

VOTERS SAY KANSAS CITY, MISSOURI SCHOOLS ON WRONG TRACK

Overview

An opinion poll of voters from across the Kansas City, Missouri School District shows widespread frustration with the performance of the public school system.

In a telephone survey of 400 voters, 69% said the Kansas City, Missouri School District is on the wrong track. More than 86% said that the School District is very important to the economic well-being and overall quality of life in Kansas City. But voters believe that it provides an inadequate education for students, cheats taxpayers, and is not able to handle the major issues facing the schools.

Voters were asked about their reaction to various proposals to improve academic performance. Although citizens have not yet reached a consensus about remedies for the situation, significant trends emerged from the research.

In regard to the proposal to change from an elected board to an appointed board, voters' attitudes are influenced by the potential gains that might come from such a measure. A majority of voters feel that an appointed board would provide more accountability in improving academic performance and managing the District's finances, reduce the amount of political distractions and patronage, and help recruit and retain a qualified superintendent who could focus on academic performance instead of dealing with outside political influences. Voters are divided about whether an appointed board could help prevent a State take-over. A majority say that since nothing else has worked there is nothing to lose in changing over to an appointed board.

If there were to be an appointed board, an overwhelming majority of voters—78%--said they would be more likely to support an appointed board that was recommended by a panel of education, business and community leaders. There is less support for a school board appointed by some level of government.

2.

Other proposals to improve the school district meet with mixed reactions. One third support dividing up the district and parceling it out to other districts in the area. Slightly over half oppose having members elected at large rather than by sub-districts. A majority believe that more tax dollars are not the answer. And a majority agree that a good, permanent superintendent is needed to solve the problems.

The poll sampled responses in four quadrants of the school district: urban core north; urban core south and east; southwest; and downtown/west/northeast. A significant majority of voters in all quadrants agree that the District's performance is unsatisfactory. There is less support for an appointed board among voters in the two urban core quadrants unless the board were to be appointed by professionals in higher education, business and civic organizations. Views of African Americans (in contrast to other ethnic groups) are similar to the views of voters in the urban core quadrants on items measuring degree of dissatisfaction with the school system and options for changing it.

Some specific statistics:

Among the 400 voters surveyed:

69% say that the District is "broken"

69% say that it is on the wrong track

73% say that it is providing an inadequate education for students

74% say that taxpayers are being cheated

77% disapprove of the way the School Board is handling major issues facing the District

39% are optimistic or somewhat optimistic that the Board can turn things around

In evaluating the alternative of an appointed rather than an elected board:

56% say that an appointed board would provide more accountability in managing the District's finances and improving academic achievement

54% say that an appointed board would reduce the amount of political distractions and patronage in the District

64% say that an appointed board would make it easier for the District to recruit and keep a permanent superintendent

78% support changing from an elected to appointed board if the board were selected from nominees submitted by professionals from higher education, business and community agencies.

3.

One possible outcome is a State takeover if the District does not meet minimum academic standards:

- 47% favor a State takeover**
- 40% oppose a State takeover**
- 13% are undecided**

In regard to the proposal to have all Board members elected at large rather than 6 of the 9 from sub districts:

- 46% favor the current system**
- 35% oppose the current system**
- 19% are undecided**

On the proposal to divide up the Kansas City, Missouri District and parcel it out to other school districts in the area:

- 29% agree with dividing it up**
- 66% disagree**

35% of the respondents said they had a child, grandchild, niece or nephew or other close relative who attends public schools in the District.

Responses by geographical quadrant to representative questions:

“The Kansas City, Missouri school system is broken and is not providing an adequate education for students.”

	<u>Agree</u>	<u>Disagree</u>	<u>Don't Know</u>
Urban Core (north)	55%	38%	7%
Urban Core (south & east)	59%	36%	5%
Southwest	78%	15%	7%
Downtown, West, N.E.	74%	18%	8%

“Since nothing else has worked, there is nothing to lose in changing from an elected to an appointed board.”

	<u>Agree</u>	<u>Disagree</u>	<u>Don't Know</u>
Urban Core (north)	49%	46%	5%
Urban Core (south & east)	36%	53%	11%
Southwest	64%	28%	8%
Downtown, West, N.E.	58%	37%	5%

4.

“How likely are you to support a board proposed by leaders in higher education, business and civic affairs?”

	More Likely	Less Likely	<u>Don't</u> Know
Urban Core (north)	77%	17%	6%
Urban Core (south & east)	72%	22%	8%
Southwest	81%	14%	5%
Downtown, West, N.E.	80%	14%	6%

Methodology: Telephone interviews were conducted with a random sample of 400 voters who live in the Kansas City, Missouri School District. Sampling was stratified so that there was proportional representation from all geographic sectors. Calls took place in August and September, 2008. Statistically, the results for the aggregate sample are accurate within +/- 5%. The project was sponsored by the Citizens Association, a non-partisan and diverse civic action organization. It was conducted by pollster and political consultant Patrick Gray and was funded by donations from more than 20 individuals and organizations.

***In a recent citizen satisfaction survey undertaken by the City of Kansas City, Missouri opinions about the school system were not measured. However, “Kansas City as a place to raise children” received one of the lowest rating of all the factors listed.**

For more information about the poll and the Citizens Association contact Ford R. Nelson, Jr., Chair, Citizens Association, and 816-472-3109.