

# LINC Commission Meeting

January 22, 2024



Some 700 boys and girls, age 5 to 13, spread across 65 teams, are working hard with their coaches this month to open the basketball season of the Kansas City Public Schools' Elementary Sports League in partnership with LINC, the Boys and Girls Clubs of Greater Kansas City and Della Lamb.

# 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, Jan. 22, 2024 | 4 – 5:30 pm  
Kauffman Foundation Conference Center

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## Agenda

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- I. Welcome and announcements
- II. November minutes
  - a. Approval (motion)
- III. Superintendent reports
- IV. Kansas City anti-violence collaboration
- V. Housing and homelessness crisis
- VI. KC Black History Project
- VII. Emergency meals with KCPS
- VIII. Basketball collaboration
- IX. LFPA protein distribution
- X. LINC Chess tournament
- XI. Year in photos
- XII. Other reports
- XIII. Adjournment



## THE LOCAL INVESTMENT COMMISSION – NOVEMBER 20, 2023

The Local Investment Commission met at the Kauffman Foundation, 4801 Rockhill Rd., Kansas City, Mo. Cochair **David Disney** presided. Commissioners attending were:

Bert Berkley  
Kiki Curls  
Aaron Deacon  
Shawn Foster  
SuEllen Fried  
Rob Givens

Anita Gorman  
Matt Haase  
Marge Randle  
David Ross  
Marj Williams

Disney welcomed everyone to the meeting.

*A motion to approve the minutes of the Oct. 16, 2023, LINC Commission meeting was passed unanimously.*

### Superintendents Reports

- **Rick Chambers** (Director of Communications and Development, Center School District) reported the district is grateful for its partnership with LINC, which this year is present in all four elementary schools, and for the community which has been united in backing the district's efforts to improve student health and safety.
- **Sheree Hudson** (Before & After School Liaison, Hickman Mills School District) reported on honors received by district students and teachers, and announced Ruskin High students will give a cabaret performance on Dec. 14.
- **Kevin Foster** (Executive Director, Genesis School) reported the school is partnering with Cascade Media, which is working with the 7th-8th grade journalism class; the students produced a podcast on recent protests on the Country Club Plaza. Genesis is also partnering with Code2KC to teach students to code.
- **Donnie Mitchell** (Superintendent, Lee A. Tolbert) reported on the schools Thanksgiving lunch, which served 600 people, including 200 community members. He also reported on an afterschool mentoring program to get students reading at grade level.

**Marj Williams** of the LINC Finance Committee introduced **Alison Swaters** of Forvis, who presented the LINC financial and compliance audit. The auditors gave a clean and unmodified opinion and reported no issues.

*A motion to approve the FY23 LINC financial audit was passed unanimously.*

**Rob Givens** of the LINC Retirement Committee reported on the committee's work since 2018 to work with broker and fiduciary Two West to increase the value and service level of the LINC employee retirement plan. Today there is an employee participation rate of 90% in a portfolio valued at \$14.5 million. There are three vacancies on the committee that need to be filled. Givens presented a resolution to appoint Commissioner **Ken Powell** and employees **Marlisa Collins** and **Sean Akridge** to the LINC 401(k) Retirement/Savings Plan Committee.

*A motion to approve the resolution was passed unanimously.*

Director of Caring Communities **Sean Akridge** introduced Kansas City Zoo and Aquarium CEO **Sean Putney** and Facilities Director **Jerry Gallagher** and reported on a partnership to provide opportunities for students and families of LINC Caring Communities sites to visit the zoo and aquarium. A video of a recent visit by Trailwoods Elementary (KCPS) LINC students to the zoo was shown. Trailwoods principal **Leah Starr** and LINC Site Coordinator **Melanie Scott** reported that the partnership gave children the opportunity to visit who otherwise wouldn't be able to go. Putney reported the zoo valued the opportunity to give experiences to students who wouldn't otherwise have them.

Akridge reported that LINC staff recently participated in a Kansas City Young Audiences workshop on integrating arts and STEM instruction. A video on the workshop was shown. Executive Director **Martin English** reported on KCYA's mission and its partnership with LINC. Teaching Artist **Harlan Brownlee** reported on KCYA's efforts to demonstrate and provide high-quality arts integration in afterschool programs.

Akridge reported on LINC's participation in October in the annual Lights On Afterschool celebration of afterschool programming. This year many partners came out to support the events. A video of celebrations at several LINC sites was shown.

Disney reported that LINC President and founding executive director **Gayle Hobbs** is stepping into the role of president emeritus as she plans for retirement next year. Hobbs shared a statement expressing her support of **Janet Miles-Bartee** to be the next President. Disney reported the LINC Executive Committee has named Miles-Bartee to be LINC President. Miles-Bartee thanked the Commission, Hobbs, staff and family.

The meeting was adjourned.

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# New sports league inspired by generational wisdom in basketball's game of life

January 18, 2024

By Joe Robertson



*Volunteer Coach T. L. Foster leads drills with the boys and girls in LINC's program at King Elementary School in the Kansas City Public Schools' Elementary Sports League.*

Of course they see themselves in those kids. The same intense eyes. Youthful legs pitched on toes, wanting to spring into the action their coach demands.

Wanting to be part of a team. To learn. To excel.

Some 700 boys and girls, age 5 to 13, spread out across 65 teams, are working hard with their coaches this month to open the basketball season of the Kansas City Public Schools' Elementary Sports League.

"I was one of them, once upon a time," says Kenneth "Pooh" Oliver, coach of LINC's team at Wheatley Elementary School, between practice drills.

Right now, the kids surely know they're learning the game, learning how to get in shape, hoping to impress.

But there's so much more to why KCPS is partnering with LINC, the Boys and Girls Clubs of Greater Kansas City and Della Lamb to build the new elementary schools sports league.

"This game kept me out of a lot of trouble," Oliver said. It was "my comfort zone . . . it opened a lot of doors

for me.”

He and many other coaches draw the same line from their hopes for the kids on their teams, through their own experiences and back to the mentors who guided them.

Waymond King, Senior Director of Healthy Lifestyles with the Boys and Girls Clubs and one of the organizers of the league, remembers young “Pooh” as a kid learning the game when King was helping then-Mayor Emanuel Cleaver II’s Night Hoops program in the early 1990s.

And that takes King to his childhood in the 1970s — when he as a teenager and he and his friends would “religiously” get out to the gym at 43rd Street and Cleveland Avenue at 8 a.m. on Saturday mornings to learn the game from the local great players of his day in pickup games.

“Rudy Liggins . . . Clay Johnson . . . Calvin Wainright . . .”

King names them and more. Somewhere along the way, he knows, looking back, the lessons went beyond basketball.

“They became mentors and role models for us,” he said. “They helped us become better citizens and helped us understand what it took to become a collegiate athlete.”

The sports league — which plans to add other sports in season such as volleyball, soccer, baseball, softball and golf — means to use the games as that “hook” to turn the kids and their families on to new opportunities in academic and social growth, just like the games lifted the people who are their coaches today.

“It’s an extension of our experience growing up,” King said.

There is a wider vision in the school district’s plans with these partnerships, said Nyala Bulock, KCPS’s assistant athletic director.

It starts with the fundamentals she has seen in some of the early practices, and the care of the coaches pouring over them.

“You see them understanding what it is to be on a team,” she said, “to understand coaching style . . . getting comfortable.”

It’s a big dream, she says, that the hub of this partnership helps connect the program and KCPS’s kids with more partners, like the Royals, Chiefs, Current and Sporting KC. And that the community engages more in the growth of the students, athletically and academically.

Then, as these children mature, the middle school and high school sports programs can grow in size and confidence, opening more opportunities for the students and their families.

“We have the talent,” Bulock said. “We have the students. We have the drive. They want it, but they just never experienced it. But once they get a taste of it, I say, watch out.”

The games are being hosted by the Boys and Girls Club’s Thornberry Unit at 43rd and Cleveland Ave., and by



*Volunteer Coach Kenneth “Pooh” Oliver instructs the students on the basketball team at Wheatley Elementary School.*

the Kansas City Public Schools at Central High School, with weekday practices occurring at various elementary schools and community sites throughout the city.

LINC's leadership among its many Caring Communities sites in schools throughout the area includes a substantial number of ex-basketball players, many of them mentored by Wainright, himself a community leader with LINC who died in 2022.



LINC Caring Communities Supervisor Jason Ervin is one of those who says basketball helped him “get out of the streets.”

LINC was eager to help create the league's partnership, Ervin said, for the kids, their families and the community.

“We all serve the same youth,” he said. “I'm hoping we can get our community back involved with sports and then know how vital it is . . . because their grades will get better, their self-esteem. They'll get to know kids in the community and learn how to compete and have fun.”

The coaches are all volunteers, King said. “It may sound a bit corny, but it's a labor of love.”

Coach T. L. Foster has his own competitive AAU team that he coaches, plus time coaching at the high school level and semi-pro women's basketball. But he's making time to volunteer with the kids at King Elementary School.

He's inspired by his dad, who was a youth and teen sports director at a YMCA in the South Bronx, New York City, who showed him “how to be a better basketball player and how to be a better person.”

He wants basketball to be for these kids what it has been for him:

“My self-care,” he said. “When I was stressed I'd go shoot some baskets. If I was down . . . if I was sad . . . it was always there for me.”

Back on the floor of the gym at Wheatley Elementary, Oliver is whistling the kids through new drills. It's supposed to be somewhat hard. Challenging. They don't always get it right. Sometimes attention lapses. Sometimes extra laps get run.

“I was one of those kids,” Oliver says again. “I see the smiles on their faces. That's why I do this.”

He remembers the feeling when he was learning, playing for those coaches who he knew wanted the best out of him.

“I was one of those kids that if I saw someone giving back,” he said, “it just made me feel loved.”

Bullock knows there are many other partners and people out in the community that can be a part of this new energy in the school district and help it grow.

“The papa out there, or a grandmother, or someone who's had experience in sports that could give back by mentoring our kids — we want that,” she said.

“Stay involved with us,” she said. “*Believe in us.*”



# ‘Alarming in so many ways’: After record homicides, will new Kansas City efforts help?

BY BILL LUKITSCH  
JANUARY 11, 2024

Killings in Kansas City reached the highest level recorded during a single year in 2023, even as most major cities around the U.S. saw significant declines.

There were 185 people killed in the city last year, according to data maintained by The Star, most of them shooting victims, in cases that included petty arguments, domestic violence and retaliatory violence.

Meanwhile, steep drops in homicide were seen in other major cities around the country, including New York, Philadelphia, Chicago, Los Angeles and Detroit.

Despite its increase in homicides, the total number of shootings in Kansas City dropped in 2023 compared to 2020, which was previously the deadliest in its history with 182 homicides. As of Dec. 31, there were 513 people shot in Kansas City last year who survived, according to police data. In 2020, there were 630 people injured by gunfire — a difference of 19%.

Local leaders have taken notice that Kansas City is bucking the national trend with regard to its homicide count.

Explanations for the uptick in homicides vary, ranging from Missouri’s lax gun laws, to poor conflict resolution skills and a low clearance rate by police in solving nonfatal shootings. Likewise, the proposed solutions also cover a range of options, from hiring more police officers, to building a city jail and creating a citywide focused deterrence program.

One common theme echoed by city leaders is a commitment to increase collaboration in 2024.

During a recent press conference at Kansas City Police Headquarters, Chief Stacey Graves said the department was implementing various strategies, including longer 11-hour shifts for police officers as work continues to address “critical” staffing shortages. She also said KCPD is “just one part of the solution” to stem the violence.

“It’s going to take all of us to come together in Kansas City,” Graves said. “And that’s why we talk about a citywide approach to violent crime. Because that’s what it’s going to take to break the generational violence that we have here in our city.”

Efforts to stop the bloodshed during 2023 included newer partnership programs organized through City Hall, the Jackson County Prosecutor’s Office and the Kansas City Police Department in concert with area nonprofit groups.

One initiative rolled out through 2023 is Partners for Peace, a collaboration of local agencies focused on connecting



*Kansas City Police Chief Stacey Graves, center, walks out with Kansas City Mayor Quinton Lucas after a press conference at Kansas City Police Department Headquarters on Wednesday. Chief Graves addressed violent crime trends in 2023 and outlined safety measures for the upcoming year. Emily Curriel ec-  
uriel@kcstar.com*

families affected by violence with social services. And in the Santa Fe neighborhood on the East Side, city leaders have already touted some early successes of a pilot program called KC360, which is modeled after a similar one in Omaha that is credited with reducing shootings there by 74% over the course of 15 years.

Jackson County Prosecutor Jean Peters Baker envisions building on those efforts by bringing back a citywide focused deterrence program in 2024. Working with KCPD, Jackson County COMBAT and others, the focused deterrence model takes aim at known violent offenders, offering social services, and directing them to change behavior or face consequences.

“Without an actual focused plan to address this issue, one should expect that violence won’t abate,” Baker said during a recent interview with The Star. “This year I get to put a strong ‘however’ on that: We are in the process of planning to roll out efforts with KCPD to address this violence problem.”

Further work will come out of City Hall, Mayor Quinton Lucas said last week, as he pointed to cases where city regulations can help address trouble spots in neighborhoods before a violent situation unfolds. He referenced a summertime shooting at an unsanctioned nightclub that had been subject to dozens of code violations and neighborhood complaints, saying KCPD had “done its job, coming time and time again” beforehand.

“Sometimes this is a requirement for the city to step up,” Lucas said. “It might be the schools being a part of it. Our medical partners. That’s what we talk about now in terms of collaborative programs and work.”

### **‘VIOLENCE HAS NORMALIZED’**

Jasity Strong, a mother of two, killed during a mass shooting while she was out celebrating her 28th birthday.

Zameyanna Williams, 18, who was shot during an argument with her boyfriend.

Manuel Valentine-Ruperto, 58, fatally shotgunned in broad daylight amid a dispute over a used Ford Mustang.

Darrell Welldon, a 17-year-old high school junior and football player, who was shot to death while preventing a gunman from entering his family home.

All were among the 185 slain in Kansas City during 2023.

Police data show the predominant underlying factor in homicides in 2023 was arguments. These accounted for 67 homicides, or 37% of the 182 investigated by KCPD. The Star’s homicide count of 185 differs from KCPD’s to account for fatal shootings by police officers, which the department does not count in its data.

Motive was unknown in 47, or 26%, of last year’s homicides, police data show. Of the remaining known motivators, domestic violence ranked second, with 22 killings, followed by 19 drug-related homicides and 18 retaliatory killings.

Gun violence was a factor in all but 20 of Kansas City’s homicides in 2023. That tracks with recent years past, where firearms were used in about 90% of homicides.

Disproportionately affected are the city’s Black residents, especially men, in neighborhoods with higher rates of pov-



*Police and crime scene investigators were on the scene collecting evidence where three people died and five were injured following a shooting early Sunday, June 25, 2023, near 57th Street and Prospect Avenue in Kansas City. Tammy Ljungblad  
tljungblad@kcstar.com*

erty. Last year, Black males, who make up roughly 13% of the city's population, accounted for 65% of Kansas City's homicide victims.

The second-largest group was white males at 12% of homicide victims. Kansas City police data also show 31% of the city's homicide victims in 2023 were 24 years old or younger. Nineteen of those homicide victims were 17 years old or younger.

Young adults between the ages 18 and 24 also made up the largest share of homicide suspects identified by police last year, at 24%. Seven more suspects were juveniles.

It's part of a continued trend where young people are becoming involved in violent crime, often in communities that have historically been subjected to a severe lack of economic investment and resources, said Damon Daniel, president of the nonprofit Ad Hoc Group Against Crime.

"When you deprive neighborhoods for decades, if not nearly centuries, in terms of access to real resources and economic development, these are the results of that. These are the symptoms," Daniel said.

"This is the biggest elephant in the room," Daniel added. "The racialized institutional policies that once existed, with the redlining and all of that, has created these pockets of poverty. And those pockets of poverty have been giving birth to a lot of crimes and violence. And you can see that when we look at where the violence is happening."

About 85% of those who receive services through Ad Hoc are not strangers to violence, Daniel said, meaning many have lost multiple family members to violent crime or have themselves been victims. It all plays a role in what Daniel describes as a generational trauma that he believes will take generations — and significant investment — to heal.

"It has gotten to a point where I think at least that violence has normalized in Kansas City, not only in terms of the frequency that we hear about violence, particularly gun violence, but the frequency by which people resolve conflict, as well," Daniel said. "And I think that that is alarming in so many ways."

In the Jackson County prosecutor's office, one key factor Baker views as a driver of violence is the confluence of lax gun laws with the expansion of self-defense law.

In 2017, Missouri did away with permits and safety training as requirements to carry concealed firearms in most places. One consequence of that is the loss of a criminal law that Baker believes was an opportunity for law enforcement "to intervene in someone's life before something worse happened."

Shooting cases have become more difficult to prosecute in the face of an expanded self-defense statute that can shield someone from criminal liability for accidentally shooting an innocent bystander during a dispute.

"The law does allow for a lot more behavior than it did before," Baker said. "So, law enforcement is stuck to kind of deal with that situation."

## **FOCUSED DETERRENCE**



*Barbara Scott, right, is embraced by a community member as she holds a cross in memory of her son, Donald Scott, during a vigil on at The Gathering Church on Thursday, Dec. 21, 2023, in Independence, Missouri. Community members gathered to honor the lives of homicide victims in Kansas City for 2023, uniting to read the names of these individuals, reflect on their legacies, and offer support to those grieving the loss of their loved ones. Emily Curiel [ecuriel@kcstar.com](mailto:ecuriel@kcstar.com)*

In 2014, Kansas City saw homicides drop to the lowest point ever with 82 recorded that year. The reduction was largely credited to the focused deterrence program known as Kansas City No Violence Alliance, or KC NoVa.

The program operated under the concept that a small group of individuals are responsible for most violent crimes. Law enforcement efforts focused on known offenders with a carrot-or-stick approach.

The carrot: Receive social services, including job training, substance abuse counseling, housing and education. The stick: Go to jail.

Despite major reductions seen in its first year, the success of the program was short-lived. Over the following two years, Kansas City's homicide totals climbed back to 111 in

2015 and 131 in 2016. A later analysis by the National Institute of Justice, a federal agency, determined there was no effect on violent crime during the program's latter years, and KC NoVa was ultimately shuttered in 2019.

As leaders look to address violent crime in 2024, an expanded focused deterrence model is being eyed again by KCPD and the Jackson County prosecutor's office. Similar initiatives have been put in place in Boston, Detroit and Oakland, California.

Baker expects the new approach to look somewhat different compared to a decade ago, including a larger focus on a high delivery of social services. She said leaders are "significantly down the road" in planning the program, though key components are in the works, and a launch is expected early in the year.

"It's a much higher degree of collaboration than it was 10 years ago when we were planning this before," Baker said. "We were effective. We did reduce violence. We worked together in a much better way back then. But we also left out some key partners. So this time, I want to make sure that that's rectified."

"I'm really hopeful," Baker added. "There are going to be people who are going to moan and complain and say we can't do it. And I say well, why don't you just get out of our way. And let's see what we can do together."

"Because when we all sit back and complain and kind of point fingers at each other it's pretty clear what the outcome for the community is going to be."



*Jackson County Prosecutor Jean Peters Baker. File The Kansas City Star*



# KC Black History Project 2024: Profiles of dedication and excellence

January 17, 2024

By Joe Robertson



*The KC Black History Project in 2024 features (clockwise from the left) Vincent O. Carter, writer; Nora Holt, composer/singer; Myrtle Foster Cook, educator/suffragist; Annetta Washington, songwriter/poet; Dr. Samuel U. Rodgers, physician; and Phil Curls Sr., legislator/activist.*

The Kansas City Black History Project has returned with an eight-page booklet and poster set featuring profiles of six area men and women who enriched, entertained, strengthened and even saved lives.

The free collection has become a staple for many schools, libraries, community groups and families in sharing Kansas City's rich history during Black History Month and throughout the year with the inspiring biographies of people who are well known, or deserve to be known.

LINC has partnered since 2010 with the Kansas City Public Library and the Black Archives of Mid-America to provide the annual booklets and posters. The profiles and links to many more Black history resources are also published online at [kblackhistory.org](http://kblackhistory.org).

The 2024 collection adds the following cast of Kansas Citians:

- Vincent O. Carter, an author and novelist, inspired by his East-Side upbringing and his service in France in World War II.
- Myrtle Foster Cook, an educator and suffragist who devoted her life to enhancing the political and economic lives of African Americans, particularly Black women and girls.
- Phil Curls Sr., a longtime legislator and political activist who championed Kansas City issues and was a co-founder of Freedom, Inc.

- Nora Holt, a renowned composer, singer, pianist and music critic who broke many boundaries both as a woman and a person of color.
- Dr. Samuel U. Rodgers, a physician who dedicated his life to providing health care to people who needed it the most, including through the health clinic that now bears his name.
- Annetta “Cotton Candy” Washington, a songwriter, musician and poet who was a performer as well as a mother figure in Kansas City’s blues community.

Booklets are available at branches of the Kansas City Public Library and the Black Archives of Mid-America, 1722 E 17th Terrace, in Kansas City.

To order a copy of the booklet, go to [kclinc.org/blackhistory](http://kclinc.org/blackhistory). The site also has links to download digital copies of the new set, plus prior booklet and poster sets, including the special 48-page book from 2022.



*This image, from the 2024 KC Black History booklet, is a circa 1938 photograph of the Black Elks parade crowd on south side of 18th Street, between The Paseo and Vine Street, Kansas City, MO. Source: Black Economic Union. Photo: Goin' to Kansas City Collection courtesy of the Kansas City Museum*



# KCPS, LINC team up to help families feed children during bitter cold days out of school

January 18, 2024

By Joe Robertson



The snow and days of missed school were mounting. Below-zero temperatures were plunging.

It was becoming apparent going into the Martin Luther King Jr. holiday weekend that families would be going most of a week without their children being able to benefit from their regular free school meals.

So LINC and the Kansas City Public Schools quickly rallied to provide some relief on Saturday, Jan. 13.

The district's security opened Central High School, the kitchen team cooked a hot cafeteria meal and LINC brought in support staff and packaged up take-home meals from its after-school program.



Even though windchills in the blowing snow were as harsh as 20 degrees below zero, more than 70 adults and children came out to the school, many sitting and warming in the cafeteria as they ate, and then taking food packages with them to have at home.

"It is a real loss when you have unexpected days off," LINC Caring Communities Director Sean Akridge said to a KMBC Channel 9 news photographer who came to see the emergency operation.

"Families have to spend more money to feed their children from funds that would've have been allocated otherwise in the household," he said. "We're really proud and happy to be able to do this."

# LINC, LFPA local farm initiative, going big on protein

December 14, 2023

By Joe Robertson

LINC's eight-month old local food distribution program got a lot weightier for the holidays.

The Local Food Purchase Assistance program — which since May had delivered more than 500,000 pounds of fresh produce to families connected to more than 65 sites inside and outside the Kansas City metro area — added significant protein.

During the second week of December, the more than 1,500 produce boxes for distribution were accompanied by 540 hams and 25 turkeys.

"It's very heavy . . . and cold," 9-year-old Kordai said after he lugged his family's frozen ham to their car with his mother, Kashie Holland. They were heading home from LINC's Caring Communities after-school program at Holliday Montessori School in the Kansas City Public Schools.

"We'll cook it for our Christmas dinner," Holland said, sharing her thanks that the food program came to their school.

As one of the state's regional community partnerships, LINC was given the task by the Missouri Department of Social Services to coordinate the program in a multi-county area around Kansas City, reaching out to local farmers and producers to supply the federally funded LFPA program with fresh and locally produced food.

To add more protein, LINC has added a partnership with Paradise Locker Meats in Trimble, Mo., to connect the LFPA program to Paradise's collaboration with local meat-producing farms.

"That's exactly what we do — it's right in our wheelhouse," said Paradise's Louis Fantasma.

By partnering with Paradise, Fantasma said, LINC and the LFPA program is boosting an effort that helps small family farms thrive.

And that means families receiving the hams are benefiting from farms where "pigs are raised better, in a special way, that tastes really, really good," he said. "And I think that's really neat when people in this local community can taste and have something that's grown right here, locally."

At Wheatley Elementary School in Kansas City, the neighborhood has many immigrant families that have been enjoying the produce boxes, and now the hams, said Monique Limon, the school's family and community engagement liaison.

"I had a mom saying that she was going to use her ham to prepare a dish from her country," Limon said. "She was able to use that, and the sweet potato — and that she was going to learn how to use spaghetti squash, she didn't know anything about it."

Many families are in need of resources, she said, "and to be able to provide them with a couple of meals for them and their family is a huge help, especially in this economy right now."



*LINC Caring Communities Site Coordinator Jay Bitner prepares hams for distribution to LINC families at Phillis Wheatley Elementary School.*



# Why we play chess: LINC tournament players show out big in NKC

December 11, 2023

By Joe Robertson



LINC Chess' first tournament of the 2023-2024 season drew 142 students from throughout the area, representing 43 different schools.

Here are some of the sights and sounds from the tournament held Dec. 9 at North Kansas City High School.

No one loses in chess, goes one of the LINC program's mantras. You either win, or you learn.

"When you do LINC Chess, it's just, like, so fun," said tournament player Dawson, 7, from Holliday Montessori School. "It's educational and fun at the same time."

Players learn new openings, middle games, end games — and make friends. Here's our photo gallery. Click on the images below to enlarge each picture.

The event also featured a meal and a STEM education recreation area with Urban TEC.

To see the results from the tournament and to learn more about LINC Chess, go to [kclinc.org/chess](https://kclinc.org/chess) or [Facebook.com/LINCchess](https://facebook.com/LINCchess).

# 'Think of the memories we'll make': Fort Family celebrates new field house

January 3, 2024

By Joe Robertson

The last time Fort Osage opened a new gymnasium, David Shrout was a scrappy junior on the Indians basketball team, handling the basketball.

56 years later, Shrout was the school board member handling the oversized scissors, surrounded by what Superintendent Jason Snodgrass called the “Fort Family,” as the community celebrated the opening of its new Field House Jan. 2.

Boys and girls basketball teams, the band, cheerleaders, students, parents and fans — all in full pep rally mode — cheered as the red ribbon fell.

The ceremony marked not only the start of the games in the new facility, but the culmination of several construction projects made possible by the community’s overwhelming support of a bond issue and levy transfer that passed in 2021.

“This is a historic evening,” Snodgrass said. “A testament to partnerships and community.”

Since the passage of the \$20 million bond issue and the transfer of 32 cents of the debt service levy to the operating levy three years ago, the district has renovated cafeterias in its secondary and elementary schools, built new drives and parking lots, renovated the high school band room, built a new maintenance and transportation center, new offices and, at long last, the new field house.

The work would not have happened, Fort Osage School Board President Floyd Hawkins told the crowd, “without your vote and your confidence.”

Like Shrout, Hawkins also remembers the old gym well, having started as a student teacher in that gym in 1973, he said.

“There are memories in that gym,” he said.

But now comes new thrills for generations to come, in this new building with new locker rooms, a media room, training room, apparel store and concession stand and enough bleacher space for nearly 2,000 students and fans.

Said Hawkins: “Think of the memories we’re going to make here.”



*David Shrout, holding the giant scissors, cuts the ribbon for the opening of the new field house at Fort Osage High School Jan. 2, along with other school board members, administrators and students.*



*The new field house includes a showcase honoring Fort Osage alumni athletes who starred in professional sports, including MLB star Albert Pujols and NFL star Skylar Thompson.*

# A year after state announced plans to revoke Genesis School's charter, review shows progress

By Alyssa Jackson

Posted at 9:41 PM, Dec 14, 2023 and last updated 10:11 PM, Dec 14, 2023

KANSAS CITY, Mo — This holiday season has a different feel for Genesis School staff and families because they aren't worrying about the state of their charter.

Friday marks one year since Genesis School was [notified](#) by the Missouri Charter Public School Commission that they intended to revoke their charter.

After [winning](#) in court, the charter school has been working to make sure they can keep it.

"When I thought they were gonna close down, I was kinda like, 'What?'" said Tisha Johnson, a parent of two kids at Genesis School.

Stacey Blount is a parent of two daughters who attend Genesis School. Last year, she was wondering where she would place her kids if it wasn't at Genesis.

"We didn't know the next steps," she said. "Everything was a possibility, up in the air and it was really emotional."

After Alison Hart, a parent of two kids at the school, heard the charter would be revoked, she started advocating.

"I knew they were gonna stay open, I wrote an extensive letter," Hart said. "I mean, they help children who have special needs. My children have behavioral issues and they are hands on with that and I like that. What we do at home should be done in school."

Some of the measures included in the Missouri Charter Public School Commission's initial review were from a school quality report led by academic experts.

The results were given as part of the reason the school should have its charter taken away.

This time around, [the report showed evidence](#) of growth in several areas, including fostering a safe learning environment and academic support.

"It was validation is the best way to say it," said Kevin Foster, head of Genesis School. "It was a huge relief."



Jack McCormick/KSHB 41

On Thursday, Dec. 14, Genesis School held their first holiday program since COVID-19 began.

Proud parents at the charter school aren't surprised because they see the results in their children. The joy on their faces during their school holiday program while they showed teachers and parents what they can do, is something that can only happen if they're in classrooms.

"She was having trouble, my kindergartner," Johnson said. "It was her first year in school and she was in Ms. Shepard's class. [Ms. Shepard] worked with her. She tested the highest score — top three in the class."

The review did reveal where Genesis could improve in instruction, including the level of engagement and participation from students in classrooms and developing problem solving and critical thinking skills.

Foster said those examples given don't meet their expectations. Overall, he said, the report does reflect the effort teachers put in every day.

"We would hope if we were doing a disservice to kids and kids weren't well served, that the community would rise up and close us and they didn't do that," he said. "They rose up and defended us."

As Genesis School continues to educate and prove why their classrooms should remain, they will take the wins they can along the way.

"It really does take a village to raise a child," Hart said.

Genesis School said they're looking forward to student's MAP results being available in a few days to gauge their academic progress. Their charter is reinstated until 2025.

After that, they'll need it renewed with the same or different sponsor to stay open.



# 'Overwhelming pride': Grandview bond issue success 'shows what's possible'

December 7, 2023

By Joe Robertson

Those returning Grandview High School alums meant well, early in Kenny Rodriquez's tenure as superintendent, when they would visit their old school warm with nostalgia.

"They'd say, 'Nothing's changed!'" Rodriquez said.

"Not exactly what you want to hear."

The old school is not so recognizable any more, thanks to a wave of improvements — which went beyond the high school and spanned the entire district — that came out of a \$45 million bond issue passed by voters in 2021.

In a blue-ribbon-cutting ceremony Wednesday, the Grandview School District and its community celebrated the culmination of the work.

With the high school's Bulldog drum line setting the beat, the audience in the school's remodeled cafeteria enjoyed what Rodriquez said was just the start of things to come.

These are the rewards of a community process that with "an overwhelming sense of pride" showed "what was possible," he said. "This is just the beginning of a journey of what's possible for our students."

In April 2021, Grandview voters approved both a 60-cent increase to Grandview's operating levy and the \$45 million bond issue. The levy won with 57% saying yes, and the bond issue got 71% of the vote.

The bond issue enabled multiple projects across the district, touching every school. Some of the major improvements included the high school's industrial technology program, the band room, the football field house and locker rooms, fine arts programs and playground improvements in all the schools, new windows in many schools, important maintenance of roofs and heating and cooling systems, as well as the remodeled cafeteria.

"It's all about relationships and partnerships," said Grandview Mayor Leonard Jones. "The city and the school district, we work together. We grow together. It's all about the students and giving them every opportunity to excel . . . We all benefit when things like this happen."



*Grandview High School students Maya Christiansen-Wright and Cree Hill, holding the scissors, cut the ceremonial ribbon in the Grandview High School cafeteria.*



*Grandview High School's drum line entertain the audience at the ribbon-cutting ceremony at the high school.*

# Hickman Mills Real World Learning program breaks ground on new home

December 8, 2023

By Joe Robertson

The Hickman Mills School District’s real world education program will have its own home that the district said will be “a hub of innovation and collaboration.”

In a ceremonial ground-breaking Wednesday, the district announced its big plans for the former Pinnacle Career Institute building at 103rd Street and Hickman Mills Drive.

Superintendent Yaw Obeng unveiled the wide range

of offerings imagined for the building, with spaces for health sciences, skilled trades, Microschool, a student-run coffee shop, alternative programming areas, adult learning classes, professional development and more — seeing “gateways to a world of possibilities.”

“Gone are the days when education just imparts information,” Obeng said. “We need to be able to facilitate where students can discover, engage, and thrive in their future success.”

The new center will provide more opportunities for the district’s real world learning program and the collaborations already in place with partnering businesses and industry. In 2023, the district reported, 62% of its graduates earned Market Value Assets— which are industry-valued and recognized skills.

The program and its partnerships will continue to grow, Obeng said.

“We see this center as an opportunity for community engagement,” he said. “We will also have evening learning opportunities as well.”

The program is part of the district’s efforts to prepare all of its students for careers, whether they go to four-year universities or specialized industry schools. There are many opportunities for students who learn valued skills, Obeng told KCTV Channel 5.

“We do our analysis with industry,” he said. “The construction trade said, ‘We don’t have students coming out into this industry.’ There are some really good dollars in terms of that. We’ve got students who are leaving and getting \$36 an hour.”

Several Ruskin High School students who are in the real world program joined the ground-breaking ceremony, sharing their excitement for more opportunities in the district like their experiences of learning with outside industries.

“You are going to different places, experiencing new things,” Ruskin senior Aleecia Star told KCTV. “You are actually around people, talking to them . . . (it’s) not something you can do in the classroom.”

Said Ruskin junior Brayden Dawson: “As long as you are dedicated enough to do it, you’ll find it fun.”



# Remembering Gayden Carruth, area education champion

Gayden Fisher Carruth died on Wednesday, November 29. Carruth devoted her career to public education as a teacher, principal, superintendent, and mentor. She broke new ground as a pioneering school administrator and as a powerful role model for her family and for thousands of people whose lives she touched.

Carruth served as Superintendent of the Park Hill School District from 1994 to 2005. She was widely regarded as a transformational leader. The Missouri Association of School Administrators named Carruth the 1998 Superintendent of the Year.

In 2008, Carruth became the executive director of the Cooperating School Districts of Greater Kansas City. In that role, she mentored educational leaders from around the region and advocated for policies to improve educational outcomes.

Carruth is survived by her three children: Gene Keifer, Clement Stovall, and Neal Carruth. She was married for 38 years to Edwin Ronald Carruth, who died in 2010, and was a grandmother to six grandchildren: Marguerite, Jackson, Katie, Sofie, Max, and Dylan.

In lieu of flowers, Carruth's family requests donations to the Dr. Gayden Carruth Student Grants fund with the Park Hill Education Foundation at [parkhillfoundation.org](http://parkhillfoundation.org).

*Published by Kansas City Star on Dec. 10, 2023.*





# State school board names Dr. Karla Eslinger to be next Missouri education commissioner

**December 5, 2023**

**By Joe Robertson**

The Missouri state school board has chosen State Senator and former Assistant Commissioner of Education Dr. Karla Eslinger to be the next commissioner of education.

The board made its decision today, naming Eslinger to succeed Education Commissioner Margie Vandeven when she steps down June 1.

“I’m honored,” Sen. Eslinger said to the board and the audience in the board room in Jefferson City. “This is an opportunity to work with you, parents and legislators on what I think is the most important work of our state: Education.”

The choice of Eslinger came with the endorsement from Vandeven, who worked with Eslinger for more than a decade at DESE.

“I’ve seen her proven leadership,” Vandeven said at the board meeting. “I’ve seen her commitment to the children of Missouri.”

Vandeven is stepping down June 1 after nearly 20 years with DESE. She was appointed as Missouri’s commissioner of education in 2014, serving in that role through 2017, then being reappointed in 2019.

Vandeven promised to support “the smoothest transition” and “do whatever we can to set Dr. Eslinger up for success.”

Eslinger will be taking over an education system that, as she noted, has been “unsettled” and suffered “disruption” from the impact of Covid-19. She pledged to work together “with all of our collective resources” to build on the work led by Vandeven, she said

Eslinger spoke to some of her beliefs and how she expects to take on her new role.

“I believe in good schools,” she said. “I believe in parent choice.” She supports “rural schools and urban schools.” She wants to be “transparent” and see that “all voices are heard.”

“I’m not a reformer or a public schools supporter” or other category of advocate that comes “with preconceived notions,” she said.

“I do believe in people,” she said. “I truly love to learn. I’m not fearful. I’m not naive. Our kids are unique and we have to work in unique ways.”

In her Senate profile, Eslinger is described as a lifelong educator with more than 30 years of experience in a variety of educational settings.

She has been a senior analyst for education services with the AEM Corporation and provided technical assistance to the U.S. Department of Education in Washington, D.C. She began her career as an elementary school teacher and rose to principal and superintendent of schools in Ava and West Plains.

She earned a bachelor degree in elementary education from The College of the Ozarks. She earned her master’s degree at Missouri State University and received her doctorate in educational leadership and policy analysis from the University of Missouri-Columbia.

In the legislature, Eslinger, a Republican from Wasola, served in the Missouri House of Representatives District 155 from 2019 to 2020, then won her Senate seat for District 133 in 2020. She will complete her current Senate term before moving into the commissioner role June 1.



*Dr. Karla Eslinger*



*Dr. Margie Vandeven*