



Gary Nodler
32nd Senate District
Capitol Building, Room 423
Jefferson City, MO 65101

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Contact: (573) 751-2306

Sen. Gary Nodler Raises Funding Awareness for the State's Career Ladder Program

JEFFERSON CITY — Sen. Gary Nodler (R-Joplin) today addressed the future of the state's Career Ladder Program, which provides additional pay for teachers working hours in addition to their contracted time. Sen. Nodler and House Budget Committee Chair Allen Icet (R-Wildwood) notified education officials earlier this summer that the Career Ladder Program may not be fully funded by the state for the 2009-10 school year.

“It is important to recognize 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,” said Sen. Nodler. “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 state pays approximately 45 percent of Career Ladder funding, with individual school districts paying the remaining 55 percent. The funding for the program is appropriated retroactively, meaning the funding for the 2009-10 school year will be decided during the upcoming 2010 legislative session. This way of funding the program, which traces back to the program's inception, is causing a great deal of concern for appropriators for the upcoming year as they closely examine the state's budget obligations.

This year's budget funded the Career Ladder Program for the 2008-09 school year using federal budget stabilization dollars, a temporary funding source. State statute says that funding for the Career Ladder Program is to be placed in a “Career Ladder Forward Funding Fund,” so that teachers can receive compensation for their work. Statute also states that legislators are to keep teachers and schools aware of how much money is available before the work is done—a process Sen. Nodler and Rep. Icet are now undergoing.

“Missouri's constitution is clear on the fact that our state cannot spend what is not there,” said Sen. Nodler. “With this in mind, we are working to make sure districts are made aware that the state's portion of their Career Ladder funding may not be appropriated, so that there are no surprises. It is also imperative that our school districts know that it is not our intent to end the Career Ladder Program, but we are instead honestly addressing the possibility of not being able to fully fund the program during a budget year that will be filled with tough choices.”

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