MISSOURI

Where are the charter school deserts in Missouri?

We detail the distribution of schools in Missouri in order to provide educators and policymakers with information about communities that provide no access to charter schools. Many families lack the financial means to move out of neighborhoods when dissatisfied with their schooling options, so the location of schools is key to ensuring access and equity for all students. Policymakers and parents can use this information to better understand the supply of schooling options in their states and cities—and to press for changes that would improve that supply. Charter operators and authorizers may also find this analysis helpful as they consider where to establish new schools.

What is a charter school desert?

The following maps display where elementary charter schools are located in Missouri. A **charter school desert** is three or more contiguous census tracts that have poverty rates greater than 20 percent but that have no charter schools.
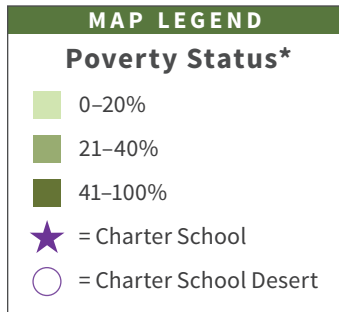
Results

Missouri has 1,357 public elementary schools, of which forty-eight are charter schools. The state as a whole has a 14.0 percent poverty rate. Missouri has sixteen charter school deserts, representing 30 percent of mid- to high-poverty census tracts,[1] located in the southern and southeast portions of the state, the southern, eastern, and northern parts of the Kansas City metro area, and the central and northwestern parts of the St. Louis metro area.

Missouri Charter School Deserts by the Numbers

% of the state population living in poverty...**14.0%**

# of public elementary schools **1,357**

# of charter schools **48**

# of census tracts **1,393**

# of charter school deserts...**16**

Approximate proportion of mid- to high-poverty census tracts
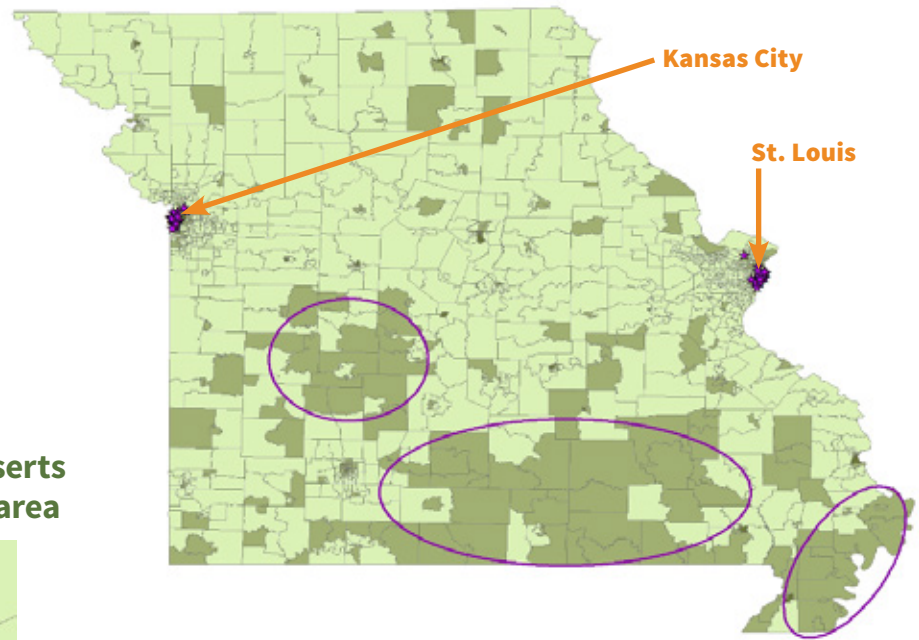that charter school deserts comprise **30%**

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1. Meaning those census tracts in which more than 20 percent of the population lives at or below the poverty line.

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Map 1 shows the census tracts and charter schools in Missouri. Darker green highlights indicate areas in which more than 20 percent of the population lives in poverty. The statewide map depicts three charter school deserts in rural areas in the southern part of the state;[2] the charter school deserts in the Kansas City and St. Louis metro areas appear in Maps 2 and 3. There are five charter school deserts in the Kansas City metro area. There are eight charter school deserts in the St. Louis metro area (seen on the next page).
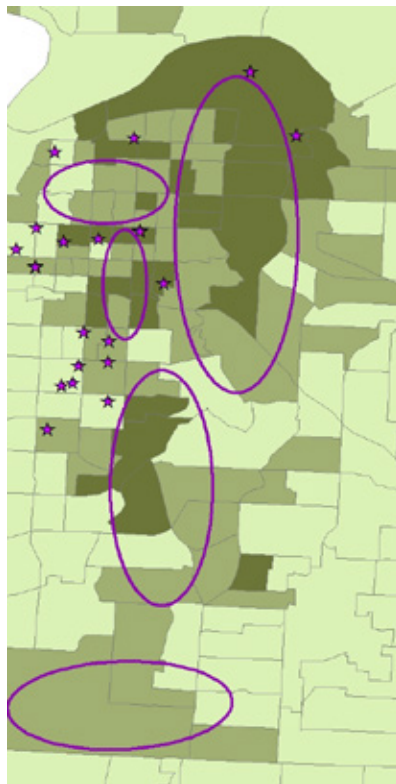
MAP LEGEND
Poverty Status*

- 0–20%
- 21–40%
- 41–100%
- ★ = Charter School
- ◯ = Charter School Desert

Percentage of the population within each tract that lives at or below the poverty line.

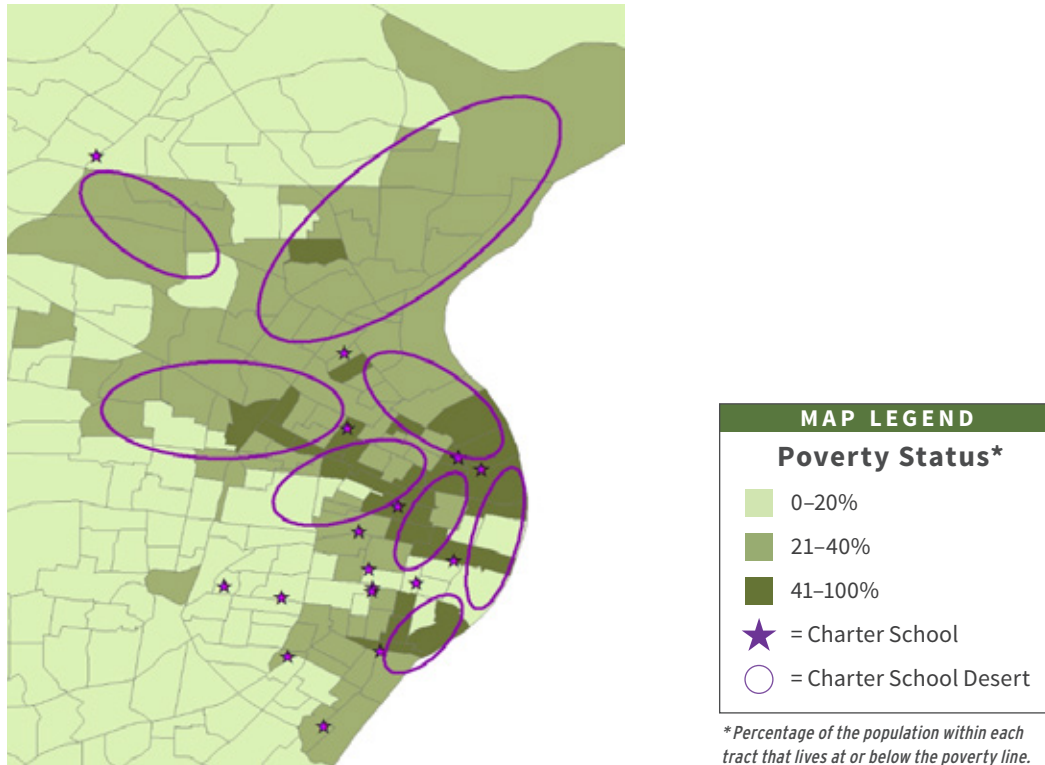## Map 1: Overview of charter school deserts in Missouri

Kansas City

St. Louis

Map 2: Charter school deserts in the Kansas City metro area

2. Due to the necessarily diminished scale on the state map, all charter school deserts do not appear on it, though they are included on the city metro maps.

Map 3: Charter school deserts in the St. Louis metro area

MAP LEGEND

Poverty Status*

- 0–20%
- 21–40%
- 41–100%
- ★ = Charter School
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Percentage of the population within each tract that lives at or below the poverty line.

Five Things to Keep in Mind

Readers should note several points. First, we have not tried to describe, analyze, or infer how state policies may impact the distribution of charter schools in Missouri—simply to show which high-poverty areas lack such schools. Second, although we focus on school locations, location alone is insufficient to ensure that families have viable access to schools. Nearby schools may not be available to families if they're filled to capacity, if policies prohibit transfer, or if transportation is unavailable. Third, some rural areas may lack charter schools simply because the population is too thin to support them. Fourth, our report does not address school quality, but the companion website allows users to view schools' math and English language arts proficiency data. Finally, visually identifying charter school deserts is inevitably vulnerable to human error, as they may be identified differently based on how contiguous census tracts are positioned and how "desert circles" are drawn.

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