



**2014 State of the City Address
Mayor Sly James
March 24th, 2014**

- **Good morning colleagues, students, community members, area superintendents, and honored guests.**
- **I know we have several state, county and local elected officials here, including some of my fellow mayors, and I'd like them all to stand to be recognized.**
- **Thank you all for your commitment to public service.**
- **The demographics of our constituencies vary, but we all have the common goal of serving our communities and leaving them in good shape for our future leaders.**
- **On that note, as you can tell, this is a different kind of State of the City Address.**
- **Sitting in front of me today are about 400 Park Hill High School juniors and seniors.**

- **This event could not have taken place without the work of Dr. Brad Kincheloe, the principal here at Park Hill High School.**
- **Last fall, my staff called Dr. Kincheloe with an idea. And it's because of him that our idea became an unprecedented event like this.**
- **I also want to thank Superintendent Dr. Scott Springston, Nicole Kirby and the communications staff at the Central Office, and the Park Hill Board of Education, for their support and their blessing in allowing my office to borrow their school and their students for a bit this morning.**
- **Students from across the metro are tuning in this morning, thanks to KCPT's efforts to livestream this event.**
- **Public institutions, like KCPT, are critical in capturing the heartbeat of a community.**
- **Thank you to the dedicated staff at KCPT for making today's event a part of your programming and a part of your mission.**
- **After I wrap up my speech, you're going to hear what's on the mind of five Park Hill High School students.**
- **They're going to join me on stage and we're going to have a townhall style question and answer segment.**
- **I'm going to have some help from my friend Nick Haines, who will moderate the townhall.**
- **Nick may look familiar to you because he hosts "Kansas City Week In Review" and co-hosts "The Local Show."**

- **Nick, thank you as well for contributing your talents to making this State of the City Address a special event.**
- **The audience and media may be wondering why I wanted to retool the annual State of the City Address in this manner.**
- **It's because the progress we make as a City not only impacts the residents of today - but for generations to come.**
- **High school students may only make up about 5% of our population, but they make up 100% of our future.**
- **They will lead this City when the rest of us are gone.**
- **So, I'm here today to talk with these young people about where we are and where we want to go as a community.**
- **After all, they will inherit the consequences, good or bad, of the decisions we make today.**
- **Students, believe it or not, I was your age once.**
- **Things were different then, our young opinions were seldom, if ever, sought and our input was not in great demand.**
- **I think I was a reasonably smart guy and had a fairly good head on my shoulders.**
- **But I'm not sure I really understood how some of the decisions adults were making back then would impact me as an adult.**
- **I'm here to tell you that they will.**

- **Let me give you an example of how that works, and while I'm at it, hopefully make a few friends among the history teachers in the room.**
- **Students, if you ever are sitting in history class wondering why any of that stuff matters, consider the streetcar as a case study in why history is important.**
- **In the late 50s, Kansas City had a complete streetcar system and the second-most miles of street rails of any place in the country.**
- **Downtown then, though racially segregated, was vibrant and the center of business activity.**
- **We allowed ourselves to be seduced by the lure of automobiles and buses and we abandoned streetcars. That was a mistake.**
- **It set us up for the disinvestment in our urban core that is synonymous with white flight. And our City is still working towards reconnecting our neighborhoods because of it.**
- **So, as I talk this morning about the issues we're facing at City Hall, I want to be sure you all see the connection between them and the City you're going to inherit.**
- **To understand where we need to go, we need to spend a few minutes assessing where we are.**
- **During the past few years, to be blunt, Kansas City has had it going on.**
- **We were named a top 10 travel destination in the US, one of the 6 best cities in the country to start a business, and in the**

top 20 cities to raise a family.

- **The young adults in the audience will be happy to know that a lot of people think Kansas City is pretty frosty.**
- **By the way, Newsweek also said that Kansas City, Missouri has one of the top 5 innovative mayors in the country.**
- **And clearly, they know what they're talking about...**
- **Here's the takeaway from all of that - We haven't been a cow town for decades and we are no longer a flyover destination.**
- **Quite the contrary - we are *the* destination.**
- **We don't have to compete with anyone - they have to compete with us.**
- **All of that is because we have been doubling down on facts and data to run the City with a results-driven focus.**
- **That sometimes means making difficult decisions with a long-term impact so that we can continue to move onward and upward - not moving backward or staying sedentary.**
- **When I say WE, I mean it. This is not a solo effort.**
- **The City Council to whom you were introduced earlier, are some of the most dedicated people I have ever had the pleasure to work with.**
- **In life, you will find that you don't always agree with everyone. That's just life.**

- **Sometimes you can't even bring 13 people around the dinner table who can all agree on a choice for dessert.**
- **But as a Council, we have found ways to find common ground on a variety of pressing policy issues.**
- **And when we disagree, we know that it is because we all care so deeply about this City.**
- **That makes my job a bit easier, and sometimes even a lot more lively.**
- **Our City Manager, Troy Schulte, is responsible for implementing the Council's policies and running the daily operations of City government.**
- **He provides behind-the-scenes leadership to our City that, if we had a hidden camera in his office, would wow the residents of this City.**
- **Thank you for that, Troy.**
- **Enough about him. Now, let's talk about me.**
- **My administration is focused on improving our City through 4 "Es."**
- **Those are Efficiency, Employment, Enforcement, and Education.**
- **These four areas all intersect and impact the overall success of this City so it's important that we make progress in all of**

them.

- I cannot sit here and tell you all with a straight face that equal progress is being made on all four Es.
- But we are rocking and rolling with regard to Employment and Efficiency.
- We are making tremendous gains in shaping City government into an efficient beacon of innovation, problem-solving and public service.
- That isn't just a good talking point. It's good business.
- And that should be important to you because when City government most efficiently leverages the public's tax dollars, we can better direct them to meet residents' needs and exceed their expectations.
- Municipal budgeting can be a complex puzzle.
- Think of it this way: almost everyone has more "wants" than they have resources.
- The trick is taking care of our needs strategically so that we have resources left over to get at least a few of our "wants."
- Or we need to figure out how to increase the amount of money we have.
- In the context of City government, we owe it to our residents to use their tax dollars wisely.

- **Several data-driven programs, like KCStat and performance management, coupled with innovative work to streamline red tape, ensure that our residents are getting the best return on their investment possible.**
- **I am very grateful for and proud of the tremendous work of the three young women in this area, Kate Bender, Julie Steenson, and our Chief Innovation Officer, Ashley Hand.**
- **Kate, Julie, and Ashley, please stand to be properly thanked for your hard work.**
- **There is nothing more critical to results-based leadership than facts and data.**
- **And concentrating on results and return on investment is important when you have a pot of money, not a bottomless barrel of money.**
- **This year's budget is a mixed bag for Kansas City because revenue is down slightly while some of our expenses continue to climb.**
- **You all are probably too young to have given much thought to retirement and pensions.**
- **But those things have been front and center during budget meetings this winter at City Hall.**
- **So, let me tell you why pension costs will impact you.**
- **Cities, like other employers, make a promise to their employees: "Work here for at least several years and you will**

be given a reasonable retirement plan and we'll pick up the check.”

- **Sounds good, right?**
- **The problem is that revenue in many cities hasn't kept pace with the amount of money needed to fully fund the retirement plans of their employees.**
- **And that negatively impacts the amount of money cities have available for basic public services and it also negatively impacts their credit rating.**
- **Unfunded pension liabilities are crippling many cities across the nation.**
- **Kansas City is not one of them because of our solid financial practices and because we are facing our pension challenges head-on.**
- **In fact, with this budget, we are fully funding all of our pension obligations for the first time in more than a decade.**
- **It's like every January when families have to make a big credit card payment to pay off their Christmas bills and they have to pull back on their spending to make up for that.**
- **But we will continue to make the right decisions for the long-term, even if it means operating with a lean budget in the short-term.**
- **There are certainly ways to innovate local government without having to spend a ton of money.**

- **I'm proud that in Kansas City that means breaking down any barriers in local government that may impede women from maximizing their potential.**
- **My office created the WE initiative - WE stands for Women's Empowerment.**
- **And for the past few months, the experts at the UMKC Women's Center, the Women's Foundation of Greater Kansas City, and the Central Exchange have helped us examine the policies and processes of local government.**
- **The goal is to see how we can shape local government to make it a conduit for widespread prosperity.**
- **Study after study tells us that when women have their fair share of leadership opportunities, and equal pay, everyone wins and everyone benefits.**
- **I'm a son, husband, father, father-in-law, friend, and colleague to some pretty awesome women and I appreciate the perspective they bring to every project and every discussion.**
- **Thursday, we'll be rolling out a blueprint for WE so be sure to follow me online to find out the details.**
- **Our efficiency agenda is packed with good stories and our residents are taking note of all of them.**
- **For the first time ever, an impressive 75.2 percent of residents rated our City as an "excellent" or "good" place to live, according to our customer satisfaction survey.**

- **This is the highest score ever reached, and it marks a dramatic 5.4 percent increase since last year's survey alone.**
- **It certainly didn't hurt that we delivered on our promise to lower some taxes, while modernizing and upgrading our infrastructure, including sewers, water mains, and streets.**
- **Next month, residents will have the opportunity to authorize \$500 million in revenue bonds to update our water system.**
- **Today's low interest rates could save taxpayers millions of dollars, and ensure affordable, clean, and safe drinking water for everyone.**
- **That's a smart investment in basic City services that drives citizen satisfaction.**
- **Few things increase satisfaction like a booming economy.**
- **Over the past year, I've been to every corner of this City touting economic development announcements.**
- **A pivotal moment for our economy came in January when Cerner announced that it will redevelop the former Bannister Mall site and add a whopping 15,000 new jobs over the life of the project.**
- **15,000 new jobs is basically a small town. That's a big deal.**
- **In addition to the historic Cerner announcement, we've added 54 projects and 2889 new jobs to our portfolio since my last State of the City Address.**

- **Freightquote, Catalent, and Burns and McDonnell are also all expanding down south.**
- **We finally opened a grocery store east of Troost with the Aldi at 39th and Prospect.**
- **And we're moving forward on the East Patrol police station and crime lab.**
- **That project is about more than bricks and mortar - it's a redevelopment catalyst in terms of physical development and in developing social capital.**
- **Downtown residential and commercial development is booming, thanks in large part to the streetcar starterline and our creative economy.**
- **And areas north of the river continue to grow like wild fire.**
- **Twin Creeks is a residential development that will be home to a whole new generation of Northlanders - possibly as many as 70,000.**
- **That type of residential project is supported by Northland-based jobs announcements like Aviation Technical Services, which is bringing almost 600 well-paying technical and engineering aerospace jobs to the City.**
- **We are one City and it's in our best interest to pursue economic development opportunities that spread prosperity north, south, east and west.**

- **That's why I am committed to expanding the development that our downtown has already seen as a result of the streetcar starter line.**
- **Over 30 new or renovation projects worth three-quarters of a billion dollars are already in process or planning phases.**
- **And more is on the way in the downtown corridor.**
- **The downtown streetcar starter line is just that—a start!**
- **We've already proven to the federal government that we have our act together. That's why they gave us a \$20 million TIGER grant for the starter line.**
- **That's the largest TIGER grant in the country and the only one for streetcar.**
- **We're working to secure another partnership with them as we consider potential expansion routes.**
- **And we're learning from that history lesson I told you earlier, and from our mistakes of the past, that we must be aggressive in finding ways to not only keep up with other cities, but to surpass them.**
- **That means understanding that the pay off to making tough decisions today is long-term growth.**
- **To that end, we've learned that investing in our infrastructure is critical to building and maintaining a world-class City.**
- **That's why we're having a sometimes rather heated community debate regarding the future of our airport.**
- **Last May, I appointed a commission of community stakeholders to study whether or not the current configuration of our airport was meeting our needs and if not, to consider**

possible alternatives.

- **While conducting their analysis, they've also had to battle misinformation.**
- **Many people argue, for example, money would be better spent on schools and roads than the airport.**
- **The reality is, however, that funds generated at airport must stay there.**
- **Facts and data have guided the commission's work.**
- **I'm not sure what they will recommend, but I'm certain that some people will agree with their assessment and others will not.**
- **Certainly, we now know that aspects of KCI need to be modernized and improved.**
- **Rather than looking at the airport as a quandary, let's look at it as an opportunity to ensure the airport is truly an asset in every sense of the word.**
- **We are a city of innovators, creators and entrepreneurs.**
- **I know we can chart a path forward for the airport that retains the convenience residents love while ensuring that when visitors step foot into it, their first thought is, "If this is what the Kansas City airport is like then I can't wait to see what else this unique town has to offer."**
- **We certainly are in a unique position.**
- **Other cities are trying to keep jobs from flowing out of their neighborhoods and we're focusing on keeping our forward momentum flowing.**

- **This year, we've made progress on several fronts that will keep us moving in the right direction.**
- **We sought the guidance of computer programming experts at Code for America in telling us how local government could help foster business development.**
- **And that partnership came to fruition this year with a cutting-edge, innovative app, called BizFriend.ly, which connects individuals with an idea and the entrepreneurial spirit to the tools they need to succeed in today's high-tech, digital world.**
- **We've also streamlined our economic development process.**
- **That's what AdvanceKC is all about.**
- **The Economic Development Corporation, or EDC as we call it, is the entity that helps the City recruit and retain businesses.**
- **Through the AdvanceKC process, we've started molding our EDC into a more strategic organization focused on industries that young people, like you all, will work in.**
- **Looking at this crowd of young people today, I see faces that could create a start-up that becomes the next Google or Twitter.**
- **High tech start-ups will be a huge chapter in the story we write about our economy of the future.**
- **Launch KC is our start-up and business recruitment program focused on attracting tech and creative entrepreneurs to town.**

- **The program is only a little over a year old, but is already claiming some big victories.**
- **We know the areas we need to cultivate in order to position ourselves as an economic powerhouse in the years to come.**
- **Tech fields and start-ups are certainly a key area.**
- **But you simply can't talk about economic development in Kansas City these days without mentioning our creative economy.**
- **The most recent data available is mindblowing:**
- **113 non-profit arts and arts-active organizations operate in Kansas City and generate more than \$180 million in revenue.**
- **The creative industries are responsible for \$1.4 billion in exports and \$2.3 billion in revenues and employ 17,723 workers in Kansas City, totaling 5% of the local workforce.**
- **The Downtown Council created a map that shows the creative businesses that call our downtown home.**
- **But arts and culture add value to a community in more ways than only monetary.**
- **Our arts and cultural institutions attract people to Kansas City.**
- **And the more people who come to our City, the bigger the spotlight that shines upon us.**

- **In order to capitalize on our arts and culture institutions, the Mayor's Task Force for the Arts spent two years analyzing our assets and engaging our community on its long-term vision for the arts.**
- **My friend, Mike Burke, expertly led this tremendous group of individuals and I know that when you all are my age you'll look back at this moment in our City's history and consider it the time when we found our voice when it comes to arts and culture.**
- **At the end of the day, we are one of only a handful of major cities who can boast of symphony, ballet, opera, and repertory theater companies.**
- **That is a tremendous advantage that we must continue to leverage.**
- **Kansas City stands out.**
- **We are not just a face in a crowd of cities.**
- **We need to aim our sights high because, frankly, we have what it takes to compete for jobs, visitors, new residents, and accolades.**
- **You have probably heard talk of the economic border war between Missouri and Kansas.**
- **Based on some of the talk, you would think you need a passport to drive from Kansas City, Missouri to Prairie Village, Kansas.**

- **Certainly, we need to change the way we think of development incentives.**
- **But we also need to realize that this fixation about competing with Kansas for jobs is short-sighted.**
- **I know it's great political theater to act like Kansas is throwing grenades over the state border and sending in double agents like something out of a prime time television drama.**
- **But the fact is we are kicking butt and taking names.**
- **Last month, Governor Nixon and I announced that Catalent, a worldwide leader in the pharmaceutical industry, would be expanding here in Kansas City.**
- **Catalent is based in New Jersey and has 30 facilities on five different continents.**
- **Governor Nixon aptly noted that they have "virtually unlimited" options for their expansion project.**
- **But they chose Kansas City.**
- **In today's economic development climate, that shows that we're doing something right.**
- **But there are a couple of ways we can be tripped up when it comes to continuing our forward momentum - crime and education.**
- **Simply put, our crime rate is too high and has been that way for far too long.**

- **But we can't shrug our shoulders and say "oh well."**
- **For many, that's an easy thing to do because of the pattern of crime in our City.**
- **Forty-seven percent of murders in our City occur within 13-square-miles of our 316-square-mile City.**
- **It's easy to ignore something like that if you don't live within those 13-square miles.**
- **I suspect many in this room do not.**
- **I did. I grew up at 44th and Montgall.**
- **And Damiah and her mother did.**
- **Damiah was three-years-old when she and her mother were gunned down in their home this past fall.**
- **That just is not right.**
- **I'm too proud of all the good we're doing and of all the good things we have going on to let this headline be the story people hear about Kansas City.**
- **Our crime problem is just that - it's OUR problem.**
- **Because the people who are killed in this City are more than statistics - they are family, friends, coworkers, boyfriends, girlfriends, wives, husbands, fathers, and mothers.**

- I'd like for the students in the room to look under your seats.
- If you have a card under your seat with the State of the City logo on it, please stand for a moment.
- Those standing represent the 106 people who died last year in homicides in this City.
- If your card has a number 1-90 on the back of it please remain standing, but everyone else can sit down.
- The 90 people standing represent the 90 people whose lives were taken by a handgun last year.
- 85% of homicides in Kansas City last year were committed with a handgun.
- If 85% of all fatal car accidents could be attributed to a single type of vehicle, that vehicle would be taken off the road.
- But commonsense isn't always commonly applied when it comes to regulating guns.
- Here in Missouri, we must recognize that a one-size-fits-all approach to guns doesn't work.
- What's good for rural Missouri is not necessarily good for urban Kansas City and St. Louis.
- That was the concept behind Attorney General Chris Koster's Urban Crime Summit.
- For four full days in September, I joined the Attorney General,

KCPD's Chief Darryl Forté, and Mayor Slay and Chief Dotson from St. Louis.

- **During that week, we learned some valuable lessons and strategies from criminal justice experts, other cities' best practices, and from each other.**
- **That Summit resulted in several recommendations, including support for an armed offender court docket pilot project.**
- **Moving forward, I'll gladly do all that I can to work with Prosecutor Jean Peters Baker to get an armed offender docket pilot project up and running.**
- **At this point, I believe we need to explore options we haven't tried before to get the results we need for our neighborhoods.**
- **Additionally, today's paper features a joint op-ed written by Chief Forté and me.**
- **In it, we support House Bill 2159, sponsored by State Representative Brandon Ellington.**
- **Representative Ellington's bill would require universal background checks before a gun can be purchased and the mandatory reporting of lost or stolen handguns.**
- **Nothing we propose limits the rights of reasonable, law-abiding citizens from owning guns, but we just might keep some idiot with an illegal gun from gunning down three-year-olds in their homes.**
- **I'll also continue to fully support KC NoVA, our**

focused-deterrence crime fighting strategy.

- **That means we're focusing on the baddest of the bad - the network of people who perpetrate the most violent crimes in the City.**
- **It's still a relatively new program and centers upon an unprecedented collaboration between local, state, and federal officials.**
- **You see, KC NoVA doesn't simply use the stick of enforcement and incarceration to change the landscape of violence, but also uses the carrot of a way out of a lifestyle of risk that could lead to violence.**
- **As of this month, KC NoVA's social service outreach program had already assessed 98 individuals for social service needs on condition that they use this opportunity to get off the path they were on.**
- **KC NoVA offers a variety of opportunities to people in our community who need to change their trajectory.**
- **But we tell them our offer of social services comes at a price.**
- **Take the help and change, or eventually go to prison or wind up dead on the street.**
- **This year, the Department of Justice put its stamp of approval on KC NoVA with a \$1 million Byrne Grant.**
- **The grant will focus on the Prospect Corridor, an area bounded roughly by 25th Street on the north, 39th on the south and between Paseo and Benton Boulevards.**

- **Dedicating these resources to the Prospect Corridor will help return that area to the family-centered, vibrant place I remember from my childhood.**
- **KC NoVA is working and it's the right strategy for dealing with criminals and criminal behavior, but it will take time to combat a problem that has taken decades to get to this level.**
- **But it certainly would help if we could take illegal guns out of the hands of idiots....**
- **When you're in the wild west of gun regulation then you better get creative if you want to reduce your violent crime rate.**
- **We have to put energy into keeping crime from happening in the first place. And that means investing in our young people because habits form early.**
- **I remember when I was 17 or 18, I was confident that I already knew everything I needed to know.**
- **Maybe some of you in this room can relate to that...**
- **I'm a little older now and it's clear to me that young people need guidance, role models, direction, hope, and someone who cares.**
- **If recent events on the Plaza and at the Zoo teach us one thing, it's that there isn't enough of any of that out there for some kids.**
- **So, the City, under my administration, has started to view our young people as strategic investments.**

- **Why shouldn't we care as much about our human capital as we do about physical infrastructure like roads, bridges, and buildings?**
- **Mayor's Nights is a mix of athletic activities and an adult-chaperoned party atmosphere with educational programming.**
- **Our community's young people love it. I'm betting some in this room today even took part.**
- **We got the idea from a pretty smart source - our youth.**
- **That's right, we asked our youth what types of programming they'd enjoy, we listened, we did what they asked, and they came by the thousands.**
- **To be exact - 12,000 attended Mayor's Nights events, including Night Kicks, Night Hoops, and Night Nets, with 9,000 in attendance at the Club KC events alone.**
- **I want everyone to know how proud I am of our youth for living up to their end of the bargain.**
- **In fact, last August I had the opportunity to visit the White House, and a certain other handsome, dashing African-American male leader.**
- **Yes, there are two of us.**
- **I told him all about what Kansas City's youth are doing with regard to our summer programming.**

- **Needless to say he was impressed.**
- **So, you could say that Kansas City's youth are off to a good start in leading the nation when you are grabbing the attention of the President of the United States.**
- **This year the City is investing \$400,000 in summer programming and we're even adding an arts component, thanks to our partnership with the Nelson, Arts Tech and the Plaza Library.**
- **Now do me a favor and make a note to check my website often for updates on summer programming.**
- **While you're at it, I hope you will apply for the new Youth Commission, which will advise the City on all things youth-related.**
- **My goal with the Youth Commission is to replicate the successes of Mayor's Nights, where the adults did the listening and the young people did the talking, to make our City THE best place to grow up - not just for now, but for future generations of young people.**
- **The City is absolutely doing a lot for our young people. More can be done, but we cannot do it alone.**
- **It is simply time that we, as a community, declare "we've had enough" and that we act together to stop it.**
- **We need parents, churches, nonprofits, and anyone who cares about the future our City, to step up to help us stop the**

senseless acts perpetrated by a small minority of idiots we've seen on the Plaza, last week at the Zoo, and up North where for no apparent reason, cars were randomly vandalized in neighborhoods.

- **The City is not a babysitter. But under my watch, we will act in partnership with others to be a catalyst for community support for our young people.**
- **I mentioned earlier the need to invest in our young people because habits form early - that's the concept behind Turn the Page KC, which is the third grade reading initiative I started three years ago that focuses on empowering every child to read at grade level by 3rd grade.**
- **That's what I call a long-term investment.**
- **If a child can't reach that critical indicator, then the chances of him or her succeeding academically dramatically diminish.**
- **Turn the Page KC pairs children in our City with volunteers who help them develop literacy skills and a love of reading.**
- **One of the first achievements of Turn the Page KC was actually pretty illuminating.**
- **You see, until 2011, we didn't know what the city-wide third grade reading proficiencies were for our students.**
- **There are 130 schools inside the City of Kansas City, Missouri. And our City's students attend 15 different school districts, so this was no small undertaking.**

- **In the end, we determined that on average, only 33% of our third graders in the City were reading proficiently.**
- **That's unacceptable.**
- **I don't understand why we are not outraged by this.**
- **Would you keep a job that only paid 33% of your wages? How about a car that only started one out of three times you turned the key?**
- **So since then, while many other education topics have been marinating at our State Capitol and in the headlines, we've been harnessing community resources around third grade reading proficiency.**
- **And we've made an impact.**
- **In total, last year Turn the Page KC helped about 10,000 students throughout the City.**
- **Scores show that students in our summer reading programs gained five months of reading skills in two summer months.**
- **That's particularly powerful considering that reading skills can regress during the summer.**
- **We are also an award-winning organization, thanks to the Campaign for Grade-Level Reading naming us a 2013 Pacesetter community.**
- **But much more needs to be done.**

- **To get more of our kids reading proficiently by third grade, we need to start talking about “growth.”**
- **We need to ask teachers and school leaders how much our kids are growing in reading. If its not at least a year in a year, then we need to know why and what’s going to be done about it.**
- **Join me in making “growth” the new metric for how we define educational excellence.**
- **No matter how good we’re doing, we can always do better. To be best, we have to keep setting the bar higher and higher.**
- **I have high standards for all of our City’s students.**
- **And those standards far surpass basic accreditation.**
- **Every child deserves a world-class education, not just an accredited one.**
- **For the educators in the room today, I can’t tell you how to educate a child - I wouldn’t know where to start.**
- **But if it helps to bring my friends, George Brett and Tech-Nine, together at a press conference to highlight the importance of school attendance, then count me in.**
- **Yes, we actually did that.**
- **I know this time next year I’m going to have even better news to share because Turn the Page KC has its first Executive Director.**

- **Mike English has already hit the ground running.**
- **Mike is here today and I'd like to introduce you to him. Mike, please stand.**
- **Mike will be working with some of the people in this room because the Park Hill School District is a partner in Turn the Page KC.**
- **In fact, one of my favorite volunteer stories comes from this district.**
- **Jordan Frazier is an AmeriCorps VISTA who works with elementary schools in Park Hill. Jordan, please stand for a second.**
- **She's told me about a volunteer who has been paired with a fourth grade student for the past two years.**
- **The student is a first-generation Vietnamese American whose parents speak limited English, but her tutoring sessions have increased her ability to recognize sight words.**
- **Right here in your own district, a child is learning to love to read so that later in her academic career, she can read to learn.**
- **So, what are *you* doing this summer?**
- **Could any of your summer plans be as impactful as helping a younger student learn to read?**
- **Mike and our AmeriCorps VISTAs will be in the back of the**

room ready to sign you up. And you can go to www.turnthepagekc.org.

- There are many things about Turn the Page KC that I'm proud of - one of which is that the goal of third grade literacy is pretty difficult to argue with.
- The same can't be said about some other education topics.
- Hysteria, hype, and emotion have fueled many education discussions recently.
- I understand it. We're talking about our kids - our most precious resource.
- But a lot of the conversation has been about the education industry, jobs, tenure, vendor contracts, and money.
- But the decades I spent as an attorney in court taught me that hysteria, hype and emotion rarely help solve tough situations.
- So, this is where I stand - without all the noise.
- As Mayor of this City, I know that education is our biggest economic development tool.
- Businesses want to settle in areas that have great schools.
- Our City boasts some wonderful, high performing schools - like this one.
- But some schools are struggling - and have struggled for decades.

- **I fervently believe that every child deserves a high quality education regardless of their zip code, their race, or their parent's income.**
- **Poverty is a condition but it cannot be used as an excuse to set or accept low standards and expectations.**
- **There are simply too many low-performing schools and not enough Park Hill High Schools.**
- **The time has passed to continue business as usual.**
- **That's why, at the end of last year, I appointed the very first Education Advisor the Kansas City's Mayor's Office has ever had.**
- **Julie Holland is here today and she's visiting with local school districts to find ways we can partner with our City's educators to increase the academic achievement of our students.**
- **I'd like for you to meet Julie. Julie, please stand.**
- **I've given Julie a very simple task: find ways to increase quality seats in our City's schools.**
- **Julie, you should have taken a job at the UN because ensuring world peace may have been less complicated.**
- **In all seriousness, we need to look at how we can replicate current success stories and increase academic achievement among young people, like the ones who are sitting in front of me today.**

- **Educational excellence isn't just a talking point.**
- **In a highly competitive, globalized world, educational excellence *is* survival and educational excellence *is* economic development.**
- **This year you will see me engage in education unlike any Mayor in our City's history.**
- **There are many good reasons why I should do that.**
- **Here are a few:**
 - **Higher educational attainment reduces crime in neighborhoods;**
 - **Quality schools spur economic development;**
 - **Education reform has become far too political and not based on the best interest of kids.**
- **These are all good reasons, but there is one more:**
- **Education is personal for me. It changed my life.**
- **I've seen it change the lives of others.**
- **I know first-hand what a quality education can do for a person and I want every child in this City to understand it, too.**
- **I think it would be frosty to hang road signs at our City limits that say, "Welcome to Kansas City, home of world-class public**

education.”

- **That’s what I want and that’s what I will continue to fight for.**
- **It’s not always the easiest thing. Many argue it isn’t the most politically astute thing to do either.**
- **I say our youth are worth it. And I’ll keep pushing forward because of that.**
- **Events like today, where I get to interact with the very people who will inherit this amazing City, truly energize me.**
- **And that’s a good thing because while last year was a foundational year for our City, there is still much left to do.**
- **This year can be a transformative year if we have the willpower to make it so and if we are aggressive in seizing opportunities.**
- **There are several issues coming at us that could be huge opportunities - or we could be here a year from now considering them opportunities missed.**
- **The picture you see on the screen is a picture of half court of the Sprint Center in June of 2003.**
- **The picture on the screen now is what that same area looks like today.**
- **CAVE men and women, and that’s Citizens Against Virtually Everything, were quick to tell every reason why that project shouldn’t move forward.**

- **But the juxtaposition between what downtown looked like in June of 2003 and what it looks like now tells me that we did something right.**
- **The lesson here is that we cannot be lulled into second-tier status because we're afraid to make tough decisions.**
- **Our City deserves better than that and the future generations who will call this place home, that's you all, deserve more.**
- **I want to ask the students here today to consider what kind of City do you want to live in in 5 years? 10 years? 25 years?**
- **And I want the adults in the room, the ones who will see this speech later tonight on the news, and those who may read it on my website tomorrow, to base their opinions and decisions on what is best for the young people who will inherit our City - not simply on what is most convenient, cheapest, and easiest for us today.**
- **2014 will be the year Kansas City decides if we're going to go big or go home.**
- **My preference is that we decide to make our home a big-time, world-class, first-tier city.**
- **I've seen every corner of this City - the good and the bad.**
- **I've lived here almost my entire life, but I feel like I know this City better now than ever before.**
- **So, I can say wholeheartedly that the State of the City is dynamic.**
- **And judging from the faces I see right here at Park Hill High School, so is our future.**
- **Thank you, Park Hill, for hosting us today and thank you,**

Kansas City, for giving me the honor of serving as your Mayor.