Thank you, Marilyn.

First of all, I would like to thank Marilyn for everything she does for ICPE. Our newsletter, our membership coordinator, our website person, our Vic’s Statehouse Notes sender-outer, our press release writer, our contact person, our sometimes panelist and representative in the news, you name it—Marilyn has done it. Please everyone, let’s give Marilyn a tremendous show of gratitude. (APPLAUSE)

Let me introduce to you some of the other amazing public education advocates and, if you could, please stand when I call your name.

Dr. Vic Smith—father of this group and author of the detailed reports on the legislature and education policy, Vic’s Statehouse Notes.

Marvin Ward—guru of all things school finance and our wonderful treasurer

Marilyn Shank—whom I just mentioned—jack of all trades (expert in communications and PR) and wind beneath our ICPE wings

Dountonia Batts—past director of the IPS Community Coalition, parent of IPS students

Maryann Schlegel Ruegger— who also sits on the Indiana Charter School Board with the important lens for oversight in the interests of public education and, more importantly, children. She is parent of a high school student herself in Washington Township.

Shelley Clark—Washington Township Parent Council leader and all-around advocate extraordinaire.

Dr. Ed Eiler—retired superintendent of Lafayette schools

Dr. Tony Lux, retired superintendent of Merrillville school corporation. Dr. Lux has been able to start the Northwest Indiana Coalition for Public Education up there and we are very excited by its growth. They have held 5 events in 6 months!

And then there’s retired teacher and former state senator, Mr. Tim Skinner… our most recent president of ICPE. His shoes are big ones to fill and I’d like to thank him for stepping up and leading us these past few years (applause)

There are board members who could not be here today:

Dr. Suellen Reed—former state superintendent

Dr. Pat Payne, IPS director of racial equity with nearly 60 years of public education advocacy and trailblazing

I am also very excited to announce that the most recent additional member to our board is another former state superintendent, Ms. Glenda Ritz, who could not be here today--but whose experience, knowledge and perspective we are grateful to have join us!

Lastly, I’d like to thank Dr. Mary Rose who was our longtime board member and who has recently stepped down. We are grateful to her for her dedication!

This is quite a list of people and it is humbling to be among them. I was once chair of the ICPE of Monroe County and I would like those in attendance who belong to that group, or are board members down in Bloomington, to please stand up (Jenny Robinson the current chair and Keri the vice chair…)

What I’m excited about today is that we are *all* here (including you all) to roll up our sleeves and get to work--thereby easing some of the load that some of these amazing board members (and our lobbyist Joel Hand) have shouldered since the beginning of ICPE in 2011.

Because public education is under attack. We know this. And that attack has been a bipartisan attack for some time and it will take a bipartisan effort to stop it. As Marilyn said, we are bipartisan.

But we ARE also political. Politics is not necessarily Republican or Democrat or partisan—politics is about your relationship to POWER. And we are caught in a tremendous power struggle over the future of public schools. There is a stranglehold of power in our statehouse by those who seek to dismantle the stability and integrity of public education as a whole. They aim to privatize public education into a system of “free markets” and competition through “school choice.” They use testing as the weapon with which to justify their actions and stigmatize our public schools, and the children who learn and people who work within them. The embargoed scores of the recent disaster ILEARN, where someone is deciding who fails and who succeeds by creating that bar, that cut score, is just the latest in this game the legislature plays of changing the rules or targets for public schools, while always finding a “get out jail free” card for the charter and voucher schools. The game is rigged. Testing is the weapon designed to legitimize or reinforce the idea that public schools are failing. But public schools are not failing. The supposed failure of public schools can nearly always be traced back to our failure as a society to address childhood poverty and institutionalized racism.

If our children were fed, if we as a society had not be willing to allow the basic needs of kids to go unmet, if we had been concerned that some children in our public schools were trying to learn in mold infested schools with crumbling ceilings and no funding for arts or music or extracurriculars, public education would not have been ripe for the picking. For too long people like me, affluent and educated white people, have been willing to look the other way and fail to address the real issues that underlie equity in public education. It is time to recognize this and to work, not only to protect public education, but to improve it. It is a promise that has yet to be fulfilled.

Our opponents claim choice and competition will make for success. But parents like me don’t ask for choice. We ask for caring, well-resourced schools with experienced teachers and stability. We recognize that our teachers are professionals and that their working conditions are our children’s learning conditions. We want those conditions to be GREAT. And we also recognize that competition involves winners and losers. None of us wants our six-year-old to be on the losing end of a competition for equal educational opportunity. This is un-American at its core.

So, while the privatizers are well funded, we are well grounded. We are grounded in the idea that every child, regardless of his or her background has the right to high quality public education. We are grounded in the idea that this public education is not for the interests of a workforce or for the wealthy or for the corporate benefit—it is in the interests of our DEMOCRACY that we have an educated citizenry. We are defenders of this democracy because public education is its cornerstone.

PLEASE join us. We need your money. We have no billionaire funding. (If you know one, please send him or her our way). We need your time. We need your expertise and your thoughts. If your community would like to start a group of your own, please let us know. We are working on rebranding ourselves and working on our growth. We have a new website in the works and it should be up very soon. We even have a new URL to go to: indianacoalitionforpubliced.org

We’re going to be working on a membership drive this fall and we would love it if every one of you could find 10 friends to join our group. We just can’t do it without you.

Thanks very much!