

# News...

*...from the Illinois House of Representatives*

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[www.housedem.state.il.us/members/fliderb/index.htm](http://www.housedem.state.il.us/members/fliderb/index.htm)

## **Flider Pushes for State Investment in Community Education Programs**

**DECATUR, IL** – Citing examples of increased citizen involvement, boosted student test scores and unexpected financial dividends resulting from local community education programs, state Rep. Bob Flider, D-Mt. Zion, has introduced a bill that would invest \$2 million in community education programs administered by schools throughout Illinois.

“Community education is founded on the principle that schools and the community in which they are located are inherently inseparable,” Flider said. “Community education uses this relationship to set students on a path to success through working with each other and their neighbors to raise the quality of life in their community.”

A new law allowing Illinois school districts to seek funding for programs that encourage greater civic involvement among students was passed by Flider in 2006, but the program has operated without state funding since its passage. After a recent meeting with the State Superintendent of Schools, Flider filed legislation asking for an investment of \$2 million in state funding to help fund existing programs and expand community education to new communities. It is estimated that 30 new schools could develop community education programs through the \$2 million appropriation.

Despite the lack of financial backing from the state, Sullivan’s community education program, as well as similar programs in Chicago and Arlington Heights, has served as a model of excellence throughout the state. Decatur is also offering a new community education program to students and residents.

Sullivan’s community education programs include a community recycling program; a litter collections and Adopt-A-Highway program; sending volunteer crews to aid in national disaster relief efforts; weekly adult education classes; a Christmas toy and clothing collection drive; a mentoring tech prep program that partners students with businesses; tutoring and after-school programs; community landscaping; seminars on drugs and crime; and several other programs that involve students and local residents working together to improve the quality of life in Sullivan.

One aspect of the community education program that is often overlooked is the positive working relationship it forms between businesses and the school. The relationship ultimately leads to increased donations and monetary contributions. For example, Sullivan’s community education program has cost nearly \$191,000 since its inception in 1991, while netting \$3.9 million worth of donated services or financial contributions. When the district put in a new all-weather track, about two-thirds of the cost was saved thanks to in-kind donations from local residents and businesses from donated time and equipment.

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At a time when the state is struggling to pay its bills, Flider says the fundraising aspect of community education cannot be overstated.

“I believe it is a very compelling argument that the return is much greater than the original investment,” Flider said. “With greater involvement and assistance from local businesses, the sky is really the limit in terms of what community education brings to students and the community they live in.”

In addition to increased investment from local businesses and area residents, evidence suggests that community education programs also result in improved performance from students. The Sullivan school district won the Bright Star Award for the seventh straight year. The award is given to schools whose test scores rank in the top 10 percent of the state but whose per-pupil funding is in the bottom 10 percent.

Matt Kracht, community education director at Sullivan High School and president of the Illinois Community Education Association, said that community education programs have done well across the state in urban cities like Chicago, suburban areas like Arlington Heights and rural communities like Sullivan.

“Community education programs can be successful as long as there is willingness on the part of students, school officials and local residents to work together,” Kracht said. “With this small investment from the state, we can help enhance and expand these important programs and ultimately provide valuable services to the community and improve students’ learning, while saving tax dollars in the process. It’s a win-win situation and we support Representative Flider’s efforts to make funding community education a top priority.”

For more information, please contact Flider’s constituent service office at 217-428-2708.

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