



# WEEKLY REPORT

State Senator Gary Nodler  
District 32



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## A Formula Worth the Investment

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JEFFERSON CITY— One of the most complex issues my fellow lawmakers and I faced this session is one step closer to being resolved. None of us contested the need to rewrite our “foundation formula,” the complex equation used to calculate how much state aid goes to each public school district. After deliberating for nine hours, the Missouri Senate sent to the House this week Senate Bill 287, which revamps the state fund distribution method for Missouri’s public schools.

The immediate improvement in the new versus the old formula is that the allocation of funds will now be based on the financial needs of each of Missouri’s 524 school districts, in terms of educational resources, rather than be based on the financial assets of each district, in terms of property.

Education reigns as a top priority in our state because we see the long-run benefits of a solid schooling background for our children. The value we place on education is reflected in the Senate’s proposal, which calls for a nearly 30-percent increase to public school funding, bringing the total state spending on education to \$3.1 billion. The additional \$665 million would be injected into the public school system over five years. This is good news for southwest Missouri. For example, schools in the Joplin district will receive \$5.5 million more than the current funding formula would allocate. On average, districts in Jasper County will receive two times more funding.

Devising this plan took collective efforts from lawmakers representing both rural and urban districts. Compromises on the Senate floor resulted in an extra \$15 million being slated to go toward high labor costs that are common in suburban and urban districts. On the other end of the scale, schools with fewer than 300 students will be able to draw from a \$10-million fund.

As for determining how much state money is allocated to each district, the new formula starts with the school district's average daily attendance, and then adjusts the amount based on extra needs in the district, such as free-lunch programs and special education. The end figure is multiplied by the proposed state minimum-spending amount per student, which is \$6,117. The revised formula also takes into account the disparities in the spending value of a dollar from district to district.

The plan we crafted enables us to work within our state budget while still providing an adequate education for Missouri students. Our state constitution holds that, after paying off public debt, we must apply our resources to the funding of public education. The high ranking of schools in the hierarchy of state-funded programs and services is as fitting as it is just.

The money we invest in the students of today shapes the opportunities, outlook and prospects of the graduates of tomorrow. The funding formula revamped during this year's legislative session betters the investment we make in our schools, and it brightens the future for our children.

*Senator Gary Nodler represents the people of Newton, Jasper  
and Dade counties in the Missouri Senate.*