



INVESTING EARLY

Missouri Districts Putting
Pre-K Policy into Practice

A Case Study Series from Aligned



Why These Stories Matter

At Aligned, we've spent the past decade working alongside policymakers to build a better early childhood system in Missouri—one that's rooted in quality, equity, and access. These case studies highlight what happens when that work meets the real world: classrooms that give young learners a strong start, districts that rise to the challenge of expanding access, and communities that benefit from smart public investment.

We advocated for placing Pre-K students into the foundation formula—first through a carefully constructed policy trigger tied to full funding, then by making that trigger attainable. When we saw that hold-harmless districts couldn't benefit from that funding stream, we championed the Missouri Quality Pre-K (MOQPK) grant to fill the gap. When Missouri's ban on measuring early childhood quality blocked our eligibility for federal support, we worked to overturn it and helped launch the Quality Assurance Report (QAR) system. And when it was time to expand access again, we led efforts to double the allowable ADA percentage from 4% to 8%.

These aren't just wins in a policy ledger. They're why more children enter kindergarten ready to learn. Why more parents have access to high-quality care. Why Missouri secured new federal investments in early learning. And why our state's early childhood landscape looks so different today than it did ten years ago.

These stories show what's possible—and what's at risk if we don't protect that progress.



■ Branson R-IV - Southwest Missouri

Meeting Families Where They Are

Branson R-IV blends state funding with local partnerships to serve hundreds of children, including many experiencing homelessness. With full enrollment and strong community ties, the district uses Missouri Quality Pre-K (MOQPK) and ADA funding to expand access while protecting K–12 resources. A commitment to quality and outreach ensures students arrive at kindergarten ready to succeed—academically, socially, and emotionally.

“We’re giving kids those foundations—through books, conversation, play, and even trips to the zoo.”

[Read more](#)



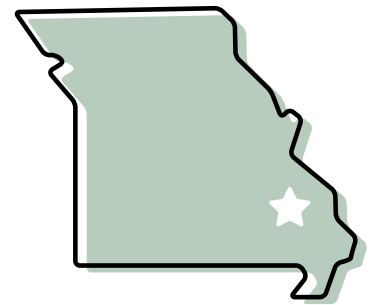
■ Marquand-Zion R-VI - Southeast Missouri

Creating Opportunity in a Child Care Desert

In this tiny, rural district, families face steep barriers: long commutes, low wages, and no access to local care. Marquand-Zion built a strong pre-school program with flexible staffing, creative funding, and support from the MOQPK grant and QAR initiative. With just one preschool classroom, the district proves that small systems can deliver big impact.

“It’s not just the academic part. It’s the whole child—social, emotional, behavioral.”

[Read more](#)



■ Stanberry R-II - Northwest Missouri

Family Connections and Early Learning That Lasts

With fewer than 400 students, Stanberry R-II is proof that high-performing rural districts can lead in early childhood. By combining MOQPK resources with a unique staffing model that strengthens family engagement, the district builds relationships early and ensures children start school confident and ready. One teacher, one paraprofessional—and a seamless, joyful environment for learning.

“It’s not just about seats in a classroom—it’s about joy, connection, and readiness.”

[Read more](#)





WeAreAligned.org