Dear Uniting at Southwest supporter,

Thank you for agreeing to write a letter of support for the Uniting at Southwest vision for a new public high school (and possibly a middle school) that is Rigorous, Innovative, and Welcoming.

We have taken the liberty of preparing several mock up letters below for your convenience. Please feel free to mix and match and alter as you see fit. We have also included an FAQ at the bottom of this note in case you’d like some more background as you consider and write your letter.

The letter should be on your organization’s letterhead and then either emailed to Unitingatsouthwest@gmail.com (or) mailed to: Uniting At Southwest, Attn. Michel Zeller 15 E 68 street KC MO 64113.

Please complete this by **Friday June 30th** as we will be submitting a full proposal to KCPS Superintendent, Dr. Mark Bedell, soon thereafter.

Thank you for your support. It matters!

-The USW Team

unitingatsouthwest.org

816.699.5808

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**Sample Letter 1:**
Dr. Mark Bedell,

Kansas City Public Schools has been making steady progress for years.  Now is the time to take it to the next level.  Let's have the hard conversations and develop the trust needed to bring our communities together, to look to the future and not the past, and to take calculated risks.  We simply cannot keep doing things the same way and expecting a different outcome.  From everything I can tell, project-based learning is the best way to prepare our students with the professional skills they will need to thrive in this ever shifting economy. Our children, our neighborhoods, and our city deserve this.

All of the pieces are on the table: a need to innovate how we bring together and how we develop our young people, an unused public facility in good condition, an obvious and demonstrated demand for an integrated and innovative school of this nature, and the philanthropic resources needed to create something truly remarkable and enduring. I believe this is a risk worth taking.

**Sample Letter 2:**

Dr. Mark Bedell,

Kansas City families are telling us very clearly that they want to live in and invest in our city.  But, far too many of them are choosing to leave every year, often because they are dissatisfied with their public school options.

However, with the new leadership, KCPS seems to be on a roll.  Now is the perfect time to get creative and to form new partnerships and to embrace new curricular models such as project-based learning.  I URGE KCPS to accept this hand of partnership, fulfill its mission in new ways, and join with this broad group to educate a healthy cross-section of our children and grow our city.



This is what it looks like when a broad cross section of parents, civic leaders, and local philanthropists come together to partner with their city's public school district.

**Sample Letter 3:**

Dr. Mark Bedell,

I am writing to ask that Kansas City Public Schools accept this offer of partnership with the Uniting At Southwest group of parents, civic leaders and philanthropists.  I've been very proud of the successes that KCPS has been racking up lately.  You have a good team in place.

Sometimes it is difficult to adjust to new ideas coming from outside.  But I have looked into the vision and met some of its proponents and I strongly believe that this could deliver our community a lot of wins all around.  I hope you keep an open mind, listen to your constituents, and make careful long-range decisions that are in the best interest of the entire community.  From everything I can tell, project-based learning is the best way to prepare our students with the professional skills they will need to thrive in this ever shifting economy. As they say, innovate or die.

**Sample Letter 4:**

Dr. Mark Bedell,

With the new leadership at KCPS, we are at a critical juncture where a new and independent high school can come alongside KCPS to create an innovative learning environment whose best practices can then be spread across the District, and the metro.

As KCPS continues to improve the educational experience of its current 15,000 students, the families and students in the neighborhoods surrounding the vacant Southwest facility also deserve a Rigorous, Innovative and Welcoming public high school.

Uniting at Southwest has demonstrated incredible demand, including more than a thousand students who will be *new to the KCPS family*. This new high school will benefit our city, our neighborhoods, our students and the tax-payers who fund our public schools.

**Some Common FAQs you might also draw upon to personalize your letter:**

**Is there demand for another public high school?** Parents of 1,700 children tell us there is. That’s how many students have been signed up at the USW website survey since March 15th.  The US Census Bureau reports an increase of 1,261 children ages birth—14 living south of Brush Creek from 2010-2015; while the number of high school age students in the same area declined by 452 over the same period. This indicates a significant, unmet demand and families are moving out of the city to find it.

**Why at Southwest?** Simple: because it’s a magnificent building designed to serve public high school students, and it’s empty. Secondly, families throughout the area want a new high school there. We envision a Southwest High School that both connects with this energy in its surrounding neighborhoods *and* welcomes students from across the city who are passionate about being a part of this unique program---an all-together school!

**Will this weaken KCPS?** No. This school will add to KCPS enrollment and KCPS performance.  The program will also bring the support of a new large and capable constituency to the KCPS community.

**How does KCPS benefit from the partnership?**

* A new rigorous, innovative and welcoming public high school fulfills the KCPS mission.
* While KCPS has made good strides to achieve re-accreditation and to upgrade the education and facilities at all of its schools, launching an innovative new school is a big and expensive task. We are proposing to do this with philanthropic funds, allowing KCPS the room to remain focused on its current progress.
* Future Southwest students and their scores and achievements will be included in the KCPS totals, helping to raise the bar on a system that is making progress.
* Facility funds presently spent on a vacant Southwest High will be saved for other KCPS schools.
* Our survey indicates a new school of this nature will keep families in the city and draw new students *into* the KCPS system.
* This will re-connect KCPS to its many constituents in the neighborhoods surrounding the vacant SW facility

6.     Develop a broad new base of constituents and partners that will strengthen KCPS.

**How soon can we open?**  Great schools take time to plan and to get the right school leader. But if we can form a partnership with KCPS in 2017, we can start with a single grade in the fall of 2019, or 2020 at the very latest.

**Is this “Autonomous School” a private school?**  We are proposing an open-enrollment public school subject to all of the same laws and state oversight as every other public school in Missouri.

**What is the curriculum plan?**  We are proposing a learner-centered and project-based curriculum. You can visit our website to see how these approaches are delivering extraordinary results among diverse populations around the country, and around the world. A future principal will take the lead in working with the community and developing the specific curriculum plans.

**What is the present relationship with KCPS?**  It is one-sided, but in a good way. We are being fully transparent with KCPS of our process and engagement efforts, knowing we have to show demand and a strategy before they could open discussions with us. Very similar to Friends of Hale Cook’s approach, we need to demonstrate that there is significant and unmet demand for a school of this nature. At the end of our community engagement efforts and data collection, we will submit our findings to KCPS as well as post it on our website.

**Is this a charter school?**  This school needs “autonomy”. Research shows that in the most effective urban schools, school principals make all the teaching and learning decisions. This can happen in a variety of school types. We are not committed to a type of school; we are committed to school leader autonomy.

**What about a middle school?**  KCPS convened a civic committee to determine the feasibility of a south KC middle school. The committee decided the prospect deserves further study and recommends KCPS not take action at this time. The USW vision could incorporate a middle school as part of this secondary program, should KCPS desire it. (Note: KCPS schools are K-6, while surrounding parochial and charter schools tend to be K-8 programs)

**Could a middle and a high school join at SW?**  It’s certainly big enough. As mentioned above, a KCPS team is looking into the possibility, and SW is an option for a southern middle school per the KCPS strategic plan.

**How is this funded?**  We have secured major commitments from the Bloch, Stowers, McDonnell and DeBruce Foundations during this research and engagement phase. They are being joined by others, including many individual offers from the school’s large alumni base. These philanthropic dollars are needed to: plan, equip, and start a public high school.   That said: This school will be a public school and will operate with public funds, once underway. This is similar to how other public institutions are created or expanded such as hospitals and universities.

**Are you related to any charter schools?**

No. However, several supporters of the movement have helped create successful charter and KCPS schools.

**Will this divert KCPS from its recent successes?** Absolutely not. USW is proposing to secure its own resources and talent to plan, equip and successfully launch the school. We intend for this to contribute to KCPS’s success.

**Who can attend?** We welcome students living throughout the KCPS boundaries who are excited about this unique, rigorous and welcoming educational experience.

**Will students have to test in?** No.

**Can students living outside of KCPS attend?** Only if they move in, which many survey responders indicate *they will*.

**Why does this public school need independence?** Autonomy will provide the space needed for the school leader to innovate and to create a radically new kind of school culture that meets the needs of the teachers, students, and community. Community-based schools also need greater autonomy and agility to work with the community.

**What is the economic impact?**  Converting an empty public facility into a vibrant, middle-size high school will increase home values (Duke University study: [https://sites.duke.edu/urbaneconomics/?p=712](https://sites.duke.edu/urbaneconomics/?p=712" \t "_blank)) and attendant municipal /*KCPS revenues*, build central city population, and generate economic activity over a wide area.

**Why will this be successful this time?**  Good question. The pieces are all before us: The vision and a proven model, the start-up, leadership, an empty school, the emerging resources, the partnerships, the community support, a growing base of elementary students (KCPS, charter, parochial), and the passion and the commitment to be successful. It's up to us.

**How can I get involved?**  We need to demonstrate demand for this unique program.  Advocate with your friends, neighbors, and family to take the Support Survey. Politely advocate with elected officials when the time comes. Many more volunteer opportunities will emerge at later stages.

*--The USW team*