

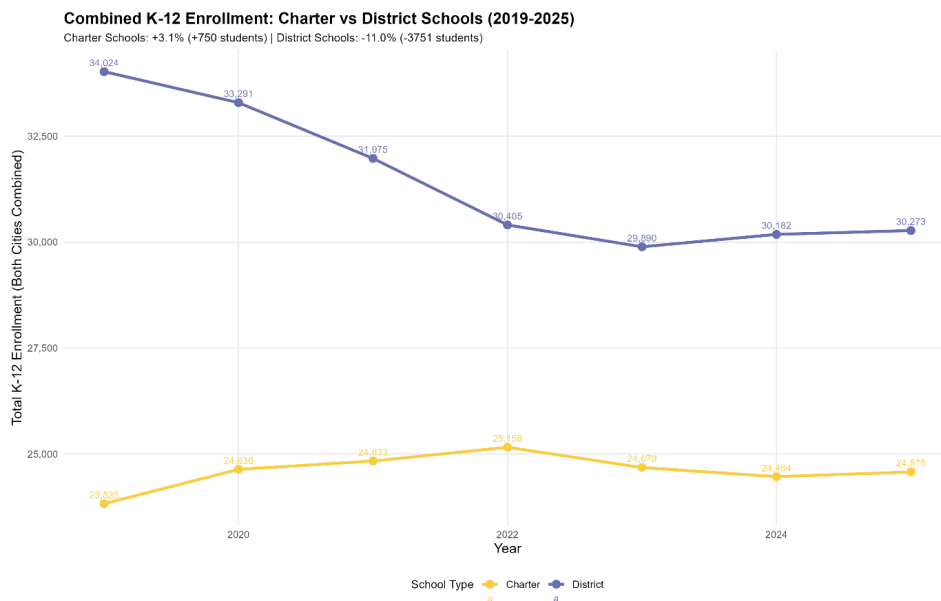
## **Enrollment Trends in Missouri Charter Schools: A 2019-2025 Analysis**

### **Executive Summary**

Missouri's charter school sector has undergone a significant transformation from 2019 to 2025, marked by contrasting patterns of growth and challenge. While charter schools achieved growth of 3.1% (+750 students), district schools experienced an 11.0% decline (-3,751 students). Most notably, charter schools demonstrated extraordinary growth in early education, with PreK-3rd grade enrollment increasing by 144.4% (+4,884 students). Individual school performances range from remarkable successes, such as City Garden Montessori's 116.3% growth, to significant challenges faced by charters like Confluence Academies' 17.3% decline.

### **Overall Enrollment Landscape 2019-2025**

The Missouri charter school sector's evolution from 2019 to 2025 reflects broader changes in urban education. The total student population across both sectors has declined from 61,410 students in 2019 to 54,848 by 2025, indicating significant demographic shifts in both cities. Missouri's charters however showed an overall growth of 3.1%, adding 750 students to their total enrollment, while district schools in the same cities declined by 11.0% (-3,751 students). Charter schools have maintained growth while district schools experienced sustained decreases. The percentage of students in each type of school now stands at 55.2% for district schools and 44.8% for charter schools. In 2019 charters represented 41% of the student population in both cities, representing a gradual but steady shift toward the charter sector. This demonstrates the increasing role of charter schools in urban education.



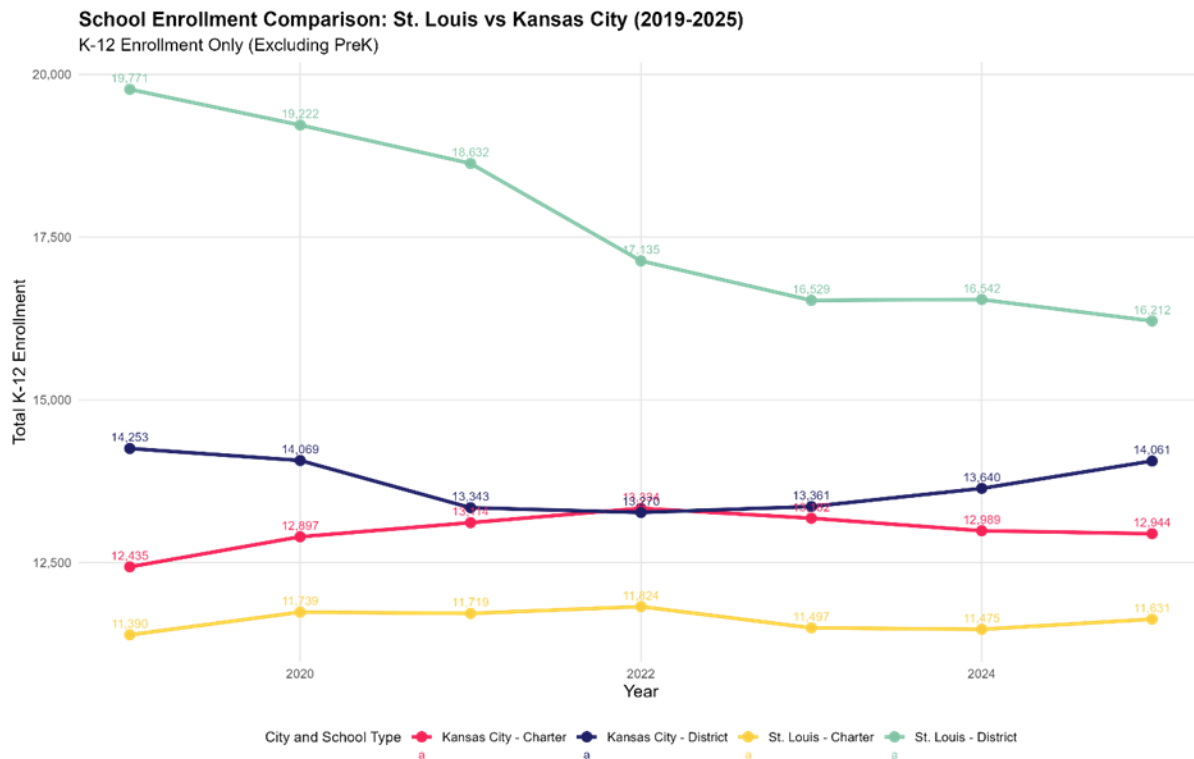
## Geographic Analysis: Tale of Two Cities

### St. Louis

St. Louis presents a stark contrast between charter and district performance. District schools have experienced a dramatic decline from approximately 20,000 students to 16,212 by 2025, while charter school enrollment grew from 11,363 to 11,631 students (+268 students, +2.4% increase). This means that in 2025 41.8% of students in St. Louis are in a charter school. The St. Louis charter sector shows strength in specialized programs and innovative models, though larger networks face notable challenges in maintaining enrollment.

### Kansas City

Kansas City charter schools serve 47.9% of students (12,944 students), while district schools enroll 52.1% (14,061 students). This balance reflects the longer history of charter schools in Kansas City. The city's charter sector shows more stable enrollment patterns overall, though individual schools still experience significant variations in their year-to-year numbers. Kansas City charter schools increased from 12,435 to 12,944 students (+509 students, +4.1% increase) over the past 6 years.



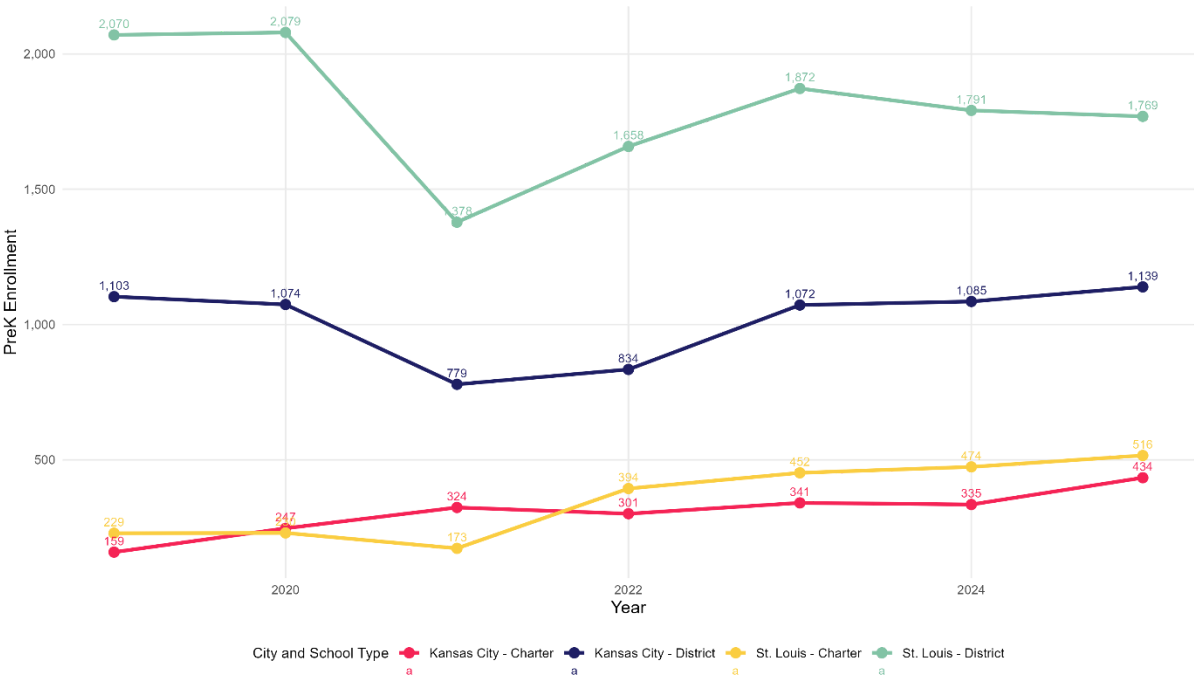
## Early Education Transformation

The transformation in early education represents the most dramatic shift in Missouri's charter landscape. PreK enrollment growth has been particularly remarkable, with St. Louis charter schools achieving 125.3% growth (+287 students) while district schools declined by 14.5% (-301 students). Kansas City's charter sector showed even more impressive PreK gains of 173.0% (+275 students), compared to district schools' 3.3% growth (+36 students). This pattern extends across the full PreK-3rd grade span, where charter schools achieved extraordinary growth of 144.4% (+4,884 students) while district schools declined by 11.4% (-1,700 students).

Looking deeper at the PreK-3rd grade trends, St. Louis charter schools grew by 139.6% (+2,536 students) while their district counterparts declined by 17.5% (-1,557 students). Kansas City charter schools expanded by 150.0% (+2,348 students) against a district decline of 2.4% (-143 students). The most significant growth occurred between 2019 and 2022, suggesting both strategic focus on early education and increasing demand.

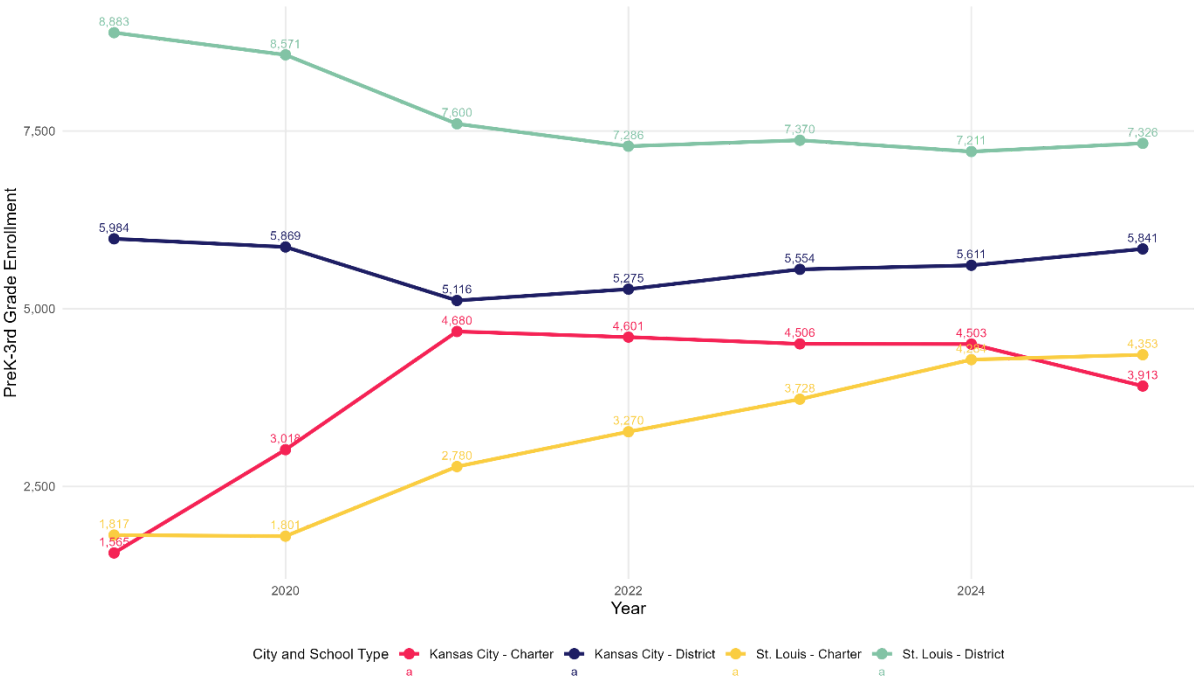
PreK Enrollment by City: Charter vs District Schools (2019-2025)

Changes 2019-2025:  
St. Louis Charter: +125.3% (+287) | St. Louis District: -14.5% (-301)  
Kansas City Charter: +173.0% (+275) | Kansas City District: +3.3% (+36)



PreK-3rd Grade Enrollment by City: Charter vs District Schools (2019-2025)

Changes 2019-2025:  
St. Louis Charter: +139.6% (+2536) | St. Louis District: -17.5% (-1557)  
Kansas City Charter: +150.0% (+2348) | Kansas City District: -2.4% (-143)



## **Individual School Performance**

The charter sector's most compelling success stories from 2019 to 2025 demonstrate the potential of innovative educational models. City Garden Montessori in St. Louis stands as the premier example, achieving 116.3% growth from 227 to 491 students over the six years. This growth occurred while there was significant drops in overall enrollment in the city, suggesting strong program differentiation and community demand. KIPP: Endeavor Academy in Kansas City demonstrated successful network expansion, growing 52.3% from 644 to 981 students, while Guadalupe Centers Schools achieved growth of 27.8%, expanding from 1,203 to 1,537 students.

However, significant challenges exist within the sector. Confluence Academies experienced a 17.3% decline, dropping from 2,881 to 2,382 students. Allen Village in Kansas City faced even steeper declines of 34.7%, falling from 574 to 375 students.

### **Short-term individual change (2024-2025)**

Recent year-over-year changes reveal ongoing sector evolution. Newer and smaller schools show remarkable growth potential, with Atlas Public Schools achieving a 36.7% increase and St. Louis Voices Academy growing by 94.1%. However, established schools face significant challenges, as evidenced by KIPP St. Louis Public Schools' 12.4% decline (-287 students) and Academie Lafayette's 11.4% decrease. These short-term fluctuations highlight the charter sector's greater sensitivity to change compared to district enrollment patterns.

## **Future Implications and Sector Development**

The analysis reveals critical priorities for future sector development. Strategic growth management must balance the charter sector's capacity for rapid expansion with the need for institutional stability. This requires developing robust support systems for struggling schools while maintaining the innovative edge that drives charter success. The remarkable achievement in early education suggests focusing on sustainable expansion in this area while building effective pathways through K-12.

Adaptation remains crucial for long-term success. Charter schools must deepen their understanding of local dynamics and strengthen community connections while preparing for demographic shifts. The contrasting experiences of St. Louis and Kansas City highlight the importance of specific strategies and the need for flexible approaches to growth and stability.

The Missouri charter sector's trajectory from 2019 to 2025 demonstrates both remarkable potential and challenges. Success in moving forward requires careful attention to balancing growth with stability, innovation with sustainability, and market

responsiveness with institutional resilience. The focus must remain on building sustainable institutions that can maintain enrollment stability while continuing to serve their communities effectively through innovation and adaptation.

**By Jose De Jesus Sotelo**

**About the Author:** Sotelo is currently a fellow at Harvard's Strategic Data Project in the School of Educational Policy. In this role, he works with the non-profit Missouri Charter Public School Association to make the use of data equitable and transparent for all stakeholders in the charter sector in Missouri. He is also a graduate of the Cognitive Psychology Program at Northwestern where he specialized in data science and statistics. In his work at Northwestern, he focused on the impact of infusing high school curricula with GIS technologies and their role in spatial problem-solving. Additionally, Jose was a fellow at ETS where he focused on equitable practices of graduate admissions and how noncognitive skills impacted decisionmaking.