
Event Agenda

Religious and Independent School Educator's Conference

Wednesday, November 12, 2025

Breakfast

7:00 AM – 8:30 AM | Location: EFGH

Continental Breakfast

Opening Session!

8:30 AM – 9:10 AM | Location: EFGH

Invocation - Sara Seligson

Welcome - Jim Cultrara

Conversation with Elizabeth and Bill Reid

Conversation with ORISS and PDRC

9:10 AM – 10:00 AM | Location: EFGH

Conversation with Giovanni Virgiglio, Executive Coordinator, Althea Johnson McNally, Director, Alicia Hennessey, Supervisor in School Business Management, and Nicole Henderson, Supervisor of Education Programs, ORISS.

Greetings from Dr. Anita Batisti and Stefanie Reda, NYS PDRC.

Child Nutrition - NYSED Short Session

10:10 AM – 10:40 AM | Location: Schenectady/Troy

NYSED Short Sessions are 30-minute presentations that provide concise overviews of key programs and initiatives from specific NYSED offices. Each session includes a brief presentation followed by time for Q&A, giving participants the chance to learn about current priorities, updates, and resources directly from state representatives. These sessions are an excellent way to stay informed and engage in focused discussions about the work and support available through NYSED.

CTLE & Certification NYSED Short Session

10:10 AM – 10:40 AM | Location: Salon A

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ESSA Funded Programs (Equitable Services) NYSED Short Session

10:10 AM – 10:40 AM | Location: Salon B

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Health Services NYSED Short Session

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Office of Early Learning NYSED Short Session

10:10 AM – 10:40 AM | Location: Salon D

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ORISS Fiscal Programs (MTS, AMTS, NPSE, Mandated Services, AIS)

10:10 AM – 10:40 AM | Location: Empire Room

NYSED Short Sessions are 30-minute presentations designed to provide a concise overview of key programs and initiatives from ORISS Fiscal, including MST (Math, Science & Technology), AMTS (Academic Intervention and Mandated Services), MSR (Mandated Services Reimbursement), AIS (Academic Intervention Services), and NPSE (Nonpublic School Enrollment). Each session features a short presentation followed by time for Q&A, allowing participants to hear directly from ORISS representatives about current priorities, reimbursement timelines, required paperwork, and updated guidance. These sessions are an excellent way to stay informed, clarify procedures, and engage in focused discussions about the supports and resources available through NYSED.

NYSED Time to Consult

10:10 AM – 11:55 AM | Location: Albany/Colonie

Time to Consult sessions, offered by the New York State Education Department (NYSED), provide schools with a valuable opportunity for personalized dialogue and support during the conference. These sessions are designed for one-on-one conversations in which school leaders can engage directly with NYSED representatives to discuss questions, challenges, or initiatives specific to their schools. Whether seeking clarification on state requirements, guidance on program implementation, or tailored feedback, *Time to Consult* offers a focused setting for meaningful Q&A and problem-solving. This option ensures that every school has the chance to receive individualized attention and actionable insights directly from NYSED experts.

COFFEE BREAK & light snack

10:30 AM – 11:30 AM | Location: Hallway

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Every Leader is an Artist (Keynote Speaker)

12:00 PM – 1:00 PM | Location: EFGH

What does art have to do with leadership and education? Our research shows that there is a significant, critical interaction between the two. The talk is an outgrowth of our management research on leading with kindness and the power of arts in education. There are

some surprising results!

Speaker



William Baker

Journalist in Residence | Fordham University

LUNCH

1:00 PM – 2:00 PM | Location: EFGH

Kosher Buffet in EFGH

Halal Buffet in EFGH

Standard Buffet in the Hallway

Wisdom Keepers

2:15 PM – 3:15 PM | Location: Schenectady/Troy

This is a television documentary series produced for PBS which aired in June. The series is now streaming on pbs.org and is being offered to libraries by PBS books. Ray Suarez interviews some of the profound thinkers of our time about making sense of a confused and polarized world. This session will include a video preview and a discussion regarding the selection of guests and classroom implementation strategies for the video.

Speaker



William Baker

Journalist in Residence | Fordham University

Mission Matters: Relational Fundraising in Religious and Independent Education

2:15 PM – 3:15 PM | Location: Salon A

This session explores how mission-driven storytelling and authentic donor engagement can strengthen advancement work. By focusing on listening, personalized communication and aligning fundraising with core values, participants will gain practical strategies to re-engage donors and build long term support for religious and independent schools.

Speaker



Ger Lavery

President | Academy of Mount St Ursula

Three Steps to Project-Based Learning

2:15 PM – 3:15 PM | Location: Salon B

During this hands-on workshop, leaders will learn how to begin project based learning (PBL) in their schools, and participants will brainstorm and design rich PBL experiences that focus on key learning targets while making authentic connections to real-world and community happenings.

Speaker



Jen Hesseltine

Founder | Marker Box EDU

AI and Lesson Planning

2:15 PM – 3:15 PM | Location: Salon C

Collaborate with ChatGPT to design detailed, standards-aligned lesson plans for high school English and ESL students. Together, we generate weekly schedules, scaffolded reading guides, rubrics, assessments, and thematic integrations that incorporate leadership, biblical principles, and student centered strategies. Use AI not to replace planning, but to streamline and enhance it with creativity, structure, and insight.

Speaker



David Pritchard

Principal | Houghton Academy

The Joy Equation: Rewiring School Culture with Purpose-Driven Learning

2:15 PM – 3:15 PM | Location: Salon D

This session introduces the "Joy Equation" a framework developed at the Randolph School that positions joy as a strategic lever for school culture and learning. Participants will explore how aligning autonomy, authenticity, and connection has led to 95% student retention and 100% teacher retention over four years, even amidst sector-wide burnout. Attendees will leave with tools to diagnose and redesign their own environments for lasting engagement and well-being.

Speaker



Josh Kaplan
Director | The Randolph School

Instilling a Culture of Philanthropy (or What Each One of Us Does Reflects All of Us)

2:15 PM – 3:15 PM | Location: Albany/Colonie

Fundraising doesn't just happen on the outside of your school. Building a culture of philanthropy starts on the insight first. Faculty, staff, and students need to first understand the importance of all being on the same page and being able to speak consistently about the essence of their school *before* they can expect those on the outside to appreciate it and support it. This session will discuss ways to inform and engage your internal stakeholders on the meaning of philanthropy, its importance, and its impact on the sustainability of your school.

Speaker



Ray Witkowski
Director of Advancement | Diocese of Albany

AI, Equity, and School Leadership

3:25 PM – 4:25 PM | Location: Albany/Colonie

Participants will explore the intersection of artificial intelligence, equity, and school leadership by examining how emerging technologies can both illuminate and exacerbate systemic disparities in education. Through an equity lens, they will learn to uncover structural barriers and develop actionable strategies to foster more just and inclusive school communities.

Speaker



Dr. Gerald Cattaro
Professor/ Executive Director | Fordham University

New York State Seal of Biliteracy

3:25 PM – 4:25 PM | Location: Schenectady/Troy

Have you been thinking about exploring the idea of starting a NYS Seal of Biliteracy program at your school? This program has experienced tremendous growth since it was first offered in 2015-2016. In 2024-25, more than 550 NYS high schools offered the Seal to over 12,00 students. This session will review what the seal of Biliteracy is, who can earn this distinction, what benefits it brings to students, educators, and schools, as well as what it takes to start a Seal of Biliteracy program. A wealth of digital resources will be provided, and time will be allotted during the session for questions from participants. Come and learn about how you can honor your English Language Learners (ELLs), your World Language students, and your Heritage Language Speakers who are developing the 21st century skill of biliteracy.

Speakers



Francisco Garcia-Quezada
NYC RBERN- CEP @ GSE -Fordham University



Candace Black
NYSED

Culture Captured: Using Media to Build Relationships and Strengthen School Community

3:25 PM – 4:25 PM | Location: Salon A

This workshop will explore how photos, videos, and digital storytelling can highlight student life, celebrate achievements, and foster connection among students, staff, and families. Participants will learn practical strategies to use media as a powerful tool to build school spirit, showcase culture, and create a sense of belonging.

Speaker



Vincent Albrecht
Principal | St. John the Baptist Diocesan HS

Building Student Confidence and Motivation

3:25 PM – 4:25 PM | Location: Salon B

Discover why many students struggle with confidence and motivation, exploring the effects of root causes such as learned helplessness, limited play, and fixed mindset thinking. This session will help equip educators with practical tools and strategies to help students build resilience.

Speaker

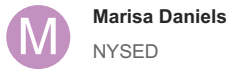


Yaakov Mintz
Educational Advocate | Work At It

Students with Disabilities Parentally Placed in Nonpublic Schools

3:25 PM – 4:25 PM | Location: Salon C

Speaker

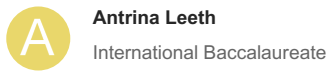


Be a Leader of Change- Collaboratively!

3:25 PM – 4:25 PM | Location: Salon D

Bridging members of school communities together around change is never easy, but utilizing phase-based change management approaches and frameworks for continuous educator reflection can enhance and support innovative and often much-needed changes within a school to ensure effective educational experiences for students. The presentation will include interactive dialogue and real-life educational issues. Attendees will leave with customizable change implementation resources and best practices.

Speaker



Organizational Meetings

4:40 PM – 6:00 PM | Location: Various - see description

Catholic	Empire
Jewish	Salon A
Christian	Colonie
7th Day Adventist	Schedectady
Muslim	Troy
Lutheran	Albany
Unaffiliated	Salon B
Historically Black	Conference Room
Montessori	Salon D
Greek	Salon C

Organizational Meetings at the conference offer a welcoming space for groups with shared missions to connect, collaborate, and explore topics that matter most to their schools. Open to all attendees, these sessions give organizations the freedom to set their own agenda, ask questions, and spark meaningful discussions. Come ready to share your experiences, exchange ideas, and leave with new insights and inspiration to support your school community.

Thursday, November 13, 2025

BREAKFAST

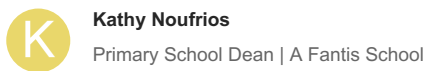
7:30 AM – 9:00 AM | Location: EFGH

Socratic Seminar: Bridging Critical Thinking and Social Intelligence

9:10 AM – 10:10 AM | Location: Schenectady/Troy

Discover how upper elementary educators can utilize the Socratic Seminar to encourage students ownership, promote critical thinking, and cultivate social awareness. This interactive session feature real classroom video that lays the foundation for the Socratic Seminar, structuring discussions that spark curiosity and foster the well-being of the whole child.

Speaker

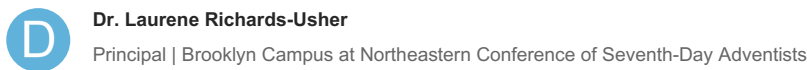


Aligning Teacher Growth with Student Success

9:10 AM – 10:10 AM | Location: Albany/Colonie

In this session, we'll explore how to design and implement professional learning experiences that are intentional, relevant, and aligned with the goals of student success.

Speaker



Informal Teacher Leadership - Inspiring and Supporting Teachers to Lead

9:10 AM – 10:10 AM | Location: Salon A

Our schools are filled with informal educational leaders who are ready to be challenged and supported. As leaders of religious and independent schools, we are invited to lead by inviting others to share their talents, insights, and ideas in initiating change and innovating in ways that help the entire school community grow and prosper. This session will explore how school leaders can help encourage, support, and grow leadership among informal educational leaders, focusing on a collaborative vision of leadership that allows for positive growth and change. The session will outline key strategies that leaders can employ to help foster a culture of leadership among those "informal leaders" in our schools. Session participants will also be encouraged to share their own best practices during the session.

Speaker



Dr. Richie Diaz

Principal | Cathedral Prep

NYS Assessments and Computer Based Testing

9:10 AM – 10:10 AM | Location: Salon B

This session, led by NYSED's Office of Standards and Assessment, will offer independent and religious school leaders a focused overview of New York's state tests, Regents exams, and the ongoing shift to computer-based testing. Attendees will learn about the phasing schedule, technical and logistical requirements, and supports available from the State. The session will also address how testing accommodations, security protocols, and scoring procedures will operate in the digital format. Participants will leave with clarity on how to align their schools' testing implementation plans with State expectations.

Speakers



Clara DeSorbo

Director - Test Administration | NYSED - Office of State Assessment



Nancy Viall

Director - Test Development | NYSED - Office of State Assessment



Emily Bryans

Associate in Educational Testing | NYSED - Office of State Assessment

Challenging Conversations with Families

9:10 AM – 10:10 AM | Location: Salon C

This session focuses on practical strategies and frameworks for approaching challenging discussion with empathy, clarity, and professionalism. Drawing from real experiences, insights will be shared on preparing for emotionally charged conversations, setting a tone of mutual respect, and maintaining strong school-family partnerships- even in moments of disagreement. The presentation will spark thoughtful dialogue among fellow school leaders and reinforce the importance of communication as a cornerstone of effective leadership.

Speaker



John-Paul Barnaba

Principal | Long Beach Catholic

The AI Ready School: Leading with Confidence, Integrity and Impact

9:10 AM – 10:10 AM | Location: Salon D

In this interactive session, participants will explore the essential capabilities every school must build to survive in the AI era. Through a guided self-assessment and reflection, leaders will evaluate their schools readiness across core areas, including teacher preparation, student AI literacy, academic integrity, online safety, and leadership competence. Participants will also complete a hands-on exercise to strengthen one common school practice, leaving with a tangible example of what AI readiness looks like in action.

Speaker



Dr. Jamiylah Jones

Founder and CEO | Creative Transformations

COFFEE BREAK & light snack

10:00 AM – 11:00 AM | Location: Hallway

From Incubation to Inspiration: How Constructivist Learning Hatches Enduring Understanding

10:20 AM – 11:20 AM | Location: Salon D

At Randolph School, a simple curiosity about chickens grew into a joyful, interdisciplinary learning experience that united science, math, writing, art, and environmental stewardship. *The Chicken Coop Project* showed how authentic, hands-on inquiry can meet academic standards while also nurturing collaboration, responsibility, and wonder.

This session invites independent and religious school leaders to see how constructivist education, where children build knowledge through experience, can strengthen learning outcomes and community connection, and so much more. When students are engaged in meaningful work, behaviors improve, teachers feel renewed purpose, and families recognize the value of a school that teachers through joy. With stories, visuals, and teacher/ student reflections, participants will explore how this approach not only leads to enduring understanding but also drives retention, deepens belonging, and helps schools thrive.

Speaker



Josh Kaplan
Director | The Randolph School

Mission-fueled Transformation

10:20 AM – 11:20 AM | Location: Schenectady/Troy

Participants will reflect on what their school's mission is good for- how does that mission drive the transformation they seek for their school, their faculty's engagement, their students' understanding of the mission, and parents' awareness.

Speaker



Sr. Remigia Kushner
Consultant Educational Leadership

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Speaker



Vincent Albrecht
Principal | St. John the Baptist Diocesan HS

Differentiated Assessment Strategies for PK-12 Classrooms

10:20 AM – 11:20 AM | Location: Salon B

In this workshop, leaders will explore practical and effective differentiated strategies that honor the various learning needs, interests, and skill levels of students. Participants will learn how to develop assessments that align with their learning standards while providing multiple pathways for students to demonstrate knowledge and skills. This session will include real-world examples and help you reimagine assessment as a tool for both accountability and student empowerment.

Speaker



Jen Hesselstine
Founder | Marker Box EDU

Navigating AI for Administrators

10:20 AM – 11:20 AM | Location: Salon C

The rapid advancement of Artificial Intelligence (AI) presents both exciting opportunities and crucial considerations for K-12 education. This workshop is designed for district and school administrators seeking to understand, implement, and oversee the integration of AI within their school communities. Participants will gain practical knowledge and insights into leveraging AI tools to enhance their own effectiveness, empower teachers and students, and develop essential policies for navigating this evolving technological landscape. This session will also review safeguards and ethical considerations.

Speaker



Emily Guarnieri
Assistant Superintendent | Diocese of Rockville Centre

Graduation Measures

10:20 AM – 11:20 AM | Location: Empire

This NYSED-led session will provide an overview of the forthcoming changes to New York State's Graduation Measures and their implications for independent and religious schools. Participants will gain insight into the proposed shifts, including the move toward

performance-based assessments, the unified diploma structure, and the Portrait of a Graduate framework. The session will highlight key timelines, compliance considerations, and opportunities for curricular alignment under substantial equivalence requirements. School leaders will leave with a clearer understanding of how these changes may affect instruction, assessment, and student pathways to graduation.

Speaker



Santosha Oliver, Ph.D.

Assistant Commissioner | NYSED - Office of Standards and Instructional Programs

Head, Heart, Hands: Animating our Shared Mission

11:30 AM – 12:00 PM | Location: Salon ABCD

This interactive talk explores how using the Ignatian three part model of *head* (intellect), *heart* (beliefs), and *hands* (operationalized action) can help your educational institution to clarify and propel its mission and shared values in word and deed.

Speaker



Robert Parmach

Senior Director of Ignatian Mission and Education | Fordham University