

Shaping Tomorrow Today

Public Education

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Help spread the word: 3A & 3B critical to JPS



by Nancy Henderson, JCEA President

It's election time, and this year we have an opportunity to reaffirm our commitment to Jeffco public schools. On or before November 2, we can vote to approve tax initiatives 3A (for school operations) and 3B (for school facilities and construction). Both are critically needed if JPS is to continue its record of success in helping Jeffco students achieve their highest scholastic potential.

As a teacher leader, I know that this school district has a national reputation for innovation, performance and efficiency that is admired and emulated. I also know, first hand, of all the dedicated work that JPS teachers and school employees do each day to meet the educational needs of this community.

Yet that work sometimes seems to be undervalued here in Jeffco. Even though this is a relatively affluent county, there is a substantial funding gap between what Jeffco taxpayers pay per student for schools and what the rest of metro-Denver taxpayers pay. The per pupil funding gap is the primary reason we are in a never-ending budget crisis that makes long-term planning and program development difficult, if not impossible.

In the last two years, JPS has cut \$20,000,000 worth of services and programs for students. If we fail to pass 3A & 3B, the district will be forced to cut an additional \$34,600,000 through 2007. This represents a 10% reduction in the JPS budget when other costs are escalating. However, the success of 3A & 3B will help correct the funding shortfall.

I like to shop, and I know that whether you are "retailing" at the mall or buying a house, you get the quality you pay for. An education is not a product that one can compare to items that are manufactured and sold at Target or Foleys. Nevertheless, the quality of services delivered within the public sector, like public education, DOES depend on the level of tax-based funding from the community.

This community has enjoyed a world-class educational system for its children, despite many years of inadequate resources funneled to JPS. That is because everyone in Jeffco schools is committed to doing what's best for students to the fullest extent possible. However, without the passage of 3A & 3B, that level of excellence for students will begin to erode. We cannot continue to expect the same level of outstanding public education if we do not approve 3A & 3B and drastic budget cuts are implemented.

We will receive the educational system we are willing to fund. It cannot be any other way.

If we want a new car, we have to pay for it. If we want trained police,

and firefighters for our community, we have to fund that through taxes. If we want the best public education system in the state for the children of Jefferson County, we have to approve 3A & 3B.

My own children have graduated and left Jeffco schools. That makes me part of the 70% of this community who do not have children in the public schools. Nevertheless, I will actively campaign and vote for 3A & 3B for these two solid reasons. First, I am a homeowner in Jefferson County, and my property value is greater if the public schools around me remain of high quality. I certainly want to make money when I sell my house and "downsize." Also, the economic health of this entire community where I live is tied to JPS, as it is the largest employer in the county. So, I will vote for 3A & 3B because, for me, it just makes good economic sense.

I will also vote for 3A & 3B for the futures of the children in Jefferson County. I recognize that the taxpayers in Illinois provided me with a wonderful public school education. I am also grateful that Jeffco taxpayers of the last 18 years enabled JPS to give my children a top-drawer education.

Now it's my privilege to continue funding JPS schools in order to give today's students the same great public education experienced by my children and me. I support the belief of the founding fathers that each citizen has a patriotic duty to pass on - and fund - the best public school system to the next generation. So, I will also vote for 3A & 3B for the children.

Ultimately, the funding that JPS receives will be determined through the power and responsibility of the ballot. If you have children in our schools, you are aware of our successes and the need for additional resources. Our challenge now is to inform and mobilize the rest of the voters. We ask you to share the news about JPS and actively work for 3A & 3B.

If you are a proud parent or grandparent, aunt or uncle of a Jeffco student or graduate, talk to your neighbors about why it is important to vote for increased funding to support our public schools. Tell them to vote for 3A & 3B to give every student a bright future.

If you are a realtor, explain to every homeowner the positive monetary gain to them from good neighborhood schools. Tell them to vote for 3A & 3B for higher property values.

If you are a business owner or are employed in Jeffco, inform your customers and friends about the economic impact on everyone in this county of the 11,000 JPS wage earners, most of whom live and buy here. Tell them to vote for 3A & 3B to keep jobs secure and our economy growing.

We can win this election for the children and for the community, but we need your help. Inside this issue is more information you can use. Please read it, talk to your neighbors, family and friends, and then vote **YES on 3A & 3B.**

Why we need Mill/Bond: **3A & 3B**

Citizens agree: JPS needs more Money

Many Jeffco residents have participated in Jeffco Public Schools (JPS) budget workgroups, attended public meetings, and discussed our chronic budget problems with family and friends. They have struggled with how to meet the school district's needs for additional funding. They have recommended future budget cuts, but they do not want to make them.

They, better than most, understand Jeffco voters have a clear choice: JPS can continue to make cuts in programs and staff that will ultimately hurt our children, **or** JPS can ask voters for additional funds.

A great investment

Currently Jeffco homeowners, through voter-approved funding, pay an average of \$27 a month for educating children (that's less than the average monthly cable TV bill). What's the return on that investment:

- 85,000 students attended Jeffco Public Schools last year.
- Our 2003 graduation rate rose from 78% in 2002 to 81.8%.
- Our graduates include a Nobel Prize winner, an astronaut, an Academy Award nominee, a world-renowned doctor, a state senator, and a Cy Young Award winner.
- Our students continue to earn high scores on achievement tests.
- 81% of our third graders scored proficient/advanced on reading assessments.
- 97.6% of our teachers are ranked "highly qualified" by the state.

A mill levy supports teaching and learning

A mill levy is a property tax rate based on dollars per thousand of assessed valuation of the property. The proposal approved by the Jeffco school board asks for an increase in the mill levy override totaling \$38.5 million. Look for **3A** on the ballot.

It will support additional funding of our schools' day-to-day operating expenses, which have risen dramatically during the past five years, and is designed to carry the district for only four years.

How will the money be spent?

- Restore elementary teacher reduction in grades 1-3
 - Intervene with students not meeting standards-equity in schools
 - Student safety
 - Reinstate previous reduction in work year
 - Maintain high school electives-2 teachers/school
 - Reduce class size in grades 5-6
 - Custodial—for improving square footage requirement
 - Completion of the negotiated agreement
 - 5-year school operational support for instructional, clinic aides, clerical, textbooks at \$1.5 million/year
 - 5-year maintenance/custodial support -\$1 million /year
 - "Reserve to mitigate future reductions" totaling \$15 million
- For each \$100,000 of residential property value, a Jeffco

homeowner would invest \$4.78 more a month for education.

A bond election for safe, efficient schools

A local bond election, initiative **3B**, will raise \$323.8 million for improving and building schools. The money will be spent to upgrade, remodel and build schools/facilities as follows:

- Elementary schools: \$89 million
- Middle schools: \$64 million
- High schools: \$237 million
- Athletic complexes: \$4 million
- Options Center: \$40 million
- Support facilities: \$6 million

The new bond money will be added to a \$10 million carry-over, \$90 million in internal transfers (\$15 million per year for six years), \$8 million in fees and surplus property sales, \$6.8 million in energy savings refinancing \$9.6 million in investment earnings. This makes a total investment of \$448.2 million.

A Jeffco homeowner's tax bill will increase by 73 cents a month per \$100,000 of residential property valuation. For business property, as per the Gallagher Amendment, the rate is \$2.66 per month per \$110,000 business property value.

A successful bond election will benefit everyone. Our children will get a quality education, our schools—in every neighborhood in the county—will be maintained and upgraded, and we can continue to operate schools as community resources for meetings, polling places and events. And, most importantly,

The bottom line for Jeffco students

The greatest impact of funding cuts are on this district's 85,000 students. For the past three years, groups of citizens and staff have formed budget workgroups to recommend cuts to the district's budget. After two years of cutting administrative and operating costs to the tune of \$20 million, the budget workgroups had no choice but to recommend cuts that affect the classroom. More cuts are being



identified. Our students are being hurt by:

- Increased student fees for activities, parking, labs and field trips
- Less maintenance and cleaning of classrooms
- Fewer classroom supplies and equipment
- Decline in support staff such as clinic aides, technicians and administration
- Loss of educational opportunities and activities
- Larger class sizes and fewer high school elective classes (art, music, etc.)

'Frequently Asked Questions' about the mill levy, bond election

Q: Everyone has had to cut back during these difficult economic times. Why not Jeffco Public Schools?

A: We have! JPS has cut \$20 million over the past two years. Cuts have been made to administration, technology, operations and much more. Recommendations for these cuts were made by a citizens' advisory group.

Additional cuts are being identified. Unless 3A passes in November 2004, JPS will need to cut between \$34.6 million more by 2007.

Q: Isn't the district top heavy? Why don't you cut administrators?

A: Jeffco Public Schools is not "top heavy." The district has the lowest ratio of administrators and support staff of any Denver metropolitan area school district. For the past three years, the district has eliminated administrative positions. The National Center for Educational Statistics found that Jeffco Public Schools has fewer central administrative staff per 1,000 students than any other school district in Colorado with 15,000 or more students.

Q: Isn't the school district's debt caused by poor management? What about the technology deficit?

A: No. The district has sound financial management that is reviewed monthly by the citizen Financial Oversight Committee. In addition, the district is audited regularly by an outside, independent auditor and is reviewed by the state.

The district's financial ratings from independent rating agencies have improved in the last two years and remain stable. The technology deficit was paid off in 2003 and has nothing to do with the current financial crisis, which is due to increased costs, expectations and decreased revenue.

Q: Improving schools sounds great for parents of school-age children, but what about non-parents living in the district? How do they benefit?

A: A good school system is essential to maintaining high property values. Homeowners and home buyers want strong public schools with excellent reputations. No one wants to live next door to a poorly maintained school. And, no one wants to locate to an area with bad schools. The market value of homes and the success of businesses are directly tied to the success of Jeffco Public Schools.

Q: What is the greatest impact of the 2004-05 budget cuts on our schools today?

A: While all budget cuts have an impact of some sort or another on our classrooms, the greatest impact is occurring in grades one, two, and three, where the student/teacher ratio has been increased from 18-22 (with a target of 20) to 20-24 (with a target of 22). This has resulted in the district hiring 40 fewer elementary teachers.

Additional cuts that will impact our schools include less money for textbooks— \$16.50/student at the elementary level and \$15/student at the secondary level; the reduction of clinic aide/health care paraprofessional hours; and the shortening of the work year by one day next year. As a result, Jeffco

Public Schools employees will work one less day and students will go to school one less day next year.

Q: How does Jeffco Public Schools' funding compare to other school districts?

A: Jeffco has one of the lowest per pupil funding levels in the Denver metropolitan area. Please reference the box below to see how Jeffco Public Schools compares to six other area school districts.

What do other school districts spend?	
Boulder, \$7,126	Westminster \$6,823
Denver, \$7,122	Colorado Springs \$6,748
Cherry Creek, \$6,823	Douglas County \$6,459
Jeffco \$6,216	

Q: What about Amendment 23 funding? Didn't that ensure adequate state funding?

A: Schools are not receiving a full cost of living (inflation) increase, plus one percent, as mandated by Amendment 23. Why? The state considers "fully funded" as funding to schools at the rate of inflation. However, the legislature has lowered the base funding for inflation each of the past two years, resulting in less state revenue to schools.

Q. Is there a list of proposed cuts for 2005-06?

A. Yes , the Citizens Budget Review committee has recommended the following cuts:

- Loss of approximately 159 classroom and special education teachers resulting in increased class size and the loss of arts and elective programs in senior highs
- Loss of all instructional coaches resulting in an extreme reduction in effective professional development and teacher training
- Loss of approximately 19 middle school and senior high school counselors resulting in fewer counseling and college preparation services for students
- Loss of student safety staff including six campus supervisors and approximately 13 elementary, middle, and senior high assistant principals resulting in less secure school environments
- Loss of support staff such as social workers, psychologists, secretaries, custodians, and paraprofessionals resulting in less support for classroom teachers
- Loss of 26 bus drivers resulting in limited high school transportation
- Loss of central services and support systems for school

For more information contact: www.jeffcoschoolsyes.com



For Your Information

Helping Kids Thrive

For the first time in its 14-year history, HKT is focusing on helping the parents of teenagers. This annual **free** parenting conference, presented by the Jefferson Center for Mental Health and sponsored by JCEA, will be held on Tuesday, **October 26 (Wheat Ridge MS)** and Thursday, **November 4 (O'Connell MS)** from **5: 30 - 9 p.m.**



Also, for the first time, the conference will feature special sessions for American Indian/Alaskan Native parents and those parents who

primarily speak Spanish.

Teachers and parents can register by visiting the JCMH website: www.JCMH.org, calling Carolyn at 303-432-5156, or asking your principal for a registration form. A light supper and free Child Program will be available.

Jeffco Public Library book sale

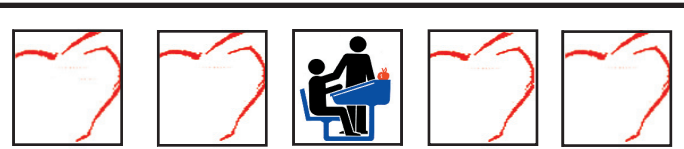
Colorado's largest book sale will be held Friday-Saturday, October 22-23 from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. and Sunday, October 24 from 11 a.m. to 3 p.m. at the Jeffco Fairgrounds. Free admission.

**For parenting information,
visit our website:
www.jcea-cea.org**

JCEA welcomes new readers

JCEA is continually updating the mailing list for Shaping Tomorrow Today. If you are a new reader, welcome!

Obviously, this is a newsletter that reflects the thinking of the 5,000 teaching professionals in Jefferson County. We hope you find the information in this newsletter helpful and at times provocative. We want you to be able to trust the information you read in this newsletter and know that it reflects the integrity of our profession and JCEA.



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Shaping Tomorrow Today is the community newsletter of the Jefferson County Education Association (JCEA) and is published periodically throughout the year. Comments may be mailed to: JCEA, 1050 Wadsworth Blvd., Lakewood, CO 80214. Our phone number is 303-232-6405; our FAX number is 303-238-2215. Visit our web site at www.jcea-cea.org.

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Our Mission Statement: *The Jefferson County Education Association exists to empower educators to promote professional rights, responsibilities and practices to achieve educational excellence within a changing society."*



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