

On the Table

Due to new political leadership, bills impacting education emerge on state and federal levels

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We are in danger of producing an educated proletariat ... That's dynamite!" These were the words of Roger A. Freeman, a key educational adviser to Ronald Reagan, defending the decision to shut down several public universities in California following student protests in 1970. His statement reflects a historical fear — and at times, hope — among the powerful: that education, when accessible to the masses, becomes a tool for reshaping society. Throughout history, efforts to control education have emerged in various forms — from defunding public schools to censoring curricula — all in an attempt to dictate who gets to learn and who gets to lead.

As new leadership enters office, bills that can determine the fate of the modern education system are on constant watch for public districts nationwide. Many states have implemented voucher programs, diverting funding to private and religious schools, and some have shown support for the dissolution of the Department of Education as a whole.

Today, new legislation and the expanding school choice movement present a double-edged sword. Certain components could potentially expand educational opportunities, while others could divert resources and limit access. Ultimately, the battle over education remains as much about money as it is about learning.

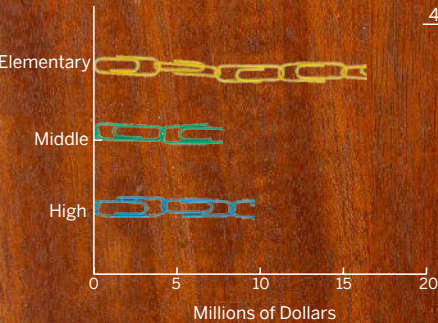
Photo by Vincent Hsiao

Report Card

Panorama surveyed 123 students Feb. 27

Breaking down the district's budget

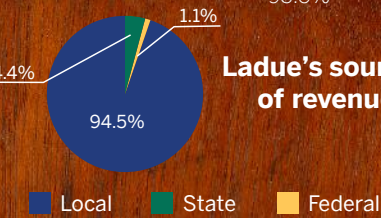
The allocation of Ladue School District's funds



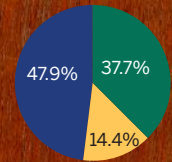
Does Ladue have enough funding for essentials?



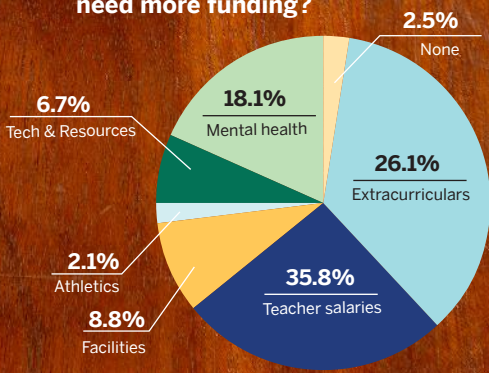
Ladue's sources of revenue



State average sources of revenue



What areas of Ladue need more funding?



On the Dime

During the infancy of the United States, children were educated through a mix of haphazard, disjointed methods. It wasn't until the 1830s that Massachusetts legislator Horace Mann advocated for state-funded schools, believing education would create moral and productive citizens, that public schooling became the norm.

"An educated public serves two functions," instructional coach Rebecca Rubin-Schlanksy said. "First, [it] is vital for a healthy democracy — if we are to disagree, we cannot do that from a place of ignorance. Second, [it] is an embodiment of our government's responsibility to its citizenry to protect inalienable rights."

Before the Civil War, public school funding came from taxes on liquor, theatre and lotteries. As the need for an educated workforce grew, lawmakers sought more stable funding. Today, public schools are funded by federal, state and local sources, with local property taxes providing the most stable revenue. In Missouri, which ranks 49th in state funding, this instability worsens dispari-

MORE TO KNOW

55.9%

of students believe the main goal of their education is **career preparation** and

18.6%

believe it's **exploring interests and passions**, while

25.4%

of students' main goal is **developing critical thinking skills**.

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ties between wealthy and low-income communities.

"[Some] districts that don't have a robust tax base rely on the state, and the expenditure per pupil is then much lower," social studies teacher Meg Kaupp said.

Per pupil expenditure is calculated by dividing a district's total spending by its student population. However, funding allocation is more complex. Missouri's school funding formula centers on the state adequacy target, set at \$6,375 in 2006 as the minimum cost for quality education. Two decades later, education costs have nearly doubled, but the SAT remains unchanged.

"The governor said '[The formula is] broken,' [and] I agree," assistant superintendent for business & finance Geoff Macy said. "But unless they put more money into [it], it's always going to be the same amount, just redistributed."

On the Floor

Recently, various levels of government are reassessing how funding is spent and distributed. Public school funding is often on the chopping block in order to free

up cash for the individual's benefit. Missouri Gov. Mike Kehoe introduced an updated budget that falls \$300 million short of funding the formula after claiming that he is not seeing "acceptable" results. At Ladue, students would be impacted by such policies.

"Income [tax reductions] would impact our transportation," Geoff Macy said. "Right now we receive approximately a million dollars to support transportation. The first line item the governor cuts is transportation. So if income tax is reduced, the most immediate impact to us would be a reduction in [those] revenues."

Residential property taxes make up a large percent of the district's revenue, and the assessment value rate lies at 19%. Proposed Senate Bill 87 would decrease this assessment value to 17%, resulting in a 10.5% decrease in property tax, ultimately prompting a 9.86% drop in revenue for the district.

"There is a desire to cut property taxes or cap them," Phillys Pasley, director of the Missouri Arts Alliance for Education, said. "The people who are bringing this

about are operating under the belief that by putting more dollars into each individual's pocket, the benefits are going to outweigh the programs that will be cut."

In just the first few months of 2025, Missouri lawmakers have filed over 100 bills impacting education. While current bills like Senate Bill 87 raise a broad concern due to their direct impact, all bills that could affect education are on watch for the school board and administration.

"It's that old fable of 'The boy who cried wolf' [with a new bill]. Our families get panicked, then it never even gets out of [committee]. We don't want to overwhelm our community, but want to let them know."

Jim Wipke

Superintendent

A recent headliner has been House Bill 711, which addresses open enrollment. It would allow students to travel outside of their designated district, expanding educational opportunities. The counterargument is that this could create an entirely new point of financial contention for low-income public schools.

"So, the kids that can leave, leave, and then what does it leave behind in terms of finances? Their money is leaving that district as well," Wipke said. "You're essentially causing a situation where districts that are already struggling will probably collapse."

On the Move

As legislation increasingly focuses on the possibility of ex-

panding school choice, many see charter schools as alternatives amid concerns over an allegedly ineffective public education system. Charter schools are free, publicly funded institutions that operate independently, allowing for greater experimentation. They can receive funding from private entities, leading to the belief that they will be able to level the playing field for kids in less affluent areas.

"School choice being a matter of fairness is an oxymoron," Calvinno Hammerman (10) said. "Also, everyone already has a choice. In current proposals, school choice legislation would be applicable for people who could have already afforded private school. The possible mixing of state funds in private religious schools is not fair."

Despite critiques, Jesse Dixon, a partner at the Opportunity Trust, a St. Louis nonprofit supporting charter schools, believes this model isn't as harmful as some claim it to be.

"Charter [schools] are generally no better or worse than district schools," Dixon said. "We end up spending quite a bit of money on charter schools in my organization, because the district isn't getting better in St. Louis City. If we want better educational outcomes for our kids, we can't influence the elected board of the district. With charters, we can decide tomorrow if we want to do something new."

The growth of charters, with enrollment increasing by nearly 400,000 students in the last five years, often comes at a cost to local public schools. With limited budgets and declining enrollment partly as a result of charters, public schools risk losing resources, funding and teachers.

"The single loudest anti-charter voice is the teacher unions," Dixon said. "For them, every char-

What Do You Think the School District Spends the Most Money On?



"I think it's electricity."

Delaney Brinker (12)



"I think paper and other resources."

Betina Hirsch (10)



"[It's] probably infrastructure."

Roger Tang (9)



"I'd have to say it's electricity."

Marcos Moran Echevarria (11)



"Probably the chunky signs that are everywhere above the doors."

Mimi Tabscott (10)

Funding Formula

Public school funds allocation formula, broken down

Weighted Average Daily Attendance:

The higher the average attendance, the more funding a school district is capable of receiving.

X

State Adequacy Target:

The averaged target amount of funding that the state will try to provide the schools with.

X

Dollar Value Modifier:

This adjusts the funding based on the cost of living in an area. The higher, the more funding, and the lower, the less funding.

=

Local Effort:

The contribution to the district from local taxes. This can be dependent on property value changes and district fines.

State Funding

-ter school that opens and fills 300 seats means fewer seats in district schools. They argue that charter schools hurt districts, but they also create competition that compels districts to improve.”

The argument that competition from charter schools translates to improved public districts is a common one. The most recent study to reinforce these claims comes from Brown University in 2024 which sampled charters in 12 districts in Florida as well as their public schools, ultimately finding that charter school presence improved reading scores and absenteeism in their respective public districts. However, limited research and the lack of safety guards for students remaining in districts still leave uncertainty.

“In my opinion, most, not all, but most charter schools don’t have a solid plan for longevity. And in my opinion, I would consider it a little bit of a money grab.”

Jim Wipke
Superintendent

The latest national study on charters from Stanford University has found that the typical charter student had reading gains that outpaced their peers in the public schools they would have attended. However, the fact remains that a quarter of charter schools close within their first five years.

“If the argument is we can turn charter schools faster, why do you need to turn a school that you just started?” Wipke said. “I don’t understand why we need to change something when we just

Students weigh in on budgets and funding

ON THE BOOKS

More to Know

33.9% of students believe public school teacher salaries in Missouri are **far too low** and

38.8% believe public school teacher salaries are **slightly too low**.

1 in 4 students believe Ladue **does not** prioritize spending in ways that **most benefit students** while

1 in 5 report that budget constraints have directly affected their experience at school.

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got started. If we are constantly innovating, then what are we getting done?”

On the Ground

While many adults devote their career to advocating for equitable access to education, student voices provide a personalized perspective when having conversations with state and federal legislators.

“I walk into a state representative’s office and I say my part and give my information, and the response is ‘Uh huh,’” Pasley said. “If a student walks into that same office, with the same message, they hear it completely differently. Student voices are incredibly powerful, especially when that student is sharing information from their lived experience.”

While it may be easy to become despondent and remain ignorant to issues relating to the subsistence of the education system, nothing will change if student’s stories go untold.

“I got involved in advocacy because I care about the world around me and I have a lot of opinions on what’s happening in the world,” Hammerman said. “I learned at a young age that change happens when you talk to people in power, and that’s exactly what advocacy is.”

The accessibility of education is ultimately a determinant of humanity’s future and of each student’s future. Advocating for education allows young people to take control of their lives.

“Not every [student] feels comfortable going up to an adult and saying ‘Here’s what you need to do, here’s why,’” Pasley said. “When students become more aware of the structures in place and the role they can play, everybody wins. They develop the skills to ask for what they want, and be able to defend it.”

Regional Budgeting

The Missouri Board of Education requested **\$500 million** to meet adequacy targets in 2026.

Only **\$200 million** is provided in Gov. Mike Kehoe’s proposed budget.

Inflation rates rose **65%** since 2020 while state target spending per student only rose **17%.**

\$23,299 per student

Ladue spends well above the median of \$14,000 for spending per student in the St. Louis area.

\$19,275 per student

Saint Louis Public Schools

\$12,068 per student

Riverview Gardens

Paper Trail

Examining regional education funding

Missouri education budget allocation

2015-24, percent of general revenue

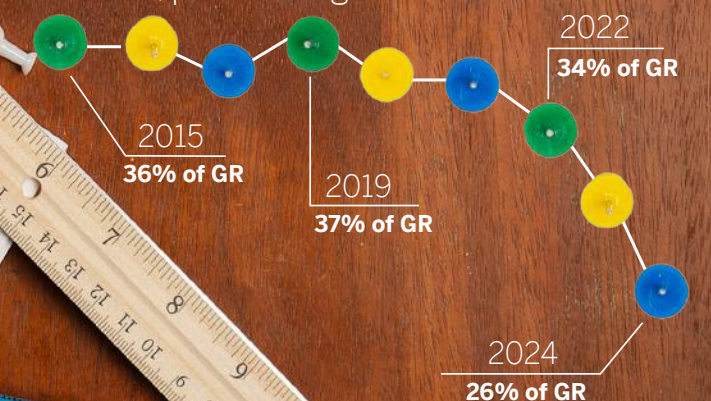


Illustration by Celina Zhou

Photo by Vincent Hsiao

Sources: Still Unequal, Forward through Ferguson, Missouri Budget, Missouri Independent

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