

State Senator

Jack Goodman District 29

THE EDUCATION REPORT

SEPTEMBER 2009 • FUNDING EDUCATION • EDUCATION REFORM • PUBLIC SCHOOL RETIREMENT • CAREER LADDER

PREPARING TOMORROW'S LEADERS TODAY

This year, after nearly a decade without any large education reforms, we were finally able to pass a comprehensive education bill — Senate Bill 291.

I was pleased that SB 291 included provisions to expand the use of virtual classrooms in Missouri schools and provide funding for school districts and charter schools to create new virtual school programs, building on the state's current virtual school. In 2006, I sponsored and passed SB 912, which established Missouri's Virtual School. This important legislation enabled students to access daily lesson plans via the Internet that teach the same concepts being learned by other public school students in that grade level. The bill also allowed gifted students to take advanced courses not offered in their districts. Additionally, those homebound for medical reasons could utilize the virtual school to receive an uninterrupted education. I am excited that the virtual school's success has been recognized with expansion and additional resources.

Listed below are some of the key provisions of SB 291:

- All new revenue resulting from the gaming measure passed by voters last November will be placed in the Classroom Trust Fund and distributed to schools on a per-pupil basis.
- Each public school will develop standards for teaching by June 30, 2010. The teaching standards will center on students' success in the learning process and the teacher's knowledge of the content, level of preparation, ability to manage students, and the teacher's degree of professionalism.
- Local school districts have the option to establish a four-day school week. The option would require the vote of a majority of the local school board members.
- The P-20 Council, a private, not-for-profit entity on behalf of the state, is created to develop a more efficient and effective education system to better prepare students for entering the workforce.
- The Missouri Senior Cadets Program is created to provide opportunities for 12th graders in public schools to mentor kindergarten through eighth grade students.
- The School Flex Program is created to allow eligible students to work part-time and still pursue a timely graduation from high school.
- The Persistence to Graduation Fund is created with an established procedure for school districts to apply for grants to implement drop-out prevention strategies.
- "The Parents' Bill of Rights" is created to inform parents of children with an individualized education program of their educational rights under law.
- Students in elementary schools will participate in moderate physical activity (beginning 2010-2011) for an average of 150 minutes per week or 30 minutes per day.
- Districts hammered by inclement weather will only be required to make up a total of 10 school days.

IMPROVING PUBLIC SCHOOL RETIREMENT

This year lawmakers made several changes to the Public School Retirement System of Missouri and the Public Employee Retirement System of Missouri through House Bill 265. Some of the changes include:

- Allowing members to purchase prior service credits without paying interest. Prior service credits help members increase their retirement benefits by "buying back" previous periods of service.
- Specifying the order in which benefits are paid to survivors after the death of a member. Upon the death of a member who has chosen a guaranteed payment option and no designated beneficiary is living, any remaining benefits will be paid in the order of the surviving spouse, surviving children equally, surviving parents equally, or to the estate of the last person receiving benefits.
- Prohibiting additional nonprofit education organizations from joining the systems.
- Allowing the systems to cover board members and employees against liability claims arising outside the scope of a member's official capacity.

Protecting Career Ladder

Recently, elected officials became aware of a joint letter, dated June 15, which was sent to the Commissioner of Education by the appropriations chairs in both chambers of the Missouri General Assembly. In this letter, the budget chairs state that:

"It is the intent of the General Assembly that the FY 2010 appropriation for Career Ladder will be the last appropriation made in arrears for this program. The General Assembly cannot assure that participants in the Career Ladder Program for the 2009-2010 school year and beyond will be supported by state appropriation, and these potential participants should be notified of these changes."

Contrary to the assertion of this letter, it is almost impossible for one or two elected representatives to speak on the intent of the entire General Assembly. This is because the intent of the General Assembly is expressed by votes on legislative vehicles — in this case, the appropriations bills for Missouri's education system. Since the General Assembly has not voted on the FY 2011 budget, no one is qualified to speak about what it will contain.

While difficult decisions will likely be required for the 2011 budget, if the funding described in this letter is cut without being restored, it could severely damage the ability of smaller rural schools to attract and retain talented teachers. Additionally, limiting access to these funds may have the unintended consequence of limiting rural students' access to much-needed tutoring programs.

Currently, Missouri's Career Ladder is funded in arrears, meaning the Legislature includes money in the budget for work done the prior year. This can create obvious difficulties in planning for the future. To the extent that the letter expresses concern with that practice, I agree. Career Ladder should be funded in the same manner as most other items in the budget. However, transitions must be made in a way that do not penalize teachers at the local level who are already participating. It is simply not right to withhold payment for work these educators have already performed. The impact of such a decision could be devastating for families already struggling with the recession.

To accomplish the transition from funding in arrears to prospective funding without interrupting the program, the Legislature will effectively need to double-fund Career Ladder one year (funding the prior year and current year). This year we passed up a perfect opportunity to use Missouri's share of federal budget stabilization funds to do exactly that.

I am staunchly committed to fiscally responsible budgeting practices. I even went against the majority of my own caucus by voting against HB 22, the bill that appropriated a large portion of Missouri's share of "budget stabilization funds." That legislation included a provision to spend \$50 million taxpayers' dollars on two private businesses. We must put an end to these types of appropriations schemes before we even consider actions that will hurt local teachers and small rural school districts.

Senator Goodman welcomes students to the Missouri Senate from Pierce City High School, his alma mater.



Funding Missouri's Future

There is truly no greater civic responsibility than preparing the next generation to assume the mantle of leadership. While much of this work is and ought to be done at home, every day, parents entrust educators with their most cherished people. We owe it to them and our children to make sure bureaucratic obstacles are removed, and teachers are empowered to improve the educational opportunities available to Missouri children. This year we reaffirmed our commitment to those principals by fully funding K-12 public schools.



For fiscal year 2010, the General Assembly allocated more than 31 percent of the \$7.8 billion general revenue budget to elementary and secondary education. Most importantly, we provided a \$63 million increase to the state's school funding formula (called the foundation formula) without raising taxes.

The foundation formula has been in place for four years, funding K-12 public schools based on student need. Under the formula, our state's public schools have enjoyed full funding without an added burden to taxpayers. As promised, we have honored our commitment to continue making education one of the state's top budget priorities, in raising total funding by \$406 million over the past four years.

Without proper funding, our schools would not be able to educate Missouri students at the level that is necessary to provide them with the tools they need to succeed later in life. We cannot expect the future leaders of our state to excel if they do not have a solid foundation to build upon.

In a world where commerce is global and competition for jobs is fierce, a quality education—and a commitment to lifelong learning—opens doors to the best opportunities. Missouri is home to many of this country's best and brightest, and we should do everything we can to set them on the path to success with a good education. It is up to us to ensure that the next generation enjoys the same opportunities we have taken for granted. This starts by providing our schools with adequate resources so they are up to the task of educating tomorrow's leaders.

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