JCPS Equity Ethical Challenge

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For this paper I will be focusing on Jefferson County Public Schools (JCPS). Specifically, the team of Student Relations and the Department of Culture and Climate. Student Relations is a subunit/department of the Department of Culture and Climate. Student Relations meets with students who have been suspended from school and have a recommendation for counseling services or a placement in an alternative school/environment. Even though I will focus on this particular department of JCPS I will also look at some overarching ethical challenges and decisions from Dr. Polio, Superintendent, and his vision for JCPS that trickle down to all departments, classrooms and culture of the district. I will also delve into Dr. Polio’s impact on the departments of JCPS and how his leadership is viewed by others in the district.

The people that I will be interviewing are from the team of Student Relations. To protect the privacy of the people being interviewed I will call them Supervisor- Female, Counselor- Female and Clerk- Female. I will conduct these interviews October 21 at approximately 3:30, 4:00 and 4:30 respectively.

I plan to focus on the ethical challenge of Equity/Racial Equity within JCPS. Racial Equity is part of a Three Pillars vision that Dr. Polio has for the district. The unit of Student Relations plays a big role in the Racial Equity plan. I will go into detail about the Three Pillars and what it means for and to the district.

**History of Organization:**

*JCPS Origins*

“JCPS has a rich history reaching back to the early nineteenth century.

The Louisville Public Schools began in 1829. On April 14, 1829, the Louisville Mayor and Council established a public school for children under 16 years of age, and on August 17, 1829, a school was opened at the southwest corner of Fifth and Green (now Liberty) Streets in the rented upper story of the Baptist Church. In September 1830, the first public school building in the Louisville Public School district was opened at the corner of Fifth and Walnut (now Muhammad Ali Boulevard) Streets.

JCPS traces its origins to an act of the legislature of Kentucky, which established a system of common schools in the state in 1838. Official reports begin with the 1840 Annual Report of the Superintendent of Public Instruction. The Common Schools of Jefferson County reported that 30 schools were "districted previous to 1840." Reports made by the Commission of the Common Schools of Jefferson County to the state superintendent of public instruction, beginning with the 1876-1877 school year, report 68 public schools in Jefferson County. The first superintendent was elected by popular vote in 1884. Many smaller districts were gradually merged or incorporated into the JCPS district.

The Louisville Public Schools and the Jefferson County Public Schools merged April 1, 1975, into the present Jefferson County Public School (JCPS) District.”

**The Three Pillars- Dr. Polio’s Vision for the District**



“Under Superintendent Marty Pollio’s leadership, all of our schools share an unwavering focus on three key pillars, which collectively are earning JCPS national recognition for our transformative approaches to education.

Our Backpack of Success Skills, for example, launched during the 2018-19 school year and already we are seeing students at every level engage in more meaningful learning experiences through the initiative. Developed exclusively for JCPS on Google Drive, this digital platform is not only providing students with a deeper understanding of math and literacy—but it’s also preparing them to be good communicators, problem solvers, collaborators and more.

JCPS is committed to ensuring all students have access to the same quality programs and academic experiences. That’s why we’re elevating our focus on equity by implementing the newly adopted racial equity policy. This transformative policy was created to address the needs of students traditionally underserved and ensure that our own workforce is as diverse as the community we serve.

We’re continuing Superintendent Pollio’s laser-focus on a healthy and positive school climate and culture so that all students and staff feel a true sense of belonging. We know that the attitudes, beliefs and actions of adults in a school can impact student learning. From bringing teachers and school leaders together to finding ways to connect students and families to our schools, we are establishing excellence across all levels of JCPS.”

**JCPS Vision**

All Jefferson County Public Schools students graduate prepared, empowered, and inspired to reach their full potential and contribute as thoughtful, responsible citizens of our diverse, shared world.

**JCPS Mission**

To challenge and engage each learner to grow through effective teaching and meaningful experiences within caring, supportive environments.

**Core Values**

•Caring—All JCPS children are nurtured as if they are our own.

•Equity—All students receive an education that gives them what they need to thrive through differentiated supports focused on removing social factors as a predictor of success.

•Excellence—Empowering people to lead, create, and innovate is essential to creating a culture of excellence.

•Respect—All students, staff, and families are treated with dignity and respect as members of a safe and welcoming learning community.

•Individuality—Children learn differently and require personalized approaches to learning.

•Diversity—Our diversity is a strength—differences of each are assets of the whole.

•Opportunity—Effective teaching is the most powerful tool for engaging and motivating students to reach their full potential.

•Creativity—The ability to create, innovate, and solve challenging problems is a critical skill for educators and children to develop and employ in teaching and learning.

•Collaboration—Relationships, cooperation, and partnerships among students, staff, families, and community are fundamental to the success of our students.

•Stewardship—Adults model integrity, respect, and responsibility through mindful stewardship of talents, resources, and time.

**Ethical Challenges**

The list of Ethical Challenges that I considered are as follows:

1. Covid19- Keeping kids and staff safe vs Providing in school instruction/instructional days

2. Snow and Ice- Keeping kids and staff safe vs Providing in school instruction/instructional days

3. Diversity & Equity/Racial Equity

4. Striving to make positive learning environment in a classroom when you have students in the class who want to disrupt the learning environment consistently.

5. Doing the right thing consistently.

6. Staffing- Hiring and keeping staff

7. Resourcing

For this portion of the paper, I will be highlighting most of these ethical challenges that the organization deals with. However, the overarching challenge will be achieving equity for all and Racial Equity. This coincides with all the challenges listed. Dr. Polio, the superintendent, has three pillars for JCPS and Racial equity is one of these.

JCPS uses utilitarianism with their purchasing (resources) polices. Most items are on a bid system. The lowest bid will always win regardless of the quality. This is because it is generally accepted that spending less money will do the “greatest good for the greater number of people”. It will allow schools to purchase things at a lower price and, in theory, make their budget stretch further. However, this will ultimately lead to lower quality products in the school and classroom.

For the most part JCPS does not use Utilitarianism. They lean more toward Rawl’s equitable principles. Ethical decisions, for students especially, are based on equitable values. This is evident in their Racial Equity Pillar explained earlier in the paper. The focus unit supervisors have procedures in place to remain racially equitable. Given the scope of what the units purpose is being racially equitable is crucial.

JCPS appears to keep with Rawls Principle 1- “The first principle, the principle of equal liberty, has priority. It states that certain rights are protected and must be equally applied to all.” (Johnson, 2022, p. 16) This is shown in their policies within their union contracts. Everyone is given the same rules and benefits which are basic across the board. The raises are given in steps and when you reach a certain step (yearly) you receive the same as any person in that step. The raises are not given by merit, popularity or friendship. Everyone has the same choices in insurance. The benefits are choices, but they are the same choices for all.

JCPS also holds value with Rawls Principle 2A- “Principle 2a, the equal opportunity principle, asserts that everyone should have the same chance to qualify for offices and jobs. Job discrimination based on race, gender, or ethnic origin is forbidden.” (Johnson, 2022, p. 16). According to their website JCPS is an equal opportunity employer. This is their statement: “The Jefferson County Public School District shall not discriminate in recruitment or employment on the basis of age, color, disability, marital or parental status, national origin, race, sex, sexual orientation, gender identity, gender expression, veteran status, religion, genetic information, or political affiliations or beliefs. The District shall promote equal opportunities through a vigorous affirmative action program as an integral part of personnel policy and practice in the employment, development, advancement, and treatment of employees of the Jefferson County Public Schools”

Dr. Polio appears to also embrace Kant’s theory. “Kant argued for the importance of “treating humanity as an end,” or respect for persons, which has become one of the foundational principles of Western moral philosophy.” (Johnson, 2022, p. 13). For instance, “260” or year round employees work year round (unlike schools) and contracts dictate that this type of employee should come into the office to work regardless of the circumstances. However, when the area had snow and ice last year, he made an ethical decision to allow everyone to stay home. This was with respect to all employees and their safety. The working calendar this year for inclement weather has been changed to now state that 260 employees are required to come to work unless the superintendent states otherwise- putting “humanity as an end”. Although one could argue that this is Altruism- “should help others regardless of whether or not we profit from doing so.” (Johnson, 2022, p. 22). But according to our text some experts believe that every theory has some altruistic characteristics and is not a theory in and of itself.

Yet, when an employee, in the focus unit, found it difficult to get to work because of weather last year the same ethical approach was not used. She was told by the leader that she needed to come to work because Dr. Polio hadn’t said to stay home. However, the person lived out of the county and the weather had been much worse where she lived. The unit leader used a utilitarian approach to the decision-making process disregarding the employee’s safety thus treating her as a utility.

**Power and/or Leadership and/or Trust**

JCPS has had poor trust building. A previous superintendent did not build organization trust. In the checklist I can see several areas that made trust an issue for that superintendent. They were not honest or transparent to start. The overall view of the new superintendent seems to be favorable. They are transparent on the what and why of decisions. They held forums with parents, students and staff. They listen to others and people feel valued for the work they. They made parents and students feel like they had a voice.

From my interviews I learned that the unit/department leader was not seen in the same light as the Superintendent. There was a lack of trust in her ability to run the unit. I found that several things in the Ethical Checkpoint was part of the reason why there was no trust among the staff. There was no difference in opinion between the supervisor, counselor and clerk. The dialogue of openness is reserved for the direct supervisors. None of them felt “valued for their contributions”. They did not feel “safe in expressing honest opinions”. The leader demonstrated a need to keep information from everyone because they thought employees didn’t need to know because they were “under” them. There was also a shared belief that the leader had a consistency of behavior where they did not “always do the right thing”. Further the unit leader does not trust their employees either. There seems to be a disconnect between everyone with the leader. However, everyone in the office from the direct supervisors to the clerks have a trust bond, shared values and goals. Everyone is valued for what they contribute to the shared goals. Dialogue is continuous and everyone feels safe giving opinions and ideas. Issues arise when the leader interferes with that dynamic.

Having a leader such as the superintendent is essential for the organization. However, if you have too many departments that have leadership like the one in the focus unit the organization will suffer and perhaps crumble. The organization can’t be effective and grow if it’s units are not sharing the same path.

**Culture & Climate**

The culture and climate of the unit are poor. The information I got from the interviews was that the leader of the unit is not a good leader, as stated above. The moral in the office is low and staff are looking for other places in the district to move. One clerk has already procured another placement, the secretary is looking for another job, another clerk looks and considers leaving on a daily basis, and two are retiring that would have stayed in the department if the leader was not there any longer. The staff are not heard and team building activities are considered the “staff being too close with one another”.

**Ratings- Power**

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| Challenge of: | Rating: | Reasoning |
|  |  |  |
| Power | 1- Poor | This leader has “Legitimate Power” within the unit, but it is limited to and challenged by a union and its contracts. Among the three that I interviewed, all levels of employees, did not think she was a good leader and used her power within the unit to keep employees fearful. To quote one employee “when I hear her heals coming down the hallway, I start getting nervous and almost panic. I want to find someplace to hide”. Her power is limited but she doesn’t seem to do anything good with the power she does have. She has proven herself a “bully” by yelling and demeaning her employees. One of the ones interviewed recalls a time when a meeting was called to discuss mistakes. The leader yelled and banged her hands on the table about a few mistakes that had happened. She also called a mistake an employee made criminal over and over until the employee was sobbing. Through observation I concluded that the leader uses coercive power to run the unit. One employee states that everyone, including supervisors are being threatened with right ups consistently.  |
| Privilege | 2- Needs Improvement | The leader has her privileges. They are limited to a certain extent. She is bound by the same union contracts as everyone. However, because she leads a unit she isn’t supervised as tightly. She feels that calling in or working from home is a privilege only she has in the unit. She will yell and threaten to write up employees for their attendance and no one is allowed to work from home (unless quarantined with COVID). This is not an equitable process, therefore, does not align with the Equity policies of JCPS. |
| Responsibility | 3- Fair | The leader knows her responsibilities. She admits those to everyone- Often to say she has a lot of responsibilities and is overworked. In relation to the students and the direct supervisors the leader takes steps to make sure that no one is abused. The procedures they have put into place follows the Racial Equity plans and policies. She also makes sure that security is available for meetings- if needed. The leader has taken the Racial Equity vision of the district and woven them into the framework of how the unit works. She and her staff have corrected ethical issues that came before them. However, as stated above, she does not hold to the same standards as the unit employees. |
| Information Management | 2- Needs Improvement | The leader is slow to give information that could make the unit run better. Of all interviewed they felt that communication with the leader was poor. Lower-level employees felt out of the loop entirely. |
| Consistency | 2- Needs Improvement | There is a lack of consistency within the unit. Those in the leader’s favor enjoy being treated with respect and in an equitable way. The employees who are not- are not. |
| Loyalty | 3- Fair | The leader is loyal to what she has created and what Dr. Polio expects |

**Assessment: Auditing the System**

*Selected Questions for Auditing the Formal System*

1. Does a formal Code of Ethics and/or Values exist? Is it distributed and how widely? Is it used? Is it reinforced in other formal systems such as performance?

JCPS has a formal Code of Ethics and Core Values. The information is on their website and they have trainings every year. Their Code of Ethics is found throughout each department and implemented daily.

The Core Values of JCPS is also on their website. Equity is one of its Core Values. These values seem to exist throughout the district. Equity and/or Racial Equity is a topic of everyday conversation in the unit.

2. Are workers at all level’s encouraged to take responsibility for the consequences of their behavior? To question authority when they are asked to do something they consider to be wrong?

Under current leadership- yes. Dr. Polio had to work hard to get this into practice. He opened the district up to transparency. This is something that the previous leader was against doing. Under Federal/State Laws employees have a responsibility to self-report and to report any child incident or abuse. This is supported by the district. The unit also follows these laws.

Dr. Polio has implemented a reporting system on the website where employees, students and parents can report inappropriate behavior. The district has a Compliance & Investigation Department. They handle any reports against employees- among other things. The person reporting is protected and is anonymous to everyone except the Compliance and Investigation team. The department also does yearly training on harassment.

*Selected Questions for Auditing the Informal System*

1. Identify the organization role models and heroes. What values do they represent? What advice do mentors give?

Unfortunately, I can’t analyze the leader of the unit for this question. All the people interviewed viewed her as a role model for the unit. However, I can answer about the Role Models in the unit and what the leader does bring to the ethical table. I will also analyze Dr. Polio as he is admired by much of the district for his integrity and transparency.

As stated earlier the leader of the unit does a fair job with Equity and Racial Equity for students. She makes sure the offices Dr. Polio’s vision for the district. However, this does not flow to employees. From interviews she appears to be a rigid, intemperate and callous leader. From our text the callous leader is uncaring or unkind, ignoring or downplaying the needs, wants, and wishes of followers. Intemperate leaders lack self-control and are enabled by followers who don’t want to intervene or can’t, and Rigid leaders may be competent, but they are unyielding and cannot accept new ideas, new information, or changing conditions. (Johnson, 2022, p. 208)

Within the unit the Direct Supervisors (2 males, 1 female) are looked upon favorably. They have Ethical Leadership and seem to face all six of the leadership challenges from our text positively. All make ethics part of their focus. One such supervisor was quoted as saying “at the end of the day I’d rather do the right thing and “Id rather do the right thing and be wrong than to do the wrong thing and be right” when talking about a student and a placement decision. They lead by example.

Dr. Polio also leads by example. He is transparent, talks with employees, talks with parents and includes them in decisions. His Three Pillars vision has equity and racial equity at its core. He meets Kellermans guidelines for leaders who want to be both effective and ethical: He shares power with not only a board of directors but also with parents, students and employees. He recognizes his limitations- he has teams and departments to distribute to and does so. He stays balanced and stays healthy- he has a runner’s club during the spring where employees can join him on a run. And among many other things he remembers the mission and his vision. (Johnson, 2022, pg 209-210)

2. Does acceptable language exist for discussing ethical concerns? Is ethics talk part of the daily talk?

Ethical concerns are talked about often in the unit. Especially as it pertains to students. With the purpose of the unit, it is imperative that they are equitable and racially equitable in what they do. Data is collected automatically, and results are talked about. Meetings are discussed and outcomes are discussed thoroughly.

According to the chart Characteristics of Ethically Decoupled and Ethically Transformed Organizations the unit is Ethically Transformed. The district as a whole is easily Ethically Transformed. However, the unit has several that point to Decoupled. Such as the leader “exhibits organizational behavior inconsistent with stated values” towards employees. She also “emphasize rules and penalties”. However, where there are district values towards students the leader matches the organization.

**Recommendations**

Based on the previous analyses, the following recommendations are made:

* Focus using an equitable approach with the employees in the unit.
	+ The unit leader thrives at being equitable with students but, fails with staff. Equity, diversity and equality is encouraged by the organization leader. All units should embrace these ethical approaches.
* Empower all employees in the unit
	+ Psychological Empowerment refers to an increase in motivation by giving way to meaning, competence, self-determination and impact to the employee. According to out text you can do this by working as a team and encouraging employee involvement. To summarize: She can use “practices that eliminate feelings of powerlessness while, at the same time, encouraging employee involvement”. (Johnson, 2022, p 138). She can allow everyone participate in decision making of the unit. The unit leader has a hard time including the staff. She makes the rules that everyone must follow. However, Skill/Knowledge based pay is not possible for the unit leader to help with because of union contracts. She can open up the flow of information and listen to ideas from employees. According to a female clerk interviewee “she used to share this philosophy when she was new to the unit but something changed after she obtained all the information she needed from the staff. The structures are not decentralized in regards to the organization and equity for the students. She makes sure that training is done at all levels, however, often in a demeaning way. Training should not be an employee discipline session. (Johnson, 2022, p 138)
* Build trust within the unit

**Building Blocks of Organizational Trust**

***Dialogue of Openness and Sharing***

-Be honest with yourself and others (share humanness).

-Don’t harbor hidden agendas.

-Let others know that what they say will not be used against them.

-Make people feel valued for their contributions.

-Make people feel safe in expressing honest opinions.

-Don’t withhold information for power.

-Hold a basic belief that all people have good potential.

-Be willing to listen.

-Be willing to be vulnerable.

To start building trust the unit leader should start by letting others talk and not use what they say against them. An open dialogue starts communication with others and each party should feel safe talking. As with many leaders they have a hard time expressing to employees that they are valued, and this leader is no exception. She seems to focus on the need for work to be perfect so that others perceive the unit to be – *perfect*. She equates perfection with admiration and accolades from other departments and higher leadership. Being vulnerable will be the hardest part of building trust the leader will face. She doesn’t let her guard down often.

***Consistency in Behavior***

-Say it and do it.

-Do the right thing.

-Be consistent in how decisions are made.

-Keep promises and commitments.

Doing the right thing with the students is at the forefront for this leader- which is admirable. However, the entire unit strives to do what is right. A quote from one of the interviewees- “the leader doesn’t think, as clerks, we strive to be ethical and do what is right for the students and families”.

***Everyone Committed to the Mission***

-Know where the organization is headed.

-Make sure people know and believe in organizational goals.

-Encourage teamwork.

-Encourage dialogue to establish shared values.

Where this leader lacks in this area is encouraging teamwork. She feels everyone should stay in their lane and not work as a team. Without teamwork employees are left doing mundane tasks day in and day out just to get the work done. There is no communication or shared values. The shared value for this unit should be equitable services and equitable decision making. But the value is different for each person depending on what their job is. (Johnson, 2022, pg 122-123)

* Strive to become an ethical leader.
	+ The unit leader struggles with the five challenges of leadership as stated previously in the paper.
	+ “Ethical leadership theory emerged out of a systematic attempt by social scientists to identify the characteristics of ethical leaders and to determine how these leaders influence the behavior of their followers and organizations.” (Johnson, 2022, pg 214-215) On the Ethical Leadership Scale (Chart 7.1 pg 214-216) the unit leader scored 16 points- 10 being the least and 50 being the most ethical. Some of the low points were from listening to employees, making fair decisions, and trust. To become a ethical leader she will need to consider being an ethical person to her staff.

**Conclusion**

In conclusion the organization is full of potential and does a great job with what it has to work with. They strive to be an ethical, equitably sound, diverse and have a culture that is inviting and comfortable. The unit leader does follow this with students but has a hard time leading the unit the same way. I fear that the turnover in the unit will continue thus making the unit less effective and more open to be less equitable.

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