



TESTIMONY

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SENATE BILLS 1194 AND 1653: A–F LETTER GRADE REPORT CARDS FOR SCHOOLS & DISTRICTS

By Cory Koedel and Avery Frank

Testimony before the Missouri Senate Committee on Education

TO THE HONORABLE MEMBERS OF THE COMMITTEE

Thank you for the opportunity to testify. Our names are Cory Koedel and Avery Frank. Cory Koedel is director of education policy at 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. He is also a professor at the University of Missouri, where among other activities, he works on a contract with the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education to produce measures of test-score growth. Avery Frank is Senior Policy Analyst at the Show-Me Institute. The ideas presented here are our own and are offered in consideration of Missouri's educational environment.

The primary objective of Senate Bills 1194 and 1653—to make clear and informative school and district report cards available to the public—is laudable. It is a strategy used by many states with superior academic performance on national tests, including Texas and Florida. The following stipulations in these bills are the most important for ensuring the report cards will be useful:

1. The use of a letter-grade system to rate academic performance; this system is easy for everyone to understand.

2. The requirement that the letter grades be based on academic performance and not other aspects of schools.
3. The requirement that each school and district post its report card in a clear and accessible location on its website.
4. The stipulation that the rating scale for the letter grades shall automatically increase when too many “A” and “B” grades are assigned, which ensures rigor in the grading system. This will prevent grade inflation and the outcome that all or virtually all Missouri schools and districts receive an “A” grade.

While this legislation is a needed reform, we have two suggestions for its improvement.

First, we recommend that the committee consider using direct language in Section 160.522.1, to ensure information about academic performance is prioritized on the school and district report cards over all other information. The legislation as currently written indicates that in addition to information about performance, the report cards will be designed to satisfy federal reporting requirements for the disclosure of information about students, staff, and finances. This is fine, but we should aim to avoid the current state of affairs where the most important information to parents and constituents—about

academic performance—is buried in the report cards. The report cards should emphasize academic performance, with all other information treated as secondary.

Second, the committee should consider increasing the weight of value-added growth in the final rating. Value-added growth is the most accurate indicator of true school quality that we have, and it is effectively independent of the students' performance levels and poverty rates. Growth to proficiency does not have this feature, and like the academic achievement level, rewards schools and districts with students who are higher performing and generally better off for reasons unrelated to the school itself. A concrete suggestion would be to shift the weights on achievement, value-added growth, and growth to proficiency, with value-added growth receiving a greater weight than either of the other two.



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