

MASA Legislative Priorities 2012-13

Context under which these priorities were developed.

(Approved At MASA Business Meeting on September 28, 2012)

Missouri's most important natural resource is its citizens, which is why the most important investment the state can make, is in its students' futures. However, Missouri currently finds itself with a mixed bag when it comes to results in its education policy. On a positive note, when compared to other states that test as many students as Missouri on the ACT (75%), Missouri ranks fourth! Missouri scores on the National Assessment on Education Progress (NAEP) are some of the best in the country while our graduation rate has risen each of the last three years. Missouri's graduation rate now stands at 79.3%, good for 7th best in the country. However, two of the state's three largest school districts are unaccredited under the state's school improvement program while many more high poverty districts, both urban and rural, are struggling to meet state standards and a significant achievement gap exists between African American students and their white and Hispanic peers.

In the area of school finance, Missouri currently underfunds its state foundation formula by approximately \$400 million with projected underfunding of \$700 million next year, earning the state a C- grade from *Education Week* this year. Additionally, in researching states across the country for the fairness in school funding, Rutgers University found Missouri to be one of only three states to be deficient in all three of its categorical indicators for funding. Transportation funding since 2009 has been slashed by \$69 million, while Career Ladder has been eliminated (\$37 million loss), Parents as Teachers has been cut in half (\$16 million loss) and RPDC funding has been cut \$6 million. In order to find support, districts have been forced to seek revenue from their communities. Missouri ranks second in the U.S. with the highest percentage (65%) of school funding coming from local communities while ranking next to last in the percentage (31.5%) of funding coming from the state. Overall, Missouri's ranks 49th in the nation in the amount of state funds spent on education and 46th in the nation in average teacher salaries.

In recent years, Missouri's public education system has been attacked by outside interests. These outside interest groups have capitalized on Missouri's failures, particularly in urban areas, to push agendas that are focused on moving away from the public education model. They view Missouri's failures as a reason to abandon the entire system and replace it with school choice measures like charters, open enrollment, and vouchers to allow students to attend private schools. These groups have made significant political contributions to legislators who support their agenda which has resulted in increased pressure on the recipients of those contributions to accomplish the contributors' goals.

With a scarcity of financial resources and hostility from outside influences, school districts are now dealing with the implementation of several new programs from the State Board of Education and the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education. These "Top 10 by 20" programs include a new teacher and administrator evaluation system, new core curriculum standards, and most importantly the fifth version of the Missouri School Improvement Program (MSIP5) that will be used to accredit schools across the state. These programs have been quickly developed and implemented in the midst of record turnover within the administration at DESE and with little interest in substantive input from superintendents, principals, or teachers.

The United States has a 20% child poverty rate, the highest among first-world nations. Educators deal with our culture's failures in their attempt to break the cycle of poverty. Successes are frequently overshadowed or overlooked while their failures are placed at the forefront of public debate. Despite these significant challenges, changes, and criticisms, Missouri educators wake up every morning to meet the needs of their students to provide the highest quality of education possible.

Legislative Priorities for 2012-13

Funding: MASA supports the creation of a long-term plan to grow Missouri's state budget and cut wasteful spending in order reach the goal of fulfilling the promise that was made to Missouri schools when the foundation formula was adopted in 2005 and to restore the cuts made in transportation funding, parents as teachers funding and early childhood education programs.

MASA Supports:

- Fully funding the regular term state foundation formula;
- Establishing benchmarks or targets to provide a long-term plan to fully fund the foundation formula;
- Funding the small schools appropriation for the formula;
- Freezing the Dollar Value Modifier and thresholds until the State Adequacy Target of \$6,131 is reached;
- Updating the calculation of the State Adequacy Target to be consistent with the current school accreditation program;
- Restoring funds to the transportation categorical; to Parents as Teachers and to early childhood programs;
- Extending the flexibility of state funding for salary compliance, fund placement, professional development, and the implementation of the resource and process standards until the formula is fully funded;
- Reforming Missouri's business regulatory climate to spur job creation. Examples include reforms to be made to laws regarding workers' compensation, unemployment insurance, employment, etc.;
- Consideration of revenue enhancements such as a sales tax on Internet sales tax, tobacco taxes, alcohol taxes or a general sales tax to provide long-term funding for Missouri public schools;
- Modifying the Circuit Breaker law to increase the number of eligible participants;
- Using uniform assessment processes by county assessors to provide consistent appraisals throughout the state;
- Reforming Missouri tax credits largely based on the recommendations of the Missouri Tax Credit Review Commission that includes the following...
 - ✓ Placing sunsets on all current and future tax credit programs;
 - ✓ Making all new tax credit programs subject to the appropriations process;
 - ✓ Tying the caps of tax credit programs to funding of categorical education spending;
 - ✓ Conducting a standardized, annual review of tax credit programs to monitor and report on each tax credit's return on investment;
 - ✓ Prohibiting the use of multiple tax credit programs on the same project, particularly the stacking of the low-income tax credit with the historic preservation tax credit; and
 - ✓ Placing a portion of the savings from tax credit reform to be dedicated to funding the improvement of school facilities and infrastructure;
- Increasing the bonding capacity for school districts;
- Allowing voters to approve bond issues with a simple majority;
- Providing additional funding for technology, MOREnet, math and science equipment, Safe Schools grants and alternative education programs;
- Creating state funding for school facility replacement and/or improvement;
- Exempting education spending from proposals, like the Taxpayer's Bill of Rights that seek to put a cap on state spending;
- Funding of the Missouri Virtual Instruction Program rather than the establishment of virtual charter schools;
- Requiring the unanimous support of all taxing jurisdictions for any tax abatement project. If unanimous support cannot be achieved, the issue should be put to a vote of the people in the affected taxing jurisdictions; and

- Changes to transportation hardship law that do not financially burden either the sending or receiving district.
- Amending Chapter 213, RSMo to eliminate claims of liability filed against individual employees, school board members when named parties in an employment action;

MASA opposes:

- Diverting state funds from the public schools by any means including tuition tax credits/vouchers;
 - Mandating open enrollment of students to attend schools in districts in which their parents do not pay property taxes;
 - Mandating programs without appropriating the necessary funds to implement and sustain the programs;
 - Imposing property tax reductions, freezes or limits;
 - Transforming the early childhood special education program from a required to a voluntary program;
 - Replacing the Missouri income tax with a sales tax;
 - Redirecting state aid from accountable, public schools to unregulated, selective private schools through voucher/tuition tax credit programs;
 - Forcing consolidation of school districts; and
 - Limiting the ability of school districts to seek civil, equitable and other legal remedies.
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Educator Quality: MASA understands that high quality educators are the best investment Missouri can make in order to deliver a world-class education to its students. The following positions represent MASA's position on increasing educator quality in Missouri.

MASA Supports:

- Defining the parameters by which employees may collectively bargain including (1) establishing the Board of Education as the decision making body on any issue that may reach an impasse between administration and a bargaining group; (2) identifying issues and topics which may be the subject of bargaining negotiations; (3) establishing a process that does not exclude any teacher organization; (4) setting stringent and significant penalties for anyone participating in a school strike; and (5) defining "good faith bargaining";
- Dedicating funds for programs that train superintendents and principals to deliver effective and constructive teacher evaluations; and
- Extending of the PSRS "25 and out" program and the 2.55 multiplier for PSRS members who have 31 years of service or more.

MASA Opposes:

- Basing a teacher's pay, a district's salary schedule, layoffs, or tenure solely on teacher evaluations until funding can be dedicated to effective teacher evaluation and evaluator programs.
 - Establishing an arbitrary percentage of student performance that must be used in employee evaluations;
 - Reducing the probationary period for teachers; and
 - Using outside arbitrators to resolve employment disputes.
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Struggling Districts: In addition to St. Louis and Kansas City being classified as unaccredited, Missouri is implementing a new accreditation system that will result in an increased number of high poverty districts to be classified as unaccredited. MASA recognizes the struggles occurring in these high poverty areas across the state. Rather than abandoning the students in these districts for selective charter and private schools or sending

students and resources to neighboring public school districts, MASA believes the state of Missouri must provide additional assistance and support to these districts that meet the needs of their community and their students.

MASA Supports:

- Offering incentives for the recruitment of highly effective teachers into unaccredited districts;
- Making tenure and collective bargaining laws in the St. Louis Public School District consistent with the laws governing the rest of the state of Missouri;
- Providing specialized training for administrators, teachers and staff who work in high poverty areas or with diverse student populations that focus on the unique situations children face in their communities and culture;
- Replicating programs that have been proven to be effective in meeting the needs of students and specifically those that live in poverty or those who are considered “at-risk”; and
- Funding the Missouri Virtual Instruction Program rather than the establishment of virtual charter schools.

MASA Opposes:

- Redirecting resources from public schools to unproven, for-profit charter schools until the charter reforms passed in 2012 are implemented and proven effective; and
 - Under Missouri’s current property tax system, MASA opposes the open enrollment practice of allowing students to attend districts in which their parents do not pay property taxes.
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Investment in the Future of Education: MASA acknowledges the large amount of pressure to change the way education is delivered in the state and country. MASA opposes many of these “reforms” because many of these proposals are more interested in abandoning our local communities and school districts. MASA also understands that it is in the best interest of students, school districts, and administrators that stakeholders must come to the discussion with their ideas of what “reform” looks like.

MASA Supports:

- The benefits of early childhood education are long documented, particularly for those children coming from lower income levels. MASA supports allowing local communities or school districts to invest in early childhood education by creating a separate accounting fund (Fund 5) and revenue stream dedicated to early childhood education;
- With many districts facing funding challenges, particularly in the transportation categorical, and other districts actively wanting to implement innovative programs to assist at risk students, MASA supports allowing districts to set their school calendar based on a requirement for the number of hours students must attend school rather than requiring a set number of days;
- Creating approved pilot programs that districts may adopt which would allow those districts to be exempt from certain aspects of the state school improvement plan in exchange for a continuous improvement effort that promotes financial and organizational efficiency while focusing on the unique needs of their communities;
- Increasing Missouri’s graduation rates by offering incentives for students to stay in school and/or disincentives for dropping out; and
- Continuing the current independence, structure, and governance of the Missouri High School Activities Association.