



## 2025 Institute for Teaching Excellence

**September 17-19**  
**Sonesta Bee Cave, Austin, TX**

### Day 1

September 17 | 12:45 – 1:00 p.m.

#### Conference Check-In

Ballroom      Pick up your conference name tag  
Foyer

September 17 | 1:00 – 2:10 p.m.

#### Active Learning Session

Ballroom BC      This session will provide an overarching frame for the three days we will spend together. Participants will work through three active learning situations with emphasis on simulating classroom experiences. Teachers will be asked to reflect on the activities in relation to their specific content with a particular eye on the ways in which the principles of the work can be adapted to their current school context.

*Kevin Burke, Tia Madkins, Maria McKenna*

September 17 | 2:10 – 2:20 p.m.

Move to divisional breakouts

September 17 | 2:20 – 3:00 p.m.

#### Active Learning Breakouts (breakout by division)

Honeycomb      PreK-K: facilitated by Ashley Read and Shannon Nadalini  
Ballroom E      1-4: facilitated by Elizabeth Pham and Tim Reilly  
Ballroom BC      5-8: facilitated by Perrin Jones and Sara Zedlitz  
Ballroom A      9-12: facilitated by Fred Kountz and Amy Clark

September 17 | 3:00 – 3:15 p.m.

Break



September 17 | 3:15 – 4:00 p.m.

**Mapping Your Resources**

Ballroom BC We will center our discussion on two main questions: What are the resources available to us and how do we actively deploy them in service of our students? The session will focus on various modes of mapping. Teachers will be asked to bring with them photos (or videos) of their classroom spaces, with particular attention paid to the ways in which the space is being utilized to foster learning. From there facilitators will work through asset mapping with teachers as well as other techniques in service of shifting thinking about the value of physical (and conceptual) space.

*Kevin Burke, Tia Madkins, Maria McKenna*

September 17 | 4:00 – 4:15 p.m.

Break

September 17 | 4:15 – 5:30 p.m.

**Teaching Experience Cohorts**

- |             |                                                                                  |
|-------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Ballroom BC | • Teachers brand new to teaching in the past 3 years; <i>Maria McKenna</i>       |
| Ballroom A  | • Public Teachers transitioning to Independent Schools; <i>Tia Madkins</i>       |
| Honeycomb   | • Higher Ed instructors transitioning to Independent Schools; <i>Kevin Burke</i> |

**Day 2**

September 18 | 7:00 – 7:45 a.m.

Ballroom E Breakfast Buffet

September 18 | 7:20 – 10:45 a.m.

**Board Buses and Visit Local Austin Schools** (school is assigned in advance)

Lobby	EC (ages 0-4 years) Teachers depart for Trinity Episcopal School
	LS (K-4 <sup>th</sup> grade) Teachers depart for St. Michael's Catholic Prep
	MS (5 <sup>th</sup> –8 <sup>th</sup> grade) Teachers depart for Trinity Episcopal School
	US (9 <sup>th</sup> –12 <sup>th</sup> grade) Teachers depart for St. Stephen's Episcopal School



September 18 | 10:45 – 11:30 a.m.

**Divisional Breakouts – debrief the school visits at the Sonesta**

Honeycomb	PreK-K: facilitated by Ashley Read and Shannon Nadalini
Ballroom E	1-4: facilitated by Elizabeth Pham and Tim Reilly
Ballroom BC	5-8: facilitated by Perrin Jones and Sara Zedlitz
Ballroom A	9-12: facilitated by Fred Kountz and Amy Clark

September 18 | 11:30 a.m. – 12:30 p.m.

Lunch with Teaching Experience Cohorts (tables will be marked for groups)

September 18 | 12:30 – 1:00 p.m.

**Independent School Culture: A Refresher**

Ballroom	A brief overview of independent school culture including the differences between independent and public schools, the role of ISAS and communication with peers and parents.
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September 18 | 1:00 – 1:30 p.m.

**Classroom Management: Building Classroom Community**

Ballroom	<i>Kevin Burke, Tia Madkins, Maria McKenna</i>
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September 18 | 1:30 – 1:45 p.m.

Move to breakouts

September 18 | 1:45 – 3:00 p.m.

**Classroom Management Breakouts**

Honeycomb	PreK-K: facilitated by Ashley Read and Shannon Nadalini
Ballroom E	1-4: facilitated by Elizabeth Pham and Tim Reilly
Ballroom BC	5-8: facilitated by Perrin Jones and Sara Zedlitz
Ballroom A	9-12: facilitated by Fred Kountz and Amy Clark

September 18 | 3:00 – 3:15 p.m.

Break



September 18 | 3:15 – 4:30 p.m.

**Speed Innovating**

Ballroom      Participants will attend 3 discussion groups during this session (20 minutes each).

September 18 | 4:30 – 4:45 p.m.

**Building Classroom Culture**

Ballroom      What are ways that we can think about constructing learning environments that are collaborative and effective? This brief session will set the tone for dialog among colleagues about frustrations and opportunities in building student spaces open for collaboration. There will also be some ideas about classroom culture shared to take back to your own classrooms.

*Kevin Burke, Tia Madkins, Maria McKenna*

September 18 | 4:45 p.m.

Dinner and evening on your own

**Day 3**

September 19 | 7:00 – 8:00 a.m.

Breakfast Buffet

September 19 | 8:00 – 8:45 a.m.

**Lesson Planning**

Ballroom      The focus here is twofold: What can I, as a teacher, take away and use for my classroom on Monday and: What larger planning structures might make my life easier — and my students' educational experiences stronger — in the long term? Teachers will be asked to bring lesson and/or unit plans from the current year for discussion. Facilitators will provide sample lesson and unit plans at tables. Groups will be asked to share their own lesson plans for feedback, but also to critique lessons provided for them as a way to envision differently considering their own planning processes.

*Kevin Burke, Tia Madkins, Maria McKenna*



September 19 | 8:45 – 9:45 a.m.

**Lesson Planning Breakouts**

Honeycomb	PreK-K: facilitated by Ashley Read and Shannon Nadalini
Ballroom E	1-4: facilitated by Elizabeth Pham and Tim Reilly
Ballroom BC	5-8: facilitated by Perrin Jones and Sara Zedlitz
Ballroom A	9-12: facilitated by Fred Kountz and Amy Clark

September 19 | 9:45 – 10:00 a.m.

Break

September 19 | 10:00 – 11:15 a.m.

**Intentional Conversations**

Ballroom	How to communicate effectively with students, parents, and others in your school life so that you are heard and your boundaries (and time) are clear and respected.
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September 19 | 11:15 – 11:30 a.m.

**Closing**



## 2025 Institute for Teaching Excellence

### Workshop Leaders

#### Kevin Burke

Kevin Burke originally fell into teaching because he didn't own a suit for an interview with General Mills. We'll call that providence. As a member of the ACE program at the University of Notre Dame, he became a high school English and Theology teacher in Phoenix, because of a course he took in college focused on the nature of meaningful work. Since then he has spent time teaching college writing on the East and Third coasts respectively. After ending his K-12 teaching career, he spent five years at the University of Notre Dame supervising practicing teachers in grades 2-12 in schools across the southern United States. He is now a Professor of English Education and department head at the University of Georgia. His teaching focuses on middle and secondary methods for English Language Arts and his research is centered on curriculum studies as it intersects with sexuality, religion, and civic youth engagement. His recent professional development work is rooted in youth participatory methods for community-based research.

#### Tia Madkins

Tia C. Madkins grew up in the suburbs of Atlanta, Georgia in the prime of the ATL R&B and Hip-Hop music! She was a biology major at Boston University and after freezing for four years decided to get a master's degree in science education and a teaching credential at the University of Southern California. Since she comes from a family of teachers, Tia was destined to become a 3rd generation educator. She taught elementary school children in the Los Angeles Unified School District but has worked with children of all ages (PK-12) and was a science specialist and teacher educator. After leaving the classroom, she pursued a PhD in STEM Education at UC Berkeley. Tia is now an Assistant Professor of Curriculum and Instruction in the STEM Education Program at The University of Texas at Austin. Her expertise is in equity-focused teaching practices like culturally responsive teaching and supporting educators to redesign classroom environments to best support minoritized learners. She loves traveling internationally, shopping, and spending time with family and friends—especially on a beach spending quality time with her nieces and nephews!

**Maria McKenna**

Maria McKenna was lucky enough to go to a high school in Canada where the arts were valued and had access to a phenomenal theatre program. She fell in love with theatre and as an undergraduate at Notre Dame, she studied theatre while adding a “practical” economics degree to the mix. One fateful summer of wearing a suit and heels each day to work at her “bank job” was all it took for her to know she was probably destined for something different. After finishing a graduate degree in Education from Northwestern University, she taught first and second grades at Free Union Country School, an independent, progressive, multi-aged focused elementary school housed in a log cabin built by parents at the foot of the Blue Ridge Mountains. Fast forward multiple decades, add four children, stay at home mothering, many other jobs, and a Ph.D. in Educational Foundations. Maria now teaches, researches, and writes as a professor in Africana Studies and the Institute for Educational Initiatives at the University of Notre Dame. She currently oversees all of the Mission Scholars Programs at Notre Dame for first generation, low income, and differently prepared students at Notre Dame. Her expertise focuses on youth and young adult empowerment, cultural contexts of education, ethical care in education, and Montessori education.

**Master Teachers****Amy Clark**

Amy Clark became a teacher as a means of being able to talk about books and writing with some of the most inventive and insightful voices in her community — those of teenagers. After teaching in a variety of settings, Amy landed at Christ Episcopal School in Covington, Louisiana 15 years ago. Despite teaching part time at first while her boys, Ryder and Noah, were young, Amy’s role quickly grew from part-time English teacher to English department chair, literary magazine moderator, student council moderator, and more. Her love for working not just in an Independent School but in this particular school where kindness and individuality are celebrated grew space in her heart and mind for further leadership opportunities. Now the Upper School Division Head, Amy continues to teach English and to moderate student council, but her most important job rests in lifting up students and faculty as they do the hard work of embodying the mission of the



school. Outside of school, Amy loves spending time with her family, baking cookies with recipes she refuses to share, and exercising in her backyard while her dog, Gingersnap, lazes in the grass.

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#### Perrin Jones

After feeling terrorized by the Socratic Method for two whole weeks, Perrin Jones dropped out of law school and started finding her way into the independent middle school classroom. There were a lot of stops along the way, but she eventually found a home at Marist School in Atlanta, GA, where she taught 7th and 8th grade English, sponsored the school newspaper, led the 8th grade retreat, coordinated the middle school advisory program, and briefly co-chaired the English department. She moved to New Orleans, LA, in 2019 (just in time for the pandemic!) to become the Director of Middle School at St. George's Episcopal School. She loves advocating for middle schoolers and helping others appreciate why working with this age level is uniquely rewarding. Perrin studied English and theology at Fordham University before earning a master's in religion at Yale University Divinity School. In her spare time, she enjoys eating and drinking with abandon, listening to live music, and cuddling pugs.

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#### Fred Kountz

Fred Kountz currently serves as the Head of Upper Scol at TMI Episcopal in San Antonio, TX. Fred has been a teacher and administrator in Episcopal and Independent schools for 17 years, and lives in San Antonio with his wife, Anne-Victoire, three children, Romy (14), Joseph (12), and Sacha (9), and dogs Billie and Bexar. He is completing his doctorate in Theology and Educational Leadership at Virginia Theological Seminary and is an avid runner, reader, and a 20-year supporter of Arsenal Football Club.

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#### Shannon Nadalini

Shannon Nadalini, has spent her career teaching and leading teams to support the developmental growth of early childhood and elementary students. As the Head of Primary and Lower School at St. John's Episcopal School in Dallas, she enjoys impacting the experiences of students, faculty, and parents through meaningful intention and engagement. Prior to St. John's, she taught fourth-grade humanities at St. Mark's School of Texas, where she was instrumental in developing new curricula for language arts and the Character and Leadership Institute and co-chaired the annual International Boys' Schools Coalition conference in 2022. Before this role, Shannon was a second-grade language arts, math, and social studies teacher, varsity athletics coach, and student sponsor at The Hockaday School. She worked cross-divisionally and cross-departmentally to support strategic academic committees. As a kindergarten and fourth-grade teacher at Highlander School, Shannon discovered her passion for reading instruction and her curiosity about single-gender classrooms. Shannon believes the purpose of education is to activate the students' minds so that they learn to inquire meaningfully, think critically, express understanding, and apply their knowledge. She encourages students to take risks and not be afraid to fail so that they can embrace the learning process and broaden the lens through which they will see and experience the world. In May 2025, she earned her Ed.D. in PK-12 Education Leadership from SMU.

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#### Elizabeth Pham

Elizabeth Pham, Lower School Head at Episcopal School of Acadiana, has held a variety of positions at her school over the past 15 years. Starting as a Teaching Assistant, Elizabeth understands the many demands and responsibilities that teachers have when working in Independent Schools. She taught kindergarten for 5 years, worked as a reading specialist in the Learning Center, was the Director of the Learning Center and has served as Lower School Head for the last two years. Elizabeth earned a BA in Communications from University of Louisiana Lafayette and holds her a Masters of Education in Special Education: Gifted. The Lower School at Episcopal School of Acadiana implements the Schoolwide Enrichment Model, where Elizabeth derives joy from harnessing the gifts and talents of her faculty and students, inspiring them to learn, grow, and embrace challenges with enthusiasm.

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#### Ashley Read

Ashley Read has served in an independent school for over 15 years. As the Head of Early Childhood at The Oakridge School in Arlington, Texas, she finds joy in serving the students, families and faculty within the Oakridge Family. She firmly believes in educating the whole child in an inclusive, developmentally appropriate and student-focused learning environment and is grateful to serve on a team that has the same vision. Before serving as the Head of Early Childhood, Ashley spanned a variety of roles within the field of education. In true independent school fashion, Ashley wore many different hats ranging from 4th grade teacher, instructional coach, professional development specialist, and the Assistant of Technology and Modern Learning. Read began her journey at Oakridge as a student at the Early Childhood Center in 1991 as a 4-year old, graduating from the Upper School in 2005. After earning a Bachelor of Science in Early Childhood Education from Texas Christian University, she returned to her alma mater to teach. During that time, she earned a Master's Degree in Educational Leadership and Policy Studies from The University of Texas at Arlington. Ashley and her high school sweetheart-turned-husband, David, have two daughters who enjoy traveling, sports, riding ATV's around their family farm, and all things TCU. Ashley and David have two children Avery Kate (11) and Finley (8), and two spoiled dachshunds, Zoey and Macy.

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#### Tim Reilly

Tim Reilly serves as the Head of Lower School at Saint Mary's Hall in San Antonio, bringing two decades of experience as an educator and school leader. Before joining Saint Mary's Hall, Tim spent 11 years in leadership roles in Austin, Texas, at Headwaters School and the International School of Texas. He began his career in the classroom, teaching kindergarten and first grade in Chicago Public Schools and fifth grade at Cedar International School in the British Virgin Islands. Tim holds a Bachelor of Arts in Communications from Purdue University and a Master of Education from DePaul University. His leadership is grounded in a deep interest in cognitive science and a belief in the power of building strong relationships among colleagues, students, and parents. Tim and his husband have two children, Ford (5) and Archie (3), both of whom attend Saint Mary's Hall.

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Sara Zedlitz

Sara Zedlitz is the Middle Division Director at Casady School, bringing a lifetime of experience within the independent school world as a student, teacher, parent, and administrator. A graduate of Hockaday in Dallas, Texas, and Washington and Lee University in Virginia, Sara's career began in 2000 at Charlotte Latin School. Her diverse teaching and leadership journey has included roles as a department chair, grade-level team lead, professional development and growth director, and director of new teacher onboarding. Though she started her career as a committed high school history teacher, she found her true calling in middle school, initially for a single year, and never left. For the past 15 years, Sara has lived and raised a family in Oklahoma City, continuing her passion for creating learning environments that foster curiosity, kindness, courage, and connections. She knows that early adolescence is a miraculous and messy period of profound formation, requiring dedicated adults who desire to be present with students in that transformative space — enjoying both their childish enthusiasm and their burgeoning intellectual skepticism and independence. Away from work, she loves traveling, or planning to travel, enjoying good meals with friends and family, and reading.

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