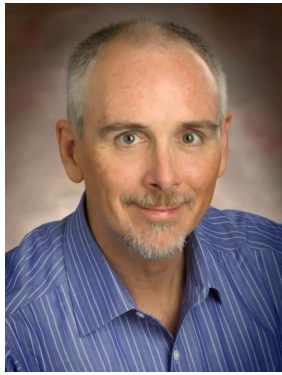


Lessons learned on the JCPS board | David Jones Jr.

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(Photo: Provided by David Jones Jr.)

JCPS aspires to be the nation's best urban school district, where every student graduates prepared for life.

Empty words, or serious intent? My term on the school board has taught me some lessons I'd like to share.

Lesson 1: Yes, we can! JCPS knows how to educate today's struggling kids. Although only half of JCPS students now leave school ready for today's competitive world, we know how to improve our schools. In 2015 the school board unanimously adopted a strategy to do so.

At its core the strategy is simple: Put more trained adults with the kids who need them and personalize learning to the individual student. That's it: Bring more counselors, psychologists, social workers, and teachers into JCPS schools, and empower our teachers to move beyond the drudgery of test prep and maintaining discipline to lead exciting learning.

Lesson 2: JCPS can pay for needed change without big new taxes, or state or federal help. Adding more adults to our classrooms will cost money -- lots of it. Unhappily, Louisville can expect little new support from Frankfort, where attention is focused on saving the state's gasping retirement systems. And who knows what, if anything, will come from Washington?

Happily, JCPS has the resources in its current budget to add hundreds of new adults to its classroom workforce -- if it will change how it spends its money. Outside studies and audits have for years found that JCPS spends way too much outside of its classrooms. Unlike her predecessors, Superintendent Hargens, with the support of the board under my leadership, commissioned a detailed study of JCPS compensation (the first since 1979) which identified \$60 million per year in non-teacher compensation that exceeds local and peer-district benchmarks. This painstaking work turned the easy generalities of auditors and critics into a 1000-page report that identifies overspending by line-item and job category, with an action plan to move money saved into education -- without layoffs and with continued raises to keep teacher pay competitive!

Putting \$60 million behind its strategy would let JCPS hire 1,000 additional teachers, counselors, psychologists and social workers, in addition to the roughly 7,000 now in these roles. Or hire a smaller number of professionals and make an enormous investment in training. No wonder Brent McKim, president of the teachers' union, tweeted in April that "The good news in the salary review is there is \$60 million in admin overhead that can and should be reduced/shifted to support students."

Lesson 3: These changes will require political courage—which I fear won't exist. Sadly, Mr. McKim's tweet was the only support he gave to restructuring JCPS in support of classroom teachers. Within days of the salary study's release, his teacher's union had frightened teachers into marching with other JCPS unions to protest its findings. Within weeks a campaign to oust the Superintendent was underway. And when the teachers' union interviewed candidates for school board this fall, they

Union candidates won all three board seats in November. When the new board convenes in January, five of the seven members will have expressed solidarity with, and owe their election to, the teachers' union.

With JCPS employee surrogates in charge of the board, there is no chance that the needed restructuring of non-teacher salaries will occur – and no chance that meaningful new resources will go into JCPS classrooms, where they are desperately needed.

Lesson 4: If Louisville won't solve JCPS' problems, Frankfort will try. The new reality in Frankfort means that JCPS' archaic structure will face big challenges. Most consequential for JCPS would be passage of a right-to-work law, which could liberate JCPS students and principals from union rules that put the least experienced teachers in schools with the neediest students and create the highest teacher turnover for students who most need stability in their adult relationships. Charter school legislation also seems certain to pass and is stirring lots of emotion, though only a small percentage of JCPS students would attend a charter.

As the new Republican supermajority in Frankfort focuses on education, the new board's failure to move the \$60 million into our classrooms may invite even stronger intervention.

One final lesson: Good governance is about results, which requires making tough and sometimes unpopular decisions. Almost everyone in education cares deeply about children and believes teaching is our society's most important job. Caring is important – but for the governing board of a big district, care is shown by making hard choices that get results. By budgeting for positive change, not just talking about it. By prioritizing the needs of today's students over the wants of adults who benefit from this antiquated system -- even when those adults engineered or funded board members' election.

I'm proud of my work with Superintendent Hargens to define a funded pathway to educate all our children. I urge Louisvillians to insist that our elected officials in Frankfort, as well as Louisville, see that JCPS improve, as I know it can.

David Jones Jr. is the outgoing chair of the JCPS Board, founder of Chrysalis Ventures, serves on the Board of Directors of Humana, Inc., is a director of the Humana Foundation, a trustee of the C. E. and S. Foundation, and is a member of GLI's Business Leaders for Education.