



School Reform: Have We Reached The Boiling Point?

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Parents continue to demand solutions to failing schools in Missouri. As an example, [five Saint Louis firefighters recently sued](#) three suburban school districts for failure to enroll their children under the Missouri Supreme Court's Turner decision. One of the firefighters is spending \$20,000 per year in Catholic school tuition just to avoid sending his children to Saint Louis public schools. This is in addition to taxes he has paid to fund the very school district that has failed him and his family. Like many families in similar situations, this family pays twice for securing the benefits of the "free public schools" that are guaranteed in our state constitution.

[My post last week](#) discussed a lawsuit between the Kansas City Public Schools and five suburban school districts regarding the implementation of the Turner decision. In a nutshell, Turner requires surrounding districts to enroll students who live in unaccredited (failing) school districts (i.e., the Saint Louis and Kansas City public schools and the Riverview Gardens School District). In effect, this is a limited school choice option under Missouri law.

Practically speaking, one issue is, how can the suburban districts in Kansas City and Saint Louis handle the potential influx of urban students? [A recent survey estimates](#) that approximately 13,500 students may flee Saint Louis schools for Saint Louis County under the Turner law. That is close to one quarter of school-age children in Saint Louis city. Pressure to abandon the Saint Louis public schools is apparently growing.

While it is easy to get caught up in the apparent chaos, why don't we disengage for a second and reflect on the deeper issues; specifically, the failure of urban education in the Saint Louis and Kansas City public schools. Perhaps the Turner decision is a blessing of sorts, compelling both the legislature and the courts to address head-on comprehensive school reform, not only for our urban districts, but for all districts in Missouri.

[Teacher tenure reform](#) , [collective bargaining](#) , [charter school expansion](#) , [school closure](#) , and [expanded school choice](#) are on the table. The legislative session is just beginning to heat up. Perhaps Turner was merely the first act in an unfolding multi-act drama. If so, the script should promote an increase in accountability for teachers and school districts, and an expansion of school choice, including choice of private and parochial schools for students in failing public schools.

About the Author



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