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House Democrats propose supplement to A+ Schools program

Higher education agenda also includes increased funding for universities and colleges

JEFFERSON CITY, Mo. – Building on the successful A+ Schools program, House Democrats on Monday proposed a supplementary scholarship called Missouri Promise to allow A+ participants to advance to a public four-year college or university to complete their bachelor's degree.

The A+ Schools program, established in 1993 as part of the Outstanding Schools Act, provides qualifying students scholarships to attend a two-year community college or vocational school. Once a student earns his or her associate's degree, however, the A+ program provides them no further tuition assistance.

The Missouri Promise scholarship would cover tuition, books and fees at a public four-year institution for A+ participants who complete their associate's degree and earn a minimum 3.0 grade point average. State Rep. Clint Zweifel, D-Florissant, will sponsor the bill.

"The A+ program has been a tremendous success, but it only goes halfway," Zweifel said. "Missouri Promise targets students who have proven records of academic excellence at community college or vocational school but can't afford to finish their bachelor's degree."

Missouri Promise would serve at least 3,000 students a year – and potentially many more -- at a cost of approximately \$15 million.

Another component of House Democrats' higher education agenda includes increasing the operating budgets of Missouri's public colleges and universities by at least \$50.4 million for Fiscal Year 2009, which begins July 1. That amount would restore funding to FY 2002 levels, the high water mark for higher education appropriations. Gov. Matt Blunt has proposed a \$40 million increase.

"Although substantially more than \$50 million is needed to bring higher education funding to where it ought to be, our proposal will at least restore us to the record levels of seven years ago," said House Minority Leader Paul LeVota, D-Independence. "If the governor and the Republican-controlled Legislature have their priorities in the right place, there should be no reason why they wouldn't support this reasonable compromise."

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**Operating Budgets of Missouri's Public Colleges and Universities
Fiscal Years 2002 and 2008**

	FY 02	FY 08
University of Central Missouri	\$61,850,221	\$57,346,668
Southeast Missouri State University	\$50,378,899	\$46,715,471
Missouri State University	\$89,291,251	\$86,446,614
Lincoln University	\$19,695,117	\$18,931,828
Truman State University	\$46,862,660	\$43,416,180
Northwest Missouri State University	\$32,287,737	\$31,839,802
Missouri Southern University	\$21,421,501	\$23,511,308
Missouri Western University	\$21,981,789	\$22,433,627
Harris-Stowe State University	\$11,334,249	\$10,513,132
University of Missouri	\$457,252,843	\$431,136,819
Community Colleges	\$152,411,759	\$142,373,963
Linn State Technical College	\$5,240,528	\$4,956,265
TOTAL:	\$970,008,554	\$919,621,677
FY 2002 to FY 2008 difference:	\$50,386,877	

SOURCE: House Appropriations