

**Foreword**

Each year, the Jefferson County Administrators Association (JCAA) sponsors issues forums to foster two way communications within the Association. Just as an athlete in training needs to find and monitor their pulse, issues forums help the Association find and monitor the pulse of the administrators in Jefferson County. Issues forums are not an exact science – the information gained through forums is really nothing more than a blip on a radar. But a radar blip tells even the most inexperienced operator something is out there. With experience, an operator can turn a blip into useful information, like speed, distance, direction of travel, altitude, friend or foe, and in some instances, the size of the object.

This report summarizes comments gathered through two issues forums conducted in April of 2009. A total of 40 people participated. 40 people represents 9% of the total JCAA Membership and 14% of JCAA's General Membership. All sections of the General Membership were represented (30% elementary administrators, 20% middle administrators, 5% secondary administrators, 38% central administrators and 5% choice administrators). The forums included Principals, Assistant Principals, and multiple levels of Central Managers.

Forum participants considered four questions. Facilitators, Warren Blair and Jim Jelinek, encouraged everyone to go beyond the obvious to implications in each question. The questions were designed to identify issues and define leadership strategies to cope or deal with the identified issues.

If nothing else, forum input can give insights as to what is on the radar screen for Jeffco administrators. With further discussion at the JCAA Officer and Board level, perhaps, this summary will provide valuable insights as to ways the Association can continue to improve the quality of life for JCAA members.

Forum comments are included as an Appendix to this summary. The JCAA Board of Directors performed a team exercise at the May board meeting to sift through all the comments with the goal of identifying top concerns, focusing strategies and JCAA actions. Although there were many concerns, this report lists the three concerns mentioned most often in forum feedback.

**The Greatest Concern**

The greatest concern for Jefferson County administrators is the need for and preparation required to achieve a positive outcome in the next mill/bond election. Administrators are concerned about helping their staffs understand that “dissing” the Jeffco “uniform” is counterproductive. Administrators are concerned about how to substantiate the need without hurting student achievement. They are concerned about the public perception of education in Jefferson County – that we aren’t responsible with what funds we have and other false rumors and how that can be countered.

*Administrative Actions To Maintain Focus*

Administrators feel like they can help by providing time and facilitating communication about all the initiatives and moves with all stakeholders, being empathetic and “connecting the dots” regarding budget and mill/bond to influence the perception of staff and parents. They can also help by remaining positive and balancing immediate needs with long term strategic issues.

*JCAA’s Role*

JCAA has a part as well. JCAA should voice a consistent and clear message both to the membership and to District leadership. JCAA should identify ways to support administrators in getting a handle around how to communicate to all the stakeholders. JCAA should also focus on helping build harmony as much as possible between associations and the district by keeping communication open, honest and consistent.

**Concern #2**

The second blip on the radar screen concerns staffing, resources, and continuing to do more with less. Specific comments –

- *How can we continue to do all that’s expected with less?*
- *There is a lack of research based resources and staffing to appropriately deliver the instruction (G.T. multi-age, class-size). There is concern about the level of support for implementing RtI and I2A.. How can we provide strategies for appropriate interventions with limited funding. Training the staff is a concern – seems like it takes at minimum a year.*
- *We’re concerned about the unknown and having the resources to be effective leaders.*
- *Do we have the professional development opportunities and resources to support the implementation of initiatives, in general, and RtI specifically? How do we keep the focus on student achievement as opposed to “agendas.” What exactly does “all means all” mean in light of the current budget?*

*Administrative Actions to Maintain Focus*

Concentrate on essential initiatives and activities. Slow down or prioritize implementation of initiatives and use research and facts to make decisions on student achievements. As always, we need to keep the staff focused on the kids and not necessarily on the tool. Connecting how the initiatives improve learning will help the staff stay focused on why we do what we do. To do that, we need to stay informed, be clear and consistent with the facts, help with the “end” vision and plan for various scenarios.

*JCAA’s Role*

Jeffco is about helping students achieve. Things JCAA can do to help the district and administrators rolling out initiatives include

- *JCAA needs to continually remember to keep everyone’s focus (cabinet, administrators, teachers, and parents) on what is best for students. We need to be sensitive to efforts to focus on one group’s needs and wants over the needs of the children we are here to help. JCAA can also help focus efforts to prioritize*

*implementation of new initiatives by using research and facts around student achievement.*

- *JCAA can help by providing support to members.*
- *JCAA can help as another vehicle for communicating facts, having expertise to share ideas/strategies for staying focused through uncertainty, providing balanced leadership concepts and finding ways to provide “relief” for administrators, socializing and networking.*
- *JCAA can help by offering professional development to help administrators implement RtI.*

### **Concern #3**

A third concern has to do with perceptions around support for Administrators. While the District is supportive of Administrators as a whole, there is a concern that Administrators are really an expendable resource in certain kinds of conflict. Administrators ask what protections there are against being targeted by JCEA for doing the job, calling a spade and doing what needs to be done to improve student achievement – even if it means remediation. There are few, if any, mechanisms in place for administrators or the District to push back against JCEA, either in the instance of an administrator who is doing their job and not committing any grievance worthy actions, or in the case where JCEA has made up its mind that a specific initiative is “just going to fail.” It’s hard for administrators to figure out how to manage the self-fulfilling prophecies and the doom and gloom which impacts staff who maybe aren’t getting all the facts. When JCEA undermines a specific administrator with no consequence, all administrators (from level 1 to 14) are undermined, central and building-based. That can impact those aspiring to administration in the District and is counter-productive to Jeffco’s vision for building leadership capacity.

### *Administrative Actions to Maintain Focus*

We need to work on having a united voice. We can help mitigate some of the doom and gloom by having plentiful curriculum resources available in each building and time for the staff to work together. We need to keep the staff’s attention and focus on how the tools improve achievement and not on why the tools won’t work. We might need to work to fashion a system of defined public support within the district structure to help balance JCEA’s public support for teachers.

### *JCAA’s Role*

JCAA needs to work on creating a united voice. Articulation Area talking points was a good first step. JCAA needs to know what to tell Administrators in conflict – where to go, where to get advice, who can advocate, and how to combat JCEA negative campaigns. JCAA also needs to help administrators balance personal and business life.

**Appendix A – Issue Forum Comments****Input on biggest challenges in buildings (sites)**

- Risk Management – Budget cuts have caused reduced insurance coverage and increased deductibles.
- Managing uncertainty – staffing (potential cuts). How do we successfully implement RTI, what are available resources, etc.
- Interventions for math – greater emphasis needed.
- Need for research based resources around math and literacy.
- Budget cuts have caused FTE reductions, impacting the personnel resources available to assist schools implementing instructional innovation.
- Change in specials pairing
- Special Ed – shortfall of \$15K to cover paraprofessionals. How do you make that up? Can you do without a paraprofessional? (NO)
- Enrollment - Using 10/1/08 numbers when those numbers may not be accurate for 09-10 causes uncertainty and anxiety.
- Change in school start and ending time.
- “Change” overall causing increases in need for communication.
- The unknown
- Staff meeting times (increased need for communication)
- Calendar planning for August 20 and 21 and the implications for planning calendar for the rest of the year.
- Temporary teacher stress
- Professional development time due to calendar and increases expectations and demands.
- I2A – concerned about funding – are RV schools going to get the same startup funding? I2A people aren't telling everything or are “beating around the bush.” Support for launching I2A isn't there and I2A isn't really communicating (probably because they don't have any answers yet).
- I2A – is a challenge.
- How do we get the time to learn as educators?
- RTI – need a full year with the staff just to explore. How do you balance implementing RTI with new reading programs, new safety programs, acuity, etc.
- RTI – teaching for understanding, experimenting, leveling groups – resources inadequate.
- Middle schools are cutting hard to keep the program.
- How to implement RTI when current resources barely permit us to service already staffed kids (IEP and 504)
- Planning for the future.
- Facilities – budgeting for materials
- Inability to purchase textbooks and supplies
- Keeping up older and planning for new buildings
- Planning for service and staffing needs
- Learning to shuffle
- Learning how to change thinking, your own and others

- Learning how, in an educational organization, to think more like corporate America. They tend to be better equipped and respond to change faster and more easily.
- How to continue to move forward creatively in these tough economic times. How to get people to focus on the future 4 to 5 years out.
- How to be lean, mean and focused.
- How to keep the balance between focusing on the trees and the forest.
- How to make sense of staffing changes – losing 4 great temporary teachers and have to take on involuntaries.
- How to help people develop the skills to collaborate and work together.
- It's really tough to hear about great programs (Reading 180) knowing you lack the resources to make them work “on the ground.”
- Dealing with declining enrollment, declining revenues. That is exasperated by choice schools which contribute to further declines in enrollment at neighboring schools.
- Multi-age and combination classes as well as replacing retiring teachers. Unknown issues around staffing. Gifted center school, enrollment is in between full classrooms and multi-age. This impacts future enrollment. Option school – challenge is implementation of RTI with limited funding – clarifying guidelines and actually implementing it is the problem. DLEA – the staff reductions translates to added responsibilities – and concerns about being in schools. Retirements are not covered. That impacts the ability to be visible and out in the district. Elementary Title I – is highly impacted by using Title 1 to reduce impact of multi age and RTI – that leaves interventions empty. JCEA – the perception that all initiatives are wrong -not in their best interest. Push back and the associated self-fulfilling prophecy – it's not gonna work. We do have workload - “coaches are a problem” etc – coming to a conclusion before reflecting. Choice enrollment – parents are allowed to enroll in multiple (8-10) schools and then wait on their first choice. That creates chaos with registration. Enrollment is higher income which then impacts budget in opposite way. No title – no at risk – no SPED funding. Staffing at high ranges is challenging with parent expectations.

#### **Input on Jeffco's biggest challenges**

- Changing public perception of problems faced by the district without having an adverse impact on students.
- P.R. - convincing the community the needs are real.
- Misconception that Jeffco mismanages their money.
- Economy and putting the effort towards passing a mil-levy.
- Getting Jeffco employees to commit to passing a mil.
- Community doesn't understand why we need more funding. Where's the balance between absorbing cuts internally and making cuts that impact the public so that they can understand the need. How do you keep from having a negative impact on students?

- Presenting a united front as educational stakeholders as we try to get a bigger piece of the resource pie.
- Setting ourselves up to go to the voters again very soon.
- Not dissing the Jeffco “uniform.”
- Making decisions based on emotions rather than fact.
- Technology (and keeping up with it) is still a huge challenge.
- Special Ed and RTI have never run smoothly in Jeffco. We have not been accountable and so now it's all “changeable.” 504 coordinators need more training so that they don't overcommit. It's better to say “no” up front than to commit and not accomplish the plan. “I have asked for 504 training for months and it has never come.”
- Budget cuts have ripple effects.
- Maintaining academic improvements in spite of budget reductions is a big challenge.
- There seems to be a more confrontational approach to collegial conversations with teacher's associations in the district.
- Building Leadership Capacity is a challenge for Jeffco – there's not a one-size-fits-all approach – elementary and secondary leadership have different challenges.
- Supporting Administrators – there are a lot of things to juggle and less experienced administrators might not see things the same as a seasoned administrator. They haven't built trust of their staffs, and may or may not understand how everyone's supposed to act.
- The District needs to work on the message they are sending to Administrators. There is a feeling that the District will ask administrators to go out on the branch, and then cut the branch out from under us when JCEA gets heated up about something. There are very few protections built in for administrators and many built in for teachers. If leadership is valued and a position AP's should aspire to, the District needs to demonstrate the value it has for the administrators. As it is now, AP's are asking why would I want the flack?
- At Central – getting everybody on board and communication to support that. Finding the resources to support communication between district, principals, coaches, ILS and Teachers.
- Title schools – too much communication – need that streamlined and then work to get everyone on board.
- Elementary schools – being thoughtful about adding “initiatives” - connecting I2A, RTI, Learning Objectives, etc in a sequential manner so teachers can easily see the purpose of new initiatives – creates trust.
- Gifted and Talented – Having resources available for the staff. Workload directly impacts morale – which becomes a JCEA issue which impacts public perception which then impacts voters negatively towards the district.
- Option – public perception – that because Jeffco is so big we have plenty of money and because we do so much with so little that further complicates public perception problems.
- How can we be the sense-makers when it doesn't always make sense?

- Justifying central ed staffing/positions to Jeffco employees can be hard. (e.g. 12 people having a hand in the secondary principal's institute on 4/14) Maybe DLEA folks could be half time central and half in buildings?

### **How to stay focused**

- Using research and facts to make decisions on student achievement.
- Distance decision-making from emotions.
- Continue to find the leverage points and move the system forward.
- Keep conversations centered on what is best for kids and student achievement (x2)
- Keep focused on students – how does “this” impact students?
- Keep lines of communication open with parents, staff and between the association and the members.
- Focus on what is possible and within our control and influence.
- Help each other with work load. Some schools are reaching out to help neighboring schools implement RTI.
- Be empathetic with the staff and parents.
- Connect the dots with parents and staff.
- Celebrate when appropriate.
- Find joy in the work!
- Be thankful for having a job.
- Serve as a positive role model.
- 504 coordinators need to be trained every year.
- Collaboration, teamwork and sharing are more important than ever in improving efficiency and effectiveness.
- Be sure we are not creating barriers that make it more difficult to be successful.
- Leaders have to keep the “main thing” the main thing. New principals need to be taught to stick with the main focus, remembering that the staff can only handle one thing at a time. Sometimes the trick is figuring out how initiatives and tools overlap.
- Stay balanced between immediate needs and long term strategic issues.
- Train new principals better. It is possible to make changes quickly provided you communicate it well and pick the right battles. Show the staff that you are a learner as well as a leader - “teach me the good things that are going on in the building.” Learn to ask questions - “what's going on that's good in the school – what do we need to fix?” Meeting with the staff over the summer – either individually or as a team. Jeffco doesn't do a real good job on supporting new principals, helping them figure out how to prioritize and implement all the things they need to do right now. Teaching through the principal institute is too generic – new principals may or may not be able to grasp things as quickly as a seasoned principal.
- Maybe we don't – we're part of the problem – we just keep on going no matter how much cutting we have to do. Maybe we're at the point where we need to start making visible cuts that impact parents and families so they understand and feel a little of the frustration we are under.

- Slow down initiatives or prioritize implementation of each. Focus on implementing existing initiatives in a time of reduced resources instead of spreading ourselves out so thin. Communicate the political realities behind initiatives and programs (I.e., we must move forward in new graduation requirements to remain eligible for increased federal dollars, RtI is a federal mandate, etc).
- Look toward grants

**What can JCAA do?**

- Provide balance on cabinet and anchor group in response to issues raised by other groups.
- Don't just sit back – improve communications and take positions on things that matter to administrators.
- Provide the administrator's voice at “the table” without finger pointing.
- Continue the work with cabinet and with balancing other associations.
- Represent our voice – communicate between reps, board, and schools about various issues impacting schools so building administrators can be proactive.
- Represent our voice at the state level.
- Do fact finding around elementary principals moving to secondary and vice versa. Not always supportive of position – also building opposition for path to administration for exemplary employees.
- Select 1 to 2 goals (that match and correspond with District goals) and work towards those.
- Support each other
- Be involved in the induction of leaders in the district
- Focus on developing sustainability – how best to meet the needs of administrators over a longer period of time.
- JCAA representatives need to be proactive in the feedback loop to develop leverage in district decision-making.
- Work on communication
- JCAA members need to take responsibility for communicating with non-JCAA members whether that's through telephone, email, or face-to-face with honesty and integrity.
- Be a force for making sure that stakeholders don't have unseemly fights at the water hole. Keep up efforts to create collegiality and support.
- Budget pressures cause “in-fighting” among groups of educators – e.g JCEA dispute – coaches vs teachers who oppose expanding the coaching program.
- Offer “informal” professional development on challenges I.e., RtI, etc.