

KY lawmakers starved JCPS of funding. Now, they're trying to break it.



Your Turn

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Guest columnist

Kentucky Republicans are once again floating a familiar distraction: break up Jefferson County Public Schools and call it reform. They frame it as accountability. They sell it as local control. But let's be honest. This proposal has little to do with fixing schools and everything to do with avoiding responsibility for years of deliberate underinvestment in public education.

JCPS is facing a financial crisis, but that crisis did not appear overnight. It is the predictable result of policy decisions made in Frankfort. Decisions that cut revenue, limited local taxing authority, ignored inflation and passed unfunded mandates onto school districts while refusing to adequately fund them. To now point at the consequences of those

choices and suggest dismantling the largest school district in the state is not leadership. It is deflection.

Splintering JCPS is not an equitable plan

Breaking up JCPS does not create new money. It does not magically fix transportation challenges. It does not stabilize pensions. It does not address special education costs, workforce shortages or rising operational expenses. What it does create is fragmentation. More administrations, more overhead, more inequity and more opportunity for communities with fewer resources to fall even further behind.

Let's also name what too often goes unsaid. Proposals to splinter JCPS carry along and troubling history in Louisville. Calls to break up the district are rarely race neutral, even when they are race-coded. Fragmentation has historically meant segregation by another name. Separating students along lines of

wealth, geography and race, while pretending the outcomes are accidental. We should be deeply skeptical of any plan that risks returning us to a system where ZIP code determines destiny.

If lawmakers were serious about accountability, they would start where accountability belongs. With themselves. Kentucky's General Assembly has restricted local school boards' ability to raise revenue while simultaneously refusing to meet the true cost of educating children in an urban district with complex needs. You cannot starve a system and then scold it for being weak.

And if lawmakers were serious about helping JCPS, they would engage in partnership, not punishment. That means stable and equitable funding. It means flexibility in how districts respond to enrollment shifts. It means addressing transportation as a statewide infrastructure issue, not a local failure. It means supporting, not undermining, the educators and administrators tasked with doing more every year with less.

Republicans need to take accountability for their decisions

This proposal is not bold. It is not innovative. And it is not courageous. It is a political maneuver designed to shift blame, fracture public trust and weaken one of the few remaining institutions that still attempts to serve all children, not just the ones whose parents have power.

Louisville does not need a smaller vision for public education. We need a stronger commitment to it.

Breaking up JCPS may make for a convenient talking point, but it will not fix what is broken. Funding will. Responsibility will. And honesty will.

Until then, this proposal should be called exactly what it is: a solution in search of a scapegoat, not students' success.

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