

SAVE THE DATE



Foundations of Education and Rehabilitation: Building Independence

When: September 17-19, 2026

Where: MS Schools for the Deaf and the Blind Campus, Jackson, MS

This year's keynote speaker at the Mississippi AER Annual Conference is **Anthony Ferraro**, an American Paralympic athlete, musician, and motivational speaker widely known for his advocacy for accessibility and his "One Love" message of positivity.

Registration will open soon! Don't miss out!

2026 MAER ANNUAL CONFERENCE

Foundations of Education and Rehabilitation: Building Independence

DRAFT AGENDA — For Committee Review

Thursday, September 17 – Saturday, September 19, 2026

Location: Mississippi Schools for the Deaf and Blind

Course Description

The 2026 MAER Conference, Foundations of Education and Rehabilitation: Building Independence, brings together professionals, individuals who are blind or visually impaired, and their families to explore the foundational skills, rights-based advocacy, and innovative practices that build lifelong independence. Through engaging speakers, exhibitors, and shared experiences, attendees will gain practical tools and fresh insight to strengthen their professional practice or personal journey.

Conference Objectives

- Emphasize the role of foundational skills and consistent instruction in promoting lifelong independence and long-term success.
- Describe strategies for educating individuals/families about their rights and identify approaches that support effective self-advocacy and family advocacy.
- Advance participants' knowledge and implementation of best practices in education and rehabilitation by highlighting innovative technologies, current research, and effective service delivery models.

Target Audience

Parents, Students with Visual Impairments, Counselors, Special Educators (Transition Coordinators, Paraprofessionals, Teachers), Certified Vision Rehabilitation Therapists, Occupational Therapists, Teachers of the Visually Impaired, Orientation and Mobility Specialists, Certified Low Vision Therapists, School Administrators, Employers, Certified Assistive Technology Instructional Specialists, Rehabilitation Counselors, Social Workers, Visual Impairment Services Team Coordinators, Advocates, and Family Members.

Continuing Education

Refer to the Continuing Education Information page near the end of this program for details on ACVREP, Mississippi Educator, Mississippi OT, and CRCC credit. Continuing education approvals for 2026 are pending as of this draft; final credit hours will be confirmed closer to the conference. As in prior years, sessions shorter than 60 minutes are not expected to be approved for CRCC or MS Dept. of Health (OT) credit.

Agenda at a Glance

Day 1 — Thursday, September 17, 2026

Time	Topic	Presenter(s)	Status
8:00 – 8:30 a.m.	Registration & Continental Breakfast, Exhibit Hall Opens		
8:30 – 8:45 a.m.	Opening Session & Welcome	MAER President	Confirmed
8:45 – 9:45 a.m.	Session 1: Strategies for Building Independence with Students and Adults	Kendra Farrow, Project Director, OIB-TAC, National Research and Training Center on Blindness and Low Vision	Approved
9:45 – 10:00 a.m.	Break — Exhibit Hall / Vendor Visits		
10:00 – 11:00 a.m.	Session 2: Assistive Technology Skills as a Foundation for Employment	Michele McDonnall, Ph.D., Director & Research Professor, NRTC; and Jamie Boydston, Ph.D., Research Scientist, NRTC	Approved
11:00 a.m. – 12:00 p.m.	Session 3: Natural Order of Contractions in Braille	Casey Robertson, Lead Instructor of TBS Program, Louisiana Tech University	Approved
12:00 – 12:30 p.m.	Lunch (Provided)		
12:30 – 1:30 p.m.	Session 4: Advances in Technology and Services 1		
	CATT (Center for Assistive Technology Training, AIDB)		Approved
	Mississippi Schools for the Deaf and the Blind		Approved
1:30 – 1:45 p.m.	Break — Exhibit Hall / Vendor Visits		

Time	Topic	Presenter(s)	Status
1:45 – 2:45 p.m.	Session 5: Accessible Resources from MAGNOLIA	Billy Loper, MAGNOLIA Outreach Coordinator, Mississippi Library Commission	Approved
2:45 – 3:45 p.m.	Session 6: From Dependence to Independence: Finding Growth at Every Stage	Kara Hecht, COMS/CTVI, Hecht Mobility	Approved
3:45 – 4:00 p.m.	<i>Break</i>		
4:00 – 5:00 p.m.	Session 7: APH in Action: Explore, Experience, and Apply	Alicia Wolfe, APH Outreach Specialist	Approved;
5:00 – 5:15 p.m.	Door Prizes & Wrap-Up, Day 1		

Day 2 — Friday, September 18, 2026

Time	Topic	Presenter(s)	Status
8:00 – 8:30 a.m.	Breakfast, Registration, Exhibit Hall Open		
8:30 – 9:30 a.m.	Session 8 — (Breakout) Track A: Issues and Ethics in Vision Rehabilitation	Dr. Zaccheus Ahonle, Dr. Phillip Rumrill, and Dr. Stuart Rumrill	Approved
	Session 8 — (Breakout) Track B: Touch, Play, Learn: Tactile Make-and-Take Activities for Early Learners and Students with Complex Needs, Including CVI	Stephanie Welch-Grenier, Ph.D., Training & Outreach Coordinator, NRTC	Approved
9:30 – 10:00 a.m.	Break — Exhibit Hall / Vendor Visits		
10:00 – 11:30 a.m.	Session 9: KEYNOTE: (Title to be announced)	Anthony Ferraro	Approved
11:30 – 11:45 a.m.	<i>Break</i>		
11:45 a.m. – 12:00 p.m.	Exhibitor Presentation: Menus4All		Approved
12:00 – 1:00 p.m.	Lunch & MAER Awards Ceremony		
1:00 – 2:00 p.m.	Session 10: How Addie McBryde Fits into the Picture	Rosie Gibson, Mississippi Department of Rehabilitation Services	Approved
2:00 – 2:45 p.m.	Afternoon Break — Exhibit Hall / Vendor Visits		
2:45 – 3:45 p.m.	Session 11: The Screen Reader Lesson You Can Teach Tomorrow: JAWS, NVDA & ChromeVox Basics	Cody Laplante, CEO, Eye.t Vision	Approved
3:45 – 4:00 p.m.	<i>Break</i>		
4:00 – 5:00 p.m.	Session 12: AI Tools and Applications	Rebecca Mathis	Approved
5:00 – 5:15 p.m.	Door Prizes & Wrap-Up, Day 2		

Day 3 — Saturday, September 19, 2026

Time	Topic	Presenter(s)	Status
8:00 – 8:30 a.m.	Breakfast, Registration		
8:30 – 9:30 a.m.	Session 13: Documentation Best Practices	Garrett Pendergast, M.Ed., M.A., M.S., COMS, CVRT, CATIS, CTVI	Approved
9:30 – 10:15 a.m.	Break — Exhibit Hall / Vendor Visits		
10:15 – 11:15 a.m.	Session 14: Advances in Technology and Services 2		
	...Medication Safety	Dr. Barbara Coatney, CEO, Time Touch Take, LLC	Approved
	...eye.T Overview	Cody Laplante, CEO, Eye.t Vision	Approved
11:15 a.m. – 12:15 p.m.	Session 15: Start Where You Are: Maximizing the Tech and Tools Already at Your Fingertips	Jonathan West, Access Vision Services	Approved
12:15 – 12:30 p.m.	<i>Break</i>		
12:30 – 1:15 p.m.	Lunch & MAER Business Meeting		
1:15 – 1:30 p.m.	Door Prizes, Closing Remarks & Adjourn		