



Finally, a Victory for Parents and Students in Missouri

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By: Susan Pendergrass

The doors to a better education may have opened wide for all Missouri students this week. Despite a distracted legislative session—and with just three days left—the Missouri legislature voted to give every student access to tuition-free online courses and a virtual schooling program. For years researchers at the Show-Me Institute have been pressing the legislature to give every student in the state free access to online classes through the Missouri Virtual Instruction Program, or MoVIP. This week it finally happened and, if not vetoed by the Governor, it will be a win-win for students and schools.

We know that it can be challenging for small communities to find Calculus, Physics, or AP teachers for their high schools. But we also know that there are bright and talented students all across the state who deserve, at the very least, the opportunity to take the courses required to apply to the University of Missouri. The legislature has cleared the way for students and parents to be able to sit down with their school counselor, figure out what classes they need, and seamlessly register to take those courses either in the building or online.

Students will also be able to enroll in MoVIP as full-time virtual students. This can be a game-changer for rural students, students who are being bullied, and for others who want options beyond their assigned public school. Providing more options for students and parents is essential to making sure that all Missouri students can reach their potential, and course access is one way to do that.

Researchers and analysts at the Show-Me Institute have traveled to Jefferson City multiple times to provide testimony on this important issue. We've included it in our legislative Blueprint for the last two sessions, we've written blog posts and essays, we've talked about it on the radio, and we've produced a video on why Missouri students deserve to have their school districts provide free access to courses that the districts are unable or unwilling to offer. It is truly a victory for Missouri families that course access is so close to being a reality.

Of course, good policy requires good implementation. The new law requires every school district and charter school to inform parents and students of their new rights under this legislation, including adding it to all registration documents and home pages. In addition, the legislation has guardrails in place to make sure that students' progress is monitored and that they are on track with the coursework. Both of these safeguards are critical to the success of this legislation.

If this law becomes final, we will follow the progress on the implementation closely to make sure that it gets done and done right. We will also help let Missouri families know that their education choices have been expanded. But we won't stop working to give parents even more options – from education savings accounts to charter schools in any district. For now, though, it's time to recognize a job well done by the Missouri legislature.

Tags:

- [course access](#)

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

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