LINC Commission Meeting

July 28, 2008

Caring Communities Map

NKC North Kansas City
IN Independence
HM Hickman Mills
FO Fort Osage
GV Grandview
CH Charter Schools
C Center
OC Other Contracted
LINC Sites

LINC
Local Investment Commission

Local Investment Commission (LINC) Vision

Our Shared Vision

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

Our Mission

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

Our Guiding Principles

1. COMPREHENSIVENESS: Provide ready access to a full array of effective services.

2. PREVENTION: Emphasize "front-end" services that enhance development and prevent problems, rather than "back-end" crisis intervention.

3. OUTCOMES: Measure system performance by improved outcomes for children and families, not simply by the number and kind of services delivered.

4. INTENSITY: Offering services to the needed degree and in the appropriate time.

5. PARTICIPANT INVOLVEMENT: Use the needs, concerns, and opinions of individuals who use the service delivery system to drive improvements in the operation of the system.

6. NEIGHBORHOODS: Decentralize services to the places where people live, wherever appropriate, and utilize services to strengthen neighborhood capacity.

7. FLEXIBILITY AND RESPONSIVENESS: Create a delivery system, including programs and reimbursement mechanisms, that are sufficiently flexible and adaptable to respond to the full spectrum of child, family and individual needs.

8. COLLABORATION: Connect public, private and community resources to create an integrated service delivery system.

9. STRONG FAMILIES: Work to strengthen families, especially the capacity of parents to support and nurture the development of their children.

10. RESPECT AND DIGNITY: Treat families, and the staff who work with them, in a respectful and dignified manner.

11. INTERDEPENDENCE/MUTUAL RESPONSIBILITY: Balance the need for individuals to be accountable and responsible with the obligation of community to enhance the welfare of all citizens.

12. CULTURAL COMPETENCY: Demonstrate the belief that diversity in the historical, cultural, religious and spiritual values of different groups is a source of great strength.

13. CREATIVITY: Encourage and allow participants and staff to think and act innovatively, to take risks, and to learn from their experiences and mistakes.

14. COMPASSION: Display an unconditional regard and a caring, non-judgmental attitude toward, participants that recognizes their strengths and empowers them to meet their own needs.

15. HONESTY: Encourage and allow honesty among all people in the system.

Monday, July 28, 2008
Kauffman Foundation, 4801 Rockhill Rd.
4 – 6 p.m.
Kansas City, Mo. 64110

Agenda

I. **Welcome, Announcements & Recognitions**

II. **Approvals & Recognitions**
   a. April and May minutes (Motion)
   b. Partnering Organizations With Essential Resources (POWER)

III. **President's Report**
   a. Community Agenda for America's Public Schools (Motion)
   b. Community Organizing – Hickman Mills
   c. Summer School

IV. **Civic Council – Poverty Project**

V. **Caring Communities Expansion**
   a. Independence School District
   b. Fort Osage School District
   c. Other

VI. **Child welfare initiative**

VII. **Closed session**

VIII. **Adjournment**

The Local Investment Commission met at the UMKC Administrative Center Conference Facility, 5115 Oak St.., Kansas City, Mo. Chairman **Landon Rowland** presided. Commissioners attending were:

Sharon Cheers	Judy Hunt
Steve Dunn	Rosemary Smith Lowe
Herb Freeman	Mary Kay McPhee
SuEllen Fried	Richard Morris
Rob Givens	David Rock
Bob Glaser	David Ross
Bart Hakan	Gene Standifer
Adele Hall	Bailus Tate
Richard Hibschman	

Rowland announced that **Carson Ross** was elected Blue Springs mayor. A letter from Ross is included in the meeting packet.

Rowland welcomed Sugar Creek Mayor **Stan Salva**. LINC Neighborhood Coordinator **Bill Rogers** reported on the partnership between LINC and the City of Sugar Creek which supports a LINC Caring Communities at city gymnasium. Salva reported that the Sugar Creek City Council is committed to continued partnership with LINC and invited LINC to be the featured program at an upcoming meeting of the Eastern Jackson County Betterment Council.

Gayle A. Hobbs gave the LINC President's Report:

- LINC Neighborhood Coordinator **Rick Bell** reported LINC is working with Swope Corridor Renaissance to provide summer activities at eight locations in Kansas City, Mo. this summer.

- Hobbs has been working with the Eldon County, Mo. community on community responses to child deaths resulting from abuse and neglect.

- Hickman Mills voters approved separate school improvement bond and levy issues in the April elections.

- The Missouri Division of Youth Services was named one of the nation's 50 most innovative government programs by Harvard University's Kennedy School of Government.

- Several representatives from LINC will participate in the Coalition for Community Schools National Forum in Portland, OR, April 30-May 2. LINC will present three workshops at the conference.

- A video on community schools produced by LINC for the Portland conference was shown.

Hobbs introduced a presentation on Families and Schools Together (FAST), a program that LINC uses to foster parental involvement at Caring Communities school sites; 18 LINC staff

recently received FAST training. LINC Community Organizer **Lee Bohannon** gave an overview of FAST, which aims to build relationships within families, between families, and between families and schools.

ACE Caring Communities site coordinator **Janis Bankston** introduced **Wesley Cunningham**, ACE Youth Coordinator, and **Janeda Oliver**, ACE Lower Campus Site Administrator, who reported that the FAST training at the ACE Collegium Campus has been effective at bringing families together and has resulted in improved academic performance and decreased disciplinary referrals for students. The staff would like to expand FAST training into the ACE middle and high schools.

Loria Hubbard, an ACE parent who recently graduated from the FAST program, reported that FAST was a positive experience for her and her children.

Discussion followed.

A LINC video about FAST was shown.

Kansas City City Council member **Cindy Circo** gave an update on activities of the Kansas City Foreclosure Task Force. The group is assessing and distributing information on upcoming foreclosures and is working to bring legislation before the city and state while building on the work being done by interested community groups.

Discussion followed.

LINC Treasurer **David Ross** introduced a report by LINC Finance Director **Robin Gierer** on the current LINC budget and budget request for FY 2008-2009.

A motion to approve the FY 2007-2008 budget & the corresponding 3rd quarter financial results, as well as the FY 2008-2009 Community Partnership budget request, was approved unanimously.

A motion to approve the minutes of the Feb. 25, 2008, and March 17, 2008, LINC Commission meetings was approved.

A motion to move to close the meeting to consider matters pertaining to legal actions, causes or action or litigation was approved by all present.

The public meeting was closed.

The public meeting reconvened.

The public meeting was adjourned.

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Bart Hakan
Richard Hibschman

Judy Hunt
Rosemary Smith Lowe
Mary Kay McPhee
Gene Standifer

LINC staff **Rick Bell** introduced a report on the partnership between LINC, the City of Kansas City, Mo. and the Palestine Neighborhood Development Corp. to provide services at Palestine Caring Communities:

> **Opal King**, PNDC President, reported on new services available through the Caring Communities partnership, including utility assistance, home painting, and a computer lab.

> Palestine Caring Communities site coordinator **DeWayne Brigh**t reported that the new services are the result of important partnerships:

>> The Matthew 25 Project is a partnership between the Palestine Neighborhood Caring Communities, William Jewell College and the City of Kansas City, Mo. that is aimed at utilizing volunteer labor to paint the exterior of residents' homes as well as perform selected major and minor repairs.

>> Through a partnership with the Full Employment Council, PNCC is now a SHARE Network Access Point (SNAP) where residents can use the computer lab as a one-stop system to look for jobs and training opportunities as well as access resources from organizations, businesses and government agencies throughout Missouri.

>> PNCC is working with Central High School to form a Dropout Prevention Center to assist in assisting students at risk of dropping out. The center will serve as a small learning environment for academic and life enrichment that will prepare the students to become more productive in their school lives.

> **Deletta Dean** of the KCMO Neighborhood and Community Services Dept. reported the city recognizes the value of the services Caring Communities has brought to the Palestine neighborhood. She reported the city provides a full-time Code Enforcement Officer from the Neighborhood Preservation Division.

Rowland introduced **Dr. Marjorie Kaplan**, superintendent of the Shawnee Mission School District. Kaplan is retiring from the district to direct the Phoenix, AZ.-based Beat the Odds Institute, which provides mentors to principals in at-risk schools. Kaplan reported that in her 16 years of service, the Shawnee Mission School District has undergone significant demographic changes. She spoke about effective responses to these changes, including:

- Increasing services for English Language Learners (ELL)

- Lengthening the school day

- Providing Saturday field trips

- Offering parent education at night (including babysitting and snacks)

- Offering a core curriculum that emphasizes phonics, comprehension, and direct instruction of English for ELLs

- Training teachers in the cultural diversity

- Sensitizing teachers to the needs of students

- Having teachers perform a diagnosis of every student's learning level each fall

- Providing medical and dental care

LINC President **Gayle Hobbs** presented the May *LINC in Review* video.

Missouri Division of Youth Services director **Tim Decker** gave a presentation on the state's juvenile justice system. In contrast to the punitive approach taken by some other state juvenile justice systems, Missouri's takes a therapeutic approach which is both humane and effective. Decker requested that LINC consider assisting DYS in a documentary film project.

A motion to authorize LINC to determine the feasibility of a documentary film project in partnership with the Missouri Division of Youth Services was approved.

Lori Worth Smith, a communications consultant for the Independence School District, reported the district is seeking volunteers, supplies and corporate sponsors for the July 27-27 Extreme School Makeover – an effort to refresh and update schools in western Independence and Sugar Creek which are becoming part of the district in the fall.

LINC staff **Lee Bohannon** introduced a presentation on the LINC Chess Club. A video slide show of the recent annual chess tournament was shown. **Dale Lombard**, coordinator of the LINC chess program, introduced student **Richard Cole**, who won first place in the tournament's K-6 division.

The meeting was adjourned.

THE COMMUNITY AGENDA FOR AMERICA'S PUBLIC SCHOOLS

The challenges our nation faces in educating all of our young people are alarming. Yet in seeking solutions we too often find ourselves divided. Public schools are too fundamental to our democratic values to leave isolated from other community institutions. This does not serve our children well. We must act collectively.

Schools now enroll the most diverse group of young people in our history, and we know that their progress depends on the environment in which they live and learn. We see stagnant high school graduation rates and unacceptably low performance in math and science. Too many students are disengaged, and too many young people are seen as problems rather than as individuals with assets, hopes and dreams. As citizens, we are less involved with our schools and in our democracy. Community issues – poverty, violence, family stability, substance abuse are school issues.

These are realities – not excuses. Surely our schools need qualified teachers and strong principals, and like all public institutions they must be accountable. But just as surely we know that our young people and their families need more connections, more support, more opportunities, and more learning time to be successful. We can and we must do both. We must create effective schools that have robust relationships with families and other community institutions.

We cannot make this happen without a willingness to work together. Missing from the education reform and accountability debate, however, is serious dialogue about how to harness the shared capacity of our schools and communities to achieve our common goals.

Therefore, we propose The Community Agenda for America's Public Schools.

The Community Agenda is built on four core beliefs

- **Communities and schools are fundamentally and positively interconnected**. Engaged communities build strong schools; effective schools are essential to strong communities.

- **Schools can make a difference in the lives of *all* children.** The quality of schools matter. High academic standards, rigorous curricula, aligned tests, clear incentives, high quality teachers, and strong professional development, and effective leadership are important factors for student success.

- **Children do better when their families do better**. We recognize this inextricable connection and actively support the strengthening and empowering of families.

- **The development of the whole child is a critical factor for student success.** Children grow into successful adulthood through high-quality instructional opportunities in school and out of school, by exploring their talents and interests through experiences that stretch their aspirations and by receiving the social, emotional, and physical support they need to succeed.

At the heart of our Community Agenda is a *commitment to work together to create strong and purposeful partnerships* for change and results.

This idea – fully embraced – would make all Americans responsible and accountable for excellent schools and the positive development of all our young people. Every institution that influences positive outcomes for children and youth must be part of the agenda - schools, families,

government, youth development organizations, health, mental health and family support agencies, higher education and faith-based institutions, community organizing and community development groups, unions and business. Each brings assets and expertise, and each must change how it does its work, and all must work together to close the opportunity gap that many of our children and youth face.

The Results We Seek

We believe results matter. Experience tells us that when schools and community partners align their resources toward common results young people will succeed. These are the results we seek for all students:

- Children enter school healthy and ready to learn.

- Students are engaged, motivated to learn and involved in their communities.

- Students learn in positive, safe and respectful environments before, during and after school.

- Children and young adolescents are healthy – physically, socially and emotionally.

- Families are actively involved in the education of their children and are committed to post-secondary opportunities for them.

- Children and youth live in self-sufficient and supportive families and communities.

- Young people succeed academically and graduate from high school ready for post-secondary education, careers and success as family and community members.

When we achieve these results young people will have the knowledge and sophisticated skills they need to contribute to the economy and the confidence, competences and commitment to family and community needed to sustain a just and effective democracy.

Strategies that Work

The capacity and energy of a whole community of partners belongs at The Community Agenda table. Schools and their community partners must work together to support the core teaching, learning, and development purposes of education and to strengthen families, and the community.

A growing number of schools and their communities are moving in this direction. They are reclaiming their schools as centers of community. These places are called community schools by many, but by other names as well – community learning centers, full service community schools, schools as hubs, community-based integrated student supports at schools. These places have already begun the transformation we envision in their curriculum and instruction, scheduling, school layout, and especially relationships and responsibilities among school staff, students, families and community partners. They rely on multiple inter-related strategies to achieve results:

- **High expectations focused on high achievement encourage students to move forward.** Every adult in the community acts on the belief that all students can learn, succeed, and contribute to society.

- **A focus on real-world learning engages students**. Students apply their learning through service learning, civic and environmental education, and see the relevance of their coursework in their lives. Moreover, youth and the school itself help to solve problems in their own community.

- **Bridging school and community resources helps students broaden their skills and aspirations.** School and community resource are integrated to provide academic support, enrichment opportunities, mentoring relationships with caring adults, internship and job training opportunities, conflict resolution training and more. These opportunities encourage students to discover their unique assets and talents (academic, artistic, athletic, musical, leadership, and scientific) and develop socially and emotionally.

- **Addressing barriers to learning supports student success.** Schools address social, emotional, physical and mental health issues affecting individual students and their families, as well as the entire school community, before major problems erupt.

- **School facilities are welcoming to all.** Schools are open to students, families and community members – spanning the generations – for learning and recreation, before and after traditional school hours, into the evenings, on weekends and summers.

Effective implementation of these strategies requires local capacity to build and bring together community leadership, manage school and community resources, and engage everyone in the work of improving the lives of young Americans.

Policy Recommendations for The Community Agenda

The following recommendations will guide the signatories to The Community Agenda as we work to craft policies that support our goals of enhancing the learning and development of all our young people as well as strengthening schools, families and communities.

Results-focused Partnerships

Through results-focused partnerships all government and community institutions can be aligned and applied in a more coordinated and effective fashion. We propose that federal, state, and local government leaders provide concrete incentives that improve the coordination of existing funding streams and support broad-based, local coalitions designed to develop and sustain partnerships between schools, families, and communities.

Youth, Parent and Community Involvement

The people and places affected by public policy must have a voice in its implementation. Policy must enable youth, parents, and community leaders to be partners in the planning and oversight of school reform and related family and community initiatives.

A Broad-Based Accountability Framework

A single standardized test should not be the basis for judging schools or students. We recommend an accountability model that includes multiple measures of academic achievement as well as measures of engagement, attendance, social, emotional and ethical competencies, physical well-being, and family and community involvement. Further, government and community leaders must be accountable for creating conditions that enable young people and their families to thrive.

Public Access to Data

Data that goes beyond test scores are critical if schools, families and communities are to identify challenges and work together. All public agencies concerned with children, youth and families should make disaggregated data available to the public on an array of indicators related to student learning and development as well as key family and community factors.

Professional Development and Capacity-Building

Policymakers must ensure that teachers, principals, other school personnel and people in social work, youth development, health and mental health, and community development are of high quality, and have the training and ability to work more effectively with families and communities and with each other.

Increased Investments

Ensuring that disadvantaged students in under-resourced communities have access to an excellent and equitable education has been the cornerstone of national policy for more than 40 years. The Community Agenda calls for adequate – and additional - funding for essential school functions; early care and education; out-of-school time enrichment opportunities; mentoring; preventive health, mental health, and family services; family and community engagement; and service, civic, and environmental learning opportunities.

Our Call to Action

Equal access to a high quality education and the support students need to succeed are fundamental to our democracy. Student success is critical for all Americans, young and old, and for our future as a nation.

The President and the Congress should designate a Commission including key Cabinet secretaries and other national, state, and local leaders concerned with youth, family, and community to launch a national conversation on The Community Agenda and define specific legislative and programmatic recommendations for its implementation. The recommendations of the Commission should lead to a White House Summit on improving results for children, families, and communities.

As signatories, we embrace the challenge of The Community Agenda for America's Public Schools. We urge our national, state and local leaders to immediately adopt policies guided by the core beliefs and recommendations we have set forth. We call upon all those engaged in leading, managing or supporting schools, families, and communities to make The Community Agenda their own. We invite you to join us.

> For further information, please contact:
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July 15, 2008

New Vision for Schools Proposes Broad Role

By SAM DILLON

Randi Weingarten, the New Yorker who is rising to become president of the American Federation of Teachers, says she wants to replace President Bush's focus on standardized testing with a vision of public schools as community centers that help poor students succeed by offering not only solid classroom lessons but also medical and other services.

Ms. Weingarten, 50, was elected Monday to the presidency of the national teachers union at the union's annual convention. In a speech minutes later to the delegates gathered in Chicago, Ms. Weingarten criticized the No Child Left Behind law, President Bush's signature domestic initiative, as "too badly broken to be fixed," and outlined "a new vision of schools for the 21st century."

"Can you imagine a federal law that promoted community schools — schools that serve the neediest children by bringing together under one roof all the services and activities they and their families need?" Ms. Weingarten asked in the speech.

"Imagine schools that are open all day and offer after-school and evening recreational activities and homework assistance," she said. "And suppose the schools included child care and dental, medical and counseling clinics."

By laying out that expansive vision of government's role in the public schools, Ms. Weingarten waded into a fierce debate among Democrats seeking to influence the educational program of Senator Barack Obama, their party's presumptive presidential nominee. In an interview last week, she said the ideas in the speech amounted to "what I'd like to see in a new federal education law."

In her 10 years of service as president of the United Federation of Teachers, which represents New York City teachers, Ms. Weingarten has defended teachers' economic interests, raising her members' salaries by 43 percent in the last five years. But she has also proved willing to accommodate the city's ideas on improving schools. She has embraced charter schools, and last year — even as teachers unions elsewhere were opposing performance pay plans — negotiated an arrangement in New York that gives bonuses to teachers in schools whose poor children show broad gains in test scores.

With her move to the presidency of the national union, with 1.4 million members, Ms. Weingarten gains a broader platform from which to influence the nation's education debates. Although the federation is smaller than the country's other teachers union, the National Education Association, with its 3.2 million members, A.F.T. presidents have had an equal or larger political profile because presidential tenures in the bigger union are restricted by term limits.

Two previous presidents of the United Federation of Teachers, [Albert Shanker](#) and [Sandra Feldman](#), also rose to lead the A.F.T.

"My sense is that Randi Weingarten is continuing Al Shanker's tradition, clearly standing up for the interests of teachers but also trying to engage in thoughtful education reform that will be good for students," said Richard D. Kahlenberg, a senior fellow at the Century Foundation whose biography of Mr. Shanker, "Tough Liberal," was published this year.

On Sunday, Mr. Obama spoke to the convention by satellite feed from California, and he mixed criticism of the No Child law with praise for teachers' contributions and an exhortation to Americans to meet the nation's responsibility to educate all children. He quoted a young Chicago teacher as telling him that she had been annoyed by a tendency "to explain away the shortcomings and failures of our education system by saying, 'These kids can't learn.' "

"These children are our children," Mr. Obama said. "It's time we understood that their education is our responsibility.

"I am running for president to guarantee that all of our children have the best possible chance in life," he said, "and I am tired of hearing you, the teachers who work so hard, blamed for our problems."

Convention delegates gave Mr. Obama a standing ovation.

Ms. Weingarten takes national office with robust support of the rank and file. "The last eight years of the Republican presidency have really been a threat to the middle class and to public education," said William Gallagher, a high school social studies teacher in Philadelphia for 33 years. Ms. Weingarten, he said, would "work hard to make sure the new president, whoever he is, puts education on the forefront of issues in this country."

In Ms. Weingarten's speech, she praised the ideas of a group of Democrats led by Tom Payzant, the former schools superintendent in Boston, who have argued that schools alone cannot close achievement gaps rooted in larger economic inequalities, and that "broader, bolder" measures are needed, like publicly financed early childhood education and health services for the poor.

Another group, headed by the Rev. [Al Sharpton](#) and Schools Chancellor [Joel I. Klein](#) of New York, issued a manifesto last month urging the nation to redouble its efforts to close the achievement gap separating poor students from affluent ones and blaming "teachers' contracts" for keeping ineffective teachers in classrooms.

Ms. Weingarten said the nation needs a new vision for schools "that truly commits America to closing the achievement gap once and for all."

"Imagine if schools had the educational resources we have long advocated, like quality pre-K, smaller classes, up-to-date materials and technology and a nurturing atmosphere, so no child feels anonymous," she said.

Ms. Weingarten, whose mother was a teacher in Nyack, N.Y., is a lawyer who was union counsel during the 1980s and 1990s. In the last decade, Ms. Weingarten taught high school history for six years in the Crown Heights neighborhood of Brooklyn.

In the interview, she said: "We all have to work tenaciously to eliminate the achievement gap and to turn around low-performing schools. But the folks who believe that this can all be done on teachers' shoulders, which is what No Child tries to do, are doing a huge disservice to America."

SCOPE OF WORK

Comprehensive Study of Poverty in the Kansas City MSA
A Joint Proposal by the Mid-America Regional Council (MARC) and
University of Missouri – Kansas City (UMKC) Center for Economic Information (CEI)

In order to measure the progress of any poverty initiative in the Kansas City Metropolitan Statistical Area (MSA), it is important to first establish an accurate poverty baseline for comparison. The research conducted under this proposal would accomplish exactly that. Moreover, by Civic Council forging a partnership with MARC and UMKC's Center for Economic Information, this project increases the capacity of the Kansas City region to conduct social and economic research on behalf of the business community in the future.

In addition to providing an accurate poverty baseline, the project will also result in a set of poverty indicators that can be used to monitor the progress of any Civic Council initiative. This is because it utilizes two different kinds of data sets, both of which are updated annually and both of which are necessary to provide a full picture of impoverished people and places. The first kind of data is that found in standard decennial censuses, which provides summary tabulations for things like age, race, income, education and occupation. Data from successive decennial censuses are used to establish poverty trends. However, comparable data has not been available *between* censuses until this decade with the advent of the American Community Survey (ACS). Since 2001, the ACS has produced annual estimates of census-quality data with gradually increasing geographic resolution. Currently, it is providing estimates for cities and counties of at least 65,000 in population. In fall 2008, the 2007 data will be released annually for cities and counties of at least 20,000 in population. Beginning in 2010, data will be released annually for census tracts and block groups which are essentially the size of neighborhoods (somewhere between 1,500 and 8,000 people).

The second kind of data, such as the Public Use Micro-Sample (PUMS) and the Current Population Survey (CPS) are records of the actual survey results from individuals, but with all personally identifying information – e.g., name, address and phone number – stripped off. As a result, these data sets allow for much greater customization of the statistics that are tabulated, but the sample sizes mean the tabulations must be for relatively large geographic areas. Even with larger geographic areas, customization is still limited by the need for statistical reliability which, in practice, means that each statistic requires approximately 20 or so observations.

The PUMS data has the biggest sample of individual survey data sets – approximately 10,000 individuals in the Kansas City metropolitan area. As a result, it provides the capability to produce customized tabulations for about 15 PUMS areas (PUMAs) in the KC Metro. (Note: each PUMA contains a minimum total population of 100,000.) Until 2000, PUMS data was available only as part of the decennial census. It is now produced annually, the most current year being 2006 and 2007 data being released in early Fall 2008. It is expected that the PUMS data will be an exceptionally rich resource for this study.

The final report would consist of data, maps and narrative organized around answering the following questions:

1. **Who is poor? (10% of total project, 100 researcher hours)**

This chapter will examine the many faces of poverty in metropolitan Kansas City and how they are different in different parts of the MSA. A special effort will be made to identify the extent and characteristics of the truly poor, as opposed to those with low incomes but high levels of wealth, such as a significant portion of the elderly, or those with low incomes but for whom this is not indicative of a problem, such as students in college. The definition of the target population will be defined in conjunction with the Task Force, and this will help determine how to customize the tabulations.

2. **Which areas are poor? (10% of total project, 100 researcher hours)**

Living in poverty implies not just having low incomes or wealth, but living in areas with diminished access to opportunity. This chapter examines impoverished places and their attributes, focusing on those attributes that make breaking out of poverty exponentially more difficult for people who live there, as compared to less impoverished places. In addition to PUMS and standard census data, this chapter will draw upon block-level crime statistics, parcel-level housing condition, school performance and address-level business locations.

3. **How is poverty changing, and why? (15% of total project, 150 researcher hours)**

It is always easier to work with trends than against them, and there some trends in poverty that could ameliorate the problem, such as its gradually diminishing geographic concentration. Other trends, though, will likely make it worse, such as the diminishing economic opportunities for those without post-secondary education or training. A key strategy is to find ways to amplify the good trends and retard the bad. This chapter describes poverty trends in the Kansas City area and the research team working with the Metropolitan Economic Opportunity Task Force will use these data and task force discussions to identify some of the fundamental forces underlying the changes at which policy might be targeted.

4. **Is poverty a short- or long-term problem? For whom? (20% of total project, 200 researcher hours)**

For some, poverty is a long-term, trans-generational condition. For others, it is a temporary, one time event. Still others seem to live forever on the edge, slipping in and out of poverty. To the extent possible, this chapter identifies which story predominates in the Kansas City area and whether there are consistent demographic characteristics associated with each. The best kind of data to answer this question is longitudinal data on individuals – i.e., data that follows the same individuals over time. Unfortunately, such a data set does not exist for the Kansas City area. National data sets, such as the Survey of Income and Program Participation (SIPP), will be examined for the characteristics of those experiencing long-term and short-term poverty. These characteristics will be matched to PUMS and other data sets to estimate the number of people in the Kansas City MSA experiencing long-term poverty and the locations that generate it.

5. **Poverty and Race: What is the relationship? (10% of total project, 100 researcher hours)**

It is well-known that a disproportionate number of the poor are minorities. This chapter documents the extent to which this is true in the Kansas City area and which minorities are most affected. This data set will provide a basis fro the Task Force to work with the research team to discuss and attempt to figure out what other characteristics, besides race alone, raise the likelihood of living in poverty.

The first five questions will form the foundation for the research effort to begin to develop responses and actions that can impact poverty in the Kansas City MSA. The Task Force's involvement and direction to the research team will set in motion the next phase of the research effort.

6. **What are the fundamental causes of poverty? (20% of total project, 200 researcher hours)**

This chapter steps back and analyzes the information gathered and provides a concise statement of the most important influences on poverty in the Kansas City metropolitan area. In particular, this chapter will attempt to disentangle the relative importance of people vs. place vs. race. That is, to what extent should poverty be thought of as the result of individuals or families lacking key capacities vs. the result of places that are disconnected from opportunities and so foster such deficiencies? To what degree does race remain an important determinant even after taking people and place into account? This chapter will be developed in conjunction with the Task Force.

7. **What policies and investments are suggested by this data and analysis? (15% of total project, 150 researcher hours)**

Given a better understanding of poverty's extent and root causes, this chapter identifies, based on Task Force discussion, the policies and investments that can have significant potential to diminish poverty in the Kansas City area. This chapter will be the product of the Task Force's review and analysis working with the research team.

Ongoing Monitoring of Impacts

In addition to producing the above report, MARC and CEI will provide training to Civic Council staff so they can access the data sets and update the poverty tabulations in the future. It is anticipated that the SAS statistical software package will be used to access and tabulate the data. Many of the data set originators, such as the Census Bureau, either provide the data in SAS format or provide SAS programs to access the data and place it in SAS data sets for analysis. The Civic Council would need to acquire a license to the SAS software from the vendor.

Data access, tabulation and analysis in SAS requires the use of programs written in SAS's programming language. Any SAS programs acquired or written as part of this project will be provided to the Civic Council, along with sufficient training to use them properly.

The Big Apple gets poorer

Jul 17th 2008 | NEW YORK

From The Economist print edition

The federal definition of poverty is challenged by local government

Illustration by Claudio Munoz

FED UP with the slow-moving federal government, America's local municipalities and states have recently launched many reform plans themselves, including health care (Massachusetts's universal health initiatives) and global warming (California's emissions caps). New York City, already a model in policing and an emerging one in school reform, is now tackling poverty. To fight it properly you need good figures; as the late Senator Daniel Patrick Moynihan once said, "you can't solve a problem until you can measure it." So Michael Bloomberg, New York's mayor, announced on July 13th an alternative to the federal poverty measure.

This measure, now 40 years old, assesses pre-tax cash income against a number of thresholds, based primarily on food spending. But this has decreased from one-third to one-eighth of average household spending over the past four decades. Housing, which now makes up more than 30% of family expenditure, is not taken into account. Nor are regional cost-of-living differences. A two-bedroom apartment, for instance, costs $1,318 a month in New York City and $1,592 in San Francisco, contrasting sharply with the national average of $867 and one Mississippi county's $498. On the income side, non-cash benefits such as subsidised housing and food stamps, are ignored. So is the earned-income tax credit, a wage subsidy geared towards the working poor.

The new formula is based on recommendations made at Congress's request in 1995 by the National Academy of Sciences, but never implemented federally. Defining who is poor is a touchy subject. The NAS measures reflect spending on food, clothing, shelter and utilities, which are assumed to equal about 80% of median family expenditures. Adjustments are made for transport costs, child care and out-of-pocket medical costs.

This measure increases the numbers of New York's poor, from 19% of the population to 23%. Under the new calculus, the new poverty line for a family of four is $26,138, not the official federal level of $20,444. The new measure reveals that a smaller number of New Yorkers live in extreme poverty, but shows a higher proportion of working poor—and a shocking poverty rate among the elderly: 32%, compared with the federal estimate of 18%.

The mayors of Los Angeles, Miami and Cincinnati have praised New York's boldness. Congress may also be inspired to change the national poverty formula, and was due to start hearings on July 17th.

Poverty is an important part of Mr Bloomberg's agenda. He set up the Centre for Economic Opportunity (CEO) in 2006 specifically to reduce it. The centre created Opportunity NYC, America's first experiment in tying some benefits to conditions, such as turning up for parent-teacher meetings, having health-insurance or even going to the dentist. Last month it opened a financial-counselling centre for poor folk in the Bronx. Now the task of tackling poverty can truly get started.

June 30, 2008

Independence initiative aims to prevent child abuse, neglect

By KAREN UHLENHUTH, The Kansas City Star

An experiment based in the Independence School District seems to be succeeding in preventing child abuse and neglect among at-risk families.

The Child Welfare Initiative was launched four years ago after three Independence children were killed by child abuse in an 18-month period. A just-completed evaluation of the pilot's first year concludes that services by school-based social workers seem to have cut the rate of abuse and neglect in half.

"Thus far we're very pleased," Independence Superintendent Jim Hinson said.

"We think the initial results are very, very promising," said **Gayle Hobbs** , president of the Local Investment Commission, a partner in the experiment. The first year's evaluation was based on a fairly small sample, so the findings are somewhat tentative. **Hobbs** said the second and third years, when the program served more families, also will be evaluated.

Should the success continue, **Hobbs** said, the prevention services might expand to other districts. LINC and the state's Children's Division, another partner, have begun discussing that possibility.

Families can enter the program in two ways: Some come after teachers or other school staff members suspect that a family is having problems that could lead to abuse or neglect. Others are referred after being reported to the state's child abuse and neglect hotline.

In 100 cases sent to the Children's Division after hotline calls, there were findings of abuse or neglect, but they were not serious enough to require court involvement. In 472 other so-called "alpha" cases, the division found no evidence of abuse or neglect, but it did find serious stressors, such as unemployment or drug use.

One distinguishing feature of this approach, **Hobbs** said, is that many families served are "the alpha cases. These are families where phone calls have been made. We're doing a lot of prevention." Amanda Hupman, 20, has no history of abusing or neglecting her children, now 1 and 2 years old, but child-welfare workers were worried about the stress in her life. Although she graduated from William Chrisman High School in Independence, Hupman says she cannot read or write. When she became pregnant with her older son about three years ago, Jennifer Ford, a social worker at the school, began working with her.

Ford said she has seen significant progress.

"She's gotten way more confident in her parenting skills," she said. "She's getting better at trying to figure things out on her own and learning she can't count on those around her."

For the first few months after Hupman's older son was born, she regularly phoned Ford for refills of diapers and formula. Ford has not gotten one of those calls in six months. The two have moved on to bigger matters. Ford is helping Hupman find an apartment so she can move out of her father's home. She also is helping Hupman become more responsible.

"I've hooked her up with a volunteer at a church who's going to show her how to write checks," Ford said, "so if she gets her own apartment, she will be more capable of doing that on her own." Researchers at Washington University in St. Louis compared the outcomes of Independence's alpha families to alpha families in the Raytown School District, which has a similar demographic profile. Those families did not receive services.

Fifty percent of the Raytown families were reported to the hot line again, compared with 27.5 percent of the Independence families, which had received services.

The program has school-based social workers who serve families within the school population. The workers might visit their families several times a week to help reduce stress that otherwise could lead to poor or abusive parenting. Assistance can involve parenting advice, counseling, emergency food or money to pay utility bills -- even picking nits off the head of an infected child.

Because troubled and overwhelmed families often are isolated, **Hobbs** said, "our primary goal was to get families more connected in their neighborhood and their school, to have more supports, whether it be for employment or emergency assistance."

At a recent meeting, the Independence school board renamed the program after a former board member and Independence principal who pushed to address child abuse. The program officially is the Van Iten Caring for Kids Project, in honor of Al Van Iten.

Child Abuse Prevention
Year 1 Report

Prepared for:
Missouri Department of Social Services Children's Division & Independence School District

Funded by:
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Independence School District Child Welfare Initiative Evaluation

Section 1: Executive Summary

With nearly one million cases of child maltreatment and 1500 maltreatment-related fatalities reported per year, implementation of effective programs to prevent child abuse is a moral imperative (www.cdc.gov/ncipc/factsheets/cmfacts.htm). Without prevention programs, children are at risk of numerous adverse physiological and mental health effects. Estimates of direct costs of child maltreatment (judicial, law enforcement, and healthcare) per year hover around $24 billion, with long-term economic consequences reaching $69 billion annually (Fromm, 2001). Unfortunately, even as more programs are implemented to prevent child maltreatment, the number of maltreated children also rises (Gershater-Molko, Lutzker, & Wesch, 2007). Concurrently, scientific knowledge regarding the efficacy of such programs lags behind the large number of services being offered, making evaluation of such programs critical to designing and implementing more effective programs.

The Child Welfare Initiative of the Independence School District is both a school-based and home-visiting prevention program in direct partnership with child welfare. The program is primarily aimed at working with those families that may come to the attention of child welfare for various risk factors but are not yet engaged in acts that meet legislative criteria for abuse or neglect. The Independence School District, Child Welfare Initiative, is a program that operates as a part of Missouri Caring Communities (MCC). This broad initiative, including child care and quality early care and education, is integral to achieving Missouri's overarching vision for children: To have strong families and communities where parents work; to have children succeed in school; and to grow up healthy, safe, and prepared to enter productive adulthood.

This report reflects the first year of a multi-year evaluation effort and contains two separate types of evaluation of the Independence School District's (ISD) Child Welfare Initiative (CWI). A process evaluation was completed the Local Investment Commission (LINC) to evaluate the program's implementation of the strength-based case management model that is a core aspect of CWI. An initial effectiveness evaluation that examined the rates of child abuse or neglect reporting following services was completed by a Washington University research team led by Dr. Jonson-Reid and also supported by the Center for Mental Health Services Research Center at Washington University in St. Louis.

Child Welfare Initiative. The Independence (Mo.) School District (ISD) has a long history of providing a large array of supportive services to students and families within the school setting. In 1992, the district began to extend services beyond the school through a Head Start Transition Demonstration Project. ISD hired Family School Liaisons (FSLs) to provide strength-based case management (SBCM) for students and families, extending Head Start-like services into the early elementary school years. In 1996, the district's partnership with the Local Investment Commission (LINC) allowed expansion of these services into LINC-supported Caring Communities sites. This expansion provided the opportunity for children and families in four schools and surrounding neighborhoods to work with FSLs to solve problems and remove barriers which affected learning, employment, health care delivery, and personal, social, and community relationships. Then, in 2005, ISD embarked on a ground-breaking partnership with the Missouri Children's Division to use SBCM and FSLs to reach at-risk families earlier and to more effectively prevent child abuse and neglect.

While other school and child welfare partnership models exist, many of these include models where employees of a child welfare agency are relocated to schools to provide services. Instead, the Child Welfare Initiative (CWI) receives referrals from the Children's Division of the Department of Social Services and uses school-based staff to combine home visitation, case management, and school-based follow-up services for students. This program is different from traditional school-sponsored home visitation programs such as Home Instruction for Parents of Preschool Youngsters (HIPPY) which seeks to increase parent involvement to prepare young children for success in school (http://www.hippyusa.org/) or Parents as Teachers, which provides general parenting support to new parents who are not necessarily considered "at-risk" (http://www.parentsasteachers.org/s). The majority of referrals to CWI are for preventive services that include families with significant risk factors for but not yet evidence of abuse or neglect. These families are offered home visitation services by a school social worker or trained paraprofessional to address the needs of the student and/ or family. CWI also serves a smaller number of families already served by child welfare for allegations of abuse and neglect, as well as referrals directly from school personnel. The program is flexible according to family-need and focuses on capitalizing on family strengths and minimizing weaknesses. CWI staff are called Family School Liaisons (FSL) and provide a range of counseling, psycho-educational, and case management services (based on the Strength Based Case Management model) depending on the needs of the child and family to prevent child maltreatment and enhance children's success in school.

Evaluation. In 2005 the Missouri Children's Division invested funds into selected child abuse prevention activities conducted in different areas throughout Missouri. A portion of the remaining funds were used to contract for an evaluation of community-based early intervention services to prevent child abuse and neglect in at-risk families. In 2006, the Children's Division contracted with Dr. Jonson-Reid and the Center for Mental Health Services Research and at Washington University in St Louis to examine whether or not these projects are associated in a reduction in future reports of child abuse or neglect for the cases they served. The evaluation focused on the three projects providing in-home services to various types of at-risk families. All three of the programs, Family Support Network's (FSN) Project First Step, Nurses for Newborns (NFN), and the Independence School District's Child Welfare Initiative (CWI), included in this evaluation are a type of home visitation program. In addition, funds were provided to LINC to conduct a qualitative assessment of the goals and process used by the Child Welfare Initiative. This document includes both the LINC case file evaluation and the Washington University evaluation of later reports of child abuse or neglect for CWI.

Summary. A case file review was conducted by LINC to examine how well the Strength Based Case Management (SBCM) approach is being applied by the ISD CWI staff and to see if implementation was associated with FSL and client reported perception of success. Overall, the review indicated that the majority of cases showed strong adherence to the SBCM process and contained measurable goals. Too few of the goals had corresponding FSL and student and/or family success ratings to adequately evaluate the perception of success related to the written goals, but those that were complete indicated positive ratings.

The Washington University evaluation team examined whether or not the families served by CWI were subsequently reported for abuse or neglect and, if reported, whether they had cases opened for in-home or foster care services provided by child welfare. Overall the results were very positive. ISD CWI cases had a moderate likelihood of a report after services starting and before closure, but few of these cases resulted in the need for in-home services or foster care. Very few cases had reports of child abuse or neglect after CWI services ended. ISD CWI cases had lower rates of reports than those of a matched comparison group in a similar district that lacks a similar program.

Sunday, July 20, 2008

A money mess bites hard in KC classrooms

By JOE ROBERTSON - The Kansas City Star

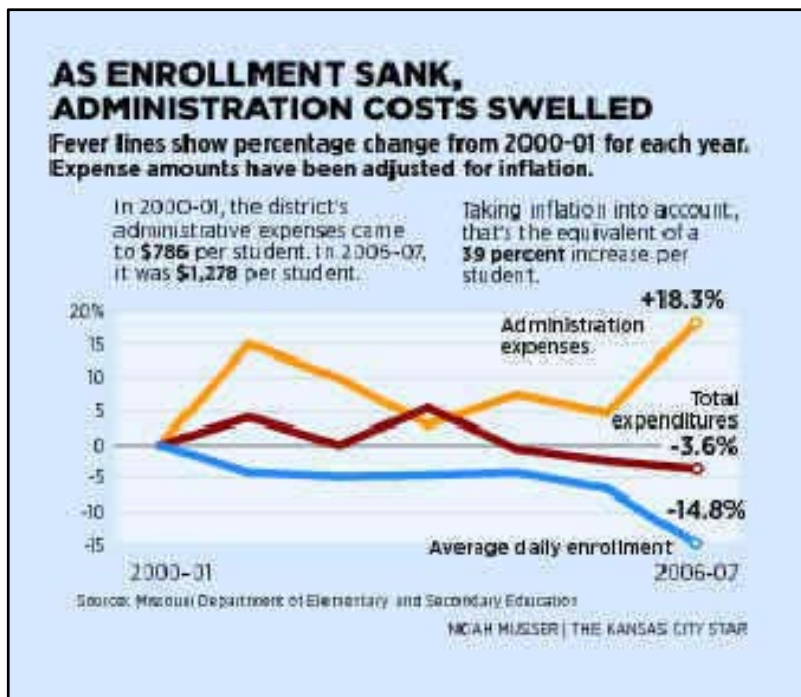Here's a test question that the Kansas City School District has been failing for many years.

You are a shrinking school district with slowly eroding revenue. Do you:

A. Take the harder route and cut administration, close enough schools and park enough buses?

B. Put off building maintenance and offer weak teacher salaries while paying more than $2 million a year to law firms?

Kansas City, an analysis of state data shows, has done too much of B and not nearly enough of A.

As the district begins this summer to try to trim costs, it once again wades into a morass of budget woes:

•Among the area's 10 largest districts on the Missouri side, Kansas City spends roughly 55 percent more per student on administration than the average for the nine others.

•Kansas City's administration costs have increased by 18 percent since 2001, accounting for inflation, while attendance has dropped nearly 15 percent.

AS ENROLLMENT SANK, ADMINISTRATION COSTS SWELLED

Fever lines show percentage change from 2000-01 for each year. Expense amounts have been adjusted for inflation.

In 2000-01, the district's administrative expenses came to $786 per student. In 2006-07, it was $1,278 per student.

Taking inflation into account, that's the equivalent of a 39 percent increase per student.

Administration expenses +18.3%
Total expenditures -3.6%
Average daily enrollment -14.8%

Source: Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education

NOAH MUSSER | THE KANSAS CITY STAR

•The district spends almost 50 percent more per student to maintain its buildings and property.

•Its transportation costs, while declining, remain two and even three times as much as those of surrounding districts.

•And legal fees are off the charts, five times the average per-student costs of other districts, reflecting a troubled district that has been "under siege," attorney Maurice Watson said.

No doubt Kansas City faces obstacles that its neighbors do not.

While many families choose Kansas City for some of its popular programs, many other families stay in the district because they don't have the means to pursue an alternative.

More students come from poor families. More come to school with deficits in language and technology.

And it's simply harder to cut administrators and close facilities while trying to keep so many programs and strategies designed to raise the poorest average test scores in the area.

"We don't have the same balance as other districts … putting money into the classrooms," interim superintendent John Martin said. "We want to refocus."

Patience wears thin, said David Oliver, a member of a citizen Education Reform Task Force who took particular interest in trying to understand Kansas City's budget.

These problems aren't new, he said.

"They say they're working on it," Oliver said. "But where have they been all these years?"

Administration costs

The Kansas City district has a lot going on.

New reform efforts. New schools, as the district goes to K-8s. New programs, including some funded by federal grants that require the district to add personnel.

All these things need administration, Martin said: "You need administrators to keep order and to guide programs."

The district also is coping with turnover in key areas, such as building principals. New principals often need extra administrative support.

"We have gotten fat," Martin said. "As we get better, we will need fewer people than we do now."

The problem is that the district always seems to be in transition.

Much of the district's troubles have risen from its inability to establish and support a clear vision of programs and goals, said a 2006 peer review by the Council of the Great City Schools.

The money spent on programs and all the structures around them would be fine, said the council's executive director, Michael Casserly, if the district could sustain academic success in the classrooms.

Administration costs per pupil	Ratio of students per administrator
Annual average 2003–07	(2006-07)
Kansas City $1,104	Kansas City 149:1
Park Hill $991	Raytown 188:1
Raymore-Peculiar $894	Hickman Mills 192:1
Hickman Mills $792	Independence 203:1
Independence $723	North Kansas City 220:1
North Kansas City $663	Liberty 222:1
Raytown $654	Raymore-Peculiar 226:1
Lee's Summit $630	Lee's Summit 241:1
Blue Springs $578	Blue Springs 273:1
Liberty $460	Park Hill 287:1

"The trick is in implementing programs faithfully enough to get academic gains for the money spent," Casserly said. "The concern (in the 2006 review, plus a supplemental review in 2007) has been in implementing programs properly. That has been a problem for some years now."

Administrative costs the district reported to the state for executive, building-level and business management have fluctuated between $23.4 million and $29.5 million over five years. The average cost of $1,104 per student each year easily topped the list of area districts.

Former superintendent Anthony Amato ushered in a wave of new programs. Executive administrative costs soared in 2006-07, in part because Amato scrambled to fill leadership gaps with outside consultants.

School board president Marilyn Simmons said the board is determined to reign in administrative costs. The board has sent out queries to accounting firms seeking volunteers to join an advisory committee that would help the school district analyze its budget.
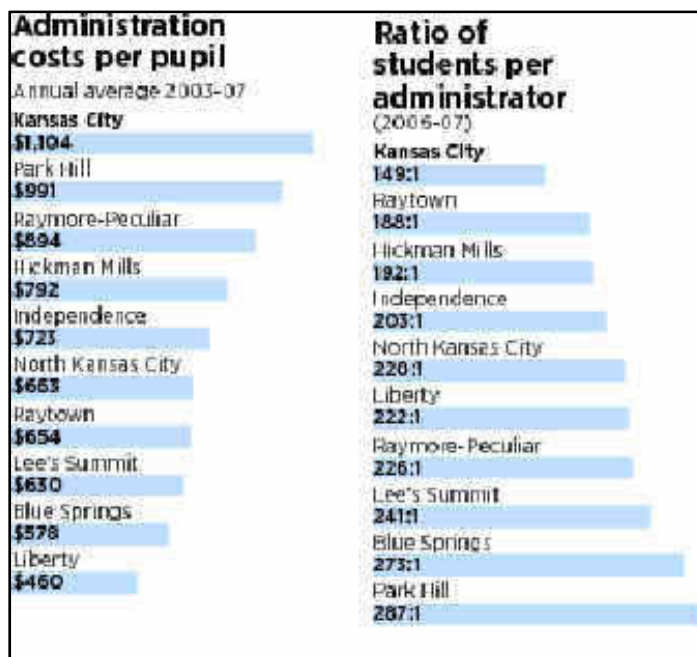
"We're too top-heavy," she said. "We need more accountability, better definitions of jobs and measured outcomes."

Transportation

Too many buses arrive at schools with less than a full load of students.

Transportation director Gene Kieczykowski knows that.

But knowing that there's a problem doesn't make it easy to solve.

"It's like a puzzle," he said. "A gigantic puzzle."

Kansas City has been taking steps to reduce transportation costs that mushroomed during the magnet school era and the peak of the desegregation litigation of the 1980s and 1990s.

Transportation costs per pupil
(2006-07)

District	Cost
Kansas City	$980
Hickman Mills	$443
Lee's Summit	$425
Park Hill	$421
Liberty	$419
Independence	$392
Blue Springs	$367
Raymore-Peculiar	$361
North Kansas City	$360
Raytown	$279

The $22.6 million the district spent in 2006-07 — amounting to $980 per student — was cut to $18.5 million for the most recent school year, Kieczykowski said.

That still leaves the district paying more than $800 per student on transportation, roughly twice the per-student costs in neighboring districts. That's also more than twice the average transportation costs of other urban districts, according to the Council of the Great City Schools.

The district went to a three-tiered bell time last year. It meant high schools started at 7:10 a.m. and some elementary schools didn't start until 9:30 a.m., and allowed the district to reduce its bus fleet by 91, Kieczykowski said.

Kansas City also has begun converting to more neighborhood K-8 schools, but the benefits to be gained are lagging. Students who were in the fifth grade or higher when the transition began were allowed to continue at their former school.

Buses have to venture farther to transport some students. Kansas City has schools that draw students from throughout the district, including its Montessori programs and Foreign Language Academy, plus the Paseo Academy of Fine and Performing Arts and the Lincoln College Preparatory Academy at the high school and middle school levels.

The district added a district-wide program with the Afrikan Centered Education Collegium Campus in 2006-07, and it will be opening the Southwest Early College Campus in the fall. These schools aim to build new enrollment, but they're also spreading current enrollment thinner.

"All these logistics affect the overall cost," Kieczykowski said.

Building operations

Buses aren't full, and many buildings aren't, either.

The district has closed more than 30 buildings since the 1970s as its enrollment has fallen from 77,000 in the early 1960s to 23,000 last year, and it expects to close five to seven more once the conversion to K-8s is completed next year.

But the district still operates some 70 schools, which, on average, are more than 30 percent below capacity.

Many of the buildings are old, too. They average more than 60 years old, and they've been suffering from budgeting that has not invested enough in regular maintenance, Martin said.

The result? Kansas City spends $540 more per student each year operating and repairing its buildings than its neighbors do, on average.

Kansas City also spends more than $300 more a year per student on its facilities than other urban districts, according to the Council of the Great City Schools.

The district reported $38 million in building costs in 2006-07.

"When you defer too much maintenance, you're playing a catch-up game," Simmons said.

Kansas City's unusually large number of buildings forces up personnel and utility costs, Casserly noted, but closing schools doesn't necessarily make a clean cut. Savings are usually offset to some degree by an increased cost in transporting students to schools farther away.

Some of the pressure on building costs will be relieved now that a voter-enacted boundary change has transferred seven schools to the Independence School District, but Kansas City will immediately lose the local property tax revenue supporting those schools and will lose state funding over the next two years.

Building operation costs per pupil
(2006-07)

District	Cost
Liberty	$1,994
Kansas City	$1,647
Park Hill	$1,202
Independence	$1,182
Raymore-Peculiar	$1,015
Hickman Mills	$966
North Kansas City	$922
Lee's Summit	$919
Raytown	$896
Blue Springs	$863

Legal fees

The Kansas City district has kept lawyers busy for many years, and the bills keep coming.

Over five years, the district has been averaging $2.4 million a year in legal fees reported in state records through the 2006-07 school year.

And school board records show that at least $2.8 million was billed in 2007-08.

The roughly $100 per student the district has been spending has no comparison among neighboring districts, which on average spend less than $20 per student.

For company, Kansas City can look across the state to its urban counterpart, St. Louis, a larger district that averaged $2.9 million a year in legal costs, or about $70 per student.

Both districts have been beset by legal battles.

The bulk of Kansas City's fees have gone to the Husch Blackwell Sanders law firm, which has been the district's counsel through a host of confrontations.

They include the struggle over control of Westport High School in 2004, an ongoing battle with charter schools over transfer of revenue, the federally ordered cleanup in 2006 of the district's program for obtaining tens of millions of dollars in federal grants for technology, negotiations with incoming and outgoing superintendents, and now the boundary dispute with Independence.

Legal costs per pupil
Annual average 2003-07

District	Cost
Kansas City	$96
Hickman Mills	$41
Independence	$24
Blue Springs	$23
Park Hill	$20
Raytown	$16
Liberty	$15
Lee's Summit	$13
Raymore-Peculiar	$8
North Kansas City	$6

And that doesn't count employee lawsuits, litigation over special education services and other actions.

"If you are an organization that tends to be under siege, it's going to result in higher legal fees," said Maurice Watson, the school board's attorney with Husch Blackwell Sanders. The board approves the expenses, he said, because in many cases tens of millions of dollars in revenue is at stake.

"When you are at war, you have a lot of expenses," Watson said. "It is indeed unfortunate."

In the future, the district needs to return to a more stable existence like neighboring districts where legal matters can be handled as needed by a couple of law firms kept on retainer, Martin said.

"But right now we're targeted with too much legal action," Martin said. "Kansas City is not there yet."

What lies ahead

No easy relief awaits.

The district began the summer still needing to make $17 million in cuts to its projected budget to keep from dipping into its reserves during the coming school year. That was before Jackson County announced earlier this month that property assessments were less than projected.

Kansas City is going to have to cut $12 million more.

The district needs to escape a bad spiral, Simmons said.

"We will do it," she said.

The advisory committee of accountants, once it is in place, should help restore public confidence, she said. And the board intends to seek the panel's help in producing a public-friendly budget report that it would maintain on the district's Web site.

"Brighter days are ahead," Simmons said. "And the board is working toward those days."