CULTURIZE Institutes

JUNE 22–23
2027 / NAPERVILLE, IL

RECONNECT. REIGNITE. CULTURIZE.

EVERY STUDENT. EVERY DAY.

WHATEVER IT TAKES.

2 KEYNOTES / 30 BREAKOUT SESSIONS / 19 PRESENTERS



Thomas Murray
OPENING KEYNOTE



Jessica Cabeen
KEYNOTE



Jimmy Casas
FEATURED PRESENTER



Garth Larson
FEATURED PRESENTER

EMBASSY SUITES BY HILTON CHICAGO NAPERVILLE

Full agenda • Session descriptions • Speaker bios

BRING YOUR TEAM. BUILD YOUR CULTURE.
IMPACT LEARNING.

YOUR INSTITUTE AT A GLANCE

Tuesday, June 22

8:30–9:45 AM

OPENING KEYNOTE

Thomas Murray | Ballroom

9:45–10:15 AM

Break & Bookstore

10:15–11:30 AM

BREAKOUT 1

Jimmy Casas
Jonathan Alsheimer
Jim Wichman
Sarah Johnson
Becky Peppler
Greg Wolcott

11:30 AM–1:00 PM

Lunch

Gift card provided

1:00–2:15 PM

BREAKOUT 2

Jonathan Alsheimer
Tony Frontier
Garth Larson
Kheila Casas
Joy Kelly
Danica Lewis

2:15–2:30 PM

Break

2:30–3:45 PM

BREAKOUT 3

Shannon Myers
Sarah Johnson
Don Smith
Gabe Hackett
Meg Simon
Greg Wolcott

3:45–5:30 PM

Social Gathering

Embassy Suites patio

All times Central Time. Choose one session in each breakout block.

YOUR INSTITUTE AT A GLANCE

Wednesday, June 23

8:45–10:00 AM

BREAKOUT 4

Jimmy Casas
Gabe Hackett
Becky Peppler
Jim Wichman
Joy Kelly
Don Smith

10:00–10:15 AM

Break & Bookstore

10:15–11:30 AM

BREAKOUT 5

David Arencibia
Danica Lewis
Meg Simon
Stephen Speck
Shannon Myers
Tony Frontier

11:30 AM–1:00 PM

Lunch

Gift card provided

1:00–2:15 PM

KEYNOTE

Jessica Cabeen | Ballroom

2:15–2:30 PM

Break

2:30–3:30 PM

Facilitated Planning Conversations

Jimmy Casas & Garth Larson

3:30 PM

Culturize Conclusion

All times Central Time. Choose one session in each breakout block.

THOMAS MURRAY

Keynote Spotlight



Thomas Murray

How You Show Up

JUNE 22 • 8:30–9:45 AM

Every day in our schools, how we show up matters. The beliefs we carry influence our behaviors. Our behaviors shape how we communicate, connect, and respond to those we lead. And over time, those everyday interactions become the culture that students, staff, and families experience. Today's educators are navigating increasing complexity, constant change, and growing expectations. Yet our greatest influence is often found in the moments that happen every day: how we respond when things get difficult, how we communicate when perspectives differ, how we make people feel seen and valued, and whether our actions consistently reflect what we say we believe. Through powerful stories, humor, research, and practical strategies, nationally recognized educator and best-selling author Thomas C. Murray explores the connection between belief, behavior, communication, relationships, and results. Participants will examine the gap between who we intend to be and who others actually experience, while discovering actionable ways to strengthen trust, communicate with clarity and empathy, navigate change with courage, and create environments where both students and staff can thrive. Ultimately, opportunity isn't something we simply wait for; it's something as leaders that we create. When we intentionally show up with purpose, authenticity, high expectations, and care, we build cultures where possibility grows and each learner has the opportunity to thrive.

BALLROOM / ALL ATTENDEES

JESSICA CABEEN

Keynote Spotlight



Jessica Cabeen

The Drip Effect

JUNE 23 • 1:00–2:15 PM

Big change rarely begins with a dramatic overhaul. More often, lasting transformation happens through small, intentional actions repeated over time. In this powerful and practical keynote, Jessica introduces audiences to The Drip Effect: the idea that sustainable leadership is built through consistent, values-aligned choices that compound into meaningful impact. Instead of chasing hustle, perfection, or constant reinvention, leaders learn how to identify the daily actions that shape culture, protect energy, strengthen relationships, and move important work forward. This session helps leaders slow down long enough to lead with clarity, focus on what matters most, and build rhythms that support both high impact and personal well-being. Participants will walk away with:

- A clear understanding of how small actions compound into long-term leadership impact
- Practical strategies for leading with clarity instead of urgency
- Tools to protect time, energy, purpose, and relationships
- A simple framework for identifying the next right “drip” in their leadership

BALLROOM / ALL ATTENDEES

JUNE 22 | 10:15–11:30 AM | 6 SESSIONS TO CHOOSE FROM

Breakout 1

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

Jimmy Casas

Audience: ALL Educators
Core values: Champion for Students, Merchant of Hope, Expect Excellence, Carry the Banner

Average schools don’t inspire greatness, and greatness is exactly what today’s students deserve. In this powerful and inspiring session, Jimmy challenges educators to move beyond the status quo and eradicate average by intentionally living out the Four Core Principles of Culturize: Be a Champion for All Kids, Expect Excellence, Carry the Banner, Be a Merchant of Hope: Through authentic stories, practical examples, and meaningful reflection, Jimmy brings these principles to life, challenging educators to examine their daily choices and consider the lasting impact they have on students and colleagues. Participants will leave inspired to put their values into action, strengthen their influence, and create cultures where excellence is the expectation, belonging is the experience, and hope is something every student encounters each day. Because great schools don't happen by accident—they are built through the intentional actions of the adults who serve in them.

Going Beyond Work-Life Balance: Harnessing Resilience to Ignite Passion and Thrive

Sarah Johnson

Audience: All Educators
Core values: Merchant of Hope and Expect Excellence

Educators face increasing demands that lead to stress and put us at risk for burnout, but the 50/50 balance formula is a myth. As servant leaders, we often pour into others until we are left drained. In this session, we go beyond feel-good buzzwords to examine how to serve as a Merchant of Hope for ourselves while continuing to Expect Excellence in our daily lives. Grounded in practical resilience research and the four Balance Quadrants (Personal, Professional, Positional, and Passions), you will leave this session empowered with actionable strategies to harness your internal energy and live intentionally in all areas of your life.

JUNE 22 | 10:15–11:30 AM | 6 SESSIONS TO CHOOSE FROM

Breakout 1

School of Engagement

Jonathan Alsheimer

Audience: Classroom Teachers
Core values: Expect Excellence, Carry the Banner

School of Engagement is an inspiring message and session that motivates educators to reignite the flame to be “that teacher,” with a focus on classroom management, strategies to help teachers build relationships, conversations around unit and lesson plan development, and simple activities and lesson ideas to enhance student engagement and the learning experience for kids. This workshop is packed with ideas for teachers!

Another Chance Isn't Enough: Rethinking Reassessment

Becky Peppler

Audience: All Educators
Core values: Merchant of Hope | Champion for Students

What if reassessment was more than another chance to earn a better grade? When designed intentionally, reassessment can become a powerful part of a culture where learning is ongoing, mistakes are opportunities and every student has a path forward. Yet, even with the best intentions, reassessment practices can create frustration, overwhelm and unintended barriers for students and teachers. How do we move beyond simply allowing another attempt to ensuring meaningful learning happens between attempts? We'll explore common reassessment challenges and the systems that help overcome them. Participants will leave with actionable strategies for creating reassessment practices that are manageable for teachers, meaningful for students and grounded in the belief that learning doesn't end with the first attempt.

JUNE 22 | 10:15–11:30 AM | 6 SESSIONS TO CHOOSE FROM

Breakout 1

We're Definitely Aligned, Trust Me?

Jim Wichman

Audience: Leaders
Core values: Moving Beyond Perceived Alignment to Shared Purpose, Intentional Practice, and Consistent Experiences

We often assume we're aligned because we share the same vision, communicate the same expectations, and work toward the same goals. But are we really? What leaders believe is happening across their organization isn't always what staff, students, and families actually experience. These gaps between perception and reality can create confusion, frustration, inconsistent practices, and ultimately a breakdown in trust. Through engaging activities, reflection, laughter, and collaborative conversations, participants will challenge their assumptions about alignment and explore the difference between what we think we're doing, what we're actually doing, and what others are experiencing. Together, we'll examine how intentional leadership, shared purpose, and consistent practices can close those gaps and create greater clarity throughout the organization.

The Need Through the Noise: Diagnosing and Responding to Misbehavior

Greg Wolcott

Audience: All Educators
Core values: Merchant of Hope, Expect Excellence

We often decide how to respond to a student’s behavior before we understand what may be driving it. Drawing on The ASCEND Approach, this session examines how adult responses can address the underlying difficulty or unintentionally make a challenging moment harder. Explore how the needs for autonomy, belonging, and competence, alongside the student’s perspective, can help you interpret difficult moments and choose a more effective next step. Leave with a clearer process for responding to misbehavior while maintaining expectations, protecting relationships, and helping students return to learning.

JUNE 22 | 1:00–2:15 PM | 6 SESSIONS TO CHOOSE FROM

Breakout 2

School of Engagement

Jonathan Alsheimer

Audience: Classroom Teachers
Core values: Expect Excellence, Carry the Banner

School of Engagement is an inspiring message and session that motivates educators to reignite the flame to be “that teacher,” with a focus on classroom management, strategies to help teachers build relationships, conversations around unit and lesson plan development, and simple activities and lesson ideas to enhance student engagement and the learning experience for kids. This workshop is packed with ideas for teachers!

Making Learning Explicit: Small Shifts That Help Every Student Succeed

Kheila Casas

Audience: Classroom Teachers
Core values: Expect Excellence, Champion for Students

Great instruction doesn’t happen by accident. It happens when teachers make learning visible, intentional, and accessible for every student. Explicit instruction gives teachers a clear set of practices for making sure students know what they are learning, why it matters, and how to be successful. But what does explicit instruction actually look and sound like in the classroom? In this practical, interactive session, participants will explore how SET (Student, Educator, Task) brings the essential elements of explicit instruction to life. Through classroom examples and opportunities to examine instructional practices, teachers will identify high-impact moves they can make immediately. The focus will be on small, intentional shifts in everyday instruction that produce observable gains in student learning. Participants will leave with concrete strategies, practical language, and ready-to-use instructional moves to make learning more explicit and help more students experience success.

JUNE 22 | 1:00–2:15 PM | 6 SESSIONS TO CHOOSE FROM

Breakout 2

Catch Them Learning: Creating Conditions for Academic Integrity in the Age of AI

Tony Frontier

Audience: Classroom Teachers, Leaders
Core values: Expect Excellence | Merchant of Hope

How can we ensure the integrity of students' homework, projects, essays, assignments, and learning in an era of everywhere, all the time access to AI? Drawing on extensive research, this workshop will describe important distinctions between cheating and integrity, and between a culture of compliance and a culture of learning. You'll learn practical, student-centered solutions to support academic integrity, deter cheating, and help students take ownership of - and show pride in - their learning. Implications for day-to-day classroom practices, course syllabi, and academic integrity policies that support students' intentional, effective uses of AI tools will be shared.

From Functioning to Performing: Building Teams That Make an Impact

Joy Kelly

Audience: All Educators
Core values: Expecting Excellence

Building a culture of excellence requires more than individuals working toward a common goal. It requires trust, shared responsibility, and a collective commitment to expecting excellence from ourselves and one another. When educators believe in their ability to make a difference and trust those alongside them, they are more willing to take action, navigate challenges, engage in meaningful conversations, and carry the banner for their school community. Yet even the most committed teams can struggle to move from knowing to doing when trust, clarity, and collective efficacy are lacking.This engaging session explores what it takes to build and sustain high-performing teams where relationships come first, every voice matters, and excellence is a shared responsibility. Using our High-Performing Team Assessment, participants will examine the strengths and opportunities within their teams, reflect on the role trust plays in creating a culture of excellence, and identify the behaviors and practices that strengthen collaboration, accountability, and collective efficacy. Participants will leave with practical strategies to build trust, champion one another, confront average, and create the conditions where individuals and teams can thrive while making a lasting impact on those they serve.

JUNE 22 | 1:00–2:15 PM | 6 SESSIONS TO CHOOSE FROM

Breakout 2

Clarity Changes Everything: Creating Greater Clarity in Today's Schools

Garth Larson, Ed.D

Audience: All Educators
Core values: Champion For Students, Expect Excellence

What are students actually expected to learn? How will they know when they've learned it? And how do we ensure that assessment, feedback, and grades accurately communicate that learning? Clarity is one of the most powerful and often overlooked drivers of effective teaching and learning. In this interactive session, Dr. Garth Larson will introduce the STAGR Process, a practical framework designed to help schools create greater clarity and consistency from what we teach to how we assess, respond to, and communicate student learning. Whether your school is exploring grading reform, strengthening assessment practices, or simply working to improve teaching and learning, this session will provide practical strategies and tools you can put to work immediately. Participants will leave with a clearer picture of what effective classroom systems can look like—and actionable next steps for creating greater clarity for teachers, students, and families.

The Arc of the Conversation: Coaching That Moves Teachers From Reflection to Action

Danica Lewis

Audience: Instructional Coaches, Teacher Leaders, Administrators
Core values: Merchant of Hope, Expect Excellence

Great coaching conversations don't follow a script, but they aren't left to chance either. Skilled coaches know where a conversation begins, how to shape it, and where it needs to land. In this session, participants will explore the arc of a coaching conversation and the moves that help teachers reflect honestly, gain clarity, and commit to meaningful next steps. Through modeling, practice, and collaborative conversation, we'll look at how to stay authentic while still guiding the conversation with purpose. We'll also cover how to offer hope and hold high expectations at the same time. Participants will leave with conversation tools and language they can use in their next coaching conversation.

JUNE 22 | 2:30–3:45 PM | 6 SESSIONS TO CHOOSE FROM

Breakout 3

The Coherent Thread: Literacy Consistency from Kindergarten to Graduation

Shannon Myers

Audience: All Educators
Core values: Expect Excellence

When literacy initiatives live in isolated silos, students experience whiplash moving from grade to grade, and intervention becomes a disconnected island. Creating lasting reading and writing cultures requires a coherent thread that ties universal classroom expectations, intervention supports, and leadership vision into one clear narrative. This session unpacks how school and district teams establish a unified literacy identity across grades K–12. Leaders and educators will examine how to cut through initiative fatigue, establish non-negotiable common language around text and discourse, and align instructional moves so students encounter the same predictable routines whether walking into 3rd-grade reading or 10th-grade biology. Attendees will leave with practical tools to audit their system's literacy coherence, eliminate conflicting practices, and build collective efficacy.

Making What Works, Work for Everyone: Collaboration that Leads to Impact

Gabe Hackett

Audience: All Educators
Core values: Champion for Students, Expect Excellence

What if the greatest resource for improving teaching and learning already exists within our schools? The collective knowledge, experiences, and expertise of our educators have the potential to transform student learning when intentionally shared and leveraged. In this interactive session, participants will discover how to move beyond traditional collaboration and create meaningful opportunities for professional growth and shared success. Using the Strategy Review tool, participants will explore practical ways for educators to share effective instructional strategies, reflect on their impact, and build upon practices that positively influence student learning. Participants will walk away with practical tools and strategies to elevate teacher expertise, strengthen professional learning communities, and create a culture where sharing what works becomes an expectation rather than an exception. When educators learn from one another, excellence is no longer isolated to individual classrooms but becomes a shared opportunity for every student.

JUNE 22 | 2:30–3:45 PM | 6 SESSIONS TO CHOOSE FROM

Breakout 3

Firm Foundations: Building Trust and Psychological Safety Through Authentic Values

Sarah Johnson

Audience: All Educators
Core values: Expect Excellence and Carry the Banner

Trust isn't built through mandates; it's earned through personal consistency. Leading through today's educational challenges requires anchoring to your core values so you do not lead from fear. Psychological safety begins when leaders align their daily actions with their values, creating space for staff and students to take risks and grow. Grounded in Culturize principles and Dr. Johnson's leadership foundational framework, this session helps you articulate the alignment that builds genuine trust. Walk away with practical tools to lead with authentic courage.

From Student Voice to Collective Impact: Co-Creating School Culture with Student Leaders

Meg Simon

Audience: All Educators
Core values: Champion for Students, Merchant of Hope, Carry the Banner

What happens when leaders move beyond listening to students and begin leading with them? This session focuses on how school leaders and staff can intentionally partner with ALL students to turn their insights into meaningful, schoolwide impact. Participants will walk away with strategies to help create structures that elevate students' voice and empower them to identify challenges across academics, policy, facilities, and school culture, where students are not just heard, but empowered to turn ideas into action and leave a lasting legacy.

JUNE 22 | 2:30–3:45 PM | 6 SESSIONS TO CHOOSE FROM

Breakout 3

The Confidence to Lead

Don Smith

Audience: Principals, District Leaders, Team Leaders
Core values: Expect Excellence

A principal's belief in their ability to lead has a profound impact on their willingness to take action, navigate challenges, and successfully implement meaningful change. Research continues to highlight the important relationship between principal leadership efficacy, collective teacher efficacy, and student achievement. Yet even when leaders know what needs to be done, a lack of confidence in their ability to lead the work can become a significant barrier to implementation. This engaging session explores the critical role principal efficacy plays in moving from knowing to doing. Participants will examine how their own sense of efficacy influences leadership decisions, implementation, and ultimately the success of their schools, while identifying practical strategies to strengthen their confidence and capacity to lead meaningful, sustainable change.

You Taught It. Did They Learn It? The Science of Learning That Lasts

Greg Wolcott

Audience: All Educators
Core values: Merchant of Hope, Expect Excellence

Students can follow a lesson and complete the work yet struggle to explain or use the ideas the next day. Explore the science behind that gap, revealing how attention, memory, and cognitive load shape what students understand, remember, and apply. This session will challenge familiar assumptions about teaching and reveal why the HOW is as important as the WHAT. Leave with practical ways to strengthen explanations, questions, practice, and feedback so learning lasts beyond the lesson.

JUNE 23 | 8:45–10:00 AM | 6 SESSIONS TO CHOOSE FROM

Breakout 4

Select for Excellence – 12 Proven Strategies to Improve Your Hiring Practices

Jimmy Casas

Audience: K-12 Leaders
Core values: Carry the Banner

There is nothing more important than selecting the right people, people, with the right talent who want to be excellent! However, are you modeling excellence during the interview process? Do you approach the selection process with the intention of establishing a meaningful relationship with each candidate? What are the candidates saying about you and your school once they leave the interview? In this session Jimmy will share 12 Tips to Improve Your Hiring Practices, leaving candidates looking back after they complete the interview process and saying, “I would give anything to work for that organization!”

The Strength May Already Be in the Room: See It. Name It. Grow It.

Jim Wichman

Audience: All Educators
Core values: Carry the Banner, Merchant of Hope

What if the greatest untapped resource in your school is the talent already walking its hallways? This engaging experience challenges leaders to recognize, develop, and maximize the strengths already present within their organizations. Participants will explore their own superpowers, learn to recognize the unique strengths in others, and discover how to create meaningful opportunities for those strengths to flourish. Through personal stories, reflection, laughter, and collaborative experiences, we will explore the emotional and professional impact of being seen, valued, and supported, and how we can intentionally create those same experiences for others. Together, we will reimagine capacity building as more than distributing responsibilities or increasing workloads. Instead, we will focus on developing people, multiplying strengths, and creating a collective impact that elevates the experience of everyone in the organization.

JUNE 23 | 8:45–10:00 AM | 6 SESSIONS TO CHOOSE FROM

Breakout 4

Beyond the Agenda: The PLC Conversations That Drive Student Success

Gabe Hackett

Audience: All Educators
Core values: Champion for Students, Expecting Excellence, Merchant of Hope

We've established our PLC structures, created collaborative norms, and protected time for teams to meet. Now what? The true power of collaboration isn't found in simply bringing educators together. In this interactive session, participants will discover how to move beyond routine meetings and create purposeful conversations centered on student success. Using the Team Impact Plan, we'll explore how collaborative teams can develop a shared vision of student learning that brings clarity to what students need to know, the content we teach, the instructional strategies we implement, and the data we use to measure impact. Participants will walk away with practical tools to focus their PLC conversations, strengthen collective commitments, and help every team member recognize the value of collaboration in improving student outcomes.

The Power of Culture in Classroom Management

Joy Kelly

Audience: All Educators
Core values: Expect Excellence

What does it mean to Culturize the classroom? It begins with intentionally creating a culture where high expectations, strong relationships, and personal responsibility are the foundation for student success. Grounded in the Culturize principle of Expect Excellence, this interactive session challenges educators to move beyond managing behavior and securing compliance toward building classrooms where students take ownership of their choices, behavior, and learning. Participants will explore research-informed classroom management practices that emphasize clear expectations, consistent routines, positive relationships, proactive strategies, and meaningful accountability. Through a classroom culture self-assessment, small-group discussions of authentic classroom scenarios, and collaborative problem-solving, participants will examine how their daily practices influence student behavior and engagement. They will leave with practical strategies and a personal commitment to strengthening their classroom culture because, after all, classroom culture is shaped not simply by the expectations adults establish for students, but by the behaviors they consistently model, teach, reinforce, and demonstrate through their own accountability.

JUNE 23 | 8:45–10:00 AM | 6 SESSIONS TO CHOOSE FROM

Breakout 4

We Say Learning Matters. Do Our Grades Agree?

Becky Peppler

Audience: All Educators
Core values: Expect Excellence | Champion for Students

We say we value learning, growth and student success. But do our grading practices tell the same story? Every grade we assign, policy we enforce and decision we make sends a message about what matters in our classrooms and schools. Sometimes those messages don't align with what we believe about teaching and learning. We'll examine how familiar grading practices can unintentionally undermine learning, motivation and student ownership. Through real classroom examples, reflection and conversation, participants will challenge common assumptions and explore meaningful ways to align grading practices with the culture they want to create. Walk away with practical shifts that strengthen the accuracy of grades, reinforce high expectations and help build a school culture where learning takes center stage.

What actually is Collective Teacher Efficacy?

Don Smith

Audience: All Educators
Core values: Expect Excellence, Merchant of Hope

Collective teacher efficacy continues to be recognized as THE most powerful influence on student achievement. Schools everywhere are investing time and energy into building collective efficacy, yet many are not seeing the improvements in student learning they anticipated. Why? Too often, collective efficacy is misunderstood as collaboration, teamwork, positivity, or simply having a strong school culture. While these elements may contribute to collective efficacy, they do not necessarily translate into improved student outcomes. In this engaging and thought-provoking session, educators will explore why so many well-intentioned efforts to build collective efficacy fail to produce meaningful results. Participants will develop a deeper understanding of what collective efficacy actually is, examine the critical conditions necessary for it to develop, and discover practical strategies for moving beyond simply talking about collective efficacy to intentionally building it in ways that positively impact student learning.

JUNE 23 | 10:15–11:30 AM | 6 SESSIONS TO CHOOSE FROM

Breakout 5

The Power of Appreciation: Practical Ways to Elevate Staff Engagement and Morale

David Arencibia

Audience: All Educators
Core values: Merchant of Hope, Carry the Banner, Expect Excellence

What if creating a more positive, engaged school environment didn't require another program, initiative, or meeting? What if some of the most powerful ways to strengthen staff morale were already within our reach? In this highly interactive session, 2022 Texas Secondary Principal of the Year and 2023 National Principal of the Year Finalist Dr. David Arencibia combines Gallup's research on employee engagement with meaningful connection activities, powerful visuals, and proven practices to explore what helps educators feel valued, appreciated, supported, and connected. Through the lens of ELITE Culture, participants will explore the four levels of Gallup's engagement hierarchy and practice low-prep, high-impact strategies to strengthen relationships, recognize contributions, and create a positive environment. Discover how colleagues, students, families, and the broader school community can all help celebrate educators and build a culture of appreciation, regardless of title or position. Leave with ready-to-use conversation prompts, practical appreciation and recognition strategies, and resources you can immediately use with colleagues and school communities. Get ready to connect, collaborate, and have some fun discovering how small, intentional actions can make a big difference in staff morale and engagement!

Keeping Students on Campus: The Power of Extracurricular Activities as a Tool to Enhance Student Attendance

Stephen Speck

Audience: All Educators
Core values: Champion for Students, Carry the Banner

An unfortunate issue facing educators across the country is the dilemma of how to increase student attendance. As percentages continue to drop, we are compelled to consider what will motivate our students to join us each day. Extracurricular activities, perhaps even more appropriately termed, "co-curricular activities," are often overlooked for their undeniable value as it relates to this topic. Join Stephen Speck for this session as we dive deeply into ways in which we can encourage our students to become more engaged with and involved in the opportunities that we offer them in our schools. Whether we are referring to interscholastic athletics, the fine arts, or even clubs, they most assuredly impact the lives of students. By creating meaningful, memorable experiences for our students, we, in turn, might very well inspire them to be present far more often than not in our classrooms. A key component of creating thriving cultures on our campuses begins with doing all within our power to ensure that they are filled with our students!

JUNE 23 | 10:15–11:30 AM | 6 SESSIONS TO CHOOSE FROM

Breakout 5

Talk, Read, Write: Small Literacy Routines That Make a Big Difference

Danica Lewis

Audience: Classroom Teachers (All Content Areas)
Core values: Expect Excellence, Merchant of Hope

Students become stronger readers and writers when they have daily chances to talk about ideas, wrestle with text, and put their thinking into words. These routines don’t require a new curriculum, just intentional planning. In this hands-on session, teachers will experience and practice simple, repeatable routines that build reading, writing, and discussion into everyday lessons in any content area. We’ll focus on routines that raise the level of student thinking, increase engagement, and help every student find their voice. Participants will leave with ready-to-use routines and planning tips they can bring into their classrooms the next day.

Beyond the Score: Culturizing Assessment to Foster Hope, Agency, and Growth

Shannon Myers

Audience: All Educators
Core values: Merchant of Hope

When data is used primarily for ranking or compliance, it breeds anxiety; when used intentionally to illuminate the path forward, it becomes an engine of hope. This session reframes assessment from an autopsy of past performance into a dynamic roadmap for learning. Participants will examine how shifting from traditional compliance-driven grading toward growth-oriented assessment protocols cultivates high expectations while preserving student agency. Classroom teachers will gain actionable strategies to demystify learning goals, deliver formative feedback that sticks, and involve learners directly in monitoring their progress. At the same time, school and district leaders will learn how building assessment literacy across teams transforms professional learning communities and establishes a coherent culture of continuous improvement across K–12 grade bands.

JUNE 23 | 10:15–11:30 AM | 6 SESSIONS TO CHOOSE FROM

Breakout 5

From Student Voice to Collective Impact: Co-Creating School Culture with Student Leaders

Meg Simon

Audience: All Educators
Core values: Champion for Students, Merchant of Hope, Carry the Banner

What happens when leaders move beyond listening to students and begin leading with them? This session focuses on how school leaders and staff can intentionally partner with ALL students to turn their insights into meaningful, schoolwide impact. Participants will walk away with strategies to help create structures that elevate students' voice and empower them to identify challenges across academics, policy, facilities, and school culture, where students are not just heard, but empowered to turn ideas into action and leave a lasting legacy.

Through Their Eyes: The Importance of Empathetic Design When AI Tools are Everywhere

Tony Frontier

Audience: Classroom Teachers, Leaders
Core values: Merchant of Hope, Expect Excellence

Has everywhere access to AI tools created problems related to student learning, motivation, and engagement…or revealed challenges that have existed for decades? By seeing challenges through our students' eyes, we can better design systems that meet their needs. In this session, we'll look at research on how students are using AI tools in ways that support, and in ways that undermine, their learning. Drawing on this research, you'll learn principles of empathetic design that will help you and your colleagues move beyond stagnation or frustration and take action to help all students move forward. Practical strategies, action steps, and anecdotes that will remind you to slow down and see through the eyes of your students will be shared.

THE PEOPLE BEHIND THE LEARNING

Meet Your Presenters

Jessica Cabeen

Jessica Cabeen is the Principal of Alternative Educational Programs and Austin Online Academy in Austin, Minnesota. Previously, she served as principal at Ellis Middle School and at Woodson Kindergarten Center—affectionately known as the “Happiest Place in Southeastern Minnesota.” Her leadership journey also includes roles as an assistant middle school principal, special education assistant director, and special education teacher. Jessica was awarded the VINCI Digital Leader of Early Learning Award in 2016, was named the Minnesota National Distinguished Principal in 2017, and was the 2021 DIVE Principal of the Year. She is a Future Ready Principal and the author of Hacking Early Learning, Balance Like a Pirate, Unconventional Leadership, Lead with Grace: Leaning into the Soft Skills of Leadership, Principal in Balance, and The Drip Effect. But by far, her favorite space is the one that involves being with her husband Rob, her sons Kenny and Isaiah, and of course the family dogs—Herman and Harvey.

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 the 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.

THE PEOPLE BEHIND THE LEARNING

Meet Your Presenters

Thomas Murray

Thomas Murray is a nationally recognized and highly sought-after keynote speaker known for blending clarity, authenticity, and practical insight to help leaders strengthen culture, communication, and learning design. He serves as Director of Innovation for Future Ready Schools®, a project of All4Ed based in Washington, D.C., where he works at the intersection of leadership, policy, and practice to support learner-centered transformation at scale. Murray has testified before the United States Congress and collaborated with the U.S. Senate, the White House, the U.S. Department of Education, state departments of education, corporations, and school systems nationwide. He is the co-author of Learning Transformed: 8 Keys to Designing Tomorrow's Schools, Today (ASCD) and the author of Personal & Authentic: Designing Learning Experiences that Impact a Lifetime and How You Show Up: Change the Belief. Change the Outcome. All three books are recognized bestsellers. Before his national work, Murray served as an elementary and middle school teacher, principal at both levels, and a district leader in Bucks County, Pennsylvania.

Garth Larson, Ed.D

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 2500 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 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.

THE PEOPLE BEHIND THE LEARNING

Meet Your Presenters

Jonathan Alsheimer

Jonathan Alsheimer is a best-selling author of Next Level Teaching and School of Engagement, nationally recognized speaker, and passionate educator known for his high-energy, game-changing approach to student engagement, school culture, and leadership. A former teacher and school leader in northern Virginia, Jonathan worked at the world-renowned Fred Lynn Middle School featured in the documentary Relentless: Chasing Accreditation. Jonathan has inspired audiences across the country through powerful storytelling, practical strategies, and partnerships with organizations, celebrities, and athletes including UFC fighter and TV analyst Paul Felder. Featured on NBC News, USA Channel 9, and the Saturday Morning Show for creating the national give-back movement “A Rae of Hope,” Jonathan challenges educators and leaders to break through limitations, lead with passion, and take their impact to the next level.

David Arencibia

David Arencibia rose from humble beginnings, overcoming challenges like situational poverty and a transient lifestyle. As a first-generation college graduate, he earned his doctorate in education despite dyslexia. His varied roles as a teacher, coach, athletics coordinator, and administrator have shaped him into an effective educational leader. As a principal, David transformed his school into a Nationally Recognized Model Campus, fostering a positive culture (measured by Gallup) and driving programs to top-tier success. His leadership has been featured in EducationWeek, U.S. News & World Report, and Jon Gordon & Dr. Jim Van Allan's national bestselling book, The Energy Bus for Schools. Recognized nationally, David was a finalist for the 2023 NASSP National Principal of the Year (of over 90,000 principals) and the 2022 Texas Secondary Principal of the Year. David was also a finalist for TEXAN of the Year by The Dallas Morning News in 2022. His book, Foundations of an Elite Culture, published by Jimmy Casas and his company, ConnectEDD, became a #1 New Release on Amazon in its category and garnered attention from educators and business leaders nationwide.

THE PEOPLE BEHIND THE LEARNING

Meet Your Presenters

Kheila Casas

Kheila Casas is the President of J Casas & Associates, where she leads the organization's instructional work and marketing. With over 20 years of experience in education, Kheila has served as an elementary classroom teacher, instructional coach, and Director of Innovation. She works alongside teachers, coaches, and school leaders to strengthen teaching practices, make instruction more explicit, and build coaching systems that produce observable results in classrooms. An Apple Distinguished Educator and the 2021 Innovator of the Year at the Pennsylvania Educational Technology Expo and Conference, Kheila is passionate about student-centered learning and helping every educator see the impact of their daily practice on student success.

Tony Frontier, PhD

Tony Frontier, PhD is an award-winning educator with 30 years of experience as a teacher, principal, curriculum director, university professor, and consultant who works with teachers and school leaders across the globe to help them prioritize efforts to improve student learning. Tony facilitates engaging, practical, research-based workshops on a variety of topics, including classroom assessment, student engagement, curriculum development, meaningful feedback, technology integration, and strategic planning. His books include Teaching with Clarity: How to Prioritize and Do Less So Your Students Understand More (2021), and Effective Supervision, Supporting the Art & Science of Teaching (2011) with Bob Marzano. His most recent book, AI with Intention: Principles and Action Steps for School Leaders and Teachers (2025) with a foreword by Jay McTighe has been hailed by John Hattie as "the best book I have read to introduce all to optimize the power of AI."

Gabe Hackett

Gabe Hackett is the director of the PLC Center with FIRST Educational Resources. He recently spent a year as the interim principal of Annandale Middle School in Annandale, Minnesota. He also spent 10 years as the principal of Little Mountain Elementary in Monticello, MN. Gabe and his teams have helped to develop Observable Impact tools and structures currently used by many schools across the United States and around the globe. Gabe is passionate about using the Observable Impact tools and protocols to strengthen collaborative teams by connecting action to impact. He enjoys working with schools across the United States to develop strong collaborative teams and finally answer the question, "What instructional strategies really work in our classrooms?". He is the co-author of Building PLCs from the Ground Up Laminated Guide. Gabe lives in South Haven, MN with his wife (Heidi) and two kids (Griffin and MarLee).

THE PEOPLE BEHIND THE LEARNING

Meet Your Presenters

Sarah Johnson

Sarah Johnson has served in educational leadership roles in Northwestern Wisconsin since 2004 as a school principal at all building levels as well as an English teacher, writing coach, and school improvement facilitator. She is passionate about assisting others in developing strong leadership foundations as well as seeking greater satisfaction in all areas of their full lives by helping them go beyond work-life balance. Sarah is deeply vested in the J Casas & Associates' mission to inspire others to be more and do more than they ever thought possible, especially when it comes to leading the learning and shaping the cultures of our schools. Sarah is the author of Lead with Faith: Building a Strong Foundation So You Can Rise Up, Slay Fear, and Serve Well and co-author of Balance Like a Pirate: Going Beyond Work-Life Balance to Ignite Passion and Thrive as an Educator. Sarah is an experienced and impactful national keynote speaker and workshop presenter featured at educational conferences such as NASSP National Principal Conference, ASCD Leadership Summit and ASCD Empower, Women Leading Wisconsin, Minnesota Elementary Principals Conference, Colorado Association of School Executives, and more.

Joy Kelly

Joy Kelly brings over 30 years of experience in education as a teacher, principal, and executive leadership coach. A passionate advocate for cultivating trust, excellence, and meaningful relationships, Joy was recognized as the 2015 Iowa Associate Principal of the Year. She believes that a strong, positive culture is the foundation of every successful school. She is the co-author of Handle with Care: Managing Difficult School Situations with Dignity and Respect, written with Jimmy Casas, which provides educators with practical strategies to navigate challenges with professionalism and compassion. Today, Joy works with school leaders across the country, helping them clarify core values, cultivate trust, hold themselves and others accountable, and build leadership capacity. Her work inspires schools to become places where educators thrive, parents feel confident, and students excel in safe, engaging environments.

THE PEOPLE BEHIND THE LEARNING

Meet Your Presenters

Shannon Myers

Shannon Myers has served as the Assistant Superintendent for the Bermudian Springs School District in York Springs, Pennsylvania, since October 2021. She has had a diverse career in education and administration spanning more than two decades, with experience in both Maryland and Pennsylvania. In recognition of her leadership and impact, Shannon was honored with the Pennsylvania Association of School Administrators' (PASA) Wanda McDaniel Award for Outstanding Female Leadership. Over the course of her career, Shannon has held various roles, including kindergarten and first-grade teacher, elementary reading specialist, elementary assistant principal, elementary principal, and middle school principal. Her passion lies in strengthening curriculum and instruction to ensure all students have access to engaging, rigorous, and meaningful learning experiences. Shannon is deeply committed to supporting teachers in designing instruction that not only meets standards but also inspires curiosity, creativity, and growth in every classroom.

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. Danica has a Master's Degree in Educational Leadership from Marian University in Fond du Lac, WI and has a Bachelor's of Science in Human Development and Education from the University of Wisconsin-Madison (WI).

THE PEOPLE BEHIND THE LEARNING

Meet Your Presenters

Becky Peppler

Becky Peppler is the Director of the FIRST Education STAGR Center, a division of FIRST Educational Resources. With over 18 years in public education, she is dedicated to helping schools navigate the challenges of grading and assessment reform to create systems that support student learning and growth. A former 6-12 Instructional Coach and science educator, Becky has played a pivotal role in guiding numerous schools through full transitions to Standards-Based Grading. She has worked with over 100 districts nationwide, helping educators design grading practices that are meaningful, accurate, and student-centered. Her expertise includes developing clear learning targets, designing meaningful assessments, implementing effective reassessment policies, and ensuring grades reflect student achievement rather than behavior. She is passionate about supporting schools in building grading systems that foster deeper learning, meaningful communication, and improved transparency between teachers, students, and families. Becky is the co-author of the best-selling book, Extinguishing the Fires of Assessment and Grading Reform and the STAGR Process Roadmap Laminated Guide, collaborating with Dr. Garth Larson and Ken O'Connor. Her work continues to drive impactful change in grading practices, helping educators create systems that truly support student success.

Meg Simon

Meg Simon is redefining what leadership looks like in education. As the youngest female principal in the history of Findlay High School, she is a trailblazer and role model for aspiring women leaders. Named to the region's Top 20 Under 40 and honored as Ohio's Assistant Principal of the Year in 2020, Meg's career reflects her unwavering commitment to excellence, connection, and impact. A wife, mother of two young boys, former Division I athlete, coach, and educator, Meg blends the discipline of competition, the empathy of a teacher, and the vision of a leader as she guides both middle and high school communities. Relatable, inspiring, and driven, Meg embodies the essence of leading courageously with heart—offering leaders a voice they can connect with and draw strength from.

THE PEOPLE BEHIND THE LEARNING

Meet Your Presenters

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 of the best selling book, 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.

THE PEOPLE BEHIND THE LEARNING

Meet Your Presenters

Greg Wolcott

Greg Wolcott is a best-selling author, keynote speaker, educational trainer, and a practicing Assistant Superintendent for Teaching and Learning. Drawing on cutting-edge research across psychology, neuroscience, and education, Greg delivers groundbreaking professional development that empowers educators to excel beyond expectations. His dynamic, evidence-based approach has inspired schools throughout North America to reimagine what's possible in the classroom. Leveraging his profound understanding of the intersection between emotions and learning, Greg guides educators in creating environments where every student flourishes. Through an artful blend of neuroscience and practical pedagogy, he transforms both teaching practice and student achievement. Greg's engaging sessions translate complex research into immediate, high-impact strategies for the classroom. His unique ability to bridge science and practice equips teachers with proven approaches that drive meaningful change.

Stephen Speck

Stephen Speck brings experience in classroom teaching, high school coaching, and athletic administration to his work with educators. He taught elementary students for nearly ten years and led two high school sports programs. He later directed athletics in three districts across two states, including South Western School District in Hanover, Pennsylvania. His work with J Casas and Associates emphasizes leadership growth, team development, and staff morale. Stephen helps educators recognize their capacity to lead and build teams grounded in trust and common purpose.

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