevedo, CEO and Executive Director, La Plaza**

"The other rumor that I heard is this: You have to submit your paperwork to apply to the magnet school to central office. Each of the three schools that I went to really impressed upon me that I needed to get a copy of what I dropped off with a timestamp, because once I drop it off, who knows what will happen to it. In our case, we didn't hear back about my son's assignment in a very timely manner. After a couple weeks, I called downtown to see what happened, and they were like, 'Oh, I see your son's name here, what was your first choice?' and then I told them and they were like, 'Yes, that's where your son was assigned.'" **Nathan Ringham, IPS parent**

"There is misinformation out there. Like if I only put one choice on my magnet application you're more likely to get in." **Christine Collier, Principal, IPS School 84**

"I had a friend whose son didn't test in, but I told her just to go to the G&T office at the district… and they let him in." **An IPS parent**

"I've heard a little of that from my neighbors. Strategies for ranking your choices and making sure you can pick right to make sure that you can get into your choice. If I'm not in the priority neighborhood, should I make it my first choice or my second choice? With all of this it makes an already complicated system even more complicated." **Nathan Ringham, IPS parent**

3b) There are various practices, both covert and overt, that schools employ in order to shape their school via enrollment. Individual schools in Indianapolis have a lot of leeway in shaping their enrollment. This extends beyond the lottery and initial enrollments, and into the school year. The district has the ability to do this overtly, by setting admissions criteria for its magnet programs. At this time, there is one magnet school that requires a test for admission. Many stakeholders IIPSC spoke to expressed concern over IPS' decision to move its magnet application online only, describing it as a screening mechanism, even if unintended.

For charter schools where law requires they be open to all, it is more covert. We are not suggesting this is because individuals are seeking to do anything illegal or inherently bad. Rather, these are rational symptoms that arise from an unhealthy system where policies are being created disparately, with each school making decisions in the best interests of their individual school communities.

"I hear a lot of things about the way schools recruit and find ways to get kids out. There's a school that is doing really well on tests, but if you take a look at their enrollment in the ninth grade and the number of graduates in the twelfth grade, there's obviously something happening. What is happening? Where are those kids now? And why? No one knows. And yet, they are highly lauded as a fantastic school." **An IPS parent**

"There are schools that bring in a really large number of kindergarten students and graduate a really small number of 8th graders or seniors. We back-fill on every grade. When you don't, obviously, it's because you want a good letter grade. I'd like to see people step up, to see school leaders have to answer uncomfortable questions about why they do that." **A charter school administrator**

There was a lot of discussion about how charter schools differentiate themselves, or publicize a focus on a particular area of study and how that may, or may not, align with the requirement that they be open enrollment. No one we spoke to said the ability for schools to develop a focus or a niche was a bad thing, per se, but there was consensus that the way it currently happens is opaque and does not necessarily create a system of schools that serves all families.

"The nature of their marketing, and their enrollment process, makes it clear it's not open to all. If the school is clearly labeled as a college preparatory school, you're telling students who don't want college not to come here. Just by the nature of the marketing, they will self-screen. When a student can't succeed there, it creates a subset of students who are going to go to the options that are available to them, right? In some cases, they go back to their neighborhood school, the majority of which are F schools." **Scott Bess, President, Goodwill Education Initiatives**

"I am highly supportive of schools being able to brand and focus on a niche. I think that helps parents. The challenge, though, is if you do that too frequently in a public school system, do parents really have the choices that they need? What if they don't want their kids in one of those specific areas of focus? I feel like there has to be a balance. The question then becomes, who gets to decide?" **An Indianapolis Education Advocate**

"In our experience supporting our families with transitioning from our school to the next option, we have been most successful when our families fully understand the academic program and expectations, culture of the school, logistics (i.e., cost, transportation, calendar) etc. so that they can make the most informed decision

possible. Unfortunately, when these things are not transparent, we have seen students struggle, families become frustrated, and often times students become quite transient in their school choice." **Emily Pelino, Executive Director, KIPP Indianapolis**

Schools lose the incentive to retain hard-to-educate children on their registers after count day and it is widely reported that charter schools commonly force children off their registers. The same used to be true of IPS' magnet schools, stakeholders reported, until recently. IPS administrators have told magnet school administrators to no longer transfer students back to their neighborhood school.

The most common tactic reported to us involves an attempt to remove a child with behavioral problems by threatening the family with long-term suspension or expulsion. If the child were actually suspended or expelled, it would be difficult for the family to re-enroll the child in another "regular" public school. Anecdotally, there is a belief that the introduction of a second "count day," the day LEAs report their enrollment to the state for funding purposes, is changing behavior in this regard. The lack of data regarding enrollment practices across schools, though, makes it difficult to prove or disprove.

> "I don't think it is just charters. You get schools that say, 'you have a choice, we can expel you or you can withdraw.' That drives me crazy. I don't have that choice, not that I would use that choice." **David Brunsting, Vice Principal, New Tech High**

> "These charter schools get our kids, they get the money, and then once the students are a problem, they have the latitude to say they have to leave. We see both scenarios: counseling out and the parent who pulls the student because they are having problems." **Tihesha Guthrie, Principal, IPS School 99**

> "We bend over backwards to meet the needs of families. We easily could have sent them back to the district but that's not how we operate. I talked to a magnet guy, celebrated for turning around a magnet school and he said, 'Well kids don't fight at our school because they know if they fight at our school they get kicked out.'" **A charter school principal**

> "The district can legally exit students from their magnet schools. They'll say, 'you're not magnet material', and they'll exit them to their local school." **Carey Danhke, Chief Academic Officer, Christel House Academy**

> "Parents will enroll their kids in charter schools and they will stay about 4 weeks, and generally it's right after count day and they come right back to the school. Usually they say it is because they wanted a school closer to home, but when you probe, you hear different stories." **An IPS principal**

It seems as though the administrative sectors in Indianapolis should work to agree upon a set of policies and operations around mid-year transfers, long-term suspension, and expulsion, and then share accountability for enforcement. Until this happens, some schools will continue to be able to use these tools without transparency.

Finding 4. School leaders and district administrators across Indianapolis want a data sharing and management system.

Data is not managed and shared across networks of public schools in Indianapolis. IPS has a system and charter networks and schools have their own systems. The absence of a shared data management system presents daily challenges for schools and the larger system of public schools misses opportunities for strategic planning. Following is a discussion of these challenges and their implications.

4a) Schools do not always have access to the most basic student demographic information, including updated contact information and student records. Families conduct admissions transactions with individual charter schools, as well as the district, in Indianapolis, and can receive offers to multiple schools. Families have no incentive to inform a school when they will decline an offer to enroll, and as discussed earlier, schools have difficulty predicting their enrollment numbers.

When a student enrolls at a new school it is possible the school will not receive the appropriate records, and may not know, for example, that the child has an IEP or belongs in grade 10 but is still in 9th grade math. The absence of a shared data system also means school staff spends a lot of time and energy tracking down students who do not show up.

> "In my school, we have teachers mark each day if a student is present. I run a perfect attendance report at the end of the day and I send my social workers the list of kids who didn't come to school. Then you need to start calling these kids. Immediately, you start getting the information about where they have enrolled. What I have instructed our registrar is that when that happens, remove them. I need to know if my class sizes are real." **David Brunsting, Vice Principal, New Tech High**

Here is a dramatic, but plausible way of describing the data problem in Indianapolis: there is no central database that contains updated enrollment and demographic information for Indianapolis' public school population. It is possible that in the event of an emergency, authorities would not be able to locate a public school student.

4b) Public school system administrators and their partners in Indianapolis are missing out on opportunities to use data to measure demand for schools and to hold schools accountable for proper implementation of enrollment policy. Thousands of families every year make decisions about where they want to send their children to school. The data about the breadth and preference order of those choices is not collected by anyone.

> "A common data system would support strategic planning: you have these neighborhoods where children need high quality seats, you have the data on the number of kids who live there, the data on the number of high quality seats that exist there, and you know the gap. Then you can figure out how to fill that gap."
> **An Indianapolis Education Advocate**

This type of data is collected in Denver, New Orleans, New York City high schools, Newark, and Washington DC. With this data, the following types of analysis are possible:

- How many children choose a specific school, and at what preference level?
- Which public elementary (or middle or high) school in a specific neighborhood receives the most 1st choice applications? The most overall applications?
- Which public schools are the children who live in a specific neighborhood asking for, and in what preference order?
- Describe the demand for 5th grade seats among students with IEPs and who are classified as high incidence/low needs – what schools are they asking for and at what preference levels?
- What schools experience a mid-year net gain of students with IEPs, and what schools experience a net loss?
- Which schools lost the fewest kids mid year from their grade 9 register?
- What are the best options regarding a space to open a new school, so that it is likely to receive the greatest level of demand?
- Which are the schools that should be targeted for support and intervention plans due to low demand levels?
- Is there a need for more seats serving a specific population in a specific neighborhood (for example, does neighborhood "X" need more seats for kids whose first language is not English)?
- Which public schools are operating at a minimum of 90% utilization rate?

These are examples of the types of questions administrators might ask as they think through critical planning decisions. In Indianapolis, these questions are going unanswered and this is, in part, because the data is not being collected in order to answer them.

Centrally managed and shared data would allow systems administrators to efficiently support schools in resource allocation. There is no way to support them in any sort of

register reconciliation if LEAs and districts are not sharing a data system that reports enrollments and movements between all schools.

> "Nobody really has a good feel about how many kids there are in the district, and how many are coming from outside of the district to [charter] schools inside of the district. IPS assumes that all of the kids in charters are their kids, but nobody really knows. How can you plan if you're assuming that 100% of the kids in charters are IPS kids when it might turn out that they are not?" **An Indianapolis Education Advocate**

It is our feeling that a central data management system, that all schools can share and benefit from, is critical to successful implementation of the reforms that would address the enrollment and choice problems raised previously in this report. Indianapolis has one very important fact in its favor in this regard: All students, regardless of whether they enroll in a traditional public school or a charter school, are assigned a student identification number by the state. A standard student identifier is a minimum requirement for this type of central data management system.

Finding 5. For the benefits of school choice to be truly realized in Indianapolis, improvement must be made to student transportation services and to communications and guidance services for families. All of this is important to families when making school choices.

Families must have easy access to unbiased and richly detailed information about their school choices, and must be able to travel to the schools they want for their children, should that school not be the local school. In Indianapolis, school choice will bring about the greatest benefits for families, schools and systems of schools when coupled with related work to improve transportation service and access to guidance and information about schools.

5a) Stakeholders speak of transportation as a factor that limits school choice in Indianapolis. By recommending meaningful improvement to the Indianapolis public transportation system, we do not mean to suggest that this is a novel idea, nor to diminish the huge scope of work and costs that would be involved. We are simply reporting what stakeholders are saying, and we are in full agreement: substantial challenges notwithstanding, school choice in Indianapolis will be considerably more beneficial to all if there is also a substantial investment in improving transportation services.

> "Transportation is a huge thing to think through. You need to have some element of realism about it. Is there some structure where you tell parents, these are the schools where your child gets transportation versus schools outside of the zone where transportation is not guaranteed, for example? Public transportation sucks.

It wouldn't be as big a problem if there were a stronger public transit system." **An Indianapolis Education Advocate**

"I think transportation is a huge barrier. Given all of the other things on their mind, the things that need attention at the moment, wondering how they are going to get their child to school would be a huge challenge. Convenience is huge. I think sometimes that gets translated as them not caring, but that's not what it is. I think it's a huge barrier, and I think it's one that stops them from even considering options right off the bat." **Andrew Green, Chief Program Officer, Shepherd Community Center**

"You can't have open enrollment without putting in the budget for transportation. It will fail. If you want to do open enrollment you must have transportation. If I live at 38th and Post, and my kid gets in downtown, but I work over in Shelbyville, how the heck would that work for me?" **Miriam Acevedo, CEO and Executive Director, La Plaza**

Transportation reform can be approached in two ways: by working with the city to improve public transportation and by working to improve the transportation provided by IPS and individual charter schools. The latter is more directly under the control of the education stakeholders in Indianapolis and should be explored.

5b) Children and families need reliable information and helpful guidance if they are to make good choices. Choosing the right school for a child is a complicated task and individual families face individual challenges in doing so. It is not always easy to spot indications of school quality, and it can be equally challenging to determine the school that will be the best "fit" for a child.

The Great Schools website and printed guide fills a vast need in Indianapolis, but it is not enough. Stakeholders also say they wish the guides were more widely distributed to families, and that its contents were more accessible to the least sophisticated of Indianapolis' consumers.

This is a difficult challenge, one that will require the charter and district sectors, as well as other non-profit organizations that serve Indianapolis families, to work together. Active guidance is needed to support many families in making good school choices.

"We need someone who can be really up front with parents: based on your student's profile, them going to School A probably isn't a great idea. Your academic profile doesn't match their student body. But here are 8 schools that do, and here is where they are, here is information about them." **Scott Bess, President, Goodwill Education Initiatives**

"One of the things that limit low income families is that they don't have options
in their life – where they buy their food, where they get healthcare, where they
shop – so, empowering them to be able to vote with their feet is very hard because
of that lens that they have of managing what is immediately before them. So it's
hard to get them to think that becoming an activist is worthwhile. If given the
ability to self select, given the right kinds of supports, given the right kind of
orientation, and if we make it efficient and simple, I think they will make good
choices. I think they will, if we give them the support and the tools to make those
choices." **James Taylor, Chief Executive Officer, James H. Boner Community
Center.**

"The tendency of some working to support families in poverty has been to plan
events and activities that conform to our experiences. But we don't have the same
experiences as families in poverty. I don't believe the characterization that people
don't care. It's really about the different lives they are dealing with. I think we try
to engage parents on *our* schedules, or when *we* think they would be available, as
opposed to what actually works for them." **Beth Stroh, Director of Education,
United Way of Central Indiana**

Guidance can come in the form of central staff who meet with families, but should also
come in the form of a technology tool that makes it easy to learn about all schools and
what makes each one special, to access easy-to-digest information about school quality
and performance, and to identify a set of schools that matches individual preferences.
Again, without diminishing the size of the challenges involved, success in enhancing
information sharing and guidance systems will vastly enhance UE's impact.

**Finding 6. There is a need for a coordinated and strategic approach to school
planning in Indianapolis.**

In Indianapolis there are many districts and authorizers responsible for opening and
closing schools. Currently these entities work independently of each other, which means
there is no one assessing whether the school options in Indianapolis meet the needs of the
population. When schools close, it is incredibly difficult to ensure that all impacted
families and children are accounted for. There is a desire, though, among education
stakeholders for IPS and authorizers of charter schools to work together.

"There's no coordination. Where the schools are locating, what resources are
going to build new facilities. I don't think there is any coordination about where
and how, within or across school systems. There should be." **An IPS parent**

"Someone needs to be monitoring the system. I don't think there needs to be
heavy-handed oversight, but there needs to be strategic oversight to make sure

that the system is serving all kids." **Stephanie Bothun, Director of Education Initiatives, Mayor's Office of Education Innovation**

"We have authorizers that seem to be authorizing with both hands, it's almost like a race to see how many schools they can authorize. That's not helping." **A school administrator**

"Not having a single authorizer is an issue. A good authorizer can help mitigate any saturation of the market by having control over where there schools are going. When you have a bunch of authorizers that don't work collaboratively, then you have a bunch of schools opening in the same place." **A charter school principal**

"There needs to be an entity who can lead the effort. An entity that has credibility across the board to bring disparate people together so that we can plan for the whole city. For example, there is a lot of need where charters aren't located. There are a lot of charters focused on Center Township, given per pupil funding levels, but there is need in the outlying townships. There hasn't been a strategy for the rest of the county." **John Barth, At Large Member, City County Council**

"From the philanthropic lens, it's such a fractured system and I worry that without some kind of unifying force, the fractured system is turning off some donors. They want to make investments but it's difficult to know where to invest. Creating opportunities for collaboration, better access to information, an easier way to think about what's in the best interest of the child, I think that could be very exciting." **Ryan Brady, Philanthropic Adviser, Glick Fund and the Glick Family Foundation**

As referenced earlier, there is a desire by local stakeholders for a data system that includes all Indianapolis public school children. Once available, the next question concerns who will use that data and how will they use it to ensure Indianapolis families are being better served. Stakeholders are hopeful that under the leadership of the Mayor and Superintendent Ferebee, this collaborative approach to school management is possible.

IIPSC | Innovation in
Public School Choice

Recommendations

Given what we have heard from the myriad of stakeholders we have spoken to, it is obvious that although there is a deep commitment to school choice in Indianapolis the processes that exist to access those choices are not working for all families, particularly those most at risk. Following are the main recommendations IIPSC proposes for Indianapolis stakeholders to consider in enacting enrollment and choice reform:

A) Make it easier for families to participate in choosing a school for their child:

> i. **Build upon the Great Schools website and guide to improve its distribution and reach to ensure better adoption of a comprehensive guide** that presents easy-to-understand information for parents to use in making decisions about the best fit for their child.

> ii. **Establish a set of school fairs/expos at which all of Indianapolis' public schools – traditional public and charter – are represented** so families have one place to go to meet with school administrators.

> iii. **Create a universal application** families can use to list all of their public school choices, in the order of preference. Make it possible for a family to apply to any and all schools without being physically present in order to do so, understanding that for some schools with academic or performance criteria, additional paperwork or an in-person interview may be required.

> iv. **Identify or create a central administrative body to serve as the point of accountability** to families in distributing, collecting, and processing applications.

B) Bring complete transparency to the annual cycle of public school enrollment and choice.

> i. **Use a centralized clearinghouse to match students and public schools** in Indianapolis, adhering to student preferences, school capacities, and prioritization policies, while employing a strategy-proof student assignment algorithm.

> ii. **Limit opportunities for enrollment to occur outside of the regulatory environment** via individual transactions at schools. Allow ample time for families to go to school fairs and open houses and to receive guidance on making choices before running the central lottery/matching process.

> iii. **Audit the data that is used to generate school matches, as well as the matches themselves,** and allow any interested and authorized party to track results.

iv. **Collaborate to recommend policies that would govern mid-year transfer** from one public school to another, mid-year enrollment of students who are new to Indianapolis or are coming from a non-public or from outside of the district, and enrollment of students who have been expelled from a school.

v. **Produce reports that use quantitative data** to demonstrate capacity by grade and by school, detailed demand results at each school, matching results at each school, mid-year transfers and mid-year enrollment.

C) Build a state-of-the-art data management system for all public schools, and for systems of schools to use in their enrollment and choice operations.

i. An effective data management system will include a simple user interface and will allow central system administrators to register users and assign them to one of several user roles (ensuring appropriate access). If at all possible, parents/guardians should be able to access the system in order to search for and learn about schools, and to submit applications.

ii. The data management system should function as the official system of record for the purposes of day-to-day enrollment, even if individual LEAs continue to manage state reporting via their official student information system (SIS). The data management system for enrollment and each LEA-level SIS should be integrated, allowing for easy updating of student records, real-time updates of seat availability at schools, processing of enrollments including new arrivals, and transfers between schools, as a result of matching systems.

iii. The data management system should be the primary mechanism for the generation of a vast array of reports that allow users to creatively display and analyze enrollment and choice data.

D) Explore options for collaboration in related areas, including transportation services, information sharing and guidance services, and the intentional coordination of school opening, turnaround, and closure decisions using transparent mechanisms.

When taken together, these recommendations are part of what is commonly referred to as a Universal Enrollment System (UE). We recommend Indianapolis stakeholders explore this solution and consider implementing a system of UE for IPS schools and the charter schools that fall within its boundary.