

**STATEMENT  
FROM  
FRANKIE M. FREEMAN & WILLIAM H. DANFORTH**

We have been involved with the St. Louis Public Schools (SLPS) for two or more decades, Frankie M. Freeman as an interested citizen and William H. Danforth since being appointed Settlement Coordinator in 1995.

Thanks to the Missouri Department of Education and to Commissioner Margie Vandeven for recognizing the progress of the St. Louis Public Schools and restoring accreditation. Congratulations to Superintendent Kelvin Adams and the Special Administrative Board (SAB) for working in close partnership with each other and with teachers and families to achieve major improvement in the education of St. Louis children.

The St. Louis Public Schools have walked a long and difficult road to accomplish this improvement. After the settlement of the desegregation litigation in 1999, authority over the SLPS returned to its Elected School Board. Soon the SLPS was spending more than it was taking in; financial reserves were going from positive to negative; board members were micromanaging the SLPS, arguing publically with each other and with seven superintendents appointed in an eight year period; and faith in the competency of SLPS management was fading. Finally the State withdrew accreditation. In 2007 the Department of Education replaced the elected board with a Special Administrative Board (SAB). In less than a year, the SAB hired a new Superintendent, Dr. Kelvin Adams, who was given full responsibility for operating the SLPS under the oversight of the SAB. He was given the difficult challenge of improving a failing urban school system. Dr. Adams and the SAB have done just that. Public support has grown, academic performance has improved, budgets have been controlled and, finally, accreditation has been regained.

How does St. Louis ensure that the SLPS improvement continues? The first challenge is what to do about the governance of the system. Today's accomplishment was possible because of a badly-needed change from the elected board to the SAB. But the SAB is temporary, and there is no clear path to a more permanent arrangement.

Here is our advice:

- 1) Do not rush. Take full advantage of this opportunity to create the best possible system of governance for the Schools of St. Louis, one that will focus on providing high quality education.
  - a. The St. Louis Public Schools are very important to our children; do not risk reversing nine years of progress.
  - b. Do not just reverse course on governance without expecting to slide backwards.
- 2) Understand why the current system of governance has been successful. Our opinion -- The SAB hired a wise, able, honest and experienced educator as superintendent and gave him responsibility to operate the system. They gave advice and guidance but did not try to micromanage; rather the SAB and the superintendent agreed upon plans, trusted one another and functioned as a team.
- 3) Learn as much as possible from experienced educators here and elsewhere about what has worked and what has not in other communities. Get ideas from a number of experts. Consider building a team of advisors. One could ask, for example, are elected or appointed boards more likely to be successful in large, complex urban communities?
- 4) Before making governance changes, resolve the current legal dispute over the allocation of tax monies and try to encourage all who care about the education of St. Louis children to work together for the good of all.
- 5) Finally we call on all interested parties not to jump to conclusions, but instead to collaborate in creating a governance structure that will carry forward the progress of recent years. We suggest that Dr. Adams and the SAB start the process by sharing their conclusions, warnings and advice. Others may join in with their ideas. The rest of us should be patient while the board of education collects and analyzes appropriate information.