MARE Focus

FEBRUARY 25, 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.

Veregy

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)**

Orrick R-XI Superintendent Search – Mrs. Mary Beth Scherer is the Search Consultant. She can be reached at (660) 281-7678 or **mbscherer@ucmo.edu**. **(03/17/2026)**

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 met at 10:00 a.m. on Monday, February 23rd in Jefferson City. The next meeting is slated for Monday, March 30th at 10:00 a.m. in Jefferson City. You are encouraged to stay engaged and informed on this endeavor. 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

"If you want happiness for an hour — take a nap. If you want happiness for a day — go fishing. If you want happiness for a year — inherit a fortune. If you want happiness for a life time — help someone else." — Chinese proverb

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

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!

Now more than ever, we must 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!

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.

A-F Accountability - Videos

GOCSD created the video below as an informational tool regarding A-F accountability. We are encouraging our districts to share this with teachers and their broader communities as they see fit. The video's purpose is to provide basic insights into accountability and general concerns with the A-F Executive Order.

My team created the content, and MSBA recorded and edited it. Please know their videographers are excellent, and I appreciated Melissa allowing us to utilize their production skills. However, my team created the script, and my board members and Tony Rosetti vetted it. You will notice that the video is unbranded.

I am hopeful that organizations across the state might consider sharing this with their members and promoting it on social media. It would be beneficial to have common talking points established within our communities throughout the state.

Here are the videos, share them with whomever you think appropriate.

Beyond The Grade: A Vision For Missouri's Students
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=m833-tIlEfA

Beyond The Grade: A Vision For Missouri's Students (Captioned)
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BW-K27vT5sU



Pam Hedgpeth
Executive Director

417-234-2903
gocsdmo.org

GREATER OZARKS
COOPERATING SCHOOL DISTRICTS

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!

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

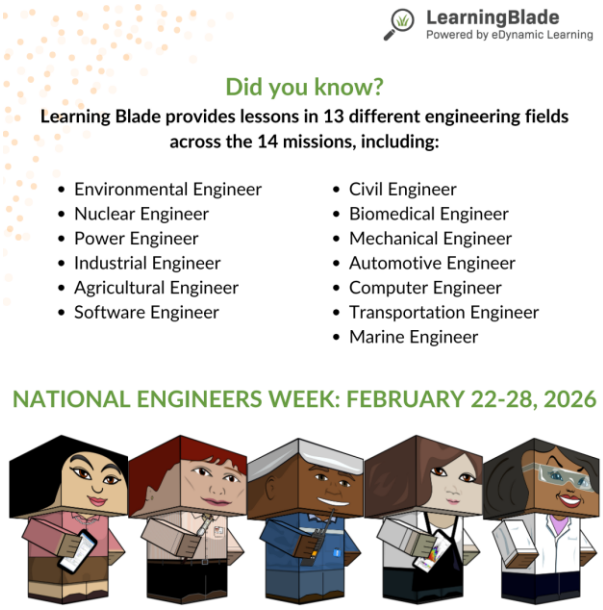
Celebrate National Engineering Week (Feb 22–28, 2026) by inspiring students to **"Reimagine the Possible"** with Learning Blade's engineering career exploration resources!

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



Missouri's Future Depends on Rural Education – Will Darter

In many ways, rural education does its best work quietly. There are no billboards, glossy campaigns, or viral moments that dominate national headlines. Yet, in communities like Everton, Dadeville, Lockwood, Greenfield, Miller, Golden City, Walnut Grove, Ash Grove, and across the state, rural schools are shaping the future of the United States of America in ways that are both profound and deeply impactful.

Rural education is not a footnote to progress in the Dade, Lawrence, and Greene counties, it is the foundation of it. In the state of Missouri, this matters more than many people realize. According to recent research in the article *Why Rural Matters 2025,* a yearly study done on rural education, over 60% of Missouri school districts are classified as rural. That means the majority of the state's communities, students, and families are shaped by rural public education.

Why Does Rural Public Education Matter?

Rural public education is central to the success of this state and the country. When conversations turn to economic development, workforce readiness, or the sustainability of small towns, the focus often begins with infrastructure, business incentives, or housing. But the truth is simpler and more direct: Strong communities are built on strong schools with empowering educational opportunities for students to learn, grow, and achieve. In rural Missouri, the local school is not just a place of learning and opportunity, it is the heartbeat of the community and the source of strength that builds the future.

This heartbeat is more than just a slogan on a wall in a hallway. It beats thoughtful, student-centered policy decisions, fair and sustainable funding structures and stewardship that recognize rural realities, partnerships between schools, local governments, businesses, and families. The low rhythmic drum of this heartbeat resounds in all the educators who go the extra mile and in communities that believe their children deserve every opportunity to succeed. Most of all, it sounds like belief in the undying hope of the future of this state and this nation.

In a rural town, the school is where generations intersect and values are passed down. Grandparents attend concerts where their grandchildren perform, often on the same gym floor they did. Neighbors fill the bleachers on Friday nights. Teachers inspire the children of students they once taught. Traditions are passed down and values are modeled. Young people learn not only academics, but responsibility, resilience, and respect.

Rural Missouri schools know their students by name and their future dreams of success. We know the families and the rhythms of the community. When a student struggles, they do not disappear into a system. The student is often surrounded by people who care deeply about the outcome of their wellbeing. That level of connection cannot be mass produced.

Rural Schools are the Most Economical Model for Education in the State

Missouri's rural communities and schools face real challenges. Transient population shifts, workforce and teacher shortages, changing industries and access to healthcare and broadband are among a few of them. Yet, rural public education remains one of the strongest tools the state has to meet these challenges head on.

Rural schools swing way above their weight class. Rural schools are some of the most resourceful places in public education. When one does not have excess, one learns to innovate, and rural communities and schools act on this innovation for the best outcome of students. When these schools cannot outsource solutions, rural schools build them together.

Whether it is an educator who wears too many hats because they believe in the students they see everyday. A teacher may also be a coach, a sponsor, a bus driver, a mentor, and a trusted adult in a student's life that calls forth a passion to learn. A principal may also be the athletic director, curriculum coordinator, and safety officer all while caring for and communicating with a concerned parent. The impact of rural education does not stop at the school doors, but fills the community with care for students and their success. That value of care for others is immeasurable.
In many Missouri communities, the school district is the largest employer and economic driver of local businesses and housing development. Rural schools run on minimal budgets, limited administrative overhead, and still provide access to learning like no other institution in the state. Also, rural schools provide stable jobs, attract families, and anchor local economies. When a rural public school thrives, businesses are more likely to invest, families are more likely to stay, and young people are more likely to envision a future close to home.

Rural School Success is Higher

Rural schools also prepare students for real life in deeply practical ways. Students learn the value of work. They see firsthand the importance of contributing to something larger than themselves. They grow up understanding that community is not abstract, but concrete and real. According to the "Why Rural Matters 2025" article, rural students are more likely to graduate than their suburban or urban neighbors. Graduates of Missouri's rural schools go on to become farmers, nurses, teachers, welders, mechanics, business owners, engineers, military members, and civic leaders. Some leave and return with new skills and experience. Others stay and become the backbone of their hometown economies.

Small class sizes allow for meaningful relationships. Strong community ties allow for authentic partnerships with local businesses, farms, hospitals, and trade programs. A shared sense of ownership allows schools and communities to move together rather than apart. This is why rural education is not on the sidelines on a gravel road way out there. It is at the center of Missouri's future. This close personal attention to students pays dividends to the value of their education and their success. When a child in a rural Missouri community begins to see what is possible in their own community, confidence radiates outward. It elevates lives and entire communities.

What Does It All Mean?

Now more than ever, rural education and schools need the support of our communities to foster the learning and success of our students. There is no more important work than caring for the children of a community. Rural public schools, in partnership with families, are engaged in the most meaningful work of all: to send students into their future to bring new levels of innovation, leadership, and lives filled with significance.

Rural schools are not something to be fixed or underrated. They are a model of what it looks like to invest wisely in children, culture, and community. There is something deeply patriotic about that idea. A state is only as strong as its communities. The strength of a community is how it cares, empowers, and believes in their children. Rural communities do this best. Supporting rural education in Missouri is not about nostalgia, but it is about the future.

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

Shape the Future of Missouri Education at MOCIS 2026!

Are you ready to innovate, collaborate, and elevate your teaching practice? Join a community of passionate educators at the **Missouri Curriculum & Instruction Summit (MOCIS)**. This isn't just another conference—it's a movement dedicated to sharing knowledge and tackling the most pressing topics in education today.

Save the Date: June 9, 2026
Location: Stoney Creek Hotel, Independence, MO

Why You Can't Miss MOCIS 2026:

- **Cutting-Edge Topics:** Dive deep into **Artificial Intelligence (AI) in the Classroom**, Personalized Competency-Based Education, and Real-World Learning.

- **Expert Insights:** Gain actionable solutions from thought leaders and specialists—you don't have to figure it all out alone!
- **Networking:** Connect with fellow Missouri educators and leaders who share your drive for student success.
- **Community Focused:** Celebrate the achievements of our state's educators and help build a stronger network of support.

Be Part of the Story

Don't miss your chance to be part of the progress. Whether you are a classroom teacher, a district leader, or an education advocate, MOCIS is the place to be this summer.

Ready to register? Visit the official site for registration, agenda details, and speaker bios: **MOCIS Official Website**

Together, we are building the future of Missouri education. See you in Independence!



MARE Organization Staff

Kevin F. Sandlin -- Cell Phone: (660) 351-0596 -- Email: ksandlin@moare.com
Executive Director
Jerry L Cochran, EdD. -- Cell Phone: (660) 596-3184 -- Email: cochranj115@gmail.com
Assistant Executive Director
Ray V. Patrick, EdD. – Cell Phone: (660) 909 – 5118 – Email: rpatrick@moare.com
Associate Director

Missouri Association of Rural Education
710 N College, Suite C
Warrensburg, Missouri 64093
(660) 747-8050
Fax: (660) 747-8160
Website: www.moare.com

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