



Agenda & Presentation Slides | June 10, 2026

LITTLE WINS WORKSHOP

A one-day virtual leadership experience for school leaders, built around 10 core practices of culture making.

Hosted by:

alpaca
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About Little Wins

Little Wins Workshop is a virtual, one-day leadership experience for principals and district leaders who know that culture isn't a side project - it is the job.

In one focused day, you'll learn from real teacher feedback, collaborate with fellow leaders, and leave with a practical culture plan you're ready to implement. Strong school culture is built through small, everyday leadership decisions.

This workshop draws on insights from hundreds of thousands of teacher reflections, plus proven practices from inside and outside K-12, to help you make culture part of how you lead every day.

About Alpaca

Alpaca is on a mission to make schools the happiest place to work. We started with teacher recognition through our unique celebration packs, and have grown to include teacher wellbeing programs, pulse surveys, and resources to support school leaders. Thousands of school leaders trust Alpaca's unique teacher wellbeing system. Alpaca's check-ins are based on industry-leading teacher wellbeing research, so you can be sure you're focused in the right places.

AGENDA

9-9:30 A.M.

Optional coffee hour: Drop in and connect.

9:30-9:50 A.M.

Opening Keynote: Karen Borchert, Founder and CEO of Alpaca

10-10:45 A.M.



1:1 MANAGEMENT

Developing Leaders, One Conversation at a Time

Track A - Leadership

Mark Schuldt, Chief of Elementary Schools, Council Bluffs

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How do you create personal relationships and meet individual needs when you're the manager of the whole school? Leaders emphasize listening, removing barriers, and building trust through individual conversations. Time constraints and increasing staff needs make individualized support harder to maintain.



MEETINGS & GATHERINGS

The Value of Warm-Ups

Track B - Culture

Kate Canales, Professor of Practice in Design at UT Austin, Founder and Principal at TWOxTWO Studio

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Bringing teams together is a critical leadership practice. But how do you balance the many obligations of the job with meaningful connection? Meetings remain a core coordination mechanism in schools, but leaders often report tension between delivering information and creating meaningful collaboration time. Leaders want gatherings that strengthen relationships and morale but must balance this against already stretched staff schedules.

10:50-11:35 A.M.



PROFESSIONAL GROWTH & LEARNING

Innovation by Design: Breaking the Rules Inside the Lines

Track A - Leadership

Mike Smith, Professional Misfit, Founder of the Bay
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Educators are by nature life-long learners, but some professional development falls short. What helps educators truly grow in their work? Many leaders report that traditional professional development is district-driven and generalized, limiting relevance to classroom needs. Leaders increasingly frame growth as developing people and leadership capacity, not just delivering PD.



PRESENCE & VISIBILITY

Our Story®, Our Presence: Building Culture Through Visible Leadership

Track B - Culture

Dr. Jeffrey Collier, Superintendent of Saginaw Intermediate School District;
Coty Kuschinsky, Chief of Staff and Communications Director, Saginaw ISD
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Leaders often have to choose: accomplish the to-do list, or be present with students and staff. How do you balance productivity and relationships? Leaders consistently describe informal presence in hallways, classrooms, and during arrival times as key to building trust. Being visible, listening, and following through shows staff and students that they are seen, valued, and supported. Schools that build routines for visibility often strengthen belonging, communication, and relational trust across staff and students.

11:40 A.M.-12:25 P.M.



CONFLICT RESOLUTION

**Hard Conversations,
Made Easy**

Track A - Leadership

Karen Borchert, Founder and CEO of Alpaca

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Resolving conflict is never a favorite part of the job. How might leaders see those difficult conversations as the most empathetic work they do? Leaders increasingly describe their work as crisis management and emotional labor, making difficult conversations more frequent. Strong conflict resolution practices are closely tied to trust, vulnerability, and curiosity, not simply policies or procedures.



COMMUNICATIONS

**Five Small Ways to Make Big Impact With
Internal Communications in Schools**

Track B - Culture

Jamie Bell, Chief Marketing Officer at Workshop

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Teachers, staff, families, districts, and communities: how do you create communications that cut through the noise? The central tension is clarity vs. overload—leaders send more information than ever, but staff often lack time to process it. Informal signals—emails, notes, newsletters—can strongly influence the emotional tone of a school.

12:30-1 P.M.

LUNCH KEYNOTE

Michael Bennett, Deputy Commissioner for P-12 Operational Support New York State Education Department

Michael Bennett is the Deputy Commissioner for P-12 Operational Support at New York State Education Department, a founding member of the Principal Recovery Network, and a school shooting survivor. Experience as a superintendent and school leader. He brings a core message about the importance of taking care of yourself while encouraging leaders to prioritize well-being in their schools.

1-1:45 P.M.



PERFORMANCE MANAGEMENT

The Power and Impact of Connected Leadership

Track A - Leadership

Mitch Holmgren, High School Principal Deer Creek-Mackinaw CUSD #701
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Performance for educators is multi-faceted and often feels compliance-focused. How can leaders go from evaluation to growth? Feedback systems exist in most schools, but leaders say they often feel compliance-driven rather than developmental. Leaders want performance conversations to help teachers grow—not simply document performance. Leaders frequently link effective feedback to trust, clarity of expectations, and follow-through on support.



EMPLOYEE WELLBEING

Creating a Culture of Care: Small Leadership Moves That Transform Wellbeing

Track B - Culture

Karyn Richmond, Employee Wellness Coordinator, Sun Prairie Area School District

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Both teachers and leaders put health and wellbeing as the biggest challenge to their work culture. How can we find new and innovative ideas in health and wellbeing? Leaders increasingly cite burnout, emotional labor, and staffing shortages as key pressures on educators. Most wellbeing efforts remain leader-driven and informal, rather than embedded structurally in school systems.

1:50-2:35 P.M.



SHARED DECISION MAKING

Growing the Shared Leadership Model

Track A - Leadership

Genevive Core, Nelson Mandela Elementary Principal; **Susan Toohey**, Nelson Mandela Elementary. Superintendent

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Every member of the team can't be involved in every decision; so how might we create opportunities for voice and input that feel great to all? Leaders consistently link participation in school decisions with trust and staff buy-in. A key challenge is balancing inclusion with the need for timely decisions or decisions that cannot involve the whole team.



RECOGNITION AND REWARD

Recognition That Sticks: From Effort to Habit
Through Systems, Community, and Authentic
Appreciation

Track B - Culture

Eric Filardi, Mendenhall River Community School Principal

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Leaders know that teacher appreciation doesn't happen once a year. How can leaders reward often, personally, and equitably all year long? Many leaders see appreciation as essential for sustaining morale and reinforcing purpose. The biggest challenge is consistency—finding ways to celebrate staff regularly amid competing demands. Leaders often rely on informal gestures.

1:50-2:35 P.M.

CLOSING KEYNOTE

Jennifer Gonzalez, The Aerodynamics
of Exceptional Schools

In any school, just as in air travel, four forces work to affect our progress: lift, the tools we select to meet student needs; thrust, the energy and enthusiasm we put into improving our practice; weight, the raw materials we have to work with—socioeconomics, budget constraints, student readiness; and drag, the resistance to change from colleagues, students, and parents.

When we try to improve lift through new initiatives, our excitement can be dampened when we meet the forces of weight and drag that await us in our schools.

What's missing is thrust: We know what it's going to take to improve our schools, but we have to get better at convincing other stakeholders to get on board. Lessons from change management theory and advice from teachers who have been there will give us the tools we need to encourage our colleagues, get buy-in from students and parents, and make our schools truly exceptional.