



Deed Restriction Not in the Best Interest of St. Louis Students

JEFFERSON CITY — A ban on the sale of St. Louis public school facilities to charter schools is drawing the ire of many throughout the St. Louis metropolitan area, and rightfully so. It just doesn't make any sense at all. Fearing competition from charter schools, the special administrative board of the transitional school district of the city of St. Louis is banning the sale of public schools to be closed to any entity seeking to re-open the buildings as charter or independent schools — for a period of 100 years! So, as charter school operators throughout the St. Louis search desperately for space to open a growing number of public charter schools, the special administrative board has chosen to let these taxpayer-funded buildings sit vacant, idle, and off limits in an attempt to hinder school choice.

There are plenty of things that are incredibly wrong with this scenario. First of all, charter schools *are* public schools, held to the same standards as other public schools, and — in this case — they share the same mission as the St. Louis Public School District. Public schools should be able to use public buildings and should NOT be excluded from the district's sale consideration as the more understandable liquor stores, landfills, distilleries and sex-oriented shops that are included in the ban.

Second, needlessly preventing the use of these available buildings for use as schools — the express purpose for which they were built — represents a waste of state funds and tax dollars, particularly given the difficult and challenging economic times. These buildings cannot easily be used for any other purpose, and if not sold for use as schools, will likely remain vacant, become targets for vandalism and theft, and end up as community eyesores. We're already seeing that in some St. Louis neighborhoods in which the deed restriction is employed.

Third, and most importantly, schools in many neighborhoods are often the only community anchor left and their loss would likely serve to undermine neighborhood stability, alter the community's commitment to education, and change a child's perspective on schools — all of which lead to a negative, long-term impact on society.

Many of my Senate colleagues and I are urging the special administrative board of the SLPS to reverse the ban on charter schools and are supporting a Senate Resolution drafted by Sen. Jim Lembke of St. Louis that calls for end of this ridiculous policy, which is definitely not — in any way, shape or form — serving in the best interest of St. Louis public school children.

If you have comments or questions about this week's column or any other matter involving state government, please do not hesitate to contact me. You can reach my office by phone at (866) 271-2844.

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