

## Citizen input essential to integration revenue hearing

Written by State Rep. Bobby Joe Champion, Guest Column  
Monday, 28 September 2009 14:43

---



The landmark Supreme Court case "Brown vs. Board of Education" marked a turning point in our nation's efforts to provide a quality education to all students. Decades after the nation's highest court declared that racially segregated schools did not provide a fair and equitable learning environment, Minnesota created its own Integration Revenue Program. The program was designed as a way to promote the value of a rich and diverse learning community that enhances the educational experience for all students.

On October 1 at 7:00 PM, a legislative working group will hold a public meeting at the North Community High School Auditorium in Minneapolis to examine the way school district integration funds are being used. The meeting is one in a series designed to help citizens understand integration revenue and gather input on ways to make sure the specific needs of our students and schools are being met.

The Integration Revenue program is a component of the K-12 education funding formula that provides money to certain school districts for integration-related activities. In 2005, 80 school districts received almost \$79 million in integration revenue; by 2009, that number had grown to 113 schools sharing a total of just over \$88 million.

The purpose of the program is a worthy one. It was intended to reduce the number of "racially identifiable schools," or schools with a significantly greater minority concentration than others within or in neighboring districts. After those schools had been identified, the funds were to be used to establish collaborative ways to improve integration within and across those districts.

However, according to an evaluation of the program by the Office of the Legislative Auditor, there are significant issues about the way the funds are currently being used. The auditor's report identified several concerns, most significantly that the purpose of the program is not clear, that it lacks accountability, and that it has not been adequately assessed to determine its effectiveness.

Further, the laws that govern the program are ambiguous. While they give schools significant flexibility - a necessary component for administrators to target funding to certain programs - the parameters are so broad that the funds are at risk of being used in ways that will have little or nothing to do with alleviating the racial imbalances that continue to persist among schools and school districts.

It is telling that school district staff have varying and, at times, conflicting ideas regarding the

## Citizen input essential to integration revenue hearing

Written by State Rep. Bobby Joe Champion, Guest Column  
Monday, 28 September 2009 14:43

---

purpose of the program. Some believe the purpose of the program is to alleviate racial imbalance; others believe its intent is to reduce the achievement gap; still others believe the funds are intended to increase community involvement in the schools. Consistently however, nearly all school districts have asked for the purpose of the program to be clarified and its efficiency evaluated.

As a State Legislator, I have a responsibility to make sure Minnesota students have access to a quality education and a learning environment that allows them to succeed in an increasingly competitive global marketplace. By the same token, I also have a responsibility to make sure the money we designate to specific programs are used efficiently and responsibly, and that we ensure the high degree of accountability that taxpayers expect and deserve in these times of economic distress.

Neither economic circumstance nor zip code of residence should determine the quality of a child's education. In fact, it's guaranteed in Minnesota's state constitution - that every Minnesota child should have access to a "uniform system of public education." That's why this hearing is so important. As the working group considers changes to make the Integration Revenue more accountable and effective, they need to hear from you about what works, what doesn't, and what your vision for our schools is. So I encourage you to attend this important meeting on October 1 -to help us learn more about how we can work together to make sure all Minnesota students can reach their full potential.