



Greater Louisville Inc.



*Report
on Education
2003*

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In the Brookings Institute report entitled *Beyond Merger—A Competitive Vision for the Regional City of Louisville*, the authors stated that “the educational and skills uplift of its citizens represents the single most important challenge confronting the new Regional City—and may ultimately determine its ability to achieve the promise of merger.” The Brookings report recognized that Louisville “must strengthen educational attainment among students at all levels and apply unprecedented commitment to pulling up the lowest-achieving students.”

Mike Harreld, who was the GLI Chair in 2002, and the GLI leadership recognized that the success of our public schools was crucial to our community achieving its full potential. Further, they recognized that the business community, in particular, has an obvious and strong interest in our schools achieving and maintaining educational excellence. The GLI Executive Committee asked our task force to examine the state of our public school system, assess the quality of education being provided to our children, and make recommendations for achieving educational excellence throughout the school system.

Our task force began its work in November 2002 and has met frequently over a seven-month period. During that time we heard presentations from speakers concerning the school system, educational achievement, and the achievement gap. In addition, our task force members attended a meeting sponsored by the Greater Louisville Project, at which we heard presentations from business and school leaders from Charlotte, Chattanooga, and Oklahoma City about their efforts to improve public education in their cities.

Our group decided not to attempt a prolonged, detailed study of every aspect of the school system and the educational process. We instead attempted to investigate a few issues that we believed were of fundamental importance to educational excellence and make general recommendations for how the schools, teachers, students, families, and the entire community

could work together to implement them. The remainder of our report summarizes our overview and our recommendations.

Overview

The Jefferson County Public School (JCPS) system is the 29th largest school district, measured by students, in the U.S. It has 152 schools and more than 13,000 employees, 5,769 of whom are teachers. Five different labor unions represent portions of the JCPS workforce. In addition to its educational services, JCPS operates large food services and transportation systems. The school cafeterias serve over 12.5 million meals annually and over 800 buses are used to transport JCPS students. JCPS has an annual general fund budget in excess of \$500 million.

Of the approximately 96,500 students who attend JCPS, approximately 58 percent are white and 36 percent are African American. Sixty percent of JCPS students are eligible for free or discounted lunches and 54 percent come from single parent households. More than 4,000 JCPS students are classified as homeless and 3,433 students speak English as a second language. There is great mobility in the system; more than 300 students change schools **every day**, some three or more times during the school year.

There is much to celebrate about JCPS right now. Attendance (the percentage of enrolled students actually attending school) has been increasing for each of the last six years and now stands at 94 percent. The number of dropouts (grades 9-12) has decreased steadily over the past four years—5.84 percent in 2002 compared with 8.43 percent in 1999. For the period 2000-2002, JCPS outpaced the rest of the state in terms of gains on the state accountability index at all three levels (elementary, middle, and high school).

Most of the JCPS schools were meeting their academic goals or making progress in 2002. Of the 87 elemen-



tary schools, 50 met their goal in 2002, 31 were deemed to be making progress, and 6 failed to make progress. Fifteen of the 24 middle schools were making progress, 7 met their goal, and only 2 failed to make progress. Of the 21 high schools, 12 were making progress, while 8 met their goal. Only one high school failed to make progress. (Only nine schools in 2002 did not make progress toward their achievement goals compared with 24 schools that failed to make progress in 2000.)

Some JCPS schools are among the top-performing schools in the state as measured by CATS scores. Barret Traditional Middle School last year scored among the state's top ten middle schools and two high schools, duPont Manual and Louisville Male, were among the top ten performing high schools in Kentucky on the accountability index.

Recently, JCPS was recognized as one of the Broad Foundation's five finalists for its annual award. JCPS was selected from among 150 urban school districts for its academic achievement gain and efforts in reducing the achievement gap between students of different economic and racial backgrounds.

But despite the gains and the good news, a significant problem persists in the area of academic achievement. There are too many novice-category learners in the school system who are not moving properly toward proficiency. And there is a significant disparity in the CATS scores between white and African-American students and between poor children and those who aren't poor.

A few statistics illustrate the problems. The JCPS administration equates the term "reading at grade level" with a CATS score of "apprentice" or a standardized (Standford or CTBS) test score of at least "4" (on a scale from 1 to 9).¹ According to data JCPS provided to us, 17,667 (approximately 18 percent) of the 96,500 students in the system do not read at grade level, based on that definition. At the elementary school level,

in reading, 21 percent of all 4th graders last year scored in the novice category and 44 percent were below proficiency (either novice or apprentice). In the 7th grade, 18 percent scored in the novice category in reading and 52 percent were below proficiency. In grade 10, 20 percent of students scored in the novice category and 71 percent were below proficiency.

The situation with respect to math is equally troubling. In grade 5, 35 percent of students were at the novice level and 65 percent were below proficiency. In the 8th grade, 41 percent of students scored as novices and 78 percent were below proficiency. In the 11th grade, 30 percent of students were novices and 66 percent were below proficiency.

A further breakdown of this data illustrates the achievement gap. As we mentioned earlier, 21 percent of all 4th graders last year scored in the novice category in reading (44 percent below proficiency). Thirteen percent of white 4th graders were novices (35 percent below proficiency), while 33 percent of African American 4th graders were at the novice level (62 percent below proficiency). Thirty percent of those 4th graders who are poor were at the novice level (59 percent below proficiency). Similar gaps are present in the other grades and in other subjects.

We are not going to achieve the community's goal of having an educated citizenry and workforce and the state mandate of providing an adequate education for all children with so many novice learners in and entering the schools every year. We will not achieve the KERA-mandated goal of all students being proficient learners by 2014 until we eliminate the achievement gap. Our task force believes that it is possible to achieve these goals. We have developed a short list of recommendations that we believe, if implemented

1 Novice is the lowest CATS test score category, followed by Apprentice, Proficient, and Distinguished.

2 Kentucky Department of Education, Spring 2002 Performance Report



properly and supported by the community, will enable JCPS to eliminate the achievement gap, accelerate our progress toward the 2014 KERA goals, and become the best metropolitan school district in the U.S.

Recommendations

Rather than attempt in the period of a few months to develop a long list of detailed proposals, our task force tried to identify a short list of general recommendations that could produce significant and quick improvement in academic achievement. We also agreed to avoid recommendations concerning particular curricula and methodologies; the administration, school councils, and teachers have the expertise to focus on those specifics.

Most members of our group were convinced that improved reading skills are a key to improvement in overall academic achievement. We were encouraged to learn that, during the past year, Dr. Daeschner has been discussing with his staff ways to improve reading skills. We also took note that other metropolitan districts are making reading and literacy the centerpiece of their strategy for achieving academic excellence. While there might be other strategies that can produce meaningful and quick improvement in overall academic achievement, we believe a strategy built around reading improvement can work. Therefore, our principal recommendation is that JCPS and our community adopt as a goal that every student in the school system read at grade level within four years. We believe this is a difficult, but feasible goal that, if achieved, will close the achievement gap, will accelerate our progress toward all students becoming proficient learners by 2014, and will put JCPS on the fast track to becoming the best metropolitan school district in the U.S.

Other urban districts that have adopted a similar strategy chose more modest goals such as having all children read at grade level by grade 4. We have chosen

a bolder goal of **all students** reading at grade level in 4 years because we believe that the needs of all students currently in the system must be addressed and met. A goal of having all children reading at grade level by grade 4 focuses only on the students who are in grade 4 or below. Yet, those students currently in the system above grade 4 are going to be workers and citizens in our community and they need to be properly equipped to fulfill those roles.

We realize that our principal recommendation is ambitious. To the best of our knowledge, no metropolitan school district can currently claim that all its students read at grade level. We also acknowledge that there will be some skepticism about our ability to achieve the goal. Some teachers, for example, will no doubt think about extremely difficult students they have tried to teach and wonder how we can make progress with those students. Teachers might wonder about how much support will be available from the JCPS administration and the community and whether that support will be maintained for the necessary time, especially if test scores don't immediately increase or don't increase in other areas as they do in the reading category. Administrators will rightly worry about the large numbers of students who come to school ill-prepared to learn because of health issues or problems relating to their home life.

Our group believes that those concerns and many others that could be raised need to be addressed and can only be addressed if the entire community embraces the goal of every child reading at grade level and actively supports the achievement of that goal. The remainder of our recommendations set forth our general thoughts about how the JCPS administration and the community should support the teachers, administrators, parents, and students to achieve the goal.



Accountability

The Superintendent should be the principal point of accountability for achievement of the goal of having every child read at grade level in four years, and he should have the authority to ensure that we meet the goal.

KERA granted significant authority to school-based decision-making councils. The school councils have jurisdiction over curriculum, the school budgets, schedules, instructional practices, discipline and classroom management, and selection of principal and staff. Our task force does not want to take issue with the policy decision to place this authority with the school councils. This policy does, however, introduce difficulties concerning achieving districtwide goals in a district like Jefferson County, with 152 schools. Dr. Daeschner believes he can work cooperatively with the school councils on such issues as curriculum, discipline policy, and scheduling in pursuit of the goal of all children reading at grade level. His inability to hire principals could, however, cause difficulties in reaching our goal.

Currently, the Superintendent is required to provide a list of principal candidates to a school council, which hires the principal from the list. Dr. Daeschner told our task force that he has outstanding principals whose leadership skills would be invaluable in some of the schools that have the highest percentage of novice learners. Yet, those principals are not willing to become candidates for the principal position at such schools because they cannot be assured of being hired by the school council. A principal does not want to face an awkward situation of having to remain with his or her current teachers and school council after agreeing to leave them. Dr. Daeschner believes that he can make an immediate difference in some schools if he can recruit and hire the principal and match that principal's leadership skills with a school's needs.

Our task force believes that the leader in a school or any other organization can make significant and

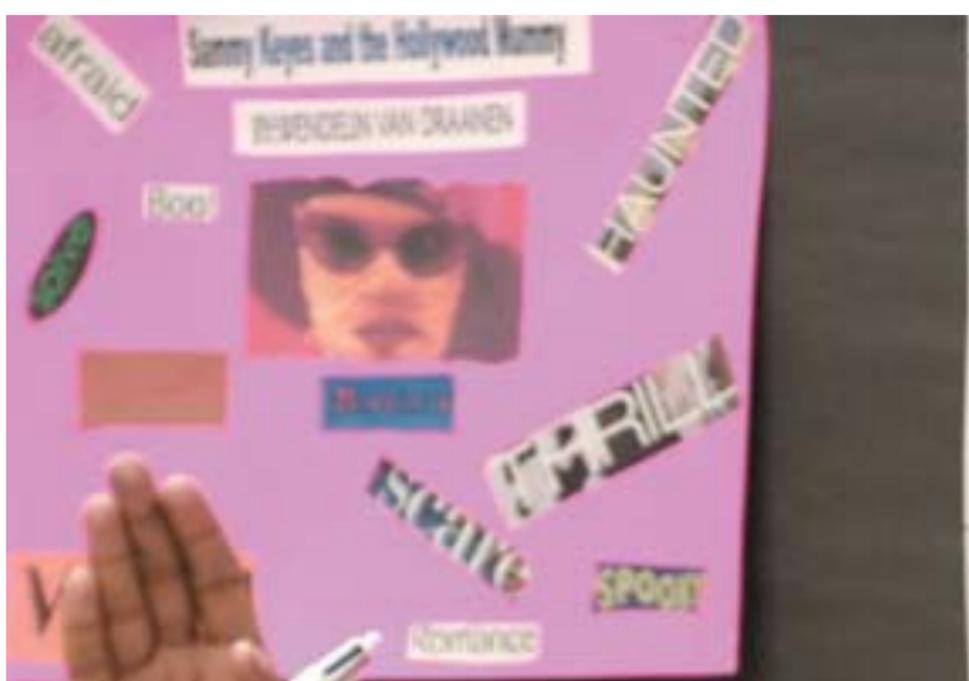
positive change. We agree that Dr. Daeschner should have the ability to appoint principals, at least in those schools with the greatest percentage of novice learners. This will, however, require a change in state law. The business community as well as our entire community should support and, if necessary, lobby for this limited amendment to current state law.

We believe that the Jefferson County Board of Education should be actively involved in the leadership of the district's efforts to achieve the goal. Our group hopes that the School Board will work together with Dr. Daeschner to set interim goals to mark progress during the four-year period necessary to achieve the reading goal and will, much like a corporate board of directors, focus on those interim goals and the policies and practices necessary to achieve the overall goal within four years. We believe that the Superintendent should report to the community regularly about progress toward the reading goal.

Assessment

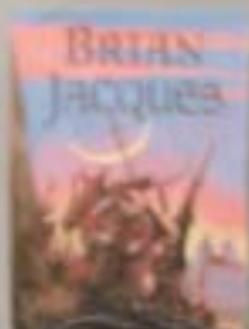
To ensure that proper progress is being made toward the four-year goal, JCPS should conduct frequent and appropriate assessments of students' ability to read and comprehend. Dr. Daeschner is a strong believer in frequent assessments, and our group agrees with him on the need for them.

It is important, however, for teachers, students, and parents to be a part of the assessment process. Teachers need to understand the purpose of the different tests and how best to use the data to improve the instruction for their students. To be useful, assessment results must be distributed in a timely way. Representatives of the Jefferson County Teachers Association (JCTA) are concerned that additional tests to be administered by teachers will take away from time that teachers could spend teaching. We believe that JCPS and JCTA should work together to address these issues. Parents must



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BY: BRIAN JACQUES



also be able to understand and interpret the data from assessments and have a clear understanding of the plan of action to improve their children's reading skills.

Professional Development

The professional-development program for teachers must be tied to the four-year reading goal. JCPS and JCTA should work together to implement a professional-development program that will enable all teachers to incorporate reading into their particular subject areas. Such programs should focus not only on methodology (i.e., teaching a particular reading instruction program) but also on pedagogy (i.e., theories of teaching that will enable a teacher to reach and teach all his or her students).

JCPS and JCTA should also cooperate to increase efforts to recruit and retain quality teachers. The data show that many schools with the highest teacher turnover also have the greatest number of novice-level learners.

Dr. Daeschner has committed to involve JCTA in designing and implementing professional-development programs. We applaud this commitment.

Our task force believes that leadership training for principals is essential and should be tied to the reading goal. The principal, as the school leader, can have a tremendous impact on the attitude of teachers, staff, parents, and students.

All Students

Additional resources should be directed toward early childhood education and dropout prevention programs. Our task force is serious about **every child** being able to read at grade level in four years. For that to happen all children need to begin school prepared to learn, and we must keep them in school. Currently,

JCPS provides early childhood services to more than 4,900 preschool children annually. Eighty-two percent (82 percent) of four year olds and 58 percent of three year olds who qualify for free lunch are enrolled in preschool.

Poor children are at greatest risk of starting school unprepared to learn. We believe that the preschool programs should be expanded to enable all three and four year olds who qualify for free lunch to be enrolled.

Our task force also believes that JCPS should develop and communicate a set of quality indicators to be used to show parents and the community how well the JCPS early childhood programs are preparing young children to learn. Much of the discussion about early childhood programs focuses more on “inputs” (i.e., how many dollars are spent and how many children are enrolled) and less on “outputs” (i.e., measurements of the quality of particular programs and how well they succeed in preparing young children for learning).

We hope private child care and day care centers can also participate in preparing young children for reading. We ask JCPS and private child-care organizations to work together to find a way to provide professional-development opportunities and other assistance to these organizations to increase the numbers of kindergartners who are ready to read.

We note the progress made in reducing the number of dropouts over the past four years. Our dropout rate, however, remains greater than the state average. We urge JCPS and the School Board to adopt and achieve a goal of reducing the JCPS dropout rate to less than the rate for the rest of Kentucky over the next four years. To assist in the achievement of that goal, the business community and Metro government should increase their support for programs such as the Louisville Education and Employment Partnership.



Resources

To achieve the reading goal, significant change will need to occur within the school system and the schools. The greater emphasis on reading will require a change in priorities and a reallocation of resources in the school system. The business community must be supportive of those changes and should be advocates for adequate funding for education generally and for Jefferson County schools.

Our task force is concerned that the percentage of state education funding allocated to JCPS has declined steadily during the past decade. According to data provided to our task force by JCPS, Jefferson County schools received, in 1990, 56 percent of their funding from state funds and 39 percent in 2002. The JCPS share of Kentucky state K-12 education expenditures has decreased from 15.8 percent in 1980 to 11.3 percent in 1998. Our community's share of state education funding is decreasing at the same time Jefferson County is taking advantage of all local tax revenues that can be directed to JCPS.

Furthermore, we believe the state education funding formula, "SEEK", does not adequately take into account the unique challenges and costs faced by the state's largest urban school district. For example, the SEEK formula does not take proper account of the growing number of English as a Second Language students in JCPS, it doesn't recognize higher salary and benefit costs for teachers and other staff in Jefferson County, and it does not recognize properly the costs necessary to maintain the JCPS student assignment plan. We are not convinced that SEEK recognizes the costs necessary to address the educational needs of poor children who live in an urban setting. The business community must support the Superintendent in his efforts to obtain a more equitable distribution of state education funds.

The business community should be willing to step forward and, if necessary, raise funds to assist JCPS in

achieving the reading goal. The expansion of early childhood programs mentioned is crucial to the achievement of the goal. Likewise, hiring additional reading coaches and teachers is essential. The business community should help find resources for such items that are directly linked to the achievement of the goal in the same way the business community took a leadership role in raising money for technology in the schools several years ago.

Community Support

The goal of having every child in the JCPS District read at grade level in four years is an ambitious, aggressive goal that is feasible if the entire community actively embraces and supports it. But that community support is essential. Most JCPS students are in school less than one-third of the day and only nine months a year. The rest of the time, their community and their families must be responsible for the students' progress.

The community should support the Superintendent, the teachers and the JCPS administration by enthusiastically supporting the reading goal throughout the next four years. We should understand and accept that changes must be made in the school system and in the classroom for the goal to be realized.

The Louisville Metro community must find ways to support the reading goal outside the classroom. The following examples are merely a few of the many support activities that should be undertaken:

- Louisville Metro government, the Urban League, and the Metro United Way agencies that touch children's lives must be made aware of the reading goal and should work with JCPS to identify opportunities to stress reading and reading at grade level in their programs.



- JCPS should work with the Louisville Metro government and local healthcare institutions should work with JCPS to ensure that healthcare problems of children are identified, treated, and not allowed to become obstacles to the students' reading success.
- The National Center for Family Literacy (NCFL), headquartered in Louisville, is eager to work with JCPS to promote literacy to school children and their families. JCPS should accept the NCFL as a knowledgeable partner in the implementation of the reading goal.
- The business community has dozens of partnerships in place with JCPS. JCPS and representatives of the business community should work together to ensure that these partnerships promote the reading goal and help to achieve it. The community and JCPS should consider forming an advocacy corps of citizens to act, with families or in place of families when appropriate, as advocates for students to ensure that their needs are met in the system.

As we noted earlier, the business community must be a strong ally for the Superintendent in his efforts to have appropriate amendments made to laws and regulations that will enable us to achieve the reading goal. The business community needs to support strongly efforts to obtain a fairer distribution of state education funding, which will aid JCPS in the achievement of the goal. And, last, the business community itself must be willing to take a leadership role and commit money to JCPS programs designed to bring about the reading goal.

Conclusion

Our task force unanimously believes that JCPS can be the leading metropolitan school district in the United States. We believe also that our community is united in the belief that we can achieve greatness. If we can achieve our goals set out in this report, JCPS will be counted as among the best school districts in the country; our Mayor and business leaders will be able to tout our school system and our educated work force to prospective employers and as a community, we will have provided the foundation for a productive life for every one of our children in the public schools. Our task force is eager to continue working with the Superintendent, the teachers, the JCPS administration, the Louisville Metro government, state officials, parents, and community leaders to ensure that our goal is implemented. We thank GLI for taking a leadership role in education and for giving us the opportunity to participate in this exciting, important effort.

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