

LINC Commission Meeting

June 22, 2020

Black Lives Matter



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.



Photo by: Marvin Francois, May 31, 2020



In Memory of Marvin Francois

Marvin Francois was a long-time supporter and volunteer for LINC Chess programs. He died late Sunday evening, May 31, from gunshots as the victim of an apparent robbery near 46th and Warwick Avenue. On the day he died, he had been out on the Plaza, of course, ranging through the crowds in the uprising for civil and criminal justice, marveling in the wild and diverse energy of the demonstrators, capturing his last photo album.





Monday, June 22, 2020 | 4 – 6 pm
Online Meeting

Agenda

- I. Welcome and Announcements
- II. Approvals
 - a. **January 2020 minutes (motion)**
- III. Superintendent Reports
- IV. LINC Finance Update
- V. LINC Updates
 - a. Caring Communities
 - b. LINCWorks
 - c. Youth Case Management/MoStar School
 - d. Infant Toddler Specialist Network
- VI. Reports
 - a. Furloughed Staff
 - b. Pandemic Food Benefit
 - c. Digital Inclusion
 - d. Voter Registration/Census
 - e. Other
- VII. Adjournment



THE LOCAL INVESTMENT COMMISSION – JANUARY 27, 2020

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

Sharon Cheers
Jack Craft
Tom Davis
Aaron Deacon
Mark Flaherty
Rob Givens

Anita Gorman
Tom Lewin
Ken Powell
Marge Randle
David Ross
Marge Williams

A motion to approve the minutes of the Nov. 18, 2019, LINC Commission meeting was approved unanimously.

Treasurer **David Ross** introduced **Alyssa Klein** of BKD, LLP, who reported on the FY2018-2019 financial audit of LINC. She reported LINC received an unqualified opinion and that LINC will be required to adopt new revenue recognition standards.

The slideshow “LINC in Photos 2019” was shown.

Superintendent Reports

- **Neal Weitzel**, Director of College and Career Readiness (Center School District), reported the Kansas City Symphony performed at Central High School on Jan. 8, raising \$6,000 for the district’s fine arts program. Last April voters approved a \$48 million bond issue – projects at the early childhood center and elementary schools are in pre-construction; construction on the new Indian Creek Elementary building begins in February; building entrance upgrades are scheduled to be finished in February; construction on the middle school gym begins in March.
- **Steve Morgan**, Assistant Superintendent (Fort Osage School District), introduced three principals from the district attending today: **Monica Shane** (Elm Grove Elementary), **Karen Harrach** (Early Childhood Center), and **Julie Stout** (Cler-Mont Elementary); Stout and Harrach are retiring at the end of the year; Indian Trails Elementary principal **Emily Cross** will succeed the retiring **Maria Fleming** as Assistant Superintendent. Students at Cler-Mont are collecting cans for the district food pantry during Super Bowl week. The district is projecting minimal growth in student enrollment over the next decade.
- **Yolanda Cargile**, Superintendent (Hickman Mills School District), reported the South Kansas City Chamber of Commerce awarded Ruskin High School the Community Impact award. The district is partnering with Onward to provide the savings benefit to staff – 136 are signed up. The Community Assistance Council is holding a meeting on Feb. 6 for Nob Hill Apartments residents, who are at risk of being displaced due to poor living conditions. The district is seeking community input on needed updates to be financed by a bond issue to be placed on the August 2020 ballot. Cargile thanked LINC for its support of the Justice in Schools initiative providing legal services for families and staff from Legal Aid. A video on Justice in Schools, Loads of Love, and First Book was shown.
- **Kevin Foster**, Executive Director (Genesis School) reported Genesis on Feb. 6 will kick off “Let’s Read,” an intergenerational reading activity. Genesis will host the annual Family Summit on Feb. 14-15. The school will participate in the city-wide School Open House on Feb. 2 including an early literacy workshop. On Feb. 20 the school will begin the second session of Families and Schools Together (FAST).
- **Vivian Roper**, Superintendent (Lee A. Tolbert Academy), reported the Apricot data system provides support to the Tolbert student assistance team and special education staff. Tolbert third- and fourth-graders visited the entrepreneur center in Blue Springs School District. Eighth-graders toured KCPS high schools. One-third of Tolbert teachers have projects funded by Donors Choose. Tolbert is starting a pre-school partnership with operation Breakthrough. Roper recited the poem “Pretend to Be OK” by a Tolbert eighth-grader who participated in the General Federation of Women’s Clubs poetry contest.

- **Bob Bartman**, Program Coordinator (Education Policy Fellowship Program), reported EPFP fellows participated in a seminar on communication strategies in December and a seminar on demography, early learning and the impact of trauma, and eviction and student attendance in January. Fellows will visit the White House Decision Center at the Truman Library in February and will travel to Washington, D.C. for the National Policy Seminar in March.

Tate introduced Mo. Division of Youth Services Director **Scott Odum**, who reported on the division's work to help young people involved in the juvenile justice system. DYS partners with LINC to provide mentoring services to aid youth in making a successful transition out of the system. DYS is also investing in Families and Schools Together (FAST), which has been a valuable experience for youth and their families. DYS also benefits from LINC's support in the form of geomapping and connection to Apricot for case management.

FAST Executive Director **Toni Rivera-Joachin** gave an overview of the organization's 32-year history and its expansion into 25 countries. A video of the Fort Osage FAST graduation in October 2019 was shown.

Caring Communities Administrator **Janet Miles-Bartee** introduced a discussion of FAST by a panel of FAST team members including site coordinators **Steve McClellan, Jamie Braden, Brenda Newsome, Melanie Scott,** and **Raul Lopez Gomez**; LINC FAST trainer **Rick Jackson**, Fort Osage principals **Julie Stout** and **Monica Shane**; and FAST family members **Smith, Jamie,** and **Sasha Liddell**. Deputy Director **Brent Schondelmeyer** reported LINC is seeking to expand the FAST program in its partner school districts. LINC staff participating in this week's FAST training were recognized.

Tate reported that Black History posters and booklets produced by LINC in partnership with the Kansas City Public Library and Black Archives of Mid-America are now available.

Tate reported that **Rosemary Lowe** was featured in the recent KCPT documentary "Land of Opportunity."

Rob Givens reported that 2020 is the year of the U.S. Census, and that getting an accurate count is of critical importance; families should be encouraged to participate.

The meeting was adjourned.

New Hickman Mills Superintendent Says 'Underdog Mentality' Will Help District Overcome Enrollment, Financial Struggles

Yaw Obeng comes to south Kansas City with school turnaround experience from Vermont. He also oversaw the construction of new schools in a district in his native Canada.



Courtesy of the Hickman Mills School District

Yaw Obeng starts as superintendent in Hickman Mills on July 1. He describes himself as 'a little geeky' and says when his three sons were growing up, he often dragged them to visit school sites on vacation.

Hickman Mills has a new leader, Yaw Obeng, who's leaving Burlington Public Schools in Vermont after five years as superintendent there.

The outgoing Hickman Mills superintendent, Yolanda Cargile, a well-liked Ruskin High School graduate, is moving to the neighboring Center School District. Obeng inherits a provisionally accredited district with declining enrollment. The district is also struggling with falling revenues, largely a byproduct of tax abatements for Cerner's south Kansas City development. The problem has gotten so bad, the board voted to close two schools last year.

But Obeng said he's up for a challenge.

"One of the things I always look for is somewhere I believe my experiences and skills can actually make a difference," Obeng said. "When I went into Burlington, the state was going to take over the district. There were some financial issues, there were some racial tensions within the district. And there was an achievement gap."

Obeng, who is originally from Toronto, oversaw a period of rapid expansion in one of the Canadian city's suburban school districts before taking the top job in Burlington. He said he expects that experience to guide him as he takes the top job in Hickman Mills.

What got you interested in Hickman Mills? What was it about the district that made you think it would be a good fit?

I know the teachers and the staff are excited to move in the direction of full accreditation. I've always been someone who likes to be on the ground floor of something. I think that Hickman Mills is a place where I can start from the beginning, work with the rest of the team and get the success we want to see.

Kansas City's education system is very fragmented. There are 14 districts within city limits, and South Kansas City districts like Hickman Mills and Center rarely get the attention the Kansas City Public Schools do. How do you make sure the students in your district aren't forgotten?

We might have sort of an underdog mentality in terms of always having to punch up, trying to get respect. ... We need to go out and tell stories about the things we're doing. That's the only way to get the kind of recognition the district has always wanted. This is an opportunity to look at our brand, at our messaging, at where we want to go in the future.

I'm guessing you've never started a new position during a global pandemic before. How do you introduce yourself to the community when no one even knows what school will look like in August?

These are unprecedented times, and you're right, it's a challenge. My mode of operation is to get out in the community and talk to people where they're at, whether it's a barber shop, restaurant, gymnasium or church. But that's not going to be possible ... until the pandemic dies down. We're going to have to learn to communicate better virtually. In my current district, we've had really good success with YouTube events, livestream, things like that. In some cases, it's better than the norm because now you can have those chat questions that everyone has a chance to ask.

The outgoing superintendent, Dr. Cargile, grew up in Hickman Mills. Do you anticipate continuing to work with her? I know she's expressed interest in continuing some of the collaborations she built between Center, Hickman Mills and Grandview, the South Kansas City districts.

I think what the previous superintendent did was lay a great foundation for me to come in. I've got fresh eyes, and I'm interested in working with everyone. I hope I can connect with my partners, my colleagues in the surrounding districts. I want to learn from them the context in Kansas City and in Missouri. I also think I have some things to share. I've had some great international experiences. And I look forward to carving out my own identity with our community. People will judge themselves who I am by how I'm responding to their needs.

Missouri Gov. Mike Parson cut \$131 million from K-12 education, and state education officials are saying to expect another round of cuts next month. With so much financial uncertainty right now, what needs to be done to shore up Hickman Mills' budget?

I don't think there's ever a situation where you're totally satisfied with the funds that you have, even when you have a fund balance you can carry forward. But I would say while we need to practice good fiduciary responsibility, ensuring we have resources and reserves for situations just like this, we need to shift our dollars toward direct student supports. This pandemic has really magnified the inequities for some students.

Speaking of inequities, George Floyd's murder in Minnesota has started a national conversation about racial injustice. I know a lot of districts were having conversations before about educational equity and what school looks like for children of color, but this feels like a tipping point for specifically anti-racist curriculum. As a newcomer to the district, how do you have that conversation?

The Floyd situation has really put a focus on people to examine their own biases and see how policies and practices are met, especially in education. I'm hoping (city and state) leaders are open to having a frank conversation. I know I'll be a strong advocate for our students and for our district to raise that voice and identify where the inequities are and look for support. ... For those of us that experienced it through education systems, through society, this is nothing new. It just brings it to light. And I'm hoping that people can actually see it.



LINC Caring Communities During COVID19

This report shares how the LINC site coordinators are supporting the children and families of the during the COVID19 school closure.

The report is not exhaustive but shows the kinds of support and assistance provided.

Academic and School Support

LINC site coordinators are mentoring students who they have worked with at the LINC Caring Communities sites providing extra support for the children and families.

- Helping children with their virtual learning and school assignments they may not understand
- Providing bi-lingual support for non-English speaking households.
- Assisting with book distributions to children at events, outdoor library boxes and front porch book deliveries.
- Distributing printed work packets.
- Cleaning, packing and preparing dedicated LINC building space for custodial cleaning.

Lesson Plans

Several LINC Caring Communities sites are funded by the 21st Century Community Learning Center federal funds.

- Preparing lesson plans tied to state standards.
- Organizing an online library of nearly 1,000 lessons plans.

Technology

LINC site coordinators have supported children and families with technology needs and challenges.

- Delivering computers, hot spots.
- Connecting families to school district technology resources.
- Providing support for virtual learning.

Connecting with Children and Families

LINC site coordinators are maintaining contact with children and families.

- Creating social media posts and livestreaming content.
- Sending notes and letters to students.
- Sharing opportunities to stay involved in LINC out-of-school time programs including virtual chess, Read-A-Louds, arts and crafts, math, Scouting (boys and girls), Girls on the Run, Harmony Project KC, Bike Walk and other opportunities.

Food Distribution and Emergency Assistance

LINC site coordinators have provided support to families.

- Outreach to families regarding the Pandemic Electronic Benefit Transfer (PEBT) which provides \$302 food benefit for each school-age child who is eligible for free or reduced lunch.
- Delivering meals, diapers and milk and many other necessities to families.
- Supporting school district early food distribution.
- Working with Harvesters and faith-based organizations on food distribution.
- Making welfare checks on families.
- Connecting families with supportive services and emergency assistance including utility assistance.

Part time Staff Furlough

In mid-March, LINC had a part time staff working in the LINC Caring Communities program of approximately 475 employees the LINC Caring Communities sites.

- Paid its part-time staff for approximately eight weeks to provide financial support given the abrupt closure of schools.
- Furloughed of May 1. LINC filed a “mass claim” unemployment filing to make it easier for furloughed staff to obtain unemployment insurance including the opportunity for the \$600 Federal Pandemic Unemployment Compensation (FPUC) benefit.
- Worked with the Full Employment Council to connect furloughed staff with free available training opportunities.

Now more than ever, LINC Caring Communities leaders serve their neighborhoods

By Joe Robertson/LINC writer

June 17, 2020



The pandemic season had LINC site coordinators on the scene in their communities, including Calvin Wainright taking the photo, left, of fellow Melcher volunteers at Central High School in Kansas City; Raul Lopez Gomez taking the photo, center, of fellow volunteers at Elm Grove in Fort Osage; and video submission, right, by a Conn-West student in Grandview for Shaniece Garlington’s Facebook talent show.

In the midst of so many phone calls to stay close, so many emails, social media posts and Zoom meetings, here was a moment for Eric Lanier to do LINC’s work the way he’d known before the pandemic changed everything.

He saw a woman out on her porch, one of his parents from James Elementary School in Kansas City’s Northeast Neighborhood. He knew she had been struggling and he stepped up her front walk to a safe closeness. No digital filters between them.

Yes, she told him, she needed help. Yes, she and the children and other adults in her home could use the hefty bag of rice, cans of tuna and other foods that Lanier, LINC’s site coordinator at James, had standing by through a partnership with Harvesters.

She knew other families too. She knew migrant families that were scared to step out and ask for aid.

With LINC’s help, the woman started her own food drive “that empowered her on her own front porch,” Lanier said. “It was just amazing, empowering the parents.”

This is how the work carries on.

From the moment in March that precautions over COVID-19 shut down the school buildings where LINC based its Caring Communities services, LINC’s site leaders scrambled after new ways to do the work of equity that would become more important than ever.

LINC’s mission — to strengthen children’s education, support families and build safe communities — turned head-on into a pandemic that is dealing disproportionate pain on the low-income neighborhoods and communities of color that LINC serves.

“Now is the time to understand more, so many may fear less,” Janet Miles-Bartee, LINC’s Caring Communities administrator, said in a Zoom call with all the coordinators from more than 50 Caring Communities sites. “It’s the time now to

continue the good work that we've always done."

LINC's before- and after-school programming was suspended, but there was so much more to do.

"At LINC we're always in the loop," Faxon Elementary Site Coordinator Yolanda Robinson in Kansas City said. "We're always aware of what's going on. We're always looking at what's the next step for us as coordinators and our front-line team."

All across the six districts and charter schools where LINC works, that call to action meant stepping in as community volunteers, conduits of aid, sharers of information, allies in support of school teachers, calling on families — doing all this while also preparing lesson plans, documenting work and converting their mission into to a vast, digital, home-based public service operation.

"People need to find jobs, they need to pay bills and mortgages," said Raul Lopez Gomez, the coordinator of LINC's Elm Grove Elementary site in Fort Osage. The school's community garden, an increasingly important resource, needed care. Food distributions needed volunteers. Families needed to get the word.

LINC threw itself into connecting these networks of relief, he said.

At first he scoured social media, social service sites and job listings to gather information to share. Then the community around him began sending him more notices to share.

"I can see people concerned about other people, thinking how they can help," he said. "I am happy we can connect people to other people."

The hardest part? The answer to that question was universal across LINC's site coordinators.

"Not being able to touch my babies," said Shaniece Garlington with Conn-West Elementary in Grandview. "Not being able to hug my families when they come through the door."

It worries her that she might not see when a parent is troubled, or that a child is upset the way she might when she could see their faces every day.

"I still continue to comfort my families," she said. "I still reach out to them."

Garlington created a video talent show for parents to post students' skills on her LINC Conn-West Facebook page. It could be anything — a cartwheel, a child on stilts, a drawing, a basketball shot — just to let the children know "they're still appreciated, that our LINC staff are still looking at them, and they're still engaged."

For most of the first two months of the pandemic, LINC continued to pay its roughly 475 part-time front-line staff, engaging them in the work of creating lesson plans with their coordinators, and keeping them paid during the first wave of the community's pandemic stress.

In May, LINC worked with state officials to speed a mass unemployment filing, helping the furloughed staff quickly take advantage of the supplemental federal pandemic relief benefits. LINC is now teaming with the Full Employment Council and the University of Central Missouri to provide its staff training opportunities while schools remain closed.

Creativity, site coordinators said, is LINC's strength both in how it serves its community and its staff

It shows in the way LINC's chess program went online with its instructors holding virtual classes, or how Border Star Montessori and BikeWalkKC kept a bike safety program in business through Zoom.

When the closing of Whittier Elementary in Kansas City scuttled Ellen Auer's plan to give away some 150 children's books at a literacy event, she turned into a door-dash book fairy. That meant plotting all her student's addresses on a

I'm part of an organization that allows you to be creative and gives you the opportunity to do the work you love to do . . . Let's fix it.

— Yolanda Robinson,
LINC site coordinator

map and charting a course through pandemic-quiet neighborhoods.

She wrote personal notes to her kids and parents that she stashed with the books — then left them with a ring of a door bell, staying COVID-safe, and here and there hearing little voices inside the house, she said, saying “*I think Ms. Auer’s on the porch!*”

Creativity can mean becoming math tutors, said Bryan Geddes, the coordinator for LINC’s Ruskin and Smith-Hale programs in Hickman Mills., or helping students and parents get familiar with new technology. He’s proud to see “a resilient community . . . figuring out how to make it work — all a team — families, school, LINC.”

At every turn, Geddes said, with every instance of aid, you’re asking: *Who else needs help?*

The community needs LINC’s work now and going forward, and that’s exactly where Robinson at Faxon said she wants to be.

She likes being part of LINC’s culture of “Let’s fix it,” she said. “I’m part of an organization that allows you to be creative and gives you the opportunity to do the work you love to do.”

Everyone working together brings courage and comfort with the message of “I’m not alone,” said Lanier, at James, and it passes through across all races, all ethnicity, and multiple languages.

“*Gracias a Dios por familia,*” said Lanier, fluent in Spanish. “*Gracias a Dios por su casa. Gracias a Dios por todo.*”

Thanks to God for family, for home, for everything.

LINC Furlough Staff Report

On May 1st, LINC furloughed 475 part-time LINC staff.

As the employer, LINC submitted a “mass claim filing” to make it easier to apply for unemployment insurance. Of the furloughed staff, 380 applied for unemployment insurance.

The Full Employment Council and LINC — longtime workforce partners — have developed training opportunities for the furloughed staff.

The trainings, which are held online, are free and provide skill development, with some courses leading to certifications and credentials.

Classes are provided typically at no cost to our employee by area universities, community colleges and trade/vocational school. FEC is able to assist those needing employment to find high-quality jobs quickly.

Our employees complete a brief survey to identify their needs and area of interest. An FEC worker follows up and schedules a 1:1 session to review choices and to assist with next steps.

There are a total of 23 course offerings covering health care, child development, computers/technology and other subjects.

The training providers include:

1. Metropolitan Community Colleges (MCC)
2. University of Missouri-Kansas City (UMKC)
3. University of Central Missouri (UCM)
4. Johnson County Community College (JCCC)
5. Kansas City School of Phlebotomy
6. MedCerts
7. New Horizons
8. SnapIt Solutions
9. Centriq

Classes are available to individual who are 18 years or older and residents of Clay, Platte, Ray, Jackson, or Cass counties.

Courses are being administered remotely using an on-line format. Many of the training providers are making laptops (and WiFi hot spots in some instances) available to students.

Training opportunities were shared with furloughed staff through email linking to additional information and an online form: <https://kclinc.org/training2020>.

As of May 26, 46 furloughed staff completed the training opportunities survey. On average, each respondent indicated an interest in five of the course offerings. FEC has made contact with 33 individuals of which 7 sought assistance with employment. Others are exploring training opportunities.

Here are two examples.

A furloughed staff member working in the Hickman Mills School District has signed up for a child development course. She began working for LINC in the 2019 school year.

Another LINC furloughed staff member has worked for LINC for eight years and is getting training on radiology commenting: “This is something I’ve always wanted to do.”

FEC has offered to develop additional training opportunities.

In addition, FEC is offering to help with professional resumes and interview skills and making furloughed staff aware of jobs that are currently hiring in fields including customer service, logistics, transportation, and information technology.

The training opportunities were shared with LINC furloughed staff through an email including [a video](#) of FEC president and CEO Clyde McQueen.



LINCWorks goes remote; keeps clearing barriers for parents seeking jobs, careers

By Joe Robertson/LINC writer

June 17, 2020



“First the schools closed,” Dawn Patterson, LINCWorks Director, said.

“Then child care centers shut down . . .”

LINC and LINCWorks' mission has always been to help parents on temporary state assistance clear the many barriers that stand between them and attaining skills and getting employed and into careers.

COVID-19 threatens to turn barriers into all-out barricades for many of the some 1,200 clients LINCWorks serves in the [Missouri Work Assistance program](#).

“ . . . the digital divide is a challenge,” she continued. “Mental health is definitely still a concern . . .”

Safety precautions meant that LINCWorks needed to close its physical offices — 10 of them serving Cass, Clay, Jackson, Platte and Ray counties. The team’s 31 case managers and data support specialists, including its management team, had to work remotely.

And the clients — already under so much stress — had to be reached, connected digitally, coached and *encouraged* in the pandemic’s new world.

With the guidance and support of LINC’s leadership and information technology team, LINCWorks moved swiftly to be able to keep its mission on track.

“Moving an entire workforce to remote in a matter of days was incredible,” Patterson said. “We could not do it without the technology. We could not do it without being flexible. The I.T. team at LINC has been phenomenal.”



Not only did staff have to be sure they were digitally equipped, many of LINCWorks' clients needed help to be able to engage in the training and support checkups that were now going virtual. Arts Tech in Kansas City helped some clients who needed computers.

As a result, case managers are continuing to connect with clients at least three times a month, now by phone, email or video calls.

The monthly assessments of progress occur by telephone or virtually.

State forms that were filled out on paper in LINCWorks offices have been converted into electronic formats.

For participants who are working, supportive services were provided to assist with transportation and work-related expenses.

And LINCWorks is now ready to resume training seminars in virtual meeting rooms online.

"In the past," Patterson said, LINCWorks believed in the strength of meeting with and coaching participants in person. "This has been a huge adjustment for everyone."

The training that LINCWorks is preparing will increase its attention to resiliency and mental health, she said. The parents in the program are facing a lot in the days ahead.

"We have parents who are not teachers having to teach their children," she said. "In the pandemic, they've lost opportunities to work. Utility companies had put a hold on bills and cut-offs, but that will end and now it's an added burden — how will you pay for past utility payments?"

As case managers, the LINCWorks team has always helped parents in the program not only with job training and job searches, but also in managing many other problems complicating their lives.

Now those complications seem to be multiplying.

"The biggest concern continues to be child care," Patterson said. "There's increased anxiety — concern with schools if they can't open."

So the case managers have helped build lists of child care facilities that are open and are helping find spots for children, along with other needs. The case managers have become a network, finding and sharing resources with each other for their clients.

During check-ins with a family, the staff are asking, "How are you doing? How are your children doing? Do you need anything?" Patterson said.

'You are professionals'; LINC trains child care specialists in power of relationships

By Joe Robertson/LINC writer

June 17, 2020



LINC's new training program for early childhood workers was barely as old as the infants in their care when the pandemic turned the work inside-out.

The first cohorts of some 35 child care workers were just getting started in learning the magic of relationship-based care taught by the [Infant and Toddler Specialist Network](#).

Then they and their trainers essentially had to adopt one of their meditative training mantras and, as program director Jimmarie Smiley said, "Relax . . . *breathe.*"

"Good self-care," she said. "That's where it starts."

Hardly missing a beat, the work has continued on, giving child care workers free training to become nurturing adults to the children who parents entrust to them.

"Good relationships," Smiley said, "shape a child's sense of self in life. Positive attachment builds security, exploration skills — developing a child's sense of self at three."

Missouri's Department of Social Services turned to LINC to be the regional programmer of the Infant and Toddler Specialist Network for a seven-county area around Kansas City. Its purpose is to make child care services stronger allies in helping families raise healthy, imaginative children who are ready for school and childhood.

The industry is under stress, with weak funding streams that lead to underpaid staffs that are vulnerable to high turnover.

LINC was eager to take on the effort to give the front-line child care workers more skills and confidence to play their critical roles.

The Infant and Toddler Specialist Network particularly teaches respect between the child care providers and the family home — and that’s important, said Renee Asher, LINC’s special projects coordinator.

The program emphasizes the importance of relationships with children when they are outside the home, but also stresses the importance of supporting the relationships in the families.

Care givers are encouraged “to respect the family culture, to learn the routine of the family home,” Asher said. “It fits LINC’s Caring Communities guiding principles — building on our communities’ strengths.”

The work began late last fall, as Smiley and her team trained themselves in the methods of ITSN and began recruiting among child care centers to enroll the first cohorts of students.

They gathered trainees from a half-dozen centers in Kansas City’s midtown area and in the Northland and had just started the first trainings in February when the pandemic forced a major strategy shift in March.

There are six stages of training in a curriculum developed in partnership with the Missouri Department of Social Services and WestEd, combined with weekly visits to the classrooms between sessions to help put the new skills into practice.

The LINC team took the training modules and turned them into Zoom virtual trainings, Smiley said. The follow-up visits also went virtual. LINC provided some of the participants who needed them iPads to be able to stay in the program. The participation in the training didn’t slip at all, she said.

“There’s engagement,” she said. “They’re unmuting their mikes. They’re in the chat.” Attendance has been nearly perfect, even 100% in some of the sessions. And the program is voluntary.

The child care centers that sent students to the training stayed open through the pandemic, having to take on fewer children to be safely spaced, but prioritizing providing care for the children of essential workers.

Smiley said the trainers recognized that child care workers — essential themselves — were under higher stress, which is why she increased the emphasis on self-care.

The child care workers seem to thrive on the training opportunity, Smiley and Asher said. They expect the enthusiasm to continue as the program broadens into the next stages, reaching farther into the seven-county area.

It gives child care workers pride and confidence, and supports them in gaining child-development specialist credentials.

“We tell them, ‘You are professionals,’” Smiley said. “This can be a career.”

And a very important one.

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Hunger Program's Slow Start Leaves Millions of Children Waiting

Child hunger is soaring, but two months after Congress approved billions to replace school meals, only 15 percent of eligible children had received benefits.

By Jason DeParle



Preparing lunches at Sinclair Lane Elementary School in Baltimore. The Census Bureau reported that 31 percent of households with children lacked the amount or quality of food they desired because they “couldn’t afford to buy more.”Erin Schaff/The New York Times

WASHINGTON — As child hunger soars to levels without modern precedent, an emergency program Congress created two months ago has reached only a small fraction of the 30 million children it was intended to help.

The program, Pandemic-EBT, aims to compensate for the declining reach of school meals by placing their value on electronic cards that families can use in grocery stores. But collecting lunch lists from thousands of school districts, transferring them to often-outdated state computers and issuing specialized cards has proved much harder than envisioned, leaving millions of needy families waiting to buy food.

Congress approved the effort in mid-March as part of the Families First act, its first major coronavirus relief package. By May 15, only about 15 percent of eligible children had received benefits, according to an analysis by The New York Times. Just 12 states had started sending money, and Michigan and Rhode Island alone had finished.

The pace is accelerating, with millions of families expected to receive payments in the coming weeks. But 16 states still lack federal approval to begin the payments and Utah declined to participate, saying it did not have the administrative capacity to distribute the money. Many Southern states with high rates of child hunger have gotten a slow start.

As of May 15, states had issued payments for about 4.4 million children, out of the 30 million who potentially qualify, the Times analysis shows. If all states reached everyone eligible, an unlikely prospect, families could receive as much as \$10 billion.

“The program’s going to be very important, but it hasn’t been fast,” said Duke Storen, a former nutrition advocate who leads the Virginia Department of Social Services, which began sending money last week. “The intent is to replace lost meals at school, but the meals have been lost for months, and few benefits have gone out.”

Among pandemic-related hardship, child hunger stands out for its urgency and symbolic resonance — after decades of exposés and reforms, a country of vast wealth still struggles to feed its young. So vital are school meals in some places, states are issuing replacement benefits in waves to keep grocers from being overwhelmed.

The lag between congressional action and families buying food is, in many places, less a story of bureaucratic indifference than a testament to the convoluted nature of the American safety net.

Many officials have worked overtime to start the program amid competing crises. Yet even in delivering a benefit as simple as a school meal, federal, state and local governments can all add delays, as can the private companies that print the cards, which can only buy food.

“We get it — this is dire,” said Lisa Watson, a deputy secretary of the Pennsylvania Department of Human Services. “We want these benefits out.”

Aid in the United States generally follows a patchwork logic, but the arbitrary nature of the moment is especially pronounced: Families with three children in Jacksonville, N.C., have received \$1,100, while families in Jacksonville, Fla., have received nothing. One corner of red-state America (Fredonia, Ariz.) can get help, while seven miles away, another (Kanab, Utah) cannot.

“This is why we need a federal nutrition safety net — hunger does not have state borders,” said Crystal FitzSimons of the Food Research and Action Center, a Washington advocacy group.

Many anti-hunger experts still think the program will make a big difference, and advocates generally have been reluctant to fault the states. “Obviously we feel a lot of urgency,” said Lisa Davis of Share Our Strength, an anti-hunger group. But she called the administrative challenge — old computers, multiple state agencies — “a herculean task.”

But Lisa Hamler-Fugitt, who runs the Ohio Association of Food Banks, said the money was coming “as a trickle, not a fire hose as it should have been.”

More than half of schoolchildren qualify for subsidized meals — 78 percent in Louisiana and 85 percent in West Virginia. The program reaches higher up the income ladder than most aid

efforts, to families with incomes up to 185 percent of the poverty line, or \$48,000 for a family of four.

After classrooms closed in mid-March, most schools continued to serve meals in grab-and-go lines or along bus routes, even as cooks and drivers fell ill. But despite tenacious efforts, the meals have reached a small share of those who previously got them. National data is lacking, but weekly surveys of low-income families in Philadelphia (by Elizabeth Ananat of Barnard College and Anna Gassman-Pines of Duke University) found the share ranged from 11 percent to 36 percent.



Meals have continued to be served in grab-and-go lines or along bus routes. Michelle V. Agins/The New York Times

All signs show [child hunger is soaring](#). In a [survey](#) of mothers with young children by the Brookings Institution, nearly a fifth said their children were not getting enough to eat — a rate three times higher than the worst of the Great Recession. The Census Bureau [reported last week](#) that 31 percent of households with children lacked the amount or quality of food they desired because they “couldn’t afford to buy more.”

With big increases in other federal relief gradually reaching families, the problem could ease. But child hunger usually grows during the summer when school kitchens close, and teenagers now have less ability to supplement family budgets with summer jobs. [Food prices](#) in April rose at the fastest pace in 46 years.

In creating Pandemic-EBT(for Electronic Benefit Transfer), Congress bet that plastic cards could reach more people than school meals and offer greater choice. It provides \$5.70 a child for every lost school day — \$285 per child in Texas and \$420 in New York, where the school year

ends later. The federal government pays the benefits, and states pay half the administrative costs.

Michigan set the pace, making its first payments on April 17, about four weeks after Congress passed the law. It has reached nearly a million children, while some states are still debating whether to proceed.

“The numbers on hunger are horrifying, and this was a fast way to get help to all kinds of families,” said Robert Gordon, the state’s health and human services director, [citing research](#) that shows children with nutritional aid do much better in school.

Michigan’s Midwestern neighbors Illinois and Wisconsin also sent money in April, as did Arizona, Rhode Island and Massachusetts. But Florida, Georgia and Mississippi have still not received federal permission to begin, and South Carolina has yet to apply.

Two Southern states moved swiftly: Alabama and North Carolina (third to get a federal green light).

Blue states have generally moved fastest. Two-thirds of states that sent money by May 15 have Democratic governors. Of the 16 states without waivers, 11 are led by Republicans.

Among those who felt the pinch of closed schools is Melynda Baker, a Walgreens cashier in Tyler, Texas, whose boys are 15 and 12. Though the schools offered grab-and-go meals, Ms. Baker works during the pickup time and her disabled husband does not drive. That has left her replacing 20 weekly meals — five breakfasts and five lunches for each big-eating son.

“I’m sorry, but they’re boys — they’re six feet tall and need a lot of nutrients,” she said.

Ms. Baker makes about \$10 an hour and budgets \$125 in food stamps for groceries each week, with a firm rule it has to last. Now that it must stretch further, strawberries are out and sloppy joes are in.

She and her husband feed their sons first, pretending to be distracted while the boys grab seconds. “We’ll say, ‘Oh, there’s plenty left,’ and then eat a bologna sandwich later,” she said. But the older one caught on. “He’s like, ‘No, Mom, I’m full,’ when I know he’s not.”

Mass protests against police brutality that have brought thousands of people onto the streets in cities across America are raising the specter of new coronavirus outbreaks, prompting political leaders, physicians and public health experts to [warn that the crowds could cause a surge in cases](#). While many political leaders affirmed the right of protesters to express themselves, they urged the demonstrators to wear face masks and maintain social distancing, both to protect themselves and to prevent further community spread of the virus. Some infectious disease experts were reassured by the fact that the protests were held outdoors, saying the open air settings could mitigate the risk of transmission.

When Ms. Baker saw a Facebook post about Pandemic-EBT she thought it was a hoax. But \$570 arrived last week, and she is saving it for meat sales to stock her deep freeze.

“When you think about all the government has to do, the money came relatively quickly,” she said. “I’m very appreciative.”

In South Euclid, Ohio, near Cleveland, Rebecca Payton feels less patient. When her husband, a mechanic, lost his job at the same time their children, 11 and 6, stopped going to school, food expenses rose as income vanished. A trying month ensued until they got unemployment

insurance and food stamps. Worse than the deteriorating diet was the stress. “I was really worried I wouldn’t be able to feed my children,” she said.

Until a reporter called, Ms. Payton had not heard of Pandemic-EBT. Told she qualified for \$600 in emergency aid, Ms. Payton urged officials to hurry. “It doesn’t seem like an emergency to them,” she said. Ohio and Pennsylvania plan to start sending benefits this week.

Most states are sending money first to families on food stamps, since they already have cards. It is harder to reach the others, about 40 percent, since eligibility lists often reside in school districts, some with obsolete addresses. Some states automatically send cards to families that lack them. Others make them apply. How many will know to do so is unknown.

California enlisted a nonprofit group, Code for America, which got philanthropic support to build an online application for families without cards, a group that includes 1.7 million children. The site went live on Friday morning and by midafternoon had applications for 370,000 children.



City workers handed out meals to parents in Santa Clara, Calif. Jim Wilson/The New York Times

“It tells me the amount of need in this state is staggering,” said Tracey Patterson, the Code for America manager who oversaw the project. “It also tells me that government technology doesn’t have to be bad. We tested it with 1,200 people,” including non-English speakers.

Unlike most aid programs, school lunches — and Pandemic-EBT — are available to children regardless of immigration status. But Congress left out Puerto Rico, perhaps by accident.

In forgoing the program, Utah officials may have kept needy families from receiving as much as \$50 million. Amid the pandemic, “changes we can implement in a short period of time must not be too complex,” a human services spokeswoman, Brooke Porter Coles, wrote in an email.

South Carolina hesitated because administrative costs could top \$1 million, though needy families stand to collect more than 100 times as much. The state aims to seek federal approval by June 1.

In New York, the pandemic's center, officials said they would start sending payments in late May but not reach all 2.1 million children until July.

One big question is whether Congress will extend the program for the summer. Its supporters say the cards could pioneer an enduring solution to the summer hunger. The Democratic-led House recently included an extension in a \$3 trillion aid package, which the Republican leaders of the Senate rejected.

With so much effort expended on laying the groundwork, the program's advocates say it would be a waste to let it lapse. "We have the apparatus," said Mandy Cohen, North Carolina's secretary of health and human services. "I would lean heavily into extending this to make sure we don't have hungry kids."

For Immediate Release
June 16, 2020

Contact: Rebecca Woelfel
Rebecca.Woelfel@dss.mo.gov

Missouri resumes Food Stamp/SNAP recertification requirement July 1

JEFFERSON CITY, MO –The Department of Social Services’ temporary waiver of the recertification requirement for Food Stamp/ Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) participants ends this month. Starting July 1, the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA), Food and Nutrition Service (FNS) resumes the requirement for Missourians to complete a periodic recertification process to verify the household still qualifies for Food Stamp/SNAP benefits. FSD has begun sending letters to households due for recertification in the month of July and the completed application form must be returned on time to ensure Food Stamp/SNAP benefits will not be interrupted, if the household is still eligible. Over 16,000 SNAP households are due for recertification in the month of July. All Food Stamp participants will receive and must complete their recertification form every year, or every two years, if the individual is aged, blind, or disabled. As of April 30, 2020, 360,937 Missouri households or 752,315 individuals receive Food Stamp/SNAP benefits.

“DSS was able to take advantage of this waiver to help Missourians during COVID-19 when the federal government declared a state of emergency,” said Jennifer Tidball, Acting Director, Department of Social Services. “Missouri has now moved into Phase 2 of the Show Me Strong Recovery Plan and I want to make sure Food Stamp/SNAP participants are aware the state is beginning to resume normal program operations. Missourians receiving a Food Stamp/SNAP benefit are responsible for completing and submitting the Family Support Division form sent to them to recertify the household is still eligible to receive Food Stamp/SNAP benefits. If a household does not provide the completed form by the due date, their benefit can end.”

DSS also reminds low-income Missouri families to apply for the Pandemic Electronic Benefit Transfer (P-EBT), a one-time food assistance benefit. The P-EBT benefit helps families of students with an income of up to 185 percent of the federal poverty level who qualify for free

-more-

or reduced-price meals with the cost of the meals they provided for their children while they learned at home during the months of March, April, and May. The maximum benefit per child is \$302. DSS and the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, in partnership with local school districts have issued this one-time food benefit to more than 148,000 households. Only about 60 percent of households that could be eligible have applied for the P-EBT benefit. The deadline for application has now been extended to July 7. Families may [download the application online](#) or call 855-FSD-INFO to get an application by mail.

Missourians who have questions can use the [DSS Virtual Assistant](#) to get immediate answers to basic questions that are not specific to an individual's case 24 hours a day or can call 855-FSD-INFO or 855-373-4636 Monday through Friday, 6:00 a.m. to 6:30 p.m.

The [Missouri Services Navigator](#) has information on over 2,800 programs and services available in the state. Missourians in need of information on Food Stamp, Medicaid, Child Care Subsidy, LIHEAP, or Temporary Assistance for Needy Families benefit programs can visit [dss.mo.gov](#). Missourians can also apply for those services 24/7 online by visiting [MyDSS.mo.gov](#), or sending completed applications and verification documents by email to FSD.Documents@dss.mo.gov, or by fax to 573-526-9400.

The Department of Social Services is committed to the "[Show Me Strong" Recovery Plan](#) and serving the needs of Missouri citizens during COVID-19 pandemic. Information regarding the department's response to the pandemic is available online <https://dss.mo.gov/covid-19>.

The mission of the Department of Social Services is to empower Missourians to live safe, healthy, and productive lives. Visit [dss.mo.gov](#) to learn more about the Department of Social Services and follow us on [Facebook](#) and [Twitter](#).

###

Marvin Francois leaves behind a recipe for healing

By Joe Robertson/LINC writer

June 05, 2020

The moment is captured forever: A child — Marvin Francois's child — photographed in full joy.

This is not by chance. It's not luck that Francois *was there*, snapping his lens right when the team champion of a LINC chess tournament was announced.

You see his son, then an elementary student at Border Star Montessori School in Kansas City, exulting with his arms high, his teammates' raised fists behind him, his face raised to the ceiling in a child's soaring cry.

Of course it was Francois whose camera found the sensitive and poignant moments in the lives of those around him.

For the same reason he will be remembered for being the mentor that his four children needed, and their friends, and new friends he met along the way — right when they needed it.

For the same reason he'll be remembered as the man in his treasured Jeep, pulling neighbors' and strangers' cars out of snowbanks. Or the dad helping set up tables for LINC programs and school programs.

On the day he died, May 31, he had been out on the Plaza, of course, ranging through the crowds in the uprising for civil and criminal justice, marveling in the wild and diverse energy of the demonstrators, capturing his last photo album.

He was shot dead that night at the age of 50, just a few blocks from the demonstrations, the victim of an apparent attempted robbery — Kansas City's 73rd homicide.

He was close to the action, close to the heart of his community as always.

Because whether in the role of husband, father, mentor, volunteer, or photographer, "Marvin was *always there*," said LINC Caring Communities Site Coordinator Adrian Wilson,

"The one face you knew you'd see," Wilson said. "The rock" in so many people's lives. Lost, he said, to "senseless violence."

'He was everything for us'

Francois's camera led first wherever he went, like the nose of a camel, so that's how LINC chess director Ken Lingelbach first knew him, but then everything else about him soon followed.

"He was a great photographer, but the ultimate thing, he was a great father," Lingelbach said. "You could see the love and care for his kids."

Two of his children, Jayden, now 18, and Diamond, 14, started at Border Star and have been LINC chess players through high school. Christi Francois, who was married to Marvin for 17 years, is their mother. He had two more children, Cheyenne, 20, and Brandon, 18.



Photo by Marvin Francois

Cheyenne recently completed an associate’s degree, and Brandon and Jayden just graduated high school. And their father captured that achievement as a photographer would, posing the four of them in a photo shoot at Loose Park’s rose garden.

“He was everything for us,” Christi Francois said of her husband. He had the “wow factor.”

He made his living as a graphic designer and then a software engineer. But at any moment he was a creator, she said, an innovator, a fixer — like the time when the air conditioner was out and the repairman was still hours away on a sweltering day and he rigged up an industrial fan to send air through the A/C.

An elderly neighbor had trouble keeping her yard up, so Francois had been mowing it for her. He deliberately took his black Jeep Wrangler out into the snow and ice because he wanted to find stuck cars and pull them out.

He not only was close with his children and meeting their comforts and needs, but with their friends.

“He loved life, he really did,” Christi said. “He loved life and he loved people.”

‘Oh my God, not again’

What’s the angle? Where’s the light coming from? What’s the moment you’re trying to catch?

Francois was always asking the fellow photographers he met at LINC.

He was quite a perfectionist who loved to talk photography — and chess, said Lee Bohannon, a community organizer at LINC and founder of the chess program.

“He had a sensitivity to the kids’ welfare,” he said.

Francois really understood the children through his lens, and then as a father figure, sitting and walking among them to talk strategy and philosophy.

“He could see when a young person embraced chess that there were things that went on in their head that rewired their thinking,” Bohannon said. “(He saw that) they become empathetic with the people around them and are helpful to one another.”

“Marvin,” Bohannon said, “always made it cool. He was the calming guy . . .”

Which makes what happened that final night near the Plaza so hard to believe.

As an organizer, advocate and activist since the Civil Rights Era, Bohannon carries a long, intimate — and first-hand — experience of the violence suffered by black men. Then came the news of Francois’s death, churned through the surreal mix of the pandemic and the uprisings across Kansas



Marvin Francois’s took this photo of his children — Diamond, Cheyenne, Brandon and Jayden. Photo used with permission of the family.



Marvin Francois with his Jeep Wrangler. Photo used with permission of the family

City's midtown..

"My first thought," Bohannon said, "was, Oh my God, not again."

Bohannon retraced his work, LINC's work in the face of inequities in health care, education, housing, and how Francois became a part of it.

"When I think of Marvin and what happened to him," he said, "there is a wound in our community that needs salving."

Marvin Francois leaves his mark on the people who knew him to take up the healing. And he leaves his art, his photography: Images of children growing and achieving. Portraits of justice. Images of a unifying, diverse revolution in his city — hot for change.

Remembering Tearo 'Missie' Condit: Her Hero Project gave children everlasting voice

By Joe Robertson/LINC writer

May 19, 2020

You know Tearo "Missie" Condit wouldn't have it any other way.

The paths people take in remembering her wander inevitably toward the same meadow.

On the way there, their memories take you through her "Hero Project" — 15 years of "extraordinary" learning, first at Kansas City's Primitivo Garcia Elementary School and then Gladstone Elementary.

You hear the names she recruited to come into her schools to be the local heroes the students met and researched, whose lives they turned into books, videos and songs:

John "Buck" O'Neil, Ollie Gates, the Guadalupe Center's Diana Rojas, Crosby Kemper III, West Side leader Irene Ruiz . . .

One year the children turned the camera around and did their hero research and writing on "Ms. Condit" herself, their vice principal.

But even then, Condit, who died last week after a long battle with diabetes and cancer, knew where all the paths led.

"I look at the kids," said Bob Wilcox, the former Garcia principal, watching the music videos again. "And I remember them. They were 10 years old, but it's like they're standing next to me still today."

Ms. Condit's kids. *Missie's kids*.

You see them anew each time in chorus in the videos they made with Kansas City singer-songwriter Bob Walkenhorst, connecting their lives to their community's heroes.

Smiling. Dancing. Raising fists in shows of strength. Pressing hands to their chests for courage and love.

This was where her life's work led all along.

Think of what Missie Condit's projects did for those students, said Roosevelt Dickerson, the former site coordinator of LINC's programs at Gladstone. They became ambassadors, venturing out in their research to hallowed spaces of their city.

"Children who'd never had the chance to talk to a person in a high position, in an office, are all dressed up, talking to the president of a bank," he said, or a sports star, or a restaurant icon.

"I saw it lift the kids," Dickerson said. "They're asking questions, talking to a person of power and influence. They're connecting to Kansas City. Their chests pump up like they met a superhero. It makes them feel like . . . 'I have a *voice*. I can *do* something!'"

Simple Beginnings

The Hero Project took root during a simple school tour for a new parent 18 years ago.

That parent was Walkenhorst, whose daughter was enrolling in the fourth grade.



Tearo "Missie" Condit

Walkenhorst noted the name of the school and asked Condit: *Who's Primitivo Garcia?*

Condit took him to a glass case that told the story from 1967 — how Garcia was a 24-year-old Mexican immigrant in Kansas City, attending an evening class to improve his English, when he saw his pregnant teacher being harassed and attacked in a parking lot by five adolescents. He ran to her aid and pulled his teacher free so she could flee to safety.

But one of the attackers fired a pistol. [Garcia died in the hospital 13 days later.](#)

The moment of sharing that story would remain on both their minds. Walkenhorst, the lead performer of [The Rainmakers](#), mentioned almost as an aside in parting that he was a songwriter and a video artist. If the school ever needed any such thing, "call me."

Condit wasn't one to miss a beat.

"Twelve years later," Walkenhorst said, "I was still doing songs and videos for Missie Condit."

The school's children told the world Primitivo Garcia's story first. His sacrifice was not forgotten. The immigrant's dream found new life in the children. Sharing the story "meant so much to his family," Wilcox said. "The tears and connections were made."

The next year, more students researched and told another story. Then another and another. Books. Songs. Videos.

The process was amazing to see, Walkenhorst said. The power of Condit's project as a learning tool — academically, socially and emotionally — became obvious.

Children as young as the first grade "are studying the immigrant story (Primitivo Garcia)," Walkenhorst said. "They're studying the farmworkers' movement (Cesar Chavez) . . . They're studying race relations (Buck O'Neil). "And they're *getting* it."

These weren't easy projects either. In fact, the idea of them caused more than a little stress for her principals who had so many other pressures — standards to meet, accreditation benchmarks and ever-looming state tests.

But just when Gladstone Principal Dana Carter started to fret how to fit it all in, Carter recalled, Condit and her bottomless well of enthusiasm would say, "I got it covered . . . I'll do it."

Condit, Tahiti-born, with an exotic energy, always buoyed her colleagues, instilling confidence for whatever presentation, PowerPoint, or central office demand came along, Carter said.

"She always told me, 'I've got your back, girl.'"

An extraordinary way to learn

As a partner of the Kansas City Public Schools providing before- and after-school programming, LINC quickly became enamored with Condit's Hero Project.



Children sing "Your heart shines a light to help us to grow," in the Hero Project video that honored Condit.



Primitivo Garcia

LINC supported the schoolwork, the extracurricular activities that went along with it, and published the story about Buck O'Neil as a book with private support.

"It was just an extraordinary, unusual sort of thing," said LINC Deputy Director Brent Schondelmeyer. "You meet your hero. You write about your hero. You produce posters about your hero. You produce a video. It was an educational experience unlike anything I had ever seen."

Excitement in the school swelled whenever a new Hero Project approached, said LINC Caring Communities Administrator Janet Miles-Bartee, who was the site coordinator at Garcia.

From the moment they entered first grade, children knew the chance might come. "You could hear it in the halls," she said. And everyone, adults and children, loved working with "Ms. Condit."

"She was just a warm spirit," Miles-Bartee said.

One year, at Gladstone, the children's hero to meet and research was longtime LINC Chairman Landon Rowland.

Rowland, who made an indelible mark in philanthropic service while rising to president of Kansas City Southern Railway, would die in his own battle with cancer before the children's final projects were done. But Schondelmeyer remembered looking back over the notes the children compiled, the questions they asked.

One student asked Rowland what he liked to collect. His answer: *I collect ideas.*

And Schondelmeyer is thinking of the kids, what they made of that answer, how it sparked their own minds as they created what became "an extraordinary celebration of the life of Landon Rowland."

Rowland's family came to the Gladstone auditorium for a show of the students' work. Just as the families and friends came with the other heroes each year.

The projects would even get national attention. [The song and video](#) that honored Crosby Kemper III, then the director of the Kansas City Public Library, became a hit in libraries across the nation. This year, Kemper, by Presidential appointment, became the director of the federal [Institute of Museum and Library Services](#).

With her health deteriorating, Condit retired in 2017. The Hero Project concluded that year with a portrait of Mattie Rhodes artist and teacher Jenny Mendez.

Everlasting in song

This is where Tearo "Missie" Condit would want us to linger, watching and listening to her kids.

"Tearo, Tearo your heart shines a light . . .," they sing on her video. *"You became a teacher . . . to show us what's right . . ."*

The compassion and generosity that Carter said marked everything Condit did glints back in the children's eyes.

"To read and to learn, to be kind and fair, to never quit believing, you always care . . ."

And the works they made, the music with Walkenhorst, "stand the test of time," Wilcox said. "We created something permanent for everyone's history and legacy."

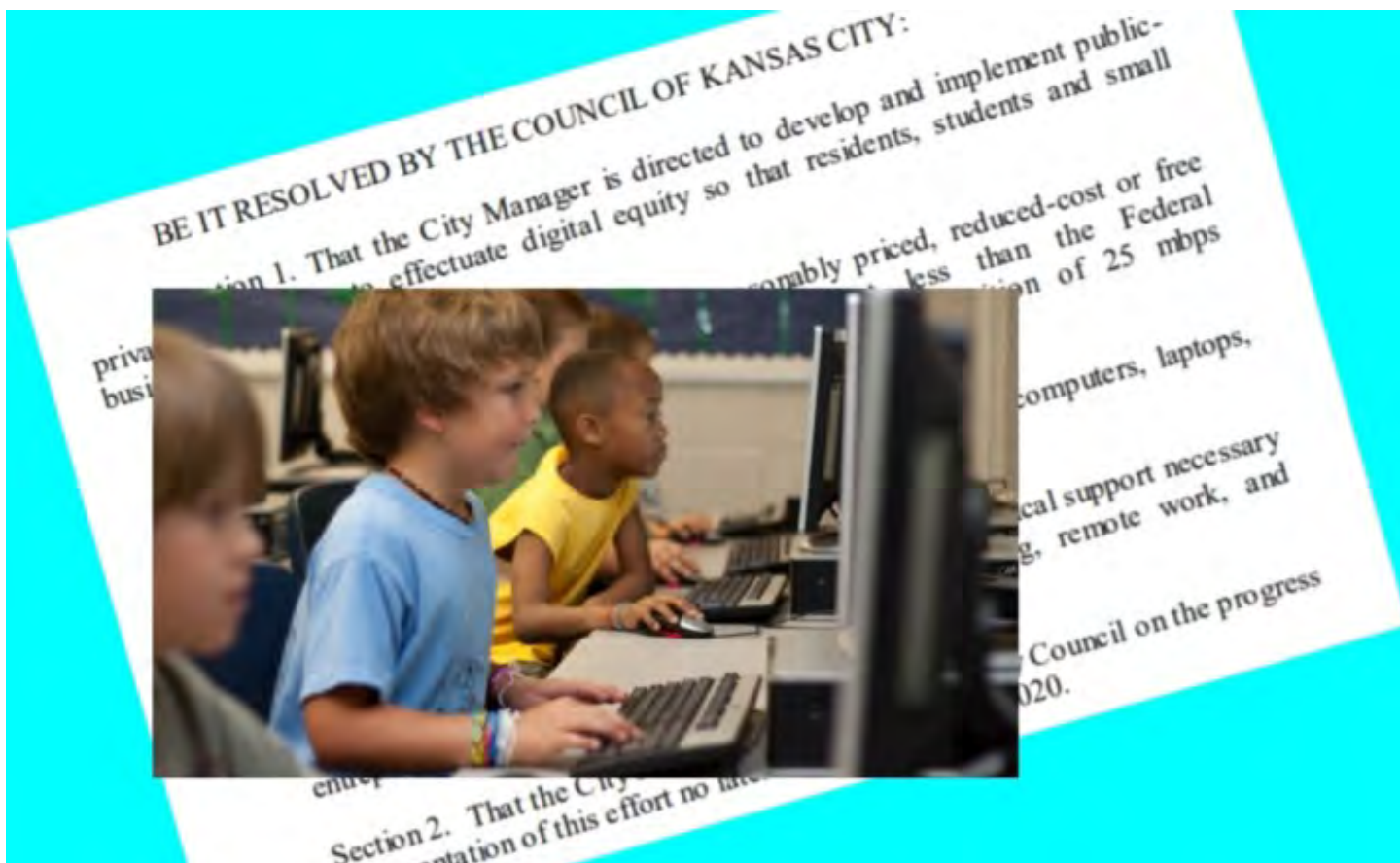
"You taught us of heroes in our community. We love you forever and that's why we sing . . . Tearo, Tearo, Ms. Condit we love you."



Condit and Bob Walkenhorst

The audacious goal: Get all of KC digitally connected, 'whatever it takes'

By Joe Robertson/LINC writer
June 08, 2020



Advocates for digital equity for all of Kansas City are [advancing a resolution](#) now before the City Council. Photo of students by [Connecting for Good](#).

Remember the heady days of Google Fiber’s big Kansas City launch some eight years ago?

To have so much high-speed broadband rippling into the metro’s digital infrastructure spurred high expectations of vast and revolutionary connectivity as the nation’s first Google Fiber City.

A resolution [now before the City Council](#) wants Kansas City to dream big again.

This is the “audacious goal” that Tom Esselman of [Connecting for Good](#), the [Kansas City Public Library](#) and other digital advocates want — that City Hall and a partnership of public and private forces resolve to do “whatever it takes” to get all households connected and functional on the Internet.

“Wireless access alone is not enough,” said John Horrigan, a Senior Fellow at the Technology Policy Institute and Senior Advisor to the Urban Libraries Council during a recent virtual forum with connectivity advocates in Kansas City. Neighborhoods need “wire-line broadband at home.”

Horrigan authored a 2019 report, funded by the Kansas City Public Library, that showed Kansas City [was lagging behind](#) the national average in advancing broadband into more homes.

The consequences of digital gaps exploded on Kansas City, as it did across the nation, when the COVID-19 pandemic shut down schools, set teachers and administrators scrambling to put education online, and sent millions of workers home.

Suddenly the disconnections throughout Kansas City laid bare the unequal opportunities for learning and working and networking.

The [KC Connectivity Report](#) recently published by MySidewalk found that nearly one-third of the households in the 3rd Council District in east Kansas City lacked internet access and one-fourth lacked a computer.

Thousands of school children were not connected, and the gaps fell heavily among low-income households and minority households.

School systems scrambled with the help of foundations and other philanthropic support to rush computers and hot spots into homes and neighborhoods, but inequities remain.

[LeanLab Education](#), a Kansas City non-profit organization that promotes education innovation, helped coordinate emergency technology efforts and surveyed the struggle among many area districts and public charter schools.

Despite heavy funding campaigns by foundations in support of schools, LeanLab reports, many gaps remain either because homes haven't been reached, hot spots sold out and couldn't meet the demand, or there is not enough tech support for families that received connections.

Hot spots, while important, are a limited, often poor-quality substitute for broadband, LeanLab founder and CEO Katie Boody said. The challenge ahead is marked by a lack of capital among schools, especially charter schools, that will be exacerbated by pandemic-caused cuts in state funding. The disruptive shift in how to deliver education is also a challenge.

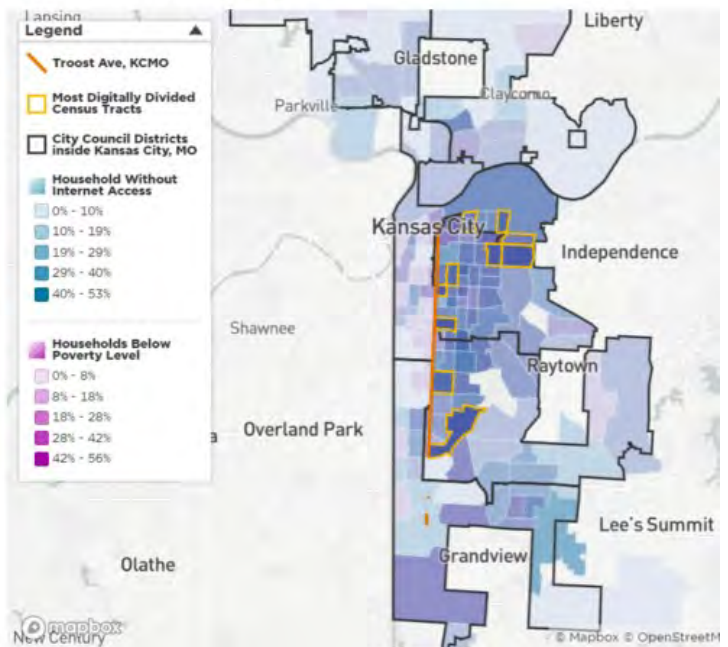
The [Urban League of Greater Kansas City](#) and the [Kansas City Coalition for Digital Inclusion](#) are teaming up to spur what the proposed city resolution says will be a public-private effort headed by the Kansas City city manager's office.

The resolution calls for digital equity so that all residents, students and small businesses will have services including:

- The ability to subscribe to reasonably priced, reduced-cost or free internet and/or wireless services providing not less than the Federal Communications Commission's ("FCC") broadband definition of 25 mbps download and 3 mbps upload speeds.
- Have access to free and/or low-cost personal computers, laptops, tablets and related hardware.
- Have access to training, education and technical support necessary to achieve economic mobility through distance learning, remote work, and entrepreneurship.

The resolution calls for the city manager to report to the City Council on the progress of the the effort by Sept. 1.

Dark Purple: Overlapping Households without Internet Access with Households Below Poverty Level



A map in MySidewalk's KC Connectivity Report shows the digital divide across lower-income neighborhoods. See the full report at <https://reports.mysidewalk.com/46060aa3cd>

