



Senator  
**Bill Stouffer**

**DISTRICT 21**

Senator Bill Stouffer – Cultivating Rural Missouri.

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## The Stouffer Report: Omnibus Education Bill Has Needed Features

We have been fortunate to pass an education bill in the Senate this year. I, for one, am hopeful that it continues all the way to the governor's desk.

[Senate Bill 291](#) started as a relatively small bill that dealt with giving public schools the ability to offer virtual courses online. After much debate and dozens of amendments, the one-page bill has turned into a comprehensive education package with some needed corrections to existing policy.

First and foremost, the bill makes a necessary change to [Proposition A](#), which was passed by voters back in November. Proposition A, which was also referred to as the Gambling Loss Limits Initiative, increases the state tax casinos pay to Missouri and eliminates the \$500 loss limit. Loss limits were enacted in 1992 and kept somebody from going to a casino and buying more than \$500 in chips within a two hour period. Prop A will also fund early childhood programs through the \$2 you pay when you go to a casino.

There was a mistake made in the way the proposition was written that was not caught until after the fact. The bill corrects the error by directing the gaming revenue that comes with the repeal of loss limits into the Classroom Trust Fund for distribution to school districts more fairly.

Another aspect of the bill deals with open enrollment, which would allow parents to put their kids in a school that is not in the district in which they reside, but is closer to the family's home. I like the idea of being able to attend the school that is closest to where you live. In rural Missouri, there are instances where somebody may live a few miles from one school, but it is actually in a different district. That means the parents have to drive their kids as much as 30 or 40 miles to the school that is in the same district as where they live. This is something worth considering.

This is something that brought a lot of debate on the Senate floor, because

open enrollment can be tricky for some districts. As the bill reads, the [Joint Committee on Education](#) would study open enrollment. But, there are also a lot of good arguments against open enrollment, so we will leave it to the experts before we make any final decision next year. We decided it would be better to look more deeply into the matter and see what we can come up with over the remainder of the year.

Senate Bill 291 also would establish teaching standards for public schools. What I like about this is each district would be able to establish its own set of guidelines. The way some subjects are taught in rural schools versus urban districts can be done differently, without compromising the subject matter. This would keep a cookie cutter approach from being used.

There are many more items in this bill. While I may not embrace all of them, I certainly do like a majority of what is contained in the bill. It is now in the House. There is a good chance the folks there may add or remove some elements of the bill. I pray they make good decisions and give everybody a bill they can be proud of so we can make the education our children and grandchildren receive not just the best in the country, but the best in the world.

*Senator Stouffer serves the counties of Carroll, Chariton, Cooper, Howard, Lafayette, Macon, Ray, Saline, and a part of Clay.*

If you have questions or comments about this or any other issue, please call toll free (866) 768-3987 or by e-mail at [bstouffer@senate.mo.gov](mailto:bstouffer@senate.mo.gov).

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