



Marlon Llewellyn Talks About Leading the First IPS 'Innovation' School

Eric Weddle

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Listen to the full interview here: <http://www.wfyi.org/news/articles/marlon-llewellyn-talks-about-leading-the-first-ips-innovation-school>

This fall, Francis Scott Key Elementary School 103 will become a Phalen Leadership Academy. The Phalen charter school company is the first outside group to be approved by the Indianapolis Public School Board under Public Law 1321.

The law lets IPS turn failing or underused buildings into autonomous schools run by management teams that are not bound by collective bargaining. The legislation was the idea of IPS Superintendent Lewis Ferebee as a means to have available "all options" to improve schools.

The Phalen elementary curriculum was developed as part of a fellowship program -- sponsored by local education reform group The Mind Trust -- to create new curriculum for struggling IPS schools.

The IPS Board approved Phalen's model in January to become the first, so-called "innovation network school." But one member voted against the plan because the first Phalen Academy has yet to receive a grade on the state's A-F accountability scale.

The management contract between IPS and Phalen has yet to be approved by the board.

Marlon Llewellyn will be the principal at School 103. He told WFYI education reporter Eric Weddle he and Phalen leaders believe their style of teaching can improve student learning.

Here is a transcript of their interview; or listen at the above link.



Marlon Llewellyn will be the principal at IPS School 103 when it opens as a Phalen Leadership Academy for the 2015-16 school year.

The Mind Trust



WFYI: The Mind Trust offered fellowships that would allow you to create a new curriculum, that could be chosen by IPS to be part of a new school model. Your's was chosen -- what did you apply?

LLEWELLYN: I think the opportunity to be different and innovate really intrigued me. Earl (Phalen) and I got together and thought about 'hey, how can we bring this wonderful model that we have currently at (Phalen Leadership Academy) to the families and the scholars at Indianapolis Public Schools.

What is the model that you will be bring to School 103, what is the Phalen model?

We have some core pillars. First core pillar we always talk about is, we believe in two teachers in each classroom. We also believe in quality enrichment for our scholars. Another key component of our model is an authentic partnership with our families. And also the big thing is the extended learning day. We want our kids to learn and want them to learn in a great environment.

Are you asking parents to have more of a buy-in of their children's education?

Correct. So I think the big thing with that is we believe that parents must be involved with their child's educational learning. So our team will work very hard with parents to teach them or show them or allow them the opportunity to really be involved in the school.

Can you explain what the extended learning day is? Is that an extra day of the week, is it more hours?

It is more hours. Instead of your traditional six, six-and-half hours, we believe in an eight hour learning day for our scholars.

Is this model being used now at the current Phalen Leadership Academy?

Correct.

That school has been open for two years now, so how do you know that this model is working?

I think a lot of the growth we saw in the first year through (the academic growth measurement) DIBELS were in our reading and our kids came in at 30 percent on track and



ended the year at 92 percent on track. So the model we believe is working but we just have to continue to stay true to our pillars.

School 103, you can say has a long history of academic difficulties. They've been an F school the past four years and the most recent ISTEP data has them at a 15 percent pass rate. It seems like a lot of barriers to turn around. Why not work with another school, maybe a D school or a school with more possibilities.

That is a really hard question, right? We feel confident in (IPS Superintendent Lewis) Ferebee and IPS's decision allowing us to serve at 103. This will be a partnership. Collectively we can make an impact.

This whole partnership is happening because of a new law that lets you create a new business model and teaching model. Part of that changes who teaches at the schools. How are you working with the current teachers at School 103 -- will they stay or go?

All teachers must reapply for their positions, that's only fair, right? We have a very rigorous process to determine what teacher fits our model. So we look forward to teachers to apply and we look forward to having these discussions around who will return to School 103.

I know IPS, you and The Mind Trust have been very open about saying "this is not takeover ... this is not like what the state has done before with failing schools." But I am sure there are some parents and teachers who feel like this is out of their control. What are you doing to reach out to them?

We received notice of this innovation, that School 103 will be our school last week. We already had our first town hall meeting. We've had an opportunity to already meet with the teachers at the current school to start that communication. We believe communication is very important and we feel confident we are ahead of the curve.

Right now you are the first school under this new law happening at IPS. Do you feel any responsibility because of that in addition to everything else you have to do at School 103?

I think we have to control expectations there. As you mentioned, only 15 percent of scholars passed ISTEP the past four years. If you do the math, that is less than 40 scholars. If you break it down even further in a building of 15 classrooms, that probably equates to only three scholars per classroom passing ISTEP. Our focus year one will be: 1) Safety for the scholars. 2) Being true to the Phalen model and also ensuring that scholars can learn academically.



Thank you very much

Thank you.

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