COMMITTED TO CHANGE
Missouri Citizens and Public Education

A Report from Public Agenda
to
The Missouri Partnership for Outstanding Schools
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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Like many other states, Missouri is struggling to create a world-class public education system where children from its many communities can be prepared for rewarding lives and careers. To provide a more complete understanding of how Missourians view their schools, The Missouri Partnership for Outstanding Schools asked Public Agenda, a nonprofit, nonpartisan research organization, to conduct a random-sample telephone survey of the general public, and also to survey educators and leaders in the state.

The resulting report, Committed to Change: Missouri Citizens and Public Education, summarizes the results of this survey. The report also puts the Missouri findings in context by comparing them to results from two national surveys and a statewide study in Connecticut—all conducted by Public Agenda.

Three major conclusions emerge from the study:

1. Goals and Performance
Missourians see serious problems with the state's public schools. There is broad agreement in Missouri, as in other parts of the country, that schools should be safe, teach children good work habits and appropriate behavior, and give students a solid grounding in basic skills. But there is also a widely-shared perception among Missourians that the state's schools are not delivering adequately on these fundamentals. These attitudes are held by residents in all parts of the state and by both African-American and white Missourians.

The study also reveals a deep and disturbing polarization between Missouri educators—the state's teachers, principals, and administrators—and leaders such as mayors and other elected officials, journalists and editors, civic and union leaders, college presidents, and religious leaders. The dispute is not over the goals of public education, but over how well the state's schools are meeting those goals. Educators, for example, are nearly unanimous in their belief that the schools are doing a good job under tough conditions. Leaders, in contrast, believe that educators often use social and funding problems as excuses to mask poor performance.

Another example: Leaders strongly support (and educators oppose) greater accountability for schools.

2. Committed to Change
Missourians are more critical of their public schools than citizens nationwide, but this criticism does not translate into rejection of the public education system itself. Instead, the depth of public dissatisfaction seems to feed the desire of Missouri residents to improve their public schools. Missourians are thus both more critical of their schools and more inclined to support change within the public school context. Compared to the nation as a whole, Missourians are less likely to support alternatives to public education, such as vouchers, and more inclined to think that the solution to education problems is to overhaul the public schools. Missourians are as likely as the rest of the nation to say their private schools outperform the public ones. But they are less likely to say they would send their child to a private school, if they could afford to do so.

Most Missourians are also generally sympathetic to educators, inclined to see them as allies rather than adversaries on several key issues. The response that comes through loud and clear from the survey is this: If there are problems with public schools, the answer is to fix them.
commit mission to continued and improved educational attainment. However, developing the public’s
interest and support for the cause was no easy task. Especially when the issues involved were much
too close to home to be dismissed as political or bureaucratic means. The Missouri Partnership
helped to focus the public’s attention on individual school fulfillment of the mission. As a result,
Missourians were united in their desire for an improved public education system. The
Partnership’s role was crucial in the process of bringing the public together to address the
problems. This led to a widespread consensus among the public about the need for reform.

The Missouri Partnership for Outstanding Schools was formed to help specifically with that effort.
When any issue is in the political legislative phase, it fosters polarization. But when the
bills become statutes, there must be reconciliation and a focusing of efforts on implementation.
The Missouri Partnership existed to help local school districts do the job of implementa-
tion in ways that glean the maximum advantage possible for students. Existing as a statewide organization, the Missouri Partnership mirrors the spirit of local partnership which is
required as the obligation to our students is fulfilled. Parents, educators, business people,
people of faith and other citizens must come together effectively use the enabling laws and the
monetary resources to better educate our children.

The Partnership for Outstanding Schools recognizes the complexity of this task. It knows
that often people’s perceptions affect their actions. Therefore, it takes more than simply
doing each phase of the job well; it takes serious listening and understanding for progress to
be made. That is why the Missouri Partnership, primarily through generous grants from
the Danforth, Hallmark and Kaufmann Foundations, asked Public Agenda to help us gather
ingformation and to assess the public’s commitment to this task in Missouri.

Public Agenda’s work has fulfilled that expectation. And in the attached study, the
strong commitment of Missourians to public education is loud and clear, and stronger in
many ways than what is found in other states. Missourians want to use our solid foundation
to build excellence by setting high standards and by lifting expectations in a manner that
lights the way to further improvement. Missourians are skeptical of trendy ideas such as
school vouchers, privatization or other approaches that fail to address the fundamental
of improving our public schools.

Missourians are concerned about safety, about the ethical messages society and the schools
import, and about the basics.

In Missouri, the torch is passing.

For more than a decade, Missouri and the rest of the nation have recognized that the way
we were educating our children was not fully preparing them for the demands of an increas-
ingly complex and competitive world. In addressing this problem, every aspect of public
education has been scrutinized from the organization of schools and classrooms and the way
teachers were being prepared, to the laws governing schools and disparate funding formulas.
Unfortunately, most early attempts to improve public education took the form of program-
matic statutes, targeted mandates and incentives which forced conformity and failed to solve
the problems. Missourians were early to recognize the need not only to reform public education in its
entirety, but also to create ambitious and thoughtful legislation which would allow improve-
ment to begin locally, in individual districts and schools. Such legislation has been enacted
in Missouri, and the torch is passing back into the hands of the parents, educators, business
people and other citizens who have worked so long for positive change. The challenge now is
to use the new resources and the power available to us.

The Missouri Partnership for Outstanding Schools was formed to help specifically with that effort. When any issue is in the
political legislative phase, it fosters polarization. But when the
bills become statutes, there must be reconciliation and a
refocusing of efforts on implementation. The Missouri Partner-
ship exists to help local school districts do the job of implemen-
tation in ways that glean the maximum advantage possible for
students. Existing as a statewide organization, the Missouri Partnership mirrors the spirit of local partnership which is
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people of faith and other citizens must come together effectively use the enabling laws and the
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Public Agenda’s work has fulfilled that expectation and more. In the attached study, the
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to build excellence by setting high standards and by lifting expectations in a manner that
lights the way to further improvement. Missourians are skeptical of trendy ideas such as
school vouchers, privatization or other approaches that fail to address the fundamental
concern of improving our public schools.

Missourians are concerned about safety, about the ethical messages society and the schools
import, and about the basics. This confirms that the local district and individual schools
must rise to the challenge. It confirms that a broad effort with cooperation from parents,
business and public agencies will be required to make a difference.
The study points out where educators, parents and community leaders differ in their understanding or in their perspectives of the problems and challenges. Knowing those differences is the first step toward working together.

We believe this study and report gives us a good picture of the beliefs and attitudes which currently exist in Missouri. It confirms that the will is present to stay the course and to do the necessary work. The study cannot communicate for us, but it points to the subjects we must discuss and for which we must forge solutions. We must do all of this with the absolute knowledge that as we carry the torch, the successful hand-off will only come when our students are fully prepared to raise the bar in turn for the next generation.

The study points out where educators, parents and community leaders differ in their understanding or in their perspectives of the problems and challenges. Knowing those differences is the first step toward working together.

Thomas R. Davis
Immediate Past-President
Missouri Partnership for Outstanding Schools

INTRODUCTION

At the request of the Missouri Partnership for Outstanding Schools, Public Agenda has surveyed attitudes toward public education in Missouri. Some of what we learned from nearly 1,400 interviews is similar to what we have seen in other areas of the country. Missourians have high expectations of their public schools and, especially in the most fundamental areas of school endeavor, they feel that their expectations are not being met. Like their counterparts in other states, Missouri citizens want schools to provide safe environments where children can acquire good work and behavior habits and the knowledge and academic skills they will need to be productive citizens in an increasingly complex and challenging world. And in common with Americans everywhere, Missourians feel their schools are performing poorly in these critical areas.

But we also heard a distinctive voice in Missouri, rather different from what we have found elsewhere. Missourians are simultaneously more disturbed by what they see in their schools and more committed to working within the public school system. This is perhaps best illustrated by comparison with a recent national study also conducted by Public Agenda. We presented a worst-case scenario of continued and sustained failure by local public schools over a period of 10 to 15 years; we then asked people what should be done.

Nationally, the responses were scattered and confused. Some people wanted to continue to work with the public schools, others wanted to explore alternatives to public education, such as vouchers. Small percentages were interested in privatization or taking control of the schools away from the local community. No single response approached majority support. But when we asked the same question in Missouri, we received a dramatically different response. A single alternative — "overhaul the public schools" — appealed to a majority of Missourians and topped all other alternatives by wide margins. We saw this same response on other topics. Regardless of how we asked the questions, the answer came back the same: "Let's get to work on fixing our schools."

The study thus suggests that Missourians have a pragmatic predisposition toward improving their schools. They support constructive change but are skeptical of measures which might be a distraction from the fundamental goals. They are less interested in blaming educators for failures and more interested in "rolling up their sleeves" and getting to work.

We believe that this attitude is a precious resource for leaders who are also committed to real educational reform.

The Committed to Change study included interviews with three different groups:

General Public: The study draws on the voices of the general public through a statewide telephone survey of 500 Missouri residents. In addition, the survey "oversampled" 200 African-American residents and 200 parents with children in the public schools, allowing more detailed generalizations about the attitudes of these specific groups. (See Methodology for full details.)

Community Leaders: Public Agenda also surveyed 211 community leaders throughout the state, including mayors, state legislators, business executives, union leaders, college presidents, newspaper editors, and religious leaders.

Educators: In addition, Public Agenda surveyed 245 Missouri educators, including public school teachers, principals, and superintendents.
In designing the research, Public Agenda worked with a distinguished group of Missouri leaders in education and social services. This group met in a one-day workshop hosted by the Partnership in August 1995 (see Appendix for a list of the participants.) Public Agenda staff also reviewed a large body of literature on education in Missouri and conducted telephone interviews with several other leaders who were unable to attend the workshop. The final survey design included three different types of questions:

1. Some questions were drawn from two recent national studies by Public Agenda: First Things First: What Americans Expect from the Public Schools (1994) and Assignment Incomplete: The Unfinished Business of Education Reform (1995). Using these questions allowed us to compare the views of Missouri residents with respondents nationwide.

2. We also drew heavily on questions from a statewide survey of Connecticut residents, reported in The Broken Contract: Connecticut Citizens Look at Public Education (1994). Comparing the Missouri results with those from another state sheds additional light on the Missouri findings.

3. Finally, a number of questions were designed specifically for this survey, giving us a reading on issues of special interest in Missouri.

PROBLEMS IN MISSOURI'S SCHOOLS

Missouri residents are deeply troubled by some of what they see in their local public schools. While schools may be doing well in some areas, most Missourians believe they are failing seriously in meeting what should be education's most important goals.

Missourians say they want a public education system that provides at least three things: A learning environment that teaches children how to behave in an adult world; schools that are safe and orderly; and an education system that at least teaches children "the basics" — defined as how to read, write, compute, and function in a world being rapidly transformed by technology. Unfortunately, many residents say that the state's schools are not delivering in these most fundamental areas.

This study presented respondents with a list of 13 education goals ranging from "using the latest educational methods and teaching techniques" to "ensuring that schools are free from weapons, crime and gangs." For each goal, respondents answered two questions: How important is this goal? And how well are your schools doing in accomplishing it?

While the individual answers to these questions are interesting, comparing people's answers for each goal — how they rate the importance of the goal vs. the schools' performance in achieving it — is especially revealing. In this study, three areas jump out as particularly troublesome to most Missourians; that is, people think the goals are very important but are not convinced that the schools are successfully addressing them.

1. Teaching Children How to Behave

In focus groups nationwide, opinion researchers hear a consistent refrain: While much of the specific content children learn in school may not be relevant to their adult lives, they must acquire certain habits and attitudes if they are to succeed in life. For example, high school graduates must learn how to relate to people in authority and acquire essential work habits such as reliability, dependability, and punctuality. Many Americans share the sense that young people will learn much of what they need to know on the job, but unless they start with the proper attitude, they will never be a success.

Moreover, there is a nearly universal perception that young people — all young people, not just troublemakers — are not learning these "survival skills" in today's schools. Even "good kids" from "good families," people say, have no idea how to behave in the adult world. Not only are many adults offended by what they see (and some are deeply offended), they also fear that these young people will have serious problems when they enter the workplace. It is widely believed that far too many young Americans reach adulthood lacking the manners, good work habits, punctuality, and dependability they need to get and keep a job.

In Missouri, these qualities — respect for people in authority and good work habits — top the public's list of priorities for education. Eighty-six percent of Missourians rate "teaching kids to respect adults and people in authority" a top priority. But despite its importance, the public gives the schools bad marks on accomplishing it. Only 26% of the public think the schools are doing an excellent or good job in this area — leaving a "gap" of 61 points between this particular goal's importance and the schools' performance on it (Table 1).
Leaders around the state — a group that includes mayors, legislators, editors, business leaders, and the leaders of unions, civic, and religious organizations — share the public's concerns. As Table 1 suggests, leaders give the schools even lower marks in this area. Only 9% say the schools are doing a good or excellent job in teaching youngsters to respect adults, leaving a performance gap of 81 points (Table 1).

The goal of "emphasizing such work habits as being on time, dependable and disciplined" shows a similar pattern. People feel these qualities are essential but give the schools terrible marks, with massive gaps between priority and performance.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Teaching Children How to Behave in the Adult World</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>How much of a priority do you think each of the following goals should be for Missouri's public schools? Please use a 1 to 5 scale where 1 means the goal should be an extremely urgent priority and 5 means it should be a very low priority. Of course, you can use any number in between. What priority do you give?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Goal:** Teaching kids to respect adults and people in authority

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Priority</th>
<th>Performance</th>
<th>Gap</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Public</td>
<td>56%</td>
<td>23%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leaders</td>
<td>90%</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Educators</td>
<td>93%</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Goal:** Emphasizing such work habits as being on time, dependable, and disciplined

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Priority</th>
<th>Performance</th>
<th>Gap</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Public</td>
<td>85%</td>
<td>33%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leaders</td>
<td>95%</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Educators</td>
<td>97%</td>
<td>29</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Missourians believe it is difficult to learn (or teach) in an environment that is physically intimidating.

Nearly 8 of 10 members of the general public — and a similar percentage of Missouri's leaders — stress that the schools should focus on "imposing strict codes of discipline and enforcing them so that kids are punished when they misbehave." But while this goal commands a high priority, most people do not feel the schools are doing a good job in meeting it. Fewer than 1 out of 4 members of the general public (23%) and 1 in 10 leaders (9%) give the schools high grades in this area.

People in Missouri also feel strongly about the need for safe, violence-free schools. Overwhelming majorities of each group rate "ensuring that the schools are free from weapons, gangs and drugs" as a high priority, and while the schools get somewhat better marks here (33% of the public gives schools a favorable performance rating), the gap between performance and priority is still extremely high (Table 2).

**TABLE 2**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Safety and Discipline in the Schools</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Goal:</strong> Ensuring that schools are free from weapons, gangs, and drugs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Priority</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Public</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leaders</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Educators</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Missourians believe that a few children are spoiling the educational experience for the vast majority. They would like to get the most disruptive children removed from regular classes and put in the rest of the country (Table 2). Nearly all Missouri school groups support this proposition (96%).

The goal of "ensuring that schools are free from weapons, gangs, and drugs" commands almost universal support. Ninety-one percent of the public endorses this goal.

2. Preserving Order and Discipline

A related problem clearly preoccupies the people of Missouri — the perception that a few misbehaving, or in some cases dangerous, children are destroying the educational environment for the vast majority of youngsters who want to learn. Missourians believe it is difficult to learn (or teach) in an environment that is physically intimidating.

Missourians believe that the state has a huge problem removing disruptive children from regular classes, which they think should be done outside the school. They also believe that the schools should create an atmosphere where children who want to learn can do so.

Missourians, along with their leaders, are convinced that a safe school system and discipline are essential to the operation of a successful school. And again, they designate this as an area where Missouri schools are not performing nearly as well as they could.

Nearly 8 of 10 members of the general public — and a similar percentage of Missouri's leaders — stress that the schools should focus on "imposing strict codes of discipline and enforcing them so that kids are punished when they misbehave." But while this goal commands a high priority, most people do not feel the schools are doing a good job in meeting it. Fewer than 1 out of 4 members of the general public (23%) and 1 in 10 leaders (9%) give the schools high grades in this area.

The goal of "making sure that students mastered the basics" commands almost universal support. Ninety-one percent of the public endorses this goal.

3. The Basics

Missourians' third major worry concerns how well schools perform their chief educational mission. Public Agenda research, and that of other major opinion analysts, suggests that communities across the nation are concerned about what they call "the basics." People expect that a high school graduate should, at a minimum, be able to read and write standard English, perform "checkbook" math, and have a basic understanding of how American society is organized. There is also a widely-shared perception that American education has fallen short in reaching this important goal. In focus groups, nearly every participant has an anecdote about a young person who can't spell commonly-used words or identify commonly-known historical figures, or who can't make change or operate a cash register without pictures of the products on the key.

These concerns are as strong in Missouri as in the rest of the country. Nearly all Missourians regard education in the basics as essential. The goal of "making sure that students mastered the basics" commands almost universal support. Ninety-one percent of the public endorses this goal, as do 97% of leaders (Table 3).

But once again,Missourians are not satisfied with the performance of the schools in this area. The public is almost as critical of the schools on this item as they are on behavior, safety, and discipline. Only 37% of Missourians give the schools a favorable performance rating here, with a 54-point gap between performance and priority. Leaders are even more critical, with only 18% giving schools a favorable rating — a gap of 79 points.
These concerns — for safety, discipline, and basics — are widely shared in all parts of the state and by all of the major demographic groups. Missouri’s whites are as concerned about these issues as are African-Americans; parents are as concerned as non-parents; younger Missourians are as concerned as older ones.

There are many areas where the schools are perceived as doing a good job, For example, the schools get relatively good marks on teaching tolerance for different groups and on running good sports programs. But on the goals that the public regards as most important — behavior, safety, order, and the basics — there is widespread concern.

Table 4 gives an overall view of the greatest areas of satisfaction and dissatisfaction for both the public and community leaders.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Goal</th>
<th>Public Gap</th>
<th>Leader Gap</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Teaching kids to respect adults and people in authority</td>
<td>61</td>
<td>81</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Imposing stricter rules of discipline and enforcing them so that kids are punished when they misbehave</td>
<td>56</td>
<td>72</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Educating that schools are free from weapons, gangs, and drugs</td>
<td>55</td>
<td>74</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Making sure that students master the basics, such as reading, writing, and arithmetic</td>
<td>54</td>
<td>79</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Emphasizing work habits as being on time, dependable, and disciplined</td>
<td>52</td>
<td>86</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Providing more education on social problems such as teen pregnancy, drug abuse, and AIDS</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Increasing teacher pay</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teaching kids high tech skills such as computer programs</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>68</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Increasing student awareness of oppression and injustice in American society</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Having school buildings that are modern and well kept</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Using the latest educational methods and teaching techniques</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Educating kids to be more tolerant of people who come from different ethnic and racial backgrounds</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maintaining a strong sports program</td>
<td>-18</td>
<td>-46</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Survey researchers typically expect some variation among groups on any given question, based upon differing perspectives, information, and values. What is significant, however, is for two groups to be diametrically opposed, with a substantial majority of one group taking one position and an equally substantial majority of the other group taking the opposite view. From a policy perspective, such disagreements can be troublesome since they may make it difficult for the two groups to reach consensus or compromise.

This study reveals a surprising number of disagreements of this kind between the state’s leaders and its educators. There is a deep disagreement between these two groups on a series of school issues. Educators, by overwhelming majorities, believe that schools are doing a better job today than in the past and that they do a better job than private schools. Leaders take the opposite position. Indeed, leaders believe that the schools use social problems and lack of funding as an excuse for poor performance (Table 6).
TABLE 6

Opposing Views of Educators and Leaders on Performance of the Schools

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Educators</th>
<th>Leaders</th>
<th>General Public</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>&quot;Compared to when you were in school, do you think the schools are doing a better job, a worse job, or about the same?&quot;</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Better</td>
<td>69%</td>
<td>29%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Worse</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>51</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Same</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**In your community, is it the public schools or the private schools which generally provide a better education?**

| Public schools are better | 79 | 27 | 32 |
| Private schools are better | 13 | 59 | 44 |

**Which of the following comes closer to your own view?**

| The schools are doing a pretty good job given the social problems and lack of funding they face. | 90 | 40 | 54 |
| The schools use social problems and lack of funding as excuses for their poor performance. | 8 | 55 | 39 |

There is also disagreement on how schools should operate. In contrast to educators, leaders are inclined to think that schools expect too little from students and typically oppose the mixing of faster and slower learners in the same classes (heterogeneous grouping). Leaders are also eager to impose some financial accountability on educators, arguing that educators should be rewarded or penalized for student progress (Table 7). Educators take the opposite position. And on each of these questions, the public lies somewhere in the middle—sometimes coming closer to one side or the other—but usually falling between the extremes.

TABLE 7

Opposing Views Between Educators and Leaders on Operation of the Schools

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Educators</th>
<th>Leaders</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>&quot;In terms of academic achievement, do you think that today's public schools generally expect kids to learn too much, too little, or are the expectations about right?&quot;</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>About right</td>
<td>53%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Too little</td>
<td>43</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Too much</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

"There are some ideas for changing the ways the schools teach. Please tell me if you favor or oppose each of them. How about [INSERT ITEM]. Do you strongly favor, somewhat favor, somewhat oppose, or strongly oppose that idea?"

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Educators</th>
<th>Leaders</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Mixing fast learners and slow learners in the same class so that slower kids learn from faster kids (strongly + somewhat)</td>
<td>70%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Oppose (strongly + somewhat)</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rewarding educators when their students improve and penalizing them when their students do worse (strongly + somewhat)</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Oppose (strongly + somewhat)</td>
<td>79</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The findings from this study indicate that large numbers of Missourians have serious reservations about the state's education system. It is failing to do the things that are most important to them. This situation is exacerbated by deep divisions between Missourian leaders (who have traditionally been the schools' greatest supporters) and the state's educational community.

**Fix the Schools!**

The public's concerns about education identified in this study are not unique to Missouri. Public Agenda has documented similar viewpoints in national studies of Americans' views on public schools and in a detailed study of attitudes in Connecticut. Since these surveys included many of the questions asked in Missouri, it is possible—and very interesting—to put Missourians' views into a national context.

Concerns about discipline, respect, and basic social issues, and Public Agenda's other studies show a growing gap between leaders and educators in other parts of the country as well. But while the perception of the problems may be similar, Missouri's reaction to these problems seems somewhat different.

One of the most important differences perhaps is a counter-intuitive. The general public in Missouri is at the same time more distressed about what is happening in its public schools and more committed to improving its public education system. Public Agenda's research suggests that, compared both to Connecticut and the nation as a whole, Missourians see more problems with their public schools and yet are more resistant to abandoning the public school system in favor of alternatives. Thus, despite perceived problems, there is a significant reservoir of resolve to "fix" public education in the state.

This resolve reveals itself in a number of different ways:

1. **A Greater Sense of the Problems**

Comparing the attitudes of people in Missouri to those of people in other parts of the country shows that Missourians are more dissatisfied with how their schools are doing in major areas. Comparisons to attitudes in Connecticut are particularly interesting because of the similarities and differences between the two states. Both states are economically diverse, rich with affluent suburbs and rural areas as well as troubled inner-cities. But there are also striking differences. Connecticut is a more wealthy state where per-student school expenditures are near the top of the nation. Missouri falls approximately in the middle of the nation as far as spending is concerned.

Missourians are generally less pleased with what they see in the public schools than are people in Connecticut. The most interesting differences emerge on the gaps between education priorities and school performance. Missourians are less likely to express satisfaction with their schools' ability to deal with student behavior, basics, and safety. As Table 8 shows, the size of gaps between priority and performance in those crucial areas is significantly greater in Missouri.
Opposition to vouchers is even stronger among parents who would presumably benefit by having more choice in the schools their children attend. Yet 74% of Missouri parents say they oppose vouchers — compared to 62% of parents nationwide who said they opposed vouchers in a recent poll by the Wirthlin Group.\(^1\)

Missouri parents are also somewhat less likely than parents nationwide to say they would send their children to private schools if they could afford to do so. While almost 6 in 10 parents nationally would choose a private school for their children if they could afford it, Missouri’s parents are more evenly split — 48% say that they would choose a public school; 46% a private one (Table 10).

As Public Agenda has suggested in other reports, much of the public does not yet completely understand policy debates about vouchers and privatization, and it is not clear which way people will go as they think more carefully about these proposals. What is clear is that the first instinct of most Missourians is to overhaul the system they currently have, rather than move to alternatives such as vouchers or privatization. Compared to the nation as a whole, Missourians are less enticed by private school alternatives.

4. Support for Educators

Missourians also appear to view the state’s teachers sympathetically. One sign is significant support for higher teacher pay. Sixty-four percent of the Missouri general public believes that increasing teacher pay should be a high priority, and only 20% think the state is doing a good job at achieving this goal. Missourians also give a high priority to having school buildings that are modern and well-kept. Seventy-one percent of Missouri residents say this is an important goal for them.

Once again, it is interesting to compare Missouri results with those in Connecticut. Connecticut teachers are among the best paid in the country, and many people in that state seem resentful of teachers’ salaries. As a result, only 30% support the goal of increasing teacher pay and 48% say the state has done a good job in this area. In contrast, Missouri residents are more concerned that their teachers are underpaid. Indeed, the Missouri public’s views on this issue are not that far away from the views of Missouri’s educators (Table 11).

3. Lower Support for School Vouchers

Another important difference is Missourians’ response to the idea of providing vouchers for parents to send their children to private schools. Asked directly whether this is a good idea, large numbers of Missourians say they oppose school vouchers. By margins of 69% to 27%, Missourians say they oppose giving parents “a voucher that they could use toward enrolling their child in a private school at public expense.”

\(^1\) Wirthlin Group, “If you could afford it, would you rather your children attend:”

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Missouri Parents</th>
<th>Nationwide* Parents</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A public school</td>
<td>46% 36%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A private religious school</td>
<td>28 37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A private non-religious school</td>
<td>18 21</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


As Public Agenda has suggested in other reports, much of the public does not yet completely understand policy debates about vouchers and privatization, and it is not clear which way people will go as they think more carefully about these proposals. What is clear is that the first instinct of most Missourians is to overhaul the system they currently have, rather than move to alternatives such as vouchers or privatization. Compared to the nation as a whole, Missourians are less enticed by private school alternatives.

TABLE 9

Support for Overhauling Public Schools Rather Than Exploring Alternatives, Missouri Versus Nation as a Whole

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Missouri</th>
<th>Nationwide*</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Overhaul the public schools</td>
<td>51%</td>
<td>28%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Increase the money public schools get</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Have the state government take over and run the local public schools</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Have companies that specialize in education run the local schools</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Give parents vouchers to make private schools an affordable option</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* Data for nationwide sample taken from Public Agenda’s Assignment Incomplete survey (1993).

TABLE 8

Connecticut Versus Missouri: Dissatisfaction with School Performance

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Goal</th>
<th>Connecticut</th>
<th>Missouri</th>
<th>Gap</th>
<th>Missouri</th>
<th>Gap</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Teaching kids to respect adults and people in authority</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>61</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Imposing stricter codes of discipline and enforcing them</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>56</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ensuring that schools are free from weapons, gangs, and drugs</td>
<td>53</td>
<td>55</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Making sure kids master the basics</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>54</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Emphasizing such work habits as being on time, dependable, and disciplined</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>52</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

2. A Greater Interest in Fixing the Public Schools

Public Agenda asked respondents in Missouri and nationwide what they would do if public schools failed, over a period of a decade, to give children a quality education. The differences in the responses are striking (Table 9). Nationally, people are divided over a number of possibilities: 28% want to overhaul the public schools; 20% would increase the money public schools get. Almost half want to explore other options such as vouchers (28%), privatization (10%), or state control (6%).

Attitudes in Missouri are different in several important ways. What is especially striking is the number of Missourians who say that their first choice is to "overhaul" the public schools (Table 9). Fifty-one percent of the Missouri residents choose this option, as opposed to only 28% of the national total. Just 9% of Missourians say giving schools more money is the best solution (compared to 20% nationally).

What people in Missouri seem to be saying, in other words, is that they believe that the public schools can be fixed and should be — but not necessarily by giving them more money.

TABLE 10

Missourians Are More Likely Than Nationwide Sample to Want to Send Their Children to Public School

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Missouri</th>
<th>Nationwide*</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A public school</td>
<td>46%</td>
<td>36%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A private religious school</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A private non-religious school</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

While Missourians regard funding educators as somewhat higher support in Connecticut, where 55% support this kind of accountability and 40% oppose it (Table 12).

**TABLE 12**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Missouri Versus Connecticut: Support for Making Educators Accountable for Student Progress</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>&quot;Here are some ideas for changing the way schools teach. Please tell me if you favor or oppose each of them. How about [INSERT TERM]? Do you strongly favor, somewhat favor, somewhat oppose, or strongly oppose that idea?&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Favor (strongly + somewhat)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>----------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Missourians are also somewhat sympathetic to the difficult constraints under which educators are working. The Missouri study asked respondents to choose between two alternatives: "Schools are doing a pretty good job given the social problems and the lack of funding they face," or "The schools use social problems and lack of funding as excuses for their poor performance." Fifty-four percent of the Missouri public says the schools are doing a good job under difficult conditions while 39% feel educators use social problems as an excuse. As indicated earlier, Missouri leaders (55%) are even more likely to believe that educators use social problems as an excuse for poor performance (Table 6).

6. A Different Approach Is More Important Than More Resources

Although Missouri residents are sympathetic to higher salaries for teachers, they are not interested in giving the schools a blank check. This becomes clear when people are asked to choose between giving the schools more money or changing what the schools are doing. By a margin of 62% to 29%, Missourians say the best way to improve the schools is to have greater accountability and more discipline instead of giving them "more money for up-to-date equipment, smaller classes, and increased support for kids with the greatest problems." Missouri leaders are even more likely to say that "greater accountability and discipline" is a better approach than giving the schools more money: they favor this choice by nearly 2-to-1 (60% to 32%). This is diametrically opposed to the views of educators, who, by an even wider margin, think that more money is the better approach (Table 13).

**TABLE 13**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Public, Leaders and Educators on Best Way to Improve Schools</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The best way to improve Missouri's schools is to give them more money for up-to-date equipment, smaller classes and increased support for kids with the greatest problems.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Missouri: 29%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The best way to improve Missouri's schools is to have greater accountability and more discipline — things that do not require additional money.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Missouri: 52%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not sure/both/neither (volunteerd)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Missouri: 19%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

This study suggests that Missouri residents want to fix the public schools and believe it should be possible to do so. Many Missourians seem to feel that their schools can improve — at least they have in the past — and that the situation does not reflect a continual downward spiral. Fully half of Missouri residents surveyed say that their own local schools are as good or better than they were in the past.

**NEXT STEPS**

Missourians have a striking interest in having their public schools, and they show broad support for two strategies — setting clearer and higher academic standards and emphasizing high technology. Missouri residents also want schools to help deal with social problems that prevent children from learning; they are concerned that such efforts, if not done carefully, may distract the schools from their primary mission. Missourians also support efforts to deal with the special problems of inner-city schools.

A. STANDING FOR STANDARDS

For Missouri residents, one of the most appealing proposals to improve the public schools is to set higher academic standards for what children should learn and what teachers should teach. In fact, as one outgrowth of the "Outstanding Schools Act of 1993," Missouri has worked to formulate a set of academic performance standards for its public education system. This study suggests that Missouri residents are extremely positive about such an approach.

By some measures, the public is even more positive about the concept of standards than are the state's leaders and educators. The Missouri public is also more optimistic about standards than the general public nationwide.

This is also an area where there is a great deal of agreement among the public, educators, and leaders. There is nearly unanimous support among all three groups for setting clear standards for students and teachers, with 92% support from the general public, 95% support from leaders, and 88% support from educators. Furthermore, all three groups want student promotion to be contingent upon the successful completion of tests which demonstrate that they have met the standards. Eighty-seven percent of the public supports this concept, as do 89% of leaders, and 73% of educators.

While support for standards is high among all groups, the public feels even more strongly about this approach than do the other two groups. Members of the general public are much more likely to say they "strongly favor" academic standards, as opposed to saying they favor them "somewhat."

For example, 64% of the general public says they "strongly favor" setting up clear guidelines for what should be taught in every major subject, more than twice as many as those who say they only "somewhat favor" such guidelines (28%). While educators also support these guidelines, their support is not as intense. Only 48% say they "strongly favor" them. Leaders are closer to the public, with 37% saying that they "strongly favor" guidelines (Table 14).
TABLE 14
Support for Standards Among Missouri Public, Leaders and Educators

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Issue</th>
<th>Public</th>
<th>Leaders</th>
<th>Educators</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Most children would actually learn more</td>
<td>79%</td>
<td>72%</td>
<td>67%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Most children would work more attention to their school work and study harder</td>
<td>76</td>
<td>71</td>
<td>63</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>More children would dislike education and resist learning</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>45</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

There is little concern that standards will harm students. Indeed, Missouri residents are convinced that standards will improve the educational experience for most children. Large majorities of Missouri residents believe that standards will encourage students to learn more (79%) and to pay attention to study harder (76%). Only a minority (26%) feel that standards will make students dislike education (Table 15). Educators and leaders also agree that standards will improve rather than harm the educational experience of most students. Once again, support for standards is high among both African-Americans and whites and in all parts of the state.

C. DEALING WITH SOCIAL PROBLEMS

Missourians, like Americans nationwide, believe that social problems such as troubled families, teen pregnancy, and drug abuse seriously undermine the ability of some children to learn. Many experts have called for "school-linked" social services in an attempt to more closely coordinate social service efforts with what happens in school. Some experts see schools as a logical place to locate many different kinds of social services, including services for pre-school children, students, and even the parents of children in school. Missourians believe these problems need to be addressed, and that they want schools to play a significant role in attacking them. But Missourians have concerns about exactly how this should be done. Most have serious qualms about "sitting" social services for adults or very young children in schools, and they are not of one mind on the services that should be available to school-age children. This is one area where the attitudes of Missouri's white and African-American residents are different, with blacks more supportive of having at least some social services for students in school buildings.

One reason Missourians are attracted to academic standards may be that they believe standards address some of the greatest concerns they have about the schools. There is a general sense that the schools have lost control of the students, that no one is setting or enforcing clear rules, and that without such rules students cannot be expected to learn. Setting clear academic standards may have appeal precisely because it is an antidote to this trend.
1. A Broader Definition of Education

This study shows solid support among all demographic groups for the proposition that social problems are a major educational obstacle and that children will not be able to learn if these problems are ignored. Moreover, Missouri residents believe attacking these problems is a public responsibility; Only 19% believe children’s health and nutrition problems should be the responsibility of local volunteer organizations; 79% feel these problems should be handled by state agencies (Table 17).

Missouri residents also feel that these problems cannot be ignored by the schools. Six in 10 (62%) Missourians say “the public schools must take responsibility for dealing with the social problems kids face because kids cannot learn if these problems are ignored.” Only about a third (32%) believe public schools “should stick to teaching academic subjects, and not get sidetracked trying to solve the social problems schools face.”

Most Missouri residents believe social programs really do help children and reject the idea that social programs only encourage poor people to have larger families. 54% say that “social programs for low-income families would help children grow up to be healthier and more productive citizens,” compared to only 34% who say that “expanding such social programs for low-income families would encourage families who can’t take care of their children to have even more children.”

| TABLE 17 |
| Social Services and Children’s Learning |
| “Many kids in Missouri have problems at home or get inadequate health care or nutrition. In general, who should take responsibility for dealing with such problems? Do you think that” |
| Inadequate health care or nutrition for children is a property matter for these families and local volunteer organizations — state agencies should not get involved — 19% |
| OR State agencies should help these families and not get sidetracked trying to solve the social problems schools face 51 |
| OR State agencies should help these families but leave the schools out of it 26 |

Which view comes closer to your own?
The public schools must take responsibility for dealing with the social problems kids face because kids cannot learn if these problems are ignored 62
OR The public schools should stick to teaching academic subjects, and not get sidetracked trying to solve the social problems schools face 32

“Here are two statements about low-income families and social programs such as child care and health services for their children. Which comes closer to your own view?”
Expanding social programs for low-income families would help children grow up to be healthier and more productive citizens 54
OR Expanding such social programs for low-income families would encourage families who can’t take proper care of their children to have even more children 34

2. Social Problems and the Schools

There is, then, broad basic support for helping children overcome social problems. And the Missouri public thinks that the best way for schools to do so is to respond as educators, by teaching youngsters about social problems and how to combat them. Sixty per cent of Missourians give a high priority to the goal of “providing more education on social problems such as teen pregnancy, drug abuse, and AIDS.” The general public is even more supportive of this approach than either leaders or educators. Only 38% of educators assign this a high priority, as do 35% of leaders.

In the public’s eyes, this educational role should not be restricted to students. There is consensus-level support for providing school-based, child-development education programs for parents. Two-thirds of the general public (66%) support programs on school grounds, “that help parents understand how children grow and change.” These programs draw somewhat stronger support from parents themselves, who approve of them by a 3-to-1 margin (74% to 22%).

This idea makes sense given the public’s view that family condition is more important to a student’s success than what happens in school. Sixty-one percent of Missourians say that a student “from a stable and supportive family who goes to a poor school” is more likely to succeed than a student “from a troubled family who goes to a good school.”

The public also believes that many parents are not currently doing a good job. Eighty-four percent believe that “parents take care of the education of their kids.” As a result of these concerns, a program directed specifically at helping parents understand child development makes a great deal of sense to most Missourians.

3. School-Based Social Services

The picture changes dramatically, however, when Missourians are asked whether public schools should become a delivery site for social services. Some experts think the schools are well-situated to provide needed services to the residents in their neighborhoods. But for the public, this prospect raises strong concerns.

For example, Missourians are divided when asked whether low-income families should be able to receive social services at the school: 51% prefer that the schools not be the place that provides such services; 26% say children— but not their parents— should be given social services, and 19% say that both kids and parents should receive such services. About two-thirds of both leaders and educators do not want social services sighted on school grounds (Table 18).

| TABLE 18 |
| Views of Public, Leaders, Educators on Whether Social Services Should be Provided on School Grounds |
| “Currently many children from low-income families are eligible for social and health services. Which of the following three statements comes closest to your own view?” |
| As much as possible, the children and their parents should get these services somewhere other than school — 51% 65% 60% |
| OR The children should be able to get these services at the neighborhood school, but the parents should get them somewhere else — 20 18 21 |
| OR The children and their parents should be able to get these services at their neighborhood school — 19 12 10 |

Committed to Change: Missouri Citizens and Public Education
4. Opposition to School-Based Social Programs Serving Pre-Schoolers or Adults

When the study asked Missourians about the appropriateness of locating specific types of health and social services on school grounds their apprehensions became more clearly defined.

The public clearly opposes school-based social services when these are intended for anyone other than the students themselves. For example, there is opposition to delivering services when the intended recipients are the parents of school children. Overwhelming majorities reject proposals to provide such services as employment counseling or drug rehabilitation to parents on school grounds. Educators and leaders also reject these proposals by overwhelming numbers (Table 19).

The Missouri public even rejects school-based social services for young children who are under school-age. Substantial majorities of Missourians oppose using the schools as a site for vaccinations for pre-schoolers (63%) or child-care services (61%). Once again, educators and leaders reject these proposals, and do so in even greater numbers.

### TABLE 19

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Opposition to Providing Social Services on School Grounds for Non-Students</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>% responding “should NOT provide”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vaccinations and physical checks for kids not old enough to be in school</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Child care services for parents whose kids are not old enough to be in school</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rehabilitation programs for the parents of students who abuse drugs and alcohol</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social services to help families with unemployment, housing and welfare benefits</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

5. Social-Services for Students at School

The Missouri public is sharply divided over in-school social services even when these are geared toward the students themselves. Missourians are split, for example, on the acceptability of school-based health clinics for students: 51% oppose such clinics and 46% support them. They are also divided over in-school family planning clinics for school students (41% favor them and 51% oppose them), drug rehabilitation programs for students (43% in favor, 53% opposed), and services for abused children (40% for, 46% opposed). For their part, majorities of educators and leaders reject most of these measures. They are especially averse to providing drug rehabilitation programs (75% of educators and 64% of leaders are opposed) and family planning clinics that provide contraceptives and counseling (75% of educators and 62% of leaders are opposed).

### TABLE 20

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Support for Providing Social Services for Students on School Grounds</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>% responding “should provide”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Programs for students who have been sexually or physically abused</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Health care clinics that provide medical services to students</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Family planning clinics to give students contraceptives and counseling on pregnancy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rehabilitation programs for students who abuse drugs and alcohol</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### TABLE 21

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Support for Academic Standards and Social Services: Blacks and Whites</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>&quot;Which view comes closer to your own?&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Blacks</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The public schools must take responsibility for dealing with the social problems kids face because kids cannot learn if these problems are ignored</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The public school should stick to teaching academic subjects, and not get sidetracked trying to solve the social problems schools face</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

"There are some ideas for changing the way schools teach. Please tell me if you favor or oppose each of them. How about [INSERT ITEM]: Do you strongly favor, somewhat favor, somewhat oppose, or strongly oppose that idea?"

Setting up very clear guidelines on what kids should learn and teachers should teach in every major subject so the kids and the teachers will know what to aim for:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Favor strongly</th>
<th>Dislike strongly</th>
<th>Somewhat favor</th>
<th>Somewhat dislike</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Favor</td>
<td>64</td>
<td>65</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

But substantial differences between blacks and whites emerge when they are asked to choose between two strategies to improve the public schools: setting and enforcing higher academic standards or providing social and counseling services to all children who need them. Blacks see social services as more important than standards by a 57% to 33% margin. Whites take the opposite position — 57% opt for higher academic standards and only 28% opt for social and counseling services.

### TABLE 22

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Which is More Important: Social Services or Higher Academic Standards? Views of Blacks and Whites</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>&quot;Which comes closer to your view?&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Blacks</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The best way to improve Missouri’s public schools is to provide social and counseling services to all kids who need them</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>OR</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Blacks and whites also diverge over providing specific services on school grounds to students. African-Americans tend to favor such programs when they focus on school children while whites are divided. The program that has the most support is family planning for students, favored by 68% of blacks but only 42% of whites. Health clinics that provide medical services to students are supported by 60% of African-Americans but only 45% of whites (Table 23).

These attitudinal differences may reflect the fact that blacks in our sample are much more likely than whites to live in inner-city neighborhoods, where social problems are often thought to be more prevalent. The plurality of blacks (46%) in our sample report they live in the inner-city, compared to only 6% of whites; and an additional 21% of blacks say they live in an urban area, compared to only 11% of whites.

### Table 23

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Service Provided</th>
<th>Blacks</th>
<th>Whites</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Family planning clinic to give students contraceptives and counseling on pregnancy</td>
<td>68%</td>
<td>42%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Health care clinics that provide medical services to students</td>
<td>63</td>
<td>45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Programs for students who have been sexually or physically abused</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>48</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rehabilitation programs for students who abuse drugs and alcohol</td>
<td>55</td>
<td>42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vaccinations and physical checkups for kids not old enough to be in school</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Child care services for parents whose kids are not old enough to be in school</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rehabilitation programs for the parents of students who abuse drugs and alcohol</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social services to help families with employment, housing, and welfare benefits</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

What do these findings mean? They seem to suggest that the Missouri public has two concerns. First, they believe that society cannot separate social problems from education. But at the same time they appear reluctant to burden public schools with too many tasks. They want the social problems of students addressed but not at the expense of distracting the schools from other missions.

Missouri is currently experimenting with programs which more closely integrate schools and social services for children. This study suggests that proponents of these programs must deal with public wariness about the possibility of distracting the schools from education itself. It also suggests that African-American communities are currently sympathetic to this approach when it is geared toward students. And it suggests substantial resistance among all Missourians to basing social services for non-students on school grounds.

### D. Fixing Inner-City Schools

Missouri has had a long history of court-ordered school desegregation measures, and concerns about school integration have been and are still on the minds of many people in the state.

Based on this study, the condition of Missouri’s inner-city schools is indeed of concern to many people in the state. Missouri residents are committed to a quality education for all students, and they support integration as a goal. Efforts to make that goal a reality, especially efforts involving school choice, also win public backing. But once again, the first priority in Missouri is fixing the public schools, and Missouri residents seem to be saying that integration efforts — however important or well-intentioned — should not become a distraction from other efforts to upgrade the schools children attend now.

Here again there are differences of emphasis between whites and African-Americans, but the study does not show deep divisions between the two groups. For example, differences between black and white Missourians are much less extensive than differences between educators and leaders we noted earlier. For that matter, integration is less controversial between blacks and whites than is the question of whether social services should be located on school grounds.

#### 1. Support for a Quality Education for All Children.

Missouri residents are committed to the goal of providing a quality education for all children. There is consensus-level support for making schools in minority neighborhoods every bit as good as schools in white neighborhoods. This goal was endorsed by 80% of whites and 82% of blacks. There is equally strong support for the notion that residents are best off when schools all over the state are producing well-educated youngsters. Only 23% of Missourians say that "the education of kids in my own community is most important to me because that's where I can make the most impact" as opposed to 76% who believe that "the education of kids all over the state is most important to me because they all do well, we all benefit."
3. Inner-City Schools.
Missourians are also convinced that inner-city schools have special problems. Missourians believe inner-city schools have less money and are less able to attract outstanding teachers who have high expectations for their students. These views are shared by blacks and whites alike, but African-Americans think they are an even more important factor than does the white population.

This difference is clear when we look at the percentages of people who think these factors are "very important." Fifty-four percent of blacks, compared to only 25% of whites, feel that the lower per-student expenditures in inner-city schools is a "very important" factor.

African-Americans are also more likely to attach greater importance to the quality and attitudes of the teachers in inner-city schools. They are more likely to emphasize that the best teachers avoid these schools and that inner-city teachers don't establish high enough expectations for their students (Table 25).

Although Missourians support integration in concept, they are often skeptical that it will have a positive impact on what children learn.

The public is not at all convinced that integration will improve the education of the general student population, or of minority students in particular. Only one-fourth (26%) of whites and 30% of blacks feel that "most students will learn better in integrated schools." And, a surprising low number of blacks (48%) believe that integration will lead to a better-quality education for minority students (25% of whites concur). These reactions seem to signal a widespread lack of enthusiasm about the academic payoff of integration (Table 26).

4. Support for Integration as a Goal.
How do Missourians feel about racial integration in the schools? Integration is regarded as an important goal by substantial majorities of Missourians, both white and black. But people do not consider integration a cure for the academic problems facing Missouri's inner city schools. Given the choice between integrating the schools or investing energy in improving the schools that children attend now, both blacks and whites put primary stress on current school improvement.

Stated as an abstract goal, integration gets support from both groups, although it is given greater importance by blacks. Seventy-five percent of blacks say that integration is an important goal for the schools, as do 50% of whites (Table 26).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 25</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Problems in Inner-City Schools: Views of Blacks and Whites</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&quot;Missouri's inner-city students generally do not do as well in school as students from other areas in Missouri and people have given many reasons for why this is so. I'm going to mention a few of these, and for each I'd like you tell me how important an explanation it is for how inner-city kids do in school. How about? (INSERT ITEM)&quot; Is this reason very important, somewhat important, not too important, or not important at all?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Inner-city schools have much less money to spend per student than wealthier areas in Missouri</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Very important</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Somewhat important</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not too important</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not at all important</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Many inner-city teachers have such low expectations for their students that they don't demand good work</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Very important</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Somewhat important</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not too important</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not at all important</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Missouri's best teachers avoid teaching in the inner-city schools</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Very important</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Somewhat important</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not too important</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not at all important</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 26</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Importance of Integration as a Goal: Views of Blacks and Whites</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&quot;Now I'd like to ask you a few questions about racial integration in the public schools. How important is it that Missouri's public schools be racially integrated? Is it?&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Very important</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>67%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Somewhat important</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not too important</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not at all important</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 27</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The Educational Impact of Integration: Views of Blacks and Whites</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&quot;How close would you say each of the following statements about integration comes to your own view? Please use a 1 to 5 scale where 5 means it is extremely close to your own views and 1 means it is not at all close.&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Blacks</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Integration of white and minority students will lead to a greater tolerance and understanding between different cultures and races</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Integration will lead to a better-quality education for minority students</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Most students will learn better in integrated schools</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Given these numbers, it is perhaps not surprising that fixing the schools which children attend now is the greater priority for both groups. The study asked respondents which made more sense to them. Integrating schools to assure an equal, quality education or focusing on fixing up schools rather than integrating them. The idea of improving the schools was preferred by both blacks and whites. Whites prefer fixing the schools to integrating them by a margin of 71% to 23%. Missouri's blacks also prefer this option, although by a lower margin of 50% to 38% (Table 26).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 28</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Fixing the Schools or Integrating Them: Views of Blacks and Whites</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&quot;Which comes closer to your own view?&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Blacks</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Instead of spending limited resources on integrating Missouri's public schools, the schools would be better off fixing up and improving the schools that kids attend now</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>OR Missouri's public schools should take concrete and immediate steps to integrate so that white children and minority children are assured of an equal, quality education</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
5. Specific Integration Measures.

Despite their reservations about whether integration will actually improve the education of minority students, Missouri residents support a number of specific measures intended to integrate the schools. As Public Agenda has found in other studies, the public is strongly attracted to programs which rely on choice and other voluntary, as opposed to compulsory, actions.

Among Missouri residents, the most popular integration tool is to give inner-city students a choice of attending suburban schools, an option favored by 74% of whites and 86% of blacks (Table 29). There is also considerable support for magnet programs, which are favored by 61% of whites and 71% of blacks. Increasing funding for inner-city schools also attracts solid support, with 60% of whites and 84% of blacks strongly or somewhat favoring this approach. Finally, redistricting gets only lukewarm support from whites (51% favor it as a way to achieve integration) but much broader support from blacks (73%).

Busing is opposed by 72% of whites while blacks are split over the issue: 50% favor it and 40% oppose it. Interestingly, 3 out of 10 blacks (30%) say they strongly oppose busing (Table 29).

6. Connecticut and Missouri: Different Perspectives on Integration.

To put the Missouri findings on integration in context, we compared the Missouri results with those in Public Agenda’s Connecticut study (The Broken Contract) which asked many of the same questions. Two differences emerge. The first is that the level of support for most school integration measures — among both blacks and whites — is lower in Missouri than in Connecticut. The second is that the gap between the attitudes of blacks and whites in Missouri is narrower than that in Connecticut. In Missouri, then, both blacks and whites are less interested in school integration as such and more likely to agree with each other.

Before discussing the differences between the two states, it is important to note that Missouri and Connecticut residents do not differ significantly in their attitudes toward inner-city schools. Citizens of both states report a commitment to the education of all children and a concern about inner-city children. Comparing the results in the two states also shows the same differences between whites and blacks on their evaluation of inner-city schools. Blacks in both states are more likely than whites to raise concerns about the amount of money spent on inner-city schools or the ability of inner-city schools to attract good teachers.

The differences between the two states surface when it comes to attitudes toward school integration and steps to achieve it. The endorsement of integration as a goal illustrates the overall pattern. Missouri residents — of both races — are less likely to identify integration as an important goal for the schools. Sixty-one percent of Missouri residents say integration is a “very” or “somewhat” important goal, compared to a slightly higher 69% of Connecticut residents who feel this way. This difference holds up when comparing the attitudes of blacks in Connecticut vs. blacks in Missouri. In each case, the level of support is higher in Missouri. The most striking difference is the number of African-Americans who say that school integration is “very important.” Sixty-eight percent of blacks in Connecticut feel this way as compared to only 37% of blacks in Missouri.

There is also less disagreement between the races in Missouri, although there are, of course, some differences. For example, in Missouri, 37% of blacks say integration is very important compared to 26% of whites. But this difference is much weaker than in Connecticut, where 68% of blacks describe school integration as very important, twice the percentage (30%) of whites who feel this way (Table 31).

Missourians seem to be saying that money may be one important component in the quest for improved schools, but more money alone will not solve the problems. Increased financial resources must be part of a broader program of school reform.
These differences are also reflected in views about the educational impact of integration. Missouri residents of both races are somewhat less likely to think that school integration will lead to a better education. Once again, the differences between the attitudes of the races are weaker in Missouri than in Connecticut (Table 32).

TABLE 31
Importance of Integration as a Goal: Connecticut Versus Missouri

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Importance</th>
<th>MO Blacks</th>
<th>MO Whites</th>
<th>CT Blacks</th>
<th>CT Whites</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Very important</td>
<td>37%</td>
<td>26%</td>
<td>68%</td>
<td>50%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Somewhat important</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Very important</td>
<td>75</td>
<td>59</td>
<td>87</td>
<td>67</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Difference between number of blacks versus number of whites who say &quot;very important&quot;</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>38</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

These differences are also reflected in views about the educational impact of integration. Missouri residents of both races are somewhat less likely to think that school integration will lead to a better education. Once again, the differences between the attitudes of the races are weaker in Missouri than in Connecticut (Table 32).

TABLE 32
The Educational Impact of Integration: Connecticut Versus Missouri

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Percentage</th>
<th>MO Blacks</th>
<th>MO Whites</th>
<th>CT Blacks</th>
<th>CT Whites</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>More students will learn better in integrated schools</td>
<td>59</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>57</td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

What do these differences mean? They could reflect the recent experiences both states have had with integration efforts. At the time the study was conducted in Connecticut, the state was struggling to react to a court ruling on educational inequities between some of the state's inner-cities and its more affluent suburbs. As a result, the state was just exploring programs to produce greater diversity in the state's educational system.

Missouri by contrast has had a long history of court-ordered integration efforts, and there has been a great deal of recent discussion in the media about whether those efforts have really helped children. The data suggest that Missouri residents are somewhat chastened by their experiences with school integration.

Our interpretation is that this difference also results from Missourians' resolve to fix the state's schools. As in the case of social services, people seem to worry that efforts to integrate the schools may be a distraction from the primary task of overhauling the schools. This may explain why integration itself has a lower priority in Missouri, even though its residents are just as concerned about the condition of inner-city schools and equally committed to a quality education for all children. At any rate, Missouri residents are somewhat more likely than Connecticut residents (68% as compared to 58%) to say that they would rather improve the schools that children attend now, rather than investing more energy and money in integration efforts.

The data suggest that Missouri residents are somewhat chastened by their experiences with school integration.

Further, we find no evidence of deep ideological polarization on education. Indeed, Missouri is striking for its consensus on the need to improve education. At bottom, however, there is a reservoir of good will and commitment to change. Further, we find no evidence of deep ideological polarization on education. Indeed, Missouri is striking for its consensus on the need to improve education, a consensus which can provide a precious resource for state leaders who share the public's commitment to change.

The findings must also be understood as a warning to the state's leaders. There is no guarantee that this support will last indefinitely. Leaders, if they are wise, will capitalize on the public's support while it lasts. If leaders do not address educational issues with pragmatic and effective solutions, Missouri could fracture, with citizens responding to voices on the edges, as we have witnessed in other areas. The public's patience will last only so long. Educators and leaders must set aside their differences and go to work.

Deborah Wodrow
Executive Director of Public Agenda

Committed to Change: Missouri Citizens and Public Education

See Related Publications for a complete list of Public Agenda’s educational studies.

2. According to the National Center for Education Statistics, the national average expenditure per pupil in public elementary and secondary schools for 1992-93 was $5,584. In Connecticut the expenditure per pupil was $7,970, while in Missouri it was $4,885.


**Methodology**

This study of attitudes toward public education in Missouri is based on a telephone survey of 600 Missouri residents and a mail survey of 240 Missouri educators and 211 community leaders. Public Agenda also conducted interviews with opinion leaders and policy leaders in Missouri.

**Telephone Survey**

Telephone interviews, averaging about 30 minutes in length, were conducted with 900 randomly selected Missouri residents ages 18 or older. All samples for this survey were provided by Genesys Sampling Systems. The 900 total interviews were comprised of 600 randomly selected members of the Missouri general public and two “oversamples.” One oversample consisted of 200 randomly selected parents with children in the Missouri public schools. When the study reports results for parents, it pools the 200 oversampled parents with the 564 parents appearing “naturally” in the general public sample, for a total sample size of 284 parents. An oversample of 200 African-Americans was surveyed as well. This sample was generated by randomly selecting telephone numbers of people who live in Missouri neighborhoods that are at least 10% African-American, according to census data. The oversample of 200 African-Americans was pooled with the 20 African-Americans appearing naturally in the general public sample, for a total sample size of 220 African-Americans. The survey has a sampling error of plus or minus 4% for the 600 members of the general public. As in all surveys, sampling error for subgroups will be somewhat higher, and non-sampling errors of error, such as question-order effects, can sometimes affect results.

Public Agenda designed the survey and questionnaire and contracted Robinson and Muenster of South Dakota to execute the interviews and tabulate the results. Respondents were selected through random-digit dialing techniques whereby every household in Missouri, including those with unlisted numbers, had an equal chance of being contacted. The interviews took place between October 30th and November 7th, 1995.

**Mail Survey**

A questionnaire, comparable to the telephone survey of the public, was mailed to 600 Missouri educators and 761 Missouri community leaders in late October, 1995. A second mailing of the questionnaire was sent in early November, 1995. The educator sample was made up of 300 public school teachers, 150 principals, and 150 superintendents. The leadership sample consisted of 200 economic leaders (chamber of commerce directors, corporate personnel managers, union and professional association leaders), 250 political leaders (state legislators and mayors), and 212 civic leaders (television/newspaper executives, local police chiefs, social service agency and foundation boards, college/university presidents, and minority organization leaders). The mailing resulted in 245 completed surveys by educators (a 41% response rate) and 211 completed surveys by community leaders (a 28% response rate).

**Leadership Interviews**

In August of 1995, John Immerwahr of Public Agenda met with a group of opinion leaders and policy makers from a number of organizations associated with education and children's issues in Missouri. This meeting was hosted by the Missouri Partnership for Outstanding Schools. Participants in this meeting discussed the goals of the project and helped determine which issues to cover in the study. Those who were not able to attend were interviewed by telephone by John Immerwahr. See the Appendix for a complete list of interviewees.
List of statewide opinion leaders and education policy makers interviewed for this report.

Dr. Richard Andrews  
St. John College of Education  
University of Missouri-Columbia

Dr. Robert E. Bartman  
Commissioner of Education  
Dept. of Elementary and Secondary Ed.

Ms. Jeanne Bates  
Vice President  
Hall Family Foundation

Ms. Constance Brooks  
Dr. Maternal Child/Family Health  
Missouri Dept. of Health

Dr. Charles Brown  
State & Federal Programs  
St. Louis Public Schools

Sen. Harold L. Cahey  
Legislator  
Missouri State Senate

Mr. Thomas R. Davis  
Immed. Past President  
Partnership for Outstanding Schools

Mr. Brent Ghan  
Public Affairs Director  
Missouri Schools Boards Association

Dr. John Gherri  
Executive Director  
Mo. Assoc. Secondary School Principals

Ms. Stacie Gofff  
Senior Program Officer  
Kaufman Foundation

Ms. Craig Jones  
President  
St. Louis Reg. Educational Partnership

Ms. Martha Karlovets  
Past President  
Mo. National Education Association

Mr. Gary Kempker  
Director  
Missouri Dept. of Public Safety

Mr. Jim Koensman  
Senior Project Manager  
Kaufman Foundation

Mr. Rob Koff  
Program Director  
The Davison Foundation

Mr. Bruce Meo  
Commissioner of Education  
Missouri State Teachers Association

Ms. Sandra Moore  
Director  
Mo. Dept. of Labor/Industrial Relations

Rep. Annette Morgan  
Legislator  
Missouri House of Representatives

Ms. Marcia Northrop  
Missouri Teacher of the Year, 1995  
Lee's Summit R-VI

Ms. Linda Poshman  
Vice President  
Missouri PTA

Ms. Margi Quirkini  
Senior Program Officer  
Kaufman Foundation

Ms. Phyllis Rzaneky  
Executive Director  
Family Investment Trust

Ms. Armentha Russell  
Asst. Superintendent  
Welston Schools

Dr. Gary Sharpe  
Executive Director  
Mo. Assoc. of School Administrators

Mr. Charles Smith  
President  
NAACP-Kansas City

Mr. Gary Stangler  
Director  
Missouri Dept. of Social Services

Ms. Both Wheeler  
Director of Community Relations  
Northwest Mo. State University

Dr. Roy Wilson  
Director  
Missouri Dept. of Mental Health

Ms. Michael Winter  
Senior Program Officer  
Parents as Teachers National Center

APPENDIX

Related Publications

*Given the Circumstances: Teachers Talk about Public Education Today, 1996. The views of public school teachers on how the public schools are performing, what children need to learn, and what schools need to be effective are examined in this report. A special focus on black and Hispanic teachers is included along with a comparison of the views of teachers, parents and community leaders. Copies are available from Public Agenda for $16.00.

*Assignment Incomplete: The Unfinished Business of Education Reform, 1995. A follow-up study to First Things First, this report examines why support for public schools is in jeopardy; why Americans are so focused on the basics; whether people are really committed to higher standards; and whether they value education in and of itself. Copies are available from Public Agenda for $16.00.

*The Basics: Parents Talk About Reading, Writing, Arithmetic and the Schools, 1995. This focus group study further explores the public's views about the basics and differences in attitudes between college and non-college educated parents. Copies are available from Public Agenda for $7.50.

*Professional Development for Teachers: The Public's View, 1996. This report indicates the potential for both support and disappointment with professional development for teachers. Copies are available from Public Agenda for $7.50.


Contested Values: Tag-Of-The-War in the School Yard, 1999. Prepared by Public Agenda for the National Issues Forums, this citizen discussion guide focuses on the debate over which values American children should be taught in public schools. Written for the general reader, the guide lays out pro and con arguments for having schools promote diversity and tolerance; having them convey a common core of civic values; having them teach traditional Christian values; and granting parents the choice of which schools their children will attend. The book can be ordered from McGraw-Hill, Inc. by calling 1-800-335-3987. ISBN 0-07-051835-4

Preserving the Higher Education Legacy, 1999. A follow-up study to The Closing Gateway (1993), this report is based on a series of in-depth interviews with California leaders who cite rising costs and declining access as problems for higher education. Copies of the report are available from the California Higher Education Policy Center, 160 West Santa Clara Street, #704, San Jose, CA 95113. Fax requests to (408) 297-4709. Ask for Report #193-3.

*First Things First: What Americans Expect from the Public Schools, 1994. Based on a national study of over 1,100 members of the general public, including 500 parents of children currently in public school, this report examines public attitudes about values issues in public schools as well as views on reform efforts. The study also offers detailed analyses of the views of white and African-American public school parents, as well as parents identified as traditional Christians. Copies are available from Public Agenda for $10.00.

*Divided Within, Besieged Without: The Politics of Education in Four American School Districts, 1993. Prepared by Public Agenda for the Kettering Foundation. This study reports the results of over 200 face-to-face interviews with teachers, principals, administrators, school board members, parents, and business executives in four typical school systems undergoing reform. It reveals a significant barrier to educational reform — political gridlock among education stakeholders — and describes the substantial in-fighting and communication gaps among these groups. The report can be ordered from Public Agenda for $10.00.

Effective Public Engagement, 1993. Prepared by Public Agenda for The New Standards Project. Based on focus groups with teachers, parents, high school students and members of the general public, this study explores responses to and concerns about implementing higher standards. This handbook suggests ways to address people’s reservations about standards, but is useful for anyone interested in communicating about education reform. To order, write or call The National Center on Education and the Economy, 700 11th Street NW, Suite 750, Washington, DC 20005. Tel: (202) 783-3698. The report is $6.00 for New Standards Project partners, $25.00 for non-partners.


*Educational Reform: The Players and the Politics, 1992. Prepared by Public Agenda for the Kettering Foundation. Based on a survey of teachers, principals, superintendents, school board members, and business executives from major corporations, the study reports consensus among the groups over the goals of K-12 education but strong differences in their evaluations of the performance of the schools. The report is $8.50 and can be ordered from Public Agenda.


* Reports marked with an asterisk can be ordered by calling or writing Public Agenda at 6 East 39th Street, New York, NY 10016. Tel (212) 466-6610, Fax (212) 889-3461. Shipping and handling costs will be applied.
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