



## **The Stouffer Report: Popular Teacher Program Threatened**

A program popular among Missouri's teachers has been the topic of interest among Missouri's budget hawks lately.

Early this summer, officials with the Missouri [Department of Elementary and Secondary Education](#) (DESE) were told the [Career Ladder Program](#) may not get its usual funding for the 2009-2010 school year. The short story is simple: folks claim the money is not there. The longer reason is: more school districts take advantage of the Career Ladder Program every year, which makes it more expensive for the state to fund, which becomes all the more difficult in times of declining revenues.

You may not have heard of the Career Ladder Program. According to DESE's website, the Career Ladder Program is a variable match [program](#) established in 1985 by the Missouri Legislature. The purpose of the program is to reward excellent educators for the work they do over and above what is required.

An educator who chooses to participate in the program must meet certain criteria prior to participation and also must agree to complete a career development plan. That plan designates the academic activities that the educator will perform outside contracted time. An educator may progress through the three stages of the Career Ladder as long as he/she meets the criteria for each stage.

One estimate shows at least 100 teachers could be affected by a funding loss just in my district alone. Needless to say, teachers and parents throughout Missouri are hopeful the program will continue to be funded.

The state pays roughly 45 percent of Career Ladder funding, with individual school districts paying the

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remaining 55 percent. The funding for the program is appropriated retroactively, which means the funding for the 2009-2010 school year will be decided during the upcoming 2010 legislative session. This method of funding the program is causing a great deal of concern for the upcoming year as the [Senate Appropriations Committee](#) closely examines the state's budget obligations.

DESE received a letter from Senate Appropriations Committee Chairman [Gary Nodler](#) (R-Joplin) and [House Budget Committee](#) Chairman [Allen Icet](#) (R-Wildwood) in July. In the letter, they explained that when legislators created this program in 1985, they were not aware of what the level of participation or the cost of the program might be.

In that first year, 63 school districts representing 2,400 teachers participated, costing the state \$2.6 million. During the 2007-2008 school year, 342 districts representing 17,980 teachers participated in the program at a cost of \$36 million to the state. The success of the program is, in a roundabout way, its own worst enemy. The more the Career Ladder is used, the more is costs, *but* the more successful it is.

I am committed to working with my colleagues to see this program funded through the current budget year; teachers and school districts have already planned accordingly and the state should follow through on its commitment to our kids.

Federal stimulus dollars will keep the Career Ladder Program funded for the time being. After that, it will be back on the Legislature to find a way to keep it going, if deemed appropriate. My hope is we will give this — and everything in our budget — the attention it deserves.

*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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