MARE Focus

OCTOBER 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.

Veregy

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)**

Stockton R-I – Dr. Jamie Burkhart is the search consultant. She can be reached at (660) 525-0952 or **jamiebeth.burkhart@gmail.com**. **(October 19, 2026)**

Documents linked to cover email!

Coming Soon! – Buchanan Co. R-IV, Osage Co. R-I with more to follow!

District Searches – District is conducting search!

Lincoln R-II - Deadline to apply is 10/23/2026. Contact Kevin Smith for more information at **smithk@lincoln.k12.mo.us**.

Naylor R-II – Deadline to apply is 10/30/2026. Contact Stacey Roach for more information at **staceyroach@naylor.k12.mo.us**.

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 (Sign up for the October 20th meeting here - October 20th SBOE Meeting Sign-Up) 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.

We are still accepting registrations!

Foundation Formula Modernization Task Force – The next meeting is on Monday, November 16th at 10:00 a.m. in Jeff City. **Scenarios may not be released until after the November 3rd elections.** **Link for community input on this process.** **Submit Comments to DESE Task Force**

Quote of the Week

"Fall is a Southerner's reward for having survived summer." -James Farmer

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!

Commissioner of Education – Survey Opportunity – Please respond!

Next Commissioner of Education News - You are invited to help with this information gathering process. Please access the link to share.

Help inform the search for Missouri's next Commissioner of Education.

Missouri stakeholders are invited to complete a brief survey about the Commissioner search process. The survey asks for feedback on issues including stakeholder participation, communication, timing, transparency, candidate recruitment and screening, and funding.

It takes approximately 8–10 minutes and is open through October 23. Survey findings will be compiled and shared with DESE and the State Board of Education.

We encourage you to participate and make your voice heard. Access this link: https://eduplusmo.qualtrics.com/jfe/form/SV_bPfeOr2nshRYhYa

EdPlus will be in our Exhibit Hall. They may have a QR code or some manner to access the link while you are at the conference.

MARE Welcomes Lebra as Diamond Associate Member

Lebra has joined MARE as an Associate Member and Diamond Level Sponsor. Please see the information below

Rural superintendents wear a lot of hats: superintendent, CFO, HR lead, and chief communication officer, all in a single school day. Which is why I'm pleased today to introduce Lebra.

Lebra, whom some of you may know from their work with MASA, has made a significant investment in rural education through a new partnership with our organization. Their tools are built to help K12 district leaders lead, with an emphasis on the realities of rural education.

• Lead: supporting staff retention through connection, making sure your staff is seen, valued, and heard.
• Ascend: evaluation tools focused on coaching and growth.
• Compass: financial storytelling, helping you turn complex financial documents into clear communications for your board, community, and parents

The Lebra team will be reaching out soon, and I encourage you to connect with them.

Eddie Small
Partnership Development Representative
Amplify Humanity
Book A Chat
Why Lebra
Resource Center

Legislative Overload Document – Chris Gaines

We all know how much the Legislature has placed on Missouri public schools over the past several years. I have attached a Legislative Overload document for you to share with your representatives, senators, community members, etc. Often these mandates come without the necessary funding to implement so we have to figure it out.
..\MARE Documents\Legislative Overload 2026.pdf

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.)

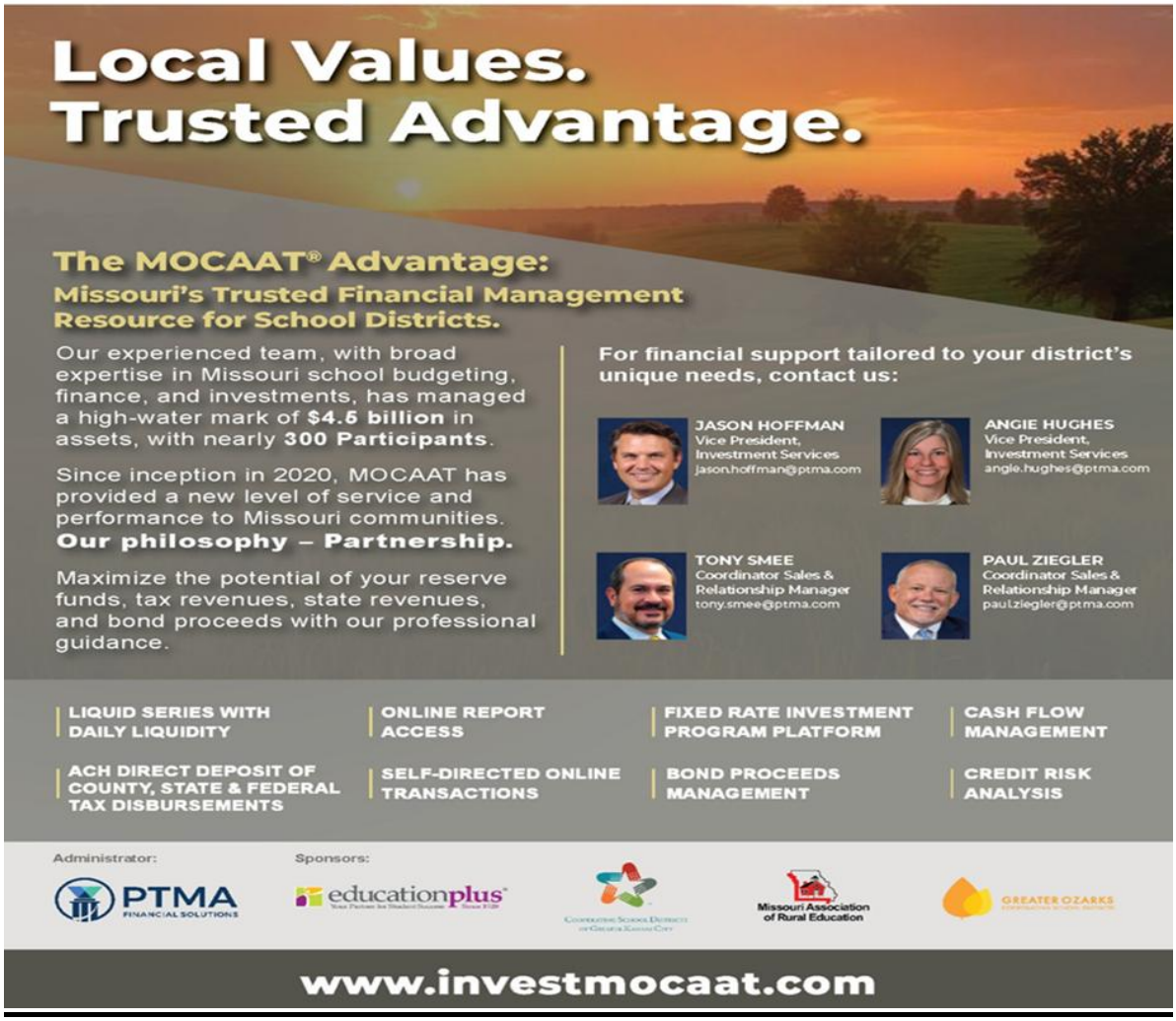
Lake Ozark, MO - The Lodge of the Four Seasons

- 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

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!**

MOCAAT – What Can You Do for Me?



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 – October Article

LearningBlade Powered by eDynamic Learning CORNER

October Learning Blade Corner

October is Cybersecurity Awareness Month!

Cybersecurity matters across Missouri, from protecting our schools and local businesses to securing manufacturers, hospitals, utilities, and government systems. As technology and AI continue to grow, Missouri will need more people with the skills to protect the systems we depend on every day. Learning Blade can help your students learn about the important work of cybersecurity and explore the careers that help keep us safe.

Through the **Hack Attack** mission and resources like **Introduction to Computer Careers**, students can:

- See how a team works together to restore a school's website and social media accounts after a cyberattack.
- Explore careers such as **Information Security Analyst** and learn how these professionals protect businesses, schools, government agencies, and other organizations.
- Build awareness of the computer science, problem-solving, and technology skills needed for cybersecurity and other high-demand careers.

Learning Blade is **fully funded for Missouri schools**, so teachers can create an account and begin using these resources at no cost. www.LearningBlade.com/MO

For more help on how to use Learning Blade, get expert tips and support with your state manager: Schedule Here

Join us at the 2026 MARE/MO K-8 Fall Conference October 21-23, 2026!

Coover/Rural Schools Partnership

The Coover/Rural Schools Partnership Rural Ready Grant Program is now open for application by school partners of the CFO. With $185,000 available, the program will provide up to $7,000 for projects that prepare students for an ever-changing world while strengthening the communities they call home.

Possible themes for projects include:

- Youth markets and economic development
- Career and workforce readiness
- Community connection and engagement
- Community improvement and volunteer service

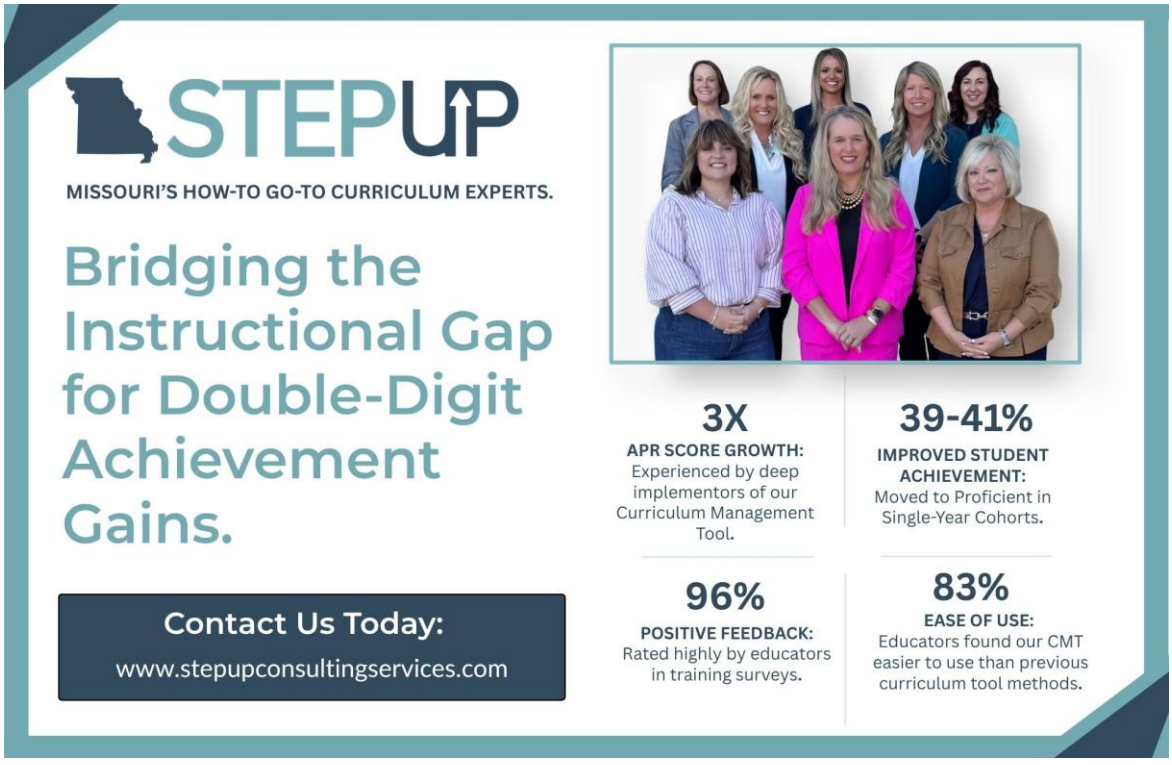
School partners can begin the application process at cfozarks.org/applyforgrants. Applications are due Tuesday, Oct. 27.

The Louis L. and Julia Dorothy Coover Charitable Foundation, a private foundation managed by Commerce Trust, is providing $135,000 for the program, with an additional $50,000 provided by the Trust for Civic Life.

Learn more at cfozarks.org.

LEARN MORE

StepUP Ad



Schilling Technical Education Grant Program

The Schilling Technical Education Grant Program, supporting technical and vocational education programs in Barton, Dade and Jasper counties, is now open for application. Funded by the Clinton and Nancy Schilling Community Fund, the $205,000 grant program will provide grants of up to $50,000 to eligible nonprofits, including schools and municipal organizations, serving the tri-county area.

Funding priorities include:

- Equipment for classrooms or hands-on education
- Curriculum
- Continuing-education stipends for educators
- Expenses for students to attend trade shows, competitions or conferences
- Facility renovations
- Capital requests (if nearing the end of a capital campaign)

Agencies can begin the application process at cfozarks.org/applyforgrants. Applications are due Wednesday, Oct. 21.

Learn more at cfozarks.org.

LEARN MORE

MOSPRA Help Desk at MARE/MO K-8 Conference



Across the Tailgate – Jesse Uhlmeyer

All across rural Missouri, especially this time of year, conversations are taking place across the tailgates of old farm trucks.
Conversations about corn prices, soybean yields, who's buying the Lloyd farm, and who's going to win Friday night.
And somewhere in the middle of one of those conversations, you might find a school superintendent trying to explain Missouri's school funding formula.
It probably starts with a simple question.
"What's going on with school funding?"
There's no PowerPoint, no spreadsheet, and certainly no interest in a long lesson about state laws or school budgets.
The person asking just wants to know what it means for their local school.
So the superintendent does what rural school leaders have learned to do. They take something complicated and explain it in a way that makes sense.
Maybe it's about rising costs, keeping good teachers, or why cutting one position in a small district can affect so many students.
Five minutes later, or maybe twenty, that person walks away knowing a little more about the challenges facing their school.
But here's what matters most.
That conversation didn't work because the superintendent had all the right words. It worked because the person asking trusted the person answering.
And that trust was built long before the question was ever asked.

A Skill We Often Overlook

Rural school leaders spend much of their time moving between two worlds.
In one, we talk about school funding, tax levies, state laws, and student achievement. We attend meetings filled with numbers and terms that most people never use in everyday life.
In the other, we're talking with parents at ballgames, farmers at the gas station, and neighbors at the grocery store.
The issues may be the same, but the conversations are different.
Rural leaders learn to explain complicated things in simple ways. We have to. Our communities expect us to be able to explain what is happening in their schools without making them feel like they need a degree in school finance.
If I can't explain a school funding issue to someone standing across the bed of a pickup truck, I probably need to work on my explanation.
That's not making the issue less important. It's making it easier to understand.
And understanding is where something much bigger can begin.

From One Conversation to a Community Voice

For years, school advocacy has often meant superintendents and school boards speaking with lawmakers about the needs of their districts.
That work matters. But I believe we have an opportunity to build something much stronger.
Grassroots advocacy for public education.
Think about the people who care about our schools.
Parents, grandparents, farmers, business owners, retired teachers, bus drivers, and neighbors who may not have children in school anymore.
They all have a connection to public education. They see how schools affect their communities. They have stories worth sharing.
But many may not feel comfortable talking about school funding or education policy. The issues seem too complicated, and the language can make people feel like those conversations are meant for someone else.
That's where school leaders can help.
We can explain the issues in ways people understand. We can share what is happening in our classrooms. We can answer questions and help people see how decisions made far from home may affect their local schools.
The goal isn't to tell people what to think.
It's to give them the information and confidence to ask questions, form their own opinions, and take part in conversations about public education.
Because the future of our schools shouldn't be a conversation that only school administrators understand.
It should be a conversation our communities can join.

Relationships Before Requests

Of course, none of this works without trust.
Think about the person standing across that pickup truck bed.
Why did they feel comfortable asking the question? Why were they willing to listen?
Chances are, the relationship began long before that conversation.

Maybe they've seen the superintendent at ballgames for years. Maybe their children attend the school.
Maybe they've worked together on a community project or shared a dozen conversations at the gas station.
Trust grows through small moments.
The same is true when building relationships with lawmakers and other community leaders.
Too often, we reach out when we need something. A new bill raises concerns. A funding decision may hurt our district. A proposed change could affect students.
We send an email or make a phone call.
But what if those relationships already existed?
What if lawmakers had visited our classrooms, met our teachers, and seen what our schools mean to the communities they serve?
The next conversation would be different.
We wouldn't be introducing our schools for the first time. We'd be continuing a relationship.
The best time to build trust is long before we need someone to listen.

Give People a Story Worth Sharing

Numbers are important. We need facts when talking about school funding and education policy.
But numbers alone rarely tell the whole story.
A budget report can show the cost of transportation. It can't show the bus driver who travels miles of gravel roads to make sure a child gets to school.
A staffing report can show the number of teachers in a district. It can't show the teacher who stays after school to help a student who is struggling.
A funding formula can show how money is divided among districts. It can't fully explain what a lost program means to the children who depended on it.
Those are the stories that help people understand what public schools do.
And those stories don't belong only to superintendents.
They belong to the people living them.
A parent can explain what a reading program meant to their child. A business owner can talk about the role the school plays in the community. A retired teacher can share how public education changed lives over the years.
When people understand the issues and feel comfortable sharing their experiences, the conversation grows beyond the superintendent's office.
That's the heart of grassroots advocacy.

Our Rural Voice Has Value

Rural schools may not have large staffs or teams of people focused on public relations and government affairs.
But we have something that matters just as much.
Relationships.
We know our neighbors. We see our families at ballgames. We run into school board members at the grocery store. We have conversations in places where people feel comfortable speaking openly.
Those relationships give us a chance to listen, answer questions, and help our communities better understand their schools.
We should make the most of that opportunity.
And we should carry those same skills into conversations with state leaders.
We don't need to use bigger words or sound like someone we're not.
We need to know the facts, explain them clearly, listen carefully, and treat people with respect.
We also need to remember that our goal is bigger than having our own voices heard.
It's helping more people find their voices in the conversation about public education.

The UnCommon Principle

The next time someone asks you about school funding across the tailgate of a pickup truck, don't overlook the moment.
It may seem like another conversation in a small town.
But it could be the start of something more.
That person may go home and talk with their family. They may ask another question at a school board meeting. They may share their own experience with someone making decisions about education.
Or they may simply come away with a better understanding of the school that serves their community.
All of those things matter.
Grassroots advocacy doesn't have to begin with a large crowd, a public meeting, or a trip to Jefferson City.
Sometimes it begins when one person asks a question and someone they trust takes the time to answer.
As rural school leaders, we have an opportunity to build on those moments. Not by telling our communities what to believe, but by giving them a clearer picture of the schools they support and the issues those schools face.
Our greatest impact may not come from being the loudest voice for public education. It may come from helping our communities find their own.
And that work can begin with a simple conversation across the tailgate of a pickup truck.



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