

Jefferson County Public Schools

No Retreat

JCPS Commitment to School Desegregation

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The Louisville Community Desires Diverse Schools

At a time when schools nationwide move away from policies to mitigate segregation, Jefferson County Public Schools (JCPS) are not—and will not—give up on providing schools that, as Justice Anthony Kennedy wrote, continue “the important work of bringing together students of different racial, ethnic, and economic backgrounds” (*Parents Involved in Community Schools v. Seattle School District No. 1*, 2007).

The June 28, 2007 ruling of the U.S. Supreme Court dismantling the JCPS student assignment plan could have meant the end of 33 years of school integration in Louisville, Kentucky. Because the district leadership, the Board of Education (Board), and the community felt strongly that diversity in the classroom leads to a superior workforce and better citizens, they renewed their commitment to following through to ensure that JCPS remained integrated. Though the Supreme Court’s ruling was disappointing, it renewed a commitment to a set of values and direction that have been the norm for the district and the community for decades.

To begin developing a new student assignment plan, the Board first approved the process which included public forums in locations throughout the county, public opinion surveys, on-line surveys, consultation with national experts, reviews of student assignment plans in other districts and a review of the educational research literature regarding the impact of race-conscious school assignment policies and school desegregation. Thousands of parents and community members were engaged in providing feedback on the new student assignment plan. Because of the long and successful history of integration in Jefferson County, the vast majority affirmed the importance of diversity in schools with 88% reporting that it was important for students from diverse backgrounds to be brought together in schools. In fact in a brief submitted to the

Supreme Court, the Louisville Area Chamber of Commerce and Louisville Metro Mayor demonstrated their support of the schools:

“JCPS’ integrated school system benefits the whole business community by educating students who will eventually become part of the highly diverse workforce upon which the city’s economic growth depends. By the time the students enter the workforce, it may be too late to eliminate the prejudicial attitudes and unfair racial stereotypes.”

The district felt strongly that the plan for inclusion and opportunity in the schools should be deliberate and distinct. The Supreme Court provided the chance to expand the definition of diversity to more accurately reflect the entire Louisville community. Before moving forward with developing a new student assignment plan, the Jefferson County Board of Education established the following guiding principles:

- **Diversity** – The student assignment proposals will create schools that reflect the diversity of the community by including students from different ethnic, racial, and economic groups and students with disabilities. Diversity will prepare students to participate fully in a democratic society.
- **Quality** – The student assignment proposals will result in higher achievement of all students by enhancing the quality of the instructional programs.
- **Choice** – The student assignment proposals will provide families the opportunity to choose from a variety of facilities and programs that best meet student needs.
- **Predictability** – The student assignment proposals will offer predictability to parents in the assignment of their children at every point in their educational career. Families will be able to understand the choices that are available and the process for assignment.
- **Stability** – The student assignment proposals will provide the opportunity for students to have continuity in the schools they attend, and it will provide each student with connectedness to the school staff, peers, and the social and academic community of the school.
- **Equity** – The student assignment proposals will provide equitable access to programs and resources for all students.

The district broadened the concept of what makes a school diverse by analyzing each elementary school’s attendance area using three demographics that research has shown have an impact on student success in school:

- The number of minorities living in a school's attendance area,
- The level of educational attainment of the adults living in a school's attendance area based on U.S. Census data, and
- The median household income per household member based on Census data.

The district's 89 elementary schools were reconfigured into 6 geographic contiguous clusters to create a student assignment plan based on where students live rather than on their ethnicity. Finally, new magnet programs were created to strengthen the academics in 22 elementary schools in our poorest and most segregated neighborhoods. The U.S. Supreme Court told JCPS to avoid racial isolation in schools without using race-conscious measures and the district created a plan for lasting integration, that is strengthened by leveraging choice to increase student learning and parent satisfaction.

Offering highly attractive schools that provide academic rigor in personalized learning environments that are supported by community and business partners was a cornerstone in the elementary magnet designs as well as the redesign of the School-to-Career high school programs. Recently the district examined the viability and future of career and technical education programs in JCPS high schools. The Superintendent created a communitywide Task Force to thoroughly review the programs and make recommendations which would improve the quality of education for all high school students and produce graduates who are college-ready and able to adapt to the needs of an evolving economy and future workforce. As a result, the curriculum was realigned and the overall redesign of the School-to-Career programs now reflects the following:

- Students have easy access to career programs through Career Academies.
- Students' choices have been significantly expanded.
- Themes and programs are cohesive.
- All students have career planning opportunities.

- The curriculum has been infused with topics and skills training relevant to students' lives.
- There are expanded and enhanced opportunities for business partnerships.
- The programs complement the trimester schedule and Freshman Academy structure.

JCPS now has the opportunity to increase access to a quality education for all students while offering unique learning opportunities. The new student assignment plan creates choice for families and students within the district while encouraging innovative teaching practices and creating new professional development opportunities for teachers. With the new elementary magnet programs, the redesign of the School-to-Career programs at the high school level and new district-wide middle and high magnet schools, JCPS students will raise their achievement levels through improved and transformed schools. Through this plan, the achievement gap will be eliminated and students from all backgrounds will achieve at high levels.

Like charter schools, JCPS utilizes shared management of schools in the district through the Site Based Decision Making Councils (SBDMs) which typically include three teachers (elected by school faculty), two parents (elected by parent members of the largest parent organization associated with the school), and an administrator. SBDMs establish policy in nine areas including: 1) assignment of all instructional and non-instructional staff time, 2) assignment of students to classes and programs, 3) determination of the schedule of the school day and week, 4) determination of use of school space during the school day, 5) planning and resolution of issues regarding instructional practices, 6) selection and implementation of discipline and classroom management techniques, including responsibilities of the student, parent, teacher, counselor, and principal, 7) selection of extracurricular programs and determination of policies relating to student participation based on academic qualifications and attendance requirements, program evaluation, and supervision, 8) procedures, consistent with local school

board policy, for determining alignment with state standards, and 9) budget decisions. The SBDMs are also responsible for hiring principals.

Each of these 22 elementary magnet schools have SBDMs with extensive authority in managing the school and setting school policy. To fully implement the new student assignment plan through the magnet programs and the redesigned School-to-Career programs, the district needs to secure resources to fully develop these programs which reflect innovation, rigor, increased capacity, and provide new instructional programs.

Now is the Time for all Students to Achieve Their Goals and Dreams

The number of children under the age of 5 living in poverty is steadily growing in Jefferson County (*Greater Louisville Education Project*, 2009). From the 2000 to 2006 the rate of poverty for children under the age of 5 grew from 22 percent to 31 percent which will ultimately impact the district in a very significant way. Nearly half of the students during the 2006–07 school year lived with a single mother and nearly 22,000 of these lived in single-mother families in poverty. About 60 percent of all JCPS students qualify for free and reduced lunches.

In general, our minority students and our students in poverty are making slightly greater annual gains than their white counterparts, but the gaps were large to begin with and the differences in achievement persist. Recently, the group that prepared the *Greater Louisville Education Project* report, Mid-Continent Research for Education and Learning (McREL), studied JCPS and compared the district with 14 similar urban districts. In its executive summary, McREL states: “Overcoming the many challenges facing JCPS students will require a comprehensive and systemic approach that calls on the efforts of families, teachers, administrators, and the greater Louisville community to address them.” We are beginning this effort by redesigning schools, focusing on the quality of teaching, and developing a

comprehensive and systemic approach to address the achievement and empowerment gaps, as well as other disparities.

The district continues to implement academic interventions to address achievement gaps on an individual student and small group basis but has also put into action more universal strategies. These include cultural competence training to promote inclusive, culturally responsive teaching. A new character education initiative, CARE for Kids positively impacts school climate and the Freshman Academies across the district facilitate students connecting to each other and to school.

Despite the challenges the district faces with increasing numbers of students coming from low-income families or families living in poverty, our new magnet programs provide varied, appealing choices for families that will attract students from varied backgrounds, creating diversity within learning communities and providing opportunities for positive education outcomes. There are already magnet programs within the district that have demonstrated the kind of success the new programs intend to replicate. Brandeis Elementary, a district-wide Mathematics/Science/Technology Magnet Program, has been recognized for meeting annual state goals on the Kentucky Core Content Test for the last eight years. Brandeis is located in downtown Louisville with more than one-third of the students qualifying for free/reduced lunches and about 65 percent of their students are minority. It is also one of the most popular choice schools for more suburban, white families seeking an exceptional education for their child. Based on the success of the district's only K-12 school in attracting a diverse group of students from across the district, The Brown School, the district will be developing The Academy at Shawnee, also west of downtown Louisville, as a second district-wide kindergarten through grade twelve school. The Brown School draws students from almost every zip code in

the county and is nearly fifty-fifty in terms of minority and non-minority students. The Brown School continues to rank in the top 10% of schools each year in the district in terms of performance on the statewide achievement tests (at every level – elementary, middle and high). Noe Middle School, located just south of downtown, offers programs including Advance Program, English as a Second Language (ESL), Exceptional Child Education (ECE), and the Visual and Performing Arts and Gifted and Talented Magnets. In May 2005, Noe was awarded the National PTA Parent Involvement School of Excellence Award. In January 2007, Noe was named a National School to Watch. The 2008 non-adjusted accountability index increased to 90, which met goal. Noe draws 58% of its students from every zip code in Louisville, and ESL students represent more than 20 languages.

The elementary magnet program choices reflect new learning opportunities and the dynamic 21st Century workforce needs:

- **Communications** – In partnership with Bellarmine University, students will engage in many communications experiences including theatre; interpersonal skills; poetry reading; newspaper writing, editing and photography; and television production and videography. The magnet program will also include a student-driven newspaper and a daily television broadcast.
- **Environmental Studies** – This magnet program focuses on active engagement in nature and the community. Classrooms provide a well-balanced curriculum that is supported by a dynamic culture for individual achievement. The curriculum is brought to life by outdoor investigations that culminate in signature field trips at each grade level.
- **Visual Arts** -The visual arts magnet promotes the development of visual literacy through the study of art history, art appreciation, aesthetics, and art production. Students will experience the visual arts and create original art through the fine arts, applied arts, and arts & crafts which allow them to explore the various ways artists express themselves and to experiment with a variety of media and processes
- **Performing Arts** - The performing arts campus will become the “gateway to the arts” for Metro Louisville. Lincoln Elementary will provide high quality, specialized performing arts instruction in the areas of music, dance, and drama/theatre while emphasizing a strong academic program in reading, writing, mathematics, science, and social studies.

- **Excellence in Teaching and Learning** – It's an advanced education team that includes not only students, parents, and teachers but also community partners and University of Louisville students, staff, and faculty. This team evaluates the most current teaching methods and uses the most powerful techniques to help students excel in reading, writing, math, science, and many other critical elementary subjects. In addition, the program includes social work interns, nursing students, and medical students who provide a range of services for students and their families.
- **Waldorf-Inspired and Talent Development** - Students immerse themselves in a curriculum that is infused with rich artistic experiences and demanding practical work. Students also participate in building community and develop respect for each individual in the classroom setting. Through the use of artistic endeavors such as song, painting, dance, storytelling rhythm, poetry, and drama, the curriculum comes alive for each student and challenges them to reach his/her full potential. Byck's Waldorf-Inspired Teachers have participated in the Rudolf Steiner College Public School Institute in California.
- **International, Cultural Studies and Language** - The multi-language environment, service learning projects, and opportunities to connect with other international students and cultural resources around the world, will take students on a learning journey to every continent. Students will connect with other international students and with cultural resources. They also will participate in various field trips and exchanges with cultural organizations throughout the community.
- **MicroSociety®** - This proprietary educational program in which students create and carry out the activities associated with the operation of a miniature society orients students to their new roles and responsibilities as citizens of their new society and assessing for 21st Century skills development.
- **Success for All® Accelerated Reading** – This magnet program prepares students as literary ambassadors to encourage reading through different genres of literature. As literary ambassadors, students will be involved with video conferencing. As literary ambassadors, students will participate in service learning projects reaching out to their community. Through the Author-in-Residence programs, students will be introduced to professional authors who will share their techniques in writing.
- **Institute for Creativity and Innovation** – In partnership with Spalding University this program will make instruction meaningful and capitalize on the interests and curiosity of individual children. Kindergarten and first grade students engage in music classes to cultivate an appreciation for the arts and provide support for classroom learning. Second and third grade students participate in Personal Learning Classes (PLC). These weekly opportunities will cultivate the individual interests of students. Fourth and fifth year students participate in project based learning to facilitate a smooth transition to middle school.

- **Leadership Academy** - While incorporating leadership concepts across the curriculum in service projects through cooperative groups, students are mentored by dedicated adults. Students develop measurable skills and attitudes around decision making, acting ethically, communication, teamwork, critical thinking, empathy, and build character-based behaviors.
- **Health and Fitness for Accelerated Learning** - The Health and Fitness for Accelerated Learning Academies promote a healthy lifestyle by integrating academic excellence and health education. The health and fitness curriculum emphasizes nutrition awareness, physical fitness/athletics, and positive social and emotional development in an accelerated learning and engaging environment.
- **Technology** – Students engage in using the technology as part of regular instruction and interact with community members who focus their work in technology. Each year, students in grade 5 spend time in the community shadowing professionals who work in technology. All students participate in the Student Technology Leadership Project.
- **International Baccalaureate World School** - Young Elementary has received authorization to offer the world-renowned Primary Years Program from the International Baccalaureate Organization. Young will be the only elementary school in Kentucky offering this program that emphasizes a commitment to a high quality, challenging, international education.

In addition to these elementary magnets, Western Middle school, located just west of downtown Louisville will become the only district-wide Performing Arts Magnet at the middle school level. The redesign of the School-to-Career high school programs aims to produce graduates who are college-ready and able to adapt to the needs of an evolving economy and future workforce. Grouping the existing career and technical programs into five overarching magnet career emphases: Business and Information Technology; Medicine, Health, and the Environment; Human Services, Education, and International Studies; Engineering (Aeronautics, Architecture, Construction, and Manufacturing); and Communications, Media, and the Arts addresses the 21st Century workforce needs while bringing the much-needed focus and remaining broad enough to encompass numerous careers. While all our fifteen school-to-career high schools provide a core academic program, three schools distributed across the district have adopted each theme and the district will provide transportation so that students have choice

among the theme-based schools in their area. Grouping career and technical programs into five overarching themes also will help administrators and teachers build stronger and more cohesive programs. The restructuring of all these schools is designed to provide families with additional choices, facilitate diversity in these schools, and provide exceptional educational experiences for students.

Need for Extended Learning Time

The Greater Louisville Education Report indicated that JCPS at-risk high school students do not participate in afterschool activities as much as their peers. During the 2007–08 school year, high school students enrolled in free and reduced-price lunch indicated that they participated on school or community sponsored sports teams, clubs, or activities, less than their peers who are not eligible for free and reduced-price lunch.

Are these high school students working after school instead of participating in sports and activities? The answer is no. Of the students responding that they do not participate in sports or activities, over half also reported that they do not work after school regardless of lunch status. This translates to more than 4,000 high school students not engaged in extracurricular activities or work after school. Given that research has shown that youth involved in extracurricular activities have lower rates of school dropout and antisocial behavior efforts should be taken to understand why the district's most at-risk youth are not more engaged and to establish initiatives to increase their level of engagement (Barber & Eccles, 1999). Additionally, during the 2007–08 school year student participation in high school athletics was often lowest in schools with higher percentages of students enrolled in free and reduced lunch.

The Greater Louisville Education Report also demonstrated that poverty in Louisville is not concentrated in one area of the county as has historically been the case but has spread throughout

the south and southwest areas of the county. By providing connections to quality afterschool programming, students attending these magnets will participate in enhanced and unique learning opportunities.

A distinctive and important element that characterizes our magnet schools is the partnerships with the community-based organizations which provide afterschool, Saturday, and summer program opportunities for students. Academic supports, recreational, and programs centered on the magnet schools' themes, will extend learning time. In partnership with the Salvation Army, Boys and Girls Club, Community Schools, Louisville Community Center, Neighborhood House, St. George Community Center, programs for students and families will be offered at multiple sites.

Recognizing that extended learning experiences can play a significant role in supporting the development of young students, high quality out-of-school programs have been developed to support the magnet schools. These will significantly impact the academic, social, and emotional development of students and especially for our more at-risk youth. JCPS has maximized out-of-school experiences which will have as much bearing on student success as what they do during the school day (National School Board Association, 2005).

Measuring the Impact

The evaluation plan for the magnet programs is designed with the clear understanding the magnet programs serve multiple purposes: to provide quality educational experiences, ensure diversity and promote parental choice. Each school has a Magnet Design Team from which formative and summative data will be collected by the JCPS Department of Accountability, Research, and Accountability. Formative evaluation will guide implementation and what changes are needed to strengthen the programs as they evolve. Summative evaluation will be

utilized to determine which goals, objectives, and outcomes are being achieved. Specific research questions and outcomes are being established for each magnet program.

To assess the impact the extended learning time experiences, JCPS utilizes an innovative and unique data management system called *KidTrax* which allows the district to collect and share data about students to help educators and service-providers understand the relationship between out-of-school activities and academic achievement. Through this data management system, youth-serving agencies, the school district, and Metro government hope to establish, for the first time, a data-supported link between quality out-of-school activities and the influence these can have on success in school.

The *KidTrax* system uses a barcode card-swipe system that allows partner organizations to track and report key variables about individual students, such as school attendance and academic performance. JCPS supplies the data system with student demographic data.

Recently, the JCPS Department of Accountability, Research and Planning completed an evaluation report on Community Schools utilizing data collected through *KidTrax*. Community schools attendees were compared to comparison students with similar demographics to assess the impact of the community schools on students' attendance for the school year 2007-08. The control group had a higher average number of unexcused absences than the community school attendees. Program attendees were compared to comparison students to explore the impact of the community schools on students' suspensions. The control group had a higher average number of suspensions than the community school attendees.

Program attendees were compared to comparison students to explore the impact of the community schools on student achievement in reading. Except for six graders, the community schools students in grades 3-8 and 10 outperformed the comparison students in their annual state

assessment testing results. This program evaluation has demonstrated the potential of *KidTrax* as a tool in evaluating out-of-school programs and activities.

JCPS is also part of the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) pilot study which will provide results on subject-matter achievement, instructional experiences, and school environment for specific populations of students (e.g., all fourth-graders) and groups within those populations (e.g., female students, Hispanic students). With a clear vision of what we want to achieve, the district is ready to move forward with a plan that will create diversity in all our schools.

In his opinion in *Parents Involved in Community Schools v. Seattle School District No. 1*, (2007), Justice Kennedy wrote, “This Nation has a moral and ethical obligation to fulfill its historic commitment to creating an integrated society that ensures equal opportunity for all of its children. A compelling interest exists in avoiding racial isolation, an interest that a school district, in its discretion and expertise may choose to pursue.”

Justice Breyer also wrote in his opinion in the case, “Primary and secondary schools are where the education of this Nation’s children begins, where each of us begins to absorb those values we carry with us to the end of our days. As Justice Marshall said (in 1974), ‘unless our children begin to learn together, there is little hope that our people will ever learn to live together.’”

JCPS has created a plan for lasting integration, and it is a plan that offers families choice, a plan that reflects the values of our community and one that promotes those values in every classroom. With \$5,000,000 of funding for each of the next two years, JCPS can make this plan a reality for students and families in the community.

References

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