



2026 Winter Symposium

“Tier One Instruction: Establishing Look-Fors in Teaching and Evaluating Whole Group Learning”

Monday, February 16th:

Morning Session: “The Case for Strong Whole Group/Tier One Instruction”

Presenter: Dr. Janie Pyle, Director SMCAA

In our efforts to get “caught up” from the recent epidemic, and to respond to students’ lack of basic skills and grade level performance, we have lost our focus on what should be our “first love”-*Tier One Grade Level Instruction*. During this short session, we will lay the groundwork for a return to whole group learning, and how grade level instruction is the first step to improve student achievement and success.

Session A: Let’s Do Learning Labs!

Presenter: Becky Jones, Assistant Superintendent CIA; Tia Marquino, Instructional Coach; Ryan Lorenz, Instructional Coach: Sullivan School District

Target Audience: Administrators, classroom teachers, instructional coaches, academic support staff

Discover how Sullivan School District’s Learning Labs at both the elementary and high school levels are transforming classroom practice through a student-centered, collaborative approach to professional growth. This breakout session will highlight how teachers engage in focused classroom observations and reflective dialogue to strengthen *Tier One differentiated instruction aligned to Teacher Standard 3.2 and 3.3* — Curriculum Implementation. Participants will explore how Learning Labs foster a culture of collective efficacy, where teachers observe, analyze, and refine instructional strategies that promote equitable access to learning for all students. Through guided reflection and shared practice, educators deepen their understanding of how to adapt instruction, scaffold learning, and utilize data to meet diverse student needs within the general education setting. Join us to see how intentional collaboration and real-time observation are driving high-impact instructional change, strengthening curriculum alignment, and empowering teachers to ensure every student is actively engaged and growing within Tier One differentiated instruction.



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Session B: “Unlocking Conceptual Conversations: How Classroom Discussions Drive Vocabulary Growth and Student Ownership”

Presenter: Wendi Stallcup, Instructional Coach: Wheatland RII

Target Audience: Administrators, classroom teachers, instructional coaches, academic support staff

"This session introduces Conceptual Conversations (CC), a cross-curricular instructional framework derived from the powerful principles of Math Talks. The teacher explicitly begins the talk with a clear objective. The key method is purposeful questioning that scaffolds students from simple answers to complex justifications. The primary objective of CC is not just the correct answer, but the justification expressed using precise, academic language. Conceptual Conversations are fundamentally built on student agency and are appropriate for all academic subjects. Participants will walk away with:

A 5-step Conceptual Conversation implementation protocol

A set of high-leverage questions designed to shift the focus from a student's answer to their strategy and content-rich vocabulary

A rubric to help teachers monitor the use of precise vocabulary during and after the talks

Techniques for managing wait time and student discourse.

Session C: “Mother Doesn’t Want a Dog!” Explicit Instruction Using Poetry

Presenter: BriAnn Lacy, Grade Three Teacher; Dee Bydler, Principal, Wing Elementary, Sikeston RVI

Target Audience: Classroom teachers, instructional coaches, academic support staff, Administrators

Through interactive classroom scenarios, attendees will see specific materials broken down with core components of *explicit instruction*, including clear learning targets, modeling, guided practice, frequent checks for understanding, and purposeful opportunities for independent application. Scenarios and lesson modeling will share implementation of Teach Like a Champion techniques and Kagan cooperative learning strategies to support student engagement through whole group teaching. Attendees will receive a lesson plan and additional ideas to take back and use right away.



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Afternoon Session: “Whole Group Instruction Skills and Expectations: What Does it Look Like?”

Presenter: Dr. Janie Pyle, Director SMCAA

Good teachers know that whole group instruction entails a large amount of planning and preparation, along with ongoing practice and adjustment. During this short introduction to specifics, we will identify the instructional skills necessary to Tier One instruction success, along with what to “look for” when observing/evaluating whole group instruction. Practice makes success. Success makes IMPACT!

Roundtable Discussions: Expertise in Observation and Feedback in Whole Group/Tier One Instruction

Presenters: Mary Van Orden, Director of Curriculum and Instruction, South Callaway RII; Dee Bydler, Principal Wing Elementary, Sikeston RVI; Mollie Bolton, Chief of Teaching, Learning and Accountability, Special School District of St. Louis County; Suann DeWitt, Curriculum Director, Woodland RIV

Target Audience: Administrators, instructional coaches, teachers, academic support staff

Focused observation and meaningful feedback can build better instruction over time. During these roundtable discussions, participants will experience short informational sessions on “look-fors” and practices when teaching, observing and giving feedback to Tier One/Whole Group instruction. Handouts and sample formats will be provided. Time for questions and conversation is key to expanding our knowledge in all aspects of our work.

DESE Guest Speaker: The DESE Approach to this issue of Grade Level Equivalence

Presenter: SMCAA board member, Shawn Bates: Standards, Curriculum and Assessment Coordinator |Office of Quality Schools

Target Audience: All Curriculum and Instructional Leaders and Teachers

Shaun will share his insights and expertise in the area of assessment and ideas related to Grade Level Equivalence. Shaun has multiple years of experience in these areas and at DESE. Come prepared with questions related to your district’s needs in these areas.



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Tuesday, February 17th:

Keynote Session: “Effective Tier 1 Instruction to Address Early Reading Challenges”

Presenter: *Karyn Tomkinson*, National Manager at hand2mind

Do you say, "This is simply a Tier One problem?" Do your interventionists see their caseloads increasing each year? We invite you to our solution-focused session if any of these questions resonate! Description: Drawing upon current research on the Big Five in Reading, we will explore evidence-based practices that have proven effective in Tier I settings. Participants will gain insight into instructional strategies, such as explicit instruction, differentiated learning supports, and multimodal approaches, that can be tailored to meet the needs of diverse learners within the Tier I framework. Participants will understand how assessments inform instruction and support student growth.

DESE Guest Speaker: DESE instructional updates and ideas about Tier One Instruction.

Presenter: Dr. Susan German: DESE Coordinator of Curriculum

Target Audience: All Curriculum and Instructional Leaders and Teachers

Dr. German comes to us as the relatively new DESE Coordinator of Curriculum. Her expertise in effective instruction is widely known and respected throughout the state. She is also known for her ability to create sound assessments that raise the bar for instruction. Come prepared for any questions related to instruction and assessment that you may have for your building or district needs.