

LINC Commission Meeting

September 19, 2022



LINC Caring Communities team members welcomed thousands of children and their families back to school in the Kansas City, Hickman Mills, Grandview, Center, North Kansas City and Fort Osage school districts, and Lee A. Tolbert Community Academy and Genesis charter schools.



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, Sept. 19, 2022 | 4 – 5:30 pm
Kauffman Foundation

Agenda

- I. Welcome and Announcements**
- II. Approvals**
 - a. July 2022 minutes (motion)**
- III. Superintendent Reports**
- IV. Caring Communities**
 - a. Back to School — Fall 2022**
- V. Utility Assistance**
- VI. Dept. of Elementary and Secondary Education Update**
- VII. Other**
- VIII. Adjournment**



THE LOCAL INVESTMENT COMMISSION – JULY 18, 2022

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

Bert Berkley
Jack Craft
Aaron Deacon
David Disney

Anita Gorman
Tom Lewin
Ken Powell
David Ross

Powell welcomed the attendees.

A motion to approve the minutes of the May 23, 2022, LINC Commission meeting was approved unanimously.

Superintendents Reports

- **Rick Chambers**, Director of Communications (Center School District), reported that Center has been engaged district-wide in training to understand unconscious bias and the impact of behaviors as part of racial equity training.
- **Anita Gorman**, LINC commissioner reported on behalf of North Kansas City Schools and Superintendent **Dan Clemens**. Two older buildings in the district, Maplewood and Davidson elementary schools have been undergoing upgrades and are being transformed beautifully. NKC also continues to benefit from its new early learning center and now has more pre-k enrollment than ever before.

Caring Communities Update

- Executive Vice President **Janet Miles-Bartee** reported on summer activities, noting many vacations are now under way after a busy June. She mentioned the plans with Center to add Red Bridge Elementary School to the LINC program, and that Red Bridge students will be bused to Indian Creek after school. **Rick Chambers** thanked LINC for stepping forward with a plan after the previous program provider at Red Bridge dropped their program.
- LINC HR Director **Trent DeVreugd** reported that LINC's Caring Communities staffing has recovered from the furlough during the pandemic, from which 278 staff did not return. Coordinators have led outreach efforts through canvassing and HR has used Indeed Jobs to good effect.
- The first LINC Caring Communities Day fair was a great success. A video of the June 11 event was shown. The event's lead planners, **Danisha Clarkson**, **Drake Bushnell** and **Marlisa Collins** described it as an emotional, joyful experience where families came for free entertainment, food and fellowship – and many also got help with rent and utility bills and other services. **Ken Powell** thanked the entire LINC staff for providing a fantastic event.
- **Bryan Shepard**, LINC Communications, reported on a successful trip by several LINC staff to the Los Angeles national conference of the Coalition for Community Schools in June. The conference drew some 3,500 attendees. LINC's team had several meaningful exclusive meetings, including with Shital Shaw of the U.S. Department of Education, current Coalition national director José Muñoz and former director Marty Blank.

- **Joe Robertson**, LINC Communications reported on a successful trip by a LINC team to the annual MAACCE (Missouri Association for Adult Continuing and Community Education) conference in Osage Beach, Mo. He noted that Janet Miles-Bartee and LINC Program Specialist Carl Wade were popular presenters, and that LINC Caring Communities Coordinator **Jason Ervin** was honored with the Outstanding MAACCE Member of the Year Award.

Department of Elementary and Secondary Education Update

- **Janet Miles-Bartee** reported that LINC is continuing to present information to the state to protect and preserve \$5.3 million in funding that is now administered by DESE since the creation of the state Office of Childhood. Miles-Bartee and LINC President Gayle Hobbs will be meeting with Education Commissioner Margie Vandeven July 19 in Jefferson City. Miles-Bartee noted that the commissioner has just received a letter from Kansas City Public Schools Superintendent Mark Bedell urging her support of LINC's blended-funding programming because of LINC's value to the success of the district.

Joe Robertson gave an update on the KCPS Blueprint 2030 process, noting that the district's consultants and planners in the coming months will be presenting scenarios in the strategic planning work that will name schools recommended for closing. He noted that LINC has talked with Caring Communities Coordinators to be ready to help families and support them in the emotional process, but to avoid participation in any campaigns to save one school over another. **Janet Miles-Bartee** said she and **Gayle Hobbs** have met with Bedell and Interim Superintendent Jennifer Collier and expressed LINC's support of the Blueprint 2030 planning and school-closing process.

LINC Commissioner **Aaron Deacon** asked what the commission was planning to do to recognize recently retired Deputy Director **Brent Schondelmeyer**. **Janet Miles-Bartee** said that LINC will be planning a future event in honor of Brent and other recent retirees.

The meeting was adjourned.

Welcome back! This is what Caring Communities look like

Aug. 26, 2022

By Joe Robertson/LINC Writer



Armando and Elijah, LINC students at Belvidere Elementary School in Grandview, enjoying afternoon snack on the first day of school.

Having mastered kindergarten, Evie, 6, knows what she wants — and expects — from LINC as she starts the first grade.

Plenty of outdoor play, she says, plus her favorite — necklace and bracelet art craft — and for sure a lot of coloring.

“Because I’m good at coloring,” Evie said with her mother Jenny Tucker at Boone Elementary’s back-to-school picnic in the Center School District.

“I colored a dinosaur picture with four colors really good,” she said, “and *I didn’t even scribble.*”

LINC Caring Communities team members welcomed Evie and thousands of other children and their families in the Kansas City Public Schools, the Hickman Mills, Grandview, Center, North Kansas City and Fort Osage school districts, and Lee A. Tolbert Community Academy and Genesis charter schools.

Yes, there will be plenty of all the creative fun that kids enjoy in LINC’s before- and after-school programs, but just as reliable are the broader supports LINC’s Caring Communities bring to the children, families and neighborhoods.

At Melcher Elementary in the Kansas City Public Schools, lines of big-smiling, cheering neighbors greeted the

children as they stepped off the bus and onto the steps leading up to school's front doors. Many were part of the Million Fathers March that LINC has helped organize for many years to get each new school year off to a rolling start.

"We want to show our kids we have great support within the community," said Pierre DeClue, LINC's Caring Communities Coordinator at Melcher. "We want to make sure they see that there are men in the community who appreciate them and love them."

A line of purple shirts in the greeting line showed that the Omega Psi Phi Fraternity — of which Melcher Dean of Students Kenneth Ellison is a member — came out in abundance.

"I love to be here . . . welcoming our students with a fresh, healthy start," Ellison said. "It's a great school. It's a great community."

College students Damien Daniels and Marty Jackson, both from "the inner city," joined in the line.

"We want to make sure they have fun and make sure they feel comfortable wherever they're at," Jackson said.

It's going to be a big year with some new sites and faces — including opening a new LINC program at the new Sixth Grade Center in Hickman Mills, and welcoming Red Bridge Elementary students into LINC's combined program with Indian Creek Elementary in Center.

And there will be families, from North Kansas City to Grandview, getting to know LINC for the first time, like kindergartner Carter, 5, and his father John Atchley at Boone.

"He's excited and nervous," the father said about his son. But it's comforting, Atchley said, that "LINC has a reputation for taking care of kids, making sure they're happy and safe."

That's what Caring Communities look like.



the "Million Fathers March" crowd of greeters at Melcher Elementary School in Kansas City, with LINC's Caring Communities Coordinator Pierre DeClue (blue LINC shirt) welcoming children as they arrive for school.



'This is our heart': Building schools of character

Aug. 17, 2022

By Joe Robertson/LINC Writer



LINC Caring Communities Program Specialist Carl Wade holds the big paper heart that he uses in LINC's core training program, Character Counts!

For those of you who are still a bit distracted, let's call this story to attention, LINC style.

"Character counts!" calls the leader.

Many in the audience of LINC staff, settling into a school auditorium for some training, call back the familiar response:

"All the time!"

"All the time . . .!" sounds the leader again. It's LINC's Program Specialist Carl Wade, demonstrating an attention-getting tactic used with kids in classrooms.

Everyone's locked in now. They answer in full chorus:

"CHARACTER COUNTS!!"

This, by the way, is no trite call-and-response exercise.

Character Counts is foundational. Speaking the program's name invokes the six pillars of moral living that

LINC’s team members learn and carry into their Caring Communities.

It guides the lessons and meaningful moments they share with children in their classrooms every day.

But now, back to class:

“Everybody close your eyes.”

This is how Wade pulls everyone into a mindset to learn and embrace the fifth pillar — Caring.

Think of a child, he says. See the face of that child — one that was difficult. One that tested your patience. Or troubled you with worry.

Ne’Kye Sheppard, one of the many LINC Caring Communities Coordinators in the audience, sees a 10-year-old girl in the darkness of her closed eyelids — a “cold-shouldered” child who was shutting herself off from staff and schoolmates.

Edina Von Hofman and her lead staff, Jo Gonzalez, think of one of their fifth-grade boys — a child too often in conflict with others, who was struggling to follow directions, who seemed not to listen.

Those children and others are held in the consciousness of the room for a moment of prolonged silence. Then Wade says, “open your eyes.”

They see Wade standing before them, now holding up a giant, red paper heart.

Who were you thinking of? Wade asks.

One by one, many of the LINC coordinators answer, telling of children like the little girl on Sheppard’s mind, whose cold shoulder, she knew, had something to do with the death of her brother, her grief, her need for a safe place — and they call out the names, like Leona.

“This is Leona’s heart,” Wade says.

They talk of children like the little boy that Von Hofman and Gonzalez were thinking of, whose difficulties they know are rooted in his moves from foster home to foster home, calling out a name like Manny.

“This is Manny’s heart.”

Throughout the pages of [Character Counts](#) training, there are



deep lessons — ways to teach and share and *live* all six of the pillars:

Trustworthiness

Respect

Responsibility

Fairness

Caring

Citizenship



The program, created by the [Josephson Institute](#) and based now at the [Ray Center at Drake University](#), encourages teachers to be creative in how they inspire children — and themselves — to contemplate moral truths that are the essence of good character.

Their [website](#) provides support materials and program ideas. And LINC's team builds their own games and lesson plans, unique to the experiences at each of the more than 50 [LINC Caring Communities](#) programs across six school districts.

Suddenly, Wade is tearing the big red heart into shreds.

He had asked his audience to call out words children hear that beat them down, the belittling and demeaning reprimands that hurt. With each one, Wade tears out another piece, rip by rip, and very quickly a pile of red scraps lies at his feet.

A volunteer from the audience scoops it all up — *little Billy's heart, little Amy's heart* — and is directed to a nearby table with tape to begin patching it back together. It's crude and slow, and soon more volunteers are sent to help.

The lesson comes clear.

Many children come to our classes with vulnerable hearts. And our own careless or purposeful barbs — flung from adults and other children — can shred them in a flash.

But the work of restoring a child's heart takes time and persistence. It takes all of the characteristics in the pillar of caring that Wade recites as the meticulous heartmenders patch and tape:

Compassion. Empathy. Kindness. Consideration. Forgiveness. Love . . .

Hear now the voices of children. This is how, in memorized recitation, many LINC children stamp Character Counts! to their day:

I pledge to be a Kid for Character.

I will be worthy of trust.

I will be respectful and responsible, doing what I must.

I will always act with fairness.

I will show that I care.

I will be a good citizen and always do my share.

The real impact, of course, comes from the lessons and the before- and after-school program experiences that LINC builds around the pledge.

It's all about sparking conversations, Wade said. Getting children to think in directions they haven't thought before.

One session might start with a classic morality tale like "The Boy Who Cried Wolf."

"What happens when you tell lies?" he said. "What is trustworthiness?"

Another lesson might have the children divide into four different corners based on something benign like favorite color or favorite food — and then, with a roll of the dice, one group is out and has to sit down. Then come discussions of fairness and respect for others and appreciating diversity and differences.

"It teaches morals," Wade said. "It's a chance for students to start thinking on their own . . . (and) get some of the social, emotional learning that they are missing."

Some LINC Caring Communities sites have been using Character Counts! for more than a decade. Wade, after getting special training in 2015, has helped LINC spread the program across all of its Caring Communities.

That's a lot of patchwork hearts.

The ragged, tape-strapped conglomeration of red paper isn't pretty. Its creators, after many minutes of diligent work, display it somewhat sheepishly to the LINC audience in the auditorium.

But a cheer goes up. Everyone applauds.

It's not perfect. It strains to capture the right shape. It's a bit shrunken. But there is no doubt: it *is* a heart.

Throughout the room, the LINC team members imagine the work ahead. They see themselves as the caretakers of hearts.



Sheppard sees again the face of the 10-year-old girl she had thought of at the beginning who had lost her brother.

She remembers when she took the girl aside and sat with her, letting her know that grief looks different for everybody, letting her know that Sheppard's office would be a safe place, whenever and for however long she needed it.

"There is no time limit," she told the girl. "Just time."

Von Hofman and Gonzalez see again the often-disruptive fifth-grade boy who had been through so many foster homes — who seemed determined at first to not talk with either of them.

They set boundaries and expectations for behavior, but layered it with encouragement and praised him for his strengths.

Bit by bit, piece by piece, he came to trust them. He felt their love.

This is our heart.

In one of Kansas City's hottest summers, thousands face brutal utility bills and shutoff threats

KCUR | By Rachel Schnelle
Published September 5, 2022 at 4:00 AM CDT



Kansas City resident Kay Id has three window air conditioning units to cool down her apartment off Paseo Boulevard. Credit: Carlos Moreno

The number of disconnection notices sent to customers by utility company Evergy has nearly doubled over the last year.

Between July and August this year, Kay Id's utility bills shot up nearly \$200.

While she's used to energy bills increasing from spring to summer, this year felt worse. The walls of her apartment near 48th Street and Paseo Boulevard have little insulation, making it hard to contain air conditioning.

The drywall is ripped away in some parts of her apartment's walls, revealing mold.

"All my heating and cooling go, it's kind of out the window, and that's why my bills are so high," Id says.

Id suffers from a number of chronic health issues – COPD, asthma, osteopenia and osteoarthritis – that are exacerbated by the heat. And Kansas City has seen [record high temperatures](#) this summer.

Her health issues also make it hard for her to work – Id is on a fixed income. And between the heat and inflation, she is struggling to get by.

“It's hard for me to manage,” Id says.

[Id is not alone](#). Thousands of Kansas City residents are struggling to pay rent and utility bills — to the point where utility companies are threatening to pull service.

The number of customers of Evergy Metro, which covers the Kansas City area, who received final disconnection notices for non-payment in May and June nearly doubled since last year, according to the Missouri Public Service Commission. (Numbers were not yet available for July or August.)

In May and June 2021, just under 10,000 people received disconnection notices. This year, more than 19,000 customers were notified.

Utility disconnections

Some experts say the increase in utility bills is a result of a combination of factors — people who suffered a loss of income during the pandemic, high fuel costs, supply chain issues, inflation and dangerously high temperatures.

“It's sort of a perfect storm of options and things that are taking place,” says Geoff Marke, chief economist with the Missouri Office of Public Counsel.

Evergy communications manager Gina Penzig told KCUR that over the last five years, Evergy's rates have been lower than the rate of inflation.

The surge in service disconnections over the last year can also be attributed to a backlog from the COVID-19 pandemic: Evergy halted service disconnections from November 2020 to May 2021, according to Penzig.

During that time, Penzing said the company helped secure millions of dollars in federal and state utility assistance for customers. While Evergy has returned to normal operations, it says it's giving customers more notice and continues to offer bill assistance.

And many Kansas City residents clearly still need the help.

Metro Lutheran Ministries is one of several organizations offering help to Kansas City residents struggling to pay bills. Case manager Stephanie Winn says they've used more than \$300,000 of the \$500,000 of the assistance money from private and federal funding since May 1, 2022.

Climate change's impact

The metro has experienced several extreme heat waves this summer. In July, Kansas City saw temperatures hit triple digits for the first time in four years. The region also experienced [unusually warm nighttime temperatures](#).

All this meant residents spent more time indoors, increasing air conditioning usage.

LINC's Morning Star team provides relief

By LINC staff

Through the hot summer of high energy bills and looming evictions, LINC's relief team at Morning Star continued to help hundreds of families secure federal funds to stay safely in their homes.

This summer LINC/Morning Star pushed its total amount of funds processed over \$2.4 million since May of 2021, providing relief to more than 1,380 households.

LINC set up the service center at Morning Star Missionary Baptist Church's Youth and Family Life Center at 27th Street and Prospect Avenue in part [to help residents in need complete the complicated federal applications](#) for relief funds under the American Rescue Act.

LINC and the church continue to team up. In addition to the rental and utility aid, LINC/Morning Star has distributed more than 3 million pounds of food, more than 26,000 Covid vaccinations and other services since early 2020.

kclinc.org/lincmorningstar

For people already struggling to pay rent — [which itself increased this summer](#) — the added cost of running air conditioning was not insignificant.

Beth Pauley, who works with the Kansas-based [Climate + Energy Project](#) and is on the [Kansas City climate protection steering committee](#), says residents with high utility bills are at more risk for evictions, and she worries it will only get worse.

According to climate research non-profit [First Street Foundation](#), Missouri is in the center of the “Emerging Heat Belt.” This is an area where heat indexed temperatures are likely to hit 125 degrees by the year 2053, due to climate change.

“The greater impacts of climate change are going to exacerbate the issues of high utility bills,” Pauley says.

For Kay Id, the high utility bills make a precarious housing situation even worse. She’d like for her landlord to help make her apartment more energy efficient.

“When property owners don't take care of their buildings, it causes their rent and utilities to go up,” she said. “The utility companies need to work with landlords to make buildings more equipped for higher utilities.”

KIDS COUNT 2022: How to rescue Missouri children from mental health crisis

Aug. 10, 2022

By Joe Robertson/LINC Writer

The good news for children, rising out of an alarming report of a national and local mental health crisis, is that we can do something about it.

The annual KIDS COUNT Data Book from the Annie E. Casey Foundation, [released this week](#), describes a rise in childhood anxiety and depression at unprecedented levels that dominates its 2022 report on the overall health and welfare of children.

The percentage of children 3 to 17 troubled by anxiety or depression rose by 25.5% nationwide from 2016 to 2020, and by 17.5% in Missouri, data shows, as more than one child out of every ten were diagnosed with mental health concerns by a doctor or health care provider.

This does not account for the many more children whose childhood stress was not officially recorded among American households where, the report further stated, surveys showed a third of parents said their young children were acting fussier and more defiant, and more than a quarter said their kids appeared more anxious than before the Covid-19 pandemic.

The mental health crisis has mounted “a pandemic atop of a pandemic,” wrote Lisa M. Hamilton, the President and Chief Executive Officer, The Annie E. Casey Foundation, in the report.

The troubling data of the 33rd edition of the Kids Count report, Hamilton said, couldn’t help but focus on mental health data “that reflects not only the turmoil of the past two-plus years but also issues that were making life harder for kids well before the pandemic.”

Within the full report, analyses update trends in the well-being of children by measuring key indicators affecting economics, education, health and their families and community. All of the indicators are impacted by mental health, Hamilton said.

Recipe for recovery

Families are taking notice. More parents are taking action to help their children. And, the report states, there are clear actions that policy makers can take to help families and their communities rise to greater health.

“The good news is that we see broad agreement on taking action,” Hamilton said.

Nearly three out of four parents surveyed earlier this year thought their child would benefit from mental



health counseling. Congress has shown bi-partisan support for legislation on mental health and substance abuse. The Biden administration has proposed several youth-focused strategies to tackle mental health concerns. And governors in 33 states have named improving mental health services as a primary objective.

The Kids Count report identifies three targets for policy makers to continue this momentum.

- **Prioritize kids' basic needs.** Children living in poverty are more likely to develop mental health conditions. Work to increase family stability fosters positive mental health and wellness.
- **Ensure that children have access to the mental health they need.** That means ensuring health insurance for all children, providing more social workers, psychologists and other mental health professionals in schools, and providing more federal resources to coordinate treatment.
- **Bolster mental health care that accounts for young people's different experiences and identities.** Mental health support should meet all children's needs regardless of their race, ethnicity, gender identity, sexual orientation or socioeconomic status.

Missouri's child health concerns

State-by-state data showed Missouri with concerning trends in several health-related indicators. There was a rise in full-term infants born with low birth weights. After several years of decline there was a slight increase in babies born to teen mothers. More than one in three Missouri teens are overweight or obese.

Also, Missouri is falling behind other states in ensuring universal health care access to children.

Trends that moved in a positive direction include a reduction in the number of children living in poverty, and the number of children living in households where no parents worked. Also, more children in Missouri attend pre-K programs, preparing them for academic success.

Overall, Missouri ranked 27th in the nation in child well-being.



Photo from 2022 Kids Count Data Book/kwanchaichaiudom/iStock



CHILDREN'S MENTAL HEALTH: WHAT IT IS, WHY IT MATTERS

Addressing a youth mental health pandemic requires understanding what mental health is. Beyond the absence of illness, it involves the capacity to fully function mentally, be productive, build fulfilling relationships and adapt.¹³ For young people, emotional and social well-being are especially important, as is the ability to navigate the challenges of life and realize their potential.¹⁴

Mental health is just as important as physical health.¹⁵ And as with other components of child well-being and success, the foundation for good mental health is laid during early childhood. Cognitive abilities, language proficiency and social skills develop alongside mental health.¹⁶ But things can go wrong. While no single indicator of the 16 in the KIDS COUNT index explicitly assesses children's health and

wellness, the four domains of the *Data Book* capture factors that reflect the link between mental health and a child's overall well-being.

ECONOMIC WELL-BEING

Parents who are struggling to maintain steady employment and cover the cost of housing are not the only ones who carry the stress of living in poverty. Their children experience it, too — in ways that can harm their development. Being unable to access food, health care or child care can influence a child's brain development and readiness to learn, as well as behavior and emotional well-being.¹⁷ Teens who aren't in school or working may face new stresses as they become financially responsible for themselves. Moreover, being anxious or depressed can affect a young person's ability to apply for, interview for, accept and retain a job.¹⁸

EDUCATION

A lack of access to early childhood education can undermine a child's social and emotional development. Students contending with mental health issues may not be able to focus in the classroom, falling behind in core areas such as math and reading and, ultimately, struggling to graduate. These and other obstacles can compound a child's anxiety and complicate the already emotionally charged processes of entering adolescence and figuring out what is next after high school.¹⁹

HEALTH

Appropriate and timely medical interventions can support better mental health. Being born at a low weight can impair early childhood development. Children who are uninsured are less likely to have access to mental health services. Struggles with mental health, though only one potential factor in childhood obesity, can lead to and further aggravate issues with being overweight.²⁰ And while child and teen deaths reflect suicides, they also include victims of other kinds of violence — notably, gun violence, which in 2020 surged to

become the leading cause of death for young people ages 1 to 19.²¹ Individuals exposed to shootings and other violent incidents often endure emotional and psychological harm and can experience post-traumatic stress disorder.²²

FAMILY AND COMMUNITY

Living in a high-poverty neighborhood can contribute to some of the same stresses noted above and fuel worries about safety. We also know that becoming a parent as a teen presents all the challenges of being a caregiver on top of managing one's own ongoing growth and development.²³

The racial and ethnic disparities we see every year in the *KIDS COUNT Data Book* disproportionately result in, and contribute to, troubling mental health issues among children of color. Although data limitations prevent a thorough examination of the implications for kids whose gender identity or sexual orientation ties into their mental health, these children likely face overwhelming circumstances, too.²⁴

Each year, the *Data Book* tracks how children are faring nationally and in every state through indicators in the areas of economic well-being, education, health and family and community. Many of these affect or are themselves affected by children's and families' mental health.

Although only some post-2019 data are available so far, our hope is that all readers will use this year's *Data Book* to increase their understanding of the issues at hand — and that policymakers will use this resource to inform the actions they could take to help improve the mental well-being of children and their families.



A PANDEMIC ATOP A PANDEMIC: KIDS' AND FAMILIES' MENTAL HEALTH IN 2020

COVID-19 took hold in the United States in March 2020. It shuttered schools and child care facilities; canceled youth sports and activities; and shut down libraries and recreational centers. It also cut off access to the places where children hang out informally: malls, movie theaters and even outdoor playgrounds. Suddenly, most kids' only connection with their peers was through the screens on their mobile devices, if they had them. A survey of parents a month into the pandemic showed 33% reported their young children were acting fussier and more defiant than before and 26% said their kids appeared more anxious.²⁵

From lost playtime for younger children to canceled proms, graduations and summer jobs for teens, the world simply stopped being what it had been for millions of young people. Teens reported spikes in symptoms of anxiety or depression as they weathered uncertainty, fear and concerns for the health and safety of themselves, their families and their friends.²⁶

Despite all of this, we see reasons for some optimism. Early research indicates that addressing youth mental health needs can reduce or even eliminate pandemic-related stress.²⁷ Yet even as children, parents and communities are finding ways to endure these times, the data show that our leaders can and must do more to support them.

Results of the National Survey of Children's Health show the extraordinary toll of the mental health pandemic for youth. Data from 2016 and 2020 indicate children across the nation and in most states were more likely to deal with anxiety or depression during the first year of the pandemic than previously (see Table 1), though more research is required to understand the large variation across states. Nationally, the number of kids ages 3 to 17 struggling with these issues jumped by more than 1.5 million, from 5.8 million to 7.3 million (or roughly 9% to 12%).

TABLE 1

PERCENTAGE OF CHILDREN (AGES 3 TO 17) WHO HAD ANXIETY OR DEPRESSION

Source: Child Trends' analysis of the Department of Health and Human Services' 2016 and 2020 National Survey of Children's Health (NSCH).

NOTE: The percentages presented here are estimates based on weighted NSCH data. The weights are important because they adjust for lower response rates in some states and over- or undercounting of certain child demographics. In this way, the percentages are weighted to be representative of the U.S. population of noninstitutionalized children and should be read as estimates.

DEFINITION

Children who had anxiety or depression is the percentage of children ages 3 to 17 who have ever been diagnosed with or reported to have anxiety or depression by a doctor or health care provider. These data are based on one-year estimates of survey responses.

LOCATION	2016	2020	CHANGE 2016 TO 2020
United States	9.4%	11.8%	25.5%
Alabama	8.2%	8.8%	7.3%
Alaska	5.4%	8.2%	51.9%
Arizona	11.7%	10.8%	-7.7%
Arkansas	8.6%	14.4%	67.4%
California	7.0%	11.9%	70.0%
Colorado	9.3%	10.4%	11.8%
Connecticut	11.5%	14.1%	22.6%
Delaware	9.8%	13.0%	32.7%
District of Columbia	7.4%	11.7%	58.1%
Florida	8.7%	10.6%	21.8%
Georgia	8.5%	10.4%	22.4%
Hawaii	4.8%	5.9%	22.9%
Idaho	11.4%	12.6%	10.5%
Illinois	10.7%	8.9%	-16.8%
Indiana	11.7%	15.9%	35.9%
Iowa	10.8%	12.6%	16.7%
Kansas	10.1%	13.2%	30.7%
Kentucky	12.4%	15.9%	28.2%
Louisiana	11.0%	10.1%	-8.2%
Maine	18.0%	17.5%	-2.8%
Maryland	9.4%	12.8%	36.2%
Massachusetts	12.2%	18.4%	50.8%
Michigan	11.9%	13.5%	13.4%
Minnesota	12.2%	14.0%	14.8%
Mississippi	10.9%	9.8%	-10.1%
Missouri	9.7%	11.4%	17.5%
Montana	12.5%	13.4%	7.2%
Nebraska	8.1%	10.4%	28.4%
Nevada	9.4%	9.0%	-4.3%
New Hampshire	14.4%	18.4%	27.8%
New Jersey	7.6%	10.7%	40.8%
New Mexico	11.4%	12.9%	13.2%
New York	8.9%	10.9%	22.5%
North Carolina	7.6%	11.3%	48.7%
North Dakota	11.4%	11.3%	-0.9%
Ohio	9.2%	13.1%	42.4%
Oklahoma	10.5%	12.1%	15.2%
Oregon	11.5%	16.1%	40.0%
Pennsylvania	10.2%	13.0%	27.5%
Rhode Island	15.5%	14.9%	-3.9%
South Carolina	7.4%	11.5%	55.4%
South Dakota	7.0%	14.2%	102.9%
Tennessee	8.8%	9.5%	8.0%
Texas	7.7%	9.5%	23.4%
Utah	13.6%	13.4%	-1.5%
Vermont	13.7%	19.2%	40.1%
Virginia	10.7%	10.8%	0.9%
Washington	11.3%	15.1%	33.6%
West Virginia	11.7%	14.6%	24.8%
Wisconsin	12.5%	15.6%	24.8%
Wyoming	11.8%	14.0%	18.6%

Time to rise: State analysis shows how far performance fell during pandemic

Aug. 5, 2022

By Joe Robertson/LINC Writer



Image from the video in the newly released report: The Impact of Lost Instructional Time from the COVID-19 Pandemic in the State of Missouri.

It's as severe as the education community feared.

Lost instruction time during the many months of virtual and distance learning took a significant bite out of the academic performance of Missouri students.

The impact fell harder on low-income students and students of color. Math performance overall suffered most, but English Language Arts performance also fell.

An [analysis](#) by the SAS Institute for the state of Missouri analyzed performance on state tests to project what would be the expected growth in students' academic performance from the prior year, then compared the projection to actual performance.

The study compared the student outcomes from 2018-2019 — the last school year before the pandemic — to the outcomes in the 2020-2021 school year.

The decrease in performance, the study noted, was significant.

Students that qualified for free lunch and Black and Hispanic students were more likely to suffer performance loss. One of the reasons, the study suggested, is that students in those categories more often attended dis-

tricts that shut down school buildings for longer periods of time.

Those same categories of students also were more likely to have fewer supports at home — for Internet connectivity and digital literacy, and other family stresses that impact learning such as housing stability and financial strains.

Call to action

School systems are using federal pandemic stimulus funds to increase learning supports such as reading and math specialists. And support programs, like LINC’s Caring Communities, which works with several Kansas City-area school districts, have taken on increased roles to aid families and children.

LINC’s after-school programming support for children has combined with the broader community supports in helping families secure housing, get federal relief with past-due rent and utility bills, and access food resources.

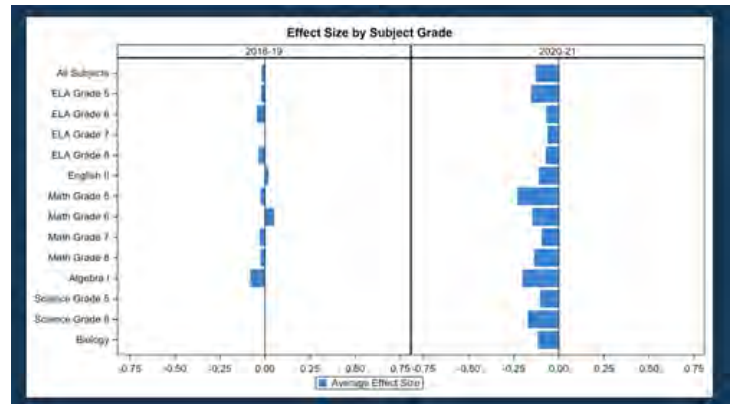
The key to recovery, said Hedy Chang, founder and executive director of [Attendance Works](#), will be a collective effort to have as many children as possible in class, every day, comfortable and ready to learn.

Everyone, from bus drivers to school greeters, secretaries, teachers, counselors, para-professionals, volunteers, after-school programmers, families and community partners have to rise to this occasion

“It’s all built on having those relationships that are so essential to positive conditions for learning,” Chang told a virtual audience in the Attendance Works webinar, *Ensuring a Welcoming, Healthy and Restorative Start to School*.

The pandemic demanded a difficult response from an education system and American communities that were already strained by an epidemic of chronic absences.

“As a country,” Chang said, “the pivot was too much for us.”



This chart shows the difference between projected and actual test performance of Missouri students in grades 5 through 12. A comparison of 2018-2019 (pre-pandemic) and 2020-2021 shows a significant drop in actual performance. The negative results in 2020-2021 were significant, according to SAS Institute analysts.

KC Goes Tech provides training – and earning potential – to the people

New KC Digital Drive program creates a pathway for upward mobility while working to close the digital skills gap.

July 12, 2022

By Mili Mansaray



A local resident enrolls in the Affordable Connectivity Program at Morningstar Missionary Baptist Church during a KC Digital Drive event. (KC Digital Drive)

In Kansas City and across the country, there aren't enough workers to fill middle-skills jobs, which require at least a high school diploma but not a four-year degree.

According to the latest data available from [the National Skills Coalition](#), in 2018, 52% of U.S. jobs require skills training beyond high school. But only 43% of America's workers have had access to the training necessary to qualify for these careers.

In Missouri, 53% of jobs qualify as middle-skilled, yet only 46% of Missouri's workers have had access to the training. In Kansas, the numbers are similar: 54% of jobs are middle-skilled, but only 44% have access to training.

[KC Digital Drive is](#) working to address this issue with this month's launch of [KC Goes Tech](#), a microgrant program that will award 10 organizations \$2,000 each to increase digital training. Half of

the grant — \$1,000 — is a stipend to help someone from the organization or the community they work with to become a trainer. That person will join a cohort and deliver digital literacy training to the organization’s clientele.

Any client-serving organization with clients who might benefit from digital literacy training and skills development but may need help with access to a device and/or connectivity is [encouraged to apply](#).

KC Digital Drive is a nonprofit working to address technology access across the Kansas City region.

Leslie Scott, the group’s digital inclusion program manager, said there has been an expansion of middle-skills jobs that require digital knowledge.

Workers in this category typically hold jobs in the clerical, sales, construction, repair, hospitality/leisure and transportation/material moving industries, according to the [Georgetown Public Policy Institute](#).

“We hear a lot about how difficult it is for employers to find qualified employees, we hear a lot about how difficult it is for low-skilled workers to, you know, to make ends meet,” Scott said.

The digital divide in Kansas City

KC Digital Drive aims to make Kansas City a digital leader by closing the digital divide and driving innovation and inclusion.

“Equity is not a unique problem to the digital world,” said Aaron Deacon, the managing director of KC Digital Drive. “We have gaps in places just in the world generally. And if we’re not careful about how we implement or adopt them, digital spaces make those worse, because technology really just accelerates whatever we’re already doing.”

LEANLAB Education, a Kansas City nonprofit, found that [11% of households](#) in Kansas City, Missouri, do not have internet access. Eight percent of households are without a computer.

These [digital inequities](#) are also skewed along race, class and location. Lack of internet access is concentrated in neighborhoods east of Troost Avenue, which disproportionately impacts communities of color and low-income families, according to the data.

Age also plays a role in this divide.

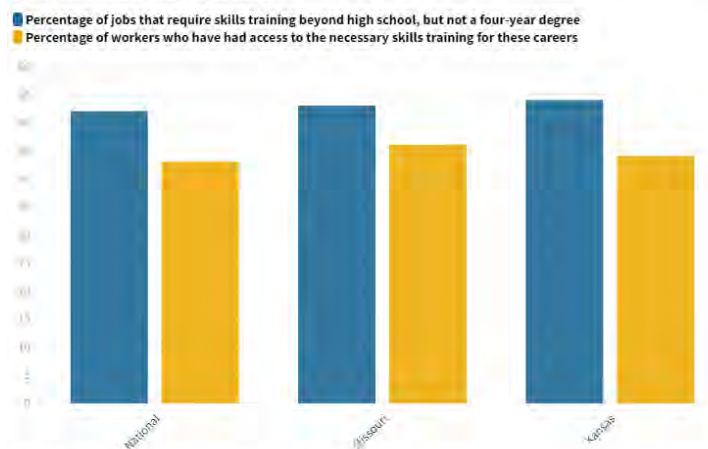
“Older adults have some of the lowest adoption rates for the internet and that’s particularly more severe for Black and brown older adults,” said Scott. “They’re not digital natives and maybe they feel like they’re just too old to learn or the tools and resources out there just don’t speak to their learning needs. ... They need materials and approaches that are unique.”

PCs for People has seen firsthand how impactful teaching these digital skills can be on a person’s life.

“If you just start with how to apply for a job, there are very few places anymore that even accept applications that aren’t online,” said Tom Esselman, the chief executive officer of the [PCs for People KC](#), the local chapter of a national nonprofit that provides low-income households with low-cost refurbished computers and high-speed 4G LTE internet service solutions starting at \$15 per month (or free with the [Affordable Connectivity Program](#)).

Other common digital expectations from employers can include familiarity with email, calendars, Zoom, Microsoft Office or Google Workspace. PCs for People offers free classes to teach most of these skills.

Percentage of middle-skills jobs in comparison to percentage of workers with middle-skills training



Source: National Skills Coalition • 2018
Graphics by: Mill Mansaray/ The Beacon

“You can at least make an indirect correlation between the fact that there’s all these basic jobs that are going unfilled, and they all require access to some level of digital competency, and you can make a correlation between those unfilled jobs and the number of people who just haven’t developed the skills or don’t have access to the technology that they need,” Esselman said.

PCs for People is a longtime partner of KC Digital Drive and a member of the [Kansas City Coalition for Digital Inclusion](#). PCs for People will provide devices to those who go through the training for KC Goes Tech.

In the past, PCs for People partnered with UPS to provide laptops and personnel for UPS’ hiring fair. PCs for People would also provide staff and volunteers to help the applicants.

“Nine times out of 10, they come in and they see the sign that says online resumes only and they just have these defeated looks on their face,” Esselman said. Staff and volunteers would walk them through how to create a resume online, after which attendants would get interviewed on the spot. Many would walk out with a new job.

“Most of them have tears in their eyes. They’re so overjoyed that they were able to get some help getting the job, because without the resume, they weren’t even able to get to the interview.”

The digital skills training program

The KC Goes Tech program is based on the successful Tech Goes Home program founded in Boston in 1999 and expanded into Chattanooga, Tennessee, by one of KC Digital Drive’s peer organizations.

“What we’re looking to do is give some grants to organizations to kind of kick-start this process, but then figure out the best way to work with all of our existing providers and start to grow the ecosystem and provide a little bit more of a holistic and systematic viewpoint to how we coordinate our digital literacy and inclusion resources,” said Deacon, the managing director of KC Digital Drive.

“Through that work, we also hope to be able to get a better view on where some of the gaps are, where maybe some of the existing providers could expand their work or expand their reach, or maybe we need new capacity to develop,” he said.

The long-term goals of the program also include helping others expand their aspirations.

“It’s about helping people get into the digital economy, and building them up as they go and seeing where they want to end up,” said Scott, with KC Digital Drive.

The organization welcomes applications from organizations that currently offer some level of digital training or those that do not but would like to start. Priorities for microgrants include service to seniors and older adults, working with community health workers, churches and faith-based communities, and school-based communities.

The [deadline to apply](#) is Aug.12 by 5 p.m.



Two customers after receiving a low-cost device from PCs for People. (PCs for People)

'Give it up! For Buck O'Neil': A look back at Garcia's Hero Project

July 25, 2022

By Joe Robertson/LINC Writer

Yes, finally. The great Buck O'Neil [has been enshrined](#) in the Baseball Hall of Fame in Cooperstown, N.Y.

So let's take a [fun look back](#) at the tribute that children at Kansas City's Primitivo Garcia Elementary created in song, book and video, working with songwriter [Bob Walkenhorst](#) on the [school's Hero Project](#) in 2006.

The original song tells the story of the Kansas City Monarchs player, manager and Negro Leagues Baseball ambassador, who is honored at Kansas City's [Negro Leagues Baseball Museum](#).

O'Neil, who celebrated the song and the book with the children at Garcia, would die later in 2006 at the age of 94.

The Hero Project began with Garcia teacher and administrator Missie Condit, who got the idea to create this annual Hero Project with Walkenhorst 20 years ago. For 15 years the school created multi-media works of art in honor of heroes — some well-known and others who deserved to be known.

Condit, who died in 2020, would be selected by the kids to be one of the honorees. See other Hero Project videos at <https://vimeo.com/showcase/3673271>

LINC partnered in the project, helping produce the videos and also a children's book on Buck O'Neil and his song. You can download a copy of the book at www.kclinc.org.

Most of all, congratulations, Buck.



Buck "O'Neil embraces children at Kansas City's Primitivo Garcia Elementary School in 2006.



From the Hero Project video, children at Primitivo Garcia Elementary sing, "Give it up! for Buck O'Neil."

LINC Commissioner Williams honored by Greater KC Chamber

Sept. 6, 2022

By Joe Robertson/LINC Writer

The Greater Kansas City Chamber of Commerce will honor Dr. Marjorie Williams and her life's work in education with the Athena Leadership Award for 2022.

Williams, a LINC Commissioner and former superintendent of the Hickman Mills School District, has given nearly 40 years in service of schools, children and teachers.

The award is named for Athena, the Greek goddess who embodies strength, courage, wisdom, and enlightenment.

The [chamber's announcement](#) of Williams' award includes an accounting of her work:

She started in education with teaching and administrative jobs in the Kansas City Public Schools and the Columbia and Ferguson Florissant School Districts before becoming Hickman Mills' superintendent. She also served in higher education as an Adjunct Professor with UMKC, Baker University, Ottawa University, and Kansas State University.

Williams currently serves as a National Professional Development trainer for Black History 365 and as a Community Advocate for CommunityAmerica Credit Union's Peace of Mind Center. In 2012, she founded The Marste Group, a consulting firm that serves school districts and businesses nationwide.

In addition to her role as LINC Commissioner, Williams has [recently co-moderated](#) a series of community listening sessions as Kansas Citians gave their thoughts and ideas on the next Chief of Police. She was honored by the Jackson County Monument of Freedom at the Leon Jordan Memorial Park for her work in the community. Her sorority, Delta Sigma Theta, presented her the Frankie Muse Freeman award for Civil Rights Activism and Making a Difference.

She is also a regular volunteer visiting with children in Genesis School's [Project Sankofa](#).

Williams is a Kauffman Fellow and can be heard weekly on the "PTK Report with Dr. Marj (Parents, Teachers, Kids Report)" on the Carter Broadcast Group stations KPRT 1590 AM/106.1FM.

The chamber will honor Williams, along with the Athena Young Professional Leadership Award honoree Pooja Shah, at the [2022 Athena Awards Reception](#) Oct. 6.





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