Focus on the student and success will follow.

As Aligned reached an organizational milestone this year, celebrating its tenth anniversary, we accomplished many of our legislative goals and scored numerous “wins.” Yet, ironically, this also was a year when test scores revealed the devastating toll on student achievement that resulted from pandemic-related school closures. A return to normalcy revealed a harsh reality that, for many students, whether they catch up relies on the availability of time and resources. Therefore, learning environments must be flexible, innovative, high-quality, and, most importantly, student focused.

We collaborated with other early childhood advocates to design an investment blueprint for early care and education.

We expanded an innovative teacher licensing pathway to make it available to all districts.

We moved an early childhood quality improvement program from pilot to permanent status.

We supported the creation of a personalized learning tract that rewards students based on mastery rather than seat time.

Our decade-long focus on education policy that places students at the center resulted in a year where most of our priorities passed in the Kansas and Missouri state legislatures.

These achievements are a result of research, relationships, and tenacity. We analyze data through a non-partisan lens and strive to be an honest broker in policymaking. Our approach allows us to build trust and deliver value to our partners and allies. But, most importantly, even in adversity, we never give up. As we look to the next ten years, we will study the policies we have championed to measure outcomes and demonstrate the return on investment to our supporters.
With focus and intensity, we push policies that deliver value to all students.

As I reflected on 2022, the one word that came to mind was “fast.” I suppose the adage that time flies when you are having fun is to blame in 2022. We feel blessed to have such a fantastic team and board to guide our work as the business voice for education. Our focus on putting students first and partisan politics last continue to lift Aligned’s work. Many often ask us how we decide what to focus on as an organization, and the answer is pretty simple: policies that offer the most significant ROI for all students.

Yes, we get to lean on transparency, accountability, and innovation/choice for ideas too, but at the end of the day, we want to see that every student is prepared; prepared for school, work and life.

We benefit from strict adherence to promoting ideas that stem from at least one of our six core values: student-focused/equity, accountability, innovation, transparency, return on investment, and choice.

We attribute our growth to our supporters who value a commitment to systemic change that moves the needle for all students, not just a few.

We thank you all and vow to continue with the intensity and focus we have maintained for the past ten years.

Torree Pederson
President/CEO
A decade built on trust and teamwork

Early learning, K-12, and higher education have traditionally operated in siloed systems. Reforming our system requires a strategic approach that tasks business and community leaders, educators, and policymakers with improving education at every entry point.

Aligned understands that transformation takes time. Therefore, we approach our work with patience and persistence and embrace the fruits of incremental change. We share our successes and celebrate wins each year with our community. We are confident that our vision of ‘Every. Student. Prepared.’ is achievable with continued support from our community.
Early Care and Education: Quality improvements and strategic investment

In 2016, Aligned fought to remove the ban on early care and education quality improvement programs and established a voluntary pilot benchmarking program called the Quality Assurance Report (QAR). After working to pass sunset extensions and securing funding, we are thrilled the Missouri General Assembly approved a statutory change to remove the pilot designation this year. The Department of Elementary and Secondary Education has made QAR expansion a vital component of the Office of Childhood’s strategic plan.

This year we helped launch the Champion of Children coalition and are serving on the Early Childhood Investment Blueprint Steering Committee. The goal is to advocate for a funding package to eliminate gaps in early care and education access for Missouri families over several years.

Teacher Recruitment and Retention: Alternative certifications

In 2018, Aligned worked to pass the Visiting Scholars alternative licensing pathway, allowing school districts to employ subject-matter experts in business education programs. This year, we advocated for the expansion of Visiting Scholars to enable subject-matter experts to teach in hard-to-staff schools and hard-to-fill subject areas.

Personalized Learning: Competency-based credits

This year we worked to help pass language that allows districts and charter schools to issue course credits based on mastery rather than seat time. The pandemic taught us that a one-size-fits-all approach is insufficient in traditional education settings. Instead, a competency-based education offers an opportunity to serve students individually and complement diverse learning styles.

Real-World Learning: Removing barriers and building bridges

Improving education often requires the removal of barriers. This year we supported legislation allowing districts to utilize innovative options by removing the requirement for school bus-based student transportation. Ride-sharing options will make it easier for students to access real-world learning opportunities off-campus.

We also championed the passage of language to require schools to provide liability coverage for business-based internship programs. By clarifying the assignment of liability, more businesses will be willing to host students responsibly.
How we see ourselves: 
*The Honest Broker*

At the end of 2022, we asked our board and staff to describe our work in three words. We are proud that our reflection represents our intention.

How others see us

“It is rare in both the world of statewide advocacy and policy, and often, in public education, to find an organization that remains unabashedly pro-student when complex situations arise. Working and learning alongside the Aligned team the last two years has been a masterclass in balancing a laser-focus on the critical needs in public education and the grace it takes to move competing interests toward collaboration. There is never a more critical time than to have an organization like Aligned leading the charge in Jefferson City to ensure we’re preparing our most valuable resource, our students, for college, career and lifelong success.”

— Samara Crawford Herrera, MSW
Executive Director
Kansas City Action Fund

“Aligned is a productive partner in the search for better education outcomes. Unbiased and pragmatic they are helpful in testimony before the education committee; I don’t hesitate to ask their opinion on different initiatives knowing their response will be reasoned and practical. Education is a difficult topic and Aligned has made it easier to support good reforms.”

— Cindy O’Laughlin
Missouri State Senator
R-Shelbina

“Aligned’s policy expertise and network of business leaders are critical to addressing Missouri’s workforce challenges. We are fortunate to have their partnership and leadership in strengthening Missouri’s early childhood system to meet the needs of businesses, families, and kids.”

— Brian Schmidt
Executive Director
Kids Win Missouri

“I know Aligned to be a network of professionals that care deeply about education. More importantly, they’re subject matter experts that care about the futures of children impacted by the quality of their education. I walk away from our conversations grateful for their experience, work, and creativity.”

— Doug Richey
Missouri State Representative
R-Excelsior Springs
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Aligned team and board members attending annual EarlystART luncheon
Every. Student. Prepared.

We are a non-profit, non-partisan coalition of businesses that believe we can, and should, achieve more for our students by engaging in policy, advocacy, and outreach to advance education reform.

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