



It Is Time To Increase Public School Transparency

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In the past three years, the Missouri State Auditor has chastised public school districts for [irresponsible spending](#) , [excessive pay for administrators](#) , [awarding a no-bid contract to a school board member](#) , [failing to collect on a real estate deal](#) , and awarding a [hefty car allowance to a district superintendent](#) .

Given that [state](#) and [local property taxpayers](#) spend billions on Missouri's public education system every year, taking a closer look at how school districts spend money is certainly warranted.

One way to do this could be to set up a transparency site like the [Missouri Accountability Portal](#) (MAP). MAP is a site where anyone can look at (or download) recent data for state tax credit issuances, state employee pay, and state spending. The general public can use it to learn how state money is being spent, reporters can use the data to find material for an article, and [policy analysts can even use it to examine the amount of tax credits issued under a certain program over time](#) . In fact, [one school board member is trying to set up a school district transparency site that would follow this model](#) .

Posting detailed school district expenditure data, even if only for Missouri's largest districts, could help ensure that the general public has better information to monitor how public education dollars are spent. This provides more detailed information about a district's

spending than the school-level and district-level data that the [Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education](#) posts.

In 2011, the state auditor [suggested that the Kansas City Metropolitan School District reconsider its \\$800 per month car allowance for its superintendent](#) . But the Kansas City district is not alone.

[In my study of Missouri school superintendent compensation](#) , I found that 26.1 percent of districts surveyed provided superintendents with a car allowance, a car, or an annuity. Indeed, 17 school superintendents in Missouri received a car allowance of more than \$500 per month, with a few school districts providing *more* than \$800 each month to superintendents for their vehicles. Years later, there are likely other school districts paying \$800 or more for superintendent car allowances.

With a transparency portal, reporters or the general public could find information like that easily, and before an audit is warranted. Transparency might discourage board members and administrators from awarding outsize benefits or spending frivolously.

With better technology, making it easier every day to share information online, school district transparency portals are something to consider.

About the Author



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Links

[1] <https://showmeinstitute.org/blog/transparency/it-time-increase-public-school-transparency>

[2] <http://www.auditor.mo.gov/press/2009-72.htm>

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[4] <http://www.auditor.mo.gov/press/2009-76.htm>

[5] <http://www.auditor.mo.gov/AuditReports/CitzSummary.aspx?id=36>

[6] <http://www.auditor.mo.gov/press/2011-82.htm>

[7] <http://oa.mo.gov/bp/budgetfacts2012/FY12TotalsbyDept.pdf>

[8] <http://mc.ds.dese.mo.gov/quickfacts/Pages/District-and-School-Information.aspx?RootFolder=%2Fquickfacts%2FSchool%20Finance%20Data%20and%20Reports%2FCurrent%20Expenditures%20Per%20ADA&FolderCTID=0x012000B3EF86959C3A824680BF44E0680ED1F4&View={0E813976->

3BD6-4D9B-9112-5D0C54B515E8}

[9] <http://mapyourtaxes.mo.gov/MAP/Portal/Default.aspx>

[10] <https://showmeinstitute.org/2010/07/low-income-housing-tax-credit.html>

[11] <https://showmeinstitute.org/author/patrick-tuohey>

[12] <http://www.showmeinstitute.org/publications/policy-study/education/55-actual-pay.html>

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