



# Transforming School Culture

Oakbrook Terrace, IL • October 27–29, 2026

## Tuesday, October 27

7:00–8:00 a.m.	Registration and Continental Breakfast	Rooms TBD
8:00–9:45 a.m.	<b>Keynote</b> —Tina H. Boogren <i>Strong Schools Start Here: How Educator Wellness Shapes School Culture</i>	
9:45–10:00 a.m.	Break	
10:00–11:30 a.m.	<b>Breakout Sessions</b>	See page 2.
11:30 a.m.–12:30 p.m.	Lunch (provided)	
12:30–2:00 p.m.	<b>Breakout Sessions</b>	See page 2.
2:00–2:15 p.m.	Break	
2:15–3:15 p.m.	<b>Panel Discussion</b> —Presenters answer your most pressing questions.	

## Wednesday, October 28

7:00–8:00 a.m.	Registration and Continental Breakfast	Rooms TBD
8:00–9:45 a.m.	<b>Keynote</b> —Anthony Muhammad <i>Culture Is King! Why Schools Can't Improve Without an Urgent Focus on Culture</i>	
9:45–10:00 a.m.	Break	
10:00–11:30 a.m.	<b>Breakout Sessions</b>	See page 2.
11:30 a.m.–12:30 p.m.	Lunch (provided)	
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2:00–2:15 p.m.	Break	
2:15–3:15 p.m.	<b>Micro-Strategy Sessions</b> —Presenters share evidence-based strategies to improve school culture and student relearning.	

## Thursday, October 29

7:00–8:00 a.m.	Continental Breakfast	Rooms TBD
8:00–9:30 a.m.	<b>Breakout Sessions</b>	See page 3.
9:30–9:45 a.m.	Break	
9:45–11:45 a.m.	<b>Keynote</b> —Mario I. Acosta <i>Taking Action: School Culture and Student Success</i>	

Agenda is subject to change.

# Breakout Sessions at a Glance

## Tuesday, October 27—10:00-11:30 a.m.

<b>Tina H. Boogren</b>	Strong Core, Strong Culture: Elevating Instruction Through the New Art and Science of Teaching	Rooms TBD
<b>Tihesha Henderson</b>	From Surviving to Thriving: Building Trauma-Informed Schools That Support Every Student	
<b>Alexander McNeece</b>	Relationship-Building Strategies to Help Students Connect With Their Teachers and Classmates	
<b>Anthony Muhammad</b>	Culture, Equity, and the Future of Fairness for All! Navigating Modern Challenges to Inclusion	

## Tuesday, October 27—12:30-2:00 p.m.

<b>Tina H. Boogren</b>	Science-Backed Wellness: Small Moves That Transform School Culture	Rooms TBD
<b>Tihesha Henderson</b>	You Don't Have to Lead Alone: Unleashing the Talent Around You	
<b>Alexander McNeece</b>	The Fundamentalists' Playbook: A Believer's Guide to Overcoming Staff Resistance	
<b>Anthony Muhammad</b>	Excellent by Design: A Three-Stage Process for Collectively Building a Healthy Culture	

## Wednesday, October 28—10:00-11:30 a.m.

<b>Tihesha Henderson</b>	Beyond the Pandemic: Addressing the New Reality of Student Behavior	Rooms TBD
<b>Alexander McNeece</b>	Tools for Transforming School Culture: The Cultural Framework for an Ideal Learning Environment	
<b>Anthony Muhammad</b>	Time for Change! Four Essential Skills for Transformational Leaders	

## Wednesday, October 28—12:30-2:00 p.m.

<b>Tihesha Henderson</b>	PLCs That Actually Grow Teachers: Designing Professional Learning That Happens During the School Day	Rooms TBD
<b>Alexander McNeece</b>	Tools for Transforming School Culture: The Six Key Elements of a Healthy School Culture	
<b>Anthony Muhammad</b>	Beyond Test Scores! The PLC at Work Process and Serving the Whole Child	

**Thursday, October 29—8:00–9:30 a.m.**

<b>Mario I. Acosta</b>	Shaping Exceptional School Culture	Rooms TBD
<b>Tihesha Henderson</b>	You Can't Pour From an Empty Cup: Protecting Your Wellness as a School Leader	
<b>Alexander McNeece</b>	Practices That Healthy Cultures Adopt: Cooperative Learning Strategies in Classrooms and Staff Meetings	
<b>Anthony Muhammad</b>	Transforming School Culture: New Insights	

Agenda is subject to change.

# Session Descriptions—Day 1

## MORNING KEYNOTE

### Tina H. Boogren

#### **Strong Schools Start Here: How Educator Wellness Shapes School Culture**

When we talk about transforming school culture, we often focus on systems, initiatives, and expectations for students. But culture is built—and sustained—by the adults in the building. Drawing from *Educator Wellness* (Solution Tree, 2021), co-authored with Timothy D. Kanold, Tina H. Boogren explores how the physical, mental, emotional, and social well-being of educators directly shapes the culture of a school. When the adults in a building feel supported and energized, their capacity to collaborate, respond to student needs, and sustain improvement grows exponentially.

In this keynote, Dr. Boogren invites participants to reflect on the role adult wellness plays in creating schools where both students and educators thrive. Rather than viewing wellness as something separate from school improvement, Dr. Boogren positions it as foundational to the work of building healthy, high-functioning school cultures. Through research, reflection, and practical strategies, participants explore how caring for the adults in the system strengthens everything else we hope to accomplish for students. Participants are renewed in their purpose and equipped with practical ways to protect the energy, humanity, and sustainability of the educators who make schools work.

Participants in this session:

- Understand the connection between educator wellness and a healthy, sustainable school culture.
- Explore practical ways leaders and teams can support adult well-being within the daily work of schools.
- Reflect on how caring for the adults in the building ultimately strengthens outcomes for students.

## MORNING BREAKOUT SESSIONS

### Tina H. Boogren

#### **Strong Core, Strong Culture: Elevating Instruction Through the New Art and Science of Teaching**

One of the most powerful ways to strengthen school culture is by ensuring every classroom is a place where students experience engaging, meaningful learning every day. When instruction is strong, consistent, and responsive, students thrive—and educators feel a deeper sense of purpose and professional fulfillment. In this session, Tina H. Boogren explores how Robert J. Marzano's *The New Art and Science of Teaching* (Marzano Resources, 2017) provides a practical framework for strengthening core instruction across a school. Participants examine

research-based strategies that help educators design learning experiences that are engaging, rigorous, and responsive to students' needs from the very start.

Rather than viewing improvement as something driven by programs or initiatives, Dr. Boogren focuses on the daily instructional decisions teachers make in their classrooms. When educators consistently apply effective teaching practices, classrooms become places where both students and teachers feel successful—and that success becomes a powerful driver of positive school culture. Participants gain practical strategies that support high-quality instruction while strengthening the shared commitment to learning that defines a thriving school culture.

Participants in this session:

- Understand how *The New Art and Science of Teaching* supports strong instructional practices across a school.
- Explore practical strategies that help create engaging and rigorous learning experiences for students.
- Examine how strong core instruction contributes to a positive and collaborative school culture.
- Identify instructional practices that support both student success and educator confidence.

## Tihesha Henderson

### **From Surviving to Thriving: Building Trauma-Informed Schools That Support Every Student**

When schools recognize how trauma impacts student behavior and learning, they can shift from reactive discipline systems to supportive environments where students feel safe, regulated, and ready to learn. In this session, Tihesha Henderson explores how school leaders can create trauma-informed cultures that prioritize relationships, predictable systems, and emotional safety. Participants examine how trauma shows up in student behavior and learn practical strategies for building schoolwide systems that support both students and staff in responding effectively to those needs.

Participants can expect to:

- Understand the impact of trauma on student behavior by examining how adverse experiences influence emotional regulation, learning, and interactions within the school environment.
- Implement trauma-informed systems and practices by learning actionable strategies that prioritize relationships, predictable routines, and supportive responses to challenging behaviors.
- Create school environments where students thrive by identifying systems and structures that promote safety, connection, and resilience across the entire school community.

## Alexander McNeece

### **Relationship-Building Strategies to Help Students Connect With Their Teachers and Classmates**

All students must feel a high level of relatedness to their teachers and classmates, and our least engaged students need it most. There are strategies teachers can implement right away that will help accomplish this. This is not a sit-and-get presentation. Attendees should be prepared to learn by doing! Participants may walk in as strangers, but they walk out as a team.

Participants in this session:

- Acquire quick classroom or staff meeting activities teachers and principals can use to increase levels of relatedness.
- Explore the importance of these activities and understand their role in the engagement process.
- Examine their feelings during this reflection-in-action session as they meet new teammates and grow a new community.

## Anthony Muhammad

### **Culture, Equity, and the Future of Fairness for All! Navigating Modern Challenges to Inclusion**

Participants explore the connection between personal and institutional mindsets and academic achievement gaps. While the issue of inequality in student learning outcomes has been studied and debated for many years, Anthony Muhammad establishes that the primary culprit in the fight to overcome the achievement gap is our thinking. Participants also address modern challenges to the egalitarian idealism of American public schools.

Participants in this session:

- Understand the true meaning of equity and inclusion.
- Understand the power of mindsets and their influence on educator effectiveness.
- Understand how to shift from damaging mindsets (superiority and inferiority) to high levels of efficacy (liberation).

## **AFTERNOON BREAKOUT SESSIONS**

## Tina H. Boogren

### **Science-Backed Wellness: Small Moves That Transform School Culture**

In this session, Tina H. Boogren connects educator wellness directly to the culture of your school. When the adults in a building feel supported and well, the entire system benefits. Participants reimagine the daily routines of busy educators through a culture lens, exploring how small, intentional wellness practices can strengthen not only individual resilience but also collective efficacy, trust, and connection across their school communities.

Together, participants engage in practical exercises and dynamic discussions designed to help them embed simple, sustainable wellness strategies into even the most demanding schedules. Participants gain actionable ideas to support themselves and others—because when educators feel energized, supported, and valued, they show up differently for students, colleagues, and the work itself. This is how wellness becomes a driver of a thriving, positive school culture—not an add-on.

Participants can expect to:

- Examine the four seasons of the school year and explore how intentional wellness practices can strengthen adult capacity and sustain a healthy, supportive school culture in each phase.
- Identify simple, research-aligned wellness strategies that can be implemented at both the individual and team levels to build connection, trust, and collective resilience.
- Discover practical ways to model and spread wellness across a school community so that staff well-being becomes visible, shared, and culture shaping for both adults and students.

## **Tihesha Henderson**

### **You Don't Have to Lead Alone: Unleashing the Talent Around You**

Effective schools are built on strong leadership at every level—not just from the principal's office. In this session, Tihesha Henderson focuses on helping school leaders identify and cultivate leadership capacity within their teams. Participants explore how distributed leadership strengthens school culture, increases staff engagement, and ensures sustainable improvement efforts. Through practical strategies and planning tools, leaders learn how to recognize emerging leaders, empower teacher leadership, and build structures that support shared ownership of school success.

Participants can expect to:

- Recognize leadership potential within their teams by identifying formal and informal leaders who can support school improvement efforts.
- Develop strategies to build leadership capacity by learning how to distribute responsibilities, provide meaningful leadership opportunities, and support emerging leaders.
- Strengthen shared leadership systems by creating actionable plans to engage staff in leadership roles that contribute to schoolwide success and sustainability.

## **Alexander McNeece**

### **The Fundamentalists' Playbook: A Believer's Guide to Overcoming Staff Resistance**

With a dash of satire, Alexander McNeece examines how the conflict between Believers and Fundamentalists plays out at the school level. While using the Fundamentalist's point of view but also giving the Believers the tools to build positive change, participants review healthy school

culture policies, procedures, and practices to learn how to flip the arguments used against those important changes.

Participants in this session:

- Analyze real-world resistance to healthy school culture policy, procedures, and practices.
- Learn about the three Ds of staff resistance.
- Collaborate on strategies to build communication, trust, capacity building, and accountability at their school.

## **Anthony Muhammad**

### **Excellent by Design: A Three-Stage Process for Collectively Building a Healthy Culture**

Anthony Muhammad addresses three vital stages in the process of creating a healthy school culture: 1) establishing philosophical agreement and building shared purpose; 2) addressing staff frustration associated with change; and 3) taking collaborative action. Participants explore the theories and research that link the importance of school culture, leaving with an abundance of practical strategies to start the process of transforming the culture in their schools.

Participants in this session:

- Learn how to address counterproductive belief systems and form a cohesive team of student advocates.
- Understand how to analyze and manage staff frustration.
- Understand the balance between support and accountability.

# Session Descriptions—Day 2

## KEYNOTE

### Anthony Muhammad

#### **Culture Is King! Why Schools Can't Improve Without an Urgent Focus on Culture**

School culture is a relatively new area of study. For years, thought leaders and influencers concentrated on structure, funding, law, and policy as vehicles to improve school performance. What most of those efforts neglected to understand is that human behavior would determine the success or failure of those efforts. Anthony Muhammad argues that the uncomfortable challenge of counterproductive adult behavior has been, and will always be, the greatest challenge in promoting school improvement.

Participants learn:

- Past attempts to circumvent culture have been futile.
- The study of school culture and healthy professional behavior is emerging and provides key insight into improving schools.
- Leadership is a powerful element in the health or toxicity of a school's culture and must be strategically improved.

## MORNING BREAKOUT SESSIONS

### Tihesha Henderson

#### **Beyond the Pandemic: Addressing the New Reality of Student Behavior**

The COVID-19 pandemic significantly disrupted students' social, emotional, and behavioral development, leaving many schools grappling with new and intensified behavior challenges. In this session, Tihesha Henderson examines the lingering effects of the pandemic on student behavior and the implications for school systems and classroom practices. Participants explore how gaps in social-emotional development impact learning environments and learn strategies schools can implement to rebuild behavioral expectations, strengthen relationships, and support students in developing the skills they need to succeed.

Participants can expect to:

- Understand the long-term behavioral impacts of the pandemic by examining how disruptions to learning and social development have influenced student behavior in schools.
- Identify effective strategies to address behavior challenges by learning approaches that focus on reteaching expectations, strengthening social-emotional skills, and building positive relationships.
- Design schoolwide systems to support students by creating action plans that address current behavioral needs while promoting positive school culture and student success.

## Alexander McNeece

### **Tools for Transforming School Culture: The Cultural Framework for an Ideal Learning Environment**

Participants in this session dive into the new book *Tools for Transforming School Culture* (Solution Tree, 2026). Building a healthy school environment requires a deep understanding of its foundational framework and the key players involved. Alexander McNeece gives a comprehensive introduction to creating the ideal learning environment our schools need to thrive. Participants explore the definition of a healthy school culture and get an overview of the core concepts and strategies necessary to drive systemic, positive change.

Participants in this session:

- Understand the foundational framework of school culture and identify the key players who influence a healthy school culture.
- Identify the key school culture players who influence a healthy school culture.
- Review essential strategies from the book and gain a tool to help them and their teams identify where to begin.

## Anthony Muhammad

### **Time for Change! Four Essential Skills for Transformational Leaders**

Anthony Muhammad addresses the importance of transformational leadership. School culture provides the context for all good strategies. A leader who understands how to motivate, develop talent, and build consensus is worth their weight in gold. Today's era of constant change requires leaders who understand the development of human capital. Participants examine four leadership competencies: communication, trust building, professional support, and accountability.

Participants in this session:

- Understand the true meaning and value of school culture.
- Understand the importance of developing consensus.
- Acquire practical skills that inspire others to embrace change.

## **AFTERNOON BREAKOUT SESSIONS**

## Tihesha Henderson

### **PLCs That Actually Grow Teachers: Designing Professional Learning That Happens During the School Day**

Professional learning communities have the potential to be powerful drivers of teacher growth, but too often they become routine meetings focused on logistics rather than learning. In this session, Tihesha Henderson helps school leaders rethink PLC structures to prioritize meaningful teacher development and instructional improvement. Participants explore systems that embed professional learning into the school day and gain practical strategies for designing PLCs that foster collaboration, reflection, and continuous growth among educators.

Participants can expect to:

- Recognize the potential of PLCs to develop teachers by examining how effective PLC structures promote instructional improvement and collaboration.
- Learn practical strategies for strengthening PLC meetings by implementing structures such as data discussions, lesson study, and collaborative reflection.
- Create systems that support teacher development during the school day by designing PLC frameworks that prioritize learning, accountability, and continuous professional growth.

## Alexander McNeece

### **Tools for Transforming School Culture: The Six Key Elements of a Healthy School Culture**

Culture transformation isn't easy. We often know the kind of school environment we want, but the path to get there can be unclear. In this session, Alexander McNeece provides the essential starting points and practical tools needed to navigate this journey. By examining the six key artifacts of school culture, educators learn how to celebrate their healthy practices while identifying and addressing areas where toxic elements may have taken root. Participants reflect on their own schools and are equipped with big ideas and actionable tools for improvement.

Participants in this session:

- Identify and analyze the six key cultural elements that constitute a highly functional, healthy school culture.
- Evaluate their current school culture to celebrate successes and pinpoint opportunities for targeted improvement.
- Acquire practical tools and actionable strategies to root out toxic elements and sustain meaningful cultural transformation.

## Anthony Muhammad

### **Beyond Test Scores! The PLC at Work Process and Serving the Whole Child**

The PLC at Work process is committed to a focus on *learning*. Learning does not have to be narrowly defined by academic standards and state test scores. Anything that we want students to learn—including social and emotional health, resilience, citizenship, entrepreneurship, and civility—can all be facilitated through the four PLC questions. If the COVID-19 pandemic taught anything, it is that human beings are complex, and our holistic well-being is important.

Participants learn:

- How to strategically plan to define, assess, and address nonacademic student traits
- Strategies to engage counselors, social workers, and other nonacademic staff members in the PLC at Work process

# Session Descriptions—Day 3

## BREAKOUT SESSIONS

### Mario I. Acosta

#### **Shaping Exceptional School Culture**

A thriving school culture is the foundation of a high-performing educational environment. In this session, Mario I. Acosta provides school leaders and educators with the skills and knowledge necessary to assess, refine, and leverage school culture into a dynamic force that enhances student success. Participants learn how to shape their school or district culture in a way that enhances collaboration, increases staff morale, and ensures students and families feel valued. Dr. Acosta gives educators the opportunity to audit their current school and district culture, allowing participants to design effective next steps to foster environments that support success for all students and staff.

Participants in this session:

- Explore the key components of school culture to help determine the current status of their school or district.
- Explore strategies to align culture with change initiatives, including how to identify key cultural influences, overcome resistance, and reinforce shared values during transitions.

### Tihesha Henderson

#### **You Can't Pour From an Empty Cup: Protecting Your Wellness as a School Leader**

School leaders often carry significant responsibility for supporting students, staff, and school communities, yet their own wellness is frequently overlooked. In this session, Tihesha Henderson addresses the importance of leader well-being and its impact on sustainable leadership and school culture. Participants reflect on the challenges of leadership fatigue and explore strategies that help leaders maintain balance, set healthy boundaries, and prioritize personal wellness while continuing to lead effectively.

Participants can expect to:

- Recognize the importance of leader wellness by understanding how burnout and chronic stress impact decision making, leadership effectiveness, and school culture.
- Develop strategies to maintain personal well-being by learning practical approaches such as setting boundaries, delegating responsibilities, and building supportive leadership networks.
- Create sustainable leadership practices by developing personalized wellness plans that allow leaders to care for themselves while continuing to support their school communities.

## Alexander McNeece

### **Practices That Healthy Cultures Adopt: Cooperative Learning Strategies in Classrooms and Staff Meetings**

Healthy school cultures seek practices that help all students learn. Research shows cooperative classroom activities support struggling students while also scaffolding autonomy to develop independent learners. This is not a sit-and-get presentation; participants should be prepared to learn by doing!

Participants in this session:

- Acquire multiple student cooperative learning strategies that grow students' level of competence and help all students engage in learning.
- Explore how these strategies develop student autonomy and practice that teachers can use to support that autonomy.
- Learn connections between using cooperative learning strategies and building a classroom culture of engagement.

## Anthony Muhammad

### **Transforming School Culture: New Insights**

Anthony Muhammad addresses the issue of conflicting agendas within schools. A high-performing school has a very clear purpose: high levels of learning for all students. Participants examine the barriers to aligning individual agendas with the organization's agenda and what *all* parties must do to develop the synergy necessary to guarantee learning. The theoretical framework developed by Dr. Muhammad in the book *Transforming School Culture: How to Overcome Staff Division*, 2nd ed. (Solution Tree, 2018) is examined as the basis for developing a collaborative culture.

Participants learn:

- How staff division develops and how to prevent it
- Strategies that heal old social and professional wounds
- How to create an environment where every professional can thrive
- How to prioritize and promote student needs beyond test scores and student labels

## KEYNOTE

## Mario I. Acosta

### **Taking Action: School Culture and Student Success**

Cultivating effective school culture is the foundation for a successful school. School culture represents the collective identity of the school, therefore playing a critical role in shaping the overall work climate, employee engagement, productivity, and achievement of the school's goals. Culture is an intangible yet influential aspect that guides attitudes and behaviors of individuals within the school and contributes to its unique identity and success.

In this keynote, Mario I. Acosta overviews the components of effective school culture and makes connections to the pivotal role of adult behavior in shaping the educational experience for students. Dr. Acosta equips participants with research-based strategies to foster a positive and inclusive school culture, thereby empowering participants to create an environment where each student, teacher, and staff member thrives academically, emotionally, and professionally.

Participants in this session:

- Reflect on key learnings from the institute.
- Understand the components of school culture and how adult behavior has a direct impact on student success.
- Audit and leverage the strengths of their school's existing culture to design improvement actions.