MARE Focus

NOVEMBER 23, 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 on 12/04/2026)**

Buchanan Co. R-IV – Dr. Michael Jinks is the search consultant. He can be reached at (660) 441-7473 or **19mj46@charter.net**. **(Closing on 12/04/2026)**

Osage Co. R-I – Dr. Jerry Cochran is the search consultant. He can be reached at (660) 596-3184 or **cochranj115@gmail.com**. **(Closing on 12/04/2026)**

Oran R-III – Mr. Darryl Pannier is the search consultant. He can be reached at (573) 803-9008 **or dwpannier@semo.edu**. **(Closing on 12/22/2026)**

District Searches – District is conducting search!

Dadeville R-II – Deadline to apply is 11/25/2026. Contact Cassy Farmer for more information at **cfarmer@dadeville.k12.mo.us**.

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

** More searches coming soon!

Small Schools Committee Information – Jesse Uhlmeyer

I have finalized the summary of our meeting this morning and would like to send this information out in an email blast. The Google document contains a lot of useful information. There are links to the Small School Priorities for 2026-2027, a calendar invite to the Capitol Visit Day, and a link to the Small Schools webpage. I have included the link to the document to share as you would like.

Small Schools Information

Small Schools Webpage

MARE Welcome Apollo Health Insurance as New Associate

Subject: New MARE Associate Member: Apollo Health Insurance

Apollo Health Insurance is proud to join MARE as a new Associate Member. Based out of Lee's Summit, MO, Apollo is a strategic benefits partner trusted both nationally and regionally to help school districts modernize health benefits.

Rather than simply bringing renewals and leaving, Apollo brings proactive solutions that help districts take control of their benefits. Their team sets up proactive infrastructures uniquely built for rural school districts, acting as an ongoing extension of district HR teams.

By blending alternative group funding strategies with individual coverage options for spouses and dependents, Apollo helps districts protect classroom funding while supporting educator families.

Alongside MARE, Apollo partners with the National Rural Education Association, AASA, and USA-Kansas, and frequently speaks at national events on the trends and realities facing rural school districts across America. Their focus is always on serving as a practical educational resource for district leadership.

If it would be helpful to connect or learn more about what Apollo is seeing across rural districts, feel free to reach out anytime or visit Apollo's profile on the MARE Associate Members page or see their contact information below.

Website
Phone: (816) 946-7675
E-mail: school.districts@apollo-insurance.com

MRTA Alert – We Deserve Answers!

MRTA Member Alert: Serious Concerns Surround Missouri's Educational Leader-ship



Today, Friday, November 20, 2026, the Missouri State Board of Education voted 6-1 in a closed meeting to appoint Senate President Pro Tem Cindy O'Laughlin as Missouri's Interim Commissioner of Education for the Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE) effective December 1, 2026.

This decision comes at a critical time for Missouri's public schools and raises significant and concerning questions about the independence of the State Board, the qualifications required of our state's highest-ranking education official, and the future direction of public education.

Missouri's educators, students, families, and taxpayers deserve answers.

For more information from MRTA concerning this appointment, please access their website. Special thanks to Maria Walden and her team for putting this out!

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!).** It is necessary that we all work together and do our part to fight for public education. The battle remains ahead of us.

Foundation Formula Modernization Task Force – The report that the Governor had requested to be delivered to him on December 1, 2026 has been pushed back to sometime in July after the 2027 Legislative Session. The Task Force Committee will reconvene to revisit the matter then!

Quote of the Week

"In the most unlikely of places, you make real connections. Grace finds you. You'll see worthwhile things growing in the dirt of imperfection." Jennifer Healy

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.

Commissioner Survey Results – Dr. Matt Goodman

But, during our time, Dr. Matt Goodman (Pattonville) shared the results from the Commissioner Search Feedback Survey that was open in October. It is exciting that we had nearly 2300 respondents to the survey. Of course, all of the pertinent organizations delivered the survey through their usual communication routes which helped to widely distribute.

The survey results can be viewed at the link below. The results have a delineated respondent number by Region, so you are able to view how we (West Central) fared as far as our contribution to the survey overall. The Region respondent number is also parsed out by role.

An overall key result (Search Transparency Indicator #18) is that respondents wish for this search process to be publicly transparent. The results will be shared with DESE and the State Board.

There is discussion of a PHASE 2 of this process eliciting responses on what characteristics/attributes/skills are desired in a candidate. Stay tuned...

https://eduplusmo.iad1.qualtrics.com/public-dashboard/v0/dashboard/web/6ae9f41d1647e50008d4de36/pages/Page_dc202308-29ca-4706-8cd1-e93662daf55c?language=EN

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

2027 Board Training Schedule will be included in the next MARE Focus!

Barbara Sinatra Children's Center Foundation

Also, here is a link to a video done by Elizabeth Smart that highlights the importance of what we are doing: https://www.youtube.com/shorts/2DDwr0kXnEs

Happy Thanksgiving and as always, let me know how I can help us be more successful in fighting child abuse.

--
Mike Nelson
Vice President, Education and Strategic Partnerships
Barbara Sinatra Children's Center Foundation
in Partnership with Wonder Media

Cell: 801 368 5580
Voice // 800 675 4123
Email: mnelson@wondermediagroup.net

Mailing address:
Barbara Sinatra Children's Center Foundation
in partnership with Wonder Media
2010 Kanin Hoj
Solvang, CA 93463

Corporate website:
www.fightchildabuse.org

..\BSCC Mental Health Monthly Flyer December.pdf

MOCAAT – What Can You Do for Me?



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

We need stories of the amazing things that are happening in your school district. Please send that information to me to pass on to Chelsea Blair and others so that it can be included in the press on this collaborative effort.

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, Apollo Health Insurance & Vogel Mechanical**. Welcome to 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.

We are thankful for all of you who have committed your lives to Missouri public education! Your work matters! Keep the Faith & Continue to Fight for your kids, schools & communities!

Learning Blade Corner – December Article

LearningBlade Powered by eDynamic Learning CORNER



Celebrate Computer Science Education Week in Missouri!
December is a great time for Missouri educators to introduce students to the fast-changing world of computer science. During **Computer Science Education Week** (CSEdWeek), schools across Missouri can help students explore the technology and careers shaping their communities. From cybersecurity and artificial intelligence to software development and robotics, computer science gives students many ways to innovate, solve problems, and plan for the future.

Learning Blade gives Missouri students an engaging way to explore these fields and see how computer science solves real-world problems. The lessons connect classroom learning with careers and help students picture themselves in Missouri's growing technology workforce.

With engaging missions like **Hack Attack** and modules like **Introduction to Computer Careers**, Missouri students can:

- **Explore cybersecurity careers** as they learn how a team of experts works together to restore a school's website and social media accounts after a cyberattack.
- **Discover in-demand computer science careers** like Information Security Analyst and explore the important role technology professionals play in keeping our digital world safe.
- **Build awareness of essential computer science skills** and learn how coding, problem-solving, and technology are transforming industries and creating exciting career opportunities.

Celebrate CSEdWeek by helping Missouri students discover their future in computer science with Learning Blade!

Learning Blade is available at no cost to Missouri schools. If you are not already using it, create an account at www.LearningBlade.com/MO. For ideas, expert tips, or support using Learning Blade with Missouri students, connect with your state manager: Schedule Here.

The Votes are Counted. The Conversations Can’t Stop

The Votes Are Counted. The Conversations Can't Stop.

Why the work before the election matters even more now.

 Jesse Uhlmeyer

Last week, voters across Missouri went to the polls. By now, most of the campaign signs are coming down, the election results have been discussed, and attention is beginning to shift to other things.
But the challenges facing our public schools haven't gone anywhere.
Over the past several months, school leaders across Missouri have spent a great deal of time talking with their communities about school funding, rising costs, and the difficult decisions facing local districts. We've shared information, answered questions, and helped people better understand how decisions made in Jefferson City affect what happens in their schools.
Those conversations were important before the election. **They're just as important now, and we can't afford to let them stop.**

The Conversations That Brought Us Here

For many rural school districts, the past several months have brought some difficult discussions. School boards have worked through tight budgets, administrators have explained financial challenges, and families have asked what those challenges could mean for their children.
These conversations haven't always been comfortable. Nobody enjoys discussing possible cuts to programs, staffing challenges, or the growing gap between what schools are expected to provide and the resources available to do it.
But something important happens when we have those conversations. People begin to understand that school funding isn't just a number in a state budget. It affects the teachers in our classrooms and the opportunities available to our students.
In small communities, those conversations often happen out of the blue in places where you least expect it. They may begin with a simple question about school finances but lead to a better understanding of the challenges facing public education.
That understanding shouldn't disappear when an election ends.

The Issues Are Still Here

Regardless of who won last week, Missouri's public schools still face important questions about funding and education policy.
How can districts plan for the future when state funding is uncertain? How should the school funding system recognize the different costs of serving students across Missouri? What happens when new requirements are placed on schools without the resources needed to meet them?
These questions matter in every community, although the answers may look different from one district to another.
In rural Missouri, we know that smaller enrollment doesn't always mean smaller expenses. Buses still travel long distances, classrooms still need qualified teachers, and students still need access to programs and services. Our districts often have fewer options when costs rise or funding falls short.
But this isn't a rural-versus-urban issue. Every school community has challenges that deserve to be understood. Good education policy should recognize those differences while keeping the needs of students at the center.
The election may have changed some of the people making decisions, but it didn't change the responsibility we share to make sure those decisions are informed.

From Community Conversations to State Decisions

As Missouri prepares for another legislative session, school leaders have an opportunity to build on the conversations already taking place in their communities.
That means continuing to share information with parents, staff, school board members, and local residents. It also means helping those conversations reach the people who will be making decisions about education policy and funding.

We shouldn't expect every lawmaker to understand the daily challenges of running a school district. Just as we rely on others to help us understand issues outside education, lawmakers need opportunities to hear from people who work in our schools and live in the communities they serve.

A conversation about school funding becomes more meaningful when we can explain what a change would mean for a classroom, a bus route, or a student program. A discussion about a new law becomes more useful when we can share what it would take to carry it out.

And those conversations need to go both ways. We have to be willing to listen, answer difficult questions, and work through ideas that may be different from our own.

The goal isn't to turn every conversation into a disagreement. It's to help people understand the issues well enough to make thoughtful decisions.

Keeping Our Communities Involved

One of the easiest things to do after an election is return to our normal routines. School leaders certainly have enough to keep them busy. There are budgets to manage, employees to support, and students who need our attention every day.

But the people who became interested in school funding before the election shouldn't have to wait until the next election to hear about it again.

We can continue providing updates at school board meetings, sharing information with families, and encouraging community members to learn about proposals being considered in Jefferson City. We can invite lawmakers into our schools and help them hear directly from teachers, parents, students, and support staff.

For rural superintendents, this is an important part of serving our communities. Our responsibility doesn't end with managing the district. It also includes helping people understand the decisions that affect their schools and making sure they have opportunities to be heard.

The more informed our communities are, the better prepared they will be to take part in conversations about the future of public education.

The UnCommon Principle

Last week's election was an important moment, but it wasn't the finish line for the conversations we've been having about public education.

The challenges are still here. The questions about funding remain. And the decisions that will shape our schools are still ahead of us.

The UnCommon Principle: The value of a conversation isn't measured by what happens on Election Day, but by what we do with that conversation afterward.

As school leaders, we've spent months helping our communities understand the issues facing public education. We shouldn't have to start those conversations over every time an election approaches. Instead, we should keep building on them, helping people stay informed, and making sure the experiences of our schools and communities are part of the decisions ahead.

The votes have been counted. The conversations can't stop.