

Missouri Economy Indicators

Post-High School Activities

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Choosing what to do after high school is a big decision for many students. Their options include pursuing post-secondary education at a two- or four-year institution, entering the workforce or joining the military. Personal needs and aspirations, plus outside forces such as job market strength, can affect the choices they make. Students' choices—whether they enter the labor market or pursue further education—also influence the local labor supply. To track the choices that students make, the Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE) collects data about recent high school graduates' choices and job outcomes.

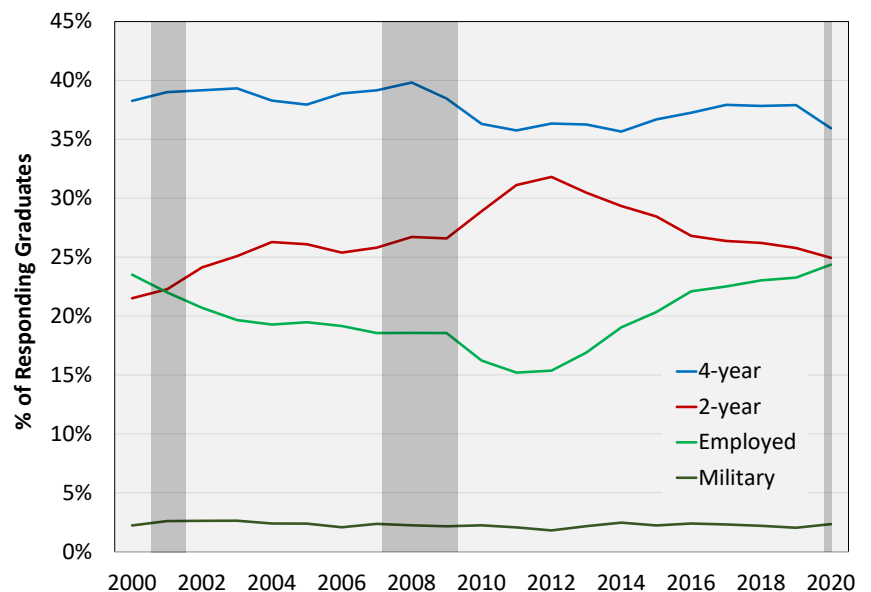
Tracking Graduates

In 2020, more than 61,000 students graduated from Missouri public schools. At the beginning of each calendar year, DESE gathers data about the previous year's graduates to understand whether young people decided to pursue post-secondary education or enter the workforce.

Among 2020 graduates, 36% chose to attend a four-year institution. Roughly 25% chose to enter the workforce, and another 25% opted to continue their education at a two-year institution. Just over 2% of the state's 2020 graduates enlisted in the military.

Post-Graduation Activities for Missouri High School Graduates

2000-2020



Source: MU Extension graphic using Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education data.

The Job Market's Relative Strength Can Influence Post-Graduation Plans

Community colleges and employment have a complementary relationship, and community college enrollment tends to be countercyclical. For instance, in the years following the Great Recession, the share of Missouri graduates choosing to continue their education at community colleges grew to more than 30%. By contrast, the share of students directly entering the workforce fell to 15%.

Data on [youth employment](#) show that some students who enter the workforce after high school graduation continue working in industries, such as food service and accommodation, where they held part-time jobs as high school students. Other graduates enter industries, such as health care, manufacturing or construction,

that offer stronger career pathways. As the economy recovered in the past decade, the share of students choosing between employment and community college became more evenly split.

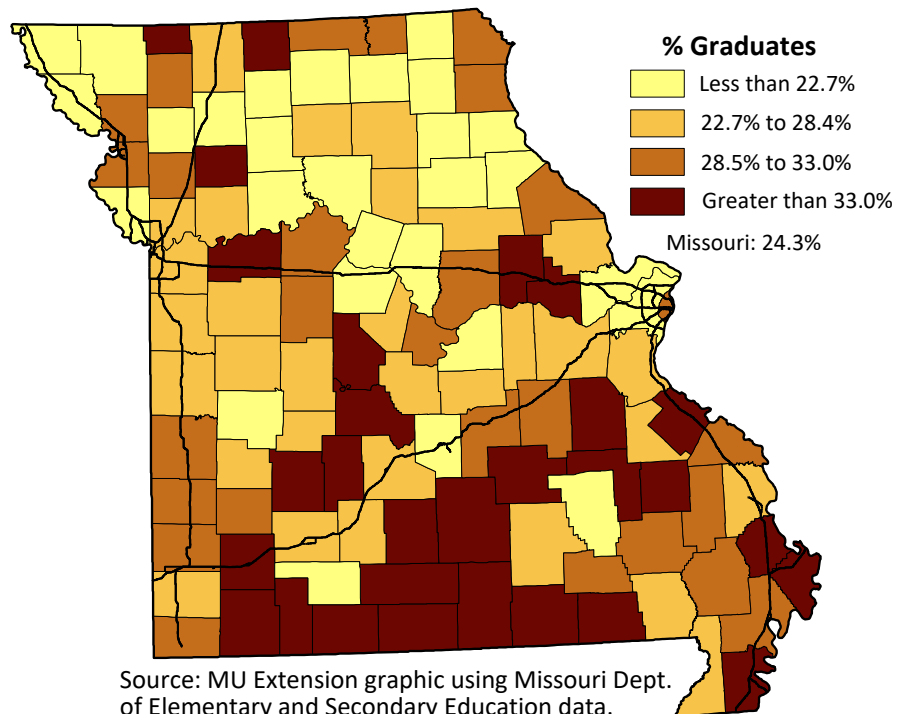
A relatively consistent share of students have chosen to pursue four-year degrees. During the past two decades, between 35% and 40% of Missouri high school graduates pursued a four-year degree after high school graduation. This trend poses challenges for four-year institutions because the millennial generation is now fully part of the workforce, and Generation Z has fewer people. With fewer traditional 18- to 22-year-old students, post-secondary institutions must reach more nontraditional students to maintain their enrollment.

Post-Graduation Choices Vary by Region

In 2020, students graduating from schools in southern Missouri were more likely to directly enter the workforce than graduates in other parts of the state. Counties with the greatest share of graduates pursuing employment directly after graduation included Washington, Wright, Madison and Taney counties.

Graduates in northern Missouri as well as those from relatively suburban counties (e.g., Platte, Christian, St. Charles) were more likely to pursue some form of post-secondary education. Counties with relatively high educational attainment levels—examples include Boone, St. Charles, Platte and St. Louis counties—also had a relatively higher share of high school graduates who elected to attend four-year institutions.

2020 High School Graduates Entering the Workforce



Additional Resources

- **Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education:** The department's Missouri Comprehensive Data System portal includes a wide array of data and information about Missouri's public schools: dese.mo.gov/school-data.
- A [previous issue](#) of the **Missouri Economy Indicators** covered youth employment. It drew upon data from the *Quarterly Workforce Indicators (QWI)* — a data source produced through a partnership between the U.S. Census Bureau and the Missouri Economic Research and Information Center. The data show demographic trends in different industries. Access the data through the QWI Explorer: qwiexplorer.ces.census.gov/static/explore.html.

All Missouri Economy Indicators briefs in this series are available at tinyurl.com/ExceedEconomyIndicators

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