MARE Focus

NOVEMBER 11, 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.

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!

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 15th!)** 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!

Foundation Formula Modernization Task Force

– The next meeting is on Monday, November 16th at 10:00 a.m. in Jeff City. **Scenarios will be shared when these are released!** **Link for community input on this process. Submit Comments to DESE Task Force**

"Honor to Whom Honor is Due – Happy Veteran's Day"

Quote of the Week

"Continuous learning is the minimum requirement for success in any field." —Brian Tracy

MARE Scholarship Program Information – Coming Soon!

The information for the 2027 MARE HS Senior Scholarship Program and the 2027 MARE College Junior/Senior Scholarship Program will be released no later than November 30th! We are transitioning to an online submission either directly or a submission process whereby you scan all documents and email them to me in a single PDF format. Our goal in this transition is to make the application process for both awards easier and faster to complete, without the hassle of late or lost applications in the mail. A separate email blast will be sent out to all MARE member school districts and colleges and universities as soon as we are ready to go "live". Special thanks to Dr. Jon Turner for his assistance in making this come to fruition.

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

"Thank You for Your Service to our Great Country!"

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

MOCAAT – What Can You Do for Me?

MOCAAT™



Authors Among Us – Check it Out! – There are so many amazing and talented people serving in rural education. Check out books by the following authors and friends of Missouri Rural Education: Dr. Will Darter – "The Empowered R.U.R.A.L Education Leader", Mr. Justin Pickens – "The Lottery Ticket Teacher" and Mr. Duane Martin – "Closed Sessions." I would encourage you to check out these books.

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

Letter to the Editor – Dr. Gearl Loden, Supt. at Nixa

It's the night before an assignment is due, and your kid rushes in and lets you know that they have a school project due the next morning. Are you shocked when the last-minute, rushed project results in a bad grade?

I've been graded before. Every superintendent has. Test scores, audits, board evaluations, and the court of public opinion all weigh in. I believe in accountability, and I've experienced firsthand a state A–F model being built from the ground up. That experience is exactly why I'm concerned about how fast Missouri is moving to grade its schools. A bad system is like a rushed school project. A bad system will have a negative impact on our kids and the communities they live in because schools are the heart of many of our communities.

School evaluation systems are complicated. As they should be. They take time, considerable research, input from educators, and extensive statistical testing. In my experience, legislators, state education departments, superintendents, and technical experts work together to develop the model over a period of years, not just a few months. Independent technical reviews are an important part of determining whether the results are valid and reliable. This is why it takes years to develop.

Missouri is developing its statewide accountability system in just a few months, primarily in response to the governor's executive order. This is an aggressive implementation timeline.

I understand that governors set educational priorities. But setting a direction and developing a statistically sound accountability system are two very different things.

The University of Missouri's October 15 technical report on the proposed A–F model raises some legitimate concerns. The researchers identified limitations in providing accurate grades to schools because of a lack of data and concerns about how poverty would impact scores.

I appreciate the university's willingness to identify these limitations. That is what good research should do. But it also raises a question: Why would we move toward publicly grading schools before these issues are resolved and the model has undergone independent technical review?

My concerns go beyond the model itself.

Recently, Missouri Speaker of the House Jon Patterson discussed the possibility of reducing Missouri's more than 500 school districts to approximately 50 or 60 through consolidation. His argument centered on potential financial savings.

I've worked in rural communities. I understand what those schools mean to the people who live there. A school district is often one of the largest employers in a community. It brings people together, supports local businesses, and is an important part of a town's identity.

Consolidation may make sense in some circumstances, but those decisions require much more consideration than whether administrative costs can be reduced.

Now consider what happens when a small rural district receives a D or F under a new accountability model that was rushed to be put in place. Could that grade eventually be used to build the case for consolidation?

I have similar concerns about communities with high concentrations of poverty. Could low school grades become part of the justification for expanding charter schools into those areas?

I don't know that either is the intended outcome, and I'm not suggesting that it is. But when we look at what is happening around Missouri, I believe those are fair questions.

In 2023, The Opportunity Trust, a St. Louis organization led by Eric Scroggins, received a federal grant award with approximately $35.6 million in expected funding over five years to support charter school expansion in Missouri.

Governor Mike Kehoe, while serving as lieutenant governor, wrote a letter in May 2023 supporting that grant application.

This same Opportunity Trust has also been active in advocating for changes to Missouri's education accountability policies.

There is nothing wrong with supporting charter schools. But I do think Missourians deserve to know who helped shape this new accountability system, what role outside organizations played, and how those decisions were made.

We should also look at the makeup of our State Board of Education.

Three of the eight voting members have previously served on charter school governing boards. Several recent appointees were still awaiting Senate confirmation as of late October. Having charter school experience does not automatically mean someone is biased. In fact, one of those members, Vincent Schoemehl Jr., voted against the proposed A–F framework in September.

Still, I would like to know how much input the board received from public school leaders, particularly those leading rural districts and districts serving large numbers of students living in poverty.

Missouri already has an accountability system. We should be able to explain why this additional model is necessary. What will this new model tell parents that they cannot already learn? And will the grades school buildings and districts receive accurately reflect the education the students are receiving?

I also want to know what happens down the road.

State officials have said these grades will not directly affect accreditation or funding under the current framework. I appreciate that clarification. But what assurance do communities have that future policymakers won't use those same grades to justify consolidation, changes in governance, or the expansion of private school options?

I've spent my career working to improve student achievement. I've led schools and districts through difficult changes, and I understand that accountability can help drive improvement when it is done well.

I am not opposed to an A–F system. I am opposed to putting a system in place before we have sufficient evidence that it works as intended.

Before Missouri releases these grades, I believe the State Board should require an independent technical review, examine results across multiple years, and give districts a meaningful opportunity to evaluate the calculations.

That doesn't seem unreasonable when we consider what is at stake.

A letter grade may look simple, but the decisions made because of it can shape a school and its community for years.

Everyone knows you don't pull a cake out of the oven just because the timer went off. You check the middle first. If it isn't done, you give it more time.

Missouri's children deserve that same care. No half-baked cake for our kids. No half-baked school grades, either.

Rural Schools are Making a Difference!

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!

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*

Is Missouri Providing Record School Funding?– Jesse Uhlmeyer

But You're Making More Money Than Ever Before

Why saying that Missouri is providing record school funding doesn't tell the whole story.

Jesse Uhlmeyer

Imagine starting a new job. Your employer tells you the position pays $1,000 a week. You agree to the amount, show up every day, and do the work you're hired to do.

Then Friday rolls around. You open your paycheck, expecting $1,000, but there's only $950. Naturally, you ask about the missing $50.

Your employer smiles and says, "But you're making more money than you did last year! In fact, this is the largest paycheck we've ever given you!"

You'd probably have a few questions. You weren't asking whether your paycheck was bigger than last year's. You were asking why it was smaller than the amount you expected. Hearing that it was a record paycheck wouldn't make the missing money any easier to explain.

Now imagine that happening every payday.

That's one way to understand a question at the center of Missouri's school funding debate. **How can schools receive record funding and still be underfunded?**

Record Funding Doesn't Tell the Whole Story

We've heard it many times from Missouri lawmakers. The state is providing record amounts of money for public education. That statement can be true, but it leaves out an important part of the story.

Missouri has a school funding formula written into state law. The formula looks at things like student attendance, student needs, and local tax money to figure out how much state funding public schools should receive.

This isn't a number school leaders made up. Missouri lawmakers created the formula and put it into law.

Yet the amount of money provided in the state budget can fall short of what the formula calls for.

Think about that for a moment. The state created a system to figure out how much money schools should receive, but it doesn't always provide the full amount.

Record funding tells us how much the state is spending. Full funding tells us whether the state is providing the amount its own formula calls for.

Those are two different things, and both deserve to be part of the conversation.

What the Numbers Tell Us

For the current school year, FY27, Missouri provided about $4.28 billion through its school funding formula. That's a lot of money, but it's also about $190 million less than what was needed to fully fund the formula.

Looking ahead to FY28, the Missouri State Board of Education has asked for about the same amount of money. However, the formula shows that schools will need about $270 million more than that request to be fully funded.

The FY28 budget has not been approved. Lawmakers will make those decisions during the 2027 legislative session.

Missouri faces real budget challenges. Lawmakers have many needs to consider, and public schools should be expected to spend tax dollars wisely. But those challenges don't change the fact that there is a difference between what the state's formula calls for and what schools receive.

Calling it record funding doesn't make that difference go away.

Another Part of the Funding Conversation

There's another part of Missouri's education budget that deserves attention.

While the public school funding formula remains underfunded, Missouri lawmakers have also set aside $60 million in state general revenue for MOScholars in FY27. This program helps eligible families pay for private school tuition and other approved education costs.

MOScholars first used private donations supported by state tax credits. That means people who donated to the program could receive a credit toward their state taxes. Today, the program also receives money directly from the state's general revenue fund.

Why does that matter?

General revenue is public money. It's the same main source of state money used to help pay for public schools, roads, public safety, and other services. The money going to MOScholars isn't taken directly from a local school district's funding payment, but it is part of how Missouri chooses to spend its tax dollars.

Supporters of MOScholars believe families should have more choices about where their children attend school. Others question why the state is putting more public money toward private school scholarships while its own public school funding formula remains underfunded.

Both views deserve to be heard. But there's a question that shouldn't be ignored.

If Missouri doesn't have enough money to fully fund its public school formula, how does it decide how much general revenue to spend on private school scholarships?

That's not a question about whether families should have choices. It's a question about how Missouri sets its spending priorities and meets the needs of the students it serves.

Schools Still Have Bills to Pay

Now, let's go back to that paycheck.

Imagine receiving $950 instead of $1,000, but your mortgage, groceries, car payment, and electric bill still need to be paid. You can't tell the electric company that your employer gave you a record paycheck. You still have to find a way to pay your bills.

School districts face a similar problem. Buses still need fuel. Buildings still need heat. Teachers and staff still need to be paid. Students still need transportation, classroom supplies, and the help they need to learn.

Those costs don't stop rising when state funding falls short.

In rural Missouri, these choices can be even harder. A school district can't always shorten a bus route because students still live miles from school. It can't easily cut a teaching position when that teacher may already teach several different subjects or grade levels.

So schools make adjustments. A position might go unfilled. A bus replacement might be delayed. A program might be reduced, or staff members might be asked to take on more work.

School leaders should always look for ways to save money and make better use of what they have. But there's a difference between finding ways to save and being forced to make cuts because funding hasn't kept up with the amount the state calculates.

Accountability Should Work Both Ways

I believe school leaders have a duty to spend public money wisely. We should be able to explain our budgets, answer questions about spending, and show our communities how their tax dollars are being used.

We should also be willing to make hard decisions when needed. Every dollar matters, especially in small school districts where resources are already limited.

But that same level of responsibility should apply to state funding decisions.

If Missouri has a formula to figure out how much money public schools should receive, people should be able to ask whether the state is fully funding it. If the answer is no, they should be able to ask why.

And when lawmakers choose to spend general revenue on programs like MOScholars, those choices should be part of the same discussion.

This doesn't mean schools should receive every dollar they ask for without question. It means that when we talk about public education funding, we should look at the whole picture instead of focusing on one number.

Missouri has real budget challenges, and people may disagree about how tax dollars should be spent. But we should all be able to agree that the public deserves clear answers about where the money is going.

The Conversation We Need to Have

One of the things I've learned from working in rural schools is that people don't need a long report filled with numbers to understand an issue. They need someone willing to explain it in a way that makes sense.

We have those conversations every day. People ask questions because they care about their schools and want to know what's happening.

We don't need everyone in Missouri to become an expert on the school funding formula. But we should help people understand the difference between record funding and full funding.

When someone hears that Missouri is spending more money than ever on public schools, they should also know whether the state is meeting the amount its own formula calls for. When they hear about MOScholars, they should understand that state general revenue is now being used to help fund the program.

And when someone hears that a local school is making cuts, they should understand how state funding, local taxes, rising costs, and district decisions all play a part.

That's how people become better informed. It's also how they become more involved in the decisions that affect their schools.

School leaders have a chance to help make that happen. We can explain the facts, answer questions, and encourage people to share their concerns with those making decisions in Jefferson City.

Good conversations don't have to begin with an argument. Sometimes they begin with a simple question about why the numbers don't add up.

The UnCommon Principle

Imagine opening that paycheck one more time.

You expected $1,000, but you received $950. Your employer reminds you that it's the largest paycheck you've ever received.

You might be glad you're earning more than you did last year, but you'd still want to know why you're $50 short.
Missouri's school funding system is more complex than a paycheck. The formula isn't a promise from an employer, and lawmakers must make budget decisions each year. But the example helps explain why school leaders continue to raise concerns even when state funding reaches record levels.
We can recognize the amount Missouri spends on education. We can understand that the state faces tough budget choices. We can have fair discussions about programs like MOScholars and the choices available to families.
But we should also be willing to ask whether Missouri is providing the amount its own formula calls for.
Because record funding and full funding are not the same thing.
If we're going to have a fair conversation about the future of Missouri's public schools, we need to understand both.
After all, **a record paycheck can still come up short.**

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