

Board of Education,

I stepped into the role of COO in October as an interim, and took the role permanently in January. While in this role I have been immersed in our current transportation predicament. I believe that there are few in the city who have as deep an understanding of the situation as I and my team do, and my task since coming into this role has been primarily to address this issue. I am concerned that we were not given a chance to respond to several incorrect statements last night, and now they will hang in the community air until 4-16. That is not fair to our transportation department. This morning our transportation department indicated their reaction to the unfounded speculation by the auditor, and I would like to set straight a few items below immediately.

1. The audit clearly references at several points that we are to listen to the transportation department. Let me be crystal clear that transportation has been in every discussion about the variety of solutions that have been proposed. Mr. Dobbs, or his next line of leadership, or bus compound coordinators have been in every discussion when we work towards solutions. I believe this recommendation is of primary importance, and implemented it without an audit, starting in October. Let me be equally clear that transportation, and our routing leads agree with our presentation of our current state.
2. I want to be clear that the chapter 3 and 4 recommendations for improvement I agree with, and that is why you had a response from management in such a short turnaround. None of these recommendations came as a surprise to my team. As I indicated in previous correspondence with you, we are prepared and in many cases have been undertaking these recommendations, without the audit since October.
3. The auditor made an incorrect assertion that I believe has done significant damage with our transportation department. The assertion that we can “trim around the edges” and take “a large swack” at the lost instructional minutes is an insult to the work that all of our compound coordinators, specialists, our GIS team, and Mr. Dobbs has done since the beginning of the school year. The auditor painted a picture that our transportation department could simply just “work harder and grind” to somehow cut 69

routes to be on time. Let me be clear that the people who need to “work harder and grind” are coming in at 5am, many leaving at 7pm, doing split shifts, or just working 10-14 hour days as the norm. These are our compound coordinators, assistants, and the leadership of our transportation department. Last month, transportation were heroes for all the work that has been done and continues to be done to alleviate our shortage and number of routes. I know for a fact we cut, trim, combine, and optimize where we can. While I’m sure there is some area we can trim a little more, I have no issue saying we have trimmed about as much as we possibly can. I know that they are doing everything they can to make this untenable situation the best that we can make it. I stress the fact that these folks are doing their best with the situation we currently have, and are looking to see what the situation will be for next year.

4. When the auditor made the remark “you’re only down 17 drivers” that was patently false. Currently we have 552 drivers for 569 routes, with 52 absent daily, we start 69 routes underwater everyday. To cover every run with our current route structure would require 621 drivers to be on time. The assertion that we are only down 17 drivers is absolutely incorrect, and demonstrates a fundamental lack of understanding of the problem. We are late everyday because we do not have enough drivers to cover our routes. Last night (3-26) our last bus cleared at 7:14pm. We clear last bus on average at 7:00pm, and are correspondingly late in the morning as you well know to the tune of nearly 8 million lost instructional minutes.
  - a. Further I will remind you that well over 100 of our bus drivers are above the age of 60. They are watching to see what next year will bring. As I have said numerous times, I will reiterate: we cannot afford to lose the vast majority of these drivers.
  - b. Of all the things speculated on last night, this is perhaps the one that is the most damaging as it is patently untrue, and said off the cuff to grandstand in front of the public. This is a damaging statement that underscores the hard work of our drivers, and transportation department.
5. The auditor made an incorrect assertion that I believe has done significant damage with our transportation department. We currently have 552

drivers for 569 routes. Our HR department continues to recruit significantly, and as you well know, we have added a myriad of incentives to the bus driver compensation package. Every single other district we talk to, has a bus driver shortage issue. The auditor says they have spoken to a handful of districts. I speak on a regular basis with dozens. The districts (few) that have alleviated their driver shortage have two things we do not: robust public transportation and a myriad of contractors in their city. This remains a nationwide issue.

6. The auditor has not done a compensation comparison with other districts. Specifically she said that we could “just pay drivers a dollar more than surrounding counties”. I find this statement to be ridiculous, and frankly disingenuous without a clear understanding of our situation. If the auditor does not know our compensation schedule or comparable districts, she should not comment on it. Our pay range is 22.78 to 35.78 depending on incentives. We pay more, and more than a dollar more than all surrounding counties. I find it remarkable that this comment was made without any understanding of our pay structure versus surrounding counties.
7. Recommendation 4.1 tells us to re-establish and adhere to a routing timeline. This is a wise recommendation and one we have been working on since December. However, last night the auditor said “we have some time”. The auditor is not the JCPS transportation department. If the primary message from the audit is to listen to our transportation department, then hear them: we need a decision for next year so that we do not get further behind in routing. Our routing season starts at the beginning of March. A final decision 4-16 will put us several weeks behind. While we can build the beginning of the routes and counts, the biggest variable of what schools we are transporting remains in flux. Our transportation department has been clear on what they need. Further, we agree we must adhere to a routing timeline. **Please understand: our routing season is March to beginning of July. We are 3 weeks in. In a normal season, we can afford some delay. We are rerouting the entire district and dismantling the routes provided from our vendor, adding back as much mirroring as possible, and going to geographic regions- all things you as a board have asked for. This is not a typical routing season. Please**

**listen to our transportation and operations division when we say this is not a normal routing season and we cannot afford delay. We are committed to a successful opening day for 24-25, but we need to know who we are transporting to construct this effectively.**

I have reached out to our coordinators today to alleviate what we can after last night. I think you need to be aware that they feel that an audit that was supposed to highlight their inclusion, instead turned into several hours of them being denigrated. In a meeting that lasted for three hours about Operations & Transportation, Operations & Transportation spoke 12 words.

V/R,

**Rob Fulk, Ed.D**