

REPORT CARD ON THE SCHOLARSHIP PROGRAMS OF THE STATE OF MISSOURI

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Executive Summary

This report documents the poor marks earned by the State of Missouri in providing educational opportunity to its residents. Analysis of the effectiveness and equity indicators of four existing Missouri scholarship programs: A+, Access Missouri, Bright Flight, and Fast Track reveals significant disparities that result from current award criteria and distribution methods. The purpose of this analysis is to inform the public and elected representatives of the effectiveness of each program in meeting its stated objectives and of inherent disparities that have resulted from flaws in program design and demographic shifts. Ultimately, the authors intend to spark the process of eliminating the four separate programs and starting *de novo* in the creation of a single and coherent financial aid program to better serve Missourians.

Introduction

Longstanding concerns regarding the relatively small awards and patchwork of scholarship programs provided by the state of Missouri inspired the work of the four Policy Data Fellows with The Scholarship Foundation of St. Louis who undertook this analysis. While many of the relevant questions had been asked in years prior, this analysis was timely as a result of new data and the many challenges of post-secondary education that resulted from the pandemic and its economic implications.

Sources: Key to the capacity to conduct this analysis was a series of data requests submitted to the Missouri Department of Higher Education and Workforce Development (MDHEWD) by Representative Kevin Windham, Jr. Data regarding characteristics of students awarded and award distribution were reported by MDHEWD for the years 2017-2020 and comprise the foundation of the analysis. The Revised Statutes of Missouri and publications of MDHEWD provided source material regarding program purpose, award criteria, and statutory minimums and maximums for awards. In assessing equitable distribution by economic, racial, and geographic characteristics, reference points derived from data of the United States Census Bureau¹ were employed.

Notes on Method: Four key points shape the analytical approach used by Policy Data Fellows in assessing each program and in comparisons made across programs.

- True rounding is applied throughout. All figures are rounded to the nearest whole percentage point.
- Definitions for urban, suburban and rural demographics derived from the United States Census: *“To qualify as an urban area, the territory identified according to criteria must encompass at least 2,500 people, at least 1,500 of which reside outside institutional group quarters. The Census Bureau identifies two types of urban areas: Urbanized Areas (otherwise called “Urban” in our report) of 50,000 people or more and Urban Clusters (otherwise called “Suburban” in our report) of at least*

¹ The United States Census Bureau (2019) - <https://www.census.gov>

2,500 and less than 50,000 people. Rural encompasses all population, housing, and territory not included within a specified Urban Area or Cluster.”²

- “UNKNOWN OR UNAVAILABLE” records are excluded from this analysis in calculations on race, ethnicity, and geographic residence. The number of program participants for which data is “UNKNOWN OR UNAVAILABLE” is provided in the notes for each program. These data may be unreported by participants or withdrawn by MDHEWD in populations numbering fewer than five (5), to protect identity.
- Awards and disbursements are not the same and are reported separately herein. There is a distinction between the percentage of aid awarded (those eligible and offered awards) versus the percentage of aid disbursed (those receiving funds). The percentage of aid awarded may be larger than aid disbursed for a multitude of reasons, including students who are unable to report to campus for personal reasons, choose to attend an out-of-state or private institution, or have been derailed from timely enrollment due to federal verification processes.

² The United States Census Bureau rural, suburban, urban definitions (2010) <https://www.census.gov/programs-surveys/geography/guidance/geo-areas/urban-rural/2010-urban-rural.html>

A+ SCHOLARSHIP

Program Purpose:

- To provide scholarship funds to eligible graduates of A+ designated high schools who attend a participating public community college or vocational/technical school, or certain private two-year vocational/technical schools.³

Number of Award Recipients (2019-2020): 13,575⁴

Administrative Responsibility:

- The program was established within the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education⁵, but is now administered by the Department of Higher Education and Workforce Development⁶

Statutory Minimum:

- The A+ Program is applied to the unpaid balance of students' tuition and general fees after all available, non-loan federal financial assistance, such as the federal Pell Grant, has been applied to the account. This may result in \$0 being applied though students otherwise meet the criteria.⁷

Statutory Maximum:

- The tuition amount eligible for reimbursement is capped at the published standard per credit hour tuition rate charged by State Technical College of Missouri.⁸ For the 2020-2021 academic year, the maximum rate is \$181.00 per credit hour or \$4.80 per clock-hour.⁹

Current Award Criteria

Participating students must:

- Be a U.S. citizen or permanent resident.
- Enter into a written agreement with their high school prior to graduation.
- Attend a designated A+ high school for 2 years prior to graduation.
- Graduate from an A+ designated high school with an overall unweighted grade point average of 2.5 or higher on a 4.0 scale.
- Have at least a 95% attendance record overall for grades 9-12.
- Perform at least 50 hours of unpaid tutoring or mentoring, of which up to 25% may include job shadowing prior to graduation.

³ <https://dhewd.mo.gov/ppc/grants/aplusscholarship.php>

⁴ MDHEWD, Legislative Request – Financial Aid Demographics

⁵ RSMo §160.545 (1)

⁶ RSMo §160.545 (8)

⁷ <https://www.newstribune.com/news/news/story/2021/jul/18/new-data-reveals-cracks-in-a-scholarship-program/879683/>

⁸ <https://dhewd.mo.gov/ppc/grants/aplusscholarship.php>

⁹ <https://dhewd.mo.gov/ppc/grants/aplusscholarship.php>

- Maintain a record of good citizenship and avoid the unlawful use of drugs and/or alcohol while in grades 9-12.
- Have achieved a score of proficient or advanced on the Algebra I end of course exam or a higher-level approved end-of-course exam in the field of mathematics.¹⁰

A+ Scholarship Award Recipients by Race/Ethnicity:¹¹

Race	% MO Population	% Students Awarded	% Funds Disbursed
Native American/Alaska Native	1%	1%	1%
Asian / Pacific Islander	2%	1%	1%
Black / African American	12%	3%	2%
Hispanic / Latino/a	4%	4%	4%
White	83%	91%	92%

A+ Scholarship Award Recipients by Geography

Geography	% MO POPULATION	% A+ Recipients
Rural	37%	35%
Urban/Metro	62%	65%

¹⁰ <https://dhewd.mo.gov/ppc/grants/aplusscholarship.php>

¹¹ Data on race/ethnicity are UNKNOWN/UNAVAILABLE for 13% Awarded and 9% Disbursed of A+ scholarship participants.

A+ Scholarship Award Recipients by top 10 Zip Codes¹²

County ¹³	Zip Code	Median Income ¹⁴
Saint Charles County (U)	63376	\$84,978
Christian County (S)	65714	\$60,645
Saint Charles County (U)	63368	\$84,978
Saint Charles County (U)	63366	\$84,978
Saint Charles County (U)	63385	\$84,978
Christian County (S)	65721	\$60,645
Saint Charles County (U) ¹⁵	63304	\$84,978
Jefferson County (U)	63052	\$65,454
Boone County (S)	65202	\$55,328
Clay County (U)	64068	\$70,510

Median Family Income of A+ Award Recipients¹⁶

Year	Total Awards Disbursed	Median Income
2017-2018	12,923	\$86,290
2018-2019	13,089	\$88,982
2019-2020	13,575	\$91,550

¹² All top 10 counties are Urban (U) or Suburban (S) metro areas.

¹³ <https://www.census.gov/quickfacts/fact/table/stcharlescitymissouri,ozarkcitymissouri/INC110219?>

¹⁴ The median household income of Missouri is \$54,478 and 14.2% of Missourians live below the federal poverty line.

¹⁵ Saint Charles County is the second wealthiest county in Missouri and accounts for 50% of the top 10 counties with the most A+ Scholarship recipients.

¹⁶ MDHEWD, Legislative Request – Median Income - Financial Aid Programs

ACCESS MISSOURI SCHOLARSHIP

Program Purpose:

- To provide aid to students on the basis of need. The department evaluates each student's application for an Access Missouri award according to the student's EFC (Expected Family Contribution) as calculated based on information provided in the student's federal need-based aid application form completed and submitted as prescribed by the United States Department of Education.

Number of Award Recipients (2019-2020): 43,656¹⁷

Administrative Responsibility: The Missouri Department of Higher Education¹⁸

Statutory Minimum:

- Two-year University: \$300¹⁹
- Four-year college/University: \$1,500²⁰

Statutory Maximum:

- Two-year University: \$1,300²¹
- Four-year college/University: \$2,850²²

Current Award Criteria²³

Participating students must:

- Be a U.S. citizen or permanent resident and a Missouri resident.
- Be an undergraduate student enrolled full-time at a participating Missouri school.
- Have an EFC of \$12,000 or less.
- Not be pursuing a degree or certificate in theology or divinity.
- Not have received a first bachelor's degree, completed the required hours for a bachelor's degree, or completed 150 semester credit hours.
- Have a FAFSA (Free Application for Federal Student Aid) on file and make any corrections affecting eligibility by the deadlines indicated.

¹⁷ MDHEWD, Legislative Request – Financial Aid Demographics

¹⁸ RSMo §173.1104

¹⁹ RSMo §173.1105 (2)(a)

²⁰ RSMo §173.1105 (2)(b)

²¹ RSMo §173.1105 (2)(a)

²² RSMo §173.1105 (2)(b)

²³ RSMo §173.1104

Access Missouri Award Recipients by Race/Ethnicity²⁴

Race	% MO Population	% Students Awarded	% Funds Disbursed
Native American / Alaska Native	1%	1%	0%
Asian / Pacific Islander	2%	3%	4%
Black /African American	12%	13%	13%
Hispanic / Latino/a	4%	6%	6%
White	83%	77%	77%

Access Missouri Scholarship Award Recipients by Geography

Geography	% MO Population	% Access Missouri Recipients
Rural	37%	29%
Urban/Metro	62%	72%

²⁴ Data on race/ethnicity are UNKNOWN/UNAVAILABLE FOR 33% awarded and 35% disbursed of Access Missouri participants.

Access Missouri Award Recipients by top 10 Zip Codes²⁵

County ²⁶	Zip Code	Median Income ²⁷
Saint Charles County (U) ²⁸	63376	\$84,978
Greene County (U) ²⁹	65807	\$46,086
Saint Louis County (U)	63123	\$67,420
Boone County (S)	65202	\$55,328
Saint Louis County (U)	63021	\$67,420
Boone County (S)	65203	\$55,328
Saint Louis County (U)	63021	\$67,420
Saint Louis County (U)	63033	\$67,420
Saint Louis County (U)	63129	\$67,420
Saint Charles County (U)	63366	\$84,978

Median Family Income of Access Missouri Award Recipients³⁰

Year	Total Awards Disbursed	Median Income
2017-2018	42,952	\$38,091
2018-2019	44,617	\$39,337
2019-2020	43,656	\$38,946

For more information, see **Access Missouri: Geographic Distribution of Financial Need, College Enrollment, and Financial Aid³¹**, created by the Active Advocacy Coalition in 2019.

²⁵ <https://www.census.gov/quickfacts/fact/table/stcharlescitemissouri,ozarkcitymissouri/INC110219?>

²⁶ All top 10 counties are Urban (U) or Suburban (S) metro areas.

²⁷ The median household income of Missouri is \$54,478 and 14.2% of Missourians live below the federal poverty line <https://datausa.io/profile/geo/missouri#housing>

²⁸ Saint Charles County has the second highest median income (\$84,978) in the entire state after Johnson County (\$89,087).

²⁹ Greene County has the second most Access recipients (554 students) but has the 61st highest median income in the state (\$46,086).

³⁰ MDHEWD, Legislative Request – Median Income - Financial Aid Programs

³¹ <https://sfstl.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/08/Access-Missouri-Report-2019.pdf>

BRIGHT FLIGHT SCHOLARSHIP

(Higher Education Academic Scholarship Program)

Program Purpose:

- The Missouri Higher Education Academic Scholarship Program (Bright Flight) is a merit-based program that encourages top-ranked high school seniors to attend approved Missouri postsecondary schools.³²

Number of Award Recipients (2019-2020): 7,784³³

Administrative Responsibility: The Coordinating Board for Higher Education³⁴ (CBHE)

Statutory Minimum: N/A

Statutory Maximum:

- Top 3% of Missouri ACT Test Takers: \$3,000³⁵
- Top 4 and 5%: \$1,000³⁶

Current Award Criteria³⁷

Participating students must:

- Be a Missouri resident and a United States citizen or permanent resident.
- Have a composite score on the ACT or SAT in either:
 - the top 3 percent of all Missouri students taking those tests, or
 - the top 4th or 5th percentiles of all Missouri students taking those tests.
- Enroll as a first-time student and receive the scholarship in the academic year immediately following high school graduation, receipt of General Education Development certificate, or completion of secondary coursework, if home-schooled.
- Submit supplemental eligibility information, if requested, by the deadline established by the MDHEWD.
- Not be pursuing a degree or certificate in theology or divinity.

³² <https://dhewd.mo.gov/ppc/grants/brightflight.php>

³³ MDHEWD, Legislative Request – Financial Aid Demographics

³⁴ 173.250 (9) (3)

³⁵ 173.250 (4) (1)

³⁶ Pursuant to Mo. Rev. Stat. 173.250 (4)(2): provided sufficient funds are appropriated, each eligible student with a qualifying score in the top fourth and fifth percentiles shall be offered an academic scholarship of up to one thousand dollars per year. Due to the State's budget, only the top 3% are awarded scholarships in practice.

³⁷ 173.250(2)(4)(a-c), in addition to RSMo 173.1104

Bright Flight Award Recipients by Race/Ethnicity³⁸

Race	% MO Population	% Students Awarded	% Funds Disbursed
Native American / Alaska Native	1%	0%	0%
Asian / Pacific Islander	2%	5%	5%
Black / African American	12%	1%	1%
Hispanic / Latino/a	4%	2%	2%
White	83%	92%	92%

Bright Flight Scholarship Award Recipients by Geography

Geography	% MO Population	% Bright Flight Recipients
Rural	37%	13%
Urban/Metro	62%	87%

³⁸ Data on race/ethnicity were UNKNOWN/UNAVAILABLE for 28% of Bright Flight participants.

Bright Flight Award Recipients by Top 10 Zip Codes

City/County	Zip Code	Median Income
Ballwin, MO	63021	\$98,750
St. Charles County	63376	\$84,978
Columbia, MO	65203	\$55,328
O'Fallon, MO	63368	\$90,025
Ballwin, MO	63011	\$98,750
Fenton, MO	63026	\$92,544
Chesterfield, MO	63017	\$113,315
St. Charles, MO	63304	\$84,978
Oakville, MO	63129	\$67,420
St. Charles, MO	63385	\$84,978

Median Family Income of Bright Flight Award Recipients³⁹

Year	Total Awards Disbursed	Median Income
2017-2018	7,357	\$102,514
2018-2019	7,500	\$104,128
2019-2020	7,784	\$108,107

For more information, see **Racial, economic, and geographical inequities in Missouri's merit-based Bright Flight Program⁴⁰**, created by the Active Advocacy Coalition.

³⁹ MDHEWD, Legislative Request – Median Income - Financial Aid Programs

⁴⁰ <https://sfstl.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/08/Bright-Flight-Materials-1.pdf>

FAST TRACK SCHOLARSHIP

Program Purpose:

- The Fast Track Workforce Incentive Grant is a new financial aid program that addresses workforce needs by encouraging adults to pursue a certificate, degree, or industry-recognized credential in an area designated as high need.

Number of Award Recipients (2019-2020): 189⁴¹

Administrative Responsibility: Missouri Department of Higher Education and Workforce Development⁴²

Statutory Minimum & Maximum:

- Grants shall be awarded in an amount equal to the actual tuition and general fees charged of an eligible student, after all federal non-loan aid, state student aid, and any other governmental student financial aid are applied. If the grant amount is reduced to zero due to the receipt of other aid, the eligible student shall receive an award of up to five hundred dollars or the remaining cost of attendance as calculated by the institution after all non-loan student aid has been applied, whichever is less, per academic term.

Current Award Criteria:⁴³

Participating students must:

- Have completed and submitted a FAFSA for the academic year for which the grant is requested.
- Be a citizen or permanent resident of the United States.
- Be a Missouri resident as determined by reference to standards promulgated by the coordinating board.
- Be 25 years or older or individuals who have not been enrolled in any school within the last two years.
- Be enrolled, or plan to enroll, full or part-time as a student in an eligible undergraduate program of study offered by an approved public, private, or virtual institution.
- Make no more than \$80,000 filing jointly, or no more than \$40,000 per year, filing any other tax status.

⁴¹ MDHEWD, Legislative Request – Financial Aid Demographics

⁴² https://dhewd.mo.gov/initiatives/fast_track.php

⁴³ https://dhewd.mo.gov/initiatives/fasttrackgrant_for_students.php

Fast Track Award Recipients by Race/Ethnicity⁴⁴

Race	% MO Population	% Students Awarded	% Funds Disbursed
Native American / Alaska Native	1%	2%	1%
Asian / Pacific Islander	2%	2%	3%
Black / African American	12%	6%	2%
Hispanic / Latino/a	4%	3%	3%
White	83%	86%	90%

Fast Track Scholarship Award Recipients by Geography

Geography	% MO Population	% Fast Track Recipients
Rural	37%	20%
Urban/Metro	62%	80%

Fast Track Award Recipients by All Zip Codes^{45 46}

County	Zip Code	Median Income ⁴⁷
Cape Girardeau County (S) ⁴⁸	63701	\$53,732
Laclede County (R)	65536	\$47,257
Greene County (U)	65802	\$46,086
Greene County (U)	65804	\$46,086
Greene County (U)	65807	\$46,086

⁴⁴ Data on race/ethnicity are UNKNOWN/UNAVAILABLE for 35% of Fast Track participants.

⁴⁵ <https://www.census.gov/quickfacts/fact/table/stcharlescitymissouri,ozarkcitymissouri/INC110219?>

⁴⁶ All Fast Track recipients come from these five counties.

⁴⁷ The median household income of Missouri is \$54,478 and 14.2% of Missourians live below the federal poverty line. All five of these counties have household income below the state's median <https://datausa.io/profile/geo/missouri#housing>

⁴⁸ Counties displayed in the chart are categorized as Urban (U), Suburban (S), or Rural (R) by county population.

Median Family Income of Fast Track Award Recipients⁴⁹

Year	Total Awards Disbursed	Median Income
2017-2018	-	-
2018-2019	-	-
2019-2020	189	\$27,721

⁴⁹ MDHEWD, Legislative Request – Median Income - Financial Aid Programs

Conclusions

Missouri students suffer from the combined effects of program design flaws and insufficient appropriations in Missouri's four primary scholarship programs. Awards in the need-based programs are approximately half the median awards in the programs that are non-need based. The net result is failure to meet student need, with the greatest adverse impact upon students who are Black or rural.

In 2020, students in the state's two programs that are **not need-based** (A+ and Bright Flight), received 49 percent (\$64.9 million) of the state scholarship budget and came from households reporting median income of \$91,550 and \$108,107 respectively (state median income is \$54,478). Missouri's post-secondary enrollment is 14 percent Black, yet these two programs benefit Black students at a rate of 2 percent and 1 percent, respectively. While 37 percent of the state's population is rural, Bright Flight beneficiaries come from rural areas at a rate of only 13 percent.

Students participating in the state's **need-based** scholarship programs (Access Missouri and Fast Track) suffer from insufficient appropriations spread far too thin. The state reports a median award in Access Missouri of \$1,544 and in Fast Track the median is \$1,850. Median awards for those programs not based on need are \$2,625 for Bright Flight and \$3,779 for A+.

The state's scholarship programs especially shortchange students from households with low income. Rural students report lower household income and are more likely to be first-generation college students than their metro area peers, yet the data demonstrate how underserved they are by Access Missouri, Bright Flight, and Fast Track.⁵⁰ The proportion of Black students who demonstrate financial need is significant, as demonstrated by the greater degree of equity in the state's one need-based program, Access Missouri, yet Black students are underrepresented in every other program.

2020 Award Distribution, by Program

Program	Median Household Income of Participants	Total Awards Disbursed	Number of Students Awarded	Median Award Disbursed
A+	\$91,550	\$42,873,454	13,575	\$3,778.66
Access Missouri	\$38,946	\$68,431,975	43,656	\$1,543.60
Bright Flight	\$108,107	\$22,049,149	7,784	\$2,625.00
Fast Track	\$27,721	\$413,886.67	189	\$1,850.00

⁵⁰ <https://dhewd.mo.gov/documents/2019EquityReport.pdf> (p 12)

In addition to disparate outcomes in awards, the A+ Scholarship is based upon a number of design flaws that require attention. Criteria include a 2.5+ GPA, positive discipline and attendance records, and completion of 50 hours of unpaid community service or mentoring; all of these requirements are far more problematic for low-income students who must work to help provide for their households. Further, the program is flawed by the number of students who have completed requirements, enroll in community college but are denied aid A+ scholarships because they also were awarded federal Pell Grants. In 2018, 2,448 eligible students had awards cancelled in this way.^{51 52}

A fundamental design flaw of the non-need based Bright Flight program lies within the choice of a single measure to define merit. Bright Flight as it currently stands requires students to score within the top 3 percent of Missouri ACT or SAT test takers. Household income has correlated with higher test scores for decades; Bright Flight recipients disproportionately come from private high schools with expensive tuition or suburban districts in affluent zip codes. In analyzing program outcomes, the “best and brightest in Missouri” are more accurately described as those with the financial means to access the most resources and test preparation. A significant portion of the state’s scholarship budget is going to students who more than likely can already afford an education.

Fast Track’s purpose is to cover any remaining gaps in tuition for students who commit to studying an “in-demand field” at a Missouri institution. This quasi-need-based program restricts eligibility based on previous education and household income. The program promises prospective students an affordable education but little flexibility in field of study. Students must agree to enter the workforce in an in-demand industry in Missouri after degree completion. If a student chooses to discontinue their education or switch to a program that is no longer considered an in-demand field, their Fast Track grant aid turns into a loan and is expected to be repaid.⁵³ This program is in danger of putting the needs of industry and the pursuit of profit ahead of Missouri students interests or talents.

Access Missouri provides an example of a different way to distribute dollars to support higher education and training. All of the top ten zip codes for the state’s only true need-based aid program correlate with population density and five of those ten report median incomes below the state’s median. Additionally, all five of the zip codes where Fast Track recipients call home are below the state’s median income as well. However, none of the top zip codes for either program fall within the state’s cities with the lowest median income.⁵⁴ If the stated purpose of Access Missouri is to fund students with financial need who enroll full-time at a Missouri institution and have an EFC of \$12,000 or less, then awards should be more significant in size and rural students represented in greater proportion. The poorest students in the state aren’t adequately represented or supported. If students are aware of the kind of aid available, they are more likely to want to pursue an education.

⁵¹ Fiscal Note (2019) for HB498, Committee on Legislative Research, Oversight Division found via <https://house.mo.gov/billtracking/bills191/fiscal/fispdf/1200-01N.UPD.pdf>

⁵² <https://www.newstribune.com/news/news/story/2021/jul/18/new-data-reveals-cracks-in-a-scholarship-program/879683/>

⁵³ https://dhewd.mo.gov/initiatives/fasttrackgrant_for_students.php

⁵⁴ https://datacommons.org/ranking/Median_Income_Person/City/geoId/29?h=geoId%2F2903160&bottom=

In both distribution and design, the state's scholarship funds are disjointed and resulting in inequity. Instead of assisting Missouri's neediest students with financial aid, they serve those who already have the means to serve themselves, primarily via a narrow definition of merit. Bright Flight and A+ serve 21,359 students with \$64.9 million, while \$68.8 million serves the 43,845 students on need-based aid Access Missouri and Fast Track. **The non-need-based programs grant approximately \$3,038 per student, while need-based programs give \$1,569 per student.**⁵⁵ For every dollar awarded by merit-based programs, approximately 52 cents are awarded by need-based programs.⁵⁶ In short, students with the most need are being given the least amount of support. The scholarship programs of the state of Missouri are exclusionary, inequitable, and no longer serve their intended purposes. If education is to be a top priority in the state, financial assistance must be fundamentally restructured.

⁵⁵ MDHEWD, Legislative Request – Financial Aid Demographics

⁵⁶ MDHEWD, Legislative Request – Financial Aid Demographics

Recommendations

The League of Student Advocates proposes that Missouri do away with the four programs and instead create a single program dedicated to awarding scholarships to the students with the highest financial need.

A single program, operating under criteria similar to the Access Missouri Scholarship, would award scholarships only to students with sufficient financial need to qualify. A student's ability to support themselves, their community, and the economy of the state of Missouri is not predicated on a higher ACT or SAT score.⁵⁷⁵⁸ First and foremost, the state will benefit when students from more disadvantaged backgrounds with fewer financial resources are given the opportunity and education to become wildly successful.

Recognizing that it will take legislators and educators some time to fundamentally restructure to a single program, the League of Student Advocates recommends these interim steps:

- *Remove community service requirement and attendance at a designated A+ high school from the requirements for the A+ Scholarship.* This revision in the program will remove barriers to scholarship eligibility that further disadvantage students who are low-income. The existing requirements regarding community service and two-years attendance at an A+ high school hold students accountable for factors well beyond their control and should be eliminated.
- *Realign A+ Scholarship to be a “first-dollar” program instead of its current “last-dollar” format.* As of now, the A+ Scholarship operates as a “last-dollar” program, meaning that funds will be applied only after all other forms of financial aid have been exhausted - including federal Pell Grants. Under this philosophy, students who complete all scholarship requirements are still not being awarded their promised aid since A+ Scholarship funds are pushed to the end of a student's financial aid options.⁵⁹ This recommendation will better serve Missouri students by upholding the program's stated purpose and is the basis of current House Bill 884 introduced by Representative Kevin Windham, Jr.⁶⁰ Similar legislation was introduced via House Bill 498 in 2019 also by Representative Windham.⁶¹
- *Adjust the test score requirement for Bright Flight to students who score 20% or more above the state average for the ACT, SAT, or equivalent.* Under current requirements, Bright Flight is the most ineffective scholarship program the state has to offer. At present, the state's students score an average of 21 on the ACT. Under a recommendation such as this, the threshold for Bright Flight would become 25. This revision would support students who excelled on the test even without expensive test preparation. This will include more rural students and students of color - two demographics dramatically underrepresented in this program currently.

⁵⁷ <https://www.forbes.com/sites/nickmorrison/2020/01/29/its-gpas-not-standardized-tests-that-predict-college-success/?sh=460c866232bd>

⁵⁸ <https://www.insidehighered.com/admissions/article/2020/02/03/study-finds-grades-are-five-times-stronger-act-scores>

⁵⁹ <https://www.newstribune.com/news/news/story/2021/jul/18/new-data-reveals-cracks-in-a-scholarship-program/879683/>

⁶⁰ <https://house.mo.gov/Bill.aspx?bill=HB884&year=2021&code=R>

⁶¹ <https://house.mo.gov/Bill.aspx?bill=HB498&year=2019&code=R>

- *Increase appropriations and resulting award amounts in Access Missouri.* The state's only need-based program requires few improvements but much more funding. At present, students from the poorest households of the state are not being served adequately due to limits on funds available. This needs to change immediately if a current generation of young people are to succeed in Missouri.⁶²
- *Eliminate "in demand" restriction for Fast Track.* The newest of all four programs, this scholarship presently supports only 189 recipients. An industry-specific program is subject to sector-bias and may close the door on credentials that coordinate with employment opportunities. This program addresses those who choose to pursue higher education not immediately after high school. As currently configured, the program lacks flexibility if a student changes major. The threat of a loan resulting is onerous to the student and to the administrative burden of the state. Fast Track is unique and has potential to be very beneficial to Missouri students but needs to be less restrictive first.

These recommendations are based on careful analysis of statewide student data, program-specific language, and emerging trends in education and financial aid. For the state of Missouri to set up its students for long-term success, education access must first be more equitable in the form of financial assistance. The four programs as they currently exist are disjointed and should be significantly restructured in order to better serve students.

⁶² https://datacommons.org/ranking/Median_Income_Person/City/geoId/29?h=geoId%2F2903160&bottom=

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The League of Student Advocates is a bi-state collective of students working toward equity in higher education. The League believes that low-income, first-generation, and undocumented students have the potential, ability, and right to pursue higher education and that students must be in the center of policy decisions regarding higher education. League members gather at least annually to set an agenda for the year, train and organize, and travel to the Missouri state capital.



The Scholarship Foundation of St. Louis, a nonprofit organization founded in 1920, is based upon the conviction that an educated society is essential to a healthy democracy. The Scholarship Foundation provides access to postsecondary education to members of our community who otherwise would not have the financial means to fulfill their educational goals.

The Foundation sees higher education as a catalyst, an agent of change for individuals, families, communities, and nations. We envision a community that recognizes the importance of educational attainment and assures positive educational outcomes are accessible to all regardless of economic circumstance. In our community, doors will not be closed to those who lack financial resources, and postsecondary education will be available to all with the potential to succeed.