MARE Focus

SEPTEMBER 16, 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**. **(October 16, 2026)**

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**. **(October 9, 2026)**

Documents linked to cover email!

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, October 19th 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

Grant Writing & Management Workshops

Grant Writing USA and Grant Management USA will present five grant training workshops in Missouri this fall.

Learn where to find the grants and how to get them.

Attend this Grant Writing workshop and you'll learn how to write winning government grant proposals and find the available grant funding. Tuition is $525 and includes two days of terrific instruction, Grant Writing USA workbook, and Lifetime access to our Alumni Resource Center that's packed full of tools. Please use the code "**ASSN**" at the time of registration to receive your $30 discount. This training is for grant seekers across all disciplines.

Kansas City, MO - September 17-18, 2026
hosted by Mid-America Regional Council
For event details visit: **https://grantstraining.com/mo0926**

Wellston, MO - October 26-27, 2026
hosted by St. Louis County & Municipal Police Academy
For event details visit: **https://grantstraining.com/wt1026**

Springfield, MO - October 26-27, 2026
hosted by Mid-States Organized Crime Information Center
For event details visit: **https://grantstraining.com/mo1026**

Learn to stay in compliance and keep the money.

Attend this Grant Management workshop and you'll learn how to administer government grants, stay in compliance with current OMB rules and regulations, and survive an audit. Tuition is $625 and includes Grant Management USA's 500-page grant management workbook and reference guide. Please use the code "**ASSN**" at the time of registration to receive your $30 discount.

Kansas City, MO - December 2-3, 2026
hosted by Mid-America Regional Council
For event details visit: **https://grantstraining.com/mo1226**

Springfield, MO - January 12-13, 2027
hosted by Mid-States Organized Crime Information Center
For event details visit: **https://grantstraining.com/mo0127**

Attend both classes and **receive $100 off** your combined tuition. Groups of 5 or more receive a $50 discount per person. Discounts for Grant Writing USA alumni are also available. Please call for details. One discount code per registration.

Quote of the Week

"Staying positive doesn't mean you have to be happy all the time. It means that even on hard days you know that there are better ones coming." — *Anonymous*

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!

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, FARCO, Paschal Air Plumbing & Electric, Progressive Technologies, Inc., Washington Roofing & Insulation, LogiCourt & Lebra**. Please watch for upcoming postings on the MARE website and in new MARE Focus articles. We greatly appreciate these businesses joining the MARE family!

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

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).

MOCAAT – What Can You Do for Me?

MOCAAT™



Missouri Loves Public Schools – Capitol Visit Days - Collaboration

Here is the webpage we have created for our Capitol Visit Days.

I have linked it here, too. This QR points to the webpage. Here's a typable address for the webpage: bit.ly/MOlovesPS

Please join us in participating in and promoting this initiative within your school community!

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.

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!**

Manufacturing Day with Learning Blade



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.

You Can't Put a Grade on Everything

Missouri is getting ready to give public schools something we've been giving students for generations: A letter grade. There's something appealing about that simplicity. But there's also something potentially dangerous about it. Because a grade can tell you something important without telling you everything important.This week's UnCommon EdLeaders asks a bigger question: What happens when the measurement becomes the definition?


Jesse Uhlmeyer

In partnership with



There is something wonderfully simple about a letter grade. A. B. C. D. F.
We have been using them in schools forever. Most of us understand what they mean without much explanation. And soon, Missouri plans to use them to describe schools themselves.
The idea makes sense on the surface. School performance data can be complicated. There are test scores, growth measures, graduation rates, college and career readiness indicators, attendance data, and plenty of other numbers. Most parents don't have an afternoon or more to spend digging through spreadsheets trying to figure out what all of it means.
So simplify it. Give the school a grade.
I understand the thinking. My concern isn't that schools are being measured.
My concern is what happens when the measurement becomes the definition.

I Was a C Student

Not really. I was an A or B student in school, but if you looked at my ACT score or MAP scores you wouldn't know that. My ASVAB was high enough for the phone to ring off the hook with recruiters, but my other scores may have painted a different picture.
Imagine a student brings home a C in math. What does that tell you?
Something.
It tells you there is probably room for improvement. But it doesn't tell you whether the student started the year two grade levels behind and has made tremendous progress. It doesn't tell you whether algebra finally clicked three weeks ago. It doesn't tell you whether the student missed several weeks because of something happening at home.
It also doesn't tell you whether that same student has an incredible talent for welding, music, agriculture, computer programming, or working with people. And it certainly doesn't tell you whether that student is a good kid.
The C is information. It just isn't the whole story.
We have spent years telling students that. Maybe we should remember it when we start grading schools.

There Is Nothing Wrong With Measuring

I don't want this to become another educator argument that sounds like, *"You just don't understand how hard our job is."* That's not particularly helpful.
Public schools receive public money. Communities deserve to know whether students are learning. If students aren't reading at appropriate levels, we need to know. If mathematics achievement is declining, we need to know. If students aren't graduating prepared for college, a career, the military, or whatever comes next, we need to know.
Good data can expose problems, challenge assumptions, and make us uncomfortable. Sometimes that discomfort is exactly what causes improvement.

So give us the data. Show us where we're succeeding and show us where we're falling short.
Just be careful about pretending all of that complexity can be captured by one letter.

Because Schools Make Choices

Here is where things get complicated. Schools make decisions every day about what they value. Some of those things are easy to measure. Others aren't.
What is the value of keeping an elementary art program when budgets are tight? What is the value of offering agriculture, industrial technology, family and consumer sciences, band, or athletic programs when those programs don't increase a state assessment score?
What is the value of giving a student his first chance to lead something? What about the student who struggles academically, but discovers that she is really good at working with her hands?
And what is the value of a high school student learning how to show up on time, work with people he doesn't particularly like, accept criticism, solve a problem, and finish something difficult?
I don't know how you assign points to those things. I'm not sure we should try.
But I know they matter. Because more times than not, those things teach kids more about life and accountability than a textbook or test will.

The Problem With Simple Answers

This isn't really just an education problem. We love simple answers.
Five stars. Rankings. Scores. Thumbs up or thumbs down.
We want to know which hospital is best, which restaurant is best, which college is best, and now which school deserves an A.
Complexity is inconvenient. A ranking or letter grade is easy. But simplicity has a cost.
Once a school becomes "an A school" or "a D school," it becomes very easy to stop asking questions.
The A school must be doing everything right. The D school must be doing everything wrong.
Neither is likely true.
The grade might tell us where to start looking. It should never tell us where to stop.

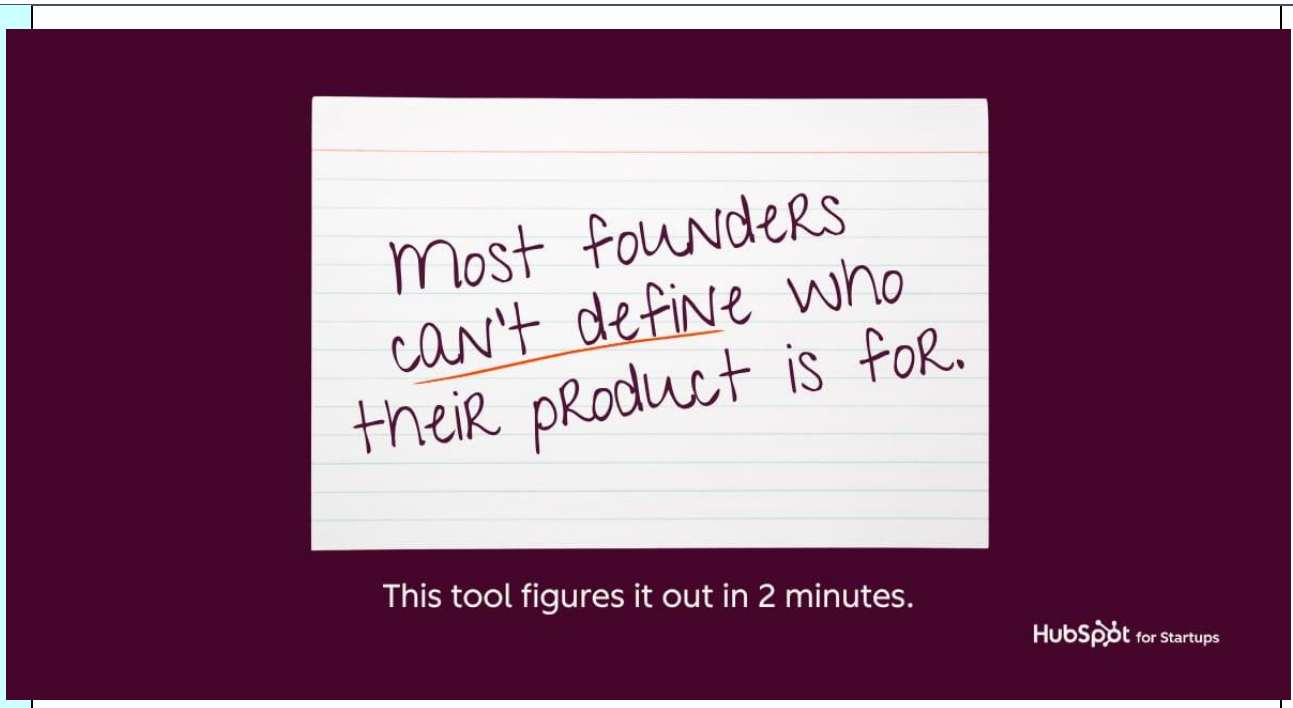
Maybe the Grade Should Be the Beginning

That's how I hope Missouri communities use these grades. Not as verdicts, but as invitations to look deeper.
If your school receives an A, ask what produced those results—and what still needs attention. If it receives a C, dig deeper. Where are students succeeding? Where are they struggling? Are they growing? Which students aren't being reached? What is the school doing about it?
Then ask some questions that probably aren't part of the calculation.
What opportunities can students access here? What can a graduate actually do? Can students solve problems without an adult giving them every step? Can they communicate? Can they work with people who are different from them or they don't particularly like? Can they recover when something doesn't go their way? Are we helping young people discover abilities they didn't know they had?
Those aren't excuses for poor academic performance. They are part of what academic performance is supposed to prepare students to do.

The UnCommon Principle

A measurement can tell you something important without telling you everything important.
That's the distinction I hope we remember.
An A–F system may help Missouri families understand school performance. It may identify places that need improvement. It may create conversations that schools need to have.
Good. Let's have them.
But let's resist the temptation to believe that because something is easy to understand, it gives us the full picture.
A school is one of the most complicated organizations we ask people to lead. Its raw materials are human beings. Its results sometimes don't become visible for ten or twenty years. And some of its best work may never get talked about or added to the spreadsheet.
So when the report card arrives, look at the grade. Take it seriously. Ask what is behind it.
Then keep looking.
Because the most dangerous thing about a letter grade isn't that it tells us nothing.
It's that it tells us just enough to make us think we know the whole story.

2 minutes. Your URL. A customer profile worth using.



Most founders can describe their product. They can't describe their customer. Not in a way that actually changes how they sell.
HubSpot for Startups built a *free tool* to fix that. Paste in your URL, answer a few quick questions, and it generates a structured profile of your best-fit customer. Firmographics, buying triggers, the works.
Takes 2 minutes. No spreadsheet required.
Build Your Free ICP.

Kummer Center for STEM Education Event

The Kummer Center for STEM Education is excited to invite you and your staff to the **Northeast Missouri STEM Connections Day** on October 20th!

Spend an exciting day discovering new STEM education resources for your school, grant opportunities, free equipment loans, and more. Hear from a variety of STEM organizations including Missouri's After School Network, REC Foundation, Project Lead The Way, 4-H, and others!

This free event will be hosted at the **Missouri Military Academy** in Mexico, MO, so stop by on your way to the annual fall MARE Conference. A continental breakfast and lunch will be provided.

For questions, please contact the Kummer Center for STEM Education at mststemoutreach@mst.edu.

Please let me know if you need anything else from me. In case the links do not transfer, I am including them below.

- Kummer Center for STEM Education: https://stemcenter.mst.edu/
- Register: https://connect.mst.edu/register/regionalstemconference

Justin Sanders

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