

LINC Commission Meeting

October 15, 2012

Lights On!

Afterschool



Join LINC as we celebrate our students & community, and focus on the importance of afterschool programs.

Thurs., Oct. 18

LINC Caring Communities programs provide safe, challenging, engaging and fun learning experiences to help children and youth develop their social, cultural, physical, and academic skills.

These programs build stronger communities by involving our students, parents, business leaders and volunteers in the lives of our young people.

For a list of events, visit:

kclinc.org/lightson



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, Oct. 15, 2012 | 4 – 6 pm
Kauffman Foundation
4801 Rockhill Rd.
Kansas City, Mo. 64110

Agenda

- I. Welcome and Announcements**
- II. Approvals**
 - a. September minutes (motion)**
- III. Superintendent's Reports**
- IV. Center School District**
 - a. Made Smart campaign**
- V. Other reports**
 - a. Lights on After School**
 - b. LINC site books**
 - c. Other**
- VI. Adjournment**



THE LOCAL INVESTMENT COMMISSION – SEPT. 17, 2012

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

Sharon Cheers
Jack Craft
Steve Dunn
Herb Freeman
Tom Gerke
Richard Hibschman
Tom Lewin

Rosemary Lowe
Sandy Mayer (for Mike Sanders)
Mary Kay McPhee
Richard Morris
David Rock
David Ross
Bailus Tate

Rowland made the following announcements:

LINC mourns the death of **Joan Berkley**. Services will be held Sept. 18, 3:30 p.m., at the Kansas City Plaza Library.

U.S. Secretary of Education **Arne Duncan** will host a town hall meeting at Penn Valley Community College on Sept. 18. The topic is college affordability and the Hispanic community.

Today's meeting was scheduled on Rosh Hashanah. LINC will avoid this in subsequent years.

A motion to approve the July 16, 2012, LINC Commission meeting minutes was passed unanimously.

LINC Communications Director **Brent Schondelmeyer** introduced a presentation on Google Fiber.

- **Rachel Hack**, Google Kansas City Community Manager, reported on the progress of Google's effort to introduce gigabit-speed internet to neighborhoods in Kansas City, Kan., and Kansas City, Mo. Google divided the area into 202 "fiberhoods" and invited residents to pre-register for the service. Pre-registration began on July 26; 180 fiberhoods met pre-registration goals when the period ended on Sept. 9. Now Google is concentrating on getting households to sign up for the service.
- **Ken Carter**, Google Fiber Policy Counsel, reported on Google's efforts to respond to the risk of people in low-income neighborhoods losing out on the service. Google is developing grants to increase access to the service in these neighborhoods.
- Schondelmeyer reported on the efforts of LINC staff, Kansas City Public Schools board president **Airick Leonard West**, and neighborhood residents to pre-register households in the Battleflood Heights neighborhood the closing weekend of the pre-registration rally.
- **Aaron Deacon**, Social Media Club of Kansas City President, reported that the pre-registration drive was only the first step, and that there is a need for further engagement with the community around signing up for the service and determining how schools can use the service.
- **Rick Chambers**, Center Education Foundation Executive Director, reported on the need for engaging residents and landlords around questions of value, access and affordability of gigabit-speed internet.
- West reported that the success of the pre-registration drive depended on a community approach that was inclusive and united; the same approach will be needed going forward to ensure that district students receive the maximum benefit from the new technology, whether as students or future workers and entrepreneurs.

- **Mike Burke**, Mayors’ Bistate Innovation Team Co-Chair, reported on the need to prepare for the next round of preregistration and ensure Kansas City becomes an innovator around the service.
- **Jason Harper**, Kansas City Public Library Web Content Developer, reported the libraries will play a role in providing patrons access to fiber internet and in educating them around digital literacy.

LINC President **Gayle A. Hobbs** introduced several LINC Caring Communities site coordinators who reported on their efforts to work together and with school principals and parent volunteers to pre-register households for fiber service. Coordinators included:

- **Yolanda Robinson** (Faxon Elementary)
- **Jamie Braden** (Attucks Elementary)
- **Richard Williams** (Center Elementary)
- **Shaniece Garlington** (Holliday Montessori)
- **Wesley Cunningham** (Troost Elementary)

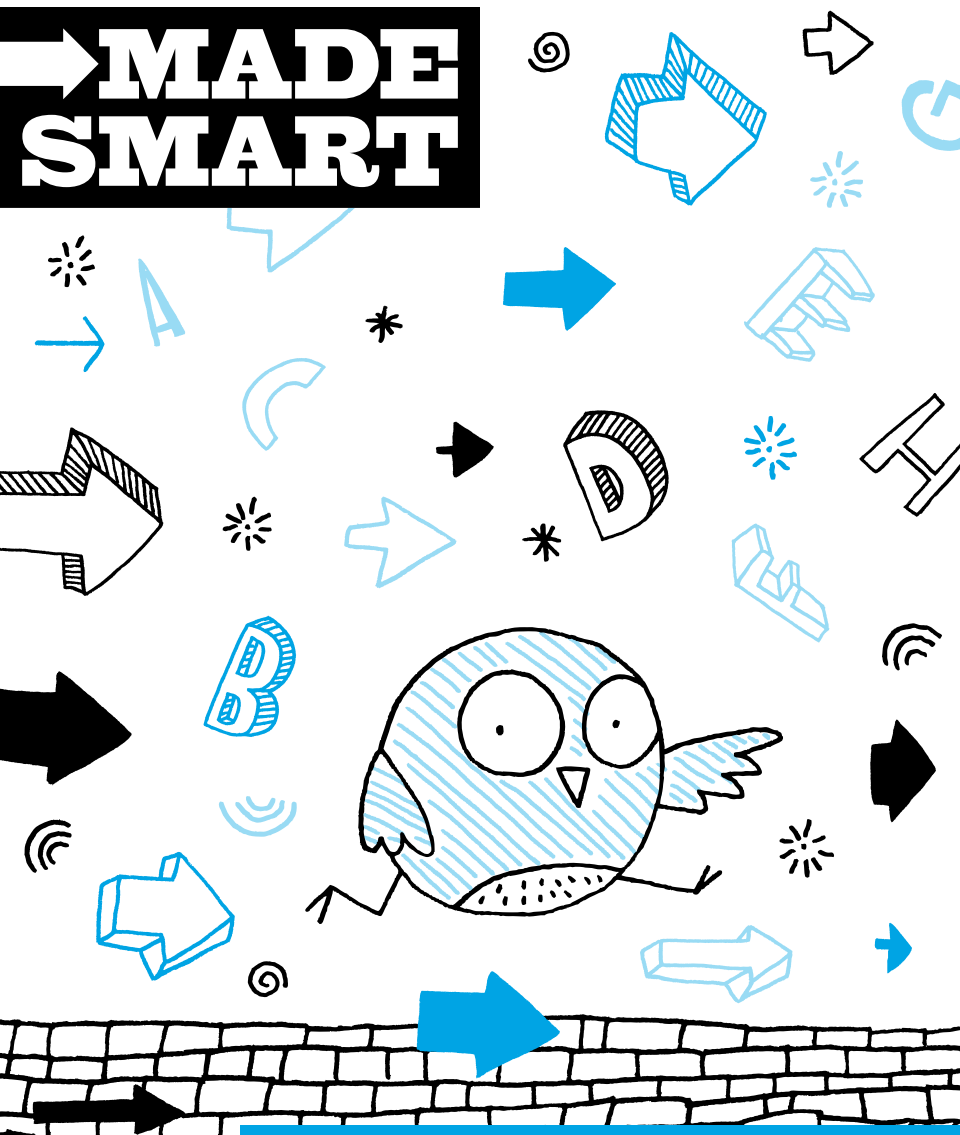
Superintendents’ Report

- **Bob Bartman** (Superintendent, Center School District) reported on the effort to pre-register district families for Google Fiber service and thanked LINC and Center Education Foundation staff for their support. He also presented the LINC chairman with a “MADE SMART” t-shirt used to promote the district’s college preparedness program.
- **Mark Enderle** (Superintendent, Fort Osage School District) reported 164 students attended summer school; he thanked LINC for offering summer camp in support of the district program.
- **Everlyn Williams** (Superintendent, Hickman Mills School District) reported the district will announce tomorrow that the state has assigned it provisional accreditation after meeting seven out of 14 standards in the Missouri School Improvement Program. The district will also announce it has received a \$100,000 STEM grant from AT&T and the Urban League.
- **Dan Clemens** (Assistant Superintendent, North Kansas City School District) reported the district has reallocated existing funding to provide schools and students with laptops and other digital technology. Last week the district distributed 6,000 MacBooks to high school seniors.
- **John Tramel** (Family Services Director, Independence School District) reported the district is pursuing health initiatives to support families so that students can succeed. He reported the district met all 14 standards in the Missouri School Improvement Program.
- **Gayden Carruth** (Executive Director, Cooperating School Districts of Greater Kansas City) reported on the effort to provide lobbying, research and professional development for 30 area Missouri school districts.

Hobbs reported LINC received over \$6,600 in donations to the fund in support of L.P., the child who was the victim of child abuse. LINC is working with the guardian ad litem to get needed items to the girl’s foster family.

The meeting was adjourned.

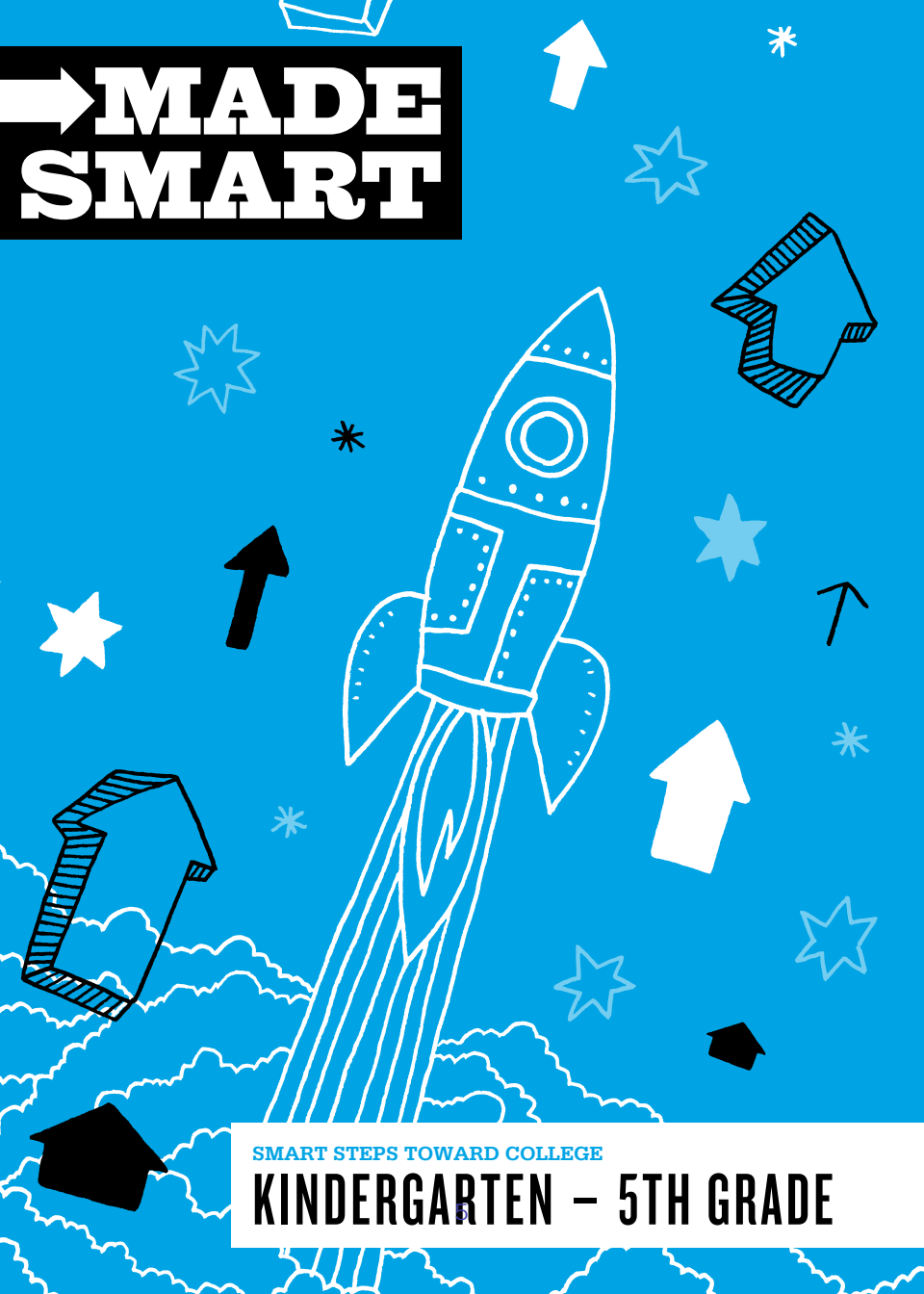
**MADE
SMART**



SMART STEPS TOWARD COLLEGE

BIRTH – PRE-KINDERGARTEN

**MADE
SMART**



SMART STEPS TOWARD COLLEGE

KINDERGARTEN – 5TH GRADE

MADE SMART campaign pays off

No area district has come as far as Center in performance on Missouri's state tests.

By JOE ROBERTSON
The Kansas City Star

It's only going get harder to grind out better student performance on Missouri's state tests, because the standards are getting tougher.

So, even among schools that pushed their loads forward in 2012, the reactions are sounding more like community-wide calls to action for 2013.

"The pressure now is to succeed," Center High School Principal Beth Heidi said. "Rather than not to succeed."

In this case, she was talking about teenagers. Sometimes, they can shun their roles in the public campaigns that districts like Center are waging to keep their schools rising.

But here they were, on the school's "MADE SMART" day last week, most of them wearing T-shirts promoting the "MADE SMART" information blitz that the district has launched to put its entire community on a mission to improve student success.

The district needs their enthusiastic backing, just as Boone Elementary School Principal Sheryl Cochran needs her parents on board, all the way before pre-school.

She was all waves and cheers at curbside on a recent morning, she said, as parent after parent delivered children in their T-shirts.

"The parents are excited about being involved," Cochran said. "They're not just leaving it to the school."

No district in the area has come as far as Center since 2006, the last time the state revamped its



During music class, fourth-graders (front row, from left) 10-year-old Brian Cubit, and Aniiisa Masterson, Alexandria Brammer and Sebastien Tanis, all 9, jumped while singing a song last week at Boone Elementary School in Kansas City. The Center School District, once looking at provisional accreditation, has received a perfect state report card. City officials want to encourage further success in a public information campaign called MADE SMART. Students were given T-shirts listing goals of the MADE SMART program.

system for pushing school improvement and measuring progress.

On the state's 14-point standards system, Center made only six at the beginning, but completed its rise to 14 out of 14 this year.

Other districts also had heavy climbs. Grandview recovered from seven to 13. Raytown, which slipped to nine just a year ago, made it back to 12.

Most districts started higher and maintained their standards achievements. Liberty and Park Hill reach 14 standards early and sustained it. Independence regained 14, and North Kansas City scored at 12, after both districts have undergone rapid growth.

It was important to join those districts, Grandview Superintendent Ralph Teran said.

"It feels really good to be able to say we can do that, too," he said. "But in our community, there is a clear understanding that we have to offer our kids high technology, high skills and higher-order thinking or they'll be at a disadvantage."

Next year's tests will be scored into a new, stiffer body of standards. As the change comes, only Kansas City Public Schools lacks accreditation, and only Hickman Mills remains in danger of slipping to provisional accreditation.

Student performance tests will remain the most significant measures in the state's accountability process that also includes measures like attendance, graduation rate, ACT college admission test performance and career placement.

Statewide, the percentage of students scoring proficient or advanced in communication arts rose from 54.6 to 55.4 percent. The percentage scoring as well in math rose from 53.8 to 55.3 percent.

Some of the biggest performance gains were seen among students who are English learners and among Hispanic students who narrowed the gap with white students in math.

Black students overall did not narrow the gap in math, and they lost ground in communication arts.



Jon Pierson leads a music class at Boone Elementary School in Kansas City. He and the students are wearing T-shirts outlining goals of the MADE SMART program. On the state's 14-point standards system, Center rose to 14 out of 14 this year.



Cortez Saulsberry, 17, worked with Troy Butler during a sophomore English class last week at Center High School in Kansas City.

The federal No Child Left Behind Act is no longer bringing its sanctions to bear on Missouri schools because the state was one of many, including Kansas, given a waiver to apply their own accountability plans. But No Child Left Behind's focus on isolating and measuring the performance of demographic and special-needs subgroups will continue under the state's plan, Education Commissioner Chris Nicastro said.

So while the growth in performance among Hispanic students was encouraging, the gap continues. And the widening of the performance gap with black students is troubling.

"We're going to have to figure out what to do with the persistent gaps, particularly with children of color," she said. "One way is to pay attention to it. The new accountability will capture even more of these students."

The districts that had to make the largest gains on the state tests and report card — like Kansas City, Hickman Mills, Center, Grandview and Raytown — have the highest concentrations of minority students and students who qualify for free or reduced-price lunches.

The districts that saw the most growth followed similar roads to recovery. Raytown drove its attendance higher and recovered dropouts. It doubled up its math instruction and prepared more students for the critical algebra success.

Grandview built stronger, more responsive student data systems and followed Center's lead in developing a benchmarked math system that compels students to move ahead only as they prove they've learned math skills.

And now comes Center's MADE SMART campaign, which inundates parents and students with strategies and incentives to propel children on the trail to college, from birth to the 12th grade.

Booklets and posters distributed to homes in the district describe at different age groups what children need at home and at school to prepare them for the next level. Even the birth-to-pre-kindergarten materials describe how families are taking critical steps on the trail to college 18 years down the road.

College readiness doesn't just happen, the message goes. Children are made smart.

It expands the learning mission beyond the school walls for the hard days ahead, said Center's director of public relations, Kelly Wachel.

"We all want to make sure we have a high-performing district," she said.

To reach Joe Robertson, call [816-234-4789](tel:816-234-4789) or send email to jrobertson@kcstar.com.



Wearing one of the T-shirts listing goals of the MADE SMART program, ninth-grader Lakesja Parrish, 14, gets books out of her locker between classes at Center High School in Kansas City.

Monday, Sep 24, 2012

Area nets seven schools on states' most-improved lists

State-created accountability plans and tireless teachers have led to improvements in reading and mathematics.

By JOE ROBERTSON and DAWN BORMANN
The Kansas City Star

To lead one of the area's most-improved schools means going to lunchtime with a game plan.

Kansas City's James Elementary School Principal Jo Lynne Nemeth looks like she could simply be a roaming Wal-Mart greeter, but she knows her targets.

"How does it feel to come to school every day?" she says, calling a boy by name and leaning in close at his cafeteria table. "You're not too far behind, are you? It's a good thing."

She knows the children who have been skipping at their former schools. She knows who's new. She's quick to pair up two boys where there has been name-calling.



Second-graders Jose Sanchez Botello (from left), Gino Morales and Adrianna Caballero showed their math solutions written on whiteboards as Jo Lynn Nemeth (right), the principal of James Elementary School in Kansas City, visited their class Thursday.

"Can you guys sit down and make a plan?" she says. "See if you can work it out. I'll come right back and see what plan you've made."

James Elementary is one of seven area schools in Missouri and Kansas that have been recognized as their states' most-improved schools.

Who's achieving; who needs help

Missouri and Kansas have identified their highest performing and best-progressing schools that receive federal Title I dollars, as well as Title I schools that are in most need of academic improvement. The designations come as part of new state-created federal accountability plans that replace the No Child Left Behind Act. Title I supports mostly low-income students and students with other special needs. Here is a list of area school districts identified as reward schools for high achievement or strong improvement, and priority schools that must implement improvement plans.

HIGH ACHIEVING TITLE I REWARD SCHOOLS

Missouri

- University Academy Upper charter

Kansas

- Blue Valley district: Stilwell, Valley Park, Indian Valley and Oak Hill elementaries
- Fort Leavenworth district: Eisenhower Elementary
- Gardner Edgerton district: Edgerton and Gardner elementaries
- Spring Hill district: Prairie Creek Elementary

HIGH PROGRESS TITLE I REWARD SCHOOLS

Missouri

- **Center district: Boone Elementary**
- **Kansas City district: James Elementary**
- Pathway Academy charter
- University Academy Middle and Lower charters

Kansas

- Kansas City, Kan., district: Emerson Elementary
- Olathe district: Indian Trail Middle

TITLE I PRIORITY SCHOOLS

Missouri

- Alta Vista charter
- Della Lamb Elementary charter
- Genesis charter
- Gordon Parks Elementary charter
- Hickman Mills: **Smith-Hale College Prep**
- Kansas City district: **King, Attucks, Franklin, Melcher, Pitcher and Troost elementaries**, Northeast and East high schools and Central Academy

Kansas

- Kansas City, Kan.: Pearson, Douglass, Grant, Mark Twain, Whittier, Welborn, Baneker, Bertram Caruthers and New Stanley elementaries; Northwest, Rosedale, Argentine, Central, Coronado and West middle schools.

Nine other area schools have been recognized as some of their states' highest achieving schools.

The recognition comes as part of new state-created accountability plans that replace the No Child Left Behind Act. The roughly two-thirds of all public schools in Missouri and Kansas that receive federal Title I dollars are held accountable by the plans. Top Title I schools and the most-improving schools are recognized, and schools most in need of improvement are also identified and must create turnaround plans.

There's little resting at James, where 95 percent of the children qualify for free or reduced-price lunches and around 80 percent are either learning English or speak it as a second language.

Since 2010, the percentage of students scoring proficient or advanced in communication arts rose from 16 to 30 percent. In math, the percentage improved from 29 to 53.

Success would seem to have followed Nemeth from McCoy Elementary School, one of the Kansas City Public Schools' highest-achieving schools before the old building was one of many the district closed in 2010.

But Nemeth sees herself as the inheritor of a tireless staff at James.

In the hall, she passes by Grace Whiting's third-grade class readying for a bathroom break. They've sung themselves into line and marched out into the hall where they sit cross-legged in neat rows. Each one has a clipboard with their math assignments so they can continue working seated on the floor while Whiting sends children a few at a time to the bathroom.

"You don't want to lose instruction time," she says.

Kindergarten teacher Alyssa Detwiler is passing by on her way to meet a parent during her planning time. The canvas belt of pouches she wears lends her the appearance of a carpenter.

Nemeth stops her for a moment.

"How late were you here Wednesday night?" she asks, remembering the regular team meeting the three kindergarten teachers and the language specialist convened to plot strategies.

Past 6 p.m., the teacher says.

Stepping into Lynn Raynor's fifth-grade classroom, Nemeth marvels at the myriad ways the teacher has her children learning math.

They're scattered about the room, some at their desks testing, others tapping away at computers along the wall and some in pairs at the three portable DVD players that Raynor bought herself to put more programs in their hands.

And they're not just any math DVDs, Nemeth says. Raynor helped write the district's math curriculum over the summer and she spends many hours researching DVDs and computer programs to find exercises that match the school's learning targets.

"It's worth it," Raynor says. "It's my life. My husband understands."

If she could, Nemeth would have a health clinic and a dental clinic in the school as she had many years at McCoy. The grant funding she needs is hard to win, but she keeps trying.

The health and wellness of children — "caring for the whole child" — is essential to good academics, she says.

There's more, of course. The strategies, echoed in various ways across the area's high-performing schools, include college campus visits beginning in pre-school, and big goals and ambitious targets.

But most of all, Nemeth says, a school's success is measured in its staff's "intensity, tenacity and passion."

Olathe Assistant Superintendent Erin Dugan knows what she means. The growth that put Olathe's Indian Trail Middle School on the reward school list relied on strong relationships between staff and students, she said.

Kids can't learn if they're hungry, she said. And they can't focus if they're worrying all day about not having track shoes for the track meet after school.

If staff know their students and their families well enough, she said, "We can meet those kinds of needs so that then we can get on to the business of math and reading comprehension."

Eisenhower Elementary on Fort Leavenworth, one of Kansas' high-achieving reward schools, has to be particularly quick in learning the skills and needs of its students, Superintendent Keith Mispagel said. Half of its students move every year because of their parents' military reassignments. Teaching teams meet regularly to gauge each child's progress and prepare specific education plans.

Blue Valley and Spring Hill described the same intensity over data at their Title I reward schools.

At Boone Elementary School in the Center School District, Principal Sheryl Cochran talked of involving parents and making them key players in understanding their children's needs and building the grand expectations that have boosted Boone onto the most-improved list.

University Academy, a charter school campus that goes from pre-school to high school, makes its expectations clear from the very beginning, Superintendent Maggie Anderson said.

At the end of the line, their seniors have to be accepted to a post-high school institution — be it a university, community college or trade school— to graduate.

When the school meets with its new parents for its pre-school program and its kindergarten roundup, that message serves as a keynote address.

The school and its community partners will support them, Anderson said, including helping its graduates as they go into college. But they make sure parents know what is expected of them. For University Academy, like other high-achieving schools, success is a great collaboration.

They tell the parents "this is where we are going," she said. "And this is the agreement you have made."

Wed, Sep. 19, 2012

Hickman Mills School District slips to provisional accreditation

Spokesman blames the recent drop in test scores on an influx of students from the Kansas City Public Schools.

By DONALD BRADLEY
The Kansas City Star

Citing a drop-off in academic performance, Missouri education officials on Tuesday lowered the Hickman Mills School District to provisional accreditation.

The designation makes the south Kansas City district with about 6,300 students only the second in the metro area to lack full accreditation. The long-struggling Kansas City district lost its accreditation in January after a decade of provisional status.

“We’re disappointed,” said Hickman Mills spokesman John Baccala. “Our test scores are up from five years ago, but we took a dip. Obviously something happened to stop our improvement.”

He has an idea of what part of that might have been. Baccala said an influx of students poured into Hickman Mills schools after the neighboring Kansas City district lost its accreditation.

“Maybe as many as 250,” Baccala said. “We were accepting kids as late as a week before MAP testing. We had to test them.”

Hickman Mills officials cited the newcomers when making an argument to state officials Monday that the district should keep full accreditation. But the State Board of Education approved the recommendation of provisional accreditation from Commissioner of Education Chris Nicastro and the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education.

The state’s Annual Progress Report released in August showed Hickman Mills had received seven out of a possible 14 APR points in 2011-12, down from nine in 2010-11.

During Monday’s meeting, Nicastro said that while she’s confident the district can reverse its slide, it is going to take time to regain full accreditation.

“We know this is difficult and we want to be supportive,” Nicastro told Hickman Mills officials, according to a district statement. “This is not the time to point fingers; it’s a time to link arms.

“We want our children held to higher standards. We’re confident that can happen (at Hickman Mills).”

Baccala said the district planned to do a better job of monitoring student progress in 10-, 20- and 30-day increments.

“We think we’re on the right track, and she (Nicastro) thinks so, too.”

Monday, Sep 24, 2012

The Star's editorial | Troubled Hickman Mills School District can rebound

The Hickman Mills School District is in an academic hole now that the State Board of Education has lowered it from full to provisional accreditation. It's an uncomfortable, disquieting development.

For the sake of the 6,300 students and the south Kansas City community, district officials and the school board must use every means necessary to regain full accreditation.

Hickman Mills in 2011-12 slipped to meeting seven out of a possible 14 standards; it had met nine the previous year. But its problems became noticeable as early as 2009, when the district reached only six standards.

Hard work followed to raise students' academic performance, and that's what's needed once again.

"They need to get unified and attack the problem," said Tony Stansberry, state area supervisor with the Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, which promises the district more help.

That's good. Hickman Mills officials say they will add more resources for reading and math specialists in the district, where 86 percent of the students receive free or reduced lunches. More teachers will be added at the elementary level, with increased monitoring on students' academic performance. Instead of using an outside firm for tutoring, teachers will do the work.

"They know where the kids need the help," said John Baccala, the district's director of media relations.

The Hickman Mills district has three years to get back to full accreditation, and the goal certainly is achievable. But parents, businesses, faith communities and others will have to help. The students also have to know what's at stake so they can shoulder their share of the load.

Education Week

Sept. 26, 2012

Chess: The Best Move for Students

By Salome Thomas-EL

The next time President Barack Obama and U.S. Secretary of Education Arne Duncan are sitting together discussing education reform, I hope that it will be across the table from one of my elementary or middle school students. If so, there will inevitably be a chessboard between them, and I am certain my students will win every match.

My inner-city students, many of whom come from some of the most impoverished neighborhoods in Philadelphia and Wilmington, Del., have traveled the country to compete in, and win, local, state, and national chess championships. Gov. Jack Markel of Delaware and former Govs. Arnold Schwarzenegger of California and Edward G. Rendell of Pennsylvania, all smart men, have challenged my students to chess matches and lost. A host of mayors, members of Congress, senators, and school superintendents—anyone brave enough to visit city schools and spend time with my students—all made the same mistake of taking them on, with similar results. These are the same children that most of society has forgotten. Yet they have gone on to attend magnet and private high schools, competitive colleges, and graduate and law schools.

Unfortunately, most of our nation's urban and rural students won't have the same opportunities as my chess players because, as a general rule, we don't teach our children to think critically or to think ahead. We don't teach them to use logic and reason or to consider rewards and consequences before they make decisions.

In the United States, we have become so focused on test scores that we have forgotten to teach our students to appreciate the process of learning, to embrace struggle, and to build self-efficacy and resilience.

Students must learn that they are not born smart, but become smart through hard work and the process of growth. Chess can help establish that foundation for students as young as 5 and 6 years old, and it is simple enough to learn quickly. Students can use a few pieces, or all of them, as they gradually learn the game. Imagine young kindergartners or 1st and 2nd graders beginning to learn to anticipate moves, think ahead, and solve multi-step problems. All children need to learn how to make difficult and abstract decisions independently and think logically and efficiently. And teaching these skills to them at an early age can make a big difference to them as they progress through their education.

I have used chess as a teaching tool in the three schools where I have worked as a turnaround principal. In each instance, most of the students were city kids, poor and minority. My mission has been to teach the game of chess to every student I have known over my 25-year career.

“But the success of our students is also a credit to our after-school chess program, which has had a tremendous impact on how our older students think and problem-solve.”

My current school, Thomas Edison Charter, in Wilmington, Del., serves students in grades K-8, 96 percent of whom are living at or below the poverty level. Many of our students are seen as at risk of not meeting with academic success before entering our charter school, yet they excel, in part, because of our instructional curriculum and the support they receive from the administration, teachers, and staff. But the success of our students is also a credit to our after-school chess program, which has had a tremendous impact on how our older students think and problem-solve.

“In the United States, we have become so focused on test scores that we have forgotten to teach our students to appreciate the process of learning, to embrace struggle, and to build self-efficacy and resilience.”

This past school year, we received Delaware's Academic Achievement Award for closing the achievement gap in a high-poverty school, improving our state test scores, and moving those scores closer to the state average. In addition, this past summer, our 8th graders were recognized for scoring over 90 percent proficiency in math and 85 percent proficiency in English/language arts on our state tests.

A year ago, I met with my teachers, and we decided to give our 2nd and 3rd graders the opportunity to learn and benefit from chess with our First Move program. Our 3rd, 4th, and 5th graders are doing the same in our Algebra Through Chess course. In total, we have almost 100 students who participate in our after-school chess program every day.

It goes without saying that exposing children to academics in the classroom advances cognition; however, games like chess, played in the classroom, can foster memory, skill at planning and strategizing, and development of cognition. Much of the traditional U.S. curriculum in the early grades does not allow for students to learn and teach themselves. Chess permits students to think on their own without the assistance of adults.

Students exposed to chess are much more optimistic about overcoming obstacles and struggles on a regular basis. Research supports the idea that schools that establish innovative programs like chess playing develop high expectations for their students and the atmosphere in which their students can achieve them.

“...[S]chools that establish innovative programs like chess playing develop high expectations for their students and the atmosphere in which their students can achieve them.”

America has much to learn from the rest of the world regarding education. Countries as small as Armenia have made chess a mandatory school subject for children over the age of 6, with the goal of teaching strategic thinking to all elementary students. As an advocate for this course of instruction, the chess grandmaster and former world champion Gary Kasparov is challenging countries around the globe to adopt chess as part of their elementary curricula. Implementing chess in the U.S. curriculum could be the low-cost answer to many of our education woes.

So many young people are raised to question their intelligence. Chess helps shatter that doubt. Chess teaches our young people about rewards and consequences, both short- and long-term. It challenges young people to be responsible for their actions. It cuts across racial and economic lines and allows poor kids to excel at a game thought to be reserved for the affluent. It boosts self-confidence. It is the great equalizer.

When a school redefines its culture by building a vision and commitment that is innovative and creative, based on increasing self-efficacy and resilience, it has the power to serve as a protective shield for all students. It can become a beacon of light for impoverished communities.

I believe that all children are entitled to success in learning and life, regardless of their gender, race, or socioeconomic status.

Mr. President, it's your move.

Salome Thomas-EL is the principal of the Thomas Edison Charter School in Wilmington, Del., and the author of The Immortality of Influence: We Can Build the Best Minds of the Next Generation (Kensington Publishing, 2010). Widely known as Principal EL, he is a national board member of America's Foundation for Chess, which is based in Bellevue, Wash.

Lights On!

Afterschool



Join LINC as we celebrate our students and community, and focus on the importance of afterschool programs.

Thur., Oct. 18

All events are Thur., Oct. 18 unless otherwise noted. Visit kclinc.org/lightson for more information.

Center Schools

Boone Caring Communities

"Campaign for Afterschool" - 4:30-6p
Students will circulate a petition supporting afterschool programs.

Center Caring Communities

"Lights On Sock Hop" - 4-6p
An old-fashioned sock hop with good food and great music!

Fort Osage Schools

Join Fort Osage Caring Communities for fun Lights On games & activities.

Blue Hills, Buckner, Cler-Mont, and Indian Trails Caring Communities
"Lights On Afterschool" - 4-6p

Elm Grove Caring Communities
"Lights On Afterschool - 4-5p

North Kansas City Schools

Topping Caring Communities

"Talent Show" - 5:30-6:45p
LINC students and staff will show off their talents

Grandview Schools

Belvidere Caring Communities

"A Day at Belvidere" - 5:30-6:30p
Follow your student through a day in the LINC program.

Butcher-Greene Caring Comm.

"LINC's Got Talent" - 5:30-7p
Watch a Drill Team performance and balloon release.

Conn-West Caring Communities

"Lights On Conn-West" - 4:30-5:30p
Join Conn-West for fitness & health activities and a balloon release.

Martin City K-8 Caring Comm.

"Afterschool Carnival" - 4:30-6p
An indoor carnival with games, prizes, and treats.

Meadowmere Caring Comm.

"Lights On Meadowmere" - 4-5:30p
Each grade level will show the awesome activities and fun at LINC.

Hickman Mills Schools

Burke Caring Communities

"Lights On Showcase"
Mon. - Wed., Oct. 15-17
Visit Burke after school to view artwork by students.

Dobbs Caring Communities

"Lights On Dobbs"
Wed., Oct. 24, 3-5pm
Each class will represent a region and parents can sample dishes.

Ingels Caring Communities

"Enjoying Our Future"
Wed., Oct. 17, 3:45-5:45pm
Register students in a Child ID program, check health numbers

Johnson Caring Communities

"We Are the Light of the World"
Wed., Oct. 17, 6-7:30pm
Students will demonstrate their skills through music and drama.

Santa Fe Caring Communities

"Lights On Santa Fe"
Wed., Oct. 17, 5-6:30pm
A showcase of projects from each grade level, and family games.



All events are Thur., Oct. 18 unless otherwise noted. Visit kclinc.org/lightson for more information.

Smith-Hale College Prep. Caring Communities
"Program Highlights & Registration Fair" - 4:30-5:45p
See what programs LINC offers.

Symington Caring Communities
"Lighting the Path" - 4:30-6p
Students will share what they do in their enrichment classes.

Truman Caring Communities
"Hispanic Heritage and Fall Festival" *Fri., Oct. 26, 5-6pm*
Join us for fun fall activities & an Hispanic heritage celebration

Warford Caring Communities
"Lights On Warford" *Tue., Oct. 30, 6:15-7:15p*
LINC students will perform one-act plays and a drill team dance.

Kansas City Public Schools ACCPA Caring Communities
"Gospel Extravaganza" - 5:30-6:30p
Celebrate Lights On Afterschool with singing and dancing.

Benjamin Banneker Caring Comm.
"LINC's Got Talent" - 5:30-7p
Classes, students and LINC staff will showcase their talents.

Border Star Caring Communities
"Lights On Border Star" - 4:30-5:30p
Join the Kansas City Public Library for story time with Anna Garcia.

Carver Caring Communities
"Lights On Soccer" - 4:30-6p
Learn about the LINC Soccer Program and its benefits for youth.

Crispus Attucks Caring Comm.
"Healthy Living, Part 3" - 4:30-6:30p
Visit with organizations promoting healthy living in our community.

Faxon Caring Communities
"Creating Our World" - 4:30-5:30p
Faxon will host a visual and performance arts event.

FLA Caring Communities
"Lights on Literacy" - 5:30-7:30p.
A Pumpkin Patch with literacy games, local authors, and more!

Garcia Caring Communities
"Lights On Garcia" - 4-5:30p
Celebrate afterschool programs with a Kansas City Westside flair!

Garfield Caring Communities
"Lights On Garfield" - 5-6:30p
Garfield Drill Team, balloon release with dreams for the future.

Gladstone Caring Communities
"Lights On Gladstone" - 5-7p
Parents are invited to view projects that students have worked on.

Hartman Caring Communities
"Lights On Hartman" - 5-6p
Celebrate with music, poetry, step, and family activities.

Holliday Montessori Caring Comm.
"Around the World in a Day" - 6:15-7:30p. Classes will represent a country and serve appetizers.

J.A. Rogers Caring Communities
"Bright Lights" - 4:30-6p
Children will recite poems, sing, and dance.

James Caring Communities
"Bike & Walk Safely to School" - 4:30-6p. Establish safe routes to school with help from BikeWalkKC.

King Caring Communities
"Character Counts Afterschool" - 5p
Student Drill Team & Character Counts performances.

Lee A. Tolbert Caring Communities
"Under the Sea" *Fri, Oct. 19, 3:30-6p*
Celebrate Lights On with a family dinner & movie.

Longfellow Caring Communities
"Emergency & Safety Preparedness" - 5-7p. Students studied how help in every-day emergencies & disasters.

Melcher Caring Communities
"Safe Space, Safe Place" - 4:30-7p
Join us for BBQ, community resources, and fun competitions.

Pitcher Caring Communities
"Family Fun Night" - 5-7p
Learn about LINC and visit with community resources.

Satchel Paige Caring Communities
"Lights On at Satchel Paige" - 5:30-7p
Students will read aloud for parents & share essays about LINC.

Trailwoods Caring Communities
"Lights On Trailwoods" - 4-6p
Join your child during LINC hours for fun, fall-themed activities

Troost Caring Communities
"A Night of Magic" - 4:30-5:30p
A night of magic and music with a message with a magician.

Wendell Phillips Caring Comm.
"Talent Show" - 4:30-6:30p
Children will perform for family, friends, & community members.

Wheatley Caring Communities
"Wheatley's Amazing Race" - 5:30-6:30p. Visit all of the countries. The fastest team wins a prize!

Whittier Caring Communities
"Health Fair" - 4-6:30pm
Health fair, art display, and dinner for families & community members.

Sunday, Oct 7, 2012

Secrecy shrouds the case of girl found in closet

State agency withholds answers about what it did to help the little girl later found in a closet.

By LAURA BAUER
The Kansas City Star

Three months after authorities found a little girl locked in a Kansas City closet, dehydrated and malnourished, unanswered questions still haunt family members, advocates and some lawmakers.

How, for five years, did the girl known as LP basically disappear after the system had recognized her to be a child in danger? Did child welfare workers follow up after she and her little sister were reunited with their mother in March 2007?

A month later, LP stopped going to school. Did caseworkers know that?

And did they ever, in the next five years, when she was kept inside her mother's apartment and often locked in a closet, visit that home again?

The people who have that information — and under state law could provide it — have refused to answer any questions. For three months, officials with the Missouri Department of Social Services have remained silent, declining even to say they have knowledge of LP's case.

First, the agency spokeswoman said state law prohibited the department from saying anything. Then she said officials wouldn't release information because of the ongoing court case against Jacole Prince, LP's mom.

"Once the criminal justice matter is resolved, the Department will be in a position to reevaluate your request," DSS spokeswoman Rebecca Woelfel said last week in an email to The Star. "It is also important to note that the Department's deference to the criminal justice process at this time is consistent with the local prosecutor's wishes regarding your request."

Advocates and some state lawmakers say it is crucial to know what went wrong in this case so another child doesn't fall through the same cracks LP did. They insist that a system set up to protect the state's most vulnerable children must be held accountable when something goes wrong.

One state senator has requested information about LP's case and so far has been denied. Though he has received information in the past from the Office of Child Advocate on other child welfare cases, the office told him that in LP's case he couldn't have anything.

"I want to know how we got to this point," said Sen. Dan Brown, a Rolla Republican. "Did the Department of Social Services follow up? Were there more hotline calls? The basic questions are what I want to know."

A new joint committee on child abuse and neglect, made up of seven state senators and seven House members, will analyze state programs and systems designed to protect children. The

goal of the committee, formed before LP was found, is to improve the child welfare system in Missouri.

LP's case is expected to come up in that committee during the next session, which begins in January.

Sen. Jolie Justus, a Kansas City Democrat who is on that committee, is concerned that a number of high-profile child abuse and neglect cases could be a sign of a broken system. And in LP's case, more must be known.

"Someone along the line failed this little girl, and I want to know who it is," Justus said. "I want the facts ... so it won't happen again."

A need for 'sunshine'

LP came to the attention of the state's child welfare system in February 2006. That's when, according to Family Court records, Jacole Prince admitted that she intentionally withheld food from LP so the girl wouldn't go to the bathroom too often. The state took custody of LP and a younger sister.

About 13 months later, after Prince reportedly had worked through a checklist of requirements set by the state, she got her two daughters back.

But after a month, LP stopped going to school and disappeared from sight. Neighbors of Prince have said they didn't even know LP lived in the apartment, although they often saw Prince with her two younger daughters, who were well kept and had nice clothes and toys.

Five years passed.

On June 22, authorities following up on a hotline call found LP locked in a dark and tiny closet amid her own urine and feces. At 10 years old, she weighed 32 pounds. Authorities believe she had been kept hidden inside her mom's Kansas City apartment.

Her mother reportedly kept a bowl and a bottle behind a couch, where the girl would sometimes eat. LP told police that some days she went without food and was made to sleep in the closet, where she could be locked for days at a time.

She told the officers she didn't want to go home again.

Prince, 29, has been charged with three felony counts of child abuse, child endangerment and assault in the first degree. She has pleaded not guilty and sits in jail awaiting trial.

According to state law, when there's a child fatality, or near-fatality, the director of the Missouri Department of Social Services may release information about the case, including whether department workers made follow-up visits and for how long the visits continued. The law leaves the decision to release such information to the director's sole discretion.

In the weeks after a DSS caseworker and police followed up on a hotline call and found LP, an agency spokeswoman said state law prohibited them from even acknowledging they had a case.

"State law prohibits release of information specific to a case or individual, so we could not confirm nor deny involvement in the case," Woelfel, the DSS spokeswoman, said in late June.

When reminded by The Star that state law says information may be released when a child was near death, the spokeswoman sent an email in July stating: "This matter is now in the hands of

the criminal justice system. We will reserve any further comments until the conclusion of that process.”

When pressed last week, Woelfel indicated that the local prosecutor didn’t want the information released.

Jackson County Prosecutor Jean Peters Baker said her office subpoenaed LP’s DSS records shortly after the girl was found in June. Three months later, her office has yet to receive them, she said, but “I know they’re working on it.”

On Wednesday, the governor’s office called to ask her opinion on whether information should be released to the media, she said.

“I told them I felt this would not be conducive to the criminal case,” she said. “I don’t have the records myself. I would like to see what’s in them first.”

In other child abuse and neglect proceedings, DSS has released information before a criminal case goes to trial.

In late 2010, after prosecutors in southwest Missouri charged a mother with killing her child, the Springfield News-Leader requested the DSS case file. According to an April 2011 story, the newspaper received more than 300 pages that detailed the agency’s involvement in the case. The mother, Tatianna Light, has not yet gone to trial.

A decade ago, after Springfield toddler Dominic James died from injuries suffered in foster care, the News-Leader sued to obtain his DSS file. The county prosecutor at the time expressed concerns early on that the state hadn’t done enough to protect James.

James’ death in August 2002 sparked an overhaul of Missouri’s child welfare system. Legislators eventually passed the Dominic James Memorial Foster Care Reform Act, which allowed for some Family Court records to be open. That law is what permitted information on LP, and her involvement with DSS five years ago, to be released through family court.

One of the major goals of the legislation was to make the system more open to create more accountability, said former House member Mark Wright, a Springfield Republican who was a sponsor of the legislation.

“There’s a saying, ‘Sunshine is the best disinfectant,’ ” said Wright. “The more transparency in government, the better the government’s response to citizens it’s supposed to serve.”

Neither DSS nor Gov. Jay Nixon’s office has addressed why in some recent cases in which a child has died, the agency has released records and information before the criminal case was resolved.

Sam Murphey, a spokesman with Nixon’s office, was asked whether DSS did an internal investigation after LP was found to determine whether all agency policies and procedures were followed.

The governor’s office “has no comment at this point,” he said Friday.

In the James case, Wright and others fought to hold the state accountable. He said he had hoped after the lessons learned a decade ago that state leaders would be more open now.

“At the end of the day, our government officials need to do the legal and ethical thing, and that’s to release information,” said Wright, who left office because of term limits in January 2007. “If they are hiding things, not giving out information, there’s likely something they are trying to cover up.”

Balancing privacy, transparency

The foundation of the child welfare system is privacy. Children in the system have a right to know that they and their information are protected.

“When the courts entrust the legal custody of these children to the Department of Social Services, the Department’s paramount responsibility is to promote and protect the safety and best interests of these vulnerable children,” wrote Scotty L. Allen, chief counsel representing DSS, in a response to The Star’s request for information in LP’s case.

Indeed, when a child is taken into custody, the state doesn’t say where that child is or who is providing care. Though police often say the child is in state custody, agency officials often don’t even confirm that.

Rules on the release of information are spelled out in state law.

“To protect the rights of the family and the child named in the report as a victim, the children’s division shall establish guidelines which will ensure that any disclosure of information concerning the abuse and neglect involving that child is made only to persons or agencies that have a right to such information,” the law reads.

Families and advocates understand that.

But in cases where a tragedy occurs, advocates say it’s important to investigate whether there was a mistake or misstep, so that the system can be improved for the next child.

“I think privacy of victims is an important consideration,” said Emily van Schenkhof, deputy director of the nonprofit Missouri KidsFirst, a statewide child welfare advocacy agency. “But we have to weigh that with public interest of what happened so more children aren’t hurt.”

And while DSS has shared information and released records after a child dies, many wonder why the agency typically does not release records when a child is found near death, as Missouri law allows.

“Does a child have to die before the system is fixed?” van Schenkhof said.

In late July, during a Family Court hearing regarding the parental rights of Prince and Marcus Benson, who is the father of Prince’s two younger daughters, the guardian ad litem’s office asked the judge to close the hearings and court records to the public. Prince’s attorney said LP’s mom would like them to be confidential as well. The attorney for the juvenile officer opposed the move, saying the hearings and records should remain open.

The judge closed the Family Court proceedings. Jermak Prince, Jacole’s brother and LP’s uncle, and another family member and friend had to leave the courtroom.

Jermak Prince said he didn’t understand why the proceedings and filings couldn’t remain open. He has his own questions, including why the state didn’t evaluate his sister for a mental illness.

“The only person they are protecting now is themselves,” Jermak said on that July day. “She’s my sister and I don’t know what the hell is going on.”

LP’s case is also unusual in that so much of her story and all the allegations of how she was forced to live are already known. Kansas City area residents and people across the country have been so touched by her story that hundreds sent her cards and presents for her 11th birthday Aug. 1.

Residents who live in the Theron B. Watkins Homes complex, who say they didn't know LP was hidden inside apartment No. 11 for years, threw a birthday party in her honor. They wanted her to know that she matters and people care.

Many continue to send donations in her name to the Local Investment Commission. Already, more than \$6,500 has been collected for the little girl.

Now, advocates say, the goal must be to examine how or whether she fell through any cracks in the state system.

"Victims always say they want other children to not have to go through what they went through," van Schenkhoof said. "Most victims want to contribute to the greater good. That helps them heal."

TECHNOLOGY | Updated October 2, 2012, 9:43 a.m. ET

Web Rivals Want What Google Got

By SHALINI RAMACHANDRAN

To entice [Google Inc.](#) to build its ultra-high-speed fiber network there, Kansas City, Kan., and Kansas City, Mo., offered the Internet company sweeteners including several free or discounted city services. Now, [Time Warner Cable Inc.](#) and [AT&T Inc.](#), the incumbent Internet and TV providers in town, are angling to get the same deal.



Google received multiple incentives to build its Kansas City ultra-high-speed fiber network. Now, Time Warner Cable and AT&T, the incumbent Internet and TV providers in town, are angling to get the same deal. Shalini Ramachandran has details on The News Hub. Photo: Bloomberg.

Among the sweeteners granted Google by both cities are free office space and free power for Google's equipment, according to the agreement on file with the cities. The company also gets the use of all the cities' "assets and infrastructure"—including fiber, buildings, land and computer tools, for no charge. Both cities are even providing Google a team of government employees "dedicated to the project."

For the past few months Time Warner Cable has been negotiating with Kansas City, Kan., to get a "parity agreement" granting it the same concessions as Google got, the city and the company says. Time Warner Cable has already signed such a deal with Kansas City, Mo.

AT&T also has approached Kansas City, Mo., for the same deal, according to a person familiar with the matter.

"There are certain portions of the agreement between Google and Kansas City, Kan., that put them at a competitive advantage compared with not just us but also the other competitors in the field," said Alex Dudley, a Time Warner Cable spokesman. "We're happy to compete with Google, but we'd just like an even playing field."

AT&T declined to comment on any negotiations but said, "It's time to modernize our industry's rules and regulations...so all consumers benefit from fair and equal competition."



Kansas City Star/MCT/Zuma Press

Google CFO Patrick Pichette discussed Google Fiber in July.

that will offer pay-TV and Internet at extremely fast speeds of one gigabit per second—a speed that the company boasts would allow a person to download a season of "30 Rock" in 30 seconds. The Internet company chose Kansas City from more than 1,100 cities in the U.S. that had expressed interest in having the Google Fiber network built in their areas.

Google plans to start providing service in the first neighborhood, Hanover Heights, later this month.

The Google Fiber project was so desired that the local governments rolled out the red carpet. In Kansas City, Mo., for instance, the city is allowing Google to construct "fiberhuts," small buildings that house equipment on city land at no cost, according to a person familiar with the matter.

The cities are discounting other services, as well. For the right to attach its cables to city utility poles, Google is paying Kansas City, Kan., only \$10 per pole per year—compared with the \$18.95 Time Warner Cable pays. Both cities have also waived permit and inspection fees for Google.

The cities are even helping Google market its fiber build-out. And both are implementing city-managed marketing and education programs about the gigabit network that will, among other things, include direct mailings and community meetings.

Several cable executives complain that the cities also gave Google the unusual right to start its fiber project only in neighborhoods guaranteeing high demand for the service through pre-registrations. Most cable and phone companies were required by franchise agreements with regional governments to build out most of the markets they entered, regardless of demand.

The concessions made by the Kansas cities raise an unnerving question for existing pay-TV and Internet providers: whether other cities across the country could offer similarly sweet deals that could encourage Google to expand its Fiber build-out. Jenna Wandres, a Google Fiber spokeswoman, affirmed Monday that "right now we're focused on Kansas City, but we hope to expand to other communities in the future."

Google's rights "appear to be significantly more favorable than those cable, Verizon or any other fiber overbuilders achieved when striking deals with local governments in the past," said Goldman Sachs analyst Jason Armstrong. "We're surprised Time Warner Cable hasn't been more vocal in its opposition."

Already, the situation has given the cities new bargaining power. The Kansas cities are asking Time Warner Cable and AT&T to promise new, improved community services comparable to the ones Google has offered—which include hundreds of free connections to government-picked locations—before they'll give them a deal like Google's.

As part of its new "parity" deal with Kansas City, Mo., Time Warner Cable said it will make certain improvements in its services still to be finalized. The city has brought up speed and performance improvements to the network, for instance, according to a person familiar with the matter. In exchange, the cable operator will be getting Google's discounts and a refund for the difference it paid

the city in fees between March 2012 and August, the new agreement shows.

Similar discussions are under way with Kansas City, Kan. "Our goal is to encourage innovation. Whether that is Google or an existing provider or someone else, we want to help this to happen over and over again," says Kansas City, Kan., Mayor Joe Reardon.

Cable executives defend their current Internet offerings by pointing out that most Web applications don't yet require gigabit-speed Internet, and the residential market isn't demanding such offerings. As one top cable executive recently put it, Google Fiber is just "an expensive PR stunt."

Google dismissed that criticism.

Kansas City government officials also disagree. "Google has completely disrupted [Internet service] business models," says Rick Usher, assistant city manager of Kansas City, Mo. "Our citizens are more aware than ever before of what's available out there."

Write to Shalini Ramachandran at Shalini.Ramachandran@wsj.com

A version of this article appeared October 2, 2012, on page B3 in the U.S. edition of The Wall Street Journal, with the headline: Web Rivals Want What Google Got.

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The Pitch – Oct 2, 2012

Google attempts to bridge the digital divide with Kansas City's poor communities

by [Ben Palosaari](#)

Kansas City, Kansas' Rosedale Ridge public-housing apartment complex is one of the battlegrounds in the metro's digital divide. Seven beige buildings, some with windows boarded over, sit atop a steep hill on Mill Street, which is lined with crumbling sets of concrete stairs. Dead ends bound the community. A hundred feet or so down one of those roads is a nearly Appalachian scene, with chickens waddling around a yard of an old house near where a rusted tractor sits.

This shabby, neglected and out-of-sight complex, where a baby was wounded by a bullet during a double homicide in March, could miss out on Google's ultrafast Fiber network, according to Michael Liimatta, president of Connecting for Good. "If they brought 100-times-faster Internet, they'd also make the digital divide 100 times bigger," says Liimatta, whose nonprofit seeks to close the gap between the city's digital haves and have-nots.



Liimatta acknowledges that 1-gigabit-per-second Internet speed is great for tech-savvy Kansas Citians who already have Internet access. But he argues that the lowest-income residents in places like Rosedale Ridge are not potential Fiber customers. Some, he adds, have never been logged on to the Internet.

Google is offering three tiers of its Fiber service, including 1-gigabit-per-second Internet with cable TV for \$120 a month, gigabit Internet alone for \$70 a month, and free standard 5-megabit service for seven years after a \$300 installation fee.

Liimatta says the residents in income-restricted Rosedale Ridge are too poor to afford Google's free Internet service, even if the \$300 installation fee is broken up into 12 payments of \$25. Liimatta says paying the \$300 for each of Rosedale Ridge's 250 units would cost \$75,000. That's untenable for his group.

"That's quite the leap, don't you think?" he says. "Seventy-five grand for one property."

So he and his Connecting for Good partners came up with an alternative idea: Install a few Fiber connections at Rosedale Ridge, then create a Wi-Fi hot spot that would give access to everybody in the complex.

"We figured, well heck, if we're in public housing, and people are dirt poor, why can't we buy one [Fiber connection] and create a hot spot?" Liimatta says. The nonprofit would pay for the

installation and cover the monthly bills, and hundreds of low-income Kansas Citians would have access to the Web.

So far, the search behemoth has been cool to the idea.

"We appreciate the enthusiasm Connecting for Good has shown, and we've had many great conversations with them," Google Fiber spokeswoman Jenna Wandres said in a statement. "But unfortunately, their plan to split one Google Fiber connection to many people is against our terms of service."

No one following Google Fiber's rise in Kansas City — the first metro in the nation to get the service — could say the company hasn't been generous. Google has vowed to wire public buildings, schools, libraries and hospitals for free in areas defined as "fiberhoods" that reach a certain threshold of residents registering for service. But Google won't budge on Liimatta's plan.

Despite Google's unwillingness to bend on the issue, Liimatta says he's determined to keep chasing the rainbow bunny. He says he isn't considering going to a Google competitor, like Time Warner or AT&T, and handing it a sterling PR moment during a year in which Google Fiber has been front-page news on a weekly basis.

"The thing about it is, we want to work with Google," Liimatta says. "All of us at Connecting for Good say this is a wonderful thing. We don't want to say, 'Here, in your face, Google. We went with Time Warner.' "

Critics have complained about the way Google required customers to sign up: with a credit card and on a website. They say those demands asked too much of citizens without Internet access or plastic.

Additionally, as the preregistration deadline approached, local TV news and *The Kansas City Star* reported that Troost Avenue was Google Fiber's dividing line, and that East Side fiberhoods' preregistration numbers lagged.

But many working with nonprofits say Google has been helpful in signing up poor residents.

Leigh Blumenthal, a community organizer with Blue Hills Community Services, says reports of Google being hands-off in poor neighborhoods are wrong.

"They [Google] had a learning curve when they came to Kansas City," she says. "They didn't understand the population."

But the company soon figured out how to help the East Side ensure that schools in the neighborhoods received Fiber, she says.

"The Google team couldn't have been more supportive or invested in that neighborhood and working with residents to make that happen," Blumenthal says. "Anytime we said, 'Let's have this registration event at the [Blue Hills] Neighborhood Association,' they were there. They would just send people and make sure they were there to support it. That's what it seemed like was going on in all the surrounding neighborhoods."

Blumenthal says there was a sense of pride when all the fiberhoods in Blue Hills reached preregistration goals.

"They were really excited, really proud," she says. "You know there was all this criticism going on in *The Kansas City Star* about [how] east of Troost isn't going to be invested in something like this. And I think people took that on as a challenge. It kind of got things going."

The Blue Hills North fiberhood is slated to receive Fiber in fall 2013.

Calvin Jones, program manager for the Front Porch Alliance in the Ivanhoe Neighborhood bordering Blue Hills, echoes Blumenthal.

"Not only did they help us out, but [they] sent a team of, I believe, five or six out to our facility," Jones says.

Google's employees helped residents set up e-mail accounts and sign up for Fiber's free seven-year DSL service. The Front Porch Alliance paid the \$10 sign-up fee for 55 residents.

The only flaw that Jones sees in Google's strategy is that the search giant didn't actively market the free version to low-income areas.

"I would say where Google dropped the ball on Google Fiber in this neighborhood is, they didn't market it right," he says. "They marketed it for their ultrafast Internet speed and things like that, when a good majority of people in this neighborhood don't even have computers in their homes."

As for Liimatta's hot-spot plan for Rosedale Ridge, Google spokeswoman Wandres says it's not a viable way of connecting poor residents to the Internet.

"Access is certainly one of our major goals," Wandres tells *The Pitch*. "But another goal is to move the Web forward. And we think that having that gigabit fiber to the home is the way to do that right now."

She explains that a key goal of bringing Google Fiber to the area is constructing a physical infrastructure that would set up Internet access for future generations. In that way, digital literacy starts at home.

Wandres says 25 percent of Kansas Citians don't have Internet access at home — and the residents who didn't want to sign up typically said they didn't want the service.

"Most conversations weren't about cost," Wandres says. "They were about, 'I don't have the Internet now. I don't think I need it going forward.'"

Wandres says a Wi-Fi hot spot is a temporary fix, while hardwiring each residence ensures future access.

"Once you have the fiber drop into your home, that fiber drop can provide a range of speeds," she says. "That fiber connection will 'future-proof' your home."

Google isn't opposed to finding a working arrangement with Connecting for Good.

"We'd love to work with them in a different way that's not against our terms of service," Wandres says.

Liimatta sounds unfazed by opposition to his plan and hopes to reach a future compromise.

"I like the [Google] people I've worked with," he says. "Google is a megacorporation. It's hard to take anything they do personally."

Thursday, Sep 20, 2012

Google puts KC in digital divide spotlight

By MARY SANCHEZ

The Kansas City Star

Congratulations, Kansas City.

“Digital divide” is now a common reference.

Kansas City’s first run at signing up people for Google’s high-speed Internet has put the issue, and our efforts, in the national spotlight. We’re the case study.

Time to steel for the challenge the term defines.

Across the U.S., cities face the problem of rural and lower-income socioeconomic areas being less wired than more affluent areas. It’s serious business, with future productivity undermined unless the gap is lessened. A strong economy depends on the students of today being tech savvy and readied for future job markets.

And thanks to the massive outpouring of community action around Google Fiber, Kansas City is organized and poised to lead.

Within the next few weeks, the leader of a new digital team will be announced as an outgrowth of the Mayors’ Bistate Innovation Team.

Also, expect more information about a little-publicized program begun in 2011 by the Federal Communications Commission. Households that qualify by poverty guidelines for free and reduced-price lunch at public schools can order Internet service by established providers such as Time Warner for about \$10 a month and also buy low-cost computers.

Meanwhile, Ken Carter of Google’s corporate team told a group of local educators Monday that efforts in registering neighborhoods for Google Fiber “exceeded my wildest expectations.” He was in town gathering insight into how the company might offer local grants to help ease the digital divide.

The school leaders he addressed know they are key. Their enthusiasm and current efforts to enhance what high-speed Internet can offer their students are laudable.

Many neighborhoods reached their goals in the final days of the drive for preregistrations with unprecedented unity and cooperation. People worked like a well-organized political campaign.

On the final day for preregistrations, community volunteers huddled in a downtown office, committed to hours of work before the midnight deadline. Some had worked through the previous night.

Aaron Deacon, of the Social Media Club, stands out for his dogged determination. But teachers, superintendents, parents and students went door-to-door and manned phones, persuading people to preregister so that surrounding schools, libraries and other entities could take advantage of Google’s offer of access for some public entities for free.

Others anonymously donated money to cover \$10 preregistration fees. Local Investment Commission employees, with their close connections with schools, were critical.

Google has awakened an army of Kansas Citians who care deeply about narrowing the digital divide. Time will measure the outcome.

Posted on Thu, Oct. 04, 2012

Revitalization agenda focuses on inner city

Plans to improve the urban core are backed by the Kansas City business community.

By MIKE HENDRICKS
The Kansas City Star

One year after it was launched, the business community's effort to rebuild Kansas City's urban core has issued an "action agenda" to build prosperity and promote health, safety and education in nine inner city neighborhoods.

The document released Thursday was more a set of broad goals than a detailed plan, leaders of the Urban Neighborhood Initiative acknowledged.

"In many ways, this is still at the strategy-goal level," said Brent Stewart, president and chief executive officer of the United Way of Greater Kansas City, as he introduced the document to a gathering of 260 neighborhood, community and government leaders at the Federal Reserve Bank of Kansas City.

The 18-page report will be followed by a more specific implementation plan later this fall, Stewart said. The new nonprofit corporation will then use that document to guide its work when it begins at the first of the year.

Revitalizing urban neighborhoods was one of five big ideas to better the community that the Chamber of Commerce of Greater Kansas City identified in 2011. The chamber asked the United Way to help develop the plan.

The charity started by identifying a target area where there was high unemployment, substandard housing and poverty, but also where some positive changes could be built upon. Someplace big enough to make a difference, but not so big that the job would be overwhelming.

The chamber and United Way settled on an area between Troost Avenue and U.S. 71, 22nd to 52nd streets. They then asked people living in those nine neighborhoods what they wanted to see happen to make the area a better place to live.

Sixteen meetings and countless hours of research later, the result was this week's report containing three overarching goals:

- **Boost prosperity:** The report notes the need for more economic opportunities and better housing for the 10,000 residents of the target area. It suggests the need to create more and better jobs and sets a goal of attracting mixed-income housing and mixed-use development.
- **Promote health and safety:** Supporting clean and safe neighborhoods and improving community health are two main objectives. The report calls for helping neighborhoods fight crime and develop safe places for recreation.

Also, the area needs healthier food options. Many inner city residents must travel long distances to shop at a full-service grocery store. Again, no specifics are given, but among the projects the organization will be supporting is a new grocery store on Troost, Stewart said.

- **Education:** The reports suggests improving educational opportunities in the target area by supporting school readiness and early learning programs and better preparing students for careers after graduation.

After the announcement, members of the audience broke into groups to discuss the report. Reactions were mixed, though generally positive.

“This is a major first step,” Dennis Robinson, president of the Ivanhoe Neighborhood, said during one of those breakout sessions. “It will propel the community by leaps and bounds. We’re excited about this.”

Others said in interviews that they came away wishing they had heard more details.

“I was hoping to see a little more of the implementation, but we’ll see,” said Mark Stalsworth, president of Neighborhood Housing Services, a nonprofit group that builds and rehabs inner city homes.

Anita Maltbia had a similar reaction. But Maltbia, executive director of the Green Impact Zone, another targeted effort to fix urban core neighborhoods, said it is unique to have the business community behind such an effort.

That hasn’t been the case in other cities that have taken on similar tasks, and she and others saw it as a positive.

“The lifeblood of all these things is money,” said assistant city manager John Wood, who is leading the city’s efforts to rebuild urban neighborhoods.

The Urban Neighborhood Initiative has no cash to spread around. But businessman Terry Dunn, co-chairman of the initiative, told a reporter that one of the organization’s key jobs will be identifying projects and groups that need support, then convincing area charitable foundations to fund them with some of the billions of dollars they oversee.

Foundations already pour money into civic projects, but Dunn said there needs to be more focus.

“In the past we’ve had these one-off ideas,” he said.

The Urban Neighborhood Initiative’s job will be to better steer those donations to where the dollars are most needed.

Missouri to vote on raising nation's lowest tobacco tax

Oct. 8, 2012

JASON HANCOCK

The Star's Jefferson City correspondent

Missouri's cigarette tax is the lowest in the nation, and that has some people doing a slow burn.

At 17 cents per pack, Missouri's tax is nearly half as much as the next lowest and well below the \$1.49 national average. In Kansas, the tax is 79 cents a pack.

All that could change on Nov. 6, however, when voters get another chance to decide whether to raise the tax to 90 cents per pack and make Missouri's cigarette tax the 33rd highest in the country.

If it wins approval, Proposition B is projected to generate \$283 million to \$423 million a year in additional tobacco tax revenue, which would be directed to a fund aimed at K-12 schools, higher education and smoking cessation programs.



"Raising the tobacco tax is one of the most effective ways to reduce smoking rates and prevent our youth from ever starting," said Misty Snodgrass, government relations director for the American Cancer Society. "It's also a revenue win for our underfunded public schools and universities."

But opponents argue Proposition B would hurt sales tax revenue for state and local government and drive business to neighboring states.

"This would put small businesses in Kansas City at a disadvantage, which is horrific public policy," said Ron Leone, who is running the opposition's campaign for the Missouri Petroleum Marketers & Convenience Store Association PAC.

Voters rejected tobacco tax hikes in 2002 and 2006. Both years, the nation's biggest tobacco companies spent millions to oppose the increase. But this time around, those same companies have said they are sitting out the campaign.

"Big Tobacco is standing down this year because they support Proposition B. They support it because it reduces their competition," Leone explained.

That's because in addition to increasing taxes on tobacco products, Proposition B also would eliminate a pricing advantage that off-brand cigarette companies currently have in Missouri.

In 1998, Missouri was one of 46 states that entered into a legal agreement with cigarette makers forcing them to pay into a state fund to help cover the cost of smoking-related diseases. Companies that didn't sign the agreement still pay into the fund, but through a loophole in the law get their money back at the end of each year.

Missouri is the only state that hasn't closed the loophole.

"This ballot initiative eliminates a loophole in the law that has created an uneven playing field for cigarette manufacturers and retailers in Missouri," said Bryan Hatchell, a spokesman for Reynolds American Inc., a major manufacturer of tobacco products. "Primarily for this reason, Reynolds American Inc. has no plans to oppose the Missouri ballot initiative."

Leone said the passage of Proposition B would mean off-brand cigarettes could cost customers as much as 57 cents more per pack, in addition to the new increased tax.

"In one fell swoop, Big Tobacco can reduce or eliminate their competition," Leone said.

Money for schools

Snodgrass said the decision to use the additional revenue generated by the proposed tax increase for public schools and higher education is a key difference from previous efforts and a big reason why supporters are so optimistic it will succeed this time.

"We know that Missourians support their local public schools," she said.

If passed, the additional revenue would be put into the Health and Education Trust Fund, where 50 percent would go to K-12 schools, 30 percent to higher education and 20 percent to tobacco use prevention and quit assistance programs.

Supporters estimate that the higher tax could result in millions in additional funding for area school districts, including nearly \$3 million for North Kansas City, \$2.7 million for Lee's Summit and \$2.3 million for Kansas City.

Leone, however, questions whether the additional revenue will actually translate into higher funding levels. Lawmakers have a history of using new revenue streams to justify cuts in other state appropriations, he said.

"Even if this brought in \$300 million for schools, it doesn't guarantee the money that is currently appropriated for schools is going to stay there," he said. "The budget is a big shell game, and what goes in the front door can just as easily go right out the back door."

Snodgrass said proponents would be vigilant to ensure the additional revenue is spent in line with how voters intended.

"The coalition behind this initiative will be a constant presence in Jefferson City to remind legislators of the voters' intent and ensure accountability for its implementation," she said.

In addition to new revenue, Snodgrass said fewer Missourians smoking will also save the state millions of dollars a year. Medicaid costs associated with tobacco-related disease cost taxpayers \$532 million annually, she said. Each pack of cigarettes sold in Missouri "costs our economy \$12.68 in lost productivity and preventable health care expenses," she added.

"The low tobacco tax in Missouri costs the state dearly in state tax dollars, in lost productivity, in preventable disease and in premature deaths."

Impact on local business

Leone called the increased tax "outrageous and unfair." The real impact of the 90-cent per pack tax would be loss of business, and ultimately jobs, at stores along the state's borders.

"For some reason we're embarrassed for being the lowest cigarette tax, even though that brings a tremendous amount of business into this state," he said.

A study commissioned by Leone's organization and performed by Joseph Haslag, an economist at the University of Missouri, found that, if estimates are correct, Proposition B would result in 157 million fewer packs of cigarettes sold in Missouri every year. That would mean the amount collected in sales and other state and local taxes would decrease by \$67 million.

Haslag's study predicts that would translate to \$1.4 million in *lost* sales taxes for Kansas City and \$824,000 for Jackson County.

"That's why this isn't just about smokers," Leone said. "That's why everyone has skin in this game. Our state and local governments are going to lose revenue if this measure passes."

Snodgrass called that argument "fatally flawed" She said it presumes that with a decrease in smoking, none of the money currently spent on cigarettes will make its way back into the local economy and countered that tobacco use in the state costs an estimated \$565 per household in public expenditures.

"They are trying to convince voters that Missouri's economy is only competitive because we sell deadly, addictive products cheaper than our neighbors," she said. "That's just a false argument. The harm caused by tobacco products is currently subsidized by all Missourians."

Leone said his organization is not opposed to any tax increase on tobacco. He said he spoke in favor of legislation that would have nearly doubled the tax to 33 cents per pack earlier this year, but the bill never gained traction.

"For anyone to say we're against all tax increases is ridiculous," he said. "We're just against any tax increase that puts us at a competitive disadvantage with our neighboring states."

Money game

The nation's biggest tobacco companies may be sitting out the 2012 campaign, but off-brand cigarette companies are spending big in Missouri.

Two of those companies – Cheyenne International LLC of Grover, N.C., and Xcaliber International LTD LLC of Pryor, Okla. – have given more than \$1 million combined to the opposition campaign this year.

Several convenience store chains, such as Dallas-based 7-Eleven Inc., also have chipped in to the opposition effort.

The American Cancer Society spent hundreds of thousands of dollars on the campaign just getting the measure on the ballot, and last week the organization chipped in another \$1.7 million.

A poll released in August by the firm Public Policy Polling showed 47 percent of respondents in favor, 38 percent opposed and 14 percent undecided.

Both sides are optimistic about their chances.

"You're always fighting an uphill battle when you're fighting a sin tax," Leone said. "Our job is to educate voters and pull back the curtain and understand all taxpayers have skin in the game. This is not simply a tax that someone else pays."

Snodgrass said the campaign is gaining support every day as proponents travel the state to educate voters.

"Once voters see the benefits to their community, we're going to be successful this November," she said.

Sat, Oct. 06, 2012

The Star's recommendation | The time has come to raise Missouri's cigarette tax

It's not often a single vote can make a state smarter, healthier and more prosperous.

But Missourians have the chance to achieve all of those things on Nov. 6 by voting yes on Proposition B. The ballot measure increases the tax on tobacco products by a rate that would add 73 cents to the cost of a pack of cigarettes.

Here are a few of the many reasons Missouri voters should get this done:

- It's a chance to climb out of the cellar without firing a general manager or breaking in a new quarterback.

At 17 cents a pack, Missouri's cigarette tax is dead last among the 50 states and the District of Columbia. That's embarrassing. And foolish. A state that can't afford to adequately fund schools and services is subsidizing an expensive habit with the nation's lowest tobacco tax.

- It would add years to lives.

Missouri has the nation's 39th lowest life expectancy. It is one of just seven states where the life expectancy for women in a significant number of counties is actually decreasing.

Not coincidentally, Missouri has the nation's 11th highest smoking rate, at 21 percent of adults and 19.5 percent of high school students. Its citizens are diagnosed with cancer, high blood pressure and heart disease at higher rates than national norms.

By motivating people, especially teenagers, to smoke less or not at all, the increased cigarette tax is projected to stop 22,000 Missourians from dying prematurely over five years.

- It would lighten a financial burden on everyone.

Missouri's ridiculously low cigarette tax costs the state's Medicaid program \$532 million a year — an expense that must be recouped through state and federal taxes. The overall health costs caused by smoking are estimated at \$2.13 billion a year, which all consumers pay for in higher insurance rates and hospital costs.

- It would help schools.

Proposition B wisely creates a Health and Education Trust Fund to safeguard the money the state would receive from the higher cigarette tax — about \$283 million a year.

By statute, half of the new revenue would be used to fund public elementary and secondary schools. Thirty percent would be spent to help the state's colleges and universities expand health care-related curriculums such as nursing.

The remaining 20 percent would fund programs to keep people from smoking, or help smokers to quit. Missouri is one of the few states that currently invests no funding toward reducing tobacco use.

Importantly, the ballot measure specifies that money from a higher cigarette tax must be treated as new funding and not simply as a replacement for money the state currently spends on schools and universities. An annual audit is required to make sure that is happening.

Plenty of other benefits would be gained by passage of Proposition B. Among other things, the state would steer clear of legal jeopardy because the ballot measure smartly closes a loophole in state law that gives a big financial advantage to small tobacco companies that sell off-brand cigarettes in the state.

Opponents of the proposal, led by the small cigarette makers and convenience store owners, protest weakly that a higher tobacco tax would damage the state's economy by reducing demand and discouraging consumers in neighboring states from purchasing cigarettes in Missouri.

It's insulting to suggest that Missouri's economic well-being depends on the sale of cheap cigarettes. Healthy, productive workers and good schools and universities are much better drivers of economic competitiveness.

State lawmakers and Gov. Jay Nixon have shamefully ducked their responsibility to lower Medicaid costs, help schools and make the state healthier by calling for a higher tobacco tax. A broad coalition of health and education advocates did the hard work of getting Proposition B on the ballot. Voters will do good on a multitude of fronts by approving it.

Topping Caring Community

FREE & FUN!

Mayor Reads to our kids!



Friday, Oct. 12

3:30 - 4:30 pm

Kansas City, MO Mayor Sly James will read to students at Topping Elementary during the LINC after-school program.

Topping Elementary
4433 N Topping
Kansas City, MO 64117



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For more information, contact:
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