

Friday, September 19, 2014 was an important day for educators in Jefferson County. Throughout the entire district, individuals chose to take collective action to raise community awareness of the Jefferson County Board of Education's new unilateral decision making model. Since the seating of new board majority, educators, administrators, parents and students throughout the District have repeatedly expressed concerns about the negative implications of a non-inclusive approach to decision making. One need only consider the countless letters, emails, and public comments reaching out to the District's administrators and educators as evidence of the public's concern at being shut out of the decision making process. ***Regrettably, these concerns have proven to be well founded and have compelled numerous educators at CHS & Standley Lake H.S., to take an appropriate and measured response in an effort to raise public awareness of this issue.***

Specifically, the Board's insistence on censoring the college preparatory AP US History curriculum will, if successful, require teachers to completely ignore certain aspects of American history rather than teach the entirety of American history in a context that promotes and develops crucial, college level, critical thinking skills. Educators, parents and students alike were all deeply disappointed to learn that the impetus for this censorship is school board member Ms. Julie Williams, who proposed the creation of a review committee but proceeded to solicit selective input from an exclusive group of her supporters days before the discussion on the review criteria for censoring the long established AP curriculum. A decision of such far reaching importance should include everyone, not just a handful of supporters from one board member.

Similarly, the Board's teacher compensation proposal is also highly problematic. It has been erroneously stated by numerous board members that Jeffco teachers are against merit based pay. Nothing could be further from the truth. And while we do not believe that such misinformation is being intentionally spread by the new Board of Education, such a complete and absolute misunderstanding of the facts is yet another indication of the ineffectiveness the Board's current mode of operation. We hope the Board agrees with us that the best decisions are informed ones, and that shutting out opposing views from the decision making process is an ineffective practice that only serves as a detriment to arriving at informed decisions. Such a practice is unreasonable, unprofessional, and will only lead to future unnecessary conflicts between administrators and educators, with the students being caught in the middle.

Given the consistent academic success of Jefferson County Schools, a merit based compensation program is greatly to the advantage of the overwhelming majority of Jeffco teachers. Merit based pay is not the issue. This issue is the use of an arbitrary, nontransparent evaluation system that vests absolute authority in administrators to determine all levels of teacher effectiveness. And while we are the first to recognize and express our gratitude for the dedication of administrators throughout the district, many of these evaluators have not been in classroom for years, and most are evaluating scholastic departments in areas where they've never been certified to teach. Even first year administrators with no previous experience are empowered to evaluate all members of a department that they are not recognized by the district to teach. It is clearly an unreasonable and untenable position for the Board to insist that an administrator who is not recognized by the district as qualified to teach in a given scholastic area should nonetheless be empowered to evaluate every teacher within that department. This is clearly not a best administrative practice.

Furthermore, there is no mechanism to ensure transparency. Teachers within a given scholastic department have no means whatsoever to compare and contrast their evaluation with other similarly situated educators. There is no intradepartmental transparency, no interdepartmental transparency, no community-wide transparency and least of all, district-wide transparency. Every teacher has to take, as a matter of faith, that they are treated on par with their coworkers. Again, this is not a best administrative practice. On the contrary, it is among the worst conceived practices in in this or any other profession, and one that teachers will continue to insist be rectified.

To bring attentions to these matters, on Friday, September 19, numerous educators at CHS and Standley Lake H.S. made the choice to raise community awareness by working within the framework of the district's employment

mandate. The decision to raise community awareness was also made in consultation with administration in an effort to minimize any negative impact on students. Our goal was not to be disruptive, but rather to act in such a way so as to avoid the larger, more costly future disruptions looming on the horizon. And while Friday's effort involved both JCEA members and non-members, it was nonetheless independent from any corrective efforts currently being taken by the JCEA. In taking Friday's action, all employees judiciously adhered to the proper procedure for arranging such absences and went so far as to inform the school's administrative team well in advance of what was to transpire.

Moreover, we were all given the impression that the schools would remain open, and even worked together to provide ample time to develop detailed substitute lesson plans. It wasn't until the following day that any participating teacher was apprised of the board's decision to abandon all efforts to find substitute coverage. ***It is our hope and expectation that the district and their respective administrative teams will accept the responsibility for unilaterally shutting down the affected schools, as this decision was made without informing the acting teachers.***

As dedicated professionals with a passion for education, we always hold the very best interests of our students at heart. But many educators have come to realize that something must be done to make our silenced voices heard again. It is our sincere desire to build upon the successes we've achieved together over the past several years by encouraging the new board to embrace us as partners in the decision making process, as in years past, rather than treat us as obstacles that have to be overcome. We hope that our respective communities can find strength and understanding in knowing that we are all in this together, and remain passionate about working on behalf of the best interests of our students.

It is our greatest desire that we reestablish the collaborative and cooperative atmosphere that has been the hallmark of relations between Jeffco teachers, administrators, parents and students for years past. The effectiveness of this approach is well justified by the prestigious position Jeffco schools enjoy on both the state and national levels. By working as a team again, we can all address the issues that are dear to us, while avoiding squandering scarce resources and attempting to solve non-existent problems. In the final analysis, we are all dedicated professionals striving to build a better future for our youth. It is in this spirit of service to our students that we ask the board to consider both our concerns and the best interests of Jeffco's students.