



2026 Counties Conference Breakouts

Saturday, Sept. 26 | 9:45 – 10:50 a.m.

Strand: Advocacy, Governance and Policy

Title: New Charter School Accountability and Oversight Requirements

Description: The 2026–27 budget trailer bill brings about many changes to charter school law, and especially to the role of the charter authorizer. Many of the provisions were implemented as soon as the budget deal was signed. County governance teams should be prepared for all the new components in a multitude of areas that will impact them, such as auditing, contracting and charter oversight. This session will lay out the new requirements and provide a timeline for county boards to hit the ground running.

Presenter(s):

- John Yeh, Partner, Burke, Williams & Sorensen, LLC
- Kristin Armatis, Executive Director, Charter School Services, San Diego COE
- Stephanie Medrano Farland, Director, Education Policy, Capitol Advisors Group

Strand: Funding, Workforce and Educational Access

Title: Competitive Edge: Transforming CTE with Pre-apprenticeship

Description: Riverside COE's Competitive Edge initiative turns high school career technical education (CTE) pathways into paid, state-registered pre-apprenticeships, scaled across two counties through IEConnect, a collaboration between Riverside COE and San Bernardino County Superintendent of Schools. The problem: many students — especially foster youth and other underserved groups — finish CTE but struggle to reach paid careers. The approach: register students directly with the Division of Apprenticeship Standards, develop MOUs and linkage agreements, and fund the work through grants and Strong Workforce dollars rather than local general funds. Attendees will learn the governance, policy, funding and partnership strategies behind it, review outcomes, and leave with a roadmap to replicate a debt-free pathway.

Presenter(s):

- Forest DeRenzo, Executive Director, Riverside COE
- Kermit Boyd, Teacher on Special Assignment, Riverside COE

Strand: Student Well-Being, Safety and Success

Title: The Big Five: Trauma-Informed Safety Protocols for Schools

Description: The Big Five provides a countywide common-response protocol that uses shared language across schools, ensuring clarity, coordination and an effective response from first responders. This comprehensive, multi-hazard framework includes standardized protocols, communication templates and practical tools for wildfire evacuation, student

reunification, communication contingency planning and violent threat response. Grounded in a trauma-informed approach, The Big Five supports inclusive emergency planning and developmentally appropriate student preparedness. This session will introduce participants to The Big Five and how districts and county offices can implement these protocols to strengthen school safety and emergency readiness.

Presenter(s):

- Mason Henricks, Manager, School Safety and Risk Prevention, San Mateo COE

Saturday, Sept. 26 | 11:05 a.m. – 12:10 p.m.

Strand: Funding, Workforce and Educational Access

Title: Workforce Housing as a Governance Strategy

Description: California's education leaders face growing workforce shortages, housing affordability challenges, enrollment shifts and increasing pressure to maximize public resources. Workforce housing is emerging as a powerful strategy to recruit and retain employees, strengthen communities and support student success. This session explores how county boards and educational leaders can leverage educational assets, navigate legal and governance requirements, and structure partnerships that advance workforce housing goals. Drawing on California case studies and practitioner experience in real estate, public agency law and educational leadership, attendees will gain actionable strategies for transforming underutilized assets into long-term solutions.

Presenter(s):

- Al Grazioli, Vice President, Brailsford & Dunlavey
- Sarine Abrahamian, Managing Partner, Orbach Huff & Henderson LLP

Strand: Advocacy, Governance and Policy

Title: Charter Authorizing: Balancing Board Discretion and Law

Description: Charter school authorizing is often viewed as a statutory function, but effective decision-making requires boards to balance legal requirements, local history, community priorities and trustee judgment. This session highlights how the Alameda COE built board capacity through a charter authorizing study session that combined historical context, authorizing trends, legal analysis and practical decision-making tools. Presenters will share strategies, materials, lessons learned and implementation considerations. Participants will leave with actionable approaches to strengthen governance, improve transparency and support more informed authorizing decisions in their local contexts.

Presenter(s):

- Alysse Castro, Superintendent, Alameda COE
- Juwen Lam, Chief, Accountability Partnerships, Alameda COE

Strand: Student Well-Being, Safety and Success

Title: Improving Graduation Rates of Foster Youth

Description: Foster youth are one of the lowest performing student groups in the state of California. On average, a student in foster care will attend six different schools and research has shown they lose four to six months of learning with each school change. To help improve the outcomes of foster students, the Monterey COE Foster Youth Services Coordinating Program (FYSCP) has implemented a robust case management program that

provides support to students, schools and districts. Join this session to learn how the Monterey COE FYSCP's case management program resulted in a 96 percent high school graduation for foster students in the 2024–25 school year.

Presenter(s):

- Justin Parker, Program Coordinator, Monterey COE

Saturday, Sept. 26 | 3:15 – 4:20 p.m.

Strand: Student Well-Being, Safety and Success

Title: AI Can Answer: But Who Is Listening?

Description: Chatbots are changing how students seek support but at what cost? Hear from experts in counseling and education on why human interaction remains essential and how schools can develop policies to protect students. New California Youth and Behavioral Health Initiative (CYBHI) funding also makes expanding mental health staffing more attainable. This timely panel brings together experts in psychotherapy, school counseling and educational leadership to explore the real implications of artificial intelligence (AI)-driven student engagement.

Presenter(s):

- Ed Manansala, Superintendent, El Dorado COE
- Loretta Whitson, Executive Director, California Association of School Counselors
- Marlon Morgan, Founder and CEO, Wellness Together, Capitol Advisors Group
- Scott Kuykendahl, Superintendent, Stanislaus COE

Strand: Funding, Workforce and Educational Access

Title: Small Investments, Big Impact: Scaling CalKIDS

Description: COEs play a key role in advancing equity and improving student outcomes. This session highlights how county offices can leverage Children's Savings Accounts (CSAs), specifically California's CalKIDS program, to expand college readiness and reduce barriers to post-secondary access. Drawing on Riverside COE's experience and partnerships with ScholarShare and the California Student Aid Commission, participants will explore governance strategies and collaborations to scale impact across districts, especially for underserved students. Attendees will leave with practical tools and strategies to strengthen partnerships, align policy and expand college access.

Presenter(s):

- Catalina Cifuentes, Executive Director, College Career Readiness, Riverside COE
- Daisy Gonzales, Executive Director, California Student Aid Commission
- Elizabeth Romero, Board Member, Riverside COE
- Noah Lightman, Assistant Deputy Director, Policy & Administration, ScholarShare Investment Board, State Treasurer's Office

Strand: Student Well-Being, Safety and Success

Title: Placer County Reads: Empowering Literacy for All

Description: Improving literacy outcomes for all students — especially English learners, students with disabilities and those experiencing poverty — requires aligned systems, strong partnerships and strategic investment. This session highlights Placer COE's Placer Reads initiative and the role of Board Literacy Ambassadors in advancing community

engagement. The initiative focuses on providing targeted support and access to quality instruction, ensuring that every student has the opportunity to read and succeed. Presenters will share approaches to implementing high-quality supports and attendees will leave with actionable strategies, tools and partnership models to drive measurable gains.

Presenter(s):

- Gayle Garbolino-Mojica, Superintendent, Placer COE
- Jennifer Hicks, Associate Superintendent, Educational Services, Placer COE

Sunday, Sept. 27 | 8:30 – 9:30 a.m.

Strand: Student Well-Being, Safety and Success

Title: Reimagining Schools Through Student Voice

Description: Student presenters will lead an interactive exercise addressing the challenges of limited authentic student input in governance decisions and of translating student voice into actionable board priorities. Students will first demonstrate for participants a student-led facilitation model that can be used to engage broad student input, co-creating a vision of the ideal school and identifying priorities for board action. Next, students will lead a group discussion on barriers to student board member engagement and share feedback around what skills students need to learn to be effective board members.

Presenter(s):

- Ethan Duncan, State Government Affairs on a Local Level Director, California Association of Student Councils (CASC), and High School Senior, Canyon High School
- Euri Kim, State President, CASC, and High School Senior, Arnold O. Beckman High School
- Kelly Wachowicz, Executive Director, CASC

Strand: Student Well-Being, Safety and Success

Title: Supporting Every Student After *Mirabelli* and *Mahmoud*

Description: As legal and policy debates surrounding parental rights, student privacy and student support services continue to evolve, county boards and educational leaders face increasing challenges in balancing legal compliance, student well-being and community expectations. This session will examine the practical implications of recent court decisions, including *Mirabelli v. Bonta* and *Mahmoud v. Taylor*, and their impact on policies, communication practices, and student support systems. Through real-world examples and lessons learned from local educational agencies, presenters will share governance considerations, policy insights and practical strategies for supporting students and families while navigating an evolving legal landscape.

Presenter(s):

- Christopher D. Keeler, Partner, F3 Law
- Greg Rolan, General Counsel, Orange COE

Strand: Advocacy, Governance and Policy

Title: County Boards and New Changes to Charter School Oversight

Description: Even before the latest charter school legislation, county boards had a critical role in charter school authorizing, as California is in its single biggest year ever for charter

renewals — and potential appeals. The education budget trailer bill makes important changes to charter oversight that boards must understand for their ongoing oversight and high-stakes decisions they make at the board level — and to help ensure county office staff are prepared for their own multi-faceted role. This session will review the board's key responsibilities before the new law, explain what has changed and how it may impact boards, and equip boards to make sure they are ready for the oversight challenges, substantively and politically.

Presenter(s):

- Debi Deal, Senior Fiscal Consultant, California Charter Authorizing Professionals
- Louise Johnson, Board Member, Nevada COE
- Tom Hutton, Executive Director, California Charter Authorizing Professionals
- Yvonne Chan, Board Member, Los Angeles COE