

IPS board overturns 2014 decisions, will partner with Phalen charter school

Partnership will create the state's first "innovation network" school

[Hayleigh Colombo](#) on January 28, 2015 12:46 am

Three new Indianapolis Public School Board members helped junk two big [decisions their predecessors backed](#) in the twilight of their terms late last year.

First, the board approved the state's first-ever "innovation network school," an autonomous IPS school under the district's umbrella, to be run in partnership with the Phalen Leadership Academy charter school. The move was authorized by a [law created by the legislature last year](#) called House Bill 1321.

Phalen's plan is to turn around a low-performing district school while it manages the building under IPS control. The school concept was crafted by two Mind Trust innovation school fellows, Earl Phalen and Marlon Llewellyn, who [won a \\$100,000 fellowship from the education advocacy group](#) last year to develop and pitch the idea.

Second, the board [reinstated a contract with Teach Plus](#) to support a [teacher leader program](#), reversing another decision made by former board members.

"The whole concept of innovation is new ideas," board president Diane Arnold said. "Let's think outside the box and try some innovative ideas."

Gayle Cosby, the lone returning board member who expressed concerns with both proposals last year, voted no again both times. She was the only no vote. The Phalen partnership passed 6-1. Caitlin Hannon abstained from voting on the contract with Teach Plus because she leads the organization's Indianapolis branch. That vote was 5-1.

The next step for the Phalen school, which is slated to open in the fall, is to decide which struggling school building will be overhauled. Superintendent Lewis Ferebee said there would be community input first. The district has to complete a contract with Phalen to decide funding levels, services and test score expectations.

The school plans to improve student performance by using strategies it employs in the Phalen charter school, including using "blended learning" — teaching students using traditional classroom instruction and through online lessons — and by extending both the school year and the school day.

The proposal was cheered by IPS parents affiliated the advocacy group Stand for Children, which pushes for change in district schools and in state education policy. Eugenia Murry, a parent of a School 93 student, told board members school choice leads to better outcomes for kids.



PHOTO: Hayleigh Colombo

Earl Martin Phalen and Marlon Llewellyn of Phalen Leadership Academy present their idea to IPS school board members to open an autonomous school within the district.



“All children have a right to benefit from high quality education,” she said. “Failure should no longer be an option. The need for this turnaround model has never been greater.”

But Cosby urged board members be more cautious about partnering with groups that haven’t yet proven successful. Phalen Leadership Academy’s Indianapolis charter school, which opened in 2013, has not yet earned an A to F grade under the state’s accountability system.

“The goal of this initiative is to improve our state letter grades,” Cosby said. “I just feel like this is a gamble we really shouldn’t take at this time. I can’t gamble with our kids’ education.”

Board member Sam Odle countered, saying trying new ideas is the intent of the law.

“What we’re doing doesn’t work, so we’re going to try something else,” board member Sam Odle said. “(We’re) not letting the status quo hold us down.”

<http://in.chalkbeat.org/2015/01/28/ips-board-overturns-2014-decisions-will-partner-with-phalen-charter-school/#.VMqKvmjF-Ve>