

Coalition says some SCALA members are privately walking away from group

A local coalition of public education advocates is urging members of the newly uncovered Steering Committee for Action on Louisville's Agenda ([SCALA](#)) to publicly break ties with the group, voicing concern with what they call its lack of transparency and minimal diversity.

While none of SCALA's 69 members — the leaders of businesses, nonprofits and religious organizations — have left the group publicly, the coalition's leadership says that some have already indicated to them privately that they will no longer participate in SCALA.

Starting with emails to SCALA members on Monday and an [open letter](#) posted to its Facebook page Tuesday, the [Alliance to Reclaim Our Schools \(AROS\) Louisville](#) called the group's approach to addressing reform of Jefferson County Public Schools "worrisome and undemocratic," asking members to "publicly 'walk away' from SCALA and find your own way to engage the affected communities and JCPS itself for discussions."

According to AROS Louisville chair Chris Harmer, the coalition has heard back from some SCALA members who say they either plan on "voting with their feet" by not showing up to future meetings of the group, or staying and



urging its leadership to make the group more inclusive and transparent.

“None want their names used because, at a minimum, they don’t want to risk their business relationships,” Harmer told Insider Louisville on Thursday. “Fine, at least for now. They can just walk away, as we have asked. We hope they will actually walk towards established community groups that have been pushing JCPS to improve outcomes for underserved populations for years.”

Insider [first reported last week on the existence of SCALA](#), an invitation-only group of 69 leaders who have focused on the topics of public safety, air service and public K-12 education in Louisville. The group has had its [motives](#) and [methods](#) questioned by those who view it as a secretive attempt by wealthy elites to undermine the democratically elected local school board, though SCALA’s leadership has defended it as being a group of city leaders who are earnestly dedicated to improving the quality of education provided by JCPS.

In a [guest column](#) submitted to Insider on Thursday, SCALA founder David Jones Sr. wrote that the persistently low proficiency scores of low-income and minority students in JCPS is why this “large and diverse group of achieving and engaged local leaders believe that public education is a truly vital issue that should be broadly addressed.”

AROS Louisville calls itself a new coalition of community groups “working for equity in public schools, adequacy of their funding, and keeping our public schools public.” It consists of organizations such as Dear JCPS, Jefferson County Teachers Association, League of Women Voters of Louisville, Louisville Showing Up for Racial Justice, Fellowship of Reconciliation and the Kentucky Alliance Against Racist and Political Repression.

The email written by Harmer tells SCALA members that “we know you are operating with good intentions, but we urge you to reconsider — and then end

— your personal and organizational ties with SCALA. We ask you to go on record publicly, committing to be a part of communitywide efforts that employ truly democratic broad-based processes.”

“The direct attack on our public school system — tacitly or openly supporting a possible direct takeover by the state — and neglecting to seek input from any public school students, parents, teachers, administrators, school board members or a host of local and national public education experts are both shortsighted and irresponsible,” wrote Harmer.

The email goes on to state that SCALA is “largely white people of power, wealth and privilege,” which “shows a fundamental disregard for democratic process.” It also accused SCALA of lacking transparency and not allowing the public to hold members accountable for decisions that may impact citizens.

“The group’s unwillingness to hold open meetings (and, until pressured through investigative media reporting, your members’ names and organization networks) keeps you from fully hearing and understanding what happens in the lives of many of the students,” wrote Hamer.

Hamer told Insider on Thursday that he would not reveal exactly how many SCALA members had privately indicated to AROS that they would either walk away from the group or stay and advocate for a change in the group’s processes or diversity.

Though the original emails from AROS to SCALA members asked for a response by noon on Wednesday, the coalition has decided to give some of the members it has spoken with privately “some space to shift,” according to Carla Wallace of Louisville SURJ. Hamer added that not every SCALA member has been sent the email yet, as the contact information for some of the business CEOs is difficult to locate.

SCALA is scheduled to hold its next meeting on Feb. 14, with Hamer stating that AROS looks forward to hearing any public announcements from SCALA after that meeting regarding any internal reforms it will make. Hamer added that while unnamed members have indicated they will no longer attend the group's meetings, some have told AROS that only 25 of the 69 members attended the last SCALA meeting.

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