

MISSOURI LEGISLATORS RETREAT

Key Takeaways /February 25-26, 2021



MISSOURI LEGISLATORS RETREAT KEY TAKEAWAYS

COVID-19 and The Child Care and Development Block Grant

This session discussed in depth the challenges that child care providers are facing, how the child care and development block grant can be used to address some of those challenges, and how policymakers can support those efforts.

MODERATOR

- [Dr. Rebecca Gomez](#), Program Officer, Heising Simons Foundation

RESOURCE EXPERTS

- [Mario Cardona](#), Chief Policy Officer, Child Care Aware America
- [Dr. Pam Thomas](#), Chief of Early Learning, Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE)
- [Jeriane Jaegers-Brenneke](#), Interim Early Childhood Administrator, Missouri Department of Social Services (DSS)

KEY TAKEAWAYS

- The child care system [has long been stressed](#); it is generally underfunded, the supply of quality of care has been declining in many places, and the combination of cost and inadequate supply makes the system inaccessible to many families.
- In many ways, COVID-19 caused the system to buckle. From February 2020 to October 2020, [2.2 million women left the workforce](#), with child care demands being a key factor.
- Moreover, as of July 2020, [35 percent of centers remained closed](#).
- In 2020, the Office of Early Learning was [announced](#) by the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education. This center will allow for the maximization of limited resources by the streamlining and consolidating of programs under one vision and one team.
- DSS also administers the [Child Care & Development Block Grant](#) (CCDBG) and federal COVID-19 relief funding. With [brain science literature](#) confirming the critical early years of development, funding from CCDBG focuses on child care as a learning opportunity for children.
- In Missouri, the majority of CCDBG funding goes to the [child care subsidy](#). Stipends are provided to centers giving non-traditional hours of care. Full authorization was paid to providers from April 2020 to July 2020.
- Considerations are being made in Missouri for how to reach out to families across any early childhood program. There is a need to think about the diversification of services.
- Moving forward, considerations need to be made for creating a true system for child care.
 - What do families truly need? We need to understand those access points and know when families need to get on the early childhood freeway, and when they need to get off.
 - Centralized communication is a need.

ACTION ITEMS FOR LEGISLATORS

- Support structures that streamline early childhood programs at the state level.
- Use best practices from other states to identify strategies for diversifying services.
- Central communication to and outreach with families to best identify and support needs.

RESOURCES

- [Missouri Department of Social Services | Child Care](#)
- [Missouri Department of Elementary & Secondary Education | Early Learning](#)
- [The Hunt Institute | Early Childhood Resources](#)
- [Child Care Aware America | Missouri](#)

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COVID-19 and its Impact on School Funding

This discussion addressed how Missouri and other states are rethinking education finance and opportunities for policymakers to think through challenges and opportunities in education finance reform presented by the COVID-19 pandemic.

MODERATOR

- [Brandon Wright](#), Editorial Director, Thomas B. Fordham Institute

RESOURCE EXPERTS

- [Treasurer Scott Fitzpatrick](#), State Treasurer Missouri, 2019 - Present
- [Dan Thatcher](#), Senior Fellow, Education, National Conference of Legislatures

KEY TAKEAWAYS

- In Missouri, a foundation distributes much of the state funding that flows to districts. The school funding formula has historically done well, and Missouri has been successful with it, with the exception of the budget concerns of this past year.
 - The school funding formula accounts for historically marginalized students and survived a Supreme Court challenge.
 - School funding formula reform is very difficult and requires monetary investment.
 - Changes have been made to the Missouri formula to make it an achievable formula that is fully funded.
- There are both strengths and weaknesses associated with the foundation formula.
 - It considers the needs of students by placing multipliers for at-risk students (e.g. English language learners (ELLs), students on Individualized Education Plans (IEPs), and students qualifying for free or reduced lunch).
 - Nationally, states adopt a new formula every 20 years on average. Funding formulas are typically not able to adjust to swift changes in K-12 enrollment, such as those that are now being seen.
 - Traditionally free and reduced lunch was used to identify students in need of multiplier. But states need to look at how many students participate in community eligibility provisions and the impact that has on low-income students.
- Initially, state revenue projections were looking bleak, with projections indicating 20-30 percent cuts, but cuts ended up being 10-11 percent.
 - Sales tax revenue generally did well, and the adoption of remote sales tax caused revenue to improve due to more online commerce.
 - S&P has reported stimulus coming from a spending boom that is expected when economies open based on the growth of household savings.

ACTION ITEMS FOR LEGISLATORS

- Collaborate closely with school leaders in your district to best identify what their fiscal needs are.
- Identify strategies and priorities for using federal relief dollars and work with DESE to create a plan for using the funds.
- Before embarking on major school funding reforms, do an independent analysis of the current funding formula so as to best understand how to allocate efforts in funding formula changes.

RESOURCES

- [National Conference of State Legislatures | The State Role in Education Finance](#)
- [The Fordham Institute | School Funding](#)
- [The Hunt Institute | School Funding in the Age of COVID-19](#)

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Teacher Training, Recruitment, and Retention

While teacher recruitment and retention were challenges in Missouri before the pandemic, COVID-19 has exacerbated them. Educator prep programs are finding it more difficult to provide a high-quality training program, teachers are being asked to step up in ways they never imagined, and the compensation levels combined with the level of responsibility and burn out are causing high-quality teachers to leave the classroom at a faster rate than they can be replaced. This session discussed in more detail how exactly COVID-19 has impacted the stability of the teacher workforce and policy considerations to support teachers and teachers-in-training during this time.

MODERATOR

- [Darrion Cockrell](#), 2021 Missouri State Teacher of the Year

RESOURCE EXPERTS

- [Dr. Desmond Blackburn](#), CEO, The New Teacher Center
- [Dr. Ericka Lembke](#), Dean, University of Missouri-Columbia School of Education

KEY TAKEAWAYS

- The demand for certified teachers exceeds the [supply](#). Elevating the profession and finding and supporting talent from a wide array of backgrounds and experiences will be key to ensuring a robust pipeline for the future.
- Teacher pipelines must reflect the diversity of the students they will serve. Research shows that students with the same racial or ethnic background as their teacher are more likely to complete high school and go to college, less likely to be suspended, and more likely to be referred to gifted and talented programs. For Black students, having just one Black teacher in elementary school [can improve their lives far into adulthood](#). Hence, any efforts to enhance teacher training, recruitment, and retention must consider teacher diversity.
- There are opportunities for universities and districts to partner in new ways that break down boundaries and consider how best and from where to identify potential candidates.
- Teachers seek mentorship, development, autonomy, and respect.

ACTION ITEMS FOR LEGISLATORS

- Create structures that provide novice teachers access to mentors.
- Consider financial incentives the state may be able to offer teachers to both attract and retain a diverse workforce.
- Portray a positive image of the teaching profession through actions and words.

RESOURCES

- [The New Teacher Project | Resources](#)
- [The Hunt Institute | An Open Letter to Secretary Miguel Cardona from TNTP and The Hunt Institute](#)
- [The Hunt Institute | Supporting Teachers during COVID-19](#)

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Professional Perspectives | School Leaders, Teacher Recruitment, and School Funding

As a follow up to the school funding discussion, legislators had the opportunity to engage in a small group discussion with school leaders from across the state to discuss COVID-19 and its impact on school funding, as well as supports that school leaders currently need. School leaders discussed the impact COVID-19 has had on teacher recruitment and retention, and what effective teacher recruitment and retention practices look like.

MODERATOR

- [Julia Cunningham](#), Senior Policy Analyst, The Hunt Institute

RESOURCE EXPERTS

- [Dr. Yolanda Cargile](#), Superintendent, Center School District
- [Dr. Angela Price](#), Principal, Indian Creek Elementary School, Center School District
- [Dr. Curtis Cain](#), Superintendent, Wentzville School District
- [Matt Schulte](#), Principal, Wabash Elementary School, Wentzville School District
- [John French](#), Superintendent, Lewis County C-1 School District
- [Larry Post](#), Principal, Highland Elementary School, Lewis County C-1 School District
- [Frank Killian](#), Superintendent, Richland R-I School District
- [Cindy Rhodes](#), Principal, Richland R-I Junior & Senior High School, Richland R-I School District

KEY TAKEAWAYS

- Some of the greatest academic challenges from this time have included how to properly pace in an online setting, ensure that students are making appropriate gains, keep students and teachers motivated, and tailor instruction to specific student needs.
- There have also been a variety of logistical challenges related to the pandemic, such as how to safely bring students back into school buildings (and provide students with the greatest needs access to in-person instruction first), manage the inflow and outflow of people in the building, and interpret and appropriately apply all of the scientific information received.
- Schools and districts are feeling the impact of reduced budgets.
- There have also been some upsides, however; schools and districts have learned to be more flexible and have more deeply integrated technology into student learning.

ACTION ITEMS FOR LEGISLATORS

- Continue to engage regularly with local school leaders to identify their needs and highest priorities.

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School Accountability and Turnaround Practices

As states and districts recover from COVID-19 related building closures and the other upheaval we have seen in the past year, many questions have arisen around how to rethink school accountability standards and how to help schools get back on track. What role do superintendents and school boards at the local level play? This conversation discussed proven, equitable strategies for holding schools and districts accountable and included a Superintendent who has successfully turned around a Missouri school district.

MODERATOR

- [Jacqueline Erickson Russell](#), Senior Program Officer, Ewing Marion Kauffman Foundation

RESOURCE EXPERTS

- [Dr. Art McCoy](#), Superintendent, Jennings School District
- [Robert Sheffield](#), Director, Quality Schools & Districts, WestEd

KEY TAKEAWAYS

- 2021 marks the 20th anniversary of No Child Left Behind. While imperfect, it was a landmark piece of legislation that signaled the importance of equity in educational outcomes and the need to hold schools accountable for educating all children.
- Multiple measures are critical when considering student performance. We need to know both how they are performing against a specific standard (proficiency) and how they are growing. Moreover, both academic and non-academic metrics can tell us different and useful things. The best benchmarks will be both rigorous and flexible to local needs and circumstances.
- States should seek to continually improve their schools rather than focusing simply on “turnarounds.” Long-term success hinges on designing – or redesigning – schools to meet the needs of the community.
- Jennings School District serves as a noteworthy example of rethinking how we support schools and the importance of considering the whole child. The district owns and operates two homeless shelters, two school-based health clinics, two grocery stores, and offers an array of other wraparound services to support students and families.

ACTION ITEMS FOR LEGISLATORS

- Consider multiple metrics of student and school accountability, including proficiency and growth, academic and nonacademic measures, college enrollment, and career certifications.
- Ensure that metrics and goals along the K-12 pipeline align with workforce needs.

RESOURCES

- [The Hunt Institute | Introducing Competency-Based Education During COVID-19](#)
- [WestEd | Assessment Leadership: Leading a Balanced, Comprehensive Assessment System to Improve Teaching and Learning](#)

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COVID-19 and School Choice

There have been a number of developments in the school choice space this year, including a significant Supreme Court decision, *Espinoza vs. Montana Department of Revenue*, which determined that families can use state-based scholarship funds for private schools. Meanwhile, virtual learning has led some families to look for different options for their students, renewing calls for more choice. At the same time, budget cuts due to the COVID-19 related economic downturn have led to calls to prioritize traditional public schools over other options. This session discussed the current choice landscape in Missouri, best practices for high-quality state school choice policy, and levers that Missouri can use to implement best practices moving forward.

MODERATOR

- [Dr. Gary Ritter](#), Dean, St. Louis University School of Education

RESOURCE EXPERTS

- [Shanika Harris](#), Charter School Program Specialist, University of MO- Columbia
- [Nina Rees](#), President & CEO, National Alliance for Public Charter Schools

KEY TAKEAWAYS

- Charter schools are public schools open to all students, funded with public dollars, and accountable to their sponsor or authorizer.
- In Missouri, as in most states, charter schools receive less funding than traditional public schools, in large part because they do not receive access to a district facility.
- Per the state's 1998 charter law, Missouri charter schools may only operate in Kansas City and St. Louis.
- A [2019 study](#) of Kansas City charter schools showed that student growth was similar to that of students enrolled in traditional public schools across the state.
- Some organizations are working to create a critical mass of quality public school seats, usually within a city or district. These organizations are often agnostic to school governance; they draw on both traditional district schools and charter schools to do so.
- As the number of charter schools in a city grows, coordination across school systems becomes more important to use public resources efficiently.

ACTION ITEMS FOR LEGISLATORS

- Consider all public schools, including both traditional district and charter, in allocating Budget Reconciliation funds.
- Seek out opportunities to learn from both traditional district and charter schools with respect to virtual learning and responses during COVID-19.

RESOURCES

- [Saint Louis University School of Education | PRiME Center](#)
- [PRiME Center | Missouri School Choice Overview](#)
- [National Alliance for Public Charter Schools | Measuring Up to the Model: A Ranking of State Public Charter School Laws, 2021](#)

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Best Practices for Virtual Learning

Missouri has practices in place for allowing public school students to take online courses. However, some proponents believe there is not enough opportunity for students to engage in these opportunities. Simultaneously, many educators are seeing, as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, an opportunity to rethink how our education system approaches learning. This session discussed some of these opportunities, as well as strategies for ensuring that equity for all students is a priority in the process.

MODERATOR

- [Jared Joiner](#), Director, Educational Practice, Chan Zuckerberg Initiative

RESOURCE EXPERTS

- [Dr. Tracy Hinds](#), Deputy Commissioner, Missouri Department of Elementary & Secondary Education
- [Dr. Vikki Katz](#), Associate Professor of Communication, Rutgers University

KEY TAKEAWAYS

- Virtual learning has required teachers to transform the way they teach, finding new ways to identify and address student needs and deliver high quality instruction. Adapting instruction for students with disabilities and English Language Learners has proved both particularly important and challenging.
- The digital divide has presented an ongoing challenge to virtual learning. Consistent access to an affordable high-speed connection continues to elude many families. Similarly, many families struggle with IT-related issues and have turned to schools for help.
- Nonetheless, there have been wins; teachers are receiving professional development related to virtual learning and many districts are providing synchronous and asynchronous instruction.
- Chula Vista Elementary School District offers a bright spot. The school opened computer rooms for families to use when needed. In addition, school staff were available to help parents navigate the technology, which helped to foster relationships between the schools and families.
- Virtual learning during the pandemic has made clear that technology cannot replace human connections. Technology is only a tool; especially in a virtual context, strong relationships between schools, students, and their families are critical.

ACTION ITEMS FOR LEGISLATORS

- Consider the new roles schools must play to support student learning in budget decisions, including IT support and troubleshooting.
- Identify a statewide strategy for discerning what technology supports are needed statewide and develop a plan for providing those resources.

RESOURCES

- [The Hunt Institute | Supporting Children with Limited Broadband and Technology Access](#)
- [Digital Equity for Learning | Leveraging Technology for Learning](#)

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Broadband Access for Postsecondary Students

The digital divide is a crucial area for institutions of higher education to address because it is intertwined with the achievement gap. It puts a barrier between students and higher education access, degree completion, and career success, particularly for many students who feel tied to their community. This session discussed the existing broadband inequities nationwide as well as in Missouri, and promising policies and practices for decreasing that gap.

MODERATOR

- [Sheri Gonzales](#), Director, KC Rising

RESOURCE EXPERTS

- [Dr. Danette Howard](#), Senior Vice President & Chief Policy Officer, Lumina Foundation
- [Vickie Robinson](#), General Manager, Microsoft Airband Initiative
- [Shannon Shores](#), Vice President of Sales and Marketing, Wisper Internet

KEY TAKEAWAYS

- Broadband access is critical for a variety of reasons including socioeconomic mobility, access to health care, education, and innovation. Yet, seven percent of Missourians don't have broadband access, including 21 percent of rural residents.
- COVID shined a light on and exacerbated inequities stemming from broadband access for postsecondary students. Many of the most marginalized students lacked broadband access when the pandemic began, and many also live in communities most impacted by COVID with respect to job loss, illness, and the consequences stemming from both.
- Efforts to expand broadband connectivity should consider the community landscape; the best policies will be flexible and address both technical and financial constraints.

ACTION ITEMS FOR LEGISLATORS

- Consider approaching broadband connectivity as a public commodity.
- Determine a baseline for broadband connectivity and how to ensure all residents have access to that baseline standard.
- Identify and offer opportunities to increase access where the gap is most apparent, such as for Pell grant recipients.

RESOURCES

- [Wisper Internet](#)
- [Microsoft | Rural Broadband Initiative](#)
- [Federal Communications Initiative | Emergency Broadband Benefit](#)