

LINC Commission Meeting

June 21, 2010



Kindergarten students from Garfield Caring Communities in the Kansas City, Mo. School District line up for their graduation ceremony.



Photo credit:
Steve Bradford
Garfield Site Coordinator

3100 Broadway, Suite 1100 - Kansas City, MO 64111 - (816) 889-5050 - www.kclinc.org

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, June 21, 2010 | 4 – 6 pm
Kauffman Foundation
4801 Rockhill Rd.
Kansas City, Mo. 64110

Agenda

- I. Welcome and Announcements
- II. Approvals
 - a. **May minutes (motion)**
- III. LINC President's Report
- IV. LINC Finances
 - a. Third Quarter Financials
 - b. 2010-11 Budget
- V. Caring Communities
 - a. Summer School
 - b. Kansas City, Mo. School District
- VI. LINC Initiative
 - a. Chess
- VII. LINC Health Briefing
- VIII. Adjournment

July meeting will be at Kansas City Central Library



THE LOCAL INVESTMENT COMMISSION – MAY 17, 2010

The Local Investment Commission met at the Kauffman Foundation, 4801 Rockhill Rd., Kansas City, Mo. Chairman **Landon Rowland** presided. Commissioners attending were:

Bert Berkley
Sharon Cheers
Steve Dunn
Herb Freeman
SuEllen Fried
Anita Gorman
Bart Hakan
Adele Hall

Richard Hibschman
Judy Hunt
Rosemary Lowe
Sandy Mayer (for Mike Sanders)
Richard Morris
David Rock
David Ross

Attendees introduced themselves.

Rowland made the following announcements:

- Homeowners facing foreclosure can take advantage of free counseling at the Hope Can Help event May 26 at Bartle Hall
- **Bert Berkley** received an honorary degree from Missouri Valley College in Marshall, Mo., where he delivered the commencement address on May 8.

A motion to approve the April 26, 2010, LINC Commission meeting minutes was passed unanimously.

Sharon Cheers announced the death of former LINC Commissioner **Dr. Oscar Pinsker**.

Deputy Director **Candace Cheatem** reported students at LINC programs in Center, Grandview, Hickman Mills and Lee A. Tolbert Academy participated in the “Buckle Up” art contest sponsored by the National Highway Transportation Safety Administration. Participant **Jeramiah Adams** of Tolbert Academy reported on what he learned from the experience.

Hobbs reported LINC is working with the Missouri Division of Youth Services to develop a youth mentoring partnership.

LINCWorks co-chair **Terry Ward** reported responsibility for Missouri’s Temporary Assistance to Needy Families (TANF) program will be transferred from the Dept. of Economic Development (DED) to the Dept. of Social Services (DSS). Under the revised system, beginning in October, DSS-Family Support Division will perform intake of new cases; case management will be performed by vendors. The change occurs as federal performance requirements are being increased for the states. An RFP for case management services will be issued by DSS.

A motion for LINC staff to respond to the RFP and develop a proposal was passed unanimously.

Rowland invited Hickman Mills School District superintendent **Dr. Marge Williams** to address the Commission. A video featuring Williams’s remarks on upcoming changes to the district was shown. Williams reported on the district’s efforts to create a positive transition for students,

families and teachers as it undergoes consolidation in the face of declining enrollment and revenues.

North Kansas City School District superintendent **Dr. Todd White** reported the district is working with LINC to expand Caring Communities to an additional school.

LINC staff **Pam Ealy** reported eight LINC sites participated in a Cinco de Mayo celebration at Northeast Elementary School on May 5. A video of the event was shown. Discussion of the event and of recent changes to the Northeast neighborhood followed.

Hobbs reported LINC will provide a variety of summer programs in the Center, Fort Osage, Grandview, Hickman Mills and Independence school districts as well as at charter schools and Wayne Miner Community Center. Programs include before and after summer school services and all-day camps.

Hobbs reported on planning for the 2010-2011 school year. LINC is negotiating with the Kansas City, Mo. School District to be present in 20-21 schools. LINC will discontinue the Before & After School program at University Academy, which has sufficient resources to provide a program itself.

LINC staff **Dr. Bridget McCandless** gave a presentation on high risk insurance pools. Currently many states, including Missouri and Kansas, offer high risk pools to make health insurance affordable to persons who are unable to purchase insurance on the individual or small group market. Under the new federal health care reform act, \$5 billion will be distributed to states to support high risk pools until federal high risk pools are established in 2014.

Rowland announced 10 LINC Caring Communities sites are teaming up to present a School and Community Day Festival on May 22 at Banneker Elementary School.

Rowland reported LINC staff **Brent Schondelmeyer** is developing the Community Advisory Committee annual performance report for the Health Care Foundation of Greater Kansas City.

The meeting was adjourned.



Monday, Jun. 14, 2010

Final Bell: Kansas City's Effort to Save Its Schools

By Karen Ball

Westport High is a magnificent old building, all brick and fine masonry, set high on a hill in the heart of town. It's more than 100 years old, just a few blocks from where Ernest Hemingway lived before he went off to drive ambulances in the Great War. So one might expect an angry roar against its inclusion in a plan to close nearly half of Kansas City's 57 public schools this summer. Instead the vibe is more, What took you so long?

After years of foot-dragging, infighting and wild spending sprees, Kansas City is finally making a last-gasp attempt to save its school district by abruptly cutting it by half. School districts all over the country are wrestling with problems in urban centers, but Kansas City's plan has caught national attention because of its scope. With the exception of New Orleans, forced to start from scratch with its schools after Hurricane Katrina, Kansas City superintendent John Covington's plan to close 26 schools at once and dump 700 of the district's 3,000 employees, including nearly 300 teachers, is considered the most drastic "rightsizing" out there. "Hail Mary — that is a very good way to describe this," says Covington. ([See pictures of a diverse group of American teens.](#))

The situation in New Orleans "was created by a natural disaster. Kansas City is due to a human-made disaster," says Jack Jennings, president of the Center on Education Policy, a public-school advocacy group. There are many factors to blame — white flight, forced desegregation, teachers' strikes, revolving-door leadership. (Covington is the 26th superintendent in 40 years.) Money hasn't been the problem. In 1985, a federal judge ordered the state to pony up \$2 billion to address decades of unconstitutional treatment of black children. The district blew the money on a six-lane indoor track, an Olympic-size swimming pool and a mock court complete with judge's chambers and a jury deliberation room. "They recruited Russians to teach fencing!" Covington marvels. Meanwhile kids weren't proficient in the basics — and still aren't. At a majority of the schools, fewer than one-quarter of the students were proficient in math and English last year. On any given day, the buildings are half empty. Kansas City had some 75,000 public-school students in the 1960s. Today it has about 17,000. ([See pictures of a public boarding school.](#))

Covington, a former principal and teacher, hit town a year ago with the task of figuring out how to cut \$50 million in spending and avoid bankruptcy. Within days he put teachers, principals and the bloated administration on notice. "We're not an employment agency. We are a school district," he says. Covington is not about half measures. The district's downtown headquarters will be sold off, and the reduced staff will move elsewhere. Principals had to reapply for their positions. Low-performing teachers must prove they deserve to keep their jobs. Surprisingly, the teachers' union is on board. "Everyone is tired," Covington says of the union's partnership. "We are just tired."

Jennings says Covington's plan is overdue. Cities like Boston, Chicago and Washington already downsized to better serve the schools that remain open. Kansas City and Detroit, he says, are bringing up the rear: "Don't be too depressed about Kansas City. Some of the most exciting things happen when people ... are willing to try new things. As bleak as it is, that's where you find the seeds of improvement."

Across town, McCoy Elementary is also closing. The school was built in 1914; it has termite damage and a warped gym floor, and it needs other repairs. So it's on Covington's list. "They say that's what the goal is — to make the rest of the schools better, but I don't know," says Valeria Jackson, a single mom who moved to this hollowed-out but relatively quiet neighborhood to be down the street from McCoy. Now her three elementary-age kids will have to ride a bus to another school. "If they board up this building, what's that going to do to the neighborhood?" Still, there's one place that would definitely be on her to-close list: Westport, where she attended high school. "That place was so dark," she says. "Schools need to have light."

- Find this article at:
- <http://www.time.com/time/magazine/article/0,9171,1993877,00.html>

Posted on Sun, Jun. 06, 2010

The Kansas City School District works to erase a tragic history

By RICK MONTGOMERY
The Kansas City Star

It's 1991 and Stanley Peebles II has entered a new world. Central High School — the core of Kansas City. He can't believe this.

Stanley and his classmates are looking at a row of desks with robotic arms stretching out, able to pick up blocks. Downstairs there is an Olympic-size pool with underwater windows. It's the first day at this \$32 million school, Stanley can choose either the "Classical Greek" or "Computers Unlimited" track, and the front foyer alone — man, fresh! Marble floor and Greek columns.

Back in sixth grade, Stanley shivered in class for a month because the boiler broke. In junior high, Nancy Reagan made a visit to address the plight of drug-infested, gang-haunted schools.

But this place — yeah, tight!

It's too bad, in this magnificent magnet school, that test scores and graduation rates will never climb out of the dumps.

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He is only 30, but Airick Leonard West knows the tragic history of the school district he wants to help save.

He knows the saga of the lawsuit that took flight before he was born. How it led to the most ambitious school-desegregation plan a court ever crafted. How \$2 billion in taxes, imposed by a judge, produced lavish new buildings across the Kansas City School District, yet never turned around lowly achievement.

He knows, as we all do now, that money doesn't teach kids.

"We can't change the past. But it is our obligation to know the lessons of that past," says West, the Board of Education president, leaning forward in a chair, his voice serious, unwavering.

"We need to draw from those lessons the wisdom to move forward."

But "forward" today is moving in the opposite direction.

Instead of building facilities decked out to impress baby grand pianists, world-class fencers and lovers of Latin, the district is closing 40 percent of its schools in a mission to better serve the students who struggle to remain.

Urban educators nationwide will be watching all summer as an uncommonly united school board and a team recruited by Superintendent John Covington try to steer the district — now down to 17,000 students — through its second wholesale transformation in a quarter-century.

“I’ve more hope for Kansas City now than I’ve had in many years, “ says Anne L. Bryant, executive director of the National School Boards Association. “This was a long time coming — you’re shifting from a capital-intensive budget to a human-intensive budget. That’s how you get better education.”

The irony, not lost on West, is that the older fellow seated three chairs to his right, board member Arthur A. Benson II, was a huge player in the last transformation.

For two decades as attorney for the plaintiff schoolchildren in the desegregation case, Benson promised that magnet schools would enhance learning for all students by luring more white ones into class — even as residents of all colors were moving out.

Benson, who is white, voices no regrets. And 15 years to the month after the U.S. Supreme Court rejected the formula that funded that spending spree, leaving the district too overbuilt and overstaffed to sustain on its own, he now supports Covington’s “rightsizing” effort.

“I don’t see any conversion on my part. More like one long continuum” to provide the area’s most at-risk kids the schooling they deserve, Benson says — and the schooling that the city desperately needs.

For the goal to become reality, experts say, district leaders need to take a magic eraser to a lifetime of images not directly related to the classroom. Like revolving-door superintendents. And phantom contractors.

To do this, it’s important to understand that practically everyone is to blame for these failing schools. Absent parents. Pregnant teens. People who abandoned the district.

Flip back a few pages in the district’s history and note that 1969 is the last year that local voters, who even today are mostly older and white, approved a school bond issue. (It also happened to be the last year that white students outnumbered black.)

Many blame past school boards, and outsiders, for micromanaging administrators to the point of picking up the phone and not hanging up until certain folks got jobs. Some making threats.

“The big they,” former assistant superintendent Cheri Shannon calls this group.

Others blame an overly critical media, or long-gone superintendents nailed by the media, for, well, faking a back injury or living outside the district.

From Liberty to Lenexa, “you don’t even have to say more than the words ‘Kansas City School District’ to trigger an emotional reaction,” says William Worley, a local historian and author.

“Rightly or wrongly, the school district has provided that scapegoat many people need for everything that bothers them about the city,” he says. “To have such a clearly challenged school district, in the minds of so many who’ve left the city, it justifies leaving.

“Why? Well, because people left — it’s absolutely circular.”

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It’s 1956. *The Rev. Earl T. Sturgess is pounding a sign into his front lawn that reads, “Not for sale — neither my home nor my moral convictions.”*

Many of his white neighbors along the 3300 to 3700 blocks of Benton Boulevard do the same. The area has become home to some black newcomers, their kids free to move into formerly all-white schools. Sturgess, a Presbyterian, is fine with that.

But real estate agents want residents to get nervous and sell.

Sturgess and a band of neighbors aren't caving to this "blockbusting," which is largely guided by redlining by the school board.

But their resolve won't last. In a few years, they will all move south or west.

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How we all got to this place is a story easy to tune out in these times, in a city that extends to, count them, 15 public school systems and now boasts a constellation of charter schools.

So deep in the district's past are quarrels that go to race, neglect, patronage, turnover and squandered opportunities, they rumble in our atmosphere like traffic noise.

Lawyer and activist Clinton Adams, one of the school board's fiercest critics over the years, personifies as well as anybody the district's bare-knuckled hostilities. While worried that Covington may be moving too fast, Adams says he is happy that "nobody is trying to integrate the district these days."

"They all see the need to *improve academic achievement*. It's the same thing I was saying 20 years ago."

Hopes seem high that this summer may usher in an era of accountability, hard but defensible decisions, prudent purse strings and a sharp focus on student success.

In March came what West calls an overdue "cathartic moment" — the bold decision to chop \$50 million and keep two dozen schools from reopening in August. Some 285 teachers — and more than 700 jobs total — will be cut.

Covington's moves, however unwelcome by the neighborhoods hit by closures, have drawn civic applause and global attention.

"What made it unique was that these decisions had been delayed for so long, so many buildings had to go at once," says Jack Jennings of the Center on Education Policy, a think tank.

"The danger now is turmoil at the beginning of the school year. Covington has got to improve education in the remaining schools ... but, traditionally, these big-city districts just have trouble getting organized even in a normal year."

By lopping off waste, renegotiating every contract and funneling resources to curriculum and teacher training — in ways yet to be ironed out — the district intends to undo its place in the nation's memory as the "Waterloo" of court-ordered racial integration, as Time magazine declared in 1996.

Or "the poster child for how money can fail," as put by University of Colorado political scientist and author Joshua M. Dunn.

"That's sort of Kansas City's claim to fame on the policy radar," echoes Tulane University sociologist Kevin Fox Gotham, "and that kind of attention from people who follow urban education is going to continue."

The district has its institutional jewels, including Lincoln College Preparatory Academy, which ranks among the highest-performing public schools in Missouri. Parents praise the learning at the Foreign Language Academy, Border Star Montessori and the Afrikan Centered Education Collegium Campus.

Even at Central, decreed "academically deficient" by the state, journalist Joe Miller in his 2006 book "Cross-X" chronicled the successes of an award-winning debate team driven by the high expectations of teacher Jane Rinehart.

The bright spots prove what groups such as the Council of the Great City Schools know: Individual schools and programs can turn around.

Strong principals, committed instructors and consistency in curriculums have raised performance and reduced dropout rates, even in the most impoverished places. It has happened in selected schools in the slums of New York and in Chicago, Charlotte, N.C., and San Francisco.

But what has not been discovered, says University of Missouri-Kansas City School of Education dean Wanda Blanchett, is the trick for turning around entire districts.

And it is this whole, complex story of the Kansas City School District — out there detailed in white papers, books and court files — that looms as the largest cloud over its chances to turn anything around.

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It's 1981 and Tom Kipp is tired.

He's the silver-haired principal at Southwest High School on Wornall Road — alma mater to a Nobel laureate, famed writers, opera and ballet stars, space researchers. There are three men in his office, from district headquarters, expressing disappointment in the school's recent achievement scores and reports of low morale.

Kipp started there as a health teacher in 1956, and in his 10 years as principal, eroding district finances have required him to give about 20 teachers the ax. Minority enrollment, mostly bused in, has climbed from 2 percent to about 60 percent, but overall attendance is down. He has had to eliminate calculus and advanced placement classes — little wonder students aren't scoring so high.

He is thinking, if you don't want me here, give me a transfer. He's 55 but feels older, putting in 70-hour weeks. One of his sons recently asked, "Dad ... are you sick?"

He will take a vice principal position elsewhere.

For its first 56 years, Southwest had only Kipp and two previous principals. Thereafter, new principals would come and go for the rest of the decade.

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Asked why success in these schools should even matter to residents outside the district, Mayor Mark Funkhouser recalls the morning that CNN, The Associated Press and MSNBC called with the same urgent question: How could any major city shut down half its public schools?

It had not occurred to the outsiders — nor to anyone who might Google "Kansas City School District" when considering taking a job at, say, Cerner Corp. — that the term applies to a relatively modest chunk of geography on a multicolored map.

Funkhouser riffles through pages of city-produced data. What do *you* think accounts for the city missing out on 70,000 jobs dating back to 1995, when its rate of employment growth is compared to the U.S. average? And who, he asks, will pay for the infrastructure needed on the outskirts to sustain all those who won't reside in the hollowed-out heart of the metro?

He throws up his hands: "We're losing a family from the district, on average, every 12 hours! And we know that. It's a disaster unfolding under our noses, killing us financially, environmentally and in every other way."

One of the killers has been that the district's boundaries were more or less cemented in place by an act of the Missouri legislature during white flight of the 1950s.

Unlike most other urban areas, the city proper could and did expand, but restrictions on school annexation kept the district from doing anything but shrink.

In Kansas City proper, the student population in public schools today stands at about 75,000 — a number rivaling those attending *only* the Kansas City district 45 years ago.

When classes open this fall, Kansas City could drop below the top five districts in the metro area in enrollment.

Beyond the decline in numbers, the competency of those who remain — and graduate — matters.

Studies and surveys have attempted, with mixed results, to quantify what seems self-evident — that effective public schools produce the kinds of workers and customers whom businesses seek. The National Center for Education Statistics found that high-school dropouts were three times as likely to receive public assistance than high school graduates not attending college.

It is unclear, however widely discussed, the degree to which public elementary and secondary education dictates where companies locate. Many surveys put stronger emphasis on what universities offer. But no real estate agent would dispute that public kindergarten through 12th grades have been dictating where *families* locate.

“When they arrive here, many have already been warned by their work colleagues to stay out of the Kansas City district,” says Stacey Johnson-Cosby, for 13 years selling homes across the metro for Reece & Nichols. “Once that decision is made, you’re not likely to change minds.”

Credit the district, also, for some distant history that most Kansas City students never learn in school. “The Troost wall,” as some scholars know it.

By sociologist Gotham’s account, published in his book “Race, Real Estate, and Uneven Development,” district officials “explicitly used Troost Avenue as a major school boundary line” after the U.S. high court in 1954 ruled unconstitutional “separate but equal” school facilities.

Before that, the Missouri constitution had not just allowed for segregated schools. It required them.

All blacks in Kansas City who attended secondary school before 1955 found their way to Lincoln High School. Many moved in from suburbs that had closed black schools or never opened them.

After the wall began to rise, the tax base withered east of Troost. Real estate agents profited from moving blacks in and moving whites out.

(The carefully plotted boundaries of Central High allowed its African-American enrollment to jump from zero to 90 percent in seven years. Paseo High School followed — 88 percent black by 1969. But west of Troost, Southwest High stayed mostly white until the late 1970s.)

Voters rejected 19 straight bond campaigns. Teachers struck in 1974 and 1977.

“I lost 100 of my best students each strike,” Kipp recalled later. “Both black and white parents ... pulled them out because they couldn’t see their kids losing 30 or 40 days of school.”

Across the city, schools began to put up with broken toilets, rats, boilers so faulty that some classrooms froze while students down the hall baked. Federal monitors threatened to cut off funding if the schools did not integrate.

In 1977, the school board, envisioning a huge busing plan across the metro, sued 18 suburban school districts in Missouri and Kansas, both of the states, and federal agencies.

By 1984, U.S. District Judge Russell G. Clark had determined enough was enough. He flipped the suit around, making students the plaintiffs and the district a defendant, but the state of Missouri would pay about three-quarters of the costs to improve the schools.

Infamously, he would order increases in local property and earnings taxes to cover the district's bill.

But he took suburban districts off the hook and made the program voluntary — a move that many scholars believe doomed the magnet schools to come.

Clark acknowledged as much in an interview before his death in 2003.

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It is 1994. *Al Hunley, who oversees the district's inventory lists, is mumbling in bed: "There is no way we lost a baby grand."*

Earlier that day, Missouri Attorney General Jay Nixon held a news conference in which he accused the district of being unable to account for millions of dollars of public property, including an \$8,000 baby grand piano.

More than \$200,000 worth of purchased computer equipment is "lost," Nixon charged, and criminal investigators are poised to look into it.

The next day, the piano is found where it is supposed to be — in the auditorium of Paseo High. Turns out inventory lists between two schools that share the auditorium got mixed up. Most of the other equipment ultimately is tracked down as well, but the record-keeping is a mess.

The episode speaks to the rancor between the district and a state under court orders to pay for the district's desegregation.

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The district's latest bid to right itself has given new online life to a 2000 study by the Cato Institute.

The paper rips into the court-ordered "Kansas City experiment" that built a kingdom of new and renovated schools to replace those rotting. Seventeen fresh structures arose, and the experiment did all that education experts at the time advocated.

It raised teacher pay by 40 percent, reduced class sizes, set one of the highest per-pupil expenditures in the country — and "none of it worked," author Paul Ciotti concluded.

Test scores at the high-school level would not budge despite more than a decade of tax increases ordered by Clark.

"At one time the Kansas City experiment was going to be a progressive light unto the educational nation," Ciotti wrote. "Instead, it became the most expensive desegregation plan in the nation and, in terms of achievement-bang-for-the-educational-buck, the biggest failure, too."

Benson, elected to the school board in 2008, disagrees that the plan was a bust: It delivered safer, cleaner buildings that could not have been built otherwise.

And when the courts eventually excused the state from paying for the plan, Missouri allowed the district to keep a local levy double the rate voters had last approved back in 1969.

Authors such as Dunn, academics such as UCLA professor Gary Orfield and local civic leaders who remember the experiment cite many reasons for its inability to boost overall achievement.

But one factor resonates today as the new transformation rolls out.

“The board and the superintendent,” says Orfield, “just never got their act together.”

Top bosses continued to come and go (to date, 26 superintendents since 1969).

Just as important, the end goal of teaching kids seemed to be lost. Black parents protested that their children could not get accepted into the most popular magnets because of targets set for admitting middle-class whites. Many questioned why it was deemed so important for whites to even be in classes.

New textbooks and supplies were ordered but sat around for weeks. Magnets or no, most students chose to go to schools with their neighborhood friends.

Here and elsewhere, the pull of traditional schools returned.

The U.S. Supreme Court in 1995 delivered the death blow in a 5-4 ruling, owing to the arrival of Justice Clarence Thomas. The court found that the Kansas City plan had improperly sought an “interdistrict” remedy by luring students and teachers from the suburbs.

But Thomas’ opinion went further: “Racial isolation itself is not a harm,” and he chastised Clark for his “experiment with the education of (the district’s) black youth.”

Normally not one to agree with Thomas’ conservative views, the black activist Adams in this case sent him a letter of thanks.

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It’s 1999, and Assistant Superintendent Cheri Shannon is in her office when Benjamin Demps Jr., the new head of the district, walks in holding a letter.

“Says here the state might be taking away our provisional accreditation,” he says. “What’s that mean?”

Demps, just a few weeks into the job, is not an educator. He is a government administrator and former Air Force staff sergeant hired to dramatically shake things up.

Shannon replies: “It means we’re in big trouble.”

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Among those encouraged by the 2010 board’s direction is Bernard Taylor, who in 2001 became the district’s 22nd superintendent in 32 years. He took the job during the district’s bleakest hours, as the state of Missouri had yanked its accreditation and looked poised to take control of the schools.

Now enjoying his work as superintendent for Grand Rapids, Mich., schools, Taylor sums up his time here this way: “It was a mean-spirited experience. ... It never was about educating children. It’s about how to mollify, placate, cater to organizations more concerned about adults. The contracts — who gets what?”

He credited Covington for staring down that history and “basically going for broke.”

“When I left (in 2006), we had 26,000 pupils. And now there’s 17,000? Nobody loses students like that,” says Taylor. “Nobody.”

Taylor, operating in what he calls “compliance mode,” stayed for a while — five years! — and helped the district get its provisional accreditation restored. Still, the lesson was clear: After \$2 billion — all those hearings and monitoring and then returning the district from court to local

control — the most glittering school facilities in the nation could not solve the problems of urban education.

“We forgot about the goal, the key, and that’s educating the kids,” says Crosby Kemper III, director of the Kansas City Public Library. “It was a massively failed social experiment ... and it was imposed on the people.

“Now we get the opposite, which is very much a grassroots movement. That makes a huge difference.”

And it begins with West.

A soft-spoken neighborhood activist who passed through 11 school districts as a kid, he started researching the Kansas City school system after he acquired guardianship of a teen who attends high school.

“Look, we are all guilty of turning our backs on the young scholars of this district,” he says. “It took one of them living in my house before I got involved.

“People were frustrated, but people were not standing up.”

Then, in 2008, the year of Barack Obama, the atmosphere changed.

When West landed on the board that year, after several elections in which school board candidates had to be pried from the community to run unopposed, he offered to hold a “School Board School” to train future contenders. He expected to buy lunch for 20 people, tops. But the minute he sent a mass e-mail invitation, the replies started popping up on his laptop screen, with 30 RSVPs the first hour. Then 50, 80, on up to 120.

“People, perhaps as a result of the Obama election, seemed to gain this powerful sense that anything was possible,” West says. “And maybe the most implausible outcomes were possible if we reach our young scholars.

“We’ve come to a place where the board, the administration, parents, teachers, faith community, business community, neighborhoods are aligned in a way I haven’t seen before.”

This is about reconciling the past. OK, folks fled the district. West shrugs and says he understands. He knows people do what they think is best for their families.

So let’s be honest with ourselves, get serious about engaging with our kids — not “those kids,” he says — and write a new history.

Says Eugene Eubanks, who served on the court-appointed committee that monitored the desegregation plan: “We’ve shown we can build schools and close schools. What we haven’t done is demonstrate we can educate kids.”

The next chapter begins, as West would write it, with one question.

“Can we make this juggling act work?” he says. “I see us willing to stand ... but with all these diverse groups, can we make it work?

“My belief, maybe naively, is yes. We can.”

Coming later this summer

As the next school year approaches, The Star will present a series of stories on the Kansas City School District and the transformation that Superintendent John Covington envisions.

We'll take you behind the scenes with Covington and his team. We'll take you inside one elementary school to show you the challenges facing students, teachers and administrators.

We'll show you how students will learn in the district's revamped schools. We'll examine, among other things, how the district has spent millions of dollars over the years.

Look for the stories starting Sunday, Aug. 22.

Your community resource

Go to KansasCity.com for everything you need to know about the school district transformation. We're here to help you navigate the changes, with regular progress reports and links to the latest information.

Posted on Sat, Jun. 05, 2010

Pledge from KC district's 'war room': We're going to get it done

By JOE ROBERTSON
The Kansas City Star

When interviewing players for the mammoth task ahead — be they principals or administrators — John Covington usually brings them here.

Officially it's the superintendent's conference room.

But his staff calls it the “war room.”

Anyone unclear about the work ahead in the Kansas City School District's transformation plan will surely leave with a better grasp.

Fourteen white boards, some of them 3 feet by 4 feet, ring the room.

This is how Covington's administration tracks some 200 tasks under way. The boards are covered with grids, drawn in black marker, that circle the room like a barbed-wire fence.

It's an ominous visual, and Covington means it to be.

“The transformation of this district is a massive and innovative kind of plan, and you have to have a commitment to get it done,” he said regarding the principal interviews that took place here in May.

“You can't do it by coming in at 7 a.m., then beating the children to the parking lot in the afternoon.”

Schools must be closed and revamped buildings reopened. The district and its communities must shape their new vision. Curriculums must be rewritten. The approach to instruction must be revolutionized. Teachers must be trained, buses routed, staffs assigned, technology wired.

The column headings across the top of the boards call for the name of each task, the team leader responsible, the documents required, the start date, the completion date, three checkpoints along the way, notes and costs.

The work doesn't get any easier, particularly with Covington rushing to recruit a new chief operations officer to replace Roosevelt Brown, who left the district at the end of May.

Confidence is high, Covington said, and community support is strong.

“We are going to change the public school dynamic,” he said. “I continue to be hopeful and excited about the direction the school district is going. ... We're going to get it done.”

First come the tasks that must be completed to open schools in August. Then will follow the major work that can be done while school is in session. And there are longer-term plans in the works.

The urgent work

Assignment of principals and teachers: Most of the principals were picked at the end of May, but some posts remain unfilled. Schools considered turnaround projects will be selecting their staffs first. Then other schools will get their teachers assigned in accordance with seniority provisions in the teachers union agreement. Depending on how it all shakes down, the district might have to do some involuntary layoffs.

Community strategic planning process: Several hundred community members and district staff have been meeting to create the district's strategic plan.

School transition teams: The schools closing and those receiving their students created joint teams to meet throughout the summer and talk about needs and concerns. They are intended to help merge the two communities, protect the unique treasures of each school and aid in opening the new schools in August.

Moving services: Furniture from closed schools will be moved where it is needed in the remaining schools. Library resources will be sorted and merged. Computers and other technology will be redistributed and the wiring infrastructure modified to handle more equipment.

Repurposing committees: The Board of Education will be recruiting community leaders to join task forces for each school that is closing. They will be charged with working in each community to plan the future use, whether it is selling the building, holding it in reserve, remodeling it for new use or razing it for park space.

Preparing schools for standards-based education: Five schools will be piloting what could be, if successful, a complete restructuring of instruction. Staff and administrators will undergo training throughout the summer to install an education approach that groups and advances students according to the skills they learn, not by age or grade.

Installing new curriculum: Teachers and principals will be training in the new curriculum, most notably a new reading program.

Preparing expanded secondary schools: The high schools this fall will be adding seventh and eighth grades. The district needs to plan how to configure the buildings, separate middle schoolers from high schoolers, stagger bell times, plan new programming and strengthen security.

Creation of the office of community service and student support: The district is already recruiting community partners and enlisting more to participate in this office, which will be charged with gauging and improving customer satisfaction. The intent is to gather district and community resources into a one-stop shop.

Leadership professional development: The board has already approved \$500,000 to train principals and instructional leaders through the Washington, D.C.-based National Institute for School Leadership. Now that principals have been chosen, the district will begin planning its training schedule.

Data dashboard: Work continues in preparing a data system that will allow everyone from administrators to parents and students to access and analyze performance records.

Transportation routes: Every summer, the transportation department has to plot new bus routes. This summer it must do it again, routing students to fewer schools.

Marketing plans for the district and each school: The work is under way to build public confidence, rebrand the district and stem the migration of families. Each school will build its own plan.

Food service: The district has been losing revenue on outsourced lunch service. It is going back in-house this year. A new director is on board and is charged with making sure hot and nutritious meals are ready on day one.

Capital improvements: Some roofs and boilers and other capital projects will be mended over the summer. Other work can be done in the fall.

Fall projects

Individual learning plans: The district envisions creating individual learning plans unique to each student's needs.

Pay for performance: Covington intends to establish a way to incorporate classroom performance into its pay schedule for teachers. This will be a planning year with the teachers to further develop a fair and thorough evaluation process.

Distance-learning labs: Plans are under way with a contractor to build two distance-learning labs in each high school. The high-tech rooms are intended to bring together students sharing specialized courses and to connect classes with other programs, even internationally.

Planetarium: The district will be renovating the planetarium at Southwest Early College Campus.

Labs and technology: Science labs will be renovated and updated. Schools will be fitted with technology infrastructure to connect at least seven computers per classroom.

Other programming: Plans include increasing the number of foreign language offerings. The district also plans to offer single-gender classes, particularly in math.

East High School gym: A new gym will create separate facilities for boys and girls. (One of East's gyms was converted to a cafeteria when the school was kindergarten through eighth grade.)

Further ahead

International Baccalaureate feeder school: The district has applied for a grant to help develop an IB school that would serve as a feeder to Lincoln College Preparatory Academy. The Lincoln middle school building might be reopened for this purpose.

Biosciences feeder school: Also pending grant support is a plan to create a school specializing in biosciences, bioethics and agriculture. Knotts Elementary might be reopened for this school, which would capitalize on the region's strength in bioscience research.

A "green" school: This would likely need the help of a bond issue, as well as evidence of potential growth in enrollment. But the transformation plan envisions a new school that would use and display new technology in sustainable resources such as solar power and recycling water systems. The school also would serve as a lab for learning environmental science and technology.

New stadium: A combination of district capital project funds and private donations would support construction of a \$9 million outdoor stadium and athletic complex at the existing football stadium next to the African-centered education campus, the former Southeast High School.

Relocating the central office: Administrative offices would be moved out of the downtown building at 1211 McGee St. and probably into space at Manual Career and Technical Center. This relocation probably would occur in summer 2011.

Thursday, Jun 3, 2010

With last day of classes, 21 KC district schools fade to memory

By JOE ROBERTSON
The Kansas City Star

Jo Lynn Nemeth stayed behind, motionless in her seat, as the rest of the crowd left with the overwhelming news of Kansas City's plan to close schools.

Her school — McCoy Elementary — was on that list.

“It was the last time you knew you would be normal,” the principal recalled.

She knew then that this day would be coming.

Today, 21 buildings will watch children pass through their doors out into summer for the last time.

It's not an easy thing, telling a school goodbye.

The schools range from 17 to 101 years old, most of them older and tired. They are elementary schools, middle schools and a high school. Their communities and their district faced storms of economic change, racial politics and down-spiraling enrollment.

But the children and teachers leaving them today will take indelible memories with them, same as the generations before them.

“The school is their social community,” said Carolyn Barber, assistant professor of educational research and psychology at the University of Missouri-Kansas City.

“School is where their friends are. It's where many of the adults are who are important in their lives.”

Closing any one of them, on its own, would be noteworthy.

It's frightening to close so many at one time, knowing what's at stake, said former City Councilman Bobby Hernandez.

He still aches over the closing of his school, West Junior High School, 30 years ago.

It served many poor families, benefiting students who needed the chance only schooling could give.

“I spent all my early education there, my whole family did,” he said. “It belonged to *us*.”

He recalls only poor efforts to listen to the people so affected by the loss of the school — a heavily Latino community that felt like “the stepchild,” he said.

“It hurts,” he said. And then when you see the school left vacant — as has happened to his and many other schools closed in the past — “it hurts again.”

Nemeth felt that pressure, but also a sense of relief as the closing plan first weighed on her that Saturday in February.

If closings had to come, she said, here was “a chance to do it right.”

• • •

Westport High School senior Prince Jones didn't know if he could reconcile with his disappointment and regret.

He understood, he said, that there were too many schools in the district, too many empty seats. He'd seen the dire reports of impending bankruptcy if drastic cuts weren't made.

Thirty schools were named on the first closings list in February. It was pared to 26 before the board voted in March. Two more came off in May to make it 24. That included two schools already phased out before today and an adult classroom building.

The choices were difficult and pragmatic. He accepted that.

But that didn't ease his fear that Westport was headed for an unfortunate farewell.

He thinks poor academic performance and the lack of a student groundswell against the end pushed Westport to this point.

“... *We never even put up a fight,*” he wrote in a poem. “*Most of us never even made a sound...*”

“*No one here wears a halo... And that's why they're tearing her down...*”

Because seniors finish the school year ahead of the rest of the students, Jones already confronted his final day.

He sat in one of the deep window wells in the main hallway that afternoon, watching underclassmen wandering between classes, watching, he said, as “it slowly faded away.”

He was going to have to leave one last time — but how?

• • •

Richard Price's urge to return to his school hit him as he stepped out of his doctor's office after a checkup on a morning in May. Feeling mortal.

“It's a cold feeling running through you,” he said. “An empty feeling.”

Several times he had told himself, and his wife, that he must go back and see McCoy before they shut it down.

He'd meant to call on old friends from 53 years ago when they all graduated from McCoy to go to junior high.

“I wanted to remember life the way it was,” he said.

He drove there straight from the doctor's.

He didn't know if they'd even let him in, but Nemeth did, of course. Even toured the school with him.

There he remembered the smell of the maple syrup that flavored their peanut butter. He remembered the storm gutter around the playground where he played marbles.

Down in the basement he remembered the ashen smell of the old coal-fired boiler.

He remembered the engulfing dread when his teacher called his name to run down and alert the janitor when the burly man was firing it up too hot.

“You get down there and he’s shoveling coal into the burner with that big grain shovel, and sweat is dripping down his face and off his nose.”

Price left that day with the news from Nemeth that the school was planning an open house for anyone old and new to come back to McCoy.

She wondered if very many people would come.

•••

Mary Edwards made a dash of her own to Swinney with classmates from the 1960s.

They went not just to see the school again, but to guard the future of murals they had been stunned to learn were still in the school all these years later, hanging in the auditorium.

They found the brightly colored mosaics shaping scenes of their childhood.

She’d expected the joy of those pictures, feeling again how Swinney families became friends through Scouts, PTA, orchestra ...

She and her schoolmates were sure that those mosaic figures had actually been modeled off of themselves. But they couldn’t discern who was who anymore, except for Bill Musgrave.

No doubt that was him, the boy jumping rope. They recognized his shoes — bright red Hush Puppies.

Then came the emotional triggers that surprised her.

Standing in one of the classrooms, Edwards glanced at her feet. The wooden floors had been sanded and treated who knows how many times, but she saw old embedded marks.

She spied the holes where the wooden desks — hers and everyone else’s — had been bolted to the floor. And just like that, she was remembering when the school pulled them out, piled them up and sold them for \$1 apiece — and how her family had bought one and she played school at home.

At the same time, she saw the kindness in the teachers today, and the children single-filing through the hall — children with creations and memories of their own.

“It made me realize,” she said, “how lucky I was to be able to go to E.F. Swinney.”

•••

School closings strike deep, said education researcher and author Diane Ravitch.

Kansas City’s plan, closing 40 percent of its schools, is particularly stunning in scope, but not a lone action. Many districts are closing schools, sometimes as the ultimate punitive measure for poor performance, other times driven by starving budgets.

“It seems that some superintendents boast of how many schools they close,” Ravitch said in an e-mail to The Star. “School-i-cide doesn’t improve education, and it destroys social capital.”

While Kansas City considered a school’s academic performance when making its list of closings, the overarching reason was a looming budget crisis. But that is small comfort, Ravitch said, to communities preparing to lose their anchors.

“When schools are closed because of underenrollment,” she said, “it is a matter of sad necessity.”

•••

The Westport Class of 1957 wasn't thinking so much at first about the angst of some of the current students.

They wanted to secure old treasures.

Carol Williams worked with board member Duane Kelly, a '52 Westport alum, in boxing up old trophies from a storeroom that had been littered with broken pieces of long-ago triumphs.

Williams found, stuffed in a manila envelope, the trowel that laid the cornerstone. Williams felt then that her most emotional moment would come turning the worn masonry tool in her hand, dried mortar still streaking its blade.

But then they encountered the new Westport.

Teacher Paul DeBarthe invited them to speak to his English classes to help them with essays and poems to remember Westport.

The '57 class, nearly all white, shared the story of 1956, when they'd integrated Westport. The first black students came, and unlike other more-talked-of integrations, Westport's went smoothly, they said.

Not that they didn't know or feel racism in those days, Williams said.

But they knew the old way was wrong. Williams told about the maid she saw step into the doorway of a midtown drugstore — a black woman on her way home on a hot day.

Ma'am, please, she asked the waitress. Just a cup of water.

The waitress was nice about it, Williams recalled. She gave her a cup of water. There were seats at the counter, but the woman remained standing just outside the door.

"My heart went like this," Williams said, clutching her fist to her chest. "I knew it was wrong."

Tears welled in the eyes of the old class members before they were done. And in the end some members of the Class of 2010 came forward and hugged them.

Sunsierra Payne, a junior, will be moving with the rest of Westport's students to Southwest next year.

It seemed to her, for all that has happened to Westport — its struggle with test scores, the real and perceived strife within — that its ending would come silently, unmourned.

Instead, she came away from the visit with the Class of '57 believing a better goodbye is possible.

"I want it remembered the way the alumni remember it, not the way people think of it now," she said. "I like Westport for the good times."

•••

Of course, Price did contact all of those old friends from McCoy.

They joined a steady procession of people filing into the open house on a brilliant day near the end of May. School staff had to run to get more food to accommodate all the friends who squeezed around the elementary school's cafeteria tables.

The Thompkins twins — Darlene and Marlene — remembered standing in that very same hallway more than 50 years ago, getting their first polio shots. Darlene fainting at the sight of the seemingly giant needle.

Linda Jolly, who became a teacher and school counselor, came all the way from the St. Louis area because she'd heard that her favorite teacher, Mr. Miner, was supposed to be there. And she was hardly alone in those feelings.

“He’s up in the auditorium,” someone announced over one of the crowded cafeteria tables. And up they sprang.

“Don’t scare him, girls,” one of them said, then adding an aside, “They’re still swooning.”

Nemeth watched it all unfold, spanning generations.

She saw the former teachers like Conrad Miner — now 84 — and saw how he did not disappoint his long-ago students. He remembered whose dad was a dentist. He remembered the student who had been sent to report to him that his wife was having a baby. He remembered who sat where.

This was how Nemeth had hoped to say goodbye.

There in the joy among so many different teachers and students, she felt the difference the school has made.

“Nothing really changes,” she said. “What matters are good, solid relationships. Those are the priceless things.”

• • •

Prince Jones stood up from the windowsill at the end of his last day and blended one more time with the last Westport students.

He walked the concrete floors, past the rows of lockers and the paintings of tigers that many classes had put on the walls over the years.

One by one, he dropped in and chatted with some of his favorite teachers, sitting with Master Sgt. Kelvin Dixon, his ROTC instructor, at the end.

“He treated us like we were classy human beings,” Jones said. “Sometimes he cared more than I did. He was the reason I was able to graduate.”

He knows something about what it’s like for those saying goodbye to McCoy today, goodbye to Swinney, goodbye to Askew, Ladd, Woodland ... and so many more.

“I’ve cried about it,” Jones said.

But not this time. He left Dixon’s room, passed through the hallway and descended the front stairs, stepping through the blue doors and out into the day.

Goodbye, Westport.

LINC and Chess

This year marks over a decade of LINC's involvement in developing an ambitious school-age chess program.

Like many other LINC initiatives, chess started small but has grown into a substantial undertaking that is poised for further growth.

Opening moves

LINC's early involvement grew out of an effort at Blenheim Caring Communities, where in 1999 a group of male adults, known as Men on Move, started teaching children how to play chess. Early results were encouraging: better focus, fewer discipline issues and improved academic performance.

One of those involved was Lee Bohannon – initially a LINC volunteer, he later joined the LINC staff – who had a passion for chess. The effort at Blenheim continued for two years, when LINC received funding and support from the Kauffman Foundation for a broader chess effort.

With that funding LINC began developing a multi-site LINC chess program focused primarily in the Kansas City, Mo. School District. Initial development was led by Zeb Fortman, a well-known chess instructor in the community.

Within a couple of years, development of the program shifted to Dale Lombard, who greatly expanded the effort and been instrumental in the growing success of the chess program. The table below shows steady program growth (note: 2007-08 was the year LINC left the Kansas City, Mo. School District) and an ability to serve more students at a lower per-student cost.

Maps on the following pages show the growth of the LINC chess program into other school districts and school sites over the years.



School Year	Students	LINC Contract Costs	Cost Per Student
2001-02	125	Kauffman grant	
2002-03	198	\$43,011	\$217.23
2003-04	174	\$29,999	\$172.41
2004-05	124	\$37,391	\$301.54
2005-06	243	\$37,728	\$155.26
2006-07	255	\$21,939	\$86.04
2007-08	197	\$20,645	\$104.80
2008-09	316	\$36,337	\$114.99
2009-10	415	\$30,116	\$72.57
Total	2,047	\$257,167	\$125.63

Key to the effort was the implementation of a Chess Academy three years ago. Volunteers attend a 10-week series of training sessions – eight sessions are required, while 11 are offered to provide volunteers flexibility. The instructional approach is to focus on understanding each chess piece – one week for each piece, i.e. pawn, rook, bishop, etc. There were five chess academy graduates last year; 16 this year. In general, chess academy attendees include parents, community members and LINC site staff members.

Once they have completed training, volunteers are ready to help students learn to play chess. The chess program is offered twice a week at each site. A contracted chess instructor teaches the first session of the week; the volunteer provides follow-up instruction at the second weekly session.

Purpose of chess

The focus of chess is personal development and growth – not searching for Bobby Fischer. The discipline of chess is like “brain exercise” which encourages structured decision making and thinking ahead and requires strong focus.

Playing and practicing chess at the school sites leads up to periodic LINC-hosted citywide chess tournaments that attract over 100 players along with the adults. The focus of the tournament is on participation, not competition. While most activity happens during the regular school year, summer chess play sessions are held on alternate Saturdays and Sundays at various Kansas City Public Library branches (Plaza, Waldo and Trails West).



Dale Lombard instructing students

LINC chess instructors also visit LINC summer camp sites for weekly sessions.

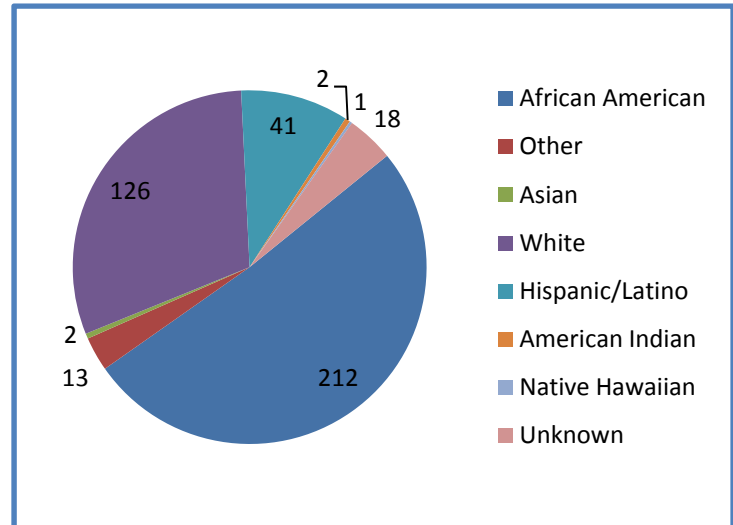
Tournaments are also occasions to develop valuable partnerships with other community institutions who host them such as the Kansas City Public Library and Rockhurst University. Our own LINC Caring Communities sites have also hosted the events.

The LINC chess program reported over 1,400 volunteers hours this fiscal year.

Who plays chess?

Chess players are primarily boys – seven out of 10. African Americans constitute about half of those participating. The demographics are generally indicative of locations where chess is offered.

The activity also encourages strong parental participation and support. Some parents have taken up playing chess themselves.



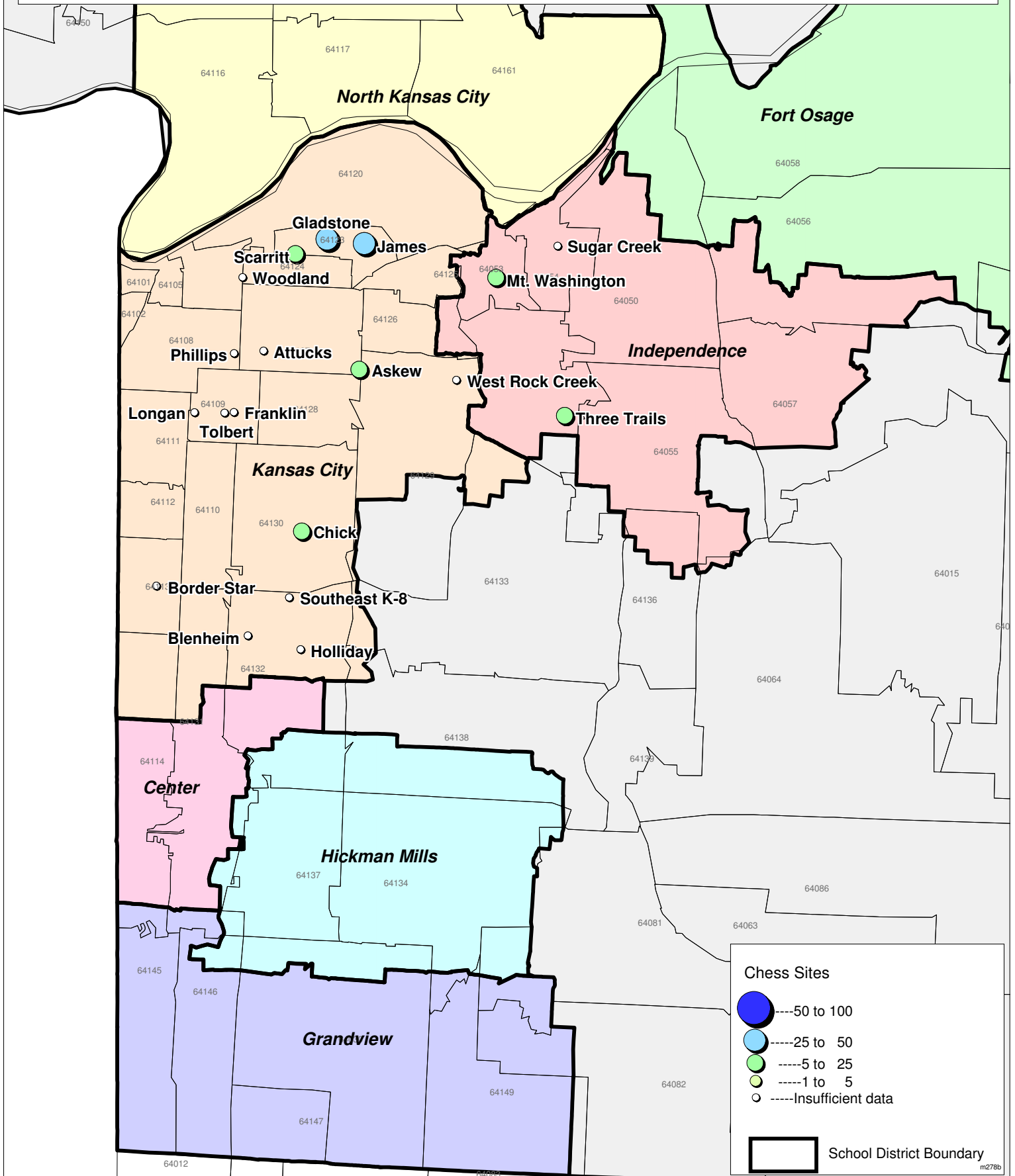
Ethnicity - 2009-10 Chess Participants

Thinking ahead

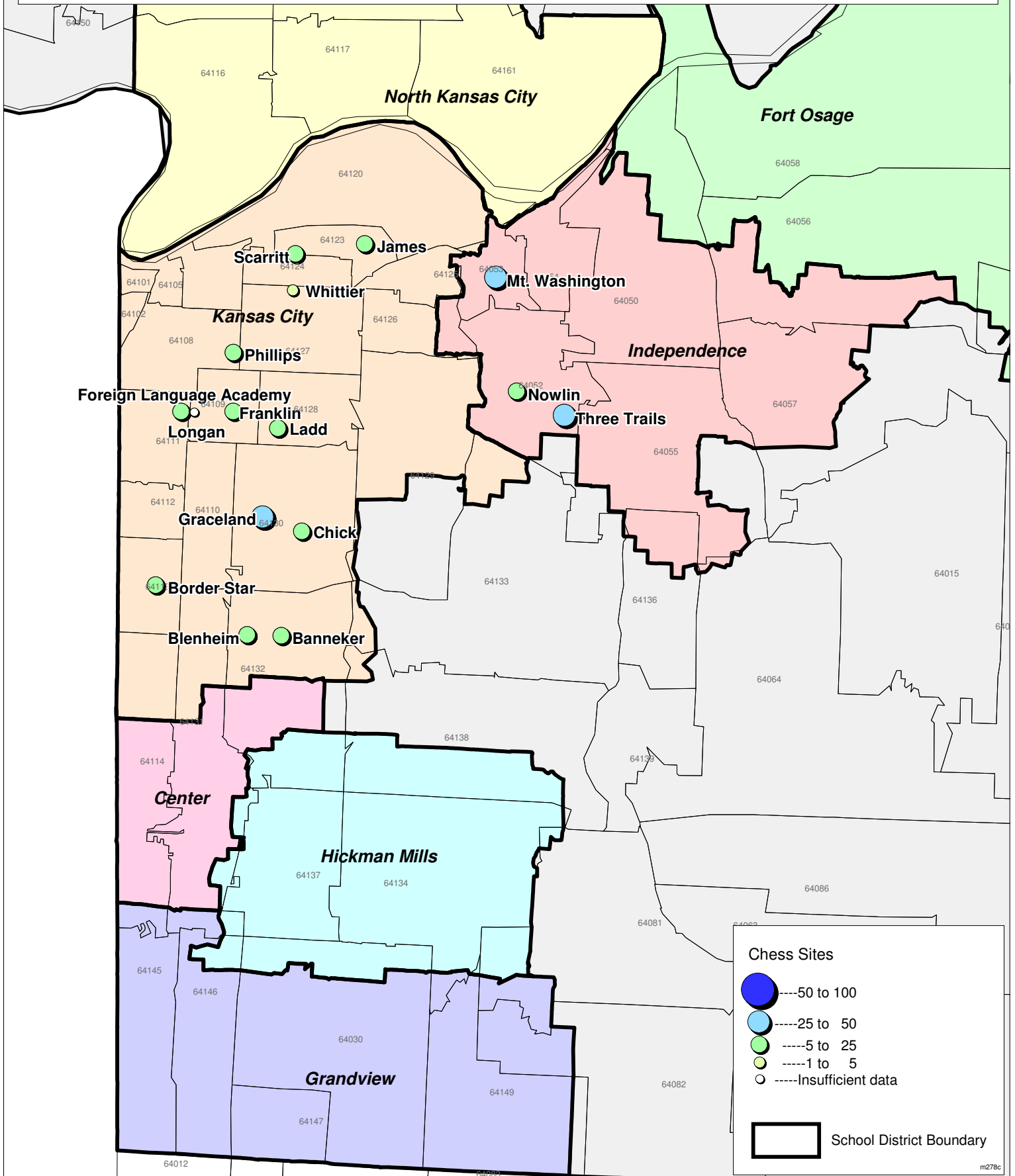
The hope is that in 2010-11 there will be opportunities to return to school locations within the Kansas City, Mo. School District and reestablish a strong chess presence in LINC Caring Communities – aligned with academic outcomes and needs of the participating students.



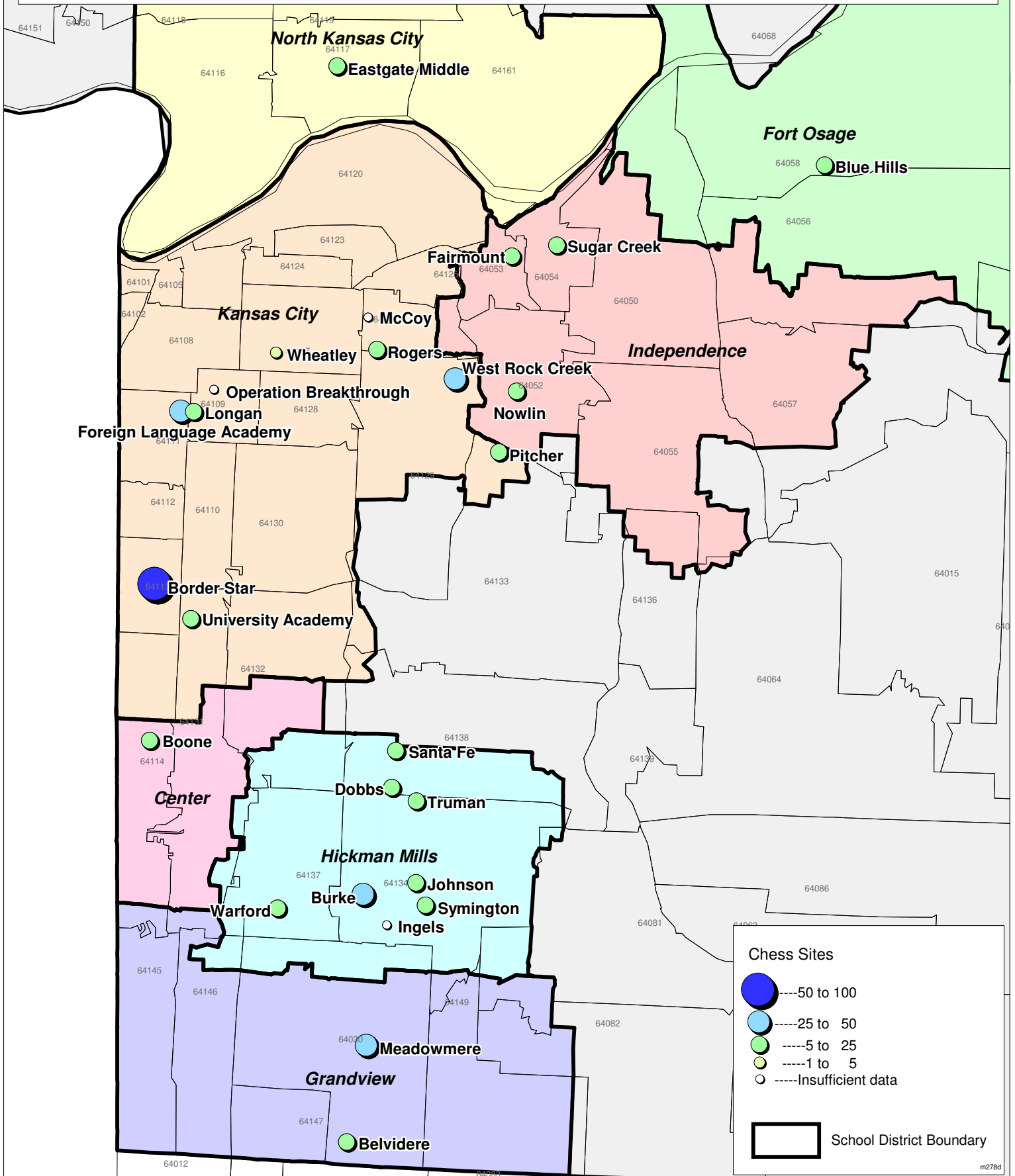
Chess Participation at LINC Caring Communities Sites FY2001-02



Chess Participation at LINC Caring Communities Sites FY2005-06



Chess Participation at LINC Caring Communities Sites FY2009-10



Tuesday, Jun 1, 2010

Cultivating community: Independence elementary school garden reborn following initial setback

By TRACI ANGEL
Special to The Star

Fred Williams slid a bowl of worms, twisting in crumbly dirt, onto a plastic table.

“Who’s hungry?” he said to the 21 children clustered around him.

Small hands clawed at the soil, resulting in wiggly fistfuls.

Nine-year-old Fati Olamaleva extended her hand. “Want to hold it?”

“Oh, my gosh, it’s moving,” said another concerned voice.

Before long, Williams was explaining how worms help plants by breaking down organic material into food and digging holes to increase the plants’ access to water and air.

Williams, who raises worms to sell as bait, was visiting the garden club at Bryant Elementary School in Independence.

Just two months into the growing season, rows of bushy kale and spinach are a visible result of the effort that the children have invested in their garden plot.

But the garden almost didn’t happen.

As school began last August and the club was preparing its garden plot in a vacant lot a block from Bryant, neighbors near the proposed spot questioned who might trek into the area and what kind of visitors the garden could draw. They circulated a petition to halt the plan for the property, which was a block from the school on Cottage Street.

“In some sense it was confounding – the harm of a garden is what?” said Brent Schondelmeyer of the Local Investment Commission (LINC), an organization that works with schools to create positive experiences for children.



Bryant Elementary decided to plant a community garden, and then some neighbors of the school in the Independence historic district moved to stop it. But other neighbors have stepped in to make it happen, offering their yard for the garden.

But the feelings and the conflict were real, he said.

Ultimately, good news sprouted from the controversy. Other neighbors – Jim and Sharon Hannah – opened their backyard to the students.

“They said, ‘Let’s figure this out. We can make the community better,’” said Andrea Mathew, schoolyard garden coordinator for Kansas City Community Gardens.

The Hannahs, who grew up in southeast Iowa, became involved as a way to give back.

“Our lot is bigger than most,” Sharon Hannah said. “We believe that when you have something good to pass it on.”

The club is an effort of Bryant elementary parents, LINC and Kansas City Community Gardens. The project focuses on educating the students, kindergarten through fifth grade, on how to grow their own food and the nutritional value of fresh produce.

To ensure surrounding support this time around, the Hannahs wrote letters to their neighbors about the proposal. Others stepped forward, too. Someone donated a paver. Another resident, Sharon Westermann, regularly sends treats incorporating fruits and vegetables, such as zucchini bread, home with the children.

The Hannahs removed a fence so they, students and parents could haul in and then heave four cubic yards of topsoil that KC Community Gardens provided.

During cold winter days, students nurtured seeds beneath fluorescent lights until tiny green sprouts popped. They inserted lettuce, spinach, kale and broccoli into the ground in early March.

Then, when a mid-March snow began to fall, the Hannahs scrambled to cover the sprouts with all the totes, buckets and bowls they could find.

Kansas City Community Gardens has helped 65 schools across the metropolitan area with garden projects. The organization provides the lumber, helps with construction and supplies soil and plants.

What’s unusual about the Bryant garden is that it’s off school property in the Hannahs’ yard. Asphalt cloaks the Bryant schoolyard, so there’s space only for multi-colored play equipment.

The Bryant community’s response to initial concerns was “a cool way for the community to find a solution to the problem,” Mathew said. “There’s definitely a movement happening.”

Nina Falls is the LINC coordinator for the Bryant garden club. She believes in the project, which has united people of different generations and of many backgrounds.

“Gardening is one thing to bring all people together,” she said. “It’s a common denominator.”

In mid-May, as rain paused its drip from a leaden sky, Sharon Hannah distributed scissors to the student gardeners.

“You harvest kale by snipping beneath the green part,” she says. “We’re going to wash it and use it for the picnic.”

Fifth-grader William Smith squeezed scissor blades and plucked a kale leaf. He pushed it into the bag that classmate Sam Wimberley clutched.

“You know it’s kale by the feel,” William said, rubbing a finger against the leaf texture. “Right here is not as hard as here – that’s where you know to cut.”

Club members are scheduled to celebrate their hard work on Thursday by inviting their parents to feast on a salad made with the vegetables they've grown.

The Hannahs downplay a suggestion that they saved the club.

The idea of community gardens is emerging in Independence with "various efforts more successful than others," Sharon Hannah said. "We have this perfect lot where the children can come safely. The kids have been absolutely amazing. They have so much enthusiasm."

For more information about schools and community gardens go to LINC's Web site at kclinc.org/gardens or Kansas City Community Gardens at www.kccg.org.

Key Findings



Total estimated charitable giving in the United States dropped 3.6 percent in 2009 (-3.2 percent adjusted for inflation). This reflects the continued recession in 2009, which particularly affected charitable recipients that otherwise receive contributions for new buildings, endowment campaigns, and long-term planning. These include education, arts, foundations, and freestanding donor-advised funds (which are part of public-society benefit). The types of charities that showed estimated growth typically provide immediate services, such as human services, health, international aid, and even environment. Religion showed a very slight decrease.



Individual giving fell an estimated 0.4 percent in 2009 (no change adjusted for inflation). Many reports suggest that individual contributions increased toward the very end of the year, as stock market indices rose and as media coverage highlighted the needs faced by charitable organizations.



Charitable bequests fell an estimated 23.9 percent in 2009 (-23.6 percent adjusted for inflation). This reflects the unusually high level of bequest giving announced in 2008 by the Internal Revenue Service in its data released in late 2009. The 2009 estimate is \$0.58 billion (2.5 percent) above the 2007 estimate.



Foundation grantmaking by private, community, and operating foundations fell by 8.9 percent, according to the Foundation Center (-8.6 percent adjusted for inflation). This is a less severe drop than foundations anticipated when the Foundation Center surveyed them early in 2009.



Corporate giving rose an estimated 5.5 percent (5.9 percent adjusted for inflation). This unexpected bounce takes corporate giving to within 1 percent of its pre-recession level. According to at least two reports (Committee Encouraging Corporate Philanthropy and Silicon Valley Community Foundation and Entrepreneurs Foundation), corporations increased their in-kind donations, which are less affected by recessions. This shift explains at least some of the growth.



Giving to religion fell an estimated 0.7 percent in 2009 (an estimated decrease of 0.3 percent adjusted for inflation).



Giving to education declined an estimated 3.6 percent in 2009 (-3.2 percent adjusted for inflation).

Key Findings



Giving to foundations dropped an estimated 8 percent (-7.6 percent adjusted for inflation), according to the Foundation Center.



Giving to human services rose an estimated 2.3 percent (2.7 percent adjusted for inflation). This seems to reflect efforts that donors made to continue emergency aid services as an increasing number of people suffered from the continuing recession.



Giving for health also shows an estimated increase, with growth of 3.8 percent (4.2 percent adjusted for inflation).



Giving for public-society benefit organizations declined an estimated 4.6 percent (-4.2 percent adjusted for inflation).



Giving to arts, culture and humanities organizations dropped an estimated 2.0 percent (-2.0 percent adjusted for inflation).



Giving to international affairs (which includes aid, development, and relief activities) increased 6.2 percent (6.6 percent adjusted for inflation).



Giving for environment/animal-related organizations also rose 2.3 percent (2.7 percent adjusted for inflation).

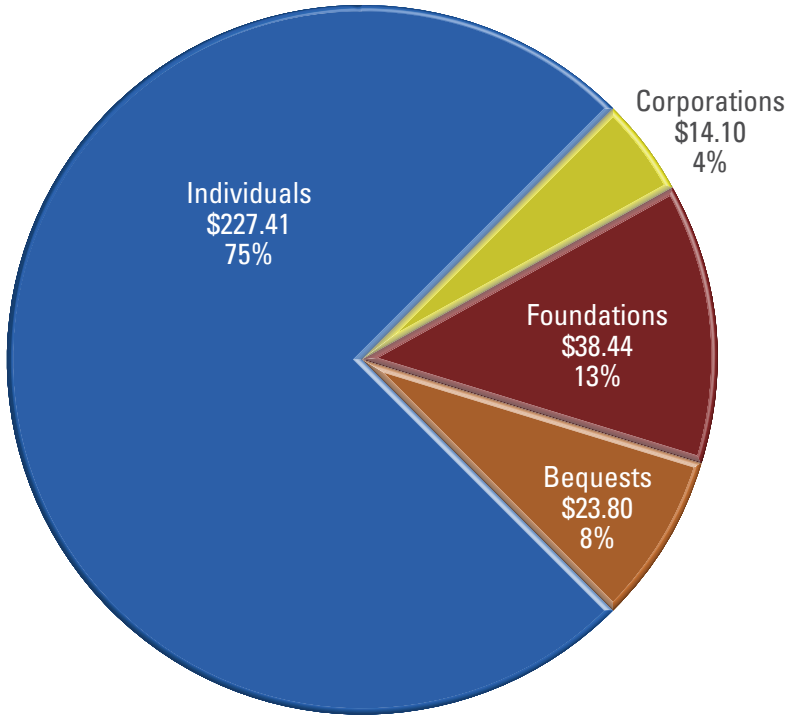


Giving to individuals includes grants from foundations to directly benefit named individuals. Most often, these are gifts of medications to patients in need and are made by operating foundations created by pharmaceutical manufacturers. These gifts are estimated to have remained relatively steady in 2009.

**** Deductions carried over and other unallocated giving** includes differences in the tax year in which a gift is claimed by the donor (carried over) and the year when the recipient organization reports it as revenue (the year in which it is received). It also includes gifts to government entities, which do not report charitable contributions at a national level; gifts made to entities in other countries by foundations; and gifts made to new organizations that have not been classified. In addition, when a donor forms a charitable trust and takes a deduction, but does not tell the recipient organization, there is an “unallocated” amount.

Giving USA: The Numbers

2009 contributions: \$303.75 billion by source of contributions
(\$ in billions – All figures are rounded)



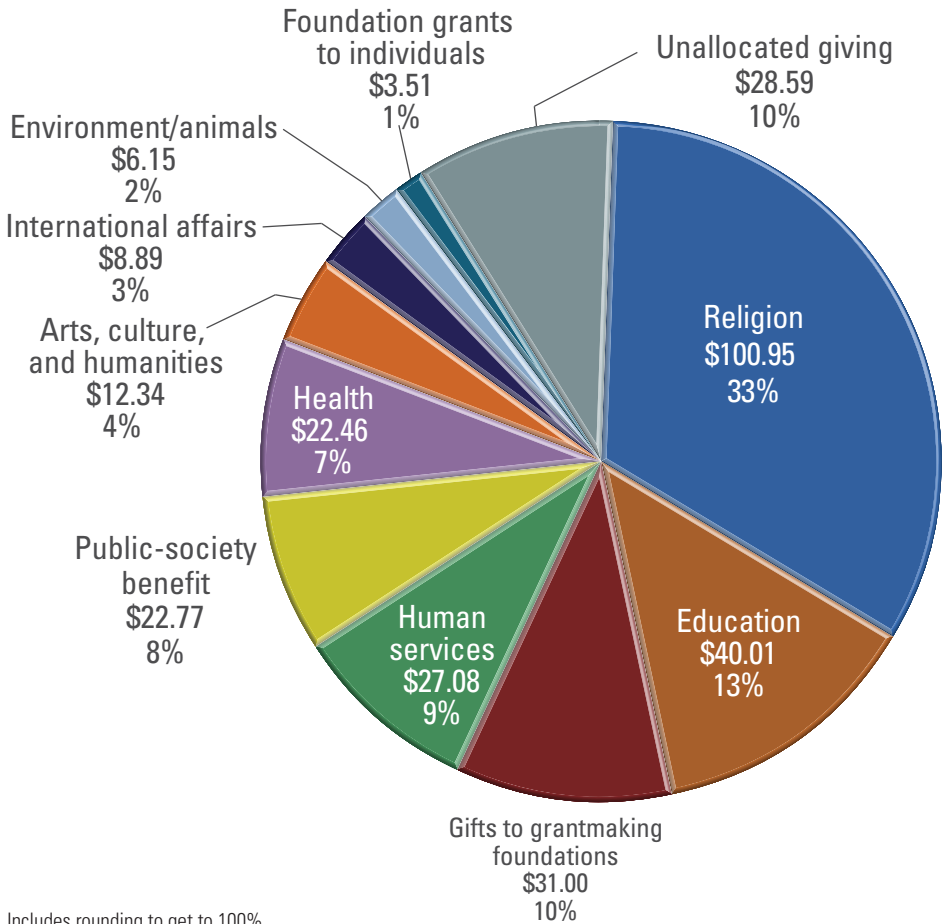
Giving USA: The Numbers

- Total giving for 2009 is estimated to be \$303.75 billion. This is a change of -3.6 percent (-3.2 percent adjusted for inflation) compared with the revised estimate of \$315.08 billion for 2008.
- Individual giving, at \$227.41 billion, includes estimated charitable deductions on tax returns filed for 2009 and an estimate of charitable giving by taxpayers who did not itemize deductions.
- The charitable bequest estimate of \$23.8 billion reflects estimates for charitable deductions on estate tax returns filed in 2009 and a conservative estimate of giving by estates not filing federal estate tax returns.
- Individual giving and charitable bequests combined are \$251.21 billion (83 percent of the total).
- Foundation grantmaking reached an estimated \$38.44 billion, according to the Foundation Center.¹ Of that, about \$15.41 billion is likely to be from family foundations, based on family foundation grants in 2007 as reported by the Foundation Center. Grantmaking by corporate foundations is included in the estimate of corporate giving.
- Individual, bequest, and estimated family foundation giving combined are approximately \$266.61 billion, or 88 percent of the total.
- Corporate giving is estimated to be \$14.10 billion. This includes an estimate from the Foundation Center of \$4.42 billion in grants made by corporate foundations.

¹Key Facts on Family Foundations, January 2009

Giving USA: The Numbers

2009 contributions: \$303.75 billion by type of recipient organization
(\$ in billions – All figures are rounded)



Includes rounding to get to 100%.

*Foundation Center estimate.

** See definition in "Key Findings" pages.



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