

# Shaping Tomorrow Today

## Public Education

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# Budget crisis created by 'funding gap'

by Dale Gatz, JCEA President



Given the fact that Jeffco Public Schools (JPS) is seeking to cut up to \$20 million (3.4%) from the 2003-04 budget, the question is two fold. First, how can JPS sustain the steady improvement in student achievement it has realized over the last two years. And second, how can it do that without investing in the people who make that happen?

To the average citizen, a cut of 3.4% may not sound like much. Indeed, if this were the first budget cut, that citizen would be right. But this cut is **not** the first cut; it's on top of \$7 million in 2002-03 and a long history of budget cuts that go back for decades. Indeed, it's a pretty depressing budgetary history for Jeffco kids.

Currently, JPS receives an average of \$239 less per pupil than other metro-Denver school districts. This "**funding gap**" is the result of inequities in the Colorado School Finance Act and our dismal history of failing to approve mill levy increases to support instruction.

If JPS received even the average per pupil expenditure of our neighboring districts, we would be receiving an additional \$20.8 million per year. In essence we would not be facing this current budget crisis. We would not be going through the agony of yet another round on mind-numbing, demoralizing cuts.

Ah, but in 1999 didn't we pass a mill levy tied to student achievement? Wasn't that supposed to solve the problem?

Well, "yes" and "no." "Yes," we passed the "Performance Promise" mill levy, but "no," **it was never designed to eliminate the "funding gap" that was even larger in 1999.**

Let's be clear about funding from the 1999 mill. JPS received \$25 of the \$45 million up front. The remainder of the funding was contingent upon increases in student performance on the CSAP. Because of our successes during the first and second years, we were able to increase our budget by about \$10.8 million.

Ultimately, when we achieve our targeted improvement goal, the 1999 mill levy will generate about \$9.2 million more for the district. So, even with that additional funding—all of the 1999 mill money—we would still be seeking to cut up to \$10 million more.

Let's also be clear that since 1999 JPS has invested the mill money wisely. JPS continued to lower class sizes at all school levels, expanded our instructional coaches program to help improve the teaching and learning process, and provided tutoring opportunities for students who need extra help. It is both ironic and frustrating that in order to balance the 2003-04 budget we must now reduce and/or eliminate some of these "investments."

Some have suggested that employees can solve this problem by simply agreeing to "freeze" or reduce salary and benefits. This may be appealing because it has no negative impact on them and it *appears* to be an easy, short-term solution. But it's the wrong solution.

For over thirty-five years, JCEA has demonstrated its willingness—as we did with a salary freeze in 1999—to be a part of the solution *when there is a solution in sight*. Today, however, there is no solution in sight. The state economy is growing worse, Amendment 23 funding is being threatened, and other state budget cuts and rescissions appear to be inevitable. JPS tells us that we are in an ongoing cycle of budget cuts for the foreseeable future. So how long should employees be expected to freeze wages and benefits to keep the system afloat?

We believe reasonable people will see that asking employees to take the freezes or cuts, while insulating the community from the negative impact of those cuts, is shortsighted and counterproductive.

In a democratic society, history tells us voters provide solutions when they clearly understand the problem. The dilemma for educators is how to maintain our professional commitment to our students and help the county's voters understand the problem. We don't believe we can do that by agreeing to any compensation freeze or cut. The bottom line is that the average citizen gains no greater understanding of the problem if employees once again bail out the district.

So, to my original question the first answer is "no." JPS cannot continue to do more with less, and we cannot be expected to continue to improve student learning while cutting the very resources necessary to meet that challenge. The proposed 2003-04 budget cuts take us backwards, not forwards.

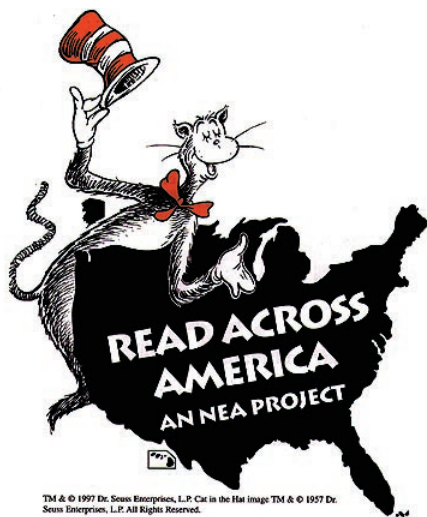
To the second question the answer is "we can't." To recruit and retain quality teachers, JPS must be able to compete in the metro area and across the country. That means JPS must offer hope of stable employment at a competitive, professional salary. Why would any teacher, knowing the history of the "funding gap" and our failure to find a long-term solution, choose to build a career in Jeffco? Realistically, JPS cannot continue to recruit and retain quality teachers as long as the "funding gap" continues to cause ongoing budget crises.

We know that many in our community support JPS and our mission. We trust that when you have the information you will join us in finding a way to build upon our past successes and honor the people who do the important work of educating our children.

You can demonstrate that support on **February 23** by join thousands of educators and parents from across the state at a "high-noon" rally in support of Amendment 23 in Denver's Civic Center Park. Together, we can convince legislators they must not ignore the will of the people who did understand the school funding problem and passed Amendment 23.

# Read Across America: Celebrate with us in March

Now in its sixth year, NEA's Read Across America program focuses the country's attention on how important it is to motivate children to read in addition to helping them master basic skills.



TM & © 1997 Dr. Seuss Enterprises, L.P. Cat in the Hat image: TM & © 1997 Dr. Seuss Enterprises, L.P. All Rights Reserved.

NEA launched the program in 1998 as a day to celebrate reading. It takes place on March 2, the birthday of beloved children's author Dr. Seuss, who epitomizes a love of learning.

Honorary co-chairs of Read Across America 2003 are Ming-Na (the voice of Mulan in the Disney classic of the same name,

and Dr. Deb Chen on NBC's top-rated ER) and Esai Morales (Lt. Tony Rodriguez on ABC's award-winning NYPD Blue, and a star of PBS's The American Family).

Because March 2 falls on a Sunday this year, the official celebration day is March 3. This date is only a guideline, though, and the NEA encourages participants to celebrate on the day that best suits their calendars.

Community members should contact their schools for information about they can get involved.

JCEA President Dale Gatz encourages the community to also celebrate at home and at work. "There is much we—as parents, grandparents, aunts, uncles, and neighbors—can do to model the importance of reading in our lives," Gatz said. "Consider giving—or lending—a favorite childhood book to your child, a relative or even a neighbor. Then talk with them about why that book was important to you. The message you will send will do much to reinforce the work we are doing in our schools."



## Shaping Tomorrow Today

**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](http://www.jcea-cea.org).

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# Jefferson Foundation marks 20 years of service

For twenty years the Jefferson Foundation has worked to change lives in Jefferson County. Its main source of funding is the highly anticipated Crystal Ball held annually. One example of their work is the **Play It Smart** program. (Left) Former Denver Bronco Jim Turner, volunteer academic coach at Jefferson HS, and Mona Sandoval, Executive Director of The Jefferson Foundation accept a \$3,000 grant from U.S. Bank for the Play It Smart mentoring program for students at Jefferson High who are at-risk of not completing their education.



# Legislature seeks to usurp voters' will on Amendment 23

In January House Majority Leader Keith King indicated he was going to try to cut school funding by redefining Amendment 23. JCEA and CEA are working with the Amendment 23 Coalition (including Colorado PTA, Colorado Education Network) to prevent that from happening. The Association is also preparing to challenge the action in court, but believes there is a larger issue at stake.

JCEA President Dale Gatz said, "We believe the legislature is once again trying to overturn the will of the people by seeking to revise Amendment 23. This essential school funding amendment was passed by voters in 2000 to make up for over a decade of underfunding our public schools. We can disagree on whether or not the legislature has the *legal* right to do that, but I think most of us are in agreement that it is wrong to violate the expressed will of the people as demonstrated at the ballot box."

**The Coalition is planning a statewide rally on Sunday, February 23 at "high noon" starting at the Greek Amphitheater in Denver's Civic Center Park.**

Gatz said, "This is not 'just' a teacher issue. This is a citizen's issue. We hope many in our community will join with us in support of both our Constitution and Amendment 23."

Amendment 23 has three parts. First, it requires the state to fund schools at inflation plus 1% for 10 years and at inflation thereafter. Second, it requires the state to increase its historic general fund support of K-12 education by at least 5% per year (called the "maintenance of effort"). Third, it creates an Education Fund out of surplus tax revenues that in the past have been refunded to citizens under Tabor.

If personal income growth for the state is low, the state may take the maintenance of effort out of the Education Fund instead of the General Fund, but it must be funded.

### 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 5,600 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 we hope it reflects the integrity of the profession it represents.

# JPS board completes budget forums

Following six budget forums—four community and two employee—on four days, the JPS school board has a lot of information but no easy answers.

Their goal was to provide an opportunity for citizens and employees to provide their best thinking about how the district can cut up to \$20 million from the 2003-2004 budget.

At JCEA's request, hundreds of teachers attended the hearings to share their concerns and ideas about Jeffco's latest budget crisis.

JCEA President Dale Gatz said, "We asked our Association Representatives to identify two people from their schools who would speak from the heart and tell the board what they thought. We provided no scripts; we had no agenda, secret or otherwise. From our conversations with school board members, the forums did indeed provide some new thinking. I do not envy their task."

In order to provide a reasonable opportunity to be heard in the limited time provided, school board members divided the participants into smaller groups and then facilitated the conversations. They were assisted by Area Administrators who helped process and record the information.

The board will now consider the input. However, their decisions will not be unilateral. Many of the issues discussed are also those covered by the JPS/JCEA Master Agreement and must, therefore, be bargained.

Gatz indicated that it is clear that JPS teachers are very frustrated about being asked to once again subsidize the teaching and learning process because of circumstances over



*JPS board member Jon DeStefano and Area Administrator Pat Turmin led a small group session at the Pomona forum.*

which they have no control.

"We did not vote for TABOR, nor vote down mill increases, nor vote to cut state taxes, nor challenge the interpretation of Amendment 23, and yet we are literally being asked to pay for those decisions. That is not a viable option!" said Gatz.

While JCEA has taken no official position on how to cut the JPS budget, Gatz said the Association has adopted a framework around which to make those decisions. That framework is reflected in a resolution approved by the JCEA Council in January. (See below)

## A JCEA Council Resolution Concerning Proposed JPS Budget Cuts

**Whereas**, research on high performing schools tells us that the single most important factor necessary to improve student learning is having a high quality, motivated, experienced teacher in every classroom, and

**Whereas**, in today's highly competitive job market, Jeffco Public Schools (JPS) must be positioned to compete for the best possible teachers by providing competitive compensation programs and comparable working conditions, and

**Whereas**, JPS' chronic budget problems stem from the fact that the district receives, on average, \$239 less per pupil than other metro-Denver school districts, and

**Whereas**, this latest round of budget cuts eliminates important instructional resources at a time when teachers are working hard to achieve the "Performance Promise," and meet new state and federal legislative mandates, and

**Whereas**, many of the proposed cuts involve issues that are specifically covered by our contract with JPS and are subject to negotiations this spring, and

**Whereas**, without a sustainable increase in per pupil funding, the 2003-04 JPS budget problems will only get worse, the proposed cuts will become permanent and even deeper cuts will be inevi-

table in the near future, and

**Whereas**, Jeffco teachers have little interest in subsidizing JPS' instructional programs through reductions in the compensation program and working conditions, especially if such reductions are not an integral part of finding a long-term budgetary solution, and

**Whereas**, we believe cuts in education never heal;

**Therefore be it resolved**, that JCEA will continue to advocate for budget cuts that will minimize the negative impact on the teaching/learning process, that will not result in a reduction in force, and that will enable JPS to attract and retain quality teachers, and

**Be it further resolved**,

1. That JCEA calls upon the state of Colorado to increase Jeffco's per pupil funding through the School Finance Act and to fully fund all mandated state programs (especially special education programs), and
2. That JCEA urges the JPS Board of Education to call upon the citizens of Jefferson County to pass a mill levy that will resolve the district's chronic budget problems and will provide the resources necessary to enable JPS to achieve its mission: "To provide a quality education that prepares all children for a successful future."

January 8, 2003

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**FACT:** In 2001 JPS set the goal that the state would rate 85% of our schools as excellent, high or average. We exceeded that goal with 87.2% of our schools earning one of those ratings.

**FACT:** Seventy-nine percent (79%) of JPS third graders scored advanced/proficient on the 2001 CSAP reading tests. Forty-seven Jeffco elementary schools saw gains from the 2000 scores, with third graders at Dennison Elementary scoring 100% advanced/proficient.

**FACT:** JPS offers a variety of educational choices to meet the diverse needs of students. Most of the 87,240 students enroll in their neighborhood schools. Other choices include options schools, charter schools, home school, in school programs, adjusted schedule options, and online education.

**FACT:** More than 350 high schools students and 100 teachers and parents from 19 high schools participated in a violence prevention workshop.

**FACT:** JPS uses an instructional day model that provides teachers with a framework for how to use class time to ensure students get a well rounded, balanced education.

**FACT:** JPS funding comes 55% from the state, 37% from property tax, and 6% from auto/ownership tax.

**Source: 2001-2002 JPS Annual Report**

# For Your Information

## JCEA provides parent-friendly resources on our website: [jcea-cea.org](http://jcea-cea.org)

JCEA's website has an entire page devoted to providing parents useful information to help their children be successful in school. You can access this information from the "home page" by clicking the "parenting" button (on the right side of the page).

### • Need a professional tutor?

Our unique referral service is designed to provide parents with a list of teachers who know how to help students who may be falling behind in their school work or may just be seeking academic enrichment.

Teachers must meet or exceed performance expectations, must be a member of their professional association (JCEA), and must honor the "Code of Ethics of the Education Profession," as well as related school board policies.

JCEA provides you appropriate information. You choose the best possible tutor for your child.

### Need help in talking about tragedy and trauma?

Tragedy and trauma are a sad part of our world today. Parents have requested information about how to talk to their kids about these events. We provide guidelines on both the "home" and "parenting" pages.

### Parenting brochures give good advise!

JCEA provides many brochures and pamphlets to help support your child in school. Please check them out at the bottom of the "parenting" page; they are downloadable, too!

**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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**Public Education**

*A Community Newsletter from the JCEA*

Jefferson County Education Association

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