



Coalition for Community Schools
Because Every Child Deserves Every Chance

THE MISSING LINC: CONNECTING RESOURCES TO THE COMMUNITY

*LINC was an outgrowth of community interest. It was just people sitting around thinking, “Surely **we** can do better by our community.” – Brent Schondelmeyer, LINC Communications Director*



Gayle A. Hobbs
LINC Executive Director



Brent Schondelmeyer
LINC Communications Director

The [Local Investment Commission \(LINC\)](#) is a citizen-driven community collaborative that functions as an intermediary between the Missouri government and community leaders, citizens, business, civic and labor leaders. Its purpose is to deploy state funding and deliver services to improve the lives of children and families in Kansas City and Jackson County, Missouri. Since its birth in 1992, LINC has recognized that the school is the central vehicle for organizing and delivering services that respond to constituent needs. LINC works with community members, families, and other stakeholders, particularly in neighborhoods with high levels of poverty, in order to create a new community governance model that includes input from informed families and citizens.

Why Community Schools?

The current principles that guide LINC’s work in community schools have been present since its inception. Over time, the approach that LINC used to connect government funding to the community morphed into a community schools strategy. Through [Caring Communities](#), its community schools initiative, LINC has a presence at 60 neighborhood school sites in seven school districts -- Center, Fort Osage, Grandview, Hickman Mills, Independence, Kansas City, MO, and North Kansas City. Caring Communities is an effort to create in neighborhoods what the courthouse square was long ago – a place where the community regularly gathers. In 1992 when the state of Missouri delivered their first community service package to LINC, they created this program to improve student learning, strengthen families and grow healthier communities. The school naturally served as the ideal venue where community partners come together to provide academic support, family support, health and social services, and youth and community development. Schondelmeyer comments,

We’ve always gone back and understand that the way we want to think about this, the way we want to talk about this, the way that we want to organize it, and the way that we want to deliver it, is really through a network of schools.



LINC Executive Director, Gayle A. Hobbs further explains,

In the planning and the creation of LINC there was a recognition that in order to get better results we had to be able to touch families close to where they work, deliver services in the appropriate time, to be convenient or accessible, and also that, the focus to be on children. To help children you had to help the families, to get healthier families you had to have healthier neighborhoods.

Prior to LINC's involvement, health clinics were operating in four Kansas City schools. The clinics were close to losing their funding. Hobbs and LINC's leadership viewed this as an opportunity to step in and keep these clinics open. Furthermore, they conducted a community assessment to gain an understanding of other high demand needs in the community. They were looking for a way to streamline these services and supports and make them accessible. Hobbs recalls,

We started to look at existing dollars and existing services that we might be able to shift and change how they were delivered and where they were delivered to make those available in and around schools.

As an intermediary, LINC recognized that the community school strategy offered a vehicle to meet their own goals. Community schools are open to everyone—all day, including evenings and weekends. Community-based organizations often work as lead agencies in community schools, helping to mobilize community assets and support student success. And where there was need, the strategy spread.

Community School Intermediary: Coordination & Management

In a community school system, the intermediary entity is an organization or network of organizations that leads the planning, coordination, and management. The intermediary's role is to ensure communication between community-wide and site leaders and facilitate operational functions across platforms and sites. They convene leadership, provide strategic planning and follow-through, ensuring that what happens at the community leadership level empowers students, families, and practitioners at the school site. In community school systems, such as LINC's Caring Communities, the intermediary plays an even greater role in the management and coordination of the community schools and their multiple partners. Intermediaries can be school districts, nonprofit organizations, community planning councils, higher education institutions, local education funds, local government, or United Ways. Each community selects the intermediary that brings the greatest expertise and resources for their unique community context.

As an intermediary, LINC carries out four critical functions: 1) engaging, convening and supporting diverse groups and communities; 2) establishing quality standards and promoting accountability; 3) brokering and leveraging resources; and 4) promoting effective policy measures. Throughout the community, LINC supports citizens who want to effect change by encouraging over 2,000 volunteers including local businesses, seniors, parents, corporation executives, and faith-based organizations volunteer to be engaged in local policy decisions. LINC lifts up the community voice to state system reform efforts. Community members play a key role in deciding how funds are spent in their neighborhoods while creating. As a result, they represent an informed constituency that can champion reform in statewide human service systems. LINC provides funding, support staff, data systems and training for over 60 low-income neighborhood schools through partnerships with seven school districts. At these schools, LINC organizes parents, neighbors and businesses into site councils that are charged to direct neighborhood-level efforts.

Partnerships: Expanding your Reach

LINC is unique because of their long relationship with the Missouri government and their role as a partner of both community service agencies and community delivery agencies. LINC works with seven different school districts, local government, and major state agencies. These partnerships require attention and maintenance as things change, people change, leaders change, and politics change. Schondelmeyer elaborates,

In building partnerships around schools and neighborhoods, one thing we have to understand is that a community is fluid. You have to be able to respond to opportunities, crisis, disasters, and sometimes step out into the unknown. But if you can keep a common vision with your partners so many things are possible, particularly if the relationships, roles and responsibilities are clear.

LINC recognizes that by virtue of them connecting government funding to the services that create the greatest community impact, they are perceived as a necessary cog in the political process by both the government and the community. Schondelmeyer explains further,

In helping a governor be successful around welfare reform, then you are accorded the confidence to try a larger challenge and so success, engenders a confidence that you can do more and that you can get better results and you can do it more effectively and you can do it more efficiently, and in many ways we have a neighborhood presence and direct access to families that they don't have.

LINC's intermediary role functions so effectively because their partnership with state government is at its core. LINC receives 85% of its funding from the state. With the understanding that state money is often the largest funding stream for human services in any community, LINC collaborates with eight different state departments and the divisions within, who contribute the largest piece of human services in the Kansas City area. One challenge in the process of creating firm partnerships is that government organizations change and leadership changes. It is a partnership that requires a great deal of understanding of how each department is comfortable working and how they shift and change. It requires balance of assertiveness. Hobbs discusses the challenges of this partnership,

It is important not to burden them with more work but become somebody, who on behalf of the community is an asset and not a threat to them.

Schondelmeyer expands on this strategy,

In some ways, you become invaluable because you are able to do things that government can't achieve or don't do as well. We are representing social innovation and entrepreneurship. We take a sort of a utilitarian approach to government. We don't go to our government partners and say: "We need you to do this for us." Our first question is always: "What can we do for you?"

At its inception, LINC was considered a bold experiment in how best to organize services for the working poor, and today it thrives as a unique system for directing government funds to the people who depend on them most. LINC ensures the availability, accessibility and affordability of child care, good schools, health care, jobs, emergency assistance, and other basic services. They understand the importance of relationships and partnerships. Their presence in Kansas City communities makes them a trustworthy organization that reaches citizens who the government alone could not. Not only does LINC function as an intermediary that coordinates, manages, and delivers government services and funding to communities, but they are an essential part of the process in ensuring that all children graduate high school, and can contribute to their communities.