
Parent Power

Defending our children.
Challenging actions
that harm them.
Making our voices heard.

PARENTS
ACROSS
AMERICA

Welcome

by Moderator Nathan Harris, Member of PAA
Board of Directors and PAA's Indianapolis host



- Nate is the **founder of Wise Knowledge Inc. (WKI)**, an Indianapolis based non-profit organization that seeks to empower low-income youth and parents.
- Nate is former Project Director for **Upward Bound** at Indiana University. Upward Bound is a US Department of Education funded program designed to provide college readiness services to high school students that are low-income and potential first-generation college graduates.
- Nate's most recent community involvement includes serving as Associate Minister at Westwood Missionary Baptist Church where he and his wife Carrie's team provides **academic support to school students**.
- Nate is currently pursuing a **Ph.D. in Higher Education Leadership** at Indiana State University, Terre Haute, IN (Nate began Ph.D. work at Indiana University, Bloomington, IN). He holds a Master of Business Administration from Anderson University, Anderson, IN. Bachelor of Science in Mechanical Technology from Purdue University, West Lafayette, IN, and an Associate Degree in Applied Science from Purdue University, West Lafayette, IN.



*The slides shown in this session are posted
on the Parents Across America website:*

www.parentsacrossamerica.org

Overview of our presentation

- Brief intro to PAA
- The state of Indianapolis schools
- Introduction of our panelists
- Panelist presentations - sharing challenges and successes
- Q and A
- Discussion - what's happening in your area? How can PAA help?
- Report out/Wrap up

What is PAA?

Take a look at our web site...

www.parentsacrossamerica.org

- Our Statement of Beliefs
- Resources:
 - Fact sheets
 - Tool kits
 - Position papers

State of Indianapolis schools

There are other organizations and many individuals who advocate for public schools. Today Nate will highlight three Indianapolis area organizations who are visible in advocating for public schools:

- Parent Power
- Indiana Coalition for Public Education, and
- The IPS Community Coalition

Parent Power

Parent power is an awesome organization that is aware of community-relevant issues that transpire within the Indianapolis Public School System (IPS), and they typically respond to the issues in an effort to push-back on decisions and actions of IPS that appears detrimental to low-income students/students of color and their parents. They possess a very active site on Facebook.

<https://www.facebook.com/Parent-Power-Indianapolis-113715475354342/>

Indiana Coalition for Public Education (ICPE)

ICPE is a statewide public schools advocate who does excellent work revealing the actions of Indiana Lawmakers whose decisions appear detrimental to public school students and parents. The voice of **Vic Smith** consistently provides very revealing information to Indiana citizens. His work alerts advocates to take action needed to push back on legislation that can be hurtful to public school families who depend on our schools. I don't know what we would do in the fight to keep public schools alive, without Vic.

<https://inschoolmatters.wordpress.com/tag/indiana-coalition-for-public-education/>

The IPS Community Coalition

The IPS Community Coalition is a new organization who advocates and strategizes how to best combat IPS decisions that may hurt families who reside in IPS districts. They have organized a strong group of members who have an awesome potential to make a difference for citizens who rely on IPS. Recently they created a list of candidates to challenge current IPS board members in the upcoming election.

<http://talkingoutofschool.org/confusing-questions-and-concerns-from-the-community-coalition/>

<https://www.facebook.com/weareallindianapolis/>

The school closing dilemma

<https://chalkbeat.org/posts/in/2017/08/24/to-keep-indianapolis-high-schools-closing-advocates-encourage-northwest-parents-to-tell-school-board-dont-sell-off-our-district/>

PAA offers a packet of fact sheets and advocacy support for parents and others challenging school closing decisions:

<http://parentsacrossamerica.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/09/schoolclosingspacket.pdf>

...and a fact sheet on the harmful astroturf group Stand for Children:

<http://parentsacrossamerica.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/06/SFC2017.pdf>

Introduction of panelists

Laura Bowman - Member, PAA Board of Directors, leader of PAA-Roanoke Valley (VA)

Steven Norton - Member, PAA Board of Directors, executive director of PAA affiliate Michigan Parents for Schools

Khem Irby - PAA President, leader of PAA-Greensboro (NC) and The Mothers' Agenda (NYC, NY)

Laura Bowman



Laura leads a chapter of PAA in Roanoke, Virginia and serves on Parents Across America's board. She's been advocating for the health, safety, education, and well-being of children for the past seven years. Her particular areas of interest are EdTech, the privatization of public education for profit, and full and fair funding for our nation's neighborhood public schools.

The Parent Voice In EdTech

Our Children. Our schools.
Our Choices.

Parents Across America's Wake-Up Call



Parents Across America Found EdTech Can...

- Interfere with children's brain development
- Impact children's mental health
- Undermine learning
- Increase sitting time which can cause many physical problems
- Contribute to screen addiction
- Contribute to eyestrain and potential myopia, macular degeneration, and blindness
- Expose children to excessive radiation
- Encourage constant testing and data collection without informed consent of students or parents, undermining student privacy
- Benefit corporations without improving education

Parents Across America....

- Created a Position Paper: Our Children @ Risk
- Backed it up with 35 pages of documentation on the effects of EdTech
- Provided parents with questions to ask of their children's teachers
- Made recommendations for appropriate, effective, healthful use of EdTech
- Hosted a Webinar with the Campaign for a Commercial Free Childhood and the Parent Coalition for Student Privacy
- Shared Dr. Kandaras' School Technology Opt-Out letter for parents to use

<http://parentsacrossamerica.org/children-risk-paa-reports-detailing-dangers-edtech/>

Parents Across America; Two Years Later....

- Promoting Current Screen Time Safety Research
- Promoting WiFi Safety Research
- Backing bills on School Screen Time Safety and WiFi Safety
- Asking local and state chapters of the American Academy of Pediatrics to stand up for the health of our children
- Focusing on the benefits of recess and nature play

Ed Tech: Questions to ask

1. What specific electronic devices and programs is my child using in school?
2. How much time per day is my child spending on an electronic device?
3. How much additional time, if any, is my child being asked to spend on an electronic device outside of school hours?

Ed Tech: Questions to ask

4. What data, if any, is being collected by electronic devices and programs? How is the school protecting my child's privacy?
5. For each specific program attached to an electronic device that my child is using, please share the purpose of the program, the reason for its inclusion in the curriculum, and evidence of its effectiveness.
6. If I choose to opt my child out of programs that depend on the use of electronic devices, what alternative forms of instruction and assessment will be made available?

Steve Norton



Steve Norton is Executive Director of PAA state affiliate Michigan Parents for Schools. He also serves as treasurer on the PAA national board. He co-founded MIPFS in 2007 and has directed the group's statewide grassroots advocacy efforts since then. MIPFS works to be the parent voice at the state capitol and also helps parents organize locally. Steve and his wife live in Ann Arbor, and their children graduated from the Ann Arbor Public Schools.



Parent-Led Legislative Action: A Case Study

Steven J Norton

Michigan Parents for Schools, and Parents Across America

Network for Public Education Conference, October 2018





Parent action at the state level

Much of the action in education policy is at the state level, especially after ESSA. Parent groups **can** play in the “big leagues” of state policy along with the powerful interest groups and paid lobbyists.

What you need:

- A solid understanding of the issues in the real world
- A thick skin and limited gag reflex
- A willingness to be flexible to keep a coalition together
- A strong set of core values to help keep you on an even keel

Michigan's Education Achievement Authority

A “tragivictory” in three acts

“First of all, there is no EAA-provided ‘curriculum.’ Teachers design the curriculum as we go and upload it into Buzz, which is an empty shell other than some videos and tests.”

-- An EAA teacher

“I left because as a special education teacher, I knew that their special ed program was violating the law. The treatment of students was making me sick. For my own professional reputation and mental health, I had to stop working there. I miss the kids. I worry about them.”

-- An EAA special education teacher

Sometimes, the best you can do is to stop something really bad from happening

- It was a “**victory**” because the coalition including parents was ultimately able to stop awful legislation from being adopted, against tremendous odds.
- It was a **tragedy** because of the number of vulnerable children who were hurt by this “experiment” run amok, not to mention the time, effort and money spent.



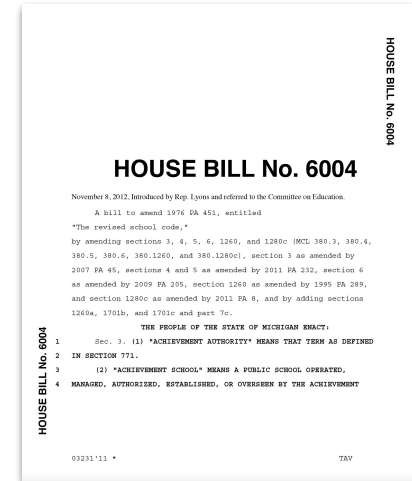
Act I: Enter the Savivors of Detroit

- Governor, along with key Detroit area pro-“reform” foundations, forms an alliance to create a new agency that will “rescue” some of the lowest-scoring schools in Detroit. They make a pitch to Detroit-native Eli Broad to fund it.
- To run this new agency, they hire Kansas City super John Covington and his team, who have a vision of “student centered” instruction delivered almost exclusively by computer.
- Administrators “clean house,” removing most of the existing staff of these schools.



Act I: Enter the Savors of Detroit, *cont'd*

- About *two months* after the EAA opens its doors, lawmakers introduce bills that would make the EAA the **state school reform district**.
- Bills would give it the power to take over schools, close schools, and open charter schools in their place anywhere in the state.
- Gov. announces this is his top education policy priority. The state is set for a huge battle during the raucous “lame duck” session of 2012.





A peek behind the curtain...

What happened in the EAA was a disaster for students (see handout). But for our purposes, it's more important to look at what was going on in the legislature:

Michigan may be the “State of DeVos,” but the EAA *was not* a DeVos organization project

- They would have been opposed on principle, because it created a new gov't bureaucracy

But the “EAA bill” **was** their idea

- The law would have turned the EAA into the administrator of the state reform district, which had so far not been used.
- It would have the **authority to take over schools anywhere in the state** on test-score grounds
- It could **close those schools and open charters**
- In the first draft, it could **also create new charters anywhere**

The “beauty” of all this was that they didn't need to actually create anything

- We already had a State School Reform District on the books, as part of our failed attempt to get RttT money
- The EAA already existed as an “inter-local agreement” that wasn't limited to one place
- All they had to do was put the two together and give it extra powers. The SSRD already had sweeping powers to take over schools

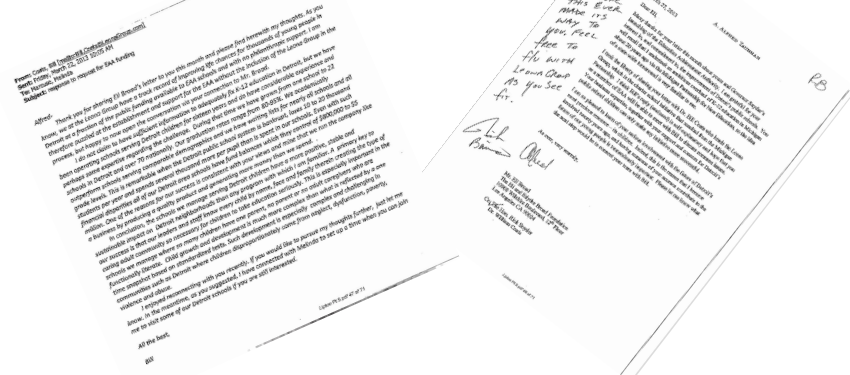
This was all *planned*

If you look carefully at the bill, you'll see that it was *first drafted in 2011, at least a year before it was introduced* (in November 2012) and a year before the EAA had admitted a single student.

The bill was introduced in a “lame duck” session, after the 2012 elections, *so that many outgoing lawmakers could make a controversial vote without fear*. (We also got “right to work”)

Side note: they didn't ignore the EAA entirely.

- Eli Broad, via Alfred Taubman, got a wounded email from the president of Leona Group, a for-profit charter chain, asking why they hadn't just farmed the whole thing out to charters for a lower cost.



Coordinated response

- State-wide education advocacy groups, including school management associations, teachers' unions, and parent groups, agree to form a coalition aimed at halting the legislation.
- The coalition agreed on consistent and simple messaging, which was made stronger by the fact that such a diverse group of organizations was unified in the effort.
- Coalition efforts included:
 - intensive lobbying of individual lawmakers;
 - developing an online and social media presence;
 - engaging the media with press conferences, interviews, op-ed pieces, and contacts with journalists;
 - simple but repeated calls to action to our group constituencies using the common messaging strategy.



Act II: Digging In

- Old habits are hard to change – keeping the coalition together gets more difficult as some groups want to negotiate their own deal.
 - Cutting side deals to protect some groups is an established strategy to remove opposition.
- Despite a full-court press by supporters of the EAA and of school takeover generally, after bruising committee hearings and dueling press conferences, the EAA legislation is kept bottled up in committee and dies at the end of the lame duck session.
- EAA management claim remarkable progress, but disturbing stories start to come out. This trickle accelerates over the next year, as FOIA requests unearth troubling details.



Act III: The Final Push and Reality Hits

- Spring 2014 – as opposition to the EAA mounts in Detroit, backers make a final push to rescue it by enshrining it in state statute.
- On the House floor, wavering Republican lawmakers are threatened with six-figure-funded primary challenges if they don't fall into line – something we can't promise to counter. Enough cave, and the EAA bill moves to the Senate.





Act III, continued...

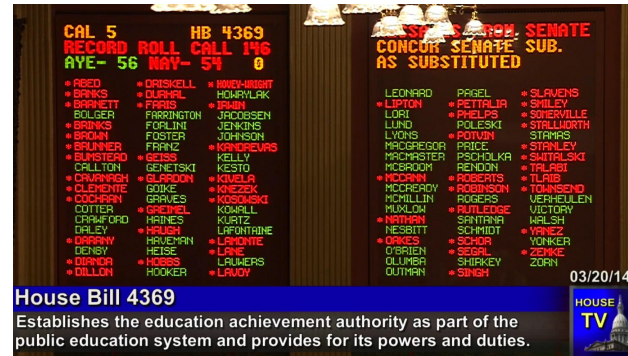
- Test scores to the “rescue:” state test results released this spring give the lie to the EAA’s claims of dramatic improvements.
- The EAA has become toxic: the Senate tries to duck the issue by making the bill more generic, but it founders and dies that session.
- June 2018 – Seven years and millions of dollars later, the EAA system closes, and the schools are returned to the now restructured Detroit Public Schools.

Parent groups stuck with the issue

This whole effort took over two years. We had to stick with it:

- To show our coalition partners that we were serious and not a “flash in the pan.”
- To show lawmakers that we were going to keep the pressure, and the spotlight, on what they were doing.

- To show affected parents and activists, especially in Detroit, that parents elsewhere would not simply abandon them





Parent groups stuck with it:

This wasn't easy, but it was crucial:

- We had to carefully track legislative developments, and be ready to mobilize our activists quickly to respond
- We had to maintain a presence at the state capitol and in committee hearings
- We had to keep talking with any wavering lawmakers who would take a meeting
- We had to keep touching base with our coalition allies, many of whom had lots of other irons in the fire and could get distracted



Reflections



Lessons Learned

- Get to know the landscape - what unites your opponents and what divides them.
- Work with allies and be ready to play 2nd fiddle for the common good.
- Don't rat on your friends, and don't let it go by if they rat on you.
- Stay on message – don't let the opposition distract you.
- Get help for communications – it makes a huge difference.
- Have an alternative – be ready for the question:
“What would you do instead?”



Recommendations: Be Ready

- Organizing after it hits the fan is too late.
- Do your homework.
- Follow legislative committees & nonpartisan analysis
- Get used to reading legislation so you can spot suspicious items quickly. Use those as rallying points.
- Find an experienced politico to show you the ropes.
- Get to know the key players; scope out potential allies.
- Build relationships with lobbyists from the major K-12 school organizations.

Most of all:

- Be strategic—choose issues that will unite your side.
 - Be ready to move.
 - Be careful—when the stakes are high, you cannot afford to mess it up.
-

Parent Organizing in NYC and NC

- Align with other Rightsholders (teachers, legislators, community leaders)
 - UFT, Class Size Matters, CPE, iCOPE, local leaders
- Southside Ashpole Elementary of Robeson County was taken over 2018-19 school year
- Carver Heights of Wayne County has been identified for 2019-20
- No parent engagement policy
- 3 state administrators - Deputy Supt. of Innovation, ISD Supt. (\$150,000 salary), Standards Curriculum and Instruction Division Leader, 1 school director



“Innovation School Districts” in NC

- Came into existence in 2016
- Southside Ashpole Elementary of Robeson County was taken over 2018-19 school year
- Carver Heights of Wayne County has been identified for 2019-20
- No parent engagement policy
- 3 state administrators - Deputy Supt. of Innovation, ISD Supt. (\$150,000 salary), Standards Curriculum and Instruction Division Leader, 1 school director



What NC Says . . .

- The North Carolina state constitution says the following:
 - Sec. 15. Education. The people have a right to the privilege of education, and it is the duty of the State to guard and maintain that right.
 - Under Article IX –
 - Sec. 6. State school fund. The proceeds of all lands that have been or hereafter may be granted by the United States to this State, and not otherwise appropriated by this State or the United States; all moneys, stocks, bonds, and other property belonging to the State for purposes of public education; the net proceeds of all sales of the swamp lands belonging to the State; and all other grants, gifts, and devises that have been or hereafter may be made to the State, and not otherwise appropriated by the State or by the terms of the grant, gift, or devise, shall be paid into the State Treasury and, together with so much of the revenue of the State as may be set apart for that purpose, shall be faithfully appropriated and used exclusively for establishing and maintaining a uniform system of free public schools.

What PAA Supports and Believes

- **What Parents Across America says and believes:**
 - **Proven Reforms:** We support the expansion of sensible, research-based reforms, such as pre-K programs, full-day Kindergarten, small classes, parent involvement, strong, experienced teachers, a well-rounded curriculum and evaluation systems that go beyond test scores.
 - **Sufficient and Equitable Funding:** Resources do matter, especially when invested in programs that have been proven to work.
 - **Diversity:** We support creating diverse, inclusive schools and classrooms.
 - **Meaningful Parent Involvement:** Parents must have a significant voice in policies at the school, district, state and national levels. We are not just “consumers” or “customers” but knowledgeable, necessary partners in any effective reform effort.

Is Not What NC Does, cont'd.

- Opportunity Scholarships a.k.a. Voucher programs for private school choice
- [HB 1030](#) citing the 2,000 per year increase
 - The most current data lists 7,283 new and renewal scholarships being offered and 6,018 of them accepted. If all 7,283 were to accept at a rate of the full \$4,200, the total funding for these scholarships would total around \$30,588,600.
 - For ex. As of September 2017 - Trinity Christian School Fayetteville has received \$ 401,100
- Race to the Top Grant – received and completed. Lifted Charter school cap.
 - Ex. – Guilford County every MS student received tablets made by Amplify which is no longer in the tablet business, tablets broke within the first month of school in 2013
- 1996 Article 14A Establishes Charter Schools in NC with cap of 50. In 2011 cap was lifted.

www.parentsacrossamerica.org

- Parents Across America (PAA) does:
 - Connect parents with other voices and resources
 - Equips parents with advocacy tools
 - empower parents to speak publicly and more effectively address the national privatization agenda as well as their local struggles, producing a stronger national voice of progressive parents to counter the false narratives about parent “choice.”
 - PAA Toolkit – helps parents organize and strategize.

Questions? Comments?

What's happening in your schools?

What can PAA do to help?



Wrap up

*Thanks
for
your
participation!!!!*

