



Missouri House of Representatives

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Missouri Legislature Passes Historic Education Reform Package

JEFFERSON CITY, Mo. – In a significant victory for education in the Show-Me State, the Missouri General Assembly has passed SB 727 and HB 2287 on a bipartisan basis a combination of comprehensive education reform bills aimed at enhancing elementary and secondary education across the state. The legislation, both carried in the House by State Representative Phil Christofanelli, represents a significant step forward in bolstering educational opportunities for Missouri's students.

SB 727, passed out of the House on Thursday, April 18th with a vote of 82-69, will enhance Missouri's education system through several key measures. These include updates to the Missouri Empowerment Scholarship Accounts Program which triples it in size, adjustments to minimum school term requirements, and efforts to boost literacy among elementary students through the Elementary Literacy Fund. The legislation encourages schools to adopt a five-day week schedule and expands options for homeschooling, providing more flexibility for families and students. Moreover, it expands the maximum amount of tax credits for the Missouri Empowerment Scholarship program, prioritizes scholarships for low-income students and those with learning disabilities, and doubles small school grants to offer crucial support to underserved institutions, all while offering more choices for families seeking alternatives to traditional district schools.

Furthermore, SB 727 significantly increases funding for early childhood education to establish a strong foundation for future generations. It also prioritizes teacher welfare by including wage increases from \$25,000 to \$40,000, career ladder programs, and flexible incentives to attract and retain top talent nationwide. In addition to these educational improvements, SB 727 addresses issues such as teacher certification, school board vacancies, and suicide prevention, showcasing a comprehensive approach to education reform.

"Every child in Missouri deserves access to a high-quality education that meets their unique needs," Christofanelli, R-St. Peters, said. "With the expansion of the ESA program, we are reaffirming our commitment to Missouri's families and their right to educational freedom. This is a victory for parents who want more control over their children's education and for students who will now have more avenues to achieve their full potential."

“As an educator and former superintendent, I believe there are a number of items in the bill that balance traditional and pro-choice individuals. This legislation will help our traditional public schools financially and at the same time offer families more educational choices,” State Rep. Brad Pollitt, R-Sedalia, and Chair of the House Committee on Elementary and Secondary Education, said. “Prioritizing the Missouri Empowerment Scholarships to kids with special educational services will be a huge help to families and schools. Also, refining the daily attendance calculations and helping fund higher salaries for our front-line teachers will positively impact all children in our schools.”

HB 2287 provides much-needed clarity by fixing language in the 2022 legislation that established Missouri's Course Access and Virtual School Program. HB 2287 addresses several aspects, such as calculating average daily attendance for full-time virtual students, providing state aid to host districts, allowing statewide open enrollment, establishing enrollment policies, accommodating students with disabilities through individualized education programs, and simplifying the enrollment process for parents or guardians. Furthermore, the bill permits host districts to contract with providers for necessary virtual education services.

The legislation was expanded in the Missouri Senate to include provisions aimed at providing cleanup and clarification measures associated with its companion education bill, SB 727. These changes include the return of the transportation trigger, reconnecting funding for K-12 tax-credit scholarships to state aid for public schools' transportation. The bill also exempts Warsaw School District from the four-day school week, as they were inadvertently caught up in that arrangement, and removes provisions related to private school certification of teachers.

"The passage of these bills marks a major milestone in our efforts to strengthen Missouri's education system for all students. This bill gives parents more choices in their child's education, strengthens and protects funding for our public schools, and ensures every child receives a quality education, regardless of background," House Speaker Dean Plocher, R-Des Peres, said. "By prioritizing initiatives that support student success and teacher excellence, all while improving the recruitment and retention of our front line teachers by increasing their salaries, we are investing in the prosperity of our communities and the well-being of our children. I also want to thank the three Democrats that joined the Republicans in voting to approve one of the largest, if not the largest, pay raises for teachers in this state's history."

Included in SB727 was my Teacher Recruitment and Retention scholarship bill and many other good things, not just for public education, but also for homeschool children., as well as language that protects the transportation funding for schools," Representative Ed Lewis, R-Moberly, said. "This bill had raised some concerns by our homeschool community that by including them in the private school scholarship program, the 2nd Amendment rights of our home school educators may be infringed. By passing HB 2287 as a companion bill along with SB 727 we address those concerns and preserves our home school educators' constitutional rights."

With passage in both chambers of the Missouri Legislature, SB 727 and HB 2287 are poised to make a lasting impact on the educational landscape of the state. The bills now head to the governor's desk, where they await his signature into law.

Representative Dean Plocher, a Republican, represents part of St. Louis County (District 89) in the Missouri House of Representatives. The district includes the municipalities of Chesterfield, Country Life Acres, Crystal Lake Park, Des Peres, Frontenac, Huntleigh, Kirkwood, Ladue and Town & Country. Rep. Plocher was elected in a Special Election in November, 2015.