

Missouri Voters' Opinion on Key Education Issues Related to Missouri Senate Bill 727

By Ashley Donaldson Burle, Ph.D.
SLU/YouGov Poll Associate Director

[Missouri Senate Bill 727](#) addresses critical education issues, including teacher salaries, school funding, four-day school weeks, charter schools, and expanding MOScholars criteria. The following highlights how SB 727's proposals align with Missouri public opinion as indicated by findings from the SLU/YouGov Poll since the poll's creation in June 2020.

Key Points

- [Likely voters overwhelmingly supported increasing public teacher salaries \(81%\) and paying individuals who teach difficult-to-staff subjects more than easier-to-fill positions \(74%\).](#)
- [A plurality of likely voters \(47%\) agreed that district funding should be based more on enrollment than attendance, while 36% disagreed.](#)
- [More than three of five likely voters \(63%\) agreed that the state education funding formula should provide more funds for each student who qualifies for free or reduced-price lunch \(i.e., low-income students\).](#)
- [Approximately four of five \(81%\) likely voters supported providing more funds for students with special education needs.](#)
- [Forty-four percent of likely voters agreed that the funding formula should provide more funds for each student who is learning English as a non-native language \(i.e., English language learners\).](#)
- [Nearly half of likely voters \(46%\) opposed a permanent reduction from a five-day to a four-day school week in their local public school district, while 34% favored it.](#)
- [Most likely voters \(55%\) supported charter school operation in all parts of the state.](#)
- [More than half of likely voters \(55%\) opposed limiting the Missouri Empowerment Scholarship Program \(i.e., MOScholars\) to areas with a population of 30,000 or more.](#)
- [Most likely voters \(53%\) stated that low-income households should get priority to receive a Missouri Empowerment Scholarship.](#)

About Saint Louis University

Founded in 1818, Saint Louis University is one of the nation's oldest and most prestigious Catholic institutions. Rooted in Jesuit values and its pioneering history as the first university west of the Mississippi River, SLU offers more than 15,200 students a rigorous, transformative education of the whole person. At the core of the University's diverse community of scholars is SLU's service-focused mission, which challenges and prepares students to make the world a better, more just place.

About YouGov

Saint Louis University has partnered with YouGov to conduct its annual survey of Missouri voters. YouGov conducts surveys for multiple academic institutions and is the primary, trusted survey firm for media organizations, including CBS News and The Economist. An independent Pew Research Center study of online survey firms in 2016 further concluded that YouGov "consistently outperforms competitors."

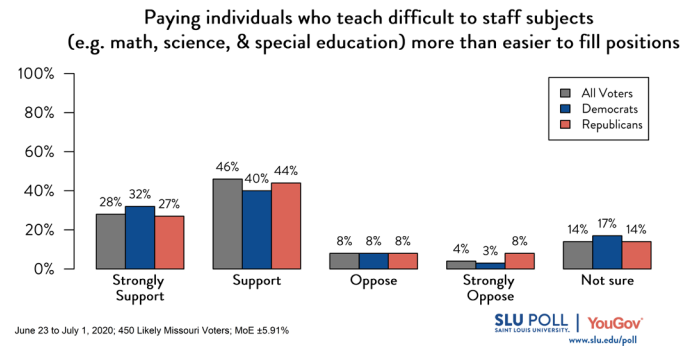
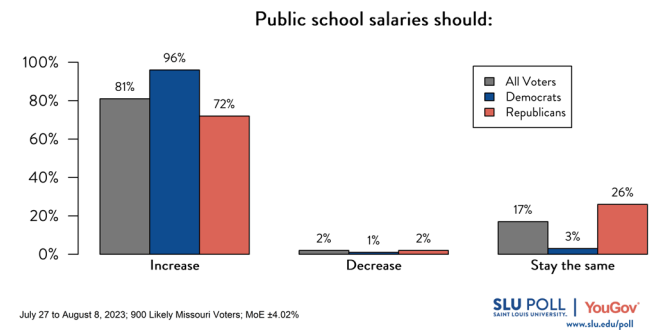
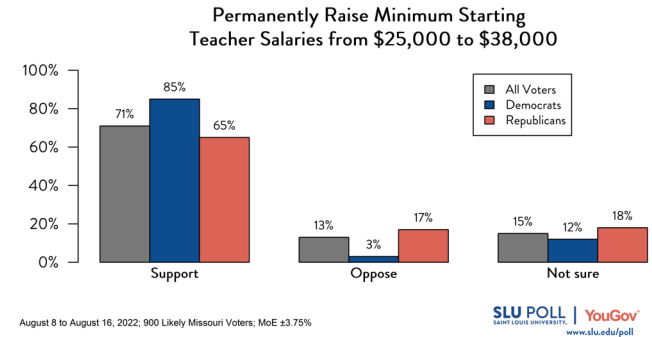
The SLU/YouGov Poll is funded by the [PRiME Center](#) in SLU's School of Education.

Raising Teacher Salaries

[Missouri law currently requires beginning public school teachers to be paid a minimum of \\$25,000 per year.](#) For the second consecutive year, [Missouri ranked 50th in the nation for average starting teacher salary at \\$34,052.](#) Instead of a permanent legislative solution, [baseline salary grants](#) were authorized by Governor Parson to raise the minimum teacher salary to \$38,000 for the past two years (academic years 2022-23 and 2023-24). In August 2022, the SLU/YouGov poll found that 71% of likely voters supported making that raise permanent.

[SB 727](#) proposes increasing the minimum teacher salary from \$25,000 to \$40,000 beginning in the 2025-26 school year.¹ In February 2023, 81% of likely voters indicated support for increasing public teacher salaries. In February 2024, when asked what starting teacher salaries should be in their district, likely voters said approximately \$55,000, on average.

[SB 727](#) proposes to pay teachers in “hard-to-staff schools” and “hard-to-staff subject areas” more for recruitment and retention purposes.² In July 2020, 74% of likely voters supported paying individuals who teach difficult-to-staff subjects more than easier-to-fill positions.



¹ Beginning in the 2025-26 school year, SB 727 increases the minimum teacher's salary from \$25,000 to \$40,000. For teachers with a master's degree and at least ten years of experience, this act increases the minimum salary from \$33,000 to \$46,000 for the 2025-26 school year and further increases such salary by \$1,000 each year until the 2027-2028 school year, when the minimum shall be \$48,000.

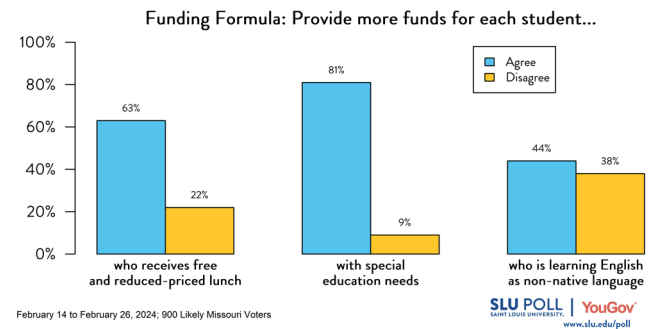
² The [National Council on Education Quality \(NCEQ\)](#) defines “hard to staff schools” as including but not limited to schools designated as “high need,” commonly schools with the lowest student performance or the highest rates of students living in poverty. The NCEQ defines “hard-to-staff subject areas” as any subject area

Funding Formula

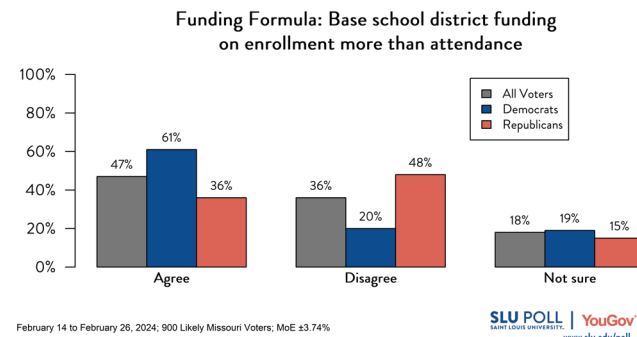
[Missouri’s public school funding formula was built in 2005 and the need for an overhaul has been argued.](#) An area of debate for the funding formula is its [weighting of students who typically cost more to educate \(i.e., low-income students, students with special education needs, and students learning English as a non-native speaker\)](#). The current funding formula only provides extra funding for these students if a district exceeds a threshold for that population of students; districts with student populations who fall anywhere below the threshold do not receive any additional funding.

[SB 727](#) would modify “the total grant amount for students with an individualized education plan (IEP) or limited English proficiency or who receive free or reduced-price lunch.” The February 2024 SLU/YouGov Poll found:

- 63% of likely voters agreed that the funding formula should provide more funds for each student who qualifies for free or reduced-price lunch (i.e., low-income students).
- 81% of likely voters agreed the funding formula should provide more funds for students with special education needs.
- 44% of likely voters agreed the funding formula should provide more funds for each student who is learning English as a non-native language (i.e., English language learners).



One key critique of the formula is its [use of average daily attendance rather than the total number of students enrolled in the district](#), which critics have argued penalizes poorer schools that typically have lower attendance. [Missouri is presently one of six states that uses average attendance for its student count.](#) [SB 727](#) would modify the state funding formula for “weighted average daily attendance” to include “weighted membership” which would account for district enrollment.³ In February 2024, 47% of likely voters agreed that district funding should be based more on enrollment than attendance, 36% disagreed, and 18% were not sure.



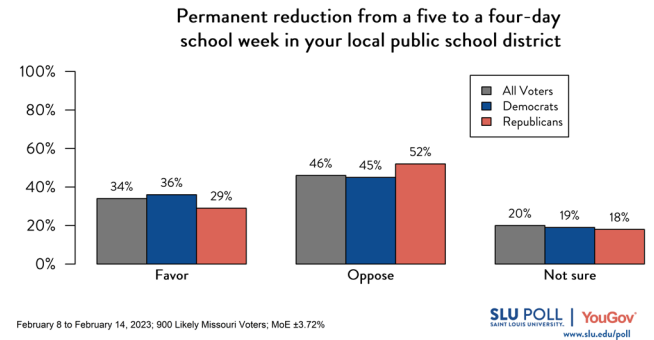
where the state educational agency or district has determined there is a shortage of qualified teachers; typically, this includes mathematics, science, foreign languages, bilingual education, or special education.

³ Current law defines “membership” (i.e., enrollment) as the average number of students enrolled in a school district who attended school at least one day during ten days at the end of January and September. SB 727 defines “weighted membership” as the current law definition of “membership” multiplied by certain weighting factors relating to the number of students who fall into certain population groups, such as the number of students who receive special educational services above a certain threshold number that is determined in a manner provided for in current law. Under SB 727, “weighted membership shall be included in

Four-Day School Week

Four-day school weeks became an option for Missouri schools in 2010-11. This year, [more than 30% of school districts \(175\) operate under a four-day school week](#). [Rural districts commonly cite switching as a response to teacher shortages](#); however, increasing attention has been brought to the issue, as [large, suburban districts like the Independence School District have adopted a four-day school week](#).

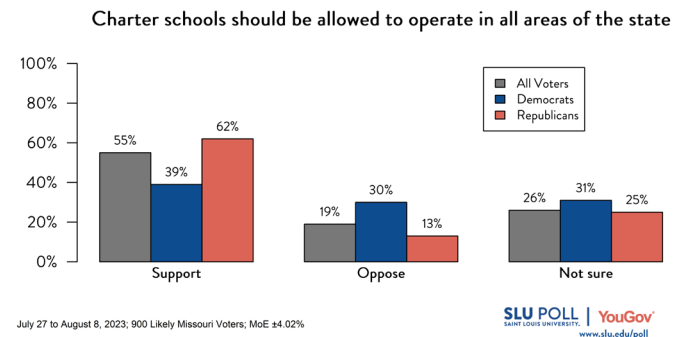
[SB 727](#) “provides that school districts located wholly or partially in charter counties or cities with more than 30,000 inhabitants may adopt a four-day school week only upon a majority vote of the qualified voters of the school district,” starting in 2026. In addition, [SB 727](#) includes financial incentives for districts with five-day school weeks.⁴ In February 2023, 46% of likely voters opposed a permanent reduction from a five-day to a four-day school week in their local public school district, while 34% favored it and 20% were not sure.



Charter Schools

Charter schools are free public schools; [37 charter districts operate in Missouri today](#).⁵ Currently, charter schools are allowed to operate in the Kansas City and St. Louis City school districts, in unaccredited school districts, in a school district classified as provisionally accredited for three consecutive years, and in accredited districts if the local school board agrees to sponsor.

[SB 727](#) “adds all school districts located in Boone County to the list of school districts in which a charter school may be operated by any entity currently authorized to operate a charter school under state law. Provisions of current law that provide for additional state aid to charter schools shall not apply to any charter school operated in Boone County.” The August 2023 SLU/YouGov Poll found that 55% of likely voters supported charter schools being allowed to operate in all parts of the state.



the calculation of a school district's weighted average daily attendance beginning in the 2026 fiscal year. In 2026, a district's weighted average daily attendance shall be calculated as the sum of 90% of such district's weighted average daily attendance as calculated in current law, plus 10% of such district's weighted membership. The percent of weighted membership included in such calculation shall increase by 10% each year until 2030, when a district's weighted average daily attendance shall be calculated as the sum of 50% of such district's weighted average daily attendance as calculated in current law, plus 50% of such district's weighted membership.”

⁴ “The Department of Elementary and Secondary Education shall remit to any school district with a five-day school week an amount equal to 1% for fiscal years 2026 and 2027, or 2% for fiscal year 2028 and all subsequent fiscal years, of such district's preceding year's annual state aid entitlement as calculated in June.”

⁵ For more information on charter schools, see the SLU School of Education PRiME Center's brief, [“Missouri School Choice Overview.”](#)

Missouri Empowerment Scholarship Accounts Program

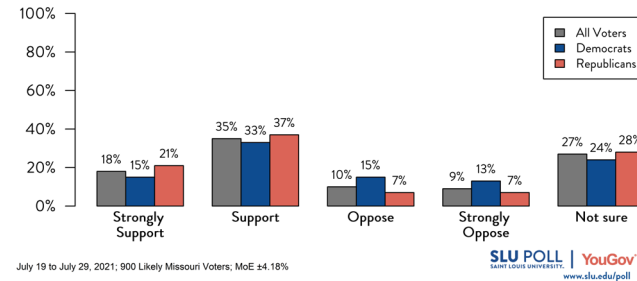
The [Missouri Empowerment Scholarship Accounts Program](#), better known as MOScholars, was established in 2021 and provides state tax credits for contributions to approved, non-profit Educational Assistance Organizations (EAOs). The EAOs use their contributions to award scholarships to students who meet specific criteria and attend eligible Missouri schools. In July 2021, 53% of likely voters favored creating the MOScholars program, and 19% opposed.

[Under current law](#), qualified students must attend a Missouri elementary or secondary school and reside “in a county with a charter form of government or a city with at least 30,000 residents.” [Five counties and ten cities currently meet this requirement](#). [SB 727](#) “modifies the definition of ‘qualified student’ by including any student who is a resident of this state, rather than only those students who live in a charter county or a city with at least 30,000 inhabitants.” In July 2021, 55% of likely voters opposed limiting MOScholars to areas with a population of 30,000 or more.

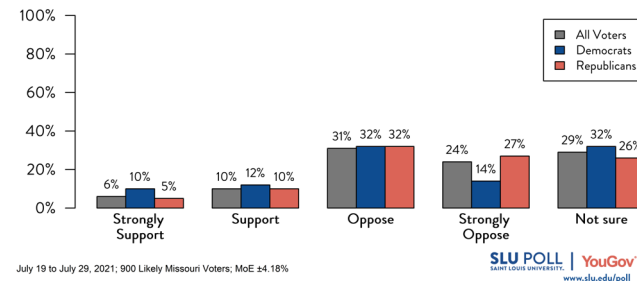
[MOScholars prioritizes funding for students with an approved individualized education plan \(i.e., special education students\) and from households whose total annual income does not exceed 100% of the amount to qualify for free and reduced-price lunches \(i.e., low-income students\)](#). If additional funds remain, the program extends to the students in households whose annual income does not exceed 200% of the amount to qualify for free and reduced-price lunches.

[SB 727](#) defines a qualified student as “any student who is a member of a household whose total annual income is 300% or less than the income standard used to qualify for free and reduced-price lunch, rather than only those students whose household income is 200% or less than such standard.” In July 2021, 53% of likely voters indicated low-income households should get priority to receive a Missouri Empowerment Scholarship.

Private donations fund private school scholarships or other educational services, & donors receive up to 50% state tax credit



Limit Missouri Scholarship Program to areas with a population of 30,000 or more



Prioritize MOScholars to (Check all that apply): Low Income Students

