When looking at the state of education across the nation, it is becoming more evident that things must change in order to improve outcomes for our children as they prepare for a successful life. Many would agree that our nation, even world, has seen more disaster in this past year than many can remember. From our current pandemic to increased global violence, the world is screaming for solutions. As such, we need to be prepared for the rebuilding of our nation, our state, our town—and perhaps most importantly, our school system, which is the learning ground for the next generation of leaders.

While some hold a view that the rebuilding efforts are limited to federal and state governments, I believe that our rebuilding should be from within our local community.

Now more than ever, we have an opportunity to contribute to real, significant, and sustainable change. H.G. Wells once stated, “Civilization is a race between disaster and education.”

Now is the time to invest in education to repair the evident disasters in our community. Unfortunately, JCPS is underprepared to take on this critical task. JCPS is in desperate need of our community’s support. Improving Educational Outcomes for JCPS students will enhance the rebuilding of our community as well as remedy some of JCPS's crucial needs. It may be easy to think about responding with quick solutions, i.e. cash in bonds, borrow money, or seek additional already limited funds from state or federal governments. However, quick fixes never bring long-term gains, nor will they address the underlying needs of our community’s educational system.

Jefferson County Public Schools are at a critical juncture. Facilities are in desperate need of repair, renovation, and/or demolition to accommodate new construction. Currently, the district has over $1 billion of unmet facility needs. While it is certainly appropriate to wonder why the situation exists, it is more appropriate to take the necessary steps to rebuild our educational infrastructure in order to provide state of the art educational facilities for our children.

The numbers regarding school buildings aren’t just alarming, they’re embarrassing. JCPS’s newest high school, Ballard, was built more than 50 years ago; the newest middle or high school in West Louisville was built in 1952. Additionally, 32 of JCPS’s buildings are at the end of their useful life, with the next step being condemnation.

Our children need to be nurtured in safe, caring environments in order to envision their future success. The research proves it. Issues with plumbing, heating and cooling, lighting, and even buckets in the middle of a classroom to catch rainwater from leaking the roofs are all deterrents to educational success. You simply can’t have a first-class learning system in second-class facilities.

Furthermore, JCPS is posed to lead the community in systematic change to improve racial equity outcomes within our city. From implementing a new student assignment plan to providing choice to all students to implementing a plan to hire more diverse teaching staff to providing technology access to every student to running summer learning programs in order to help struggling students achieve educational success, initiatives that are proven to bring real change for our community are taking center stage in the future state of Jefferson County Schools. However, these initiatives with a price tag that we as a community need to step up and support. We cannot rely on the federal or state to allocate sufficient additional funds. We must show our conviction that our community is ready to move forward.

JCPS is at a point where they need an immediate solution to fix critical needs. The Board of Education approved a 7-cent property tax increase on every $100 of assessed value in May of 2020. The additional revenue would generate an additional $54 million annually for the district. With the additional revenue, JCPS will be able to make immediate repairs and fast track systematic change in every corner of the county. The additional funds would also allow JCPS to increase their bonding capacity to build more state-of-the-art schools, including three already earmarked for the neglected West End.

As a community, the tax increase can be part of the solution. I don't just ask for your money – I ask for you to provide your voice. Our children need your support. Our community needs your voice. If passed, there are multiple avenues to bring your voice into how the additional needs of our community are addressed and the Board can be held accountable for expenditures. Your local 15th District PTA will be just that, a voice for the community and for our children. The 15th District PTA supports the tax increase and encourages you to do the same. We ask that you join us in our mission to make every child's potential a reality by providing family and community support and educational advocacy to help rebuild our community and move our school district forward! We ask that you vote yes to the JCPS tax increase.