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## A vote for Jefferson County Public Schools tax is a vote for racial justice

8-10 minutes

Ongoing revelations regarding the death of Breonna Taylor lay bare the insidious and systemic racism within the justice system in the city of Louisville. It is no longer possible to avert our gaze from the shocking racial injustice. Many want sincerely to be part of the solution to this perversion in our city. On their November ballot, voters can, literally, cast a vote for racial justice, by voting “Yes” for the JCPS tax hike proposal.

You may ask, “How does a vote to increase school taxes address racial injustice?”

Early in America’s history following its Declaration of Independence, public schools did not exist. Education was available only to the children of the elite: aristocrats, wealthy merchants, military officers, plantation owners. Only those with a personal tutor or a private school learned to read and to write. Most of the populace was illiterate and impoverished. Without an education, they were destined to continuous struggle in the agrarian economy that defined America.

For this country to fulfill its declared, self-evident truth, “that all men are created equal... with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness,” it became clear that all citizens must have access to a free public education. Only then would citizens have the skills to raise themselves above their circumstances and, in the process, help lift the economy of the struggling nation.

**More:** [Why the Greater Louisville Inc. supports the JCPS tax plan to improve education](#)

The first public schools supported by general taxes were created in the South following the Civil War. Both whites and Blacks were admitted to these new schools, but legislators agreed they would be racially segregated. When white southerners regained control of their state legislatures in former Confederate states, public schools for Black people became woefully underfunded.

This practice persisted until 1954, when the Supreme Court, in the case *Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka*, declared state laws establishing separate public schools for Black and white students were unconstitutional. This ruling negated the court’s 1896 *Plessy v. Ferguson* decision permitting “separate-but-equal” segregated schools. *Brown v. Board* established the legal precedent that segregated education was not equal at all. The intent was to insure that the nation’s system of public education equally benefitted all children.

Since that landmark decision, whites across the nation have sought to blunt and block its intent: fleeing to white communities; creating private, predominantly white academies; promoting home-schooling; eventually advocating for vouchers and charter schools that divert public funding to private and religious schools, often in defiance of historic norms separating church and state.





Such defiance surfaced in Louisville, when in 1975 U.S. District Judge James Gordon, following the precedent of *Brown v. Board*, ruled that the predominantly white Jefferson County Public Schools (JCPS) merge with the mostly Black Louisville City Schools. White people responded with violent protests and sustained, vocal resistance. In droves, they removed their children from schools in the newly integrated JCPS.

Resistance to the decision even inspired a racist political strategy. In the 1990 edition of his book, "The Two-Party South," Alexander P. Lamis cites his 1981 interview with Lee Atwater, a Republican presidential political tactician. Atwater explained the Republican Party's "Southern strategy" for increasing political support in the South by appealing subtly to the racism of some white Southern voters, without saying it openly.

He said by 1968, you couldn't use the N-word. "So you say stuff like forced busing, states' rights and all that stuff. You're getting so abstract now [that] you're talking about cutting taxes, and all these things you're talking about are totally economic things and a byproduct of them is [that] blacks get hurt worse than whites."

**Opinion:** [Early voting, more polling places, free rides: All you have to do is show up and vote](#)

Atwater's tactics continue to hover over the ongoing assault on the intent of *Brown v. Board*. Kentucky's ex-Gov. Matt Bevin, led an effort that demeaned and vilified the state's public school teachers. He vigorously and deceitfully attacked their retirement plan. He promoted charter schools, a concept that siphons public school funds.

Atwater's words, "You're getting so abstract now [that] you're talking about cutting taxes," echo in entreaties from the "No JCPS Tax Hike" group! A leader of this organization is Theresa Camoriano, Louisville's Tea Party president who is transplanted from Connecticut and Texas and now who lives in Anchorage. Anchorage is an independent city boasting its own school district with the highest per pupil expenditure, the highest per capita income and the highest median home value in Kentucky. (Bevin, Tea Party darling relocated from New Hampshire, is an Anchorage resident.)

This group circulated a petition requesting that the tax issue be placed on the November ballot. Anchorage residents are not subject to the JCPS tax or proposed tax hike. Anchorage Independent Schools (Black population: 0.8%; JCPS: 37%) levy a property tax of 98.2 cents per \$100 assessed value on a median home value that some real estate websites say is anywhere from around \$650,000 to somewhere north of \$700,000 (JCPS: 73.6 cents; \$148,000).

Anchorage residents in the "No JCPS Tax Hike" coalition are willing to adequately fund their own school system. Why do they oppose equal funding for less fortunate students in JCPS?





Law permits JCPS to increase local property taxes enough to boost revenue by 4% each year without a public referendum. A recent state audit of JCPS cited the district for not raising taxes often enough!

This year, the school board voted to raise the levy by 9.5% to 80.6 cents per \$100 of assessed value, costing a Jefferson County homeowner an additional \$70 more taxes per \$100,000 in property value annually. The current rate is among the lowest in the area. The proposal would bring JCPS, serving 67,000 kids from underprivileged families, closer to peer districts serving large groups of similar students.

No one wants to pay higher taxes, even slightly higher. But in this situation, to oppose higher taxes is to favor systemic racism.

**Editorial:** [Yes to JCPS tax plan to improve equity and student achievement](#)

Marty Pollio, JCPS superintendent, the son of two teachers, whose daughter attends a school in the district, has said that the additional \$54 million per year from the proposed tax increase would allow the district to build new schools in the West End.

“It is imperative that JCPS invest in west Louisville. The residents [there] should be upset with JCPS for not investing in that community over the past 30 years,” he said in May. “It is time to right that wrong.”

INDEED! Recent events have emphasized that the time to right that wrong IS LONG OVERDUE!

When you see the “tax levy question” on your November ballot, pause and ask yourself this question:

“In whose motives do I have the greatest confidence: those of Pollio, a dynamic, proven school leader, devoted to the Louisville community and to JCPS for almost 25 years; or those of the interlopers and Atwater acolytes like Camoriano and Bevin?”

Your answer can determine if the city of Louisville will live up to its advertising slogan, “Louisville – A Compassionate City.”

Cast a vote for equitable schools for all students. Add your voice to the throngs trying to right the wrongs of racial injustices, past and present.

*Dennis Boswell is a retired teacher and administrator and a former senior associate with the Schlechty Center for Leadership in School Reform based in Louisville. He and his wife are lifelong Louisvillians who are products of the Louisville City Schools in the Portland neighborhood. As new teachers in the Louisville City Schools, they endured the community upheaval that followed court-ordered desegregation in 1975. Both are retired career educators from JCPS. Their two children are products of JCPS.*