

# 2011 State of the City

## Address

Mayor Mark Stodola

City of Little Rock

## **Mayor Mark Stodola State of the City Address**

Thank you Vice-Mayor Dean Kumpuris for that warm and gracious introduction.

To my colleagues on the Board of Directors, City Manager Bruce Moore, City Attorney Tom Carpenter, to the many City employees in attendance, to my wife Jo Ellen who is here with me today, to Consul General Andres Chao, and to the citizens of Little Rock, thank you for joining me for this annual State of the City Address.

This year, as I reflect on what are the critical elements that make up a great American city, I am reminded of the comments I have heard from several citizens who I had conversations with while campaigning for re-election – A common refrain was that “I would vote for you, but I don’t live here.” “I can’t find affordable housing in a safe neighborhood or a good school that my child can attend.” This is the perception of many – and perception is reality.

Indeed, 103,000 people come to Little Rock metro area everyday and drive home to some other city in some other county to shop and pay taxes. While we have seen a 5.4% growth in our population over the last 10 years, virtually every other city around us has seen double-digit growth. Benton – 28%. Bryant – 41%. Maumelle – 38%. Conway – 30%.

There is no doubt that in order for us to have the next great American City in the South, we have to have very good schools, safe neighborhoods, and affordable places to live, play and raise our families. My comments today will focus on these issues. **We are a great city, but we can be better.**

For this State of the City speech, I would like to focus on three topics. **First**, I would like to spend a few minutes reflecting on how far we have come in creating livable, safe and affordable neighborhoods. **Second**, I would like to identify the many needs that remain to be satisfied in order to improve our city and, in doing so, we must discuss the City’s stewardship of our existing tax dollars and what we can look to for new revenues. And, **Third**, I want to discuss how we as a city can compliment

and contribute to our school districts in creating an optimum environment where quality learning and education can be achieved.

All of my colleagues here have been actively involved in working for the citizens of our city – some have focused on improving specific neighborhoods – others on engaging neighborhood associations to be active and involved in their city, some on improving our parks and still others who have worked to ensure financial accountability or representational diversity. However, rather than detail all of their projects, I would like to focus on some of the accomplishments of our employees.

Indeed, there are dozens of examples reflecting the dedication our employees have to the city they work for and love. I know I will leave some important ones out but let me highlight just a few of their accomplishments.

Of course, our first and foremost responsibility is to do everything we can to keep our citizens safe. Let me thank the **men and women of our Police and Fire Departments** for putting their lives on the line for us every single day.

Over the last four years, the accomplishments of our Police Department in reducing the crime rate have been astonishing. The violent crime rate has been reduced by 30%. The homicide rate over the last four years has been reduced by 59%. In 2010, the number of felony offenses committed, at 16,538, is the lowest it has been in 30 years. During a period from 1991 to 2010, the reduction in felony offenses committed in our city has been reduced by 43%. Last year, we had a 12.5% reduction in burglaries and a 9.5% reduction in larcenies. All of this was accomplished in the most difficult economic climate we have seen in nearly 80 years.

Our Fire Department has responded to thousands of calls and, as a first responder, saved dozens of lives of our citizens. This past year, we have instituted blood pressure monitoring at all of our Fire Department stations and have embarked on a fire station expansion program to bring our fire fighters

closer to our growing neighborhoods in western Little Rock. Thank you Police Department and Fire Department for all you do everyday to keep us safe.

**Neighborhood stabilization** is critical to creating safe neighborhoods. The 41 properties our Land Bank has acquired suggests that it is well on its way to having an inventory of property ready for residential infill and neighborhood revitalization.

68 specific home repair and loan assistance projects were accomplished last year. Additionally, we put to work our **Neighborhood Stabilization grant monies** which is allowing us to build or rehabilitate 100 houses in the Central High and Stephens school neighborhoods. This is critically important. It translates into increased property values in these neighborhoods with houses selling for \$85 to almost \$100 per square foot, which in turn increases the property taxes that go in large part to support our schools.

Last year, we partnered up with UALR to successfully compete and receive a \$430,000 **Promise Neighborhood Planning grant** designed to improve the quality of education for students living in low to moderate income areas. We competed successfully as one of only 10 cities to receive a **Cities of Service grant** also designed to implement programs helping our youth and the neighborhoods they live in; and received a very competitive grant (only 5 were awarded) from the **Environmental Protection Agency** to “green-up” Main Street with environmentally conscious design and construction plans.

In 2010, we improved our collection of delinquent court fines, which has resulted in additional revenue to the City of \$203,000 since its inception in April.

In the quality of life areas, we provided medical care to 2,600 patients at the St. Vincent Medical Clinic in east Little Rock, embarked on our Citywide Historic Preservation Plan, completed construction of the new Riverfront Park Plaza, highlighting La Petite Roche and are nearly finished with the city's Urban Wetland Park Project near the Clinton Library. The implementation and continuation of the War

Memorial Park Redevelopment Plan and the MacArthur Park Plan are both well underway. The Ottenheimer Therapeutic Center will be completed this June and we just opened up a \$2.4 million project at the Little Rock Zoo. This year, over 300,000 people will see the nine new residents of our city, which live at Penguin Pointe.

I am particularly proud of the hard working men and women of our Public Works department. Having received substantial snowfalls this winter, our men and women worked constantly to clean the streets so that emergency vehicles could navigate our city and our citizens could get back to work – they worked additional shifts, staggered shifts and worked 24/7 through the night blading, salting and sanding our streets. So far this year, over 12,137 labor hours have been expended, at a cost of \$160,500 along with \$125,000 worth of material. The Board and I have been the beneficiaries of dozens of compliments from our citizens but the real compliments go to our loyal city employees. There are many other accomplishments too numerous to mention – but I hope those areas mentioned sends the message to our citizens that we are doing everything in our power to be good stewards of your tax dollars.

**Now, you may be sitting there thinking everything is rosey in the state's Capital City –  
Regrettably, it is not.**

Let me explain – our streets are falling apart. We have no money for street resurfacing and have virtually ceased this function since 2007. We are filling potholes as fast as we can – so continue to call them in to 311. We have used bailing wire and band-aides to keep our communication system for Police and Fire operations working. It is not only antiquated, but one that is hard to find parts for or keep maintained. We have a 60-year-old police station that needs to be completely renovated or demolished and rebuilt; we have land for our new police substation at Midtown but not enough money to build the station. We have a new fire station in West Little Rock, but don't have the money to equip it nor the firefighters to man it. We have not purchased any police vehicles in three years. Many have in excess of

100,000 miles on them. We need more police officers patrolling our neighborhoods so we can keep the burglars and thieves at bay, since there is no room for them in the county jail and apparently there will be no room for them in the state penitentiary.

We don't have the staff to maintain, let alone beautify, our 57 city parks. We can only mow the rights of way and medians in our streets twice during the growing season, the rest of the time they are overgrown with weeds. **This is a band-aide approach.**

We have 80 major city buildings to maintain and try and keep repaired – our budget for this? A total of \$478,000 – this is approximately \$6,000 per building. This includes plumbing, electrical and HVAC repairs and replacement. **Again, this is a band-aide approach.**

We ended 2010 with 209 vacancies spread out through all our city departments. Let me emphasize this; we currently have 19 vacancies in our Parks Department, 44 vacancies in our Public Works Department, 10 vacancies in Code Enforcement and 10 vacancies in our Planning Department who are doing more reacting than planning.

Our approved budget in 2008 was \$144,000,000. Then the economy tanked. Our approved budget for 2011 is \$134,000,000, \$10 million less. Now is the time we need our citizens' help to work with us and advise us on how as a great city, **We can do better.**

Let me tell you the story of our stewardship of your existing tax dollars.

The City enacted a half penny city sales tax mid-year in 1994, some 17 years ago. The rate has never been increased. In 1995, the first full year of collecting our ½ penny sales tax, we had a total of 1,537 employees in the General Fund. Now, 16+ years later, we have 1,542 employees on the payroll for a net gain of Five employees. Consider for a moment that in 1994, when our tax began to be collected, we had a total of 869 employees in our Police and Fire Departments. Now, 17 years later, we have 1,106 employees in our Police and Fire Departments, for a net increase in the area of public safety of 237

employees. Obviously, it is apparent that all of our other operating departments have been cut so that we do everything possible to ensure that public safety is our first and foremost obligation.

Now let's compare our local sales tax rates to other cities in the state. North Little Rock currently has a 1-cent city sales tax; as a percentage of a dollar, this is 100% more than we have. Sherwood and Maumelle also have a 1-cent city sales tax, also 100% more; Jacksonville has a 2-cent city sales tax, as a percentage of a dollar, 300% more – and this list goes on. Conway has a 1 ¾ -cent city sales tax, a 250% increase as a percentage of a dollar.

Now let's compare the Northwest corridor of our state. Fort Smith – a 2-cent city sales tax – 300% more; Fayetteville, Springdale, Rogers and Bentonville all with a 2-cent city sales tax, again 300% more.

Last year, Little Rock collected \$22,500,000 in local sales taxes. Contrast this with Fort Smith, a city less than half our size collected \$37,000,000. This is \$14.5 million more than Little Rock. Fayetteville, which is only 40% the size of Little Rock, also collected more than Little Rock – \$31,650,000. Nearly \$10 million more. Rogers, a city 30% the size of Little Rock, collected more sales tax as well at \$22,600,000. Conway, a city 30% the size of Little Rock collected almost the same amount as Little Rock. And the City of Bryant, which is less than one-tenth the size of Little Rock, collected nearly half the total of Little Rock's city sales tax at \$10,260,000.

The picture becomes increasingly clear. In order to have a truly great city, so that we can do better, we have to increase our revenues. Our source – the most likely source and the one which will truly make a difference – is increasing our city sales tax.

Now, I don't like having to raise taxes anymore than the rest of you – but we as a community have to decide what we want our city to be – I believe you are like me in wanting Little Rock to be a great city, the Capital City of our state – the mecca for 21<sup>st</sup> Century good jobs, great neighborhoods,

great recreational facilities and a quality of life that makes people want to live here and be a part of our city. I want those 103,000 people who live some place else, to want to live here and be a part of our great community.

On March 29, 2011, the City Board will begin a dialogue about referring an increase in the sales tax to the citizens of our city. After this, I have asked our staff to immediately organize public meetings in each of our seven wards so that we can hear from you about what services and issues are important to you. We need your input as we fashion the specifics of a sales tax referral around the broad context of public safety, public works, parks and more jobs. I urge our citizens to participate and to become educated about our needs and how we can accomplish them.

### **Schools**

What else makes a city great? Great schools are needed to make our city great and I want City Government to do everything we can to help our schools and the students educated within their walls excel. While we don't have operational control, there are many things as a city we can do to help students excel.

Let me set the stage. Few issues stir the hearts of our citizens like the issue of educating our young. In fact, the latest national survey by the Pew Research Center for the People & the Press<sup>1</sup> ranked education (66%) among the top four issues facing the United States, just behind the economy (87%), jobs (84%) and terrorism (73%). A central concern of all families is the education and well-being of their children. A poll of Little Rock voters I conducted in the fall ranked education as the #1 issue they would like to see improved, followed by public safety, jobs and roads. Rarely do our families hold any issue dearer than the promise that a quality education for their child will lead to economic security. Not surprisingly, the data proves that, over time, households and demographics with the highest educational attainment in the United States are also among those with the highest [household income](#) and [wealth](#). In

other words, income and educational attainment remain highly correlated. <sup>2</sup>Yet, a sober look at the existing landscape sheds light on a future that presents both serious challenges and great opportunities.

## **CHALLENGES**

What are the challenges and how can the City help? The Little Rock metro area, which includes the city and six surrounding counties, is home to thirty-one high schools, three of which are considered among the nation's lowest-performing high schools, i.e., schools where fewer than 60 percent of freshmen progress to their senior year on time. Thirty-three percent of high school students in the region do not graduate on time with a regular diploma. <sup>3</sup>Shockingly, in the United States every 26 seconds a child drops out of school; 8 out of 10 dropouts end up in prison; 75% of all prison inmates are high school dropouts: Falling behind, poor grades, truancy and a failing criminal justice system are markers for acceleration of the dropout rate; and, the U.S. spends \$40 billion a year on prisoner incarceration<sup>4</sup>. Locally, the story is just as grim. Students in LRSD High Schools are permitted 7 unexcused absences per semester. Students in the elementary grades are permitted 9 unexcused absences per semester, before being declared truant.

The School District then prepares a truancy file for delivery to the City Attorney who files a Petition in juvenile court. Service of Process must be made on the child and the parents which is often a very difficult task. Usually, it takes anywhere from 4 to 6 months for a truant child to be brought before the court for a first hearing. Oftentimes, the school year is already over, or the child has completely dropped out of school and is on the street headed, in 7 out of 10 cases, for a serious crime leading to incarceration. It is quite clear that the truancy program for our schools is in serious need of fixing.

I have discussed this with school administrators and school board members and they are receptive to amending their policy to reduce the number of unexcused absences necessary for a determination of truancy. Students must be intercepted from the cycle of poor grades, to failing grades, to unexcused absences, to dropping out. After three unexcused absences, students and their parents or guardians should be counseled to determine the problem. Often, particularly in the elementary schools, it is the parents who are the problem, not the child.

These cases must get before a judge much more quickly. To this end, I have worked with District Judge Mark Leverett who desires to handle these cases on a high priority expedited basis. We have drafted legislation to accomplish this, which is currently pending before the House Judiciary Committee and while some jurisdictional issues have been raised, we must find a way to handle these cases more quickly so we can keep these kids in school. If the legislation stalls, then I have requested that our City Attorney petition the Arkansas Supreme Court for a Per Curiam order allowing district judges the ability to hear and attempt to resolve these cases on an immediate basis.

### **Additional Challenges: Food Deserts**

Additionally, Arkansas ranks at the very top of the list of States for food insecurity (not getting enough nutritious food on a regular basis) for children under the age of 18. Almost 1 in 4 children under the age of 18 in our State struggles with hunger regularly. Children living in food-insecure households are at higher risk for developmental and academic problems, frequent illness and nutritional inadequacies. According to the organization Share Our Strength<sup>5</sup>, undernourished children under the age of 3 cannot learn as much, as fast or as well: Lack of enough nutritious food impairs a child's ability to concentrate and perform well in school. In other words, children who are hungry have an increased chance of failing in school and face a future mired in poverty and its effects.

Our research also tells us that this situation is getting worse rather than getting better. We know that poor nutrition and lack of physical exercise lead to lower academic achievement, and that study after study proves what educators have long believed to be true: when the basic nutritional and fitness needs of children are met, they have the cognitive energy to learn and achieve.<sup>6</sup> We also know that children experiencing hunger have lower math scores and are more likely to have to repeat a grade than those who are not hungry.<sup>7</sup> We know that children who are hungry are more likely to have behavioral, emotional, and academic problems than those who are not hungry<sup>8</sup> and that teens experiencing hunger are more likely to be suspended from school, have difficulty getting along with other children, and have no friends.<sup>9</sup>

### **Neighborhood Condition**

We have also learned that the neighborhood conditions that children face day-to-day can have a profound impact on their health and, consequently, their ability to achieve academically. For example, we know<sup>10</sup> that the odds of a child's being obese or overweight are 20–60 percent higher among children in neighborhoods with the most unfavorable social conditions such as unsafe surroundings; poor housing; and no access to sidewalks, parks, and recreation centers than among children not facing such conditions. This same study found that the effects were much greater for females and younger children; for example, girls ages 10–11 were two to four times more likely than their counterparts from more favorable neighborhoods to be overweight or obese. In other words, **the built environment matters**, and access to healthy, nutritious foods and physical activity for children contribute to their ability to achieve academically.

A recent study released by The Reinvestment Fund<sup>11</sup> and co-sponsored by The Brookings Institution conducted a detailed analysis of supermarket access in 10 metro areas in the United States, including Little Rock. The study identified areas of low access<sup>12</sup> to supermarkets and calculated the

estimated grocery demand and grocery leakage in the areas identified in food deserts. Not surprisingly, Little Rock's most glaring Low Access Areas are located in specific neighborhoods south of I-630 between I-430 and I-30, in neighborhoods categorized by low income residents and challenging neighborhood conditions. In other words, these are areas where residents, already facing neighborhood environmental challenges, face the challenge of living in or near a Low Access Area to healthy and nutritious food.

What does this information mean for our schools? Data from the 2009-2010 school year show that 70% of students in Little Rock School District qualify for free and reduced-price meals. This index of poverty (free and reduced-price meals) forces a startling conclusion: a primary factor associated with both child hunger and obesity is child poverty, as low-income families often have inadequate income to buy enough healthy food to both prevent them from going hungry and provide a nutritious meal. In other words, more often than not, children living in poverty will be hungry. More often than not, children living in poverty live in distressed neighborhoods that contribute to poor health and poor academic performance.

**So we must ask ourselves tough questions:** as long as children in our community face the prospect of going to school hungry can we expect them to excel in the classroom? The evidence says we cannot. And when children return home to neighborhoods that present environmental and other social challenges, can we expect them to grow up to become citizens that choose to serve and contribute to their community? The evidence says they will not. Will we continue to blame our schools for poor test scores in the light of the fact that the overwhelming majority of our public school students may arrive at school hungry, sick and insecure about their neighborhood?

I am convinced that a Great City cannot be great without a Great School System. We can no longer afford to wait until the symptoms, the indicators of failure, become obvious facts. We have a

moral obligation to act and set the stage for quality learning for every student. We have an obligation as citizens to do all we can to cure the dropout rate among our children resulting in improved graduation rates.

## **SOLUTIONS**

Let me mention some solutions. What steps can City government take to tackle these conditions?

Faced with the facts set forth today I am announcing a comprehensive set of policy initiatives under the umbrella of a program we call *Love Your School* that will address cradle-to-career “markers” crucial to student academic success, address neighborhood conditions around our schools, align community resources and lay the groundwork for a prosperous City-school partnership that sets the stage for quality learning for all students in Little Rock.

### ***LOVE YOUR SCHOOL***

**Love Your School** is an initiative that will target neighborhoods around schools, every school in Little Rock, in both school districts, 70% of Ward 5 goes to the county school district, to focus on reversing environmental settings that diminish a child's ability to succeed in school: such as inadequate community infrastructure; such as access to grocery stores and/or farmers markets selling nutritious foods; nearness to and the safety of playgrounds or other recreational places; adequate street lighting, the absence of sidewalks; and the absence of parks and playgrounds that are safe and well maintained. As we take steps to support the children of Little Rock to reach their potential we will focus on creating safe and well-maintained neighborhoods beginning with the neighborhoods around our schools.

Most residents agree that public and private schools should be much more than a learning institution for the children of Little Rock: they are centers of life and learning for the people who live in the surrounding neighborhoods. Accordingly, as a part of this program, we are launching an effort, in partnership with the Robert Wood Johnson Center for the Prevention of Childhood Obesity and Metroplan, to document the conditions of all neighborhoods in our City within 5 blocks of all K-12 schools. This will give us an objective assessment of first, the condition of the neighborhoods surrounding each school and, secondly, an assessment of steps that must be taken to establish and maintain a minimum standard of public improvements for all citizens in those neighborhoods. For example, recent studies have shown that a neighborhood's walkability<sup>13</sup> (based upon a Walk Score) is strongly associated with higher housing values, ranging from \$700 to \$3,000 in nearly all metropolitan areas measured.<sup>14</sup> Given this objective data we will be armed with information that will permit us to strategically target City resources that will, over time, help all children reach their full potential and improve the quality of life in the surrounding neighborhoods.

Today I've stated, as forcefully as I am capable, the need to create a safe, nourishing and exercise-friendly environment in our neighborhoods with special emphasis around all schools in our City. It should be noted that we are developing a wonderful trail system along the Arkansas River. However, it's clear that, citizens in many of our neighborhoods cannot walk or ride bicycles to this trail system because of man-made barriers such as roads, freeways and railroad tracks. To this end I reaffirm the City's commitment to support the rehabilitation and maintenance of parks, playgrounds and recreation facilities, particularly in underserved residential areas of our City and to work with the City's Bicycle Friendly Committee on an updated plan to connect roadways to complimentary systems of trails, sidewalks and bike paths that provide safe places for children to walk and ride, as well as the elderly and the general public.

Over the last four months I have met or scheduled individual meetings with all members of the Little Rock School Board as well as Acting Superintendent, Dr. Morris Holmes and Pulaski County Special School District Superintendent Charles Hopson, to share a vision of a City in which all children receive comprehensive support from cradle to college or career. A keystone to effective implementation of the **Love Your School Initiative** is the adoption of a District- and City-wide Joint Use Agreement that facilitates partnerships between school leaders, community-based groups and the City of Little Rock that will turn schools after the school-day ends into centers of community life. **This concept is simple: share resources between the City and the school to keep costs down and keep our community healthy.** Can you imagine a more responsible public policy than to maximize the use of public assets, such as schools, to become active community centers offering after-school recreation activities that are available to citizens of all ages and home to scout troops, athletic clubs, community associations, neighborhood groups, cooking clubs and community garden sites? Or the use of City Parks as the school playground for exercise during the school day. Joint use is a way to increase opportunities for children and adults to be more physically active without the high cost of building and staffing new facilities.

My goal is to immediately engage both school districts in executing a City-wide Joint Use Agreement. Thank you Dr. Holmes and Dr. Hopson for your commitment to this concept. We want all the schools in our City to open their doors to the community surrounding them. And we have found a way to pay for the cost of utilities and staffing through funding from the Department of Education.

With regard to the neighborhoods that have been designated as Low Access Areas not having healthy and nutritious foods, I will be calling upon the leading Little Rock commercial real estate companies and the Little Rock Chamber of Commerce to join me in developing a strategy that will recruit a major supermarket chain to Little Rock to address the needs of these neighborhoods. In the

interim, I will convene a **City Food Summit** that will investigate the expanded use of neighborhood, community and school-based gardens strategically located and designed to help meet the immediate nutritional needs of citizens residing in or near these Low Access Areas and targeting them with improved access to fresh vegetables and fruits.

Additionally, I will launch discussions directing the establishment of technical assistance and other incentives to start and sustain new neighborhood farmer's markets sited on school properties as well as other innovative means to improve access to healthy foods in underserved communities.

Many stakeholders share responsibility for the safety, well-being and healthy development of young people. Schools, City Parks Departments, our faith communities and other organizations provide after school opportunities. This long list of stakeholders represents a rich potential network of community support for young people. However, as the National League of Cities has pointed out in document after document and through exhaustive studies led by its Institute for Youth, Education and Families<sup>15</sup> without a shared vision or a collaborative structure to guide and access local efforts, city and school leaders and our community partners risk wasting valuable resources and falling short of our goals for all children. Therefore I would like to announce today the establishment of a **Mayors Task Force on Youth** that will be charged with the creation of a **Youth Master Plan** that addresses challenges facing children in our community from birth to college graduation or entry into the job market, with special emphasis on early childhood nutrition and after-school activities.

To ensure that our vision of a healthy community becomes a reality for all citizens of our City I am also announcing the creation of a **comprehensive community health initiative** that will engage citizens from every walk of life, from every neighborhood and from every organization that remotely impacts the health of our community. Leading to the development and implementation of a

comprehensive, citywide wellness plan, the **Mayor's Community Wellness Initiative** will call upon and engage key stakeholders throughout our community including medical, health insurance, non-profit and regulatory organizations to coordinate efforts that lead to a City where all children and families have a safe, healthy, and nurturing environment. Thanks to a **technical assistance grant** from the National League of Cities called Municipal Leadership for Healthy Southern Cities, we will call upon the best minds in our community to create an environment for our citizens that promotes healthy lifestyles and reduces childhood obesity. My own training program starts today and next week the City will be announcing its employee wellness program.

We simply cannot continue to permit our children to slip through the cracks and face failure without acting with a high degree of urgency. We must engage our youth and empower them to take control of their health decisions as we develop the support needed to provide opportunities for success. We must support families with infrastructure that addresses the challenges that cut across all stages of a child's life, and if we do so, we will become that Next Great American City in the South.

## **Conclusion**

As we conclude here today, let me leave you with this story. Last July, an event took place that captured the best and worst of our city. With declining revenues, we were forced to shorten the season our swimming pools would be able to stay open. There simply wasn't enough money for all of the expenses it takes to run the pools till the end of the summer. When the public became aware, they were saddened and frustrated at the situation. Then, the best of Little Rock rose up. Calls came in from individuals and corporations who wanted to donate the money necessary to keep our pools open until the children went back to school. The kind-heartedness of our people is something we can all be proud of.

Once they made their donations, the funds were in place to keep the pools open for the rest of the summer.

But is this how we want to fund our city? Is this the kind of city we want Little Rock, **our city**, to be? Raising money at the last minute is just another short-term band-aide to solve a more serious problem. **Band-aides won't work any longer.** And, frankly, at this point, the wounds are too severe and the problems are too serious for us to continue using band-aides.

We must continue to work to improve our City today. We must create a sense of place and belonging for our children in the future. We need your engagement in this process, because after all, this City is for all of us. Together, with the initiatives announced today, focused on truancy reform, childhood nutrition and the neighborhood conditions surrounding our schools, we can truly become the next Great American City in the South. Thank you for attending today and God bless each and every one of you.

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<sup>1</sup>Pew Research Center for the People & the Press, conducted Jan. 5-9, 2011.

<sup>2</sup>[US Census Bureau report on educational attainment in the United States](#), 2008.

<sup>3</sup>Alliance for Excellent Education. The Economic Benefits of Reducing the Dropout Rate: Little Rock, Arkansas Metropolitan Area. July, 2010.

<sup>4</sup>The Mattie C. Stewart Foundation. [www.mattiestewart.org](http://www.mattiestewart.org).

<sup>5</sup>Share Our Strength 1730 M Street NW, Suite 700, Washington, DC 20036  
[http://strength.org/childhood\\_hunger/hunger\\_facts/](http://strength.org/childhood_hunger/hunger_facts/)

<sup>6</sup>Bogden, J.F. *Fit, healthy, and ready to learn: a school health policy guide*. Alexandria, Va: NASBE, 2000.

<sup>7</sup>Alaimo, K., Olson, C., & Frongillo Jr., E. (2001). Food insufficiency and American school-aged children's cognitive, academic and psychosocial development. *Pediatrics*, 108(1), 44-53.

<sup>8</sup>Kleinman, R., Murphy, J., Little, M., Pagano, M., Wehler, C., Regal, K., & Jellinek, M. (1998). Hunger in children in the United States: Potential behavioral and emotional correlates. *Pediatrics*, 101(1), E3.

<sup>9</sup>Alaimo, 2001.

<sup>10</sup>*Neighborhood Socioeconomic Conditions, Built Environments, And Childhood Obesity* Singh, G. K., Siahpush, M., and Kogan, M.D. Health Aff (Millwood) 2010; 29(3): 503-512. Published and copyrighted by Project HOPE/Health Affairs. Archived and Available at [www.healthaffairs.org](http://www.healthaffairs.org).

<sup>11</sup>The Brookings Metropolitan Policy Program and The Reinvestment Fund (TRF), 2010.

<sup>12</sup>Low Access Areas are identified as low- and moderate-income census block groups located considerably farther from the nearest supermarket than middle- and higher-income block groups with similar level of population density and rate of car ownership. Large low-access clusters have estimated grocery expenditure leakage of at least \$13.7 million annually. See [www.trfund.com/resource/policypubs.html#LAA](http://www.trfund.com/resource/policypubs.html#LAA) for more details on methodology. Metropolitan areas studied include: Atlanta, Baltimore, Cleveland, Jackson (MS), Las Vegas, Little Rock, Los Angeles, Louisville, Phoenix, and San Francisco/Oakland.

<sup>13</sup> Walk Score measures the number of typical consumer destinations within walking distance of a house, with scores ranging from 0 (car dependent) to 100 (most walkable). By the Walk Score measure, walkability is a direct function of how many destinations are located within a short distance (generally between one-quarter mile and one mile of a home). Our measure of walkability reflects the convenience and proximity of having shopping and cultural activities close at hand, as well as the value households attach to mixed-use neighborhoods.

<sup>14</sup> *Walking the Walk: How Walkability Raises Home Values in U.S. Cities* Joe Cortright, Impresa, Inc., for CEOs for Cities, August, 2009.

<sup>15</sup> *Creating a Youth Master Plan*, National League of Cities Institute for Youth, Education and Families, Issue #10.