MARE Focus

OCTOBER 28, 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

– One of the many services that MARE provides is a quality, yet affordable Superintendent Search Program. If you are retiring this year or making plans to move, we would welcome the opportunity to work with your district to find the next leader. Contact Kevin Sandlin, MARE Executive Director, at (660) 747-8050 or by email at 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**. **(11/06/2026)**

Davis R-XII – Dr. Maggie Anderson is the search consultant. She can be reached at (816) 898-0005 or **mg2.anderson@gmail.com**. **Closing TBD**

Buchanan Co. R-IV – Dr. Michael Jinks is the search consultant. He can be reached at (660) 441-7473 or **19mj46@charter.net**. **Closing TBD**

Osage Co. R-I – Dr. Jerry Cochran is the search consultant. He can be reached at (660) 596-3184 or **cochranj115@gmail.com**. **Closing TBD**

District Searches – District is conducting search!

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

Strafford R-VI – Deadline to apply is 11/20/2026. Contact Mark Hedger for more information at **markh@straffordschools.net**.

School of the Osage Administrative Openings – HS Principal & Extended Learning Director – Contact Dr. Jason Price at **pricej@osageschools.com**.

** More searches coming soon!

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 **(Next meeting is December 8th!)** and remaining Task Force Meetings **(Next meeting is November 16th).** 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

– Our 2026 MARE/MO K-8 Conference was our biggest and best ever thanks to our 312 attendees, 99 Exhibitor Tables (230 vendor members), 83 presenters and a host of other guests and honorees. Special thanks to our amazing sponsors:

Platinum Level ($2,000.00) – balanceHQ, Daikin TMi, EdCounsel, LLC, iCEV, Missouri Educator's Trust, MOCAAT, OSBA/Acrisure, SIC Midwest, Software Unlimited, TIPS & Veregy

Gold Level ($1,500.00) – Claim Care, Inc., Coryell Roofing, Heartland Business Systems, Hoener Architects, LLC, L.J. Hart & Company, LogiCourt, Noresco, Omni Energy Partners, LLC, Penmac Education Staffing, Performance Services, Reynolds Construction & Commercial Roofing, Smith Paper & Janitor Supply, The Horace Mann Companies & Tri-County Electrical Contractors

Silver Level ($1,000.00) – Allegion, Coaches' Tool Chest, FARCO, Gary Crossley Ford, Guin Mundorf, LLC, Mickes O'Toole, LLC, S.M. Wilson & Company, Stifel, Trane U.S. Inc. & Tueth Keeney, P.C.

Bronze Level ($600.00) – Absolute Janitorial Services, American Fidelity, Board2Classroom, First Onsite Property Restoration, Gilmore & Bell, P.C., Inter-State Studio, Midwest Bus Sales, Midwest Transit Equipment, Missouri NEA, Navigate Building Solutions, Navitas, OPAA! Food Management, Paragon Architecture, Pepco, Inc., Piper Sandler & Company, Progressive Technologies, Inc., Quality Network Solutions & Rural Schools Initiative (UCM)

Join us next year at the Lodge on October 20-22, 2027!

Outstanding Rural Education Awards

– It was our honor to recognize the following individuals at our Awards Luncheon on Thursday, October 22nd:

Outstanding Rural Staff Member – Mr. Dennis Barry, Lonedell R-XIV
Outstanding Rural Teacher – Mrs. Sarah Morris, Bronaugh R-VII
Outstanding Rural Administrator – Dr. Will Darter, Everton R-III
MO K-8 Administrator of the Year – Dr. Rachelle Jennings, Laclede Co. C-5
Outstanding Rural School District – Galena R-II School District
Friend of Rural Education – Senator Lincoln Hough

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

"Great leaders do not set out to be a leader…They set out to make a difference. It's never about the role - always about the goal."

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, Brockmiller Construction & Noresco**. Welcome to the MARE family!

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

- 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

"It is not a red or blue issue; it is a public school issue."
Maria Walden

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. Please contact me to arrange delivery at an area meeting!

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

Learning Blade Corner – November Article

LearningBlade Powered by eDynamic Learning CORNER

Celebrate National STEM Day with Learning Blade in Missouri!

November 8 is National STEM Day! It's a great opportunity to show Missouri students how science, technology, engineering, and math connect to exciting careers across our state!

From aerospace and advanced manufacturing to healthcare, agriculture, and energy, STEM professionals are making a difference in Missouri every day. **Learning Blade helps students explore these careers and see how STEM connects to their future.** With engaging missions like **Dolphin Rescue, Rescue Robot, and Energy Sources**, your students can:

- **Explore healthcare, veterinary science, and engineering careers** as they work to rescue an injured dolphin and design a prosthetic tail, learning how STEM professionals solve real-world problems.
- **Discover robotics, engineering, and computer science careers** while exploring how sensors, circuits, and programming are used in Missouri's aerospace, automotive, and manufacturing industries.
- **Learn about energy and environmental careers** as they investigate different energy sources and discover how STEM professionals help power Missouri communities and protect our natural resources.

Celebrate National STEM Day by helping your Missouri students discover the STEM careers and opportunities available right here in their home state!

Learning Blade is available **at no cost to Missouri schools** through funding from the Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE).

*If you aren't already using Learning Blade, remember that it is **FREE** to create a new account: www.LearningBlade.com/MO, or for more assistance on how to use Learning Blade, get expert tips and support with your state manager: Schedule Here*

Consolidation Article – Jesse Uhlmeyer

Every once in a while, a comment from a political leader makes people stop what they're doing and take a second look.

That happened recently when Missouri Speaker of the House Jon Patterson suggested that the state could save millions of dollars by consolidating school districts.

For many school leaders across Missouri, the comment was a head-turner. Not necessarily because consolidation is a new idea, but because of how openly it was being discussed as a way to reduce the cost of public education.

Some may have been surprised. Others may have felt it confirmed concerns they have had for some time about the direction of public school funding in Missouri.

In an interview with *The Kansas City Star*, Patterson compared Missouri's more than 500 school districts serving approximately 850,000 students to Florida's 67 districts serving nearly three million students. He suggested that if Missouri's districts were closer in size to Lee's Summit or Blue Springs, the state could operate with just 50 or 60 districts and redirect millions of dollars in savings toward education.

On the surface, that might sound like a reasonable financial argument. Fewer districts could mean fewer superintendents, fewer central offices, and less administrative spending.

But for those of us who work in rural education, there is much more to the conversation than the number of districts on a map.

Missouri has spent the past two years funding public schools below the amount called for by its own Foundation Formula. School leaders are being asked to improve academic performance, meet higher expectations, and make increasingly difficult financial decisions.

Now, one of the state's most influential legislative leaders is suggesting that having fewer school districts could be part of the answer.

That raises a question worth asking.

Are we looking for ways to make public education better, or are we looking for ways to make it cheaper?

Those are not always the same thing. Especially since Missouri uses a formula for funding public education that is based on enrollment and fewer school districts does not create fewer students.

Before Missouri moves too far down that road, there is some research from a neighboring state that deserves our attention.

Arkansas Tried It. Did It Work?

A few months ago, I wrote an article about open enrollment that included research on the effects of 30 years of open enrollment in Iowa. Now, we have a chance to learn from another neighboring state about a different topic.

Earlier this month, *The Hechinger Report* published an article examining a 20-year study of school district consolidation in Arkansas. The findings challenge the belief that combining smaller districts automatically saves taxpayers money.

In 2004, Arkansas passed a law requiring school districts with fewer than 350 students to consolidate. Over the next decade, 85 districts merged with others, and 105 schools closed.

The reasoning was familiar. By combining smaller districts, the state expected to reduce administrative costs and operate its education system more efficiently.

And to a certain extent, that part worked.

Researchers from the University of Arkansas found that administrative spending decreased by as much as $138 per student. That sounds like a financial success.

But the story didn't end there.

Transportation costs increased by as much as $63 per student annually. Instructional staffing costs rose by as much as $179 per student, and student support costs also increased.

When researchers examined the overall financial picture, they found that the administrative savings had been offset by increased expenses elsewhere.

After two decades, the researchers found no overall cost savings from consolidation.

The study was presented at a research conference in September 2026 and has not yet been published in a peer-reviewed journal. Its findings are preliminary, but they offer an important warning about assuming that fewer districts will automatically mean lower costs.

The reason is fairly simple.

Combining two school districts doesn't eliminate the students who need to be educated.

Those students still need teachers, classrooms, transportation, meals, special education services, and support staff. In some cases, bringing districts together creates additional expenses rather than eliminating them.

The research also points to consequences beyond school budgets. Earlier studies in Arkansas found that consolidation contributed to population loss in rural communities, lower property values, and little improvement in student achievement.

Arkansas reduced the number of school districts, but the expected financial benefits did not appear.

That should give Missouri something to think about.

A School District Is More Than a Number on a Spreadsheet

I understand why someone looking at Missouri's school funding system might question why we have more than 500 school districts.

From a distance, it may seem unnecessary for neighboring communities to have separate superintendents, school boards, and administrative offices.

But rural education looks a little different when you get off the interstate and travel the gravel roads that connect our communities.

In many small districts, administrators wear several hats. A superintendent might also oversee transportation, facilities, federal programs, and a dozen other responsibilities. A principal may supervise multiple programs while handling responsibilities that would be divided among several administrators in a larger district.

Small schools have already learned to operate with limited resources because they have never had the luxury of operating any other way.

And geography matters.

A district serving 500 students spread across 150 square miles faces different challenges than a district serving 5,000 students in a much smaller area.

Consolidating those rural districts doesn't make the miles between communities disappear. It may actually increase the distance students travel to school each day.

That means longer bus routes, additional transportation costs, and potentially less time for students to participate in activities outside the classroom.

There is also something else that doesn't appear on a financial spreadsheet.
In rural Missouri, the local school is often the center of the community. The school is often one of the largest employers in town. It brings families into the community and gives people a reason to stay. When a small community loses its school, the impact can reach far beyond education.
That doesn't mean every school district should remain exactly as it is forever. There may be situations where consolidation makes sense for students and communities. But there is a difference between a community choosing consolidation because it creates better opportunities for children and a community being pushed toward consolidation because it can no longer afford to operate.
That difference matters.

Could Underfunding Become a Path to Consolidation?

Yes, I said another quiet part out loud because this is the part of Missouri's current school funding conversation that deserves greater attention.
For FY27, Missouri's Foundation Formula is approximately $190 million below full funding. Looking ahead to FY28, the State Board of Education's budget request could leave the formula approximately $270 million short of what full funding would require.
At the same time, Missouri is developing a new school accountability system, discussing revisions to the Foundation Formula, and expecting districts to improve student performance.
Those expectations are not necessarily unreasonable. Schools should be accountable for student learning, and taxpayers deserve to know their money is being spent responsibly.
But those expectations come with costs.
When funding doesn't keep pace with the formula, school leaders must make difficult choices. They delay purchases, reduce programs, leave positions unfilled, and look for savings wherever possible.
For a small rural district, there may be very few places left to cut without affecting students. Eventually, a district can reach a point where it is no longer deciding what is best for students. It is deciding what it can afford to keep.
That brings us back to the Speaker's comments.
Patterson has openly discussed consolidation as a possible way to save millions of dollars. He has also expressed the belief that schools should look for greater efficiency when funding is limited.
Those statements do not prove that state leaders are intentionally underfunding schools to force consolidation. But when they are considered alongside the state's recent funding decisions, they raise a legitimate question.
Could continued underfunding eventually accomplish what a mandatory consolidation law might struggle to achieve?
A state would not necessarily have to pass a law requiring small districts to merge. Financial pressure alone could eventually leave some communities with little choice. That possibility deserves an open and thoughtful conversation, especially among the rural communities that could be most affected and the legislators who represent those communities.

Efficiency Doesn't Always Mean Bigger

There is nothing wrong with expecting school districts to be financially responsible.
In fact, school leaders and local school boards have an obligation to make the best possible use of taxpayer dollars. That includes examining staffing, purchasing, transportation, facilities, and opportunities to work with neighboring districts.
But efficiency and consolidation are not the same thing.
Missouri already has examples of school districts working together to provide opportunities that might otherwise be difficult to offer independently. Districts share specialized staff, coordinate professional development, and work together to provide services for students. Those partnerships can create opportunities while allowing communities to maintain local control of their schools. And local control is an important part of this conversation.
A school board elected by the people of a small rural community understands the needs and values of that community. Its members are accessible to the families they serve. They see parents at the grocery store, church, ballgames, and community events. That connection creates a level of accountability that is difficult to measure but important to preserve.
The research from Arkansas suggests we should be careful about treating consolidation as a simple solution to school funding challenges. Saving money in one part of a district's budget doesn't necessarily mean saving money overall. And eliminating a district office or administrative position doesn't eliminate the responsibility to educate the children who live in that community.

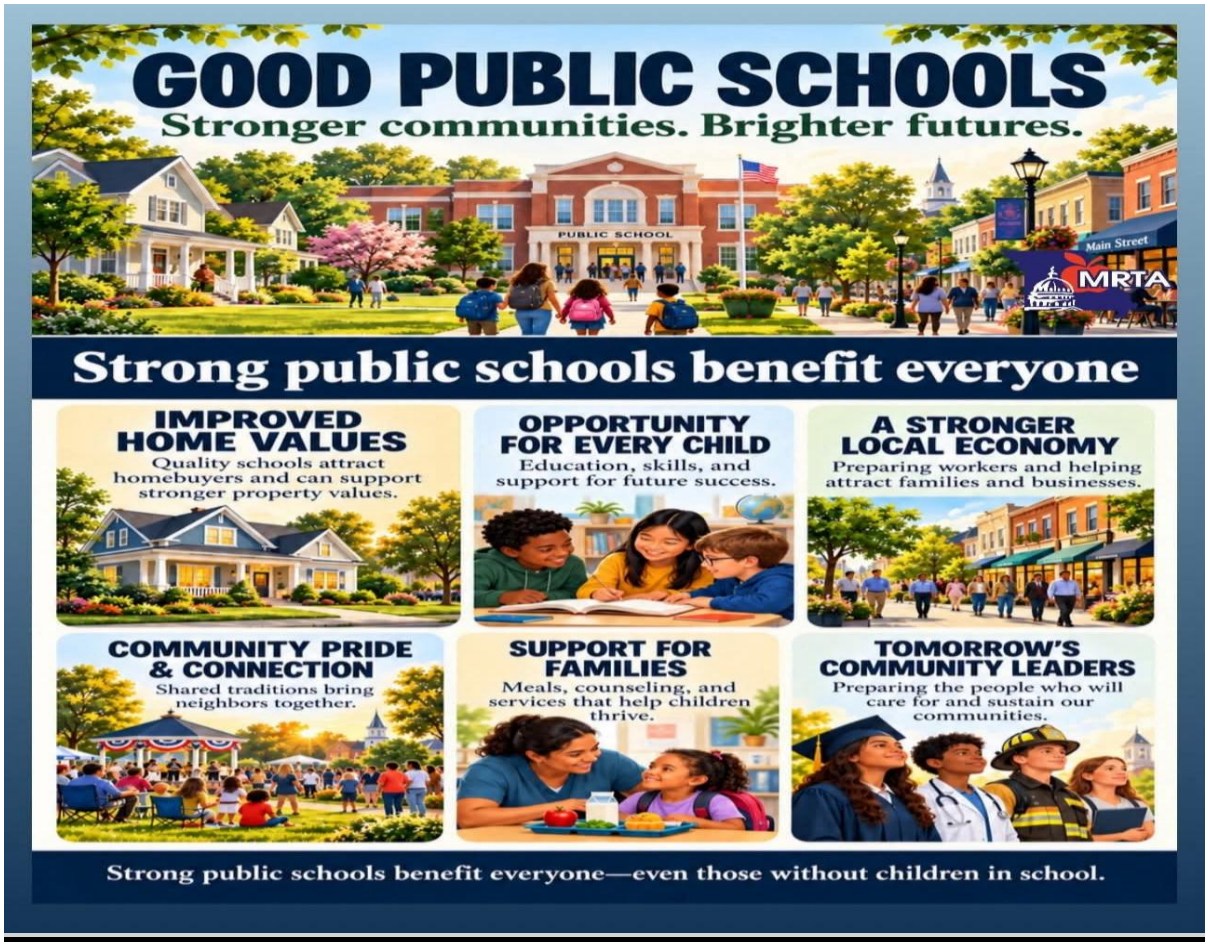
Before We Change the Map, Let's Ask Better Questions

Missouri is entering an important period for public education.
The decisions made about the Foundation Formula, accountability, and school funding over the next several years could shape our public schools for generations. Those conversations should include efficiency. They should include accountability. And they should certainly include how taxpayer dollars are spent.
But they must also include the realities of rural education.
If consolidation is going to be part of Missouri's plan, we should be asking what the research tells us about its actual costs and benefits.

Will students have better educational opportunities? Will transportation costs increase? Will communities lose their local schools? Will taxpayers actually save money? And who will make those decisions?
Perhaps the most important question is whether Missouri is willing to fully fund the schools it currently has before deciding that there are too many of them.
There is a significant difference between asking school districts to become more efficient and creating financial conditions that make it increasingly difficult for them to survive.
The Arkansas study does not tell us that every school district consolidation is a bad idea. It does, however, challenge the assumption that consolidation is an easy way to reduce the cost of public education. And that should matter to anyone making decisions about Missouri's schools.
The Speaker's comments may have caught some school leaders by surprise, but perhaps they have also given us an opportunity to have a conversation that has been needed for some time.
A conversation about what Missouri expects from its public schools, what it is willing to invest in them, and what might be lost if financial savings become the driving force behind decisions about their future.
Because at the end of the day, the goal should not be to have the fewest school districts possible.
The goal should be to provide the best possible education for every Missouri student, regardless of the size of the community they call home.
And before we start erasing school district boundaries from a map, we should make sure we understand everything that exists inside them.

The UnCommon Principle

Good leadership doesn't begin by asking what we can eliminate. It begins by understanding what we are responsible for preserving, improving, and providing for the people we serve.



MARE Organization Staff

Kevin F. Sandlin -- Cell Phone: (660) 351-0596 -- Email: ksandlin@moare.com
Executive Director
Jerry L Cochran, EdD. -- Cell Phone: (660) 596-3184 -- Email: cochranj115@gmail.com
Assistant Executive Director
Ray V. Patrick, EdD. – Cell Phone: (660) 909 – 5118 – Email: rpatrick@moare.com
Associate Director

Missouri Association of Rural Education
710 N College, Suite C
Warrensburg, Missouri 64093
(660) 747-8050
Fax: (660) 747-8160
Website: www.moare.com

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