Small Group Sessions

Wednesday, October 21 - 11:30 a.m.-12:45 p.m.

Conference Pre-Session #1

Leading Well in Uncertain Times: The Call for Super(intendent) H.E.R.O.S. within Rural School District

Room - HK's Club Room

(Administrators, Board Members, Teachers)

Presenters: Bryan Rush, Joe Vigil, Carisma Rush - Team-Builders Academy, LLC

Rural leaders master clarity and confidence to conquer legislative and financial uncertainty. Join us to gain the essential skills needed to become the H.E.R.O.S. your district needs. Be equipped and inspired to move beyond survival, empowering you to help your entire school community thrive.

Conference Pre-Session #2

From Deferred Maintenance to Modernization: Roadmap for Rural Schools

Room – Valencia A

(Board Members, Administrators)

Presenters: Josh Irving, Vince Throckmorton – NORESCO

Many rural districts struggle with aging facilities, deferred maintenance, and limited capital while managing numerous competing responsibilities. This session presents a practical framework for prioritizing facility investments, evaluating funding and financing options, and developing implementable modernization plans that improve building performance, reduce operating costs, and extend the life of existing assets.

Conference Pre-Session #3

Administrator Certification Session: Earn a Missouri-Approved IRC

Room – Lookout

(Administrators)

Presenter: Dr. Calee McElwain – iCEV

Join fellow education leaders for a free professional learning session designed specifically for administrators. Participants will have the opportunity to earn an industry-recognized certification from Missouri's Approved Industry-Recognized Credential (IRC) list while exploring strategies to strengthen college and career readiness across their schools and districts. This session provides valuable professional development, enhances understanding of MO IRCs, and equips administrators with tools to support high-quality CTE programs, student achievement, and postsecondary success. Walk away with a recognized credential and practical insights to help align program excellence and career-connected lerning.

Small Group Sessions

Wednesday, October 21 - 2:10-2:50 p.m.

From Data to Difference

Room – Marbella A

(Administrators, Board Members, Teachers)

Presenter: Mrs. Whitney Thompson – Principal/Superintendent at Orearville R-IV

Discover how one rural K-8 school transformed student achievement through intentional, data-driven RTI practices. This session highlights using i-Ready data to create targeted intervention groups, monitor meaningful growth, and build a schoolwide culture of continuous improvement that increased student outcomes across all grade levels.

Breaking Cycles, Building Futures: Using Story to Strengthen Culture, Retain Teachers & Influence Communities

Room – Marbella B

(Administrators, Board Members, Teachers)

Presenter: Justin Pickens, Teacher & Speaker

"No one ever made a decision because of a number. They need a story." (Daniel Kahneman) In this session, district leaders will learn how to use simple, yet important tools to help maximize their districts' powerful stories to reconnect staff to their purpose, strengthen culture, and clearly communicate the impact of their schools to boards, families, and policymakers.

Cooperative Purchasing: A Tool to Save Time and Money

Room - Granada A

(Administrators, Board Members, Others)

Presenter: Jeff Townsend, Education Plus

Discover how cooperative purchasing helps schools and public entities streamline procurement, ensure bid compliance, leverage collective buying power, and reduce costs – saving valuable time and money while accessing competitively awarded contracts.

Making Every Square Foot Count: Maximizing Today's Learning Environment While Planning for Tomorrow

Room – Granada B

(Board Members, Administrators, Teachers)

Presenters: Dana Hubbard, Lindsay Reichert – Paragon Architecture

With budgets stretched and facility needs growing, rural school leaders must maximize every investment. Discover how thoughtful design principles can help improve existing educational spaces, identify high-impact priorities, and guide future facility investments that support teaching, learning, and community goals.

Small Group Sessions

Wednesday, October 21 – 2:10-2:50 p.m. (Continued)

Let's Put the Cards on the Table: Is Your District AI Ready?

Room – Granada C

(Administrators, Board Members, Others)

Presenters: Dr. Erin Lawson, EducationPlus, Katie Dunlap, Pevely Elem. School

Through virtual conversation cards aligned to the CoSN AI Maturity Tool, participants will examine their district's current AI practices, share successes and challenges, and identify readiness gaps. These collaborative conversations will help leaders move beyond reacting to individual tools and begin building an intentional, sustainable, district-wide approach to AI integration.

Recipe for Success: Checklist to Reduce Student Tobacco Use

Room – Valencia A

(Board Members, Administrators, Teachers)

Presenter: Christy Inskip, Youth Tobacco Use Prevention Specialist with MDHSS

Digital vapes and nicotine pouches are contributing to high youth tobacco use rates. The Tobacco and Vape-Free School Checklist can help schools identify policy strengths and gaps. This interactive session will cover how to use the tool to collaboratively leverage strengths and fill gaps to successfully reduce student tobacco use.

Navigating CTE Programs in Your Small Rural School

Room – Valencia B

(Board Members, Administrators, Teachers)

Presenters: Stephanie Nold, Ballard R-II, Dr. Calee McElwain, iCEV, Oscar Carter, DESE, Byekwaso Gilbert, DESE, Jeff Voris, DESE, Will Darter, Everton

Join your colleagues and DESE Career Technical Education (CTE) leaders for an engaging discussion focused on the unique opportunities and challenges facing Missouri's rural school districts. Panelists will share insights on state initiatives, funding opportunities, workforce development priorities, and strategies for expanding student access to high-quality CTE programs.

Getting Ready for 2026-2027 Federal Programs

Room – HK's Club Room

(Board Members, Administrators, Federal Program Directors)

Presenter: De Frink-Hedglin, DFH Consulting

This session will focus on necessary information for program success and detail what is known for 2026-2027. Topics include incorporating and utilizing funding from available programs, annual program requirements, the triennial tiered monitoring process, and yearly plans and actions for continued success.

Small Group Sessions

Wednesday, October 21 – 2:10-2:50 p.m. (Continued)

Board Secretary Training – (Special Event Timeline – 2:30-4:30 p.m.)

Room – Seville

(Board Secretaries, Administrators)

Presenter: Emily Omohundro, EdCounsel, LLC

Board Secretaries hold the keys to the school district and wear many hats. From human resources to running elections, legal compliance is a key part of the job. This workshop will provide practical legal guidance on a wide range of topics handled by Board Secretaries on a regular basis.

MASA First-Year Superintendent & Mentor Roundtable

Room – Lookout

(Administrators)

Presenter: Kelly Hinshaw, MASA Director of Leader Development

This roundtable discussion is for first-year Superintendents and any MASA mentors that are in attendance. The meeting will focus on current issues that first-year Superintendents are facing. The agenda will be based on input from those in attendance, as well as recent survey results. Attendees will have the opportunity to discuss best practices and possible solutions when attempting to address their concerns.

Wednesday, October 21 – 3:00-3:40 p.m.

Active Learning, Engaged Students, Healthier Outcomes: Beyond the Classroom

Room –Marbella A

(Board Members, Administrators, Teachers, Others)

Presenters: Dr. Margie Vandeven, Wendy Parrett, Marty Marsh – Missouri Department of Conservation

How to improve student outcomes and student well-being at the same time? Emerging research points to a powerful, often underutilized, solution: nature. This session will highlight the growing body of research linking nature-based experiences to stronger academic outcomes, improved attention and executive functioning, reduced stress, and increased student engagement. Participants will leave with actionable strategies and will know how to access resources through the Missouri Department of Conservation.

Small Group Sessions

Wednesday, October 21 – 3:00-3:40 p.m. (Continued)

Why Teachers Leave: Lessons from Voluntary Teacher Turnover in Missouri's Four-Day School Week Districts

Room – Marbella B

(Board Members, Administrators)

Presenter: Dr. Jon Turner, Missouri State University

The four-day school week is often adopted to help recruit and retain teachers – so why do some teachers still leave? This session will share findings from a 2026 student of teachers who voluntarily left Missouri four-day districts, examining their reasons for leaving and offering practical retention insights for administrators and boards.

The Questions Keeping Superintendents Awake at Night – & How Communication Helps Solve Them

Room – Granada A

(Board Members, Administrators, Others)

Presenters: Lana Snodgras, Amplified & Zac Rantz, Communications Director at Nixa

From declining enrollments and staff shortages to parent complaints, Facebook rumors, school choice, political pressure, and crises, today's leaders face constant communication challenges. Learn practical, proactive strategies to build trust, strengthen community support, and confidently navigate the issues that matter most.

Maximizing School Funding: Strategic Bond and Levy Campaigns

Room – Granada B

(Board Members, Administrators, Others)

Presenters: Cory Bextermueller, Navigate & Mike Mabe, former Union R-XI Supt.

Generating the plan for a successful bond or levy campaign. Creating the information, communicating with the Board and public, finalizing documentation, campaign process and implementing the projects. The roadmap for a successful campaign.

Roundtable with DESE Area Supervisors

Room - Granada C

(Administrators, Board Members)

Presenters: DESE Area Supervisors

Join DESE Area Supervisors for an interactive, roundtable discussion focused on current regional priorities and updates. The roundtables are designed as open Q&A and dialogue sessions, giving Superintendents a direct opportunity to work through state updates, discuss common district challenges, and share strategies with peers and supervisors.

Small Group Sessions

Wednesday, October 21 – 3:00-3:40 p.m. (Continued)

American Heart Association Programs and Resources

Room – Valencia A

(Board Members, Administrators, Teachers)

Presenters: Tim Nikolai, Alison Van Bergen & Kary Bachert, AHA

Come listen and learn how American Heart Association programs can help your school district build healthier, safer communities. Kids Heart Challenge inspires students to be active, learn heart health, and support lifesaving causes. Through participation in Kids Heart Challenge, schools can augment their funding with NFL and AHA grant opportunities. AHA's Community Impact initiatives address anti-tobacco use, policy initiatives and recurring rural health needs through education and outreach. Our team will also share how we are supporting schools by helping create a Cardiac Emergency Response Plan, secure funding and prepare schools to respond quickly and effectively during cardiac emergencies.

What's Next with eMINTS: Updates and Opportunities

Room – Valencia B

(Board Members, Administrators, Teachers)

Presenters: Doug Caldwell & Haylee Anderson, eMINTS

Have you heard about our free resources for instruction? This workshop is meant to showcase eMINTS opportunities for K-8 school educators and to demonstrate the focus and benefits for students. We will examine materials and free resources, and then sample hands-on strategies that are inspired by our current open grants.

Small District, Big Story: Using Student Interns to Power Your Social Media

Room – HK's Club Room

(Board Members, Administrators, Teachers, Others)

Presenter: Kari Yeagy, Communications Director at Hallsville School District

Learn how a rural school district built a student communications team to create engaging social media content, highlight students and staff, and strengthen community connections. Discover how to recruit, train, and mentor student interns, while building sustainable communication systems without adding staff.

Small Group Sessions

Wednesday, October 21 – 3:00-3:40 p.m. (Continued)

Small Schools Committee

Room – Lookout

(Small School Committee Members Only)

Presenters: Mike Lodewegen, MCSA & Scott Kimble, MASA

This session is set aside for the 2026-2027 members of the Small Schools Committee to hold their annual fall meeting to discuss committee concerns and develop a schedule for activities for the 2026-2027
school year. Members only are invited to attend.

Thursday, October 22 - 10:40-11:30 a.m.

Board Refresher Training

Room – Granada A

(Board Members)

Presenter: Emily Omohundro, Attorney, EdCounsel, LLC

This session provides "refresher training" for Board members including the training requirements as stipulated below mandated by RSMO 162.203. Additional topics to be covered include relevant legal issues for this school year and Board member roles and responsibilities.

"Any school board member serving a term as of August 28, 2019, or elected or appointed after August 28, 2019, shall complete at least one hour of refresher training each year of any term in office; except that, the refresher training shall not be required in the year in which the member completes the initial orientation and training under subsection 1 of this section. The refresher training shall address concepts covered in the initial training including, but not limited to, the prevention of sexual abuse of children."

Building a Diploma+ Mindset and Program in Your Rural School District

Room – Granada B

(Administrators, Board Members)

Presenter: Dr. Will Darter, Superintendent at Everton R-III School District

Rural schools can deliver more than a diploma. This workshop explores how districts of any size can build a *Diploma+ Mindset* through community partnerships, technology, apprenticeships, and industry-recognized credentials (IRC). Learn practical strategies for advanced coursework, workforce training, and Tech School partnerships that prepare students for life beyond graduation.

Small Group Sessions

Thursday, October 22 - 10:40-11:30 a.m. (Continued)

The Trust Advantage – Building, Maintaining and Protecting Trust in your District

Room – Granada C

(Board Members, Administrators)

Presenter: Jill Filer, CESO Communications

The strongest school districts don't earn trust through one successful bond issue, one great school year, or one effective crisis response. They earn it every day. Discover how investing in relationships from the inside out – from staff to community – builds lasting confidence through intentional leadership and everyday interactions.

What AI Can't Do: The Four Pillars of Prosocial Education

Room – Valencia A

(Board Members, Administrators, Teachers, Others)

Presenters: Doug Caldwell & Haylee Anderson, eMINTS

In this session, participants will walk away understanding prosocial education and the four pillars that make up the concept; gain insights and examples from current classrooms implementing it with their students; and use practical active learning strategies to engage with each other while learning about the four pillars.

Are Your Bond & Operating Dollars Working as Hard as You Do?

Room – Valencia B

(Board Members, Administrators)

Presenters: Jason Hoffman & Angie Hughes, MOCAAT & Kenya Thompson, Superintendent at North Callaway R-I School District

This presentation highlights why cash flow analysis is vital for school district financial health. It also outlines clear steps for strategically investing bond proceeds – ensuring liquidity, maximizing returns, and supporting long-term educational goals with fiscal responsibility.

Religion in Schools Update – Preparing for the 2026-2027 School Year

Room – HK's Club Room

(Board Members, Administrators)

Presenters: Anthony McDaniel & Cody Wiegers, Guin Mundorf, LLC

This session provides practical guidance about balancing protective measures against discrimination and First Amendment rights. Specific topics will include prayer in school, student groups against the Israeli war and new Missouri laws regarding religious discrimination.

Small Group Sessions

Thursday, October 22 - 10:40-11:30 a.m. (Continued)

Is it Time for Change? MSHSAA's Possible Next Moves

Room – Seville

(Board Members, Administrators)

Presenter: Dr. Jennifer Rukstad, MSHSAA Executive Director

MSHSAA is an independent, private association of public, private, and charter member schools. The schools and board of directors establish the terms and conditions for a statewide interscholastic competitive league. The association is currently considering a number of big questions. What might be the next big change?

Career Advisors and Career Exploration

Room – Lookout

(Administrators, Board Members, Teachers, Other)

Presenters: Jackie Marling & Michelene Carbol, Career Advisors

By the end of the session, participants will be able to: Explain the role of regional Career Advisors and identify ways they can support schools and districts; Navigate key Missouri Connections features, including self-surveys, career exploration resources, planning tools, and reports; Describe how Missouri Connections supports ICAP development and implementation; Locate resources that help students make informed academic, career, and postsecondary decisions. Missouri Connections is a free, statewide career-development program funded by the Missouri Department of Elementary & Secondary Education.

Thursday, October 22 - 1:20-2:10 p.m.

Board Meeting Jeopardy

Room – Granada A

(Board Members)

Presenter: Duane Martin, EdCounsel, LLC

Board meetings have many requirements and best practices can make things go much more smoothly, even with a variety of personalities around the table. In this session, Duane will host a game of jeopardy covering many topics related to the conduct of productive school board meetings.

Small Group Sessions

Thursday, October 22 - 1:20-2:10 p.m. (Continued)

The Rural Voice: Building Trust that Inspires Advocacy

Room – Granada B

(Board Members, Administrators)

Presenter: Mr. Jesse Uhlmeyer, Superintendent at Canton R-V School District

In today's educational landscape, a rural superintendent's greatest influence isn't their title. It is the trust they have earned. Discover strategies for building authentic relationships, communicating with purpose, and becoming a trusted voice who can confidently advocate for rural schools, students, and communities in an increasingly complex world.

MTDS – An Overview of Programs and How It Can Make a Difference in Teachers

Room – Granada C

(Board Members, Administrators, Teachers)

Presenters: Dr. Bobbie Joe Lewis, DESE & Mr. Darryl Pannier, MTDS Specialist

Discover how the Missouri Teacher Development System (MTDS) empowers educators in every stage of their careers through competency-based professional learning. Developed through statewide collaboration, MTDS supports continuous growth, leadership, and excellence in teaching. Join us to explore the programs and opportunities that can elevate your professional journey.

The End of the Sticky Note: Organizing Your Digital Keys

Room – Valencia A

(Board Members, Administrators)

Presenter: John Riley, Cybersecurity Analyst with MOREnet

This session explores essential tools to balance convenience with ironclad security. Learn to generate complex passwords, prevent phishing, and audit for breaches while ensuring seamless syncing and secure team sharing.

Show-Me Missouri Schools: Using AI to Give Rural Districts a Data-Driven Voice

Room – Valencia B

(Board Members, Administrators, Teachers)

Presenters: Dr. Jon Turner, MSU & Dr. Will Darter, Everton R-III

Rural districts lack the data tools urban systems take for granted. This session introduces ShowMeMissouriSchools.com, a free tool visualizing 35 years of Missouri school data across all 516 districts, and explores how AI helped build it. It also demonstrates how board members and administrators can use it to advocate for their schools.

Small Group Sessions

Thursday, October 22 - 1:20-2:10 p.m. (Continued)

Here Comes the Sun(shine Act): A Legal Primer on Sunshine Act Compliance

Room – HK's Club Room

(Administrators, Board Members, Teachers)

Presenter: Michelle Basi, Tueth Keeney Cooper Mohan & Jackstadt, P.C.

In this presentation, we will review the requirements of the Sunshine Act, including meeting procedures, recordkeeping, and responding to records requests. We will review real-life scenarios and discuss best practices for managing and responding to the ever-increasing number of Sunshine Act requests.

Effectively Using State Achievement Reports to Improve Achievement

Room – Seville

(Board Members, Administrators, Teachers)

Presenter: Jessica Gray, Director of Learning Systems with STEP Up

Principals aren't short on data – they are drowning in it. State portals hand districts dozens of reports without ever showing leaders which reports matter, how to break results down by standard, or how to spot the exact type of question students keep missing. The result: information rich, data poor. This session fixes that. Attendees will learn how to prioritize the right reports, disaggregate by standard, and pinpoint the misconceptions behind missed questions – then turn all of it into a district data landing page every teacher can actually use, all year long.

Architecting Unbreakable Culture: Unlocking 90% Retention 3 Consecutive Years with Connection Keys

Room – Lookout

(Board Members, Administrators, Teachers)

Presenters: Bryan Rush, Joe Vigil, Carisma Rush, Team-Builders Academy

Learn the proven framework that has retention rates over 90% with our partner districts for 3 years straight. The Connection Keys Ecosystem (CK) equips leaders, engages staff, and unlocks true connection. CK could be your next decision that pays in measurable district outcomes. Join us for a simple preview.

Small Group Sessions

Thursday, October 22 - 2:20-3:10 p.m.

Jeopardy Beyond the Board Meeting

Room – Granada A

(Board Members)

Presenter: Duane Martin, EdCounsel, LLC

Lots of issues get raised for and with board members outside the board meeting context. In this session, Duane will host a game of jeopardy covering many topics related to the issues board members face away from the board table.

Educating the Masses

Room – Granada B

(Board Members, Administrators, Other)

Presenters: Jerry Girdner, Princeton R-V, Dustin Skoglund, South Nodaway R-IV & Wade Hall, North Mercer R-III

This presentation will educate school leaders on addressing their stakeholders in hopes to educate them on hot topic issues facing education. All three presenters participated in public forum presentations last year over hot topic education issues. They bring first-hand knowledge from their own experiences that may assist other school leaders in planning/hosting their own presentations with stakeholders.

DESE's Level Up and Building & District Matrix Tools

Room - Granada C

(Board Members, Administrators, Teachers, Others)

Presenters: Stuart Smith, DESE & Ben Sayeski, Education Strategy Consulting

This session introduces participants to the District Matrix, Building Matrix, and Level Up – new data visualization tools available to stakeholders on the DESE website. The tools are designed to provide educators, administrators, and stakeholders with clear and actionable insights into district and building level performance data.

Special Educators Who Stay: Registered Teacher Apprenticeship at MSU

Room – Valencia B

(Board Members, Administrators, Teachers)

Presenters: Kaleigh Pickett, MSU, Taylor Gunter, Exceptional Pupil Cooperative, Dr. Kristina Smith, Hollister

Missouri State University's Pathways for Paras program helps rural school districts grow and retain special educators from within their own communities. This session will highlight how registered teacher apprenticeship combines paid employment, district partnerships, mentorship, and flexible coursework to reduce barriers, support candidates, and build a sustainable local educator workforce.

Small Group Sessions

Thursday, October 22 - 2:20-3:10 p.m. Continued

Leveraging Technology to Simplify CSIP, Improve Student Outcomes on MSIP 6, and Increase Leadership Capacity

Room – Valencia B

(Administrators, Board Members)

Presenters: Dr. Chad Sutton, Clear Education LLC, Dr. Bryan Copple, Superintendent at Richmond R-XVI

Discover practical ways technology can help reduce the workload associated with CSIP development while improving organizational alignment and student outcomes on MSIP 6. Participants will also preview a continuous improvement platform developed by a Missouri educational leader for Missouri school districts that is currently being implemented in a few districts.

Protecting Your District: Essential Provisions for Contracts

Room – HK's Club Room

(Board Members, Administrators, Teachers)

Presenters: Anthony McDaniel & Cody Wiegers, Guin Mundorf, LLC

This practical session guides Missouri rural school leaders through critical contract review steps. Learn to identify high-risk clauses, protect district resources, and ensure student data privacy compliance. Attendees will leave with a structured checklist to confidently evaluate and sign vendor agreements.

Community Conversations with Purpose

Room – Seville

(Board Members, Administrators)

Presenter: Marci Orr, Communications Director at Mexico Public Schools

Town halls aren't open-mic complaint sessions. Learn a practical framework for planning and facilitating community conversations that build trust, gather meaningful feedback, and align with your strategic plan. Whether discussing school finance, budgets, or a bond issue, you will leave with a process you can use immediately.

MO K-8 Leadership Roundtable

Room – Lookout

(Board Members, Administrators)

Presenters: MO K-8 Board Members

MO K-8 Board members will discuss a variety of topics specific to leading a Missouri K-8 school district. Finance, Legislation, Tuition, K-8 Leadership, Mentors, etc. will be covered.

Small Group Sessions

Thursday, October 22 - 2:20-3:10 p.m. Continued

Inside the MARE Superintendent Search Service

Room – Terrace I

(Board Members, Administrators)

Presenters: Dr. Mike Jinks, Dr. Jerry Cochran, Mr. Darryl Pannier, Mrs. Mary Beth Scherer, & Dr. Maggie Anderson, MARE Search Consultants

Over 380 Missouri School Districts were in need of a superintendent from 2021-2026. Securing a suitable new superintendent for your district in the face of such dramatic turnover is a daunting task. Consultants will provide an overview of the MARE Superintendent Search Service for Board members, summarize key data associated with superintendent vacancies in Missouri, and offer suggestions on how to avoid missteps often made by applicants. Discussion and questions will be encouraged.