



# SENATOR MATT BARTLE

**District 8 – Capitol Building, Room 431 Jefferson City, MO 65101**

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## **Local Control of Public Schools**

A look out the window confirms that spring has truly arrived. At our state capitol, nature's awakening after the long winter is evident everywhere. The redbud and tulip trees are beginning to bud and brightly colored tulips set against the backdrop of the majestic stone walls of the capitol building. With spring comes the reminder that the legislative session is fast approaching its final, hectic sprint towards adjournment in May. All bills not passed by both the House and Senate by or before May 12th are automatically dead for the year.

During these last hectic weeks, hundreds of bills are competing for time to be debated and passed by the legislature. Among these are bills relating to what the state considers "secondary" education -- what most of us know as high school. I am convinced that many of the bills filed each year in Jefferson City with the goal of improving schools in our communities ultimately have the effect of tying the hands of local schools and schools boards. I am further convinced that allowing local control of our schools is the best way to educate Missouri's kids.

For example, there is a trend for the legislature to mandate specific courses that must be taught. Currently, classroom instruction time must be dedicated to teach about Lewis and Clark. While the great expedition led by these explorers just over 200 years ago is an important part of our history, is it more important than the Battle of Gettysburg, the signing of the Declaration of Independence or any number of other events in American history? We have passed so many of these specific requirements I fear there will be no time left for reading and writing. Local teachers and administrators are in a much better position to know how to properly divvy up classroom instruction time than are lawmakers in Jefferson City.

On another front, I oppose efforts to mandate that students be required to be buckled up when on school buses. While it sounds good on paper, it is an impractical step that would jeopardize the safety of students by diverting the attention of the bus driver who is supposed to be watching the road and turning him or her into an enforcer of the seat belt rule. Studies show that seat belts do not make school buses safer.

Another example of school micromanagement coming out of Jefferson City is the mandate that schools use a certain type of fuel blend in their buses. A school administrator's job is to educate, not to be tied down by unnecessary regulations and red tape.

As I mentioned last week, I have filed a bill that would free schools from certain standards under the Missouri School Improvement Program. Many of the current MSIP provisions, such as how many librarians and counselors to hire, also serve as an example of binding the hands of local schools with arbitrary guidelines. Slated to be heard in committee, Senate Bill 1234 removes the now-mandated standardized scoring system for the number of library staff, counselor staff or vocational educators. While the state should set general operating parameters for public schools, blanket standardization mandates that don't account for individual district needs must be lifted. School boards -- whose members are elected by their local peers -- and the administrators hired by the boards are best suited to decide staffing levels and curriculum offerings.

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

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