



Higher Education Initiative Working to Ensure Missouri Students' Future Success

JEFFERSON CITY — Hundreds of thousands of Missouri students will return to state colleges and universities this month, while many others are set to begin their college experience. In Missouri, I am very pleased the Legislature is investing in those students' educational dreams and goals by making higher education our state's top priority.

The \$22.4 billion state budget, which went into effect on July 1, increased funding for higher education at its highest level ever, with a 7.8 percent increase for a total appropriation of \$1.2 billion. This includes a \$48.7 million increase in Access Missouri scholarships, a \$6.2 million increase for community colleges and a \$33.6 million budget increase for four-year colleges and universities.

During the past few years, the General Assembly has worked to help secure Missouri's role as a higher education leader by ensuring college remains accessible and more affordable for Missouri families. We've expanded educational opportunities through scholarship programs and set limits for public universities to increase tuitions. And just this year, the General Assembly approved legislation I sponsored that increases Missouri families' ability to save for a cost of a college education by expanding tax deductions to all college savings plans (529s).

The Lewis and Clark Discovery Initiative is yet another successful way Missouri is successfully demonstrating its commitment to higher education. The landmark higher education initiative will infuse \$350 million into our state's higher education institutions over the next five years. This will benefit students by giving them the proper resources they need to be ready for the workforce and to be competitive in our global economy. Funding is used to boost scholarship programs and will bring much-needed infrastructure improvements to our colleges and universities across the state, ensuring a world-class education can be attained at our educational facilities.

St. Charles Community College is among the community colleges to benefit from the higher education initiative. The college has received \$2 million toward the completion of several projects, including creation of an organic chemistry lab, SMART classroom upgrades, and a campus security project. The college has already received \$189,415 of \$324,726 available for maintenance and repair through 50 percent local funding matches.

Harris-Stowe State University, the University of Missouri-St. Louis and St. Louis Community College are also set to receive funds for construction and renovation of educational complexes.

Thus far, the higher education initiative has provided nearly \$240 million to Missouri students, colleges and universities.

As you know, higher education has long been a focus of mine. As a member of the Senate Education Committee, Senate Appropriations Committee, Joint Committee on Education, and a member of the appropriations conference committee, I am very proud to have played an active role in making college more accessible and affordable for Missourians — and in ensuring our state’s role as a higher education leader through programs such as the Lewis and Clark Discovery Initiative.

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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