



## **The Washington School Counselor Association on Strategies for a Successful Start to the School Year**

September 11, 2025 AI Summary

[Watch the LEVinar recording](#)

### **Introduction: Advocacy Rooted in Equity**

The webinar, hosted by the League of Education Voters, opened with a heartfelt introduction by CEO Arik Korman, who shared his personal motivation for advocacy—his son, a high school junior of the global majority accessing special education services. Korman emphasized that education must be a tool for justice, and that radical change is needed to dismantle systems of racial and disability injustice. The League’s mission is to ensure every student in Washington feels safe, supported, and a positive sense of belonging, so that they can achieve academically and access the life they choose.

### **Student Panel: Lived Experiences and Aspirations**

Four student leaders from the [AWSL](#) Student Voice Network—CC Humble, Daisy Conway, Jack Farrell, and Angel Joshi—shared their experiences and insights:

- Jack Farrell (Inglemoor HS) described a smooth, welcoming start to the year, with teachers easing students in through syllabus week and minimal homework, especially helpful for seniors managing college applications.
- Daisy Conway (Mountain View HS) noted her district was on strike, but highlighted scheduling challenges and the need for flexibility in course selection.
- Angel Joshi (Southridge HS) praised her school’s “Freshman First Day” and the proactive support from counselors who helped her secure her ideal class schedule.
- CC Humble (Kentlake HS) shared her role in Falcon Crew, supporting freshmen, and expressed appreciation for teachers who had already reviewed her 504 plan—something she struggled with in previous years.

Their stories underscored the importance of student-centered practices, relationship-building, and early intervention.

---

## **Counselor Leadership: Strategies for Belonging and Support**

**Lauren Mendez** ([WSCA](#) CEO)

Lauren emphasized that belonging must be structurally embedded in school environments. She offered tangible strategies:

- Visual and physical cues: Inclusive signage, multilingual materials, and welcoming front office staff.
- Street data: Collecting stories from students and families to guide decision-making.
- Healthy Youth Survey: Using state-level data to assess student safety, trusted adult relationships, and access to resources.

Lauren also shared a [video featuring national school counselors](#)—including Fondra Magee—highlighting creative practices like:

- The “Jolly Trolley”: A decorated cart filled with treats and music to reconnect with staff.
  - Welcome messages to families outlining counselor roles and services.
  - Administrator conferences to align goals and share data early in the year.
  - Off-campus team-building events to foster staff cohesion.
- 

## **School-Based Practices: Spokane, Kirkland, and Beyond**

**Fondra Magee** (Stevens Elementary, Spokane)

Fondra’s school culture is built on community and continuity:

- Launch conferences: Early parent-teacher meetings to ease transitions.
- “Boohoo tables”: Comfort stations for kindergarten parents with coffee, donuts, and tissues.
- Peer-led programs: Older students trained as mediators and tour guides for new students.

- Puppet troupe and peer pals: Creative ways to engage younger students in conflict resolution and leadership.

Fondra also emphasized minute meetings—brief one-on-one check-ins with every student to gather insights and build relationships.

---

### **Stefa Chow** (Juanita High School, Kirkland)

Stefa described a decade of transformation at Juanita HS, driven by demographic shifts and a commitment to student-centered innovation:

- Link Crew: Peer mentorship for freshmen, including a celebratory welcome and graduation send-off.
- Affinity homerooms: Weekly 40-minute sessions where students choose interest-based groups (e.g., cars, baking, Brazilian culture).
- Family Connection Center: A hub for tech support, basic needs, and community resources.
- Welcome Team: Multilingual student-led tours and interviews for new students to ease transitions and identify needs.

Stefa also shared how data collection helped identify why students—especially multilingual learners and students of color—were withdrawing. This led to the creation of Flex Academy, a new alternative learning program tailored to credit-deficient students.

---

### **Tabatha Copeland** (Spokane International Academy)

Tabatha's K–12 charter school focuses on transitional support and global competence:

- 6th and 9th grade orientations: Including an “Amazing Race” scavenger hunt and ropes course at Camp Reed.
- Student ambassadors: Leading tours and sharing school culture with prospective families.
- Global Perspectives curriculum: Required for middle schoolers, culminating in international travel for 8th graders.
- Grant-funded initiatives: Including a 9th grade success grant and creative use of public transportation for field trips.

Tabatha stressed the importance of joy, presence, and relationship-building, especially during the first two weeks of school.

---

### **Disrupting White-Dominant Culture: Equity in Action**

Counselors shared how they are actively working to dismantle white-dominant norms:

- Fondra highlighted cultural nights, multilingual lunch groups, and student-led language exchanges.
  - Lauren described integrating top languages into school art and library displays, and supporting clubs like Latinos Unidos and D&D.
  - Tabatha emphasized global competence as a foundational value.
  - Stefa spoke candidly about the emotional toll of losing students and the importance of listening sessions and flexible programming.
- 

### **Sustaining Belonging Beyond September**

Students offered powerful suggestions for maintaining a positive culture year-round:

- Jack: Teachers should follow up on student interests and feedback, and build club time into the school day.
- Daisy: Weekly check-ins and personalized outreach foster trust.
- Angel: School spirit events and emotional support during finals are key; teachers shape students' ethics and values.
- CC: Mental health check-ins and discreet support for struggling students are essential.

They emphasized that belonging is ongoing, and that small gestures—like saying “I’m proud of you”—can be transformative.

---

### **Closing Reflections: A Call to Action**

The webinar concluded with a reminder that every student deserves to feel safe, seen, and valued. Arik Korman invited attendees to continue the conversation at upcoming

events, including the October 2nd LEVinar on educational opportunity gaps and the November 1st Youth Advocacy Summit in Spokane.

[www.educationvoters.org](http://www.educationvoters.org)