

# SCALA's lack of diversity worries education, civic leaders

The co-founder of a group of prominent local power brokers has released the members' names, one day after an [Insider Louisville article](#) in which the group was criticized by public school officials for holding private meetings with state leaders on matters of public interest.

David Jones Sr. provided a list (see below) of members of the Steering Committee for Action on Louisville's Agenda (SCALA) to the [Courier Journal](#), days after declining to provide a list to Insider, saying that it "wouldn't keep (him) awake at night" if the organization were called secret.

The group's 69 members have, for seven months, discussed at invitation-only meetings issues including public safety, air service and the state's potential takeover of Jefferson County Public Schools.



David Jones Sr. | Courtesy of UofL

SCALA includes CEOs of some of the largest and most well-known Louisville companies, including Humana's Bruce Broussard, Kindred Healthcare's Ben Breier, Brown-Forman's Paul Varga and Papa John's former CEO John Schnatter. But it also includes leaders of startups, including Jim Lancaster, of Lantech; and Sean O'Leary, of Edj Analytics.

The group's members represent industries including health care, finance,

food, real estate, religion, law, logistics and interior design.

Education, too, has significant representation, with Susan Donovan, president of Bellarmine University; Tori Murden McClure, president of Spalding University; Al Sullivan, chancellor of Sullivan University; Kevin Cosby, president of Simmons College; Rich Lechleiter, president of the Catholic Education Foundation; and Jim Patterson, the president and founding member of private school advocacy group School Choice Kentucky.

Notably absent are Jefferson Community and Technical College President Ty Handy, UofL Interim President Greg Postel and JCPS Acting Superintendent Marty Pollio. Jones Sr. had told Insider that Pollio was not invited because he is merely the interim head of an organization, which makes him ineligible — though, according to a review of the member list, SCALA includes people who do not hold their organization's top leadership spot.

SCALA leaders told Insider that they quickly identified education as one of their keystone topics, with Jones Sr. calling JCPS a “miserable failure.” His son, David Jones Jr., who heads the group's subcommittee on education, said the district's testing outcomes had improved little in the last 25 years and that JCPS brings less than half its students to proficiency.

Jones Jr., a venture capitalist who chaired the JCPS school board until he was defeated in the November 2016 election, said SCALA members are concerned about education especially from a workforce perspective.

He had told Insider that Pollio was not invited to join SCALA because the obstacles that keep the district from improving can be eliminated only at the state level.

Jones Jr. and unnamed SCALA members have discussed



education issues separately with Gov. Matt Bevin and Education Commissioner Stephen Pruitt, who is expected to soon recommend that the state initiate a “[hands-on intervention](#)” of JCPS because of significant management failures. The intervention could include the appointment of a state manager whose authority would supersede that of the elected school board.

David Jones Jr.

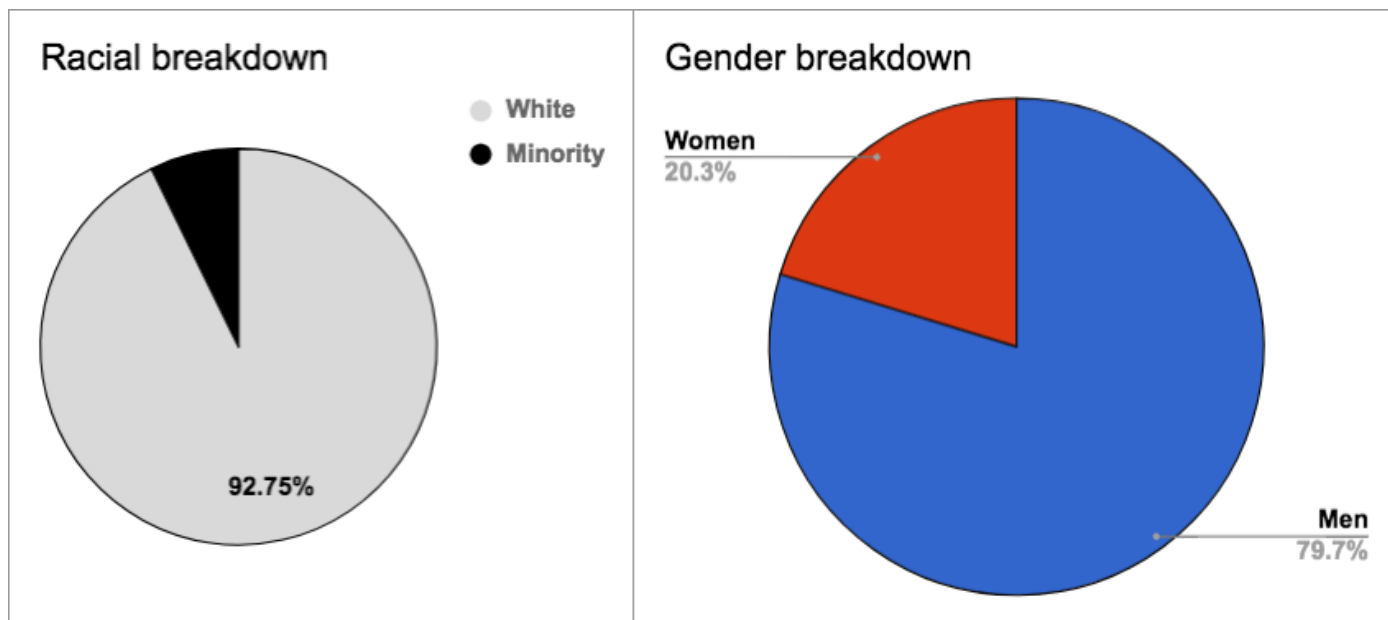
The severity of problems within JCPS that the state uncovered spurred Pruitt in September to take the rare step of demanding that the district take [immediate actions](#) to correct violations of state and federal laws, including some that protect the health, safety and education opportunities of students with disabilities.

Jones Jr. has said that SCALA will not take an official position on a state takeover, but he said the community should keep an open mind. Personally, he said, he believes some state intervention could benefit the local district.

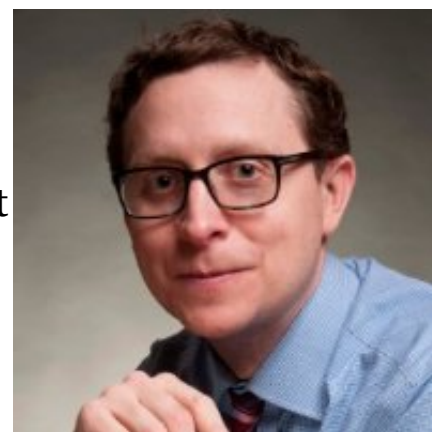
“The root causes of the difficulty in JCPS changing itself, modernizing itself, restructuring its spending or any other things, lie in state law and regulation,” he said. “Unless and until the state changes some of that stuff, we’re just going to keep spinning our wheels locally.”

### **Here’s a look at the group**

The group’s diverse representation of business sectors, nonprofits and organizations stands in stark contrast to its racial and gender composition: Of the 69 members, 80 percent are men, and 93 percent are white. SCALA includes five of the 10 UofL board of trustees members — though none of the three African-Americans. All 10 were appointed by Bevin.



Chris Kolb, the District 2 representative on the JCPS board who defeated Jones Jr. in 2016, said SCALA's demographics and stated goals, which include more nonstop flights to the coasts, reinforce the notion that the group represents a "paternalistic, wealthy, white male view on things."



Chris Kolb

He said the group's motivation for improving schools provides further evidence for that notion. Jones Jr.

had said that SCALA members were especially concerned about their inability to hire people and their businesses' long-term viability in a region with low educational attainment.

"That fact," Kolb said, "also, I think, shows that they're coming at education from a certain angle."

While preparing students for work after school is an important piece of education, he said, "education is about much more than that."

Kolb said the lack of racial, gender and income diversity among the members

of SCALA is problematic especially in a school district as diverse as JCPS, where more than half of the district's 100,000 students are minorities, including 37 percent African-Americans.

"It does render problematic their ability to understand the different perspectives of students in the district," Kolb said.

His school board colleague Chris Brady, who represents District 7, agreed.

About three-quarters of the district's employees are women, Brady said.

"Perhaps it would serve this committee to have more diversity on it," he told Insider.



Chris Brady

He, too, said he wondered whether the SCALA members' position of privilege would undermine their ability to understand some of the root causes of poor student performance.

"Through the [Louisville Promise](#) Initiative, JCPS, along with the mayor and many community organizations, is working to address issues such as poverty and inadequate mental health supports, which are the root cause of poor academic performance for many students. If we are to overcome these endemic issues affecting our students every day, then it'll take all of us working together to do so," he said.

"Groups with agendas such as (SCALA) jeopardize the important work we all must to do improve outcomes for our students," Brady said.

Louisville Metro Councilwoman Jessica Green, who is African-American, said that while she thinks it is appropriate for any citizen to take an interest in matters that concern the community, she was "disappointed" that SCALA did

not include members of JCPS, any teachers and more minorities.

Green said the organization's composition reinforces the view that a group of wealthy elites "is trying to decide what is best for the have-nots."

"All people should have a seat at the table," she said. "You can't forget the people who are most affected."



Jessica Green

[SCALA members](#) by [insiderlouisville](#) on Scribd

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