

Board Report — Dr. Chris Kolb, District 2

Tuesday, February 7, 2017

I have received several communications from parents of children at Phoenix School of Discovery who are classified as having a moderate or severe disability (or, MSD). These parents are quite upset about changes coming to Phoenix that will require moving MSD children to a different school, and the fact that parents of MSD students have not been consulted or informed of these changes.

It seems that parents of other (non-MSD) children at Phoenix received a letter from Principal Ken Moeller informing them of the coming changes. However, it seems that parents of MSD children did not receive the letter, and were not informed that their children would not be able to return to Phoenix.

Based on what I believe to be credible information provided to me by a parent, it appears the decision to move MSD children from Phoenix was made in late September at the latest. However, parents of MSD children were never informed by anyone in JCPS that their children would not be allowed to return to Phoenix. It is unclear if the parents would have been informed at all before the end of the school year had they not pieced together this conclusion themselves.

Dr. Hargens has recently communicated to the Board that no child will be sent away from Phoenix and that no decision about the future of Phoenix has been made. However, this seems to be contradicted by Principal Moeller's letter which states that "Students with less than a 2.5 GPA, less than 90% attendance, or any out of school suspensions will be placed on probationary status." This seems intended to send some kids away, otherwise there would be no need for these guidelines.

Dr. Hargens also recently communicated to the Board that the ECE Department should have been involved in the process. However, I must ask why ECE was not involved from the very beginning. This was extremely poor judgment and reflects very poorly on the administration. Dr. Hargens also recently stated to the Board that "Apparently there were attempts to include [ECE]. It will now be insistence." I must also question why involving ECE was not an insistence from the beginning.

The desire to relocate MSD students seems to be partly a result of closing Myers Middle School a few years ago. However, why should ECE families be forced to relocate due to what appears to have been poor planning by the district for the consequences of closing Myers? It may well be the case, as Dr. Zeitz states in her letter, that "The ideal setting for your [MSD] children ... [is] a comprehensive (A1) school." However, if this is the case then why did JCPS decide not to place these ECE children in an A1 school to begin with.

There are several things about this situation that I find deeply concerning. Here is a partial list.

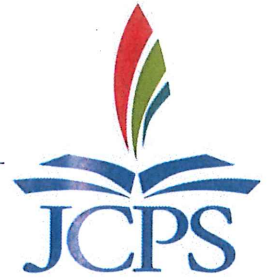
1. MSD parents have had no input into the assignment of their children for next year.
2. MSD parents were never proactively informed about the reassignment of their children and only found out through happenstance. Whether or not JCPS would have ever informed them before the end of the year is unclear.
3. This is now February 7 and JCPS apparently still has no plans for where these MSD children will attend school next year.

4. Some if not all parents of MSD kids at Phoenix chose the school because there would be no transition from middle to high school. They are now facing a much more traumatic transition.
5. A staff person at Phoenix appears to have provided inaccurate information to MSD parents and to me.
6. I believe this is profoundly poor planning on the part of JCPS, and we seem to have shown no understanding of the unique challenges of MSD kids and parents, causing us to make decisions that I feel are deeply inconsiderate at the very least.
7. As a Board Member who must represent the best interests of my constituents, I feel the lack of communication with me and other board members regarding these changes has been unacceptable.
8. The impending changes at Phoenix appear to require Board approval, yet the Board was not informed in the least and only found out through happenstance. This is unacceptable for many reasons, not the least of which is that it makes it impossible for Board Members to represent their constituents to the best of our ability.

This entire process reflects very poorly on the district and on you in particular, Dr. Hargens. I am deeply saddened for our MSD students and parents at Phoenix. I was not elected to represent a school district that treats some of our most vulnerable students with profound disrespect.

In my recent campaign, we knocked on over 13,000 doors, and I knocked on over 5,000 of them myself. The most frequent thing we heard from people is that they don't trust JCPS and that they don't think this administration is open, honest, and forthcoming with the public. It is precisely these types of instances that have created this impression in our community. JCPS is suffering a crisis of credibility that we all must work hard to address, not through PR but through making meaningful changes. Those meaningful changes must start now.

Jefferson County Public Schools
Administrative Offices – Area 5
Assistant Superintendent



VanHoose Education Center
3332 Newburg Rd.
Louisville, KY 40218
(502)-485-6266

February 3, 2017

Dear MSD students, families, and stakeholders,

My name is Katy Zeitz, I am the Assistant Superintendent supporting students, staff members, programs, classes, and units, located at your child's school. Not even eight months ago, I was serving students in Jefferson County as the proud principal at Waggener High School. I was fortunate to serve students, and classroom communities, very similar to your children's MSD classrooms. I assure you that your children's needs and safety are of the utmost importance to me and to the Jefferson County Public School (JCPS) District.

I would like to offer you background information to provide insight into why the programs, classes, and units at 3741 Pulliam Drive are being reviewed. Starting in spring 2014, Myers Middle School was identified for closure, leaving the existing MSD classrooms at Myers. The MSD classrooms would have been relocated to Waggener, but there was not enough space to accommodate the additional classrooms. The plan was for those students to finish their middle school years at the Myers building, and matriculate to high school in another facility.

Additional programs were identified to move to the building for the 2014-15 school year. ESL Newcomer Academy and The Phoenix School of Discovery, located in the southern region of the district, were relocated to classrooms at the former Myers building. Phoenix was a school that offered blended learning opportunities to students. Instruction was, and will be, self-directed with much time spent using e-learning platforms with the support of a classroom teacher.

Beginning in 2014, and continuing through the present, various other programs/units were added to the facility, beyond those discussed above. The building's enrollment varied in age from 4th grade to 12th grade, and supported the needs of a wide variety of approximately 7 different programs. These programs were not combined in their prior locations. Currently, the building is not meeting the needs of the collective programs and units at the facility. In addition, the original intent or purpose for some of the programs and/or units have been compromised as a result of space, learning conditions, safety, and more.

The MSD programs initially housed in the building were part of Myers Middle School, a comprehensive school for middle grades students. The ideal setting for your children did, and still should, provide the most access possible to same age peers and educational, social and recreational opportunities available at a comprehensive (A1) school.

The review and relocation of programs is never simple. Many students are being impacted by the current situation at The Phoenix site. Safety, what's best for students, how to meet student's needs, and the programmatic needs of our students, were all considered when reviewing the future locations of programs.

Currently, our Operations and Transportation staff are identifying potential comprehensive school locations for the MSD units, while also mapping bus routes for each of your children. We plan to have feedback from the district later this month. While waiting for those proposals, we would like to also hear from you regarding the potential moves. I've scheduled a meeting at The Phoenix for next Wednesday, February 8, 2017 at 5:30pm.

I understand you are anxious about your children. My daughter will be transitioning to middle school next year, and I do not know where she will be attending. I sympathize with those feelings as a parent advocate. However, please know, even if there are re-locations, it is our plan to keep the students together. We would offer their current teachers and assistants the opportunity to re-locate with them, keeping their classroom community intact. The needs of all children at

The Phoenix location are paramount in this process. We look forward to enhancing the learning environment for all students in school year 2017-18. Again, my name is Katy Zeitz and if you have additional questions or concerns, I may be reached at 485-6266.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Katy Zeitz', with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Dr. Katy Zeitz, Assistant Superintendent
Jefferson County Public Schools

The Phoenix School of Discovery

3741 Pulliam Drive
Louisville, KY 40218
(502) 485-7700



Dear Parents / Guardians:

Thank you for allowing The Phoenix School of Discovery staff an opportunity to work with your student(s) during the 2016-17 school year. I think you would agree that we have evolved into one of the most progressive and innovative schools in the district. Our goal is to constantly create unique strategies that reach and meet the needs of Jefferson County Public School students interested in a more self-directed, technology inspired classroom.

We will be returning to a blended learning focus in the 2017-18 school year. Students will see a much more extensive emphasis on using classroom technology and blending on-line courses with traditional instruction. In addition, we will no longer have elementary students at The Phoenix. We will return to a 6th through 12th grade school.

The Phoenix School of Discovery is an alternative choice for our middle and high school students. Enrollees for the 17-18 school year should be able to work in a self-directed environment. The Phoenix has always had its roots in technology, and we acknowledge that our renewed focus and commitment to blended learning might not be the desired instructional environment for some of our current students. We want to offer our Phoenix families an opportunity to learn about what our instructional program will look like, what the student experience and day will look like, and of course, meet staff at the school. On February 9th, 2017 at 6:30pm, an Open House will take place for currently enrolled students. It will be an opportunity to hear details about the new focus and the requirements for returning to The Phoenix.

Families interested in continuing for the 2017-18 school year at The Phoenix should recommit to the new program. Families will receive a U.S. mailed form from The Phoenix to complete and return. Students with less than a 2.5 GPA, less than 90% attendance, or any out of school suspensions will be placed on probationary status for the remainder of the 2016-17 school year. You should receive your 2017-18 Commitment mailer in mid-February which will include criterion for review of probationary students. Our goal is to match students' interests and needs with those that will thrive in this new technological, self-directed environment.

If you have questions, feel free to e-mail me (ken.moeller@jefferson.kyschools.us) or call at 485-7700.

Sincerely,

Ken Moeller
Principal, The Phoenix School of Discovery

www.jefferson.k12.ky.us

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