

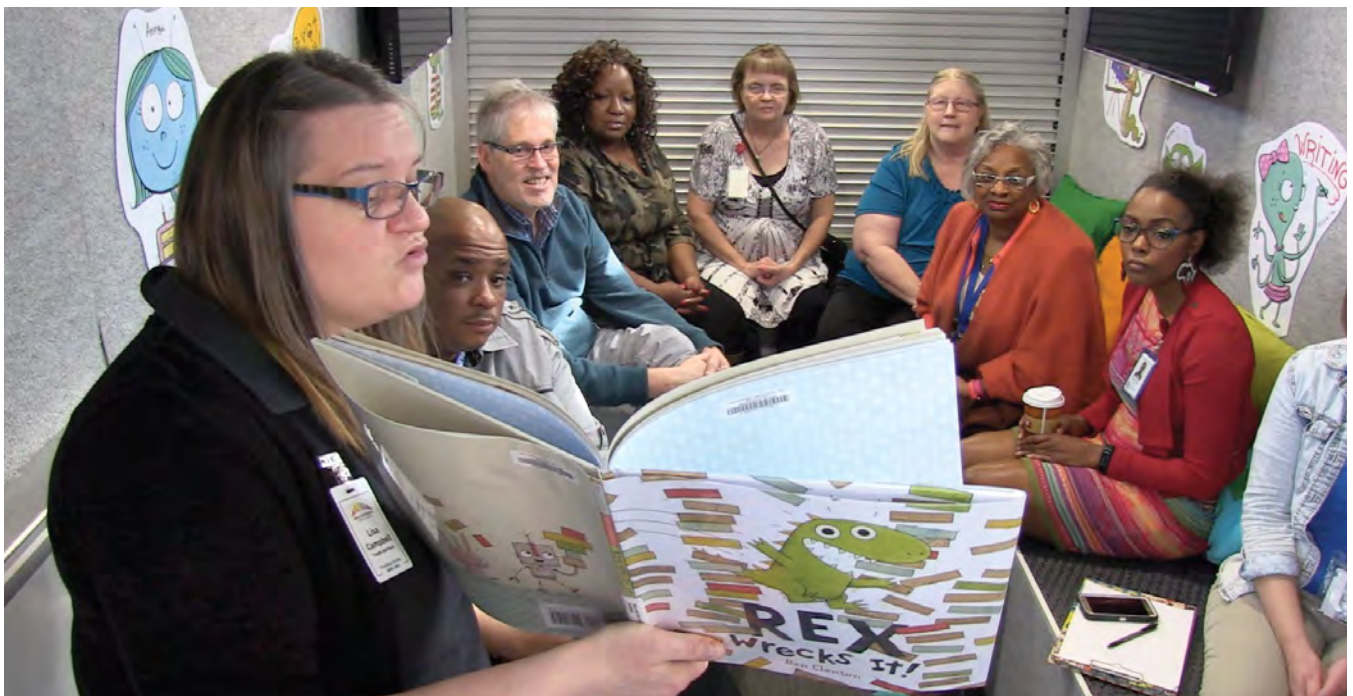
LINC Commission Meeting

February 27, 2017



Mid Continent Public Library's new mobile Reading Rocket (above).

Inside the Reading Rocket, LINC staff learn about literacy activities offered to young readers. (below).



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, Feb. 27, 2017 | 4 – 6 pm
Kauffman Foundation
4801 Rockhill Rd.
Kansas City, Mo. 64110

Agenda

- I. Welcome and Announcements
- II. Approvals
 - a. **January minutes (motion)**
- III. School Superintendent Reports
- IV. LINC Financial Report
 - a. Kansas City Public Schools Update
- V. Community Schools: Hickman Mills perspective
 - a. Hickman Mills overview
 - b. Barb Shelly – KCUR reporting
- VI. Other
 - a. School bond issues
 - b. KCMO bond issue
 - c. Reading Rocket
- VII. Adjournment



THE LOCAL INVESTMENT COMMISSION – JAN. 23, 2017

The Local Investment Commission met at the Kauffman Foundation, 4801 Rockhill Rd., Kansas City, Mo. Co-chair **Jack Craft** presided. Commissioners attending were:

Bert Berkley
Tom Davis
Mark Flaherty
Herb Freeman
SuEllen Fried
Rob Givens
Anita Gorman
Tom Lewin

Rosemary Lowe
Mary Kay McPhee
Ken Powell
David Rock
David Ross
Bailus Tate
Marge Williams

A motion to approve the minutes of the Nov. 21, 2016, LINC Commission meeting was passed unanimously.

A list of Commissioners nominated for membership on the LINC Executive, Finance and Audit, and Personnel committees was shared.

A motion to approve the recommended appointments to the LINC Executive, Finance and Audit, and Personnel committees was passed unanimously.

Superintendents Report

- **Kelly Wachel**, Director of Public Relations (Center School District), reported more than 140 people attended a town hall meeting held by Missouri State representatives DeRon McGee and Judy Morgan on Saturday at Center High School. The meeting was held in response to concerns about legislative efforts to strengthen legal penalties for students fighting in schools. The district continues work on its “Why I Chose Center” campaign.
- **Kenny Rodriquez**, Superintendent (Grandview School District), reported on the district activities related to the three priorities identified by the school board: college readiness, career readiness, and cultural awareness. Honeywell will provide HOPE scholarships for five Grandview students to pursue a post-secondary degree focused on a career in a manufacturing trade or technical profession. This week is School Board Appreciation Week.
- **John Ruddy**, Asst. Superintendent (Fort Osage School District), reported the district will ask voters to consider two questions on the April 4 ballot: a levy increase of 67 cents to support district operating expenses and a no tax increase bond issue of \$11.3 million to fund construction of an early childhood center, stadium improvements, playground upgrades and other improvements.
- **Yolanda Cargile**, Assoc. Superintendent (Hickman Mills School District), reported the district is working to obtain advanced education accreditation. A two-day “Beyond Diversity” staff training was held to examine the role that “whiteness” plays in teaching relationships and to increase the cultural awareness of staff. Students from Smith-Hale Middle School participated in the Girls in Tech KC event on Dec. 9 at Cerner; the initiative connects students to educational resources and mentors to spark conversations about a career in tech. Also in December, several district schools partnered with LINC to hold activities such as skating, STEM activities, and holiday events.
- **Merideth Parrish**, Director of Family Services (Independence School District), reported the school board at its January meeting approved placing a no tax increase \$38 million bond issue on

the April ballot. The bond would fund construction of a new elementary school, expand classroom space to enhance the Career Academies initiative at high schools, and add gym and locker room space at Van Horn High School.

- **Christy Harrison**, Summer School Director (Kansas City Public Schools), reported the administration's reorganization plan has been shared with staff and the board and is soon to be made public. The district is planning for summer school. KCPS is partnering with UMKC to give staff the opportunity to earn administration degrees. KCPS will host its annual career fair at Paseo Academy on Feb. 4.
- **Dan Clemens**, Superintendent (North Kansas City School District), reported Fox Hill Elementary is one of eight Missouri schools to be nominated for the National Blue Ribbon award, and West Englewood has been named a model school by the International Center for Leadership in Education. Construction at North Kansas City High School and on two new elementary schools is about to begin; 17 other schools will be upgraded to receive an Energy Star rating.
- **Kevin Foster**, Executive Director (Genesis Promise Academy), reported the board is set to pass its strategic plan, which will be shared on the website. Last Wednesday the school held its first annual Family Summit in conjunction with parent-teacher conferences. Forty-five attendees participated in one of several workshops on topics such as home ownership, financial literacy, and computer literacy.
- **Bob Bartman**, Director (Education Policy Fellowship Program), reported EPFP fellows attended a session on diversity and inclusion last week featuring **Merrell Benniken** (Board of Police Commissioners), **Juana Hishaw** (formerly of Center School District), and **Juan Rangel** (Donnelly College).

The LINC in Photos 2016 slideshow was shown.

Brent Schondelmeyer, Deputy Director-Community Engagement, reported on the following initiatives:

- **Black History Month.** LINC is partnering again with Kansas City Public Library and Black Archives of Mid-America to produce and share calendars, posters and booklets featuring photographs and information on the lives of area African Americans and their accomplishments in entertainment, medicine, politics, civil rights, and the military.
- **Jackson County Children's Service Fund.** In November Jackson County voters approved an eighth-cent sales tax to finance the Children's Service Fund to support efforts that provide supportive services for at-risk children and youth in Jackson County. Like COMBAT, the Children's Service Fund will be administered by a board which will oversee the distribution of the approximately \$15 million. Board nominations were accepted until last Friday; members will be appointed by Jackson County Executive **Frank White Jr.**
- **Summer Electronic Benefits for Children.** LINC will again operate the SEBT program in the Kansas City, Center and Hickman Mills school districts this summer. This year the program will expand to include all school-age children eligible for food stamp benefits. This represents approximately twice the number of children who participated last year.

Mark Flaherty reported the Missouri Court of Appeals Western District issued an opinion in the case involving the Health Care Foundation of Greater Kansas City (HCF) and HCA. The court reduced to \$200 million the earlier judgment of \$433 awarded to HCF by a trial court. Flaherty gave an overview of the litigation, which stemmed from promises by HCA to invest in area hospitals and charity care following its purchase of the nonprofit Health Midwest hospital chain.

Robin Gierer, Deputy Director-Operations, reported on financing of the LINC Before and After School program, which began in Kansas City Public Schools in 1999 and expanded into other school districts in 2007 when LINC left KCPS for two years. Since LINC returned to KCPS in 2009 the district's contribution to program operations has decreased over the years. In order to continue operating the program in KCPS, LINC will have to cut \$900,000 in services, which represents the program expense at nine KCPS elementary schools.

Rob Givens made the following motion: *LINC Commission will go into closed session as provided under Missouri Revised Statute 610.021(1) to discuss potential legal actions and privileged communications with our attorneys and under Missouri Revised Statute 610.021(3) to discuss "Hiring, firing, disciplining or promoting of particular employees... when personal information about the employee is discussed or recorded." The motion was passed unanimously.*

The Commission met in closed session.

Following the closed session the meeting was reopened.

A motion to authorize the reduction of LINC-provided services within the Kansas City Public Schools was passed unanimously.

The meeting was adjourned.

Here's What It Means When We Talk About Student Churn In Kansas City

By BARBARA SHELLY · FEB 20, 2017

A parent arrives home one day to find the family's possessions sitting on the curb. Those eviction threats were all too real.

A basement fills with water and the landlord won't come around to deal with the problem. The family has no choice but to move.

An ex-boyfriend is making threats. A nearby apartment complex has a rent special going on. A family moves to be closer to a parent's new job.

For many reasons, families move over the course of the school year. For children and their schools, the consequences can be profound.

"You walk around schools and you hear people talking about this," said Leigh Anne Taylor Knight, an educator and researcher who led one of the most comprehensive studies on student mobility a couple of years ago, focusing on the Missouri side of the Kansas City metropolitan area.

Up until now, student mobility has been something of an under-the-radar factor in education policy discussions. In Missouri and Kansas, for instance, mobility rates are not factored into state accountability ratings for public schools.

But the steady comings and goings of students during a school year, especially in high-poverty districts, are increasingly a worry for educators. High student mobility -- also known as churn -- means extra work for teachers, less involvement on the part of parents and anxieties for students.

"A lot of schools in the metro area are really concerned about their mobility rates," said Taylor Knight.

A mobility rate can tell us a lot about a district, a school and even a classroom. To calculate rates for Missouri school districts and charter schools in and around Kansas City, Taylor Knight used a formula generally accepted in education policy.

1. Add transfers in plus transfers out.
2. Divide that number by the official start-of-the-year enrollment.



For 4th grade teacher Angelica Saddler and her colleagues at Ingels Elementary School, a high student churn rate means extra work and challenges.

BARBARA SHELLY / KCUR 89.3

[Taylor Knight's research](#), which was made public in August 2015, found that school district mobility rates on the Missouri side of the metropolitan area ranged from 14 percent in Grain Valley to 74 percent in the Kansas City Public Schools. (The Kansas Department of Education did not make data available.)

The second highest mobility rate on the Missouri side — 61 percent — was in the Hickman Mills School District.

From the beginning of the school year, I've been watching students come and go at an elementary school in that south Kansas City district.

According to data that Taylor Knight obtained from the Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, Ingels Elementary had a 74.7 percent churn rate in the 2015 school year.

That number represents 198 students who transferred into the building plus 136 students who transferred out -- adding up to 334 transfers. We divide that number by the official September enrollment, which in the fall of 2015 was 447. Sure enough, my handy calculator comes up with 74.7 percent.

To narrow the lens a bit, let's look at Aubrey Paine's 2nd grade classroom this year.

Eighteen children arrived for the first day of school on Aug. 22. More students moved in over the first few weeks, and a few moved out, as schools and families adjusted to attendance boundaries. On the final Wednesday of September — the day of the annual attendance head count required by the Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education — Paine had 22 students.

Since then four students have moved out of the classroom and seven have come in. So the mobility rate in this classroom so far is 50 percent, with three and a half months left in the school year.

Angelica Saddler's fourth grade classroom had a more consistent enrollment until Thanksgiving. Since then, four students have transferred into her class and four have transferred out. One boy joined the class right after Thanksgiving and never showed up after the winter break. He gets counted twice in the churn rate formula — as a transfer in and a transfer out.

Saddler's official September head count was 28 students. So the mobility rate in her classroom so far is 29 percent.

Because the circumstances behind mobility vary — military communities have high churn rates, for instance — there is no agreed-upon threshold as to what constitutes an unhealthy school, or district. Educators generally say that the lower the rate, the better.

We know that every arrival in a classroom means [extra work](#) as a teacher must assess the new student's knowledge and capabilities and introduce the child to the classroom routine. We know that [every departure](#) disrupts a classroom's dynamics.

And we know that even one move in the midst of a school year can negatively impact a student's academic achievement throughout his or her school career. Taylor Knight's research found that mobile students had a harder time scoring as proficient in communication arts and math as students who stayed in the same classroom. Even one move during a school year lowered the chances of achieving proficiency by about 40 percent, her research found.

Taylor Knight's research found that a student who moves even once during the school year is only 60 percent as likely to be proficient in communication arts as a student who spent the year in the same classroom. A student who transfers is 62 percent as likely to be proficient in math as one who doesn't.

If a school's churn rate appears to be high, we can be certain the emotional and academic toll is right up there also.

Barbara Shelly is a freelance contributor for KCUR 89.3. You can reach her at bshellykc@gmail.com.

For Some Hickman Mills Students, Frequent Tests Bring Language Barriers Into Stark Focus

By BARBARA SHELLY · FEB 3, 2017

Second-grade teacher Aubrey Paine leads her class into the school computer lab, gets everyone seated, then moves from computer to computer, typing in login information and issuing instructions.

It is testing time at Ingels Elementary School in the Hickman Mills School District. Besides the “benchmark” testing that goes on throughout the school year to assess whether classes are mastering necessary material, students are taking tests known as “Star assessments.” These are standardized, computer tests designed to measure a student’s progress in subjects like reading and math over the course of the school year.

After 10 minutes or so, most of Paine’s students are engaged with reading short segments and answering multiple choice questions to test their comprehension. About the only sound is the murmur of children sounding out words and sentences out loud.

Predictably, the silence doesn’t last. “I don’t know these words,” a student says plaintively, then grunts in frustration. Paine tells him to stay calm and do his best.

One of the last students to be logged in is a child who arrived in Paine’s class in the fall speaking only Spanish. She’s making progress, but English doesn’t yet come easily to her.

“It’s testing your brain,” Paine tells her. “It’s better to guess than to leave a question blank.”

To me, she says: “It kills me that she has to take this test. You can’t pass a reading test if you can’t read English.”

For most of the class, though, the Star test provides a way for Paine and her students to gauge their progress.

“I’m trying to get them to have their own goals and meet them,” Paine says. “Just telling them they have to get better doesn’t work.”

A little later in the day, she is able to give her students good news. Most of them had boosted their scores from the start of the year. A few who didn’t were able to retake the test.

When all the scores are counted, Paine has 12 students performing at or above grade level -- up from just four in September. Only three students are in the “urgent intervention needed”



2nd grade students Dadrianna Tate (left) and Victoria Toledano are a study in concentration as they work on an assessment test at Ingels Elementary.

BARBARA SHELLY / KCUR 89.3

bracket. All of them are from families where a language other than English is spoken in the home.

Paine's second-grade class gets a shout-out from Sabrina Winfrey, the school principal, during morning announcements. Winfrey frequently makes a big deal out of a good Star test performance. The other day she announced that a student had improved her math score by 39 points.

"It's to encourage kids to do their best," Winfrey says. "They like to hear their names on the intercom."

After 2nd grade, the testing stakes grow more serious. Students from 3rd grade on this spring will take the Missouri Assessment Program (MAP) tests. Their scores will play a role in the school's annual performance report and also factor into the Hickman Mills School District's accreditation status. The district currently is provisionally accredited.



Students get lots of practice in test taking. In a 4th grade classroom the other day, teacher Angelica Saddler urged her students on as they worked on a test that involved writing out answers to 26 questions. It was an exercise in thinking and focusing that some students embraced while others fidgeted and appeared to struggle.

Testing is serious business at Ingels Elementary School in the Hickman Mills School District, as shown by this makeshift sign on a classroom door.

CREDIT BARBARA SHELLY / 89.3

Complicating the testing -- along with most everything else at Ingels -- is that the makeup of the classes keeps shifting. The school has seen an influx of students since Thanksgiving. The staff thought the school was crowded in September, when the attendance count was 494 students. In mid-January it was up to 518.

Saddler had a girl move out of her classroom recently, but she gained two boys -- one from outside of the district and one from another classroom at Ingels. Paine also acquired a child from another classroom, and a new boy from the Belton School District. She's working on assessing their skills and getting them comfortable with the classroom routine.

"Every time I think we're getting it down something changes," Paine says.

In a high-poverty elementary school characterized by student churn, everyone gets tested.

Barbara Shelly is a freelance contributor for KCUR 89.3. You can reach her at bshellykc@gmail.com.

For This Hickman Mills Mom And Her Son, Elementary School Is A Hope For Stability

By BARBARA SHELLY · JAN 17, 2017

Kaily Ross rocked a baby stroller as she talked to the staffers who run the after-school program at Ingels Elementary School in the Hickman Mills district.

Could her older son, the 3rd grader she was enrolling in the LINC program that day, still get in the flag football activity? What else did they offer?

It was a few weeks after the start of the school year and Ross's son was transferring from another area district. When I asked how many schools he had attended to that point she sighed and said, "There have been so many."

Later, we added them up. The move to Ingels Elementary marked the seventh time that Jeremiah has walked into a new classroom, although he has cycled in and out of the same elementary school in Independence three different times.

His mom, who herself left school in the 11th grade, regrets the instability. The moving around has created stress for her son and made it hard for him to make friends, she says.

Life has rarely been easy for Ross, who is 32, but as recently as 2014 she was living in an apartment, working in a warehouse and paying her rent early. That year she gave birth to a second son. The delivery required a cesarean section and a longer recovery than Ross and her employer had figured on. She also went through a bout of postpartum depression. The result was a lost job, unpaid rent and an eviction.

Ross didn't realize at the time that the eviction would thrust her family into homelessness. She moved in with relatives for awhile and then traveled with family members to Seattle, hoping to get a fresh start there. But expenses on the West Coast were too high, so Ross returned with her children to Kansas City and spent a few months couch surfing and living in a cheap motel. Finally she sought help at a family shelter.

"I want to give some major props to the Salvation Army, because that's where I went. They were amazing," Ross told me. "I was scared because I didn't know what to expect. I thought a shelter was for somebody else but not me. Then I found out everyone there was just like me."

All this time, while working a series of low-paying jobs, she was on the phone with landlords and property managers, trying to find a place to stay.



Kaily Ross wishes she could spend more time at Ingels Elementary School, where her son is in the 3rd grade.

BARBARA SHELLY / KCUR 89.3

“I probably called 100 to 200 property managers. I was desperately looking for housing,” Ross said.

The experience was demeaning. Ross had saved enough money for a deposit on rent, but that was canceled out by the eviction on her record. “They were very rude when they heard that,” she said. “Even if you have money in your pocket, they don’t want to talk to you.”

Finally one of Ross’s coworkers told her about someone he knew who was looking to rent a small house in south Kansas City. With great relief, Ross moved in and enrolled Jeremiah at Ingels.

Having a roof over her head hasn’t solved all her problems. After weeks of sputtering, the transmission in Ross’s car gave up entirely soon after she moved. That made it impossible to get to the job she held at the time. So now Ross takes temporary jobs through staffing agencies. She rides metro area buses to work, even as far as Kansas City International Airport.

Fortunately, a family near her home helps out with child care. Still, shortage of cash forced Ross to choose which utility would go unpaid. She picked water, and the family went without for several weeks.

Shortly before Christmas, Ross and her son arrived at Ingels Elementary for the holiday concert featuring 3rd and 4th grade students, Jeremiah dapper in a jacket and tie. Neither let on that they had walked a mile or so in the dark to get to the program.

Ross said she considers her son’s school an anchor. “He knows that whatever happens, you still go to school, you have a schedule, you have to do certain things,” she said. Jeremiah has always gotten good grades, but recently they’ve been slipping, she said. She’s hoping that this summer she can get him in some programs where he can make friends.

Although she rarely has enjoyed a stable life, Ross has a wistful concept of what one would look like. She said she would like to spend more time at the school, getting to know her son’s teachers and attending parent’s events, but her erratic work schedule and lack of a car make it difficult.

“I really would have liked to have been with Jeremiah when they did the ‘muffins with moms,’” she said.

Barbara Shelly is a freelance contributor for KCUR 89.3. You can reach her at bshellykc@gmail.com.

As Families Come And Go, Hickman Mills School Administrators Power Through

By BARBARA SHELLY · JAN 10, 2017

It is late morning, and Barb Wunsch limps a bit as she emerges from her office in the enrollment area of the Hickman Mills School District. Twice already she's banged her knee on the corner of her desk in the process of jumping up to cope with a new situation.

Outside of her office, at least a dozen people sit at tables. The adults busily sort through piles of papers and fill out forms. Children color or read the children's books on hand in the office. Wunsch moves among the tables, dispensing advice, checking on documents and admiring a newborn in a baby carrier.

It's the first school day after winter break, and families have been on the move. Parents were waiting for Wunsch when she got to work at 7:30 a.m. at the district's Baptiste Center and they never stopped coming.

A family was moving in from Wichita, Kansas. Another from Topeka, Kansas. A couple was taking custody of children who had been living in the Springfield, Missouri, area. Another mother said her kids had last attended school in Franklin County, near St. Louis, but they'd missed most of December because of an unexpected move.

More plentiful are families who had relocated from area neighborhoods served by other school districts, like Kansas City, Kansas; Raytown and Grandview in Missouri. At least a dozen parents were transferring children from the Kansas City Public Schools or charter schools. Others were simply moving within the Hickman Mills district.

"We just tend to have a very transient population in the Hickman Mills area," Wunsch said. "We have a lot of rental properties, a lot of Section 8 housing. We have families who live in hotels. A lot of families double up."

Wunsch has handled residency and enrollment issues for the district for 18 years. In that time, her job has only become more intense as the district's housing stock has become older and its population poorer.

The first week or so after winter break is her second busiest period, right behind late summer, when families enroll for the upcoming school year.



Barbara Wunsch, the residency coordinator for Hickman Mills School District, talks to Yohana Gomez, a freshman who started the school year in the district before moving to a school in Kansas City, Kansas.

ELLE MOXLEY / KCUR 89.3

By early afternoon on Wednesday, all of the seats at the tables in the outer office were occupied. Roxane Odneal, the receptionist at the Baptiste Center, scrambled to find folding chairs and clipboards for people crowding a second waiting area.

After families fill out a sheath of forms, Wunsch checks to make sure everything is in order. At a minimum she needs birth certificates, proof of residency and shot records. Many families need to document that they have legal custody of a child. Every situation is different and many of them are complicated.

“This is where the frustration sets in,” Wunsch tells me, as she surveys the growing crowd. She is big on customer service and hates to keep people waiting.



Kimberly Carrell reads to her son, Brandon, and daughter, Naomi, in the admissions office. Carrell says she moved a lot as a kid and wants to keep the kids in the same school district.
CREDIT ELLE MOXLEY / KCUR 89.3

On this day, though, most people don't seem to mind. Kids share games and toys and parents and grandparents swap stories. Those stories help to explain why the Hickman Mills School District's churn rate — the number of students who move in and out in relation to the start-of-the-school-year attendance count — is the second highest in the region, behind only the Kansas City Public Schools.

Yohanna Gomez, formerly of El Salvador, wanted to re-enroll in the district's Freshman Center. She had attended classes there when school started in the fall, but moved in with relatives in Kansas City, Kansas, after clashing with her parents. Yohanna wasn't happy in her new high school and decided to move back home. She was looking forward to rejoining her friends in Hickman Mills.

Cecily Winda was enrolling three boys, ages 10, 8 and 7, in a Hickman Mills elementary school. It will be their third school in a year's time, following stays in Raytown and Grandview. “They were just getting comfortable in their old school,” said Winda, who works at a call center. But she found an affordable house in Hickman Mills — one with three bedrooms, a patio and a full basement. She hopes it will be her last move.

A grandmother arrived with elementary-age children who had attended schools in Texas and California.

“Where's Mom?” Wunsch asked.

“She's homeless,” the grandmother said.

Shortly before 3 p.m., the admissions office took on an international cast.

Natalia Shupe, who moved here several years ago from Moldova in Eastern Europe, came to re-enroll her kindergarten-age son, Mickey, who was dropped from the rolls when he missed too many school days because of ear infections and other problems.

Families from El Salvador and Mexico sat at tables filling out forms with the help of district-provided translators.

Galen Turner, from Jewish Vocational Services, arrived with a family from Syria. The refugee relocation agency initially found the family housing in Kansas City's northeast neighborhood. Now the parents have chosen to move to south Kansas City, where a Syrian community seems to be getting established, he said.

Wunsch verified that. A landlord in the district is willing and eager to rent to Syrian families, she said. She's seen several families already and expects to see more. For students who don't speak English, the district provides language help for one year.

By 5 p.m., the office is cleared out. Some of the parents will have to return the next day with paperwork. Most will take their children to their assigned new schools, where they may or may not land quickly in a classroom. Staffers must obtain transcripts and other records from the students' most recent schools. Students transferring to middle and high schools will need schedules.

For Wunsch and her families, it's been a long day in the admissions office. But the problems with moving around don't stop when a family clears the paperwork hurdles. [A recent study](#) by the Kansas City Area Education Research Consortium showed that students who switch schools in midyear are significantly less likely to score as "proficient" or higher on state assessment tests than their peers. [Some studies](#) suggest that churn in the classroom even affects students who don't move.

But there is research, and there is reality. Children in low-income neighborhoods are forced by circumstances to move frequently. Wunsch expects a busy January and another rush of families after spring break.

"I continue enrolling students up until the last week of school," she said.

Barbara Shelly is a freelance contributor for KCUR 89.3. You can reach her at bshellykc@gmail.com.

With Flood Of New Students Ahead Of Break, Hickman Mills School Is Running Out Of Room

By [BARBARA SHELLY](#) · DEC 22, 2016

Ingels Elementary School in the Hickman Mills district marked the days before the holiday break with a concert, a chance to spray the principal with silly string and enough cookies and candy canes to vault children into the new year on a sugar high.

Like teachers everywhere, the faculty was visibly relieved as the closing bell drew near. But this group may need the break more than their peers in some other schools. As the principal, Sabrina Winfrey, told parents at the start of the concert, featuring 3rd and 4th graders, “this year has been a bit different.”

I’ve visited Ingels Elementary frequently since the start of the school year, watching how poverty and [high rates of student churn](#) affect children, teachers and school communities.

The [Hickman Mills School District](#) in south Kansas City serves a community that has become increasingly isolated and cut off from prosperity. Homes that once belonged to middle-income families have become battered rental properties owned mostly by absentee landlords. Most parents work one or more service industry jobs. The student enrollment is constantly in flux.

Ingels Elementary started the school year with more new students than usual. The Hickman Mills district converted two of its formerly neighborhood-based elementary buildings into magnet-type schools specializing in math, science and technology. The move provided an attractive option for some district families, but it displaced others.

Nearly 200 children who had formerly attended the converted schools ended up at Ingels. Teachers — many of them new as well — spent the first half of the year reinforcing the school’s culture and expectations. It wasn’t easy.

Then, right after the Thanksgiving break, a flood of new students entered the school.

“I’ve never seen it like this before,” Connie Sistrunk, the longtime attendance clerk, told me. “I’m enrolling one or two a day. We’re running out of room.” In all, about 20 students enrolled between Thanksgiving and Christmas — usually a time of low turnover. The student population now tops 500.

In the 4th grade, teacher Angelica Saddler added two new students, bringing her roster to 30 in a classroom that already had seemed too small. Saddler, a teacher with four years of



At Ingels Elementary School, 3rd and 4th grade students head into winter break with a holiday concert for family and friends.

BARBARA SHELLY / KCUR 89.3

experience, returned to work from family leave in late September, with an infant at home and a formidable task at school. Most of her students are below their grade level in reading and math. Many days she feels like she spends more time on classroom management than on actual teaching.

But Saddler — who showed up for the evening concert to watch her students — told me she was looking forward to a fresh start after the holiday. The break, she said, would give her a chance to impose more routine and expectations when students return.

On Wednesday, a half-day for students before the start of winter break, only 12 of the 23 children in Aubrey Paine’s 2nd grade showed up for the planned classroom party. As her students munched on treats sent by parents and watched a movie starring Dr. Seuss’s “Grinch,” Paine seemed worried not about getting new children, but about one she was about to lose.



Teacher Aubrey Paine and her 2nd graders play a game as part of their holiday party celebration. Only 12 of Paine’s 23 students show up for the half-day of school on Wednesday.

CREDIT BARBARA SHELLY / KCUR 89.3

A girl who had come into the class in October hadn’t been in school for the last week and a half, the teacher said. The child’s mother never provided the required proof of residency to the school district, and she was to be dropped from the roster at the end of that day.

“She’s so great,” Paine said of the student. “I can’t afford to lose her.”

Thinking about the year so far, Paine said she is pleased many of her students are testing at or close to grade level. But others haven’t made progress. “They’re not here enough,” she said.

Attendance, like mobility, is one of the school’s struggles. Winfrey addressed the issue at the holiday concert, as she does every time she addresses parents.

“I ask you to have your kids here on time and to let them stay the entire school day,” she said. If winter clothing was an issue, the school could provide coats, hats, boots — anything to get children out of their homes and into the building, Winfrey said. “School starts on January 4 and we need them here.”

But in this high-churn district, that’s never a given. In Saddler’s 4th grade classroom, I asked one of the students why she wasn’t at the holiday concert.

“I was packing,” she said.

I asked if she was going on a trip. She shook her head. “Moving,” she said matter-of-factly. When I asked if she would be returning to Ingels, she said she didn’t know.

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Despite Challenges, This Grandparent Shows Up For Everything At Hickman Mills School

By BARBARA SHELLY · DEC 12, 2016

If an event at Ingels Elementary School calls for participation from parents, Shari Anderson is there.

Goodies for grandparents. Check. Anderson has legal guardianship of two grandchildren who are enrolled at the school.

Muffins with moms. Why not? She's mothering the kids.

Parent teacher conferences. Halloween trunk or treat night. School council meetings. At a school where the principal literally pleads for parental involvement, Anderson shows up for everything. She's the tall lady with the reddish hair who enrolled two children at the school in the Hickman Mills district a couple of weeks into the start of the academic year.



Shari Anderson is trying to provide stability for her two grandchildren, who now attend Ingels Elementary School in the Hickman Mills School District.

BARBARA SHELLY / KCUR 89.3

"I feel like I'm getting a second chance," she told me. "When my kids were growing up I really didn't have a lot of time to do anything because I was in the military."

Anderson's engagement in her grandchildren's lives and school seems admirable even before you learn what she goes through to pull it off.

Anderson, 52, struggles with a chronic form of leukemia called myelofibrosis. It leaves her fatigued and at risk for abdominal bleeding. It is the reason she went on medical retirement in 2009 after 14 years in the Air Force and several years after that working in military-related office jobs. Since then she's struggled to get by on disability payments.

She took guardianship of her grandchildren in 2012 when their mother, the oldest of Anderson's three daughters, was unable to care for them. Her middle daughter was living in the Kansas City area, so Anderson brought the children here. Lacking money and a place to stay, they sought help at the City Union Mission and spent a couple of years in the long-term family care program.

Like many of their classmates at Ingels Elementary, Anderson's grandchildren have moved around. They started out at an elementary school in Kansas City near the shelter. Last spring, seeking a more stable situation, Anderson moved with the children to San Diego and enrolled them in school there. That arrangement didn't work out, so they moved back to Kansas City.

After a short stop back at the City Union Mission, Anderson stayed for awhile in a motel near Ingels Elementary. She enrolled Isaiah in 2nd grade and Nevaeh in 3rd grade. Then her middle daughter and son-in-law found a rental home in the Hickman Mills School District. Anderson and the grandchildren moved in to share rent.

Isaiah and Nevaeh are happy in their classes and doing well. That may have something to do with Anderson's coaching. She talks to Isaiah about controlling his temper and counsels Nevaeh about making good choices. She insists they do their homework and read every night, seeking out books at libraries and thrift shops.

"We all sit down and eat dinner together every night," Anderson told me, when we talked at her home. "Well, we don't have a table yet," she amended. But everyone finds a seat somewhere and eats and talks.

Anderson has no car. So unless she can borrow her daughter's vehicle, she relies on city buses to get to the children's school and her medical appointments. When we visited she had a cast on her left hand -- the result of a tumble in a rutted parking lot at a neighborhood strip mall. She broke three fingers.

The obstacles seem daunting, but Anderson shrugs them off. Over her lifetime she has dealt with an abusive relationship, substance abuse among family members, homelessness and now illness.

"I'm of the belief that the life experiences I've gone through are not just for me," she said. "If I can offer any encouragement or hope to someone I think it's my responsibility to share. I've never allowed my circumstances to define who I am."

Her one wish is that life will be easier for her grandchildren.

"Being a grandmother is amazing," she said. "I was there when Isaiah and Nevaeh were born. There's nothing more beautiful I've experienced in my life than to see them come into the world."

Anderson wants more than anything to provide stability for her grandchildren. But more changes may be coming.

Anderson controls her illness with daily medications, but eventually she will need a bone marrow transplant. She'll probably have to spend a few months in Seattle, where she would have the procedure at a Veterans Administration hospital. That will require more decisions about care for Isaiah and Nevaeh; Anderson hopes they can stay in Kansas City.

Even if they remain in Hickman Mills, the children may have to move to a new school next year. Their rental home is outside of the boundaries for Ingels Elementary.

For this school year, the family falls under the protective umbrella of the McKinney-Vento homeless assistance program. A partnership among the federal government, states and school districts, McKinney-Vento provides resources for children who at some point in the school year have met the definition of homelessness. About 200 of the Hickman Mills district's nearly 6,000 students fit the guidelines.

Anderson's family qualifies because they were living in a motel when they enrolled in classes. One benefit — a big one — is that children can remain in the same school even if they move outside of its attendance zone. But that privilege expires at the end of the school year.

In facing uncertain circumstances, Anderson and her grandchildren have plenty of company at Ingels Elementary. This is a school where children move in and out of classrooms frequently. Many families don't even notify the school that they've left.

That wouldn't be the case with Anderson, who loves to drop in at the school and check on her grandchildren.

"To me, everything is about these kids," she said. "I think their success in school depends on me. I've learned that kids need one adult they can depend on."

That will be her, she said. No matter how many obstacles life throws out.

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Superintendent Defends Hickman Mills School District In Wake Of Poor Performance Report

By BARBARA SHELLY · NOV 15, 2016

School district performance reports matter. They can affect accreditation status, real estate dynamics -- even whether students get to go on field trips.

“We are in an era of testing,” Sabrina Winfrey, the principal of Ingels Elementary School, told a group of parents at her school in the Hickman Mills School District recently. “I would love for your kids to go on more field trips, but right now they need to be in this building learning to read.”

The urgency felt by Winfrey and other principals intensified last week when the Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education released its annual performance reports. Hickman Mills’ scores of 67.9 points was the lowest of any area school district, though it was enough to retain provisional accreditation.

I’ve been observing classrooms at Ingels Elementary this school year, noting the challenges of educating children in an area of Kansas City marked by poverty and instability. Children move frequently in and out of its classrooms, for instance.

And so I wasn’t surprised when Dennis Carpenter, the district’s superintendent, responded to the state report and its implications with a fiery presentation to his school board last week. In a room packed with some of the school district’s best teachers, he defended their work and blasted Missouri’s accountability system, saying it was biased against high-poverty districts like Hickman Mills and the Kansas City Public Schools.

In those districts, Carpenter said, “you have a concentration of the poorest kids in the area.”

The state has altered either its testing system or its academic standards every year since he’s been in Missouri, said Carpenter, who arrived in 2013. The flux disproportionately affects classrooms of low-income students, where teachers deal with multiple needs and have less time to focus on test preparation, he argued.

“For our kids to hit the bar, it’s got to stop moving,” Carpenter said.

He faulted the state for a one-size-fits-all accreditation system. In reality, he pointed out, Hickman Mills looks nothing like most of Missouri school districts. For the state as a whole, 51 percent of students qualify for free- or-reduced lunches and 27 percent are students of color.



Dennis Carpenter is superintendent of the Hickman Mills School District.

CREDIT COURTESY HICKMAN MILLS SCHOOL DISTRICT

All of Hickman Mills' students are poor enough to qualify for free- or-reduced meals; 90 percent are students of color.

School district	Enrollment	Students receiving free and reduced lunch	Students of color	Missouri annual performance review score
Hickman Mills	6,300	100%	90%	67.9
Belton	4,600	52%	29%	76.8
Center	2,400	78%	81%	80.7
Grandview	4,200	78%	72%	78.6
Independence	14,200	71%	40%	89.6
Kansas City	14,500	100%	91%	70
North Kansas City	19,300	49%	39%	96.4
Raytown	8,900	68%	69%	79.6

Carpenter said he came to the district believing that hard work alone was the answer to raising the achievement of low-income students to a par with more affluent students. Now, he said, he's more in tune with research that contends 60 percent of a student's performance on standardized testing is determined by factors outside of the school building; 20 percent is determined by what goes on in school; and 20 percent is unexplained.

According to the researchers -- educational psychologist [David C. Berliner](#) and professor [Gene V. Glass](#) -- outside factors include the health of both children and their parents; the rate of violence, substance abuse and mental illness in neighborhoods; and family stress. Students moving in and out of classrooms during the school year -- a rampant occurrence in Hickman Mills -- was also cited as a downward pull.

"Does this mean we don't have work to do? Absolutely not," Carpenter said. But, he added, "Working hard in and of itself is probably not going to be the answer."

Critics will accuse Carpenter of making excuses for an underperforming school district. But a fairly new thread of education research argues that expecting schools to lift student achievement on their own allows policy makers and citizens to ignore larger social and economic factors.

As someone who has spent many hours over the past two months observing what goes on in one of Hickman Mills' elementary schools, I see concerted efforts to raise student performance.

Elementary teacher Angelica Saddler told her students one morning she was under orders from principal Sabrina Winfrey to get started earlier on reading lessons.

"We need to get started at 8 o'clock, not 10 minutes after," Saddler said. "Not because I say so but because Dr. Winfrey says so. I have to listen to instructions, too. Am I complaining? No, I am not."

At a thinly attended parents' meeting a couple of weeks ago, Winfrey explained the urgency. "I told my teachers, we are in a state of emergency," the principal said. "We've got kids in this building who can't read."

Back at the school board meeting, board members told Carpenter they appreciated his attempt to explain the back story to the district's test scores. In a region where schools are segregated by income and race, it is unrealistic to expect districts to perform at the same level.

But the missing element in the superintendent's presentation was a clear path forward. There is little reason to think the demographics of the Hickman Mills district will change soon, or that middle class families will return to its classrooms.

That ought to be a challenge embraced by city and state policy makers and the community at large, Carpenter argued. But for now, it's his problem.

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It's Early Days Yet, But Hickman Mills Teacher Already Is Absorbing Churn In Her Classroom

By BARBARA SHELLY · NOV 2, 2016

Aubrey Paine is a 2nd grade teacher, the mother of a 1-year-old girl, a Kansas City Chiefs fan and a technology buff. So it isn't as if she needs more excitement in her life. But lately she's taken to looking at her class roster every night, just to see what the morning might bring.

"We have all these new kids. I never know what to expect," she told me on a recent Tuesday afternoon. The newest student had joined the

class just that day. You couldn't miss him: the shaggy-haired boy in soccer shorts, an athletic shirt and eyes that darted between eager and guarded.



Teacher Aubrey Paine uses tablets to teach essential reading and math skills in her 2nd grade classroom.

BARB SHELLY / KCUR 89.3

Paine started her school year at Ingels Elementary school on Aug. 22 with 18 students in her class. Since then, the count has fluctuated almost weekly.

"I got two more students this morning," Paine told me three weeks into the academic year, when I dropped into her classroom during the school's open house. She opened her computer roster to show me the names and began to laugh. "Oh, I have another. I have another new one coming in the morning. Good thing I checked."

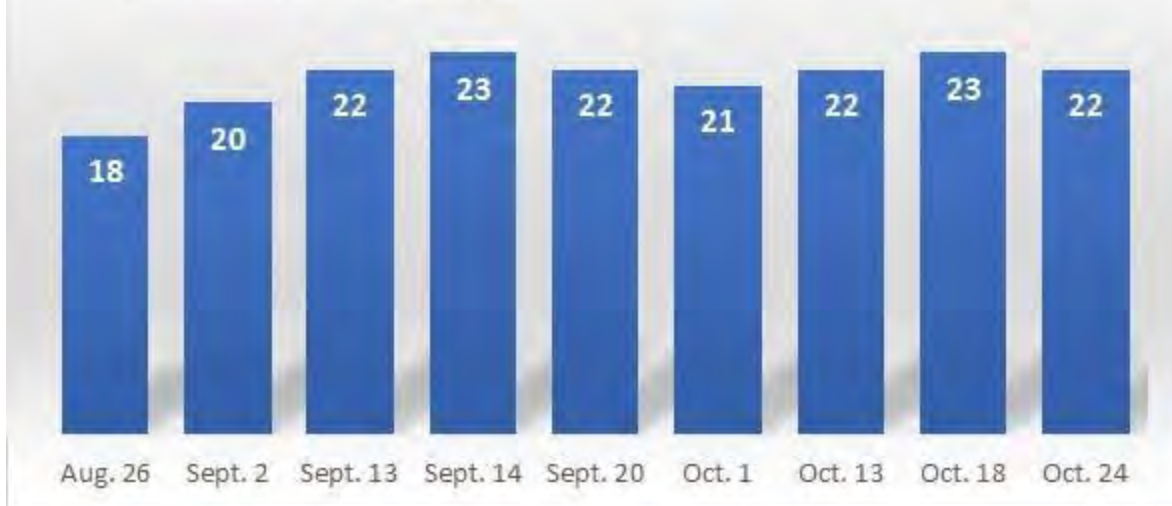
Such is life in a high-churn classroom. The Hickman Mills School District, one of the Kansas City region's most impoverished, serves a community characterized by low-income housing and mobile families. Ingels Elementary School has a 75 percent mobility rate, meaning that in any given classroom, three of four seats are likely to change ownership over the course of the school year as children move in and out.

Paine is in her second year with the Hickman Mills district, after two years spent teaching in Baldwin City, Kan. At Ingels, the young teacher is respected for her classroom management skills, her unflappable manner and her expertise with technology. Recently, she won a contest for the chance to learn a new reading program done on iPads.

"I was trained in one day. I'm like obsessed with it," she told me, practically bouncing with excitement. "I'm teaching the whole school (staff) tomorrow."

Students come and go

Aubrey Paine's 2nd grade roster has fluctuated often in the first two months of the school year.



At first, Paine's classroom grew as new students trickled in. But around mid-September she became concerned about a student named Jarbin. For two weeks he was absent from school, with no word from an adult. The Ingels attendance clerk phoned his contact number, but the person who answered spoke only Spanish. Finally the school enlisted a translator, who established that Jarbin and his family had moved to Texas.

Paine greeted the news with mixed emotions. Jarbin had been a sweet student and he had bonded with another child who needed a friend. On the other hand, if he had popped back up in class he would have missed two weeks or more of crucial lessons, including writing detailed sentences and three benchmark math tests. Paine already had her hands full trying to catch up the three students who joined her class in mid-September.

"I don't know my numbers because I'm kind of new," one of those students said plaintively one afternoon, after becoming frustrated during a math lesson and knocking objects off his desk. Paine assured him that he did indeed know his numbers and he couldn't use his new-kid status as an excuse.

Soon after Jarbin's departure was confirmed, Paine logged into her computer one night to see that another student, from Mexico, was expected the next day. Paine was scheduled to test students all day and a substitute teacher was lined up for her class. She sent an email to her list of parents, asking them to instruct their children to clean out Jarbin's desk in the morning and welcome the new student. Her 2nd graders stepped up to the desk-cleaning job admirably, but the girl from Mexico never showed up. Eventually she was dropped from the roster.

Jarbin's old desk is getting good use, though. A new girl joined the class the second week of October and a boy moved in the third week. Both had attended schools outside of the Hickman Mills district.

Also, a boy who'd been in the class since the beginning of the school year transferred to another elementary school in the district. His mother notified the school and the class was able to give him a send-off. But another boy mysteriously disappeared. After he'd been missing for two weeks, Mark Dayton, the school's family resource specialist, knocked on the door of his last known address and found the place abandoned. He eventually confirmed that the child was enrolled in the Kansas City, Kan., School District.

In her classroom the next day, Paine said she would miss the child. He had a pleasant personality and an aptitude for math. For the moment, his pencil box, crayons and notebooks remained stuffed into the space beneath his desk, as though he might be coming back.

Meanwhile, life in the 2nd grade goes on. Paine is busy assessing the math and reading skills of the two most recent arrivals. In order to work individually with those two students, she gives the rest of the class assignments and hopes they can work independently. That doesn't usually last long; these are 7-year-olds, after all.

Perhaps all of the comings and goings were in the mind of a student who hugged her teacher in the midst of a recent school day and said, "I don't want to leave." Paine hugged the girl back. "I won't let you leave," she said.

But she knows that is a promise she may not be able to keep.

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This Longtime Hickman Mills Teacher Has Witnessed Economic Slide In The District

By BARBARA SHELLY · OCT 11, 2016

Marcia Pitts lets her 4th graders know they have a big job ahead of them on this Tuesday. Open house at Ingels Elementary School is scheduled for the next evening, and Pitts is preparing her students to write a short essay. The best of their work, she says, will be posted on the bulletin board outside of her room to show to parents.

The essay assignment is biographical, and Pitts has written a sample about herself.

“Let me tell you about Ms. Pitts,” it begins. “I am a 4th grade teacher at Ingels. Let me begin by saying I love to travel. I enjoy being on the beach.”



Fourth grade teacher Marcia Pitts has observed the transformation of the Hickman Mills School District over the last 30 years.

BARBARA SHELLY / KCUR 89.3

With the dramatic flair she has used to captivate elementary students for more than four decades, Pitts expounds on her theme.

“If you want to see a happy 4th grade teacher, put me on the beach,” she tells her class. “Oh, to hear the surf, to breathe the smell of salt water, to feel the sand between my toes. It’s so peaceful. It’s so relaxing. I could live on the beach, I really could.”

An adult in the room, like me, can detect a bit of wistfulness in Pitt’s recitation. She actually retired two years ago, but can’t seem to cut her ties with Ingels Elementary School. Right now she’s on a long-term substitute assignment, filling in for a teacher on family leave.

Demographics evolve

Over the first few weeks of the school year, in the rare moments when she wasn’t directly engaged with her students, Pitts filled me in on her long history in the Hickman Mills School District.

She arrived there 30 years ago with 10 years of teaching experience. At the time, Pitts said, about 70 percent of the district’s students were white. She was one of only 12 African American teachers in the district, and three of them were at Ingels.

The district’s demographics were different then. Many of her students’ parents were homeowners who worked at Bendix Corp. or Marion Laboratories or the former Richards-Gebaur Air Force Base.

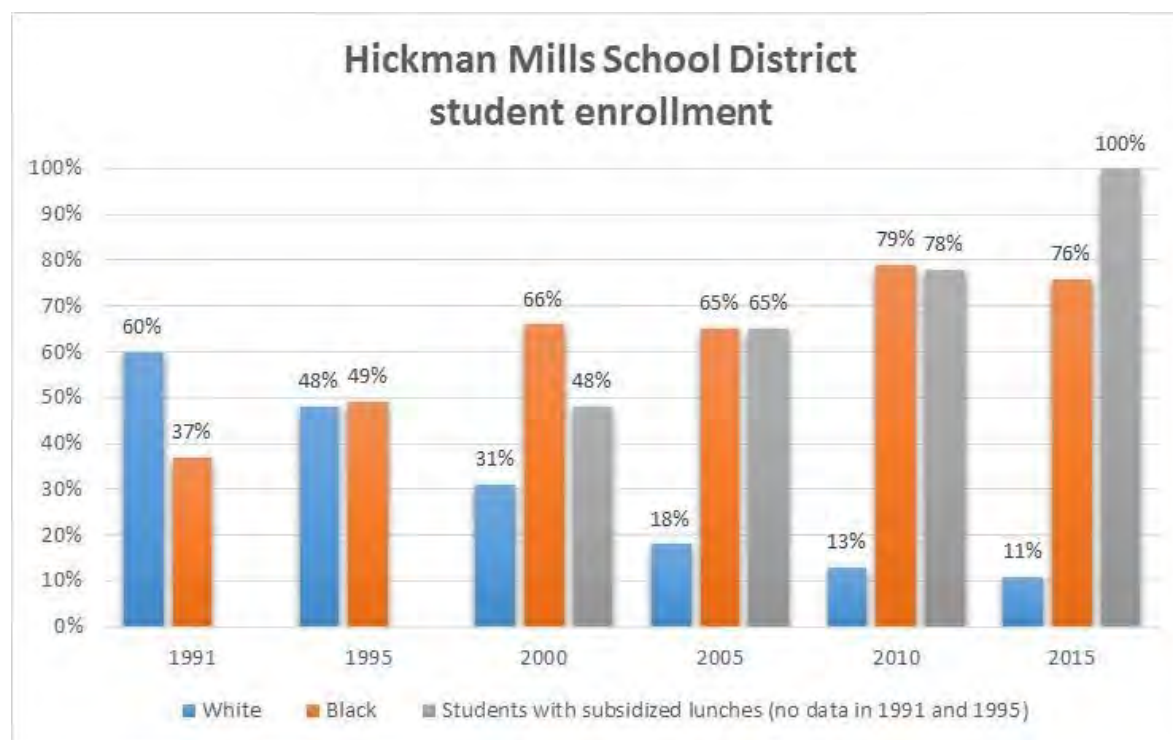
Parental involvement was off the charts. “We had a lot of non-working mothers,” Pitts said. “They practically ran this place when I came. It was hilarious.”

Parents distributed school supplies, copied and laminated papers and even took attendance, she recalled. “We had room mothers, they did all the parties, anything you’d need.”

Over the years, Pitts said, “I’ve always had very good parents and I’ve worked with them very well.”

But the stay-at-home moms have been mostly replaced by parents working one or more low-paying job and stretching to pay their rent. I’ve watched as they pick their children up from school, many wearing the uniforms of city sanitation workers, painters and food service employees.

“I’m tired,” one mother told a staffer from LINC, the agency that runs Ingels’ before- and-after-school programs. “I worked overnight last night and I’m working again in 15 minutes.”



Source: Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education

Pitts has observed the district’s transformation since 1986 from her perch at the blackboard.

“Around my tenth or eleventh year, you could see it start to change,” she said. By year twenty, we just had question marks. What in the world happened?”

The answers to her questions could fill a book. Hickman Mills provides a sad but fascinating study of how a community that once considered itself a working-class suburb rapidly took on the look and the problems of urban poverty.

About 75 percent of Hickman Mills’ students today are African-American, with white students and Hispanic students each accounting for about 10 percent of enrollment. Nearly all of the district’s students come from households poor enough to qualify for free- or-reduced lunches.

A declining tax base, inadequate state funding and what school district Superintendent Dennis Carpenter describes as “more than a decade of disinvestment in our school district and community” has left teachers like Pitts facing bigger challenges with fewer resources.

“This can be a difficult job and we have children coming from a difficult environment,” she told me.

Missing class

Pitts was worried that a couple of her students who had transferred from other schools weren’t keeping up with the class. And by the sixth week of school, one girl had attended fewer than 10 days of classes.

“It hurts because some of these children could make such enormous progress if they were here,” Pitts said.

The teacher’s desk was about to experience some mobility as well. The regular classroom teacher, Angelica Saddler, was due back the last week of September. “They’ll have a new face in front of them,” Pitts said of the students.

But on this Tuesday, she was upbeat as she reviewed the class’s mini essays. “Oh, I like that,” she told one girl. “That’s attitude!”

Pitts collected everyone’s papers, eyed her students and delivered her verdict. “For your first writing project I am very, very pleased,” she said. “I know your parents are going to be happy when they see these on the board.”

But the next night, the open house was lightly attended. Only a handful of parents drifted into the 4th grade classroom.

Pitts takes these disappointments in stride. “Some days I go home skipping and jumping. Some days I go home dragging,” she said. “The good lord has blessed me to always see people’s potential.”

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Turn the Page KC succeeds in mobilizing crusade for reading, but thornier tasks remain

By Joe Robertson

No doubt there were skeptics. Mayor Sly James, five years ago, took the lead in a citywide crusade to make Kansas City children stronger readers.

The mission, [Turn the Page KC](#), would have to navigate more than a dozen school districts and a host of charter schools in bringing new and existing education resources to bear — with the city’s fractured history of school politics ready to darken the path.

But an analysis by The Star shows the program to be a success — so far. Kansas City children at the critical point of third grade are stronger readers now than when Turn the Page started in 2012.

“The vision of the mayor has brought energy to everyone working in this space,” said former state Education Commissioner

Bob Bartman, a member of the Turn the Page board.

The combined performance of Kansas City’s districts and charter schools shows that third-graders have narrowed the performance gap between the city and the Missouri state average.

The gap is narrowing within subgroups, as well — among low-income students, black students and Hispanic students.

National awards [have come Kansas City’s way](#) for its focus on reading tutors, kindergarten readiness, summer school expansion and attendance.

But reflecting recently on the work so far, James felt the weight of the difficulties that persist.

Turn the Page needs an even stronger swell to reach its goal of seeing at least 70 percent of the city’s third-graders reading at grade level in 2017’s test results later this year.



The percentage of the city’s third-graders scoring proficient or advanced in reading rose from 35 to 55 percent since 2011, but that still trails the state’s improved rate of 61 percent high performers.

With two years left in his tenure, James stands face to face with what he described to The Star as “the most difficult part — trying to understand the factors you can’t control.” Factors like city economic divides and disparate home environments.

The mayor’s education adviser, Julie Holland, knows her inquiries are reaching in complicated directions. She wants to study the debilitating [midyear migration of low-income students between schools](#).

Social issues also effect school success, so she’s asking hard questions surround the effects of resegregation, she said. Will white families integrate? Can we call quality classrooms high quality if the color of the students “is monochromatic”?

Turn the Page KC’s shining moments, though, are far simpler for 8-year-old Gary Barbor.

He had three new books in his hands, given to him through the [United Way of Greater Kansas City’s My Very Own Library](#) book giveaway with Scholastic books.

He stood in a throng of second-graders at Primitivo Garcia Elementary School on Kansas City’s west side. Each child’s eyes searched across a sea of adults gathered by the local nonprofit volunteer recruiter [Lead to Read](#).

“Hey, buddy,” a voice called to him. It was his weekly partner, Chato Villalobos, a Kansas City police officer, with a raised-fist greeting. Other adults there came from the Bryan Cave law firm and Service Management Group marketing company, giving up a lunch hour — all of them partners in the mission.

It was Valentine’s Day, and Gary hopped over to his friend with a handwritten card ready.

“Dear Mr. Villalobos,” his card said. *“Thank you for helping me read words I don’t know yet. It means a lot to me...”*

James said the heart of Turn the Page for volunteers had to be “as narrow and focused as possible.”

“We can sidestep a lot of the nonsense that goes on in large bureaucracies. It’s sitting down and reading with kids and getting them in school.”

Not in the original plan

James didn’t ride into office with a reading mission.

But it came soon after a conversation at his first [U.S. Conference of Mayors](#) meeting in Baltimore in 2011, sitting with Ralph Smith, director of the Annie E. Casey Foundation’s [Campaign for Grade-Level Reading](#).

Smith’s statistics were alarming. One out of every six children not reading proficiently by third grade drops out or doesn’t graduate on time — odds that are four times worse than for proficient readers.

Most won't catch up, won't achieve higher education, will be many times more likely to be arrested, will typically account for hundreds of thousands of dollars in lost earnings, taxes and productivity over a lifetime that is also likely to be shortened.

"I was in Month Two of being in office," James said. "I got it. (I determined) we ought to do something here."



By early 2012, Turn the Page came rolling out. The city brought together work groups, involving hundreds of people, including social services providers, pediatricians, librarians, health care providers, youth club workers, ministers, counselors and educators from multiple school districts.

The campaign's message was "this is an urgent problem," said Judy Heeter, its first coordinator and current vice president of the Turn the Page board. "And there is a role for everyone to play."

They established targets:

- Improve attendance by working with schools and communities to reduce chronic absenteeism, and reduce out-of-school suspensions.
- Work against "summer slide" by helping schools and libraries draw more children into summer learning programs.
- Support early childhood programming to boost kindergarten-readiness.

Mike English, the executive director of Turn the Page KC, said numbers from school districts and charters show that the percentage of children in kindergarten through third grade who missed 18 or more days of school has dropped from 14 to 10 percent since 2013.

The percentage of low-income children across the city who attended summer school grew from 7 to 44 percent, with the most growth in Kansas City Public Schools.

The number of volunteers in schools has topped 1,500, and more than 240,000 books have been distributed to children.

Just how much credit for this growth goes to Turn the Page is impossible to know. The campaign mostly joined and encouraged work already underway by institutions and groups long invested in helping make children better readers.

But the impact should not be underestimated, said Brent Schondelmeyer, deputy director for community engagement at the [Local Investment Commission](#), which has been running after-school programs.

James has visited nearly 120 schools since the beginning to read to children, and when you see him reading, Schondelmeyer said, “It’s a love fest going on. It’s one thing to poke your head in and say, ‘Hi,’ and another thing to pull up a rocking chair and gather up kids and read to them.”

Turn the Page has brought people and organizations together that didn’t work together before, Schondelmeyer said.

“I would credit the mayor with that urgency,” he said.

The city budgets \$50,000 to seed the program, and the rest of Turn the Page’s \$275,000 in expenses in its 2016 report were supported by foundations, grants and donations.

Much of the work is carried out by partners — either recruited to the city, like [Literacy Lab](#), or existing programs that the city has endorsed, like Lead to Read — operating on their own budgets and revenue sources.

Literacy Lab, which trains AmeriCorps volunteers to provide intense reading intervention, is now in 16 buildings across several Kansas City districts and charters and will be expanding.

The Local Investment Commission and the United Way are helping distribute books. The public library systems and community groups are pushing summer reading.



The Family Conservancy has been enlisting everyone to take up early literacy with its [Talk, Read, Play](#) campaign in engaging children every day.

“Millennials are jazzed for volunteering — others, too,” said Pauly Hart, director of reader development at Lead to Read. “The bottom line is everyone wants our kids and schools to succeed. They see really good things going on in the public schools.”

On to Phase Two

Now, though, the work looks deeper.

The city is collaborating with the [Kansas City Area Education Research Consortium](#) to try to learn from what schools and their communities know about the transiency of families, particularly in lower-income neighborhoods.

They expect to pick into issues of public housing policy, the impacts of school discipline practices, the dynamics of race.

“The landscape is so complex,” said Karin Chang, the executive director of the research consortium. “The question is, how do we measure those things that are critically important, but hard to measure?”

James is making sure the work can carry on after his tenure ends. Because there will always be more work to do.

Turn the Page now operates independently of the city as a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization, with its own board of directors. It is establishing its own funding sources.

To James, this has been just the “first phase” of Turn the Page.

It’s set to run on its own, he said, “so there will be other people pushing the ball up the hill.”

It’s not impossible work, either, Heeter said.

“It’s not like boiling the ocean,” she said. “We know where the levers are, and we need a lot of people to help.”

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The Kansas City Star

February 13, 2017

\$800 million bond package is a big political gamble on Kansas City's April ballot

By Lynn Horsley

When Kansas City Councilman Dan Fowler talks to his Northland constituents about the city's proposed \$800 million infrastructure plan and tax increase, he can take at least a bit of consolation.

So far, he says, "I haven't gotten booed."

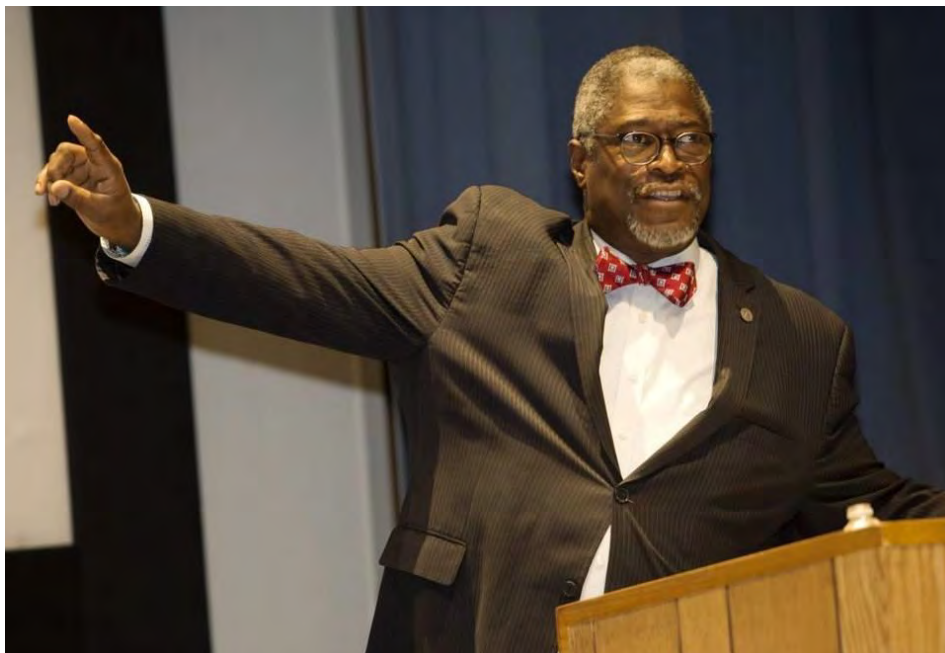
Yes, the campaign to win voter approval of the bond package in the April election is a hard sell. Fowler, his council colleagues and Mayor Sly James realize many people think that.

It requires a property tax increase — and a supermajority 57 percent voter approval — at a time when anti-tax sentiment runs high and trust in government nationally is low.

People keep asking the mayor, won't this be a heavy lift, persuading Kansas City voters to go against that trend?

"I don't see it that way," James told about 100 Brookside-area residents at a recent town hall meeting. Instead, he believes residents realize it's a worthwhile investment to address decades of deferred maintenance.

"We're asking you to do something that solves a number of problems," James told the crowd. "If we don't do the work, it's not going to get better."



With three questions on the April ballot, the city wants voter approval to borrow \$800 million over 20 years for streets, bridges, sidewalks, flood control, a new animal shelter and other city buildings.

No organized opposition campaign has emerged, but there are plenty of critics. They agree Kansas City has huge infrastructure needs but wonder why elected officials let it get so bad. They believe there's no assurance the money will be well spent.

And they correctly point out that there's no specific schedule of projects. That's because the city wants to maintain flexibility to address emergencies that might arise.

"What we're opposing is a lot of the ambiguity and misinformation," said Dan Coffey, head of a loose-knit group known as [Citizens for Responsible Government](#), which in the past has opposed a new airport terminal, streetcar expansion and earnings tax renewal.

James and his council colleagues [voted unanimously to put this on the ballot](#), so they own it and have a lot at stake politically.

They know it won't be easy but say they are "cautiously optimistic" all three ballot questions will pass.

Fowler is fond of saying that the campaign can't sell a tax increase but can sell a product. He believes the list of essential street, flood control and other projects, outlined in a nonbinding resolution, fairly covers the entire city and "now we have something to sell." More information is at kcmo.gov/infrastructure.

Councilman Scott Taylor, on the council since 2011, said residents in south Kansas City believe the investments will be worthwhile. "They've been talking to us about the need for streets and sidewalks every year I've been on the council," he said. "I think people know what we're doing, and they're going to be supportive."

These ballot questions are teed up for April specifically because Missouri law spells out that a general obligation bond in April requires 57.1 percent approval. If the city waited until August or November, state law requires an even higher approval margin — 66 percent.

Councilwoman Teresa Loar said that no bond request is easy to pass, but that this package can appeal to a broad base, including animal lovers who know the urgent need for a new animal shelter.

Still, skeptics abound.

At the Brookside town hall meeting, some residents said they've already paid for their own sidewalks, so they don't know why they now must help pay for other people's sidewalks.

Meanwhile, Pat Clarke, president of the Oak Park Neighborhood Association, wonders if the projects will really help his neighborhood.

"I don't see the big benefit from the sidewalks and the streets," he said, adding he's more concerned about abandoned housing, empty schools and trash.

“Who is going to manage the money?” he asked of the spending, which would be overseen by the City Council. The council promises an annual report card on projects accomplished and future work.

Lillian Anderson said she and her husband, senior citizens living in the Blue Hills neighborhood, just can’t support a property tax increase. She expresses a big concern echoed by many other Kansas City residents.

“We are taxed out over here,” she said, adding that skyrocketing water and sewer bills are already a big burden.

Progress KC

Bond lawyers insisted the City Council divide the proposal into three separate ballot questions, to clarify the infrastructure categories. All three don’t have to pass; any question that gets 57.1 percent approval could be implemented.

The three questions:

- Up to \$600 million for streets, bridges and sidewalks. Most of that, \$450 million, would be spent on roads and bridges, with the rest for a [new sidewalk improvement program](#).
- Up to \$150 million for flood control. This would be the city matching funds for more than \$550 million in federal dollars [already authorized by Congress](#).
- Up to \$50 million for public buildings, including [about \\$14 million for a new animal shelter](#) and up to \$35 million for upgrades to comply with the [Americans with Disabilities Act](#).

For the owner of a \$140,000 home and a \$15,000 car, taxes would increase, cumulatively, by about \$8 annually to a peak of about \$160 per year at the end of 20 years. Tax increases might be steepest in the early years, before flattening out as other city debt rolls off.

A Global Strategy Group poll of 400 likely voters in early January showed all three questions passing. Streets and sidewalks had 62 percent support; flood control 65 percent support; the animal shelter and other buildings 64 percent. With a 5 percent margin of error, it’s close.

“It’s not a slam dunk. This is a winnable election, but there’s not a lot of room for error,” said Mark Nevins, the campaign’s chief strategist, with Dover Group of Philadelphia. He has helped run James’ mayoral campaigns and said James’ popularity and 80 percent job approval rating are pluses for selling this plan to voters.

Kansas City campaign coordinator Steve Glorioso points out that local voters have approved other challenging tax increases in the not-too-distant past.

For example, in 2005, voters approved a 22-cent property tax levy for health care for poor people at Truman Medical Center and clinics. That increased taxes by about \$53 per year for the owner of a \$100,000 home, which was higher than the initial increase required by this bond. Voters renewed the indigent care tax with 76 percent approval in 2013.

Kansas City voters also approved a sales tax increase for the city’s buses in 2003, and renewed that tax several times, even though the vast majority of residents don’t ride the buses.

But voters south of the river rejected a 2014 proposal for higher property and sales taxes to support a streetcar expansion. That effort failed 60 percent to 40 percent.

This year's campaign is dubbed Progress KC (www.progresskc.com). So far, the biggest contributors include Burns & McDonnell, JE Dunn, Mark One Electric, and several development and law firms.

Supporters are counting on the Heavy Constructors to help fund the campaign. That group, whose members stand to benefit from the infrastructure jobs, won't officially decide until later this month.

Key endorsements came Friday from the Greater Kansas City Chamber of Commerce and the Civic Council. But the African-American political club Freedom Inc., which has discussed the proposal, didn't take a position and is still deliberating.

If this election is to be won, it's likely at the grass-roots level.

To that end, groups like Northland Neighborhoods Inc. and the Ivanhoe Neighborhood Council are on board.

"Yes, people are aware there will be a tax increase, but it's a modest increase," said Ivanhoe Executive Director Margaret May. "People feel very strongly that the kinds of things they're talking about doing really need to be done."

Northland Neighborhoods chief executive Deb Hermann acknowledged many residents of older Northland suburbs already struggle to pay their bills. Still, she said they realize Kansas City's sprawling infrastructure desperately needs more funding, and the problem will only get worse without it.

"We all know that quality of life, and infrastructure and basic services cost money," she said. "In the Northland, they get it."

Opposition

Dan Coffey and Citizens for Responsible Government campaigned unsuccessfully against the earnings tax renewal in 2016. He said they have no current plans for a formal campaign this time.

Coffey sent out an email in January that claimed, falsely, that if the property tax money is insufficient to pay the bond debt, then bondholders could seize people's homes.

That is not correct. The city clarified that, in the very unlikely event the property taxes are insufficient, the city can use other legally available funds to make the payment.

But Coffey and others still argue there's not enough information about how the money will be spent, and no guarantee it will be spent wisely.

Woody Cozad, a consultant who also campaigned against the earnings tax, said he is not involved in any campaign against the bonds. He agrees the city needs to fix its infrastructure but decries the city's high debt load and says the city should have addressed these basic needs long before now.

“Deferred maintenance is another phrase for bad management,” he said.

The Show-Me Institute, a free-market nonprofit think tank, does not take official campaign positions. But it has pointed out that the last batch of 20-year bonds likely won’t be paid off until 2055.

Crosby Kemper III, co-founder of the Show-Me Institute, has been a frequent critic of Kansas City’s development incentives and other financial management. But in this instance, he says he will likely support these ballot questions, despite reservations.

“I think we have to do it,” he said on KCPT’s “Ruckus” program. “But we’re a very high tax city already. ... We put the most on the people who can least afford it. So it’s going to have a hard time.”

Much of the skepticism comes from African-American ministers and others pushing a different ballot question, a petition initiative for a one-eighth-cent sales tax for East Side economic development. The Rev. Vernon Howard, president of the Southern Christian Leadership Conference of Greater Kansas City, said infrastructure doesn’t address their biggest concerns.

“Our people are suffering severely from lack of housing, jobs, business development,” Howard said. “So this piece does not get to the core of what our very basic needs are.”

Some bond supporters worry that so many tax questions on a single April ballot may doom them all.

James doesn’t think about failure. He believes the city has to seize this time of low interest rates and a reviving economy to get this moving. But if voters don’t support this general obligation bond proposal, he’ll work on other priorities until he leaves office in August 2019.

“I’ve got 2 1/2 years, and a whole bunch of other stuff,” James said. “If it fails, somebody else can pick it up and go with it down the line.”

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RESOLUTION NO. 160951 CAPITAL IMPROVEMENTS PLAN EXHIBIT A

Street Construction and Reconstruction projects will focus on safety, capacity or reconstruction of existing streets and include bike and pedestrian facilities where appropriate, as referenced in Exhibit A. The projects in Exhibit A may change slightly over time as the City implements an asset management system for its street network.

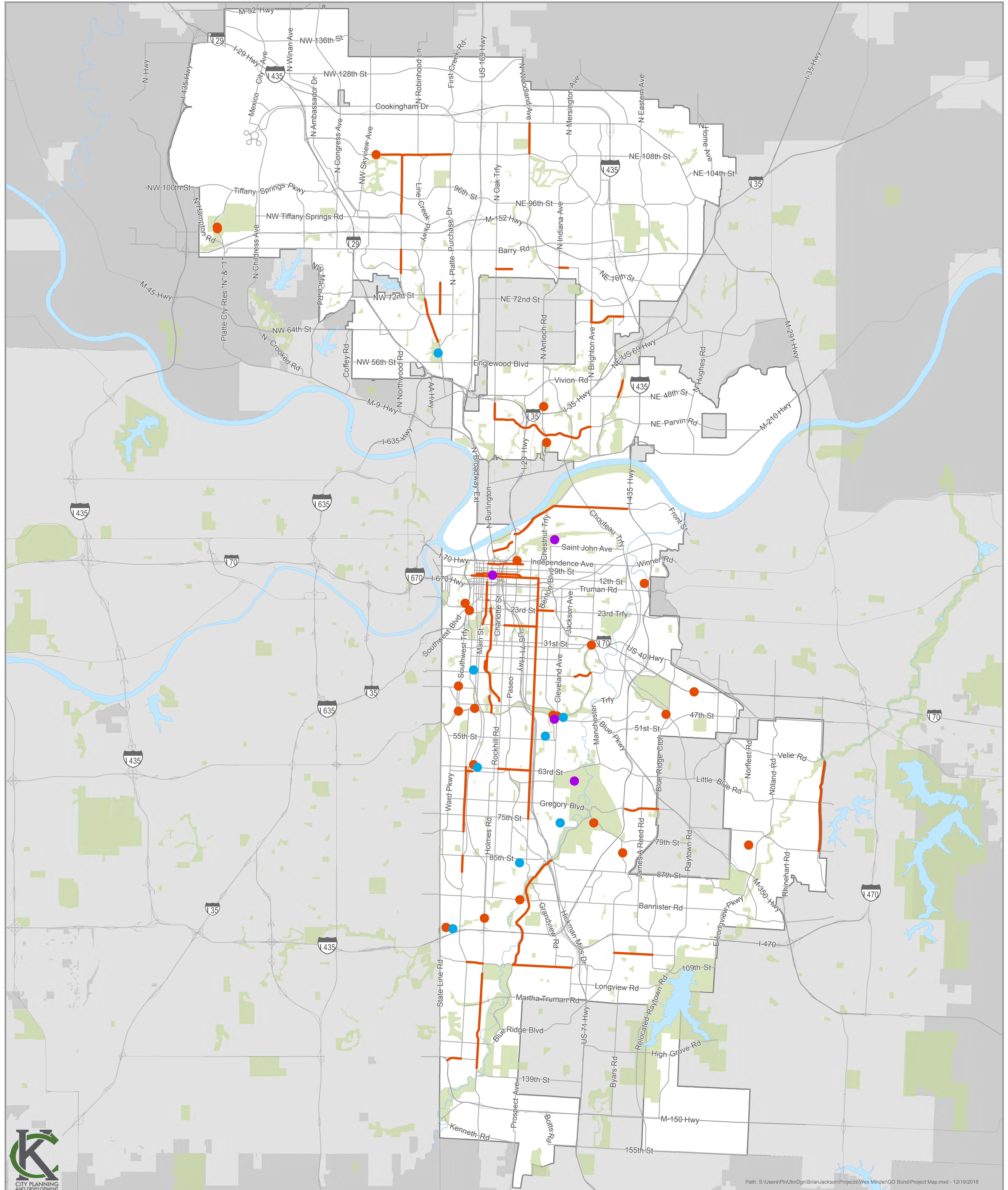
103rd Street Bridge over Indian Creek (East of State Line Road)	Line Creek Parkway from NW 68th Street to NW 72nd Street
107th Street from Blue Ridge to James A Reed	Maplewoods Parkway from M-1 to N. Antioch
12th Street Bridge over the Big Blue River (between Crystal and I-435 outer road)	Meyer Blvd. from Wornall to Baltimore
135th Street - Wornall to Hwy 150	N Antioch Road Bridge over small creek
20th Street Improvements	N Brighton - N Pleasant Valley Rd. to NE 72nd Street
Admiral Boulevard Improvements	N Coventry from NW 68th Street to NW 76th Street
23rd Street Reconstruction from Prospect to Indiana	N Green Hills Rd. from NW 78th Street to Barry Road
27th Street Reconstruction from Troost Ave to Prospect Ave.	N Green Hills Rd from NW Old Tiffany Springs Rd to NW 108th Street
31st/Linwood/Van Brunt Intersection	N Hampton Rd. Bridge (just south of NW Tiffany Park Rd.)
39th Street Reconstruction from Elmwood to Emanuel Cleaver II Blvd.	N Woodland/Maplewoods Parkway from Shoal Creek Parkway to Cookingham
43rd Street and Pittman Road Bridge (and intersection improvements)	NE 45th Street Bridge
63rd Street Reconstruction from Prospect to Troost	NE 79th Street from N Oak to Oak Park High School/Troost
75th Street - Swope Industrial District	NE Industrial Trafficway Bridge and Street Improvements Cherry to Nicholson
Benton Blvd. Bridge over Brush Creek	NE Parvin Rd. Improvements from NE Davidson to N Brighton
Blue River Rd. Landslide Issues - 87th St. to Red Bridge Rd.	NE Pleasant Valley Rd. from N Brighton to N Searcy Creek Pkwy.
Briarcliff Parkway/NE 42nd Street - N. Oak Trafficway to Davidson	North Oak Trafficway Reconstruction
Broadway/West Pennway Bridge over KCTRR	NW 108th Street/Shoal Creek Pkwy. from Cosby to Platte Purchase
Brookside Plaza Street Improvements	NW 108th Street Single Lane Bridge Replacement
Byrams Ford Bridge over Round Grove Creek (between Raytown Rd. and 47th Terrace)	NW Tiffany Park Drive Bridge (west of Hampton Road)
Cleveland Bridge over Brush Creek	Old Bannister Road over Big Blue River and over Blue river Road (2 bridges)
Front Street from I-35 to I-435 (City Obligation)	Oldham Road Bridge 500' south of KCSRR
Frost Road Bridge	Paseo Gateway (Paseo Blvd. and Independence Ave.)
Gillham Road Corridor Improvements	Prospect MAX
Grand Blvd. from 14th to 27th Street	Red Bridge Road from Blue River Road to Grandview Road
Gregory Boulevard - Eastern Avenue to Blue Ridge Blvd.	Red Bridge Road Reconstruction from Holmes Rd. to Wornall Rd.
Hillcrest Road Bridge (200' south of Oldham)	Roanoke Pkwy. Bridge over Brush Creek Deck Rehab
Holmes Road Bridge over Indian Creek Rehab (north of 100th Terrace)	Rockhill Road Improvements
Holmes Road Improvements – Minor Drive to 137th Street	Searcy Creek Pkwy. from NE 48th Street to Maple Park Middle School
JC Nichols Parkway Bridge over Brush Creek	West Pennway Improvements to Summit Street intersection
Lee's Summit Road from Anderson Dr. to Lakewood Blvd. (Hardin Curves)	Westport Triangle Improvements
Lee's Summit Road from Lakewood Blvd. to Gregory	Wornall Road Reconstruction from 63rd Street to 79th Street
Line Creek Parkway - NW 62nd Street to NW 68th Street	Wornall Road Reconstruction from 85th Street to 89th Street

RESOLUTION NO. 160951
CAPITAL IMPROVEMENTS PLAN
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Proposed GO Bond Projects

While the City of Kansas City, Mo., makes every effort to maintain and distribute accurate information, no warranties and/or representations of any kind are made regarding information, data or services provided. As provided by Section 82.1035, Revised Statutes of Missouri, the City of Kansas City, Mo., shall not be liable for any damages which may arise from any error which may exist in the information or the geographical information system. Users of this data shall hold the City of Kansas City, Mo., harmless in all matters and accounts arising from the use and/or accuracy of this data.

- Road or Bridge
- Structure
- Flood Control
- Road or Bridge



QUESTION 1 BOND REFERENDUM GET THE FACTS



WHY NOW?

Addressing Immediate Needs:

- Safety and security
- Need for additional space
- Replacement of roofs and District warehouse freezers

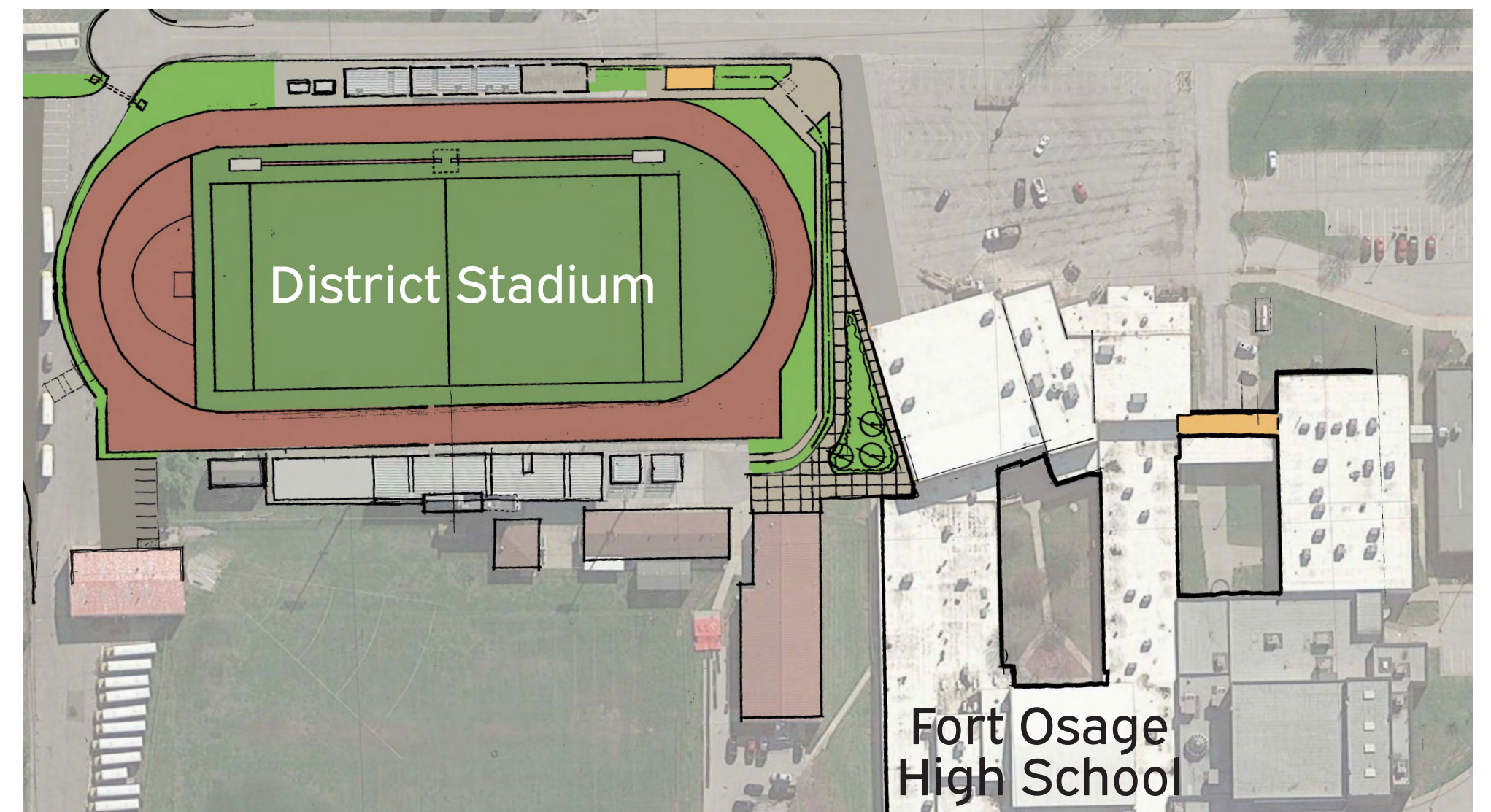
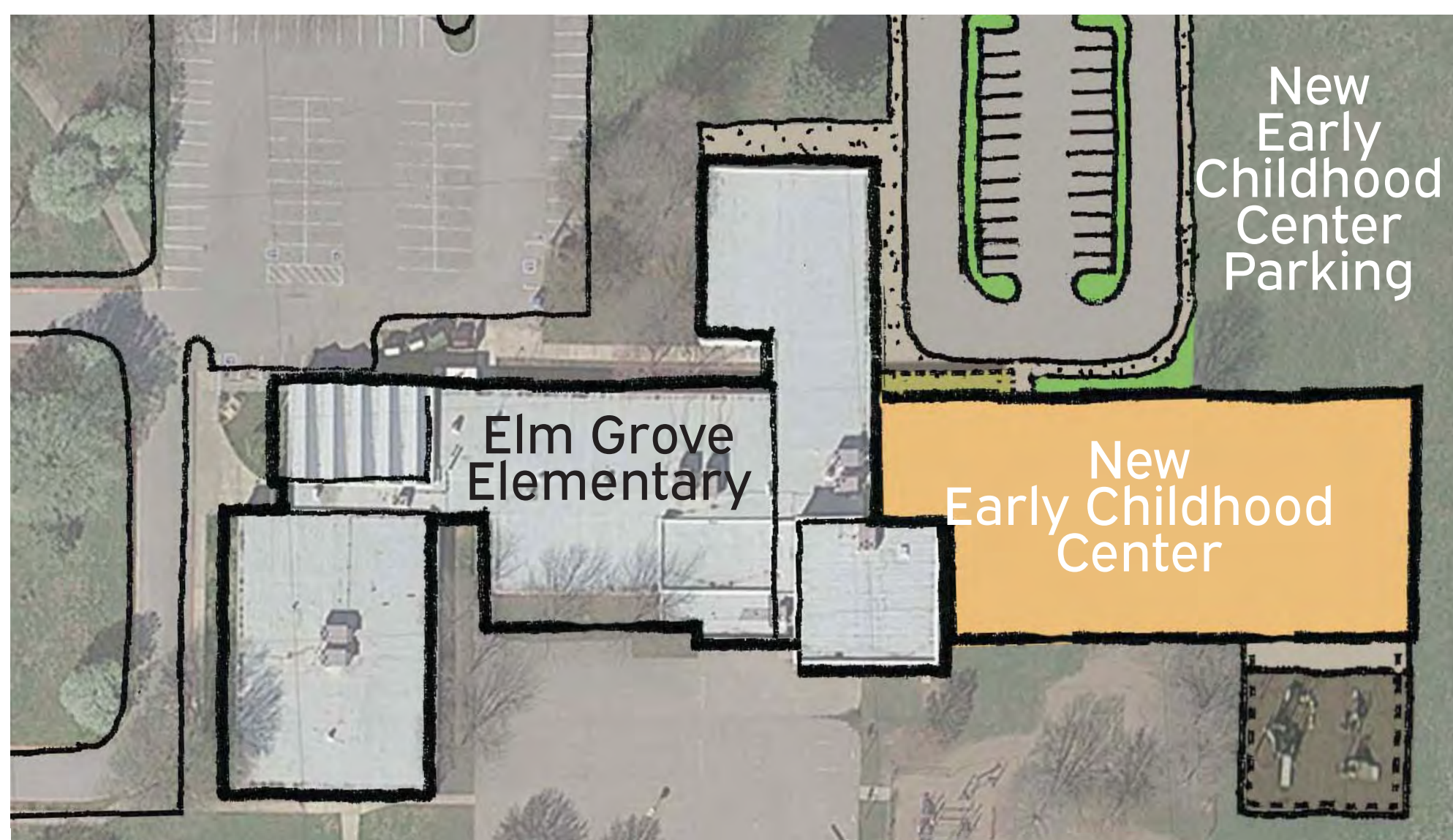
FINANCIAL FACTS

- No tax increase to the debt service levy
- \$11,370,000 bond

QUESTION 1 PROJECTS

Improvements to the Early Childhood Center include:

- Construction of a new Early Childhood Center adjacent to Elm Grove Elementary
- Address overcrowding by increasing square footage
- Expand to eight classrooms for future growth
- Dedicated therapy space
- Space for Parents as Teacher Program



Improvements to the District stadium include:

- Construction of a new eight-lane track
- Synthetic field turf
- Visitors restroom
- Upgrades to existing restrooms and concession stand
- Expanded bleachers

ADDITIONAL PROJECTS INCLUDE

- Safety and security improvements at the high school
- Upgrades of playgrounds at various district facilities, including playground equipment and play surfaces
- Roof improvements at various District facilities
- Replacement of District warehouse freezers

QUESTIONS?

IMPORTANT DATES

Voter Registration Deadline
March 8, 2017

Absentee Ballot Requests Due
March 29, 2017

FOR MORE INFORMATION

Dr. Jason Snodgrass
Superintendent of Schools

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www.facebook.com/FortOsageSchoolDistrict



www.twitter.com/FortOsageSchool

PLEASE VOTE APRIL 4, 2017

Prepared by the Fort Osage School District
Dr. Jason Snodgrass, Superintendent

QUESTION 2 67 CENT OPERATING LEVY INCREASE



GET THE FACTS

WHY THE INCREASE?

Fort Osage has lost over \$23 million in state and local funding since 2010. Revenue generated from the levy increase will be used to address ongoing District costs. With the increase, Fort Osage will remain one of the lowest operating levies in the Kansas City area.

DISTRICT CHALLENGES

Fort Osage has made over \$19 million in budget reductions since 2010. Reductions include but are not limited to:

- Reductions to staff including: classroom teachers, para professionals, clerical and central office staff
- Reduction to school supply and maintenance budgets of 35%
- Reduction to the number of bus routes and bus stops



IMPACT ON FORT OSAGE STUDENTS

- Maintain high-quality educational programming
- Maintain appropriate class sizes
- Recruit and retain quality staff
- Meet each student's needs
- Remain fiscally responsible

FINANCIAL IMPACT

A 67 cent operating levy increase will generate \$1,825,000 annually.

HOME MARKET VALUE	WEEKLY IMPACT
\$75,000	\$1.84
\$100,000	\$2.45
\$150,000	\$3.68
\$200,000	\$4.90



PLEASE VOTE APRIL 4, 2017

Prepared by the Fort Osage School District
Dr. Jason Snodgrass, Superintendent

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FOR MORE INFORMATION

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WEBSITE
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Learn Their Stories
kclinc.org/blackhistorystories

