



# Addendum: Teacher Career Ladders

## Executive Summary

Career ladder programs allow teachers to earn a supplement to their incomes by completing activities such as student mentoring and earning professional credentials. These plans are optional in Missouri, with neither school districts nor teachers being required to participate. Missouri is one of the few states to have a state-funded career ladder program, though related incentive or merit-based pay structures for teachers are used in some states and school districts. Though still [in code](#), Missouri's teacher career ladder program has not been funded since 2011. House Bill [2493](#) would make several changes to the structure of the teacher career program, including reducing the number of service years required to enter into the program and expanding the number of qualifying activities for such programs. Additionally, it would increase state matching for such programs from 40% to 60%.

## Highlights

- The Missouri Career Development and Teacher Excellence Plan, commonly called the Career Ladder Program, was created in 1985.
- The program was last funded in 2010 when it had a \$37,467,000 appropriation.

## Limitations

- Two studies have shown that academic performance is higher in participating school districts, though other factors about the school districts could explain this.
- The effects of such plans on teacher recruitment and retention are unclear due to a lack of research on the topic.

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## Research Background

### Teacher Career Ladder Programs in Missouri

Teacher salaries are typically determined with salary schedules by years of service and educational attainment. Teacher salary schedules vary substantially throughout Missouri.<sup>1</sup> Career Ladder programs provide additional ways for teachers to earn increased pay based on classroom performance evaluations and other qualifying activities. The qualifying activities to progress to each stage can vary between districts; some examples include student mentoring, professional certificates, curriculum development, attending workshops, school ground beautification, and student mentoring. For more information on teacher compensation, see Science Note on [Public School Teacher Retirement Plans](#).

The Missouri Career Development and Teacher Excellence Plan, commonly called the Career Ladder Program, was created in 1985, RSMo [168.500](#). The program was created as a way to help

with teacher recruitment and retention and was most often utilized by rural schools.<sup>2</sup> The plans contain three stages with increased salary supplements at each stage. The program is voluntary for school districts, with a 40% matching from state funds. However, the program has not had a state appropriation since 2010 when it was funded at \$37,467,000. Some schools in Missouri still use the program even without the state matching, such as [Sikeston R-6](#) and [Stanberry R-II](#).

House Bill [2493](#) would change the state matching funds percentage from 40% to 60%, would decrease the number of years of service required to enter Stage I from 5 years to 2, and would increase the options of qualifying activities for each stage. Currently, at each stage teachers earn up to \$1,500, \$3,000, and \$5,000 for Stages I, II, and III respectively. The exact qualifications for each stage vary by participating school district.

### **Effects of Teacher Career Ladder Programs**

Various states and school districts use or have used merit/performance/incentive pay mechanisms for teachers.<sup>3</sup> In the 1980s, several states had pilot programs for teacher career ladder programs though only a few states, including Missouri, kept such programs in place. Because such few teacher ladder programs have existed previously, there is little research to assess what effects such programs have. One study in Missouri found that academic performance increased slightly in schools with such programs,<sup>2</sup> and a study in Arizona found even larger improvements in academic achievement for schools with career ladder programs. However, both studies note that these schools may not be representative, so these results could also have been due to other factors.<sup>4</sup> A meta-analysis of various performance-based teacher mechanisms found that they tend to have a small positive effect on student performance.<sup>5</sup>

The effects of such plans on teacher recruitment and retention are unclear due to a lack of research on the topic. Teacher retention in Missouri is comparatively low, with a 50% retention rate over 5 years.<sup>6</sup> This could in part be attributed to teacher salaries in Missouri being among the lowest nationwide. For more general information on this topic, see Science Note on [Teacher Recruitment & Retention](#).

### **References**

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6. Katnik, P. (2021) Report on Teacher Workforce. Missouri Department of Elementary & Secondary Education: Office of Educator Quality.  
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