



Guest Commentary: MASA Plan Falls Short of Quality Options for All Students

November 20, 2013 / by Guest Reporter / 0 Comment

The Missouri Association of School Administrators (MASA) recently released a proposal, "A New Path To Excellence," in an attempt to address unaccredited school districts and the laws governing student transfers once a district becomes unaccredited. In actuality this 'plan' simply asks for more time and more money to perpetuate the status quo.

Though the Missouri Charter Public Schools Association (MCPSA) and the Children's Education Alliance of Missouri (CEAM) agree the creation of a Missouri Achievement District is critical to improve the education of students in many of Missouri's unaccredited districts, there are a significant recommendations in this proposal that raise concerns.

Parents and their children simply deserve the right to choose the public educational option that best meets their needs. The right children in unaccredited districts

have today—the opportunity to access a better education immediately through the recent implementation of a transfer program—will no longer exist under the MASA proposal. Rather, under the MASA proposal the 75% of children who remain in Normandy and Riverview Gardens today, along with all the children in Kansas City and all the children in districts who will be unaccredited in the future would be forced to attend a school that is not meeting minimum state standards for ten years.

In practical terms this means a child in an unaccredited school's kindergarten today would not have the ability to transfer out of the district or to a charter public school until they were in high school. Even so, after ten years, under the MASA proposal their school would be lapsed and they



Katie Casas, State Director for
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would be forced to go to another school, in the unaccredited district, not of their choosing.

Furthermore, requiring a school to spend at least five years as a provisionally accredited school before it moves into the new “academically stressed” category and another five years before it is lapsed creates an unnecessary and arbitrary timeline that is likely to prevent most students from accessing a better education expeditiously.

The Achievement District briefly outlined in the MASA plan really isn’t the establishment of a new governing body but the creation of a division within the current Department of Education that will govern regional districts who in turn govern unaccredited schools. This is a drastic deviation from the structure of the statewide achievement districts that have shown early success in Louisiana and Tennessee through their ability to exercise true transformation of failing schools.

Also, the requirement that a school in the MASA plan Achievement District returns to its original district once it has improved ignores the likely possibility that traditional school districts will be unlikely to maintain the improvements and school performance will once again decline.

Of greatest concern, however, is that under the MASA plan the Achievement District does not appear to have the ability to convert schools under its authority to charter schools. Attracting high quality charter schools has been one of the key elements to success for the Louisiana and Tennessee statewide achievement districts. Not giving a Missouri Achievement District this same authority would be a devastating oversight. There is also no role for parents, community members, and other civically significant organizations/people to play when determining the management structure for the school their children will be required to attend. Once again, more time, more money, and no significant change to benefit students.

The MASA plan is clearly an attempt to alter the implementation of law through the complicated rule making process. The only reason they would take this approach is so the changes they want can be made behind closed doors. Missouri families deserve better than that. They deserve a public debate done by our elected officials in the light of day.

We sincerely hope that as we move forward in the legislative process, we are all able to work together in ensuring all of Missouri’s children have the ability to attend a high quality accredited school. We feel that the plan recently developed by a regional ad hoc committee better addresses all or most of these concerns and demonstrates how a true Achievement District can benefit students and transform underperforming schools. As such, we hope that the committee will join us as we try to work with superintendents from across the state to address these important challenges.

Sincerely,

Dr. Douglas Thaman, Executive Director Missouri Charter Public Schools Association, Kate Casas, State Policy Director Children’s Education Alliance of Missouri

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