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## PRESIDENT'S CORNER

From the Desk of Dr. Monica Schroeder, AASPA President



Dear AASPA Members,

Last month, I had the incredible opportunity to visit Washington, D.C., with our AASPA Executive Director, Kelly Coash-Johnson. Our primary goal was to solidify AASPA's position as the leading resource for educator workforce development and information, particularly as the national conversation around education continues to evolve, with an increasing emphasis on state-led initiatives and local control.

During our visit, we focused on building crucial relationships, sharing our legislative priorities and gaining insights into upcoming federal initiatives and how they might impact the critical work happening at the state and local levels. We also discussed the recent resolution of the withheld ESEA funding, a clear example of the dynamic shifts in federal engagement. Most importantly, we held productive meetings with representatives from the U.S. Department of Education and key Congressional and Senate staff, including:

- Senate HELP Committee Ranking Member Sanders
- Senate HELP Committee Chairman Cassidy
- House Education Committee Chairman Wahlberg
- House Education Committee Ranking Member Scott
- Congressman Brad Schneider (IL)

Given the current climate, where states are increasingly empowered to tailor education policies and solutions to their unique needs, I strongly encourage each of you to engage proactively with your local and state political leaders. Share your specific workforce needs and advocate for their support. Your state affiliate, represented at our Legislative Committee meetings, can offer invaluable guidance as we navigate these evolving landscapes. Remember, as human capital leaders, you represent the professionals who are most vital to our children's future and your voice at the state level is more crucial than ever.

As a direct result of our meetings in Washington, D.C., I'm honored to host an educator roundtable later this month in my school district, supported by AASPA and Foresight Law & Policy. Congressman Brad Schneider will be joining us to discuss the Teachers Are Leaders Act, which he plans to reintroduce this Congress to bolster teacher retention efforts. This event is just one example of how we can collectively keep the conversation about workforce needs front and center, working with both federal partners and strengthening our state-level advocacy.

AASPA thrives because of your passion, commitment and expertise. I am proud to lead alongside you, and I'm excited about what we will continue to achieve together. I hope to see many of you at our Annual Conference in Nashville, Tennessee, from Tuesday, October 7, 2025 to Friday, October 10, 2025.

Warm regards,

*Monica*

**Dr. Monica Schroeder**

President, American Association of School Personnel Administrators  
Deputy Superintendent, North Shore School District 112, Highland Park, IL



As educational leaders, how do we build a systemwide culture that entices our faculty and staff to keep coming back every year? In short, the non-complex answer to this question is undeniably leadership establishing and committing to the right priorities.

# RETAINING YOUR MOST IMPORTANT CAPITAL: HUMAN CAPITAL

by Emily Johnson, HR Director, Pike County Schools, Zebulon, GA



The top-down method suggests that leadership defines the mission, vision and focus areas for the organization. Sounds simple, right? Here’s a hint: do not try this on your own. The magic is in the collaboration in creation, collective action planning, analysis and support in monitoring and the commitment to follow through. The mission and vision (priorities) must be the basis for all decision making and seeking excellence must be at the forefront of daily operations.

In Pike County, Georgia, we have committed to providing an educational experience of excellence that values the needs, interests and talents of all students. To support this mission, we created five strategic goal areas: Acquire and Retain Talented Personnel, Maintain Modern and Safe Facilities, Foster Positive Culture and Climate, Cultivate Stakeholder Engagement and Establish Effective and Efficient Use of Educational Resources. For this article, we will focus on the strategic goal area Acquire and Retain Talented Personnel.

The number one piece of feedback on any retention survey is likely to be “higher salary, please!” Pike County is a rural county in central Georgia. Our county doesn’t touch an interstate and there are no huge super stores to bring in generous tax revenue. So, if not for astronomical salaries, how do we have an overall voluntary retention rate of 94%? Systemwide culture. We have a culture of support and intentionality that begins with our Central Office and school administrators, and extends to all staff members, including bus drivers, paraprofessionals, teachers, coaches, clerical staff and other professionals.

With a focus on Acquiring and Retaining Talented Personnel, several supports are put in place from recruitment to a special hire offer and through continued years of service. We have utilized several marketing strategies to increase recruitment success. These include informal coffee shop chats targeted at our highest area of need (currently transportation and substitutes), we hosted a county-wide job fair (Pike Works) that not only included representation from the school system but was free for all local businesses. We ended up with over 40 businesses and over 200 potential new hires. This also created strong new community partnerships for schools and connections for work-based learning opportunities.

A new hire’s first impression cannot be understated! Developing a comprehensive onboarding process is imperative. The main focal points of our onboarding process include the usual hire offer, immediate, clear and welcoming contact from the human resources department, a streamlined online onboarding process, new employee orientation, mentor meetings and support, new hire surveys, staff perception and stay surveys and

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Signs scattered throughout campus and community. / 2025 Pike County Schools

in-person check-ins once a semester. What makes Pike County different is the way in which these supports are implemented. Make. It. Magical!

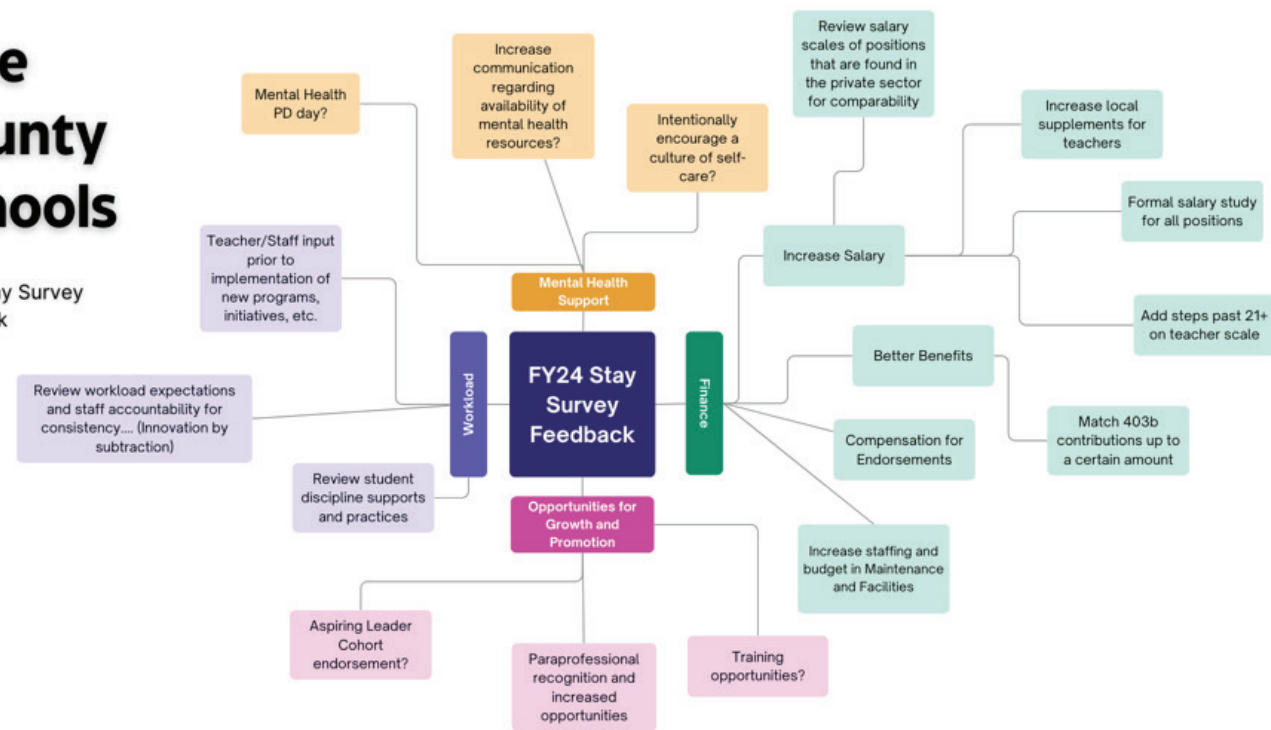
During our years of high recruitment needs, our hiring managers made the hiring offer moment something to be remembered. They have gone as far as visiting a career changer’s job as a waitress at a restaurant to present the hire offer, inviting a spouse and children to make the hire offer on behalf of the school district, and Facetiming a new hire’s favorite teacher to make the hire offer and congratulate them and letting a new music teacher’s future students write and sing a hire offer song to her. These thoughtful gestures set the course for a welcoming and memorable onboarding experience. Plus, it doesn’t hurt that the new hires often share them on their social media channels!

During onboarding, we take a break from the copious amounts of information they receive at New Employee Orientation and our Superintendent drives them on a “surprise treasure hunt” on a bus around campus. The HR Department serves as tour guides, giving out historical and new, exciting information about each of our sites. Each stop includes a visit from the principal/director and a gift for the new hire’s pirate treasure goody bag (a PC lunch bag!). They are not only learning the locations of our buildings (and learning the ins and outs of car rider lines!), but they’re getting to interact with personnel and receive memorable tokens.



# Pike County Schools

FY24 Stay Survey Feedback



Analysis of a past Stay Survey. Several improvements were made from this feedback. / 2025 Pike County Schools

After our annual convocation event, new hires begin their school-level onboarding journey, where multiple supports are put in place to include a mentor program and meet-and-greets. Three new hire surveys go out throughout the year in September, January and May, with the feedback informing optional professional development or informational sessions on the next professional learning day. We feel that in-person contact makes onboarding personal, so the HR Department drops by on an informal basis once a semester to inquire about how things are going and take note of any support needed.

A staff perception survey is sent twice a semester to gather feedback on departmental support of employees. This data is used to inform decisions and encourage growth where needed and to challenge the status quo. A stay survey that has its roots in Gallup's Q12 Employee Engagement Survey is sent in January to gather staff feedback. This data is broken down by school and by feedback category. An action plan is created, and items are placed in one of three categories:

- Let's Gather More Information
- These Items Can't Be Changed
- Low-Hanging Fruit!

The common themes from the stay survey are shared with the board of education and staff with updates on possible action items. It is imperative that staff voices are heard and that they know leadership is using their feedback to make improvements.

Lastly, but perhaps most importantly, ensure leaders are using the "assume good intentions" practice. Adults want to be trusted to do their jobs. They want supervisors to assume good intentions and just like anyone else, they want to be respected and valued. Keep those things at the forefront of all conversations whenever possible. Education is hard enough these days, so look for ways to be seen as someone who holds employees accountable but is also highly relational.



**Emily Johnson** holds a B.S.Ed. in Health and Physical Education and a Master's in Curriculum and Instruction from Georgia Southern University, along with a Specialist degree in Educational Leadership from Columbus State University. With 16 years

of experience in public education, her career has included roles as a Physical Education and World History teacher, Graduation Coach and Assistant Principal. With a passion for andragogy, Emily seized the opportunity to transition into Human Resources and hasn't looked back since!

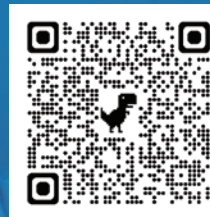


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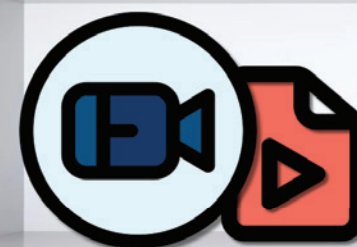
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# MAPPING A STRATEGIC MARKETING BLUEPRINT FOR TEACHER RECRUITMENT

by Cris Seidel, Director, Kansas State Department of Education Educate Kansas Teacher Recruitment Retention Project, Hutchinson, KS

When implementing a marketing plan, it is essential to take a purposeful approach to design and strategy. The following outlines key components for launching a targeted marketing campaign aimed at attracting future educators to the field.

**Consistent Branding & Messaging:** Unique to Your Community: School districts should develop cohesive branding and messaging strategies that align with a unified recruitment effort. Identifying features in the branding materials that are unique to the district and community can make the district stand out to the potential candidate.

**Engaging Content:** Make it Personal: Utilize teacher testimonials, behind-the-scenes classroom stories and success stories to attract prospective educators. Candidates who feel a personal connection are more likely to engage and move forward in the hiring process. Strengthening collaboration between the school and community fosters a unified and appealing school culture.

**Influencer & Educator Partnerships:** Collaborate with experienced teachers and education influencers to amplify recruitment messages. Identify key stakeholders and seek their input on marketing content through interviews, surveys and focus groups. Their insights can make recruitment campaigns more authentic and effective.

**Targeted Social Media Advertising:** Invest in Facebook, Instagram, Twitter and LinkedIn ads to reach specific demographics, including college students, career changers, retired teachers and "grow your own" candidates. Email platforms like HubSpot can help target specific audiences. These tools offer built-in analytics that provide valuable insights into Return on Investment (ROI).

**Interactive Campaigns:** Encourage engagement through Q&A sessions, live discussions and interactive posts featuring current educators sharing their experiences. Strategically guide your target audience to connect with resources and employment opportunities. Utilize tools like QR codes to provide easy access to your website and social media platforms.

**Stakeholder Engagement:** Empower current educators to share recruitment materials within their professional and personal networks. Provide easily accessible and shareable materials through email and social media platforms. Design recruitment materials using user-friendly platforms like Canva, which offer multiple formats that can be easily downloaded and shared.

**Measuring and Analyzing Impact:** It is important to analyze whether the initiative has achieved the desired results.

- Establish a timeline for launching the campaign and gather baseline data on key analytics such as views, clicks, impressions, engagement and shares of social media posts.
- Track data over time to identify which platforms generate the most interest and interaction. Consider adding a question to the job application portal to identify which marketing tools led candidates to the employment opportunity.
- At the campaign's conclusion, analyze ROI by asking: Was the investment in social media platforms worthwhile? Did one platform outperform others? What adjustments should be made for future campaigns?
- Follow up with stakeholders to report on the campaign's impact. Future initiatives can further enhance teacher recruitment by incorporating interactive content, targeted advertisements and influencer collaborations.

By strategically developing a blueprint for digital marketing tools, implementing them in a targeted campaign and analyzing their impact, school districts can create sustainable and effective recruitment strategies that reach a broader audience of prospective educators.

Educate Kansas supports school districts across the state on teacher recruitment and retention. A key component of this work is assisting districts in marketing the unique features of their schools and communities. Each year, Educate Kansas launches a Statewide Marketing Campaign to unify efforts in promoting the teaching profession and enhancing recruitment across Kansas. Through email marketing, social media engagement and stakeholder collaboration, the campaign successfully expands outreach and increases interest in the teaching profession. Data and analytics gathered from this statewide campaign serve as a valuable resource for school districts looking to develop their own targeted recruitment strategies.



Cris Seidel is a veteran Kansas educator with nearly three decades of experience. Throughout her career, she has served in many roles as teacher, school support specialist, professional development coordinator and building and district-level administrator.

With a strong understanding of the educational landscape, Cris has excelled in the recruitment and retention of top-tier educators across rural, suburban and urban districts in Kansas. She possesses an innate understanding of the unique challenges in each setting and is recognized for her innovative leadership characterized by her "possABILITY" and outside-of-the-box thinking.

Cris is the Director for the KSDE Educate Kansas Teacher Recruitment Retention Project. In a time marked by persistent educator shortages, her pioneer efforts have successfully united key educational influencers within the state to thoughtfully design messaging aimed at elevating the teaching profession with the primary objective of attracting and retaining the finest educators, thereby contributing to the overall improvement of education in Kansas.



# COACHING, MENTORING & TRAINING, OH MY!

By Kirk Koennecke, Superintendent, Indian Hill EVSD, Cincinnati, OH

*The leader pipeline in America is wide open. For decades, the flow of talent into public education professions has been tasked with navigating a growing list of professional development challenges, including legal compliance, technology instruction and mental health and wellness curricula. What's often left by the wayside is the development of core leadership skills.*

Indeed, there has been a scarce national effort to address leadership at all levels of public education. Not only would a greater focus on individual, team and organizational leadership skills insulate public education from competition and alternative choices in the future, but these skills will assist with staff attraction and retention rates, school climate issues and, overall, produce talented student citizens ready to succeed now in a complex work environment.

The moral and ethical values that public schools espouse through research-based leadership development content and platforms can transform classrooms, buildings and entire communities. A commitment to providing lifelong self-governance tools, decision-making skills and problem-solving methods will equip students for the “real world”, and more importantly, set adults who help children up for success in their own lives and careers.

What's needed is a systemic approach to coaching, mentoring and training. The approach will define the future of both competitive staffing and enrollment in public schools in America. As Director of K-12 Leadership and Career Development at Indian Hill EVSD in Cincinnati, Ohio, Mr. Jeff Damadeo takes his approach seriously. “Becoming a leader is synonymous with becoming yourself. It is precisely that simple and it is also that difficult.” It has become more apparent than ever that we challenge future leaders to learn about leadership itself.

## **Four Key Questions Need To Be Asked**

**1. What is the difference between Coaching, Mentoring and Training?** Leaders must build a blueprint to promote standards in content delivery and curricular examples for adult learners.

**2. How can we align our professional learning priorities for adults to increase leadership training impact with students?** States, local district leaders must define deeper career pathways to align their financial and budgetary priorities to student retention through relevant programming of life skills that drive America's overall economic success in the second half of this century. The future needs leaders ready now.

**3. What leadership partners make sense?** How does a public organization partner and work with other industries to develop appropriate programs when so few models exist in K-12 schools? We need exemplars.

**4. How can we help deliver resources and skills to current leaders to prepare and grow the next generation of leaders to succeed?** If the chief role of a CEO, Superintendent or HR Director is to develop talent, how do we do this? District leaders everywhere, from board members to union officers, need to be developed with supportive programs, courses and practice to celebrate new leadership in public schools and then empowered to lead students. Flexible opportunities create strong cultures.

## **Build the Road**

It's hard to navigate how to become a “leader” even if you want to become one, in today's world, where a myriad of negative publicity challenges shape the





narrative that the entire profession is less attractive than other industries. Here are a few directional signals to keep in mind:

1. Leadership content can come from lots of sources, but only a few are truly research-based. It's incumbent upon education leaders to move past the memes and clickbait coaching speeches to do research in the area of leadership content.

2. Books by leadership gurus that say "best seller" don't meet the standard for research. Books that are best sellers because they've had multiple editions with scholarly reviews and research studies tied to them do meet a standard.

3. Discerning among certification and credential vendors matters. There are specific HR and Human Capital vendors that produce researched content. Similarly, there are certified and uncertified executive coaching and leadership models out there. Look for accredited and recognized vendors.

### Culture Is What You Get After You Build It

Over the past decade, public education institutions have spent millions of dollars more on remediation, staff attrition and discipline and onboarding than on actual professional development.

Maybe the model is a backyard? What's needed is a marketing revolution, a rebrand of leadership itself into three categories:

1. Coaching: teaching leadership skills that would otherwise need to be learned and honed over the years through action planning and performance checks.
2. Mentoring: situational leadership skills with examples and feedback for tasks over time.
3. Training: direct teaching of a new skill or task competency.

Early exposure to any of these three paths to leadership happens informally for most staff in public education roles. Where formal training occurs, it is typically reserved for a college-level course or a one-off third-party presentation instead of an intentional, routine and consistent program of learning and empowerment. "Leadership is about equipping someone else with the tools to be successful. Director Damadeo is working on scaling leadership training grades K-12 and delivering programming to adults as well.

Partnering with the Blanchard Institute, students at Indian Hill have had a unique career badging experience through a blended platform that combines virtual and real-time access to the Blanchard Institute's world-class leadership coaches. Blanchard's mission is to fill the leadership void by providing teens and their adult supporters with the knowledge and tools needed to transition from being life passengers to life leaders. The training is provided through Blanchard's non-profit organization, The Blanchard Institute, co-founded by Ken and Margie Blanchard. Blanchard has taken the most effective strategies from their leadership and development company over the past

45 years and adapted them to meet the unique needs of high school students.

Margie Blanchard explains: "We do this because we believe students shouldn't have to wait until adulthood to learn the skills to lead themselves. For the past 40 years, our corporate trainers have heard comments like these at the end of their workplace training sessions: 'I wish I had learned the mindsets and skillsets of a self-leader back in high school.' 'My life would have been better if I had learned these skills earlier.' 'I would have been able to handle life's challenges more productively if I had learned self-leadership earlier.'"

The past four years have seen larger exits of future educators from university education programs. In any other industry or higher education program, alarm bells would be resounding across the nation. Leadership learning is an attractive prospect for students and adults.

Recruiting a new generation of teachers has to start early. Additionally, program requirements are varied, but altogether lack a focus on experience-based learning and development. Why not leadership interns? It's about time leaders discussed removing lesser priorities to focus on developing human capital with a foundation in life skills from the get-go.

In fact, in colleges, universities and secondary schools across America, so few accredited leadership degree programs exist that the US Naval Academy turned inward and developed its curriculum. As their model demonstrates, a marriage of career pathway learning and leadership skills makes more marketing sense to all industries.

"Understanding the importance of coaching, mentoring and training allows us to personalize the development of a future leader, thus helping to ensure that they are equipped with the tools to become truly effective", says Damadeo.

### Model The Way

When should a middle school learner be able to self-govern? To lead others on a team? What about a high school soccer player? A mock trial club member? Who is teaching all of these adults in charge how to teach leadership skills? In any other industry, specific, trained individuals and teams teach the leadership content needed for the management class or for employee classes. Where public schools are spending millions of dollars on contracts to place adults in positions of power and authority, there is scant research to show that their leadership credentials and qualifications go deeper than their past personal experiences.

A concerted "grow your own" model could work in so many schools, but very few districts or their partners attempt this type of plan for internal leadership

improvement, simply relying on past practice and flashy resumes to cover their decisions to place adults in roles of vast responsibility to teach others how to behave as leaders. This outdated model has a serious cost attached, both in personal development and in real dollars.

### Professional Development That Gets Personal

Some adults need training, others need mentoring and many need coaching. Some require a combination or variety of the three that is nuanced, and evolves over time. Based on one's level of responsibility, any or all of these paths can benefit one for life, both in and out of the job. Jim Nichols, Chief Human Resources and Operations Officer for Indian Hill Exempted Village School District, offers, "True professional development begins with understanding the individual—it's about connecting personal growth with professional purpose. When we intentionally invest in personalized learning experiences, we empower our staff to lead and inspire our students to view leadership as an essential skill." To that end, Nichols has partnered with Experience Management Institute in Ohio, among others, to provide human capital certifications for administrators. "By embedding leadership opportunities into the core of K-12 learning, we create a ripple effect that equips students with transferable skills, empowering them to succeed in any post-secondary education or career path."

Personalized learning and professional development are the keys. Who wouldn't want to spend time talking and reflecting on their own needs and wants and desires? The magic of leadership development is that the skills are for the learner first, and for the learner to model for others second. Planning among school administrators and their higher education partners must become more intentional, routine and consistent. The lack of current K-12 partnerships with higher education leadership opportunities is astounding.

There is an inherent generational bias and exclusivity trend behind these practices. Analyze the trends demographically, and the stark contrast between suburban, urban and rural talent development is also disappointing. Encouraging the current certified and classified workforce to engage with K-12 students on leadership practices now would provide significant value to future higher education partners, employers and government officials.

Training students with a scaffolded array of opportunities to develop and showcase leadership skills improves communication talent, lessens the necessity for remedial work and improves behaviors overall. More leadership skills mean less micromanaging, and a better climate; less employee discipline, and more focus on deeper learning of content and specialized topics in schools. More leaders mean fewer mental health and wellness issues and more career success.



Indian Hill’s leaders are working directly with Franklin Covey to implement unique training models in leadership habits so internal staff can model the way for other staff members. They are also taking advantage of Franklin Covey’s online learning modules through its All Access Pass platform to train both certified and classified staff members.

“The work that Indian Hill is doing to utilize Franklin Covey’s Leader in Me framework has been a beacon, for not only the state of Ohio, but across the country”, states Adriana Berger, Franklin Covey’s Education Partner. “The Leader in Me process, founded on the principles of The 7 Habits of Highly Effective People, is a PK-12 evidence-based model focused on leadership, culture and academics. It equips students, educators and families with the leadership and life skills needed to thrive in a dynamic world”.

**Develop A Class of Leaders**

Wonder where most leaders work once they graduate? The region where they grew up.

Multiple avenues to higher wages and flexible work schedules should fuel decision-making by adults to help teens avoid remedial education programs after high school by focusing on talent development schools, and through work experiences that narrow their career paths before they leave the region. Affluent career paths that pay higher wages demand complex problem-solvers and thinkers who can lead teams.

Government loans, grants and legal barriers need to be re-evaluated through a human capital lens for student leadership and staff development. We need to start treating teachers the same way Fortune 100 companies treat their managerial class, where ongoing leadership programming is essential for success. Why shouldn’t the new teacher experience the same support? The student is looking for relevant skills?

According to a recent AACTE study, only 32% of all teacher candidates are not white. Alternative pathways for recruits, such as Educators Rising and Pathways2Teaching, are just two examples of creative means to an end. Why not add leadership training to attract more diverse talent? Says Berger, “I am thrilled to support Indian Hill in their continued journey of growing the leadership capacity for staff and students”.

**Local Solutions Begin at the Top**

There are stark challenges facing educators and districts across the country. Local boards of education from Brigantine to San Ramon Valley must recognize the core of the problem, or they are missing the broader message issued by workers and union leaders in the last decade: American employers are demanding better leaders who are ready now. A transformation begins locally.

School leaders across the country need to be vocal and repeat the call for leadership study to the larger community to frame the need for what it is, and what results come from stronger leadership development. The future is not bright for all schools, but this approach can shed light on concrete solutions that promote higher-level learning, focused career choices and stronger citizens.

Finally, we need to train principals and administrators to not only be instructional leaders but also empathic human capital leaders where EQ matters more than IQ. We need to develop teachers as leaders, or they’ll leave our organizations. A serious lack of marketing and promotion acumen among both higher education and public school districts has not helped change the narrative about this wonderful profession.

Injecting a new layer of ongoing leadership skill promotion is necessary for the larger culture to digest and relay that the problem and the solution are so often in the priorities we broadcast. You want to make America stronger and create a better world for all? Develop a leader now.



**Kirk Koennecke** is a veteran educational leader with 29 years of service to students and 19 years in administration. He currently serves as superintendent of Indian Hill School EVSD, having previously led

Graham Local Schools and worked as a head principal in multiple districts. He is the 2024 National Superintendent of the Year (NASS) and was recently named the 2025 Ohio Digital Superintendent of the Year (COSN). Mr. Koennecke holds degrees from The Ohio State University, Miami University of Ohio, John Carroll University and Wright State University, and he currently teaches as an adjunct professor at the University of Cincinnati. A certified executive coach and recognized presenter, he is trained in Covey’s leadership principles, CCL’s 360 Benchmark and has certifications in Human Capital Leadership, Education Finance, Negotiation & Influence and DEI Leadership. He founded the Ohio Small & Rural Collaborative and has been honored with multiple innovation and educator awards. An active member of several national education organizations, Mr. Koennecke contributes regularly to educational publications and podcasts, sharing his leadership insights nationwide.



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AASPA’s Virtual Boot Camp offers a unique opportunity for PK-12 HR School System Leaders to come together, collaborate across all levels and access valuable resources to support teachers, employees and school districts. This two-day virtual workshop covers a wide range of essential topics for HR administrators. Dive into recruitment strategies, effective investigations, ADA accommodations, employee discipline, FMLA compliance and more!



**HUMAN  
CAPITAL  
LEADERSHIP  
SUMMIT**

DEC. 4-5, 2025

SAVANNAH, GA



Designed for school leaders who are past their first three years of human capital management or are looking for an advanced level of professional development in HR leadership.

REGISTER NOW!





# UNIQUE VALUE PROPOSITIONS HELP SCHOOLS STAND OUT WITH JOB CANDIDATES

By Mellissa Braham, APR, Associate Director, National School Public Relations Association, Rockville, MD

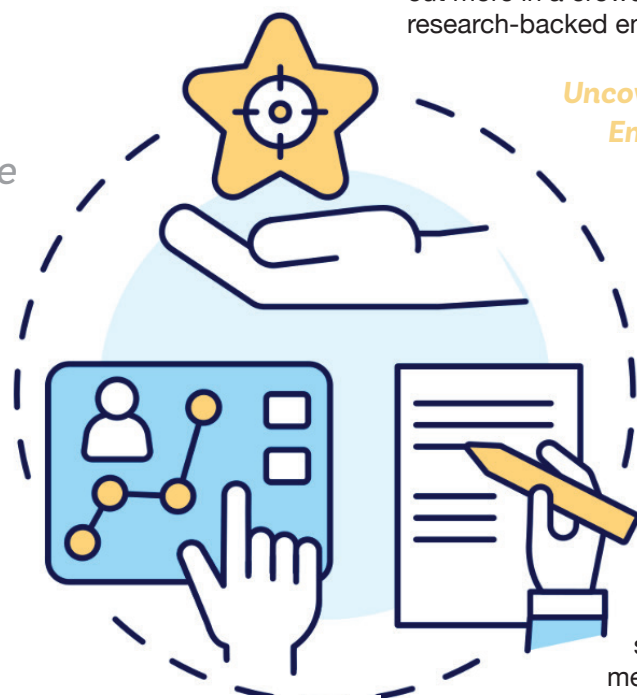
*Walk down any pasta aisle at a grocery store, and you'll see box after box of yellowish noodles. They all basically taste the same once you cook them. Yet as a shopper, you still look for the unique dining experience hidden inside each box: the delicate thinness of Angel Hair or the thrilling twist of Rotini or the saucy squash of Penne.*

*As a current or aspiring educator, picking out a potential school system to apply to can be a bit like hunting for pasta.*



All schools educate students, give employees the chance to make a difference and inspire others, and offer (or try to) competitive benefits. Stroll through any career fair for current or aspiring educators, and you'll see phrases like these paired with pictures of smiling students at table after table. But what might be more helpful to those candidates is insight into a school's unique employee experience.

To hone your employee experience messaging and stand out more in a crowded "aisle," it helps to start with a clear, research-backed employee value proposition.



## Uncover a School's Unique Value for Employees

A value proposition indicates the benefits that something offers, and when combined with the word employee, the phrase "employee value proposition" refers to the unique benefits of employment with a particular organization. It sums up both what makes an organization attractive to potential employees and what makes its current employees want to stay.

This may sound obvious, but some school systems use taglines and messaging related to their branding for students and families even when recruiting for employees. The marketing ends up being more about what schools do as educational institutions than about what potential employees might want for their professional and personal lives.

Understanding their employment needs and goals, as well as any gains expected for their quality of life and potential barriers to their professional happiness, is key to crafting more effective messaging. There are a variety of ways to gather the data necessary for greater understanding:

- Review national data on employees' priorities and the job market. For example, Gallup's State of the Global Workplace 2023 Report found that more than half of respondents rated "greater work-life balance and better personal wellbeing" (62 percent), "significantly increases my income or improves my benefits package" (58 percent) and "allows me to do what I do best" (58

percent) as the most important factors when considering whether to take a job elsewhere.

- Conduct exit interviews/surveys with outgoing employees. When the results are in, be sure to look for responses that indicate employment needs or goals that were unmet, particularly those that the school might be able to do something about in the future.
- Review school climate/working condition surveys. These may be a statewide initiative or a local project, but the results can provide insight into why employees stay with a school system and in which job-related areas they feel most positively.
- Conduct stay interviews/focus groups with current employees. Ask about their perceptions of the school culture, school system values and how they learn that they are a valued party of the school community. Try what is known as a "loss aversion exercise" and ask them what they would miss if they didn't work for the school, to identify highly valued job features.

Nearly 70 years ago, psychologist Abraham Maslow theorized that a person has certain needs that must be met first before any other needs can be pursued. Researchers have continued to build on his work, but the essence of "Maslow's hierarchy of needs" is that a person's physiological and safety needs, like for food and financial security, must be met first. These basic needs are where a lot of school employee recruitment efforts center, with pitches about salaries, benefits and sign-on bonuses.

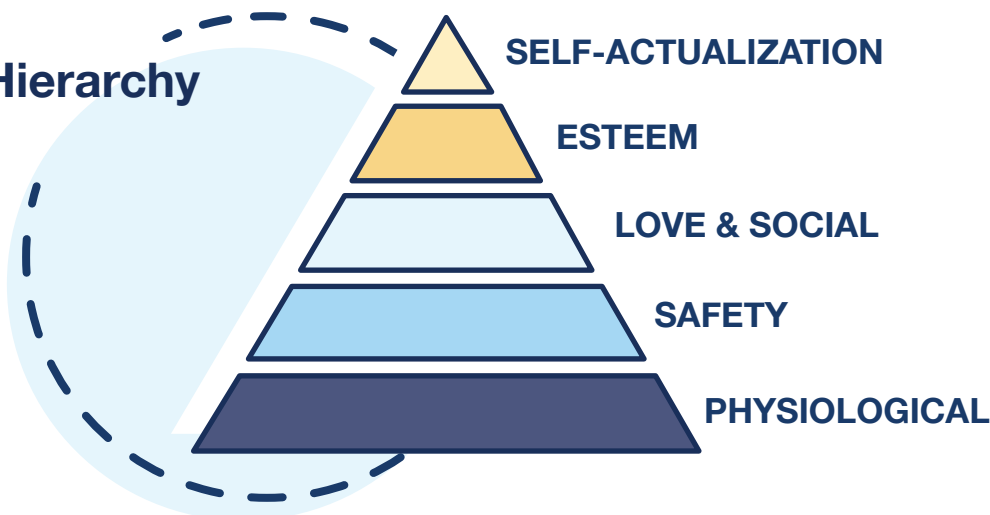
To differentiate itself as an employer, a school must also understand potential employees' higher-level needs, for belongingness, esteem and self-actualization as Maslow identified.

Only then does a school's true employee value proposition become clear, with answers to the following questions:

- In what ways does our school help employees meet their basic employment needs and goals?
- In what ways does our school create the additional gains that employees expect for their quality of life?
- In what ways does our school help employees overcome potential pains or barriers to their professional and personal happiness?



# Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs



## Amplify the Value of Recruitment Messaging

Telling a potential new hire to “join the best school” or “teach/drive with the best” is a bit like telling grocery shoppers in the pasta aisle, “We make pasta!”

In contrast, these school systems have crafted recruitment messaging that reflects a higher-level, employee-centered value proposition:

- “Bring Your Passion, Discover Your Purpose” is the employer tagline for North East Independent School District in Texas), which was named one of America's Best Employers by Forbes Magazine in 2023. The tagline is featured on the district's careers website, in posters, on banners, in social media graphics and more.
- “Difference makers. Career growers. Team contributors.” That is how the Wentzville School District in Missouri describes its workplace and team of employees in a recruitment brochure that earned a 2024 NSPRA Award of Excellence.
- “Classroom Calling” illustrates the employee value proposition of the Lincoln Public Schools in Nebraska (<https://home.lps.org/hr/careers/>) through videos showing that teaching is a life calling. Staff spotlight articles on the careers website also share the “sense of belonging” employees can find in LPS and are complemented by “An Educator's Guide to LPS”, which earned a 2024 NSPRA Award of Merit.

An employee value proposition can be communicated in a variety of ways, as these examples illustrate.

It might be shared through brief taglines or lengthier positioning statements and articles. It might appear on websites, banners and posters, in a LinkedIn profile and social media posts and as soundbites in videos and

radio spots. Be sure to communicate the employee value proposition across all of these potential recruitment spaces consistently.

Too often, there are too few qualified candidates for the open positions in schools today. Having an employee value proposition to market a school as a great employer for educators and support staff, as well as a great space for student instruction, is essential to recruitment success.



**Melissa Braham, APR,** is an accredited professional with more than 25 years of experience in public relations. As the associate director for the National School Public Relations Association since

2018, she is responsible for coordinating NSPRA's research services, managing staff, coordinating session programming for the annual NSPRA National Seminar, overseeing chapter relations, contributing to member resources and developing association products. Prior to joining NSPRA, she served school districts across New York for more than 12 years as a trusted strategic advisor, communications professional, regional project leader, mentor, trainer, facilitator and communication auditor. Her school communications work was honored with an NSPRA Gold Medallion in 2013, an NSPRA Golden Achievement Award in 2016 and more than 50 national and state publication awards. Today she presents on a variety of school communication topics for national and state-based education associations.



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# TOGETHER, WE CAN EXCEL:

## REIMAGINING ONBOARDING AS A LEADERSHIP IMPERATIVE

By Dr. Michel Pantin, pHCLE, Executive Director of Talent Services, Savannah-Chatham County Public School System, Savannah, GA

*Imagine this: The first report about Human Resources that crosses the new Superintendent's desk reveals a striking conclusion: SCCPSS does not have a structured, equitable onboarding program and onboarding experiences differ drastically between certified and classified employees. According to the district's internal audit, this gap presents a reputational risk to trust, consistency and retention. In short, onboarding was not just an operational gap; it was a leadership imperative.*



Rather than shy away from the findings, the Office of Talent and Human Resources in the Savannah-Chatham County Public School System (SCCPSS) responded with urgency, designing a clear, practical and equity-focused onboarding framework. Rooted in our Superintendent's vision: Together, we can...EXCEL, this guidance document became a foundational tool for lifting the employee experience across every school and department.

In SCCPSS, we believe the first year sets the tone for an employee's long-term engagement. Through our onboarding framework, we emphasize the five pillars of leadership under our Superintendent's vision:

**E – Empower**  
**X – Examine**  
**C – Cultivate**  
**E – Encourage**  
**L – Lead**

Together, we can... EXCEL.

As Jim Collins reminds us, “Great vision without great people is irrelevant.” And as our work has demonstrated, great people need great beginnings.

### **Empower: Start Strong with a Personal Welcome**

The first step to creating a strong workforce is ensuring that each new employee feels seen, valued and celebrated. That is why empowerment begins with how we welcome employees.

We empower new employees by beginning their journey with belonging. Leaders announce their arrival, introduce them to colleagues and mentors and tour the workplace. Whether it is a welcome kit, their name badge or ensuring their workspace is ready, these acts show that we have prepared for their arrival and that they matter.

### **Examine: Set Clear Expectations and Systems Access**

Once employees feel welcomed, the next essential step is ensuring they are prepared with the tools and clarity they need to succeed.

We guide leaders to examine and explain the critical foundations of the role: job descriptions, departmental procedures, daily schedules and evaluation tools. We also help new employees gain access to essential systems such as student platforms, applicant tracking systems, time and attendance software or evaluation platforms.

### **Cultivate: Nurture Learning and Organizational Alignment**

With the basics in place, onboarding must evolve from planning to purpose, connecting individuals to the culture and mission of their team and the district.

We encourage leaders to designate “Listen and Learn” time for new employees, fostering alignment with team norms and district priorities. When employees understand how their role contributes to larger goals, they gain clarity, confidence and direction.

### **Encourage: Foster Ongoing Connection and Feedback**

Culture alignment is only the beginning. Ongoing encouragement ensures employees do not just feel welcomed, but they feel supported throughout the journey.

Our onboarding framework includes structured check-ins through the first year, designed to promote dialogue, well-being and continuous growth. These checkpoints are our chance to reflect, intervene early and celebrate wins.

### **Lead: Create a Culture of Growth and Belonging**

The most lasting onboarding impact happens when leaders model care and consistency. It is in this final phase that onboarding transitions from support to transformation.

Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. once said, “Life's most persistent and urgent question is: ‘What are you doing for others?’”. Onboarding is a leader's opportunity to answer that question with empathy and intention.

### **Conclusion**

Together, we can...EXCEL is more than a slogan. It is a daily challenge to lead with vision and purpose. Through our structured onboarding guidance, SCCPSS is turning that vision into action. Empowering leaders to examine practices, cultivate talent, encourage growth and lead with intention.



Our goal is not only to move from good to great, as Collins so powerfully framed it, but to go one step further: to EXCEL. Through Empowerment, Examination, Cultivation, Encouragement and Leadership, we are building systems where excellence is not aspirational, it is operational.

As I often say in our district: “Retention is the new recruitment, and that begins with onboarding.” When leaders treat onboarding as a strategic investment rather than a compliance task, we not only welcome new talent, but we keep it.



**Dr. Michel Pantin** is the Executive Director of Talent Services for Savannah-Chatham County Public School System. She oversees all staffing functions-certified, classified and temporary, and leads the district’s strategic efforts in recruitment, onboarding, employee engagement and retention. With two decades of experience as a teacher, coach and HR leader, Michel is known for her solution-focused leadership and commitment to equity in talent management. Her leadership philosophy: Be Inspired to L.E.A.D. (Lift, Empower, Achieve and Develop) guides her approach to building capacity, elevating excellence and supporting a student-focused workforce. She holds a doctorate from Georgia Southern University, and her research explores urban education and educator identity. Michel lives a purpose-driven life rooted in service to others.



# Looking for some last minute PD?

Check out AASPA’s recorded webinars!

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- > Smarter Leadership With AI
  - > Developing a Mentor Program for Emergency Certified Teachers
  - > Building a Positive Workplace Culture
  - > Addressing Employee Behavior & Performance



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## CHECK OUT OUR UPCOMING Events

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REGISTER NOW!



### 2025 School HR Virtual Boot Camp / AUG 20 - 21, 2025

AASPA’s Virtual Boot Camp offers a unique opportunity for PK-12 HR School System Leaders to come together, collaborate across all levels and access valuable resources to support teachers, employees and school districts. This two-day virtual workshop covers a wide range of essential topics for HR administrators. Dive into recruitment strategies, effective investigations, ADA accommodations, employee discipline, FMLA compliance and more!



REGISTER NOW!



### 2025 Virtual Legal Summit / NOV 12 - 13, 2025

AASPA’s Virtual Legal Summit is a one of a kind opportunity to engage with attorneys who specialize in the field of education and school law. Over the course of this two day virtual event, attendees will gather up-to-date information on the latest laws, policies and legal challenges facing school HR departments. This two-day event will provide a platform to make valuable connections with driven and focused people from across the legal and HR profession.



REGISTER NOW!



### 2025 Annual Conference / OCT 7 - 10, 2025 Nashville, TN

AASPA’s 87<sup>th</sup> Annual Conference delivers four days of engaging content, the opportunity to encounter diverse perspectives and the ability to grow valuable connections across the industry. It is the premier conference that offers PK-12 school leaders ready-to-use solutions and research-based strategies all in a relaxed and fun environment. Our goal is to help you put things into focus, so that you will leave feeling rejuvenated and armed with new ideas, resources and contacts.



REGISTER NOW!



### 2025 Human Capital Leadership Summit / DEC 4 - 5, 2025 Savannah, GA

The Human Capital Leadership Summit is designed for school leaders who are past their first three years of human capital management or are looking for an advanced level of professional development in HR leadership. These sessions will be dedicated to helping participants grow professionally in their knowledge as well as personally in their leadership skills.



REGISTER NOW!



### 2026 School HR Winter Boot Camp / JAN 22 - 23, 2026 Clearwater, FL

AASPA’s School HR Boot Camp is the perfect time to pause and focus on your professional development, and there’s no better way to truly reflect on your leadership than with our lineup of inspiring and knowledgeable HR speakers. This two-day workshop offers a variety of essential topics for all HR administrators, including recruitment, hiring, employee discipline, HR legislation, employee evaluation and much more!



VIRTUAL

IN PERSON





## AASPA'S 87TH ANNUAL CONFERENCE

# TUNING INTO TALENT

*Live from Nashville*

OCTOBER 7-10, 2025



## Evening Events

Make meaningful connections and enjoy inspiring moments at our many networking opportunities—don't miss your chance to be part of the experience!

## Join us and get ready to "Tune Into Talent!"

AASPA's 87th Annual Conference delivers four days of **engaging content**, the opportunity to encounter diverse perspectives and the ability to **grow valuable connections** across the industry. It is the premier conference that offers **PK-12 school leaders ready-to-use solutions** and research-based strategies all in a relaxed and fun environment. Our goal is to help you put things into focus, so that you will leave feeling rejuvenated and armed with new ideas, resources and contacts.

Hear from **speakers who are experts in their field** and take-home new ideas and approaches to invigorate your own district. **Connect with like-minded leaders** and share strategies on improving equity, student outcomes, district performance and so much more. **Stay current with the research**, trends and connections that help advance not only the profession, but also your individual career.

Your job is unique. How often do you have the chance to interact with another, much less many other school administrators? This is your chance! Build the relationships that will support you through years to come.

### WHO SHOULD ATTEND?

- HR Directors
- Superintendents
- Assistant Superintendents
- Personnel Staff
- Principals
- School Administrators
- Business Officials
- And Others!

### WHAT'S INCLUDED:

- Pre-Conference Workshops\*
- Keynote Sessions
- Breakout Sessions
- Session Materials
- Networking Receptions
- Exhibit Hall Access
- Breakfast, Lunches, AM & PM Breaks
- Conference Website and Mobile App

\*For All Access Registrations ONLY

[www.aaspaconference.com](http://www.aaspaconference.com)

### Regional Meet & Greet // Tuesday, October 7 / 4:15pm - 5:15pm / JW Marriott Nashville

Join us for our Regional Meet & Greet to connect with your region reps, network with peers and win great prizes—all while building valuable connections!

Sponsored by:  **AASPA**  **UPBEAT**

### First-Time Attendee Reception // Tuesday, October 7 / 5:30pm - 6:30pm / JW Marriott Nashville

First AASPA Conference? Join us for the First-Time Attendee Reception to meet new people and connect with the AASPA Executive Board and Staff.

Sponsored by:  **AASPA**  **PowerSchool**  **Red Rover**

### Welcome Reception // Tuesday, October 7 / 7:00pm - 10:00pm / Category 10

Dust off your boots and grab your cowboy hat — it's time to kick off AASPA's 87th Annual Conference, Nashville-style! Enjoy dinner, drinks, live music and fun while networking in a festive, relaxed atmosphere.

Sponsored by:  **AASPA**  **PowerSchool** 

### Exhibit Hall Reception // Wednesday, October 8 / 4:30pm - 6:00pm / JW Marriott Nashville

Don't miss the Exhibit Hall Reception! Connect with 70+ companies showcasing innovative HR solutions, enjoy drinks and appetizers and explore the latest industry trends to support your district's success.

Sponsored by:  **AASPA**  **Marathon Health.** 

### Networking in Nashville // Wednesday, October 8 / 7:00pm - 10:00pm / Various Locations

Don't miss this chance to connect with fellow attendees at sponsor-hosted gatherings across Nashville's vibrant venues. Enjoy Music City while building valuable relationships!

Sponsored by:  **ESS**  **PROXIMITY LEARNING**  **Edustaff**  **Moreland University**  **Marathon Health.**  **\*ets**

### 2026 Conference Kickoff Party // Thursday, October 9 / 4:30pm - 6:00pm / JW Marriott Nashville

You don't want to miss our 2026 Conference Kickoff party as we unveil the location of AASPA's 88th Annual Conference. Join us for drinks, light appetizers and a few surprises as we celebrate and gear up for next year's spectacular event.

Sponsored by:  **AASPA**

### DEI Reception // Thursday, October 9 / 7:00pm - 10:00pm / National Museum of African American Music

Step into an unforgettable evening. Enjoy lively music, dancing, a light dinner and refreshing drinks as we honor diversity in music and education.

Sponsored by:  **AASPA** 



**REGISTER  
NOW!**

**\$1,000 for Members and \$1,300 for Non-Members\***

\*For the All Access Package Registration



# Agenda at a Glance

## MONDAY, OCTOBER 6

02:30pm - 05:00pm Registration Open

## TUESDAY, OCTOBER 7

07:30am - 05:30pm Registration Open  
08:00am - 05:30pm Information Desk Open  
09:00am - 12:00pm AM Pre-Conference Workshops  
01:00pm - 04:00pm PM Pre-Conference Workshops  
04:15pm - 05:15pm Regional Meet & Greet  
05:30pm - 06:30pm First Time Attendee Reception  
07:00pm - 10:00pm Welcome Reception at Category 10

## WEDNESDAY, OCTOBER 8

07:00am - 04:30pm Registration Open  
07:00am - 08:00am Breakfast Available  
08:00am - 04:30pm Information Desk Open  
08:00am - 09:30am Opening Ceremony & Keynote  
09:30am - 04:30pm Exhibit Hall Open (Closed During Lunch)  
10:15am - 11:45pm Clinic & Ignite Sessions  
10:45am - 11:45pm Community Conversations  
11:45pm - 01:30pm Lunch on Own (Gift Card Provided by AASPA)  
01:30pm - 04:15pm Clinic & Ignite Sessions  
04:30pm - 06:00pm Exhibit Hall Reception  
07:00pm - 10:00pm Networking In Nashville (various locations)

## THURSDAY, OCTOBER 9

07:00am - 04:00pm Registration Open  
07:00am - 08:00am Breakfast Available  
08:00am - 04:00pm Information Desk Open  
08:00am - 09:30am General Session: Keynote  
09:30am - 11:15am Exhibit Hall Open  
10:15am - 11:15am Clinic & Ignite Sessions  
10:15am - 11:15am Business Meeting  
11:15am - 12:00pm Exhibit Hall Closing & Grand Prize Drawing  
12:00pm - 01:30pm Lunch on Own or Join ESS/Proximity Learning  
01:30pm - 04:15pm Clinic & Ignite Sessions  
02:45pm - 04:15pm State Leaders Meeting  
04:30pm - 06:00pm 2026 Conference Kickoff Party  
07:00pm - 10:00pm DEI Reception at The National Museum of African American Music

## FRIDAY, OCTOBER 10

07:00am - 11:30pm Information Desk Open  
07:00am - 08:00am Breakfast Available  
08:00am - 10:45am Clinic & Ignite Sessions  
11:00am - 12:15pm Closing Ceremony & Keynote

# Keynote Speakers



## WEDNESDAY, OCTOBER 8

### Shola Richards

TEACHERS•TOMORROW

KEYNOTE SPONSORED BY TEACHERS OF TOMORROW



*Shola Richards' mantra is a simple, but powerful one: we are defined by how we treat each other. In his inspiring flagship keynote, Shola will reinforce that key point by introducing the transformative concept of Ubuntu, which translates to "I am, because we are". The Ubuntu philosophy, along with three powerful questions, will provide the audience with actionable strategies to transform their work culture, amplify team civility and inspire themselves and others to consistently bring their best to their work.*



## THURSDAY, OCTOBER 9

### Taryn Southern

KEYNOTE SPONSORED BY ESS / PROXIMITY LEARNING



*Pioneering content creator Taryn Southern has always had a front-row seat to the future. As one of the first creators on YouTube, she helped lead a media revolution that transformed business and personal life. Since then, she has broken new ground in AI, blockchain, virtual reality, and neurotechnology. In 2019, Taryn faced a series of unexpected life events that tested her optimism and resilience. In her session, she shares mind-blowing AI tools to spark creativity, unconventional thinking, and personal transformation in your business—and life.*



## FRIDAY, OCTOBER 10

### Cassandra Worthy



KEYNOTE SPONSORED BY UBC

*In an era where change is relentless and multifaceted, traditional leadership strategies often fall short. Leaning on her 15 years of Corporate M&A experience, Cassandra introduces the C.H.A.N.G.E. Traits®, a research-backed power skillset, designed to equip leaders with the emotional agility and practical tools needed to not just navigate but thrive through transformation.*



# Pre-Conference Sessions

Tuesday, October 7

## MORNING SESSIONS

9:00am - 12:00pm

### 1. Building Cultures of Value, Respect, Belong, Opportunity & Accessibility in the Workplace

Presented by Kevin Walton & Michele Stephens

### 2. FMLA – The Right Way

Presented by Barbara Erickson

### 3. Leveraging the 5 Shifts and Candidate Personas to Impact the Educator Shortage

Presented by Dr. Sara Skretta & Dr. Kelly Coash-Johnson

### 4. Navigating Difficult Conversations with Emotional Intelligence

Presented by Jodie Graham, Dr. Jeffry Grassmeyer & JD Hunter

### 5. Investigations & Documentation

Presented by John Hooks & Elizabeth Maron

### 6. Drink the Kool-AID - AI in the HR Office

Presented by Dr. Dale Fisher & Dr. David Bruno

## AFTERNOON SESSIONS

1:00pm - 4:00pm

### 7. Questions You Should Ask Before Firing an Employee

Presented by Brent Siler

### 8. Hot Topics in School Law

Presented by John Hooks & Elizabeth Maron

### 9. Got Candidates in Low Places? Improve Recruitment, Retention and Onboarding Culture by Starting at the Bottom

Presented by Jamie West & Michael Coleman

### 10. A Whole New World: Navigating the Civil Rights Landscape in K-12

Presented by Jackie Gharapour Wernz & Holly McIntush

### 11. Total Rewards Remix: Designing Talent-Centered Strategies That Resonate

Presented by Emily Douglas-McNab & Dr. Kate Heynoski

### 12. Strategic School Staffing: Best Practices for Large and Small Districts

Presented by Michele Thomas & Marco Holland

## Elite Sponsors



## 6 tips

## to get the most out of Conference

By Alexis Krist, Meetings Coordinator, AASPA, Overland Park, KS

### Sessions

With over 100 breakouts, pre-conference, and keynote sessions, choosing the right ones can feel overwhelming. Before you join us, take time to review all available sessions at [www.aaspaconference.com](http://www.aaspaconference.com) and select those that best meet your needs. Our mobile app is also a great tool to explore sessions and plan your week. All sessions align with the Human Capital Leaders in Education (HCLE) Standards and are eligible for recertification credits from SHRM, HRCI, and pHCLE. Our expert speakers will leave you with actionable ideas and strategies for your district. If you miss a session, don't worry—clinic and ignite session materials will be available in the app.

### Networking

One of the best parts of the AASPA conference is the chance to meet and mingle with fellow attendees. With seven evening events and lots of daytime networking opportunities, you'll have plenty of chances to make connections that will benefit you long after the Conference ends. Many past attendees say that the friendships and professional contacts they make are the highlights of their experience. Aim to leave Nashville with at least one new connection and don't forget to pack those business cards!

### Enjoy

Over the past few years, we have experienced tremendous growth. Our growth means that things might look a bit different this year. But rest assured, different is good! It means we're evolving, expanding and becoming an even stronger community of school HR leaders. The AASPA staff has embraced this challenge with creativity and innovation and we're excited to share the new features we've incorporated.

With AASPA's 87<sup>th</sup> Annual Conference just around the corner, it's time to get excited and prepare for an amazing experience! Whether you're a conference pro or this is your first time, these tips will help you make the most of your time in Nashville and start **#TuningIntoTalent**

### Technology

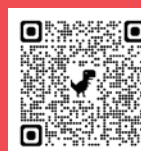
One of my biggest conference tips would be to make sure you utilize the conference mobile app. It's your go-to for everything from session descriptions to speaker info and handouts. The app also has maps, menus and a handy "My Schedule" feature to help you plan your days. You can even connect with other attendees, share schedules and request appointments. Make sure your notifications are turned on so you stay up-to-date with all the latest news and updates.

### Weather

Be sure to pack an umbrella and a sweater or light jacket to stay cozy in cool meeting spaces. And comfortable shoes are a must—you'll be doing quite a bit of walking between sessions, exploring the Exhibit Halls and enjoying Broadway.

### Exhibit Hall

The AASPA Exhibit Hall is packed with innovative tools and technology designed to streamline your district's operations and give you more time to focus on what you love about your job. Our exhibitors are some of the best in the biz and are excited to show you what they've got. With over 70 companies to visit, you'll want to make sure you have enough time to check them all out. And don't miss the Exhibit Hall Reception—you might just walk away with an awesome prize!

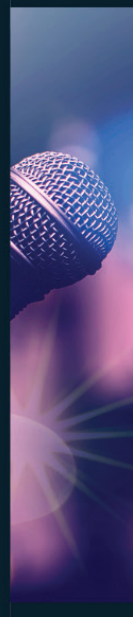


If you are a first-time attendee, be sure to register for one of the first time attendee webinars!

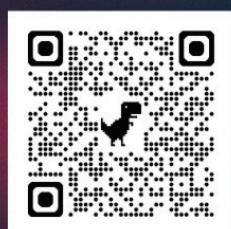
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# TUNING INTO *live from Nashville* TALENT



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