



Do The Right Thing For Kids
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KCPS School Board Report Card

Do the Right Thing for Kids Report June 13, 2012

To supporters of quality public education in Kansas City, Missouri:

For over four years members of Do the Right Thing for Kids have observed and evaluated Kansas City Public Schools board meetings. Initially our aim was to provide feedback to the board and the public about the board's performance in the hope that greater public scrutiny and accountability would help bring change in the quality of public education. Although doubtful that a major turnaround could be achieved within the current culture, we reserved judgment when Superintendent Covington arrived. Now with the loss of accreditation, continual shrinkage and depletion of leadership, and after seeing no real turnaround effort in this system in crisis, we have changed our focus to one of providing an evaluation of the board, administration and overall system in regard to **turnaround efforts**. We continue to have serious doubt that the Kansas City Public Schools system has the capacity and resolve to turn itself around by overcoming decades of dysfunction characterized by low expectations, cronyism and lack of professionalism.

Therefore, we have taken the position that *outside intervention will be necessary*. We supported the legislation that failed in spite of near unanimous initial support that would have allowed the Missouri Commissioner of Education to take control of the district and institute major changes that the current system does not have the capacity to achieve by itself. We believe that most members of the board and administration are sincere in their desire to do the best for children. However, many studies of successful turnarounds support our belief that a much higher level of functioning will be required to overcome vested interests and inertia.

Meeting Date: June 13, 2012

Do the Right Thing for Kids observers left this meeting more discouraged and frustrated than at any time recently. The cycle continues---another meeting that does not begin on time. The board president opens the meeting by asking members for commentary on learning for deep understanding, a question that has doubtful bearing in a district where too many children are reading well below grade level. After an administration presentation on academic achievement, the community and parents were asked for input on monitoring the administration, an issue that effective districts have resolved and another example of a group of well-intentioned individuals who do not have the experience and expertise to aggressively lead a major turnaround. For two years we have been hearing about policy governance. Are there not policies and procedures in place to monitor academic progress and administrative effectiveness?

We have grave doubts about the almost mystical belief that greater District Advisory Council (DAC) and parent involvement will drastically improve classroom learning. Certainly citizen participation is important, but where is the evidence that it will raise math and reading scores? Furthermore, the few individuals who claim to speak for all parents seem to be speaking primarily for their small in-group.

A district teacher reports that there is no reason for her to adopt a new curriculum or teaching strategies because there is a perpetual two-year cycle. In two years the superintendent will be gone and current programs will be scrapped. So the teachers just keep doing what they have been doing. It is easy to talk about 1.5 to 2 years of student academic growth in one year, but we see no solid plans for getting there, just vague talk of more professional development. Major improvement comes about through longer school days and school years, highly motivated teachers, administrations that support strong principals and other factors well documented in the education literature.

District representatives hold out hope that enough points will be earned on the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE) evaluation scale to earn *provisional* accreditation. Those possible points do not include solid academic achievement elements but have to do with such factors as courses offered in certain fields, etc. We deem this provisional accreditation, if it happens, completely unsatisfactory. Surrounding school districts are fully accredited, many of which have demographics comparable with KCPS students. Why not Kansas City?

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