

The Missouri **ADMINISTRATOR**

ISSUE 3 | SPRING 2026

OFFICIAL MAGAZINE OF THE MISSOURI ASSOCIATION OF SCHOOL ADMINISTRATORS

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Challenging SB3

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Leading with Presence, Purpose,
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On the Cover: Dr. Mike Slagle, 2026 Pearce Award Recipient

EDITOR'S NOTE

As we close out the spring issue, and our first year of this publication, I find myself reflecting on how far we've come in just a short time.

When we launched this magazine last fall, we knew we were building something new. With each issue, we've continued to learn, refine, and better understand what this space can be for Missouri's superintendents.

What has become clear is that this magazine is, at its core, a reflection of you. It reflects your leadership, your challenges, your innovation, and your commitment to the communities you serve.

This issue, like the ones before it, highlights the meaningful work happening across the state. It also reinforces something that has stood out to me all year. Even in complex and challenging times, there is an incredible amount of thoughtful, student-centered work taking place in Missouri schools every day.

On a personal note, this spring also marks one year since I joined MASA. I never would have guessed that part of that journey would include serving as editor of a magazine. It has been an unexpected and deeply rewarding part of my role, and one that has brought me a great deal of joy.

Coming from a background in state government, I have gained a new perspective on public education over the past year. I have seen firsthand the care, leadership, and dedication that district leaders bring to their work. The impact is real, not just in schools but across families and entire communities.

As we look ahead to the 2026–2027 school year, our focus is on continuing to improve and build on what we've started. We want this publication to be useful, relevant, and reflective of the work that matters most to you. Your feedback is an important part of that process, and I encourage you to share your thoughts, ideas, and suggestions at communications@mcsa.org.

Thank you for reading, for sharing your work, and for allowing us to help tell the story of public education in Missouri. We are just getting started, and I am grateful to be building this alongside you.



Chelsea Blair

Editor, The Missouri Administrator

The Missouri ADMINISTRATOR

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SPRING UPDATES

As MASA continues to support school leaders across Missouri,

this spring has been marked by meaningful progress, valuable connections, and a strong focus on the future. From strategic planning to new resources and member engagement, several key initiatives are moving forward to strengthen the association and the support we provide to our members.



Pictured above: MASA Past Presidents pose at the 2026 Spring Conference.

Strategic Planning: Building the Next Five Years

MASA’s strategic planning process is well underway, with strong engagement from leaders across the state. On March 13, the Strategic Taskforce—comprised of superintendent members and business partners—came together to review the Key Priority Areas (KPA) identified through comprehensive SWOT and PESTLE analyses. Those KPAs include:

- Advocacy and Influence
- Membership Experience
- Talent Development
- Strategic Communications

To further refine these priorities, a series of member surveys were distributed in May, providing valuable input from across the MASA membership. The Steering Committee will review this feedback at the end of the month as we continue shaping the plan.

Development of the full strategic plan draft will take place over the summer, with the goal of presenting it to the Executive Committee for review. We are excited about the direction this work is taking and look forward to strengthening MASA’s impact over the next five years. More details will be shared soon.

Spring Conference: Energy, Engagement and New Ideas

MASA welcomed nearly 500 members to the Spring Conference, held March 16–18 at Margaritaville in Lake Ozark. This year’s event brought fresh programming, new perspectives, and meaningful opportunities for connection.

We were honored to welcome Steve “Stand Tall Steve” as our opening keynote and Amelia Rose Earhart as our luncheon keynote, both of whom delivered inspiring and engaging messages. The School of the Osage Wind Ensemble added a special touch to the luncheon, showcasing student talent from within our region.

We also extend our congratulations to all of this year’s MASA award recipients for their outstanding leadership and contributions to public education. To view the full list of honorees, please visit our awards page:

masaleads.org/o/masa/page/awards

In an effort to enhance the experience, we introduced new elements—including a fun and well-received Music Bingo event. Members shared thoughtful feedback throughout the conference, and we are already incorporating those insights into plans for next year to ensure an even stronger experience.

Tight Times Initiative: Supporting Financial Leadership

On April 17, MASA launched the Tight Times Initiative, a focused effort to support members as they navigate the financial realities facing Missouri schools. This initiative provides:

- A dedicated resource webpage with templates, slide decks, and practical tools
- The “Tight Times Tuesdays” webinar series, featuring school finance expert Dr. Jim Cummins
- Ongoing opportunities for deeper learning and discussion

The School Finance Focus Group continues to meet, with a virtual session scheduled in June and an in-person gathering planned for late July following the DESE Conference in Lake Ozark. The Group remains committed to expanding these resources throughout the summer and will continue to share updates as new supports become available.

For more information, visit:
<https://www.masaleads.org/o/masa/page/tight-times>
 or email tighttimes@mcsa.org



Membership Renewal: Invest in Your Leadership

Membership renewal begins July 1, and we encourage all members to stay connected and continue taking advantage of the resources and support MASA provides. This year, we are excited to introduce new membership benefits, including:

- Complimentary access to premier virtual learning sessions (previously a \$60 cost)
- Continued access to the 24/7/365 Crisis Communications Hotline
- The Superintendent Helpline
- A strong, statewide network of peer support
- Exclusive events, workshops, and leadership opportunities

These benefits are designed to provide timely, practical support while strengthening your connection to a community of leaders across Missouri.

To learn more, visit: masaleads.org/page/member-benefits

Summer Learning and Connections

As summer approaches, MASA is preparing for a full season of events focused on connection, leadership development, and continued support for our members.

June begins with the MASA Masters Golf Tournament at The Oaks Golf Course, where more than 23 teams are set to participate. This annual event continues to provide a valuable opportunity for members and partners to connect in a more relaxed setting.

On June 9, we will conclude this year's Women in Leadership Cohort, marking the end of a meaningful and impactful experience for participants. We extend our sincere appreciation to Dr. Deanna Ashby of Studer Education for her partnership and leadership throughout the cohort.

MASA will then partner with DESE to host the First Year Superintendent Workshop and Dinner, June 15 through 18 at the MCSA Education Center in Jefferson City. This experience is designed to help new superintendents build connections and gain practical guidance as they step into their roles.

Later in the month, June 24 through 25, MASA will host the Aspiring Superintendent Cohort, with 24 participants currently registered. This program continues to grow as we invest in developing the next generation of district leaders.

In July, MASA staff will attend the AASA Legislative Advocacy Conference in Washington, D.C., July 7 through 9, helping ensure Missouri's voice remains part of national conversations impacting public education.

We will also be on site at the DESE Conference, July 26 through 28 at Margaritaville in Lake Ozark. We look forward to welcoming new superintendents at the reception and connecting with members participating in the School Finance Workshop on Setting the Tax Rate.

“

Looking Ahead

As we continue this work and look toward the months ahead, we value your feedback and encourage you to share your questions or ideas at: communications@mcsa.org.

Thank you for your continued leadership and your commitment to Missouri's public schools.



FROM THE
MASA TEAM



ANNUAL MEMBERSHIP RENEWALS BEGIN JULY 1ST

MEMBERSHIP BENEFITS



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YEAR IN REVIEW

Dr. Mark Penny



A Year of Listening, Learning, and Looking Ahead

On July 1, I will mark one year as Executive Director of MASA. As I reflect on this past year, what stands out most is not a list of accomplishments, but the people and conversations that have shaped the work.

I've enjoyed the opportunity to travel across Missouri to MASA regional meetings, conferences, and events. I've spent time with superintendents in rooms large and small, listening to the realities of the job, the challenges leaders face, and the victories, both big and small, that keep this work meaningful. Those conversations in school hallways, meeting rooms, and communities across the state have been the foundation of everything we've begun to build.

What I've heard consistently is that this is a demanding moment for public education.

Leaders are navigating staffing shortages, shifting student needs, fiscal pressure, legislative uncertainty, and heightened community expectations, often all at once. And yet, I continue to see an unwavering commitment to students, communities, and the belief that public schools remain at the heart of strong Missouri communities. This year has also taken me beyond our state's borders. Through national meetings and conversations with education leaders across the country, and through advocacy efforts on Capitol Hill, I've gained valuable perspective. While many challenges are shared nationally, the solutions must be grounded in Missouri's unique context.

Our superintendents bring deep expertise and credibility to that work, and it has been an honor to advocate alongside them for public education in our state. Listening closely to our members has been critical as we begin shaping MASA's next chapter.

Over the past year, we've taken what we've heard and started developing a new strategic plan designed to better align MASA's work with your needs. That planning is ongoing, and we anticipate sharing more this fall. The goal is clear: to ensure MASA is positioned to support you not just for today's challenges, but for what lies ahead. This work has never been about one person. MASA is strongest when the expertise of our staff and members is brought together.

Our team has worked collaboratively to strengthen how we serve districts. With the addition of a new Communications Director, MASA has expanded support in moments that matter most. This includes the launch of a crisis communications hotline with our partner, The Donovan Group, as well as a new website and elevated communication efforts, with more enhancements still to come.



Pictured above: MASA staff attend the 2026 Women in Leadership Summit.

We've also continued to grow professional learning opportunities for leaders at every stage. This includes the Advanced Leadership Program with FranklinCovey, long-range facility planning support with Trane, and the launch of a Women in Leadership cohort in partnership with Studer Education. These opportunities reflect what members have shared with us:

Leadership growth, planning, & sustainability matter now more than **ever**.

Our partnership model has also evolved. This year, MASA introduced a tiered partnership program that allows business partners to engage with districts in more intentional ways. This approach not only strengthens relationships, but also increases MASA's capacity to reinvest resources directly into services and supports for members.

One of the most timely efforts this year has been the creation of the School Finance Focus Group. As districts face tightening budgets and growing fiscal uncertainty, this group has helped MASA better understand how to equip superintendents to lead during tight times.

That work is already taking shape through tools, learning, and the Tight Times Initiative, and it will continue into the year ahead. Even with all of this underway, it feels like we are just getting started.

As we move through the summer and into the coming year, my commitment remains the same: to keep listening, learning, and working alongside you.

MASA is not a building, a board, or a staff. **MASA is its members.**

Our role is to support, amplify, & strengthen the leadership happening every day in districts across Missouri.

Thank you for the trust you've placed in this association and for the work you do on behalf of students, staff, and communities. I look forward to continuing this work together. With deep respect, ■

Executive Director
Missouri Association of School Administrators

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Missouri Association of School Administrators



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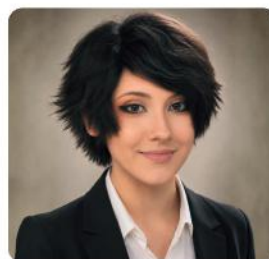
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Reflecting on the PAST YEAR

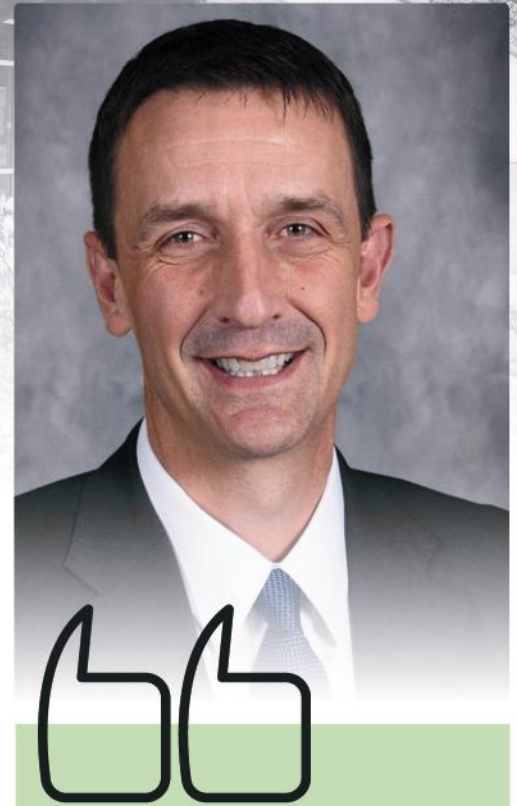
I am thankful for the opportunity to serve MASA and work alongside so many outstanding school leaders across Missouri. This year has reminded me that one of the greatest strengths of MASA is not just the professional learning, legislative work, or resources we provide. It is the friendships and connections that are built along the way. The relationships formed through MASA make us better leaders, better problem solvers, and better advocates for the students, staff, and communities we serve.

One thing I have learned during my time in leadership is that we are never done learning. School leadership continues to change, and the challenges facing public education are complex. However, when we stay connected, ask questions, listen to others, and remain willing to grow, we are better prepared to lead. As the saying goes, "The more you learn, the more you realize how much you still have to learn." That mindset is important for all of us.

I would encourage every MASA member to get involved. Attend your regional meetings. Say yes to leadership opportunities. Serve on committees. Volunteer to mentor a new superintendent. Share what you know with someone who is just getting started. MASA is strongest when members are engaged, connected, and willing to give back.

I also want to express my sincere thanks to the MASA staff. Their work behind the scenes is outstanding, and their support of Missouri administrators is something we should never take for granted. They care deeply about our members and the future of public education in Missouri.

Serving as MASA President has been an honor. I am thankful for the friendships, the lessons learned, and the opportunity to serve with so many dedicated leaders. I look forward to continuing to support MASA and public education in Missouri for years to come.



Success is the
sum of small
efforts,
repeated day
in and day
out.

Jerry Girdner

Jerry Girdner
MASA Executive Committee President
Superintendent, Princeton R-V

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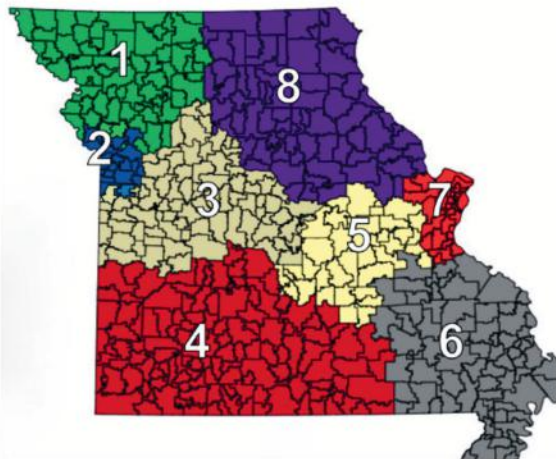
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Park Hill



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Region 4
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Region 7
Dr. Jason Sefrit
St. Charles R-VI



Region 8
Dr. Zach Bruner
Marceline R-V

EVENT CALENDAR

JUNE

- 1 MASA Masters Golf Tournament
- 9 Women in Leadership Cohort
- 10-12 MASA Executive Committee Meeting
- 15 First Year Superintendent Dinner & Workshop
- 17-18 MASA/FranklinCovey 4 Essential Roles of Leadership
- 19 MASA Office Closed, Juneteenth
- 22 MASA Training for Regional Presidents & Representatives
- 24-25 Aspiring Superintendent Cohort

JULY

- 1 Membership Renewals Begin
- 3-6 MASA Office Closed, Independence Day
- 7-9 AASA Legislative Advocacy Conference
- 21 MASA Advanced Leadership: 4 Disciplines of Execution
- 22 MCSA Finance Academy for New School Leaders
- 26-28 DESE Cooperative Conference
- 26 MASA Executive Committee Meeting
- 26-28 DESE Cooperative Conference for School Administrators
- 28 MASA/MoASBO School Finance Workshop: Setting the Tax Rate

AUGUST

- Law Seminars - *(Information available through your firm)*
- Back to School Preparations

SEPTEMBER

- 7 MASA Office Closed, Labor Day
- 15 MCSA Finance Academy for New School Leaders
- 21 Bartow Memorial Golf Tournament
- 24-25 MASA Executive Committee Meeting



More Details Online

*Events are current as of publication.
For the most up-to-date details, visit
masaleads.org/events or
scan the QR code.*



SAVE THE DATES

MASA 2026-27 Events



DESE Cooperative Conference

July 26-28, 2026 | Margaritaville, Lake Ozark

AASA Advocacy Conference

July 7-9, 2026 | Washington, D.C.

Gale T. Bartow Memorial Golf Tournament

September 21, 2026 | Redfield Golf Course, Eugene

Emeritus Reunion

October 2, 2026 | MCSA Education Center

MASA-MSBA Fall Conference

October 22-24, 2026 | Crown Center, KC

Women in Leadership Summit

February 8-9, 2027 | Margaritaville, Lake Ozark

AASA National Conference on Education

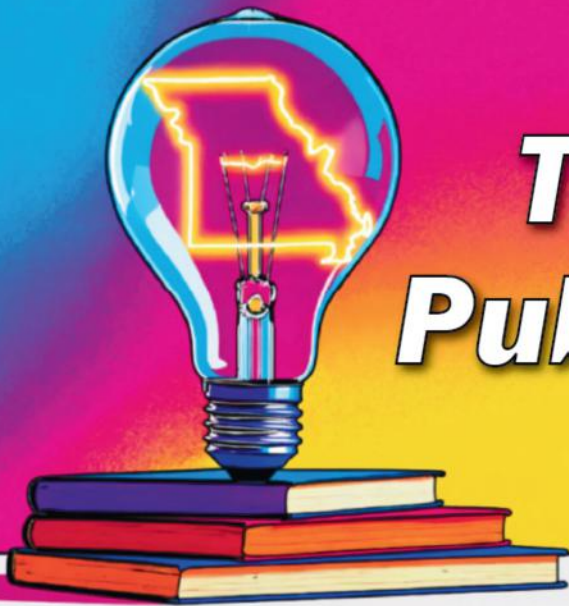
February 25-27, 2027 | Atlanta, GA

MASA Spring Conference

March 17-19, 2027 | Margaritaville, Lake Ozark

MASA Masters Golf Tournament

June 7, 2027 | To Be Determined



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In Focus

DR. MIKE SLAGLE

Leading With Presence, Purpose, and People

By Chelsea Blair

Dr. Mike Slagle was presented with the 2026 Pearce Award by the Missouri Association of School Administrators at the Spring Conference in Lake Ozark this past

March. He was also named Missouri Administrator of the Year by the Missouri School Public Relations Association. The dual honors recognize Dr. Slagle's leadership as superintendent of the Raymore-Peculiar School District and reflect the high regard in which he is held by peers across Missouri. Known for his steady leadership, collaborative approach, and focus on opportunity for all students, Dr. Slagle exemplifies the values at the core of the Pearce Award.

During a visit to the Raymore-Peculiar School District earlier this spring, Dr. Slagle reflected on his leadership philosophy, the work underway across the district, and the shared responsibility he believes defines effective superintendency.

For Dr. Slagle, recognition is meaningful only insofar as it reflects collective effort. "This isn't about one person," he said. "It's a validation of what Ray-Pec is doing as an organization and what happens when people work together around a shared purpose."

Recognition Rooted in Gratitude

Throughout the conversation, Dr. Slagle consistently redirected attention away from himself and toward the people around him. He described his role as creating conditions for others to lead, rather than serving as the source of solutions. "My job is often to support the work that's already happening, make sure people have what they need, and then step out of the way," Dr. Slagle explained. "Great ideas don't belong to one office."

That philosophy extends to his relationship with the Raymore-Peculiar Board of Education. Dr. Slagle spoke at length about the importance of strong governance and described the board as a defining strength of the district. "I believe we have one of the finest boards in the state," he said. "Their focus is always on students, and their trust allows us to do meaningful work."



He emphasized that a high-functioning board-superintendent relationship requires continual attention, honesty, and mutual respect. That alignment, he noted, has allowed the district to remain focused on long-term goals rather than short-term distractions. Peers across Missouri cited that collaborative leadership style as a key reason Dr. Slagle was selected for the Pearce Award.

A Personal Commitment to Public Education

Dr. Slagle's leadership philosophy is deeply informed by his personal story. Raised in a low-income household in South Texas, he is a first-generation high school graduate who credits educators for taking an interest in him and opening doors he did not know existed. "Public education changed the trajectory of my life," he said. "There are students who would not have access to opportunity without our schools, and that matters deeply to me."

That belief continues to shape his decisions as a superintendent and underpins his focus on equity, access, and authentic opportunity for students from all backgrounds. Professionally, Dr. Slagle's path to the superintendency has been intentionally broad. He began his career as a high school social studies teacher in Nebraska, where he developed a lasting interest in how students learn and how educational environments support that learning.

His interests later led him into urban policy and planning. After earning a master's degree from the University of Iowa, he worked in economic development and county government, helping communities plan for growth and align vision with resources.

Those experiences translated naturally into district leadership. During 27 years in Kansas' Blue Valley School District, Dr. Slagle held leadership roles across nearly every area of operations, including planning, academics, athletics, legislative advocacy, budgeting, policy, and human resources. "I've had a chance to see how all the pieces fit

together," he noted. "That experience teaches you to listen first and rely on the expertise around you." When the Raymore-Peculiar Board of Education selected him as superintendent in 2020, Dr. Slagle was transparent about having never served as a building principal. He viewed that not as a limitation, but as an opportunity to approach leadership without assumptions and to trust the knowledge of others.

Leadership Defined by Presence

Dr. Slagle assumed leadership during the earliest months of the COVID-19 pandemic, a period marked by uncertainty and heightened concern among families and staff. In those early days, presence mattered. Without formal announcement, he began spending mornings in school car lines, greeting students, parents, and staff as they arrived. What started as a way to connect during crisis became a daily practice that continues today. "If people see you, they trust you," Dr. Slagle said. "If they trust you, they work with you."



Dr. Slagle receives the Pearce Award at the 2026 Spring Conference

Colleagues describe him as a careful listener who encourages open dialogue and positions himself as part of a team rather than above it. Decision-making, he explained, is strongest when it reflects multiple perspectives and shared ownership.

Building a District of Choice

Under Dr. Slagle's leadership, Raymore-Peculiar has intentionally expanded opportunities for students by ensuring programs reflect a wide range of interests, abilities, and postsecondary pathways. The district now serves approximately 6,300 students and continues to grow. The LEAD Center exemplifies that vision.



Preparing EACH Student for a Successful and Meaningful Life.

The facility brings together career and technical education, teacher preparation, business incubation, and special education in a shared environment, allowing students to learn alongside peers pursuing a variety of futures.

Another initiative, the Integrated Learning House, reflects Dr. Slagle's belief in listening first and allowing solutions to emerge collaboratively. The project began with a conversation with a parent concerned about transition opportunities for students with functional life skills needs.



Rather than offering a predetermined answer, Dr. Slagle posed a question and allowed others to lead. Students from multiple programs ultimately constructed a fully functioning home with support from community partners. Construction trades students led the build, while interior design, botany, drone technology, and project management students contributed throughout the process. "When you trust people and allow them to lead," Dr. Slagle said, "they will always surprise you in the best way."

Looking Ahead

The Pearce Award honors administrators whose careers reflect integrity, collaboration, and service. In recognizing Dr. Mike Slagle, peers across Missouri acknowledged a leader whose impact extends beyond his own district and into the broader profession.

During the visit to Raymore-Peculiar, Dr. Slagle spoke candidly about the lessons he has learned throughout his career and the advice he often shares with aspiring and early-career superintendents. Chief among them is the importance of seeking out mentors and colleagues who are willing to share their experience.

"No superintendent should feel like they have to navigate this work alone," Dr. Slagle noted. "There is a tremendous network of support in this profession if you're willing to use it."

He also emphasized the value of presence, encouraging leaders to spend time in classrooms, hallways, and school communities rather than staying behind office doors. Equally important, he added, is the ability to tell meaningful stories about the work taking place in schools, reminding leaders that people connect more deeply to purpose than to numbers alone.

Perhaps most telling was his perspective on perspective itself. "There may be difficult moments," Dr. Slagle said, "but when you step back and look at the bigger picture, there is almost always something good that happened for a student or a colleague that day. If you can hold onto that, you realize you've never really had a bad day." It is that blend of humility, optimism, and steady focus on people that has defined Dr. Slagle's leadership and made him a fitting recipient of the 2026 Pearce Award. ■

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No. 1

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272

K-12 education transactions completed in the Midwest in 2023-2025*



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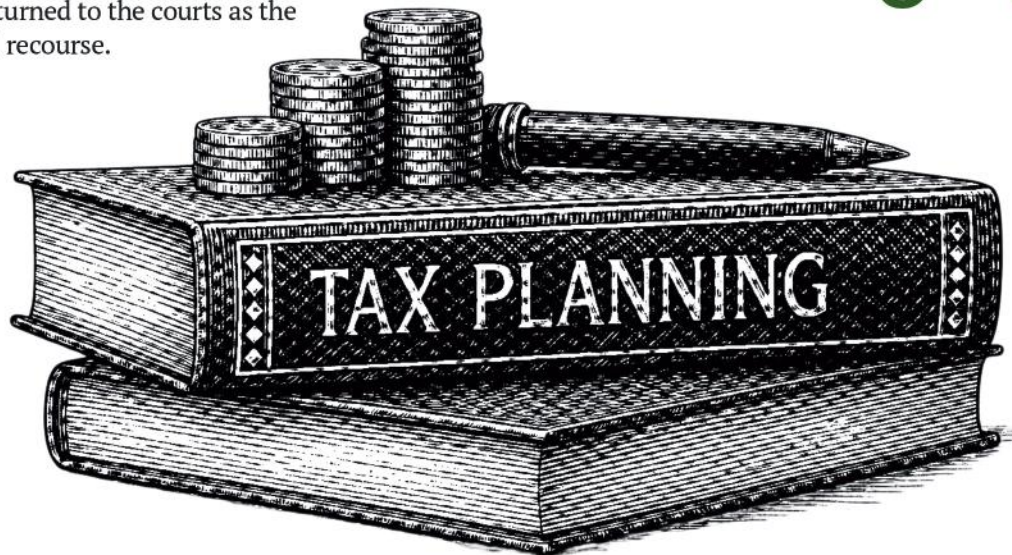


John Jungmann
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*Competitive and negotiated long-term transactions, underwriter and financial advisor combined. Source: Thomson Reuters, as of 12/31/2025
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When the Missouri legislature passed Senate Bill 3 in 2025, the property tax law was promoted as future relief. In practice, it has triggered a statewide reckoning. Every county, every school district, and every local taxing authority is now grappling with a single question: can the General Assembly fundamentally reshape Missouri’s constitutional tax structure? Faced with a statute that disrupts uniform taxation and alters long-settled constitutional protections, two individual taxpayers, a small group of public school districts and a fire protection district turned to the courts as the only available legal recourse.

Why Missouri Schools are Challenging SB3



By Natalie Hoernschemeyer
Attorney, Mickes O'Toole

Kirchhoffer et al. v. State of Missouri et al. challenges Section 137.1055, enacted during a fast-moving June 2025 special session as part of Senate Bill 3. The lawsuit places squarely before the judiciary a set of core questions about uniformity, equality, and the limits of legislative authority. The outcome will not only determine the validity of a single statute; it will define how Missouri funds public education and governs local taxation for years to come.

The background of the statute is as important as its substance. Following the close of the regular legislative session, the General Assembly convened an additional, special session. Within only a few days, SB 3 was introduced and passed, including the “Homestead Property Tax Credit” section. The statute did not emerge through a traditional, data-driven policy process.

Instead, the new law divides Missouri’s counties into three categories: “zero-percent,” “five-percent,” and “ineligible counties.” Individual counties were placed into these categories at the discretion of individual legislators, without any objective or rational framework tying those classifications to property valuation trends or assessment accuracy.

The mechanics of the law are constitutionally problematic. If approved by a vote of the local community, property taxes on eligible homesteads in “zero-percent” counties are frozen at a base-year level. In “five-percent” counties, increases in property taxes are capped annually at no more than 5%. In excluded counties, no limitation on property tax increases is available and no public vote on the question can even be held.



Unequal Treatment of Residential Property

Critically, these tax credits are implemented without any mechanism to reimburse school districts or other political subdivisions for lost revenue. School districts brought suit to challenge this unfair tax structure, highlighting the new law's multiple violations of the Missouri Constitution.

Article X, §§ 4(a) and 4(b) of the Missouri Constitution establishes three classes of property. Specifically, providing that real property may be subdivided into residential, agricultural, and commercial categories, but "subclasses... shall not be further divided." Missouri courts have long enforced this limitation strictly.

As the Supreme Court has explained, "[t]here are no subclassifications of real estate for the purposes of taxation" and all property must be assessed and taxed on the same basis.

Section 137.1055 directly contravenes this constitutional directive by creating functional subclasses within residential property (owner-occupied versus non-owner-occupied, improved versus unimproved, and even distinctions based on county classification) resulting in different

effective tax burdens for properties of equal value. This defect strikes at the core constitutional limitation that the legislature may define classes but may not fracture them.

Non-Uniform Taxes within the Same School District

Closely tied to the prohibition on subdivided property classes is the constitutional requirement of uniform taxes within the same district. Article X, § 3 mandates that taxes "shall be uniform upon the same class or subclass of subjects within the territorial limits of the authority levying the tax." Missouri courts have emphasized that "[a]ll in each natural class must be taxed or exempted alike," and that "[a] natural class may not be split."

Section 137.1055 does precisely what the Constitution prohibits. School districts routinely span multiple counties, as illustrated by districts like Warren County R-III (covering both zero-percent and five-percent counties) and Meramec Valley R-III (covering zero-percent and ineligible counties). Under the new law, taxpayers within the same district will be subject to materially different effective tax burdens based solely on county lines. The result is not merely theoretical non-uniformity; it is a real, operational fracture in how districts fund their obligations. Two

taxpayers supporting the same school system may pay different amounts for identical services, not because of valuation differences, but because the new statute dictates it.

An Impermissible Special Law with Arbitrary County Classifications

Article III, § 40(30) prohibits special laws where a general law could be made applicable. Missouri Supreme Court precedent makes clear that the relevant inquiry is whether there is a rational basis for the specific classifications drawn, not simply for the general policy objective. The Court has held that the constitutionality of a law depends on whether there is a rational basis for "the line drawn by the legislature" between those included and excluded.

Section 137.1055 does not satisfy this standard. The classifications divide counties into three groups without any consistent relationship to assessment ratios, tax growth patterns, or any other measurable criterion. As asserted in the lawsuit, there is "no conceivable state of facts" that connects the counties within each category or justifies why one county receives a full freeze, another a partial cap, and another no choice at all. This is the hallmark of a prohibited special law: similarly situated political subdivisions treated differently without a rational basis.



Unequal Voting Rights

The equal protection guarantee in Article I, § 2 of the Missouri Constitution raises an additional concern. Section 137.1055 grants voting rights to some Missourians while denying those same voting rights to others based solely on where the voter resides. Voters in designated counties may decide whether to implement tax limits; voters in excluded counties are denied that opportunity altogether.

Missouri courts have recognized that differential treatment of citizens must be supported by a rational basis tied to the classification. Here, no such basis exists. If local control were truly the objective of the General Assembly, the statute would allow all counties to exercise that choice. Instead, it selectively grants that right, undermining both voter equality and the coherence of local governance.

No Replacement for Lost School Revenue

Perhaps the most immediate concern for school districts is the statute's failure to comply with Article X, § 6(a), which allows tax credits only if the State provides

restitution for lost revenue. Section 137.1055 creates a tax credit system that will reduce future property tax collections but does not provide any replacement funding.

This omission is not a policy oversight; it is a constitutional defect. The Constitution expressly conditions the legislature's authority to grant this type of tax relief on the protection of political subdivisions. Without restitution, the statute shifts the financial burden of state policy decisions onto local schools, local libraries, and local emergency services.

An Uncertain Future as the Court Weighs the Constitutionality of SB 3

Taken together, these constitutional defects reveal a statute that does more than experiment with tax policy. It disrupts the constitutional framework that ensures fairness, predictability, and stability in public finance. It fragments a unified class of property, destroys tax uniformity within districts, arbitrarily divides counties without rational justification, grants unequal voting rights, and strips revenue from local governments without compensation.

For school districts, this is not an abstract legal debate. Property tax revenue remains the foundation of local education funding. When the rules governing that system become inconsistent, unpredictable, or constitutionally infirm, districts face real consequences: reduced revenue growth, uneven taxpayer burdens, and uncertainty in long-term planning. The Missouri Constitution was designed to prevent precisely this kind of instability. Section 137.1055 departs from those principles in fundamental ways.

The Missouri Supreme Court will ultimately determine whether the statute stands. But the issues raised in this litigation underscore a critical point for policymakers and education leaders alike; tax relief cannot come at the expense of constitutional structure. When it does, the result is not relief. It is inequity, instability, and, for public schools, a direct threat to the financial foundation on which they depend. ■



A LEGACY OF LEADERSHIP

HONORING DR. KARLA ESLINGER



After more than three decades of service to public education in Missouri, Dr. Karla Eslinger will retire as Commissioner of Education on June 1, 2026, bringing to a close a remarkable career defined by leadership, service, and an unwavering commitment to students.

Dr. Eslinger's journey in education began in the classroom as an elementary teacher and grew to include roles as a principal and superintendent in Ava and West Plains. In each position, she built a reputation for thoughtful leadership and a deep understanding of the challenges and opportunities facing Missouri schools.

Her impact extended well beyond the district level. Following her time in the superintendency, Dr. Eslinger served as Assistant Commissioner in the Office of Educator Quality at the Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE), where she helped shape statewide efforts to support educators. She later brought her expertise to the national level, providing technical assistance to the U.S. Department of Education.

Dr. Eslinger also dedicated herself to public service through elected office, representing southwest Missouri in both the Missouri House of Representatives and the Missouri Senate. In every role, she remained a strong and consistent voice for public education.

As Commissioner of Education over the past two years, Dr. Eslinger led with a focus on collaboration, transparency, and long-term planning.

Her work to strengthen data systems, improve communication with educators and families, and advance a statewide strategic plan has positioned Missouri's education system for continued progress. She has consistently emphasized partnership by working alongside school leaders, educators, and communities to support student success across the state.

Throughout her career, Dr. Eslinger has exemplified dedication to the profession and to the people it serves. From her early days in the classroom to her leadership at the state level, her work has been guided by a clear purpose to ensure every student in Missouri has access to a strong public education.

Beyond her professional accomplishments, Dr. Eslinger remains deeply rooted in her community. A lifelong resident of Wasola, she and her husband, David, have built their life on the family farm while raising a family committed to education. Both of their daughters are public school educators. Dr. Eslinger has also been a trusted partner to Missouri's superintendents, consistently engaging with MASA and district leaders to better understand the realities facing public schools.

Her willingness to listen and collaborate has been deeply appreciated across the state.

As she steps into retirement, Dr. Eslinger leaves behind a lasting legacy of service, leadership, and advocacy. Her contributions have strengthened Missouri's schools and the educators who serve within them. On behalf of Missouri's superintendents and the broader education community, MASA extends its sincere gratitude to Dr. Karla Eslinger for her extraordinary career and her enduring impact on public education. "Dr. Eslinger has been a respected leader and a true partner to Missouri's superintendents. She understands public education from every level, and that perspective has guided her work in ways that benefit schools across our state. We are grateful for her leadership, her willingness to listen, and her commitment to doing what is right for students and educators," said Dr. Mark Penny, Executive Director of MASA. Her partnership with school leaders across the state has made a lasting difference, and her leadership will be felt for years to come.

We wish her all the best in this next chapter. ■



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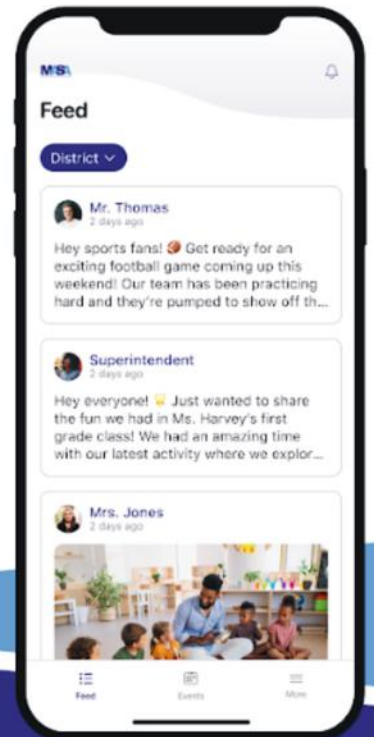
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SCHOLARSHIP 2025-26 RECIPIENTS

MASA BARTOW GOLF TOURNAMENT PRESIDENTS SCHOLARSHIP



PAST PRESIDENT HONOREE - STAN JOHNSON

Canyon Warden, Salem R-80

Canyon Warden, is the recipient of the MASA Scholarship for the 2025/2026 school year. He will attend Ozarks Technical Community College to study Radiologic Technology. Known for his computer skills and attention to detail, Canyon is a lifelong learner with a strong work ethic who aims to positively impact his community.



PAST PRESIDENT HONOREE - DR. ROGER DORSON

Lily Chitwood, New Franklin R-I

Congratulations to Lily Chitwood, the 2026 Valedictorian of New Franklin High School and scholarship recipient. As Dr. Roger Dorson's granddaughter, she has excelled academically and athletically and plans to study Business at the University of Missouri-Columbia. We celebrate her achievements and wish her continued success.



SOUTHWEST REGION PRESIDENT - MIKE HENRY

Douglas Russell Lee, Marshfield R-I

Doug plans to attend Ozarks Technical College and obtain his general education credits while using his A+ Scholarship. Following his time at OTC, he plans to attend Missouri State University to earn a degree in animal science. His career goals include working as a zookeeper at Dickerson Park Zoo, where he is currently employed.



NORTHWEST REGION PRESIDENT - DAN WIEBERS

Makenzie Fleener, Chillicothe R-II

Makenzie plans to attend Graceland University where she will major in Elementary Education. While at Graceland she will be a member of the women's softball team. At Chillicothe High School, Makenzie has been enrolled in Early Childhood Professions and will graduate with her Child Development Associates, Substitute certification and Paraprofessional certification.



NORTHEAST REGION PRESIDENT - DR. ZACH BRUNER

Miles Chowning, Marceline R-V

Miles will attend the University of Missouri (Mizzou), where he aspires to gain the skills and knowledge essential for success in the finance sector, specifically majoring in Accounting.



SOUTHEAST REGION PRESIDENT - CHAD MORGAN

Halle Ann Jamerson, Senath Hornersville C-8

Halle plans to attend Southeast Missouri State University this fall to pursue a degree in Early Childhood Education. Halle is currently an FTA in one of our Pre-School classroom and is very loved and valued by the pre-schoolers and teachers alike.



SOUTH CENTRAL REGION PRESIDENT - HILARY BALES

Abigail Mae Nacol, Waynesville R-VI

Abigail's ultimate goal is to become a special education teacher, where she hopes to create a nurturing and supportive learning environment for all her students. She will be attending Missouri State University–West Plains to study Elementary Special Education.



WEST CENTRAL REGION PRESIDENT - DR. THERESA CHRISTIAN

Maddix Inman, Concordia R-II

After graduating from high school, Maddix intends to enroll at William Jewell College, where he will major in business administration while continuing his football career at the collegiate level. Looking ahead, he aspires to operate his own electrical business.



GREATER KANSAS CITY REGION PRESIDENT - MIKE KIMBREL

Ademilola Ilori, Parkhill School District

Ademilola is filled with enthusiasm about her future and is eager to begin her journey in higher education. She has made the commendable choice to attend Washington University in St. Louis, where she will pursue a degree in Biomedical Engineering.



GREATER ST. LOUIS REGION PRESIDENT - DR. JASON SEFRIT

SCSD Foundation

Dr. Sefrit presented the scholarship to the St. Charles School District Foundation, which utilized the funds for various student scholarships and teacher grants.

TURNING SCHOOL FINANCE DATA INTO ACTION FOR MISSOURI DISTRICTS

By Chelsea Blair



DR. JORDAN DICKEY

Assistant Superintendent of Finance, Joplin Public Schools

When school finance conversations grow complex and fast-moving,

Missouri school leaders increasingly know where to turn. Over the past year, Dr. Jordan Dickey, Assistant Superintendent of Finance for Joplin Public Schools, has become a trusted voice in statewide school finance discussions, helping MASA and district leaders translate complicated policy proposals into clear, usable information. Through collaboration, technical expertise, and a deep commitment to public education, Dr. Dickey's work is strengthening superintendent advocacy at a critical moment for Missouri schools.

Grounded in Real-World Leadership

Dr. Dickey's perspective on school finance is shaped by experience at every level of public education. Raised in Liberal, Missouri, she began her career teaching middle school mathematics in Joplin before moving into administration. She later

served as a K-12 principal and superintendent in the Bronaugh R-VII School District, a small, rural district where leadership responsibilities are expansive and often overlapping. Serving as superintendent provided Dr. Dickey with firsthand insight into how financial decisions affect instruction, staffing, and community trust. "In small districts, there's no separation between finance and leadership," she explained.

"You're doing the budget, facilities, staffing, and advocacy, often all at once." In 2022, Dr. Dickey returned to Joplin Public Schools as Executive Director of Student Services. Over time, she transitioned into the finance office and now serves as Assistant Superintendent of Finance, overseeing district operations while remaining connected to instructional needs. "I really enjoy being in the weeds of school finance," Dr. Dickey said. "Understanding the mechanisms and how decisions actually impact districts."



From District Question to Statewide Resource

Dr. Dickey’s statewide involvement began with a practical question: How will this legislation impact my district? As proposals around property taxes, funding formulas, and local revenue surfaced, she began modeling impacts for Joplin. “It became pretty simple to scale the work,” she said. “We realized we had access to enough data to do this for the whole state.” Working closely with MASA and fellow district leaders, Dr. Dickey helped develop fiscal note tools that replaced broad, generalized concerns with district-specific financial impact estimates.

These tools standardized assumptions and removed a major barrier to engagement, uncertainty. Instead of expecting superintendents to calculate impacts on their own during tight legislative timelines, districts received one-page resources that combined data, methodology, and communication points. “Our goal was to empower superintendents,” Dr. Dickey explained. “Here’s your number. Understand the logic, then connect it to your district’s story. Legislators want to hear from the superintendent living the impact.”

Data With a Human Story

One of Dr. Dickey’s most meaningful contributions has been helping bridge the gap between numbers and storytelling. “When leaders are afraid they might be



wrong, they tend to stay quiet,” she noted. “That fear can stop engagement altogether.” By providing consistent, district-level data, Dr. Dickey has helped leaders focus less on calculation and more on communication.

Superintendents are better positioned to explain how policy proposals affect classrooms, staffing, programs, and communities. That clarity has been especially valuable during a year marked by rapidly changing legislation and tightening budgets.

Collaboration During Tight Times

For Dr. Dickey, collaboration has been central to the success of this work. She credits open dialogue, debate, and revision for strengthening both the tools and the leaders who use them. “You grow when people push your thinking,” she said. “That back-and-forth is where better solutions come from.”

As Missouri districts navigate what MASA has aptly termed Tight Times, Dr. Dickey sees this work as more important than ever. “There are so many new superintendents stepping into roles with enormous responsibility,” she said, “often while learning complex funding systems during a period of significant uncertainty.” She believes that connecting school



finance more intentionally to superintendent leadership is essential. “If we want strong communities, we have to fund the schools that serve them,” Dr. Dickey said. “Public education is foundational to strong communities and a healthy democracy.”

Looking Ahead

Dr. Dickey hopes to continue contributing at the statewide level as long as the work remains helpful. That ongoing engagement is made possible, in part, by the support of Joplin Public Schools, where her leadership in finance has quickly become an asset.

As Superintendent Dr. Kerry Sachetta shared, “Dr. Dickey quickly became a valuable employee and an asset for our district as a central office administrator early on in her tenure. We knew she had acumen and a high interest in school finance, and she has proved it in her first full year of the position. We are very happy with her work at Joplin Public Schools, and we are thrilled we can share her expertise with the rest of the state to help all of us with complex school finance issues.”

“As long as this work benefits Joplin and helps districts statewide, I’m happy to keep doing it,” she said. Through expertise, collaboration, and a deep belief in public education, Dr. Jordan Dickey is helping Missouri’s school leaders move from uncertainty to clarity, one dataset and one district story at a time. ■

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END OF SESSION HIGHLIGHTS



POLITICAL PULSE

The 2026 legislative session ended with many of the major issues our organizations tracked throughout the year falling short of the finish line. While that outcome reflects real advocacy wins on several fronts, it also leaves several unresolved issues that will carry into the interim and return next session.

Budget

Ahead of the Governor's final signature on budget bills in June, the FY27 budget falls more than \$190 million short of fully funding the state's foundation formula requested by DESE. That estimate also does not include the use of one-time funding transfers from sources such as the Capitol Commission and Blind Pension Fund to backfill shortfalls in lottery and gaming revenue. Nor does it include the shortfall in funding for school transportation that stands at \$20 million for the 2026-27 school year.

While the legislature has fully funded things like minimum teacher salary grants, career ladder, and the small schools grant, as it stands, the cumulative underfunding across the major education line items in FY26 and FY27 is now estimated at \$362.7 million of what statute calls for schools to receive.

Property Tax

No property tax legislation of substance passed during the 2026 session. While the immediate threat has passed, the underlying debates are far from settled and will be front and center in the formula rewrite when the session convenes in 2027. Our organizations will also be watching the continued



Photograph of the Missouri State Capitol in Jefferson City, Missouri

implementation of SB 190, the senior property tax freeze, as well as the pending legal challenges to SB 3 passed during last summer's special session.

A-F Report Cards

HB 2710 did not pass, but school leaders should not take that as a signal that A-F accountability is off the table. The State Board of Education and DESE retain the authority to move forward administratively, and our organizations expect them to do so. The question we will be watching is whether an A-F system is implemented alongside the existing Missouri School Improvement Program or in place of it. We will keep members informed as the State Board and DESE move forward over the interim.

Literacy

HB 2872, which would have mandated third-grade retention and required intensive acceleration classrooms in grades K-3, did not pass before adjournment. Structured literacy and reading intervention policy will remain active issues heading into 2027, and our organizations will continue to engage as new proposals are developed.



State Rep. Brandon Phelps, a Republican from Warrensburg, smiles as the Missouri House tosses bills into the air at the adjournment of session Friday (Amelise Hanshaw/Missouri Independent).



Missouri Capitol (Photo Courtesy of Canva)

School Choice

The session produced no major changes to Missouri's school choice landscape. Open enrollment did not pass. Charter school expansion did not advance, though State Board accreditation decisions this fall could make additional districts eligible for charter entry without further legislation. The session ended without a statutory expansion of the ESA program, though the budget included an additional \$10 million, bringing the total state appropriation to \$60 million. The NEA's lawsuit challenging the constitutionality of MO Scholars remains pending.

What Voters Will Decide: HJR 173

SS SCS HJRs 173 & 174 was passed by the legislature earlier in the spring. If approved by voters, implementation would dominate legislative discussions for years to come, as lawmakers would need to expand the sales tax base and increase rates to offset income tax reductions. The individual income tax is one of the state's largest revenue sources, and any sustained reduction carries direct implications for school funding. We will keep members informed as the ballot campaign develops.

MSHSAA Oversight

SB 863 was truly agreed to and sent to the Governor. The bill establishes the "Interscholastic Athletic Oversight Commission," a Governor-appointed board to hear appeals of certain MSHSAA decisions. The final version reflects a negotiated agreement between Sen. Jason Bean, Rep. Bennie Cook, and MSHSAA. Our organizations will be monitoring the appointment process and rulemaking ahead once the law goes into effect on August 28.

IEP Consent

HB 2304, which would have established written parental consent requirements for IEPs, did not advance to a final vote in the House.

Gifted Testing

HB 1757, which would have required universal gifted screenings for all students before third grade beginning in 2027-28, passed the House 142 to 8 but did not receive a final Senate vote. We expect this to return next session as a part of the formula rewrite.

Binding Arbitration

HCS HBs 3283 & 3306, which would have established a public sector collective bargaining framework including binding arbitration, did not pass. Our organizations will monitor whether this effort returns in 2027.



The Missouri House of Representatives. (Tim Bommel/Missouri House Communications)

TIGHT TIMES

WHAT MISSOURI SCHOOL LEADERS NEED TO KNOW

By Mike Lodewegen

Missouri school leaders are no strangers to difficult decisions. Every year, superintendents, their leadership teams, and their boards work to balance student needs, community expectations, staffing challenges, with the demands and financial realities of operating a school district. But the moment ahead is different.

Missouri is entering a new fiscal era. One where federal money is leaving state and local coffers, Missouri’s state budget outlook is bleak, and local property tax revenues are becoming increasingly uncertain.

We saw this reality play out during the FY27 state budget process, public education faced significant funding pressure. Ahead of the Governor’s final signature on budget bills in June, the FY27 budget falls roughly 190 million short of fully funding the state’s foundation formula requested by DESE. That estimate also does not include the use of one-time funding transfers from sources such as the Capitol Commission and Blind Pension Fund to backfill shortfalls in lottery and gaming revenue. Nor does it include the shortfall in funding for school transportation that stands at \$20 million for the 2026-27 school year.

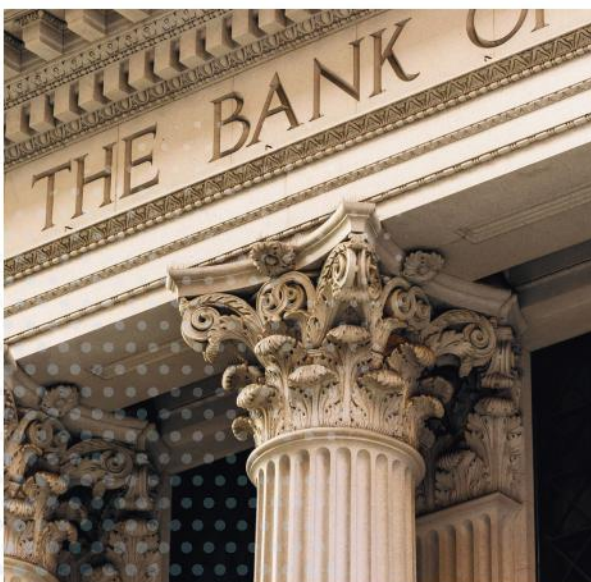


These shortfalls are not isolated occurrences; they are likely to become increasingly regular and larger in scale in the years ahead.

At the same time, the cost of operating schools continues to rise. Transportation, utilities, insurance, salaries, benefits, instructional materials, student services, and facility needs are not becoming less expensive. That combination has created what many school leaders are already feeling: tight times.

The School Funding Focus Group, made up of superintendents, MASA, and partner organizations from across the state, launched the Tight Times initiative to help districts respond to this moment with clarity, preparation, and leadership. It is not a campaign built on fear. It is a public information and community planning effort designed to help school leaders educate their communities, prepare for financial challenges, and lead difficult conversations with honesty and purpose.

At its core, Tight Times is about helping communities understand what is happening and why it matters. School finance is complex, and many of the factors shaping district budgets are not immediately visible to parents, staff, taxpayers, or other stakeholders.



A district may be doing everything right and still face rising costs, slowing revenue, reduced state support, or the end of one-time funding. Tight Times gives superintendents tools to explain those realities in plain language.

The initiative also encourages districts to begin planning now. Waiting until a budget problem becomes urgent limits options and strains trust. Planning early allows districts to review their financial outlook, identify priorities, examine efficiencies, consider short-term and long-term needs, and engage their boards, leadership teams, staff, and communities before decisions must be made.

This work is also about leadership. In moments of uncertainty, communities look to their schools for steady voices. They want to know what is changing, what is being protected, and how decisions will be made. Tight Times helps superintendents frame those conversations around shared values: protecting students, using resources wisely, being transparent with the public, and making careful decisions that support long-term stability.

For many districts, the first step will be internal conversations with leadership teams, boards of education, and staff. From there, districts can

expand the discussion to parents, families, taxpayers, business leaders, civic organizations, and community members. The goal is not simply to explain a budget. The goal is to keep the focus on students and build understanding of financial realities.

These are tight times, but Missouri school leaders cannot face them alone. Communities care deeply about their schools. They support students at ball games, concerts, career programs, bond issues, fundraisers, and everyday moments that define public education. Tight Times is an opportunity to invite those communities into a deeper understanding of what it takes to sustain strong schools in a changing financial environment.

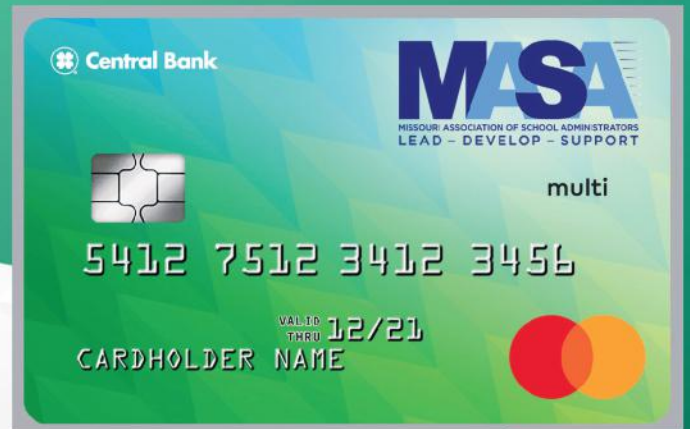
Resources, tools, and guidance will continue to be developed to support districts in this work. But the most important examples will come from you. It is our hope that schools and districts across Missouri share how they are using Tight Times in their communities. Send your materials, communication strategies, community feedback, lessons learned, and stories from the process. Together, we must educate, prepare, and lead our communities through what comes next in order to ensure that the focus remains on serving Missouri students and coming out of these tight times better than when they started. ■

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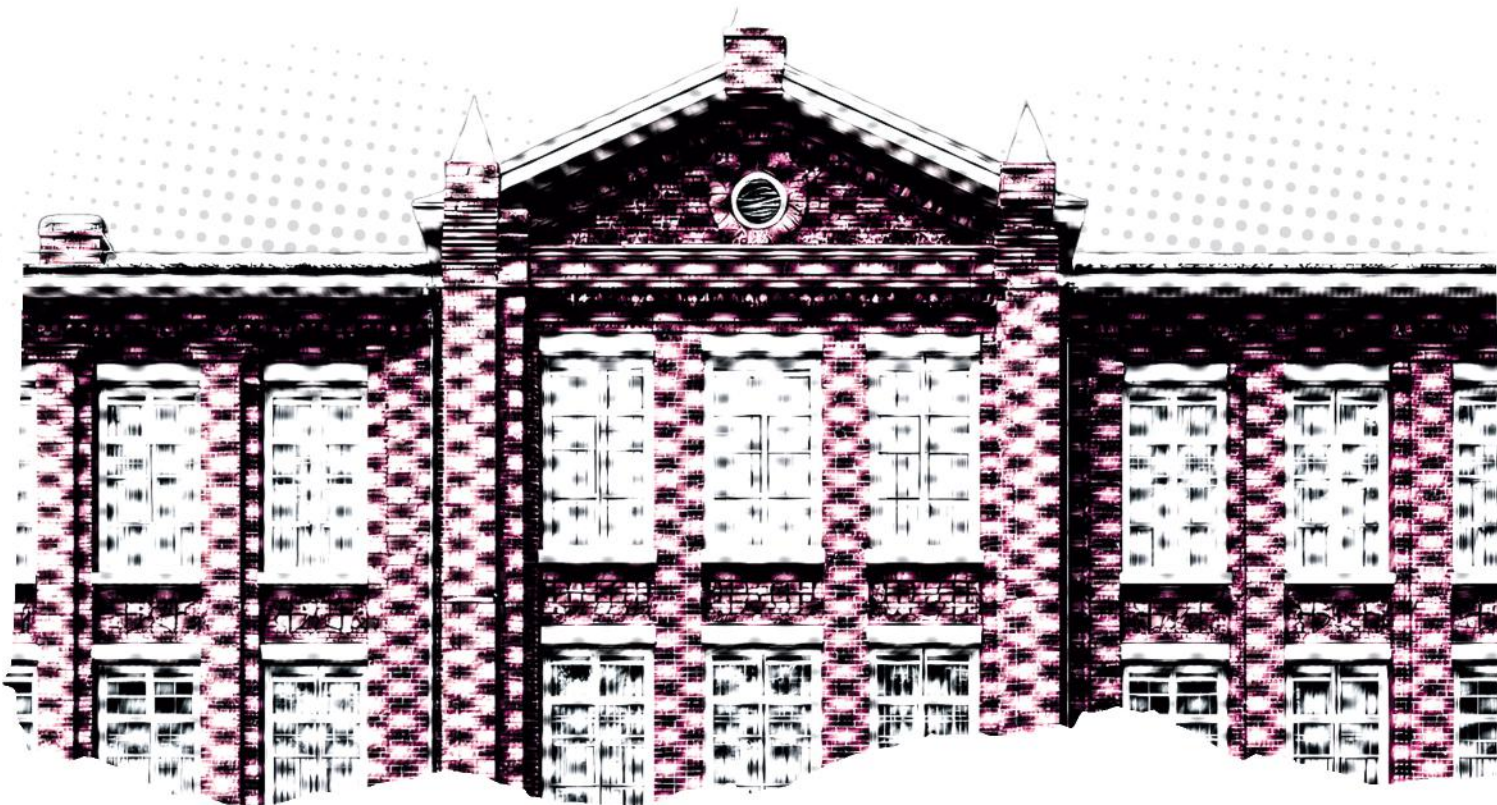
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PREFACE BY DR. PAM HEDGPETH

Executive Director, Greater Ozarks Cooperating School Districts

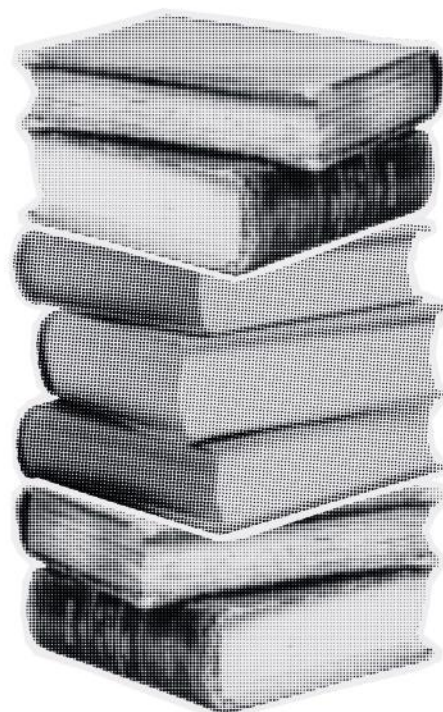


The Missouri education community lost a dedicated leader with the passing of Tyler Laney. As Dr. Karla Eslinger, Commissioner of Education, described him, Tyler was truly a “Warrior for Public Education.” He spent countless miles traveling to meet with board members and communities, passionately speaking about the inequities in public school funding. He often shared a simple but powerful image of students and asked, “Which one does not deserve to be adequately funded?”—a question that stayed with all who heard it. Tyler was deeply community-minded, never afraid to speak up for schools, and unwavering in his passion for public education.

He demonstrated what true advocacy looked like in both word and action.

Just as impactful were his relationships with students and staff—so many recall the encouragement, support, and advice he freely gave. He also served as a mentor to many superintendents, offering steady guidance and wisdom that will continue to influence educational leaders for years to come.

Tyler’s passion for public education never wavered; the op-ed he wrote this fall serves as a powerful reminder to all of us of the importance of a fully funded school formula, as well as the critical role of advocacy and standing up for public schools.



MISSOURI SCHOOLS NEED NEW FUNDING

*Lack of State Funding For Missouri Schools is Causing Higher Property Taxes,
But New Funding Formula Can Fix That*



*By Ty Laney, former Crane R-III Superintendent
July 26, 1955 - April 2, 2026*

Historically, funding public schools in Missouri was a balanced partnership between state policymakers and local taxpayers to give Missouri students the resources they need to learn, grow and eventually lead our communities. We badly need to return to this model. The quality of Missouri's future workforce and the fairness of our future property taxes will depend on us doing so. As a former superintendent of a small school district in southwest Missouri, Crane R-III, I've seen firsthand how changes made to the foundation formula have had generational impacts on our students and communities.

Governor Kehoe has asked state lawmakers over the next two years to update the Missouri funding formula for the first time since 2005. This presents a rare opportunity to restore balance between state and local investment — creating stronger schools and fairer taxes for Missouri families.

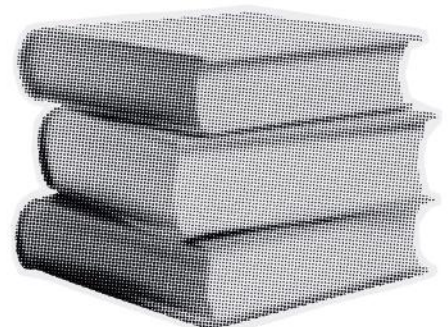
The facts aren't pretty. Currently, public schools in Missouri get a smaller share of their funding from state government than any other state in the country, according to National Center for Education Statistics. On average, less than 30% of a Missouri school's funding comes from state government. By comparison, Kansas funds 66% of their schools' budgets, while Iowa is at 51% and Kentucky at 52%.

Not surprisingly, because we are dead last in this metric, Missouri public schools are forced to rely overwhelmingly on local taxpayers to fund schools, mostly through property taxes. In fact, local funding makes up a greater share of total school funding in Missouri than all but four states. It's a simple equation: when the state underfunds, local taxpayers overpay. You see, school funding and property taxes aren't two public policy issues. They're one. Once we acknowledge this and understand that our local property taxes in southwest Missouri are higher than they should be now primarily because our schools get so little investment from the state, we can start to right this wrong. Unfortunately, now some of the

same state lawmakers who have starved our schools of state funding now want to go a step further, proposing to freeze or abolish property taxes altogether. These efforts would strip local funds not only from schools but also from law enforcement, firefighters, libraries and community colleges.

The answer isn't to take local funds away. It's to restore the state's responsibility. The real solution lies in rewriting the foundation formula in a way that eases the burden on local taxpayers while increasing state funding for our classrooms. If the State of Missouri has money to give professional sports teams hundreds of million in incentives, we have the resources to significantly increase state funding for education during this upcoming rewrite of the foundation formula.

Out of all 50 states, no other state government contributes less to its public schools than Missouri. Fixing this will not only lead to better schools, but to fairer property taxes for Missouri families and small businesses. A new school foundation formula gives us a once-in-a-generation opportunity to do just that. ■



MISSOURI SUPERINTENDENT ACADEMY

— By Dr. Donna Jahnke

Calling all early career superintendents! Are you in your second, third, or fourth year of your superintendency? Would

Professional Development on school finance, growing your leaders, facilities financing and contracting, working with your Board of Education, and communications are all topics explored in the Academy, to name a few. Your input and ideas help to formulate the content of the Academy sessions are also solicited to ensure the offerings meet your needs.

One of the great benefits of the Academy is the opportunity to meet other superintendents across the state and network with them over the year and well beyond. These cohorts become connected colleagues who support one another throughout



your career. Presenters also become a part of your network and offer assistance and support when needed.

The Academy meets three times a year for 2-day retreats, which are always on Thursday and Friday. On Thursdays we begin at 11:00 a.m. to allow for travel to Jefferson City's MCSA building, and end at 2:00 p.m. on Friday so you can travel home to school events or family activities. Here are the dates for the 2026-27 Academy Cohort:



- **OCTOBER 15-16, 2026**
- **FEBRUARY 18-19, 2027**
- **APRIL 22-23, 2027**

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COACHING & COLLABORATION

Expanding Networks, Strengthening Leadership

By Dr. John Jungmann

The MASA Coaching and Collaboration programs are redefining how Missouri school superintendents are supported in one of education’s most demanding roles. Built on a foundation of personalized coaching and meaningful collaboration, these programs address a longstanding need in leadership development: consistent, experience-driven support at every stage of the superintendency. These initiatives are designed to empower superintendents by equipping them with the tools, strategies, and insights necessary to navigate the complexities of their roles effectively.

By fostering an environment of continuous learning and reflection, the programs not only enhance individual leadership capabilities but also contribute to the broader educational landscape in Missouri. Participants benefit from tailored guidance and the opportunity to

engage with a diverse network of peers, creating a vibrant community of practice where shared experiences and collective wisdom drive innovation and improvement. Through a partnership between the Missouri Association of School Administrators (MASA) and the Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE), MASA offers three distinct Coaching and Collaboration programs, each intentionally designed to meet superintendents where they are in their leadership journey:

- The Early Career Superintendent Coaching Program
- The Veteran Superintendent Coaching Program
- The Veteran Collaborative Cohort Program

Together, these programs serve leaders from their earliest years through seasoned practice, ensuring that no superintendent leads in isolation.

A Growing Network of Support

Since their launch, participation in MASA’s Coaching and Collaboration programs has continued to grow. By the 2025–2026 school year, 247 Missouri superintendents statewide are participating, reflecting both the increasing complexity of the role and the value of sustained, relationship-based leadership support.

At the heart of each program is a connection to retired, highly experienced Missouri superintendents who understand the realities of district leadership. These retired leaders serve as trained coaches and facilitators, offering perspective, guidance, and candid feedback grounded in real-world experience.



Personal Coaching for Every Stage

Superintendents in the Early Career Superintendent Coaching Program, designed for leaders entering their second or third year, receive 15–20 hours of one-on-one coaching annually. This individualized support focuses on leadership development, strategic problem-solving, and building confidence during some of the most formative years in the role.

For more experienced leaders, the Veteran Superintendent Coaching Program supports superintendents entering year three or beyond through 10 hours of individualized coaching each year. This program emphasizes reflection, goal-setting, and strategic growth, providing space for experienced leaders to recharge and sharpen their leadership practice.

Collaboration Through Cohorts

In addition to individual coaching, the Veteran Collaborative Cohort Program brings together small, peer-based groups of superintendents entering year four or beyond. These cohorts meet for approximately 15 hours throughout the school year, creating a confidential, supportive environment for collaboration. Within these cohorts, superintendents have the opportunity to:

- Share best practices
- Brainstorm solutions to pressing challenges
- Offer encouragement and feedback
- Reflect on leadership, strategy, and growth

The collaborative model strengthens professional networks and reinforces the idea that even experienced leaders benefit from learning alongside their peers.

Impact That Matters

Annual feedback continues to highlight the program’s impact. Participants consistently point to the value of having a trusted advisor who understands the complexities of the superintendent role and can offer judgment-free guidance. One superintendent shared, “Having someone I can call, text, or meet with who has been in my shoes has been invaluable. It’s a sounding board that helps me make better decisions every day.”

Many participants credit the program with increased confidence, stronger decision-making, and improved capacity to navigate budgeting, personnel challenges, board relations, and community engagement.

Dr. John Jungmann, Director of the Coaching and Collaboration Program, emphasizes the importance of ongoing, relationship-driven leadership support. “This work is about ensuring superintendents are never leading alone,” Jungmann said. “By investing in coaching and collaboration, we strengthen leadership capacity across Missouri in ways that directly support students, staff, and communities.”

Looking Ahead

In an era of increasing complexity and pressure, MASA’s Coaching and Collaboration programs offer a powerful model for intentional leadership support. By providing both individualized coaching and peer collaboration, MASA and DESE are investing in superintendent success at every stage. MASA encourages superintendents to consider participating in Coaching and Collaboration during the 2026–2027 school year and to take advantage of this opportunity to grow, connect, and lead with clarity. ■



Dr. John Jungmann

Director of Coaching & Collaboration

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 Missouri Association of School Administrators



FINISH STRONG, START SMARTER:

Using What Matters Most to Drive What's Next

DR. DEANNA D. ASHBY

It is the final stretch of the school year. The “busyness trap” is alive and well, fueled by a cycle of graduation ceremonies, staffing conversations, concerts, athletic events, and countless end-of-year activities. At the same time, leaders are already planning for what comes next, such as building schedules, refining priorities, and preparing for a new academic year. Amid the chaos of the final stretch, one critical leadership move is often the first to be sacrificed: the strategic pause. While the urge to rush is strong, we must protect the time to look back.

If we let the pause become a casualty of the calendar, we lose the chance to shape a more intentional version of the year ahead. Superintendent Amy Ruzicka of Bayless School District captures this tension well: “As educational leaders, there is a constant urgency to keep moving forward and achieve more. At the same time, finishing the year strong requires us to pause and reflect on the progress we have made. In our district, we often talk about ‘Celebrate and Elevate.’ We name what is

working, identify the actions that led to that success, and use those insights to intentionally set the next, more ambitious goal. The measures that matter most in this reflective process are not just the outcomes, but the practices behind them, including the leading indicators that help us predict and improve results for students.”

The Leadership Pause That Drives Progress

Here’s the challenge: If leaders do not intentionally pause to reflect, they risk repeating the same patterns. The most effective leaders pause to ask:

- What truly made a difference for students this year?
- What moved the needle for our staff?
- What aligned to our purpose, and what did not?

How we finish the year directly shapes how and where we begin the next year. As Dr. Andrea Dixon-Seahorn of Liberty Public Schools reminds us, “Stay the course even as challenges arise! Now is the time to influence positive change and inspire your

teams to actualize strategic goals as strong building blocks for the upcoming school year.” Strategic leaders do not just move forward; they look back with purpose, and use what they’ve learned to lead more effectively, not just more quickly.

Measure What Matters Most

Reflection is only as good as the data that informs it. In the 9 Pillars of Leadership Excellence, Dr. Janet Pilcher emphasizes Pillar 2: Measure What’s Important. Without clear measures, leaders operate without visibility, often unaware of critical gaps or opportunities across the system. As Pilcher notes, “What gets measured gets improved.” To ensure meaningful reflection, leaders should focus on three key areas:

1. Student Experience & Outcomes

- Do students feel safe, supported, and engaged?
- Are students taking ownership of their learning?
- Where are we seeing growth, and where are we stagnant?

2. Staff Culture & Outcomes

- Are staff consistently implementing agreed-upon strategies?
- Where is inconsistency limiting impact?
- What are we learning from staff feedback and engagement data?

3. Systems & Processes

- Are our systems supporting or slowing down the work?
- Is communication clear, consistent, and actionable?
- Are we effectively closing feedback loops in real time?

These indicators shift conversations from opinions to evidence and from isolated efforts to aligned improvement. Leaders stepping into new roles, where understanding the current reality of the system is essential for shaping what comes next. Dr. Tyler Overstreet, incoming Superintendent, Republic School District, shared, “As an incoming superintendent, the end-of-year data is not merely a report of what happened. It provides a current reality for the system and serves as a guide for what is possible. It reveals celebrations, opportunities for improvement, and actionable steps to keep moving forward. Through the lens of continuous improvement, this data forms the foundation for a strong, focused, and successful first year as Superintendent.”

Turning Reflection into Action: After-Action Reviews

One of the most impactful practices for a leader is the After-Action Review. Aligned to Pillar 9: Continuously Improve to Achieve Success, After-Action Reviews provide a structured way to learn from experience by engaging those closest to the work. This process is not about evaluation; it is about learning forward. When we shift the focus from ‘who failed’ to ‘where the process broke,’ we build the psychological safety and trust necessary for that learning. Whether reviewing final assessment results, graduation rates, or a major new initiative, guide your team through these five questions:

1. What was **expected**?
2. What **happened**?
3. Where did we **succeed** and why?
4. Where were the **gaps** and why?
5. What did we **learn**?

By documenting these responses, the lessons learned in May become the standard operating procedures for the year ahead, allowing teams to replicate success, identify and address gaps, close feedback loops, and strengthen future implementation. To maximize impact during the discussion:

- Schedule reviews with intentionality
- Create a safe space for honest dialogue
- Ground discussions in data
- Define clear next steps and ownership
- Document insights into your scorecard

Final Thought: Lead the Finish to Shape the Future

The final weeks of school can feel like controlled chaos. It is easy to shift into survival mode, but leadership matters most in these moments. Leaders who create lasting impact are those who pause long enough to ensure they are focused on what matters most. Stay anchored to your priorities. Reinforce expectations. Recognize the work that made a difference. Then, look back with intention, measure the important things, celebrate the bright spots, and lead forward with clarity. ■



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Lead with clarity. Measure what matters.



"What gets measured gets improved."

– Dr. Janet Pilcher, 9 Pillars of Leadership Excellence

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9
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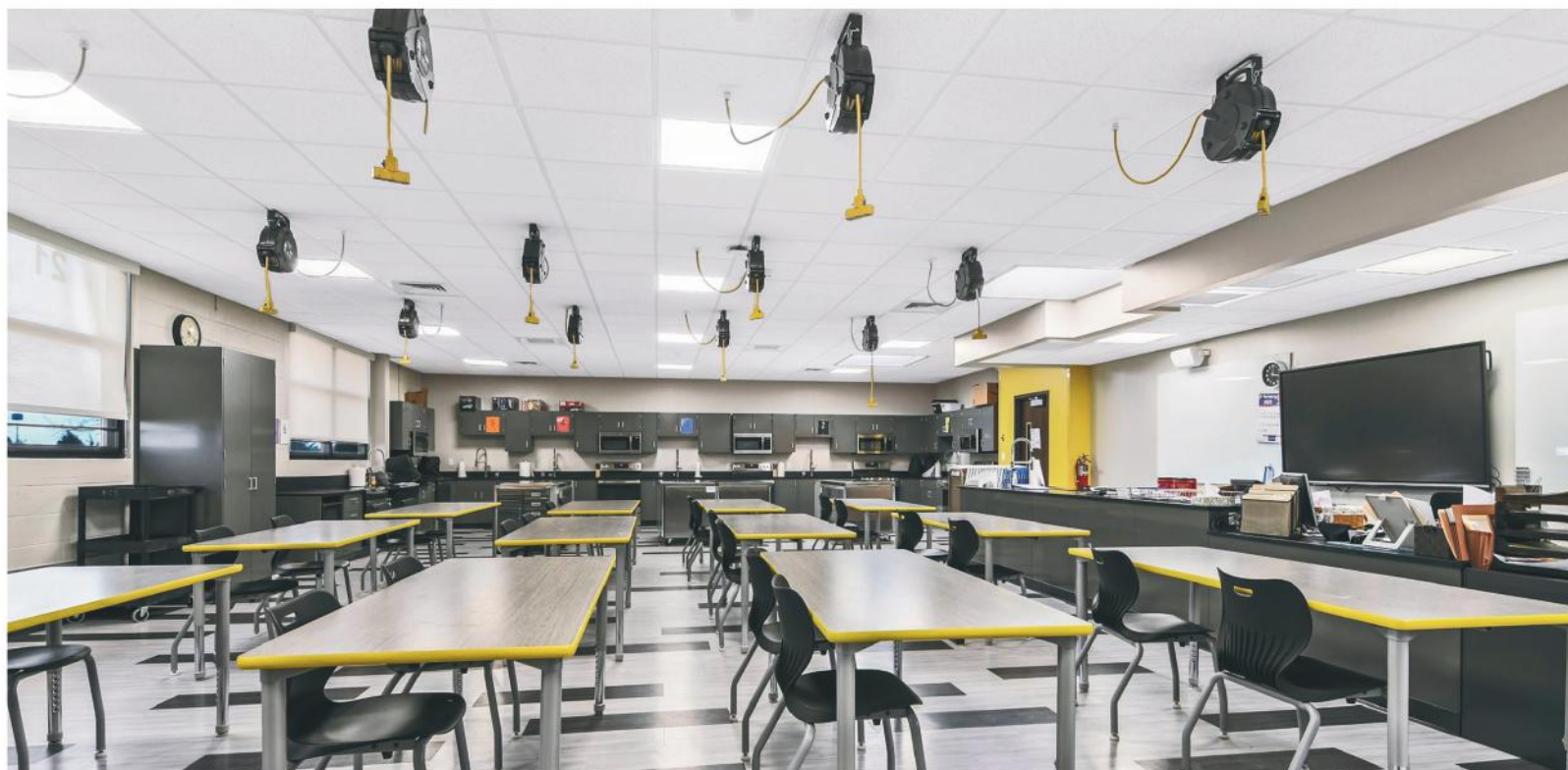
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SUMMER PRIORITIES

School's Out! What's Next?

AN INSIGHT FROM MINDY HAMPTON

Each year, as the final school buses pull away in May and the buildings grow quiet, educators grow quiet, educators are often met with a familiar question: “What do you do all summer?” or perhaps, “Did you enjoy your summer off?” While those questions are usually well-intended, they often overlook the reality of what summer means for a school district’s leadership team. In many ways, summer represents the busiest and most critical season for a superintendent and central office staff.

Certainly, the pace of daily school life changes. Hallways are quieter, parent concerns naturally decrease, and many of the immediate HR challenges tied to the regular school year are temporarily paused. That shift creates a welcome opportunity to focus deeply on the behind-the-scenes work that keeps a district running smoothly. However, the workload itself does not diminish—it simply changes form.

Summer is the season of preparation, planning, & rebuilding for the year ahead.

While students and staff enjoy a well-deserved break, central office teams are immersed in some of the most important work of the year. June alone brings extensive Core Data reporting requirements, year-end financial closeouts, and the preparation of year-beginning financials. Budget planning and presentations to the Board of Education are underway, including salary schedule approvals and audit preparation for the previous fiscal year.

At the same time, districts are actively preparing for the return of students and staff. Staffing adjustments are finalized, professional development plans are created, and instructional teams work diligently to ensure schools are ready for day one. Core systems must be rebuilt for the new school year to ensure success, including new staff onboarding, setting up student enrollment processes, transportation logistics, and finalized school calendars into core data. Beyond the office walls, summer is also when facilities teams tackle major projects and maintenance work that simply cannot occur while students occupy buildings. Floors are refinished, classrooms refreshed, walls painted, carpets cleaned, technology updated, and grounds maintained—all with the goal of creating safe, welcoming environments for learning.

One of the greatest gifts of summer is the uninterrupted collaboration time with the central office and Administrations teams. Without the constant interruptions of the regular school year, significant progress can be made in a single day. Strategic conversations, long-range planning, and district improvement efforts gain momentum during these quieter months. For me, summer is also a time to reconnect with the people who matter most. It’s the season of evenings gathered around the dinner table, family vacations, quick weekend getaways, and all the moments that define summer — boating, time on the water, basketball, concerts, and barbecues.

Take time to enjoy the slower pace. Step away from the office for a few days to unwind, recharge, and refocus. I can’t overstate the importance of self-care during the summer months. Investing in your well-being is essential to sustaining both your energy and the longevity of your tenure as a superintendent.

And yet, despite the productivity and the appreciated change of pace, there is always a moment in August when excitement begins to build again. The return of teachers and staff breathes energy back into the buildings, and nothing compares to seeing buses arrive on that first day of school, carrying the students who remain at the heart of every decision we make. Summer may be busy, but the true joy of education begins when our schools are once again filled with life and learning. ■



MINDY HAMPTON

Superintendent

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