



# Strategic Priority: Youth Connections

The St. Louis Community Foundation's 2024–2028 Strategic Plan aligns philanthropic resources to two areas that have been identified as critical to the long-term success of our region: Economic Mobility and Youth Connections. These investments will create opportunities for youth to excel academically and professionally.

## UNDERSTANDING THE NEED

The Foundation has served the Greater St. Louis Metropolitan region since 1915. We strive to align philanthropic dollars and local funders in an effort to streamline investments and amplify philanthropy's positive impact on our community.



**Early Childhood Education (ECE):** Quality early childhood programming is essential to the healthy growth and development of children, as well as to working families and their employers. Studies<sup>1</sup> show that access to quality ECE programs lessen the gaps between children from low- and high-income families at kindergarten entry, which levels the playing field for academic achievement. In the St. Louis region, access to quality early childhood programs is a major challenge, particularly for children from low-income households. Quality ECE can be defined<sup>2</sup> as an agency that has met requirements beyond licensing. Based on this standard, only 19%<sup>2</sup> of children who are eligible for childcare subsidies have access to quality ECE programs in their neighborhoods. In addition, state subsidies cover only a small portion of the cost of childcare, leaving childcare out of reach for families that qualify for subsidies.



**Educational Innovation:** Over 50%<sup>3</sup> of the lowest-performing schools in Missouri are in the our region. To improve academic and social/emotional outcomes for youth, we must address the quality of our schools. Studies have shown that "school leadership is second only to classroom instruction among all school-related factors that contribute to what students learn" and that investing in school leaders is likely the most efficient way<sup>4</sup> to affect student achievement in school settings. However, high-poverty school districts are more likely<sup>4</sup> to have novice principals.



**Scholarship Programs:** Nationally, only 16%<sup>5</sup> of students from low-income families earn a college degree. The Federal PELL Grant covers less than 20%<sup>6</sup> of the average cost for low-income households to attend a public four-year institution in Missouri. Access to higher education offers a pathway to building wealth, however, degree attainment in Missouri is below the national average. Impactful scholarship programs that are need-based, renewable for up to four years of undergraduate education, and that broadly define eligibility criteria will serve a wider range of students for generations to come.

<sup>1</sup>The First Five Years Fund | <sup>2</sup>The First Steps to Equity Report, IFF, 2019 | <sup>3</sup>St. Louis Schools Face One of the Steepest Post-Pandemic Climbs Anywhere, The74 Article, 2023 | <sup>4</sup>How Principals Affect Students and Schools, Wallace Foundation, 2021 | <sup>5</sup>Degrees with Less Debt, St. Louis Graduates, 2020 | <sup>6</sup>State of Student Aid and Higher Education in Missouri, Trellis Research, 2023

## STRATEGIC VISION OF THE COMMUNITY FOUNDATION

### Early Childhood Development and Education

The Foundation is centering high-quality, accessible early childhood education (ECE) as a strategic priority to invest in our region's families today and for generations to come. We are committed to driving investment toward conveners of ECE providers with the understanding that a coordinated system is a crucial first step toward quality improvement.

Specific areas of focus will include: supporting coordination efforts among key ECE conveners; investing in professional development opportunities and access to licensing for early childhood providers; and aligning dollars to advocacy work related to increasing access to quality early childhood centers for low-income families.

### Educational Innovation

The Center for Education Leadership, a program of the Foundation, will function as a hub for educational support. As a backbone organization, the Center will support a portfolio of projects that collectively aim to improve the social and emotional educational outcomes in our region's schools.

The Center aims to address regional issues by empowering school leaders through high-quality professional development; driving innovations in teaching and learning; and contributing to a shared regional knowledge base aimed at driving positive educational transformation.

### Scholarship Programs

The Foundation administers more than 80 scholarship programs that impacted 620 students with awards totaling a record-setting \$1.9M in 2023. While private scholarships from the Foundation make college education possible for hundreds of students each year, even more applications are denied because of limited scholarship funding. The Foundation's community-funded *Investing for the Future Scholarship* is open to high school seniors with financial need. By prioritizing the growth of this scholarship fund to increase the award amounts, the Foundation will make a greater, lasting impact on students' lives.

## GET INVOLVED

Individuals who are interested in supporting the Foundation's work in early childhood development and education, educational innovation, and scholarship programs can donate to the Youth Connections Fund. This general fund was established to support the Foundation's strategic efforts. Visit [stlgives.org/give-today](https://stlgives.org/give-today) or follow the QR code.



### Ready to learn more?

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