



KENTUCKY DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION

STATEMENT

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STATEMENT BY INTERIM COMMISSIONER WAYNE LEWIS ON JEFFERSON CO. BOARD OF EDUCATION DECISION TO RELINQUISH \$15 MILLION HEAD START GRANT

(Frankfort, KY) – As Interim Commissioner of Education and as a parent of a young child, I am deeply concerned and troubled about ongoing allegations of neglect and abuse of children in the Jefferson County Public Schools (JCPS) Head Start program and the district’s proposed solution, which is to walk away from \$15 million in federal funds and associated scrutiny of the program.

In August 2017, the United States Department of Health and Human Services, Administration for Children and Families, Office of Head Start (HHS), issued findings that included more than 20 incidents of one or more of the following:

- maltreatment of or endangering the health and safety of children;
- discipline that involved isolation, the use of food as punishment or reward, or the denial of basic needs;
- children being left unsupervised;
- inefficient and ineffective reporting

Last fall, Head Start Acting Director Ann Linehan said the report (see attached) left her sick to her stomach. These deficiencies cited by HHS are similar to issues raised throughout the [Jefferson Co. audit](#), including planning, restraint and seclusion and IDEA and are a significant reason for my recommendation of state management of the district.

During its meeting on Tuesday, the JCPS board voted to relinquish its \$15 million Head Start grant for the 2018-19 school year, before Head Start had a chance to pull the funding. Instead, the board will spend \$8 million in general fund monies that could support other initiatives to set up a program that focuses on ensuring 3-4 year olds are kindergarten ready when they start school.

During the meeting, JCPS board member Chris Kolb stated that “there’s probably some changes to Head Start coming, and this was kind of an effort to get ahead of it and do it on our terms.” Superintendent Marty Pollio agreed.

As interim commissioner, the action taken by the JCPS board raises serious questions for me about the district’s current capacity to keep children safe and to be good stewards of taxpayer dollars.

(more)

Page 2 – Statement on JCPS Head Start grant

For the protection of the children of Jefferson County, the board must give this matter the immediate critical attention that it deserves beyond relinquishing the \$15 million Head Start grant. The Kentucky Department of Education will do everything in its authority to ensure that children in Jefferson County are kept safe.

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