



## School Information Act passes House

February 27, 2013 / by Collin Reischman, Managing Editor / 0 Comment

Collin Reischman

Jefferson City, Mo. — House Bill 388, known as the School Information Act, was perfected in the House on February 26 and successfully third read and passed on Feb 28.

HB388, sponsored by Rep. Kathy Swan, R-147, would require that the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education create a “simplified letter-grade report for each public-school attendance center and each charter school,” similar to a student report card.

The bill, which is sponsored by Rep. Kathy Swan, R-147, quickly moved through committee, despite opposition from St. Louis Public Schools, the Missouri School Teachers Association and the Missouri School Board Association.

Mike Wood of the MSTA said his organization would support the measure with an amendment removing the requirement for an “over simplified,” letter grade. Wood said a single letter grade measuring the performance of an entire school was “dumbing down,” the process.

“We support all the data being collected, which the bill calls for,” Wood told The Missouri Times. “But if your child comes home, he doesn’t get a grade for his whole school experience. He gets a grade for everything, because in some areas he’s probably stronger than others. If a school does one thing very well and another thing not so well, is a letter grade going to reflect that?”

Amendments offered during the debate removed the provision of a single letter-grade for an entire school. Under the new amendments, offered by representatives Dave Hinson, R-119, and Casey Guernsey, R-2, schools would be permitted to grade individual areas of performance rather than



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attributing a single grade to the schools a whole.

Kate Casas, State Policy Director for the Children's Education Council, said she was pleased with the final result

"We are pleased that an agreement was reached to guarantee Missouri families and communities will have access to transparent information about school performance." Casas said.

The new bill language requires the information schools gather, as well as the grades for different aspects of their operation, be distributed to all parents throughout the school district as well as the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education.

Whether various letter grades were too simplistic to accurately rate public schools remained the primary point of contention during the final floor debate on the 28th. Proponents contended on the floor that this bill would make schools good schools more likely to attract students and force bad schools to face their own shortcomings. Opponents rebutted that such systems would lower confidence in struggling schools and label them as failures.

"I see this bill as a public information bill," Representative Vicki Englund, D-94, said on the floor. "I don't think it's perfect, but I see it as a way to make our schools more accountable, and as long as we move forward and find ways to improve those schools that don't do well, then I think this is can work."

The final amendment, offered by Rep. Ellington, D-22, had wide bi-partisan support and largely was welcomed by the Republican majority.

Ellington's amendment requires any school that scores less than 70 percent overall to submit an action plan to DESE that details how the school will make improvements during the following academic year. Ellington said the bill was about making schools better across his district and the state, independent of politics.

"I'm not going to comment on the bill as a whole," Ellington said, "But I think if we're going to be dealing with schools, then let's just make those schools that are failing be transparent and tell each of the parents what they are going to do to improve."

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