



Building a Better Assessment Future

Blazing a Trail to Student Success!

August 5–6, 2025 • 8:30 AM – 4:00 PM

Kellogg Center, East Lansing, MI

Breakout sessions by strand

Use the color key below to choose breakout sessions based on topic strands.

Leadership

Systems

Classroom

DAY ONE • TUESDAY, AUGUST 5

TIME	EVENT
8:30–8:45 AM	Welcome Kathy Dewsbury-White
8:45–9:00 AM	Conference Overview Ellen Vorenkamp
9:00–10:15 AM	Keynote: Matt Townsley <i>Five Leadership Actions for Advancing Student-Centered Assessment and Grading Practices</i> Implementing meaningful assessment and grading reforms, such as standards-based grading, serves as a powerful catalyst for enhancing student learning and success. However, this change can also be contentious among stakeholders. News and social media often depict contrarians appearing at parent-teacher conferences, and even school board meetings, demanding a return to traditional grading practices. As education leaders initiate and maintain student-centered grading, they must understand common obstacles and apply key strategies to address inevitable opposition effectively. In this engaging keynote, Matt Townsley will explore five leadership actions for advancing student-centered grading practices. Whether your school is initiating systemic reforms to assessment and grading or is already well underway, you will benefit from Matt's practical approach to synthesizing research and sharing real-world examples from schools.

Breakout Sessions — Block A

10:30–11:45 AM A1: Igniting Student Creativity: Assessing the Creative Process in the Arts

John Churchville, Heather Vaughan-Southard

Preparing students for the future requires direct experience with creativity, expression, and operating from a clear point of view. This session introduces how assessment in the arts supports student voice, choice, and expression in the arts and beyond. This leads to engagement, achievement, and disciplinary literacy that set students up for life, learning, and the pursuit of happiness.

10:30–11:45 AM A2: Blazing Trails: Phoenix Union’s Transformative Journey in Balanced Assessment

Karen Cárdenas, Samantha Middagh

Journey with Phoenix Union High School District as we unveil our strategic blueprint for educational transformation through Professional Learning Communities (PLCs). Over three years, we’ve systematically redesigned our approach, starting with a Guaranteed Viable Curriculum (GVC) and essential standards, using PLCs and data as the catalyst for unifying Multi-Tiered Systems of Support (MTSS) across three critical pillars: District Leadership, Site Leadership, and Classroom Teachers. This session provides an authentic roadmap for revolutionizing teaching, learning, and assessment through intentional, collaborative approaches.

10:30–11:45 AM A3: Making History Class Culturally Responsive Again

Matt Vriesman

How can we transform history classrooms to truly reflect and empower the diverse student populations we serve? Seven years ago, Kentwood Public Schools faced a turning point when our award-winning social studies program no longer yielded the success it once had. Recognizing that all education is culturally responsive, we committed to rebuilding our curriculum, teaching practices, and assessments to better align with the cultures represented in our district. Central to this transformation has been innovative assessment practices, including grading for mastery on AP essays, which has been instrumental in tripling AP class enrollment, increasing African American student participation in AP Histories by 300%, and reviving a state championship-winning civics competition team. In this session, participants will learn practical strategies for designing culturally responsive assessments that empower students, strengthen engagement, and transform outcomes.

10:30–11:45 AM A4: Unpacking Instructional Utility: A new way forward

Aneesha Badrinaryan, Julianna Charles Brown

As states continue pursuing innovations that are designed to center positive impact on instruction as a first order priority, they are confronting the question: what actually renders an assessment “instructionally useful”? This discussion aims to unpack how instructional utility should be defined, examines how a narrow definition of instructional utility may limit the success of initial innovative assessment designs and pilots, and envisions

a new way forward for the middle ground approach. We will engage current educators and policymakers together in a discussion about the type and frequency of data teachers and instructional leaders really need when making instructional decisions. By taking a fuller view of the type of data that constitutes “instructional utility” we will seize on the momentum of a willingness to collect data more frequently than annually, unpack the notion that academic outcome data alone are enough to guide instructional decisions, and propose viable measures that can have positive instructional impact within demonstrated possibilities for innovative design.

12:00–12:45 PM Lunch

12:45–1:00 PM Field Notes

1:00–2:15 PM Keynote: Brandi Hinnant-Crawford

Blazing Ahead: One [PDSA] Cycle at a Time

The science of improvement has one goal: to get better faster. It is one thing to know what to do; it is a different thing to get individuals to adopt or adapt practices that counter what they have always done. The field of assessment has made great strides, and we know how to design and employ assessments that both provide feedback to students and information to educators. Yet, the shift from knowledge to practice requires more than simply telling educators there is a new and better way.

Improvement science takes the pragmatic question of *what works* and makes it more specific, by asking *what works, for whom, and under what circumstances*. The context specificity of improvement allows practitioners to be innovators as they test the merit of different practices for their efficacy. Informed by its own pragmatic assessment, called practical measures, improvement science offers a user-friendly methodology for trying, changing, adopting, adapting, and implementing new practices within the field. By providing educators with a framework to taste and see, improvement empowers while changing practice. Let improvement be part of the strategy to change the way we do assessment; we can blaze the trail to equitable education—one PDSA cycle at a time.

Breakout Sessions — Block B

2:30–3:45 PM

B1: The Future of Assessment: Innovative tools to measure durable skills in real time

Susan Bell

This session describes the “Skills for the Future” initiative a research-based suite of assessments and tools that provide actionable insights on the essential skills necessary for success in school and work in the 21st century. Led by the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching and ETS and piloted in five states—the suite of assessments moves away from seat time to competency-based learning records and focuses on three durable skills: Communication, Collaboration and Critical Thinking. The session answers these three questions: How might we measure student academic learning more equitably and effectively? What is the vision for a future of academic assessments that integrates artificial intelligence and advances

student learning? Where do gaps exist in current assessment systems and how might new approaches lead to system improvements?

2:30–3:45 PM

B2: Empowering Student Self-Directed Learning Through the Formative Assessment Process

Hilary Johannes, Tara Kintz

Student self-directed learning is central to the formative assessment process. A primary goal of this process is for students to take ownership of their learning, recognize their strengths and areas for growth, and identify next steps in their learning. The community of learners is also essential—each student is part of a community in which they give and receive feedback and support one another in learning. The teacher is a member of this learning community who structures the classroom in a way that students can support one another, and the student and teacher are partners of equal importance to support one another as they grow in their skills. Highlights will include information on Portrait of a Learner, student led conferences, and portfolio evidence to showcase the formative assessment process and self-directed learning. Participants will learn from classroom examples as well as concrete information for how educators can develop their practice to support student ownership in the learning process.

2:30–3:45 PM

B3: Harnessing Street Data: Strategies to foster student belonging through inquiry

Amy Colton

Discover how inquiry-based strategies can help educators gather “street data” directly from students to deepen their understanding of individual needs, experiences, and perspectives. This interactive breakout session will explore practical techniques for leveraging these insights to create inclusive environments that nurture a sense of belonging for all students. Participants will leave with actionable tools to implement inquiry-driven practices in their classrooms and build stronger, more meaningful connections with their students. Join us to reimagine how student voices can transform teaching and learning!

2:30–3:45 PM

B4: Does Your Assessment System Really Support Teaching & Learning?

Steven Snead

You’ve got lots of assessments, but do you have the ideal culture in your school/district to support teaching & learning using those assessments? In this interactive session, be prepared to physically move, individually reflect, and collaboratively connect around evidence-based practices in assessment that make for a strong culture that supports quality teaching and learning. Using the Understanding Assessment Culture Guide created by the National Center for Assessment, we’ll engage in critical conversation about assessment culture, spanning from less supportive to more supportive of teaching & learning. We’ll model how you can use this guide to pinpoint areas for growth in your class, school, or district assessment practices, and provide you with free copies of the guide for use in your work.

3:45–4:00 PM

Break

4:00–4:30 PM Reflection
4:30–5:30 PM Mix & Mingle reception

DAY TWO • WEDNESDAY, AUGUST 6

7:30–8:15 AM Hot breakfast and coffee

8:30–9:15 AM Student Panel

Breakout Sessions — Block C

9:30–10:45 AM **C1: Building educator assessment literacy through classroom task improvement and alignment processes**

Melissa Spadin, John Spiegel

This session will explore two different projects for building educator assessment literacy; one through a process for improving assessment task quality with student input and the other focused on alignment to specific practices and concepts in NGSS. Attendees will learn about the original design and our successes/challenges, experience the improvement/alignment processes, and take away resources and tools for implementation in their own setting.

9:30–10:45 AM **C2: From Start to Success: Fostering FAME Teams in Wayne Westland Schools**

Stephanie Niedermeyer, John Ross, Julie Wakefield

Learn how the Wayne-Westland High School Instructional Coach Team began their FAME Team (Formative Assessment for Michigan Educators) journey and the growth their teams have made so far. Experience a variety of FAME strategies that have been implemented successfully in the classroom, while also preparing to boost the Formative Assessment Process in your schools.

9:30–10:45 AM **C3: Practical Steps and Lessons Learned: Help your district ensure coherence in a balanced assessment system**

Amy Hodgson, Leah Braman

Hear how a district was able to create systems through the creation of shared, written expectations and guidance to keep all staff on track and to ensure coherence, even in the midst of staff turnover. Specific documents and examples will be shared.

9:30–10:45 AM **C4: Harnessing Stakeholder Data in District Strategic Planning**

Bré Bartels, Sunil Joy, Veronica Lake, Carrie Tellerico

Discover how Kentwood Public Schools (KPS), Michigan's most diverse district and the sixth most diverse in the nation, developed a transformative strategic plan that prioritizes equity and innovation. This session provides a detailed overview of KPS's data-driven strategic planning process, which emphasizes amplifying the voices of its diverse stakeholders. Participants will learn how KPS harnessed stakeholder feedback to shape district goals, develop

actionable work plans, and establish an accountability mechanism through its Strategic Plan Dashboard. Gain practical insights into engaging diverse communities, setting measurable objectives, and designing transparent tools to track progress. Walk away inspired and equipped with strategies to create or enhance a dynamic strategic planning process in your own district.

10:45–11:00 AM Break

11:00 AM–12:15 PM Keynote: Lee Ann Jung

Assessing Students, not Standards: Keeping Students at the Center

Over the past two decades, the focus on academic standards has transformed assessment systems, moving us beyond outdated and harmful grading practices. The assessment work in countless schools has been both groundbreaking and exciting! Yet, as we have elevated standards to center stage, we must ask: is there room left for teaching and assessing the transferable skills students need most to thrive in life?

In this session, we will examine the balance between measuring content standards and cultivating transferable skills that lay outside them. Specifically, we will explore the pivotal role of metacognition—how students reflect on and regulate their thinking.

To what extent do we explicitly teach and assess metacognitive skills, and what might change if we prioritized them more? We will consider how opening multiple pathways for students to demonstrate their learning can ignite engagement, strengthen self-efficacy, and deepen metacognition. We will explore a common misunderstanding of the terms formative and summative that serves as a barrier to providing multiple pathways. Together, we will envision assessment as more than a tool to prepare students as experts in content—but as a tool to nurture them as experts in learning.

12:15–12:30 PM Closing

12:30–2:00 PM Lunch and Team Time

REGISTER



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Discounted pricing for early registration before May 31, 2025

SCECH: 9.5 credits available



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