

Ronald E. Barnes

Director of the Indiana School Executive Leadership Academy; Associate Director of Educational Leadership Field Studies; Associate Professor, Part-time, of Leadership and Policy Studies

Public education at every level, kindergarten through graduate studies, has benefited from the work of Ron Barnes. In each leadership role he turned ideas, law, policies, and public sentiment into programs that served and advanced students and the larger community. In fact, Ron's sterling reputation, built by work with countless public school students and staff, graduate students, school boards, and administrators, stretches across this nation.

In his home state of Iowa, Ron earned a B.A. in business education from Northern Iowa University in 1967. A year later he earned an M.A. in school administration from the same university. In 1978 Ron earned a Doctor of Education degree from Indiana University, which combined his already well-regarded abilities in secondary education with a firm knowledge of school business administration.

Few in public education served with so much distinction, right from the start and at each step along the way. While a first-year business teacher in Cedar Rapids, Iowa, Ron was selected to chair a North Central Association steering committee. In the role of assistant principal in the late '60s and early '70s, he was instrumental in defusing student unrest, bringing young people and the community together in a racially tense setting, and paving the way for cooperative approaches to the management of curriculum and instruction.

In 1972 Ron began an eight-year tenure as senior high school principal in Moline, Illinois. His clear-sighted leadership continued with the encouragement of coeducational opportunities across all areas of the school curriculum. A girls' athletic program was established. A clever "mini-faculty meeting" system was set up to maximize teacher input into school management and minimize the loss of precious instructional time. With Ron's leadership a strong management team participated in the school's operations and planning.

The opportunity to serve an even wider community came when Ron was appointed superintendent of schools for the Consolidated High School District 230 in Orland Park, Illinois, in 1980. He applied and expanded his leadership abilities in ways that brought programs to students and teachers as well as cutting-edge opportunities for the school district. Computer-based instruction was introduced, teacher development was incorporated on an intensive and sustained basis, contract negotiations moved to a "win/win" format, and a regional insurance cooperative, supplying a self-insurance program, was instituted. During Ron's 14-year tenure, District 230 high schools Amos Alonzo Stagg and Carl Sandburg each received Department of Education School of Excellence awards.

When Ron was hired by Indiana University in 1994 as its first clinical professor in the educational leadership unit of the School of Education, an ideal opportunity to match field experience with a research base began to take shape. As director of the Public School/University Partnership, he used his field experiences to mutually benefit all parties. Indiana University, businesses from across the state, and school corporations joined forces to meet the challenges of a shrinking planet with a global economy. Because of his efforts, Indiana school corporations and the business community knew they had a problem-solving ally in Indiana University.

Graduate students know that Ron Barnes “knows schools.” When coupled with the knowledge and background of Indiana University and colleagues in educational leadership and policy studies, as well as the rising appreciation of research by local administrators nationwide, Ron’s ability to change the seemingly abstract into programs that served his newest students was apparent. He has remained warmly regarded by all, not only because of his work but because of his seemingly endless patience, thoughtfulness, and indeed humor. Besides telling you that Ron knows schools, graduate students would also say his comments are both humorous and instructive. Many papers and presentations have been shortened when the authors have confronted the vision of “vaccination by a phonograph needle.” And likewise through humor and the ability to see things for what they are, one would surmise that thousands of our fellow citizens know why Ron’s career in education has had such a powerful impact. Indeed, as a consultant to school boards Ron has worked with over 200 such groups in development, evaluation, and planning efforts.

Ron also brought his insights, knowledge, and patience to the educational leadership unit in the School of Education. He coordinated schedules to deliver programs to graduate students. He did the leg work to keep the unit connected to the professional associations in this state as well as the American Association of School Administrators. He continually proved to be a reliable, thoughtful colleague in the deliberation of the unit’s work.

In reading this chronology one quickly realizes that to do it all, Ron had strong, steady, and confident support from his family and in his personal life. Cheryl Barnes’ contributions to Ron’s success go beyond what can be measured. She made the difference! And now in retirement Ron can spend his evenings at home. Travel will be in the schedule as well as visits to children and grandchildren in Illinois and Utah. The Barneses will live in Bloomington, and, yes, Ron will remain an active senior partner in BWP & Associates, a search firm for school leaders.

One never knows how far a reach can extend through public education. Ron Barnes has built a bridge well into the future not only with the practices and programs he established through his leadership, but with the sterling quality of character, thoroughness, thoughtfulness, and patience he practiced.

Chuck Little