

Weekly Report  
Week of 1-31-05

By: Sen. Matt Bartle  
(573) 751-1464

## **SEN. MATT BARTLE NAMED TO COMMITTEE CHARGED WITH REWRITING STATE'S FOUNDATION FORMULA**

We have all heard much in the news recently about the need for the legislature to address inequalities in Missouri's school funding formula. School funding is one of the most controversial issues facing the legislature. In recent months several school districts have taken the state to court arguing that our current funding formula that divides up education dollars among all the districts in the state is fundamentally unfair.

Last week I was named to a special legislative panel that is charged with coming up with a plan to fix the current education funding system. This is a daunting and difficult task. Regardless of the amount of money the state is able to spend on education, it is likely that no funding plan will be able to satisfy every district in the state, but I am convinced we can do better than we are doing now.

Much of the discontent with our funding formula comes from the large discrepancy between what is spent to educate kids in different school districts around the state. For example, in one district, only \$4,771 is spent to educate each student, but in another \$13,379 is spent on each pupil. In reality much of the inequality of what is spent per pupil is actually due to the fact that each school district is required to fund part of their education expenses with local property taxes. Suburban districts like those in eastern Jackson County generally have higher than average property taxes, voluntarily assumed by local voters in order to better fund our schools.

Further complicating Missouri's funding situation is the state's foundation formula itself. Created in 1993 the current plan written into statute resembles a large complex algebraic equation that only a few in Jefferson City fully understand. The state pours millions of dollars into this complex formula, money which is then distributed around the state in varying amounts and subject to many exceptions and exemptions.

This year the State of Missouri will spend \$2.18 billion on elementary and secondary education. Next year, Governor Blunt has proposed that the state increase this amount by more than \$100 million. However, simply pouring more money through a formula that fails to adequately distribute the funds is an exercise in futility. For example, certain districts (including some in eastern Jackson County) that pay higher local property taxes than most other districts are penalized under the current formula. I have filed legislation to address this problem, but in reality, a total rewrite of the funding formula is needed.

The committee I've been appointed to will be working on a formula rewrite, and many tedious hours of work await us. However, this issue desperately needs to be addressed by the legislature and it is high time we got started.

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](mailto:matt_bartle@senate.state.mo.us) or by phone at (888) 711-9278.