

LEGISLATURE PASSES NEW EDUCATION FUNDING PLAN

One of the most important jobs of the state legislature is to provide for the education of Missouri's children. This is a job that we take very seriously. While Missouri's Constitution requires that we spend at least 25% of the entire state budget on education, in reality we spend far more. In fact, this year we will be spending over 37% of our budget on elementary and secondary education.

The way the legislature determines how education dollars will be distributed to the 524 school districts across the state is rather complex. In 1993, legislators passed an education formula that reads like one of the worst algebra problems you ever encountered in school. This bill also imposed the largest single tax increase in Missouri history to fund education.

Now fast-forward ahead to 2005. Missouri's aging foundation formula has gradually become outdated and fails to address the current needs of our schools. This session I served on a committee of legislators charged with rewriting the formula and while it is not perfect, I am satisfied that it significantly improves the current formula. Instead of relying on property taxes as the primary factor in determining how much money the state will pay out to each school district, the formula focuses more on providing an equitable education for each child in Missouri's public school system.

This year the governor's office has committed to significantly increase funding for education. The net result is that schools across the Missouri, including schools in Eastern Jackson County, will benefit.

Yet despite the work of the legislature to rewrite the formula to be more equitable and in spite of hundreds of millions of new dollars that will be appropriated for education in the future, certain school districts have decided that they will continue with their lawsuit against the state. Next week we'll talk more about the disastrous effect allowing courts to tell the legislature how to spend tax dollars would have.

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. Thank you again for making it possible for me to serve in the Missouri Senate.

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