

# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

## FINAL REPORT OF THE MAGNET STEERING COMMITTEE

Presented by: JCPS Magnet Steering Committee  
In Preparation for: Board Work Session (June 27, 2017)  
DRAFT: June 21, 2017

# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

## Overview and Conclusions

### *Who is the intended audience?*

This report from the JCPS Magnet Steering Committee was requested by the Jefferson County Board of Education (JCBOE). The proposals for improvement are directed to district leadership including the Board, Superintendent, Cabinet, and district central office staff. All of these groups are responsible for reviewing these proposals and implementing the work needed to meet the Magnet Mission and district goals for diversity, equitable access, and successful students. We also hope that this report can provide a resource for school based personnel and parents and will help educate the larger community regarding the operation of the magnet system within JCPS and the areas in need of improvement.

### *What prompted the report?*

In 2014, the district invited an external review of JCPS magnet schools and programs to determine whether they are attractive, diverse, and promote achievement. The Magnet Steering Committee studied the 2014 external review conducted by Magnet Schools of America (MSA) to determine whether, and how, the MSA's recommendations should be implemented.

### *What did the Magnet Steering Committee find?*

The Magnet Steering Committee found that district offers a number of high-quality, magnetic programs valued by families in the community. The district has a long-standing history of successfully promoting diversity and equity – a key tenant of magnet programs nationally – through engaging theme-based choices for families. These also are key strategic priorities of the district currently in Vision 2020. Research indicates that attending an integrated school contributes to improved academic and life outcomes for students (Ayscue, Levy, Siegel-Hawley, & Woodward, 2017; Coleman, 2005; U.S. Department of Education, 2009).

The Committee also identified significant areas for improvement. Many of the MSA recommendations collectively point to systems issues that can be resolved through greater district coordination and support to JCPS magnets. In response, the Committee proposes changes that better promote district goals and safeguard the Magnet Mission of promoting diversity, equitable access, student achievement, and cohesive learning environments that are truly magnetic.

### *How should change occur?*

As a result of this review, the Magnet Steering Committee proposes a series of actions around three key system improvements beginning in 2017-18: (1) develop intentional financial support mechanisms for magnets, (2) establish a cross-departmental team focused on enhancing and monitoring district coordination and support to magnets, and (3) work with schools to implement the Magnet Program Standards and self-assessment processes. The Steering Committee concluded from its fiscal analysis that the district provides inconsistent financial support to magnets currently to sustain their specialized programs, and that district support is lower relative to other benchmark districts with magnets. The cross-departmental team is needed to ensure that magnets work together as part of a coherent school system rather than a set of individual schools and programs. Implementation of the Magnet Program Standards and common processes should improve magnetism, achievement, and quality and lead to greater access and transparency for families.

## Detailed Summary

### *Background*

In May 2015, the Board directed the district to form a steering committee that included community representatives. The Magnet Steering Committee began in October 2015 with district staff, principals, teachers, parents, and students. Non-JCPS committee members made applications to participate, and an

external group of reviewers vetted these applications with the goal of forming a committee representative of Jcps schools and the community.

The bulk of the Committee's work focused on the 26 overarching MSA recommendations, although individual school recommendations from MSA also informed Committee proposals. The Committee started by addressing the MSA's recommendation to "...clarify the purpose, mission, and goals of magnet programs throughout the district". In response, the Steering Committee developed a mission statement for Jcps magnets and a charter outlining the Committee's purpose and focus relative to this mission. The Jcps Magnet Mission captures key elements and functions of all magnets:

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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

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### *Proposed Improvements*

The Steering Committee reviewed district data in multiple areas, requested feedback from community members and district stakeholders on key issues, and investigated methods used by other districts with magnets in order to propose responses to the MSA recommendations. The Committee quickly recognized interconnections between clusters of recommendations; thus, they proposed a set of key system improvement areas to support individual MSA recommendation. The areas of focus for key system improvement areas and corresponding MSA recommendations include <sup>1</sup> :

- ✓ Financial resource allocation (MSA recs 5, 6, 7, 14, 15, 16, 17, 18, 20, 21, 22)  
Starting in 2018-19, Jcps should fund the Magnet Office with a minimum of three district specialists and allocate \$500,000 to properly support regular professional development with these specialists.
- ✓ Enhanced district coordination and support (MSA recs 2, 5, 6, 7, 13, 14, 15, 16, 17, 18, 20, 21)  
These MSA recommendations highlight the need for greater district **professional support** to magnet staff (e.g., PD training, theme integration) and **coordination between various central offices** (not just Magnet Office) to support unique magnet challenges and to clarify the choice system (magnets, optional, 5-Star, Talent Development Academies). Develop a cross-departmental magnet team to review current funding allocations and possible mirror, whole school, and new magnets. A shared understanding of why Jcps offers so many choices and access points would be an enormous benefit to families and the Jcps community.
- ✓ Magnet Program Standards, criteria, and processes (MSA recs 2, 5, 6, 9, 11, 19, 20, 23, 25, 26)  
Establish common district processes and criteria for developing, evaluating, and supporting magnet programs. The Magnet Program Standards, adapted from Magnet Schools of America Standards of Excellence, represent "best practices". These Standards and corresponding processes and criteria developed by the Steering Committee will improve student access and equity and program quality.

Changes in these areas should directly lead to improved access for students, increased emphasis on diversity as a core purpose of magnets, and better theme integration and quality.

### *Monitoring Success*

A cross-departmental district team should hold primary responsibility for implementing and monitoring proposed key system changes as well as Committee proposals for individual MSA recommendations. This approach will ensure key leaders are "at the table" and working together to meet the needs of magnet families and schools while not adversely impacting the rest of the Jcps system. Again, the objective is to complement and support district goals.

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<sup>1</sup> See Magnet Schools of America Report (2014) or full Final Report of the Magnet Steering Committee for descriptions of each MSA recommendation.

## References

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