

Session Titles and Descriptions

AASPA Equity in Action Summit

March 31 - April 1, 2025 | Schaumburg, IL

Beyond Bias: Building an Equitable Future in K-12 Hiring

Presented by Dr. Stephanie Morgan-Harris, Staff Engagement & Recruitment Coordinator, Kankakee School District 111, Kankakee, IL
Educational institutions thrive on diversity, yet implicit biases in hiring can create barriers that limit opportunities for underrepresented educators. As schools work to recruit and retain top talent, it is imperative to implement equitable, data-driven hiring practices that foster a more inclusive workforce. The goal of this presentation is to help educational leaders identify, address, and remove biases in K-12 hiring processes, ensuring all candidates are evaluated based on their qualifications, experiences, and potential contributions—rather than unconscious prejudices.

Change Leadership through a Culturally Responsive Filter

Presented by Bess Sullivan Scott, Retired from Doane University, Roca, NE

Leaders can have all the knowledge, understanding, and skills of instructional, organizational, political, and strategic leadership, AND if they cannot lead change through a culturally responsive filter, the change will not impact the constituents who need it most. Learn how a culturally responsive filter analyzes every decision made and each action taken for the impact it will have, with a bias toward meeting the needs of the underserved. Determine what might be possible in “your world.”

Continuing to Strive in 2025? Supporting our Stakeholders within an Ever-changing Political Landscape

Panel Discussion Facilitated by Michele Stephens, Chief Human Resources Officer, Rockdale County Public Schools, Conyers, GA

Join us for an insightful panel discussion featuring school personnel administrators who are at the forefront of supporting diverse students and staff in the current educational landscape. Significant policy shifts have impacted diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) initiatives in all areas. This session will explore the challenges faced by school administrators and ideas for a path forward.

DEI In the News: Understanding the Changing Legal Landscape

Presented by Aaron Kacel, Attorney, Robbins Schwartz, Chicago, IL

The session will walk attendees through the recent federal developments concerning DEI, including relevant executive orders, directives to federal agencies, and responses from those agencies. It will also discuss practical implications for educational institutions and their administrators.

Empowering Leadership Through the Lens of Storytelling

Presented by Anna Marie Candelario, Director of Planning and People Development, Oswego Community Unit School District No. 308, Oswego, IL

In this dynamic session, educational leaders will uncover the transformative power of storytelling as a tool for fostering equity, trust, and cultural awareness. Through engaging, hands-on activities, participants will explore how narratives can build connections, inspire action, and shape culturally responsive environments. Be prepared to reflect, connect, and leave with actionable strategies to elevate your leadership through the art of storytelling.

From Awareness to Action: Practical Steps to Mitigate Bias in Hiring

Presented by Ryan Kelling, Executive Director of Human Resources, Bend-La Pine Schools, Bend, OR

Unconscious bias can quietly influence every stage of the hiring process, especially in interviews, leading to inequitable outcomes that impact school communities. This session will explore common biases found in interview practices, such as affinity bias, confirmation bias, and stereotype threat, and the subtle ways they can undermine equity. Participants will learn how to identify these biases in their own processes and develop actionable strategies to mitigate them. Using real-world examples and research-based techniques, the session will provide tools for structuring interview questions, evaluating candidates consistently, and creating inclusive environments for all applicants. Attendees will engage in reflective activities and leave with practical resources to implement equitable hiring practices in their districts. Whether you are an HR professional, administrator, or hiring committee member, this session will equip you with the knowledge and skills to turn awareness into action. Together, we can create hiring processes that ensure fairness and opportunity for all candidates.

Hiring and Sustaining Black Educators

Presented by Dr. Tiffany Brunson, Superintendent, Elementary School District 159, Matteson, IL

This workshop is designed to support school and district leaders in learning best practices to recruit, hire, and retain Black educators. In this experiential session, attendees will be guided to gain a deeper understanding of the historical and current context of Black educators' work and their impact on creating equitable educational environments. Participants will assess their current efforts and learn to use an equity lens to implement more effective recruiting, hiring, and sustaining practices.

Keynote: Leading with Clarity: The HR Blueprint for Engagement and Accountability in Schools

Presented by Dr. Nicole Price, Keynote Speaker, Lively Paradox

Balancing day-to-day school operations with the need to attract, retain, and engage top talent is a growing challenge. Many HR professionals and school leaders struggle with common misconceptions about what really drives employee motivation, accountability, and long-term retention. Without clear strategies, well-intended efforts can lead to frustration, burnout, and missed opportunities to create strong, high-performing school teams.

*Sessions are subject to change.

Great leadership isn't about choosing between fairness and high performance—it's about ensuring everyone has the opportunity to contribute their best work. By fostering clarity, accountability, and engagement, school HR professionals and leaders can create environments where excellence is the standard and all employees feel valued and aligned with the mission. This session provides a practical, results-driven framework to help leaders eliminate wasted energy, focus on what matters most, and sustain a culture of growth and success.

Participants will:

- Gain practical strategies for building engaged, high-performing school teams
- Understand what truly drives retention, accountability, and employee motivation
- Reflect on the benefits of aligning personal and professional goals with the district's mission
- Recognize the unique challenges of leading through change (even positive change) in schools
- Walk away with immediately actionable tools to improve engagement and effectiveness

This session provides a clear, actionable approach to strengthening leadership, building a results-driven workplace, and ensuring schools attract and retain top educators and staff.

Navigating Immigration Policy and Enforcement: Implications for HR Professionals

Presented by Mary Kate Fernandez, Associate, Adams & Reese, LLP, New Orleans, LA

As immigration policies continue to evolve, HR professionals must navigate complex legal landscapes that directly impact recruitment, hiring, and retention of foreign-born employees and staff. This panel will provide critical insights into the latest immigration enforcement trends, visa sponsorship considerations, and compliance obligations for school districts. This session will discuss best practices for supporting immigrant employees, ensuring legal compliance, and advocating for policies that promote an equitable and inclusive workforce. Attendees will gain actionable strategies to address challenges related to work authorization, changing visa regulations, and the impact of enforcement measures on school staffing and retention efforts.

Overcoming Bias for Better Student Outcomes

Presented by Dr. Nashwa Mekky, Chief People, Equity & Culture Officer, Illinois Math and Science Academy, Aurora, IL

Does implicit bias about students' race disproportionately impact student achievement? Join this practical session designed for human resource leaders in public schools to explore this critical question. You'll gain insights into the intersectionality of implicit bias and its effects on student outcomes relating to teacher demographics in Illinois public schools. We will discuss actionable recommendations to mitigate these biases and positively influence student achievement. More importantly, you will learn valuable approaches to enhance your practice and make a meaningful impact in your school community.

Permission to Interrogate

Presented by Monica Roshawn Green, Director of Equity and Diversity, Omaha Public Schools, Omaha, NE

Permission to Interrogate When engaging in challenging topics such as race, equity, bias, and disproportionality, it's important to recognize that not everyone may feel ready to participate in these conversations. Research shows that developing cultural proficiency is a continuous process. In today's political climate, it's essential to provide foundational preparation before introducing leaders to more complex discussions—especially when these topics personally impact individuals who may feel targeted by them. To effectively address these challenging topics, facilitate meaningful conversations and provide relevant training that will guide leaders and participants toward discussions capable of creating immediate, practical changes in their daily practices.

Transforming Our Environments: Fostering Inclusivity to Enrich Organizational Culture!

Presented by Peter Ferguson, Coordinator of Culture, Inclusion, and Scholar Development and Assistant Supervisor of Recruiting, Lincoln Public Schools, Lincoln, NE

Lincoln Public Schools (LPS) in Nebraska recognizes that "retention is recruitment." LPS has formalized practices and offerings for all staff (certificated, classified, administrative, and prospective (staff) to create a nurturing, transformative, and action-oriented environment where educators from diverse backgrounds can connect, learn, face challenges, and heal together. This engaging session will raise awareness and provide insights into replicable LPS's district offerings and collaborations with the following objectives: - Curating safe, inclusive, enriching spaces for staff of diversity to connect, grow, learn, and empower one another. - Expanding the BIPOC professional network supporting a diverse workforce. - Sharing ideas for collaboration, activism, and self-care.

More Sessions Coming Soon!

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