



2026 Institute for Teaching Excellence

September 23-25
Hilton Post Oak, Houston, TX

Day 1

September 23 | 12:00 – 12:30 p.m.

Conference Check-In

Ballroom	Pick up your conference name tag
Foyer	Beverages and light snacks available (lunch is not served today)

September 24 | 12:30 – 1:15 p.m.

Independent School Culture: A Refresher

Ballroom C	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 23 | 1:15 – 1:30 p.m.

Break

September 23 | 1:30 – 2:30 p.m.

Active Learning Session

Ballroom C	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.
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Kevin Burke, Tia Madkins, Maria McKenna

September 23 | 2:30 – 2:45 p.m.

Move to divisional breakouts



September 23 | 2:45 – 3:45 p.m.

Active Learning Breakouts (breakout by division)

PreK-4: facilitated by Lindsey Stenberg and Tim Reilly
5-8: facilitated by Byron Williams and Sara Zedlitz
9-12: facilitated by Amy Clark and Steven Fletcher

September 23 | 3:45 – 4:00 p.m.

Break

September 23 | 4:00 – 5:00 p.m.

Teaching Experience Cohorts

- People brand new to teaching in the past 3 years; *Maria McKenna*
- Public Teachers transitioning to Independent Schools; *Tia Madkins*
- People transitioning from other professions or Higher Ed to Independent Schools; *Kevin Burke*

Day 2

September 24 | 7:00 – 7:45 a.m.

Ballroom E Breakfast Buffet

September 24 | 7:30 – 10:30 a.m.

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

Lobby EC (ages 0-4 years) Teachers depart for The Fay School
LS (K-4th grade) Teachers depart for The Fay School
MS (5th–8th grade) Teachers depart for River Oaks Baptist School
US (9th–12th grade) Teachers depart for St. John's School

September 24 | 10:45 – 11:30 a.m.

Divisional Breakouts – debrief the school visits at the Hilton

PreK-4: facilitated by Lindsey Stenberg and Tim Reilly
5-8: facilitated by Byron Williams and Sara Zedlitz
9-12: facilitated by Amy Clark and Steven Fletcher



September 24 | 11:30 a.m. – 12:30 p.m.

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

September 24 | 12:30 – 1:30 p.m.

Mapping Your Resources and Classroom Management

Ballroom C 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 24 | 1:30 – 1:45 p.m.

Move to breakouts

September 24 | 1:45 – 3:00 p.m.

Classroom Management Breakouts by Division

PreK-4: facilitated by Lindsey Stenberg and Tim Reilly
5-8: facilitated by Byron Williams and Sara Zedlitz
9-12: facilitated by Amy Clark and Steven Fletcher

September 24 | 3:00 – 3:15 p.m.

Break

September 24 | 3:15 – 4:30 p.m.

Speed Innovating

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

Topics are TBD and will be announced in August.



September 24 | 4:30 – 4:45 p.m.

Building Classroom Culture

Ballroom C 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 24 | 4:45 p.m.

Dinner and evening on your own

Day 3

September 25 | 7:00 – 8:00 a.m.

Breakfast Buffet

September 25 | 8:00 – 8:45 a.m.

Lesson Planning

Ballroom C 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 25 | 8:45 – 9:45 a.m.

Lesson Planning Breakouts by Division

PreK-4: facilitated by Lindsey Stenberg and Tim Reilly

5-8: facilitated by Byron Williams and Sara Zedlitz

9-12: facilitated by Amy Clark and Steven Fletcher

September 25 | 9:45 – 10:00 a.m.

Break

September 25 | 10:00 – 11:15 a.m.

Intentional Conversations

Ballroom C 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.

September 25 | 11:15 – 11:30 a.m.

Closing

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 16 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 and later to Upper School Division Head. This year, Amy takes on a new role as Academic Dean while she also continues to teach English and moderate student council. 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, chases squirrels.

Christ Episcopal School, 80 Christwood Boulevard, Covington, LA; 985-871-9902;
aclark@christepiscopalschool.org

Steven Fletcher

Steven E.S. Fletcher, Ph.D., has served in independent schools since the early 2000s, when using Limewire and Napster were the norm. He worked his way from a math and science teacher who used an overhead projector to being an upper school administrator who yearns for the days where it was cool to use an overhead projector. He loves the life of schools and seeing students' growth in and outside of the classroom. For Steven, education and service to the community go hand-in-hand. After spending most of his career on the East Coast where he unashamedly became a Philadelphia Eagles fan, he calls Austin, Texas, home. As the Head of Upper School at St. Andrew's Episcopal in ATX, he considers himself the chief motivator, cheerleader, coach, mentor, and advisor to faculty and students alike.

St. Andrew's Episcopal School, 1112 West 31st Street, Austin, TX; 512-299-9800;
sfletcher@sasaustin.org



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 (6) and Archie (4), both of whom attend Saint Mary's Hall.

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Lindsey Stenberg

Lindsay Stenberg is in her 4th year as the Assistant Head of Preschool and Lower School at Greenhill School in Addison, (Dallas) Texas. Despite being the daughter and granddaughter of lifelong educators, Lindsay did not initially see teaching as a career path, and instead pursued Social Work and Government at the University of Texas. A stint serving in the Peace Corps (Tonga) proved that classrooms provided opportunities to impact children's futures within an always changing and dynamic space. While completing an alternative teaching certification, she started her teaching career in Garland, Texas, as a middle school ESL teacher and quickly decided to complete a Masters in Education at Texas A&M Commerce. She later worked as a 4th Grade Teacher and Campus Reading Specialist in Richardson, Texas. After 11 years in public schools, Lindsay made the move to Greenhill as a Literacy and Learning Specialist and earned her Certification of Academic Language Therapy. Through her various roles and environments, Lindsay has learned the power of high quality classroom practices and relationships that help all students in a classroom thrive. Lindsay and her husband Doug have two teenage daughters, Jenna (18) and Alice (15) who also attend Greenhill School.

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Byron Williams

Dr. Byron Williams has served as the Head of Middle School at St. Francis Episcopal School since June 1, 2022. He credits the sleek marketing materials and compelling mission of Teach For America for drawing him into the classroom. For more than 20 years he has taught and led in independent and public schools. He spent 11 years at The Kinkaid School and five years in Houston ISD. A creative and collaborative leader, Dr. Williams loves helping students and adults reach their full potential and believes that he has a lot to learn from them. He constantly reminds students and sometimes their teachers and parents that Middle School is not practice for real life; it is real life. The broken bones and hearts of middle schoolers don't hurt less because the weight of high school, college, and careers have yet to descend upon them. Dr. Williams holds a Bachelor of Arts degree in history from Xavier University of Louisiana and a Master of Divinity from Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary. A lifelong learner, he earned his doctorate in education with a focus on curriculum and instruction from Texas A&M University. His research, which focused on teaching and assessing historical reasoning skills in middle school classrooms, introduced him to literature on disciplinary literacy, a concept which continues to shape his educational philosophy. He loves poetry, cool quotes, sports, hip-hop, history, his two daughters, and his beautiful wife, so expect a heavy dose of each of those in nearly all his presentations or conversations.

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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



Independent Schools
Association of the Southwest

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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