

USAA Newsletter

Urban Superintendents Association of America, Inc.
www.usaa.org



April/May, Vol. 2, Issue 1, 2025



Inside this Issue

- Greetings from the President, P. 2-3
- A Note from the Executive Director, P. 5
- Women's Leadership Academy, P. 6-8
- 30th Summer Academy, P. 10
- Gold Sponsor Featured Articles, P. 11-12
- Summer Academy Sponsors, P. 13

Spring Academy

*A gathering of
women leaders from
across the nation*

The Urban Superintendents Association of America is thrilled to celebrate the overwhelming success of our Inaugural Women's Leadership Spring Academy held in Austin, Texas, March 26-28, 2025. This groundbreaking event brought together more than 70 distinguished women leaders from across the nation, representing diverse school districts and educational organizations.

Conference highlights begin on page 6.

From the Desk of the President

Greetings Esteemed USAA Colleagues,

As we continue to lead through the fourth quarter of the 2024-2025 school year, it is imperative that we take time to care for ourselves. Our personal and professional development must include intentional focus on our physical, mental, financial, and spiritual well-being. As part of the Inaugural USAA Women in Leadership from Across the Nation Conference, in the vibrant city of Austin, Texas, March 26 – 28, 2025, we did just that.

In a time that calls for steadfast courage and dynamic leadership, a powerful convening of women from across the country became a beacon of strength, unity, and purpose. The event was a movement. A sisterhood of phenomenal women came together, bringing with them their knowledge, skill, passion, and grace, ready to lead through the ever-changing tides of our world.

From the opening remarks to the final embrace, the convening pulsed with energy and intention. Women shared their journeys, stories of challenge, triumph, growth, and resilience, each one a testament to the power of lived experience and purposeful leadership.



Dr. Daveda Colbert , President

As gems and nuggets of wisdom were exchanged throughout the sessions, participants responded with joyful tears, snaps, claps, and celebratory shouts, affirming the deep resonance of each word and experience shared.

The conference reminded us that women leaders are not just occupying seats at the table, they are bringing vision and voice, shaping the future with both courage and conviction. The guiding spirit of the event echoed a powerful message: keep your boots on the ground and your fans in the air. Stay rooted, stay refreshed, and keep moving forward with purpose.

From the Desk of the President

Continued from page 2

A highlight of the convening was the celebration of Dr. LaRuth Gray, a trailblazer and icon in educational leadership. Her decades of groundbreaking work and countless “firsts” were honored with high praise and heartfelt admiration. Dr. Gray’s presence reminded everyone to keep the faith while doing the work and to continue expanding the space we take up, not just being at the table, but transforming it.

As the conference ended, women left not only rejuvenated, but inspired to return to their communities, ready to lead with renewed strength. This convening was more than impactful, it was a reminder of the enduring necessity of women’s leadership, and a celebration of its powerful legacy and future. Women leaders remain essential. And after this extraordinary gathering, we are more ready than ever to rise, lead, and make a difference. Thanks to all my USAA colleagues who supported the convening by either participating or sending one of their phenomenal women leaders to participate.

I am looking forward to our 30th Anniversary, USAA Summer Academy in New Orleans, Louisiana. Hopefully, you have completed your reservations, including hotel and travel accommodations, and are ready for the celebration. Our time together will allow us to dissect all that is happening in public education and to share how we are navigating the space today.

As I opened, continue to prioritize yourself.

With deep respect and admiration,

Daveda

Daveda J. Colbert, Ph.D.
President, USAA Inc.

Have News to Share?

Submit your questions, comments or story ideas to:
urbansuperintendents@gmail.com

USAA Executive Committee Members

The USAA Executive Committee is comprised of dynamic leaders from across the United States. These individuals are at the forefront of innovation and excellence in education. Whether you are looking to collaborate, learn or find inspiration, this directory connects you with trailblazers who are shaping the future of education in our nation. Our Executive Committee is committed to serving the education community and we value their dedication.



Dr. Daveda J. Colbert, President

Wayne, MI

Dr. Jason Simeroth, President-Elect

Yukon, OK

Regina Rossall, Past President

Quartz Hill, CA

Dr. Sharon Desmoulin-Kherat, Secretary-Treasurer

Peoria, IL

Dr. Casey Allen, Vice President, At Large

Barlow, KY

Dr. Marlon King, Vice President, At Large

Jackson, TN

Paul Norton, Vice President, At Large

Austin, TX

Dr. J. R. Green, Vice President, Southeastern States

Winnsboro, SC

Dr. Eric Bracy, Vice President, Eastern States

Smithfield, NC

Dr. Gordon Amerson, Western States

Duarte, CA

Dr. Erin Keating, Vice President, Northeastern States

Scranton, PA

Danny Massey, Vice President, South Central States

Clute, TX

A Note from the Executive Director

Looking Forward to Our 30th Anniversary Summer Academy in New Orleans

Dear Colleagues,

It is with great anticipation that I look forward to seeing you all at our upcoming Summer Academy in New Orleans, July 9-12, 2025. This gathering marks a significant milestone as we celebrate the 30th anniversary of our Summer Academy program.

For three decades, the Urban Superintendents Association has stood as a pillar of support for educational leaders facing the complex challenges of urban education. Our Summer Academy has been the cornerstone of this mission, providing a space for professional growth, meaningful connection, and renewed inspiration.

As we gather in the vibrant city of New Orleans, I invite you to join in celebrating our rich history of addressing the educational needs and challenges of superintendents. Through changing educational landscapes, policy shifts, and societal transformations, our association has remained steadfast in its commitment to those with the courage to pursue and conduct this vital leadership role.

The upcoming Academy promises to honor our past while equipping us for future challenges. I hope you will join us for this special occasion as we reflect on our journey, celebrate our achievements, and recommit ourselves to the important work that lies ahead.

I look forward to seeing you in New Orleans as we mark this significant milestone together.

Sincerely,

Dr. Wanda Cook-Robinson
Executive Director, USAA Inc.



Dr. Wanda Cook-Robinson

Women in Leadership: Spring Academy Empowers Education Leaders

The Urban Superintendents Association of America Inc.'s Inaugural Women in Leadership Conference recently made waves in the education sector. Held March 26–28, 2025, in Austin, Texas, the Women's Leadership Spring Academy was designed to equip, inspire, and connect women educators from across the country. This groundbreaking gathering marked the beginning of a transformative movement—one that empowered a cohort of women in education to lead with confidence, innovation, and purpose.



A Leadership Experience Like No Other

This immersive academy was specifically created for principals, administrators, teacher-leaders, and aspiring education executives ready to sharpen their leadership skills, expand their networks, and drive meaningful change in their schools and communities. The response was tremendous, with over 70 women from across the nation participating in this powerful leadership initiative.



Building Connections That Matter

One of the academy's core strengths was its focus on collaborative networking. Participants connected with like-minded women leaders, mentors, and peers from diverse backgrounds who shared a commitment to transforming education. These connections created a supportive community that extends beyond the conference itself.

Program Highlights

The academy featured an impressive lineup of speakers and facilitators who brought depth and expertise to the event:

- Keynote Address by Tiffany Taylor, who inspired attendees with her vision for women's leadership
- Leadership Workshop conducted by Dr. Claudia Beeny, providing practical skills and strategies
- Special Presentation by Dr. Eleanor Smalley, sharing insights from her extensive experience in educational leadership



Honoring a Pioneer in Education

A significant highlight of the conference was the special award presented to Dr. LaRuth Morgan-Gray, a trailblazing educator who was among the first African American superintendents hired across the nation. The ceremony recognized her groundbreaking contributions to education leadership and her role as a pioneer who opened doors for generations of women leaders, particularly women of color, in education administration.



Looking Forward

From engaging sessions to enriching conversations, this academy served as a catalyst for change, setting a new standard for women's leadership in education. Participants left with renewed purpose, expanded professional networks, and concrete strategies to implement in their respective roles.

The Urban Superintendents Association of America's Women's Leadership Spring Academy represents just the beginning of what promises to be an impactful ongoing initiative to support and advance women leaders in education nationwide.



08/14

Women in Leadership Conference Sponsors

The Urban Superintendents Association of America, Inc. expresses its deepest gratitude to the sponsors of our inaugural Women in Leadership Spring Academy. Your generous support made it possible for us to create a groundbreaking event that celebrated the strength, vision and leadership of women in education. Thanks to your partnership, we provided a platform for meaningful dialogue, professional growth, and empowerment for current and future leaders.

Gold Sponsors



BetterLesson®



magma



Silver Sponsors



plante moran
REALPOINT

09/14



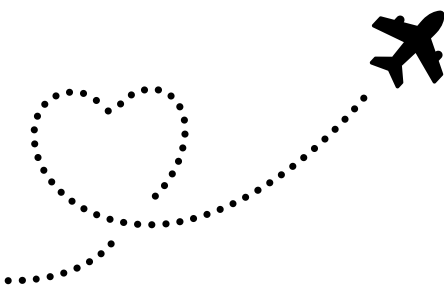
Join Us for the 30th Summer Academy “A Milestone Celebration in New Orleans”

The Urban Superintendents Association of America proudly invites you to our 30th Summer Academy, marking three decades of leadership, innovation, and impact in urban education. This milestone event will take place in the vibrant city of New Orleans, where we will celebrate our collective achievements, engage in dynamic discussions, and prepare for the future of urban education.

This year's Academy will be more than just a conference a celebration of 30 years of dedication to students, educators, and communities. Expect insightful sessions, inspiring speakers, and unparalleled networking opportunities with top educational leaders from across the nation.

Save the Date! More details are coming soon, but you won't want to miss this historic gathering. Book mark our website, www.usaa.org, to receive the latest updates and be part of this extraordinary event.

Let's honor the past, celebrate the present, and shape the future together in New Orleans!



2025

New Orleans, Louisiana
Hilton New Orleans Riverside
Two Poydras Street
New Orleans, LA 70130



Can sensory-enabled architecture improve mental wellbeing in students?

By: Gwen Morgan and Stephen Parker

School districts and academic institutions are exploring ways to support students' mental health. One approach involves the provision of multisensory environments. These are spaces designed to stimulate or soothe an individual's senses to promote positive emotions, aid relaxation, and foster a sense of control and choice.

We wanted to know exactly how multisensory spaces impact students. To find out, we partnered with Amanda Gale, a professor of the Department of Interior Architecture at the University of North Carolina, and Lisa Williams, a graduate student in that program, to conduct research on sensory-enabled architecture (SEA) to inform design of such spaces for our education clients moving forward. For the research project, our team converted a dormant office storage room into a vibrant multisensory space for neurodiverse students to use at the University of North Carolina at Greensboro and surveyed them to monitor the impact. From the survey, where end users told us that they liked the adjustable lighting and sound elements and being able to select and control music individually, we learned that users found the sense of control to be comforting. They appreciated being able to individualize and personalize the space for a customized experience.

Despite the small scope and budget for the storage-room-conversion project, the results were positive. From this effort, the Stantec 'ZenDen' was born. The ZenDen is a pop-up sensory experience designed to travel to different locations to raise awareness of SEA and its benefits while measuring the results. Stantec currently has a ZenDen iteration installed at a secondary school roughly 100 miles between Austin and Houston in Texas, where high school students can use the space as needed. In partnership with the school district, we hope to learn how these spaces impact students at a critical time in their academic career.

With proper planning and implementation, as a part of a renovation or new construction project, a multisensory environment promises to be a successful tactic for reducing student stress and anxiety.



Image courtesy of Stantec

Gold Sponsor



3 Smart Staffing Strategies That Strengthen Instructional Continuity

By ESS Proximity

Solving the persistent challenge of educator shortages requires more than short-term fixes. Districts seeking sustainable improvements in classroom coverage should consider data-driven strategies, retention-focused programs, and innovative instruction models.

Use Absence Data to Stay Ahead.

Identifying patterns in absences, such as last-minute callouts or high annual averages, can guide proactive staffing decisions. Adjusting policies or developing a dedicated pool of permanent substitutes can ensure continuity and reduce instructional disruptions.

Invest in Substitute Retention.

Retaining daily substitutes is equally critical. Training programs, mentoring opportunities, and performance incentives can help substitutes feel more connected and confident in their roles. These initiatives encourage consistency, turning short-term coverage into long-term classroom support.

Close Gaps with Certified Virtual Instructors.

For unfilled vacancies or hard-to-staff subjects, live virtual instruction offers another proven solution. Certified teachers can deliver real-time lessons tailored to each district's curriculum and systems, helping maintain instructional quality while expanding access to courses that may otherwise go unoffered.

Sustainable solutions start with the right partners. Learn how ESS and Proximity Learning can help your District strengthen coverage, improve retention, and support student success at ESS.com and ProxLearn.com.

Thank You Sponsors!

We are immensely grateful for your generous support. Your commitment contributes significantly towards our shared goals and initiatives. Your involvement with USAA makes a profound impact, and we are privileged to have your trust and partnership.

Gold Sponsors



Silver Sponsors

Amira Learning
Better Lesson
Black History 365
Care Solace
Centegix
Edmentum
First Financial Group of America
Jason Learning
K12 Insight
Lightspeed Technologies
Right At School
Veregy



https://www

Visit Our Website



Visit www.usaa.org.

Notes/Story Ideas

☐

☐

☐

☐

Contact USAA

Our mailing address has changed.
Please update your records with our
new address:

P.O. Box 461
Lake Orion, MI 48361
Phone: (248) 587-7429

Note: Remittances to the Urban
Superintendents Association of
America Inc.

All payments must be addressed to
the Urban Superintendents
Association of America Inc. The full
name of the organization must be
used.

