



Chris L. Nicastro, Ph.D. • *Commissioner of Education*

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November 4, 2011

Mr. Jim French, Education Division Chair
Missouri Baptist University
One College Park Drive
St. Louis, MO 63141-8698

Dear Mr. French:

I note with concern your recent public statements that the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education has not provided sufficient guidance to Missouri Baptist University (MBU) relating to the performance of Imagine charter schools.

Current state law establishes the charter agreement negotiated by your institution with each charter as the primary device to ensure charter quality. To compensate for this oversight, sponsors receive 1.5 percent of the total state and local funding allocated to the charter school. In the case of the Imagine charter schools in St. Louis, Missouri Baptist University, received \$343,856 during the 2010-2011 school year.

The Department's role is limited to an initial review of these agreements for minimal statutory compliance. There is no authority given to the Department for ongoing administrative oversight of the schools.

Your request for Department review of school reform plans did not occur until after media coverage began to focus on the issues surrounding the Imagine schools. Although MBU has been a charter sponsor since 2006, you have only recently expressed concerns over the Department's role relating to charters.

In your meeting with Department staff on September 21, 2011, you acknowledged the need for MBU to increase its oversight of the charter schools it sponsors.

We do not view it as the intent of the Missouri General Assembly that the Department engage in intrusive regulatory oversight of charter schools, or to perform the administrative responsibilities of the sponsor. However, it appears from your public statements that MBU desires our recommendations in this matter. Let me be specific:

- 1) Announce immediately that the Imagine charter schools will close at the end of the current school year.
- 2) Work closely with the St. Louis Public Schools and other charter schools to ensure the smooth transition of students from Imagine to other public schools.

The Department has provided as much technical assistance as current statutes and our current resources allow. Should you need additional assistance, please contact my office.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Chris L. Nicastro".

Chris L. Nicastro
Commissioner of Education

c: Doug Thaman
State Board of Education

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