

The Courier-Journal

THURSDAY, JULY 8, 1993.

COPYRIGHT © 1993, THE COURIER-JOURNAL, LOUISVILLE, KENTUCKY • A GANNETT NEWSPAPER

ION • 36 PAGES ★

Schools candidate would rally community

Lone Kentuckian admires district

By MICHAEL JENNINGS
Staff Writer

An African maxim has it that it takes a whole village to raise a child. Jerry Patterson says he'd like to make the Jefferson County Public Schools a vivid demonstration of that.

The last of four finalists for the county's school superintendency to visit for interviews, Patterson said yesterday that Jefferson County already shows a rare community-wide commitment to its children. That's one reason this district attracts him as few others could, he said.

"We as a nation are going to have to come to grips with the question that all the children belong to all of us," said Patterson, superintendent of the Appleton, Wis., schools. By building on the partnership concept apparent in programs such as a parent-and-child education program, he said, the Jefferson County district provides the chance to "position ourselves for the next century."

Patterson, an Owensboro native and the lone Kentuckian among the finalists, met yesterday with members of civil-rights, religious and business groups, as well as current and former school board members, government officials and media representatives.

His interviews end today, and the school board may announce its tentative choice of a superintendent Monday. Board Chairwoman Carol Ann Haddad says she wants board members to visit the chosen candidate's district before making the decision official, perhaps at a special July 19 meeting.

With his mop of silvery hair,

See SCHOOLS
Page 6, col. 3, this section

SCHOOLS

Continued from Page One

bushy eyebrows and dimpled smile, Patterson, 48, resembles an uncommonly cheerful Roman senator. Again and again yesterday, he spelled out beliefs that match his demeanor.

People of good will can agree on solutions to problems that beset schools, he said, provided they don't paint themselves into opposing corners. That's why asking for a pro or con commitment on issues like ability-grouping and changes in busing is the wrong question, he said.

The right question, which a given tracking or busing plan might or might not answer, is how schools can foster success for all students, he said. Patterson said he's passionately committed to that goal.

Student success requires diversity in schools, he said, adding that his track record shows his commitment to that. Since becoming Appleton's superintendent in 1988, Patterson has hired three black principals, and he said some in the district asked why he did it. "And I said, 'Because I believe in it.'"

Patterson spent 14 years, with the Madison, Wis., schools, the last five as assistant superintendent. While

there, he oversaw the design and implementation of a busing plan to desegregate two mostly black elementary schools.

He said yesterday that the Madison schools had "an impeccable track record in addressing the question of diversity." The busing plan there focused on providing "equitable opportunities," not just on balancing the numbers, he said.

Some in Madison disagree. Rick Berg, a former Madison school board member and an educational policy aide to Wisconsin Gov. Tommy Thompson, said the Madison busing plan was "a numbers strategy" that achieved nothing educationally. Betty Franklin-Hammonds, former president of the Madison Urban League, said the plan "just hasn't worked" to improve black students' schooling.

Patterson said he would separate school data to determine the impact of educational and disciplinary practices on black students. Under former Superintendent Donald Ingwerson, Jefferson County's schools were criticized for failing to do that regularly or comprehensively.

Patterson said he's against setting racial quotas because "if we're true to what we believe, then the numbers will fall into line." He said he's for a degree of choice among public schools, provided that equitable



STAFF PHOTO BY PAUL SCHUHMAN

PATTERSON: "We as a nation are going to have to come to grips with the question that all the children belong to all of us."

school funding is preserved and all parents have the information and resources to make good choices.

Patterson said experts disagree

on the value of ability-grouping, or "tracking." But he said that if it amounts to putting children "in a rut and leaving them there for 12 years," he's against it.

He promised an open administration.

The superintendent should talk with community leaders "on your own terms and, if you will, on your own turf," he said. The Rev. Jim Holladay of Kentuckiana Interfaith Community said that "would be a refreshing change" from Ingwerson's style.

School administrators should listen to and report the bad news about schools as well as the good, Patterson said. Responding to a charge that school board meetings are often "dog-and-pony shows" where votes are lined up in advance, he said that's not his way.

Haddad said yesterday that another finalist, James Fleming, has dropped out of the running. Fleming told his board in the Capistrano Unified School District in Orange County, Calif., last week that he had withdrawn his candidacy, but Haddad said she wasn't notified until yesterday.

The remaining candidates are Patterson, Fairfax County, Va., Area Superintendent Loretta Webb, and Cedar Rapids, Iowa, Superintendent Stephen Daeschner.