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## **Power, Prestige, and Wealth: Indiana's 1998 Award-winning School Districts**

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### **Abstract**

This research examines relationships between the Blue Ribbon school awards of 1998-1999 in Indiana and their per pupil expenditure, their local monetary sources, and their self-reports evidencing power, prestige, and wealth. An earlier study of 1994-1996 middle and high schools in Indiana found that total local funds were significantly greater in Blue Ribbon school districts than in non-Blue Ribbon school districts. Part of the conclusion suggested a follow up study of subsequent years. The ensuing report seeks to determine if school districts chosen for Blue Ribbon awards in 1998-1999 had greater local sources, or greater total expenditures per pupil, than non-Blue Ribbon school districts did. Did Blue Ribbon School districts spend more local funds than non Blue Ribbon School districts did? Did Blue Ribbon School districts spend more total (federal, state, and local) funds than non Blue Ribbon School districts did? A discussion related to the power, prestige, and wealth of the award-winning elementary schools follows the presentation of the findings.

### **Introduction**

“By almost any measure, there continue to be serious differences between the level and quality of educational achievement for children coming from rich or from poor families and from ethnic-majority or from some ethnic-minority group families” (Gordon, 1999, xii). In 2000, [the authors] published findings from a study about the Indiana Blue Ribbon School award winners of 1994-1996. We found that total local funds were significantly greater in Blue Ribbon school districts than in non-Blue Ribbon school districts. Part of our conclusion suggested a follow up study of subsequent years (the authors). The ensuing report of the years 1997-1999 seeks to determine if school districts chosen for Blue Ribbon awards had greater local sources than non-Blue Ribbon school districts, and to analyze Blue Ribbon school reports for evidence of the power, prestige, and wealth of the districts. As no public middle or high school was a winner from Indiana in 1997-1998 (one private high school did win), and only one public middle school won in 1999-2000, the researchers' attention has shifted to the elementary schools that were selected as Blue Ribbon winners. (Winning elementary schools had been

alternating with winning middle and high schools every two years.) Therefore, this new set of data focuses on elementary schools.

### **Blue Ribbon awards**

Blue Ribbon School awards were given to three public elementary schools in 1996-1997. This year marked a change in the pattern from selecting elementary schools for two years and then selecting middle and high schools for two years to alternating the elementary school awards with middle and high school awards every year. The Blue Ribbon awards office in Washington, D.C. reported that the 1996-1997 elementary school reports had been thrown away as data is “only saved for three years” (the authors). There were no public elementary school winners in 1997-1998. Thus, the set of data that has been disaggregated is from the 1998-1999 school year only. There were four winning elementary schools that year.

### **Results**

#### Total per pupil expenditure

The average total expenditure per non award-winning school district in Indiana was \$25,936,320, whereas the average total expenditure for the four award-winning school districts was \$27,382,844. This is a difference of \$1,446,524 per school district. Indiana’s 290 non award-winning school districts averaged \$8,016 total funds per pupil expenditure for the 1998-1999 school year. The four school districts with Blue Ribbon Schools spent an average of \$8,370 total funds per pupil for 1998-1999. Blue Ribbon award-winning school districts in Indiana spent an average of \$354 more per pupil than non award-winning school districts did. This difference of \$354 per student equals 4.2% of the total funds of the district, which includes all federal, state, and local sources, along with capital outlay, transfer funds, and debt service. Numbers used were reported by the Indiana State Department of Education. Descriptive statistics are used instead of inferential statistics because the data reported are populations rather than samples.

#### Notes on the total per pupil expenditure statistic

Total per pupil expenditure on Indiana’s 294 (total) districts averaged \$8,021. This figure includes all funds, including capital outlay, transfer funds, and debt services. The Indiana Department of Education’s website page titled “Indiana State Total Trends Graph Current Expense Per Pupil” records \$7,249 as the average per pupil expenditure for 1998-1999. This number excludes capital outlay, transfer funds, and debt service (Gary Tatlock, personal communication, Nov. 28, 2001). The National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) cites \$6,589 as the total per pupil expenditure for Indiana school year 1998-1999 (NCES, Quick Tables and Figures, Elementary and Secondary Education, Common Core of Data, Early Estimates Survey, 1998-99). I asked Mr. Tatlock at Indiana’s School Finance Division about this discrepancy. He attributed the difference of \$660 per pupil to the federal government’s estimation of pupils and expenditures. NCES records the number of pupils on October 1<sup>st</sup>, but Indiana uses

average daily attendance (ADA). Mr. Tatlock explained that ADA would be “much lower because kids get sick and miss days.”

### Local per pupil revenue

Blue Ribbon award-winning districts in 1994-1996 had an average of \$480 more per pupil local sources than did non award-winning districts. This was a statistically significant difference in local funds at the 0.05 level of confidence (the authors). This information was read and discussed at the Blue Ribbon Schools office in Washington, D.C. (personal conversation, the authors). Looking exclusively at local sources in 1998-1999, the average revenue per school district in Indiana was \$12,690,796 for the 290 non award-winning districts. The average revenue from local sources for the four award-winning school districts was \$9,730,877. Average revenue from local sources per pupil for the 290 non award-winning districts in 1998-1999 was \$3922, compared with \$2974 average revenue from local sources per pupil for the four Blue Ribbon award-winning districts. This difference of \$948 per pupil local sources revenue shows that non award-winning districts generated much more income locally than award-winning districts. However, award-winning districts spent an average of \$354 more per pupil total expenditures than non award-winning districts did. This data seems to indicate that award-winning districts had less money from local sources but derived more from the state and federal government.

Comparing local per pupil revenue with total per pupil expenditure, the four Blue Ribbon winning districts received more federal and state funds. They not only made up the difference in the lack of local funds, but they surpassed the other districts. Does that have to do with the district's power? Do these four Blue Ribbon winning districts have a commitment to excellence and a willingness to spend what would appear to be beyond their means? Or can these differences be attributed to some other factor, such as greater numbers of students in special education classifications?

Special education funding in the state of Indiana in “Digest of Public School Finance in Indiana 1999-2001 Biennium” describes the formula for calculating the grant to school corporations. Monies are disbursed based on the number of students in the special education program numbered on December 1<sup>st</sup> of the previous year. (Reed, p. 13) Administrators multiply the “unduplicated count of enrolled students with severe disabilities...by \$7,561; ...students with mild and moderate disabilities by \$2,052, and a duplicated count of enrolled students...for communication disorders and the cumulative count of enrolled students receiving home bound services... by \$486”. (Reed, p. 13)

### **Demographic data**

The following data is compiled from Blue Ribbon School program reports, the applications that schools send to the state offices to apply for the Blue Ribbon School awards, and from the Indiana State Department of Education.

### Special education population

The average number of students classified within the special education population in Indiana's 290 non-Blue Ribbon districts was 494 students, or 14.7%, in 1998-1999. The average number of students within the special education population in Indiana's four Blue Ribbon districts was 544 students, or 16.2%, in 1998-1999. Numbers of students receiving special education services at the four award-winning schools were reported as 5% (17 students), 14% (72 students), 23.5% (103 students), and 9% (33 students). The Blue Ribbon school districts recorded that 15.2%, 15.2%, 19.8%, and 14.8% of students in their districts received special education services. See Table 1.

Table 1: 1998-1999 Special Education Population in Blue Ribbon and Non-Blue Ribbon Elementary School Districts and in Individual Blue Ribbon Schools

Special Education Population	IN.Non-Blue Ribbon School District Average	Blue Ribbon School 1	Blue Ribbon School 2	Blue Ribbon School 3	Blue Ribbon School 4
	14.7%				
District Data (from In. Department of Education)		15.2%	15.2%	19.8%	14.8%
Individual School Data (from Blue Ribbon School reports)		5%	14%	23.5%	9%

Data indicate that the four Blue Ribbon schools did not have greater numbers of students within the special education population, and they did not receive more funds from the state based on the funding formula described above. Of the 290 non Blue Ribbon award-winning school districts, 122 districts reported 16% or higher special education populations, and 25 districts recorded special education populations of 20% or more of their total student enrollment.

### Minority student enrollment

- ⌚ School 1 reported 98% White, .011% Black or African American, .008% Hispanic or Latino, 0% American Indian or Alaska Native, 0% Asian, .001% Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander.
- ⌚ School 2 noted 97.43% White, 1% Black or African American, 1.37% Hispanic or Latino, .2% American Indian or Alaska Native, 0% Asian, 0% Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander.

- ⌚ School 3 showed 83.7% White, 14.4% Black or African American, .69% Hispanic or Latino, 0% American Indian or Alaska Native, 1.16% Asian, 0% Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander.
- ⌚ School 4 listed 93.3% White, .8% Black or African American, 3.8% Hispanic or Latino, .5% American Indian or Alaska Native, 1.6% Asian, 0% Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander.

The Indiana Department of Education's website page, "Indiana State Total Trends Graph—Minority Students, Public School (Percent of Total)" reported a total of 16.1% minority students in 1998-1999. This percentage was not broken into specific categories. Table 2 presents averages from the 1998-1999 Indiana Blue Ribbon award winning schools in contrast with the average of all schools in Indiana, calculated by the Indiana Department of Education.

Table 2: 1998-1999 Minority Students in Blue Ribbon and Non Blue Ribbon Elementary Schools

	IN. Average	Blue Ribbon School 1	Blue Ribbon School 2	Blue Ribbon School 3	Blue Ribbon School 4
Minority Students	16.1%	2%	2.6%	16.3%	6.7%
White Students	83.9%	98%	97.4%	83.7%	93.3%

(Data from Indiana Department of Education and Blue Ribbon School Reports)

With the exception of School 3, the Blue Ribbon award-winning schools were well under the average for numbers of minority students. These low numbers of minority students point to the possibility that a relationship exists between the wealth of the district and the inability of minorities to acquire housing within that district.

### Location of the school districts

Each of the award-winning schools' districts differed in terms of type of area where the schools were located: School 1 was found in a small city or town in a rural area. School 2 was situated in an urban or large central city. School 3 was located in a suburban area. School 4 was in a rural area.

The locations of the Blue Ribbon award winning districts were contrasted with those of poor districts that have been involved in litigation regarding inequitable financing. School districts that have been caught up in school finance litigation "have been urban, rural, suburban, or a mix." These litigated districts all have the following "common fact patterns": they are "below the state average – and often among the lowest in the state. They "frequently make above average tax efforts but typically raise relatively little local revenue per pupil. Even with state aid, they usually spend at levels well below the state average." (Long, 1999, 1) The location of the school district (urban,

rural, suburban, or small city) does not seem to be related to the Blue Ribbon School award.

### Student mobility rate

Student turnover, or mobility rate, is defined in the Blue Ribbon Schools Program application as “the total number of students who transferred to or from different schools between October 1 and the end of the school year, divided by the total number of students in your school as of October 1, multiplied by 100.” The rate for each of the four schools was as follows: 7%, 24.5%, 17.89%, and 7.16%. The average for the non-winning districts was not available.

### Students of English as a New Language

The percentage of Limited English Proficient (LEP) students at the Indiana Blue Ribbon schools was 0%, .058% (3 students), .002% (1 student), and 2% (9 students). Table 3 contrasts numbers of LEP students at Blue Ribbon winning schools with the average number of LEP students at non-winning districts for the state of Indiana.

Table 3: 1998-1999 LEP Students in Blue Ribbon and Non Blue Ribbon Elementary Schools

	Non Blue Ribbon Average	Blue Ribbon School 1	Blue Ribbon School 2	Blue Ribbon School 3	Blue Ribbon School 4
LEP Students	1.13%	0%	.058%	.002%	2%

(Data from Indiana Department of Education and Blue Ribbon School Reports)

### Students qualifying for free and/or reduced lunch

The four schools' information on numbers of students qualifying for free and/or reduced lunch prices was 12% (45 students), 54% (275 students), 25.8% (94 free and 17 reduced = 111 students), and 3.1% (13 students). (Only School 3 breaks the percentage into free and reduced.) The Indiana Department of Education's website page “Indiana State Total Trends Graph—Pct Free Lunch” listed 22.1% of Indiana children receiving free lunches for the 1998-1999 school year. This figure does not include students who received reduced price meals (Gary Tatlock, Nov. 27, 2001, personal communication (e-mail)). In sum, three of the four Blue Ribbon award winning schools had a lower percentage of students receiving free lunches than the total percentage of students receiving lunches for all of Indiana. Although this statistic is self-reported and some parents refuse to sign up (the authors), it is nevertheless a measure of income and indicates parents' wealth. Based on statistics from the Indiana Department of Education and our calculations, the average percentage of children receiving free and/or reduced lunches from non Blue Ribbon winning districts was 29.2% in 1998-1999. See Table 4.

Table 4: 1998-1999 Students Receiving Free and/or Reduced Lunches in Blue Ribbon and Non Blue Ribbon Elementary Schools

	Non Blue Ribbon Average	Blue Ribbon School 1	Blue Ribbon School 2	Blue Ribbon School 3	Blue Ribbon School 4
Students Receiving Free and/or Reduced Lunches	29.2%	12%	54%	25.8%	3.1%

(Data from Indiana Department of Education and Blue Ribbon School Reports)

#### Items related to power, prestige, or wealth

Number of students per teacher is an important indicator of the wealth of the district. Can the school district afford to reduce class sizes? Reduction in class size has been cited as a strong possibility for the gains that American students have made on the NAEP (Grissmer, D., Flanagan, A., and Williamson, S. in Fowler, Jr. W.J., 1998). Nationally, the pupil/teacher ratio was 16.6:1 for the 1998-1999 school year (NCES, Quick Tables and Figures, Elementary and Secondary Education, Common Core of Data, Early Estimates Survey, 1998-1999). Indiana's Department of Education reported 17.1:1 pupils per teacher (elementary, middle, and high school) for the school year 1998-1999. Does the pupil/teacher ratio really indicate class size? It may not. According to Gary Tatlock at the Indiana School Finance Division, (personal communication 11/28/01), all certified teachers are included in the pupil/teacher ratio. This would include special education teachers and any paraprofessionals that are certified. Part-time teachers are also included as a decimal. Administrators are not included unless they are teaching part of the time. One of the Blue Ribbon award-winning schools, West Newton Elementary in West Newton, IN. (Marion County) listed 23.5% of their students, totaling 103 students, receiving special education services. Their school has 19 classroom teachers and 9 full-time special resource teachers, 3 part time special resource teachers, and 11 full time and 2 part time paraprofessionals. These special resource teachers and paraprofessionals may or may not be an essential part of the regular education students' instruction, depending upon many factors at the site, such as relationships with the regular classroom teachers, expectations of the principals, and extent of the accommodations that must be made for the students with special education classifications. The numbers of students in the special education categories will also vary from year to year, and specialists' roles will change with those differing loads. The four schools with Blue Ribbon awards did not report student teacher ratios but did list numbers of teachers, specialists, paraprofessionals, and support staff in their reports. These numbers cannot be compared with the Indiana and national averages because the Blue Ribbon schools did not use decimals for their part time personnel and did not specify which employees were certified. However, the Indiana Department of Education's website recorded "Students per Teacher Core Subjects Grades 1-6" for the state, and for each school, described as "the number of students per teacher in core subjects, grades 1-6. 'Core Academic Subjects' include all courses in English/language arts, social studies, foreign languages, mathematics, and



science.” Their average for Indiana was 22 students per teacher for 1998, and 22 for 1999. According to their website, Blue Ribbon school 1 had 19 students per teacher in 1998, and 23 students per teacher in 1999; school 2 had 23 students per teacher in 1998, and 21 students per teacher in 1999; school 3 had 25 students per teacher in 1998, and 23 in 1999; and school 4 had 20 students per teacher in 1998, and 20 in 1999. See Table 5.

Table 5: Students per Teacher Core Academic Subjects

	Indiana State Avg.	Blue Ribbon School 1	Blue Ribbon School 2	Blue Ribbon School 3	Blue Ribbon School 4
1998	22	19	23	25	20
1999	22	23	21	23	20

(Data from Indiana Department of Education)

The pupil per teacher ratio for the Blue Ribbon award winners seems to be within the average ratio for the state of Indiana.

The second item related to the power, prestige, or wealth of the elementary school is clubs and enrichment activities. Clubs represent prestige. It gets in the paper...people get to know it. It's a little bit of glitter on the crown. The clubs and enrichment activities also represent wealth, because the district must put the money out there, and they may not break even. Teachers that help with the clubs probably get some additional remuneration. School 1 reported “many additional programs” including “Study Club for our remedial students; After School Enrichment for extended learning opportunities; Science and Academic Fair for extension activities in the Sciences; Art Club for students wishing to further develop visual arts expression; and Media Club for students interested in developing communication and technology skills.” The After School Enrichment program included “French, Line Dancing, Book Talks, Musical Movement, Art Enrichment, Math Pentathlon, Technology, and Outdoor Enrichment.” Students were able to choose the classes, which ran for six week periods. Transportation was also provided. School 1 reported that about half of their students have attended the After School Enrichment program. They concluded, “We feel very good about our ability to offer so many varied opportunities for all of our students.” This program is also offered during the summer, in addition to summer school classes. The Media Club was for fifth graders only. Students produced a news show and led the announcements. School 1 also reported on Economics Club, Care Club, Student Council, and Super Saturday. “Approximately 70% of our student population participate” in these activities which for the most part also include free transportation. School 3 reported on a choice of after school clubs for their students: Library Club, WNTV Club, Study Table, and Essential Skills Clubs.

Regarding field trips (now called study trips), School 1 said that their students “attend many study trips throughout the year.” They included details about overnight camping “with courses on nature, zoo visits to study animal adaptations or birds, expeditions to our Indianapolis Children’s Museum; and visits to local orchards, farms, and greenhouses.”

School 4 offered soccer, basketball, t-ball, baseball, and softball. About 140 students participated per year. School 4 also supported a student council, student newspaper, and a choir which performed musicals.

Grants obtained by the school are an obvious indicator of the power of the school leadership to attract funding for innovative programs, services, materials, teacher stipends, professional development, or other enhancements. Further details on the Study Club of School 1 explain a "Family Connection Night" for parents including a dinner, training, books, and other materials for parents to "support the learning environment at school." Funding was obtained through an Indiana Department of Education remediation grant. School 1 also received an "At Risk grant" which included "counseling services from a counselor two days each week." School 1 reported that "Many of our teachers utilize grants that are offered through community resources as a means for funding special activities and projects." Their "School to Work" grant funded their Economics Club. "The grant has provided funding for the after school hours that the teachers work, the initial start-up costs of our school store that is operated by the Economics Club, and the educational materials used to teach economics to the club's members."

School 2's list of grants included the following: the "Educate Indiana" grant in 1995, 1996, 1997, and 1998; the national "Goals 2000" grant in 1995; "a Regional Training Site for C.L.A.S.S." (Connecting Learning Assures Successful Students) in 1997; a "Training Site for Reading Recovery and host trainer" in 1996; "model school for full inclusion of Special Education students;" and "host school for Jalex (Japanese Teacher Exchange Program) program." School 3 received an Educate Indiana grant which funded their partnership with the University of Indianapolis. Indiana Incentive Award money was also received by School 3 for 8 of 9 years. School 4 and their corporation had a grant with Valparaiso University to integrate technology and classroom instruction.

Professional development opportunities are tied closely with successful grants writing. School 1 was designated as "the first C.L.A.S.S. school in the state and visitation site, collaboration with Susan Kovalik, nationally known educator and creator of the I.T.I. model..." School 1 became known as a "model teaching site." "As a C.L.A.S.S. school we have many opportunities for our teachers to attend professional development activities..." School 2 also wrote about C.L.A.S.S.: "Three teachers...were honored by the IDOE by being invited to be CLASS coaches (mentors for other teachers in the state). Two of these teachers then received special leaves of absence to serve as full-time coaches." These honors certainly added to the prestige of the school.

School 3 discussed a University of Indianapolis partnership in detail. Because of the relationship, thirteen staff members took a graduate class on literacy using release time. School 3 also reported that one of their teachers is being supported through National Boards. School 3 discussed two other community partnerships, one of which enabled them to obtain a full time counselor.

Support staff are an indicator of the wealth of the district to provide for students who require special accommodations. School 1 listed a counselor and speech therapist

who worked with students in individual and small group settings. School 1 also reported a Gifted and Talented “liaison and a Special Education cadre of teachers,” as well as two technology specialists. School 2 wrote of the Reading Recovery teacher who was also a trainer, and “provides comprehensive training and guidance for teachers in this area, including southwest lower Michigan.” School 3 also explained their Reading Recovery program.

Technology is an obvious indicator of the wealth of the district, or the power of the district to write grants. State of the art equipment and software also adds to the prestige of the school. School 1 reported that students “research...in the Media Center and on the computer.” School 1 has 60 computers and 25 printers, networked throughout the school. Grades 2 through 5 have 1 computer workstation with CD-ROM and color printer per classroom; teachers have access to a multi media workstation with video player, large screen projector, laptop computer, and CD-ROM. They mentioned a variety of software programs: Children’s Writing and Publishing, Reading for Meaning and Comprehension, Living Books, Microsoft Works, Microsoft Word, Grade Book, Math Blaster, Accelerated Reader, and WASATCH. “Instruction in keyboarding skills begins in the first grade...” They noted that they had the “appropriate software to supplement science inquiry,” and had two technology specialists on staff. These persons deliver technology support and training. School 4 reported 3 computer labs, and a media center. They use “Advanced Learning Systems (A+) skill, drill, and evaluation...”

School 1 had acquired the following curriculum or supplements that they reported: attribute blocks, pattern blocks, unifix cubes, base 10 blocks, clocks, storyboards, geoboards, solid geometric shapes, play money, balance scales, tangrams, and numerous others” [mathematics manipulatives for the children]. “A well-equipped science resource closet and outdoor lab, supervised by a teacher and parents, provides the needed tools for observing, classifying, experimenting, and recording data as children learn through discovery.” School 1’s curriculum in science included participating in “Innovation Conventions.” [a group of hands-on science activities]. School 3 noted their “innovative remedial summer program, Goose Creek Academy.” School 4 mentioned their classes in French, German, Spanish, and Japanese.

Parent volunteers are indicative of the wealth of the local population; parents who must work during school hours may want to donate time but cannot do so. “Parent volunteers frequently assist in the classrooms,” noted School 1. “We have volunteers daily in the media center and computer lab to help with book checkout and computer maintenance. For our Multiplication Week in third grade, a week dedicated to multiplication activities, parents come to school each day throughout the week to conduct small group, hands-on activities with third graders. We have first grade parents in each week to assist with one-on-one reading conferences with our first-graders that are learning to read.” School 3 explained a “Learn-A-Thon” that parents created and hosted. (It also raised funds.)

Another indicator of power, prestige, or wealth is the level of involvement of the local community. Each of the Blue Ribbon award-winning schools wrote extensively

about various programs involving the community and fruitful community partnerships. School 1 explained the "School to Work committee, a committee of local business people committed to helping our school corporation." School 2 mentioned that "a beautiful dining area has been furnished in our atrium" as a result of a parent writing and receiving a grant for that purpose. Schools 2, 3, and 4 also described a number of other partnerships that had yielded benefits for their students.

## Conclusions

Unlike the Indiana Blue Ribbon award-winning districts of 1994-1996 who received and spent a greater amount of local funds than non award-winning schools, the Indiana Blue Ribbon award winners of 1998-1999 had less local funds but spent more total funds than their non award-winning counterparts.

Demographic data reveal that the Blue Ribbon award winning districts had greater state funds from special education populations, but a large number of non winning school districts also fell into this category. Three of the four Blue Ribbon award winning districts showed very low numbers of minority students. Further studies should be pursued on past and future Blue Ribbon award-winning schools to discuss segregation and other concerns.

The Blue Ribbon self-reports reveal that the award-winning schools relied upon grants for their extra money. Their ability to attract grants to fuel their innovations is a measure of the power of these schools.

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