



# Jefferson EDGE 2020 Strategic Implementation Plan: **PUBLIC EDUCATION**

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## Introduction

Public education has a profound impact on so many aspects of a community's overall quality of life. The preparedness of the workforce, the community's appeal to businesses that are looking to relocate or expand, the community's overall sociological health, and even the level of crime are all influenced by the quality of its public school system. Especially relevant to the *Jefferson EDGE 2020* initiative is the fact that public education can play a major role in a family's decision to live in a particular community. Recent national research indicates that a high quality school system is one of the three most important factors in assessing an area's appeal.<sup>1</sup> In light of this evidence and given the manifold benefits of a quality public education system, Jefferson Parish must strive for better, more competitive public schools.

A comparative analysis of Jefferson Parish Public Schools (JPPS) and other school systems reveals that there is ample room for improvement. Along any number of objective measures, student performance in Jefferson Parish lags behind other communities in the metropolitan area as well as the state as a whole. Most notably, at all grade levels and in all subject categories, the mean LEAP (Louisiana Education Assessment Program) test scores in Jefferson fall below the statewide averages.<sup>2</sup> Various other measures confirm the need for academic improvement.

These student achievement data carry with them a number of implications for the future prosperity of the Parish. In an increasingly knowledge based economy, a highly educated, highly skilled workforce is essential both to the success of extant businesses and to business recruitment efforts. Furthermore, there is a strong, well documented correlation between the education level of a community and its overall sociological health. For instance, individuals who succeed academically (as measured by a number of statistics, such as graduation rate) are substantially less likely to commit crimes than those who do not succeed in school.<sup>3</sup> The academic achievement gap between Jefferson and "competitor" communities thus jeopardizes the stability and prosperity that have been the hallmark of Jefferson Parish for decades.

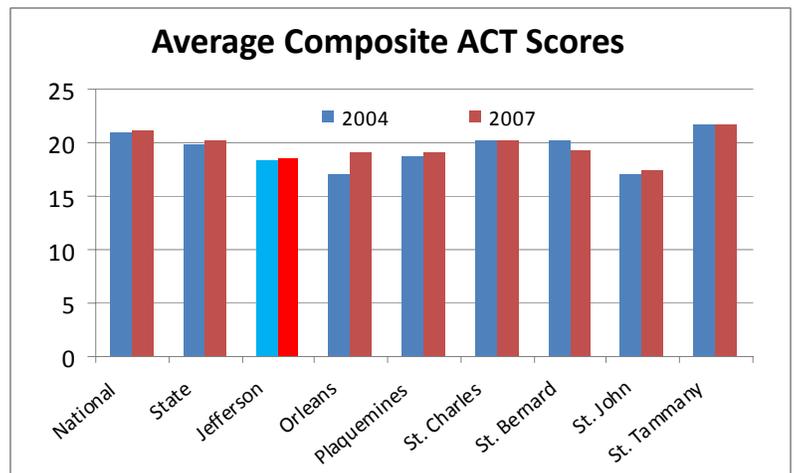
Fortunately, the educational leadership in Jefferson Parish acknowledges this achievement gap and the need for an aggressive, transformative action plan. Over the past five years, new magnet schools and themed schools have been created; state of the art technology has been implemented; internal accountability has been strengthened; and curricula have been diversified and improved. The list of new, well-conceived programs that the Superintendent and School Board have initiated over the past several years is truly comprehensive. Nonetheless, additional community engagement and further measures are needed to effect a renaissance in public education in the Parish.

The first goal of this document is to better inform the business community, the political leadership, and the residents of Jefferson Parish of the substantial progress that has been made in recent years and of the myriad new programs that are underway. The second goal is to unite the community behind a focused educational policy agenda—one that aims to make Jefferson Parish a model for educational reform and achievement.

## Educational Achievement in Jefferson and Other Communities

In order to understand the reasoning behind the recent initiatives that JPPS has undertaken and the new initiatives that this document proposes, one must first acknowledge the educational achievement gap between Jefferson and other communities. According to a multitude of objective, statistical criteria, Jefferson’s public schools score somewhat below those of other communities in the metropolitan area, such as St. Tammany Parish and St. Charles Parish. Furthermore, even in comparison to statewide averages, Jefferson’s public schools register lower scores. This shortcoming is noteworthy for two reasons. First, Louisiana as a whole consistently scores below national averages, suggesting that if Jefferson Parish is truly to become nationally competitive in attracting residents and businesses, it must be especially ambitious in improving its public education system. Secondly, Jefferson’s lower than average test scores are somewhat counterintuitive given the Parish’s relative wealth. According to the 2000 Census, Jefferson Parish registered the sixth highest median family income out of the 64 parishes in Louisiana. At \$45,834, the Parish’s median family income was approximately 15% higher than the statewide figure.<sup>4</sup> However, the demographic make-up of the school system is somewhat different from the Parish’s population as a whole—a topic that this report will address in considerable detail. First, a review of the educational achievement data is in order.

In our increasingly knowledge based economy, students’ preparedness for college—as measured by standardized tests such as the SAT and ACT—is an especially salient measure of educational quality. Every year the Louisiana Department of Education tracks the mean ACT score by school and school district. In the most recent year for which data are available (2007), the nation-wide average score was 21.2, and the Louisiana statewide average was 20.1. In St. Charles and St. Tammany parishes, the mean scores were 20.2 and 21.6, respectively. Meanwhile, the mean score for Jefferson Parish Public School students was 18.6, a score that is only slightly higher than the mean score for New Orleans Public Schools.<sup>5</sup>



One limitation of college entrance exam scores is that only some students choose to take the tests. Additionally, these exams measure aptitude at only one point in time, i.e. toward the end of high school. In order to objectively measure student achievement at various grade levels, the Louisiana Department of Education administers the Louisiana Educational Assessment Program (LEAP) tests for all 4<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> graders and

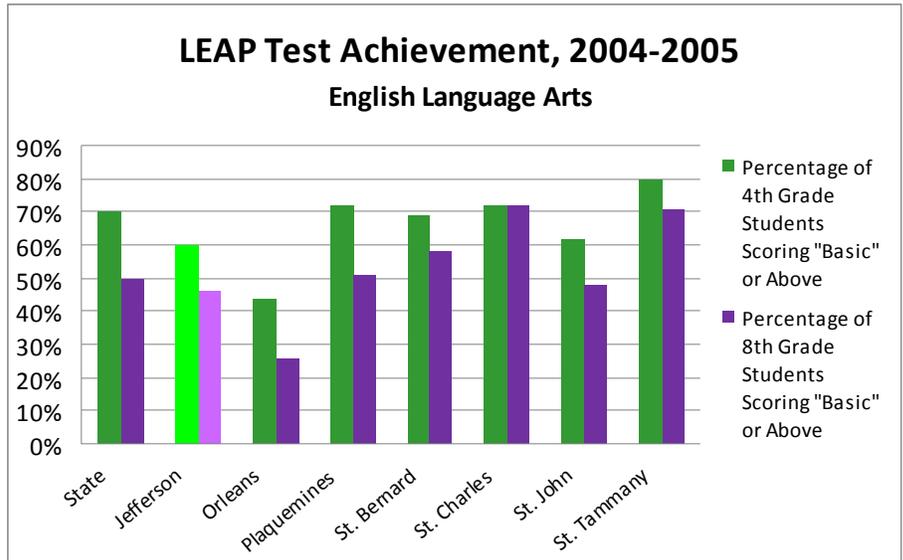
the Graduate Exit Exam (GEE) for all high school students. At all of the grade levels at which these tests are administered and for each of the subject areas, Jefferson Parish recorded a lower percentage of students at the “basic” or above level than the state as a whole.<sup>6</sup> The adjacent graph illustrates these results in one of the subject areas, English Language Arts, for the most recent pre-Katrina school year (2004 – 2005).

Another measure of academic performance on a school by school basis is the school performance score that the Department of Education releases annually. The school performance score combines attendance and dropout rates with standardized test scores to arrive at a single measure of overall school quality.

School performance scores range from five stars for especially high performing schools to the “Academic Warning” and “Academically Unacceptable” categories for those schools that are particularly underperforming. In St. Tammany Parish, for the 2004 – 2005 school year, 56% of all public schools received a ranking of three or more stars while no public schools were in the Academic Warning or Academically Unacceptable categories. In Jefferson, by contrast, only 2.5% of the public schools merited a ranking of three or more stars. Almost one fifth of the schools were in the Academic Warning or Academically Unacceptable categories.<sup>7</sup> While the number of Jefferson Parish schools that were in these underperforming categories represents a fairly small minority of JPPS schools, that percentage is nonetheless considerably higher than in other jurisdictions.

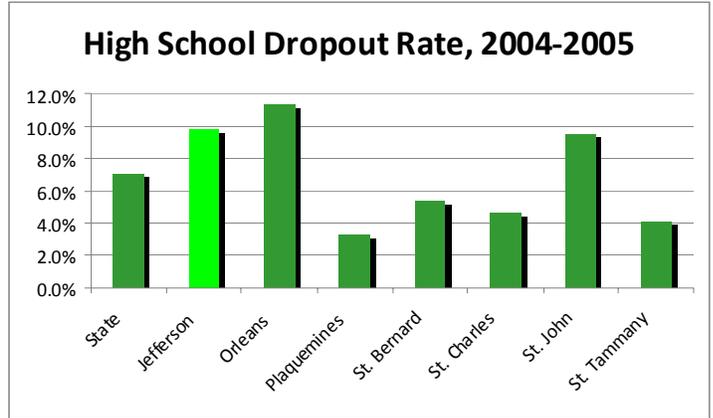
A final measure of academic performance is the high school dropout rate. For the most recent year in which comparative data are available (2004 – 2005 school year), the statewide dropout rate was 7.0%. In the New Orleans metropolitan area, St. Charles and St. Tammany registered a dropout rate of 4.6% and 4.1%, respectively. Jefferson Parish fared worse than some of its metropolitan neighbors and worse than the state as a whole. In 2004 – 2005, the dropout rate in Jefferson Parish Public Schools was 9.8%.<sup>8</sup>

These myriad statistics illustrate that Jefferson Parish has been somewhat less competitive than other predominantly middle class communities in providing high qual-

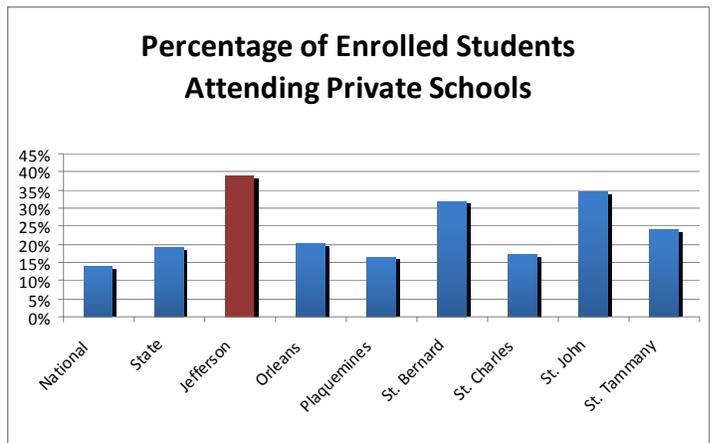


ity public education. This trend has two distinct, deleterious consequences. First, it limits the Parish’s ability to attract and retain employers and middle class individuals, the backbone of any healthy, prosperous community. Second, it implies that the Parish’s workforce is less well educated—and consequently less competitive—than the workforces of other communities. In a post-industrial economy that is driven by knowledge based industries, this is especially problematic.

There is evidence to suggest that the achievement gap between Jefferson Parish’s public schools and other jurisdictions’ is not a recent phenomenon. Comparative data from recent years are more voluminous and readily available as a result of the State’s effort to more closely track student performance. Since the inception of standardized tests such as the LEAP exam, the aforementioned gap between Jefferson’s scores and those of other metropolitan parishes has persisted. Comparative data that pre-date the State’s push to expand standardized testing are limited, but anecdotal evidence suggests that Jefferson’s public schools have been viewed as less competitive for some time.



The Parish has been able to maintain its appeal to middle class families in spite of lower performing public schools through the availability of quality private and parochial education. Indeed, in comparison to other parishes, Jefferson has an exceptionally high rate of private school enrollment. As of the 2000 Census, almost 40% of Jefferson Parish children were enrolled in non-public schools. In St. Tammany Parish this percentage was only 24%; the statewide percentage was 19%.<sup>9</sup>

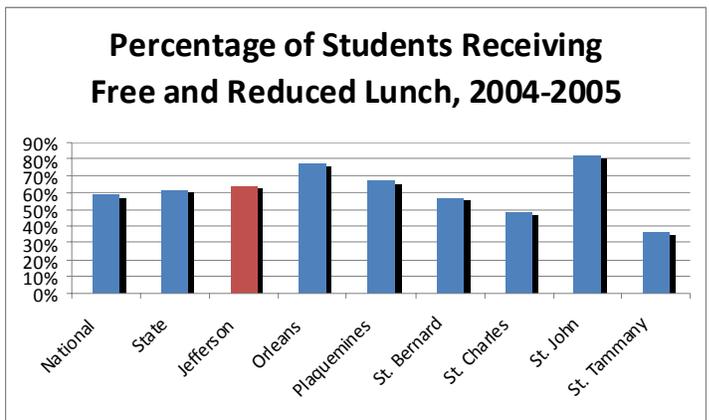


Jefferson Parish families’ reliance on non-public education is problematic for two reasons. The first reason pertains to the cost of private education. A simple survey of school tuition for area private and parochial schools highlights the tremendous cost of private education. At the non-public schools that were surveyed, the annual cost of tuition ranged from \$4,500 to over \$18,000 per child.<sup>10</sup> For a family with even just one child, this constitutes a substantial financial burden that parents in many other communities do not have to pay.

The second major problem with an over-reliance on private education is that it creates a two tiered education system—one system for the middle class and wealthy (i.e. the private schools) and another system for the working class and poor (i.e. the public schools). The socio-economic profile of a school system is most succinctly captured by the percentage of the student body that is eligible for federal assistance in the form of a free or reduced price lunch. Not surprisingly, a high percentage of JPPS students are eligible for free or reduced price lunches—65% in the 2004-2005 school year. In St. Charles and St. Tammany parishes, the respective percentages were 47% and 36% while the statewide figure was 61.6%. Nationally, 59.1% of students in public schools were eligible for free or reduced price lunches during the 2004-2005 school year.<sup>11</sup>

Thus, the profile of Jefferson Parish Public Schools is somewhat more low income than the country as a whole and considerably more low income than “competitor” parishes in the New Orleans metropolitan area. There is a strong, well documented correlation between the presence of a strong middle class in public school systems and their academic performance. School systems with little middle class buy-in typically register lower test scores. This creates a vicious cycle in which lower performing schools fail to attract students from middle class families, thereby blocking one route (i.e. greater middle class enrollment) to higher academic achievement.

Because there is a preponderance of evidence linking the socio-economic profile of a student body to a school’s academic performance and because education in Jefferson Parish has traditionally been somewhat socio-economically segregated, this report will focus on this point in greater detail.



## Middle Class “Buy-in” and Public School Performance

A sizable middle class presence in any public school system is important for two main reasons. First, it is an indication that the middle class has confidence in public education and is comfortable enrolling their children in public schools. When this occurs, a community is better positioned to retain and attract a greater middle class presence because the middle class is not burdened with the onerous cost of private school tuition. Second, and less well understood by the general public, is the tremendous correlation between the presence of a middle class population and overall school performance. Generally speaking, a school system that has a predominantly middle class constituency produces strong academic results. While there are notable exceptions, the obverse is usually true, i.e. a predominantly low income constituency generally corresponds to lower academic achievement.

The correlation between the presence of middle class students and school performance is attributable to several factors. At a young age, many middle class students begin school with a stronger academic foundation than students from lower income households. The educational background of their parents, the presence of educational games, books and other learning tools, and a variety of other factors equip middle class students with academic skills that lower income students may lack when they begin their formal education. Even several years into school, that achievement gap may persist or widen because of the amount of learning that goes on outside of the typical 8:00 am to 3:00 pm school day. The availability of the aforementioned intellectual resources, students’ interactions with peers outside of class, and informal learning from sources such as dinner table conversation all contribute tremendously toward a student’s academic performance.

Because of the resources, extramural learning, and academic expectations that middle class students, by and large, bring to the classroom, their presence generally correlates to strong school performance. This, in turn, generates a virtuous cycle whereby middle class investment in public schools and a strong record of academic achievement serve to attract further generations of middle class students and strong public school performance.

Furthermore, a middle class constituency contributes to public school performance not simply by “stacking the deck” with students who have a strong academic foundation. Several case studies suggest that a predominantly middle class school environment can exert a positive effect on the academic achievement of students from less fortunate backgrounds.



**A tremendous amount of intellectual and social development occurs outside of the classroom**

Albuquerque, New Mexico provides an example of both this phenomenon and the overall effect of a strong middle class presence upon public school performance. A study that was conducted by David Rusk and the Urban Institute in the 1990s tracked the performance and the socio-economic composition of all of the Albuquerque School District's elementary schools. The Albuquerque School District is comprised of a wide variety of public schools including schools with an inner city, urban profile and those with a more affluent, suburban profile. Since all of these schools fall within the same school district, per pupil funding, the quality of the faculty, the quality of the facilities, and other educational "inputs" are relatively constant throughout the district. Consequently, it was relatively easy for the study's authors to isolate the connection between a school's socio-economic composition and its overall academic performance. The study found that a school's socio-economic make-up was responsible for an overwhelming 80% of the variation in school-by-school standardized test scores. The study also confirmed that a predominantly middle class learning environment can exert a positive effect on the academic performance of lower income students. The study tracked the performance of Albuquerque public housing residents in various District schools. The authors concluded that a public housing student who attended a middle class school with only 20% poor children would realize a 13 percentile standardized test score improvement over a public housing student attending a school with 80% poor children.<sup>12</sup>

An extensive study of the Montgomery County (Maryland) School District that was conducted by *The Washington Post* in 2001 arrived at similar conclusions. Like the Albuquerque School District, Montgomery County (a suburb of Washington, DC) is home to schools that are predominantly middle class and wealthy as well as schools that are predominantly working class and poor. The study found that poverty was the single most influential factor in predicting a student's performance. Drawing upon nationwide research, the authors cite data that for every \$10,000 increase in household income, students register a 30-point gain in standardized test scores. The Montgomery County study also concluded that the performance of individual students hinged greatly on the overall level of poverty in the school that they attended. For instance, those lower income students who happened to attend schools comprised mostly of affluent students achieved substantially higher test scores—even matching or exceeding county-wide averages despite their less privileged backgrounds.<sup>13</sup>

The purpose of highlighting these examples is not to suggest that attracting a greater middle class presence is the only means to improving the quality of public schools. Class size, the quality of school facilities, early childhood education, the quality of teachers, and many other factors play a major role in educational quality. Nonetheless, the correlation between middle class involvement in public education and school performance seems particularly relevant to Jefferson Parish—a community that is largely middle class but that has a school system that is disproportionately low income.

Attracting a greater middle class presence to Jefferson Parish Public Schools should be a core policy goal. Such an initiative would not be at odds with other, simultaneous efforts to improve aspects of the school system, such as curriculum changes and the condition of facilities. Likewise, such efforts should not be misinterpreted as overlooking the needs of lower income students. One of the great virtues of public education is that it is truly public and truly open to all families and students from all backgrounds. An effort to attract more middle class students would not change this mission; it would merely strive to make the JPPS system more inclusive and more representative of the Parish as a whole. The evidence from prior research and the case studies presented above suggests that if Jefferson were to accomplish this goal, JPPS would realize higher overall test scores; its lower income students would profit academically; and JPPS would become a compelling, affordable alternative to private schools.

## Education Initiatives

The purpose of the previous sections is not to critique the present leadership of Jefferson Parish Public Schools. The Superintendent and School Board are well aware of the historical achievement gap between Jefferson's public schools and those of other communities. They are also well aware of the socio-economic divide that distinguishes the enrollment profile of area public and private schools. Indeed, well before Hurricane Katrina, the JPPS leadership embarked on an ambitious series of reforms to raise expectations, increase accountability, improve facilities, and elevate the overall quality of public education in the Parish. Since Katrina, the pace of reform has only hastened. Recent initiatives to improve public education in Jefferson Parish include the following measures:

- School choice has been significantly expanded with the establishment of Parish-wide magnet and academically themed schools. Magnet schools were first established in the 2004-2005 school year. The Parish is now home to six magnet schools and a number of other themed schools, including six other schools that have attained the prestigious International Baccalaureate (IB) accreditation for their adoption of the rigorous IB curriculum.
- In order to achieve prestigious accreditation status from the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools, a survey is being administered to parents, students, teachers, and administrators to determine their perceptions of and desires for public education in Jefferson Parish. The survey results will provide JPPS administrators with hard, objective data that will guide future policy decisions.
- The District was awarded a \$20 million dollar grant from Cisco Systems Inc. to install state of the art technology at 16 school campuses. The new technological infrastructure ranges from fiber optic cable to cutting edge educational hardware, such as interactive "Promethian Boards" that facilitate a more engaging classroom environment. Initial reviews of the technology have been overwhelmingly positive.<sup>14</sup> The School Board has adopted a technology plan to upgrade the remaining 70 campuses to the same technological standard. A highly qualified chief technology officer has been hired to oversee this effort.



**Magnet schools, such as Metairie Academy for Advanced Studies, have been established in recent years.**

- A lucrative incentive program is being developed whereby high-performing teachers and principals will be encouraged to relocate to the most academically struggling schools in the school system. For a minimum commitment of three years at an academically challenged school, selected principals would receive a bonus of \$50,000 while selected teachers would receive a \$21,000 bonus. According to a recent study by the Wallace Foundation, exceptional teachers and administrators are critical to turning around historically troubled schools. In their words, “there are virtually no documented instances of troubled schools being turned around in the absence of intervention by talented leaders.”<sup>15</sup>
- Special student assistance centers have been established for students and families with unique needs. In response to the influx of Hispanic families to Jefferson Parish, “newcomer centers” have been set up to ascertain the language ability and optimal grade level for new students from Hispanic families. The Hispanic Business Resource and Technology Center has also been established at Roosevelt Middle School to meet the unique needs of Hispanic students, families, and businesses and to further their academic, social, and economic well-being. Furthermore, “transitional centers” have been established to provide rigorous academic assistance to those students who are two years or more behind their grade level in learning.
- Non-college track curricula have been diversified and expanded at various campuses. Partnerships with trade unions, homebuilders, and a variety of other technical professions have been strengthened so that graduating students who do not go directly to college may make a seamless transition to a skilled, well-paying position.
- Numerous educational initiatives have been supported by the Jefferson Chamber of Commerce. The Jefferson Dollars for Scholars program provides financial assistance and academic support (such as ACT test preparation courses) to Jefferson public school students to expand access to higher education. Adult GED education and skills training and employment referrals for students eligible for SSI and SSDI have also been vigorously supported by the Jefferson Chamber. The Chamber also provides mentoring and internships for students in the “Option 3” program—those students who are either behind in course credit or who do not thrive in the regular school system. Finally, the Chamber is working to secure multiple grants and partnerships to enhance educational opportunities for students who are struggling.
- Relationships with local colleges, such as Our Lady of Holy Cross College, have been strengthened in order to bolster teacher recruitment efforts. Diminished enrollment in local colleges and in education degree programs in particular has adversely affected teacher recruitment following Katrina. Stronger relationships between JPPS, local schools of education, and the career centers at local universities will hopefully reverse this trend.

- A more exacting, more objective principal evaluation rubric was established starting in 2003. This evaluative methodology has enhanced the District's ability to track principals' performance, to recommend changes where necessary, and to reward exceptional results.
- The overall curriculum has been strengthened through an intensive reading and math focus so that all JPPS students emerge with strong, core academic skills. Additionally, JPPS has adopted internal standards for grade level achievement that exceed the standards outlined in the state mandated curriculum.
- The school year and the school day have been modified to provide for more instruction time.
- Relationships have been strengthened with national organizations such as Teach For America and New Leaders for New Schools. These organizations have a successful track record of providing well trained, highly qualified, and highly motivated teachers and principals to socio-economically disadvantaged schools. JPPS is working with these organizations to obtain more teachers and administrators for the school system.
- A plan has been approved to reduce the overall student to teacher ratio at all grade levels. The school system is aiming for student to teacher ratios of 15:1 at the pre-Kindergarten level, 20:1 at the elementary level, 28:1 at the middle school level, and 33:1 at the high school level. The administration would like to further reduce these ratios; its ability to do so hinges on successfully recruiting additional teachers, not on budgetary constraints. Ensuring that this plan is implemented and ensuring that even further reductions in class size are realized must be a priority of the administration and School Board.
- While not specific to Jefferson Parish, the statewide LA-4 program has been introduced to augment the federally funded Head Start program. The purpose of these programs is to enroll more children—and children from disadvantaged backgrounds in particular—into pre-Kindergarten programs. Preliminary research has confirmed that early childhood education helps to minimize the academic gap between middle income and lower income students, a gap that frequently exists from the first day of elementary education. Recent research on the success of the program constitutes a statistical “slam dunk.” Third graders who participated in the LA-4 program registered standardized test scores from 7.3 to 10.9 percentage points higher than those with no pre-K education. Furthermore, the biggest gains came from children from disadvantaged backgrounds.<sup>16</sup> Jefferson has established pre-school centers at nearly all of its elementary schools and is working towards offering universal pre-school.



**A plan has been approved to reduce class sizes in Jefferson Parish Public Schools.**

- Standardized interval tests have been introduced so that at seven separate occasions during the school year, students' progress can be objectively monitored. This initiative allows teachers and administrators to respond early and aggressively when deficiencies are identified.
- A plan has been approved to rebuild all or part of 18 school campuses over the next several years. Many JPPS schools are in need of a significant facility overhaul, given that the newest school facility in Jefferson was completed in 1987. This initiative represents the first step toward comprehensively upgrading school facilities.
- Nationally recognized architects have been retained to design a new school campus on the site of the Churchill Technology and Business Park to house the Patrick F. Taylor Science and Technology Academy, a college preparatory magnet school with a science and mathematics focus.
- 124 teachers in Jefferson Parish have attained prestigious National Board certification status. National Board certification is the highest credential in the teaching profession, and Jefferson boasts the greatest number of National Board certified teachers in the state.<sup>17</sup>
- Special programs at St. Ville Academy and Bunche Middle School have been established to give special attention to those students who are two or more years behind in their studies. The specialized environment allows educators to tailor lesson design to prepare these students for high school and to focus on achievement in mathematics and English/language arts (ELA).



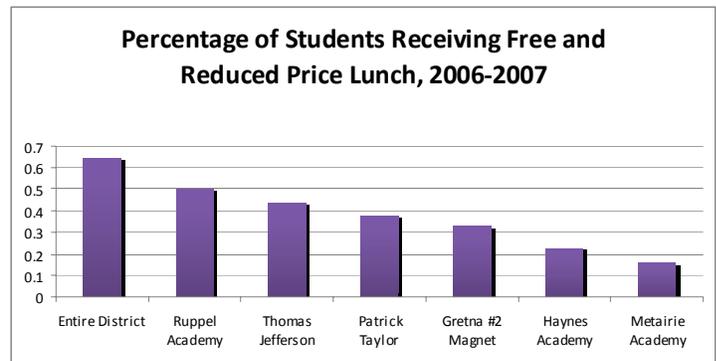
**Patrick Taylor Academy will be relocated to a new facility at the Churchill Technology and Business Park.**

## Education Action Items

The sheer volume of ambitious, well-conceived initiatives that the School Board and administration have pursued over the past several years is a testament to their leadership and their appreciation for the challenge at hand. Arguably the most important action item in the coming years is to support the many reforms that are underway, to see them to fruition, and to give the reforms a chance to work. Too often, a change in leadership or mere impatience results in the premature abandonment of a reform effort. Tangible results from these efforts may not be seen overnight, and it is incumbent upon all stakeholders to be sufficiently patient as they scrutinize the results of these programs in the coming years.

At the same time, further efforts are needed—efforts that will complement those initiatives that are already underway. One of the most important policies for the school system to pursue is expanded public school choice in the form of magnet and academic theme schools. While only established in the 2004-2005 school year, the preliminary results from these schools show tremendous promise along several measures. Most importantly and most fundamentally, the magnet schools have recorded very strong results on the LEAP and GEE tests. Across all subjects, the six existing magnet schools have recorded a considerably higher percentage of students at the “advanced” and “master” levels and a considerably lower percentage at the “unsatisfactory” level, relative to the Jefferson school system as a whole.<sup>18</sup> These results put Jefferson’s magnet schools in the same category of achievement as the best public schools in St. Tammany and St. Charles parishes.

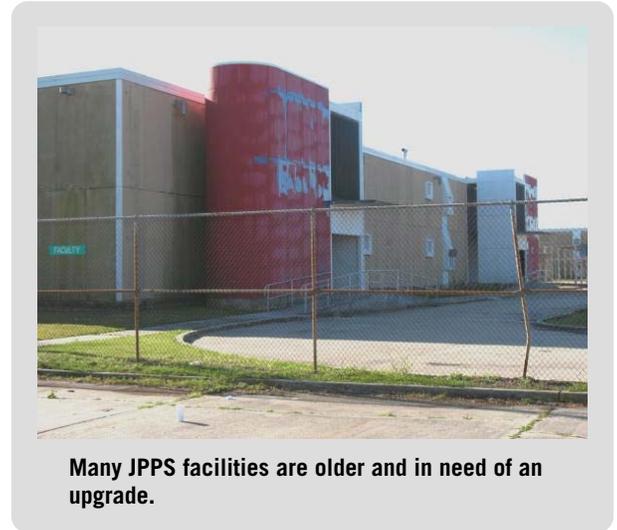
A second measure of magnet schools’ potential is that they have succeeded in drawing a more diverse and more middle class student body back to the public school system.<sup>19</sup> The graph to the right illustrates the percentage of students who are eligible for a free or reduced price lunch at each of the magnet schools, relative to the system-wide percentage. For all of the reasons enumerated earlier, attracting a greater middle class presence to the public school system represents a major accomplishment. The only caveat to this phenomenon is that JPPS must remain vigilant to ensure that a bifurcated system of haves and have-nots does not emerge *within* Jefferson Parish Public Schools. The administration must closely monitor schools’ enrollment profile, outreach efforts to underrepresented groups, and admissions criteria to preclude a two tiered system of magnet schools on the one hand and traditional neighborhood schools on the other.



Fortunately, preliminary evidence suggests that this kind of segregation is not occurring. According to JPPS estimates, a substantial percentage (approximately 40%) of students enrolled in magnet schools are not coming from other public schools in Jefferson. Rather, they are coming from private or parochial schools.<sup>20</sup> This estimate, paired with the fact that there are enrollment waiting lists at a number of grade levels for the magnet schools, suggests that the magnets are adding to the system’s overall enrollment rather than taking high performing students away from traditional neighborhood schools. The fact that there are waiting lists also suggests that there is further unmet demand for quality public education that could be met through additional magnet and academically themed campuses.

Another critical action item that warrants special mention is the need for upgraded facilities. A distinguishing characteristic of private schools and the best public schools in the metropolitan area is first rate facilities. A school system cannot expect A+ results and cannot expect to attract new families with C+ infrastructure. Along any objective assessment of school facilities in the metropolitan area, Jefferson’s physical infrastructure does not match up. As was stated earlier, the newest school in the JPPS system was constructed over 20 years ago. Many of the facilities are architecturally unremarkable at best, and at worst are ill-suited to new technologies and teaching methods. Throughout the years, Jefferson’s school buildings have been well maintained; but a major capital campaign, rather than mere maintenance, is what is needed to keep pace with other school facilities in the metropolitan area. The simple fact that many of the school buildings are outmoded should be justification enough for an aggressive capital replacement plan. The fact that research has linked the quality of school facilities to academic achievement and school discipline should be further justification for a major capital initiative.<sup>21, 22</sup>

Needless to say, such an initiative will require considerable resources, whether from re-programmed, existing revenue streams or from new sources of revenue. Parish leaders and all stakeholders in public education must



**Many JPPS facilities are older and in need of an upgrade.**



**Communities that have urbanized in recent years often have exceptional public school facilities.**

have the fortitude to make the difficult budgetary decisions that need to be made in order to bring the school system's physical infrastructure into the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

The following action items have been identified as being critical to improving public education in Jefferson Parish:

1. **Increase the number of magnet and academically themed schools in accordance with a detailed magnet school facility and enrollment plan.** The six magnet schools that have been established thus far in Jefferson have produced strong test scores and increased middle class involvement in public education. The fact that there is documented, unmet demand for additional magnet school desks provides a strong justification for setting up new magnet and academically themed schools. Providing more high quality schools that are available to all Parish residents will make Jefferson Parish more competitive with other communities by giving families a compelling alternative to private school tuition. It will elevate the overall level of academic achievement in the public school system, and it will likely make the middle class more invested in public education. However, any expansion in the number of magnet and themed schools must be pursued not haphazardly, but according to a specific plan. This plan would outline the optimal number of magnet and themed campuses over a particular time horizon, the optimal number of desks at various grade levels, approximate geographical locations, admissions policies, and the interplay between these schools and traditional neighborhood schools. The completion of this long range "roadmap" for magnet and themed schools would be the necessary first step toward increasing the total number of magnet and academically themed schools.
2. **Modify the federal consent decree to allow children on the East Bank and West Bank to attend the magnet school of their choosing.** The Jefferson Parish School Board recently approved a consent decree to comply with a federal desegregation order. One stipulation of the decree is that magnet schools and other "open enrollment" schools, such as academic theme schools, may only draw students from their respective side of the Mississippi River. This provision runs counter to the concept of open-enrollment schools; it runs counter to the aim of attracting a more diverse, representative population to Jefferson Parish Public Schools; and by limiting school choice, it sends the wrong message to parents who have embraced the magnet school concept. The more bureaucratic and inflexible the school system is perceived to be, the less likely it will be to attract families who otherwise would not send their children to public schools.

A modification to the consent decree to allow students from either side of the River to attend JPPS magnet schools is presently under consideration, as the final consent decree has not yet been signed by the federal judge presiding over the case.

3. **Embark on a major capital campaign to renovate and replace Jefferson’s public schools.** The administration and the School Board are well aware of the present deficiencies in the school system’s physical infrastructure. In recognition of this, they recently approved a \$50 million dollar plan to replace all or part of 18 school facilities.<sup>23</sup> This represents an important first step in upgrading facilities, but these 18 schools constitute just over 20% of all of Jefferson’s public school campuses. Because most of the schools were constructed between 1950 and 1980, virtually all of them are in need of major renovations, if not a complete overhaul. If Jefferson is to keep pace with private schools and with the high-performing public school systems in the metropolitan area, it cannot market its public schools as a legitimate alternative unless major improvements are made to their physical condition. The age of Jefferson’s school buildings and the comparatively good condition of non-public schools and facilities in other school districts demand an aggressive capital campaign.
  
4. **Work with the State Legislature and the Louisiana Department of Education to increase funding for JPPS from the Minimum Foundation Program (MFP).** The MFP grant program is the principal funding mechanism for directing state funds to local school districts. The funding formula that determines school districts’ annual MFP allocation is extremely complicated and incorporates numerous data elements, such as overall school enrollment, local revenues for public education, and the presence of special needs children. On a per pupil basis, JPPS collects less MFP funding than other school districts because of certain components of the funding formula. Specifically, the number of students who are eligible for the free and reduced price lunch program and the size of the local school millage serve to penalize Jefferson Parish. A comprehensive audit of the funding formula should be undertaken, and revisions should be made to increase Jefferson’s share of this funding source.

**2004 - 2005 MFP Level 1, 2, 3 Appropriations**

Parish	Enrollment Total	Total MFP Dollars	Dollars Per Pupil
Jefferson	51,356	\$141,907,769	\$2,763.22
Orleans	64,920	\$218,612,049	\$3,367.41
Plaquemines	5,024	\$11,544,458	\$2,297.86
St. Bernard	8,802	\$29,693,503	\$3,373.50
St. Tammany	35,620	\$145,934,333	\$4,096.98
St. John	6,466	\$27,237,682	\$4,212.45
St. Charles	9,719	\$25,939,475	\$2,668.94

(source: LA Dept. of Education)

5. **Bring the Head Start program under the purview of Jefferson Parish Public Schools.** The purpose of the federally funded Head Start program is to provide pre-Kindergarten education to children from disadvantaged families. This program is currently operated by the Parish Government, through their Community Action Programs (JEFFCAP) agency. Because JPPS is the primary provider of educational services in the Parish and because JPPS is the local implementing agency for the State funded LA-4 program for early childhood education, it would only make sense to place the administration of Head Start under the oversight of JPPS as well. This would allow for greater coordination and leveraging of local, state, and federal funds and greater coordination of various pre-Kindergarten programs.
6. **Expand public funding and support for alternative schools serving children with discipline problems.** There are currently two alternative schools in Jefferson Parish, the Jefferson Community School on the East Bank and the West Bank Community School. Historically, a number of local public agencies—the Jefferson Parish Sheriff’s Office, the District Attorney’s office, and the Parish Government—have contributed resources to these schools under the premise that they help to prevent crime and other quality of life problems. In recent years funding has dwindled in spite of impressive academic progress. Students at the Jefferson Community School, for example, have scored at or near the Parish-wide mean on standardized tests, a particularly impressive accomplishment given the at-risk profile of the student body. The two existing alternative schools serve students only in grades 6 through 8. Support for alternative schools must be expanded, and the age range that they serve must be broadened as well.



7. **Work with the business community, trade unions, community colleges, and the local Workforce Investment Board (WIB) to develop improved career-track curricula, with a particular focus on those students at risk of dropping out.** In all public school systems, a substantial number of students do not enroll in college upon graduation. Vocational, career-oriented curricula provide an alternative for those students so that they may graduate with a trade skill and immediately embark on a career upon graduation. JPPS has made great strides in expanding and refining these courses of study in recent years, but further improvements in these programs may be realized through closer cooperation with the business community, WIB, trade unions, and community colleges. These institutions could provide assistance in course instruction, developing curricula, identifying fields with a high demand for labor, and identifying post-graduate training and apprenticeship programs. The Jefferson Chamber Foundation recently received a Multiple Education Pathways Grant from the U.S. Department of Labor to examine these issues and make recommendations to enhance vocational education and improve the outcomes of students at risk of dropping out. Implementing the recommendations of this study should be a priority. Additionally, restoring successful programs, such as the Young Marine program overseen by the Jefferson Parish Sheriff's Office, should be a first priority.
  
8. **Implement the recommendations of the High School Redesign Commission.** In recognition of the educational demands of today's knowledge-based economy, the Louisiana Department of Education has chartered the High School Redesign Commission to articulate a series of recommendations to elevate the quality of secondary education throughout the state. Among other topics, the Commission has focused on creating more engaging curricula; guaranteeing four full years of math and science to keep students competitive; and creating cooperative, dual enrollment programs with 2-year and 4-year institutions of higher education. When the Commission has finalized its recommendations, JPPS should implement those initiatives that will best complement the changes in curriculum that JPPS has overseen in recent years.
  
9. **Engage the Jefferson Federation of Teachers (JFT) to expand continuing education programs for Jefferson Parish Public School teachers.** Changes in curricula, changes in the technology that is available to teachers, and evolving research on teaching techniques all highlight the importance of supporting continuing education initiatives for teachers. A pilot mentorship and continuing education program at Hazel Park Elementary School has received extremely favorable reviews from participating teachers. In tandem with the JFT, JPPS should seek ways to expand programs such as this one to ensure that JPPS teachers are proficient in the best and latest pedagogical techniques.

- 10. Work with the State Legislature and Louisiana Department of Education to expand and enhance the data that are collected from standardized tests.** There are a number of important datasets that are not collected or published as part of the State’s standardized testing program. Most notably, non-public schools are not required to release information on their students’ performance on standardized tests. Because so many children in Jefferson Parish attend non-public schools, collecting and reporting standardized test scores for private and parochial schools would serve several important functions. First, it would provide a more complete picture of the quality of schools that are available to Jefferson Parish residents. Second, it would provide the public schools with an important measuring stick for academic progress. In light of the fact that non-public schools receive taxpayer support in Louisiana, this is an entirely reasonable request.

In addition to publishing information on standardized test scores for non-public schools, the Department of Education should also look to publish other datasets relative to test scores. For instance, longitudinal studies that track the performance of children as they progress through the grade levels and distinguishing between the ACT scores for college bound and non-college bound students would also paint a more complete picture of educational quality in the public schools.

- 11. Work with the business community to offer special programs to JPPS teachers to augment recruiting efforts.** A smaller post-Katrina labor market, diminished enrollment at area colleges, and diminished enrollment in education programs have resulted in difficulties in teacher recruitment. Although teacher salaries in Jefferson Parish remain competitive with other school systems in the southern United States<sup>24</sup>, additional inducements from the business community could assist the school system in attracting and retaining teachers. Examples of potential inducements include favorable mortgage terms, discounts on monthly rent, and other programs targeted specifically toward teachers.
- 12. Initiate an outreach campaign to increase parental involvement in the school system.** According to JPPS officials, the level of parental involvement in the school system varies greatly. While many parents are actively involved in their children’s school work, other parents—whether due to time constraints, indifference, or other factors—are less engaged. Jefferson Parish Public Schools should develop an aggressive outreach campaign to give individual schools guidance in engaging those parents who have not been involved in their children’s school work. Outreach materials, recommended protocols for reaching out to parents, and even the participation of social workers could be components of this effort.

- 13. Initiate a public outreach campaign targeted both to real estate agents and the general public.** One of the most immediate ways that the public school system can gain the confidence of families who are not currently “invested” in Jefferson’s public schools is by launching a strategic public outreach campaign. Through various media such as a periodic newsletter and an enhanced website (linked to other websites such as the Parish government’s web site, Realtor web sites, etc.), JPPS can more effectively communicate academic successes, new initiatives that are underway, gifted and talented curricula, and profiles of individual schools. The Parish government provides an effective template for public outreach in the form of the newsletter that it publishes on the Southeast Louisiana Flood Control Project (SELA).

A particularly important component of this effort would be an outreach campaign focusing specifically on real estate agents. Because real estate agents exert a tremendous amount of influence on a family’s decision about where to live, JPPS must convey to them the progress that is being made, the exemplary scores that the magnet schools are registering, the planned improvements to facilities, and any other information that would give prospective homeowners greater confidence in the quality of public education in Jefferson Parish.

## Summary Matrix of Action Items

The following table provides a summary of locally implemented and state coordinated action items for improving public education in Jefferson Parish.

Action ID#	Implementation Action	Responsible Local Agencies/Actors	Benchmarks	Local Resources/Funding	Timeline
E1	Increase the number of magnet and academically themed schools in accordance with a detailed magnet school facility and enrollment plan	Jefferson Parish Public School System (JPPS)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Creation of 4 – 5 new magnet schools</li> <li>Higher % of West Bank students in magnet schools</li> </ul>	Approximately \$150 – 250K per year	Board approval in 2008 – 2009; establish schools in 2009 - 2010
E2	Modify the federal consent decree to allow children on the East Bank and West Bank to attend the magnet school of their choosing	Jefferson Parish Public School System (JPPS)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Modified language of decree</li> <li>School board and U.S. District Court approval</li> </ul>	Administrative staff time	Obtain approval for revised consent decree in 2008
E3	Embark on a major capital campaign to renovate and replace Jefferson's public schools	Jefferson Parish Public School System (JPPS)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Adoption of comprehensive capital improvement plan</li> <li>Identification of revenue source (e.g. millage)</li> </ul>	Approximately \$200 million for complete system overhaul (2008 dollars)	Adopt plan and secure revenue source in 2008 – 2009; implement capital campaign through 2025
E4	Work with the State Legislature and the Louisiana Department of Education to increase funding for JPPS from the Minimum Foundation Program (MFP)	Jefferson Parish Public School System (JPPS), Parish Government, JEDCO, Jefferson Chamber of Commerce, community leaders throughout Jefferson Parish	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Audit of MFP funding formula</li> <li>Changes to formula, adopted by legislature and governor</li> </ul>	Staff time related to advocacy	Audit completed, recommendations made and adopted in 2009 - 2010
E5	Bring the Head Start program under the purview of Jefferson Parish Public Schools	Jefferson Parish Public School System (JPPS), Parish Government	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Memorandum of understanding between JPPS and Parish government</li> <li>Council and school board action, potential state legislation</li> </ul>	Staff time related to advocacy and administrative tasks	Change in administration of Head Start by 2010 - 2011
E6	Expand public funding and support for alternative schools serving children with discipline problems	Jefferson Parish Public School System (JPPS), Parish Government, Jefferson Parish Sheriff's Office (JPSO), Jefferson Parish District Attorney's Office, JEDCO, Jefferson Chamber of Commerce	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Additional funding secured from JPPS and other agencies</li> <li>New alternative schools established and/or existing schools expanded</li> </ul>	Contingent on level of external (i.e. non-JPPS) funding; alternative schools had previously received \$300,000 total from JPSO, Parish Government, and District Attorney's office (\$100,000 apiece)	Adopt plan for expanded alternative education in 2008 – 2009; establish new or expanded schools in 2009 - 2010

Action ID#	Implementation Action	Responsible Local Agencies/Actors	Benchmarks	Local Resources/Funding	Timeline
E7	Work with the business community, trade unions, community colleges, the local Workforce Investment Board (WIB), and Louisiana Department of Labor to develop improved career-track curricula, with a particular focus on those students at risk of dropping out. Pre-Katrina programs, such as the "Young Marine" program should be restored and new courses of study should be added	Jefferson Parish Public School System (JPPS), JEDCO, Jefferson Chamber of Commerce, Jefferson WIB, local community colleges, Louisiana Department of Labor, JPSO (Young Marine program)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Completion of Multiple Education Pathways study</li> <li>• Implementation of recommendations</li> <li>• Identification of need for additional facilities, courses of study, funding sources</li> </ul>	Contingent on evaluation of gaps in existing programs through Multiple Education Pathways study and other evaluative efforts	Complete evaluation of existing programs in 2008 – 2009; initiate new programs in 2009 - 2010
E8	Implement the recommendations of the High School Redesign Commission	Jefferson Parish Public School System (JPPS)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Completion of High School Redesign Study</li> <li>• Evaluation and implementation of recommendations</li> </ul>	Contingent on recommendations of study	Complete study by 2008 – 2009; evaluate and implement recommendations in 2009 - 2010
E9	Engage the Jefferson Federation of Teachers (JFT) to expand continuing education programs for Jefferson Parish Public School teachers	Jefferson Parish Public School System (JPPS), Jefferson Federation of Teachers (JFT)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Analysis of cost and feasibility of expanded continuing education programs</li> <li>• Implementation of expanded programs</li> </ul>	Contingent on recommendations of study and level of participation from JFT	Complete analysis by conclusion of 2008 – 2009 school year; begin implementation of expanded continuing ed. programs by end of 2009 – 2010 school year
E10	Work with the State Legislature and Louisiana Department of Education to expand and enhance the data that are collected from standardized tests	Jefferson Parish Public School System (JPPS), Parish Government, JEDCO, Jefferson Chamber of Commerce, community leaders throughout Jefferson Parish	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Implementation of new data collection protocols</li> <li>• Publication of expanded data</li> </ul>	Staff time related to advocacy and administrative tasks	Collect expanded data sets by 2009 – 2010 school year; publish results during same school year
E11	Work with the business community to offer special programs to JPPS teachers to augment recruiting efforts	Jefferson Parish Public School System (JPPS), JEDCO, Jefferson Chamber of Commerce	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Identification of potential incentive programs</li> <li>• Commitment of funding from businesses</li> </ul>	Staff time related to advocacy and administrative tasks	Design programs and secure commitments in 2008 – 2009; initiate programs in 2009
E12	Initiate an outreach campaign to increase parental involvement in the school system	Jefferson Parish Public School System (JPPS)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Completion of program design</li> <li>• Funding and implementation of program design, focusing on schools with greatest</li> </ul>	Staff and direct cost needs contingent upon results of program design	Complete program design in 2008 – 2009 school year; aim to implement in 2009 – 2010 school year
E13	Initiate a public outreach campaign targeted both to real estate agents and the general public	Jefferson Parish Public School System (JPPS), JEDCO, Jefferson Chamber of Commerce	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Roll out of improvements to JPPS website</li> <li>• Roll out of newsletter</li> </ul>	\$20,000 for website \$110,000 for newsletter	Unveil website and issue newsletter in 2008 - 2009

## Conclusion

High quality public education, aside from being a community asset in and of itself, affects a community's overall quality of life in numerous ways. The preparedness of the workforce, the community's appeal to outside residents and businesses, and even the sociological health of the community are all impacted in some way by its public schools. For too long Jefferson Parish has had a two-tiered system of primary and secondary education whereby private and parochial schools are the schools of choice for the Parish's middle class and wealthy residents while the public schools exist for everyone else. This phenomenon has resulted in a number of negative consequences through the years, from lower public school performance relative to other metropolitan area communities to the financial burden of private education that puts Jefferson at a competitive disadvantage. Reversing the middle class's long-standing abandonment of Jefferson Parish Public Schools must be a principal policy goal in the coming years.

Attracting the middle class back to the school system and improving the quality of education for those families that are already invested in Jefferson Parish Public Schools will require bold action from the Superintendent, School Board, State of Louisiana, the local business community, and other public and private stakeholders. In recent years, the educational leadership in Jefferson Parish has confronted the challenges that Jefferson faces in public education head-on, having sponsored a number of wide ranging and ambitious initiatives. The challenge before the community now is to build upon these actions by making certain investment and policy choices in order to elevate the Parish's public schools to the level of quality that the community deserves.

This document has outlined precisely those actions that are necessary to accomplish this objective. With the support of Parish residents, businesses, and political leaders, the implementation of this plan will result in improved public education and will thus contribute to a better overall quality of life for the Jefferson Parish community.

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