Dear Jacksonville Community:

Although it’s been about 45 years since 35th President John F. Kennedy included this excerpt in an education address to Congress, our growth as a nation remains linked to the quality of our public education system. The city of Jacksonville is no exception. Our progress as a city can be no swifter than our progress in education. As one of the 20th largest school districts in the nation, Duval County public schools have made significant gains over the years, but there is a new opportunity today for even faster and greater school improvement, and for the rebuilding of school and community culture in ways that contribute to the maximum development of every student’s capacity.

Returning to Jacksonville to lead a public school system that served me during a decade of my childhood has been both exciting and humbling. Since my arrival in November 2005, it has become increasingly clear to me that Jacksonville is thriving and growing in unimaginable ways due to highly capable business and civic leadership. I have seen much evidence of exciting improvements and growth throughout our city, and in our schools. In fact, I have seen some of the best teaching practices and collaborative community partnerships of my career. I have also seen some things that concern me. It is clear that our city faces numerous challenges including inadequate state funding for education, community violence, strained race relations, and adult illiteracy. Will we ever receive adequate funding for our public schools or will Florida and Jacksonville remain near the bottom of our nation’s list on per-student expenditures? Will Jacksonville become known as a city of love or the state’s leader in homicides and violence? Will we allow further erosion of our democracy because we have continued to allow too many students, often from low socioeconomic homes, to leave school frustrated with the opportunities we have failed to provide for their futures? Will we remain complacent with so many students dropping out of school only to expand their chances of becoming poor, homeless or criminals? Schools and communities aren’t separate. As communities strengthen, so do schools. As schools strengthen, so do communities. Whether an individual’s support of school and community improvement is driven by an interest in Jacksonville hosting another event like Super Bowl XXXIX or attracting more environmentally responsible businesses to our city, we must all work together to seek enhanced investments, improvements, and involvement in each one of our schools. It is paramount that we ensure all children are sufficiently educated to reach their dreams and enter meaningful and productive adulthoods. To achieve what is crucial, we must develop skilled and deliberate community-wide partnerships, investments in public education, and great discipline. Public education in Duval County can be one big hindrance or one big propeller in moving this city forward.

The Duval County School Board members and I are committed to making our schools stellar – the best not just in Florida, but also throughout the United States. To do so, we are committed to providing a high-quality education and opportunities that enable all students to reach their dreams and goals. We realize that for us to achieve this mission, we must demand a great deal from our students; rely on a great deal from our parents; invest a great deal in our teachers; and expect a great deal from our community. We need voices of candor, and hands of involvement including support, resources, and partnerships to make Duval County Public Schools a world-class system. With it, our success will be remarkable, because "our progress as a nation can be no swifter than our progress in education. Our requirements for world leadership, our hopes for economic growth, and the demands of citizenship itself in an era such as this all require the maximum development of every young American’s capacity. The human mind is our fundamental resource.”

Sincerely,

Joseph Wise
Superintendent of Schools