



# PUBLIC EDUCATION ITILL WORKS

## From Bulgaria to Harvard by way of Indiana's public schools

BY AMBER STEARNS | [ASTEARN@NUVO.NET](mailto:ASTEARN@NUVO.NET)

PHOTOS BY ELLEN ROGERS, MSDWT

I first learned about Stefan Stoykov via Facebook April 8. My fellow alumni shared and commented on the announcement from North Central High School about the young man who was accepted to all eight Ivy League schools on the U.S. eastern seaboard. Former students posted comments like “This is my school!” “PantherPride 4ever!” and “Congratulations to him and Washington Township schools!” to show praise for one of our own. >>>

**STOYKOV**, FROM PAGE 09

In the immediate days that followed, Stefan found himself in *The Indianapolis Star* and on several television stations in town. He even Skyped with a television news station in his native country of Bulgaria.

That's one of the things that made his story so newsworthy. Not because Stefan was accepted to the most elite colleges in the country, not because he is ranked at the top of his graduating class with a 5.3 GPA (on a 4.0 scale), not because he received a perfect score on the SAT and not because he received the highest score possible on the AP English Literature exam.

Well, maybe that last one is significant.

At least it is for Stefan. It is significant because when he began his education at the age of eight in the second grade at Nora Elementary School Stefan could not speak, read or understand a single word of English.

Eight days later after the announcement of Stefan's success, The Center for Tax and Budget Accountability released a report indicating that students who use vouchers to attend private schools in Indiana do no better than those who attend public schools. Their analysis went on to say that students who live in poverty, are learning English as a new language (like Stefan) or have special needs and attend public schools actually outperform their peers who attend charter or private schools.

It may or may not have been a coincidence that the CTBA's report came out so close to the announcement of Stefan's success, but his story certainly is proof that their analysis has merit.

In other words, despite what some members of the state legislature and even the State Board of Education might lead us to believe, public education in Indiana still works.

**“When I had some difficulty that faced me, I just worked hard to make it, to overcome it then it motivated me to do well in other things, too.”**

— STEFAN STOYKOV

**THE NEW STUDENT FROM BULGARIA**

In 2004, Stefan moved to the United States with his mother, father and younger brother.

“There weren't a lot of employment opportunities in Bulgaria at the time and the jobs there didn't pay very well, so my family ended up moving,” said Stefan, sitting in the Media Resource Center at North Central High School. “They [my parents] knew that the education I would receive here would prepare me to have a fulfilling career and I wouldn't have to work in tedious jobs. So the desire for a better life is what really motivated my family to move here.”

But as Stefan recalled it wasn't an easy transition. His first day of school was a frightening one.

“I remember sitting in the corner and trying to grasp some meaning from what people were saying and trying to understand what the teacher was saying to the students and when they answered questions what they were saying. I didn't understand anything,” said Stefan. “And I remember I started crying on the first day actually because I was so scared.”

Stefan's second grade teacher, Ellen Sayles Lane, remembered that first day as well. Now retired, she remembered a child who was frightened on that first day, but also determined to succeed.

“I just remember him standing at the door with these big eyes looking around as if to say ‘I'm here; what are they doing?’” said Sayles. “He was there to learn. I could see it in his eyes.”

In their first year in America, Stefan's parents worked in the deli department of a local grocery store. With a limited income in 2004 the public education system was the Stoykov family's only option for their two young boys. Charter schools had only been around for two years in the city and most likely weren't considered by this new immigrant family. Odds are the charters at that time were not equipped to help Stefan learn English as a new language. The Indiana General Assembly didn't pass the school voucher system until 2011 so private school was not an option. The family resided on the northside of Indianapolis so the Metropolitan School District of Washington

Township (MSDWT) was their family's only school option. Lucky for them, they weren't the first immigrant family to live in the school district.

“Most students who didn't speak English where put in my room,” Sayles remembered.

While “English as a New Language” or ENL, education isn't a new thing for public schools, the organization of specific programming and staff to accommodate that education in the middle of a regular curriculum is only about 10 years old. When Stefan began at Nora Elementary, the responsibility of teaching an immigrant student English fell on the shoulders of the classroom teacher.

“I loved other world cultures and would incorporate that into my classroom,” said Sayles. “I think that's why most if not all of the ENL students ended up in my classroom.”

Sayles said she used a variety of techniques to help her students learn English including pairing or grouping her new English speakers with those students who were below grade level on their reading and English skills. “They were helping each other even if they didn't realize it,” she said. She also used picture-word flashcards, writing and oral presentations assignments and special projects.

Sayles also had her classes study one country each month incorporating all of the subject areas (math, English, social studies, science, etc.) in the class exploration of that country. And of course the countries represented in the classroom made that year's study list.

Stefan remembered those writing assignments and class presentations and told me they were helpful in helping him grasp the language.

“I remember my second grade teacher would come up to help me when giving presentations in English about our assignments,” he recalled. “There would be this assignment where we had to write about our weekend. We would write out a paragraph about that and then we would stand up in front of the class and we would talk about it and read what we wrote. I couldn't read it very well so she would stand with me and help me along as I read it. That helped me a lot.”

It has been a few years since Sayles

SEE. **STOYKOV**, ON PAGE 12



SUBMITTED PHOTOS



**BACK IN THE DAY**

When Stefan first moved to the U.S. in 2004 and started school, it was not easy. Those early days were filled with fear and uncertainty. But, with hard work and perseverance, Stefan succeeded. He earned a spot on his elementary school's high honor roll list and was a multiyear recipient of the district's “Personal Best” award, which honors students who make big improvements in one or more subjects throughout the academic year. For the district, the number of ENL students increases each year. Student needs require more than just English literacy, but also acculturation, school and community navigation, health/well-being and social skills.

**CELEBRATING SUCCESS**



Stefan's celebrated success has allowed him to reconnect with former teachers and principals. His 2nd grade teacher, Ellen Sayles Lane, and his former elementary school principal, Suzanne Zybent, speak highly of Stefan and his family and give them as much credit for his success as Stefan gives them for helping him grasp the English language and excel as a student. Both Sayles and Zybent were present for Monday evening's City-County Council meeting where Stefan was recognized and honored for his accomplishments. District 2 Councillor Kip Tew, who is also a MSD of Washington Township parent, authored the resolution.



SUBMITTED PHOTOS



**MAY 19TH**  
5:30-7:30PM  
HAUGHVILLE BRANCH LIBRARY



**MAY 26TH**  
5:30-7:30PM  
COLLEGE BRANCH LIBRARY



## NEAR HOME TOUR AT ST. CLAIR PLACE

**Saturday, May 16, 2015 • 12-4 pm • 836 N. Beville Avenue**

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836 BEVILLE AVENUE

906 BEVILLE AVENUE

For more information about NEAR, or St. Clair Place, please visit [nearindy.org](http://nearindy.org)

**STOYKOV, FROM PAGE 10**

was in a classroom every day, but she still keeps in touch with education as a substitute teacher and volunteer. She says she feels for what teachers have to deal with now compared to when she a fixture in the classroom.

“Teachers now have so many more pressures,” said Sayles. “They don’t have the time or the flexibility to do what I used to do.”

**THE RISING ACADEMIC STAR**

Stefan’s mastery of the English language isn’t his only accolade, but it was most likely his biggest obstacle to overcome. But he prevailed and used his past successes as fuel to achieve more.

“When I had some difficulty that faced me, I just worked hard to make it, to overcome it then it motivated me to do well in other things, too,” said Stefan.

That was the attitude and determination to learn that Sayles saw in his eyes from the moment he walked into her classroom. Others, like the Nora Elementary School principal at that time, Suzanne Zybert, saw it too. Zybert is now the Assistant Director of Career-Technical Education Programs and District Partnerships. It was evident from witnessing her reunion with Stefan how much of an impact this student had on his teachers and administrators.

“You have not let anything stop you,”

Zybert told Stefan with a combination of pride, joy and admiration. “Think about how many teachers you’ve had, how many times you may have been tempted by other things, and here you are.” With tears welling up in her eyes she told Stefan how exciting it was to see his accomplishments and retell his story. She discussed a neighborhood gathering where friends and neighbors, aware of her connection to Stefan as his elementary school principal, wanted to hear her perspective on her former student and everything that could be said about him.

“He sets the stage for others that there are no excuses,” said Zybert. “We like to make excuses for everything, but we can’t and he has demonstrated that.”

Beyond the language barrier, Stefan’s the child of a single parent in a low-income household. He moved to this country with both parents and his brother, but a year after their arrival his parents divorced. Stefan’s father took to the highways as a truck driver and wasn’t around very often. His mother took a job as a housekeeper. It wasn’t her ticket to Easy Street, but it gave her the flexibility to keep up with her children, their schooling and extracurricular activities. Zybert credited a lot of Stefan’s success to his mom as the one who made her children’s education a top priority. After all, that was one of her primary reasons for bringing the family to America in the first place, according to Stefan. He was determined to honor it.

**THE BIG PICTURE**

For public school districts, providing students like Stefan the best education they can presents several obstacles — most of which need funding to survive.

“Non-public schools have the choice to say ‘we are unable to provide services or not to accept that application for that child’ if they can’t or don’t have the means to provide for that child,” said Dr. Nikki Woodson, MSDWT superintendent. “We don’t have that choice. Any student that comes through our doors with any need, we have to figure out a way to educate that child.”

In Stefan’s case that need began with learning the English language. Once he got that down and continued to grow, Stefan’s needs changed from remedial language skills to increased academic enrichment. Scholastic excellence was in his future and it was up to the school district to nurture and develop it.

And that’s exactly what they did. Special needs in education come in various forms. Dr. Woodson used the more accurate phrase “complex needs” to describe a what a child requires beyond the standard traditional K-12 curriculum. Those complex needs include ENL services, gifted and talented enrichment, speech therapy, special education for intellectual disabilities ranging from dyslexia to autism and many others. And all of those complex needs require resources.

“It’s the same concept as going to the dentist,” said Woodson. “Doing a regular routine check up is much less expensive than a root canal for someone who needs

more extensive dental work. It’s the same thing for education. You have those routine kids and then you have kids who need something different to meet their needs and it takes more money to do that.”

Woodson’s job is to ensure all of those needs are met for every student within the district. For the MSD of Washington Township that means meeting the needs of 11,348 students, the district’s enrollment number for the current school year.

Stefan’s accolades of “a job well done” were resonating about the same time that the Indiana General Assembly was determining the future path of education in our state. Legislators were considering adjustments to the school funding formula, an expansion of the voucher system and additional funding for charter schools. The final budget expanded educational spending by 2.3 percent. Charter schools will receive an additional \$20 million dollars and more families will be allowed to send their children to private schools with vouchers. The formula that calculates the cost of educating each child in the public school system was reconfigured. Republican leaders said they wanted to distribute funds equally so that schools in suburban areas where populations were expanding would see as much money as urban school districts did. But the new formula doesn’t redistribute new funds as much as it reallocates that same money — thereby taking funding away from urban areas that have seen a drop in student populations. Often these school districts are already suffering from

SEE, **STOYKOV, ON PAGE 15**



**STEFAN’S CLASS SCHEDULE**

So what does a budding Ivy League scholar take in the second semester of his senior year?

<b>IB</b>	Theory of Knowledge
<b>AP</b>	Statistics
<b>AP</b>	Biology
<b>IB</b>	Advanced Math Topics
<b>AP</b>	English Literature & Composition
<b>IB</b>	International Relations
<b>AP</b>	French

**IB** = International Baccalaureate, **AP** = Advanced Placement

**WHAT DOES INTERNATIONAL BACCALAUREATE MEAN?**

The International Baccalaureate is an international education program developed and accredited through the International Baccalaureate Organization (IBO). The program focuses on the development of the whole child emphasizing intellectual, personal, emotional and social growth through the study of languages, humanities, technologies, sciences, mathematics, and the arts. While the diploma program is the most commonly known, the IBO has created a program that begins at the elementary level and continues through high school. MSD of Washington Township is the only public school in Indiana that has adopted the IB program districtwide. Kokomo-Center Schools and Indianapolis Public Schools offer the IB program as a magnet program in select elementary schools and middle schools. The International School of Indiana (ISI) is the only private school in the state that offers IB for elementary through high school as well.

Only 17 public high schools, three private high schools and one charter school in the state offer the IB diploma program. Out of the 21 IB diploma high schools in the state, seven are located in Marion County and three are in Hamilton County.

**STEFAN’S EXTRACURRICULARS**

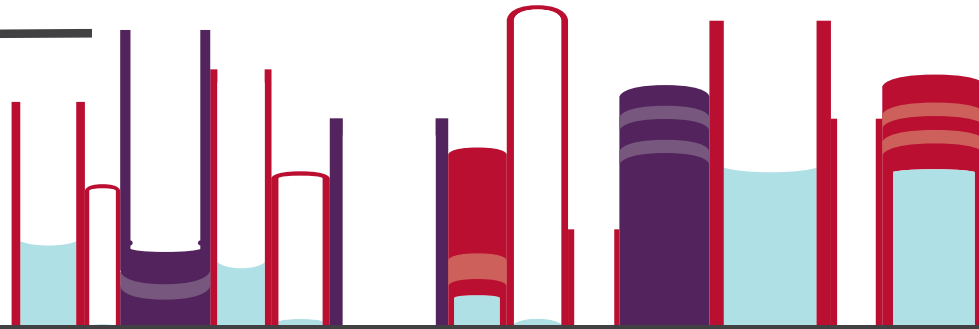
<b>President</b>	Stock Market Club
<b>Captain</b>	Science Olympiad
	Speech Team
<b>President</b>	Cycling Club
	National Honor Society
<b>Spirit Week Chair</b>	Student Council

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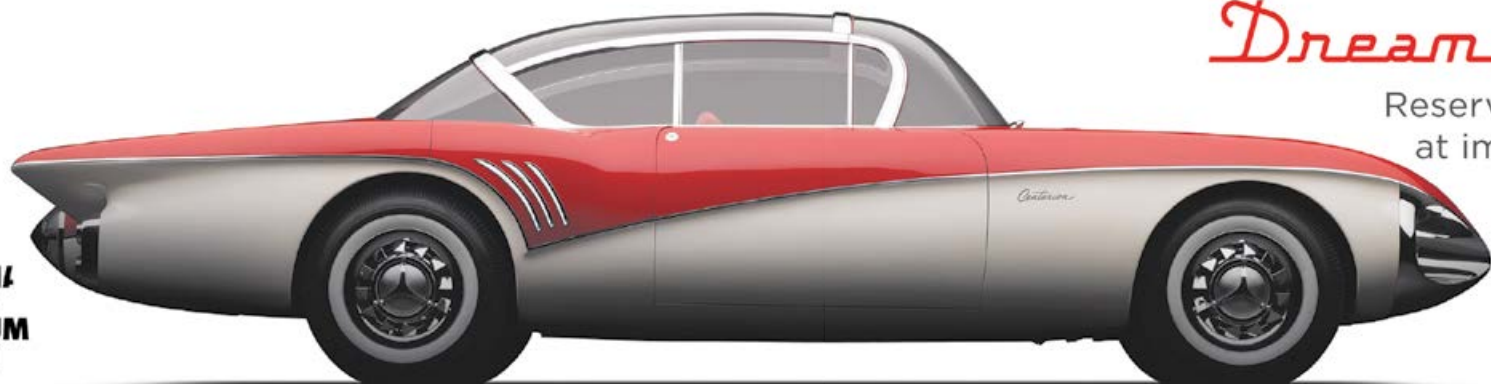


**“Any student that comes through our doors with any need we have to figure out a way to educate that child.”**

— DR. NIKKI WOODSON, SUPERINTENDENT  
MSD OF WASHINGTON TOWNSHIP



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## STEFAN'S OPTIONS

BROWN COLUMBIA CORNELL DARTMOUTH

HARVARD PENNSYLVANIA PRINCETON YALE

### STOYKOV, FROM PAGE 12

a lower tax base, blighted neighborhoods, high poverty rates and other factors that not only impact a school district's resources but also a child's learning environment both at school and at home.

It's unclear exactly how the MSD of Washington Township will be affected by the revised formula. But Woodson says the current funding levels aren't enough to do what the district needs to do. According to Woodson, it costs about \$265 more to educate an ENL student each year. However, the state and federal grants available to fund those programs only cover about 77 percent of that cost. And that's just one complex need area. Others are even more underfunded and in some other school districts, gifted and talented enrichment isn't even an option because the resources simply are not there. For Woodson, short-changing any student on their education is not an option.

"We have a long legacy of excellence in education in Washington Township and we are not going to do for some and not all," said Woodson. "It is an all or nothing mentality for us in Washington Township and so if we get the proper funding or not, we provide excellence for all."

That mentality is the driving factor behind the school district's recent appli-

cation of the International Baccalaureate program districtwide. The program is an elite global approach to educating the whole child. A handful of high schools in Indiana offer the IB diploma. North Central has offered the IB diploma for the better part of 25 years. The IB diploma requires a student to take certain high level courses in grades 11 and 12. The International Baccalaureate Organization also offers a curriculum of exploratory learning for the grades K - 10. It's that curriculum that Washington Township offers districtwide.

(As much as I wanted Woodson to say, "Hey! Public schools rule and charters and private schools drool!" she would never stoop to my level. And I have the utmost respect for her because of that.)

"They (charters and private schools) have their system set up the way they want their system to run within the confines of the law," said Woodson. "I'm a public educator because I believe that is the American way — educating everybody who comes through our doors or lives in our school district. I'm a public educator for that reason."

Woodson recognizes the need and desire for parents to have choices for their kids' education, whether it's for special needs, religious affiliations or other reasons. As a parent herself, she welcomes the various choices that are available and chooses public education for her kids.

"I'm not bitter about the other choices or the other systems looking different or abiding by different rules that I don't have to," said Woodson. "My concern comes when anyone tries to compare us as if we are abiding by the same rules."

For Woodson, trying to compare public, private and charter schools who all have different funding rules, accountability rules and even entrance rules is unfair because those things put each group on completely different playing fields. And the same thing can be said of comparing urban schools with suburban or rural schools. They may be all public schools, but they will ultimately look different because of the differing variables at play including poverty levels and outside community resources.

Funding for all of the choices is the biggest issue that every school faces in order to provide their own version of excellence in education. With losses in state and even federal funding, even public school districts have had to find alternative ways of acquiring the funds needed to survive. For Washington Township, that comes through grants from private foundations and even alumni fundraising, just like private schools. The school district has become reliant on a development office, similar to a university, to find private dollars to keep necessities going, like filling in that missing 23 percent in ENL funding or maintaining a districtwide IB program.

"Ordinary funds get ordinary things done," said Woodson. "And we are not ordinary."

Nor can you effectively educate students who are beyond ordinary like Stefan Stoykov.

Stefan is a great example of how public schools still work.

They also need to work for the future, not only the students they serve, but for the communities where they are located.

"Public school systems are the lifeline of that community," said Woodson. "From property values to commerce to business, if public schools systems do well, the entire community does well. The students that we (public schools) are pushing out into the community will either be great contributors to the community or thorns in the community. We prefer them to be great contributors. And that depends upon the support from the community."

That support comes from everyone in the community who lives in that school district, regardless if they have a student in the school district or not.

Stefan Stoykov, who will join the Harvard University Class of 2019, will not doubt be a great contributor, thanks to his public school education. ■

### WHERE WE'LL BE

**BIKE TO WORK DAY**  
Friday, May 15, 7 a.m.  
Bike to Work Day promotes a more engaged and bike friendly Indy! Join us as we Bike to Work with IndyCog!  
Indy Bike Hub  
222 E. Market St.

**3RD FRIDAY ON THE PLAZA**  
Friday, May 15, 6 p.m.  
This Friday is "Ladies Night" at 3rd Friday on the Plaza in Fountain Square. It is certain to be a great night of live music and its Free!  
Fountain Square  
Shelby St. & Virginia Ave.

**BROAD RIPPLE ART FAIR**  
May 16-17, 10 a.m.  
Start your summer fun at the Broad Ripple Art Fair. The BRAF will show original art by more than 225 artists. We will be on-site with some fun activities so make sure to stop by our booth!  
Indianapolis Art Center  
820 E. 67th St.

**UPLAND'S SOUP+WILD+FUNK FEST**  
Saturday, May 16, 2 p.m.  
The Street Team can't wait to go to Upland Brewing Company's 4th annual event. There will be 25 breweries from across the country with samples of sour, wild and funky brews!  
Indianapolis City Market  
222 E. Market St.

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