

PROPOSED OUTLINE
FOR
FINAL REPORT

Presented by: JCPS Magnet Steering Committee
Draft: February 21, 2017

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WHAT IS THE PURPOSE OF THIS REPORT?

This report summarizes the improvement opportunities identified by the Jefferson County Public Schools (JCPS) Magnet Steering Committee for the magnet system. The report satisfies the Committee’s ultimate objective, assigned to it by the Jefferson County Board of Education (JCBOE), to develop a long-term plan that “...clarify[ies] the purpose, mission, and goals of magnet programs throughout the district” in response to a recommendation from Magnet Schools of America (MSA).

Background on Magnet Steering Committee

In January 2014, JCPS engaged MSA to conduct a review of the JCPS magnet schools and programs and to offer recommendations for improvement¹. JCPS asked MSA to focus on three essential questions:

1. Are the magnet schools magnetic?
2. Are the magnet programs diverse?
3. Are the magnet programs promoting achievement?

While they focused their review around these three questions, the MSA also utilized their criteria and method for what constitutes a successful magnet school. These criteria embody what the MSA calls “the Five Pillars of Magnet Schools—essential attributes of successful magnet schools.” As a result, MSA expanded their review of JCPS Magnet Programs beyond the three questions to provide their views of what a magnet program should be. The outcome of the MSA review was a report with 25 recommendations (MSA, March 2014). (See Appendix A).

One of the recommendations (MSA Recommendation 3) specifically addressed how improvements to the existing system should be implemented and read as follows:

JCPS should create a community task force with various stakeholders to determine the purpose, goals, and types of magnet programs that will serve students in the county. The goals of the task force should be to develop a five-year strategic plan, monitor implementation, and serve in an advisory capacity upon its implementation.

Initially, instead of creating a community task force with outside stakeholders, the committee consisted entirely of JCPS employees. That group presented a preliminary plan to during a JCPS Board of Education work session on May 11, 2015. At the conclusion, the Board determined that additional community input would be helpful. In the months that followed, the current iteration of the Committee was formed, which included not only JCPS employees but also members of the community. Those members were chosen through a selection process in which the 15th District PTA, the Governor’s

¹ Magnet Schools of America (MSA) is a national nonprofit professional education association. It represents magnet schools, school district leaders, principals, teachers, parents and families, business partners, and institutions of higher education. The Executive Director and staff serve in the national office based in Washington, DC. MSA has developed its own definition of “magnet schools” and has developed its own set of criteria for what makes a success magnet program. It also offers, for a fee, an evaluation service that will review and evaluate a school district’s magnet system and offer recommendations for improvement.

Commonwealth Institute for Parent Leadership (GCIPL), and Louisville Urban League reviewed candidates. The candidate review panel group developed a slate of potential members from applications received through a public applications process.

The new Committee with community members met for the first time in October 2015. Initially, the Committee was comprised of a “Core Committee” of 12, plus an additional 12 participants to form a Full Committee of 24 members. Each group included half community members and half JCPS staff. Since its formation, the Committee has lost several members and has since consolidated into a single group. The Committee has met two times each month since its formation. It has also formed a number of subcommittees to evaluate specific issues and to hone in on particular recommendations or groups of recommendations from the MSA.

This group agreed to work as a committee under this model for a two-year period (September 2015 through September 2017). Although the Committee included many JCPS central office personnel responsible for facilitating, supporting, and managing magnet schools and programs, the Committee also included community members, principals, and teachers as well as student input.

The Committee reviewed all MSA recommendations and also considered the more expansive question of how magnet schools and programs within JCPS can operate as a **cohesive magnet system** to support greater diversity, improve student learning and achievement, and become more attractive and accessible (i.e. more magnetic) for all students. These were the same three target areas of the 2014 MSA review: (1) Are JCPS magnet schools diverse? (2) Are JCPS magnet schools promoting achievement? and (3) Are JCPS schools “magnetic” (attractive to students and families)? MSA also noted that JCPS has repeatedly received national recognition as a large urban school district for its efforts to achieve diversity, equity, and excellence through a system based on maximizing student and parent choice. The magnet system plays a crucial role-in meeting these objectives by providing students with unique learning opportunities that engage students’ interest and challenge them to reach their full potential. The Steering Committee’s tenure over the past 20 months has confirmed that there is much to be proud of when it comes to the magnet system, but that multiple opportunities exist for improvement and expansion.

Guiding Principles and Methods of the Magnet Steering Committee

For the most part, the Committee focused on a high level, global review of the MSA recommendations to improve magnets as a cohesive system within JCPS as opposed to proposing changes to individual schools. The Committee came to this approach after working together to describe a common Mission for magnets in JCPS.

This Mission statement for JCPS captures key elements and functions of all programs called *magnets* across the nation.

Provide specialized educational options that attract a diverse population of students to cohesive, theme-based learning environments that promote excellence in student learning.

– JCPS Magnet Steering Committee, 2015

This Mission statement describes the purpose of magnet programs in JCPS, and it has guided the Committee’s work. In particular, agreement on this statement helped clarify the need to focus on larger, systems issues in order to achieve this Mission, such as developing more consistent and transparent practices across magnet programs aligned with the district’s strategic vision.

The Committee adopted a guiding framework to define how they would move forward starting with systems-level work (What are we trying to do?), strategies for addressing these priorities (How are we trying to do it?), and processes and data for ensuring strategies are implemented and priorities met (How will we know it's working?). For example, the Committee proposed common magnet program standards for schools to work toward to demonstrate *magnetism* as well as suggested general criteria and practices for how and when to introduce, evaluate, and replicate programs. The Committee has examined larger issues affecting improved diversity including increased transparency and access. It has also looked at the potentially competing interests of equitable access and sustained excellence.

The Steering Committee has reviewed individual schools and programs as case studies to understand how issues and challenges play out at the school and district levels. However, the Committee has avoided proposing specific changes to specific schools because this is beyond the scope of their role; instead, the standards and processes proposed by the committee should allow district offices to move forward with decisions on individual schools.

Finally, the Committee developed its own Charter to solidify the Magnet Mission and Committee guiding framework. The Committee Charter describes their purpose, roles, scope of work, and processes for prioritizing work and receiving feedback from various groups. This document served to anchor the Committee to ensure work aligns with priorities, and it clearly defines their purpose and methods for non-Committee members. Committee Charter attached at appendix ____.

In sum, the Magnet Steering Committee has tried to suggest change only where it saw such changes fitting in with the magnet system as it actually exists within JCPS. The Committee also has remained cognizant of the need to avoid suggesting change that could have a negative effect on the goals of supporting diversity and excellence.

HOW DO MAGNET SCHOOLS AND PROGRAMS FIT INTO JCPS?

In this section, we describe the history and mechanics of how the magnet system operates currently within JCPS, the successes and challenges of using this educational model in JCPS historically, and how magnets support and align with Vision 2020.

Definition, Description and History

A *magnet* program is an educational environment intended to attract students to the school by offering specialized, theme-based learning options. (e.g., U.S. Department of Education, 2009, 2016; Magnet Schools of America, 2016). These programs "...are typically more 'hands on – minds on' and use an approach to learning that is inquiry or performance/project based" (Magnet Schools of America, 2016).

Current State

Successes

Challenges

Alignment with Vision 2020

While Vision 2020 does not identify magnets explicitly, district strategic priorities implicitly point to the important role of magnet schools to meet student interests and needs. Magnets serve as clear models for achieving many district priorities, such as deeper learning experiences for students and educators as well as access to choice for families through best practices. These are exactly the purposes of *magnets* –

choice, diversity, and best practice. Magnets offer families theme-based choices in learning environments with deeper, personalized learning embedded as a key practice. The new JCPS Magnet Program Standards developed by the Steering Committee highlight best practices that all magnets should strive to provide their students.

Conversely, magnets should benefit directly from other Vision 2020 priorities, such as improved infrastructure. Magnets often require resources above and beyond those needed to achieve missions of comprehensive schools, such as additional visual arts equipment and media, music facilities or instruments, or technology labs to support their theme appropriately. These resources are the lens through which learning occurs across the curriculum in magnet programs. As such, magnets should receive appropriate infrastructure (equipment, instructional support, and people) to implement their target learning environments for attracting students.

WHAT IMPROVEMENTS DOES THE MAGNET STEERING COMMITTEE PROPOSE?

This section presents Committee proposals for improvements to the JCPS magnet system in two ways. First, we present each of the 25 MSA recommendations with the Committee's proposals to the district for whether and how to implement them. Second, we expand on several key system-wide improvements that would move the JCPS magnet system to greater equity, transparency, and coherence.

Response to MSA Recommendations

Key System Improvements

Committee members agreed that many MSA recommendations could be addressed collectively by making several systems changes that will increase coherence. As such, the Committee proposes that the district focus on the following areas as key changes needed to ensure JCPS magnets are indeed magnetic and equitable.

Magnet Program Standards, Criteria, and Processes

Enhanced District Coordination and Support

Financial Resource Allocation

HOW AND WHEN SHOULD IMPROVEMENTS BE IMPLEMENTED?

District Work

Goals for Magnets: 2-, 5-, and 10-years

HOW WILL WE KNOW IMPROVEMENTS ARE SUCCESSFUL?

Expected Outcomes

Suggested Method for Monitoring Progress

REFERENCES

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