

## **Report from the Strategy Work Group to the JCPS Board of Education**

### **Establishment and Purpose of the Strategy Work Group**

At the request of Board Chair David Jones, Jr., board members Linda Duncan and Lisa Willner agreed to establish and serve on the Policy and Pedagogy Work Group (name subsequently changed to the Strategy Work Group), with a charge of *identifying the most effective levers for improving teaching and learning and increasing achievement for all students.*

### **Members of the Work Group**

Dr. Lisa Willner (Board Member; Work Group Chair)  
Mrs. Linda Duncan (Board Member)  
Mr. Raymond Burse (President, Kentucky State University)  
Dr. Donna Hargens (Superintendent)  
Mr. Jonathan Lowe (Chief of Strategy, JCPS)  
Mr. Brent McKim (President, JCTA)  
Dr. Scott Williamson (Professor, Louisville Presbyterian Theological Seminary)  
Ex Officio:  
Mr. David Jones, Jr. (board chair)  
Ms. Diane Porter (board vice chair)

### **Process and Stages of Work**

The group's work was guided by an ethos of transparency and inclusiveness. All work group meeting times and locations were published and open to the public. All who attended were given a seat at the table and invited to participate fully. In its initial meetings, the group agreed to a 3-stage process: 1) Gather community input, 2) Consult with national experts, and 3) Synthesize inputs and develop recommendations for presentation to the JCPS Board of Education.

**Stage One: Gather community input.** Supported by District staff, we convened 10 community stakeholder sessions. Four were in English at JCPS facilities across the district; two were in Spanish at La Casita Center; student forums were held in three different high schools; there was one online community forum. The student forums were conducted by District staff; all other stakeholder sessions were externally facilitated.

We asked community stakeholders: *what do we want our students to know and what do we want them to be able to do?* Consistently,\* community members told us that we want our students to have academic skills and knowledge, and be prepared for success in college or career. Beyond this, there is a greater community vision for our students: for them to feel a sense of belonging and hope for the future, demonstrate resilience and other character strengths, and be prepared to realize their potential and contribute meaningfully to our world.

**Stage Two: Consultation with national experts.** Collectively, the group consulted with Dr. Terry Holliday, Dr. Gene Wilhoit, and Dr. Jon Saphier. Without exception, our expert consultants expressed appreciation for our process and applauded our community for the loftiness of its goals for all Jefferson County children. Better yet, our experts affirmed that *higher level skills, capacities and dispositions beyond content knowledge can be taught and assessed.* Further, there is a general expectation that *this will result in improved and more equitable outcomes for all students.*

## JCPS Board of Education Strategy Work Group Report 8/18/2015

It is, therefore, the Strategy Working Group's Theory of Action that if we equitably teach, develop, and assess capacities, life skills, and dispositions in addition to content knowledge, we expect that more students will achieve at high levels, achievement gaps will narrow while all student groups progress, and student behavior and engagement in learning will improve.

This will not be easy work. Success will require a strong commitment to shared accountability at all levels of the organization – board, administration, school staff, families – and broad collaboration with the community including state and local government, the business community, and all stakeholders.

**Stage Three: Synthesizing Inputs and Developing Recommendations.** Grounded in our community's vision of success for all students, expert consultation, and our theory of action, the Strategy Work Group offers three recommendations.

### Recommendations

**1) Amend the JCPS vision statement** to include inspiring and aspirational language reflecting our community's hopes and vision for all children. Sample language: students graduate "prepared to make meaningful contributions to our world"; "empowered to become thoughtful, creative, caring human beings"; "prepared to thrive in a democratic society and diverse, changing world"; "expanded horizons." **Expand the JCPS mission** beyond "providing instruction." Sample language: "actively engage students in meaningful learning." Both vision and mission should reflect the District's commitment to diversity, equity, and inclusiveness.

**2) Develop, and guide our schools to implement, a broader definition of student learning, achievement and college/career/life readiness** that includes capacities, skills (e.g. critical thinking, collaboration) and dispositions (e.g. resilience, creativity) in addition to content knowledge and standardized test scores. Capacities, skills, and dispositions are not secondary to content mastery; they are equally important and complementary.

This will require adding new assessments, pruning away redundant standardized tests that waste time and other resources, and using the state accountability tests for their intended purpose and no other.

### Considerations:

- District staff shall recommend a plan for more holistic student assessment practices grounded in the best available research and national best practices. (NOTE: In-state resources are available; see University of Kentucky National Center for Innovation in Education.)
- District staff shall request a waiver from the KY Department of Education to allow for more local and authentic assessment (up to 50% of state accountability) to include, for example, performance-based assessment demonstrating mastery of specifically identified skills and dispositions. In this context:
  - State accountability testing shall remain an integral part of JCPS' evaluation of school performance and, where relevant within professional growth system frameworks (e.g. JCPS Educator Growth System, PPGES, SPGES), shall continue to be used and improved;
  - District staff shall work collaboratively with teachers and administrators and, their professional associations, and other experts and stakeholders (e.g. Prichard Committee) to identify standardized tests that do not fit within the agreed-upon core of essential tests needed for quality control of schools and state

accountability, and eliminate these tests unless a persuasive student-specific, diagnostic, or learning goal is enunciated.

- Reduce achievement and learning gaps and support growth for all students by adding focus on and support for “opportunity measures” at the school level. These may include, but are not limited to: advanced and gifted/talented programs; Advanced Placement and International Baccalaureate courses; project-based learning; strategies for novice reduction; appropriate class size to allow for personalization; access to highly skilled teachers; access to engaging programs/magnets without prohibitive entry barriers; early childhood education programs; wraparound support; growth metrics reflecting successful “catch-up” strategies; suspension and behavioral referral reduction through social/emotional learning and positive engagement of all students; balanced curricula including arts, practical living, and service learning components; strong career and technical education programming.
- In developing and implementing recommendations, District staff shall work collaboratively with professional school staff and their representative organizations.

**3) Develop the capacity of our professional school staff** to teach and authentically assess capacities, skills, and dispositions in addition to content knowledge. A successful plan for professional capacity-building will be grounded in a growth mindset that energizes and empowers teachers and principals; will nurture positive educator beliefs about what *all* students are capable of accomplishing; and will support our professionals in responding to the reality that 21<sup>st</sup> century skills must go far beyond knowing and remembering specific content and following rote procedures.

Considerations:

- District staff shall use the JCPS Educator Growth System to develop personalized professional growth plans grounded in the best available research and national best practices.
- Professional growth plans shall include short- and long-term strategies for improving professional practice of teachers and principals.
- District staff shall provide opportunities for professional collaboration for teachers and principals (e.g. PLCs) that balance high expectations for student learning, growth, and development with opportunities for continuous improvement of professional practices.
- District staff shall use the JCPS Educator Growth System to create structures and provide regular and ongoing opportunities for collaboration and constructive, non-evaluative feedback to students, teachers, principals, and area superintendents, both within and between role groups.
- In developing and implementing recommendations, district staff shall work collaboratively with professional school staff and their representative organizations.

### **Additional Discussion: Systemic change, collaboration, and communication**

A shift to more holistic teaching, learning, and assessment to improve learning and equitable outcomes for all students will require a *coherent and systemic shift within all levels of the organization*. The Strategy Work Group’s recommendations are not about adding a program or “tweaking” programs already in place, but are a call for comprehensive change in district culture to emphasize more nuanced, equitable, and customized teaching, learning, and assessment. The shift includes moving from a deficit model of student achievement (“*What are our students unable to do?*”) to a strengths-based approach (*personalizing teaching and learning based on students’ interests and aptitudes to increase motivation and engagement*). The shift will also include an intentional focus on fostering a “growth-mindset” among both teachers and students:

## JCPS Board of Education Strategy Work Group Report 8/18/2015

the understanding that an individual's intellectual abilities are not fixed, but rather, can be improved through use and strengthened through effort and constructive struggle. This systemic shift should be grounded in the best available research and national best practices.

Because change is difficult and it is in the nature of systems to maintain themselves, the perspective, consultation, and guidance of external experts may be helpful in planning and/or implementing the changes recommended in this report. We therefore encourage District staff to enlist external expertise.

One of our expert consultants advised us: "There will be tension between getting this fast and getting it right." We urge the district to undertake this work with a sense of urgency as well as an understanding that the stakes are high for "getting it right." The latter will involve collaboration at all levels of the organization including professional school staff, and with community stakeholders, as well as a clearly articulated plan for internal and external communication about the purpose, planning, and progress of this important work.

\*\*\*\*\*

\*NOTE: Across stakeholder meetings, there was remarkable consistency of what participants said they want our students to know and to be able to do, with one notable exception. Participants in the Spanish language stakeholder sessions focused much less on outcome for students, raising concerns instead about the more basic question of *access* to schools, programs, and information. For this reason, the Strategy Work Group referred information from the Spanish language stakeholder sessions to the Technology and Performance Work Group in the hopes that customer service and access issues for non-English speaking families will be addressed by that group's recommendations to the Board.