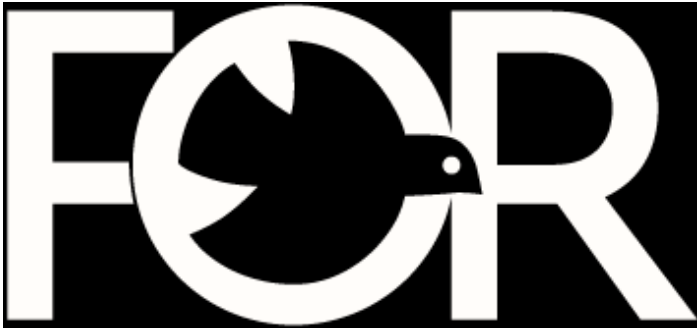




Fellowship of Reconciliation

Working for peace & justice
through nonviolence since 1915.

FOR 2026 Questionnaire for Jefferson County Public Schools (JCPS) School Board Candidates in District 3

Candidates:

Taylor Everett School Board District #3 Candidate



Taylor Everett had significant family health issues as he was preparing responses. FOR allowed him to fully answer 4 specific questions out of the 10 and we have pulled some other relevant information from his campaign website.

Everett is an incumbent JCPS school board member. He has been endorsed by Better Schools KY (the teachers union PAC).

As a current member of the JCPS School Board, I don't rubber-stamp administrative bureaucracy. I ask tough, thoughtful questions, audit expenditures, and demand measurable results for our students and families. I believe in a public school system that prioritizes academic excellence, fiscal discipline, and transparent communication.

His campaign website is at <https://www.everett4jcps.com/>

Veda Pendleton School Board District #3 Candidate



Dr. Veda Pendleton, a native of Pine Bluff, Arkansas, has lived in Louisville for over twenty years. A retired educator, she has taught in public schools and at universities. Dr. Pendleton is a Presbyterian deacon and is an author and Bible study leader. Her most recent work is titled, "Love is Equity in the Body of Christ." Dr. Pendleton has five children and eight grandchildren. She holds an undergraduate degree in English from Wesleyan University, a master's degree in reading from the University of Central Arkansas and a doctor of philosophy degree in reading education from The University of Georgia.

website: <https://friendsofvedapendleton.com> or <https://vedapendleton.com>.

Veda Pendleton chose not to respond to the Fellowship of Reconciliation questionnaire because of work load, but has provided responses from other surveys she has completed.

Neil Seftor School Board District #3 Candidate



I'm an economist and Associate Director at NORC at the University of Chicago, a social policy research firm. I've been doing evaluations of education programs and policies for 25 years, trying to find out what works, for whom, and under what conditions. I grew up in Northern Virginia before getting my B.A., M.A., and Ph.D. in economics at the University of Virginia. My wife and I have four sons, two who have finished college, one in his last year at the University of Kentucky, and one in seventh grade at Noe Middle School.

I'm running because I believe the budget cuts this past spring fell disproportionately on students and staff, which is where the resources should be going. I'm running because legislative changes make it even more important for the board to hold the administration accountable. But ultimately I'm running

because I want students to get the best education possible, and I don't think that is currently happening in JCPS. The district needs transparency, accountability, and evidence-based decision-making, and I believe I can provide a unique perspective to ensure those happen.

Email: nseftor@gmail.com

Gay Adelman did register as a candidate. She does not live in District 3. Under state law she could not be sworn in as a school board member. It is not clear if her name appeared on the ballot.

Questions for candidates

1. Background: During and after the pandemic, former Superintendent Marty Pollio, his team, and the boards took advantage of available Federal COVID era funding to make critical new program investments for JCPS, e.g.,

- a. 1:1 chromebooks and wi-fi so all students could be computer savvy at graduation, not waiting at a public library;
- b. Mental health professionals in place at every school;
- c. Nurses at every school; and
- d. New research-based literacy and numeracy curricula rolled out with teacher professional development for early school years.

Superintendent Pollio, board and chief financial officer knew this COVID money would end, but they believed the programs would help JCPS students move forward. They knew there would be deficits, and that cuts or more property tax income would be needed to maintain the successful improvements. Indeed, they set up a committee of community groups (including Fellowship of Reconciliation) to consider the possibility of a recallable tax increase to be able to retain the best of the new programs.

Here are two detailed stories from local media. They reported on the process and timing around making these important decisions and, also, the making of the first \$100 million of cuts under former Superintendent Pollio and the board at the time:

Jess Clark of Louisville Public Media, in August of 2023:

<https://www.lpm.org/news/2023-08-29/amid-budget-shortfall-jefferson-co-board-of-education-lowers-tax-rate-for-2023-2024>

[Fernando Garcia-Franceschini](#) of WAVE TV in May of 2025:

<https://www.wave3.com/2025/05/14/jcps-cut-close-100-million-its-upcoming-budget/>

Over the last year and during the selection of a new superintendent, various state and local officials, local media and social media have berated previous decisions as financial mismanagement.

The current board just accepted the new nonrecallable property tax rate of 70.3 cents/\$100 assessed value. Because the assessments are higher, the actual rate was dropped from last year's rate of 71.7 cents/\$100 assessed value. The board meeting on Tuesday (youtube at JCPS Board Meeting Materials on JCPS website) September 22, 2026 will show that while there may be "tax anticipation" notes to cover salaries that must be paid in late fall of the next three years, the major cuts are over and the deficit not as large as anticipated last year.

Question: How will you as a board member, working with the Superintendent, rebuild trust in JCPS management with the community and with the legislature? How will you evaluate what programs and staffing should be retained or could be scaled back? Is there a path to COLAs? Under what circumstances/when might you be open to calling for and promoting a recallable tax increase to be able to retain the good programs and teachers that grow our learners?

Response by Taylor Everett:

Trust comes from listening and backing up what you plan to do with data. We must end the culture of retribution in this district along with asking for input from Frankfort so they are part of the process. If we listen to all parties involved, make data backed decisions and end the bad culture, trust will be built over time. Programs must show ROI that are tied to academic or behavioral outcomes in order to continue funding them. Yes, there is a path to COLAs we need to cut what isn't working or necessary. I would be open to a recallable tax increase once we show we have cut all we can, improved academically and have the community supporting it. We would also need to put strict controls in place so the money can only be used for buildings or employee pay.

Response by Veda Pendleton:

Building a relationship with the state legislature could be a potential uphill challenge. Central to relationship building is listening and building trust. Both sides will have to agree to engage in intentional efforts that establish trust in order to work together for the best interests of all of our students. The work of building a relationship would most likely include multiple meetings whereby each group agrees to listen to the other group without pre-conceived notions and biases that could potentially negatively impact the well-being and success of students.

Response by Neil Seftor:

The previous board actually planned for the COVID funding cliff, forming a community tax committee years before the deficit hit. What broke down was execution: contracts ballooned and no cohesive plan

ever materialized despite that early foresight, which is exactly what the state auditor found this summer. Rebuilding trust starts with making spending visible before it becomes a crisis, so I'd require the superintendent to publish rolling three-year budget projections every quarter instead of a single annual snapshot. Every major program should carry a specific outcome metric set in advance, tracked annually and reported school by school, with a program showing no measurable gain within two years triggering formal board review rather than automatic renewal. On COLA, this year's reorganization added nearly as many central office positions as it eliminated, so that growth needs reversing before any new ask of taxpayers. A recallable tax increase could still make sense, but only tied to a specific, published list of programs with dollar amounts attached, so voters can judge exactly what they're funding and recall it if those commitments aren't met.

2. Background: You as a board member will plunge immediately into helping the JCPS superintendent, staff and community create a five-year plan for improved outcomes for all our students, especially those who have been struggling. In parallel, you will oversee three-year, rolling budget projections.

Two JCPS schools were recently identified as being among the best schools in the country. Both schools had relatively selective entrance policies. Among the rest of our nearly 170 schools, several dozen schools—generally with most of their students living in poverty-- are among the bottom 5% of public schools in Kentucky.

Children living in poverty have extra basic needs, from safety in their home neighborhoods, to adequate meals and sleep every day. In some cases, working parents facing a lack of time together to fully shape their children's character and adaptability and to engage with their school. JCPS has important family support staff (FRYSCs) for helping to address some of these needs.

In the class rooms, we are seeing some improvements from new literacy and numeracy curricula in the lower grades. We also must assess and address the needs of older (middle school and up) students who were not exposed to the new curricula, so that they can also graduate with English and math skills of a lifelong learner.

Data from Stanford University Education Data Archives--Educational Recovery Project showed that the last three years (2022-2024) Dr Yearwood was Superintendent at Columbia (MO) public schools, the average change in reading scores was +0.04 for low-income students. JCPS' change for the same time period was -0.23 for our low-income students. Those same students in MO raised their average math scores 0.39, while scores for the equivalent student in JCPS rose only 0.19. Dr, Yearwood and his CAO did improve outcomes in reading, and more so in math.

Question: We have talented teachers and they need to be supported, but what extra is necessary to catch these struggling children up? Who should be guiding/coaching teachers at these high-needs schools? KDE? The CAO? Should principals be administrators or chief teachers? Do teachers need more time to confer with other teachers in their school to identify each child's specific way of learning? Do we have the right curricula to speak to these struggling students? Do we need more teachers who look like their students? Is it a matter of extra contact time after school for individualized help? Summer study and enrichment? What questions would you ask of Dr. Yearwood's approach? As you visit your district schools, what questions would you ask of JCPS teachers/principals who may have successfully turned around underperforming schools?

Response by Taylor Everett:

From Everett's website: Every classroom must be staffed by a full-time, certified teacher—not a temporary, long-term substitute.

Response by Veda Pendleton:

Students' overall academic achievement based on their performance on the state tests is unacceptable. Students at all grade levels are not performing well in reading and math. In order to determine if a specific policy or program needs to be implemented, we have to ascertain the cause of students' performance rates. Reading proficiency rates are 24% for elementary students and 22% for middle and high school students. The majority of students are not performing well on these tests. Reading comprehension is the foundation for all learning, and students must understand what they have read for learning to occur. Teachers need support in teaching reading comprehension in all grades. Every teacher is a reading teacher because students have to be taught how to understand the text in each content area. Students should learn to think critically, to ask questions, and to write about the reading.

Response by Neil Seftor:

The 41 schools in the bottom 5% statewide need dedicated support. I'd assign each an instructional coach from the CAO's office, paired with a written improvement plan reviewed twice a year against specific reading and math targets. Principals need scheduling authority to protect weekly common planning time for teachers, which tends to be the first thing cut when a school is short staffed. High dosage tutoring, including several structured sessions a week with trained tutors, has stronger evidence behind it than most curriculum changes, and it's affordable to target specifically at these schools. There's also the problem that middle and high school students who never received the new K-8 curriculum need their own

catch-up sequence, with its own budget and timeline. I'd ask Dr. Yearwood directly why JCPS's reading scores for low-income students fell over the same three years his prior district's rose under his leadership, and what specific practice from Columbia he's actually bringing here. For principals who've turned around a struggling school, I'd ask exactly which single change they made first, staffing, schedule, or intervention, and how they knew within one semester it was working rather than waiting for a year-end test.

3. Background: According to the US Census, children born from today forward will graduate high school and plunge into life in a “majority minority” country. JCPS is already a majority minority district, i.e., our students are mostly people of color. JCPS must meet the needs of all our students for their personal success and for creating the Jefferson County of the future. It is a matter of fairness—of equity.

Gap reduction requires that underserved groups of students improve faster than more privileged demographic groups. Our students come from many racial and ethnic backgrounds, and students from immigrant families may speak one or more of over 100 different languages heard in JCPS. A majority of our students come from low-income families. Some are homeless. Some have special developmental or disability challenges. We must find the best ways to reach and teach all of them.

Research shows that all students respond more easily to teachers who look like them. For a variety of reasons, not the least of which are the demographics of our state, we have only about 20% of our teachers who are people of color. JCPS has been active in trying to grow and recruit more.

Following a model used by Miami Dade (FL) school district and others, JCPS created a path to provide extra money for a school, based on the percentage of the school’s population which came from low-income households, were immigrants, had special needs, etc. During the recent cost-cutting to reduce the deficit, half of these targeted funds were cut. Some have been restored.

Question: You will be helping shape the diverse future of our city and country. How will you look at apportioning resources to help our diverse groups overcome challenges so that all become proficient at the skills of lifelong learners?

Response by Taylor Everett:

No applicable response from their sources provided.

Response by Veda Pendleton:

During my 30-plus years in education and after the enactment of the American with Disabilities Act in 1990, curriculum developers and publishers have included instructions for adapting their curriculum for students with learning differences, including special needs students and English learners. When curricular materials are used with fidelity, provisions are readily included to meet the learning needs of neurodivergent and culturally diverse students. Some publishers create reading passages at different reading levels within the same grade while others publish texts in more than one language. There are also children's literature written in at least two languages.

Response by Neil Seftor:

JCPS's own demographic data puts students of color at 67% of enrollment, against a teaching force that's only 20% people of color, a 47-point gap. Seth Gershenson's research, using randomized classroom assignment in the Tennessee STAR experiment and North Carolina administrative data, found Black students assigned a Black teacher in grades K-3 were about 39% less likely to drop out and 15% more likely to take a college entrance exam, with later studies showing reduced chronic absenteeism and suspension risk too. That gap is the fairness problem the board needs to treat as a real target, backed by specific partnerships with teacher preparation programs and loan forgiveness for new hires who commit to our highest-need schools. On funding, I'd restore the Needs Index to its full pre-cut level and require a school-by-school public report showing exactly how much each high-poverty, immigrant, or special-needs population received and what outcome changed, with a stated goal of closing the income-based proficiency gap by a set number of points over four years.

4. Background: Immigration has been a primary source of population growth in Jefferson County for more than a decade. While our current federal government has reversed that policy, approximately one out of every five JCPS students is part of an immigrant family. Almost 40% of these students may have been born in the US and are US citizens, but many speak a different language with their family at home.

There are a limited number of ESL (English as a second language) teachers available for hire regionally. We do have some who are immigrants themselves. We have never had an immigrant on the board.

JCPS was actually an innovator and early adopter of real-time translation technology to allow more teachers to work with these students successfully. JCPS created the Newcomer Academy for initial intensive English language training for new immigrant students before they were mainstreamed in schools. Some immigrants arrived at an older age and became Newcomer students. Some of these students are now graduating from Newcomer directly, without first being mainstreamed.

Almost a decade ago, the JCPS board created a sanctuary policy to prevent federal officials from upsetting our school communities for immigration enforcement. Today the pressure has been compounded by new federal directives. Schools must be a safe space for students and their studies. Students should not have to be concerned about being taken from the schools, about being used to track down their parents when they come to the schools, about needing to be absent to work enough to support families where parents are at risk. We have a JCPS police force of over 70 officers, specially trained to support and protect our students. The JCPS board and lobbyists have thus far resisted ICE and legislature efforts to create 287g partnerships to support ICE enforcement.

Question: Each of you will have immigrant students in your district schools. How can we better support their educational challenges and better protect their families as they participate in our community and its schools?

Response by Taylor Everett:

We can better support our immigrant students by looking at our current programs and other around the county and only investing in what works. We seem to try things because it sounds good, but we must look at data and other examples to guide us. As for protecting the families, we need to do all we can to make sure they are always out to date on our protocols in dangerous situations and alerted immediately if threats are imminent. I would also like to hear more from our immigrant families on what they truly need, unfortunately I feel they are worried about reaching out with suggestions, we need to encourage it.

Response by Veda Pendleton:

No applicable response from their sources provided.

Response by Neil Seftor:

Families need to know these protections hold regardless of who sits in the superintendent's office, so I'd move the sanctuary policy and the refusal to sign 287(g) agreements into formal board policy rather than leave them as administrative practice that could shift. About one in five JCPS students come from immigrant families, and the regional ESL pipeline is too thin for that, so I'd set a specific staffing growth target built around partnerships with teacher preparation programs and recruiting immigrant educators themselves, who already make up part of our current ESL staff. Newcomer Academy capacity should

expand based on actual enrollment demand rather than a number set years ago, and direct graduation from Newcomer should be tracked and reported as its own outcome. None of this helps if families don't know about it, so every school needs to communicate these protections directly in the languages families speak, since fear of enforcement is already driving some of our absenteeism and that's a solvable piece of it.

5. Background: Teachers and classroom aides are the core of who interact directly with our students and help them become lifelong learners. Teachers need time to plan, time to collaborate, time for professional development. JCPS' "products" are all the new members of our Louisville community.

Wages for teachers, aides and other staff haven't kept up with inflation since 2008. Part of this is JCPS, part of it is reduced SEEK funding from the state. Teachers did not create the JCPS deficits and they should not be borne by teachers and school staff.

Salaries and benefits need to keep pace with inflation so that: 1) older, more experienced teachers don't retire at the first opportunity and 2) that we can't compete for teacher talent with surrounding districts and states. A cost-of-living allowance (COLA) costs about \$10million/per year for each one percent for all teachers. This year inflation has been high across the country, around 3%. This spring the teachers settled for one-time payments, not a COLA, because of the deficit. Other staff union contracts follow the percentages for JCTA salary increases.

We cannot count on massive funding for public schools from the coming Federal education \$1,700 tax credit program. The program can pay for individual students' tuitions for private schools, but there is no tuition in public schools. Our students might have smaller expenses like after school tutoring or transportation to extra curriculars.

Question: Given that we are reducing the deficit from COVID spending, how can we find money for COLA so that we can continue to attract new teachers and retain our most experienced teachers? How do we find and prioritize funding for those in front of the classrooms?

Response by Taylor Everett:

From Everett's website: Our teachers and support staff deserve competitive compensation that reflects the true difficulty of their roles while keeping pace with inflation.

Response by Veda Pendleton:

The two biggest challenges facing JCPS are the budget deficit and reading achievement as shown in student performance in reading on state tests. The budget is the biggest concern, because without reconciling it, decisions about spending is a challenge. That impacts the daily operations of the district at every level. Our district has to face the budget deficit head-on and work together to find funds and solutions to remedy it. The second biggest challenge is the low percentage of students who are reading proficiently. Only about 22% of students are reading on grade level. For many students, reading comprehension is a hurdle that they have not overcome. Teachers need professional learning in teaching reading comprehension, and students need to be taught how to comprehend texts and how to think critically about what they read. That ability will help them to write about their learning.

Response by Neil Seftor:

Teachers didn't create this deficit, and the honest answer isn't new revenue before we've cut what should have been cut already. This year's reorganization promised roughly 300 fewer central office positions and landed net far short of that, with new positions added almost as fast as old ones were eliminated. That growth is the first place to look, not COLA. I'd require the board to identify every central office position added since the reorg vote and treat eliminating them, not holding them level, as the actual funding source for a COLA, since a 1% raise costs about \$10 million and inflation has run close to 3% this year. On the state side, two concrete asks are worth pursuing in Frankfort: fixing the SEEK formula's treatment of large tax base districts like ours, which sends us proportionally less per pupil even during statewide increases, and recovering JCPS's share of the \$250 million in SEEK funding the state's own audit found had lapsed back to the general fund instead of reaching districts.

6. Background: JCPS is continuously evaluating programs for their value in improving student outcomes. Over the past year of deficit reduction, JCPS produced millions of dollars in savings by scaling back or eliminating some programs, such as poorly attended summer and tutoring programs. We have urged the administration to listen to and engage with the community about equity before decisions are made.

One example of a non-academic program that the Fellowship of Reconciliation (FOR) believes should be considered for elimination is the Junior Reserve Officer Training Corps (JROTC) program, which costs the District approximately \$1.4 million per year. Open Records Requests over the years have shown that many students in JCPS' JROTC programs have been leaving the programs instead of staying in until graduation. In the class of 2023, 54% of the cadets left early. The class of 2025 is similar-- just over 50% left JROTC early. Over the last two years, two schools have independently dropped the JROTC program for lack of student enrollment. In four other schools, JROTC enrollment recently fell below the minimum required by the schools' contracts with JROTC, but the programs were allowed to continue. The district should be listening to students and their parents and scrutinizing JROTC district-wide.

Unlike the highly-successful Academies of Louisville program – which creates links between academics and career training -- JROTC has no ties to academics. JROTC instructors (now 18 in the nine JROTC units) are not certified teachers. JROTC curriculum is supplied by the Pentagon and is not subject to District review. There is no academic focus aligned with state standards. Nor does JROTC offer a career-training advantage. At graduation, any 18-year old can walk into a recruiting office and enlist in the military.

But the most significant shortcoming of JROTC may be the opportunity cost to students. The 120 to 180 class hours per year spent in JROTC classes reduce time available for arts, music, foreign languages and computer skills – subjects proven to improve academic achievement and social/emotional development. Numerous studies link arts participation to improved literacy, math performance, and problem-solving skills. Music programs, for example, strengthen pattern recognition and mathematical reasoning, while theater and visual arts improve reading comprehension and verbal communication ([Public School Review](#)). Foreign language classes develop cognitive flexibility, memory, and cultural awareness, which support learning in other subjects. JROTC offers none of these benefits – and for the over half of students who exit the JROTC program early, it prevents them from gaining the full advantage of the other Academy programs offered at their school.

Question: How would you evaluate the value of investing in JROTC and other nonacademic offerings compared to further support for Related Arts offerings such as arts, music, or foreign language classes? What would you do to make sure that JCPS students, parents and community are given objective, balanced information to make informed decisions, both for their own family and for JCPS' consideration, of nonacademic offerings like JROTC? Should we also be assessing different Academies for students quitting a pathway, similarly to JROTC cadets?

Response by Taylor Everett:

No applicable response from their sources provided.

Response by Veda Pendleton:

No applicable response from their sources provided.

Response by Neil Seftor:

Schools exist to teach students skills and open real opportunities, not to feed enlistment pipelines. JROTC costs the district \$1.4 million a year with early departure rates above 50%, no academic alignment to state standards, and a Pentagon-supplied curriculum the district doesn't even review, while four schools continue below their own enrollment contract minimums without formal review. I'd redirect that funding to arts, music, and foreign language programs, which carry a much stronger and broader evidence base for academic benefit, from pattern recognition in music to the reading comprehension gains tied to theater and visual arts. I'd require JROTC and the Academies to report identical cost, completion, and post-graduation data to the board every year, published for families to see directly rather than requiring

an open records request. Any unit falling below its own contract minimum would trigger automatic board review, not administrative discretion, and the same reporting standard would apply to any Academy pathway with high early departure rates.

7. Background: This new board, along with the legislature and the Ky Department of Education (KDE), will face policy issues around technology and its impact on student learning. The current board has wrestled with phone use by students during school and seems to have created workable policies. The next set of issues for the board may concern screen time limits and use of and or reliance on AI. The challenges are about ethical use.

Educational psychologists have over the last two decades seen reductions in critical thinking ability as screen time increases. TV, without educational programming, detracts from socialization, physical activity, sleep, etc. At the same time, increased screen time and AI hold promise for more individualized and creative work, drawing on more sources. There is also the opportunity for misrepresenting work as a student's creation and loss of independent writing skills.

Question: How should teachers use these tools to create personalized work products for learning without becoming dependent on these tools? What role does the board play in limiting screen time of students, while still providing technology for all students who otherwise might not have access. Do we still need one-to-one Chromebooks provided and maintained by JCPS?

Response by Taylor Everett:

***From Everett's website:** We must stay at the forefront of AI to equip our students with the tools for tomorrow. At the same time, we must always be evaluating if we have become too reliant on tech and if it is truly helping.*

Response by Veda Pendleton:

We use AI on all of our devices. AI is a tool already used in schools by many. We have to be intentional about how we teach students to use AI apps responsibly in schools. What is crucial to using AI is 1) teacher support on how to teach students to think critically about creating appropriate prompts for querying an AI app; 2) guiding students in critiquing the app results; and 3) helping students learn how to incorporate their own thinking in whatever results AI gives them. These are vital learning skills for understanding and critiquing any text or media. AI can be used as a thought partner to support students in completing tasks.

Response by Neil Seftor:

One to one Chromebooks should stay in place. Pulling them back would hit students with no other device access at home the hardest, which runs against everything the equity funding is meant to do. The harder work is building real guardrails around how the technology gets used. For grades K-3, where the evidence of harm to critical thinking from passive screen time is clearest, I'd set a specific limit developed with teacher input and revisited annually as the research develops. At the secondary level, students and teachers need a clear, written policy on what counts as acceptable AI assistance versus submitted work that isn't actually the student's own. Teachers need specific training on using AI as a feedback and practice tool rather than a grading shortcut, since that's the difference between personalization and dependency the question is really asking about. I'd require the district to report annually on which specific tools are in classroom use and what evidence supports keeping each one.

8. Background: Part of the pledge made by the previous JCPS management and boards was for improving near West End schools—creating the schools of the Choice Zone-- and providing transportation to and opportunity for attending engaging magnet and Academy schools for the African American students. Our current COO who has thankfully led us back to adequate general bus service in 2026, has said he believes JCPS has hired all the drivers it can get competitively and retain against UPS, Amazon, etc.

The Magnet Schools of America organization in particular urges intentionally diverse student populations in magnet classrooms, because its data show that a diverse mix of students, exposed to other students' different ways of learning and looking at problems, helps all students be more effective and creative problem solvers.

Question: How do we create the transportation that will allow us to fully live into the promise made regarding African Americans access to magnet schools? Is the answer to fuller transport in TARC, vans, or other paths, such as more mirror magnets in schools in African American neighborhoods?

Response by Taylor Everett:

First, we need aggressively upgrading our schools so people don't feel they are missing out if they aren't in a magnet school. Second, I believe we should move magnets to be more evenly distributed around the district so everyone has one that is within reasonable distance of their home.

Response by Veda Pendleton:

No applicable response from their sources provided.

Response by Neil Seftor:

Our own COO has said the district can't competitively hire more drivers against UPS and Amazon, so building this plan around solving that shortage isn't realistic. A better path is bringing the opportunity closer to families directly, so I'd set a specific target for new mirror magnet schools sited in African American neighborhoods using current enrollment and travel-distance data, consistent with what Magnet Schools of America's own research says drives the benefit, the diverse program itself, not the bus ride to reach it. I'd track magnet enrollment by neighborhood and zip code every year and report publicly whether access gaps are actually closing rather than assume a new site solves it automatically. TARC and van partnerships are worth pursuing as a near-term bridge while those sites come online, but I wouldn't build the long-term promise on a driver shortage our own transportation leadership has already told us it can't win.

9. Background: Around the country, major school districts are finding they need to close, repurpose, and/ or consolidate schools, as birth rates and lower immigration reduce attendance. We are seeing this in JCPS as well. This fall, JCPS counted just above 90,000 students in classrooms, far below the attendance a decade ago. The Courier -Journal (9/20/26) estimated JCPS has 15,000 classroom seats unclaimed.

Last year, in the interest of reducing budget deficits by cutting operating costs, JCPS closed Martin Luther King Elementary in Shawnee and Zachary Taylor Elementary in the East End. \$5.4 million were saved. Both schools had diverse student populations—people of color, special needs students, students living in poverty mostly. Neither had anywhere near the lowest school occupancy rates. Both had teaching staff that had worked together well and been improving struggling student lives. Parents, teachers, and students came or marched to meetings by candlelight for the opportunity to be heard by the Superintendent and administrative staff, but to no avail. The MLK families told JCPS that MLK was “the heartbeat of the neighborhood”.

The CJ article identifies some key steps other district had identified. Every closure must be preceded by adjustment of the attendance zones not only for student seats, but also for shared programs in all new clusters. Consolidations must look at the mix of demographics, access to special programs, magnets, and student services, etc. Teachers also need to be involved and heard. They can help figure how school populations could be blended and how to avoid the apparently common student slowdowns in progress in English and math, both for the affected students and the receiving schools' rankings.

Question: How would you look at selecting schools for closure and/or consolidation? Would you support a district-wise approach redoing attendance zones, instead of just finding lower-occupancy schools? How can we take smaller steps in modifying attendance zones with a great deal of cross-

community input? How would you involve the teacher and entire community in downsizing discussions long before actual selections were proposed? In what way can we keep a JCPS presence and community centers across the JCPS geography? Schools are community centers for our neighborhoods.

Response by Taylor Everett:

It starts with data, cost and community input. You need to go into these decisions with an open mind and hear from the community on how the schools can mean much more than the days and costs show. I believe we need to also look at the current district map and right size it based on where people have moved in the city. If we do that, plus look at everything unbiasedly we can make the right decision for the community and the district. Also, any savings from closing schools need to be put into very specific things that have a proven ROI.

Response by Veda Pendleton:

I would not support additional school closures, especially in economically disadvantaged neighborhoods. Schools provide safe places for residents in our communities, and they serve as places of learning for the community. Because I believe in the importance of small class sizes to maximize learning, students who may struggle with learning benefit from small teacher to student ratios. Instead of closing additional schools, JCPS could consider converting low-enrollment schools to specialized programs tailored to enhance student learning and performance.

Response by Neil Seftor:

MLK Elementary shows what happens when a single building gets targeted in isolation from the broader zone picture, so I'd require a full attendance zone redesign study before any closure proposal reaches the board, not after a school has already been selected. That study should weigh demographics, program access, and staff continuity against published criteria rather than occupancy rate alone, with teachers directly involved in figuring out how populations would blend and how to avoid the learning slowdowns common in these transitions. Public hearings need to happen while multiple options are still genuinely open, with that input documented in whatever final proposal the board actually votes on. With roughly 15,000 unclaimed seats districtwide, some consolidation is probably unavoidable given our fiscal reality, which makes getting this process right more important, not less. Where a school does close, the district should commit in writing to a specific community use for the site, since these buildings function as neighborhood anchors, not just classrooms.

10. Background: There are a variety of programs (e.g., PBIS, Restorative Practices, Compassionate Schools, Trauma Informed Care, peer mediation, etc.) and, now, mental health professionals at every JCPS schools where—ideally-- teams of teachers and counselors assess students and implement plans to avoid situations that give rise to behavioral problems for individual students. Teachers are continually being trained to teach and model specific positive behaviors, to understand different cultures, to de-escalate, and to ask not “what is wrong with this child?” but “What has happened to this child?”. Some of this support and healing work must include families, not just students.

Much has happened to our students--increased violence in parts of our community, and the generational stress and trauma of families living in poverty. Absenteeism is soaring at JCPS and elsewhere across the country and is emblematic of the impact of these stresses on student sense of belonging and inclusion and corresponding behaviors. There are increasing the numbers of social workers and mental health professionals in JCPS schools. Because of their limited numbers, though, they may often be called on to respond only after problems occur rather than inviting some students into group counselling.

We already have weapons detection technology and about the 40th largest police force in Kentucky. Nationally, armed, sworn officers in schools have been shown to actually increase arrests and suspensions and decrease student sense of belonging, particularly for students of color. They have not been found to effectively stop mass shootings in schools.

National research data show that out-of-school suspension is a key predictor of future low achievement, dropping out, delinquency, and incarceration. Just one suspension doubles the chance of dropping out. These inequities do not occur uniformly in every school across JCPS.

National research also shows that out-of-school suspensions are ineffective at changing student behaviors. Suspended students are more likely to repeat behaviors-- and consequences-- again. Suspensions accelerate declines in academic performance both because of the lost learning time and the disengagement from loss of a sense of belonging.

Suspensions are also expensive for JCPS—e.g., a loss of attendance-based funding and the cost of providing “alternative schools”. While all that research is clear, some JCPS teachers (as indicated by national TELL surveys) feel they do not have all the skills and resources necessary to maintain their classrooms without using out-of-school suspension for “crises”.

Multiple or serious suspensions can lead to assignment to one of JCPS’ alternative schools. At one alternative school, the 2023-24 student population was almost 78% African American and 33% special needs students. Students at alternative schools are now most likely to continue and graduate from the alternate school, rather than being reinvesting at their previous home school.

Question: How can the schools provide professional, collaborative behavioral assessments of students at every school to help students, parents, and teachers (and, yes, bus drivers) engage positively, before students are stigmatized by disciplinary consequences? What models are needed to

build appropriate self-control behaviors and sense of accountability by students, teachers, and parents? How do we engage with and support parents around their students' challenges inside and outside of school, as well as their learning and school choices? How can student voice help direct this work?

How can we simultaneously create for both students and staff a sense of belonging in safe and welcoming schools? Can we reduce unwanted behaviors and radically decrease use of out-of school suspensions? How can we decrease the demographic disproportionalities of alternative school placements and, more generally, find ways to keep more students--in all demographic groups--in regular schools where they can develop their social skills and maintain their progress in learning? How would you pay for the programs, training, etc.?

How should student voice help direct this work? Do you support further expansion of armed/sworn officers in JCPS schools?

Response by Taylor Everett:

From Everett's website: We must implement common sense policies to make sure our staff feel safe while supporting those kids that need it the most.

Response by Veda Pendleton:

No applicable response from their sources provided.

Response by Neil Seftor:

Suspensions are also expensive for the district, through lost attendance funding and alternative school costs, so prevention is a real budget argument, not just a values one. TELL survey data shows many teachers feel they lack the skills to manage a crisis without removing a student, so I'd fund specific, ongoing de-escalation and behavioral-assessment training rather than treat restorative practices as a philosophy teachers absorb on their own time. I'd require every behavioral plan to include documented parent and student input and set a specific staffing ratio target for mental health professionals so schools can engage proactively rather than only after an incident. Suspension and alternative-school placement data should be published by school and demographic group every year, since the 78% Black, 33% special-needs makeup at one alternative school shouldn't need an open records request to surface. I would not support further expansion of armed, sworn officers, given the research showing real costs to "belonging" without evidence it prevents the threats it's meant to address.