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The challenges facing Indianapolis Public Schools are daunting. Fiscal constraints and school safety are just two of the factors that contribute to high dropout rates, low academic achievement, achievement gaps between middle-class and low income children and declining enrollment. IPS' challenges raise legitimate questions as to whether an elected school board can provide the vision, accountability and support needed to implement and sustain the necessary reforms.

School boards and superintendents across the country have confronted similar challenges of declining enrollment, declining state funding, a mismatch between the location of school buildings and school age children and persistent low achievement. Communities that successfully revitalized their schools did so only after radically restructuring how they manage the school system. New York placed the schools directly under the mayor's control. Chicago and Boston have mayoral appointment of the school board. Other cities have some hybrid of formal and informal mayoral influence.

A well thought out, deliberate, significant change in how Indianapolis manages its schools is needed. While a change to mayoral control or a mayoral appointment would guarantee nothing, it would provide IPS with a new set of possibilities. A new governance structure could be permanent, time-limited or subject to review by the General Assembly or the people of Indianapolis. Past reform efforts have not succeeded perhaps in part because they did not address school governance. U.S. Secretary of Education, Arne Duncan, who led the turnaround of Chicago public schools, has strongly advocated for the reform of public education and has recommended placing schools under mayoral control.

The success of a new governance structure and true reform would require leadership of a broad-based civic alliance and must include these four elements:

- Transparency – Public meetings, hearings and reports on a regular basis.
- Strong Oversight – Local public officials and civic leaders must insist on verifiable measures of performance.
- Defined metrics of success – All must agree on what success means, which must include test scores, graduation rates, gains in teacher quality, transportation, student health and safety and financial success.
- Willingness to expend political capital for community success – City, civic and business leaders must make concrete commitments.

If broadly supported and diligently implemented, a bold change may provide the catalyst required for sustainable success for the benefit of Indianapolis. Indianapolis must be a city that works for its children by providing them with a safe, academically rigorous education. Together we can build a city that works for all of us.

Sincerely,

Brian S. Williams

Paid for and authorized by Williams for Indianapolis, Robert Herzog Treasurer