

Weekly Report
March 11, 2004

By: Sen. John Griesheimer
(573) 751-3678

**SB 1361 FILED IN ORDER TO BRING ALL PARTIES TO THE TABLE
TO DISCUSS THE EDUCATION FOUNDATION FORMULA**

Over the last several months, there has been considerable discussion regarding school funding.

One option that has been discussed would take away hold harmless school district's local tax money and use it to fund school districts that don't have as much local funding. This Robin Hood approach is fundamentally wrong and we cannot let that happen.

For that reason, the two largest hold-harmless schools in my district – Rockwood and Washington – asked me to file a bill on education funding recommended by the Foundation of Excellence in Education.

Senate Bill 1361 would raise income taxes by 2 percent but would reduce property taxes.

I want to emphasize that I do not support raising income taxes to fund schools, but there has to be another option to property taxes. This bill raises income taxes, but reduces property taxes.

This is just another option that should be discussed.

That's why I agreed to support this legislation. I don't intend for the bill to be heard in committee or passed on the floor, but I want the hold-harmless school districts to be at the table.

If the lawsuit filed by 240 school district in this state is successful, which right now it appears that it will be, then this bill will allow the hold-harmless school districts to go to the court and demand that they be figured into the new formula.

People assume that hold-harmless school districts are rich and don't need state funding. That's untrue.

I want to guarantee that as we move forward with reworking the foundation formula and that the hold-harmless districts are at the table whenever education funding is being discussed.

SB 1361 also sets up a new foundation formula, with allocations beginning with a base amount per elementary student. Adjustments are then added to address the specific needs of students enrolled in middle school, gifted, at-risk, special education, English as a second language and urban district burden. A multiplier would then be applied to reflect regional cost variances as documented by the Department of Economic Development and based upon self-sufficiency wages.

The base allocation is then reduced by local property taxes generated through the minimum operating tax rate and certain state and federal revenues deducted through the current formula.

In addition, the bill would ensure that no school district receives fewer dollars per pupil under the new formula and that all districts would receive at least an inflationary increase annually.

The absolute reality is our current school funding system is broken. Sooner or later there will be a major reconstruction of how we fund our schools. Either the legislature will rewrite how we fund our schools or the courts will. I believe that it is legislative responsibility, not judicial responsibility, to ensure that public education in Missouri is adequately and equitably funded.

I just hope that instead of all the school districts fighting among themselves, that somehow they can figure out how to solve the problem without pitting one district against the other.

I don't want this bill to pass, but you have to have alternatives out there and that's why I agreed to sponsor this legislation. Someone had to file this bill to help the hold harmless districts.

I knew when I agreed to sponsor SB 1361 it would be unpopular, but you have to take action to bring people to the table. Sometimes you have to do the unpopular to get things done.

SB 1361 is probably not the answer to solving our school funding problems, but by sponsoring this legislation I am trying to encourage educators and my fellow lawmakers to get off the fence and get down to the business of restructuring the education funding formula.

If you are in Jefferson City, please feel free to stop by my office in Room 226 at the State Capitol. You may call me anytime at (800) 247-6102 or (573) 751-3678, or you may call my home at 239-2521 or 239-2523. My cell phone number is (314) 650-5777.