



Legislative Platform 2025 Missouri 103rd General Assembly

Approved 12-12-24

The Missouri Council of Administrators of Special Education (MO-CASE) is committed to advancing the field of special education through professional development, advocacy, and support for leaders overseeing special education programs. Our legislative platform addresses key priorities to ensure the provision of high-quality special education services for students with disabilities in Missouri.

MO-CASE Legislative Priorities

1. Special Educator Attract, Prepare, and Retain High-Quality Professionals
2. Mental Health Support for All Students
3. Disproportionality
4. Equitable Accountability for All Schools Receiving Public Funds

Priority 1: Special Educator Attract, Prepare, and Retain High-Quality Professionals

Challenges:

- High caseloads, safety concerns, burdensome paperwork and complex regulations hinder attracting and retaining special education professionals.
- Missouri faces a critical shortage of qualified special educators, impacting the quality of education for students with disabilities.
- Nearly 9 in 10 schools struggle to hire qualified educators
- 86% of districts had trouble filling their open positions for the 2023- 24 school year.
- Around 70% of educators say their school is understaffed, leading to a heavier workload.
- Nearly 60% of schools have trouble finding substitute teachers.
- In K-12 education, 39% of teachers say they feel burned out “very often” or “always.”
- More than three-quarters of teachers find their jobs stressful on a regular basis.

Proposed Solutions:

1. Pipeline Strengthening: Support initiatives that enhance the educator pipeline, focusing on attracting and preparing special education professionals.
2. Financial Support: Advocate for increased state and federal funding for student financial aid programs, including grants, loan forgiveness, and scholarships to cover tuition costs for special education candidates.
3. Alternative Certification: Promote alternative pathways to obtain certification in special education, encouraging grow-your-own programs to recruit and train local candidates.
4. Competitive Salaries: Increase teacher pay specifically for special education professionals to address the current salary disparity.

Data Support:

According to an article from the National Education Association (April 2024), the following

statistics apply to pay in Missouri.

- The average teacher's starting salary is \$36,829 - ranked #50 in the United States
- Average teacher salary \$53,999 - ranked #47 in the United States
- Minimum living wage is \$56,843 in the United States (taken from the Economic Policy Institute; this dollar amount is for one adult and one child to have a modest but adequate standard of living)
- Teacher Pay Gap is 71 cents compared to other college-educated professionals with similar experience in other states

A recent MO-CASE survey indicated that 36% of Missouri districts have special educator (teachers, related services personnel, and support positions) vacancies at the end of September 2023. Unfilled positions after the start of the school year are unacceptable, yet there are either no applicants or very limited applicants for open positions.

The *U.S. Condition of Education (2024) Report* states that the number of U.S. students ages 3-21 served under IDEA increased from 6.4 million in school year 2012-13 to 7.5 million in 2022-2023. Taken as a percentage of total public school enrollment this equates to an increase from 13 to 15 percent of students. Missouri reported a 14% disability rate in 2022-23.

- Without significant intervention, by the 2025-26 school year, there is projected to be a shortfall of roughly 200,000 public school teachers.
- Based on Bureau of Labor Statistics projections, between 2020 and 2030, 37,600 new special education teachers are required to keep up with demand.
- From 2010 to 2020, the number of students who receive special education services increased by approximately 800,000 students.
- In 2018, there were one-quarter fewer Black and Latinx teacher candidates enrolled in teacher preparation programs than were enrolled in 2010.

Priority 2: Mental Health Support for All Students

Challenges:

- Pre-existing mental health needs among students have increased post-pandemic, necessitating enhanced school mental health services.
- Timely and coordinated delivery of mental health services requires collaboration between various agencies.

Proposed Solutions:

1. Comprehensive Mental Health Services: advocate for increased access to school mental health services from qualified providers.
2. Interagency Collaboration: Encourage coordinated efforts between service agencies, mental health, education, Medicaid, and private insurance carriers to ensure timely service delivery.

Priority 3: Disproportionality

Challenges:

- Current IDEA requirements may not effectively address the root causes of disproportionality in the identification, placement, and discipline of students with disabilities.

- The reallocation of funds for Coordinated Early Intervening Services (CEIS) based on disproportionate representation may not address the underlying issues.

Proposed Solutions:

1. **Comprehensive District Plans:** Advocate for a proactive comprehensive district or agency-funded plan addressing all aspects of the educational program to tackle disproportionality.
2. **Increased Federal Funding:** Lobby for increased federal funding for special education to adequately support school districts in addressing disproportionality.

Priority 4: Equitable Accountability for All Schools Receiving Public Funds

Challenges:

- Some schools receiving public funds may not adhere to all aspects of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), potentially compromising the delivery of special education services.
- Accountability measures for schools receiving public funds may vary, creating inconsistencies in service quality.

Proposed Solutions:

1. **Uniform Accountability Standards:** Support legislation ensuring that all schools receiving public funds adhere to the same standards as public schools, including the tiered monitoring process.
2. **Teacher Certification Requirements:** Advocate for consistency in certification or licensure requirements for teachers and service providers across all schools receiving federal funds.

Legislative Position Statements

Keep Public Funds in Public Schools

Oppose the use of public funds for parentally-placed private school programs unless these programs comply with IDEA provisions and provide appropriate special education services.

District Transfers/Open Enrollment

Oppose transfers and open enrollment without addressing the complexities of delivering special education services, ensuring procedural safeguards are the responsibility of one local education agency.

Special Education Procedures

Oppose laws or policies that expand or conflict with IDEA provisions, emphasizing the need for a system of non-discrimination for students with disabilities.

Funding and Resources

Strongly support increased federal and state funding for special education, addressing the significant financial burden on schools providing services for students with disabilities.

Early Childhood Funding

Support funding for early childhood programs, advocating for a continuum of services and integration into existing locations for efficiency and effectiveness. There are many options for early childhood programs with a variety of funding streams (Title, Average Daily Attendance, Early Childhood Special Education). This is burdensome, not to mention confusing, for educators who are implementing the programs.