



Missouri's Teacher Pipeline: Out-of-State Reciprocity and Alternative Pathways

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KEY POINTS

Over the past decade, the number of individuals completing an educator preparation program (i.e., earning an education degree) in Missouri has steadily declined, while the number of initial certificates has remained flat. As Missouri school districts seek to fill teaching vacancies, two potentially untapped pipelines include recruiting teachers from out-of-state and easing some of the burdens for those looking to switch career paths. Still, Missouri's low starting and average teacher salary may dissuade qualified individuals from considering teaching in Missouri's public schools. In this brief, we describe Missouri's certification reciprocity policy, alternative pathways to certification, and potential "blocks" in the pipeline due to salary. We find:

- Missouri's educator prep programs have experienced a 24% decline in completion rates, while the number of new teacher certificates issued has remained steady since the 2015-16 school year.
- Missouri is one of the few states offering full reciprocity in statute, is one of 18 states without requirements for additional coursework to become certified, and has no additional assessment required for out-of-state teachers.
- Missouri offers four alternative routes to certification, but these programs may not be attractive to career switchers due to their requirements, a common critique of such pathways nationally.
- Currently, Missouri has one of the lowest starting teacher salaries in the nation, likely making it more difficult to recruit new teachers both in- and out-of-state.

Introduction

In the midst of the COVID-19 pandemic, the Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE) allocated \$50 million dollars to recruit and retain new teachers.¹ These funds created multiple avenues for districts to recruit new teachers and fill shortages.

While Missouri retains roughly 86% of its public school teachers each year, it's estimated that just under half of Missouri's teachers left the state's public schools during the 2020-21 academic year after teaching for three or fewer years.² Between 2016 and 2020, roughly 3 in 10 teachers statewide were in the first 5 years of their career. During the 2020-21 school year, this fell to just over 1/4, while those teachers with 21 or more years experience increased from 17% of all teachers to over 1/5 of all teachers.³ This signals an aging teacher population with fewer individuals entering or staying in the profession early in their career, an issue that will likely exacerbate potential shortages through retirements.

Potential avenues to recruit new teachers include searching beyond our state's borders for viable candidates or offering alternative routes to teacher certification. While Missouri has struggled to sustain its teacher workforce through in-state preparation programs, we have seen the percentage of new hires coming from out-of-state remain stagnant. Within

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Better evidence, better
policies, better schools

this context, this brief examines Missouri’s out-of-state teacher certification reciprocity policy and alternative certification pathways and offers some explanation as to why we may struggle to recruit teachers from within and outside our borders. Specifically, we examine the state’s average and beginning teacher salaries, explaining that the state’s poor compensation compared to our neighboring states may be serving as a deterrent to joining the state’s educator workforce.

Missouri’s Educator Preparation Programs’ Completion Rate has Fallen by 24%

To become a teacher in Missouri, individuals have 6 routes to earn a certification.⁴ Among these, the traditional route through one of the state’s 43 four-year institutions approved by the State Board of Education is the most popular.⁵ During the 2018-19 school year, 6 in 10 Missouri teachers were certified through a traditional, in-state route.⁶ However, the number of individuals completing one of these programs has steadily declined over the last 10 years. In 2011, Missouri educator preparation programs saw 4,795 program finishers. In 2020, that number fell to 3,651, representing a 24% decline in completion rates.⁷

Enrollment in Missouri’s educator preparation programs has similarly declined. During the 2010-11 school year, over 14,000 individuals enrolled in one of the state’s educator preparation programs. This number has substantially declined. Enrollment was at its lowest point during the 2015-16 school year, when just under 8,000 individuals enrolled in an educator prep program. Missouri has recovered in recent years to enroll roughly 10,000 students.

While enrollment and completion numbers for educator prep programs in the state have declined, districts and schools continue to have teaching vacancies that need to be filled. According to DESE’s most recent Recruitment and Retention report, Missouri has a 6-year average hiring rate of 11.1%, compared to 8% for national trends.⁸ This signals that Missouri has had to fill more educator vacancies than the national trends over the last 6 years.

Roughly 6% of all new hires in Missouri schools are from out-of-state

Over the previous 6 school years, Missouri school districts statewide averaged around 7,824 new hires per school year. The most common source of these hires are first-year teachers. As we show above, Missouri’s educator preparation programs do not supply enough new teachers each year to meet the demand for new hires. Therefore, Missouri school districts, just like every other state, must resort to hiring teachers from other districts and other states. In 2020-21, first-year teachers

Out-of-State Teacher Reciprocity Policy

MISSOURI

- Participate in NASDTEC: YES
- Full Reciprocity in Statute: YES
- Require Additional Courses: NO
- Require Additional Assessments: NO

ARKANSAS

- Participate in NASDTEC: YES
- Full Reciprocity in Statute: NO
- Require Additional Courses: YES
- Require Additional Assessments: YES

OKLAHOMA

- Participate in NASDTEC: YES
- Full Reciprocity in Statute: YES
- Require Additional Courses: NO
- Require Additional Assessments: NO

KANSAS

- Participate in NASDTEC: YES
- Full Reciprocity in Statute: NO
- Require Additional Courses: NO
- Require Additional Assessments: YES

NEBRASKA

- Participate in NASDTEC: **YES**
- Full Reciprocity in Statute: **NO**
- Require Additional Courses: **YES**
- Require Additional Assessments: **YES**

IOWA

- Participate in NASDTEC: **YES**
- Full Reciprocity in Statute: **NO**
- Require Additional Courses: **YES**
- Require Additional Assessments: **YES**

ILLINOIS

- Participate in NASDTEC: **YES**
- Full Reciprocity in Statute: **YES**
- Require Additional Courses: **YES**
- Require Additional Assessments: **YES**

TENNESSEE

- Participate in NASDTEC: **YES**
- Full Reciprocity in Statute: **NO**
- Require Additional Courses: **NO**
- Require Additional Assessments: **YES**

KENTUCKY

- Participate in NASDTEC: **YES**
- Full Reciprocity in Statute: **NO**
- Require Additional Courses: **YES**
- Require Additional Assessments: **YES**

represented 58% of all new hires, 37% of newly hired teachers were from other districts in-state, and 6% of new hires were from outside of Missouri.⁹

Of the 7,560 new hires made during the 2020-21 school year, 416 were from outside of Missouri. This group rarely represents a substantial portion of new hires. Over the last six school years, Missouri has averaged 468 new hires annually coming from outside of the state. However, this represents a potentially untapped pipeline in the teacher supply, as Missouri has some of the more lenient teacher certification reciprocity policies in the nation.

Missouri's out-of-state reciprocity policy makes it relatively easy for teachers to move in

Teaching license reciprocity is an important aspect of the labor market. Individual teachers hold a license to teach from the state in which they are certified. Reciprocity agreements allow teachers from other states to serve as certified teachers in new states.¹⁰ Reciprocity has become such a common practice that the National Association of State Directors of Teacher Education and Certification (NASDTEC) has facilitated an interstate agreement allowing teachers certified in other states to become teachers in their new state.¹¹ Currently, 48 states, the Department of Defense Education Activity, the District of Columbia, and Guam have signed onto the NASDTEC agreement.¹² Reciprocity is multi-faceted, often including additional coursework requirements, additional assessments, or proof of experience/effectiveness.¹³

Compared to other states, Missouri has quite lenient reciprocity requirements in policy. It is one of only 8 states that has full reciprocity in statute for a teacher who is fully licensed out of state.¹⁴ In several states, in-bound teachers are required to complete additional coursework to become certified.¹⁵ Missouri is one of 18 states that does not require additional coursework, while 5 of our border states have some sort of additional course requirement.¹⁶ While several states allow for most inbound teachers to avoid taking additional assessments to become certified, Missouri and Florida are the only two states that have blanket "no additional assessments required" policies.¹⁷ It is important to note these policies may not work directly in practice, offering a possible explanation as to why so few new teacher hires across Missouri are from out-of-state. Another possible explanation for this blockage in the pipeline may be due to Missouri's maligned teacher compensation policy.

Missouri offers alternative pathways for career switchers to become teachers

Along with traditional pathways to becoming an educator, Missouri—like 45 other states—offers alternative pathways to becoming a teacher.¹⁸ In fact, Missouri has four alternative pathways as shown in Table 1. For the 2018-19 academic year, Missouri had 1,563 individuals enrolled in an alternative certification program, a number that has steadily increased over the past few years.¹⁹

A recent report from the National Center on Teacher Quality examined these policies finding that most of these programs are flawed for a variety of reasons. Among the 50 states and the District of Columbia, 37 were classified as only partially meeting, meeting only a small part, or failing to meet the goals of “providing efficient preparation that is relevant to the immediate needs of new teachers...”²⁰ Missouri was one 15 states that meets only a small part of the goal.²¹

Potential flaws in Missouri’s alternative pathways for career switchers center on the amount of coursework required, a lack of “practice” teaching opportunities, and potentially irrelevant coursework for new teachers.²² However, it is important to note that few states have made their alternative certification pathways navigable for potential career switchers. In doing so, states like Missouri may be limiting the number of potential candidates to fill “hard-to-staff” subjects.²³ Additionally,

this may be weeding out teachers of color, as more individuals going through alternative certification routes identify as Black or Latinx when compared to those going through traditional certification routes.²⁴

Missouri’s Teacher Salary is a Potentially Limiting Factor in Attracting Teachers

While Missouri is lenient in allowing out-of-state teachers to move in and offers multiple alternative certification pathways, our state has one of the lowest starting and average salaries for educators as shown in Figure 1.^{25,26} Of the 50 states and the District of Columbia, Missouri ranks 50th for starting salary for public school teachers, exceeding only Montana. Missouri’s neighbor Arkansas is ranked 49th, offering an average starting salary that is over \$2,200 higher. Several of Missouri’s districts along the border offer a substantially lower starting salary compared to those immediately across the border. In fact, nearly every Missouri district along the Iowa border and those in the Kansas City region lag far behind their neighbors.

In each of the following figures, we show the starting and average salaries as reported by either the state department of education or the individual districts that either share a border with Missouri or are within 40 miles of the border, selected based on the average commute time for Missourians.²⁷

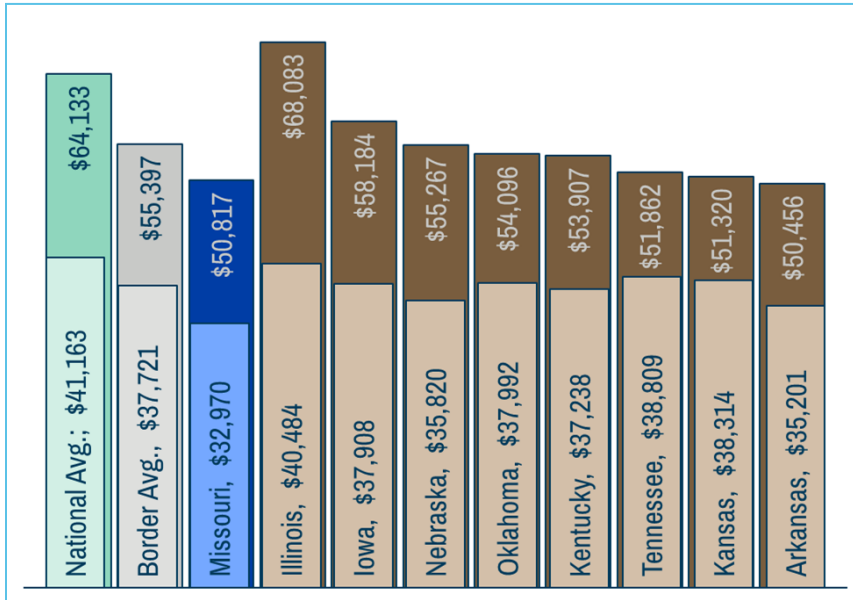
A strong tool to recruit and retain teachers to a district and state is salary. During the 2022 state of the state address, Gov. Mike Parson called for an increase to the legally-mandated minimum starting salary for teachers in Missouri, raising from the current level of \$25,000 to \$38,000.²⁸ This would represent a

Table 1: Alternative Pathways to Teacher Certification in Missouri

Pathway	Who is eligible?	Requirements
Alternative Route	Individuals with a bachelor's degree in a content area	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Enroll at an approved institution of higher education - Complete ~30 hours of coursework - Teach with a provisional certificate - Pass teaching assessment
Temporary Authorization Certificate (TAC)	Individuals with a bachelor's degree in a content area	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Self-directed course of at least 24 credits - Teach for two years - Receive mentoring from district of employment - Pass at least two exit exams
American Board Certification for Teacher Excellence (ABCTE)	Individuals with a bachelor's degree	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Complete ABCTE's program of study - Pass specific examinations
Doctoral Route to Certification	Individuals who hold a Ph.D. in a secondary content area	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Pass the 063 Professional Knowledge: Secondary assessment

Source: Information pulled from Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education's Office of Educator Quality; <https://dese.mo.gov/educator-quality/certification/routes-certification>

Figure 1: Average Salary and Average Starting Salary for Public School Teachers



Source: National Education Association (2021, April 23). Teacher Pay and Student Spending: How Does Your State Rank? Retrieved from :<https://bit.ly/3uvhxp>.

substantial increase, as the average starting salary for a teacher in Missouri during the 2017-18 school year was \$32,226, far below the national average of \$39,249 and below all but one of our border states.²⁹ In fact, during the 2019-20 school year, 66 teachers were earning the state minimum of \$25,000, while nearly 10,000 teachers earned less than the proposed starting salary of \$38,000.³⁰

As shown in Figure 1, starting salary in Missouri varies substantially and often trails districts along our border. This likely makes it less appealing for new teachers to come to start their careers in Missouri. In fact, nearly every district along the Iowa border and those districts in the Kansas City region are often at a competitive disadvantage if they are attempting to attract new teachers from beyond the Missouri border. This is similarly true for average salary (Figure 2), as many districts along the Iowa and Arkansas border have average salaries lower than that of the

Figure 2: Observed Starting Salary in Missouri School Districts and Border Districts, 2018-19

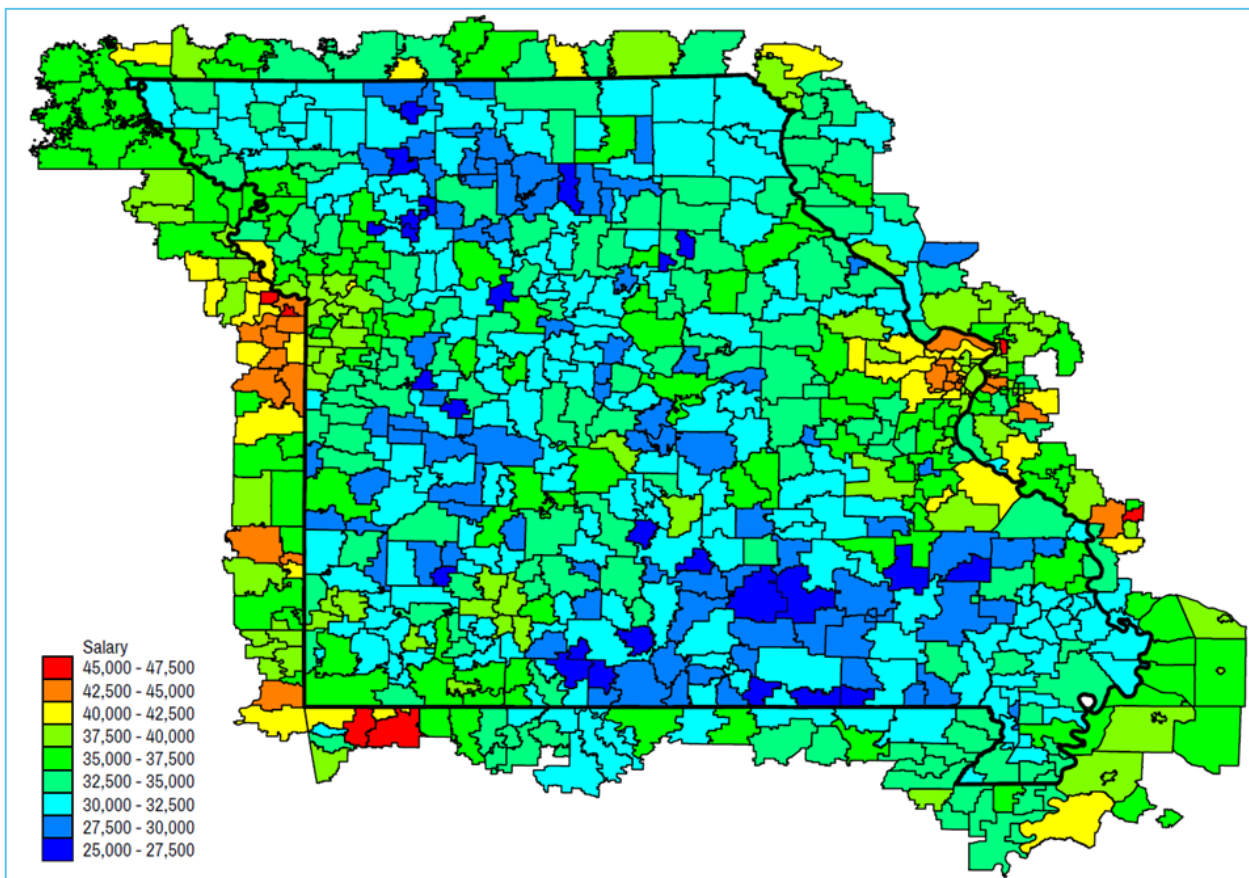
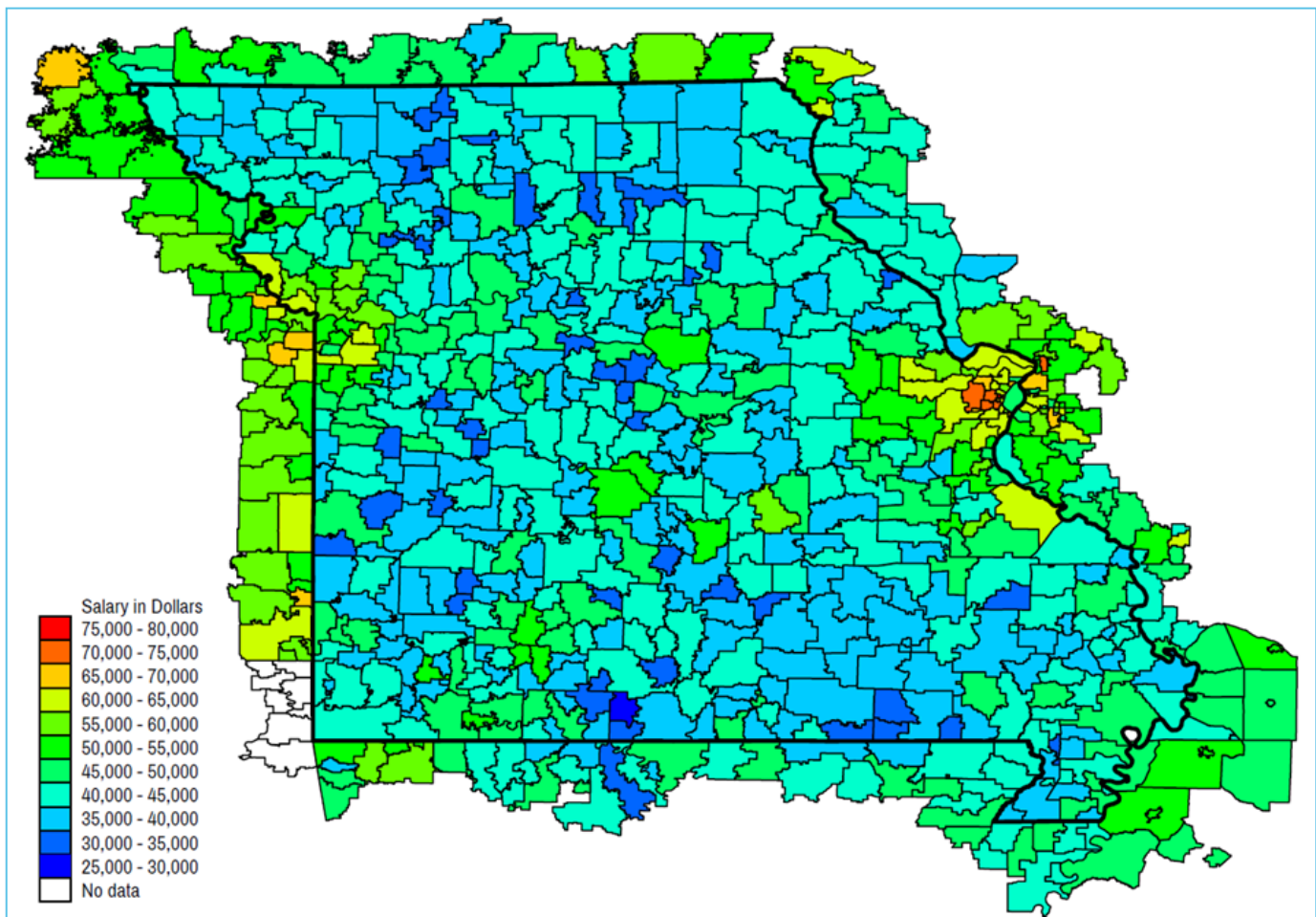


Figure 3: Observed Average Salary in Missouri School Districts and Border Districts, 2018-19



districts across the border. Therefore, it is plausible that Missouri's starting and average teacher salaries might serve as a disincentive for inbound teachers to seek employment in one of Missouri's public school districts if they are within a reasonable distance of a district across the border.

Conclusions & Implications

As Missouri school districts seek to fill teaching vacancies, two potentially untapped pipelines include recruiting teachers from out-of-state and easing some of the burdens for those looking to switch career paths. As we have shown using DESE data, the number of individuals completing one of the state's educator preparation programs has fallen while the number of individuals becoming certified to teach has remained flat. This traditional pathway often produces too few new teachers to fill all of the vacancies statewide. If there are individuals from out-of-state looking to become a teacher, Missouri has a comparatively lenient reciprocity process in policy. But, we see few out-of-state teachers coming into our state's public schools. A potential disincentive for inbound teachers from out-of-state (and in-state) could be Missouri's comparatively low starting and average teacher salary. For those looking to enter teaching through an alternative path, the low salary coupled with the added hurdles of entering the profession through one of these routes may be too burdensome. Taken together, existing policies and practices in Missouri may be unintentionally blocking the teacher pipeline and preventing schools from filling vacancies.

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