KANSAS & MISSOURI ENVIRONMENTAL EDUCATION CONFERENCE

KACEE.ORG/CONFERENCE

OCTOBER 26-27, 2026

THE KAUFFMAN FOUNDATION CONFERENCE CENTER

KANSAS CITY, MISSOURI

FROM SOIL TO THE STARS:
SYSTEMS CONNECT US ALL

missouri environmental education association

KACEE KANSAS ASSOCIATION FOR CONSERVATION & ENVIRONMENTAL EDUCATION

KANSAS GreenSchools

PROGRAM AT A GLANCE

Two days, three strands, one system

MONDAY, OCTOBER 26

12:00 – 2:00 PM

eeHigher Education Meeting

Invitation Meeting for KS Higher Education Professionals

1:00 – 3:00 PM

Field Experiences

1:00 PM | KC Community Garden Beanstalk Children's Garden
2:00 PM | KC Water Parking Lot Tour

3:00 - 6:15 PM

Conference Opening

3:00 PM | Registration Opens
6:00 PM | Dinner/Networking/Exhibits

4:00-5:00 PM

Opening Night Keynote — Diane Mora

"From Classroom to Community: NourishingPeople, Planet, and Possibility"
Award-winning educator and food system advocate

6:30 - 7:30 PM

A Lightwalk at Night

1-mile (paved & trail) path in and around the Anita B Gorman Center

8:00 PM

Hospitality Suite

at the Hampton Inn & Suites Kansas City - Merriam

CONFERENCE STRANDS · LOOK FOR THESE MARKS ON EACH SESSION

RELATIONSHIPS

Relationships that Sustain Us

Land,place, and belonging through Indigenous knowledge systems and land ethics.

SYSTEMS

Systems that Sustain Us

AOneHealth lensconnecting ecological and human wellbeing.

CONNECTIONS

Connections that Sustain Us

Networks, partnerships, and collective environmental action.

PROGRAM AT A GLANCE

Two days, three strands, one system

TUESDAY, OCTOBER 27

7:30 – 9:00 AM	**Breakfast**
9:00 – 9:45 AM	**Concurrent Sessions · Block 1** Four 45-minute presentations
9:45 – 10:00 AM	Break & Exhibits
10:00 – 10:45 AM	**Concurrent Sessions · Block 2** Four 45-minute presentations
10:45 – 11:15 AM	Break & Exhibits
11:15 AM – 12:00 PM	**Concurrent Sessions · Block 3** Three presentations and a panel discussion
12:00 – 1:30 PM	Lunch, Keynote & Business Meeting
12:15-1:00 PM	**Keynote — Ujima: Nick Speed & Sunni Hutton & Amanda Tello** "Sowing Joy and Harvesting Collective Care" Environmental justice and community-centered models
1:30 – 3:30 PM	**Interactive Workshops** Four 2-hour hands-on workshops

TUESDAY, OCTOBER 27 · CONCURRENT SESSIONS

9:00 – 9:45 AM

Block 1 · Sessions 1–2 of 4

PRESENTATION

SYSTEMS

From Seed to System: Using Vertical Gardening to Explore Food, Health, and Sustainability

Nancy Zenger-Beneda Kansas Foundation for Agriculture in the Classroom

Discover how a vertical garden can become a powerful tool for teaching systems thinking. Participants will explore how hands-on growing experiences help students make connections among food production, natural resources, health, sustainability, and thriving communities while integrating STEM, inquiry-based learning and careers in agriculture.

AUDIENCE

High School | Special Needs Educators | ELL Educators

PRESENTATION

CONNECTIONS

The Trail Effect: How Small-Town Partnerships Expand Environmental Education

Myron Leinwetter · Rossville Community Foundation

Audience members will explore how rural partnerships—USD 321, the City of Rossville, and local volunteers—work together to build trail systems that expand environmental education. Expect practical tools for collaboration, partnership mapping, and using trails as living classrooms that strengthen community engagement and collective impact.

AUDIENCE

Middle School | High School | Program Administrators | Non-Profits | General/Mixed

9:00 – 9:45 AM

Block 1 · Sessions 3–4 of 4 · continued

PRESENTATION

✦ CONNECTIONS

Pathways to Participation: Growing Sustainable School Communities

Kelley Krejnik · Ladue Horton Watkins High School

Sustainable school communities grow when people have meaningful ways to participate. Drawing on research, systems thinking, and school-based examples, this session explores how educators can identify barriers and leverage points, create multiple pathways for contribution, and expand environmental agency among students, staff, leaders, and community partners.

AUDIENCE

High School · College & University · Green Schools · Nonformal Educators · Program Administrators · Non-Profits · General/Mixed

PRESENTATION

✦ RELATIONSHIPS

Find Your Flock: Developing a Conservation Culture through Backyard Birds

Kelly Schouten & Olivia Yurko · KansasCityZoo&Aquarium

People protect what they value, and a spotlight species can successfully connect communities to natural habitats around them. Explore how you can utilize backyard birds in your own communities to foster a sense of environmental ownership and provide an accessible entry point to conservation—no matter where in the world.

AUDIENCE

PreK/Early Elementary · Elementary · Middle School · High School · Nonformal Educators · Program Administrators · Non-Profits · General/Mixed

TUESDAY, OCTOBER 27 · CONCURRENT SESSIONS

10:00 – 10:45 AM

Block 2 · Sessions 1–2 of 4

PRESENTATION

RELATIONSHIPS · SYSTEMS

How Our Past and Future is Shaped by the Plants We Grow: A Perennial Sorghum Case Study

Lydia M. Nicholson · The Land Institute

This presentation will focus on perennializing Sorghum, a crop that originated in Northeast Africa and whose North American production is based in Kansas. Grains have deeply influenced our cultural patterns, and inviting these plants into the classroom can make these influences tangible to students. Snacks and seeds may be distributed!

AUDIENCE

Middle School · High School · Nonformal Educators · Non-Profits · General/Mixed

PRESENTATION

SYSTEMS · CONNECTIONS

From Single-Use to Lasting Change: Plastics Reduction in Schools

Stori Smith & Melina Matheney · Missouri River Bird Observatory & Show-Me Less Plastic

"Show-Me Less Plastic" is reframing plastic use across Missouri schools. Learn how we can reduce cafeteria plastics while supporting students' health, engagement, and sense of agency over a defining challenge of their lifetime. Session includes resources to join or replicate this work anywhere—even schools beyond our project's reach!

AUDIENCE

Elementary · Middle School · High School · Green Schools · General/Mixed

TUESDAY, OCTOBER 27 · CONCURRENT SESSIONS

10:00 – 10:45 AM

Block 2 · Sessions 3–4 of 4 · continued

PRESENTATION

CONNECTIONS

Collaboration in the Outdoor Space

Chris Geden · River City Outdoors

Discuss how when we collaborate we are able to serve more youth and give them so many more experiences. We can share resources and fill holes in programming.

AUDIENCE

Non-Profits | General/Mixed

PRESENTATION

CONNECTIONS

Collaborative Summer Library Program

Mandy Kern · Kansas Wetlands Education Center

Each summer, local libraries use a central theme for their youth programming. The Kansas Wetlands Education Center will take you through the books, hands-on activities, crafts, and live animal ambassadors used in the most recent themes: Unearth a Story, Color Our World, and Adventure Begins at Your Library. Gain ideas for offering your own library program and brainstorm ideas for the 2027 theme: Mysteries Await at Your Library.

AUDIENCE

PreK/Early Elementary | Elementary | Nonformal Educators | Program Administrators | Non-Profits | General/Mixed

TUESDAY, OCTOBER 27 · CONCURRENT SESSIONS

11:15 AM – 12:00 PM

Block 3 · Sessions 1–2 of 4

PRESENTATION

RELATIONSHIPS · SYSTEMS

One Square Meter: A Micro-Examination of Nature

Tess Wilson · University of Kansas

As tech becomes more ubiquitous, we become more distant from the natural world. Imagine what you might find when you focus on what's right in front of you! Learn about using David George Haskell's The Forest Unseen as a foundation for interactive, meditative, and investigatory nature walks.

AUDIENCE

Elementary · Middle School · High School · College & University · Special Needs Educators · ELL Educators · Nonformal Educators · Non-Profits · General/Mixed

PANEL & OPEN SPACE DISCUSSION

SYSTEMS · CONNECTIONS

Schools as Green Ecosystems

Marcel Harmon, BranchPattern · Michael Ralph ,DLR Group· Tony Barron, Johnson County Government · Rachel Wahle, KACEE

A panel framing a green school as a connected system. Four panelists unpack their lanes to show how design, operations, evidence, and learning connect: building performance & experience; educational outcomes; facilities operations & maintenance; and turning building operations into curriculum. Attendees can expect expert presentations, interactive discussions, and some practical takeaways.

AUDIENCE

Green Schools · General/Mixed

11:15 AM – 12:00 PM

Block 3 · Sessions 3–4 of 4 · continued

PRESENTATION

RELATIONSHIPS · CONNECTIONS

Emotional Imperialism in the Outdoors: Supporting Diverse Feelings

Amity Freiman ·ColumbiaCenterforUrbanAgriculture / MEEA

How are fears socially constructed and deconstructed? How is discomfort related to wonder? How do dominant institutional structures impose emotional norms on learners? In this session, we'll engage with critical pedagogies of discomfort through the lens of environmental education and emotional imperialism.

AUDIENCE

Special Needs Educators · ELL Educators · Nonformal Educators

PRESENTATION

CONNECTIONS · RELATIONSHIPS

Conservation and Outdoor Learning with Monarch Butterflies

Dena Podrebarac · Monarch Watch

Learn how Monarch Watch partners with educators to bring research and conservation to the classroom and school garden through interactive learning with live insects and plants.

AUDIENCE

PreK/Early Elementary · Elementary · Middle School · High School · College & University · Special Needs Educators · ELL Educators · Green Schools · Nonformal Educators · Program Administrators · Non-Profits · General/Mixed

1:30 – 3:30 PM

WORKSHOP

RELATIONSHIPS

Slow Viewing Workshop: Place + People

Joshua Best & Shauna LeAnn Smith ·SpringfieldArtMuseum / City of Springfield · Slow Viewing

In this hands-on workshop, participants will experience Slow Viewing, a facilitation method

rooted in durational looking, reflective writing, and non-hierarchical group discussion. Participants will explore how attention to site-specific art installation can support personal connection and collaborative meaning-making in their own communities and learning environments.

AUDIENCE

Middle School | High School | College & University | Green Schools | Nonformal Educators | Program Administrators | Non-Profits | General/Mixed

WORKSHOP

CONNECTIONS

Let There Be Night: Curricular Resources to Engage Students in Light at Night

Vayujeet Gokhale &Alice Jensen · Truman State University

In this workshop, participants will be provided with curricular resources including slides, assignments, demos, hands-on activities, short & long term projects related to the importance of natural darkness at nighttime as a natural resource, and the responsible ways of using outdoor lighting.

AUDIENCE

Middle School | High School | College & University | Green Schools | Nonformal Educators | Non-Profits

1:30 – 3:30 PM

WORKSHOP

SYSTEMS · CONNECTIONS

How Food Connects Us: Systems. Students. Solutions.

Diane Mora · Kids Feeding Kids, an education initiative of Pete's Garden

Join me for classroom-ready strategies focused on food systems to spark curiosity, systems thinking, and solution-focused outcomes. Participants will take part in interactive investigations, collaborate on implementation ideas, and explore how these adaptable RWL experiences can engage students across grade levels, subject areas, and community settings.

AUDIENCE

Middle School · High School · College & University · Nonformal Educators · Program Administrators · Non-Profits · General/Mixed

WORKSHOP

SYSTEMS

Food Too Good To Waste: Closing the Loops with Food Waste

Stan Slaughter & Kathryn White · Missouri Organic Recycling

Join us to experience the Food Too Good To Waste unit that examines the next level of recycling—composting. This dynamic unit consists of four lessons that utilize rich scripted discussions and original informative content videos we created. Once the informative lessons have been taught, students are expected to create a project (individual, small group, or whole class). This is where a deep dive into the concepts happens. Experience the activities and lessons that make the FTGTW Science Unit an effective way to demonstrate the cycles of life (food, nutrients, energy, carbon). There will be live earthworms & singing! Find out how to acquire this effective unit for use at your school.

AUDIENCE

Elementary · Middle School · High School · College & University · Special Needs Educators · ELL Educators · Green Schools · Nonformal Educators · Program Administrators · General/Mixed

Notes & Connections

Ideas to try, people to follow up with, and connections you made today.

WITH GRATITUDE

Thank You to Our Program Sponsors

Our sponsors' support connects educators across Kansas and Missouri, and helps keep this conference accessible to all.

Kansas Department of Wildlife and Parks

Kansas Forest Service

KACEE.ORG/CONFERENCE

KACEE Kansas Association for Conservation & Environmental Education

Kansas GreenSchools

missouri environmental education association