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## **Back to School**

JEFFERSON CITY — It's the time of year when the temperature starts to cool just a bit from the dog days of summer, leaves will soon start to turn colors, and our children will go back to school. Schools across the state and our district are either in session or will soon be filled with students eager to take on the challenges their knowledge quests take them on. This past legislative session, we lawmakers were able to give the students, teachers, and parents a big tool in that quest for knowledge: more money.

The money we spend to educate our youngest children in the basics to our older students for their professional degrees will have an impact long after any of us leave the Capitol Building. My work on the Senate Education Committee and the Joint House-Senate Education Committee is responsible for large gains in elementary and secondary education as well as higher education.

This is the third year in a row that we have increased the amount of funds to the re-designed Foundation Formula. Schools across the state are seeing a combined increase of \$132.6 million compared to last year's budget, continuing our commitment to fully funding our Foundation Formula. In addition, we passed an additional \$15 million for the continued funding of the Small Schools Grant program. State money for our public schools is increasing and becoming more equitable.

For the second year in a row, colleges and universities in Missouri will see more money as well. The Higher Education budget has been increased by about \$100 million with community colleges and our public four-year universities seeing their funding going up 4-5 percent. In addition, we've increased the number of state-funded scholarships and the amount of money in those. Students who test in the top 3 percent of their college entrance exams will get a \$3,000 a year scholarship (up from \$2,000 a year), and those who are in the top 3-5 percent will get a new \$1,000 a year scholarship. We've also moved to rein the rising cost of a college education by capping tuition increases by our higher learning centers.

The Lewis and Clark Discovery Initiative will bring much-needed infrastructure improvements to our colleges and universities across the state, ensuring that a world-class education can be had at our world-class facilities.

So whether you're a parent who is taking your child's hand in yours and walking them to that first kindergarten class or sending your son or daughter off to a university to complete the highest level of education, rest assured that this legislature will make sure the money to have the best teachers and best classrooms is always available.

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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