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MISSOURI HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Chuck Basye

State Representative
District 47

Melissa Randol

Executive Director

Missouri School Boards Association

2100 I-70 Drive SW

Columbia, Missouri 65203

February 18, 2021

Dear Ms. Randol:

For several weeks running, my colleagues and I have listened to a succession of misleading and inaccurate statements by MSBA officials about both existing state education data as well as the details of several sorely needed reform measures under consideration by my colleagues and me in the Legislature.

Worse, your organization is using taxpayer dollars to spread those misstatements far and wide via legislative alerts and other communication to members — falsehoods that no doubt are being used to scare and frighten Missouri families who for too long have been deprived educational options that meet the needs of their children.

In the interest of setting the record straight and ensuring that this vital discussion take place amid facts, not fear, I offer the following fact-check to MSBA's erroneous assertions – and ask that you update all MSBA communications to accurately reflect these missing or misspoken details.

Charter school expansion

At a Feb. 2 hearing of the House Education Committee, MSBA associate executive director Susan Goldammer again repeated the discredited assertion that public charter schools lack sufficient accountability. Her sworn testimony followed a similar appearance, filled with similar inaccuracies, by Cape Girardeau School Board member Casey Cook, who represented MSBA at a Senate Education Committee earlier this session.

In fact, public charters arguably are more accountable, and unlike district schools can be (and are) shut down for poor performance.

Missouri data shows that charter public schools in both St. Louis and Kansas City, the only jurisdictions where such schools now operate, overall **outperform the traditional local school district** when looking at both academic achievement and academic growth.

Among Black students, charters do an even better job, particularly in the city of St. Louis where 88% of charter public schools achieve better outcomes than district public schools. In fact, Black student achievement in both Kansas City and St. Louis is 2-3 times greater than in Boone, Greene, and Cape Girardeau counties, where charters are not currently allowed.

This suggests that providing alternatives for Missouri's families would have the effect of increasing outcomes for all students, in line with the research on the impact of school choice overall.¹

Contrary to your employee's assertion, public charter schools must comply with stringent public reporting and performance standards regarding governance, financial oversight and performance management, including annual fiscal reviews by independent auditors.

The Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE) Annual Performance Report for traditional district schools that you cite as evidence of stringent accountability is far from a gold standard. Academic outcomes account for just 42% of the overall score compared to

¹ Gill, Brian. The Effect of Charter Schools on Students in Traditional Public Schools: A Review of the Evidence. Education Next, Winter 2021, vol. 21, no.1.

70% or more of points in the approaches utilized in many states across the nation, including our neighbors in Tennessee. The result is that 98 percent of districts meet the criteria for full accreditation while just 16 percent of those districts are graduating more than half of their students proficient in math and reading.

Education Savings Accounts

While simultaneously bemoaning the supposed lack of accountability for charter public schools, MSBA's dire warning to its members reluctantly acknowledges that proposed legislation creating the Missouri Empowerment Scholarship Program "pile(s) on accountability measures" for the charitable educational assistance organizations that would grant scholarships so families could direct education resources to where they're most needed.

Here are just some of those "piled on" accountability measures for students and their parents:

- Ensures that students receive instruction in core subjects: English, math, social studies and science;
- Scholarship money can only be spent on 11 specific, qualified expenses; and,
- Parents who commit fraud can be charged with a misdemeanor crime.

Additionally, the program would give both the state Treasurer and Missouri State Auditor the authority to investigate fraud complaints and publicly disclose test results, graduation rates, financial impact and educational outcomes of the program.

Board Accountability

Amid the unceasing calls for "greater accountability," MSBA is decidedly opposed to a pair of measures that would **actually increase public accountability** over elected and appointed education bureaucrats at the state and local level.

It's telling that the lead item on a recent MSBA "action alert" regarding needed school reform focuses on a proposal outlining the process for citizens to initiate recall elections through petition signatures.

Local school board elections are among the least participated in of all our elected offices – for example, only 10 percent of registered voters participated in school board elections in St. Louis during the last municipal election. In the St. Louis suburb of Webster Groves, officials canceled the last school board election after the number of open seats exceeded the number of candidates.

This minimal participation invites special interest groups to pack local school boards, with little recourse. Recall elections for breach of public trust are a needed check and balance and an accepted voter empowerment tool at numerous levels of local government.

Similarly, a proposed 8-year term limit for State Board of Education members would align those appointed positions with identical existing limits on all of our major statewide elected office, and similarly mitigate against the influence of special interests. Eight years is ample time for any one person to hold the same public office, as is the case for our governor, attorney general and Legislature, among others.

If the pandemic's sustained disruption to learning and widespread struggles faced by Missouri families over the past year have taught me anything, it's that the status quo simply isn't working. As my colleagues and I work over the coming weeks and months to ensure a better future for our state's parents and students, I'd ask that MSBA stick to the facts, not scare tactics, and come evidence-based solutions that will help to improve our schools.

I would hope that honest testimony with accurate facts is part of the minimum ethics you would require of your staff and members. Even better would be an authentic openness to common sense reforms to address the shortcomings made so clear this year.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Charles R. Basye".

Rep. Chuck Basye

House Elementary and Secondary Education Committee, Chairman

