

COURIER JOURNAL EDITORIAL

JCPS takeover simply the wrong move at wrong time

A state takeover of Jefferson County Public Schools is not the solution. Not now. Not in this way.

The recommendation of Kentucky's interim education commissioner is a clear political move, not a problem-solving proposal. A genuine proposal to fix JCPS requires meaningful input from students, parents, teachers and administrators, and from a truly diverse collection of business and nonprofit leaders. A genuine proposal to fix JCPS requires consensus on what problems we're trying to fix. A genuine proposal can come only after newly installed Superintendent Marty Pollio has had a chance to dig into the problems in a way his predecessor never did.

No one disagrees that there are major problems in JCPS, particularly with the shameful achievement gaps between some students of color and white students. But those gaps are the manifestation of deeply layered problems tied to how this country, this commonwealth and this city distribute resources and how they enforce a hierarchy that has created a permanent economic underclass disproportionately occupied by African-Americans.

A takeover also is an inappropriate infringement on local control of a district unlike any other in the commonwealth, one that we must not forget educates the vast majority of productive workers who successfully power the state's economic engine.

This takeover proposal is too much and it's way too soon.

Others share our view.

"Governor Bevin's announced takeover of the largest public school district in the Commonwealth is the latest and most disconcerting assault in his ongoing war on public education. Rather than working with Dr. Pollio and experienced educators on the progress being made and providing the resources necessary to improve our schools, Bevin has instead decided to pursue a personal agenda that demands our schools do more with less. The governor has spent the last several months trying to cheat our teachers out of their promised benefits, and now he has shown his intent to cheat more than 100,000 Jefferson County students as well. Louisville families want a voice in securing better futures for their children, and their governor has snatched that from them. I share

the concern and outrage of parents in our community over this betrayal and will continue to work in any way I can to protect our schools from this reckless political ideology that seeks to divert money from public schools at the expense of Louisville's children."

— Congressman John Yarmuth, Louisville

"I am pleased that the audit recognized the strong leadership abilities of Dr. Marty Pollio. I am extremely disappointed that it is recommending state takeover, and for Dr. Pollio to report to the state, instead of JCPS' elected local leadership. Providing assistance and resources to JCPS, and allowing Dr. Pollio and the local board to drive those changes, would have greatly helped us address the gaps we all acknowledge. All of us agree that every child must have every opportunity to succeed. And, until we address the societal challenges that lead half of our children to show up at JCPS unprepared to learn, many of our children will continue to struggle. The only agenda we should all have is creating the best large urban school district in the nation. Public education is the heart of our democracy, and we must all ensure a strong JCPS. I urge the state Board of Education to reject the audit's recommendation and replace takeover with assistance."

— Louisville Mayor Greg Fischer

I am a member of the House Standing Committee on Education and am not surprised by the recommendation of the underhandedly appointed commissioner to recommend a state takeover of Jefferson County Public Schools. It was on the horizon when the Republican new majority passed charter school legislation and attempted to end busing in the most diverse school system in Kentucky. In fact, it is that diversity that terrifies the governor who appoints people to positions who will do his bidding without question — people who were salivating to get their hands on JCPS. We can improve JCPS by fully funding public education. Instead, the legislature passed a biennium budget that removes funding for textbooks. We can improve JCPS by advancing equity, listening to students and engaging parents. I am a proud graduate of JCPS, the mom of a graduate and mom of a current student. I hold JCPS to a high standard and hold it accountable for its failures. Unfortunately, JCPS was never given a chance by the governor to im-

prove its areas of deficiencies. We are reminded time and again that elections have consequences — this is the consequence of 31 percent voter turnout to elect a new governor of Kentucky.

— State Rep. Attica Scott, D-Louisville

Bevin has stacked the State Board with unqualified people, and has accomplished his goal of taking over JCPS. This is an overt power grab by Bevin, starting with the war on Louisville, and now taking over a democratically elected school board. Superintendent Marty Pollio has implemented positive change, and parents and teachers are supportive of JCPS. Bevin has been attacking our teachers and public employees ever since he was elected, calling our hardworking teachers thugs and un-informed.

— State Rep. Mary Lou Marzian, D-Louisville

"County attorneys are known as the lawyer for the people. As a constitutional public officer, I will explore every legal option available to oppose the Bevin Administration's overreach and attempted takeover of Jefferson County Public Schools. I will work to protect the interests of Jefferson County citizens, to the extent that I am able to participate, in what, undoubtedly, will be future court proceedings."

— Jefferson County Attorney Mike O'Connell

"State takeover of JCPS is an insane idea that will jeopardize the future of public education. State leadership needs to provide more resources to JCPS to invest in early education as most of the children from underprivileged homes are not kindergarten ready. My wife tutors such a child in an elementary school who does not even know basic alphabets and numbers. It will be a grave mistake if the root causes are ignored just for the sake of politics. Teachers in our commonwealth have already been robbed of their own invested pension plans due to incompetence of politicians on both sides of the aisle. Now children should not be used as pawns in the power game of Frankfort that has bent over to destroy the basic principles on which our nation was founded. Children deserve a future that ensures life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness for all and not just for few who could afford charter and private schools."

— Muhammad Babar of Louisville is president of the Pakistani American Alliance for Compassion and Education and a board member of the Center for Interfaith Relations, Fund for the Arts and Louisville Public Media.

We object to this naked politicization of the public education of our children. Courier Journal, in concert with key leaders in Jefferson County, calls on the state education board to say no to a takeover.

Not now. Not in this way.