



**Advancing Character  
Across Education**

# **ANCIENT FOUNDATIONS, MODERN HORIZONS**

*Character in Today's World*

**2026 Annual Conference**

March 2-4, 2026

Omni Tempe Hotel  
7 East University Drive  
Tempe, AZ 85281



# FEATURES FOR THE 2026 ANNUAL CONFERENCE

## Launching Communities of Practice

We're excited that we will be launching Communities of Practice.

During the final session on Wednesday, March 4, from 9:30 – 11:30 a.m., the topics and challenges identified during these conversations will inform the launch of Communities of Practice within the network following the conference. You won't want to miss this opportunity to shape ongoing collaborative communities beyond the conference!

## Seeds & Needs Session

**Seeds** are the exciting projects, ideas brewing, and work others want to develop further. **Needs** are where they're looking for support, resources, or fresh perspectives. Browse the tables and displays and see what catches your eye. Stop by spaces that intrigue you and ask questions.

Your expertise might be exactly what someone needs to move their project forward, or you might find the resource or collaborator you've been looking for.

## Link Lounges

In the foyer outside of Salt River Ballroom, you'll find comfortable spaces designed for connection and collaboration. Pull up a chair, grab a coffee, and dive into a meaningful conversation that reminds you why you do this work. We encourage you to take full advantage of the Link Lounges during your time at the conference.



## Capture the Moment



Whether you're meeting new colleagues or attending with your team, stop by our photo booth to commemorate your time at the conference. Share your photos on social media and celebrate being part of the Advancing Character Across Education community! The photo booth will be located in the Sun Devil Ballroom on Monday evening during the Seeds & Needs session and in the foyer outside the Salt River Ballroom on Tuesday and Wednesday.

# AGENDA

## DAY 1

**Monday, March 2, 2026**

12:00 - 5:00 p.m.

**Registration Open**

*Sun Devil Ballroom Foyer*

5:00 - 6:15 p.m.

**Welcome Reception / "Seeds & Needs" Session**

*Sun Devil Ballroom & Lawn*

*The Seeds & Needs session is an interactive exchange highlighting projects and initiatives from the community. Participants who registered in advance will host tables sharing their seeds (active ideas or projects) and needs (areas where support, resources, or partnership are needed). All attendees are encouraged to visit the tables to engage in conversation, ask questions, and explore opportunities for collaboration.*

6:30 - 7:00 p.m.

**Welcoming Remarks**

*Salt River Ballroom 5-8*

7:00 - 8:30 p.m.

**Sequoia Dinner**

*Salt River Ballroom 5-8*

*The Sequoia Dinner is a facilitated dining experience designed to create space for genuine connection and meaningful conversation. Through a small set of thoughtfully guided questions, participants share personal stories, reflect together, and build relationships through a single, shared dialogue at each table. Inspired by the strength of Sequoia trees that grow and thrive through interconnected roots, this experience invites leaders to form connections that can encourage, sustain, and strengthen their work beyond the conference.*

## DAY 2

**Tuesday, March 3, 2026**

7:00 - 8:00 a.m.

**Breakfast**

*Salt River Ballroom 4*

8:15 - 8:40 a.m.

**Opening Remarks**

*Salt River Ballroom 5-8*

8:45 - 9:45 a.m.

**Keynote - Love and Belonging: How Character Education Saves Lives**

Dr. Kadeem Ruiz, Rocketship Public Schools

*Salt River Ballroom 5-8*

# AGENDA

10:00 - 11:00 a.m.

## Breakout Session I

### *Bronze Room*

#### **Presentation 1 - Synthetic Realities and Moral Growth: Deepfakes, Social Media, and the Urgency of Character Education**

Adma Gama-Krummel and Simao Luis, University of Rochester

#### **Presentation 2 - Connected but Alone: Navigating AI Intimacy, Hookups, & Relationships Without Virtues**

Susan Morrissey, Boston College

### *Crimson Room*

#### **Presentation 1 - Generous Listening and Dialogue: Ancient Roots and Modern Applications of Promoting Character Development and Human Flourishing**

Dr. Jonathan Tirrell and Naomi Boase, Tufts University

#### **Presentation 2 - Wisdom at Work: Bridging Ancient Virtue and Modern Leadership Through Practical Wisdom**

Andrea Rolla and Maria Soledad Hershey, Harvard University

### *Amber Room*

#### **Presentation 1 - Bridging the SEL gap: Data-driven Tier II interventions for student success**

Sabrina Stavonor, DREAM Charter Schools

#### **Presentation 2 - The Importance of the Intellect in Character**

Dr. Diana Smith and Peter Anderson, Washington Latin Public Charter School

### *Salt River Ballroom 3*

#### **Workshop - Character in the Age of AI: Cultivating Agency, Integrity, and Purpose in Digital Learning Environments**

Anastasia Shikanova, Ohio State University

### *Terracotta Room*

#### **Workshop - Relational Praxis: Enduring Foundations and Emerging Horizons in the Formation of Character and Leadership**

Monica Dixon, Search Institute

### *Salt River Ballroom 5-8*

#### **Table Dialogues**

#### **The Importance of Understanding Cultural Relativism and Cultural Relevance**

with Deanna Flores, Voices College-Bound Language Academies

#### **Reconnecting Cultural Roots to Character Formation: Pre-Service Teachers as Co-Creators of Moral Values in Indonesian Elementary Education**

with Fauzi Abdillah, University of Rochester

#### **Trauma-Informed Character Education: Building Compassionate School Communities**

with Dr. Ashley Brandon and Emily Farkas, Grand Canyon University

# AGENDA

10:00 - 11:00 a.m.

*Salt River Ballroom 5-8*

## **Table Dialogues Cont.**

### **Reimagining Professional Development through Blended Writing Groups: Cultivating Character, Integrity, and Community among Teacher Educators**

with Hendriwanto Hendriwanto, Michigan State University

### **Walking the Talk: A Case Study of Character Education Implementation in Middle School**

with Dr. Jordyn Horner, Knox County Schools and Dr. Mary Lynne Derrington, University of Tennessee

### **You Can't Give Away What You Don't Own**

with Jose Rosario, Center for Urban Teaching

### **Developmental Love: How to Serve Another's Best Developmental Interest**

with Sara Mendonça, Wake Forest University and Jonathan Triller, Tufts University

11:15 a.m. - 12:15 p.m.

## **Breakout Session II**

*Bronze Room*

### **Presentation 1 - Cultivating Maturity and Leadership in Higher Education: Insights from Greenleaf**

Dr. Jason Weberl, Texas Tech University System

### **Presentation 2 - Principled Innovation for Character Integration: Exploring "The Guide" as a Professional Development Tool for Higher Education Teaching**

Dr. Teresa Foulger and Gulnora Isaeva, Arizona State University

*Crimson Room*

### **Presentation 1 - Moral Measure: The Game**

Jillian Meyer, Indiana University Bloomington

### **Presentation 2 - Ancient Virtues, Modern Horizons: Cultivating Character and Human Skills for Flourishing in Schools**

Dr. Shelby Clark, Lynn Barendsen, and Danny Mucinskas, Harvard University

*Amber Room*

### **Presentation 1 - Quantum Character: Preparing Students for Ethical Engagement from K-12 to Higher Education**

Dr. Rebecca Crews, Miami University

### **Presentation 2 - Character Development from Ancient Foundations to Modern Horizons: Collaborative Partnerships focused on Developing Practical Wisdom in Leaders**

Dr. Maureen Spelman, North Central College, Dr. Bill Cleveland, Dr. Kara Chism, and Dr. Jane Cobia, Samford University, and Dr. Lance Forman, Lipscomb University

*Salt River Ballroom 3*

### **Workshop - Flourishing through Practical Wisdom: A Curriculum for Character Formation in Education and Leadership**

Dr. Scott Parsons and Dr. Robert McGrath, Fairleigh Dickinson University

*Terracotta Room*

### **Workshop - From Historical Imperative to Modern Necessity: How Human Connection Fuels Flourishing and Methods for Creating the Conditions for Connection**

Kelsey LaVigne, Fignant Solutions

# AGENDA

11:15 a.m. - 12:15 p.m.

*Salt River Ballroom 5-8*

## **Table Dialogues**

### **Character Walks - Foundation for Success**

with Dr. Ben White, University of Alabama and Dr. Ashley Brandon, Grand Canyon University

### **Character, Merit, and Equity: The Politics of Holistic Review in U.S. Private Education**

with Maahi Kumar and Dr. Jake Plantz, E3<sup>n</sup>

### **Reflective Practice: Bridging Health Professions Education to K-12 Character Education**

with Tiara Adzakiyah, University of Rochester

### **Forward-Thinking Approaches to Character Development through Principled Innovation**

with Jaron Neal, Arizona State University

### **Identifying and Measuring Character Strengths Using the Maximum Differential Technique**

with Yasmine Perry, Institute for Research on Youth Thriving and Evaluation

### **How to Bridge Differences: Drawing on Three Key Virtues in a Community of Practice for Educators**

with Dr. Amy Eva, Greater Good Science Center

12:15 - 1:15 p.m.

## **Lunch**

*Salt River Ballroom 4*

1:30 - 2:30 p.m.

## **Breakout Session III**

*Bronze Room*

### **Presentation 1 - Ancient Virtues, Modern Tools: AI as a Partner in Character Formation for Educational Leaders**

*Dr. Lance Forman, Lipscomb University*

### **Presentation 2 - MCW Practical Wisdom Pathway: A human-centered approach to accessing and deepening practical wisdom in medical student learning communities**

Julia Schmitt and M. Chris Decker, Medical College of Wisconsin

*Crimson Room*

### **Presentation 1 - Virtue and AI: How Does AI Impact Character Education?**

Dr. William Cochran, Wake Forest University

### **Presentation 2 - Ancient Virtues for Modern Technology: Character Education and Generative AI**

Krista Berry, Western Governors University

*Amber Room*

### **Presentation 1 - Teaching "The Good Life" From Eastern and Western Perspectives**

Dr. Eunice Jianping and Leanna Bernish, Wake Forest University

### **Presentation 2 - Cultivating Virtue Through Civic Engagement: A Case Study from Leavenworth Senior High School**

Misti Stevens, Grand Canyon University

# AGENDA

1:30 - 2:30 p.m.

*Salt River Ballroom 3*

**Workshop - Building a Comprehensive Approach to Character Education: Engaging Students Faculty, and Staff**

Kathleen Stimely, Cristy Guleserian, and Jasmine Logan, Wake Forest University

*Terracotta Room*

**Workshop - The ABCs of Human Flourishing: Ancient Wisdom and Modern Research on the Power of Self-Determination in Schools**

Dr. Julie Sperry, CharacterPlus

*Salt River Ballroom 5-8*

**Table Dialogues**

**“Schools of Political Education”: Situating Character and Civics in The Gambia’s and Burkina Faso’s Non-Formal Education Sector**

James Fisher, Generous Listening and Dialogue Initiative

**Enduring Wisdom, Emerging Horizons: Dewantara and Culturally Relevant Pedagogy in Future Education**

Laela Nurbatra and Nurkamilah Nurkamilah, Pennsylvania State University

**Character in Action: Let’s Teach The Principal to Carry the Flag**

Dr. Hank Staggs, Crieve Hall Elementary School Nashville

**Coaching for Character: Cultivating Reflective, Ethical, and Flourishing Leadership in Iowa’s Schools**

Dr. Mary Sult, Dr. Amanda Schmidt, and Dr. Denise Schares, University of Northern Iowa

**Virtue-Ethical Design in Early Literacy: Reviewing Duolingo ABC and Digital Character Formation**

Zaldi Harfal, University of Rochester

**Compassionate Innovation: Leading with Heart, Creating for Good**

Susan Maynor, CharacterPlus

**AIK as a Model for Character Formation in Islamic Higher Education: Reflections from Muhammadiyah University Indonesia**

Erpin Said, University of Rochester

2:45 - 4:00 p.m.

**Keynote - Ethical Skills and Virtuous Character in the Nested Classroom**

Dr. Darcia Narvaez, University of Notre Dame

*Salt River Ballroom 5-8*

4:00 - 4:20 p.m.

**Closing Remarks & Book Raffle**

*Salt River Ballroom 5-8*

6:00 - 8:00 p.m.

**Reception & Dinner**

*Sun Devil Ballroom & Lawn*

# AGENDA

DAY 3

Wednesday, March 4, 2026

7:15 - 8:00 a.m.

## Breakfast

*Salt River Ballroom 4*

8:15 - 9:15 a.m.

## Breakout Session IV

*Bronze Room*

### **Presentation 1 - Ancient Wisdom for Modern Wellbeing: Restoring Character Through Connection**

Anastasia Hercules, University of Missouri - St. Louis

### **Presentation 2 - Bridling Character: Ancient Virtues and Modern Growth through Equine-Assisted Learning**

Dr. Mary Lombardo-Graves, Grand Canyon University

*Crimson Room*

### **Presentation 1 - Messy Middle: Intentionally Cultivating Character in the 6 - 8 Space**

Nolan McDaniel, Kelli Fulton, Ethan Evans, and Natalee Buchanan, ChattAcademy Community School

### **Presentation 2 - Forming Practical Wisdom: Leading with Virtue for Human Flourishing Across the Educational Community**

Jolleen Wagner, Brilla Public Charter Schools / Seton Education Partners

*Amber Room*

### **Presentation 1 - Communities of Character: Flourishing Faculty in Today's Schools**

Natalie Demers, The Flourishing Faculty Project

### **Presentation 2 - Instructional Leaders Promoting Teachers' Reflection In Arkansas and Tennessee Schools**

Dr. Amany Saleh, Arkansas State University, Dr. Mary Lynne Derrington and Matthew Murphy, University of Tennessee

*Salt River Ballroom 3*

### **Workshop - Community of Practice Value Creation: Using the Wenger-Trayner Framework to Catalyze Character Formation in Higher Education**

Kaley Bontrager, Marina Basu, and Enrique Borges, Arizona State University; Megan K. Hennessy, Independent Researcher.

*Terracotta Room*

### **Workshop - St. Louis Youth Advocacy: Cultivating Civic Character Through a University-School-Community Partnership**

Mindy Bier and Colby Crowder, University of Missouri - St. Louis

# AGENDA

8:15 - 9:15 a.m.

*Salt River Ballroom 5-8*

## **Table Dialogues**

### **Images that Move Us: Photographs as a Tool for Character Education**

Md Mamunur Rashid, University of Rochester

### **Character, Emotion Regulation, and Distressing Subjects: Equipping Students for the World They'll Face**

Dr. Randall Curren and Dr. Sieun Park, University of Rochester

### **How to Educate for Virtue: Developing an Educational Model of Virtue Formation for K-12 Educators**

Christopher Anthony, Clare Kilbane, Monica Kowalski, and David McPherson, University of Florida

### **The Character Imperative: Transforming School Leadership through the Intentional Nurturing and Assessment of Virtue**

Dr. Melodie Wyttenbach, Boston College, Lindsey Hughes, Cathedral High School, and Teresina "Maria" Ruiz, Notre Dame Academy

### **Flourishing in the Early Years: The Mediating Role of Teacher Purpose and Learner-Growth Orientation in the Leadership-Wellbeing Link**

Arinze Amanekwe, University of Rochester

### **Character in Action: Leveraging Student Leadership Through Restorative Practices**

Michael Barolak, CharacterPlus

9:30 - 9:35 a.m.

## **Opening Remarks**

*Silver River Ballroom 5-8*

9:35 - 11:30 a.m.

## **Panel & Community Activity - From Conversation to Collective Impact: Building Communities of Practice to Advance Character Across Education**

*Salt River Ballroom 5-8*

- **Facilitated by:** Cristy Guleserian, *Wake Forest University*
- **Panelists**
  - Danny Mucinskas, *Harvard University*
  - Megan K. Hennessy, *Independent Researcher- Communities of Practice*
  - Jennifer Rothschild, *Wake Forest University*
  - Jen Urban, *Montclair State University*

11:30 - 11:45 a.m.

## **Closing Remarks**

*Salt River Ballroom 5 - 8*

# KEYNOTE

*Dr. Kadeem Ruiz*

ROCKETSHIP PUBLIC CHARTER SCHOOLS



Dr. Kadeem Ruiz is the Executive Director of Rocketship Wisconsin, overseeing all aspects of Rocketship's two Milwaukee schools.

Kadeem is living proof of the impact of exemplary educational opportunities. Kadeem grew up in Brooklyn, New York, the son of a single mother and the only one of four children to graduate from high school. Having lost one brother to gun violence and another to prison, Kadeem understands firsthand the devastating consequences of a lack of educational opportunities for all kids. Kadeem's youngest brother struggled with emotional management differences and inspired Kadeem to pursue special education instead of matriculating into Columbia Law School, where he was accepted after college. Teachers and adult mentors also played a large role in Kadeem's trajectory, eventually helping him win a scholarship to an elite boarding high school, The Hotchkiss School, and go on to Princeton University. There, Kadeem discovered his passion for teaching through tutoring reformed drug addicts recently released from prison to take the GED. He went on to earn a Master's Degree from Hunter College in Special Education and a Master's Degree in Educational Leadership from the Bank Street School of Education. He also received his Educational Doctorate Degree in Leadership and Innovation from New York University in 2025.

Most recently, Kadeem worked as the Managing Director of Exceptional Student Education at Breakthrough Public Schools, a 12 school K-8 charter network. There, he deepened and expanded Breakthrough's impact through a nationally-recognized distance learning program. Prior to joining Breakthrough, Kadeem was the Senior Director of Special Populations at Explore Schools in Brooklyn, New York, served as special education director and taught special education for many years in New York City.

## **LOVE AND BELONGING: HOW CHARACTER EDUCATION SAVES LIVES**

In this powerful keynote, the speaker shares a deeply personal story of growing up amid violence, loss, and systemic inequity, and how character education became a life-saving force. Through experiences shaped by trauma, the speech reframes character education not as enrichment, but as survival, rooted in love and modeled through high expectations, integrity, perseverance, and the belief that every child is capable of choosing a different future.

Positioning love as the foundation of character and character as the driver of outcomes, the keynote highlights Rocketship as a model for what is possible when schools operationalize care through rigorous academics, a deep sense of belonging, and strong family partnerships. The talk ultimately challenges educators and leaders to view character education as an act of courage, one that interrupts trauma, builds hope, and transforms lives by helping children not only survive, but truly thrive.

# KEYNOTE

*Dr. Darcia Narvaez*

UNIVERSITY OF NOTRE DAME



Dr. Darcia Narvaez, is Professor Emerita of Psychology at the University of Notre Dame, and Fellow of the American Psychological Association, American Educational Research Association, Association for Psychological Science, and the American Association for the Advancement of Science. Born in Minnesota (USA), she grew up living around the world as a bilingual/bicultural Puerto Rican-German American but calls Earth her home. Her earlier careers include professional musician, business owner, classroom music teacher, classroom Spanish teacher, and seminarian, among other endeavors. She uses an interdisciplinary approach to studying evolved morality, child development and human flourishing. Her most recent books include *Restoring the Kinship Worldview*, and *The Evolved Nest: Nature's Way of Raising Children and Creating Connected Communities*. A recent book, *Neurobiology and the Development of Human Morality: Evolution, Culture*

and *Wisdom* won the 2015 William James Book Award from the American Psychological Association and the 2017 Expanded Reason Award. Her recent short films are *Breaking the Cycle*, *The Evolved Nest*, and *Reimagining Humanity*. She hosts the webpage [EvolvedNest.org](http://EvolvedNest.org) and serves as president of [KindredWorld.org](http://KindredWorld.org).

## ETHICAL SKILLS AND VIRTUOUS CHARACTER IN THE NESTED

### CLASSROOM

Moral formation is initiated at the beginning of life with the shaping of neuronal systems towards patterns of health and virtuous cooperation or towards dysregulated disorder and self-protection. Nurturing families and communities support embodied prosocial moral/ethical capacities for ethical behavior. Ethical behavior requires a set of processes and capacities for ethical sensitivity, ethical judgment, ethical motivation/focus, and ethical implementation. A well-nurtured species-normal engagement ethic embraces the full complement of prosocial capacities. In contrast, protectionist ethics curtail such capacities, narrowing perception, affordances (action possibilities), and motivation. What can schools and classrooms do to enhance capacities for ethical behavior? The Minnesota Community Voices and Character Education project (CVCE) identified sets of skills in the four areas that can be incorporated into regular academic instruction. Ideally, educators follow natural pedagogy, a community-based immersion with mentors who help students build experiential knowhow. Setting up nurturing schools and classrooms that align with our species' Evolved Nest supports the growth of ethical capacities, specifically, prosocial morality.

Nested classrooms are both trauma-informed and wellness-promoting in that students are helped to develop self-calming routines, trusting relationships, prosociality, and an expanded communal imagination through the provision of our species-normal Evolved Nest. These include the encouragement through structures and practices of a welcoming social climate, responsive relationships with adults and peers, extensive opportunities for self-directed learning and play; routine healing rituals such as class meetings and conflict resolution practices; and immersion in the natural world to build ecological attachment and respectful relations with the other than human. Ethical instincts and virtuous character are cultivated over time through the development of multiple skills and embodied intelligence that foster sustainable, regenerative ways of being.

# PANEL & COMMUNITY ACTIVITY

## FROM CONVERSATION TO COLLECTIVE IMPACT: BUILDING COMMUNITIES OF PRACTICE TO ADVANCE CHARACTER ACROSS EDUCATION

How might we move from shared conversations to collective action in Advancing Character Across Education? This interactive session invites participants to explore Communities of Practice (CoPs) as a powerful way to connect research, theory, and practice across diverse contexts.

A facilitated panel will explore the concept of CoPs and strategies for fostering community and impact. Participants will then engage in guided table discussions to surface topics, all focused on advancing character in diverse contexts and across education more broadly.

The topics and challenges identified during these conversations will inform the launch of Communities of Practice within the network, transforming today's dialogue into ongoing collaborative work.



### CRISTY GULESERIAN

*Moderator*

*Wake Forest University*

Cristy Guleserian is the Executive Director of Leadership and Character in the College at Wake Forest University. A leader in the field of character education, she most recently served as the architect and Executive Director of Principled Innovation at Arizona State University, where she collaborated with faculty, staff, students, and other partners to engage a community approach to character development and principled innovation across one of the country's largest public universities. Prior to her work at ASU, Guleserian served as Director of Social Emotional Learning and Character Development Programs at Casa Center for Positive Social Change. Guleserian graduated from Ohio University with a Bachelor of Science degree in Interpersonal Communication. She earned a Master of Science in Management from New England College and a Master of Arts in Character Education from the University of Birmingham.



### DANNY MUCINKAS

*Harvard University*

Danny Mucinkas is a Senior Project Manager at the Harvard Graduate School of Education. He has worked at the Project Zero research center, particularly with The Good Project to explore the nature of "good work" through the lenses of excellence, ethics, and engagement. He collaborated on a multi-year investigation of the impact of a set of learning resources focused on the relationship between "good work" and character growth, which built a global educator community of practice. More recently, he has worked with the Democratic Knowledge Project's Civic Learning Institute, supporting professional development offerings that encourage high-quality civic learning and teaching, and with EdEthics/Justice in Schools, an initiative focused on affirming that ethics matter in educational practice by helping educators and policymakers reason through ethical dilemmas they face, primarily through the use of normative case studies. He holds an Ed.M. in Education Policy and Analysis from the Harvard Graduate School of Education and a B.A. in History and International Relations from Boston University.

# PANEL & COMMUNITY ACTIVITY



## MEGAN K. HENNESSY

*Independent Researcher*

Megan K. Hennessy is an Independent Researcher and Community Builder (Communities of Practice) specializing in shared learning and the design of collaborative professional communities. With 25 years of experience in PreK–12 education both nationally and internationally, she has worked extensively in Title I and bilingual schools, supporting educators and leaders in developing equitable, evidence-based systems and innovation programs. She holds an M.Ed. in Global Education and brings expertise in educational research, instructional coaching, and program development.



## DR. JENNIFER ROTHSCHILD

*Wake Forest University*

Jennifer Rothschild is the Executive Director of the Educating Character Initiative. She joined the initiative as its Senior Scholar of Character in the summer of 2023, when the ECI was a brand new project of the Program for Leadership and Character at Wake Forest University. Since that time — a time of early partnership phone calls and drafts of a first request for proposals — she has been fortunate enough to be part of the growth of a national and international community of character educators, fueled in part by over \$35M of ECI grants to US institutions of higher education. A philosopher by training, Jennifer came to the field of character education via her academic research interests in ethical theory, the history of ethics, and Aristotelian virtue ethics. Her work focuses primarily on questions about habit, the sociality and unity of virtue, and the constitutions of vicious people. She has a Ph.D. in philosophy from the University of Chicago and a B.A. in philosophy and biology from Grinnell College. Prior to joining the Educating Character Initiative, Jennifer spent a decade as faculty in the Philosophy Department at the University of Florida.



## DR. JENNIFER URBAN

*Montclair State University*

Dr. Jennifer Brown Urban is Professor in the Department of Family Science and Human Development at Montclair State University where she also co-directs the Institute for Research on Youth Thriving and Evaluation. Dr. Urban received her B.A. in psychology and child development in 2001 from Tufts University. She earned her M.A. in 2006 and Ph.D. in Human Development in 2008, both from Cornell University. Dr. Urban is trained as a developmental scientist with specific expertise in youth character development as well as program planning and evaluation.

Dr. Lance Forman is a dedicated educator and leader with over two decades of experience in K-12 and higher education. He currently serves as an Associate Professor of Education and Assistant Dean for Education Specialties at Lipscomb University, where he oversees all graduate education programs in the College of Education. His work includes supporting faculty to integrate character formation into coursework, training current and aspiring school administrators, and collaborating with partner districts to strengthen leadership pipelines across Tennessee. He is also the co-founder of Novastone Learning, an educational resource company delivering AI-integrated, cinematic-quality simulation films focused on leadership and character development.

Prior to his tenure in higher education, Dr. Forman spent 13 years in the Metropolitan Nashville Public Schools (MNPS), where he served as a teacher, STEM coach, assistant principal, and executive principal. As Assistant Principal at Julia Green International Baccalaureate World School, he played a pivotal role in the school's IB authorization, contributing to significant student achievement gains and equity-focused interventions.

A graduate of Trevecca Nazarene University, Dr. Forman holds an Ed.D. in Leadership and Professional Practice, an M.Ed. in Educational Leadership, and a B.S. in Interpersonal Communications and Human Relations. His passion for empowering educators and fostering sustainable leadership continues to drive his work in shaping the next generation of school leaders.

## CONFERENCE AMBASSADORS

Are you new to the Advancing Character community and looking to learn more? Conference Ambassadors are here to help you connect.

**Conference Ambassadors**, identified by a special badge on their name tag, are available throughout the event to assist you. These ambassadors have been active members of the Advancing Character community for several years (some since its inaugural year at Boston University!). Please feel free to approach them with questions about the community and opportunities for involvement. They can also help connect you with other community members attending the conference.

- **Ben White**, *University of Alabama*
- **Chris Straffon**, *Uplift Education*
- **Christina Aldrich**, *Mosaic Learning Academy*
- **Danny Mucinskis**, *Harvard University*
- **Elyse Postlewaite**, *Montclair State University*
- **Emily Farkas**, *Grand Canyon University*
- **Jane Cobia**, *Samford University*
- **Jeremy Sager**, *Novus SMART Academy*
- **Jolleen Wagner**, *Brilla Public Charter Schools / Seton Education Partners*
- **Juan Carlos Villasenor**, *Voices College-Bound Language Academies*
- **Julie Sperry**, *CharacterPlus / Character.Org*
- **Kelsey LaVigne**, *Figment Solutions*
- **Lee-Anne Oros**, *Arkansas State University*
- **Lori Doyle**, *Concordia University, Irvine*
- **Lynn Barendsen**, *Harvard University*
- **Mark Kennell**, *The Couffo Collaborative*
- **Mary Sult**, *University of Northern Iowa*
- **Maureen Spelman**, *North Central College*
- **Michael Hahn**, *Saint Mary's University of Minnesota*
- **Mike Huguelet**, *Iowa Coalition for Public Charter Schools*
- **Nancy Winfrey**, *Wake Forest University*
- **Rochelle Van Dijk**, *Great MN Schools*
- **Scott Parsons**, *Fairleigh Dickinson University*
- **Sieun Park**, *University of Rochester*


 AMBASSADOR

## BREAKOUT SESSION I

10:00 - 11:00 a.m.

### Bronze Room

#### **Presentation 1 - Synthetic Realities and Moral Growth: Deepfakes, Social Media, and the Urgency of Character Education**

Adma Gama-Krummel and Simao Luis, University of Rochester

In a world where deepfakes and social media blur truth and deception, this session explores how synthetic media affects students' mental health, moral development, and sense of identity. Through real-life cases and discussion scenarios, two presenters will examine how character education can equip learners to navigate digital manipulation with empathy and ethical reasoning. Attendees will gain practical tools for addressing misinformation, fostering resilience, and promoting authenticity in classrooms increasingly shaped by artificial intelligence and media distortion.

#### **Presentation 2 - Connected but Alone: Navigating AI Intimacy, Hookups, & Relationships Without Virtues**

Susan Morrissey, Boston College

As students face a world of AI intimacy, hookups, and a culture that accepts relationships without virtues, our education must go beyond digital literacy and privacy policies. Schools and districts should teach courage, compassion, and collaboration—empowering students to discern between authentic and artificial connection, protect themselves against exploitation, and build true social well-being. Programs should foster real conversation, emotional awareness, and critical thinking about intimacy in the digital age, while safeguarding vulnerable students and ensuring equitable access to support. Ultimately, we must help students cultivate genuine relationships and resilience, not merely adapt to the shifting boundaries of tech-driven connection.

### Crimson Room

#### **Presentation 1 - Generous Listening and Dialogue: Ancient Roots and Modern Applications of Promoting Character Development and Human Flourishing**

Dr. Jonathan Tirrell and Naomi Boase, Tufts University

Across millennia and disciplines, listening has been associated with human flourishing. In this workshop, we introduce generous listening and dialogue as a framework for understanding and advancing character development and thriving. Framed by contemporary approaches to studying human development—relational-developmental systems metatheory, which emphasizes mutually influential relations between individuals and contexts—we frame generous listening as a means to recognize, integrate, and celebrate our common, shared humanity and unique, individual differences. The workshop will include practices in the skills and strategies of listening and dialogue that are intended to promote character and community development for thriving individuals and flourishing communities.

#### **Presentation 2 - Wisdom at Work: Bridging Ancient Virtue and Modern Leadership Through Practical Wisdom**

Andrea Rolla and Dr. Maria Soledad Hershey, Harvard University

This session presents Wisdom at Work: Revitalizing School Leadership, an initiative advancing Aristotle's phronesis—practical wisdom—as a foundation for character and flourishing in K–12 school leadership. Through a Research Practice Partnership and design-based research, the project integrates philosophical depth with modern professional learning design. Findings from two leadership cohorts suggest growth in judgment, ethical action, and flourishing. The presenters will share the framework and the design elements involved in building a sustainable model that bridges enduring virtue ethics with the evolving demands of contemporary school leadership.

## BREAKOUT SESSION I (continued)

10:00 - 11:00 a.m.

### Amber Room

#### Presentation 1- Bridging the SEL gap: Data-driven Tier II Interventions for Student Success

Sabrina Stavonor, DREAM Charter Schools

This presentation will showcase DREAM's Tier II SEL model through a case study format, integrating data visuals, implementation strategies, and lessons learned. Participants will explore the model's foundation in data-informed decision-making, interdisciplinary collaboration, and culturally responsive SEL practices. The session will include opportunities for reflection and discussion around adapting this framework to participants' unique school contexts.

#### Presentation 2 - The Importance of the Intellect in Character

Dr. Diana Smith and Peter Anderson, Washington Latin Public Charter School

We will explore the Greek concept of knowledge and what Plato meant by "To know the good is to do the good." We will explore the connection between knowledge and goodness, and apply our thinking to character formation. We will distinguish character from social and emotional learning, and discuss how schools can re-establish the connection between the intellect and goodness. We will also introduce a template for auditing a school's intellectual culture. We aim for participants to leave with an understanding of the ancient emphasis on the mind, and with a method for assessing the intellectual engagement in their culture.

### Salt River Ballroom 3

#### Workshop - Character in the Age of AI: Cultivating Agency, Integrity, and Purpose in Digital Learning Environments

Anastasia Shikanova, Ohio State University

Generative AI is transforming education, but how can it be harnessed to strengthen character, agency, and ethical decision-making?

This interactive workshop explores strategies for integrating AI in ways that cultivate integrity, purpose, and learner autonomy in K-12 and higher education contexts. Participants will engage with research-based frameworks, explore real-world examples, and collaborate on practical approaches to prepare students and future leaders to use AI responsibly.

Attendees will leave with actionable tools and strategies to foster critical thinking, ethical reflection, and flourishing, bridging timeless principles of character with emerging educational technologies.

### Terracotta Room

#### Workshop - Relational Praxis: Enduring Foundations and Emerging Horizons in the Formation of Character and Leadership

Monica Dixon, Search Institute

This experiential session bridges enduring wisdom and modern science to explore how relationships form the foundation of character and leadership. Participants will engage in reflective and design-based activities that connect timeless principles of formation with practical strategies drawn from the Developmental Relationships Framework. Together, we will translate theory into living practice, cultivating purpose, belonging, and flourishing across schools and leadership programs. The workshop reimagines education as a relational journey where character grows through shared inquiry, intentional culture, and the daily practice of leading well.

## BREAKOUT SESSION I (continued)

10:00 - 11:00 a.m.

### Salt River Ballroom 5-8 Table Dialogues

#### The Importance of Understanding Cultural Relativism and Cultural Relevance

Deanna Flores, Voices College-Bound Language Academies

In this table dialogue learn how Voices College-Bound Language Academies, a Charter Network (TK-8th) serving marginalized communities with a dual-language model in Northern California is addressing the importance of positive cultural identity and how it relates to Social Emotional Learning (SEL) and overall academic growth. As a 97% Latino Network focused heavily on character education and academic rigor aligned to our culturally-relevant Core Values of Si Se Puede Attitude and In Lak'Ech, it is crucial to provide instruction in a school environment that is both culturally relative and relevant and understanding the difference.

#### Reconnecting Cultural Roots to Character Formation: Pre-Service Teachers as Co-Creators of Moral Values in Indonesian Elementary Education

Fauzi Abdillah, University of Rochester

This table dialogue presents an ethnopedagogical project where pre-service elementary teachers co-created civic moral values from the cultural wisdom of four Indonesian ethnic groups: Sundanese, Minangkabau, Dayak, and Sasak. Through participatory exploration and interpretation of local traditions, the project developed Nilai Moral Kewarganegaraan (Civic Moral Values) as a framework for character formation in schools. Participants will learn how the process bridges local wisdom and modern teacher education, offering practical insights for designing culturally rooted character education that cultivates flourishing among students and educators alike.

#### Trauma-Informed Character Education: Building Compassionate School Communities

Dr. Ashley Brandon and Dr. Emily Farkas, Grand Canyon University

This table dialogue introduces a research-based book integrating trauma-informed practices with character education, offering a compassionate guide for educators working with students who have experienced adversity. Grounded in current research and practical application, the book explores how trauma shapes student development, behavior, and character, and provides strategies for support. Participants will learn about different types of trauma, their impact, and approaches to healing and growth, including restorative practices and trust-building routines. Through stories and lessons, educators gain resources to foster virtues, such as resilience, empathy, and ethical decision-making, cultivating inclusive environments where all students can thrive in an evolving society.

#### Reimagining Professional Development through Blended Writing Groups: Cultivating Character, Integrity, and Community among Teacher Educators

Hendriwanto Hendriwanto, Michigan State University

This study reimagines professional development by examining blended writing groups (BWGs) as transformative spaces for cultivating reflective, ethical, and community-oriented teacher educators. Using a community-based action research design, six Indonesian teacher educators engaged in semester-long BWGs integrating online peer feedback, collaborative genre analysis, and reflective dialogue. Findings reveal that BWGs fostered intellectual humility, integrity, resilience, and empathy, shaping participants' professional identities and agency in writing for publication. The study argues that character is enacted through relational, technology-mediated collaboration, positioning BWGs as learning communities that bridge theory and practice and renew virtues of humility, care, and integrity in scholarly work.

## BREAKOUT SESSION I (continued)

10:00 - 11:00 a.m.

**Salt River Ballroom 5-8 Table Dialogues**

### Walking the Talk: A Case Study of Character Education Implementation in Middle School

Dr. Jordyn Horner, Knox County Schools and Dr. Mary Lynne Derrington, University of Tennessee

A research presentation sharing a qualitative case study of character education implementation in a suburban middle school. The session explores alignment with Lickona's Eleven Principles and offers implications for educators and leaders seeking to strengthen schoolwide character initiatives.

### You Can't Give Away What You Don't Own

Jose Rosario, Center for Urban Teaching

Effective character education is done with students, not to them. Students mirror the beliefs and value systems of their leaders, teachers and staff members. In this session, learn how to bridge the gap between the culture you have and the one you want with your team. Participants will explore the core beliefs necessary to develop a proactive plan to integrate character education, starting with your staff.

### Developmental Love: How to Serve Another's Best Developmental Interest

Sara Mendonça, Wake Forest University

Human flourishing depends on developmentally-nurturant relationships that foster character virtue development (CVD), a dynamic that we call developmental love (DL). Developmental love suggests that loving through service, authentically committing to another's optimal development, promotes flourishin described or optimized for human flourishing. As a group of scholars representing developmental psychology, theological ethics, character education, and measurement, we hope to introduce this new concept examining its nature, boundaries, and, especially, its relational dimension to CVD education and advancing human flourishing across diverse contexts. We will begin to address foundational questions: What is DL? How does it relate to flourishing—is it necessary, intentional?

## BREAKOUT SESSION II

11:15 a.m. - 12:15 p.m.

**Bronze Room**

### Presentation 1 - Cultivating Maturity and Leadership in Higher Education: Insights from Greenleaf

Dr. Jason Weber, Texas Tech University System

Robert K. Greenleaf's essay Education and Maturity identifies four enduring challenges in education: separating intellect from character, prioritizing technical skill over wisdom, navigating ambiguity, and neglecting service. This session examines these issues in the context of modern higher education and their implications for leadership development among students, faculty, and staff. Participants will explore how institutions can intentionally cultivate mature, self-aware, service-oriented leaders, using Greenleaf's insights as a theoretical foundation. Attendees will leave with practical perspectives on integrating character and leadership development into curricula, professional development, and campus culture.

## BREAKOUT SESSION II (continued)

11:15 a.m. - 12:15 p.m.

### Bronze Room

#### Presentation 2 - Principled Innovation for Character Integration: Exploring "The Guide" as a Professional Development Tool for Higher Education Teaching

Dr. Teresa Foulger and Gulnora Isaeva, Arizona State University

This session introduces "The Guide," a professional development model to help faculty integrate Principled Innovation (PI), a character development framework, into university courses. Participants will explore how this process-oriented approach can guide how character is represented as 1) core curriculum, 2) implicit curriculum, and 3) spiraled curriculum. Using a Table Dialogue format, attendees will review "The Guide" and engage in discussions to reflect on its applicability in their contexts, share insights, and identify potential barriers to implementation in higher education. K-12 educators will have the opportunity to guide higher education partners on how character is established in the preparation curriculum.

### Crimson Room

#### Presentation 1 - Moral Measure: The Game

Jillian Meyer, Indiana University Bloomington

The Moral Measure is a developing tool that brings timeless questions of character into a modern, game-like format. Drawing on traditions from Aristotle's virtues to Darwin's moral sense, and modern perspectives in psychology, anthropology, and religious studies, it invites students to weigh values such as autonomy vs. community or secular vs. spiritual priorities. Its two goals are to unite insights from multiple disciplines into one framework and to make moral learning accessible and appealing. For educators, it offers an interdisciplinary, research-backed, and adaptable way to spark dialogue, foster empathy, and teach character across today's evolving K-12 landscape.

#### Presentation 2 - Ancient Virtues, Modern Horizons: Cultivating Character and Human Skills for Flourishing in Schools

Dr. Shelby Clark, Lynn Barendsen and Danny Mucinskas, Harvard University

This interactive presentation bridges Aristotle's golden mean with contemporary research on good work and the human skills needed for the future of work. Participants will reflect on the character strengths most relevant to themselves and their students, explore the four domains of character (moral, intellectual, civic, performance), and analyze how role modeling shapes flourishing in schools. The session concludes by offering educators practical strategies and resources to cultivate character and purpose in their educational communities.

### Amber Room

#### Presentation 1 - Quantum Character: Preparing Students for Ethical Engagement from K-12 to Higher Education

Dr. Rebecca Crews, Miami University

What if character development in education reflected the complexity and uncertainty of the world students face? The Quantum Character Model (QCM) applies principles of quantum theory (superposition, entanglement, and uncertainty) to reimagine how we cultivate student character across K-12 and higher education. This session introduces QCM as a framework for designing learning environments that honor diverse identities, foster collaboration, and equip students to make values-based decisions in ambiguous contexts. Through interactive reflection and small-group discussion, participants will leave with tangible strategies that integrate character with academic achievement to better prepare students for meaningful engagement in the 21st century.

## BREAKOUT SESSION II (continued)

11:15 a.m. - 12:15 p.m.

### *Amber Room*

#### **Presentation 2 - Character Development from Ancient Foundations to Modern Horizons: Collaborative Partnerships focused on Developing Practical Wisdom in Leaders**

Dr. Maureen Spelman, North Central College, Dr. Bill Cleveland, Dr. Kara Chism, and Dr. Jane Cobia, Samford University, and Dr. Lance Forman, Lipscomb University.

What does it mean to live well, lead with integrity, and advance the common good in education today? This interactive session explores how partnerships among Lipscomb University, North Central College, Samford University, and Advancing Character are reimagining character formation in leadership preparation. Participants will experience the use of moral dilemmas and reflective frameworks that cultivate virtue and practical wisdom in emerging leaders. Drawing on interdisciplinary research and evidence-based practices, presenters will share proven models for embedding character development into professional learning across higher education and K-12 settings.

### *Salt River Ballroom 3*

#### **Workshop - Flourishing through Practical Wisdom: A Curriculum for Character Formation in Education and Leadership**

Dr. Scott Parsons and Dr. Robert McGrath, Fairleigh Dickinson University

This workshop introduces a curriculum for cultivating character and flourishing in education and leadership. Grounded in Aristotelian virtue ethics, it integrates ancient wisdom with modern research on character development and practical wisdom. Participants will explore four elements of character—heart, mind, will, and practical wisdom—through experiential activities and self-assessment using the Golden Mean Inventory (McGrath et al., 2025). Focusing on the golden mean as a framework for balanced strength use, the session demonstrates how practical wisdom connects research and practice to advance education, virtue, and flourishing in today's world.

### *Terracotta Room*

#### **Workshop - From Historical Imperative to Modern Necessity: How Human Connection Fuels Flourishing and Methods for Creating the Conditions for Connection**

Kelsey LaVigne, Figment Solutions

Our need for belonging is rooted in our primal instincts for survival. Though humans are no longer threatened by prehistoric predators, our need for connection with others has endured and evolved and remains foundational to our flourishing. With the decline of third spaces, our responsibility as leaders to create the conditions for members of our school communities to meaningfully connect is even more critical. Participants will explore the impact of different types of connection experiences on members of school communities and consider strategies for application.

## BREAKOUT SESSION II (continued)

11:15 a.m. - 12:15 p.m.

**Salt River Ballroom 5-8 Table Dialogues**

### Character Walks - Foundation for Success

Dr. Ben White, University of Alabama and Dr. Ashley Brandon, Grand Canyon University

This session explores how schools can intentionally cultivate character by engaging educators, students, and stakeholders in meaningful dialogue and reflection. Participants will explore: The Character Walk process – from planning to implementation: Observation tools that highlight characters in action and Gathering authentic feedback to strengthen school culture and climate.

Attendees will have the opportunity to review sample resources, planning templates, and real feedback gathered from previous Character Walks. These materials provide a window into how schools have used the process to celebrate strengths, identify growth areas, and foster a sense of shared commitment to educating for character among faculty and students.

### Character, Merit, and Equity: The Politics of Holistic Review in U.S. Private Education

Maahi Kumar and Dr. Jake Plantz, E3<sup>n</sup>

Character skill assessments have been shown to promote greater educational equity in private schooling. However, in recent years, participation among schools has declined. As political dynamics increasingly shape the practice of holistic admissions in private education, this discussion will ask participants to examine how current political developments may influence the future of character assessments. We will review past instances where political polarization affected admissions practices before turning to a discussion on how to approach an educational landscape that is increasingly impacted by a focus on political ideologies.

### Reflective Practice: Bridging Health Professions Education to K–12 Character Education

Tiara Adzakiyah, University of Rochester

This interactive table dialogue explores learning strategies from health professions education, particularly guided reflection practices, to inform character formation and development in K-12 education. This session will examine reflective frameworks that can be designed for K-12 school leaders and teachers. This session invites participants to discuss, share insights, reflect on their own practices, and collaborate on practical strategies for integrating reflection as a foundation for students' character formation and development across educational levels.

### Forward-Thinking Approaches to Character Development through Principled Innovation,

Jaron Neal, Arizona State University

This interactive roundtable invites K–12 educators and leaders to explore how Arizona State University's Principled Innovation framework can guide character development amid rapid technological and social change. Through collaborative dialogue, participants will examine how values such as empathy, integrity, and responsibility can inform decision-making, leadership, and learning design. Drawing on ASU's partnerships and initiatives, the session highlights innovative approaches—like mentorship and community-centered learning—that balance ethical responsibility with forward-thinking innovation. Participants will co-create actionable ideas to foster character development that prepares students for purposeful, principled leadership in a complex and evolving world.

## BREAKOUT SESSION II (continued)

11:15 a.m. - 12:15 p.m.

**Salt River Ballroom 5-8 Table Dialogues**

### Identifying and Measuring Character Strengths Using the Maximum Differential Technique

Yasmine Perry, Montclair State University

This session bridges research and practice using innovative approaches to identify the character strengths most meaningful to and prioritized by the population served. Maximum Differential, originally developed for businesses to measure consumer preferences, offers a data-driven approach to determine the character values students most consistently embody through a forced-choice response. We will discuss how educators can leverage this methodology to gain evidence-based insights into their students' values and also translate this knowledge into the strategic direction for character education practice. Attendees will gain actionable ideas for incorporating research-driven methodologies into their character education initiatives.

### How to Bridge Differences: Drawing on Three Key Virtues in a Community of Practice for Educators

Dr. Amy Eva, Greater Good Science Center

In this interactive table dialogue, participants will learn about the Greater Good Educator Community of Practice (CoP) framework and experience an evidence-based practice called "Tell Me More," which draws on participants' capacity for curiosity and intellectual humility while engaging in potentially polarizing dialogue. Participants will explore intellectual humility as a courageous stance that can strengthen dialogue and support deeper learning, and they will also receive additional research-informed practices that cultivate the key virtues of intellectual humility, empathy, and forgiveness in schools and universities.

## BREAKOUT SESSION III

1:30 - 2:30 p.m.

### Bronze Room

#### Presentation 1 - Ancient Virtues, Modern Tools: AI as a Partner in Character Formation for Educational Leaders

Dr. Lance Forman, Lipscomb University

What happens when ancient virtues meet modern technology? This hands-on workshop explores how artificial intelligence can deepen moral and character formation for educational leaders. Participants will experience interactive AI chatbots that simulate complex school-based dilemmas, prompting reflection on virtues like courage, empathy, and justice. Drawing from both ancient moral traditions and emerging research, the session demonstrates how AI can serve as a creative partner in cultivating virtue literacy, empathy, and moral reasoning. Attendees will leave with practical tools and new perspectives for integrating character formation into leadership preparation and professional development.

#### Presentation 2 - MCW Practical Wisdom Pathway: A human-centered approach to accessing and deepening practical wisdom in medical student learning communities

Julia Schmitt and M. Chris Decker, Medical College of Wisconsin

Our work at the Medical College of Wisconsin (MCW) began by activating our faculty in understanding their own practical wisdom to foster practical wisdom development and virtue literacy in their medical students. We used a human-centered design approach to develop a reflection and deliberation model, the MCW Practical Wisdom Pathway (PWP), which is being taught to all MCW medical students. In this experiential session, you will apply PWP through a relatable, personal scenario and utilize our novel visual tools in a pair-share setting followed by whole group discussion. You'll leave with actionable takeaways that are highly translatable to K-12 contexts.

## BREAKOUT SESSION III (continued)

1:30 - 2:30 p.m.

### *Crimson Room*

#### **Presentation 1 - Virtue and AI: How Does AI Impact Character Education?**

Dr. William Cochran, Wake Forest University

How will AI change character education? This workshop applies the Seven Strategies for Character Development—research-based strategies rooted in Aristotelian virtue ethics—to diagnose AI's threats to character development and design pathways forward. Using AI may bypass the practice needed to develop virtue, undermine genuine dialogue, and replace the relational accountability essential for character growth. But could AI also act as a coach for virtue practice, deepen self-reflection, or help surface relevant moral exemplars? Through collaborative discussion and brainstorming, participants will examine the risks and explore the pathways for integrating AI into their particular educational settings.

#### **Presentation 2 - Ancient Virtues for Modern Technology: Character Education and Generative AI**

Krista Berry, Western Governors University

As generative AI (GenAI) becomes more prevalent in K–12 and higher education, educators are grappling with its impact on student character development. This session shares findings from a mixed-methods study at an online university, exploring whether GenAI facilitates or inhibits virtues like integrity, responsibility, and critical thinking. While most instructors perceived GenAI as inhibiting character growth, some saw potential for positive impact with ethical guidance. Drawing on Aristotelian virtue ethics and practical wisdom, this session offers insights and strategies for educators and students to evaluate ethical GenAI use while fostering character in today's evolving educational landscape.

### *Amber Room*

#### **Presentation 1 - Teaching “The Good Life” From Eastern and Western Perspectives**

Dr. Eunice Jianping Hu and Leanna Bernish, Wake Forest University

The Dialogues with Antiquity course explores what it means to live a “good” life in modern societies through examining the ancient perspectives of Confucius and Aristotle. The course seeks to support students' growth in moral attentiveness and their use of moral exemplars, and in virtues such as bravery, kindness, compassion, respect, and open-mindedness. Through a mixed methods, pre-post survey, we observed growth in a variety of virtues, demonstrating that the course achieved many of its aims. In this presentation we provide an overview of the course and further detail the methodology, results, and the implications of the present study.

#### **Presentation 2 - Cultivating Virtue Through Civic Engagement: A Case Study from Leavenworth Senior High School**

Misti Stevens, Grand Canyon University

This presentation explores how classical and biblical conceptions of virtue were reimagined through civic engagement at Leavenworth Senior High School. Amid a diverse and divided student body, learners cultivated purpose and moral character by serving the Westside CAN Center. Through interviews, guest speakers, and structured reflection, students developed tools for flourishing—without imposing solutions. This case study offers a compelling model for character formation rooted in lived experience, ancient wisdom, and community partnership.

## BREAKOUT SESSION III (continued)

1:30 - 2:30 p.m.

### *Salt River Ballroom 3*

#### **Workshop - Building a Comprehensive Approach to Character Education: Engaging Students, Faculty, and Staff**

Kathleen Stimely, Cristy Guleserian and Jasmine Logan, Wake Forest University

This 60-minute workshop will immerse participants in a comprehensive character education model that integrates students, faculty, and staff through the Seven Strategies for Character Development. The session will begin with a brief framing of a comprehensive character education approach based on the strategies, followed by two interactive segments that highlight their application in student programming, faculty course development, and staff professional learning. Participants will engage in small-group dialogue, experiential learning, and reflective exercises that demonstrate how the strategies can be adapted to their own contexts. Attendees will leave with practical tools, insights, and ideas for cultivating character across educational communities.

### *Terracotta Room*

#### **Workshop - The ABCs of Human Flourishing: Ancient Wisdom and Modern Research on the Power of Self-Determination in Schools**

Dr. Julie Sperry, CharacterPlus

This interactive workshop explores the convergence of ancient wisdom and modern research on human flourishing. Building on Aristotle, Maslow, Bloom, and contemporary Self-Determination Theory, participants will discover the “ABCs of Flourishing” — Autonomy, Belonging, and Competence — as essential drivers of intrinsic motivation. Through dialogue and reflection, school leaders will explore how these principles foster purpose, connection, and growth in their communities, leaving with actionable strategies to embed flourishing into everyday leadership and practice.

### *Salt River Ballroom 5-8* **Table Dialogues**

#### **“Schools of Political Education”’: Situating Character and Civics in The Gambia’s and Burkina Faso’s Non-Formal Education Sector**

James Fisher, Generous Listening and Dialogue Initiative

This table dialogue consists of a quick presentation which discusses the historical cases of The Gambia’s (1963-1994) and Burkina Faso’s (1983-1987) planning and implementation of character and civic education programming in non-formal education. It discusses the cases’ successes with an eye towards how they can be applied today, particularly for inclusive education for children and adults. It will be followed by a short activity centered on inviting audience members to think critically about how to create a curriculum that is responsive to the set of contexts in educational spaces and how to apply character education in different scenarios.

### **Enduring Wisdom, Emerging Horizons: Dewantara and Culturally Relevant Pedagogy in Future Education,**

Laela Nurbatra and Nurkamillah Nurkamillah, Pennsylvania State University

This session explores the intersection of Ki Hadjar Dewantara’s Indonesian educational philosophy and Culturally Relevant Pedagogy (CRP) to reimagine leadership as a moral, relational, and culturally grounded practice. Drawing from Dewantara’s Tri Pusat Pendidikan (home, school, community) and his leadership motto—Ing ngarso sung tuladha, ing madyo mangun karso, tut wuri handayani—the paper highlights how integrating Indonesian values of character, communal harmony, and humanization with CRP’s focus on identity, equity, and critical reflection can cultivate future educational leaders who are globally minded yet locally rooted, leading with empathy, integrity, and intercultural awareness in diverse educational settings.

## BREAKOUT SESSION III (continued)

1:30 - 2:30 p.m.

Salt River Ballroom 5-8 Table Dialogues

### Character in Action: Let's Teach The Principal to Carry the Flag

Dr. Hank Staggs, Crieve Hall Elementary School Nashville

This table discussion will explore complexities that principals face in practice and how leader prep can help equip them with courage to go beyond metrics for academic success and carry the flag for character development.

### Coaching for Character: Cultivating Reflective, Ethical, and Flourishing Leadership in Iowa's Schools

Dr. Mary Sult, Dr. Amanda Schmidt and Denise Schares, University of Northern Iowa

This presentation highlights how leadership coaching for K–12 educational leaders in Iowa fosters character, ethical decision-making, and reflective wisdom in complex educational environments. Through a year-long coaching program grounded in honesty, integrity, and reflection, leaders engaged in thoughtful conversations around Leadership Standards and professional growth. Survey results revealed 100% of participants increased reflective practices, reduced isolation, and strengthened their character-driven leadership. The session will share the coaching framework, participant insights, and strategies for integrating these principles into leadership development, illustrating how timeless virtues and modern practices together nurture flourishing, ethical, and purpose-driven educational communities.

### Virtue-Ethical Design in Early Literacy: Reviewing Duolingo ABC and Digital Character Formation

Zaldi Harfal, University of Rochester

This session reinterprets Duolingo ABC, a gamified early-literacy app, through the lens of virtue ethics and technological mediation. Drawing on Annas (2006) and Verbeek (2006), it explores how design elements (e.g. feedback, rewards, and goal structures) can “materialize morality” by cultivating perseverance, curiosity, and self-regulation in young learners. Participants will discuss how teachers and parents can guide children’s engagement with technology to promote flourishing rather than dependence. The session bridges ancient virtue ethics and modern design ethics, offering insights for educators and leaders seeking to design or evaluate digital tools that nurture both literacy and virtue.

### Compassionate Innovation: Leading with Heart, Creating for Good

Susan Maynor, CharacterPlus

Discover Compassionate Innovation—a heart-first framework for cultivating creativity with purpose. In this interactive, technology-infused workshop, participants will explore how empathy sparks imagination and how students flourish when they create for good. Through examples from EPiC Elementary—a Missouri State School of Character and Apple Distinguished School—digital storytelling, and hands-on challenges, participants will experience the power of compassionate creativity and design their own “Seed Idea → Flourishing Practice” sprint. Leave with practical tools, inspiration, and a renewed vision for how timeless virtues and emerging technologies connect to help students design, create, and lead with heart—transforming imagination into impact in today’s classrooms.

### AIK as a Model for Character Formation in Islamic Higher Education: Reflections from Muhammadiyah University Indonesia

Erpin Said, University of Rochester

This presentation introduces Al-Islam dan Kemuhammadiyah (AIK), a compulsory character-education course and institutional culture across Muhammadiyah universities in Indonesia. Drawing on teaching experience at Universitas Muhammadiyah Sorong and doctoral research in education, the session shows how AIK unites faith, knowledge, and service to foster moral integrity and civic responsibility. It highlights AIK as both a structured curriculum and a living culture that informs leadership and teaching practice. The session bridges ancient moral traditions and modern educational innovation, offering insights for cultivating ethical, community-oriented leadership and human flourishing.

## BREAKOUT SESSION IV

8:15 a.m. - 9:15 a.m.

### Bronze Room

#### Presentation 1 - Ancient Wisdom for Modern Wellbeing: Restoring Character Through Connection

Anastasia Hercules, University of Missouri - St. Louis

This session explores how ancient character practices—such as self-reflection, balance, generous listening and civil discourse—can restore wellbeing in today's fast-paced, high-stress school environments. Grounded in virtues like humility, stewardship, and noble purpose, participants will be introduced to a three-level professional development model that supports educators in leading from a place of wholeness. Through practical tools, peer engagement, and reflective exercises, this session offers a pathway to reconnect with enduring wisdom and foster flourishing school cultures. Join us to rediscover character in practice and reclaim a hopeful, connected vision for the future of education.

#### Presentation 2 - Bridling Character: Ancient Virtues and Modern Growth through Equine-Assisted Learning

Dr. Mary Lombardo-Graves, Grand Canyon University

This session explores how equine-assisted learning (EAL) can serve as a transformative framework for developing timeless virtues—such as humility, patience, courage, and empathy in modern educational and leadership settings. Drawing from ancient philosophical and spiritual traditions that emphasize character formation through relationship and reflection, this presentation connects these enduring principles with contemporary experiential practices involving horses. Participants will learn how the nonverbal, relational feedback horses provide creates opportunities for authentic self-awareness, ethical decision-making, and emotional regulation skills essential for today's complex world.

### Crimson Room

#### Presentation 1 - Messy Middle: Intentionally Cultivating Character in the 6 - 8 Space,

Nolan McDaniel, Kelli Fulton, Ethan Evans and Natalee Buchanan, ChattAcademy Community School

Middle school is messy. At ChattAcademy, we never shy away from the work to build character in this formative phase. Intentional whole school structures, like Advisory, and individual supports, such as Character Development Plans, put this work at the forefront of our model. We believe strong character and belonging transform academic results and lead to lives of choice.

#### Presentation 2 - Forming Practical Wisdom: Leading with Virtue for Human Flourishing Across the Educational Community

Jolleen Wagner, Brilla Public Charter Schools / Seton Education Partners

Brilla Schools leads with virtues to form wise, flourishing people. This session explores how Brilla cultivates practical wisdom and embraces education as formation, not just information, across its entire community: students, educators, and families as first educators. Participants will see how virtues such as wisdom, justice, courage, and self-control are lived through leadership formation, adult development, and family partnerships. The session offers a vision of schools where character is not hidden but embodied in every system, relationship, and daily choice so that what students know and who they become are braided together in the pursuit of human flourishing.

## BREAKOUT SESSION IV

8:15 a.m. - 9:15 a.m.

### Amber Room

#### Presentation 1 - Communities of Character: Flourishing Faculty in Today's Schools

Natalie Demers, The Flourishing Faculty Project

This interactive presentation explores how schools can strengthen faculty culture through the lens of character and flourishing. Drawing on international research into teacher well-being and character development, alongside design work from The Flourishing Faculty Project, presenters share a framework for reimagining recruitment, retention, and professional development. Participants will reflect on the virtues that sustain thriving communities and identify the barriers that erode them, leaving with both inspiration and adaptable strategies to cultivate schools where adults flourish, colleagues support one another, and students benefit from communities rooted in character and hope.

#### Presentation 2 - Instructional Leaders Promoting Teachers' Reflection In Arkansas and Tennessee Schools

Dr. Amany Saleh, Arkansas State University and Dr. Mary Lynne Derrington and Matthew Murphy, University of Tennessee

This study investigates how instructional leaders in Arkansas and Tennessee foster teacher reflection. Using qualitative interviews, it finds leaders value reflection for enhancing critical thinking and self-awareness, but often guide teachers toward compliance rather than authentic problem-solving. Strategies include professional learning communities, data-driven discussions, and post-observation meetings. Key obstacles are teacher resistance, time constraints, and standardized testing pressures. Leaders note that data use can feel evaluative, hindering reflective culture. Instructional leaders play a crucial role in modeling and supporting reflection, which is essential for instructional improvement and student character development. The authors share the findings and strategies to promote reflection.

### Salt River Ballroom 3

#### Workshop - Community of Practice Value Creation: Using the Wenger-Trayner Framework to Catalyze Character Formation in Higher Education

Kaley Bontrager, Marina Basu and Enrique Borges, Arizona State University; Megan K. Hennessy, Independent Researcher

Hands-on workshop introducing the Wenger-Trayner Values Creation Framework to design, evaluate, and scale CoPs within teacher education. After a concise overview, participants reflect on CoP experiences, hear a university case story, and analyze that story in small groups using five value cycles: immediate, potential, applied, realized, and transformative. Facilitators provide a one-page CoP planning template, a low-burden evaluation rubric, and facilitation prompts emphasizing equity and ethical clarity. Participants leave ready to prototype a 60-minute CoP cycle, map value from quick wins to transformative outcomes, and strengthen intra-university collaboration that prepares educators to cultivate character in K-12 schools.

### Terracotta Room

#### Workshop - St. Louis Youth Advocacy: Cultivating Civic Character Through a University-School-Community Partnership,

Mindy Bier and Colby Crowder, University of Missouri - St. Louis

This session presents a university-school-community partnership in the promotion of civic virtue. The Youth Advisory Board (YAB) initiative reflects the enduring relevance of ancient moral and civic philosophy while addressing the evolving challenges of contemporary democracy. Rooted in Aristotelian and Confucian notions of virtue as habituated moral excellence developed through communal participation, YAB translates timeless principles into actionable learning for today's youth. The student's work in areas such as food insecurity, voter access, and literacy in juvenile detention centers exemplifies how character education can be both historically grounded and socially responsive.

**BREAKOUT SESSION IV***8:15 a.m. - 9:15 a.m.***Salt River Ballroom 5-8 Table Dialogues****Images that Move Us: Photographs as a Tool for Character Education**

Md Mamunur Rashid, University of Rochester

This Table Dialogue explores how photography can be used as a tool for empathy, reflection, and character education. In a world where powerful images of injustice or celebration spread instantly through social media, photographs continue to shape moral awareness and collective response. Participants will view and discuss selected photographs from the past and present, sharing emotional and ethical reflections. Together, they will explore practical ways to use photography in classrooms to encourage empathy, moral discussion, and civic understanding, helping students connect visual experience with ethical awareness and character formation.

**Character, Emotion Regulation, and Distressing Subjects: Equipping Students for the World They'll Face**

Dr. Randall Curren and Dr. Sieun Park, University of Rochester

The ancient foundations of character education include a strong focus on virtues of emotion regulation, such as courage, that enable people to remain focused on acting appropriately in the face of perturbing emotions. Our presentation builds on this foundation through contemporary research in the science of emotion regulation. The premise of our paper is that integrative emotion regulation is a central aspect of virtuous functioning that can be nurtured through psychologically need-supportive pedagogy. A specific focus will be the benefits of such pedagogy in teaching subjects, such as climate change, that may elicit troubling emotions leading to denial.

**How to Educate for Virtue: Developing an Educational Model of Virtue Formation for K-12 Educators**

Christopher Anthony, Clare Kilbane, Monica Kowalski, David McPherson, University of Florida

In this session, a model for growth in character designed specifically for educational applications will be presented. We will present the model for the first 30 minutes of the session with references to the philosophical literature and examples of how each component might be translated into instructional practices. As the model is meant to be eminently usable, we will specifically seek feedback from participants regarding the clarity, feasibility, and utility of the model. Indeed, we will specifically solicit web based feedback (e.g., via QR code) that will facilitate continued honing of the model to promote effective character education.

**The Character Imperative: Transforming School Leadership through the Intentional Nurturing and Assessment of Virtue**

Dr. Melodie Wyttenbach, Boston College, Lindsey Hughes, Cathedral High School and Teresina "Maria" Ruiz, Notre Dame Academy

This session details a scholarly approach to measuring character growth in emerging K-12 school leaders, grounded in virtue ethics. The framework advocates for holistic character formation—prioritizing virtues over technical skills—and its impact on school culture. The research reviews a program where 75 aspiring administrators were intentionally developed across five virtues: vision, attentiveness, adaptability, humility, and joy. The program employed a robust triangulation model involving academic instruction, executive coaching, and peer learning. Crucially, the research developed a systematic, multi-rater assessment strategy over 2.5 years. This method uses observable, measurable behaviors for each virtue to track developmental trajectory, moving beyond subjective evaluation.

# Join the SEEDS AND NEEDS



*Session and Reception*

**MARCH 2 AT 5 - 6:20 P.M. | SUN DEVIL BALLROOM & LAWN**

	<b>Name(s)</b>	<b>Organization(s)</b>	<b>Title</b>
1	Anastasia Shikanova	Ohio State University	Scaffolding Graduate Learning with Instructor-Designed GenAI Prompts
2	Becky Crews	Miami University	Quantum Character
3	Catie Garcia Arik Shur	FranklinCovey Education	Growing Life-Ready Student Leaders with Character Through Leader in Me
4	Chang Liu Zhilin Zhang	University Of Rochester	Practices and Challenges of Monolingual Music Teachers
5	Charles Fadel	Center for Curriculum Redesign	Assessing Character
6	Christina Aldrich	Mosaic Learning Academy	Stories that Shape Character
7	Clare Kilbane Christopher Anthony Monica Kowalski	University of Notre Dame	Developing an Educational Model of Virtue Formation for K-12 Educators
8	Jillian Meyer	Indiana University Bloomington	Moral Measure: The Game
9	John La Muth	American University of Sovereign Nations	The Motivation Solution
10	Kelsey LaVigne	Figment Solutions	Values-Driven Culture: Modules + Implementation Support
11	Kristen Pelster Nicole Diehl Roxanna Mechem	CharacterPlus/Character.org	Growing Character Together
12	Mary Lombardo-Graves	Grand Canyon University	Bridling Character Equine-Assisted Learning & Virtue Ethics
13	Sara Luesse	Edgar Road Elementary	Family Groups