

# Superintendent Annual Evaluation

Dr. Donna Hargens

June 28, 2016

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Jefferson County Board of Education

## Preface

The Jefferson County Board of Education conducted its annual evaluation of the Superintendent of the Jefferson County Public Schools on June 14, June 17 and June 28, 2016. The evaluation was based on four Performance Objectives for the 2015-2016 school year, defined in the Superintendent's annual evaluation document dated June 22, 2015:

- Performance Objective 1: Instructional Leadership and Strategic Leadership: Continue to improve student learning according to state outcomes measures and broader measures that JCPS defines.
- Performance Objective 2: Cultural Leadership: Develop an internal culture that is structured around high-performing teams, values collaboration, and fosters an atmosphere of trust.
- Performance Objective 3: Managerial Leadership: Promote and expand the capacity of all JCPS levels toward a standard of excellence in execution.
- Performance Objective 4: Human Resources Leadership: Effectively develop and implement a means of improved focus on leadership selection criteria, leadership development, professional development, and effective support of teachers' professional practice.

The Superintendent presented her review of 2014-15 to the Board on June 14, 2016, having previously posted her portfolio of evidence at <https://webapps.jefferson.kyschools.us/SuperintendentLeadershipPlan/>.

### **Evaluation Narrative 2015-2016 Performance Objectives**

**Performance Objective 1: Instructional Leadership and Strategic Leadership: Continue to improve student learning according to state outcomes measures and broader measures that JCPS defines.**

*What we wanted to see:* A year ago the Board and Dr. Hargens agreed that a narrow focus on academic achievement as measured by test scores was inadequate to achieve the District's vision. The board called on Dr. Hargens not only to continue to deliver improvement on state test measures but also to identify strategies and measures of broader learning.

*What we observed:* With respect to defining strategy, the Board commends Dr. Hargens on leading the thoroughly collaborative process that produced Vision 2020: Excellence With Equity. This strategic plan charts the course toward

developing and implementing the broader strategies and measures the Board called for a year ago.

With respect to delivering on continued progress on standardized tests while beginning to implement “measures of broader learning,” the District’s performance was mixed. Certainly, wonderful examples of innovative teaching through collaboration among teachers, and of schools where project-based and experiential learning have engaged students and faculty alike while significantly raising academic outcomes, are known to all Board members. However:

- Academic performance as measured on standardized tests plateaued, including progress toward closing gaps among demographic groups;
- Although two schools exited priority status, an additional three new schools entered priority status;
- The promise and potential of Vision 2020 have not yet been shared with teachers and principals with the clarity required by a busy professional workforce.

*What we have concluded:* With respect to Strategic Leadership, the Board considers Dr. Hargens’ leadership of the strategic planning process--as well as the process itself and the outcome—as accomplished. However, Dr. Hargens’ leadership in implementing Vision 2020, and in particular the instructional elements, is developing. Regarding Instructional Leadership, growth is required in energizing JCPS educators to move beyond narrow test-defined education, training them on new expectations, and empowering them to engage and teach our students.

**Performance Objective 2: Cultural Leadership: Develop an internal culture that is structured around high-performing teams, values collaboration, and fosters an atmosphere of trust.**

*What we wanted to see:* In the context of calling for the changes in instruction and strategic direction described above, the Board last year expressed the view that “moving closer to the goal of all students thriving will require deep cultural change that results in confidence, teamwork, individual initiative and mutual trust among the District’s people.”

*What we observed:* The Board sees little or no progress toward this objective. In addition, Board members have observed, via constituent communication and survey data, an internal culture where collaboration and participation are not ingrained and the erosion of trust in District leadership is sapping morale.

*What we have concluded:* Regarding Dr. Hargens Cultural Leadership, growth is required if the transformation envisioned in Vision 2020 is to occur. The Board wholeheartedly agrees with Dr. Hargens' self-assessment that she must give the work back to the people who do it as she builds the internal JCPS community and gains trust through a more disciplined attention to issues and a discontinuation of surprises that erode confidence. The Board recalls the constructive concepts discussed in its June 14 work session on Labor-Management Collaboration: The central tenets of Vision 2020 are responsive to calls heard loud and clear from our teachers, but without building trust and understanding among educators on the one hand and Board and District leadership on the other, Vision 2020 will come to naught.

**Performance Objective 3: Managerial Leadership: Promote and expand the capacity of all JCPS levels toward a standard of excellence in execution.**

*What we wanted to see:* Recognizing that “strategies cannot succeed without . . . proper execution,” the Board last year called for Dr. Hargens “to put into place methodologies that insure that strategic initiatives find their tactical realization” through sound management processes.

*What we observed:* Dr. Hargens took important steps over the past year to expand JCPS' execution capacity:

- Creation of the Chief Business Officer (CBO) function;
- Creation of the Director of Priority Schools position;
- Initiation of zero-based budgeting;
- Building a communications team with contemporary capacity;
- Commissioning the first-ever inventory of facilities and identifying long-term needs; and
- Starting to use the powerful capacity of the reorganized internal audit function.

But these steps have not yet resulted in adequate execution. Last year's hope that JCPS would develop “a rhythmic cadence of successfully fulfilled processes among JCPS management team members” is unfulfilled. Examples include:

- Inadequate planning and execution of human resources portions of the alternative schools reorganization;
- Ineffective communication of District learnings from the salary study and plans to use these important insights;
- Ineffective response to and timely communication of the state's misleading characterization of school districts' (including JCPS') relative performance in prior years; and

- Student behavior oversight that lacked clear accountability, failed to identify or respond to negative and/or inaccurate data trends, and undermined confidence in the safety of our schools.

*What we have concluded.* The steps Dr. Hargens has taken to expand JCPS' execution capacity are examples of an accomplished, experienced leader defining systemic needs and organizing to meet them. However, overall Dr. Hargens' Management Leadership in response to the District's execution weakness is developing—with growth required in the speed and effectiveness with which she builds consensus, resolves conflicts and clarifies accountability among her team; delegates responsibility with effectiveness; assures an effective system of district wide communication; ensures the accuracy and reporting of data; and collaboratively develops and implements classroom behavioral expectations.

**Performance Objective 4: Human Resources Leadership: Effectively develop and implement a means of improved focus on leadership selection criteria, leadership development, professional development, and effective support of teachers' professional practice.**

*What we wanted to see:* Last year the Board focused Dr. Hargens' attention on the centralized, structural ways in which “the District's human resource management practices and capabilities lag those of effective contemporary organizations of similar size.”

*What we observed:* At the centralized, structural level Dr. Hargens has demonstrated an accomplished understanding of the needs of large instructional organizations. Examples include:

- Addition of a CBO with the ability to restructure HR systems, who quickly filled the HR leadership position;
- Successful implementation of software that automates and allows focused management of the teacher hiring process;
- Successful collaboration with JCTA and the state legislature on legislation that will allow future improvements in principal appointments; and
- Completion of the first comprehensive salary study since 1979, which identifies opportunities for moving substantial funding to activities that affect students more directly.

*What we have concluded:* Some important strides have been made. However, the Board has so far not seen data showing that teachers and principals are being hired or appointed in a more timely fashion or that JCPS is succeeding in hiring more minority teachers. Nor have new structures and supports for leadership

development been unveiled. We therefore conclude that work on this objective is incomplete but progressing and her Human Resource Leadership is developing.

## 2016-17 Performance Objectives

The first several years of Dr. Hargens' leadership tenure were generally guided by the roadmap laid out in the Curriculum Management Audit of early 2012. She focused on driving improvement in academic achievement as measured by Kentucky standardized tests, and the District made steady progress.

In early 2015, however, it became clear to Dr. Hargens and the Board that the District was neither reaching all students nor closing gaps among demographic groups using that pedagogy and those structures. In Vision 2020, The Board and Dr. Hargens defined a new and extremely ambitious path that requires fundamental change in how JCPS supports its teachers and students. The adaptive challenge laid out by Vision 2020 is very hard. It's hard to conceive, it's hard to explain, it's hard to do, and it calls for giving up ways that confer comfort and authority. No large school district in America has yet done this.

New goals call for new ways of leading. Dr. Hargens' self-assessment focused on her need to adapt her leadership to enable JCPS' principals and teachers to understand, believe in, and create the reality called for in Vision 2020. The Board agrees with this assessment and calls on Dr. Hargens to achieve the following objectives.

**Performance Objective 1: Bring people with you.** In the words of the state's Superintendent Professional Growth and Evaluation System (SPGES), Dr. Hargens has "create[d] conditions that result in strategically reimagining the district's vision, mission and goals to ensure that every student . . . is prepared for life in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century."<sup>1</sup> But she has not yet "[m]odel[ed] and reinforce[d] the culture and vision . . . by having open discussions with teachers, school executives . . . and other stakeholders."<sup>2</sup> In her own words Dr. Hargens must "describe what Vision 2020 looks like and sounds like" and "inspire with the WHY behind every decision." Dr. Hargens understands (and the Board agrees) that she must adapt her *Strategic, Instructional and Cultural Leadership* to bring the great talent and deep caring of JCPS to bear, intensely and collaboratively, on needed change.

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<sup>1</sup> SPGES, Standard 1 (Strategic Leadership)

<sup>2</sup>SPGES, Standard 1(A) (Vision-Relationships)

**Performance Objective 2: Earn trust and instill confidence.** The Board and Dr. Hargens agree that surprises erode confidence and trust. Confusing and inaccurate data may be a rite of passage in old organizations as they move into the world of big, instantly accessible data – but they have different resonance when safety and stability of children are at issue. Dr. Hargens must articulate clear expectations around student behavior and its consequences as well as classroom environments that promote positive behavior that educators can apply with confidence under accountable District oversight. Similar clarity is needed in defining and explaining how restructuring non-teacher compensation and deploying resources in new ways will support student needs and teachers’ passion for helping learners grow. To take these and other confidence-building steps Dr. Hargens must grow in *Collaborative Leadership*, designing “structures and processes that result in broad community engagement with support for and ownership of the district vision.”<sup>3</sup>

**Performance Objective 3: Make JCPS systems work.** JCPS has not achieved a standard of predictable excellence in execution. From the incomplete creation of a modern human resources organization, to the betwixt and between implementation of a philosophy and operating system around student behavior, to the yet-to-be-detailed improvements in customer service and expansions of student supports, JCPS effectiveness is constrained by ineffectual organization and systems. Dr. Hargens and her team have identified these issues and even identified potential funding to speed improvement. The Board calls for growth in *Managerial and Human Resources Leadership* to clarify roles, break down silos and manage conflict to improve core operating systems.

**Performance Objective 4: Use your time differently.** In prior years Dr. Hargens showed effective, even exemplary, *Influential and Collaborative Leadership* by building strong relationships outside of JCPS that continue to serve the District well. Her challenge now is to demonstrate such leadership *internally* as she works for change. The Board and Dr. Hargens agree that change is very hard; that demands for change are often heard as threats of loss; and that gaps in understanding and trust can destroy the best-laid, best-financed plans. To meet this challenge, the Board calls on Dr. Hargens to change how she spends her time (and if necessary to restructure her team) so she can focus on the big picture and address the future and the talented JCPS people who will build it – in her own words she must “get on the balcony.”

## Summary

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<sup>3</sup> SPGES, Standard 6 (Collaborative Leadership)

In 2015-16 the board witnessed important accomplishments that leave it confident JCPS is pointed in the right direction. But there have been obvious mistakes and omissions showing that the District still has a long way to go. Dr. Hargens and the Board agree that she must step up to the challenge of leading this stage of JCPS' development in new ways, both professionally and personally. The Board will look for Dr. Hargens to demonstrate this capacity, will expect nothing less of her, and will support her in her efforts to make the District's vision a reality.