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The Impact of BR 111 on Parental Choice in Jefferson County Public Schools

BR 111, AN ACT relating to school attendance.

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Department of Accountability, Research and Planning

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**BR 111, AN ACT relating to school attendance.
(2011 Regular Session)**

Sponsors: Senator Dan Seum, Senator David L. Williams, Senator Elizabeth Tori

Bill Summary

- The bill would permit a parent or legal guardian to enroll a child for attendance at the school nearest to the child's home, except in cases in which there are academic or skill prerequisites for attendance at the school.
- If the number of children living in a school's attendance area were to exceed the capacity of a school, children residing the shortest distance from the school would be given first priority in assignment to the school.
- If a child were to be denied attendance at the school closest to his or her home due to the school having reached enrollment capacity, the child shall be given priority for assignment to the next closest school.
- A child currently attending a school could not be displaced to permit the attendance of another child.
- A parent or legal guardian would be permitted to enroll a child at a school other than the closest school if the child meets any academic or skill prerequisites for enrollment and there is attendance capacity, with the permission of the district.

Impact of BR 111 on Jefferson County Public Schools

Would Significantly Reduce Parental Choice

The bill would dismantle Jefferson County Public Schools' (JCPS) robust parental choice plan, which includes traditional schools, career-themed high schools, and magnet schools and programs. This would significantly reduce educational options for thousands or tens of thousands of families in Louisville.

Would Eliminate the Current Plan that Offers All Families a Fair School Selection Chance

No student assignment plan, including the one proposed in BR 111, can provide all families with their first school choice. The bill would supplant the current JCPS student assignment plan, which offers every family a fair chance at selecting a school regardless of where they live.

Would Resegregate Public Schools

The bill would resegregate our schools by race and income, negatively impacting equitable educational opportunities and student achievement across the district. It would be a profound departure from a long-standing community commitment to diversity, with lasting and detrimental consequences for the future of Louisville Metro.

New District Boundaries Would Prohibit Many from Their Current Resides School

The bill would eliminate every existing school boundary in Jefferson County. With an entirely new set of boundaries, many families would not be in the attendance area for their current resides school, because other students live closer to that school, or they live closer to a different school. Siblings of a current student who is attending a school other than the school nearest their home would not be given priority over other students who live closer to the school.

Complicated Student Assignment Plan Would Create Massive Disruption

BR 111 would create an even more complicated student assignment plan than the current one, adding confusion and additional transportation costs. If all students were assigned to the school nearest to their home, many schools would exceed their capacity. This would require a significant number of students to be offered attendance at the school next closest to their homes, if space were available. This complicated "musical chairs" scenario of students being bumped from school to school would create a disruptive, unworkable plan for the district and its families.

Would Eliminate Local Control of Student Assignment

Student assignment has always been the responsibility of local school districts, and for good reason. Each district is different, and local decision makers have the clearest understanding of how to best meet the needs of families in their districts. A "one size fits all" mandate dictated from Frankfort will never meet the needs of individual counties.

Would Significantly Reduce Parental Choice

- The current JCPS student assignment plan is designed to provide the greatest number of families with their choice of schools. Indeed, the choices of a large majority of parents are accommodated under the current plan. For the current school year:
 - 80 percent of kindergarteners and 86.7 percent of first graders were assigned to their first or second choice of schools during the enrollment period, excluding magnet or optional choices.
 - 42.3 percent of parents chose a school other than their resides school as their first choice.
- While not all students are assigned to their first or second choice of schools, many parents of those students ultimately express a high degree of satisfaction with the educational opportunities provided to their children.
- Of the many magnet schools and programs offered by JCPS, only Manual, Central and YPAS have admissions standards based on “academic or skill prerequisites for attendance.” Access to all other magnet schools and programs would be trumped by a formula based on proximity to a school.
- The defacto dismantling the system of the magnet schools and programs would result in significantly reduced choices for families and diminished opportunities for students to pursue their educational and career interests. This will be detrimental to individual students and the entire community.

Would Eliminate the Current Plan that Offers All Families a Fair School Selection Chance

- No student assignment plan, including the one proposed in BR 111, can provide all families with their first school choice. The bill would supplant the current JCPS student assignment plan, which offers every family a fair chance at selecting a school regardless of where they live.
- JCPS is striving to provide a system of excellent schools throughout the district so that parents will have greater choice and feel good no matter where their child is assigned.
- The current student assignment plan works to balance the preferences of parents with the goal of ensuring diversity and equitable educational opportunities across the district.

Would Resegregate Public Schools

- Housing patterns in Louisville Metro are such that BR 111 would, to a significant degree, resegregate JCPS public schools by race and socioeconomic status.
- JCPS has conducted an analysis of the distribution of elementary school students by race and income if students were assigned to the school closest to their homes. For the 89 elementary schools in the district, the analysis found that:
 - While the district-wide elementary student population is 34 percent African-American:
 - 10 schools would be 90 percent or more African-American.
 - 17 schools would be 90 percent or more White/Other.
 - While the district-wide elementary student population has 60 percent of students eligible for free or reduced-price lunch (F/R):
 - 29 schools would be 80 percent F/R or greater.
 - 11 schools would be 30 percent F/R or less.
- The severe concentration of students by race and socioeconomic status would create a host of new challenges for many schools.
- The decimation of the magnet school structure would reduce educational opportunity for all students, particularly minority and low-income students.
- The educational and social experiences of all students would be diminished if schools were allowed to become resegregated, having a profound impact on the future of our city.

New District Boundaries Would Prohibit Many from Their Current Resides School

- The bill would eliminate every existing school boundary in Jefferson County.
- With an entirely new set of boundaries, many families would not be in the attendance area for their current resides school, because other students live closer to the school, or they live closer to a different school.
- Students entering the school system who are siblings of current students at a school other than the school closest to their home would not be given priority over other students who live closer to the school.

Complicated Student Assignment Plan Would Create Massive Disruption

- BR 111 would create an even more complicated student assignment plan than the current one, adding confusion and additional transportation costs.
- JCPS conducted an analysis of the impact on student capacity of elementary schools if students were assigned to the school closest to their home. The analysis found that:
 - 30,500 of the 45,747 elementary school students in the district currently attend a school other than the school closest to their home. Each of those 30,500 students would be given priority to attend the school closest to their home, except that students would be allowed to continue attending their current school if they chose.
 - 32 of 89 schools would be over capacity by a total of 5,494 students if all students were assigned to the school closest to their home. Ten schools would be more than 200 students over capacity.
- If all students were assigned to the school nearest to their home, many schools would exceed their capacity. This would require a significant number of students to be offered attendance at the school next closest to their homes, if space were available. If those next closest schools were also at capacity, students would be offered the subsequent next closest school. This would result in a confusing, complicated “musical chairs” scenario with students being bumped from school to school until all slots are filled.
- The current student assignment plan allows a student attending a school based on the previous student assignment plan to continue attending that school. The proposed legislation would add complexity by requiring a second layer of “grandfathered” student assignments based on the current plan. This would require additional buses, additional transportation costs, and potentially, extended travel times for some students.
- The combination of all of these factors would create a complicated, confusing, expensive, and disruptive plan for the district and its families.

Would Eliminate Local Control Over Student Assignment

- Student assignment has always been the responsibility of local school districts, and should remain so.
- Each district is different, and each is confronted with a unique set of issues and challenges. Local decision makers have the clearest understanding of how to effectively and efficiently meet the educational needs of students in their districts.
- A “one size fits all” mandate dictated from Frankfort will never meet the needs of individual counties and their citizens.