

# CULTURIZE

Every Student. Every Day. Whatever It Takes.

# Institute *Chicago*



**JUNE 24-25,  
2025**



**Hyatt Regency Lisle**  
1400 Corporate Drive - Lisle, Illinois



<http://www.culturizeinstitutes.com/>



Every Student. Every Day. Whatever It Takes.

# Day 1 Agenda

June 24, 2025

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8:00 - 8:50 am CENTRAL	Registration, Networking and Coffee
9:00 - 10:00 am CENTRAL	Welcome and Keynote with Jimmy Casas
10:00 - 10:15 am CENTRAL	BREAK
10:15 - 11:30 am CENTRAL	Breakout Sessions
11:30 - 12:30 pm CENTRAL	LUNCH <i>(Provided)</i>
12:30 - 1:45 pm CENTRAL	Breakout Sessions
1:45 - 2:00 pm CENTRAL	BREAK
2:00 - 3:00 pm CENTRAL	Keynote with Garth Larson
3:15 - 5:15 pm CENTRAL	Social in the Pavilion at the Hyatt



## Books, Resources, and More!

Stop by the registration table to check out our books and resources and to learn more about how we support teachers, leaders, and schools.

FOR MORE INFORMATION: [WWW.CULTURIZEINSTITUTES.COM](http://WWW.CULTURIZEINSTITUTES.COM)

# CULTURIZE

Every Student. Every Day. Whatever It Takes.

## Day 2 Agenda

June 25, 2025

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8:00 - 8:50 am CENTRAL	Networking and Coffee
9:00 - 10:00 am CENTRAL	Keynote with Joy Kelly
10:00 - 10:15 am CENTRAL	BREAK
10:15 - 11:30 am CENTRAL	Breakout Sessions
11:30 - 12:30 pm CENTRAL	LUNCH <i>(Provided)</i>
12:30 - 1:45 pm CENTRAL	Breakout Sessions
1:45 - 2:00 pm CENTRAL	BREAK
2:00 - 3:00 pm CENTRAL	Closing Keynote with Baruti Kafele
3:00 pm CENTRAL	Culturize Institute Closing



### Books, Resources, and More!

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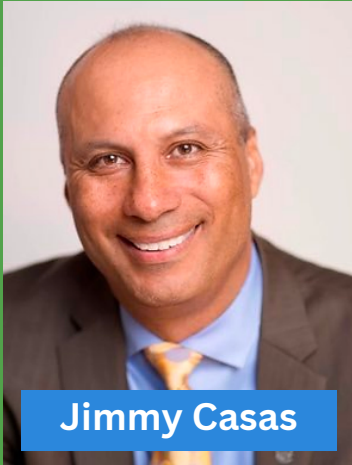
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## June 24 - Session Details

9:00 - 10:00 am CENTRAL

WELCOME AND OPENING KEYNOTE

Culturize – Every Student. Every Day. Whatever It Takes.



Eradicate Average! CULTURIZE Your School. Average schools don't inspire greatness--and greatness is what our schools need if we are going to produce world-changing learners. In this presentation author and education leader Jimmy Casas shares his 4 Core Principles - Champion for All Kids, Expect Excellence, Carry the Banner and Merchant of Hope, to maximize student learning and remind us that every child deserves to be a part of something great. Jimmy draws from his personal experiences as a struggling student and his insight from working in an inner-city school to remind you of your purpose and reignite your passion as an educator. This session will inspire you to go do whatever it takes for all students to be successful!

10:00 - 10:15  
am CENTRAL

*Break &  
Networking*

10:15 - 11:30 am CENTRAL

BREAKOUT SESSIONS



**JESSICA CABEEN - The Power of Connection to Transform Student Outcomes**

In the wake of unprecedented challenges over the past four years, educators have been tasked with supporting increasingly diverse student needs. This session dives deep into the "Champion for Students" pillar of the Culturize framework, exploring how educators can create meaningful connections with students by investing time to understand their unique stories. Participants will learn actionable strategies to build empathy, foster trust, and show students they are valued and heard. By connecting to students' experiences, educators will be empowered to cultivate a culture of compassion that helps every student thrive.

June 24, 2025

10:15 - 11:30 am CENTRAL

**BREAKOUT SESSIONS** *(continued)*

**JIMMY CASAS - Change...Is it Really That Scary?**



As educators, we must regularly ask ourselves: Have we grown complacent? Have we settled? The status quo and average results are no longer acceptable. In this session, participants will learn to identify and address the average in their schools. Using a proven framework, Jimmy shows us that change can be inspiring and recalibrate our passion for the work, and more importantly, remind us that we never have to allow average to become the standard.

**JIM WICHMAN - Championing Through Affirmation: Uplifting Students and Colleagues with Intentional Encouragement**



Educators hold a unique role in fostering growth, learning, and resilience in an environment where mistakes are opportunities for deeper understanding. This interactive session focuses on the transformative impact of words of affirmation—delivered in ways that align with how individuals best receive and appreciate them. Participants will explore their own personal profiles to uncover their “superpowers” and “kryptonite,” gaining valuable insights into their strengths and areas of growth. They will then learn how to harness this knowledge to champion the success of both students and colleagues, fostering a culture of encouragement, connection, and collective efficacy. Join us for a dynamic and empowering session that will equip you with practical tools to uplift and inspire those around you, one intentional affirmation at a time.

11:30 - 12:30 pm  
CENTRAL



12:30 - 1:45 pm CENTRAL

BREAKOUT SESSIONS

**JESSICA CABEEN - Carrying the Banner for Wellness and Leadership**

“We may be superheroes, but we are not made of steel.” — Jessica Cabeen

School leaders are the voices that set the tone for their schools, and their well-being directly impacts the culture they cultivate. By embracing the Carry the Banner pillar of Culturize, this session challenges principals to become champions for wellness—not only for their staff and students but also for themselves. Participants will explore practical strategies to model balance, prioritize self-care, and set a positive example of sustainable leadership. Healthy, balanced leaders inspire trust and enthusiasm, creating school environments where staff and students can thrive.

Through this session, leaders will:

- Learn how to “carry the banner” by modeling wellness and balance for their teams.
- Build strategies to create meaningful experiences that leave lasting impressions on staff, students, and families.
- Develop an actionable plan for integrating balance into their lives during the summer, ensuring it remains a priority throughout the school year.

When leaders carry the banner of positivity and wellness, they transform their schools into thriving communities where everyone feels valued and supported.

**JIM WICHMAN - Inspiring Students and Colleagues to Thrive**

In this breakout session, we will explore the transformative principle of being a “Merchant of Hope” as outlined in the book **Culturize**. Participants will delve into the heart of this concept, gaining a deeper understanding of what it means to inspire hope and belief in others. The session will provide practical strategies for embodying this principle in daily interactions with students and colleagues. Through guided activities and team discussions, attendees will leave with actionable steps to implement the Merchant of Hope mindset in ways that are both meaningful and manageable for their unique educational settings. Join us to discover how fostering hope can create a culture where individuals are empowered to overcome challenges, embrace their potential, and thrive.

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Ballroom  
C/D

A circular icon with a white center and a multi-colored border (teal, yellow, green). The text "Willow" is written in black inside the white center.

Willow

June 24, 2025

12:30 - 1:45 pm CENTRAL

**BREAKOUT SESSIONS**

**GARTH LARSON - Culturize Through Connection and Reflection**

Connection and reflection is not a single act, it's a mindset. During this session, Dr. Garth Larson will emphasize the vital role of authentic connections in enhancing school improvement and along with making embedded reflective practice a part of what you do daily. Drawing insights from his book, "Simplifying School Improvement," this session explores the multifaceted benefits of fostering strong relationships among educators, students, and caregivers. Participants will discover strategies for building trust and empathy, creating an inclusive and supportive school environment. By prioritizing reflection and connection, educators can better understand and meet the diverse needs of their students, leading to a more personalized and impactful learning experience as well as a higher rate of job satisfaction. This session aims to equip attendees with the tools to cultivate meaningful connections and reflective practice that drive growth, learning, and success for all stakeholders.



1:45 - 2:00 pm  
CENTRAL

*Break & Networking*



June 24, 2025

2:00 - 3:00 pm CENTRAL

DAY 1 CLOSING KEYNOTE

### The Opportunity in Front of You



Every day, educators face countless challenges—from navigating evolving expectations to addressing the unique needs of their students and communities. Yet, within every challenge lies an opportunity to make a lasting impact. In this empowering one-hour keynote, Dr. Garth Larson invites educators to embrace the possibilities that lie before them, even in the face of adversity on a personal and professional level. Drawing from his diverse experience as a teacher, principal, district leader, and global consultant, Dr. Larson will share stories, insights, and practical strategies to inspire educators to recognize and seize the opportunities embedded in their work every day. Through a lens of optimism and resilience, attendees will discover how to see every situation in front of them as an opportunity to create positive outcomes for students and colleagues alike. Join Dr. Larson in exploring how, no matter the circumstances, the opportunity to make a difference is always within reach. Walk away re-energized, with a renewed commitment to the transformative power of education and the belief that every day brings new chances to shape the future.



**Join us for the Day 1  
Social in the Hyatt  
Regency Pavilion.**

**3:15-5:15 pm**



## June 25 - Session Details

9:00 - 10:00 am CENTRAL

WELCOME AND OPENING KEYNOTE

**Handle with Care: Managing Difficult Situations in Schools with Dignity and Respect**

Ballroom  
A/B



Joy Kelly

In schools across the country, educators at every level are faced with delicate, challenging situations that require high-level skills and insights in order to produce favorable outcomes for all students and staff. In this presentation, author Joy Kelly examines a variety of difficult school-related situations, both in and out of the classroom, and provides strategies, tools, and techniques to address a variety of difficult-to-handle situations and scenarios in order to help students and staff emerge from missteps more self-aware, feeling valued, and able to move forward.

10:00 - 10:15  
am CENTRAL

*Break &  
Networking*

10:15 - 11:30 am CENTRAL

BREAKOUT SESSIONS

**DON SMITH- The Power of Collective Teacher Efficacy: How Beliefs Shape Actions**

Ballroom  
C/D

Collective Teacher Efficacy has a profound impact on school culture and student outcomes. In this session, we'll explore what Collective Teacher Efficacy is, how it fosters positive actions and collaboration among educators, and the ripple effects it creates across a school. We'll also examine how the absence of this shared belief can hinder progress and morale. Leave with actionable strategies to build and sustain collective efficacy in your school community.

June 25, 2025

10:15 - 11:30 am CENTRAL

**BREAKOUT SESSIONS** *(continued)*

**SHELLY DAUN - Teaching with Impact: Strategies for Student Growth and a Culture of Excellence**



**Willow**

It's no secret that ALL students should be afforded high-quality instruction that promotes growth and achievement. In this session, we will explore high-impact instructional strategies that elevate every student. Rooted in a belief that all students deserve access to exceptional, growth-oriented instruction, we'll dive into evidence-based practices that enable each learner to thrive. Attendees will walk away equipped with practical techniques to foster a culture of belonging, inspire ownership, and address diverse needs, ensuring that every student feels valued, challenged, and capable of success.

**JOY KELLY - Lifting the Banner: Shaping School Culture Through Words, Actions, and Empathy**



**Ballroom  
A/B**

As educators, we hold a unique privilege and responsibility to carry the banner for our schools. The way we talk about and to students, staff, and families has the power to shape perceptions, build trust, and foster a culture of pride and belonging—or undermine it. In this interactive and thought-provoking breakout session, participants will explore how their words and actions reflect the values of their schools and impact the broader school community. Through guided reflection and engaging activities, participants will examine their own narratives about their schools, challenge long-held beliefs about the role of educators, and identify opportunities to speak and act in ways that inspire confidence and collaboration. This session will also focus on reframing how we view others—encouraging participants to withhold judgment, avoid labeling, and approach all members of the school community with curiosity, empathy, and respect. Participants will discover how carrying the banner for their school can elevate morale, strengthen relationships, and cultivate pride in their school community.

11:30 - 12:30 pm  
CENTRAL



June 25, 2025

12:30 - 1:45 pm CENTRAL

**BREAKOUT SESSIONS**

**KHEILA CASAS- Culturizing Your Classroom For Observable Impact**



Building a positive, student-centered culture in our schools is more important than ever. In this dynamic session, educators will dive deeper into strategies for creating transformative learning environments that go beyond surface-level displays of culture and instruction. Together, we'll move past posters, slogans, and buzzwords to focus on actionable strategies. Designed for teachers, instructional specialists, and instructional leaders, this session provides practical tools, ideas, and a clear framework for defining and implementing observable behaviors that drive success. Leave this session empowered with actionable steps to build a culture that inspires, engages, and impacts every student and educator, every day.

**BARUTI KAFELE- There is Nothing Wrong with Me...I Just Don't Learn the Way You Teach**



Too many brilliant children are often overlooked academically because time wasn't taken to discover how they process new information, make sense out of new information, think, and learn. Consequently, they quickly become bored in school and in far too many cases, become behavioral challenges or candidates for Special Education. In this highly-engaging, self-reflective workshop (or keynote address), Principal Kafele will take teachers on an introspective journey of reflecting upon their current instructional practices toward engaging all of their learners while simultaneously discerning their current levels of effectiveness. He will also engage teachers in a self-assessment of how cultural responsiveness and equity factor into their instruction, and how they go about planning and organizing toward addressing all of the learning styles in their classrooms.

**DANICA LEWIS- Expecting Excellence Through Cross-Disciplinary Literacy**



In this session, teachers in all content areas will learn strategies they can use within their content instruction to support students in becoming better readers, writers, and communicators. Disciplinary literacy is not one more thing on the plates of non-ELA teachers, but rather is a necessary set of skills that students must learn to experience success in the course. Learning literacy skills in the context of the courses students love enables them to learn the skills they will need in their future lives and careers. As a result of this session, teachers will walk away with several strategies that they can implement right away to improve student learning.

June 25, 2025

1:45 - 2:00 pm  
CENTRAL

*Break &  
Networking*

2:00 - 3:00 pm CENTRAL

**CLOSING KEYNOTE**

**Closing the Attitude Gap: A Classroom Climate/Culture Framework**

**Ballroom  
A/B**



**Baruti Kafele**

The discussion on gaps in student achievement continue to be one of the most important discussions in education today; particularly as it relates to the underachievement of children of color. Equally challenging for educators is the continued lack of student motivation, undesirable student behaviors and the overall underachievement of at-risk student populations across racial and ethnic lines. In this highly engaging, thought-provoking workshop, Principal Kafele will assert that the greatest difficulty to closing the achievement gap is the overwhelming assumption that the achievement gap is in fact, the problem. He says that the achievement gap is a direct consequence of the failure to adequately address what he coined, the Attitude Gap (the gap between those students who have the will to achieve excellence and those who do not) that continues to persist in American classrooms. He will share with teachers how to close the Attitude Gap in their classrooms through a classroom climate / culture framework comprising the following five strands: Environment for Learning, Attitude toward Students, Relationship with Students, Compassion for Students and Relevance in Instruction.

## Speaker Biographies



**Jessica Cabeen**

Jessica Cabeen is the Principal of Alternative Education Programs in Austin, Minnesota. Previously, she was the principal of Ellis Middle School in Austin, Minnesota, and the principal of the “Happiest Place in Southeastern Minnesota,” the Woodson Kindergarten Center. She has been an assistant middle school principal, a special education assistant director, and special education teacher. Jessica was named the 2021 ED Dive National Principal of the year, 2017 Minnesota National Distinguished Principal of the Year, and was awarded the NAESP/VINCI Digital Leader of Early Learning Award in 2016. She is a NAESP Middle Level Fellow and a Future Ready Principal. Jessica is the author of *Hacking Early Learning* and co-author of *Balance Like a Pirate*, *Unconventional Leadership*, and *Lead with Grace: Leaning into the Soft Skills of Leadership*. She is a sought-after speaker and trainer and enjoys getting to learn and lead with other educators across the nation. Jessica enjoys connecting and growing her Professional Learning Network (PLN) on social media. She can be found on Instagram, Facebook, and Twitter @JessicaCabeen.



**Jimmy Casas**

Jimmy Casas is the CEO and President of J Casas and Associates, an educational leadership company aimed at serving teachers, principals and superintendents in school districts across the United States by providing high quality, practical and meaningful coaching support. Jimmy served twenty-two years as a school leader. He is a best selling author, speaker, leadership coach, and a state and national award winning principal. Under Jimmy’s leadership, Bettendorf High School was named one of the best high schools in the country three times by Newsweek and U.S. News and World Report. Jimmy was named the 2012 Iowa Principal of the Year and was runner-up NASSP 2013 National Principal of the Year. In 2014, Jimmy was invited to the White House to speak on the Future Ready Pledge. Finally, in 2015, he received the Bammy Award for the National Principal of the Year.



**Kheila Casas**

Kheila Casas currently serves as a teaching and learning coach for J Casas and Associates, where she collaborates with educators and school leaders to implement strategies that drive measurable classroom success. With over 20 years of experience in education, Kheila has worked as an Elementary Classroom Teacher, Instructional Coach, and Director of Innovation. Her passion lies in leveraging technology to ignite creativity across subjects and using student interests as natural motivators for learning. As an Apple Distinguished Educator and the 2021 Innovator of the Year at the Pennsylvania Educational Technology Expo and Conference, Kheila is dedicated to transforming education through innovation and student-centered approaches.



**Shelly Daun**

Shelly Daun is an accomplished education leader with over 30 years of experience, currently serving as the Director of Curriculum, Instruction, and Assessment in a northeastern Wisconsin school district and the Director of the FIRST Education Math Center, a division of FIRST Educational Resources. Honored as the "Instructional Leader of the Year" for Wisconsin in 2022 by the Wisconsin Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development, Shelly has dedicated her career to driving instructional excellence, systems change, and comprehensive school reform. Her expertise spans curriculum design, data analysis, standards and assessment development, and research-based instructional pedagogy, with a strong commitment to student equity, leadership development, K-12 mathematics instruction, and sustainable action planning. Shelly has successfully guided numerous school districts through impactful improvement initiatives, fostering success and growth at every level.



**Baruti Kafele**

Baruti Kafele is a highly-regarded urban educator in New Jersey for over twenty years. Principal Kafele distinguished himself as a master teacher and a transformational school leader. As an elementary school teacher in East Orange, NJ, he was selected as the East Orange School District and Essex County Public Schools Teacher of the Year and New Jersey State Teacher of the Year finalist. As a middle and high school principal, Principal Kafele emerged as a turnaround school leader which included the turnaround of "The Mighty" Newark Tech, that went from a low-performing school in need of improvement to national recognition, including U.S. News and World Report Magazine recognizing it three times as one of America's best high schools. This culminated in Principal Kafele receiving the coveted Milken Educator Award for his leadership. One of the most sought-after school leadership and classroom equity presenters in America, Principal Kafele is impacting America's schools. For over 35 years, he has delivered more than 3000 conference and program keynotes, professional development workshops, parenting seminars and student assemblies. In addition to writing several professional articles for popular education journals, he has authored thirteen books, including seven ASCD best sellers. His newest book, *The Assistant Principal Identity* was released in May, 2023. Principal Kafele is the creator and host of the popular AP & New Principals Academy, streamed live every Saturday morning. He is the recipient of over 150 educational, professional and community awards which include the prestigious Milken Educator Award, the National Alliance of Black School Educators Hall of Fame Award, the East Orange, NJ Hall of Fame Award, recognition as one of the World's Top 30 Education Professionals for five consecutive years (2020 – 2024) by Global Gurus Top 30, and the City of Dickinson, Texas proclaiming February 8, 1998 as Baruti Kafele Day.



**Joy Kelly**

Joy Kelly, Ed.S., brings nearly 30 years of experience in education. Her professional background includes serving as a high school teacher and associate principal, where she earned recognition as the Iowa 2015 Associate Principal of the Year. Joy has also served as a comprehensive high school principal and a PK-12 Head of School. Central to Joy's philosophy is the belief that the culture of a school community is paramount to its vitality and success. She emphasizes the importance of cultivating safe and supportive relationships among adults, students, and families as the foundation for positive student achievement. Alongside Jimmy Casas, Joy co-authored "Handle with Care: Managing Difficult Situations in Schools with Dignity and Respect."



**Garth Larson**

Garth Larson, Ed.D, is the Co-Founder and CEO of FIRST Educational Resources. He began his career as a high school English teacher and Associate Principal, later serving as an elementary principal and the Director of Learning for the Winneconne Community School District in Northeast Wisconsin. In 2015, he co-founded FIRST Educational Resources, aiming to enhance student achievement across the United States. Since then, over 2000 school districts worldwide have partnered with his company. Garth consults globally, providing customized professional development on topics such as Professional Learning Communities, Learning-Centered Grading Practices, Leadership, and School Improvement. He is the co-author of six books, including Collaborative Systems of Support, PLC 2.0, Grading for Impact, The STAGR Process Roadmap, Extinguishing the Fires Within Assessment and Grading Reform, and Simplifying School Improvement: A Framework for Impact in Today's Schools.



**Danica Lewis**

Danica Lewis has 20 years of experience in schools, serving as an elementary teacher and later as a school and district administrator, including school building leadership, early childhood leadership, special education leadership, and curriculum & assessment leadership in urban and suburban schools. Danica led the implementation of standards-aligned instruction, assessment, and grading as both a district-level and building-level administrator and implemented a coaching program for a medium sized district. Danica facilitates powerful professional learning around instructional coaching, literacy, standards-aligned instruction and assessment, rigorous teaching, data analysis, and professional learning community leadership. In 2017, the Wisconsin Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development recognized Danica as the "Instructional Leader of the Year" for the State of Wisconsin.

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**Don Smith**

Don Smith has 20 years of professional experience in public schools. Don previously served as the Director of Teaching and Learning for the Winneconne Community School District, in Wisconsin. Prior to that, Don was the Director of Teaching and Learning in the School District of Waupaca. Don also served as the Principal at Fond du Lac STEM Academy and Fond du Lac STEM Institute, as well as the District Assessment Coordinator for the Fond du Lac Area School District (WI). Don is a co-author on Extinguishing the Fires of Assessment and Grading Reform, as well as a co-author of the laminated guide, Leveraging the Block Schedule for Student Learning Growth. Don continually leads professional development sessions centered on research based practices in instruction, assessment and grading. In 2022, Don began working full time with FIRST Educational Resources.



**Jim Wichman**

Jim Wichman is a twenty-five year veteran of education administration who possesses a plethora of urban/rural public school experiences. Growing up in poverty and even temporarily homeless, Jim knows the importance of constantly supporting students and the adults who serve those students. Jim's years of experience at wide-ranging levels and within varied settings culminate for a specialist perspective. Jim takes pride in his innovative, dedicated approach to procure collective efficacy within each building he has served. His consistent focus on "Respecting, Supporting, and Valuing" has allowed for ongoing enhancement of staff, students, and systems. Jim is the former Prairie Ridge Middle School Principal in Ankeny, Iowa, serving over 1100 middle schoolers where he "shook the world as he went by." Additionally, Jim has been a featured speaker and leadership coach throughout the country from Arizona to New York, focusing on organizational culture and employer/employee relationships. Jim also served as Iowa's NASSP State Coordinator for 4 years where he worked with elected officials on understanding the current state of education. Jim is married to his wife Amy, also a lifelong educator, and they have three children, EmmaKate, Evallyn, and Everhett.