MISSOURI COMMISSIONER'S EDUCATION POLICY COMMITTEE

ADVISORY COMMITTEE
RECOMMENDATIONS

▶ *Building the Workforce through Early Childhood Education*

Missouri needs to develop a shared vision defining the role of early childhood education, particularly as it relates to strengthening the current and future workforce. The vision-setting process should be specifically focused on increasing alignment in governance and standards, allocating funding adequately and equitably, and creating buy-in statewide for quality early childhood programs.

ACTION STEPS

- **Develop a shared definition of "early childhood education," and articulate what it should look like in Missouri in order to set clear priorities going forward:**
  - Create a mission statement articulating the overall objective of Missouri's early childhood education efforts and gather the necessary data to measure progress against that objective, focusing on making these services available to all in an equitable manner.
  - Engage parents/guardians and local partners including libraries, health care clinics, and child care providers in grassroots efforts to advocate for high-quality early education programs in their regions.
  - Develop a strategic plan for expanding early childhood programs equitably and communicate the successes of these programs to the public. This is also an opportunity to utilize the Preschool Development Grant Birth through Five Initiative (PDG B5) needs assessment that will be available in late 2019.
  - Create a communications plan that will educate stakeholders on the need for early childhood investments and highlight the bipartisan support.

- **Create a statewide framework that encourages alignment in governance and standards between various early childhood programs:**
  - Explore options for creating a cohesive statewide early childhood system. Currently, funds are sent from the Child Care Development Fund within the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services to the Missouri Department of Social Services. It is then subcontracted to the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education to administer a certain portion of the funds to support early learning services.
  - Establish policies that increase collaboration and standardization among the various state departments responsible for facilitating quality early childhood care and education.
  - Create a framework at the regional and local level for community-based preschool providers to collaborate with school districts to utilize curriculum and standards that are aligned with school readiness standards.
  - Develop a formal communication and collaboration plan that increases efficiency between departments responsible for the development of young children and clearly delineates the responsibilities of each.

- **Allocate additional *and* equitable funding across the state for early learning centers, including funding to acquire and/or upgrade facilities:**
  - Explore the benefits to additional revenue in early childhood programs, including the expansion of access to early childhood education, which would enable more parents to reenter the workforce and, in turn, strengthen the economy. This may take the form of cost-modeling to better understand exactly what funds are needed and how they can be acquired through existing policy.
  - Partner with businesses and universities to encourage and support the creation and/or utilization of existing early education centers in private and community facilities.
  - Direct a portion of increased funds towards building and diversifying the early childhood workforce. This could take the form of creating a tax-credit or scholarship fund for early childhood educators looking to further their education or working with higher education institutions, particularly community colleges, to create early childhood education programs.

ADVISORY COMMITTEE RECOMMENDATIONS | *Meeting One*

▶ *Teacher Preparation, Recruitment, and Retention*

Teacher recruitment and retention levels are low statewide, and Missouri is experiencing a shortage of qualified teachers to fill available positions. Missouri needs to improve teacher preparation recruitment efforts and reconsider preparation providers' models and structures in ways that incentivize a high-quality and diverse array of candidates to enter the workforce. Additionally, policies must be enacted that encourage teachers to stay in the workforce. These policies may relate to compensation, leadership opportunities, access to mental health and wellness supports, and increased support and professional development.

ACTION STEPS

- **Create a marketing and communication campaign that rebrands the teacher profession in a way that entices people to enter the teaching workforce and emphasizes the beneficial impact teachers have on the public. Research shows that millennials are attracted to organizations and positions whose missions align with their own beliefs:**
  - This should be used as an opportunity to increase the level of respect and opportunity for professional advancement for teachers.
  - Develop relationships with chambers of commerce who are working to increase workforce participation to create partnerships to build the teacher workforce as well.
  - Create a statewide program that encourages and guides candidates to enter the teaching workforce through marketing campaigns and incentives for entering the workforce such as loan forgiveness or scholarship programs.
  - Prioritize the recruitment of teachers from underrepresented groups.

- **Create opportunities for districts to develop innovative pathways to teaching:**
  - Some programs that could potentially be developed are: early teacher colleges, grow-your-own teacher programs, and pathways for paraprofessionals and other non-certified staff to earn their teaching certificate.
  - Collaborate closely with higher education agencies to ensure teacher preparation courses are equipping candidates with the skills needed to be effective in the classroom.
  - Create flexibility both in entry to the teacher workforce and teacher licensing once teachers have already started working, while still maintaining high expectations and rigorous standards for performance.

- **Work to change the traditional structure of the teaching profession so that it is a sustainable field in which one can grow:**
  - Create pathways for teachers to participate in leadership development opportunities that advance their career while remaining in the classroom.
  - Develop frameworks to support districts in prioritizing student and teacher mental health and wellness.
  - Rethink and restructure compensation systems so that teachers are compensated in a manner that makes it possible for them to continue working with students. Some methods of doing so are: increased compensation for leadership responsibilities, student debt reimbursement and/or forgiveness programs, increased options for affordable access to quality childcare, longevity bonuses, and pay-for-performance compensation models.

▶ *Workforce Development & Tomorrow's Economy*

Missouri needs to create shared definitions of the various pathways students can take as they move from K-12 schooling to postsecondary education and the workforce in the form of concrete checkpoints that students reach as they advance through their academic careers. In order to achieve this common understanding, strategic conversations need to occur regularly across sectors, including education, business, and government. Systems that enable this consistent communication need to be developed at the local, regional, and state levels.

ACTION STEPS

- **Strengthen partnerships between education leaders and business leaders to better inform workforce needs:**
  - Incentivize coordination within regions and across the state between businesses and local education agencies (LEAs) to encourage collaborative development of LEA programs informed by workforce needs.
  - Facilitate listening sessions between K-12 and industry leaders so that both groups have a working knowledge of the current landscape and opportunities for growth and partnership.
  - Partner with industry leaders to better communicate to students the importance of what they're learning and demonstrate ways classroom knowledge is applied in industry.
  - Develop consistent state-level frameworks to engage students and businesses in high-quality, meaningful, and applicable internships and apprenticeships.

- **Develop a state framework that establishes clear pathways for students to enter the workforce:**
  - In order to create an education system that efficiently prepares students for the future, Missouri must guide students by outlining clear pathways at the state level that allow students to track their progress along these pathways.
  - Redesign accountability systems so that student success is measured based not only on traditional performance but also career credits, social emotional learning, and community service, among other metrics.
  - Develop stronger and more consistent postsecondary advising programs in schools and invest in programs that give students the skills they need to be prepared for postsecondary success.
    - Some methods for doing so are: school counseling corps, professional development for teachers, counselors, and administrators, and college and career mentors.
  - Allow greater flexibility for schools and districts to develop sustainable structures that better prepare students for workforce needs. This could take the form of project-based learning, early colleges, profession-based learning opportunities, year-round school, or other innovative ideas.

- **Expand access to postsecondary credentialing opportunities for all students, regardless of location, race, age, socioeconomic class, etc.:**
  - Expand funding for A+ Schools, the state's framework for incentivizing higher education access, to allow more students from a larger diversity of backgrounds to access significant postsecondary funding.
  - Create a marketing campaign to highlight the innovative, cost-effective program offerings of the community college system.

▶ *Innovative and Flexible School Structures*

In order to be responsive to the changing and varying needs of Missouri's students, the Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE) should give districts flexibility in creating different pathways and school structures. Missouri is a diverse state that represents a wealth of geographies and types of people, and the state should develop a clear vision around what students should know, what skills they should possess, and what steps need to occur in order for that to happen. This may include teacher professional development and microcredentialing, innovative curriculums that emphasize soft skills, project-based learning, and a number of other initiatives that best serve the students individual needs.

ACTION STEPS

- **Develop a clear vision around what students should know and be able to do by the end of high school, and demonstrate why those goals are important:**
    - Systems operate in the way they were created to operate. To redesign schools, there must be a clear and articulated vision for what students should be receiving from their education. From there, local districts and schools, with support from DESE, can determine what steps they would need to take to rebuild the system based on those goals.
    - Facilitate processes to begin a shift in mindset from a generally compliance-based process to an innovation-based one.
    - Encourage engagement among local districts and their relevant stakeholders, such as students, parents, civic groups, business partners, and insitutions of higher education to inform what this ideal system would look like.
    - Develop an understanding at the local level of what the ideal school would look like and what would need to happen at each step of the education continuum to keep students moving through the redesigned system effectively.

- **Implement a plan to support schools and districts in understanding what flexibility they are able to implement and the potential incentives available:**
    - Create financial and non-financial incentives that encourage schools and districts to redesign their traditional systems in a manner that best serves their students.
    - Develop a program to fully support schools and districts that are undertaking this work so that they are able to do so in a way that still provides a high-quality education.
    - Aid districts in creating systems that prioritize quality programs. Clear skills goals must be articulated, and these skills should be aligned to an applicable industry need.
    - Organize high-quality professional development programs that train school leaders and teachers in how to effectively implement these new strategies.

- **Rethink accountability standards for districts based on a redesigned school model:**
    - Articulate what purpose assessments play in accountability and what assessments would look like in nontraditional school models.
    - Identify how some of the wraparound services and social and emotional learning competencies that schools will be encouraged to provide will play into the accountability system.
    - Develop a system for balancing equity within these accountability measures so that schools who do not have the capacity to undertake some of these designs are not punished through their Missouri School Improvement Program (MSIP) rating.

▶ *Using Data Systems*

State longitudinal data systems are complex and often lack a direct connection to learning, which is why it is crucial to have a set of statewide goals that inform practice. Missouri should develop a set of actionable use cases that can inform and improve programs and practice immediately by identifying specific scenarios in which data systems can be utilized. Once those use cases are clearly defined, the state will then need to ensure that it has the requisite data systems and processes that will allow teachers and leaders to leverage the data for improved practice and equity. Given the challenges involved with making the direct connection between data and practice for many stakeholders, Missouri should also inform its target audiences about the utility and critical importance of strong data systems, particularly for accountability and equity purposes.

ACTION STEPS

- **Identify what Missouri is trying to measure and what information would need to be collected in order to do so effectively:**
  - Answer the questions of: who needs to be targeted, what message should be articulated, and what method is being used to articulate that message?
  - In addition to identifying what data is necessary to measure the progress toward statewide goals, leaders must also determine the precise timeline for collecting and releasing this information so that it can be as effective as possible.
  - Identify the purposes for collecting data. Data can be used for action and accountability, and it is necessary for Missouri to create a balance between the two.
  - Engage in a gap analysis process to identify what data are needed that either is not being collected or is too difficult to access and analyze.

- **Create a plan to foster stakeholder engagement to discuss the desired outcomes for a state longitudinal data system in order to gain momentum and encourage collaboration:**
  - Develop an action plan for utilizing analyzed data so that citizens can see for what practical purposes the information would be used.
  - Anticipate concerns of data privacy, and proactively develop plans to prevent data abuse and breaches.
  - Communicate that these data can empower students and families to become well-informed about their educational progress.

- **Create a communications plan to educate various audiences (i.e. students, parents, districts) on how a data continuum can be useful for their needs. For example, parents will be informed on how to access data dashboards and districts will know how to navigate data available on their schools and students:**
  - Roll out a series of tutorials, focus groups, information sessions, and other engagement means to make it clear to families that the data can be useful for their purposes as well.
  - Further develop relationships with policy and business leaders in order to build a coalition of people who see data systems as a priority.

▶ *Redesigning Accountability Systems*

In order to incentivize districts and schools to take advantage of the flexibilities and opportunities available to them, the state must create an accountability system that rewards innovation while continuing to hold educators to a high standard. The accountability system should be holistic in nature, incorporating traditional rigorous measures such as literacy and numeracy, as well as innovative programs and hard to define elements such as school climate and social emotional competencies. The system must be designed to capture how well students are performing and being served and ensure that student subgroups are not being left behind.

ACTION STEPS

- **Determine the intent of the accountability system and clearly communicate that message to various audiences:**
  - Create clearly digestible goals that schools and districts should meet and then determine what information would be necessary to see if they are meeting that goal.
  - Articulate the importance of accountability as a means of program improvement and better student outcomes rather than as a punitive measure.
  - Identify any additional accountability requirements needed to address the unique aspects of programs that prepare students for different career tracks.

- **Build out accountability standards for project-based learning, internships, and other innovative school programs to ensure that they are adequately and rigorously preparing students:**
  - Continue communication with business leaders and trade organizations to identify base metrics for various career tracks.
  - Create measures to ensure that outside partners who are providing educational opportunities such as internships are being held to rigorous standards and are not merely helping a student in "checking off" a box on their career track.

- **Develop a system for measuring some of the more abstract elements of school quality, such as school climate, leadership, and social emotional competencies:**
  - It has been a struggle for many states to articulate to the public why these abstract measures are important to gauge. One possible method for doing so could be framing it from a business mindset. For example, DESE can allow business leaders to explain why social emotional competencies are an important workforce skill, which would then allow this to become framed as a workforce development need.
  - Develop a means of ensuring that schools who do not necessarily have the capacity to engage in some of these unique opportunities are not in turn being punished.
  - Maintain rigorous accountability standards for critical college and career readiness skills such as literacy and numeracy.