

Expert helps JCPS patch teacher-administrator relations



Kirsten Clark, @kirstenlclark 7:40 p.m. EDT June 14, 2016



(Photo: JCPS)

Jefferson County Public Schools officials brought in a national expert on labor-management relations in schools for a work session Tuesday to address relationships between district leaders and teachers that have recently become strained.

During a 2-hour session, [consultant Pat Dolan](#) - who spent time working with JCPS administrators, teachers union representatives and other stakeholders prior to the work session - warned of a top-down organization that results in "deep alienation" between top administrators and teachers and support staff.

"This is a tough narrative right now," he said of JCPS' recent disagreements over [proposed changes to the code of conduct](#) and [teacher salaries](#). "That's not what it is. It's about children learning and us being the key to that."

JCPS, he advised, needs to become a "high-trust organization" where the school board, administrators, teachers union representatives and all teachers buy into the district's strategic plan, which calls for deeper learning for all students.

It's a tough task, Dolan said, when not everyone feels like they were part of the plan's development and feels like they "own" it.

Dolan provided some suggestions to improve communication and collaboration among administrators and teachers, saying that improving relations between top administrators and the teachers union are key.

Last month, Jefferson County Teachers Association President Brent McKim said teachers feel ["lied to and disrespected"](#) by Superintendent Donna Hargens. His comments stemmed from a recent recommendation to freeze salaries for all JCPS employees, including teachers, making more than \$14 an hour. Proposed changes to the code of conduct, which some perceived as a "loosening" of discipline, further caused concern and [caused teachers to protest with "walk-ins" in early May](#).

Dolan recommended that the district create a committee of principals, teachers, counselors and even high school students to act as a liaison between district administrators and the teachers union.

"What you're trying to do is build a listening and learning organization that heals itself," Dolan said.

Dolan stressed that in order for the district narrative to be about student learning - not about internal conflict - teachers must buy into the goals, processes and measurements of success that feed into the strategic plan. He called for the district to make the plan "real and authentic" for teachers, who are in the classroom every day with students. Dolan said JCPS' vision is a good one, but the district needs to lay out how to make it happen.

JCPS spokeswoman Allison Martin mentioned a different kind of division within the district: one where parents and teachers are proud of their individual schools but feel it's OK to "place blame" on the school system as a whole.

Dolan urged the district to be open and honest about the district's weaknesses. Otherwise, he said, the public will be skeptical about "the good stuff" happening in

JCPS.

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