



## **Going Back to School will be Better than Ever for Students**

JEFFERSON CITY — Although it is hard to believe that summer vacation is almost over, public schools are once again preparing to open their doors to Missouri students. In the opening days of the new school year, parents and students are often nervous about what to expect in the coming year. However, thanks to the Legislature's commitment to education in recent years, Missouri students will be better served in getting a quality education. Missouri's new education funding formula distributes education funds more equitably and is based on the needs of students, not local tax rates. Further, we have improved communication among state officials and teachers to help students succeed as they make the critical step between high school and college.

A year after the General Assembly approved the most comprehensive school funding formula in Missouri history, lawmakers are fully funding the initiative in 2006. The K-12 foundation formula in 2006 is set to receive a \$127 million funding increase, with an additional \$15 million going to the Small Schools Grant Program. The funding plan, which will be fully phased in by Fiscal Year 2014, ultimately will provide an additional \$830 million to Missouri schools each year.

Missouri's foundation formula determines a minimum per-student dollar amount needed to provide an adequate education (currently \$6,100), a figure devised by studying the best-performing districts in the state. This new funding plan also calls for the buying power of Missouri districts to be equitable and will not reduce state education funds in any Missouri district.

In another effort to improve Missouri's public school experience, the Legislature this year promoted greater collaboration among education and workforce-development officials, as well as between high school and college teachers.

Senate Bill 580 directs the Commissioner of Higher Education, the president of the state Board of Education, the director of the Department of Economic Development and others to meet and discuss ways to develop an education system that offers students a more seamless academic experience. Officials are charged with creating a system that is more efficient and effective and better prepares students for the workforce.

This attempt to foster dialogue among state education officials is a useful component in improving education for Missouri students.

Together, these efforts are improving public education in the state of Missouri and will make going back to school a better experience.

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 phone at (866) 271-2844.

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