

# EDUCATION CONNECTION

NEWS FROM THE KANSAS CITY, KANSAS PUBLIC SCHOOLS

SPRING 2014

## NEW KCK BOYS CHOIR IS MAKING A NAME FOR ITSELF

### ONE-TO-ONE LAPTOP INITIATIVE SEEN AS A MODEL FOR OTHER DISTRICTS

### SUPREME COURT RULES IN FAVOR OF KANSAS KIDS



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# MESSAGE FROM THE SUPERINTENDENT



**Dr. Cynthia Lane**  
Superintendent of Schools

## Literacy – A Civil Right.

It is really amazing how fast our world is changing. Today, maybe more than at any other time in our past, the ability to read and write is essential for academic and economic success. That's why the Kansas City, Kansas Public Schools (KCKPS) has declared literacy a civil right. Literacy is not optional. Our

students deserve access to a quality life. The key to a quality life is to be highly literate.

## So What Does It Mean to Be Highly Literate?

As a district, there is no more important responsibility that we must embrace, than to ensure that every student develops as a literate person. Literacy is inclusive of reading, language development, speaking, writing, and reasoning across all disciplines or content areas, including the arts. Literacy is more than reading, but we know that learning to read, and then reading to learn, is the core of being literate. One of the most complicated things we will ever achieve in our lives is the skill of reading. And in today's world with immediate access to information at our fingertips, it is never too early to begin teaching our children to read. The best way to learn to read is to read. Most of us grew up hearing "practice makes perfect." I don't know about perfect, but encouraging our children of all ages to get in the "practice" of reading every day is crucial. By age 5 or 6, children should be reading several simple books a week. Reading the same book(s) over and over again is great for building fluency and vocabulary. Encouraging fourth and fifth grade students to read 15-25 chapter books a year puts them on the path to academic success. Middle and high school students who read 20-30 minutes a day generally have good grades, do better on assessments, and are more focused on future success than students who don't read.

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there is no  
more important  
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literate person.*

## District-wide Focus on Literacy.

Enter any school in KCKPS and you will see a clear focus on literacy. Student writing fills the halls of schools and the walls of classrooms. Those classrooms are filled with books. On any given day, in any classroom in the district, you likely will find students reading, and writing about what they are reading. Teachers are focusing on writing as an essential part of reading in every subject area, including English, math, social studies, science, fine arts, and physical education. Yes, I know: Kids read and write in physical education class! Every school has a literacy plan that is alive and active. And it's not just students reading and writing in KCKPS. Teachers, principals, support staff, and yes the superintendent, read with and to students on a regular basis. Adults are talking about what they are personally reading. Staff and students of all ages are blogging, writing poetry, keeping writing journals in all subject areas, writing about research, and publishing their own work. This culture of literacy hasn't always been in place in our schools, or in most schools

across the nation. But today, more and more KCKPS classrooms are filled with rich conversations centered around reading!

## Join Us!

Read to kids, read with kids and listen to kids read. Start a conversation about something you are reading. Volunteer at your schools. Make regular trips to the public library. Start a reading initiative at your church, in your neighborhood, or have book talks as a family. Help us get kids of all ages excited about what they are reading. Join our efforts to surround our children and youth with books, magazines, eBooks, articles, any type of literature. Join us in our declaration that literacy is a civil right. When you are literate, you can achieve anything.

Check out Dr. Cynthia Lane's  
blog, "It's Up to Us" at  
[blog.kckps.org](http://blog.kckps.org)

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## HIGH SCHOOL GRADUATION SCHEDULE

### J.C. Harmon High

7 p.m. Thursday, May 15 at the KCKCC Fieldhouse

### Wyandotte High

11 a.m. Saturday, May 17 at the Wyandotte Auditorium

### Sumner Academy

3 p.m. Saturday, May 17 at the KCKCC Fieldhouse

### F.L. Schlagle High

7 p.m. Monday, May 19 at the KCKCC Fieldhouse

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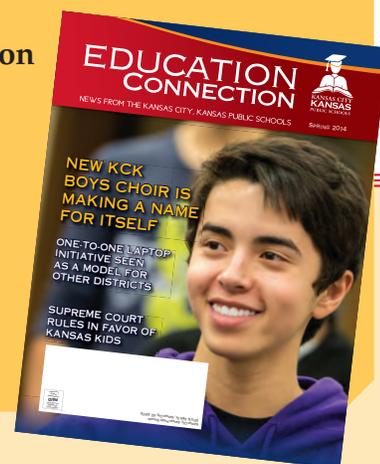
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### Washington High

7 p.m. Tuesday, May 20 at the Washington Stadium

### Fairfax Learning Center

7 p.m. Wednesday, May 21 at Bridges

### Bridges

7 p.m. Thursday, May 22 at Bridges

# SUPREME COURT RULES IN FAVOR OF KANSAS KIDS

Four years ago, the Kansas City, Kansas Public Schools (KCKPS) joined in a lawsuit, filed in Shawnee County District Court in Topeka on behalf of more than 50 school districts, which argued that the system for financing schools in Kansas was unconstitutional, because the legislature was not funding schools adequately. On March 7, 2014, the Kansas Supreme Court ruled in favor of Kansas school children in the *Gannon vs. State of Kansas* school funding case. In a 110-page opinion, the court upheld the original decision made by a three-judge panel in Shawnee County District Court that said the current levels of school funding are unconstitutional and inequitable.

The decision was long and complicated. Here are a few key points from the Supreme Court's written opinion:

- **The court ruled that the plaintiff school districts (including KCKPS) had standing to pursue their claims under Article 6 of the Kansas Constitution.**
- **The court agreed with the ruling from the district court that the State failed to meet its duty to provide equity in public education as required under Article 6 of the Kansas Constitution, by:**
  - **Withholding all capital outlay state aid payments.**
  - **Prorating all supplemental general state aid payments.**

Both of these payments benefit lower-wealth districts like KCKPS, and by withholding them, the court said, the state was creating inequity. (It is estimated that the district was required to add an additional 10 mills to its tax levy because of the failure of the state to fulfill its obligation. If the legislature fulfills the court's order to reinstate capital outlay state aid, homeowners will see a corresponding reduction in their property tax levy.)

- **The court sent back to the district court panel the requirement to determine whether the state met its duty to provide adequacy in public education as required under Article 6 of the Kansas Constitution.**

"This ruling has profound significance for the future of our students and students throughout the state," said Dr. Cynthia Lane, KCKPS superintendent. "This decision makes clear that the legislature has a constitutional obligation to provide equitable funding for all Kansas children. We are confident that the Kansas legislature will take the necessary steps to fulfill their constitutional obligation."

KCKPS was a lead plaintiff in the lawsuit filed in 2010 in Shawnee County District Court. A three-judge trial court ruled in January 2013 for the plaintiffs, finding that the cuts reduced per-pupil expenditures far below a level "suitable" to educate all children under Kansas' standards. To remedy the funding shortfall, the judges ordered that per-pupil expenditures be increased to \$4,492 (the level previously established by the legislature as suitable), up from \$3,838. Rather than comply, the state appealed to the Kansas Supreme Court.

This is not the first time the state has been involved in litigation for failing to provide adequate funding to schools. In 1999, school districts filed suit in the District Court of Shawnee County, Kansas, alleging the financing system established by the state legislature did not meet the Kansas Constitution's requirement to "make suitable provision for finance of the educational interests of the state." The court ruled in favor of the schools in that case, which also went to the Supreme Court. In 2005, the Supreme Court upheld that ruling.

The Supreme Court has given the legislature until July 1, 2014 to remedy the finding of inequity, under the threat of further action by the district court. It also ordered the district court to reexamine the question of whether the school finance formula was providing adequate funding to meet the constitutional mandate.

The complete *Gannon* decision can be viewed online at <http://www.kscourts.org/Cases-and-Opinions/opinions/default.asp>.

# UPDATE ON BUILDING CONSTRUCTION AND RE

Two construction projects are under way in the Kansas City, Kansas Public Schools as part of the district's effort to rebuild and renovate buildings for efficiency and to meet the needs of the changing student population. Capital outlay funds are being used for both projects. Capital outlay funds are funds designated to be used for existing facilities, improvement of grounds, construction of facilities, additions to facilities, remodeling of facilities, or for the purchase or lease of equipment. Residents have incurred no tax increases to fund the projects.



## **New McKinley Elementary School**

A new McKinley Elementary School building is being constructed at 1301 Armstrong. Overcrowding at the current McKinley school and a projected growth in population in the surrounding area, prompted the need for a new building. Because the school's current site, at 611 N. 14th St., did not lend itself to expansion, the district sought other property for the construction of a new school.

The new 2.5-acre site, located just 1 ½ blocks from the current McKinley school, was owned by Community Housing Wyandotte County (CHWC). The district entered into a contract with CHWC to exchange the two properties since the site on Armstrong lent itself to the construction of a larger building.

The new building has the capacity to accommodate 350 students. The current McKinley building dates back to 1916, and had reached its capacity in student population at 200.

Construction began last spring on the new building and will continue through the summer. It will be ready for students and staff at the start of the 2014-15 school year in August.

**Features of the new building include:**

- **2,035-square feet of space**
- **15 Classrooms**  
(Including three kindergarten classrooms)
- **Art room**
- **Music room**
- **Multipurpose room**
- **Media center**
- **Computer lab**
- **Swing classrooms**

The current McKinley building will be razed by the district so that CHWC can develop the property into single homes for families.

# RENOVATION PROJECTS



## Former TEC Building (Central Office North)

Kansas City, Kansas Community College has moved its Technical Education Center to a new location and has vacated the district's building at 2220 N. 59th Street (adjacent to the KCKPS Central Office and Training Center.) The building is under renovation and will be used to house several district departments and programs including, but not limited to, the following:

- The KCKPS Police Department
- The Shop  
(Maintenance and Operations)
- KCKPS-TV Studio
- Technology and Information Services (TIS) staff
- Preschool classrooms

# A DAY OF GOLF PROVIDES SCHOLARSHIP SUPPORT FOR STUDENTS

## Kansas City, Kansas School Foundation For Excellence



For nearly a quarter of a century, local businesses and organizations have been "teeing off" to provide educational opportunities for students in the Kansas City, Kansas Public Schools.

The tradition will continue on Wednesday, June 11 when the KCK School Foundation for Excellence hosts its 24th annual Scholarship Golf Tournament. The tournament will take place at Sunflower Hills Golf Course in Bonner Springs.

Teams may register for a morning flight (beginning at 7:30 a.m.) or afternoon flight (beginning at 1 p.m.) A lunch/dinner and awards ceremony will follow each flight.

Several levels of sponsorship are available. Top level sponsors receive advertisements in the golf program, corporate recognition, gift bags and more. Sign and hole sponsors are also needed.

Through the years, more than 250 students have received scholarship assistance for their post-secondary education from proceeds received through the Golf Tournament. These scholarships provide students with not only monetary support, but also help them to feel a sense of community support.

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- CBIZ
- UDP/Datamax KC
- Gold Plus Level - \$4,000
- BlueCross BlueShield

#### Gold Level - \$3,000

- ACI Boland Architects
- CDW-G
- Piper Jaffray

#### Silver Plus Level - \$2,000

- Catalyst Construction Group
- Staples

#### Silver Level - \$1,500

- Aon
- Conentra Medical Centers
- Cytek Media Systems
- Mainstreet Credit Union
- McAnany, Van Cleave & Phillips
- PACES
- R. F. Fisher Electric, LLC
- UMB Bank
- University of Kansas Hospital

Registration for the tournament is open. For a registration form and more details, contact Susan Westfahl, [susan.westfahl@kckps.org](mailto:susan.westfahl@kckps.org), (913) 279-2235.

# CHANGING THE WORLD THROUGH SONG

## NEW KCK BOYS CHOIR IS MAKING A NAME



Above: Eli Jones, choral director at Eisenhower Middle School, is one of the co-directors of *The Voices of Change*.



They haven't been around long, but they are starting to make a name for themselves in the Kansas City area. Their harmonious sounds combined with their quiet confidence and obvious passion make them irresistible.

They are the Voices of Change, an all-boys choir made up of middle and high school students (grades 7 through 12) from Wyandotte County. The choir was formed last fall as an initiative to strengthen the choral and social skills of boys at the secondary level. Co-directors Leayn Losh, choral director at Rosedale Middle School, and Eli Jones, choral director at Eisenhower Middle School, wanted young men at this age to know they could be a positive force in society. They also wanted to provide them with a creative extracurricular activity that would enhance their confidence.

The group started with 8 to 10 boys who saw it as a fun way to spend time with their friends. That all changed when Jones took them to a boys choir workshop where they were able to sing and perform with other boys from around the area. This opened their eyes to the possibilities that existed.

Then came their first performance at Crown Center during the holiday season. Decked out in their black slacks, black dress shirts and red bow ties, the group was poised and polished – and proud!

Today, the Voices of Change has a group of 28 core members, and the maturity and talent of members continues to grow.

"This has become a dream for us," Losh said. "We have already started to see what an all-boys choir can do for these young men. Their enthusiasm and joy of singing together has

# FOR ITSELF



inspired us even more.”

The choir meets once a week for a two-hour evening rehearsal, but they also spend time building camaraderie through fun activities. They hold a celebration once a month after their rehearsal that includes food and social time. And once a quarter, they have a “fun night” such as an open gym night. These types of events build teamwork, and allow the students a chance to interact outside of rehearsals.

While there was not a formal “tryout” process to become a part of the choir, Losh said it is considered an “honor choir,” and she and Jones have high expectations for the young men as far as behavior, attitude and rehearsals. For example, if they miss two rehearsals, unexcused, they are out for the semester.

“We are strict with them, but we also are very positive,” Losh said. “We see them as role models for other young men in the community and so we set high expectations.”

Their name has a double meaning. It reflects their mission to impact and move people with their musical performances. It also has a literal meaning, as many of them have voices that are literally changing by the day because of their age. In her many years of teaching, Losh has been challenged by helping boys through those periods of vocal range changes. She said it’s not uncommon for a boy to come into class one day as a tenor and the next day show up as a bass.

“Sometimes boys are embarrassed because of their voice changes,” Losh said. “I always assure them that they sound fine. The key for them is learning to sing in the range they are in.”

While the boys are learning and developing with each passing

week, so are Losh and Jones. In fact, Losh is connecting this program with her graduate studies. She is finishing her second master’s degree and working on her doctorate in music education.

Because this is their first year, the choir doesn’t have a regular performance schedule, but they are gaining requests to perform as word of their talent spreads. One of their goals is to master the Star Spangled Banner so they can perform it at a Royals or Chiefs game.

To keep up with their schedule, “like” them on Facebook at [www.facebook.com/VoicesOfChangeKC](http://www.facebook.com/VoicesOfChangeKC).

**The Voices of Change Choir strives to develop confidence and self-respect, while inspiring global awareness of social, cultural, ethnic and generational diversity and encouraging the joys of lifelong learning through choral music education.**

# TECHNOLOGY UPDATE

## ONE-TO-ONE LAPTOP INITIATIVE SEEN AS A MODEL



Many said it couldn't be done. But it's been seven years and counting since the Kansas City, Kansas Public Schools (KCKPS) initiated its One-to-One Laptop initiative. Today, the program is seen as a model of excellence for school districts around the country.

Through the program, KCKPS provides a laptop computer to each of its high school students to use during the school year. The initial goal was two-fold: to ensure that KCKPS students had the same access to computers as students in more affluent districts; and to foster a more creative environment for teachers and students.

The first year, 5,000 laptops were distributed. Today, the district has grown its entire technology program into a one-to-one ratio district-wide through the distribution of student, staff and classroom

laptops, iPads, iPods and Apple TVs. More than 25,000 pieces of technology equipment fill classrooms and district buildings.

"We're not just keeping up with technology, we're trying to stay ahead of the game," said Joe Fives, director of the district's Technology and Information Services (TIS) Department.

Because technology is becoming more prevalent in all aspects of life and business, it's important for students to be engaged at as many levels as possible to be ready for their futures. And it's important for staff to open up opportunities for engagement in technology.

Fives is clear that technology for technology's sake is not the proper use of the equipment. KCKPS stresses leveraging technology to expand learning opportunities and to take

advantage of rare resources and experiences.

"It's going beyond that lesson. We want our classrooms to be student-centered classrooms where there is a focus on problem solving communication and collaboration, and that's what you see when you go into many of our schools," he said.

For example, classrooms have used Skype to connect with real scientists in the field, to visit a working farm or to host a concert exchange with another school. Students are creating videos, websites and sophisticated games. They are improving their reading and vocabulary through iPod apps. All assessments are taken on computers, and they are used in district-wide events such as Math Relays and Battle of the Books. This school year, computer programming classes (CodeHS) were offered at the middle and high school levels

to introduce students to some of the skills needed for the career field of technology. Teachers are using GoogleDocs and Facebook to communicate with students and parents. Most importantly, teachers are encouraging students to think beyond the classroom.

"It's much more than simply learning a word processing program," Fives said. "We have students who are programming robots and creating small appliances. The critical thinking and logical thinking skills they learn from these experiences can be applied to so many other disciplines."

*We have students who are programming robots and creating small appliances. The critical thinking and logical thinking skills they learn from these experiences can be applied to so many other disciplines.*

*—Joe Fives,  
director of Technology and  
Information Services (TIS)*

# FOR OTHER DISTRICTS



Fives said he has fielded a steady stream of phone calls over the years from both local school districts such as North Kansas City, Liberty, Shawnee Mission and Lawrence, and many throughout the nation such as Joplin, Mo., and East Chicago Public Schools, who are interested in replicating the district's One-to-One Laptop initiative.

"They want to know how effective our initiative has been, and the steps they can take to implement a similar program in their schools," he said.

Fives is more than willing to share; it's about preparing all students for bright futures.

"The fact that so many other school districts are coming to us so many years later is really a credit to the staff, the students and the Board for believing in the administration and for supporting our technology program," Fives said. "There were people outside who said we couldn't do it so the fact that we did and have been so successful, I think really speaks to the community as a whole."



## 2013-2014 DISTRICT CALENDAR

### May

- 13 Board of Education Meeting
- 16 Last Day of School for Graduating Seniors
- 23 Last Day of School for Grades K-11
- 26 Holiday/ Administrative Offices Closed
- 27 Board of Education Meeting
- 27 ½ Day Records Prep, ½ Day Inservice

### June

- 10 Board of Education Meeting
- 24 Board of Education Meeting

### July

- 4 Holiday/ Administrative Offices Closed
- 15 Board of Education Meeting

The full district calendar is accessible from the homepage of the website, [www.kckps.org](http://www.kckps.org) (click on "calendars").

## NOMINATIONS SOUGHT FOR *REASONS TO BELIEVE* ALUMNI HONOR ROLL



Nominations are open for the Kansas City, Kansas Public Schools' (KCKPS) 2014 *Reasons to Believe* Alumni Honor Roll, part of a coordinated plan to spotlight alumni successes to encourage and inspire today's students.

KCKPS established the *Reasons to Believe* program in 2002 to generate pride and celebrate the progress being made throughout the district.

The Alumni Honor Roll annually showcases the high caliber of graduates that the district produces and brings a select group of them together with staff, students, community members, colleagues and key leaders for a night of honors in November.

### NOMINEES MUST:

- Be graduates of a KCKPS high school
- Be successful in their chosen business, profession or life work
- Be a person of integrity and stature that KCKPS would take pride in recognizing
- Have demonstrated the importance of their education from KCKPS

Nomination forms can be downloaded from the KCKPS website, [www.kckps.org/recognition/alumni](http://www.kckps.org/recognition/alumni) or call (913) 279-2242 to request one. The deadline for returning nominations is Monday, June 16, 2014.



# Math Relays 2014



# SUMMER CAMP ACTIVITIES PLANNED AT MR. AND MRS. F.L. SCHLAGLE LIBRARY

The Mr. and Mrs. F.L. Schlagle Environmental Library (located at Wyandotte County Lake Park) has a number of Summer Camp offerings for children ages 3 through 15. Registration is now open for all programs.

## **Tots 'n Trails Family Camp, ages 3-4**

*Monday, June 2- Friday, June 6, 9:30 to 11:30 a.m. • Cost: \$20*

Attend camp with your child during this week filled with fun and educational activities geared toward younger preschoolers. Activities include hikes along the nature trail, up-close encounters with education animals, crafts, games and songs. Limited to 10 children. All children must be accompanied by a parent/guardian.

## **Nuts About Nature, ages 5-6**

*Monday, June 9 – Friday, June 13, 9 a.m. to noon • Cost: \$20*

Looking for a great way to get your young explorer out into nature? During this week of summer camp, your little one will learn about animals in the world around us as we explore the trails around the library. Your child will work on crafts, play games and even meet education animals. Parents are invited to attend camp with their child on the last day of camp.

## **Eco Explorers, ages 6-8**

*Monday, June 16 – Friday, June 20 OR Monday, June 23 – Friday, June 27  
10 a.m. to 2 p.m. • Cost: \$25*

Eco Explorers is a week-long adventure where campers will work their way toward becoming Junior Naturalists! Summer camp classics such as crafts, challenge activities, fishing, water games and hikes make this an unforgettable experience!

## **Discovery Day Camp, ages 9-11**

*Monday, July 7 – Friday, July 11 OR Monday, July 14 – Friday, July 18  
10 a.m. to 3 p.m. M-TH, 10 a.m. to noon Friday  
Cost \$25 (Overnight stay, additional \$20)*

Discovery Day Camp combines science and nature education with adventure activities such as archery, hiking and fishing. Each day of this week-long camp will be spent “discovering” a different aspect of the natural world around us. Wildlife, trees, water and environmental action are just a few things we will be learning about this year. Other planned activities include teambuilding, games, crafts and an optional overnight stay!

## **Destination Science, ages 12-15**

*Monday, July 21 – Friday, July 25  
OR Monday, July 28 – Friday, August 1  
10 a.m. to 3 p.m. M-TH, 10 a.m. to noon Friday  
Cost: \$25 (Overnight stay, additional \$20)*

Destination Science is a week-long camp for middle schoolers that focuses on science, nature and the environment. Activities may include orienteering, fishing, water exploration and games, team building, nature trail hikes, archery, experiments, an optional overnight stay and much more!



# Working together to make Kansas healthier



The Schlagle Library is located at  
4051 West Drive at the Wyandotte County Lake.  
Camp registration forms are available online at  
[www.kckpl.org](http://www.kckpl.org) (choose Schlagle Library).  
Call (913) 299-2384 for more information.

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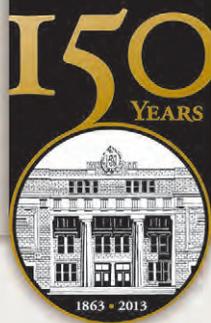
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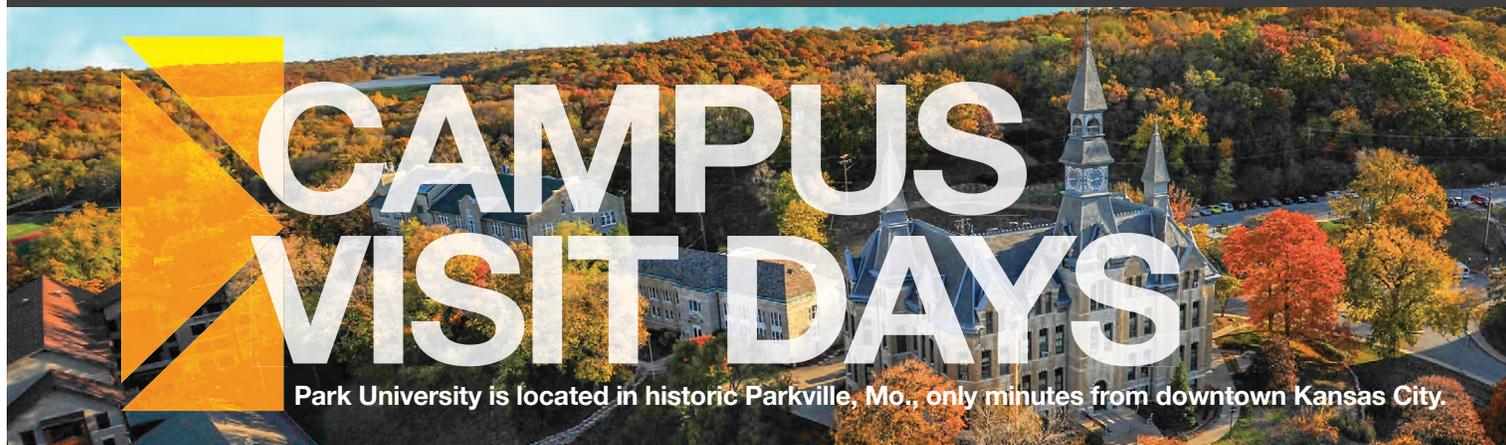
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### 1-ON-1 WEEKENDS

These special weekend dates are for students looking to get details one-on-one with an admissions counselor RSVP early as space is limited.

- May 16, 2014 • June 6, 2014 • July 12, 2014
- June 14, 2014 • July 18, 2014

### PERSONAL CAMPUS EXPERIENCE

*Make any day your visit day.* Tour the Parkville Campus, meet faculty, talk with current students and discover historic Parkville. Schedule your experience at [park.edu/kcschools](http://park.edu/kcschools) or (816) 746-2533.

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