

I can give 10 reasons why JCPS doesn't deserve more tax money



Your Turn

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Guest columnist

As a longtime Louisville taxpayer, parent of former Jefferson County Public School students, and grandparent to potential future students, I don't believe JCPS deserves to get more of our money resulting from any potential proposed tax increase, and here are 10 reasons why:

1) Over the last 10 years, JCPS's annual revenue has risen from \$1.25 billion in 2016 to \$1.86 billion in 2025 while district annual spending (with the board's approval) has increased from \$1.27 billion in 2016 to \$2.06 billion in 2025. With the exception of 2022, spending has exceeded revenue every year for the past 10 years.

2) The increase in annual district spending over the past 10 years has occurred in categories including instruction (\$742 million in 2016 to \$1.03 billion in 2025), student support services (\$58 million in 2016 to \$126 million in 2025) and school administrative support services (\$99 million in 2016 to \$138 million in 2025) with very little to show for it.

3) Since 2017, adjusted for inflation,

total funding per student has increased 35% from \$17K to \$23K per student while teacher salaries have actually declined 8% from \$72K to \$66K. Teacher pay appears to have not been a high priority for the district.

4) The district spent (with the board's approval) the majority of temporary emergency COVID relief funding on recurrent expenses that would require ongoing unknown future funding to maintain rather than on one-time needs. This has caused the fiscal cliff we now face within the district's budget.

5) After a 2018 report from the Council of the Great City Schools noting the disorganization in JCPS' central office, the former superintendent said that he would cut as much as \$100M from the central office budget over the next 10 years. But central office funding in the JCPS 2025-2026 Working Budget is higher than it was in 2018.

6) Grade 4 and grade 8 test scores in reading and math have declined steadily since 2009, even though per student funding has dramatically increased over the same time frame.

7) The student achievement gap between economically disadvantaged and non-economically disadvantaged students shows no improvement since 2009, nor has any improvement been made in the racial achievement gaps



JCPS Superintendent Brian Yearwood speaks during a JCPS listening event on Dec. 1, at Kammerer Middle School to discuss the current models for closing some schools and keeping others open. MICHAEL CLEVENGER/COURIER JOURNAL

during the same time period.

8) ACT average composite scores have declined since 2017 and are below that of the rest of the state.

9) JCPS student outcomes are consistently below that of the rest of the state, both in total and by all racial groups except White.

10) JCPS student outcomes for fourth and eighth grade reading and math scores are below other large urban school districts that have the same economic and demographic challenges as JCPS and whose spending is compara-

ble or less to that of JCPS.

The Jefferson County Board of Education, as well as JCPS leadership, needs to provide more transparency and accountability regarding their past actions and performance before asking the community for more money and, most importantly, asking for their trust that the money will be spent on things that will produce results, which hasn't occurred in quite some time in spite of increased funding.

Jody Wurtenberger is a retired health care executive and CPA.