

Board Report

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My board report is a reflection and statement on the important role of publicly elected local school boards in general, the recent accomplishments of the Jefferson County Board of Education in particular, and the vital role of public voice in the governance of our public schools.

Some in our community have privately and publicly made the case that stripping the locally elected school board of its authority through “state takeover” of the Jefferson County Public Schools should be welcomed as an opportunity for progress. Yet scholarly research and real-life examples from other communities lead to a very different conclusion. Public school governance by locally elected school boards has been clearly demonstrated as an essential and necessary ingredient of school improvement. Conversely, “school takeover” that involves stripping away the authority of democratically elected school boards has been an essential part of the public school privatization agenda that has failed communities, cities, and entire states across our country.

The lesson to be learned from privatization of public school systems in other communities is that “state takeover” that strips the local board of its governance role would be a disaster for our students and our community.

In *Vanishing School Boards*, author and scholar Patrick Rice makes the case: “Local school boards provide the link to the community so that local constituents’ voices are heard and board members are held accountable through the election process” (p.92). The link between community voice and our own local school board can be clearly demonstrated.

I was elected to the Jefferson County school board as an agent of change in 2014. I am proud and honored to serve, and as an elected board we have much to be proud of. Together, your elected school board has successfully navigated a leadership transition without a single day’s disruption to students, families, or staff.

We invited and included the community’s participation in our superintendent search process.

By listening first to the people we are elected to represent, we have developed a bold plan that focuses on educating the whole child, improving culture and climate for all shareholders, providing opportunities for deep, culturally relevant, and engaging learning opportunities for every student, and providing our teachers and school employees the resources they need to improve outcomes for every child. The board, again with broad public input, has selected its next leader to implement the community’s plan for our schools.

Still, all is not rosy. The current board and JCPS administration have looked unflinchingly at our district’s challenges. We have worked hand-in-hand with the Kentucky Department of Education and other educational partners to address problems and establish policies to face deficiencies head on. This board has made clear that it will not tolerate the withholding of data, or sweeping our problems and challenges under the rug. We recognize that there is still much work ahead. We eagerly await the results of the KDE State Management Audit so that we can get on with the work.

In sharp contrast with democratically governed school systems, a takeover by state officials that would trump the authority of local school board members would also take away the voice of the people of our local community. A community's public schools and locally elected boards to govern them are cornerstones of our American democracy. An attack on locally elected school boards is an attack on democracy itself.

It is intuitive that local voice is essential to the success of our community's children. That conclusion is also borne out by the best and most valid research, which demonstrates that local public governance is what works best to improve outcomes for students.

According to the Program for International Student Assessment (PISA), local governance is a key factor in successful student outcomes, reporting that "...systems that grant more autonomy to schools to define and elaborate their curriculum and assessments perform better than systems that don't" (PISA Results, 2012), and that "there is a positive correlation in school autonomy for resource allocation and improved student performance" (PISA Results, 2015).

Arguably the country's leading authority on school district governance, Dr. Thomas Alsbury emphasizes the compelling research that points to the relationship between locally-governed schools and positive outcomes for students. While "it might be tempting to look for easy, onsize- fits-all policy responses for a specific problem, simple solutions to complex problems are doomed to fail," Alsbury writes. State takeover could be viewed as one example of a simple solution to complex problems.

It is vital for our community to understand the importance of locally elected board governance, and to push back against threats to local autonomy. With the current Superintendent/School Board governance team currently in place, with the community's bold plan for our school district providing the North Star, and with the current level of momentum and engagement of our talented and hard-working JCPS staff, it appears to me that JCPS is poised for progress.

Together, we must stand up for our community, our public schools, our children, teachers, and public school employees. Together, we must push back against all threats to our local democracy.