



Building a Better Assessment Future

Time to Lead: Innovation to Implementation

August 6–7, 2026

Kellogg Center, East Lansing, MI

BBAF 2026 Schedule

Breakout sessions by strand

Use the color key below to choose breakout sessions based on topic strands.

SYSTEMS

LEADERSHIP

CLASSROOM

Day One • Thursday, August 6

8:30–8:45 AM

Welcome

Kathy Dewsbury-White

8:45–9:00 AM

Conference Overview

Amy Colton

9:00–10:15 AM

Keynote: Lillian Pace

Empowering Creativity in an Era of Federal Change

How can disruption in federal K–12 education create opportunities for state and local assessment innovation? This keynote address will examine the evolving education landscape and its impact on assessment systems. An exploration of the shifting role of the federal government will uncover new possibilities for innovation. Examples of promising assessment innovation will provide insights on how to better meet the needs of educators, students, and communities. These bright spots offer valuable lessons and raise important questions about how to build systems that are more relevant and useful. Ultimately, this address will deepen understanding of the federal role in K–12 assessment and present ideas for how the field might evolve in an era of growing state and local leadership.

Breakout Sessions — Block A

10:30–11:45 AM

A1: CBE & Math Instruction in an Elementary Classroom

Ron Studley, Kristy Walters

Competency-Based Education (CBE) continues to expand across Michigan, shifting the focus of learning to students and enabling teachers to differentiate instruction to better meet individual needs. Performance

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assessment plays a critical role in measuring student competency. To support this work, the Michigan Department of Education (MDE) commissioned the Michigan Assessment Consortium (MAC) to develop a cadre of educators, Michigan Performance Assessment Cadre (MiPAC), with expertise in designing high-quality performance tasks that can be used by educators statewide. This session will highlight the MiPAC project and its impact. Participants will see the bank of items that Michigan item writers have produced and learn more about the processes they used and how you might choose to use some of these performance tasks. Participants will also learn how Anchor Bay Schools have developed instructional Pathways to guide mathematics teaching and the integration of performance assessments. Learn more about the MiPAC project and see what CBE looks like in action in an elementary classroom.

10:30–11:45 AM A2: Improving Balance: Improving Local Assessment Systems

Caroline Wylie

NAEd and the Center for Assessment released [Implementing Balanced Assessment Systems: A Practical Guidebook for Districts & Schools](#) in 2025, exploring balanced assessment systems through the lens of three constructs efficiency, usefulness, and coherence. This session explores nine threats to balanced assessment systems and provides practical suggestions that school and district leaders can take to identify and remediate threats to balance. The session concludes with a discussion of the change process and ways that leaders can support and sustain the change process.

10:30–11:45 AM A3: Exploring the Components of an Equitable Assessment System (CEAS) Survey

Kathy Dewsbury-White, John Lane, Joe Orban

This interactive session will provide an overview of the components of an equitable survey and how the components are captured in the CEAS survey. Participants will then hear from practitioners in the field about their experiences administering the survey and learning from the results. Finally, participants will explore the survey and generate ideas about how they might use it in their local contexts.

10:30–11:45 AM A4: Integrating AI As an Assessment Partner in the Classroom

Deven Parrish

What if every student could access personalized, immediate feedback on demand without adding to your workload? This session demonstrates practical AI integration that transforms formative assessment from a teacher bottleneck into an adaptive, student-driven learning tool. This includes working examples of “training prompts” that provide scaffolded practice, graduated hints, and iterative feedback across subjects. Learn a 7-step framework for designing AI-powered assessments that maintain academic rigor while building student agency. Walk away with ready-to-use templates, implementation strategies, and troubleshooting tips from 2+ years of classroom experimentation. Whether you’re AI-curious or AI-experienced, you’ll discover concrete ways to make assessment work smarter, not harder.

12:00–12:45 PM Lunch

12:45–1:00 PM Field Notes

1:00–2:15 PM **Keynote: Steven Snead**

Is the Future of Assessment A.I. or D.E.I.?

As Artificial Intelligence (A.I.) rapidly reshapes K–12 schools, education faces a defining question: will technological innovations be the hallmark of the next generation of assessment, or can we design assessments that are both technologically advanced and deeply human-centered? This keynote cuts through the hype to explore how A.I. and diversity, equity, and inclusion (D.E.I.) can collide, conflict, and ultimately co-create a more just, accurate, and actionable assessment future. We'll explore emergent research around the use of A.I. in educational assessment, and map research-informed practices to the Michigan Assessment Consortium's Components of an Equitable Assessment System, shedding light on actions that teachers and school leaders can take to advance assessment. Expect bold insights, real tensions, and a vision that refuses to choose between technology and humanity.

Breakout Sessions — Block B

2:30–3:45 PM **B1: How AI can Enhance and Improve Assessment Literate Practices and Systems**

Shirin Mathew

Generative AI has challenged traditional assessment practices, raising questions about validity, reliability, and fairness. Too often, this has shifted attention toward detection and compliance rather than meaningful assessment redesign. This session reframes the conversation, exploring how AI can strengthen student-centered, evidence-based assessment practices grounded in research. We will examine how AI can support assessment design, ease feedback demands on teachers, and expand opportunities for authentic tasks that measure deeper understanding, while keeping human judgment central. The session also addresses how clear guidance and an AI-literate community can foster responsible, metacognitive AI use that builds student agency. Participants will leave with practical strategies for assessment innovation in an AI-integrated learning environment.

2:30–3:45 PM **B2: Seeing Students Clearly: Integrating Formative Assessment Within MTSS for Responsive Learning**

Nicole Kalmbach

The Formative Assessment Process is the lens that brings student learning into focus—in classrooms and across systems. This session examines how everyday instructional practices can generate the timely, trustworthy evidence MTSS teams need to make responsive decisions. Participants will explore how leaders and educators can use formative assessment to strengthen Tier I instruction, guide interventions, and build coherence across all tiers of support. Through practical examples and system level insights,

attendees will leave with strategies for creating learning environments where student needs are visible, shared, and actionable.

2:30–3:45 PM

B3: Advancing Student-Centered Learning and Assessment: Lessons from Anchor Bay

Phil Jankowski, Emily McEvoy

Join Anchor Bay Schools to explore how competency-based education and innovative assessment practices are transforming learning. Through Anchor Bay’s journey, learn how districts can build equitable, student-centered systems that promote growth for all learners. See how this district has developed learning progressions and assessments designed to meet students where they are, fostering personalized pathways and deeper engagement in their learning journey.

2:30–3:45 PM

B4: Re-Engaging Learners through Meaningful Assessment

Ryleigh Scott Weeks, Ellen Vorenkamp

Chronic absenteeism and student disengagement continue to challenge schools, particularly when learning feels more about compliance than purpose. Too often, assessment is experienced by students as something done to them—tasks to complete, grades to earn, hoops to jump through—rather than as a meaningful part of learning done with them. This session explores how high-quality, student-centered assessment practices can help reverse these trends. Grounded in research and classroom practice, the session examines how clear learning goals, authentic tasks, actionable feedback, and opportunities for student agency can re-engage learners and strengthen their sense of belonging, competence, and ownership. Participants will consider how meaningful assessment shifts the focus from “doing school” to purposeful learning—and how those shifts can positively influence attendance, motivation, and persistence.

3:45–4:00 PM

Break

4:00–4:30 PM

Reflection

4:30–5:30 PM

Mix & Mingle Reception

Day Two ●

Friday, August 7

7:30–8:15 AM

Hot breakfast and coffee

8:30–9:15 AM

Student Panel

Students Speak: How Students Experience Assessment in Classrooms

Facilitator: Rané Garcia

This facilitated discussion involves students sharing their personal experiences with classroom assessment. Focusing on student voice, this session invites leaders to listen to how assessment is perceived, what supports learning, and what information students want educators to notice beyond grades and test scores. Instead of a presentation, this session is

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set up as a listening experience that reveals ‘street data’ to promote more equitable, student-centered assessment practices.

Breakout Sessions — Block C

9:30–10:45 AM

C1: MI Creative Potential: Systems Change through an Arts Model

Heather Vaughan-Southard

Artists examine patterns to disrupt the rhythm and invite innovation. When this way of being is applied to systemic change and coalition-building, we engage in disciplinary literacy within a novel context. We also create a model for education policy and practice improvements that reach well beyond the arts. You are invited into the creative process of collective impact and collaboration in service of systemic growth.

9:30–10:45 AM

C2: Sustaining the Launch! Embedding the Formative Assessment Process into our Balanced Assessment System

Julie Wakefield

Discover how formative assessment teams have been strategically implemented PreK–12 in the Wayne-Westland Community School District to strengthen instruction, elevate student learning, and build collective efficacy. This session shares the journey from initial rollout to a sustained practice, emphasizing how collaborative team processes are embedded within our balanced assessment system. Participants will explore practical structures, leadership moves, and cultural shifts that support long-term success. Learn how intentional alignment, shared ownership, and continuous learning have transformed formative assessment from an initiative to a way of work.

9:30–10:45 AM

C3: Leadership For Learning: Creating Systems for Formative Assessment to Thrive

Mackenzie Sheahan, Jessica Winstanley

Effective leadership fuels a balanced assessment system that empowers learning and continuous improvement. This session invites participants to explore how district leaders, at every level, create the conditions for formative assessment to flourish, and why it sits at the heart of a balanced system. Attendees will learn how thoughtful leadership weaves assessment seamlessly into structures, routines, and instructional practices to elevate learning for all. The session highlights purposeful leadership moves that school leaders at all levels can use in their own roles to turn vision into action. Through examples from one district, participants will see how strategic decisions around system development can shape practice and how balanced assessment can transform teaching, learning, and growth over time.

9:30–10:45 AM

C4: Beyond “Back-to-Basics:” Sustaining Robust Literacy Instruction and Assessment with PA146

Jeffrey Austin

Using the Disciplinary Literacy Essentials as a guide, this session will focus on how sustaining humanizing, responsive, and robust instructional and assessment practices for secondary students while aligning with the intent

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and spirit of PA 146. Participants will explore ways to fuse inquiry-based, community-centered learning with foundational structured literacy elements at the secondary level to ensure that middle-and-high school students are well prepared for career, college, and civic life, which requires an expansive approach to literacy instruction and assessment that both includes and expands upon the “basics.”

10:45–11:00 AM Break

11:00 AM–12:15 PM Keynote: Jill Willis

Accessible Assessment for Learning and Agency: How small classroom choices can create powerful possibilities for the future.

Assessment and agency go hand in hand. Agency grows when assessment is treated as a verb; that is the human process of working out what is valued and making judgements. Being someone who can assess is essential for how we make our way through the world. Questions like “Should I spend more time on this? Is this good enough? What are some next steps that help us become people who make choices about what matters to us and the lives we want to lead no matter if those questions relate to friendships, hobbies or work. As educators, when we teach students how to be assessors, we are helping them develop identities as people who matter and who make choices about what matters. This is the beauty and strength of the Assessment for Learning (AfL) set of practices that are well known in our schools—sharing learning intentions and success criteria, self- and peer assessment, dialogue, and feedback.

So why aren’t all classrooms and school systems hives of student agency and AfL?

It isn’t because teachers are not working hard enough. In this presentation I share some recent research about AfL in Australian classrooms. We will focus on the achievable “what” practices but also the sustainable “how” teachers can work together within system conditions. The potential of small classroom choices that prioritize student agency and accessibility is demonstrated through some stories of long-term impacts for schools. Importantly, the voices of students in the process of reform are highlighted as a catalyst for change.

12:15–12:30 PM Closing

12:30–2:00 PM Lunch and Team Time

[Learn more](#) about the keynote and breakout session presenters.

Register

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