

Title Page & Abstract

An Interview with Ehren Jarrett, EdD

Part of the Abraham Lincoln Presidential Library
Illinois Public School Funding Oral History project

Interview # EF-A-L-2020-047

Dr. Ehren Jarrett, Superintendent of Rockford School District, a district facing funding challenges, was interviewed on the date listed below as part of the Abraham Lincoln Presidential Library's *Education is Key – Public School Funding Oral History* project.

Interview dates & location:

Date: Aug.4, 2020 Location: Telephonic interview

Interview Format: Digital audio

Interviewer: Philip Pogue

Technical Support (cameraman, etc):

Transcription by: _____

Edited by: _____

Indexed by: _____

Total Pages: _____ Total Time: 1:24 / 1.4 hrs

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The interview is archived at the Abraham Lincoln Presidential Library in Springfield, Illinois.

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Abstract

Ehren Jarrett, *Education in Illinois-Funding*, EF-A-L-2020-047

Biographical Information/Overview of Interview: Ehren Jarrett was born in Iowa City, Iowa in April 1974. He grew up in Rockford, IL, and attended Bloom Elementary and Rockford Lutheran Jr-Sr High School. Ehren then attended Concordia University in River Forest, majoring in secondary education (concentrating in history and English), graduating in 1997. He obtained an MS degree in curriculum and instruction from National Louis University in 1999. Ehren worked at Rockford Lutheran High School, (teacher/coach), then Hononegah High School in Rockton, IL (teacher), then Rockford East as assistant principal, back to Hononegah as assistant principal/principal, and then Rockford Public School District #205 as assistant superintendent. In 2013 he became superintendent. Jarrett obtained an MS degree in 2004 in educational administration from Northern IL University, an EdD degree in 2009, and an EdS in 2006. Dr. Jarrett has also served as president of the Large Unit District Association (LUDA) consisting of the 53 largest Unit Districts in IL. He was also supported the Evidence Based Funding Model and seeks changes in Title I pension calculations used by the State Board of Education.

In this interview, Dr. Jarrett looks at Illinois public school funding for the Rockford Public Schools (#205), with 30,000 students, from 2013-2020. He covers the challenges caused by static state school funding appropriations which often led to pro-rationing which hurt districts like Rockford, with a large percentage of low income students. This funding shortfall led to challenges in building upkeep, restrictions in adding or maintaining curricular programs, and large class size. The local revenue situation was helped by the passage of a major building referendum in 2013 which allowed two new schools to be built and additions and repairs to be made to the remaining thirty-nine schools. Dr. Jarrett reviews the school district's support for the new Evidence Based Funding Model. He also covers the demographics of the district, sources of district funding, the tax levy, TIFs/Enterprise Zones (non-taxable property), enrollment patterns and the 10 Year Strategic and Facilities Plan. Also discussed was the importance of Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) for focusing on needs for the Title I schools. Other topics reviewed included teacher shortages, the impact of pension costs for the state, and partnerships with area universities including Rockford College (Grow Your Own Teachers). The interview concludes with the financial impact to the School District due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

Headings/Key Words: Rockford Public School #205; IL Evidence Based Funding Model (2017); District #205 Ten Year Facilities Plan; COVID-19 pandemic challenges; pension costs; teacher shortages; legislative mandates; Every Student Succeeds Act; district revenue sources

Notes to the Reader: Readers of the oral history memoir should bear in mind that this is a transcript of the spoken word, and that the interviewer, interviewee and editor sought to preserve the informal, conversational style that is inherent in such historical sources. The Abraham Lincoln Presidential Library is not responsible for the factual accuracy of the memoir, nor for the views expressed therein. We leave these for the reader to judge.

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