

School Finance in Kansas & Missouri

Funding adequacy, student outcomes, and what fifteen years of data mean for policy — September 2026

Executive Summary

Since 2009, both Kansas and Missouri have moved from funding their public schools above the estimated cost of national-average student outcomes to funding them below it. Missouri's decline has been more severe: by 2024, its enrollment-weighted average district spent just 85% of what the national cost model estimates is needed, versus 98% in Kansas. Student outcomes have declined in step with funding in both states, consistent with the broader national and research literature finding that money spent on schools moves outcomes in both directions.

The underfunding is not evenly spread. It concentrates in higher-poverty and higher-Black-and-Hispanic districts, and gaps within a single metro area can exceed 100 percentage points — the Kansas City metro, split by the state line, is a stark illustration: Kansas City, Missouri swung from modestly overfunded in 2009 to the steepest decline of any district in the metro by 2024, while Kansas City, Kansas was the only district in the cluster to improve its position.

This brief summarizes the underlying data — drawn from the School Finance Indicators Database's national cost model and the NECM/SEDA merged district-year file, 2009–2024 — for a policy audience. A companion slide deck and an interactive data-visualization tool accompany this document.

AT A GLANCE, 2024

98%

KANSAS ENROLLMENT-WEIGHTED %
ADEQUACY

85%

MISSOURI ENROLLMENT-WEIGHTED %
ADEQUACY

52%

OF KANSAS DISTRICTS UNDERFUNDED

83%

OF MISSOURI DISTRICTS UNDERFUNDED

NATIONAL BENCHMARK

The enrollment-weighted national average % Adequacy fell from **117% in 2009 to 93% in 2024**. 48 of 50 states and DC became less well-funded over that period, relative to the cost of national-average outcomes.

“Money matters whether it's going up or down: increases to school funding lead to improved student outcomes, and decreases in funding lead to decreases in outcomes.”

— SCHOOL FINANCE INDICATORS DATABASE RESEARCH SYNTHESIS

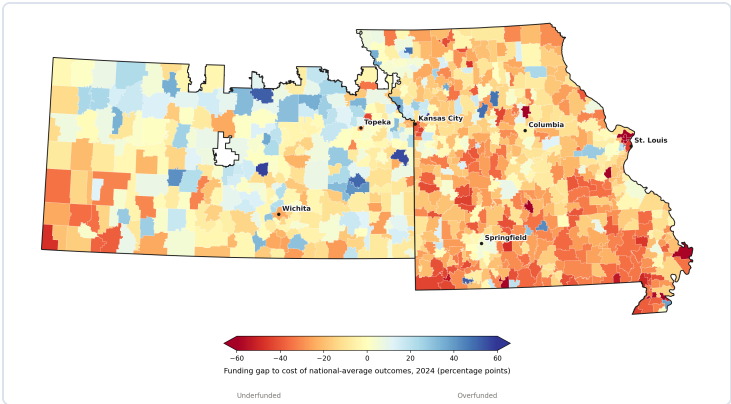
WHAT'S INSIDE THIS BRIEF

Funding adequacy trends (p.2) · Kansas City metro spotlight (p.3) · Equity, achievement & fiscal effort (p.4) · Legal landscape & implications (p.5)

COMPANION MATERIALS

A full slide deck and a live, interactive Kansas + Missouri district-level data visualization accompany this brief.

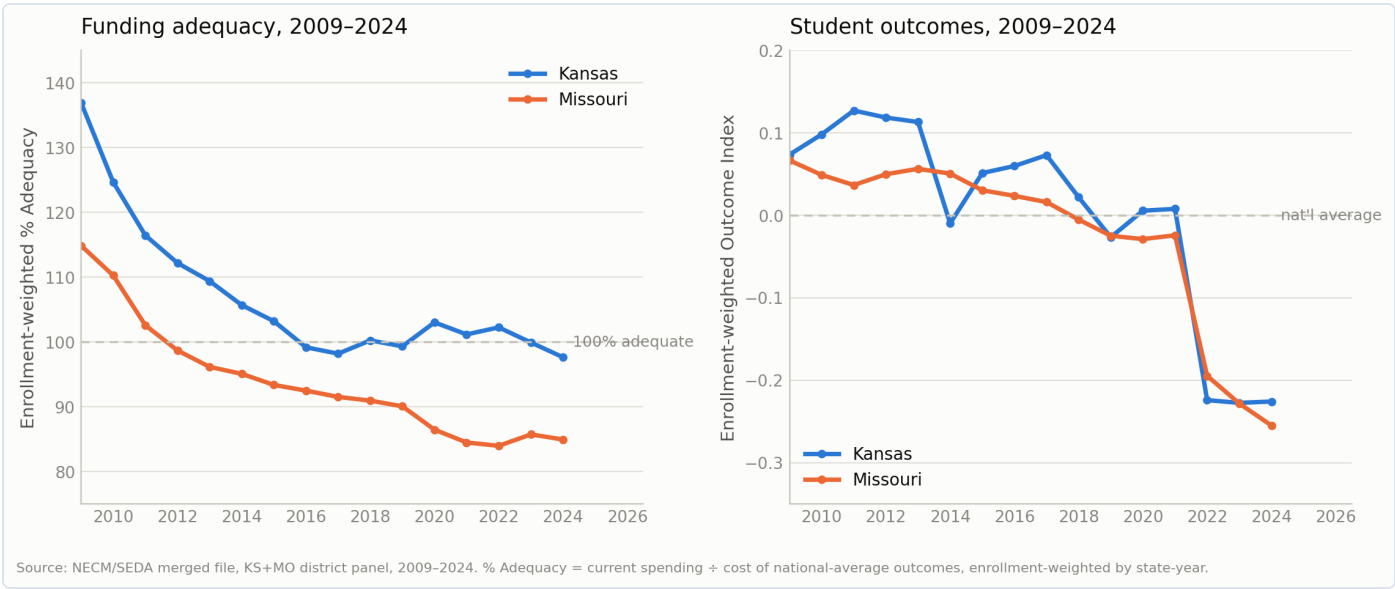
Where the Money Falls Short



Funding gap to the cost of national-average outcomes, 2024. Missouri runs consistently underfunded across southern and eastern portions of the state, especially near St. Louis, while Kansas sits closer to neutral. Funding gap = % Adequacy – 100. Source: NECM/SEDA merged file, 2024.

Missouri is substantially more underfunded than Kansas relative to the cost of achieving national-average student outcomes. The gap is sharpest around St. Louis: Jennings and Riverview Gardens, both high-poverty districts, are underfunded by 73 and 68 points respectively, while neighboring Clayton — a wealthy suburb — is overfunded by 85 points. That is a **150-plus point gap within a single metro area**.

This pattern is not unique to Kansas and Missouri. Nationally, the enrollment-weighted average % Adequacy fell from 117% in 2009 to 93% in 2024, and the share of districts below 100% adequacy grew from 31% to 54% over the same period. Both states' trajectories sit within that larger national retreat from adequate funding — visible in the trend lines below.



Enrollment-weighted funding adequacy and outcomes, 2009–2024. Kansas fell from 137% to 98% adequacy; Missouri from 115% to 85%. Both states' outcome indices held near or above the national average through the mid-2010s, then dropped sharply after 2021.

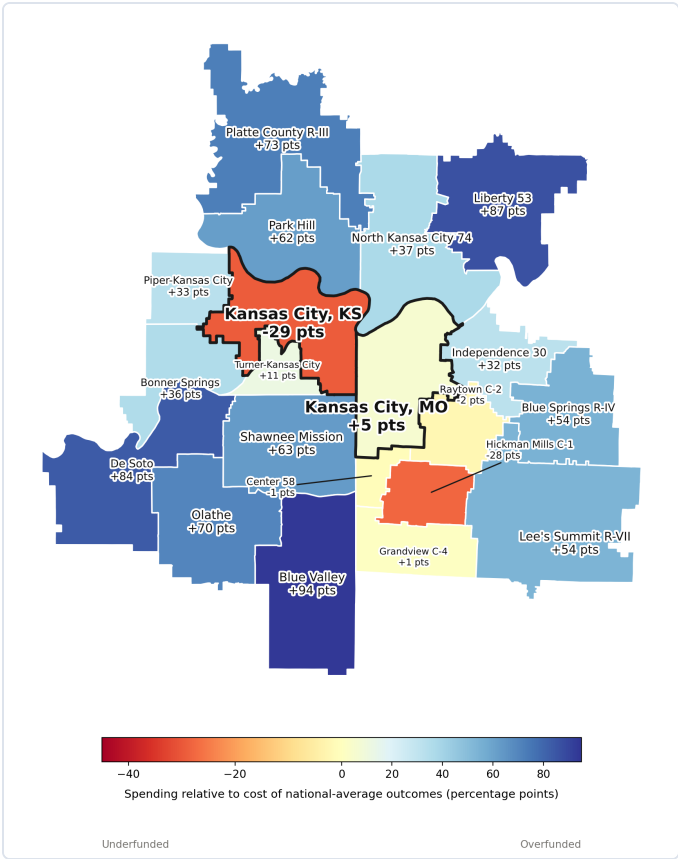
Two School Systems, One Metro

The Kansas City metro area straddles the state line, giving a rare natural comparison: neighborhoods and commuting patterns are shared, but school funding policy is not. In 2009, Kansas City, Kansas Public Schools was the most underfunded district in the metro at -29 points, while Kansas City, Missouri sat close to fully funded at +5 points. Most suburbs on both sides of the line were substantially overfunded, led by Blue Valley (KS) at +94 points.

By 2024, the entire metro had shifted toward underfunding — but unevenly. Kansas City, Missouri fell from +5 to **-40 points, the sharpest reversal of any district in the cluster**, while Kansas City, Kansas was the only district in the metro to *improve*, moving from -29 to -23. Six of the twenty districts shown flipped from overfunded to underfunded over the period, and KCMO's enrollment fell roughly 26% as funding adequacy declined.

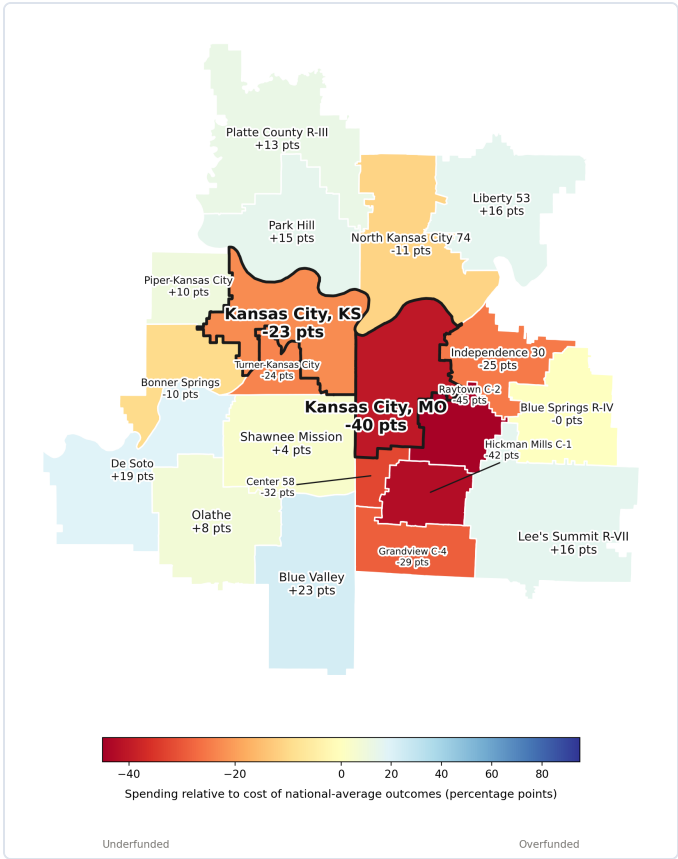
DISTRICT	2009 FUNDING GAP	2009 ENROLLMENT	2024 FUNDING GAP	2024 ENROLLMENT
Kansas City, KS	-29 pts	20,317	-23 pts	21,132
Kansas City, MO	+5 pts	19,788	-40 pts	14,694

KANSAS CITY, KS



2009 — funding gap to the cost of national-average outcomes, both sides of the state line.

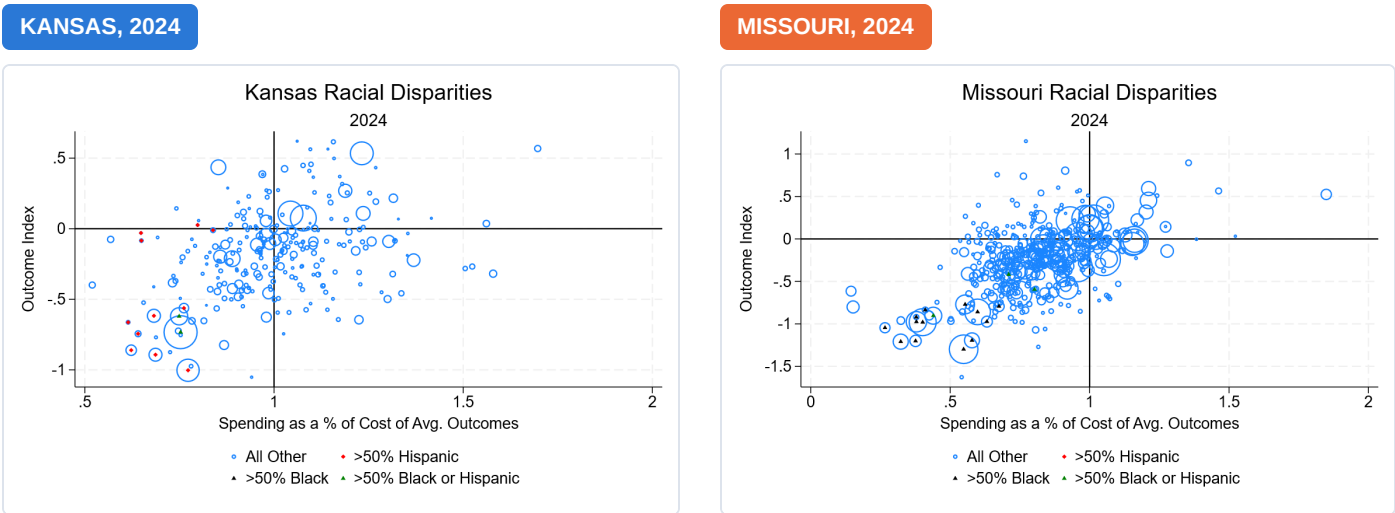
KANSAS CITY, MO



2024 — same color scale as 2009 for direct comparison.

Who Is Underfunded, and Why It Persists

Underfunding concentrates by race and poverty. Nationally, the typical African American student is twice as likely as a white student to be in an underfunded district, and 3.5 times more likely to be in a chronically underfunded one. The same pattern holds within Kansas and Missouri: majority-Black and -Hispanic districts (triangles/diamonds below) cluster in the lower-left of both states' funding-vs-outcome charts — below-average outcomes and below-100% adequacy. Cost itself rises faster with poverty than spending does, and that growing gap is the mechanical source of the disparity.



Spending as % of cost of average outcomes vs. outcome index, by district racial composition. Bubble size = enrollment. Source: NECM/SEDA merged file, 2024.

Achievement has followed funding downward. Grade 8 NAEP scores for both states tracked near or above the national average through the mid-2010s and have declined since 2019; Missouri's 2024 reading score is now below the national average, and Kansas's math score sits roughly at it.

Fiscal effort has lagged economic growth

−0.44

pts — Kansas's 2023 effort vs. 2006 (pre-recession), ranked #24 nationally. Revenue foregone: **\$3.26B (6.1%)** since 2016.

−0.41

pts — Missouri's 2023 effort vs. 2006 (pre-recession), ranked #23 nationally. Revenue foregone: **\$7.46B (8.5%)** since 2016.

Effort = total state/local K-12 revenue ÷ gross state product or personal income — what a state chooses to raise relative to its economic capacity, not what it can afford. Nationally, effort was lower in 2023 than in 2006 in 42 states, a collective "loss" of roughly \$575 billion in potential K-12 revenue since 2016.

What This Means for Policymakers

Courts have taken different paths

Kansas's litigation history (*Gannon* and predecessors) produced an enforced funding remedy — the state's highest court found a violation and secured compliance. Missouri's constitutional education clause has been recognized but has not driven a comparable enforcement order. That difference shapes what legal and legislative options are realistically on the table in each state going forward.

STATE	STATUS
Kansas	Enforced compliance
Missouri	Right recognized, not enforced

Where this leaves the discussion

- **Messaging & public advocacy** — distilling this evidence into terms that hold up in public debate and committee testimony.
- **Explaining why things feel worse** — because funding adequacy and outcomes have both declined since 2009, more sharply in Missouri; the trend lines back up what districts are reporting.
- **Framing legal causes of action** — Kansas's enforcement history and Missouri's unenforced right create different starting points for litigation or legislative strategy.
- **Federal and state protections together** — statutory protections (e.g., Title I, IDEA) intersect with state constitutional adequacy and equity obligations; neither substitutes for the other.

Key takeaways

- Both states have moved from overfunded to underfunded relative to the cost of national-average outcomes since 2009 — Missouri more severely than Kansas.
- Outcomes have declined alongside funding in both states, consistent with the broader national pattern.
- Underfunding concentrates in higher-poverty, higher-Black-and-Hispanic districts; within-metro gaps can exceed 100 points.
- Kansas City's two school systems diverged sharply since 2009, with Missouri's side seeing the steepest reversal in the metro.
- Fiscal effort has lagged pre-recession levels in both states, foregoing billions in potential K-12 revenue.

DATA, METHODS & COMPANION MATERIALS

This brief draws on the School Finance Indicators Database's national cost model — which controls for Census poverty, labor costs, district size, population density, and other factors, and covers 12,000+ districts, 2009–2023 — and the NECM/SEDA merged district-year file, 2009–2024. A companion slide deck and an interactive Kansas + Missouri data-visualization widget (HTML) accompany this brief, along with the underlying district-year data (CSV/JSON).

Bruce D. Baker · University of Miami · Prepared September 2026