

Missouri NEA Missouri State Board of Education Report

*Notes from October 20, 2020 meeting of the Missouri State Board of Education
Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education*

Board approves publishing for comment lower standard for teacher certification

The state board approved publishing for public comment DESE staff's proposal to eliminate the currently required cumulative 2.75 grade point average for teacher candidates while keeping the 3.00 GPA in content-area and professional knowledge courses. The main reasons given were negative impacts on male candidates and candidates of color, and increases to student debt as candidates retake courses to raise their cumulative GPA. Staff said research that does not show a correlation between cumulative GPA and quality teaching. Until 2017, teacher certification required a 2.5 cumulative GPA. Since 2017, the 2.75 cumulative GPA prevented 90 candidates from receiving teacher certification.

None of Missouri's border states or other professional programs require a cumulative GPA for licensing, though many professional preparation programs require a minimum cumulative GPA for admittance or are highly competitive. Board members engaged in spirited discussion about maintaining standards and high levels of rigor in education programs and the public perception of the rule change. Board president, Charlie Shields, opposed the change. Missouri NEA encourages educators to submit comments regarding the rule change, please watch for an Action Alert from MNEA in December.

Report shows mixed results for students from the first year of Missouri Online Course Access Program

MOCAP, established by the General Assembly in 2018, is the successor program to the Missouri Virtual Instruction Program. State law requires local school districts to pay tuition to MOCAP programs if certain conditions are met, while holding school districts accountable for student progress. DESE staff presented 2019-2020 school year data from the program. COVID 19 disrupted data collection and implementation. With just over 1,000 students enrolled in MOCAP last year, 67% completed coursework with a 59% passing rate. The low pass rate of 6-12 grade students in English language arts courses is an area of concern.

45% of MOCAP courses are electives, and 77% of courses are for grades 9-12. School districts are providing a great deal of feedback for program improvement and concerns regarding student access. DESE formed an advisory group to develop recommendations.

Board heard report on ongoing impacts from COVID-19

DESE staff reported that the most pressing issue school districts face is the large number of students and staff who are quarantined. Responses have included designating educators as essential workers which would give them the ability to leave quarantine if they are asymptomatic and wear a mask. This approach raises serious safety concerns and impacts district leave policies. Some local health authorities are implementing new standards: allowing asymptomatic students to leave quarantine or redefining who is designated as a close contact. DESE staff stated that only plans that follow state and national guidelines would be supported by the department.

Board members restated their position of strong support for in-person instruction for students when it can be done safely. DESE is developing guidance for the deployment of rapid antigen test kits for K-12 and higher education campuses. Districts should apply to the department for making testing available to staff and students. *NOTE: DESE is not taking more applications from districts as of this writing.*

DESE staff created an information dashboard to track patterns of instruction and data around the state: <https://dese.mo.gov/communications/coronavirus-covid-19-information>. As of Oct. 19:

- 92% of districts are doing some form of on-site instruction, 8% are fully distanced.
- 18% of districts have changed their instructional model since they started school.
- Overall enrollment is down 3% over past averages with the largest decrease in Pre-K (24% decrease) and Kindergarten (9% decrease). Grades 7-12 enrollment is similar or slightly increased over past averages.
- 1 in 5 students still have no/limited internet access

\$107,358,165 of CARES funding has been distributed to districts. Several COVID-19 funds are still being distributed and have later application deadlines. Governor Parsons allocated an additional \$61,500,000 of relief funds to be distributed based on enrollment. \$2 million has been allocated for reimbursement of costs for applying to be a substitute including application fees and background checks.

The state board will discuss state testing, accountability, and measuring progress in December. “What you should be doing with state testing is always looking at a standardized metric measurement and you are supposed to be measuring standard practices,” said Commissioner Vandeven. “There is nothing about this year that has been standard. At the same time, we need this information. We want to be very reasonable and responsible and yet, if we don’t have that information, how do we know?”

Commissioner Vandeven and board members praised educators and administrators for their ongoing work and had extended discussion regarding the emotional and mental wellbeing of teachers.

In other business, the board:

- Adopted a resolution honoring Lindbergh NEA’s Darrion Cockrell, 2021 Missouri Teacher of the Year. Cockrell is an elementary physical education and health teacher with 9 years of experience.
- Approved the ex-officio appointment of Melissa Grandel, 2019 Teacher of the Year, to the Missouri Advisory Council of Certification for Educators (MACCE).
- Received a report on districts experiencing financial distress. Malta Bend R-V was the only district identified as financially stressed. DESE staff reported that an increasing number of districts are anticipating a worsening financial situation as an impact of COVID-19.
- Received a report on educational equity priorities embedded in MSIP 6 and MSBA policies. Presenters made recommendations to address strengthening equity goals in state standards and diversifying the teacher workforce.
- Received an update on early learning. DESE created the Office of Early Learning with an emphasis on parent education, preschool programs, and special projects to coordinate all Pre-K programs.

The next meeting of the Missouri State Board of Education will be December 8, 2020. If you have any questions or suggestions, please contact Rebeka McIntosh or Ann Jarrett at 800-392-0236. Details of state board agenda items can be found at <http://dese.mo.gov/state-board-education/agendas-minutes>.

Respectfully submitted,

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