

Educational Assistant Symposium:

Together We Grow

Friday, October 23 2026
Glenmore Christian Academy

8:45 – 9:00		Megan McKinnon & Erin Murphy – Welcome and Opening Remarks
9:00 – 10:15		Ryan Szarko – Opening Keynote
10:15 – 10:30		Refresh Break
10:30 – 11:30	See Table Below	Breakout Sessions 1
11:30 – 12:15		Lunch & Recharge
12:15 – 1:15	See Table Below	Breakout Sessions 2
1:15 – 1:30		Refresh Break
1:30 – 2:30		Angela Blakely Elliot & Colleen Drybrough – Closing Keynote <i>The Power of Regulation: Why Educator Well-being Matters</i>

Breakout Sessions 1					10:30 – 11:30
Less Lecture, More Tools Neuroaffirming Language for Autism-Inclusive Classrooms Jay Monge & Tracie Czerkowski	Assistive Technology in Classroom How AT Can Support Diverse Learners in the Classroom Cathi Graveline	From Meltdowns to Mindsets Building Executive Functioning Skills and Emotional Regulation (Grades 4–9 focus) Farial Nasriyay	Executive Functioning in Action K–3 Successful Tools & Strategies Jill Northwood, Jana Zalmanowitz & Rae-Ann Kerr	Student Reading Intervention-Video Project (4–12) Reading Intervention Tools for Grade 4+ Kim Tackaberry & Carla Cameron	

Breakout Sessions 2					12:15 – 1:15
The Power of Calm: Low Arousal Strategies for De-escalation and Regulation Support Across Ages In the high-pressure classroom environment, an Educational Assistant's calm presence is often their most powerful tool Cassidy Brown	Predict, Prepare, Transition 3 practical tools every EA can use immediately Yolande Daley & Lauren Schiwy	Beyond the First Day: Building Trust to Stay Building Rapport Through Emotional Regulation: How Connected Are They? Karman Shergill & Jourdan Moores	The Power of Play Cultivating holistic wellness in early childhood Lauren Lutz	Math is Fun! Supporting Students in Overcoming Math Resistance and Anxiety Aliaa Ghander	

Opening Keynote Ryan Szarko

Ryan Szarko, MSc.SLP, R.SLP is a registered Speech-Language Pathologist with 19 years of experience supporting neurodiverse children, teens, and adults. His practice uniquely bridges communication development, attachment theory, and family systems. Ryan's work focuses on Autism Spectrum Disorder, ADHD, and trauma informed approaches to parenting and education.

He offers consultations, workshops, and training for parents, educators, and care teams seeking to understand and support complex behaviours through connection rather than control.

Known for his warmth, humour, and clarity, Ryan helps families and professionals turn moments of frustration into opportunities for growth, empathy, and deeper relationship.

Jay Monge & Tracie Czerkowski

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

Inclusion isn't just a mindset — it's a skillset. This interactive session helps educators move beyond awareness into practical, strengths-based strategies that support Autistic students in everyday classroom life. Through hands-on activities and collaborative discussion, we'll explore how language shapes classroom culture, identity, and outcomes. Shifting from deficit-based thinking, we'll focus on recognizing neurodiversity as a strength. Educators will gain ready-to-use strategies for communicating expectations, support needs, and feedback in inclusive, respectful ways — during lessons, family conversations, support plans, or team meetings. Grounded in lived experience and best practices, this session offers a fresh lens on inclusion that builds confidence, fosters curiosity, and benefits the entire classroom. These approaches support all learners. Come ready to participate, reflect, and leave with tools you can use tomorrow.

Cathi Graveline

Assistive Technology in Classroom How AT Can Support Diverse Learners in the Classroom

This presentation focuses on how Assistive Technology (AT) can support diverse learners in the classroom. AT helps bridge learning gaps by enabling students to concentrate on understanding content rather than struggling with tasks that may interfere with their learning. The session will introduce a range of tools, including speech-to-text, text-to-speech, graphic organizers, notetaking strategies and AT accessories such as smart pens, C-Pens, and note-recording apps along with strategies to use them effectively. While the presentation is not aimed at a specific grade level, some tools are particularly well suited for junior high and high school students. Learners of all ages can benefit from using both speech-to-text and text-to-speech technologies. Many of these tools extend beyond the classroom and can support students throughout their lives. As students continue to use assistive technology, they often become more confident and efficient over time.

Key Learning Objectives

- Understand the role of Assistive Technology (AT) in supporting diverse learners and reducing barriers to learning.
- Match AT tools to student needs, recognizing how different technologies support reading, writing, organization, and comprehension.
- Integrate and model AT into everyday instruction to promote student independence, confidence, and academic success.

Fariat Nasriyay

From Meltdowns to Mindsets Building Executive Functioning Skills and Emotional Regulation (Grades 4–9 focus)

This session will explore executive functioning and social-emotional regulation in the classroom, with a focus on practical strategies to support students in developing these essential skills. Participants will gain a better understanding of how challenges with attention, organization, emotional control, and self-regulation can impact student learning, behavior, and peer interactions. The session will highlight evidence-based approaches that educators and educational assistants can use to foster independence, improve emotional awareness, and support positive behavior in diverse classroom settings. Emphasis will be placed on proactive supports, structured routines, and individualized strategies that can be easily implemented in everyday practice. As part of the session, attendees will participate in a hands-on activity by creating their own personalized "Zones of Regulation" scale. This activity will demonstrate how tailoring tools to a student's interests such as using themes like "Summer Friday lip balm" can increase engagement, understanding, and meaningful use. Participants will leave with practical resources and ideas that can be immediately applied to support student success.

Key Learning Outcomes

- Understand the role of executive functioning and social-emotional regulation in student learning and behavior
- Learn practical, classroom-based strategies to support self-regulation and independence
- Develop personalized tools (e.g., Zones of Regulation scale) to enhance student engagement and emotional awareness.

Jill Northwood, Jana Zalmanowitz & Rae-Ann Kerr

Executive Functioning in Action K-3 Successful Tools & Strategies

Join speech-language pathologists from Uncovering Potential, to learn how executive functioning impacts the students you support. Get acquainted with what skills are included in “executive functioning” and delve deeper into understanding attention, perception, verbal and nonverbal working memory, and inhibition.

Come away with low-to-no-prep universal strategies you can implement to build foundational executive functioning skills. Reframe how you understand diverse learners from struggling with specific subjects, to seeing how incorporating executive functioning support increases student ability to learn and gain independence in all areas of the classroom.

Kim Tackaberry & Carla Cameron

Student Reading Intervention- Video Project (4-12) Reading Intervention Tools for Grade 4+

For Grades 4-9: The Student Reading Video Project is an initiative designed to support students in Grades 4-9 who have gaps in their foundational phonics knowledge. Kim & Carla will guide EAs through a structured, evidence-based phonics approach that uses on-demand student videos to strengthen decoding skills within a focused 10-minute intervention block. A brief follow-up conference between the EA and student reinforces the phonics instruction by applying new learning to the reading of connected words and sentences.

Cassidy Brown

The Power of Calm: Low Arousal Strategies for De-escalation and Regulation Support Across Ages In the high-pressure classroom environment, an Educational Assistant’s calm presence is often their most powerful tool

In the high-pressure environment of the classroom, an Educational Assistant’s greatest tool is often their own presence. This session introduces the Low Arousal Approach, a non-confrontational philosophy designed to support students of all ages—from early childhood through high school—who struggle with emotional regulation. Rather than focusing on “compliance,” we will explore how to manage our own “affective communication” and environment to reduce triggers and foster safety. Through practical case discussions and interactive scenarios, Cassidy will provide tangible strategies for trauma-informed intervention and emotional resolution that you can implement immediately.

Yolande Daley & Lauren Schiwy

Predict, Prepare, Transition 3 practical tools every EA can use immediately

Transitions happen all day—subject to subject, classroom to locations around the school (gym, recess, sensory room etc.), and from preferred to non-preferred activities. For autistic and neurodivergent learners, these moments can be stressful when the “what’s next” feels unclear, the environment shifts quickly, or a preferred activity ends abruptly. In this highly practical session, Educational Assistants will learn three proactive, ready-to-use transition strategies that reduce anxiety, increase predictability, and build independence in any classroom. The session emphasizes visual supports as the foundation—not as “extras,” but as tools EAs can actively use before transitions occur. Participants will leave with concrete examples (visual schedules, first-then boards, transition/location icons, and simple cueing language), along with supports that make moving through the school day smoother.

Karman Shergill & Jourdan Moores

Beyond the First Day: Building Trust to Stay Building Rapport Through Emotional Regulation: How Connected Are They?

When thinking about rapport building, we often focus on how to get to know our students during the first few weeks or months of school. However, rapport extends far beyond initial introductions and occurs in daily interactions. What occurs each morning when the student arrives through those school doors? Reorientation and building trust. At its core, effective rapport building supports the development of neural networks that promote a sense of safety and emotional regulation – daily, monthly, and over the years we are part of the student’s lives. This presentation aims to explore the relationship between rapport building and emotional regulation. While these topics are often discussed separately, they are deeply connected and are contingent on one another. Drawing on experiences within our work, this session will highlight how intentional relationship-building practices can also serve as an opportunity to support emotional regulation. The presentation will explore several practice areas, including recognizing early signs of distress, identifying and brainstorming co-regulation strategies, and adjusting environmental demands to better support clients. Our session aims to complete hands-on learning and practice opportunities to build the confidence and skills of the group.

Key Learning Objectives

- Participants will learn to recognize early signs of distress and develop critical thinking skills to consider underlying factors that may not be immediately visible.
- Participants will explore how rapport-building can be incorporated into everyday tasks—such as daily routines and self-help activities—and understand that emotional regulation is a foundational component of learning, not a separate process.
- Participants will engage in hands-on learning experiences and have opportunities to practice within a collaborative group environment.

Lauren Lutz

The Power of Play

Cultivating holistic wellness in early childhood

In the fast-paced world of early education, play is often mistaken for a break from learning—when in reality, it is the learning. This interactive workshop explores how intentional play serves as the foundation for a child’s cognitive, emotional, and physical development. Drawing on her dual experience as an Early Childhood Educator and Educational Assistant, Lauren will bridge the gap between theory and practice. Participants will dive into the specific benefits of outdoor play and examine how active engagement boosts brain function and long-term wellness.

Key Takeaways

- The Science of Play: Understand how play directly impacts cognitive mapping and executive function.
- The Great Outdoors: Strategies for leveraging nature to reduce stress and increase engagement.
- Ready-to-Use Ideas: A curated list of planned play activities adaptable for various learning environments.
- Hands-On Practice: Participate in a live collaborative activity to experience the “wellness boost” of play firsthand.

Join us to rediscover how a play-first approach can transform your practice and help every child thrive.

Aliaa Ghander

Math is Fun!

Supporting Students in Overcoming Math Resistance and Anxiety

This engaging session is designed for Education Assistants who support students experiencing math resistance and anxiety. It delves into the root causes of math-related stress, including negative past experiences, rigid mindsets, and diminished self-esteem, and examines how these elements can influence student engagement and success. Participants will gain a deeper understanding of how math anxiety presents in the classroom and how it can affect learning behaviours. By employing practical strategies and real-world examples, Education Assistants will learn how to foster a supportive and low-pressure learning environment that promotes risk-taking and persistence. The session will highlight effective approaches such as using positive

language, breaking tasks into manageable steps, and reinforcing a growth mindset. Additionally, there will be a focus on cultivating strong relationships with students to enhance trust and confidence. Participants can expect to engage in discussions and reflective activities. By the end of the session, participants will feel better equipped to assist students in overcoming psychological obstacles, cultivating resilience, and establishing a more positive connection with mathematics. The goal is to transform math into a more approachable and even enjoyable subject for all learners.

Closing Keynote

Angela Blakely Elliot & Colleen Drybrough

The Power of Regulation: Why Educator Well-being Matters

Supporting educators in using inclusive, neurodiverse-affirming practices to help all students grow, participate, and thrive

This session is designed for Educational Assistants and explores the powerful connection between adult well-being, regulation, and positive student support. Grounded in mental health and brain-based practices, the session looks at how stress shows up in our bodies, impacts our responses, and influences the relationships we build with students and staff. Attendees will gain practical, realistic strategies to support their own regulation during busy, high-demand moments in the classroom. Together, we will explore how small, intentional shifts can help reduce overwhelm, increase patience, and create more calm and connected learning environments. This session highlights the important role EAs play in shaping classroom climate and supporting student regulation, while also recognizing the need to care for their own well-being in the process.

Ryan Szarko

Ryan Szarko, MSc.SLP, R.SLP (C), is a registered Speech-LanguagePathologist who has worked with neurodiverse adults and children for over 18 years. Unique as an SLP, his areas of specialization center on individuals with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD), complex ADHD, and family systems trauma. In his work with these kids and their families, Ryan provides parent consultations and gives talks to teachers, educational assistants, and community caregivers seeking to understand and support the special needs of their students and clientele. In his talks and consultations, Ryan provides insightful behavioural analyses of difficult child behaviours that are deeply informed by his post-graduate training in applied Attachment Theory.

Jay Monge

Jay Monge (she/her) is the Learning and Connection Coordinator for the Sinneave Family Foundation. She oversees Sinneave's Information and Navigation Service, which provides resources to self-advocates, parents and professionals. Jay also supports with knowledge exchange activities, including community engagement, presentations, workshops and digital content. She has had the honour to offer support to diverse people for 10 years including families and kids in crisis, adult offenders, young people with disabilities pursuing post-secondary education, adults with disabilities and co-occurring health challenges, and currently, supporting autistic and neurodivergent youth and adults with the transition to and throughout adulthood.

Tracie Czerkowski

Tracie Czerkowski (she/her) is a Learning Strategist – Autism and Neurodiversity at The Sinneave Family Foundation, where she supports the innovation and delivery of educational resources for Autistic self-advocates and the broader community. She holds a Bachelor of Arts in Women and Gender Studies with a focus on critical disability studies from the University of Manitoba and has completed graduate coursework in Educational Research at the University of Calgary.

Tracie has over 15 years of experience supporting people with disabilities in across educational settings from preschool to post-secondary. Her work is rooted in removing systemic barriers and fostering inclusive, accessible, and engaging learning opportunities where everyone can thrive.

Cathi Graveline

With over 20 years of experience, Cathi Graveline supports diverse learners as an Assistive Technology Specialist/Coach, helping them build confidence and independence through assistive technology. She specializes in mentoring students in the use of accommodations using Assistive Tech and has strong expertise in accessibility across Google, Microsoft, and Apple platforms. She is passionate about staying current with new technologies that enhance student success. Through presentations and coaching, Cathi work with students, families, and educators to expand their assistive technology toolbox.

Fariat Nasriyay

Fariat Nasriyay has been a proud member of the CGCS community for the past seven years, working as an Educational Assistant (EA). She attended Mount Royal University and holds a Child Development certificate, and is currently pursuing a degree in Education, along with UFLI training. She specializes in supporting executive functioning skills and social-emotional development, and is dedicated to creating a welcoming, positive learning environment that meets diverse student needs and learning styles. Fariat has experience supporting students from preschool through Grade 9 and provide early intervention in both math and literacy to help build strong foundational skills. Prior to joining CGCS, she worked as a Child Development Advisor with various agencies, where she implemented thoughtful, balanced approaches to support student growth, focusing on both social-emotional development and academic performance.

Jill Northwood

Jill has been a SLP since 2012. She has supported families and kids spanning from 18 months to 18 years of age with a variety of diagnosis.

Jill is a friendly and encouraging presence in her clients' lives. She sees that just like kids, adults thrive in settings where they are engaged and interested. This emphasis on play (in all its forms) makes her a dynamic presenter.

As a mom to 4 kids (8 and under!), Jill knows how to fuse fun, organization and practicality so everyone around her can achieve their goals.

Jana Zalmanowitz

Jana has been a SLP since 2009. She loves working with people of all ages and has provided services in hospitals, schools, daycares, homes and out in the community.

Jana's warm and open demeanour, combined with a genuine enthusiasm for building personal connections makes her an engaging presenter whether one on one with her clients or in a large group.

She is a mom to two neurodivergent kids which means she's had lots of opportunities to practice her work at home (and maybe a few good stories to tell!).

Rae-Ann Kerr

Rae-Anne has been a SLP since 2008. She has supported individuals of all ages, across a variety of settings, including hospitals, schools, preschools and in the community.

She has an empathetic, engaging and creative personality. In addition to seeing progress with her clients, she wants to "pump them full of positivity," an approach she also brings to her presentations.

Rae-Anne is a mom to two kids, one of whom has participated in his fair share of therapies. The impact of this first-hand experience shines through in her professional knowledge.

Kim Tackaberry

Kim Tackaberry, M.Ed, has 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 Consortium (Calgary office), where she develops and implements professional learning to support educators across Alberta. Much of her teaching career was spent at Foothills Academy Society, a specialized school for individuals with learning disabilities and/or ADHD.

Carla Cameron

Carla Cameron, M.Ed, is an educator with over 22 years of experience supporting diverse learners across the Canadian prairie provinces. For more than 15 years, Carla has worked closely with learners who struggle with reading, combining research-based practices with practical classroom insight. She has served as a classroom teacher, learning resource teacher, and workshop presenter, and currently leads as the Inclusive Practices Coordinator at Connect Charter School in Calgary, AB.

Cassidy Brown

Cassidy Brown is a dedicated Behaviour Consultant and the founder of Cassidy Brown Behaviour Consulting Services Inc., the first organization in Southern Alberta to exclusively implement the Low Arousal Approach. With over 20 years of experience, Cassidy specializes in supporting children and families navigating ADHD, Autism, OCD, and anxiety. Her practice is built on the philosophy that empowering the family system is the key to helping children thrive. As a certified trainer in the Low Arousal Approach—developed by Studio III—Cassidy focuses on non-confrontational strategies that reduce stress and manage challenging behaviors with dignity. Beyond her clinical work, she is the creator of the “Friendship Thermometer,” a specialized program designed to help children understand social dynamics. Based in Calgary, Cassidy is passionate about sharing practical, least-intrusive strategies that empower educational assistants and caregivers to foster resilient, supportive environments for students with exceptional needs.

Yolande Daley

Yolande Daley is the Director of Training at Janus Academy, where she leads the development and delivery of practical, evidence informed training for educators within the organization and community to support autistic and neurodivergent children and youth. She has over twenty years of experience in specialized and inclusive settings.

Yolande works closely with teachers, educational assistants, clinical teams, and school leadership to strengthen confidence, consistency, and capacity. Her training emphasizes proactive approaches, and relationship based practices that are immediately applicable across any learning environment. Yolande is passionate about helping teams move from theory to action. She is committed to building partnership and meaningful outcomes for both learners and the adults who support them.

Lauren Schiwy

Lauren Schiwy is the Training Coordinator at Janus Academy, where she has dedicated 18 years to supporting students with autism and the educators who teach them. She trains and mentors staff, helping new and returning team members build the skills and confidence to provide effective, compassionate support. Passionate about connecting evidence-based practices with real classroom application, Lauren fosters a learning culture where students and staff grow together.

Karman Shergill

Karman Shergill is an Occupational Therapist at Society for Autism Support and Services (SASS). She is passionate about continually learning and exploring new approaches to support emotional regulation. Karman prioritizes learning from student’s experiences before implementing strategies, ensuring that interventions are meaningful and individualized. In her role at SASS, Karman works with a wide range of age groups, from toddlers to school-aged children and youth up to 18 years old. Across all age groups, she believes that emotional regulation remains at the forefront. Through this presentation, Karman hopes to share insights from her practice and engage participants in reflecting on the role of rapport building with students. She will explore how rapport is not limited to an initial “rapport-building period”, but it is something that is continually developed and renewed over time, and invites you to discover how we can intentionally integrate it within everyday interactions and routines.

Jourdan Moores

Jourdan Moores is a Behaviour Consultant supervised by a Registered Psychologist at Society for Autism Supports and Services. She is deeply committed to advancing equity, diversity, inclusion, and neuro-affirming practices in her work. Jourdan is a passionate advocate for empowering and supporting autistic children across all stages of development. Known for her ability to build meaningful, trusting relationships, Jourdan brings a relational and compassionate approach to her practice – grounded in emotional regulation and connected beyond first impressions. She is dedicated to ongoing professional growth and continuously strengthens her knowledge and skills through a trauma-informed lens. Jourdan’s experience spans a wide range of developmental, cognitive, and age profiles, enriching both her perspective and impact in the field. Through our presentation, she aims to share practical, relationship-based strategies to foster connection, build trust, and use intentional reciprocity to highlight meaningful, teachable moments with children in school settings.

Lauren Lutz

Lauren Lutz is a passionate Level 3 Early Childhood Educator and Educational Assistant who believes that some of a child’s most vital “work” happens through play. She specializes in creating inclusive environments where open-ended activities can create connection and provide tools for learning. By protecting the joy of childhood and play, she helps students build essential social, emotional, and cognitive skills.

Lauren is also a certified Yoga and Mindfulness instructor, Lauren integrates these practices to help children develop body awareness and emotional regulation. By blending outdoor time, active play with mindful movement, she empowers students to understand themselves, and connect with nature, while strengthening their ability to build deep, meaningful peer relationships. Ultimately, Lauren believes the role of an Educational Assistant extends far beyond academics. Her mission is to nurture the whole child—fostering a foundation of wellness and connection so every student feels seen, supported, and ready to learn.

Aliaa Ghander

Aliaa Ghander is an Education Assistant at Calgary Girls Charter School. Prior to joining CGCS, she worked at a local high school, where she supported students in math and science. She also brings over three years of experience in out-of-school care, providing both emotional and academic support to students. In addition to her professional work, Aliaa is currently a student at the University of Calgary, pursuing a Bachelor of Arts with a major in Political Science alongside a Bachelor of Education specializing in Secondary Social Studies. Aliaa is deeply committed to supporting students in building confidence and achieving their goals. She has a particular passion for working with students in math, helping them overcome mental hurdles and develop a strong sense of capability in their learning.

Angela Blakely Elliot

Angela Blakely-Elliott is a mental health therapist and program manager with the Providence ECLS team. With her background in social work, she is committed to supporting educators as they implement innovative strategies and approaches to learning in their classrooms.

Colleen Drybrough

Colleen Drybrough is an OT and manager with Community Services at Renfrew. She delivers OT services to children in schools while also coordinating and developing therapy programs across Calgary. Colleen is deeply committed to advancing neurodiverse-affirming approaches and strengthening inclusive education. Colleen’s work is grounded in one purpose, to help every student grow, participate and thrive.