

Leka Pua **ANITEMA**

**2026 School Counselor
of the Year® Finalist**

KEYNOTE TOPICS



Systems Built for Students: Making Opportunity the Outcome

Leka Anitema, a 2026 School Counselor of the Year finalist, challenges us to rethink who our systems are truly built for. When opportunities depend on who asks, who knows or who happens to be in the right place, students get left behind. When access is intentional, every student wins by design.

Drawing from communities where needs are high and resources are limited, Leka shares a real-world approach to building systems that work even in imperfect conditions. Rather than creating more programs, the focus is on creating support that meets students where they are and remains steady through disruption. This shift from offering opportunity to intentionally designing for it makes access part of the daily student experience. Participants will gain high-impact strategies to support every student with clarity and confidence.

LEARNING OUTCOMES

- Apply a flexible real-world framework across school sizes, staffing and community contexts
- Build connected supports aligning academic, social/emotional and postsecondary supports into one structure
- Prioritize high-impact work in stretched environments so support remains consistent and intentional
- Build student agency so every student owns their path and moves forward with confidence

Clearing the Path: Helping Students Move From Options to Direction

Leka Anitema, a 2026 School Counselor of the Year finalist, challenges the common belief in education that more options automatically lead to better outcomes. Students and families are not struggling due to a lack of choices but from too many choices without enough clarity, which leads to confusion, fear and decision fatigue, especially in first-generation and rural communities. This keynote shifts the focus from student deficits to system design.

Leka introduces the CLEAR Path Model: Clarify what matters, Limit the noise, Evaluate with purpose, Act with confidence, and Revisit and adjust. Instead of expecting students to navigate complex systems alone, this approach focuses on designing guidance that centers priorities, reflects student realities and builds confidence at every step.

Are your systems creating clarity or confusion? This session equips school counselors and school leaders with strategies to streamline pathways, align supports and communicate postsecondary options in ways students and families can understand and act on.

LEARNING OUTCOMES

- Apply the CLEAR Path Model to support confident decision-making
- Build aligned systems that connect supports into one clear structure
- Use clear communication strategies that reduce complexity for all
- Identify and remove system barriers that create confusion and limit direction

KEYNOTE TOPICS

Engineer, Pioneer, Igniter, Cheerleader: Redefining How School Counselors Move Students Forward

School counseling requires shifting who we are in the moments students need us most. Leka Anitema, a 2026 School Counselor of the Year finalist, challenges school counselors to examine the roles they default to and the ones students actually need to move forward with confidence, direction and belief in themselves.

This session introduces the EPIC Role Model, a framework for intentional role shifting: the Engineer who removes barriers through systems design, the Pioneer who opens pathways through uncertainty, the Igniter who turns confusion into clarity and action, and the Cheerleader who builds belief and confidence when students cannot yet see it in themselves.

Rather than adding to school counselor workload, this model reframes effectiveness as purposeful presence. Participants will reflect on how their roles either support or limit student movement and consider how intentional shifts can create more responsive and sustainable support systems.

LEARNING OUTCOMES

- Apply the EPIC Role Model within school counseling practice
- Intentionally shift roles to meet student needs across academic, social/emotional and postsecondary domains
- Strengthen school systems to improve access, follow through and continuity of support
- Increase student agency and confidence through consistent relational and structural support

Leading with Lived Experience: Building Conditions Where Students Can Succeed

Leka Anitema, a 2026 School Counselor of the Year finalist, brings lived experience shaped by poverty, immigration and parenting a child through cancer. These are not just personal experiences but the foundation of how she leads: relationship-grounded, intentional and deeply aware of the realities students and families carry every day.

This keynote challenges how schools define excellence. Too often it is measured by compliance or performance under pressure. Real excellence is a system-level responsibility in education, where students are consistently met with stability, care and clear expectations. This shifts the focus from intensity to integrity and from doing more to doing what matters most in ways students and families can depend on.

Through lived experience and responsibility, Leka invites school counselors and educators to lead with a softness that is not weakness, with steadiness that is not rigidity and with an expectation of excellence that includes humanity.

LEARNING OUTCOMES

- Reframe excellence as a system responsibility grounded in dignity, access and consistency for first-generation, low-income and trauma-impacted students
- Implement streamlined systems that strengthen accountability while ensuring equitable access to school counseling
- Apply ethical storytelling practices that build trust and connection without over-disclosure or self-centering