

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

Experience Management, Talent Acquisition, 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.

Building Cultures of Value, Respect, Belonging, Opportunity and Accessibility in the Workplace

Experience Management, Total Rewards, Work-Life Integration

Presented by Kevin Walton Sr., Director of Equity & Inclusion, Area Cooperative Educational Services, New Haven, CT
Attendees will gain practical strategies to develop and implement policies that foster a safe, fair, and equitable workplace, ensuring every employee has access to the same opportunities. Whether enhancing current efforts or starting from scratch, this session will provide the tools and inspiration needed to make a meaningful impact.

Change Leadership through a Culturally Responsive Filter

Experience Management, Total Rewards, Work-Life Integration

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

Risk Management, Talent Development, Training & Development

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

Risk Management, Talent Development, Training & Development

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.

EEOC in the News: Understanding the Legal Background, Investigations and Recent Updates

Risk Management, Talent Development, Training & Development

Presented by Holly Jacobs, Attorney and Aaron Kacel, Attorney, Robbins Schwartz, Chicago, IL
This presentation will offer attendees valuable insight into the agency tasked with enforcing federal employment discrimination laws. It will explain the laws at issue, how the EEOC investigates alleged violations, and recent actions and communications coming from the agency, including any practical implications for educational employers.

Empowering Leadership Through the Lens of Storytelling

Experience Management, Talent Development, Performance Management

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.

*Sessions are subject to change.

Hiring and Sustaining Black Educators

Strategy, Talent Acquisition, Recruitment

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

Experience Management, Talent Development, Performance Management

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.

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

Risk Management, Talent Development, Training & Development

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.

Navigating the Dynamic Landscape of Title IX: Legal Updates and Considerations for Compliance

Risk Management, Talent Development, Training & Development

Presented by Holly Jacobs, Attorney and Aaron Kacel, Attorney, Robbins Schwartz, Chicago, IL

This session will provide an overview of the legal requirements established by Title IX and will analyze recent updates to the Department of Education, the Office of Civil Rights, and Title IX itself. The presentation is intended to engage attendees regarding the practical implications of recent changes to Title IX, as well as the Department of Education's new enforcement priorities, including where schools may want to focus their Title IX compliance efforts going forward.

Navigating the Legislative Landscape in Education

Risk Management, Talent Development, Training & Development

Presented by Dr. Kelly Coash-Johnson, Executive Director, AASPA, Overland Park, KS

This session will provide information on current national legislative issues affecting education policy, funding, and reform. Participants will gain insights into recent developments, such as federal funding initiatives, teacher workforce challenges, equity in education and the future of the U.S. Department of Education. Kelly will share the national AASPA legislative priorities and how you can get involved and stay informed at both the state and national level.

*Sessions are subject to change.

OMG! How Can My School Leaders Effectively Recruit and Retain Teachers of Color?

Strategy, Talent Acquisition, Recruitment

Presented by Dr. Jill Ardley, Associate Professor, Norfolk State University, Norfolk, VA

Oh My Gosh! How Can I Recruit and Retain Teachers of Color is a session for any employer dealing with the challenges of moving forward effectively with a diverse teaching faculty. The researcher and former director of clinical practices at a Historically Black University will share research and tips for diversifying your teaching staff. Information will also be shared on how principals and school leaders can retain teachers of color once they are hired. Be prepared for research-based information and practical solutions for diversifying staff in this ever evolving educational climate that ranges from free to cost effective ideas.

Overcoming Bias for Better Student Outcomes

Experience Management, Total Rewards, Work-life Integration

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

Risk Management, Talent Development, Training & Development

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!

Experience Management, Total Rewards, Work-Life Integration

Presented by Peter Ferguson, Coordinator of Culture, Inclusion, and Scholar Development & Assistant Supervisor of Recruiting and Marla Styles, Human Resources Specialist, 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.