



Jeff Smith
4th Senate District

MISSOURI SENATE
JEFFERSON CITY

CAPITOL BUILDING, ROOM 425
JEFFERSON CITY, MO 65101

**A Column for the Week
of Feb. 26, 2007**

**Contact: Stacy Morse
(573) 751-3599**

Senator Jeff Smith & Representative T.D. El-Amin's Education Plan

With the recent turmoil in the St. Louis Public School System, culminating with the State Board of Education's appointment of a transitional school board, the need for comprehensive education reform has become clear. For too long, students in St. Louis have suffered because of turmoil at the administrative and governance level. Our education plan will address challenges facing our school system by encouraging highly qualified young people to pursue teaching careers, helping give students the tools they need to succeed, and providing a safe, orderly school climate that is conducive to learning.

Strengthening Missouri's Educators

One of the greatest challenges facing the city schools public education system today is the dearth of qualified teachers. Extensive research suggests that teacher quality is the key determinant of how much a child will learn in a classroom. If we are to improve our schools, we must get serious about attracting Missouri's brightest young people to teaching, and we must reward our best teachers by compensating them appropriately for exceptional performance. Finally, to ensure the best for our children, we ask teachers to pass tests demonstrating competency in the subject areas they teach.

- Offer one year of college tuition loan forgiveness to high-performing high school seniors in the top 10% of their class (according to ACT scores and/or GPA) in exchange for each year that they agree to teach in districts that are not fully accredited (up to 4 years).
- Offer state-funded bonuses to teachers who agree to teach in underserved subjects like math, science, special education, and ESL; offer similar bonuses to teachers, administrators and staff in the top 10% of district schools based on a variety of measures including test score and attendance improvement.
- Allow teachers to opt off tenure track in exchange for the chance to eventually double their salary, subject to qualitative and quantitative evaluation.
- Exceptional teachers may earn salary increases of up to twice the annual increase on the district's traditional salary ladder, and will be funded by a combination of state money and contributions from private donors, who will receive a 50% tax credit for contributions to the new Missouri Extraordinary Teacher Fund.

- Require that teachers take Praxis tests every 5 years in their content area in exchange for collective bargaining rights. Teachers who score in the 90th percentile will only have to test every 10 years. Teachers who fail will have 3 months to receive professional development and retake the test. Teachers who fail twice may face dismissal.

Helping Missouri Students Achieve

SLPS students are in school less than students in many other states – and far less than students in other industrialized nations. Japanese students, for instance, spend 245 days a year in school; their test scores in science and math far exceed those of most American students. But more days of school is not the only answer. Successful programs in other cities reach children earlier in life to stimulate neurological development in crucial early years, instruct them longer each day, and enrich them with after-school programs in sports and the arts. Finally, research shows that bonds students form with teachers, coaches, and principals increase achievement and the likelihood of persistence to graduation. Thus, we offer innovative pilot programs to help teachers form meaningful, lasting relationships with students and their families.

- Increase school day 90 minutes; increase year 6 weeks from 174 to 204 days.
- Increase funding for enrichment programs during after-school hours (4-6 p.m.), with tax credits for private citizens who contribute to an after-school program fund.
- Require students at each level to take benchmark tests at least once every 6 weeks that are aligned with state standards; those failing to achieve proficiency each period shall receive state-subsidized remedial tutoring after school or on Saturdays.
- Ensure that all children ages 3-5 qualifying for Title I aid may receive state-funded care in a licensed preschool or early childhood care program meeting standards in SB 161.
- Start pilot “mega-looping” programs so that teachers have students in multi-year blocks (K-2; 3-5; 6-8; 9-12) to better facilitate meaningful relationships, reduce discipline problems, and increase parental involvement, school attendance, and academic achievement.

Safe and Orderly Schools

No student can be expected to learn in a chaotic environment. That is why we propose new state funding for alternative schools with specialized instructional programs to reach particularly challenging students, and supplemental state aid to ensure that social workers can locate truants, re-enroll them in school, and provide an array of social services to help stabilize their families.

- The district shall ensure that disruptive students can attend schools staffed by teachers and social workers trained in specialized instruction.
- Funds shall be appropriated to help the Department of Social Services locate truant students and return them to school; a re-entry program will be established and DSS shall provide wrap-around services for students and their families.
- The district shall require uniforms of students in all schools, and shall require fingerprinting of all district employees to ensure student safety.

###