



800 WEST MONROE STREET | JACKSONVILLE, FLORIDA 32202

The Honorable Paula Wright, Chairman
Duval County Public Schools
1701 Prudential Drive
Jacksonville, Florida 32207

December 12, 2017

Dear Chairman Wright:

The quality of Duval County's K-12 public education system is absolutely fundamental to our region's economic vitality, directly impacting our workforce and business recruitment as well as local colleges and universities. It is also crucial to our quality of life, which depends upon a thriving economic engine to provide jobs and opportunity for local residents.

With that in mind, I am writing today on behalf of the Jacksonville Civic Council to offer the Duval County School Board our assistance with the search for the next Superintendent. As you know, our members represent a broad cross-section of Jacksonville's business, non-profit, philanthropic and higher education leaders. All are keenly interested in the well-being of our city; and all concur that the hiring of a new Superintendent is one of the most important decisions our community will make in the near future.

Duval County has made great strides in student achievement under your leadership, achieving record graduation rate in 2016, and ranking in the Top 4 across multiple categories of the most recent National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP). To continue this forward momentum, we support the hiring of a well-rounded, experienced and community-vetted and supported Superintendent. We applaud you for beginning the process with a series of community meetings in November, and offer our service to help the School Board move forward with this complex and high-stakes effort.

Several school directors' associations, including the Washington State School Directors' Association (WSSDA), recommend forming an ad hoc committee to articulate the challenges pertinent to the search and develop guidelines for the qualities and qualifications of a successful candidate. The WSSDA also recommends that this committee (or a similar group of stakeholders) be included in the interview process of top candidates to provide further feedback and insight to the local school board. They posit that such inclusion promotes community approval and support of the board's choice, and we agree.

Therefore, the Jacksonville Civic Council offers to assemble a working group of business, non-profit, philanthropic and higher education volunteers to work with you and the School Board as you continue to develop the criteria for our next Superintendent. We would plan for the working group to function alongside your staff and fellow board members, providing an additional resource to aid in this critically important hiring decision. Our only agenda is to help the School Board with a thorough search and recruitment effort that resolves successfully.

In addition to recommending the inclusion of a working group of stakeholders, and offering ourselves as such, we strongly urge the School Board to leave the final selection of a new Superintendent to the 2019 School Board. In less than a year, at least two new School Board members will have oversight of the

District and its Superintendent, and we believe these new board members should have a voice in the selection process.

We are not asking you to sit idle during this time. Rather, we recommend that you partner with the community work group discussed above to develop a robust profile of the next Superintendent. This approach has multiple advantages. It will give the community time to fully engage in the search process and attract the highest-level candidates in the nation – candidates who are unlikely to apply knowing that their board will undergo significant change in less than a year.

The search that brought us Nikolai Vitti highlighted the benefits of a deliberative and well-timed approach. After a thoughtful “community conversation” to determine the best qualities required for a Superintendent, the board extended an offer of employment to Nikolai Vitti on September 25, 2012, just 41 days before the election of four new School Board members. While he worked hard to implement education reform measures, we believe you’ll agree that the lack of alignment between Dr. Vitti and the board negatively impacted education reform.

Chairman Wright, this is a critical time for Jacksonville’s K-12 public education system. Now, more than ever, we need to capitalize on the progress we’ve made thus far and speak with one voice to further implement the education reform measures that will take our community’s schools, economy and quality of life from “good” to “great.” Doing so will require a robust community-involvement effort, and we feel confident that our members can add value to that process.

Thank you for your thoughtful consideration of our proposal. We stand ready to be an additional asset and sincerely believe that a thorough, inclusive search process and well-timed selection will help provide a world class Superintendent for our schools and an excellent education for the children who represent our future.

Sincerely,



Edward E. Burr
Chairman, Jacksonville Civic Council

Cc:

The Honorable Lori Hershey, Vice Chairman, District 7
The Honorable Cheryl Grymes, District 1
The Honorable Scott Shine, District 2
The Honorable Ashley Smith Juarez, District 3
The Honorable Warren A. Jones, District 5
The Honorable Becki Couch, District 6