



# State Senator Harry Kennedy

Room 226 - State Capitol - Jefferson City, MO - Phone 573 - 751 - 2126

## PRESS RELEASE



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

January 31, 2007

## Sen. Kennedy States Position on St. Louis Public Schools

JEFFERSON CITY — The following represents written testimony submitted by Senator Harry Kennedy, District 1, to the Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education concerning the possible loss of accreditation and imposition of a transitional school board. This letter was hand delivered to DESE to be placed in record in time for the hearing held Tuesday, January 30, 2007, at Harris-Stowe State University.

January 30, 2007

Department of Elementary and Secondary Education  
Jefferson State Office Building  
205 Jefferson St.  
PO Box 480  
Jefferson City, MO 65102

Re: Public Testimony for SLPS accreditation

Dear Commissioner King and members of the board:

I am writing to you to place in record my opposition to the possible vote eliminating the accreditation of the St. Louis Public Schools (SLPS) by the Missouri State Board of Education. Loss of accreditation could then lead to a complete takeover of the St. Louis Public Schools by a transitional board under the authority of the desegregation statute. I believe an extension of provisional accreditation is the answer everyone is seeking to most favorably influence the successful operation of the St. Louis City public schools.

An extension of provisional accreditation would allow the Missouri State Board of Education to be on record that the St. Louis Public School system is operating below standard. Extending provisional accreditation would allow the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE) the ability to officially monitor and advise the current elected school board and superintendent. Assistance we all agree this board desperately needs.

Recently the current school superintendent presented a turnaround plan. This superintendent has been on the job six months. If accreditation is lost, the appointment of a transitional school board and new superintendent would require additional months to re-evaluate, plan and execute yet another turnaround strategy. Obviously an immediate loss of accreditation by the state will delay the implementation of any plan and not increase the rate or likelihood of improvement.

The current chapters of law being exercised to invoke this intervention involve the desegregation provisions enacted years ago. Extending provisional accreditation would allow us in the legislative branch the time necessary to update and clarify the law if implementation of a transitional board becomes completely unavoidable.

Clarification of the section relating to the powers, duties and rights of the transitional school board and citizens should include, but not be limited to: a time certain for the transitional board to exist, benchmarks for measuring the success of the transitional board, limitations on transitional board authority, a clearly defined process for implementing transitional board recommendations that could include such items as vouchers, forced busing, the breakup of the district into smaller pieces or the contracting out of operations to not-for-profit corporations. Currently the statutes are not clear as to how these possibilities would be presented to the citizens for vote, if at all.

I understand the concern from Mayor Slay's office, other politicians, business and community leaders who call for immediate action. The City of St. Louis has been making incredible economic gains in jobs, housing opportunities and growth. If our city schools cannot operate at a high level, this resurgence in city vitality will slow. Immediate intervention of the state, without exploring every option available to local authorities could undermine and delay future success.

Any delay in the future success of our public schools will injure not just the citizens, the voters, the business community, the local school board, the superintendent, the teachers and politicians but the one group we all say this takeover is for: the children.

Sincerely,

[signed]

Senator Harry Kennedy

*Senator Harry Kennedy can be contacted at the State Capitol – Phone: 573-751-2126.*

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