



THE STOUFFER REPORT

Senator Bill Stouffer
Senate District 21

For the Week of:
Sept. 17, 2007

Capitol Building, Room 332
Jefferson City, MO 65101

Contact: Aaron Baker
(573) 751-1507

Continuing Quality Education Through the School Funding Formula

Even though the Legislature is not currently in session, the work we have done in Jefferson City continues to work for you. One of the most important issues to lawmakers and constituents is education. Schools in Mid-Missouri are now in full swing and students are receiving the best education thanks to legislation passed by the General Assembly in 2005.

The General Assembly created a new foundation formula that works to develop a school funding system — distributing education funds more equitably and moving the old program from one driven by tax rates to a system based on the differing needs of school districts. The old program simply no longer worked for Missouri. The new program is a step towards fair and quality education.

The foundation formula distributes state money to schools based on students' needs rather than local wealth based on tax revenue — giving every student an opportunity at the best education possible. The formula begins with a school district's average daily attendance and then gives additional credits for each student enrolled in special programs, such as students who qualify for free or discount lunch programs, students who are enrolled in special education, or students with low English proficiency.

The formula also sets a minimum per-pupil dollar figure based on the spending levels of schools that scored well on the state performance report and adjusts the figure according to varying property values and cost of living for each school district. Beginning in 2005, the foundation formula guaranteed that the state would spend at least \$6,117 per student.

Urban and suburban districts were compensated through the formula for the higher cost of educating a student in those areas. Smaller rural districts also received an extra \$15 million in grant money, which is particularly important to the schools in the senatorial district that I represent.

The estimated cost to the state is more than \$800 million phased in over the course of seven fiscal years. The Legislature has worked hard to increase funding over the past three fiscal years by more than half a billion dollars.

Despite the efforts of the General Assembly, more than 230 school districts in the state sought up to a \$1.3 billion increase in school funding, claiming state aid was currently not enough to adequately and equally educate Missouri students.

Missouri courts upheld the school funding formula by saying the funding system adopted by the Legislature “is a reasonable attempt to meet its obligations” under the state constitution. This decision recognizes that we are giving every child — from rural, suburban, and urban areas — an equal opportunity to a great education based on the school foundation funding formula we passed in 2005.

Courts are now listening to testimony on what additional funding should be included when determining if our state spends 25 percent of its budget on elementary and secondary education. Our state constitution requires that at least one-fourth of state revenue must be appropriated to schools.

The Legislature has created a funding strategy that does not favor one school district over another. As long as the General Assembly works together, we will continue to increase funding for our children’s educations because each Missouri child has the right to an education that is equal to the next.

For more information on the foundation formula, visit www.senate.mo.gov. And if you have questions or comments about any other issue, please call my office toll free (866) 768-3987 or send me an e-mail at bstouffer@senate.mo.gov.

- END -