

# Educational Assistant Symposium:

## Together We Grow

Friday, October 31 2025  
Connect Charter School

|               |                 |                                                                                                                                                          |
|---------------|-----------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| 8:30 - 8:45   | Gym             | <b>Carla Cameron &amp; Leanne Riley</b> - Welcome and Opening Remarks<br>(collaboration between Charter & Independent Schools, AISCA and The Consortium) |
| 8:45 - 9:45   | Gym             | <b>Dr Gabrielle Wilcox</b> - Keynote - The Value of Educational Assistants: Supporting Student Behaviour                                                 |
| 9:45 - 10:00  |                 | Break                                                                                                                                                    |
| 10:00 - 11:00 | See Table Below | <b>Breakout Sessions 1</b>                                                                                                                               |
| 11:00 - 11:45 | Gym             | Lunch                                                                                                                                                    |
| 11:45 - 12:45 | See Table Below | <b>Breakout Sessions 2</b>                                                                                                                               |
| 12:45 - 1:00  |                 | Break                                                                                                                                                    |
| 1:00 - 2:00   | See Table Below | <b>Breakout Sessions 3</b>                                                                                                                               |

| Breakout Sessions 1                                                                                                                                    |                                                                                                       |                                                                                                            | 10:00 - 11:00 |
|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------|
| <b>Featured Speaker</b><br>Less Lecture, More Tools:<br>Neuroaffirming Language<br>for Autism-Inclusive<br>Classrooms<br><a href="#">Amy Tatterton</a> | Supporting Reluctant<br>Readers and Writers<br><a href="#">Kim Tackaberry &amp;<br/>Jessica James</a> | Learning to Love Math:<br>Math Anxiety and Social<br>Emotional Learning<br><a href="#">Lindsey Bingley</a> |               |
| Gym                                                                                                                                                    | 12                                                                                                    | 11                                                                                                         |               |

| Breakout Sessions 2                                                                                                                                                 |                                                 |                                                                                               | 11:45 - 12:45 |
|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------|
| <b>Featured Speaker</b><br>Using Talk to Support<br>Student Learning: Dialogic<br>Strategies for EAs<br><a href="#">Dr Michelle Bence &amp;<br/>Dr Miriam Ramzy</a> | Self Compassion<br><a href="#">Leanne Riley</a> | Taking Care of Yourself While<br>You Take Care of Others<br><a href="#">Karen Cuthbertson</a> |               |
| Gym                                                                                                                                                                 | 14                                              | 13                                                                                            |               |

| Breakout Sessions 3                                                                                                                                          |                                                                                    |                                                         | 1:00 - 2:00 |
|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------|-------------|
| <b>Featured Speaker</b><br>Supporting Students with<br>Disabilities: Accommodation,<br>Modification, and<br>Personalization<br><a href="#">Curtis Slater</a> | Supporting Grades 2-6<br>Students with Math Games<br><a href="#">Wanda Dechant</a> | Watercooler Conversation<br><a href="#">Erin Murphy</a> |             |
| Gym                                                                                                                                                          | 12                                                                                 | 11                                                      |             |

**Amy Tatterton**  
Featured Speaker

### Less Lecture, More Tools: Neuroaffirming Language for Autism-Inclusive Classrooms

This interactive session is for EAs ready to move beyond awareness into practical, strengths-based, neuro-affirming strategies that help create learning environments where Autistic students can thrive. This session focuses on how the language we use shapes classroom culture, student identity, and learning outcomes. EAs will walk away with a clear understanding of how using neuro-affirming language better communicates support needs, celebrates strengths, and fosters belonging. This session offers practical, day-to-day strategies to help EAs support Autistic and neurodivergent students academically, socially, and emotionally. Together, we'll explore what "neurodivergent" means, with real-life examples that bring the concept to life. This session isn't a checklist or a one-size-fits-all solution. It's an opportunity to practice a new way of thinking and talking about students that invites curiosity and supports the whole classroom community.

**Kim Tackaberry & Jessica James**

### Supporting Reluctant Readers and Writers

This session is designed to support Educational Assistants in fostering students' writing and reading development. Participants will explore practical strategies to assist students with fluency, idea generation, organization, sentence structure, spelling and word choice. EAs will gain insights into supporting diverse learners, encouraging confidence and independence in reading and writing, and collaborating effectively to achieve student goals.

**Lindsey Bingley**

### Learning to Love Math: Math Anxiety and Social Emotional Learning

Everyone can do math and every person is a math person! We know that this is true, according to some of our most well-known mathematicians/educators such as Jo Boaler, Marian Small, and John Mighton. However, there is an epidemic of math anxiety in our classrooms that prevents students from fully engaging in learning math. In order to counteract this contagious condition, schools need to create a classroom community where students feel safe enough to take risks and

make mistakes. Through the explicit teaching of the skills, habits, and mindset of social emotional learning, all math students can understand the process of learning, the purpose of mistakes, take risks, and support each other as they learn to love math. In this engaging session, education assistants will reexamine and challenge their own perceptions of math and learn to see math in a new light. Education assistants will learn strategies and games that they can use immediately to help counter math anxiety and improve the math learning experience for everyone.

**Dr Miriam Ramzy & Dr Michelle Bence**

Featured Speakers

### Using Talk to Support Student Learning: Dialogic Strategies for EAs

In this interactive session designed specifically for educational assistants, we will explore how purposeful talk can powerfully support student learning in both literacy and numeracy. Grounded in the concept of dialogic learning, we will build a shared understanding of why dialogic conversations matter and how they help deepen student thinking. Participants will be introduced to 3–4 practical conversation "moves" that can be used to support meaningful talk with students across subjects. Through a combination of modelling, guided reflection, and collaborative practice, EAs will have the opportunity to explore, discuss, and begin to apply these strategies with confidence. This session invites participants to try out new ideas together and build their repertoires of supportive, student-centered talk for all learners.

**Leanne Riley**

### Self Compassion

This session offers a safe, welcoming space to slow down, reconnect with yourself, and express what words sometimes cannot. Using simple, accessible art materials and guided prompts, participants will be invited to explore their emotions and personal insights through creative expression. No art experience is needed—this is not about skill or perfection, but rather showing up for yourself with kindness and self compassion. We will begin with a short grounding practice followed by time for art-making, reflection, and optional sharing. Come as you are. There is no pressure or judgement, just space to create, breathe, and be.

**Karen Cuthbertson**

### Taking Care of Yourself While You Take Care of Others

This session will focus on helping you to stay healthy and build mental resilience. We will explore self-compassion, resources, navigation and boundaries to help you avoid burnout and compassion fatigue. This will be an interactive session and include discussion and activities.

**Curtis Slater**

Featured Speaker

### Supporting Students with Disabilities: Accommodation, Modification, and Personalization

Education Assistants play a critical role in creating inclusive classrooms where all students can thrive. In this practical and engaging session, we'll unpack the key differences between accommodation, modification, and personalization and explore when and how to use each to support students with disabilities across K–12 settings.

**Wanda Dechant**

### Supporting Grades 2–6 Students with Math Games

Not all math games are created equal. In this hands-on session, we'll explore the key qualities that make a math game a powerful tool for developing fluency and thinking skills related to addition, subtraction, multiplication, division and place value. Participants will experience a group math activity, have time to try a variety of games. You will leave with ideas and ready-to-use games to strengthen math learning through fluency games.

**Erin Murphy**

### Watercooler Conversation

This session will give you the opportunity to connect with your colleagues and talk about current issues you are facing. What is keeping you up at night? What areas would you like to know more about? What brings you the most joy in your job? Connect and share!

### **Dr Gabrielle Wilcox**

Dr. Gabrielle Wilcox is a Registered Psychologist in Alberta and a Nationally Certified School Psychologist. She specializes in working with students with intellectual disabilities, emotional and behavioural problems, and pediatric neuropsychology.

### **Amy Tatterton**

As the Director of Learning and Connection, Amy Tatterton (she/her) provides leadership to The Sinneave Family Foundation's learning activities and community engagement initiatives. This work helps Sinneave fulfill its mission of reducing barriers and enhancing opportunities for Autistic and neurodivergent youth and adults. Amy holds a Master of Education in Interdisciplinary Studies from the University of Calgary with a concentration in Educational Research and has personal and professional experience serving the disability community in a variety of environments including sport, post-secondary supports, pediatric behaviour intervention, early childhood learning management and now adulthood transition support.

### **Kim Tackaberry**

Kim Tackaberry has had an extensive 33-year career in education, with a strong focus on literacy and inclusive education. She currently serves as a Designer of Professional Learning at the Calgary Regional Consortium, where she develops and implements professional learning to support educators. Much of her teaching career has been spent at Foothills Academy Society, a specialized school catering to children with learning disabilities and ADHD. Kim's commitment to education is evident in her pursuit of a recent Master of Education at Queen's University, specializing in literacy.

### **Jessica James**

With over 14 years at Connect Charter School and experience as a certified classroom teacher, Jess is a cornerstone of the school community. She builds strong connections with students through empathy, humor, and encouragement—often with a little candy-based motivation. Along with making math fun and accessible, Jess supports literacy growth through precision reading, creating engaging, personalized passages that spark student interest and motivation. Her easygoing nature and genuine care make her a trusted, uplifting presence for both students and staff.

### **Lindsey Bingley**

Lindsey Bingley is the Literacy and Numeracy Strategist at Foothills Academy, where she supports students and teachers. With over fifteen years of experience teaching diverse learners, she strives to help all students discover and achieve their best. Lindsey is a lifelong learner who is passionate about the value of relationships and connection in the classroom. When not teaching, Lindsey can be found volunteering, running, or reading a good book.

### **Dr Michelle Bence**

Michelle Bence is a dedicated educator with over 20 years of experience in K-12 classrooms and literacy education. She has worked extensively with several school boards across Western Canada as a literacy consultant, leading initiatives in literacy development, professional teacher learning, and the system-wide implementation of evidence-based literacy practices. Michelle recently completed her Ph.D. at the University of Calgary. Her research focuses on dialogic pedagogy and its role in fostering students' complex thinking, literacy identities, and language development in relation to literacy acquisition and engagement with texts.

### **Dr Miriam Ramzy**

Miriam Ramzy is a teacher and researcher based in Alberta. She has worked as a classroom teacher in both English and French Immersion settings, a literacy coach and facilitator, a school administrator, and Director of Student Learning. Currently, she works with school boards across Western Canada, supporting teachers, leaders, educational assistants, parents, and students from Jr. K - 12. Her work centers on literacy research and practice, with a deep commitment to supporting partners in education to create effective, responsive, and inclusive spaces where all students thrive. Miriam holds a PhD from the University of Calgary. Her research examined writing instruction, with a particular focus on the transcription process. She continues to contribute to professional learning and educational research with a passion for bridging theory and classroom practice.

### **Leanne Riley**

Leane Riley is a Certified Therapeutic Arts Practitioner through the Canadian International Institute of Art Therapy, with experience supporting mental health and personal growth through creative expression. She has worked with students in Grades 4 to 9, led staff wellness sessions, and facilitated community arts programs, including intergenerational groups. With 12 years as an Education Assistant, Leane is passionate about inclusive support,

leadership, and service learning. Her approach centers on the belief that wellness is the foundation for growth, and she strives to create safe, creative spaces for exploration and healing. Outside of work, Leane enjoys life's simple joys—time with her family, nature, music, and meaningful conversations with loved ones.

### **Karen Cuthbertson**

Karen Cuthbertson is the Manager of Support Services for Caregivers Alberta. Her role is to support people to navigate the challenging role of being a caregiver for family members or friends. Karen is a "sandwich generation" caregiver herself caring for both young adults as well as aging parents. She has extensive experience working in youth mental health, dementia and cancer care. She has a Master of Science in Psychology as well as 25+ years' experience working in the public, private and non-profit sectors.

### **Curtis Slater**

Curtis Slater is the Executive Director of The PREP Society, a nonprofit in Calgary that provides educational and therapeutic services to children and youth with Down syndrome. Over the past 15 years, Curtis has worked in various roles within the nonprofit and public sectors, including as a researcher for the Calgary Board of Education studying the impact of technology in the classroom, as a researcher at Vecova evaluating the impact of programs within the disability sector, and as a post-secondary instructor at Bow Valley College within the Disabilities Studies program.

### **Wanda Dechant**

Wanda supports the education community in the areas of k-12 math and numeracy as a Designer of Professional Learning. Three critical aspects of learning that Wanda embeds into her work include: Increasing student (and teacher) self-confidence in math, students engaging in visible learning and thinking with their peers and weaving in conceptual understanding, procedural fluency and adaptive reasoning.

### **Erin Murphy**

Erin Murphy has worked in the world of Independent ECS for the last 15 years. As the former Director of Education for Foothills Creative Beginnings, she shared her passion for the early years with teachers, EAs and families. Erin has a strong view of children as capable learners and values the support early intervention can provide. Erin currently works with the Association of Independent Schools and Colleges in Alberta, where she advocates for early learning programs and provides supports to ECS across the province.