



“Social Studies: The Art and Science of It All”



Illinois Council for the Social Studies
2026 Spring Conference

April 9, 2026 Eastern
Illinois University
Charleston, IL

Welcome to the 2026 ICSS Spring Conference

On behalf of the Illinois Council for the Social Studies, I want to thank you for taking the day to engage with social studies education at our spring conference.

This conference gives everyone who attends the opportunity to contribute to the professional dialogue through session presentations and networking with colleagues across Illinois and beyond. Our students need to understand how to navigate and engage in civil dialogue to better address societal concerns. Social Studies teachers today, as in the past, are tasked with exploring the narrative of our histories with our students, however right now this is a volatile task for our educators. What better way to respond to these challenges than for teachers and others to take part in our conference where participants will explore a variety of topics and sessions that are pertinent to social studies students and teachers in the field across grade levels and social studies content areas.

As you move through the sessions, keep in mind that you can be a part of the conference in the future. At ICSS, we are always looking for new and innovative ways to engage with social studies education in the State of Illinois. Look out for our call for proposals for future conferences.

We would also like to encourage you to think about joining the leadership team at ICSS through service on Board Committees. We are in need of representatives for our prek-2 and 3-5 grade bands. Our organization depends on great social studies educators in a variety of venues and grade levels giving their time and expertise to continue to grow by bringing resources and support to our members. If you are passionate about supporting such a mission, reach out to the organization and see where you can help.

Once again, Welcome and I hope you enjoy your day.

Theresa Coomer

Conference Program Director
Illinois Council for the Social Studies

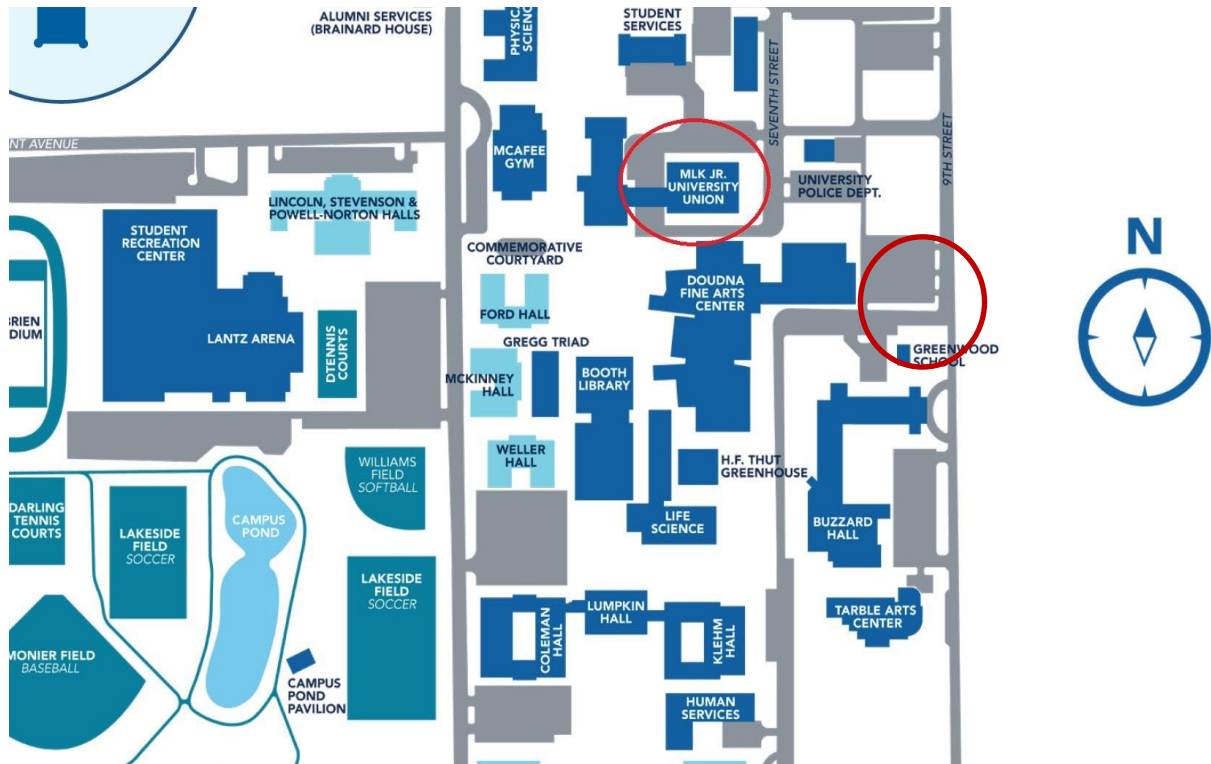
2026 ICSS Executive Board Members

President	Andy Levin, Harper College
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Secretary	Jacquelyn Benchik-Osborne, Chicago State University
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6-8 Representative	Lauren Brown, Oak Park
Higher Education Representative	Jay Bickford, Eastern Illinois University
Higher Education Representative	Bill Waychunas, Bradley University
Higher Education Representative	Fred Isle
Member at Large	Olivia Leiby
Member at Large	Crystal Johnson, Chicago History Museum
Executive Director	Benjamin R Wellenreiter, Illinois State University

Conference Information

Parking

1. Prior to arrival, you will be emailed a parking pass document. Please print the document for display on the dashboard of your car.
2. Please park in the Lot at the Corner of 9th Street and Garfield Avenue. Use the QR Code for a detailed campus map



Sign-in

Sign-in and vendor activity begin at 7:30am in the MLK Jr. University Union. We will have a sign-in table in place on the third floor right outside of the Charleston Mattoon Rooms. There, you may pick up a copy of the conference program to assist you in planning your day. Coffee, decaf, hot tea, and water will be available in the registration area.

Professional Development Credit

Attendees seeking Professional Development Credit will need to provide their Illinois Educator Identification Number (IEIN) and email address at sign-in. Upon completion of the day, attendees who signed in will receive a link to a post-conference survey. The survey will be available for one week following the conference. At the conclusion of the survey, a link to PD Documentation will be provided. ICSS does not provide partial-hour credit for PD activities.

WiFi

When you arrive on campus, simply connect to EIU WiFi, you will then be prompted to open a browser or it may automatically redirect you to EIU's Acceptable Use Policy. [Scan the QR code or click here for more information](#)



Welcome to National Council for the Social Studies 2026 President Joe Schmidt



Joe Schmidt is a national leader in social studies education whose career spans the classroom, district leadership, state service, and national advocacy. As Executive Director of K–12 Education at Colonial Williamsburg and founder of Joe Schmidt Social Studies LLC, he supports educators across the country through professional learning, curriculum development, and thought leadership. He is also co-author of *Civil Discourse: Classroom Conversations for Stronger Communities* (2022) and *The Social Studies FIELD Guide* (2025).

Joe began his career as a high school social studies teacher in rural Wisconsin, later serving as Social Studies Teacher Leader for the Madison Metropolitan School District, Social Studies Specialist for the Maine Department of Education, and Senior Director of Teacher Programs for the Bill of Rights Institute. His work reflects a deep commitment to connecting educators—from PK through college—regardless of grade level, geography, or political perspective.

He has collaborated with a wide range of organizations, including Learning for Justice, National Geographic, iCivics, the Jump\$tart Coalition, Educating for American Democracy, the Alliance for Decision Education, and the National Council for Geographic Education, and has taught elementary social studies methods at the University of Maine.

A respected advocate for the field, Joe is President-Elect of the National Council for the Social Studies (NCSS) and will begin his presidential term in July 2026. He has contributed significant leadership through numerous NCSS committees, task forces, and initiatives, as well as service on affiliate council boards in both Wisconsin and Maine.

A frequent keynote speaker and workshop facilitator, Joe has presented in more than half the country, with sessions focused on civil discourse, disciplinary literacy, inquiry, assessment, and primary sources. He lives in Maine with his wife, Peggy, and is the proud father of three children.

[Click here to Learn more about the NCSS Annual Conference in Chicago, December 2026!](#)



 NCSS Annual Conference
Chicago, IL | Dec 4–6, 2026

Welcome National Council for the Social Studies Executive Director Kelly McFarland Stratman

Kelly McFarland Stratman is the Executive Director of National Council for the Social Studies. With more than 25 years of nonprofit experience, Kelly is an ASAE-certified association executive with a track record of fostering innovation and transformative change for mission impact.



Previously, Kelly worked at the League of Women Voters of the United States (LWV), a national, nonpartisan organization committed to voter engagement and civic participation. Kelly held successive leadership roles at LWV, where she managed executive teams, board relations, organizational strategy and governance. For more than 10 years, Kelly worked in the organization's field department collaborating with the organization's grassroots membership and 750 chapters across the US. Prior to joining the national entity, Kelly was executive director of the League of Women Voters of Ohio, a state affiliate.

Kelly's career began in education, first teaching English to middle and high school students in Japan through the JET Program, and later as a classroom teacher for kindergarten and 4th grade in Ohio and Massachusetts. Currently, Kelly serves as vice chair of AFS-USA, a nonprofit that promotes global citizenship and intercultural learning through international exchange.


She resides in the Washington, DC area with her husband and has two college-aged daughters.

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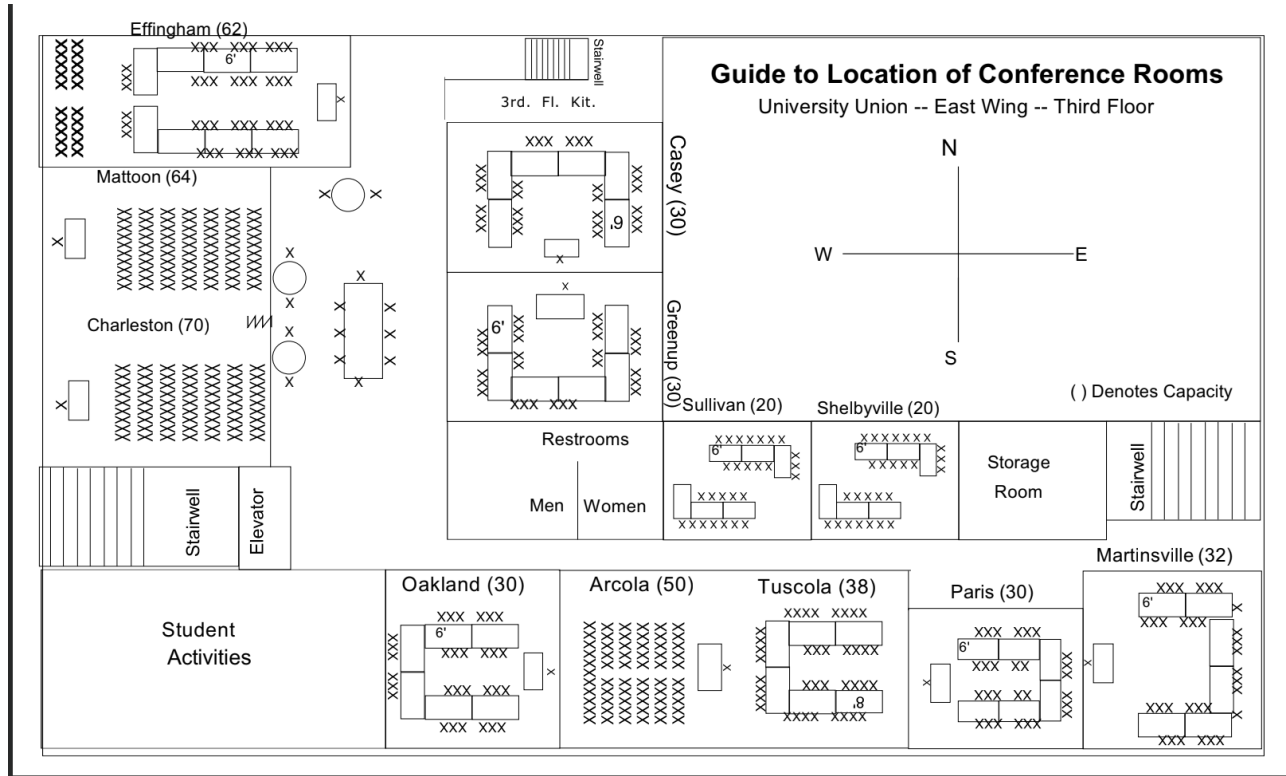


NCSS Annual Conference
Chicago, IL | Dec 4-6, 2026

2026 Conference Schedule at a Glance

7:30-8:30	Registration and Breakfast Vendors	<h3 style="margin: 0;">Keynote Panel</h3>  <p>Catherine Cristofani: an educator for over 25 years teaching Us History, Civics, History through Film and more. She has brought innovative teaching techniques to her classroom where she challenges her students with tough and sometimes controversial questions that they explore through inquiry.</p> <p>Luke Knight: has been actively in the classroom for 8 years teaching AP Government, Civics, Psychology, and Sociology. He sees the social studies classroom as the antidote for the civic education ills we see in society today. He is teaching his students how to have functional debates on the many contemporary topics that are seen as controversial today.</p> <p>Ryan Lawler: Has been an educator for over 10 years. He brings his wealth of experience to our panel to discuss how we can move past the binary nature of the American Political spectrum to have challenging discussions that consider multiple perspectives.</p>
8:30-8:40	Opening Remarks	
8:40-9:30	Keynote Panel: Catherine Cristofani, Ryan Lawler, and Luke Knight	
9:30-9:40	Break and Vendors	
9:40-10:30	Session 1	
10:30-10:40	Break and Vendors	
10:40-11:30	Session 2	
11:30-12:30	Lunch	
12:30-1:40	Session 3	
1:40-1:50	Break and Vendors	
1:50-2:30	Session 4	
2:30-2:40	Break and Vendors	
2:40-3:30	Session 5	

Map of Session Rooms—3rd Floor



Time	Event	Charleston	Casey	Effingham	Greenup	Paris
9:40-10:30	Session 1	Barbara O'Donnell Abigail Schwent The Art and Science of Learning How to Inquire PreK-12, general audience, Elementary, Middle Level, Secondary/High School, Special Education	Ben Wellenreiter The Art and Science of Teaching Social Studies: Where is the Balance Between Content Knowledge and Inquiry? Elementary, Middle Level, Secondary/High School	Marissa Unes Dr. William Waychunas Amanda McGinn Discussions in a Social Studies Secondary Classroom Secondary/High School	Justin Kelsheimer Beyond worksheets: Strategies for more meaningful map-making activities in primary classrooms Early Childhood	Irenea Walker An Examination of Children's Books Featuring Black Artists Early Childhood, Elementary
Break and Vendors in Arcola-Tuscola						
10:40 - 11:30	Session 2	Tiffany Middleton Catherine Hawke Search Me: Case Studies and the Fourth Amendment Middle Level, Secondary/High School	Ryan Lawler Survivor: Bill of Rights Edition Secondary/High School	Justin Kelsheimer Beyond worksheets: Strategies for more meaningful map-making activities in primary classrooms Early Childhood	Cindy Gilden Addressing the Challenges of Teaching the IL Mandates with Art & Social Science Elementary, Middle Level	Jennifer Guminski It's Their Country, Too! Using Controversial Issues to Foster Civic Engagement Secondary/High School
11:30-12:30 Lunch and vendors						
12:40 - 1:30	Session 3	Tiffany Middleton Catherine Hawke What Happens	Ben Wellenreiter The Art and Science of Teaching Social Studies: Where	Jennifer Guminski It's Their Country, Too! Using Controversial	Cindy Gilden Addressing the Challenges of Teaching the IL Mandates	Bonnie Laughlin-Schultz Contextualizing Today's History Wars through

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		After a Legal Conviction? Middle Level, Secondary/High School	is the Balance Between Content Knowledge and Inquiry? Elementary, Middle Level, Secondary/High School	Issues to Foster Civic Engagement Secondary/High School	with Art & Social Science Elementary, Middle Level	Primary Documents Secondary/High School
Break and Vendors in Arcola-Tuscola						
1:40-2:30	Session 4	Barbara O'Donnell Abigail Schwent The Art and Science of Learning How to Inquire PreK-12, general audience Elementary, Middle Level, Secondary/High School, Special Education	Ryan Lawler Survivor: Bill of Rights Edition Secondary/High School	Andy Laird Standards Based Social Studies: How to Align Heart Standards and Assessments Elementary, Middle Level	Brian Kahn Cameron Hummitsch Teaching the Holocaust and Genocide: A Model for Preservice Teacher Candidates Middle Level, Secondary/High School, university-based educators working with preservice teachers	Bonnie Laughlin-Schultz Contextualizing Today's History Wars through Primary Documents Secondary/High School
Break and Vendors in Arcola-Tuscola						
2:40-3:30	Session 5	Andy Laird Standards Based Social Studies: How to Align Heart Standards and Assessments	Marissa Unes Dr. William Waychunas Amanda McGinn Discussions in a Social Studies Secondary Classroom	Irenea Walker An Examination of Children's Books Featuring Black Artists	Brian Kahn Cameron Hummitsch Teaching the Holocaust and Genocide: A Model for Preservice Teacher Candidates	

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		Elementary, Middle Level	Secondary/High School	Early Childhood, Elementary	Middle Level, Secondary/Hig h School, university- based educators working with preservice teachers	