



# WEEKLY REPORT

State Senator Gary Nodler  
District 32



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## Logging on to Innovation

**JEFFERSON CITY**— Providing our children with the necessary resources to acquire a quality education is a top priority of the Missouri Legislature. What qualifies as a resource goes far beyond securing substantial funding for public schools. It includes making an investment in innovation.

The Senate this week approved a measure that does just that. As chairman of the Senate Education Committee, I support Senate Bill 912, which establishes a virtual school for Missouri K-12 public school students to “attend” using computers and digital technology. The legislation essentially creates a 525<sup>th</sup> public school district for Missouri. It does not intend for virtual schools to replace traditional public schools nor is it a way to streamline homeschooling, which is largely free from state government education requirements. Unlike homeschooling, the virtual curriculum extension would be subject to all laws applicable to Missouri's brick-and-mortar public schools, including the accreditation program, progress standards, performance reports and curriculum guidelines. This means that credits obtained from completion of an online course can be transferred to any Missouri public school district.

Similar Internet-based schools exist in a dozen other states, all of which have had a positive experience with the modernized learning opportunity. Missouri will be the first state in the Midwest to open new opportunities for those in grades K-12 who have special needs or interests.

Students have their own strengths and weaknesses. Some learn better with hands-on experience; others more quickly master subjects when they read from textbooks. By creating an alternative learning method via online classrooms, we will be empowering students who thrive on using technology or who are more likely to succeed academically outside of the traditional classroom setting. Under the legislation, first-year enrollment for the virtual school, which would begin operating by July 1, 2007, will be limited to 500 students. We expect the virtual school to be most appealing to and appropriate for public school students who are temporarily homebound, on an extended suspension or reside in school districts that don't offer certain supplemental courses. We can level the playing field for all public school students so no one falls behind and misses out on advancing their own education.

Students can have the best of both learning worlds. They aren't obligated to complete all their classes through the virtual program. Pupils of the virtual classrooms will use computers and the Internet at home to access lessons mirroring the in-classroom instruction of other students in their grade levels. Interaction with teachers and other students who are enrolled in the virtual school will also be made possible via chat rooms and various online social connections. Because of this student-teacher link, the students would still be active participants in their school districts, which will continue to receive 15 percent of the per-pupil amount set by the foundation formula. The measure is endorsed by the Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE) the Missouri School Boards Association and the Missouri State Teachers Association.

With this bill, we are enhancing the students' instructional opportunities in environments that are conducive to learning. By using the technology of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, virtual-school enrollees can learn at their own paces, track their progress and have a fair chance at getting an education that they can be proud of.

The measure now heads to the House for similar consideration. House passage will send the bill to the governor to be signed into law. There is a companion House bill, sponsored by Rep. Brian Baker, R-Belton that was voted on this week by the Senate Education Committee. I will keep you updated on the progress of the virtual school plan.

*Senator Gary Nodler represents the people of  
Newton, Jasper and Dade counties in the Missouri Senate*