



School Districts: Time to Turn in Your Homework

Published on *Show-Me Institute* (<https://showmeinstitute.org>)



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By: Philip Oehlerking

Taxpayers pay thousands of dollars a year to support their local school districts. Shouldn't they be able to monitor how the schools are spending their money?

The passage of House Bill 1606 tells me that the Missouri Legislature thinks they should. If it's signed by the governor, the new law would address transparency in school district spending by requiring public school districts to develop a searchable database to track their expenditures and revenue, which would be made publicly available. It also directs the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education to create a template for schools to use for expenditure and revenue tracking if they do not have a website to host a database.

It is encouraging to see the legislature offer this tool, which would allow taxpayers to scrutinize their schools' spending decisions, especially when [audits](#) give reason to question the wisdom of certain expenditures.

Given some of the [difficulties](#) we've encountered in obtaining spending records for the [Show-Me Checkbook Project](#), we understand that navigating the process for requesting information can be frustrating. That is why I (along with Show-Me Institute Director of Government Accountability Patrick Ishmael) [testified](#) in favor of the creation of a database similar to the one

proposed in House Bill 1606, where public entities can upload their spending data as a way to increase transparency.

I hope the creation of a database to track school district spending will lead to the establishment of other databases to monitor how cities, counties, and special taxing districts spend their money. The legislature is to be commended for taking this step toward more transparency.

About the Author



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Philip Oehlerking graduated from the University of Missouri-St. Louis in 2015 with a bachelor's degree in political science. His research interests include transportation policy and government transparency.

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