

Session Titles and Descriptions
AASPA 2026 Conference 2.0 | Virtual
(All sessions will be presented in Central Time.)

Cultivating Healing Centered Leadership in HR

Training & Development; Work-Life Integration

Presented by Nichelle Rivers, Assistant Superintendent for Human Resources, Eastern Suffolk BOCES

In today's rapidly evolving workplace, HR professionals are being called to lead not just with policy—but with presence, empathy, and resilience. This dynamic 90-minute workshop invites Human Resource administrators into a transformative experience to explore what it truly means to be a healing-centered leader. Healing-centered leadership goes beyond trauma-informed care. It recognizes the whole person and centers on creating emotionally safe, culturally affirming, and restorative work environments. As the architects of organizational culture, HR administrators are uniquely positioned to drive this shift. Participants will leave this highly interactive and engaging session with:

- A clear understanding of the core principles of healing-centered leadership
- Best practices and practical tools to create more compassionate and resilient workplace environments
- An opportunity to reflect on their own leadership style and how to better support themselves and others
- A renewed sense of purpose, connection, and inspiration to lead with heart

Drink the Kool-AID - AI in the HR Office

Performance Management; Planning & Preparation

Presented by Dr. Dale Fisher, Assistant Superintendent for Human Resources, Deerfield Public Schools District 109 and Dr. David Bruno, Assistant Superintendent for HR, Glen Ellyn School District 41

Imagine a Human Resources department that works smarter, not harder. AI is transforming HR in K-12 education, and it's time to harness its full potential. Join us for an eye-opening professional development session where we'll explore how AI can be a game-changer for K-12 HR teams, streamlining processes and freeing up your time to focus on what truly matters: your people. In our session, you'll gain actionable insights into implementing AI solutions designed specifically for K-12 HR, backed by real-world success stories. Don't miss this chance to step into the future of HR.

FMLA - The Right Way

Compensation & Benefits; Work-Life Integration

Presented by Barbara Erickson, Partner, Hodges, Loizzi, Eisenhammer, Rodick & Kohn LLP

Learn how to unlock and demystify the Family and Medical Leave Act (FMLA). Whether you are just starting out in HR or a seasoned professional, this session will equip you with the fundamentals of the FMLA and equip you with the knowledge of how to approach the FMLA as a step-by-step system and how to integrate it with other mandatory leave and benefit rights. Join us and master the FMLA the right

From Hello to Hired: Mastering Recruitment; Retention & Onboarding

Recruitment; Hiring; Orientation & Onboarding

Presented by Jenny Hulett, Recruitment & Retention Specialist, West Ada School District, Jennifer Fletcher, Administrator of Recruitment and Retention, West Ada School District and Caitlin Bothke, Special Education, Recruitment & Retention Specialist, West Ada School District

This presentation will provide an overview of the systematic approach recently implemented by the West Ada School District—the largest district in Idaho—to enhance recruitment, retention, and onboarding efforts. From initial connections at career fairs to collecting data during the separation process, we'll walk through each phase of the employee lifecycle. Learn how our team is using a structured process to attract top talent, support new hires, and build long-term engagement across the district.

HR as a Change Agent: Driving School and District Transformation

Planning & Preparation; Performance Management; Training & Development

Presented by Katrina Riley, Director of HR, Aiken County Public Schools

HR is more than just hiring and compliance—it's a catalyst for meaningful school and district transformation. In this session, participants will explore how HR can drive systemic change by fostering educator engagement, strengthening leadership pipelines, and aligning workforce strategies with student success. Through proven strategies, attendees will learn how to shift HR from an administrative function to a strategic leadership force that enhances school culture and retention. This interactive session will feature real-world case studies, group discussions, and actionable planning exercises to help attendees apply HR-driven transformation strategies in their own districts. Target Audience: HR professionals, school and district leaders, and policymakers looking to leverage HR for long-term educational impact. Learning Objectives: Reposition HR as a strategic driver of school and district transformation. Develop leadership pipelines to sustain high-performing teams. Implement workforce strategies that directly impact student outcomes.

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I'm Not Really an AH***: Changing the Perception of the HR Department**

Performance Management

Presented by Chris Mauger, Director, Certificated Personnel, Hesperia Unified School District & Chris Seybert, Director, Certificated Personnel, Hesperia Unified School District

A hard truth we have to accept in our role as HR administrators is that we're often cast as the villain. The hammer. Some people have even gone so far as to use the word "a**h***" from time to time. But we all know that's a gross distortion of reality—if not an outright lie—because most of us HR folks are not a**h***s. In fact, we're pretty decent people. In this session, you'll see how Hesperia Unified School District's personnel team engages positively with teachers and classified staff to build positive relationships between HR and our employees.

Legal Speed Dating: Issues Spotting and Avoiding Liability

Recruitment; Performance Management; Training & Development

Presented by Jackie Gharapour Wernz, Legal Consultant, ERC Solutions & Holly McIntush, Attorney, Thompson & Horton, LLP

Need a crash course in identifying legal red flags before they turn into lawsuits? This fast-paced, interactive session uses a "speeddating" format to walk participants through a variety of real-world school scenarios—from student discipline to employee leave requests to bullying reports. Each scenario is designed to help you quickly spot potential legal issues under federal laws like Title IX, Title VII, FMLA, ADA, and more. Learn how to ask the right questions, escalate appropriately, and take preventive action to keep your district compliant and reduce liability risk. Perfect for anyone who wants legal training that's engaging, practical, and anything but boring!

Lions and Tigers and Metrics, Oh My! Creating an HR Dashboard to Measure Your Strategic Plan

Planning & Preparation; Recruitment; Hiring

Presented by Dr. Amy Dillon, Asst Superintendent for HR, Park Hill School District, Josh Colvin, Director, Compliance & Employee Relations, Park Hill School District, Sasha Kalis, Director of Human Resources, Park Hill School District

This session will explore how school districts can effectively use metrics to assess and achieve the Human Resources goals outlined in their strategic plans. Attendees will learn about the process one district used to develop and deploy a strategic plan, as well as the creation of measurement teams that play a critical role in tracking progress. Key topics will include identifying and developing meaningful measures, aligning metrics with district goals, and establishing a data-driven culture. The session will also cover next steps for continuous improvement, ensuring that the strategic plan remains responsive and effective over time. Whether you're in the early stages of planning or refining your approach, this presentation will provide actionable insights for enhancing strategic plan implementation and outcomes through thoughtful metric development.

Mitigating the Risks of AI: Lessons Learned from an Ogre and a Donkey

Performance Management; Training & Development

Presented by Gretchen Lawn, Consultant, ESC of Northeast Ohio

AI is no longer the future, it is the now. Exploring new AI tools is a great way to build capacity. But are you keeping your district safe from unintended consequences? Join this fast-paced 30-minute session to ensure you are doing what you can to mitigate risk at the district level when it comes to AI use. Bring your device for hands-on interaction with ChatGPT and other GenAI tools to customize and properly establish settings to ensure the highest quality responses with the least amount of bias or hallucinations. Even if you think you know how to use AI, I encourage you to attend. You will be surprised at some simple tweaks you can make that will positively impact your results.

Nice Perks Won't Fix Burnout: The Case for Mental Health and Emotionally Intelligent Workplaces

Orientation & Onboarding, Training & Development, Work-Life Integration

Presented by Melisa Sandoval, Director of Wellness, Westminster Public Schools

Across the country, schools are struggling to retain staff—not because of pay alone, but because of culture, burnout, and lack of meaningful support. The solution isn't self-care alone. It's multi-dimensional and involves a strategic shift in how we support employee mental health and emotional intelligence at work. This session explores how one district's HR department embedded mental health literacy, trauma-informed practices, and emotionally intelligent leadership into their employee experience strategy. The presenter, a licensed therapist and EQ practitioner serving as Director of Wellness, will share practical tools and real-life lessons from the first year of implementation. Attendees will walk away with actionable strategies to support staff wellbeing, strengthen leadership EQ, and build a healthier workplace culture—one that retains talent by genuinely supporting the people who make the system work.

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Stop Justing, Start Shifting: Supporting Every Brain at Work

Orientation & Onboarding; Training & Development; Work-Life Integration

Presented by Stephanie Powell, Brain Science Strategist, AuDHD Speaker, Educator

We don't tell asthmatics to just breathe — so why do we tell people to just focus, just calm down, or just try harder? This session challenges default thinking about “support” in schools and workplaces, especially for neurodivergent individuals. With punchy real-talk moments and brain-based truths, you'll walk away with a deeper understanding of how to actually support every brain at work — even the ones that don't know they need it. Whether you're leading a team or hiring one, this talk will help you shift from justing to genuinely supporting. (for additional info: By the end of this session, participants will be able to: Identify at least three harmful “just” statements commonly directed at staff or students and explain why they are ineffective. Describe how brain wiring affects behavior, productivity, and engagement — particularly in high-demand roles. Apply brain-based strategies to shift from one-size-fits-all “support” toward responsive, inclusive practices that help every brain thrive.)

Strategic School Staffing: Best Practices for Large and Small Districts

Planning & Preparations; Recruitment

Presented by Michelle Thomas, HR Supervisor, Cobb County School District, & Marco Holland, Chief Human Resources Officer, Marietta City Schools

In today's evolving educational landscape, effective staffing is critical to student success. This session explores strategic staffing best practices tailored to the unique needs of both large and small school districts. Participants will examine data-driven approaches to recruitment, retention, and resource allocation; learn how to align staffing decisions with instructional goals; and explore innovative scheduling and staffing models. Real-world case studies will highlight how districts of different sizes navigate common challenges—such as budget constraints, talent shortages, and equitable staffing—while adapting strategies to their scale and community needs. Ideal for district leaders, HR professionals, and school administrators, this session will equip you with practical tools to build a strong, sustainable workforce.

Workplace Conflict: Strategies for Effective Resolution

Performance Management; Training & Development

Presented by Sandra Moore, Director, Region 10 ESC

In this interactive session, participants will explore the dynamics of workplace conflict and gain practical tools for managing and resolving disputes. By understanding the root causes of conflict, attendees will learn how to approach challenging situations with confidence, empathy, and professionalism. The session will cover communication strategies, emotional intelligence, and the role of active listening in defusing tension, fostering collaboration, and creating a positive work environment. Understanding Conflict Types: Identify different types of conflict and their root causes in the workplace. Communication Skills: Master techniques for clear, assertive, and empathetic communication to address issues without escalation. EIQ: Insight into managing your emotions and understanding others' perspectives to reduce friction. Conflict Resolution Frameworks Building a Collaborative Culture