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Kentucky Board of Education
Office of the Commissioner of Education
C/o Dr. Wayne Lewis, Interim Education Commissioner
260 Sower Blvd. 5th Floor
Frankfort, KY 40601

Dear Commissioner Lewis,

I want to congratulate you and the new State Board members on your recent appointments.

The Kentucky Board of Education has a tremendous responsibility for the oversight of school systems across our great Commonwealth, a responsibility I know you appreciate.

I represented a Jefferson County District in the Kentucky General Assembly for 32 years, having retired in 2016. During that time I have seen many great pieces of legislation passed. One of those was the Kentucky Education Reform Act (KERA), passed early in my legislative career.

This legislation was far-reaching and has stood its test over the years as a set of guiding principles for our public school system. Other states have recognized portions of it as a model for education reform as well. Along the way, we have made some changes, but the core values of KERA have remained the same.

One of the great foundations of KERA is local control, the empowerment of local school boards to shape the contours of a school system in their own communities to meet their local educational needs. The advent of school-based decision making has provided greater opportunities for teacher, parent and community involvement.

Local control is an ingrained component of K-12 public education in Kentucky, and I fear that recent decisions made regarding the Jefferson County Public Schools (JCPS) have discarded this touchstone without adequate reason for doing so.

Before you and the Board make any further decisions about JCPS, I encourage you to visit, at random, any school in the JCPS system, and I think you will see that under our new Superintendent, Dr. Marty Pollio, the culture and energy have changed in a positive way. I personally visited the high school in my neighborhood, and I can tell you first hand that, in line with Dr. Pollio's vision and direction, we have a new principal with the necessary leadership skills to guide this school into the future. The school's climate and energy are vastly improved when compared to the previous visit I made at that school some five years ago.

Leadership starts at the top, and Dr. Pollio's vision and direction are permeating schools across the system. I have also had the opportunity to meet in private with Dr. Pollio and have come away impressed with his understanding of the system, his vision for its future and his sense of how important JCPS success is for our state, city and, most important, the children of our community.

I have never seen our community rally behind a school superintendent like we have for Dr. Pollio. I know you personally have been complimentary of his performance up to this point as well. I encourage you give him a chance to succeed. He needs your guidance and partnership for the good of our 101,000 school children. A state takeover of JCPS stalls the momentum he has built during his short time in charge of our District. Our parents sees this as a negative action that hurts the image of public education in our community. Many of them welcome the assistance of the Board and the KDE to help work through problems we all recognize exist. But we do not welcome a top-down, state directed takeover.

I speak only for myself, but I know I am not alone: I urge that you and the Board reconsider any potential decision that the state should take system management away from our duly elected board and Dr. Pollio. Assistance from the state can work, but I do not believe a direct takeover can. We are in this together, for the common good of those children now in our schools and those in future generations.

Education is an investment!

Sincerely,



Larry Clark

Cc: B. Cundiff, T. Cusick, R. Gimmel, K. Gornik, H. Heiner, G. Hockens, A. Johnson, J. Papalia, M. Seymore, A. Stamper, L. Timberlake.