General Session Descriptions

General Session – Wednesday, October 21st – 1:00-2:00 p.m.
Room – Marbella A/B

Presenter: Dr. Paul Katnik
Title: "Teachers Wanted: Reimagining Recruitment in a Changing World"

Description: This presentation explores strategies that have been proven effective for recruiting and retaining teachers, even in today's evolving landscape. The presentation will highlight a number of state initiatives currently underway that can impact your local teacher recruitment and retention efforts. You will also learn ways to improve your own district strategies.

General Session – Wednesday, October 21st – 3:45-4:30 p.m.
Room – Marbella A/B

Presenter: Mike Lodewegen, MCSA Director of Government Affairs
Title: "Preparing for the 2027 Legislative Session"

Description: In this presentation, MARE's legislative team will discuss takeaways from the previous legislative session, and forecast the upcoming 2027 legislative session. Also, we will be discussing strategies and tactics that rural school districts can implement between now and January to improve their ability to engage in the legislative process.

General Session – Thursday, October 22nd – 9:30-10:30 a.m.
Room – Marbella A/B

Presenters: Grant Wiens & Jennifer Hansen, Mickes O'Toole, LLC
Title: "Schools & Security – SRO's, SPO's, and Searches"

Description: Join our legal team for practical guidance on managing SRO and SPO expectations, navigating law enforcement investigations, and conducting legally sound student searches. Walk away with actionable strategies to strengthen campus safety while minimizing liability exposure for your district.

General Session Descriptions

General Session – Thursday, October 22nd – 12:40-1:10 p.m.
Room – Marbella A/B

Presenter: Justin Pickens
Title: "Breaking Cycles, Building Futures: A Forever Rural Story"

Description: Raised in rural Missouri amid significant childhood adversity, Justin Pickens beat the odds because teachers and coaches became his winning lottery tickets. In this keynote, he unpacks the intentionality behind their impact and the ripple effect rural educators hold in kids' lives.

General Session – Thursday, October 22nd – 3:20-4:20 p.m.
Room – Marbella A/B

Presenters: Attorneys from EdCounsel, LLC; Guin Mundorf, LLC; Mickes O'Toole, LLC and Tueth Keeney Cooper Mohan & Jackstadt, P.C.
Title: "Legal Panel Discussion - Hot Topics Q&A"

Description: Panel attorneys will provide answers to various "hot topic" questions that have been submitted prior to the session. An open "Q&A" session is also planned.

General Session – Friday, October 23rd – 8:00-8:45 a.m.
Room – Marbella A/B

Presenter: Dr. Kyle Kruse, Deputy Commissioner with DESE
Title: "School Finance & Governance Update"

Description: Dr. Kruse will provide updates on a variety of school finance and governance topics, including information on the status of the state budget and how it is impacting school funding in Missouri (Formula, CTF, Transportation, Prop C). Other topics include changes to federal funding and provisions of recently passed legislation. Time will be provided for questions and answers.

General Session Descriptions

General Session – Friday, October 23rd – 8:45-9:30 a.m.
Room – Marbella A/B

Presenter: Dr. Kari Monsees, DESE
Title: "Missouri School Funding Modernization Task Force Update"

Description: Dr. Kari Monsees will provide an update on the activities of the Missouri School Funding Modernization Task Force. The Task Force is charged with making recommendations to the Governor by December 1, 2026.

General Session – Friday, October 23rd – 9:30-10:00 a.m.
Room – Marbella A/B

Presenter: Dr. Stacey Preis, Interim DESE Commissioner
Title: "A Conversation with the Interim Commissioner"

Description: Interim Commissioner Preis will provide the audience with an update on current state education activities. She will answer questions and engage in casual dialogue with those in attendance.

General Session – Friday, October 23rd – 10:05-10:55 a.m.
Room – Marbella A/B

Presenters: Duane Martin & Emily Omohundro, EdCounsel, LLC
Title: "The Coming Legal Storms: What Rural School Leaders Need to See on the Horizon"

Description: What legal challenges are coming next for Missouri's rural schools? While no one can predict every storm, school leaders can prepare for the issues most likely to affect their districts in the year ahead.

In this practical general session, attorneys from EdCounsel will examine the emerging legal developments, court decisions, legislative changes, regulatory trends, and policy debates that are expected to have the greatest impact on rural school districts during the coming school year. Drawing on recent legal developments and the questions we are receiving from school leaders across Missouri, we will discuss topics such as student rights, parent requests and opt-outs, employee relations, Title IX and discrimination issues, student discipline, school

General Session Descriptions

General Session – Friday, October 23rd – 10:05-10:55 a.m.
Room – Marbella A/B (Continued)

safety requirements, artificial intelligence, board governance, and the increasing fiscal and operational pressures facing rural school districts.

Designed specifically for rural school leaders, this session will focus not only on what is changing, but also on the practical steps districts can take now to reduce risk, strengthen compliance, and confidently navigate the year ahead. Whether the forecast calls for scattered showers or a full-scale legal storm, attendees will leave with a clearer understanding of the challenges on the horizon and a roadmap for preparing their schools to respond.