



PERSPECTIVE

NEWS FOR & ABOUT MEMBERS OF THE AMERICAN ASSOCIATION OF SCHOOL PERSONNEL ADMINISTRATORS

IN THIS ISSUE:

Forecasting Practices That Will Change Your Hiring Outlook from Cloudy to Sunny

Creating the Conditions for Improving Teacher Retention

What Can We Do to Develop Leadership Opportunities to Grow and Retain Teachers

AASPA Virtual Conference Highlights



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President's Corner From the Desk of Dr. Cathy Donovan, AASPA President



"We are going virtual!" In March 2019, this phrase created a great deal of anxiety and stress for education leaders. Human Capital leaders were faced with unique challenges they had never encountered in their professional careers. Throughout these challenging times, our AASPA organization continued to provide the quality support, services, and resources to which we were accustomed. As a result, I was not worried when Kelly and staff informed us "we are going virtual". Like many of you, I was disappointed we would not be networking and learning face-to-face in Seattle, but I did not doubt our 2020 national conference would provide us with valuable professional learning opportunities and experiences. The keynotes and breakout sessions were phenomenal, and the breaks and networking events were creative and fun. I am excited about and looking forward to our upcoming professional development opportunities!

I am looking forward to working with our Executive Board and AASPA staff to plan for the future of our organization. I am proud to work with such talented Human Capital professionals. Our work will be guided by our strategic plan. AASPA's strategic plan and goals are to help the association remain active and strive for excellence while meeting our individual member's needs. Through action steps and strategies implemented from the strategic plan, we can achieve AASPA's mission to provide every member with services, resources, and information vital to successful school human capital professionals. Check out the QR Code below to view the AASPA Strategic Plan. Please feel free to visit with Kelly or a Board Member if you have questions regarding our strategic plan or goal areas. Please let us know if you have suggestions or ideas. We value your input and feedback.

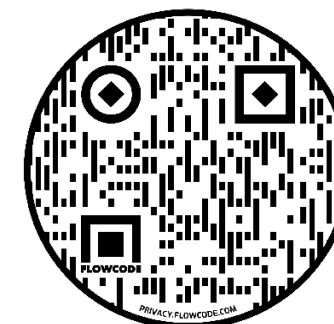
Our association is built on membership involvement and the activities are directed toward the needs of the membership. I encourage you to get involved as much as your schedule permits. You can participate on a committee, write an article for the Perspective, present a webinar or at one of our professional development opportunities, or interact on social media. The QR Code below will make it easy to sign up and get involved right away.

I want to thank you for this opportunity to serve you and our association. Your support of AASPA is greatly appreciated. I look forward to interacting with each one of you throughout this year whether virtually or face-to-face. Please contact me at any time with questions or if I can be of assistance.

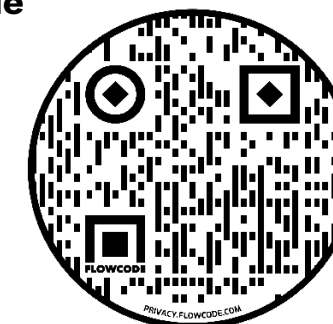
Respectfully,

Cathy Donovan
AASPA President

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FORECASTING PRACTICES THAT WILL CHANGE YOUR HIRING OUTLOOK FROM CLOUDY TO SUNNY

by Dr. Amy Holcombe, Interim Dean of the Stout School of Education; High Point University; High Point, NC

Does COVID have you using a Magic 8 Ball to forecast your hiring needs for the next school year? Although none of us can accurately predict the impact of a global pandemic on employee attrition for this school year, there are some proactive practices in which we can engage that will increase the accuracy of our hiring forecast. These practices are critical to increasing the overall quality of our talent pool as there is a direct correlation between a teacher's hire data and their future level of effectiveness. The better our forecasting, the sooner we can complete the hiring process. The sooner we close hires, the more effective our overall teaching force.

Declaration of Intent

If you are not already doing so, consider issuing a non-binding Declaration of Intent to your faculty and staff. A Declaration of Intent provides employees a low-risk opportunity to share with you their intentions for the following school year. Results can be used to increase the accuracy of your hiring forecast by allowing you to plan for potential transfers, vacancies, and coverage for leaves of absence. A typical letter or electronic survey, if that is your preference, asks employees to indicate if they intend to:

- Remain at School X in their current position
- Remain at School X but be considered for another position within the school
- Transfer to another school or department within the district
- Take a leave of absence (FMLA, maternity, disability, etc.)
- Retire
- Resign to work in another school district, or
- Resign and leave the field of education

As the building or district leader, access to this information allows you the opportunity to activate interventions designed to counteract any undesirable trends such as a large exodus from a single school. It is recommended that Declarations of Intent be issued in December but no later than January so that they can inform your recruiting practices in the early spring.

Inter-School Transfer Windows

District transfer policies vary widely and may be dependent upon union negotiations. To the extent that transfer policies are within local control and/or negotiation, principals should advocate for transfers to be limited to between-school-year time periods. 'Always open' transfer policies should be discouraged as during the school-year attrition can be disruptive to student learning. Strategic transfer policies use a transfer window that occurs in the winter or early spring with movement to occur after the school-year ends. This timeline allows for principals to leverage strong candidate pools throughout the spring to fill vacated positions. Transfer policies that allow movement into the late spring, or even into summer, only serve to further disadvantage students in hard to staff schools.

Retirement Notifications

Annually, retirements account for 31 percent of teacher attrition. As an example, in a large district with 5,000 teachers and an annual attrition rate of 12 percent, approximately 186 of those teachers are potential retirements. Recruiting and hiring 186 teachers is extremely time intensive and early knowledge of these retirements would be extremely valuable to any district. Putting into place a policy

requiring a six-month advance retirement notification would allow a time advantage for securing candidates. If instituting such a policy is not allowable in your organization, consider offering a monetary incentive, such as a \$500 spot bonus, to employees who voluntarily submit their notification six months in advance of their retirement. This small, per retiree, investment will allow you to recruit and hire from a much higher quality candidate pool than if you were seeking to fill 186 positions in July.

Annual Birth Rates

One of the most stable data sources for forecasting future staffing needs is your region's live birth rates. Annually, the Centers for Disease Control (CDC) publishes a live birth rate report that can be used to project out the number of kindergarteners that will enroll in five years. Local municipalities will also have this data and can likely break it down even further by zip code, gender, ethnicity, SES, etc. Using historical birth and enrollment rates, districts can project out the percentage of births that translate into enrolled students. Tracking historical cohort enrollment in kindergarten can then be used to project grade level enrollment through high school on an annual basis. While other factors such as the job market, housing market, and local economics need to be taken into account, watching birth rate data certainly provides a very strong indicator for forecasting staffing needs.

Historical Hiring and Attrition Data

Knowledge of who is coming into your organization by tracking hiring patterns, and who is leaving it, using attrition patterns, are strong data sources for forecasting future staffing needs. By examining the sources of your hires over time, you can not only strengthen your forecasting but can better align

recruiting efforts to your sources of candidates. Other considerations to take into account are changing state licensing requirements which could limit the production of new, in-state candidates, changes in teacher-to-student ratios which could increase your need for teachers, and any licensure test changes that could tighten or open your pipeline of candidates. With multiple years of hiring and attrition data, hiring managers can use a combination of trend data and contextual data to accurately predict staffing needs for future school-years.

Ultimately, forecasting should not only include estimates of overall teacher needs, but reporting should break down those needs by school, grade level, licensure area and even identify special knowledge areas or skill sets necessary to improve student outcomes. When principals and hiring managers have knowledge of future vacancies, they can proactively seek out the very best candidates, spend appropriate time screening them and make hiring offers early in the recruiting season. And, that is the key to achieving our overall goal of improving outcomes for all students.



Amy Holcombe, Ph.D. is the Interim Dean of the Stout School of Education at High Point University and the author of the book, *Strategic Talent Leadership for Educators- A Practical Toolkit*. She has twenty-five

of experience in public education, having served as a teacher, principal, Director of K-12 Curriculum and Executive Director of Talent Development. Her research is focused on human capital management, alternative licensure and educator effectiveness.

CREATING THE CONDITIONS FOR IMPROVING TEACHER RETENTION: LESSONS LEARNED IN A LARGE URBAN DISTRICT

by Dr. Marco A. Munoz, Employee/Teacher Retention;
Dr. Aimee Green-Webb, Executive Administrator - Personnel
Jefferson County School District; Louisville, KY

Based on the premise that teachers' experience in schools is a central influence on their career decision to stay or leave the profession, our efforts in certified employee retention are improving in Jefferson County Public Schools (JCPS) as observed in teacher retention metrics. Trend data is showing positive results regarding the percentage of teachers retained in our school system (Figure 1). In collaboration with school leaders, we reduced our attrition rate of teachers by 21%, retaining 112 more teachers in 2019-2020 than the prior year (2018-2019); these retention efforts translated into decreased teacher vacancies as well. Thanks to the diligent efforts of our committed hiring specialists and their teams, JCPS has less than a 2% teacher vacancy rate during a pandemic. Particularly as related to our Racial Equity Policy, trend data is showing that we successfully decreased our teacher attrition of Black teachers from 14.2% in 2018-19 to 7% in 2019-20 (Figure 2). These accomplishments can only happen in close collaboration with school-based leadership, as the critical partners in our HR efforts to engage and retain teachers.

The natural follow-up questions seek to understand what specific initiatives have driven this positive change, both for teacher retention in general and among our Black educators in particular. Our HR team knows the value of addressing root causes and correctly attributing factors with results. This article has the objective of reflecting on the causes of our positive results associated with teacher retention so that we may continuously improve the support systems that create healthy working conditions for our teachers in JCPS schools. The reader will find seven lessons learned for best practices in our pursuit of equity and excellence in teacher retention.

Our schoolwork does not happen in a vacuum, so we need to start by first reflecting on contextual factors. The sudden, emotionally-charged, and uncertain context associated with the COVID-19 pandemic has emphasized to us that educators in our school system are purpose-driven and extremely resilient. As reported by researchers, teachers' experience working from home during the COVID-19 pandemic has been challenging. Findings indicated that when compared to in-person teaching, teachers felt less successful during remote teaching; however, supportive working conditions were a protective factor because it influenced teachers' sense of success during the pandemic. As result, this is lesson 1: Supportive working conditions matter, regardless of the mode of delivering teaching lessons (i.e., in-person or online).

Mid-career teachers (5-15 years of teaching experience) are struggling to balance their work with the demands of their personal lives during the pandemic. Caretaking responsibilities have made performing the professional

job of teaching difficult since mid-career teachers are the most likely to have children at home; this, in turn, is demanding physical, mental and emotional attention. However, mid-career teachers are not the only ones challenged by online teaching. Late-career teachers report being less comfortable teaching online due to the new demands in a virtual teaching-and-learning environment; the good news is that these senior teachers are resilient and quickly adapting to the new context. In JCPS, we are noticing that online teaching has created wonderful opportunities for our new teachers as they are digital natives and become a source of support for late-career teachers. Lesson 2: Understanding teachers' career phases has implications for retention of educators, as there are unique challenges in each stage during a pandemic.

It has been evident to our Human Resources team that data analytics helps to drive teacher retention, but good data is not enough if not accompanied by actions. For example, when attrition data is showing higher turnover in particular schools and in a specific time period, we have been able to implement higher levels of support to improve retention. Lesson 3: Data and research must lead to teacher retention actions and it is important to stay focused on the "critical few" (i.e., high-impact) factors that matter the most.

As we reflect on the positive results observed in our data, it is important to consider the research associated with factors that contribute to understanding teacher

turnover: (1) school resources and practices, (2) school climate, (3) instructional leadership opportunities, and (4) individual characteristics. School resources and practices refer to the idea that teachers—as any professionals—cannot work without the necessary resources to do their job well. Teachers are more likely to stay in schools that they perceive to have good working conditions: high-quality professional development, supportive mentors, and fair evaluation. In JCPS, the Professional Development and Learning department has well-designed training available that is specifically tailored to the needs of new teachers as well as a well-designed peer-mentoring process. Lesson 4: Keep ongoing efforts to personalize professional development and teacher mentoring to meet the specific needs of (new) teachers. The importance of school climate is grounded on the premise that teaching is a social career and that the relationships that teachers have with those who support their work in schools (administrators, colleagues) heavily influences teachers' job satisfaction. Research indicates that teachers are three times more likely to transfer from schools with particularly poor social working conditions than from schools with an average quality working environment. In fact, teachers working in more supportive environments improve their effectiveness over time, contributing to a teacher's sense of self-efficacy.

Teacher appreciation is a hallmark of a healthy school climate. In this sense, don't underestimate the impact



of appreciation in the form of email communication from building and district leaders; messages sent by our HR Retention Office were warmly received by JCPS new teachers. This simple, kind act proved that teacher appreciation shouldn't be isolated to one month and it doesn't require financial resources. Lesson 5: Creating a positive school working conditions is fundamental for retaining teachers and starts with building trusting relationships between teachers, coaches, and administrators.

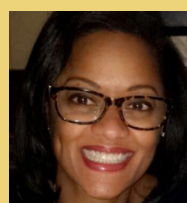
Instructional leadership opportunities address the need that teachers should be treated as the experts they are. Teachers learn extensively from each other. When administrators collaborate with teachers, grant them healthy levels of autonomy, and promote teacher leadership, schools have positive work environments and teachers are more likely to stay. First-year teachers who are given time to collaborate with other teachers are less likely to leave after their first year of teaching. Our experience shows that new teachers have a higher degree of job satisfaction when they collaborate with experienced teachers as this provides an opportunity to learn and grow. Lesson 6: No educator is an island—engagement in team collaboration is positively impacting teacher growth as well as the likelihood of teacher retention.

Teachers' individual characteristics play a role in shaping their career decisions. Meaningful work is a significant predictor of workers' intentions to stay at their jobs. Finding purpose in teaching is critical for retention since most teachers enter the profession as a calling. Resiliency predicts effectiveness among novice teachers and grittier teachers tend to remain committed to teaching for a longer period of time. Lesson 7: We must have a compelling school mission—it gives purpose and meaning to our work, particularly in difficult times.

As part of the continuous improvement efforts, JCPS schools have volunteered to be part of the promising Teach Upbeat (2020) Teacher Retention Project during this school year. As part of this process, we are going to implement collaborative cycles of continuous improvement. We will be using robust and fine-grained data to guide decision-making and actions coupled with coaching. To accomplish our equity and excellence vision in retention we will need the ongoing collaboration of multiple stakeholders, starting with our purpose-driven and resilient teachers as well as our empathetic school leaders—administrators that never forget when they were teachers themselves!



Dr. Marco A. Muñoz has over two decades of experience in educational administration and research. He is currently serving in Human Resources in the area of employee retention with the Jefferson County Public Schools (JCPS) and applying the Improvement Science in talent management and teacher engagement work. In JCPS, he previously served for several years as Director of Priority Schools and over a decade as an Evaluation Specialist for institutional research (including large-scale federal grants). Recipient of the 2015 Harvard University Strategic Data Project Fellowship on teacher effectiveness and the 2008 National Staff Development Council Best Evaluation Award on professional development, Dr. Muñoz is the author of numerous publications in refereed journals, including the area of human resources.



Dr. Aimee Green-Webb is the Executive Administrator of Personnel for Jefferson County Public Schools (JCPS) where she leads the recruitment, staffing, and retention of over 18,000 JCPS positions. As the product of, and former leader in Kentucky's only district-based alternative route to certification program, Dr. Green-Webb has a unique perspective of teacher workforce complexities. She taught and provided district and regional instructional leadership in the area of elementary education and literacy for nine years, then joined the JCPS HR team. Dr. Green-Webb's HR leadership includes the areas of teacher induction and mentoring, teacher evaluation, recruitment and retention incentives, union negotiations, and alternative routes to certification. Her research interests include new teacher job satisfaction, teacher retention, and workforce diversity.

Figure 1

Trend Data on Jefferson County Public Schools Teachers' Retention Rate (2013 to 2021).

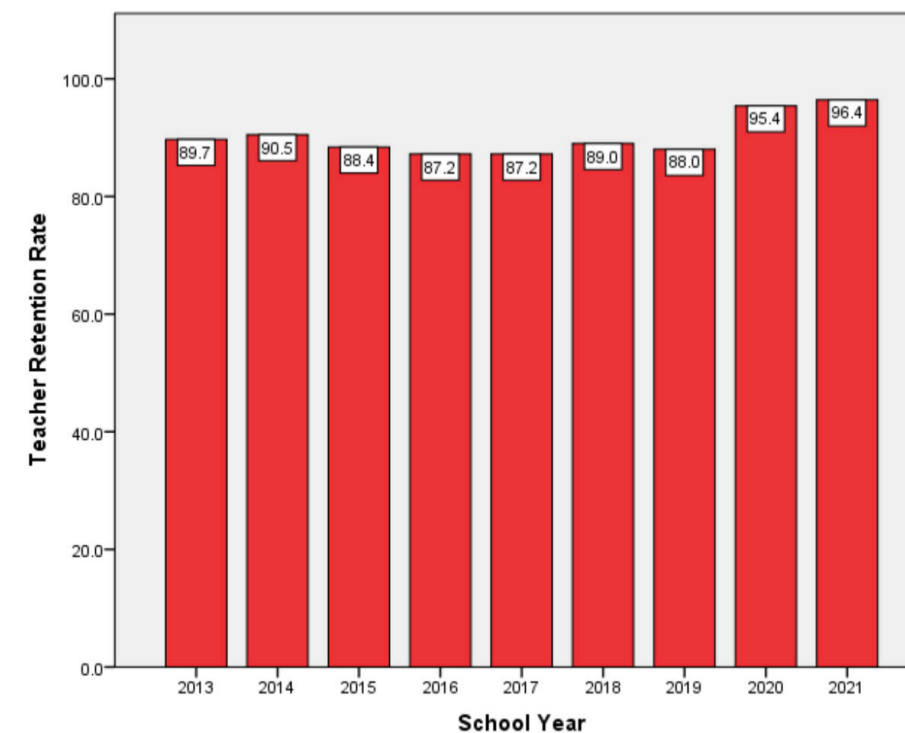
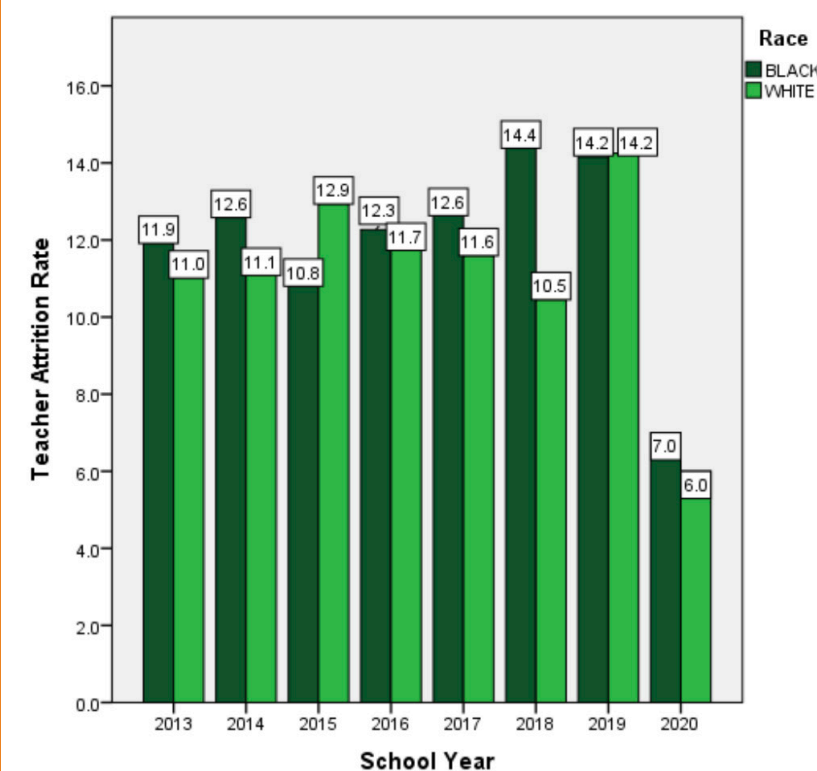


Figure 2

Trend Data on Jefferson County Public Schools Teachers' Attrition Rate by Race (2013-2020).



WHAT CAN WE DO TO DEVELOP LEADERSHIP OPPORTUNITIES TO GROW AND RETAIN TEACHERS?

by Dr. Andrea Anthony, Assistant Superintendent of HR & Student Services;
Rutherford County Schools; Murfreesboro, TN

In Rutherford County, we offer career advancement opportunities and a differentiated pay plan for our hard to staff teaching areas to try to keep our millennial teachers. Creating teacher leaders in the buildings and across the district is a continued focus. Teacher leaders present to other teachers in their buildings and serve as practitioner at our summer district-wide two-day in-service. Teacher leaders can also advance as Instructional Coaches and Assistant Principals. These advancements give teachers opportunities to impact instruction. There are opportunities to serve on building leadership teams, as department chairs, and as Professional Learning Communities (PLC) leaders. Often teachers wish to serve as mentors for new or for struggling teachers by sharing best practices and strategies. Teachers wanting to be administrators have the opportunity every other year to participate in a seven-week course to experience what building level principals live daily.

This Aspiring Administrators Academy is taught by central office leaders and district level administrators to help candidates gain knowledge on school culture and instructional leadership to be a change agent. The objective is to provide participants with the theoretical and experimental basis from which to gain knowledge and apply leadership skills. This academy examines how to utilize a variety of data resources to make instructional decisions to impact all our diverse students' needs. Topics include: manager v. leader; school improvement; public relations; evaluations; hiring effective teachers; data-based decision making; summative and formative assessments; Response to Intervention; school attendance; special education law; and panel discussions. We have Lead Special Education teacher opportunities for each school building. Response to Intervention (RTI) Coaches are positions available to oversee new teacher mentoring and development. These coaches work an additional ten days beyond a teacher contract and are paid a stipend to compensate for these extra days. This spring of 2021, we will be offering our first Future Principals Academy focused on instructional leadership and culture. The participants will be our current assistant principals and will be selected through a rigorous application and recommendation process.

Offered for one semester on the years opposite of the Aspiring Administrator Academy is our Teacher Leadership Academy for teachers who do not wish to become principals, but who want to lead peer collaboration. With a five-day academy set up, our Teacher Leadership Academy looks at best practices in improving student learning and instructional leadership. Participants work on case studies analyzing data and scenarios applicable to their school setting. Topics include: know thy impact; PLCs; summative data for school planning; understanding state data (TVAAS);

guaranteed and viable curriculum; formative assessments for school planning; and leadership. These academy participants must have a minimum of three years of teaching experience. In its 16th year, we offer a two-day summer conference made available to all teachers. This is an annual strategy-packed summer conference for PreK-12 educators. This annual professional development opportunity goes in-depth with a range of ready-to-implement strategies. Our goal is to provide support at every grade level to boost student growth and achievement. Our professional development team selects presenters to deliver instructional best practices and research-based solutions that are relevant to their classrooms. There are multiple in-depth sessions on visible learning, technology, writing, math, student motivation, STEM and a growth mindset.

We have an Academy to Support, Sustain, and Induct Successful Teachers (ASSIST) which is a one-day professional development opportunity in the summer for brand new teachers to the profession. Topics include classroom management skills, best practices, a few get to know your students ice breakers, what a first-year teacher needs to know from the perspective of a successful first year teacher, and a variety of sample activities. We then have a follow up connection day in the spring for those who participated in the summer. We have a separate one-day Special Education ASSIST professional development opportunity for our brand-new special education teachers led by our coordinator of special education.

We are currently evaluating and considering a "Master Teacher" designation for teachers who have a minimum of five years of teaching experience and have performed at an evaluation level of 5 overall (the most effective level) on TVAAS individual growth and maintains an overall evaluation score of 4.5 or higher. We are working on a rubric to include the teacher's professional development hours obtained and attendance record for the year. We are considering rolling out this recognition for the 2021-22 school year. Recognizing the importance of engaging in a continuous improvement process, we are seeking to transform what it means to be an effective instructional leader. This aim is accomplished by setting high standards for effective leadership based upon research and best practice, supporting leaders to reach those standards, and empowering districts to build a network of exceptional instructional leaders who get results. Operating from the belief that ethical behavior permeates the mindset and actions of every effective leader, the Tennessee Instructional Leadership Standards (TILS) embed the phrase, "ethical and effective instructional leader," into the opening stem of each leadership standard. The purposeful placement of this phrase articulates the intrinsic nature of ethical behavior in all facets of school leadership. Attributes such as honesty, respect, sound judgment, commitment, fairness, compassion, work ethic and a genuine belief that all children can learn and grow, contribute to the foundation of ethical behavior connected to leadership. Effectiveness pertains to "educators' capacity to meet performance expectations, implement evidence-based practices, create and sustain conditions for effective learning, and increase student learning". Based upon best practice and current research, and sharpened by the wisdom of experienced educators, the Tennessee Instructional Leadership Standards (TILS) identify core performance

indicators of ethical and effective instructional leaders. To be designated as a "Master Teacher" in Rutherford County, eligible educators must clearly demonstrate each of the following criteria as described in the TILS. Master Teachers will achieve exemplary scores in all four standards on the scoring guide rubric. Standard A: Instructional Leadership for Continuous Improvement, Standard B: Culture for Teaching and Learning, Standard C: Professional Learning and Growth, and Standard D: Resource Management. Millennials have multiple opportunities for advancement based on their desires in our district.



Our 2020-21 differentiated pay plan has been focused on recruitment of hard to staff areas. A teacher who is new to our county (mainly millennials) or a teacher in the system who is not teaching in a hard to staff area can be eligible if they are certified in the content/grade area. The teacher must hold a valid apprentice, professional, or out of state teaching license with a 7th -12th -grade level endorsement in the following areas: math; physics; chemistry; world language; ELL; or board-certified behavior analyst. If the teacher meets the criteria, then they are eligible for a one-time signing bonus of \$3,000 and an early signing bonus of \$2,000 if their contract is signed before April 1st for the upcoming year. For ELL teachers, there is a one-time signing bonus of \$1,500. Our differentiated pay plan offers a \$2,000 stipend in addition to the 210 days worked for a RTI Coach. We added this school year the \$1,000 signing bonus for those who have recently student taught in our district and have taken a position in our district. These pay plan offerings can help our large millennial teacher population earn more money and gain enriched experiences. In the end, our district benefits from retaining these trained and driven employees—a win-win outcome.

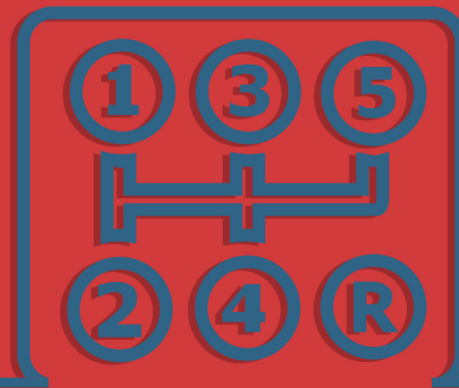


Dr. Andrea Anthony began her secondary education career 26 years ago and is continuously recognized for her leadership and vision. She has served as a curriculum and instruction assistant principal, director of her district's K-12 summer schools, an executive principal for 12 years and her district's coordinator of secondary education. She works in the fourth largest school district in TN with 46,000 students and 5,300 employees. Dr. Anthony is involved with her local university's EPP team, recruitment and job fair team, and the state's retention team to recruit and retain effective CTE teachers.

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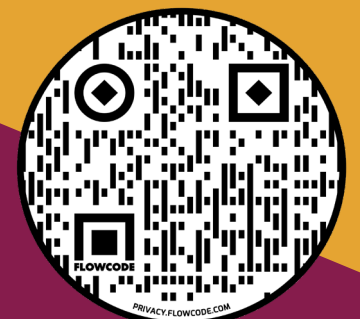
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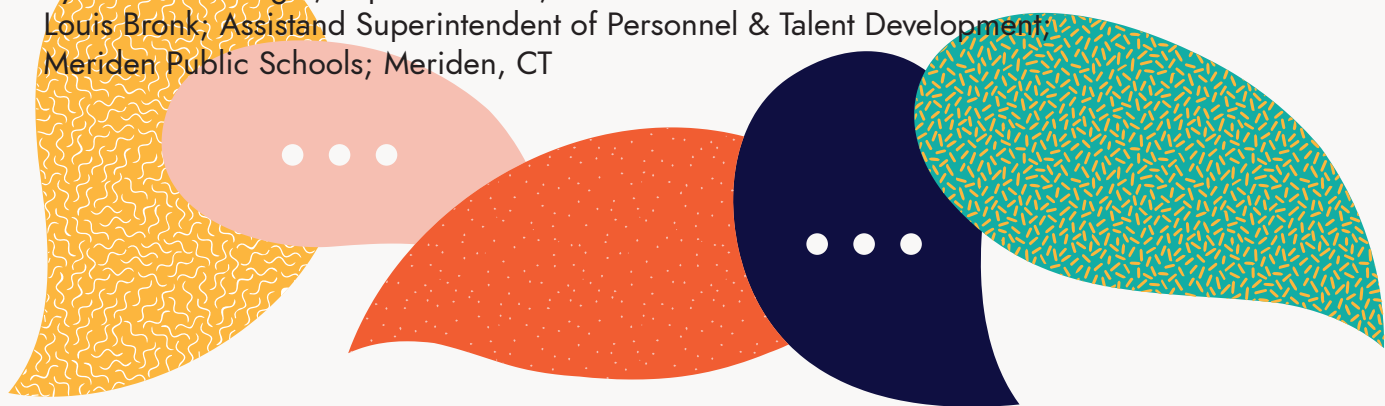
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VALUING YOUR DIVERSE STAFF: IMPLEMENT AN AFFINITY GROUP IN YOUR SCHOOL DISTRICT NOW

by Dr. Mark Benigni; Superintendent;
Louis Bronk; Assistant Superintendent of Personnel & Talent Development;
Meriden Public Schools; Meriden, CT



Our schools are a microcosm of our communities. As our communities are becoming more diverse, so too are our schools. How do you respect and value the diversity of your staff? In Meriden, like many other districts throughout the State of Connecticut and the nation, our school district has implemented a number of strategies to recruit, hire and retain staff members of color. Approximately 35 percent of Connecticut's students are of Latino or Black descent, compared to the teaching force that is 7 percent Latino or Black. Conversely, 57 percent of the students are classified as White, as are 91 percent of the teachers. Nationally, Edutopia recently reported that 80% of public school teachers are white, and 7% were black. They also referenced a 2018 study that found Black students who had a single black teacher were 13% more likely to enroll in college. While student diversity rises at an accelerated pace, the rates

of teacher diversity are rising much more slowly, thus creating larger gaps between students and staff of color. As districts successfully recruit and hire teachers of color, efforts must be made to support these staff members as they enter a workforce where they can feel isolated and face challenges their peers may not be aware of. Implementing an affinity group for staff members to network, assist each other and offer professional learning opportunities to, can be a powerful strategy to support and retain staff members in your district.

Affinity Group Defined

An affinity group is a group formed around a shared interest or common goal, where individuals formally or informally belong. An affinity group is a designated "safe space," where everyone in that group shares a particular identity. This identity can

be based on race, gender, sexual orientation, language, nationality, physical/mental ability, socio-economic class, family structure, religion, etc. Affinity groups can be a place for underrepresented people in a community to come together to feel less isolated and more connected. Participants might share and talk about their experiences, or focus on working towards a particular mission or goal. In the Meriden Public Schools, we have implemented an affinity group for staff members of color in order to provide support, professional development and a medium to help our recruitment efforts to increase staff member diversity in the district. This is one small way to let your diverse staff members know they are valued and supported.

Tapping Into Our Teacher Leaders

We believe that for educational initiatives to flourish and to achieve our vision, we need teacher leaders who embrace change and recognize the global and diverse interests of our students. By empowering educators to contribute to the collective growth of our district, we believe that we are building capacity and shared ownership in a meaningful and purposeful way. In Meriden, we have taken a multi-tiered approach to diversify our teaching staff, ranging from "grow your own" programs, on the spot hiring, partnering with our local chapter of the NAACP to recruit at historically black universities, and other talent development initiatives. These efforts helped us attain increased percentages of staff of color for our new teacher cohorts hired over the past three years of; sixteen percent, twenty-five percent and twenty percent. However, missing in our recruitment and retention strategy was an intentional structure of support for the staff members of color in our district to network and support one another. We were aware of the concept of affinity groups from our research and professional learning around equity, but did not have a plan in place to implement such a group as recently as the 2018-2019 school year. We had, however, been involved in work around equity for a number of years. We spent more time on recruiting diverse staff members rather than looking at supporting our current staff members of color. We had recently completed a Teacher Leadership Academy for High School staff focused on the topics of Equity, Student Centered Learning and Teacher Leadership. At the conclusion of that academy, our district secured grant funding to continue equity and leadership training for staff members who shared a strong desire to continue

with this work.

With the help of a local consultant, we developed an Equity Leaders program intended to train our own teaching staff on how to conduct equity training throughout the district. It was one of these equity leaders, Orlando Valentin, who helped organize and implement the affinity group in our district. He agreed with our central office team that this was an area we could further strengthen our support for staff members of color. With the Equity training in place, Orlando felt confident that he could help lead an affinity group with support from the central office team. "From personal experience, I know that teaching can seem like a solitary mission, especially if you are the single educator of color in your school. In creating this safe space for educators of color, we hope to retain and empower them, so that they feel valued for all that they do for our students. These educational meet-ups will help foster organic interactions and will address topics of equity and inequality which can plague any educational system. Ideally, these sessions will build camaraderie within this small community of teachers of color" Orlando Valentin, 4th grade teacher, Casimir Pulaski Elementary School, Meriden, CT. Orlando's strong leadership encouraged our central office leadership team to think strategically about all of our equity work. It became more apparent that having a platform to share the district efforts with all stakeholders was critical. We now have a page devoted to this work on our website.

Planning For Implementation, Year 1

We began by jointly brainstorming how the district could support the endeavor and what we hoped for in regards to intended outcomes. After outlining a structure that aligned with our district improvement plan, we paired Orlando with our district grant coordinator to draft a proposal for local funding. The proposal was successful and our district received funding to start our own Meriden Public Schools (MPS) Affinity Group. We implemented this initiative in the 2019-2020 school year. Funding was used to purchase educational literature, host experts in the field of equitable education, and purchase a compilation of books to host book studies. Some examples of texts purchased were: For White Folks Who Teach in the Hood... and the rest of y'all too, Pushout, Lost At School, Why Are All Of The Black Kids Sitting Together In The Cafeteria, as well as many other texts. The meetings were designed to

allow attendees to build a support system, but also to provide professional learning so that they can become advocates for equity work within the district and assist in the recruitment and retention of educators of color. Topics such as; navigating situations involving micro aggressions, implicit bias, and having conversations around race, were some of the topics provided to our group. A year end culminating activity was planned, allowing our members to attend the Leadership In Diversity Annual Conference at the University of Connecticut. While the Covid-19 Pandemic prevented our group from attending this conference, the concept of our MPS Affinity Group attending and providing professional learning to others remains.

Building On Initial Success, Year 2

With current conditions dictated by the pandemic, and staff health and safety at the forefront of our decision making, we have planned for virtual sessions to start the 2020-2021 school year. We held our first session in early October and experienced increased attendance from the previous year. This session served as an opportunity for our staff members to express their feelings regarding the racial unrest in the country, the effects of working and living during a global pandemic, and the challenges facing staff in the new normal of social distancing and hybrid teaching and learning. This truly served as a platform for staff to openly share their feelings and experiences, and to support one another during a challenging time. Reflecting afterward, we feel we truly had accomplished one of our goals for this initiative; to reduce the isolation felt by some of our staff members and create an environment for nurturing and support. This initial meeting also helped serve as a platform to report out to our staff on the equity work we had engaged in throughout the past year. Additionally, we were able to share the gains made in recruiting and hiring staff members of color to the district. Members of the MPS Affinity Group have expanded their individual efforts and have initiated their own equity book clubs within their schools, offered professional development to their peers, and even held a virtual panel discussion on diversity for early career educators. Some of our MPS Affinity Group members have volunteered to help the district launch the Educators Rising, a division of Phi Delta Kappa International (PDK). This program supports students who may be interested in pursuing a career in education. Momentum has been built to continue this work and our teacher leaders are helping to expand

and reinforce our district vision and goals.

Expanding Our Scope and Distributing the Leadership

One of the main goals for this year is to increase the MPS Affinity Group beyond the approximately thirty staff members that are presently involved. We have expanded participation beyond teachers and classified staff to incorporate administrators in our group. This will allow us to further the scope of the work from the classroom to the school and district level. We hope to have a designated MPS Affinity Group representative from each of our schools to assist in communicating updates and promoting further participation. If we are going to create an environment where “all students” succeed, then our system must value and support diversity. That is how we will retain and recruit a staff that is more reflective of our students.



Mark D. Benigni, Ed.D., has been an educator for over twenty years and begins his tenth year as Superintendent of the Meriden Public Schools. Dr. Benigni served as a teacher, assistant principal, principal, and Mayor of the City of Meriden. The Meriden Public Schools has received awards from CoSN, the Learning Counsel, NSBA, District Administration, and Edutopia. Dr. Benigni is currently the co-chair of the Connecticut Association of Urban Superintendents, as well as 2nd Vice President of the Connecticut Association of Public School Superintendents.



Louis Bronk is an assistant superintendent for Personnel and Talent Development for the Meriden Public Schools. He has helped lead district talent initiatives recognized by the American Association of School Personnel Administrators (AASPA) C.S. Robinson Award. Email: louis.bronk@meridenk12.org

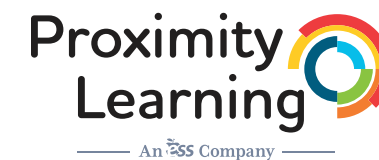


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GIVE ME A HI-FIVE: THE 5 ACTIONS I TOOK TO ACCELERATE MY HR GROWTH FROM YEAR 1 TO YEAR 3

by Dr. Rodney Lewis, Assistant Superintendent of Human Resources; City of St. Charles School District; St. Charles, MO

With an evolving pandemic, ever-changing laws and policies, the human resource profession is as challenging as it has ever been. However, as a third-year Assistant Superintendent of Human Resources, I am assured in navigating most situations. If I don't have the answer, I know where to find it. Nonetheless, when I started this role three years ago, it was quite a different story. I was delighted but very quickly found myself overwhelmed and confused. After pondering on my journey, I used the five actions to expedite my growth from year one to three.

Believed In Me

After six years as a principal, I was very certain about how to navigate uncertain circumstances. On the other hand, when I started three years ago, I grappled with finding self-confidence. Nothing was more obvious than when our principals would call me for advice. I did not trust myself to give them the right guidance. I did not want to get "i" wrong or look bad to my peers. Yet, this perception of incompetence was one of the greatest things that transpired in my career. You see,

when we struggle in our learning, and we explore answers, we grow! It does not appear as if we are growing, but we are each time this cognitive conflict happens. After we struggle, we grow, and that growth produces a tiny layer of personal trust. The most significant leap in my HR journey from year one to year two was embracing my conflicts and learning to believe in myself.

Accepted The Present Moment

The HR role can be very challenging. In fact, one of the most arduous aspects of my work has been meeting with adults and holding them accountable. Early on, the internal opposition permeated my mind and body. I did not aspire to do it because it was uncomfortable, and frankly, the unsettled atmosphere was difficult to accept. This resistance reduced when I began meditating and focusing on the present moment. I understand this is a tad spiritual in nature. Nevertheless, I believe every hard moment I have encountered as an HR leader has delivered me to this moment of clarity. So, not only am I directing my awareness on the "now", I am welcoming each day and learning from it. This extension in perspective has forced me to recognize



that there are seeds of learning confined inside each trying moment. It is my responsibility to discover those teachable moments and plant the seeds for growth.

Designed My Day

Numerous times during my first year, I felt like a fish out of water. One of the foremost reasons for this was because I lacked adequate organization skills. As a principal, my students and school activities heavily influenced my day. Activities such as morning, lunch, and after school supervision; grade level PLC meetings, and staff meetings were weekly calendar items. Additionally, unpredictable events such as working with a challenging student, calming an upset parent, and reviewing all of this with my Central Office supervisor could not be planned but took up many hours of my day. Relocating into HR was somewhat unusual for me. I struggled with planning my time. There were no daily challenging behaviors, supervision duties, or weekly teacher meetings. During the summer of my first year, I self-assessed. I noticed my organization skills were seriously lacking. As I entered year two, I started to learn from my colleagues about how they planned their day. Their counsel and support encouraged me to create an organized process that would support my goals. Because I had to create a new system, I felt like Rodney 2.0! As I was re-teaching myself how to design my day as an HR professional, I learned that every important task must be placed on my calendar. Today, if one looks at my calendar, they will see that it is full. Daily tasks such as gym sessions, Spanish classes, articles that I need to read, meetings, lunch, and important emails I need to send all have made their way to my calendar. This small but powerful system has kept me centered and in charge of how I manage my time.

Created A Work-Life Balance

Before I started this position, I hardly-ever concentrated on my mental health. During the second semester of my second year, I began to take meditation seriously. I needed the capacity to listen to my thoughts without regard, blame, or guilt. For me, it has proven to be valid when handling high-pressure situations. Now, during stressful moments, I pause, breathe, and listen. Nothing elaborate, but I strive to produce some distance between me and whatever I am managing at the moment. As part of this awareness, I started seeking balance in all sections of my life. One

approach I implemented was to stop responding to emails once I arrived home from the office. Like you, I have a smartphone, which means I can literally work all day and night. But, declaring "Yes" to the email means answering "No"; to my wife and daughter. Lastly, on the weekends, I will finish working on Friday evenings, Saturdays, and the majority of Sunday. This space has allowed me to explore other things like play video games with my daughter, go for a hike with my wife, or watch some NBA basketball. When I recharge my emotional batteries, I return to the office joyous, rested, and rejuvenated...ready to embrace all that the day brings me.

Connected With Colleagues

Early in my HR work, I seldom reached out to my HR colleagues. I was hesitant to pick up the phone and ask for help. Going into my second year, I made a conscious effort to attend local AASPA meetings, build relationships with other HR professionals, and ask questions. I remember communicating with several HR leaders in my county and surrounding counties about their collective bargaining procedures. The feedback was overwhelming! I recall thinking how much those conversations, text, and emails shaped my thinking about our district's agreements. Today, if a situation challenges me, my initial response is to phone a colleague. Their time and energy have supported me in more ways than one. Never did I imagine my vulnerability would be the major source of my growth.



Dr. Rodney Lewis has served the City of St. Charles School District for three years as the Assistant Superintendent of Human Resources. Before moving to HR, Dr. Lewis was a principal for six-years in the Rockwood School District and the Ferguson-Florissant School District. Currently, he is starting his first year as President of MOASPA-STL as well as the MOASPA Board of Directors, where he will continue its goal of growing, developing, and supporting Human Resource personnel across the St. Louis region.

ESPRESSO YOURSELF

When this year began no one ever imagined that the 2020 Annual Conference would be held virtually. AASPA worked hard to provide our members with a week of quality professional development, networking opportunities and entertainment, which we have all come to expect with an AASPA Conference. What resulted was an amazing virtual experience that attracted school personnel administrators from all around the country. The conference was a huge success, drawing over 370 attendees with more than 22 exhibitors, 10 pre-conference sessions, 90 clinic sessions.

/// I wanted to reach out and let you know how energizing, smooth, meaningful and engaging this conference has been. I must be honest and share that, at first, when I heard it was all going to be virtual I was a bit sad, from both the presenter and the attendee perspective. However, after spending the last two days "with" AASPA, this is certainly not the case at all. Challenging times also call for more innovative and progressive ways of thinking ahead... AASPA has nailed it with every single detail... as I sit between sessions enjoying the jazz break. Thank you so darn much! Absolutely incredible! ///

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Recognizing AASPA's Brightest

Herb Salinger Personnel Administrator of the Year Award

The Herb Salinger Personnel Administrator of the Year Award is given to an active member of AASPA who has at the local, state/province, national, and/or international level, distinguished him/herself in personnel administration; is involved and a contributing participant in personnel functions and/or programs; whose contributions have had a significant impact on public education; is a skilled manager of change and is creative in his/her approach to personnel administration; approaches personnel administrative work with a sense of humor and sense of respect for their fellow person.

2019-2020 Recipient: Dr. Amy Dillon, Blue Valley Schools

Human Resources/Support Staff Award

The Human Resources Specialist/Support Staff Award is given to an individual whose contributions have had significant impact on the efficiency of the human resources office and to the field of human resources; who has at the local, state/province, national, and/or international level distinguished him/herself through leadership service; and is a collaborative, contributing participant in personnel functions and/or programs.

2019-2020 Recipient: Olivia Schmitt, Blue Valley Schools

C.S. Robinson Award

2020 Theme: "Building a Healthy Team" Innovations in Overall Wellness. The C. S. Robinson Award is open to all current AASPA members. This award recognizes those who demonstrate innovations and leadership in human resources based upon a theme annually determined by the Recognitions Committee.

2019-2020 Recipient: Blue Valley Schools

New Member Award

The New Member Award is given to an active member of AASPA who has less than 3 years of experience in the field. This individual has demonstrated involvement at the local, state/province, national, and/or international level though new to the field and has distinguished him/herself in personnel administration through contributions that have had an impact on public education.

2019-2020 Recipient: Michelle Hackney, Spring Hill USD 230

Newsletter Award

The Newsletter Award is open to all state/province/private organizations which publish a newsletter for their members at least annually. Newsletters are judged on content and layout.

2019-2020 Recipient: Flagstaff Unified School District

Digital Branding Award

The Digital Branding Development Award is given to the school district whose personnel or human resources department has most effectively managed to leverage the power of at least one digital avenue to tell their district's employment story and provide communication to and gather information from current and prospective employees.

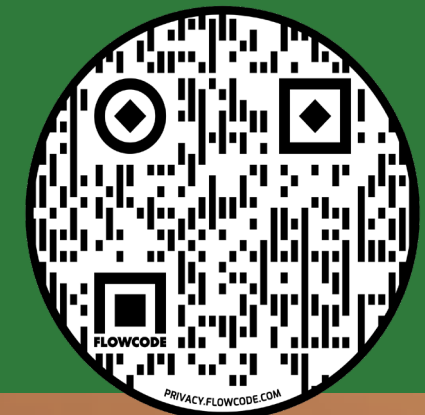
2019-2020 Recipient: Maine Township High School District 207

Arch S. Brown Awards

The Arch S. Brown Awards are given on the basis of affiliate activities in these areas: communication with members, member participation, affiliate conferences, special projects, cooperative activities and other contributions.

2019-2020 Recipients: TASP, IASPA

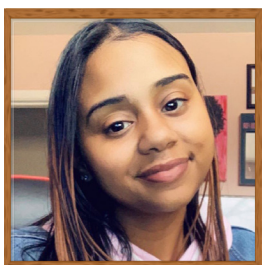
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2020 LEON BRADLEY SCHOLARSHIP RECIPIENTS

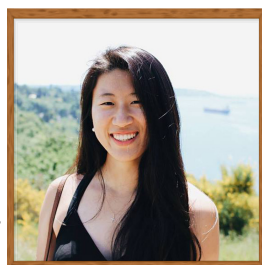
C'AWNA FORD-JOHNSON

C'Awna Ford-Johnson is a Senior in the department of Education- Secondary English at the University of Kansas. C'Awna found her passion for helping others early on, and at a young age began volunteering at church functions and school events with family. C'Awna developed her passion for teaching in her high school and helping others, as it gave her the chance to create lesson plans, teach elementary aged students and receive feedback from their instructors. Outside of curriculum, C'Awana was involved in the debate and forensics teams, served as Black Student Union President and participated in Scholars programs. Currently, C'Awna is also a volunteer for Kennedy Elementary school, where she works with students as a mentor and tutor. C'Awna's goal is to one day be back in high school, as an English teacher. She looks forward to being a resource for others, helping students realize the importance of self-investment and pursuing education.



ELAINE LIU

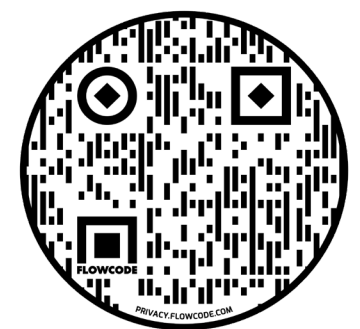
Elaine Liu is an aspiring Chinese-American educator who has been passionate about the field of education since the beginning of high school. She is passionate about multicultural education and global education, where she has had the opportunity to teach abroad in Italy and New Zealand. Through her studies, she has become more aware and curious about teacher and student identity, and Liu especially emphasizes the importance of classroom testimony and empowering voices in the classroom and community, especially as an Asian-American teacher. Liu is currently in her final year of finishing the University of Georgia's Double Dawg Program for Early Childhood Education through the Mary Francis Early College of Education. This 5-year program allows undergraduates to pursue both a master's and bachelor's degree at the same time. Liu graduated as a First Honor Graduate and Summa Cum Laude and she received her Bachelor's degree in Early Childhood Education, as well as her certificate in Disability Studies at UGA. Currently, she is in her final year of pursuing her master's degree and is also pursuing her ESOL Endorsement, Gifted Endorsement and TESOL Certification.



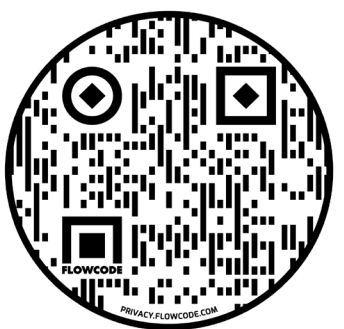
THE LEON BRADLEY SCHOLARSHIP AWARD is intended for minority college students pursuing the teaching profession and/or school leadership. The scholarship is named in honor of the late Leon Bradley, the first African American president of AASPA (1983 - 1984).

Any members or organizations may send tax deductible contributions for the Leon Bradley Scholarship Fund to the AASPA headquarters at 7201 W. 129th Street, Suite 220, Overland Park, KS 66213.

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