

Today, well over 60% of JCPS students come from families with low incomes. Just over 50% are people of color. While system-wide results for proficiency in math and reading have climbed to 45%, only one out of three students from families with low incomes are rated proficient. For every 100 African American students, only 28 have reached that mark—half the rate for all white students. Students who have special educational needs or who are English language learners scored even lower.

**The gaps are clearly real. The question to JCPS leaders, though, is simple:**

**Are JCPS schools reducing or widening the achievement/learning gaps among our children?**



**Right now, they don't know.**

Vision 2015—the current strategic guidebook of JCPS--has no measureable goals around reducing actual learning gaps based on race, family income, English language ability, or special needs. Don't allow that to continue in the new five-year plan, Vision 2020.

To put more of our tax dollars into the right budget buckets, JCPS needs to collect and act on hard evidence—local and national--of individual program effectiveness in moving these “gap” children forward faster. The Fellowship of Reconciliation and the Kentucky Alliance against Racist and Political Repression support measureable, achievable gap reduction targets to drive and monitor that progress. Tell your JCPS Board members and leaders that we need those specific targets in our new Vision—as clear as “20/20” vision.

There will be four public meetings to discuss what you think is most important in Vision 2020:

VanHoose Education Ctr, May 8, 8-10am

DuValle Education Ctr, May 12, 6-8pm

Fairdale High School, May 21, 6-8pm

Westport Middle School, May 28, 6-8pm

RSVP at 485-3995 or [teresa.gray@jefferson.kyschools.us](mailto:teresa.gray@jefferson.kyschools.us) . If you can't attend a meeting, contact your board member before their Board Retreat on May 16 at: [jefferson.k12.ky.us/Board/BoardMap/Board\\_Members.html](http://jefferson.k12.ky.us/Board/BoardMap/Board_Members.html)

*“We spend more--even in the public schools-- on the children of the rich than we do for the poor. We are transmitting advantages and disadvantages across generations, and that is the most important factor in creating this inequality of opportunity.”*

--Nobel-prize winning economist Joseph Stiglitz

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For more background for your comments, turn the page, or see the related article in the May 2015 *FORsooth* newsletter (page3): [louisvillefor.files.wordpress.com/2015/04/for-5-15.pdf](http://louisvillefor.files.wordpress.com/2015/04/for-5-15.pdf)

## **Background and Talking Points-- targeting measurable gap reduction in JCPS:**

- JCPS is a public system and is available to all students. Its programs should reduce the learning and skills gaps compared with advantaged students and create a more level competitive field at graduation. However, JCPS programs may actually increase the gaps. If that is the case, JCPS is part of institutionalizing the inequity that persists in our society and community. Programs need to be evaluated on that impact.
  - Seattle Public Schools Policy #0030 (8/15/2012) on Ensuring Educational and Racial Equity says in part  
*"...Seattle Public schools will: Raise the achievement of all students while narrowing the gaps between the lowest and highest performing students; ..."*
- Narrowing the gaps in learning does not mean giving up improvements for higher performing students. Both should be the mission of any diverse, public school system. It is a matter of rebalancing budget, resources and programs—and adding new resources when and where necessary.
- Well over 60% of JCPS students come from families with low incomes. Just over 50% are people of color. These families represent the majority of the “customers” of JCPS. Success of JCPS is tied to the success of these students.
- Race and socio-economic status of students are unrelated to the student’s innate potential, but are still strong predictors of student achievement today. KY Department of Education data for school years 2012-2014 shows:
  - Only one out of three students from families with low incomes has reached math and reading proficiency at their grade level. For every 100 Hispanic students, only 40% were rated proficient. For every 100 African American students, only 28 have been rated proficient—half the rate for all white students. Students who have special educational needs or who are English language learners scored even lower.
  - While the data for proficiency for every demographic group—race/ethnicity, income, English language learners, special needs – showed improvement, the generally more-advantaged white student group rose by more percentage points when with every gap group. Those gaps are increasing.
- Using the intense, once-a-year state testing may be a requirement currently imposed on JCPS, but it is not the best way to measure and compare student progress and learning gap reduction. The No Child Left Behind Act is up for renewal right now. Students and their parents in several states have organized test day walk-outs against these stressful, distracting, high-stakes, multiple choice tests. It makes no sense to rely on—to enshrine-- these measures as the basis for seeing what best helps our students over the next five years.
- JCPS leadership must research available alternatives for broader, measurable indicators of demonstrated student progress in gap reduction and overall learning. Not only would these be more useful to classroom teachers’ ongoing adjustments for student learning, they would be less likely to be “gamed” for short-term improvements in district- and school-wide results. Right now for example, the focus on attaining the “proficiency” rating encourages extra focus on students who just missed reaching that level—so-called bubble students—so they reach proficiency. Ask a teacher. This leads to short-term improvements in the overall achievement results, but the extra instruction/mentoring disproportionately focuses on the higher-performing half of students—where you find fewer gap students. We need to accelerate progress by the lower performing students.
- To be on target with current goals, JCPS overall gap group math and reading proficiencies would have to rise from last year’s 34% to 51.2% (when this year’s results are released in October 2015, weeks after the Board is scheduled to approve the new Vision 2020!). A 50% increase in the proficient students in one year? Really? A measurable learning gap target would be a new driver, a new lens for every evaluation and decision. It would require new hard evidence-based decisions about what works and what doesn’t, and doubling down on those that close the gap. Here are some possibilities (you can think of more): more aggressive hiring of minority teachers; more engaging magnets, without academic thresholds for acceptance; fine-tuning student/teacher ratios; intensive, extended pre-K development programs; faster rollout of programs for pre-emptive assessment of-- and resources for-- behavioral concerns instead of suspensions ...the possibilities are endless.