

Veda Pendleton

What is the biggest issue facing JCPS right now, and how would you address it?

The biggest issue facing JCPS is the budget deficit. Much work needs to be done to both balance the budget and to ensure that such a shortfall does not happen again. We cannot determine how we will fund the new school year without knowing and understanding how to eliminate our debt.

What specific changes would you push for at JCPS if elected?

If elected, I will push for the following changes:

- I will work to eliminate the budget deficit. Since the deficit did not occur in a year but over multiple years, it is going to take time to reduce the deficit. It is also going to take intentional strategies to understand how to best manage the resources entrusted to us by the community.
- I will work for greater transparency with the district budget.
- Not all students in JCPS are reading proficiently. More than 50% of all students are not proficient in reading comprehension, and thus, I will work to improve the reading comprehension rates for all students.
- Many JCPS families are unaware of the academic expectations of their children at each grade level. In efforts to engage families, I will work to ensure that families and community members know and understand what their children need to know and be able to do at each grade level in literacy, mathematics, health and wellness, and socially.
- JCPS classroom teachers carry a tremendous load for our community.

What is your connection to the district?

I am the parent of a former student who graduated from Manual High School in 2012. A former employee of the district, I retired in 2022.

What relevant experience in education do you have?

I am a retired educator. My thirty-one-year education career spanned grade bands K-5, 6-8, and higher education in three different states, namely Arkansas, Georgia, and Kentucky. As a tenured university professor and administrator, I taught pre-service and in-service classroom teachers how to teach reading. My teaching experience includes three years in the Little Rock School District in Arkansas and eleven years with JCPS. I also had an opportunity to serve as Equity Lead and literacy coach at the Kentucky Department of Education. Most recently, I coached classroom teachers in Shelby County and taught as a part-time instructor for the University of Kentucky. I am currently

an education entrepreneur, author, and nonprofit CEO. Read more about me at <https://vedapendleton.com> .

What relevant business, budgeting or financial management experience do you have?

The experiences that I bring to the table with regard to managing budgets are those of managing grants (eight years) at a regional university and managing department and college budgets as a department chair (six years) and college dean (three years). I have also managed political campaign budgets. With each budget experience, I learned that you do not spend money that you do not have. Managing the JCPS budget should be no different.

JCPS has faced major budget challenges. What would you do to improve financial oversight and rebuild trust with taxpayers?

The school board is tasked with the responsibility of making sure that taxpayer funds are spent wisely without overspending. In order to ensure responsible spending, both internal and external audits of all spending are necessary. These audits would hold everyone accountable and responsible for spending decisions. Monitoring of spending priorities should be inspected monthly in order to remain within budgeted guidelines.

How would you measure whether the superintendent is doing a good job?

I would measure the superintendent's performance based on the following:

- Budget management and fiscal responsibility after the previous year's budget deficit is eliminated
- Student academic performance data and overall student achievement that demonstrates the elimination of targeted achievement gaps
- Culture and climate of the schools and the effectiveness of community engagement.

What do you believe JCPS should do to improve student achievement?

My focus will always be ensuring that all the children are well and that each and every child has what they need in order to be successful in the classroom and to be able to thrive in our society. What that means is making sure that our teachers have the knowledge, skills, and dispositions to reach and to teach each and every child effectively. It also means that our teachers are supported with the tools, resources, and professional learning that they need in order to deliver quality instruction that is culturally relevant and meaningful. As a retired teacher, I know what it is like to not always have the support that you need in order to be effective in the classroom, and as

a former administrator, I know how beneficial it is to all when educators are empowered and trusted to do their jobs.

In addition to supporting students and teachers, I will work to build community partnerships with families that best serve the interests of the children. Many times families are not included in the decision-making process for matters that directly impact their children. That is unfortunate for everyone involved. Over the years, my research and community work have been focused on giving families the language, tools, and understanding about school learning that they need in order to advocate for their children and to support classroom learning. As a member of the JCPS School Board, those efforts will be continued.

Another improvement needed is ensuring that each and every student is able to read and comprehend grade level texts. As a reading specialist, I understand that the ability to understand the written word is essential to every aspect of learning. Many of JCPS students are not reading on grade level, and reading comprehension remains to be a challenge. I will work to make sure that students have teachers who can teach them how to understand what they read. In addition, every effort will be made to ensure that teachers have the professional learning that they need in order to offer reading comprehension instruction.

Is there anything else you want voters to know about you or your campaign?

I am running for the Jefferson County Public Schools School Board because of my sincere desire to see children thrive. I am an advocate for all children—the shy child, the homeless child, the child from a two-parent home, the straight child, the child who is unsure about their identity, the transgendered child, the child who is learning English, the child who is struggling with reading comprehension, the child who is on the autism spectrum, the immigrant child, the child who is experiencing poverty, the lonely child, the child who is wheelchair bound—especially those children who are often marginalized and who do not have their academic and social needs met in schools. I will be a part of ensuring that all children have equitable opportunities to thrive in an environment where they feel as if they belong.

When the Maasai warriors of Kenya return home, their first question is: “And how are the children?” The expected response is “All the children are well.” Until we can respond and say that ***all*** the children in our schools are well, there remains a need for advocacy for our children. I am that advocate, and I will make sure that decisions are made with the best interests of all children as a priority.

In addition to advocacy, I will work for a renewed focus on reading comprehension instruction at all grade levels. Reading comprehension is vital for student success in the classroom and beyond.