

# Something doesn't feel right about David Jones' group of Louisville powerbrokers | Joe Gerth

[Joseph Gerth](#) Updated 5:12 p.m. ET Feb. 2, 2018

Louisville business leader David Jones Sr. released a list of the 69 members of a private group whose aim he said is to seek community improvements such as education and public safety. Courier Journal

The group that David A. Jones Sr. brought together is impressive.

There are [nearly 70 community leaders](#) — from entrepreneurs to ecclesiastics (and a rabbi thrown in for good measure) — who have [joined to address](#) the problems that have held Louisville back for decades.

Good idea. Talented cast.

But something doesn't feel right about this.

Jones' group wants to start with education but also tackle problems like crime and access to flights at the preposterously named Louisville International Airport.

They have a point.

If those problems aren't solved, Louisville will never thrive like Cincinnati, Indianapolis and Nashville, which have company headquarters and professional sports teams and bustling downtowns, and have the amenities

that made two of them finalists for Amazon's second North American headquarters.

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If Louisville ever is going to become anything like our former "peer cities," we're going to need big thinkers (like the ones that Jones has assembled) and big ideas.

But something doesn't feel right about this.

The Steering Committee for Action on Louisville's Agenda — or SCALA, its gawd-awful acronym — was born of secrecy, no matter what David Jones Sr., who founded the group, says.

And its insular beginnings don't appear likely to change.

It has operated in private for nearly a year without any public notice of its existence, without any public meetings and without any public input. And when it meets next time, it will meet without any public involvement.

"Because I said so," Jones haughtily declared to Courier Journal reporter Phillip Bailey.

The group operated in complete secrecy until Insider Louisville wrote about it earlier this week and said that Jones wouldn't turn over a list of members. He relented and gave Courier Journal a list of names the following day.

Even when the group's education task force sent a letter to Courier Journal after its existence was revealed, it still identified those writing the letter only by name and job title, never once mentioning Jones' group.

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The organization is patterned off a group in Nashville that was created a couple of decades ago to tackle similar problems there, but unlike in Louisville, Action on Nashville's Agenda Steering Committee was very public.

In fact, it held two dozen community meetings where it asked for ideas from people like you. You didn't need to be rich or hold an exalted position in the community to have input.

That's not what is happening here.

The group appears to be a pretty homogeneous bunch. By my count, only 13 are women. Even fewer are people of color.

I was able to find home addresses of 57 of the group's nearly 70 members, and of the ones who live in Jefferson County, only two live west of Interstate 65.

In fact, only three members from Jefferson County live in ZIP codes that aren't in a triangular wedge that goes from the Ohio River down to Interstate 64, east of downtown.

That's fine. If you want a group that is comprised of Louisville's elite, the people who have shown that they can get things done, you're going to get a lot from that part of town. I get that.

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But it's troublesome that the group isn't seeking input from elsewhere, especially since the group's top priority is education, and very few of those on the steering committee have any idea about the issues facing African-Americans or the poor.

It's black students and poor students who are the ones really suffering in an educational system that is doing pretty well for the children of middle and upper class families.

It's troubling that not a single person from Jefferson County Public Schools has been invited to take part in the discussions, and that even though several college presidents are on the committee, no one on the education faculty at the University of Louisville or any other college has been brought on board.

But what really doesn't feel right about this is the involvement of David Jones Jr., who was ousted by voters from the Jefferson County Board of Education in 2016 after just one term, but now appears to be using the organization to push for a state takeover of the school system.

Call it sour grapes. Call it an end-around. Heck, call it a coup d'etat.

This all started five months after voters told Jones they didn't want him on the school board. Now, he's pushing for a state takeover.

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His father's organization is pushing to strip power from the school board and from the teachers' union, with which Jones Jr. struggled, and give it to a super-powered superintendent who could be hired by either a mayor or a governor and not by the elected board of education.

Perhaps part of Louisville's problem is that traditionally, the power has been held in the hands of a few people who make decisions in their ornate offices and at their cocktail parties that affect oh so many of us.

Can you think of anything big in Louisville that has happened in the last 30 years that didn't have the blessings of the Joneses or the Browns or the Grissoms or the Glasscocks?

Don't get me wrong, they have all done wonderful things for our community. That's not what this is about.

It's about making this process open.

The people on the steering committee have the oomfph to get things done — that's exactly why others need a voice in the process.

Otherwise, something doesn't feel right about this.

Joseph Gerth's column runs on most Sundays and at various times throughout the week. He can be reached at 502-582-4702 or by email at [jgerth@courier-journal.com](mailto:jgerth@courier-journal.com). Support strong local journalism by subscribing today: [www.courier-journal.com/josephg](http://www.courier-journal.com/josephg).