

**By Sen. Mark Christensen**

*44th District, Neb. Legislature*

The Legislature finished Day 67 of the 90-day session of the 103rd Legislature last week. Only 23 legislative days remain in the session scheduled to end June 5.

This week the Legislature will be discussing the budget bills and making the tough decision on appropriating funds for the operation of state government.

This week though, I would like to discuss Legislative Bill 407—the school funding bill.

The bill came off the agenda for three days last week while urban and rural senators worked out a compromise to move forward with funding public schools.

Upon that, LB407 advanced to Select File with a 42-0-6 vote.

I would like to highlight some of the changes in the compromise amendment. The Allowable Growth Rate for school districts would be 1.5 percent for FY2013-14 and 2.5 percent thereafter. The Local Effort Rate for FY13-14 and FY14-15 will be \$1.03 and \$1.00 thereafter.

Beginning in the 2014-15 school year, there will be change in the averaging adjustment threshold.

For school districts with 900 or more students, instead of averaging the funding received by the next five largest districts and next five lower districts, the threshold will be the average basic funding for all districts in that category.

In addition, state aid will include \$30 million for teachers' level of education, with half of that going as teacher education aid.

Districts will also be eligible for \$20 million of the Instructional Time Allowance for districts in school for over 175 days, with 50 percent of the funds to be used in instructional time aid.

Both of these allowances will begin in the 2013-14 school year.

Finally, for the 2013-14 school year only, an additional two percent for budget growth may be included in the General Fund Operating Expenditures (GFOE) with a 75 percent district board approval.

On a side note, many of you might have read the quote in the Lincoln Journal online of a lobbyist representing an Omaha school. The lobbyist was arguing that many small districts are wanting to get aid when they don't pay their fair share because their local levies are too low.

I bring this up because this is a reoccurring complaint of many of the large eastern school districts. Though I can understand some of their needs with a growing student population, we need to continue to explain the realities of operating a school in the rural areas of Nebraska.

Otherwise, we could see less needed funds coming our way.

If you have any questions or comments, contact my office.

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