



TESTIMONY

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HOUSE BILL 607: ADDRESSING A VARIETY OF EDUCATIONAL POLICY MODIFICATIONS

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Testimony Before the Missouri Senate Education Committee

TO THE HONORABLE MEMBERS OF THIS COMMITTEE

Thank you for the opportunity to testify. Our names are Cory Koedel, Director of Education Policy, and Avery Frank, Policy Analyst. We are from the Show-Me Institute, a nonprofit, nonpartisan, Missouri-based think tank that advances sensible, well-researched, free-market solutions to state and local policy issues. The ideas presented here are our own and are offered in consideration of Missouri's educational environment.

House Bill 607 includes several different policy provisions relating to education in Missouri. While we note the ban on three-cueing (which is an ineffective strategy for teaching children how to read) is a positive feature of the bill, a problematic change is the creation of a new "grade-level" performance category on state standardized tests. This new

performance category lowers academic standards for Missouri students and will be misleading to the public.

Lowering Standards for Missouri's Students

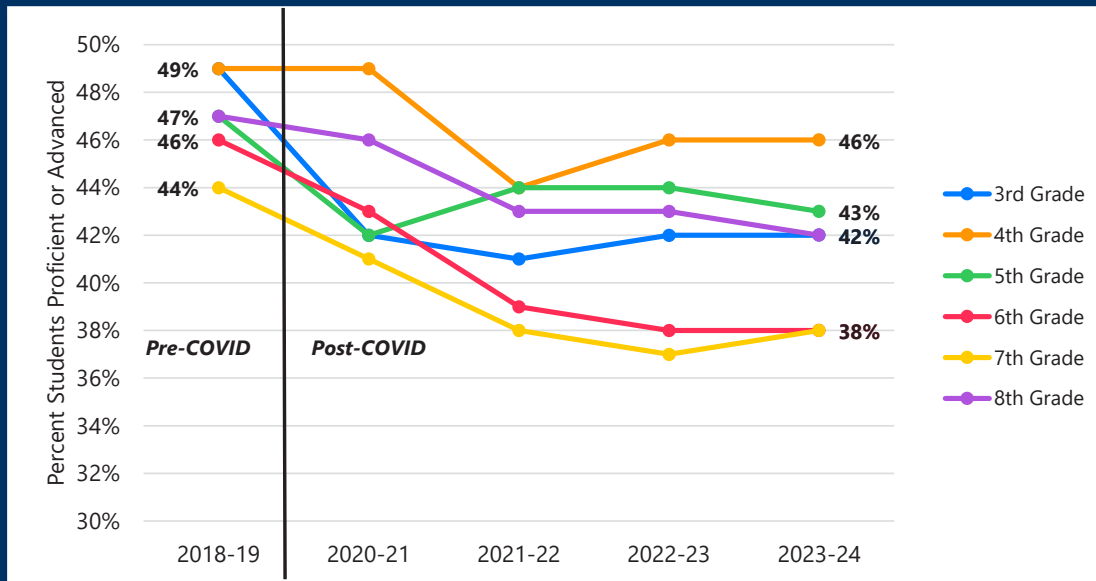
Currently, Missouri students are categorized into one of four performance levels based on their state standardized test scores. From lowest to highest, these are: (1) below basic, (2) basic, (3) proficient, and (4) advanced. We believe the meaning of these categories is self-evident, as it should be.

HB 607 proposes the addition of a fifth performance category called "grade level," which would be above basic but below proficient.

Digging deeper into the language of the bill, it defines a student as "proficient" if the student can "demonstrate mastery over all appropriate grade-level standards and

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Figure 1: Percent of Missouri Students Scoring Proficient or Advanced on the Missouri Assessment Program (MAP), English Language Arts, 2018-19 to 2023-24



Source: Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE).

It is important to maintain clear and rigorous standards in the face of declining academic achievement in Missouri. Otherwise, improvement efforts will lack proper urgency.

Rejecting this change is also important in the interest of government transparency. For example, with this new category, when schools and districts report out to the public on student performance, they will be able

has introductory-level knowledge for the next grade or level of education.” This is reasonable.

Like “proficient,” the “grade level” category also means that the student “demonstrates mastery over appropriate grade-level subject matter,” but goes on to indicate that a “grade level” student “may be ready, with appropriate reinforcement, for the next grade or level of education.” This means that a student could be classified as testing at grade level on end-of-year assessments even if he or she is not fully ready for the next grade. This is not reasonable.

This provision seems like an implicit acceptance of the fact that Missouri’s children are learning less in school than their counterparts from a decade ago. Indeed, whether one uses the Missouri Assessment Program (MAP) or the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP), Missouri’s scores have been declining, especially in reading. Figure 1 shows recent declines in reading on the MAP since 2018–19.¹

to report on the share of students who are performing at “grade level” or higher, but this will not mean what most people will think it means. The definition of “grade level” in the bill is more appropriately communicated by the term “basic,” which is already a performance category. Missouri’s laws should promote transparent reporting on school performance, rather than causing confusion.

The Ban on Three-Cueing

The ban on three-cueing and emphasis on phonics instruction are positive features of the bill, as they align with research on effective reading practices.

In several states, such as South Carolina, Tennessee, and Mississippi, dedication to the science of reading (which focuses strongly on phonics-based instruction) has helped English/language arts (ELA) scores surge past their pre-

pandemic levels. All three states have committed to the science of reading, while Missouri emphasizes the science of reading only after a struggling student is identified.²

In June 2023, the National Council on Teacher Quality (NCTQ) conducted a survey to evaluate which universities are effectively incorporating the science of reading instruction into their curricula for future teachers. The results were concerning—only 25 percent of higher-education institutions across the nation adequately address all five of the core components of reading instruction (phonemic awareness, phonics, fluency, vocabulary, and comprehension).³ In Missouri, nearly half of our participating universities⁴ earned an “F” grade from NCTQ.⁵

Banning ineffective strategies such as three-cueing is an important step toward improving student reading skills in Missouri.

CONCLUSION

House Bill 607 contains some meaningful reforms, such as the ban on three-cueing. However, the proposed addition of the “grade-level” performance category on state tests is a change for the worse. It sets low expectations for Missouri students and is potentially misleading for parents, students, and the public. We need more transparency, not less, regarding the education of our children.

We appreciate the opportunity to testify and would be happy to answer any questions.

NOTES

1. *Department of Elementary and Secondary Education: State Report Card*; apps.dese.mo.gov/MCDS/Reports/SSRS_Print.aspx?Reportid=84d85ca8-c722-4f9b-9935-70d36a53cf54. Accessed 9 Apr. 2025.
2. Frank, Avery. *Some States Making Large Reading Gains Post-Pandemic*. Show-Me Institute, 14 Nov. 2023; www.showmeinstitute.org/blog/performance/some-states-making-large-reading-gains-post-pandemic.
3. *Teacher Prep Review: Strengthening Elementary Reading Instruction*, National Council on Teacher Quality, June 2023; www.nctq.org/publications/Teacher-Prep-Review:-Strengthening-Elementary-Reading-Instruction.
4. Central Methodist University (F), Hannibal-LaGrange University (F), Lincoln University (B), Lindenwood University (B), Lindenwood University Graduate (D), Missouri Southern State University (F), Missouri Western State University (D), Northwest Missouri State University (F), Southeast Missouri State (F), University of Central Missouri (F), University of Missouri-Kansas City (A), University of Missouri-St. Louis (C), University of Missouri-St. Louis Graduate (C); all other Missouri universities declined to participate.
5. Frank, Avery. *The Science of Reading in Missouri*. Show-Me Institute, 26 June 2023; showmeinstitute.org/blog/performance/the-science-of-reading-in-missouri.



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