


 exclusively from
verizonwireless
everybody loves *chocolate*...
in all its flavors.
Your life. Sweet.
NOW ONLY
\$99.99
WITH NEW 2-YR. ACTIVATION
Get A Taste

 HOME NEWS BUSINESS SPORTS ENTERTAINMENT LIFE & STYLE SUBURBAN JOURNALS JOBS AUTOS HOMES SHOPPING
 #1 ST. LOUIS WEB SITE SITE SEARCH Go! STORY FINDER Go! ADJUST TEXT: + | -
NEWS ST. LOUIS CITY /
COUNTY

METRO EAST

ST. CHARLES

JEFFERSON COUNTY

LAW & ORDER

MISSOURI STATE NEWS

POLITICS

NATION

WORLD

SPECIAL REPORTS

EDUCATION

RELIGION

SCIENCE & MEDICINE

DEATHS & OBITUARIES

COMMUTING & TRAFFIC

COLUMNISTS

EDITORIAL /

COMMENTARY

SPECIAL REPORTS

PHOTOS & MULTIMEDIA

CORRECTIONS

NEWS OF THE WEIRD

P-D ARCHIVES



READER VALUES

ST. LOUIS' BEST BRIDAL

INTERACT

BLOG ZONE

CONTESTS

EVENT CALENDAR

FORUMS

GET RSS FEEDS

MAPS & YELLOW

PAGES

MEMBERCENTER

PERSONALS

SIGN UP FOR

E-MAIL ALERTS

News > St. Charles > Story

Assessments cited at school funds trial

By **Matt Franck**

POST-DISPATCH JEFFERSON CITY BUREAU

01/05/2007

JEFFERSON CITY — A failure to accurately assess property values in many parts of the state is undermining the validity of Missouri's system for paying for public schools, according to an expert witness in a trial that seeks to toss out the \$2.7 billion school funding plan.

Steven Gardner, a researcher at the University of Missouri at St. Louis, told the Cole County Circuit Court on Thursday that flawed property tax assessments were probably causing many school districts to receive more state tax dollars than they deserve, while others are being shortchanged.

"We're classifying some school districts as poor when they aren't, and other districts as rich when they aren't," he said, in his daylong testimony.

But those findings were challenged as unreliable and potentially biased by a lawyer defending the state's school funding system.

Gardner's claim attacks a central tenet of the state's school funding formula, which seeks to guarantee about \$6,200 in annual per-pupil funding, regardless of whether a child lives in a rich or poor school district. Under the plan, districts that can't reach the minimum spending through local property taxes are given additional state tax dollars.

But Gardner said the school funding formula was based on flawed property tax assessment data. Where property is undervalued, he said, school districts aren't collecting enough local tax revenue. Consequently, he said, those districts are receiving too much state money.

The reliability of property tax assessment is just one part of the highly complex school funding trial, which began Wednesday and is expected to last six weeks. The case deals more generally with the broader question of whether Missouri adequately supports its schools. More than 250 school districts are part of the suit.

But tax assessment is a lead concern for a separate group of 26 school districts, 18 of which are in suburban St. Louis County. In court documents, a lawyer representing those districts claims that the state may be overpaying \$100 million a year to districts with undervalued property.

According to the study, only four of 27 counties met the state's standard of assessing residential property. St. Charles County is one of a few to fare well under the study, suggesting that schools there may be hurt most if assessment practices are flawed. St. Louis County ranked slightly better than the average county in the study, while several rural districts and the city of St. Louis were near the bottom.

Gardner acknowledged that his findings were at odds with data collected by Missouri's State Tax Commission, which has found that assessments are accurate across the state. Gardner faulted the tax commission for auditing only a few properties in some counties. He said his research, in contrast, often looked at hundreds of properties.

But during cross-examination, Karen Winn, an assistant state attorney general, challenged Gardner's methodology for determining property values. She also cited a factual error in the report, suggesting the research was rushed to be ready for trial.

Gardner's research was funded by the plaintiff school districts. Winn presented the court with an e-mail in which an administrator of one of those school districts pressured Gardner to complete the study.

Despite Winn's objections, Judge Richard Callahan allowed the study to be admitted into evidence.

The trial resumes today, as both sides continue to focus on assessment practices.

mfranck@post-dispatch.com | 573-635-6178

[Top of page](#)

 [E-mail this story to a friend](#)

 [Printer friendly](#)

 [3 O'Clock Stir e-mail alerts. Details here.](#)

 [Get RSS Feeds of STLtoday.com headlines.](#)

YESTERDAY'S MOST E-MAILED STORIES

At last, La Russa has filled the void

Clutter: New book strikes a blow against the cult of über organization

Missing wallet returned 48 years later ... and the money is still in it

Mulder decides to stay in town

Arc brings special workers and employers together

Are you ever really ready to have kids?

Everything you wanted to know about dogs but were afraid to ask

Mulder signing is smart move for pitcher and Cards

Private vs. Public

New analysis looks at the pill, breast cancer
[Last 7 Days]

St. Louis At Work TOP JOBS

hotel ARAMARKHarrison

St. Louis, Mo
Aramark Harrison Lodging

Cabinet Maker STORE

Earth City, MO
Confidential

Legal Secretary

St. Louis, MO
confidential

Management Professional

St. Louis, MO
Voyager

DATA ENTRY/ MEDICAL

St. Louis, MO
Company Confidential

WELDER/Fabricator

St. Louis, MO
Commercial Fabrication

Manufacture Seeking

St. Louis, MO
Confidential

DRIVERS Want to run

St. Louis, MO
confidential

construction MASON

St. Louis, MO
confidential

Retail EIS Kodak

St. Louis, MO
Kodak

[More jobs](#)



 **Subscribe to the Post-Dispatch for just 50 cents a day.**

 **Write letter to editor**

[ABOUT US](#) | [ADVERTISE](#) | [CONTACT US](#) | [HELP](#) | [PRIVACY](#) | [TERMS OF SERVICE](#) | [COPYRIGHT](#)