



An Open Letter to Kansas City Public School Teachers

Ethan Gray, Founder and CEO – CEE-Trust

Late last week my organization submitted our final recommendations for how to transform public education in unaccredited Missouri school districts with a special emphasis on Kansas City Public Schools.

In our first draft (released in January), we explained that our plan was guided by research into the conditions that enable the nation's top urban schools to succeed: empowering educators to run schools while holding schools accountable for student success.

We also explained that under our plan every three and four year old would access pre-K, schools would control over \$10,000 per student, teachers could be paid more, and schools would have budgetary flexibility to purchase wrap-around services.

Some critics of our plan suggested that it was impossible to provide all of these benefits, that there wasn't enough money in the system. That's just not true. By reallocating money from today's top-down school district structure, and empowering educators at the school level to make key decisions, we can achieve all these priorities.

To demonstrate exactly how this would work we added a new section to [our report](#) – Appendix C (p. 72-73) – that outlines a sample elementary school budget.

In our sample school budget we show that:

- Teachers would be **paid 20 percent more** on average than what they are paid by KCPS.
- Class sizes would be more than **20 percent smaller** than state requirements.
- The school would have **full time art, music, and PE teachers** to ensure a rich curriculum.
- The school would have a **full time social worker** and a **half-time nurse** to help meet students' mental and physical health needs.
- The school would employ a director of finance and operations, to ensure the **principal could focus on instructional leadership**.
- The school system would still provide funding for **every 3 and 4 year old to access pre-K** (see appendix B on p. 71).

Our sample school also has the budgetary flexibility to make other choices, like investing in a robust technology plan. But it could just as easily spend some of that technology money on other priorities, like partnering with a dentist's office to provide students with dental care, or upgrading the school's meal plan to provide more healthy or organic foods.



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The point is that schools and educators should have the power to decide how best to allocate their budgets, because nobody knows how to meet students' needs in school better than their teachers.

Why have we addressed this letter to KCPS teachers? Over the past several months, those who benefit by keeping the current system in place have consistently misrepresented our beliefs and what our plan would mean for you.

They have suggested that this plan is experimental, when it is based on solid research into the conditions that enable school success.

They have said it would be bad for teachers, when it puts teachers in charge of schools, preserves pensions, health care, and collective bargain, and increases teacher pay by 20 percent.

They have said it is a charter school plan that privatizes education, when we require schools to be part of a strong central school system, outlaw for-profit schools, and increase local control.

Every time our views are misrepresented you are denied an opportunity to fully consider which plan would better enable your success as educators and the success of your students.

That does not mean our plan is without challenges. We outline a multi-year transition period during which some teachers will have to apply for jobs with new schools. Collective bargaining at the school level, as opposed to the district level where it is now, will require more of teachers' unions. And parents will have to adjust to a new system where they make an active choice as to where to enroll their children in school, even if that school is their neighborhood option.

There is also some uncertainty at the state level. We don't know what the Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE) will recommend to the State Board of Education; our plan is one of several under consideration. And KCPS might avoid state intervention altogether if it scores in the provisional accreditation range again this year.

Regardless of whether our plan moves forward, or if KCPS regains accreditation, we think that you – as educators – deserve better pay and more control over what happens in your schools. You deserve a school system that provides universal access to pre-K and money for wrap around services. You deserve better working conditions and more professionalism. You deserve all this because we believe when these priorities are met better student results will follow.

We encourage you to read our [final plan](#) and a new [FAQ's](#) we put together. And we wish you all the best in your important efforts to serve the children of Kansas City.