MARE Focus

FEBRUARY 11, 2026 | FROM THE DESK OF MR. KEVIN SANDLIN, MARE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

ENDORSEMENTS

American Fidelity Assurance Co.

Claim Care, Inc.

Forrest T. Jones & Co.

Hamlin Energy

IMS Technology

L.J. Hart & Company

MASA MTS

MEUHP

Mike Keith Insurance

MO. Consult. For Ed.

MOCAAT

M.U.S.I.C.

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MARE PARTNERSHIPS

- **LEGAL HOTLINE: EDCOUNSEL, GUIN MUNDORF, MICKES O'TOOLE, TUETH KEENEY**
- **EDPLUS**
- **AMERICAN LEGION BOYS STATE**
- **GIRLS STATE**

MISSOURI ADMIN. JOB POSTING

Superintendent Search Program – One of the many services that MARE provides is a quality, yet affordable Superintendent Search Program. If you are retiring this year or making plans to move, we would welcome the opportunity to work with your district to find the next leader. Contact Kevin Sandlin, MARE Executive Director, at (660) 747-8050 or by email at ksandlin@moare.com for more information.

Bismarck R-V Superintendent Search – Mr. Darryl Pannier is the Search Consultant. He can be reached at (573) 803-9008 or **dwpannier@semo.edu. (02/26/2026)**

**** New Search posting soon!**

Closed Searches - Altenburg #48, Kirbyville R-VI, Maryville R-II, Chaffee R-II, Santa Fe R-X, Morgan Co. R-I, NE Randolph Co. R-IV, Pettis Co. R-V, Archie R-V, Linn Co. R-I, North Harrison R-III, Madison C-3, Prairie Home R-V, La Monte R-IV, Newburg R-II & Breckenridge R-I

Foundation Formula Modernization Task Force – The group will meet at 10:00 a.m. on Monday, February 23rd in Jefferson City. For more information on this work, please check out the website at this link: Missouri School Funding Modernization Task Force.

Small Schools Committee – Capitol Visits – Capitol visits for Small Schools have been scheduled for Wednesday, March 4th and again on Wednesday, March 11th. Please make plans to be in Jefferson City to make your voice heard!

Quote of the Week

Good leaders build products. Great leaders build cultures. Good leaders deliver results. Great leaders develop people. Good leaders have vision. Great leaders have values. Good leaders are role models at work. Great leaders are role models in life." -Adam Grant

2026 MARE/MO K-8 Conference – October 21-23, 2026!

ESSA Changes – March 1st Workshop – Fed Ed Consulting

Once March 1 arrives, school districts must move from preparation to action under ESSA Equitable Services—and the expectations come quickly.

With nonpublic school data becoming available, districts must determine which nonpublic schools require consultation, initiate timely communication, document the process, and plan compliant services. For many districts, knowing where to start, and most importantly, how to do it correctly, can be challenging.

The Federal Education Consulting Group **invites you to a 2-hour virtual workshop designed to guide districts through this critical phase, *From Data to Delivery: Navigating ESSA Equitable Services After March 1.*** The workshop will be held Thursday, February 26th, 2026, 1pm - 3pm via Google Meet.

This practical session will walk participants step by step through:

- Interpreting nonpublic school data
- Identifying consultation obligations
- Conducting meaningful and timely consultation
- Required documentation and timelines
- Common compliance pitfalls—and how to avoid them

Whether your district is new to Equitable Services or simply wants to ensure its processes are in compliance, this workshop will provide clarity, confidence, and actionable next steps.

Who should attend:
Superintendents, Federal Programs Coordinators, and staff responsible for ESSA compliance.

Register today to ensure your district is prepared and compliant. Training limited to 100 participants.

Sincerely,

Julie Cowell and Theresa Villmer

Federal Education Consulting Group
Guiding Success in Implementing Education Policy

2025-2026 MARE Scholarship Program Information

The Missouri Association of Rural Education offers two scholarship programs for students interested in becoming teachers and returning to rural school districts to teach. The first program is the MARE Rural Missouri Scholarship Fund. This program is open to only junior and senior level students attending Missouri colleges or universities that offer degrees in education. Applicants must have completed 60 or more credit hours and have declared a major in education. Last year, MARE provided twenty-two (22) $1,000.00 scholarships. We plan to present 20-25 $1,000.00 scholarships this year alone! Information for this program is available below. This information is in the mail to all Missouri

colleges and universities that offer teacher education programs and certifications. The deadline to apply for this scholarship is Friday, March 13, 2026.

Materials must be received by this date!

2025-2026 College Scholarship Guidelines & Application

2025-2026 College Scholarship Guidelines in Word

The second scholarship program offered by MARE is open to graduating high school seniors of MARE member school districts. Applicants must have indicated plans to pursue a degree in education. Only senior students from MARE member school districts are eligible to apply. This includes HS students from tuition paying MO K-8 MARE member school districts. Last year, MARE, with support from EdCounsel, LLC provided forty-three (43) $750.00 scholarships to graduating high school seniors from all over the state. The deadline to apply for this scholarship is Friday, March 13, 2026.

Materials must be received by this date!

2025-2026 HS Senior Scholarship Guidelines & Application

2025-2026 HS Senior Scholarship Guidelines & Application in Word

If you have any questions regarding these Scholarship Programs, please contact Kevin Sandlin, Executive Director, at (660) 747-8050 or ksandlin@moare.com. Since 2017, MARE has provided a total of **$316,250.00** in scholarships through these two programs.

Save the Date – 16th Annual MARE Scholarship Golf Tournament – Monday, July 20th, 2026 at Osage National Golf Course. $90.00 per person or $360 per team! Thanks to our very generous sponsors, we were able to commit over $43,000 to new scholarships for the 2026-2027 school year for students wanting to become Missouri teachers. Please make plans now to support this growing event!

MOCAAT – What Can You Do for Me?



Welcome New Associate Members – MARE is pleased to welcome the following as New Associate Members: Absolute Janitorial Services, LLC, CoffeeTree Group, First Onsite Property Restoration, Finalsite, HaloRRS, LLC & Absolute Janitorial Services, LLC. Be on the lookout for more information on these MARE supporters on the website, direct emails to membership and future MARE Focus articles. We appreciate their support for our work here at MARE!

Now more than ever, we have to be engaged in the legislative arena in Jefferson City. Please join the weekly MASA calls, read the weekly bulletin, continue to reach out to your area legislators and find key leaders in your community to speak up! Together, we can protect public education!

Board Training Schedule for 2026 – See dates/locations below!

Southeast Missouri - Poplar Bluff, MO – Holiday Inn – (573) 712-9021

- Friday, May 29, 2026 (12:00 noon - 6:00 p.m.)
- Saturday, May 30, 2026 (8:00 a.m. - 4:30 p.m.)

Northeast Missouri - Kirksville, MO - Holiday Inn Express (660) 956-4682

- Friday, June 12, 2026 (12:00 noon - 6:00 p.m.)
- Saturday, June 13, 2026 (8:00 a.m. - 5:00 p.m.)

Southwest Missouri - Bolivar, MO - Comfort Inn - (417) 326-6169

- Friday, June 19, 2026 (12:00 noon - 6:00 p.m.)
- Saturday, June 20, 2026 (8:00 a.m. - 4:30 p.m.)

West Central Missouri - Warrensburg, MO – Quality Inn - (660) 747-3000

- Friday, June 26, 2026 (12:00 noon - 6:00 p.m.)
- Saturday, June 27, 2026 (8:00 a.m. - 4:30 p.m.)

Northwest Missouri - Maryville, MO - Holiday Inn Express (660) 562-9949

- Friday, July 10, 2026 (12:00 noon - 6:00 p.m.)
- Saturday, July 11, 2026 (8:00 a.m. - 4:30 p.m.)

Lake Ozark, MO – The Lodge of the Four Seasons (Conference)

- Wednesday, October 21, 2026 (11:00 a.m. - 5:00 p.m.)
- Thursday, October 22, 2026 (8:00 a.m. - 4:30 p.m.)

Lake Ozark, MO - The Lodge of the Four Seasons

- Friday, December 4, 2026 (12:00 noon - 6:00 p.m.)
- Saturday, December 5, 2026 (8:00 a.m. - 4:30 p.m.)

***** Please share this information with any new Board member who has not completed the 18.5 hours of required training! MARE is an approved Board Training provider!**

To register, please complete the form found on our website, scan and email to ksandlin@moare.com

CESO/MARE Partnership Opportunity

Just a reminder to all our MARE members....You have access to free communications support through a new partnership with CESO Communications. Each member district can benefit from one free phone call/video consultation (up to one hour) during the 2025-26 school year.

The focus for your free hour-long appointment is completely up to you and your district's communication needs. Are you taking on a superintendent role or is your district welcoming a new superintendent? Do you have a bond/levy on the April

ballot? Is it time to update your strategic plan? Would you like to develop a plan for improving social media content or internal communications? Does your website need a refresh?

The consultation can cover one topic or multiple areas of support.

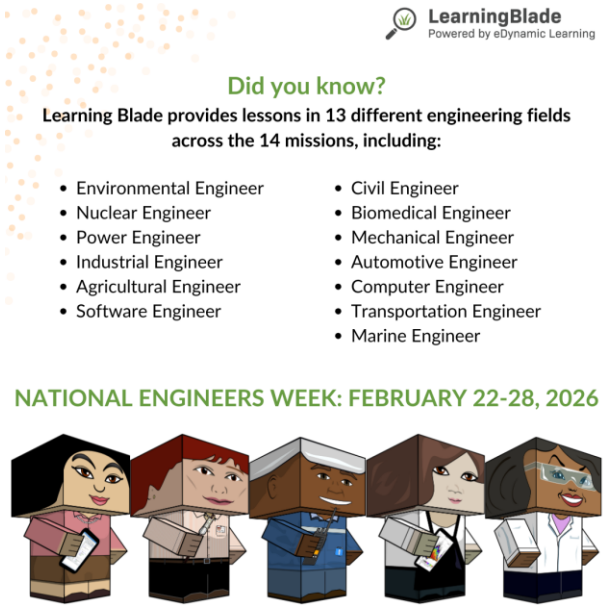
To access this free service, call CESO Lead Strategist Jill Filer at (816) 738-1055 or email her at jill.filer@theceso.com to schedule an appointment.

Learning Blade Corner

February 2026 LB Corner

Celebrate National Engineering Week (Feb 22–28, 2026) by inspiring students to **"Reimagine the Possible"** with Learning Blade's engineering career exploration resources!

Learning Blade offers educators a wide range of engaging Missions and lessons, providing students with an exciting glimpse into the diverse opportunities in the world of engineering.



Engineering careers in Learning Blade include:

- Environmental Engineer
- Nuclear Engineer
- Power Engineer
- Industrial Engineer
- Agricultural Engineer
- Software Engineer
- Biomedical Engineer
- Mechanical Engineer
- Automotive Engineer
- Computer Engineer
- Transportation Engineer
- Civil Engineer
- Marine Engineer

The Attack on Public Education – Terry Mayfield

Public education in Missouri is under coordinated attack, and it's time to stop pretending otherwise.

This isn't about "innovation," "parent choice," or "freedom." It's about redirecting public money away from public institutions and toward private interests, with fewer rules, less transparency, and no obligation to serve all students.

To be clear, parental choice itself is not the problem. Families already make choices every day — where to live, which school district to enroll in, whether to homeschool, attend private school, or pursue virtual options. That choice exists and always has.
The issue begins when public tax dollars are attached to that choice without requiring the same level of accountability from every entity receiving those funds.
Vouchers and so-called open enrollment don't create meaningful choice. They subsidize private education with taxpayer money while removing the public safeguards that come with it.

Private schools accepting voucher funds are not required to accept all students. They can deny enrollment based on disability, behavior, academic history, religion, or family background. They are not bound by open records laws, do not answer to locally elected boards, and are not required to provide the full range of services public schools must offer. Many can raise tuition while still collecting public dollars, ensuring vouchers primarily benefit families who already have access, not those who need support the most.
Public schools, by law, must educate every student who walks through the door. They provide special education services, serve high-need populations, offer transportation and meals, and operate transparently with full public accountability for every dollar spent.

When voucher money leaves a public school district, the fixed costs don't disappear. Buildings still exist. Buses still run. Staff is still required. The result is fewer resources for the students who remain, often those with the greatest needs. That isn't expanding opportunity. It's shifting responsibility without providing capacity.
Accountability also disappears the moment public money goes private.
Public schools operate under state and federal accountability systems, financial audits, open meetings and open records laws, locally elected boards, and civil rights protections. Most of those safeguards vanish for private schools receiving public funds. Taxpayers are told to trust that the money is being used responsibly while being denied access to records, decision-making, or outcomes.

If public money is involved, public accountability should be required. The type of school shouldn't matter. The source of the funding does.
These policies don't exist in a vacuum. Out-of-state advocacy groups, political donors, and ideological organizations are heavily invested in weakening public education and shifting control away from local communities. They help write legislation, fund campaigns, and influence decision-making while claiming to "support parents."
Parents aren't gaining power. Decisions are being moved farther away from local school boards and closer to political operatives and donors who won't live with the consequences.

The push to phase out Missouri's state income tax follows the same pattern. It's sold as economic growth, but the revenue doesn't disappear. It gets replaced with higher sales taxes, fees, and increased costs of goods. That shift places a disproportionate burden on low- and middle-income families while providing the greatest benefit to those at the top. When state revenue shrinks, public education, infrastructure, healthcare, and local government funding are the first targets. Local communities are then forced to raise property taxes or cut services, shifting costs downward instead of upward. That isn't tax reform. It's cost shifting.

Now we're seeing efforts to place MSHSAA under a governor-appointed board, stripping local schools of control over student activities. This isn't about student safety or improvement. It's about political retaliation and centralized control. When lawmakers don't like the outcome of a decision, the response shouldn't be to seize authority from schools and communities.

Public schools remain one of the last true public goods. They educate all students, serve every community, operate transparently, and answer directly to voters through locally elected boards.

Weakening them weakens communities, workforce development, and democracy itself. If Missouri continues down this path, the result will be greater inequity, less accountability, higher costs for working families, and less local control.
If you care about your local school, your community, or fiscal responsibility, now is the time to speak up. Contact your Senators and Representatives. Ask who benefits from these policies and who pays. Demand accountability for any institution receiving public funds.

Public education doesn't need to be dismantled. It needs to be defended.

Terry Mayfield

Missouri Youth Leadership Forum - The Governor's Council on Disability is pleased to announce **that applications are now open for the 2026 Missouri Youth Leadership Forum (MO-YLF)**.

This is a highly regarded, week-long program designed for Missouri high school students with disabilities, ages 16-21. MO-YLF provides delegates with a structured, immersive experience focused on developing critical leadership skills and ensuring a successful transition to post-secondary education, employment, & independent living.

Delegates will spend the week on the University of Missouri campus in Columbia, engaging with successful adult mentors and leaders from the disability community. **The entire program is offered at no cost to selected delegates**, thanks to support from our generous sponsors and donors.

Please share this opportunity with your colleagues, family members, or constituents who may know a student who would benefit from participation.

Watch the Experience Come to Life!

To truly capture the **energy and scope** of the Forum, we encourage you to view the following promotional videos. Produced by the Office of Administration (OA) communications team, these resources feature highlights from the 2024 Forum, including legislative role-playing, collaborative projects, adaptive sports, social events, and personal testimonials from parents and staff:

- Missouri Youth Leadership Forum Video for Parents and Teachers
- Missouri Youth Leadership Forum Video for Potential Delegates

Mark your calendar!
When: July 14-18, 2026
Where: University of Missouri – Columbia
Application Deadline: March 16, 2026

MO-YLF is more than just a leadership camp. It's an immersive program that delivers critical leadership and transition skills through five core pillars:

- **Leadership & Advocacy:** Workshops cover key areas like self-advocacy, goal setting, and self-determination.
- **History & Culture:** They will explore the rich history of disability rights and culture while connecting with successful mentors.
- **Career & College Readiness:** Delegates get vital resources to prepare for a successful transition to adulthood and careers.
- **Community & Friendship:** They will form friendships and networks with peers and young leaders from the disability community.
- **Recreation & Fun:** The experience is rounded out with adaptive sports, social events (talent show, dance), and more

If you know a student who would benefit, encourage them to apply or learn more by visiting: disability.mo.gov/gcd/ylf

Applications close on **March 16, 2026**—don't let them miss this chance!

Together, let's support the next generation of leaders in Missouri's disability community.

Sincerely,

The Governor's Council on Disability

MARE Organization Staff

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