Session Titles and Descriptions
AASPA 2026 Human Capital Leadership Summit
December 10-11, 2026 | San Diego, CA

All Aboard for "Onboarding"
Recruitment & Retention
Presented by Michael Williford, Assistant Superintendent- HR, Victory Valley Union High School, Victorville, CA
Discover how Victor Valley Union High School District (VVUHSD) transformed onboarding into a strategic approach for strengthening employee connection, engagement and retention. Designed for both classified and certificated staff, VVUHSD's onboarding program goes beyond paperwork and orientation to intentionally build belonging, clarify expectations, connect employees to district culture and provide the tools needed for success. This session highlights practical strategies VVUHSD has used to create a welcoming employee experience from day one while supporting workforce stability and a 98% teacher retention rate. Participants will leave with ideas for developing an onboarding experience that moves employees from simply being hired to feeling inspired, connected and committed to their organization.

Beyond Hiring: From Strategy to Powerful Impact
Strategic Leadership
Presented by Dr. Tameka McKeithan, Assistant Superintendent - HR Operations, Spring ISD, Houston, TX
This collaborative session will focus on strategically hiring and developing team members, effectively aligning HR priorities with district goals and translating those priorities into clear, actionable plans. Participants will identify key initiatives, define responsibilities, gain insight on continuous improvement models and determine how to measure success. Through setting a clear vision, intentional planning, leveraging technological advancements and shared accountability, participants will strengthen HR operations, overall efficiencies and support employees and ultimately make a positive impact on employees and students.

Beyond the Complaint: Managing Employee Investigations in the Real World:
A Practitioner's Guide to Navigating Complex Employee Investigations
Recruitment & Retention
Presented by Amy Baer, District Relations & Development Advisor, F3 Law, Oakland, CA
The complaint arrives Friday afternoon. By Monday morning, the union is involved, the superintendent wants answers, the principal has already interviewed witnesses and someone has shared screenshots with half the staff. Welcome to employee investigations in public education.

Employee investigations rarely unfold the way the handbook suggests. Allegations are unclear, witnesses disagree, administrators have opinion and what begins as a straightforward complaint can quickly become a much larger personnel problem. In more serious cases, HR leaders must also navigate student safety, administrative leave, mandatory reporting obligations and potential criminal investigations.

Drawing on 28 years in public education, including serving as Associate Superintendent of Human Resources for San Francisco Unified School District, Amy Baer shares a practitioner's perspective on managing investigations when the facts are messy, emotions are high and everyone wants a resolution yesterday.

Through realistic, complicated case studies and a healthy dose of HR humor, this session explores the judgment calls HR leaders face throughout the investigation process. From determining whether an investigation is necessary and whether an employee should be placed on administrative leave to manage competing interests, working with legal counsel and addressing what happens after the findings, participants will examine what works, what doesn't and what experienced HR leaders wish they had known sooner.

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Charting a new Course: A Comprehensive Model for Substitute Workforce Development
Recruitment & Retention

Presented by Kirk Skorpanich (eHCLE), Assistant Superintendent Human Resources, Banning Unified School District, Banning, CA
Substitute employees are essential to maintaining instructional continuity and safe, effective school operations, yet they are often expected to step into schools with little or no preparation. In this session, Kirk Skorpanich shares Banning Unified School District's journey from a "sink or swim" substitute model to a comprehensive workforce development system. Participants will explore a practical, districtwide approach to substitute onboarding and training that includes clear expectations, role specific preparation, legal and safety requirements, technology and site procedures and ongoing support. The session will also highlight how cross departmental collaboration, pilot testing, data and continuous improvement can strengthen the substitute experience and better support schools. Attendees will leave with practical strategies for building a more prepared, confident and connected substitute workforce while strengthening instructional continuity and school operations.

Creating Space to Lead: Transforming HR from Reactive Support to Strategic Partnership
Strategic Leadership

Presented by Tiffany Taylor (eHCLE), Executive Chief of Human Resources, Evanston/Skokie District 65, Evanston, IL
What happens when district leaders spend more time reacting to day-to-day personnel matters than leading the strategic work that moves their organization forward? This session explores the design and implementation of a Human Resources Business Partner (HRBP) model that shifts HR from reactive problem-solving to proactive, strategic partnership. Grounded in the real-world challenges of a public school district, this session highlights how an intentional HRBP model is designed to reduce routine escalations, strengthen leadership capacity and establish trusted partnerships that anticipate needs and address challenges before they escalate. Ultimately, allowing district leaders the time and space to focus on what matters most: advancing strategic priorities, strengthening organizational effectiveness and improving student outcomes.

Decisions That Hold Up: A Practical Framework for Human Capital Leaders
Strategic Leadership

Presented by Debbie Simons, Executive Director, OSPA Oregon School Personnel Association, Grants Pass, OR
Human capital leaders make consequential decisions every day—often with incomplete information, competing priorities and little room for error. The quality of those decisions depends not only on what is decided, but also on who is involved, how the decision is communicated and whether the process can withstand later scrutiny. In this interactive session, participants will explore a practical framework for making clear, defensible and well-executed HR decisions. Using realistic PK–12 leadership scenarios, participants will examine how to establish decision rights, identify when input or approval is needed, distinguish consultation from consensus and determine when a matter should be elevated to HR, executive leadership, or the governance level. The session will also address factual documentation, communication of expectations, consideration of operational and student impact and the importance of closing the loop after a decision is made. Participants will leave with adaptable tools for reducing ambiguity, strengthening accountability and making timely decisions that support employees, organizational effectiveness and student success.

Diversifying Your Leadership Team: Effective Recruitment and Retention of a Diverse Workforce
Recruitment & Retention

Presented by Rosa E. Coronado, Interim Director Human Resource, Greenfield Union School District, Greenfield, CA
Join this interactive session to sharpen your recruitment strategies, strengthen your leadership pipeline, and turn your commitment to belonging to action. School district leaders and HR professionals will uncover barriers in recruitment and selection, examine how bias shapes hiring decisions and explores practical ways to reach untapped talent. From targeted outreach and social media to inclusive onboarding, mentoring, coaching and "grow your own" pathways, discover strategies to attract, develop and retain diverse leaders. Through reflection and discussion, identify where your district can make meaningful changes—and leave with concrete next steps you can put to work.

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Fix the Comparison Before You Fix the Pay: Job Architecture When Every Role Is a Special Case
Strategic Leadership

Presented by Wayne Birch, Strategic Compensation, Metro Nashville Public Schools, Nashville, TN

Pay equity becomes a trap when the comparison group is wrong. Many districts begin compensation reviews by grouping employees who share a job title or pay grade. But the same title can hide substantially different work, while comparable jobs can remain hidden behind different titles, departments and grades. When that happens, a mathematically sound analysis can still recommend the wrong solution. In one large urban school district, 417 of 773 unique job titles belonged to a single employee. Other titles stretched across numerous pay grades and included positions with very different responsibilities, authority and capability requirements. Nearly every job had become its own special case. In this interactive workshop, participants will step into that problem. Using realistic job scenarios, they will decide which positions should be compared, identify false peers and hidden peers and determine what to do when a single-incumbent role has no obvious comparator. They will build defensible comparison groups based on the work performed, organizational scope, decision authority, accountability and required knowledge, skills, abilities and competencies. Participants will also construct a career bridge for a single-incumbent role and examine how stronger job architecture supports compensation, recruitment, performance expectations, internal mobility, retention and succession planning. Participants will leave with a practical diagnostic they can use before their next pay-equity study, market review, reclassification or salary-placement decision. Before you fix the pay, make sure you are comparing the right work.

Four Unions. One District. One Strategy
Strategic Leadership

Presented by Alfredo Andrade, Chief Human Resource Officer, Maribel Escobar, Director of Human Resources & Mayra Chavez, Administrative Assistant to HR, Perris Union High School District, Perris, CA

Managing labor relations across multiple bargaining units requires more than knowing collective bargaining law or contract language. It requires a coordinated human capital strategy that balances employee interests, organizational needs, fiscal realities, board priorities and long-term relationships. Through the experience of a California public school district working with four bargaining units, this session will explore practical strategies for preparing for negotiations, establishing district parameters, managing multiple bargaining relationships, evaluating proposals beyond their immediate cost and maintaining productive labor-management relationships between bargaining cycles. Participants will examine how HR leaders can move labor relations from a transactional process to a strategic leadership function.

Grooming Allegations: How to Investigate and How to Prevent
Strategic Leadership

Presented by Liz DeChellis, Shareholder, Van Dermyden Makus Law Corporation, Sacramento, CA

Grooming allegations are serious and must be addressed promptly and comprehensively. This program focuses on warning signs of grooming behavior, discusses ways to prevent grooming in your district and best practices for investigating grooming allegations.

Growing Our Own: Developing and Investing in Classified Staff
Strategic Leadership

Presented by Gabriela Magann, Director of Human Resources, Agua Fria Union High School District, Avondale, AZ

Classified employees play an essential role in the success of our schools, yet leadership development and professional growth opportunities are not always intentionally designed with them in mind. In this session, Gabriela Magann will share how Agua Fria Union High School District is taking a strategic approach to investing in classified employees through leadership development, professional learning, career pathways and higher education. Participants will learn about Agua Fria's Classified Leadership Cadre, an initiative designed to identify, develop and prepare classified employees for future leadership opportunities while strengthening the district's internal talent pipeline. The session will also highlight the district's educational partnership with American InterContinental University (AIU), which provides employees with pathways to pursue bachelor's, master's and doctoral degrees. Attendees will leave with practical ideas they can adapt within their own organizations to develop classified employees, create career and educational pathways, strengthen retention and build a culture of growing their own future leaders.

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Grow. Stay. Thrive. A Strategic Framework for Employee Retention in Today's Schools
Recruitment & Retention
Presented by Liz Young, Executive Director of Recruitment, Retention and Strategy, Fulton County Schools, Atlanta, GA
This session will explore Fulton County Schools' journey to improve employee retention through a strategic framework that any school district could adapt to strengthen employee retention.

Quit Hitting Snooze: Navigating the Conversations That Matter Most
Keynote Speaker
Presented by Courtney Ramsey, Keynote Speaker, Dallas, TX
You're no stranger to difficult conversations. From staffing shortages and performance concerns to competing priorities and tough decisions, navigating sensitive issues comes with the territory. But even experienced leaders can find themselves putting off a conversation, overthinking how to approach it or walking away wondering why it didn't go better.

In this engaging, interactive keynote, leadership expert Courtney Ramsey challenges conventional thinking about tough conversations and reveals three common traps that keep even experienced leaders from getting the outcomes they want. Through relatable examples and practical strategies, attendees will discover how to challenge their assumptions, open conversations in ways that reduce defensiveness and ask better questions that uncover what's really going on.

You'll leave with a fresh perspective and practical tools to tackle the conversations you've been putting off, strengthen relationships and lead with greater confidence and clarity.

Stranger Things Have Happened at the Table: The Upside Down of our First Negotiations
Strategic Leadership
Presented by Gabe Cappozzo, Director of Human Resources, Dr. Denise Wilcox, Superintendent & Frank Adams, Director of Business/ CSBO, Beach Park District 3, Beach Park, IL
You've spent years building equity, nurturing relationships, creating transparency and elevating staff voice. Your culture is strong and your monthly union meetings are collaborative. Then, it's time to negotiate the contract and suddenly, you've stepped into the Upside Down. The people are the same, the district is the same, but the environment is totally unrecognizable. If this sounds familiar, you are not alone. Join a first-time bargaining triad, a Superintendent, Chief School Business Official (CSBO) and HR Director, as they share their candid, trial-by-fire experience navigating their first collective bargaining cycle. This session will demystify the shocking transition from collaborative daily operations to the adversarial reality of the bargaining table. We will explore how to maintain your district's core values when the temperature rises, how to align the distinct priorities of HR, Finance and the Superintendency into a unified strategy, and how to survive the emotional whiplash of negotiations. Attendees will leave with practical strategies for preparing their administrative team, managing the psychological shift of the bargaining table and ensuring that the years of relationship-building survive the contract ratification process.

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The Legal Side of AI
Strategic Leadership
Presented by Carrie L. O'Brien, Attorney, Gust Rosenfeld P.L.C., Phoenix, AZ
Description Coming Soon!

The Educator Workforce Continuum: Aligning Recruitment, Preparation and Retention for Long-Term Success
Recruitment & Retention
Presented by Sheiveh Jones, Executive Director & Keri Morgan, Coordinator, San Diego County Office of Education, San Diego, CA
Many workforce strategies focus on recruitment or retention as separate challenges. However, the strongest educator workforce systems connect recruitment, preparation, onboarding, induction and ongoing professional growth into a coherent continuum of support. This session highlights innovative practices from California districts and county offices that are strengthening educator pipelines, removing barriers to entry, supporting new educators and improving retention. Participants will explore practical strategies for partnering with educator preparation programs, developing grow-your-own pathways, leveraging residency and apprenticeship models and creating conditions that help educators thrive and remain in the profession. I think this last option would position SDCOE as a thought leader rather than simply sharing a program. It elevates the conversation to strategic human capital leadership, which appears to be exactly what the Human Capital Leadership Summit is seeking. Based on your work with teacher residencies, Education Specialist pathways, future educator initiatives, district-IHE partnerships, induction and regional workforce development, you already have a strong story to tell.

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