Superintendent of Schools

KANSAS CITY PUBLIC SCHOOLS

June 23, 2020

Thirteen years spans a child's first day of kindergarten to their last day of high school. In Kansas City Public Schools, the majority of students experiencing these milestones are children of color. More than half of the students in our classrooms are Black.

On Thursday, the City Council is scheduled to vote on an incentive package for BlueScope, a billion-dollar multi-national corporation. After a 100 percent property tax abatement for 20 years, they want 13 more, holding the City Council hostage by saying they might move to Kansas.

And what they want is the continuation of a deal that has already disproportionately impacted the funding of Kansas City's schools, libraries and mental health resources.

Last week, Mayor Lucas introduced a resolution focused on implementing more equitable practices and policies at City Hall. I am asking for the City Council to give meaning to their votes of support. Financial decisions can be moral ones and this request is a violent economic practice that would never be inflicted on the majority-white school districts in the Northland. I am confident my Superintendent colleagues in those districts would agree.

Members of the City Council, as well as business leaders, have stood up in the recent weeks to say Black Lives Matter. I commend them for doing so, but as the adage goes, actions speak louder than words. If Black Lives Matter to you, then so should the schools south of the river.

In the wake of the last month, I am sitting with how racism continues to fester in the culture, conversations and policies relating to business and economic development practices in our City. Frankly, I am exhausted with the development community pitting the City against the public entities that are doing the work of trying to give our students and their families access to the world they deserve. This *is* systemic racism.

In response to the BlueScope project, a Northland Councilmember said the Council had to think of the City first, not the schools, libraries and mental health services. Are our families not Kansas City constituents?

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The funding for public schools is constantly under attack. As we work to budget in this trying and uncertain time, we continue to fill in the gaps created by the racial and economic inequities our society allows.

Even throughout a pandemic, we have supplied multiple meals a day for all Kansas City kids who need them. These are students who don't always have access to food because this City is rife with food deserts.

We have sourced technology equipment for our children. We do this because there is a vast digital divide that impacts our families at a higher rate than ones living in other areas of our City.

We have offered trauma-informed supports as our children continue to have to walk through neighborhoods with increasing gun violence.

We have secured resources for families who are dealing with evictions and experiencing homelessness because there is a lack of safe, affordable housing in this City.

I understand why the Council would want to retain BlueScope and the earnings tax it generates. KCPS supports growth and business retention, and we know a thriving City should benefit all of us. But a Kansas City company believing they can bring forward *any* a*dditional request* that diverts resources away from our students speaks loudly to the systemically racist real estate practices we have allowed to exist here. Approval by the City Council would speak even louder.

This is a call to action — for our elected officials, for our business leaders, for our community stakeholders — to not only stand with me, my Board and KCPS families in our demands for a more equitable City, but to fight for one as well.

Enough is enough.

Yours in education,

Mark T. Bedell
Superintendent of Schools
Kansas City Public Schools