

**MAPS for Kids - a Unique Partnership of
The City of Oklahoma City, the Oklahoma City Public School District
and 23 Suburban School Districts in Oklahoma City**

MAPS for Kids was developed to reverse the downward spiral of the Oklahoma City Public School District, encourage redevelopment and enhance the quality of life in the inner city and foster economic development. Oklahoma City has an area of 620 square miles and encompasses all or part of 24 public school districts. The District, which largely serves the inner city, once had an enrollment of 70,000. Court-ordered busing in the 1970s and development of the suburban city severely weakened the District. Test scores declined. Enrollment decreased to less than 40,000, with over 80% of the families eligible for free or reduced federal lunch programs and many for whom English is a second language. The inner city declined; blight and decay overtook some areas. The public lost confidence in the District's ability to manage its affairs and would not approve badly needed bond issues for new buildings or repair of the 98 buildings, which had an average age of 57 years.

In the 1990s, Oklahoma City's Metropolitan Area Projects (MAPS) program constructed \$350 million in public improvements that revitalized downtown and the adjacent entertainment district and restored citizen confidence in municipal government. In Oklahoma, municipal governments and public school districts are distinct, separately funded entities, with little or no direct relationships. City leaders recognized improving education in the District was key to restoring the inner city, improving the quality of life and providing for sustained economic development. A change in State law allowing cities to use their tax dollars to support public education caused City and community leaders to seek a way to use the City's success with MAPS as a model for improving the District.

In late 1998, the City, the District and the Oklahoma City Public Schools Foundation launched Project KIDS (Keep Improving District Schools), a community-based effort to determine how to restore the failing school system. After two years of consultant studies and broad community input, the 75-member Steering Committee adopted four goals: overhaul the District's management; establish proven, measurable learning methods and objectives for student achievement; raise the money to renovate or reconstruct every school, with a net reduction of at least 18 buildings; and ready schools for technology.

The Project Kids recommendations could not go forward without funding. Oklahoma's school districts rely on property taxes for capital needs. The District's bonding capacity could only fund one third of the needed building improvements. In a unique effort, Oklahoma City committed its taxing capacity to revitalize the District. Proposals were developed for a seven-year, one-cent City sales tax to raise \$500 million and a District bond issue to raise \$180 million all for new or renovated schools, school buses and technology. Voters approved both measures on November 13, 2001.

The public's lack of confidence in the District's ability to manage the funds and oversee the projects was addressed by establishment of a seven-member Oklahoma City Metropolitan Area Schools (OCMAPS) Trust that holds monthly televised public meetings. Oklahoma City created the OCMAPS office under the direction of a licensed professional engineer and staffed with experienced project managers to oversee the projects. A March 4, 2005, lead editorial in the *Daily Oklahoman* stated "Allowing experienced Oklahoma City officials to oversee the bulk of the MAPS for Kids money is proving to be a wise decision."

The OCMAPS Trust had to address perceptions in certain areas of the District that some schools would receive more than other schools, as these threatened the cooperation and confidence needed for a successful program. To counter concerns about equity in education and equality in construction, consultants were selected for two key studies and reports. The Educational Specifications Report established the sizes for classrooms, offices and other spaces. The Design Standard report provides uniform standards and finishes for all school buildings.

The District hired a new superintendent with a strong record of improving public schools and a goal of making the District a model urban school district. He reorganized the reporting structure to provide better, more-direct communication and stronger support for at-risk schools. Additional testing was added to identify and address academic problems. Standardized student test scores showed outstanding gains in 2003-2004, with 62% of fifth graders scoring satisfactory or advanced in math, compared with 45% the prior year, and smaller gains in reading and science scores. Eighth grade reading improved, with 58% scoring satisfactory or advanced, a gain of 12%, and there were gains of 11% in math and 9% in science and history scores. District scores are becoming competitive with those of surrounding districts.

Community and corporate involvement brought 1,900 volunteers to tutor and mentor students in the elementary schools. The District partnered with the Public Schools Foundation and the Chamber of Commerce in a program to bring volunteer tutors to the secondary schools to help with reading and will expand the program next year to provide assistance with math.

Most of the District's school buses were old and in constant need of repair. MAPS for Kids funds were used to purchase 80 new buses for the start of the 2003 school year. Another 80 buses are on order. \$52 million in technology improvements are providing computers, learning software and network upgrades in all District schools.

The OCMAPS Trust worked with the District to develop priorities for the \$470 million building program to renovate or replace 73 school buildings. MAPS for Kids is on target and on schedule to complete all projects in 2010. Two construction projects are complete. Five projects, including three new high schools are under construction, one project is in the bidding process, 10 projects are in design, and eight are in the consultant selection process.

The 23 suburban school districts benefit from MAPS for Kids proportionately to the number of City-resident students in each school district. Approximately \$150 million will be distributed to these schools over seven years. The funds can be used for capital projects decided upon by the respective School Boards and approved by the Trust.

In just three years, MAPS for Kids has made a difference in the lives and education of its students. Improved test scores, better communication, more accountability and more parent and community involvement are improving the public's confidence in the District. Oklahoma City's commitment to quality education for inner-city students is building a better, stronger city. Dell Corporation is constructing a new Service Center in the heart of the inner city that will eventually employ 3,000 people. The Chamber of Commerce reports a significant increase in the number and quality of firms with a strong interest in the city. MAPS for Kids is a model program for city-school partnerships. Other cities and schools are requesting information about the program.