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

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Improving Education in Missouri

Over the past several years, Missouri lawmakers have paid particular attention to the needs of our public schools. Last year, the Legislature took on the difficult task of revising Missouri's outdated education funding formula. In the end we passed a bill establishing a new formula for funding public schools that 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.

Missouri's new foundation formula will implement an \$800 million increase in the annual budget for public schools over the course of seven years. Under the old plan, per-pupil funding in Missouri school districts varied from \$5,000 to \$13,000. However, our new formula determines a minimum per-pupil dollar figure needed to provide our students with an adequate education and adjusts funding according to the differing costs of living in Missouri school districts. No Missouri school district will see a reduction in state funding under the new system.

This new funding plan also calls for the buying power of Missouri districts to be equitable. This was an especially important provision I wanted included because the cost of living in Eastern Jackson County is considerably higher than in other areas of the state, and I did not want to see teachers and school districts penalized by a "one-size-fits-all" approach.

One of the Legislature's most important jobs is to provide for the education of Missouri's children. Missouri's new foundation formula funds public schools at unprecedented levels.

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.

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 or by phone at (888) 711-9278.

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