MEDIA ADVISORY

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Racial, economic, and geographical inequities in Missouri's merit-based Bright Flight Program

Feb. 3, Jefferson City – A coalition of Missouri students finds the state's merit-based program, Bright Flight, to be inequitable and outdated. In light of state budgetary constraints and the importance of college access and success for all Missourians, the coalition recommends that the program be discontinued.

The Active Advocacy Coalition, a student-led advocacy coalition, has compiled data and research on Bright Flight and has found the program is inequitable across a number of measures. On February 3, 2016, students will deliver district level reports of Bright Flight recipients to the Missouri state legislature and the authors of the analysis will be available for questions. Faith Sandler, Executive Director of The Scholarship Foundation of St. Louis and Chair of Advocacy for St. Louis Graduates, says the coalition is releasing "critically important analysis at exactly the right time for Missouri to make some changes. Most importantly, this work is designed and driven by students who know first-hand the consequences of outdated policy and inequity."

Bright Flight was designed 30 years ago to keep the "best and brightest" students in the state by awarding a scholarship if they remain in Missouri for college. Students are eligible for Bright Flight if they score a 31or higher on the ACT. Data obtained from the Missouri Department of Higher Education show that rural students, students of color, and students attending public high schools are not getting their fair share of Bright Flight awards. The Coalition recommends elimination of the program in favor of need-based programs and immediate suspension of any legislation that would expand Bright Flight until a thorough and principled review of all state scholarship programs is undertaken.

WHO: The Active Advocacy Coalition

WHAT: Distribution of district level reports and white paper detailing racial, economic, and geographical inequities in Missouri's Bright Flight Scholarship Program.

WHEN: Wednesday, February 3, 2016

WHERE: Missouri State Capitol House Hearing Room 4 from 11:30am-12:30pm. **More information, data and white paper can be found here:** http://sfstl.org/news/active-advocacy-coalition-calls-elimination-bright-flight**.**

For more information, interviews and photos, contact Manager of Advocacy and Policy Research, Karissa Anderson, at (314) 932-6947 or at Karissa@sfstl.org.

The Active Advocacy Coalition is a bi-state-coalition of students working within policy internships at The Scholarship Foundation of St. Louis and through St. Louis Graduates to increase higher education access and affordability for students in Missouri and Illinois by inspiring, advancing, or defeating policies at the institutional, state, or federal level that affect access and success for low-income and first-generation students.

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BRIGHT FLIGHT IS OUTDATED AND INEQUITABLE;
COALITION CALLS FOR ELIMINATION OF THE PROGRAM

Background: Bright Flight, Missouri's merit-based scholarship program, aims to keep the "best and brightest" students in the state by providing a $3,000 yearly grant to over 6,000 students if they score a 31 or above on the ACT exam and choose to attend college in Missouri. The program awards public funds to students who do not need them.

Problem: Bright Flight uses an ACT score as a single measure to qualify students and is inequitable. Bright Flight recipients are concentrated at a small number of high schools throughout the state.

- Only about one-third of Missouri's 800 high schools currently have five or more Bright Flight recipients.
- Twenty Missouri high schools constitute nearly one-third of the awards.

Bright Flight overlooks many talented students. The data demonstrate that Bright Flight disadvantages bright students who:

- Attend public school: Private school students make up only 10% of Missouri's high school population, but account for 20% of Bright Flight recipients.
- Come from low-income families: Half of Missouri students qualify for free or reduced lunch (a measure of poverty), but almost 80% of public schools with students receiving Bright Flight have free or reduced lunch rates less than 50%.
- Live in rural areas: Only 11% of recipients come from rural areas. Almost three quarters of recipients come from the state's two largest metro areas, St. Louis and Kansas City.
- Are black: A peer-reviewed study found that less than two percent of Bright Flight awards are black students, although 13% of Missouri's high school students are black.

Why it matters: Missouri's limited higher education scholarship funds must be effectively used to support state goals. Missouri has set a target that 60% of adults will have postsecondary degrees by 2025. This ambitious agenda depends upon using scarce public funds where they will have the greatest impact.

What should be done: The Bright Flight program was designed thirty years ago and no longer serves state priorities. The program should be curtailed and funds redirected to Access Missouri, which serves 50,000 students who all demonstrate NEED. At the very least, Bright Flight should be restructured in the following ways:

- Award Bright Flight only to students with demonstrated financial need.
- Award Bright Flight proportionately throughout the state. To recognize the talent of students in public schools, under-resourced schools, and rural districts, awards should be made to top students in competition only with peers from their same school.
- Use more inclusive criteria for assessing talent. Instead of, or in addition to ACT scores, Bright Flight should use grade point average and community service, as do other scholarship programs.

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THE ACTIVE ADVOCACY COALITION

January 2016

Inherent Inequities: How Missouri's Bright Flight Scholarship Program Fails Key Demographics

By Amber Overton, MSW and Karissa Anderson, MSW[1]

Missouri's merit-based scholarship program has been in existence for almost 30 years. Legislators continue to support increases in Bright Flight's budget and to propose program expansion despite little evidence to demonstrate program value. Created as an effort to boost Missouri's economy by encouraging workforce development, Bright Flight has produced inequitable outcomes across certain demographics of students.

Missouri's merit-based scholarship program was launched 30 years ago with the purpose of retaining high-performing students in Missouri and has since outlived its usefulness. The program is no longer relevant to the needs of the state and its students. In the program, funds are disproportionately awarded to students graduating from private and affluent high schools in the state's metropolitan areas. Students of color, rural students, and those graduating from challenged school districts are far less likely to receive the scholarship. In a state newly focused on equity and workforce development, this scholarship program does not serve the state's objectives.

[1] Overton is Senior Policy Intern with The Scholarship Foundation of St. Louis. Anderson is Manager of Advocacy and Policy Research for The Scholarship Foundation of St. Louis and St. Louis Graduates. Both are working with the Active Advocacy Coalition to inspire, advance, or defeat policies that affect access and success for low-income and first generation students.

In 1986, the state of Missouri established the Higher Education Academic Scholarship Program (HEASP), which provided financial aid to Missouri high school graduates who scored in the top three percent of standardized college admissions tests[2]. The Higher Education Academic Scholarship Program, more commonly referred to as "Bright Flight," requires that its recipients enroll full-time at an approved postsecondary institution in Missouri during the year immediately following high school graduation[3]. This merit-based scholarship program was established with the intention of encouraging "top-ranked high school seniors to attend approved Missouri postsecondary schools."[4] Bright Flight aims to keep Missouri's "best and brightest"[5] students in their home state with hopes that these students will graduate from a Missouri college or university, choose to continue to live in Missouri, and will then demonstrate contribution to the state's economy and workforce. The program includes no assessment or consideration of financial need, and solely bases academic assessment on student's ACT scores. Currently, the program serves about 6,000 students who are in the top 3% of ACT test takers; at present, the minimum ACT score to qualify is a 31, although the state average is a 21.5. Bright Flight provides these students a grant of $3,000, whether they need it or not, if they choose to attend a college or university in Missouri. In recent years, there have been several proposals put forth to expand the program, including adding a $5,000 forgivable loan component to the award. The award is renewable for up to 10 semesters or until completion of a bachelor's degree[6]. The

[2] Missouri Department of Higher Education. Bright Flight Scholarship to be fully funded for Missouri's top-scoring students. http://dhe.mo.gov/news/show.php?u=Bright_Flight_fully_funded&yr=2014
[3] Missouri Revised Statutes. Department of Higher Education. Section 173.250.1 http://www.moga.mo.gov/mostatutes/stathtml/17300002501.html
[4] Missouri Department of Higher Education. Bright Flight. http://dhe.mo.gov/ppc/grants/brightflight.php
[5] Office of Missouri Governor Jay Nixon. Gov. Nixon proposes new Bright Flight incentive for high-achieving students who stay and work in Missouri. https://governor.mo.gov/news/archive/gov-nixon-proposes-new-bright-flight-incentive-high-achieving-students-who-stay-and
[6] Missouri Department of Higher Education. Bright Flight. http://dhe.mo.gov/ppc/grants/brightflight.php

state's other large scholarship program, Access Missouri, is need-based, and in recent years has struggled to meet the statutory minimum award of $1,500 per student. Approximately 50,000 students qualify for Access Missouri annually[7].

Missouri faces significant workforce development and equity issues, and this paper will demonstrate that Bright Flight does not advance the state's interests sufficiently to justify the investment. In the first two sections, we describe current program characteristics and outcomes; we then demonstrate who is served by Bright Flight and argue that key demographics are left out of the program; and finally, we make recommendations for a shift away from Bright Flight to a more equitable and inclusive model with greater return on investment.

Bright Flight Benefits Students Who Do Not Need It, an Expense the State Cannot Afford

While there is some correlation between Bright Flight awards and choosing to remain in the state for higher education and career, there is little to demonstrate that the award was a deciding or causal factor, and even less to attest that the expenditure is worth the outcome. To date, only one peer-reviewed study has examined the program's effectiveness. A 2014 study[8] examined Bright Flight's impact on students who graduated high school between 1999 and 2002 (some 12-15 years prior). Using data from ACT Inc., the Missouri Department of Higher Education (MDHE), and Missouri Department and Industrial Relations (DOLIR), the study examined more than 150,000 Missouri students' participation in the state's workforce eight years after high school graduation. The study suggested that receiving Bright Flight was positively

[7] Missouri Department of Higher Education. Access Missouri. http://dhe.mo.gov/ppc/grants/accessmo.php

[8] Examining the Impact of a Highly Targeted State Administered Merit Aid Program on Brain Drain: Evidence from a Regression Discontinuity Analysis of Missouri's Bright Flight Program. Harrington, Muñoz, Curs, & Ehlert. (2014). https://www.researchgate.net/profile/Bradley_Curs/publication/283246624_Examining_the_Impact_of_a_Highly_Targeted_State_Administered_Merit_Aid_Program_on_Brain_Drain_Evidence_from_a_Regression_Discontinuity_Analysis_of_Missouris_Bright_Flight_Program/links/56322fc908ae3de9381fac4b.pdf

associated with an increased likelihood for participation in Missouri's workforce. Though the study did suggest a positive correlation, the study's authors describe various limitations that impact the validity of their findings. Namely, the study could not control for "any predisposed intentions that students may have to stay in state regardless of being awarded a Bright Flight scholarship or not," and also could not control for other financial aid (i.e., institutional merit aid) that may have impacted students' decisions to attend college in Missouri. The study noted extreme disparities in terms of the program's racial and income equity, both trends of significance in terms of equity.

Test Scores are More Predictive of Family Income than of Success in College and Career

Former State Representative Ken Jacob[9] sponsored the Bright Flight Scholarship bill in 1986; at that time, Representative Jacob asserted that more than two thirds of the state's brightest students were leaving Missouri to attend college in other states. Bright Flight was his proposed response to keeping the best and brightest students in Missouri. Program design then, unfortunately rested on the flawed notion that test scores are an appropriate measure of who is "best and brightest" and therefore of greatest value to the future well-being and economy of the state.

However, research shows that standardized test scores are highly correlated to a student's family income.[10] Primary data from ACT Inc., shows that students from higher-earning families earn a higher score on the exam. A compelling amount of evidence suggests that college admissions tests are unfavorably biased against certain subgroups of students,[11] namely, students of color, and first-generation college attendees, who are often times low-income students.

[9] Vote Smart. Issue Position: Bright Flight and The Missouri College Guarantee. https://votesmart.org/public-statement/743554/issue-position-bright-flight-and-the-missouri-college-guarantee#.Vl_SEsqUckU
[10] ACT. "The Condition of College & Career Readiness 2013 Students from Low-Income Families." (2014).
[11] Amo and Lee. (2013). SAT Wars: The Case for Test-Optional College Admissions ed. by Joseph A. Soares (review). *The Review of Higher Education*, *36*(3), 405-406.

Despite strong evidence that ACT and SAT scores are biased, the idea that student's worth and intelligence could be measured using this isolated score was the basis of the Bright Flight program when it was created, and that belief still holds true today.

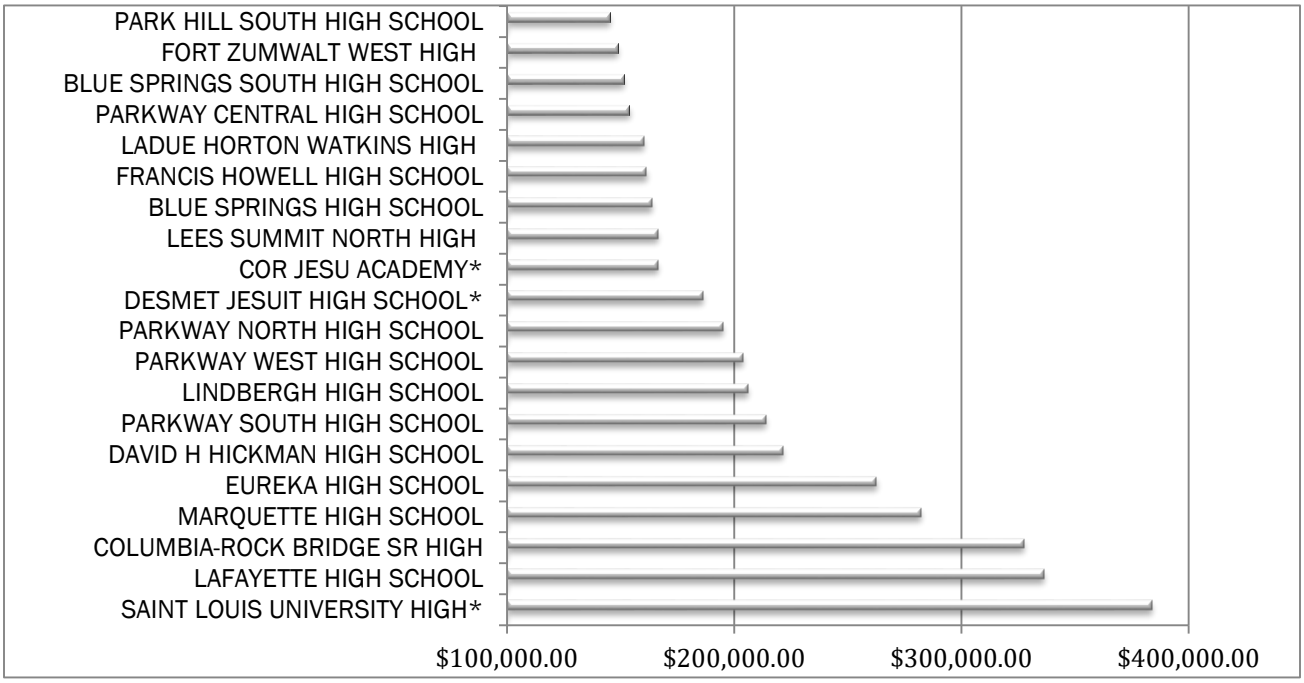
Bright Flight's Design Produces Inequity; Key Demographics are Left Out

Data depicted below were obtained from the Missouri Department of Higher Education for FY 2014. The aggregated data include the number of Bright Flight recipients and amount of funding received by Missouri high school of attendance. Due to privacy requirements, exact number of recipients and total dollar amounts of awards could not be reported for schools with less than five recipients.

In conjunction with findings from the aforementioned 2014 study of Bright Flight,[12] findings from the analysis demonstrate alarming disparities in regard to who receives the award. During FY 2014, a total of $14,515,519 was awarded to 6,116 Bright Flight recipients. Missouri is home to nearly 800 high schools, but in Bright Flight's current form, less than one-third (228) of these high schools had 5 or more graduates benefiting from the program in 2014. The 20 high schools with the largest number of students receiving Bright Flight funding collectively received $4,234,171, or 29% of the program's funds (see Table 1 below).

[12] Examining the Impact of a Highly Targeted State Administered Merit Aid Program on Brain Drain: Evidence from a Regression Discontinuity Analysis of Missouri's Bright Flight Program.

Table 1. Top 20 High Schools – Bright Flight Funded Students During FY 2014[13]



*Indicates private high schools.

Bright Flight's structure results in inequitable distribution of financial aid for public school students, students in poorer school districts, students in rural communities, and students of color. These inequities are described in further detail below.

Bright Flight is ***disproportionately being awarded to students attending private high schools.***

Bright Flight is inequitable because it serves a disproportionate number of private high school graduates. Private school students comprise only 10% of Missouri's high school population, but they make up 20% of Bright Flight recipients. These statistics and the following example demonstrate that Bright Flight's current structure unfairly penalizes students whose families do not have the financial resources to send them to private high schools.

[13] Of the 20 high schools with the highest number of graduates receiving Bright Flight, 10 are among the largest high schools in the state. The other 10, though enrolling more students than the average for all Missouri high schools, are as notable for their affluence and location as they are for their size.

Students graduating from private high schools are far more likely to be eligible for Bright Flight, but it is doubtful that the program affects their enrollment decisions. The data regarding the 2014 graduating class of St. Louis University High School demonstrates the flawed structure of Bright Flight as currently configured. In that year, 52 percent of the class of 268 members qualified for Bright Flight based on their ACT scores. Of those, only 38 (14%) accepted the award and chose to remain in Missouri.[14]

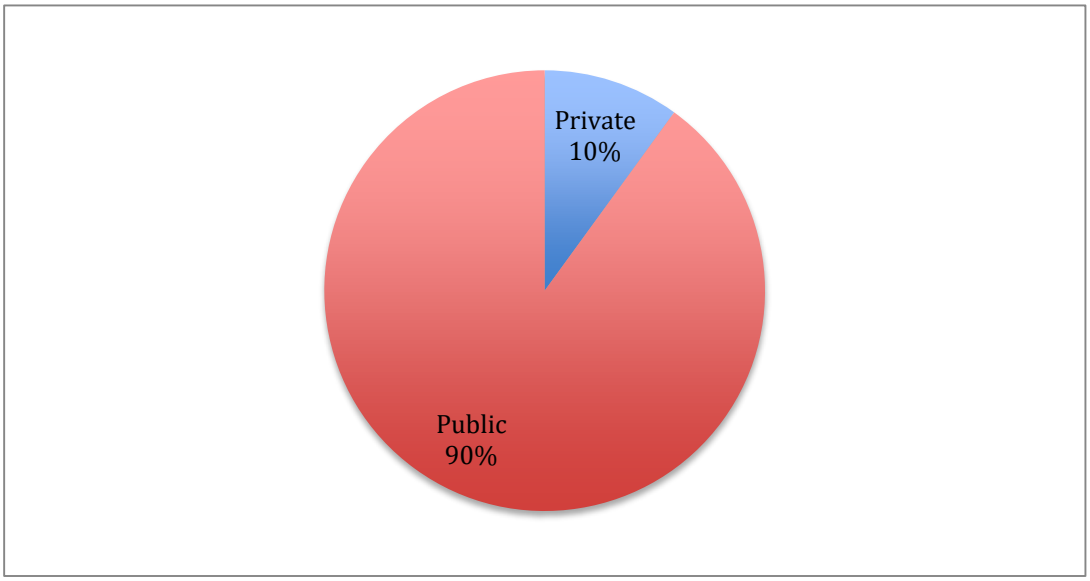


Figure 1. Missouri High School Students: Public vs. Private High School

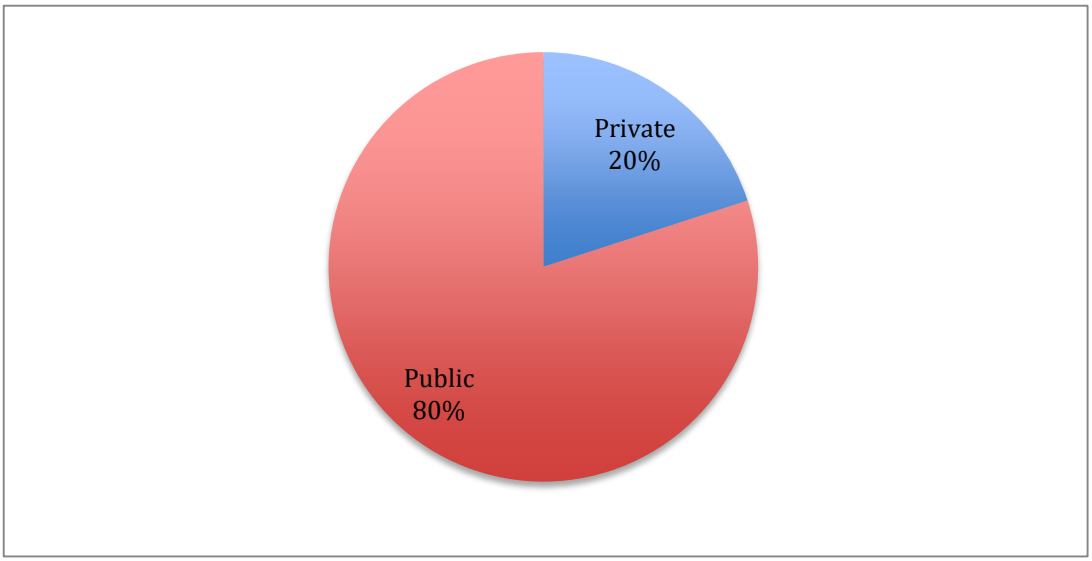


Figure 2. Bright Flight Recipients: Public vs. Private High School

[14] St. Louis University High. Class of 2014. http://www.sluh.org/news/article/2314/

Even among those public high school students receiving Bright Flight, the vast majority are attending ***affluent public high schools and/or come from wealthy families***.

In addition to being unevenly distributed among public and private high school students, Bright Flight is also inequitable because it is disproportionately awarded to public high school students in wealthier school districts. The percentage of the student population qualifying for the National School Lunch Program (federal free and reduced lunch program) is a consistently used method of assessing the intensity and concentration of poverty in schools. Throughout the state, half of Missouri students qualify for the free or reduced lunch program,[15] yet 79% of public high schools with graduates receiving Bright Flight report free or reduced lunch rates that are less than 50%. Nearly one quarter of these schools have free or reduced lunch rates less than 25%.[16] Table 2 displays the free or reduced lunch rates for the 20 high schools with the most Bright Flight recipients.

[15] As a reference point, the statewide free and reduced lunch rate of 50% applies to all grade levels. High school rates are often underreported. Stein, Karen. "Erasing the stigma of subsidized school meals." *Journal of the American Dietetic Association* 108.12 (2008): 1980-1983. Pogash, Carol. "Free lunch isn't cool, so some students go hungry." *New York Times* (2008).

[16] Kids Count Data Center. Students Enrolled in Free/Reduced Price Lunch. http://datacenter.kidscount.org/data/tables/1964-students-enrolled-in-free-reduced-price-lunch?loc=27&loct=2#detailed/2/any/false/36,868,867,133,38/any/4132,17339

High School	% Free/Reduced Lunch
SAINT LOUIS UNIVERSITY HIGH	PRIVATE
LAFAYETTE HIGH SCHOOL	12.2
COLUMBIA-ROCK BRIDGE SR HIGH	19.6
MARQUETTE HIGH SCHOOL	14.1
EUREKA HIGH SCHOOL	11.1
DAVID H HICKMAN HIGH SCHOOL	32.6
PARKWAY SOUTH HIGH SCHOOL	16.7
LINDBERGH HIGH SCHOOL	16
PARKWAY WEST HIGH SCHOOL	13.7
PARKWAY NORTH HIGH SCHOOL	25.4
DESMET JESUIT HIGH SCHOOL	PRIVATE
COR JESU ACADEMY	PRIVATE
LEES SUMMIT NORTH HIGH	17.9
BLUE SPRINGS HIGH SCHOOL	27.8
FRANCIS HOWELL HIGH SCHOOL	8.4
LADUE HORTON WATKINS HIGH	13.2
PARKWAY CENTRAL HIGH SCHOOL	17.8
BLUE SPRINGS SOUTH HIGH SCHOOL	20.4
FORT ZUMWALT WEST HIGH	15.3
PARK HILL SOUTH HIGH SCHOOL	20.9

Table 2. Top 20 Schools Receiving Bright Flight – Percent Students Free/Reduced Lunch[17]

Findings from Harrington, Munoz, Curs, and Ehlert's (2014) study also show drastic inequities by income-level; 71% of the 1999-2002 Bright Flight recipients came from a household with an annual income of more than $60,000. Consequently, the program's current structure overlooks those students with 4.0 grade point averages and relatively high ACT scores attending under-resourced and impoverished high schools. These poorer schools and the students that attend them cannot afford ACT preparation classes, workshops, and other courses, so these otherwise high-performing and hard-working students are excluded from receiving an award that is supposed to reward hard work and high scholastic achievement.

[17] Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education. 2014 Student Demographics (Building). http://mcds.dese.mo.gov/quickfacts/Student%20Characteristics/Student%20Demographics%20(Building).aspx

*Bright Flight is awarded in overwhelming measure to **students living in metropolitan areas**, leaving rural students behind.*

Bright Flight is inequitable because students from rural areas are severely underrepresented as recipients of the award. In 2014, 89% of recipients were graduates of high schools in one of Missouri's five metropolitan areas, while only 11% of those awarded Bright Flight graduated from high schools in rural counties; this is disproportionate, as rural students represent an estimated 27% of Missouri high school students[18]. The state's two largest metropolitan areas, St. Louis and Kansas City, together account for 72% of Bright Flight recipients, or about 3,900 of the recipients. Students in rural communities face significant obstacles such as lack of technology[19], high teacher/staff turnover, and less access to rigorous courses (e.g., Advanced Placement or International Baccalaureate classes)[20]. Bright Flight's current structure ignores the distinct barriers faced by rural students and instead holds these students accountable for where they happen to live.

[18] Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education. 2015 Building Enrollment. http://mcds.dese.mo.gov/quickfacts/District%20and%20School%20Information/2015%20Building%20Enrollment.xls; U.S. Department of Commerce. Missouri – Core Based Statistical Areas and Counties. http://www2.census.gov/geo/maps/metroarea/stcbsa_pg/Feb2013/cbsa2013_MO.pdf

[19] Belcastro, F. (2002.) Electronic technology and its use with rural gifted students. http://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/02783190209554191?journalCode=uror20

[20] Center for American Progress. Make Rural Schools a Priority. http://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/02783190209554191?journalCode=uror20

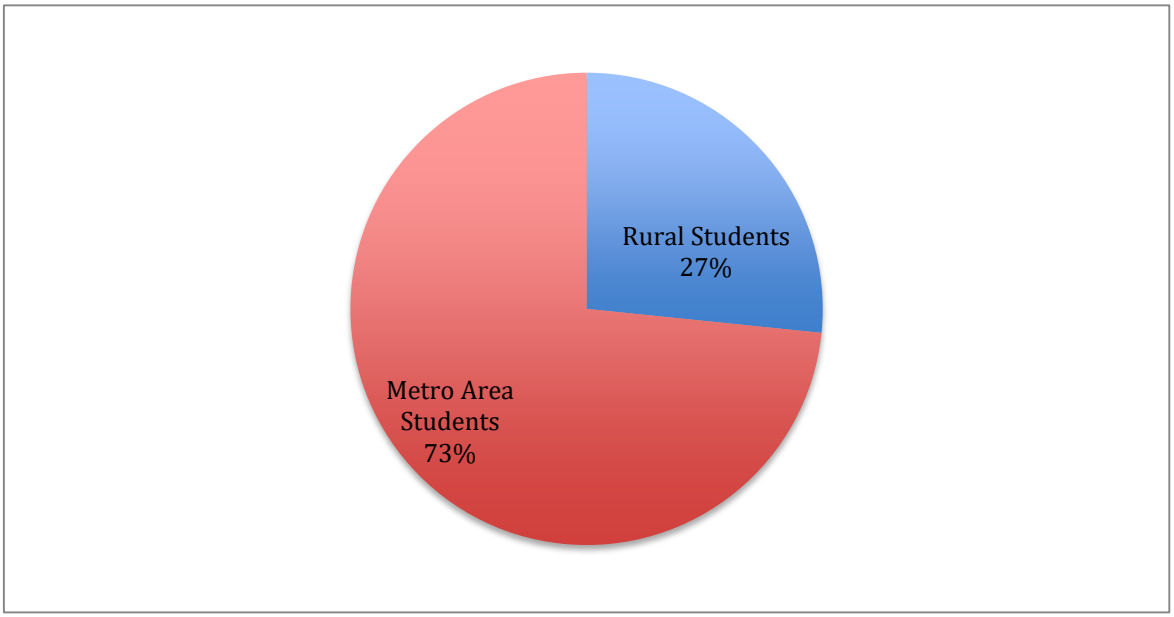


Figure 3. Public Missouri High Schools: Percent Rural vs. Metro Area Students

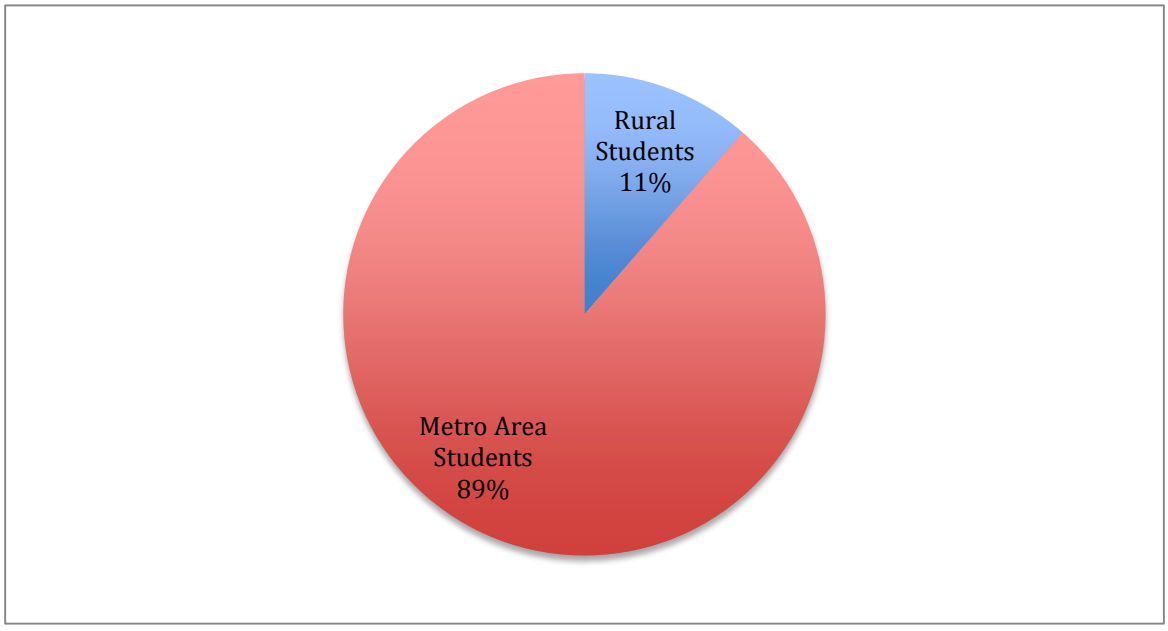


Figure 4. Bright Flight Recipients: Percent Rural vs. Metro Area Students

*Bright Flight disproportionately disadvantages **students of color**.*

Harrington, Munoz, Curs, and Ehlert found that Bright Flight recipients were overwhelmingly and disproportionately white students. They found that 89% of the Bright Flight recipients were white students, while only 1.7% were black students. Black students represented almost 13% of Missouri's graduating high school seniors,[21] but represented this much smaller proportion of the merit program's recipients.

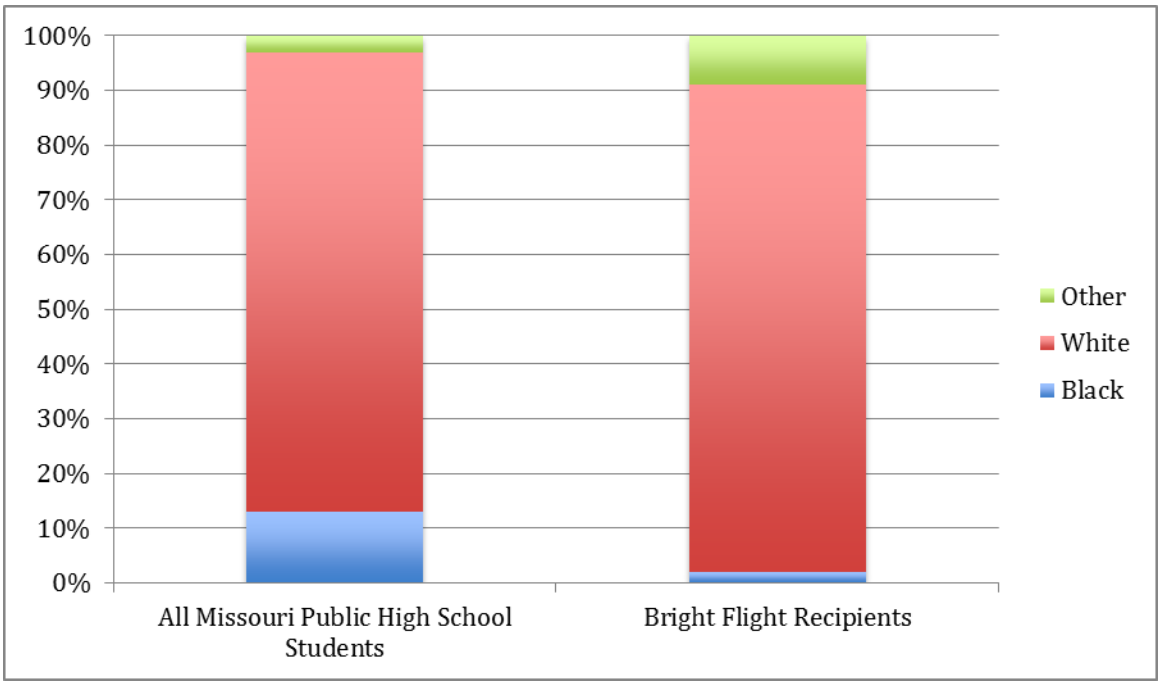


Figure 5. Missouri Bright Flight Recipients by Race

[21] National Center for Education Statistics. High school graduates and dropouts, by race/ethnicity and state: 1999-2000. http://nces.ed.gov/programs/digest/d02/dt105.asp

Recommendations: Eliminate or Restructure Bright Flight

As the program is and has been configured, Bright Flight is inequitable. Though it was not intended to provide educational access, but was rather created as an economic driver, the program has outlived its intended usefulness and should be discontinued. Missouri's limited scholarship dollars should be awarded to students who need them, through Access Missouri or at the very least through a restructuring of Bright Flight.

Accordingly, we recommend:

1. **Eliminate Bright Flight** and direct those budgetary resources to need-based scholarship programs.

OR

2. **Fundamentally restructure Bright Flight**:
    a. Award only to students with financial need;
    b. Distribute awards equitably, to top students from each high school proportionate to population size; and,
    c. Choose performance characteristics instead of or in addition to ACT and SAT scores (e.g., GPA, leadership and community service).

CONCLUSION: Time for Change

Missouri's workforce and educational objectives require attention to equity and to serving those in need. Scarce public dollars will generate the greatest return on investment if they are directed to change outcomes for students and communities, not reward those already destined to degree attainment and economic success who need no further incentive.

In its distribution, Bright Flight is disproportionately awarded to students graduating from private and affluent public high schools in the state's metropolitan areas. Students of color, rural

students, and those graduating from challenged school districts are far less likely to receive the scholarship.

Need-based aid programs will further equity objectives and address workforce development goals.[22] [23] Until a thorough review is conducted using an equity lens at the forefront, proposals to increase Bright Flight awards or expand the program to include a loan forgiveness award should be suspended. Missouri's students and citizens merit a more carefully constructed set of scholarship programs.

[22] Doyle, William R. "A New Partnership: Reshaping the Federal and State Commitment to Need-Based Aid." *Committee for Economic Development* (2013).
[23] Baum, Sandy, Michael McPherson, and Patricia Steele. "The effectiveness of student aid policies: What the research tells us." (2008).