

2023 UPDATE EDUCATION

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

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

New facilities, programs mark progress at SPS

Since the 2021 Community Focus Report, area school districts have focused on addressing the learning challenges and teacher shortages that emerged during the pandemic.

Springfield Public Schools, Greene County's largest with 24,500 students, adopted a new strategic plan in 2023 that will guide the district's work for the next five years including efforts to further enhance Blue Ribbons and address Red Flags.

Developed with extensive input from stakeholders, the plan identifies priorities to improve efficiency and create a collaborative culture and high-quality learning environments to develop students ready for success. The district is implementing several tools to track and improve education, including a screening system to monitor student performance more regularly as well as a career/college-prep tool for students in grades 6–12. With the new system coming online this year, real-time data is now available at multiple points throughout the school year for teachers to adapt instruction to meet individual student needs and promote mastery.

The district is tackling **achievement gaps** among a variety



Students cut the ribbon for York Elementary on March 27, 2023. The new building was funded through the first phase of Proposition S. In 2023, voters approved a second phase for \$220 million in facility improvements.

RECENT SUCCESS STORY

Drew Irwin gives his fifth-grade son, John, a quick hug in the hallways at Twain Elementary School. Then, he walks a few steps, pointing to a door.

"That will be my classroom next year," he says with a smile. "I live up the street; I substitute here all the time. I've subbed in every grade in the building, so I've developed great relationships with all the teachers. I feel like Twain is already my home."

In August 2023, Irwin began his career at Springfield Public Schools because of an innovative district program, Future Educators, which helps schools recruit, hire and retain educators from underrepresented and under-resourced backgrounds.

In August 2022, Irwin was one of seven participants of the first Future Educators cohort to sign papers of intention to complete the multi-year program in partnership with Missouri State University. Upon completion, Future Educators' teachers commit to teaching four years at SPS.

Sam Johnson, another program participant, graduated with her bachelor's degree in early childhood education and is now teaching kindergarten at Bingham Elementary. If not for Future Educators, she says, she wouldn't be pursuing a teaching career in Springfield.

"I'm originally from Houston, Texas," she explains. "I got to know Springfield, and I really like it. But Future Educators made me decide to stay and teach here because of all the support. I'm a first-generation college



student; no one in my family knew how to help me or tell me what to expect. Future Educators gave me interview prep, resources, and an amazing mentor teacher, Alicia Johnson. I'm so grateful."

From professional-development Saturday summits to mentors and incentive funds, Future Educators provides a holistic approach to helping those interested in education acquire and thrive in teaching positions in the district, says Michelle Gavel, director of student access and opportunity.

"Future Educators help us grow our own workforce of exceptional educators within the system," said Gavel. "When we invest in our incoming teachers, we're making an investment in their success. That directly translates to our students' academic achievement and greater outcomes for the entire district."

For Irwin, he's proud to be a Future Educator and a new teacher at SPS. "Future Educators has been an amazing program," said Irwin. "I really do feel like I'm learning valuable lessons that I'll take with me into my first year of teaching, and I feel like the district supports me."

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of categories including disparate performance by income and race. The district sponsored its second Back to School Bash in July 2023 with more than 5,000 attendees. More than 50 community partners supported the event, which provided over \$100,000 in resources to families in the district, including backpacks and hygiene kits.

Specific efforts to address **teacher shortages** include the Future Educators program (see “Recent Success Story” sidebar), competitive wages and benefits with the highest starting salary for teachers in the region, and teaching pathways available to students through GO CAPS and the SPS high-school academy model.

In 2023, Springfield Public Schools completed Phase 1 of Proposition S, which invested \$168 million in safety and security upgrades and facility improvements to schools districtwide to keep the school district strong and **expand educational opportunities** for area students. In April 2023, Springfield voters overwhelmingly approved an additional \$220 million investment in schools through Phase 2 of Proposition S.

The Education 2023 Update was produced by Springfield Public Schools with input from Teresa Bledsoe, Kevin Creighton, Bruce Douglas, Michelle Gavel, Stephen Hall, Nicole Holt, Nichole Lemon and Bret Range.

KEY METRICS

Public School Districts in Greene County, 2021–22

	Enrollment	Free/Reduced Lunch Eligibility	Four-Year Graduation Rate
Ash Grove R-IV	704	39.10%	92.45%
Fair Grove R-X	1,186	29.10%	96.04%
Logan-Rogersville R-VIII	2,296	20.40%	91.62%
Republic R-III	5,086	29.00%	94.77%
Springfield R-XII	23,428	46.40%	95.01%
Strafford R-VI	1,322	24.40%	97.44%
Walnut Grove R-V	270	39.40%	93.75%
Willard R-II	4,510	25.50%	97.66%

SOURCE: MISSOURI DEPARTMENT OF ELEMENTARY AND SECONDARY EDUCATION

ABOUT THE 2023 UPDATE

This interim update reviews current data for the Blue Ribbons and Red Flags from the 2021 report. The 20th anniversary report, to be released in 2024, will develop an updated list of Blue Ribbons and Red Flags.