

# LINC Commission Meeting

April 17, 2023



## GETTING INTO THE FLOW

LINC Caring Communities students learn the power and peace of mindfulness and body awareness through yoga practice. Eight LINC sites currently offer yoga as a way to promote fitness and mental health.



# LINC<sup>SM</sup>

Local Investment Commission

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# 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, April 17, 2023 | 4 – 5:30 pm**  
**Kauffman Foundation Conference Center**

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## **Agenda**

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- I. Welcome and Announcements**
- II. February minutes**
  - a. Approval (motion)**
- III. Superintendent Reports**
- IV. New Commissioners**
  - a. Approval (motion)**
- V. Caring Communities**
  - a. Caring Communities Day, June 10**
  - b. LINC Summer Programs**
  - c. Yoga**
- VI. Digital Inclusion**
- VII. Bert Berkley Birthday**
- VIII. Adjournment**





## THE LOCAL INVESTMENT COMMISSION – FEB. 27, 2023

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

Bob Bartman  
Bert Berkley  
SuEllen Fried  
Rob Givens  
Anita Gorman

Tom Lewin  
Marge Randle  
David Ross  
Marj Williams

*A motion to approve the minutes of the Jan. 23, 2023, LINC Commission meeting was passed unanimously.*

Discussion followed.

### Superintendents Reports

- **Kevin Foster** (Executive Director, Genesis School) reported that the Missouri Charter Public School Commission voted 6-1 to revoke Genesis' charter. The decision followed a Jan. 30 public hearing at the Kansas City Public Library Bluford Branch. On Feb. 23 the Genesis board voted to appeal the decision to the Missouri Board of Education, which is expected to rule on the appeal at its April board meeting. Genesis has informed families and staff of their options should the MCPSC's ruling be upheld, and the board is pursuing alternative ways to serve families should the charter be revoked. Discussion followed.
- **Terry Ward** (School Board Member, North Kansas City School District) reported on the progress of the district's Grow Your Own initiative to identify and incentivize students to work to become teachers in the district. The first cohort of the Early College Academy recently graduated; the program provides the opportunity to earn college credit while gaining valuable college experience at Metropolitan Community Colleges and University of Missouri-Kansas City. The district has promoted **Rochel Daniels** to chief of staff with the expectation she will succeed **Dan Clemens** as superintendent next year. The district is concerned about the KCATA tax incentive program, which diverts public funding away from school districts including North Kansas City. District construction projects, including new elementary school construction, have added more than \$500 million to the region in the last 10 years.
- **Christy Harrison** (Assistant Superintendent, Kansas City Public Schools) reported that Dr. Jennifer Collier has been selected as the new superintendent. The Blueprint 2030 process has ended with the district deciding to close Troost and Longfellow elementary schools. The district is beginning the transition process for those schools' families; LINC staff have supported the process, especially during school tours.
- **Carl Skinner** (Deputy Superintendent, Hickman Mills School District) reported that the third session of the district's Adult ESL program will begin tomorrow. Ingels Elementary will be moving to an extended calendar with LINC's support. Last year the district opened the 6th Grade Center; next year it will be combined with 7th grade, and the 8th grade will be in its own building. The district is expanding its Real World Learning program to include training at Pinnacle Career Institute. The district is identifying and recruiting students who didn't graduate in 2020-2022 to return to the district to finish their work and receive a diploma.

- **Steve Morgan** (Assistant Superintendent, Fort Osage School District) reported six wrestlers qualified for state. Next year the district will partner with the Blue Springs School District on a business accelerator program for students to gain business experience in the community. Northpoint is building several projects in eastern Jackson County including a 10 million square foot office building; Northpoint will lease office space to the district for use in its alternative program. The district's east campus project, which will house maintenance, transportation, and technology, is ongoing.
- **Rick Chambers** (Director of Communications and Development, Center School District) reported the South Kansas City Chamber of Commerce gave an award to the district for its Real World Learning program; students have been building tables for a coffee shop in the Red Bridge area. The district has been involving students in leadership roles in two initiatives: the multiyear racial equity initiative, and the Communities That Care substance abuse initiative.

LINC Executive Vice President **Janet Miles-Bartee** introduced three videos showing LINC's work in the community around three initiatives: a holiday book distribution to students at LINC sites; the Toys for Tots holiday assistance partnership with the U.S. Marines; and the Girls on the Run initiative to boost girls' confidence.

**Rick Bien** of Lathrop GPM reported on recent developments with the Mo. Dept. of Elementary and Secondary Education; an interagency agreement could allow LINC's funding to be used next fiscal year as it is currently being used. LINC President **Gayle A. Hobbs** reported LINC has the support of the Governor and the Commissioner of Education. Miles-Bartee reported on a recent meeting with the Governor and reported that many people in Jefferson City are in support of LINC.

LINC staff **Bryan Shepard** reported on LINC's effort to connect area families with utility and rental assistance through walk-in clinics at Morning Star Youth & Family Life Center. LINC helped 1,900 households access \$2.8 million in Emergency Rental Assistance Program funds over a two-year period ending in January 2023. Morning Star Caring Communities site coordinator **Danisha Clarkson** reported that even though the ERAP program has ended, LINC staff are still assisting families in need with other forms of utility assistance as well as food and clothing. Caring Communities staff **Drake Bushnell** reported that LINC is also providing families with blankets, hygiene items, and other essential needs. A video of the effort was shown.

Shepard reported that LINC has partnered with the Kansas City Public Library and Black Archives of Mid-America to publish a second, expanded edition of the Kansas City Black History book that was published in 2020. The book has won several awards and is in great demand in the community. A video of poet **Glenn North** reciting his contribution to the book was shown.

**Marj Williams** reported that Black Archives of Mid-America recently held its annual awards luncheon, where LINC was represented. The luncheon featured Academy Award-winning filmmaker Kevin Willmott as keynote speaker.

Miles-Bartee reported that a LINC delegation also attended the recent Greater Kansas City Mayors' Prayer Breakfast. The mayors thanked LINC for its work in the community.

The meeting was adjourned.

# LINC COMMISSIONER NOMINEE



**Shalonn “Kiki” Curls**

In nine years on the Missouri State Senate and four years as a member of the State House of Representatives, former Senator Shalonn “Kiki” Curls worked tirelessly advancing the causes of Kansas City families and neighborhoods.

Senator Curls’ strength in building consensus on both sides of the political aisle showed her to be an effective negotiator in the issues of economic development, infrastructure, affordable housing, quality healthcare, criminal justice reform, children and families.

She held key leadership positions, including Assistant Democratic Floor Leader and Democratic Caucus Chair, and served as the Ranking Member on many major legislative committees, including Budget Appropriations, Transportation, Infrastructure & Public Safety, Gubernatorial Appointments and Small Business & Insurance. Her leadership helped see millions of dollars allocated for important programs and initiatives such as the Center for Neighborhoods at UMKC, the indefinite extension of the transportation sales tax, Kansas City’s Major League Baseball Urban Youth Academy and an Annual Public Health & Safety Fair that served more than 2,500 citizens.

Senator Curls currently serves as Deputy Director of the Heavy Constructors Association of Greater Kansas City after previously serving as a governor-appointed Commissioner for the Missouri Department of Labor and Industrial Relations.

She has served as President of Freedom, Inc., and President of the Missouri Legislative Black Caucus Foundation, which, through Kiki’s leadership, was able to award \$50,000 in college scholarships every year to deserving students throughout the state.

Senator Curls worked in real estate development prior to her political career. She received her education from the University of Missouri-Columbia and St. Teresa’s Academy in Kansas City. In her free time, she enjoys spending time and traveling with her children and grandson.

# LINC COMMISSIONER NOMINEE



**Shawn G. Foster**

Shawn Foster has used early household lessons in persuasion and passion to mold his life as a lawyer committed to giving voice and power to people who need it the most.

As the son of a father in politics, Shawn was raised on spirited debate. In his early years as a lawyer for insurance companies and Fortune 500 companies, he saw the imbalances between injured victims who had access to good representation and those who did not. Shawn shifted to devote his work to representing individuals who have been injured or wronged at the fault of someone else, seeking to give everyone fair and equal access to justice.

His work has valued making partnerships with clients and families, building a collaborative atmosphere in challenging times. The team approach has been successful for Shawn and has allowed for a diverse litigation practice. He has represented individuals injured by the negligence and fraud of others throughout the world.

Shawn is a founding partner of Preuss | Foster Law, an adjunct professor in Trial Advocacy and Constitutional Law at the University of Missouri-Kansas City, and a governor-appointed commissioner on the Jackson County Sports Complex Authority. He is a committee member for Legal Aid of Western Missouri, and a board member for the Kansas City Metropolitan Bar Association and the Missouri Association of Trial Attorneys.

He has been appointed to serve on national committees and his zealous representation of clients has been recognized by some of the most respected judges in the United States. His representations have resulted in hundreds of millions of dollars in recoveries for injured victims nationwide.

Shawn and his wife Heather have two children.

# LINC COMMISSIONER NOMINEE



**Matthew G. Haase**

Matt Haase has made his life's work building collaborations that help communities grow and thrive.

His career spans 18 years as a top aide for U.S. Senator Roy Blunt on his Congressional staff in Washington, D.C., and his Senate staff in Missouri, and now as the Senior Director for External Relations at the University of Missouri-Kansas City.

Originally from Springfield, Missouri, Matt started his career on Capitol Hill where he served in a variety of roles, including in the Office of the Majority Whip and as a Senior Legislative Assistant. Matt moved to Kansas City in 2009 and served first as the Kansas City Office District Director for Senator Blunt and then as the State Director. As a member of the Senator's senior leadership team, Matt advised the Senator on policy and strategic decisions, including major projects such as securing federal support for the Bannister Federal Complex and the Kansas City Streetcar Expansion.

In his many roles, Matt has actively engaged with community members, elected officials and business leaders, creating and sustaining partnerships to provide the most impact for Missourians.

Matt was recently selected for the Kansas City Chamber Centurions Leadership Program's Pinnacle Class of 2025.

Matt has served as Vice Chair of the Legislative Affairs Committee for the Northland Chamber of Commerce, as a member of the Legislative Committee for the Economic Development Corporation and the Public Affairs Committee of the Greater KC Chamber of Commerce.

Matt lives in Kansas City with his wife Molly and his daughter Betsy.



# ‘Most fortunate man’: LINC’s founder at 100

April 13, 2023

Joe Robertson, LINC Writer



To find Bert Berkley, you push a doorbell set in a ceramic rainbow trout, and the man himself, on the verge of 100, stands at the threshold, beckoning visitors into the ambiance of the life he’s lived.

Those are Colorado River bluffs on the giant painting in his living room. Native American sculptures stand on the fireplace mantle, gathered among other mementos from travels in British Columbia, the American Southwest and elsewhere. Touchstones from Bert’s fishing trips and work that took him around the world.

And in corners of special warmth stand portraits of his beloved Joan — pronounced Jo-Ann — recalling their 64-year marriage in adventurous love.

He is a humble marvel.

Consider that Bert was approaching his 70s when he founded LINC – Kansas City's Local Investment Commission – which has nothing to do with stocks and bonds but everything to do with investing in children and families. It was right here in his living room, as if in an epiphany, that he drew up the plans for his revolutionary non-profit.

That was more than 30 years ago.

The civic giant — named Mr. Kansas City in 1971 — and former longtime CEO and president of the still family-owned-and-run Tension Envelope has powered on, seemingly non-stop, while LINC’s Caring Communities mission grew and evolved beyond his early imaginings.

“The secret is exercise,” muses the man born during the Harding Administration. He still works out on a stationary recumbent bike after he had, into his late 80s, practiced a frequent regimen of climbing 600 stairs — 40 times up and down the 15 steps of his staircase.

Not to mention all of his and Joan’s backpacking and high-adventuring . . .

But he also carries a debt.

So much of it weighs from the consequences of what he calls his biggest mistake. He accepted an offer from the U.S. Army that allowed him to come home one day early from his service in World War II — if he signed up for the Army Reserves.

Four years later, unexpectedly, the Army summoned him back for 17 months of additional service, 11 of which were spent in Korea in combat where, Bert said, he was a First Lieutenant, Infantry, “expendable.”

He remembers clearly, soon after he returned 71 years ago, walking a Florida shore with Joan. They shared a somber ocean view with their friend Louise, the widowed wife of Korean War casualty Dick McKinstry, and Louise’s two small children.

Somewhere along the walk, the boy — 5 years old — stopped his padding through the sand, raised his chin and looked young Bert in the eyes.

This is the salty-aired memory that chokes Bert’s voice.

“He asked me, *“How come you came back and my daddy didn’t?”*”

He knew then what he knows now — that the boy’s father, Bert’s friend, had been in a foxhole hit by a mortar shell and died immediately.

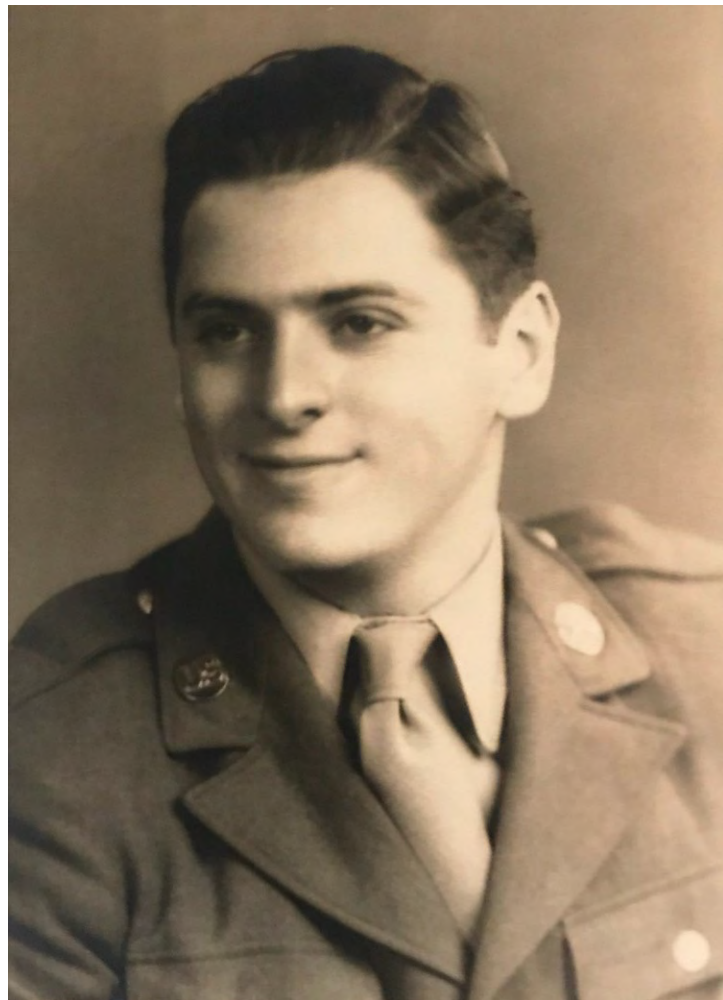
He knew that 11 of the 15 men on the Army plane that had delivered Bert to the war died there.

He knew he had feared for his life the same as his friends and the men under his command and that his own foxhole thoughts to survive the night firefights ached with one desire:

“I had to get back to Joan.”

If he could somehow get out of Korea alive, he committed to himself, he would spend his life giving back.

And somehow he’d come home “without a scratch.”



But he could not tell these things to a 5-year-old boy. All he could do on that beach was kneel down to meet the little boy's eyes and answer the giant question they shared by saying, "I just don't know."

That is why it is no trite observation — when someone takes measure of Bert's fully lived life as a friend, husband, father, grandfather, great-grandfather, innovator, adventurer, leader and community builder — that Bert says:

"You're looking at the most fortunate man you've ever met."

## Love stories

*How annoying.* That's how Bert remembers it. He's recalling the first night that he and his two best friends — Ed Kander and Bud Meinrath — were reunited in Kansas City, 1946, all returned from their service in World War II.

"The three musketeers were once again together," he said, but first the three of them plus Ed's little brother, John Kander, had been diverted by an errand to pick up Bud's little sister arriving from St. Louis by train at Union Station.

The last time he'd seen Bud's sister was at a farewell dinner at the Meinraths' home right before Bert dispatched overseas. She was 16 then — five years younger than Bert — a "shy, soft-spoken girl in a little white dress."

Bert was sent to the Philippines where, because of his Duke University education, the Army thought he'd make an excellent quartermaster, so he ended up managing an equipment and supply depot instead of meeting combat in his first experience with war.

During those 22 months, he gave little thought to Joan. "She was not on my radar."

At Union Station, he and his friends watched the crowds of arriving passengers coming through the brass doors, Bert impatiently.

That little sister who appeared before them, of course, was Joan — now 18, and suddenly, it seemed to Bert, "a stunning, beautiful woman."

After quick kisses for Ed, Bud and John — and a prim handshake with Bert — Joan locked arms with Ed, Bud and John and they marched spiritedly across the Union Station floor, with Bert stumbling behind them, "hardly able to breathe."

But he was saying to himself, "Someday, someday I'm going to ask that girl to marry me."

He was as sure then of his future love life as he already was of his career plans.





No one was going to have to prod Bert into a role with the family's successful business. Tension Envelope "was the only job that ever interested me," he said.

He was enthralled by the habits of his "workaholic" father — E. Bertram Berkowitz — a "mechanical genius," Bert said, whose 30 patents numbered more than those of the rest of the envelope industry combined.

His father often would work at night at home, drafting letters and plans. He spoke his ideas into a dictaphone to be transcribed and distributed the next day. Bert would listen, just as he listened to the sales and business talk when his parents hosted sales representatives for dinner.

Bert imagined himself stepping into increasingly important roles in the company that his grandfather and great uncle — William and Maurice Berkowitz — started in Kansas City in 1886 as a small, advertising novelties print shop.

The company turned to envelope manufacturing after William Berkowitz noticed most KC businesses were getting envelopes from Chicago or St. Louis. The company bought an envelope folding machine and brought it back in 1894 to be the first such machine as far west as Kansas City, and business boomed.

Machinery and production fascinated Bert the same as it did his father. He trained for big business, first at Duke, then, after World War II, at Harvard Business School. He changed his last name to Berkley at 18 in 1941. He never hid his Jewish background, but in an increasingly anti-Semitic world, he said, he wanted a chance for people to get to know him first.

What a great setup it was.

Bert and Joan were in love. They married Sept. 1, 1948, and Bert returned from Cambridge, Mass., with his Harvard degree in 1950, just starting his Tension dream job and dream life . . .

## **You've opened the doors**

Korea was a jolt.

For two hard months in 1952 — 37 years before Missouri Department of Social Services Director Gary Stangler would look to Bert to reimagine the delivery of state services that would become LINC — Bert wasn't himself .

He was young and battle-shaken. His eyes still held the strain of the commander worrying who was on the next hill, his ears echoing with his urgent radio calls for air support. Yet, at home he found himself mixing with people who didn't even know where Korea was.

"I was egotistical," Bert said. It took Joan's patience and gentle prodding to get him past the arrogance of having survived two wars.

"She cracked my shell . . . and made me a human being again."

She was his "nature girl," drawing him into the outdoors, taking their Scamp trailer to national parks.

When their children arrived — Janet in 1955, Bill in 1956 and Jane in 1959 — nature adventures became a family vocation.

Tension Envelope continued to expand its reputation through an intense commitment to high technology and production.

Bert, as the third-generation leader, moved up to president of Tension in 1962 as his father stepped into the role of chairman. Bert would run the company for 27 years, then follow the same succession plan, succeeding



*Tension Corporation's Kansas City office and manufacturing plant*

as chairman in 1988 at the age of 65 as son Bill became the fourth generation of the family to lead Tension. Over the years, the innovative company — now Tension Corp. — diversified into packaging and automation for both e-commerce and pharmaceutical drug fulfillment. The corporation now employs more than 1,100 people in nine plants across the United States, China and Taiwan, with annual sales of more than \$300 million.

It was certainly a treat, son Bill says, to have been able to grow into his role as president, working with his father and family. “In a family owned business,” Bill said, “there is a unique opportunity to create a culture of quality, innovation and high expectations, and an environment that cares a great deal about associates.”

“Bert really believes in listening,” he said.

Along the way, in the civic world, Bert accumulated an enormous record of leadership roles, including head of the Kansas City Civic Council, chairman of the Greater Kansas City Chamber of Commerce, memberships on library and park boards, roles with the Kauffman Foundation’s entrepreneurial programs and the area United Way . . .

Enter Stangler.

The DSS director and Bert were strangers when Bert accepted an invitation in 1989 to join Stangler's proposed business roundtable to explore ways his department could operate more efficiently.

It was a surprising request. Here was a bureaucrat, Bert said, who was willing “to have his kingdom taken apart and put back together.”

For several months the roundtable engaged in fact-finding, process-reviewing, and journeys into the field throughout the state, including a visit to the neonatal ward at a St. Louis hospital. Stangler, in a 2001 interview with LINC, told of the “personal epiphany” he saw in Bert as he cradled a preemie baby in his hands.

“From that moment,” Stangler said, “Bert was committed to the agenda.”

Bert immersed himself in the analysis and he could see needs for change, but was struggling for an effective approach. He bandied thoughts with a friend, anti-bullying author SuEllen Fried. She mentioned that a state program she worked with in Kansas was putting decisions in the hands of local providers.



*Boom.*

Bert said, “SuEllen, you may have just opened the doors.”

For more than two weeks, he composed a plan, drafting and redrafting, shaping ideas. He envisaged a volunteer commission of dedicated citizens, close to their communities. They’d divide into subcommittees by expertise and interests — like welfare reform, school-linked social services, children and families, healthcare and housing.

The commissioners would be the liaisons between state funds and the specific and changing needs of Kansas City-area communities. With the help of an advisory professional panel, the commissioners would make state resources rapidly responsive and creative.

Bert took the opportunity on a couple of business trips to try out his idea on directors of state social services in Iowa and Massachusetts. Both said a citizen commission wouldn’t work.

Undaunted, Bert laid his proposal on Stangler.

Stangler said: Good idea. Let’s try it.

## **You paid money for *that*?**

Great ideas can come while one, adrift on a boat, is casting a dry fly on a fishing line across a cold, clear mountain river.

Or while reading notes by candlelight in a tent sheltered against an Alaska tundra night.

Work colleagues and social service compatriots — including Stangler — noted over the years how Bert had a knack for brainstorming born during his escapes to wilder country.

Adventuring became a life-long passion for Bert and Joan, perhaps reaching their pinnacle when they embarked on a 17-day trek across the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge. Some days were harder than others with him carrying his 60-pound pack and she with a 40-pound pack. One day, encountering especially difficult terrain of boot-sticking mud, they were brought to their knees when they finally reached the evening campsite and helped each other take off their packs.

They were both exhausted, but 20 minutes later they were helping prepare dinner.

Joan was a skilled photographer and Bert had a video camera. They had friends over to view a film show of the trip and when it was over, after some meaningful silence, one of their friends said, “You paid money to do *that*?”

In his late 40s, a friend introduced Bert to fly fishing in



New Brunswick, Canada. And there began what has become a five-decade love affair with a catch-and-release game of patience and guile in havens of quiet beauty.

Bert loves the contest.

“I fail to understand,” he says, “how a fish with a brain the size of a pea can outsmart me time after time.”

Still, he’s hooked bonefish in the Caribbean, salmon in New Brunswick, Canada, and rainbow trout in Montana with dedicated skill – precise and calculated casting, then waiting patiently but queued for the split second a fish bites, hooking the fish, letting it play, reeling it in, letting it run, reeling it in . . .

Nature delivered humbling lessons in patience, perseverance and adaptability.

And the creation of LINC required all three of those virtues, and more.

He began assembling an experienced and diverse team of original commissioners, including Rosemary Smith Lowe, Herman Johnson, Adele Hall, SuEllen Fried, Anita Gorman, Jack Craft, Oscar Tshibanda and Landon Rowland.

LINC hired Gayle Hobbs to be its executive director, who’d formerly worked the Capitol halls in Jefferson City with the state’s Division of Youth Services.

Into the community they went to sell the idea of an intermediary non-governmental organization that was dedicated to listening and learning the specific needs of unique communities and making state resources work for them.

“We met a lot of skepticism and got a lot of negative questions,” Bert recalled. Neighborhood associations and their leaders had seen too many well-intentioned groups come and go with failed, prescriptive plans to help.

LINC proved itself different.

## **Ready. Fire! Aim.**

When President Bill Clinton set out during his first term on a federal effort to create welfare-to-work programs, his model was already at work right here in Kansas City.

LINC’s collaboration with the state Department of Social Services and the local Full Employment Council was breaking new ground in putting together case management to help train both welfare recipients and participating employers to make job placements stick.

This Kansas City effort also created an innovative system to allow newly working parents to keep childcare benefits and other supports that welfare-to-work families historically had lost when parents secured jobs.

LINC was fulfilling the mission Bert had described in the commission’s first meeting in 1992 — to think beyond demonstration projects that spent grant funds, earned pats on the back, then faded away.

“What we want to do,” he said, “is change the system.” And the way to do that was to listen to — and trust — each community’s residents and the workers on the ground and concentrate on reforms with outcomes.

And move with urgency.

“Ready. Fire! Aim,” he said that night. Do the research with the community. Make a plan and take action. Then assess and adapt as you go. Keep the work moving and don’t get lost in the typical bureaucratic function of committees and reviews that waste precious time.



*Some of LINC's original team members, left to right, were Bert Berkley, Herman Johnson, Rosemary Smith Lowe, Gayle Hobbs, Oscar Tshibanda and Landon Rowland.*

Clinton came to Kansas City in 1994 and 1995 to tout his welfare-to-work movement, using Kansas City as a teaching and motivating model.

The work of system change never was a popularity contest, Bert said. LINC was always about the work.

But it was a good moment, Bert said in an interview for LINC in 2001, during Clinton's 1994 visit as he arrived at an airport hangar, when then-Missouri Governor Mel Carnahan made some introductions, saying, "Mr. President, this is Bert Berkley, the founder of LINC." And Clinton beamed, "Oh LINC! I'm so glad to see you."

Over the next three decades, LINC continued to encompass more and more services.

It took on before- and after-school programming for the Kansas City Public Schools and other districts, connecting thousands of families to the breadth of Caring Communities services.

LINC led the legal struggle that compelled the Hospital Corporation of America to invest in charitable care after it purchased publicly funded Health Midwest, leading to the creation of today's Health Forward Foundation that has invested more than \$360 million in community health support in Kansas City.

When Covid-19 took a disproportionately heavy toll on some of Kansas City's most vulnerable neighborhoods, LINC rushed to make state and local partnerships to open a clinic with the Morningstar Youth and Family Life Center that resulted in more than 25,000 life-saving vaccinations and \$3 million in rent and utility assistance.

Those efforts and more — unimaginable when he drew up the plans 30 years ago — are what swells Bert's pride for LINC, the commissioners and their staff.

He's been involved in so many boards and associations, "but LINC," he says, "is the organization of which I am most proud."

## Thankful

Not that Bert is resting much.

The latest: He's deeply concerned about the state of reading education in America.

In December 2022 he wrote letters to the education directors of every state urging a return to dedicated instruction in phonics. Bert, through his family foundation, has endowed the University of Missouri-Kansas City with \$50,000 to recognize educators doing important work in phonics.

Ralph Smith, the managing director of the National Campaign for Grade Level Reading, praised Bert as “among the fiercest and most relentless of champions” of the American literacy campaign, describing him in a word — “indefatigable.”

Almost daily, Bert's daughter in Kansas City, Janet, and son Bill check in, either dropping by or on the phone. Bert and his daughter in Boston, Jane, talk nearly every night. Bert still enjoys hearing every day what's happening at Tension, Bill said.

Bill said he's also hearing frequently from friends and family that they can count on Bert to call on birthdays and anniversaries — all part of Bert's boundless enthusiasm for life.

“There's a zest there in everything he does,” Bill said. “He loved his work. He loves fishing. He loves family . . .”

Bert's planning his annual major fly fishing excursion. His entourage of family and friends have been alerted. He'll be 100 and back out to New Brunswick in September.

“Maybe I'll be able to get myself into the boat,” he says. “Maybe not.”

Bet on Bert slinging his masterful cast, enjoying the contest, holding up another salmon, fully in the moment, then returning the fish home.

“I have been very fortunate through my life,” he says. “I'm grateful I have been able to work with so many wonderful people to try and make positive change.”





# Save the date! LINC Caring Communities Day summer fair returns June 10

April 4, 2023

Joe Robertson, LINC Writer

*Get ready everybody! The 2nd Annual LINC Caring Communities Day coming June 10, 2023, promises more fun, more family resources, more games, prizes, music, dancing and lots of food. A thousand faces. A thousand smiles. Mark your calendar and read about the first annual Caring Communities Day, held in 2022.*

A thousand faces. A thousand smiles. Food for everyone. Games, prizes . . .

The first annual LINC Caring Communities Day in Kansas City was a huge hit — all under a big bowl of blue sky.

“This is the happening place for taking care of our community,” said Jackson County Executive Frank White, one of several public officials who joined the summer fair outside the Morning Star Missionary Baptist Church Youth and Family Life Center at 27th Street and Prospect Avenue.

“Whatever it might be (that a family needs),” White said of the services and activities sprawled across the church campus, “it’s here today.”

The rhythm hits you first. Dance beats shook the soundstage, luring the approaching crowd ahead of the smell of grilled hamburgers and hot dogs.

Group dances on the asphalt followed soon after: *“To the right, to the right, to the right . . .”*

But while partying to tunes like *The Cupid Shuffle* and the laughter of children made the day, more serious work really hit home, said LINC Caring Communities Coordinator Danisha Clarkson.

Because the fair also helped dozens of families and households get help with rent, utility bills and other services.

“The standout moment for me,” Clarkson said, “was helping a Wendell Phillips (Elementary School) family whose lights were cut off, and being able to immediately restore their service.”

The list of service partners was long: The Kansas City Fire Department, Community Action Agency of Greater Kansas City, Every, Spire, Justice in the Schools with Legal Aid of Western Missouri, voter registration with the League of Women Voters, job information with the Full Employment Council and take-home children’s books that LINC purchased



Among the many attractions for children were the “Hi-Striker” bell-ringer, above, and Hula Hoops, below.



Free ice cream and KC Wolf from the Kansas City Chiefs helped make Caring Communities Day a special treat for kids.





*The fitness dance team NickiFit leads some fair attendees in a dance in front of a stage filled with raffle prizes of air fryers and outdoor grills.*

through First Book .

“What a beautiful Caring Communities Day we had!” Clarkson said.

This is what LINC does, said Kansas City Mayor Quinton Lucas, who joined the crowd at the fair.

“Caring Communities LINC is invested in our city in so many different neighborhoods,” Lucas said. “You see so many people doing the work that makes a difference in our community each day. . . . The truth is, we (city government services) can’t do it all. It’s groups like this that do.”

Children went home with some 1,500 new children’s books.

Families and children won more than a thousand game prizes. Eight raffle winners went home with an air fryer or outdoor grill.

University Health distributed 125 bags of fruit.

Adults and kids ate some 1,300 hamburgers and hot dogs and 500 ice cream treats, plus snow cones and cotton candy.

Dozens more registered to vote, learned about free legal services, applied for home internet discounts or got help with utility bills and rent.

“It was just terrific, terrific, terrific,” said Morning Star Missionary Baptist Church Pastor Rev. John Modest Miles.

“You could see the community really, really enjoyed it — the hundreds and hundreds of people. It meant so much.”

Miles thanked the many partners in the effort with the church and LINC, especially the Kansas City Fire Department which was a key collaborator in putting together Saturday’s fair.

Fire Chief Donna Lake said she had to come out and see the celebration of “being able to give back” to the community.

“We really wanted to be out here for a great event like this,” Lake said, “with all these kids and families.”



*LINC team members keep score at the Pop-a-Shot game.*

While the fitness dance team NickiFit and DJ Carl led the show from the soundstage, one special performance dazzling the crowd was LINC’s drum line and drill team from Smith-Hale Middle School in the Hickman Mills School District.

Hickman Mills Superintendent Yaw Obeng watched their show as he joined the celebration of the community’s strength together.

“It sends a message to our students and our families that people do care,” Obeng said. “And the opportunities (families have) to reach out to the many organizations that are here — and (enjoy) ice cream and food — brings fellowship and camaraderie.”

Missouri state Rep. Ashley Bland Manlove surveilled the scene Saturday and saw everything that’s possible with so many neighbors binding together.

“I see a lot of families,” she said. “I see a lot of potential. I see a lot of room for engagement.”

The message is particularly important for the students and young adults she saw enjoying the fair.

“Our young people need to be stimulated,” she said. “Events like this help them see what giving back means.”

LINC [has been teaming with Morning Star](#) for more than two years, setting up a service hub for surrounding Kansas City neighborhoods that were most stressed by the pandemic. Services gathered at the site distributed more than 26,000 Covid vaccinations, accessed more than \$1.8 million in utility bill and rent assistance and distributed more than 3 million pounds of food since early 2020.

Saturday’s Caring Communities Day celebrated that work and the work of all of LINC’s Caring Communities serving neighborhoods throughout the area including in the Kansas City Public Schools and the Hickman Mills, Grandview, Center, North Kansas City and Fort Osage school districts.

LINC intends to make this an annual celebration, taking a Saturday each year in June to bring everyone together in a really big way.



*A member of Hy-Vee’s catering team grills some of the 1,300 hotdogs and hamburgers served at Caring Communities Day.*



# LINC children find power and peace in yoga

April 12, 2023

Joe Robertson, LINC Writer



*Center Elementary School students learn yoga's butterfly pose.*

Dreamy music rises in a classroom lit by slanting afternoon light. Children lie face-up on mats, limbs splayed.

"The peace . . ." says their instructor, seated at the center, in a solemn chant.

"*The peace,*" respond the children, their voices soft in echo.

"Begins. . ." she says.

"*Begins,*" they answer, like a heartbeat.

"With . . ."

"*With.*"

"Me . . ."

"*Me.*"

A second time, and then a third, yoga teacher Rasheedah Villarreal repeats the call and response with a dozen Center Elementary School students in LINC's Caring Communities after-school program, growing softer and more entranced each time.

In sessions like this, Villarreal and another yoga instructor, Danielle Small, are teaching LINC after-school students the power and peace of mindfulness and body awareness.

Both instructors bring an urgency to their work, determined to help children grow into adolescence with a reliable path to serenity and confidence.

“I don’t want you thinking about homework,” Small calls out to children lying on mats, getting into a yoga state of mind at LINC’s program at Truman Elementary School in Hickman Mills.

“I don’t want you thinking about chores,” she says. “Just look at the ceiling. Listen to the music. Whatever has made you mad or sad, I want you to release that energy . . . and bring your mind to stillness.”

These yoga skills, both Villarreal and Small say, are needed more than ever in a post-pandemic world that has levied more stress on young people.

They saw the youth mental health crisis in their other work in schools and each started their own yoga business with missions to bring comfort — Villarreal creating Social Emotional Yoga with Mrs. V, and Small creating Dani’s Dear You Yoga.

Villarreal was a counselor at Grandview Middle School. After the pandemic, she said, “I saw students were struggling with emotional regulation. They’re getting upset very quickly, they’re very anxious and they’re just really struggling to be in school every day.”

Small was motivated by tragedy. A former LINC Caring Communities coordinator, she was shaken like the rest of Kansas City’s Northeast Middle School community when a teenager who had been one of Small’s students in elementary school, died in a stabbing a year ago.

“It allowed me to see what our kids are struggling with — the mental health piece,” she said.

Small went into training in the past year to be certified as a yoga instructor because she saw a way she might be able to help other children.

“I really want to connect yoga to our youth,” she said.

LINC and yoga made perfect sense, they said.

LINC’s Caring Communities Coordinator Jason Ervin made the first connection with Villarreal to bring her program to Grandview Middle School and watched the LINC students — reluctant at first — get quickly absorbed.

“I thought it would be something good to implement a healthy lifestyle,” Ervin said. “To help kids relax and take their mind to a different place and learn things that could help them mentally.”



*Meditation is part of the yoga instruction at Truman Elementary School.*



*Rasheedah Villarreal of Social Emotional Yoga with Mrs. V leads students in stretching and breathing exercises at LINC’s Center Elementary after-school program in the Center School District.*

Soon other LINC Caring Communities coordinators wanted to expand yoga into their programs, so Ervin worked with Villarreal and Small to add more LINC sites.

Currently LINC is teaching yoga at eight sites — Belvidere, Conn-West and Butcher-Greene elementary schools plus the middle school in the Grandview School District; Center and Indian Creek/Red Bridge elementary schools in Center; Truman Elementary in Hickman Mills; and Hartman Elementary in the Kansas City Public Schools.

All of the LINC programs serve families in majority Black neighborhoods, and that’s important to the missions of the yoga instructors to reach children and families that might not otherwise have access to yoga.

“I’ve noticed that when you look at yoga practitioners and when you go to yoga classes, there are not a lot of people of color,” Villarreal said. “So the opportunity here is to show kids that yoga is for everybody.”

It is a new experience for many of the students, like Center Elementary student Alayshia, who was at times in silent meditation and at other times laughing with other LINC children as they learned stretches, poses and games.

“It’s my type of thing,” she declared of yoga, “because I never did this before . . . schools, like, never do this.” She completed extra work that Villarreal had offered students on skills like patience and the peace process, because, she said, “I just love it. I wanted to do it because I wanted to learn how to be patient.”

The yoga instructors are seeing the boys and girls in their programs build tangible, usable skills.

“You know how to take a deep breath,” Villarreal said. “You know how to walk away. You know how to reflect and sit back . . . (and) you can use mindfulness skills right in the classroom, right now, any day, any time.”

“You show them,” said Small, “with the stretches, that the more you focus on your inhales and exhales, it can be a very powerful tool in your everyday life.”

Listen to the roll call from some of the children in LINC’s yoga program with Small at Butcher-Greene Elementary School in Grandview, telling what yoga means to them.

“It helps me relax when I’m like kind of stressed out and had a long day at school,” said Keagan.

“It helps me calm down,” said Courtney.

“I like to be around people because it makes me feel supported,” said Dalia.

And Ry’Elle said: “It soothes me.”

They finish thinking good thoughts together, sitting up on their mats, symbolically bringing their hands — and their thoughts — to their hearts.

“I am happy,” they say, repeating after Small. “I am grateful for another day.” “And another breath.”

“*Namaste.*”



*Danielle Small of Dani’s Dear You Yoga leads a stretching and balance exercise with children in LINC’s Truman Elementary after-school program in the Hickman Mills School District.*



## AFFORDABLE CONNECTIVITY PROGRAM - REGIONAL OUTREACH

A snapshot of the KC region's digital inclusion efforts around affordability and the ACP

[Subscribe to Digital Inclusion News](#)

**67,058**

Households in the KC Region  
Enrolled in the ACP

**34%**

Enrollment Rate for Eligible  
Households

**19**

ACP Outreach Events Held

### Here's a regional outlook on Affordability.

In our bi-state region—and across the country—many low-income households struggle to afford their internet service. Each month, they must choose which expenses to pay and are often forced to pick rent, utilities and other critical expenses over the internet. They may rack up late fees, making an already too-high bill even higher—and get disconnected for nonpayment, leaving them without this service that is essential in today's digital economy.

The Affordable Connectivity Program (ACP) is a subsidy program provided by the FCC, and with its (up to) \$30/month discount, it has not only lowered the internet bills of eligible low-income households, it has influenced some internet service providers to offer plans that are 100% covered by the discount, making internet service free for those who can select such a plan.

Notably, the ACP prevents credit checks, upselling and requiring contracts and requires that ISPs refrain from disconnecting service for 90 days. And if a household does end up getting disconnected, they do not need to pay off their balance to restore service.

But, none of this helps if a household is unaware of or unable to sign up for the ACP. Our evidence shows that awareness of this program is very low in our region among both low-income households and community-based organizations. Therefore, we are building on our work over the last two years through the [Internet Access Support Program](#), which has provided up to \$225 for past-due bills and an internet subsidy up to \$75/month for six months for about 1,200 households in the KC metro, by deploying a number of tactics to increase ACP awareness and enrollment. We also continue to bolster a comprehensive coalition of organizations familiar with serving diverse, low-income households and are experienced in helping their clients connect to other community resources like the ACP.

### Tools and resources

Download the [ACP Sign-Up Manual](#) – prepared by KC Digital Drive for local community organizations

[Share your ACP activities](#) to include in local monthly reports and newsletters

[Contact](#) us to learn more about regional planning or to request an ACP overview or ACP training for your staff

Download the Greater Kansas City ACP Enrollment Reports by month – prepared by KC Digital Drive. Reports feature YTD numbers as well as all time cumulative enrollment data; information is assembled when new data is released from [USAC](#).

[Oct 2022](#) – published on 12/1/22

[Nov 2022](#) – published on 1/4/23

[Jan 2023](#) – published on 2/7/23

Check out our [Internet Access Support Program](#) (IASP) to learn more about additional assistance we can provide and subsidies that may be available



THE FUTURE OF COMMUNITY DESIGN

## What If City Renters Had More Political Power?

Kansas City tenants have formed a power base and are seeking equal footing with the forces that have traditionally defined how the city is governed.

March 23, 2023 • Jared Brey

### In Brief:

- KC Tenants Power, a politically focused spinoff of a Kansas City tenants group, released a 30-page voting guide ahead of the April 4 municipal primary.
- The group asks candidates to sign a “co-governance pledge,” committing to advancing tenants’ goals and keeping them informed about the legislative process.
- KC Tenants has pushed for a range of anti-eviction policies and affordable-housing investments since its founding in 2019.

In 2019, Andrea Bough was a first-time candidate for the Kansas City City Council and KC Tenants was a fledgling organization pushing a [People’s Housing Platform](#) focused on renter protections and more affordable housing.

At first blush, they didn’t seem like natural allies. Bough had built a career as a real estate attorney, helping developers navigate the local permitting process to build some of the biggest projects in Kansas City. KC Tenants was focused on chipping away at the influence of for-profit developers and building power for low-income renters. But Bough attended the group’s city council forum and got its hesitant endorsement over an opponent who was more openly hostile to its aims.

“I would suspect that in their minds I was the lesser of two evils,” Bough says.

Bough is now running for a second term and touting legislative achievements, including a law that gives tenants a right to legal representation in eviction proceedings, which she developed in partnership with KC Tenants and the [Heartland Center for Jobs and Freedom](#). And she’s running with an enthusiastic “HELL YES” endorsement from KC Tenants Power, a partner organization to KC Tenants, which wrote in its new [voter guide](#): “Because of her background, in 2019 we were worried that if she got elected, Bough might be an opponent. We are thrilled to report that we were wrong, and Bough has become a steadfast champion.”

KC Tenants Power’s 30-page voter guide for the April 4 municipal primary election displays a level of power-building ambition that goes far beyond getting a few allies elected to the city council. The organization push-

es candidates to adopt a practice it calls “co-governance,” defined as “the process of consulting with the people most impacted by the issue at hand, ensuring those people are involved in the process every step of the way, amplifying their voices in and out of rooms they are invited into, voting alongside their demands, and giving them recognition, before, during and after, both publicly and directly.”

As the group expands its horizons beyond housing to [issues](#) like transit and public safety, it’s also seeking to redefine the role renters play in the political life of the city.

“We are not transient,” says Jenay Manley, a former KC Tenants leader who’s now running for a city council seat. “We’re not disengaged. We have *been* disengaged. People intentionally leave us out.”

## Building Tenant Power

Manley, a single mother of nine-year-old twins, joined KC Tenants in the fall of 2019 after hearing a friend speak at one of their events and realizing that lots of people were struggling to pay for basic needs like housing, and that it was a reflection of problems with the system rather than failures of individuals. She became the group’s City Hall liaison just before the pandemic began. Over the following few years, she would watch city council committee hearings while working the overnight shift at QuikTrip, a convenience store. Manley says she was watching partly to see what local leaders’ plan was to make sure people like her and her kids were OK during the pandemic.

“What I realized was they weren’t talking about people like me,” she says.

In its endorsement of Manley, KC Tenants Power noted that she helped lead a group of organizers that secured [a \\$50 million housing bond](#), and wrote that she “is a damn good listener, negotiator, and relationship-builder.” (One of her opponents “has nothing about issues on her website, but does have the Realtor’s endorsement, so there’s that,” the guide says.) Wilson Vance, the political director for KC Tenants Power, says the group is working to build governing power for low-income tenants before Kansas City becomes completely unaffordable to them.

“Poor and working-class people have been shut out of public conversations for so long,” Vance says. “We’re just not in the rooms [where governing decisions are made], and when we are in the rooms, we’re patronized ... The people who are invited into the rooms to play ball are those who have a financial interest in being in that room.”

## Pushing for ‘Co-Governance’

KC Tenants Power didn’t invent the term “co-governance,” but began refining it after Manley wrote a memo on the concept. The term “co-governance” or “collaborative governance” has been [used](#) to describe a range of practices aimed at building more robust democratic processes, says Hollie Russon Gilman, a senior fellow on the political reform team at New America, a left-leaning think tank in Washington, D.C. That can include things like the growing practice of [participatory budgeting](#), in which residents help make decisions about how public money is spent, or “citizens’ assemblies,” like one recently [conducted](#) in Petaluma, Calif., in which a

representative sample of city residents were paid to help plan the future of a public fairground.

“This is still a very inchoate space and part of what we’re trying to [sort out] is what is co-governance and what isn’t co-governance?” Gilman says.

Practices that could be described as co-governance have come from inside and outside of government, Gilman says. Broadly, they reflect a desire to build two-way collaboration between citizens and lawmakers, and address a “crisis of legitimacy” for American institutions.

“We have a very anemic idea of democracy in the U.S. Every two to four years you elect someone, less than half your community votes, and OK, goodbye. That’s not satisfying to people, aside from the fact that it’s led to inequitable outcomes,” Gilman says. “I think there is a growing appetite [for collaboration], and it’s exciting to see people be open to deepening some of these relationships.”

KC Tenants Power urges candidates to sign a co-governance pledge, with seven clearly defined bullet points. Some candidates and elected officials have claimed to be confused or turned off by the concept of co-governance as a potential blow to their independence, Vance says. But in those instances, KC Tenants Power reminds officials that co-governance is part of a spectrum of very common practices, like when councilmembers consult developers and their attorneys before passing zoning bills, or when state lawmakers back model legislation written by interest groups.

“When people say, ‘This is a new concept to me,’ I say, ‘You know what? I actually think you’ve been co-governing with corporations and people who stand to make a profit off of our community for a long time,’” Vance says.

When it came to the tenant right to counsel bill that Bough sponsored, she says KC Tenants wrote the bill in partnership with the Heartland Center and other groups and shared it with her office. Bough shared it with the city law department and helped identify cosponsors, while communicating the “brightline issues” that KC Tenants wouldn’t compromise on. They strategized together over who would publicly testify in favor.

“That really was kind of the epitome of co-governing,” Bough says. “A lot of people are afraid of that term — to some extent my campaign manager is afraid of that term — but that’s really what we do as legislators. We co-govern with the people.”





# 2023 Summer Programs

District	Location	Before & After Summer School	Summer Clubs
<b>Center</b>	Boone Elem.	June 5–30 7–8:30am & 1–6pm	
<b>Fort Osage</b>	Blue Hills Elem.		May 30–June 29
	Buckner Elem.		
	Indian Trails Elem.		
<b>Grandview</b>	Belvidere Elem.	June 5–30 7–9am & 4–6pm	
	Conn-West Elem.		
<b>Hickman Mills</b>	Dobbs Elem.	June 6–30 7–9am & 3–6pm	
	Ervin Elem.		
	Ruskin High		
<b>Kansas City</b>	Banneker Elem.	June 5–29 7–9am & 3:30–6pm	
	Foreign Language Acad.		
	Garfield Elem.		
	Gladstone Elem.		
	Holliday Montessori		
	King Elem.		
<b>North Kansas City</b>	Topping Elem.	June 5–29 (Mon-Thur.) 7–8:45am & 2:45–6pm	
	<b>Charter</b>	Lee A. Tolbert Academy	June 5–July 11 7–8am & 3:30–6pm

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