



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

**Kansas City Public Schools Report**

**KCPS Board Meeting - July 11, 2012**

Four members of the Do The Right Thing for Kids board watchers group observed and evaluated the "workshop" board meeting. We looked for evidence of board and administration progress in the following areas that we deem crucial to the district's success:

- Is the school board in a **turnaround mode**? Are they focusing on strategic factors that will turn the organization from one that has historically been dysfunctional to a high performing system? And are they insisting that district administration focuses strategically on those factors? Or are they spending time on matters that won't help them get to where they need to go?
- Is **academic achievement** kept at the center of priorities and policy decisions? Are proven instructional strategies being implemented?
- Is the board avoiding **micromanagement**--getting involved in issues that deal with operations rather than policy, implementation rather than direction-setting, short-term complaints vs. longer term strategies?
- Are school board/administration meetings operated **efficiently** with an eye toward conserving resources, including time and dollars?

The July 11 meeting was devoted to monitoring, a worthy focus to making sure that appropriate data are collected to allow the board and administration to track district progress on several dimensions. Unfortunately the board watchers came away disheartened and critical. Here are some of the observations that pertain to the crucial factors listed above:

The meeting started half hour late, and then 1 1/2 hours were spent talking about how to present monitoring reports. Several board members expressed divergent opinions. No consensus was reached but much time was spent on a matter that should be left to the administration. Once the topic came up, the board "couldn't let go." One board member pointed out that presentations at RSIT meetings already provide the information on a monthly basis. In the same vein, the administration could have presented its system for monitoring progress for the board to critique and approve. DTRTFK observers "were frustrated and disappointed at the low level of the meeting."

The meeting provided an example of the backward technique employed by this board. Instead of assigning a small group to meet earlier and make recommendations to the full board, which would be standard practice with most corporate and nonprofit boards, this board did the opposite--a very inefficient approach that wastes resources.

We continue to be concerned about the push to involve “outsiders” in the monitoring process as well as in other district administrative issues. Putting a student in a spot where he is clearly in over his head, involving a union official in policy and administrative matters and pretending that a small group of community allies represents parents will not lead to greater effectiveness. It conveys a sense of gamesmanship rather than bringing the best resources to bear on reaching effectiveness.

We observe, again, that the policy governance scheme adopted by the board can get in the way of progress. Rather than an abstract policy outline the board leadership should be asking, "What crucial issues do we need to be dealing with to get this district turned around?"

Current practice allows for routine expenditure of millions of dollars without, so far as we can tell, rigorous board oversight. What checks and balances are in place to assure that money is being spent responsibly and in line with the board's priorities?

DTRTFK members hear continual concerns by community members about their inability to get answers to question about enrollment, the teacher corps, curriculum alignment, reading progress and many other matters. These seem like issues that should be solvable.

We continue to see a group of well-intentioned people pulled into a dysfunctional culture that is beyond their capacity to cut through. It does not help that time and resources are expended by some to create a favorable spin on a clearly dire situation. Court decisions that may allow transfer to other districts, a growing number of charter schools and marginal provisional accreditation at best threaten the district's survival. The successful effort to head off state intervention may backfire.

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