

LINC Commission Meeting

September 16, 2013



Students get free haircuts at a back to school event at Fairmount Elementary in the Independence School District. Nearly 400 students from Fairmount, Sugar Creek, and Mallinson Elementary schools attended. Each received backpacks with all their required school supplies, books, and more.



Local Investment Commission (LINC) Vision

Our Shared Vision

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

Our Mission

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

Our Guiding Principles

1. **COMPREHENSIVENESS:** Provide ready access to a full array of effective services.
2. **PREVENTION:** Emphasize “front-end” services that enhance development and prevent problems, rather than “back-end” crisis intervention.
3. **OUTCOMES:** Measure system performance by improved outcomes for children and families, not simply by the number and kind of services delivered.
4. **INTENSITY:** Offering services to the needed degree and in the appropriate time.
5. **PARTICIPANT INVOLVEMENT:** Use the needs, concerns, and opinions of individuals who use the service delivery system to drive improvements in the operation of the system.
6. **NEIGHBORHOODS:** Decentralize services to the places where people live, wherever appropriate, and utilize services to strengthen neighborhood capacity.
7. **FLEXIBILITY AND RESPONSIVENESS:** Create a delivery system, including programs and reimbursement mechanisms, that are sufficiently flexible and adaptable to respond to the full spectrum of child, family and individual needs.
8. **COLLABORATION:** Connect public, private and community resources to create an integrated service delivery system.
9. **STRONG FAMILIES:** Work to strengthen families, especially the capacity of parents to support and nurture the development of their children.
10. **RESPECT AND DIGNITY:** Treat families, and the staff who work with them, in a respectful and dignified manner.
11. **INTERDEPENDENCE/MUTUAL RESPONSIBILITY:** Balance the need for individuals to be accountable and responsible with the obligation of community to enhance the welfare of all citizens.
12. **CULTURAL COMPETENCY:** Demonstrate the belief that diversity in the historical, cultural, religious and spiritual values of different groups is a source of great strength.
13. **CREATIVITY:** Encourage and allow participants and staff to think and act innovatively, to take risks, and to learn from their experiences and mistakes.
14. **COMPASSION:** Display an unconditional regard and a caring, non-judgmental attitude toward participants that recognizes their strengths and empowers them to meet their own needs.
15. **HONESTY:** Encourage and allow honesty among all people in the system.



Monday, Sept. 16, 2013 | 4 – 6 pm
Kauffman Foundation
4801 Rockhill Rd.
Kansas City, Mo. 64110

Agenda

- I. Welcome and Announcements
- II. Approvals
 - a. July minutes (motion)
- III. Superintendents' Reports
- IV. Kansas City (MO) School District Update
- V. Finance Committee
 - a. 2013-14 Budget Update
 - b. LINC Investment Policy
- VI. Other reports
 - a. Family Support Division Resource Centers
 - b. Summer Electronic Benefit Transfer (SEBT)
 - c. Turn the Page KC (Reading Initiative)
- VII. LINC Commission Appointment
 - a. Aaron Deacon (motion)
- VIII. Adjournment



THE LOCAL INVESTMENT COMMISSION – JULY 17, 2013

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

Jack Craft	Dick Hibschan
Steve Dunn	Tom Lewin
Herb Freeman	Rosemary Lowe
SuEllen Fried	Mary Kay McPhee
Anita Gorman	Bailus Tate
Bart Hakan	Marge Williams

A motion to approve the June 17, 2013, LINC Commission meeting minutes was passed unanimously.

Superintendents' Report

- **Pamela Pearson** (Executive Director, Genesis Promise Academy) shared developments at the school.
- **Bob Bartman** (Superintendent, Center School District) reported students in the district summer school program benefitted from the LINC summer program. He also reported the district is concerned about court rulings regarding student transfers from unaccredited school districts. Discussion followed.
- **Gayden Carruth** (Executive Director, Cooperating School Districts of Greater Kansas City) shared information about legislative developments
- **Ralph Teran** (Superintendent, Grandview School District) shared information about summer.
- **John Tramel** (Director of Family Services, Independence School District) reported 1,300 volunteers participated in Project Shine landscaping and school maintenance projects at five schools. He also reported district teachers this summer are writing curriculum to meet Common Core standards.
- **Dennis Carpenter** (Superintendent, Hickman Mills School District) reported key district positions have been filled, the board has established priorities for the school year, and the administration will begin planning to carry out the priorities.
- **Jerry Kitzi** (Director of Early Learning, Kansas City Public Schools) reported the district held summer school programs that were supported by LINC summer camps and before and after school programs.

Woodland Early Learning Community School

Kitzi reported on the effort to open the Woodland Early Learning Community School this fall, which will serve more 300 young children. LINC President **Gayle A. Hobbs** reported LINC will support the effort to develop Woodland as a community center providing multiple services. Mo. Family Support Division Kansas City Region Administrator **Marge Randle** reported the division will locate a family resource center at Woodland to help families access food stamps, temporary assistance, and other benefits. LINCWorks Director **Tom Jakopchek** reported LINCWorks staff will be located at Woodland to assist clients with soft skills classes and work groups.

LINC Data System Project

Oscar Tshibanda of Tshibanda & Associates reported on the effort to develop a new data system for LINC and its partners. The project involves interviewing users and stakeholders in order to develop requirements for the new system, and working with vendors to ensure the requirements are met.

Health Care

Scott Lakin of Mid-America Regional Council reported on the Kansas City Regional Health Assessment, which studied the socioeconomic factors affecting health care coverage and health outcomes. The report found the spread of poverty within the region has resulted in a rise in those who are uninsured or on Medicaid, as well as a rise in chronic conditions such as obesity and diabetes.

Jessica Hembree of the Health Care Foundation of Greater Kansas City reported on the challenges to implementing the Affordable Care Act in the Kansas City area, including negative perceptions of the ACA, the lack of Medicaid expansion in Missouri and Kansas, and the lack of navigators to help enroll people in the health insurance marketplaces that will begin on Oct. 1. These challenges provide community organizations with opportunities to educate and assist those who are eligible to be enrolled.

Graciela Couchonnal of the Health Care Foundation of Greater Kansas City reported on the foundation's effort to support the goals of the ACA – better health care, better health outcomes, reduced costs – through its partnership with the Missouri Foundation for Health on the Missouri Medical Home Collaborative.

Summer

LINC Communications Director **Brent Schondelmeyer** reported 2,341 students were served by LINC summer programs, many of them with a focus on reading. In addition, so far LINC has distributed \$234,000 in food benefits during the third and final year of the Summer Electronic Benefits Transfer for Children demonstration program of the U.S. Department of Agriculture.

Grandparent Support

LINC Deputy Director **Candace Cheatem** reported on LINC's initiative to provide assistance to grandparents raising grandchildren. The effort, in partnership with the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development, is focused on Pemberton Park, where LINC provides workshops and skills classes for both grandparents and youth. Grandparent Linda Benson reported LINC's assistance is beneficial to her as she raises five grandchildren.

Project Shine

Principal **Hayet Woods** of Smith-Hale College Preparatory Academy (Hickman Mills School District) reported the Project Shine event at her school succeeded in engaging parent and neighborhood volunteers at the school.

The meeting was adjourned.

Missouri School Performance Scores (2013)

District	Enrollment 2012-2013	% Free or Reduced Lunch	Test performance: Percent proficient or advanced in 2013				Accreditation score: % of possible points
			Language Arts	Math	Science	Social Studies	
MISSOURI TOTAL	888,319	49.9	55.6	53.9	59.1	50.7	

CLAY COUNTY

Excelsior Springs	2,890	47.1	55.3	52.9	63.9	61.8	84.3
Kearney	3,590	16.3	69	65.4	76.4	62.3	95
Liberty	11,282	21.1	67.5	66	72.1	66.7	93.6
Missouri City	15	46.7	66.7	72.7	60	na	96.3
North Kansas City	18,934	48.7	53.1	49.3	56.3	45.1	78.9
Smithville	2,448	14.3	68.2	63.8	74	55.2	87.9

JACKSON COUNTY

Blue Springs	14,059	30.3	68.4	69.1	78.2	66.2	97.9
Center	2,349	74.1	48.7	48.5	43.4	45.8	85.4
Fort Osage	4,862	56.1	49.3	49.8	64.2	40.2	72.5
Grain Valley	3,770	22.8	63.3	64.3	67.4	49.3	83.9
Grandview	3,856	76.5	47.8	48.6	48.6	25.2	93.6
Hickman Mills	6,361	86.4	31.9	30.7	32	57.2	51.8
Independence	13,938	68.5	46.3	41.9	56.2	57.5	73.2
Kansas City	15,709	89	30.6	30.2	28.3	28.2	60
Lee's Summit	17,578	20.2	66.6	64.2	71	67.6	96.1
Lone Jack	575	18.7	69.5	59.2	70.5	55.1	90
Oak Grove	1,985	38.1	61.4	58.1	65.3	57.8	93.6
Raytown	8,547	66.1	44.1	44.4	49.1	42.6	85

Charter districts

Academie Lafayette	776	22.3	69.7	75.2	80.5	na	87.5
Allen Village	423	93.7	46.5	54.5	34.7	na	95.6
Alta Vista	443	90.3	43.2	50.7	36.7	18.5	64.3
Banneker	370	96.2	20.5	28	8.1	na	29.4
Brookside	441	86.1	35.4	46.1	15.1	na	72.9
Crossroads Academy	186	73.8	35.6	35.6	20	na	*
DeLaSalle	216	82.3	23.9	12.1	8.5	6	24.2
Della Lamb	627	98	17.9	10.8	5.7	na	42.9
Derrick Thomas Academy	878	96.5	23.6	23.6	18.6	12.1	56.4
Ewing Marion Kauffman	182	83.4	50.3	56.1	51	na	*
Frontier School of Innovation	901	91.5	35.5	45.7	22.2	6.4	79.5
Genesis	211	96.8	15.2	15.6	0	na	53.6
Gordon Parks	240	96.1	14.6	16.7	9.5	na	50
Hogan Prep	699	88.6	19.3	17.1	22	21.9	45.7
Hope Academy	569	92.4	18.6	9	12.2	7.8	17.1
Hope Leadership Academy	82	100	5	5	na	na	*
KIPP Endeavor Academy	234	97.9	36.7	45.7	19	na	75
Lee A. Tolbert	525	85.3	36.9	39.6	22.4	na	74.3
Pathway Academy	460	98.8	18	24.9	21.8	na	75
Scuola Vita Nuova	172	90.6	43.1	60.7	37.5	na	87.5
University Academy	860	77.9	57.5	63.1	47	87.3	96.4

* New schools without enough years of data to be given an accreditation score

Posted on Fri, Aug. 23, 2013

News

Missouri report card gives Kansas City better grades

By JOE ROBERTSON
The Kansas City Star

The first round of scores has landed under Missouri's new performance report for school districts with good news for Kansas City, not-so-good news for St. Louis.

The reports were mostly encouraging for Kansas City area districts as they chase after performance benchmarks that will rise steadily through the end of the decade.

Kansas City Public Schools, as it had been projecting, reached 60 percent of the possible points it could earn, placing the unaccredited district securely above the 50 percent needed to be considered for provisional accreditation.

It marked a dramatic rise from the 19.6 percent the district had scored last fall in a test of the new accountability system using the past three years of performance data.

Kansas City's jump, balanced heavily on the points the new system grants for growth in student performance, stood in contrast to St. Louis Public Schools, currently provisionally accredited, and the two other unaccredited districts in the St. Louis area — Normandy and Riverview Gardens.

All three of those districts remained mired with low scores — St. Louis at 24.6 percent, Riverview Gardens at 28.6 and Normandy at 11.1.

Among 26 Kansas City-area K-12 districts, 15 earned more than 90 percent of their possible points, which would make them candidates to be accredited with distinction.

Nine districts scored between 70 and 90 percent, the level needed to be considered for full accreditation.

Two districts — Kansas City at 60 percent and Hickman Mills at 51.8 — scored at the provisional level.

The scores are a major factor in earning accreditation, but the state school board determines a district's status. In most cases, the state will want at least two and usually three years of data under the new system before changing a district's status, said Missouri Education Commissioner Chris Nicastro.

“We applaud Kansas City’s effort,” Nicastro said. But the state intends to judge districts “in the context of sustainable trends,” she said. “One annual performance report does not constitute a sustainable trend, whether for improvement or decline.”

Kansas City wants an early decision in changing its accreditation status because it fears the impact of a student transfer law that could be implemented in Kansas City as early as next spring.

The law, already being applied in the St. Louis area, allows students in unaccredited districts to transfer to nearby districts at the cost of the unaccredited district.

Kansas City’s leadership team will be meeting with Nicastro and her staff in early September, and Kansas City Superintendent Steve Green expects he will have a strong case.

“If you look at us in operations, finances and academically, we are stabilized and improving — dramatically in some cases,” Green said. “This is the beginning of a renaissance for this district.”

The road ahead, however, gets harder for all school districts — especially those benefiting from points for growth in student performance.

The new accountability system deepens the measures in academic performance, college and career readiness, graduation rate and attendance. The state is applying the scoring system not just to districts but for individual schools.

“What’s better — and scary — is that each building gets a breakdown,” said Grandview Superintendent Ralph Teran. “It helps get data as close as you can to the source, the kids.”

Grandview, a school district where three-fourths of the students qualify for free or reduced-price lunches, opened the new system with a score of 93.6 percent.

The score “feels good for the kids,” Teran said. But Grandview “gobbled up” many points for improvement, which it will have to build on.

“With everything ratcheting up, we have to work really hard to maintain our status,” he said. “It’s going to be a haul.”

One district that has a lot of work ahead is Hickman Mills, under new Superintendent Dennis Carpenter. Hickman Mills was knocked down to provisional accreditation last year.

Teachers joined in a summer of work matching performance targets to the state’s rising benchmarks and worked with consultants on instructional strategies, Carpenter said.

“I find this system of accountability to be both fair and realistic,” he said.

While most of the area school districts opened with scores in the fully accredited range, the reports were much more mixed for area charter schools.

Most of the charter schools, like Kansas City, serve high concentrations of poor students and some — like University Academy and Allen Village — scored above 90 percent. But others scored in the unaccredited level, including Hogan Preparatory Academy, Della Lamb and Banneker Academy. Gordon Parks, which was spared the loss of its charter by a court ruling this summer, scored 50 percent.

Some schools that primarily try to serve high-risk students and former dropouts, DeLaSalle and Hope Academy, scored under 25 percent.

Charter schools, public schools that operate independently, are scored by the state but are held accountable by the universities that sponsor them. Still, the state's measures are pushing them higher, said Allen Village Principal Phyllis Washington.

Allen Village began accelerating more of its students into algebra I and English I in the eighth grade in part to reach for the state's rising expectations, Washington said.

"We push for the best as hard as we can," she said. "We're pushing kids toward more technology. We're going to have to raise the bar. All of us are going to have to think out of the box."

In Kansas City, teachers and principals are deep into the next quest, pushing student performance to levels that would put the district at the fully accredited level at this time next year, Green said.

It will be harder, he said, "But we've got the wiring in place to sustain this effort. I want a stethoscope on every student, like a doctor getting vital signs, getting the academic heartbeat."

To reach Joe Robertson, call 816-234-4789 or send email to jrobertson@kcstar.com.

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Posted on Fri, Aug. 23, 2013

News

Area districts cheer progress of Kansas City schools

By JOE ROBERTSON
The Kansas City Star

Amid all the enthusiasts you'd expect at a Kansas City Public Schools rally, eight sharply dressed men filled the second row.

Superintendents, all of them.

They sat there Friday morning, right behind the Kansas City school board members, almost lost in a room full of Kansas City staffers, volunteers, parents, students and supportive civic leaders as the district paraded its stunning report card news in front of a full bank of news cameras.

The superintendents came, some said afterward, because the future of the Kansas City district weighs over their schools and communities as well — particularly Kansas City's quest to earn provisional accreditation.

"It would be a travesty if the (state) school board ignored their progress," said Lee's Summit Superintendent David McGehee.

The unaccredited Kansas City district scored securely in the provisional range in the first year of the state's new accountability system, one year after it had come close to the mark in the old system.

"Kansas City deserves to be rewarded," McGehee said.

But there is more at stake, he and other superintendents said.

They came from Lee's Summit, Grandview, Hickman Mills, Raytown, North Kansas City, Park Hill, Independence and Grain Valley in part because they are concerned about the potential impact of a controversial student transfer law.



Stephen Green, superintendent of Kansas Public Schools, listened to Chris Nicastro, Missouri education commissioner, at a school board meeting two years ago.

The law, already in effect in the St. Louis area, allows students in unaccredited districts to transfer to nearby accredited districts with tuition and transportation costs covered by the unaccredited districts.

Two unaccredited St. Louis districts — Normandy and Riverview Gardens — combined had 2,600 of their 10,600 students seek transfers for this school year. While receiving districts mostly are working to accommodate the arrivals, the 8,000 students remaining behind are in districts that the state projects will be bankrupt within two years without funding relief.

“This transfer issue is so intense,” said Grandview Superintendent Ralph Teran.

Earlier at the podium, Kansas City Superintendent Steve Green had spoken his case that Kansas City’s two years of growth should warrant the higher classification from the state.

“I support his argument,” Teran said.

Districts in the Kansas City area have held off acting on the transfer law because a Missouri Supreme Court case involving several area districts is pending. But the same court upheld the law in a ruling handed down in June in a St. Louis area case.

The districts in the Kansas City case have argued that the law is unconstitutional because it compels districts to pay unfunded costs. In the St. Louis case, the court determined the law causes only a shuffling of costs.

The fact that districts in the St. Louis area are going bankrupt suggests “there is an unfunded mandate” in the law, McGehee said. “There is a mess.”

Kansas City Mayor Sly James, in a letter Friday to Education Commissioner Chris Nicastro, stopped short of asking the commissioner to recommend provisional status for Kansas City, but he asked her to listen to Green’s case, particularly with the potential disruption of transfers looming.

“I have watched recent education-related events in St. Louis with great interest, sadness and fear,” James wrote. “As you are well aware, our community faces uncertainty around the accreditation status of Kansas City Public Schools.”

He said he would not presume to tell education professionals what decision they should make.

“However,” he said, “I do believe the district deserves to be heard and I hope you will consider listening to KCPS’ case for provisional accreditation...”

Nicastro plans to meet with Green and Kansas City staff in early September to talk about the district’s status, she said Thursday.

The state will consider the district’s argument, Nicastro said, but she reiterated that she believes that the district needs to show improvement for at least two years, if not three, under the new accountability system.

While she is concerned about the transfer law's effects, Nicastro said, she thinks the transfer issue should be considered separately from the state's accountability system.

Kansas City's improved performance — reaching 60 percent of its possible points — is significant and laudable, she said, but many of the points were earned in recognition for growth in student test scores.

Seven out of 10 students in the district still did not perform at proficient or advanced levels in math and English language arts. So the district will have to build on its growth just to keep its score in a provisional range, let alone attain a full accreditation level.

Kansas City's jump was just a highlight in what was overall a strong first showing for Kansas City area districts under the new report cards, said Gayden Carruth, executive director of the Cooperating School Districts of Greater Kansas City.

She also joined with the superintendents at the Kansas City pep rally.

The pending student transfer law threatens what she sees as an otherwise encouraging education climate across the area — particularly with the improvement in Kansas City.

"The entire Kansas City area should be proud of what's been accomplished here," she said.

At the rally, Green assured the crowd that the district understands how it made its improvement, and also how far it still has to go.

"What we accomplished was not an accident," he said. "It was by design. It was strategic. It was very intentional."

He acknowledged that the community has seen bursts of optimism before over the past many years that ultimately fizzled.

This time, he said, will be different.

"The roller coaster is done in this district," he said.

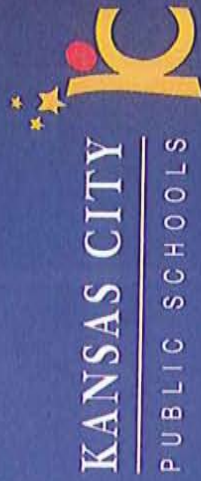
This morning, Green's executive cabinet will be meeting with the school board at a retreat to talk about the work already under way toward next year's state report, said board president Airick Leonard West.

"Milestones are worth celebrating," he said. But the leadership and the board will be meeting, "and we will have the same conversation one more time: Here is the vision. How many steps can we take next year?"

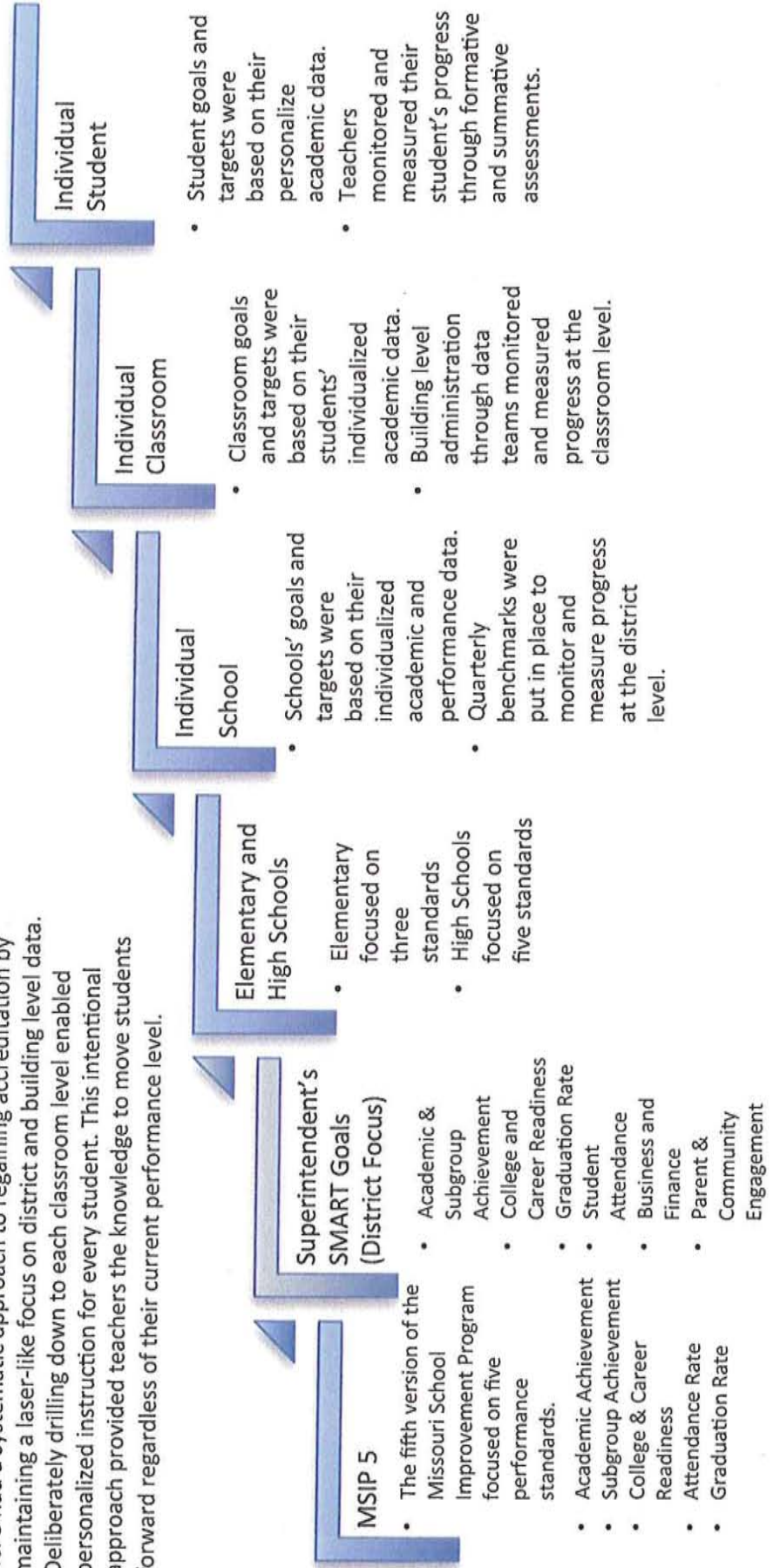
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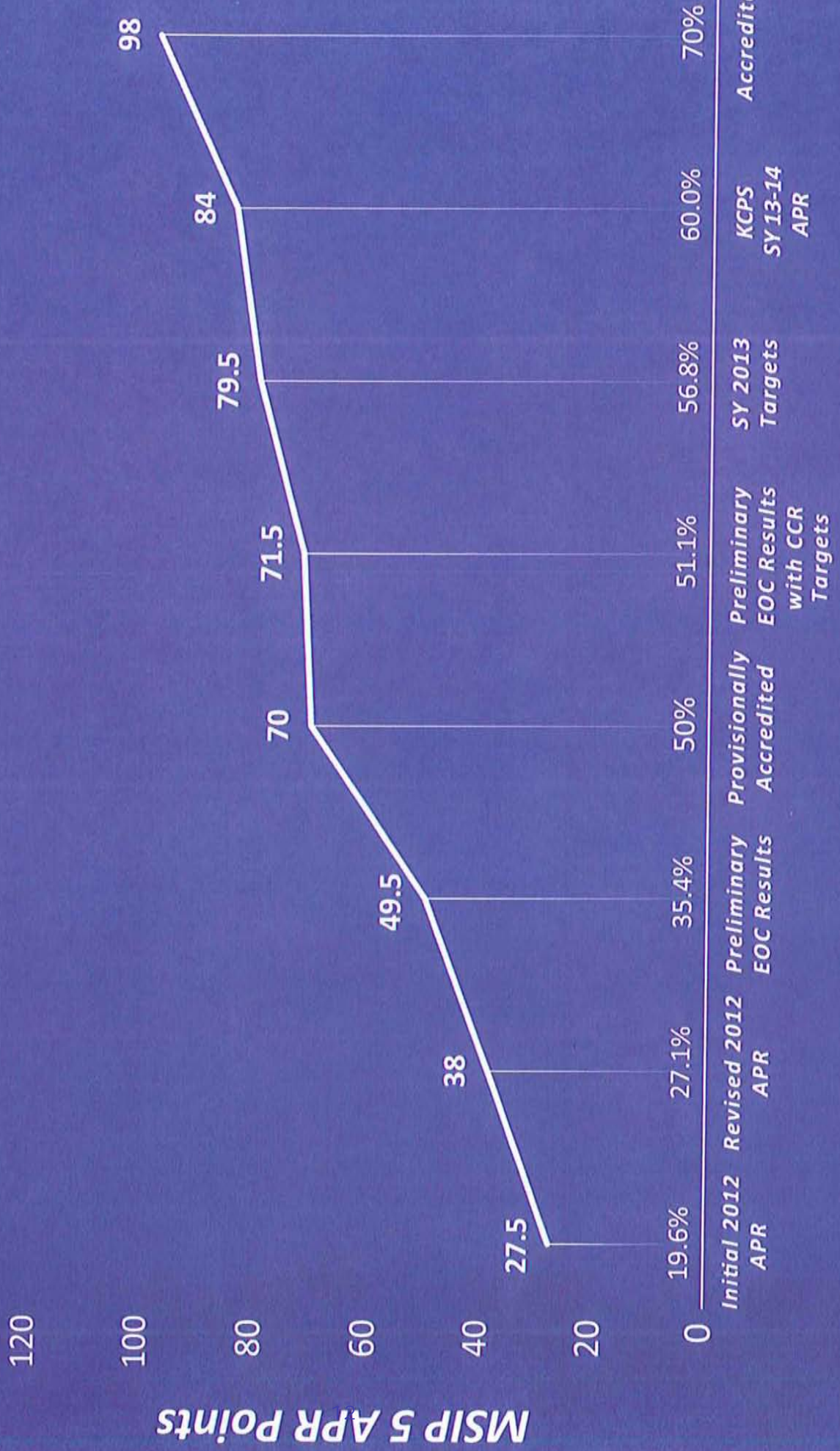
A Systemic, Sustainable Approach to Regaining Accreditation



KCPS had a systematic approach to regaining accreditation by maintaining a laser-like focus on district and building level data. Deliberately drilling down to each classroom level enabled personalized instruction for every student. This intentional approach provided teachers the knowledge to move students forward regardless of their current performance level.



SY 2012-SY 2013 PROGRESS TOWARD ACCREDITATION



Posted on Fri, Aug. 23, 2013

Editorial

State should reward KC school district's progress

Buoyed by an impressive climb in Missouri's performance report, Kansas City Public Schools Superintendent Steve Green plans to ask state officials to return the district to the status of provisional accreditation.

We support that move — with the caveat that much work remains for Kansas City's core school district to regain the community's confidence and fully prepare students for the demands of a knowledge-based economy.

After hitting bottom in 2011, when news broke that the district would lose its accreditation, overall performance scores have improved for two years. The 60 percent of possible points earned in the latest round put the district securely above the 50 percent threshold needed to be considered for provisional accreditation.

That may not be enough, however. Chris Nicastro, the state's education commissioner, said this week that the Department of Secondary and Elementary Education didn't intend to change the status of any districts based on this year's ratings, which are the result of a new set of performance standards. The state wants to evaluate districts for several years to see if they are on an upward or downward trajectory, Nicastro said.

Under normal circumstances, a waiting period would make sense for Kansas City, given the district's long history of administrative upheaval at the expense of student achievement. But the district and state are eyeing a Missouri Supreme Court decision, expected in the spring, that could enable families in the unaccredited Kansas City district to transfer to schools in nearby accredited districts. Kansas City Public Schools would be forced to pick up the tab.



Kansas City Public Schools Superintendent Steve Green recently greeted first-year kindergarten teacher Adrienne Williams at Hartman Elementary School.

A transfer process is currently wreaking havoc in the St. Louis area, where 2,500 students have left two unaccredited districts for other schools. State officials say the transfers are expected to bankrupt the Normandy School District within a year, and the Riverview Gardens School District won't be far behind. Meanwhile, students are traveling as far as 30 miles to their new schools.

By refusing to grant provisional accreditation to Kansas City Public Schools, state officials risk throwing the district and indeed the entire region into turmoil just as the district is finally showing stability.

For the first time in decades, Kansas City Public Schools appears to have a board and administrative team focused on student achievement. Green has proved himself a steady and unassuming leader.

The district has improved its attendance and graduation rates over the past two years and has shown better test scores in math, science and social studies. Scores in English language arts — reading and writing — remain in the basement. At a news conference Friday, Green called that situation “unacceptable” and promised to reverse it.

Superintendents from eight neighboring school districts attended the celebratory event at Paseo Academy for Fine and Performing Arts, and expressed support for the district's bid for provisional accreditation.

“I think it would be a travesty if the commissioner and (state) board of education ignore this progress,” said David McGehee, superintendent of the Lee's Summit School District.

The Missouri legislature has shown abysmal leadership on educational issues in recent years, refusing to fix the law authorizing the transfers. But one bright spot is a law passed this year enabling the education commissioner to intervene much more quickly when a district runs into serious academic or financial problems. Should the Kansas City district again become unaccredited, the state could take action immediately.

At the moment, Kansas City is as close to full accreditation on the state's performance scale as it is to losing its accreditation. As Green noted, the district is closer to the goal of full accreditation than it's ever been in the current system.

It will take a great deal of hard work but Kansas City Public Schools finally seems to be on the right track. Nicastro and state education leaders would make a terrible mistake by ignoring the gains and opening the region up to the upheaval of the misguided transfer policy.

Tuesday, Sep 10, 2013

Kansas City rally promotes the importance of school attendance

By JOE ROBERTSON
The Kansas City Star

It's looking like a pretty good year for Ariana Gasca.

The Northeast High School eighth-grader's grades are strong. She is no longer worrying about dropping out.

And on Tuesday, she had "Happy Birthday" sung to her by Tech N9ne in Mayor Sly James' 29th-floor City Hall office while the mayor, Royals' Hall of Famer George Brett and a crowd of dignitaries and celebrities sang along before a battery of television cameras.

That's what comes when you are selected as the face of city and school [truancy programs](#) that are working together to help keep children in class across the city. Ariana, one of the success stories, will turn 15 on Sunday.

James gathered the collection of educational, political and civic leaders — along with sports mascots Sluggerrr and KC Wolf — to rally parents and the community around the importance of school attendance.

The city has declared September to be Attendance Awareness Month, and officials used Tuesday's rally to affirm good school attendance as the critical first step to the city's greater goals, including Turn the Page KC's campaign to get all children reading at grade level by the third grade.

Attendance is one of the five pillars the state is using to measure school districts' performance, noted Tony Stansberry, regional supervisor for the Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education. The new standard expected of schools is that at least 90 percent of all students attend class at least 90 percent of the time.

City Councilman Scott Wagner retraced the reasons the city worked with school districts to create an attendance ordinance to leverage support and encouragement for families under stress whose children are missing school.

The mayor said that academic success — and ultimately a stronger workforce and economy — depends on more success stories like Ariana's.

Her efforts, supported by Northeast's "Success Court," have "made me into a better person," Ariana said. "For students skipping school, I would tell them, 'You guys really need to stay in school. Don't give up on your dreams.'"

To reach Joe Robertson, call 816-234-4789 or send email to jrobertson@kcstar.com.

Tuesday, Sep 10, 2013

States are sticking with Common Core standards, survey shows

By HEATHER HOLLINGSWORTH
The Associated Press

Education officials in most of the states that have adopted Common Core standards say they will go forward with the benchmarks for reading, writing and math despite objections, according to a survey released Wednesday.

The independent nonprofit Center on Education Policy at George Washington University said 37 of the 40 states that responded to its survey this spring considered it unlikely that they would reverse, limit or change their decision to adopt the Common Core education standards during the upcoming school year.

The center didn't identify the states that participated but noted that some of the states that didn't respond were dealing with pushback — a factor that could affect the results.

The new Common Core standards replace a hodgepodge of educational goals that had varied greatly from state to state. The federal government was not involved in the state-led effort to develop them but has encouraged the project. The only states not to adopt the standards are Alaska, Nebraska, Texas and Virginia. Minnesota adopted the reading but not the math standards.

While proponents say the new standards will better prepare students, critics worry they'll set a national curriculum for public schools rather than letting states decide what is best for their students.

Efforts to slow down or derail the standards sprung up this year in Kansas, Missouri, Michigan, Pennsylvania, Georgia, Indiana, Alabama, South Carolina and Utah. Meanwhile, the Republican National Committee passed a resolution calling the standards an "inappropriate overreach."

Maria Ferguson, executive director of the Center on Education Policy, dismissed the efforts against the standards.

"School districts and states are practical," she said. "The resources that have been put into this are pretty profound. And you have to think about, if not this, what?"

Most states described overcoming resistance to the Common Core as either a minor or nonexistent challenge, the survey found. Only two states found that overcoming resistance from colleges and universities was a major challenge. And only five felt that overcoming resistance from outside the education system was a major challenge.

The opposition, however, wasn't convinced.

“I still think there are lingering questions, to say the very least,” said Jonathan Butcher, education director for the Phoenix-based conservative Goldwater Institute, which has opposed the standards. He said the big issue is the rollout of new tests designed around the standards. The tests are electronic, and one concern is that states lack the bandwidth and enough computers to administer them.

Two upcoming reports from the Center on Education Policy will look specifically at testing issues, Ferguson said.



Common Core State Standards Q&A

Missouri's Learning Standards are updated regularly so that students graduate from high school with the knowledge and skills they need for success in college, other postsecondary training and careers. The Missouri Learning Standards include the Common Core State Standards (CCSS) for English language arts and mathematics. For additional information about the Missouri Learning Standards and the Common Core State Standards, visit dese.mo.gov/divimprove/curriculum/Common_Core.html.

The Standards

What are the Common Core State Standards?

The Missouri Learning Standards include the Common Core State Standards (CCSS), which are a set of high-quality academic expectations in English-language arts (ELA) and mathematics. The CCSS define both the knowledge and skills all students should master by the end of each grade level to be on track for success in college and a career. They were created through a state-led initiative and have been adopted by more than 40 states, including Missouri. The CCSS have enhanced Missouri's state standards.

The Missouri State Board of Education adopted the CCSS in 2010. Most schools have already begun transitioning to the standards, which are set to be fully implemented in Missouri during the 2014-15 school year.

Where can I find the Common Core State Standards?

You can find and read the Common Core State Standards at www.corestandards.org.

Why did Missouri adopt the Common Core State Standards?

Missouri regularly updates its learning standards so that students graduate from high school with the knowledge and skills they need for success in college and careers. Leaders in work force development and in postsecondary education have voiced the need to better prepare students for postsecondary success. Future generations of students will face a job market requiring higher levels of knowledge and skills. Students increasingly need education beyond high school at a four-year college, community college, vocational technical school or other type of postsecondary training program.

Currently, nearly one-third of students entering college in Missouri are required to take remedial classes before they are able to enroll in college-level courses. Students pay tuition but do not receive college credit for remedial classes. This increases higher education costs for families and students and adds to the amount of time required to obtain a degree.

The Common Core State Standards are a common sense first step toward ensuring that students obtain the best possible education no matter where they live. With clear academic expectations for each grade level, teachers, parents, and students can work together toward shared goals. The standards draw from the best existing standards in the country and are benchmarked to top-performing nations around the world,

ensuring that students are well-prepared to compete not only with their peers at home, but also with students around the world, maintaining America's competitive edge.

What are the benefits of the Common Core State Standards?

With consistent standards, states have the option to pool their collective expertise and resources in order to reduce costs for each individual state and bring the most well-informed, creative thinking to various efforts around the standards. For example, states can work together to:

- Make expectations for students as clear as possible to parents, teachers and the general public.
- Encourage the development of resources for educators aligned to the standards.
- Implement high-quality, locally-developed curriculum that best enable teachers to help all students reach the standards.
- Develop and implement comprehensive assessment systems to measure student performance based on the standards and replace existing testing systems that often are inconsistent, burdensome, and confusing.
- Evaluate and advocate for policy changes needed to help students and educators meet the standards.

What grade levels are included in the Common Core State Standards?

The Common Core State Standards are for grades K-12. Research from the early childhood and higher education communities also were considered in the development of the standards.

Do the Common Core State Standards include standards for science, social studies or other subjects?

No. The Common Core State Standards are for English language arts and mathematics. They do not include standards for science, social studies or any other subjects.

Why are the Common Core State Standards for just English-language arts and mathematics?

English-language arts and mathematics were the subjects chosen for the Common Core State Standards because they teach skills upon which students build skill sets in other subject areas. The English-language arts standards address literacy across disciplines, including science, social studies and technical subjects.

Do the Common Core State Standards incorporate both content and skills?

Yes, both content and skills are important and have been incorporated in the Common Core State Standards. One of the criteria by which the standards have been evaluated is whether or not they include rigorous content and application of knowledge through higher-order thinking skills, such as critical thinking, problem solving and communications.

How will the Common Core State Standards impact gifted children, children with special needs and English-language learners?

The Common Core State Standards create consistent, high expectations for all students and provide a greater opportunity for states to share experiences and best practices that can lead to an improved ability to best serve special populations. As with Missouri's current learning standards, school districts will establish curriculum at the local level to meet the state's learning standards, including the CCSS. Educators will develop lesson plans that reflect the curriculum and provide for the educational needs of all students, including those receiving gifted and special education services. The CCSS include information on the application of the standards for English-language learners and students with disabilities. Alternate assessments are being developed for students with the most severe cognitive disabilities, as are English-language proficiency assessments for English-language learners; both are aligned to the CCSS.

The CCSS do not encompass everything that could or should be taught, and educators are free to go above and beyond the standards for gifted students as well as make modifications for special education students.

Why do the Common Core State Standards emphasize non-fiction? What are the new nonfiction requirements?

Twenty-first century readers need opportunities to explore, analyze and closely read a range of texts that represent all modes and a variety of genres. The Common Core State Standards call for 50 percent of all reading throughout the school day, including reading in science, social studies, and other classes at the elementary school level, to be nonfiction. Currently, students in elementary school read 20 to 30 percent nonfiction. The CCSS emphasize building knowledge through content-rich nonfiction and informational texts in addition to literature. Students read a balance of informational and literary texts. It is not a question of one or the other. The standards offer guidance; the “what” and the “how” are still up to teachers.

Do the Common Core State Standards instruct teachers to teach using certain methods?

No. The Common Core State Standards documents do not provide instructional strategies or limit instructional strategies. The CCSS do provide illustrations and examples of the content described by a standard but do not establish a preference for a particular strategy. In fact, the opposite is true. Teachers continue to be encouraged to use the many methods, strategies and algorithms available to them as they instruct students.

Are the Common Core State Standards copyrighted?

Yes. The Common Core State Standards are copyrighted in order to protect this collaboratively developed product from unauthorized use by vendors. The standards are copyrighted by the Council of Chief State School Officers (CCSSO) and the National Governors Association (NGA) as membership associations representing states on behalf of the states that developed them, including Missouri.

What is the EIMAC?

The EIMAC is the Education Information Management Advisory Consortium. For more information, visit [www.ccsso.org/resources/programs/education information management advisory consortium \(eimac\).html](http://www.ccsso.org/resources/programs/education%20information%20management%20advisory%20consortium%20(eimac).html).

The Development Process

Who led the effort to establish the Common Core State Standards?

The Common Core State Standards were created through a state-led initiative with the goal of establishing a single set of clear educational standards for English-language arts and mathematics to be shared among states. The effort was spearheaded by governors and school chiefs through their membership in the National Governors Association Center for Best Practices (NGA Center) and the Council of Chief State School Officers (CCSSO), respectively.

How were the Common Core State Standards created?

Governors and schools chiefs convened a diverse team of teachers, parents, administrators, researchers and experts in the education community to design the Common Core State Standards in order to ensure they reflect the best current thinking in education, the realities of the classroom, and aspirations for our children. The Council of Chief State School Officers (CCSSO) and the National Governors Association Center for Best Practices (NGA Center) also provided public comment periods for all stakeholders to submit feedback on the draft standards documents.

To ensure this process was open, inclusive and rigorous, several work groups and committees were formed:

- The Standards Development Work Group was responsible for determining and writing the standards.
- The Feedback Group provided expert input on draft documents, drawing from a wealth of education research.
- The Validation Committee—comprised of independent, national education experts—reviewed the standards to ensure they met the development criteria. Its members were nominated by states and national organizations, and selected by a group of 12 governors and school chiefs who held leadership positions at the NGA Center and CCSSO.

How was Missouri involved in writing the Common Core State Standards? How many Missourians were involved in the process?

The list of the Work Group and Feedback Group members can be found at http://www.nga.org/cms/home/news-room/news-releases/page_2009/col2-content/main-content-list/title_common-core-state-standards-development-work-group-and-feedback-group-announced.html. Two-hundred fifty-seven Missourians provided feedback.

Were teachers involved in the creation of the Common Core State Standards?

Yes, teachers have been a critical voice in the development of the standards to ensure that they are practical in the classroom. The National Education Association (NEA), American Federation of Teachers (AFT), National Council of Teachers of Mathematics (NCTM), and National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE), among other organizations, have been instrumental in bringing together teachers to provide specific, constructive feedback on the standards.

Did the federal government play a role in developing the Common Core State Standards?

No, the federal government was not involved in the development of the Common Core State Standards. This has always been, and continues to be, a state-led and driven initiative. States voluntarily adopted and are currently implementing the standards on an individual basis. These standards are in no way federally-mandated—rather, they are the standards of more than 45 individual states.

By what criteria were the Common Core State Standards developed?

The Common Core State Standards were developed according to the following criteria, set by states through governors and school chiefs:

- Alignment with expectations for college and career success.
- Clarity, so that educators and parents know what they need to do to help students learn.
- Consistency, so that students are not taught to a lower standard just because of where they live.
- Inclusivity of both content and the application of knowledge through higher-order skills.
- Grounded in the strengths and lessons of existing state standards.
- Benchmarked to top-performing nations across the world.
- Realistic for effective use in the classroom.
- Evidence and research-based.

How are educational standards determined?

Each state has its own process for developing, adopting and implementing standards. As a result, past academic expectations of students have varied widely from state to state. The Common Core State

Standards have now established the same rigorous expectations for a majority of students; however, each state remains fully in control of its own standards and all related decisions.

How did Missouri get involved with the Common Core State Standards?

Governor Jay Nixon and Commissioner of Education Chris L. Nicastro, with the approval of the State Board of Education, signed a memorandum of agreement (MOA) in 2009 permitting Missouri to work with other states on the **development** of the Common Core State Standards for English language arts and mathematics. The MOA document can be found at dese.mo.gov/divimprove/curriculum/documents/Common-Core-Standards-MOA.pdf.

After carefully reviewing and gathering public feedback on the final version of the standards, the Missouri State Board of Education adopted the Common Core State Standards in 2010.

How were the Common Core State Standards internationally benchmarked?

The Common Core State Standards were benchmarked by looking at the countries that perform well on international tests such as the PISA (Program for International Student Assessment) and TIMSS (Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study) and states that perform well on the NAEP (National Assessment of Educational Progress) tests. The mathematics document specifically sites documents from: Alberta, Canada; Belgium; China; Chinese Taipei; Denmark; England; Finland; Hong Kong; India; Ireland; Japan; Korea; New Zealand; Singapore; Victoria (British Columbia); and existing state documents. The English language arts team consulted numerous international models, including those from Ireland, Finland, New Zealand, Australia (by state), Canada (by province), Singapore, the United Kingdom and others.

Were any pilot studies conducted for the Common Core State Standards?

The Common Core State Standards build on the best standards from high-performing states and countries throughout the world. The Department of Elementary and Secondary Education carefully reviewed the CCSS before adoption. During development, Missouri was one of a few states that received draft documents as they were developed. Members of the Department and select content experts from around the state of Missouri carefully examined the drafts to gauge alignment with the Show-Me Standards and their fit with Missouri's goals for its students. The staff also compared the new standards with existing Missouri standards to ensure that the CCSS would truly be more rigorous for students. This crosswalk can be accessed at dese.mo.gov/divimprove/curriculum/Common_Core.html.

Implementation

What do the Common Core State Standards mean for students?

The Common Core State Standards hold students to rigorous, yet attainable, academic benchmarks designed to ensure college and career readiness. The standards also provide important clarity for students—and their parents and teachers—about the knowledge and skills they should be learning at every step in their academic careers. Furthermore, consistent standards will allow students to stay on track when their family moves between states, rather than entering a new school behind or ahead of their peers, as was often the case when standards varied from state to state.

How will the Common Core State Standards reduce the need for remedial classes in college?

The Common Core State Standards are key to the state's initiative to become one of the top 10 states in education by 2020. The standards are more rigorous and are designed to better prepare students for college, other postsecondary training and a career.

In the fall of 2009, the Missouri Department of Higher Education (MDHE) staff compared the Higher Education Curriculum Alignment Initiative entry-level competencies in mathematics and English language

arts to the draft standards of the CCSS to assess the extent of alignment between the two sets of standards. The MDHE also asked content experts in both mathematics and English language arts to do a similar analysis. Both the MDHE and the content experts concluded that there were no significant gaps in alignment between the Curriculum Alignment Initiative competencies and the CCSS.

Higher standards alone do not guarantee increased student achievement. Missouri students also need highly qualified educators, early childhood support and strong parental involvement to reach their goals.

How will the Common Core State Standards impact teachers?

Great educators are at the core of a great education. Teachers helped design the Common Core State Standards to ensure that they reflect the realities of the classroom and provide the clarity and consistency teachers need to make sure their students stay on track and are equipped with the knowledge and skills they need for success. The standards do not tell teachers how to teach, but rather establish what students need to learn. It is up to schools and teachers to decide how to best help students reach the standards.

Additionally, the standards will:

- Help colleges and professional development programs better prepare teachers.
- Establish a foundation for educators to work collaboratively with their peers to develop and share resources, expertise, curriculum tools and professional development.
- Allow states to develop and provide better assessments that accurately measure whether students have learned what was taught.
- Guide educators toward curriculum and teaching strategies that will give students a deep understanding of the subjects and skills they need to learn.

Who is in charge of implementing the Common Core State Standards?

The Common Core State Standards are being implemented by each state individually through the collaboration of various groups including state education agencies, local education authorities, institutes of higher education, state educator associations and individual school leaders. The standards do not tell principals how to run their schools, and they do not tell teachers how to teach, nor do they mandate or include any accompanying assessments, curriculum or instructional materials. While states are voluntarily coming together on certain implementation-related efforts, each state is independently and solely responsible for putting the standards into practice.

Will local teachers be able to decide what and how to teach with the Common Core State Standards?

The Common Core State Standards simply establish a clear set of goals and expectations that will prepare students with knowledge and skills to help them succeed. It is up to local teachers, principals, superintendents and others to decide how the standards will be reached. Teachers will continue to develop lesson plans and tailor instruction to the individual needs of the students in their classrooms.

Will curriculum and instructional material aligned to the Common Core State Standards be developed?

Yes, there are already state-led efforts underway to develop standards-aligned curriculum and instructional materials. The Council of Chief State School Officers (CCSSO) has convened a group of states to work together to address systemic approaches to managing the transition to the Common Core State Standards. It is specifically designed to help states implement the standards, allowing them to share best practices and work together on identifying and disseminating specific tools for states to use. By collaborating, states can conserve both money and resources and make sure that top talent from across the country has a seat at the table to create the highest quality products. Whether Missouri school districts decide to use these tools is still a local decision.

When will the Common Core State Standards be fully implemented?

The Common Core State Standards are set to be fully implemented by the 2014-15 school year. Missouri school districts will have had five years of revising curriculum and training educators by the time the standards are fully implemented.

How will we know if students are meeting the Common Core State Standards?

Just as students currently take tests through the Missouri Assessment Program (MAP) to determine if they are meeting Missouri's current learning standards, students will continue to take tests near the end of the school year to determine if they are meeting the Common Core State Standards.

How do standards impact teacher evaluations?

Standards are goals for student learning, and teachers are the guides to helping students reach those goals. The Department of Elementary and Secondary Education has identified seven essential principles and created a state model for educator evaluations, which are used to guide the local educator evaluation process. Evidence of student learning – using state standards in all subjects as a guide – is a part of that process, along with multiple other measures for evaluating effective teaching.

Is the federal government playing a role in the implementation of the Common Core State Standards?

No. The federal government is not implementing the Common Core State Standards.

Will the Common Core State Standards be updated?

Yes, there will be an ongoing state-led development process to continuously improve the Common Core State Standards.

Will the Common Core State Standards require schools to purchase specific text books and other teaching materials?

No. School districts will continue to select the text books they use for instruction. Schools will determine their curriculum and instructional materials as they have done in the past.

The Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education has developed model curriculum based on the Common Core State Standards that school districts may use. The curriculum is available free of charge to local school districts to adopt or adapt to their needs or to use as an instructional resource.

How will the Common Core State Standards impact private and parochial schools and families that home school their children?

The Common Core State Standards have been adopted by the State Board of Education for all public schools, including charter schools, in Missouri. Private and parochial schools or families that are home schooling are not required to follow the CCSS. However, some private schools have announced plans to voluntarily adopt the CCSS.

Will the ACT/SAT tests reflect the Common Core State Standards?

Yes. Both ACT and the SAT have announced that these tests will become aligned with the Common Core State Standards to accurately reflect student college preparedness.

Assessment

Who will develop the assessment tests for the Common Core State Standards?

The Smarter Balanced Assessment Consortium—a group of 25 states, including Missouri—is developing the assessments for the Common Core State Standards. The assessments were pilot tested from February

through May by schools across the country, including more than 360 schools in Missouri. Practice tests are now available and will allow teachers, parents and students to try out the new online Smarter Balanced assessment system. Sample test questions may be accessed here: <http://www.smarterbalanced.org/pilot-test/>.

How did Missouri get involved in the Smarter Balanced Assessment Consortium to develop assessments based on the Common Core State Standards?

Governor Jay Nixon and Commissioner of Education Chris L. Nicastro, with the approval of the State Board of Education, signed a memorandum of understanding (MOU) in 2010 permitting Missouri to participate as a governing state in the Smarter Balanced Assessment Consortium. That MOU can be viewed at dese.mo.gov/divimprove/assess/documents/SBAC.pdf.

Will the Smarter Balanced Assessment tests replace the Missouri Assessment Program (MAP) tests?

Beginning with the 2014-2015 school year, the Smarter Balanced Assessment tests in English language arts and mathematics are set to become a part of the Missouri Assessment Program and will replace the grade-level testing for English language arts and mathematics. Missouri Assessment Program testing will continue in other subject areas.

How will the Smarter Balanced assessments effect school accreditation?

Results from the Smarter Balanced assessments for English language arts and mathematics will be part of the state's school accreditation process just as the MAP scores have been in the past.

Data Collection

Has the adoption of the Common Core State Standards changed the data reporting requirements for school districts in Missouri?

No. The adoption of the Common Core State Standards has not increased the data reporting requirements for school districts. Missouri school districts have been collecting and reporting data to the state Department of Elementary and Secondary Education since 1989. These data are used for education accreditation and accountability purposes and related federal program purposes. Federal programs that require the collection of data are: Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA - Special Education); Federal Title Programs; School Food Services; Migrant Education Programs; and Carl Perkins Career Technical Education.

What data are collected by the Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, and why are they collected?

The Department of Elementary and Secondary Education collects information from schools through its comprehensive data system. A list of data collected by the Department can be found at dese.mo.gov/MOSIS/documents/StudentDataCollected_20130503.pdf.

The information is collected by the Department to comply with Missouri laws, federal program standards and Missouri school improvement accountability requirements. No information - with the exception of migrant education - is reported to the U.S. Department of Education at the individual student level. Student information reported to the U.S. Department of Education is done only at the aggregate (school and district) level and is not personally identifiable.

How are data collected by the Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education protected? Who maintains the database?

Data are reported by local school districts to the Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education. The Department maintains the Missouri School Information System (MOSIS). Data transmitted to the Department by school districts are protected by the confidentiality provisions of the Family

Educational Rights and Privacy Act (20 U.S.C. 1232g). The privacy act prohibits the disclosure of personally identifiable student information without parental consent or unless authorized by federal law. This includes transmission of data to the federal government.

Can parents or schools opt out of data collection?

No. Data collection is an important tool in education. Data have been collected in Missouri since 1989. Data collection provides information that school districts need to determine student achievement levels, and it helps educators make decisions necessary to improve instruction and student learning. The information is used by the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education to determine how well schools in Missouri are performing and identify schools that need improvement. The data are also used to help determine the accreditation of school districts and provide information to the public about how schools are performing.

Does the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education or the Smarter Balanced Assessment Consortium retain control over data retrieval and dissemination?

The Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education retains control over the data collected from assessments.

Did the Smarter Balanced Assessment Consortium sign an agreement with the U.S. Department of Education to send Missouri data to the federal government?

No. There is no agreement between the Smarter Balanced Assessment Consortium and the U.S. Department of Education for data sharing. Missouri retains control over test results in the same way test results are handled with current assessment vendors.

Funding

How is Missouri funding the implementation of the Common Core State Standards?

Missouri is using existing resources to implement the Common Core State Standards. During the past three years, local school districts have been providing information about the CCSS to educators during professional development trainings and have been using existing resources to update their curriculum and align it with the standards.

Educators throughout the state have been working with the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education to develop a model curriculum for districts to adapt or adopt as locally determined.

What will it cost local school districts to conduct the Smarter Balanced assessment tests?

Because the tests are computer-based, schools will need adequate computer technology and bandwidth available to conduct the assessments. The Department of Elementary and Secondary Education and the Smarter Balanced Assessment Consortium have been working with school districts to determine if their current technology is adequate to conduct the testing. Once needs are assessed, the Department will lay out a plan for bringing instructional technology into the 21st century for all students. All students deserve access to the Internet and technologies to help them achieve their goals for education and a career.

Tuesday, Sep 10, 2013

Imagination Library aims to spark a love of reading in KC area children

By MARÁ ROSE WILLIAMS
The Kansas City Star

The choo-choo train story made 3-year-old Katelyn Sims giggle and wiggle and squeal.

She was having a great time in her mother Elisha Sims' lap as Mom read Watty Piper's "The Little Engine That Could" to the toddler.

"I think I can. I think I can," Sims read.

Two weeks ago, the book had arrived by mail, wrapped in plastic, at the Simses' home in Kansas City's Marlborough neighborhood. Katelyn's mom tore into it right away and began reading it to her daughter.

"I was very excited to get it," Sims said. "We had been waiting for it to come. Katelyn loves books."

The book was sent by the [Dolly Parton Imagination Library](#), an early childhood literacy program being funded in the Kansas City area this year through private donations to the United Way of Greater Kansas City but separate from the umbrella charity's annual campaign dollars.

Funding from [BMO Harris Bank](#) and the [Government Employee Health Association](#), along with individual donations, covers the \$25-a-year per-child cost of having a new age-appropriate book selected by Imagination Library and sent each month to enrolled children, ages birth to 5. The United Way's Woman's Leadership Council announced in March they were bringing the program to Kansas City.

"The Little Engine That Could" is always the first book children in the program receive.

The Dolly Parton Imagination Library, founded in 1996 by the country music superstar, sends books to more than 700,000 children each month in the U.S., Canada and the United Kingdom. It is the United Way of Greater Kansas City's newest education initiative and part of its efforts to bolster academic achievement in this area.

Support of education opportunities is one of the organization's three main "building blocks toward a good life," said Brent Stewart, the CEO and president of the local United Way. The other building blocks are helping families attain financial independence and access good health services.

So far, 100 area children are enrolled in Imagination Library. The United Way hopes to have 1,000 children getting a book a month by the end of the program's first year and expand to 5,000 children in five years.

The program is not limited to children in low-income homes. Kansas City Public Schools and the North Kansas City, Independence, Shawnee Mission and Center school districts are working

with the program to select low-income neighborhoods where many children don't have books in their homes.

"We decided to start the program in the urban core," said Dana Abraham, the chairwoman of the Woman's Leadership Council and the president of private wealth management at UMB Bank.

Abraham called it "divine order" that the Imagination Library's goals align with both Mayor Sly James' [Turn the Page](#) effort and the Greater Kansas City Chamber of Commerce's [Urban Neighborhood Initiative](#). The goal of the mayor's program is to have all Kansas City children reading at grade level by third grade. The chamber initiative focuses on prosperity, health and safety and education.

"We believe that when we fix the education problem everything else leading to an independent and healthy, quality life will fall into place," Abraham said.

The [National Center for Education Statistics](#) has reported that children who are read to frequently start school at an academic advantage over children who were not. According to the center, children who are read to are more likely to start school counting to 20 or higher than those who were not, write their names and read or pretend to read. But children in families with incomes below the poverty line are less likely to be read to daily.

Armed with that information, Aimee Alderman, the director of the Parents as Teachers program in the Center school district, a team of other educators and a helper from the Woman's Leadership Council walked Kansas City's neighborhoods in June, knocking on doors and telling parents about the Imagination Library. Alderman visited Elisha and Katelyn Sims and signed them up.

Alderman said the school districts will track through high school each child who signed up for the Imagination Library and compare that child's progress with those of other children from similar socioeconomic backgrounds who were not enrolled in the program.

Elisha Sims, who is studying computer science at Metropolitan Community College-Penn Valley, said she reads to Katelyn several times a day. "At bedtime she wants at least two stories," Sims said.

To reach Mará Rose Williams, call [816-234-4419](tel:816-234-4419) or send email to mdwilliams@kcstar.com.

Aaron Deacon

Aaron Deacon is managing director for KC Digital Drive, a city-backed civic startup designed to drive innovation and collaboration across the Kansas City area and capitalize on next generation infrastructure. KC Digital Drive covers a broad range of issues including education, health care, the arts, entrepreneurship, sustainability and digital inclusion.

He has been an instrumental leader in helping Kansas City prepare to be the first major U.S. metro area with gigabit connectivity in the home. Among many initiatives related to Google Fiber's Kansas City project, he helped to create the Building the Gigabit City community brainstorming session.

Deacon led the Give Us a Gig initiative to educate Kansas City communities about the possibilities of gigabit speed and help neighborhoods express demand for service. And he is cofounder of the Gigabit City Summit, a series of telepresence roundtables designed to facilitate conversation among city leaders around the world about shaping city infrastructure around next generation networks.

His professional background is in research and strategic planning and owns Curiolab, which manages the discovery, creation and application of insights and information needed for strategic decision-making.

He serves as president of the Social Media Club of Kansas City.

Deacon has a masters in social science from the University of Chicago and a bachelor's degree from the University of Dallas.

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