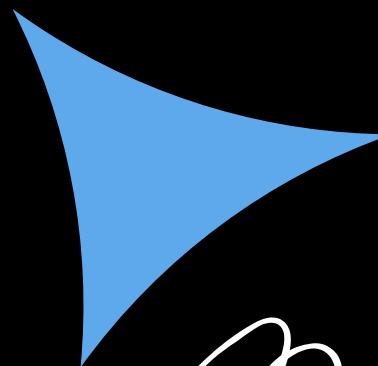
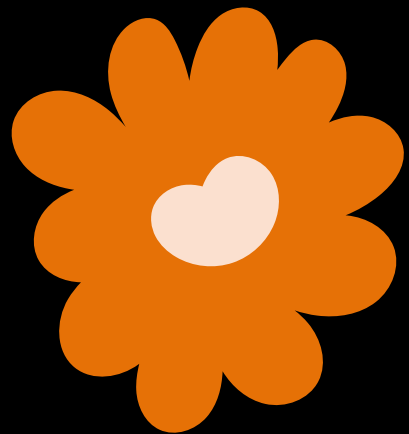
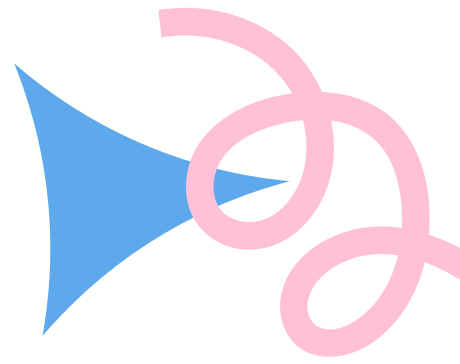


CLF ANNUAL REPORT 2026



Director's Statement



A flexible mindset is perhaps the most important ingredient in organizing an event like the Children's Literature Festival. No matter how much planning goes into it, there are always unexpected challenges and last-minute surprises. In my mind, the festival is Princess Buttercup and I am Westley navigating the Fire Swamp—lifting her over the flame spurts, charging after her into the lightning sand, and doing my best to remain calm, capable, and unflappable through it all. The goal is to keep everything moving safely forward while adapting to whatever comes next—and, ideally, to make it through without encountering any rodents of unusual size!

Thanks to the dedication, creativity, and passion of our presenters, volunteers, staff, and attendees, the 2026 festival was a tremendous success, providing meaningful experiences and opportunities for connection, learning, and inspiration for thousands of students, educators, and community members.



Maya

mm

lll

Festival Overview

In 2026, the Children's Literature Festival at the University of Central Missouri welcomed more than 3,500 participants and featured 25 acclaimed authors and illustrators of books for children and young adults. Sixteen presenters were making their first festival appearance, and eight had titles included on the Missouri Association of School Librarians (MASL) Readers Award lists. Over the course of two days, presenters delivered multiple sessions for students in grades 3–10, offering engaging opportunities to explore literature, creativity, and storytelling. Students and educators traveled from across Missouri to attend, including many from rural and underserved communities. Through their presentations, authors and illustrators spoke about their creative work, shared personal experiences, and their sources of inspiration. Attendees left energized by meeting the creators of the books they know and love.



Festival Goals



1

To provide the experience of meeting a published author or illustrator in person

2

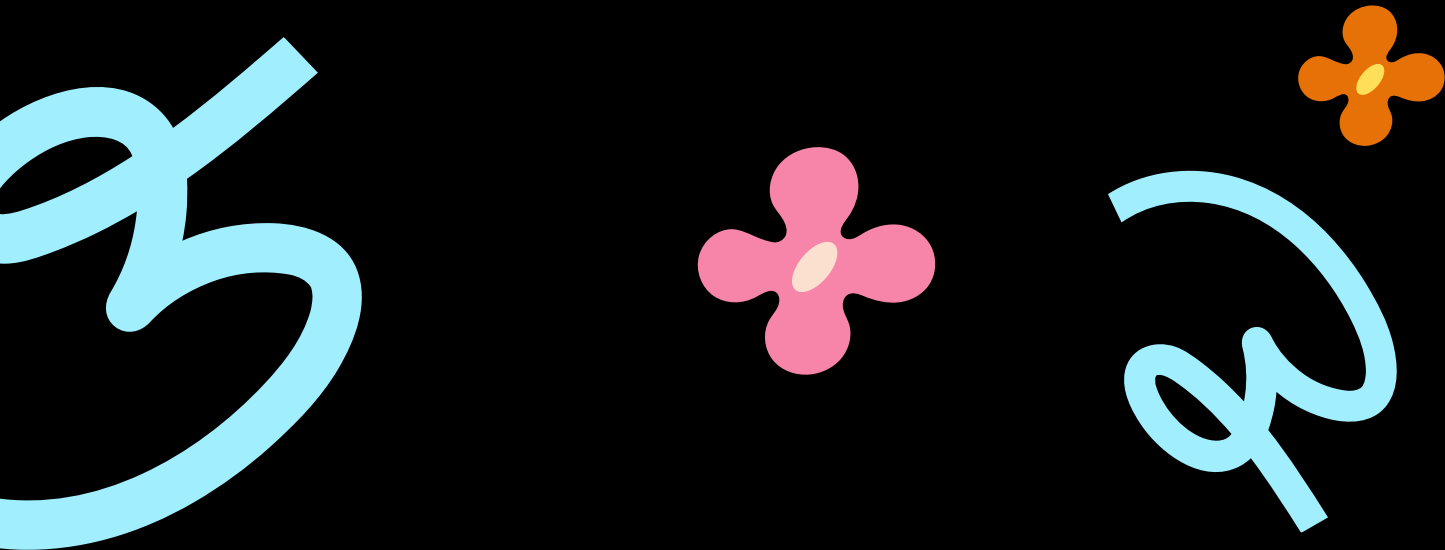
To promote reading and validate the research and creativity behind the process of bookmaking

3

To make a significant and visible contribution to a culture of literacy in the state of Missouri

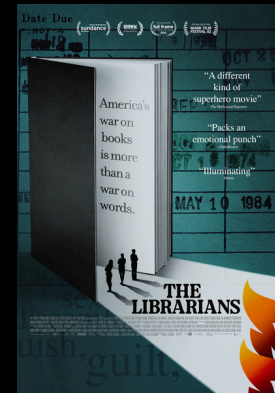
4

To work towards fair representation of all groups within our Festival program and to be truly inclusive by seeking active participation from all individuals



New in 2026

New in 2026, the festival included multiple screenings of the documentary *The Librarians*, presented in collaboration with UCM's Library Science program and the campus chapter of the American Democracy Project.



Improved internal building signage enhanced wayfinding throughout the festival, helping attendees navigate event spaces more efficiently and contributing to a smoother overall experience.

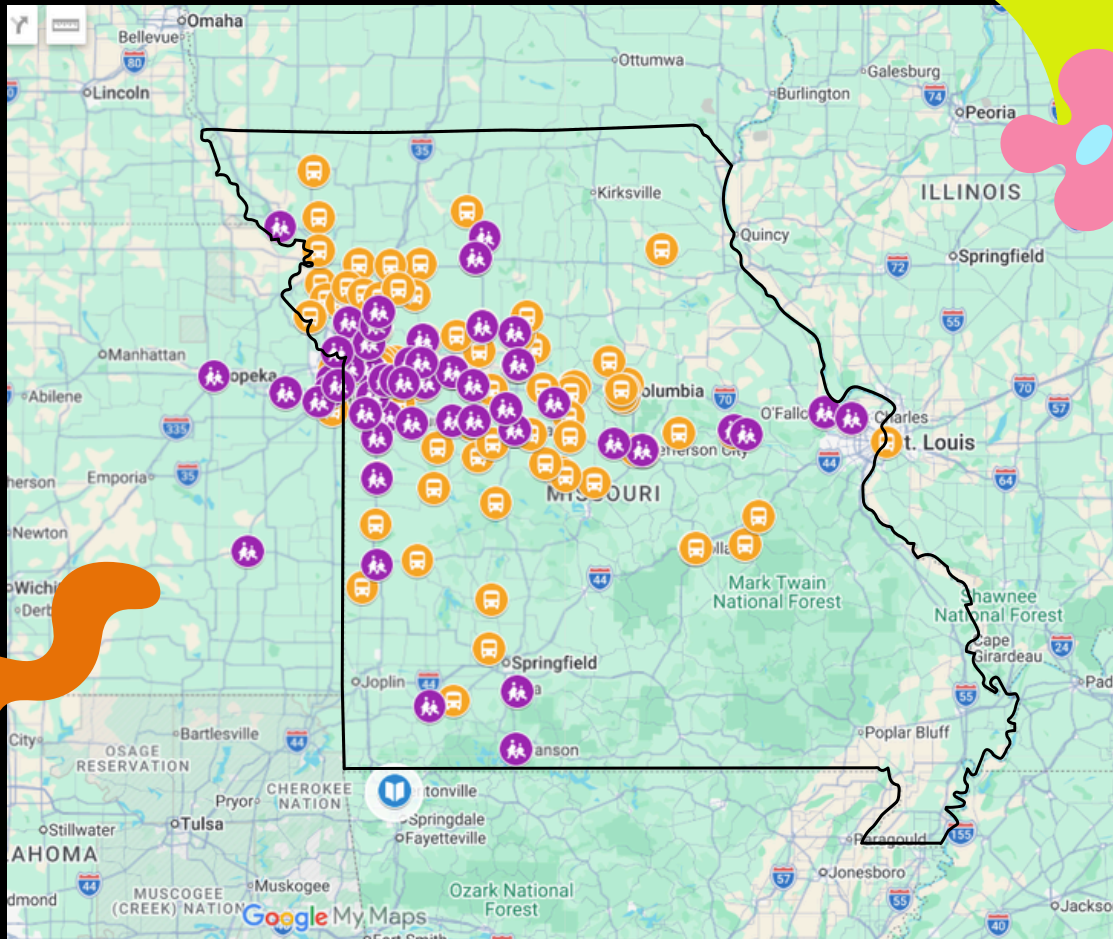


We hosted one presenter meal at Checker Tavern, providing a more intimate and comfortable dining experience while giving presenters an opportunity to enjoy a local Warrensburg establishment.



We introduced a new registration option, the "Mystery Session," as a pilot initiative to help balance attendance across sessions. This flexible option allowed participants to be assigned to presentations with available capacity, improving session distribution and maximizing opportunities for attendees to engage with festival presenters.

Our Attendees



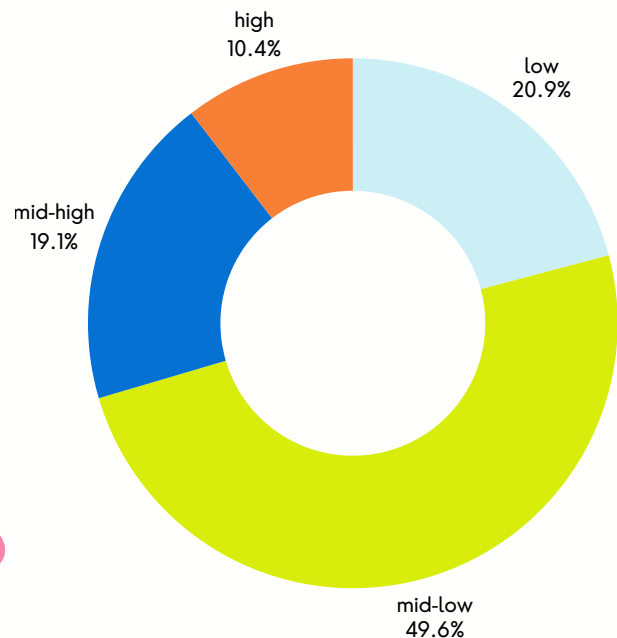
In 2026, the CLF welcomed 124 schools, including 11 schools attending for the first time, with participants coming from 34 Missouri counties. We also had schools and individual participants from Kansas.

Serving our Communities

Title I is a federally funded program that supports schools and districts serving high percentages of students from low-income families. Its purpose is to help ensure that all students have access to educational opportunities and resources that support academic success, often through programs that would not be possible without additional funding.

In 2026, 93% of the schools attending the Children's Literature Festival (115 of 124 schools) received Title I funding, an 8% increase from 86% in 2025. This growth underscores the festival's continued success in reaching students from economically disadvantaged communities and providing access to meaningful literary and educational experiences

Poverty Level of Schools Attending CLF



Title I funds are awarded to assist schools with the highest student concentrations of poverty to meet school educational goals. The percentage of students eligible for free or reduced-price lunch (FRPL) under the National School Lunch Program also provides a proxy measure for the concentration of low-income students within a school. Low-poverty schools are defined as public schools where 25.0 percent or less of the students are eligible for FRPL; mid-low poverty schools are those where 25.1 to 50.0 percent of the students are eligible for FRPL; mid-high poverty schools are those where 50.1 to 75.0 percent of the students are eligible for FRPL; and high-poverty schools are those where more than 75.0 percent of the students are eligible for FRPL.

Source of Poverty Level ranges: https://nces.ed.gov/programs/coe/indicator_clb.asp

Source of Missouri Federal allocations: [https://apps.dese.mo.gov/MCDS/FileDownloadWebHandler.ashx?](https://apps.dese.mo.gov/MCDS/FileDownloadWebHandler.ashx?filename=51401fc5-0751Free%20and%20Reduced%20Priced%20Lunch%20Percentage%20by%20Building%202009-10%20to%202025-26.xlsx)

[filename=51401fc5-0751Free%20and%20Reduced%20Priced%20Lunch%20Percentage%20by%20Building%202009-10%20to%202025-26.xlsx](https://apps.dese.mo.gov/MCDS/FileDownloadWebHandler.ashx?filename=51401fc5-0751Free%20and%20Reduced%20Priced%20Lunch%20Percentage%20by%20Building%202009-10%20to%202025-26.xlsx)

Attendee Survey

Following the conclusion of the festival, evaluation surveys were distributed via email to the primary contact at each participating school and to all individual attendees. The survey gathered feedback in three primary areas: Registration, Communication & Campus Navigation; Author and Illustrator Sessions; and Book Sales & Publicity. As an incentive to participate, respondents could choose to enter a prize drawing. School contacts were eligible to win a \$50 Book Sales certificate, while individual attendees could win complimentary registration for a family of four to attend a future festival.

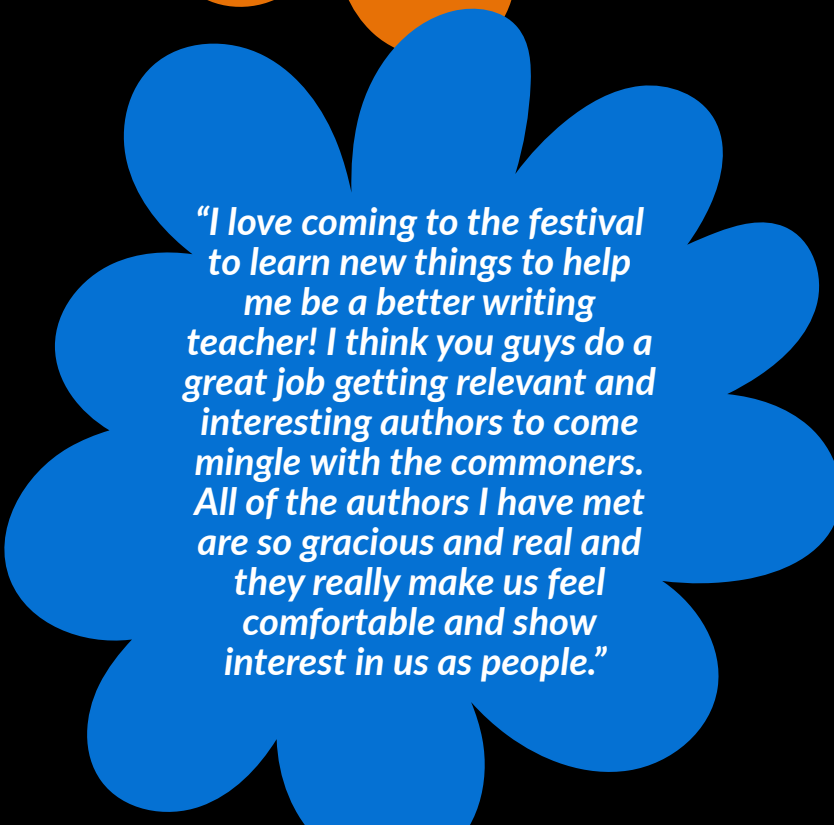
A total of **123 fully completed** surveys were received in 2026, representing a **46% increase** over the **84 completed surveys** received in 2025. The higher response rate provides a broader and more representative picture of attendee experiences and offers valuable feedback to guide future festival planning and improvements.



"You all are amazing. Thank you for creating such an incredible opportunity for humans in an area that often doesn't get blessed during author tours!"



"This festival is amazing and our family does it every year as a tradition. I love it that my kids are growing up with this beautiful experience and I can't thank you enough for keeping prices low so that families can attend. This is the highlight of our year, every year and you bring so much joy to the love of reading and writing! I can't thank you enough!"

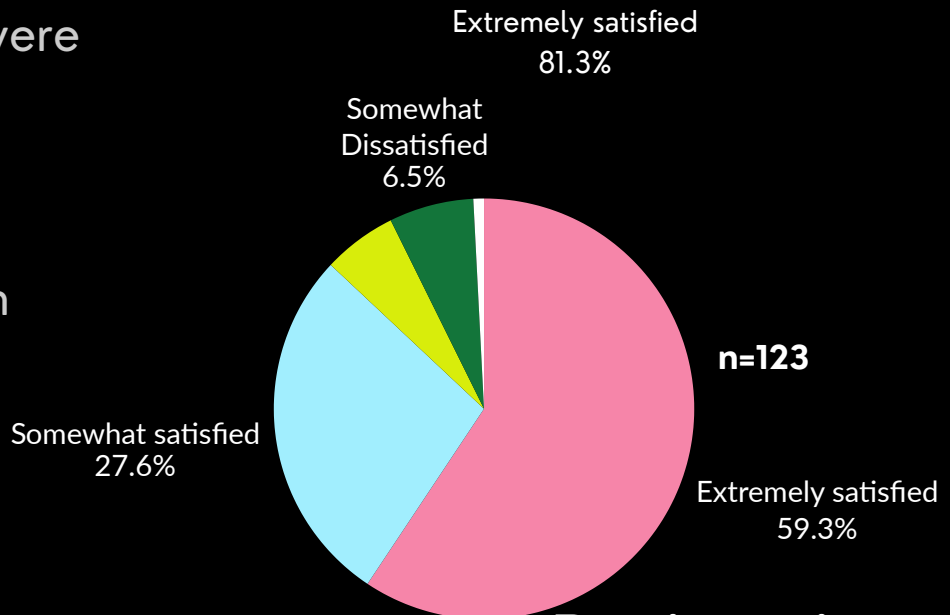
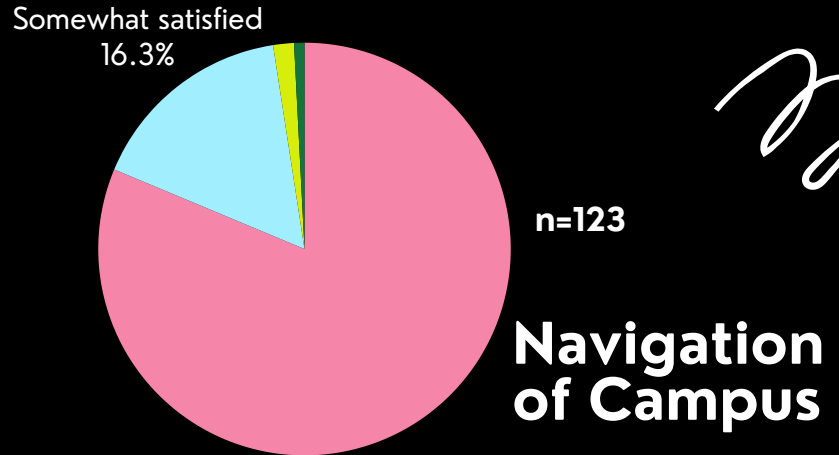


"I love coming to the festival to learn new things to help me be a better writing teacher! I think you guys do a great job getting relevant and interesting authors to come mingle with the commoners. All of the authors I have met are so gracious and real and they really make us feel comfortable and show interest in us as people."

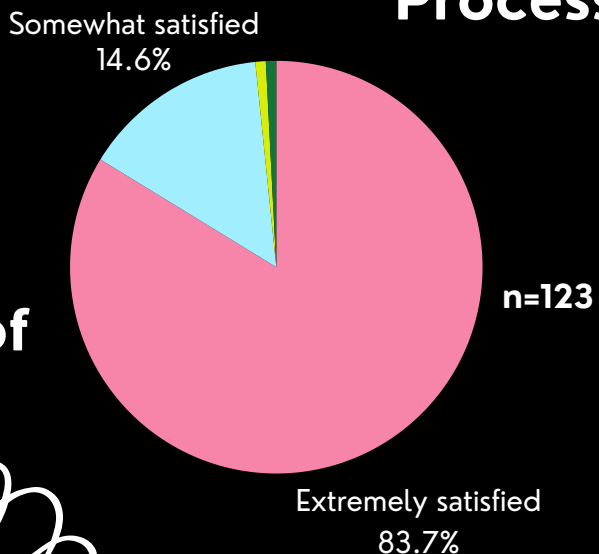
Survey Results

the pre-festival experience

Survey responses reflected a high level of satisfaction with the pre-festival experience. More than 83% of respondents were extremely satisfied with the completeness of the information provided prior to the festival, and over 81% were extremely satisfied with campus navigation. The registration process also received strong marks, with 59.3% reporting they were extremely satisfied. While these results are very encouraging, we remain committed to refining the registration experience and continuously improving festival operations.



Completeness of Information

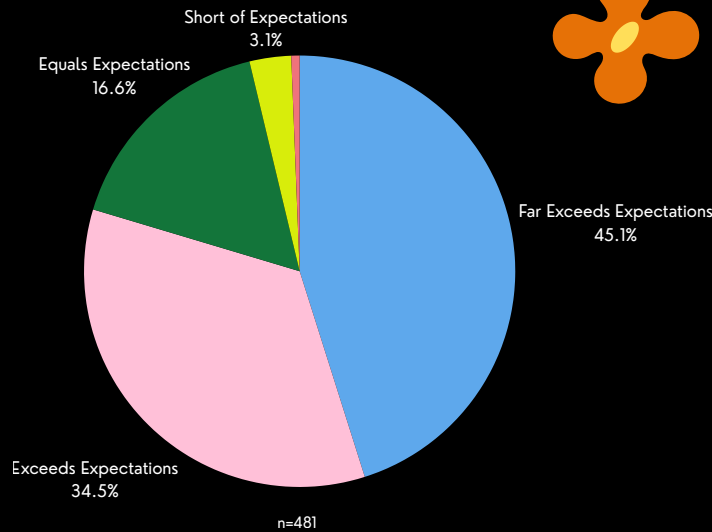




Attendee Survey

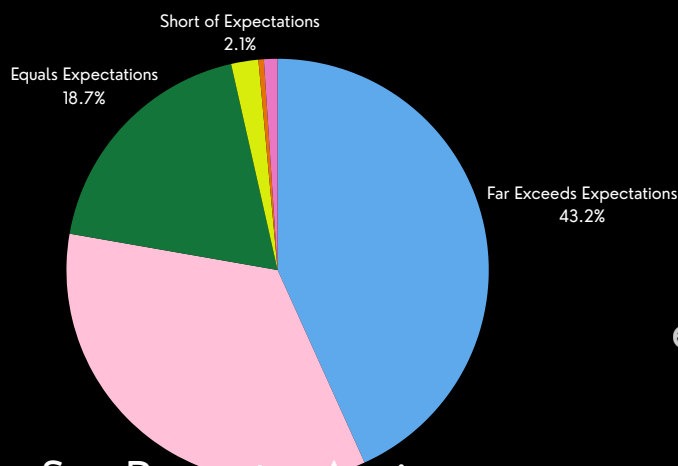
presentation evaluation results

Presenter Engagement



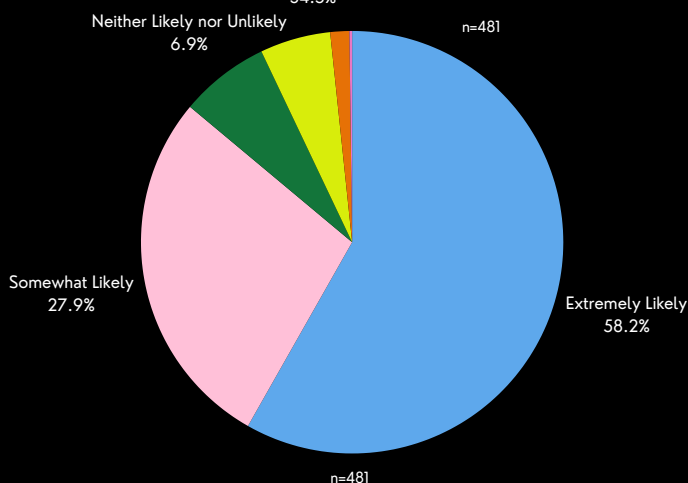
Feedback from attendees continued to highlight the strength of the festival's presenters. Nearly four out of five respondents (79.6%) reported that presenter engagement exceeded or far exceeded their expectations, while 77.7% rated the sessions as exceeding or far exceeding expectations for relevance to students' ages and grade levels.

Relevance to Age/Grade

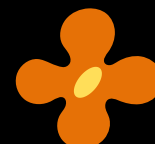


The festival also fostered strong enthusiasm for future events, with 86.1% of respondents indicating they were either extremely or somewhat likely to attend another presentation by the same author or illustrator.

Desire to See Presenter Again



These findings reinforce the festival's continued success in providing engaging, age-appropriate programming that encourages ongoing participation.

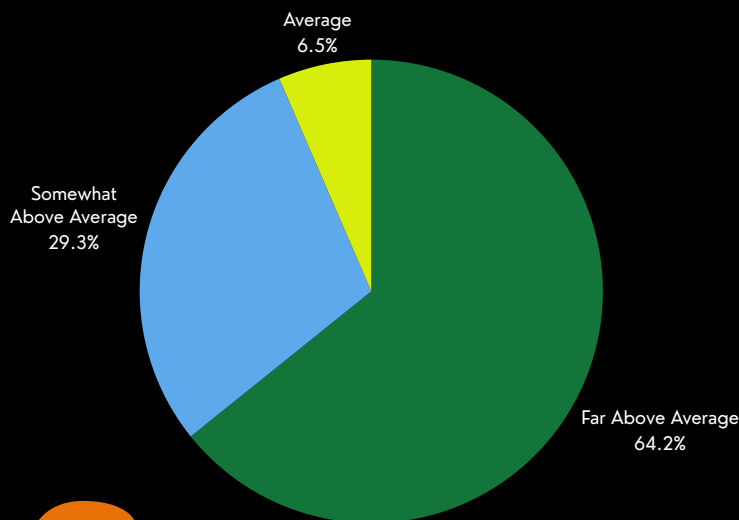


Attendee Survey

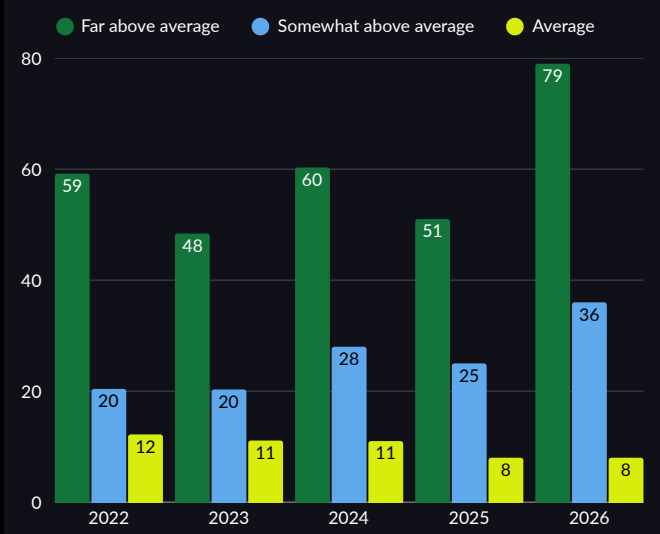
a festival for every reader

The Children's Literature Festival is committed to offering a program that reflects the wide range of experiences, backgrounds, and perspectives of young readers. We strive to ensure that our selection of presenters and programming represents many voices while encouraging meaningful participation from all attendees. This commitment also extends to promoting literature that helps children and young adults see their own experiences reflected in books while fostering greater understanding of others. These principles continued to guide festival planning and programming throughout 2026.

Satisfaction with Presenter Diversity 2026



Satisfaction with Presenter Diversity 2022-2026



Presenter Survey



A post-event survey was distributed to all 2026 Festival presenters to assess their overall experience and identify opportunities for improvement. The survey included questions in four areas: Pre-Festival Experience; Festival Experience; Presentation Sessions; and Looking Forward. All 24 in-person presenters completed the survey.

Presenter feedback was overwhelmingly positive. Twenty-one presenters rated the Festival as extremely well organized, while three rated it as very well organized. All respondents (100%) indicated that they would be interested in returning as a presenter for a future Festival.

Festival personnel received uniformly excellent ratings from all presenters. Volunteer support was also highly rated, with 19 presenters rating it as excellent and 6 as good. While overall satisfaction remains exceptionally high, recurring areas for improvement include providing more consistent technology support on Monday morning and ensuring volunteers are fully prepared for their assigned responsibilities before presenter sessions begin.

A pink flower-shaped graphic containing text.

"This is the most wonderful and well organized festival. Thank you for being so accommodating and hospitable."

A yellow flower-shaped graphic containing text.

"Thank you so much for such a wonderful few days. I feel like I made lifelong friends, and connected with so many wonderful kids and families!"

A blue flower-shaped graphic containing text.

"Everyone is so kind and the attendees are excited and respectful. I'd love to keep coming back!"

Sunday Luncheon



Roland Smith

A post-event survey was distributed for the third consecutive year to 2026 Gilbert-Sadler Luncheon attendees, with 24 completed surveys received. This year's luncheon featured speaker **Roland Smith**, marking his **25th invitation to the Children's Literature Festival**.

Attendee feedback was overwhelmingly positive. All respondents (100%) were extremely satisfied with the completeness of the event preparation information provided. The registration process also received high marks, with 91% (21) of respondents reporting they were extremely satisfied and 9% (2) somewhat satisfied. Additionally, 100% (23) of respondents were extremely satisfied with campus signage and maps.

Overall, attendees rated their Sunday Luncheon experience very highly: 79% (19) described it as far above average, 17% (4) as somewhat above average, and 4% (1) as average. No respondents rated their experience below average.



Provost Tim Crowley kicks off the 57th Sunday Luncheon.

Volunteer Survey



In 2026, 40 volunteers completed the post-Festival survey, with results indicating a highly positive volunteer experience. Volunteers rated the Festival's organization highly, with 22 respondents (55%) describing it as extremely well organized, 15 (38%) as very well organized, and 3 (8%) as moderately well organized.

Communication before and during the Festival also received positive feedback, with 24 respondents (60%) rating it as excellent, 13 (33%) as good, and 3 (8%) as fair. Navigation throughout the community was similarly well received, with 23 respondents (62% of those responding) reporting it was extremely easy to find locations, 11 (30%) indicating it was somewhat easy, and 3 (8%) reporting it was neither easy nor difficult.

Nearly all volunteers (38, 95%) reported having all the resources and information they needed to complete their assignments effectively, while only two respondents (5%) indicated they could have benefited from additional guidance.

Volunteer retention remained strong, with 31 respondents (78%) indicating they would volunteer again next year and 9 (23%) saying they would consider volunteering again. No respondents indicated they would not return.

New in 2026



In 2026, we moved away from providing boxed lunches for volunteers due to their cost and the amount of food waste they generated. Instead, we served hamburgers on Monday and pizza on Tuesday. The pizza proved to be both the more popular choice among volunteers and the more cost-effective option.



Book Sales



In 2026, we again partnered with the UCM University Store to use their cash register system, which greatly streamlined the reconciliation process. As in previous years, book stock was divided across three dates—Sunday, Monday, and Tuesday—to help ensure availability throughout the Festival and minimize disappointment for later attendees.

Survey results continued to demonstrate strong engagement with Book Sales. Ninety-two percent of respondents (113 of 123) reported visiting the Book Sales area, and 97 of those attendees (86%) purchased books. Of the 97 purchasers, 87 responded to the satisfaction question: 41 (47%) were very satisfied, 29 (33%) were somewhat satisfied, 14 (16%) were neither satisfied nor dissatisfied, and 3 (3%) were somewhat dissatisfied. Ten purchasers did not respond to the satisfaction question. While attendees generally reported positive experiences, accurately forecasting demand remains challenging, and several popular titles sold out early, resulting in some disappointed attendees.

Bookmark Contest

The Children's Literature Festival Bookmark Contest continued to engage young artists across Missouri in 2026, marking its seventh year. Participation reached a new high with 329 entries submitted by students from 41 schools, as well as several homeschool participants. The contest continues to serve as a creative extension of the festival, encouraging students to connect with books and reading through art.

This year's entries were evaluated by Sheez Lu, Professor of Illustration at the University of Central Missouri. The quality of submissions was especially strong in the upper elementary division, with so many outstanding entries from fifth- and sixth-grade students that the judge requested separate winners be selected for 5th and 6th grades. As a result, an additional winning bookmark was recognized this year. The winning designs were printed and distributed to festival attendees, and winners and honorable mention recipients received certificates and copies of their bookmarks.

All submitted artwork was displayed during the festival's Book Sales event in the Elliott Student Union, providing participants and visitors with an opportunity to view and celebrate the creativity of students from across the state.



2026 Winners:

Grade 3-4: Cullen Brandt, South Callaway

Grade 5: Elaina Hobratschk, Adventures of Frog and Toad

Grade 6: Zoe Holland, Knob Noster Middle School

Grade 7-8: Isabella Yeung, Homeschooler

Honorable Mentions:

Grade 3-4: Theo Blankenship, Russell Boulevard Elementary

Grade 5: Emmett Sauser, Sacred Heart

Grade 6: Scarlett Bryant, Montessori Schoolhouse

Grade 7-8: Mallory McNeeley, Bueker Middle School

Key Recommendations

1

Bookmark Contest

Revise the Bookmark Contest grade-level categories beginning in 2027 by eliminating the separate Grade 7 and Grade 8 categories due to consistently low participation. Award one winner each for Grades 3, 4, 5, and 6. This change will better align award categories with participation levels while maintaining opportunities for student recognition.

2

Presenter Scheduling

Consider revising the presenter schedule so that each presenter delivers two standard presentation sessions rather than three. In place of the third presentation, presenters would participate in a 30-minute grade-level panel discussion at the end of the day, followed by dedicated time for book signings. Presenters would be grouped by the grade levels they serve. This change was suggested by presenters as a way to help reduce fatigue while providing attendees with an additional opportunity for attendees to engage with multiple authors, ask questions, and participate in a more interactive experience.

3

Volunteer Coordination

Review and streamline volunteer procedures to improve communication, scheduling, and logistics. Priorities include implementing a volunteer check-in system, clarifying presenter-volunteer meeting procedures and timelines, providing volunteers with the information and resources needed for a successful Festival experience, and exploring the use of designated volunteers as campus guides in addition to those assigned to presenters.

4

Photo Opportunities

Increase opportunities for attendees to take photographs throughout the Festival by providing designated photo locations and scheduled photo opportunities for both small and large groups. This could include themed backdrops, presenter group photos when appropriate, and clearly identified spaces that encourage participants to capture and share their Festival experience.

Thank you, CLF Presenters!



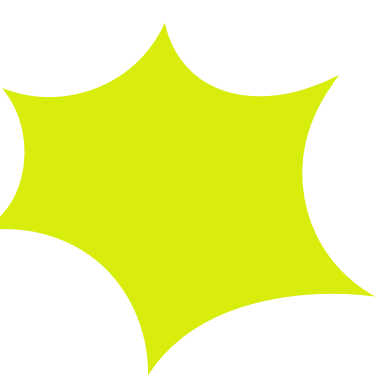
Back row: Jared Chapman, Dave Valeza, Byron Graves, Sherri Winston, Pablo Cartaya, Erin Stewart, Dan Gemeinhart, Roland Smith, Kiyash Monsef, Rob Buyea

Middle row: Annabelle Oh, Mark Oshiro, Traci Chee, Meg Medina, Ally Russell, Katherine Marsh, Meg Eden Kuyatt

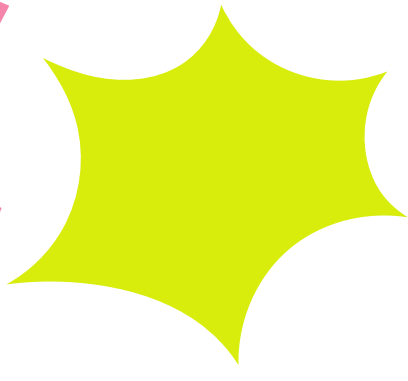
Front row: Olugbemisola Rhuday-Perkovich, Karina Yan Glaser, Lindsay Lackey, Ruth Chan, Donna Barba Higuera, Angela Cervantes

Missing: Gary Schmidt and Mary Downing Hahn

(Cows from Udderly Cute Mini Moo Farms!)



THANK
you

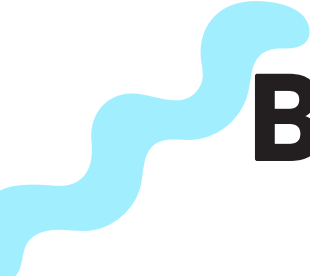


Missouri Arts Council

The State of the Arts



&



Becky Sadler Klein



whose generous support funds
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- GRIFFIN SHAW
- LOGAN SHAW
- RORY SHAW
- WINN SKINNER
- ALEX SMITH
- LEAH SOBBA
- RAHILA WEED

Book Sales

- CHAD MARNHOLTZ
- KIM ANTHES
- BRIAN CARRENDER
- JANETTE KLEIN
- CAROL KNIGHT
- JONES KNIGHT
- MADDIE KNIGHT
- CINDY SKAHAN



THANK YOU

Festival Committee

LIZ RIGGS, REGISTRATION & LOGISTICS

CHAD MARNHOLTZ, BOOK SALES

KIM ANTHES, BOOK SALES

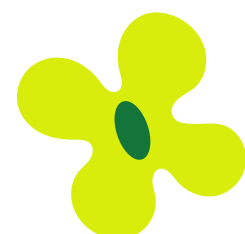
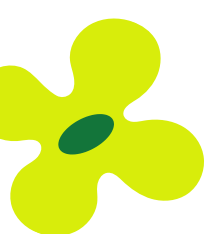
KIRSTEN SHAW, VOLUNTEERS

BREA PARNELL, SOCIAL MEDIA & OUTREACH

ASHLEY MCDONALD, CLF STUDENT WORKER

CHARITHA SRI SHAVVA, CLF STUDENT WORKER

MAYA KUCIJ, DIRECTOR



ALL OF OUR CLF VOLUNTEERS

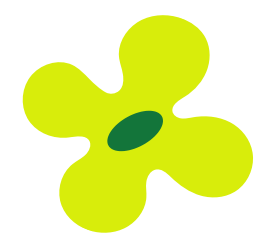
INCLUDING OUR GROUPS FROM

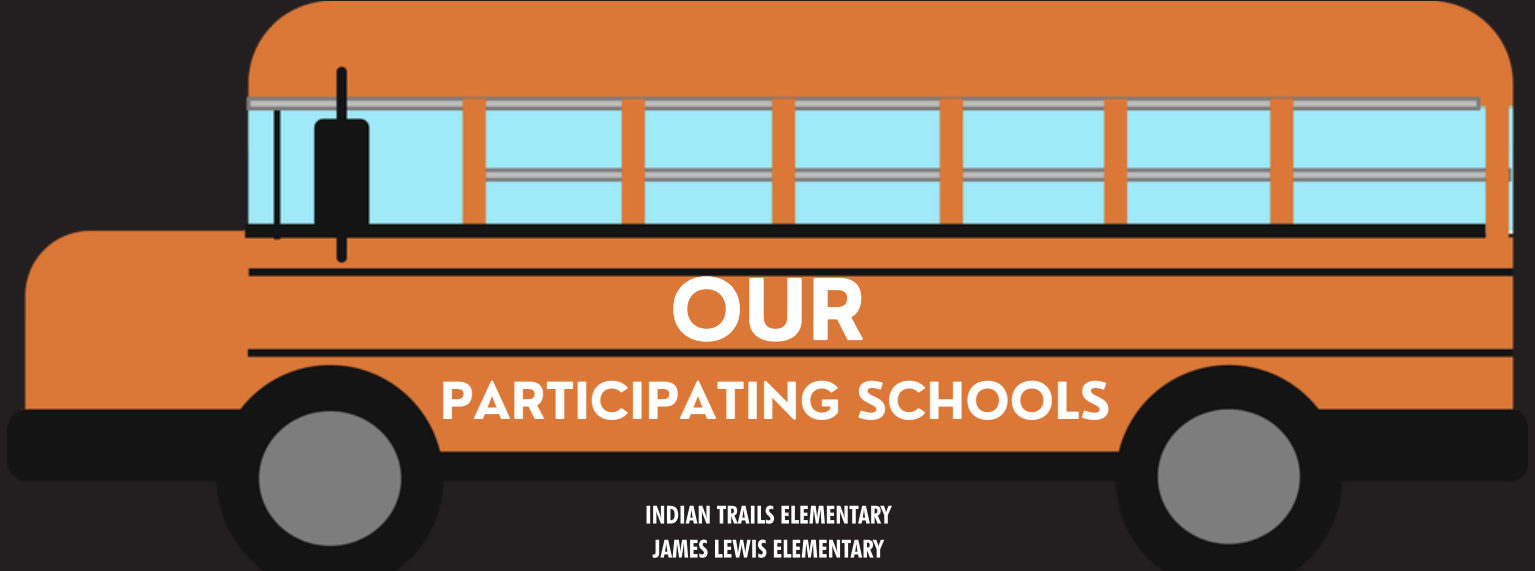
WARRENSBURG HIGH SCHOOL NATIONAL HONOR SOCIETY

SMITH-COTTON HIGH SCHOOL NATIONAL HONOR SOCIETY

HIGGINSVILLE NATIONAL HONOR SOCIETY

UCM - FACULTY, STAFF, AND STUDENTS





OUR

PARTICIPATING SCHOOLS

ADRIAN ELEMENTARY
ADRIAN MIDDLE/HIGH
AURORA HIGH SCHOOL
BLACKWATER R-II
BLUE HILLS ELEMENTARY
BOLIVAR MIDDLE SCHOOL
BOONVILLE HIGH SCHOOL
BRUNSWICK SCHOOLS / BRUNSWICK R-II
BUCKNER ELEMENTARY
BUEKER MIDDLE SCHOOL
BUNCETON
CAMERON HIGH
CAMERON INTERMEDIATE
CAMERON VETERANS MIDDLE SCHOOL
CARROLLTON MIDDLE SCHOOL
CLINTON COUNTY MIDDLE SCHOOL
COLE CAMP R-I
CONCORDIA R-2
CORDILL MASON ELEMENTARY
CRAWFORD COUNTY R-I
DANIEL YOUNG ELEMENTARY / BLUE SPRINGS R-IV
DAVID BARTON ELEMENTARY
DAVIS R12
DELTA WOODS MIDDLE SCHOOL
DOGWOOD ELEMENTARY
EAGLE HEIGHTS ELEMENTARY
EAST BUCHANAN SCHOOL DISTRICT
EL DORADO SPRINGS HIGH SCHOOL
ELDON MIDDLE SCHOOL
FIRE PRAIRIE UPPER ELEMENTARY
FORT SCOTT HIGH SCHOOL
FRANKLIN SMITH ELEMENTARY
GENTRY MIDDLE SCHOOL
GREEN RIDGE SCHOOL / GREEN RIDGE R-VIII
GUADALUPE CENTERS ELEMENTARY SCHOOL
HAMILTON ELEMENTARY
HARRISBURG HIGH SCHOOL
HARTVILLE ELEMENTARY / HARTVILLE R-II
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HERMANN MIDDLE SCHOOL
HORIZON ELEMENTARY

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JOHN NOWLIN ELEMENTARY
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KNOB NOSTER ELEMENTARY SCHOOL
KNOB NOSTER MIDDLE SCHOOL
LATHROP ELEMENTARY
LAURA SPEED ELLIOTT MIDDLE SCHOOL
LEE'S SUMMIT MIDDLE SCHOOLS
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LONE JACK MIDDLE
LUCY FRANKLIN ELEMENTARY
MAPLE ELEMENTARY
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MARSHALL INTERMEDIATE SCHOOL
MARYVILLE R-II SCHOOL DISTRICT
MASON ELEMENTARY SCHOOL / LEE'S SUMMIT R-VII
MATTHEW ELEMENTARY
MIAMI R-1 SCHOOL DISTRICT
MID BUCHANAN ELEMENTARY
MIRABILE C-I
MONTESSORI SCHOOLHOUSE HIGGINSVILLE
MORELAND RIDGE MIDDLE SCHOOL
MORGAN COUNTY R 1
MORGAN COUNTY R-II MIDDLE SCHOOL VERSAILLES
NORBORNE
NORTH ANDREW COUNTY R-VI
NORTH PLATTE INTERMEDIATE
NORTH PLATTE JUNIOR HIGH 6-8
NORTH SHELBY
ODESSA HIGH
ODESSA UPPER ELEMENTARY
OUR LADY OF LOURDES INTERPARISH SCHOOL
PAUL KINDER MIDDLE SCHOOL
PETTIS COUNTY R12
POLO
PRAIRIE BRANCH ELEMENTARY
RICH HILL SCHOOL

RIVER OAK CHRISTIAN ACADEMY
ROLLA JR HIGH
ROLLA MIDDLE SCHOOL
RUSSELL BOULEVARD ELEMENTARY
SACRED HEART
SAINT ANDREW
SAINTS PETER AND PAUL
SANTA FE ELEMENTARY / SANTA FE R-X
SEDALIA MIDDLE SCHOOL / SEDALIA 200
SHAWNEE R-3
SLATER ALEXANDER ELEMENTARY
SMITH-COTTON JUNIOR HIGH
SMITHTON R-VI
SNI-A-BAR ELEMENTARY
SOUTH CALLAWAY
SOUTH HOLT R-I
SOUTHVIEW ELEMENTARY
STEELVILLE MIDDLE SCHOOL
STEWARTSVILLE ELEMENTARY
STONY POINT ELEMENTARY
SUNNY POINTE ELEMENTARY
SUNRISE ELEMENTARY
SWEET SPRINGS ELEM
SWEET SPRINGS HIGH
THE ATELIER ELEMENTARY AND MIDDLE SCHOOL
TIMBER CREEK ELEMENTARY
TRINITY LUTHERAN JEFFERSON CITY, MO
TRINTIY LUTHERAN SCHOOL
TURNER HIGH
TURNER MIDDLE
VERSAILLES ELEMENTARY
VOY SPEARS JR ELEMENTARY SCHOOL
WARSAW NORTH
WARSAW SOUTH
WELLINGTON-NAPOLÉON ELEMENTARY
WEST MIDDLE SCHOOL
WEST PLATTE ELEMENTARY
WEST PLATTE MIDDLE SCHOOL
WHITEMAN ELEMENTARY
WILLARD INTERMEDIATE SCHOOL NORTH
WILLIAM YATES ELEMENTARY