

20 | **MISSOURI**  
23 | **LEGISLATORS**  
**RETREAT**

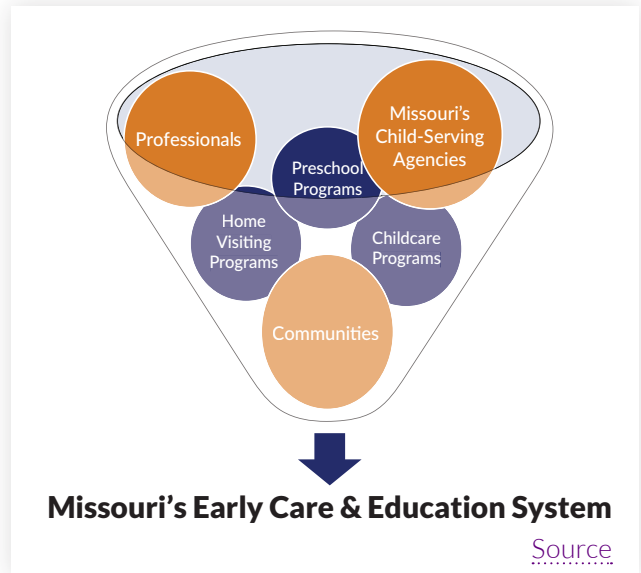
## SUPPORTING EARLY CHILDHOOD INITIATIVES

### Office of Childhood

On January 28, 2021, Governor Parson, alongside leaders from the Departments of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE), Health and Senior Services (DHSS), and Social Services (DSS) [announced](#) the consolidation of Missouri’s key interagency early childhood programs into a single [Office of Childhood](#). This consolidation integrates early learning, after school, home visiting, and child care into one office, based in DESE, with one shared vision: Missouri’s children are safe, healthy, successful learners. With the creation of a single Office of Childhood, coordination and collaboration will be improved to maximize the effectiveness and quality of the available programs with the goal to make services easier to access and navigate for families.

### Early Connections

In 2019, a [needs assessment](#) was conducted in Missouri and found that families were unaware of what resources were available to them and how to access those resources. Along with the creation of the Office of Childhood, [Early Connections](#) was designed to ensure coordination and collaboration between Missouri’s early childhood agencies. It is a central place for families and professionals to access resources and information about what young children need from the early care & education system.







### Home Visiting

The consolidation of services under one office has allowed for increased parent engagement in early childhood services. Of these services, home visiting is targeted towards expectant parents and families with children ages birth to five to support healthy child development. Though models and programs vary, home visits typically allow trained experts to provide services, share best practices, and connect families to other resources, all within the home setting. [Research](#) has shown that home visiting services contribute to reduced child maltreatment, which is most likely to occur in the first year of a child’s life.

[The Missouri Children’s Trust Fund](#) is using the Collective Impact model to improve the home visiting

### Findings from 2019 Missouri Statewide Needs Assessment

<p>The Early Care &amp; Education (ECE) system in Missouri lacks a coordinated referral and enrollment process for families to enter the system.</p> 	<p>There are no warm “hand-offs” to refer or transition families to other programs.</p> 	<p>There are duplicated efforts and missed service opportunities for families, especially Missouri’s most vulnerable children.</p> 	<p>Professional development activities are not shared across programs, resulting in training in important topics such as trauma-informed care, developmental milestones, and social-emotional not being accessible to the entire birth to five community.</p> 
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Source

system in the state by fostering collaboration/ coordination at the state and local levels, advocating for sufficient and equitably distributed funding for services, and promoting an emphasis on key outcomes over services models. This home visiting model will help local service provider centers better address families’ needs through Collective Impact Sites. By consolidating services under one office, Missouri is working towards becoming more efficient and effective, benefiting parents, providers, and children throughout the state.

## Policy Considerations

- What are other states with a consolidated governance model doing to increase parental engagement?
- How will the expansion of home visiting programs increase high-quality learning experiences for young children in Missouri?
- How can policymakers engage community stakeholders in local efforts to increase caregiver-child engagement in their districts?

## K-12 SCHOOL ACCREDITATION

Although accreditation is not federally mandated, Missouri is one of many states that accreditation [requires](#) all public schools, including charter schools, to be accredited through the **state department of education**. (MSIP 6), which is used by DESE to evaluate and accredit public school districts across the state. The standards and indicators outlined under MSIP 6 establish a method for the state to determine the extent to which students are meeting the [Missouri Learning Standards](#) and obtaining the necessary skills and knowledge for their grade level. School accreditation can vary by state, but is [not required](#) in Missouri.

The MSIP 6 Annual Performance Report (APR) is [scored](#) on two metrics: Performance and Continuous Improvement. The Performance section, which makes up 70 percent of the overall score, measures student outcomes and includes the following metrics:

- Academic Achievement: Status
- Academic Achievement: Growth
- Success-Ready Students
- Graduation Rate
- Graduate Follow-Up

The Continuous Improvement section accounts for the remaining 30 percent of a local education agency’s (LEA) overall score and assesses the quality of the LEA’s work towards improving the opportunities provided to all students. It is [based](#) on a review of the following forms submitted by the LEA:

- Continuous School Improvement Plan (CSIP)
- Climate and Culture Survey
- Response to Standards
- Required Documentation
- Components of Standard Success-Ready Students

Under MSIP 6, schools are [evaluated](#) on a scale from 0 to 100, with accreditation statuses assigned as follows:

PERFORMANCE SCORE RANGE	ACCREDITATION STATUS
0 - 49.9 percent	Unaccredited
50 - 69.9 percent	Provisionally Accredited
70 - 94.9 percent	Accredited
95 percent and above	Accredited with Distinction

[Source](#)

Classification recommendations will begin to incorporate MSIP 6 APR data in the 2023-24 school year, with the [first](#) reclassification based on APR performances occurring in the fall of 2025. The graphic below outlines the number of Missouri schools and their 2022 APR performance under the scoring rubric of MSIP 6. Note: two schools were unaccredited in 2022.

## Policy Considerations

- What mechanisms are in place to support struggling schools or school districts in Missouri that may face challenges in meeting the accreditation standards outlined in MSIP 6, particularly in terms of improving student outcomes and continuous improvement efforts?
- What proactive measures can be taken to identify struggling schools before they fall into the “Unaccredited” or “Provisionally Accredited” categories, and how can early intervention strategies be implemented effectively?

## K-12 PUBLIC SCHOOL GOVERNANCE

School governance is a shared responsibility between the federal government, state governments, and local school districts. The federal government plays a role in setting educational standards and providing funding to schools through the [Every Student Succeeds Act](#).

Missouri’s state constitution [explicitly](#) affirms the right to free education for all students up to age 21. To fulfill this commitment, the legislature is tasked with establishing and sustaining cost-free public schools and free instruction for all individuals in the state. Additional bodies share responsibilities in the execution of educational duties within the state as outlined in the table below.

## Policy Considerations

- How can local school districts be empowered to make decisions that best serve their communities while ensuring alignment with state and federal requirements, and what policies can support this balance between local autonomy and broader educational goals?
- Are there policies that can encourage the active participation of parents and community members in educational decision-making and the governance process, fostering a stronger connection between schools and their communities?

Body	Responsibilities
Governor	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Appoints the members of the Missouri State Board of Education.</li> <li>• Approves or disapproves bills passed by the legislature.</li> <li>• Provides recommendations for funding through the state budget process</li> </ul>
State Board of Education	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Adopts rules to formulate policies for the guidance of the Commissioner of Education and the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education.</li> <li>• Carries out policies relating to public schools.</li> <li>• Directs investment to be applied to support public education.</li> <li>• Grants professional certification to public school employees.</li> <li>• Grants approval to new charter schools.</li> </ul>
Legislature	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Allocates funds through the state budget.</li> <li>• Creates statutes regarding education.</li> <li>• The senate approves governor’s appointments to the state board of education.</li> </ul>
Department of Elementary and Secondary Education	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Administers public education in Missouri.</li> <li>• Oversees school improvement efforts.</li> <li>• Collects and reports data on student achievement.</li> <li>• Oversees new charter school formation application process and collects annual performance reports to ensure state and federal compliance.</li> </ul>
Local School Boards	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Sets local policies and curriculum.</li> <li>• Has supervising control of the public schools and public school property of the district.</li> </ul>

## SUPPORTING STUDENTS IN RURAL MISSOURI

Roughly two million people, or [33.7 percent](#) of Missouri’s population reside in one of the state’s [99 counties](#) identified as rural. [Nearly 17 percent](#) of rural residents live below the poverty line, compared to [12.3 percent](#) of urban residents. Residents of rural communities face significant difficulties accessing equitable education options, housing, healthcare services, and more.

### Challenges Rural School Communities Face

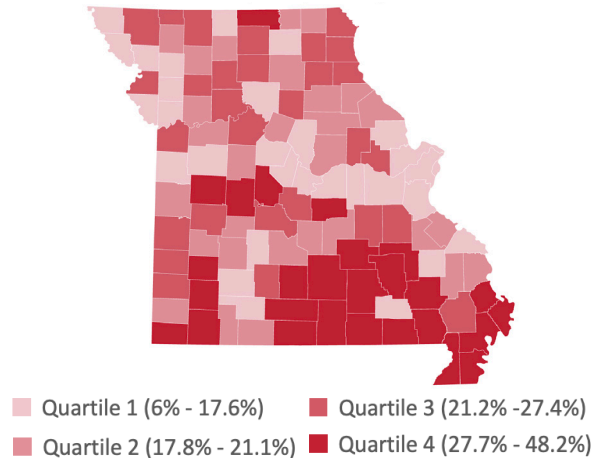
Rural areas face unique challenges to providing high quality public education to students.

**Higher fixed costs** | Rural schools tend to be smaller because populations are spread out over larger areas. As a result, [fixed costs](#) are higher because they are distributed across fewer students.

- **Transportation** | Students often travel further and over more challenging terrain to reach school, making it both [difficult and expensive](#) to transport students to school.
- **Ability to attract talent** | Rural communities tend to have [difficulty recruiting and retaining teaching talent](#).
- **Limited course offerings** | Smaller rural schools often cannot offer students a wide variety of

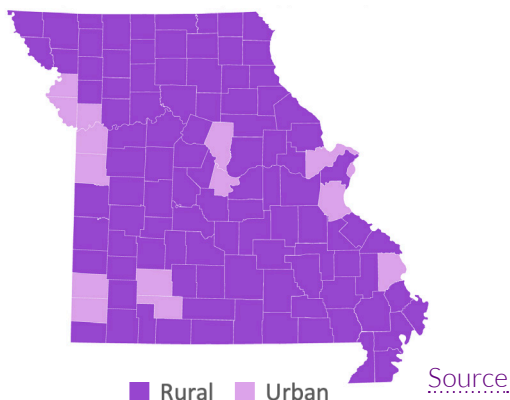
courses – including the most rigorous courses – that schools in suburban or urban settings are able to offer. Students in rural areas also face challenges traveling to other schools or regional centers to access additional content.

**Under 18 Poverty Rates Missouri | 2015-2019**



[Source](#)

**Rural/Urban Classification by County Missouri | 2019**



- **The digital divide** | The COVID-19 shined a light on the necessity of reliable broadband access. Despite this, rural districts across the state were up to [35 percent](#) less likely to provide devices and over 40 percent less likely to provide internet access than more urban districts in 2021. Furthermore, less than [20 percent](#) of residents have access to consistent broadband access in many communities across the state.

### Supporting Rural Districts

To address the inequities rural communities face, there are several organizations that focus on providing support to Missouri school districts.

**Missouri State University | Center for Rural**

**Education:** Launched in June 2023, [The Center for Rural Education](#) focuses on developing partnerships and initiatives that identify, prepare, and support high-quality educators for rural students and school districts. The center’s objectives include the development of





robust school-community collaborations and the creation of a sustainable teacher pipeline, with ongoing support for rural educators.

**Missouri Association of Rural Education (MARE):**

Founded in 2007, [MARE](#) is comprised of school administrators, board members, educators, parents, representatives from higher education institutions, and business professionals who share a common interest in supporting rural community school districts across Missouri. Its core mission revolves around addressing the distinct needs and challenges of rural education, fostering a platform for constructive dialogue and resolution of these issues, and advocating for rural education in Missouri through a united voice.

**Missouri Postsecondary Advising Initiative:** In collaboration with [rootEd Alliance](#), DESE [introduced](#) the Missouri Postsecondary Advising Initiative, designed for those residing in rural areas, to receive

dedicated guidance for achieving success after graduation. Trained advisors are deployed to rural high schools and work alongside school counselors to offer personalized college and career support to students.

Missouri schools with advisors from the rootEd Alliance saw a college enrollment rate boost of [almost eight percent](#) across all participating schools with some as high as 14 percent. One-third of college-bound [students](#) at rootEd-affiliated schools noted that they would not have pursued higher education if it were not for the guidance provided by their advisor.

## Policy Considerations

- What strategies can be enacted to foster community engagement and collaboration in the delivery of educational services, ensuring that rural schools and their communities work together to provide holistic support for students?
- What strategies can be implemented to attract and retain qualified educators in rural schools, especially in subject areas with shortages, like science and math?
- Given Missouri’s urban/rural makeup, what systems and policies are in place to collect, analyze, and utilize data effectively to assess the performance of rural schools and guide improvement initiatives tailored to their unique needs?

## SCHOOL CHOICE

### Exploring the Landscape of School Choice Policies and Programs

School choice refers broadly to families’ ability to “choose” the school their child attends and draw on public funding to do so. The term encompasses public school options – such as charter schools, magnet schools, and inter- and intra-district transfers – as well as private school options, including vouchers, tax, credits, and education savings accounts. On one hand, school choice offers families more voice in their children’s education. Advocates claim choice programs provide opportunities for new and different education

models to develop and create competitive pressures to push traditional schools and districts to innovate and improve. On the other hand, critics argue that some school choice options funnel students – and funding – from the traditional public schools that continue to serve the vast majority of students. Still others emphasize that the key question is not which entity operates schools, but rather how a community can create enough high-quality seats to serve the diverse needs of all students living in a particular community.

## School Choice Options

### Public School Choice

Public choice options are funded by federal, state, and local dollars or a combination of these sources. While the structure varies by state and choice option, generally a portion of the per pupil funding that would typically go to the student's assigned traditional public school is allocated to their school of choice. Students do not pay tuition to attend public schools of choice.

■ **Charter Schools:** Charter schools are publicly funded, but independently managed. In order to operate, the founder(s) are required to develop a plan and receive approval from an authorizer. Charter schools have greater operational autonomy than traditional public schools over areas like staffing, curriculum, and time. In exchange, charter schools are also supposed to face greater accountability; they must meet the expectations included in their charter contract, or their authorizer can close them. Though most charter schools are brick-and-mortar buildings where students and teachers meet in person, some charter schools are also virtual.

- Students residing in the Kansas City 33 School District, or the St. Louis Public School District may choose to attend a charter school if they reside within either city. These two districts are currently the only districts where charter schools can legally operate by law.

■ **Magnet Schools:** Magnet schools are public schools that allow students to focus on a specific learning track, such as engineering, language immersion,

or the performing arts. Unlike traditional public schools or charters, magnet schools can use a selective admissions process, such as testing requirements. As of the 2021-22 school year here are 3,015 magnet schools across the country serving a little over five percent of the student population.

- Missouri allows for inter-district open enrollment in certain situations, including to attend magnet programs.

■ **Open Enrollment:** Open enrollment policies allow families to choose a district-operated school, other than the one they are assigned to, depending on where they live. These policies may pertain to district schools within a district (intra-district) or to district schools across districts (inter-district). As of 2022, 43 states have some form of open enrollment policies, with only 11 states having mandatory policies requiring districts to offer open enrollment policies under state law.

- Students from unaccredited school districts have the right to transfer to neighboring districts.

### Private School Choice

Private schools are schools that are privately owned and funded. As such, they are not subject to the same rules and regulations of public schools. Private schools fall into five categories that are based on religious



affiliation: Catholic, conservative Christian, affiliated religious, unaffiliated religious, and nonsectarian. In **2019**, roughly 11 percent Missouri's K-12 students were enrolled in private school.

- **Vouchers:** Voucher programs are designed to provide some or all the public funding that would support a student's schooling to families to apply towards private school. While the concept of a voucher is not new (Maine and Vermont have voucher programs dating back to the 19th century), they have grown in popularity and are the most commonly used private school choice mechanism. Data on the impact of voucher programs on academic performance is mixed, though there is evidence that attending a private school may improve parent or student satisfaction.
- **Education Savings Accounts:** Education savings accounts (ESAs) allow parents to withdraw their child from public or charter schools and receive public funds to be used for expenses associated with learning programs. ESAs are a relatively new private school choice option, with Arizona becoming the first state in the nation to adopt an ESA policy in 2011. ESAs act like a more flexible version of the voucher concept; the state deposits a portion of the per-pupil expenditure into a restricted-use bank account that families can use for education products and services, including private school tuition, as well as a range of educational services and tools, such as tutoring, supplies, college tuition, and other learning services and materials. Funds in ESAs also typically roll over from year to year.
  - The Missouri Empowerment Scholarship Accounts Program (MESA) is a tax-credit-funded education savings account (ESA) that allows eligible parents to receive money to pay for tuition at any school they choose, as well as other educational expenses such as tutoring, educational therapies, individual classes, and extracurricular programs. To qualify, a student must be enrolled in a public school and either have an Individualized Education Program (IEP) for students with special needs, or from a family

whose income does not exceed 200 percent of the federal free-and-reduced-price lunch income eligibility.

- **Tax Credit Scholarships:** In some states, individuals and businesses can receive a tax break for donations to nonprofits that provide private school scholarships. The specifics surrounding tax credits vary from state to state. For instance, Florida provides a 100 percent credit to businesses that support the program while Indiana only provides a 50 percent match for donations. Eligibility for these programs also differs across states. Montana's tax credit scholarship is available to every student without qualification. On the other hand, only low-income students are eligible for Arizona's scholarship program.
- **Individual Tax Credits and Deductions:** In 2017, the federal government expanded the 529 college savings plans that allow families to invest dollars for college tuition and related expenses in state-administered mutual funds that grow tax-free to also include elementary and secondary education. This expansion allows families to use up to \$10,000 per year in 529 funds to pay for private school tuition and related expenses. All 50 states and the District of Columbia sponsor a 529 plan, and, in some states, families can receive an additional tax credit or deduction to their individual state tax returns for approved educational expenses, such as private school tuition, books, supplies, computers, tutors, and transportation.
- **Home Schooling:** Beginning in the late 1970s, families began opting to teach their children at home. While the number of families choosing this option had seemingly plateaued from 2012 - 2016 at three percent of students nationwide, the most recent numbers from 2022 reveal that number has climbed to five percent nationally.
  - The Department of Elementary and Secondary Education does not regulate or monitor home schooling in Missouri and there is no registration required with the state.



## Policy Considerations

- How are school choice programs held accountable for student outcomes and quality of education?
- How are school choice programs funded and sustained over time?
- How do school choice programs ensure equity in access to education for all students, particularly those from low-income families or underserved communities? Will these programs exacerbate existing inequalities or help to address them?

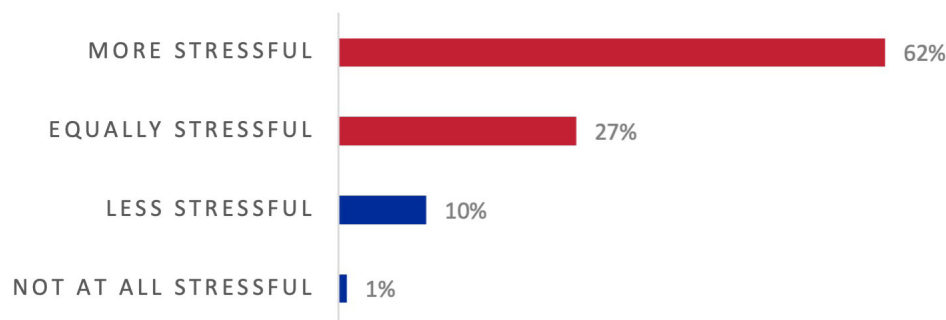
## TEACHER RECRUITMENT AND RETENTION

To address the state’s teacher shortage, the Missouri State Board of Education (State Board) formed the [Teacher Recruitment and Retention Blue Ribbon Commission](#) in early 2022 to develop a set of recommendations and clear action steps that address teacher recruitment and retention solutions, incorporating feedback and perspective from a wide range of stakeholders and Missouri citizens. Following the submission of their [first report](#) of recommendations to the State Board in October 2022, the Commission continued their work in 2023 with a renewed focus on school culture and climate as a mechanism to strengthen and support the educator workforce. Recent national [data suggest](#) that K-12 teachers have reported the highest burnout rate of all U.S. professions, with over four out of every 10 teachers feeling burned out at work, and both burnout and stress are the [most common](#) drivers for teachers exiting the workforce.

Commission members considered the experiences and perspectives of teachers and school and district leaders, including:

- Teachers need various forms of support, including financial assistance, professional development opportunities, and clear career advancement and leadership opportunities. Providing comprehensive support and development systems can contribute to their job satisfaction, professional growth, and overall well-being.
- Insufficient staffing and the lack of resources can result in overcrowded classrooms, limited access to materials and technology, and increased administrative tasks that take away from instructional time and infringe on their own family time.
- Teachers [emphasize](#) the importance of having a voice at the table. This includes [opportunities](#) for administrators to visit classrooms, actively listen to teachers’ perspectives, provide them with leadership opportunities, and involve them in decision-making processes that directly impact their work and students.
- Teachers often feel [isolated](#) due to limited opportunities for collaboration and the lack of sufficient support systems within the education system. To remain effective, they value extra time to accommodate various instructional needs and professional development opportunities.
- School leadership can [improve](#) educators’ well-being and strengthen the classroom by providing sufficient planning time and mentorship. This can

■ **Missouri Educators’ Stress Level in the 2021-22 School Year as Compared to the 2020-21 School Year**



Source



include building [professional learning communities](#) to offer clear steps for new teachers to partner with experienced educators to foster support and development or to create a culture of structured peer observation in which educators can observe and provide feedback to their colleagues cultivating a culture of collaboration and continuous improvement.

The [following](#) recommendations were presented to and unanimously approved by the State Board of Education at their August 2023 meeting.

## Immediate Support for Classroom Management

The Commission recommended that DESE and the State Board:

- Investigate opportunities to expand apprenticeship and residency programs across Missouri to place more high-quality teacher candidates in classrooms.

- Work with Missouri education organizations to market opportunities to teachers who have retired or otherwise left the classroom to return in a support role.

## Innovative Models for Reorganizing Schools

The Commission recommended that DESE and the State Board:

- Conduct an assessment to determine whether any local education agencies (LEAs), including administrators and teachers, are currently utilizing an advanced teaching roles model and, if so, which ones, and then develop a best practices document for statewide distribution.
- Establish a voluntary annual evaluation and reporting process for LEAs that have adopted an advanced teaching roles model to inform continued sharing of best practices.
- Review Career Ladder program statutes and regulations to ensure the Career Ladder program can support advanced teaching roles as a source of funding.
- Work with the legislature to establish a grant funding process for LEAs implementing an advanced teaching role model.
- Provide resources and guidance to LEAs on accessing alternative funding sources to support implementation.
- Provide support at the Regional Professional Development Center level for district and school leaders implementing advanced teaching roles.

## Master Teaching Certificate

The Commission recommended that DESE and the State Board:

- Work with stakeholders to explore the creation of a master teaching certificate.
- Create uses and/or compensation for the master teaching certificate.

## Missouri Leadership Development System (MLDS) Expansion

The Commission recommended that DESE:

- Work with the Missouri School Boards' Association (MSBA) to ensure that training for school board members includes their role in supporting a positive school culture and climate.
- Work with the Missouri Association of School Administrators (MASA) to ensure that training for district leaders includes their role in supporting a positive school culture and climate.
- Expand MLDS to serve all principals and assistant principals statewide, including the possibility of an annual appropriation to fund this expansion.
- Use MLDS programming to further support principals' work to develop a positive school climate and culture, including effective student discipline.
- Collect additional data on the demographics of who is participating in MLDS to monitor and ensure that Missouri is producing and supporting high-quality school leaders across the state who are able to support a teacher workforce that reflects the demographics of the state's student population.

## Policy Considerations

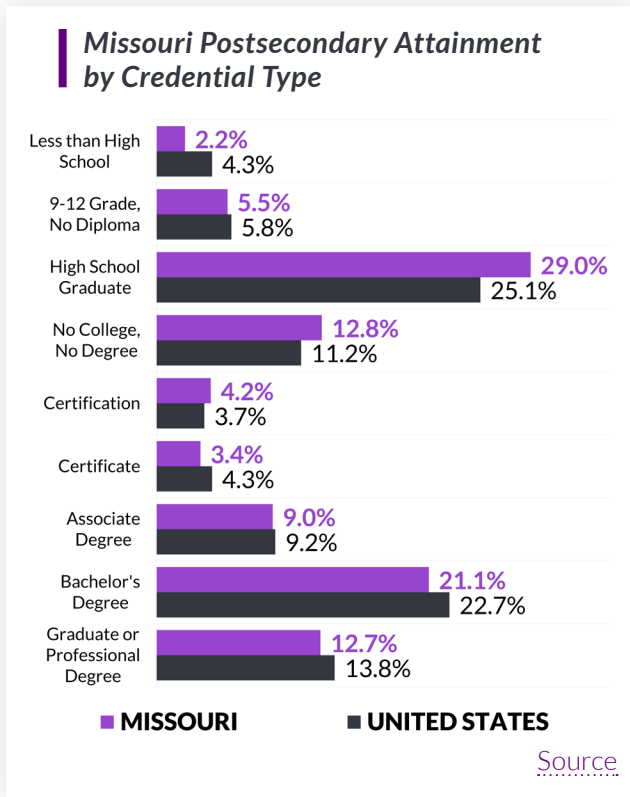
- How can policies create pathways for teachers to take on leadership roles within their schools, fostering a culture of collaboration and shared decision-making?
- What reforms or updates are needed in teacher certification and licensing requirements to attract and retain educators, especially those with non-traditional backgrounds or expertise in high-demand subjects?
- Are there policies that can provide incentives for principals and assistant principals to actively participate in MLDS and receive training on how to effectively cultivate a positive school culture and climate within their schools?

## LEVERAGING APPRENTICESHIPS & INTERNSHIPS FOR POSTSECONDARY SUCCESS

As employers struggle to fill [open positions](#), career readiness education plays a critical role in addressing the disparity between jobs available and the skill sets of job seekers—also known as the [skills gap](#)—and helps prepare job seekers for open positions. Middle-skill jobs—jobs that require more than a high school diploma but less than a four-year degree—make up [roughly 52 percent](#) of the labor market. However, only [43 percent](#) of the workforce have access to the skills training needed to fill those jobs, creating a [worker shortage](#). In 2020, about [66 percent](#) of jobs in Missouri required a postsecondary degree of some kind, but only [50 percent](#) of the working age population in Missouri does not have a postsecondary degree or credential. Thus, Missouri's goal is to increase the percentage of working-age adults with a postsecondary degree to [60 percent](#) by 2025.

As the demographics of higher education and workforce needs continue to change, there is a growing recognition of the value different types of credentials provide for students. Postsecondary pathways are the varying opportunities students may pursue to become college and career ready. The full scope of postsecondary pathways includes:

- [Workforce Training Programs](#): Programs that offer students new and/or improved skills often aligned to a specific industry.
- [Industry Credentials](#): Vocational certifications, licenses, or badges that are recognized by local, state, or national business and industry partners.
- [Certificates](#): Awards that usually require less than one or two years to complete and prepare individuals for middle-skill jobs (such as nurses and welders).
- [Postsecondary degrees](#) include associate, bachelor's, and graduate degrees that provide students with the opportunity to gain knowledge and skills that can be used toward employment or further study.



High-quality career coaching and career readiness education allows all K-12 students to meaningfully navigate postsecondary plans through exploration, engagement, and experience activities inside and outside the classroom. Career coaching and career readiness education should empower students to directly enter skilled positions in the workforce, pursue a postsecondary pathway, or enlist in the military after graduation. At the postsecondary level, career-related experiences and coaching create [a bridge](#) between the classroom and the workforce, while also providing opportunities for adult learners to re-skill, up-skill, or attain a postsecondary degree or credential.

## Missouri Initiatives

■ **Apprenticeship Missouri:** This [initiative](#), coordinated by the Missouri Department of Higher Education and Workforce Development, seeks to collaborate with employers, providers, and partners to “skill up” the Missouri workforce by expanding opportunities for work-based learning and apprenticeships. Through this program, Missouri

is now [ranked third nationally](#) in registering new apprentices and ranked fourth in the nation for completed apprenticeships.

## State Examples

- **Indiana:** The Indiana Commission for Higher Education (IN-CHE) offers the [Next Level Jobs Workforce Ready grant](#) for Indiana residents who have completed their high school diploma but have not attained a postsecondary degree or credential. The grant covers the tuition and fees for students participating in eligible high-value certificate programs at select institutions of higher education. The grant is available for students for two years and covers the certificate program’s course credit requirements.
- **Tennessee:** In Tennessee, two institutions of higher education have developed partnerships with business and industry to meet workforce needs while providing students with opportunities to pay for their education. In 2017, TCAT Murfreesboro and Nissan partnered to create the Smyrna Campus, a technical training center representing a [public-private partnership between Nissan and the College System of Tennessee](#) to create educational opportunities that are closely aligned to current workforce needs in the region.

## Policy Considerations

- In what ways can policymakers connect workforce development opportunities to affordable postsecondary pathways? What is the role of business and industry in this connection and what incentives are currently offered to leverage their role?
- How can Missouri strengthen its workforce development opportunities to ensure credit mobility for participating students?
- How can Missouri continue to strengthen its workforce development pipeline and retention of individuals who complete a postsecondary pathway?



## EXPANDING POSTSECONDARY AFFORDABILITY

Postsecondary affordability speaks to a student’s (and their family’s) ability to pay for all the necessary educational costs and corresponding resources, such as textbooks, while also having enough money to cover essential needs, such as food and housing. [Affordability is different for each student](#) given their means, as well as available state and federal aid.

### Postsecondary Affordability in Missouri

The cost of attending an institution of higher education (IHE) in Missouri has never been greater. Average tuition for four-year colleges in the state rose [37 percent](#) between 2008 and 2022. Over the same period, state funding for postsecondary education only increased about 8 percent. The combination of rising tuition costs and the state’s unequal investment in postsecondary education have greatly increased the cost burden for students.

#### Student debt

In comparison to the national average, Missourians are slightly less likely to have educational debt, with [roughly 56 percent](#) of people making payments on student loans. However, Missourians owe a significantly higher amount – [\\$28,713](#).

It follows that many students, especially students from low-income families, struggle to afford a postsecondary education. As of 2019, students

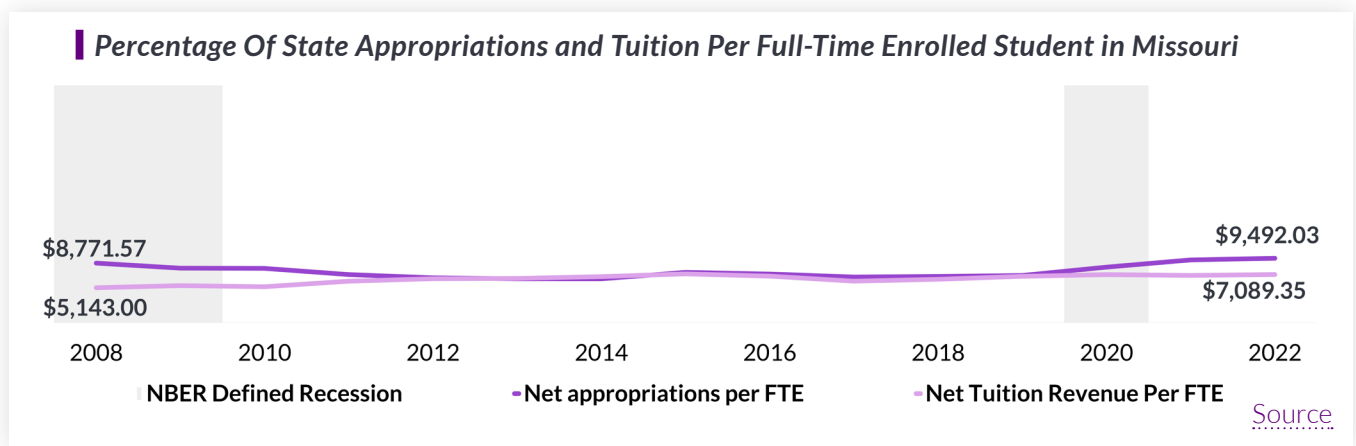
receiving Pell grants could afford [fewer than 25 percent](#) of public four-year institutions nationally. Students that do choose to take out loans to cover the growing gap between total cost of attendance and financial aid often find themselves saddled with student loan debt for years to come. Not surprisingly, affordability – or lack thereof – is a major barrier for many students.

#### Basic Needs Insecurity

As noted above, the complete cost of college includes more than tuition and books; students must also pay for food and housing, transportation, and childcare. Unfortunately, an increasing number of postsecondary students have struggled to meet their basic needs since the onset of the pandemic. A 2022 study by the Journal of the Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics found that about [45 percent](#) of Missouri college students lacked consistent access to enough food to live an active, healthy life. Missouri does not currently track statewide basic needs insecurity at the postsecondary level, making it difficult to determine the true range of student need. Nationally, [three in five students](#) experience basic needs insecurity, and it is fair to assume postsecondary students in Missouri experience it at similar rates.

#### FAFSA

The Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) is a form current and prospective college students complete to determine their eligibility for student financial aid. Whether or not a student completes their



FAFSA is one of the [strongest indicators](#) of whether a high school senior will go on to pursue a postsecondary education.

As of September 1, 2023, [53.1 percent](#) of 2023 high school graduates in Missouri completed the FAFSA. However, more work is needed to match the 70 percent threshold seen in states like [Louisiana](#) and [Tennessee](#).

## Efforts to Improve Postsecondary Affordability in Missouri

Three aid programs aim to make postsecondary education more affordable in Missouri :

- [Postsecondary Equity Network \(MOCAN\)](#) | This program by the Missouri College & Career Attainment Network is a coalition of MO institutions of higher education and community organizations that seek to eliminate equity gaps in higher education access for BILPOC (Black, Indigenous, Latinx and People of Color) students and students from low-income backgrounds. MOCAN provides resources, data, and best practices to members of the network to aid in addressing equity barriers.
- [Access Missouri Financial Assistance Program](#) | This program facilitated by the Department of Higher Education and Workforce Development is a need-based financial aid award eligible for students who have an Expected Family Contribution (EFC) less than \$12,000.
- [A+ Scholarship Program](#) | This scholarship program from the Department of Higher Education and Workforce Development for students graduating from A+ designated high schools and will be attending a MO vocational school or community college. This program seeks to eliminate affordability barriers and ensure that higher education in MO is meeting workforce needs.

## Policy Considerations

- Which metrics best speak to measuring and understanding postsecondary affordability?
- How can the state and postsecondary institutions better reduce student needs insecurities?
- In what ways can Missouri increase its FAFSA completion rate?





Established in 2001, [The Hunt Institute](#) honors the legacy of James B. Hunt, Jr., the former governor of North Carolina who distinguished himself as an ardent champion of education.

The Hunt Institute brings together people and resources to inspire and inform elected officials and policymakers about key issues in education, resulting in visionary leaders who are prepared to take strategic action for greater educational outcomes and student success.

In 2016, The Hunt Institute became an independent, nonprofit entity and joined forces with Duke University's Sanford School of Public Policy to pursue research, educational partnerships, and events related to improving education policy.

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