



Senate Gives First Nod to Well-Crafted Education Bill

JEFFERSON CITY — The Senate gave first-round approval recently to a multi-faceted education bill that includes what I believe are some exceptional and progressive measures to benefit Missouri students and our state's elementary and secondary education system.

[Senate Bill 291](#) started out as a smaller bill that proposed allowing school districts to recoup attendance money they lose when their students enroll in virtual, or online, classes. It then expanded into a larger omnibus education bill when several amendments with measures from other education bills were considered and many added — including a proposal that would also guarantee virtual courses be made available to private, parochial and home schools students in school districts where they live.

After much debate on a variety of education proposals, Senate lawmakers developed a solid, expansive bill that provides measures ranging from changing how the school funding deals with Prop A money, to developing teacher standards in public schools, to a teacher merit pay plan for St. Louis Public Schools.

One of the key proposals of the bill would change the school funding formula so that it allows a more efficient and effective way of distributing education money derived from the new education money. The provision would also allow for the removal of the current 5 percent growth cap on school funding and would add a component for gifted students.

Another major feature of the bill would require school districts, including charter schools, to develop performance standards for teachers, including requiring forms of assessment to monitor and manage student learning, ensuring teachers are prepared and knowledgeable of subject content, and requiring teachers to stay current in instructional knowledge. Another provision of the bill would allow the governor to create a 13-member P-20 Council charged with creating a more efficient and effective education system to adequately prepare Missouri students for entering the workforce.

A pilot program proposal that would allow St. Louis teachers to opt out of their tenure track to vie for higher performance-based salaries up to \$15,000 over three years is another major element of this comprehensive bill. This type of proposal is catching on across the country as a tool for helping improve struggling urban school districts.

My proposal to regulate the use of seclusion rooms, also included in [Senate Bill 445](#), is also contained in the bill and would require the state education's department to create procedures for the

proper use of restraint and time-outs in public schools. I'm glad this was included because our state currently doesn't have a policy for ensuring proper protections and guidelines to address this urgent matter.

Some other proposed measures include:

- Adding new procedures and requirements and more accountability measures for charter schools;
- Establishing a parents' bill of rights for parents of children with an individualized education program based on current federal and state law; and a similar foster care education bill of rights that would designate a staff person to be an educational liaison for foster care children;
- Creating a method of obtaining teacher certification from the state board of education for individuals to teach in the areas of banking or financial responsibility; and
- A proposal to create the Missouri Preschool Plus Grant Program — a pilot program that would provide preschool services to students in school districts that are classified as unaccredited.

I also want to briefly note a couple of highly publicized education proposals that did not make it into this first approved version of the bill — a provision to allow open enrollment in schools and one to allow school districts the option of a four-day school week. At the direction of the Senate leader, a legislative committee will study the open enrollment issue and make recommendations by next year. The option of allowing school districts to adopt a four-day school week was voted down by a majority of senators.

The proposed education bill requires a second “yes” vote before moving to the House for similar consideration.

In addition to some further opportunities to amend the education bill, more debate on the jobs bill ([Senate Bill 45](#)) is expected in the coming days. The state budget proposals will also take the spotlight soon on the Senate floor. As you know, the General Assembly is facing critical decisions regarding the state budget before it delivers its final version to the governor by 6 p.m. on May 8.

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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