

## INTRODUCTION

Welcome! Thank you for being here! My name is Cathy Fuentes-Rohwer and I am the president of the Indiana Coalition for Public Education. We are a nonpartisan, nonprofit organization that seeks to inform our communities about the issues facing public schools and, hopefully, empower them to act on behalf of our schools, our teachers, and most importantly, our students.

We are here because we LOVE OUR PUBLIC SCHOOLS!

I see parents, grandparents, caregivers of children in the audience, WE are the ones who truly **STAND FOR CHILDREN!**

I see teachers and educators here, those who SHOULD be at the center of education policy, instead of billionaires and businessmen and campaign contributions. Our TEACHERS are the true **MIND TRUST** in education.

I know that there are people here whose schools and local communities are looking at budget cuts, looking at a loss of local control, and at taxation without representation by having to share our property taxes with charter schools. In particular, our friends here in Indianapolis. We stand here with them, those of us from places all over the state, because, if we know anything at this point, we know that their fate is inextricably tied to our own. What happens for their children WILL affect our own. We are here because together we will help **RISE INDY** and the whole state up. We are here because we recognize that we need public education to be supported and stable in order to lift up all children—for their future, for our communities' future, and, ultimately for the future of our democracy.

We are in the PEOPLE'S HOUSE! We are here to show that we want our public schools fully funded this budget session. It is INEXCUSABLE to have parents holding bake sales while they have siphoned BILLIONS of dollars away to privatization. Have you visited our bake sale over there? 200 cookies by talented local high school culinary students. Do you have \$25 million for one?

Bills moving through the legislature are seeking to make this situation worse. For a list of them, see our table over there. Why are we creating an entitlement program for the wealthiest families in the state to pay for the tuition of their private schools while our most vulnerable students don't have fully funded special education? While we don't have universal preK? Public schools must be prioritized as mandated by our state constitution! They are the common good.

PUBLIC means ALL! Our public schools are transparent and accountable to the communities. Public schools are the vast majority of Hoosiers' CHOICE, but, unlike charter and voucher schools, we also get VOICE in our community public schools by electing school board members.

When public funding that belongs in public schools and public hands is directed into the private hands of charter, innovation and voucher schools, that is privatization. Private schools can pick and choose students; they are not free and open to ALL. Charter and innovation schools are outsourced to management companies and marketed as entrepreneurial projects. In reality, children are the guinea pigs of educational experiments. These experiments and privatization efforts are rarely found in largely affluent communities or communities of majority-white students.

Why are our Black and Brown children required to win a competition for excellent educational opportunities through a lottery.. while their white peers are given the stability of fully funded, resourced neighborhood public schools? But what goes around, comes around and we will hear later on how rural and small school corporations are hurting for resources and adequate funding.

It is time to end policies that disproportionately harm children with special needs, children dealing with the effects of poverty, and Black and Brown children. We stand with the national NAACP and other educational justice organizations such as Journey for Justice, in calling for a moratorium on charter schools (and, we would add, their hybrid — “innovation” schools). We stand with parents of color who ask for the stability of a well-resourced public school, not the empty promise of “choice.”

Closing schools is NOT accountability. It is HARM. It hurts children and disrupts their education. When schools across the country closed in response to the pandemic, we saw an outcry from parents of all walks of life at the disruption and havoc it caused their children -- imagine if this happened to them year after year! This opening and shuttering of schools at the whim of the market is disproportionately occurring to our Black and Brown children under the guise of “school choice.” Taking neighborhood public schools with rich traditions, named for Black and Brown community leaders, and rebranding them like a product for the marketplace, erases history and disrespects these communities.

Ultimately, public education is the cornerstone of our democracy. Like our democracy, public education is sometimes messy and flawed, but, in the end, public schools are where the vast majority of our children come together from all walks of life to learn to value and appreciate our differences—and find common ground. Public schools’ mission is to educate and welcome all children. “School choice” purposefully shifts the focus from our collective responsibility to educate ALL children, to the individual choices which benefit a few. Public schools are not businesses, they are the heart of our communities. The legislature can try to put a chill over the classroom with their bills, they can attempt to defund the budgets of our public schools, but we are the majority and we will keep the fire burning in our hearts to see that every single Hoosier student has what he/she/they need to thrive. We will continue striving to keep the “public” in public education.