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Sen. Roberts visits Children's Campus of KC to discuss strategies that help close the achievement gap

Local health and education center highlights importance of high-quality facilities to the success of at-risk children

KANSAS CITY, KS (Aug. 8, 2016)—When Sen. Pat Roberts sat down with preschoolers today at the Children's Campus of Kansas City (CCKC), he was focused on much more than story time and snacks. The senior senator from Kansas dropped in on the first day of school to learn more about CCKC's model for closing the achievement gap among low-income kids—starting with a unique community facility designed specifically for young learners.

CCKC is home to three non-profit organizations that provide a continuum of services focused on the health and wellness of children from birth to age five. That includes nearly 150 preschool students participating in CCKC's Educare program, which lays a strong educational foundation for children who might otherwise be derailed by the deep and lasting implications of poverty.

"I am pleased to visit Children's Campus to see firsthand a local partnership trying new methods to teach and nurture low-income children in a facility specifically designed for their needs," Sen. Roberts said. "These children are the most vulnerable in our society, and it is very encouraging to see a community harness the resources it has, like the University of Kansas Medical Center, LISC, Wyandotte County and other organizations by working together to meet the educational and developmental needs of at-risk children. Reading to these kids is a great way to start the day, and I hope they are off to a great start for the year."

Funding gaps almost derailed CCKC before the first brick was laid—even though expanding access to quality early education programs and services has been a local priority, notes Heather Schrotberger, director of Project Eagle, the University of Kansas Medical Center program that operates Educare Kansas City.

"We know that quality early childhood education can make all the difference in a child's future," she said. "It is a powerful anti-poverty strategy. Young children flourish when we create early education settings designed for their needs, with classrooms and teachers that keep them safe and engaged. That's why CCKC exists."

In other words, space matters. According to a report published by the National Institute for Early Education Research (NIEER), a facility's layout, size, materials and design features can improve program quality and contribute positively to child development, while a poorly adapted and overcrowded environment undermines it. The physical configuration of early care and education spaces directly affect adult/child interaction and influence how children grow and learn.

But financing high-quality, appropriate space for young learners – much less space that can also accommodate other family services, as is the case with CCKC – is not easy. Early fundraising and philanthropic support enabled the project to secure a conventional bank loan, but CCKC still faced a significant funding gap. The project utilized the federal New Markets Tax Credit (NMTC) program, which is designed to encourage private-sector investment in underserved communities, to fill that critical shortfall.

CCKC highlights an important intersection between federal policy and local impact, said Matt Josephs, LISC senior vice president of policy, who joined Sen. Roberts on the CCKC tour. “The corner of 5th St. and Minnesota Ave. might seem like it’s a long way from Washington, but federal programs like the New Markets Tax Credit have a significant local impact,” said Josephs, who also serves on the board of the New Markets Tax Credit Coalition. “CCKC is illustrative of how NMTCs can be used to deliver private sector investments into distressed neighborhoods, helping to not only provide critical services to community residents, but also to revitalize the neighborhoods and fuel further growth.”

Stephen Samuels, executive director with LISC’s Kansas City program office, notes that these kinds of investments also have significant economic benefits for the city at large. LISC helped finance CCKC as part of its comprehensive efforts to revitalize disadvantaged neighborhoods.

“CCKC allows parents to go to work without worrying if their children are in a safe, nurturing place,” he said. “It has created more than 200 jobs in a community with high poverty and unemployment rates. And, it has transformed a vacant commercial corner into an active, vibrant space,” he explained. “By connecting so many critical local partners and institutions, this facility is not only an imperative for our children; it is a significant, lasting asset for our community.”

About CCKC

CCKC is a collaborative partnership aimed at improving outcomes for young children and their families. Three agencies representing the fields of early childhood education, parenting education, family support, health, education and research have co-located on the campus and collectively built a system of services that address the multiple needs of young children and their families, paying special attention to addressing the educational achievement gaps between low-income children and their higher income counterparts. These agencies are:

- **Juniper Gardens Children’s Project** – Juniper Gardens Children’s Project, of the University of Kansas, works to improve children’s developmental experiences and their academic and social achievements through research.
- **Project Eagle** – Project Eagle, of the University of Kansas Medical Center, directs multiple programs on site, including an Early Head Start program (Educare of Kansas City, serving 150 students), a Maternal Infant Early Childhood Home Visiting Program, and the Connections centralized screening and referral system for Wyandotte County.
- **The Family Conservancy** – The Family Conservancy provides mental health assessments and services, parenting education, crisis intervention, assistance to overcome poverty, and professional development to enhance the quality of early education across the community.

About LISC

LISC equips struggling communities with the capital, program strategy and know-how to become places where people can thrive. Since 1980, LISC has invested more than \$16 billion to build or rehab 348,000 affordable homes and apartments and develop 56 million square feet of retail, community and educational space.

For more on the importance of developing early childhood education facilities, read [*Building Early Childhood Facilities: What States Can Do to Create Supply and Promote Quality*](#), published by NIEER and authored by LISC, or visit <http://www.lisc.org/our-initiatives/education/early-childhood-facilities/>.

About New Markets Tax Credits

The New Markets Tax Credit was enacted in 2000 in an effort to stimulate private investment and economic growth in low income urban neighborhoods and rural communities that lack access to the patient capital needed to support and grow businesses, create jobs, and sustain healthy local economies. The NMTC is a 39 percent federal tax credit, taken over seven years, on investments made in economically distressed communities. Today due to NMTC, more than \$75 billion is hard at work in underserved communities in all 50 states, the District of Columbia, and Puerto Rico. Since its implementation, Congress has made several last-minute reauthorizations, making it difficult for practitioners and communities to rely on its availability. However, Congress passed a five-year extension of the NMTC in the PATH Act, which was passed in December 2015.