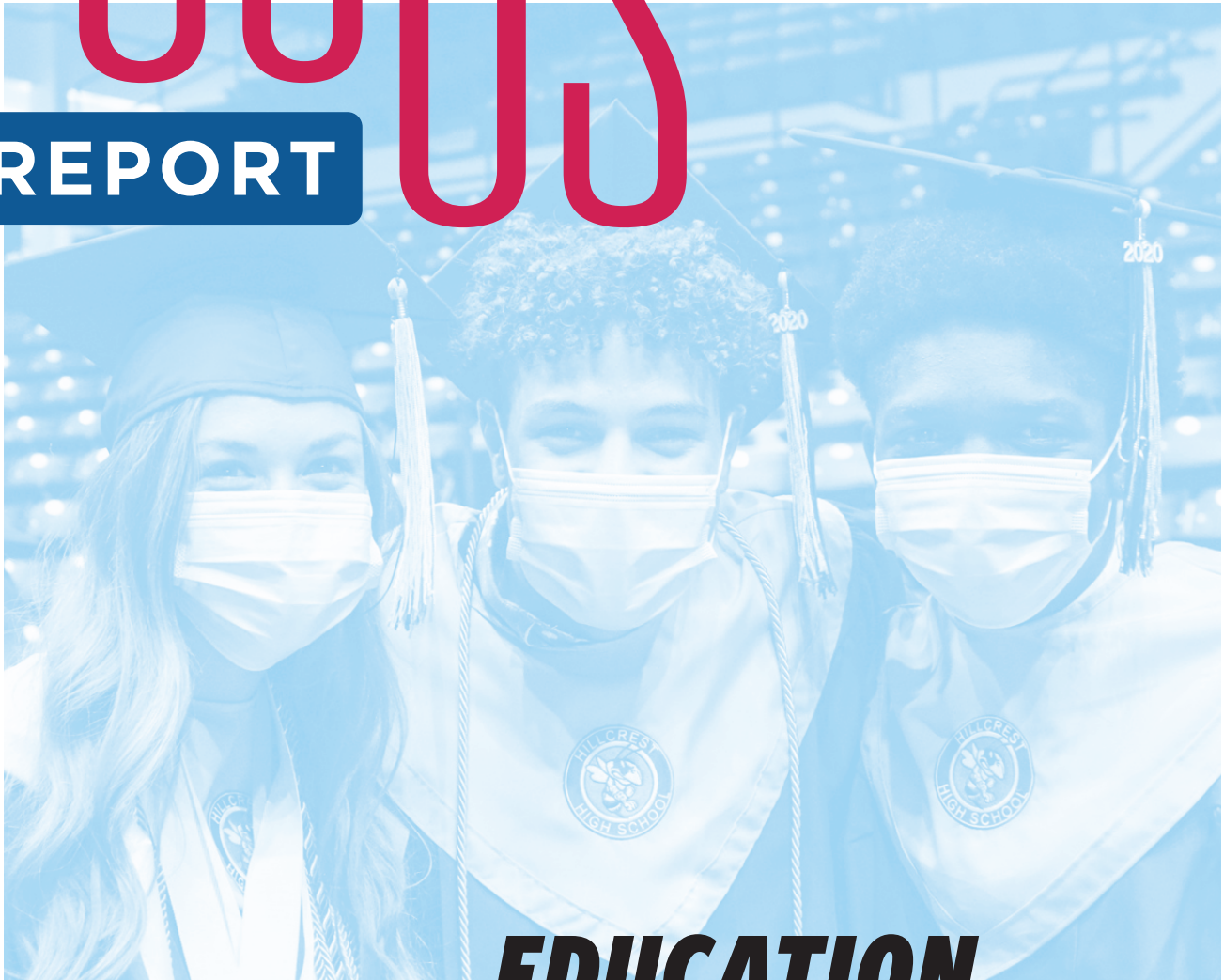


COMMUNITY FOCUS REPORT

2021 UPDATE

A series of white papers on the report's 11 primary topics will be published on a rolling basis ahead of the 2021 edition. For news, podcasts and more information, visit springfieldcommunityfocus.org.



EDUCATION

New programs and facilities expand learning options as SPS works to close achievement gap.

BLUE RIBBONS Graduation rates · Expansion of learning opportunities · Progress as promised

RED FLAGS Achievement gaps · Pandemic-related learning challenges · Teacher shortage and recruitment challenges

SPS graduation rate up, while gaps persist

Springfield Public Schools is committed to serving the Springfield community and the district relies on the financial and volunteer support provided by Springfield patrons to carry out its mission. The delivery of this mission centers on deploying strategies aimed at providing engaging and relevant learning experiences for the 23,500 students who attend SPS schools and equipping them with skills to be successful in college, careers and citizenship. During the 2019–20 school year, all school districts in Greene County faced unexpected challenges meeting the varied needs of students as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic that began in March 2020. As the largest school district in the state, SPS demonstrated its flexibility by providing services to students and families while staying focused on achieving the goals laid out in the district's strategic plan.

both students' needs and parent/guardian preferences for choice within the learning environment. During the 2019–20 school year, 4,505 high school credits were earned using virtual courses and 76.3% of seniors in the 2020 graduating class took a virtual course. The virtual learning team increased course offerings to more than 200 options including a comprehensive high school, alternative programming, Advanced Placement courses, middle-school options, and first- through fifth-grade summer programming during Explore. The Academy of Fine and Performing Arts, the newest choice magnet school, opened in August 2020 and program planning and curriculum development is underway for the AgAcademy, scheduled to open in 2022.

SPS is committed to supporting the development of early childhood programs within the Springfield community. During the 2020–21 school year, the



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A new magnet school, the AgAcademy, will become a choice program for students interested in agriculture. This program is made possible through a \$6.5 million gift to Missouri State University from Bill and Virginia Darr and the Darr Family Foundation. MSU is partnering with SPS to provide this program at the Darr Agricultural Center in southwest Springfield.

BLUE RIBBONS

Student graduation rates are important when assessing the performance of a school system. SPS continues to stress the importance of high school graduation rates, with an increased emphasis on the graduation rates of under-resourced and under-represented students. During the 2019–20 school year, the four-year graduation rate improved to 93.6% (up from 88.5% in 2018–19 and 85.8% in 2017–18), the highest on record, with notable graduation-rate increases for under-resourced and under-represented students. For example, students from poverty demonstrated a 9.4% increase in their graduation rate. Additionally, Black students demonstrated an increase of 1.8% in their graduation rate while Hispanic/Latinx students demonstrated an increase of 7.9%.

Expanding learning opportunities and the modes by which students engage in K–12 education is important to meet

COVID-19 IMPACT

Faced with the growing COVID-19 pandemic in March 2020, SPS focused on ways to facilitate student learning in an environment that was as safe as possible for everyone. For the remainder of the 2019–20 school year, students continued to learn at home through the SPS At Home online learning platform. To facilitate virtual learning, SPS ensured that every student had a device and adequate internet service.

In addition to the focus on learning, during the initial phases of the pandemic, SPS staff completed wellness checks, connected families with support services, offered grab-and-go meal service and provided childcare for healthcare professionals and first responders.

At the beginning of the 2020–21 school year, SPS offered families a choice between modified in-person or fully virtual learning options. Initially, approximately 75% of students selected in-person learning while 24% chose the fully virtual option. To protect students and staff, SPS implemented

health and safety practices, including requiring face coverings, frequent hand washing and thorough cleaning of district facilities to help prevent the spread of COVID-19 in the classroom.

Throughout the pandemic, the goal of SPS was to welcome as many students as possible back to school for in-person learning. In consultation with the Springfield-Greene County Health Department, SPS regularly reviewed data and found that transmission of COVID-19 within the school setting was very low, which indicated that health and safety protocols were effective. In November 2020, in-person learning days for K–8 students were increased from two to four days a week. In February 2021, in-person learning days for high school students also increased.

Finally, enrollment for the 2020–21 school year was impacted by the pandemic. The September 2020 total student enrollment count was 23,139 total students, down from 24,677 total students in September 2019—a decrease of 1,538 students.



2021 UPDATE: EDUCATION

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Adah Fulbright Early Childhood Center opened. Along with Campbell Early Childhood Center and Shady Dell Early Childhood Center, SPS has provided dedicated space for 600 preschoolers to attend school in 2020–21.

With its focus on being an accessible and inclusive school system, SPS strives to make the learning environment affirming for all students, especially for those from under-represented and under-resourced backgrounds. SPS developed a new strategic plan Focus Area centered on equity and diversity, which was unanimously adopted by the Board of Education. As a result of recommendations from the Equity and Diversity Council the prior year, the district hired a position responsible for coordinating and recruiting a diverse workforce.

Club Encore, the district's after-school tutoring program for students in reading and math, saw participation of Black, Hispanic/Latinx and students who receive English Language Learner services increase from the prior year (1%, 2% and 1% increases, respectively). Additionally, 352 students participated in Empowerment Groups, which allow students in fourth- through eighth-grades to engage in activities and lessons focused on identity development, academic and cultural enrichment, and provide opportunities for students to engage with diverse community members. SPS partnered with Equal Opportunity Schools at three high schools (Central, Hillcrest and Parkview) to ensure that under-represented and under-resourced students have equitable access to Advanced Placement and International Baccalaureate courses in comparison to their peer groups. A total of 160 under-represented students—63 at Central, 32 at Hillcrest, and 65 at Parkview—were identified for upcoming AP course enrollments.

Strong partnerships with businesses, nonprofit groups and community organizations support SPS in its efforts to provide expanded learning opportunities which make learning engaging, relevant and personal for all students.

Progress continues for delivering projects supported by the 2019 bond initiative known as Proposition S. The

SUCCESS STORY

Robyn Fondren, a school counselor at Delaware Elementary, describes her role as the school's Equity Champion:

"As a school counselor, my job is to support each and every student in my building. Each of my students comes from a diverse background of needs, whether it is social-emotional, varying abilities and basic needs. In both of my positions as their school counselor and our building equity champion, I am learning every day what my students and their families need from me in every area. When I listen whole-heartedly, I am able to be most effective in offering support, guidance and resources. This work not only impacts students, it also impacts staff and our community. When people of diverse backgrounds feel seen and heard, equitable change can take place. In addition to this, I am a big believer that when we know better, we do better. Learning about how to support our under-resourced and under-represented students and staff helps us all to support our students, their families and our community."

PHOTO COURTESY OF SPRINGFIELD PUBLIC SCHOOLS



district finalized construction on all 33 secure entrances, and construction was completed of the Adah Fulbright Early Childhood Center, Delaware Elementary, Sunshine Elementary, Boyd Elementary and Williams Elementary. Design work for Jarrett Middle School and Hillcrest High School continued throughout 2019–20. Administration continues to meet with the Community Task Force on Facilities two times per year to provide progress on deliverables and will engage with the group on planning for phase two of the Facility Master Plan. Due to successful management of projects to date and a favorable bid market, projects originally identified for phase two of the Facility Master Plan are being delivered, including the second phase of the Hillcrest High School renovation and design and construction of the new York Elementary. Additionally, elementary storm shelter gymnasiums will be built at Field and Twain.

RED FLAGS

Academic achievement for all

students is a key goal for SPS and the district acknowledges student **achievement gaps** exist, especially for under-resourced and under-represented students. These achievement gaps were **magnified by the COVID-19 pandemic** as school leaders and teachers attempted to engage with students and families in both virtual and seated settings and within a hybrid learning model. As a response to COVID-19 school closures statewide, SPS partnered with other districts by providing access to virtual course content with 33,410 course enrollments utilized. Noteworthy data points are bulleted below and compare student performance between school year 2019–20 to school year 2020–21:

- Reading: Students (K–8) reading on or above grade level dropped 2.47%. Students from poverty reading on or above grade level dropped 2.64%, while Black students reading on or above grade level dropped 1.18%. Finally, Hispanic/Latinx students reading on or above grade level dropped 3.16%.
- Math: Students (K–8) performing

2021 UPDATE: EDUCATION

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math on or above grade level dropped 3.92%, while students from poverty performing math on or above grade level dropped 3.99%. Black students performing math on or above grade level dropped 20.25%, and Hispanic/Latinx students performing math on or above grade level dropped 4.88%.

- **Course Failure Rates:** Middle-of-the-year course failure rates for students (grades 6–12) showed an increase of 8.89%. For students from poverty, course failures increased by 13.31%. Course failure rates for Black students increased by 13.45%, as did course failure rates for Hispanic/Latinx students by 14.12%.
- **Graduation Rate:** There was a 10% difference in the graduation rates between students from poverty (86.9%) and those who are not (96.9%). Additionally, there was a 9.4% difference in the graduation rates of Black students (85.2%) compared to White students (94.6%) and a 2.9% difference in the graduation rates of Hispanic/Latinx students (91.7%) compared to White students.

Attracting, developing, and retaining highly effective teachers, leaders and staff holds the greatest promise to positively impact student learning, particularly in high-poverty schools and when serving under-resourced and under-represented students; however, a **teacher shortage**

and recruitment challenges are affecting this progress. The district received applications from 2,543 applicants for certificated positions during 2020 as compared to 3,893 applicants during 2019. The 2019 totals, however, include both Launch and Explore certificated applicants, whereas the 2020 totals for certificated applicants are limited to regular teaching positions. Additionally, the district experienced a significant decline in applicants for operations positions, from 4,833 applicants in 2019 to 2,747 applicants in 2020. This is due, in part, to the decision to hold on operations hiring during the spring and summer as the district assessed instructional modalities and staffing needs for the 2020–21 school year. The district felt it prudent to delay hiring until a full assessment of current staffing needs and staff availability was complete. Other factors contributing to the decline likely include the COVID-19 pandemic, access to unemployment benefits, reduced work hours for some classifications of employees and other work opportunities in the community.

The Education 2021 Update was produced by Springfield Public Schools with input from Teresa Bledsoe, Carla DeSilva-Carver, Yvania Garcia-Pusateri, Stephen Hall, Nicole Holt, Nichole Lemmon, Bret Range and Amy St. John.

LEGISLATIVE IMPACT



Each year, the SPS Board of Education adopts a legislative platform, which identifies its priorities and positions regarding key legislative issues. This focus ensures SPS is clearly communicating with legislators about issues at the state and federal levels that will affect public education and SPS students and employees. These priorities and positions focus on accountability, funding, school reform, local control and general policy. A common set of beliefs adopted by the Board of Education informs its legislative platform:

- Public education serves as the cornerstone to the success of our state and country.
- An effective public education system is a critical component of economic and civic development in our community.
- All schools should be held to high and rigorous standards that develop the full potential of every child.

KEY METRICS

Public School Districts in Greene County, 2019–20

	Enrollment	Free/Reduced Lunch Eligibility	Four-Year Graduation Rate
Ash Grove R-IV	683	49.4%	93.2%
Fair Grove R-X	1,142	39.4%	98.8%
Logan-Rogersville R-VIII	2,252	32.5%	92.1%
Republic R-III	4,902	38.8%	97%
Springfield R-XII	24,679	52.9%	90.8%
Strafford R-VI	1,204	41.8%	98.8%
Walnut Grove R-V	262	45.6%	100%
Willard R-II	4,555	42.2%	98.8%

SOURCE: MISSOURI DEPARTMENT OF ELEMENTARY AND SECONDARY EDUCATION