

Missouri Policy Journal

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DRED SCOTT

FEAR NOT,
FOR I AM
WITH YOU.
BE NOT
DISMAYED,
FOR I AM
YOUR GOD.
I WILL HELP
YOU. I WILL
STRENGTHEN
YOU. I WILL
UPHOLD YOU
WITH THE
RIGHT HAND
OF MY
RIGHTEOUS-
NESS.

ISAIAH 41:10

THEY HAVE
NO RIGHTS
THAT WHITES
ARE BOUND
TO RESPECT.

DRED SCOTT
DECISION
MARCH 6,
1857

FOR I KNOW
THAT MY
REDEEMER
LIVES, AND
THAT HE
SHALL STAND
AT THE
LATTER DAY
UPON THE
EARTH AND
THOUGH
WORMS
DESTROY
THIS BODY,
YET IN MY
FLESH SHALL
I SEE GOD.

JOB 19:25-27

THIS COURAGEOUS JOURNEY
TO SUE FOR HIS FAMILY'S
FREEDOM BEGAN WITH HIS
WIFE HARRIET ON APRIL 6,
1846. ON MARCH 6, 1857, THE
DRED SCOTT DECISION WAS
READ BY U.S. SUPREME COURT
CHIEF JUSTICE ROGER B.
TANEY. HE DECLARED THAT
DRED SCOTT WAS NOT A
CITIZEN. HE COULD NOT SUE
IN COURT. THIS CASE BECAME
A NATIONAL CATALYST FOR
THE U.S. CIVIL WAR.
THE DRED SCOTT DECISION
HELPED PERSUADE ABRAHAM
LINCOLN TO CONTINUE HIS
POLITICAL SERVICE. THE
CIVIL WAR VICTORY BY THE
NORTH BROUGHT ABOUT THE
END OF SLAVERY WHICH WAS
RATIFIED BY THE 13TH
AMENDMENT. THE 13TH, 14TH
AND 15TH AMENDMENTS ARE
DIRECT RESULTS OF THE
DRED SCOTT DECISION. THE
DRED SCOTT FAMILY WAS
FREED BY TAYLOR BLOW, A SON
OF SCOTT'S ORIGINAL OWNER.
BLOW BOUGHT THE FAMILY
FOR \$2.00 FROM ABOLITIONIST
DR. CALVIN CHAFFEE AND
HIS WIFE IRENE WITH THE
EXPRESS PURPOSE TO FREE
THEM. TAYLOR BLOW MOVED
SCOTT HERE FROM WESLEYAN
CEMETERY ON NOVEMBER 27,
1867. HE LAID HERE IN AN
UNMARKED GRAVE FOR
90 YEARS. FR. EDWARD
DOWLING REDISCOVERED
SCOTT'S BURIAL SITE. THE
GRANDDAUGHTER OF TAYLOR
BLOW, MRS. HARRISON OF
PENNSYLVANIA, DONATED HIS
ORIGINAL HEADSTONE IN
1957. THE DRED SCOTT
HERITAGE FOUNDATION
HONORS HIS HEROIC FIGHT
AS A MAN FOR THE AGES.

HE MAY
DECIDE,
AND DECIDE
AGAIN; BUT
HE CANNOT
REVERSE THE
DECISION OF
THE MOST
HIGH. HE
CANNOT
CHANGE THE
ESSENTIAL
NATURE OF
THINGS—
MAKING
EVIL GOOD,
AND GOOD
EVIL. HAPPILY
FOR THE
WHOLE
HUMAN
FAMILY, THEIR
RIGHTS HAVE
BEEN
DEFINED,
DECLARED,
AND
DECIDED IN
A COURT
HIGHER
THAN THE
SUPREME
COURT.

FREDERICK
DOUGLASS

I WILL
PRAISE THEE;
FOR I AM
FEARFULLY
AND
WONDERFULLY
MADE:
MARVELOUS
ARE THY
WORKS;
AND THAT
MY SOUL
KNOWS
RIGHT
WELL.

PSALM 139:14

IT IS NOT WELL TO LET THE GREAT PASS AWAY WITHOUT NOTE AND WORTHY HONOR. DRED SCOTT IS DEAD. IT IS ONLY NOW AND THEN WE ARE CALLED TO REGRET THE LOSS OF THE TRULY EMINENT. ONCE OR TWICE, PERHAPS, IN A GENERATION. DRED IS OF THESE. HIS NAME WILL LIVE WHEN THOSE OF [OTHERS] WILL BE FEEBLY REMEMBERED OR WHOLLY FORGOTTEN. POSTERITY WILL MAKE INQUIRY ABOUT THE SUBJECT OF THAT GREAT LEADING CASE, DECISIVE OF HUMAN RIGHT, UPON WHICH THE FATE OF THE UNION WAS IN HIS DAY PRESUMED TO DEPEND.... SO, BY ALL MEANS, LET THE NOTED NEGRO HAVE HIS OBITUARY AND MONUMENT WITH THE REST. OF A TRUTH, FEW MEN WHO HAVE ACHIEVED GREATNESS HAVE WON IT SO EFFECTUALLY AS THIS BLACK CHAMPION.

EXCERPTS FROM DRED SCOTT EULOGY THE NEW YORK TIMES, 1858

New Dred Scott Memorial
St. Louis, MO
Photo by Jeanie Thies

Photo by Jeanie Thies

A new memorial honoring Dred Scott, a slave who lost his fight for freedom in a landmark Supreme Court case, was dedicated on Sept 30, 2023. The memorial is near Scott's grave in Calvary Cemetery in North St. Louis.



Introduction

The Missouri Policy Journal continues to establish itself as a respected professional journal that brings timely articles to the public's attention. This is the eleventh year of publication, and it is enjoyable to reflect upon its growth over more than a decade.

In the article: "In Real Time, A Crisis in Public Education: Teacher Shortages in Missouri and Kansas," authors Dong Hwa Choi and Judith McConnell Mikkelson note that while COVID-19 had an adverse effect on teacher shortages, there were other factors that continue to matter. The future does not necessarily look promising to overcome a teacher shortage, which might increase. Factors such as "culture wars," where teachers face increased hostility regarding what they are teaching, have added to the stress confronting the profession. In addition, compensation, expectations that cannot always be met or quickly achieved, and safety issues add to the problems teachers face. Furthermore, colleges and universities have seen a drop in students enrolling in education as a major. Teacher shortages could be an issue states, including Missouri and Kansas, will need to address.

In "An Overview of the Nonprofit Sector in Missouri," Ivy Shen addresses the role played by nonprofits separate from government programs or for-profit organizations. She notes that Missouri nonprofits have over \$222 billion in assets with the City of St. Louis, St. Louis and Jackson Counties, accounting for the highest levels of this amount. In addition, the IRS code 501 (c)(3) comprises 76 percent of all nonprofits in Missouri. The range of services provided by these organizations covers: education, arts and culture, health care, religious activities, and environmental protection, as well as support for foreign affairs. Over the past decade, the number of nonprofits has grown from approximately 27,000 to over 38,000. Although the growth seems impressive, the post-COVID-19 environment had an impact, and the hope is that the future of nonprofits will be strong and continue to grow.

Finally, in "Book Banning Trend Fuels Far-Reaching Effects, As Well As Challenges To Restrictions," Elizabeth MacDonald addresses an issue with culture war written all over it. Book banning has seen an increase in recent years, even though a March 2022 report by the American Library Association showed that 71 percent of voters opposed banning books. In Missouri, the legislative session in 2022 introduced Senate Bill 775 (SB775) which broadly addressed book banning, and this bill went into effect as a law in August 2022. This new law was part of a broader climate that has seen book banning activity on the rise. School districts such as Lindbergh, Wentzville, and Kirkwood, to name a few, have experienced an increase in challenges to books in school libraries. MacDonald states, "Conservatives have...[created] an environment of fear and misinformation." Furthermore, this broad effect to confront book banning is spilling over into higher education. In twenty-eight states, more than seventy bills have been introduced since January 2021 that adversely impact teaching at the college and university level.

Missouri Policy Journal continues to present articles that the public and media, as well as policymakers, will find useful and relevant. We encourage manuscript submissions and aim to respond to authors in a quick manner.

Joseph A. Cernik, Editor

In Real Time, a Crisis in Public Education: Teacher Shortages in Missouri and Kansas

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Introduction

Nationwide public school teacher shortages, including those in Missouri and Kansas, started before the onslaught of COVID-19 yet were exacerbated by the pandemic. Shortages are found in all elementary, middle school and high school grades, including special education. An increasing number of public school teachers who are no longer teaching have quit classroom teaching, were fired, retired, transferred, died, or were separated from teaching due to their disability. Reasons for leaving classroom teaching include gaining employment in more financially advantageous, socially prestigious and safe professions.¹

The percentage of teachers who have quit their profession has been on a relative increase since 2009. “Although there has been considerable volatility during the pandemic era, the rate reached a record high of 1.3 percent in March 2022. These data provide a clear indication that educators quitting—not leaving for other reasons—is driving a significant part of the current educator shortage.”²

Teachers quitting the education profession has definitely led to the shortfall of teachers in public education. Reasons why teachers have quit and why undergraduates are not choosing to major in education are further explained in this article.

Contributing Factors to the Teacher Shortage in Missouri and Kansas

Rick Ginsburg, dean of education at the University of Kansas, said, “Kansas was experiencing teacher shortage issues present nationally. A federal report said 53 percent of public schools

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Judith McConnell Mikkelson is an Emeritus Professor of Early Childhood Education at Washburn University, Kansas.

¹ Stacey Pelika, “6 Charts that Explain the Educator Shortage,” *NEA Today*, September 30, 2022, accessed August 10, 2023, <https://www.nea.org/advocating-for-change/new-from-nea/6-charts-explain-educator-shortage>.

² National Education Association, *Elevating the Education Professions: Solving Educator Shortages by Making Public Education and Attractive and Competitive Career Path* (National Education Association, October 2022), accessed August 11, 2023, <https://www.nea.org/sites/default/files/2022-09/solving-educator-shortage-report-final-9-30-22.pdf>.

were understaffed in the current academic year. A National Education Association (NEA) survey in 2022 found 55 percent of teachers had given thought to a career change. In 2019, a Phi Delta Kappa poll showed 55 percent of teachers didn't want their children to follow them into teaching."³ The public education teacher shortage in Missouri, like Kansas, has been a prevailing problem for many years, escalating since the spring of 2020 with the onset of the COVID-19.

The teacher shortage in public education is a pervasive and complicated problem. Reasons for the teacher shortage range from low teacher pay to stress and burn-out from the changes in their teaching roles due to the COVID-19, to being micromanaged in their classroom teaching. Too many teachers have unsupportive administrators, elected officials and parents who create barriers to their success in teaching. These contributing factors, among other reasons for the current teacher shortage are further explained as follows.

Low Pay

NEA President Rebecca Pringle said, "As the nation's public schools struggle with a looming teacher shortage that has only been exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic, one of the best indicators of attracting and retaining teachers is looking at the starting and average salaries for the profession."⁴ Pringle is advocating for a national teachers' salary of \$40,000. Among its numerous reports and position statements, NEA annually collects data from each state's department of education to rank and compare public school teachers' beginning salaries and average yearly salaries. The average beginning public school teacher salary is \$41,770. Montana has the nation's lowest beginning teacher salary of \$32,495 and New Jersey has the highest state beginning teacher salary of \$54,053. Kansas beginning teachers earn an average of \$39,100, a ranking of twenty among the fifty states. Missouri ranks a low forty-eight in comparison to the other fifty states with a beginning teachers' salary of \$33,234.⁵

An analysis of an annual report in the publication *Education Week* ranks the national average teacher's salary for 2021 as \$65,090. New York public school teachers average a salary which ranks as the highest nationwide with a salary of \$87,738, whereas Mississippi ranks lowest among the states with an average public school teaching salary of \$47,655. Within the national rankings, Kansas is thirty-ninth with a public school teaching salary of \$53,932. Missouri ranks an even lower forty-fourth, as their public school teachers earn an average of \$51,557.⁶ Salary ranges can vary widely depending on the city and many other important factors, including the

³ Tim Carpenter, "Kansas Public Universities Finalizing Plan in Response to Shortage of K-12 Teachers," December 27, 2022, accessed January 30, 2023, <https://kansasreflector.com/2022/12/27/kansas-public-universities-finalizing-plan-in-response-to-shortage-of-k-12-teachers/>.

⁴ Reggie Wade, "State-by-State Data Show Gaps in Teacher Salaries, Student Spending: NEA," *Yahoo Finance*, April 27, 2021, accessed January 30, 2023, <https://finance.yahoo.com/news/state-by-state-data-shows-gaps-in-teacher-salaries-student-spending-nea-175635145.html>.

⁵ NEA Collective Bargaining and Member Advocacy Department, "Teacher Salary Benchmarks," April 26, 2022, accessed January 29, 2023, <https://www.nea.org/resource-library/teacher-salary-benchmarks>.

⁶ Madeline Will, "Teacher Salaries are Increasing. See How Your State Compares," *Education Week*, April 26, 2021, accessed January 30, 2023, <https://edweek.org/teaching-learning/teacher-salaries-are-increasing-see-how-your-state-compares/2021/04?s>.

teacher's education degree(s), state teacher certifications held, and the number of years the teacher has been a classroom teacher.

The “teacher wage penalty” is a nationwide phenomenon. The Economic Policy Institute (EPI) estimates wage gaps comparing the states nationwide. Six years of federal data was accumulated from 2016 to 2021 to devise a big enough sample size to evaluate. “The institute has been tracking the ‘teacher pay penalty’ for 18 years, and in 2021, it reached a new high: 23.5 percent less than comparable college graduates,” according to an article in *Education Week*.⁷

Teachers’ Salaries in Missouri and Kansas

During 2020-23, approximately 300,000 Missouri teachers left teaching. One of reasons that teachers left their profession is low teacher’s salary.⁸

By law Missouri sets a limit of a minimum annual salary for public school teachers for first year teachers at \$25,000 and for teachers with a MA degree with 10 years of teaching experience in public schools is \$33,000.⁹

Stress and Burn-out

Public schools in Missouri and Kansas initially responded to COVID-19 by closing their brick and mortar schools and continuing instruction through remote learning. Teachers had little training, skills or time to prepare to teach electronically. The stress of accommodating instruction to an online format took its toll on teachers’ mental health. During the first few years of the Coronavirus, teachers were regarded as heroes by many students’ parents as they saw teachers tirelessly teaching creative lessons to their homebound students. Over time, this changed. As Daniel Klaassen wrote in the Kansas Action for Children Blog, “Two and a half years later, the narrative has shifted from praising teachers’ tireless contributions helping raise the next generation to criticism by some policymakers and disgruntled special interest groups attacking their lesson plans, library selections, and professional judgment.”¹⁰

According to a 2020-2021 survey by The RAND Corporation (research and development) American Teacher Panel, during the pandemic stress was cited as the major reason teachers left the profession. “Perhaps as a result [of the pandemic], one in four teachers were considering leaving their job by the end of the school year—more than in a typical prepandemic year and a higher rate than employed adults nationally. Black or African American teachers were particularly likely to plan to leave. Also, teachers were more likely to report experiencing

⁷ Madeline Will, “The Gap Between Teacher Pay and other Professions Hit a New High. How Bad is it?” *Education Week*, August 22, 2022, accessed February 1, 2023, <https://www.edweek.org/teaching-learning/the-gap-between-teacher-pay-and-other-professions-hits-a-new-high-how-bad-is-it/2022/08>.

⁸ Elizabeth Bleier and Julie Gronquist-Blodgett, “Missouri Teachers Deserve Better Pay and Sufficient Support,” *Missouri Independent*, May 9, 2023, accessed September 7, 2023, <https://missouriindependent.com/2023/05/09/missouri-teachers-deserve-better-pay-and-sufficient-support/>.

⁹ Missouri NEA, *Teacher Salary Research*, accessed Sept 22, 2023, <https://www.mnea.org/research>.

¹⁰ Daniel Klaassen, “Kansas’ Teacher Shortage has Worsened, Hurting Kids’ Learning Opportunities,” Kansas Action for Children Blog, November 2, 2022, accessed January 24, 2023, https://www.kac.org/kansas_teacher_shortage_has_worsened_kids_learning_opportunities.

frequent job-related stress and symptoms of depression than the general population,” the report found.¹¹

Stressors for classroom teachers include the use of unfamiliar technology for remote instruction, balancing multiple modalities of instruction, worries about their personal health as well as that of their students when returning to in-class instruction, and a concern about the challenges of transitioning to remote teaching in addition to the economic necessity of having secondary jobs for some. Job-related stress and symptoms of depression are remarkably higher among teachers compared to that of the general adult population in the United States.

In an article by Abigail Johnson Hess, teacher Henry Rivera Leal stated that, “People are posting about how burnt out they are, how frustrated they are, how close to the edge they are.” In addition, he said, “You go into it [teaching] because it’s something that you want to do. And we’ve reached the point where that’s been exploited.”¹²

A contemporary and too often occurring stress for teachers is the terror of school shootings.

“Since 1970, there have been 2,057 incidents involving the discharge of a firearm on school property and 680 people have died.”¹³ These numbers continue to increase the fear of gun violence in the schools which impact the stress and safety of the teachers, students, staff, and administrators.

Patricia Woods was a classroom teacher for nine years in the southwestern part of Missouri. She was threatened by students, cursed by them and physically restrained by a student on his lap in front of the other students in her class. “Woods was not alone in navigating those types of altercations. Almost 22% of educators say they have been threatened, and 12% say they have been attacked by a student at their current school, according to a 2019 report from the Economic Policy Institute.”¹⁴ As a result of persistent stress Woods experienced burn-out, leaving the teaching profession for a corporate job.

Cindy Deutsch taught kindergarten in Wichita, Kansas, for thirty-seven years and has recently retired. She said that as teachers they are micromanaged a lot and told exactly what they are to teach and when they are to teach it. She stated that a major frustration was a focus on testing even the youngest of students, her kindergarteners. Deutsch said that when she began teaching, her students’ report cards contained four categories in the subjects of reading and writing. In the

¹¹ Elizabeth D. Steiner and Ashley Woo, *Job-Related Stress Threatens the Teacher Supply: Key Findings from the 2021 State of the U.S. Teacher Survey* (Santa Monica, CA: RAND Corporation, 2021) accessed January 23, 2023, https://www.rand.org/pubs/research_reports/RRA1108-1.html.

¹² Abigail Johnson Hess, “I Felt Like I was Being Experimented on’: 1 in 4 Teachers are Considering Quitting After this Past Year,” *CNBC Make It*, June 25, 2021, accessed February 10, 2023, <https://cnbc.com/2021/06/24/1-in-4-teachers-are-considering-quitting-after-this-past-year.html>.

¹³ Amy Rock, “K-12 School Shooting Statistics: 52 Years of Data,” *Campus Safety Magazine*, October 5, 2023, accessed November 5, 2023, <https://www.campussafetymagazine.com/safety/k-12-school-shooting-statistics-everyone-should-know/>.

¹⁴ Ralph Chapoco, “Missouri Faces Teacher Shortage as Wages, Demands Drive Educators Away,” *Missouri Business Alert*, February 20, 2020, accessed February 4, 2023, https://www.missouribusinessalert.com/news/business/missouri-faces-teacher-shortage-as-wages-demands-drive-educators-away/article_941c01d2-2795-56c9-8d15-d929f073203f.html.

final years of her teaching there were more than twenty reading and writing categories on a student's report card. Deutsch provided the following analogy comparing teaching a student to that of caring for a cow. She said, "We weigh the cow, and we weigh the cow, but we don't have time to feed the cow because we're weighing the cow so much."¹⁵

An excessive amount of student testing, along with the contemporary reality of school boards and the public at large creating a "culture war," often banning selected books, results in continued stress for teachers. These facts along with other external influences controlling and in some cases legislating what subject matter can be taught in schools leads to teachers feeling a heightened amount of stress. This intense stress often results in burn-out for too many teachers. Some special interest groups and politicians respond to what they consider schools' liberal orthodoxy and teaching practices. These influences, such as those of the Moms for Liberty organization, are having a growing impact on public education. Extreme conservative approaches attempt to control the verbiage teachers use with their students along with the textbooks and literature used in their classrooms.¹⁶ The contributing factors which have led to a teacher shortage in Missouri and Kansas are indicative of a broader nationwide trend.

Suggestions To Solve Teacher Shortages

Teacher Salary Increase

There are policies that can be adopted to increase public school teachers' salaries. For example, the teachers' pay scale can be differentiated depending upon the needs of the school and the qualifications of the teachers. When teachers teach in high-need schools or in demanding subject matters such as in STEM, they could be paid a higher salary through a differentiated pay scale. A differentiated pay scale could result in increasing teacher retention. Performance-based pay programs can skillfully be implemented for teachers who demonstrate strong quality teaching, carry out additional responsibilities besides teaching in the school, or assume the role of an instructional coach.¹⁷

Four-day School Week

One of the strategies of handling the public school teacher shortage is implementing a four-day school week, which is an alternative to the traditional five-day schedule. It has become popular lately because it is helpful not only for rural school districts but also for urban school districts which constantly suffer from teacher shortages and budgetary limits.¹⁸

¹⁵ Suzanne Perez, "Burned-out: As More Educators Leave, Kansas Faces its Worst-Ever Teacher Shortage," July 5, 2022, accessed June 13, 2022, <https://www.kmuw.org/news/2022-07-05/burned-out-as-more-educators-leave-kansas-faces-its-worst-ever-teacher-shortage>.

¹⁶ Paige Williams, "The Right-Wing Mother Fueling the School-Board Wars," *The New Yorker*, October 31, 2022, accessed November 7, 2023, <https://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2022/11/07/the-right-wing-mothers-fuelling-the-school-board-wars>.

¹⁷ Michael Hansen, "Ways to Reform Teacher Compensation, Beyond a \$60,000 Minimum Salary," The Brookings Institution, March 8, 2023, accessed September 10, 2023, <https://www.brookings.edu/articles/ways-to-reform-teacher-compensation-beyond-a-60000-minimum-salary>.

¹⁸ National Conference of State Legislatures (NCSL), "Four-Day School Week Overview," June 28, 2023, accessed September 7, 2023, <https://www.ncsl.org/education/four-day-school-week-overview>.

Nationwide, almost 900 school districts are implementing a four-day school week and the number of school districts scheduling such weeks is increasing. In 2020, there were 650 districts with four-day school weeks, and in 2023, there are 876 districts in twenty-six states that implemented a four-day school schedule.¹⁹

In the academic school year 2023-2024, 161 school districts in the state of Missouri have implemented a four-day school schedule. For example, the Independence school district in Kansas City serves 14,000 students and has become the largest school district to shorten the school week. Consequently, the number of teacher applications in the district has increased as a result of changing the weekly schedule to longer hours within a four-day school week.²⁰

Missouri school districts must deliver the instructional time of 1,044 hours required by state law. School districts have the flexibility to schedule the school week as they wish, for example, Monday to Thursday or Tuesday to Friday. School districts can elect to add thirty-five extra minutes onto each day to meet the state instructional time requirement. Since 2019, Warren County R-III School District in Warrenton, a suburb of St. Louis, Missouri, approximately 3,000 students go to school from Tuesday to Friday. For parents who need child care service on Monday, the school district offers free of charge child care. The four-day weekly school schedule is a factor in the teacher retention rate being increased from 15 percent to 20 percent.

School Climate

School climate is a multifaceted concept. It refers to the culture, quality, and character of the school that encompasses multiple layers of goals, standards, values, and interpersonal interactions among students, parents, and school personnel. It is a foundation for school success which contributes to the students' academic achievement and socio-emotional wellbeing, promoting teachers' autonomy, and creating a safe environment. Specifically, the concept of school climate is related to three critical aspects of school success, as follows:

- **Engagement.** Strong relationships between students, teachers, families, and schools and strong connections between schools and the broader community.
- **Safety.** Schools and school-related activities where students are safe from violence, bullying, harassment, and controlled-substance use.
- **Environment.** Appropriate facilities, well-managed classrooms, available school-based health supports, and a clear, fair disciplinary policy.²¹

Reasons why education sector employees, including teachers, plan to leave or stay is closely related to the school climate. Two of the predominant reasons that teachers are willing to stay in

¹⁹ CBS News, "More U.S. school districts are shifting to a 4-day week. Here's why," August 7, 2023, accessed September 7, 2023, <https://www.cbsnews.com/news/school-districts-4-day-week-teachers-parents/>.

²⁰ Natalie Wallington, "About 140 Missouri and 25 Kansas districts have 4-day school weeks. Here's where," *The Kansas City Star*, August 24, 2022, accessed September 7, <https://www.kansascity.com/news/local/education/article264703479.html#storylink=cpy>.

²¹ National Center on Safe Supportive Learning Environments, "School Climate Improvement," accessed September 7, 2023, <https://safesupportivelearning.ed.gov/school-climate-improvement>.

their professions are “meaningful work” and “colleagues/community.” When teachers perceive that their work and the mission of the organization are aligned with their educational philosophy, they are satisfied with their current teaching position. An additional reason that teachers continue to stay in their job is when a collaborative relationship develops with coworkers who have shared goals and genuine concerns. Along with the low monetary compensation, other factors such as being overwhelmed with work responsibilities, a work-life imbalance, and a lack of support and resources contribute to lower teacher retention.²²

Teacher burnout and attrition are closely related to how the decision-making process or communication channel is structured in the school. When the power is vertically structured, or the communication is mostly delivered from the administrative top down to teachers, they can feel isolated or marginalized, which negatively affects the teacher’s mental health and is evident in their job performance. Teachers’ mental health and job performance is associated with their students’ learning outcomes and their students’ social-emotional development. In many cases, collaborative work relationships among teachers or learning from one another such as in a peer observation experience can provide effective learning opportunities for teachers.²³

To foster a positive school climate, it is important to collect relevant data to identify areas in the school climate needing improvement. This needs assessment can easily be accomplished through conducting a survey which asks the opinion of teachers, parents, and administrators. A collaborative relationship among teachers, parents, and administrators creates a positive and reassuring school climate which positively improves teacher retention.²⁴

Conclusion

As the NEA states, “The educator shortage crisis is real, and it requires immediate and sustained attention to identify and implement long-term solutions to improve educator recruitment and retention.”²⁵

This teacher shortage crisis is exacerbated by the lower number of undergraduate students majoring in education during the past few decades. These undergraduate majors serve as the “educational pipeline” to fill needed teacher vacancies. Figure 1 identifies this nationwide decline in education majors since 1970 when there were 176,307 undergraduates receiving a

²² Jake Bryant, Samvitha Ram, Doug Scott, and Claire Williams, “K–12 Teachers Are Quitting. What Would Make Them Stay?” McKinsey & Company, March 2, 2023, accessed September 7, 2023, <https://www.mckinsey.com/industries/education/our-insights/k-12-teachers-are-quitting-what-would-make-them-stay>.

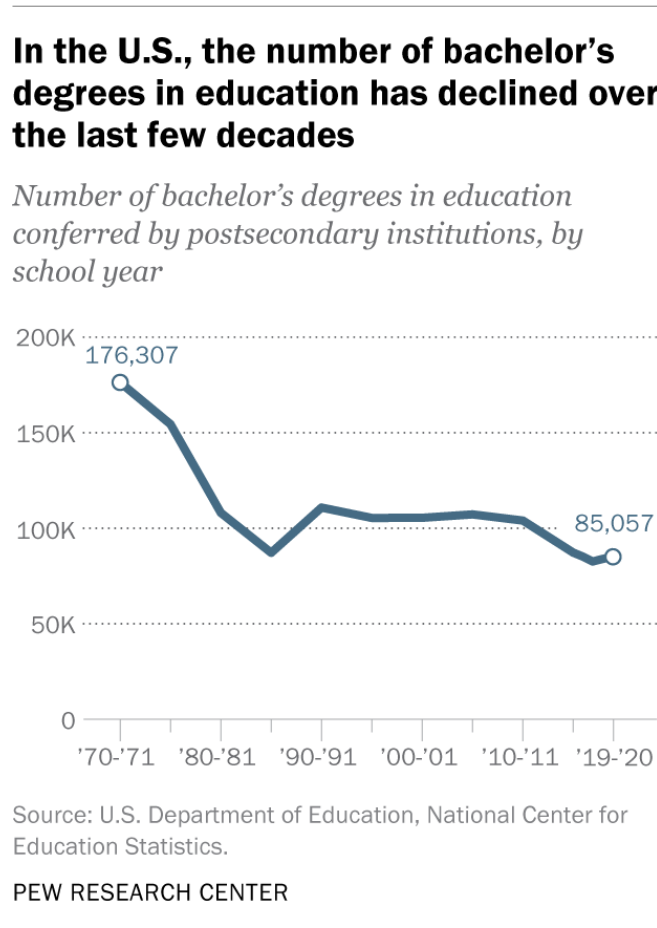
²³ Sarah Gonser, “Building a Culture that Respects Teachers and Reduces Stress,” *Edutopia*, February 5, 2021, accessed September 7, 2023, <https://www.edutopia.org/article/building-culture-respects-teachers-and-reduces-stress/>.

²⁴ Abigail Swisher, “Building a School Climate That Makes Teachers Want to Stay,” National Counsel on Teacher Quality Blog, April 14, 2022, accessed September 7, 2023, <https://www.nctq.org/blog/Building-a-school-climate-that-makes-teachers-want-to-stay>.

²⁵ National Education Association Report, “Solving Educator Shortages by Making Public Education an Attractive and Competitive Career Path,” October 4, 2022, accessed August 12, 2023, <https://www.nea.org/resource-library/solving-educator-shortages-making-public-education-attractive-and-competitive-career-path>.

bachelor’s degree in education at postsecondary institutions to a considerably lower number of 85,057 pre-teachers graduating in 2020.

Figure 1: Decline in Undergraduate Students Choosing to Major in Education.²⁶



The reasons that some undergraduate students are not choosing to become teachers are those same reasons teachers are choosing to leave the profession. Teachers experience low pay, safety concerns, stress and burn-out and as a consequence, public school classroom teaching can seem less attractive as a life-long career. There are complex reasons for the growing teacher shortage in Missouri and Kansas and needed actions, if heeded, can rectify this dire situation in public education.

²⁶ Katherine Schaeffer, “A Dwindling Number of New U.S. College Graduates Have a Degree in Education,” Pew Research Center, September 27, 2022, accessed August 11, 2023, <https://www.pewresearch.org/short-reads/2022/09/27/a-dwindling-number-of-new-u-s-college-graduates-have-a-degree-in-education/>.

In Real Time, a Crisis in Public Education: Teacher Shortages in Missouri and Kansas

Dong Hwa Choi, PhD
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Introduction

Nationwide public school teacher shortages, including those in Missouri and Kansas, started before the onslaught of COVID-19 yet were exacerbated by the pandemic. Shortages are found in all elementary, middle school and high school grades, including special education. An increasing number of public school teachers who are no longer teaching have quit classroom teaching, were fired, retired, transferred, died, or were separated from teaching due to their disability. Reasons for leaving classroom teaching include gaining employment in more financially advantageous, socially prestigious and safe professions.¹

The percentage of teachers who have quit their profession has been on a relative increase since 2009. “Although there has been considerable volatility during the pandemic era, the rate reached a record high of 1.3 percent in March 2022. These data provide a clear indication that educators quitting—not leaving for other reasons—is driving a significant part of the current educator shortage.”²

Teachers quitting the education profession has definitely led to the shortfall of teachers in public education. Reasons why teachers have quit and why undergraduates are not choosing to major in education are further explained in this article.

Contributing Factors to the Teacher Shortage in Missouri and Kansas

Rick Ginsburg, dean of education at the University of Kansas, said, “Kansas was experiencing teacher shortage issues present nationally. A federal report said 53 percent of public schools

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Judith McConnell Mikkelson is an Emeritus Professor of Early Childhood Education at Washburn University, Kansas.

¹ Stacey Pelika, “6 Charts that Explain the Educator Shortage,” *NEA Today*, September 30, 2022, accessed August 10, 2023, <https://www.nea.org/advocating-for-change/new-from-nea/6-charts-explain-educator-shortage>.

² National Education Association, *Elevating the Education Professions: Solving Educator Shortages by Making Public Education and Attractive and Competitive Career Path* (National Education Association, October 2022), accessed August 11, 2023, <https://www.nea.org/sites/default/files/2022-09/solving-educator-shortage-report-final-9-30-22.pdf>.

were understaffed in the current academic year. A National Education Association (NEA) survey in 2022 found 55 percent of teachers had given thought to a career change. In 2019, a Phi Delta Kappa poll showed 55 percent of teachers didn't want their children to follow them into teaching."³ The public education teacher shortage in Missouri, like Kansas, has been a prevailing problem for many years, escalating since the spring of 2020 with the onset of the COVID-19.

The teacher shortage in public education is a pervasive and complicated problem. Reasons for the teacher shortage range from low teacher pay to stress and burn-out from the changes in their teaching roles due to the COVID-19, to being micromanaged in their classroom teaching. Too many teachers have unsupportive administrators, elected officials and parents who create barriers to their success in teaching. These contributing factors, among other reasons for the current teacher shortage are further explained as follows.

Low Pay

NEA President Rebecca Pringle said, "As the nation's public schools struggle with a looming teacher shortage that has only been exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic, one of the best indicators of attracting and retaining teachers is looking at the starting and average salaries for the profession."⁴ Pringle is advocating for a national teachers' salary of \$40,000. Among its numerous reports and position statements, NEA annually collects data from each state's department of education to rank and compare public school teachers' beginning salaries and average yearly salaries. The average beginning public school teacher salary is \$41,770. Montana has the nation's lowest beginning teacher salary of \$32,495 and New Jersey has the highest state beginning teacher salary of \$54,053. Kansas beginning teachers earn an average of \$39,100, a ranking of twenty among the fifty states. Missouri ranks a low forty-eight in comparison to the other fifty states with a beginning teachers' salary of \$33,234.⁵

An analysis of an annual report in the publication *Education Week* ranks the national average teacher's salary for 2021 as \$65,090. New York public school teachers average a salary which ranks as the highest nationwide with a salary of \$87,738, whereas Mississippi ranks lowest among the states with an average public school teaching salary of \$47,655. Within the national rankings, Kansas is thirty-ninth with a public school teaching salary of \$53,932. Missouri ranks an even lower forty-fourth, as their public school teachers earn an average of \$51,557.⁶ Salary ranges can vary widely depending on the city and many other important factors, including the

³ Tim Carpenter, "Kansas Public Universities Finalizing Plan in Response to Shortage of K-12 Teachers," December 27, 2022, accessed January 30, 2023, <https://kansasreflector.com/2022/12/27/kansas-public-universities-finalizing-plan-in-response-to-shortage-of-k-12-teachers/>.

⁴ Reggie Wade, "State-by-State Data Show Gaps in Teacher Salaries, Student Spending: NEA," *Yahoo Finance*, April 27, 2021, accessed January 30, 2023, <https://finance.yahoo.com/news/state-by-state-data-shows-gaps-in-teacher-salaries-student-spending-nea-175635145.html>.

⁵ NEA Collective Bargaining and Member Advocacy Department, "Teacher Salary Benchmarks," April 26, 2022, accessed January 29, 2023, <https://www.nea.org/resource-library/teacher-salary-benchmarks>.

⁶ Madeline Will, "Teacher Salaries are Increasing. See How Your State Compares," *Education Week*, April 26, 2021, accessed January 30, 2023, <https://edweek.org/teaching-learning/teacher-salaries-are-increasing-see-how-your-state-compares/2021/04?s>.

teacher's education degree(s), state teacher certifications held, and the number of years the teacher has been a classroom teacher.

The “teacher wage penalty” is a nationwide phenomenon. The Economic Policy Institute (EPI) estimates wage gaps comparing the states nationwide. Six years of federal data was accumulated from 2016 to 2021 to devise a big enough sample size to evaluate. “The institute has been tracking the ‘teacher pay penalty’ for 18 years, and in 2021, it reached a new high: 23.5 percent less than comparable college graduates,” according to an article in *Education Week*.⁷

Teachers’ Salaries in Missouri and Kansas

During 2020-23, approximately 300,000 Missouri teachers left teaching. One of reasons that teachers left their profession is low teacher’s salary.⁸

By law Missouri sets a limit of a minimum annual salary for public school teachers for first year teachers at \$25,000 and for teachers with a MA degree with 10 years of teaching experience in public schools is \$33,000.⁹

Stress and Burn-out

Public schools in Missouri and Kansas initially responded to COVID-19 by closing their brick and mortar schools and continuing instruction through remote learning. Teachers had little training, skills or time to prepare to teach electronically. The stress of accommodating instruction to an online format took its toll on teachers’ mental health. During the first few years of the Coronavirus, teachers were regarded as heroes by many students’ parents as they saw teachers tirelessly teaching creative lessons to their homebound students. Over time, this changed. As Daniel Klaassen wrote in the Kansas Action for Children Blog, “Two and a half years later, the narrative has shifted from praising teachers’ tireless contributions helping raise the next generation to criticism by some policymakers and disgruntled special interest groups attacking their lesson plans, library selections, and professional judgment.”¹⁰

According to a 2020-2021 survey by The RAND Corporation (research and development) American Teacher Panel, during the pandemic stress was cited as the major reason teachers left the profession. “Perhaps as a result [of the pandemic], one in four teachers were considering leaving their job by the end of the school year—more than in a typical prepandemic year and a higher rate than employed adults nationally. Black or African American teachers were particularly likely to plan to leave. Also, teachers were more likely to report experiencing

⁷ Madeline Will, “The Gap Between Teacher Pay and other Professions Hit a New High. How Bad is it?” *Education Week*, August 22, 2022, accessed February 1, 2023, <https://www.edweek.org/teaching-learning/the-gap-between-teacher-pay-and-other-professions-hits-a-new-high-how-bad-is-it/2022/08>.

⁸ Elizabeth Bleier and Julie Gronquist-Blodgett, “Missouri Teachers Deserve Better Pay and Sufficient Support,” *Missouri Independent*, May 9, 2023, accessed September 7, 2023, <https://missouriindependent.com/2023/05/09/missouri-teachers-deserve-better-pay-and-sufficient-support/>.

⁹ Missouri NEA, *Teacher Salary Research*, accessed Sept 22, 2023, <https://www.mnea.org/research>.

¹⁰ Daniel Klaassen, “Kansas’ Teacher Shortage has Worsened, Hurting Kids’ Learning Opportunities,” Kansas Action for Children Blog, November 2, 2022, accessed January 24, 2023, https://www.kac.org/kansas_teacher_shortage_has_worsened_kids_learning_opportunities.

frequent job-related stress and symptoms of depression than the general population,” the report found.¹¹

Stressors for classroom teachers include the use of unfamiliar technology for remote instruction, balancing multiple modalities of instruction, worries about their personal health as well as that of their students when returning to in-class instruction, and a concern about the challenges of transitioning to remote teaching in addition to the economic necessity of having secondary jobs for some. Job-related stress and symptoms of depression are remarkably higher among teachers compared to that of the general adult population in the United States.

In an article by Abigail Johnson Hess, teacher Henry Rivera Leal stated that, “People are posting about how burnt out they are, how frustrated they are, how close to the edge they are.” In addition, he said, “You go into it [teaching] because it’s something that you want to do. And we’ve reached the point where that’s been exploited.”¹²

A contemporary and too often occurring stress for teachers is the terror of school shootings.

“Since 1970, there have been 2,057 incidents involving the discharge of a firearm on school property and 680 people have died.”¹³ These numbers continue to increase the fear of gun violence in the schools which impact the stress and safety of the teachers, students, staff, and administrators.

Patricia Woods was a classroom teacher for nine years in the southwestern part of Missouri. She was threatened by students, cursed by them and physically restrained by a student on his lap in front of the other students in her class. “Woods was not alone in navigating those types of altercations. Almost 22% of educators say they have been threatened, and 12% say they have been attacked by a student at their current school, according to a 2019 report from the Economic Policy Institute.”¹⁴ As a result of persistent stress Woods experienced burn-out, leaving the teaching profession for a corporate job.

Cindy Deutsch taught kindergarten in Wichita, Kansas, for thirty-seven years and has recently retired. She said that as teachers they are micromanaged a lot and told exactly what they are to teach and when they are to teach it. She stated that a major frustration was a focus on testing even the youngest of students, her kindergarteners. Deutsch said that when she began teaching, her students’ report cards contained four categories in the subjects of reading and writing. In the

¹¹ Elizabeth D. Steiner and Ashley Woo, *Job-Related Stress Threatens the Teacher Supply: Key Findings from the 2021 State of the U.S. Teacher Survey* (Santa Monica, CA: RAND Corporation, 2021) accessed January 23, 2023, https://www.rand.org/pubs/research_reports/RRA1108-1.html.

¹² Abigail Johnson Hess, “I Felt Like I was Being Experimented on’: 1 in 4 Teachers are Considering Quitting After this Past Year,” *CNBC Make It*, June 25, 2021, accessed February 10, 2023, <https://cnbc.com/2021/06/24/1-in-4-teachers-are-considering-quitting-after-this-past-year.html>.

¹³ Amy Rock, “K-12 School Shooting Statistics: 52 Years of Data,” *Campus Safety Magazine*, October 5, 2023, accessed November 5, 2023, <https://www.campusafety.com/safety/k-12-school-shooting-statistics-everyone-should-know/>.

¹⁴ Ralph Chapoco, “Missouri Faces Teacher Shortage as Wages, Demands Drive Educators Away,” *Missouri Business Alert*, February 20, 2020, accessed February 4, 2023, https://www.missouribusinessalert.com/news/business/missouri-faces-teacher-shortage-as-wages-demands-drive-educators-away/article_941c01d2-2795-56c9-8d15-d929f073203f.html.

final years of her teaching there were more than twenty reading and writing categories on a student's report card. Deutsch provided the following analogy comparing teaching a student to that of caring for a cow. She said, "We weigh the cow, and we weigh the cow, but we don't have time to feed the cow because we're weighing the cow so much."¹⁵

An excessive amount of student testing, along with the contemporary reality of school boards and the public at large creating a "culture war," often banning selected books, results in continued stress for teachers. These facts along with other external influences controlling and in some cases legislating what subject matter can be taught in schools leads to teachers feeling a heightened amount of stress. This intense stress often results in burn-out for too many teachers. Some special interest groups and politicians respond to what they consider schools' liberal orthodoxy and teaching practices. These influences, such as those of the Moms for Liberty organization, are having a growing impact on public education. Extreme conservative approaches attempt to control the verbiage teachers use with their students along with the textbooks and literature used in their classrooms.¹⁶ The contributing factors which have led to a teacher shortage in Missouri and Kansas are indicative of a broader nationwide trend.

Suggestions To Solve Teacher Shortages

Teacher Salary Increase

There are policies that can be adopted to increase public school teachers' salaries. For example, the teachers' pay scale can be differentiated depending upon the needs of the school and the qualifications of the teachers. When teachers teach in high-need schools or in demanding subject matters such as in STEM, they could be paid a higher salary through a differentiated pay scale. A differentiated pay scale could result in increasing teacher retention. Performance-based pay programs can skillfully be implemented for teachers who demonstrate strong quality teaching, carry out additional responsibilities besides teaching in the school, or assume the role of an instructional coach.¹⁷

Four-day School Week

One of the strategies of handling the public school teacher shortage is implementing a four-day school week, which is an alternative to the traditional five-day schedule. It has become popular lately because it is helpful not only for rural school districts but also for urban school districts which constantly suffer from teacher shortages and budgetary limits.¹⁸

¹⁵ Suzanne Perez, "Burned-out: As More Educators Leave, Kansas Faces its Worst-Ever Teacher Shortage," July 5, 2022, accessed June 13, 2022, <https://www.kmuw.org/news/2022-07-05/burned-out-as-more-educators-leave-kansas-faces-its-worst-ever-teacher-shortage>.

¹⁶ Paige Williams, "The Right-Wing Mother Fueling the School-Board Wars," *The New Yorker*, October 31, 2022, accessed November 7, 2023, <https://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2022/11/07/the-right-wing-mothers-fuelling-the-school-board-wars>.

¹⁷ Michael Hansen, "Ways to Reform Teacher Compensation, Beyond a \$60,000 Minimum Salary," The Brookings Institution, March 8, 2023, accessed September 10, 2023, <https://www.brookings.edu/articles/ways-to-reform-teacher-compensation-beyond-a-60000-minimum-salary>.

¹⁸ National Conference of State Legislatures (NCSL), "Four-Day School Week Overview," June 28, 2023, accessed September 7, 2023, <https://www.ncsl.org/education/four-day-school-week-overview>.

Nationwide, almost 900 school districts are implementing a four-day school week and the number of school districts scheduling such weeks is increasing. In 2020, there were 650 districts with four-day school weeks, and in 2023, there are 876 districts in twenty-six states that implemented a four-day school schedule.¹⁹

In the academic school year 2023-2024, 161 school districts in the state of Missouri have implemented a four-day school schedule. For example, the Independence school district in Kansas City serves 14,000 students and has become the largest school district to shorten the school week. Consequently, the number of teacher applications in the district has increased as a result of changing the weekly schedule to longer hours within a four-day school week.²⁰

Missouri school districts must deliver the instructional time of 1,044 hours required by state law. School districts have the flexibility to schedule the school week as they wish, for example, Monday to Thursday or Tuesday to Friday. School districts can elect to add thirty-five extra minutes onto each day to meet the state instructional time requirement. Since 2019, Warren County R-III School District in Warrenton, a suburb of St. Louis, Missouri, approximately 3,000 students go to school from Tuesday to Friday. For parents who need child care service on Monday, the school district offers free of charge child care. The four-day weekly school schedule is a factor in the teacher retention rate being increased from 15 percent to 20 percent.

School Climate

School climate is a multifaceted concept. It refers to the culture, quality, and character of the school that encompasses multiple layers of goals, standards, values, and interpersonal interactions among students, parents, and school personnel. It is a foundation for school success which contributes to the students' academic achievement and socio-emotional wellbeing, promoting teachers' autonomy, and creating a safe environment. Specifically, the concept of school climate is related to three critical aspects of school success, as follows:

- **Engagement.** Strong relationships between students, teachers, families, and schools and strong connections between schools and the broader community.
- **Safety.** Schools and school-related activities where students are safe from violence, bullying, harassment, and controlled-substance use.
- **Environment.** Appropriate facilities, well-managed classrooms, available school-based health supports, and a clear, fair disciplinary policy.²¹

Reasons why education sector employees, including teachers, plan to leave or stay is closely related to the school climate. Two of the predominant reasons that teachers are willing to stay in

¹⁹ CBS News, "More U.S. school districts are shifting to a 4-day week. Here's why," August 7, 2023, accessed September 7, 2023, <https://www.cbsnews.com/news/school-districts-4-day-week-teachers-parents/>.

²⁰ Natalie Wallington, "About 140 Missouri and 25 Kansas districts have 4-day school weeks. Here's where," *The Kansas City Star*, August 24, 2022, accessed September 7, <https://www.kansascity.com/news/local/education/article264703479.html#storylink=cpy>.

²¹ National Center on Safe Supportive Learning Environments, "School Climate Improvement," accessed September 7, 2023, <https://safesupportivelearning.ed.gov/school-climate-improvement>.

their professions are “meaningful work” and “colleagues/community.” When teachers perceive that their work and the mission of the organization are aligned with their educational philosophy, they are satisfied with their current teaching position. An additional reason that teachers continue to stay in their job is when a collaborative relationship develops with coworkers who have shared goals and genuine concerns. Along with the low monetary compensation, other factors such as being overwhelmed with work responsibilities, a work-life imbalance, and a lack of support and resources contribute to lower teacher retention.²²

Teacher burnout and attrition are closely related to how the decision-making process or communication channel is structured in the school. When the power is vertically structured, or the communication is mostly delivered from the administrative top down to teachers, they can feel isolated or marginalized, which negatively affects the teacher’s mental health and is evident in their job performance. Teachers’ mental health and job performance is associated with their students’ learning outcomes and their students’ social-emotional development. In many cases, collaborative work relationships among teachers or learning from one another such as in a peer observation experience can provide effective learning opportunities for teachers.²³

To foster a positive school climate, it is important to collect relevant data to identify areas in the school climate needing improvement. This needs assessment can easily be accomplished through conducting a survey which asks the opinion of teachers, parents, and administrators. A collaborative relationship among teachers, parents, and administrators creates a positive and reassuring school climate which positively improves teacher retention.²⁴

Conclusion

As the NEA states, “The educator shortage crisis is real, and it requires immediate and sustained attention to identify and implement long-term solutions to improve educator recruitment and retention.”²⁵

This teacher shortage crisis is exacerbated by the lower number of undergraduate students majoring in education during the past few decades. These undergraduate majors serve as the “educational pipeline” to fill needed teacher vacancies. Figure 1 identifies this nationwide decline in education majors since 1970 when there were 176,307 undergraduates receiving a

²² Jake Bryant, Samvitha Ram, Doug Scott, and Claire Williams, “K–12 Teachers Are Quitting. What Would Make Them Stay?” McKinsey & Company, March 2, 2023, accessed September 7, 2023, <https://www.mckinsey.com/industries/education/our-insights/k-12-teachers-are-quitting-what-would-make-them-stay>.

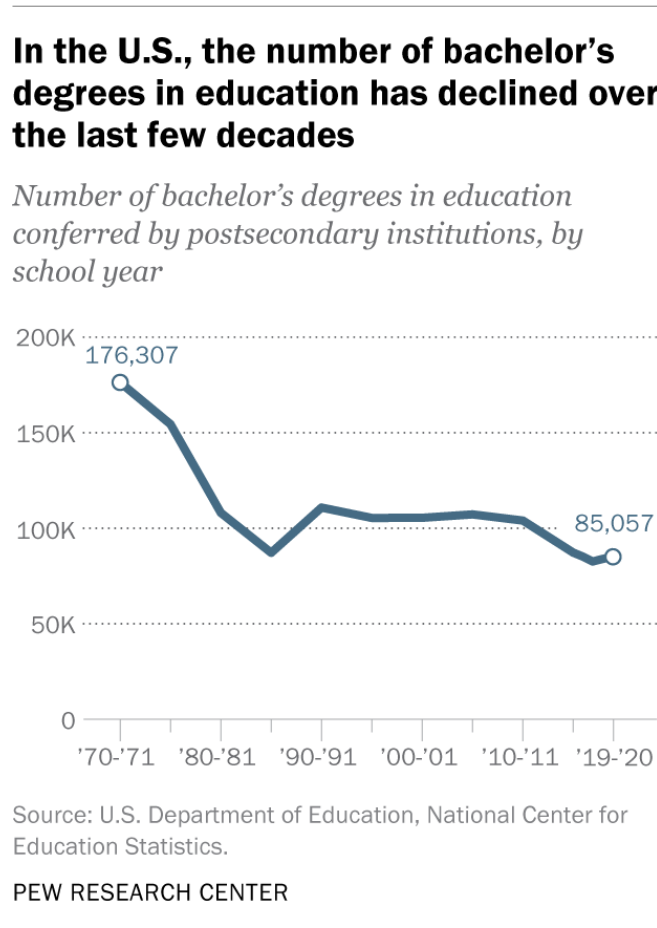
²³ Sarah Gonser, “Building a Culture that Respects Teachers and Reduces Stress,” *Edutopia*, February 5, 2021, accessed September 7, 2023, <https://www.edutopia.org/article/building-culture-respects-teachers-and-reduces-stress/>.

²⁴ Abigail Swisher, “Building a School Climate That Makes Teachers Want to Stay,” National Counsel on Teacher Quality Blog, April 14, 2022, accessed September 7, 2023, <https://www.nctq.org/blog/Building-a-school-climate-that-makes-teachers-want-to-stay>.

²⁵ National Education Association Report, “Solving Educator Shortages by Making Public Education an Attractive and Competitive Career Path,” October 4, 2022, accessed August 12, 2023, <https://www.nea.org/resource-library/solving-educator-shortages-making-public-education-attractive-and-competitive-career-path>.

bachelor’s degree in education at postsecondary institutions to a considerably lower number of 85,057 pre-teachers graduating in 2020.

Figure 1: Decline in Undergraduate Students Choosing to Major in Education.²⁶



The reasons that some undergraduate students are not choosing to become teachers are those same reasons teachers are choosing to leave the profession. Teachers experience low pay, safety concerns, stress and burn-out and as a consequence, public school classroom teaching can seem less attractive as a life-long career. There are complex reasons for the growing teacher shortage in Missouri and Kansas and needed actions, if heeded, can rectify this dire situation in public education.

²⁶ Katherine Schaeffer, “A Dwindling Number of New U.S. College Graduates Have a Degree in Education,” Pew Research Center, September 27, 2022, accessed August 11, 2023, <https://www.pewresearch.org/short-reads/2022/09/27/a-dwindling-number-of-new-u-s-college-graduates-have-a-degree-in-education/>.

Book Banning Trend Fuels Far-Reaching Effects, As Well As Challenges To Restrictions

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Every September since 1982, the American Library Association has supported libraries across the country by devoting a week to highlighting banned books. Every year, my library pours over banned book lists and creates a display of titles that have received this “honor” at one time or another. The exercise has always been interesting, and let’s face it, a little disturbing.

Unfortunately, what had been an annual endeavor to expose flagrant censorship has quickly evolved into a daily undertaking in protecting what appears to be a brazen assault on intellectual freedom and inquiry evident in the spate of restrictive legislation appearing across the country in educational settings at every level. Results of a report published by the American Library Association in March 2022 notes 71 percent of voters oppose book banning. Broken down by party, results indicate 75 percent of Democrats are in opposition, as are 58 percent of Independents and 70 percent of Republicans.¹ While public opinion stands against book banning, Missouri lawmakers have introduced more “educational intimidation bills” than any other state, with thirty proposals among nearly 400 identified nationwide, according to a 2023 report by PEN America.² The proposals included legislation like Missouri Senate Bill 775 (SB775) that effectively banned “explicit” content and led schools to remove hundreds of books, especially those related to racial and LGBTQ+ themes, even though most voters disagreed with censorship.³ The incongruity of these numbers is reflective of both stunning and perplexing legislation recently passed, as well as pending actions.

In November 2021, St. Louis Public Radio reported the Lindbergh School District, along with Wentzville, Francis Howell, Rockwood, and Kirkwood, were schools embroiled in literature challenges. Lindbergh identified sixteen titles, “more than three times the number of the other districts,” for removal.⁴ Books in question primarily include content related to race and/or LGBTQ themes and include titles such as *Heavy*, *The Bluest Eye*, *The Hate U Give*, *All Boys*

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¹ American Library Association, *Large Majorities of Voters Oppose Book Bans and Have Confidence in Libraries*, March 24, 2022, accessed June 1, 2022, <https://www.ala.org/news/press-releases/2022/03/large-majorities-voters-oppose-book-bans-and-have-confidence-libraries>.

² Elizabeth Barmerier, “Missouri Leads Nation in Most ‘Educational Intimidation Bills,’ Says New Report,” *Spectrum News*, August 23, 2023, accessed September 22, 2023, <https://spectrumlocalnews.com/mo/st-louis/news/2023/08/23/new-pen-america-report--missouri-leads-nation-in--educational-intimidation-bills-->.

³ Missouri General Assembly, Senate Bill 775, 101st General Assembly, 2nd sess. (January 5, 2022), effective August 28, 2022, accessed November 15, 2023, [https://www.senate.mo.gov/22info/BTS_Web/Bill.aspx?SessionType=R&BillID=71259740#:~:text=This%20act%20adds%20that%20a,%20FSB%20834%20\(2022\)](https://www.senate.mo.gov/22info/BTS_Web/Bill.aspx?SessionType=R&BillID=71259740#:~:text=This%20act%20adds%20that%20a,%20FSB%20834%20(2022).).

⁴ Kate Grumke, “Schools Across St. Louis Face More Attempts to Remove Books from Library Shelves,” *St. Louis Public Radio*, November 18, 2021, accessed May 20, 2022, <https://news.stlpublicradio.org/education/2021-11-18/schools-across-st-louis-face-more-attempts-to-remove-books-from-library-shelves>.

Aren't Blue, This Book is Gay, and Gender Queer, to name a few. The Wentzville School District removed *The Bluest Eye* from its shelves in January 2022, with the vote being overturned in February 2022, and the book was returned to its shelf.⁵ The bans only continued to accelerate. Across the state of Missouri, there were 333 books banned during the 2022-2023 school year, the third highest total of any state behind Florida and Texas.⁶ In response, the American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU) filed a lawsuit challenging the Missouri law that led to these removals, arguing unconstitutional vagueness and infringement on First Amendment rights.⁷ The legal challenge represented pushback against government overreach into educational materials available to students. These local Missouri bans are reflective of a broader national wave of book banning and censorship efforts.

Restrictive legislation has far-reaching effects. A recent report described how a new Missouri law banning “explicit sexual material” has created an atmosphere of fear among librarians of prosecution for providing certain books.⁸ The account further describes a high school librarian in Wentzville who was reported to police for distributing pornography to students at the high school library in the form of books.⁹ Vague wording led schools like Wentzville to hastily remove hundreds of titles, disproportionately targeting LGBTQ+ related books. Although no librarians have been charged yet, the law sends a message that politicians, not educators, control access.¹⁰

A report by the Associated Press indicated that the book ban push is fueling state libraries nationwide, including Missouri, to leave the American Library Association, which both defends access and protects from censorship.¹¹ The departures highlight growing battles over youth access to disputed materials, with conservative lawmakers and activists seeking greater oversight rather than deferring to librarians’ professional expertise.

As book banning accelerates in Missouri and across the nation, these overt censorship efforts appear to stem from the political firestorm surrounding Diversity, Equity and Inclusion (DEI) programs and critical race theory (CRT) in schools, with legislative attempts to limit access to

⁵ Jane Henderson, “Wentzville School Board Reverses Its Decision on Banned Book,” *St. Louis Post-Dispatch*, February 26, 2022, accessed March 1, 2022, https://www.stltoday.com/entertainment/books-and-literature/wentzville-school-board-reverses-its-decision-on-banned-book/article_69e2d211-a4a0-5900-8a4d-981cd3b50188.html.

⁶ Elizabeth Barmer, “Missouri Bans More Than 333 Books during 2022-23 School Year, New Report Says,” *Spectrum News*, September 21, 2023, accessed October 16, 2023, <https://spectrumlocalnews.com/mo/st-louis/news/2023/09/21/missouri-bans-330-books-during-2022-23-school-year#:~:text=Missouri%20bans%20more%20than%20330,school%20year%2C%20new%20report%20says&text=21%2C%202023-,ST.,333%20book%20bans%20in%20Missouri>.

⁷ ACLU of Missouri, “The ACLU of Missouri; Professional Library Organizations Challenge Government Censorship and Book Removals in Schools,” February 23, 2023, Accessed October 16, 2023, <https://www.aclu-mo.org/en/news/aclu-missouri-professional-library-organizations-challenge-government-censorship-and-book>.

⁸ Erica Hellerstein, “Missouri Librarians Are Risking Jail Time – for Doing Their Jobs,” *Coda Media*, March 30, 2023, accessed October 16, 2023, <https://www.codastory.com/rewriting-history/missouri-libraries-book-ban/>.

⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁰ *Ibid.*

¹¹ Mead Gruver, “Book Ban Push Fuels Library Exodus from National Association That Stands up for Books,” *ABC News*, September 5, 2023, accessed October 16, 2023, <https://abcnews.go.com/US/wireStory/conservative-book-ban-push-fuels-library-exodus-national-102923402#:~:text=Magarian%20has%20been%20following%20Missouri%27s,deemed%20inappropriate%20for%20their%20age>.

both books and instruction on any related topics. CRT is generally found at the graduate level in the academe and seeks to explore racism at the institutional and systemic level.¹² There is no evidence it has been found in K-12 curricula. Instead, the term has been hijacked and redefined to represent any content challenging materials purporting to challenge white narratives of history and power structures. The educational intimidation bills introduced in Missouri exemplify how the manufactured controversies over DEI and CRT are being used as justification to impose greater political control over schools and libraries under the guise of parental rights.

While K-12 educators are certainly on the frontline in defending choices in the classroom and risk punitive consequences should they misstep, educators in higher education face additional challenges. In the academe, there is an expectation of “academic freedom,” meaning the allowance for a great deal of latitude in the presentation and interpretation of ideas. The intention is to provoke thought and critical analysis from students. If students disagree with a thought, idea, or concept, in theory, they should be in an environment encouraging them to express their opposing ideas. However, these legislative realities do not encourage discourse—they promote civil litigation. In higher education, educators are ethically bound to promote a vibrant community of ideas, a willingness to explore ideas not in alignment with our own, a commitment to diversity of thought, and an acceptance of ideas that may be in opposition to our own. This legislation is punitive in its nature, promotes none of the goals stated above, and poses a host of ethical challenges.

Conservatives have reframed the language of CRT and have chosen to make a case for the “dangers” of CRT, creating an environment of fear and misinformation. For example, a podcast with Ted Cruz and Christopher Rufo, a leading conservative voice in the anti-CRT movement, uses divisive language to make their case.¹³ As another example, a diversity training program for government agencies is referred to as a forced “reeducation camp.” A list of liberal “buzzwords” is provided to be on the lookout for as indicators CRT is being presented in the classroom—words like “white privilege,” “systemic racism,” “diversity and equity training,” and the list goes on. Further, they try to make the argument that CRT endeavors to eliminate property and institute a Marxist totalitarian state.¹⁴ A report from the Heritage Foundation does much the same.¹⁵ The report refers to Black Lives Matter protests as an “insurgency.”¹⁶ Further, they refer to CRT in school curriculum as dangerous. They bemoan the integration of issues such as BLM, LBGTQ, and white supremacy as both dangerous and distracting from “real learning.”¹⁷ These hyperbolic outrages have only deepened divisions in an already heated environment.

Just as manufactured outrage over critical race theory has fueled K-12 and higher education censorship efforts, diversity and inclusion initiatives at the postsecondary level have also faced

¹² Stephen Sawchuk, “What Is Critical Race Theory, and Why Is It Under Attack?” *Education Week*, May 18, 2021, accessed April 19, 2022, <https://www.edweek.org/leadership/what-is-critical-race-theory-and-why-is-it-under-attack/2021/05>.

¹³ Ted Cruz, “The Poisoning of the American Mind Ft. Christopher Rufo,” *Verdict with Ted Cruz*, podcast, July 1, 2021, accessed November 15, 2023, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mkAdHQ2q8Fs>.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*

¹⁵ Jonathan Butcher and Mike Gonzalez, “Critical Race Theory, the New Intolerance, and Its Grip on America,” *The Heritage Foundation*, December 7, 2020, accessed May 15, 2022, <https://www.heritage.org/civil-rights/report/critical-race-theory-the-new-intolerance-and-its-grip-america>.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*

¹⁷ *Ibid.*

growing legislative attacks. Missouri’s proposed “Do No Harm Act” threatens diversity, equity and inclusion programs at *any* state-funded post-secondary healthcare training programs.¹⁸ This includes community colleges and vocational programs, as well as state universities. The bill prohibits requiring students, faculty, or staff to study or agree with DEI materials under the threat of institutional loss of state funding.¹⁹ Healthcare educators and professionals rationally argue DEI teachings are essential for training culturally competent clinicians, addressing health disparities, and meeting accreditation requirements.²⁰

Further, failing to meet accreditation standards could jeopardize programs entirely, severely limiting graduates’ educational and employment opportunities.²¹ Opponents of the legislation note DEI helps trainees understand marginalized communities’ needs, diversify campuses and curriculums, and mitigate providers’ implicit biases that demonstrably impact care quality and patient outcomes.²² By imposing arbitrary political limits disconnected from educational and healthcare imperatives, Missouri’s proposal epitomizes the spread of censorship and government overreach under the false pretense of academic oversight. This postsecondary DEI ban provides further support of escalating measures to ban books and censor educational spaces.

Since January 2021, seventy bills have been introduced in twenty-eight states that intend to restrict teaching and learning at the university level.²³ As of June 8, 2022, legislation targeting higher education has been passed in seven states.²⁴ As a result, PEN America released a joint statement with the American Association of Colleges and Universities (AAC&U) bringing light to threats to higher education posed by this type of legislation.

Legislation has targeted what proponents refer to as “divisive” language and includes topics related to race, gender, sex, etc. In states such as Tennessee, Florida, Mississippi, Idaho, Iowa, Oklahoma, and South Dakota, legislation passed that can threaten funding for public universities, as well as open the door for civil action against faculty found guilty of discussing “divisive” topics. What is even more troubling is the vague language used in the legislation, leaving university employees vulnerable to castigation.

¹⁸ Missouri General Assembly, Senate Bill 410, 102nd General Assembly, 1st sess. (January 4, 2023), accessed October 8, 2023, <https://senate.mo.gov/23info/pdf-bill/intro/SB410.pdf>.

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ Association of American Medical Colleges, *DEI: A Strategic Priority for the AAMC and Academic Medicine*, May 22, 2023, accessed October 8, 2023, <https://www.aamc.org/news/press-releases/dei-strategic-priority-aamc-and-academic-medicine>.

²¹ Nathan Lee, KOMU 8, “Opponents Fear Senate’s Dei Bill Would Affect University Accreditation, Curriculum,” *Columbia Missourian*, March 28, 2023, accessed September 29, 2023, https://www.columbiamissourian.com/news/opponents-fear-senates-dei-bill-would-affect-university-accreditation-curriculum/article_e4467891-bfdd-54db-a161-c75da197ad85.html.

²² Association of American Medical Colleges, “DEI: A Strategic Priority.”

²³ PEN America and American Association of Colleges and Universities, *Legislative Restrictions on Teaching and Learning Violate Academic Freedom and Threaten Higher Ed’s Autonomy*, June 8, 2022, accessed July 8, 2022, <https://pen.org/press-release/joint-statement-from-pen-america-aacu-legislative-restrictions-on-teaching-and-learning-violate-academic-freedom-and-threaten-higher-eds-autonomy>.

²⁴ Wyatt Myskow, “Legislation to Limit Critical Race Theory at Colleges Has Reached Fever Pitch,” *Chronicle of Higher Education*, June 8, 2022, accessed July 8, 2022, <https://www.chronicle.com/article/legislation-to-limit-critical-race-theory-at-colleges-has-reached-fever-pitch>.

As Matthew Arrojas at *BestColleges* noted, withholding of state funding and legal repercussions at universities in states where legislation has passed is only part of the story.²⁵ He pointed to the unintended consequence of ramifications for regional accreditation for universities in affected states. A joint statement from PEN America and the American Association of Colleges and Universities provided specific language to this effect, which stated:

These agencies play an essential role in upholding the quality, academic integrity, and independence of American universities, and are a linchpin of the United States' global leadership role in higher education. The accreditors monitor institutions' adherence to a series of self-governance principles, including freedom from undue political influence. Colleges and universities forced to comply with political edicts governing curricula and classroom discussions may forfeit their eligibility for accreditation, a drastic result that could compromise students' eligibility for federal financial aid and place the institutions themselves in jeopardy.²⁶

What are public universities to do? If legislation is ignored, institutions are faced with loss of funding. If faculty fear retribution, ignore legislative directives, and build course content in service of state laws, accreditation and resulting federal funding may be at risk.

The legislative push has not gone unnoticed. Faculty are pushing back in affected states, as well as in states where legislation is pending. In Texas, Alabama, Pennsylvania, and Ohio, faculty at public universities have banded together to pass resolutions that reflect commitments to academic freedom and rejection of measures attempting to undermine it. For example, the Faculty Council at University of Texas at Austin passed a resolution 41-5 refusing to accept “any attempts by bodies external to the faculty to restrict or dictate the content of university curriculum on any matter, including matters related to racial and social justice.”²⁷

Such efforts are being replicated at universities across the country. Even with widespread support at the faculty council level at universities, there is still a chilling effect, and faculty are visibly anxious about going on the record to support the various resolutions supporting academic freedom. However, faculty understand what is at stake for the academe and let their voices be heard. In response to the “Do No Harm Act” in Missouri, open letters in protest of such harmful legislation and in support of DEI programs have been distributed by students at the University of Missouri-Columbia, citing barriers to quality education and employment opportunities.²⁸

Additionally, the Missouri Budget Project sent Missouri state senators a letter signed by 200 organizations from across the state, asking that language regarding diversity, equity and

²⁵ Matthew Arrojas, “New State Laws Target Critical Race Theory in Higher Ed,” *BestColleges*, April 15, 2022, accessed June 16, 2022, <https://www.bestcolleges.com/news/2022/04/15/state-laws-critical-race-theory-higher-education/>.

²⁶ PEN America and American Association of Colleges and Universities, *Legislative Restrictions on Teaching and Learning*.

²⁷ Nick Anderson and Susan Svrluga. “College Faculty Are Fighting Back Against State Bills on Critical Race Theory,” *The Washington Post*, February 19, 2022, accessed July 8, 2022, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/education/2022/02/19/colleges-critical-race-theory-bills/>.

²⁸ Shay Lawson, “MU Medical Students Sign Petition in Opposition to Bills That Prohibit Diversity Training Requirements,” *KOMU 8*, March 22, 2023, accessed September 20, 2023, https://www.komu.com/news/midmissourinews/mu-medical-students-sign-petition-in-opposition-to-bills-that-prohibit-diversity-training-requirements/article_effcf462-c746-11ed-8e96-43d8f57899a0.html.

inclusion be removed from budget bills, citing economic consequences.²⁹ Fortunately, the Missouri Legislature passed the fiscal 2024 budget eliminating the proposed anti-DEI language with a bipartisan vote. However, this was not before a six-hour heated debate took place.³⁰

The traction gained in book banning and challenges as an outgrowth of the CRT and anti-DEI movement is poised to change public education as we know it. What seemed to be a movement relegated to K-12 public education is now bleeding into the academe. The proof can be found in legislation making its way through state legislatures across the country, challenging public colleges and universities to eliminate “divisive speech” from classrooms and training programs. Educators, librarians, advocacy groups, and lawmakers are attempting to fend off this plan to dismantle and redefine public education. Unfortunately, it looks as though the battle is only just beginning and until it becomes clear what this looks like in real-time, we are forced to wait for these laws to be challenged in the courts, which may be a very long wait.

²⁹ Missouri Budget Project, *More Than 200 Organizations Oppose Dangerous DEI Language in State Budget*, April 17, 2023, accessed September 20, 2023, <https://www.mobudget.org/letter-dei-budget/>.

³⁰ Rudi Keller, “Missouri Senate Approves \$50B Budget Plan After Divisive Diversity Debate,” *Missouri Independent*, April 26, 2023, accessed November 17, 2023, <https://missouriindependent.com/2023/04/26/missouri-senate-approves-50b-budget-plan-after-divisive-diversity-debate/>.