27th ANNUAL BLUE RIBBON SCHOOLS OF EXCELLENCE (BRSE) CONFERENCE
WALT DISNEY WORLD, ORLANDO FLORIDA

Welcome to the 27th Annual National Blue Ribbon Schools of Excellence (BRSE) Conference! We are delighted to gather once again in the inspiring setting of Disney, a place where imagination, innovation, and possibility come to life. This year, educators and leaders from across the nation have come together to share ideas, explore new perspectives, and strengthen our collective commitment to educational excellence.

Thank you for joining us for four days of meaningful learning, collaboration, and celebration. With nearly 100 sessions available, you can create a personalized conference experience that supports your professional goals and inspires new approaches to teaching and leadership.

Whether this is your first BRSE Conference or you are returning as a valued member of our community, we hope your time here is both energizing and transformative. Our sessions are designed to address the evolving challenges and opportunities in education, equipping you with practical strategies and insights to better serve your students and school communities.

We are also proud to recognize our institutions that exemplify excellence, innovation, and a deep commitment to student success. These schools demonstrate what is possible when educators and communities work together to dream big, pursue excellence, and continuously improve outcomes for all students.

During the conference, we invite you to visit the Main Ballroom Exhibit Hall to explore innovative resources and solutions designed to support today's schools. Be sure to stop by the BRSE booth as well to learn more about our nationally recognized school improvement process and how BRSE can support your school's journey toward excellence.

Thank you for being part of this remarkable community of educators. We wish you an inspiring, engaging, and memorable conference experience filled with new ideas, meaningful connections, and a renewed passion for the work you do every day.

Bart Teal, BRSE President and Founder
Dr. Judy Warden Fields, BRSE Chief Executive Officer and National BRSE Conference Chair
Scott Stewart, BRSE Board Chair

27th ANNUAL BLUE RIBBON SCHOOLS OF EXCELLENCE CONFERENCE SCHEDULE AT A GLANCE

MONDAY, NOVEMBER 30, 2026

- **11:00 AM – 7:00 PM**: Registration – *South Registration Counter*
- **1:00 PM – 5:30 PM**: Pre-Conference Sessions – Monterrey 1 and Yucatan 3
- **2:30 PM – Refreshment Break** – *South Registration Counter*
- **7:00 PM – 8:30 PM**: **Exhibit Hall Opening** – *Coronado Ballroom H-J*
  With Mickey & Minnie, desserts, door prizes – bring your family!

TUESDAY, DECEMBER 1, 2026

- **7:15 AM – 4:00 PM**: Registration – *South Registration Counter*
- **8:00 AM – 9:00 AM**: **Breakfast** / Visit Exhibitors – *Coronado Ballroom H-J*
- **9:00 AM – 10:30 AM**: **Opening Session** – *Coronado Ballroom H-J*
- **10:45 AM – 11:45 AM**: Concurrent Sessions A – *Breakout Rooms*
- **12:00 PM – 1:15 PM**: **Lunch Session** – *Coronado Ballroom H-J*
- **1:15 PM – 1:45 PM**: Visit Exhibitors – *Coronado Ballroom H-J*
- **1:45 PM – 2:45 PM**: Concurrent Sessions B – *Breakout Rooms*
- **3:00 PM – 4:00 PM**: Concurrent Sessions C – *Breakout Rooms*
- **4:30 PM – 5:30 PM POWER HOUR SESSIONS**

WEDNESDAY, DECEMBER 2, 2026

- **7:15 AM – 4:00 PM**: Registration – *South Registration Counter*
- **7:15 AM – 8:00 AM**: **Breakfast** / Visit Exhibitors – *Coronado Ballroom H-J*
- **8:00 AM – 9:15 AM**: **Keynote Speaker** – *Coronado Ballroom H-J*
- **9:30 AM – 10:30 AM**: Concurrent Sessions D – *Breakout Rooms*
- **10:45 AM – 11:45 AM**: Concurrent Sessions E – *Breakout Rooms*
- **11:45 AM – 12:15 PM**: Visit Exhibitors – *Coronado Ballroom H-J*
- **12:15 PM – 1:30 PM**: **Lunch Session** – *Coronado Ballroom H-J*
- **1:45 PM – 2:45 PM**: Concurrent Sessions F – *Breakout Rooms*
- **3:00 PM – 4:00 PM**: Concurrent Sessions G – *Breakout Rooms*

THURSDAY, DECEMBER 3, 2026

- **7:30 AM**: **Coffee Service** – *South Registration Lobby*
- **8:00 AM – 10:30 AM**: Registration – *South Registration Counter*
- **8:00 AM – 9:00 AM**: Concurrent Sessions H – *Breakout Rooms*
- **9:15 AM – 10:15 AM**: Concurrent Sessions I – *Breakout Rooms*
- **10:30 AM – 12:30 PM**: **Brunch Session** – *Coronado Ballroom H-J*

DAY ONE - MONDAY, NOVEMBER 30, 2026 - PRE-CONFERENCE SESSIONS

11:00 AM – 7:00 PM REGISTRATION
LOCATION: South Registration Counter

1:00 PM – 5:30 PM PRE-CONFERENCE SESSIONS
LOCATION: Monterrey 1 and Yucatan 3

1:00 PM – 2:30 PM
SESSION DESCRIPTION: ***Lighthouse Leadership Series - Re-Establishing Your Vision.*** Amid the rapid pace of daily school operations, it is easy for an institution's primary mission to get obscured by administrative noise. This interactive session serves as a strategic reset for school leaders ready to clear the clutter and refocus on what matters most. Participants will explore practical frameworks to uncover, refine, and articulate their foundational "why," aligning daily instructional practices with long-term institutional goals. Moving beyond abstract theory, this session provides the tools to build organizational clarity, re-energize staff, and construct an actionable blueprint that breathes new life into your school culture. Leave with a renewed focus and a clear, practical roadmap to drive sustainable student success.
KEY TAKEWAYS:

- Clarify Your Core: Learn strategies to separate daily operational demands from your overarching educational mission.
- Build Organizational Alignment: Discover how to effectively communicate and embed your refined vision into school culture and classroom practices.
- Actionable Roadmap**:** Walk away with a practical framework to lead your staff through a vision reset and sustain momentum throughout the school year.

PRESENTER: Scott Stewart, Scott serves as the Chairman of Board for Blue Ribbon Schools of Excellence and has been preparing young leaders for the principal's role the past 20 years. He served as the principal of award winning New Albany High School for 13 years. Scott also mentors selected leaders throughout the US and works for the State Department of Education for South Carolina. Scott is the CEO and Founder of Leverage Leaders LLC, a Leadership Consulting Company.
LOCATION: Monterrey 1

1:00 PM – 2:30 PM
SESSION DESCRIPTION: ***A Systems Approach to Multilingual Learners Success*****.** The academic and social success of multilingual elementary students depends on more than classroom instruction—it requires a comprehensive, systems-based approach. This presentation explores how one schools implemented integrated supports across instructional, cultural, and policy levels to promote success for multilingual learners. Using evidence-based practices and multiple data points, the session will outline how collaboration among educators, administrators, and families, creates environments where multilingual students can thrive. Attendees will gain practical tools for implementing a systems-thinking model, aligning resources, and fostering culturally and linguistically responsive learning environments.
PRESENTERS: Brenda Blue, Principal; Malinda Kennedy, ESOL Teacher; Immie Powell, ESOL Teacher; and Emily Webb, ESOL Teacher, Pritchardville Elementary School, South Carolina.
LOCATION: Yucatan 3

2:30 PM – 3:00 PM REFRESHMENT BREAK - Cookies and Punch
LOCATION: South Registration Lobby

DAY ONE - MONDAY, NOVEMBER 30, 2026 - PRE-CONFERENCE SESSIONS

3:00 PM – 4:15 PM
SESSION DESCRIPTION: ***How Your School Can Become a Blue Ribbon School of Excellence.*** How does your school measure up to the highest performing schools in the nation? Where do you start and what can you expect? If you would like to become a Blue Ribbon School of Excellence this is the session for you. Find out what is a Blue Ribbon School of Excellence and learn about the process to become one. We will share all the details from the application process to being named a Blue Ribbon School of Excellence. Interested in the Blue Ribbon School of Excellence process, but you are concerned because your school is not high performing. Find out how the process works for all schools.
PRESENTER: Jayne Ellspermann, 2015 NASSP National Principal of the Year; Educational Consultant; Leadership Coach/Trainer; and Blue Ribbon Schools of Excellence, BRSE, Vice Board Chair and Senior Assessor, Florida.
LOCATION: Monterey 1

3:00 PM – 4:15 PM
SESSION DESCRIPTION: ***The Research-to-Practice Pipeline: Advancing Schools and Instruction Through Evidence.*** Educational research offers valuable insights into how students learn, yet translating findings into everyday instructional practice remains a challenge. This session explores strategies for bridging the research-to-practice gap, highlighting evidence-based approaches that educators can implement to enhance school structures, teaching effectiveness, and student outcomes.
PRESENTER: Amy Mason, Senior Assessor, Blue Ribbon Schools of Excellence, Alabama.
LOCATION: Yucatan 3

4:30 PM – 5:30 PM
SESSION DESCRIPTION: ***Unlocking the Love of Learning.*** What if learning felt less like an assignment and more like an adventure? In this interactive session, you will explore how purposeful play, collaborative problem-solving, and meaningful challenges can spark curiosity and deepen student engagement. Participants will experience practical strategies for transforming everyday lessons into memorable learning experiences that build critical thinking, communication, creativity, and perseverance. Attendees will leave ready to create classrooms where students are excited to participate, empowered to take risks, and inspired to rediscover the joy of learning.
PRESENTER: Adam Bellow, Educational Technologist, Breakout EDU, New York.
LOCATION: Yucatan 3

4:30 PM – 5:30 PM
SESSION DESCRIPTION: ***Servant Leadership: Growing Students, Growing Staff, Growing Organizational Health.*** School communities thrive when the principal demonstrates self-leadership, is committed to growing teachers and staff day by day and thus creates a 'culture of care' that serves students and adults in healthy ways. This session will highlight the effectiveness of developing a relationship-driven school, steeped in trust, community, engagement, innovation, and the heart of servant leadership. Cultivating a flipped school culture away from assembly-line mandates and uninspiring compliance toward a community that learns together--creating intrinsic accountability as opposed to a cookie-cutter mindset that heavily depends on forced "learning".
PRESENTER: Dr. Joseph 'Rocky' Wallace, Professor, Education, Campbellsville University, Kentucky.
LOCATION: Monterey 1

DAY ONE - MONDAY, NOVEMBER 30, 2026 - EXHIBIT HALL OPENING

7:00 PM – 8:30 PM EXHIBIT HALL OPENING

BRING YOUR FAMILY! WEAR YOUR FAVORITE DISNEY APPAREL! Join us for the **Exhibit Hall Opening** featuring special guests **Mickey & Minnie**, exciting **door prizes**, and a delicious **dessert reception** sponsored by **Educational Epiphany**.
LOCATION: Coronado Ballroom H-J

DAY TWO - TUESDAY, DECEMBER 1, 2026

7:15 AM – 4:00 PM REGISTRATION
LOCATION: South Registration Counter

8:00 AM – 9:00 AM BREAKFAST AND VISIT EXHIBITORS
LOCATION: Coronado Ballroom H-J

9:00 AM – 10:30 AM OPENING SESSION

MASTER OF CEREMONY – Dennis W. Bega, Senior Assessor, Blue Ribbon Schools of Excellence, Georgia.

SPECIAL MUSIC
Celebration K-8 School Wind Ensemble, Osceola County School District, Florida.
Todd Leighton, Director of Bands

PRESENTATION OF COLORS
Lieutenant Colonel Jimmy R. Soles, USAF (Ret) and Senior Aerospace Science Instructor.

NATIONAL ANTHEM
Celebration K-8 School Wind Ensemble, Osceola County School District, Florida.
Todd Leighton, Director of Bands

PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE

RECOGNITION OF THE BRSE LEADERSHIP TEAM AND BRSE BOARD OF DIRECTORS

Bart Teal, President/Founder/Board Member
Alice Teal, Vice President
Dr. Judy W. Fields, CEO/Conference Chair
April Stansberry, Director of Schools and District Partnerships/Conference Registration Director
Ty Watwood, Marketing and Technology Leader
Tiffany Kelley, Accounting Leader
Scott Stewart, Board Chair
Jayne Ellspermann, Board Vice Chair
Michelle Kinley, Board Secretary
Dr. Shane Barnette, Board Member
Ed Bernetich, Board Member
Nancy Guzman, Board Member
Dr. Akil Ross, Board Member

RECOGNITION OF THE BRSE NATIONAL ASSESSMENT TEAM

OPENING KEYNOTE SPEAKER: MARLON STYLES

TITLE: ***MAKE YOUR MOVE.*** There is a future in front of us worth pursuing, and it begins with the choices we make today. Within every educator and leader is the ability to shape what comes next, reimagine what is possible, and bring people together in ways that matter. Make Your Move is an inspirational experience that helps you reconnect with your purpose, embrace your biggest aspirations, and move forward with a renewed sense of what is possible.

Marlon Styles is a recognized inspirational speaker and educational leader. In 2017, he was named a Top 30 Digital Trailblazer by the Center for Digital Education. Under his leadership at Middletown City Schools, the district was awarded the ISTE Distinguished District Award in 2019. He testified before the United States Congress in 2020 to advocate for access and opportunity for all students. K-12 Dive recognized him as the Superintendent of the Year in 2020 for his advocacy and leadership on a national stage. In 2025, he was named one of the Top 100 Education Influencers by District Administration. He is the author of the book *Make Your Move*. Styles' mission is to inspire educators to see themselves as empowered Unifiers capable of creating the types of learning experiences today's modern learners need to thrive.

REMARKS FROM OUR SPONSOR: ***The Culture Shift Tour with Jared Scott.***
Award-winning speaker, counselor, author, and entrepreneur Jared Scott is the founder of the Culture Shift Tour, a nationally recognized student empowerment initiative that has impacted more than 1,000 schools across the United States. With over 15 years of experience working alongside students, educators, and communities, Jared is dedicated to helping schools create positive, lasting culture change from the inside out. Jared's journey began at the age of 15 when he used music and storytelling to bring hope to his peers during a mental health crisis in his hometown. Today, he is recognized as one of the nation's leading youth speakers, helping students develop resilience, emotional intelligence, leadership skills, and a stronger sense of purpose.

LOCATION: Coronado Ballroom H-J

10:45 AM - 11:45 AM CONCURRENT SESSIONS A - TUESDAY

SESSION DESCRIPTION: ***Identity Shift for Educators: Healing Your Inner Student.*** In this breakout workshop, educators will revisit their own student experiences to uncover beliefs, biases, and unresolved challenges that can influence teaching and learning today. Through guided reflection and supportive dialogue, you will learn to heal past wounds, reclaim the joy of learning, and realign your identity as a learner. By nurturing this inner shift, teachers and administrators can cultivate greater empathy, authenticity, and resilience, ultimately creating more meaningful connections with the students they serve.
PRESENTER: Jared Scott's motivational movement began at the young age of 15, marking the start of an impactful career dedicated to inspiring resilience and hope. Today, Jared is known as an award winning speaker that creates legacies and movements wherever he goes. He is also a proud husband and father, an author, and a counselor. Jared's aspiration to become a public speaker started with a mental health crisis in his hometown. Using his musical talents, Jared reached out to his peers through a song, offering messages of strength and hope after the loss of two friends to suicide. This early experience set the foundation for his later work, leading to speaking engagements in over 1,000 schools across the country. Through a unique blend of inspiration and actionable guidance, Jared can reignite passion and meaning in the lives of students, staff, and communities at large. This ultimately led to the creation of the Culture Shift Tour. It is centered on empowering students to voice their challenges and pressures, with the goal of turning these discussions into actionable solutions. Jared is dedicated to converting student-led ideas into practical initiatives that initiate positive movements, laying the foundation for the development of positive school cultures from the ground up. His method is hands-on and focused on outcomes, showcasing his commitment to driving genuine and lasting change
LOCATION: Monterrey 1

SESSION DESCRIPTION: ***Beyond Safety: How Real-Time Student Accountability Transforms School Culture and Drives School Improvement.*** School safety is only the beginning. Discover how real-time student movement data can become a powerful tool for improving school culture, increasing accountability, and maximizing instructional time. Join Bayport-Blue Point High School Principal Jamal Walcott and the MOOV team, Kevin Camson and Samera Shim, as they share practical strategies for using data to reduce disruptions, strengthen student engagement, and support informed decision-making. Leave with actionable ideas to transform everyday student movement into measurable gains in school improvement.
PRESENTERS: Kevin Camson, CEO and Founder, and Samera Shim, Director of Operations, MOOV and Jamal Walcott, Principal of Bayport-Blue Point High School, New York.
LOCATION: Monterrey 2

10:45 AM - 11:45 AM CONCURRENT SESSIONS A – TUESDAY (CONTINUED)

SESSION DESCRIPTION: ***Beyond Intervention: A School-wide System for Student Success.*** Effective intervention doesn't happen by chance, it is the result of intentional planning, collaborative decision-making, and a school-wide commitment to meeting every student's needs. Join the Goldsmith-Schiffman Elementary team as we share how our WIN (What I Need) Time has evolved into a school-wide framework that ensures every student receives targeted instruction, enrichment, and support. This session will explore how intentional planning, collaborative data analysis, and clearly defined expectations create a seamless system that connects district leadership, school administration, and classroom instruction. Presented from the perspectives of the district leader, school administrator, and classroom teacher, participants will learn how to strategically design a master schedule that prioritizes student needs, establish systems for reviewing student data, organize flexible student groups based on current needs, and facilitate teacher collaboration that leads to actionable instructional plans. We'll also take you inside the classroom to see what high-quality WIN Time looks like in practice and how consistent expectations translate into meaningful student growth. Whether you are building a new intervention block or refining an existing one, you'll leave with practical tools, planning strategies, and implementation ideas to transform intervention from "just another period of the day" into a comprehensive system that addresses the needs of all students.
PRESENTERS: Haley James, School Improvement Administrator, Huntsville City Schools and Former Principal, Goldsmith-Schiffman Elementary School, Alabama. Wynetta Ford, Assistant Principal; Anna King, Teacher and Amy Scott, Teacher, Goldsmith-Schiffman Elementary School, Alabama
LOCATION: Monterrey 3

SESSION DESCRIPTION: ***How Transformative Experiences Build Leadership, Self-Confidence, Resilience, and Teamwork.*** What allows a powerful learning experience to influence students long after the final performance? This educational session examines how a demanding, supported, shared experience can establish durable patterns of leadership, self-confidence, resilience, and teamwork, and how those patterns can contribute to a successful academic journey. Drawing on research on self-efficacy, social interdependence, engagement, motivation, and resilience, the presenters use more than four decades of youth circus practice as a transparent case. Participants follow the learner's pathway from unfamiliar challenge through coaching, rehearsal, responsibility to peers, public performance, and reflection. The session then connects that pathway to academic behaviors such as beginning difficult work, seeking help, revising after feedback, communicating clearly, contributing to group learning, and accepting responsibility for quality.
PRESENTERS: Olivier Lazar, CEO and Bruce J. Pfeffer, Founder and President, Circus of the Kids, Florida.
LOCATION: Yucatan 1

10:45 AM - 11:45 AM CONCURRENT SESSIONS A – TUESDAY (CONTINUED)

SESSION DESCRIPTION: ***New Kids on the Block: Orienting and Mentoring New Teachers.*** In this presentation, learn how one school leader has used research to inform changes that improve the new-teacher experience. By focusing on orientation and mentoring as a holistic, year-long process, new teachers (and staff) can learn the procedures and expectations of their roles and the school's culture. By sharing this information, a sense of belonging and ownership can build, which strengthens the overall professional community. This program has also informed school leaders of factors that can help with overall faculty retention by focusing on culture and community, so new faculty immediately feel welcome at their new school. Considerations of your school's culture will help you identify changes you may wish to make at your school.
PRESENTER: Elizabeth Acquadro, Head of Upper School, Oratory Prep School, New Jersey.
LOCATION: Yucatan 2

SESSION DESCRIPTION: ***Digital Declutter: Get Your Digital Life Together.*** Feeling overwhelmed by overflowing inboxes, scattered files, and endless digital distractions? This session will help you simplify your digital life with practical strategies for staying organized and efficient. Participants will learn how to effectively use Gmail features, create and maintain a digital task list, archive emails for easy access, and connect tasks directly to their Google Calendar, including deadlines and reminders, for better time management and accountability. The session will also focus on building habits that support the goal of reaching an empty inbox each day. Walk away with realistic systems and time-saving tips that will help reduce stress, improve productivity, and bring order to your digital world.
PRESENTER: Elizabeth Watwood, Principal, Hanceville Middle School, Alabama.
LOCATION: Yucatan 3

SESSION DESCRIPTION: ***Full STEAM Ahead! Providing STEAM Lessons to Schools Without a STEAM Lab.*** This session explains how one rural school district takes STEAM to all its elementary schools without them all having a designated STEAM lab. Cullman County Schools took a bus that was rotating out of their fleet and converted it into a mobile STEAM Lab. In this session, the presenters discuss how their own maintenance staff remodeled the bus to be a state-of-the-art, exciting mobile STEAM Bus that students cannot wait to load and perform hands-on activities. We will also discuss activities that the teachers lead on the bus and the logistics of providing it to students across the district.
PRESENTERS: Dr. Shane Barnette, Superintendent; Mr. Timmy Smith, Maintenance Team; and Kristi Barnette, STEAM Teacher, Cullman County Schools, Alabama.
LOCATION: Coronado A

10:45 AM - 11:45 AM CONCURRENT SESSIONS A – TUESDAY (CONTINUED)

SESSION DESCRIPTION: ***Where the Magic Happens: Unlocking the RTI Roadmap & Learning Lab.*** Once upon a time, supporting every learner felt like navigating an enchanted forest filled with unexpected twists and turns. At Mariemont City Schools, we discovered that the key to student success was not hidden treasure. It was a structured, intentional framework designed to help every student shine. In this session, we invite you to go behind the scenes to discover where the magic happens by exploring our Learning Lab and the comprehensive Response to Intervention (RTI) roadmap that powers it. School leaders and intervention teams play a critical role in designing systems that ensure support is timely, targeted, and responsive to student needs. Join us as we unveil our streamlined RTI process, beginning with a structured referral system that helps identify and support students early. Discover how collaborative teams use data to design evidence-based intervention plans aligned to individual student goals, ensuring that every child receives exactly what they need to succeed. Learn how this daily 30 to 45 minute Learning Lab block, supported by a cohesive RTI framework, transforms MTSS into a place where support, challenge, and growth come together, helping every student write their own happily ever after.
PRESENTERS: Holly Zimmerman, Dean of Students, and Maria Childs, Elementary Tier 2 Learning Lab Specialist, Mariemont Elementary School, Ohio.
LOCATION: Coronado B

SESSION DESCRIPTION: ***Promoting the Leader's Carousel of Progress.*** Attendees will engage in activities to identify the key components of their leadership "carousel", including vision, communication, adaptability, and creativity, while learning strategies to maintain momentum and foster resilience in times of change. Dr. Stranges will give participants a step-by-step guide for current and emerging leaders to “find their voice” through book publishing. He has written and published over thirty books during his years as a building administrator and school superintendent. By the end of the session, participants will leave equipped with actionable tools to write and publish books, inspire teams, navigate challenges, and continuously refine their leadership journey, ensuring a sustainable and forward-moving path to success.
PRESENTER: Dr. Ric Stranges, Superintendent, Buckeye Valley Local Schools, Ohio.
LOCATION: Coronado C

SESSION DESCRIPTION: ***Supporting Oral Reading Fluency Through 1st Grade PLCs.*** This session will highlight how 1st grade Professional Learning Communities (PLCs) can be leveraged to develop students’ oral reading fluency through intentional planning and strong collaborative practices. Participants will learn how the partnership between the reading coach and principal fosters a supportive structure that empowers teachers, builds team ownership, and creates meaningful buy in. The presentation will showcase how PLC teams use student data to set rigorous, measurable goals and drive instructional decisions. Attendees will gain practical strategies for facilitating effective PLC meetings, aligning instruction to student needs, and implementing a continuous cycle of collaboration, reflection, and progress monitoring to accelerate early literacy outcomes.
PRESENTER: Dr. Erica Rutherford, Principal, Fairview Elementary School, Alabama.
LOCATION: Coronado D

10:45 AM - 11:45 AM CONCURRENT SESSIONS A – TUESDAY (CONTINUED)

SESSION DESCRIPTION: ***Cardinal Culture: A Playbook for PBIS, Culture, and Accountability.*** Creating a strong school culture doesn't happen by chance—it's built through intentional systems, clear expectations, and collective ownership. In this session, South Laurel High School shares how we "protect the nest" by establishing a culture where every stakeholder understands and fulfills their role. Participants will explore how we align PBIS practices, behavioral expectations, and staff accountability with our school motto, "Do Your Job." Through real examples, data protocols, and practical strategies, attendees will leave with a replicable framework for building a positive, consistent, and student-centered culture that drives results.
PRESENTERS: Dr. Jeremy Kidd, Principal; Amanda Bretz, Assistant Principal; Shelly Scheithauer, Special Education Teacher; and Samantha Kirby, Social Studies Teacher, South Laurel High School, Kentucky.
LOCATION: Coronado E

SESSION DESCRIPTION: ***Where Joy Meets Achievement: Building a Culture for Student Success.*** How can schools create classrooms where students genuinely enjoy learning while also being challenged to achieve at high levels? This session explores practical, research-based strategies used by Forestbrook Elementary, a three-time National Blue Ribbon School and Blue Ribbon Schools of Excellence Lighthouse School, to raise student achievement while cultivating a positive, student-centered and teacher-friendly culture. Participants will discover how a strong school culture can transform schools into more constructive, supportive, and highly effective learning environments. Emphasis will be placed on ideas for building meaningful emotional and social connections with students. Through real-world examples and actionable ideas, attendees will learn strategies for planning, designing, and creating environments that maximize student learning, engagement, and development. This session will provide educators with ideas to support students on their journey toward academic excellence as well as social and emotional success.
PRESENTER: Johnny Calder, Three-Time National Blue Ribbon School Principal, Blue Ribbon Schools of Excellence Lighthouse Principal, and Senior Assessor for Blue Ribbon Schools of Excellence, South Carolina.
LOCATION: Coronado F

SESSION DESCRIPTION: ***Cultivating a Culture of Learning Through Continuous Improvement.*** Leadership is at the heart of every highly effective school. This session is designed to support school and district leaders in fostering a culture of high expectations grounded in continuous improvement. By embracing a unified vision, educational leaders can drive meaningful, lasting change. Participants will explore how to: develop a shared vision for continuous improvement that includes students, teachers, and parents; understand the foundational principles and importance of continuous improvement in schools; identify actionable pathways for embedding continuous improvement into school practices; build and sustain a positive, learning-focused culture that engages all stakeholders. This session empowers leaders to shift from isolated efforts to a cohesive, system-wide approach that promotes excellence and ongoing growth across the entire school community.
PRESENTERS: Dr. Michael Bratcher, Vice President, Accreditation Services, and Dr. Annette Melton, Senior Director, Southeast Region, Cognia, Georgia.
LOCATION: Coronado G

NOON - 1:15 PM LUNCHEON

MASTER OF CEREMONY: Dennis W. Bega, Senior Assessor, Blue Ribbon Schools of Excellence, Georgia.

KEYNOTE SPEAKER: Dr. Todd Whitaker, ***What Great Educators Do Differently.***

Dr. Todd Whitaker has been fortunate to be able to blend his passion with his career. Recognized as a leading presenter in the field of education, his message about the importance of teaching has resonated with hundreds of thousands of educators around the world. Todd is a research professor at the University of Missouri and professor emeritus at Indiana State University. This award-winning educator has spent his life pursuing his love of education by researching and studying effective teachers and principals.

Prior to moving into higher education, he was a math teacher and basketball coach in Missouri. Todd then served as a principal at the middle school, junior high, and high school levels. He was also a middle school coordinator in charge of staffing, curriculum, and technology for the opening of new middle schools.

One of the nation's leading authorities on teacher and principal effectiveness, staff morale, teacher leadership, and school culture and climate. Todd has written over 65 books including the national best seller, What Great Teachers Do Differently. Other titles include *What Great Principals Do Differently, Shifting the Monkey, School Culture Rewired, Your First Year, Dealing with Difficult Parents, Motivating & Inspiring Teachers, and How to Get All Teachers to Become Like the Best Teachers.* Todd is married to Beth, also a former teacher and principal, who is currently a faculty member in educational leadership at the University of Missouri and professor emeritus at Indiana State University. They are the parents of three children: Katherine, Madeline, and Harrison.

LOCATION: Coronado Ballroom H-J

REMARKS FROM OUR SPONSOR: Freebird McKinney, Director of Partnership Development, Participant Learning.

1:15 PM - 1:45 PM VISIT EXHIBITORS
LOCATION: Coronado Ballroom H-J

1:45 PM - 2:45 PM CONCURRENT SESSIONS B - TUESDAY

SESSION DESCRIPTION: ***The MTSS Diamond: Daily Support for Every High School Student.*** The MTSS Diamond: Daily Support for Every High School Student outlines a systemwide approach to ensuring that every student receives targeted support and acceleration as part of the daily school experience. Unlike the traditional MTSS triangle, which often limits intensive supports to a small group of students, the MTSS Diamond expands access so that all students are actively engaged in either skill recovery, grade-level support, or acceleration every day.

At the center of the model is strong Tier 1 instruction, where teachers deliver differentiated lessons aligned to clear learning objectives and success criteria. This ensures that core instruction remains the primary driver of student learning. Surrounding this core, the Diamond structure intentionally provides Tier 2 and Tier 3 supports not only for intervention, but also for acceleration. Students are flexibly grouped based on real-time data and are provided targeted instruction that addresses unfinished learning, reinforces key concepts, or extends learning beyond grade level expectations.

A critical component of this model is proactive planning. Three weeks prior to the start of a Tier 1 unit, students are pre-assessed on prerequisite skills. This allows schools to identify gaps in advance and front-load targeted support during the intervention and acceleration period. As a result, Tier 1 instruction is strengthened because teachers are not reacting to gaps in real time but instead are entering instruction with students better prepared to access grade-level content.

To support this work, the district provides dedicated, full planning release days for teachers by subject area. These structured opportunities allow teachers to collaboratively unpack standards, analyze prerequisite skills, align instructional strategies, and design both Tier 1 lessons and targeted intervention and acceleration support. This ensures coherence across classrooms and schools and builds a shared understanding of what high-quality instruction looks like.

Together, these elements create a coherent system where instruction, intervention, and acceleration are fully aligned. The MTSS Diamond is not an add-on—it is a daily, embedded structure that ensures every student receives the right support at the right time, leading to stronger instruction and improved student outcomes.
PRESENTERS: Krish Mohip, Superintendent and Rubi Ortiz, Director of MTSS and Curriculum, Proviso Township High School District, Illinois.
LOCATION: Monterrey 1

1:45 PM - 2:45 PM CONCURRENT SESSIONS B – TUESDAY (CONTINUED)

SESSION DESCRIPTION: ***The S'more Stakeholders Know…The S'more Student's Grow. Including all Stakeholders in Data Discussions.*** Student success is strongest when everyone has a seat at the table. This engaging presentation highlights how intentionally involving all stakeholders-including teachers, families, support staff, students, and community partners-in meaningful data discussions creates a shared vision for success. Participants will explore practical strategies for making data accessible, fostering collaborative conversations, and building a culture where everyone understands student progress and their role in accelerating achievement. Through real-world examples from Mill Creek Elementary, attendees will discover how transparent communication, shared accountability, and strong partnerships can transform data into action. The effectiveness of this best practice was evaluated through student achievement data, progress monitoring, family participation in data conferences, and stakeholder feedback. Student performance was monitored throughout the year using district and state assessment data, while parent engagement was measured through conference participation and ongoing communication. The results demonstrated increased family involvement, stronger collaboration between home and school, and improved student ownership of academic goals. These efforts contributed to significant academic growth, including Mill Creek Elementary improving from the lowest elementary school in the district at a "C" to a "B" school grade in one year while meeting 100% of federal ESSA subgroup requirements. Moving 118 points.
PRESENTER: Seth Daub, Principal, Mill Creek Elementary School, Florida State Representative for the National Association of Elementary School Principals (NAESP) Florida.
LOCATION: Monterrey 2

SESSION DECRIPTION: ***Culturally Sustaining Schools: Affirming Cultural Wealth for All Students.*** This presentation offers a practical blueprint for building a culturally sustaining school culture that honors and affirms the identities and cultural wealth of students and families. Grounded in the experience of leading a school where over 70% of students are Multilingual Learners representing 25+ languages, the presenter will share actionable strategies to shift school culture by centering community assets. Participants will explore concrete examples of leveraging local languages and culture to strengthen family engagement, staff professional development, community partnerships, and extracurricular programming—all designed to drive academic excellence for every student.
PRESENTER: Dr. Pauline Cheung, Principal, Francis Scott Key School, Pennsylvania.
LOCATION: Monterrey 3

SESSION DESCRIPTION: ***Building a Culture of Courage in the Classroom.*** Building a Culture of Courage in the Classroom explores how educators can create safe, supportive environments where students feel confident taking academic risks. This session highlights practical strategies for normalizing mistakes, encouraging curiosity, and fostering resilient mindsets. Participants will leave with actionable ideas to promote brave learning and deeper student engagement.
PRESENTER: Dr. Regina Fontana, Educator Preparation Institute (EPI) Director and Professor of Education, Seminole State College of Florida, Florida.
LOCATION: Yucatan 1

1:45 PM - 2:45 PM CONCURRENT SESSIONS B – TUESDAY (CONTINUED)

SESSION DESCRIPTION: ***From Inquiry to Action: A Replicable Process for Embedding Student-Led Action in Inquiry Units.*** This session will demonstrate how Seven Oaks Global Elementary School in Lexington-Richland Five School District (SC) has expanded inquiry-based units to include authentic student action. Participants will learn how to align existing academic units with the *Blueprint for a Better World*, a framework that connects curriculum to global challenges while maintaining a strong focus on academic standards. Mary Cumbee, PYP Coordinator, will share practical strategies for helping students identify global issues they care about, develop a sense of agency, and take informed action that creates a positive impact in their school and community. Through classroom examples and implementation tools, attendees will leave with a replicable process for embedding authentic action into inquiry units, increasing student ownership of learning, and preparing students to apply their learning to real-world challenges.
PRESENTERS: Freebird McKinney, Participant Learning, North Carolina and Sara Wheeler, Director of Magnet Programs, Lexington-Richland School District Five; and Mary Cumbee, PYP Coordinator, Seven Oaks Elementary School, South Carolina
LOCATION: Yucatan 2

SESSION DESCRIPTION: ***Why Isn't It Working? Practical Partnership Strategies from National Family Friendly Schools***. Family engagement is a priority in many schools, yet many educators struggle to find approaches that truly stick. This session introduces the National Family Friendly Schools (NFFS) Certification, a research-informed continuous improvement process that helps schools strengthen family partnerships and earn recognition for high-impact practices. Participants will learn how the certification pathway works and explore two practical tools they can use immediately: the 4C High-Impact Checklist to identify one strength and one growth priority in family engagement, and the Family Friendly 5 Objectives to identify one systems-level strength and one opportunity for improvement. Real examples and strategies will be shared to help teachers and school leaders build meaningful, sustainable partnerships with families.
PRESENTER: Laura Beard, Senior Director of Commonwealth Institute for Parent Leadership, Prichard Committee for Academic Excellence, Kentucky.
LOCATION: Yucatan 3

SESSION DESCRIPTION: ***Cultivating Intentional Connections.*** This dynamic session will teach administrators how to cultivate solid and meaningful relationships with staff, students, and the broader school community. Learn proven methods to build trust, improve communication, and foster collaboration, all essential components of effective leadership in today's educational landscape. Participants will explore practical tools to strengthen interpersonal relationships, strategies to foster a culture of open dialogue and mutual respect, and techniques for leading with empathy to create an inclusive environment. They will also learn approaches to motivate and inspire the administrative team, driving both personal and institutional success. Whether you are a new administrator or a seasoned leader, this workshop will provide actionable insights to enhance your leadership skills and empower the entire school community. Gain the motivation to build connections that not only elevate leadership but also contribute to a positive, thriving, and caring school culture!
PRESENTER: Ivin J. Gunder, Principal, Ridgeview High School, Florida.
LOCATION: Coronado A

1:45 PM - 2:45 PM CONCURRENT SESSIONS B – TUESDAY (CONTINUED)

SESSION DESCRIPTION: ***Everyone Reads: Toward Designing and Sustaining an Effective, Schoolwide Approach to Reading Intervention*****.** If you're searching for literacy utopia, this session isn't for you; but if you're realistic about the needs of your struggling readers, join faculty members from Corley Elementary School as they share what they have learned through their journey toward effective, schoolwide reading intervention. How do you align instruction, create shared ownership, and support/develop teachers? How do you manage the practicalities of staffing and scheduling? How do you assess effectiveness and adjust to the needs of your learners? And how do you leverage data to drive it all? Join us for a true-to-life exploration of these topics and more!
PRESENTERS: Ben Jones, Principal; Natalie Reaves, Reading Specialist; Natalie Whitley, Third Grade Teacher; Rachel Jones, Second Grade Teacher; and Keely Harris, Special Education Teacher, Corley Elementary School, Alabama.
LOCATION: Coronado B

SESSION DESCRIPTION: ***Tiny Humans, Big Culture: The Early Leader Blueprint for Building Identity and Belonging*****.** An intentional K–4 framework that empowers scholars as "Culture Keepers." By elevating authentic scholar voice and purposeful leadership, this model positions the primary grades as the foundation for deep community, strong school identity, and shared belonging. Harrison Elementary School (HES) and the Kindergarten Success Academy (KSA) implement an intentional K-4 framework that embeds leadership opportunities and identity-building experiences beginning in kindergarten. Rather than waiting until upper elementary, our youngest scholars are given structured ways to lead, share their perspectives, and take ownership of their school community. Examples include student greeters, classroom leadership roles, morning meeting facilitators, school-wide helpers, tradition-building projects, and opportunities for scholars to contribute to assemblies, service initiatives, and culture-focused events. At Harrison, recognized as a BRSE Lighthouse School and School of Character, these practices are woven into daily routines and schoolwide traditions, reinforcing a strong, unified identity and a culture rooted in character, leadership, and belonging. At Kindergarten Success Academy, the foundation for this work begins in the earliest years. KSA has received recognition from Character.org and was awarded a Promising Practice, and the school was also recognized through the America's Healthiest Schools initiative for excellence in Social-Emotional Learning.
PRESENTERS: Dr. Melissa D. Nevarez, Principal, Harrison Elementary School, 2025 BRSE Lighthouse School and Mrs. Lauren Gonzalez, Principal, Kindergarten Success Academy (KSA), New Jersey.
LOCATION: Coronado C

1:45 PM - 2:45 PM CONCURRENT SESSIONS B – TUESDAY (CONTINUED)

SESSION DESCRIPTION: ***From Lighthouse to Global Citizens: Leveraging the IB PYP Framework for School-Wide Excellence.*** How does a neighborhood school transform into a Blue Ribbon Schools of Excellence (BRSE) Lighthouse School? At Jenks Academy for the Arts and Sciences, the answer lies in the synergy between the BRSE performance standards and the International Baccalaureate (IB) Primary Years Programme. In this session,
Principal Corinne Scioli and the IB Coordinator Erin Younis from Jenks Academy (Chestnut Hill, Philadelphia) will share the "Jenks Journey." We will demonstrate how we utilize inquiry-based learning and the IB Learner Profile to foster a culture of high expectations and student agency. Participants will explore how to transition from traditional instruction to a student-centered model that emphasizes global mindedness, even within the constraints of an urban district. We will provide a roadmap for aligning rigorous international standards with local requirements to produce measurable "Indicators of Success."
PRESENTERS: Corinne Scioli, Principal and Erin Younis, IB Coordinator, Jenks Academy for the Arts and Sciences, Pennsylvania
LOCATION: Coronado D

SESSION DESCRIPTION: ***Change Beliefs to Change Outcomes.*** School improvement accelerates when adult thinking shifts from protecting past practices to ensuring student learning. This session focuses on how leaders guide that shift through purposeful conversations, clear expectations, and shared responsibility. Participants will learn how to lead respectful but honest discussions about performance, address resistance without damaging relationships, and anchor every decision in a student's-first mindset. The session also demonstrates how an instructional playbook defines what students must know, how mastery is measured, and how teachers respond when learning doesn't occur and aligns staff around a common vision. Leaders will leave with practical language, meeting structures, and follow-through routines that help move a staff from individual preference to collective commitment, ensuring instruction is consistent and students receive the support necessary to succeed.
PRESENTER: Jennifer Halter, Director of Secondary Curriculum, Alachua County Public Schools, Florida.
LOCATION: Coronado E

SESSION DESCRIPTION: ***In It to WIN It.*** In It to WIN It is a practical session designed for educators looking to maximize the impact of WIN (What I Need) time. With increasing academic demands and diverse learner profiles, structured and intentional intervention time is more important than ever. In this session, participants will learn how to effectively design and implement a focused 30-minute small group reading lesson using Orton-Gillingham based methods. Attendees will walk away with a clear lesson framework that includes phonemic awareness, explicit phonics instruction, multisensory practice, reading application, and meaningful review. The presentation will also provide actionable strategies for: Organizing materials and routines for smooth, efficient transitions; Increasing student engagement and retention through multisensory techniques; Progress monitoring in manageable, sustainable ways; Using data to inform instructional next steps; and Participants will leave with ready-to-use structures, planning tools, and practical tips that can immediately strengthen intervention blocks and ensure WIN time truly meets students where they are. This session is ideal for classroom teachers, interventionists, literacy specialists, and school leaders committed to making every instructional minute count.
PRESENTER: Karen Gjertsen, Teacher and Curriculum Leader, Bronxville Public Schools, New York.
LOCATION: Coronado F

1:45 PM - 2:45 PM CONCURRENT SESSIONS B – TUESDAY (CONTINUED)

SESSION DESCRIPTION: ***Know Your Students' B.A.S.E Line, the MTSS Process & Intelligent Behavioral Practices.*** In a rapidly evolving educational landscape, where student well-being, academic achievement, and school safety are all top priorities, one foundational question often goes overlooked: Do we truly know what is "normal" for each student? Without understanding a student's personal baseline—how they typically behave, perform, and feel—interventions often become reactive, mistimed, or misdirected. The goal of every school is to get the most out of every single student, but no two students are alike. Personalized learning has become an educational practice that has had proven success for students of all learning styles and abilities. For a student to maximize their success academically, all schools must think of the student as whole. This requires schools and their teachers to make sure they know their students on a Behavioral, Academic, Social and Emotional level. This is where a new integrated approach, the BASE-line Protocol, comes in. Drawing on principles from both the Multi-Tiered System of Supports (MTSS) and behavioral intelligence practices (including those used by elite teams like the Navy SEALs), this framework proposes a clear, practical model: understand each student's Behavior, Academics, and Social-Emotional state from the beginning and use that as the measuring stick for support.
PRESENTERS: Caroline Hernandez, Superintendent, Millbrook Central School District, and Steven Cabello, Principal, Millbrook Middle School, New York,
LOCATION: Coronado G

3:00 PM - 4:00 PM CONCURRENT SESSIONS C – TUESDAY

SESSION DESCRIPTION: ***Expert Roundtable Conversations.*** Join us for an engaging, interactive roundtable experience designed to spark ideas, share best practices, and foster meaningful professional connections. Participants will select from topic-focused tables led by experienced practitioners and thought leaders. Each roundtable facilitator will provide a brief overview of their topic, followed by guided discussion. Attendees will have the opportunity to participate in **two different 25 minute roundtable discussions** during the session, allowing them to explore multiple areas of interest while gaining practical strategies and insights they can immediately apply in their schools and organizations. Whether you are seeking innovative solutions, fresh perspectives, or connections with colleagues facing similar challenges, this session offers a unique opportunity to learn from both experts and peers in an interactive setting.

Roundtable 1 - ***Excellence in Action: A Conversation with Three National Principals of the Year.***
NASSP's National Principal of the Year program recognizes outstanding middle level and high school principals who have succeeded in providing high quality learning opportunities for students as well as demonstrating exemplary contributions to the profession. This is an opportunity to bring your current challenges, issues, and hot topics to an informal session with **three national awarding-winning high school principals.**
PRESENTERS: Tony Cattani, 2026 National Principal of the Year, New Jersey; Dr. Akil Ross, 2018 National Principal of the Year, South Carolina; and Jayne Ellspermann, 2015 National Principal of the Year, Florida

Roundtable 2 - ***Windows, Mirrors, and Mastery: Practical Tools for Continuing Literacy.***
In this roundtable discussion, participants will explore the transformative impact of Educational Epiphany's Continuing Literacy Classroom Libraries for grades 3–8. When students have consistent access to a rich, diverse collection of both literary and informational texts that reflect a wide range of concepts, themes, topics, and lived experiences and that allow every child to see windows and mirrors — background knowledge deepens, curiosity expands, and confidence grows. When children are exposed to informational texts that are historical, scientific, and technical in nature, paired with literary texts including plays, poetry, and stories and supported by standards-informed writing opportunities to demonstrate what they have learned, they develop the capacity to not only comprehend what they read, but to demonstrate mastery of the expectations resident in the standards.
PRESENTERS: Richard Bourque, Chief Marketing Officer and Jerry Richardson, Chief Operations Officer, Educational Epiphany.

Roundtable 3 - ***The Culture Conversation: Mental Health, Belonging and Student Success*****.** How do we create school cultures where students feel safe, valued, connected, and ready to learn? In this engaging expert roundtable, Jared Scott will lead a meaningful conversation about the powerful relationship between mental health, belonging, and student success. Participants will explore how school culture, trusted relationships, and intentional support systems can influence student engagement, resilience, and achievement. Through practical insights and collaborative dialogue, attendees will consider strategies for recognizing student needs, strengthening a sense of belonging, and building learning environments where every student can thrive. This conversation will challenge educators to look beyond academic outcomes alone and recognize that **student well-being and school success are deeply connected.**
PRESENTER: Jared Scott, Founder, The Culture Shift Tour.

Roundtable 4 - ***Rethinking Technology: Helping Education Leaders Transform the Modern Classroom***
As educational technology evolves at a rapid pace, school leaders are challenged to balance innovation with impact. This collaborative roundtable will examine emerging trends, classroom technology initiatives, and leadership strategies that foster future-ready learning environments. Attendees will exchange ideas on how to align technology investments with student outcomes, teacher support, and long-term district goals.
PRESENTER: David Lopez, Global Director of EDU Strategy, Screenbeam.
LOCATION: Coronado H-J

3:00 PM - 4:00 PM CONCURRENT SESSIONS C – TUESDAY (CONTINUED)

SESSION DESCRIPTION: ***Excellence in Action: Practical Strategies for Turning Your School into a Blue Ribbon School.*** Miller Perry pairs deep relational support with a rigorous, common-sense instructional model, leading to a 2024 Blue Ribbon Schools of Excellence award and seven consecutive years as a Tennessee Reward School. Our four areas of focus include: Relational Focus: Guided by the motto "Every Student, Every Class, Every Day," the school emphasizes teacher-student trust and a "common language" (K–5) to build student confidence; Instructional Strategy: Teachers use a Concrete-to-Representational-to-Abstract model and a Gradual Release of Responsibility. While K–2 uses a mix of district and custom tools, grades 3–5 rely primarily on high-level, teacher-created materials; Dynamic Environment: Success is driven by ability grouping, alternating block schedules, and clubs (Math Masters, Robotics) that celebrate student milestones; and Data-Driven: Daily formative checks and quarterly benchmarks via Mastery Connect allow for real-time reteaching and individualized student support. Ultimately, Miller Perry's success is built on the belief that students excel when they feel seen, supported, and challenged. By blending a "common-sense" instructional roadmap with data-driven precision and a culture of mutual trust, the school has created a sustainable model for academic excellence. This intentional focus on both the heart and the head has solidified Miller Perry's standing as a top-performing institution within the state.
PRESENTERS: Michael Wilson, Principal; Gina Zimmerman, Math Learning Leader, Fifth Grade Math and Science Teacher; and Angela Bass, Administrative Assistant, ELA Learning Leader, Fourth Grade ELA and Social Studies Teacher, Miller Perry Elementary School, 2024 National Blue Ribbon School, Tennessee.
LOCATION: Monterrey 1

SESSION DESCRIPTION: ***The Power of "We": Creating Collaborative Cultures That Improve Student Learning.*** Collective efficacy is the shared belief among educators that they can positively influence student learning and achievement. John Hattie's research identifies teacher collective efficacy as one of the most influential school-based factors affecting student achievement with an effective size of 1.57 which far exceeds the average impact of other educational interventions. Collective efficacy does not develop by chance. It is intentionally cultivated through systems, relationships, shared learning and reflection, and a clear and relentless focus on student success. In this interactive session school leaders explore how to move beyond traditional professional learning activities and build a highly collaborative culture where educators believe that they have the knowledge, skill, and collective responsibility to improve outcomes for every student. Participants will explore practical strategies for creating high-functioning collaborative teams, facilitating productive instructional planning using protocols, using evidence of student learning to strengthen practice, developing teacher leadership through systems of peer observation and feedback, and embedding reflection into everyday work. Participants will leave with a framework for organizing collaborative professional learning activities, collaborative protocols to implement for instructional planning and the review of student work samples, and implementation and reflection tools that can immediately strengthen the culture of teaching and learning in their schools. This session helps school leaders shift from asking, "How do we get teachers to collaborate?" to the more important question, "How do we create the conditions where collaboration builds a shared belief that together we can improve outcomes for every student?" The shift from collaboration as an activity to collective efficacy as a mindset promotes and sustains continuous professional learning and lasting school improvement.
PRESENTER: Dr. Melissa Pratto, Principal, Fort Clarke Middle School, Florida.
LOCATION: Monterrey 2

3:00 PM - 4:00 PM CONCURRENT SESSIONS C – TUESDAY (CONTINUED)

SESSION DESCRIPTION: ***Unlock the Power of Your Data.*** If you are ready to turn your spreadsheets into impactful stories, join me for a hands-on exploration of Google Data Studio! In this session, you'll learn how to use Google Data Studio to **connect** to data sources; **craft** stunning interactive visualizations that bring your data to life; **build** informative dashboards to gain insights at a glance; and **share** your dashboards with staff for easier analysis. Participants should bring a laptop (not mobile device) and have access to a spreadsheet with data they want to turn into a dashboard. If participants do not have access to their own data, sample data will be made available during the presentation to utilize. It is also strongly recommended that participants choosing to build a dashboard have reliable access to WIFI. Sometimes conference WIFI can be unreliable. Data Studio is a free product of Google, if your school system does not allow the use of Google products, this program might not work for you.
PRESENTER: Kyle Pinckard, Principal, Boaz Middle School, 2024 BRSE Lighthouse School, Alabama.
LOCATION: Monterrey 3

SESSION DESCRIPTION: ***Beyond the Textbook: Using Primary Sources to Deepen Comprehension and Teach Inclusive History*****.** In celebration of America's 250th birthday in 2026, this session explores how primary sources related to the Founding Era can strengthen student comprehension, improve vocabulary, increase engagement, and promote a more inclusive approach to history. Led by a 5th grade teacher and a George Washington Teacher Institute 250 Ambassador, this session blends classroom tested strategies with rich historical content. Participants will examine letters, maps, and other original documents while learning practical, ready to implement strategies for integrating primary sources into social studies instruction alongside picture books and mentor texts for elementary teachers. While the Founding Era serves as our case study, the instructional approaches shared are adaptable for any content area or grade level. Educators will leave with many tools to make history more meaningful, accurate, and engaging for all students.
PRESENTER: Virginia Conerly, 5th Grade Teacher, Hampton Cove Elementary School, Alabama,
LOCATION: Yucatan 1

3:00 PM - 4:00 PM CONCURRENT SESSIONS C – TUESDAY (CONTINUED)

SESSION DESCRIPTION: ***High-Leverage Practices That Stick: What Great Classrooms Do Differently.*** High-performing classrooms are not defined by an ever-changing collection of instructional strategies, but by the consistent and intentional use of a small set of high-leverage practices that produce significant and sustained gains in student learning. While educators are frequently exposed to a wide range of instructional approaches, implementation often remains fragmented, inconsistent, or short-lived. This session examines what great teachers do differently by focusing on the practices that "stick", those that become embedded into daily instruction and operate as default instructional behaviors rather than occasional strategies. Drawing from research-based instructional frameworks and educator preparation and leadership experience, this session explores how clarity, repetition, and system support transform effective practices from awareness to sustained implementation. Participants will explore how to move beyond initiative overload toward focused instructional improvement, ensuring that high-impact practices are not only introduced but deeply embedded in classroom routines, instructional design, and schoolwide systems. Emphasis will be placed on practical strategies for implementation, coaching, and sustaining instructional consistency across classrooms while maintaining teacher autonomy and professional judgment. The goal is to support educators and leaders in identifying, refining, and sustaining the instructional moves that matter most for student achievement.
PRESENTERS: Dr. Tamala Martin, MSU Ashland Regional Director/Assistant Visiting Professor; Dr. Gera Nelson, Assistant Professor; and Brianna Picklesimer, Dianna Ward, Abby Tanner, and Victoria Parsons, Students, Morehead State University, Kentucky.
LOCATION: Yucatan 2

3:00 PM - 4:00 PM CONCURRENT SESSIONS C – TUESDAY (CONTINUED)

SESSION DESCRIPTION: ***Strengthening Teacher Well-Being Through Collaborative Wellness Practices: A Qualitative Study in a Canadian Indigenous School Partnership.*** Teacher well-being is essential to fostering healthy learning environments, particularly within Indigenous school communities where educators often navigate complex social, cultural, and emotional responsibilities. This study explores a collaborative initiative between an Indigenous school and a post-secondary institution in Nova Scotia, Canada. It was designed to support teacher well-being through a holistic professional learning session focused on mindfulness, yoga, physical activity, and team building. Grounded in relational and strengths-based approaches, the initiative sought to create culturally responsive spaces that encouraged reflection, connection, and collective care among educators. Using a qualitative research design, data were collected to examine teacher participation and perceptions of the well-being session. Methods included semi-structured interviews, facilitator observations, and collaborative sharing circles conducted following the session. Thematic analysis was used to identify recurring patterns related to engagement, emotional well-being, collegial relationships, and perceived impacts on professional practice. Findings highlighted the importance of community-centered wellness practices, opportunities for collaborative dialogue, and embodied activities that supported stress reduction and strengthened staff relationships. The partnership between the Indigenous school and the post-secondary institution demonstrated the value of reciprocal collaboration in developing meaningful teacher wellness initiatives that honor Indigenous perspectives of holistic well-being. This study contributes to emerging conversations on educator wellness by emphasizing the importance of collaborations within post-secondary institutions, as well as culturally grounded, relational, and participatory approaches to support within Indigenous contexts. This session will be engaging participants within 2 mini TWB activities from the study. Seated yoga and staff BINGO will be incorporated within the presentation. In concluding, limitations and suggestions for future study are also offered.
PRESENTERS: Dr. Lynn LeVatte, Associate Professor Education, Cape Breton University, and Lucy Joe, Principal, Maupeltuewey Kina'matno'kuom, Nova Scotia, Canada,
LOCATION: Yucatan 3

SESSION DESCRIPTION: ***Advancing Social-Emotional Excellence at Scale: A Measurable, Technology-Integrated Model for Distinguished Schools.*** Blue Ribbon Schools exemplify measurable excellence, strong culture, and whole-child development. As student behavioral needs intensify nationwide, even high-performing schools face increasing social stress, emotional dysregulation, and relationship challenges that impact school climate and academic focus. This session presents a scalable, data-driven model for strengthening social-emotional learning across entire school communities through the integration of immersive technology. Impact VR is a brief, evidence-based socioemotional learning platform designed to enhance emotion recognition, emotional regulation, empathy, and relationship skills. In a randomized controlled trial of youth (10-17 years), students demonstrated significant improvements in emotional accuracy, peer and parent relationships, and reductions in social stress. Caregiver reports confirmed reductions in conduct problems and aggression, with sustained decreases for three months. These outcomes represent measurable gains in protective factors directly tied to student success and prosocial behavior. For schools committed to advancing excellence, this presentation offers a practical, research-validated pathway to integrate innovation with accountability to elevate student success nationwide.
PRESENTER: Dr, Nicholas Thomson, Professor of Psychology and Psychiatry, Virginia Commonwealth University, Virginia.
LOCATION: Coronado A

3:00 PM - 4:00 PM CONCURRENT SESSIONS C – TUESDAY (CONTINUED)

SESSION DESCRIPTION: ***Powering Up Education: Leveraging AI for Student Success.*** We propose a presentation about exciting and impactful partnerships that aim to harness the power of AI and foster technology awareness, global competence and financial readiness among students. In today's interconnected world, it is crucial for our students to develop the skills and perspectives necessary to thrive in an increasingly globalized society. Through our partnerships, we can create a transformative educational experience that prepares our students for the challenges and opportunities of the 21st century. We hope to share our goals to incorporate AI basics into existing subjects like computer science or ethics classes, as well as how we are working to teach students to evaluate AI outputs, identify potential biases, and understand the limitations of AI.
PRESENTERS: Dr. Julie Snider, Assistant Superintendent of Curriculum and Instruction and Jen Mazza, Director of STEM & Instructional Technology, Clarkstown Central School District, New York.
LOCATION: Coronado B

SESSION DESCRIPTION: ***Big Brand Brilliance*****.** How are you known by your students? What's your "teacher street cred?" And most importantly… what do students say about your class when they leave your room? In today's world, the best educators don't just teach content — they create experiences. The most memorable classrooms have a clear identity, energy, and culture that students want to be part of. Join this high-energy session to discover how to build your own powerful educator brand while transforming everyday lessons into engaging, unforgettable learning experiences. We'll take a deep dive into the "Big Brands" and uncover what makes companies like Disney, Starbucks, Apple, Buc-ee's, and even the Savannah Bananas so magnetic, memorable, and successful, then connect those same principles directly to classroom instruction. In this interactive session, you'll learn: How to create a classroom culture students buy into; Ways to make lessons more engaging, meaningful, and memorable; Strategies to increase student participation and energy; How branding, storytelling, and experience design can transform instruction; and Simple shifts that make your classroom stand out and keep students talking. This isn't just another PD session; it's a chance to rethink how students experience learning in your classroom. Walk away with practical ideas, creative inspiration, and game-changing strategies you can use immediately to elevate engagement and strengthen your impact as an educator.
PRESENTER: Dr. Buddy Berry, Superintendent, Eminence Independent Schools, Kentucky.
LOCATION: Coronado C

3:00 PM - 4:00 PM CONCURRENT SESSIONS C – TUESDAY (CONTINUED)

SESSION DESCRIPTION: ***Where Excellence Feels Electric: Designing a School Culture Students Love and Teachers Never Want to Leave*****.** What happens when a school intentionally engineers joy, belonging, and high expectations into its daily experience? The result is a campus culture where students arrive energized, teachers feel valued and inspired, and achievement becomes the natural outcome. This session explores how strategic leadership, meaningful traditions, student voice, and teacher autonomy combine to create a thriving school environment that supports academic excellence and vibrant extracurricular engagement. School culture is not a slogan. It is a system. In this session, participants will learn how Huntsville High School has built a dynamic environment where students are excited to attend, memories are intentionally created, and success is celebrated across academics, athletics, arts, and service. The presentation will highlight practical structures that cultivate connection, pride, and motivation while maintaining alignment with district and state expectations. Participants will also explore how empowering teachers with trust and creative flexibility fosters innovation, professional fulfillment, and retention. Attendees will leave with replicable strategies for shaping a climate where positivity is authentic, expectations are clear, and every member of the school community feels they belong and can thrive.
PRESENTERS: Kari Flippo, Principal and Alyse Brewer, Assistant Principal, Huntsville High School, Alabama.
LOCATION: Coronado D

SESSION DESCRIPTION: ***Advisory for the Win: Growing Student Leaders and a Positive School Culture*****.** Advisory and Town Hall are structured, on-purpose time to build leadership, support academics, and strengthen our culture. Once a week, students participate in an Advisory Period. During this time, students either meet in their small advisory group or attend Town Hall. In small groups, students engage in John Maxwell's iLead Program, a student-led leadership program that develops essential non-academic life skills. They also conference with their teacher to review academic progress and reflect on personal assessment data to set goals and track growth. Once a month, each grade level comes together for a Town Hall meeting. Students review grade-level data such as attendance, discipline, and assessment trends, then celebrate growth and achievement through recognitions like Golden Buckets and Coin Winners. Town Hall also reinforces positive behavior through our House System and House Leaderboard, helping students feel connected, motivated, and proud of their contributions to the school community. By embedding Advisory and Town Hall into our weekly routines, we help students live out our vision: students who are academically and socially prepared for the future.
PRESENTERS: Heather Bardwell, Principal; Shana Folk, Assistant Principal; and Erica Formby, Counselor, Mountain Gap Middle School, Alabama.
LOCATION: Coronado E

3:00 PM - 4:00 PM CONCURRENT SESSIONS C – TUESDAY (CONTINUED)

SESSION DESCRIPTION: ***From Curiosity to Classroom Practice: Building Teacher Capacity Through Sustained Professional Learning*****.** As schools respond to evolving educational priorities, many struggle to move beyond one-time professional development to meaningful and lasting classroom implementation. This session shares a practical, scalable model for building teacher capacity through sustained professional learning. As one example, participants will explore a six-week online AI learning experience that guides educators from foundational understanding to hands-on application and collaborative reflection. This case study serves as a replicable model for designing professional learning that leads to meaningful changes in instructional practice. The session also highlights how this work is extended through ongoing professional learning opportunities, including book studies, digital badge pathways, and partnerships with local colleges and universities. Together, these connected experiences create a coherent support system rather than isolated training events. Participants will leave with a practical framework and fresh professional learning ideas they can immediately adapt to meet the needs of their schools and districts.
PRESENTER: Denise Flood-Doyle, Director of the Bronxville Professional Development Center and Latin Teacher, Bronxville School, New York.
LOCATION: Coronado F

SESSION DESCRIPTION: ***One Vision, One Direction: Uniting District Leadership Through Maxwell Principles*****.** This session highlights a three-year leadership journey grounded in Maxwell Leadership Training, led by one superintendent's vision to create a shared understanding of district leadership core values. Through intentional professional learning, administrators, directors, and supervisors engaged in a cohesive leadership experience that aligned core values, mindset, language, and action across the district. Participants will learn how the district implemented four small-group coaching calls annually, engaged in the study of four leadership books, and offered PLU and ACLD PLU credit to ensure commitment and accountability. Attendees will explore how this model created coherence and momentum across all leadership levels.
PRESENTERS: Dr. Shane Barnette, Superintendent, and Tonya Cupp, Instructional Programs Director, Cullman County Schools, Alabama.
LOCATION: Coronado G

4:15 PM – 5:15 PM POWER HOUR SESSIONS – TUESDAY

SESSION DESCRIPTION: ***Everyone Is a Candidate: Recruitment Strategies That Work in 2026.*** In today's ultra-competitive talent market, effective recruitment can't wait for candidates to come to you, you must be ready all the time. This fast-paced, interactive session will dive into the specific, research-informed recruitment strategies that are working right now in 2026. You'll learn how to: tap into new and unconventional candidate pipelines; position your district or school as an employer of choice; integrate "always recruiting" habits into everyday leadership work; and practice retention 24/7 so your best employees want to stay. Fair warning: this is not a sit-and-listen presentation. Through live practice, scenario work, and peer feedback, you'll experience what it means to show up as a recruiter in every interaction. If you're not careful, you may walk out with a job offer yourself because the truth is: everyone is a candidate, and you are always interviewing for your next position.
PRESENTERS: Allen Barber, Principal; Emily Brink, Assistant Principal; and John Stillwell, Assistant Principal, North Medford High School, Ohio.
LOCATION: Coronado A

SESSION DESCRIPTION: ***Every Day Matters: Building Belonging, Boosting Attendance, and Expanding Opportunity.*** In today's educational landscape, improving attendance requires more than monitoring data; it demands a deep commitment to connection, relevance, and opportunity. This session highlights how a rural school district transformed its approach to attendance by intentionally fostering a culture of belonging and expanding meaningful experiences for all students. Participants will explore practical strategies that move beyond compliance to connection, including building strong relationships, embedding social-emotional supports, and creating authentic, real-world learning opportunities through work-based learning and community partnerships. By aligning these efforts, schools can create environments where students feel valued, engaged, and motivated to show up each day. Attendees will leave with actionable ideas, scalable practices, and a renewed perspective on attendance as a reflection of student connection and purpose; because when students feel they belong, every day truly matters.
PRESENTERS: Jenette Fruit, Superintendent, and Michele Fahrlander, Junior High/High School Social Worker, Earlville CUSD 9, Illinois.
LOCATION: Coronado B

SESSION DESCRIPTION: ***The Magnificent 5: Systems for Achieving and Sustaining an A-Rated School.*** This is a leadership-focused presentation centered on the systems, structures, and collective practices that enable an elementary school to achieve and sustain high levels of student performance. The session emphasizes that an A-rated school is not created by isolated programs or individual effort, but through intentional systems that create consistency, accountability, and a shared commitment to excellence. The presentation highlights five essential systems that successful schools establish and continuously refine: a strong instructional framework, a data-driven system, a systematic feedback system, a culture of collective responsibility, and a system for monitoring and sustaining results. Together, these systems align the work of administrators, teachers, students, and families around clear expectations and measurable outcomes. The Magnificent 5 communicates that excellence is a system, not an event. Successful schools intentionally build structures that make effective instruction, collaboration, feedback, data use, and accountability part of the daily culture. The presentation challenges school leaders to move beyond simply responding to problems and instead create predictable systems that allow teachers and students to thrive.
PRESENTERS: Leonard Castleberry, Principal, Nitsch Elementary School and Frank Ward Principal, Klenk Elementary, Texas.
LOCATION: Coronado C

4:15 PM – 5:15 PM POWER HOUR SESSIONS – TUESDAY (CONTINUED)

SESSION DESCRIPTION: ***Administrator and School Counselor - Moving from Co-Existence to Systemic Synergy*****.** What happens when the principal and school counselor stop working in parallel and begin working as partners? In high-performing schools, the relationship between administration and counseling cannot be an afterthought. It is a strategic partnership that can influence school culture, student behavior, academic achievement, attendance, career development, family engagement, and staff well-being. This interactive session explores how administrators and school counselors can intentionally align their roles around one shared mission: student success. Using real-world examples from a rural, high-poverty K–8 school, participants will examine how an administrator and counselor can complement one another—combining leadership, data, relationships, and student support to address the whole child while strengthening the overall school. Participants will leave with practical strategies for moving from a traditional "principal sends students to the counselor" model to a collaborative leadership model in which the administrator and counselor work together to identify needs, analyze data, develop interventions, communicate with stakeholders, and measure results.
PRESENTERS: Caleb Elrod, Principal, and Kim Crumbley, Counselor, Parkside School, PreK-8, Alabama.
LOCATION: Coronado D

SESSION DESCRIPTION: ***Project-Based Learning Puts Students F.I.R.S.T.*** Project-based learning (PBL) provides students with authentic learning experiences that teach the standards while providing opportunities for inter-disciplinary collaboration, community engagement, and real-world relevancy. In this session, three current middle school teachers will share their approach to PBL which puts student learning F.I.R.S.T. through a strong collaborative planning model, focus on student agency, and inclusion of community partners and resources.
You will walk away from this session with actionable steps to cultivate a culture of project-based learning at your school and plan projects that you can implement in the classroom tomorrow. Bring your project ideas and questions about schoolwide and grade-level PBL implementation!
PRESENTERS: Samantha Flerlage, 8th Grade Social Studies Teacher; Dr. Mary Rogers, 7th Grade ELA Teacher; and Briana Higdon, 8th Grade Team Lead, 8th Grade Math & Integrated Math Teacher, Isaac Litton STEM Magnet Middle School, Tennessee.
LOCATION: Coronado E

4:15 PM – 5:15 PM POWER HOUR SESSIONS – TUESDAY (CONTINUED)

SESSION DESCRIPTION: ***STEM Without Limits: Building a Next-Level Program in a Rural School.*** How can a small, rural school system with limited resources create meaningful, high-quality STEM opportunities for every student? This presentation will share a practical journey for building and sustaining a STEM program in a rural school serving a high free and reduced-lunch population. Participants will explore how to develop a vision, build staff capacity, maximize community partnerships and available resources, and create engaging, hands-on STEM experiences that move learning beyond the traditional classroom.
Participants Will Learn How To:
-Implement and grow a STEM program in a small school system with limited resources.
-Create STEM opportunities that engage all students, regardless of background or economic circumstances.
-Build staff ownership and develop a school-wide STEM culture.
-Leverage community partnerships, grants, volunteers, and existing resources to expand STEM opportunities.
-Integrate STEM into core instruction and connect learning to authentic, real-world problems.
-Sustain and continually improve a STEM program over time.
PRESENTERS: David Lamb, STEM Specialist and Todd Reagan, Principal, Wes-Del Elementary School, Indiana.
LOCATION: Coronado F

SESSION DESCRIPTION: ***Level Up Learning: Using Interactive Games to Boost Student Engagement.*** What if a simple worksheet could become the most exciting part of your students' day? This interactive session will show teachers how to transform everyday academic practice into high-energy learning experiences using simple, engaging classroom games. Participants won't just hear about the games—they'll play them, experience them from a student's perspective, and leave with practical ideas they can immediately take back to their classrooms. We will demonstrate how activities such as Sticky Note Attack, Capture the Flag, The Unfair Game, Popdarts, Deck of Cards, and more can turn review questions, slide problems, and worksheets into opportunities for movement, collaboration, competition, and meaningful learning. These strategies go beyond familiar games like Trashketball and Jeopardy and can be adapted to a variety of subjects, grade levels, and classroom settings. We will also explore intentional strategies for creating teams, adapting games to different classroom scenarios, and using game-based activities to develop student leadership and collaboration skills. When students are having fun learning, they are bought into the mindset of achieving success. When students are actively participating, working together, and having fun, learning feels different. Our goal is for teachers to leave this session with new ideas, practical strategies, and the confidence to bring more play, energy, and engagement into their classrooms—without adding hours to their workload. Come ready to play, compete, collaborate, and Level Up Learning!
PRESENTERS: Langdon Kennedy, 4th Grade Teacher and Sydney Arkoette, 4th Grade Teacher, Buena Vista Elementary School, South Carolina.
LOCATION: Coronado G

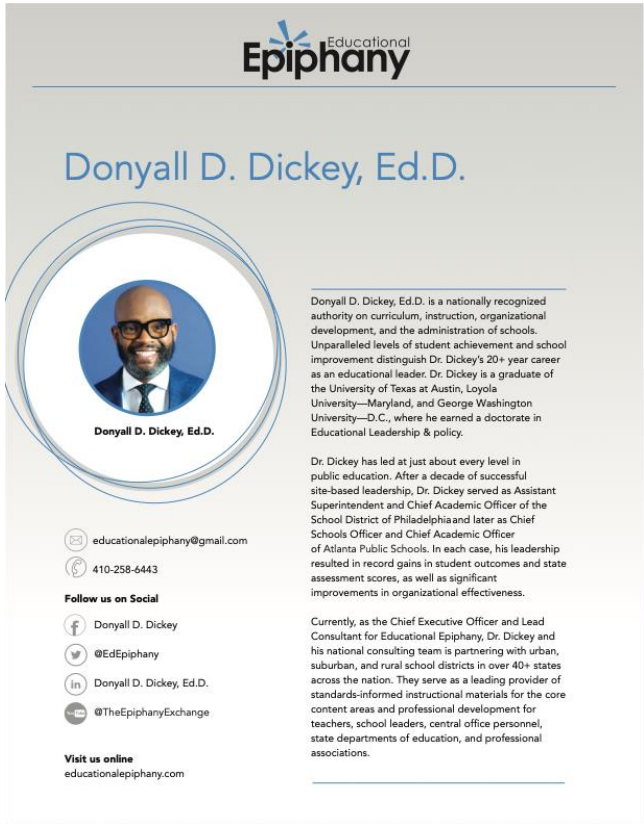
DAY THREE - WEDNESDAY, DECEMBER 2, 2026

7:15 AM - 4:00 PM REGISTRATION
LOCATION: South Registration Counter

7:15 AM - 8:00 AM BREAKFAST AND VISIT EXHIBITORS
LOCATION: Coronado Ballroom H-J

8:00 AM - 9:15 AM GENERAL SESSION
KEYNOTE SPEAKER: Dr. Donyall Dickey is an Internationally Recognized Authority on Curriculum, Instruction, Organizational Development, and District Improvement.

KEYNOTE TITLE: ***Fortifying Futures: The Universal Language of Literacy — A Research-Grounded Framework for Guaranteeing Access*****.** Literacy is the gateway to finding one's voice and forging a future defined by choice. This session equips participants with a groundbreaking body of knowledge freshly excavated from decades of cross-state classroom research — dismantling outdated assumptions and replacing them with research-grounded insight. Drawing on Dr. Donyall D. Dickey's recently published book, The Universal Language of Literacy: A Manifesto for Transforming America's Schools, this dynamic keynote is grounded in the conviction that access to quality instruction is an inalienable right. Participants will explore the universal literacy concepts embedded across standards, content areas, and grade levels — leaving equipped with the knowledge, tools, and language needed to deepen instructional expertise, ignite student potential, and accelerate mastery for every learner, especially academically vulnerable populations. This keynote will surface what the data confirms: discrepant educator understanding of universal literacy concepts is among the most significant — and most correctable — barriers to student achievement. When these concepts are elevated to the forefront of discourse, planning, instruction, and assessment design, students do what they have always had the capacity to do — soar.


Educational Epiphany

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Donyall D. Dickey, Ed.D. is a nationally recognized authority on curriculum, instruction, organizational development, and the administration of schools. Unparalleled levels of student achievement and school improvement distinguish Dr. Dickey's 20+ year career as an educational leader. Dr. Dickey is a graduate of the University of Texas at Austin, Loyola University—Maryland, and George Washington University—D.C., where he earned a doctorate in Educational Leadership & policy.

Dr. Dickey has led at just about every level in public education. After a decade of successful site-based leadership, Dr. Dickey served as Assistant Superintendent and Chief Academic Officer of the School District of Philadelphiaand later as Chief Schools Officer and Chief Academic Officer of Atlanta Public Schools. In each case, his leadership resulted in record gains in student outcomes and state assessment scores, as well as significant improvements in organizational effectiveness.

Currently, as the Chief Executive Officer and Lead Consultant for Educational Epiphany, Dr. Dickey and his national consulting team is partnering with urban, suburban, and rural school districts in over 40+ states across the nation. They serve as a leading provider of standards-informed instructional materials for the core content areas and professional development for teachers, school leaders, central office personnel, state departments of education, and professional associations.

LOCATION: Coronado Ballroom H-J

9:30 AM – 10:30 AM CONCURRENT SESSIONS D – WEDNESDAY

SESSION DESCRIPTION*: The Universal Language of Literacy in Action: The Pathway to Mastering Literary Concepts.* This breakout session invites participants into a deeper conversation about what it truly means to teach literary concepts with clarity and consistency across PreK–12 classrooms. Calming the Instructional Noise: A Research-Grounded Approach to Planning and Delivering Instruction in English Language Arts, Science, and Social Studies, Dr. Donyall D. Dickey leads participants through an in-depth exploration of the universal literary concepts embedded in standards across grade levels and content areas, illuminating not just what these concepts are, but the profound impact that occurs when educators possess a deep, calibrated understanding of them and bring that understanding to the planning table, the classroom, and the feedback cycle. From plot and figurative language to mood, tone, point of view, and author's purpose, the participants will examine the literary concepts that appear again across standards and explore ways for students to develop conceptual understanding and demonstrated mastery.
PRESENTER: Donyall D. Dickey, Ed.D. is an Internationally Recognized Authority on Curriculum, Instruction, Organizational Development, and District Improvement.
LOCATION: Monterrey 1-3

SESSION DESCRIPTION: *The Magic of Honoring Student Voice to Enhancing Student Engagement and School Improvement.* Honoring student voices is a key to supporting a school of excellence. Promoting student voice benefits the student, the school, and the community. This workshop will address how to promote student voices in the classroom and within the school environment. Practical strategies will be presented to support student voice and how it enhances student motivation to learn. A series of exercises and activities will be presented to strengthen the student voice. Social emotional learning goes together with student voice that supports students becoming positive leaders, good decision makers, and strengthens their communication. You will see the magic of extraordinary power of influence the student voice will have in your school.
PRESENTER: Dr. Dawn Cobb-Fossnes, Professor for Doctorate Students in Education and Instructional Mentor for Twenty-One Professors, Liberty University, New Jersey.
LOCATION: Yucatan 1

9:30 AM – 10:30 AM CONCURRENT SESSIONS D – WEDNESDAY (CONTINUED)

SESSION DESCRIPTION: ***Franklin Elementary School -- Moving the Needle Like It's Our Job!*** Welcome to Franklin Elementary School, home of the Falcons! Franklin serves approximately 300 students, with 55–65% eligible for free/reduced lunch. About 18–22% of our students are multilingual learners, and 12–18% receive services through an academic IEP. In this session, participants will learn how our Illinois elementary school in a Large Unit District Association (LUDA) district started from a low point and rose over the past 4 years to become a top school in the Midwest. We'll share the key moves that helped us shift outcomes and culture through focused systems, consistent implementation, and a commitment to what works for students. You'll learn how we leveraged NWEA MAP data to drive unprecedented growth—sometimes seeing results that reached quartiles or quintiles above national norms. We'll also explore how we built and sustained a strong school culture, as measured by the UChicago Impact 5Essentials Survey, and how we gained significant traction on state proficiency measures, boosting test scores by more than a quintile! Over the past 4 years, Franklin has earned several honors that reflect this progress, including the GreatSchools.org "Thrive Award" (2024) and the ClassDojo "Community Builder Award" (2025). We also earned the top Illinois Assessment of Readiness (IAR) scores in math and ELA in our county in 2025, had three teachers selected for statewide (Golden Apple Awards) and board recognition (Illinois Teacher of the year Awards) across 2025 and 2026, and were selected as a National Model School in 2026. Please arrive 5 minutes before our presentation begins. We'd love to show you a little extra of what we're all about at Franklin before the session starts! - Rachel and Andrew
PRESENTERS: Rachel Moore and Andrew Anselm, Teachers, Franklin Elementary School, Illinois.
LOCATION: Yucatan 2

SESSION DESCRIPTION: ***AI as Your Grant Writing Partner: Increasing Efficiency Without Losing Authenticity*****.** What if you could dramatically increase both the efficiency and competitiveness of your grant writing without sacrificing authenticity or originality? Artificial Intelligence has quietly woven itself into nearly every aspect of our lives, and education is no exception. While many educators already use AI to save time or generate ideas, few are leveraging it effectively and responsibly within the grant writing process. In this session, Debbie Edwards shares how she strategically integrated AI into her workflow over a three-month period, producing 54 grant applications while maintaining original, compliant narratives. Rather than using AI to write proposals, she uses it to analyze RFPs, identify patterns, synthesize data, align responses to scoring rubrics, and strengthen the clarity and structure of her writing. Participants will learn how to use AI as a behind-the-scenes partner supporting research, organization, and alignment while ensuring the final narrative remains authentic, human-centered, and fully original. The session will also address AI detection tools, ethical considerations, and practical safeguards to ensure compliance with grant requirements. Designed for busy educators and administrators, this session provides realistic, time-saving strategies that make grant writing more efficient, more strategic, and more accessible without requiring participants to become AI experts.
PRESENTER: Debbie Edwards, CEO/Founding Partner, Consulting Services of D and J/Mesa Public Schools, Arizona.
LOCATION: Yucatan 3

9:30 AM – 10:30 AM CONCURRENT SESSIONS D – WEDNESDAY (CONTINUED)

SESSION DESCRIPTION: ***Rookies to Retirement: Building Instructional Rigor and Professional Culture Through a Unified Support Model*.** How do we ensure that every student, regardless of learning needs, has access to grade-level, standards-aligned instruction without lowering expectations? And how do we build a professional culture strong enough to sustain that work overtime? At P224Q, a NYC District 75 school serving students with diverse learning needs across multiple sites, we address both questions through a unified framework that connects instructional rigor, teacher development, and school culture: *Rookies to Retirement.* This signature model establishes a sustainable teacher support continuum from onboarding through instructional leadership while strengthening classroom implementation of our standards-aligned HMH curriculum through the Universal Design for Learning (UDL) framework. Rather than treating curriculum rollout and teacher development as separate initiatives, we integrated them into one coherent system: teachers are trained to deliver grade-level content with fidelity; UDL ensures students access that content through differentiated entry points; professional learning cycles, aligned to the Danielson Framework (Domains 1E, 3B, and 3C), build teacher capacity to maintain cognitive demand while differentiating access; and distributed leadership pathways cultivate in-house and informal opportunities to create mentor/mentee relationships that help sustain implementation across sites.
PRESENTERS: Jamie Allen, Principal; Nicole Hersch, IEP Coordinator: and Jessica Fudge, Assistant Principal, P.S. 224Q, Pre K-9, New York.
LOCATION: Coronado A

SESSION DESCRIPTION*: Connections through Customized Communication*. Connections Through Customized Communication is a practical presentation that highlights how intentional, structured communication can strengthen relationships and improve outcomes across a school community. It showcases effective strategies used to communicate with staff, students, and families through tools such as newsletters, templates, and data discussions. Participants will gain insight into creating clear, consistent, and meaningful communication systems that build trust, increase engagement, and support student success.
PRESENTERS: Marla Turpin, Principal; Beth Childers, Assistant Principal; and Rosemary Thigpen, Instructional Coach, Central Elementary School, Georgia.
LOCATION: Coronado B

SESSION DESCRIPTION: ***A Whole New World: Bringing Authentic Learning to Life*.** Step into a classroom where learning is purposeful, engaging, and memorable. This session explores how small, intentional shifts can transform required curriculum into authentic learning experiences that spark curiosity and ownership. Participants will learn how to design rigorous, standards-aligned instruction that positions students as active participants while leveraging community partnerships to extend learning beyond the classroom.
PRESENTERS: Danielle Jump, First Grade Teacher, and Chrissy Myers, Kindergarten Teacher, Old Mill Elementary School, Kentucky.
LOCATION: Coronado C

9:30 AM – 10:30 AM CONCURRENT SESSIONS D – WEDNESDAY (CONTINUED)

SESSION DESCRIPTION: ***Enrichment for All at PS 682, The Academy of Talented Scholars (TAOTS) "Brooklyn's Best Kept Secret."*** PS 682, The Academy of Talented Scholars (TAOTS) was the recipient of the 2015 National Blue Ribbon School Award and in 2017 and 2022 received the Blue Ribbon Schools of Excellence Lighthouse Award. TAOTS will share their ideas and secrets of success on how they provide ENRICHMENT OPPORTUNITIES for their entire student body. You will learn how your school can incorporate the school-wide Enrichment Model of education. You will be taught "step by step" how to develop, create and implement successful Student Driven Enrichment Clusters. You will learn about scheduling, budgeting, and tapping into resources. You will walk away feeling knowledgeable and full of practical ideas to bring back to your school. TAOTS provides enrichment opportunities for ALL students by growing students' ideas, tapping into their interests, and cultivating their talents resulting in GREATNESS for ALL students. TAOTS is a NYC public elementary school educating a diverse group of students from the Bensonhurst/Bay Ridge area of Brooklyn, New York. TAOTS continues to thrive because of the strong foundation that was created and laid out by the school's founding principal, Josephine Sportella-Giusto, in her 2008 NYCDOE New School Proposal. TAOTS has become one of NYC's most sought after public elementary schools. With an overall student population of 400 students, TAOTS receives over 500 kindergarten applications yearly with only 50 seats to offer.
PRESENTERS: Josephine Sportella-Giusto, Founding Principal, The Academy of Talented Scholars, TAOTS, and Stacy Butsikares, Principal, PS 971, New York.
LOCATION: Coronado D

SESSION DESCRIPTION: ***Rethinking Tier 2: How We Use Content, Engagement, and Data to Move Readers Forward.*** At PS 249, a high-achieving Title 1 Blue Ribbon School in Brooklyn, we redesigned Tier 2 MTSS to close reading gaps without removing students from meaningful content. Instead of isolated skill drills, we embed science and social studies standards directly into intervention time. Students read authentic nonfiction texts aligned to our state standards and scope and sequence, build background knowledge, strengthen vocabulary, write about their thinking, and analyze maps and data. In this session, we will share our weekly structure, data cycles, staff training model, and the specific moves that made the difference. Participants will leave with a clear framework they can adapt immediately. Participants will leave with:

- A concrete weekly MTSS structure that protects access to grade-level content
- A three-day instructional cycle they can replicate immediately
- Clear expectations for MTSS provider roles, including training and data analysis
- A model for aligning intervention with classroom scope and sequence
- A practical approach to data cycles that focuses on instructional decisions
- Strategies for increasing student engagement in Tier 2 groups

PRESENTERS: Hans Yadira, Assistant Principal; Dorothy Atkin-Mapes, Fifth Grade Teacher; and Rachel Montolio, Kindergarten Teacher, P.S. 249 The Caton School, New York.
LOCATION: Coronado E

9:30 AM – 10:30 AM CONCURRENT SESSIONS D – WEDNESDAY (CONTINUED)

SESSION DESCRIPTION: ***Valley View Leadership Academy; Preparing the Leaders of Tomorrow.*** When you step into an administration role, there is no blueprint or golden binder that is handed to you. Valley View Local Schools has created a Leadership Academy that is a comprehensive professional development initiative designed to bridge the gap between the classroom and school administration by identifying and nurturing select teachers who demonstrate an interest in future leadership roles. Participants engage in deep-dive book studies of foundational texts while simultaneously exploring the complexities of several topics they may deal with such as school and state policy and regulations, legal services (Title IX and Title VI), federal grant coordination through the CCIP and One Plan, and district financial management. A central strength of the Academy is its emphasis on authentic exposure to the administrative lifestyle and the broader educational landscape. This is achieved through "Day in the Life" sessions with current superintendents, principals, and treasurers. To ensure participants are prepared for the state-level demands of the role, the program facilitates direct interaction with representatives from the Ohio Department of Education and Workforce and features insights from recognized leaders, such as a NASSP Principal of the Year. Beyond theoretical knowledge, the Academy focuses on actionable skill-building and career readiness. Attendees also participate in scenario-based learning to practice high-stakes decision-making and work on a capstone project centered on "Problems of Practice" within the district. By investing in this internal talent pipeline, the district ensures that its future leaders are not only legally and operationally literate but are also deeply committed to fostering a positive, instructionally focused school culture.
PRESENTERS: Patrick McKee, Principal, Valley View High School; and Andrea Cook, Superintendent, and Nichole Thomas, Curriculum Director, Valley View Local Schools, Ohio.
LOCATION: Coronado F

SESSION DESCRIPTION: ***Tech-Conscious Leadership: What You Need to Know.***
In a world where technology continues to reshape teaching and learning, school and district leaders face a critical challenge: how do you balance innovative tools with proven instructional practices that drive student achievement? While the foundational work of Hattie, Lemov, and other educational thought leaders remains as relevant as ever, today's leaders must also navigate increasingly complex technology decisions that impact classrooms, budgets, and learning outcomes. Join Jayne Ellspermann, nationally recognized school leadership consultant, former award-winning principal, and co-author of *The Fundamental 5 Revisited and* David Lopez, Director of Education Strategy at ScreenBeam and a veteran educator and ed-tech leader, as they explore what it means to become a truly tech-conscious leader. Together, they will share practical strategies for aligning technology investments with high-impact instructional practices, creating learning environments that support both teacher effectiveness and student success, and maximizing the value of existing resources without sacrificing innovation. Drawing on decades of combined experience in educational leadership, instructional excellence, professional learning, and classroom technology, David and Jayne will examine common pitfalls in technology implementation, highlight leadership practices that strengthen teaching and learning, and provide a framework for making informed decisions that keep students at the center of every initiative. Whether you lead a school, district, or educational organization, this session will help you confidently bridge the gap between technology, instruction, and leadership to create classrooms where both educators and students can thrive.
PRESENTERS: Jayne Ellspermann, Educational Leadership Consultant, Former Principal, and Co-Author of *The Fundamental 5 Revisited, Florida and* David Lopez, Director of Education Strategy, ScreenBeam Education, Florida.
LOCATION: Coronado G

10:45 AM – 11:45 AM CONCURRENT SESSIONS E – WEDNESDAY

SESSION DESCRIPTION: ***Calming the Instructional Noise: A Research-Grounded Approach to Planning and Delivering Instruction in English Language Arts, Science, and Social Studies.*** In an era of competing priorities, endless initiatives, and ever-increasing demands on educators' time, the path to instructional coherence can feel overwhelming. This session cuts through the noise. The primary engine of instructional coherence is a structured understanding of eight to ten requisite questions that educators should pose before, during, and after delivering instruction — questions that ensure every student has equitable access to dynamic, standards-informed, student-centered learning experiences in English Language Arts, Science, and Social Studies. In this session, Dr. Donyall D. Dickey will guide participants through the gold standard model for planning and delivering transformative, content-driven instruction in English Language Arts, Science, and Social Studies and for leading PLCs anchored in the deliberate, sustained development of conceptual knowledge across these disciplines. Participants will engage in a deep dive into the eight to ten content-specific planning questions that anchor and drive every high-impact instructional decision — ensuring that collaborative planning time is strategically invested in what matters most: the quality of the learning experience for every student.
PRESENTER: Donyall D. Dickey, Ed.D. is an Internationally Recognized Authority on Curriculum, Instruction, Organizational Development, and District Improvement.
LOCATION: Monterrey 1-3

SESSION DESCRIPTION: ***Breaking Through Resistance.*** Sustaining excellence requires more than strong goals, clear expectations, and proven strategies. Even in successful schools, leaders can face resistance when educators are overwhelmed, disconnected, unsure, or unconvinced that a change is worth the effort. In this practical session, leaders at all levels will learn how to move beyond labeling resistance as negativity, defiance, or unwillingness and instead use it as information. Participants will be introduced to a clear framework for diagnosing the root causes of resistance, including whether the barrier is connected to value, ownership, belonging, confidence, or growth. Leaders will leave with practical tools and language they can use immediately to better understand what is getting in the way, choose more aligned supports, have more productive conversations, and strengthen engagement, follow-through, and ownership across their teams.
PRESENTER: Becca Silver, Leadership Trainer, The Whole Educator, North Carolina.
LOCATION: Yucatan 1

10:45 AM – 11:45 AM CONCURRENT SESSIONS E – WEDNESDAY (CONTINUED)

SESSION DESCRIPTION: ***Navigating Stress and Pressure in a Digital World: What Adults Can Do to Support Adolescent Girls.*** Just released research reveals that 79% of adolescent girls are under so much pressure that they feel like they are going to "explode." Be among the first to dive into the findings of the largest-of-its-kind national survey with girls, The Girls' Index, and learn how 17,000+ girls in grades 5-12 are thinking, behaving and perceiving their worlds. This session will help you identify trends, illuminate concerns, and focus resources to help girls manage stress and pressure in a digital era.

- Participants will learn the findings of the national survey, The Girls' Index, which was completed by more than 17,000 5th-12th grade girls in 2022-23. They will understand the key social, personal, academic and developmental issues impacting girls during middle and high school.
- Participants will explore the relationships between various data points of interest including stress/pressure and social media use.
- Explore how to have supportive conversations with girls and understand how to effectively communicate these skills to caregivers along their own spectrum of comfort and understanding.

PRESENTER: Angel Mensing, Growth Initiatives Manager, Ruling Our eXperiences, Ohio.
LOCATION: Yucatan 2

SESSION DESCRIPTION: ***Believe to Achieve: Leadership Lessons from Ted Lasso for Winning School Improvement.*** In this engaging and energizing session, we'll explore what school leaders can learn from the unexpected wisdom of Ted Lasso. While set on the pitch, the show offers powerful insights for principals, instructional coaches, and district leaders committed to meaningful school improvement. Together, we'll unpack key leadership themes: building trust before driving change, leading with optimism without ignoring reality, developing people over programs, and creating cultures where feedback fuels growth. Through clips, reflection, and practical application, participants will connect Lasso's belief-driven leadership style to real-world strategies for improving instruction, strengthening teams, and sustaining momentum in schools.
PRESENTERS: Roxanna McCommon, Executive Principal, Glenview Elementary School and Jon Wren, Director of Magnet Schools, Metro Nashville Public Schools, Tennessee.
LOCATION: Yucatan 3

SESSION DESCRIPTION: ***A Systems Approach to Multilingual Learners Success.*** The academic and social success of multilingual elementary students depends on more than classroom instruction—it requires a comprehensive, systems-based approach. This presentation explores how one schools implemented integrated supports across instructional, cultural, and policy levels to promote success for multilingual learners. Using evidence-based practices and multiple data points, the session will outline how collaboration among educators, administrators, and families, creates environments where multilingual students can thrive. Attendees will gain practical tools for implementing a systems-thinking model, aligning resources, and fostering culturally and linguistically responsive learning environments.
PRESENTERS: Brenda Blue, Principal; Malinda Kennedy, ESOL Teacher; Immie Powell, ESOL Teacher; and Emily Webb, ESOL Teacher, Pritchardville Elementary School, South Carolina.
LOCATION: Coronado A

10:45 AM – 11:45 AM CONCURRENT SESSIONS E – WEDNESDAY (CONTINUED)

SESSION DESCRIPTION: ***Blueprint of a Blue Ribbon School: What We Actually Did (No Fluff).*** Most schools have improvement plans. Few have a blueprint that delivers results. This session breaks down the exact systems, decisions, and leadership moves behind a Blue Ribbon Lighthouse School - no theory, no fluff, just execution. This session deconstructs the operational and instructional systems behind being recognized as a Blue Ribbon Lighthouse School. Rather than highlighting outcomes alone, this workshop provides leaders and educators with a replicable 5-shift framework focused on alignment, coherence, accountability, predictable systems, and belonging as infrastructure. Participants will leave with implementation tools, sequencing strategies, and sustainability practices to move their schools from fragmented efforts to disciplined excellence.
PRESENTER: Dr. Laura Onwuka, Principal, P.S 41 Walter Francis White Elementary School, New York.
LOCATION: Coronado B

SESSION DESCRIPTION: ***Bringing Families into the Work: Using Parent Voice to Strengthen Authentic Learning Systems.*** Authentic learning cannot thrive in isolation; it must be understood, valued, and supported beyond the classroom. This session shares how one elementary school moved from isolated pockets of strong instruction to a cohesive, schoolwide model of authentic learning by intentionally aligning systems, leadership practices, and family voice. Using a Parent Advisory group, school leaders gathered honest feedback about what families understood, misunderstood, and needed to fully engage in their child's learning. That feedback directly informed the development of a family-friendly Graduate Profile guide, a school podcast designed to make learning visible, and ongoing communication structures that built shared language between home and school. Participants will explore how these efforts strengthened core systems such as PLCs, student reflection, and schoolwide showcases of learning—resulting in increased student ownership, deeper family engagement, and a more unified instructional experience across classrooms. This session will provide practical strategies for gathering and leveraging parent voice, building clarity around complex instructional shifts, and sustaining meaningful family partnerships that support authentic learning at scale.
PRESENTER: Brittany Joiner, Principal, Old Mill Elementary School, Kentucky.
LOCATION: Coronado C

SESSION DESCRIPTION: ***Tow Matter: Pulling Schools from Compliance to Commitment Building a Culture Where Every Student and Every Educator Thrives.*** Across the country, school leaders are being asked to do more with less while navigating increasing accountability demands, staff shortages, initiative fatigue, and the growing need to support both student achievement and educator well-being. As schools work to improve outcomes, many find themselves trapped in a cycle of compliance: implementing programs, meeting mandates, and checking boxes, without creating the commitment necessary for sustainable success. In this engaging and inspiring session, Dr. William (Tony) Bonds shares the Tow Matter Framework, a leadership approach grounded in the belief that meaningful school improvement occurs when every student matters and every educator matters. Drawing from his experiences leading successful school improvement efforts at both the elementary and middle school levels, Dr. Bonds and his team explore how leaders can build cultures rooted in trust, ownership, accountability, and belonging while maintaining a relentless focus on excellence. Participants will examine practical strategies for establishing clear expectations without sacrificing relationships, developing teacher leaders who drive change from within, navigating leadership transitions, strengthening staff morale, and creating systems that move schools beyond initiative overload toward focused, purposeful action. Through real-world examples, reflective activities, and actionable resources, attendees will gain a deeper understanding of how culture influences every aspect of a school's success, from student engagement and academic achievement to teacher retention and organizational effectiveness. Participants will leave equipped with a comprehensive toolkit, including a culture audit, accountability framework, communication plan, recognition system, and implementation roadmap designed to help transform schools into environments where people are not simply compliant with expectations, but fully committed to a shared vision of excellence. When leaders intentionally invest in people, align purpose with practice, and create systems that support both accountability and connection, they cultivate schools where students thrive, educators flourish, and lasting improvement becomes possible.
PRESENTERS: Dr. Tony Bonds, Principal; Mrs. Faith Bedsole, Assistant Principal; and Mr. Charlie Wilburn, Assistant Principal, Huntsville Junior High School, Alabama.
LOCATION: Coronado D

10:45 AM – 11:45 AM CONCURRENT SESSIONS E – WEDNESDAY (CONTINUED)

SESSION DESCRIPTION: ***Creating A Culture of Excellence: "Have Your School Thrive - Not Just Survive".*** School culture refers to the shared values, beliefs, norms, relationships, and everyday practices that define a school community. A positive school culture is what makes a great school great. Research indicate it directly influences student engagement, teacher effectiveness, and overall academic success. Our two presenters have studied school culture closely during their combined 100+ years of education experience. They understand culture is what makes or breaks a school. They know what it looks like, how it impacts a school community, and how it can be developed and sustained. Edward Bernetich and Bart Teal will share what they have learned about the importance of a positive school culture and give practical examples of what can be done in your school to assure success. "*The Blue Ribbon Schools of Excellence message is simple; a positive culture is the single most important characteristic of a school, and determinate of success."* Bart Teal, BRSE Founder & President
Presenters: Bart Teal is the Founder and President of Blue Ribbon Schools of Excellence, Inc. He has dedicated his long career to improving schools and engaging students. He is a proud South Carolina educator who has taken his message of "What's best for kids?" across the country, and around the world. Bart played a leadership role in the U.S. Department of Education's Blue Ribbon Schools Program, serving as a site visitor and member of the Program's National Review Panel. Bart and his wife Alice have worked together to make BRSE a meaningful pathway to school improvement. **Edward Bernetich** has worked with Bart Teal and the Blue Ribbon Schools of Excellence, Inc. since its inception. A former Ohio teacher and principal, he also spent 9 years with the National Blue Ribbon Program in Washington, D.C. His schools twice received National Blue Ribbon recognition, a BRSE Lighthouse School Award, and an *INTEL Excellence in Technology Award*. He was named an *International Distinguished Principal* in Xi'an, China in 2005. He served as Director of Teacher Education at Case Western Reserve University (Cleveland, OH) and teaches graduate courses in school leadership at Cleveland State University.
LOCATION: Coronado E

SESSION DESCRIPTION: ***I'm Hangry for Learning: Developing a Balanced Instructional Menu to Promote Healthy Learning.*** Just like a nutritious meal fuels the body, a well-balanced lesson plan fuels the mind. In this engaging and energizing session, educators will explore how to craft instructional "menus" that satisfy students' hunger for meaningful learning. Participants will examine key lesson planning considerations, discover how to blend interdisciplinary approaches, and explore strategies for creating rich, memorable learning experiences. With a focus on engagement, relevance, and retention, this session will help educators design lessons that not only meet standards but also feed curiosity, creativity, and critical thinking. Come hungry—you'll leave full of fresh ideas and practical tools to serve up a dynamic classroom experience.
PRESENTER: Amy Mason, Senior Assessor, Blue Ribbon Schools of Excellence, Alabama.
LOCATION: Coronado F

10:45 AM – 11:45 AM CONCURRENT SESSIONS E – WEDNESDAY (CONTINUED)

SESSION DESCRIPTION: ***Empowered to Grow! Creating Effective Learning Environments for All Students.*** Under the right conditions, all children can grow academically, socially, and emotionally. This session provides educators and school leaders with a framework for creating three growth conditions shown to help students improve academically and increase self-confidence. The alignment of purpose, skills, and outcomes is at the core of any successful process. Attendees will be able to identify, apply, measure, and refine growth strategies to help historically disadvantaged children reach their maximum potential.
PRESENTER: Dr. Akil Ross, Superintendent of School District Five of Lexington and Richland Counties and the 2018 NASSP National Principal of the Year in South Carolina. He is also a recipient of the National Blue Ribbon School Principal and Blue Ribbon School of Excellence awards in South Carolina. In 2026, Dr. Ross was named Administrator of the Year by the South Carolina Chapter of the National School Public Relations Association (SCNSPRA), and 2027 State Superintendent of the Year by the South Carolina Association of School Administrators (SCASA)
LOCATION: Coronado G

11:45 AM – 12:15 PM VISIT EXHIBITORS
LOCATION: Coronado Ballroom H-J

12:15 PM - 1:30 PM BEACON LUNCHEON
MASTER OF CEREMONY - Dennis Bega, Senior Assessor, Blue Ribbon Schools of Excellence, Georgia.

KEYNOTE SPEAKERS: Dr. Jonathan Mathis and Dr. John Tupponce
TITLE: ***Creating Schools Where Students Want to Be***. What makes students feel connected, engaged, and genuinely excited to show up at school every day? Led by two dynamic educational leaders with decades of transformational impact, this engaging session will support thoughtful reflection and analysis of practical strategies for **creating schools where students want to be**. Through considering our own experiences as students and leaders, participants will examine the role of relationships, student voice, belonging, leadership, and school culture in shaping student engagement and well-being. Together, we will explore the conditions that help young people feel seen, valued, and invested to ensure our students don't just attend school — they want to be there.

Dr. Jonathan Mathis. Cultivating transformational experiences—in academia, within the community, through organizational leadership, and otherwise—remains the professional mantra for Jonathan D. Mathis, PhD. His work spans primary, secondary, and postsecondary educational institutions, including leadership roles in schools across major urban centers: Los Angeles; New York City; and Washington, DC in particular. Highlights from his leadership journey include serving as: Senior Vice President, Education Policy & Systems Change, City Year, Inc; Executive Director of The Next Step PCS; Director of the National Honor Societies; and currently, Chief Executive Officer (CEO) of the Center for Supportive Schools (CSS). He has served on several national advisory councils and nonprofit boards, as well as a fellow within the American Express Leadership Academy and Aspen Institute. He earned a BSBA from American University, a MSA from Trinity Washington University, and a PhD in Urban Education Policy from the University of Southern California.

Dr. John Tupponce. John T. Tupponce, EdD is the Founder and Principal of J. Tupponce Advisors and a Trustee of the Center for Supportive Schools (CSS). John works with family offices, foundations and individuals navigating the space between private capital and public impact, helping them find opportunities that are both financially sound and genuinely transformative. Before his advisory work, John served as Chief Operating Officer at City Year National, leading strategy and operations across a large, multi-site organization dedicated to educational equity. Earlier, he spent his years in Virginia and Philadelphia public schools as a classroom teacher and working his way to Assistant Superintendent, where he directly shaped the direction of approximately seventy K–12 schools. In addition to CSS, John serves on the boards of North 10 Philadelphia and Bound Utah. John holds a doctorate in Leadership from the University of Pennsylvania, a master's in Educational Leadership from The College of William & Mary, and a bachelor's in Sociology from The College of New Jersey. He and his wife have five adult children and live on the Upper West Side of Manhattan.

LOCATION: Coronado Ballroom H-J

PRESENTATION OF BRSE BEACON AWARDS

Bellmawr Park Elementary School
Decatur Middle School
Dr. Leroy McCloud Elementary School
John Moffet School
Rhoades Elementary School

1:45 PM – 2:45 PM CONCURRENT SESSIONS F – WEDNESDAY

SESSION DESCRIPTION: ***Calming the Instructional Noise: A Research-Grounded Approach to Planning and Delivering Mathematics Instruction.*** In an era of competing priorities, endless initiatives, and ever-increasing demands on educators' time, the path to instructional coherence in mathematics can feel overwhelming. This session cuts through the noise. The primary engine of instructional coherence in any mathematics classroom is a structured understanding of eight to ten requisite questions that educators should pose before, during, and after delivering instruction — questions that ensure every student has equitable access to dynamic, standards-informed, student-centered mathematical learning experiences that build conceptual understanding, procedural fluency, and the capacity to reason and communicate mathematically. In this session, Dr. Donyall D. Dickey will guide participants through the gold standard model for planning and delivering transformative, mathematics content-driven instruction — and for leading PLCs anchored in the deliberate, sustained development of conceptual knowledge of the mathematical concepts embedded in standards across grade levels. Participants will engage in a deep dive into the eight to ten mathematics-specific planning questions that anchor and drive every high-impact instructional decision — ensuring that collaborative planning time is strategically invested in what matters most: equipping every student with the mathematical knowledge, language, and reasoning skills they need to demonstrate mastery and soar. Participants will leave this session with a clear, practical, and immediately applicable framework for silencing the instructional noise in mathematics and focusing their energy where it has the greatest impact on student outcomes.
PRESENTER: Donyall D. Dickey, Ed.D. is an Internationally Recognized Authority on Curriculum, Instruction, Organizational Development, and District Improvement.
LOCATION: Monterrey 1-3

SESSION DESCRIPTION: ***Cultivating Classroom Magic: Inclusive Co-Teaching That Helps Every Student Shine.*** Every classroom has the potential for a little magic when educators work together to create an environment where every student can thrive. This session explores an inclusive co-teaching model through the shared perspectives of general education and special education teachers. Participants will discover practical strategies for managing collaborative classrooms, implementing effective behavior supports, and using data to make informed instructional decisions. Presenters will share engaging, student-centered ideas that make learning meaningful and enjoyable while supporting students in achieving goals outlined in their individualized education plan. This session is designed for elementary teachers, special education teachers, counselors, and anyone passionate about creating inclusive learning environments where every learner can shine.
PRESENTERS: Sarah Bagwell, Special Education Teacher and School Counselor, West Point Middle School, 2021 Blue Ribbon School of Excellence Lighthouse School, Alabama; Monica Bates, General Education Teacher, Good Hope Elementary School, 2023 Blue Ribbon School of Excellence Lighthouse School, Alabama.
LOCATION: Yucatan 1

SESSION DESCRIPTION: ***2-3 Years of Growth in One Year? Leveraging the Power of Collective Teacher Efficacy*.** Are you concerned that your professional learning communities are not as effective as intended? Do you see a need for authentic educator reflection that is actionable in real time, rather than at the end of the year when students are already gone? Learn how these common concerns led to the development of a budget-neutral professional study model that utilizes a simple approach for guiding educators to 'inspect what they expect.' Explore a four-step process for embedding data study within a simple-to-manage and budget-neutral collaborative professional learning model. Informed by John Hattie's newest research related to the often overlooked potential of Collective Teacher Efficacy to impact student learning and school success; this session will offer specific strategies for elevating outcomes and cautions of pitfalls to avoid.
PRESENTER: Tammy Pawloski, Professor & Director, Francis Marion University, South Carolina.
LOCATION: Yucatan 2

SESSION DESCRIPTION: ***The Three R's: Building Leadership Capacity through Robust Professional Development that Fosters Relationships, Resiliency, and Restoration***. How often do we set aside time for our staff to reconnect, recharge, and reflect? In what ways do we support our staff to build relationships with one another and students, boost resiliency in the face of ever-growing challenges, and focus on their well-being in ways that feel authentically restorative? This workshop will provide school leaders with a model of robust, intentional professional development to support learning communities where both students and educators can thrive. This responsive framework: (1) supports data analysis and reflection; (2) offers a needs/strengths assessment; and (3) illustrates a design approach for professional development experiences supporting wellness and cohesion among staff and turn-key experiences engaging students and classroom environments. Participants will feel equipped to implement these efforts in their own school community, supporting efforts to engage, retain, and support staff throughout the approaching academic year.
PRESENTERS: Catherine Bell, M.Ed., Managing Director, Program Excellence, Center for Supportive Schools (CSS) and Margo Ross, Psy. D., Managing Director, External Affairs & Engagement, CSS.
LOCATION: Yucatan 3

1:45 PM – 2:45 PM CONCURRENT SESSIONS F – WEDNESDAY (CONTINUED)

SESSION DESCRIPTION: ***The Journey from Good to Great is Just Around the River Bend***. How do you take a good school and push it to greatness? Learn the nuts and bolts of fueling your momentum to fine tune your school and tap into its highest potential. This session will discuss how to take what is considered a good school and make it better by supporting both teachers' & students' social emotional health and unmet student learning needs. It's the story of walking into what looks from the outside like a "good" school - is considered an A school by state standards (but barely an A at 90%) which is arguably a harder place to start from than a failing (turnaround) school because the possibility of falling is huge - especially with too many "new items like new curriculum and new school system. Your goal as an administrator is to keep the good stuff while deleting the waste to push the entire organization higher. This is accomplished by addressing the personal social emotional needs through Leader in Me (LIM) and the academics through Precision Teaching for learning. LIM gives a voice and personal control over their successes, builds self-efficacy, positive attitude, decreases discipline, improves attendance, and improves overall performance for both students and teachers. Precision teaching using data, solid curriculum, and creative scheduling to revise the RTI process, introduce Walk to Intervention, dedicated Reading block, integrate Math foundation standards into hands on STEAM and Green lessons. All these pieces work together to give teachers and students the tools they need to push students from high to higher.
PRESENTER: Dr. Alicia Early, Director of Federal Programs, Compliance, and Strategic Initiatives, Gulf Shores School District, Alabama.
LOCATION: Coronado A

SESSION DESCRIPTION: ***From Blue Ribbon to Blueprint: Practical Strategies for Closing Achievement Gaps in High-Poverty Schools.*** How does a school serving 73% economically disadvantaged students and 40% English learners achieve national recognition for closing achievement gaps? At Avona Elementary, success was not driven by a single program or intervention. Instead, it was the result of a comprehensive approach centered on relationships, belonging, high expectations, family partnerships, community engagement, and relentless progress monitoring. Participants will leave with practical, scalable strategies that can be implemented immediately to support student growth and improve outcomes for all learners.
PRESENTER: Katie Burton, Principal, Avona Elementary School, Pennsylvania.
LOCATION: Coronado B

SESSION DESCRIPTION: ***From Reluctant Writers to Confident Communicators: Transforming Literacy Through Authentic Inquiry and Structured Support.*** In this interactive professional learning session, educators will explore how to transform traditional literacy instruction into meaningful, engaging experiences through authentic inquiry. Students often enter the classroom with a predetermined mindset about writing—especially our special education students—believing they are not capable or that writing is simply a task to complete. When writing is presented primarily through worksheets and isolated prompts, it can negatively impact student motivation and confidence. However, what remains constant is students' innate desire to problem-solve and engage deeply with topics that feel authentic and relevant to them. This session will demonstrate how to leverage that natural curiosity to drive literacy instruction. Educators will experience how reading, writing, and critical thinking seamlessly come together when students are given a real problem to solve, shifting writing from a task of compliance to a meaningful tool for communication and inquiry.
PRESENTER: Jordyn Gerdes, Special Education Teacher, Old Mill Elementary School, Kentucky.
LOCATION: Coronado C

1:45 PM – 2:45 PM CONCURRENT SESSIONS F – WEDNESDAY (CONTINUED)

SESSION DESCRIPTION: ***Literacy for All: Piloting a K-12 Coaching Model to Elevate Differentiated Small-Group Instruction*****.** As a member of the Virginia Department of Education's 2025 Principal of Distinction Cohort, the presenter successfully piloted a targeted coaching model designed to solve a critical leadership challenge. Effective small-group literacy instruction is a cornerstone of student success, yet school administrators often struggle to provide the specific, actionable feedback required to shift instructional practice. General classroom observation tools frequently miss the nuances of targeted reading interventions, data-driven grouping, and responsive teaching. This interactive session introduces the comprehensive, field-tested framework born from that pilot. Participants will be equipped with an administrator-facing walkthrough "look-fors" tool and a structured post-observation conference guide. Together, these resources bridge the gap between observation and implementation. Attendees will learn how to identify high-leverage literacy practices in real-time, navigate critical post-observation coaching conversations, and foster a culture of continuous improvement that measurably strengthens teacher practice and elevates student outcomes.
PRESENTER: Amanda Voelker, Principal, James River High School, Virginia.
LOCATION: Coronado D

SESSION DESCRIPTION: ***The Importance of Advocating on a State and National Level for your School Program.*** This year, I was honored to be named a national finalist for National Advocacy Chair of the Year at the National Educational Leaders Advocacy Conference, sponsored by the National Association of Secondary School Principals. As the NASSP Advocacy Chair for Alabama, I bring firsthand experience in building meaningful relationships with elected officials at all levels of government. In this session, I'll share practical strategies for connecting with your local, state, and national representatives—and why these relationships matter. You'll learn how to establish credibility with policymakers, communicate your school's needs effectively, and leverage these connections to amplify educator voices in policy decisions that directly impact your students and schools.
PRESENTER: Roderick Sheppard, Deputy Superintendent and former Principal of Florence High School and Florence Learning Center, Florence City Schools, Alabama.
LOCATION: Coronado E

SESSION DESCRIPTION: ***Creating a Culture That Sticks: From Vision to Daily Practice*****.** School culture is built through intentional actions, meaningful relationships, and a shared commitment to excellence. In this session, participants will learn how Forest Lake Elementary, a Title I school located in Columbia, SC, has created a culture in which teachers, students, families, and the community are actively engaged and invested in student success. Through practical examples and proven strategies, attendees will explore how we foster teacher collaboration, strengthen parent and community partnerships, and create memorable student experiences that reinforce our mission every day. Participants will leave with actionable ideas to build a positive, sustainable school culture that inspires ownership, belonging, and lasting impact.
PRESENTER: Benjamin Jackson, Principal, Forest Lake Elementary School, South Carolina.
LOCATION: Coronado F

1:45 PM – 2:45 PM CONCURRENT SESSIONS F – WEDNESDAY (CONTINUED)

SESSION DESCRIPTION: ***Leading Without Evaluating: Creating Trust-Based Coaching Systems in Schools.*** This session explores how a school district redefined the work of literacy and mathematics specialists to strengthen instructional coaching, build teacher leadership capacity, and support sustainable instructional improvement across schools. Rather than functioning as compliance monitors or informal administrators, specialists were intentionally positioned as collaborative instructional partners focused on coaching, facilitation, and teacher learning. Participants will learn how the district developed clearer coaching structures, protected role clarity, and created job-embedded professional learning experiences that empowered teachers while strengthening instructional practice. The session will highlight systems used to support collaborative planning, coaching cycles, reflective conversations, and teacher-led learning opportunities across multiple schools and content areas. Attendees will leave with practical strategies for: clarifying specialist and coaching roles, building trust-based coaching systems, developing teacher leadership capacity, and creating sustainable professional learning structures that improve instruction without increasing compliance pressures.
PRESENTERS: Morey Reinblatt, Coordinator of Middle and Secondary English Language Arts, and Dr. Yashica Latimer, Coordinator of Middle and Secondary Mathematics, Fort Mill School District, South Carolina.
LOCATION: Coronado G

3:00 PM – 4:00 PM CONCURRENT SESSIONS G – WEDNESDAY

SESSION DESCRIPTION: ***The CREED of Success: Building an Exceptional School Climate.*** A positive school culture and climate are essential to student success, educator effectiveness, and community engagement. This session will explore how intentional leadership, collaborative practices, and shared values create an environment where students and staff thrive. Participants will learn strategies for fostering meaningful relationships, building a sense of belonging, celebrating diversity, and promoting academic excellence. Through practical examples and real-world experiences, attendees will gain actionable ideas for strengthening school culture, enhancing student outcomes, and sustaining a climate of excellence within their own schools. Campus School is a laboratory school which promotes excellence in teaching and enthusiasm for learning. Through integration of research into an innovative curriculum, the school can offer its best to aspiring teachers and to the urban community it serves. A diverse school population allows for valuable relationships and collaborations -- educational, cultural, social, and personal -- among the stakeholders who are involved. Teachers, students, and parents working together can maximize outcomes to the benefit of all involved.
PRESENTERS: Dr. Rebecca Scott, Executive Director, Campus School, Dr. Aaren Cassidy, Assistant Director, Campus School and Mrs. Stacy Adams, Executive Director, Campus School Kimball-Memphis, Tennessee.
LOCATION: Monterrey 1-3

SESSION DESCRIPTION: ***Making Every Minute Count: Active Teaching and Learning Through WIN Groups.*** Effective instruction meets students where they are. This engaging session explores how WIN (What I Need) groups can transform instructional time into targeted, student-centered learning experiences that increase engagement, accelerate achievement, and maximize teacher impact. Participants will learn practical strategies for designing flexible WIN groups using assessment data, implementing active learning structures, and creating meaningful interventions and enrichment opportunities that meet the diverse needs of all learners.
Through real-world examples, collaborative discussions, and ready-to-use resources, attendees will leave equipped to implement or strengthen WIN groups that promote active teaching and learning across all grade levels.
PRESENTERS: Stacie Givens, Principal; Cassie Washington, Assistant Principal; Leslie Dutton, Reading Specialist; and Jessica Mitchell, Resource Teacher, Austinville Elementary School, Alabama.
LOCATION: Yucatan 1

3:00 PM – 4:00 PM CONCURRENT SESSIONS G – WEDNESDAY (CONTINUED)

SESSION DESCRIPTION: ***From Principal to Architect: Designing Leadership Ecosystems That Develop Leaders***. Schools rarely improve because of isolated initiatives. They improve because leaders intentionally design organizations where relationships, systems, people, and purpose work together to create the conditions for continuous improvement. This session introduces **Leadership Architecture**, an emerging framework for intentional school design grounded in systems thinking, organizational learning, and leadership development. Rather than viewing the principal as a manager of programs, Leadership Architecture reimagines the leader as an architect who intentionally designs interconnected leadership ecosystems that develop people, strengthen collaboration, and sustain organizational flourishing. Using an authentic school transformation journey as a case study, participants will explore how instructional leadership, professional learning communities, distributed leadership, school culture, attendance systems, intervention structures, and data cycles function as one interconnected ecosystem rather than independent initiatives. Through reflection, practical examples, and collaborative design activities, participants will begin evaluating the **leadership architecture** of their own schools while leaving with practical tools and strategies for intentionally designing schools where leaders are developed, relationships flourish, and organizational excellence is sustained.
PRESENTER: Dr. Patrick Holness, Principal, Franklin Elementary School, New Jersey.
LOCATION: Yucatan 2

SESSION DESCRIPTION: ***From Consumers to Creators: Classroom-Ready Tech Projects for K-5.*** Technology time doesn't have to mean another app or another worksheet on a screen. This session gives K-5 teachers practical, classroom-ready project ideas that turn students into creators, not just consumers. From designing in Tinkercad to building habitats in Minecraft Education to producing simple podcasts, participants will explore real projects tied to core content areas like science, ELA, and social studies, projects that can be adapted and used the following week. No tech background required. Teachers will leave with specific project ideas by grade band, tips for making it work with limited devices or time, and a ready-to-use planning template they can bring straight into their classroom. This session is designed for elementary classroom teachers, instructional coaches, and specialists looking for practical, low-lift ways to make technology time count.
PRESENTER: Jacqueline Campbell, Founder and Lead Consultant, Promise Consulting, LLC, South Carolina.
LOCATION: Yucatan 3

3:00 PM – 4:00 PM CONCURRENT SESSIONS G – WEDNESDAY (CONTINUED)

SESSION DESCRIPTION: ***There's a Great Big Beautiful Tomorrow: Building Leadership Capacity for Continuous Improvement.*** In today's rapidly evolving educational landscape, effective school leadership extends far beyond the principal's office. There's a Great Big Beautiful Tomorrow: Building Leadership Capacity for Continuous Improvement is designed to equip school administrators with the knowledge, skills, and strategies needed to develop leadership at every level of the organization while fostering a culture of continuous growth and improvement. We will explore how principals can intentionally cultivate teacher leaders, empower collaborative teams, and create systems that sustain school improvement efforts. Participants will examine current challenges facing schools—including teacher recruitment and retention, school culture and climate, instructional leadership, and administrator wellness—through the lens of distributed leadership and capacity building. Through practical application, reflection, and collaborative problem-solving, participants will learn how to strengthen leadership pipelines, develop high-performing teams, leverage data to drive decision-making, and establish structures that support continuous improvement. Emphasis will be placed on creating positive school cultures where staff members are empowered to lead, innovate, and contribute to meaningful change.
PRESENTER: Dr. Alicia Early, Director of Federal Programs, Compliance, and Strategic Initiatives, Gulf Shores School District, Alabama.
LOCATION: Coronado A

SESSION DESCRIPTION: ***Short Cycle, Big Gains, and High Expectations.*** What if every student received additional time and support before falling behind? This session highlights the implementation of a Short-Cycle Learning model that ensures students receive timely interventions, enrichment opportunities, and frequent feedback throughout the learning process. Participants will learn how short-cycle assessments, targeted interventions, PLC collaboration, and a focus on essential standards can dramatically improve student achievement while creating a culture of accountability and growth. Attendees will leave with practical strategies for organizing intervention time, monitoring student progress, and building systems that help every student succeed.
PRESENTER: Darren Tobey, Superintendent, Broken Bow Schools, Nebraska.
LOCATION: Coronado B

SESSION DESCRIPTION: ***Beyond the Classroom Walls: The Power of Cross-Curricular Synergy.*** What happens when the gym, the lab, and the classroom collide? In this high-energy session, a 5th-grade teacher, a STEAM specialist, and a PE instructor pull back the curtain on a year of radical cross-collaboration. Move beyond isolated "specials" and explore how to transform standard units like the human brain, animal adaptations, and colonial history into immersive, multi-sensory experiences. From using VR headsets to walk through Jamestown to identifying neurological functions during a "Glow Week" PE challenge, we will share a blueprint for "sticky learning." These are just a few highlights of a much larger movement; we will showcase an extensive portfolio of additional cross-collaboration experiences that prove any subject can be bridged. Attendees will leave with practical strategies for aligning schedules, co-planning authentic units, and leveraging community experts to bring curriculum to life. Join us to see how breaking down the silos between subjects can ignite student engagement and turn every corner of the school into a classroom.
PRESENTERS: Kaylee Compton, STEAM Teacher, Andrea Miller, Teacher and Megan Boston, Teacher, Old Mill Elementary School, Kentucky.
LOCATION: Coronado C

3:00 PM – 4:00 PM CONCURRENT SESSIONS G – WEDNESDAY (CONTINUED)

SESSION DESCRIPTION: ***The CLIMB.*** Shifting a school culture takes time, vision, and relentless execution theory suggests it takes three to five years of intentional effort to yield true systemic change. When our leadership journey began, parents and teachers openly referred to our school as "the black hole" because of its long history of low performance. Burdened by consecutive D ratings and a history of never climbing higher than a C, the baseline was daunting. Fast-forward through our multi-year journey: as a 100% Title I secondary school serving a 20% Students with Disabilities (SWD) population, we made history by becoming the first secondary school in Hendry County to ever earn an "A" rating. This session details "The CLIMB", a practical roadmap for school leaders seeking sustainable turnaround. Attendees will walk through our 3-to-5-year transformation framework, built entirely around three non-negotiable core beliefs: Relationships, Mindset, and Data. We will share how we dismantled toxic perceptions, restored trust across our campus community, and established high-yield instructional practices that prove demographic challenges do not limit student performance.
PRESENTERS: Tina Kelley, Principal and Samantha Johnston, Assistant Principal, Clewiston Middle School, Florida.
LOCATION: Coronado D

SESSION DESCRIPTION: ***From Red Flags to Results: Using Data to Strengthen Reading Instruction.*** Universal screening data is often used to identify students for intervention, but it can also be one of the most powerful tools for strengthening tier one instruction. In this session, educators will learn how to move from "red flags" on screening to implementing diagnostic and prescriptive instruction aligned throughout all three tiers. Participants will examine how consistent instructional routines, language, and error correction practices between Tier One and intervention settings accelerate learning and improve transfer of skills. Participants will leave ready to use data to refine tier one instruction, make smart core adjustments, and strengthen instructional routines. The goal is prevention, coherence, and a unified reading system that supports more students the first time.
PRESENTERS: Keighley George, Lead Interventionist and Chrystal Barker, Reading Coach, Forest Lake Elementary School, South Carolina.
LOCATION: Coronado E

SESSION DESCRIPTION: ***Imagineering the Library: The Magic of Yearly Themes.*** What if the school library became more than a place students visit to check out books? What if it became an experience they looked forward to all year long? Imagineering the Library explores how a purposeful yearly theme can transform the library into an engaging, connected learning environment. Inspired by the idea of Imagineering—combining imagination, creativity, storytelling, and intentional design—this approach uses one overarching theme to connect library lessons, read-alouds, book displays, reading challenges, STEM activities, makerspace experiences, and special events. Participants will learn ways to select a theme that has enough flexibility to support an entire school year, connect it to curriculum standards and literacy goals, and create developmentally appropriate experiences from pre-K through sixth grade.
The session will also demonstrate how themes can encourage cross-curricular collaboration. School nurses, Classroom Teachers, Art, Music, and STEM specialists can become part of the story through nutrition and wellness fairs, STEM challenges, concerts, plays, art shows, literacy night, and other themed events.
PRESENTERS: Misty Buerhaus, Library Media Specialist; Sarah Ryan, School Nurse; Laura Abernathy, Graduate Assistant; Avery Witt, Art and Music Instructor; and Dr. Eric Kirkman, Director, Kilby Laboratory School, Alabama.
LOCATION: Coronado F

3:00 PM – 4:00 PM CONCURRENT SESSIONS G – WEDNESDAY (CONTINUED)

SESSION DESCRIPTION: ***Reframing Success: Making Wellness a Core Component of a High-Performing High School Culture.*** Consider this, high achievement and emotional well-being do not have to be mutually exclusive. Follow one school's journey as they developed and implemented a comprehensive Social-Emotional Learning (SEL) and Wellness Program impacting every student, faculty member, and classroom in a high-performing environment. School leaders and educators will explore how leveraging distributed leadership, stakeholder voice, and systemic articulation can successfully shift school culture to prioritize wellness alongside academic rigor. In this interactive session, participants will:
- Receive turnkey classroom materials, including restorative circle discussion prompts and community-building activities.
- Examine sample schedules, master agendas, and planning resources used to execute school-wide Wellness Days.
- Analyze their own school dynamics to identify strategic, actionable steps toward designing a tailored wellness program that fits their community.

PRESENTERS: David Cohen, Principal and Dr. Micheala Finlay Assistant Principal, Jericho High School, New York.
LOCATION: Coronado G

SESSION DESCRIPTION: ***How the BRSE Process Brings Magic to Lighthouse Schools.*** Discover how the Blue Ribbon Schools of Excellence (BRSE) process can inspire meaningful transformation and help move your school from **Good to Great**. In this engaging session, BRSE Lighthouse School principals and superintendents will share firsthand how the BRSE process strengthened their schools through data-driven decision making, a positive school culture and climate, high-quality teaching and learning, and stronger parent and community engagement. Learn how the BRSE framework, built around nine comprehensive categories of school excellence, provides a practical roadmap for continuous improvement. You'll also see how the BRSE Action Plan Blueprint transforms assessment data into actionable strategies that lead to measurable results. Many schools find that simply completing the BRSE assessment provides valuable insights that immediately influence school improvement efforts. Whether you are beginning your continuous improvement journey or striving to become a BRSE Lighthouse School, you'll leave this session with a clear understanding of the BRSE process, practical strategies you can implement, and inspiration from school leaders who have successfully achieved Lighthouse recognition.
PRESENTERS: April Stansberry, Director of Schools and District Partnerships, Blue Ribbon Schools of Excellence, Florida; Dr. Jeremy Kidd, Kentucky Association of School Administrators (KASA) 2026 Building-Level Administrator of the Year Award.
and Assistant Superintendent, Laurel County Public Schools, Kentucky; and Ben Baker, Alabama Superintendent of the Year and Superintendent, Dale County School District, Alabama.
LOCATION: Coronado Ballroom H-J

DAY FOUR - THURSDAY, DECEMBER 3, 2026

7:30 AM COFFEE SERVICE
LOCATION: Monterrey Lobby

8:00 AM - 10:30 AM REGISTRATION
LOCATION: South Registration Counter

8:00 AM – 9:00AM CONCURRENT SESSIONS H – THURSDAY

SESSION DESCRIPTION: ***Bump it Up! - Easy Ways to Improve Rigor and Relevance.*** This fast-paced session delivers one powerful idea: raising rigor doesn't require a new program—just small, intentional shifts in how we design student questions, tasks, and ensuring engagement. Drawing from classroom examples and state assessment expectations, this presentation shows how everyday assignments often sit at low cognitive levels even when standards and assessments require deeper thinking. Participants will learn a simple, repeatable process for "bumping up" any activity using Depth of Knowledge (DOK) and the Rigor/Relevance Framework. Attendees will see how quick prompts—like asking students to justify, compare, or apply learning—can immediately elevate rigor and relevance without adding to teacher workload. Leaders will leave with a practical lens they can use in walk-throughs, PLCs, and coaching conversations to help teachers design richer learning experiences that better prepare students for the demands of modern assessments and real-world problem solving.
PRESENTERS: Stewart Thorson, Principal and Christy Lang, Assistant Principal, Farley Elementary School, Alabama.
LOCATION: Monterrey 1

SESSION DESCRIPTION: ***Station Rotation and Hands on Learning*****.** Participants will explore the research behind hands-on centers and learn how our teachers structure tiered instruction, including literacy centers and math stations. Presenters will share best practices for how to plan differentiated tiered instruction and how to establish classroom literacy centers and math stations to ensure students are engaged in instruction. We compared data of teachers who did/did not use data to plan tiered instruction and literacy centers and math stations. Our conclusion was that teachers who used data to inform tiered instruction had students who achieved and grew at a higher level.
PRESENTERS: April Clark, Principal and Sara Northcutt, Curriculum Specialist, Roger B. Chaffee Elementary School, Alabama.
LOCATION: Monterrey 2

8:00 AM – 9:00AM CONCURRENT SESSIONS H – THURSDAY (CONTINUED)

SESSION DESCRIPTION: ***"From Textbook to Town Hall: Empowering Student Voice Through Civic Action".*** When students are given meaningful roles in real decision-making, engagement shifts from participation to ownership. The Youth in Government, geared towards grades 6-12, provides structured opportunities for students to move beyond learning about government in a textbook and instead actively participate in civic processes that impact their school community. This session explores how the Youth in Government program strengthens student voice, civic literacy, public speaking skills, and school-community partnerships through authentic civic learning experiences. Participants will learn how the program is structured as a connected cycle of civic learning and will receive practical resources, templates, and turnkey materials that can be adapted for implementation in their own schools and communities. The session begins with strategies for building a shared vision for civic engagement and developing partnerships with educators, administrators, community leaders, and local stakeholders. The session will examine how students identify meaningful issues within their school or community through surveys, school data, and structured discussions. Participants will explore how students gather research and stakeholder perspectives, ensuring that multiple voices are represented throughout the problem-solving process.
PRESENTER: Leyla Kaja, Grade 8 Social Studies Teacher/ Youth in Government Chairperson, Joyce Kilmer School, New Jersey.
LOCATION: Monterrey 3

SESSION DESCRIPTION: ***The Power of the Principal and Assistant Principal Partnership.*** While today's school leadership is often framed through the lens of a single head administrator, running an efficient school truly takes a cohesive, strategic dream team. Drawing on real-life examples from working alongside leaders at Edwin Forrest Elementary, a two-campus, inner-city school in Philadelphia with over 850 pre-K-5th-grade students and 120+ staff members, this session will tackle the often-overlooked co-leadership partnership between the Principal and their Assistant Principal (AP). Join Vance McNear, M.Ed., Lindback Award-winning principal of Edwin Forrest Elementary, as he shares a proven framework that has empowered administrative teams to shift from delegation as a mere division of tasks to distributive leadership that ensures true ownership in your school. Move beyond checking operational boxes and start sharing ownership of your school by intentionally developing your APs' capacity to lead, building your administrative pipeline, combating burnout, and having a measurable impact on student success.
PRESENTER: Vance McNear, Principal, Edwin Forrest Elementary School, Pennsylvania.
LOCATION: Yucatan 1

8:00 AM – 9:00AM CONCURRENT SESSIONS H – THURSDAY (CONTINUED)

SESSION DESCRIPTION: ***From Tech Consumption to Student Creation: Building K–5 Systems for AI + Computer Science Integration.*** In today's elementary classrooms, technology is often present—but not always purposeful. This session explores how schools can shift from passive technology use to intentional student creation through a structured K–5 system for integrating computer science and AI across core content areas. Participants will learn a practical, replicable framework for embedding coding, robotics, digital creation, and AI tools into everyday instruction without adding additional standalone programs or overwhelming teachers. Through real classroom examples and project-based learning models, this session demonstrates how students can move beyond consuming digital content to designing, building, and problem-solving with technology. Attendees will explore how tools such as coding platforms, robotics systems, digital storytelling, and AI-assisted learning can be strategically aligned to ELA, math, science, and social studies standards. The focus will be on building vertical progression across grade levels so that students develop increasingly sophisticated computational thinking and creation skills from kindergarten through fifth grade. Educators will leave with a clear roadmap for implementation, including strategies for teacher readiness, curriculum alignment, and sustainable school-wide systems that support innovation. This session is designed for school leaders and instructional teams ready to build a culture where students are not just using technology—but creating with it in meaningful, standards-aligned ways.
PRESENTER: Jacqueline Campbell, Founder and Lead Consultant, Promise Consulting, LLC, South Carolina.
LOCATION: Yucatan 2

SESSION DESCRIPTION: ***Reimagining Intervention: How High-Performing Schools Close Learning Gaps Without Overwhelming Teachers*****.** Schools face increasing pressure to accelerate student learning while avoiding initiative fatigue. This session explores practical strategies schools use to strengthen Tier 2 and Tier 3 support, maximize intervention time, and create sustainable systems that help students make measurable growth. Participants will leave with actionable ideas for improving intervention structures while increasing student engagement and confidence. Participants will learn how to strengthen intervention practices, increase student engagement, support MTSS implementation, and improve achievement outcomes through targeted support. Detailed Instructions: Implement a consistent intervention cycle by identifying student needs through assessment data, providing targeted small-group instruction, monitoring progress regularly, and adjusting supports as needed. Resources include Hands-On Standards® Math Intervention, Daily Math Fluency Intervention, Phonemic Awareness & Phonics Toolkits, and MTSS frameworks.
PRESENTER: Stacy Bradley, Educational Sales Consultant, and former Assistant Principal and Teacher, Duval County Schools, Florida.
LOCATION: Yucatan 3

8:00 AM – 9:00AM CONCURRENT SESSIONS H – THURSDAY (CONTINUED)

SESSION DESCRIPTION: ***Building High-Scale Career Training Partnerships.*** The Launch Program is designed to create career transformation through incorporating career exposure, training, and placement experiences directed toward generating ongoing career transitional outcomes in students' chosen fields. Specifically, Launch consists of Florence High School and its Career Technical and Specialized Education (CTSE) department forming workforce development partnerships with a large spectrum of business-industry organizations designed to enable CTSE students to function in various intern, extern, and/or apprenticeship employment roles while in high school. Additionally, these "Launch" participants are required to complete professional skills classes (employability) as well as career-focused certifications, which enhance their professional marketability moving forward. These strategic partnerships have helped numerous students both identify their specific career path while also leaving them equipped to do their desired role at a high level. The Launch program has won numerous awards and recognitions while serving as a state model of innovation and excellence, most recently being honored with the Governor's "Seal of Excellence."
PRESENTER: Dr. Corey Behel, Career Technical Education Director, Florence High School, Alabama.
LOCATION: Coronado A

SESSION DESCRIPTION: ***Rooted in Tier 1: Building District-Wide Systems that Support Learning, Wellness, and Belonging for Students and Staff.*** In Commerce City Schools, we've learned that sustainable MTSS implementation starts with strong Tier 1 systems — consistent, proactive supports that benefit every student and every adult. This session will showcase how our district has aligned academic, behavioral, and social-emotional supports within Tier 1 to ensure that every learner begins with a solid foundation. Participants will explore how we've built collaborative MTSS structures that connect district leadership, mental health coordination, and staff wellness to strengthen Tier 1 practices across all schools. Our work focuses on creating predictable systems, building capacity through coaching and professional learning, and embedding wellness supports that sustain educators as they deliver Tier 1 instruction and interventions with fidelity. From developing consistent Tier 1 behavior expectations and progress monitoring tools to integrating SEL and trauma-informed practices, we'll share how our district uses data to drive improvement and equity. Participants will also see how staff wellness initiatives — such as after-school fitness programs, on-site supports, and recognition systems — serve as the "adult Tier 1," ensuring the people implementing MTSS are cared for and supported.
PRESENTER: Dr. Lauren Milford, Director of Human Resources and Engagement, Commerce City Schools, Georgia.
LOCATION: Coronado B

8:00 AM – 9:00AM CONCURRENT SESSIONS H – THURSDAY (CONTINUED)

SESSION DESCRIPTION: ***Blueprint for Excellence: How Leadership, Structures, and People Transform Schools*****.** What does it really take to transform a school into a high-performing learning community? While every school has unique challenges, lasting success is built on intentional leadership decisions rather than isolated initiatives. This session explores the leadership framework used to transform John Handley High School. Participants will examine how strong hiring practices, clearly defined systems, and a student-centered culture work together to create sustainable school improvement. Presenters will share practical strategies for:
-Hiring and developing exceptional educators who strengthen school culture.
-Establishing structures and procedures that allow staff to thrive.
-Building reflective, data-driven leadership systems that monitor student learning and guide instructional decisions.
-Aligning curriculum, evaluation, and professional learning around student success.
-Strategically allocating resources to areas of greatest student need.
-Creating a culture where staff and students feel supported, valued, and empowered.
-Knowing when to accelerate improvement efforts and when to provide support, ensuring change is both ambitious and sustainable.
Participants will leave with a practical framework for leading school transformation that can be adapted to schools of any size or context. Rather than focusing solely on programs or initiatives, this session emphasizes the leadership decisions, organizational systems, and collaborative culture that create lasting excellence.
PRESENTERS: Susan Braithwaite, Principal and Emily Badman, Instructional Assistant Principal, John Handley High School, Virginia.
LOCATION: Coronado C

SESSION DESCRIPTION: ***Infusing Joy into Literacy for Children Across All Grade Levels: A Pathway to Lifelong Learning, Identity, and Academic Success*****.** In the wake of declining national reading outcomes and widening opportunity gaps, educators are called to rethink not only how we teach literacy, but how students experience it. This session explores the transformative power of joy as a critical lever for improving literacy outcomes for children across all grade levels. Grounded in research, practitioner experience, and equity-centered frameworks, this presentation will demonstrate how joyful, culturally responsive literacy practices increase engagement, strengthen identity development, and accelerate academic achievement. Participants will leave with actionable strategies to design literacy environments where students see themselves, feel valued, and develop a genuine love for reading that extends beyond the classroom.
PRESENTERS: Rodney Johnson, Principal; Stephanie Carey, Counselor; and Carly Swita, School Based Math Teacher Leader, John Moffett School, Pennsylvania.
LOCATION: Coronado D

8:00 AM – 9:00AM CONCURRENT SESSIONS H – THURSDAY (CONTINUED)

SESSION DESCRIPTION: ***Beyond the Behavior Chart: Building a School Where Everyone Feels Seen, Valued, and Celebrated.*** What if PBIS became more than expectations, incentives, and consequences? What if it became the framework for creating a school where students want to come to school, teachers feel appreciated, families feel connected, and the community feels invested? Beyond the Behavior Chart is a practical, action-focused session designed for elementary school administrators who want to intentionally build a positive school culture through relationships, recognition, PBIS, and celebration. Using examples and lessons from Jones Valley Elementary School, participants will explore how school leaders can move beyond traditional PBIS systems to create a culture where positive behavior, academic growth, attendance, character, effort, staff contributions, family involvement, and community partnerships are consistently recognized. The central message of this session is simple: What we consistently recognize becomes part of our culture. Celebration should not be reserved for honor roll students, perfect attendance, Teacher Appreciation Week, or the end of the school year. When administrators intentionally create opportunities for people to feel seen throughout the year, celebration becomes a leadership strategy. Participants will leave with practical tools they can immediately adapt for their own schools, including an Administrator Celebration Checklist and a Yearlong Celebration Blueprint.
PRESENTERS: Crystal Alexander, Principal; Fisher Hedgeman, Assistant Principal; Alex Garner, Collaborative Teacher/Aspiring Administrator; and Kristina Swearengin and Jennifer Land, PBIS Leads/Classroom Teachers, Jones Valley Elementary School, Alabama.
LOCATION: Coronado E

SESSION DESCRIPTION: ***You, Too, See Transformation: Leading Schools through Uncertainty, Conflict, and Change.*** As some of the most dynamic social institutions, schools engage and serve at least two generations of stakeholders, daily. The expected outcomes of schools are multi-faceted—aligning with various accountability metrics and governance matters, while also impacting current and future generations—thereby cultivating ever-evolving needs of internal and external stakeholders, as well as the greater ecosystem. *You, Too, See Transformation (UCCT)* is created and delivered as an innovative and restorative experience designed to assist educators, leaders, and youth development professionals as they navigate uncertainty, conflict, and change, ultimately leading to TRANSFORMATION. Participants will engage in reflective experiences, establish new goals and practices, and partner with peers to accelerate leadership development competencies, including a focus on resilience.
PRESENTERS: Catherine Bell, M.Ed., Managing Director, Program Excellence, Center for Supportive Schools (CSS) and Jonathan D. Mathis, Ph.D., CEO, CSS
LOCATION: Coronado F

8:00 AM – 9:00AM CONCURRENT SESSIONS H – THURSDAY (CONTINUED)

SESSION DESCRIPTION: ***How Your School Can Become a Blue Ribbon School of Excellence.*** In this session, we'll explore what the Blue Ribbon Schools of Excellence designation means, how your school measures up to the nation's top-performing institutions, and how the process works for **all types of schools**, not just high performers. Where do you start and what can you expect? If you would like to become a Blue Ribbon School of Excellence this is the session for you. Find out what is a Blue Ribbon School of Excellence and learn about the process to become one. We will share all the details from the application process to being named a Blue Ribbon School of Excellence. Interested in the Blue Ribbon School of Excellence process, but you are concerned because your school is not high performing. Come to this session and you will put your concerns aside. Find out how the process works for all schools.
PRESENTER: Jayne Ellspermann, 2015 NASSP National Principal of the Year; Educational Consultant; Leadership Coach/Trainer; and Blue Ribbon Schools of Excellence, BRSE, Vice Board Chair and Senior Assessor, Florida.
LOCATION: Coronado G

9:15 AM – 10:15 AM CONCURRENT SESSIONS I – THURSDAY

SESSION DESCRIPTION: ***From Firefighting to Leading, "What They Don't Teach You About the Principalship".*** The transition into the principalship is one of the most demanding leaps an educator can make. Moving from the classroom or an assistant role into the lead chair requires a rapid shift from daily management to long-term strategic vision. Drawing on 17 years of experience leading a nationally recognized high school and mentoring over 150 school leaders across the country, Scott L. Stewart shares critical reflections, hard-won lessons, and actionable frameworks. This session will help new and aspiring principals establish organizational clarity, build personal resilience, and move from survival mode to impactful leadership.
PRESENTER: Scott L. Stewart, *CEO, Leverage Leaders & Chairman of the Board, Blue Ribbon Schools of Excellence, Inc.*, South Carolina. **Scott L. Stewart** is an author, executive coach, and dedicated advocate for educational excellence. He currently serves as the CEO of Leverage Leaders and Chairman of the Board of Directors for Blue Ribbon Schools of Excellence, Inc., where he supports school systems nationwide in achieving operational and instructional clarity. A veteran educator, Scott spent 17 years as a high school principal, notably leading the nationally recognized New Albany High School in Central Ohio. He is also a leadership coach for the South Carolina State Department of Education and the author of *The Resilient Leader*, a definitive guide helping school administrators navigate the complex, high-stakes expectations of modern school leadership. Throughout his career, Scott has personally mentored and coached over 150 principals across the United States.
LOCATION: Monterrey 1

SESSION DESCRIPTION: ***The Kind Effect: How Leaders Build Positive School Cultures Where Scholars Thrive.*** We spend enormous amounts of time discussing standards, programs. testing and data. And while those things matter, we sometimes overlook the one factor that influences every single one of them, school culture. Because the truth is this: students do not learn well in environments where they do not feel safe, teachers do not thrive in environments where they do not feel valued; and schools cannot improve if their culture is broken. What if the most powerful strategy for improving academic achievement wasn't a program, curriculum, or initiative but school culture? Campus Director Shanda N. Walker shares the leadership framework she uses to cultivate positive school environments where scholars feel safe, seen, and supported. Through compelling stories and actionable strategies, Walker will demonstrate how leaders can transform school culture into the foundation for academic excellence.
PRESENTER: Shanda Walker, Campus Director, Varnett East, Texas.
LOCATION: Monterrey 2

SESSION DESCRIPTION: ***Reimagining Discipline: From ISS to Restorative In-School Education.*** At Joyce Kilmer Middle School, we redefined our approach to student discipline by replacing the traditional In-School Suspension (ISS) model with a restorative, student-centered framework known as RISE (Restorative In-School Education). Traditional ISS models often isolate students from instruction, limit access to peer interaction, and emphasize compliance overgrowth. While effective in removing immediate disruptions, ISS does little to address the underlying causes of behavior or equip students with the skills needed for long-term success. The RISE program was developed to shift discipline from a punitive, exclusionary practice to a restorative, instructional experience. Instead of being removed from learning, students in RISE: remain academically; participate in structured; engage in social-emotional learning; and receive guided support through mentoring conversations with staff.
PRESENTER: Justin Bloss, Dean of Students, Milltown Borough Public Schools, New Jersey.
LOCATION: Monterrey 3

SESSION DESCRIPTION: ***Building the Teacher Pipeline: How Schools and Universities Can Work Together.*** With teacher shortages continuing to impact schools nationwide, developing a strong educator pipeline has never been more important. This session will explore proven strategies for recruiting, inspiring, and supporting future teachers through meaningful partnerships among K–12 schools, higher education institutions, and community organizations. Participants will learn how to create opportunities that engage students early, strengthen educator preparation, and build pathways that lead to successful teaching careers. Through practical examples and replicable strategies, attendees will leave with actionable ideas to develop or enhance their own teacher pipeline, strengthen recruitment efforts, and cultivate the next generation of highly qualified educators.
PRESENTER: Dr. Tamara Pack, Associate Professor and Chair, Lander University, South Carolina.
LOCATION: Yucatan 1

SESSION DESCRIPTION: ***How to Establish Leadership Labs: A Place Where Theory Meets Practice.*** Instructional leadership includes days filled with planned and unplanned activities. This session provides district and school-based leaders with practical ideas for planning, implementing, and monitoring organizational and academic structures through their instructional leadership teams and school-based leaders. Participants will observe an implementation model for any school setting, which will include planning and monitoring templates for immediate use. The model lab will include sample teams, scheduling, and monitoring protocols. This is where you turn theory into practice and transform what should happen into what can happen.
PRESENTER: Dr. Nina Williams, Executive Director of School Supports, Teacher Growth, and Leadership, Dothan City Schools District, Alabama.
LOCATION: Yucatan 2

SESSION DESCRIPTION: ***From Surviving to Thriving: Practical Strategies for Sustainable School Turnaround.*** We talk about flipped classrooms- but what does it take to flip a school? It requires structures, systems, clarity and investments of all stakeholders. Within this session, learn about the process by which Maupin Elementary- a high poverty, urban school- showed continuous improvement in every indicator- both academic and non-academic; and moved and stayed out of the perpetually lowest performing school in the state.
PRESENTERS: Allyson Vitato, Principal, Maupin Elementary School and Phillip Guthrie, Education Recovery Leader, Kentucky Department of Education, Kentucky.
LOCATION: Yucatan 3

SESSION DESCRIPTION: ***Beyond Buy-In: Sustaining the SOR Through Systems and Culture in a Small, Rural School.*** Implementing the Science of Reading is challenging in any school—but sustaining it can feel even more daunting when you're a small, rural district where educators wear multiple hats and resources are limited. This session shares how one rural elementary school in east central Indiana serving students from diverse socioeconomic backgrounds transformed those challenges into strengths by building sustainable systems rather than depending on additional personnel or programs. Three years into implementation, we have learned that lasting literacy improvement grows from cultivating teacher expertise, developing shared leadership, creating efficient systems, and fostering a school culture where every educator sees themselves as a literacy leader. We will share how our team built a sustainable literacy model that continues to evolve despite limited staffing and resources.
PRESENTERS: Kelly Whitinger, Literacy Specialist and Todd Reagan, Principal, Wes-Del Elementary School, Indiana.
LOCATION: Coronado A

SESSION DESCRIPTION: ***From an F to a Blue Ribbon School: Building Places People Want to Be and Places Kids Can Win.*** How do you take a failing school and turn it into a Blue Ribbon School of Excellence? You don't do it by finding "better kids," and you don't do it by relying on the "teacher lottery." You do it by owning the process. In this candid, high-energy session, Dr. Layne Dillard shares the real roadmap she used to move a high-poverty school from an F rating to award-winning status. Moving beyond toxic positivity and initiative overload, this session focuses on the work that actually drives transformation: design, discipline, and alignment. Participants will learn practical ways to: Escape the Urgency Trap: Move your campus from constantly reacting to symptoms to strategically designing systems that address their causes. Use Data as Bloodwork: Transform data from a weapon of shame into a tool for diagnosis, intentionality, and action. Design for Intervention: Build support into the master schedule before students fail instead of scrambling to respond after they do. Scale what Works: Move beyond isolated pockets of great teaching to create a shared environment where every student benefits from what works. These principles are not only for turnaround schools but work anywhere leaders are serious about improvement—whether the goal is to move from an F to award-winning status or from a 90 to a 98. Walk away with the clarity and courage to make your next right move—and ensure that, in your building, "all" truly means all.
PRESENTER: Dr. Layne Dillard, Educational Administrator, Office of School Improvement, Alabama State Department of Education, Alabama.
LOCATION: Coronado B

SESSION DESCRIPTION: ***The Harlan Way: Six Award-Winning Programs Driving Student Success.*** Harlan Elementary School has established itself as a leader in innovative educational practices and student engagement, earning recognition as a six-time award-winning school through the Council for Leaders in Alabama Schools (CLAS) School of Distinction program and a two time award-winning CLAS Banner School. These honors reflect Harlan's unwavering commitment to creating meaningful learning experiences, fostering student leadership, and building strong connections among students, families, and the community. At the heart of Harlan's success is a culture centered on engagement, relationships, and continuous improvement. Through several signature programs, the school has developed opportunities that empower students academically, socially, and emotionally. 1. Harlan's most celebrated initiative is Goodnight Harlan, a family engagement program designed to strengthen the connection between home and school. 2. The school's Lion Buddies program promotes mentorship and relationship-building across grade levels. College students are paired with younger peers to provide encouragement, academic support, and positive role modeling. 3.Harlan's innovative FLEX Scheduling model ensures that every student receives the support or enrichment needed to maximize learning. By strategically utilizing instructional time, teachers can provide targeted interventions, enrichment opportunities, and individualized instruction based on student needs. 4. To improve writing instruction across all grade levels, Harlan implemented a Vertical Stack Writing Audit. This collaborative process allows teachers to analyze student writing expectations from kindergarten through sixth grade, ensuring consistency, alignment, and progressive skill development. 5. Student leadership and service are exemplified through Peer Helpers: Petals of Love, a program that empowers students to make a positive impact on their school and community. 6. The Read to Right program reflects Harlan's commitment to literacy as the foundation for student success. By providing targeted reading support, intervention opportunities, and engaging literacy experiences, the program helps ensure that all students develop the reading skills necessary to thrive academically and beyond.
PRESENTERS: Thomas Casteel, Principal, and Amanda Green, Counselor, Harlan Elementary School, and Sonja Croone, District Social Worker, Florence City Schools, Alabama.
LOCATION: Coronado C

SESSION DESCRIPTION: ***Culture by Design: Small Leadership Moves That Create Extraordinary Schools.*** How do school leaders intentionally build a culture where teachers stay, students thrive, and excellence becomes the expectation rather than the exception? In this session, participants will explore practical leadership strategies used in a large comprehensive high school to strengthen staff morale, increase visibility, improve communication, and build trust, without increasing budgets or adding initiatives. Through real examples, attendees will leave with immediately implementable ideas that transform everyday leadership moments into culture-building opportunities. School culture is not built through a single initiative -- it is shaped by the small, intentional leadership decisions made every day. This session highlights a practical leadership framework focused on creating a culture where educators feel valued, supported, and inspired to do their best work. Participants will explore how intentional leadership practices, including visible leadership, meaningful recognition, purposeful communication, relationship-building, and thoughtfully designed meetings, can strengthen staff morale, increase engagement, and foster a shared commitment to student success. Rather than relying on costly programs or large-scale reforms, this approach demonstrates how consistent, people-centered leadership actions can create lasting organizational change.
PRESENTER: Amber Saunders, Principal, Jupiter High School, Florida.
LOCATION: Coronado D

SESSION DESCRIPTION: ***From Compliance to Clarity: Building Teacher Capacity Through Intentional PLCs***. Teacher clarity is one of the highest-impact influences on student learning, but translating research into consistent classroom practice requires intentional support. This session shares how South Jackson Elementary School embedded teacher clarity into weekly professional learning communities through collaborative planning, learning intentions, success criteria, formative assessment, and instructional reflection. Participants will explore practical leadership strategies, coaching structures, and ready-to-use resources to empower teachers to strengthen instructional practice and foster a collaborative culture focused on student learning. Attendees will leave with an implementation framework and adaptable tools to support teacher clarity in their own schools and districts.
PRESENTER: Dr. Heather Allison, Assistant Principal, South Jackson Elementary School, Georgia
LOCATION: Coronado E

SESSION DESCRIPTION: ***More Than Rules and Rulers: Designing the Soul of Our School*.** Let's be honest: in Philadelphia, we don't just run schools; we navigate complex ecosystems. As principals in this city, we know that our school communities have immense heart, but we also know how quickly "the grind" can lead to burnout. Too often, we are forced to focus on the "rulers"—the compliance, the mandates, and the rigid systems—while the human beings inside our buildings are running on empty. The result? Great teachers leave, and student outcomes stall. In this session, we're stepping out of our offices to have a real, honest conversation about how we restructured our schools to prioritize educational vitality. We'll share how we moved away from survival mode by intentionally designing sustainable, supportive school structures. We'll show you how we audited our schedules, streamlined our operations, and realigned our daily systems to do two things at once: protect our staff's morale so they want to stay, and create the consistent, stable environment our students need to thrive. No lofty theories—just practical, battle-tested strategies from two Philly leaders who are making it work.
PRESENTERS: Nicole Patterson, Principal, William H. Ziegler Elementary School and Dr. Cassandra Houston, Principal, Ethan Allen Elementary School, Pennsylvania.
LOCATION: Coronado F

SESSION DESCRIPTION: ***From Rural Roots to Global Reach: How One Title I Elementary School Built a Culture of Excellence*.** What does it take to build a school where students thrive, teachers feel empowered, and families genuinely feel like partners? Stanfield Elementary School, a rural Title I school in North Carolina, has experienced significant transformation in recent years. As enrollment grew from 364 to nearly 500 students, the school community also became increasingly diverse, representing more than 20 countries of birth and 10 home languages. These changes brought both opportunities and challenges, requiring intentional leadership, strong instructional systems, and a renewed commitment to school culture. This session shares the leadership journey of building excellence by aligning vision, instructional practices, staff development, and community partnerships around one common purpose: ensuring every student succeeds. Participants will explore practical strategies used to strengthen teacher collaboration, establish consistent instructional expectations, develop a positive school identity, increase family engagement, and create sustainable systems that support continuous improvement. The session emphasizes that while accountability measures and school grades matter, lasting success is built through relationships, shared leadership, and a culture where every stakeholder feels valued.
PRESENTERS: Dr. Lindsay Merritt, Principal, Stanfield Elementary School and Jessica Dunn, Instructional Coach, Stanly County Schools, North Carolina.
LOCATION: Coronado G

10:30 AM – 12:30 PM LIGHTHOUSE CELEBRATION BRUNCH

MASTER OF CEREMONY - Dennis Bega, Senior Assessor, Blue Ribbon Schools of Excellence, Georgia.
KEYNOTE PRESENTATION - ***Excellence by Design: Leading Schools with Pride.***
Tony Cattani is the of Lenape High School, 2025 New Jersey Visionary Secondary School Leader of the Year and 2025 NASSP National High School Principal of the Year from New Jersey. Tony has built his career around a simple but powerful mission, leading with pride by empowering others to grow, connect, and share their best practices. With almost three decades in education, Tony is known for cultivating strong school cultures grounded in relationships, student voice, and staff collaboration. Under his leadership, Lenape has become a model for innovative initiatives such as a peer observation model which has produced over 4000+ peer observations, leadership development for students and staff via the Lenape Leadership Academy, all designed to elevate community, purpose, and collective pride. Beyond his school community, Tony hosts the Proud Principals Podcast, where he celebrates and amplifies the best practices of school leaders across the country. Tony's authentic energy, humor, and practical insights motivate people to lead with pride, share what works, and continue creating schools where both students and educators can be the best version of themselves.

2026 Blue Ribbon Schools of Excellence Lighthouse Award Recipients

Blossomwood Elementary School 2 TIME
Brewbaker Technology Magnet High School
Brindlee Mountain Elementary School
Central Elementary School
Charles DeWolf Middle School
Charles W. Henry School
Clarkdale Elementary School
Cold Springs Elementary School 3 TIME
Creekside Elementary School 2 TIME
Creekside Primary School 2 TIME
Dale County High School
Dr. Ronald E. McNair Public School 5
Earlville Community Unit School District 9
East Lake Middle Academy of Engineering
Fairview Elementary School 3 TIME
Farley Elementary School
Forest Avenue Academic Magnet School
George W. Long Elementary School
Goldsmith-Schiffman Elementary School 2 TIME
Good Hope Middle School 3 TIME
Good Hope Primary School 3 TIME
Hampton Cove Elementary School 2 TIME
Holly Pond Middle School 2 TIME
James Weldon Johnson College Prep Middle School
Jones Valley Elementary School 2 TIME
Kate Duncan Smith DAR Elementary School, Inc.
Millbrook Middle School
Mountain Gap Elementary School 2 TIME
Mountain Gap Middle School 2 TIME
Parkside School 3 TIME
PS 170 The Ralph A. Fabrizio School 2 TIME
PS 249 The Caton School 2 TIME
Roger B. Chaffee Elementary School
T. Baldwin Demarest Elementary School
Temple Middle School
Union Hill Middle School
Welti Elementary School 3 TIME
West Point Elementary School 3 TIME
West Point Intermediate School 3 TIME

LOCATION: Coronado Ballroom H-J

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SAVE THE DATE – CORONADO SPRINGS RESORT
Conference 2027 - November 29 - December 2, 2027

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