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DISTRICT LEAVE BENEFITS and EARLY CAREER FEMALE TEACHERS

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Table of Contents

Key Points	1
Introduction	2
Why Do Early Career Teachers Leave the Profession?	4
Leave Benefits and Missouri Teachers	8
Implications for Teacher Retention	13
Conclusion	16
References	19

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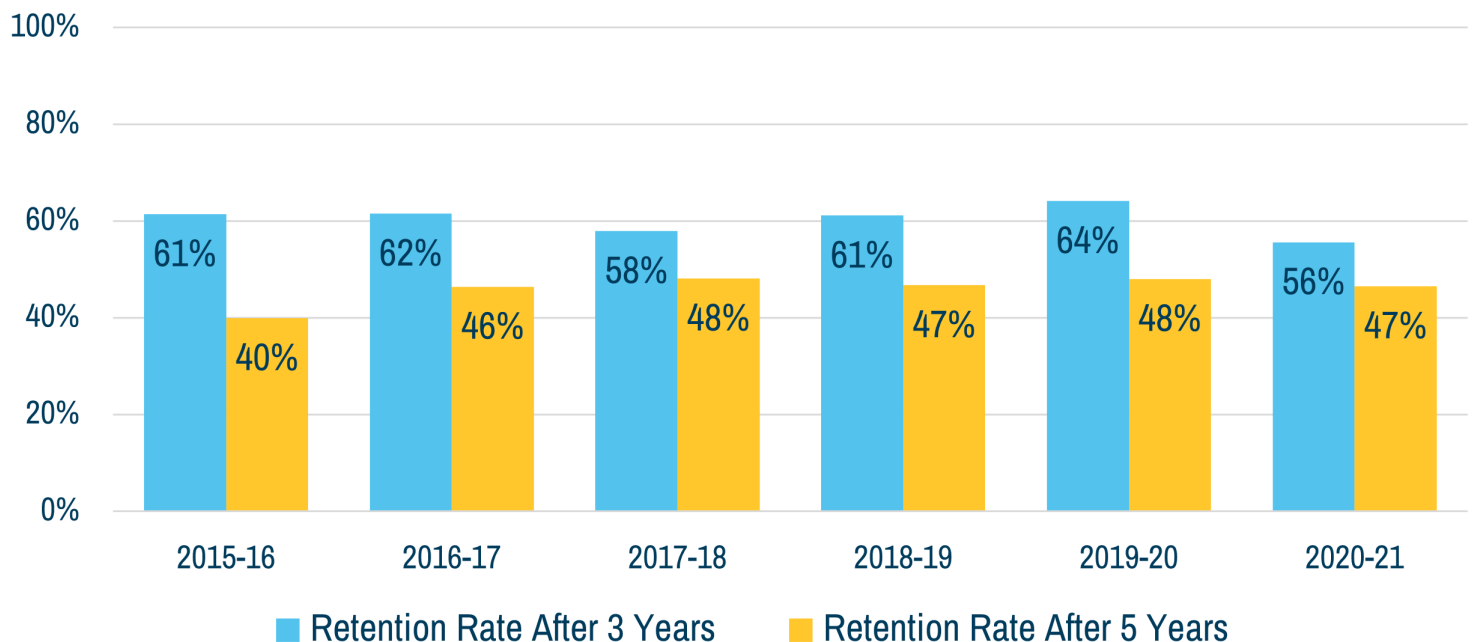
Missouri's lawmakers often note concerns about retaining early career educators since more than half of the state's public-school teachers leave the profession within their first five years on the job. Though women of prime childbearing age comprise over 36% of Missouri's educator workforce, Missouri districts offer no paid parental leave for childbirth or adoption. In this brief, we use data from the Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE) and the Missouri State Teachers Association (MSTA) from the 2021-22 school year to describe district leave policies and the characteristics of teachers most impacted by those policies. We find:

- District's paid leave benefits reflect regional teacher labor market realities, with rural districts offering more annual personal days and more generous sick day accumulation policies than metropolitan area districts.
- Statewide, districts offer an average of 10.99 sick days annually. This means the average female teacher would need to bank all of her sick days over six years with the district to take a full 12-week maternity leave as allowed by the Family and Medical Leave Act.
- Teacher tenure differs by gender, region, teacher on-duty days, and leave day benefits.
 - Districts offering more annual leave days attract and/or retain more experienced teachers.
 - The most experienced male teachers work in districts with fewer than 150 teacher on-duty days, while districts with 190-199 on-duty days attract the most experienced women.
 - Teachers in five-day school week districts are significantly more experienced than those in four-day week districts.



For decades, researchers have documented a widespread teacher shortage in the United States.^{1,2,3} Approximately eight percent of teachers move schools each year and another eight percent of teachers leave the profession entirely, resulting in the need to hire about 90,000 teachers annually.⁴ Enrollment in teacher preparation programs has also declined dramatically since 2008, meaning there are fewer qualified teachers to fill vacancies.⁵ Attrition rates among early career teachers are particularly alarming, with nearly 12% of teachers leaving the profession within their first year and more than 44% of new teachers leaving within their first five years of teaching.⁶

Retention Rates of Missouri Public School Teachers Having Less Than Five Years' Classroom Experience, 2015-2021



Source: [Strengthening Teacher Recruitment and Retention in Missouri](#)

Missouri, like many states, is concerned about teacher recruitment and retention. Approximately eight percent of full-time teaching positions remained vacant or were filled by individuals lacking full credentials during the 2020-21 academic year.⁷ Missouri's newest educators attrit at higher rates than the national average, with 44% leaving within three years and 54% leaving within five years of teaching.⁸

Since the pandemic, early career teacher attrition has accelerated at faster rates in Missouri than in other states. Between the 2019-20 and 2020-21 academic years, Missouri experienced an 8.5-percent increase in attrition among teachers with three-years' experience or less and a 1.5-percent increase among teachers with at least five years' experience.⁹ In contrast, Massachusetts experienced a 2.5-percent increase in attrition among new teachers¹⁰ and Arkansas saw a 1.6-percent decline in attrition among first year teachers during the same period.¹¹

3

Why Do Early Career Teachers Leave the Profession?



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Second only to job dissatisfaction, “personal or family reasons” are cited by 40% of first year educators¹² and 52% of former teachers as the reason for their departure.¹³ Yet, little data exists which describes the frequency with which teachers exit due to childrearing responsibilities^{14,15} despite over three-quarters of the public-school teacher labor force being comprised of females in their prime childbearing years^{16, 17} (up to 44 years of age).¹⁸

Teaching offers low wages relative to other professions, a circumstance often cited as a primary contributor to educator staffing challenges.^{19, 20, 21, 22} However, a common gendered stereotype is that women may be willing to accept salary tradeoffs for the teaching profession’s perceived compatibility with childrearing.^{23, 24, 25} Promoting teaching as a “family-friendly” occupation may not completely or accurately depict the experiences of early career female educators, particularly among new mothers.

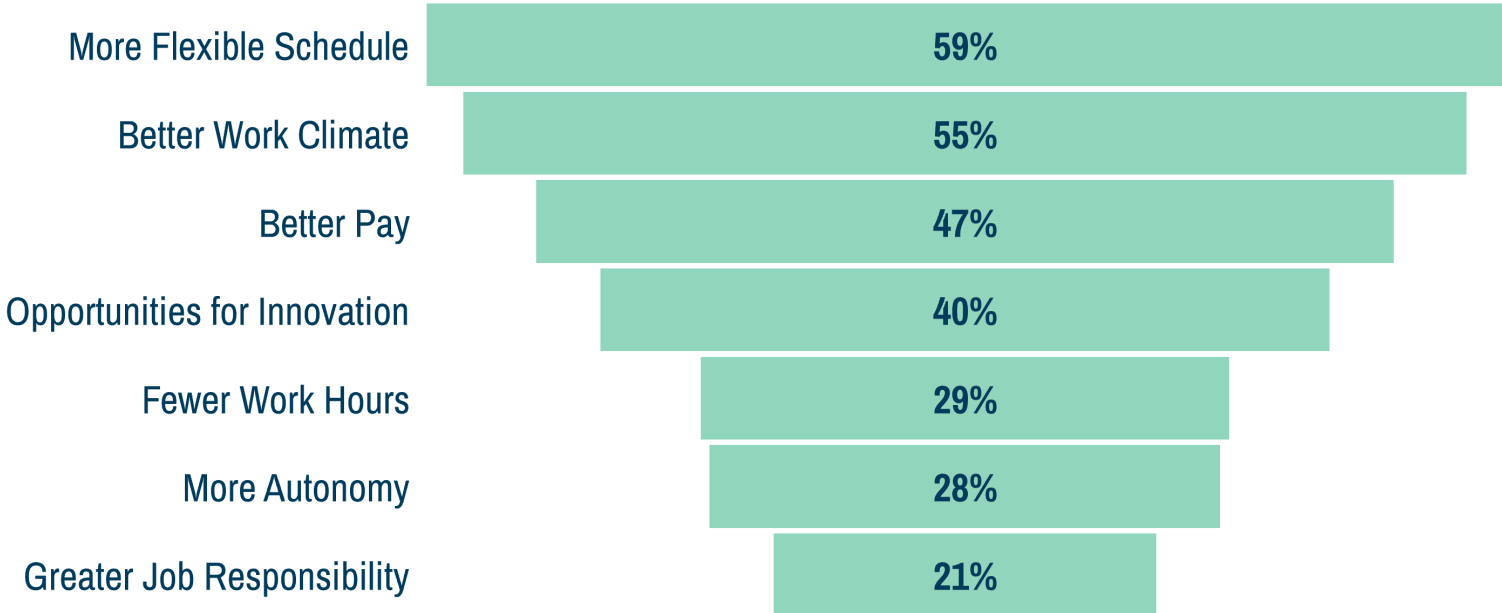
For example, fewer than 20% of school districts in the United States offer paid parental leave, engendering financial hardship for new teachers who have not accumulated many sick days.²⁶ With a mean salary of \$35,388, Missouri teachers in urban areas with less than five years’ experience may have difficulty affording childcare, which averages \$9,800 for full-time, center-based care.²⁷ Postpartum teachers who return to the classroom may also find that inflexible teaching schedules and lack of sick leave make it difficult to juggle responsibilities associated with new parenthood, like frequent doctor’s visits during infancy or pumping breast milk during the workday.^{28, 29, 30}

Though the existing research is scant on flexible workplace arrangements, leave policies, and their connection to teachers’ job satisfaction, a wide body of general labor market

evidence indicates as many as 30% of working women exit the labor force after giving birth absent paid leave.^{31, 32} Three recent studies on attrition in the educator workforce suggest leave policies and flexible work arrangements may also have implications for recruitment, turnover and attrition, especially among young teachers. A 2023 survey of 1,000 full-time public-school teachers found that 37% of teachers, and 42% of teachers under age 30, believe higher quality benefits like improved family leave would attract more teachers of color to the profession.³³

In a national survey of 958 teachers conducted by the RAND Corporation in 2021, 60% of young female teachers cited childcare as a major factor in their decision to exit the profession.³⁴ Among those surveyed who left teaching for another job, 59% cited “more flexibility in your schedule” as the primary attribute attracting them to their current position. In fact, flexibility ranked higher than any other attribute including higher pay (47%), better working conditions (55%), and more autonomy (28%).³⁵

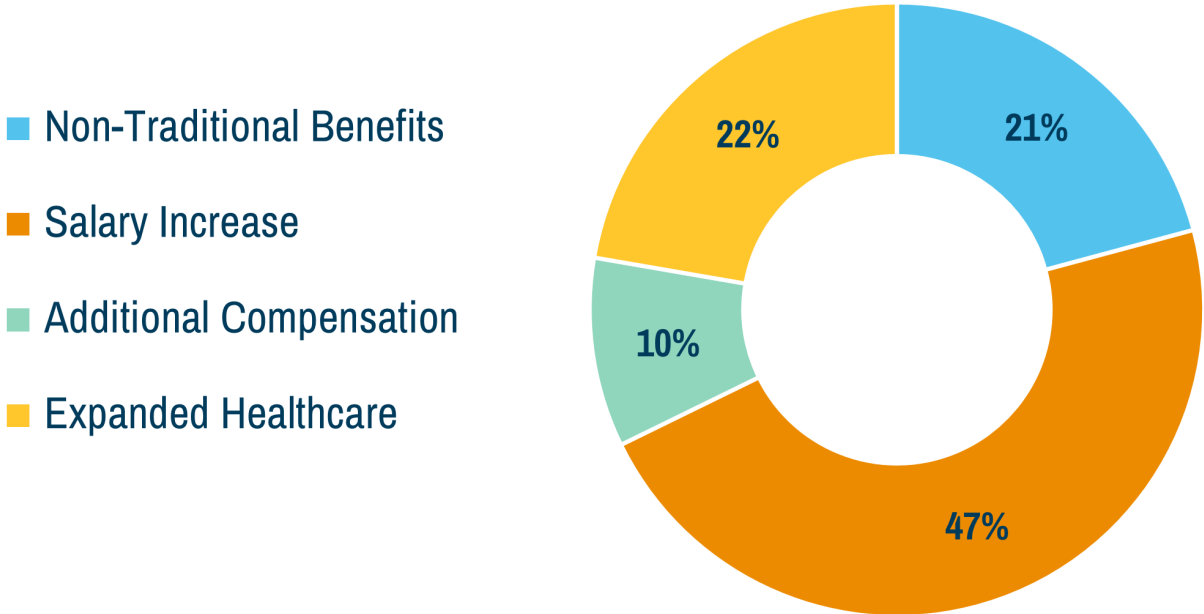
Positive Attributes of New Position, as Reported by Former Public School Teachers



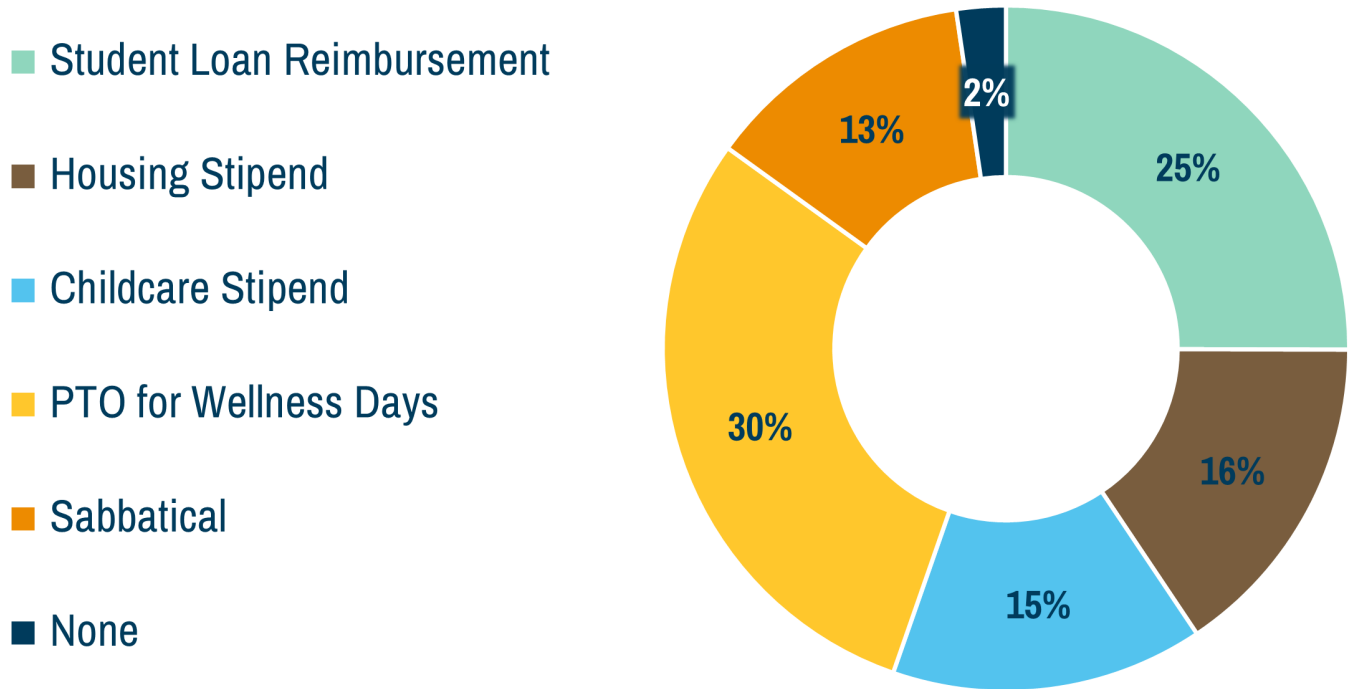
Source: [Stress Topped the Reasons Why Public School Teachers Quit, Even Before COVID-19](#)

Missouri’s teachers share these concerns. In 2022, the Missouri State Board of Education’s Blue Ribbon Commission on Teacher Recruitment and Retention (“Blue Ribbon Commission”) surveyed approximately 15,000 teachers, 900 principals, and 350 district leaders about effective recruitment strategies and professionalization of teaching.³⁶ Missouri has the lowest average starting salary for teachers in the nation.³⁷ Not surprisingly, most teachers and superintendents surveyed indicated a base salary increase is essential to curb attrition.³⁸ However, principals rated the addition of non-traditional benefits as the most important factor in recruiting and retaining teachers, even higher than increasing base salary. Respondents also prioritized adding specific non-traditional benefits to teachers’ total compensation package. Over 72% of teachers prioritized paid time off for wellness days, and 69% of superintendents and 67% of principals indicated a childcare stipend would be popular among their teachers and themselves. Regarding systems and strategies to professionalize teaching, teachers, principals, and superintendents rated increased flexibility during the school day as the most important factor at 77%, 75%, and 66%, respectively.³⁹

Essential Components of Teacher Compensation, as Reported by Missouri Teachers, Principals, and Superintendents (2022)



Predicted Utilization of Non-Traditional Benefits, as Reported by Missouri Teachers, Principals, and Superintendents (2022)

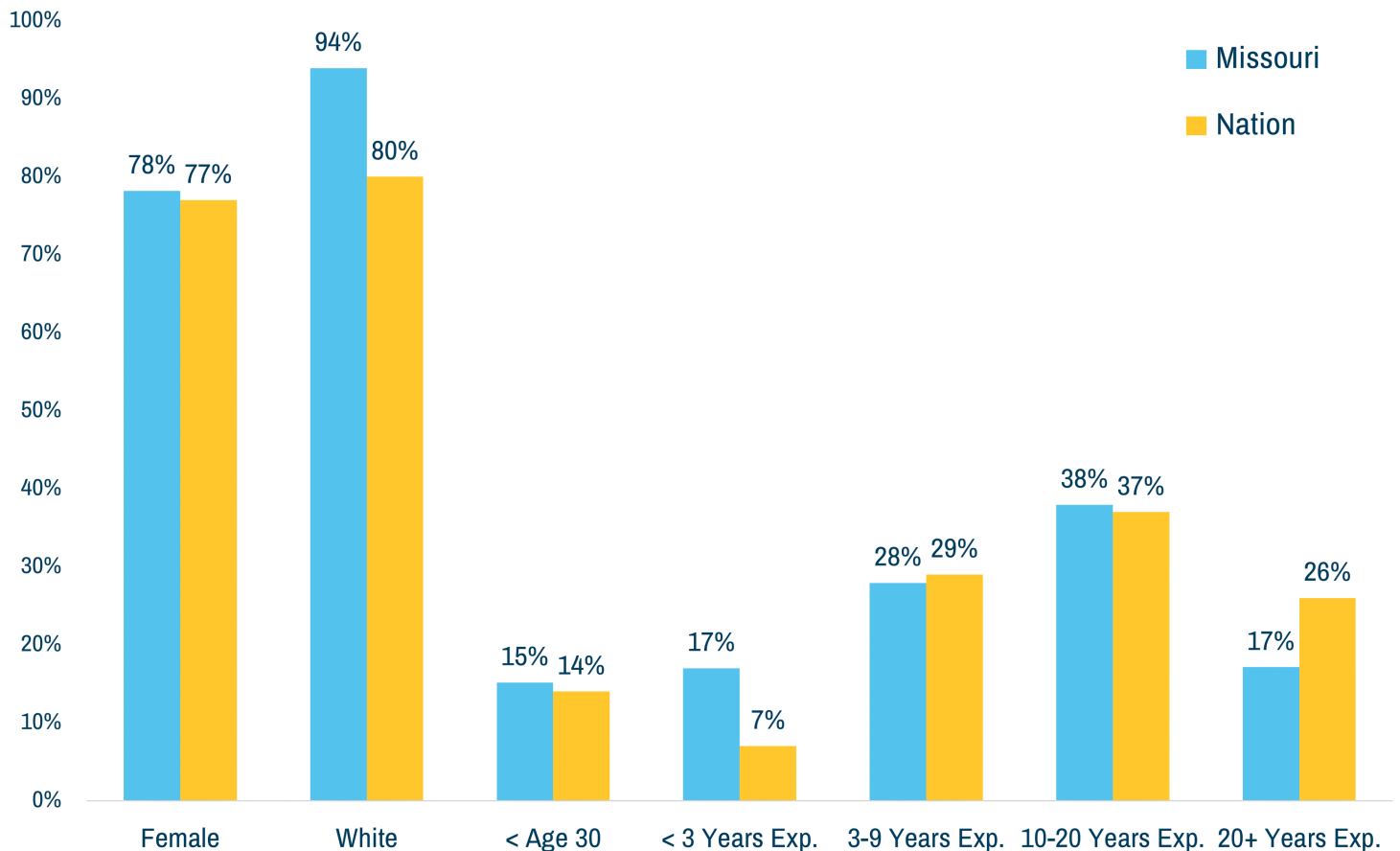


Source: [Strengthening Teacher Recruitment and Retention in Missouri](#)

As states and districts grapple with high teacher turnover rates, some are proactively implementing expanded leave and flexible workplace policies to aid in their recruitment and retention efforts. Three states — Oklahoma, Tennessee, and South Carolina — passed legislation to provide six weeks of paid leave for childbirth or adoption, while the Chicago Public School District implemented a 12-week parental leave policy this year.⁴⁰ About 40% of districts now report plans to adopt flexible staffing models;⁴¹ in 2021, Missouri legislators passed HB432 mandating private space and break times for breastfeeding educators following teacher testimony describing using 20-minute lunch breaks to pump instead of eating.⁴²

During the 2021-22 academic year, Missouri’s public-school districts employed over 61,000 full-time educators, defined as teachers who worked a minimum of 30 hours per week and earned at least the state’s mandated minimum salary of \$25,000.⁴³ Compared to the national average, Missouri’s educator workforce is comprised of more young, white, lesser-experienced females.^{44, 45, 46} Over 45% of Missouri teachers have less than 10 years of teaching experience and 17% have less than three years of experience. Approximately 2,700 educators were first-time teachers during the 2021-22 academic year, a decline from 3,800 during the prior year.⁴⁷

Key Teacher Demographics and Tenure: Missouri vs. Nationwide Average (2021-22)



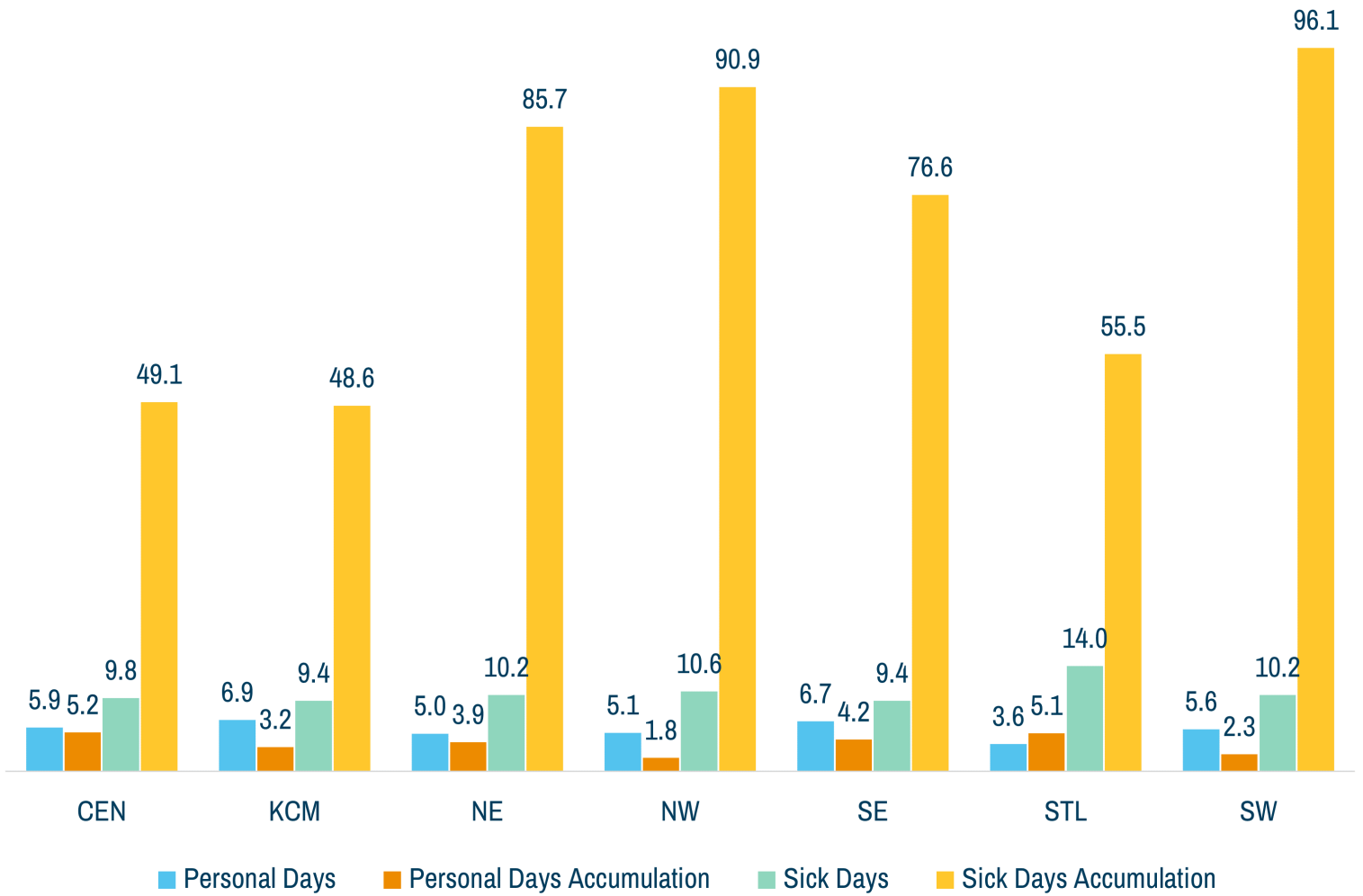
Sources: [Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education](#) and [National Center for Education Statistics](#)

The large number of new hires translates into a teacher labor force primarily of prime childbearing age. Though nearly 36% of Missouri’s educator workforce is comprised of women under age 40 — 15% of whom are under age 30 — Missouri school districts offer teachers no paid leave.⁴⁸ Instead, teachers must use their remaining sick leave when staying home with their newborn children. Many early career teachers with few accumulated sick days or who lack the required years in service to receive any paid sick leave at all, must take unpaid leave if they have a child during the school year.⁴⁹

Generosity of sick leave, personal leave, and accumulated leave varies by district depending on region and total number of teacher duty days. In general, districts offer sick and personal days which differ in the amount able to be accumulated. For example, districts offer an average of 5.39 personal days to teachers annually, but 54% of districts prohibit rollover of unused personal days to the following year.⁵⁰ In contrast, districts offer an average of 10.99 sick days annually and allow employees to bank an average total of 67.51 unused sick days for subsequent years.

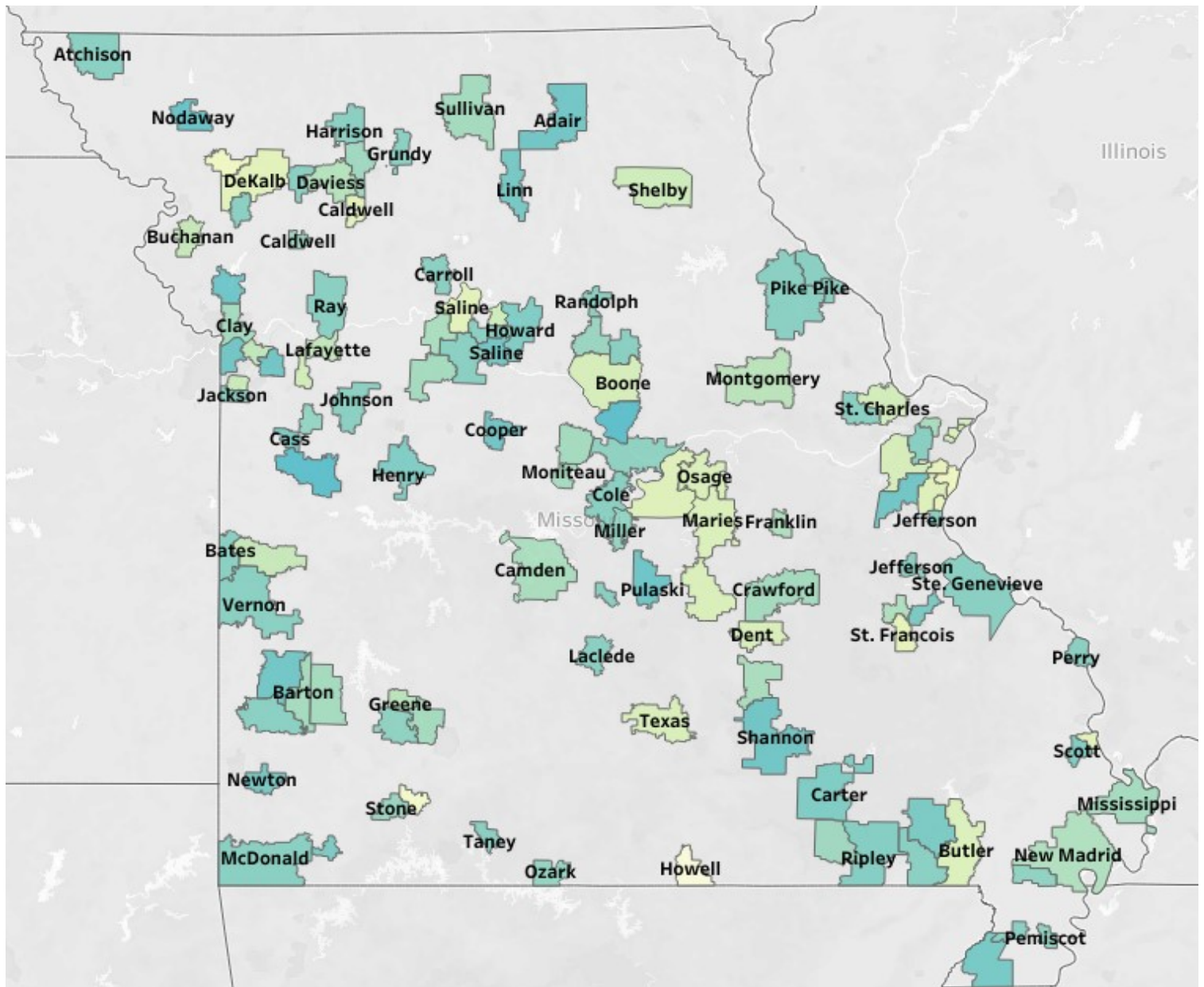
The educator labor market is highly localized,⁵¹ which is reflected in the regional differences in leave benefits packages offered to recruit employees. Metropolitan area school districts offer a marginally higher number of annual sick days and personal day carryover, while rural districts offer more personal days and allow significantly higher sick day carryover than their Kansas City, St. Louis, and Columbia counterparts. While four-day and five-day school week districts differ in the allocation of total days between sick, personal, and accumulated, five-day districts offer just 0.15 more annual or accumulated days in total than four-day school week districts (87.45 versus 87.30, respectively).

Average Missouri K-12 District Leave Benefits, by Region



Source: [Missouri State Teachers Association 2023 Salary and Benefits Report](#)

Missouri K-12 Districts with Unlimited Sick or Personal Rollover, by County and Average Teacher Days on Duty



Number of Teacher Days



148

189

Source: [Missouri State Teachers Association 2023 Salary and Benefits Report](#)

As a proxy for paid leave, 125 districts offer unlimited accumulation of sick or personal days. Proportionate to the number of districts in a region, more metropolitan-area districts allow teachers to accumulate an unlimited number of leave days than rural districts. At the high end, 43% of St. Louis-area districts allow teachers to accumulate unlimited leave, while only 16% of districts in northeast Missouri offer such benefits. However, the proportionate share of five-day week districts with unlimited rollover (24.5%) differs only slightly from the proportionate share of four-day week districts offering the same (23%).

Missouri District Tenure by Gender, Region, and Mean Annual Leave Days

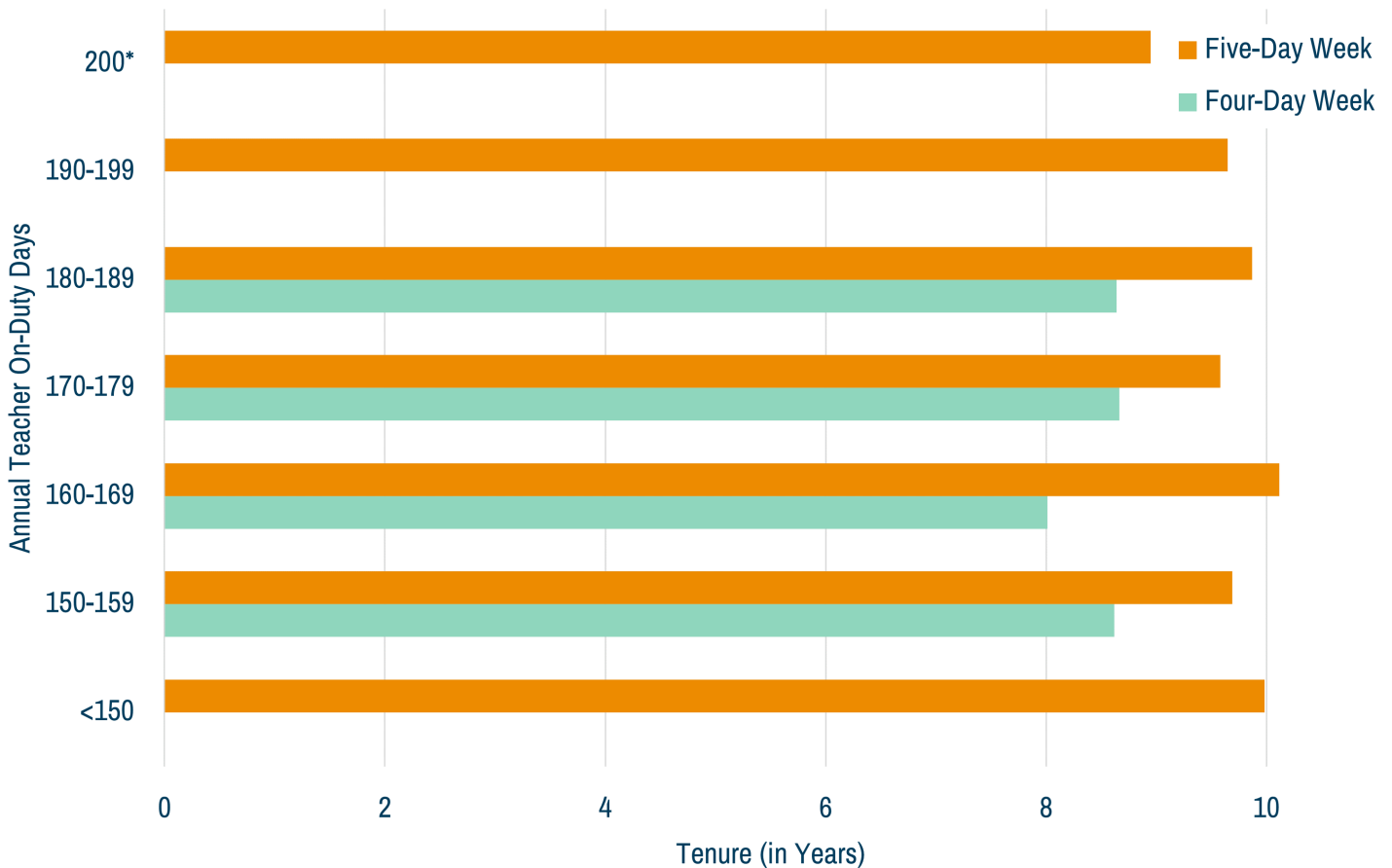


Sources: [Missouri State Teachers Association 2023 Salary and Benefits Report](#), Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education

On average, women have more teaching experience within their districts, within Missouri, and in total than men, with districts in the St. Louis region attracting the most experienced educators. In addition to regional differences in tenure, districts attract teachers of different experience levels depending on the number of average annual leave days and teacher on-duty days. Districts offering 16 or more annual leave days retain the most experienced teachers longer, even exceeding districts offering unlimited accumulation of sick or personal leave.

In general, districts with fewer than 150 teacher on-duty days attract the most experienced male teachers and retain them longer. However, districts with 190-199 teacher on-duty days have the highest retention rate among females. Across all genders, five-day school week districts retain the most experienced teachers longer than four-day school week districts.

Average Missouri District Tenure, by Teacher On-Duty Days and Five-Day vs. Four-Day Week



Sources: [Missouri State Teachers Association 2023 Salary and Benefits Report](#), Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education

As policymakers investigate the causes of teacher turnover and solutions to staff teacher vacancies, it is important to understand how family-friendly leave policies might contribute to a supportive workplace environment. Though research describing the relationship between district leave policies and teacher attrition remains sparse, recent studies indicate educators believe workday flexibility and addition of non-traditional benefits like paid wellness days and childcare stipends would professionalize teaching and aid in retention. Trends in tenure among Missouri teachers suggest favorable leave policies in conjunction with other district factors like region and total on-duty days may contribute to retainment of more experienced teachers.

- ¹ Ingersoll, R. (2001). Teacher Turnover and Teacher Shortages: An Organizational Analysis. *American Educational Research Journal*, 38(3), 499–534
- ² Hahs-Vaughn, D. L., and Scherff, L. (2008). Beginning English Teacher Attrition, Mobility, and Retention. *The Journal of Experimental Education*, 77(1), 21–53.
- ³ Sutch, L., Darling-Hammond, L., and Carver-Thomas, D. (2016). A Coming Crisis in Teaching? Teacher Supply, Demand, and Shortages in the U.S. Palo Alto, CA: Learning Policy Institute. <https://doi.org/10.54300/247.242>.
- ⁴ Carver-Thomas, D. and Darling-Hammond, L. (2017). Teacher turnover: Why it matters and what we can do about it. Palo Alto, CA: Learning Policy Institute. <https://learningpolicyinstitute.org/product/teacher-turnover>
- ⁵ Garcia, E. and Weiss, E. (2019). U.S. Schools struggle to hire and retain teachers. *Economic Policy Institute*. Washington, DC. <https://files.epi.org/pdf/164773.pdf>
- ⁶ Ingersoll, Richard M.; Merrill, Elizabeth; Stuckey, Daniel; and Collins, Gregory. (2018). Seven Trends: The Transformation of the Teaching Force – Updated October 2018. CPRE Research Reports. Retrieved from https://repository.upenn.edu/cpre_researchreports/108
- ⁷ The Hunt Institute and Missouri Department of Elementary & Secondary Education (2022, October). *Strengthening Teacher Recruitment and Retention in Missouri: Blue Ribbon Commission Report to the State Board of Education*. <https://dese.mo.gov/media/pdf/brc-final-report>
- ⁸ Ibid.
- ⁹ (7)
- ¹⁰ Bacher-Hicks, A., Chi, O. & Orellana, A. (2022). Two Years Later: How COVID-19 has Shaped the Teacher Workforce. (EdWorkingPaper: 22-572). Retrieved from Annenberg Institute at Brown University: <https://doi.org/10.26300/t5h7-y366>
- ¹¹ Camp, A., Zamarro, G., & McGee, J. B. (2022). Changes in Teachers' Mobility and Attrition in Arkansas During the First Two Years of the COVID-19 Pandemic. Education Reform Faculty and Graduate Students Publications. Retrieved from <https://scholarworks.uark.edu/edrepub/138>
- ¹² (6)
- ¹³ (4)
- ¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ Schaefer, L., Long, J. S., and Clandinin, D. J. (2012). Questioning the Research on Early Career Teacher Attrition and Retention. *Alberta Journal of Educational Research*, 58(1), 106–121.

¹⁶ National Center for Education Statistics (n.d.). National Teacher and Principal Survey: Average and median age of public-school teachers and percentage distribution of teachers by age category, sex, and state: 2017–18. https://nces.ed.gov/surveys/ntps/tables/ntps1718_ftable02_t1s.asp

¹⁷ Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (2022, December). *Recruitment and Retention of Teachers in Missouri Public Schools: A Report to the Missouri General Assembly*. <https://dese.mo.gov/media/pdf/recruitment-and-retention-report>

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¹⁹ (3)

²⁰ (5)

²¹ Nguyen, Tuan D., Lam Pham, Matthew Springer, and Michael Crouch. (2019). The Factors of Teacher Attrition and Retention: An Updated and Expanded Meta-Analysis of the Literature. (EdWorkingPaper: 19-149). Retrieved from Annenberg Institute at Brown University: <https://doi.org/10.26300/cdf3-4555>

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²³ Wong, A. (2019, February 20). The U.S. Teaching Population Is Getting Bigger, and More Female. *The Atlantic*. <https://www.theatlantic.com/education/archive/2019/02/the-explosion-of-women-teachers/582622/>

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²⁵ Podgursky, M. (2006, July 13). Fringe Benefits. *Education Next*. Vol. 3, No. 3. <https://www.educationnext.org/fringebenefits/>

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²⁷ Missouri Department of Social Services (2022, October 1). Childcare Rates – St. Louis County. <https://apps.dss.mo.gov/childcarerates/report.aspx>

²⁸ Will, M. (2019, April 1). With No Paid Parental Leave, Many Teachers Return to Class Before They’re Ready. *Education Week*. <https://www.edweek.org/leadership/with-no-paid-parental-leave-many-teachers-return-to-class-before-theyre-ready/2019/04>

²⁹ Loewus, L. (2017, August 21). 'Would You Mind If I Pumped in Here?' Breast-Feeding Teachers Lack Accommodations. *Education Week*. <https://www.edweek.org/teaching-learning/would-you-mind-if-i-pumped-in-here-breast-feeding-teachers-lack-accommodations/2017/08>

³⁰ Phillips, M. M. (2020). K–12 Teachers' Experiences "With or Without" Breastfeeding/Pumping Policy in the School Workplace (Order No. 28025876). Available from ProQuest Dissertations & Theses Global. (2437187762). <https://ezp.slu.edu/login?url=https://www.proquest.com/dissertations-theses/k-12-teachers-experiences-without/docview/2437187762/se-2>

³¹ Jones, K. & Wilcher, B. (2020, March 12). Reducing maternal labor market detachment: A role for paid family leave. Washington Center for Equitable Growth. <https://equitablegrowth.org/working-papers/reducingmaternal-labor-market-detachment-a-role-for-paid-family-leave/>

³² Romig, K., & Bryant, K. (2021). A national paid leave program would help workers, families. *Center on budget and policy priorities*, 27.

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⁴² Rivas, R. (2021, August 2). New Missouri law mandates private space and break times for breastfeeding teachers. *Missouri Independent*. <https://missouriindependent.com/2021/08/02/new-law-gives-breastfeeding-mothers-more-protections-and-ensures-accommodations/>

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⁴⁸ Missouri State Teachers Association (2023). Missouri Salary Schedule & Benefits Report. <https://www.msta.org/MSTA/media/MSTAMedia/Salary%20Resources/salary-book-2022-23-email-2.pdf>

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The Policy Research in Missouri Education (PRiME) Center is a non-partisan research center housed in the Saint Louis University School of Education. Opened in the Spring of 2019, we are wholly committed to conducting and sharing research that leads to better policies, educational outcomes, and opportunities for all students.

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We conduct and share research on education. We help lawmakers, educators, and families in the state of Missouri make decisions about education policy and practice. Our mission is to ensure that the people making decisions and building policies around education have the relevant data and evidence they need to build the best and most equitable educational systems possible.

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