

BROAD RIPPLE HIGH SCHOOL FACING CLOSURE

by Jim Grim



The Indianapolis Board of School Commissioners is scheduled to vote September 29 on a plan to move Indianapolis Public Schools (IPS) to an “all-choice model” for the district’s high schools.

The school board is also expected to affirm the recommendation of an IPS Facilities Utilization Task Force this summer to **close Broad Ripple High School in June 2018**. The task force found that Broad Ripple was operating at 28% capacity, with a projected enrollment this fall of 666 students in a facility that could hold 2,400.

Multiple public meetings this year preceded the recommendation that includes closing John Marshall Community High School (after it serves as a middle school this academic year) and converting Arlington and Northwest community high schools into middle schools in 2018. However, it appears Broad Ripple’s fate came down to its geography: the buildings recommended to cease operating as high schools are furthest from the heart of the city, and Broad Ripple’s unique location could potentially attract millions of dollars for property redevelopment.

entertainment management and communications, will move to Shortridge and International Baccalaureate and humanities programs there.

er proposed programs:

ARSENAL TECHNICAL HIGH SCHOOL

- construction, engineering, and design
- military academy
- math and science
- law and public policy
- New Tech High
- the existing career technology center

CRISPUS ATTUCKS HIGH SCHOOL

- health and science
- teaching, learning, and leading academies

GEORGE WASHINGTON COMMUNITY HIGH SCHOOL

- IT
- manufacturing, engineering, and logistics
- business and finance academies

While closing Broad Ripple is a very difficult and personal decision for me, and I am very emotional about it, I am optimistic about moving the humanities arts programs at Broad Ripple High School to Shortridge,” Bentley says. “The Midtown neighborhoods might be losing one of their high schools, but they aren’t losing any high school programs. With the strong leadership and change at Shortridge, I feel confident the transition of these programs—and design—will benefit the current Broad Ripple High School students and boost the number of Midtown families choosing to stay in IPS for high school.”

Reports about 5,000 students today attend the seven high schools that have capacity for 15,000 total enrollment. The Task Force reported that reducing the use of the buildings for high school will save millions of dollars in operations and transportation costs, freeing up about \$4 million annually that could support the choice model career academies.

‘A groundswell of emotion’

During the July 18 school board meeting at Broad Ripple High School, more than 30 individuals took up to three minutes each at the microphone and faced 16 IPS administrators and board commissioners lined up behind a row of tables across the entire performing arts auditorium stage.

Scott Jenkins, a member of the Midtown Indy board of directors, asked IPS to include the community in determining reuse of the site—and preferably to continue it as a school. The property “has a strong set of bones for education,” Jenkins said. “Education is part of our economic development plans.”

Kent Springer, Broad Ripple High School Class of ’74, is the past president and a current board member of the Broad Ripple Village Association. He presented the organization’s request that the facility continue to serve public educational purposes. “Maintaining a school within Village boundaries will increase resident retention and raise the profile of Broad Ripple among potential new residents moving to the Indianapolis area,” he said.

Midtown resident Kelly Bentley is an IPS school board commissioner. “The past month has seen a groundswell of emotion regarding Broad Ripple High School—and I want all of you to know that when it comes to the joy and pride of being a Broad Ripple student and parent, I share every word and every sentiment and every emotion,” she said. “I do not minimize at all—not for one minute—the love many people feel for the school and the memories we all hold so dear.”

She continued: “In my role as commissioner, however, I must put the interests of the entire district ahead of everything else. Empathy and sympathy have their place, but fiduciary responsibility must come first.” She added, “We must use our scarce resources to support the education of the students we have rather than buildings we don’t need.”

Choice options

Beginning in 2018–19, IPS plans for all high school students to choose a school to attend based on 45 proposed career academies—schools to be added to existing “choice options.” Broad Ripple visual and performing arts programs, for example, along with

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Enrollment erosion

The Task Force reports that IPS experienced a **peak enrollment of about 109,000 students in 1967** (myips.org/facilitiestaskforce). Over the next 50 years, multiple factors contributed to enrollment decreases, resulting in **about 30,000 students today**. Meanwhile, IPS has **closed multiple elementary and middle school buildings** but only one of the **10 high schools that operated during peak enrollment in 1967**. (The district opened an 11th high school, Northwest, in 1968.)

IPS enrollment has followed the population decline in Center Township, the Task Force notes. IPS **lost 42,574 students** from just before the federal desegregation order in 1970 until IPS began busing in 1981, a decrease of **40 percent** enrollment. Throughout the 1980s and 1990s, IPS **lost an additional 25,000 students**, coinciding with a decline in Center Township’s population. In the 2000s, the growth of charter schools and dramatic population increase in surrounding counties drove IPS enrollment **down further**, by **about 10,000 students**.

Now, the Broad Ripple property, according to the Task Force report, could be sold for **\$6 million to \$8 million**, a **one-time boost** to district finances that have experienced expenses higher than annual revenue the past three years. In contrast, one speaker July 18 noted IPS had **spent \$9.2 million in renovations to BRHS only a decade ago**.

Board President Mary Ann Sullivan ended the BRHS meeting by thanking everyone for attending. “I can assure you we are listening to what you have to say,” she added. “Your voice will impact how we move forward with these difficult decisions.”

Jim Grim, director of university/community school partnerships at IUPUI, has lived in Midtown for 30 years. He has been widely published and specializes in education and community engagement topics.

BROAD RIPPLE HIGH SCHOOL 1956

MEMORIAL ROLL OF HONOR

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William L. Allen
Charlotte R. Ammerman
James L. Anderson
Harold Apley
Allen Ashworth
Michael T. Baird
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Martin D. Barratt
Gerald L. Bayne
James W. Becker
Carol D. Bingham
William V. Borden
Don A. Boyd
Ann H. Bradford
Charles W. Bunch
Clo Ann Carnes
Anne H. Carr
Barbara J. Clingman
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Faye DeFenlon
Robert Dill
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Thomas F. Donlon
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John R. Ely
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Norman T. Fields
Ernest K. Fisher II
Sharon M. Ford
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Frederic H. Genck
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Judith Ann Lambert
Mary Lou Landes
Josette M. Lavaux
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Margo Matthews
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JoAnne McDowell
Don D. McFarren
Jon M. Meese
Judith Metzger
Marcia D. Miller
Donis H. Mills
Richard D. Moser
Sharon D. Murphy
Phyllis A. Newhouse
Nancy L. Ogle
Vivian G. Osting
Donald W. Penington
Sandy Pennock
John Phillips

Von A. Phillips
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Joyce E. Query
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A. William Spivey
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Betty Swank
Tim Talbott
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Sue Ann Teegarden
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Stephen A. Wann
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