

MSTA ACTION

THE LEGISLATIVE BULLETIN OF THE MISSOURI STATE TEACHERS ASSOCIATION • PLEASE POST



Legislative session begins

The 2022 legislative session began on Wednesday, January 5. Work in both chambers will quickly get underway concerning two large issues which must be addressed early in the session - drawing new congressional districts and approving the spending of billions of dollars in federal stimulus money.

So far, a large number of education bills have been filed in both chambers. Bills expanding school choice include the expansion of vouchers, charter schools and virtual education. There will also be another push by members of the legislature for open enrollment. In other states, open enrollment has led to school consolidation which hurts the relationships between schools, families and communities. Bills relating to school employee retirement, greater flexibility for school districts and state regulation of school curriculum have also been filed.

Funding for public education continues to be supported by the legislature. MSTA legislative priorities include advocating for increased funding for student transportation costs and reinstating the career ladder program with state funding. Legislation has also been filed that would expand the time limit on the work after retirement critical shortage provision to allow retired teachers to fill needed positions without giving up their PSRS benefit. This expansion would increase the allowable use of critical shortage from two years to four years.

The 2020 census was completed late due to the COVID-19 pandemic, so work on drawing maps was delayed. Drawing congressional districts is the responsibility of the Missouri General Assembly, while state legislative districts are drawn by

bipartisan commissions appointed by the governor. The legislature is under a time crunch to approve new maps because 2022 is an election year. Districts must be settled prior to candidate filing which begins on February 22. Bills have been filed in the House and Senate for new maps that will detail Missouri's eight congressional districts, but there is still no agreement on what those maps should look like. The approval of the maps will go through the legislative process and could take some time to get to the governor's desk.

The commission appointed to draw Missouri House districts submitted two maps to Secretary of State Jay Ashcroft. The two maps largely agree on districts outside of urban and suburban areas. The House commission will have until late January to come to an agreement for a finished product. The Senate commission was unable to produce a new redistricting map, so the Missouri Supreme Court will select six appellate judges to draw new state Senate districts.

The legislature will address a supplemental budget spending bill early in the session as well. Items that have already been mentioned for the supplemental budget include funding for the state Medicaid program and approval of federal stimulus dollars, with a large portion directed toward public education. Even though the federal government already approved the use of the federal Covid relief money, the legislature must appropriate the money before it may be spent pursuant to federal guidelines. Available federal education funding under review by the legislature currently amounts to almost \$2 billion. A bill approving this expenditure must be passed by the legislature and signed by the governor prior to March 24.

This work will be done while still addressing other bills filed during the session, as well as the constitutional requirement to pass a state budget by May 6. The legislature will adjourn for the year on May 13.

MSTA lobbyists will continue to work in the capitol during session - attending legislative hearings, testifying on legislation and working with legislators to advocate for Missouri students, teachers and local communities.

Advocacy starts with you

MSTA advocates for and empowers public educators so they can teach. MSTA provides valuable information about the legislative session, PSRS/PEERS and the State Board of Education. While advocacy is a full-time job for the association, members can make a big difference with just a few actions throughout the year. Major policy decisions happen each session and it is important that educators make their voice heard in the process.

We all know that decisions are made by those who show up, but we must also be aware that the narrative is controlled by those who speak up. Policy makers don't make decisions in a vacuum - they rely on input from stakeholders, constituents, friends and family.

Missouri's education professionals are doing amazing things inside schools each day and helping students to reach success in innovative ways. Each member has a story about how they made a difference in a student's life and how that student makes a difference for their community. Those stories must be shared with legislators and policy makers.

MSTA has many strong leaders that are passionate about advocacy, and even small actions by many people can make a difference. Advocacy can take many different forms such as making a phone call, sending an email, sharing MSTA Action with your coworkers, being involved in a political campaign or discussing current education issues with your friends and families. You may consider attending an MSTA Region Capitol Visit and connecting with your elected official.

To stay on top of the most critical issues, sign up for MSTA's Rapid Response program by texting "MSTA" to 52886. Further information on capitol visit days can be found on the MSTA website at msta.org/capitol-visits. Members are encouraged to schedule meetings with their representatives and senators prior to arriving in Jefferson City.

Make your voice heard. When it comes to education in Missouri, there are no greater experts than the members of MSTA.



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2022 MSTA

EDUCATION POLICY PRIORITIES



“A general diffusion of knowledge and intelligence being essential to the preservation of the rights and liberties of the people, the general assembly shall establish and maintain free public schools for the gratuitous instruction of all persons in this state within ages not in excess of twenty-one years as prescribed by law.” Missouri Constitution Article IX, Section 1(a).

STATE ISSUES

Funding:

Although the state legislature has worked to appropriate funds to fully fund the school foundation formula, years of underfunding transportation reimbursements by hundreds of millions of dollars, and recent budget withholdings have led to inadequate public school funding. Expectations from Missouri schools, teachers and students continue to rise, with a new return of indications that future revenues will not meet anticipated formula growth. To account for lost state revenues, local taxpayers have increased their percentage of funding for schools. The state must work to close the funding gap for K-12 transportation, while fully funding of the formula. “Full Funding for Education” must include the state meeting its obligation to pay the legally required reimbursement for transportation costs and addressing Missouri teacher salaries. MSTA also supports increased funding for early childhood education, parenting programs and family literacy programs.

- **MSTA supports** public charter school expansion when charters are granted by the local school board within an existing accredited Missouri public school district and requires all members of a public charter school board to be residents of the district in which the charter school serves. Charter school expansion should include requirements that charter schools have the same certification and compensation standards of other schools in the district, and tenure status should not be reduced or lost as a result of teaching in the public charter school.
- **MSTA supports** requiring all members of a public charter school board be required to be residents of the district which the charter school serves.
- **MSTA supports** expanding high speed internet access.

Supporting teachers for student success:

The average teacher salary in Missouri is far below the national average and compared to other states, the average beginning teacher salary is even lower. These inadequately paid professionals are expected to deliver student performance results that are above average. While states surrounding Missouri continue to increase teacher pay, Missouri falls further and further behind national trends in teacher compensation.

- **MSTA supports** reinstating state funding of the Career Ladder program, allowing educators to

earn an additional stipend for engaging students in activities that enrich the student, school, and community.

Teacher Retirement:

A secure and stable defined-benefit retirement program is vital to recruiting and retaining highly qualified and effective educators. Actuarially sound improvements to the system continue to strengthen the Missouri public educators’ financial futures. Transitioning work after retirement from a limit on the number of hours worked to an earnings limit for Public School Retirement System (PSRS) will further simplify burdensome requirements on employees and districts.

LOCAL CONTROL

Assessment and Evaluation Reform:

The single biggest factor in the success of students is the teacher. MSTA believes that teacher input is vital to the continued success of our students. Local districts need to have the freedom to meet the needs of their communities without control by the state or federal education departments.

- **MSTA supports** each school district developing a written policy for transfer and assignment of students within a district and to any other school district.
- **MSTA supports** the use of locally developed assessments to improve instruction.
- **MSTA supports** local control of public education by the district board of education and autonomy of the local school district to develop and adopt curriculum, assessments, evaluations, and other programs to meet educational goals.
- **MSTA opposes** legislative actions involving inter-district choice. Open enrollment fails to serve the needs of all students in the community to receive a quality education, increasing student mobility while creating further funding inequities.
- **MSTA opposes** any plan that would use student grades, student class performance or student performance on standardized tests as the single criteria to measure the merit of the teacher.

COVID-19

Pandemic next steps:

MSTA strongly believes all students and staff have a right to a safe school environment. Missouri education professionals have worked tirelessly

throughout the COVID-19 pandemic, responding to a constantly changing environment to provide the best possible education to students. As professionals in public education, teachers and support staff must be involved in decisions affecting schools, students and communities. As school districts continue to evolve their plans for recovery from COVID-19, education professionals must continue to have a voice in the safety and wellbeing of those in the school community.

- **MSTA supports** local school districts developing, approving, and disseminating a local policy that prioritizes the health and safety of students and employees with input from school stakeholders and the community. The policy must describe the health and safety measures the district will take to mitigate and respond to public health threats, including what actions the school district will take in response to a confirmed contagious disease in the district.
- **MSTA opposes** statewide student assessments and punitive measures against school districts, educators and funding during any pandemic or long-term closure.

FEDERAL ISSUES

Retirement and Social Security:

- **MSTA opposes** any state or federal proposal to group the teachers’ retirement system funds with Social Security. In addition, the association opposes provisions that deprive teachers of their earned social security benefits.
- **MSTA opposes** the Government Pension Offset as well as the Windfall Elimination Provision.

Federal Influence in Education:

- **MSTA supports** requiring existing funding and future increases in federal dollars be delivered directly to the local school district whenever possible and increased focus on distributing federal dollars back to the classroom.

MSTA OPPOSES

- **MSTA opposes** state restrictions or limitations placed on any federal COVID-19 pandemic relief funding for public education that go beyond federal rule or law.
- **MSTA opposes** limiting the ability of employees to discuss working conditions with their employer.
- **MSTA opposes** federal supersession over state and local responsibility for public education, including assessments that set standards and drive curriculum.
- **MSTA opposes** any proposal to eliminate or weaken the teacher tenure law.
- **MSTA opposes** school vouchers, education tax credits, or education savings accounts, that would divert public money to pay for homeschooling or private school tuition.
- **MSTA opposes** merit pay, including the use of standardized test scores or other subjective criteria as a measurement of teacher performance or to determine further salary increases.

#MSTAadvocate



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