Moving Forward Together

Mark T. Bedell, Ed.D
Kansas City Public Schools
Superintendent’s Post-Entry Plan
Dear Community and Staff,

As the new Superintendent of Kansas City Public Schools, I have made it a point to ensure that students are at the center of every decision we make as a school system. The purpose of my post-entry plan is to navigate us through the first year of my superintendency, provide direction and purpose for our staff and community, and ensure that my Board members are able to hold my administration accountable in a meaningful way.

The first 100 days of my tenure have been both rewarding and eye-opening. I have met with community members, legislators, teachers, students and business folks, and have learned so much that will help us move this school system forward. I also have worked internally with my central office staff to figure out what we are already doing well and where we see areas for growth. We are moving in the right direction, but we have much to do if we’re going to bring our students to where they need to be academically. I have no magic potions or silver bullets, but I will work tirelessly to put the right people and systems in place in order to ensure the success of our students. When I walk into a classroom, I want to see students at the center. I want to see high-level teaching and learning and I want to see school houses that are inviting resource hubs that showcase student work and welcome families.

In order to promote transparency in the school system, it’s essential that we continue to meet and collaborate with Team KCPS members as well as expand business partnerships. I will meet with students twice a month, will host student and teacher town halls, and will create advisory groups that I will meet with on a monthly basis. Community voice is key in decision making, and therefore nourishing this collaboration is necessary.

KCPS students are some of the strongest kids I have ever met. They are funny, inquisitive, precocious and resilient. We owe it to them to be the best school system we can be. They need more opportunities in terms of electives, extracurriculars, and higher-level classes. It is vital that we use technology in a more progressive manner, with differentiation and individualization at the forefront of lesson plans. It is our responsibility to prepare them for college, careers and beyond, and to support them in every facet of their lives. In order to do this, we will need to create 21st-century learning environments, build out student supports, and better train teachers to be culturally responsive.

In KCPS, when it comes to kids, all means ALL. We will embrace every student that comes through our doors.

Yours in Education,

Mark Bedell, Ed.D
Superintendent of Schools
**Definitions**

**Student-centered learning:** Student-centered learning, also known as learner-centered education, embraces methods of teaching that shift the focus of instruction from the teacher to the student. In KCPS, this shift will occur by leveraging technology in order to individualize learning based on each student’s needs and abilities.

**Instructional digital conversion:** This refers to the infusion of technology and digital curriculum into classroom instruction.

**Equity:** Equity in education means that circumstances such as race, gender, special education status, ethnicity, sexual orientation, English language learner (ELL) status, or socioeconomic status are not obstacles to student achievement. Although historical factors have continued to contribute to the inequities our students face, it is imperative that we work collectively to address these barriers to success.

**Work Priorities**

**Academics:**
- Creating student-centered learning environments while leveraging technology
- Expanding social and emotional supports for students and families throughout KCPS
- Introducing culturally-relevant curriculum into our classrooms

**Organizational Effectiveness and Planning:**
- Laying a foundation for efficiency and effectiveness through our strategic plan and ensuring our organization is structured with student achievement at the forefront
- Creating succession plans and standard operating procedures for each department
- Recruiting quality educators and ensuring they stay with KCPS

**Communications and Culture:**
- Building a culture of trust in our school community and community at large
- Leveraging partnerships to ensure that we have innovation and valuable resources in our schools

**Areas of Focus**

Academics  
Communication & Culture  
Organizational Effectiveness  
Planning
Marking the Destination: Governance

The Direction

A public school system exists to serve its public. In the United States, we believe that all children should be given an equitable opportunity to learn how to become responsible and productive members of their communities, states and nation. This foundational conviction took root when the first public school was founded about 150 years before the writing of the Declaration of Independence and Constitution.

To function as intended, a school system has to be organized to identify the right destination for its public. That is the job of the school board: to help establish the ideal destination for children to arrive at the end of their public education. That is as true in Kansas City Public Schools as it is in every other school system. Everything that happens in KCPS should be a function of that grassroots input that travels from the public to the public’s representatives, to the administration, and finally on to the office of the Superintendent of Schools.

It follows that KCPS can only succeed if it is governed well. That’s why goal one of my first 100 days as Superintendent was to develop unified school district governance by creating a transparent, trusting and collaborative working relationship with the KCPS Board of Directors. My objectives included coming together as a focused leadership team, communicating effectively and transitioning smoothly. Achieving these ends will ensure that our map is well drawn and our destination is clear. We will be headed in the right direction.

The Journey

I have had a very productive process of becoming acquainted with our School Board during my first 100 days as Superintendent.

My individual visits with all nine members gave me an opportunity to learn how they prefer to communicate. They were also very forthright as they shared their perspectives on our school system. Most importantly, I was able to outline what their constituents want KCPS to accomplish moving forward.

In addition to our one-on-one conversations, the Board and I have started to cohere as a unit. On Sept. 24, we had a fun and revealing experience at an “escape house” in Kansas City. It’s worth noting that several Board members are new to their positions, so this was a great opportunity for all of us to get to know each other better outside of a KCPS context.

After the team-building exercise, we held our first retreat together. We discussed important issues, governance, core values and beliefs, and communication. The Board members and I were able to talk about our roles, responsibilities, norms and expectations. We set goals and agendas, and considered what information we need to make decisions and the best ways to get that information.
Finally, we were able to make important decisions about our professional development as a governing body.

There are several actions that are ongoing as I develop my relationship with the Board. We've made good progress and I'm confident they will be completed in a timely manner. These include:

- Developing a performance evaluation for myself as Superintendent
- Facilitating meetings between the Board Chair, Vice Chair and committee chairs and my leadership team in order to determine how we can best work together
- Developing a process to evaluate implementation of the Master Plan
- Engaging the community in the strategic planning process

Finally, I have begun and will continue to meet as needed with the Board’s communications, government relations, and strategic planning committees. I will also carry forward my plans to conduct site tours with individual Board members, and schedule quarterly meetings with the Board.

The Destination

A Shared Goal

KCPS has an excellent School Board. Its members are bright, talented and dedicated to meeting and surpassing their obligations as elected public representatives. They are all passionate about growing a school system that provides the greatest possible benefit for our children and our community. It’s clear that every Board member wants me to succeed, and I so appreciate their support. The Board is the last line of defense when it comes to ensuring that our scholars receive a comprehensive education, and I fundamentally believe that our Board members have the interest of our students at the forefront of every decision they make.

Our Board has made its investment in myself as Superintendent and KCPS as a school system, and that is no small thing. That is a source we can use to help launch ourselves further and faster than otherwise. It boils down to ensuring that our Board focuses on ends instead of means. We will travel light years if we share a vision for where we want to go. It’s my intention to nurture the Board’s investment by helping establish a culture focused on our shared destination.
Designing A Supportive Organization

Imagine that nine people decide to buy a professional basketball team and hire a coach. They share a goal: win the league championship. Then they each start demanding that the coach use their individual and often conflicting plays and practice techniques. Some owners insist that the coach use a full-court press defense, while others argue strongly against it. They find flaws in the coach and his players for their game-day decisions even though some of them don’t have a basketball background. Then, they each start creating their own team uniform designs and bring their own music selections for games. That is not a team that will achieve its goal.

A competent basketball coach knows his or her team members better than anyone, and understands the best way to get results. The best owners understand that they can best serve their teams by focusing on 30,000-foot tasks. With one voice, they establish the strategic direction of the organization, approve budgets, and monitor the team’s general progress. They think in terms of years and decades. They design a unified organizational structure that enhances the strengths of the coach and players and allows them to execute with excellence on the court. They help build the team’s capacity through policy and protocol.

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Not to put too fine a point on it, but I believe firmly that our Board has an excellent opportunity to become that type of high-functioning leadership team.

The best way that the Board can help KCPS succeed is by focusing on these very critical roles:

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**Governance**
How board members will organize, communicate and monitor themselves

**Budget**
Strategic decisions about how to use financial resources

**Policy**
The ground rules for the Board and KCPS

**Supervising the Superintendent**
Goals and expectations for and evaluations of the school system’s chief executive

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“The ultimate test of man’s conscience may be his willingness to sacrifice something today for future generations whose words of thanks will not be heard.”

-Gaylord Nelson, former Wisconsin governor and U.S. Senator
By focusing on the governance process (Board Policy 2.0) and governance relationships (Policy 3.0), the Board members will allow me as the Superintendent to focus on achieving our desired ends (Policy 1.0) while staying within established limitations (Policy 4.0).

I was hired to make executive decisions about how we’re going to reach our destination. It is my job to ensure that the many complicated facets of our school system are operating correctly, our resources are allocated wisely, we are sending and receiving the right information in a timely manner, our system is being maintained and upgraded regularly, and that we are traveling swiftly on the right route. I’m in the driver’s seat.

Moving forward, as is proper for a well functioning Board, I will be the single point-of-contact for its members. I am eager to get the Board’s guidance through the Board Chair. I welcome conversations with the Chair regarding requests by Board members to visit schools and other sites. I will help the Board speak with one voice when addressing the news media.

I also anticipate that the Board will readjust its way of doing business as a whole and in committees in order to make sure that staff members can focus on the job of serving students. This will require Board members to proactively fulfill their roles in terms of taking responsibility for projects, events, initiatives and communications with their constituents. This step alone will prove to be an enormous boost for my team.
The Direction

Students are the heart and soul of every school system. A child is born, and it's the role of loved ones to raise that child into an adult who is a reflection of family, culture and his or her own unique qualities. Together, we as a society facilitate that process. Society creates and commissions school systems to help equip our children with the knowledge and experiences they need to become responsible, productive citizens. Like the turning of the Solar system around the sun, everything and everyone in a school system exists in relationship to our gravitational center: students.

Great instruction is the axis of an effective classroom. The tools and techniques we use to instruct our students combine to become the way in which we propel them to new levels of achievement. But here's the thing: every student is unique. We're not building mass produced cars. We're more like NASA engineers who carefully craft every spaceship in order to ensure that the payload is delivered safely at the right time and to the correct location under the most threatening conditions. Each student demands individualized attention. Each student will have his or her own goal, which means we have to minutely tweak our practices so that our students reach as high as they possibly can. Great instruction is individualized.

I cannot emphasize enough how very important students are to me personally and to KCPS as a whole. It was my positive experiences with a few student-centered educators that are largely responsible for keeping me on track in school. Every one of our students should be able to attend classes led by adults who are focused on doing everything possible to help them succeed. That's why my second goal when I arrived at KCPS was to make sure that our classrooms are equitable and help our lower-performing students close the gap with their classmates, as well as ensure our high-achievers soar even higher. I am also determined to create a school system that recognizes and addresses the unique social and emotional needs of our students.
The Journey

All journeys start by establishing your current location and condition. If you’re facing snow-covered mountains and your tires are worn out, that needs to be addressed before departing.

With the help of my Leadership Team, I was able to dive deep into our student achievement data going back to 2009. We spent time analyzing academics, subgroup achievement, college and career readiness, and attendance, graduation and suspension rates. This gave me an excellent sense of the terrain we face and the state of the school system as we prepare to advance.

I had multiple in-depth conversations with the appropriate team members to determine where things stand in regard to teaching and learning, school leadership and professional development. We also had very productive discussions around improving graduation rates for all students, but especially our students of color, our English language learners, and our students with disabilities; the return-on-investment of our academic programs, materials and curriculum; system-wide literacy efforts; and the effectiveness of our Response to Intervention and Positive Behavior Interventions and Support programs.

The most significant moments of this assessment process happened at schools and in the community. I’m experienced enough to recognize the disconnection between a central office and schools and the community. Data that appears to be clear at the administrative level can, in fact, be opaque and merely obscure real problems when viewed from different facets of the school system. I was determined to gain a fresh, ground-level perspective.

To that end, I spent many hours in fruitful conversation with students, teachers, school leaders, support staff and community partners. I had some excellent lunches with students, where they were able to express their views on academic rigor and relationships with staff. I met with a wide range of people to get a grasp on how we measure student progress and how we make sure those measurements align with achieving the desired ends. Staff, students and parents talked with me about how we should be providing emotional and social support.

The Leadership Team and I also produced a calendar for reporting our progress to the Board. I’m pleased to report that I completed every action on my entry plan, but will continue these conversations and visits because they are so critical to truly seeing who you’re serving.

“The function of education is to teach one to think intensively and to think critically. Intelligence plus character - that is the goal of true education.”

-Rev. Martin Luther King, Jr.
The Destination

As I come to the end of my first 100 days as Superintendent of KCPS, it’s very clear to me that we have some excellent resources and many high-quality, dedicated instructors, administrators and support staff. Just as importantly, we have some of the hardest-working, bravest, and most astute students I have ever met. They want to learn. They are bright, precocious and creative. They deserve a school system that will give them the equitable boost they need to reach their goals.

Our students and staff have made incredible progress as measured by the Missouri School Improvement Program, gaining 76 points in just four years. That’s despite continually shifting assessments and standards at the state level. It was also accomplished in the face of concerted efforts by some state officials and elected representatives to essentially take over and disassemble the school system. It’s hard to imagined more challenging terrain for our students and staff to overcome. But they did, and now KCPS has made the points necessary to gain full accreditation.

Let me be clear, we as a school system are competing on an uneven playing field. We have a 41 percent mobility rate, the highest percentage of English Language Learners in the state, and often find ourselves enrolling students who have been discharged from charter schools in the middle of the year. Since we are a public school system, we do not cherry pick our students. In fact, our motto in KCPS is, “All means ALL.” We know that ALL students have talents and gifts to offer the world, and it is our duty to find and uplift those gifts for every single child that walks through our doors.

We’ve reached the starting line for the next phase of our development as a school system. The road doesn’t necessarily get any easier from here, though, and there are some significant changes that we will make in order to put ourselves in a better position to complete the journey. It starts with rebuilding our foundation.
School Unchained

In my experience, programs, services, methods and tools are rarely effective when they are solely conceived at a school system’s central office and passed down with limited input from schools. That type of top-down management often misses critical differences between schools and neighborhoods. Distinctions that might appear subtle at the central office can be enormous for school staff, students and parents.

My administration will not be handing down academic programs, services and methods. There are no silver bullets or magic potions. Every student is unique; every school is distinct. We will treat them as such. Schools will be given the freedom and resources they need to explore and grow academic solutions that will thrive in their particular ecosystem.

My team, our staff and I will work closely with principals to help our schools become student-centered. That means the culture and climate in our schools will be built around the needs of our kids. Classrooms will go from being teacher-owned to belonging to the students. I want to see student work all over the walls in classes; I want to see high academic expectations being passed down no matter what classroom I walk into; and I want to see students engaged in hands-on experiences and deep in thought because they are having to think critically and problem solve.

Rather than dictating specific programs, services and methods for schools and classrooms, my team and I will focus our attention on ensuring that the solutions developed by our schools are being used appropriately and producing the desired results. We will work together to gain a true understanding of what it means to be servant leaders. If we don’t have authentic buy-in, we don’t have anything at all. There will be accountability, rigor and consistency. We will expand solutions that are having the right impact, replicating them as appropriate at other sites. A digital warehouse will be created so that teachers can easily share effective lesson plans. A principals’ toolkit is in the works to make administrative tasks easier than ever so that principals can spend more time in classrooms and walking the halls of their schools.

Initiatives that are unfruitful will be adjusted or discontinued, but only after we’ve evaluated them thoroughly and deduced lessons learned. As any scientist will tell you, negative results can often be the most revealing. We will go from antiquated to innovative by looking at schedules differently, introducing new electives and better utilizing resources.
While solutions will be created in cooperation with schools, there are definitely some critical areas of focus that I have identified for the entire school system:

- **Fully developing and implementing systems to improve attendance, graduation and dropout rates and classroom evaluations**
- **Giving students the attention they need to cross the academic threshold and be considered proficient or advanced, particularly in science**
- **Improving the way we identify students who are capable of taking more rigorous classes, and generally expanding access to dual-credit college-level courses. This will include increasing access to our Early College Academy**
- **Expanding our pre-K programs and developing assessments and systems to ensure that preschoolers are Kindergarten ready**
- **Providing more multilingual support for students and families. I will be proposing the foundation of a “newcomer center” for our ELL students and families**
- **Broadly moving our schools away from brick and mortar and towards greater use of 21st Century ways of learning and interacting. We will leverage digital technology on behalf of our students**
- **Expanding opportunities in our CTE program by leveraging partnerships with businesses in the KCPS community**
- **Increasing and expanding emotional and social support and education for our students who are impacted negatively and traumatically by events in their homes and neighborhoods. Examples include the trauma-sensitive schools initiative, the hiring of a student mental and emotional health specialist, and the mentorship program that I have already started for our high school students**
- **Equipping teachers to create culturally relevant classroom experiences**
- **Shifting classes away from worksheets and handouts and toward the use of multiple digital devices and lessons that are structured around engaging students with a wide variety of tools**
- **Writing curriculum that emphasizes student choice, engagement and differentiation**
- **Introducing a mentorship program that will grow to eventually serve half of our student population**

My office will support schools with equity as they work to achieve these and other important ends. This means that we will recognize that different schools have different needs, and those needs have different degrees of demand. Struggling schools simply need more of our attention. That is a fact. We want every school to be high functioning and largely autonomous. I want them to fly down the road as facilitators of learning, with leaders at the central office cheering them on and supporting them as they go. We will be conducting a campus-by-campus needs assessment and then adjust the way we allocate our resources so that each site gets the appropriate support.
The Direction

In astronomical terms, Earth and Venus are sitting side-by-side around the sun. Yet Earth supports unmeasured varieties of life while Venus is completely uninhabitable. Our planet exists in an ideal relationship with the sun only because the solar system is structured to make it so. Every piece of the system has its place. If the moon didn't exist or Jupiter rotated in some other location, it's very likely there would be no life on Earth.

Our school system is similar. The various parts of KCPS have to be weaved together in mutual support of student achievement. There can be no silos. Every member of Team KCPS is intricately and inextricably intertwined. That should be for the best, but it can work both ways. Unconsidered and uncoordinated actions can tear through our system and smash into our schools like an asteroid strike.

That is why I made organizational effectiveness and efficiency a focus of my first 100 days. We need a school system that is designed, engineered and functioning to provide first-class support and services to our schools, students, parents and community. To that end, I set out to review our structure, with a particular focus on our leadership and staff capacity and development.

The Journey

I'm a people person. I believe firmly that the best way to get a grasp on a situation is to find the right individual and have a conversation. It's no surprise that I spent a significant amount of time during my first 100 days talking with my Leadership Team and central office staff, both individually and as departments. That is an ongoing process and it has been extremely productive. Their input has and will continue to guide every decision I make as Superintendent.

In addition to spending time in conversation with our central office staff, I started the work of nurturing a team mentality. A big part of that will require restructuring our team to encourage interdepartmental collaboration and accountability.

Briefing documents from each division and department provided an overview of their major responsibilities, initiatives and timelines, challenges and upcoming decisions. This helped me quickly understand our strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats as a central office team. My team and I reviewed how we track the impact of our programs, curriculum and other materials. We established a schedule to meet with school leaders, successfully launched classes for the 2016-2017 academic year, reviewed our financial condition and procedures, and assessed our current legal situation and challenges.

The team helped me understand the steps we need to take to develop the best possible curriculum. That was particularly valuable in light of our continued implementation of the Missouri Learning Standards and alignment of how our curriculum is written, taught and assessed. I also was updated on our assessment system and philosophy, and the instructional supports we provide teachers and other staff.

“The bad leader is he who the people despise; the good leader is he who the people praise; the great leader is he who the people say, ‘We did it ourselves!”

–Peter Senge
There are a number of important actions related to our organizational support that will continue moving forward, including:

- Leadership Team retreat for members of my cabinet
- Principal and teacher meetings to discuss student achievement data and central office support
- Leadership development and succession planning meetings
- Development of systems to facilitate collaboration between schools
- Reviewing central office positions and departments to determine if right-sizing is needed
- Assessing the degree to which principals have the authority and autonomy to make critical strategic and tactical decisions for their schools
- Evaluating whether we are using the right measurements when gauging the success of departments, and whether we are aligning department goals with Board goals
- Reviewing all critical documents, including policy and procedure manuals, Board minutes, student achievement data, budgets, legal proceedings, facility reports, accountability plans, project management protocols, and safety and emergency plans
- Compiling standard operating procedures within each department in order to increase efficiency and accountability
Great leaders are great servants. I've had the privilege to work with and learn from some of the best practitioners of servant-leadership in public education. A focus on service and respect will drive my administration, our schools and me. This means we will all work together closely as a disciplined, coordinated organization. When something needs to be done, we will demonstrate leadership by doing the work together, planting in the morning and harvesting in the afternoon.

Student-Focused Decisions
When I metaphorically stepped onto the balcony and took in the state of our school system, I could see an opportunity to improve our overall decision-making philosophy. In my assessment, many steps have been taken based on a bureaucratic mindset. Compliance is the goal of these types of decisions, and they rarely achieve anything other than average results. Instead, every decision has to be made based on its impact on students. That is the bottom line!

A University Model of Professional Development
One of the best ways of equipping our schools to focus on individual students is by paying attention to the individual needs of our teachers and other educators. One of the first things I will do is lead a migration to a "university" model of professional development for school teams.

Currently, our educators have very little choice when it comes to sharpening their skills. That does not appear to be effective. Instead, we will give them a wide range of options from which they can choose based on their own circumstances. This will help teachers use the right tools and techniques for their unique students. Every plane of the school system will revolve around our children. This is what is referred to as customization and differentiation. The ideas of customization and differentiation should also be adhered to when it comes to the Professional Development for our teachers and staff.

Along these same lines, I will head-up an effort along with our Human Resources Department to establish a leadership development academy designed to nurture and cultivate future principals, vice principals and teacher-leaders. We will create a clear structure and process for identifying our most talented staff members early in their tenure at KCPS and give them the opportunity to grow as professionals and leaders while remaining in our system.

We will also create leadership succession plans for our schools and central office departments so that our recruitment and promotion efforts anticipate our needs. This will go a long way toward retaining our best educators, instead of enduring the constant turnover we are currently experiencing.
Investing In Our Team

KCPS must continue to focus on being a top career choice for high-quality education professionals. I have already directed the HR Department to add a team member who can focus on recruiting effective teachers, leaders and support staff.

We will have appropriately high expectations of our team members, we will treat our teammates with respect and we will do the hard work of helping them succeed. We will value our employees. That means spending time identifying and meeting each employee's unique training and development needs. Dollars spent on high-quality professional development are an investment that will have a positive impact on the entire school system. I will be holding myself and our leaders, supervisors and managers accountable to that standard.

Our HR Department will also play an important role as we revamp the way we help our employees improve and achieve their individual and department goals. In my assessment, goals have been set for team members, but there are inadequate, ineffective or non-existent measures to support them. Frankly, the way we set expectations and gauge success seems inconsistent and unscientific. It also is vital that we vigilantly audit our departments to ensure that they don't have any internal control violations.

Leveraging the Data

While we currently have a research team that sits under the Chief Academic Officer, I think it is imperative that we create a Research, Accountability and Assessment department that stands on its own. Think about science or market research and how often those researchers run double-blind experiments in order to ensure that the research is unbiased. When you think about it, having the office of academics do research about themselves and their own practices is a conflict of interest. Although it is important to self-assess, it is equally as important that we have impartial data collectors and assessors.

Foundational Support

We will continue to develop the Catalyst Fund for KCPS Children as a source of support for our programs through fundraising and grants. Aside from providing financial resources, a well run educational foundation can and should help rally community support around our major initiatives. It is critical that we start that work now. That means hiring a strong executive director who can set goals for the foundation and then work to reach and even exceed them. We need a full-time fundraising entity that can help us put on events like Summerfest, State of the Schools and Teacher of the Year. We need our education foundation to support grants and provide resources to our schools that they wouldn't otherwise get, all in an effort to provide better outcomes for our kids.
Creating A Culture of Trust: The importance of follow-through

The Direction

One of the most important traits effective leaders have is the ability to create a culture of trust among their stakeholders. To me, trust and integrity are what drive everything else. If I can trust my staff members to do their jobs, all I have to do is lift them up and provide them the resources to be the best they can. Trust allows me to feel confident when delegating responsibility rather than micromanaging them and checking after each and every move. If my staff, Board, students and community trust me, I have more leverage and increased ability to take risks and be innovative in the hopes of better educating our young people.

The Journey

Kansas City Public Schools is lacking a culture of trust. It is plain for me to see each day when I am in the central office or when I’m meeting with outside stakeholders. We don’t fully trust each other, and a 30-year trend of getting beat up in the public eye has made our guards come up and has occasionally caused an “every man for himself” mentality. I know this may be hard for people to hear, and I understand that, but we have work to do in this area. This work has to be the work we do first. If we don’t cultivate a culture of trust, partnership and teamwork, we will be at an impasse when it comes to turning these schools around.

Many students, parents, staff, partners and community members talk as if we’re stuck in a deep hole and grasping for leverage as we attempt to climb out, and while we are doing this together, our motives and backgrounds often cause us to go in different directions as we are attempting to reach the same destination. While as a school system we are starting to see light at the end of the tunnel, this “protect yourself at all costs” mindset is pervasive, and I understand why. These folks have all been here before: a new superintendent with a new vision and new energy. While the KCPS community has embraced me and seems optimistic about my tenure here, they don’t want to get their hopes up to only be let down yet again.

That is why I moved my family here, why I play pick-up games of basketball in the community every Saturday, and why you’ll see me at various community events throughout the city. I want the people of Kansas City to know I am committed. Not only am I getting out and about around the community, but I am working with my communications team to create organized outreach efforts. We have hosted 11 “Listening and Learning Tour” community meetings, are having student and teacher town halls, “Brown Bags With Bedell” lunches with students, and so much more. My cabinet members have attended each of the Listening and Learning tour stops and also joined me as we walked neighborhoods on November 5 to talk to our community and families.
Little by little, I am starting to see optimism—but it takes work. Our community is holding us at arms-length because of years of history that I can't control. Fear of state takeover a few years back also means that our employees are often ambivalent of the intentions of outsiders, and I can't blame them. This mindset reminds me of observing a person who is dealing with trauma. There is a default mode of being reactionary instead of proactive in order to keep afloat. Instead of looking at the long term, that person only has the ability to do whatever it takes to protect themselves and survive.

The Destination

It is my intention to ensure that KCPS is a school system that follows through on its promises and continues to build trust. As I said earlier, we have a lot of work to do in this area. Trust is fragile, and we are rebuilding it from the ground up. While in my first 100 days we have started to lay the foundation, it is imperative that we continually work to not only keep that foundation stable, but also to build upon it. One of my top priorities during my transition was to hear and understand our community's hopes for its children. It is critically important to me that I understand the aspirations and expectations of my community. Therefore, I will continue to engage families, teachers, business folks, clergy, legislators, administrators, and most importantly our students.

I have high expectations of my staff to do the same. We must become a service-oriented organization that is providing something invaluable for our students and community. This work around trust needs to be work that is sustainable, and it needs to be at the forefront of every initiative we start, every event we throw, and every partnership we build. There are a number of important initiatives we have started or will start that will continue to build upon the foundation we have started to create thus far:

- Advisory group meetings with business professionals, legislators, clergy, community and neighborhood organizations, teachers, administrators, and students
- An oral history project where we will work together to talk to internal and external stakeholders about how we got there and how we will continue to move forward
- A mentorship program where students will build trusting relationships with teachers, staff and community members
- Building a coalition of storytellers from around the community through grassroots efforts who are able to present the counter-narrative when we face unjustified scrutiny (storytellers will use word of mouth, social media and other methods to get the word out)
- Principal, teacher and volunteer recognition ceremonies to ensure that people feel valued
- Training around equity and cultural competence for all KCPS staff
- The State of the Schools Luncheon, where we will host our community partners and stakeholders and show them all of the wonderful things happening in Kansas City Public Schools
- Town hall meetings for students, teachers and school staff that will occur twice a year
- An annual faith-based breakfast for our clergy from around the city

“Trust is the highest form of human motivation. It brings out the very best in people.”

-Stephen Covey
Community Feedback Top Ten

Areas For Growth
1. More parent involvement
2. More trauma support
3. Too much testing
4. More communication
5. Classes are too crowded

Positives
1. Community involvement
2. Superintendent Bedell
3. Lower class sizes
4. Restorative discipline
5. Increased communication

Summary
• Data from 8 of 10 meetings
• This data does not include Waldo Library and Historic East Neighborhood Coalition meetings
**Listening and Learning**

**Community Feedback Top Ten**

- Limited High/Middle School Options
- Diversity
- Community Forums
- Increased Community Involvement
- LINC
- Superintendent Bedell
- More Community Partnerships
- Communication
- Perception/Reputation
- Building Utilization

**Areas For Growth**
1. Limited high/middle school options in the south
2. Building utilization
3. Reputation
4. Communication
5. Need more partnerships

**Positives**
1. Diversity
2. Community forums
3. Community involvement
4. LINC
5. Superintendent Bedell

**Summary**
- Data from Waldo Library and Historic East Neighborhood Coalition (HENC) meetings (195 people at Waldo, 9 people at HENC)

[www.kcpublicschools.org]
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