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JACKSONVILLE BUSINESS, NONPROFIT, PHILANTHROPIC AND COMMUNITY LEADERS URGE DUVAL COUNTY SCHOOL BOARD AND SUPERINTENDENT TO UNIFY AND WORK THROUGH CHALLENGES

JACKSONVILLE, Fla., Sept. 21, 2016 – Today, several key members of the Jacksonville business, nonprofit and philanthropic community jointly announced their support for the Duval County School Board and the superintendent as district leaders work through the challenging task of improving mutual cooperation and respect while focusing on overall student achievement with bold reforms and measurable outcomes.

The Jacksonville Civic Council, JAX Chamber, The Community Foundation for Northeast Florida, United Way of Northeast Florida and the Jacksonville Public Education Fund stand steadfastly behind the school board as a whole, as well as Superintendent Nikolai Vitti, and encourage them to follow through on their commitment to work with a mediator to unify and resolve their differences.

“A high quality public education system is at the heart of every great city. Our school system leaders have shown the courage to implement long-term education reforms that have resulted in significant improvements such as, the highest overall graduation rate in the county’s history and the smallest gap in graduation rates between African-American and white students when compared to Florida’s seven largest school districts,” said Jacksonville Civic Council Chairman Edward “Ed” E. Burr. “We are pleased that Duval County School Board Chairwoman Ashley Smith Juarez clarified the purpose of Friday’s meeting, since now is not the time to discuss whether to change superintendents, as reported in the media. Rather, our school board members and superintendent should jointly focus on the quality of education for our children. We are confident that they can rise above any adversity that may exist in order to create a world class education system.”

The groups said jointly that the important work of comprehensive school reform is what should be the sole focus of the school board and superintendent. And while no single governing body tackles tasks of such magnitude without differences of opinion, it is critical to unify for the sake of the children of Duval County. The various groups that have joined in this coalition have reported that they have assurances from Juarez that Friday’s scheduled meeting is to work through issues and move the district forward – but not to call for the superintendent’s resignation. The business, nonprofit and philanthropic community believe the clearest and most appropriate path forward at this juncture is for all parties to fully commit to goal-oriented mediation, as the chair has called for over the past few weeks.

“We’ve made substantial progress in the Duval County Public Schools under Dr. Vitti and it is critical that children in our community have the best possible opportunity to succeed,” JAX Chamber Chair Audrey Moran said. “To be a great city, we need a great public education system. We encourage our school district leaders to continue to work together for the children in our community.”

These community organizations are encouraged that Dr. Vitti received an “effective” performance evaluation rating from the collective school board earlier this month. Since becoming superintendent of Duval County Public Schools in October 2012, positive momentum has been demonstrated through improvement of school grades and increased graduation rates, among other areas.

“We strongly encourage both the school board and the superintendent to channel their stated passion for improving student achievement in a way that is productive, rather than disruptive,” said Deborah Pass Durham, chairman of The Community Foundation’s board of trustees.

As two new board members, including former City Council President Warren Jones, prepare to take their seats in November, the business, nonprofit and philanthropic community is prepared to lend its full support to the new board as it continues working together to enhance the educational offerings of Duval County.

“The challenge of improving outcomes for all students is long-term, requiring patience and mutually supportive leadership,” said Cindy Edelman, Jacksonville Public Education Fund board chair. “Our district leaders need to come together for the benefit of all students and our community, as well as recognize that through cooperation, trust and mutual respect, the potential to realize substantive gains can be achieved.”

The Jacksonville Public Education Fund, Community Foundation, JAX Chamber, United Way and Civic Council will continue to support the school board and superintendent in any and all ways possible, and are available as resources, sounding boards and support networks at the board’s disposal as district leaders continue their important work of improving all schools on behalf of the students, the families and the future of Duval County.

About Jacksonville Civic Council

The [Jacksonville Civic Council](#) is a CEO-led business membership organization founded in 2010. The Civic Council’s vision for Jacksonville is simple and straightforward: We want our city to be a safe, personally satisfying, economically rewarding place to live and raise a family. Our mission is to promote a fiscally responsible, economically vibrant, thriving community, which offers opportunity for all its residents.

About JAX Chamber

The [JAX Chamber](#) is the business membership organization dedicated to driving quality economic growth in Northeast Florida to make this region the best place to live, work and play. Membership provides the opportunity to connect with and buy from other Chamber members. The connections result in business growth and a more prosperous economy.

About The Community Foundation for Northeast Florida

The Community Foundation for Northeast Florida (www.jaxcf.org), Florida’s oldest and largest community foundation, works to stimulate philanthropy to build a better community. The Foundation helps donors invest their philanthropic gifts wisely, helps nonprofits serve the region effectively, and

helps people come together to make the community a better place. Now in its 52nd year, the Foundation has assets of \$313 million and has made grants of nearly \$369 million since 1964.

About United Way of Northeast Florida

United Way of Northeast Florida supports measurable solutions to ensure children enter school ready to learn, students stay on track to graduation, families achieve financial stability and people have the resources to lead healthy, productive lives. Learn more at unitedwaynefl.org.

About Jacksonville Public Education Fund

The Jacksonville Public Education Fund is an independent nonprofit organization that works to inform and mobilize the community to advocate for universally high-quality public schools for all children. For more information, visit www.jaxpef.org or call (904) 356-7757.

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