



The Evolving Classroom: Nurturing Mindful Learners in a Tech-Savvy World

Lower School Educators Conference
March 10, 2025 | Triangle Day School, Durham

AGENDA

8:15 am Registration Opens | Continental Breakfast

9:00 am Welcome | You Were Built for This! | Dr. Gerrelyn Patterson, Keynote

This uplifting and energizing keynote will affirm the incredible work of all who work at lower schools. In a profession where adaptability, creativity, and compassion are essential, this address will celebrate your unique gifts and the profound impact you make every single day. Through storytelling, practical insights, and moments of joyful reflection, you will walk away recharged, inspired, and reminded that you are not just doing a job—you are living a calling. You were built for this!

10:00 am Break

10:15 am Breakout Session I:

Critical Practices to Guide Students for Internet Usage When Doing Research or Gathering Information | Joann York, Trinity Episcopal School

Teach critical practices for internet use in your lower school classroom through explicit guidelines that scaffold safety and curiosity. The internet can be an effective tool for developing knowledge and reading skills, but young readers and thinkers need healthy boundaries to maintain focus. Learn simple boundaries that consider young learners' readiness in a world where students need the internet and crave the opportunity to explore. In addition, discover a questioning protocol to measure the validity and relevance of sources through a fundamental mindset that can be used for any content area research.

Using Visual Thinking Strategies in the Classroom | Kate Newman, Carolina Friends School

Visual Thinking Strategies is a student-centered facilitation approach that creates inclusive and accessible classroom discussions. The conversations are grounded in an artwork or piece of visual media. VTS supports students in gaining critical thinking, visual literacy, clear communication, deep listening, and collaboration skills. In this session, you will experience VTS as a participant, practice facilitating a VTS discussion, and learn other playful ways to use art to foster empathy, inspire writing, and more. You will leave the session with new skills and tools for implementing VTS and planning resources.

Brain-based Instructional Design | Alison Provan, Durham Academy

Learn about how cognitive science applies to designing practical lessons for your students. See how theories from Dan Willingham's books *The Reading Mind* and *Outsmart Your Brain* pertain to an elementary classroom. Understand how our brains did not evolve to learn to read and write and what gets reorganized cognitively as students learn literacy skills. Learn about the balance of explicit instruction to statistical learning with considerable practice to develop independent learners. Consider the mental processes as we read to improve your reading, spelling, and vocabulary instruction for both typically developing and struggling students.

Simple Acts, Big Impact: Bringing Joy to Your Classroom Community | Candace Morgan and Tiffany Philbeck, Triangle Day School

In today's busy classrooms, prioritizing joy can sometimes get lost. This session explores simple, meaningful classroom traditions designed solely to bring joy to students and teachers, fostering a stronger sense of community. Discover practical, easy-to-implement ideas for incorporating moments of happiness and connection, creating a more positive learning environment and boosting student engagement.

11:15 am Break

11:30 am Breakout Session II:

The Role of SEL in Classroom Management and Student Independence | Amy Cowan, Triangle Day School & Mansi Brown, WNCSource, School readiness coach

Highlight the importance of social emotional learning and how having an established SEL curriculum and routine can aid in classroom management and student independence. When students have the ability to name their emotions and are equipped with strategies to work through them, it allows them to take ownership in problem solving and advocating for themselves. Explore how setting students up with a strong foundation in SEL can lead to emotional literacy as they progress through lower school.

Dynamic Differentiation: Leveraging Math Stations and Technology to Boost Student Engagement & Learning | Gabrielle Clark, Ravenscroft School

As educators, our classrooms are filled with diverse learners, all requiring different tools and scaffolds to succeed. This session will outline several ways elementary teachers can structure their math instructional blocks to create engaging and differentiated learning experiences for their learners. Attendees can expect to learn how to organize and structure their time using any math curriculum through math stations, technology, self-reflective formative assessments, and daily feedback! Teachers can formatively assess daily using this structure and use this data to guide differentiated small groups.

Project-Based Learning Through Storytelling | Maureen Beyt, Carolina Day School

Engage, create, and collaborate in this project-based learning workshop for cross-curricular exploration. Reflect on "voice vs choice" and the unexpected magical moments from authentic engagement! This workshop experience will give attendees a deeper understanding of creating a Project-Based Learning unit and resources to assist in that endeavor.

Math Beyond the Classroom | Doug Norry, Triangle Day School

All of our students are taught math concepts and skills each and every day. At TDS, this exposure extends well beyond the typical classroom lesson. The Estimation Jar, Problems of the Week, Math Week & Pi Day -- Learn about several programs, challenges, and celebrations that you can bring back to your school to shine a spotlight on math and boost math literacy among students, teachers, and parents.

12:30 pm Lunch | Roundtable Topics

- Mastery Learning
- Structured Literacy
- PBL
- Standards-Driven Instruction
- Integration Of Content And Special Areas
- AI
- Progress Monitoring/Intervention

1:30 pm Breakout Session III:

Inside Out, Not Upside Down | Emily Hayes, The Lerner School

Anxiety is present in all of our classrooms. So are Joy, Sadness, Envy, and Embarrassment. Our student population knows all of these words as characters and can relate to the gamification of emotions to

understand better and regulate their own. This session will create strategies to meet our early learners where they are and support emotional growth.

Designing with Purpose: Leveraging the Built Environment to Enhance Learning | Yolanda McClure, Michelle Klosterman, Lauren Frye, Michelle Hopkin, Forsyth Country Day School

This dynamic hands-on session explores the intersection of wellness, design, and pedagogy. Participants will engage in interactive activities to reimagine learning spaces, focusing on intentional design elements that foster collaboration, deep learning, and well-being. From understanding learning environment research to hearing firsthand experience of the impact of various environmental shifts, attendees will leave inspired and equipped with practical strategies to create environments that enhance educational outcomes. This session is ideal for educators eager to transform spaces into powerful tools for learning and growth.

Connecting the School Day with Extended Day and Summer | Cindy McArthur, Shannon Kincaid, Greensboro Day School

Anxiety in students and parents is increasingly prevalent, impacting academic performance, well-being, and family dynamics. Schools are on the front lines of addressing these needs, requiring innovative and compassionate approaches to support anxious students and their caregivers. This session will focus on practical strategies GDS implemented to reduce the anxiety the parents and students may face as their child transitions from the classroom to the extended day program (i.e., before-care and aftercare) and to the summer programs.

2:30 pm Breakout Session IV:

Raising the Bar - Classroom Support Strategies for Diverse Learners | Suzanne Billips, Greensboro Day School

Attendees will discover how to address the increasing need for student support in general education classrooms in independent schools. Classroom teachers will be equipped with the tools to recognize and respond to common learning challenges often undiagnosed in Lower School students. Practical ways to support students while fostering success will be shared.

AI in Action: Tools for Equity and Differentiation | Laura Manke, High Point Friends School

This session empowers educators to use AI to simplify differentiation and promote equity, making supporting each student's unique needs and learning style easier. We will actively explore AI tools that allow teachers to adapt their lesson plans to meet the needs of various learners at the click of a button. Join me as we vary text levels, translate documents, generate individualized feedback, create resources tailored to meet multiple learning styles, and more!

The Learning Impact of Neuroscience, Multisensory Teaching, and Gaming Philosophy | Diane Milner & Anna Hall, Key School

Employing the powerful tools we have learned from neuroscience can increase student engagement and enhance joyful learning. Strategies that foster information processing and learning retention will be presented. Success in the classroom motivates students, similar to the dopamine release that occurs as students achieve new levels of success in video gaming. This presentation will share the why behind effective teaching strategies and discuss the importance of multisensory teaching, novel ways to capture student attention, and new approaches to building executive functions that enable students to become more engaged in learning.

3:30 pm Adjourn