

Weekly Report
Week of 4-12

By: Sen. Matt Bartle
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It has been a very good week for education in Missouri. Three events have occurred that should raise the spirits of teachers and parents alike. First, the Governor has released \$115 million dollars to elementary and secondary education that he had withheld from this year's budget citing economic uncertainty. Second, the Missouri House of Representatives has increased funding for education by \$100 million over what the Governor's proposed budget for next fiscal had recommended. Finally, voters in many school districts around the state, including some districts right here in Jackson County, have raised their local school's operating levies.

The first piece of positive news is the Governor's decision to release the \$115 million he had withheld because he felt that the legislature appropriated more money than the State would collect. As it turns out, the legislature's numbers were accurate, for a change, and the State's budget picture was not as bleak as first feared.

This \$115 million is being released for the 2003/2004 school year, which is almost over. This is money that the schools did not expect to receive. However, the legislature is currently involved in the process of passing a new budget for the 2004/2005 school year. The good news is that the \$100 million in additional funding the House has approved is for the upcoming school year, not the one that will soon be over. The budget has now been sent to the Senate where the fate of this extra funding will be decided. I strongly support this bold move by the House and hope my colleagues in the Senate will go do the same.

The funds previously withheld that have now been released and the new money that has been appropriated by the House has become available in large part to an improving economy and higher than expected tax receipts. If this trend continues, it bodes well for the future of education in Missouri. While we do not yet know the specific impact of this funding to the schools in Jackson County, I am excited by the prospect of an improving financial picture.

I am also pleased to see that the legislature is joining with the voters who passed levy increases across the State in recent days to find as much money as possible for education. We currently spend a large portion (more than 30 percent) of our budget on elementary and secondary education in Missouri yet we should not rest on the past but should continue to strive for greater achievements and for adequate levels of funding.

If you have comments or questions about this week's column or any other matter involving state government, please do not hesitate to contact me. You can reach my office by e-mail at matt_bartle@senate.state.mo.us. Also, you can read any of the bills I file on my website at:

<http://www.senate.state.mo.us/04info/members/mem08.htm>). Thank you again for making it possible for me to serve in the Missouri Senate.