

# PRESS RELEASE

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## KCPS Proactively Addresses Inaccurate Attendance Data

*Misreporting occurred before Dr. Mark Bedell become superintendent*

**Kansas City, November 20, 2019:** Kansas City Public Schools is proactively sharing information about the intentional misreporting of student attendance data that occurred before Dr. Mark Bedell became superintendent. Today's release includes a review of the findings of an independent investigation and an outline of corrective steps that have already been taken by Dr. Bedell to ensure that nothing of this sort ever happens again.

In January 2019, KCPS learned of possible attendance data inaccuracies that occurred over a three year period from 2013-2016. With this, KCPS immediately began an internal investigation in February 2019, and upon further review, the KCPS team decided to move the investigation into the attendance data to an outside investigative entity.

The independent investigation of reports regarding altered student attendance records over a period of three school years, 2013-2014, 2014-2015 and 2015-2016, revealed that a small circle of KCPS employees changed student attendance records in the district's student information system to increase the percentage of students who were reported as present for 90 percent of the school year.

These actions resulted in a higher percentage of students attending class being reported to the state and the district receiving a higher-than-earned score in the Missouri School Improvement Performance Standards. This misreporting also resulted in KCPS receiving more funding from the state than it was actually due.

The independent investigation revealed that this alteration of data has not occurred since 2016. The investigation examined forensic records for school years 2016-2017 and 2017-2018 and found no similar wrongdoing or problematic conduct analogous to its findings for 2013-2014, 2014-2015, and 2015-2016.

KCPS has been working diligently to earn points for academic achievement, subgroup achievement, college and career readiness measures, graduation rates and attendance rates - all counting toward an Annual Performance Report (APR) number that helps indicate the district's progress toward full accreditation.

The state standard on attendance requires 90 percent of students be in attendance 90 percent of the time in order for the district to receive full credit in this category. There are significant breaks in the scoring system that are counted when a district achieves the 80 percent threshold. The attendance records that were changed allowed the district to score over that 80 percent threshold when in fact the records indicate that attendance fell just short of that mark.



Significant changes in human resources policy, personnel and organizational culture were instituted by KCPS in the 2016-2017 school year, spearheaded by Dr. Mark Bedell, who became superintendent that year. These policies make it much easier for employees to report incidents without feeling pressured to engage in improper behavior. These changes include:

- A KCPS employee may directly contact the Chief Human Resource Officer to report alleged improper behavior.
- A KCPS employee may directly contact the Human Resource Director of Employee Relations to report alleged improper behavior.
- An ethics hotline is in place for employees to leave anonymous tips to report alleged improper behavior.
- An extensive three (3) day onboarding process is in place to address, among other things, the ethical culture that KCPS promotes.
- A “Let’s Talk”, web-based feature allows for reporting of ethics concerns to the Superintendent and the Chief Human Resource Officer.

The investigation implicates seven individuals who were involved.

With this, corrective actions have been implemented to address the findings of both the independent investigation and the district’s internal attendance audit. These actions include the establishment of the following:

- An Attendance Standard Operating Procedure (SOP)
- Revised district-wide training for attendance monitors (regarding attendance reconciliation, attendance verification, documentation, and checklists)
- District-wide standardized attendance documentation in compliance with DESE Attendance Reporting Policy
- Improved management controls in Tyler SIS (the district’s student information system) regarding attendance marking.

KCPS has been working with the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE) officials to keep them apprised of the investigation. They have been cooperative in working with the district through this data. The district is still working through how this might affect its Annual Performance Report numbers, again, because the data is cumulative from year to year. And as the school system works through this, it was important to bring this to the attention of not only KCPS internal staff, but families and the community as well. We wanted to be upfront with our findings and actions.

We have worked diligently to earn trust and demonstrate academic and performance progress in Kansas City Public Schools. We regret the actions of a few have affected many and we are sorry for those actions. We have brought this city into the fold of ownership of our schools and this acknowledgment of past reporting inaccuracies does not diminish our continued progress toward full accreditation. We commit to our continuation of supporting our students and families and providing the best educational opportunities for our Kansas City children.

**Thoughts from Dr. Mark Bedell, Superintendent:**

“Please know that these actions, conducted by a few in our school district, and who are no longer working for our schools, cannot and will not be tolerated or accepted. While these ramifications might adversely affect our attendance data in the short-term, I remain steadfast and determined to continue our positive course we began implementing when I arrived in 2016.

The findings within the report revealed an unhealthy culture within parts the of school district's staff several years ago. We have since worked tirelessly to build a new culture within the district, one that is geared toward achieving excellence while providing a workplace that inspires and empowers all people. We want to remind our community, the people of Kansas City, that we are in the midst of bringing a new vision to life on behalf of the children of Kansas City. Great things are happening for our children, and we are determined to continue helping navigate their successful futures."

**Thoughts from Ms. Pattie Mansur, Board of Education Chairperson:**

"There are several items we want to address regarding the findings of this report. First, the Board has been working with the administration throughout this investigation. It has been important to us to provide support and keep apprised of the findings. While we are disappointed and frustrated by the findings of this report, we are also grateful that the current district leadership took decisive action to address the outcomes of the report with the appropriate parties, and subsequently implement the necessary personnel decisions. We are also encouraged to learn that the misdeeds ceased following the arrival of Dr. Bedell, and we are satisfied with the actions now in place to ensure this won't happen again.

We apologize to the state, the city of Kansas City, our teachers and our staff members of the district, and most importantly to our children and families who depend on us. We believe the District has been on a much stronger path forward the past three years. The appropriate safeguards are now in place, and our children are in good hands."

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