

# LINC Commission Meeting

January 24, 2022



Superintendent Dr. Mark Bedell speaks to a large crowd of staff and supporters at J.A. Rogers to announce that Kansas City Public Schools has earned full accreditation.

**KANSAS CITY**  
PUBLIC SCHOOLS



**LINC**<sup>SM</sup>  
Local Investment Commission

# Local Investment Commission (LINC) Vision

## Our Shared Vision

A caring community that builds on its strengths to provide meaningful opportunities for children, families and individuals to achieve self-sufficiency, attain their highest potential, and contribute to the public good.

## Our Mission

To provide leadership and influence to engage the Kansas City Community in creating the best service delivery system to support and strengthen children, families and individuals, holding that system accountable, and changing public attitudes towards the system.

## Our Guiding Principles

1. **COMPREHENSIVENESS:** Provide ready access to a full array of effective services.
2. **PREVENTION:** Emphasize “front-end” services that enhance development and prevent problems, rather than “back-end” crisis intervention.
3. **OUTCOMES:** Measure system performance by improved outcomes for children and families, not simply by the number and kind of services delivered.
4. **INTENSITY:** Offering services to the needed degree and in the appropriate time.
5. **PARTICIPANT INVOLVEMENT:** Use the needs, concerns, and opinions of individuals who use the service delivery system to drive improvements in the operation of the system.
6. **NEIGHBORHOODS:** Decentralize services to the places where people live, wherever appropriate, and utilize services to strengthen neighborhood capacity.
7. **FLEXIBILITY AND RESPONSIVENESS:** Create a delivery system, including programs and reimbursement mechanisms, that are sufficiently flexible and adaptable to respond to the full spectrum of child, family and individual needs.
8. **COLLABORATION:** Connect public, private and community resources to create an integrated service delivery system.
9. **STRONG FAMILIES:** Work to strengthen families, especially the capacity of parents to support and nurture the development of their children.
10. **RESPECT AND DIGNITY:** Treat families, and the staff who work with them, in a respectful and dignified manner.
11. **INTERDEPENDENCE/MUTUAL RESPONSIBILITY:** Balance the need for individuals to be accountable and responsible with the obligation of community to enhance the welfare of all citizens.
12. **CULTURAL COMPETENCY:** Demonstrate the belief that diversity in the historical, cultural, religious and spiritual values of different groups is a source of great strength.
13. **CREATIVITY:** Encourage and allow participants and staff to think and act innovatively, to take risks, and to learn from their experiences and mistakes.
14. **COMPASSION:** Display an unconditional regard and a caring, non-judgmental attitude toward participants that recognizes their strengths and empowers them to meet their own needs.
15. **HONESTY:** Encourage and allow honesty among all people in the system.



Monday, Jan. 24, 2022 | 4 – 5:30 pm  
Online Meeting

---

## Agenda

---

- I. Welcome and Announcements
- II. Approvals
  - a. **November 2021 minutes (motion)**
- III. Superintendent Reports
- IV. Beating the Odds
  - a. High Growth Academic Achievement
- V. Kansas City Public Schools
  - a. Accreditation Decision
- VI. LINC Finances Update
  - a. Revised Budget (2021-22)
- VII. Other
  - a. Governor's Prayer Breakfast
  - b. State of the State
- VIII. Adjournment





## THE LOCAL INVESTMENT COMMISSION – NOV. 15, 2021

The Local Investment Commission met via Zoom. Cochair **Ken Powell** presided. Commissioners attending were:

Bob Bartman  
Bert Berkley  
Sharon Cheers  
Aaron Deacon  
David Disney  
Rob Givens

Anita Gorman  
Tom Lewin  
Marge Randle  
David Ross  
Marj Williams

Powell welcomed the attendees.

*A motion to approve the minutes of the Oct. 18, 2021, LINC Commission meeting was approved unanimously.*

Treasurer **David Ross** introduced **Alissa Klein** of BKD, who reported on the audit of LINC's financial statements and of LINC's compliance with standards for federal awards; BKD has issued an unmodified opinion of both areas and has issued pronouncements of future accounting standards.

*A motion to accept the Fiscal Year 2021 audit on the recommendation of the LINC Finance Committee was approved unanimously.*

*A motion to accept the Tax Year 2020 IRS Form 990 on the recommendation of the LINC Finance Committee was approved unanimously.*

### Superintendents Reports

- **Christina Medina**, Director of Public Relations (Center School District), reported students are real-world learning projects are ongoing, including the Hive TV student crew which is livestreaming student athletic events. The district will be closed next week. The district is seeing more quarantines and is facing staff shortages.
- **Steve Morgan**, Asst. Superintendent (Fort Osage School District), reported Jackson County lifted the mask mandate last week; the district is recommending but not requiring masks. The district is addressing a bus driver and other staff shortage. The district is getting to approve three rooftop solar panel projects. Haley Ward was named Missouri female athlete of the year and received a National Wrestling Hall of Fame award; the female wrestling team won the district championship. The student-run coffeehouse Campus Grounds has been open for three weeks.
- **Carl Skinner**, Assistant Superintendent (Hickman Mills School District), reported most district schools held Trunk or Treat events for Halloween. The district's recent food shortage was resolved thanks to funds donated by partners. Many buildings are currently under construction to improve entrance security. Project-based learning through Project Lead the Way is ongoing. United Way provided washers and dryers through the Loads of Love initiative. Smith-Hale Middle School hosted a vaccine clinic last weekend.
- **Kevin Foster**, Executive Director (Genesis School), reported school will not be in session next week. Genesis was named a Patrick Mahomes Read for Fifteen school, and all students grades K-8 will receive books and other support. Attendance this fall is above that of 2019 in spite of the bus driver shortage. There have been no quarantines at the school since Sept. 17.

Executive Vice President **Janet Miles-Bartee** reported that many LINC Caring Communities sites held Lights On Afterschool events in October to draw attention to the benefits of afterschool programs. Covid has changed the way such events were organized because of restrictions on entry to school buildings. A video on Lights On Afterschool was shown.

HR Director **Trent DeVreugd** provided an update on LINC staffing, including current part-time and full-time positions and new hires since September. LINC has produced videos of current staff promoting LINC as a fun, meaningful place to work. He reported that research suggests employment won't return to normal until next year.

Miles-Bartee reported that the LINC Infant Toddler Specialist Network initiative provides on-site guidance and resources for childcare centers who serve low-income families. ITSN Specialist **Claire Harbison** reported that ITSN has a big impact because brain development in children at this age is so important. A video on ITSN was shown.

Deputy Director **Brent Schondelmeyer** gave the following reports:

- LINC helped distribute stocking caps that were made, by hand, by a volunteer. The caps were distributed to children at Lights On Afterschool events last month. A video was shown.
- **Anita Gorman** was recognized with the Alexander Doniphan Award for her work on behalf of the Northland community.
- LINC Caring Communities sites distributed high-quality books from First Book to children at Lights On Afterschool events. A video was shown.

The meeting was adjourned.

---

# Fully accredited: KCPS community rejoices

January 12, 2022

By Joe Robertson/LINC Writer



*Kansas City Public Schools Superintendent Mark Bedell.*

The six years it took for Superintendent Mark Bedell to lead the Kansas City Public Schools to the promised land of full accreditation would have been wilderness enough.

But the joy that swept over the resilient school district Tuesday burst from 22 years of pain that longtime educators and a community of partners and supporters have carried since the state stripped accreditation in 2000.

In a unanimous vote, the state board in Jefferson City Tuesday approved Missouri Education Commissioner Margie Vandeven's recommendation that Kansas City Public Schools be fully accredited — effective immediately, at 10:56 a.m.

It's been a long road.

"This school district isn't easy," Bedell said at a press conference at J.A. Rogers Elementary School just hours after the Jefferson City vote, as he looked out across a crowded room that included so many people who'd been "fighting for kids" in Kansas City long before he came.

This moment was for all of them, he said, who persevered through the harsh light and all of "the good, the bad and the ugly."

"Brighter days are ahead."

In most years since 2000, KCPS made sufficient progress to eventually earn provisional accreditation, but that status still marked the district as less than whole.

The return of full accreditation honors the determined and compassionate work of teachers, principals and support



staff — as well as LINC’s before- and after-school program teams and many other district partners — who kept their focus on children and families during the two-decade struggle.

“I am amazed at the work the Kansas City school district has done,” said LINC Executive Vice President Janet Miles-Bartee, who started as a teacher in the district’s Ladd Elementary School in the late 1990s. “We have to continue to be that strong, supportive partner.”

LINC has been one of the district’s most dependable and durable community partners, providing the Caring Communities initiative at the district’s elementary schools as well as other supportive services to children and families.

“What we do in the before- and after-school program and how we support our families and how we support the community has made a tremendous difference in this accreditation,” Miles-Bartee said.

The vote for accreditation joins a critical movement of support for the district, said State School Board President Charlie Shields before the vote in Jefferson City. Gone are the days of discussions on how to break up or dissolve the district.

“We are absolutely invested in the performance and success of the Kansas City school district,” said Shields, the president and CEO of University Health in Kansas City. “Alternatives (to a city public school district) are not the discussion anymore. The discussion is: ‘How can we help?’”

Bedell had hoped the district would win full accreditation in 2019 after earning enough points on its annual performance review to score in the fully accredited range.

But the state held off, wanting the district to repeat its improvements. Then Covid-19 threatened to derail much of the progress.

The state did not issue annual performance reports the past two years and did not measure districts on some metrics, like attendance, because of the pandemic’s impacts. But the state saw enough merit in KCPS’s other achievements.

Performance on state tests suffered all across Missouri school districts in the wake of the instruction time lost to the pandemic, but Kansas City compared well against the state trends.

The district held mostly steady on student performance



Children at J.A. Rogers Elementary School watch the Kansas City Public Schools’ celebration of earning full accreditation January 11, 2020.



Former and current Kansas City school board members, left to right, Pattie Mansur, Amy Hartsfield, Ajia Morris, Jennifer Wolfsie, Kandace Buckner, Tanesha Ford and Manny Abarca join in celebrating Kansas City Public Schools’ full accreditation.

on advanced placement and baccalaureate tests, as well as college and career-ready assessments.

The state was impressed with the district’s educator evaluations, its strategic planning, its financial condition — and its stability in leadership.

Carol Hallquist, a Kansas City–area member on the state school board who made the motion to accredit the district, said the district “is fortunate to have Dr. Bedell. His leadership and tenure has made a difference.”

“His boots-on-the-ground caring,” she said, “enabled him to engage the community.”

The confidence in the district’s stability is refreshing, because it had been absent or fleeting throughout a repeating cycle of changing boards and leadership.

Eight superintendents — including interim leaders — had taken their turns at the task of restoring accreditation before Bedell arrived in 2016: Benjamin Demps, Bernard Taylor, Anthony Amato, John Martin, Clive Coleman, John Covington, Steve Green and Al Tunis.

And 18 superintendents before them — and their school boards — steered a spiraling course beginning in the 1970s as a district caught in massive demographic and societal changes became a nationally notorious drama.

The district went through heavy-handed restructuring plans under Amato and Covington, only to see both of them leave abruptly — Amato being forced out and Covington resigning.

It was after Covington’s departure that the district became completely unaccredited a second time in 2011.

“There was disarray,” said Shields, who was on the state board then. “People didn’t see a path forward. There was this revolving door of superintendents . . . and no faith in the elected board.”

Bedell had other options when Kansas City sought him out as a candidate for superintendent in 2016. But he listened to his wife’s encouragement that he go where he was needed, because, she told him, “You can turn around schools.”

That work has carried on with leadership and staff, community partners and a supportive board that have separated the current district from its stormier past.

At Rogers, Bedell acknowledged the people in all the many layers of the district and its community that made Tuesday’s announcement possible. It was truly a day for celebration.

But it was also a day to redouble on commitment.

There is still so much work ahead, Bedell and KC board members said. Performance must improve. All of the community forces that improve the welfare of families have to carry on against barriers like crime and unaffordable housing.

## Timeline: Kansas City’s fall and the winding road back

**1985-1999** — The federal desegregation court case directs Missouri to fund Kansas City’s district-wide magnet school plan.

**1999** — Missouri legislature allows public charter schools in the Kansas City school district.

— State school board strips Kansas City’s accreditation, effective in 2000.

**2001** — Superintendent Benjamin Demps resigns in turmoil. Bernard Taylor becomes superintendent.

**2002** — Kansas City regains provisional accreditation.

**2006** — Bernard Taylor steps down as his unrenewed contract expires.

— Tony Amato is hired as superintendent, with plans including remaking the district with K-8 schools and smaller high schools.

**2007** — Voters in Independence and Kansas City vote for new boundary lines, moving seven schools in western Independence into the Independence School District.

**2008** — Tony Amato resigns under pressure. John Martin and then Clive Coleman serve as interim superintendents.

**2009** — John Covington is hired as superintendent with plans including remaking the district with standards-based grade-level designations for students.

**2010** — The KC board approves Covington’s plan to close 26 schools.

**2011** — Covington abruptly resigns in August. Steve Green is hired as superintendent.

— The state school board strips Kansas City’s provisional status in September, making the district unaccredited effective in 2012.

**2014** — Kansas City regains provisional accreditation.

**2015** — Steve Green resigns as superintendent. Al Tunis serves as interim superintendent.

**2016** — Mark Bedell hired as Kansas City’s 27th superintendent in 45 years.

**2022** — Jan. 11, the state school board votes to give Kansas City full accreditation effective immediately.



But with the accreditation vote, the lack of a full state endorsement will no longer weigh down a district determined to win new families.

Bedell is the district's 27th superintendent in the past 50 years. Now deep into his sixth year, Bedell has out-tenured all of them. And his fire is lit.

"I'm a competitive athlete," he said. "I want to beat everybody. This (Kansas City school) board is huge on raising the needle. We're going to do this."

The state's full blessing will inject fuel into the district's work to re-imagine its schools, its programs and its community partnerships.

Deputy Superintendent Jennifer Collier, who with 22 years of service in the district has witnessed the journey from and back to accreditation, outlined some of the innovations ahead.

Culturally responsive teaching. Critical pedagogy that gives children voice and agency. Project-based, real-world lessons. Foreign language instruction beginning in kindergarten. Flexible scheduling that breaks the constraints of time so children learn at their best pace and best time. Integral roles for empowered parents and caregivers. More community partnerships. The list goes on.

The district is deep into a year-long project to build a community plan for the future of the district — Blueprint 2030.

Bedell and his team have relied on advisory groups, held community listening sessions and conducted surveys and more — all to gather the wisdom, fears and dreams of staff, parents, students and patrons.

The work is both exciting and challenging with all things on the table in planning the best classroom experiences for children — from class sizes to extra curricular investments to school closings.

The district is "hyperfocused," Kansas City School Board President Nate Hogan said in Jefferson City and again at Rogers.

"Our board is committed, in collaboration with Dr. Bedell and his team," he said, "to create a district that is nimble, effective, equitable, challenging . . . and fun."

Throughout the celebratory press conference, a row of Rogers students who had served as hosts and escorts looked on from behind an array of news cameras and reporters.

It is children like them who stayed on the minds of everyone who, over the hard years, "woke up every day fighting for children," said Derald Davis, an administrator and former principal who has worked 26 years in the district.

It is children like them that Bedell was thinking of when he talked about why he took the challenge in Kansas City, and why he has stayed.

Bedell was a child was a ward of the state, he said, growing up without parents, his mother having died of an overdose. He knew the "plight and struggle of many students here."

Yes, full accreditation is something to celebrate and it will be celebrated, he said. But then it will be time to get back to work.

Because . . .

"I have a life story," he said.

And these children and all those to come have theirs.



*Bedell poses with teacher Jamekia Kendrix and board member Jennifer Wolfsie*

# Hickman Mills wants to be the next Kansas City school district to win back full accreditation

KCUR | By Barbara Shelly

January 13, 2022



*Students arrive for a new school year at Ingels Elementary in the Hickman Mills School District. Enrollment in the district has been dropping.*

Yaw Obeng looked on with a mixture of envy and hope this week as leaders of the Kansas City Public Schools celebrated the Missouri Board of Education vote to grant the district full accreditation.

Obeng is superintendent of the Hickman Mills School District in south Kansas City, which is one of six districts in Missouri to lack the stamp of approval of a fully accredited district. Hickman Mills was classified as provisionally accredited in 2014, with state education officials citing low student academic scores and other problems.

Obeng, who arrived here in June 2020 after leading a district in Vermont, said he intends to begin conversations with his school board and staff at the Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education about moving Hickman Mills to full accreditation.

He said the district has been making progress on academic achievement and graduation rates, and it actually tops KCPS in some of those metrics. The district's financial picture has improved, partly with the help of fed-

eral COVID aid, and the board last year approved a substantial pay bump for teachers.

Obeng hopes state education officials will focus on Hickman Mills now that KCPS has received full accreditation.

"I've heard from the community that Hickman Mills gets treated like the little brother to KCPS," Obeng said. "I don't think that we've had the opportunity to share our story yet."

Others are less upbeat about the district of about 5,000 students. They say low academic achievement and ongoing dysfunction on the school board has become a drag on the Hickman Mills community.

"People talk with their feet and they're moving," said Karry Palmer, a former school board member and president of Hickman Mills United Neighborhoods. "They're just not putting their kids in the neighborhood schools. The school district isn't the only problem, but it is a major problem and it's really not being addressed."

The Hickman Mills School District sits in a part of Kansas City that is plagued by poverty and disinvestment. The median household income is \$43,774, and more than [35% of children in the district's boundaries live in poverty](#), according to [Census Reporter](#), a project that interprets U.S. Census data.

Economic investment in the area is lagging and hopes that the 290-acre Cerner Campus off of Bannister Road would jumpstart a revival suffered a further blow when the company announced it would be acquired by Oracle Corp. The campus was built with the help of an incentive package [now valued at \\$1.75 billion](#), which allowed Cerner to hold on to tax money that would have gone to the school district.

More than 50% of the housing in the Hickman Mills school district is rental. Evictions and unplanned moves leave classrooms in [a continual state of flux](#), as children move frequently across school and district boundaries during the academic year.

Kansas City Public Schools faces many of the same issues. School and state officials have credited the progress there to Bedell's sustained leadership, his insistence on sticking to a strong strategic plan, cooperation from his school board and support from the broader civic community.

Governance in Hickman Mills has been rockier. Obeng is the district's third superintendent in five years. His two predecessors each left for superintendent jobs in neighboring districts.

Board relationships are fraught. Some district residents were recently startled to receive a holiday greeting card featuring photos and best wishes from four board members -- pointedly ignoring the remaining three.

"Over the past year we've had incidents where things just haven't been done right," said board member Cecil Wattree, who usually finds himself in the minority. He has raised issues about contracts being signed without the correct approval process, outdated policies and failure to keep minutes of meetings.

"There is convolution everywhere," he said.

Obeng said he gets along with his board, and it has supported all of his recommendations regarding student achievement. He and his wife have built a home in the district, and he said he is planning to stay for the long term.

Obeng said he hopes that Kansas City's civic and political leaders, who embraced the KCPS march toward full accreditation, will show more support for his district and community.

"We don't have a major voice," he said. "No one takes ownership of us. It makes it hard to bring people together."

Susan Wally works with the Hickman Mills School District as CEO of PREP-KC, which helps urban districts and schools in the region with college and career preparedness and other student-centered work.

"We helped KCPS get to this point. There's momentum there," she said, referring to the greater civic community.

"It's very easy to wring your hands. I remember when people used to do that with KCPS," Wally said. "(Obeng) needs some social capital. He needs some folks to pay attention to that community."



# 'Beating the Odds' study shines light on KCPS, Hickman Mills schools making academic gains

January 14, 2022

By Joe Robertson/LINC Writer

On the surface, Wendell Phillips Elementary School’s state test performance in English Language Arts is the kind often dispatched to the bin marked for failing schools.

After all, three out of four students scored below proficient in 2019.

But a series of new studies looking beyond that point-in-time data reveals a school that ranks 20th out of Missouri’s 1,026 elementary schools when measuring the gains students have made over three years.

Wendell Phillips was one of several schools in the Kansas City Public Schools and Hickman Mills school districts that stood out statewide for raising the performance of children, many of whom entered public school challenged by the deficits caused by poverty.

The [PRiME Center](#) of Saint Louis University released its [Student Growth Report](#) that unpacked state test results and analyzed the Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education’s “Growth Model” to identify schools that otherwise might not be recognized for performance.

In a more focused report — [Beating the Odds](#) — the researchers isolated the 256 elementary schools with the highest percentage of students who qualify for free or reduced-price meals. And in that group, Wendell Phillips ranked 7th in English Language Arts growth.

Other KCPS schools in the Top 30 for growth were Border Star Montessori, Melcher, Faxon, Holliday Montessori, Garfield, Hartman and Pitcher.

Hickman Mills’ Santa Fe Elementary also scored in the Top 30.

In Math performance growth, Top 30 schools from KCPS were Hartman, Whittier, Melcher, Pitcher and James.

Hickman Mills schools in the Top 30 were Santa Fe, Warford and Dobbs.

In a similar review of middle schools, Grandview Middle School rated in the Top 20 among 124 middle schools with the highest percentages of low-income families.

“The importance of examining student growth for a more full picture of school effectiveness is even more apparent

## Beating the odds

Several Kansas City and Hickman Mills school district schools were among the highest achieving when measured by the growth of student performance on state tests. Statewide rankings are a comparison among the 256 highest poverty elementary schools in Missouri.

### English Language Arts

State rank	School	District	Pct scoring proficient or advanced	PRiME growth score
4	Border Star Montessori	Kansas City	59	95.7
7	Wendell Phillips	Kansas City	27	95.4
12	Santa Fe	Hickman Mills	37	93.6
18	Melcher	Kansas City	13	92.4
20 (t)	Faxon	Kansas City	18	91.9
20 (t)	Holliday Montessori	Kansas City	33	91.9
23	Garfield	Kansas City	16	91.6
28 (t)	Hartman	Kansas City	34	91.3
28 (t)	Pitcher	Kansas City	36	91.3

### Elementary schools Math

State rank	School	District	Pct scoring proficient or advanced	PRiME growth score
5	Hartman	Kansas City	51	98.9
11	Santa Fe	Hickman Mills	47	93.8
12	Warford	Hickman Mills	36	93.7
13	Whittier	Kansas City	27	93.6
16	Melcher	Kansas City	18	93.6
17	Pitcher	Kansas City	47	93.3
21	Dobbs	Hickman Mills	29	92.5
29	James	Kansas City	36	91.3

when looking at the performance of schools that serve high concentrations of low-income students,” the PRiME researchers wrote.

“Single point-in-time proficiency scores can undersell the performance,” the report said.

Missouri’s Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE) created a Missouri Growth Model in 2013 to provide a contextual measure for the annual scores in the Missouri Assessment Program (MAP) tests.

The model uses students’ Math and English Language Arts MAP test performance over a three-year period to predict the expected future score based on the average performance of their peers. DESE could then measure how well schools or school districts overall were raising student achievement above the predicted scores in the growth model.

In its reporting, the PRiME Center took DESE’s scores and converted them into a scale that resembled familiar test performance percentages. Schools that showed marked growth would score into the 90s with a high score of 100. Schools showing less growth scored into the low 70s or below.

In its Beating the Odds report, PRiME Center researchers isolated one-fourth of Missouri’s schools that had the highest percentage of students who qualify for free or reduced-price lunches and charted their performance in the growth model.

“We believe it is especially important to recognize these schools as they face many unique barriers to succeed at moving students forward at incredible rates,” the report said.

Kansas City Public Schools and Hickman Mills are among districts in the state in which all student receive free meals because the most of their schools serve populations where well over 90% qualify for the benefits.



*Photo from the PRiME Center Student Growth Report*

# Ready to take on the Omicron winter, schools ask for community's support

January 4, 2022

By Joe Robertson/LINC Writer



*LINC staff provide masks to Faxon Elementary School students during the Fall 2021 school semester.*

LINC and its partner school districts returned to class this week, fully in-person, determined to meet the challenges of the Covid Omicron winter ahead.

The counts of Covid-19 cases and quarantines across district dashboards are bound to rise as the Omicron variant's infections course through their communities, but the vital role of schools is clear:

The CDC and the American Pediatrics Association, among others, stress that the well-being of children and their ability to thrive will rely heavily on communities being able to keep classrooms open.

Schools are focused on recovering the social and academic ground that was lost during many months of online learning during the 2020-2021 school year. The emotional and mental health of children also relies on schools being able to prevent further isolation.

So schools need everyone's help.

Districts are returning with safety protocols in place. Vaccinations and follow-up booster shots are encouraged. Masks are either required or encouraged for staff, visitors and students. Sanitizing and cleansing continue with vigor.

Every effort that supports schools' protocols — and practicing the same safety measures in the community — will help keep children healthy and in school.

Children continue to be at low risk from Covid compared to older populations, but it is also critical to protect teachers and staff who are more vulnerable.



The Kansas City Public Schools, as are other districts with LINC programs, are continuing safety protocols, with 80% of its staff vaccinated and time off being granted as necessary to get booster shots, district spokesperson Elle Moxley said.

“We're committed to keeping students, families and staff safe, and we will communicate widely if we make any changes in the near term,” she said. “We're staying the course with what we know works to slow the spread of Covid in our schools.”

Hickman Mills School District continues to require masks in all buildings regardless of a person’s vaccination status, and the district has been hosting monthly vaccination clinics, spokesperson Marissa Cleaver Wamble said.

“We are monitoring the spike in cases closely,” she said.

“We are in regular communication with both the KCMO Health Department and the Jackson County Health Department.”

The social and political climate around Covid has raised its own challenges as districts navigate the need for precautions and the scattered backlash against various mandates and regulations.

In some cases, school districts are adapting their precautions to changes in city or county mandate requirements. Fort Osage schools have made masks optional since December. The North Kansas City district still has mask mandates in place in the city of North Kansas City, but masks are optional in district buildings located in Kansas City, Mo.

Grandview schools are continuing their safety measures from December, including mask requirements.

The Center School District, in its message to its families, also said the safety protocols it set before the holiday break remain in place as school returns.

“Please continue to be safe and be vigilant in following District protocols to protect you, your family, and the community at large,” the district’s message said.

At Genesis School, the threat of the Omicron variant means no let-up in precautions, said Genesis Executive Director Kevin Foster. Masks remain required. Visitors have to be pre-approved and be vaccinated. So far, he said, signs are good, with no rise in Covid cases among students.

“The challenge may be staffing,” Foster said, “if vaccinated adults are in fact susceptible and the community spread is high.”

### **Covid-19 vaccination and testing information:**

- [kclinc.org/covid19](https://kclinc.org/covid19)

# 'Trusted leaders': Governor Parson praises Morning Star, LINC community mission in State of the State

Jan. 20, 2022

By Joe Robertson/LINC Writer

The last time Gov. Mike Parson stood before the Capitol crowds to deliver a State of the State address, Missouri was staring down a big problem.

New vaccines were just arriving on the scene for a nation in Covid distress — vaccines which were available at that time for only a small number of Missourians.

“No one had a roadmap or a playbook,” he recalled. “We knew we faced difficult times ahead.”

Parson was back in the Capitol Wednesday, delivering his 2022 address, looking out among the faces in the balcony of the House chamber for special guests he’d invited in honor of the work that helped pull Missouri through.

Two of them were Rev. John Modest Miles, pastor of Morning Star Missionary Baptist Church, and his daughter, LINC Executive Vice President Janet Miles-Bartee.

They, along with Michael McMillan and James Clark of the Urban League in St. Louis, played essential roles in helping Missouri get vaccinations to some of the state’s hardest hit and most vulnerable populations, Parson said.

“With these trusted leaders aiding our efforts,” he said, “we were able to get hundreds of thousands in Kansas City and St. Louis vaccinated.”

Missouri is in a strong financial position, Parson said, unveiling in his speech a proposed budget with \$12 billion in increased spending in anticipation of healthy tax revenues and federal pandemic aid.

It included proposals to fully fund the Foundation Formula that funds K-12 education, increase teachers’ starting pay to \$38,000 and invest \$400 million in broadband technology to connect 75,000 more families to the internet.

What buoyed his strength, Parson said, was the journey he and First Lady Teresa Parson took throughout the state in Missouri’s Bicentennial Celebration year, experiencing the “heart and soul of what makes Missouri great,” he said.

“Faith, family, neighbors helping neighbors — that’s who Missourians are.”

Morning Star Missionary Baptist Church and LINC teamed up during the past year to help neighbors across multiple East Kansas City neighborhoods that were in danger of falling short of many relief opportunities, including access to federal funds for assistance with past due utility bills and rent, as well as life-saving vaccinations.

The clinic at Morning Star’s Youth and Family Life Center at 27th and Prospect Avenue [has become a hub for community aid](#), having provided so far more than 25,000 Covid vaccinations and helped nearly a thousand households access some \$1.5 million in utility bill and rental assistance. Morning Star has also distributed more than 2 million pounds of food.

Parson’s support of the work at Morning Star showed the state’s commitment to seek relief for all Missourians, especially the most distressed, said Miles-Bartee.



*Jeanette Richard Miles, Janet Miles-Bartee, First Lady Teresa Parson, Gov. Mike Parson and Rev. John Modest Miles pose outside the governor’s office before Parson’s State of the State address Jan. 19, 2022. Photo from the Missouri Governor’s Office staff.*

“We thank the governor for seeing the need to be of service to all people,” she said. “We (LINC and Morning Star) would not have been able to serve so many people in these communities where people don’t have computers, don’t have the Internet, where they don’t know where or how to get help.”

After University Health — the former Truman Medical Center — had used Morning Star’s community center as a temporary vaccination site in January 2021, Rev. Miles and Miles-Bartee reached out to Parson for support to make Morning Star an ongoing vaccination site.

Parson, who has a longstanding friendship with Rev. Miles, recognized the opportunity and sent medical teams from the Missouri National Guard to the site in February.

The National Guard named their Morning Star mission [Task Force Freedom](#), honoring the work that Capt. Tony Rich said came to the rescue of people “whose lives were put on hold,” reaching out purposefully to predominantly Black neighborhoods with the greatest health risks.

The Guard was at the site through May. Morning Star continues to offer a weekly vaccination clinic in partnership with University Health. The utility and rental assistance and the food distributions continue as well.

Parson [visited Morning Star](#) in April 2021 to see first-hand how the center was [distributing hundreds of vaccines a day](#) during those first months that immunizations were available, predicting then that the operation “will be a model for our state and it will be a model for the country.”

The State of the State speech marked the second time this month that Parson summoned Rev. Miles and Miles-Bartee to Jefferson City. On Jan 6, Rev. Miles [was the featured speaker](#) at the Governor’s Prayer Breakfast.

The work at Morning Star exemplified the goodness and ingenuity Parson praised in his speech and marked the spirit he sees throughout Missouri.

“Remember, our strength is our people,” he said. “When times are hard, Missourians move forward. When someone is down, Missourians lift them up.

“These past years have been tough and dividing for a lot of people,” he said, “but Missourians stay true. They give their best and they always put others first, and we are a better state — a better people — because of it.”



*Miles-Bartee and Rev. Miles, center, acknowledge a standing ovation after being recognized by Gov. Parson during the State of the State ad-*



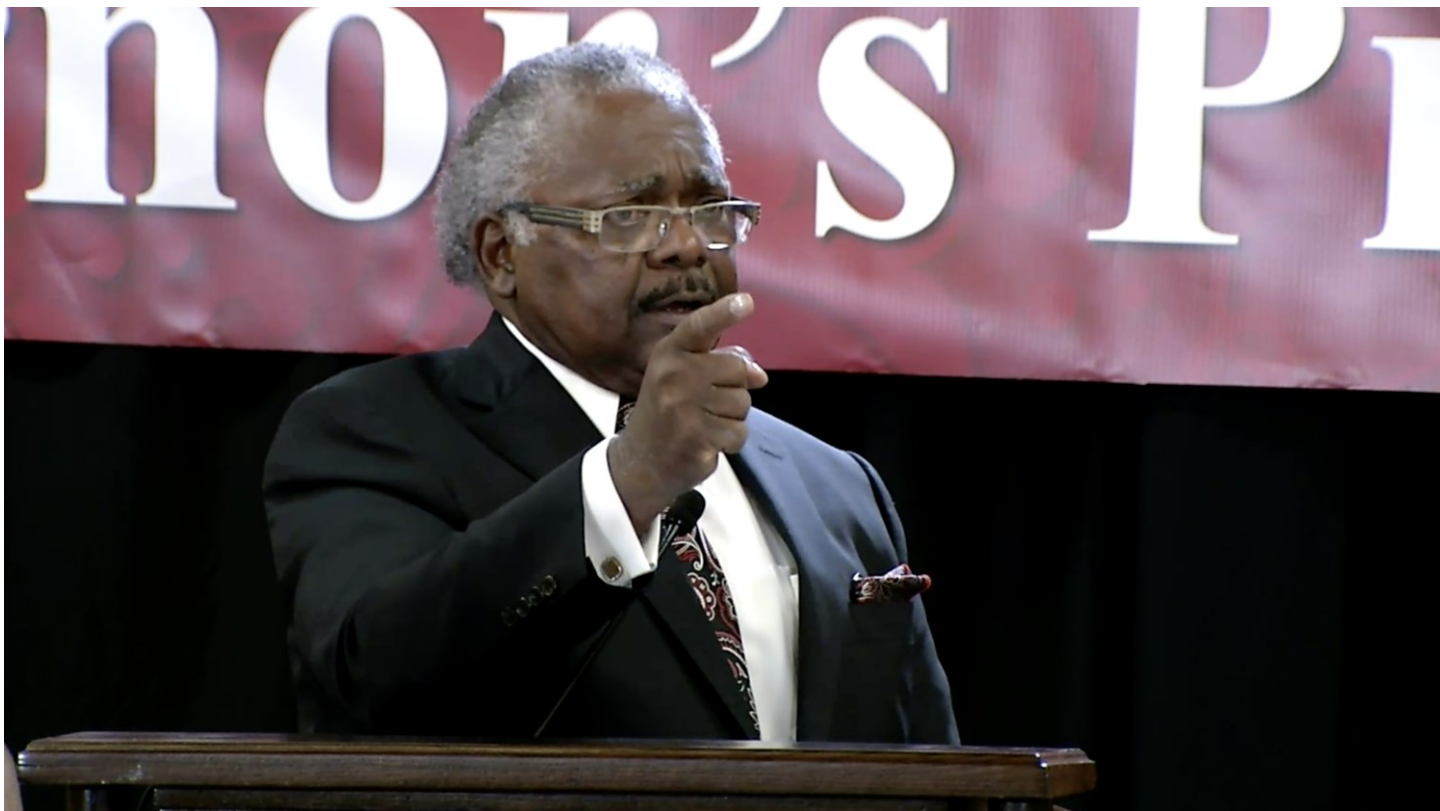
*Photo from the Missouri Governor’s Office staff.*



# Pastor Miles at Governor's Prayer Breakfast: Faith can save nation from 'slippery edge of disaster'

January 7, 2022

By Joe Robertson/LINC Writer



*Photo from state video of Gov. Mike Parson's Prayer Breakfast, Jan. 6, 2022*

"Our world is nervous," the pastor said.

"Our world is jumpy.

"Our world is irritable, restless, frustrated, quick tempered, unhappy and all the rest."

But the Rev. John Modest Miles took the podium as the featured speaker at Gov. Mike Parson's Prayer Breakfast with a message of hope for a nation he feared is "moving along the slippery edge of disaster."

The beacon of light, he told an audience of more than 500 in Jefferson City, comes from the "prayer and faith" that helped Morning Star Missionary Baptist Church in partnership with LINC, the Kansas City Police Department, Gov. Parson and many others build a powerful community hub at what was once "the baddest community in Kansas City."

The story of what has happened at the corner of 27th Street and Prospect Avenue, he said, brings "hope that you may leave here with and continue to hold onto."

The governor's annual breakfast — which traditionally helps kick off the opening week of Missouri's legislative session — coincided with the one-year anniversary of the insurrection on the nation's Capitol and as Missouri is eyeing rising Covid-19 case numbers once again.

Parson, speaking before Miles' featured presentation, shared the same call for confidence that Jesus had in the Bible when he stilled a stormy sea.

“Go back to your faith,” the governor said. “Go back to true leadership. Calm down. Have faith . . . If we focus on that, we’ll have a path to get through . . . That’s why we’re here this morning — to remind ourselves what our guiding light is.”

Parson knows well the work that Morning Star and its supporters have achieved in recent years, and particularly since the pandemic came bearing down two years ago.

The governor visited the church’s Youth and Family Life Center in April 2021, praising it as a “model” in Missouri’s fight against Covid.

Morning Star had already been holding food distributions for its stressed community when the arrival of Covid vaccinations had health providers looking for partners to help get immunizations into communities that needed them most.

After University Health in Kansas City had set up a temporary clinic at Morning Star, Miles worked with Parson and the Missouri National Guard so Morning Star and LINC could create a long-running vaccination clinic that has now dispensed more than 25,000 vaccinations.

Later in 2021, when federal relief dollars for rental and utility bill assistance were log-jammed by a lack of awareness and a cumbersome application process, LINC and Morning Star stepped up again. They worked with utility companies and other social service agencies to model an assistance clinic that has now processed more than \$1.3 million in relief for more than 800 households.

Meanwhile, the food aid — now at more than 2.1 million pounds distributed — continues on.

The broad collaboration, bridging all political, racial and religious divisions, shows the power communities can bring to bear, Miles said.

“We are faced with the greatest challenges ever encountered in the history of our nation,” Miles said. “It is our compassion for humanity, no matter where we stand politically; it is our humanity that is the single thing that will guide us to a fair and unbiased remedy, that will accomplish the ultimate goal.”

“Working together we can reshape the consciousness of this state,” he said. “Working together we can help change the moral value that has become morally and spiritually bankrupt. Working together with faith we can provide hope for those who have no hope.”



Missouri Gov. Mike Parson speaks at the Governor’s Prayer Breakfast.



Rev. John Modest Miles, right, and his wife, Jeanette Richard Miles, center, greet well-wishers after the Missouri Governor’s Prayer Breakfast in Jefferson City, Jan. 6, 2022.

# Front Porch Alliance–LINC robotics team at Faxon shines in FIRST Lego League tourney

December 8, 2022

By Joe Robertson/LINC Writer

The judges were waiting. And Faxon Elementary School's robotics teams were up.

Nervous?

Oh yes.

But now it was time to show why Faxon and its partners at the [Front Porch Alliance](#) this year decided to move its robotics program to after-school hours with LINC.

These kids had to make commitments to work those extra hours. Their parents made commitments to support the cause.

Saturday, Dec. 4, they stepped into the arena at the [FIRST Lego League](#) robotics competition at Kansas City's Troost Elementary School and — though some had flashes of doubt — they were ready.



*Faxon Elementary's Promised Robot Slayers and Scooby Doo Crew celebrate winning performances in the FIRST Lego League robotics competition Dec. 4.*

"I could sense all of the tension and the nerves," said Hanna Hochstetler, the lead coach with the non-profit Front Porch Alliance.

Some were telling LINC Caring Communities Coordinator Yolanda Robinson, "I can't do it, Ms Yolanda!"

But they came back from their closed-door meetings with the judges, where they talked about the innovation and the design in their computer-programmed Lego robots, "all lit up," Robinson said.

They had trusted each other, bonded anew and came out for the field competitions with soaring confidence, Hochstetler said.

"The excitement really set the tone for the rest of the day," she said.

When it was over, one of Faxon's teams — Scooby Doo Crew — won the Robot Performance Award. The other Faxon team — The Promised Robot Slayers — won the Motivate Award.

They also came away with scores and comments from the judges that they had performed with great sportsmanship and gracious professionalism, Hochstetler said — the core values that the FIRST robotics competitions treasure most of all.

The Front Porch Alliance, whose youth programs reach nearly 200 children on Kansas City's East Side, has had a partnership with Faxon for 10 years, including robotics programs. But robotics went on hiatus during the pandemic's quarantine.

Faxon Principal Kathleen Snipes and LINC's Robinson thought the after-school program would be a great place to bring the robotics back, Hochstetler said.

One of the first hurdles was impressing on families at home that the robotics program needed a two-nights-a-week commitment to stay at Faxon until 6 p.m., Robinson said. And parents bought in.



“They saw the work was tangible,” she said. “They saw this was important, and the kids kept coming back.”

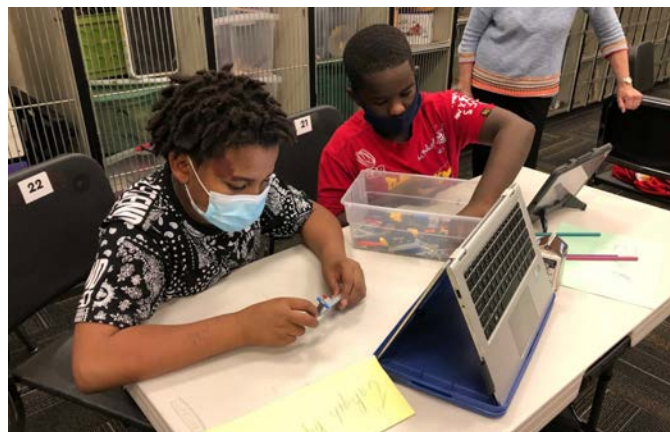
The FIRST program, by design, provides many roles for teammates, including robot design, computer coding, research, spirit support and more. The team’s mentors, coaches and parents and families saw their children stepping into leadership roles.

And families got to go into the auditorium at Troost Elementary to see the teams compete as the players guided their programmed robots through a field of tasks and challenges.

Many schools, including the Kansas City Public Schools, because of Covid-19, haven’t allowed parents inside school buildings, so Saturday’s competition was a refreshing opportunity to be together and cheer.

“I saw parents, grandparents, godparents, big brothers, cousins,” Robinson said. Through Covid and everything that has happened, she said, “there is still power in parents and their support.”

And in those Faxon students, Robinson and Hochstetler said, where there might have been a wisp of doubt, they saw the smile of *confidence*.



# 'A huge help': LINC's team on the job as 'Toys for Tots' aims to reach 50,000 KC-area kids

December 9, 2021

By Joe Robertson/LINC Writer

It's pretty clear now. The U.S. Marines' massive Toys for Tots gift-giving project and all its big red bags blends beautifully with LINC blue.

A year ago, it was more of a crisis intervention when LINC for the first time dispatched a fleet of helpers in the final days ahead of Christmas to speed the sorting, bagging and tagging of toys that had overwhelmed the Marines' warehouse in south Kansas City.

This time around, the blue-shirted LINC team members are on the job from the get-go. The operation is neatly and efficiently routing the gifts coming in from a 350-mile radius around Kansas City into ready storage bins well ahead of Christmas — even as the Marines prepare to distribute more than 50,000 toys, compared to roughly 40,000 last year.

"LINC has been a huge help," said U.S. Marines Staff Sgt. Warren Ory. "We couldn't do it on our own."

The Marines have been collecting new, unwrapped toys in its Toys for Tots program since the late 1940s — and the mission has grown steadily over nearly eight decades.

LINC has for many years taken part in distributing toys as one of the KC-area non-profits that the Marines use to pick up sorted toys and pass them out to families in time for Christmas.

Last year, when LINC Program Specialist Carl Wade visited the warehouse to pick up bags of toys, he saw that the Marines needed help. Covid-19 had limited the number of organizations that had been sending volunteers, and the staff were swimming in mountains of unsorted toys.

"We've partnered with the U.S. Marines to provide toys for our children and our families," Wade said. "But last year there was a need for volunteers. LINC stepped up and we are continuing this partnership this year, and we will continue (in coming years)."

On a recent mid-week morning, the LINC team and the Marines were able to clear the toys from the warehouse floor by noon, loading all of the giant red bags into a row of outdoor storage containers, the toys sorted by gender and age.

That was good, Ory said, because "we have 26 pallets of toys coming on deck that we will have to break down, sort, count and put into the pods."

And it's not too late for donors to add to the tide of toys, Ory said. The Marines want all toy donations to be made by Monday, Dec. 13, though Ory said they will continue to pick up from drop-off sites through Dec. 17.

To donate or to find drop-off locations, go to: <https://kansas-city-mo.toysfortots.org/>





# Kansas City Black History Project honored by Jackson County Historical Society

January 13, 2022

By Joe Robertson/LINC Writer



The Jackson County Historical Society will honor the Kansas City Black History Project by the Kansas City Public Library, the Black Archives of Mid-America and LINC at its annual awards dinner this month.

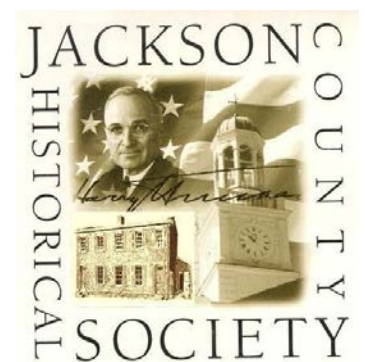
The 12-year campaign of annually gathering the stories of great and influential Black men and women from the Kansas City area culminated this past year with a book that compiled the more than 70 biographies.

The book also included essays from Kansas City Mayor Quinton Lucas, Black Archives' executive director Carmaletta Williams, Negro Leagues Baseball Museum President Bob Kendrick, Activist Justice Horn and an original work by poet Glenn North.

The project is winning the award for Historic Publication.

The Jackson County Historical Society is dedicated to the preservation and understanding of its county's heritage and will promote the study, appreciation, and interpretation of local and regional history.

**Learn more about the project and order or download a copy of the book at [kclinc.org/blackhistory](http://kclinc.org/blackhistory).**



**Kansas City Black History**  
The African American story of history and culture in our community.







Learn Their Stories  
kcbblackhistory.org

