



## MISSOURI SENATE

JEFFERSON CITY

Frank A. Barnitz  
16<sup>th</sup> Senate District

CAPITOL BUILDING, ROOM 425  
JEFFERSON CITY, MO 65101

**For Immediate Release:  
June 19, 2006**

**Contact: Shelly St. Clair  
(573) 751-2108**

# Sen. Barnitz Condemns Bad Education Bill

---

JEFFERSON CITY – A savvy, strong-arm piece of education legislation that passed through the Legislature fairly easily this year has left State Sen. Frank Barnitz (D-Lake Spring) angry because he recognizes that the bill is bad for Missouri schools. The bill is awaiting the governor's signature.

"Senate Bill 894 is bad legislation, pure and simple," Sen. Barnitz said. "Either a school district must certify to the state that it is providing an adequate education, thereby weakening their argument as an aggrieved school under the lawsuit currently filed by more than 250 schools, or they must state that they are not providing an adequate education, and the legislation then implies that a local tax increase or a merger with a neighboring district is needed. Talk about a Catch 22."

The bill specifies that local school districts with local tax rates lower than the "performance levy" set in the state funding formula (\$3.43 per \$100 assessed valuation) must tell the state whether they are providing an adequate education. An Associated Press analysis of school tax rates estimates that 69 percent of those districts involved in the lawsuit will have to report to the state.

The lawsuit stems from a lack of adequate or equitable funding for all students in Missouri public schools, especially many poor, rural districts. The latest formula adopted by the state sets school funding according to costs of teaching students, not the district's property tax base, as the funding formula once was organized. Variances in property values across the state complicate the issue. A tax rate in a suburban St. Louis school may generate a vastly different amount of revenue than the same rate in Steeleville.

The senator noted there are other considerations as well.

-MORE-

“A rural school district should not be penalized because it manages its budget well and can succeed in educating its students with a levy of, say, \$2.75,” he said. “Many districts are under pressure to increase their levies, such as the schools in my Senate district that have large tracts of government-owned land.”

Sen. Barnitz said he was concerned about the ultimate effect of the bill, which could be “to force local districts to try and raise local taxes, and that is a constitutional violation,” he said. “I think the legislators who came up with this little scam are trying to switch the obligation for funding education away from the state. This lawsuit occurred because too many of our schools are under economic hardship due to neglect by the state.”

If the bill is signed by Gov. Blunt, one option for districts may be to ignore it. The bill contains no explicit penalty if districts choose not to comply. Schools likely will send in qualified responses such as “we’re doing the best we can with the money we have,” as the lawyer representing the school districts has suggested.

“This was a maneuver to try and stave off a lawsuit the state would rather not participate in,” Sen. Barnitz said. “I hate when the state interferes in local matters, and I don’t like the fact that it is attempting to pass the buck and shirk its constitutional duty to provide for public education.”

###