



Legislative Successes for K-12 Schools

JEFFERSON CITY — With the school year now underway, it seems only fitting to highlight the many legislative successes for K-12 schools that came from the 2009 session of the General Assembly. Despite a downturn in the nation's and state's economy, Missouri passed one of the most meaningful education reform bills in the last decade, and, for the fourth year in a row, continued its commitment to fully fund the school funding formula — adding \$63 million for public schools, WITHOUT a tax increase.

That's a pretty remarkable feat, particularly in these tough economic times, and can be credited to fiscally responsible budgeting in recent years and the General Assembly's knowledge that funding education is the best investment it can make for Missouri residents.

Four years ago, the Legislature created a stronger school funding formula that distributes state aid to individuals based on student need, not assessed property values, and this has been a tremendous success for many of our school districts. Under this formula, funding for K-12 schools in District 2 has increased 24.26 percent, with a total of \$33.3 million in increases since fiscal year 2007. Our schools are set to receive \$160 million for this school year — a \$7.3 increase over the previous year.

This year, there is also a unique funding opportunity for K-12 classrooms with one-time budget funding available through federal stimulus dollars allocated through this year's budget. More than \$17 million will go to nine school districts in District 2 over the next two years, with each school deciding the best way to utilize this money to enrich education.

I would be remiss if I didn't also mention that once again the Legislature for the fourth year in a row also increased funding for higher education in support of our state's commitment to keep education our number one priority and to ensure our future workforce is the most educated in the nation. A new Senate Educated Citizenry 2020 Committee is studying how elementary, secondary, and higher education systems prepare students to be productive and successful citizens in Missouri and is in the process of creating long-term plans with the goal of making Missouri one of the top 10 states for education within the next 10 years.

Missouri also continued its commitment to education this year by passing one of the most meaningful education bills in the last decade. Among the measures passed are: developing performance standards for teachers; creating a method of obtaining teacher certification for individuals to teach in the areas of banking or financial responsibility; expanding virtual classrooms; and creating a non-profit P-20 Council to create a more efficient education system for grades P (preschool) to 20 (post secondary) to adequately prepare Missouri students for entering the workforce. My proposals to bring about more financial and educational accountability to charter schools and to require school districts to have a policy on seclusion rooms and restraint methods are also included in the legislation slated to become law on Aug. 28.

In addition, we ensured money derived from the passage of Proposition A last November by Missouri voters will go to all school districts plus we removed the 5 percent growth cap on the school funding formula so that funding for schools will now grow based on need and not be artificially capped.

The state's economy did impact some areas in education funding, including the Missouri Career Ladder Program for educators. With major gaps in the budget, there's a strong chance the program won't be fully funded in next year's budget. Federal stabilization funds are being used as a temporary funding source. Please be assured that whatever happens we will do all we can to retain this valued program that recognizes and rewards the extra efforts of our teachers who are working to guarantee the success of our students.

As always, if you have any questions about this week's column or any other matter involving state government, please do not hesitate to contact me. You can reach my office by phone at (866) 271-2844.

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