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New Study Sets Priority Areas and Recommends Strong Standards So All St. Louis Students Have Access to a Quality Education

St. Louis, MO – The National Association of Charter School Authorizers (NACSA) and IFF, in conjunction with the St. Louis Mayor's Office, released a new study today analyzing the performance, location, and enrollment of both St. Louis Public Schools (SLPS) and charter schools in 2007-08. The study - *Place, Performance, and Promise* – determined that St. Louis students have limited access to a quality school in their neighborhood. In fact, in 2008 only one St. Louis Public School neighborhood school and three magnet schools met Missouri State Standards for academic performance. None of the fourteen charter schools in the City met the Missouri State Standard. This leaves some 52,000 school age children without access to a quality public education in the City of St. Louis.

The study provides city leaders and school reform stakeholders with recommendations to determine precisely where in St. Louis the greatest need for academically performing schools exists. With only four SLPS schools and no charter schools achieving this standard, this study sets priorities for improvement by using the concept of "Tier 1" performance to measure the relative need for performing schools. Tier 1 schools are those that perform at one-half the state standard or better for 2007-08.

"I'm pleased to see that many of the initiatives launched this school year by Superintendent Kelvin Adams and the SAB of the St. Louis Public Schools, such as Pilot Schools and Full Service Schools are targeting these priority areas," said Mayor Francis Slay. "I look forward to working with SLPS leaders and new charter school developers in supplying even more quality schools in these key zip codes."

"This is a valuable report that looks at public education through the eyes of St. Louis parents," said Greg Richmond, President of NACSA, which funded the study. "Those parents are asking, 'Where can I find a good school for my child that is close to home?' For tens of thousands of them, the answer is that they can't. This isn't about looking back and assigning blame. This is about looking forward and creating new, good schools for St. Louis families."

"This is not a bricks and mortar study. It is a school improvement study. The IFF study highlights the areas of our city in which children need access to a high quality education. We are working to make that happen," said Dr. Kelvin Adams, Superintendent of the St. Louis Public Schools."

Key findings from the report include:

- Only four of the 91 SLPS schools and 14 charter schools studied met Missouri State Standards in 2007-08, all of which were SLPS schools – three magnet schools and one neighborhood school. These schools serve 1,167 children or 3.5 percent of students enrolled in SLPS.

- Fourteen additional SLPS schools and one charter school performed at one-half Missouri State Standards. Combined with the four schools that meet Missouri State Standards, these 19 schools provide a total of 7,818 seats of Tier 1 capacity and serve 22.9 percent of the students enrolled in public schools. An additional 26,369 performing seats are required to meet the needs of public school students.
- Elementary school students have better access to Tier 1 schools than middle and high school students. More than 60 percent of Tier 1 seats are in elementary schools; 32.3 percent are in middle schools; and 5 percent are in high schools.
- Magnet and neighborhood schools provide almost all of the Tier 1 capacity (6,900 seats). Only one charter school contributes to Tier 1 capacity (918 seats).
- There are no Tier 1 seats in neighborhood or charter high schools, and only a few hundred in two selective magnet schools. Moreover, more than 1,500 high school students are estimated to have dropped out from 2005-07.
- The neighborhoods included in four adjacent zip codes on the city's north side had no Tier 1 schools – at any grade level. These four areas had a need for 9,714 performing seats. They include the communities between Forest Park and Broadway and between Union and Grand, as well as to the east between Delmar and St. Louis (63115, 63113, 63106 and 63108).
- The neighborhoods included in two adjacent zip codes on the city's south side had a need for an additional 6,476 performing seats. These include the area between Kingshighway and Grand and east of Grand between Sydney and Meramec (63116, 63118).

“Hoping to find a better school alternative, many families travel their children across the city to schools that are no better than the local neighborhood school,” said IFF CEO and President Trinita Logue. “The community-specific information in this report can be used to involve and educate parents about school performance, and to work with them to improve educational opportunities for their children.”

IFF’s methodology draws upon general population trends, school attendance, academic performance and the physical capacity of schools. Using this data, which are compiled citywide and at zip code levels, the study then ranks each zip code from one to 16, with one representing the area with the greatest shortage of performing schools. Each zip code is further analyzed and a detailed individual profile is included in the report.

Place, Performance, and Promise supports a place-based strategy that builds on the new education reform efforts already underway in St. Louis, such as the passage of SB 291 to strengthen charter school accountability, SLPS’ recently announced education initiatives including five Pilot Schools in five neighborhoods, and Mayor Francis G. Slay’s Charter 2.0 initiative. Specifically, the report recommends:

- Focusing on the six areas of St. Louis most in need of performing schools. A plan to quickly improve existing public schools and bring new schools to these communities would address 52 percent of the need citywide.

- Increasing access to existing but underutilized Tier 1 schools. A strategy to occupy more seats in these nearly performing schools could reach more than 2,700 students immediately.
- Improving charter schools so that they offer a performing option to students.
- Tracking and recapturing the estimated 1,500 high-school eligible students that dropped out from 2005-07.
- Engaging in strategic long-term planning using neighborhood, performance, and facilities information.

About NACSA:

NACSA (www.qualitycharters.org) is the trusted resource and innovative leader working with educators and public officials to increase the number of high quality charter schools in cities and states across the nation. NACSA provides training, consulting, and policy guidance to authorizers and education leaders interested in increasing the number of high quality schools and improving student outcomes.

About IFF:

Founded in 1988, IFF (www.iff.org) is a nonprofit community development financial institution committed to strengthening nonprofits, their clients and communities through affordable financing, real estate consulting, and research and public policy. It serves nonprofits in the Midwestern states of Illinois, Indiana, Iowa, Missouri and Wisconsin.