



MISSOURI SENATE

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**A Column for the Week
of March 12, 2007**

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Plan to Improve Education in St. Louis Receives Bipartisan Support

JEFFERSON CITY — In my continuing effort to improve education in St. Louis, this week I introduced legislation to expand educational opportunities for city students. This measure, which has widespread support in the Senate, will offer residents more choices for a quality education and keep St. Louis families in the city.

Senate Bill 564, which I introduced to the Senate Education Committee, authorizes the St. Louis mayor's office to join area colleges and universities in authorizing charter schools in the city. This legislation will help provide families a public school alternative to St. Louis's struggling public school district.

The mayor's office has committed to selecting school models that have proven track records of success in other cities, such as KIPP (Knowledge Is Power Program), a rigorous college prep model that has expanded rapidly to 16 cities to meet demand. Nationally, more than 80 percent of KIPP students are eligible for free and reduced lunches, yet the program sends more than 80 percent of its graduates to college.

Charter schools are public institutions that are led by their own school board and operate independently of the city school district. The schools are free to students living in the city and accept students on a first come, first served basis. Charter schools must follow academic requirements, but they do not have the same accreditation standards as district schools. Currently, Missouri charter schools can operate only in St. Louis and Kansas City.

SB 564 is modeled on a successful charter school initiative in Indianapolis, whose mayor has approved more than 20 charter schools that are making significant progress for area students. Under the measure, charter schools would operate independently of the mayor's office, but the office would be accountable for student performance. The Indianapolis program recently received the 2006 Harvard University Innovations in American Government Award for its success in improving public education in that city.

St. Louis has reached a critical stage when it comes to educating our youth. This and other legislation I have filed to improve our public schools and offer families more choices are necessary steps in finding new ways to improve performance.

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