

“A human being is not attaining his full heights until he is educated.”

Horace Mann

At a time when public education faces growing challenges nationwide, the eight K-12 public school districts in Greene County offer children and youth a quality education. These students consistently score above state and national averages on a variety of benchmarks.

Despite mounting accountability pressures from federal and state government, rapidly diversifying student bodies, growing enrollments and uncertain funding sources, the region’s school districts have demonstrated academic success.

COMMUNITY COLLABORATION. The county’s K-12 districts are supported by strong partnerships with Missouri State, Drury and Evangel universities and their teacher preparation degree programs.

Collaborative programs include the Ozarks Education Research Initiative where school climate is being studied, allowing local districts to share data to improve student achievement. The Student Teacher Academy and Drury’s partnership with Midtown schools through Yale University’s Comer School Development Program are also helping students succeed.

Additional partnerships with businesses, faith-based groups, social service providers, the City of Springfield and Greene County have enhanced student achievement. Examples of collaborative initiatives include Character Education, Partners in Education, Safe Schools/Healthy Kids grant, Truancy Court, Building Blocks for Youth and Caring Communities.

The ECHO project—Enhancing Children’s Healthy Opportunities—was specifically established to address two red flags identified in the 2005 Community Focus Report. Community Foundation of the Ozarks, Springfield Public Schools, Missouri State University, Community Partnership of the Ozarks and Burrell Behavioral Health are partnering to meet the social, emotional, physical and academic needs of children at two elementary schools in Springfield, both of which have a high percentage of children living in poverty. ECHO is implementing integrated prevention orientation services for students, families, school staff and teachers.

LEARNING ENVIRONMENTS. Greene County’s student enrollment was 36,279 for the 2005–06 school year, an increase

mirroring the growth in the metropolitan area’s total population. Class sizes in most schools were slightly above the state average.

Some districts are experiencing rapid growth in student enrollment, creating pressures on existing classrooms and school buildings. Four of the eight school districts have facility capital projects underway to accommodate the growing number of students and improve learning environments. Collectively, these expenditures total \$132.3 million.

PUBLIC SCHOOL ENROLLMENT				
	2004	2005	Enrollment Change	Percent ± Enrollment
Springfield	24,585	24,115	- 470	- 1.9
Willard	3,098	3,508	410	13.2
Republic	2,822	3,370	548	19.4
Logan/Rogersville	1,837	1,922	85	4.6
Strafford	1,012	1,126	114	11.3
Fair Grove	1,010	1,069	59	5.8
Ash Grove	836	869	33	3.9
Walnut Grove	340	300	- 40	- 11.8
Greene County	35,540	36,279	739	2.1
State of Missouri	895,624	894,855	- 769	- 0.1

TEACHER SALARIES. The growing discrepancy between local teacher salaries and state averages is a concern. In 2000, the average salary for teachers in Greene County was \$32,278, while the statewide average was \$34,230, a gap of almost \$2,000. Although the county average increased slightly to \$33,162 in 2005, the gap widened by nearly \$5,000.

A competitive salary schedule for highly qualified teachers is paramount to maintaining a committed and well-prepared teaching force.



WHO ARE OUR STUDENTS? Most students in Springfield and Greene County attend public schools, but private, parochial and home school settings expand educational options for families.

Within public school systems, choices are increasingly available.

Springfield Public Schools has initiated several academic options, including the International Baccalaureate Programmes at the elementary, middle and high school level. Springfield is the only district in Missouri to offer the International Baccalaureate from pre-kindergarten through grade 12.

All eight Greene County districts offer alternative academic programs for at-risk students, and most districts participate in Missouri's A+ scholarship program.

Reflecting state and national trends, Springfield Public Schools and surrounding districts educate an increasing number of both economically disadvantaged students (as measured by the percentage of students receiving free and reduced lunch rates) and students with limited English proficiency.

In 2005, more than 13,000 public school students in Greene County received free or reduced lunch rates, an increase of nearly 2,000 students since 2000. The number of students with limited English proficiency was 265, an increase of 70 students in five years. In both cases, these students often face academic obstacles brought on by poverty or by inadequate language skills.

STUDENTS QUALIFYING FOR FREE AND REDUCED LUNCH				
	2000		2005	
	Percent	Number	Percent	Number
Springfield	36.8	8,776	40.7	9,611
Willard	24.8	778	33.4	1,182
Republic	26.9	816	33.7	1,138
Logan-Rogersville	20.4	376	22.9	430
Strafford	33.4	344	36.8	412
Fair Grove	30.8	315	34.4	370
Ash Grove	30.5	257	31.1	260
Walnut Grove	35.8	118	41.4	123
Greene County	29.9	11,780	34.3	13,526
State of Missouri	36.6	329,716	41.8	364,441


OVERCOMING OBSTACLES. Despite these increases, Springfield and Greene County student academic performance is on par with or exceeds state averages. For six of the eight districts, the percent of graduates scoring at or above the national ACT average is higher than the statewide percentage.

Seven of the eight districts had an attendance rate above the


STUDENT PERFORMANCE						
	2000 Percentages			2005 Percentages		
	ACT*	Attendance	Dropouts	ACT*	Attendance	Dropouts
Missouri	35.4	93.6	4.5	33.7	94.0	3.7
Springfield	46.6	93.8	7.5	40.6	93.7	5.4
Willard	35.3	95.0	2.8	32.0	94.0	2.5
Republic	41.6	93.8	1.6	36.1	95.2	1.9
Rogersville	40.2	93.5	4.0	37.4	94.7	3.3
Strafford	47.7	94.7	2.4	43.1	95.9	1.4
Fair Grove	39.6	94.4	2.7	36.5	96.2	3.0
Ash Grove	31.3	95.0	2.4	53.2	96.0	0.0
Walnut Grove	40.0	95.4	3.7	33.3	94.9	3.7

*Graduates scoring at or above national average

state average, while seven districts also had a dropout rate below the state average.

 Springfield Public Schools' dropout rate was the lone exception. The increasing number of students voluntarily choosing not to complete their education is a concern. The entire community must address this growing disengagement, as high school dropouts often present future problems for law enforcement and the work force, and create an increased demand for social services.

ADEQUATE YEARLY PROGRESS. To comply with federal and state law, students are tested annually to determine academic progress using the Missouri Assessment Program (MAP) test. The percentage of students scoring in the levels Proficient or Advanced is reported annually to determine if a district has made "adequate yearly progress." Failure to increase this percentage or meet a target percentage can jeopardize a district's federal funding, as outlined in the federal legislation known as No Child Left Behind. Seven of the eight Greene County districts met adequate yearly progress in communication arts and math in 2005.

 **BUDGETARY ISSUES.** Adequate and equitable public funding remains a top concern for county districts. Senate Bill 287 (passed in 2005 and implemented in 2006) contains a new foundation formula whose provisions prohibit Greene County school districts from meeting state targets for full funding.

Districts must maintain minimum operating (or performance) levies of \$3.43 to receive full state funding. Since the average operating levy for Greene County schools is \$3.25, Greene County school districts will lose millions in state funding over the current formula's seven-year phase-in period.

To partially compensate for this loss of state funding, some districts' residents are bearing a larger percentage of their districts' operating budgets. Statewide, residents support 55.7% of their district operating budgets. Springfield's local contribution of 64.1% is the highest among Greene County districts, while Walnut Grove is the lowest, at 39.7%.

Balancing equitable and adequate state, federal and local funding is essential for maintaining the quality of public education throughout the region.