

Adopted June 27, 2008

**Final Report and Recommendations
Kansas City, Missouri, School District
Education Reform Task Force
July 1, 2008**

To: The Honorable Members of the Kansas City, Missouri,
School District Board of Directors
Marilyn Simmons, President
Arthur A. Benson, Vice-President
Helen Ragsdale, Treasurer
Ingrid Y. Burnett
Duane B. Kelly
Joel Pelofsky
David A. Smith
Airick Leonard West
Ray Wilson

Dear President Simmons and Members of the Board:

We are pleased to submit the final report and recommendations of the Education Reform Task Force appointed in March, 2008, by David Smith during his tenure as president of the Kansas City, Missouri, School District Board of Education. On behalf of the entire task force, we appreciate this opportunity to support efforts to strengthen the process and promise of education in our city.

We submit this report well aware that this is not the end of the work that needs to be done, but merely a step aimed at achieving excellence throughout the district in academic outcomes, governance practices and community engagement. We know that you share this goal, and we hope this report will serve as a catalyst to bring a renewed sense of commitment across our city to work toward a unified vision of success for all of our children.

As we work toward this goal, we firmly believe that our children must be the central focus of our attention and concern. This report addresses many issues, all of which are important. But it is even more important that, as a community, we not only focus on the means of education, but also on the ends of education—our children and their future. We must stress that the overriding goal of this report is to equip our children with skills, to fill them with hope and to surround them with support.

We must also stress the importance of a unified vision that expresses itself in a broadly shared political consensus. The district can achieve lasting, positive results only if the community is united and committed to a shared vision of success. The entire community — every citizen, every civic leader, and every organization — shares in this

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responsibility. As divided as we may be on many fronts (race, ethnicity and socio-economic status), we all share common hopes and aspirations for our children. We can and we must unite around the education of our children.

We also submit this report with full respect for the complexity of the challenges in front of the board and the district staff and with our admiration for your dedication to your mission. We have heard from many people, and we are encouraged by the talent and passion evident in many district leaders and staff. Yet we have also seen evidence of significant gaps in performance that leads us to conclude that the district's progress toward excellence is not acceptable. Our assessments are candid, at times critical, but are offered in a spirit of hopefulness and with our pledge to continue to work with you and the broader community to build the outstanding school system our children need and deserve.

Sincerely,



Rev. Wallace Hartsfield
Co-Chair



Susan Stanton
Co-Chair

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**Kansas City, Missouri, School District
Education Reform Task Force**

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Rev. Wallace Hartsfield
Susan Stanton

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Background

In March, 2008, David Smith, then president of the Kansas City, Missouri, Board of Education, appointed a civic task force to develop a strategy to rebuild community confidence in and support of the school district through greater academic achievement and more effective policy leadership.

The task force, which was co-chaired by Rev. Wallace Hartsfield and Susan Stanton, was asked to identify ways in which parents and the broader community can support the district to advance progress in each of the five work areas outlined for the School District by DESE (the Missouri State Department of Elementary and Secondary Education), including the following:

Academic Achievement

1. Student performance
2. Highly qualified staff
3. Facilities, support and instructional resources

Policy Leadership

4. Parent and community involvement
5. Governance

A complete Statement of Purpose is enclosed at the end of this report.

Methodology

The task force held a series of seven meetings, each about three hours long. The meetings included reports from district staff, as well as testimony from a wide range of stakeholders, including current and former district board members, administrators, principals and teachers, as well as parents and representatives of ethnic communities.

The task force also received public comments at each meeting and fostered public awareness and input by posting materials on the district web site and making itself available through email and other means. In addition, the task force held three evening public hearings at Paseo High School, Trail Woods Elementary and Hartman Elementary. The hearings were attended by a total of approximately 250 people and featured testimony from approximately 60 people, including parents, students, teachers and staff, concerned patrons, neighborhood leaders, business owners and representatives of community-based agencies. The task force also read numerous articles, reports and other materials developed in response to questions raised.

The task force based its findings and recommendations on the testimony and public comments received and the reports reviewed during this process. We did not conduct independent or original research.

We are grateful to all those who provided testimony. These perspectives form the foundation of our findings and recommendations. We are also grateful to the KCMSD staff for its support and consistent responsiveness to the task force throughout this process. In particular, we appreciate the assistance of Dr. John Martin, Dr. Clive Coleman, Cecilia Spears, and Andre Riley.

General Findings

The task force finds that the performance of the Kansas City, Missouri, School District is unacceptable. Academic outcomes are not sufficient, district governance and management practices are unstable and unreliable, and the community is inadequately engaged. Even the minimum expectation of quality – state accreditation – remains elusive.

We have learned a great deal during our study, and we have come to respect the complexities of managing and teaching in a community that is characterized by a wide range of interests and that faces special challenges, such as entrenched poverty and diverse student and family issues. However, we firmly believe that excellence in this district is attainable and that the community should expect nothing less.

We reach this conclusion with the following in mind:

Responsibility. In its deliberations, the task force consistently affirmed three core beliefs:

- All children can learn.
- All children must have a sense of hope for their future.
- All children need to believe and see daily evidence that their success is actively supported by their families, their teachers and the broader community.

We believe, therefore, that it is the paramount responsibility of the entire community to provide the systems and resources for all children to receive a quality education. The board and staff of the district have a primary role in meeting this responsibility, but cannot achieve success without a highly engaged community that provides support to the district, as well as resources and guidance to help children achieve their full potential.

Commitment. The task force is committed to work toward unifying the community around this goal. In our deliberations, we came to an early recognition that we must build a new community context that provides the district with both a base of support and a clear source of accountability. We find that many district patrons have disengaged from active participation in the district, in part because district affairs have often been characterized by conflict and because the district has not organized itself in ways that facilitate either engagement or accountability to community expectations. We believe that the greatest contribution of the task force may lie in its ability to be a catalyst for creating a new type of community engagement – one that is characterized by a common vision, strong partnerships, positive engagement, and clear accountability to outcomes.

Strengths. While the performance of the district is far less than it needs to be, we find that it is better than is commonly perceived or portrayed. Indeed, the district has many highly qualified, dedicated and effective administrators and teachers who care deeply about their mission and who help students achieve strong outcomes. There are several effective community partnerships and highly engaged parent groups at many schools. The district also has several noteworthy academic programs and schools, such as the

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Central High debate program, The Lincoln College Preparatory Academy, the Chick Elementary Afrikan-centered collegian campus, and the Paseo jazz ensemble, to name only a few. We were especially touched and impressed by several students who testified before the task force and demonstrated an exceptional sense of confidence, pride and achievement.

Deficiencies. Despite these strengths, the governance and administrative systems of the district have not delivered consistent outcomes. The district has adopted reform strategies but they have either not been implemented or had the intended impact. We also find that community confidence in the district is low, and the district has extraordinary problems in maintaining basic levels of customer service and communications. Administrative systems are not adequate to allow for effective management and accountability of either strategic objectives or daily operations. Significant change in how the district is managed is required to improve both the reality and the perceptions of the district's performance.

Interrelatedness. The task force findings embrace academic success, governance practices, and community engagement. Each of these areas requires a distinct strategy; however, we believe that progress in each of these areas is dependent on progress in all. Reform in the district must be focused, but it must also be comprehensive. For instance, we believe past efforts to improve academic success have not succeeded because they have not been supported by reliable governance or have not been understood or embraced by the community. School reform is like the proverbial "three-legged stool" that is supported equally by effective strategies in the classroom, in the district offices and in the community.

Urgency and Opportunity. The task force members share a high sense of urgency to develop a clear and effective strategy for achieving strong academic outcomes and restoring confidence in the direction of the district. With each passing day, we deprive children of a future that we owe to them, we enervate the community's sense of self-confidence and we undermine the attractiveness of this city as a place to live and to invest.

We also believe that community concern and frustration about the performance of the district is intense and continues to mount, which is evidenced by declining enrollment, the passage of the measure to divest several schools, and the level of debate about alternative models of governance. Yet, in this profound desire for change lies an opportunity to bring reform and meaningful progress. This community once was known for its ability to rally in response to crisis. We believe we are, indeed, in a time of crisis, and we find hope in the increasingly urgent calls that we unify ourselves in support of all the children of this city.

Recommendations

The task force is asked to identify the top three actions that the school district can take to advance progress in each of the five work areas outlined for the school district by DESE (the Missouri State Department of Elementary and Secondary Education):

- Student Performance
- Highly Qualified Staff
- Facilities, Support and Instructional Resources
- Parent and Community Involvement
- Governance

Our specific recommendations are related to each of these areas in the summary table at the end of this section of the report.

Need for Significant Change

The task force believes that significant change is required in how the district is managed to achieve actual progress toward the DESE goals and to instill confidence across the community in the progress and direction of the district.

Implementation of past plans has been impeded by a broad range of competing issues, board and organizational dynamics, community discord, ineffective administrative systems, and individual employees not performing at the level necessary. There are certainly many talented, hard-working and well-intended leaders within the district, but this alone has not been sufficient to overcome impediments to sustained and uniform success among children.

The task force believes that some changes in personnel may be necessary, yet we believe equally that merely changing individuals in key leadership positions is not sufficient – a broader set of changes embraced by the community is necessary to allow district leaders to be effective over time.

The recommendations focus on seven key elements of change:

- Build on existing foundations
- Clarify vision
- Recast board leadership practices
- Rebuild administrative systems
- Implement academic strategies
- Foster high expectations
- Engage the community

Build on Existing Foundations

Build on Existing Assets

We believe the district should begin its reform effort by learning from and extending strategies that work. The district should develop an intentional method to identify and deploy assets that include strong principals in certain schools and effective instructional practices. For instance, the Afro-centric themed schools have demonstrated a higher

degree of success, not only because of the relevance of the theme to students, but also because they employ techniques that create an effective teaching environment. The use of these techniques could be promulgated throughout the district, even in schools with other themes. Centers of excellence throughout the district should be identified, studied to determine the ingredients of success, and systematically supported. A system should be set up to expose these successful practices and to disseminate them throughout the district.

Implement Previous Reports

The strategies and directions in previous reports and analysis of district practices can form the basis of a reform strategy. Certainly annual audits can be useful guides to strengthening administrative systems, and the Missouri School Improvement Plan and follow-up implementation plans give clear guidance on where improvements need to be made to secure accreditation. On-going programs, such as Head Start, are regularly assessed with improvement recommendations, and internal reviews of other programs are conducted with regularity. These kinds of reports offer clear guideposts for improvement, although many programmatic and management decisions do not seem linked to these assessments.

The 2006 Council of the Great City Schools report, in particular, seems to provide a thorough and valid road map for achieving high performance. It receives special attention in this report because it touches on many of the policy, administrative, academic and engagement issues that have been reviewed by the task force. The task force is disappointed in the district's inability to provide a complete statement of progress on implementation of the report, despite repeated requests.

Nonetheless, rather than generating a new list of priority strategies, especially for academic achievement, the task force confirms the efficacy of this report as a guide for strengthening district performance and we recommend that its implementation be given top priority. We also strongly recommend that the district continue its alliance with the council, and we are encouraged that the council is supporting the newly elected school board and the administrative staff in strategic planning.

Clarify Vision

Articulate a Vision of Unified Community Expectations.

The district, in partnership with the community, must articulate a broad but clear vision that sets a tone of hope and high expectations for children and conveys to young people that the entire community embraces their success. A vision of possibility and community support should drive the operating plan of the district, not test scores, or logistical and business decisions.

The community and district personnel must be engaged in constructing and understanding how this vision relates to the goals and policies of the district. The vision should not be merely rhetoric, and it also should convey more than community aspirations. Instead, it should be compelling enough to inspire and unify the community,

and yet, specific enough that it can guide and inform both strategic and operational decisions. Properly crafted, a vision can set the tone for positive momentum and the structure and discipline to guide decisions.

The process of developing and embracing the vision can be an effective way to engage the broader community, and the task force stands ready to play an active role in this process. As a beginning point in this process, we suggest that a vision statement must reflect a commitment from the people of Kansas City to support schools that teach all children to the highest standards, ensure they learn, expect the best of them, care for their well-being, invest in their future, and welcome their full participation in the progress of our community.

Recast Board Leadership Practices

Develop Policy Leadership

The school board does not function in an effective manner. While the new board has not been seated long enough to draw firm conclusions, board practices have been characterized by inordinate attention to transactional matters, contentiousness in deliberations, sidestepping management channels, inconsistent adherence to policies, and orderly, transparent decision making.

The school board must change the manner in which it governs. It must develop new capacities to provide clear policy-oriented oversight, build and engage a healthy community support system, and retain talented and responsive professional leaders committed to the vision of the district. The board should take steps to ensure a healthy board culture that transcends changes in office holders. These measures should include DESE-sponsored and other policy governance training, adopting and monitoring adherence to formal board practices and codes of conduct, strengthening internal and external board communications practices, undertaking regular goal-setting and team-building processes, assessing and improving board/management relations, and other measures. The task force has three specific observations that may help this process:

1. We believe that the board must focus on understanding, improving, and using state-identified governance documents as a primary vehicle for governance. Many of the deficiencies noted by the task force can be traced to insufficient use of one or more of these key governance tools: Board policy statements, the Comprehensive School Improvement Plan, the Annual Budget, the Superintendent Evaluation, the District Professional Development Plan, and the Meeting Agenda. These tools are specifically enumerated and exclusively assigned to the board by Missouri statute and/or code and should shape all district action and procedure. Board members and administrators have advised the task force that the governing documents are not sufficiently reviewed, understood, or employed by the board, even though effective use of these governance documents forms the basis of the DESE accreditation evaluation process. The board needs to institutionalize the use of these documents in order to advance educational outcomes and to avoid distracting influences.

2. The task force believes it is imperative that the board develop a pattern of governance that systematically reaches out to a variety of community constituent groups to actively seek and build a community consensus on both strategic directions and significant policy and programmatic decisions. The board has taken positive steps in community engagement through formation of this task force and the inclusion of the community in key decisions, but the district needs to more significantly expand the level and effectiveness of community engagement. The board must not be passive in this regard, but actively lead the process of community engagement and consensus through its own decisions and through the expectations it sets for district and school administrators. Groups such as the District Advisory Council and School Advisory Councils should be fully utilized as an important vehicle for this process.

3. The task force is concerned that several issues and challenges that have prevented implementation of the Council of the Great City Schools report still exist. The task force is not convinced that the administration and board have overcome issues that include:

- Insufficient administrative structure, communication and the teamwork of professional staff.
- Competing priorities and issues of concern. As we look to the future, several issues have the potential to push aside implementation of the CGCS report, including recruitment and selection of a new superintendent, the implementation of K-8 schools plan, implementation of the Missouri School Improvement Plan, and changes to school boundaries and staff and student assignments resulting from the transfer of schools to Independence School District, and
- School board members who bypass management channels and diminish management authority and accountability systems.

As a result, the board should pay particular attention to rebuilding an effective and stable administrative structure, finding ways to stay focused on major reform goals and strategies in the face of competing issues, and adopting procedures that limit its individual members from working around formal decision-making channels.

Continue Dialogue on Board Selection Method

The task force recognizes the intensity of current community conversation and debate about the manner in which the school board is selected. Broad dialogue on this issue is healthy, and it may lead to a higher level of community engagement in district affairs and perhaps build a wider level of political consensus that is important to good governance, no matter how the board is selected. It is important to stress that no board, no matter how selected, can be effective and policy-focused, without reliable administrative systems, high-performing staff, and vital, ongoing community engagement. Each of these capacities is deficient and is the primary focus of this report.

The task force, as a group, has not concluded that the board selection process must be changed to achieve improved governance practices, but neither has the task force concluded that the current board selection process can work as it stands. The community should closely monitor whether there is meaningful and timely progress in board conduct and district outcomes, and if not, alternative board selection processes must be considered.

Improve Resource Management

The board should also focus on developing systems of oversight and transparency in the allocation and use of resources. The task force is highly concerned about the district's cost per pupil, which has increased dramatically and is among the highest in the nation. Information is not accessible about the district's fiscal status and outlook, as well as how funds are contracted and how resource allocations are linked to goals. The district must bolster its basic financial, budget and accounting practices, which appear to be weak and unreliable and which are essential to undertaking analysis that can lead to stronger management of district resources.

Rebuild Administrative Systems

The task force believes that the administrative capacity of the district must be rebuilt. This does not mean it needs to increase in size, and in fact, in the face of declining enrollment, reductions may be warranted. It does mean, however, that the performance of the system must be strengthened by retaining competent leadership, improving basic management systems and assuring individual accountability. We specifically recommend the following:

Define Superintendent Qualities

One of the most important functions of the school board is to retain and support the effectiveness of a superintendent. The instability of this position has been a major impediment to progress, and the board should take special care to define the qualities required for success, as well as the strategic priorities to guide a new administration. The task force welcomes the newly formed board search committee, and we recommend the search process focus on retaining a new superintendent who is committed to priorities that include:

1. Implementing academic strategies of the CGCS report
2. Supporting the board in its efforts to govern at a policy level
3. Rebuilding basic administrative systems.

It is critical that the board retain a superintendent who meets a clear profile set by the district, and that the board and community use the profile as the means to assess performance. We believe a "savior superintendent" is not needed, nor one with a history of pursuing an independent or personalized vision. Instead, the district should seek to retain a competent administrative leader who has the potential to bring stability to the position, which is desperately needed. We strongly believe that the community should be engaged in the selection process, as it has been in the past, and that the community participants have a clear understanding of the profile developed by the board to better evaluate the merits of the candidates and their potential to meet priorities set by the board.

Improve Management Systems

The task force strongly believes that the district's basic management systems are inadequate to achieve consistency and accountability in improving academic outcomes. In fact, the lack of reliable administrative systems is the chief impediment to sustained change and undermines all areas of performance, including academic outcomes, governance practices and community engagement. The task force believes that

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administrative and instructional accountability is not possible without major improvements in the management capacity of the district.

The task force believes that the primary focus of district leadership should be to rebuild critical administrative systems relating to areas that include financial management and reporting, human resources management, community engagement, internal communications, and academic affairs and instructional support programs. The Council of the Great City Schools report more specifically outlines improvement required in many of these areas.

Implement Accountability Systems

The district must develop performance accountability systems that apply to all levels and all systems within the district. The school board, administrators, principals, teachers, parents and the community all have a role to play in ensuring sustained academic achievement; and measures and monitoring systems should be developed and deployed that are relevant to each role. Programs, curriculum and reform strategies should similarly be held accountable for achieving intended goals.

Accountability systems can range from statements of goals and objectives to more defined and standardized systems, but to be effective they must be well supported and well understood, positive and reinforcing of gains, and vigorously monitored and transparently administered. They must also be used consistently as means to evaluate progress, adjust strategies and make decisions. In any event, the district must put tools in place to monitor and manage implementation of reform strategies, as well as to instill public confidence in the district's progress.

Accountability systems, whether they apply to programs or people, must lead to consequences. Programs that excel should be broadly supported and those which do not should be modified or abandoned. People who excel should be rewarded and those who do not should be given proper support or guidance, or replaced. It is essential that accountability systems not simply monitor and report but lead to high performance.

However, it is impossible to hold people or programs accountable if the system in which they are operating is not functioning. As a result, it is important to stress that accountability cannot be effectively exercised without more reliable administrative systems.

Implement Academic Strategies

Implement Council on Great Cities Schools Report

The district must have a comprehensive academic strategy supported with more resources, clear benchmarks, active management, robust curricula and time to work. As noted earlier, the strategies and directions in the 2006 Council of the Great City Schools report provides a comprehensive and valid road map for moving toward high academic performance, and we strongly recommend that its implementation become a guiding principle for the board and district administration.

In addition, there are certain issues that require special attention:

Focus on School Principals

The evidence from task force testimony is that a strong and effective school principal is the key agent of reform and is essential to academic success. The district needs to enable and support strong principals, including providing more flexibility in the deployment of resources and further ability to recruit and retain teachers. Principals should be a chief focus of accountability systems. They should be reassigned less frequently, and when they are, more orderly transition processes should be used. Efforts should focus on creating a comprehensive, ongoing professional development program for all principals. These efforts should include strengthening executive coaching and peer-to-peer learning networks among principals.

Support Immigrant Students and Families

The task force also heard repeated testimony about the special issues facing students and families who are new to the country and who may have limited English language proficiency. There may be several immigrant groups that require special attention; however, both demographic information and testimony heard by the task force indicate that Hispanic and Somali immigrants are in particular need of assistance. Special emphasis needs to be placed on building cultural competency among staff, coordination with family support services, developing individualized health assessments and educational plans for immigrant students, parental outreach and after-school programs. There are significant opportunities for community partnerships to assist in this process.

Restore Robust Arts Education

Finally, the task force heard compelling testimony about the value of a robust arts curriculum as an important educational strategy, as well as extensive concern that arts education had been significantly diminished. Arts education is an important motivator, helpful in developing cultural awareness, and intrinsic to building creativity and intellectual versatility. We are encouraged by the district's stated intent to review and restore arts education, and we recommend every effort be made to ensure that robust visual and performing arts education programs are a part of the curriculums in all schools. This is also an area that provides rich opportunity for community partnerships.

Foster High Expectations

Promote Culture of Possibility and Success

The task force heard considerable evidence that the tone that is set for children is at the core of success. The district, with community support, should deploy programs and strategies to celebrate achievement, to foster hope, to help young people to envision career paths, and to hold high expectations for all students.

Apply Discipline Policies

One of the most common concerns expressed at the task force public hearings is the degree to which student behavior is disruptive to the educational and social environment in many schools and classrooms. The district needs to give priority to recommendations made by the Council of the Great City Schools to strengthen policies regarding student

discipline, with special attention aimed at connecting with families and equipping teachers with strategies to manage discipline through positive behavioral interventions. Community-based programs can be especially helpful in this area.

Engage the Community

Broaden Involvement of Hispanic and Other Ethnic Communities

The number of Hispanic students in the district is significant and increasing in proportion to other groups. Yet, there is a widespread view that Hispanic voices and views are under-represented in district affairs. The district needs to develop specific strategies to more effectively engage Hispanic representation in both internal operations and external relations. These efforts should respect the varying needs among Hispanics families and students, only some of whom are recent immigrants. The task force recommends that the district begin a formal dialogue with Hispanic leaders and organizations to identify the best ways to build strong and effective relationships over time.

We also recommend that dialogue be initiated with other ethnic communities to develop a unified, inclusive district that crosses cultural boundaries. It appears that special attention needs to be given to Somali students and families, which have a significant presence in the district, to assess strategies to more effectively serve this community.

Strengthen Communications

There are many strong outcomes being achieved in classrooms throughout the district. A comprehensive public awareness and engagement effort should be undertaken to inform and invite greater participation in the successes and pride in important accomplishments. People want to be associated with and involved in successful efforts, and honest, but open and positive, communications is an essential part of creating a culture of progress and success.

Instill Quality Constituent Service

Special attention needs to be given to strengthening parental communications and basic customer services in the district. The inability to conduct daily business in a prompt and predictable manner frustrates patrons and impedes confidence. Basic customer service training is a simple, but imperative, place to begin. Other systems, such as the district web site, parent newsletters, and the voice mail system, should also be reviewed to ensure accessibility to information and assistance.

Build Strong Partnerships

The district should give priority to ensuring every school in the district has a base of community partnerships that support classroom instruction, school activities, and children and families in need of support. There is a deep reservoir of goodwill in this community that can be tapped to support the district, which is insufficiently organized to take full advantage of the support the community is willing to offer. In fact, the task force heard wide-ranging testimony about the ease and effectiveness of forging partnerships with the district, which has led us to conclude that partnerships result from the initiative of individual principals or teachers and are not systematically supported by the district. The district should develop administrative capacity to actively forge

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partnerships and to develop systems to ensure that partnership opportunities are meaningful, driven by the district's academic strategy, available to all schools, tailored to the needs of individual schools, and implemented with consistency over time.

Enable Ongoing Community Organizing

Progress in the district will depend on broad support from the community, as well as engaged community leaders who push the district to achieve progress. This task force can be the catalyst for creating the sources of support and accountability. It should continue its work by launching an ongoing group or community-driven process that brings together committed leadership to build political consensus, stability, and trust; to engage new partners; to facilitate understanding of educational issues; and to provide a wider audience to monitor and promote adherence to efforts to achieve strong academic outcomes.

The task force believes by continuing in some form, it can be an important means to ensure compliance with the strategies to regain state accreditation and to set a tone for even further gains toward uniform excellence. We are cautious, however, not to create a shadow school board, or to repeat the role of the former Desegregation Monitoring Committee, which often taxed the time and resources of the district staff. Instead, our goal would be to create a forum that seeks to support the district by promoting a wider, more engaged political framework focused on results.

To achieve this goal, this effort should be supported through private resources, but should promote close and cooperative working relationships with the school board and administration, with the intention of creating a positive, but independent forum for broad community engagement. We are encouraged by the dialogue at the joint meeting with the task force and the board, in which most board members voiced support for continuation of the task force.

As indicated earlier, we believe that the greatest contribution of the task force may lie in its ability to be a catalyst for creating a new type of community engagement — one that is characterized by a common vision, strong partnerships, positive engagement, and clear accountability to outcomes. We embrace this not only as our goal, but also as our responsibility to ensure the success of all children in our city.

Priority Recommendations

The task force believes that all recommendations in this report merit timely implementation, however, we have identified the following five priority recommendations as essential to securing consistent academic achievement and community confidence.

Priority #1: Articulate a Vision of Unified Community Expectations.

The district, in partnership with the community, must articulate a broad but clear vision that sets a tone of hope and high expectations for children and conveys to young people that the entire community embraces their success.

Priority #2: Develop Policy Leadership

The school board must develop new capacities to provide clear policy-oriented oversight, build and engage a healthy community support system, and retain talented and responsive professional leaders committed to the vision of the district.

Priority #3: Implement Council on Great Cities Schools Report

Strategies and directions in the 2006 Council of the Great City Schools report provide a comprehensive and valid road map for moving toward high academic performance, and we strongly recommend that its implementation become a guiding principle for the board and district administration. In fact, many of the specific recommendations in this report are also addressed in the council report.

Priority #4: Engage the Community

The district must deploy strategies to more fully and effectively engage the community in the process of governance and education. Priority attention should be given to recommendations in this report to broaden involvement of Hispanic and other ethnic communities; strengthen communications; instill quality constituent service; build strong partnerships; and enable ongoing community organizing.

Priority #5: Support Immigrant Students and Families

Special emphasis needs to be given to students and families who are recent immigrants, including building cultural competency among staff, coordination with family support services, developing individualized health assessments and educational plans for immigrant students, and parental outreach and after-school programs.

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Next Steps

The task force will initiate the following activities over the next 90 days:

July 1 Complete and Issue Report

July-August: Meet informally with the school board to assess interest in working cooperatively with the task force and to set priority areas of interest. Develop plan to house and support the task force and to broaden engagement.

September: Task force will reconvene itself within 90 days to assess progress toward implementing recommendations outlined in this report and will communicate its assessment to the community.

Summary of Recommendations and Relation to Department of Elementary and Secondary Education Accreditation Assessment Goal Areas					
DESE Goals					
	Performance	Staff	Resources	Involvement	Governance
Build on Existing Foundations					
1. Build on Existing Assets	x	x	x	x	x
2. Implement Previous Studies	x	x	x	x	x
Clarify Vision					
3. Articulate a Vision of Unified Community Expectations.					x
Recast Board Leadership Practices					
4. Develop Policy Leadership					x
5. Continue Dialogue on Board Selection Method					x
6. Improve Resource Management			x		x
Rebuild Administrative Systems					
7. Define Superintendent Qualities					x
8. Improve Management Systems			x		x
9. Implement Accountability Systems	x	x	x	x	x
Implement Academic Strategies					
10. Implement Council on Great Cities Schools Report	x	x			
11. Focus on School Principals		x			
12. Support Immigrant Students and Families	x	x	x	x	
13. Restore Robust Arts Education	x				
Foster High Expectations					
14. Promote Culture of Possibility and Success	x	x		x	x
15. Apply Discipline Policies	x				
Engage the Community					
16. Broaden Involvement of Hispanic and Other Ethnic Communities	x	x	x	x	
17. Strengthen Communications				x	
18. Build Strong Partnerships			x		
19. Enable On-going Community Organizing				x	x

**Kansas City, Missouri School District
Education Reform Task Force Statement of Purpose**

The task force co-chairs, in cooperation with school board leaders, are suggesting this statement of purpose to more fully outline the committee charge issued by the school board.

The overall aim of the task force is to develop a strategy to rebuild community confidence and support in the school district through greater academic achievement and more effective policy leadership.

The task force is asked to identify the top three actions that the school district can take to advance progress in each of the five work areas outlined for the school district by DESE (the Missouri State Department of Elementary and Secondary Education). To facilitate task force discussions, these five areas are grouped into two broad discussions focusing on academic achievement and policy leadership, as follows:

Academic Achievement

1. Student performance

Develop and enhance quality educational/instructional programs to improve performance and enable students to meet personal, academic, and career goals.

2. Highly qualified staff

Recruit, attract, develop, and retain highly qualified staff to carry out the district mission, goals, and objectives.

3. Facilities, support and instructional resources

Provide and maintain appropriate instructional resources, support services, and functional and safe facilities.

Policy Leadership

4. Parent and community involvement

Promote, facilitate, and enhance parent, student, and community involvement in district educational programs.

5. Governance

Govern the district in an efficient and effective manner providing leadership and representation to benefit the students, staff, and patrons of the district.

For each of these areas, the task force is asked to focus primarily on how parents and the broader community can advance progress. More specifically, we expect to address the following questions in each of the five areas:

- What are the plans and strategies in place or planned to advance progress?
- How can parents and the broader community engage in and support these plans and strategies?
- Are there other actions which must be taken to advance progress?

The report of the Task Force will provide a road map to guide the district and community toward common objectives and to build a shared sense of confidence in the future.