



13TH ANNUAL



RAPSA
FORUM

EVENT PROGRAM

REACHING AT-PROMISE
STUDENTS ASSOCIATION

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2025
NOV 3-5
SAN DIEGO, CA

Dear RAPSA Attendees:

Welcome to the 13th Annual Reaching At-Promise Students Association (RAPSA) Conference! It is an honor to welcome you to this gathering of passionate educators, leaders, and advocates who are dedicated to advancing equity and opportunity for atpromise youth.

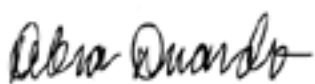
I extend my deepest gratitude to RAPSA for creating a space where we not only explore evidence-based strategies, resources, and solutions that accelerate educational opportunity, but also build a community where educators and advocates feel valued, supported, and empowered. This conference is a place where people of all backgrounds, united by a shared commitment to honoring the potential of every young person, come together to celebrate the brilliance of our students and reaffirm our collective mission to transform education.

We recognize that our nation's educational system has not always served all students equitably, but together, we have the power to reshape it for a more just and inclusive future. RAPSA is steadfast in its commitment to dismantling systemic barriers and ensuring that at-promise students receive the high-quality education and support they deserve. Through professional development, networking, and innovative partnerships, RAPSA equips educators with the knowledge, tools, and community support necessary to foster meaningful and lasting change for opportunity youth.

Equity in education is not just about academic achievement—it is about nurturing the whole child. It is about ensuring that every student feels seen, heard, and supported in their academic, social, and emotional development. It is about using data not just to identify gaps, but to drive systemwide changes that put students at the center of decision-making.

When we see differently, we act differently. This conference represents another important step forward in our shared mission to create educational systems where every at-promise student has access to a world-class education. Thank you for your leadership, your passion, and your unwavering dedication to the students, families, and communities you serve.

In partnership,



Debra Duardo, M.S.W., Ed.D.
Superintendent



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AGENDA AT A GLANCE

PRE-CONFERENCE | NOVEMBER 3

9:00 AM REGISTRATION OPENS

10:00 AM - 11:30 AM PRE-CONFERENCE SESSIONS I

- Building Futures Through Partnership – Trades & Financial Empowerment
- Youth at the Table: Redefining Partnership in Education & Workforce

11:30 AM - 12:30 PM Independent Lunch Break before afternoon sessions

12:30 PM - 2:00 PM PRE-CONFERENCE SESSIONS II

- Workforce Literacy
- YouthBuild: A Model for Positive Youth Development

2:00 PM - 2:30 PM BREAK

2:30 PM - 4:00 PM PRE-CONFERENCE SESSIONS III

- Building Momentum: A Continuous Improvement Approach to School Success
- Pandemic Pivot to Proof Point: Workforce Solutions from New Orleans

4:00 PM - 5:00 PM FREE TIME

5:00 PM - 6:30 PM WELCOME RECEPTION

Passion Award Announcement and light dinner provided

STRANDS

- Nationwide Alternative Accountability
- Policy & Advocacy
- Leadership in Times of Change
- Teaching for Progress
- Youth Innovation and Workforce Transformation

AGENDA AT A GLANCE | TUE, NOV 4

7:30 AM - 8:30 AM

REGISTRATION AND CONTINENTAL BREAKFAST

8:30 AM - 9:30 AM

OPENING GENERAL SESSION

Welcome to the RAPSA Forum! Vision Award Announcement

9:30 AM - 10:00 AM

BREAK

10:00 AM - 11:00 AM

BREAKOUT SESSIONS

- Alumni Lab: Pivoting from Uncertainty to Opportunity
- Closing the Comprehension Gap: Develop Language Comprehension, Expression, and Critical Thinking for All Learners
- Counting What Matters
- Policy Exchange: Innovations in Alt Ed / From the Schoolyard to the Statehouse
- Rewriting the script: How a state policy collaborative is changing the rules of high school alternatives

11:00 AM - 11:15 AM

COFFEE BREAK

11:15 AM - 12:15 PM

BREAKOUT SESSIONS

- From summer slide to summer stride: A no-gap approach to student reengagement
- Improving Educational Outcomes for Foster Youth through Comprehensive Warp-Around Support and Collaboration with San Diego County Office of Education
- Lifting the Bar: A Platform to Strengthen Relationships for Students and Elicit Greater Support from Educators
- Measuring What Matters: Designing Equitable Accountability Metrics for Innovative Education Models
- Pipeline to Possibility: Linking Pre-Apprenticeship to California Community College Pathways

12:15 PM - 1:00 PM

LUNCH BREAK

Lunch Provided by RAPSA

STRANDS

- Nationwide Alternative Accountability
- Policy & Advocacy
- Leadership in Times of Change
- Teaching for Progress
- Youth Innovation and Workforce Transformation

AGENDA AT A GLANCE | TUE, NOV 4

1:00 PM - 2:00 PM KEYNOTE SESSION

Afternoon Keynote Mary Helen Immordino-Yang. Heart Award Announcement.

2:00 PM - 2:30 PM VENDOR SESSIONS

Not Everyone Learns the Same! - Bright Thinker

Young People Rising through Big Picture Learning

2:30 PM - 3:30 PM BREAKOUT SESSIONS

Youth Meeting

- A Grassroots Approach to Refining Washington's Youth Reengagement Policy Framework
- Aligning Workforce Needs & Assets: Leveraging Spatial Data to Visualize Talent, Opportunity, and Equity
- Raising the Accountability Bar for Alternative Schools and At-Promise Youth in California
- What Opportunity Youth Taught Us About Building Better Systems
- The Power of Community Partnerships

3:30 PM - 3:45 PM BREAK

3:45 PM - 4:45 PM BREAKOUT SESSIONS

- Flipping the Script: Building value for educational journeys for opportunity and at-risk youth through the power of community and work
- From Education to Employment: Building a Tech-Enabled Pathway for Every Learner
- Love and Breakthrough Leadership: The Courage to Do School Differently
- Unleashing the Potential of Opportunity Youth As Leaders In and Out of the Classroom
- Whose Success Counts? Amplifying Student Voice in Alternative School Accountability

AGENDA AT A GLANCE | WED, NOV 5

7:30 AM - 8:30 AM **BREAKFAST**

8:30 AM - 9:30 AM **GENERAL SESSION - KEYNOTE**

Keynote Barry E. Knight and Courage Award Announcement

9:30 AM - 9:45 AM **BREAK**

9:45 AM - 10:45 AM **BREAKOUT SESSIONS**

- Making it Make Sense: How a Coalition Built Clarity, Credibility, and Momentum for Opportunity Youth
- Monitoring What Matters: Framework for Strengthening Implementation and Accountability
- Partnering with County Boards To Advocate for Court and Community School Students
- The Power of Meaning-Making: Neuropsychological Insights into Teaching and Learning with Opportunity Youth
- UCLA Center for the Developing Adolescent: Leveraging Developmental Science to Support Economic Agency in Young People

10:45 AM - 11:00 AM **COFFEE BREAK**

11:00 AM - 12:00 PM **BREAKOUT SESSIONS**

- Centering Student Engagement: A Framework for Youth-Led Advocacy at the State Level
- Fewer Chutes, More Ladders: Preventing Juvenile Legal Involvement and Ensuring Successful School Reentry for California's Youth.
- Rethinking the High School Diploma: Redefining Success through the New York State Portrait of a Graduate
- The Cavalry is Coming: Opportunity Schools for 2 Million Students in Crisis
- The Impact of Measure Alignment on Alternative Education Campuses and Their Students

12:00 PM - 12:15 PM **BREAK BEFORE LUNCH**

AGENDA AT A GLANCE | WED, NOV 5

12:15 PM - 1:30 PM **Alternative Education Funders Panel Lunch: Stuart Foundation**

General session with a panel. Lunch provided by RAPSA

1:30 PM - 1:45 PM **BREAK**

1:45 PM - 2:45 PM **BREAKOUT SESSIONS**

- Break the Mold: Rethinking Accountability for At-Promise Students
- From Dropout to Degrees: How Open Doors programs are leveraging legislation to reimagine reengagement in Washington State

STRANDS

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**Download
our event
app CVENT**

FULL EVENT AGENDA | PRE-CONF

10:00 AM - 11:30 AM

BREAKOUT SESSIONS

Building Futures Through Partnership – Trades & Financial Empowerment

Celia Garcia, Kris Georgeson

This session highlights a powerful collaboration between ABC SoCal Trades Apprenticeship and the SoCal Financial Education Center—two organizations creating real, lasting impact in our communities.

ABC SoCal provides a clear path to career advancement in the skilled trades, offering competitive wages, a team-based learning environment, strong mentorship, and a sense of purpose. In partnership, the SoCal Financial Education Center delivers financial literacy programs that help participants build long-term security, manage money wisely, and plan for their future. Together, they empower individuals to build not just careers—but stable, fulfilling lives. Join us for an inspiring and interactive session featuring:

- Real stories of transformation from program participants
- A guided activity to reflect on career and financial goals
- A vision for how workforce development and financial education can work hand-in-hand

We hope you'll be part of this dynamic launch to the conference and explore ways to connect, support, or expand this impactful work.

Youth at the Table: Redefining Partnership in Education & Workforce

Moderator: Alex Guerrero

Panelists: Roberta Frame, Abby Rubtsova, Alaska Romero

How do we move beyond simply listening to young people to building true partnership with them in shaping programs, schools, and workforce systems? This interactive session features young leaders from our Horizons 32K Youth Advisory Council, who bring lived experience with navigating education, workforce programs, and support systems. Guided by a series of reflective questions, panelists will share their personal journeys, challenge common misconceptions about youth, and highlight moments where they felt truly supported by educators or programs. They will also discuss the role that trusted adults and effective initiatives played in helping them stay engaged or re-engage in their education and career journeys. Through storytelling and lived experience, participants will gain insight into what authentic youth partnership looks like and leave with practical ideas for building meaningful collaboration with young people in schools, workforce programs, and beyond.

11:30 AM - 12:30 PM

LUNCH BREAK

Independent Lunch Break before afternoon sessions

STRANDS

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FULL EVENT AGENDA | PRE-CONF

12:30 PM - 2:00 PM

BREAKOUT SESSIONS

Workforce Literacy

Dane Puterbaugh

Buckeye Community Hope Foundation created a program called “Workforce Literacy” using money from the Future Forward Ohio initiative. This first of its kind program combines the science of reading, explicit literacy instruction, and career preparation. 10 sponsored schools participated over two years and saw increased test scores for participating students. The program created a replicable pedagogy and structure for sustainable success.

YouthBuild: A Model for Positive Youth Development

Frank Alvarez, Ely Flores, Michelle Fuentes-Miranda, Phil Matero, Jesse Noonan

In this fireside chat, representatives from the YouthBuild movement will share the transformative experience that young people have within YouthBuild programs. With its foundation in love and positive youth development, the in-person combination of education and workforce development has evidence-based results for at-risk youth. Since 1978, YouthBuild has created opportunities for over 210,000 young people in 9 countries and 49 US states and territories. Representatives from YouthBuild Charter School of California and YouthBuild Global, as well as YouthBuild alumni will engage in a conversation about the YouthBuild model and its history of impact.

12:30 PM - 2:00 PM

BREAK



FULL EVENT AGENDA | PRE-CONF

2:30 PM - 4:00 PM

PRE-CONFERENCE

Building Momentum: A Continuous Improvement Approach to School Success

Troy Dudley

In this session, you will explore the Balanced Accountability & School Improvement Cycle (BASIC), a powerful framework designed to help Alternative Education Campuses achieve continuous improvement and accountability. You will learn how the four stages—Exploration, Installation, Initial Implementation, and Full Implementation—work together to drive meaningful, sustainable change in school systems and practices.

Pandemic Pivot to Proof Point: Workforce Solutions from New Orleans

Jake Gleghorn

This session highlights how New Orleans Career Center's Rapid Reskill program became a proof point for a nationally recognized model of career and technical education post-pandemic. Co-designed with employers, the program demonstrated how barrier-removal strategies, hands-on training, and continuous feedback drive strong outcomes for opportunity youth learners (18-24). Presenters will share how Rapid Reskill's lessons now shape NOCC's other training programs—and how bold, rigorous self-evaluation can fuel innovation for educators, leaders, and policymakers everywhere.

4:00 PM - 5:00 PM

FREE TIME



Parsec Education's mission is to improve and transform K-12 education and student outcomes through modernizing, evaluating, improving, and standardizing the way schools view, interpret, and respond to data.

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EDUCATION & WORKFORCE WELCOME RECEPTION

5:00 PM - 6:30 PM

GARDEN BY THE BAY

Kick off the conference with an evening of connection and celebration. Enjoy a light dinner and refreshments as we officially open the event and honor this year's Passion Award recipient, presented by the WSJ Foundation.



OPENING GENERAL SESSION

8:30 AM - 9:30 AM

Begin the conference with a warm welcome from the Reaching At-Promise Students Association (RAPSA). This opening session sets the stage for inspiring conversations ahead and includes the presentation of the Vision Award.

10:00 AM - 11:00 AM

BREAKOUT SESSIONS

Alumni Lab: Pivoting from Uncertainty to Opportunity

Pagee Cheung

Through an intensive cohort-based workshop series, Alumni Lab helps opportunity youth gain entry to workforce development programs that lead to financially sustainable, personally meaningful careers. Alumni Lab helps students identify career paths that are appealing to them, and rediscover their confidence and sense of purpose that allows them to be successful.

Closing the Comprehension Gap: Develop Language Comprehension, Expression, and Critical Thinking for All Learners

Tom Mendoza

To engage in a communicating world, students must effectively comprehend language. Many curricula treat comprehension as a byproduct of background knowledge and vocabulary. This results in disadvantaged students being left behind. Participants will learn how the imagery-language connection, aligned with the Dual Coding Theory of cognition, is foundational to helping all students meet their potential. Instructional strategies will be introduced to develop imagery for listening and reading comprehension, vocabulary, language expression, and critical thinking.

Counting What Matters

Javier Guzman

Alternative schools need to develop the skills to tell their stories well. Often, we are solely using the metrics that have been imposed on us. This paints an incomplete picture that lacks complexity and nuance. To be more accurate, truthful, and rigorous in our storytelling, requires us to count what really matters. In this session, we will delve into strategies that help us reframe and message our work to our communities and the broader public.

Policy Exchange: Innovations in Alt Ed / From the Schoolyard to the Statehouse

Erica Stavis, Korinna Wolfe

Join us for a dynamic, solutions-driven ideas exchange where district leaders and authorizers from across the country share policy innovations in alternative education. This session offers a rare opportunity to explore what's being piloted on the ground — from school-level initiatives to state policy shifts — and how local experimentation is informing broader systems change. Whether you're scaling a policy, refining a pilot, or just beginning to explore new pathways, this exchange is designed to spark collaboration and inspire actionable next steps.

Rewriting the script: How a state policy collaborative is changing the rules of high school alternatives

Ashlie Denton, Taylor Burtch

Inappropriate and restrictive state policies often stand in the way of high school alternatives' efforts to implement student-centered approaches. This session will share learnings from a national collaborative—funded by the Annie E. Casey Foundation and led by Education Northwest—focused on transforming state policy on high school alternatives. Learn more about how our collaborative facilitated coalition-building and case-making for policy change, and walk away policy examples and tools to support your policy change efforts.



John Muir Charter Schools equip 14- to 26-year-olds to earn a high school diploma and prepare for a fulfilling career through job training and educational, social, and emotional support that fits into their lives. At JMCS, we fully believe you can graduate – because of and regardless of your experiences, skills, and dreams.

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11:15 AM - 12:15 PM

BREAKOUT SESSIONS

From summer slide to summer stride: A no-gap approach to student reengagement

Julie Petrokubi, Mandy Paradise, Melanie J. Olson

With state legislative funding, the Washington Open Doors Youth Reengagement Summer Pilot responds to the summer gap for reengaging youth. Grants supported ten community partnerships to expand summer learning, reengage youth who experienced detention or incarceration, and reduce barriers to school or work. An Education Northwest evaluation finds powerful outcomes for students and programs, especially related to career-connected learning and basic needs. Let's discuss how to keep youth both connected and thriving over the summer!

Improving Educational Outcomes for Foster Youth through Comprehensive Wrap-Around Support and Collaboration with San Diego County Office of Education

Jennifer Whitton, Ernesto Vizcarra

Youth in foster care endure multiple adverse childhood experiences that can create obstacles to educational achievement. Compared to non-foster care youth in California, youth in foster care are grossly underperforming academically. The Fostering Academic Success in Education (FASE) program aims to provide a comprehensive package of wrap-around supportive services to youth who enter the child welfare system, onsite in schools to enable them to reach educational success in high school and beyond.

Lifting the Bar: A Platform to Strengthen Relationships for Students and Elicit Greater Support from Educators

Dr. Greg Mariotti Walton Nikki Tognozzi

Strong relationships are at the heart of student success, yet too many young people go unseen by the adults who teach and support them. Lifting the Bar helps students share who they are and who they want to become, giving educators a simple way to build trust and connection. Originally designed for youth returning from the juvenile justice system, it has since expanded to support students in many other circumstances. We'll share the research behind the intervention, emerging insights across contexts, and interactive materials to facilitate meaningful discussions and practical strategies for implementation.

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■ **Measuring What Matters: Designing Equitable Accountability Metrics for Innovative Education Models**

Josh Charpentier

How can we redefine student success when outdated accountability metrics overlook the complexity of real student progress? This session introduces Map Academy's groundbreaking engagement phase framework and competency-based, self-paced model, designed to more equitably reflect the experiences of opportunity youth and learners with complex needs. Participants will leave with actionable strategies to redesign accountability systems that capture authentic growth.

Traditional accountability metrics often fail to capture the complexity of student success in schools designed to serve opportunity youth and learners whose educational journeys have been disrupted. Recognizing this challenge, Map Academy helped shape Massachusetts DESE's engagement phase framework, defining Minimally Connected, Partially Connected, and Connected phases to better reflect real student progress beyond outdated metrics.

12:15 PM - 1:00 PM

LUNCH BREAK



KEYNOTE:

Mary Helen Immordino-Yang

1:00 PM - 2:00 PM

Introducing our afternoon Keynote speaker, Mary Helen Immordino-Yang, a professor at the University of Southern California.

The Heart Award recipients will also be announced.



2:00 PM - 2:30 PM

VENDOR SESSIONS

Not Everyone Learns the Same!

Coach Joe Marino

Learn how to use Print OR Digital Curriculum with A-G UC approval, CA Standards and Customization features to help Students recover credit or receive Initial Credit K-12 Core, Fine Arts, CTE and Elective Courses!

Schools throughout CA are seeing a 20% or higher increase in engagement, credit recovery and graduation rates! Especially with SPED and ELLs!

Come learn from a Teacher who has used the methods, resources and activities to bring kids to the next level!

Young People Rising through Big Picture Learning

Isaak Egge

When students feel disconnected from school, real-world learning can reignite purpose. In this student-focused, hear how internships, access to mentors, and interest-driven projects help transform schools and redefine the concept of teaching and learning. As students stepped beyond the classroom, they build confidence, connections, and social capital. These aren't isolated stories, they're schoolwide shifts. Come ready to engage, ask questions, and rethink what it takes to activate students and expand their world.

2:30 PM - 3:30 PM

BREAKOUT SESSIONS

Youth Meeting

A Grassroots Approach to Refining Washington's Youth Reengagement Policy Framework

Jeremy Hurdus

With innovative legislation passed in 2010, Washington laid the foundation for a statewide youth reengagement system, known as Open Doors. Drawing on specific examples from individual programs, I explore how state policy, when implemented in contextually grounded ways, can serve the unique needs of distinct communities. I argue that a grassroots organization, in the process of being created, has the potential to transform the collective knowledge and experience of educators into improved legislation.

Aligning Workforce Needs & Assets: Leveraging Spatial Data to Visualize Talent, Opportunity, and Equity

Rachel Bereza

This session will showcase the San Diego Workforce Partnership's new interactive Workforce Needs and Assets Map, an interactive mapping tool designed to illuminate the varying needs of the region's workforce. By combining geographic information systems (GIS) with labor market and demographic data, the map helps policymakers, service providers, and employers visualize where opportunities are concentrated, where gaps exist, and how to align resources more effectively. Attendees will learn how this tool is being used to identify workforce deserts, support equitable access to training and quality jobs, and guide strategic investments that strengthen San Diego's economy and communities.

Raising the Accountability Bar for Alternative Schools and At-Promise Youth in California

Jorge Ruiz de Velasco, Joe Bishop

This session will focus on the status of accountability approaches and state policy regarding schools that serve At-Promise youth in California. Stanford researchers will preview findings from an on-going statewide study of how state policy affects the capacity and incentivizes for alternative high schools to provide the academic and critical support services that students need to succeed. The session will also review a series of case studies drawn from the California Learning Collaborative on Alternative Education. These case examples explore the emerging “better practices” and innovations that characterize more successful schools and that inform state high school redesign policy going forward.

What Opportunity Youth Taught Us About Building Better Systems

Lauri Collier, Ena Volic, Amber Chatman

Opportunity Youth want meaningful careers, but they often face major roadblocks: confusing referrals, inconsistent outreach, overwhelming enrollment paperwork, and work experiences that don't align with their goals. This interactive workshop shares findings from a Los Angeles case study on youth engagement that included focus groups with young people, workforce providers, and social workers.

We'll highlight what works: warm handoffs and three-way calls between caseworkers and staff, clear and youth-friendly communication, peers helping peers, holistic supports like housing and transportation, and job placements that match career interests.

Participants will leave with:

A clear picture of the common barriers Opportunity Youth face in workforce systems.

Practical, tested strategies for outreach, enrollment, and persistence that make programs more effective.

Concrete examples of youth-centered design practices that can be adapted in any community.

Whether you're a frontline practitioner, a program manager, or a systems leader, this session will give you tools and inspiration to better connect Opportunity Youth to meaningful pathways.

The Power of Community Partnerships

Angela Pierce-Ngo

Nationally, we are witnessing significant cuts to postsecondary bridging supports in our communities. It is essential for us to unite and develop collaborative strategies and genuine partnerships to assist our most marginalized students in succeeding in postsecondary education. This session will explore opportunities for creating partnerships between colleges, school districts, and community-based organizations to enhance the support available to students. Attendees will engage with strategies for implementing intentional partnerships in their communities, learn best practices for sustaining these partnerships, and leave with a practical assessment tool to take back to their institutions.

Northwest Education Access is a community-based organization in Western Washington that provides postsecondary navigation support to students facing substantial educational barriers and serves as the backbone of the Sound Reengagement Collaborative.

3:45 PM - 4:45 PM

BREAKOUT SESSIONS

Flipping the Script: Building value for educational journeys for opportunity and at-risk youth through the power of community and work

Randal Tillery, Heather Mattson

We often presume the challenge for opportunity or at-risk youth is re-engagement with education to get them back on the traditional pathway to college and then career. For youth alienated from educational pathways who may have very negative prior experiences of formal education, this may be framing the problem backwards. This session will discuss a call to action and ways to flip the script for opportunity youth by leveraging the therapeutic values of work and community engagement to build a value proposition for youth and young adults to reinvest their time and energy in educational pathways. It is not education itself which may be most important, but the structure of young adult experiences and journeys that likely provide the key to future educational and economic mobility.

From Education to Employment: Building a Tech-Enabled Pathway for Every Learner

Jacob Griscom

Learn how AI-powered tools are bridging the gap between education and employment by matching student strengths and interests with real-world opportunities. This session showcases how charter schools can use dynamic learner profiles and curriculum alignment to prepare students for meaningful, future-ready careers. We'll explore practical tools and real use cases that connect learning to labor market needs.

Love and Breakthrough Leadership: The Courage to Do School Differently

Isaak Egge, Loren Demeroutis

Rooted in Big Picture Learning's Leadership Elements of Love and Breakthrough Leadership, this interactive session blends real stories of disruption, growth, and community connection with space for participants to reflect on their own practice. Together, we'll examine how love, care, and vulnerability, paired with courage and creative rule-bending can transform school communities and unlock new possibilities for young people. The second half of the session turns toward you: an invitation to reflect, share, and co-design your next courageous move as a leader.

Unleashing the Potential of Opportunity Youth As Leaders In and Out of the Classroom

Emily Suttmeier dos Santos, Isabel Velasquez, Dr. Celine Massuger, Alonso Erazo, Hazel Grant-Gonzalez

Our young people have so much to teach us. How are you involving your students in your curriculum development, event planning, culture building, advocacy, and outreach? This workshop will provide strategies to do just that. In this session, we will discuss the role of Youth Policy Councils (YPCs) at YouthBuild Charter School of California as well as how students are empowered to be leaders in the classroom and in their communities through our unique project-based approach to education rooted in social justice and community action. We will also have a Q&A with three of our alumni: Alonso Erazo, Hazel Grant-Gonzalez, and Isabel Velasquez.

Whose Success Counts? Amplifying Student Voice in Alternative School Accountability

Zoe Plotnick

In this lively, interactive session, we will explore an approach to developing an alternative accountability framework that is grounded in student narratives. To advance school evaluation processes that better reflect the realities of re-engagement, at-promise students volunteered to discuss how they would answer one guiding question: What does 'success after graduation' mean to you? Session participants will consider ways to shift from compliance-driven metrics to more context-sensitive, equity-centered systems that value growth, belonging, and self-determination.



sarah@slslawcorp.com

We are thrilled to announce the opening of the Law Office of Sarah Sutherland, PC, founded by the distinguished education law attorney, Sarah Sutherland. With a wealth of knowledge, experience and a commendable track record in advocating for school districts, county offices of education and SELPAs, Sarah is embarking upon this new venture to provide more efficient and effective legal services focused on the individual needs and characteristics of each agency she represents.

Sarah prides herself on providing practical legal advice to facilitate her clients obtaining their desired outcome faster and with less cost. Sarah provides tailored legal solutions designed to address the unique challenges faced by educators and schools, ensuring student success remains on the forefront. Her dedication and commitment to delivering exceptional results with integrity and care is steadfast as she continues serving and supporting public education agencies. Sarah is excited for the opportunity to offer her expertise through her own practice. Join us in celebrating this new chapter and the positive impacts it promises to bring.



KEYNOTE:

Barry E. Knight

8:30 AM - 9:30 AM

Introducing our morning Keynote speaker, Barry E. Knight, founder and CEO of BEK Impact Co.

The Courage Award recipients will also be announced.



9:45 AM - 10:45 AM

BREAKOUT SESSIONS

Making it Make Sense: How a Coalition Built Clarity, Credibility, and Momentum for Opportunity Youth

Taylor Toledo, Gina Plate, Sean Hughes

How do you align a statewide coalition with deep expertise, diverse member organizations, and a bold vision for Opportunity Youth? In this session, leaders from the Opportunity Youth Schools Coalition (OYSC) will share how they built a strategic communications foundation that centers OY while amplifying the unique value of its members. From brand clarity to messaging for influence, you'll walk away with insights on how language, visuals, and voice can drive systems-level impact. Attendees will participate in a live messaging exercise to apply key principles to their work.

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Monitoring What Matters: Framework for Strengthening Implementation and Accountability

Babatunde Ilori

Most school systems don't fail because they picked the wrong strategy—they fail because they never checked if it was actually happening. This session introduces a practical framework for monitoring implementation quality in real time.

Participants will learn how to define key actions, track progress with consistency, and build systems that drive adult behavior and student success before outcomes slip. Walk away with tools to make monitoring meaningful, actionable, and focused on what matters most.

Partnering with County Boards To Advocate for Court and Community School Students

Bina Lefkovitz Dr. Yvonne Chan, David Patterson

Learn about the critical role County Boards of Education play as the oversight body and School Boards of Record for Juvenile Hall and Community Schools in CA. This panel will discuss the roles of County Boards and County Superintendents, share what tools and leverage County Boards have in strengthening oversight and improving student outcomes. Get introduced to the new statewide Association of County Boards of Education (ACCBE), and how that organization is advocating for, equipping county board members as good stewards, creating partnership and spotlighting innovations that can improve outcomes for at-risk students. We are interested in hearing from students, advocates, staff of Alternative Education programs, on how ACCBE can advocate for reforms in CA for juvenile justice and alternative education, to improve student outcomes and create a greater focus on prevention, diversion, early warning systems, early intervention and expanded opportunities for students in our schools.

The Power of Meaning-Making: Neuropsychological Insights into Teaching and Learning with Opportunity Youth

Christina Kundrak, Doug Knecht

In this session, participants will explore the critical role of meaning-making in the adolescent brain, particularly for opportunity youth navigating complex life experiences and educational disruption. Grounded in cutting-edge transdisciplinary research from USC's Center for Affective Neuroscience, Development, Learning and Education (USC CANDLE), this session will illuminate how transcendent thinking supports identity development, motivation, and resilience in both teens and their teachers. Participants will gain insight into the neurobiological and psychological processes that position meaning-making as a catalyst for culturally and emotionally relevant engagement inside and outside the classroom. The session will contextualize these findings within the unique demands of schools serving at-risk youth and promote collaborative discussion around actionable supports for staff and student growth.

UCLA Center for the Developing Adolescent: Leveraging Developmental Science to Support Economic Agency in Young People

Dr. Andrew Fuligni, Natalie Saragosa-Harris

UCLA CDA is embarking on a new, multi-year initiative to share insights from developmental science relevant to supporting economic agency among young people as they enter adulthood. We aim to promote a broader understanding of the science of adolescent development for the ages 16 to 25 as a unique period of opportunity to connect our young people with developmentally appropriate supports at home and school, in the community, and the workplace to help them enter adulthood with the agency to build a meaningful, engaging, and secure economic future. Our focus includes efforts in college preparation and completion, career and technical education, dual enrollment, job training and advancement, mentorship, durable skill building, and benefits access. In this session, we will share our emerging work in this area and look to make connections with policymakers, advocacy organizations, and young people who are focused on improving systems that impact the transition to adulthood.

11:00 AM - 12:00 PM

BREAKOUT SESSIONS

Centering Student Engagement: A Framework for Youth-Led Advocacy at the State Level

Christy Irrgang, Eric Billiet

Learn how the Minnesota Department of Education launched a democratically-led student advisory for alternative education in the state, with support from adult facilitators and monthly meetings. Explore the structure that enabled authentic student engagement and action—including advocacy on access to resources and development of targeted policy change priority areas. This session will highlight how youth consultation now informs daily practice in the alternative program area, offering a replicable model for youth-centered advisory and advocacy.

Fewer Chutes, More Ladders: Preventing Juvenile Legal Involvement and Ensuring Successful School Reentry for California's Youth.

Michael Massa, Arnold Chandler

This workshop presents the findings from Fewer Chutes, More Ladders: Preventing Juvenile Legal Involvement and Ensuring Successful School Reentry for California's Youth a forthcoming report commissioned by the California Office of Youth and Community Restoration (OYCR). Drawing on an extensive synthesis of the research literature and in-depth practitioner interviews, the session will summarize pathways into juvenile legal involvement as well as the state-of-the-art on evidence-based interventions to both prevent juvenile legal involvement and to facilitate successful reentry. Particular highlights will include a focus on effective alternatives to exclusionary discipline, the importance of attachment to school in preventing juvenile recidivism, and meaning-based intervention for juvenile reentry. Attendees will leave with a shared problem frame, a practical menu of evidence-based interventions, and concrete next steps for policy and practice that reduce chutes and build ladders.

Rethinking the High School Diploma: Redefining Success through the New York State Portrait of a Graduate

Dr. Lisa DiGaudio, Dr. Sara Asmussen, David Frank, Dr. Lisa Long

What does it mean to graduate prepared for life in today's world? In New York State, this question sparked a transformative initiative to redefine what a diploma signifies. This session presents the New York State Portrait of a Graduate, a forward-thinking framework identifying the critical knowledge, skills, and mindsets students need to thrive in the 21st-century global economy. Participants will gain insight into how student-centered assessment models can support readiness for college, career, and civic life.

The Cavalry is Coming: Opportunity Schools for 2 Million Students in Crisis

Greg Lippman, Jai Nanda

This presentation by Groundswell Network CEO Greg Lippman and Urban Dove ED and founder Jai Nanda will focus on how Opportunity Schools--schools designed for children furthest from opportunity--are the answer to the challenges faced by the over 2 million students in US high schools in any given year who will eventually fail to earn a high school diploma. The presentation will highlight how the successes and lessons learned in the more narrowly-defined alternative education sector are the first step toward the nationwide growth of Opportunity Schools and transformative change in public education for the students we currently are leaving behind.

The Impact of Measure Alignment on Alternative Education Campuses and Their Students

Dr. Jody Ernst

Attendees will first hear about a study that looks at the impact of AECs having accountability goals that are responsive to their mission, vision, and student population on students' and schools' outcomes. Attendees will then be introduced to a number of resources and tools to help them in developing and implementing their own Responsive Goals, including an AEC performance database, a repository of Responsive Goals developed by schools and charter authorizers over the last eight years, as well as a how to guide for working collaboratively to develop and implement Responsive Goals. Attendees will have the opportunity to practice the goal setting process, using these tools and resources, during this 60 minute session.

STRANDS

- Nationwide Alternative Accountability
- Policy & Advocacy
- Leadership in Times of Change

- Teaching for Progress
- Youth Innovation and Workforce Transformation

Alternative Education Funders Panel Lunch: Stuart Foundation

12:15 PM - 1:30 PM

Enjoy our panel with our partner, Stuart Foundation along with a provided lunch.



Located on a 100-acre campus in Salinas, California, Rancho Cielo provides a welcoming and affirming environment for underserved youth in Monterey County, ages 14 to 24. For 25 years, the organization has provided a lifeline where these young people can have a fresh start to transform their futures.

Established as a 501 (c)(3) nonprofit in 2000, Rancho Cielo now serves over 250 students annually through programs that integrate vocational training with high school education in partnership with WASC (Western Association of Schools and Colleges)-accredited John Muir Charter Schools. The approach goes beyond education, including case management, wraparound services, a personalized care plan, life skills development and, importantly, hope.

Rancho Cielo cultivates a goal-oriented atmosphere, providing tailored programs, opportunities and experiences to prepare students with the skills and confidence needed to secure living-wage jobs in the region's top industries. Graduates earn an accredited high school diploma (or equivalent) and industry-recognized certifications, and are equipped to enter college, careers, post-secondary training/ internships, or military service (or a combination of these). Longterm, the goal is for them to become successful, productive community members with upward mobility in careers they choose.



ranchocieloyc.org

1:45 PM - 2:45 PM

BREAKOUT SESSIONS

Break the Mold: Rethinking Accountability for At-Promise Students

Sherry Betcher, Teresa Boardman, Pieter Hoekstra

Tired of accountability systems that don't reflect your school's reality? This workshop introduces a bold, equity-centered model that blends a unique use of NWEA MAP Growth data with custom, non-standardized goals—like attendance, credits earned, and graduation rates—to capture what success truly looks like for At-Promise students. Backed by two years of results, the workshop also gives attendees time to begin brainstorming ways to improve their own evaluation systems using practical, mission-aligned strategies.

From Dropout to Degrees: How Open Doors programs are leveraging legislation to reimagine reengagement in Washington State

Chelsey Berry

Washington State is the first in the nation to implement a sustainable, statewide funding model for dropout reengagement through its Open Doors legislation. This session will highlight how Edmonds Career Access Program (EdCAP), one of the longest-running Open Doors programs, has uniquely leveraged this model in partnership with a community college to provide an alternative high school experience embedded within a college setting.

The Power of Community Partnerships

Angela Pierce-Ngo

Nationally, we are witnessing significant cuts to postsecondary bridging supports in our communities. It is essential for us to unite and develop collaborative strategies and genuine partnerships to assist our most marginalized students in succeeding in postsecondary education. This session will explore opportunities for creating partnerships between colleges, school districts, and community-based organizations to enhance the support available to students. Attendees will engage with strategies for implementing intentional partnerships in their communities, learn best practices for sustaining these partnerships, and leave with a practical assessment tool to take back to their institutions.

Northwest Education Access is a community-based organization in Western Washington that provides postsecondary navigation support to students facing substantial educational barriers and serves as the backbone of the Sound Reengagement Collaborative.

COURAGE AWARDS

SUPPORTED BY



These awards recognize at-promise students who demonstrate courage in overcoming obstacles and pursuing academic excellence. There were many nominations from students across the country that were considered for these awards that includes a \$1,000 scholarship.

This year the RAPSA Awards Committee have chosen 5 students to receive a courage award.

CONGRATULATIONS TO OUR COURAGE AWARD RECIPIENTS!



Christian Wilkinson
New Dawn Charter School
New York



Rosa Chitop Pu
RUTH YouthBuild
Los Angeles, California



Eduardo Mendoza
California State University
Salinas, California



Erick Bonilla
RUTH YouthBuild
Los Angeles, California



Enrique Garcia Luis
Pomona/Azusa YouthBuild
Pomona, California

HEART AWARDS

These awards recognize educators who have demonstrated exceptional heart in uplifting and empowering At-Promise students through compassion, dedication, and care.

This year the RAPSA Awards Committee felt compelled to honor and share this award to five incredible nominees whose work cannot go unrecognized.



Dr. Sara Asmussen

Dr. Sara Asmussen has been a steadfast advocate for at-promise students since 2007, dedicating her career to expanding access to safe and supportive learning environments. Her belief in equitable education led to the founding of New Dawn Charter High School in 2012 and New Dawn Charter High School II in 2019, with plans underway for a third campus in Newburgh, NY. A respected leader in the transfer high school community, Dr. Asmussen continues to mentor emerging professionals in the charter sector while inspiring others through her humility, compassion, and unwavering commitment to helping students succeed.



Elena Bautista

Elena Bautista exemplifies the compassion, vision, and unwavering commitment that define the RAPSA Heart Award. As Principal of Gateway College and Career Academy—a dual enrollment alternative high school serving students who have been pushed out, disconnected, or counted out—she leads with empathy and a fierce belief in every young person’s potential. Under her leadership, Gateway has built a culture grounded in trust, restorative practices, and trauma-informed care, helping students reclaim their education and their future. Known for her courage, authenticity, and deep commitment to equity, Elena works alongside her team to ensure every student feels seen, supported, and capable of success.



Kendra Ford

Kendra embodied the true spirit of whole-child education through her deep commitment to at-risk students and their success. As Assistant Principal and MTSS Coordinator, she built systems of support grounded in compassion, data, and equity—ensuring every student received what they needed to thrive. Her leadership brought restorative practices, wellness supports, and creative interventions like the Phoenix Nest to life, transforming school culture and reducing discipline referrals. Kendra’s work was a model for alternative education, blending heart and strategy to help students feel safe, valued, and capable of success.



Tabitha Frable

Tabitha Frable embodies the spirit of the RAPS Heart Award through her unwavering dedication to at-risk students and the empathy shaped by her own lived experience. A graduate of Tucson Preparatory School, she overcame the challenges of group homes and the Child Protective Services System to earn her degree from Northern Arizona University. Now an administrator at Tucson Prep, Tabitha leads with compassion and purpose—developing alternative accountability measures, improving data systems, and teaching vital career and life skills. Her leadership empowers students to see their worth, believe in their potential, and define their own success.



Dr. Mercedes Harvey-Flowers

Dr. Mercedes Harvey-Flowers exemplifies the compassion and commitment celebrated by the RAPS Heart Award. For over a decade at Crestwood High School in Dearborn Heights, Michigan, she has created inclusive, trauma-informed classrooms that reengage students with empathy and high expectations. As Department Chair and advisor to the Key Club and Black Student Union, she empowers students to lead, serve, and advocate for equity. Her leadership in developing African American History and AP African American Studies courses amplifies historically underrepresented voices. Through restorative practices, mentorship, and advocacy, Dr. Harvey-Flowers fosters a culture of belonging where every student feels seen, valued, and capable of success.

VISION AWARDS

These awards recognize policymakers who embody a clear and inspiring vision that advances opportunities and outcomes for At-Promise students.

This year the RAPSAs Awards Committee chose to honor two exceptional nominees.



Josh Fryday

As a member of the Governor Gavin Newsom's Cabinet, Josh Fryday leads the newly created Governor's Office of Service and Community Engagement. He also serves in a leadership position with the California Governor's Council for Career Education.

He oversaw the creation of the largest service force in the country—including the nation's first statewide California Climate Action Corps, opens in a new window, College Corps, opens in a new window and Youth Service Corps, opens in a new window.

Fryday is the former Mayor of Novato, his hometown. Fryday led the COVID-19 Task Force to support food insecure communities and food banks across the state. He also served as President of Golden State Opportunity (GSO), leading the expansion and implementation of the California Earned Income Tax Credit (CalEITC). Prior to GSO, he served as Chief Operating Officer (COO) for NextGen Climate, a leading national organization focused on climate change.

Fryday served in the military as an Officer in the United States Navy ('09-'13) as a member of the Judge Advocate General's Corps (JAG). He worked on the Military Commissions in Guantánamo Bay, Cuba. He also served in Japan, where he augmented the Navy's 7th Fleet's Humanitarian Aid and Disaster Relief efforts during 'Operation Tomodachi' following the 2011 earthquake, tsunami, and Fukushima nuclear disaster. Fryday received his law degree from UC Berkeley School of Law, and clerked in the US Attorney's Office for the Northern District of California, as well as the San Francisco District Attorney's Office for then District Attorney Kamala Harris.

He is a founding Board Member of Amazon Frontlines, an emeritus board chair for Demos, a national think-tank focused on issues of economic, racial and political inequality. He is married to Mollye Fryday, an educator, and they have three energetic young boys, Shay, Calvin and Tam.



David Frank

David Frank is the Executive Director of the New York State Education Department (NYSED) Charter School Office, where he authorizes 81 charter schools across the state and guides the creation of new schools. In this role, he champions innovative educational models and ensures that schools serving at-risk populations and students with disabilities have the support they need to thrive. Previously, David served as Director of Charter Policy and Analytics at the New York City Department of Education and as Director of School Supports at the NYC Charter Schools Center, providing oversight, regulatory guidance, operational and financial support, professional development, and teacher certification assistance to schools across the city.

Throughout his career, David has been a tireless advocate for authentic school improvement and equity in education. He has a particular talent for amplifying the voices of educators and practitioners in the field, ensuring that the insights of those doing the “live work” of teaching and learning shape policy and accountability systems. His work supporting New Dawn Charter High School, for example, demonstrated his commitment to alternative accountability models, helping schools tell their story and validate their impact, even in challenging contexts.

As Assistant Commissioner, David continues to advance innovative practices through New York’s Portrait of a Graduate initiative, emphasizing holistic student growth and learning outcomes. His approach reflects a deep belief in collaboration, capacity-building, and the power of strong school-community partnerships to improve student experiences across the state.

David holds a Master’s in Developmental Psychology and has dedicated his career to ensuring that schools are not only compliant with regulations but truly empowered to make a difference. Colleagues and school leaders alike describe him as a pillar of the education community—passionate, professional, and unwavering in his commitment to student learning and equitable opportunities.



PASSION AWARD

This award recognizes an exceptional Career and Technical Education (CTE) or workforce development instructor or administrator who demonstrates unwavering commitment to student success, innovative instructional practices, and excellence in program leadership. The recipient is a champion of career readiness and skill development, continually bridging the gap between education and industry needs.



Kris Georgeson, MS

Kris Georgeson is a dynamic education leader with over 17 years of experience advancing programs that empower youth and strengthen communities. Inspired by growing up with a sibling with Down Syndrome and experiencing the challenges of scarcity, Kris developed a lifelong commitment to using education—especially financial education—as a tool for empowerment for both individuals and families.

As Director of Education at Associated Builders and Contractors of Southern California, Kris creates equitable opportunities for at-risk students to thrive academically and personally. Supporting more than 1,000 students across five trades at any given time, Kris ensures graduates are well-prepared for careers while helping families gain access to education, financial literacy, and pathways that uplift communities.

With extensive experience in nonprofit leadership, program development, workforce training, and staff development, Kris drives innovation, builds strong partnerships, and leads high-performing teams to meaningful impact. Guided by a deep belief in the transformative power of education, Kris champions initiatives that foster resilience, equity, and lifelong success for students and their families, serving as a true model of dedication, vision, and leadership in career and technical education.

