

LINC Commission Meeting

May 15, 2023







“Together We Are Better.”

LINC and other community partnerships from across the state rallied at the Capitol in Jefferson City, April 24, urging lawmakers to the work of improving the welfare of children, families and neighborhoods.











LINC Caring Communities Area Legislators 2023

Missouri Senate

			
<p>Sen. Greg Razer (D-07) Room 330 573-751-6607</p>	<p>Sen. Barbara Washington (D-09) Room 425 573-751-3158</p>	<p>Sen. John Rizzo (D-11) Room 333 573-751-3074</p>	<p>Sen. Lauren Arthur (D-17) Room 427 573-751-5282</p>
<p>Districts Center Grandview, Hickman Mills KCPS</p>	<p>Districts Center Hickman Mills KCPS</p>	<p>Districts Fort Osage KCPS</p>	<p>Districts North Kansas City</p>
<p>Schools Gladstone Elementary James Elementary Primitivo Garcia Elementary Garfield Elementary Whittier Elementary Foreign Language Academy Longfellow Elementary Boone Elementary Border Star Montessori Hale Cook Elementary Indian Creek/Red Bridge Hartman Elementary Belvidere Elementary Butcher-Greene Elementary Conn-West Elementary Grandview Middle School Martin City K-8 Meadowmere Elementary Sixth Grade Center Compass Warford Elementary</p>	<p>Schools Genesis School Lee A. Tolbert Charter School Carver Dual Language Faxon Elementary Melcher Elementary Pitcher Elementary Richardson Early Learning Center Wendell Phillips Elementary Wheatley Elementary Center Elementary Dobbs Elementary Millennium at Santa Fe Truman Elementary Holliday Montessori African-Centered College Prep. Banneker Elementary King Elementary Troost Elementary Freda Markley Early Childhood Ervin Early Learning Center Ingels Accelerated Elementary Ruskin High School (9th grade) Smith-Hale Middle School</p>	<p>Schools Cler-Mont Elementary Elm Grove Elementary Indian Trails Elementary J.A. Rogers Elementary Trailwoods Elementary Blue Hills Elementary Buckner Elementary</p>	<p>Schools Topping Elementary</p>






LINC Caring Communities Area Legislators 2023

Missouri House of Representatives

			
Rep. Bill Allen (R-17) Room 115-H 573-751-1218	Rep. Ingrid Burnett (D-19) Room 105-A 573-751-3310	Rep. Aaron McMullen (R-20) Room 412-C 573-751-3674	Rep. Yolanda Young (D-22) Room 102-BB 573-751-3129
School District North Kansas City	School District KCPS	School District Fort Osage	School District KCPS, charter
Schools Topping	Schools Gladstone James Garcia	Schools Cler-Mont, Elm Grove Indian Trails	Schools Genesis School Lee A. Tolbert Carver Dual Language Faxon Melcher Pitcher Richardson
			
Rep. Michael Johnson (D-23) Room 105-F 573-751-0538	Rep. Emily Weber (D-24) Room 109-G 573-751-4485	Rep. Patty Lewis (D-25) Room 109-F 573-751-2437	Rep. Ashley Bland Manlove (D-26) Room 105-G 573-751-2124
School District KCPS	School District KCPS	School District Center, KCPS	School District Center, KCPS, Hickman Mills
Schools Garfield Whittier Wendell Phillips Wheatley J.A. Rogers Trailwoods	Schools Foreign Language Academy Longfellow	Schools Boone Border Star Montessori Hale Cook	Schools Indian Creek/Red Bridge Hartman Center Elem. Dobbs Millennium Truman Holliday Montessori Smith Hale Middle School

LINC Caring Communities Area Legislators 2023

Missouri House of Representatives

			
<p>Rep. Richard Brown (D-27) Room 134 573-751-7639</p>	<p>Rep. Keri Ingle (D-35) Room 101-E 573-751-1459</p>	<p>Rep. Anthony Ealy (D-36) Room 101-J 573-751-9469</p>	<p>Rep. Mark Sharp (D-37) Room 102-BA 573-751-0238</p>
<p>School District KCPS</p>	<p>School District Hickman Mills</p>	<p>School District Grandview</p>	<p>School District Center, Hickman Mills</p>
<p>Schools African-Centered College Prep Banneker Elementary King Elementary Troost Elementary</p>	<p>Schools Freda Markley Early Childhood</p>	<p>Schools Belvidere Elementary Butcher-Greene Conn-West Grandview Middle Martin City K-8 Meadowmere</p>	<p>Schools Sixth Grade Center Compass Warford Elementary Ervin Early Learning Ingels Elementary Ruskin High School</p>
			
<p>Rep. Jeff Coleman (R-32) Room 313-1 573-751-1487</p>			
<p>School District Fort Osage</p>			
<p>Schools Blue Hills Elementary Buckner Elementary</p>			



Monday, May 15, 2023 | 4 – 5:30 pm
Kauffman Foundation Conference Center

Agenda

- I. Welcome and Announcements**
- II. April minutes**
 - a. Approval (motion)**
- III. Superintendent Reports**
- IV. Local Food Purchase Assistance (LFPA)**
- V. Personnel**
- VI. Community Partnership Day**
- VII. Other Reports**
- VIII. Adjournment**

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.



THE LOCAL INVESTMENT COMMISSION – APRIL 17, 2023

The Local Investment Commission met at the Kauffman Foundation, 4801 Rockhill Rd., Kansas City, Mo. Cochair **David Disney** presided. Commissioners attending were:

Bert Berkley
Aaron Deacon
Anita Gorman

Ken Powell
David Ross
Marj Williams

A motion to approve the minutes of the Feb. 27, 2023, LINC Commission meeting was passed unanimously.

Superintendents Reports

- **Rick Chambers** (Director of Communications and Development, Center School District) reported that the Center High School rocketry team recently qualified for the national American Rocketry Challenge competition, May 18-20, outside Washington, D.C. The diverse team of three students is one of 100 teams who qualified for nationals out of around 800 teams who competed. As part of a series of community discussions on diversity and equity, a panel of community leaders and high school seniors spoke last Tuesday on their experiences growing up as black and brown men.
- **Prissy LeMay** (Assistant Superintendent, Grandview School District) reported that Grandview hosted a math relay competition in March which was attended by 300 area students. The district is aiming to improve student literacy by implementing teacher training using the Language Essentials for Teachers of Reading and Spelling curriculum. Kathleen M. Budge and William H. Parrett, authors of *Disrupting Poverty: Five Powerful Classroom Practices*, are providing coaching in district buildings. Several bond-financed projects aimed at enhancing security are ongoing.
- **Carl Skinner** (Deputy Superintendent, Hickman Mills School District) reported 130 students attended MAP relays last Saturday. The district will hold three summer school sessions including extended summer school for Ingels Elementary. As part of a bond initiative, the district has purchased a building for its real world learning center. The district will hold the annual Triangle Run on May 6 in partnership with LINC, and the Hickman Mills Education Foundation will hold its annual golf tournament on June 2. Starting this fall, the sixth grade will join the seventh grade at Smith-Hale Middle School, and the eighth grade will be in its own building. The district is seeking students who haven't graduated to return to Burke Academy to finish and earn their diplomas.
- **Terry Ward** (School Board Member, North Kansas City School District) reported that the district is providing support to students affected by the shooting of a Staley High School student. The district's early education program continues to grow and is expecting 1,100 students by the end of the year. The program, which has been recognized as the best in the state, serves low-income families through Title I and provides no-cost transportation and snacks. The district will hold six graduation events next month. This week there will be two groundbreaking in the district's effort to modernize and replace many 50-year-old buildings; two new elementary school buildings are planned to open in August 2024. The district is working with ConnectED to design and implement college and career pathways in each of the district's four high schools.

David Disney reported that there are three nominations to the Commission and presented background information on nominees Kiki Curls, Shawn Foster, and Matt Haase.

A motion to approve the appointments of Kiki Curls, Shawn Foster, and Matt Haase to the LINC Commission was approved unanimously.

Discussion followed.

Executive Vice President **Janet Miles-Bartee** reported LINC will hold Caring Communities Day on June 10 at Morning Star Youth & Family Life Center. A video of last year's event was shown. LINC Caring Communities staff **Drake Bushnell** reported that LINC will be building on the success of last year's event. Discussion followed.

Caring Communities Administrator **Sean Akridge** reported that LINC will offer summer programs in support of summer school programs at 18 sites this year. In addition to providing opportunities for children to learn and have a good time with friends, the programs are an opportunity for LINC site staff to visit different schools and learn how other programs operate.

LINC Support Coordinator **Jason Ervin** reported on the implementation and expansion of yoga in eight LINC Caring Communities sites. LINC is seeking to expand the program, which is important in promoting physical fitness and mental health. A video on the yoga program was shown.

Miles-Bartee presented videos on two recent events: the Super Bowl pep rally at Whittier Elementary and the father-daughter dance at Hale Cook Elementary.

Miles-Bartee reported that as a result of hiring challenges LINC is short of site coordinators and part time staff, which has hindered some programming. Human Resources Director **Trent DeVreugd** reported that LINC has been recruiting vigorously and has reestablished a relationship with the Career Center at Penn Valley Community College. LINC President **Gayle Hobbs** reported that to recruit more, LINC will need to pay more.

Aaron Deacon reported on the KC Goes Tech initiative helping organizations provide connectivity and digital literacy to low-income families. The initiative is planning to equip LINC site coordinators to enroll families in the FCC's Affordable Connectivity Program, which provides a \$30/month subsidy for low-income families to obtain internet access. KC Goes Tech will also help school districts access E-Rate, which provides funding for districts to build or rebuild network infrastructure. **Leslie Scott** of KC Digital Drive reported that ACP, a \$14.2 billion program, is expected to continue to mid-2024. Discussion followed.

LINC staff **Joe Robertson** reported that **Bert Berkley** and his family were generous with their time and memories for a feature article on Berkley's life produced by LINC on the occasion of his 100th birthday on May 8. Berkley reported on his pride in the LINC board and staff for making LINC a vital force in the community and one that will have much work to do – specifically on poverty and health care – in the future.

The meeting was adjourned.



USDA Announces Its Local Food Purchase Assistance Cooperative Agreement with Missouri

HOME > **USDA ANNOUNCES ITS LOCAL FOOD PURCHASE ASSISTANCE COOPERATIVE AGREEMENT WITH MISSOURI**

Date: Thursday, December 8, 2022 - 1:00pm

Contact Info:

Public Affairs

PA@usda.gov

(202) 720-8998

Release No.: 204-22

WASHINGTON, Dec. 8, 2022 -- The U.S. Department of Agriculture’s (USDA) Agricultural Marketing Service (AMS) today announced it has signed a cooperative agreement with Missouri under the Local Food Purchase Assistance Cooperative Agreement Program (LFPA). Through LFPA, the Missouri Department of Social Services (DSS) seeks to purchase and distribute locally grown, produced, and processed food from underserved producers.

“USDA is excited to partner with Missouri to promote economic opportunities for farmers and producers and to increase access to locally sourced, fresh, healthy, and nutritious food in underserved communities,” said USDA Under Secretary for Marketing and Regulatory Programs Jenny Lester Moffitt. “The Local Food Purchase Cooperative Agreement Program will improve food and agricultural supply-chain resiliency and increase local food consumption around the country.”

With the LFPA funds, DSS will work with Family and Community Trust (FACT), a local non-profit corporation, to identify partnerships throughout the state to develop agreements on local supply

and demand, nutritional needs, partnership development, and distribution with a network that includes producers, food banks, farmers and much more. The goal is to enhance the well-being of children, families, and the stability and economic viability of the communities where they live.

“This cooperative agreement allows us to continue to support families facing financial hardships across the state by ensuring they have access to nutritious, locally-produced food,” said Robert J. Knodell, Acting Director of the Missouri Department of Social Services. “The Department of Social Services is excited to extend this opportunity to Missouri citizens as we carry out our mission to empower Missourians to live safe, healthy, and productive lives.”

USDA’s Local Food Purchase Assistance Cooperative Agreement Program provides up to \$900 million through non-competitive cooperative agreements to enable state, territory and tribal governments to support local, regional and underserved producers, and maintain or improve food and agricultural supply chain resiliency through the purchase of food produced within the state or within 400 miles of delivery destination. Funding for the program comes from the American Rescue Plan and the Commodity Credit Corporation.

AMS looks forward to continuing to sign agreements under this innovative program that allows state and tribal governments to procure and distribute local and regional foods and beverages that are healthy, nutritious, and unique to their geographic area.

More information about the program is available on AMS’s [Local Food Purchase Assistance Cooperative Agreement Program](#) webpage.

#

USDA touches the lives of all Americans each day in so many positive ways. In the Biden-Harris Administration, USDA is transforming America’s food system with a greater focus on more resilient local and regional food production, fairer markets for all producers, ensuring access to safe, healthy and nutritious food in all communities, building new markets and streams of income for farmers and producers using climate smart food and forestry practices, making historic investments in infrastructure and clean energy capabilities in rural America, and committing to equity across the Department by removing systemic barriers and building a workforce more representative of America. To learn more, visit www.usda.gov.

Get the latest Agricultural Marketing Service news at www.ams.usda.gov/news or follow us on Twitter

@USDA_AMS. You can also read about us on the USDA blog.

USDA is an equal opportunity provider, employer, and lender

Connecting with Underserved Producers

The Local Food Purchase Assistance (LFPA) Cooperative: Agreement:

Empowers states and tribal governments to purchase domestic foods from local, regional, and underserved producers, and helps these producers navigate the procurement process.

June 2022.
USDA is an equal opportunity provider, employer and lender.



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Direct Connections

If they wish to, State and Tribal governments may engage with underserved producers through direct outreach:

- Meet with industry groups.
- Providing technical assistance to facilitate participation in the LFPA program.
- Market to producers through radio, social media, etc.
- Develop resources in multiple languages.

Visit the [AMS LFPA outreach page](#) for more info.

Collaboration

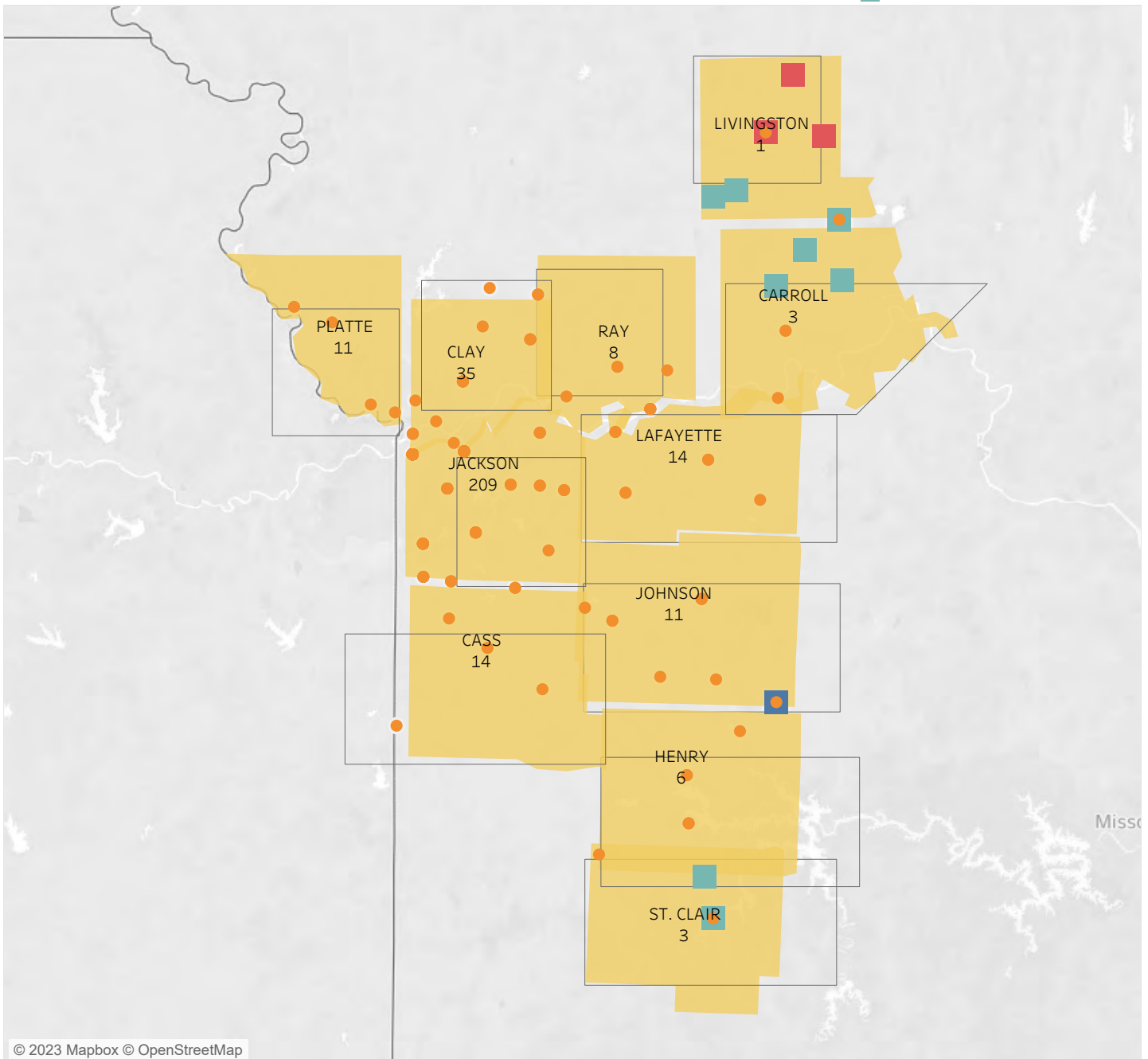
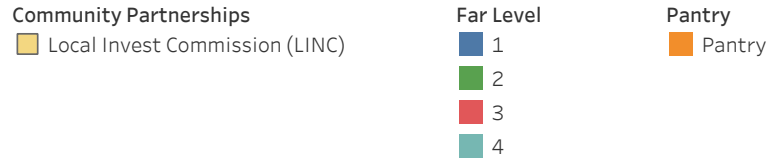
State and Tribal governments may connect with producers by partnering with state government agencies, universities and extension services, community-based organizations and non-profits, and federal agencies.

These partners may be subrecipients for LFPA and conduct purchasing and outreach for the state and tribal governments.

For additional assistance, visit the [USDA Farm Service Agency](#) and [Office of Partnership and Public Engagement \(2501 Program\)](#) websites.



LINC



Level One FAR areas consist of rural areas and urban areas up to 50,000 people that are 60 minutes or more by car from an urban area of 50,000 or more people.

Level Two FAR areas consist of rural areas and urban areas up to 25,000 people that are 45 minutes or more by car from an urban area of 25,000-49,999 people and 60 minutes or more from an urban area of 50,000 or more people.

Level Three FAR areas consist of rural areas and urban areas up to 10,000 people that are 30 minutes or more by car from an urban area of 10,000-24,999, 45 minutes or more from an urban area of 25,000-49,999 people, and 60 minutes or more from an urban area of 50,000 or more people.

Level Four FAR areas consist of rural areas that are 15 minutes or more by car from an urban area of 2,500-9,999 people, 30 minutes or more from an urban area of 10,000-24,999 people, 45 minutes or more from an urban area of 25,000-49,999 people, and 60 minutes or more from an urban area of 50,000 or more people.

Mapping frontier and remote areas in the U.S. USDA ERS - Data Feature - Mapping Frontier and Remote Areas in the U.S. (n.d.). Retrieved March 1, 2023, from <https://www.ers.usda.gov/amber-waves/2012/december/data-feature-mapping-frontier-and-remote-areas-in-the-u-s/>

'Together we are better': LINC and partners rally lawmakers for kids and communities

April 28, 2023

By Joe Robertson, LINC Writer



LINC Youth Services Advocate Steve McClellan and LINC Caring Communities Coordinator Yolanda Robinson visit lawmakers' offices on Community Partnerships Day at the Capitol.

On the same day that the 2023 Kids COUNT data was released, LINC and other community partnerships from across the state rallied at the Capitol in Jefferson City, April 24, urging lawmakers to the work of improving the welfare of children, families and neighborhoods.

“We all know we are better when communities and neighborhoods and government work together for the betterment of our children and our families,” LINC Executive Vice President Janet Miles-Bartee said.

LINC’s team of advocates was surrounded on the Capitol’s third floor rotunda by several other community partnership organizations from across Missouri that are members of the statewide Family and Community Trust on “Community Partnerships Day.”

It was “great to have these community partnerships” at the Capitol, said state Rep. Michael Johnson of Kansas City, one of several lawmakers who met with LINC’s team, “because it gives us the opportunity to see what each organization is great at and where we can fill in and pick up the slack.”

“In return,” Johnson said, “that gives us the opportunity to build a bigger and better community-based ecosystem.”

In their meetings at the Capitol, the community partnerships carried with them the latest data from the newly released [2023 Kids Count](#) report.

While the welfare of children in Missouri, including in Jackson County and Kansas City, still comes with concerns, the data show that overall children’s lives have improved — and the collaboration between community partnerships and government have helped, said Bill Dent, the executive director of the Family and Community Trust.

The day at the Capitol was “an opportunity for all of our partnerships to meet with their legislators and talk about the good work they’re doing in their local communities around kids and families.”

Most of the measured outcomes in the report showed improvement in 2021 — the latest year of data — compared to 2017, but some areas declined.

More Missouri newborns were considered to have low birthweight in 2021 compared to 2017, which is a concern because low birthweight increases the risk of long-term health problems.

High school graduation rates also declined, possibly because of lower school attendance during the pandemic.

Mental health issues were concerning, as suicides drove an increase in the rate of death among children 15 to 17.

Increases in public assistance during the pandemic may have helped boost improvement in some indicators, including a reduction in the number of children living in poverty and experiencing homelessness.

Other positive indicators include a decrease in child hospitalizations and admissions for asthma, and a decrease in infant mortality.

And while poverty indicators improved overall, significant disparities persist between Black and white children — with the poverty rate being twice as high and asthma ER visits seven times higher among black children compared to white children.

The annual reporting should continue helping the partnerships and lawmakers advocate for the welfare of children, Dent said.

“Thinking forward,” he said, “if they look at what the data is telling them, they can think about policies that will impact those kids and families as they’re doing their work here at the Capitol.”



State Rep. Michael Johnson of Kansas City visits with LINC Caring Communities Coordinator Danisha Fultz.



State Sen. Barbara Washington of Kansas City, center, talks (left to right) with FACT Executive Director Bill Dent, LINC Youth Services Advocate Steve McClellan and LINC Executive Vice President Janet Miles-Bartee.

How LINC, DSS revolutionized the road out of welfare

May 9, 2023

By Joe Robertson, LINC Writer



President Bill Clinton congratulates Marge Randle, then a supervisor in Missouri's Family Support Division, in recognition of her department's efforts with LINC and the Full Employment Council that made Kansas City a model for welfare reform in 1996.

Marge Randle wasn't expecting the welfare revolution that would soon draw President Bill Clinton to town that day she first walked into Gayle Hobbs' midtown Kansas City office some 30 years ago.

All Randle knew was that she had orders tumbling down from the upper echelon of Missouri state government to work with Hobbs and her fledgling non-profit organization.

Randle, then a newly promoted supervisor in the state's Family Support Division, sat in a folding chair across the simple card table serving as Hobbs' desk and opened with a question something like:

Just what is LINC anyway?

"And Gayle started laughing," Randle said, recalling that first meeting. "I don't think Gayle even knew where this was going."

LINC — the Local Investment Commission of Kansas City — was still developing what was designed to be a community-driven mission, said Hobbs, who'd been hired out of state government to run the non-profit.

LINC, the brainchild of its founder, Kansas City businessman and civic leader Bert Berkley, and Missouri De-

partment of Social Services Director Gary Stangler, was in ongoing dialogues throughout the community to identify how it would leverage government funds and build partnerships to strengthen Kansas City families and neighborhoods.

Despite the awkward opening that first meeting, Randle and Hobbs quickly knew something special was happening. (Years later, after her retirement, Randle would join LINC's Commission in 2019.)

"When we met it was like lightning," Hobbs said. "She (Randle) had political savvy."

For Randle, Hobbs and the [creative concept of LINC](#) was "a breath of fresh air," she said. "It opened windows for families."

The work that they tackled, impressing Clinton and others worldwide, reformed the way Kansas City supported families and individuals on welfare.

LINC and Randle's local office of the state's Family Support Division teamed up with the Full Employment Council and its director, Clyde McQueen to develop strategies with employers that helped people on welfare gain the skills and confidence to break free of dependence on government aid.

By 1996, Clinton would visit Kansas City and convene a community work session to boost his administration's efforts to get a welfare-to-work reform bill through Congress.

"These people in Kansas City know what they are doing," Clinton declared. "It's miraculous what they are doing."

The achievements of the state, LINC and the FEC [deserve recognition again](#) after a [nationwide study by Child Trends](#) and [the New York Times](#) showed that child poverty in America had dropped by more than half since the early 1990s.

Several factors contributed to what the researchers called "an astounding decline." Among them were historical efforts in welfare-to-work reform nationwide that helped parents, especially single mothers, persist and thrive in the workforce.

Kansas City's reform model obtained waivers adapting welfare regulations so that employers that hired workers from welfare roles could have the value of their paychecks diverted to the business to subsidize higher wages.

And workers hired off of welfare could keep benefits such as Medicaid and child care support that otherwise were forfeited when welfare recipients found employment.

Kansas City's team of the state, LINC and the FEC also intensified training to help keep new workers in their jobs, focusing on soft skills and post-employment case management.

If it sounds simple, it wasn't.

They were diving into systems that weren't conditioned for rapid change. There was so much to be learned, so many challenges as each new idea led to new barriers.

It was both daunting and thrilling for Hobbs and Randle and members of her team.

"We were working into the night on changes we wanted to make," Randle said.

Changes like putting available services into menus that ease the stigma many clients felt in receiving aid. Adding flexibility to provide lump sums of benefits for clients with major up-front needs. Building creative internship opportunities with companies to give clients soft-skills experience.



Marge Randle, right, then a supervisor with the Missouri Family Support Division, speaks at a LINC Commission meeting with LINC President Gayle Hobbs in 2014. After her retirement, Randle was appointed a member of the LINC Commission in 2019.

“Sometimes clients needed an alarm clock,” Randle said. “We’d get them clothing for interviews. We’d jump in and try anything.”

All along the way, LINC was affirming its approach to social services — working through schools, neighborhood associations and community groups, localizing data and information.

“We worked with Ad Hoc (Group Against Crime),” Hobbs said. “We worked with Project Neighborhood. Before that, everything was top-down models.”

The welfare reform work relied on swift collaboration with employers. Soon on, the Kansas City effort recognized the need for intensified training — both in preparing work places for the workers coming from welfare, and in giving the new workers better skills to stay in their new jobs.

Kansas City began working with esteemed consultant Dr. Beverly Ford, who had great success nationally in helping families thrive and rise from public housing.

As Randle became aware of the need to help struggling families with housing issues, she essentially created her own internship experience, embedding in a public housing office.

The leadership of LINC — its director and the members of its commission — were hungry for new ideas and then became powerful influences in helping them happen, Randle said.

And the innovations came at uncommon speed.

“It was not bureaucratic at all,” Randle said. “We could change things and not worry about calling Jefferson City. We were making headway . . . You could make decisions knowing that if it didn’t work we could make it right.”

Other cities began sending teams to Kansas City to observe their work or they summoned Kansas City's team leaders to come and talk at seminars and work sessions. Ideas were shared nationwide and even internationally, as Kansas City partnerships included the work with the United Kingdom, the Netherlands and Israel.

More than once, President Clinton came as he aimed to make welfare-to-work reform a signature part of his legacy, eventually signing legislation in August 1996.

The community-driven, reactive and personal approach to services continued for the local state offices and at LINC in the years that followed.

The state's case managers were seeking to understand their clients in ways they hadn't before, Randle said. They weren't just "paper pushers looking for income records." They learned to get to "the soul" of their needs.

"Our staff grew affectionately fond of our clients," she said. "It felt like parenting. We rejoiced over their accomplishments."

For LINC, the lessons learned have thrived as it established its Caring Communities model of service that is anchored now at more than 50 schools in the Kansas City area, and reflected also in the [LINCWorks](#) program, contracted specifically with the state to support families who are receiving TANF funds — Temporary Aid for Needy Families.

LINCWorks' team of advocates help parents build career and life skills to break free from dependency.

LINC has subsidized legal aid for families, helping them get ahead of housing crises and staving off evictions. LINC has also helped hundreds of households get access to rent and utility bill assistance to help them stay in their homes and their children stay in school.

So goes the work, always adding new chapters in answer to that question — *What is LINC?* — from 30 years ago, building a legacy of leadership and change.

Genesis School petitions court to keep doors open

April 27, 2023

By Joe Robertson, LINC Writer

Genesis School's fight to stay open is heading to court.

The Kansas City public charter school filed a petition this week in Cole County Circuit Court after the Missouri state school board on Monday, without addressing admitted flaws in the process, upheld the state charter school commission's decision earlier this year to revoke the school's charter.

Genesis is asking the court [to reinstate the charter](#), arguing that the decision to revoke it was unlawful and a breach of contract. Without relief from the court, the school would have to close July 1.

More than 200 children attend the K-8 public charter school whose mission over more than two decades has been to serve all children, including many who have struggled in other school settings. The school is the site of one of LINC's Caring Communities programs.

State law requires the publicly funded charter schools to operate under the supervision of either universities or the state's Missouri Charter Public School Commission (MCPSC).

Genesis had just come under the supervision of the MCPSC in July and was just a few months into its new contract when the MCPSC instead began a process to revoke the school's charter.

Genesis made an appeal to the state school board, arguing that Genesis should be given the opportunity to fulfill the expectations and achievement targets in its new charter with the MCPSC. The MCPSC, Genesis argued, was taking an unprecedented and flawed action in seeking to revoke the charter.

In February, hundreds of Genesis supporters [crowded into a meeting room](#) at the Bluford Branch of the Kansas City Public Library in a hearing before the MCPSC, but the panel later in the month voted 6-to-1 [to revoke the charter](#).

The state school board took up Genesis's appeal in an online meeting Monday.

Missouri Education Commissioner Margie Vandeven, addressing the board, said there were flaws in the process by the MCPSC, but recommended that the state board uphold the MCPSC's decision to revoke Genesis's charter over concerns with the school's academic performance.

The state board did not address the school's concerns with the process or the issue of breach of contract.

The Kansas City representative on the state school board — Carol Hallquist — described the question before the board as a "tough decision," noting that Genesis "is beloved in the community" and has "stellar relationships with parents."

However, she said, she was troubled by issues over the school's academic performance.

In a written statement after the state school board's decision, Genesis expressed concern with the board's brief consideration of Genesis's future, noting that the board did not acknowledge or discuss the many statements in support of Genesis made by educators, parents and partner organizations.

"Board members expressed concern regarding the impact their decision has on the future of our students," the Genesis statement said, "but none acknowledged or asked why parents currently choose to attend Genesis."



Supporters of Genesis held up this sign during a public hearing on the future of the school at the Bluford Branch of the Kansas City

Calling all fathers (and father figures): Hickman Mills' men's summit aims to start a movement

April 19, 2023

By Joe Robertson, LINC Writer

The idea started from a conversation Ruskin High School Principal Ernest J. Fields Jr. had with the district's hearing officer about the officer's meetings with students in trouble and their parents.

So many times just the mother was there, the hearing officer told Fields. If a father would be there too, he said, "it was a blessing."

So began the Men of Hickman Mills Summit — titled "The Future We Want" — at Ruskin High School.

"It's a start," the principal said. The first summit, April 15, was an initial call to rally fathers and father figures, mentors and community leaders.

The support for the summit ran deep.

The high school provided food and gathered partners like LINC, Caring for Kids, Community America Credit Union, LM2 Construction and Consulting, and Bethel Family Worship Center. It worked with Jackson County's BAM (Becoming a Man) program and brought in the Parent Leadership Training Institute to help show men ways to get involved in support of their children, their schools and their community.

Superintendent Yaw Obeng and Hickman Mills Safety Director Cyrus Rodgers welcomed the audience. Senior Pastor Dennis Lester Jr. of Bethel gave the invocation.

The Rev. Emanuel Cleaver III, senior pastor at St. James Church, delivered the keynote address, championing the impact fathers can have if they participate in the academic lives of their kids.

He was joined on the Ruskin stage by other speakers, including Marcus Walker, a FUSE executive fellow who is working with the Kansas City Mayor's Office on anti-violence and peace initiatives.

LINC Caring Communities Coordinator Bryan Geddes said the support will pay dividends.

"You plant a seed and these kids will flourish," he said. "Be a mentor. Be a tutor. Be a teacher. Be whatever is needed . . ."

The call will continue to go out, Fields said.

"It's about praising fathers for their roles at home," Fields said, "and trying to get them more involved here at school."



Ruskin principal Ernest J. Fields Jr. started the Hickman Mills Men's Summit to rally fathers to participate in their children's academic lives.

LINC Caring Communities at Topping earns NKC 'Culture of Excellence' award

May 3, 2023

By Joe Robertson, LINC Writer

Topping Elementary School in the North Kansas City Schools has named LINC Caring Communities as the winner of its Culture of Excellence Business award.

“Our partnership and the service that is provided to our students and families has been so beneficial for all and we want to celebrate you and show appreciation,” said Topping Principal Tina Hinds-Booth.

North Kansas City Schools Superintendent Dan Clemens noted that he has known LINC Caring Communities Administrator Sean Akridge since they worked together when Clemens was principal at Crestwood Elementary some 20 years ago.

“I know the investment they (LINC) make in kids,” Clemens said.

NKC Chief of Staff Rochel Daniels — who will succeed Clemens as superintendent after next school year — praised all of the Culture of Excellence winners at a ceremony in the school’s cafeteria with the Topping staff and partners.

“From the bottom of our hearts we sincerely appreciate all that you give each and every day,” she said. “I look forward to working with you for years to come.”



Children play with crafts and art at LINC's Caring Communities program at Topping Elementary School.



Left to right, North Kansas City Schools Chief of Staff Rochel Daniels, LINC Caring Communities Administrator Sean Akridge, LINC Caring Communities Coordinator Rachel Wolf, LINC Lead Colin McClatchey and North Kansas City Schools Superintendent Dan Clemens pose at the Culture of Excellence ceremony at Topping Elementary School May 3, 2023.

With no guaranteed free meals, Kansas City students are racking up thousands in school lunch debt

KCUR | By Jodi Fortino

April 17, 2023

After two years of free meals, students had to pay for lunch after starting this school year. Now, fewer students are buying lunch and meal debt is piling up for Kansas City area schools.

Lunchtime at Meadow Lane Elementary is filled with the buzz of excited children as students shuffle through the line with their trays, shouting over each other as they reach for a serving of spaghetti and meatballs or veggies to fill their plates.

At the end of the line, kids type in a code to pay for their lunch – an unfamiliar step after two years of free lunches.

During the pandemic, the federal government [issued waivers](#) that allowed all school districts to offer free meals to all students. Congress let the program expire last fall.

Lori Danella, the Lee’s Summit School District’s nutrition director, said families had some trouble adjusting to lunch payments.

“When that first call went out, I swear all of our phones lit up. ‘Why? Why do we owe anything? Meals are free,’” Danella said. “It was really hard, and it took a good three to four weeks to get these parents on board and get them back in the same routine.”

The district’s nutrition team sends weekly emails and calls to let parents know if their child’s account is in the negative. Since the payment model resumed, school lunch debt has spiked – students owed \$60,050 as of April 5. Danella said that’s three times what students usually owed at the end of a pre-pandemic year.

[A recent survey](#) from the School Nutrition Association found school districts had more than \$19 million in unpaid meal debt. School districts across the Kansas City area have seen soaring student lunch debt – students in the Shawnee Mission School District, for example, owe nearly \$110,000.



Students at Meadow Lane Elementary School in Lee’s Summit line up for lunch on April 13, 2023. Carlos Moreno / CUR 89.3

School lunch debt in Kansas City area districts

Two Kansas City area districts qualify for community eligibility, meaning all their lunches are free and they carry no debt. In other districts, debt has ballooned since the end of the pandemic lunch waivers.

SCHOOL DISTRICT	LUNCH DEBT	# OF STUDENTS	DEBT PER STUDENT
Shawnee Mission School District	\$108,636.51	2,184	\$49.74
Hickman Mills School District	0	0	0
Independence School District	\$101,022.89	1,731	\$58.36
Kansas City Public School	0	0	0
Kansas City, Kansas School District	\$213,608.45	4,000	\$53.40
Lee's Summit School District	\$60,050	604	\$99
North Kansas City Schools	\$62,000	2,747	\$22.57
Olathe Public Schools	\$33,255.42	2,660	\$12.50
Park Hill School District	\$53,274.38	1,067	\$49.93

Fallout of the end of pandemic-era relief

Fewer students are buying lunch at school since paid lunches resumed. [A survey from the National Center for Education Statistics](#) found that the share of schools with more than half of students using the program dropped from 84% to 69% just months into the 2022-2023 school year.

Danella said 90% of students were getting their meals at school in the Lee's Summit School District last year – a number she says is “unbelievable” for a suburban school. Now, she says schools are serving only about 50 to 60% of their students.

In the Shawnee Mission School District, nutrition director Grace Liss said schools serve 3,000 fewer meals a day than they did last year. The school district does have some relief to offer families – [a pilot program through the](#) U.S. Department of Agriculture allows Kansas schools to directly certify students for free and reduced lunch based on their Medicaid eligibility data.

Liss said the district serves more reduced or free lunches than ever before – but some students fall just short of qualifying.

“For a middle school and high school student, the meal price is \$3, and for some families, \$3 a day is too much,” Liss said. “The families that we are unable to give meal benefits to, when we look at their applications they're missing out by just a few dollars.”

Other school districts struggle to get families to fill out the application to qualify for free and reduced lunch. They haven't had to apply to the program in two years, and many face [barriers](#).

Rising wages have also pushed some families over of threshold for free and reduced lunch even as higher food and housing costs stretch their budgets. A family of four can't make more than \$36,000 a year and qualify for free lunches this year.

Danella said families who have never been in need before may also find it hard to ask for help.

"Many of the families are struggling because with the fuel prices, with utility prices, with grocery prices, it seems like school meals are at the bottom of their list," Danella said. "That's their lowest priority because they know we're gonna feed their kids no matter what."

Students in the Shawnee Mission School District with a negative balance of more than \$75 at the end of a semester have their debt turned over to a collections agency. The district uses donations to keep students below that threshold, but it can't cover all of the district's debt.

Push for universal free school lunch

Nutrition experts are pushing for a return to pandemic-era free meals to keep kids fed and debt-free. States like California, Colorado, New Mexico, Minnesota have [already passed legislation](#) ensuring free lunches for all students.

More school districts could also offer free meals to their students under a new proposal from the U.S. Department of Agriculture [that would expand the Community Eligibility Provision](#). The program allows school districts with a large population of high-needs students to make all their lunches free. In the Kansas City area, Kansas City Public Schools and the Hickman Mills School District offer universal free lunch under that program. The move would lower the threshold of 40% high-needs students to 25%.

Crystal FitzSimons, director of school and out-of-school time programs for the advocacy group [Food Research and Action Center](#), said just because families don't qualify for free lunches doesn't mean they don't struggle to make ends meet.

"Offering free meals to all students is really a game-changer — for kids who are able to access the meals that they need throughout the school day, for families to help stretch their household food budget, and for schools who are able to make sure that all of their students are well-nourished and in the classroom ready to learn," FitzSimons said.

FitzSimons said free meals also mean less paperwork for already understaffed nutrition workers — plus, no school meal debt.

Liss at Shawnee Mission, said it also takes away the stigma of eating a free or reduced price lunch.



Students at Meadow Lane Elementary School make their selections from the salad bar and head toward the cashier. Carlos Moreno / KCUR 89.3

“I felt like when meals were free for everybody, it just opened up our cafeteria as more of a safe space that anybody could eat there,” she said. “Everybody’s all on the same playing field, and so it just makes the cafeteria environment better.”

Missouri is among several states [considering legislation](#) that would make lunch free, but no bill on the issue has made it to a vote.

Danella said many of her district’s families are down an income and need free lunch.

“To me, it’s such a misconception because people see Lee’s Summit as an elite community. We have a couple of schools that are over 50% free and reduced,” Danella said. “We’re 20% total, but when you look at that overall, those kids are still there – and then there’s some that are paid that are still struggling too, so I think there’s a need everywhere.”

STLPR’s Kate Grumke contributed reporting.



Students at Meadow Lane Elementary School in Lee’s Summit file through the lunch line grabbing spaghetti and meatballs and vegetables. Carlos Moreno / KCUR 89.3

Warning for teachers, parents: Tobacco is changing and teens are the targets

May 2, 2023

By Joe Robertson, LINC Writer

Meet the next generation of addictive tobacco products

Beware: Electronic cigarettes, little cigars, smokeless products, sweet candy flavors, and new products designed to hide addiction in plain sight — the next generation of dangerous and deceptive tobacco products is here and doesn't look anything like a pack of cigarettes.

Tobacco is developing [new products](#) and [tactics](#) so fast, it's tough for parents to recognize tobacco when they see it, and even tougher to talk to children about the terrible damage tobacco products can do.

But that can change right here, says [a new state campaign](#). It has to. Because the tobacco industry has already found ways to get around restrictions that banned a few flavored tobacco products and made it illegal to sell tobacco to anyone under 21.

Tobacco is changing, faster than ever, and parents need help catching up.

The campaign by the Missouri Department of Health and Senior Services and the Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education has created a website to help teachers and parents fight back: tobaccoischangingmo.org.

Our teens are stressed. Nicotine makes it worse.

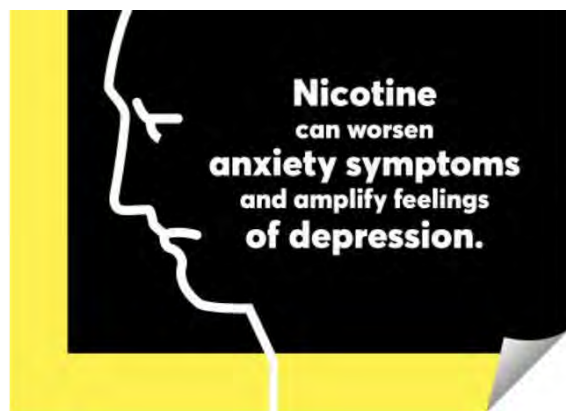
The stress Missouri teens feel is real. Around 70% of teens say mental health issues like anxiety and depression are a major problem for young people their age. They're struggling to cope—and often turn to vapes and other addictive nicotine products that pretend to be “stress relievers” for help.

That's a real problem, because studies shows that nicotine can actually make anxiety and depression worse. When teens vape, they stress more—so they vape more. It's a dangerous loop that damages their mental health and can leave our kids with a lifelong addiction.

Fight back.

Go to tobaccoischangingmo.org and:

- Learn the products
- Understand tobacco tactics
- Find more tips and resources
- Take action



Help for teens to quit

Teens can text **VAPEFREEMO** to **873373**.

Or visit www.youcanquit.org for free help to quit using e-cigarettes of other tobacco products

MISSOURI INDEPENDENT

Missouri's governor made access to child care a top priority. Where do his proposals stand?

By Clara Bates

May 3, 2023

Missouri Gov. Mike Parson made improving access to child care a major part of his 2023 legislative agenda, declaring during his annual State of the State address in January that “early childhood care is essential to our state’s success.”

Since then, lawmakers have worked to enact his recommendations, but the proposals have faced roadblocks on their way to his desk.

The Missouri General Assembly adjourns for the year at 6 p.m. on May 12. Here are where Parson’s major child care priorities stand:



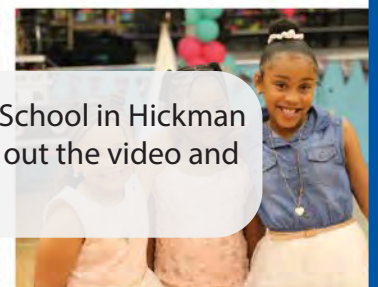
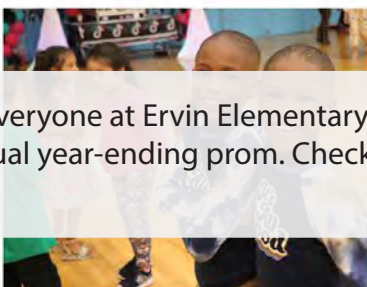
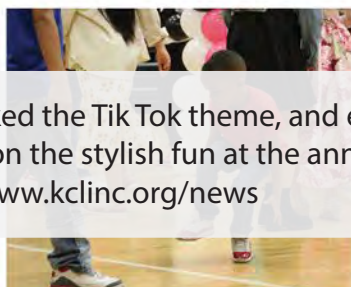
Missouri Gov. Mike Parson delivered his annual State of the State Address on Jan. 18, 2023 (Tim Bommel/Missouri House Communications).

- **\$56 million to expand pre-k to all four-year-olds eligible for free or reduced-price lunch:** The House’s version of the budget funded the pre-k program through the regular school aid in the foundation formula, despite concerns from some lawmakers that school districts wouldn’t be ready to host pre-k, or that it was too costly, and others argued a universal program would be fairer. The funding was set off in a separate line by the Senate, and it made the final version of the state’s \$50 billion budget this week that will receive final votes this week.
- **\$78 million to increase child subsidy rates:** The House removed this from its budget only to see the Senate restore it. Critics of the increase argued the rates had been improperly set. This funding is also expected to remain in the budget when it heads to the governor for his signature.

Parson has also pushed to create tax credits to “improve child care facilities, support employers who support their workers with child care assistance, and allow more of our dedicated child care workers to earn a pay increase.”

Unlike his budget proposals, the tax credits face a more uncertain future due to opposition from conservative lawmakers in the Senate.

- **A child care contribution tax credit**, which would allow donors to child care providers to receive a credit equal to 75% of a qualifying donation, up to a \$200,000 tax credit.
- **Employer-provided child care assistance tax credit**, which would allow employers to receive tax credits equivalent to 30% of qualifying child care expenditures.
- **Child care providers tax credit**, which would allow child care providers to claim a tax credit equal to the provider’s employer withholding tax and up to 30% of a provider’s capital expenditures on costs like expanding or renovating their facilities.
- **The Supporting Use of Child Care for Economic Stability and Security (SUCCESS) Tax Credit**, while not a part of Parson’s agenda, was added onto a bill that includes the other three credits. It’s sponsored by Rep. Hannah Kelly and would provide parents up to \$1,800 per year, per child, in child care refunds.



LINC students picked the Tik Tok theme, and everyone at Ervin Elementary School in Hickman Mills could get in on the stylish fun at the annual year-ending prom. Check out the video and photo gallery at www.kclinc.org/news