# FERGUSON COMMISSION

## Fifth Commission Meeting
## January 20, 2015

### Community Discussion
### Report

## Meeting Overview

The fifth meeting of the Ferguson Commission was held on Tuesday, January 20, 2015 at Westview Middle School. During this meeting, fourteen Commissioners and 142 members of the community discussed disparities in Education & Child Well-Being for more than three hours. Attendees:

- Shared their thoughts about regional education and reflected on the need for reforms in the meeting's open mic period;
- Participated in small group break out sessions to further explore the evening's topic and to generate recommendations for improvement;
- Heard presentations from issue experts on school district performance, systems reform, critical child well-being supports and educational equity efforts; and
- Listened to Commissioners as they considered administrative action items.

This document provides a summary of the meeting's findings and serves as a record of the insights and suggestions that emerged from community input.

## Attendance

*Commissioners in attendance included:*

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| Co-Chair Rev. Starsky Wilson | Co-Chair Rich McClure |
| Rasheen Aldridge, Jr. | Scott Negwer |
| T.T. Carr, Ph.D. | Brittany Packnett |
| Rev. Traci deVon Blackmon | Felicia Pulliam, J.D. |
| Gabriel E. Gore, J.D. | Grayling Tobias, Ed.D. |
| Daniel Isom, Ph.D. | Byron Watson |
| Becky James-Hatter | Rose A. Windmiller |

## Public Discussion Summary

### I. Electronic Polling Results

The meeting began with an invocation from Westview Middle School student Mariah Jones followed by welcome remarks from Principal Valeska Hill. Co-Chairs, Rev. Starsky Wilson and Rich McClure, extended the welcome with greetings from the Commission and reviewed the meeting's purpose and agenda. After the Co-Chairs concluded their opening remarks, meeting staff conducted an electronic polling exercise to obtain demographic information on event attendees. Participants were asked six questions, excluding the initial test question, that focused on: 1) where they lived; 2) where they worked or attended school; 3) their gender; 4) their race / ethnicity; 5) their age; and 6) the number of prior Commission meetings they had attended. Though the number of respondents varied by question, a total of 105 attendees participated in the electronic polling process. Survey findings are presented in the accompanying table on the following page.

| PARTICIPANT DEMOGRAPHIC FINDINGS | |
|---|---|
| **Geographic Work or School Area** | **Principal Place of Residence** |
| ■ St. Louis City, MO – 32%<br>■ St. Louis County, MO – 58%<br>■ St. Charles County, MO – 2%<br>■ Jefferson County, MO – 1%<br>■ Franklin County, MO – 0%<br>■ St. Clair County, IL – 2%<br>■ Madison County, IL – 2%<br>■ Monroe County, IL – 0%<br>■ Other – 4%<br>Total Number of Respondents –104 | ■ St. Louis City, MO – 29%<br>■ St. Louis County, MO – 64%<br>■ St. Charles County, MO – 3%<br>■ Jefferson County, MO – 0%<br>■ Franklin County, MO – 0%<br>■ St. Clair County, IL – 1%<br>■ Madison County, IL – 1%<br>■ Monroe County, IL – 0%<br>■ Other – 2%<br>Total Number of Respondents – 103 |
| **Gender** | **Race / Ethnicity** |
| ■ Female – 60%<br>■ Male – 39%<br>■ Other – 1%<br>■ Decline – 0%<br>Total Number of Respondents – 103 | ■ White – 33%<br>■ Black, African American – 58%<br>■ Hispanic, Latino or Spanish Origin – 1%<br>■ Asian – 1%<br>■ American Indian or Alaska Native – 0%<br>■ Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander – 0%<br>■ Other – 6%<br>■ Decline – 1%<br>Total Number of Respondents – 105 |
| **Age** | |
| ■ 21 and Under – 5%<br>■ 22 to 34 – 25%<br>■ 35 to 44 – 21%<br>■ 45 to 54 – 15% | ■ 55 to 64 –22%<br>■ 65 and Over – 11%<br>■ Decline – 1%<br>Total Number of Respondents – 104 |
| **Prior Commission Meeting Attendance** | |
| ■ None – 57%<br>■ One – 25%<br>■ Two – 7% | ■ Three – 4%<br>■ Four – 7%<br>Total Number of Respondents – 102 |

## II. Public Open Mic Session

Following the Youth Summit presentation, attendees were invited to share their insights and ideas on the evening's topic of "Education & Child Well-Being." In this public open mic session, which lasted 25 minutes, participants spoke for an allotted period of two minutes or less (though some spoke a bit longer). Speakers covered a range of topics, including public education funding, teacher preparedness, youth development programs and the school to prison pipeline. A summary of their comments is presented in the accompanying tables.

| **PUBLIC OPEN MIC COMMENTS** |
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*Education Funding*
- Regional public education is severely underfunded, by at least $600M to $700M. The governor is holding education money and schools are suffering as a result
- The state needs generous education funding bills that underwrite equity efforts
- Education funding should be pooled statewide and then distributed by need
- Since funding for districts is largely determined by attendance, how do we get more funding for the neediest districts? Our children are being cheated and are not getting their fair share of school resources
- We must fix schools where they are. Education reform is costly, but necessary
- The state must stop cutting funds to early childhood education
- Legislative action is needed to bring about change

*Education & Poverty*
- Education and child well-being are game changers that pull people out of poverty, off the streets and into work. Court and police reform are important, but do not resolve the roots of the region's problems like education
- Fairness in education should be our number one priority. School disparities are linked to systemic poverty
- People steal because they don't have. Our community must address poverty through education rather than hire more police officers. If we create more jobs and adequately prepare people to work them, then we won't need more police

*Model Programs*
- Teach for America has made a difference in the lives of underserved students across our region
- St. Louis Community College – Florissant Valley Campus – is an all access college that meets the needs of students no matter their level of preparedness. The College is a community asset that is willing to work with the Commission on its development of education recommendations
- There is a local program in North County that helps students realize their full academic and athletic potential. It currently works with five football teams in the area. The founder volunteered to be of service to the Commission

*Teachers*
- There are wide disparities in teacher experience and education levels across districts. We must more equitably distribute experienced and educated teachers

| PUBLIC OPEN MIC COMMENTS CONTINUED |
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*Teachers Continued*
- Teachers are often forced to pay attention to nonessential things in the classroom because of politics. As a result, children are not kept first
- We don't need any more clock in and clock out teachers

*Curricula*
- Schools need to stop mis-educating children. Christopher Columbus did not discover America. Students need to be taught their history
- Teach youth how to be free. Teach them about their rights and responsibilities

*School to Prison Pipeline*
- The community must address the school to prison pipeline
- Education is the key to keeping students / youth out of the criminal justice system
- We need more action on education reform right now, not tomorrow, to stop the criminalization of our children

*Miscellaneous*
- More regional organizations are now stepping up to address disparities and racism
- Businesses are targeting schools and using zip code data to influence youth and teachers. The Commission should look into this
- Bill SP129 will give kids in Normandy and Riverview transfers so that they can be safe
- Commission needs to look into the website CEAM. It has information on transfers

## III. Small Group Discussions

At the conclusion of the public open mic period, participants broke into small groups to discuss in greater detail Education & Child Well-Being. Participants self-selected into groups focused on either education or child well-being to help narrow their interests and deepen their thinking. Meeting facilitators gave each group 35 minutes to consider the following questions:

*Education*

1. What concerns, if any, do you have about education in our region?

2. What actions would you suggest to improve education and student success in the region?

*Child & Youth Well-Being*

1. What concerns, if any, do you have about the well-being of children and youth in our region?

2. What actions would you suggest to improve the well-being of local children and youth?

When the discussions ended, community members from each of the groups reported out to the large body their group's main insights and findings.

*Education Discussion*

| EDUCATION | |
|---|---|
| **Issues:** What concerns, if any, do you have about education in our region? | **Desired Improvements:** What actions would you suggest to improve education and student success in the region? |
| • ***School to Prison Pipeline***<br>    o Neighborhoods prepare children for prison<br>    o Too many school districts are unaccredited and failing.  They do not produce widespread student success<br>    o Too many youth, especially those with incarcerated parents, do not have advocates – at school or at home.  There are resources available (like the Coalition for Children of Offenders), but most families are unaware of them.  As a result, these children are at high risk of entering the criminal justice system<br>    o The community and Commission must address the neighborhood to school to prison pipeline<br><br>• ***Family & Community Responsibility***<br>    o The schools are not all to blame<br>    o Youth do not have enough positive activities to engage in during the summer.  Some children are left unattended while their parents work<br>    o A lot of 12 to 14 year old youth are raising themselves because their parents are absent<br>    o Many young people do not have lots of models of success that are accessible and attainable in their communities.  They need help, beyond their parents, who themselves may have had limited and limiting experiences<br>    o To many parents and community members do not have high expectations of kids.  Parents often do not demand the very best of and for their children<br>    o Strong social support systems need to be in place to allow people to take advantage of educational programs<br>    o Not enough programs are in place for African American men.  Much of the focus is on mothers/women<br><br>• ***Poor Use of Technology***<br>    o Use of technology and Internet is taking the place of critical thinking.  Technology needs to be used as a tool | • ***Parental Involvement***<br>    o Training and support for parents – children's first teachers – are big pieces of the child well-being / student learning puzzle<br>    o Parents As Teachers (PAT) has spent decades helping parents develop the knowledge and skills they need to guide their children through the incredible years (0 to age 6).  PAT needs to be better funded.  It is in all 500 school districts, but its funding was cut by two-thirds in 2010.  PAT should be placed in high schools so that students learn about positive parenting in school<br>    o Parents need help to better understand school culture so that they can effectively advocate for their children.  School leaders respond to involved parents<br>    o Parents must teach youth how to advocate for themselves.  This helps empower youth, enabling them to advance their own interests as well as those of their peers<br>    o Setting and maintaining high expectations for children and youth are major parts of parenting.  When parents do this, their children often stretch to meet their standards and end up doing well<br>    o In general, parents need more support<br><br>• ***Village Interventions***<br>    o It takes a village to raise a child.  Adults often do not get involved when children misbehave and young people see this.  The whole community – neighbors, churches, families etc. need to wrap their arms around our children<br>    o More community volunteers are needed to support students and schools<br>    o The first thing adults have to do is LOVE our children.  Collectively, we must rebuild our relationships with our children.  We cannot help them get to the next level if we are not connected to them and demonstrating that we care.  Everything stards and end with love<br>    o We need more programs that work to improve adult / youth relationships and connections |

| EDUCATION | |
|---|---|
| **Issues:** What concerns, if any, do you have about education in our region? | **Desired Improvements:** What actions would you suggest to improve education and student success in the region? |
| <ul><li>*Safety*<ul><li>Getting children to and from school is an issue. Many neighborhoods are dangerous and unsafe</li><li>Sometimes students are shooed off of school campuses if they arrive too early. This usually happens because schools do not have adequate staff to supervise the students</li><li>Kids need safe spaces to be before and after school</li></ul></li><li>*Mental Health*<ul><li>Many children in our community experience toxic stress and trauma from birth through young adulthood. This stunts their growth and limits opportunities for them to succeed in school and in life</li><li>Research on adverse childhood experiences reveal that toxic stress, poverty, racism and the lack of safety undermine healthy child development</li><li>Mental health services and supports are key. We need a holistic approach to student success</li></ul></li><li>*Lack of Accountability*<ul><li>State spent money on policing and a national guard when money could have been allotted to education which addresses the core problem over the long-term</li><li>No one pays the price for educational failure – there is no political accountability</li><li>How would funding be allotted even if the state invested in education? There is a need for government intervention, but also a concern that corruption and cronyism will be at play without appropriate accountability and monitoring</li><li>Lack of teacher accountability</li></ul></li><li>*Not enough Early Childhood Education*<ul><li>In Missouri, children are not required to be in school until they are 7 years old</li><li>Young children lack preparation, especially in vocabulary</li></ul></li><li>*Student Voice*</li></ul> | <ul><li>*Village Interventions contd.*<ul><li>Parents cannot support children by themselves. We need more mentors for youth. Kids cling to adults who care. These adults set high expectations and pay attention to youth needs, choices and behaviors</li></ul></li><li>*Broad Solutions for Education*<ul><li>Expand supports provided to students in recognition of challenges and lack of stability some families have to manage</li><li>Housing should be a part of the conversation; and not just limited to developing shelters</li><li>Develop Community Learning Centers that are tailored to specific neighborhood needs and responsive to the broad set of complex community needs</li><li>Consider out of the box ways to leverage vouchers</li></ul></li><li>*Improve Classroom Experience*<ul><li>Lower classroom size</li><li>Hold teachers' accountable for failing schools</li><li>Continue to leverage technology in intelligent ways</li></ul></li><li>*Youth Programs*<ul><li>The community needs more youth programs</li><li>Young people need more options beyond sports. They need to be exposed to an array of options, careers and programs</li><li>Lots of programs exist, but most people do not know how to access them. Parents and kids lack knowledge and guidance counselors are often overtaxed. More efforts need to be made to build community awareness of youth programs</li><li>Model Program: Scholarship Foundation, Inroads, Teach for America</li></ul></li><li>*Firm Foundation*<ul><li>Invest in Early Childhood Education and resources</li><li>Ensure that students are prepared with rigor and a firm understanding of reading, vocabulary, writing and arithmetic</li></ul></li></ul> |

*Education Continued*

| EDUCATION | |
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| **Issues:** What concerns, if any, do you have about education in our region? | **Desired Improvements:** What actions would you suggest to improve education and student success in the region? |
| • *Unequal Schools with Unequal Outcomes\** <br>     o Unequal schools are a direct result of disparate funding <br>     o Now STEM class work is considered non-essential in many schools with inadequate funding. Also, some key courses in language and art that are important for youth development are being cut <br>     o Schools are not emphasizing STEM and the basic English Language Arts <br>     o What about students who have already gone through the system? How are we managing the young people who are failing now? <br><br> • *School Choice Debate* <br>     o Con: There is a negative effect of school choice and the shutting down of local, failing schools on the social fabric of the community. The local sense of pride and community resources diminish <br>     o Pro: School choice is essential when the system is failing students <br><br> • *Miscellaneous* <br>     o There are too many fast food establishments in our community serving too much fat, sugar and salt. Our children have limited access to fresh, healthy produce <br>     o Sometimes when youth "come off strong," they are really scared and want attention. Many kids are scared because they don't know what to do. They often have not seen adults in their homes build positive relationships | • *Empowered Students* <br>     o Civic Education is important to making sure students have a voice and that the educational system is preparing youth to become leaders ready to affect systems <br>     o Training and empowerment to help students with self-identity and resiliency so they are prepared to respond and thrive despite the circumstances some face <br>     o We must involve students in developing their own educational solutions. They are influencers and have the power to bring about positive change <br>     o Convince the legislature that the "non-essentials" like music, language arts and other out-of-school programming is essential for student development <br><br> • *Legislative Action* <br>     o Create a standard that is visionary – a goal that positions MO as best in the nation <br>     o Organize a political movement/campaign that will ensure accountability of funds and demand equal access to quality education <br>     o Fix the funding disparity issue – how can we re-imagine how schools are funded for equal access? |

*Child & Youth Well-Being Discussion*

| CHILD & YOUTH WELL-BEING | |
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| **Issues:** What concerns, if any, do you have about the well-being of children and youth in our region? | **Desired Improvements:** What actions would you suggest to improve the well-being of local children and youth? |
| <ul><li>***Safety***<ul><li>Children are not safe in their neighborhoods due to violence, gangs, gunshots, and speeding vehicles</li><li>Bullying, fear of violence on the bus, and fear of being "jumped" make it unsafe for kids to walk or travel to school</li><li>Children must navigate gangs to get to school</li><li>The freedom of children is limited; they are stuck inside because of safety concerns</li></ul></li><li>***Education***<ul><li>School funding is being cut</li><li>Parents need additional support to raise respectful children</li><li>Children are not receiving the necessary guidance, protection, and support at home</li><li>Children are not receiving "home training"</li></ul></li><li>***Teachers***<ul><li>There are not enough teachers and administrators of color</li><li>Teachers are not prepared to teach</li><li>Educators are not culturally diverse</li><li>Schools are not training and teaching students for the 21<sup>st</sup> century</li><li>Teachers have more paperwork to do than time to teach</li></ul></li><li>***Inequality in Education***<ul><li>There is not the same level of public education across the board like in magnet schools. There are spaces in magnet schools set aside for white students, but more black children need to attend</li><li>We do not have universal pre-kindergarten like New York City. Our children are coming to school not having read a book. Poverty is the problem.</li><li>No textbooks to reinforce learning at home. There are not books in every school, every class.</li></ul></li></ul> | <ul><li>***Schools***<ul><li>Increase afterschool programming</li><li>Utilize the research. Smaller classes and schools are more effective</li><li>Teach conflict resolution, particularly as children encounter "dueling neighborhoods" at school</li><li>Ensure all school buses have a monitor or aid onboard</li><li>Provide cell phones to children to be used only for emergency purposes as they travel to and from school</li><li>Provide "safe houses;" homes where children can seek refuge in the event of an emergency on the way to or from school</li></ul></li><li>***Teachers***<ul><li>Hire teachers with degrees who have been trained about different cultures</li><li>Hire more culturally diverse teachers</li><li>Create a more inclusive environment for LGBT teachers</li><li>Hold teachers accountable for students learning but let them teach to learning, not teach to pass MAP scores</li><li>If you penalize teachers, then penalize all the way to the top</li><li>Raise teacher salaries</li><li>Look at teacher tenure and prioritize students over teachers Tenure is more about teachers than student well being</li></ul></li><li>***Curriculum***<ul><li>Expand school curricula to include learning about poverty, mental illness, and sex education – if there is no money for wrap around services</li><li>Put arts back into education because it works on the same part of the brain where students learn</li><li>Support community education for residents</li><li>Mirror some of the things KIPP does such as involving colleges in the development of curricula</li></ul></li></ul> |

*Child & Youth Well-Being Discussion Continued*

| CHILD & YOUTH WELL-BEING | |
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| **Issues:** What concerns, if any, do you have about the well-being of children and youth in our region? | **Desired Improvements:** What actions would you suggest to improve the well-being of local children and youth? |
| <ul><li>***St. Louis Public Schools***<ul><li>St. Louis Public School social workers are spread out over several schools</li><li>Mayor Slay supports charter schools so money not there for St. Louis Public School system</li></ul></li><li>***Higher Education***<ul><li>We do not have free community colleges</li><li>Community colleges have low matriculation rates and that needs to be fixed first. (Someone from St. Louis Community College was in the group and he said unlike other institutions of higher learning, a community college is required to accept all students. Also some students attend community college without the goal of graduating. Instead they attend for other reasons, such as to take just one class on a topic in which they are interested).</li><li>Dangerous debt college students acquire</li></ul></li><li>***Wrap Around Services***<ul><li>Not enough wrap around services to address students' social and emotional issues so they are better prepared to learn. Need to address homeless, hunger, etc. Take care of the entire child</li><li>Are districts aware of and using the wrap around services that are available, such as Youth-In-Need?</li></ul></li><li>***Children and Youth Programming***<ul><li>There are limited afterschool programs</li><li>There is "nothing to do" for the children which causes them to get into trouble</li></ul></li><li>***Guidance & Supervision***<ul><li>Children and youth lack positive role models</li><li>Communities are not sticking together</li></ul></li><li>***Housing***<ul><li>The youth homeless population is growing</li><li>Shelters are being closed</li><li>Homes in the community are in serious disrepair</li></ul></li></ul> | <ul><li>***Students and Schools***<ul><li>Look at post-traumatic stress disorder in students. If a student is dealing with trauma, he/she should not be labeled a bad student. Detroit uses transcendental meditation for such students</li><li>Consider different approaches to and criteria for school accreditation</li><li>Put trained social workers in each school and have them serve only one school and not several at the same time</li><li>Educate parents and provide them the resources they need to educate their children</li><li>Provide alternative disciplinary action other than suspensions</li></ul></li><li>***GED***<ul><li>Provide programs for adults to get a diploma other than a GED. Employers do not always look favorably on people with GEDs</li><li>Allow ex-felons to get a diploma rather than a GED</li></ul></li><li>***Elected Officials***<ul><li>Invite legislators and other decision makers to come and visit the classrooms and teach with teachers. They will see that students can't learn if they are hungry, can't eat</li><li>Decision makers need to come off their ivory tower and come see what is going on in our schools</li></ul></li><li>***Community Safety***<ul><li>Increase the wattage or brightness of streetlights</li><li>Sponsor a "neighborhood night out;" provide activities for both youth and adults to build unity and trust</li><li>Form a neighborhood watch and block units</li><li>Consider "block monitors" in the neighborhoods</li><li>Improve playgrounds</li></ul></li><li>***Guidance and Supervision***<ul><li>Find and train role models and mentors</li><li>Enforce a curfew; youth should be home before the street lights come on</li></ul></li></ul> |

*Child & Youth Well-Being Discussion Continued*

| CHILD & YOUTH WELL-BEING | |
|---|---|
| **Issues:** What concerns, if any, do you have about the well-being of children and youth in our region? | **Desired Improvements:** What actions would you suggest to improve the well-being of local children and youth? |
| • *Transparency*<br>   ○ The school funding formula is not transparent. It needs to be examined to include wrap around services<br>   ○ People are concerned about the closing of schools and these closings are justified. We need to look into schools and not sell them, but reopen them and use them for programs<br>   ○ How is the state board selected and what role does politics play in the selection process<br>   ○ What input does the community have on state Education Commissioner's selection and staff?<br>• *School Suspensions*<br>   ○ School suspensions do not help students. Many who are sent home want to go home<br>   ○ There is no way for students to recover from their mistakes. They have a permanent blemish on their records<br>   ○ Children use excuses to explain why they do not do well and adults accept them<br>• *Ferguson Commission*<br>   • The Ferguson Commission should focus on the most pressing issues and not take on too much too fast | • *Community Programming*<br>   ○ Increase afterschool programming<br>   ○ Provide greater guidance and supervision to children and youth in community programming<br>   ○ Increase accountability and resources<br>   ○ Teach volunteers to better value their role and responsibilities<br>   ○ Assist community centers to develop more resources to better support youth and other residents<br>   ○ Help community centers and organizations to connect with residents through electronic communication and social media<br>   ○ Help community centers to better market their services<br>• *Communication*<br>   ○ Listen to children and youth; they will tell you what they need and want<br>• *Housing*<br>   ○ Address youth homelessness<br>   ○ Provide necessary wraparound services<br>   ○ Address LBGT youth issues and concerns, particularly as it relates to homelessness<br>   ○ Increase landlord supervision<br>   ○ Address subpar housing<br>• *Citizen and Law Enforcement Interactions*<br>   ○ Hold regular public affair meetings at the police department<br>• *Intersectionality*<br>   • Make the connections: education is related to child well-being<br>   • *Communication*<br>   ○ Listen to children and youth; they will tell you what they need and want |

## Conclusion

The sixth meeting of the Ferguson Commission will be held on Monday, February 23, 2015 from 5:00 pm until 8:30 pm at the University of Missouri St. Louis, in the J.C. Penney Conference Center (located at One University Drive., St. Louis, MO 63121). The focus of this meeting will be on Economic Mobility. As with previous meetings, community input is welcomed.