

Kansas City school board votes to close 28 of 61 schools

Our reporter
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The Kansas City (Missouri) Board of Education voted Wednesday night to close almost half of the city's public schools. In a 5-4 vote, board members endorsed a plan by the district's superintendent to shut down 28 of the city's 61 schools and to cut 700 of 3,000 jobs, including 285 teachers' jobs.

The sweeping attack on the district's students, parents and teachers was in line with the "Right-Size" plan put forward by Kansas City, Missouri, School District (KCMSD) Superintendent John Covington. (See "Superintendent plans to close nearly half of Kansas City schools")

The board's vote took place at a highly charged meeting, with parents and student advocates packing an auditorium where the KCMSD board met. Many held up signs opposing the "Right-Size" plan and shouted down board members.

The move is in line with the Obama administration's education policy, which seeks to punish students and teachers in so-called "failing schools" in predominantly impoverished districts. According to standardized tests, in Kansas City public schools, fewer than a third of elementary students read at or above grade level; fewer than a quarter of students are proficient in their grade levels.

KCMSD faces a \$50 million deficit on its \$300 million budget, which Covington says will bankrupt the district's general fund by June 2011. Student enrollment has declined by half over the past decade. This shrinkage is not attributable solely to migration out of the area, but to a conscious policy of expanding privately run charter schools that have siphoned off students.

In a scene now being repeated across the country, schools in working class districts starved for cash are

seeing school closures, teacher layoffs and other attacks on the right to public education. Recently, in Rhode Island, the entire teaching staff at Central Falls High School was fired, effective the end of the school year, and the teachers' contracts ripped up.

In Kansas City, most of the district's high schools will be reconfigured to serve grades 7 to 12. The African Centered Collegium Campus will be consolidated into one building, and the district's Montessori schools will be consolidated from three to two. The Southwest Early College Campus will absorb Westport High School, which is being closed. The school district also plans to sell its downtown headquarters.

The day after the school board's vote, Covington vowed that the Kansas City schools were ready to "rise from the ashes." The following school facilities are slated to be mothballed in the devastating reorganization plan:

- Westport High School
- Afrikan Centered Education (ACE) Lower Campus
- ACE 6th Grade Center
- Kansas City Middle School of the Arts
- Lincoln College Prep middle school
- Franklin, Longan, McCoy, Woodland and Carver elementary schools
- KCMSD central office



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