

GOVERNOR'S COUNCIL ON DISABILITY

GCD NEWSLETTER

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MO-YLF 2026: EMPOWERING MISSOURI'S FUTURE LEADERS

by Reece Ellis



From July 14-18, 2026, 28 high school students with disabilities from across Missouri, from Springfield to Louisiana and Mound City to Thayer, convened at the University of Missouri-Columbia for the Missouri Youth Leadership Forum (MO-YLF). Throughout the week, the students become "delegates" and explore leadership, career development, disability history and advocacy, self-determination, mentorship, and independent living.

MO-YLF is hosted annually by the Governor's Council on Disability (GCD) in partnership with Vocational Rehabilitation, MU Pre-Employment Transition Services, Missouri Centers for Independent Living, Paraquad, and the Office of Equal Opportunity. The program is funded entirely through sponsorships, grants, and private donations. This year's keynote address was delivered by Daniel Van Sant, Director of Disability Policy at the Harkin Institute, who spoke with delegates about self-advocacy and the importance of civic engagement.

Delegates engaged with mentors from the disability community, took part in a mock legislative debate at the Missouri State Capitol, and completed a community service project, delivering hundreds of pounds of food donations to the Ronald McDonald House of Mid-Missouri.

Evening programming included adaptive sports, a talent show, and a dance.

The week concluded with a graduation luncheon, where each team shared reflections on their experience with staff and families.

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Reaching delegates like these takes work well before the program begins, including hours of planning meetings, multiple interagency committees, and regular informational webinars. This year, GCD staff also traveled to Hannibal, Maryville, St. Joseph, Kansas City, Pacific, St. Louis, St. Charles, St. Peters, Farmington, West Plains, Moberly, and Aurora to meet directly with families, students, and educators about what MO-YLF offers. That groundwork is what allows the program to reach students in every corner of the state, and it remains one of the most valued parts of the job for our entire team.

The 2026 MO-YLF introduced two new honors at its closing ceremony:

The Justice Bowman Breakthrough Leadership Award is named for a 2025 delegate from Southeast Missouri who arrived guarded and reluctant but left the program having built friendships and the confidence to voice his own accessibility needs. The award recognizes the delegate who makes the greatest personal growth during the week; its inaugural recipient was Lyza Alumbaugh of Thayer.

The Caitlin Bartley Advocacy Award honors a 2009 MO-YLF alumna who became a community organizer and dedicated her career to the Division of Developmental Disabilities, working to ensure the state continued to make progress on the equal and effective delivery of services to which individuals with disabilities are entitled. The award recognizes the delegate who best demonstrated advocacy for self and others; its inaugural recipient was Brenna Holz of Wentzville.

This year's program also benefited from expanded collaboration with the Office of Equal Opportunity. Angela Lenczycki joined the MO-YLF logistics team, and Kim Hicks led a refresh of program materials. As in past years, volunteer staff, many of them MO-YLF alumni, gave generously of their time throughout the week and were models of mentorship. None of this would be possible without the continued support of OA, and programs like MO-YLF are one of the many reasons the GCD team is proud to serve the people of Missouri.

Upon completing MO-YLF, delegates may apply to return as team leaders and facilitators in future years.

For more information, visit the [Missouri Youth Leadership Forum website](https://www.moyleadershipforum.org) or follow @MOLeadershipForum on Facebook.



Photos:

1) Justice Bowman Breakthrough Leadership Award winner Lyza Alumbaugh and MO-YLF facilitator Arienna Gray

2) Caitlin Bartley Advocacy Award winner Brenna Holz with MO-YLF volunteer staff Lily Womack and Letiah Fraser



LEGISLATIVE ANNOUNCEMENTS

by Laura Mueth

The next primary election is August 4th. This election will determine which candidates will be on the general election ballot in November. The ballot will also feature a few amendments to be voted on. Regardless of your political party affiliation or your views on the amendments, take time to vote in the upcoming election.

The [State of Missouri's Disability Portal Voting page](#) includes a video that reviews accessible voting options. If anyone has difficulties voting on election day, call or text 1-866-OUR-VOTE.



The bills GCD tracked this year that made it to the Governor's desk were signed. Information on individual bills including what is in each bill can be found using the links in the last issue of the Legislative Update, which can be found on the GCD website at [Legislative Update Issue 19](#). The complete list of legislative actions taken by Governor Kehoe is available on the [Governor's Legislative Actions](#) web page.



As is common practice, Governor Kehoe did veto various lines in the appropriation bills. The list of vetoed items can be viewed at [Fiscal Year 2027 Veto List](#). He also restricted some expenditures. The expenditure restriction list can be viewed at [Fiscal Year 2027 Expenditure Restrictions](#).

LEGISLATIVE PRIORITIES POLL COMING SOON

by Laura Mueth

The 2026 Legislative Priorities Poll will be available for completion beginning in late August and closing on November 2 at 5:00 p.m.

While this year's version will have many of the same questions as last year, please take the time to share your thoughts. Even if your opinions or concerns are unchanged, we still want to hear from you. In addition to being reviewed by our staff and Council members, the results will be shared with all legislators at the beginning of the 2027 legislative session. This is an opportunity to possibly spark an idea for a bill or help a representative or senator decide how to vote on bills.



New and returning legislators need to hear the perspective of those with a variety of disabilities, family members, friends, service providers, and others as they begin what is likely to be a difficult session. You are encouraged to share the Poll with anyone you believe would like to provide input on the covered topics.

Keep your eye out for the Qualtrics link to participate. It will be distributed via email and posted on GCD's [Facebook](#) page and [Poll](#) web page. Alternate formats which can be completed and returned to our office will also be made available for those who may need them. Our staff will be available to assist anyone who has difficulty understanding the questions or completing it independently.

If you have not received the Poll in the past and would like to receive it directly once it is ready, contact Laura Mueth at Laura.Mueth@oa.mo.gov. We are excited for all the responses!

CELEBRATING MILESTONES IN DISABILITY ADVOCACY AND SUPPORT

by Claudia Browner

As we reflect on July's historic landmarks of the 36th anniversary of the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) and the 35th anniversary of the National ADA Network, we carry that momentum into August to celebrate another historic milestone: the **70th anniversary of the Social Security Administration's Disability Insurance Program**.

On August 1, 1956, President Dwight D. Eisenhower signed the Social Security Amendments, establishing the Social Security Disability Insurance (SSDI) program. Over the past seven decades, SSDI, commonly referred to as "Disability", has stood as a fundamental pillar of America's dedication to workers who have a disability that stops or limits their ability to work. This vital program continues to offer essential financial stability to millions of disabled workers and their families nationwide when they need it most.



To better support these individuals, the Social Security Administration has recently implemented major improvements in its service delivery. Applicants are now experiencing significantly reduced wait times cut by over 25 percent along with expedited decision-making processes, streamlined case management, and overall more timely assistance.

Alongside these operational upgrades, the agency has enhanced the **my Social Security** portal to expand convenient self-service options. By creating a free personal account at ssa.gov/myaccount, you can gain immediate access to a comprehensive suite of secure online tools. We encourage you to explore these upgraded digital services, or contact your [local Social Security office](#) directly for additional information and assistance.

GCD NDEAM POSTER CONTEST: ENTER BY AUGUST 31

by Claudia Browner

Attention Missouri Artists & Creatives! Show us your talent and help spark meaningful conversations about workplace inclusion.

In honor of National Disability Employment Awareness Month (NDEAM), the Governor's Council on Disability (GCD) is hosting its annual poster contest!

This year's theme is "Celebrating Value and Talent," carrying the spirit of last year's celebration forward through 2026 in honor of America's 250th birthday.

We are looking for original artwork that:

- Showcases the importance of equal employment opportunities for individuals with disabilities.
- Highlights the value of workplace accessibility and how it empowers talent.
- Celebrates the diverse contributions workers with disabilities make to our community and economy.

Who Can Enter: Open to all Missouri residents

Deadline: Entries must be received by August 31, 2026

The Reward: Statewide recognition and featured placement on the official 2026 GCD NDEAM Poster

Governor's Council on Disability
POSTER CONTEST

Open now - entries due 8/31/26

Submit your creative artwork for a chance to be featured on the Governor's Council on Disability's 2026 National Disability Employment Awareness Month (NDEAM) poster.

This year's NDEAM theme is *Celebrating Value and Talent*, carrying the spirit of last year's celebration forward through 2026 in honor of America's 250th birthday.

disability.mo.gov/gcd/PosterContest





Beyond the chance to win and receive statewide recognition, this poster contest serves as a powerful opportunity for all of us to discuss civil rights, barrier-free design, and how a modern workplace built on accessibility benefits everyone.

Review the contest guidelines on the [Poster Contest website](#) and submit your entry today.

MANAGING BACK TO SCHOOL ANXIETY

by Dara Sailer, Office of Equal Opportunity

The summer heat is still in full swing, but August marks the beginning of back-to-school season for many schools across Missouri. Early morning alarms, new routines after a leisurely summer, homework, and extracurricular activities can make this season stressful for both parents and children. While these challenges affect nearly everyone, they can be even more difficult for children with disabilities such as neurodivergent conditions, as well as their parents.

School-related anxiety can appear in many ways. In younger children, they might complain of an upset stomach. Sometimes anxiety doesn't look like worry at all. It can appear as irritability, difficulty concentrating, emotional outburst, or refusing to go to school. In older kids, they may become quiet and withdrawn. Social media often presents an unrealistic picture of the perfect school year, which can leave both parents and students feeling like they aren't measuring up. It's important to remind yourself and your teens that life is not perfect and it's okay to feel overwhelmed. As parents, showing yourself the same patience and grace you offer your child can make the adjustment easier for everyone.

Here are a few ways to make the transition back to school a little smoother:

- Start the transition early. Begin adjusting bedtime and wake-up time about two weeks before school starts. This can help ensure everyone is getting enough sleep and the school schedule is less of a shock to the body and mind, which can exacerbate an already anxious or stressed individual.
- Create a routine. Children really do thrive on a routine. They know what to expect and it helps alleviate decision fatigue or confusion in the morning. Visual checklists can take routines one step further by helping children know what comes next while giving them a sense of accomplishment as they complete each task.
- Remind your children that it is good and encouraged to ask for help. If they feel overwhelmed with the responsibilities of school and activities, asking a parent or trusted adult for help or guidance is a great way to help. Remind them that asking for help is a sign of strength, not weakness.
- Teachers, counselors, school nurses, and administrators all want to help your child succeed. The more they understand your child's needs, the better they can provide support.
- Stay calm. Dr. Rachel Busman, child psychologist, explains, "The way we as adults interact and react is so important: a little bit of active ignoring, a little bit of positive attention and a lot of encouragement."
- While some back-to-school jitters are expected, ongoing anxiety that interferes with daily life may signal a deeper concern. If your child continues to struggle after the school year begins, don't hesitate to speak with their pediatrician or a mental health professional. Early support can make a tremendous difference.

Helpful Resources include:

[NIMH Resources for Students and Educators](#)

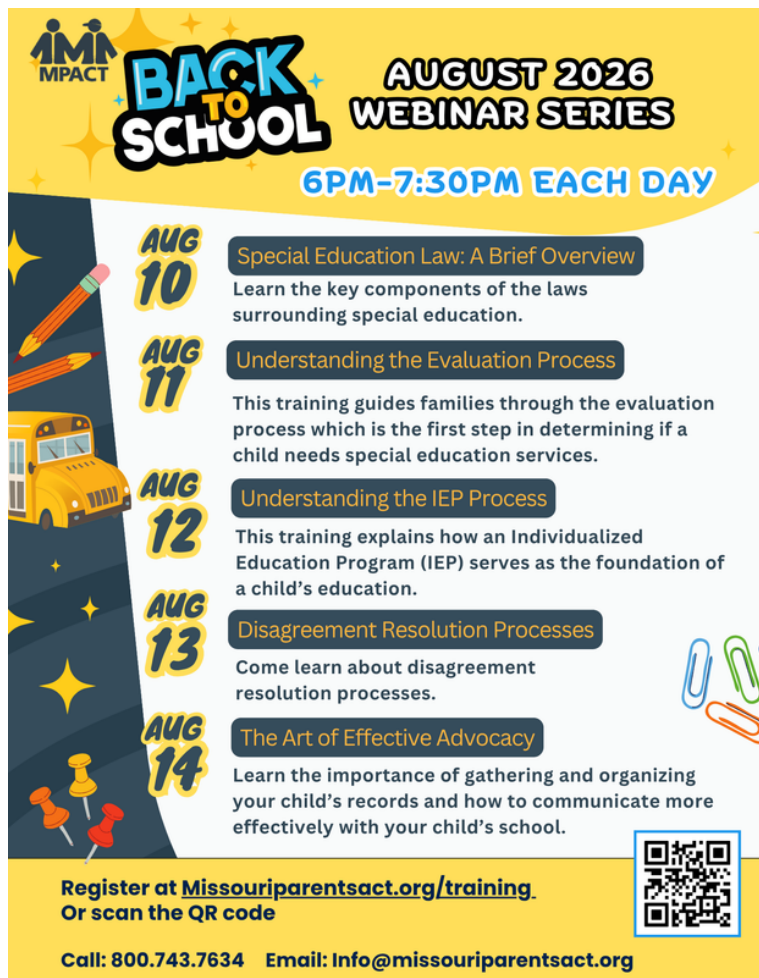
[Back-to-School Anxiety](#)

BACK TO SCHOOL



MPACT BACK TO SCHOOL WEBINAR SERIES AND YOUTH SUPPORT

by Claudia Browner



MPACT BACK TO SCHOOL **AUGUST 2026 WEBINAR SERIES**
6PM-7:30PM EACH DAY

- AUG 10** **Special Education Law: A Brief Overview**
 Learn the key components of the laws surrounding special education.
- AUG 11** **Understanding the Evaluation Process**
 This training guides families through the evaluation process which is the first step in determining if a child needs special education services.
- AUG 12** **Understanding the IEP Process**
 This training explains how an Individualized Education Program (IEP) serves as the foundation of a child's education.
- AUG 13** **Disagreement Resolution Processes**
 Come learn about disagreement resolution processes.
- AUG 14** **The Art of Effective Advocacy**
 Learn the importance of gathering and organizing your child's records and how to communicate more effectively with your child's school.

Register at Missouriparentsact.org/training.
 Or scan the QR code

Call: 800.743.7634 Email: Info@missouriparentsact.org

Missouri Parents Act (MPACT) empowers families to advocate for themselves so that children with special education needs can reach their full potential in education and life – through support, training, and education.

This August, MPACT is offering a series of Back to School Webinars to help families prepare for the school year.

Webinars are free to attend and cover a variety of topics including Special Education Law, Understanding the Evaluation Process, Understanding the IEP Process, Disagreement Resolution Processes, and the Art of Effective Advocacy.

Register at Missouriparentsact.org/training or scan the QR code on the flyer.

MPACT's newly formed **MyVoice** (Missouri Youth Voices of Independent & Collective Education) is a youth-led group of passionate young adults dedicated to creating a more inclusive educational environment, where students feel safe, heard, and empowered to use their voice. To get involved, visit the [MyVoice website](https://MyVoice.org).

For more information, please visit the [MPACT website](https://Missouriparentsact.org).

SHOW-ME STARS AND STRIPES AT THE MISSOURI STATE FAIR

by Claudia Browner

Celebrate the Show-Me Stars and Stripes theme at the Missouri State Fair this August while taking advantage of resources for all visitors.

During Senior Day, older adults can take advantage of special activities, exhibits, and promotions designed just for them.

The fair also provides disability assistance, including accessible parking, shuttle service, mobility equipment rentals, and designated seating at many venues.

Visit the State Fair [Disability Assistance](#) web page for more information.



NATIONAL WELLNESS MONTH - CHOOSE YOU THIS AUGUST

by Kristal White, Office of Equal Opportunity

August is National Wellness Month, a time to focus on one of the most important investments you can make—your own well-being.

In the midst of busy work schedules, family responsibilities, deadlines, and everyday demands, it's easy to place your own health on the back burner. National Wellness Month serves as a reminder that caring for yourself isn't a luxury, it's an essential part of living a healthy, balanced life.

Self-care is more than an occasional treat. It's the intentional practice of supporting your physical, mental, and emotional well-being through healthy daily habits. Research has shown that practicing self-care can help reduce stress, build resilience, improve overall health, and even increase happiness. The best part? Small changes can make a big difference.

Consider incorporating one or more of these five simple ways to prioritize your wellness into your daily routine:

1. Drink more water throughout the day.
2. Add more fruit and vegetables to your meals.
3. Prioritize quality sleep by creating healthy bedtime routines.
4. Stay active by taking a walk, joining a yoga class, or participating in another form of exercise you enjoy.
5. Practice mindfulness or meditation to reduce stress and improve focus.

Take the "I Choose Wellness" Challenge

This August, make a commitment to yourself by taking the "I Choose Wellness" pledge. Choose one small wellness goal and practice it every day for 31 days. Whether it's drinking 64 ounces of water, walking 10,000 steps, spending a few minutes meditating, or simply taking time to unplug, every positive choice contributes to a healthier you.

Remember, wellness isn't about perfection—it's about making consistent choices that support your overall health and wellbeing.

Missouri Wellness Resources

The Missouri Department of Mental Health (DMH) is committed to improving the mental well-being and overall wellness of all Missourians. Through its wellness initiatives, DMH provides resources, educational opportunities, and practical tools designed to help individuals thrive where they live, work, learn, and play. Their wellness program is built around the Eight Dimensions of Wellness, encouraging a holistic approach to health that supports physical, emotional, social, financial, occupational, intellectual, spiritual, and environmental wellbeing.

Explore wellness resources, self-care tools, and educational materials at [Missouri Department of Mental Health Wellness](#).





SAVE THE DATE

Join us for the 3rd annual statewide National Disability Employment Awareness Month (NDEAM) celebration!

The event will be hosted by the Office of Administration's Office of Equal Opportunity and Governor's Council on Disability, on Thursday, October 1, 2026 at 11:30 AM at the Harry S Truman Building in Jefferson City.

UPCOMING EVENTS

Check out these upcoming disability-related conferences and events! Click on the links to learn more or register.

August 23-25, 2026
[Real Voices, Real Choices Conference, Lake Ozark](#)

September 16-18, 2026
[Missouri Behavioral Health Conference, St. Louis](#)

September 24, 2026
[Disability Inclusion Summit, Kansas City](#)

October 1, 2026
[Statewide NDEAM Celebration, Jefferson City](#)

October 7-8, 2026
[Starkloff Disability Employment Summit, St. Louis](#)

October 7-9, 2026
[MACDDS Annual Conference, Columbia](#)

October 20-21, 2026
[Missouri Brain Injury Association \(BIA-MO\) Annual Statewide Conference, St. Louis](#)

November 2-4, 2026
[Missouri Association of Area Agencies on Aging \(MA4\) Show Me Summit on Aging & Health, Columbia](#)

November 18-20, 2026
[Universal Design Summit 8, St. Louis](#)

If you know of other events you would like us to share with the disability community, please contact our office.



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