

Title: Recognizing Dr. Larry Gambaiani for His Significant Impact in Indiana

Every day, educators across the nation are charged with changing the world in their communities through their education programs. In Indiana, Dr. Larry Gambaiani made a significant impact for thousands of students, educators, and communities over his career that spanned 55 years.

A humble and personable man, Larry grew up in the coal mining town of Blanford, Indiana, 25 miles north of Terre Haute. In 1947, he began his education by attending a four-room elementary school that had no running water and no bathrooms, a much different environment than what students are used to today. Following elementary school, Larry graduated from Clinton High School and, following graduation in 1959, he went on to become the first in his family to obtain a college degree.

It was at Indiana State University (then known as Indiana State Teachers College) that Larry found his passion for both business and teaching. His family recognized his interest and ability to work with young people and encouraged him to pursue a career as an educator rather than the business world. Larry, as an athlete, also had a desire to be a coach, a way to share wisdom while incorporating his love of athletics.

In 1963, when it was time to complete student teaching, Larry was sent to Columbus High School. He was able to connect with Don McDonald, one of his former coaches from Clinton High School, who was teaching PE and coaching basketball. Coach McDonald permitted Larry to do split student teaching with the business department in the morning and the physical education department in the afternoon. This arrangement gave Larry the chance to demonstrate and hone his skills in both areas.

Following student teaching and graduation at ISU, Larry signed his first contract to teach in the business department at Lawrence Central High School in Indianapolis. At the same time, his future wife Helen was completing her senior year at Indiana State, Larry was looking forward to returning to Lawrence Central in 1964 when he heard about a position which had opened up in the business department at Rockville High School (RHS). The position would be much closer to Indiana State for Helen and it also included coaching. Thankful to Lawrence Central for the opportunity and experience, Larry accepted the position at RHS and enjoyed nine years in the business department along with living his dream of being a football and baseball coach. Helen went on to enjoy a wonderful career of teaching French and Spanish at Turkey Run High School.

Meanwhile, Larry and Helen decided to start their family and Helen gave birth to a son, Nickolas Joseph, in December of 1967. Nickolas was born with an intellectual disability and a physical handicap. At the time, Larry and Helen had not been married long, they were young, and the pregnancy was uneventful. Despite not having many answers to Nick's situation, the couple was dedicated to doing what was best for him, which meant not hiding him or sheltering him from the community. As a result, over the years Nick enjoyed many friends and classmates and took part in many community activities. After meeting many milestones in his life, including graduating from Rockville High School, he became a clerk for the Indiana Department of Education (IDOE). Unfortunately and quite unexpectedly, Nick suddenly passed away peacefully one night in his sleep in 2005 at the age of 37. Even today he continues to be a big part of many family conversations.

Larry and Helen are also proud and loving parents to their son Tony and their daughter Gina. Tony currently serves as a banker in Columbus, Indiana, and has two children, Michael and Mia, with his wife Diana. Gina is an auditor for the Indiana State Board of Accounts and has two children, Trent and Whitney, with her husband Brad.

Larry's enthusiasm and leadership capabilities were evident early in his teaching career. After obtaining his Master's Degree from ISU in 1967, he was approached casually to see if he would be interested in becoming a school principal. After thinking it over, Larry began post graduate work at ISU and obtained a secondary principal license in anticipation of a future opportunity to enter school administration. The dream of becoming a principal would become reality in 1973 when the superintendent unexpectedly visited Larry in his classroom the first day. He shared the assistant principal had resigned and asked Larry if he was interested in taking that new role, which meant leaving the classroom. Larry happily accepted and remained in that role for one year. In 1974, the principal resigned and Larry became principal of Rockville Junior/Senior High School.

Larry was perfectly content and enjoyed being the RHS principal when in 1976, opportunity came knocking at Larry's door yet again. The same superintendent that had brought him into the administration shared that he was going to retire in July and wanted to know if Larry would be interested in succeeding him. Larry had already begun work on obtaining an Education Specialist (EdS) degree at ISU and was on track to complete the program in August. Delighted, Larry said he would be honored to accept the position. Even though he would not have his degree by July 1 at the time his predecessor was going to retire, the school board offered Larry the position. On July 1, 1976, Larry became the youngest superintendent in the state at 34 years old.

During his time as superintendent, among all of his other responsibilities, Larry was very interested in obtaining his doctorate degree. To Larry, a doctorate in education would be the highest achievement a superintendent could obtain in education academia. However, he knew that completing a doctorate was a serious commitment and one that would need to be discussed with his school board.

Larry shared his interest with the board, and they enthusiastically asked him to talk with Indiana University (IU) to see what was possible. IU said they could do a part-time sabbatical leave, splitting Larry's time between being a superintendent and completing his doctorate for nine months. Without hesitation, the board said, "Go for it, Larry; we want it as bad as you do." In 1982, after driving back and forth from Bloomington to Rockville for the better part of one year, Larry became Dr. Gambaiani. Larry credits the school board and his family — his wife Helen, his late son Nick, his son Tony, and his daughter Gina — for being his "great motivators" in obtaining his doctorate.

During this time as superintendent, Larry had not left his passion for sports behind. He was elected and served on the board of the Indiana High School Athletic Association (IHSAA) for 12 years, serving as chairman of the board in 1989 and 1990. He has fond memories of the historic basketball finals at the Hoosier Dome in 1990. Over 41,000 fans attended the game, making it the most-attended high school basketball game in history in America. Larry, although in the minority, was also part of the historic vote of 12-5 that led Indiana to implement multiple classes for tournament play in some team sports beginning in the 1997-98 school year. To this day, Larry still feels it is not the best message that prepares our youth to enter the tough world we live in with all of its challenges.

After serving as a superintendent for 15 years, Larry was ready for a professional change and in 1991 he joined the MSD of Washington Township (MSDWT) in Indianapolis as an assistant superintendent. Following 10 years with MSDWT, he decided it was time to retire on his 60th birthday in August 2001. He retired after 37 years in public education, but the education world wasn't ready for Larry to leave yet. The day after he retired, he received a call from ISU offering him a position in the Bayh School of Education. Larry was appreciative of the offer by Indiana State and he joined, helping graduate students to be principals and superintendents. Larry truly enjoyed his 15 years with ISU in preparing the next generation of school administrators.

One year later, in 2002, he received a call from a couple of directors from the Indiana Educational Service Centers (IAESC) sharing that they were looking at hiring a liaison for their organization and they wanted to see if Larry would be interested in talking with them. Larry was

familiar with the service centers and joined the nine directors and became their communications liaison. Following 18 years of service, Larry announced his retirement in November of 2020.

Larry has received multiple awards during his career in education including: the Outstanding Young Hoosier Award in 1976 by the Indiana Jaycees; the Indiana Association of Public School Superintendents Retirement Award in 2001 for 15 years of service; a special recognition for the contribution and distinguished service from the Indiana High School Athletic Association; a recognition from the Department of Educational Leadership at Indiana State University for 50 years in public education; and the honor of being awarded the State's highest award, Sagamore of the Wabash in 2001 by Governor Frank O'Bannon. Recently, the Indiana Association of Public School Superintendents (IAPSS) Distinguished Service Award Committee (DASC) selected him as the recipient for their 2020 award. While honored by all of these awards, Larry says his biggest accomplishment has been the opportunity to teach, coach, and work with exceptionally professional educators and students throughout his career.

Larry and Helen thought they'd stay in Rockville for a couple of years; the couple has lived in and had the opportunity to be part of Rockville and Park County for 56 years. As his career comes to an end, Larry's impact lives on through his students, educators, and the legacy of his administrative leadership.