



INDIANA EDUCATORS OF COLOR NETWORK CONFERENCE



JUNE 11 - 13
INDIANAPOLIS

STILL WE RISE: UNAPOLOGETICALLY

OUR ASSOCIATION

MISSION STATEMENT

The Indiana State Teachers Association is a professional association organized to sustain quality public education, improve students' education opportunities and advance the professional status of educators.

PURPOSE

To develop and organize members as leaders, professionals and active citizens to improve the professional status of educators and educational opportunities for Hoosier kids.

GOALS

- Unified voice - we are stronger together.
- Economic security and professional working conditions for educators.
- Premier public education system that serves all kids regardless of ZIP code, culture or ability.

STRATEGIC PRIORITIES

- Build strong locals.
- Increase membership and engagement.
- Advocate for educational issues.
- Fight for racial and social justice.

SPONSORS



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WELCOME FROM ISTA PRESIDENT



It is with deep gratitude and immense pride that I welcome you to the fourth annual Indiana Educators of Color Network Conference, hosted by the Indiana State Teachers Association. As ISTA president, I am honored to stand with you in this sacred space—one that celebrates the brilliance, strength and leadership of educators of color across our state.

This year's theme, "Still We Rise: Unapologetically," reflects the strength, resilience and purpose that educators of color bring to their work every day. Your role goes far beyond teaching academic content. You inspire confidence, cultivate belonging and create opportunities for future generations.

You build bridges for students to cross into their full potential. You open doors that were once shut. You uplift voices that too often go unheard. And in doing so, you leave a mark not only on classrooms, but on entire communities and future generations.

This conference is an opportunity to be seen, to be heard and to be celebrated. It is a time to connect with peers, to grow professionally and personally and to affirm the importance of your voice in the ongoing work of equity and justice in education.

Let us use this time together to reflect, rise and reimagine what's possible. Whether you're a veteran educator or new to the profession, your presence here matters. Your story matters. And your legacy is being written each day—with courage, compassion and transformative power. Thank you for the invaluable work you do. Thank you for continuing to lead with purpose and passion. We are honored to walk beside you in this journey.

In solidarity,

Jennifer Smith-Margraf
ISTA President

WELCOME FROM CONFERENCE CHAIR

Dear Conference Participants,

Welcome to the 2026 Indiana State Teachers Association Educators of Color Conference! It is with great excitement, pride and gratitude that we welcome each of you to this powerful gathering of educators, leaders, advocates and changemakers from across Indiana and beyond.

This year's theme, "Still I Rise: Unapologetically," is both a declaration and a call to action. It honors the resilience, brilliance and strength that educators of color have demonstrated throughout history and continue to embody every day in our classrooms, schools, communities and union spaces. In a time when challenges persist and voices are often questioned or marginalized, we gather to affirm that we will continue to rise—not quietly, not conditionally but unapologetically.

Over the course of this conference, we invite you to learn, connect, reflect and grow. Engage fully in the conversations, workshops and networking opportunities. Share your successes, your challenges and your vision for the future. Build relationships that extend beyond these conference walls and strengthen the collective power of educators committed to equity, justice and opportunity for all.

As we gather under the banner of "Still I Rise: Unapologetically," let us celebrate our accomplishments, honor those who paved the way and recommit ourselves to the work ahead. Let us rise in our leadership. Let us rise in our advocacy. Let us rise in our solidarity. And let us do so with confidence, authenticity and an unwavering belief in the power of our collective voice.

Thank you for being part of this year's conference. We are honored to share this space with you and look forward to the inspiration, learning and community that await us.

Together, we rise.

In solidarity,

Yolanda Smith
Chair, Indiana Educators of Color Network Conference

WELCOME FROM RAC CO-CHAIRS

Dear Esteemed Educators, Leaders and Changemakers,

On behalf of the Indiana State Teachers Association's Racial Affairs Committee, it is both an honor and a privilege to welcome you to our fourth annual Educators of Color Conference.

This year's theme, "Still We Rise: Unapologetically" is more than a statement—it is a declaration. It reflects the strength, resilience and brilliance that each of you brings into your classrooms, schools and communities every single day. In a world that often challenges our presence, we gather here rooted in truth, uplifted by purpose and united in our power.

This conference is intentionally designed to be an inspiring, welcoming and enriching experience. It is a space where your voice matters, your story is honored and your impact is celebrated. Together, we will engage in meaningful dialogue, share innovative practices and build connections that extend far beyond this moment.

As we celebrate the uniqueness that makes us who we are, we also affirm our collective commitment to equity, excellence and the transformative power of education. You are not only educators—you are leaders, advocates and the embodiment of possibility for the students and communities you serve.

We hope you leave this experience feeling renewed, empowered and deeply connected to a network of individuals who understand, uplift and stand alongside you. May this conference pour into you as much as you continuously pour into others.

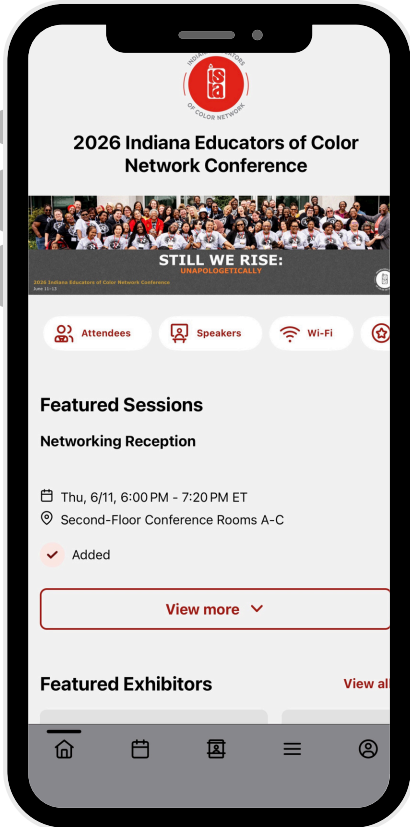
Welcome to a space where you can show up fully, authentically and unapologetically.

Still, we rise—together.

With gratitude and purpose,

Sophia-Grace Stewart & Ronald Swann
Co-Chairs, ISTA Racial Affairs Committee

CONFERENCE APP



Download the conference app

ISTA designed a conference app that will help you have an enjoyable and stress-free conference experience.

Download the app and engage with fellow conference attendees, share your photos and breakout session take-aways and plan your conference schedule.

View the venue map, learn more about conference sponsors and more.





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KEYNOTE SPEAKER



Dr. Tia Trumaine Mills is a special education teacher from Baton Rouge, La., with more than 20 years of classroom experience. Dr. Mills was elected to the NEA Executive Committee in 2025 for a three-year term.

Dr. Mills is the immediate past president of the Louisiana Association of Educators (LAE) and the youngest person to serve as president in the association's history. In her capacity as president of LAE, she served as the official spokeswoman of LAE where her primary duties included leading the association's efforts at the Louisiana State Legislature and the Louisiana Board of Elementary and Secondary Education meetings.

She also served as local president of the East Baton Rouge Parish Association of Educators (EBRPAE) for seven years. As president, Dr. Mills led the association's efforts in the fight to enhance the salaries of district employees by convincing the school board to unfreeze educators' pay schedules. She was also instrumental in helping increase membership in the local by 30 percent during her term as EBRPAE President and led the local association's push for fair standards for the state's Industrial Tax Exemption Program.

KEYNOTE SPEAKER

Dr. Mills' state-level activism includes her service on the LAE Board of Directors, as well as the Board of Trustees for the Teachers Retirement System of Louisiana. In 2017, LAE honored Dr. Mills with the association's top honor, the LAE Teacher Image Award.

A strong and fierce advocate for students and their educators, Dr. Mills has received numerous accolades, including the NAACP's Benjamin Hooks Keeper of the Flame Award, the NEA Foundation's Horace Mann Award, and recognition as one of Southern University's "40 Under 40."

Dr. Mills is affiliated with several professional and civic organizations, including the Southern University Alumni Federation, the NAACP, 100 Black Women of Metropolitan Baton Rouge, and is a proud member of the Tau Kappa Omega Chapter of Alpha Kappa Alpha Sorority, Incorporated.

Dr. Mills believes that the fight for public education and labor is inseparable from the fight for equity and racial and social justice. As an adjunct professor at Southern University in Baton Rouge, she hopes to inspire a new generation of activist leaders to uphold the NEA's rich legacy of fighting for great public schools for every student.

Dr. Mills earned her Bachelor of Arts in history, Master of Arts in social science with a concentration in history, and an alternative certification in special education, all from Southern University and A&M College. She received her EdD in higher education and organizational leadership from Nova Southeastern University.

AGENDA

All times are ET.

Thursday, June 11

5 – 6 p.m. | **Registration** | *First-Floor Lobby*

5 – 9 p.m. | **Liberation Lobby** | *Second-Floor Office*

6 – 7:20 p.m. | **Networking Reception** | *Second-Floor Conference Rooms A-C*

7:30 – 8:20 p.m. | **Workshops – Block A***

8:30 – 9:20 p.m. | **Workshops – Block B***

Friday, June 12

8 a.m. – 4 p.m. | **Liberation Lobby** | *Second-Floor Office*

8 - 9 a.m. | **Registration/Grab & Go Breakfast** | *First-Floor Lobby*

9 – 10:20 a.m. | **Welcome & Keynote, Dr. Tia Mills, NEA Executive Committee** | *Second-Floor Conference Rooms A-C*

10:30 – 11:20 a.m. | **Workshops – Block C***

11:30 a.m. – 12:20 p.m. | **Panel Discussion, *Unapologetically Leading: Centering Student Voice as Pathways for Change*** | *Second-Floor Conference Rooms A-C*

12:20 – 1:40 p.m. | **Mariachi Alegria & Lunch** | *Available throughout the conference rooms*

1:40 – 2:30 p.m. | **Workshops – Block D***

2:40 – 3:10 p.m. | **Discussion, Rita Maxey, ISTA Minority Educator of the Year** | *Second-Floor Conference Rooms A-C*

3:10 – 4:45 p.m. | **Unapologetically Building Power: From Issue to Action** | *Second-Floor Conference Rooms A-C*

4:45 – 6 p.m. | **Break + Travel to Gala**

6 – 9 p.m. | **International Gala: Dinner Stations & Activities at the Girls Scouts Founders Lodge** (Please wear cultural attire)

AGENDA

Saturday, June 13

8 – 9 a.m. | **Registration & Light Breakfast Snacks** | *Second-Floor Office*

8:30 – 10:30 a.m. | **Coffee Bar Opens** | *Second-Floor Office*

9 – 9:50 a.m. | **Workshops – Block E***

10 – 10:50 a.m. | **ESP Panel Discussion: Power, Partnership & Visibility** | *Second-Floor Conference Rooms A-C*

11 a.m. – Noon | **Lunch** | *Available throughout the conference rooms*

12:10 – 1 p.m. | **Workshops – Block F***

1:10 – 2:10 p.m. | **Immigrations, Resistance and Lessons from Minneapolis** | *Second-Floor Conference Rooms A-C*

2:10 – 2:40 p.m. | **Closing Ceremony** | *Second-Floor Conference Rooms A-C*

*Review available sessions and locations starting on page 13.

SESSION DESCRIPTIONS

June 11

7:30 – 8:20 p.m. | Block A

Identity-Based Affinity Spaces

Each session offers participants an opportunity to engage in meaningful conversations, build community and explore the unique challenges, strengths and perspectives that shape their personal and professional journeys.

- Black/African American: *Still We Rise (First-Floor Room A)*
- Latinx/Hispanic: *Ni De Aquí, Ni De Allá/ Neither Here Nor There (First-Floor Room B)*
- AAPI: *Seen and Unseen (Second-Floor Room A)*
- Indigenous/Native: *Original Voices, Ongoing Resistance (Second-Floor Room B)*
- Multiracial: *In Between and Beyond (Second-Floor Room C)*
- White Educators: *From Awareness to Accountability (First-Floor Cafe)*

Reclaiming the Body, Reclaiming the Work | Second-Floor Executive Conference Room

Evelyn Bako, 11 Yellow Road Transformation Coach

As we continue the work of education and liberation, we recognize that our bodies hold both the weight and the wisdom of our journey. In the spirit of *Still We Rise*: Unapologetically, this somatic grounding session invites participants to return to themselves—fully and without apology—through African Indigenous healing practices. Together, we will engage breath, movement, and ancestral grounding as acts of restoration, resistance, and renewal. This is an opportunity to rise in your body, reclaim your presence, and stand rooted in your purpose and power in the work.

Watercolor Wellness Workshop: An A.R.T. Burst | Second-Floor Staff Conference Room

Bernade Flournoy, Art Teacher at The Painted Pose

Educators of color are often called to rise, advocate and lead for others. This 40-minute session offers an A.R.T. Burst — a structured break designed to help participants align, restore and thrive.

Using a paint like a kindergartener approach, participants will release perfection and work at their own pace in a supportive, low-pressure environment. In a profession that demands constant output, choosing to rest, reflect and create is an act of restoration. This session creates intentional space for that practice. Participants are invited to continue the experience through complimentary access to "The Art Room", an online space for ongoing creative renewal.

8:30 – 9:20 p.m. | Block B

Identity-Based Affinity Spaces

Each session offers participants an opportunity to engage in meaningful conversations, build community and explore the unique challenges, strengths and perspectives that shape their personal and professional journeys.

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June 12

10:30 – 11:20 p.m. | Block C

Hidden Voices: Using Counter Narratives to Dismantle Fears Against Muslim Students and Educators | First-Floor Conference Room A

Wafa' Safi-Hassan, ISTA member & Board member

In this session, participants will explore common myths and perceptions that negatively impact Muslim students and educators and learn how to use counter narratives to debunk dominant narratives regarding marginalized groups. Through an examination of historical events, data on hate crimes, negative media influence, dress code implications and classroom safety concerns, the session provides critical context and insight. Participants will learn how a story of self can be used as a counter narrative and will have reliable and vetted resources to use when addressing the concerns and needs of Muslim students.

SESSION DESCRIPTIONS

Our Lived Experiences: How They Shape Our Educator Identity | Second-Floor Conference Rooms A-C

Felicia Williams, Lecturer at Butler University's College of Education

In his published article "The Purpose of Education," Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., states that "[t]he function of education, therefore, is to teach one to think intensively and to think critically." He goes on to say, "We must remember that intelligence is not enough. Intelligence plus character—that is the goal of true education. The complete education gives one not only power of concentration, but worthy objectives upon which to concentrate."

So, the questions are: What are we, as educators, critically thinking about? What are we, as educators, concentrating on? Reflecting upon?

In this session, participants will reflect on their lived experiences and discuss how they shape various aspects of their identity. This reflective practice can serve to help participants identify their personal biases and deepen awareness of how those biases influence interaction with students. From there, participants will be guided to critically examine and refine their pedagogical practices in the classroom.

The 'B' In BIPOC: Why is it different? Part II | Second-Floor Executive Conference Room

Rosiland Jackson, ISTA member

This workshop continues to examine the historical significance of "B" in the term BIPOC, by exploring the experiences of the Black community within a system that was specifically "DESIGNED" to exclude them. This session highlights how Black individuals and communities have navigated these structures while continuing to live, rise and thrive unapologetically. Participants will reflect on the enduring impact of these systems and the importance of recognizing, acknowledging and honoring the many contributions of Black people throughout U.S. history.

Unapologetically Human in STEM Classrooms | First-Floor Conference Room B

Jessica Farlow, ISTA member

STEM classrooms are often framed as objective, neutral and culture-free spaces—but this narrative has historically excluded the identities and stories of students of color. In this session, educators will explore how the myth of neutrality in STEM reinforces inequity and how centering culture can transform both teaching and learning.

Grounded in culturally sustaining and humanizing pedagogy, this session invites educators to reimagine STEM spaces where students of color are affirmed as thinkers, creators and problem-solvers. Participants will examine how traditional definitions of "smartness," rigor and success in STEM often marginalize students, and how educators can intentionally disrupt these narratives.

Through discussion and practical classroom examples, attendees will leave with strategies for embedding culture and student voice into STEM instruction—without sacrificing academic rigor. This session affirms that teaching STEM unapologetically human is not a departure from excellence, but a pathway to equity, belonging and liberation.

SESSION DESCRIPTIONS

White Fragility. What Is It? How Do We Rise Above It? | Second-Floor Staff Conference Room

Andie Renner-Miller & Monica Shellhamer, ISTA members

Progress is not possible within harmful social constructs until all stakeholders examine the interconnectedness of race, power and oppression. In this session, participants will learn how to define white fragility and explore how it shapes reactions to conversations centered around oppression. This understanding will help participants recognize and analyze why discussions of inequity are often met with defensiveness and avoidance.

Participants will also explore the emotions and behaviors that contribute to "nice racism" and how to engage more constructively to have meaningful cross racial conversations.

1:40 – 2:30 p.m. | Block D

Collective Care for Collective Action: Healing and Sustaining Educators for Advocacy Work | First-Floor Conference Room

Carey Obye & Nickesha Williams, ISTA members

Educators who witness and navigate systemic injustice carry a hidden labor that extends far beyond curriculum design. This unacknowledged emotional toll—often manifesting as burnout, isolation or paralysis—quietly erodes our capacity for collective action.

This interactive workshop repositions collective care as the strategic foundation for sustained anti-racist work. Participants will explore how primary and secondary trauma disrupts collaboration and how co-regulation can interrupt these cycles. By honoring the lived experiences of those in the room, we move beyond "self-care" as an afterthought and toward intentional, strategic preparation for the long road ahead.

Through activities and reflections, participants will:

1. Identify the internal barriers and trauma responses that surface in anti-racist advocacy.
2. Understand the connection between individual nervous system health and organizational culture.
3. Practice simple co-regulation strategies to build trust and psychological safety.
4. Reimagine advocacy spaces as healing spaces rather than just sites of struggle.
5. Commit to one concrete, context-specific step to strengthen collective care.

We don't have to apologize for what we bring with us; instead, we can become more intentional in how we sustain ourselves—and each other—for the work to come.

How To Leverage the Union Space to Walk the Walk Regarding Social and Racial Justice | Second-Floor Executive Conference Room

Jessica Ramirez & Wafa' Safi-Hassan, ISTA members

Unions can be powerful spaces for advancing social and racial justice in our schools and communities. This session will explore how union structures, leadership, and organizing can move beyond statements and into meaningful action. Participants will discuss ways to elevate diverse voices, build inclusive union spaces, and advocate for policies that promote equity for both educators and students. Learn practical strategies for using the collective power of unions to turn shared values of fairness and dignity into real change.

SESSION DESCRIPTIONS

Power in Practice: Real-Time Tools for Educators of Color to Advocate, Organize and Lead | Second-Floor Conference Rooms A-C

Karen Moore, Special Education Teacher/Harvey Public Schools

In this session, participants will move beyond rising quietly and step into rising unapologetically gaining the tools, language and strategies needed to shift the systems they navigate. Educators of color often carry the burden of advocacy without protection. Rising unapologetically means moving with intention, not just emotion. Rising unapologetically means no longer shrinking your voice to fit the room.

Read the Room: Helping Students Identify and Respond to Illegal Discrimination | Second-Floor Staff Conference Room

Paris Walton, Community Educator & Tynnetta Muhammad, Educational Consultant

Students often recognize when something feels unfair or unjust but may not know how to describe their concerns using the language of rights and protections.

This session introduces educators to examples of illegal discrimination and briefly reviews the protected classes outlined in state civil rights laws. Through school-based scenarios, participants will explore how these issues appear in everyday learning environments and how educators can help students name what they are experiencing.

Participants will also briefly consider how illegal discrimination can appear beyond K-12 settings, including college environments. The workshop includes a hands-on multimodal activity where participants explore advocacy through creative expression, such as posters, messaging, spoken word and other formats.

Educators will leave with a stronger understanding of how to help students recognize illegal discrimination, understand their rights and respond with confidence. By centering student awareness and youth voice, this session reflects the conference theme.

June 13

9 – 9:50 a.m. | Block E

How To Succeed With IREAD-3 | Second-Floor Executive Conference Room

Rosiland Jackson, ISTA member

This session equips educators with practical, ready-to-use resources designed to improve student performance on the mandatory state standardized reading assessment.

Participants will leave with a strong instructional foundation, proven strategies and actionable tools to help students build confidence and pass the test.

Restorative & Healing-Centered Leadership: Soul Care as Resistance | First-Floor Conference Room

Brittany Wayman, Soul Care Coaching Founder and CEO

In a profession shaped by constant scrutiny, pressure and systemic inequity, BIPOC educators are often asked to give more, endure longer and remain silent about the cost. Yet, still we rise. Unapologetically.

SESSION DESCRIPTIONS

This interactive workshop invites educators to reclaim soul care as an act of resistance. Participants will name the unique emotional and cultural weight carried by BIPOC educators and explore how tending to their inner lives allows them to rise.

Participants will walk away with a renewed understanding of soul care as a tool for sustainability and liberation, practices they can integrate into daily rhythms and language to unapologetically prioritize their well-being while continuing to advocate for students and communities.

Still We Rise: Redefining Education for Deaf and Hard of Hearing Students and Staff Excellence | Second-Floor Staff Conference Room

Linda Miller, Speech Language Specialist at Jersey City Public School

Educational excellence has often been defined through systems that unintentionally overlook individuals who are deaf and hard of hearing. This session challenges traditional definitions of success and calls educators to rethink access, communication and engagement through a more inclusive and equity-centered lens.

Participants will explore how educational environments can move beyond compliance and toward authentic inclusion that honors language, culture, identity and diverse ways of learning. This session will empower and equip participants with ways to redesign practices to allow deaf and hard of hearing educators and students to thrive.

Together we will examine how to truly rise unapologetically while redefining excellence in ways that elevate voice, opportunity and belonging for all.

The Journey Begins: Reflections of a First-Year African American Teacher | Second-Floor Conference Rooms A-C

Adrianna Hannon, Community Liaison & Robinique King, Teacher

The first three years of teaching are often the most formative and challenging for educators. For African American teachers, these years can also include navigating racialized expectations, cultural isolation and systemic inequities while simultaneously serving as cultural anchors for students of color.

This session explores the lived experiences of African American educators during their first three years in the classroom. Grounded in research on teacher retention, culturally responsive pedagogy and racial identity in education, the session highlights how early-career Black educators develop resilience, professional identity and advocacy skills.

Participants will examine key phases of the early-career journey—from entry and adjustment to affirmation and leadership—and identify strategies that support belonging and professional growth. The session will also center on the importance of mentorship and institutional accountability in retaining teachers of color.

This session affirms the power and presence of African American educators who continue to rise and lead despite systemic barriers.

SESSION DESCRIPTIONS

12:10 – 1 p.m. | Block F

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Rooted in Rest, Unbound by Burnout | Second-Floor Conference Rooms A-C

Rashieta LaLand-Johnson, Unbound & Rooted LLC Consultant/Coach/Speaker

Society often asks educators of color to be martyrs for their communities. This workshop challenges the narrative and frames radical self-care and boundary-setting not as a luxury, but as an unapologetic requirement for longevity in the profession.

In this session, participants will learn how to identify and dismantle the "martyr mentality" in education, stay grounded in their "why" without sacrificing their physical and mental well-being and apply practical boundary-setting frameworks to protect your energy from institutional micro-aggressions and systemic fatigue.

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Bernade Flournoy, Art Teacher at The Painted Pose

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Want to know more about session presenters?
Review speaker bios by scanning the QR code:



PGP CERTIFICATE



Indiana
State
Teachers
Association

ISTA CERTIFIES THE RECIPIENT ATTENDED THE

Indiana Educators of Color Network Conference

— of Professional Growth Plan Points

This certificate recipient earned the above Professional Growth Plan points for attending the Indiana Educators of Color Network Conference, a professional development and learning event, hosted by the Indiana State Teachers Association.

June 11 - 13, 2026

Jennifer Smith-Margraf
Jennifer Smith-Margraf
ISTA President

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