

## IPS takes on partners to turn schools around

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By Rich Van Wyk, WTHR reporter

**Watch:** <http://www.wthr.com/story/29046136/ips-takes-on-partners-to-turn-schools-around?autoStart=true&topVideoCatNo=default&clipId=11487843>

There are no students at Phalen Leadership Academy. Teachers call them scholars. They from the same impoverished neighborhoods and struggling families as IPS kids, but appear to be learning a lot more.

A remarkable 93 percent of 3rd graders passed their state-mandated I-Read tests. That's significantly higher than the state average.

"I know if you put together certain ingredients, children will rise to expectations," said school founder Earl Phalen.

Phalen will put those ingredients for learning to work next year at Francis Scott Key Elementary. Despite numerous improvement plans, the IPS school on the city's far east side has persistently received failing grades. Only 15 percent of students pass their ISTEP exams.

"Only fools go where angels fear to tread?" Phalen chuckled. "That's what they say. But firemen go into a fire and police officers go into trouble."

Phalen will run the first of 9 planned IPS "Innovation Network Schools." Superintendent Dr. Lewis Ferebee, Mayor Gregg Ballard and Indianapolis-based "Mind Trust" announced three additional candidates.

"This is an opportunity to dramatically change how our education is done in schools that historically have been underperforming." Ferebee said.

Students remain enrolled in IPS, however the operators will be in charge, running them independently of the district's administration and policies.

For instance, at the Phalen Academy, there are at least two teachers in every classroom. Along with the extra attention, students have a longer school day and a longer school year. Ten extra days, an extra hour and a half a day administrators say add up to about 20 percent more class time.



*Earl Phalen, Phalen Leadership Academy founder (WTHR photo)*



*93 percent of 3rd graders at Phalen Leadership Academy pass their I-Read tests (WTHR photo)*



*Phalen mandates at least two teachers be in every classroom, each school day is 1.5 hours longer than IPS and they have 10 more school days a year (WTHR photo)*

Teachers continuously track academic progress, strategize and if necessary changes occur.

"Traditionally public schools don't have the flexibility around teachers in the classroom to make a change in the middle of a school year if a teacher is not working," Phalen explained.

There are also higher expectations placed on parents. They have to agree to the longer class time and other commitments and rules.

The three candidates selected to operate three other yet-to-be-named IPS schools competed against scores of other candidates. They have more than a year to prepare, plan and hire a staff to take on the makeover. IPS principals of struggling schools never have that luxury or independence in their attempts to turn them around.

However the Innovation Network Schools will operate under additional expectations and pressure from IPS. The district wants to see significant improvement in test scores and other student achievement within the first year of operation.



*Francis Scott Key Elementary on Indianapolis' east side (WTHR photo)*



*Dr. Lewis Ferebee, IPS superintendent (WTHR photo)*

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