



2026 INNOVATIVE IDEAS INSTITUTE

COLLABORATIVE LEADERSHIP FOR COLLECTIVE IMPACT

Breakout Sessions

Monday, June 22, 2026

11:00 a.m. – 12:00 p.m.

Becoming Screen Strong: What School Leaders Need to Know About Brain Science, Technology, and Student Well-Being

Melanie Hempe, ScreenStrong

School leaders are facing unprecedented challenges related to student mental health, attention, behavior, and academic engagement, many of which are directly connected to excessive and unsupervised screen use. This leadership-focused session equips superintendents, principals, and district administrators with compelling, research-based insight into how smartphones, social media, and gaming impact the developing brain, learning, and school culture.

Grounded in neuroscience and developmental psychology, the session explains why children and adolescents are uniquely vulnerable to dopamine-driven digital platforms and how this vulnerability presents in classrooms, hallways, and school communities. Participants will explore the academic, behavioral, and social consequences of personal device use during the school day, including reduced focus, increased impulsivity, anxiety, and disrupted peer relationships. This session empowers educational leaders to make informed, proactive decisions that protect student well-being, strengthen school culture, and support long-term academic success across schools and districts.

Collaborative Connections: The Alternative Setting and Exceptional Children

Kalila Wilson, Liberty Hill Academy and Kevin Keith, Charleston County Schools

Addressing the complex needs of exceptional children in alternative settings requires a robust, collaborative approach. This presentation showcases effective strategies for building strong partnerships among staff, administrators, and families to support students with significant behavioral and emotional needs. Drawing on real-world examples, we will detail practical ways to improve communication, implement universal behavioral supports, and create truly individualized, effective programs. Attendees will learn actionable techniques to enhance student outcomes and create more supportive learning environments for this vulnerable population.

Connection at the Core: How Intentional Collaboration Shapes School Culture

Mattie Hughes, Vanessa Hefley, and Christina Labbe, Jefferson Elementary School

What does it really look like when a school puts relationships, intentional planning, and collaboration at the center of everything? This session offers an inside look at Jefferson Elementary's school experience, where connection and collaboration drive growth, and every student and staff member is valued. At Jefferson, we believe that when we collaborate, we

multiply our knowledge. Alone, we teach what we know. Together, we create what students need. Our growth is rooted in the intentional work we do together, through shared planning, professional trust, and a commitment to consistency across classrooms. We honor teacher autonomy and the power of professional judgment. We're not asking teachers to be cookie cutters—unique teaching styles and strengths are an asset to our school. But we also know that being on the same page matters. Planning together means committing to implementation together. True collaboration means shared ownership, not just of the planning, but of the outcomes too. Attendees will leave with practical ideas they can implement right away, ways to strengthen relationships, build shared ownership, and create a school environment where both students and adults grow and succeed together.

Disciplinary Literacy for SC Administrators

Wanda Littlejohn, Greenville County Schools

This session, led by Literacy in the Disciplines (LiD) 6–12, introduces administrators to the essential role of disciplinary literacy (DL) in improving student outcomes across all content areas. Disciplinary literacy is defined as helping students read, write, think, and communicate like experts in each field—historians, scientists, mathematicians, and literary scholars. The session connects this work to South Carolina academic standards and college and career readiness expectations. Participants will examine why DL matters by exploring data on reading proficiency gaps and the impact of literacy on graduation and postsecondary success. DL is presented not as an additional initiative, but as a lens to strengthen Tier 1 instruction. Administrators will learn what to look for in classrooms—students engaging with complex texts and evidence, teachers modeling disciplinary strategies, and structured opportunities for discussion and meaning-making. The session highlights best practices and examples from science, social studies, math, and ELA. The session concludes with a call to action for administrators to identify opportunities to advance disciplinary literacy in their own schools.

From Confusion to Clarity: Understanding SQL Queries

Jay Lindler, South Carolina District Data Governance Group

Learn how to break down SQL queries into plain language. Gain confidence in reading and understanding what queries are doing to your school or district data.

Panel Discussion: Grounded in Local Contest: Using SC Administrator and Teacher Working Conditions Data to Strengthen Continuous Improvement

Panelists: Bill Briggman, Charleston County Schools; Latoya Dixon, York District 4; Sheila Quinn, York District 2; Wendell Sumter, Chester County Schools; and Todd Walker, Richland District 1

Facilitators: Sandy Brossard and Ann Byrd, SC TEACHER

With the release of the inaugural South Carolina Administrators Working Conditions Survey (SCAWCS) results, school and district leaders now have access to powerful new evidence about administrators' lived experiences—their job demands, supports, and conditions for success. This panel session will explore how SCAWCS findings can be layered with South Carolina Teacher Working Conditions Survey (SCTWCS) data and other district indicators (e.g., achievement, turnover, attendance) to create a more complete picture of system health and leadership capacity. During this session, district leaders will share concise examples of how administrator and teacher working conditions data—grounded in the job demands–resources framework—are being used to inform strategic planning, leadership development, and improvement efforts.

Panel Discussion: Leading Forward: A Superintendent–Principal Dialogue on District Success

Join South Carolina’s district superintendents for an engaging panel discussion designed specifically for school principals. This session will explore how district leadership and school-based leaders can work in stronger alignment to improve student outcomes, support educators, and navigate evolving challenges in K–12 education. Panelists will share insights on strategic decision-making, resource allocation, leadership development, and building a cohesive vision across schools. Attendees will gain practical perspectives, ask questions, and leave with actionable ideas to strengthen collaboration and drive success within their own schools and districts.

Prioritizing Employee Well-Being and the Bottom Line in 26-27...Yes, You Can do Both!

Nathan Craig and Josh Hyman, Southern Benefit Systems

Rethinking the Master Schedule: Every Minute and Person Matters

Melida Reeves, Erica Brady, and Kelly Dunlap, La France Elementary School

Intentional interventions contribute not only to achievement, but measurable student growth over time. In this session the La France Elementary leadership team will share how to utilize opportunities in the master schedule to leverage all certified and non certified staff for interventions. We will review how to identify, create, and fill schedule “holes” to provide more support for students. We will also explore strategies for grouping students by skill level and/or needs. We will also offer tips in developing an action plan to pilot a schoolwide, collaborative intervention model.

Turning Walkthroughs into Impact: Feedback that Fuels Growth

Katie Barker and Carey Ball-Hodge, Dorchester District 2; and Susan Aplin, Classroom Mosaic

Classroom observations are powerful tools for supporting teacher growth and advancing student learning—when the data is used intentionally. This session will share how Dorchester District Two leaders leverage classroom walkthroughs using platforms such as Classroom Mosaic to move beyond compliance to meaningful practice that transforms observation notes into actionable feedback and professional learning opportunities. Participants will explore strategies for analyzing observation trends, delivering feedback that fosters reflection and growth, and using data to identify schoolwide instructional priorities. Through discussion and practical examples, leaders will leave with clear approaches to strengthen teacher practice, build trust, and drive measurable improvements in instruction and student outcomes.

Unlocking Success: Interventions That Propel MLL Achievement

Tiffany Hall, Northside Middle School

How can schools transform outcomes for multilingual learners? At our school, where 50% of students are Hispanic, we moved achievement forward by exceeding the state’s MLL proficiency rate growing by 15% and achieving 14% ELA SCREADY growth. This session unpacks how we restructured ACCESS testing to remove barriers, established a common Tier I language across content areas, and built effective Tier II/III interventions that supported measurable student progress.

Vision 2027 Initiative: Utilizing a Structured Data Protocol to Ensure All Students Reach Grade Level

Stephanie Grayson, Charleston County Schools; Jill Brady and Tyler Garrett, Curriculum Associates

The Vision 2027 Initiative reflects Charleston County School District's districtwide commitment to ensuring all students read on grade level by the end of fifth grade. This session is designed for leaders seeking to align data-driven decision-making, instructional coherence, and equitable resource allocation to accelerate student outcomes. Participants will explore how CCSD utilizes a structured data protocol to bring cross-functional teams together to analyze current and historical student data, identify trends, and determine targeted instructional actions. Leaders will examine how insights from this protocol inform strategic decisions around small-group instruction, grade-level challenge opportunities, and instructional pathways. The session highlights how district leadership sustains this work through aligned PLCs, MTSS structures, and continuous progress monitoring, reinforcing shared accountability and ensuring systems-level support for school-based implementation.

Where Materials Meet Momentum

Paige Mitchell and Nicole Barker, SC Department of Education

Where Materials Meet Momentum explores how high-quality instructional materials and purposeful instructional technology work together to strengthen teaching and accelerate student learning. Participants will examine practical strategies for selecting, integrating, and using materials and digital tools to design engaging, standards-aligned instruction.

Work Smarter, Lead Stronger: AI Tips for Busy School Administrators

Neal Vincent, Florence District 2

Today's school administrators manage many administrative tasks, including emails, reports, meetings, data reviews, and staff communication, all while striving to lead effectively. This session provides simple, practical tips and strategies for using readily available AI tools to save time, reduce stress, and enhance school leadership. Participants will explore how to automate routine tasks, generate professional communications, and organize and analyze data with AI tools. No advanced technical skills are required, just a willingness to discover how AI can streamline daily work and improve decision-making. By reducing administrative overload, school leaders can focus their energy on what matters most: instruction, relationships, and student success.

Monday, June 22, 2026
1:15 p.m. – 2:15 p.m.

Aligning MAP-Growth with SCDE Added-Value Targets to Strengthen Teams, Transform Instructional Practices, & Impact State Accountability

Jess Koon, York District 1 and Megan Hoyt, Cotton Belt Elementary School

Ready, S-E-T, Grow – join York School District One to learn how we STRENGTHENED our data systems to inspire collaboration and interventions for continuous student improvement, EMPOWERED our educators to use data in innovate ways to make meaningful data-informed decisions, and TRANSFORMED our state and federal accountability results. Learn how our journey began with aligning NWEA MAP Conditional Growth Percentiles to our SC School Report Card Student Progress Metric, but evolved into a district-wide movement that boosted both teacher and student growth through personalized learning strategies. Hear firsthand from YSD1 Coordinator of Accountability & Student Data and Elementary School Principal about achieving an Excellent Student Progress rating, the highest growth in the district, including success for students with disabilities, economically disadvantaged learners, and those from diverse backgrounds.

Beyond ChatGPT: Launching South Carolina’s AI Pathway to Meet Graduation Requirements and Workforce Demand

Ivy Coburn, Southern Regional Education Board and Kayce Cook, SC Department of Education

Artificial intelligence is reshaping every industry in South Carolina — from advanced manufacturing and agriculture to healthcare and sports analytics. The question for schools and centers is no longer if students should learn about AI, but how we prepare them to move beyond using AI tools to understanding how they are built. This session spotlights South Carolina’s custom-designed Introduction to Artificial Intelligence (Course 1) and the full AI Career Pathway — created specifically for our state to meet workforce demand while providing a powerful option for satisfying the computer science graduation requirement. Students learn the foundational building blocks behind AI systems, including machine learning, computer vision, natural language processing, data preparation, and responsible AI design — all through project-based units grounded in South Carolina’s priority industries. Participants will learn implementation strategies for meeting graduation requirements while exposing students to viable career pathways, including approaches for adopting the full pathway and building dual enrollment partnerships with regional postsecondary institutions. We will share lessons from pilot implementation, strategies for embedding AI into existing CTE programs, and insights from new initiatives that connect pathway skills to real-world AI applications, validation processes, and industry troubleshooting demands.

Building and Sustaining a Culture of Excellence

Eric Masaitis, Katresa Chares, and Staci Burnette, Alice Drive Elementary School

How did Alice Drive Elementary earn its first ever Excellent rating on the SC School Report Card? How did we do it again the next year and then again a third year? There is no magic bullet, but there is a little bit of magic in all that we do. Learn how we built a culture based around trust, collective leadership, and high expectations for all. Learn how leadership has learned to let the teachers teach the standards and not push new initiatives chasing short-term results. How do we not only attract the best people, but get the best out of the people we already have? Why does the principal say he is not student-centered, and what does he mean by that? How does STEM-

based learning fit into the culture of the school? Learn how data and MTSS went from being negative four letter words into invaluable resources for student growth. Learn what challenges have we faced over the past few years, how we overcame them, and where we go from here. Join us if you are looking for an energetic and fast-paced, yet practical and thoughtful presentation about one school's journey and its four pillars of success.

Building Positive Partnerships: Alternative Programs & Home Schools

Jamie Brunson, Gordon Odyssey Academy

This session introduces a practical framework for building strong partnerships between alternative education programs and home schools. It focuses on creating collaborative systems that support academic achievement, positive behavior, and smooth transitions for students in nontraditional placements. Participants will explore strategies to address common barriers such as inconsistent communication, misaligned expectations, and fragmented transitions. The session emphasizes the use of ABC data (Attendance, Behavior, Course performance), regular communication cycles, and aligned academic and behavioral practices across schools. A key focus is on designing person-centered transition protocols that involve families, educators, and support staff. The session also highlights how to celebrate student growth publicly to reduce stigma and promote inclusion. Attendees will receive “take home” tools including templates for transition planning, ABC data tracking, and communication schedules. These resources are designed for district leaders, school administrators, counselors, and teachers working to improve support systems for students navigating alternative settings. By the end, participants will understand how shared leadership, consistent practices, and inclusive engagement can improve outcomes and ensure that every student receives the support needed to succeed academically and socially.

Cultivating Curiosity: Engaging Students in Geometry with Statistics

Janelle Mills, SC Department of Education

This session provides practical strategies and ready-to-use activities designed to actively engage students using geometric concepts from the 2025 SC CCR Geometry with Statistics standards and indicators. Learn how to help your teachers transform abstract geometric ideas into meaningful learning experiences by moving beyond lectures to incorporate real-world applications and collaborative and tactile experiences that make math relevant and deeply understood. This presentation explores strategies that allow students to think critically and investigate spatial relationships through guided discovery. By incorporating tools such as manipulatives, measurement activities, and real-world challenges, teachers can deepen students' conceptual understanding and support multiple learning styles. Administrators will leave better equipped to observe, support, and coach teachers as they leverage practical, classroom-ready strategies to make geometry engaging, memorable, and accessible for all learners.

Future Teacher Academy: Building a Pipeline of Educators Through Innovation, Mentorship, and Partnerships

Kelly Nalley and Rachel Turner, Greenville County Schools

The Greenville County Schools (GCS) Future Teacher Academy (FTA) is an innovative “grow-your-own” pipeline designed to address teacher shortages by engaging high school students in early, authentic preparation for careers in education. A signature feature of the program is the Expressway to Tigertown, an accelerated path to earn a degree in education and certification to teach through a partnership with GCS, Greenville Technical College, and Clemson University.

While in high school, students complete 150 hours of field practice, earn 12 college credits, and gain leadership experience through the FTA Leadership Board, where they receive targeted instruction and are mentored by the GCS Teacher Forum. Students who graduate from the program are invited to interview for district teaching positions, creating a sustainable pipeline of future educators. The Academy aligns with career readiness initiatives by offering work-based learning credentials, career technology pathway completion, and college/career readiness skills. This media-rich session highlights program design, partnerships, and strategies other districts can replicate to recruit, prepare, and retain high-quality teachers. Participants will engage in a Q&A panel and small group interactions. They will receive a companion guide with suggestions for program development and testimonials from current and former participants in the Academy.

Hot Topics in School Law

Kathy Mahoney, Vernie Williams, and Dwayne Mazyck, Halligan Mahoney & Williams

This session will highlight any new legislation and new caselaw affecting school districts, as well as provide school administrators with practical legal guidance for their daily work in schools.

Label-Less Learning - Going Beyond the LRE Continuum to Create True Equitable Learning Environments.

Jessica Lairson and William Derden, Colleton County Schools

As states and districts navigate shifting political climates, special education leaders must balance the legal imperatives of IDEA and Section 504 with evolving community and legislative pressures. This session introduces Label-Less Learning, an innovative framework for inclusive services that provides the infrastructure for implementing inclusive and high-leverage practices for ALL students. Presenters will outline a replicable framework for service delivery that goes beyond the traditional LRE continuum by emphasizing student strengths, access, and relationships over labels. Participants will leave with a blueprint for designing systems that withstand litigation while remaining student-centered, strategies that can be immediately implemented, and SCTS 4.0 aligned rubrics to ensure high quality total district implementation.

Leveraging Insights to Transform Outcomes

Amanda Patterson, HMH/NWEA

Do you have growing needs but fewer resources? Has your ML and special education population doubled? Are you over assessing your students? Are teachers feeling exhausted? In today's educational landscape, being able to respond to the increasing demands and limited resources is a challenge faced by many districts. One widely adopted solution which addresses these challenges involves leveraging coherence maps and the data insights derived from them. By meticulously analyzing these insights, districts have been able to transform their approaches, fostering more supportive environments for students, teachers, and leaders in modern classrooms. This session offers educators and leaders a valuable platform to connect, share experiences, and learn from one another. Participants will acquire practical strategies to support all students, effectively implement Multi-Tiered Systems of Support (MTSS), and develop an understanding of how assessment enhances daily instructional outcomes. The session will provide actionable solutions for immediate support at both the leadership and teacher levels.

Panel Discussion: Powering School Success: The Impact of Assistant Principals

Assistant principals play a pivotal yet often underrecognized role in driving school success. In this engaging panel, South Carolina assistant principals will share firsthand perspectives on how they support instructional leadership, foster positive school culture, and ensure smooth daily operations. Designed for school leaders and aspiring administrators, this session will highlight the ways assistant principals influence student achievement, support teachers, and serve as key connectors between staff and administration. Attendees will gain practical strategies, real-world insights, and a deeper understanding of how this critical leadership role helps schools thrive.

Shifting the Course: Grab-and-Go PD for Immediate Instructional Impact

Betsy Burr, Matia Goodwin, and Micki Dove, Kershaw County School District

In today's fast-paced school environments, principals and instructional leaders face the challenge of providing meaningful professional development while balancing countless demands. Kershaw County School District's innovative Grab-and-Go PD model addresses this challenge by delivering short, targeted, and highly actionable professional learning experiences grounded in John Hattie's Visible Learning research. This interactive session will guide leaders through the framework, share ready-to-use digital resources, and demonstrate strategies that teachers can implement the very next day. Participants will collaborate on planning, problem-solving, and envisioning how Grab-and-Go PD can be adapted for their own schools, regardless of grade level. Whether you oversee elementary, middle, or high school teams, you will leave with practical ideas to increase instructional impact, improve teacher engagement, and align daily learning experiences to your district's mission and vision.

Small but Mighty: Driving Academic Gains with Teacher Ownership

Lynn Cary, Era Roberts, Beth Brooks, Jill Christmus, and Bucky Ware, School District of Newberry County

The School District of Newberry County (SDNC) has achieved five-year highs on SC READY in ELA and Math, with scores steadily climbing since 2021, despite having limited resources and a small district staff. This session will highlight innovative, replicable strategies that have driven these results in a small, rural district. Participants will explore how SDNC: designed and implemented its own Instructional Delivery Model to align curriculum, instruction, and assessment; built teacher capacity through homegrown collaborative planning adapted from PLCs; developed a district-wide common assessment system, authored by teachers and aligned to state standards; leveraged i-Ready with fidelity for targeted tiered supports; launched a School and District Lead System to strengthen communication and capacity without adding staff; integrated the arts districtwide through strategic planning, targeted PD, and instructional shifts over four years; and expanded professional learning through choice-based PD, with 90% of sessions led by SDNC teachers year-round. The session is interactive and leader-focused, offering concrete frameworks, timelines, and tools. Participants will leave with scalable strategies for driving instructional coherence and growth in districts with lean administrative teams.

Unified for Safety: Enhancing Collaboration Between Schools and SROs

Sara-Beth Brown, Merriwether Elementary School and Jason Holt, Edgefield County Schools

Exploring the vital partnership between schools and School Resource Officers (SROs) to create safer, more supportive learning environments, we will discuss strategies to engage your SROs as collaborative partners who contribute not only to safety but also to positive community relationships. We will examine best practices for building trust, communicating effectively, and aligning goals between school staff and SROs. Attendees will discover how to leverage the unique skills and presence of SROs to support student well-being, conflict resolution, and community engagement. This session offers practical tools and real-world examples that empower educators and SROs to work together proactively, strengthening their connection to the broader community. Whether your school is beginning to develop its SRO partnership or looking to deepen an existing one, this session provides valuable insights to enhance collaboration for the benefit of students, staff, and families alike. Join us to foster a culture of mutual respect, safety, and shared responsibility through meaningful school-SRO engagement.

Instant Ideas

Each presenter shares their personal and professional passions for a total of 8 minutes. The following topics will be shared.

Community Learning Exchanges for Addressing School Readiness and Resiliency

Dan Boudah, East Carolina University

Relate. Connect. Grow: From Referrals to Relationships

Melinda Johnson and Harriet Boykin-Garity, Jackson School

Something Old, New, Borrowed and Blue: No, We're Not Getting Married - We're Leading!

Elaine Lundy, Cayce Elementary School

The Efficacy Effect: How Impact Reviews Drive Consistency and Growth

Kim Odom, Independence Elementary School

A Thousand Little Things

Ashley Wardlaw, Abby Choplin, Joel Perkin, and Rhianon Andry, Blue Ridge High School

How Mentorship Impacts School Culture in Positive Ways

Rico Salliewhite and Luke Slice, Brewer Middle School

Monday, June 22, 2026
2:30 p.m. – 3:30 p.m.

AI in Action: Leading and Learning in the Age of the 21st-Century Classroom

Courtney Jackson, Braden Wilson, Kyle Whitfield, Chris Chapman, and Megan Selman, Wren High School;

Artificial Intelligence is reshaping education—from data-driven decision-making in the front office to transforming learning experiences in the classroom. This session will explore how school administrators can leverage AI as a strategic tool to streamline communication, enhance efficiency, and support instructional leadership. We'll also tackle the complex conversation of AI use in classrooms where critical thinking, problem-solving, creativity, and other vital 21st-century learning skills remain essential. Participants will examine approaches for crafting local policies and frameworks that respect a continuum of practice—from classrooms that fully integrate AI tools to those that remain cautious or limited in use. Through practical examples, sample guidelines, and real-world applications, attendees will leave with strategies to thoughtfully and ethically guide AI implementation that aligns with their district's vision and values, preparing both leaders and learners for a future shaped by innovation.

Discipline and Disability: Practical Strategies and Legal Clarity for School Leaders

Sarah Longshore and Kevin Toole, Lexington District 1

Student discipline becomes especially complex when disabilities are involved. This session equips school and district leaders with tools to respond effectively to behavioral challenges while maintaining compliance with IDEA and Section 504. Participants will learn how to apply proactive behavior supports, understand the role of Functional Behavior Assessments (FBAs) and Behavior Intervention Plans (BIPs), and navigate Manifestation Determination Reviews (MDRs) with confidence. Real-world scenarios will be used to highlight how to balance student rights, legal obligations, and the need for safe and orderly schools. The emphasis is on avoiding discriminatory practices and building systems that support both students and staff.

Driving Student Success for All: Integrating HQIM, Science of Reading, PLCs, and Data-Driven Decision Making at the District Level

Merriman Nichols and Matthew Ferguson, Darlington County Schools

In today's complex educational landscape, district leaders face the critical challenge of ensuring equitable student growth through effective instructional practices and collaborative cultures. This session offers a comprehensive framework for district-wide implementation of High Quality Instructional Materials (HQIM), grounded in the Science of Reading (SOR), supported by vibrant Professional Learning Communities (PLCs), and guided by purposeful data-driven decision making. Participants will explore how to strategically align these four pillars to create a cohesive system of clarity and purpose that empowers educators, builds instructional capacity, and accelerates academic outcomes for all students, including traditionally underserved populations. Through case studies, actionable strategies, and reflective dialogue, school leaders will gain tools to lead purposeful change, monitor implementation fidelity, and foster a culture of continuous improvement.

Empowering Student Independence for Resilience

Andrea Keith, Let Grow; Allison Duckett, Woodruff Primary School; and Kevin Stinehart, Central Academy of the Arts

A panel of SC educators will be joined by Andrea Keith to highlight research, real-world examples, and practical strategies educators can use to empower students in and outside the classroom. Quantitative and qualitative data will show how their implementations of the Let Grow Experience are bringing big gains in strengthening mental health, reducing anxiety, increasing confidence, independence, responsibility and resilience in students - helping every child grow into a capable, confident, and resilient SC graduate.

From Classroom to Career: Scaling the "Pathways to Success" in South Carolina Districts

Eleanor Smalley, JASON Learning

How do we ensure every student in South Carolina—from the Upstate to the Lowcountry—graduates with a clear vision of their future and the technical skills to achieve it? Pathways to Success is JASON Learning's premier career-readiness initiative that demystifies the world of work by connecting students directly with STEM professionals and real-world industry challenges.

From Compliance to Care: Building a Culture Where People Choose to Stay

Johnnie Miller, Allendale County Schools

Drawing from real experiences in a rural district in South Carolina and an urban district in another state, this presentation will highlight practical strategies for turning transactional moments into transformational ones that strengthen morale and organizational loyalty. This session explores how Human Resources can move beyond compliance driven practices to create systems that affirm, support, and inspire. Participants will learn how everyday HR processes can be transformed into meaningful experiences that foster connection, trust, and belonging. Whether your district is large or small, rural or urban you'll discover how intentional leadership and relational HR practices can shift culture, reduce turnover, and reignite the sense of purpose that keeps great people in our schools.

"LEA"ding Beyond the IEP Meeting: Administrator Best Practices in Special Education Leadership

Katherine Sokohl and Traci Hogan, Greenville County Schools; and Meredith Welch, Rudolph Gordon School

School and district leaders play a vital role in shaping the success of special education programs, yet their leadership often extends far beyond the IEP table. This session will explore best practices for administrators in leading effective, student-centered special education programs. Drawing on experiences from Greenville County Schools—the largest district in South Carolina—presenters will highlight practical strategies for cultivating collaborative cultures, ensuring compliance while fostering innovation, and building trust with families and staff. Participants will examine leadership approaches that promote equity, strengthen instructional quality, and improve outcomes for students with disabilities. Whether you are a principal, district leader, or aspiring administrator, you will leave with actionable strategies and tools to enhance your leadership in supporting inclusive practices and empowering special education teams.

Making Magic in MacTown - Our one year Journey from Low-Average to Excellent
Skip Hopkins, Cameron Oswald, Melissa Cockrell, and Sulema Wright, McCormick County Schools

Join us in a presentation that documents our move from Low-Average to Excellent (Pending Release) on the SC School Report Card. See how McCormick Middle School, with the highest Pupils in Poverty rating, had one of the highest Student Progress and Climate scores in SC. Discover how culture shifts, scheduling, school-wide procedures and expectations, PLTs, identification of essential standards, backward design, and constant data reviews played a role in the amazing, historical gains in McCormick County School District.

Palmetto Math: Where Every Student in South Carolina is a Math Student
Elizabeth Schumpert and Sheah Pacheco, SC Department of Education

Participants will learn and practice using Concrete to Representational to Abstract (CRA) Models to gain a better understanding of how students learn and progress through math. The best practices shared will ensure all students have access to grade-level math and will clarify common misconceptions that interfere with students' learning and progressing through advanced-level math courses. This session will prepare school and district administrators to observe, support, and coach teachers in implementing CRA models.

Panel Discussion: From Systems to Success: Advancing MTSS in the Middle School Years

Panelists: Patrice Green and Alexis Stradford, Carolina Springs Middle School; Vernon Sava, Kelly Thacker, David, Sunday, and LuAnn Graul, Dutch Fork Middle School; Andrew Cartee, Sims Middle School; and Brandon Ross, Muller Road Middle School

In this dynamic panel discussion, middle school leaders will share how they are moving beyond foundational implementation to strengthen and sustain a comprehensive Multi-Tiered System of Supports (MTSS) model that drives both academic achievement and school culture. The conversation will explore how aligned systems create consistent and responsive support. Panelists will also discuss how advisory and mentoring structures foster meaningful relationships, enabling both academic and social-emotional growth through goal setting, student ownership, and ongoing progress monitoring. In addition, the session will examine how leadership alignment, PLCs, and intentional planning time ensure fidelity to MTSS while strengthening staff collaboration, morale, and resilience. Attendees will gain practical strategies and ready-to-implement ideas to elevate instruction, build cohesive support systems, and create equitable, data-informed environments where all students can succeed.

Panel Discussion: Palmetto's Finest: What Makes a Winning School

This session will provide an overview of the 2026–27 Palmetto's Finest Award application process, including key components of the application, expectations for site visits, and best practices for showcasing school excellence. In addition, the 2026 Palmetto's Finest Award-winning principals will participate in a panel discussion focused on what makes their schools truly "Palmetto's Finest." Panelists will share the core beliefs, systems, culture, and instructional practices that define excellence in their schools and contributed to their recognition. Attendees will hear authentic stories and actionable strategies related to leadership, teaching and learning,

school culture, community engagement, and continuous improvement. This session is designed to help school leaders understand not only how to navigate the application and site visit process, but also how to cultivate the conditions that lead to sustained, high-quality school performance.

The Role of the School Board in Continuous Improvement Aligned with Accreditation

Annette Melton, Cognia

Helping school board members see their role in establishing a clear vision, working as a team, and focusing on what is best for all students is foundational to an effective district. Learn more about Standard 31 and the newly established accreditation designations. Join us to uncover specific connections between continuous improvement and accreditation and the collaboration needed between board members and district leaders.

Understanding the New Student Progress Indicator: MAT, AVT, and the Evolution of Goal Setting

Jeffrey Bedford, Beech Hill Elementary School and Thad Schmenk, Dorchester District 2

This workshop is designed to support school administrators in both understanding and leading effective professional learning. First, participants will gain clarity on South Carolina's new growth measures—AVT and MAT—through clear explanations, practical examples, and opportunities for discussion. Second, the session will focus on strengthening participants' ability to facilitate impactful staff development by sharing key "lessons learned," along with practical tips and strategies that enhance engagement and effectiveness. By the end of the workshop, participants will feel more confident in explaining AVT and MAT within their schools and districts, as well as more equipped to design and deliver meaningful professional learning experiences. This session aims to build both knowledge and leadership capacity, empowering administrators to support educator growth and improve outcomes across their districts.

Walk the Stage: Raising Graduation Rates with Heart

Lori Grant and Reed Gunter, Dutch Fork High School

Every year, thousands of students walk away from high school without a diploma—not because they couldn't succeed, but because they lacked the systems, support, and belief to get there. As school leaders, we know the stakes: lower graduation rates mean fewer life opportunities, greater economic instability, and generational consequences for entire families. This presentation outlines a call to action—and a guide to action. It's for high school administrators who are tired of watching students fall through the cracks and ready to lead intentional, sustainable change. We will discuss strategies that are rooted in data, lived experience, and the real-world complexity of school leadership. We'll explore how to: build early-warning systems and student tracking tools; create targeted support classes and tutoring structures; develop meaningful mentorships for at-risk students; engage families and community partners; shift school culture to one that expects—and supports—graduation; and sustain momentum all the way through senior year and beyond.

Tuesday, June 23, 2026

11:00 a.m. – 12:00 p.m.

A Systems Approach to Multi-Lingual Learner Success

Brenda Blue, Malinda Kennedy, Immie Powell, and Emily Webb, Pritchardville Elementary School

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 school 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 multi-lingual students can thrive. Attendees will gain practical tools for implementing a systems-thinking model, aligning resources, and fostering culturally and linguistically responsive learning environments.

Beyond the Tassel: How Adult Education Helps Districts Achieve Graduation Goals

Ova Brown-Gillespie, Gretchen Trexler, and Angel Mack, Chesterfield County Adult Education; and Katie Brune, Chesterfield County Schools

This session explores the vital role Adult Education plays in helping school districts achieve their graduation goals. By providing alternative pathways and family-centered learning opportunities, Adult Education reengages learners who might otherwise be lost from the system. Participants will learn how adult education programs create win-win partnerships for districts: improving graduation rates, strengthening families, and aligning students with workforce and postsecondary opportunities. The session will highlight both data-driven strategies and powerful success stories that illustrate the transformative impact of adult education on individuals, families, and communities.

Building Thinking Classrooms in all Content Areas

Tonya Kram and Ansley Morrow, North Myrtle Beach High School

This session introduces the 14 research-based practices from *Building Thinking Classrooms in Mathematics* by Peter Liljedahl and demonstrates their application across all subject areas. Participants will explore practical strategies for organizing students, presenting tasks, and fostering collaboration that move learners from passive compliance to active, critical thinking. Although designed for math, these practices are highly adaptable to science, social studies, and English language arts. Attendees will leave with concrete strategies and insights to create student-centered, thinking-rich classrooms where engagement and problem-solving drive learning in every content area.

CTE for Special Populations: Skills for a Future

Carla Stegall, Lexington Technology Center

Perkins V requires us to serve special populations. How we reach them, and what is the benefit of CTE when there are so many differences in situations and abilities? How does your school/center reach these students? Plan to share from your experiences and programs as we

work to include and serve all nine groups of special populations in CTE, providing them with skill preparation leading to post-secondary careers.

Funding What Matters: How Charleston County is Redefining Equity in Education

Daniel Prentice and Anita Huggins, Charleston County Schools

Charleston County School District (CCSD) is transforming how resources reach students through its Weighted Student Funding (WSF) model—an equitable, transparent approach that directs dollars based on student needs. This presentation will highlight how WSF empowers schools to make data-driven, locally responsive decisions and how one innovative program is already changing outcomes. To address South Carolina's rising chronic absenteeism rates, CCSD launched a nine-week pilot that used WSF funds to provide families with \$25 weekly incentives for perfect attendance. Rather than investing in additional personnel or punitive interventions, the district redirected resources to directly support families facing economic barriers. The results have been remarkable: attendance improved by 1.48 percentage points overall—and more than three points in elementary schools—with the largest gains among multilingual learners and economically disadvantaged students. These attendance improvements have already contributed to measurable growth in SC READY performance across key student groups. Participants will learn how CCSD's WSF framework encourages school-level innovation, strengthens accountability, and fosters equity by funding what works—ensuring that every dollar makes a difference in the lives of students.

House Rules: Starting and Maintaining a Middle School House System

Josh Kay and George Austin, Florence Chapel Middle School

This presentation addresses the implementation, day-to-day management, and benefits of starting and maintaining a house system in a middle school setting, focusing on helpful tips, tricks and shortcuts for navigating possible speed bumps which are likely to arise during the initial implementation period.

Is the State Investment in Rural Teacher Recruitment Successful?

Dana Yow and Rainey Knight, SC Education Oversight Committee

South Carolina's rural regions have long struggled to fill teaching positions with adequately trained and certified educators. Challenges unique to these areas—such as limited access to resources, geographic isolation, and economic constraints—have contributed to persistent staffing gaps, directly impacting the quality of education students receive. The Rural Recruitment in Education Initiative serves as a strategic response to these challenges, making substantial investments in targeted strategies that support community growth and help ensure equitable educational opportunities for students in rural districts. By implementing targeted recruitment and retention strategies and offering incentives, the program aims to strengthen education in rural areas and improve long-term student outcomes. This session will provide a summary of a report that the Education Oversight Committee was directed by the SC General Assembly to produce by June 2026 on the impact and outcomes that have resulted from the State's continued investment in this initiative.

Implementing HQIM: Purpose, Principles, and Practical Application

Brenna McCormick, SC Department of Education

High-Quality Instructional Materials (HQIM) can boost engagement and achievement, but effective use requires more than following a script. This session clarifies key HQIM principles and offers school and district administrators practical guidance for implementing materials with fidelity while meeting diverse student needs.

Panel Discussion: Strengthening School Safety: Prevention, Response, and Best Practices

Panelists: Rich Todd, York District 4, Santana Sanguiliano, Lexington District 2; Andrew Jones and Jennifer Wilson, York District 3

School safety is an evolving and multifaceted responsibility that requires proactive planning, informed decision-making, and a deep understanding of emerging threats and protective strategies. In this panel discussion, experts will explore the current and emerging landscape of school safety across South Carolina and the nation, offering research-based insights, case studies, and practical tools to help schools prevent, mitigate, and respond to potential risks while maintaining environments where students can learn and thrive. Panelists will examine lessons learned from averted school violence, including a case study in which a school resource officer successfully prevented a targeted attack, highlighting key indicators, intervention strategies, and prevention frameworks. In addition, the discussion will explore the role of proactive safety measures such as random screenings and targeted observation in identifying hidden risks and strengthening school security systems. Attendees will leave with actionable strategies and evidence-based practices to enhance school safety planning, protect student rights, and build safer learning environments for all.

Road to Success

Jessica Williams, Janis Headden, Cordelia Jenkins, and Brandi Boseman, Colleton County Schools

The Road to Success initiative represents Colleton County School District's comprehensive commitment to student growth, community partnership, and a thriving school environment. The district's strategic focus centers on three key areas designed to ensure academic excellence and equitable opportunities for all students. Colleton County School District was recognized as #2 in the State of South Carolina for growth in ELA. The district is implementing targeted academic supports and enrichment opportunities to meet students where they are and propel them forward. Evidence-based instructional practices, data-driven interventions, and accelerated learning pathways are being used to close learning gaps and promote mastery across all grade levels. Recognizing that success is a collective effort, the district actively partners with families, community members, and local organizations. Through transparent communication, shared decision-making, and ongoing collaboration, stakeholders are empowered to play a vital role in supporting student achievement and shaping the district's vision for success. The district is fostering safe, supportive, and inclusive learning environments that prioritize student and staff well-being. Initiatives to strengthen positive behavior supports, celebrate diversity, and build strong relationships contribute to schools where every individual feels valued, respected, and motivated to succeed. Together, these focus areas form the foundation of Colleton County School District's Road to Success—a strategic, community-driven approach to preparing every student for college, career, and life readiness.

Scaling Up Success: Using Proficiency Scales to Monitor and Assess Learning

Rob Burggraaf and Jennifer Wise, Lexington District 2

Effective assessment is more than assigning grades—it's about understanding where students are and guiding them toward mastery. In this session, participants will explore how proficiency scales can serve as a powerful tool to monitor and assess student learning with clarity and precision. Attendees will learn how to create, interpret, and use proficiency scales to track progress, provide actionable feedback, and support differentiated instruction. Participants will discover strategies to make learning expectations transparent, align instruction with standards, and engage students in self-assessment. By the end of the session, educators will leave with practical approaches for implementing proficiency scales in their classrooms, enabling them to measure learning growth, celebrate progress, and identify next steps for student success. We'll share our experiences using scales at the elementary level and outline our own next steps for using them at the secondary level.

SC State Retirement System

Lee Wilson, Horace Mann

Understanding your state's retirement benefits is key to planning for your retirement. This workshop shows educators how your South Carolina state retirement benefits and supplemental retirement plans can work together.

Strategies to Support All Subgroups

Joey Greene, Charlene Gleaton, and Jennifer Dillon, SC Department of Education

In this session, Team Leads from various SCDE offices will center on systems designed to support the needs of all students to accelerate their learning, with specific attention to identified subgroups leading to ATSI school improvement designations. Participants will gain an understanding of the designation and explore subgroup report cards at the elementary, middle, and high school levels. Facilitators will model how to determine next steps for MTSS and Special Education implementation fidelity through intentional structures and strategies. Teams will be given tools to ensure that every meeting is productive, purposeful, and aligned to school improvement goals, with a focus on increased collaboration in MTSS and Special Education efforts.

Tuesday, June 23, 2026

1:15 p.m. – 2:15 p.m.

Balancing the Crown: Leadership, Motherhood, and the Power of Presence

Tracie Swilley, Fairfield Country Schools

Women in leadership often carry multiple crowns—professional, personal, and familial—each requiring strength, grace, and intentional balance. In this inspiring 1-hour session, 2025 NASSP National Principal of the Year and current Acting Superintendent/Assistant Superintendent of Academics, Dr. Tracie Anderson Swilley shares her journey of navigating leadership while embracing motherhood and authenticity. Through personal stories, practical strategies, and reflective moments, participants will explore how to lead with purpose while managing competing demands.

Behind the Discipline Decision: What Happens in a Hearing and Why It Matters (Trends, Policies, and Growth Areas in K-12 Hearings)

Brian Chatman, Lexington District 2; Kelvin Williams, Sumter County Schoolst; Cedrick Tidwell, Richland District 2; Larry Dunn, Aiken County Schools; and Sheka Houston, Chester County Schools

This interactive panel discussion session brings together experienced panel of K-12 hearing officers to share insights on student discipline hearings and their impact on schools. Participants will learn how discipline decisions connect directly to classroom management, school climate, and student equity. The panel will explore emerging trends, common procedural pitfalls, and strategies for building consistency across schools. Administrators, teachers, and support staff will walk away with practical tools to strengthen collaboration, reduce errors, and ensure fair outcomes that keep students engaged in learning while protecting school safety.

Cultivating Future-Ready Citizens: Empowering Student and Community Voices in Responsible AI Integration

Susan Stevens, Kevin Roper, Tara Dean, Tim Van Huele, and Stephanie Williams, Greenville County Schools

Greenville County Schools (GCS) presents its strategic journey into generative AI, emphasizing a human-centered approach that prioritizes student success, a premier workforce, and a caring culture. This session will outline GCS's three-year plan, detailing how the district is fostering AI literacy and responsible innovation among students, educators, and the wider community. We will explore our phased implementation, from foundational awareness and exploration (Year 1) to empowering educators through targeted integration (Year 2) with tools like MagicSchool.ai, and ultimately, cultivating future-ready students through mastery and expansion (Year 3) with MagicStudent.

Effectively Using SC READY ISRs to Empower Families to Drive Student Success

Crystal Huckabee, SC Department of Education

Family engagement is a shared responsibility and a cornerstone of student achievement. SC READY Individual Student Reports (ISRs) provide meaningful data about student learning, yet many families need support in understanding how to use these results to effectively support their child. This session focuses on leveraging SC READY ISRs as tools for authentic family partnership, moving beyond one-way reporting to clear, accessible, and actionable communication. Participants will explore strategies for explaining SC READY performance levels, reporting categories, and scale scores using family-friendly, strengths-based language that aligns with SCDE family engagement guidance. The session emphasizes two-way communication, ensuring families are not only informed but empowered to ask questions, set goals, and collaborate with schools around student learning. Attendees will examine practical approaches for connecting ISR data to the SC College- and Career-Ready Standards, instructional supports, and next steps families can reinforce at home. Special attention will be given to removing barriers to understanding, ensuring equitable access to data, and building trust with diverse families. Participants will leave with concrete strategies to use SC READY ISRs to strengthen family engagement, foster shared ownership of learning, and support sustained student growth.

Employee Conduct 101

Will Suggs, Charleston County Schools

Managing student behavior can be second nature for school administrators, but navigating employee misconduct can be a challenge. This interactive session will present various misconduct scenarios; review common pitfalls administrators face in handling employee discipline; and provide guidance for investigating and documenting incidents of misconduct.

I Do, We Do, You Do: A Coaching Model That Intentionally Align PLCs, Collaborative Planning, and Learning Walks To Promote Targeted Growth and Collective Teacher Efficacy

Dawn Mitchell and Shawn Wootton, Spartanburg District 6; Kerrie Kish, Fairforest Elementary School; and Maddie Jurek, Gable Middle School

John Hattie defines collective teacher efficacy as the collective belief of teachers in their ability to positively affect students (Visible Learning, 2019). If we want our teachers to be the change agents in their classrooms, we need to provide a model that allows our literacy coaches to be the change agents in their schools. Our teachers need and deserve clear, relevant, and engaging standards-aligned and student-centered professional development. In order to promote targeted growth and collective teacher efficacy, our district has created a coaching model that utilizes a gradual release model (I Do, We Do, You Do) intentionally aligning PLCs, collaborative planning, and learning walks this school year. This session will provide participants with the process our district utilized in partnership with our state literacy specialists to implement a targeted approach to providing coaching support across both our elementary and middle schools. We will share resources used including strategies from John Hattie's *Illustrated Guide to Visible Learning* (2024) as well as our own templates and examples used from multiple schools.

Inspector's Gadget: How to Use PowerSchool Reports to Find Potential Diploma Graduates

Adrienne Robinson, Lancaster County Schools

In this session, adult education professionals will explore how Powerschool reporting can be used to identify potential high school diploma graduates in your own school district. Drawing from years of administrative experience, Ms. Adrienne Robinson, director of the Lancaster County Adult Education Program, will share how she utilizes Powerschool reports as a tool to recruit new students, increase measurable skill gains, and build relationships with secondary principals and counselors. Attendees will gain actionable insight on locating and disaggregating key Powerschool data to improve program outcomes.

Next Steps for Educational Accountability in SC: What's New and What's on the Horizon?

Matthew Lavery and Dana Yow, SC Education Oversight Committee

Continuous improvement is afoot in accountability! The EOC recently completed its cyclical review of the South Carolina Educational Accountability system with a broad group of stakeholders. We are actively participating in the new interagency cross-functional team (X-Team) structure with SCDE around accountability and School Report Cards. And we are supporting improved data quality and transparency through investment in interoperable data systems and tools. Come hear a summary of projects currently underway, the recommendations from cyclical review, our plans for the future, and implications for accountability which supports improved outcomes for all South Carolina students and their educators.

Open Wide the Gates: PBC & Seal of Biliteracy Accessibility

Flor de Lis Morales, York District 3

The Seal of Biliteracy is a national recognition available to Junior and Seniors at the high school level. Proficiency-Based Credit (PBC) is an educational opportunity for students who already have a proficiency in a world language to receive credit for levels 1-3. The goal is to provide educational opportunities to students that will advance their language skills. Multiliteracy/biliteracy is a skill that opens wide doors of opportunity in employment, education, and quality of life. The presentation focuses on ways to systematically implement the PBC & SofBil processes to maximize accessibility to students across the school district.

Panel Discussion: The Case for CTE: Changing Perception, Culture, and Results

Panelists: Leon Burgess, Lake City Career & Technology Center; Greg Cooke and Adam Massey, Enoree Career Center; and Greg Lovelance, Swofford Career Center

Career and Technical Education (CTE) is rapidly redefining what meaningful, future-ready learning looks like for students—but perceptions have not always kept pace with its impact. In this engaging 60-minute panel discussion, education leaders will explore how CTE programs are transforming student engagement, expanding enrollment, and delivering measurable academic, workforce, and postsecondary outcomes. Panelists will share how intentional culture shifts have driven significant enrollment growth, strengthened student trust, and elevated expectations while expanding access and equity. The discussion will highlight innovative program design—including “Grow Your Own” pathways, hands-on learning experiences, and structured internships—that connect students directly to high-wage, high-skill, and high-demand careers. Participants will also

examine how strong partnerships with industry, higher education, and school systems sustain program quality and accountability while fostering continuous improvement rather than compliance. The session will conclude with actionable strategies and forward-looking insights on how career centers and CTE programs can continue evolving to meet the needs of students, communities, and the workforce of the future.

SCASA Legislative Update

Quincie Moore and Ryan Bailey, SCASA

This session will provide an update of the 2026 Legislative Session and what to look for in 2027.

What's Your 20?

Ginny Haynes and Christy Harrelson, Waccamaw Middle School; and Tabitha Strickland, Georgetown County Schools

In targeting the lowest performing 20% of your students, where are they and what are you doing to address student needs? How do you use your Tier 1, Tier 2, Tier 3, and SPED instructional plans and processes to identify your students that need the most support for growth to achieve "Meets" or "Exceeds" on the SC Ready state assessment? How do you use your SPED program and classes to target the lowest performing 20% and intentionally plan for their success? Join us for a session that will show you how to flip your triangle and target the lowest performing 20% of students through Tier 1, Tier 2, and Tier 3 instruction and special education. Come and hear how collaboration between school instructional leaders, teachers, and the district SPED department can result in positive change for the placement and direction of underperforming students. Where are they? What are we doing? This session will provide strategies proven to strengthen and support multi-tiered instruction to promote growth for all students, especially your lowest performing 20% of your students. What's Your 20?

Instant Ideas

Each presenter shares their personal and professional passions for a total of 8 minutes. The following topics will be shared.

Beyond Borders: A Consortium Model for Serving Diverse School Districts

Robert Jackson, Spartanburg District 5; Elizabeth Haun, Spartanburg District 6; Kira Reaves, Spartanburg District 7; Corey Willimon, Spartanburg District 2; and Russell Mahaffey, Spartanburg District 4

Social Media: The New Front Door to Your School

Harold Johnson, Pontiac Elementary School and Charae'a Johnson, Langford Elementary School

Recruitment & Retention: Beyond the Benjamins

Scott Matthews, Tracy Tayloe, Ebony Summers-Fogel, Sharon Kerley, and Nancye Charpia, Dorchester District 2

The WPEC Way

Fay Sprouse, Western Piedmont Education Consortium and Beth Taylor, Greenwood District 52

A.I. K-12 Educator Program: A Governor's School for Science and Mathematics + Google Collaboration

Jackie Weber and Danny Dorsel, South Carolina Governor's School for Science and Mathematics

Engagement in Action: Our Arts-Rich Commitments Driving Student Achievement

Emily Prado, Arts in Basic Curriculum Institute and Cassandra Cowdrey, Berkeley County Schools

Tuesday, June 23, 2026

2:30 p.m. – 3:30 p.m.

Best of Both Worlds: How Blended Scheduling Transforms Student Learning and Success

Andrew McMillan, Spartanburg High School

Spartanburg High School has revolutionized traditional scheduling by implementing an innovative blended model that combines the best of block scheduling with year-long instruction. This hybrid approach addresses the limitations of both traditional seven-period days and standard block schedules. The blended schedule features four class blocks per day, with most courses running by semester while preserving year-long "skinny" periods (half-blocks) for Fine Arts, Advanced Placement, and select courses requiring continuous instruction. This design enables students to earn eight credits annually instead of seven, providing greater flexibility for acceleration or credit recovery. Key benefits include immediate course retakes the following semester, enhanced access to career and technical education through improved alignment with our shared Career Center, and preservation of distinguished programs. Advanced Placement students maintain continuous learning through spring exams, while performance ensembles operate at full capacity year-round. A two-year journey, SHS has created our own uniquely tailored model that maximizes competitive advantages for students. The schedule supports diverse learner needs while maintaining program excellence that has earned SHS highest accolades in academics, fine arts, and athletics. This session will explore implementation strategies, stakeholder engagement, and measurable outcomes from this transformative scheduling approach.

Building Capacity in Paraeducators- A Tiered Intervention Model to Increase Effectiveness

Carol Anne Barnes, Laurens District 56

Students with disabilities often face heightened challenges that can hinder both academic achievement and social-emotional growth. This presentation summarizes a Dissertation in Practice focused on strengthening paraeducators' self-efficacy and their confidence in the knowledge and skills needed to effectively support these students. To create meaningful and lasting improvements in staff capacity, intentional training in evidence-based strategies is essential. This session highlights a tiered intervention model implemented in District 56 that has produced—and continues to sustain—positive outcomes for paraeducators and the students they serve.

From Intervention to Inspiration: The ASPIRE Model

Vallerie Cave and Marcus Scott, Allendale County Schools

The ASPIRE Academy is a comprehensive framework designed to put Students First by addressing academic, behavioral, and social-emotional needs with intentional strategies. ASPIRE stands for: Acceleration, Suspension Alternatives, Prevention Programs, Interventions, Remediation, and Enrichment. This session will showcase how the ASPIRE model equips schools to meet students where they are and move them forward. Participants will learn how acceleration opportunities challenge advanced learners, while remediation and targeted interventions close gaps for struggling students. The framework provides alternatives to suspension through structured supports, emphasizes prevention by implementing proactive strategies such as PBIS, field trips, MTSS and mentoring, and expands learning through enrichment programs in arts, STEM, and leadership. This presentation will highlight practical, student-centered solutions that reduce discipline issues, increase engagement, and improve achievement. Attendees will leave with actionable strategies and a clear understanding of how the ASPIRE model creates pathways for every student to succeed. Join us to discover how putting students first through the ASPIRE Academy can help transform your school community.

From Survival to Thriving: Creating Conditions Where New Teachers Flourish

Whitney Koeppen, Aiken County Schools

New teachers often enter the classroom full of passion but face challenges that can quickly shift their focus from thriving to merely surviving. This session equips district leaders with strategies to build systems and cultures that promote growth, confidence, and longevity among beginning educators. Participants will explore how intentional mentoring, meaningful feedback, and supportive leadership practices can foster resilience and professional identity. Through data-informed approaches and real-world examples, leaders will learn how to create conditions that nurture belonging, reduce burnout, and strengthen teacher retention. Attendees will leave with actionable steps to transform their district's new teacher experience from one of endurance to one of empowerment and success.

High-Quality PLCs for High-Quality Instructional Materials: Collaborative Preparation that Drives Results

Brenna McCormick, SC Department of Education

Effective Professional Learning Communities (PLCs) prepare for instruction together, not just reflect afterward. This session will show school and district administrators how to design and lead HQIM-centered PLCs using proven intellectual preparation protocols that strengthen instructional readiness and impact.

Implementing Zearn Math to Reach Impact

Jennifer Madden, Zearn

Independent research, including a large-scale randomized control trial, shows Zearn Math has a statistically significant impact on student math achievement — earning the program the highest rating from Evidence for ESSA. Across this evidence base one takeaway is consistent: results are strongest when students complete 3+ grade-level lessons each week. In this panel session, South Carolina district and school leaders will reflect on their first year implementing Zearn Math to support grade-level learning. Participants will come away with actionable strategies to promote consistent usage and drive impact, including dedicating consistent time in the schedule each

week for students to use Zearn; supporting teachers and leaders with dedicated training; and developing routines for reviewing data in order to support student progress and engagement. By the end of the session, participants will leave with concrete implementation strategies they can apply to strengthen math instruction and support student success.

Launching your Principalship: Strategies for Success

Ryan Poston, St. James High School

Join for an insightful presentation tailored for new and aspiring principals. "Launching Your Principalship: Strategies for Success" offers a dynamic roadmap to navigate the exciting yet challenging journey of becoming an effective school principal. In this engaging session, we draw from our extensive experience as principals to impart practical wisdom, key insights, and essential strategies. We will cover critical topics, including leadership principles, building a positive school culture, fostering effective teacher relationships, and managing administrative responsibilities. Participants will gain actionable takeaways on communication skills, decision-making, and leveraging technology to streamline school operations. The presentation will emphasize the importance of stakeholder engagement, collaboration with teachers and parents, and the art of problem-solving in the ever-evolving educational landscape. With real-world anecdotes and evidence-based practices, we empower new principals to set themselves up for success, emphasizing the significance of adaptability and resilience in the role. This presentation promises to inspire, equip, and motivate the next generation of educational leaders to excel in their principalship and make a lasting impact on their schools and communities.

Leading Well - Personal Wellness Strategies to Sustain School Leaders in High-Pressure Roles

Jason Warren and Kate Sokohl, Greenville County Schools

School leadership is rewarding but comes with unique pressures that can take a toll on effectiveness, decision-making, and personal well-being. Leading Well equips school leaders with research-based strategies to manage stress, maintain balance, and lead with clarity under demanding conditions. This professional development experience blends findings from educational leadership research, psychology, and organizational health with practical tools leaders can immediately implement in their daily practice. Participants will leave with a personalized action plan to strengthen resilience, manage stress & anxiety, and sustain long-term effectiveness in leadership.

Meeting Students Where They Are: Innovative Pathways to Graduation

Byron Johnson, Kershaw County Adult Education; Etta Carter, Horry County Adult Education; and David Branham, North Central High School

Kershaw County Adult Education (KCAE) and Horry County Adult Education are transforming how districts support at-risk high school students by meeting them where they are—academically, socially, and emotionally—before they drop out. Through strategic partnerships with district high schools, both programs identify disengaged or off-track students early and provide personalized, flexible pathways toward graduation and workforce readiness. KCAE's award-winning Choice Academy and Adult Ed 101 initiatives bring Adult Education staff directly into high schools for staff trainings, student assemblies, and parent engagement sessions—breaking down barriers and misconceptions while connecting students to meaningful re-engagement opportunities. Horry County's Connect 2 model hosts Adult Education programs directly on large high school campuses, offering flexible scheduling, embedded supports, and career-aligned instruction that

keep young adults on track for success. This session highlights how collaborative, student-centered innovation can reduce dropout rates, raise graduation outcomes, and build stronger bridges between K–12 systems and Adult Education.

On the PROWL - Reimagining Your Schools Culture and Climate for Success

Chavon Browne and Geneva Young, Lady's Island Middle School

What if your school's culture and climate could shift from "good intentions" to tangible results? Join the team from Lady's Island Middle School as they share their On the PROWL journey to higher climate, culture, and report card ratings. Learn how intentional changes—such as refocusing the master schedule, transforming advisory into PROWL Time, celebrating success through PROWL Parties, and using PBIS & LiveSchool to reward positive behavior—created a stronger sense of belonging for students and staff. Walk away with practical strategies, real-world examples, and a framework you can adapt to reimagine the culture and climate in your own school.

Rebuilding Hope After School Tragedy — Guidance from the NASSP Principal Recovery Network

Denise Fredericks, Townville Elementary School

When a school community experiences the unthinkable—a school shooting—the school leader can stand at the intersection of trauma, leadership, and hope. The NASSP Principal Recovery Network (PRN), founded in 2019, is a national network of current and former school leaders who have experienced such tragedies firsthand and/or have led schools after such tragedies. Its mission is to provide support to other principals through the aftermath of crisis by offering compassionate, experience-based support and practical recovery strategies. This session is grounded in the collaborative experience of the Principal Recovery Network (PRN), representing more than twenty school leaders nationwide who have navigated post-tragedy recovery. Its content is both research-informed and lived-experience-based — emphasizing empathy, practicality, and hope. This session will share lessons and frameworks from the NASSP's Principal Guide to Recovery, addressing key phases such as securing support, reopening schools, attending to ongoing needs, and honoring student voice.

The STRENGTH Behind The Scenes

Samuel Myers, Sumter County Schools

So often, the most essential contributors to a school's success are those whose work goes unseen. While teachers lead instruction, it is the custodians, food service workers, bus drivers, and support staff who form the backbone of daily operations—the STRENGTH Behind the Scenes. These dedicated professionals ensure that every school day begins safely, runs smoothly, and ends with students supported and cared for. This engaging, interactive session will highlight the vital roles of support personnel and offer practical strategies for fostering pride, professionalism, and teamwork across all operational areas. Participants will explore innovative ways to motivate, empower, and celebrate these essential team members while building a stronger culture of unity and respect within their schools. Just as in a relay race, success depends on every runner doing their part and passing the baton with purpose. Every handoff matters. Every role is essential. Together, we keep the momentum going—and that's how schools win each day.

Transformational Leadership: Creating a Common Vision

Kevin Hasinger, Dionne Sturdivant, and Eunice Williams, Richland District 1

Richland County School District One's Teaching and Learning executive leadership team, including Dr. Eunice Williams, Ms. Dionne A. Sturdivant, and Dr. Kevin Hasinger, focuses on creating a common vision and language centered on transformational leadership and collaboration to improve teaching and learning. The presentation emphasizes understanding the 'why' behind teaching, prioritizing connection before content, and aligning daily practices through collaboration to create productive classrooms with student-driven, data-based instruction. Success is measured by implementing foundational instructional expectations, managing data-driven PLCs, and utilizing valid data to inform instruction. Collaboration occurs through Transformation Teams, Continuous Improvement Teams, and addressing subgroup and school-specific needs, supported by a transformational model developed collaboratively with teaching staff and executive directors to identify problems of practice aligned with district instructional expectations.