



**ST. LOUIS ASSOCIATION OF COMMUNITY ORGANIZATIONS**  
5888 Plymouth Avenue, Saint Louis MO 63112  
314-361-9406, [www.slaco-mo.org](http://www.slaco-mo.org)

January 12, 2021

#### **SLACO Response to closing of St. Louis Public School**

We mourn the loss of our neighborhood schools. For decades, a once impressive school system in the city has been abandoned, defunded, and cannibalized by ideological actors. Now we are being asked to pay the price in the form of another round of school closures. Politicians howl, now, when the price is due. Meanwhile those policies that hollowed out school funding and shifted students out of the system are left untouched, and even unremarked upon. We must have an honest conversation about what we have lost and why.

The loss of our neighborhood schools is the loss of community. A broader look at the role of public schools in our communities shows that they are so much more than a vehicle for improving test scores. A neighborhood school is a community center. Parents of children all within the same block meet each other there. A neighborhood takes ownership of a school, takes pride in its appearance, sponsors sports teams, invests in local partnerships, and rejoices as generations follow each other through its doors. Our current obsession with school choice, bussing kids across town, and the madcap expansion of Charter Schools strains every part of the system and removes the neighborhood school as a community pillar.

The same day that the Board of Aldermen passed a unanimous resolution condemning school closures, they moved forward on a slew of bills tax abating properties. Not even seeing the direct consequences of offering layers and layers of unnecessary tax breaks to developers could make them stop for a single day. An empty resolution without any legal standing for our schoolchildren. Legally binding tax cut after tax cut for developers.

Tax abatements, as much as they offend our sense of justice, however, are not the chief cause of our current troubles. While officials claim that school closures are driven mainly by population loss, this simply cannot be true. The city's population has fallen considerably from its 1960s heyday. But the population has been stable for the past ten years since the last round of closings. The public schools are not losing money and students because the city is losing population. They are losing money and students to Charter Schools.



**St. Louis, MO:**  
*Academy/Sherman Park*  
*Benton Park*  
*Benton Park West*  
*Better Bevo Now*  
*Chain of Rocks*  
*Clifton Heights*  
*Downtown*  
*Downtown Dutchtown*  
*Fairground*  
*Holly Hills*  
*Hyde Park*  
*Kingsville*  
*Kingsway East*  
*Kingsway West*  
*Lewis Place/Visitation*  
*Lindenwood Park*  
*Marine Villa*  
*North Hampton*  
*North Pointe*  
*Revitalization of Baden*  
*Shaw Neighborhood*  
*Skinker DeBaliviere*  
*Southwest Garden*  
*S.P.U.D. Skinker, Page, Union, Delmar*  
*Tower Grove East*  
*Tower Grove South*  
*Union Communion Ministries*  
*Walnut Park East*  
*Walnut Park West*  
*We Live Here - The Ville*  
*West End Neighbors*  
**East St. Louis, IL:**  
*Concerned Citizens of the 12th Precinct*

Most city politicians are unwilling to say this out loud because of moneyed interests who support their campaigns. We cannot fix our problems if we cannot admit what they are. SLACO calls upon St. Louis and St. Louisans to Save Our Schools. There is no better time than now, as we elect a new Mayor, half the Board of Aldermen, and three School Board members, to insist upon three changes:

- View the Neighborhood School as a community center rather than a testing center. Add trade schools, community colleges, and other child and community programs to the schools to make the buildings viable.
- Pass a law, either at the state or local level, that protects the school budget from tax abatement predation. Either do not allow abatements to cut from the schools' budget or replace the lost funds with general revenue.
- Stop expanding Charter Schools. Review the schools currently in existence and make them either public or private. Public schools should serve their neighborhood; private schools should not receive government money.

We join other calls to stop the current closures, especially Sumner High School, a national treasure. But we cannot continue to pursue policies for decades with foreseeable consequences, and then act surprised at those consequences.

The closure of our neighborhood schools is a predictable consequence of our current policies, if we do not try to change them, the predictable consequences will continue.  
Sincerely,



Kevin B. McKinney, Executive Director, SLACO  
Tax ID 43-1155562

