MARE Focus

AUGUST 31, 2026 | FROM THE DESK OF MR. KEVIN SANDLIN, MARE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

ENDORSEMENTS

American Fidelity Assurance Co.

Claim Care, Inc.

Hamlin Energy

IMS Technology

L.J. Hart & Company

MASA MTS

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

2026-2027 Superintendent Searches

– MARE prides itself in providing a thorough, district-focused and economical Superintendent Search service. If you are making plans to retire or leave your current district next year, please give MARE an opportunity to visit with your district about our Superintendent Search Program. We have a team of seven former district Superintendents who make up our search team. For the sixth year in a row, MARE has provided more facilitated searches than any other entity in the state. Please contact Kevin Sandlin, Executive Director, at (660) 747-8050 or ksandlin@moare.com for more information.

Mountain View-Birch Tree R-III – Mr. Darryl Pannier is the search consultant. He can be reached at (573) 803-9008 or **dwpannier@semo.edu**. **Posting on September 28th!**

Henry Co. R-I – Mrs. Mary Beth Scherer is the search consultant. She can be reached at (660) 281-7678 or **mbscherer@ucmo.edu**. **(TBD) Posting in September!**

Rich Hill R-IV – Dr. Michael Jinks & Dr. Bryan McDonald are the search consultants. Contact Dr. Jinks at (660) 441-7473 or **19mj46@charter.net**. **(TBD) Posting in September!**

Calling on & Counting on our Educational Leaders

MARE, MASA, GOCSD, EdPlus, Kansas City GCSD, MRTA and others are working together to combine advocacy efforts for the 2027 Legislative Session. More information will be forthcoming as this evolves. We will be asking our members to rally folks to attend various "We Love Missouri Public Schools Days" at the Capitol from January through May. We will also be encouraging folks to attend State BOE meetings and remaining Task Force Meetings. It is necessary that we all work together and do our part to fight for public education. The battle remains ahead of us. Recent victories in the elections have bolstered us, but there is much work ahead. Be ready to stand up when called upon, as I know you will!

2026 MARE/MO K-8 Conference

– Scheduled on October 21-23, 2026 at the Lodge of Four Seasons. We will have five legal sessions, a Legal Panel, Mandatory Initial 18.5-hour Board Training, Annual Mandatory 1 hour Board Refresher Training, presentations from Dr. Stacey Preis, Dr. Kyle Kruse, Dr. Kari Monsees, Dr. Paul Katnik, Mr. Justin Pickens, DESE Area Supervisors, Mike Lodewegen, MSPMA Sessions, Specific Board Training sessions, and many more. **We will also be offering a specific two-hour Board Secretary Training on Wednesday, October 21st**. The conference also features the presentation of "Outstanding Rural Awards" during the luncheon on Thursday, an awesome reception, great food, an Exhibit Hall featuring many of our Associate Members and other companies who support rural education and numerous other opportunities to grow, learn and collaborate. **Please join us!**

Links to Registration, Exhibitor Registration, Conference Planner at a Glance, General Sessions & Small Group Sessions appear on the email accompanying this report.

This is going to be a great conference! Please make your plans now to join us!

Foundation Formula Modernization Task Force – The next meeting is on Monday, September 14th at 10:00 a.m. in Jeff City. **Scenarios are on the horizon!** For more information on this work, please check out the website at this link: Missouri School Funding Modernization Task Force. **Please note and share the link below for community input on this process.**

Submit Comments to DESE Task Force

Quote of the Week

"The measure of a leader is not the number of people who serve him but the number of people he serves."
John C. Maxwell

Opportunity to Recognize Outstanding Staff

The Missouri Association of Rural Education will present awards for outstanding performance in the area of rural education. Four such awards will be given during the luncheon on **Thursday, October 22nd** as part of the Annual MARE/MO K-8 Conference at The Lodge of Four Seasons, Lake Ozark, Missouri. One award will be presented in each of the following areas.

- ***Outstanding Rural Teacher (1 award)***
  (Teachers from any grade level are eligible.)
- **Outstanding Rural Support Staff Member (1 award)**
  (Secretaries, aides, cafeteria employees, bus drivers, bookkeepersetc.)
- ***Outstanding Rural Administrator (1 award)***
  (Principals and Superintendents are eligible.)
- ***Outstanding Rural School District (1 award)***
  (Any MARE member school district is eligible.)

To submit a nomination for an award, please complete the nomination form for each nominee. (No limit on number of nominees a school district may submit.) A minimum of three support letters is needed to validate the nomination. The support letters should provide information explaining why the individual or school district is being nominated. Nominations may be submitted by:

- Completing the nomination form on the MARE website and linked here 2026 Outstanding Rural Education Awards Nomination Form or
- Mailing or emailing (ksandlin@moare.com) all the requested information in an envelope marked, **"Award Nomination"** to the MARE office at the addressed listed above.

All nominations & materials must be received by 12:00 noon on Friday, September 25, 2026 to be eligible for consideration by the Awards Committee!

MARE/MO K-8 Conference - October 21st-23rd

iCEV Certification Opportunity at MARE/MO K-8 Conference



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

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 contact ksandlin@moare.com

New Superintendent Boot Camp – New Superintendent Boot Camps are scheduled for Tuesday, September 15, 2026 at the Mickes O'Toole Offices in St. Louis and on Wednesday, September 23rd at the Springfield Public Schools. For more information on these free PD events, please call (314) 878-5600 or go to seminars@mickesotoole.com.

Welcome New District Members - MARE is pleased to welcome Iberia R-V & Orearville R-IV back as district members! Welcome to the MARE family of 421 districts! If you are not sure of your MARE member status or would like more information on becoming a MARE member school district, I would welcome the opportunity to visit with you.

New MARE Associate Members – Since January of 2026, the following organizations have been added as MARE Associate Members: **Absolute Janitorial Services, HaloRRS, Magic School, Omni Energy Partners, Bubbletastic Events, & Tri-County Electrical Contractors.** Please watch for upcoming postings on the MARE website and in new MARE Focus articles. We greatly appreciate these businesses joining the MARE family!

MARE Organization Staff

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If you are the intended recipient but do not wish to receive communication through this medium, please notify the sender immediately.

MARE Executive Board Members – The MARE Executive Board for 2026-2027 is made up of the following individuals: President - Dr. Brian Sherrow (Region I), Vice-President – Dr. Kim Burger (Region E), Dr. Tammy Erwin (Region A), Dr. Geoff Neill (Region B), Dr. Eric Wilken (Region C), Dr. Jason Price (Region D), Mr. Joe Murphy (Region F), Mr. Aaron Sydow (Region G), Dr. Billy Daleske (Region H), Dr. Bryan Copple (Region J), Mrs. Rebecca Steinhoff (MO K-8), Dr. Jon Turner (Higher Education), Mrs. Christy Groppe (Board Member – Franklin Co. R-II), and Mr. Marty Doogs (Board Member – Cole Camp R-I).

Conference Theme - Forever Rural

MOCAAT – What Can You Do for Me?

MOCAAT™



Several of our Platinum Exhibitors will be sponsoring $500.00 checks to be awarded to schools on Thursday, October 22nd!

Often They Know Before You Do – Jesse Uhlmeyer

"You're not hunting in the right spot."
I heard that more than once growing up.
Two of my bus drivers, Corky Garner and Joe Stevenson, traveled the gravel roads past our family farm every morning. Long before deer season crossed my mind, they already knew where "that nice buck" was hanging out.
"He's down there in the corner of that field every morning when I'm coming in to pick you up."
They knew because they were there.
Same road. Same time. Every morning.
Corky and Joe had patterned that buck better than I ever did. The buck had likely patterned them too.
I would take their advice and head to the woods. Unfortunately, I was always better at taking a nap against a tree than I was at deer hunting. Somehow, I never seemed to see "that nice one."
But Corky and Joe were right.
My younger brother eventually proved it.
Looking back, there's a leadership lesson hidden in that old hunting story.
They saw something I didn't because they traveled the road every day.
That's the thing about a school bus route. It gives you a different view of a community.
A bus driver knows which gravel roads wash out after a hard rain. They know the driveway with the dog that chases the bus and which bridge gets slick before everything else.
But they know more than the roads.
They know the people along them.
They know which student is always standing at the end of the driveway before the bus arrives and which one comes running out the door at the last second.
They notice when the kid who normally talks the entire ride suddenly gets quiet.
They notice when someone hasn't been at the bus stop for three mornings.
They notice when something just doesn't seem right.
Those observations don't show up on a dashboard.
They're noticed because someone travels the same road, sees the same people, and pays attention day after day.

Every Seat Has a Different View

As leaders, we spend a lot of time trying to understand what's happening in our organizations.
We study reports.
We look at data.
We hold meetings.
We send surveys.
We build strategic plans.
All of those things matter.
But they can never tell us everything.
The people closest to the work see things leaders simply can't.
A school secretary hears the hesitation in a parent's voice on the phone.
A paraprofessional sees a student struggle with something that may never appear in a grade book.
A coach recognizes when an athlete isn't acting like themselves.
A maintenance worker notices a problem with a building months before it becomes an emergency repair.
A teacher sees the small changes in a child that no spreadsheet could ever capture.
They're all traveling different roads.
And each road provides a different view.
The mistake leaders make is assuming that because we have more information, we automatically have a better view.
Sometimes we don't.

Ask a Better Question

One of the easiest questions a leader can ask is:
"Is everything going okay?"
Most of the time, we already know the answer.
"Yep."
So I've learned there is a much better question:
"What are you seeing that I might be missing?"
That's a different question.
It tells people we recognize they have a perspective we don't.
Ask the bus driver.
Ask the secretary.
Ask the teacher.
Ask the custodian.
Ask the student.

Ask the parent.
Then listen.
You might discover a problem.
You might hear about something worth celebrating.
You might learn that a decision that sounded great in a meeting doesn't work nearly as well in practice.
And every once in a while, you'll discover something everyone else seems to know except you.
That's humbling.
But humility isn't a weakness in leadership.
It's one of the things that keeps us connected to reality.

Don't Let the Title Change the View

There's a danger that comes with leadership.
The higher we move in an organization, the farther we can get from the everyday work.
Our calendars fill with meetings.
Our inboxes fill with problems.
We start spending more time thinking about budgets, policies, staffing, and long-term plans.
Those things are part of leadership.
But if we're not careful, we can know more and more about the organization while knowing less and less about what it actually feels like to be part of it.
That's why presence matters.
An open office door is good.
Walking through it is better.
Spend time where the work happens.
Ride the bus.
Walk the halls.
Visit the kitchen.
Sit in a classroom.
Go to the game.
Talk to people without an agenda.
Not every conversation needs to produce an action item.
Sometimes leaders simply need to see the road for themselves.

The Gravel Road Advantage

Rural leaders have an advantage.
Our communities are often small enough that we can still get close to the work.
We see people at the grocery store.
At church.
At ballgames.
At the gas station.
At the county fair.
Sometimes the conversation we need doesn't happen during a scheduled meeting.
It happens beside a pickup truck in the parking lot.
That's part of rural leadership.
But being small doesn't automatically make us connected.
We still have to choose to listen.
We still have to ask questions.
We still have to resist the temptation to believe our position gives us the clearest view.
Corky and Joe didn't know where that buck was because they had a better title.
They knew because they traveled the road.
There's a difference.

Beyond the Gravel Road

This isn't just a lesson for rural schools.
In fact, it may become even more important as an organization gets larger.
A superintendent leading thousands of students can't personally know every child.
A principal in a large school can't see every interaction.
A CEO can't understand every part of a company from an office.
A hospital administrator can't experience every interaction between a patient and a nurse.
The larger the organization, the more intentional leaders must become about staying connected to the people closest to the work.
You may not be able to travel every road.
But you can know the people who do.
Ask them what they're seeing.
Listen when they answer.
And make sure they know their perspective matters.
That's not rural leadership.
That's good leadership.

The Stories Behind the Numbers

This matters for another reason in public education.
School leaders are also advocates.
We talk with board members, legislators, parents, and community members about what our schools need.
Data matters in those conversations.
But numbers only tell part of the story.
I can explain what transportation costs our district.
The bus driver can tell me what those miles look like on a January morning.
I can show someone an attendance percentage.
A teacher may know the story behind the absences.
I can explain a staffing shortage.
A principal can tell me what that empty position means when students walk through the doors tomorrow morning.
Data tells us **what** is happening.
The people traveling the road often tell us **why**.
Good leaders need both.
And good advocates carry both stories and numbers to the table.

The View from the Gravel Road

Years ago, Corky and Joe knew where I should be hunting.
I had the gun.
I had the hunting clothes.
I had the deer tag.
I even knew the farm.
What I didn't have was their view.
They had traveled that road every morning and paid attention to what they saw.
That's a lesson I've carried with me far beyond deer season.
Leadership doesn't require us to see everything.
We can't.
It requires us to recognize that other people see things we don't.
The challenge is having enough humility to admit it and enough curiosity to ask about it.
Every organization has people traveling roads the leader doesn't.
Find them.
Listen to them.
Learn from them.
Because sometimes the clearest view of your organization comes from someone sitting in a seat very different from yours.

The UnCommon EdLeader Principle

The higher you move on the organizational chart, the easier it becomes to lose sight of what's happening on the ground.
So don't assume your seat gives you the best view.
Ask the people who travel the road every day.
They may already see what you've been looking for.

2026-2027 Missouri School Directory - Each MARE member school district will receive one free copy. If you pre-ordered extra copies through MARE, we will have those to deliver as well. We will start delivering these in early October! **Also available at the conference!**

2026-2027 District Membership Invoices – Invoices were mailed on June 17th. **If you have not received your annual membership invoice (dues statement), please email or call me so that I can resend. Membership invoices should be paid by September 16, 2026!** If you have any questions regarding your status as a MARE member, please reach out to me. If you are not a current member, we would love to have you join the other 421 MARE member school districts across the state!

Learning Blade Corner – September Article

LearningBlade Powered by eDynamic Learning CORNER

Celebrate Manufacturing Day with Learning Blade!
Manufacturing Day is October 2nd! Celebrate by helping students discover the innovation, technology, and exciting careers behind modern manufacturing. Find out more here.
With Learning Blade, students can explore real-world manufacturing through missions like Car Manufacturing, Building Submarines, and Assemble the Fleet while learning about careers in robotics, welding, engineering, machining, automation, and more.
These skills are especially important in **Missouri, where manufacturing supports nearly 280,000 jobs and contributes more than $50 billion to the state's economy each year**. Missouri manufacturers build everything from cars, trucks, naval parts, and aircraft equipment to food products, chemicals, machinery, and metal products.
Celebrate Manufacturing Day by launching a Learning Blade mission and inspiring the next generation of makers and innovators!
Get started with your free account here.


