

Education

With an enrollment of just under 25,000 students, **Springfield Public Schools (SPS) is the largest accredited school district in Missouri.** While other urban districts in the state and nation have lost students, SPS's enrollment has increased over the past five years, due in part to **its reputation for academically rigorous and innovative curriculum and comprehensive extracurricular programming.** With a staff of more than 3,500, students are educated at more than 50 sites, including five comprehensive high schools, nine middle schools, 37 elementary schools, and several sites for alternative and choice programming.

The demographics of the district mirror the changing demographics of the community. Growth in ethnic diversity among the student body is an asset, as the district prepares students to live and work in a global society. While this demographic diversity is something the community and school district have actively pursued, those changes also create real opportunities to focus on the individual learner in providing academic excellence for all. In 2013, an SPS student is more likely to come from a family eligible to receive free or reduced lunch, to be an ethnicity other than white, and to speak a native language other than English. Traditionally, traits like these suggested students could face more academic obstacles than their peers. While this shift is reflected in public school enrollment trends of Greene County, the state, and the nation, it also points to the importance of focused attention on the individual learner and collaboration necessary to meet the needs of all students. This strong thread of community support and collaboration remains a cornerstone to the commitment of academic excellence for all.

Today, through strategic development, implementation and evaluation practices, Choice and Innovation initiatives focus on personalized learning opportunities for students that promote student engagement and academic rigor. For example, the Wonders of the Ozarks Learning Facility, a partnership with Wonders of Wildlife and Bass Pro, offers approximately 60 fifth-grade students the opportunity to experience their entire curriculum

“Individualized learning is essential to ensure students are prepared to succeed in a global society. Focusing on the individual student embeds the student’s needs in every decision. Collaboration between the learner and the teacher leads to quality instruction and innovative choices; creating opportunities for active engagement of the learner, not passive listening.”

—Dr. Norm Ridder, Superintendent, Springfield Public Schools

BLUE RIBBONS

Choice and Innovative Academic Programming

Choice and Innovation describes a variety of programs that provide additional learning options for students in Springfield Public Schools. Choice and Innovation was developed based upon key findings from stakeholder input indicating the need for additional, unique learning opportunities. The term Choice was originally developed to communicate stakeholder input from the strategic planning process during the 2006–2007 school year. The process of meeting a variety of learning styles can be traced to past non-mandated program implementations such as the International Baccalaureate programs at Boyd, Field and Roundtree elementary schools, Pipkin Middle School, and Central High School as well as the establishment of the Phelps Center for the Gifted to address the needs of our gifted student population. SPS is the only district in the State of Missouri to offer International Baccalaureate programs for students K-12.

through the lens of science. Additionally, the Roberson Community School enhances individualized learning by emphasizing social and emotional support for students and families in the school setting. Over the next few years, other partnerships and new academic programs are expected to be announced as the community and school district seek innovative ways to meet the needs of all students.

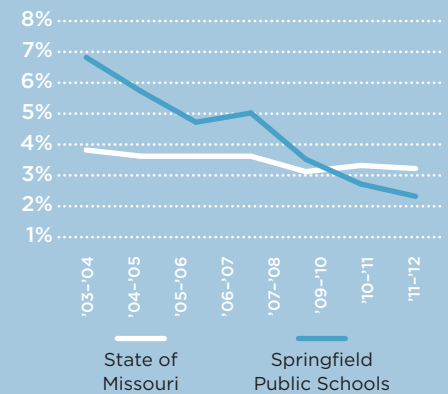
Increased Graduation/ Decreased Dropout Rates

A high school diploma opens doors for young adults and prepares them for competitive employment, so school districts must focus on both dropout and graduation rates. SPS has made significant strides in helping students reach the goal of a diploma. Seven years ago, Springfield's graduation rate (78.9 percent) was well below the state average (85.9 percent). In 2011–2012, the gap closed to just a half percent between Springfield's rate (87.5 percent) and Missouri's rate (88 percent). In fact, since 2010 the graduation rate has grown more than five percentage points to this all-time high.



Proud graduates of Springfield Public Schools.

DECREASED DROPOUT RATE IN SPRINGFIELD



Source: Department of Elementary and Secondary Education

SPS teachers and administrators also are focused on slowing the dropout rate. In seven years, the dropout rate fell to 2.3 percent, well below the Missouri average of 3.2 percent. One reason for this decrease is the district's focus on individual needs in areas such as counseling, classroom engagement, health services, and alternative education programs.

RED FLAGS

Funding Volatility

The volatility in educational funding remains a red flag since identified in the 2009 and 2011

Community Focus reports. The economic turbulence of the past five years has only added to the annual unpredictability for local districts. In Missouri, funding comes from three sources: local property taxes, state funds, and federal allocations. The reduction of the percentage of state funding is an alarming trend, forcing SPS and surrounding districts to place funding initiatives on ballots in an attempt to maintain adequate funding for quality public education throughout Greene County. April 2013 SPS ballot initiatives for a 20-cent increase to the operating levy and the \$70 million bond to renovate existing facilities, build a new elementary school, and improve the bandwidth in all SPS facilities passed with strong community support; this move should stabilize funding and allow for more local control of district finances.

Achievement Gap

Mentioned in the 2011 Community Focus report as a red flag, the achievement gap between certain groups of students remains a concern. Educators have long known the strongest bridge across the achievement gap is built when students are treated as individuals and their needs are addressed in unique ways. But this bridge is facing new challenges as the demographics of Missouri's student population shift and sway.

For the first time, the Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education reports major changes in the makeup of the student population. In particular, the majority of the state's student population now falls into a "super sub-group" of learners who have historically performed below the state average. Missouri data shows significant gaps in the academic achievements of five sub-groups: low-income students, students with disabilities, English language learners, African-Americans, and Hispanics. Students in these groups now outnumber those outside the group, a statewide shift in the majority, mirrored in Springfield Public Schools. This change is forcing schools in Springfield, Greene County, and across Missouri to rethink ways of addressing individual needs with minority groups collectively now a majority.

Researchers know poverty is growing and this growth directly affects learning. A simple measure of poverty is the number of school-age children eligible for free and reduced price school lunches (FRL). Across the board, in Springfield, Greene County, and Missouri, the number of students receiving FRL is growing. Since 2001, the gap between those receiving FRL and those not receiving FRL has narrowed. In Missouri, the number is now roughly the same; in Springfield, the number receiving FRL has now exceeded those who do not.

The largest school in Greene County is Kickapoo High School with 1,734 students. In the 2001-2002 school year, the number of FRL students across Greene County would fill the equivalent of seven Kickapoo High Schools. In the 2011-12 school year, the number of students receiving FRL

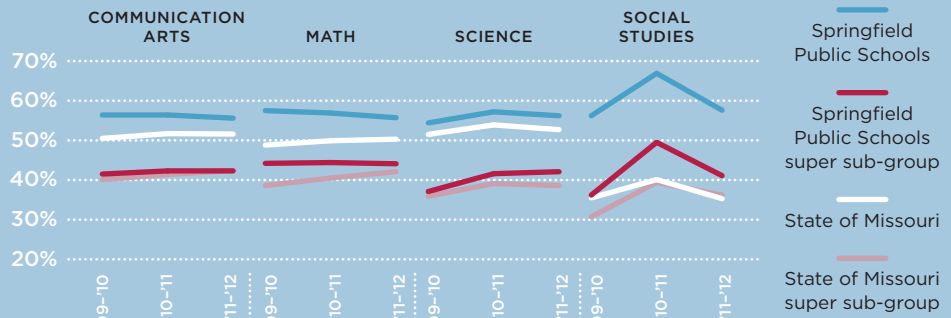
FUNDING VOLATILITY FOR LOCAL SCHOOL DISTRICTS

	LOCAL			STATE			FEDERAL		
	2004	2011	DIFF.	2004	2011	DIFF.	2004	2011	DIFF.
Springfield	63.9	65.1	▲1.2	26.1	20.3	▼5.8	10.0	14.7	▲4.7
Willard	51.0	51.0	0.0	41.9	35.8	▼6.1	7.1	13.3	▲6.2
Republic	47.6	46.7	▼0.9	46.9	39.8	▼7.1	5.4	13.5	▲8.1
Logan-Rogersville	58.2	58.4	▲0.2	33.5	30.9	▼2.6	8.2	10.6	▲2.4
Strafford	61.5	62.9	▲1.4	32.0	25.1	▼6.9	6.5	12.0	▲5.5
Fair Grove	35.2	42.8	▲7.6	51.4	43.0	▼8.4	13.4	14.2	▲0.8
Ash Grove	43.9	42.1	▼1.8	48.8	43.0	▼5.8	7.3	16.2	▲8.9
Walnut Grove	37.6	40.1	▲2.5	55.6	44.2	▼11.4	6.8	15.7	▲8.9
State average	55.2	N/A	—	35.5	N/A	—	9.2	N/A	—

Source: Department of Elementary and Secondary Education

LOWER RATE OF PROFICIENCY BY "SUPER SUBGROUP" ON STANDARDIZED TESTING

Five sub-groups — low-income students, students with disabilities, English language learners, African-Americans, and Hispanics — comprise the "super sub-group," which now outnumber those outside the group at both the state and local level.



Source: Department of Elementary and Secondary Education

was 18,711, the size of 11 Kickapoo High Schools.

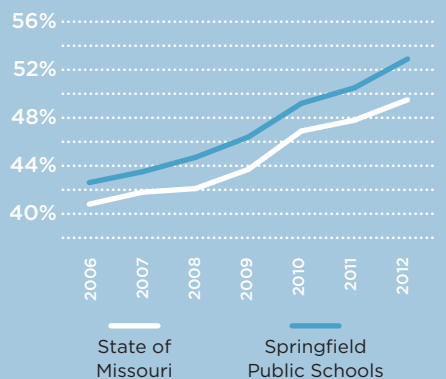
Our community is finding ways to bridge the achievement gap through collaboration. High poverty schools need a specialized corps of educators. The Teacher Education Alliance (TEA) aims to better prepare student teachers for the

demands of Title 1 schools. The TEA, a partnership among Springfield Public Schools, Drury, Evangel, and Missouri State universities, works to increase student achievement while supporting education majors who have a passion for the demands of high poverty schools. These young educators-to-be are learning new ways of teaching in low-income schools.

Missouri State University has established a new Division for Diversity and Inclusion to attract underrepresented students headed by Dr. Ken Coopwood, Sr., the university's first African-American vice president.

Drury University's Scholars Program (DUSP), now in its sixth year, identifies potential leaders and scholars among Springfield's African-American middle and high school youth. Through an integrated program of year-round mentoring, tutoring, career and personal development, and intensive summer academic enrichment, DUSP encourages and equips these students to successfully pursue higher education. The program already is showing success. Seven of 12 seniors active in the program were accepted at colleges of their choice with four eligible for academic scholarships. Of those who took the ACT exam, almost half increased their scores by three points.

INCREASING RATE OF FREE & REDUCED LUNCH PARTICIPANTS



Source: Department of Elementary and Secondary Education