

## The Fragility of the Missouri Teaching Workforce: How Temporary Fixes are Becoming Permanent Solutions in Missouri Classrooms

### Executive Summary

The first two reports in this series described the “hollow core” of exiting mid-career teachers and a growing “retirement cliff” of veterans. This third report answers the critical question: How are schools keeping classrooms staffed amidst this workforce fragility? The answer lies in a fundamental shift in the credentials of Missouri’s educators. While the total number of classroom teachers has remained relatively stable over the past decade, the professional qualifications of those teachers have changed dramatically.



- **The Core Finding:** In 2015, nearly 97 percent of Missouri classrooms were led by a teacher holding a full certification (Lifetime or Professional). By 2024, that number dropped to 81.4 percent.
- **The “Substitute” Surge:** The number of classrooms by educators on a substitute certification has increased ten-fold, rising from 157 in 2015 to 1,622 in 2024.
- **The “Probationary” Shift:** The state is churning through new teachers. The number of teachers on an Initial Professional Certificate has exploded from ~1,500 to ~7,700, a 387 percent increase.

## 1. Introduction: Certification Changes and Missouri’s Temporary Educator

The previous reports of the Missouri Classroom Teacher Experience Series identified an emerging “hourglass” distribution in the workforce: a growing number of new and novice teachers, a hollowing out of mid-career professionals, and a growing reliance on late-career veterans. However, experience is only one metric of workforce health. Equally important is the professional preparation of the individuals serving as the teacher of record. As districts face intensifying staffing pressures, the definition of who is qualified to lead a Missouri classroom has evolved through both policy changes aimed at lowering barriers to entry and through emergency staffing measures.

### 1.1 The certification landscape

To understand the data in this report, it is necessary to distinguish between the four primary categories of educators currently in Missouri’s classrooms:

- **Career (Professional and Lifetime) Certificate:** The “gold standard” of the profession, those educators who have completed a preparation program, passed all required assessments, completed their initial professional requirements, and demonstrated effective teaching practices. These individuals are the anchors of instructional quality.
- **Initial Professional Certificate (IPC):** These new and novice teachers have completed their preparation (traditional and alternative), but they are in their first four years of teaching. These individuals require mentorship and induction support to advance to their Career certificate.
- **Provisional & Temporary Authorization (TAC):** These individuals are teachers of record while simultaneously completing the coursework or assessments required for full certification.
- **Substitute Certificate:** The “emergency measure, historically reserved for short-term coverage. This has become an increasingly popular option to fill full-time vacancies.

### 1.2 The policy context

Missouri has actively adjusted policy to address these shortages, but they have pulled the workforce in two directions:

- **Lowering Barriers:** To combat immediate vacancies, the state updated substitute requirements. While previously requiring a high school diploma plus 60 college credit hours, the state now allows individuals to obtain a substitute certificate by completing a 20-hour online training program. This change was intended to rapidly expand the pool of available bodies to cover classrooms during the COVID-19 pandemic, but it has evolved into a solution to fill persistent vacancies.
- **Recruiting New and Retaining the Core:** Missouri has invested heavily in recruiting and retaining educators. The state’s Baseline Salary Grant program helps districts access funds to meet the new minimum starting salary of \$40,000 (increasing from \$25,000), targeting recruitment and retention of early-career educators. Additionally, the reinvestment in the Career Ladder program aims to retain experienced educators by providing financial incentives for extra duties and leadership roles.

### 1.3 Why certification matters

Lowering barriers to entry while simultaneously making the position (relatively) more lucrative creates a complex labor market. While the total headcount of *classroom* teachers in Missouri has remained relatively stable (roughly 53,000), headcount alone is a weak measure for instructional capacity. A classroom led by a 12-year veteran holding a Career Certificate likely offers a fundamentally different educational experience than one led by a long-term substitute with 20-hours of training. This is likely true for a newly recruited, fully trained traditionally or alternatively certified educator compared to a first-time substitute or provisionally certified educator.

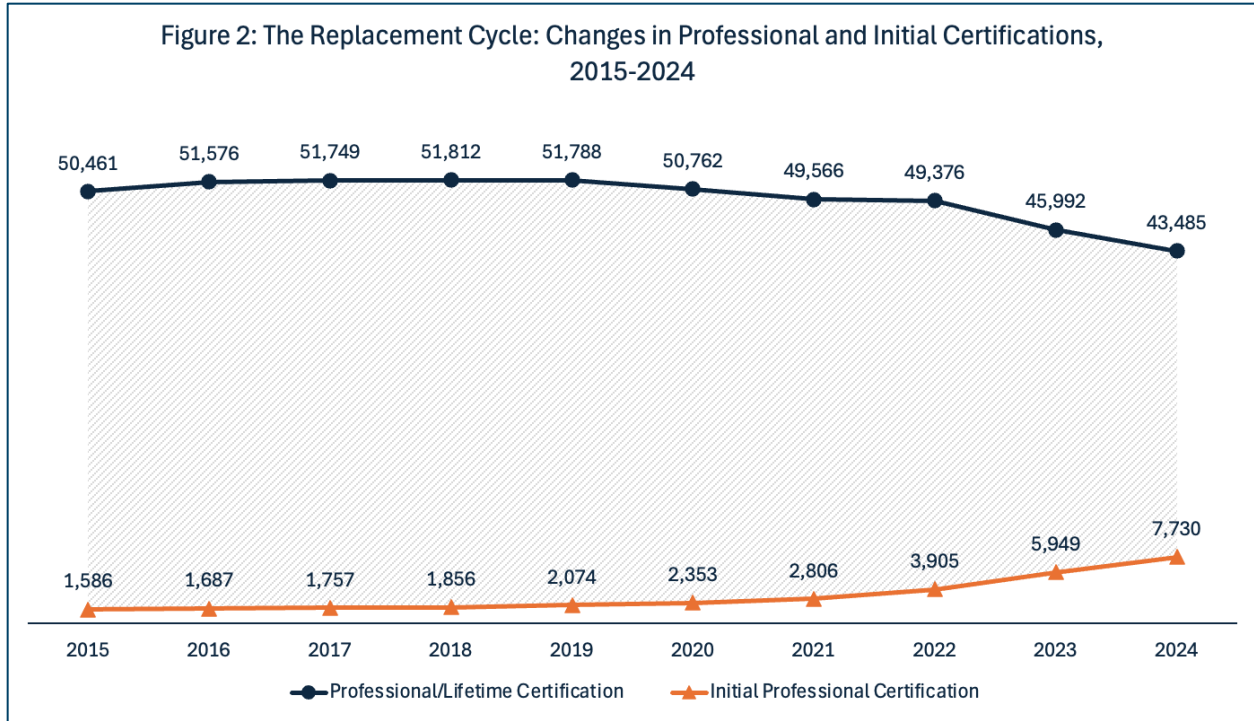
This report describes how these policy changes are coming to fruition in Missouri’s classrooms. It provides a more nuanced look at the increase in new and novice educators based on the jump in Initial Professional Certifications, the loss of mid-career teachers based on the decline in Professional Certifications, and whether the relaxed requirements for substitutes becoming a permanent structural feature of Missouri’s schools. By examining the shift from Career Certifications to Initial, Provisional/Temporary, and Substitute certifications, we can see the true “cost” of the teacher shortage: a quiet but rapid de-professionalization of the educator workforce.

## 2. The “Professional” Exodus: Evidence of a Leaky Bucket

The most critical indicator of workforce health is the Standard (Professional and Lifetime) Certificate. This credential signifies a teacher who has completed their induction period, passed evaluations, and committed to the profession.

Missouri has lost nearly 7,000 fully certified teachers since 2015

- **The Decline:** In 2015, 96.4 percent of Missouri’s classroom teaching force held a Professional or Lifetime certificate. By 2024, that number dropped to 81.4 percent, representing a loss of nearly 7,000 teachers.
- **The Churning Replacement:** Simultaneously, the number of teachers on an Initial Professional Certification has risen sharply from 3 percent (1,586) to 14.5 percent (7,730).



The rise in Initial Professional Certification holders shows that Missouri’s teacher recruitment pipeline of university-based and alternative certification programs is active and bringing educators into the profession. However, the simultaneous drop in Professional certificates reveals a catastrophic retention failure. Schools are churning through thousands of new teachers who leave before earning their Career certification, forcing districts into a state of constant restart.

### 3. The “Sub” Standard: Patching Recruitment Holes

While the increase in initial certifications signals churn, the data on temporary credentials signals a true shortage. When districts cannot recruit a certified teacher, they turn to emergency measures.

**Table 1: The Rise in Temporary Certifications, 2015-2024**

	Years									
	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024
<b>Substitute</b>	157	154	258	271	318	353	379	602	1,081	1,622
<b>TAC</b>	74	72	80	79	87	117	118	148	190	279
<b>Provisional</b>	57	67	80	86	85	107	119	133	194	282

Full-time substitute-led classrooms have increased 10-fold over the last decade

- **The Surge:** In 2015, only 157 classroom teachers were classified as having a substitute certification. In 2024 that number exploded to 1,622. Substitute teachers are an essential part of day-to-day operations in schools, but these individuals are filling full-time vacancies for the academic year.
- **Provisional Growth:** Teachers on Provisional or Temporary Authorization Certifications have similarly doubled since 2020 (224 to 561). This is likely multi-faceted, as many of these individuals are likely working toward a full certification. However, this does mean many classrooms are staffed by an educator learning on the job.

Together, nearly 2,200 classrooms — roughly one in every school building in the state — is now led by an educator who does not yet hold a full certification. This “emergency” workforce has grown by 450 percent over the last decade.

#### 4. Discussion and Recommendations

The shift from Professional to Initial and Substitute certifications represents a fundamental change in the “product” Missouri’s public schools offer students.

- **Instructional Consistency:** A workforce dominated by new and novice teachers is a workforce in flux. High turnover disrupts school culture, breaks student-teacher relationships, and hinders long-term initiative success.
- **The Mentorship Void:** In 2015, there were roughly 30 standard certificate holders for every 1 initial certificate holder. In 2024, that ratio shrunk to 5-to-1. New teachers need mentorship to grow and thrive, and experienced teachers need capacity to provide mentorship. As the pool of experienced mentors shrinks while the number of rookies explodes, this imbalance likely accelerates churn among both new and experienced teachers, creating a vicious cycle of “lose-and-replace.”
- **The Hidden Inequity:** While this report looks at statewide totals, the previous two reports suggest churn is likely highly concentrated in “Transition grades” (3-6), hard-to-staff subjects, and rural and urban geographies. Students in these critical years and communities in these parts of Missouri are most likely to be taught by a rotating cast of new and temporary educators that are likely unprepared to implement instructional practices essential to student learning with fidelity.

The veteran-to-novice ratio has fallen from 30:1 down to just 5:1

Missouri cannot simply “recruit” its way out of this quality dip. The state must find ways to stabilize the ~7,700 teachers working on their Initial Professional Certification and professionalize the 2,100+ teachers in the Sub/Provisional band.

- **Recommendation 1: “Induction to Tenure” Grants**

- **The Issue:** The state is losing thousands of teachers during their “initial” years before they reach “career” status.
  - **Potential Fix:** Create targeted state grants that reward districts for successfully “graduating” Initial Certification teachers to Professional Certification.
  - **Exemplar:** [Iowa’s Teacher Leadership Compensation System](#) allocates over \$150 million annually to districts specifically to build career ladders. These funds support veteran teachers to serve as mentors and instructional coaches for new teachers, providing supports necessary to bridge the gap between initial and career status.
- **Recommendation 2: Support for Mentorship**
    - **The Issue:** The ratio of educators holding a professional certification to those on an Initial Professional Certification has collapsed from 30:1 to 5:1 over the past decade.
    - **Potential Fix:** Missouri should formalize master and mentor teacher designations as state-funded roles using Career Ladder and other grant funds.
    - **Exemplar:** [Tennessee’s Instructional Partnership Initiative](#) uses teacher effectiveness data to pair high-performing mentors with early-career teachers in a data-driven professional development system to create specific growth and practice goals for new educators.
- **Recommendation 3: The “Sub-to-Cert” Accelerator**
    - **The Issue:** Missouri has seen a dramatic increase in the number of educators leading classrooms on Substitute Certifications, rising from just 157 teachers of record with such certifications in 2015 to an astonishing 1,622 in 2024.
    - **Potential Fix:** Missouri should formalize a “Work-Based Learning” route to certification for long-term substitutes who qualify, like the state’s Pathways for Paraprofessionals. Formalizing a pathway supporting the completion of coursework to earn an Initial Professional Certificate for substitute certified teachers who have successfully led a classroom for an academic year with positive evaluation and student outcomes.
    - **Exemplar:** Missouri has already undertaken a “Pathways for Paraprofessionals” program, focused heavily on special education certification. Washington and several other states have invested heavily in similar programs and Grow Your Own initiatives, of which Missouri is one. Washington’s program offers specific scholarships and support programs to capitalize on candidates already rooted in communities and classrooms to earn teaching credentials.