



MISSOURI SENATE

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**For Immediate Release:
February 13, 2008**

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Senator Smith's Preschool Education Initiative Garner Positive Support

Jefferson City — The Senate Education Committee today considered a bill proposed by Sen. Jeff Smith, D-St. Louis, that would offer quality pre-school education to three- and four-olds who live in some of Missouri's most educationally challenged school districts, including St. Louis County.

Sen. Smith received support from several state education groups for his innovative educational initiative — the Missouri Preschool Plus Grant Program. The pilot program would pay for pre-school services for families whose incomes fall below 130 percent of the poverty level and who reside in unaccredited and provisionally unaccredited school districts. The program, which would be administered by the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education in collaboration with Coordinating Board for Early Childhood, is similar to one already in place in Oklahoma.

“By giving a hand up to our most vulnerable children — we will begin making the kind of impact needed to help them succeed not just in school, but in life,” Sen. Smith said.

Currently, there are 19,000 students identified in unaccredited and provisionally accredited schools across the state. The proposed pilot program, estimated to cost \$20 million, could initially serve up to 5,000 children. School districts and non-sectarian community-based programs would be eligible to apply for the three-year, renewable grants through a competitive bid process and could begin implementing the program during the 2009-2010 school year.

An unusually diverse cross section of groups ranging from the St. Louis Regional Commerce and Growth Association and Kansas City Chamber of Commerce to the National Education Association and Partnership for Children-Kansas City announced support for the bill (SB 779).

“This is a starting place to address a substantial problem that needs immediate attention,” Sen. Smith said. “When kids receive critical early childhood education, they come to school ready to learn and are better equipped to reach their potential.”

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