

# News Release

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## **First Chancellor named for Education Achievement Authority**

*John Wm. Covington, Ed.D. raised student achievement in Missouri, Colorado and Alabama posts*

John Wm. Covington, Ed.D., an education innovator and creative problem solver with a track record of success in urban school districts, has been selected as the first Chancellor of the Education Achievement Authority, based on action by the Authority's Board this afternoon.

The new Chancellor has served as Superintendent in Kansas City, Missouri; Pueblo, Colorado; and Lowndes County (Montgomery), Alabama.

Covington has one of the strongest track records in the nation of initiating district-wide reforms that make it possible for students and teachers to succeed. When he became Kansas City Schools superintendent in 2009, the schools were half-empty, the district had a \$50 million deficit and was facing potential bankruptcy, and barely 25 percent of students scored proficient on the state exams. By the end of Covington's first year, the district posted the greatest academic student performance gains on the state assessment since the development of the current Missouri test.

Additional reforms undertaken by Covington in Kansas City include the right-sizing process, the presentation of a balanced budget for the 2011 fiscal year (the first time in several decades), the initiation and completion of a community-wide strategic planning effort, and the development and implementation of student centered education designed to address the individual and diverse learning needs of all students enrolled in KCMUSD. The district eliminated wasteful spending and called for greater fiscal accountability by reducing vendor contracts from more than 6,000 to approximately 800, saving \$35 million.

In Pueblo, Colo. under Covington's leadership, the schools were nationally recognized for closing income and ethnic academic achievement gaps. After he served as superintendent of Lowndes County Public Schools in Montgomery, Ala. every school in the district made



Adequate Yearly Progress as determined by the State of Alabama and as required by the Federal No Child Left Behind law.

Roy Roberts, Detroit Public Schools Emergency Manager and Chairman of the EAA Executive Committee, said, "Dr. Covington brings not just great experience and skill but one of the strongest track records in raising student achievement in the nation. Detroit – in fact all of Michigan – is very fortunate that such a leader has agreed to join us on this important work."

"There may be no greater opportunity to make a dramatic shift in the lives of many, many deserving young people than through this new system," Covington said. "We know what we need to do to produce far better opportunities and outcomes for students and we certainly know how great the need is here in Detroit and in the rest of Michigan. With support for major change coming both from the Detroit community and the state, I am confident that we can succeed. I truly believe we will create a modern, nationally acclaimed system of public schools that puts students on the path to graduate prepared for college, careers and anything to which they aspire. We are talking about academic change the likes of which Detroit and Michigan has never seen."

"The future of Detroit and Michigan depends on making our education system a success for our students, our teachers, our parents and our economy," said Michigan Gov. Rick Snyder. "Dr. Covington's record of achievement is just the right fit to ensure that our children get the education they so richly need and deserve. Coupled with the leadership of Roy Roberts, the EAA, and tremendous community and business support, challenged Detroit and Michigan schools are on track for a dramatic turnaround. The time and opportunity are truly now."

Prior to his first superintendency, Covington served in Alabama's Montgomery Public Schools System as an assistant superintendent and executive assistant to the superintendent. Prior to his tenure in Montgomery, Dr. Covington served in numerous professional capacities in Macon County, Troy City and Eufaula City Public Schools in Alabama.

Covington earned B.S., M.S., AA Certification and Ed.S. degrees from Alabama State University. He also holds a M.Ed. Certification from Troy University and an AA Certification and Ed.D. degree from Auburn University. He was named a Japan Fulbright Scholar in 2005, recipient of the NAFEO (National Association for Equal Opportunity in Higher Education) award in 2007, and graduated from the Broad Superintendents Academy in 2008. In 1994, Dr. Covington was selected as a distinguished alumnus of his alma mater, Alabama State University.

Covington is married to the former Wilanie Rivers. They have three children; Melvin, David, and Simone, and two granddaughters; Hunter and Hayden.

In June 2011, Gov. Snyder, EM Roberts and state Superintendent of Public Instruction Mike Flanagan announced a plan to dramatically redesign public education in Michigan's lowest performing schools by including them into a new system that drives vastly more resources directly into their classrooms and offers greater autonomy to help ensure dramatic student achievement increases.

The Education Achievement Authority is a new statewide school system that will operate the lowest performing 5 percent of schools in Michigan not achieving satisfactory results on a redesign plan or that are under an emergency manager. It is designed to provide a new, stable, financially responsible set of public schools that create the conditions, supports, tools and resources under which teachers can help students make significant academic gains. It will first apply to underperforming schools in Detroit in the 2012–2013 school year and then be expanded to cover the entire state.

### **Accomplishments of John Wm. Covington in Kansas City Schools**

#### 1. Made operations far more efficient

- Eliminated wasteful spending and called for greater fiscal accountability by ending vendor contracts that added no educational value to the school district; vendor contracts were reduced from more than 6,000 to approximately 800, saving \$35 million
- Reduced outside legal fees by over sixty percent
- Presented the first balanced budget in decades, two years in a row
- With community and school board support, recommended the closure of some schools in order to focus far more resources directly onto children
- Reduced the budget by \$68 million in year one and \$37 million in year two
- Received Series 1 and II in the Qualified School Construction Bonds and established an A credit rating for the district
- District transportation was recognized by the Council of the Great City Schools as one of the top school transportation providers in the country
- Brought in millions in new grants

#### 2. Engaged the community

- Held numerous community meetings, met with staff, teachers, parents and business leaders to hear concerns and engage in conversations about why improving the city's public schools was so important
- Completed a community-wide strategic planning effort aimed at delivering a student centered education that addressed each student's individual and diverse learning needs

#### 3. Strengthened teaching and learning

- Rewrote curricula and implemented a standards-based approach at five elementary schools aligned to Missouri Model Content, National and International Standards
- Added innovations designed to personalize learning based on student needs, including doing away with traditional letter grades and eliminating grade levels, instead strategically grouping students by their skill level
- Developed software to integrate cutting edge online learning into instruction
- Introduced opportunities for students to learn through working on real life projects with students and teachers around the world online

4. Empowered teachers and principals with meaningful support and rewards
  - Aligned professional development programs to evaluation outcomes and accountability measures
  - Customized an integrated learning management system for teachers which included curriculum maps, common assessments, assessment reporting tools and individualized learning plans
  - Strengthened leadership development opportunities for teachers and principals
  - Monetarily rewarded teachers for taking additional students above the maximum class size for Missouri
  - Initiated a real-time on-demand observation system for teachers
  - Put in place ability for teachers producing the strongest student gains to earn higher pay
  
5. Held the organization responsible for student outcomes
  - Required all employees to be evaluated every single year
  - Developed a model to measure each teacher's contribution to student learning
  
6. Kept student safety and well being front and center
  - Placed a registered nurse in every school
  - Placed air-conditioning in every elementary classroom in the district, a first in the history of the Kansas City Public Schools