



MISSOURI SENATE
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**A Column for the Week
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St. Louis Public School District and the Transitional Board

The State Board of Education has voted 5-1 to remove the St. Louis Public School District's accreditation. Starting on June 15, 2007, a three-member transitional board will oversee the district. The Governor has nominated Rick Sullivan to head the new board. Two other board appointees, to be selected by Mayor Francis Slay and Board of Aldermen President-elect Lewis Reed, have yet to be named. This shift in authority is understandably worrisome for many, but it should be viewed as an opportunity for positive change.

This is not the time to hold your children out of school, or sit in the mayor's office, or worry about which contracts will not be renewed. The focus now needs to be on the processes and the systems that will be implemented for comprehensive reform. We need to have a solid plan for the next six years. The theme going forward should be that of continuity and implementation. We need to be right-sizing the district so there is fiscal stability in the future.

Legislation I've proposed this session that will accomplish these goals includes a bill establishing the Missouri Teaching Fellows Program, which provides loan forgiveness to the brightest teachers coming to districts not fully accredited; a measure increasing charter authority and creating a charter school board for increased accountability; and an omnibus education plan that provides accountability to the district and extends educational opportunities for students.

There are many families who are concerned that the new status of the district (which will not affect this year's graduating class) will preclude students of St. Louis public schools from pursuing college. However, education officials from the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE) state that coming from an unaccredited district does not necessarily have an impact on whether a post-secondary institution will accept a student. Keep in mind that private and parochial schools are not required to be accredited and those students routinely attend post-secondary schools. Rather than accreditation, schools generally consider individuals' applications, ACT scores, and transcripts when determining who will be accepted. Both Senator Smith and DESE are willing to intercede if there are any schools that refuse students based on the district's accreditation status. Please see DESE's newly released FAQ page that explains the loss of accreditation and reiterates the belief that few, if any students would suffer a negative consequence from the board's decision.

DESE FAQ link: <http://www.dese.mo.gov/divimprove/sia/msip/unaccredited.html>

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