

Week of November 9, 2009



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Educated Citizenry 2020 Committee Developing Long-term Plan for Missouri Schools

Perhaps just as important as what takes place during the legislative session is what takes place outside of session. For many lawmakers, much of our interim work involves our committees, many of which are charged with studying and researching specific issues and then providing recommendations to the Legislature come January. With the 2010 legislative session less than two months away, the Missouri Senate [Educated Citizenry 2020 Committee](#), on which I serve as chairman, has been busy holding meetings in order to gather as much public input as we can.

The Missouri Senate Educated Citizenry 2020 Committee was established this year under [Senate Resolution 304](#) and is one of three “2020” committees charged with developing strategies for improving Missouri’s standing in the areas of education, job creation and health care coverage. The Educated Citizenry 2020 Committee, which will serve through Dec. 31, 2010, is responsible for creating a forward-thinking plan for improving the state’s educational system and determining where the state should stand in terms of education by the year 2020. Our eventual goal is to develop tactics for Missouri schools to consistently produce well-rounded individuals who are able to thrive in a competitive global market as a result of the quality of the education they received. I was fortunate to be named to the committee by Senate Leader Charlie Shields earlier this year and then chosen to serve as chairman by fellow committee members.

After holding a meeting in August where we began the process of determining our goals, we have since been working on developing long-term strategies for achieving those goals. Too often in the Legislature, lawmakers are focused on the present without looking too far ahead to the distant future. We tend to look at issues just one year at a time.

Unfortunately, this leads us to be reactive rather than proactive in our actions. In this committee, we have a great opportunity to focus several years down the road, which is exciting because we have time to really develop a tangible plan and the strategies for how to get there.

Ultimately, our state's economic fate is tied to the quality of our state's education. This is why it is critical to gather input from those invested in education—including teachers, administrators, parents and students—so we can put together a plan of action that is comprehensive, effective and executable. Our committee met last week (11/5) at the University of Central Missouri in Warrensburg and this week (11/9) at Confluence College Prep High School in St. Louis to hear public testimony on the future of education in Missouri. The public testimony focused on answering specific questions, such as what it will mean to be an educated citizen in the year 2020, what employers will require from their employees by the year 2020, what principles will anchor the state's decisions about education, and how to best balance the needs of Missouri students.

While there are many excellent public schools in this state, Missouri still has a long way to go, especially in improving accessibility to higher education. Missouri ranks in the bottom tier of states in the number of young adults with a degree past high school. To get us to the level where we want to be in terms of economic prosperity and growth, we need to stress the importance of higher education and develop policies that make it a priority. In addition, we need to broaden our focus. Though elementary, secondary and traditional higher education is obviously important, we must also turn our attention toward early childhood education, community and technical colleges, and life-long learning and re-training. All are connected to our state's future success.

I look forward to continuing our discussion of bold and innovative education solutions in these coming weeks leading up to session. I'm confident that the Educated Citizenry 2020 Committee will come to the table with a collection of ideas that will develop into a comprehensive, long-term plan for Missouri's educational system. I urge my colleagues to continue making education one of the Legislature's top priorities next year, despite a discouraging budget forecast. If we turn our backs on education in this state, we will inflict long-term damage to our economic stability. Missourians deserve better.

As always, please feel free to contact me or my staff with any questions or concerns at any time. We look forward to hearing your comments and suggestions and trying to answer any questions you may have. You can reach us by phone at 866-277-0882 (toll-free) or 573-751-2272, or by fax at 573-526-7381.

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