



**Do The Right Thing For Kids**  
[dothrightthingforkids.org](http://dothrightthingforkids.org)

**Kansas City Public Schools Report**

**KCPS Board Meeting - June 27, 2012**

Do the Right Thing for Kids board watchers paid particular attention to factors important to providing students the quality of education they need and deserve. These included:

- Strong focus on academic achievement and full accreditation vs. internal processes, public image and minor issues;
- Commitment to a real turnaround strategy to overcome a culture of low performance, lack of professionalism and cronyism vs. a business as usual mentality;
- Strong leadership to the administration and the community vs. a reactive follower style;
- Full and honest reporting to constituents of important information about district issues vs. "managing" the news.

At board meetings, we hear lip service and see data about achievement but observe few bold steps to improve it. It seems much more business as usual. Discussions mention the hope of achieving five points on the DESE accreditation rating scale with four of these points having nothing directly to do with academic achievement. None of the informed citizens in the district with whom we have spoken think that marginal provisional accreditation is a worthy goal. Graduates need strong reading, math and citizenship skills. We learn there are no designated reading specialists in the district (contrary to practice in other districts), but not to worry, reading assistance is provided by volunteers. In what way is that a demonstration of commitment to achievement?

The dropout rate is 50 percent with 1 out of 3 students who cannot read by second grade and 40 percent by third grade. Is the saving of \$1.2 million from reducing the bus schedule from a 3-tier to a 2-tier system being devoted to these issues?

It is widely understood in many segments of the community that decades of a culture of low expectations, lack of commitment to professional standards, personal relationships that trump performance and an almost total absence of rigorous performance evaluation lie behind the current failure of the district. Until these issues are confronted and resolved there is unlikely to be major change. We hear descriptions of future plans to improve performance evaluation but talk with teachers who have not had a real evaluation in many years. Nothing strongly attests to "the spirit of transforming public education"--- the words of the board president. Very strong

leadership from the board will be required to overcome the administrative and educational inertia that has plagued the district and continues to do so.

A good deal of time at the last board meeting was taken up with issues important to some people but not directly related to achievement: renaming a school, a new diversion program and a student information system. The board needs to be careful that meetings do not turn into show and tell sessions with public relations values but little long-term payoff. Also, such discussions easily lead to micromanagement.

We view as ill advised and inefficient the emphasis on constituents playing a key role in developing procedures for evaluating the administration. Best practices in the field and experience of neighboring successful districts would be much more helpful than advice from citizens with little or no experience in program evaluation but vested interests in certain programs. Is the goal better evaluation or PR? Who is driving this effort?

We admire the good intentions of the board and administration and hope they can rise to the occasion and pull the district out of its spiral of dysfunction. It is going to take much stronger leadership than we are seeing.

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