



MISSOURI SENATE

JEFFERSON CITY

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**A Weekly Column for the
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New School Foundation Formula

JEFFERSON CITY – The Missouri Senate this week undertook the Herculean task of adopting a new school foundation formula. This action is necessary, in part, because the state faces a lawsuit filed by more than 250 school districts challenging the current funding formula. Those school districts claim the current formula, adopted as part of the Outstanding Schools Act of 1993, is both unfair and inadequate.

The new school funding formula (SB 287), which received initial approval in the Senate this week, moves the state away from a property tax-driven formula to one based on student needs. The new formula establishes a base rate of \$6,117 per student, and increases the total basic state aid for Missouri schools from \$2.4 billion to just over \$3 billion.

It's important to move away from a school funding formula tied to local property tax levies because of huge differences in local property values. The new formula seeks to ensure that school districts with the same levy receive the same amount of funding from combined state and local revenue sources.

Under the current formula, per-pupil spending ranges from a low of \$4,771 to a high of \$13,379. By establishing a base per-pupil spending level of \$6,117, legislators will ensure school funding is distributed on the basis of what it takes to adequately educate students in a given district.

The new formula also assigns additional weights to school districts' student counts based on certain student characteristics. Those include the number of students receiving free and

reduced lunch, the number of students receiving special education services and the number of students who possess limited English language proficiency.

Under the new formula, 473 of Missouri's 524 school districts will receive additional state aid compared to what they are getting this year. No school district will lose money under the new foundation formula.

One key amendment to the bill will provide more money to rural school districts. That measure sets aside \$10 million for grants to school districts with fewer than 300 students. Of the 41 school districts that will not receive a funding increase under the new formula, all but one have enrollments of fewer than 200 students.

In order to achieve full funding for education, the state will have to allocate an additional \$682 million. That new money will be phased in over five years.

The new school foundation formula needs another vote in the Senate to move to the House.

The First Regular Session of the 93rd General Assembly ends May 13.

If you have questions or comments about this or any other issue, please feel free to contact me at 573-751-8793 or by e-mail at: delbertscott@senate.state.mo.us

Senator Delbert Scott represents the people of Barton, Benton, Cedar, Dallas, Henry, Hickory, Pettis, Polk and St. Clair counties in the Missouri Senate.