



Dr. Joyce Roberts, President  
Board of Education of the City of St. Louis

January 10, 2022

Mr. Charles Shields, President  
Missouri State Board of Education  
205 Jefferson Street  
Jefferson City, MO 65101

Dear President Shields and members of the Missouri State Board of Education:

I am writing to you regarding Item K on your agenda for the January 11, 2022 meeting of the State Board of Education. On behalf of the Board of Education of the City of St. Louis, I am respectfully asking you to do what is in your power to postpone your decision on the Charter School Application for St. Louis Voices Academy of Media Arts. Please postpone until St. Louisans have engaged in productive and long-overdue conversations about the future of our public education system and developed a citywide plan for education.

As you may recall, in January 2021, leaders of Saint Louis Public Schools (SLPS) announced the permanent closure of six schools and the reconfiguration of two others. Closing these schools was the most difficult decision our board has made. School closures are painful and emotional, not only for us as a board but also for the children, families, and employees we serve. They disrupt the stability of families, neighborhoods, and communities and none of us want to be faced with that decision again.

Although SLPS closures receive the most media attention, at least 15 charter schools have also closed in the past 20 years. One of the SLPS schools closed last year is in the 4<sup>th</sup> Ward, the same Ward where St. Louis Voices proposes to open.

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Saint Louis Board of Education  
801 N 11<sup>th</sup> St. Saint Louis, MO 63101



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The most recent census data shows that the population of children living in the 4<sup>th</sup> Ward decreased almost 60 percent in the last ten years. It is hard to see how the data supports opening a new school in that area at this time.

Our opposition to Agenda Item K is not an ideological stance against charter schools, competition, or school choice. Instead, we oppose the opening of any new schools in St. Louis until a plan for education can be developed.

Prior to school closures, the District spent over a year engaging with more than 1,000 St. Louisans through a series of community visioning workshops and focus groups to better understand what is needed to create a system of excellent schools. Through this process, we repeatedly heard that the public education system in St. Louis is under-resourced and difficult to navigate. The children of St. Louis suffer from this confusion and these inefficiencies.

In February 2021, the Board of Education unanimously passed a resolution in support of a moratorium on new school openings until a city-wide plan for education can be developed. In that resolution the Board asked for the support of other local and state elected officials. The City of St. Louis Board of Alderman answered our call; passing their own resolution on the topic by a vote of 24-1. The governing bodies of both the City and the school district stand together in recognizing the power of collaboration to develop a strong public education system for St. Louis's 44,000 school-aged children. We have already initiated the process to develop a citywide plan for education with the intent of including all stakeholders, including representatives from charter schools and their sponsors, in the planning conversations.

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We want our City's children to have quality options no matter where they choose to attend school. However, the lack of a solid foundation for the St. Louis education system breeds unhealthy competition among schools who are forced to fight for students, teachers, services, and tax dollars.

We believe that by working together to understand our current system and to re-imagine its future we can provide strong, viable, quality options for our City. However, progress requires the good faith efforts of all stakeholders. Opening or approving a new charter school now, prior to the development of a plan to strengthen our foundation, is not in the best interests of students and families and goes against the will of St. Louis' democratically elected officials and the people they represent.

On behalf of the children and families of St. Louis, I ask you to support our call for a temporary moratorium on new school openings by postponing the decision on St. Louis Voices Academy, or any other St. Louis charter schools, until a citywide plan for education can be developed.

Thank you for your time and attention to this matter.

Sincerely,

Dr. Joyce Roberts, President  
Board of Education of the City of St. Louis