

# Example of research paper on kansas city missouri education reform

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The provision of education to children of Kansas City is one of the most important tools that would ascertain economic development of the City (James, 2014, p. 1). Education reforms that cover the entire city is no small feat because Kansas's City students attend many school districts totaling 15- and there are more than 130 schools within the City limits. These statistics paint a grim picture, and a substantial percentage of the kids in Kansas City are not afforded similar educational opportunities. By the time they take the Missouri state exam in the third grade, the Kansas City Public Schools' (KCPS) students will have already fallen behind their peers significantly in exceedingly affluent schools like Lee's Summit in both writing and reading. This gap continuously widens throughout the time entire the kids spent in the Kansas City school system. Because of this situation, Kansas City needs a vision for educational progress that is unified, and this vision should be pursued regardless of the approach or strategy present within the school district (James, 2014, p. 1).

Kansas City public schools have been stripped of state accreditation twice in a ten-year period. The schools have spent billions, but they have remained dysfunctional as ever (Chieppo, 2011, p. 1). Going by this phenomenon, it is noticeable that the Kansas City education reforms should not just involve injection of more money but should encompass focus on performance and accountability. Money alone won't fix the problems that ail urban education. In 1985, Judge Russell Clark, a federal district judge, found out that the school system in Kansas City was segregated in a manner that went against the constitution expectations. The judge ordered the fixing of this problem by compelling the state to spend more money in education improvement. He

ordered the Missouri State and district to spend about US dollars 2 billion to be used in fixing the problem (Chieppo, 2011, p. 1). This amount was eight times the amount Kansas City spent on schools in 1985. From 1985 to 1997, Kansas recorded higher per-pupil spending while it had the lowest student-teacher ratio compared with any other of the countries 280 largest school districts. As part of education reform initiatives, the district used the money to build fifteen brand new schools, and gave a facelift to 54 others. An Olympic-sized swimming pool was constructed in one of the schools. Other schools had a planetarium, a model United Nations complete with a simultaneous translation capability, and others featured a 25-acre wildlife sanctuary (Chieppo, 2011, p. 1). The lavish spending on unnecessary facilities reflected lack of knowledge on how to reform the education in the Kansas City district. All the priorities of the reformers were essentially misplaced because they did not address the real problems that needed to be tackled head-on.

The lavish spending on school facilities came to an end in 1999.

Interestingly, the lavish spending was coupled with a seven-point percentage rise from 73 percent to 80 percent, in the number of African-American students attending the city's schools (Chieppo, 2011, p. 10). However, the student performance had not improved at all; the school achievement gap between minority and white students had not narrowed. The unprecedented investment in the school facilities did not yield the expected results. An important reason for this was the bloated school administration of Kansas City public school. For example a school district that had more than 14, 000 students in a Catholic neighborhood, was run by few administrators; a

superintendent, two assistant superintendents, and a part-time marketing manager. In comparison, the Kansas City public schools had a population of about 36, 000 students, but it was run by more than 600 employees (Chieppo, 2011, p. 1). This was between two and three times more than in districts that had a slightly similar size as Kansas. The money meant for reforming education had gone to the wrong places; more than fifty of the district's budget was unnecessarily spent on the classroom precincts. Additionally, a school board that was practically dysfunctional led to the district having ten superintendents in just ten years. Many of these superintendents had their contracts bought out signifying existence of corruption in the management of the district's education. Astonishingly, there was a moment when five superintendents were on payroll leading to siphoning of funds that could have been directed to education reform. Furthermore, the district was very quick to spend on amenities, but lacked the political will to engage in things that would have improved the performance of students. The school board paid attention the hiring of good teachers. The bad teachers also overstayed, and it was impossible to hear of bad teacher dismissals. After the attempts to peg payment of salaries on merit were blocked, all teachers, custodians, and cafeteria workers were given a 40 percent salary raise (Chieppo, 2011, p. 1). This, therefore, reduced the amount of money available for meaningful education reforms, specifically in classrooms. Over the years, merit pay has been instituted, but the approval of this pay system was not adequately evaluated. Another factor that stalled education reform in Kansas City education district was the lack of substantive curriculum necessary to guide learning across

the many schools. Parents had no wide range of schools to choose from. Charter schools were absent, but magnet schools existed. Fifty private schools were focused on educating 4, 000 Kansas City students by charging half the cost of the district, but many city school officials would not hear any of this and they turned them down (Chieppo, 2011, p. 1). This was myopic of them because by saying no they denied deserving city kids the opportunity to receive an education.

Against this background, there have been concerted efforts by leaders from Missouri State to institute long-lasting education reforms to ensure the revival of education standards in this district. Mayor Sly James has been actively pushing for education reforms to salvage the district from education demise. Mayors lack functional control over any district, but James has focused his efforts in tackling issues that are common to each and every student in Kansas City. In his first year of administration, he laid the groundwork for pursuing education reform. Subsequently, in the second year, he established the “ Turn the Page KC” campaign (James, 2014, p. 1). This campaign is focused on reading proficiency of students in third grade, the learning gap that occur in the summer, improved school attendance level, the readiness of schools, and collection of important data like performance of students and enrolment patterns. The Turn, the Page organization, has an arrangement whereby willing volunteers are absorbed in the education structures of the district, and they become reading tutors throughout the district. This is a hands-on approach that the Mayor believes will yield fruits. Moreover, Mayor James has made some hires, Julie Holland, the first ever Educational Advisor to serve in the office of the mayor for

Kansas City (James, 2011, p. 1). Julie's work will be focused on developing community partnerships that are innovative, and will support the achievement of students across Kansas City's fifteen school districts. There is a necessity for the City to look continuously at the ways it can replicate the recent success stories, and ultimately raise academic achievement among its youth population. Another important education reform suggestion that has been fronted by the mayor has been changing the structure of district governance from an elected board to one based on mayoral leadership (James, 2011, p. 1). The rationale behind this suggestion is that problems facing students in Kansas City Missouri School District extend beyond the classroom. Social challenges of domestic destabilization and high unemployment are cited as leading contributors of student underachievement. As much the Office of the Mayor cannot solve the social ills single-handedly, the Mayor enjoys influence afforded to an elected leader of the city which forms the best platform from which to tackle some of these challenges that students encounter. The Mayor has the ability to leverage his relationships with the business, artistic, philanthropic communities to yield both in-kind and financial support to be channeled to education reform efforts (James, 2011, p. 1)

The continued failure of the Kansas City Missouri School District to adequately provide quality education to every child in the district has many ramifications for the economic and social fabric of the city. A populace that lacks education is prone to engagement in crime. The workforce will under-prepared, and high levels of joblessness will be registered. All these impact negatively the economic well-being of communities. It is immoral for the

leadership of this City and state to sit on their laurels and fail to institute far-reaching education reforms that will salvage the education situation that is in a sorry state.

## References

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