



Time to Say “Goodbye” to Mr. Blaine

Proposed Amendment would repeal outdated, discriminatory provision in Missouri Constitution

Blaine Amendments appear in 40 state constitutions, including Missouri’s. They are vestiges of anti-Catholic sentiments that were popular in the late 19th and early 20th centuries in America as large immigrant Catholic populations moved to the new world seeking a better life for themselves and their children. Named for James G. Blaine, a speaker of the U.S. House of Representatives who first championed the idea in 1875, the amendments provide that no school funds or benefits shall be expended in aid of “sectarian” (read Catholic) sects or denominations.

Blaine Amendments were popular at a time when some saw the building of Catholic schools as a papal plot to take over America. Missouri has one of the strictest Blaine Amendments in the nation, and it makes our state an odd man out in federal education programs that are supposed to provide services to all school children, public and private alike. Where in most other states public school teachers can enter a Catholic school to provide educational services under a federal program, such practices are discouraged in Missouri for fear of running afoul of the state’s Blaine Amendment.

As a consequence, the federal government often bypasses the state of Missouri and hires a private contractor to provide

the services to the private school children. This sets up a dual universe of administration that wastes taxpayer dollars. Getting rid of Blaine would actually save the state of Missouri money.

It is time to politely say goodbye to Mr. Blaine. His idea has stymied meaningful school reform and frustrated the desire of parents to educate their children in a school that corresponds to their own moral convictions. In the 21st century, people expect to have some choice in their children’s education, just as they have some say in who their health care provider will be.

The old distrust of Catholics and Catholic schools is rapidly vanishing. Even in areas of the state where Catholics are a distinct minority, they are a welcomed part of communities. Meanwhile, support for giving parents more choices in their children’s education continues to grow. Perhaps it is fitting that this year the sponsor of an amendment to repeal Blaine is State Rep. Shane Schoeller, a Baptist from Southwest Missouri.

Ballot Title of the Proposed Constitutional Amendment

Voters will read this ballot title when entering the voting booth on Nov. 6, 2012, if the Missouri General Assembly approves Rep. Shane Schoeller’s joint resolution.

“Shall the Constitution of the State of Missouri be amended to end discrimination against churches, religious organizations, and their members while ensuring and safeguarding separation of Church and State as required by the First Amendment of the U.S. Constitution?”

Want to Help?

Contact the Missouri Catholic Conference and join our Citizens’ Network to get updates on this important issue.

- Call 1-800-456-1679
- Email mocatholic@mocatholic.org
- Go to MOcatholic.org

“As those first responsible for the education of their children, parents have the right to *choose a school for them* which corresponds to their own convictions. ...

Public authorities have the duty of guaranteeing this parental right and of ensuring the concrete conditions for its exercise.”

Catholic School Creates Environment of Success

By Melissa Varner

When you walk through St. Louis Catholic Academy, you might mistake Meke Smith for a father of one of the students.

He knows each one of them by name, the exams they have coming up and the clubs they participate in.

He talks about the achievements and accomplishments of his students with pride. He knows their personalities: who is the class clown or the social butterfly. But he isn't their father; he's their principal.

Although he's friendly with the students, Smith's goal isn't to be their friend. His goal, and that of the rest of the faculty and staff, is to put the students in a position where they can be in a relationship with Christ and to help them achieve success academically.

Instilling these values onto 165 pre-K through eighth-graders (less than half of whom are Catholic) might seem like an impossible task, but Principal Smith makes it sound easy.

"We have to make sure that everybody who's here, from the person who sweeps the floors to the person who runs the building, understands that we all teach two things no matter our subject, no matter our responsibilities: We all teach language arts because children need to learn how to speak, and we all teach religion because children need to have faith."

Smith stressed that while the school seeks to develop the total person, religion serves as the basis for everything they do, whether it's Spanish class, core religion courses, after-school violin lessons, athletics, choir or astronomy club.

Smith also doesn't let the children's

demographics dissuade him. Seventy to 75 percent of the students at St. Louis Catholic Academy qualify for free and reduced lunch, a rough estimate of poverty according to the government, and most of the children come from single-parent homes. Roughly a quarter of the students have a primary caregiver that isn't their mom or dad.

While Smith noted that these are challenging circumstances, he explained that he and the rest of the faculty and staff hold the students to the same, or higher, standards as they would students from any other background.

"We will give them the support they need because of the difficulties of their background, but they are not allowed to use their background as an excuse for not performing, and we, as an institution, are not allowed to use their background as an excuse for not performing," Principal Smith said.

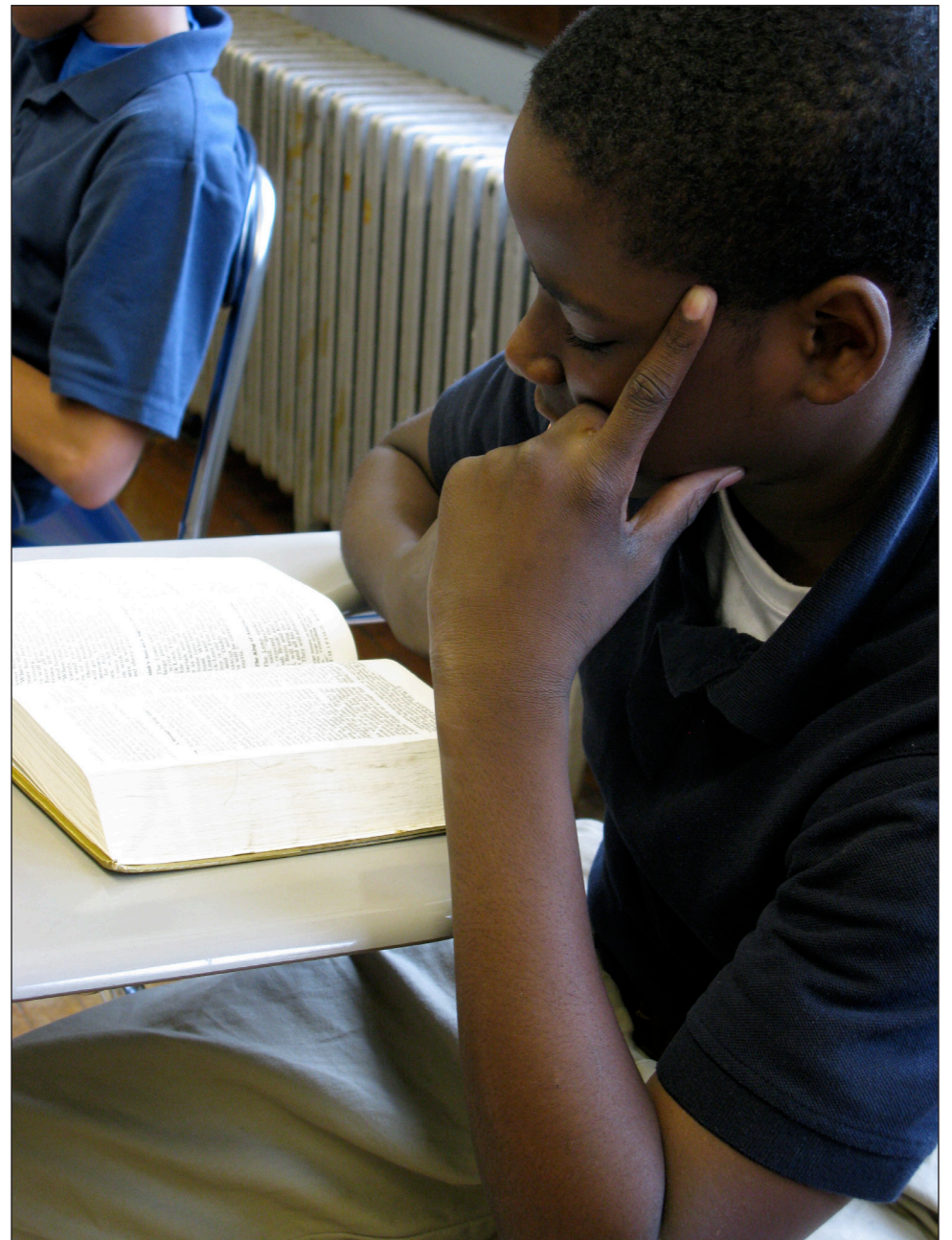
Smith also credits the faculty and staff's expectations of the students for their success.

"We have dozens upon dozens of success stories ... where this school has been a transformative influence in their lives, and not just their lives, but their families' lives," he said.

And while Smith and the faculty are completely invested in the students, they realize that they are only part of the equation because student success also depends on the parents' investment in the child's education.

"We do everything we can to bring our parents into the fold," Smith said. "No school that's successful can have parents that simply push their children through the door."

This is why St. Louis Catholic



A St. Louis Catholic Academy student reads during class.

Academy has an employee who works full time on parent communication and integration.

Emily Bland is the parent liaison for St. Louis Catholic Academy, one of the few schools that has such a position. Like Smith, Bland stressed the importance of working alongside parents. She said she views her job as a partnership, not as a service provider.

"We're in this together; it's not just me educating [their] child. We all need to work together," Bland said.

She said that while a lot of parents have the best intentions, they just don't realize the resources that are available to them and their chil-

dren. For instance, if a parent realizes their child needs tutoring, but thinks that an expensive private tutor is the only option, she can point them toward less costly choices, such as volunteer tutors that come to the school.

Bland also arranges events for the parents, such as the parent appreciation night last fall, which included dinner and a DJ.

Other assistance the school offers includes its Family Resource Center, complete with computers and printers for parents who don't have one at home. The center also serves as a library with books about parenting, adult fiction and other

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Public Education is More Than Public Schools

By Jay Barnes

What makes education ‘public’? Is it our commitment to school buildings and bureaucracies? Or is it our commitment to children?

I believe ‘public’ education should be about helping all children in our state achieve their highest possible level of success – whether those children attend public schools, private schools or are home-schooled.

In my legislative district, which includes parts of Jefferson City and Cole County, we are fortunate to have a rich mix of public, private and religious schools, as well as many parents who home school their children.

All of these schools add to the quality of life in Jefferson City and Cole County. It is no accident, for example, that this area has one of

the best-educated workforces in the state of Missouri.

What would happen if there were only public schools? Well, it would certainly make Jefferson City and Cole County a less attractive place to live. This would be true not because the public schools in my area provide poor education, but because parents want options, just like people want options in their health care providers.

Educating children is not easy. For some children, the local public school is not a good fit. And some parents want their child to receive an education that is grounded in their religious faith.

There would be a fiscal impact, too, if our nonpublic schools closed down. According to the Missouri Depart-

ment of Elementary and Secondary Education, statewide there are 83,682 nonpublic school students. If all of these students attended public schools, the state of Missouri would have to shell out an additional 815 million in tax dollars.

Other Midwestern states such as Iowa, Minnesota and Illinois recognize the sacrifices parents make when they educate their children in a setting other than a public school. These states offer tax deductions or credits for the K-12 expenses parents incur in educating their children.

I think it is time for Missouri to do the same thing. To help ensure families have better access to the education of their choice, I am sponsoring a bill in the Missouri General Assembly this year to allow par-

ents a tax deduction for educational expenses related to attending K-12 school (public, private or religious) or home schooling.

HB 1133 would allow parents a deduction of up to \$2,500 for each child for which they have expenses, such as school tuition, tutoring and school supplies, including computer software.

I believe all Missouri K-12 school parents should be able to educate their child in a school best suited for their children. One size (school) does not fit all. It is time we set aside public versus private school debates and put the educational needs of children first.

Jay Barnes is a state representative representing Jefferson City and parts of Cole County.

Continued: Catholic School Creates Environment of Success

books parents can check out to read with their children. The school has an automated call system to make it easier for parents to keep up with their children.

While St. Louis Catholic Academy has a lot to offer, it relies on fundraisers, private donations and financial assistance from organizations such as the Today and Tomorrow Educational Foundation (TTEF) to maintain its resources. A substantial portion of the school’s budget comes from TTEF, which helps private and faith-based schools in the St. Louis area generate financial assistance for economically disadvantaged students. Smith also credited Father Jeff Vomund for his work in establishing fundraisers to raise money for scholarship assistance.

According to Principal Smith, about 60 percent of the families from St. Louis Catholic Academy receive some sort of financial assis-

tance. Smith also said that most of the money the school receives that is nonrestricted goes toward tuition assistance for the families. Without financial help from organizations such as TTEF, many of the children at St. Louis Catholic Academy might not be able to afford the opportunity to attend the school. Instead, they might have to look at less expensive options, including public schools such as those in the unaccredited district of the City of St. Louis.

This is why the MCC supports legislation that will assist families in failing districts who want to send their children to schools such as St. Louis Catholic Academy.

Melissa Varner is the communications director for the Missouri Catholic Conference.

Right: A St. Louis Catholic Academy student studies in class. The school has students from 30 different ZIP codes attending.



Church and State: Partners for the Common Good

When fire gutted the Missouri Capitol, St. Peter Interparish School came to the rescue

By Joseph Gulino

St. Peter Interparish School has the distinction of being the “Ninth Capitol of Missouri.” For many years, Jefferson City struggled to remain the state capital as other Central Missouri towns vied to have the seat of government moved to their communities. In February 1911, this controversy came to a head when the Missouri State Capitol was struck by lightning and burned. The pastor of St. Peter Parish, Fr. Joseph Selinger, and the Parish Committee quickly offered use of the school to the Missouri Legislature at no charge. The offer was accepted and for the remainder of the 46th General Assembly the House of Representatives met in session in St. Peter’s Hall on the second floor of the school building.

William Jennings Bryan, noted American orator and political leader, addressed the Joint Legislative Assembly in St. Peter’s Hall during the session. School classrooms

were used for committee meetings and school classes for the children were held in private homes. The Senate met in session in the Supreme Court Building.

A short time after the House of Representatives moved into the school building, the Missouri State Legislature voted to keep the seat of government in Jefferson City, probably in large part because of the community’s rapid response to the crisis and the generosity and concern of St. Peter Parish.

In times of disaster and human need the legislative stance regarding the “separation of church and state” was modified and adjusted because we really were (and still are) all one in spirit (the spirit of American Missourians).

In a time of normalcy, can we not look with a compassionate eye at modifying the rules

and regulations in place today to decrease the financial burden parents and faculty members of parochial schools face in educating students? Does compassion and co-operation only have to arise from tragedy and grief? Yes, we do choose to exist and be separate from the governance of public school systems, but schools that are successfully educating the children of Missouri are saving the citizens of Missouri many tax dollars. Full funding of parochial schools in Missouri would be an unreasonable request, but funding assistance in forms such as tax deductions or credits for other K-12 educational expenses, as offered by other states, would be a logical place to look and would be greatly appreciated.

Joseph Gulino is the principal of St. Peter Interparish School in Jefferson City.

This article is an excerpt. To read the entire article, go to MOcatholic.org.



In this photo provided by the Missouri State Archives, the Missouri Capitol burns after being struck by lightning the evening of Feb. 5, 1911, in Jefferson City, Mo. City firefighters, state penitentiary inmates and fire crews from Sedalia, Mo., who rushed by train to assist from more than 60 miles away, fought the blaze but the building was a total loss. (AP Photo/Missouri State Archives, Thomas Cooper)