



Why Are Other Organizations Doing DESE's Job?

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["Kind of crazy."](#) That's how the director of school improvement for the Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE) describes the Missouri accountability and reporting system for Missouri schools. And I don't disagree. Navigating the DESE school report card [website](#) to figure out how a particular school is doing is challenging and kind of crazy.

It doesn't have to be that way. The Data Quality Campaign gave our neighbor Illinois [high marks](#) for their school report card [website](#). Their report cards are parent-friendly and go beyond the federal requirements for what must be included. The same analysis found that Missouri report cards have so much technical language that they are written at a 17th-grade level. That means you have to be a year or two into graduate school in order to fully understand them.

Fortunately, the *St. Louis Post-Dispatch* has built a [website](#) that is easily searchable with a nice display of information that may be of interest to parents and other stakeholders. Of course, the site only has information on the schools around St. Louis, not the whole state.

The St. Louis University School of Education has also launched the [PRIME Center](#) to provide education data to those who are interested in it. So far, they have built [education profiles](#) for St. Louis, Kansas City, and the entire state. And here at the Show-Me Institute, we have been busy building datasets and analyzing Missouri education data so we can better understand how schools and districts actually perform.

According to [Wikipedia](#), the purpose of a state education agency is to [be] "responsible for education, including providing information, resources, and technical assistance on educational matters to schools and residents." So why are the media, universities, and non-profits doing the job that should be done by DESE?

We discussed this topic in a recent podcast. [Listen here.](#)

About the Author



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Susan Pendergrass was Vice President of Research and Evaluation for the National Alliance for Public Charter Schools before joining the Show-Me Institute. Prior to coming to the National Alliance, Susan was a senior policy advisor at the U.S. Department of Education during the Bush administration and a senior research scientist at the National Center for Education Statistics during the Obama administration. She earned a Ph.D. in Public Policy from George Mason University.

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Advancing liberty with responsibility by promoting market solutions for Missouri public policy.

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