

KC BriefED: 2022 Education at a Glance

KANSAS CITY ACTION FUND

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ABOUT US

The Kansas City Action Fund is a 501(c)4 organization founded with the belief that access to a high-quality public education can change the trajectory of student lives and transform a community. The mission of KC Action Fund (KCAF) is to demand educational opportunities for KC kids that are rooted in equity and the liberation of marginalized students. We do this through collaboration amongst stakeholders, coalition-building, objective data and research, and strategic communications.

Our values are:

- ▲ **Hope:** We believe in the future of our students
- ▲ **Parent Wisdom:** It is important that all parents can choose a school that best meets their child's needs.
- ▲ **Students over Systems:** We are here to advocate for every public-school student, whether they are in traditional or charter systems to ensure that student outcomes are always the priority.
- ▲ **Data Informed:** Action Fund will rely on data and research to provide objective guidance for our work.
- ▲ **Big Tent Collaboration:** We will strive for civic participation that invites more, rather than fewer, voices into the education space. Coordinated action will always take us further than any one entity working alone. We owe our students collaboration for change.
- ▲ **Proactive Engagement:** We will challenge ourselves and the education system to actively pursue multiple opportunities for participation and engagement. We will meet individuals, organizations, and systems where they are and as they are.

We believe that a step in rebuilding our systems, our work, and our programming for the benefit of all children is to understand the current state of education. This is the genesis of our **KC BriefED** – our truth-telling, data-based brief that outlines the state of KC education and, in future issues, tackles pathways to our most ardent problems and roadblocks.

KCAF is gearing up to mobilize our community: we will be asking leaders, elected officials, parents, students, and teachers to join us in doing things differently on behalf of students. To begin this work, we need to ground our work in the realities of the K-12 system. KC BriefED is our first step and will be used to support community surveys, town halls, and focus groups where we can all come together and advocate for change.



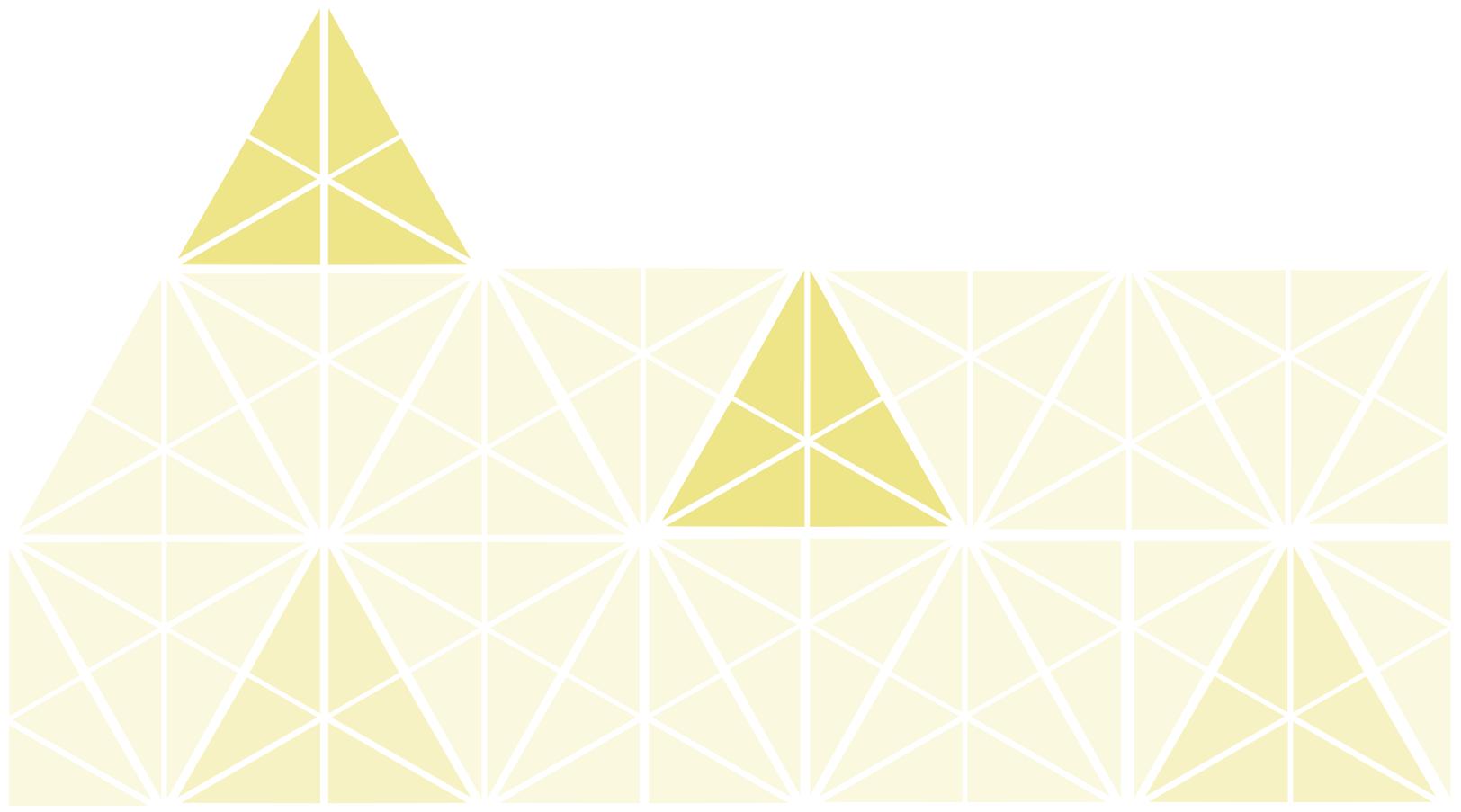
INTRODUCTION

We love Kansas City. We love its people. We love its vibrant culture. We of course love our sports – we will soon be home to the 2023 NFL Draft and the 2026 World Cup. Most importantly, we love our commitment to being a world-class city for **all**.

As part of this commitment, we believe we need to (re)commit to our young people – and to our educational systems. Unfortunately, as we start to understand the impact of COVID and assess how effectively we are serving our children, we can quickly see that, in total, our systems are not meeting students' needs. Yes, we have many, many bright spots of educational success in our city; individual district and charter schools like Lincoln College Prep and University Academy are supporting students toward a 100 percent college acceptance rate, but, on average, success is the outlier rather than the norm.

Despite the extraordinary work of educators throughout this very difficult time, the increased advocacy for education across the city, and the support of many education-focused organizations, our systems continue to prove that education in Kansas City isn't working for our students. Our children – the cultural and economic future of our city – are as capable as any children in the country, but we're not meeting their needs.

At KC Action Fund, we believe that student success should be expected, not accidental. We feel inspired. The clock is ticking, and it's time that everyone in Kansas City get BriefED to the realities of education in Kansas City. Our children deserve better, and Kansas City deserves better.





COVID Impact

Before diving into any data, it is important to acknowledge the obvious: Any conversation regarding K-12 education must account for the impact of the COVID pandemic. From March 2020 through June 2021, the overwhelming majority – more than 85 percent – of Kansas City’s 26,000 public school students attended school virtually. Nationally, where students attended school virtually, students lost ground to their peers, who also lost ground relative to previous years. A recent study by the Center for Education Policy Research at Harvard University, in fact, found that “within school districts that were remote for most of 2020-21, high-poverty schools experienced 50% more achievement loss than low-poverty schools.”¹ In Missouri, the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education reported that in all subjects – English language arts (ELA), math, and science – students who were instructed via a hybrid mode were approximately 20 percentage points lower in proficiency and advanced scores than onsite students and that students who received primarily virtual instruction were five times less likely to be proficient than their onsite peers.²

In Kansas City, across all students in district and charter schools, we saw a 10 percent decline – from 3 in 10 students to 2 in 10 – students scoring proficient and advanced in ELA and math.

In light of this impact, KC Action Fund believes there are important questions to ask of all districts and charter schools:

1. How are you evaluating and addressing the impact of COVID on your students?
2. How are districts aligning federal Elementary and Secondary School Emergency Relief Funds (ESSER) to address learning loss?
3. What do districts and schools need from the civic, business, and philanthropic community to support the work on behalf of students?

1 <https://cepr.harvard.edu/files/cepr/files/5-4.pdf?m=1651690491>

2 Report on the 2020-21 Missouri Assessment Program Grade-Level and End-of-Course Preliminary Statewide Results in English Language Arts, Mathematics, and Science | Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (mo.gov)



Third-Grade Reading

One of the most important indicators of academic success is third-grade reading. Children who cannot read proficiently by the end of third grade are four times more likely to drop out by high school³, and failing to complete high school by age 20 means that an individual is 50 percent more likely to have sporadic employment and seven times more likely to be persistently poor as a young adult.

Children who cannot read proficiently by the end of third grade are

4X

more likely to drop out by high school



Failing to complete high school by age 20 means that an individual is

50%

more likely to have sporadic employment

7X

more likely to be persistently poor as a young adult

Exacerbating these sobering statistics is that more than 80 percent of children from low-income families who are behind in reading at an early age fail to “catch up” at a later age, primarily because 85 percent of future curriculum beyond third grade – content, knowledge, and skills - across all subjects is taught through the basis of reading.

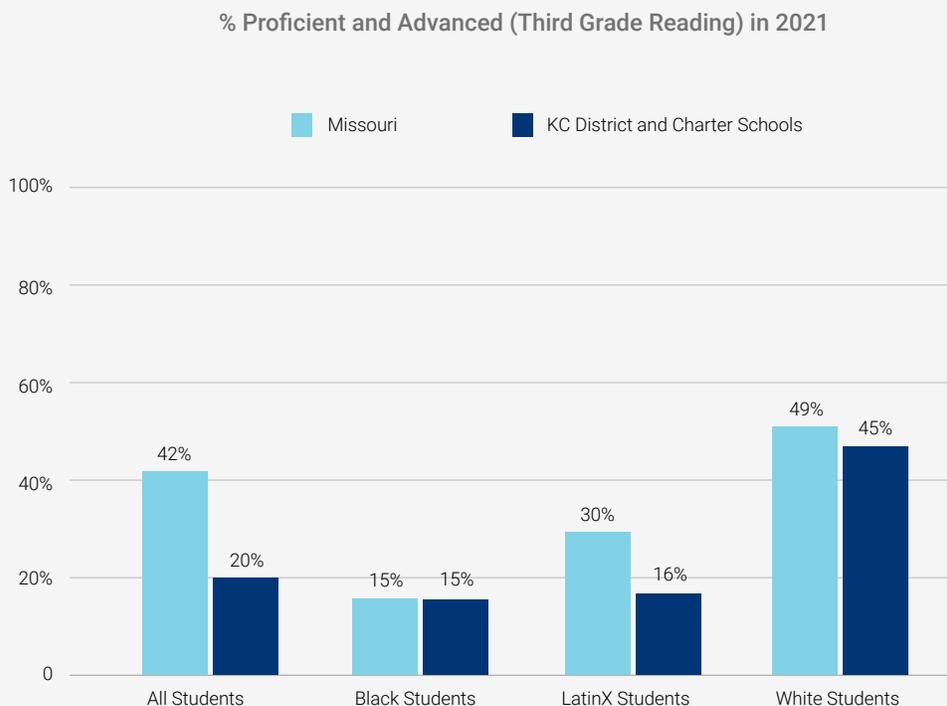
Proficient reading by third grade is pivotal to future success for a child.

KC Action Fund believes that we need to understand the current state of our third-grade readers so that we can best support them – and our educators – moving forward.

As of 2021, there are 365 (20%) third graders in the Kansas City, Missouri, School District Boundaries (district and charter schools) who scored proficient or advanced in third-grade reading on the State of Missouri annual assessment. This means that 84 percent of our third graders scored Below Basic or Basic in third-grade reading, which means they do not have foundational or proficient reading skills and knowledge to access the next grade. Our educators and families across the city will therefore be playing catch-up starting in fourth grade.

³ Annie E. Casey Foundation, 2010. “Students Who Don’t Read Well in Third Grade Are More Likely to Drop Out or Fail to Finish High School.” Located at: <https://www.aecf.org/blog/poverty-puts-struggling-readers-in-double-jeopardy-minorities-most-at-risk>

When we look at the data by race for Kansas City, we see that students who are Black and students who are LatinX are even further behind. While 45 percent of white students are proficient or advanced in third-grade reading, only 15 percent and 16 percent of Black and LatinX students are proficient or advanced in third-grade reading, respectively.



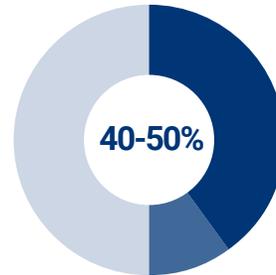
Again, KC Action Fund believes there are important questions to be asked in light of this data:

1. How do we close the gap of the 1,600+ students who are not proficient in third grade so that all 2,000 students are proficient in years to come?
2. What strategies are the most effective, such as [high-dose tutoring](#), to close the reading gap as quickly as possible?
3. What do districts and schools need from the civic, business, and philanthropic community to support the work on behalf of students?



Teacher Recruitment & Retention

Teacher shortages continue to expand in Missouri, and the number of subject areas considered in “high need” for teachers has expanded to include nearly all subjects at all K-12 grade levels taught in the state. Further, 40-50 percent of teachers leave within the first five years of teaching, with burnout, low comparative pay, and poor student supports consistently ranking as the leading reasons teachers leave the profession. And now, compounded by generalized stress from the pandemic, teachers are at their limits.



of teachers
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Leading reasons teachers
leave include burnout,
poor student support &
low comparative pay



White female teachers are disproportionately represented state-wide, with only seven percent of teachers identifying as people of color; however, public schools in Kansas City serve a majority of students of color. That means only about one tenth of public-school students in Kansas City see themselves racially represented by their teachers. Short-term learning and behavior consequences for students, as well as students’ long-term educational and economic outcomes, are directly associated with their opportunity to learn from teachers of the same race.⁴

While teacher recruitment and retention is a national problem, KC Action Fund believes that by working collaboratively, we can develop local solutions for our students and teachers.

1. How can we as a region identify and employ creative strategies to support better teacher compensation?
2. Outside of compensation, what can Kansas City do to make teaching a more desirable profession?
3. What do districts and schools need from the civic, business, and philanthropic community to support students and teachers?

You will be hearing a lot more data from KC Action Fund in the future. We are here to support school districts and charter schools to better serve our students, and we intend to hold school systems accountable when they are not preparing our children for success in academics and in life.

To learn more about KC Action Fund, visit our website at www.kcactionfund.org.

⁴ “Representation Matters: The effect of own-race teachers on student achievement,” by Egalite, Anna J., Kisida, Brian, and Winters, Marcus A. 2015. *Economics of Education Review*.”