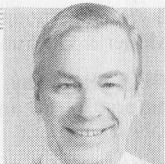


# State must step in to reform wasteful JCPS spending

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Columnist



Oh, the joys of spring-time!

The dogwood and azalea have bloomed, the horses are running at Churchill Downs, and the trim, ruggedly handsome (if romantically challenged) men in those endless Cialis commercials are planting flowers and shrubs instead of sitting in bathtubs in the middle of snow-covered forests. Another delightful spring tradition is the college commencement address, where freshly minted graduates are encouraged to go out and find their life's work that might make a difference in the world and perhaps put a small dent in a five-, or even a six-figure student loan balance.

And speaking of six figures, here in Louisville, those searching for steady employment with high income, generous benefits and absolutely zero chance of layoff or those nitpicking job evaluations need look no further than the offices of the Jefferson County Public Schools system. As announced last week in a scathing report by state Auditor Adam Edelen, our public school's administration is, to borrow a real estate

euphemism, "under water," in that as the list of "low-performing" (read: failing) schools continues to climb, and the achievement gaps for minority students continue to widen, the salaries of those overseeing this debacle are growing faster than the dandelions in one's springtime lawn.

Fresh on the heels of the death penalty meted out to Myers Middle School and with no real progress in sight for six of the state's 10 worst-performing high schools located in Jefferson County (2010 Kentucky Department of Education audit), life goes on sublimely at the Van Hoose Education Center, where 370 people pull down \$100,000 annual salaries and never is heard a discouraging word.

In a school system whose intractable shortcomings led a brutally frank Education Commissioner Terry Holliday to declare the entire apparatus "genocide," it is reassuring to know that we can still afford a "demographics analyst" (\$129K per year), a "site administrator" (\$107K), a "specialist in community support" (\$102K), an "assistant director of student relations" (\$124K) — isn't that a principal's job? — and somebody called a "data warehouse modeler" (\$116K). Just beneath the six-figure benchmark are a small army of plebeians in the \$90,000 to

\$99,000 per year range including \$90K annually for the invaluable (if inscrutable) services of a "psychometrist." But then, in a school system with a \$1.3 billion budget, who's counting? Such largesse allows the taxpayers to underwrite a \$90 million fuel tab every year for a cross-county transportation scheme to maintain an artificially contrived level of "diversity" with enough left over to pay for two "managers of platform services" (at \$111K each).

Perhaps the most intriguing revelation in the report is that the JCPS has a "manager of customer support" (\$106K per year). Well, the "customers" (taxpayers) are outraged that their financial "support" is being squandered in such a profligate manner. They justifiably ask: "Where is the accountability? Is there any accountability? Will there ever be any accountability?"

What will our school board members do about this crisis? Well, not much, apparently. Board member Carol Haddad shockingly labeled the devastating audit a ploy by the state auditor to gild his resume for higher office. And, she harumphed, "I think that is terrible."

What's really "terrible" is a see-hear-say-no-evil JCPS board member who refuses to be galvanized into action by

the extremely troubling results of a study that JCPS *originally requested*. And how about this gem from board Chairwoman Diane Porter: "This guidance (the audit) is coupled with several things we are already doing to ensure transparency and efficiency." Translation: "Taxpayers, get lost. We're not doing a blessed thing about Mr. Edelen's findings — but we will put our blind intransigence online for you."

Will the newer board members find their collective voices? Has JCTA President Brent McKim entered the federal witness protection program? With some teachers forced to buy their own chalk, why hasn't their union chief, to paraphrase Mr. Shakespeare, "troubled deaf heaven with his bootless cries?" The silence from the Jefferson County legislative delegation is also deafening. Aren't they just a tad disappointed that the millions of tax dollars for public school children they take great pains to include in the state's biennial budgets are shanghaied by rapacious bureaucrats miles from any classroom?

Obviously, as the state auditor recommended, the school board needs its own complement of staff — answerable only to it — to independently scrutinize the administration's budget down to the last dollar

spent on a "business intelligence specialist" (\$95K per year) or, more important, determine whether JCPS really needs any business intelligence specialists. Sixty-five years ago, Kentucky's legislature established the Legislative Research Commission (LRC) to develop its own data instead of accepting at face value the pabulum handed to it by the executive branch. The question remains, however, even if armed with this important tool, would the board use it to its full advantage to make JCPS accountable to the public?

In the final analysis, the auditor's report confirms two unassailable truths: (1) The failures of the Jefferson County Public Schools system are definitely not the result of inadequate funding, and (2) things will never change unless a reform-minded (next) governor and General Assembly empower parents to direct their education tax dollars to the public, private, religious schools of their choice without the assistance of even a single \$88,281.89-per-year JCPS "placement specialist."

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