



August 24, 2023

Dear JPS High School Parents and Guardians,

IT TAKES A VILLAGE. Our beloved city is known for its resilience, southern hospitality, and pride, but I'm grieved that some of our schools, which we love so dearly, have become labeled due to disturbing acts of crime and violence by a few scholars. The overwhelming 99 percent of Jackson Public Schools scholars are getting it right and making us all very proud. Our teachers give it their all daily to ensure quality instruction despite HVAC issues, low to no water pressure, and the past COVID-19 pandemic. Students are in class, engaged in learning, and on task. Learning is happening, and our District is on a path to higher academic success.

Still, social media timelines and media reports paint a grim story of the 1 percent. While we cannot deny that there has been an uptick in violence in our community, schools continue to be a safe haven. Our schools must be a place to run to and not run from. We have comprehensive supports to keep reaching the challenged 1 percent, but we cannot do it alone. IT TAKES A VILLAGE.

Before children can learn, they must first feel SAFE. Since returning to in-person learning a few years ago following the height of the COVID-19 pandemic, there has been a NATIONWIDE increase in school violence. More fights. More bullying. More threats. More guns. Tensions are high, and consequences are an afterthought. IT TAKES A VILLAGE.

We are ramping up our resources to keep our schools safe and are offering more mental health and Social Emotional Learning (SEL) services. Yet, violence continues to spill into our schools. It's hurting our neighborhoods, our families, and our children. In addition to providing a new districtwide SEL curriculum, ReThink Ed, we've also invested in other supports for our scholars, such as increased access to professional mental health counseling, implemented a TAP Program in all seven high schools aimed at restorative justice practices, included an

Opportunity Block in the bell schedule to allow for individualized supports, academic and social, without impacting instructional time, offered teletherapy and a social-emotional hotline for students and families, and installed an advanced system for physical security screening. IT TAKES A VILLAGE.

We have clearly defined rules and a code of conduct to ensure the safety of students and staff. We understand that students come from all walks of life and that a one-size-fits-all approach to discipline is not the answer. We focus on progressive discipline and restorative practices that allow students to reset their behavior before matters escalate. We are here to EDUCATE and support our scholars. But let me be clear: We have no tolerance for weapons and violence in our schools, and we will take appropriate actions against those who CHOOSE to create an unsafe environment and disrupt learning. Students who choose to engage in misbehaviors, including but not limited to group fights, possession of drugs and weapons, and causing severe bodily injury, could face serious disciplinary actions AND criminal charges. IT TAKES A VILLAGE.

Mothers, fathers, aunts, uncles, grandmothers, grandfathers, cousins, and neighbors, this work has begun earnestly, and we need you to be vigilant. Children today are growing up fast and taking on more roles and responsibilities. However, neurologically, their brains are only sometimes ready to make wise choices. Parents, here are a few suggestions to guide your child(ren):

Do daily check-ins and have conversations with them. Ask them about their day and interests—even if you get an eye roll or shrug in response. Ask if anything is bothering them. If you have guns in your home, keep them safe and secure. Check their backpacks before and after school. Monitor their social media. Let them know they don't have to be self-reliant. You've got their back. Keep your children busy and involved in activities that they enjoy.

If you are looking for an opportunity to make a difference in a child's life, I'm calling ALL males across the District and our community to join our WATCH D.O.G.S (Dads of Great Students) Program.

Our after-school tutorial program starts this September for students in K-12. We'll also seek internships and externships with community partners this spring for our junior and senior high

school scholars. These are just a few ways to keep our students engaged. IT TAKES A VILLAGE.

This work is personal, and I wholeheartedly believe in our educators and children. We all love and want what is best for the children of Jackson Public School. Support is always available. If you have questions or would like to volunteer, please get in touch with your child's school.

I appreciate you and thank you for your steadfast support. We are One District, moving in One Direction, Marching Towards EXCELLENCE. WE ARE THE VILLAGE.

Respectfully,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Laketia M. Thomas". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Laketia Marshall-Thomas, Ed.S.
Assistant Superintendent, High Schools