

## Missouri Voters' Opinion on Key Missouri Education Legislative Issues Spring 2025

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This education memo addresses critical education issues facing the Missouri Legislature in spring 2025, including cell phone policies, social media education, charter schools, and open enrollment. The following highlights how legislative proposals align with Missouri public opinion as indicated by findings from the SLU/YouGov Poll since the poll's creation in June 2020.

### Key Findings

#### Cell Phones in Schools and School Safety (e.g., [HB 416](#) and [HB 408](#))

- 70% of voters favored prohibiting students from accessing cell phones during regular instructional activities at all K-12 schools (i.e., elementary, middle, and high schools). ([February 2025 Poll](#))
- 56% of voters were somewhat or very worried about a shooting happening at Missouri public schools. ([February 2023 Poll](#))

#### Social Media (e.g., [HB 116](#))

- 86% of voters favored requiring Missouri public schools to teach students about social media's negative effects on mental health. ([February 2025 Poll](#))
- 76% of voters favored requiring Missouri public schools to teach students the purpose and acceptable use of social media platforms. ([February 2025 Poll](#))
- At least 81% of voters favored public schools prohibiting students from accessing social media using the school's internet access, except when instructed by the principal for educational purposes in all K-12 schools (i.e., elementary, middle, and high schools). ([February 2025 Poll](#))

#### Open Enrollment (e.g., [HB 711](#))

- 59% of voters supported allowing students to enroll in public schools outside of the district where they live. ([February 2024 Poll](#))
- 50% of voters were opposed to school districts limiting the number of students who transfer out of their district. ([February 2024 Poll](#))
- 83% of voters supported transferring students or their guardians being responsible for transportation to and from nonresident districts. ([February 2024 Poll](#))
- 49% of voters supported the state reimbursing receiving school districts for the transportation costs of nonresident students who qualify for free or reduced-price school lunches or special education services; 34% were opposed. ([February 2024 Poll](#))

#### Charter Schools (e.g., [SB 177](#))

- 56% of voters favored allowing charter schools to operate in all parts of the state, while 55% of voters favor allowing charter schools to operate in their school district. ([February 2025 Poll](#))

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## Cell Phones in Schools

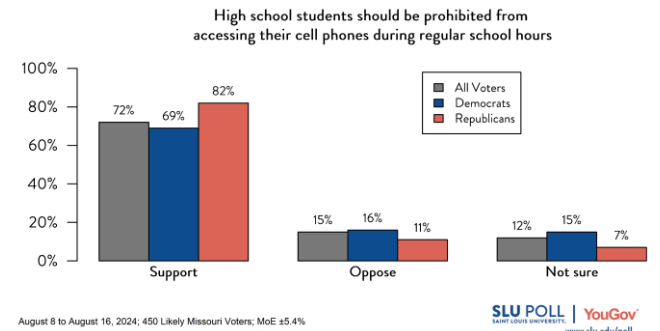
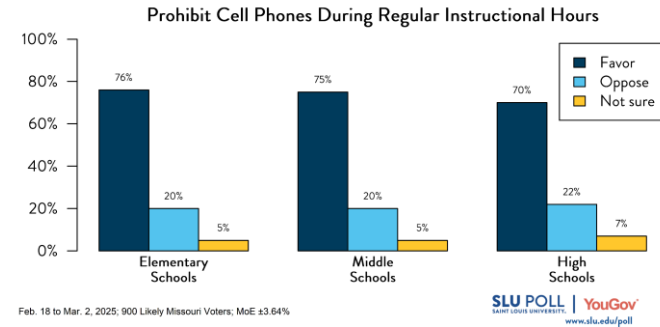
The Missouri Legislature is considering legislation on cell phone use in schools, examples of which include [HB 416](#), [HB 408](#), and [SB 68](#).

[At least 19 states have laws or policies that ban or restrict cellphone use in schools or recommend local districts enact their own policies. Sixteen additional states have introduced statewide legislation aimed at similar outcomes this year.](#)

### Key Legislative Points and SLU/YouGov Poll Findings

[HB 416](#) and [HB 408](#) propose that starting in the 2026-27 school year, each public and charter school district “adopt a written policy governing a student’s possession or use of an electronic personal communications device,” and the policy must at least prohibit “students from using electronic personal communications devices during instructional activities.” [SB 68](#) proposes a similar requirement for a “school electronic personal communications devices” policy for all public and charter schools starting in the 2025-26 school year.<sup>1</sup> All three bills address several other areas related to school safety.<sup>2</sup>

The [February 2025 SLU/YouGov Poll](#) found at least 70% of voters favor prohibiting students from accessing cell phones during regular instructional activities at all K-12 schools (i.e., elementary, middle, and high schools). Results from [August 2024](#) indicated similar support, with 72% of voters indicating support for prohibiting high school students from accessing their cell phones during regular school hours. These results also align with a national [YouGov survey that found 58% of U.S. adults supported a smartphone policy for high school students that would prohibit students from using them in school](#).<sup>3</sup>



<sup>1</sup> SB 68 defines an “electronic personal communications device” as including, but not limited to, the following: cellular telephones, paging devices, beepers, mobile telephones that offer advanced computing and internet accessibility, digital media players, portable game consoles, tablets, notebooks, or laptop computers, digital cameras, digital, video or audio recorders, smart watches, and devices that can connect and transmit data through Bluetooth technology.

<sup>2</sup> See the “School Safety” on page 6 of this memo for more detail.

<sup>3</sup> 13% agreed that smartphones shouldn’t be allowed into school building at all; 19% agreed that smartphones should be required to be turned in while in school; 26% agreed high school students should be allowed to have their phones in school but not allowed to use them.

## Social Media Education

The Missouri Legislature is considering legislation on social media education in schools, an example of which is [HB 116](#).

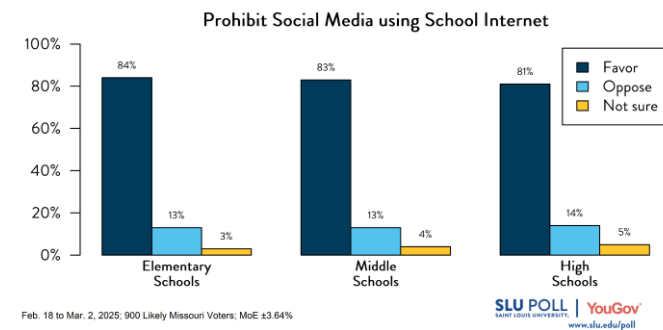
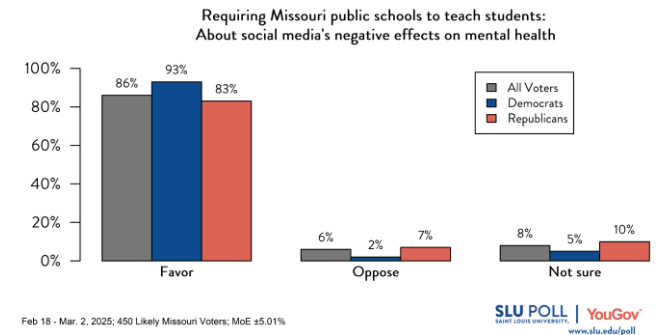
[Several states have enacted or have considered legislation related to social media use in schools, with some focusing on age verification, parental consent, and restricting access to platforms during school hours, while others address privacy and online safety education.](#)

### Key Legislative Points and SLU/YouGov Poll Findings

The [U.S. Surgeon General recommended that social media come with a warning](#) that “social media is associated with significant mental health harms in adolescents.” The [February 2025 SLU/YouGov Poll](#) found that 86% of voters favor requiring Missouri public schools to teach students about social media’s negative effects on mental health.

[HB 116](#) proposes the establishment of the “Media Literacy and Critical Thinking Act,” which would require the Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE) to establish a Pilot Program<sup>4</sup> in 5-7 diverse schools to address media literacy.<sup>5</sup> Results from February 2025 indicate that 76% of voters favor requiring Missouri public schools to teach students the purpose and acceptable use of social media platforms.

In February 2025, at least 81% of voters favored public schools prohibiting students from accessing social media using the school’s internet access, except when instructed by the teacher for educational purposes in all K-12 schools (i.e., elementary, middle, and high schools).



<sup>4</sup> The Pilot Program would be established for the 2026-27 and 2027-28 school years.

<sup>5</sup> HB 116 defines media literacy as including concepts such as but not limited to: “an individual’s ability to access, analyze, evaluate, and participate with all forms of media, including news in print and social media content, and recognize bias and stereotypes in media, as well as Internet safety.”

## Open Enrollment

The Missouri Legislature is currently considering legislation on open enrollment, an example of which is [HB 711](#).

[Seven of Missouri’s eight border states currently require districts to create interdistrict open enrollment policies.](#)<sup>6</sup> This is the fifth consecutive year that the House has approved this or a similar open enrollment bill, but these bills have never passed in the Senate.

### Key Legislative Points and SLU/YouGov Poll Findings

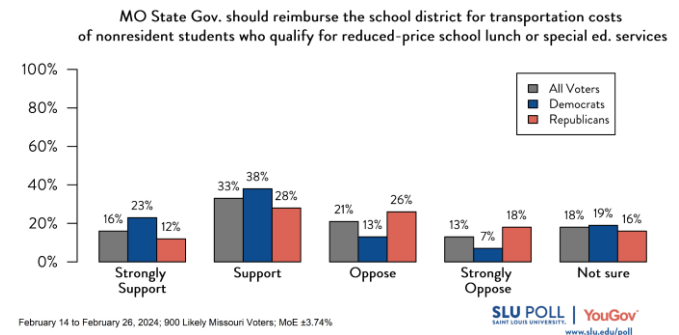
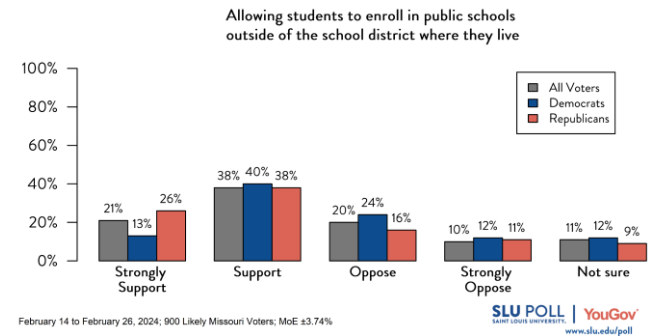
[HB 711](#) establishes the “Public School Open Enrollment Act” which proposes an “opt-in public school open enrollment program.” The bill specifies that any K-12 student may attend a public school in a nonresident participating district. The [February 2024 SLU/YouGov Poll](#) found 59% of voters support allowing students to enroll in public schools outside of the district where they live.

[HB 711](#) states districts can “restrict the outgoing transfer students to 3% of the previous school year’s enrollment.” In [February 2024](#), 50% of voters were opposed or strongly opposed to school districts limiting the number of students who transfer out of their district.

[HB 711](#) requires parents to be responsible “for transportation to the nonresident school or an existing bus stop location in the nonresident district,” with a few exceptions. In [February 2024](#), 83% of voters supported transferring students or their guardians being responsible for transportation to and from nonresident districts.

[HB 711](#) specifies that students who qualify for free and reduced-price meals can be reimbursed quarterly for transportation costs or transportation services can be offered by the non-resident district if it borders the student’s resident district. Students who have transportation as a related service of an independent education plan (IEP) may also be offered transportation services by neighboring districts. In [February 2024](#), 49% percent of voters supported or strongly supported the State of Missouri reimbursing “the receiving school district for the transportation costs of nonresident students who qualify for free or reduced-price school lunch or special education services;” 34% were opposed or strongly opposed.

For more SLU/YouGov Poll findings, see the [Open Enrollment Issue Summary](#).



<sup>6</sup> For more information, see the Saint Louis University PRiME Center’s brief, “[Open Enrollment in Missouri: Current Policies and Proposals.](#)”

## Charter Schools

The Missouri Legislature is considering legislation on charter schools, an example of which is [SB 177](#).

[Forty-five states and the District of Columbia have approved legislation allowing charter schools to operate in some capacity. Missouri passed its charter school law in 1998. More than 24,000 students were enrolled in charter schools in Missouri in FY24.](#)

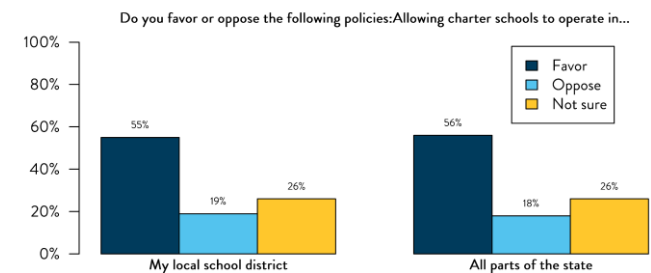
### Key Legislative Points and SLU/YouGov Poll Findings

[SB 177](#) proposes the State Board of Education be required to issue a “certificate of need” before any new charter schools can open. The certificate of need application will be submitted by the governing board of the school district or the governing body of the city or county in which the proposed charter school would be located. The supporting documentation must affirm that there is: (1) consumer demand for alternative educational options; (2) the school district’s attendance area contains sufficient economies of scale;<sup>7</sup> and (3) the proposed charter school is likely to alleviate economic and racial inequities, improve students’ academic achievement and test scores, reduce student-teacher ratios, result in a more efficient education service delivery system, limit the number of schooling disruptions, and address family priorities that are not strictly educational in nature.

[The February 2025 SLU/YouGov Poll](#) found that 56% of voters favor allowing charter schools to operate in all parts of the state, while 55% of voters favor allowing charter schools to operate in their school district. Similar results were found in [August 2023](#), indicating voters’ views of where charter schools should be allowed to operate remain largely unchanged.

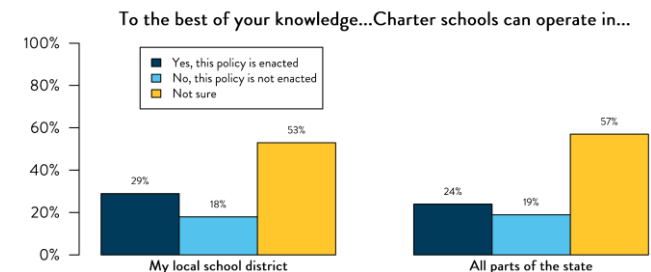
[Charter schools are independent public schools authorized to operate in Kansas City, St. Louis City, and Boone County, with some exceptions.](#) However, in February 2025, only 23% of voters correctly described charter schools as public schools; 58% described them as private schools. Additionally, 53% of voters were unsure if charter schools could operate in their school district, while 57% were not sure if charter schools could operate in all parts of the state. These results suggest voters lack knowledge of what charter schools are and where they are allowed to operate in the state.

For more SLU/YouGov Poll findings, see the [Charter Schools Issue Summary](#).



Feb. 18 to Mar. 2, 2025; 900 Likely Missouri Voters; MoE ±3.64%

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<sup>7</sup> “Economies of scale” shall mean the capacity to reduce costs and increase efficiency as student enrollment numbers change.”

## Freedom of Speech in Public Schools and Libraries

The Missouri Legislature is currently considering legislation to promote students’ education about the importance of media literacy and freedom of speech, such as [HB 116](#), and legislation on banning materials in public schools and libraries, such as [SB 276](#).

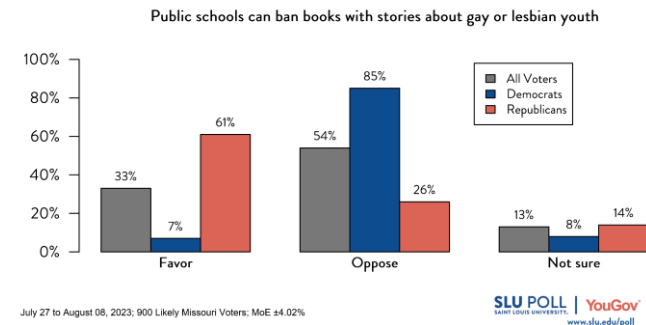
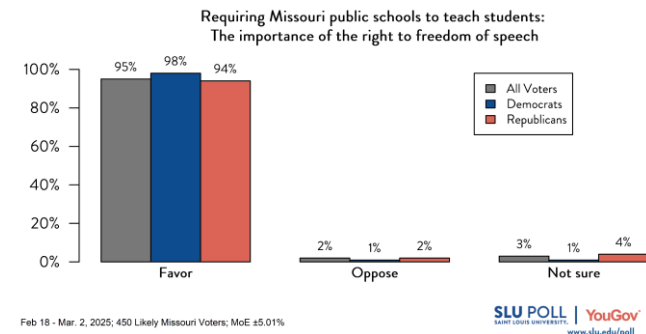
[Missouri’s 160 local public libraries previously adopted policies on the age-appropriateness of literature in 2023.](#)

### Key Legislative Points and SLU/YouGov Poll Findings

The “Media Literacy and Critical Thinking Act” ([HB 116](#)) would create a pilot program for the 2026 – 27 and 2027 - 28 school years to increase students’ media literacy. Part of the program would provide students with information about the importance of freedom of speech and how to identify online misinformation. Supporting this provision, the [February 2025 SLU/YouGov Poll](#) found 95% of voters favored requiring Missouri public schools to teach students the importance of freedom of speech, and 86% favored requiring schools to teach students how to identify online misinformation.

[SB 276](#) proposes public schools and libraries be required to create a “digital library catalog” and exclude any resource or material that is “explicit sexual material” or “pornographic for minors” as defined in current law.<sup>8</sup> The legislation requires all public schools and libraries to equip every computer or digital library catalog with software that restricts minors’ access to such materials by January 1, 2026.

The [August 2023 SLU/YouGov Poll](#) found 54% of voters opposed banning books with stories about gay or lesbian youth in public schools; 33% favored it. When asked whether public schools should be allowed to ban books with stories about transgendered youth, results from [August 2023](#) indicated 49% of voters opposed; 38% favored.



<sup>8</sup> “Explicit sexual material” is defined as any visual depiction of acts of sex and genitalia, encompassing photos, videos, or pictures, and applies to both public and private schools, with exceptions for certain artistic, anthropological, or science-related materials. Any material is considered “pornographic for minors” if the following apply: (a) the average person, applying contemporary community standards, would find that the material or performance, taken as a whole, has a tendency to cater or appeal to a prurient interest of minors; and (b) the material or performance depicts or describes nudity, sexual conduct, sexual excitement, or sadomasochistic abuse in a way which is patently offensive to the average person applying contemporary adult community standards with respect to what is suitable for minors; and (c) the material or performance, taken as a whole, lacks serious literary, artistic, political, or scientific value for minors.

## School Safety

The Missouri Legislature is currently considering legislation on school safety, examples of which include [HB 416](#) and [HB 408](#). Launched in 2023, the [School Safety Grant Program](#) provided \$70 million to school districts for physical security updates and technology, aiming to improve school safety.

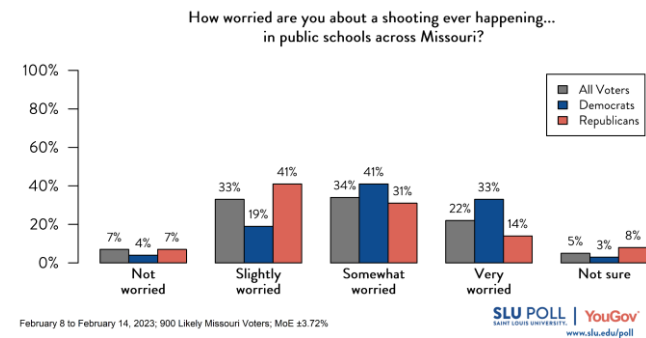
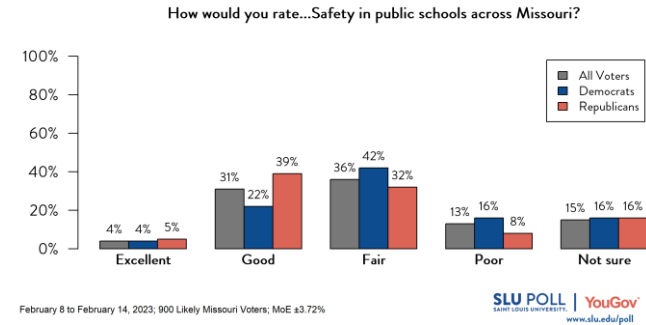
### Key Legislative Points and SLU/YouGov Poll Findings

In [February 2023](#), the SLU/YouGov Poll asked voters to rate the condition of safety at public schools in Missouri; 35% of voters felt it was excellent or good while 49% felt it was fair or poor.

The [February 2023 SLU/YouGov Poll](#) also found that 56% of voters were somewhat or very worried about a shooting happening at Missouri public schools. If [HB 416](#) were adopted, districts would be required to adopt a comprehensive emergency operations plan and cardiac emergency response plan. The State Board of Education would also modify the Missouri School Improvement Program school safety criteria to require all schools to equip interior doors with anti-intruder door locks and exterior doors with bullet-resistant window film and establish the “Active Shooter and Intruder Response Training for Schools Program.”

[HB 408](#) requires districts to report school safety incidents to the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, antibullying requirements, establishes the “Missouri Educators and Parental Empowerment Rights Act,” and requires districts adopt zero-tolerance discipline.

For more SLU/YouGov findings, see the [Guns and Public Safety Issue Summary](#).



The February 2025 SLU/YouGov Poll was funded by the PRiME Center in SLU's School of Education.

### **About YouGov**

Saint Louis University has partnered with YouGov to conduct its annual survey of Missouri voters. YouGov conducts surveys for multiple academic institutions and is the primary, trusted survey firm for media organizations, including CBS News and The Economist. An independent Pew Research Center study of online survey firms in 2016 further concluded that YouGov “consistently outperforms competitors.”

### **About Saint Louis University**

Founded in 1818, Saint Louis University is one of the nation's oldest and most prestigious Catholic institutions. Rooted in Jesuit values and its pioneering history as the first university west of the Mississippi River, SLU offers more than 15,200 students a rigorous, transformative education of the whole person. At the core of the University's diverse community of scholars is SLU's service-focused mission, which challenges and prepares students to make the world a better, more just place.