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**MONTEREY, CALIFORNIA**

**THESIS**

**EARLY RECRUITMENT IN THE INNER CITY:  
A POSSIBLE ANSWER TO THE FIRE SERVICE'S  
DIVERSITY PROBLEM**

by

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September 2021

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**EARLY RECRUITMENT IN THE INNER CITY:  
A POSSIBLE ANSWER TO THE FIRE SERVICE'S DIVERSITY PROBLEM**

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## **ABSTRACT**

The Indianapolis Fire Department (IFD) and Indianapolis Public Schools (IPS) created the Arsenal Technical High School (ATHS) Fire Rescue Program (FRP) for juniors and seniors in the heart of Indianapolis. The program's goals are multidimensional—community outreach, a pathway to a high school diploma, and a recruitment tool. For 10 years, however, the IFD has hired not a single program graduate. This research examines the IFD's history of recruitment, government-issued consent decree, and current demographics, comparing the department's diversity challenges to those in the workplace generally and in police recruitment. Given this context, this thesis defines the intended outcomes, critical problems, successes, and failures of the ATHS-FRP and offers a series of recommendations: incorporate other IPS schools into the program, create “legacy spots” for children whose parents work for the IFD, develop an emergency medical technician class during the senior year, emphasize IFD 9-1-1 telecommunications as an available career path, add half a point to the scoring packets of program graduates in good standing, create a part-time civilian job with the IFD to bridge the gap between graduation and the minimum hiring age of 21, and possibly, relocate the program to the new IFD Training Facility.

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## LIST OF ACRONYMS AND ABBREVIATIONS

ATHS	Arsenal Technical High School
BFA	Black Firefighters Association
CFAI	Commission for Fire Accreditation International
CPAT	Candidate Physical Abilities Test
EMT	emergency medical technician
FRP	Fire Rescue Program
IFD	Indianapolis Fire Department
IPS	Indianapolis Public Schools
MOU	memorandum of understanding
SCBA	self-contained breathing apparatus
SIT	social identity theory

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## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Fire departments across the United States struggle to find diverse, qualified applicants, and the Indianapolis Fire Department (IFD) is no exception. The department's previous recruitment efforts, specifically its outreach and recruitment program at Arsenal Technical High School (ATHS), have seen limited success. In 2012, the ATHS Fire Rescue Program (FRP), created in one of the city's most economically depressed areas, attempted to reach a population segment that typically does not consider the fire service a career path. In the program's 10 years, it has produced zero firefighters for the IFD. Although several candidates have been inspired and have attempted to go through the extensive hiring process, none have scored high enough in the oral interview (the second of eight events) to move on. Over the last 10 years, program graduates have entered just three hiring processes, only to experience the same disappointing outcome. Although a valiant effort in community outreach, the ATHS-FRP has not produced the expected results. This thesis sought to examine difficulties seen by the program, such as low classroom attendance rates, poor academic performance, and the three-year gap between high school graduation and the minimum hiring age for the IFD.

Chapter II reviews the recruitment background of the IFD in terms of challenges and successes, specifically with the inner-city ATHS-FRP. The challenges include the IFD's federally mandated consent decree and current demographics. Looking to the Indianapolis Black Firefighters Association (BFA) and its community outreach efforts, the chapter turns to the ATHS-FRP, a class for inner-city high school juniors and seniors to develop the skills required to become a firefighter with hands-on experience. This class meets every school day during school hours, and students can test for state fire certifications while receiving both high school and college credits.

Chapter III explores the history of diversity in the workplace and its relation to the IFD's recruitment efforts. It investigates the dynamics of diversity in the fire service and how not every applicant is a good fit for the profession. Moreover, it discusses the qualities that make a good firefighter: integrity, morality, capacity for teamwork, compassion, and a drive to serve the community.

Case studies from police recruitment and retainment efforts reveal lessons learned and development opportunities. Chapter IV addresses police recruitment’s similarities to and differences from the fire service. Lessons from this comparison include the need to educate people about what the job entails before they apply, the importance of building community trust through positive engagements with the citizens, and the effect of mentorship on newly hired employees.

Chapter V explores why the IFD program was created, its intended outcomes, critical problems, successes, and failures. It identifies the demographics and characteristics of the students served by the program and key components of the structure and day-to-day operations of the class. The chapter also traces the evolution of the mentor program to meet the program’s needs—this component of the course has positively affected students over the years. Community involvement, another successful endeavor of the program, teaches students to look at themselves in a new light.

Chapter VI offers seven recommendations for improving the ATHS-FRP:

1. The program needs more students than just those at ATHS; other Indianapolis Public Schools (IPS) students and those who go to private schools in Indianapolis should be eligible.
2. Along the same line, the class should reserve up to five spots for “legacy students”—sons and daughters of IFD employees who reside in the suburbs. Adding students who are more academically minded would increase the standards and expectations of the program.
3. If the first two recommendations come to fruition, the ATHS-FRP should reinstate the emergency medical technician class in the students’ senior year.
4. Also, the program ought to emphasize jobs for public safety telecommunicators in Indianapolis as an option for post-graduate employment; IFD’s communications positions are continuously short-staffed and especially need bilingual employees.

5. When they apply for the IFD in the future, program graduates in good standing should be awarded half a point to their application packet.
6. The department ought to create a part-time job with the IFD in a civilian capacity for graduates in good standing. Such a position will help fill the three-year gap between graduation and the IFD's minimum hiring age of 21.
7. Finally, IFD leadership and the IPS need to consider the possibility of moving the program from the ATHS campus to the new IFD Training Facility. This potentially controversial option would give the instructors more opportunities for training scenarios. The students would have the experience of being at an actual training facility instead of the chaotic ATHS campus.

Such efforts to increase the impact of the ATHS-FRP will provide more qualified diverse candidates for the IFD in the future.

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I dedicate this work to the most significant contributors to who I am—my parents. They taught me grit, perseverance, integrity, resilience, and a strong work ethic. They led by example. Thank you, Mom and Dad.

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## I. INTRODUCTION

The Arsenal Technical High School (ATHS) Fire Rescue Program (FRP) in Indianapolis began in 2012–2013. It has graduated approximately 100 students, and of those graduates, roughly 40 percent are women, 48 percent Hispanics, and 42 percent African Americans. In the program’s 10 years, it has produced zero firefighters or 9-1-1 telecommunicators for the Indianapolis Fire Department (IFD). This thesis provides a structured evaluation of the ATHS-FRP to identify areas of success, challenges, and opportunities for improvement. The research analyzes the program and how to increase the likelihood of hiring the graduates as IFD firefighters in the near future.

### A. PROBLEM STATEMENT

In 1964, discrimination based on color, religion, race, national origin, and sex was outlawed by Title VII of the Civil Rights Act.<sup>1</sup> This act mandates that all people receive fair treatment regarding hiring and employment. A quota system has been put in place in some fire departments to ensure discrimination does not occur. Even with the quotas and the Civil Rights Act, the fire service continues to have a largely homogeneous employee base: as of 2020, 85 percent of its workforce is white, and decades after women’s inclusion into the profession, only 4.4 percent of career firefighters are women.<sup>2</sup> Other minorities also lag in numbers. African Americans represent 8.4 percent, Asians, 1.2 percent, and Hispanics, 13.1 percent.<sup>3</sup> After decades of effort to increase diversity, the fire service workforce continues to comprise primarily white men. The source of the problem is a lack of qualified, diverse applicants. For example, in 1988, 15,000 people took the New York Fire Department written exam, the first step in the hiring process; only 1,600 were African

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<sup>1</sup> “Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964,” Equal Employment Opportunity Commission, accessed October 1, 2020, <https://www.eeoc.gov/statutes/title-vii-civil-rights-act-1964>.

<sup>2</sup> Bureau of Labor Statistics, “Firefighters,” in *Occupational Outlook Handbook* (Washington, DC: Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2020), <https://www.bls.gov/ooh/protective-service/firefighters.htm>.

<sup>3</sup> Bureau of Labor Statistics.

Americans.<sup>4</sup> Only 2.2 percent of those applicants scored high enough to move on in the process, and 29 people (1.3 percent) were ultimately hired.<sup>5</sup>

Noncompliance with the terms of Title VII can result in lawsuits, which typically lead to court-mandated consent decrees. This type of settlement resolves a dispute without admission of guilt and appoints an administrator to ensure the court-decided stipulations are implemented and enforced.<sup>6</sup> Once levied, consent decrees are notoriously challenging to lift. For example, the fire department in Buffalo, New York, recently petitioned to resolve a ruling placed 40 years ago for not meeting hiring quotas.<sup>7</sup> Many other fire departments such as Austin, Chicago, New York City, and San Francisco operate under consent decrees to increase minority hires.<sup>8</sup> This unenviable circumstance costs the taxpayers money and city officials time and effort to resolve. A settlement between the Austin City Council and the Justice Department cost the city \$780,000.<sup>9</sup> Of course, the settlement cost the city money, but it also required the city to make reparations. The money was allocated to unsuccessful firefighter applicants to cover back pay for what they might have earned had they not been subject to discrimination, and 30 new positions were created for Hispanic and African American candidates.<sup>10</sup>

Low numbers of minority applicants, compounded by the need to find people who are the right fit for the fire service, complicate the issue. This career is not a good fit for

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<sup>4</sup> Samuel Johnson Jr., “How Fire Departments Could Look Like the Communities They Serve,” *Governing*, November 30, 2016, <https://www.governing.com/gov-institute/voices/col-steps-improve-fire-department-diversity.html>.

<sup>5</sup> Johnson.

<sup>6</sup> John K. Murphy, “Title VII and Consent Decrees,” *Fire Engineering Training Community* (blog), October 29, 2016, <https://community.fireengineering.com/m/blogpost?id=1219672%3ABlogPost%3A632957>.

<sup>7</sup> Murphy.

<sup>8</sup> Murphy.

<sup>9</sup> Philip Jankowski, “After Four Years, Feds End Oversight of Austin Fire Department’s Hiring,” *Austin American-Statesman*, November 20, 2018, <https://www.statesman.com/news/20181120/after-four-years-feds-end-oversight-of-austin-fire-departments-hiring>.

<sup>10</sup> Jankowski.

everyone. The crux of the work is to help people: firefighters must have a genuine drive for community service. Firefighting is also very physical and team-oriented. Again, not just anyone can successfully fill these positions. Moreover, many prospective recruits do not understand and are not prepared to complete the year-long hiring process. A helpful factor in achieving the goal of being hired appears to be knowing a firefighter before and during candidacy. If there are not many firefighters in or from one's community, that connection is far less likely to occur.

Fire departments need to represent the citizens they serve. A diversity of firefighters can generate a wide array of solutions to a problem and contribute diverse value to the service. That is, inclusion and diversity are not ends unto themselves for the sake of avoiding costly lawsuits. For example, as a female firefighter, I have been called on to offer support to and console rape victims before they are willing to give their statements to the police. Moreover, parents have chosen to hand their children to me over my male counterparts in medical emergencies. Furthermore, because some cultures prohibit a man from touching a woman unless he is her husband, a woman with medical training can be the difference between life and death. Firefighters who know Spanish are especially helpful on emergency medical runs with non-English speaking patients, and firefighters with a rural background might offer unique solutions to tactical problems that their urban counterparts have not considered. Quick problem-solving in life-threatening events is the cornerstone of the fire service. Diversity can prevent groupthink, a danger to any successful organization.

Military recruiters establish contact with and educate young adults about opportunities in the armed services. High school guidance counselors promote secondary education—fire department recruiters might do the same for the fire service. The difference for a career in the fire service is that most departments hire at the age of 21, making joining the fire service a long-term goal. With the competitive nature of fire service application processes, the most successful candidates have college and military experience. If a young person learned this at an early age and was intentional about pursuing the career, they could take steps to build a solid resume. Fire service recruiters could work with high school guidance counselors and military recruiters to plan short-term and long-term goals.

There is a nationwide struggle for the fire service to attract and successfully recruit overall, but the challenge is especially difficult for hiring minorities. The simple deployment of recruiters has a negligible effect in some departments against other jobs and professions' more sophisticated and attractive merits. At least one known effort is to recruit high school students, effectively offering them a way out of the inner city and valuable professional experience regardless of their eventual career choices. It is potentially crucial in the battle against other professions for good people. Since 2012–2013, the program's inaugural school year, the ATHS-FRP in Indianapolis has graduated approximately 100 students. While the program has graduated significant numbers of women and people of color, it has not achieved its goal of recruiting and hiring graduates for the IFD. This outcome has three known reasons. First, there is a three-year gap between graduation from high school and the minimum hiring age of 21. Second, the fire department hires infrequently; hiring processes are spaced at least two years apart. Third, of the 2,000–5,000 people who apply for openings, only 50–100 become firefighters. If research can help to increase the return on investment for the IFD, it will solve other issues in the process. Inner-city citizens will find gainful employment, their future families will benefit, and the citizens will see a more inclusive public safety organization.

## **B. RESEARCH QUESTION**

How could the Arsenal Technical High School Fire Rescue Program be improved or expanded to meet its recruitment objectives?

## **C. LITERATURE REVIEW**

There are challenges associated with creating a diverse workforce, but the benefits appear to outweigh the costs of minority inclusion. Scholars have tried to promote diversity in organizations, and this section highlights some of these efforts. This review investigates some of the different approaches to finding unique solutions to a common problem. These issues include the benefits and challenges of a diverse work environment, how departments and organizations have attempted to create a qualified and diverse employee base, and the effectiveness of programs for inner-city teens with the intent of early recruitment to a workforce.

Variety in the workplace brings with it both benefits and challenges. In his Naval Postgraduate School thesis, Bailey C. Martin compares social identity theory (SIT), information/decision-making, and the categorization elaboration model to weigh the pros and cons of diversity.<sup>11</sup> He concludes that in-group/out-group dynamics, as described in SIT, can lead to conflicts in the workplace and, as a result, decrease productivity.<sup>12</sup> SIT asserts that diversity may create challenges, which can be detrimental to the work environment and production. This challenge is known as the “double-edged sword” of diversity.<sup>13</sup> According to this work, women and minorities constantly manage their differences from the in-group to fit in; they cannot be themselves in the workplace.<sup>14</sup>

Recruitment and retention of women in the police service have been the subject of much scholarly debate. Women who pursue a male-dominated career face different challenges from their male counterparts from when they apply for the job until the day they retire. Dione Neely identifies one of these challenges in her Naval Postgraduate School thesis.<sup>15</sup> She asserts that women in the police force who choose to become mothers face cultural biases and discrimination from male supervisors and co-workers. They are regarded differently from women who do not have children by co-workers, other women, and supervisors. Per Neely, these conditions can sometimes be the reason they leave the profession.<sup>16</sup> Further research investigates similar issues but does not consider motherhood. The experiences of female officers differ from those of male counterparts

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<sup>11</sup> Bailey C. Martin, “Diversity in the Fire Service: Beyond Basic Demographics” (master’s thesis, Naval Postgraduate School, 2019), <https://www.hsdl.org/?abstract&did=828246>.

<sup>12</sup> Martin.

<sup>13</sup> Martin, 3.

<sup>14</sup> Martin.

<sup>15</sup> Dione A. Neely, “Level the Playing Field: Are Law Enforcement Policies and Practices Rigged against Women and Mothers?” (master’s thesis, Naval Postgraduate School, 2019), <https://calhoun.nps.edu/handle/10945/63488>.

<sup>16</sup> Neely.

based on gender alone, according to Angela Swan.<sup>17</sup> These differences can be detrimental to a woman's career. Swan elaborates that the job of a police officer in the male-dominated culture unavoidably segregates women, thus creating an inability for them to feel socially accepted and, inevitably, to survive in the profession.

The matter of not feeling accepted is significant for non-traditional employees. Frances J. Milliken and Luis L. Martins agree that the integration of minorities, including women, is fraught with struggles.<sup>18</sup> Their work refutes the need for diversity and purports that women and minorities will be less satisfied with the work environment if it is mixed. They argue that the minority group will be less integrated with more diversity, resulting in higher dissatisfaction and, ultimately, higher employee turnover rates. Neely, who agrees with Milliken and Martins, addresses the long-term implications of a high turnover rate. She says recruiting and training new personnel to replace those who resign prematurely are quite expensive.<sup>19</sup> Moreover, Neely claims that losing skilled and knowledgeable employees lowers productivity and possibly employee morale.<sup>20</sup> The consensus among scholars is that it is difficult to create both diversity and inclusivity in the work environment.

The challenges associated with diversity are the prices to pay for generating a more comprehensive array of solutions and representing the entire community of citizens. In his research, Martin examines information/decision-making theory. According to Martin, diversity offers the benefits of different knowledge bases and more abundant group creativity, which results in better information and decisions.<sup>21</sup> This work supports the need

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<sup>17</sup> Angela A. Swan, "Masculine, Feminine, or Androgynous: The Influence of Gender Identity on Job Satisfaction among Female Police Officers," *Women & Criminal Justice* 26, no. 1 (2016): 1–19, <https://doi.org/10.1080/08974454.2015.1067175>.

<sup>18</sup> Frances J. Milliken and Luis L. Martins, "Searching for Common Threads: Understanding the Multiple Effects of Diversity in Organizational Groups," *Academy of Management Review* 21, no. 2 (April 1996): 402–33.

<sup>19</sup> Neely, "Level the Playing Field."

<sup>20</sup> Neely.

<sup>21</sup> Martin, "Diversity in the Fire Service."

for and benefits of a diverse workforce; it affirms the benefits of diversity in the workplace. The fire service thrives on creative solutions. John K. Murphy agrees with Martin as he examines diversity in the fire service. The benefits of diversity outweigh the challenges by including multiple perspectives in problem-solving processes.<sup>22</sup> For example, a graduate of a trade school might solve a problem differently from a college graduate. Someone with a military background might possess more leadership skills than someone who knows only the civilian realm. Murphy encourages readers to consider the ways people are different; he points out that differences can come in other forms besides race and gender. He points out that “group think” is a product of a homogeneous environment; both can be detrimental to firefighters’ complex issues.

A diverse department tends to help citizens see themselves reflected in the department’s sworn members. In a recent *New York Times* article, Lauren Leatherby and Richard A. Oppel Jr. support the need for diversity among sworn personnel. Especially in non-white neighborhoods, trust increases when government agencies and local police departments are diverse.<sup>23</sup> Leatherby and Oppel say that when a department employs many minority officers in high-ranking positions, it is less likely to have complaints about the use of excessive force, even when the excessive force itself remains constant.<sup>24</sup> This example shows that the perception of inclusion, in this case, African Americans in police leadership roles, matters to citizens within the community.

Informationally diverse teams have more resources to solve complex problems. Van Knippenberg, Dreu, and Homan have determined that the categorization elaboration model accounts for diversity’s positive and negative effects.<sup>25</sup> Within an organization,

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<sup>22</sup> John K. Murphy, “Diversity in the Fire Service: An Important Discussion,” *Fire Engineering Training Community* (blog), September 30, 2017, <https://community.fireengineering.com/m/blogpost?id=1219672%3ABlogPost%3A641362>.

<sup>23</sup> Lauren Leatherby and Richard A. Oppel Jr., “Which Police Departments Are as Diverse as Their Communities?,” *New York Times*, September 23, 2020, <https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2020/09/23/us/bureau-justice-statistics-race.html>.

<sup>24</sup> Leatherby and Oppel.

<sup>25</sup> Martin, “Diversity in the Fire Service.”

there are differences in perspective and knowledge bases. Informational diversity, as well as the ability to share information across organizations, is imperative. Van Knippenberg et al. claim that this deeper and more extensive consideration of task-relevant information “may lead diverse groups to outperform more homogeneous groups” on tasks with clear information processing and decision-making requirements.<sup>26</sup> As previously noted, firefighters who have a more hands-on background as graduates of a trade school have different strengths from those whose experiences are more academic. In this profession, there is a need for both skillsets.

Several academics claim that the subject of diversity comprises more than one issue. Van Knippenberg et al. suggest that SIT and the categorization elaboration model are not mutually exclusive, as one might assume. Milliken and Martins address both the benefits and downfalls of a diverse work culture; they call the two different views the “double-edged sword of diversity.”<sup>27</sup> Individual personalities, previous relationships, prejudices, and openness to new experiences play into the success or detriment of interaction between co-workers. Organizations that support diversity and encourage exchanges with heterogeneous groups have a better chance of buy-in from their workers.<sup>28</sup> According to Van Knippenberg et al., the elaboration model supports the idea that decision-making and team collaboration do not happen in a vacuum and acknowledges the human component to the equation.<sup>29</sup> This research shows that leadership of fire organizations must realize that the issue of diversity is complex. Differences between employees will play into a multitude of topics. These unique situations will provide opportunities for growth and challenges for the leadership to squelch. According to Van Knippenberg et al., top-down leadership and support are essential to a diverse workforce.

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<sup>26</sup> Daan Van Knippenberg, Carsten K. W. De Dreu, and Astrid C. Homan, “Work Group Diversity and Group Performance: An Integrative Model and Research Agenda,” *Journal of Applied Psychology* 89, no. 6 (2004): 1011, <https://doi.org/10.1037/0021-9010.89.6.1008>.

<sup>27</sup> Milliken and Martins, “Searching for Common Threads,” 403.

<sup>28</sup> Van Knippenberg, De Dreu, and Homan, “Work Group Diversity and Group Performance.”

<sup>29</sup> Van Knippenberg, De Dreu, and Homan.

Open-mindedness is a prerequisite for employees to confront and experience co-workers who are different from themselves. Milliken and Martins observe that education may not help and that when attempting to change a person's attitude, it is not helpful to employ logic.<sup>30</sup> According to Milliken and Martins, this problem seems to be the proximity of similar ethnicity since access to a similar culture can increase job satisfaction.<sup>31</sup> If an organization wants to improve its diversity by hiring more women, for example, the worst thing it can do is hire just one woman, who would be the only one to represent her sex. If she does a good job, other workers will likely conclude that women can do this job. On the other hand, if she is not proficient or does not assimilate to the culture, the probability of hiring more women will be low. Also, with just one member of a minority group, the person may experience isolation and feel excluded; job satisfaction decreases when group cohesion or inclusion is lacking.<sup>32</sup>

A 1993 study by Verkuyten, de Jong, and Masson in the Netherlands supports Milliken and Martins's findings that a more diverse workforce supports minorities.<sup>33</sup> It found that while non-Dutch employees experienced lower job satisfaction than their Dutch counterparts, their happiness increased the more time they spent with colleagues of similar ethnic backgrounds (non-Dutch workers).<sup>34</sup> To complicate the issue further, the length of time workers are together and their familiarity with different groups are also factors. Milliken and Martins's research reveals that adverse effects appear early in the groups' lives, but the groups benefit from various perspectives as behavior integration occurs.<sup>35</sup> Individual behaviors become more integrated and coordinated over time.

The lesson from this research is that the workers from different backgrounds who spend more time together will find ways to get around their differences and perform as a

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<sup>30</sup> Milliken and Martins, "Searching for Common Threads."

<sup>31</sup> Milliken and Martins.

<sup>32</sup> Milliken and Martins.

<sup>33</sup> Van Knippenberg, De Dreu, and Homan, "Work Group Diversity and Group Performance."

<sup>34</sup> Milliken and Martins, "Searching for Common Threads."

<sup>35</sup> Milliken and Martins.

coordinated team. According to the British Department for Communities and Local Government, organizations must model and support diversity, especially at the top ranks.<sup>36</sup> Indeed, the most successful organizations display and embrace it as a core value. Studies that focus on diversity and company success have found a 3 percent increase in revenue for every one percent increase in gender diversity and a 15 percent increase with higher ethnic diversity levels.<sup>37</sup> For example, Johnson & Johnson is recognized as one of the “best of the best” in terms of diversity.<sup>38</sup> Its chief diversity officer reports to the chairman and CEO; this operation is entirely overseen by top-level management. Initiatives within this company include “Diversity University” to help workers understand the benefits of unified teams, mentoring programs, and employee resource teams.<sup>39</sup>

In summary, there are challenges associated with creating a diverse workforce, but the benefits appear to outweigh the costs of minority inclusion. Even with the implementation of consent decrees, the fire service is losing its battle to find qualified, diverse applicants; its business model is failing.

#### **D. RESEARCH DESIGN**

This research relied on two primary approaches to better understand the challenges and possible solutions of recruitment via the ATHS-FRP. First, I completed case analyses of other fields and departments to understand lessons learned from their efforts. Second, I performed a structured evaluation and analysis of the ATHS-FRP.

This research contains case analysis from the police and other like-sized fire departments of the IFD. I reviewed literature that analyzed the problems that plague the police service’s recruitment efforts. The desire to protect and serve citizens should be the

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<sup>36</sup> Department for Communities and Local Government, *Creating the Conditions for Integration* (London: Department for Communities and Local Government, 2012), [https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/7504/2092103.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/7504/2092103.pdf).

<sup>37</sup> “9 Companies around the World Embracing Diversity in a Big Way,” *SocialTalent* (blog), August 14, 2020, <https://www.socialtalent.com/blog/diversity-and-inclusion/9-companies-around-the-world-that-are-embracing-diversity>.

<sup>38</sup> “Embracing Diversity in a Big Way.”

<sup>39</sup> “Embracing Diversity in a Big Way.”

factor that attracts applicants to these fields, and lessons learned from police recruitment apply to the fire service. I also reviewed five innovative approaches to fire service recruitment from Toronto, Chicago, Austin, Milwaukee, and Philadelphia. These cities' departments are approximately the same size as the IFD. They strive to find diverse applicants who want to become firefighters but face many of the same struggles to achieving that goal. Both police and other fire departments can offer best practices in recruitment of a diverse and qualified workforce.

Next, a structured case study and evaluation of the ATHS-FRP identified areas of success, challenges, and opportunities for improvement. According to Jennifer Rowley, local case study knowledge should build a comprehensive understanding of a problem in its real-life context.<sup>40</sup> From 2012 to 2020, I served as the manager of the ATHS-FRP and, thus, contributed my knowledge of it to this analysis. I used the retrospective study technique to examine what has happened in the program's history. As someone who has worked daily in the school program, I have observed the challenges associated with the social context of inner-city students striving to attain high-level, long-term goals. I also conducted semi-structured interviews with the chief of the IFD and the original and current ATHS-FRP instructors. Due to the transience and changing contact information of the graduates, it was hard to find and interview them; this research provides none of their input.

## **E. CHAPTER OVERVIEW**

Chapter II presents the history of the IFD in maintaining a diverse employee base and the efforts given to the ATHS-FRP. Chapter III describes issues with diversity in the fire service. Chapter IV examines how the police attempt to identify, recruit, and retain non-traditional applicants. Chapter V evaluates the ATHS-FRP's outcomes and offers an understanding of its challenges to success. Chapter VII concludes this research by offering recommendations to increase the likelihood of ATHS-FRP's success and suggestions for further study.

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<sup>40</sup> Jennifer Rowley, "Using Case Studies in Research," *Management Research News* 25, no. 1 (January 2002): 16–27, <https://doi.org/10.1108/01409170210782990>.

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## **II. THE INDIANAPOLIS FIRE DEPARTMENT AND THE ARSENAL TECHNICAL HIGH SCHOOL FIRE RESCUE PROGRAM**

Historically, the IFD has struggled with diversity. In recent years, the department has had small victories, but there is still work to be done. The first part of this chapter explores the origins of the IFD’s efforts for diversity, its successes, and room for growth. Next, the ATHS-FRP is covered, as well as its stakeholders and funding. Then, the chapter takes a candid, comprehensive look at the program to determine its successes and areas for improvement, examining the learning environment, schedule, activities, student profiles, mentor program, and volunteer opportunities built into the program.

### **A. DIVERSITY GOALS OF THE INDIANAPOLIS FIRE DEPARTMENT**

This section explains the 1978 consent decree that set diversity efforts in motion and the successes of the IFD since the 1970s in becoming more diverse. This section provides current diversity statistics and areas that require improvement—specifically, the need to recruit women (of all races) and Hispanics. Finally, this section outlines the areas of success and needed growth. By understanding its present limits of diversity, the department can make practical corrective actions.

Indianapolis—the capital of Indiana, in the middle of the state—is a diverse city by midwestern standards. The IFD covers 278 square miles of the city, and in 2020, its 43 stations responded to 155,449 runs.<sup>41</sup> As the largest department in the state, the IFD responds primarily to incidents in an urban environment. As of 2019, according to the Census Bureau, white citizens make up 61 percent of the Indianapolis population compared to 85 percent of the Indiana population.<sup>42</sup> The same source shows that black citizens represent 28 percent of the capital’s population as opposed to just 10 percent of the

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<sup>41</sup> “IFD Reports & Statistics,” City of Indianapolis, accessed October 29, 2020, <https://www.indy.gov/activity/fire-department-statistics>.

<sup>42</sup> “QuickFacts: Indiana; Indianapolis City (Balance), Indiana,” Census Bureau, accessed February 1, 2021, <https://www.census.gov/quickfacts/fact/table/IN,indianapoliscity/balanceindiana/PST045219>.

state's.<sup>43</sup> The Hispanic populations are closer, with 10 percent and 7 percent calling the city and state home, respectively. Historically, numbers of white and black citizens have remained relatively stable, but since 2000, the Hispanic population has risen from 4 percent in Indianapolis and 3 percent in the state—representing a city-wide increase of 150 percent and a statewide increase of 133 percent over 19 years.<sup>44</sup> Indianapolis is a diverse area within the state, and these trends are sure to continue.

## **B. THE 1978 CONSENT DECREE**

In the past, federal reviewers cited both the IFD and the Indianapolis Metropolitan Police Department, then called the Indianapolis Police Department, for a lack of diversity among their sworn members. The federal government forced Indianapolis to address diversity hiring with a formal consent decree in 1978, which affected both the police and fire departments.<sup>45</sup>

Private Christina Engleking, an engineer in the IFD who also specializes in employment law, describes a consent decree as follows:

an order by a judge that binds an agreement between parties to a dispute. In a criminal case, a consent decree resolves the conflict without the admission of guilt. A consent decree resolves the dispute without admission of liability in a civil case (as would most typically apply to employment/hiring issues). Employment consent decrees will generally require specific action or inaction to prevent employers from engaging in unlawful conduct in the future. Very generally speaking, as applied to employment disputes, consent decrees are intended to minimize employers' discriminatory practices regarding the hiring, employment, and firing of employees.<sup>46</sup>

The 1978 Indianapolis consent decree cited both the fire and police departments for unfair hiring and promotional practices. The Justice Department deemed it necessary for

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<sup>43</sup> Census Bureau.

<sup>44</sup> "Indianapolis City, IN Census Data," Infoplease, accessed August 13, 2021, <https://www.infoplease.com/us/census/indiana/indianapolis-city>.

<sup>45</sup> *United States v. Indianapolis*, No. 1:07-CV-897-DFH-WTL (S.D. Ind. 2009) (consent decree in resolution of suit), <https://www.justice.gov/sites/default/files/crt/legacy/2010/12/15/indianapoliscd.pdf>.

<sup>46</sup> Christina Engleking, personal communication, June 2020.

the Indianapolis Police Department to hire at least 20 percent women in each recruit class until the department comprised 40 percent women.<sup>47</sup> In 1978, Bryona Slaughter, an African American woman, was hired as Indianapolis’s first female firefighter.<sup>48</sup> Due to its competitive selection process, an extended history of “men only,” and greater physical demands in the selection process and job requirements, the fire department was expected to achieve these results more slowly than the police department. By 1992, women made up 14.7 percent of police but only 2.8 percent of firefighters.<sup>49</sup> These statistics show the slow change, as was expected, in demographics between the departments.

### **C. AREAS TO INCREASE DIVERSITY IN THE IFD**

Years of effort and recruiting to fulfill the consent decree encouraged more diverse public safety employees in Indianapolis, resulting in the decree being lifted—but not until 2005. From 1978 to 1992, people of color in the police force rose from 18 to 29.3 percent while 9.3 to 21.8 percent in the fire department.<sup>50</sup> Two areas of meaningful change in working toward diversity have included the number of black male firefighters working in the IFD and the 2020 accreditation of the department by the Commission for Fire Accreditation International (CFAI).

The African American population of Indianapolis represents 29 percent of its citizens.<sup>51</sup> Assuming half of those citizens are men, the IFD is on track with 15 percent African American male representation. This number is well over the national average of

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<sup>47</sup> “Indianapolis Hiring More Women for Police and Fire Departments,” *New York Times*, January 14, 1979, <https://www.nytimes.com/1979/01/14/archives/indianapolis-hiring-more-women-for-police-and-fire-departments.html>.

<sup>48</sup> William Doherty, “Women and African Americans in Public Safety,” Polis Center, accessed September 15, 2021, <https://polis.iupui.edu/women-and-african-americans-in-public-safety/>.

<sup>49</sup> Doherty.

<sup>50</sup> Doherty.

<sup>51</sup> Census Bureau, “QuickFacts: Indiana.”

8.4 percent African American firefighters.<sup>52</sup> Ongoing efforts to drive recruitment of qualified black citizens have paid off, except among the category of black women. Therefore, the IFD has evidence that historical recruitment efforts are effective within the African American community, but only with males; efforts to recruit black women need attention and more action.

A big part of the strong representation of black men on the IFD could be from formal and informal recruitment by the Indianapolis Black Firefighters Association (BFA). This group focuses on outreach and visibility in the community. The BFA provides food to low-income residents, back-to-school supplies for kids, and Christmas at the Firehouse for residents to receive food and toys for their families.<sup>53</sup> Assuming that people tend to relate to or interact with people who look like them, it stands to reason African American male firefighters tell other African American men about careers with the fire service. Minorities are often the primary recruiters for other minorities because, generally, people tend to associate with people of similar backgrounds. If someone finds a good job opportunity and wants to pass this information along to one's friends and family, most likely, those referrals will look the same as the originator of the information.

The firefighters associated with the BFA also have a robust social media presence on Instagram and Facebook. They use these avenues to invite applicants to meet in person for help with practice exams before the written test and interview preparation for fire department applicants. The BFA does a tremendous job of reaching out to the black firefighters of the IFD and other minorities in the department and encourages them to help with applicants' informational exam preparation sessions. Applicants interact with current firefighters who are there to help them and who also look like them. The expansive outreach of the BFA still struggles to find women who both want to be firefighters and can do the

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<sup>52</sup> "Labor Force Statistics from the Current Population Survey: Employed Persons by Detailed Occupation, Sex, Race, and Hispanic or Latino Ethnicity," Bureau of Labor Statistics, accessed January 30, 2021, <https://www.bls.gov/cps/cpsaat11.htm>.

<sup>53</sup> "Home Page," Indiana Black Firefighters Association, accessed April 22, 2021, <https://indyblackfirefighters.com/>.

job. Black women, who make up only 1 percent of the IFD, are underrepresented in the department, as are white women.<sup>54</sup>

In March 2020, the CFAI awarded the IFD international accreditation. The product of collaboration between the International Association of Fire Chiefs and the International City/County Managers Association, the CFAI assesses departments worldwide based on over 280 industry best practices—diversity is one of the included assessments. A team of peer assessors verifies and validates the department’s claims of professional standards and submits a report to the commission, which awards accredited status. Earning international accreditation is a monumental task, but this department was not afraid to take an honest look at its performance and adjust accordingly. Nonetheless, with this enormous accomplishment to ensure the safety of its citizens, Indianapolis still struggles to find qualified and diverse firefighters. Figure 1 demonstrates the overall representation of the IFD’s recruit class in 2021.

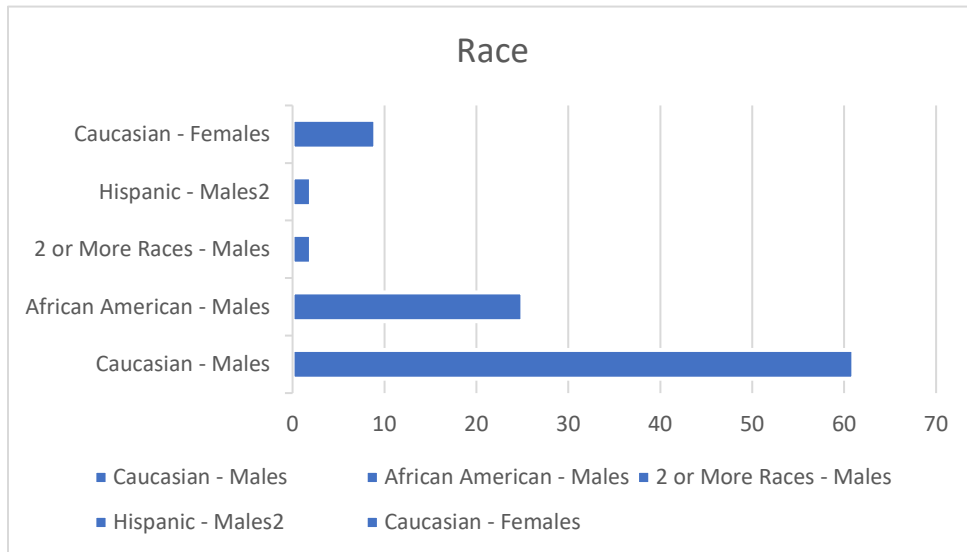


Figure 1. Demographics of the IFD’s 2021 Recruit Class<sup>55</sup>

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<sup>54</sup> “Become a Firefighter,” City of Indianapolis, accessed July 23, 2021, <https://www.indy.gov/activity/become-a-firefighter>.

<sup>55</sup> Adapted from Lori White, email to author, March 2021.

#### **D. CHALLENGES AND REMAINING AREAS FOR GROWTH**

A department that has been through the arduous task of fulfilling a federally mandated consent decree by spending time and money to create new recruiting methods will undoubtedly go to extraordinary lengths not to repeat the process. The department must undertake ongoing efforts; such an issue cannot be “fixed” and then forgotten. If trust from citizens is vital to our public safety organizations, we need to reflect the diversity of the cities we serve. Recruitment must continue to maintain numbers of firefighters who represent the entirety of the community, and even with a directed recruitment effort, it is still a difficult task. Sustained efforts should center on targeted groups, not on increasing the base numbers of applicants.

Even as an accredited fire department, Indianapolis does not fully or equitably represent its community, as depicted in Figure 1. As previously mentioned, diversity in the city of Indianapolis has grown over the past 19 years, yet the IFD has not maintained pace with its sworn members. While the number of black firefighters has been consistent with the percentage of black citizens, the Hispanic population has grown tremendously but has not increased representation in the IFD. To represent the entirety of the community, the IFD needs awareness of population trends.

In the mid-2000s, mergers with suburban departments on the perimeter of Indianapolis presented a new challenge, as they were responsible for a decline in diversity numbers within the new, much larger department.<sup>56</sup> For example, the Franklin Township Fire Department, one of the suburban departments that merged with the IFD, comprised 82 white men, four African American men, one Hispanic man, and four white women.<sup>57</sup> To counteract discrepancies, the department needed to get creative with recruitment and increase previous efforts.

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<sup>56</sup> “Indy Fire Merger Raises Concerns,” Firehouse, July 2, 2010, <https://www.firehouse.com/home/news/10465755/indy-fire-merger-raises-concerns>.

<sup>57</sup> Firehouse.

Table 1. Demographics of IFD Sworn Personnel versus the Population of Indianapolis in 2021<sup>58</sup>

<b>Men</b>	<b>Percent of Department</b>	<b>Percent of Indianapolis</b>
White	77	29
Black	15	14
Latino	2	5
Asian	1	2
<b>Women</b>		
White	4	32
Black	1	15
Latina	0.01	5
Asian	0.01	2

**E. ARSENAL TECHNICAL HIGH SCHOOL FIRE RESCUE PROGRAM**

In 2010, the IFD partnered with Indianapolis Public Schools (IPS) to create a win-win scenario for both organizations. The partnership between the IFD and IPS is unique and can reach students in a meaningful way. This section profiles the ATHS-FRP; outlines program goals, stakeholders, and funding sources; and describes the learning environment, structure of the class, and activities.

The ATHS-FRP is not the only effort by the IFD to reach young people. Other actions by the IFD have attempted to address inadequacies in the department’s diversity through young people in the community. For example, its Junior Cadet Program, focused on ages 14–18, is available to any teenager who can attend the meetings held once a month at IFD headquarters. However, the ATHS-FRP targets a narrower, more diverse population of students at the biggest high school in the city.

These outreach efforts reflect an understanding of the role of trust and community engagement in driving diverse recruitment. Anna Schermerhorn-Collins, a firefighter for the New York City Fire Department, discusses the need for trust within the community and its relation to recruitment efforts. She reports that sometimes citizens need a gentle push

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<sup>58</sup> Adapted from City of Indianapolis, “Become a Firefighter”; Census Bureau, “QuickFacts: Indiana.”

from the department to consider the career as an option.<sup>59</sup> Her work encourages interaction with teenagers who show an interest in the profession and underscores the need to nurture this interest before young people find more realistic career pathways.<sup>60</sup>

ATHS is the largest school in the IPS system, with 1,944 enrolled students in the 2019–2020 school year.<sup>61</sup> The unusual setting of ATHS is rich in history. In the heart of downtown, the 76-acre grounds were originally a military arsenal from 1864 to 1903; in 1912, the campus became a high school.<sup>62</sup> The unique historical setting and the open campus have the feel of a small college. The community that the school draws from has a high concentration of black citizens. Eighty-seven percent of the student body is African American, well above the state’s 32 percent African American population.<sup>63</sup> Thirty-eight percent of the student body is Hispanic.<sup>64</sup> According to William Alfke, a retired firefighter with 35 years on the IFD and the first academic instructor of the FRP, the kids at ATHS are the “lost and forgotten” kids of the Indianapolis public school system.<sup>65</sup> See Figure 2 for ATHS’s student body demographics and relevant statistics.

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<sup>59</sup> Anna Schermerhorn-Collins, “The Challenges to Gender Integration in the Career Fire Services: A Comparative Case Study of Men in Nursing” (master’s thesis, Naval Postgraduate School, 2017), <http://hdl.handle.net/10945/53044>.

<sup>60</sup> Schermerhorn-Collins.

<sup>61</sup> “How Does Arsenal Technical High School Rank among America’s Best High Schools?,” U.S. News & World Report, accessed February 27, 2021, <https://www.usnews.com/education/best-high-schools/indiana/districts/indianapolis-public-schools/arsenal-technical-high-school-7257>.

<sup>62</sup> “About Our School,” Arsenal Technical High School, accessed February 27, 2021, <https://myips.org/arsenaltech/about-our-school/>.

<sup>63</sup> “Arsenal Technical High School,” Public School Review, accessed February 27, 2021, <https://www.publicschoolreview.com/arsenal-technical-high-school-profile>.

<sup>64</sup> “Arsenal Technical High School,” SchoolDigger, accessed September 18, 2021, <https://www.school-digger.com/go/IN/schools/0477000801/school.aspx>.

<sup>65</sup> William Alfke, personal communication, April 11, 2021.

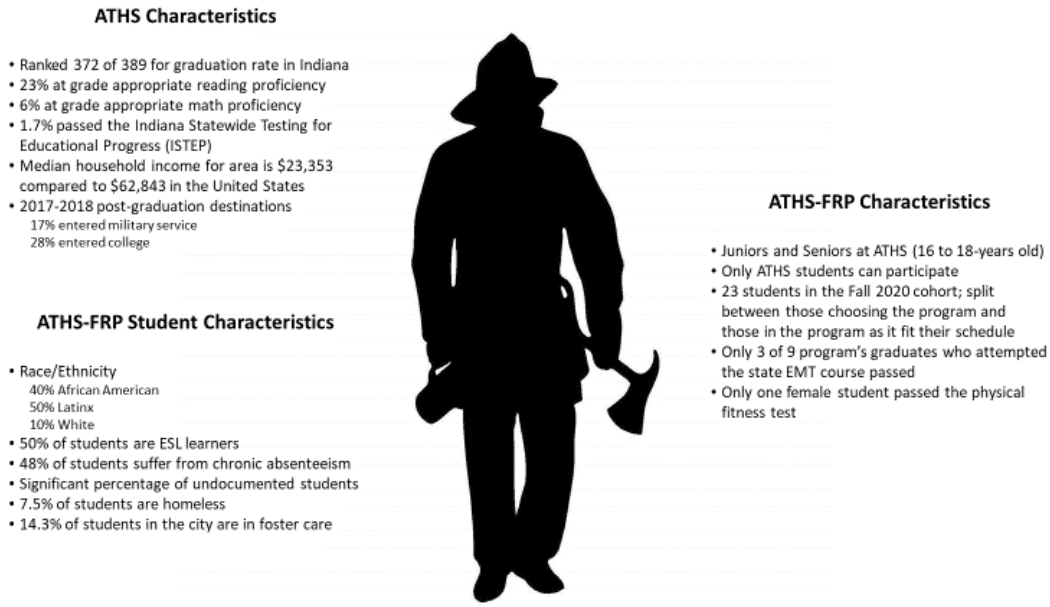


Figure 2. Student Characteristic Breakdown

## F. PROGRAM GOALS

The IFD aims to build a path to the fire service and develop firefighters from the community it serves through its program for students at ATHS. The ATHS-FRP targets citizens served by the department and identifies teenagers with interest in public safety. ATHS allows the IFD to reach a group of students who could help increase its diversity. The students at ATHS understand the inner workings of the city streets better than most, and this knowledge could prove helpful within public safety environments. To meet its goal of developing firefighters, in 2012, the IFD established the program in the heart of the inner city, an area where many non-traditional applicants reside. In essence, the program aims to build a path to the fire service and develop a firefighter from the ground up. Like many departments nationwide, the IFD attempts to create a community outreach effort and a recruitment tool for inner-city teenagers. At the same time, it may have a phenomenal impact on the lives of the young people who participate. Nevertheless, it is failing as a recruitment tool for the IFD.

To explain the program's creation and efforts in terms of recruitment, Chief Ernest Malone of the IFD said, "We want these kids to see themselves in us—that we are not a

threat, and they can emulate us. We want to create an environment where everyone is welcome, and there are no barriers to employment.”<sup>66</sup> Chief Malone, a graduate of the inner-city school system, recognizes the perception of public safety organizations in the eyes of some of the city’s residents. One goal of the ATHS-FRP is to educate both people of hiring age and teenagers about this career’s benefits. Beyond a steady paycheck, health insurance, and retirement benefits, firefighters make a difference in people’s lives. For young people from families that struggle with financial issues, the biggest payoff may be the goal to support oneself, have stable employment, maintain stable housing, and contribute in a way like no other.

The commitment to this high school program is as a long-term venture, so the IFD could see returns on investment as far as 15 years in the future. An article for *Firefighter Insider* estimates that a fire service applicant has a 1 percent chance of being hired.<sup>67</sup> Many applicants try for years and apply to many departments, so it is not surprising that FRP graduates struggle to find work in the field—especially in a large urban department that draws thousands of hopeful applicants. Figure 3 depicts ATHS-FRP students of the 2016–2017 school year in turnout gear.

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<sup>66</sup> Ernest Malone, personal communication, March 11, 2021.

<sup>67</sup> “Is It Hard to Become a Firefighter? Tricks to Get Hired Fast,” *Firefighter Insider* (blog), accessed April 16, 2021, <https://firefighterinsider.com/is-it-hard-to-become-a-firefighter/>.



Figure 3. ATHS-FRP Students from the 2016–2017 School Year<sup>68</sup>

## 1. Stakeholders and Funding

Leadership at IPS and ATHS had its own reasons to support the recruitment effort. In 2012, the school system agreed to add the program to ATHS’s career pathway programs to give its students another option—a career in public safety. The school relies heavily on the career pathway programs to uphold graduation requirements, so both IPS and ATHS welcomed the IFD’s curriculum.

Both IPS and the IFD pay wages for program instructors per the memorandum of understanding (MOU) between the two parties, drafted by the Indianapolis City Legal

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<sup>68</sup> All student photos used in this research were taken by the author while on duty in an official role with the IFD and while class was in session. Permission to take and publish student pictures was granted by the Indianapolis Public Schools unless parents signed an opt-out form for media publication.

Department. When the program began in 2012, there was one part-time instructor, whose compensation was less than that of a substitute teacher. Seven IFD firefighters interviewed for this position. Based on program growth, by the third school year, in 2015, the part-time position became full-time, paid at the rank of captain, with a salary ranging from approximately \$75,000 to \$100,000, including benefits. Chief Malone appointed one firefighter—a private—to the rank of captain and created an administrative position for the program. The full-time instructor, a retired IFD firefighter, provides academic instruction, attends all meetings for teachers, provides grades, and upholds state testing standards for the required fire certifications.

Collaboration between the IFD and IPS pays for some but not all of the program's costs. Multiple stakeholders in the community have provided program funding to help with operating costs. For example, Local 416 (the IFD's union), the BFA, and the Indianapolis Emerald Society (a professional organization of firefighters) have provided intermittent financial backing. These organizations paid for school supplies at the beginning of the year for each student in the ATHS-FRP, CPR certifications, t-shirts, sweatshirts, and jackets.<sup>69</sup> Without a consistent financial source, instructors still struggle to find the money for supplies. Donations from firefighters in classes at the National Fire Academy in Emmitsburg, Maryland, were sent home with the author of this thesis on four occasions, equaling about \$1,000 in total. In 2015, Local 416 donated the program's first workout equipment, 20 jump ropes, to the ATHS-FRP. The IFD also donated workout equipment—a Cybex machine, an elliptical machine, and free weights. Individual firefighters have donated a stationary bike and a treadmill.

## **2. Learning Environment**

The program strives to deliver a realistic fire training environment with no budget to cover costs beyond instructors' salaries and regular classroom supplies. Per the MOU, IPS provides supplies for the classroom. In comparison, the IFD contributes an engine (with standard equipment), air-fill station, outdated turnout gear, self-contained breathing

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<sup>69</sup> This information comes from the author's direct professional knowledge.

apparatuses (SCBAs), chainsaws (but not gas), ladders, and axes. State fire service standards for certification include many hands-on skills that require specialized equipment. Instructors often pay out of pocket for costs associated with the class, for such items as gas for chainsaws, oriented strand boards for the flashover chamber, and other miscellaneous materials not accounted for in the MOU.

Creating a learning environment that resembles a firehouse requires a larger budget and more equipment than a typical classroom. For example, a glass wall divides the classroom from the engine bay. Students have the unique experience of sitting at their desks while viewing (and then using) a fire engine, tools, and turnout gear. In the fall of 2019, the IFD worked with Local 416 to purchase a three-story training tower. The structure, located on an unused portion of the student parking lot, provides options for training scenarios that were previously unavailable to the class.

In the last few years, the school has found innovative ways to help support the program's financial needs and create a realistic training environment. For example, every year, the school uses grant money to purchase three SCBAs, and grant money has also funded one rowing machine and floor tiles for the workout area. Each piece of equipment was added slowly through the years to create a firehouse environment. Students have access to the same workout equipment, tools, SCBAs, turnout gear, and fire apparatus as IFD firefighters. Such equipment facilitates physical fitness instruction and functional fitness training to increase these cadets' overall stamina and muscular strength. It helps students understand the physical nature of the profession and the lengths applicants must go to be successful in a fire department hiring process.

### **3. Structure of the Class**

The class meets every school day for three class periods, and students earn both high school and up to nine college credits. The academic standards and hands-on skills are compatible with the Indiana State Mandatory Firefighter Curriculum, and students who pass receive enough certifications to become volunteer firefighters.

Instructors have a wide range of designated responsibilities in the program. They support students with academics and hands-on skills, provide physical fitness training, and

oversee the mentor program. In the author's opinion, these are difficult positions. The school has inconsistencies in leadership and direction, and the program does not have a budget to sustain recurring costs. Considering the training scenarios, which involve multiple moving parts, absenteeism among the students is one of the biggest problems. In addition to the logistics of the class, issues with students take an emotional toll on instructors. There is never a time when the students' lack of attendance, disregard for academics, erratic home lives, danger to their wellbeing, or lack of planning for their futures do not weigh heavily on the minds of the instructors.

The program challenges students in multiple ways. Every student has one's own set of turnout gear and SCBA. They take pride in this equipment because they must earn every piece of it. Early each school year, the class is introduced to the significance of the number 343 and the events of September 11, 2001. To honor the 343 firefighters who gave their lives on that day, each student is required to earn each piece of turnout gear by doing 343 burpees, sit-ups, jumping jacks, and push-ups. In addition to educating the group about firefighters' sacrifices, students gain the feeling of accomplishment and establish their commitment to the ATHS-FRP.

Teamwork is essential in the fire service, and the workouts focus on both the individual's and group's strength when they work together. The instructors meet each student where they are in terms of fitness. There is no initial fitness requirement for students to enroll in the course—they need only give their best effort. Many students have benefitted from significant gains in terms of fitness, and their pride is palpable.



Figure 4. ATHS-FRP Participants Encourage Classmate during Group Run

The academic work is at the same caliber as that of the IFD Training Academy. Students read from a college-level textbook to assimilate information—a daunting task for many students who admit they have never read a whole book (of any kind) before. Texts supplement hands-on practice and learning; notably, a mix of learning styles benefits students who speak English as their second language. Knowledge is tested through chapter exams, culminating in the state certification exam. Students are also CPR certified and receive training for sudden infant death syndrome and autism; these training opportunities provide helpful knowledge for any young adult.

This class teaches life skills, competencies needed to succeed in the modern world. Students take an introspective look at their lives through daily journal questions and then discuss these questions as a class. Students learn about financial issues such as credit cards, banking, loans, and mortgages. The course also addresses interview skills and what employers look for in a good employee. In the past, students have asked the instructors how to read a clock and address an envelope. The classroom's judgment-free atmosphere provides the teenagers with a safe place to ask questions and talk about the struggles in their lives. Discussions of personal problems occur almost daily, including such incidents as a diagnosis of schizophrenia, the murder of a parent out of the country, sexual abuse at the hands of a parent, a parent in prison, illegal immigration and separation from family,

siblings being sent to foster care, and a parent's drug addiction. Even if these students do not become firefighters, they have more skills to help their families or the community; thus, they are better citizens of Indianapolis.

#### **4. Mentor Program**

An active firefighter becomes a personal mentor for each teenager to provide a positive influence missing in many students' lives. One course assignment requires the student to go to a firehouse with one's mentor. If the student is 18 years old or older, he can ride out on emergency calls. If under 18, she may tour the firehouse and eat lunch or dinner with the crew. The relationship between the mentor and mentee is encouraged outside of class requirements. Students who have shown an interest in college receive mentors who are college graduates; those who would like to join the military pair with firefighters with military service experience.

Several relationships have blossomed into genuine friendships, and mentors remain in contact after the students graduate. Others go no further than the class requirements—they did the minimum to complete the assignment and did not stay in touch. The difference between the relationships' success rests solely with the students' commitment; those who wanted a meaningful interaction found it, and those who did not merely completed the assignment with their assigned firefighters. Because some students have found the mentor relationship helpful, there is an opportunity to extend the effort of building and sustaining relationships with the teenagers outside of class. Associations such as these could bridge the gap between high school graduation and the minimum hiring age of the IFD.



Figure 5. Photo of an ATHS-FRP Participant and His IFD Mentor

## 5. Community Involvement

Volunteer opportunities built into the program's structure have a different meaning for students than for the instructors. In an eye-opening conversation I had with the kids the first year I was there, I asked them what "community service" meant. One person quickly responded that it is what someone does when he gets in trouble with the law. When I asked what else the term could mean, after a long silence, a student said, "Community service is what the white people do in my neighborhood on a Saturday."<sup>70</sup> Yet helping the community is a basic tenet of public service, and the ATHS-FRP attempts to show students the rewards of giving back to the community. The program aims to provide novel situations and expose students to experiences outside of their comfort zones; such experiences can help them view the world through a broader lens. A broader perspective on public safety

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<sup>70</sup> Class discussion with author, Fall 2014.

might encourage these non-traditional applicants to consider a career in the fire service, thus providing a more diverse applicant pool.



Figure 6. Community Education Event for Fire Safety

As many students have always been on the receiving end of volunteerism, this is a novel opportunity to help others. To help the students learn the importance of expressing gratitude, students write thank-you cards whenever a guest speaker visits or someone goes out of their way to help. This practice provides an avenue to express thanks, understand why being appreciative is essential, learn to address an envelope, and practice writing skills.

Although it cannot be a required part of the class, about half of the students volunteer to help with the Clothe-a-Child event, sponsored by Local 416 for over a century. Students serve breakfast to elementary school–age kids before they go out with firefighters to shop for new clothes. Students then clean up and help to prepare the gifts Santa gives the kids upon their return from shopping. In conjunction with lessons on gratitude, students have an assignment to discuss how they felt about the experience—specifically if someone said “thank you” to them. Most students said they were happy that they had made an effort to attend the event, even though it was outside of school and they did not receive compensation for their time. One student was upset that nobody thanked him, which became a lesson for the whole group; it is important to show gratitude, and it can impact the perception of others.

Another volunteer opportunity built into the curriculum of the ATHS-FRP is the Fire Safety Olympics provided by the IFD for all IPS second-grade students. This one-day event, sponsored by the IFD’s Life Safety Division, focuses on teaching youngsters about fire safety. The fire rescue students supervise events such as “stop, drop, roll, and cover,” “save the baby,” how to evacuate from a burning building, and how to call 9-1-1. The outcome of students’ participation in these community education events is a change in mindset. Students learn the importance of giving back to the community and ways to engage in activities that are meaningful to the greater good of the citizens of Indianapolis.

An additional opportunity for the ATHS-FRP students to make a difference in their community is the Smoke Alarm Blast sponsored by the IFD’s Life Safety Division. Students are paired with an IFD civilian employee to canvas the neighborhood within a half-mile radius of the school to install smoke alarms. The average income per person in this neighborhood is \$14,416 per year, in contrast with the national average of \$53,482.<sup>71</sup> Most likely, many of the homes in this area lack working smoke alarms because of the cost of purchasing and maintaining the device—a clear safety risk to the residents. Not only do the students learn how to install a smoke alarm, but they also gain experience working with

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<sup>71</sup> “Zip 46201 (Indianapolis, IN),” BestPlaces, accessed February 27, 2021, <https://www.bestplaces.net/economy/zip-code/indiana/indianapolis/46201>.

the public and performing a much-needed service. Another benefit of this event is making the fire department visible to citizens—outreach efforts such as this help build trust among the people in the district. Young adults might like to join such a department and apply in the following hiring process if the community perceives the department is a respectable, trustworthy, and involved organization.

## **G. CONCLUSION**

In terms of reaching at-risk teenagers and making a difference in their lives, the program is a huge success; as a recruitment effort, it is lacking. Chapter VI provides a more in-depth assessment of program outcomes and performance. Even though the IFD has hired no program graduates, the program certainly has potential. The program could find its initial success with a more encompassing effort, especially for graduates between 18 and 21.

### III. DIVERSITY IN THE FIRE SERVICE

Social changes over time have affected the fire service. What was once a job for a select group of people has evolved into something our grandparents would not recognize. In recent years, the fire service has taken heed of what business leaders have known for some time. David J. Bland and Alexander Osterwalder address the need for diversity of strong business teams. In *Testing Business Ideas*, they assert, “When forming your team, keep diversity top of mind, rather than as an afterthought.”<sup>72</sup> The consent decrees and laws that mandate the fire service employ diverse employees are one side of the issue. Diversity makes good business sense.

There are two sides to the diversity issue—that of the potential employee and the employer. Because of their unique needs, non-traditional applicants (non-white men and women of any race) require support. The fire service must understand the obstacles they face if the goal is to create an inclusive representation of their citizens. The ATHS-FRP attempts to take the unique needs of non-traditional applicants into account from an early age, but there is a gap between the school program and employment as a firefighter. Departments need to understand the problems applicants face, and this research provides data to consider. This chapter explores difficulties faced by women and people of color. Additionally, it is vital to find people who are the right fit for the job—this chapter includes a discussion of these characteristics.

#### A. NON-TRADITIONAL APPLICANTS

Non-traditional applicants have struggled historically to gain employment in the fire service. Women in paid departments across the United States comprise only 4 percent

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<sup>72</sup> David J. Bland and Alexander Osterwalder, *Testing Business Ideas* (Hoboken, NJ: Wiley, 2020).

of the workforce.<sup>73</sup> Moreover, 82 percent of paid firefighters are white.<sup>74</sup> Therefore, non-traditional applicants—women and people of color—face significant disadvantages related to a lack of role models and mentors in the profession. This research investigates the problems non-traditional applicants face to help build a bridge between the ATHS-FRP and the IFD.

The minimum prerequisites for applying to the fire service can be deceiving, and people without access to insider perspectives may think the process is more straightforward than it is. Of applicants to firefighter positions, upwards of 70 percent drop out after being rejected in one or more selection processes and move on to another career.<sup>75</sup> Because of intense competition for each vacant position and a limited number of basic requirements for someone to apply, those hired often have relevant fire training, education, and more experience than is required.<sup>76</sup> Knowing someone who is already a firefighter may give applicants a realistic view of this process and help them to prepare.

## 1. Women

Despite challenges, the IFD rates well in its recruitment and is within the national average of women in paid departments. At one time, the perception was that women lacked the qualifications required for firefighting. Now, modern recruiting efforts see qualified women as a highly desirable resource. The following section examines the physical demands of the job and gender stereotypes of firefighters.

Given the physically demanding work of a firefighter, it might seem unlikely that such a strenuous profession could comprise 50 percent women. Yet, the physical work is

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<sup>73</sup> Robert McCoppin, Angie Levintis Lourgos, and Alicia Fabbre, “Female Firefighters Still Fight for Equality: ‘We’re Assumed Incompetent,’” *Government Technology*, April 25, 2018, <https://www.govtech.com/em/disaster/Female-Firefighter-Still-Fight-for-Equality-Were-assumed-Incompetent.html>.

<sup>74</sup> Corinne Bendersky, “Making U.S. Fire Departments More Diverse and Inclusive,” *Harvard Business Review*, December 7, 2018, <https://hbr.org/2018/12/making-u-s-fire-departments-more-diverse-and-inclusive>.

<sup>75</sup> Steve Prziborowski, “Becoming a Firefighter: 10 Must-Do Things,” *FireRescue1*, March 14, 2020, <https://www.firerescue1.com/career-1/articles/becoming-a-firefighter-10-must-do-things-wmOqMRqBfm8Jflg/>.

<sup>76</sup> “Is It Hard to Become a Firefighter?”

comparable to that of the military, and the fire service's 5 percent falls short of the 15 percent of women in the military.<sup>77</sup> One consideration is that the military has more options for jobs than the fire service does, and perhaps that is why it has higher numbers of women. A 2008 study on gender inclusion performed by the National Report Card on Women in Firefighting estimates that barring cultural resistance, women should make up 17 percent of the workforce.<sup>78</sup> This study examined jobs with similar physical challenges along with the number of women of hiring age. The same report observed that proper training for the required physical tests disproved the misconception of women not being as physically strong as men.

The IFD utilizes the Candidate Physical Abilities Test (CPAT) to determine a candidate's strength and endurance. Without proper education and training, candidates will likely fail. Even if more women apply for a fire department position, a majority will likely be disqualified by the CPAT because it tests strength and endurance. In the last hiring process for the IFD, 28 women ranked high enough on the list of 300 applicants to make it to the CPAT (the third event of eight in the year-long process). Only five women passed. If they all had passed, a job offer would have gone out—most likely to all 28. Their previous success reflects strong scoring in the written test and the oral interview but a lack of preparation for the demanding nature of the physical examination.

If women have the proper training and enough time to prepare, the CPAT should not necessarily disqualify women in hiring processes. After 14 weeks of training in Milwaukee, women's fitness levels were 96 percent of those observed in men applying for hire.<sup>79</sup> In this author's personal experience with proctoring the test, women report that they have not trained enough or not in the right aspects to be successful. The lesson for the fire service is that if women firefighters are the goal or at least part of the goal, emphasis on preparation should start early, and support needs to be given early and often to increase

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<sup>77</sup> Elizabeth M. Trobaugh, "Women, Regardless: Understanding Gender Bias in U.S. Military Integration," *Joint Force Quarterly* 88, no. 1 (2018): 46–53.

<sup>78</sup> James V. Marrone, *Predicting 36-Month Attrition in the U.S. Military: A Comparison across Service Branches* (Santa Monica, CA: RAND Corporation, 2020), <https://doi.org/10.7249/RR4258>.

<sup>79</sup> Rivard, personal communication, June 8, 2021.

awareness of the physical requirements of the CPAT. Such practice would replicate what the BFA does in helping minority applicants prepare for the written exam and the oral interviews.

Stereotypes are likely part of the reason for lower numbers of women interested in the profession. Research by the U.S. military on gender integration revealed the primary obstacle facing women in firefighting is its traditional culture.<sup>80</sup> Firefighting, like military service, has a long tradition of bravado, and stereotypes of men as heroes and women as onlookers or worse—victims—are engrained in our culture.

Not all women are willing to consider joining a male-dominated workforce. Concerns about the treatment of women are real, and there is a chance of psychological impact on those who enter the career. Harassment typically happens slowly, not immediately, and can range from verbal attacks, to physical assaults, to degrading pranks and jokes.<sup>81</sup> Many women do not report such harassment in hopes that it will stop or out of fear of retaliation. In a 2019 report on women’s health and safety, the U.S. Fire Administration determined, “With the exception of the more overt attacks, the participants stated that the constant little jabs wore them down over time.”<sup>82</sup>

Women who are successful in the fire service must be mentally strong and able to handle a work environment that can be, at times, harsh. A female chief on the IFD recounted her experience before her smaller department (with only three women) merged with the IFD. She stated that she faced additional challenges, not just because she was a woman but because she was a straight woman. When she began to move up the ranks, firefighters accused her of sleeping her way to the top. She said that at the time, it was typical for a firefighter to have taken five to seven additional classes to attain further education and fire certifications. Her goal was to reach 100 certificates. After 34 years in

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<sup>80</sup> Trobaugh, “Women, Regardless.”

<sup>81</sup> U.S. Fire Administration, *Emerging Health and Safety Issues among Women in the Fire Service* (Emmitsburg, MD: U.S. Fire Administration, 2019), [https://www.usfa.fema.gov/downloads/pdf/publications/emerging\\_health\\_safety\\_issues\\_women\\_fire\\_service.pdf](https://www.usfa.fema.gov/downloads/pdf/publications/emerging_health_safety_issues_women_fire_service.pdf).

<sup>82</sup> U.S. Fire Administration, *Emerging Health and Safety Issues among Women*, 80.

the fire service, she earned 130 fire service classes/certifications, as well as her associate, bachelor's, master's, and doctoral degrees.<sup>83</sup>

Another consideration in the recruitment of women is the need for potential candidates to envision themselves as firefighters. The author of this research was first introduced to the fire service on a kindergarten field trip in 1978. The firefighter who led the show-and-tell at the firehouse requested the girls be separated from the boys. He then allowed the boys to climb on the engine while the girls watched. Admittedly, times have changed, and the employment options for women are more inclusive. This author witnessed this change when she was pointed out by a mother of a preschool-age girl: "Look! There is a woman firefighter!" The little girl's response succinctly summed up the change in society's views on women in non-traditional roles when she said, "So?" In sum, not all women are willing to consider a male-dominated career, but a little extra support can go a long way for those eager to become a firefighter for the right reasons.

## **2. People of Color**

Low diversity in a department can create a negative reinforcing cycle. Employees of any company are typically the biggest recruiters—they tend to promote job openings to their friends and family. The fire department is no different. Since most of the nation's firefighters are white men, and people typically interact with people who look like them, white men are most likely to learn about openings in the fire service. Linda Willing asserts, "As is said, if you can't see it, you can't be it."<sup>84</sup> Miller et al., too, discuss why diversity is essential: "The more diverse first responders are, the more likely they may be to engage with diverse local populations, the greater the engagement, and the more likely they are to attract diverse local populations, the greater the engagement, and the more likely they are

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<sup>83</sup> Candace Ashby, personal communication, June 1, 2020.

<sup>84</sup> Linda Willing, "Fire Service Recruitment: Making It a Way of Life—for All Firefighters," *FireRescue1*, January 8, 2020, <https://www.firerescue1.com/fire-careers/articles/fire-service-recruitment-making-it-a-way-of-life-for-all-firefighters-fX00tFhjMoixLsQY/>.

to attract diverse citizens as employees.”<sup>85</sup> Once a department establishes a high level of diversity, trust will be less of a problem within the community and public safety, and recruitment efforts will become easier.

Candace Ashby, battalion chief for the IFD, discussed her experience of talking to young black firefighters:

The fire service is viewed as fulfilling a ‘calling to serve.’ I’m not sure the African American communities push blue-collar service-based jobs while the kids are young. I say this because not many African American firefighters I had informally interviewed when asked how you learned of this job say, ‘I always wanted to be a firefighter.’ Most respond they learned from a friend who happens to be a firefighter.<sup>86</sup>

Public safety is not seen positively in all communities, which might be a factor in recruitment for the fire service. In a June 2020 survey of how Americans view law enforcement, Yahoo News found 65 percent of black respondents versus 41 percent of white respondents disapprove of the police.<sup>87</sup> The same survey asked whether participants believed that racism resides in American society. Black respondents strongly agreed at a rate of 63 percent versus white respondents at 25 percent.<sup>88</sup>

It is reasonable to assume that black citizens might not view the fire service as a career path based on social identity and fear of how their peers would view such a job. Careers within public safety might be doubly hard to consider based on one’s acceptance within the culture of the profession, as well as the culture of friends and family. Corinne Bendersky, writing for *Harvard Business Review*, details the experience of Captain Brent Burton of the Los Angeles County Fire Department: “When I was hired, . . . people

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<sup>85</sup> Abby Miller et al., *Promising Practices for Increasing Diversity among First Responders* (Bethesda, MD: Coffey Consulting and American Institutes for Research, 2016), 51, [https://www.dol.gov/sites/dolgov/files/OASP/legacy/files/FirstResponders\\_Full\\_Report.pdf](https://www.dol.gov/sites/dolgov/files/OASP/legacy/files/FirstResponders_Full_Report.pdf).

<sup>86</sup> Ashby, personal communication, June 1, 2020.

<sup>87</sup> “Yahoo! News Race and Politics,” YouGov, June 11, 2020, [https://docs.cdn.yougov.com/86ijosd7cy/20200611\\_yahoo\\_race\\_police\\_covid\\_crosstabs.pdf](https://docs.cdn.yougov.com/86ijosd7cy/20200611_yahoo_race_police_covid_crosstabs.pdf).

<sup>88</sup> YouGov.

essentially told me ‘you’re an affirmative action guy, you’re not as good.’”<sup>89</sup> Today, greater representation has reduced some of that performance skepticism, but black firefighters still face social exclusion and explicit racism.<sup>90</sup>

Obtaining a job as a firefighter is hard for anyone, but it can be harder for black citizens. Young black citizens might not even consider themselves a good fit for the job because of the low visibility of black firefighters. Families might not encourage young people to consider such a profession either because of the belief that it is blue-collar or because of social stigmas—both inside the fire service and within the community. Black citizens face more challenges than their white counterparts. Thus, instructors in the ATHS-FRP must understand and address these issues.

## **B. FINDING FIREFIGHTERS WHO ARE A GOOD FIT FOR THE JOB**

It is crucial to understand what characteristics one must possess to be a good firefighter to develop a program that identifies qualified diverse candidates. An article for Women in Fire listed the following top attributes of successful firefighters:

- Honest and dependable
- Learns quickly; can remember & use what’s learned when the pressure is on
- Physically fit: is committed to a healthy lifestyle and to maintaining fitness
- Functions well as part of a team
- Cares about and respects co-workers and members of the community
- Communicates and listens well
- Is dedicated to their work
- Is emotionally stable & deals with stress appropriately
- Has a sense of humor
- Is open-minded & flexible, willing to try new things and listen to new ideas<sup>91</sup>

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<sup>89</sup> Bendersky, “Making U.S. Fire Departments More Diverse.”

<sup>90</sup> Bendersky.

<sup>91</sup> “Firefighter Career Resource Center,” Women in Fire, April 15, 2014, <https://www.womeninfire.org/job-resource-center/>.

The following section expands on the characteristics needed from firefighters, emphasizing the themes of dedication to help people, trust, close interpersonal interactions, and skills as an employee.

The fire service has a long tradition of helping people, inspiring a great sense of pride in the career and practices. Are applicants just looking for a job, or do they have the heart of a servant? An article in the *Carolina Fire Rescue EMS Journal* discusses the virtues of servants in the fire service. It emphasizes empathy, a passion for purpose, honor, integrity, structure, order, a team mindset, and humility.<sup>92</sup> In Wisconsin, the Fitchburg Fire Department has a firefighter talk with the potential applicant about why he is interested in the profession (before applying) and one or two things he likes about the department.<sup>93</sup> It is essential to know the real motivation behind the applicant's motivation to join the fire service.

Joining the service entails not just taking a job but acquiring another family. Firefighters look after each other, both on duty and off, in relationships characterized by trust. In a culture where firefighters spend 24-hour shifts together, newly hired people must be a good fit. Firefighters need substantial additions to their team; their lives depend on their co-workers' skills and work ethic. Finding the right fit in candidates is supported by Joseph Pulvermacher in his Naval Postgraduate School thesis on reflective recruitment. He asserts, to build trust, recruiters must be empathetic and maintain continued community engagement that draws in a motivated candidate pool that reflects the community.<sup>94</sup> People who cannot understand the community's overarching needs and their brother and sister firefighters are not suitable candidates for the job.

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<sup>92</sup> Douglas Cline, "8 Attitudes of a Servant Leader," *Carolina Fire Rescue EMS Journal*, April 24, 2015, <https://www.carolinafirejournal.com/Articles/Article-Detail/ArticleId/4835/8-Attitudes-of-a-Servant-Leader>.

<sup>93</sup> Joseph Pulvermacher, "The Case for Affirming Diversity: Reflective Recruitment That Represents the Community Served" (master's thesis, Naval Postgraduate School, 2021), <http://hdl.handle.net/10945/67170>.

<sup>94</sup> Pulvermacher, 19.

Besides the stress of working incidents, the unique work environment provides close interpersonal interactions that do not exist in most professions. Firefighters cook for each other, eat together, share housework duties, repair equipment together, share dormitory space, train to enhance job skills, and spend downtime together. Part of the initiation of a new firefighter is to see how they can interact and get along with the team. The first step in building a respectable reputation for any new firefighter is the ability to fit in, demonstrate a good work ethic, be humble, and listen to those with more experience. An article for FireRescue1 offers some tips for how to fit into the firehouse culture. Some suggestions include treating everyone equally, being flexible and adaptable, being consistent and predictable, knowing your audience, thinking before you speak, being direct, laughing at yourself daily, being humble, taking criticism, and growing thick skin.<sup>95</sup> Fire department recruitment efforts should keep the unique environment in mind and attempt to find potential applicants with the grit, determination, customer service mindset, work ethic, and team mentality to make a positive addition to the profession. Not everyone is a good fit for this line of work.

Firefighters must get along with others, be committed to serving, and have the rudimentary ability to be good employees. If the person possesses basic competency and a good work ethic, she can learn the necessary skills. The *Small Business Chronicle* lists the following basic work traits to look for in an employee: punctuality, consistency in attendance, the accomplishment of tasks on time, a helpful and cheerful attitude, excellent communication skills, professional appearance, kindness, and a goal-setter.<sup>96</sup> The same traits also apply to the fire service, but other qualities are required to make an excellent public servant. The focus group that provided research for Fitchburg's diversity study identified that it is essential to find candidates who enjoy working in a diverse culture, have organizational pride, and possess interpersonal strengths.<sup>97</sup>

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<sup>95</sup> "Firehouse Living: 55 Basic Rules for Survival," *FireRescue1*, August 20, 2009, <https://www.firerescue1.com/rescue/articles/firehouse-living-55-basic-rules-for-survival-JZsWNPlaPfCsw16h/>.

<sup>96</sup> Ruth Mayhew, "Why Is Diversity in the Workplace Important to Employees?," *Houston Chronicle*, February 12, 2019, <https://smallbusiness.chron.com/diversity-workplace-important-employees-10812.html>.

<sup>97</sup> Pulvermacher, "The Case for Affirming Diversity."

It is hard to measure integrity, morality, teamwork capacity, and compassion in a typical hiring process. Coaching can take place to answer questions “correctly,” but this acceptable performance does not consider why someone wants to join the fire service. Finding people of any race who want to be firefighters for the right reasons and with the right skills is a difficult task—without the added complexity of race, gender, and nationality. For instance, the New York City Fire Department in 2020 had 72,611 people apply, and by the completion of the written exam and the CPAT, only 4,503 remained.<sup>98</sup> Although both the ability to pass an academic-centered exam and a physical fitness exam are paramount to finding qualified applicants, it does not guarantee those remaining candidates are there for the right reasons—to serve the public rather than just obtaining a job.

The fire service has a unique culture, and not all applicants possess the required qualities to fit in. Hiring people who can physically do the job, handle the emotional stress, and demonstrate a reliable work ethic is a challenge for fire departments. A structured hiring process is important to select those applicants who want to be firefighters for the right reasons and can handle the job’s demands.

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<sup>98</sup> New York City Fire Department, *Fire Fighter Civil Service Open Competitive (7001) and Promotional (7501) Exam, & Firefighter Proby School Results Admissions and Graduation Statistics Break Down by Race and Gender* (New York: New York City Fire Department, 2020), <https://www1.nyc.gov/assets/fdny/downloads/pdf/about/fdny-demographics-12-16-2020.pdf>.

## **IV. REACHING NON-TRADITIONAL APPLICANTS FOR POLICE RECRUITMENT**

The fire service is not the only profession that struggles to find qualified, diverse employees. The profession can apply lessons learned from police recruitment and efforts toward employee retention. There are parallels between the two careers—both are public-oriented, safety-minded, and physical in nature. Both professions have underlying cultural issues, and a lack of knowledge of how to be successful in these environments can harm a new employee’s job performance. This chapter explores police recruitment and lessons from police efforts that are translatable to the fire service. These lessons include the importance of educating potential applicants about what the job truly entails, the need to build trust with the community, and mentorship for newly hired officers.

### **A. EDUCATE POTENTIAL APPLICANTS ABOUT WHAT THE PROFESSION TRULY ENTAILS**

This section discusses why some police officers choose to leave the job early. Education of job applicants on all aspects of the role of police officers might help solve this issue. Other issues covered in this section include the need for police officers to be the right fit for the job, and they need to want to be there for the right reason—to serve the community. Some early efforts with potential candidates might alleviate more significant problems later.

Attrition in the police service tends to happen for many reasons, but addressing what the job entails can help alleviate some officers leaving early in their careers. A 2021 publication by the University of Portsmouth identified the top three reasons police officers leave the profession.<sup>99</sup> The leading cause was poor leadership, followed by little or no autonomy in the job or the ability to sustain work–life balance, and personal factors such

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<sup>99</sup> Emma Gaisford, “Walking Away from the Beat—Why Police Officers Are Voluntarily Leaving in Large Numbers,” EurekaAlert!, March 1, 2021, [https://www.eurekaalert.org/pub\\_releases/2021-03/uop-waf030121.php](https://www.eurekaalert.org/pub_releases/2021-03/uop-waf030121.php).

as relentless work hours that do not support the responsibilities of a single parent.<sup>100</sup> Ensuring that applicants fully understand what the job entails might help alleviate problems later for the organization and the employee.

Studies support the need to find the right people for the job of first responders. The Community Policing Consortium, operating under the Department of Justice's Office of Community Oriented Police Services, sponsored research that Ellen Scrivner undertook. She conducted case studies of five U.S. police departments—Sacramento Police Department in California, Burlington Police Department in Vermont, Hillsborough County Sheriff's Office in Florida; Detroit Police Department in Michigan, and King County Sheriff's Office in Washington—to identify best practices for effective recruitment and retention in police departments.<sup>101</sup> Scrivner's aim was to explore how communities could tackle the same challenge but in different ways. Her report, *Innovations in Police Recruitment and Hiring*, addresses the need to find the right people for the vocation, thus supporting the position that education about what the job truly entails should happen during the recruitment process.<sup>102</sup>

Key components that candidates must consider are building trust, developing problem-solving skills, controlling crime, and promoting community values.<sup>103</sup> Dramatic scenes overly emphasized by Hollywood, such as car chases, kicking in doors, and hot foot pursuits, need downplayed.<sup>104</sup> Instead, the focus should be on identifying people who desire to serve the public—those are the people who will make good police officers.

Lessons from the previous section on police recruitment show the need to be very straightforward about the job when speaking with potential applicants. Not only does the

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<sup>100</sup> Gaisford.

<sup>101</sup> Ellen Scrivner, *Innovations in Police Recruitment and Hiring: Hiring in the Spirit of Service* (Washington, DC: Office of Community Oriented Policing Service, 2006), <https://www.ojp.gov/ncjrs/virtual-library/abstracts/innovations-police-recruitment-and-hiring-hiring-spirit-service>.

<sup>102</sup> Scrivner.

<sup>103</sup> Scrivner.

<sup>104</sup> Scrivner, 15.

applicant need to be the right fit for the job, but the job also needs to be the right fit for the applicant. Recruiters should be straightforward about the demands of the profession when talking to potential applicants, who need to know that the fire service centers on customer service and teamwork. Work hours are long, and mental and physical injuries are possible. Empathy and compassion are important characteristics in this profession, and potential new hires need screening for these attributes.

As with police recruitment, potential fire service applicants need to know that television shows and movies are not accurate—they need to understand the true nature of the job. There are inherent dangers to consider when one is contemplating a career as a firefighter. Circulatory, musculoskeletal system, and mental disorders are the most common causes of disability and cause for early departure from the profession.<sup>105</sup> Physical fitness standards need upholding, and this commitment must last the entire length of the career—not just long enough to pass the entrance exams.

## **B. TRUST FROM THE COMMUNITY IS IMPORTANT**

This section addresses the importance of trust from citizens in the communities that police serve. It also includes a study that investigated practical recruitment efforts for five U.S. police departments. The lessons learned that apply to the fire service include building trust within communities, being a visible presence, and connecting with communities before stressful engagements.

The police have faced significant challenges with community trust and a dwindling applicant pool in the wake of viral videos showing excessive force by police officers.<sup>106</sup> Two studies reveal the importance of the central role of community trust in recruiting police. Scrivner’s principal finding is that a strong emphasis on community engagement

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<sup>105</sup> Zuzanna Szubert and Wojciech Sobala, “Zdrowotne przyczyny odejścia ze służby strażaków jednostek ratowniczo-gaśniczych [Health reason for firefighters to leave their job],” *Medycyna Pracy* 53, no. 4 (2002): 291–98.

<sup>106</sup> Martin Kaste, “America’s Growing Cop Shortage,” NPR, December 12, 2018, <https://www.npr.org/2018/12/12/675359781/americas-growing-cop-shortage>.

and building trust is critical.<sup>107</sup> For example, she reports, “Community engagement became [the] hallmark at each site. This level of involvement communicated the message that the law enforcement agency was interested in a new way of doing business that included the community as its partner.”<sup>108</sup> Her work found that asking general questions, specifically in focus groups, provided helpful information and allowed law enforcement to hear the voices of the community. Nevertheless, she also discovered there was a history of mistrust; community members did not have faith in focus groups based on their distrust in the police force. This evidence suggests that the police need to publicize and market their efforts of inclusion internally and externally. Educating officers about how the community outreach program could help enrich the organization was as helpful as the external marketing.<sup>109</sup>

Along with transparency and accountability, a Department of Justice report cites trust as a central component in how citizens positively view their police and fire departments.<sup>110</sup> Conversely, underrepresented people in their local public safety organizations have less trust in those sworn to serve and protect them.<sup>111</sup> The Department of Justice article on building trust within the police force offers ideas on how community relations can be strengthened and repaired by focusing on three concepts: bias reduction, procedural justice, and racial reconciliation.<sup>112</sup> It argues that these ideas foster an atmosphere that allows working partnerships to flourish between citizens and police.<sup>113</sup>

The fire service can learn lessons for recruitment based on these findings. In Pulvermacher’s thesis, trust was a recurring theme in his focus group examining

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<sup>107</sup> Scrivner, *Innovations in Police Recruitment and Hiring*, 70.

<sup>108</sup> Scrivner.

<sup>109</sup> Scrivner.

<sup>110</sup> “Building Trust,” Office of the Community Oriented Policing Services, accessed June 2, 2021, <https://cops.usdoj.gov/buildingtrust>.

<sup>111</sup> Office of the Community Oriented Policing Services.

<sup>112</sup> Office of the Community Oriented Policing Services.

<sup>113</sup> Office of the Community Oriented Policing Services.

recruitment for his fire department. He explained their sentiments: Early outreach, involvement in diverse neighborhoods, a better understanding of socio-economic contributors—including disproportionate wages and incarceration—and optimism are some things that contribute to an empathetic recruitment approach.<sup>114</sup> Reflective representation of a community builds trust in its public safety organizations. As a 2021 survey revealed, 92 percent of respondents regard firefighters as the most trusted in a worldwide study that ranked professions.<sup>115</sup> There are lessons in the comparison between police and fire organizations. Citizens want their opinions to matter, and they want representation in public safety. Maintaining efforts are required to ensure that trust is established and preserved.

### C. MENTORS FOR NEW POLICE OFFICERS

Another critical component of maintaining a fully staffed and competent police force is mentoring new officers. Efforts to support police officers in this fashion resulted in increased professional standards and development, thus growing organizational value.<sup>116</sup> Mentoring can provide new employees with a way to feel connected to their new workplace. A Bureau of Justice Assistance grant through the Department of Justice allowed Harvey Sprafka and April H. Kranda to research mentoring in the police profession. Their work revealed a greater likelihood of success among those who have a mentor:

Mentors help protégés gain competency and avoid failure. [Mentoring] assists protégés in setting goals and charting career paths, encourages and provides opportunities for new experiences and professional growth, helps the protégé avoid pitfalls and learn through real-life examples, enhances the protégés' feeling of worth to the mentor and the organization, [and] encourages self-confidence by cheering the protégé achievements.<sup>117</sup>

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<sup>114</sup> Pulvermacher, “The Case for Affirming Diversity.”

<sup>115</sup> Emily Feldman, “Firefighters the Most Trusted Group: Survey,” NBC4 Washington, June 7, 2009, <https://www.nbcwashington.com/local/firefighters-receive-hat-tip-in-international-poll/1876368/>.

<sup>116</sup> Scrivner, *Innovations in Police Recruitment and Hiring*, 70.

<sup>117</sup> Harvey Sprafka and April H. Kranda, *Best Practices Guide for Institutionalizing Mentoring into Police Departments* (Alexandria, VA: International Association of Chiefs of Police, 2015), 2, <https://www.theiacp.org/sites/default/files/2018-08/BP-Mentoring.pdf>.

In addition to the value-added proposition of an early investment in new employees, the feeling of being supported and included boosts employee morale. Sprafka and Kranda purport, “Many successful people attribute their achievements to a mentoring relationship.”<sup>118</sup> This relationship can come full circle. The research finds that many of those mentored often become mentors in the future because they see value in this type of relationship.<sup>119</sup> An early investment in new members of the police force can pay benefits long into the future.

Scrivner’s study also mentions the need for mentorship in the police with the fastest-growing segment of the U.S. population—people of Hispanic descent. Immigrant populations need inclusion in the police force to ensure proportional representation. Scrivner’s findings reveal that newly hired Hispanic officers greatly benefit from mentoring from senior staff members.<sup>120</sup> The effects of a robust mentorship program for new officers are most significant for this group of new officers—especially for those who learned English as a second language.<sup>121</sup> Her research supports the idea that non-traditional officers significantly benefit from asking questions and gaining guidance from their mentors.<sup>122</sup> A sustained program could have long-term effects on both the officer’s length of employment and the department’s face in the community’s eyes.

Although retention is not as challenging in the fire service, the service could still learn lessons regarding mentorship. When senior members of a department extend a helping hand to new firefighters, it creates a sense of inclusion. According to John Wright, a writer for *Eagle’s Flight*, millennials want mentors.<sup>123</sup> Furthermore, Scrivner’s research indicates the importance of mentors for those who have learned English as a second

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<sup>118</sup> Sprafka and Kranda, 2.

<sup>119</sup> Sprafka and Kranda.

<sup>120</sup> Scrivner, *Innovations in Police Recruitment and Hiring*.

<sup>121</sup> Scrivner, 70.

<sup>122</sup> Scrivner.

<sup>123</sup> John Wright, “The Important Role of Mentorship for Millennials in the Workplace,” *Eagle’s Flight* (blog), October 8, 2019, <https://www.eaglesflight.com/blog/the-important-role-of-mentorship-for-millennials-in-the-workplace>.

language. The fire service struggles to recruit people with these backgrounds. Perhaps the added effort to support those brought into the career would pay off in the minority firefighters endorsing the occupation to their friends and family.

Research supports the idea that mentorship, especially for those who are non-traditional firefighters, might be helpful. Pulvermacher's focus group suggested that the fire service culture might feel exclusive to someone who has no relationship with someone in the fire service.<sup>124</sup> Additional effort to implement outreach focused on those who have only basic knowledge of the profession could pay off. Pulvermacher also maintains that finding talent in diverse neighborhoods, providing training and education, and building skill sets can improve qualifications and drive candidate marketability and employability.<sup>125</sup> As shown in the police force, mentors can also prove valuable, especially for minorities who are new to the career. The fire service is laden with traditions and underlying expectations. A good mentor can be a precious resource as the new employee attempts to navigate a unique work environment, especially as a first-generation firefighter.

#### **D. CONCLUSION**

To conclude, those who apply for a position as a police officer need to understand what the job truly entails. Recruitment efforts should provide practical information, so applicants can determine whether their skills and abilities (as well as their desire) are the right fit for the profession. Trust within a community leads to increased success in terms of recruitment efforts to support diversity. Consistent positive engagement helps encourage young people to consider a career in policing. Mentoring of young officers helps to support and promote the growth of career paths. This scenario is especially true for minority officers. In sum, efforts performed by an organization on the front end of recruitment can pay off exponentially down the road.

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<sup>124</sup> Pulvermacher, "The Case for Affirming Diversity."

<sup>125</sup> Pulvermacher, 56–59.

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## **V. EVALUATING PROGRAM OUTCOMES AND UNDERSTANDING CHALLENGES TO SUCCESS**

Although struggling to prove itself a recruitment tool for the IFD, the ATHS-FRP shows promise. Early recruitment of potential applicants is a long-term venture, and it could take years to reap the rewards of these efforts. Students of diverse backgrounds show interest in the program, but they need more support to be successful. The following chapter discusses the program’s outcomes, the problems it faces, and possible solutions for the future.

### **A. OUTCOMES**

The goals of the ATHS-FRP are to recruit firefighters and 9-1-1 telecommunicators from the community the IFD serves and reach the community in a unique and meaningful way. As a community outreach effort, the program is exceptional, but as a recruitment tool, the program needs more structure and support. It is difficult to determine the impact on the lives the ATHS-FRP touches, but students in the program learn more than just the skills needed in the fire service—they learn to be overall better citizens.

#### **1. Areas of Program Success**

Chief Ernest Malone of the IFD discussed evaluation techniques for the program: “We can’t use just one measurement because there are so many layers—life lessons, mentoring, work ethic, integrity, and opportunities to emulate our behavior—just to name a few.”<sup>126</sup> This program offers a unique way of creating public trust by engaging with the community, and the hopes are that this interaction will pay off in future recruitment efforts. Chief Malone also understands there is an immeasurable benefit: “Just like how our Life and Fire Safety works with kids to teach them about the dangers of fires, we will never know how many fires did not happen because of this education.”<sup>127</sup>

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<sup>126</sup> Malone, personal communication, March 11, 2021.

<sup>127</sup> Malone.

The program has succeeded in attracting diverse applicants, and as of 2021, it is in its ninth year and has graduated almost 100 students. Over the life of the program, an estimated 40 percent of participants have been girls. This number is 10 times greater than the 4 percent represented by the nationwide average of professional firefighters.<sup>128</sup> At nearly half the program's student population, the girls have expressed an interest in the field, thus providing an avenue to reach a much-needed minority group for the IFD.

Another area of success regarding the girls is their interactions with the boys in the program. Based on my observations, the boys are very inclusive of the girls. Historically, men in this line of work have not always been supportive of women who choose firefighting as a career. This interaction is valuable for the girls and the boys; the boys learn from the beginning that women in firefighting are "normal." Given the role that team support for difference plays in recruiting and retaining diverse personnel, recruiting male firefighters who demonstrate inclusive attitudes is also essential. It ultimately creates working conditions in which more diverse recruits feel trust and community.

An additional critical demographic for Indianapolis is people of Latin descent, and they are richly represented in the program but underrepresented in the IFD. In the 2017-2018 school year, 65 percent of the students were Hispanic; in most years, however, Hispanic students make up about 50 percent of the program's participants. This representation is evidence that students of Latin descent are interested in the course and represent a more significant number than the average proportion of Hispanic students at the school, which is approximately 36 percent.<sup>129</sup> With a mere 0.2 percent of firefighters of Hispanic descent, the IFD sorely lacks this demographic.<sup>130</sup> Thus, as with women, the school program provides education about a career that this group typically does not consider.

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<sup>128</sup> "Firefighters," Data USA, accessed October 1, 2020, <https://datausa.io/profile/soc/firefighters#demographics>.

<sup>129</sup> SchoolDigger, "Arsenal Technical High School."

<sup>130</sup> City of Indianapolis, "IFD Reports & Statistics."

Given the challenge posed to fire service job applicants by the physical fitness requirements, another strength of the program is the ability for the students to take the CPAT in the spring of both their junior and senior years. Success in the application process depends on candidates' physical fitness ability, and it is doubtful that they will pass the test without proper training. Starting the first week of school, students begin to train for the test. About half of the boys pass each year; only one of the girls has passed in the 10 years of the program (she passed in both her junior and senior years). Students who gain insight from this experience will benefit when they apply for the IFD because they will know what to expect and understand how to prepare.

Graduates of the program have entered other career fields. In the 2017–2018 school year, 17 percent of the graduates went to the military, and 28 percent attended college. That school year was outstanding as far as secondary school enrollment and military enlistment. No other graduating class has matched those statistics. Regardless of career choice, graduates enter the workforce with a better understanding of employers' expectations. Thus, even if the program entices only a small percentage of graduates to pursue a career in the fire service, they are better prepared for the workforce.

## **2. Areas of Limited Success**

The program goals of recruiting ATHS students to careers in fire and 9-1-1 telecommunication fields have been mostly unmet. After 10 years of engagement with students at ATHS, no program participants have successfully joined the fire department. Even with prior education about how to be successful in the fire service, graduates of the ATHS-FRP still struggle to gain employment in the field. Three former students sought employment with the IFD in 2016, the first hiring process for which graduates were old enough to apply. All three completed the written test, but none made it past the oral interview. The same result happened in the 2018 and 2020 hiring processes, except with five applicants: none of the program's graduates scored well in the oral interview. These results align with the statistics of all applicants, as most candidates do not advance beyond the oral interview; in a typical hiring process, only 300 (out of the 1,000+) will move on to

the CPAT. Graduates of the ATHS-FRP do not have an advantage in the hiring process based on their prior interaction in the class.

Another job possibility in public safety exists as a 9-1-1 telecommunicator. One student successfully passed the required entrance exam and became a 9-1-1 telecommunicator for the Marion County Sherriff's Department. Although the IFD's Communication Division did not employ this young man, he did become a public safety employee in Indianapolis. As a high school student, he struggled; without the help of the ATHS-FRP instructors, he would not have graduated. He had also been in foster care since he was 11 years old, and at the age of 17, he became the foster son of this author. The investment in the students of this program goes well beyond the classroom. The end goal of finding more diverse qualified applicants still needs achieving, and the next section discusses some of the problems associated with this outcome.

The steady and fair income from a job as a firefighter could not only change the lives of this generation but also benefit later generations of a family. The median household income in the 46201 zip code, where most of the students at ATHS live, is \$26,353—compared to \$47,873 in Indianapolis and \$62,843 in the United States.<sup>131</sup> Compensation for firefighters with the IFD offers a middle-class lifestyle, medical insurance, and retirement plans. Salaries jump dramatically within the first three years and then level out (see Table 2). Economic security offers a family more options—vacations, health care, and the ability to send kids to college, among other benefits. For this reason, the IFD has taken a stance to reach out to the teenagers—to help them build a strong foundation, so they can be viable candidates for hire in years to come.

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<sup>131</sup> “46201 Income Statistics,” Income by Zip Code, accessed February 27, 2021, <https://www.incomebyzipcode.com/indiana/46201>.

Table 2. Wages for Newly Hired IFD Firefighters in 2020<sup>132</sup>

Year of Service	Pay Rate Per Year
First Year	\$51,000
Second Year	\$59,500
Third Year	\$76,086



Figure 7. ATHS-FRP Student in Fire Gear<sup>133</sup>

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<sup>132</sup> Source: City of Indianapolis, “Become a Firefighter.”

<sup>133</sup> All student photos used in this research were taken by the author while on duty in an official role with the IFD and while class was in session. Permission to take and publish student pictures was granted by the Indianapolis Public Schools unless parents signed an opt-out form for media publication.



Figure 8. 2019 ATHS-FRP Students

## **B. SOCIAL PROBLEMS THAT UNDERMINE STUDENT SUCCESS**

Some problems that negatively affect the participants and their success in the program, such as interconnected societal and family dynamics, are beyond the control of the ATHS-FRP. This section explains some of the issues students in the program face—and which the program cannot fix but must acknowledge and accommodate.

### **1. Poverty in the District**

Many of the citizens of the inner-city struggle with socio-economic problems, which plague the families of IPS. As mentioned previously, the median household income in the surrounding area of ATHS is \$26,353—compared to \$47,873 in Indianapolis and \$62,843 in the United States.<sup>134</sup> The 46201 zip code, the heart of the inner city, suffers from higher unemployment than elsewhere in the state. Data from 2020 show an unemployment rate of 8.1 for this area versus 3.1 percent for the entire state of Indiana.<sup>135</sup> Along the same line, residents of the inner city earn 23.7 percent less than an average

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<sup>134</sup> Income by Zip Code, “46201 Income Statistics.”

<sup>135</sup> BestPlaces, “Zip 46201.”

worker in the rest of Indiana.<sup>136</sup> One of the most reliable indicators of poverty, or socioeconomic inequality, is the need for subsidized, school-provided meals. By this metric, 67 percent of the students are eligible for free lunch.<sup>137</sup> There is also a discrepancy concerning poverty rates along racial lines in Indianapolis: black citizens, at 47 percent, are almost twice as likely to live in poverty as their white neighbors, at 27 percent.<sup>138</sup>

The issue of poverty shows up in the classroom of the ATHS-FRP. Students may be hungry and distracted or lack the tools and materials needed for success in school, contributing to daily battles for instructors. As previously stated, 67 percent of the students at the school are eligible for free lunch, but the school provides free lunch and breakfast for all students. Students are often late to school because of inconsistent bussing, and it is not unusual for them to miss breakfast due to no fault of their own. Another issue is a lack of personal school supplies—including notebooks, pens, or folders—so students do not arrive at class prepared most of the time.

The program cannot solve poverty, but to truly reach the students, the instructors need to understand the basic needs of the teenagers in the program. Instructors often provide snacks, and school supplies are kept in the back of the classroom and made available to all students. In the fall of 2020, the Emerald Society partnered with the BFA to provide all students with a multitude of school supplies. Another unique problem for this class is the need for workout clothes, and donations from various people are kept in a closet and made available when needed. Other types of clothing, shoes, and coats are often offered to students as well.

## **2. Unstable Home Life**

The students in the ATHS-FRP customarily struggle with multiple personal issues linked to poverty, neglect, and unstable home lives. The author of this research has observed that many live independently, in foster care, or in neglectful and abusive home

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<sup>136</sup> BestPlaces.

<sup>137</sup> SchoolDigger, “Arsenal Technical High School.”

<sup>138</sup> BestPlaces, “Zip 46201.”

environments, or they lack dependable and respectable role models. In Marion County, the home of the ATHS-FRP, 14.3 percent of public school students are in foster care. This number is double that of the next highest-ranking county in the state of Indiana.<sup>139</sup> Due to the transient nature of the foster care system, children frequently move from family to family, thus disrupting their home environment and their academic progress. Only 55 percent of students in foster care graduate from high school—versus 87 percent of students not in foster care.<sup>140</sup> Other students experience an even more destabilizing issue: homelessness. To these students, foster care might seem like a desirable situation compared to threatening, violent, or neglectful homes. In 2018, about 150 of the 2,000 students at ATHS were homeless.<sup>141</sup> In sum, students at ATHS have other concerns that rank higher than doing their homework; these teenagers live in survival mode.

An undocumented status is another kind of instability many students face. Graduates of the ATHS-FRP who do not have legal citizenship have fewer opportunities after they leave high school, and this hampers their ability to build a strong resume for the fire service. Many undocumented Hispanic students do not have the opportunity for scholarships and cannot afford full tuition. They could go to a secondary school, but they would have to pay out-of-state tuition—even at a state school. For families with economic challenges, this situation diminishes a child’s chance at higher education. Enlistment in the military is also not an option for these graduates. Since undocumented students make up a significant portion of the class each year, they are at a disadvantage for options after they graduate. The IFD hires people who are not citizens, but they must have the ability to work in the United States legally.

Students may not pursue education and career opportunities because of a lack of family support. If parents or guardians do not encourage students to work toward

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<sup>139</sup> Foster Success, *Foster Students in Indiana 2020* (Indianapolis: Foster Success, 2020), <https://fostersuccess.org/2020outcomes-2/>.

<sup>140</sup> Foster Success.

<sup>141</sup> Dylan Peers McCoy, “‘They Made Sure I Didn’t Give Up’: How an Indianapolis High School Raised Graduation Rates,” Chalkbeat Indiana, February 2, 2018, <https://in.chalkbeat.org/2018/2/2/21104269/they-made-sure-i-didn-t-give-up-how-an-indianapolis-high-school-raised-graduation-rates>.

demanding career paths or higher education, it is reasonable to assume teenagers will not continue their academic pursuits. A conversation between an African American girl who had a 4.0 GPA and the author of this research was deflating. Her father—who had just been released from prison and had fathered 17 children—discouraged her from going to college. She explained how he succinctly destroyed her dreams: “You want to go to college? So, you think you are better than us?”<sup>142</sup>

The unstable home lives of the students affect the program daily. Among all the moving parts of a non-traditional class that provides hands-on learning and daily workouts, emergencies often require immediate attention. Some of these situations have included imminent homelessness, the brutal murder of a parent, rape, immigration issues, pregnancy, a diagnosis of schizophrenia, student arrests, food insecurity, drug-addicted parents, and the looming threat of siblings going into foster care. These events affect the planned curriculum of the classroom by taking instructors out of the role of teacher and into the role of guidance counselor or social worker. When working with students who are in basic survival mode, it is difficult to encourage academics and consider long-term vocational goals

Again, the program cannot solve these problems, and the scope of the issues is more significant than the resources of the class. Instructors attempt to create a safe environment where students can share what they face in their lives outside the classroom walls. Daily journal questions lead to in-depth conversations about real-life problems. At every opportunity, instructors provide empathy and guidance. Each year, students take a field trip to a college campus where many of them see for the first time what this environment looks like. If students only have a vague concept of higher education, it is unlikely they will pursue it. The program’s instructors go out of their way to ensure students feel safe, heard, included, important, and supported.

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<sup>142</sup> This information comes from the author’s professional experience.

### 3. Violence on Campus

Violence permeates the school campus, and several fights have involved guns. The school has been in the national news for gun violence and riots. For example, in 2014, an ex-boyfriend shot a student on campus.<sup>143</sup> In 2018, about 300 students participated in fights during the school day. Police barricaded the school for two and a half hours and took 13 students into custody.<sup>144</sup> A student brought a loaded gun to school in a backpack in 2019. This attempt at violence on the school grounds ended before it began because a student told a teacher about the gun.<sup>145</sup> Graduates of the ATHS-FRP have revealed that they were sometimes armed while on the campus out of fear of violence from other students. Although this is not the ideal environment for a school, the students subjected to these events could be helpful in public safety careers—they understand what it feels like to live under these circumstances.

Students at ATHS do not have a “typical” high school experience. There is a fully staffed, armed police force on campus. The prom is held off campus and involves armed police to ensure the safety of the participants. Students in this type of environment might, understandably, have a skewed notion of what public safety entails; they may see themselves as on the “other side of the divide” from public safety professionals.

While in the ATHS-FRP, students reconsider the need for public safety officials; ultimately, police and fire services keep people safe. This sentiment might be different from what they hear at home. Through the built-in service projects of the program, students have the opportunity to serve others, which might be a departure from their previous experiences. Ultimately, it might challenge their thinking about who they want to be. Again, the bigger problem of violence is outside the program’s scope, but addressing the

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<sup>143</sup> Donna Schiele, “Suspect Surrendered in Arsenal Tech Shooting,” WTLC Indianapolis, June 3, 2014, <https://praiseindy.com/2032767/suspect-surrendered-in-arsenal-tech-shooting/>.

<sup>144</sup> “13 in Custody after 300-Student Fight at Arsenal Tech High School; 7 Hurt,” WISH-TV, August 16, 2018, <https://www.wishtv.com/news/13-in-custody-after-300-student-fight-at-arsenal-tech-high-school-7-hurt/>.

<sup>145</sup> “Gun Discovered in Student’s Backpack at Arsenal Technical High School,” Fox 59 Indianapolis, August 8, 2019, <https://fox59.com/news/weapon-discovered-in-students-backpack-at-arsenal-technical-high-school/>.

issue by providing opportunities for students to see the other side of the dilemma might lead to a change of hearts and minds.

### **C. PERFORMANCE AND PREPARATION ISSUES UNDERMINE RECRUITMENT**

Throughout the life of the program, poor student attendance and poor academic performance are overarching themes. These issues may stem, in part, from the social challenges outlined in the previous section. Nevertheless, these performance issues undermine the recruitment goals of the program. This section discusses attendance issues, academic concerns, and the lack of driver’s education—all critical components of a job as a firefighter.

#### **1. Attendance Issues**

ATHS set out to train students in specific trades and teach them how to be good employees for when they enter the workforce. Both the school and class struggle with the students’ attendance, and the extreme truancy does not translate well into the workplace. Since the inception of the ATHS-FRP, sporadic attendance has been the biggest problem, according to William Alfke, the academic instructor from 2012 to 2019.<sup>146</sup> The fall semester of the 2019–2020 class was the worst the program had ever seen. That semester, the average absence rate for the class was 28 days—an average attendance rate of only 59 percent. In Indiana, the average high school student attends class 96 percent of the time.<sup>147</sup> This rate is drastically higher than at ATHS. In the 2018–2019 and 2019–2020 school years, the average attendance rate for all students at ATHS was 84 percent and 86 percent, respectively.<sup>148</sup> Typically, this is about the average proportion of days attended in the

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<sup>146</sup> Alfke, personal communication, April 11, 2021.

<sup>147</sup> Terry Spradlin and Hedy N. Chang, *Coming to Terms with Absenteeism in Indiana* (San Francisco: Attendance Work, 2012), <https://www.attendanceworks.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/08/Indiana-Policy-Brief-7-11.pdf>.

<sup>148</sup> “Find School and Corporation Data Reports,” Indiana Department of Education, accessed September 18, 2021, <https://www.in.gov/doe/it/data-center-and-reports/>.

ATHS-FRP, although the students have told the instructors that they sometimes come to school just for this class and then skip their other courses.

Instructors of the program over the years have lamented that the school’s lack of accountability regarding attendance is setting students up for failure in their adult lives. The school system considers students who have missed more than 10 percent of the school year to have chronic absenteeism. The school’s chronic absenteeism for the 2019–2020 school year was 48 percent compared to the state’s 11 percent.<sup>149</sup> As one might expect, low attendance rates have hurt academic performance. The school is ranked 362 out of 381 schools in Indiana for graduation rates.<sup>150</sup> Since the ATHS-FRP constitutes part of the graduation pathway, all participating students graduate.

But young adults entering the workforce will receive a harsh surprise when they discover they cannot skip work as frequently as they missed school. One of the tenets of the class, another life lesson, is two-fold: you must show up, and then you must *show up*. The meaning behind this is the first step is to arrive in the classroom on time and then be mentally present. Students who struggle with basic attendance requirements are challenging to recruit for a job that requires strict attendance policies.

## **2. Poor Academic Performance**

The school is one of the lowest performing in the state. In 2019, only 1.7 percent of sophomores passed the ISTEP test, which measures language arts and math achievement. The average graduation rate for the state was 87 percent, compared to 67 percent for ATHS in the 2019–2020 school year.<sup>151</sup> The career pathway programs and leniency of the school’s graduation policy inflate the graduation rate. If a student passes one state-required written test (e.g., ISTEP, ASVAB, SAT, or ACT) and passes a semester

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<sup>149</sup> “Arsenal Technical High School (5462),” Indiana Department of Education, accessed February 27, 2021, <https://inview.doe.in.gov/schools/1053855462/graduation>.

<sup>150</sup> SchoolDigger, “Arsenal Technical High School.”

<sup>151</sup> Indiana Department of Education, “Arsenal Technical High School (5462).”

of a career pathway class with a grade of D- or better, he is eligible to graduate.<sup>152</sup> Students who have grown up with these standards could struggle with the academic criteria of fire departments' hiring processes, thus eliminating some non-traditional applicants.

In Indianapolis, a combination of the written exam score and the oral interview score ranks the applicants. The written test requires basic reading-comprehension skills, problem-solving ability, and eighth-grade math competency. The oral interview comprises seven two-part questions that allow the applicant to answer in a two-minute window. People who have not had the experience of studying and preparing for mentally taxing events are likely to struggle on these tests. Especially for the oral interview, applicants will not move on if they have not prepared.

### **3. Access to Driver's Training**

Graduates of the ATHS-FRP have a long way to go to be considered for the IFD hiring process. Viable candidates must have a strong resume, a clean driver's record, and no criminal history. In the fall of 2019, 20 of the students in the class had access to a car and often drove to school—only one had a driver's license.<sup>153</sup> There is no formal driver's education program at ATHS, and economically challenged students cannot pay for a private driver's education service. Furthermore, those who have a poor driver's history will not be hired—without proper training, the likelihood of a bad history increases. Without a driver's license, graduates of the ATHS-FRP are not eligible to apply for the IFD. In sum, teenagers in the program face more challenges than can be addressed.

## **D. PRACTICAL PROBLEMS AND OPPORTUNITIES TO IMPROVE**

Although students face problems outside the control of the ATHS-FRP, support from the program might alleviate some of them. For success, building the program around issues associated with poverty is critical. To increase the chances of resiliency in the students, support for this program needs to go outside of traditional classroom boundaries.

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<sup>152</sup> Chelsa Thompson, email message to author, n.d.

<sup>153</sup> This information comes from the author's professional experience.

Efforts behind the ATHS-FRP need to grow to support the likelihood of hiring graduates by the IFD. First, students allowed in the course need addressing and the addition of an emergency medical technician (EMT) class to the program. Second, employment opportunities to bridge the gap between graduation and the minimum hiring age for the IFD also require attention. Third, outstanding students of the ATHS-FRP should be awarded extra help in the IFD hiring process to ensure the ability to capture those who truly stand out. This section addresses these topics.

### **1. Direct the Right ATHS Students to ATHS-FRP**

Filling a successful class depends on how well guidance counselors direct potential students to the class. Although all juniors and seniors who attend ATHS are eligible, guidance counselors should understand the characteristics of what makes a student successful in the program—namely, the willingness to work as a team, the ability to move beyond one’s comfort zone, the desire to increase physical skills, and the drive to help others. The high turnover in guidance counselor positions requires a sustained effort by the IFD to educate them about the qualities needed to be successful and to override the counselors’ mental map of what a firefighter looks like—in other words, they need reminding that the girls are also welcome in the class.

Part of the problem identified by the author of this research is that guidance counselors have not understood the program’s scope.<sup>154</sup> They were not aware that the class was highly physical and required comprehension of a college-level textbook. During the first week of school, it is crucial to be brutally honest with the students about the class’s expectations. Typically, about half the students drop the class when they find out they must work out every day and be in fire gear without the option to shower. At ATHS, the first month of school consists of a shuffling of students; class really does not get started until after that first month because so many students change their schedules. After a mass exodus in the first few days, students typically add the class one by one to increase the numbers to approximately 10–15 per class. An additional safety concern is students who do not know

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<sup>154</sup> This information comes from the author’s professional experience.

English. Communication between instructors and students is critical because of the dangerous nature of working with chainsaws, extrication tools, and ladders.

Education of the guidance counselors about who is a good fit for the class is critical for the program's success. Because there are changes to staffing every year, education needs to keep pace with the position's turnover. Guidance counselors need to hear that to increase the likelihood of success for the students, those who show interest in helping people, want a physical challenge, and prefer to work in a team environment need recruiting to the ATHS-FRP. It bears repeating that the counselors need to consider girls for the class. Everyone is invited and expected to do the same components of the course; students do not get to pick and choose the exercises in which they participate. Ultimately, if counselors can help find students who are a good fit for the class, the time spent will pay dividends over the entire school year.

## **2. Reach IPS Students beyond ATHS**

As previously stated, students at ATHS struggle with academic success. This problem is not due to the teenagers' abilities but the lack of overall importance placed on the personal costs of gaining an education. Expectations of students are lower at this school than other schools in terms of attendance and classroom performance. In the ATHS-FRP, there are avenues to work with students who are academically behind. The problem is the lack of interest in school; students do not typically have good attendance.

When the class represented a broader student base, which included students from another IPS school, the class achieved greater success rate than when it limited the population solely to ATHS students. From 2012 to 2016, one IPS magnet school, the Lighthouse Academy, which supports students who have the goal of going to college, allowed its top-performing students to attend ATHS to take advantage of the career pathway programs. If a student was on track to graduate in her sophomore year, she could participate in a career pathway program. The students were bussed from their small IPS high school to the larger campus of ATHS for half of each school day during their junior

and senior years. Those who took advantage of this opportunity consistently led the class in academic performance.<sup>155</sup>

A new administration in 2017 at ATHS decided that transportation was too costly and subsequently removed this option for Lighthouse students. The removal of these top-performing students diminished the overall success rate of the students on certification tests and hands-on skill performance. The most significant factor in the high achievement of these students from the IPS magnet school was their willingness to attend school; their attendance rates far exceeded those of the students from ATHS.<sup>156</sup>

To capitalize on the investment in diverse recruiting and support a broader segment of the city's population, students from other IPS schools and private schools should be eligible for the program. An increase in students who have a track record of attendance and high academic performance could bolster the program's standards. James King suggests that the addition of students from other schools would increase the return on investment by including kids who have a good shot at getting on the IFD—not just the kids who are long shots.<sup>157</sup> Bringing in students from other schools who have a history of better school attendance would allow for an opportunity to hold ATHS students to a higher standard. If the expectations of the class are commensurate with a more successful attendance rate, those who fall short would need removing from the program.

Another suggestion offered by the initial class instructor, retired Lieutenant Bill Alfke, was to create five “legacy spots” in the class: children of IFD firefighters who could join the program, no matter what school system they are in.<sup>158</sup> The fire service has a history of hiring sons and, more recently, daughters of firefighters. The ability to join a high school class specific to the job of a firefighter would benefit both the student and the IFD in the

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<sup>155</sup> Alfke, personal communication, April 11, 2021.

<sup>156</sup> Alfke.

<sup>157</sup> James King, personal communication, n.d.

<sup>158</sup> Alfke, personal communication, April 11, 2021.

future. This idea is not necessarily an answer to the diversity issue, but it would help create stronger candidates for hire in the future.



Figure 9. Girls of the 2017 ATHS-FRP Cohort

### **3. Mitigate the Three-Year Gap between IPS and the IFD**

Candidates from the ATHS program face a three-year gap from its end until they can be considered for the IFD, creating an insurmountable barrier for many. The IFD does not hire candidates until 21; even in the most structured environment, the years of 18–21 are turbulent because young people are finding their way in the adult world. The average student who graduates from this program faces a lot of uncertainty as a young adult and typically struggles to find substantial mentoring from family or friends, not to mention the obvious pressures to earn income, as most live in poverty.

To bridge the gap between high school graduation and the minimum hiring age, graduates need more opportunities for employment within public safety careers, whether in a civilian role with the IFD or as a dispatcher or EMT. The ability to work part time with

the IFD in a civilian capacity might help some of the graduates. Ideally, the young adult would work part time at IFD headquarters while attending college, a trade school, or an EMT class. Keeping in contact with graduates and having the ability to guide and influence them in their young adult years might pay off in robust, prepared candidates for the IFD.

Another option for civilian work is the IFD Communications Center. During the high school program, instructors should emphasize employment options for telecommunicator positions with Indianapolis Communications, which supports the fire service. Notably, special consideration needs placing on those who are not interested in college or the military. Moreover, the 9-1-1 Communications Center struggles to find qualified and dedicated employees—especially people who are bilingual. The minimum age for hire is 18; thus, the graduates of the ATHS-FRP are prime candidates for these positions. This job option can serve students with the goal of either gaining experience in public safety and eventually being hired as firefighters or finding a stable career with great benefits.

The Indianapolis 9-1-1 Communications Center has hired no one from the high school program. Four graduates have taken the critical test, the first step in the hiring process for a 9-1-1 dispatcher; the test evaluates typing speed, accuracy, the ability to listen to information, and multitasking. None of the graduates have successfully passed this test because of their lack of multitasking, spelling, reading-comprehension, and keyboarding skills.<sup>159</sup> The ATHS-FRP does not directly address these proficiencies, but these skills would benefit some of the students and increase their success if they try to get hired.

A third option to fill the three-year gap is to help students obtain their EMT certification. The minimum age for an EMT is 18 years old, and for someone who aspires to become a firefighter, job experience in this arena is very valuable. Again, for those not interested in college or the military, entry-level EMT jobs are abundant if one has a certification. For most of the students, the required EMT course curriculum would prove challenging, but for those who could conquer the coursework, it would well prepare them for a job as a firefighter.

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<sup>159</sup> This information comes from the author's professional experience.

Initially, the ATHS-FRP had an EMT component—the juniors took the fire class, and the seniors the EMT class. The intended structure did not happen, and after two years, IPS independently removed the EMT class option—without consulting the IFD. Part of the problem was the lack of certifications earned by the students. None of the students in the class had ever completed the fire class before attempting the EMT class, and guidance counselors viewed the EMT class as a step up from a typical high school health class. To the contrary, earning an EMT certification requires that students put in time and effort far beyond a health class. Another issue was that the instructor did not want to teach high school students. The civilian-run organization (not part of the IFD) placed the instructor in this role without considering whether he was the right fit for this work.

In summary, both students and the EMT instructor need vetting. Students need the academic ability to handle the coursework and a history of good attendance. It bears mentioning that the students' overall reading proficiency at ATHS is 23 percent, and math proficiency is 6 percent.<sup>160</sup> Thus, the EMT coursework, designed for adults, will be challenging for students who struggle to maintain general high school classes. The instructor needs to be someone who not only is a good teacher of the material but can also connect with teenagers—especially those who have other challenges in their lives beyond typical high school students.

#### **4. Reward Outstanding ATHS-FRP Participation in the IFD Hiring Process**

This research proves there are a lot of obstacles that face the graduates of the ATHS-FRP. There is no concrete benefit for hiring participants who were high performers in the program; there are no quantifiable advantages during the hiring process. To achieve the job of a firefighter with the IFD, any applicant is up against sheer numbers—no matter one's background. Moreover, a high percentage of ATHS-FRP graduates are even more of a long shot based on instability in their home lives, educational experiences, and social environments.

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<sup>160</sup> U.S. News & World Report, “How Does Arsenal Technical High School Rank?”

While students are in the ATHS-FRP, they need evaluating to determine whether they would be a good hire for the IFD. First, students who are outstanding performers should receive a positive assessment that follows their application packet for the IFD. Second, graduates who pursue employment with the IFD should receive an additional half point (0.5) to their profile packets. Top candidates on the IFD's hiring list have a college degree, military experience, or ideally both. In 2017, half the recruits in the training academy had bachelor's degrees, and half of those also had master's degrees.<sup>161</sup> A merit law in Indianapolis adds half a point to a candidate with military service with an honorable discharge. When the difference between someone who gets hired and someone who does not comes down to decimal points, half a point could be a game changer. While students are in class, they need evaluating for characteristics that make a good firefighter. If they are academically capable, exhibit the ability to work within a team, attend class regularly, show compassion, and be empathetic, they should receive a recommendation for the extra half point in their applicant packets. This extra help mirrors the benefit of military service. Graduates would need to do well in all events in the hiring process, and this boost to their score would significantly increase their chances of getting hired by the IFD.

## **5. Seek IPS Buy-in**

Although the ATHS-FRP was created as a partnership, IPS has made unilateral decisions about the program without the IFD's input. For instance, counselors have not placed appropriate students in the program's classes, leadership has removed high-performing students from another IPS school, and IPS has eliminated a key component, the EMT class. Thus, it is impractical for the IFD to obtain its original goal of recruitment of the graduates of the program.

Part of this problem is the high turnover in IPS leadership. Within the first six years of the program, there was a new director of the career pathway programs every year. In the same six years, five different principals oversaw the school, and one of those changes happened in the middle of the school year. It is detrimental to the program's goal when

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<sup>161</sup> King, personal communication, n.d.

leadership does not know the reason for the IFD's support. In sum, IPS and the IFD need to work together to provide a life-changing opportunity for the students and a viable career path for the graduates.

#### **E. CONCLUSION**

The ATHS-FRP shows promise, but it could use more help. To increase success rates, it could use more options for a broader student base. Employment options for graduates should be increased and highly emphasized. Additional support for those graduates who show characteristics of a good firefighter needs implementing. With more backing, the likelihood of successful recruitment efforts for the IFD would increase.

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## **VI. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

The original intent of the ATHS-FRP was for IPS and the IFD to work together to create a career path for high school juniors and seniors. The payoff for the IFD was a unique avenue to reach the community it serves while at the same time introducing inner-city teenagers to the fire service as a possible job option for the future. While the program has positively impacted the community, the IFD has yet to hire a program graduate. There are lessons for both IPS and the IFD to learn from the efforts exerted in the last decade. The following chapter provides recommendations to increase the likelihood that graduates of the ATHS-FRP are successful if they apply for hire with the IFD.

### **A. RECOMMENDATIONS**

The following section offers recommendations for strengthening the ATHS-FRP. In addition to being a unique community outreach endeavor, the intent is to recruit the program's graduates. Several areas need expanding to increase the likelihood of graduate success in the IFD hiring process. The program does an excellent job of exposing young people to the career, but more support needs adding to complete the intent of hiring this diverse group of inner-city citizens.

#### **1. Expand Participation beyond ATHS**

Allowing students from other Indianapolis high schools to join the ATHS-FRP would bolster some graduates' chances of entering the IFD successfully. Students who attend other schools would attend ATHS for half the school day and spend the other half at their school of origin. For IPS students, bussing needs provided. Students enrolled in private schools would need to provide their own transportation. Since the attendance rate, historically, for ATHS students is one of the lowest in the state, allowing more academically minded teenagers dedicated to their education into the class would increase the standards for the overall program.

## **2. Create Opportunities for Legacy Students**

Reserving five spots in the class for legacy students would give back to the IFD members by allowing the option for their high-school-age children to have access to the program, no matter what school system they attend. Many live in the suburbs of Indianapolis, and these students would be required to provide their own transportation and return to their school of origin for the second half of the school day. Having these students in the program would bring a unique perspective on the fire service into the classroom.

## **3. Reinstate the EMT Course Option**

Reinstating the EMT course option into the senior year of the ATHS-FRP would give a direct job pathway to 18-year-old graduating students, who could fill the gap between their graduation and the IFD's minimum hiring age. Working as an EMT would give students valuable experience to improve their preparation to apply for a fire service career. An EMT class is challenging and requires students to do the work and be committed. Students need vetting to assess their academic abilities and overall attendance rate; guidance counselors need to understand the requirements for success in this class. Thus, only students who show a history of academic achievement should be placed in this class. Enrolling students from other schools would support this effort.

## **4. Emphasize Telecommunicator Career Options**

Prioritizing the students' exposure to employment options as telecommunicators with the IFD would be another way to bridge the three-year gap and offer a path to those not interested in serving as firefighters. There are often entry-level positions available, and the minimum age for hire is 18. Notably, a potential communicator will likely thrive if she possesses multi-language skills, and historically, about half of the ATHS-FRP classes are fluent in Spanish and English. Moreover, the addition of a part-time option with the IFD Communications might entice graduates who have other family, school, or work obligations. A further option would be to create a formal internship for both high school and college students, which might prove effective in recruiting people who would not typically consider this job a career option or fear what the job entails.

## **5. Award Half a Point in IFD Hiring Processes to Outstanding Graduates**

To mirror the IFD's efforts to support military veterans and increase the likelihood of hiring outstanding graduates of the ATHS-FRP, students who perform exceptionally well in the high school program should receive half a point added to their overall score in IFD hiring processes. This additional help should only apply once the applicant has completed all required steps in the hiring process; applicants still need to successfully progress through the standard chain of events first, beginning with the written exam, oral interview, and CPAT. Typically, decimal points separate the final scores of those who are hired from those who are not, so what might seem like only a minimal advantage could prove invaluable.

Instructors should evaluate all students at the end of the school year to determine whether they warrant half a point. This determination should consider the students' attendance, physical abilities, work ethic, academic ability, mental attitude, capacity for empathy, desire to serve others, teamwork, inclusivity, and overall resilience. Instructors of the program should maintain a record of all graduates and half-point award determinations for future reference. Students who do not earn half a point because they lack these attributes are still eligible for hire by the IFD but would need to do so on their own merits. This opportunity allows for growth and maturity that can happen after one becomes an adult; some teenagers do not have the maturity to grasp the tenets taught in the class but might later understand them as adults. The intent is not to disqualify candidates from a career with the IFD, but they will need to prove themselves in the same fashion as other non-ATHS-FRP graduates.

## **6. Part-Time Civilian Job with the IFD**

Another possibility to fill the three-year gap between high school graduation and the minimum age of hire for the IFD is to create part-time work with the department in a civilian capacity. Ideally, this position would serve as employment for someone in a trade school, EMT class, or traditional college or university. Only graduates in good standing—recommended by the ATHS-FRP instructors for the half-point award in the hiring

process—would receive consideration for this employment option. The ability to work with firefighters who serve as their mentors might help the graduate stay focused on a career in the fire service.

## **7. Move the ATHS-FRP to a Different Location**

What might constitute a controversial choice is the option to move the ATHS-FRP to a different location. This direction might help the success of the program and the recruitment efforts for the IFD. Currently, the IFD is renovating an old administrative building for a defunct trucking company. This facility will serve as the IFD’s new location for recruit and incumbent training. It offers both classrooms and structures used in firefighters’ hand-on drills. An assessment would be required to determine whether there is room for a class at this location. Ideally, students would need locker rooms with access to showers and additional space for turnout gear and workout equipment.

Benefits of this option include the ability to get students into a professional training atmosphere. Ideally, they would perform at a higher standard, in terms of attendance and academics, than in a traditional high school setting—especially given the turbulent atmosphere at ATHS. Furthermore, students would have access to more training tools and facilities than they have now. Because many of the hands-on skills required for state certification are currently on the city’s far west side, and students have only one chance to demonstrate some of these skills, relocating the class could provide more options for practicing skills required for state certification tests.

The program’s leadership would need to hold extensive meetings to make this relocation work, and multiple people would need to be involved. Leadership from the IFD would need to develop a plan for how this would work and present it to the administration of ATHS and, ultimately, IPS. This avenue needs to consider the goals of both entities—recruitment and community outreach of the IFD, a graduation pathway for the students of IPS, and potential benefits for students outside IPS.

Beyond the issue of IPS not wanting to lose one of its most popular career pathways, the most apparent problem is the transportation of students to a remote location. There are costs associated with bussing, and often the bus system for IPS students is

unreliable. Also, students who are not in the IPS system would need to provide their own transportation. Assuming the transportation issue could be fixed, the program should offer two versions of the course’s first year—one in the morning and the other in the afternoon. Students would spend half their school day at the ATHS-FRP and the other half at their school of origin. The program’s instructors would need to decide what state certifications they could offer—much of this depends on the availability of training resources at the new location. See Figure 10 for a graphical representation of the seven recommendations.

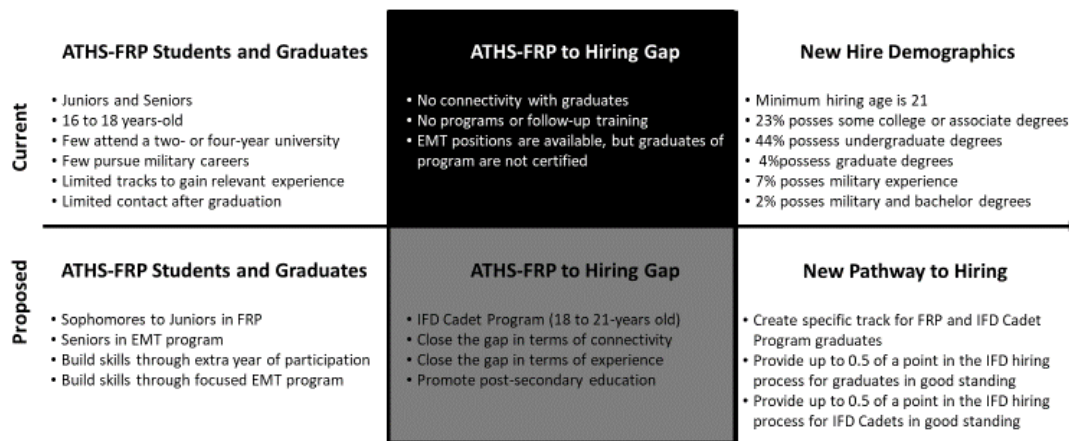


Figure 10. Bridging the Gap

## B. QUESTIONS FOR FURTHER RESEARCH

More research is required to understand why more graduates of the program do not apply for the IFD. The following details potential areas of research:

1. A key question is how to support those applying in a hiring process that draws thousands of people for a handful of jobs.
2. Further research might determine whether the use of mentors for newly hired non-traditional firefighters are effective. Mentoring could be a worthwhile effort that pays off in longer, more productive careers for the mentees.

3. Another question is to determine whether the program helps those who pursue other careers—What (if any) lessons did the graduates learn that served them in their adult lives?
4. Bearing in mind that the school does not sponsor a driver’s education course, yet all applicants are required to have a valid driver’s license, in what other ways are students from the inner-city school system hampered from being candidates with the fire service? Research might reveal options for getting the driver’s training needed.
5. What are the long-term effects (if any) on the lives of students who had/have mentors? Such research might investigate whether the ATHS-FRP had an impact on the lives of graduates and compare students who stayed in contact with their mentors versus those who did not.
6. This thesis has suggested that non-traditional police officers benefit from a relationship with someone who knows the culture and expectations of the police work environment. Does this concept also translate to the fire service? To what extent do mentors help newly hired non-traditional firefighters?
7. The program is designed to provide lessons that impact daily life and build good employees. To what extent do graduates of the ATHS-FRP believe the program helped them, even if they now work in other professions? As the graduates age, do they see benefits from teachings of this class?

### **C. CONCLUSION**

The ATHS-FRP is a unique collaboration between IPS and the IFD. It strives to meet the goals of both organizations. ATHS has an interest in the program to provide a career pathway option for its students. For the IFD, the effort is two-fold: it is a community outreach program and an attempt to recruit from the citizens it serves. It effectively meets the goal of community outreach, and with some restructuring and additional support, recruiting graduates of the program is more likely.

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