

September 2007

LOCAL & NATIONAL PERSPECTIVES ON CRITICAL ISSUES FACING THE ST. LOUIS PUBLIC SCHOOLS

*Summaries from Community Forums in the Series
“A Public Dialogue on Public Education”*

The eight forums held to date in the series were conducted between September 2006 and March 2007. The community forum series will resume in Fall 2007.

*Sponsored by the St. Louis Metropolitan Children’s Agenda with staffing
provided by Vision For Children At Risk*



St. Louis Children's Agenda



Vision for Children at Risk



A PUBLIC DIALOGUE ON PUBLIC EDUCATION

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- Forum 1 - Building Public Will: Promoting Citizen Engagement to Improve Your City's Schools.* 9/21/06
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- Forum 2 - What Data & Information Do We Need to Understand the Schools and Monitor Student Achievement?* 10/5/06
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- Forum 3 - St. Louis Public Schools Plans & Goals for 2006-2007: Views of the School Board, Superintendent, & Teachers* 10/19/06
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- Forum 5 - Serving the Customers: What Students Need & Parents Want from Public Education, Plus Perspectives of City Residents* 11/16/06
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INTRODUCTION & OVERVIEW

The St. Louis Metropolitan Children's Agenda, which has been in operation since 1993, focuses on seven areas related to the fundamental life needs of St. Louis area children. One of those areas is the need for a quality education for all children.

Over the history of the Children's Agenda—and, indeed, for many decades before—public education in the City of St. Louis has faced significant challenges: disparities and inequities, a student population with high needs, lack of adequate finances, problems with classroom safety and discipline, low parental involvement, and weak community support. By Summer 2006, as it continued to face the many problems outlined above, a new crisis arose within the district. The environment surrounding the public schools had become charged and factionalized. Civil discourse about vital school issues seemed out of reach and there was no workable venue in which to pursue solutions to the many problems the district faced. Many key educational stakeholders were at odds and others appeared to be taking a seat on the sidelines.

With its focus on community collaboration, the Children's Agenda, with staff support from Vision for Children at Risk, began to look at how other urban communities had successfully addressed critical challenges facing their public schools. Several major findings emerged:

- There is a need for constructive, civil dialogue among all major educational stakeholders and segments of the community;
- The community must understand the link between providing quality education to all children, the quality of life, and the overall success of community and economic development efforts;
- Responsibility for the quality of public education rests not just with the schools, but with all civic stakeholders. Everyone must be held accountable for playing an appropriate role to ensure children have good schools; and
- Structured forums and collaborative processes must be put in place to engage and support the community in working together for quality public education.

In light of the above findings, the St. Louis Metropolitan Children's Agenda and Vision for Children at Risk initiated the community forum series *A Public Dialogue on Public Education* with the goal of establishing a civil discourse about the St. Louis Public Schools that might open the door to developing joint community strategies to improve public education. The goal was to solicit the perspectives and suggestions of all stakeholders and segments of the community and establish a forum for discussion of those issues. Whenever possible the process was supported with the best available data and policy research.

Richard H. Patton
Executive Director
Vision For Children At Risk

St. Louis Public Education Initiative

Steering Committee Members

The following representatives have served as members of the Steering Committee for the St. Louis Public Education Initiative that plans and provides oversight for the community forum series A Public Dialogue on Public Education. The make-up of the Steering Committee will be expanded as the initiative continues to ensure that is balanced and representative of all stakeholders and interests in the St. Louis community. The community forum series will be ongoing. The public education initiative also will turn its attention to establishment of a St. Louis Public Education Coalition that can address critical educational issues facing the St. Louis Public Schools on a long-term basis.

- Walle Amusa, At-large community representative
- Don Cuvo, St. Louis Mental Health Board
- Ray Cummings, St. Louis Teachers Union – Local 420
- Gwendolyn DeLoach-Packnett, Black Leadership Roundtable
- Ruth Ehresman, Committee Co-chair, Missouri Budget Project
- Lora Gulley, Committee Co-chair, Family Resource Center
- John Martin, Deputy Superintendent, St. Louis Public Schools
- Carol Minor, retired teacher, St. Louis Public Schools
- Tom Nolan, ACCESS Academies & Vision for Children at Risk board
- Kathleen Strout, Civic Progress
- Susan Turk, St. Louis Public School Parent
- Robbyn Wahby, Office of the Mayor, City of St. Louis

Steering Committee and Forum Series Staff – Vision for Children at Risk:

- Belinda Boston
- Pearlina Boyd
- Jim Braibish
- Maggie Callon
- Courtney McDermott
- Richard Patton



St. Louis Children's Agenda

Presenting the Forum Series "A Public Dialogue on Public Education"

Summary of Forum #1 in the Series

Promoting Community Engagement in Public Education

September 21, 2006, 2:30 – 4:30 PM

St. Louis Children's Agenda/VCR Offices, 2433 N. Grand Blvd.

Some 50 stakeholders concerned with public education in the City of St. Louis came together on September 21 for the opening forum in the series, "A Public Dialogue on Public Education." The series is sponsored by the St. Louis Metropolitan Children's Agenda. A broad-based, diverse audience engaged in constructive dialogue focused on the City's schools, expressing their desire to overcome polarization and work to ensure access to quality education for St. Louis children. A positive tone was established for the forum series.

Those in attendance included representatives of the board and administration of the St. Louis Public Schools, as well as teachers and other school personnel. The St. Louis Teacher's Union was represented, as were parents of current and past students in the SLPS. Among the agencies and community organizations in attendance were ARCHS, BJC HealthCare, Child Day Care Association, the Children's Division/Missouri Department of Social Services, RegionWise, and St. Louis City Family Court. Faith community representatives included Holy Metropolitan M.B. Church and Lafayette Park United Methodist Church. St. Louis University and St. Louis Community College represented higher education. U.S. Senator James Talent had a representative at the session, as did Jamilah Nasheed.

Businesses and business organizations represented included Civic Progress, St. Louis Regional Business Council, Boeing, Commerce Bank, and Vector Communications. There was strong representation from the philanthropic community including the Deaconess Foundation, Greater St. Louis Community Foundation, Incarnate Word Foundation, and Mildred Simon Foundation.

A complete list of participants for the initial forum in the series is being compiled and will be included in a cumulative list of participants in the forum series.

There were three major segments of the initial forum:

1. Purpose & Goals, including principles of community collaboration
2. National League of Cities audioconference and webinar, *Building Public Will: Promoting Citizen Engagement to Improve Your City's Schools*; and
3. Discussion with forum participants to identify critical issues related to community engagement to improve public education in the City of St. Louis.

Major issues addressed at the first forum in the series, *A Public Dialogue on Public Education*, are outlined below under headings related to the three forum segments.

1. Purpose & Goals of the Forums, Including Principles of Community Collaboration

The forum series was organized because of the belief of Children's Agenda coalition partners that access to a quality education is central to the life-long well-being of the City's children.

Forums will be held approximately biweekly over the course the current school year in two phases:

- **Phase I – Information** (2006). The first phase will provide key stakeholders an opportunity to outline their perspectives on advancing quality education in the City schools and identify what they see as the critical issues that must be addressed. The goal is to establish a common foundation of stakeholder positions, data, and policy information.
- **Phase II – Strategy** (2007). The second phase will establish a stakeholder dialogue in which key community players can work toward development and implementation of effective strategies to address the many challenges facing the public schools.

Specific goals for the forum series include:

- Establishing a balanced, civil forum for dialogue on public education in the City;
- Providing needed data and policy information to inform discussion about the schools;
- Enabling stakeholders to identify issues they see as critical to quality education; and
- Developing an informed community coalition committed to understanding and improving public education in the City of St. Louis.

The forum series will be conducted based on established, research-based principles of community collaboration. Those principles include:

1. Ensuring that all stakeholders and segments of the community have input into the forums and are afforded an opportunity to participate;
2. Identifying critical issues related to public education that require community attention and can be addressed through the forum series;
3. Supporting the community dialogue with the best available data, policy analysis, and research-based information on the schools and strategies for school improvement;
4. Ensuring that information is presented in a fair, balanced fashion;
5. Establishing a structured, collaborative process for community dialogue and planning that is forward-looking and oriented to problem-solving;
6. Conducting the community forum series in accordance with established, research-based principles of collaborative planning and conflict resolution;
7. Working to disseminate findings and recommendations that emerge from the forum series to all stakeholders and the broader community;

8. Assisting participants in the forums to adopt a broader perspective on local educational issues and an openness to national, research-based best practices;
9. Fostering development of an informed, committed community coalition that is representative of the community and focused on taking the actions necessary to ensure that all children in the City of St. Louis have access to a quality public education; and
10. Promoting collaborative approaches to problem-solving.

2. Information from the National League of Cities web seminar, *Building Public Will: Promoting Civic Engagement to Improve Your City's Schools* is outlined in the PowerPoint presentation in Appendix A that follows.

The National League of Cities web seminar identified four primary common themes that emerged in cities successful in improving their public schools

- Cross-sector leadership collaboratives were convened to address public education issues;
- All projects used data and evidence to mobilize and to inform;
- There was a sharp focus on student learning and success;
- Community and civic partners had authority to plan and lead work.

3. Critical St. Louis Issues Related to Public Engagement to Improve Schools Identified by Participants in the Local Forum Series

In response to the National League of Cities web seminar on public engagement to improve schools, participants in the local forum series, *A Public Dialogue on Public Education*, were asked to identify what they saw as the key issues related to engaging the public to promote quality public education in St. Louis. The following inventory reflects the critical issues identified by St. Louis stakeholders who participated in the September 21 forum:

- Establishing as a community priority the critical need for all children to have access to a quality education;
- Setting aside political agendas on all sides and focusing on the need to provide quality, public education to promote the well-being of children and youth;
- Adopting a “laser focus” on student achievement and success;
- Working to ensure the community gets the “real experience” of the schools, so that they see the many good things going on in the schools and are, therefore, more likely to support them;
- Actively involving parents in the schools and their children’s education;
- Being responsive to the culture in the schools and broader community and determining what messages will be heard and responded to;

- Reforming governmental structures to support the schools and facilitate community engagement; and
- Establishing collaborative structures through which all members of the community can come together to advance quality education.
- Other issues:
 - Need to increase early literacy and reading skills
 - Need to increase school funding through mayoral involvement
 - Availability of preschool for children who can benefit
 - Early intervention into academic and problem behaviors

This meeting summary was developed by St. Louis Children's Agenda staff. It is subject to revision or refinement based on review by the participants in the September 21 forum.

The next forum in the series, *A Public Dialogue on Public Education*, will focus on the data and information the community needs to better understand its public schools and take action to improve them. That forum will be held on October 5 at 2:30 PM in the St. Louis Children's Agenda/VCR offices at 2433 N. Grand Blvd. To register for the October 5 forum, please send an e-mail to vcr@visionforchildren.org, or call 314-534-6015.



St. Louis Children’s Agenda

A Forum in the Series “A Public Dialogue on Public Education”

Summary of Forum #2

Using Data to Better Understand Public Schools and Promote Student Achievement

October 5, 2006, 2:30 – 4:30 PM

St. Louis Children’s Agenda/VCR Offices, 2433 N. Grand Blvd.

The second community forum in the St. Louis Children’s Agenda series *A Public Dialogue on Public Education* was held on October 5, 2006. The forum focused on the use of data to better understand public education and promote student achievement. Some 50 people participated in the session. About half the participants also attended the first forum in the series held on September 21. A list of those who have attended one or both of the first two forums held to date is included here. As in the first forum session, there was a broad representation of all segments of the community and the tone of the discussion was positive, focused on better understanding and more effectively addressing issues related to providing quality public education in the City of St. Louis.

There were three major segments of the October 5 forum:

1. Presentation and audio conference featuring Daria Hall, Senior Policy Analyst, at The Education Trust reviewing the report *Making Data Work* and discussing how similar information can be used in the St. Louis setting.
2. Demonstration by Courtney McDermott, research coordinator of Vision for Children at Risk, of how to access the web site of the Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education to obtain the types of data identified in the report of The Education Trust for the St. Louis Public Schools at both the district and school building levels
3. Panel discussion with Joyce Dana, College of Public Service at St. Louis University, Eric Aplyn, E. Desmond Lee Technology and Learning Center, College of Education at the University of Missouri - St. Louis, and forum participants about the implications of school data and how it can be used to improve quality education.

Major issues addressed at the first forum in the series, *A Public Dialogue on Public Education*, are outlined below under headings related to the three forum segments.

1. The Education Trust Report, *Making Data Work*, Daria Hall, Sr. Policy Analyst

In a PowerPoint presentation presented to the St. Louis audience, Ms. Hall outlined the underlying “Data Message” of The Education Trust report, outlining **three fundamental questions that can be answered with school data**:

- How are students achieving academically?
- What opportunities are students being given to learn?
- Where are schools succeeding with all students?

Specifically with regard to **student achievement**, four critical issues were identified about which school data can inform the community:

- Are all students meeting standards?
- How has student achievement changed over time?
- Are there achievement gaps between groups of students?
- How have achievement gaps changed over time?

Three questions related to the **educational opportunity** afforded to students that can be informed by school data were examined:

- Are students given access to a challenging curriculum?
- Do students have access to quality teachers?
- Are there funding gaps between districts?

Key questions related to **what it is possible for students to achieve** that can be answered with data include:

- Are there high-poverty, high-minority schools/districts that are high achieving?
- Are there high-poverty, high-minority schools/districts that have improved achievement over time?
- Are there schools/districts that have closed gaps and raised achievement for all?

Ms. Hall presented sample school data that illustrated how data can be used by communities to answer all the critical educational questions outlined above. That sample data is available in the PowerPoint presentation that she presented at the forum, *Making Data Work: Using Data to Improve Student Achievement*. The presentation is available on the VCR/St. Louis Children’s Agenda web site at <http://visionforchildren.org>.

A new interactive web tool developed by The Education Trust that is designed to enable local communities to access their own school data related to quality education and student achievement was shared with the forum participants. The data tool is titled *Dispelling the Myth* and is directed to debunking the myth that students of color and from low-income families cannot perform well academically. The tool can be accessed at <http://www2.edtrust.org/edtrust/dtm/>.

2. Obtaining Data for the St. Louis Public Schools, Courtney McDermott, VCR

Moving from the broader conceptual discussion of how local communities can use data strategically to find out about their schools and improve student achievement, Courtney McDermott, Vision for Children at Risk’s Research Coordinator, demonstrated for forum participants how to access school data on the web site of the Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education. Ms. McDermott focused specifically on how to access both district-wide and building-level school data for the St. Louis Public Schools.

The step-by-step instructions provided by McDermott are outlined below:

Go to: www.dese.mo.gov

1. Under the **“Resources”** heading on the left side, click on the first purple oval, **“School Data/Statistics”**
2. Under the Alphabetical List of School Districts, choose **St. Louis City (115115)** and click **“Load Profile”**. (This will take you to the **SLPS Profile** page).
3. To access the **Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP)** data:
 - Under **“Summary Reports”** click on **“2006 Annual Performance Report (APR) and AYP”**
 - For SLPS School District Data: Click on the double arrows under **“AYP grid”**
 - For building level data, choose a school and click on the double arrows under **“AYP grid”**

Data recommended for use by The Education Trust available in the AYP report includes:

- Test scores
- Test scores over time
- Test scores by race and ethnic group
- Test scores by income level (Free and Reduced Lunch)
- Test scores by limited English proficiency (LEP)
- Test scores by racial and ethnic groups over time
- Graduation Rate

To access the **Annual Performance Report (APR)** for the SLPS school district:

- Click on **“2006 School District Report Card”** from the SLPS Profile page

To access the **Annual Performance Report (APR)** for an individual building:

- On the SLPS Profile Page, select **“Building Data in Detail”** under **“Summary Reports”**
- Click on school building link (this will take you to the **individual building Profile Page**)
- Click on **“2006 School Report Card”**

Other important and useful data can be accessed under **“Educational Resources”** and **“Educational Performance Data”** from the district and building profile pages.

If you have questions about accessing this data, please contact Courtney McDermott at Vision for Children at Risk at cmcdermott@visionforchildren.org or (314) 534-6015.

3. Panel and Participant Discussion, Joyce Dana, Eric Aplyn & Forum Participants

It was clear from the panel presentations and discussion with forum participants that use of school data to understand and improve student achievement, while a valuable tool, can be a complex and rigorous undertaking. It is essential to know precisely what the data means, the context in which it is being viewed, and the technical issues related to understanding the data.

Several specific technical questions arose related to such issues as what constitutes a "group" within a school for assessment purposes, how a group is defined, and what racial categories mean. Considerable discussion was devoted to understanding the Index Scores for the MAP test -- including how the scores are calculated and what those scores represent. A broader technical issue addressed was the challenge of understanding trend data and assessing school progress in a context in which target goals move upward on an annual basis.

Reverend Richard A. Martin III, expressed the view, unchallenged by other forum participants, that the illustrative national data presented by The Education Trust, the local data for the St. Louis Public Schools viewed on the DESE web site, and the real-world, on-the-ground experience in the community were all consistent with one another. Martin said information from all three sources reflected the fact that far too many poor and minority students are not getting what they needed educationally and are not achieving academically. It is imperative, said Martin, that the community recognize that fact and take corrective action.

Policy issues discussed by the group focused on how test data is to be used at the classroom level, including the temptation of "teaching to the test" and whether expectations imposed on teachers by test data are clear and realistic. Other policy concerns identified were social promotion and low graduation rates. It was also suggested that to understand the situation of students and the challenges facing the public schools it is necessary to look beyond educational data to broader indicators of child and family health and well-being.

Panelist Joyce Dana of the College of Public Service at St. Louis University outlined some of her positive experiences in seeing student achievement raised in poor and minority communities through changes that involved intensified community support for schools and increased school support of parents.

There was a recognition among forum participants that this initial look at educational data was only the starting point for what needed to be a rigorous and ongoing analysis of information related to schools and student achievement. Accurate interpretation and effective use of school data has a host of program and policy implications for what goes on in the classroom, school system, and broader local, state and national communities.

St. Louis Children's Agenda staff developed this meeting summary. It is subject to revision or refinement based on review by the participants in the October 5 forum in the series "A Public Dialogue on Public Education."



St. Louis Children’s Agenda

A Forum in the Series, *A Public Dialogue on Public Education*

Summary Outline of Forum #3

“St. Louis Public Schools Plans & Goals for 2006-2007: Views of the School Board, Superintendent, & Teachers”

I. Date: October 19, 2006

II. Panelists: Dr. Diana Bourisaw, Superintendent, St. Louis Public Schools
Mary J. Armstrong, President, St. Louis Teachers & School Related Personnel Union, Local 420

III. Summary:

A. Panelists’ Presentations: *For summaries of presentations please see Appendix A, Supt. Bourisaw’s PowerPoint Presentation entitled “St. Louis Public Schools: Focusing on Improvement,” and Appendix B, literature from Local 420 entitled “Plan to Improve the Academic Outcomes Of Our Children: 5-Point Plan.” Discussion points that are not outlined in the appendices are as follows.*

1. Demographics of the St. Louis Public Schools, Supt. Bourisaw
 - Minimum percentage of students in poverty = 80%
 - Percentage of students each day who are homeless = 10%
 - Percentage of students each day in precarious living conditions = 20%
 - Percentage of students who experienced homelessness over the course of a year = 30%
 - Percentage of non-English speaking students = 10%
 - Number of preschool students = 1,300
 - Number of magnet schools = more than 20
 - Number of students in the Inter-District Transfer Prog. attending school in St. Louis County = 8,200
 - Number of students in charter schools = 4,700
 - Number of students in St. Louis Public Schools = 33,000
 - Percentage of African American students = 82%
 - Percentage of students receiving free or reduced lunch = 87%

B. Audience Questions

Question #1: Becky James-Hatter, Big Brothers Big Sisters of Eastern Missouri. Many community agencies are interested in helping the SLPSs succeed in the indicators tracked with the Scorecards to which you referred. Will the information on the Scorecards be available to the public? (Panelists responded that, yes, the data will be made available.)

Question #2: Laura Lambrix, ARCHS. Can you comment more fully on your professional development plans for the instructional leaders, specifically at the principal level?

Supt. Bourisaw: We are working with the Wallace Foundation and have received a grant from them to engage in professional development. Principals meet monthly and are trained in data-driven decision-making. We are emphasizing sustainable skills (such as analyzing data to inform classroom practices) through collaboration with the University of Missouri at St. Louis (UMSL). We are hoping to institute our own leadership academy to teach character education, which correlates with a reduction in discipline problems in the classroom.

Pres. Armstrong: Local 420 would like to work in partnership with the district to improve professional development opportunities. We will offer training on classroom management, stress management for teachers, and team-building workshops for the administration and staff of each particular school.

Question #3: Jamilah Nasheed, State Representative-Elect. I have a question for President Armstrong. Are there stated guidelines to determine how you will meet the goals of the 5-Point Plan?

Pres. Armstrong: Guidelines for some of these points would be established jointly with the district to coincide with their strategic planning. Guidelines for the remainder of these points, including student-to-teacher ratios and preschool attendance will develop out of legislative venues.

Question #4: Alicia Green, SLPS parent. Regarding “zero tolerance,” have there been any thoughts about dealing with a school culture that is tolerant of the harassment and assault of gay, lesbian and transgendered students? My concern is not only with the behavior of students but the behavior of teachers as well.

Pres. Armstrong: The tone of the school, including what is and is not tolerated, is set by the administrator and should be observed by administration, staff and students. The Board of Education specifically admonishes discrimination due to sexual orientation, race or gender. If you have experienced problems in a particular school, you should continue up the chain of command until it is resolved, even if this means you have to “take it downtown.”

Supt. Bourisaw: I agree. Harassment should not be tolerated and you should continue asking for help from administration. One of the reasons to implement character education is to address this very issue.

Audience Member: There is a policy to establish a Diversity Committee in every school. Such a committee, working with the staff and representatives from downtown, might prove helpful.

Question #5: Chuck Kindleberger, Board Member for The Children’s Agenda. I have a question for Supt. Bourisaw. What aspects of the previous Superintendent’s plans do you prefer and which would you revise?

Supt. Bourisaw: The funding mechanisms to enact the previous plan are simply not available. The previous plan includes improvements in teaching methods and the Small School Initiatives, both of which we are currently pursuing. Earning accreditation is our number one issue at this time. Other elements of the previous plan are being evaluated.

Question #6: Jeanette Mott Oxford, State Representative, City of St. Louis. I am filing legislation to lift low-income workers out of poverty which would benefit their children and, in turn, the schools. When I suggest a bill for income tax credits for low-income workers, eligibility requirement updates for subsidized childcare or legislation to maintain utilities in the homes of low-income families, will you send someone to testify on behalf of those bills?

Supt. Bourisaw: I would certainly support your efforts as research shows that poverty is the key determinant of academic success in absence of other interventions. I would suggest a bill in which parents would be able to take off work time without penalty to volunteer and attend their children’s activities within the school.

Pres. Armstrong: “We are only a phone call away. We come when asked.”

Supt. Bourisaw: I have already been to Jefferson City a couple of times since taking on the role of Superintendent, and I’d be glad to go again.

Question #7: I am a parent of a SLPS student, and a former School Board Member. I would like to hear more about your strategic plan for improving student achievement. How does your School Improvement Plan intersect with your strategic plan? How will you prepare students for 21st Century learning?

Pres. Armstrong: The connection between student achievement and strategic planning for the district as a whole is a tenuous one. Any school district that teaches students at a greater-than-average risk of the effects of societal ills also runs the risk of being criticized for the lower-than-average student achievement that is often characteristic of such students. Local 420’s approach is simply to ensure that resources are adequately and fairly distributed and that the “playing field is leveled.” Underprivileged students today are not as readily able to develop school readiness skills, as they once were. I would suggest legislative action, including alternative school opportunities and parenting classes in the high school curriculum. Revisions to student assessment practices will better inform AYP. Regarding “poverty-stricken” students – I think that is just a label. Quality professional development can help teachers understand how to tap the best qualities of their students with compassion and caring, and students will succeed.

Supt. Bourisaw: You mentioned mobility rates; some of our schools exceed 100% mobility. One strategy to address this is to improve and align the curriculum and resources to help teachers deliver consistent classroom material despite the high mobility of students. Increased rigor and monthly measurement of progress in each school will boost student achievement.

Question #8: Al Katzenburger, President of the Public Revenue Education Council. I am concerned that the City of St. Louis is making some progress, but that it is not positively affecting the incidence of poverty. The City is receiving billions of dollars in new construction, but none of the funds are benefiting the schools. I think financial and budgeting reform can do a lot for the SLPSs but it would take school-by-school accountability.

Supt. Bourisaw: These are all very good points.

Pres. Armstrong: We believe in school-by-school accountability and would encourage it in the school district.

Question #9: Jolie Baker, Supervisor of a Truancy Unit at Family Court. We are involved with many public schools and one of my concerns is that children are being withdrawn from school for poor attendance in order to meet the attendance goals of the particular school. Is there a formalized process for withdrawal of truant students, and is it consistently followed?

Supt. Bourisaw: The attendance accounting practices have not been completely sufficient. If a student misses ten consecutive days of school they are typically withdrawn. We are trying to refine and implement better attendance accounting and there will be procedural inconsistencies in the interim.

Pres. Armstrong: I believe that there is a plan at the state level to have every student enrolled in public school carry a state identification number that follows them from one school or district to another. The students’ information would be housed in a centralized database to help streamline the truancy issue.

Question #10: Jessica Du Maine, parent of a middle school student and a high school student in the SLPSs. I have three separate questions.

1) What are your plans for the gifted schools?

Supt. Bourisaw: We are analyzing whether or not we should expand the gifted program. These programs need to be better attended to by administration.

Pres. Armstrong: I would like to see gifted programs spread out to a wider range of schools, rather than concentrating within just a few campuses. Instead of “gifted schools” we could perhaps offer “gifted classes” in which a child who is gifted in Math but not in Reading would still be able to receive the benefits of advanced study in his or her particular strength.

- 2) Regarding education of the whole child, I think nurses are under-utilized. A nurse would not treat my child for an asthma attack because the nurse lacked a certain permission form. Could they be given more authority to utilize their expertise and treat students within the schools?

Supt. Bourisaw: I am unfamiliar with the details of your situation, the school’s situation and the level of training for the specific nurse in this instance, but it is possible liability could be an issue.

Pres. Armstrong: Nurses and counselors need to be more numerous within the district to meet the demands of the students. In elementary school, you may actually have a single nurse or counselor assigned to multiple schools, depending on enrollment.

- 3) Early education for students is beneficial, but there are many logistical problems educating such young children. Would 3-year-olds have to take the bus to school? Will extended before- and after-school care be available at times similar to the hours of operation of many day cares?

Supt. Bourisaw: I do not see that the early childhood program will be mandatory, but will be available for parents who want to send their children to such a program. And many of our schools do offer very accessible before- and after-care programs.

Question #11: Carol Minor, retired educator from the SLPSs. The MAP test is a very poor test. There is a great deal of subjectivity in the scoring and I feel teachers are pressured to teach to the test. Why do we have to use the MAP test, when there are perhaps better tests that would emphasize critical thinking skills?

Pres. Armstrong: The answer to your question is “No Child Left Behind.” The federal government requires standardized testing. Any changes to testing procedures would be determined by the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE) and state legislators. I do not support the practice of “teaching to the test.” I would suggest we teach concrete objectives in each grade level and subject area allowing students to succeed no matter what test they take.

Question #12: In addition to parents and teachers, many of the people present here today represent the wider network of community groups, such as private agencies, churches and volunteer groups. Could you talk about ways these people and organizations could help as community partners?

Supt. Bourisaw: We welcome anyone who is willing to work with us to benefit our students. We would like to partner each of the 93 schools with one corporate sponsor to provide funding support, one community sponsor to provide man/woman-power and one faith-based sponsor to provide that “24/7” gap.

Pres. Armstrong: As stakeholders we need to make sure we are really helping the students. I am a proponent of neighborhood schools and the ability of such a school to unite an entire community – from school parents and grandparents to the vagrant on the corner – in an effort to collectively own and minister to their children.

Question #13: Timothy Hughes, a product of the SLPSs, a Co-pastor of Friedens Chapel United Church of Christ, and the Co-owner of Touchdown Enterprise, Inc. which in the past has supported the SLPSs’ in-school suspension program. Would we be able to continue supporting the schools under the current administration?

(Supt. Bourisaw indicated that, “yes” this can be arranged).



St. Louis Children’s Agenda

A Forum in the Series, *A Public Dialogue on Public Education*

Summary Outline of Forum #4

Perspectives of Community Stakeholders: Business & Philanthropy

I. Date: November 2, 2006

II. Panelists:

- *Tony Thompson*, CEO of Kwame Building Group Inc., and Chair of the K-12 Committee of the Regional Business Council (RBC)
- *Linda Aitch*, Director of Community Investment, Greater Saint Louis Community Foundation
- *Deborah Patterson*, President of The Monsanto Fund

III. Summary: Three community leaders in business and philanthropy discussed the needs of the St. Louis Public Schools (SLPSs), and suggested action and collaboration to improve school funding and achievement. An outline of the 90-minute forum follows.

1. Introductory statements:

- A. Tony Thompson:** There is an urgent need to address our school issues. Teach For America identified three areas that can most significantly affect urban schools.
1. Leadership, primarily at the “principal” level
 2. Qualified teachers in the classroom
 3. High expectation of students
- B. Linda Aitch:** The Community Foundation is dedicated to helping those in the St. Louis area and has a certain amount of discretionary funding they invest in the community. The Foundation would like to aid St. Louis education but needs to analyze issues strategically and find ways to leverage, partner and collaborate with other stakeholders.
- C. Deborah Patterson:** The Monsanto Fund is primarily focused on improving math and science education to increase the future number of knowledgeable, quality professionals in St. Louis from which they hope to draw employees. There is a need for a “bold vision” – an urgent plan to improve the quality of education and student achievement, with specific goals and within a specific timeframe. The St. Louis business community is intimately concerned about the SLPSs, and needs only to know the most effective way to deploy resources.

2. **Moderator Questions:** Ruth Ehresman, Co-chair of The Children's Agenda, asked the following questions.
 - A. **Question 1:** Each of you discussed elements of your vision for quality education in St. Louis. What challenges and barriers do we need to address to enact such a bold vision?
 1. Patterson: Develop a solid plan that links donated funds to outcomes over time. There needs to be well-oiled collaboration between SLPSs and community businesses.
 2. Thomas: Model current successful programs and relationships between SLPSs and business.
 3. Aitch: There needs to be...
 - a. A solid strategic plan developed by all stakeholders
 - b. Appropriate leadership
 - c. The shrewd, strategic deployment of resources
 - d. A focus on the children's education, not the adults' politics
 - B. **Question 2:** If the goal is to establish a strategic use of resources, who is responsible to see that this happens?
 1. Patterson: The school district, the business community and the philanthropic community.
 2. Thompson: The St. Louis community as a whole. In regards to the SLPS, the allocation of resources is more the issue than the lack of resources. The Missouri Coordinating Board For Higher Education and the Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE) could collaborate.
 3. Aitch: A wide variety of stakeholders, modeled by other city's public education coalitions
 - C. **Questions 3:** What exactly are successful partnerships among stakeholders in education? What elements go into making an ideal partnership?
 1. Patterson: Respect among parties resulting in a true collaboration, with no one party asserting control or ownership.
 2. Aitch: We need to research successful models. In this case a "bottom up" organizational approach among stakeholders may work better than a "top-down," authoritarian approach.
 3. Thompson: We should develop regionally successful models.
3. **Audience Question:** Members of the audience asked the following questions.
 - A. **Question 1:** How do you get the entire community, including St. Louis City and County residents, involved in the issues of the schools?
 1. Thompson: We need to communicate ownership of the children and the schools to the individual citizen.
 2. Aitch: Enlighten people on how they are already affected by SLPS issues in their day-to-day lives.
 - B. **Question 2:** The principals are key to developing goals because they are knowledgeable and motivated to change their schools for the better, don't you agree?
 1. Thompson: The Teach For America study supported this, too.
 2. Patterson: Yes, principals are key proponent of change, but the downside is the great administrative costs related to their involvements. Their involvement in strategic planning should not detract from the responsibilities at their individual school.
 - C. **Question 3:** The SLATE (St. Louis Agency for Training and Employment) is cutting back on summer programs. Is there anything the business and philanthropic communities could do to bolster summer internships for teenagers to help keep them engaged in positive activities?
 1. Thompson: I can report this to the K-12 Committee of the Regional Business Council.
 2. Patterson: SLATE could also approach their funding partners directly and ask for monetary support for particular programs.
 - D. **Question 4:** Is there a chance that the business and philanthropic communities will tire of the "adult issues" involving politics and bureaucracy and give up on the public schools?
 1. Aitch: If so, it is merely an excuse to exit the arena of donating to education.
 2. Thompson: The RBC is committed to the SLPSs. It has not slowed its rate of funding, but it has shifted allocations slightly, due to "adult issues."

- E. **Question 5:** How can the schools pair with the business community to develop immediate improvement for those students who *are* achieving?
1. Thompson: Focused communication. Give businesses detailed and specific information on the needs of the schools. Perhaps initiate programs that target the "C" student and focus on academic improvement.
 2. Aitch: Business leaders, especially minority leaders, can act as role models and portray for children a successful life vision other than those offered in the mainstream media.
- F. **Question 6:** There are places in which the SLPSs are "doing it right." For example, Metro High School is in the top 50 in the nation. How can we duplicate this success and better publicize it?
1. Patterson: Quality leadership is key, as is detailed management of the individual school.
 2. Aitch: Pierre Laclède School is a great example of urban school reform.
 3. Patterson: Leaders in education should communicate regarding what has worked well.

IV. Background Information:

The Vashon Education Compact: In April 1998 a bond issue was passed that provided persons in the JeffVanderLou neighborhood an opportunity to partner with local and national corporate foundations to rebuild their neighborhood around the \$35 million dollar construction of a new Vashon High School. (<http://www.vashoncompact.org>, William M. Carson executive director. Viewed April 15, 2007)

Urban school reforms: Several urban school districts have successfully implemented strategic plans and/or public education coalitions, including the Chicago Public Schools (www.cps.k12.il.us), Seattle Public Schools (www.seattleschools.org), and the Charlotte-Mecklenburg School District (www.cms.k12.nc.us).

V. Notes/Recommendations from Forum Participants:

- 1) Expect more from schools and from students. "It is morally incomprehensible that we are not giving all of our kids a quality education."
- 2) Develop a bold vision for the business community to support – a comprehensive plan to improve the schools based on outcome data.
- 3) SLPS education is important to business because it helps to develop a source of future employees and it is a contributing factor to overall growth and health in the city. The success or failure of the SLPSs affects everyone in the region.
- 4) Quality leadership and instruction is key to school improvement. The SLPSs should recruit and retain the best teachers and administrators and offer opportunities for professional development.
- 5) St. Louis Public School leadership should focus less on "adult issues" and political concerns and focus more on the children's educational needs.
- 6) Quality public education is not only the responsibility of the school board and the administration. Parents, citizens, businesses and community organizations must all be involved.
- 7) Make a request of the business community to donate more than funds. Ask them to help with legal advocacy.
- 8) DESE and representatives from local higher education should work together to prevent educational issues they have in common.
- 9) A key task to community involvement is communicating ownership of the schools. If individuals feel they *own* the schools, they will be more likely to support them.
- 10) Clear communication between corporate/business entities and the SLPSs is necessary.
- 11) Healthy, long-term interaction among school leadership and community/business leadership is necessary.



St. Louis Children’s Agenda

A Forum in the Series, A Public Dialogue on Public Education

Summary Outline of Forum #5

Serving the Customers: What Students Need and Parents Want From Public Education, Plus Perspectives of City Residents

I. Date: Nov. 16, 2006

II. Panelists:¹

- *Alycia Greene*, parent of a student at Gateway High School
- *Charles N. Jacobs*, parent of a high school student, new to the St. Louis Public School (SLPS) system
- *Rev. Anne Kelsey*, Community Episcopal Church and parent of five children, who attended either public, religious or special needs schools, depending on the needs of the child. Members of her parish have children in various kinds of schools
- *Andy Thorp*, parent of three boys attending Kennard Classical Junior Academy. Mr. Thorp is involved in the Parent Teacher Organization for the school.
- *Jessica du Maine*, parent of three children in SLPSs. Originally a county resident, she moved into the city to participate in the desegregation program.
- *Nicole du Maine*, Senior at Metro High School

III. Summary: Students and parents respond to moderator and audience questions regarding SLPS issues and needs. An outline of the 90-minute forum follows:

A. Moderator Questions

1. Moderator Question #1: What are the needs or major problems of the SLPSs?

A. Greene:

1. The primary concern is safety – specifically concerns of violence, bullying and negative student behavior in the classroom. Fostering equality in the classroom could be a solution.
2. Accommodating special needs (including mental and psychological health)
3. Accommodating English as a Second Language

B. Thorpe:

¹ Note: A total of nine SLPS parents and students were slated to appear as panelists for this forum. The six who attended were all affiliated with magnet schools. Panelist comments, therefore, reflect a narrower rather than broader parental and student perspective on the SLPSs.

1. Recruiting and retaining good teachers
 2. Administrative instability
 3. Classroom discipline problems and behavior disruptions
- C. **N. du Maine:** educational opportunities differ between schools

2. Moderator Question #2: What do the SLPSs do well? In what ways are they successful?

- A. **Thorp**
1. Diverse environment
 2. Dedicated teachers
 3. Academic testing and goal-setting is a positive and a negative
- B. **J. du Maine:** Magnet schools and special learning programs
- C. **Jacobs:** Magnet schools
- D. **Greene:** In the elementary grades, parents are welcomed and recruited as volunteers.

3. Moderator Question #3: Mr. Thorp mentioned his ambivalence to standardized testing. Could you share your perspective on that issue?

- A. **J. du Maine:** Testing is determined by the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) which has had limited success. NCLB does not test critical thinking and assumes learning is a “one-size fits all” issue. In Italy they test children qualitatively, rather than quantitatively. Alternate testing methods in the U.S. might better represent the students’ achievements.
- B. **Thorp:** At Kennard Classical Jr. Academy, testing puts a great deal of pressure on students and the administrator.
- C. **N. du Maine:** I think there is more pressure on students than administrators. I think schools should focus on entrance to college or careers rather than testing.
- D. **J. du Maine:** Higher education in Italy presents an innovative model for standardized testing and school entrance. There are no entrance exams and no restraints on what courses one can take. This allows them to attract a diverse student base.

4. Moderator Question #4: The NCLB Act requires standardized testing; what do we do with the large number of students who are not meeting the testing criteria?

- A. **Thorp:** Testing detracts from classroom instruction and is too rigorous for the children. What does one do with a school that does not test well? Principals should be able to set clear guidelines for achievement on testing, and replace teachers who are not meeting those standards.
- B. **Green:** Testing alone does not adequately represent whether or not a child is performing. It does not take an individual’s creativity or unique gifts into account.
- C. **J. du Maine:** Perhaps the state should sue the federal government for the NCLB Act, as Connecticut has done. Today’s paper noted differing achievement goals for African American students. Lowered expectations or differing expectations will not work in the classroom.
- D. **Audience Member:** To clarify, the 1999 Central Agreement requires the SLPSs to measure different student achievement levels for different ethnic backgrounds, and to set differing goals for each group.
- E. **Green:** Are the under-funded schools the ones with lowered student achievement? If so, that is very telling. Secondly, NCLB is meant to focus on the children in greatest need, not the ones who test more successfully. We need to adopt the ideal that “I won’t do well if you don’t do well,” and make sure everyone is educated.
- F. **N. du Maine:** The key to good test scores is to develop an atmosphere of learning. If many of the students are serious about their education and motivated to achieve, a kind of positive peer pressure exists that keeps students interested in learning. A nurturing environment where students really believe they can do something about their future can overcome the boundaries of race or socio-economic status.
- G. **Thorp:** How is school funding distributed to the individual schools? I’m not sure that the Magnet Schools are better funded.
- H. **Susan Turk, audience member:** Kennard is actually one of the lowest funded elementary schools.

5. Moderator Question #5: Charles, can you address your assessment concerning the status of parent involvement in the SLPSs and how we can increase parent involvement?

A. Survey Question: A poll of clients and my social work colleagues were asked “Is there sufficient parental involvement with our students?”

B. Findings

1. SLPS parental involvement depends upon the school, where it’s located and how passionate the people in that area are about children’s education
2. Parents aren’t as involved because they have very little time. Many parents work full time and manage families. In addition, many parents today are also taking classes (GED classes, graduate school classes, and other professional development) which is a further drain on time and money.
3. Single parents have even less time and money to give to schools.
4. Many parents get information on the SLPSs from media coverage, which has been predominantly negative. This causes some parents to withhold involvement.

6. Moderator Question #6: What concrete steps could the SLPSs take to enable parents to become more involved?

A. Kelsey: Decrease the poor and negative behavior of the School Board.

C. Green: It used to be that all community adults parented all community kids. Schools housed our culture.

D. J. du Maine: Perhaps re-opening neighborhood schools would make it more convenient for people to be involved.

E. Jacobs: The city needs more positive role models and caring parents interacting with the children in the neighborhoods.

Audience Comments

1. Audience Comment #1, Karen Kalish, civic activist: I am frustrated that we only have magnet schools represented on the panel. No one is representing the other 89 schools and their problems.

A. Green: My child just entered the magnet system, and was predominantly educated in the comprehensive schools.

2. Audience Comment #2: In my experience, I have not found Contractual Services for the Special Education District to be at all helpful; someone should look at the amount of revenue spent there.

3. Audience Comment #3: First, I think information on how tax dollars are spent in the SLPSs should be more transparent to the average citizen. Second, we need parent like those on the panel to run for the School Board.

4. Audience Comment #4: The breakdown of the family, especially the lack of males in the household, has led to greater problems in the larger community.

5. Audience Comment #5: I hope those present can unite and collaborate to make some positive changes to the SLPSs.

6. Audience Comment #6: I have talked to Peter Downs of the school board, and found him to be open to and helpful with my concerns. It is easy to blame the Board, but we should keep in mind how difficult a job that is.

IV. Notes/Recommendations: Parents and students found the following concerns/issues prevalent.

A. Standardized testing

1. It is too rigorous and detracts from learning.
2. It is not as important to parents and students as career training and job preparation.

B. An “atmosphere of learning” is necessary to improve and sustain student achievement.

C. Parental Involvement is hindered by:

1. Bad behavior by the school board
2. Negative media coverage
3. Parents, especially single parents, have little time and energy available after employment and other family responsibilities are attended to
4. Other parents are not involved, so there is no community incentive or status quo to aide involvement



St. Louis Children’s Agenda

A Forum in the Series, A Public Dialogue on Public Education

Summary Outline of Forum #6

Perspectives of Community Stakeholders: Government & Community Organizations

I. Date: Dec. 14, 2006

II. Panelists:

- *Robbyn Wahby*, Educational Liaison, Office of the Mayor
- *Becky James-Hatter*, President & CEO, Big Brothers Big Sisters of Missouri
- *John Moten, Jr.*, Chairman, St. Louis Black Leadership Roundtable
- *Chris Chadwick*, Executive Director, FOCUS St. Louis
- *Don Cuvo*, Director, the St. Louis Mental Health Board

III. Summary: Five leaders in government and community organizations answered questions regarding the issues and needs of the St. Louis Public Schools (SLPS). A summary of the questions and responses follows.

A. Introductory Remarks

1. **Wahby:** Addressing poverty is the most significant factor in educating St. Louis’ children. The SLPSs are not properly educating children. The Missouri Dept. of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE) needs to appoint a strong administrator to address SLPS issues.
2. **James-Hatter:** Parents, citizens and community agencies alike care about the state of the SLPSs and want to help, but generally do not know what to do or where to go to offer their help.
3. **Moten:** The St. Louis Black Leadership Roundtable is committed to lessening the African-American achievement gap.¹ They have developed guidelines, comprised of “The Four Essentials” and “The Four Desirables,” to aid school leaders in improving the state of the achievement gap.

¹ African-American Achievement Gap: The achievement gap refers to the observed disparity on a number of educational measures between the performance of groups of students as defined, in this case, by race/ethnicity. <http://en.wikipedia.org>

4. **Chadwick:** A strong region is dependent upon a strong education system. FOCUS St. Louis has been working in the area of public education, and targets three main areas for improvement: 1) developing leadership, 2) influencing policy and 3) promoting community connections. Frequent turnover of school representatives has made it hard for the community to develop a trusting relationship with the SLPSs.
5. **Cuvo:** The Mental Health Board is a special taxing district that provides grants to community agencies who deliver support services to public school students. Difficulties in the SLPSs have caused funders to withdraw some of their support, due to the increasing "high risk" nature of the investment. MHB finds that parents are less concerned with test scores than the real-world issue of whether their children will be able to earn a living after graduation from the SLPSs.

B. Moderator Questions

1. **Moderator Question #1: From your perspective as community activists, what needs of the SLPSs should be addressed in order to further aid the success of its students?**
 - a. **James-Hatter**
 1. A solid working relationship between community agencies and SLPS's central administration
 2. Collaboration between community agencies, parents, students and teachers
 - b. **Chadwick:** The media needs to engage in fair reporting without harming the region's ability to support it's schools.
 - c. **Moten**
 1. The media should use their unique position to educate parents and citizens about their schools.
 2. Parents and students need to be made aware of the impact standardized testing has on student achievement.
 - d. **Wahby**
 1. Urgency: The SLPSs need to act with urgency on multiple fronts to address its problems.
 2. Stability: The SLPSs need to partner with knowledgeable community-based organizations. The schools need a stable administration to maintain long-term relationships with these organizations.
 3. High expectations: The SLPSs need to institutionalize service delivery so that everyone has the opportunity for a quality education.
 4. Responsiveness: The SLPSs need to be able to be responsive to the changing needs of the modern family.
 - e. **Cuvo**
 1. Career education and job training
 2. Continued involvement of social service agencies
2. **Moderator Question #2: What specific things can you do as a municipal government or community organization to help promote the quality of education and meet some of those student needs?**
 - a. **Moten:** Cooperation among schools and private businesses to ensure adequate job training
 - b. **James-Hatter:**
 1. Effective training and use of a corps of volunteers
 2. The development of "institutional confidence," perhaps by identifying one common goal among all stakeholders and targeting resources in that area for the best chance of overall improvement.

C. Audience Questions

1. **Audience Question #1:** How many of the panel members support a school board takeover?
 - a. **Wahby:** The Mayor’s office supports a state intervention as soon as possible to stabilize the district and later return it to the control of the local board.
 - b. **Moten:** Under certain circumstances, the Roundtable might support a state intervention. Currently, it does not see the need to repeal voting rights.
 - c. **Chadwick:** FOCUS St. Louis has no official position, but remains committed to the needs of the children.
 - d. **Cuvo:** The MHB has not taken an official position, but thinks that something must change.
2. **Audience Question #2:** Would it be possible to see all the organizations represented on the panel come together and find a common solution to raising the levels of student achievement in reading and math?
 - a. **Chadwick:** The greatest obstacle to this process is finding a trusted, neutral party without political ties or an agenda to act as the convening party.
3. **Audience Question #3:** Considering that we are trying to educate children to become productive members of the work force, how can we draw corporations to the table to help develop a plan for the schools?
 - a. **Chadwick:** School districts need to pay teachers wages comparable to those in St. Louis County to retain their teachers.
4. **Audience Question #4,** Maria Chappelle-Nadal, MO State Representative in University City: My legislative district houses the Wellston School District which lost accreditation and was taken over by the state in 2005. The result of the state takeover was to recruit volunteers to tutor in the classrooms; this is an intervention that does not really require such drastic action as a state takeover. My question is for Ms. Wahby. If the mayor is having a lobbyist testify in Jefferson City on behalf of tax credits and vouchers, would he also testify on behalf of school outcomes?
 - a. **Wahby:** The Mayor has long-standing history of supporting public education. The mayor is supporting a takeover by DESE, comprised of knowledgeable leaders and educators in hopes to improve school outcomes.
 - b. **Chappelle-Nadal:** If the SLPSs intend to petition the MO House of Representatives for more funding they will have to analyze and rationalize those costs. Contracting the charter or private schools to educate SLPS students may not be successful, as their achievement scores are not significantly better.
 - c. **Wahby:** Charter schools do have some advantages. They tend to have increased parental involvement and they receive \$800 less per pupil than public schools. Increased funding will not necessarily solve the problem. The SLPSs need stable leadership, responsiveness to community needs, commitment to technology, and an involved community.
5. **Audience Question #5:** Children’s ability to learn is primarily affected by major issues in the home such as poverty and homelessness. What will the mayor do to address these issues?
 - a. **Wahby:** The city has improved its housing situation in respects to affordability and quality, but there is still a great deal of poverty in the area that affects our children’s education, and it needs to continue to be addressed.
6. **Audience Question #6:** What are some ways your organizations can help increase the capacity of the media to reach the public and mobilize them to help?
 - a. **Chadwick:** FOCUS St. Louis sponsors, “What’s Right With the Region” to raise community awareness. Citizens should respond to positive news about the public schools with phone calls and letters expressing their approval.
 - b. **Cuvo:** Many media institutions are actually businesses, and may respond well to business strategies, such as strategically-placed advertising space supporting the SLPSs.
 - c. **Wahby:** A School Forum on media involvement might be able to develop some discussion on the issues common to both the media and the schools.

7. **Audience Question #7:** Is the mayor going to use public funds to send SLPS students to parochial schools? Is that not a violation of the Blaine Amendments of the Missouri constitution?
 - a. **Wahby:** To clarify, the mayor has never supported vouchers. The Blaine Amendment is still in effect and prevents the spending of public money among religiously-based institutions.
8. **Audience Comment #1:** I believe there is great parental support for the elected board, the superintendent, and adequate funding for the SLPSs. I think parents are aligned against the state takeover, the Mayor's Office, the local media coverage of the SLPSs, and leadership difficulties in the schools.
9. **Audience Comment #2,** Patty Carlton, St. Louis Public Libraries: I am encouraged to hear honest and open dialog about the public schools and hope it will serve to increase job readiness.

IV. Background Information:

On July 27, 2006, Dr. D. Kent King, Commissioner of the Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE) designated a group of five community leaders (The Special Advisory Committee) to study the status of the St. Louis Public Schools (SLPSs) and report ideas for change.

The Special Advisory Committee will soon release its findings and recommendations and will advise DESE on possible actions related to the SLPSs. The report will address the legal alternatives that can be taken by the state, accreditation status of the SLPSs, and control of the School Board.

V. Notes/Recommendations:

- A. Statistics provided by the Mayor's office: Of the 3,000 youth who enter the SLPSs each year, only 50-60% graduate. Fewer than 200 test at or above the average on the ACT; these are generally confined to just a few magnet schools.
- B. The region needs a strong central city and strong city schools. Citizen engagement is crucial.
- C. There must be an improvement in communication between the SLPSs and government and community organizations. This communication is necessary to engender a consistency of services to the students and families.
- D. Many resources currently exist in the St. Louis area, but they are simply not getting to the student. This seems due to bureaucracy, confusion, inconsistencies in leadership and policy, and the general fear that the St. Louis Public Schools will not improve.
- E. There needs to be an increase in "institutional confidence," to increase morale and community participation around SLPS issues. If the schools and community can target a problem, work together, and achieve some success for its children, it would engender greater confidence and enable persons to tackle larger issues.



St. Louis Children’s Agenda

A Forum in the Series, A Public Dialogue on Public Education

Summary Outline of Forum #7

Findings & Recommendations of Missouri’s DESE-Appointed Special Advisory Committee on the St. Louis Public Schools

I. Date: February 10, 2007

II. Forum Moderator: Lora Gulley, Co-Chair of the St. Louis Children’s Agenda and Manager at the Family Resource Center/Family Support Council

III. Summary: The forum’s audience members consisted of SLPS teachers, parents, School Board members, local civic and political leaders, representatives of community agencies, philanthropies, and corporations. The public sentiment regarding the Special Advisory Committee’s (SAC’s) report ranged from mild ambivalence to outright disagreement.

IV. Background Information:

On July 27, 2006, Dr. D. Kent King, Commissioner of the Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE) designated a group of five community leaders (The Special Advisory Committee) to study the status of the St. Louis Public Schools (SLPSs) and report their findings and recommendations.

Dr. William H. Danforth, Chancellor Emeritus at Washington University, and Mrs. Frankie M. Freeman, attorney with Montgomery Hollie & Associates LLP, served as Co-chairs of the committee. Danforth and Freeman also head a committee to monitor St. Louis City’s response to the 1999 Desegregation Settlement Agreement. The Special Advisory Committee recently released its findings and recommendations in the report titled “The Special Advisory Committee on St. Louis Public Schools: Final Report Dec. 17, 2006,” available for viewing in its entirety online at www.slps-committee.org

V. Notes/Recommendations: Audience comments varied, but several themes emerged.

A. Governance

1. The report does not recommend a "State takeover," but instead recommends a 3-person transitional board (appointed by the Mayor of St. Louis, the President of the Board of Alderman, and the Governor) be put in place to direct school district operations. Many people saw no distinction between a "takeover" by the State and the institution of a transitional board.
2. Many were outraged at the thought of losing the power of their vote for the school board members. It was noted, however, that voter turnout for the School Board Election was in the range of 11%.
3. It was frequently asserted by forum participants that principals, teachers and parents support Superintendent Bourisaw.
4. The transitional board was set up for taxation purposes, not for governance.

B. Financial concerns

1. The financial summary of the report is as accurate and concise as any available.
2. Many expressed concern that education, in general, is under-funded.
3. Participants were concerned with recommendations for budget cuts, in the school district. One participant noted the need to "right-size" the district to reconcile operational expenditures with available revenue.
4. The State of Missouri should take responsibility for its role in the SLPSs budget deficit, especially concerning funds they owe to the school district

C. Omissions of the Report

1. The report does not address academics, and does not provide an adequate plan for improvement.
2. The report does not address socio-economic problems such as poverty, homelessness and domestic violence.

D. Strengths of the Report

1. The research in the report shows public schools are important to the St. Louis community. Many audience members were encouraged by the people involved in SLPS concerns and the opportunity to build a citizen group dedicated to improving education.
2. Members of the Special Advisory Committee are very experienced in education policy regarding the SLPSs .



St. Louis Children's Agenda

A Forum in the Series, *A Public Dialogue on Public Education*

Summary Outline of Forum #8

St. Louis Public Schools' Board of Education: A Candidate Forum

I. Date: March 24, 2007

II. Panelists: Candidates for the School Board Election

- *David Lee Jackson, Jr*
- *Bill Monroe*
- *Rev. Douglass Petty*
- *Jason Spray*
- *Katherine Wessling*

III. Summary: The following report outlines the responses of five candidates for the Board of Education of the St. Louis Public Schools (SLPSs) to questions from the moderator and attendees at the forum.

A. Opening Statements

1. **Petty:** I will bring an understanding of systems and a dedication to stewardship to the School Board.
2. **Jackson:** I am an SLPS parent and graduate. I will focus on academic achievement and education rather than issues of funding or charter schools. I am against the transitional school board takeover.
3. **Wessling:** I am an active SLPS parent and lawyer for abused women. As a board member I would advocate for parents and children, safety in education and quality education.
4. **Spray:** I am an educator who has previously worked in the SLPSs for eight years. I am an advocate for children's issues. I think too much emphasis is currently being placed on SLPS finance concerns.
5. **Monroe:** I am a resident of the City and graduate of the SLPSs. I have background in the military and as a St. Louis City police officer. I believe education is the key to societal improvement. I have great concern about the dysfunction of the school board. I have already attended the Missouri School Board Association's training sessions.

B. Moderator Questions

1. **Question 1: What is your vision for the SLPSs? What successes would you build on? What are the challenges that need to be addressed?**
 - a. **Jackson:** I support Supt. Bourisaw's Comprehensive School Improvement Program (CSIP) and the success of the magnet schools.

- b. **Wessling:** My vision is for a safe school environment offering the best education possible. I would build on the magnet schools. I would work on 1) improved morale of and support for teachers and 2) addressing the larger issues of poverty, homelessness and violence in the home within the context of the greater community – not expecting individual teachers or schools to be responsible for improving these issues.
- c. **Spray:** I support improvements to the curriculum, support and professional development of teachers, and higher teacher salaries. I would also support efforts to improve student discipline and provide safe schools.
- d. **Petty:** I have a six-point goal strategy for the SLPSs.
 - 1. A healthy, functional school board
 - 2. Board support of Superintendent Bourisaw and her improvement plan, the CSIP
 - 3. Reacquisition of provisional accreditation and later full accreditation
 - 4. Community engagement and input
 - 5. Staff development and research to identify internationally affective strategies to improve urban education programs
 - 6. Ensuring that children are educated, which necessitates the examination of inadequate funding for Special Education.
- e. **Monroe:** My vision is to heal the Board. I would improve job readiness and target socio-economic issues, such as homelessness and poverty.

2. Question 2: How would you address the financial difficulties of the St. Louis Public Schools?

- a. **Wessling:** develop proper funding formula in Jefferson City; support public money with community donations and support; and revise the budget to ensure that spending is appropriate.
- b. **Spray:** community outreach and media coverage of SLPS successes; state and federal grants
- c. **Petty:** conduct a financial assessment to pinpoint spending and deficits, and use it to reform the budget; utilize a "fund developer" to assist the grant writer by soliciting private and corporate funding.
- d. **Monroe:** advocate for increased spending on education in lieu of sports and entertainment; instate bonds, levys and taxes; decrease outsourcing of services to the schools
- e. **Jackson:** create a non-profit entity within the school system to draw additional funds; pursue the "casino dollars" due to the SLPSs; I support the current lawsuit regarding the funding formula for the SLPSs.

3. Question 3: Changes to the governance of the SLPSs have been proposed and, barring legal or legislative action, a transitional board would be established. What would be your response as a newly elected board member?

- a. **Spray:** The elected board should work cooperatively with the transitional board, but not be silenced by it.
- b. **Petty:** a working relationship would likely be formed by the two boards
- c. **Monroe:** The SLPSs should launch a legal campaign against the state takeover. Regardless, I will continue to work for the success of the children.
- d. **Jackson:** I would continue to support children's education and the Superintendent's programs.
- e. **Wessling:** I would support the legal challenges to the state takeover, but I also agree that it would not be helpful to be antagonistic toward the transitional board, and that a collaborative working relationship between the two would be most effective.

C. Audience Member Questions

- 1. **Audience Question 1: Rev. Petty talks about a healthy School Board, but according to a recent article, gave individual members grades of "C" and "F." How does he explain the discrepancy?**
 - a. **Petty:** The grades were based on each person's capacity to be an effective leader within their current circumstances.

2. Audience Question 2: What is your vision for alternative schools and how would you implement that vision?

- a. **Monroe:** I believe in alternative schools and support the Superintendent's plan regarding them.
- b. **Jackson:** I would expand the alternative schools and increase the roles of social services and the Dept. of Health & Human Services. I support efforts to channel these students back into the mainstream schools.
- c. **Wessling:** I agree with previous statements.
- d. **Spray:** I support alternative schools and would expand them at the younger grade levels for early intervention. Each child should have a specific behavior intervention plan to bring behavior under control and transition them back into the regular classroom.
- e. **Petty:** I agree with prior statements and I support a comprehensive special education program. Comprehensive assessment of the individual child is crucial. I support parental involvement and a formal reentry program to the traditional schools.
- f. **Jackson:** Alternative schools and comprehensive special education are two distinct things. The CSIP addresses some of these complex issues.

3. Audience Question 3: As a board member, what will you do to safeguard state and federal programs such as Chapter One, Title One and Title Nine Programs?

- a. **Jackson:** I would like to set up an in-house, not-for-profit entity within the schools to solicit funds to continue support to such programs.
- b. **Wessling:** These programs are required by law, so we just "make it happen."
- c. **Spray:** I would try to ensure continued funding for a wide range of such programs to cater to each student's strengths.
- d. **Petty:** I do support such programs, but I think quality financial management is also necessary for school success.
- e. **Monroe:** I would like to institute committees to advise the board on special interests such as this, and implement board decisions directly.

4. Audience Question 4: How will you address the negative image of the SLPSs that is currently being portrayed in the media and in political circles?

- a. **Wessling:** close communication with community members is important
- b. **Spray:** publicize some of the many positive occurrences of the district
- c. **Petty:** rather than defending oneself, the best course of action is to present the evidence of your work and let it speak for itself
- d. **Monroe:** revise the structure of board meetings so that they are more collaborative and open to parent and community involvement; facilitate a less authoritarian board presence
- e. **Jackson:** promote positive SLPS action; bring the board to the people to promote community involvement.

5. Audience Question 5: Will you contest the state intervention?

- a. **Spray:** yes, and I have joined the Save Our Schools group.
- b. **Monroe:** yes, and I would ensure the SLPS attorney had resources to make every necessary legal inquiry into the state's position on SLPS accreditation and the transitional board.
- c. **Jackson:** Yes. I am a member of Save Our Children's education legal fund, and encourage donations. A parent group is also filing a lawsuit with The Champagne Law Firm.
- d. **Wessling:** Yes I will also support action against the state takeover.

IV. Background Information: St. Louis Public School Board elections occur on April 3, 2007. Candidates are vying for two open positions out of seven total.

On 3/22/07, the Missouri State Board of Education voted 5-1 to revoke accreditation of the St. Louis Public Schools. The state approved a three-person transitional board to take over leadership of school district on June 15, 2007 and serve for six years. The current board will continue to exist but will not have any power or authority in the district.¹ MO Commissioner of Education D. Kent King supported this action "because of steady declines in academic performance in the St. Louis Public Schools, concerns about long-term financial stability and turmoil in the district's leadership."¹

In January the school board voted 4-3 against having the School District's attorney challenge the state takeover.² Other groups are considering legal action against the state of Missouri.

The Committee for Education Equality, comprised of 524 MO school districts, is in the midst of a lawsuit against the state of Missouri claiming that its current funding formula does not provide enough funds for an adequate education, nor does it distribute them fairly.³

V. Notes/Recommendations:

- A. The audience and candidates focused on several main topics as issues of concern for the St. Louis Public Schools:
 - 1. Loss of school accreditation
 - 2. School safety and behavioral concerns
 - 3. Legal actions to challenge the institution of a transitional board of education
 - 4. School budget concerns and state funding
 - 5. Academic achievement
 - 6. The poor image of SLPSs in the media and among the general populace (community support)
 - 7. School board dysfunction
 - 8. The socio-economic problems of St. Louis City as a whole, and how this affects the public schools

- B. The candidates, in general, named the following strengths of the district.
 - 1. The Magnet Schools
 - 2. Superintendent Diane Bourisaw and her Comprehensive School Improvement Program
 - 3. An increasing morale among SLPS teachers

- C. Many candidates supported a legal challenge to the state takeover. Being that the two board seats available were held by persons who have voted against such action in the past, the new board could now have a majority in favor of such a challenge.⁴

¹ Morris, Jim. "State Board De-accredits St. Louis Public Schools: Businessman Nominated to Lead Transition Board," March 2007. Missouri Dept. of Elementary and Secondary Education. <http://dese.mo.gov/news/2007/SLPSaccreditation.htm> (accessed April 6, 2007).

² Giegerich, Steve. "New Board Members to Fight Takeover of Schools." *St. Louis Post-Dispatch*, April 4, 2007.

³ Hoover, Tim. "School Funding Trial Ends." *The Kansas City Star*. March 30, 2007. www.kansascity.com/115/story/53303.html (accessed April 6, 2007).

⁴ Since the March 24th Forum, the elected board for the SLPS, with two newly-elected members, asked the Cole County Circuit Court to block a state intervention. After this appeal failed, the elected board authorized the expenditure of school district funds to mount a legal challenge to the authority of the appointed board. School district attorneys have initiated work on that challenge. Richard Sullivan, CEO of the appointed board, has stated that attorney fees for such legal work will not be paid for by the district.



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