



# 2025 INQUIRY MATTERS CONFERENCE

APRIL 26TH, 2025  
CENTER FOR INQUIRY

# PROGRAM

**7:30 a.m. – 8:00 a.m.**

**Registration, Continental Breakfast, Professional & Children's Books Sales & CFI Expert Projects**

**8:00 a.m. – 8:30 a.m.**

**Opening Song: "Brave" by Sara Bareilles & Jack Antonoff**

Christine Harding & CFI Chorus

**Welcome**

Emily Whitecotton

**For the Love of Learning: Hold Fast to Dreams**

Heidi Mills, Liz Baranik, Megan Drayton, & Katie Dawsey

**8:40 a.m. – 9:30 a.m.**

**Concurrent Sessions A**

**9:40 a.m. – 10:30 a.m.**

**Concurrent Sessions B**

**10:40 a.m. – 11:30 a.m.**

**Concurrent Sessions C**

**11:45 a.m. – 12:30 p.m.**

**Why Beliefs Matter: Holding Fast to Dreams**

Heidi Mills, Liz Baranik, Mackenzie Thompson Mujica, Tianna Myers, Taylor Wuerfel, Jessie Steedly, Rutland Martin, Sequoia Hampton, Nozsa Kyler, Hannah Frederick, Brandi Cade, Tracy Etu, Tiffany Palmatier, Katie Dawsey, & Emily Whitecotton

**Closing Song: "Inquiry is Learning on Purpose"**

Rutland Martin, Sequoia Hampton, & CFI 5th Graders

8:40 AM - 9:30 AM

# Concurrent Sessions A

## LEADING WITH COURAGE: WHAT MATTERS MOST?

Quantina Haggwood, Julius Scott, Kendra Lynn & Arthur Newton

How do courageous leaders cultivate a positive learning culture where teachers and students are seen, heard, and valued while simultaneously lifting academic achievement? This session will explore how courageous leadership is grounded in enduring beliefs and practices that empower others to transform their school communities through innovation, creativity, risk-taking, and a solid understanding of credible educational research. Current and aspiring instructional leaders will leave with concrete strategies and visionary inspiration to lead with certainty in uncertain times.

302

K-12  
Coaches &  
Leaders

## NURTURING PASSIONATE WRITERS IN EARLY CHILDHOOD CLASSROOMS

Michelle Kimpson

Writing Workshop is an essential part of a literacy framework. It is also a curricular structure that lifts literacy and learning across the curriculum. This session will explore ways to engage, motivate, and grow young writers and inquirers. Participants will follow a first-grade class as they grow as writers of their own identities. Participants will leave with a vision of how to teach writers as well as how to foster writing as a tool for learning across the day and curriculum.

204

K-2

## REIMAGINING MATH WORKSHOP

Taylor Wuerfel

Imagine an engaging math workshop where students approach math joyfully. This session will share an inquiry-approach where mathematicians are empowered to think creatively, not procedurally. Leave this session with new warm-ups, number talks, and games to take back to your classroom. These engagements will help to build foundational skills, develop mental math strategies, and have students eager to start math workshop each day!

201

K-2

## DISCOVERING YOUR TEACHING IDENTITY: CULTIVATING HOPE, JOY, AND POSSIBILITY

Jordan Page & Liz Baranik

Teaching is most powerful when rooted in strong personal, professional, and pedagogical beliefs. This interactive workshop will help educators clarify their identities, prioritize competence over compliance, and cultivate classrooms filled with hope and possibility. Through reflection and collaboration, we will explore ways to foster joy in teaching and learning, ensuring we do what's best for students while imagining new possibilities. Leave inspired, empowered, and ready to create a fulfilling and impactful teaching practice.

203

K-5  
Teachers &  
Coaches

## REPURPOSING MORNING MEETING WITH INQUIRY IN MIND

Nozsa Kyler & Tianna Myers

Morning meetings have long been used as a time for greetings and reviewing the forecast for the day. However, it can be given more purpose with inquiry at its heart. Through the use of journals and articles, morning meetings become a place where kids can ask questions about their world and think up together. It becomes an additional space for them to learn and grow as academic beings, community members, and citizens of a democratic world. Come prepared to learn not only how you can implement this in your own classroom, but also to engage in a morning meeting with fellow third and fourth graders.

303

2-5

8:40 AM - 9:30 AM

# Concurrent Sessions A

## I HAVE TO PAY FOR WHAT!?

Brandi Cade

Participants will learn how to incorporate money and budgeting into science investigations in their classroom. Join in this hands-on opportunity to take your STEM challenges and science investigations and bump them up a level or two. Learn how students engage in the engineering design process, work through planning material needs, budgeting for supplies, purchasing, and then creating and testing designs.

103

2-5

## EXPANDING OUR UNDERSTANDING: FOSTERING EMPATHY AND PERSPECTIVE-TAKING THROUGH CLASSROOM PRACTICES

Rafa Navarro, Chris Hass & Rutland Martin

In this session two fifth grade teachers and a college professor will share practices that foster empathy and perspective-taking among students. The presenters will share how they have created a rich pen pal experience across two states in an effort to build critical dialogue around important issues. Participants will acquire practical strategies for cultivating perspective-taking in their own classrooms.

101

3-5

## NIFTY NON-FICTION: A CROSS-CURRICULAR INVESTIGATION INTO ANIMAL CLASSES

Veronica Anderson, Margaret Cabe, Brooke Fonder, Kaitlyn Foy, Gina Morris, & Laura Timmons

In this session participants will have the opportunity to follow alongside the 4th grade team at Satchel Ford Elementary as they conduct a non-fiction inquiry project into the 5 different classes of animals to coincide with their grade-level science standards. Watch as teachers and students discuss their deep dive into the world of mammals, birds, reptiles, amphibians, and fish as they investigate through an exploratory lens the art of reading, researching, and crafting clever non-fiction writing.

304

2-5

Teachers & Coaches

## WE DIDN'T KNOW WHAT WE DIDN'T KNOW: VALUING AND SUPPORTING INTERNATIONAL TEACHERS

Lyn Mueller, Zaida Prater, Joy Ruth, Gertrude Kassene, & Cherry Joy Javier

International teachers bring unique cultural perspectives to our schools, but their challenges often go unrecognized. Join a District Instructional Coach and three international teachers as they share insights from their collaborative experiences and provide recommendations for teachers and administrators to foster successful relationships and support cultural exchange in the classroom.

102

K-8

Coaches & International Teachers

## INQUIRY IN ACTION: PROJECT-BASED LEARNING THAT WORKS

Lesley Snyder & April Beale

Project-based learning (PBL) engages students in real-world, inquiry-driven experiences—but how do we make it practical, manageable, and meaningful in middle school classrooms? Join an experienced educator and instructional leader to explore hands-on strategies for designing impactful PBL experiences that align with standards while fostering student curiosity and critical thinking.

301

3-8

## OUR CAROLINATIP JOURNEY: NOVICE TEACHER STORIES OF GROWTH & SUPPORT

Corey Shearer, Allie Hall Collins, and Joyce Brooks with support from Angela Adams

Designed for anyone wanting a glimpse into the experience of new(ish) teachers, this presentation focuses on stories from the field as recounted by educators who student-taught just a few years ago. The teachers will share their beginnings, their growth, and what's on the horizon for them. The session will include an overview of the Carolina Teacher Induction Program and its proven support of novice educators.

202

4K- 12

9:40 AM – 10:30 AM

# Concurrent Session B

## LEADING WITH BELIEFS TO FOSTER CONFIDENCE, COMPETENCE, & CAPACITY

Megan Drayton

Megan Drayton will share how being guided and driven by her beliefs as a teacher has positively impacted her professional and personal journey as an inquirer and lead learner. She will share how she has stayed true to her beliefs despite curricular changes, roles, or shifts teachers face throughout their careers. Megan will share how she maintains joy in the profession and grounded in what is most important: our students.

302

2-5

## TELL ME ABOUT YOURSELF: LIFE STUDY PASSION PROJECTS THAT MOVE BEYOND CUTENESS!

Tiffany Palmatier

In this session, Tiffany will share how she uses the Life Study Passion Project as an authentic touchstone experience to help students understand chronology (past, present, and future), while celebrating students' identities and career aspirations.

202

K-2

## REIMAGINING MATH WORKSHOP

Taylor Wuefel

Imagine an engaging math workshop where students approach math joyfully. This session will share an inquiry-approach where mathematicians are empowered to think creatively, not procedurally. Leave this session with new warm-ups, number talks, and games to take back to your classroom. These engagements will help to build foundational skills, develop mental math strategies, and have students eager to start math workshop each day!

201

K-2

## EMPOWERING EDUCATORS THROUGH INQUIRY & MICRO-CREDENTIALS

Elizabeth Scarbrough

Join us for an engaging session that explores the potential of inquiry-based learning to support professional growth through micro-credentials. In partnership with the South Carolina Writing Improvement Network, this session will showcase how educators can leverage inquiry-driven approaches to develop their writing instruction skills and earn recognized micro-credentials. Join us to sign up for a free micro-credential!

101

K-12

## FROM ROUTINES TO RITUALS: BUILDING A CLASSROOM COMMUNITY THAT THRIVES

Hannah Frederick & Jessie Steedly

How do intentional classroom rituals create a strong sense of community, help foster connection, trust, and belonging among students? In this session, participants will learn strategies for implementing daily routines and consistent rituals that promote collaboration, encourage student voice, and establish a culture of empathy and accountability. Discover how simple, consistent practices can transform classroom culture and enhance both social-emotional growth and academic achievement.

203

K-5

9:40 AM – 10:30 AM

# Concurrent Sessions B

## NEWS CREW: EXPERTS IN RESEARCH AND MEDIA

Sarah Earle, Reynard Jefferson, Qwardarius O'Neal, Kalissa Sermon, Ernest Jennings, Joslyn Davis, Jamarcus Little & Felicia White

News Crew will explain their process of seeking and sharing information daily on the News Show to the whole school. Students will discuss primary and secondary sources, the importance of a credible source (and how to find it), the dangers of clickbait, and a potential career in media. Mostly students will show off their amazing research and public speaking skills.

103

K-5

## BITES AND BEATS: WRITING WITH THE RHYTHM OF FOOD AND MUSIC

Valente' Gibson, Jacqui Witherspoon & Eliza Braden

This session aims to equip educators with practical strategies for incorporating student interests into writing instruction. The presenters will showcase how to create engaging writing units that connect with students' cultural backgrounds, which fosters deeper engagement and enhances writing skills. By examining curriculum units centered around universal themes such as food and music, attendees will explore effective approaches to making writing instruction more meaningful and inclusive. Participants will leave with a template plan and actionable strategies to improve student writing.

102

K-5

## "THIS ISN'T WHAT WE LEARNED IN COLLEGE!": PRESERVICE AND EARLY CAREER TEACHERS DISCUSS EFFORTS TO REMAIN COMMITTED TO THEIR PROFESSIONAL BELIEFS WHILE NAVIGATING STRICT MANDATES

Emma Miller, Rebeca Martinez, Lauren Darnell, Sunshine Brown & Chris Hass

In this session, first year teachers, student interns, and their college professor will invite participants into discussions about the lack of autonomy that has become commonplace in so many schools. Presenters will share strategies they have employed to work with or around strict mandates to remain true to their beliefs about what constitutes quality teaching and learning.

303

K-5

## READING FOR EMPATHY AND COMPASSION

Katie Kelly, Sophie Johnson & Emma Begg

With each turn of the page, readers engage with characters and situations that expand their perspectives and challenge their ideas and views. This session will explore how to guide students to become thoughtful and empathetic readers, committed to taking action to make a positive impact in the world.

304

K-5

## BEYOND THE SCRIPT: AUTHENTIC LITERACY INSTRUCTION WITH THE SCIENCE OF READING

Liz Baranik & Alexis Pressley

Join 5th grade teacher Alexis Pressley and CFI Literacy Coach Liz Baranik as they explore ways to use curriculum as a tool—not a script—for meaningful and engaging literacy instruction. This session will provide genuine, real-world strategies for integrating the Science of Reading and other curriculum/research-based practices, into rigorous, student-centered workshops. Participants will leave with a clear understanding of how to stay true to their educational beliefs while making curriculum work for their unique learners. Don't let the curriculum control your teaching—use it in ways that are authentic, effective, and empowering!

104

K-5  
Teachers &  
Coaches

## ELEVATING INSTRUCTION: CULTIVATING EFFECTIVE SUPPORT SYSTEMS FOR COACHES AND EDUCATORS

Kendra Lynne & Richland One Literacy Coaches

Effective instructional coaching is a cornerstone of fostering teacher growth and enhancing student learning outcomes. In this session, participants will explore practical strategies for creating and sustaining robust support systems that empower both instructional coaches and educators. Participants will gain insights into how to build a collaborative coaching culture, provide ongoing professional development, and tailor support to meet the unique needs of teachers.

301

K-8  
Coaches &  
Administrators

10:40 AM - 11:30 AM

# Concurrent Sessions C

## FIRM FOUNDATIONS, WALLS THAT PROTECT, TEACHING WITH JOY! LET'S BUILD!

Brittne Guerry Knight & Alex Salter

Dynamic hands-on, collaborative experience that demonstrates from a student's lens what it's like to have the freedom to explore, create, and challenge themselves through play and integrated learning. Participants will explore a student-driven learning environment that emphasizes the significance of student ownership in their personalized learning experiences. By overriding pre-conceived notions, reinforcing logical reasoning, while encouraging innovative thinking, participants will extend beyond previous knowledge and foster a dynamic classroom environment in which teaching and learning are a shared joyful and exciting journey between educators and students.

304

K-5  
Teachers &  
Leaders

## DEVELOPING MEANINGFUL PARENT-TEACHER PARTNERSHIPS

Jessie Steedly & Taylor Wuerfel

Parents are our partners in growing learners! When teachers connect with, educate, and empower parents, they see that students begin to truly thrive. In this session, speakers will share about Curriculum Nights: a structure used to teach parents about what learning looks, sounds, and feels like in the classroom. See how classroom blogs and take-home resources can empower parents to be teachers, too..

201

K-2

## EXPLORING INQUIRY: CAROLINA CAP TEACHERS' JOURNEYS

Darrian Love, Mackenzie Montana & Brittany Wright

Join Carolina CAP Teachers as they share their Responsive Inquiry Projects, exploring the power of noticing and naming patterns in student learning. Through research, instructional strategies, and data collection, these educators deepened their practice by pursuing meaningful questions aligned with the SCTS 4.0 Instruction Domain. Gain insights into their process, findings, and the impact of an inquiry stance on teaching and learning.

202

3K-2

## BUILDING BRIDGES: INTEGRATING LITERACY INTO EVERY DISCIPLINE

Michelle Kimpson

This session explores strategies for enhancing content literacy in the classroom, drawing on insights from a long-ago project that integrated reading, writing, and critical thinking. Participants will gain practical tools to support student engagement, and academic success across disciplines, fostering a deeper understanding of content and promoting lifelong learning skills.

203

K-2

## BRINGING IT ALL TOGETHER: STRATEGIES FOR INTEGRATING UNITS OF STUDY

Tianna Myers & Katie Dawsey

Tianna and Katie will take you through the process of integrating content from different units of study across subject areas. They will demonstrate how intentionally integrating units of study can lead to meaningful learning experiences as readers, writers, mathematicians, scientists, and social scientists. Tianna and Katie will share their passion for thinking deeply about content, and invite you to learn alongside your students as you begin to plan for your own content integration.

204

K-5

## INQUIRING MINDS WANT TO KNOW

Brooke Fonder, Sumner Livingston, Michele Miller & Daniel Treece

In this session, educators will get an inside glimpse into two inquiry units conducted by 5th grade students at Satchel Ford Elementary. Participants will have a front row seat to an in-depth hands-on discovery into the world of journalism and the creation and publication of student generated magazines, as well as a study into our national parks' system, where participants will see the behind the scenes work of creating brochures and trail guides for various parks around the country. Participants will have the opportunity to see these projects from idea generation to final publication and will be able to hear from students as well as teachers.

101

3-5  
Coaches &  
Teachers



10:40 AM - 11:30 AM

# Concurrent Sessions C

## BEYOND HANDS UP: INTERACTIVE TECHNIQUES

JP Shorter & Natalie Brown

Compliance is not engagement—students must think, respond, and stay actively involved. Inspired by Dr. Anita Archer's insight that we must "gain attention and maintain attention," this session equips teachers with simple, high-impact strategies to boost participation, motivation, and student ownership of learning. Walk away with easy-to-implement techniques that work across all subjects—ready to use tomorrow!

103

3-5

## IGNITE YOUR PASSION FOR THE ART OF INQUIRY IN WRITING

Colavito McKie, Jr.

In this session, teachers gain insight on how to help students refine their scope of inquiry in core subject areas, using practices that encourage questioning, collaborative learning, and deep understanding. With a focus on the art of inquiry, participants will learn firsthand what inquiry practices look like at the upper elementary level, while incorporating engagement strategies that support the writing process. Mr. McKie and students will show: "Student engagement represents the sum total of their investment in learning, commitment to academic success, ongoing curiosity, expressive creativity, and development of positive relationships with others." - Hanover Research Center

102

3-5

## TRANSFORMING TEACHING PRACTICES WITH *BUILDING THINKING CLASSROOMS*

Angie Morvay, Rossi Sloan, Beth White, with Interns Malia Matthews, Alyssa Gonzalez & Sara Kate Blalock

What began as a professional inquiry into Peter Liljedahl's *Building Thinking Classrooms* has evolved into a transformative journey in teaching practices. This session explores BTC's groundbreaking framework and methodologies, such as vertical non-permanent surfaces, random grouping, and thin-slicing. Participants will gain practical tools, strategies, and inspiration to create a collaborative, interactive classroom where students think critically, reason deeply, and thrive in mathematical understanding.

303

2-8

## LEADING WITH BELIEFS TO FOSTER CONFIDENCE, COMPETENCE, & CAPACITY

Megan Drayton

Megan Drayton will share how being guided and driven by her beliefs as a teacher has positively impacted her professional and personal journey as an inquirer and lead learner. She will share how she has stayed true to her beliefs despite curricular changes, roles, or shifts teachers face throughout their careers. Megan will share how she maintains joy in the profession and grounded in what is most important: our students.

302

2-5

## BEYOND MULTIPLE CHOICE: ENGAGING ASSESSMENT STRATEGIES FOR INQUIRY-DRIVEN CLASSROOM

Lesley Snyder & April Beale

Traditional assessments often fail to capture the depth of student understanding. This interactive session will explore alternative assessment strategies that allow students to demonstrate their thinking in creative, inquiry-driven ways. Through hands-on activities, participants will engage in hexagonal thinking, this/that debates, and other innovative strategies that promote critical thinking, collaboration, and student ownership of learning.

301

5-8

Closing Address 11:45 a.m. – 12:30 p.m.

Why Beliefs Matter: Holding Fast to Dreams

Our Gathering Place



# EXHIBITS, CONFERENCE SPONSORS & HOST



Special thanks to the Center for Educational Partnerships at the University of South Carolina for sponsoring this informative and inspiring conference.

We want to express our deepest gratitude to the Center for Inquiry for hosting the 2025 INQUIRY MATTERS conference. We also want to share our appreciation for all the support that Richland Two Magnet Programming provided for this special event.



Thank you to Heinemann Educational Books for offering a conference discount, and GG's Library for making a contribution to *A Chance Through Literacy*, in memory of our dear friend and colleague, Jennifer Wilson.

## **Schools/Organizations Represented**

Berkely County Schools Butler Academy, Center for Inquiry, Elaine E. Thompson Elementary, Gilbert Elementary School, Heath Springs Elementary, Honey Run Elementary, Irmo Elementary School, Jackson Creek Elementary, Liberty Elementary, Lewis Greenview Elementary, Midland Park Primary, Oak Pointe Elementary, Satchel Ford Elementary, Smithland Elementary, Watkins-Nance Elementary, Furman University, James Madison University, University of South Carolina, Lexington-Richland School District Five, Richland School District One, Richland School District Two, Maxwell Leadership Foundation, Sharper Minds Literacy Group LLC.



Please scan this QR code to access our 2025 Inquiry Matters Reflection.

Thank you for spending your morning with us. We wish you the best as you strive for what is possible.

