



Do The Right Thing For Kids
dothrightthingforkids.org

KCMSD School Board Report Card

Meeting Date: April 25, 2012

**All School Board members were present: West, Richey, Benson,
Carroll, Jackson, Kelly, Rea, and Wilson**

Report of the April 25, 2012 Kansas City Public Schools Board and Administration Meeting.

Do the Right Thing for Kids Board Watchers focus their evaluation of the meetings on academic achievement and its indicator--state accreditation. Many issues are discussed at meetings with board and administration members at the table. Some of these topics have only peripheral relation to whether students are learning what they need to learn. If this poorly performing school district is to experience a dramatic turnaround *the board must provide strong leadership*. Incremental change and much time spent on internal policy processes will not serve our students and the community. The change effort cannot be delegated to the administration. This is especially true when most of the top staff have left the district. Board members must look beyond their personal interests and agendas and raise their sights to grapple with crucial strategic challenges.

A major part of the meeting was taken up with several policy proposals that would impact the governance of the district including advocating for local control, changing the size and composition of the board, moving the election date, filling board vacancies and establishing an advisory committee. While these are worthy topics over the long run, their introduction at this time seems a little like, pardon the expression, "arranging the deck chairs on the Titanic." They may help to convince the State Board of Education of the school board's willingness to change (and maybe that is the purpose), but it seems highly unlikely that they will increase academic achievement in the near term. In fact, the policy issues deflect attention from the task that is Job One: academic excellence. A citizen asked during the public comment session why 1 in 3 first graders cannot read at grade level but 96% are advanced to the next grade. The answer from the administration was murky.

On the positive side, board watchers were glad to see a real give-and-take discussion of the proposals even though some of the discussion seemed defensive of the current system, i.e. putting current or retired teachers on the advisory board rather than outsiders with a different and perhaps threatening perspective.

Much is made of parent and community involvement as the key to achievement and accreditation. Certainly over the long run an engaged community will help build a stronger school district; however, we are waiting to see evidence of real community engagement as opposed to hype on the part of a few people. Three recent public meetings to discuss the governance ideas were attended by a total of less than 30 people. School advisory councils in

many schools never meet or are attended by a few people. The correlation between engaged communities and school achievement could mean that engagement brings about achievement. It could just as well indicate that strong achieving schools lead to an engaged community. The basic learning setting is the classroom and the person responsible for creating a learning environment is still the teacher. Citizens may help, but they cannot be held accountable for student learning. If we can build a fully accredited high performing district that the community is proud of, getting citizens involved will be no problem. This will take some major changes that threaten the status quo.

Other observations:

The new decor for the board platform is nice, and we appreciate improvements being made to the sound system. Another high priority for the audience is screens that can be read from around the room.

The Superintendent's report on the A+ Program was welcome. We look forward to the program being installed in all high schools.

The Scholar Superstars presentations tend to be over-long, and the technology needs to be tested before the meeting to avoid embarrassing the students and further affirming the unprofessional image of the district.

The financial report lacked any information for the audience: no handout, video or slides. Remember community involvement?

View the agenda/minutes of this meeting at: <http://www.boarddocs.com/mo/kanscsd/Board.nsf/Public>