

# **TAASE Legal Conference 2025**

***December 1-3, 2025***



**Music Road Hotel & Convention Center**  
**303 Henderson Chapel Road**  
**Pigeon Forge, TN 37863**

## **Monday, December 1, 2025**

**Registration-** Convention Center Lobby

**7:30 AM**

**Welcome & Opening Session-** Orchestra Ballroom

**8:00 AM - 8:15 AM**

TAASE President- Daniel Mobley- Welcome

TAASE App- Sarah Huffman

TAASE Cup Awards- TAASE Board Members

**Platinum Sponsor** - Goalbook

**8:15 AM – 8:30 AM**

**TDOE Update-** Assistant Commissioner, Jennifer Jordan

**8:30 AM - 9:00 AM**

**Keynote Speaker-** Karen Haase, Esq.

**9:00 AM - 11:30 AM**

Yearbook in Review: Most Likely to .....Litigate?

**Lunch-** (on your own)

**11:30 AM - 1:00 PM**

### **Breakout Sessions #1**

**1:00 PM - 2:15 PM**

**DOBRO**      **Scott Bennett, Esq.**

“Removing a Disruptive Student from Gen-Ed: Considerations Pitfalls, and the New SBE Rule”

**HARP**      **Amanda Morse, Esq.**

“Fifty Shades of Modifications: Untying the Knot of Accommodations, Modifications, and Modified Content”

**UKULELE**      **Catlin Burchette, Esq.**

“How to Conduct a Title IX Investigation”

**VIOLIN**      **TDOE: Dr. Alison Gauld:**

“Ensuring Students with Significant Cognitive Disabilities and Complex Needs are Engaged in Learning Standards”

**GITAR**      **Karen Haase, Esq.**

“AI, IEP, OMG: What’s Changing in Special Education”

**Break-** Coffee /Soft Drinks/ Snacks

**2:15 PM - 2:45 PM**

## **Breakout Sessions #2**

**2:45 PM - 4:00 PM**

|                |                                                                                                          |
|----------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>DOBRO</b>   | <b>Debra Owen, Esq.</b><br>"Breaking Barriers: Tackling Tough Talks about Students with Disabilities"    |
| <b>HARP</b>    | <b>TDOE: Taylor Jenkins, Esq.</b><br>"A Day in the Life of a Special Education Director"                 |
| <b>UKULELE</b> | <b>TDOE: Dr. April Ebbinger:</b><br>"Manifestation Determination Review and Threat Assessments"          |
| <b>VIOLIN</b>  | <b>Caitlin Burchette, Esq.</b><br>"Data Collection & Disruptive Forces"                                  |
| <b>GITAR</b>   | <b>Deanna Arivett, Esq.</b><br>"Placement Isn't a Choice: Understanding your Legal Requirements for LRE" |

**Evening Reception:** Band sponsored by: **Goalbook**  
(Held in the Vendor Hall)

**5:00 PM - 6:30 PM**

## **Tuesday, December 2, 2025**

## **Breakout Sessions #1**

**8:00 AM - 9:15 AM**

|                |                                                                                                                           |
|----------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>DOBRO</b>   | <b>Scott Bennett, Esq.</b><br>"Too Many Cooks in the Kitchen: Whether to Allow Outside Therapists in the Classroom?"      |
| <b>HARP</b>    | <b>Katherine Kimmel, Esq.</b><br>"The IEP Team: Ensuring Active Participation from Every Member"                          |
| <b>UKULELE</b> | <b>Debra Owen, Esq. &amp; Co-Presenter: Caitlin Burchette, Esq.</b><br>"IDEA, 504, or Both"                               |
| <b>VIOLIN</b>  | <b>TDOE: Taylor Jenkins, Esq.</b><br>"A Day in the Life of a Special Education Director"<br>(Repeat Session)              |
| <b>GITAR</b>   | <b>Deanna Arivett, Esq.-</b><br>"From Referral to Developing a Plan: Understanding the Legal Requirements of Section 504" |

**Break-** Coffee /Soft Drinks/ Snacks

**9:15 AM - 10:00 AM**

**Platinum Sponsor-** Allied Instructional Services

**10:00 AM - 10:15 AM**

**Gold Sponsor-** Thrive Therapies

**10:15 AM - 10:25 AM**

**Keynote Speaker-** Chris McCarty, Esq.

**10:25 AM - 12:00 AM**

**Lunch-** (on your own)

**12:00 PM - 1:30 PM**

**Gold Sponsor-** Presence

**1:30 PM – 1:40 PM**

**Ask the Attorneys-** Orchestra Ballroom

**1:40 PM- 3:30 PM**

Attorneys from the TAASE conference will answer questions from the audience concerning current legal trends in special education.

**Facilitator:** Debbie McAdams, TAASE Legislative Chairperson

## **Wednesday, December 3, 2025**

**TAASE Board Meeting:** Orchestra Ballroom- (Full Board)

**8:30 AM - 9:00 AM**

**Chris McCarty, Esq.-** “State and Federal Legal Updates”

**9:00 AM - 11:00 AM**

**Closing Remarks-** TASL Information and Certificates of Attendance

**11:00 AM - 11:30 AM**

# **Keynote Speakers**



**Karen Haase**

**"Yearbook in Review: Most Likely  
to... Litigate?"**

**Monday, December 1, 2025**

***Orchestra Ballroom***



**Chris McCarty**

**"IEP, 504, and Damages"**

**Tuesday, December 2, 2025**

***Orchestra Ballroom***

# **Breakout Speakers**



**Karen Haase, Esq.**

**Karen Haase** is a recovering teacher at the high school, community college, and university levels, Karen is passionate about high-quality public education. Oh, and her husband, David, happens to be a teacher too! Karen's a yoga nut, dog enthusiast, avid Husker fan and an outspoken advocate for the elimination of the Oxford comma. Karen has been practicing school law for long enough that if there is a legal problem facing a school, Karen has probably dealt with it at least once. Karen relies on these experiences to provide realistic, practical solutions to complex legal problems, and she's always ready for the tough and "totally hypothetical" questions.



## **Chris McCarty, Esq.**

**Chris McCarty** is a shareholder in our Knoxville office, practices in the areas of employment law, education law and civil litigation. Mr. McCarty handles matters before state and federal courts throughout Tennessee. Mr. McCarty is also a trained arbitrator, and is listed as a Rule 31 mediator by the Tennessee Supreme Court Alternative Dispute Resolution Committee. Mr. McCarty also presents on employment and education law topics. His articles on those topics have been seen in numerous publications, including HR Magazine, the Tennessee Bar Journal and the Knoxville Business Journal. Mr. McCarty is approved as a member of the American Arbitration Association's (AAA) Panel of Employment Arbitrators.

### **AFFILIATIONS**

- Federation of Defense & Corporate Counsel
- DRI – Employment & Labor Law Committee
- Society for Human Resource Management
- American Bar Association
- Knoxville Bar Association
- Tennessee Bar Association
- National School Boards Association Council of School Attorney

Following college, Mr. McCarty spent two years teaching eighth grade United States history at Seymour Middle School in Seymour, Tennessee. He now lives in the Concord area with his wife and their three children, and is actively involved with his church, Cedar Springs Presbyterian.



**Dr. Jennifer Jordan**

***Tennessee Department of Education***

***Assistant Commissioner of Education for Special Populations***

**Dr. Jennifer Jordan** is the Assistant Commissioner of Special Education and Intervention Programs with the Tennessee Department of Education. Before her appointment to the assistant commissioner in October 2021, Dr. Jordan served as the Senior Director of Instruction and Intervention with the department.

Prior to joining the department, Dr. Jordan's professional career spanned 33-years as a special education teacher, instructional coach, behavior consultant, school psychologist, literacy consultant, and district leader with the Lauderdale County School District. Dr. Jordan has twenty years' experience at the district level as Director of Special Education and Director of Literacy and Instructional Interventions (K-12). Dr. Jordan has served as adjunct professor at Union University in special education as well as presented at the district, state and national levels in the areas of literacy, high-quality instructional materials, and special education.

Dr. Jordan holds a master's degree in Special Education, an educational specialist degree in School Psychology, and a doctorate in Literacy and Reading.



**Scott Bennett, Esq.**

**D. Scott Bennett, Esq.** has represented school boards, other local governments, police officers, and private employers for almost 30 years. After practicing in a regional litigation firm for most of his career, Mr. Bennett concluded that clients need, and deserve, a more personal connection with their attorney. Ms. DeCamp and he have built Bennett & DeCamp around the purpose of providing high quality, personally focused legal representation to value conscious community leaders and businesses.

Mr. Bennett focuses heavily on the needs of local school systems, their employers, and students. His practice includes every aspect of the diverse area, including employment, discrimination and equity issue, contracts and vendor relations, policy development, student discipline, bullying and harassment, risk management, first amendment issues, tort claims, governance issues, internal investigations, and the like. Mr. Bennett also focuses on IDEA law, ADA, ADEA, FLSA, THRA, Title II and VII, and 504 cases.



### **Deanna Arivett, Esq.**

**Deanna Arivett, Esq.** consults with clients on day-to-day legal matters and represents clients in litigation at both the administrative and federal court levels. In addition to legal representation, Deanna also enjoys providing professional development to school district staff at national conferences, state conferences, and at the local school level.

Deanna has a valuable combination of professional background and passion for supporting school systems that allows her to understand and represent the unique needs of school systems. Prior to her legal career, Deanna obtained a Master's of Arts degree and an Educational Specialist Degree in the field of school psychology from Middle Tennessee State University. Deanna then practiced for six years as a nationally certified school psychologist in public schools in both Tennessee and Ohio. Deanna's experience as a school psychologist has provided her with a unique insight and knowledge of the challenges faced by today's school personnel.

Furthering her education, Deanna graduated magna cum laude with a Juris Doctorate from the University of Dayton School of Law. Deanna was the executive publication editor for the University's law review and published a comment on the use of restraints in public schools. While obtaining her legal degree, Deanna clerked for an Ohio law firm that represented over a hundred public school districts. Deanna worked on a number of legal issues faced by school systems, including special education, Section 504, ADA, general education, student discipline, employment law, and board policy. Under an Ohio intern's license, Deanna also obtained courtroom experience through her externship with an Ohio prosecutor's office.

Upon completion of her legal degree, Deanna went into private practice as an attorney with the Law Office of Melinda Jacobs PLLC (LOMJ). As an attorney with LOMJ, Deanna was mentored by a renowned special education attorney, Melinda Jacobs, and gained experience in consultation, trial preparation, litigation, and professional development in the legal areas of IDEA and Section 504. These experiences have prepared Deanna to provide unparalleled services to her clients.



**Katherine Kimmel, Esq.**

**Katherine Kimmel** is an associate in the firm's Nashville office where she focuses her practice on Education Law. Prior to joining the firm, Katherine directed state and federal policy for a trade association of child care businesses. She also has experience providing policy analysis in the areas of orthotics and prosthetics, rehabilitative services, early childhood home visiting, and Head Start.

Katherine is a graduate of the University of Mississippi School of Law where she served as an Associate Cases Editor for the Mississippi Law Journal. During law school, Katherine worked as a research assistant for Professor William Berry and served as a student attorney for the Child Advocacy Clinic.

Katherine spends most of her free time with her husband and young daughter. As a recent Nashville transplant, she enjoys exploring new restaurants and taking advantage of the many beautiful local parks.



**Caitlin Burchette, Esq.**

**Caitlin C. Burchette** is an associate in the firm's Knoxville office where she focuses her practice on education law, employment law, civil litigation, and insurance defense. She also has an extensive background in governmental entity defense, civil rights litigation, and appellate work.

Caitlin is a graduate of the University of South Carolina School of Law. While in law school, she served as a member of the Pro Bono Board and was an Articles Editor on the ABA Real Property, Trust, and Estate Law Journal. Caitlin is admitted to practice in all state courts in Tennessee, as well as the Eastern and Middle Districts of Tennessee, the Sixth Circuit Court of Appeals, and the U.S. Supreme Court.



**Debra Owen, Esq.**

**Debra D. Owen** joined the firm now known as Jackson, Shields, Holt, Owen & Bryant after serving seven years as staff attorney for the Jackson-Madison County School System. Prior to becoming a licensed attorney, she served twenty-eight years as a secondary classroom teacher in that same school system. The primary focus of her legal practice is school law, but she also assists other clients in employment law matters. Her goal is to help clients avoid becoming mired in litigation or other legal disputes. She is an experienced trainer/presenter and is also a Tennessee Rule 31 listed civil and family mediator.

Debra graduated with honors from Union University, holds two graduate degrees, with honors, from Memphis State University (now University of Memphis), and earned her Doctorate of Jurisprudence degree, with honors, in 2001 from the Nashville School of Law. Ms. Owen is a member of the Howell Edmunds Jackson American Inn of Court, the Madison County and Tennessee Bar Associations, National School Attorneys Association, Tennessee Council of School Board Attorneys, and Jackson Area Business and Professional Women.

Debra and her husband enjoy activities with family and friends and participate actively in the ministries of First Methodist – Downtown Jackson. They enjoy day trips and vacations, especially when they can enjoy being outdoors, and they try to visit zoos, aquariums and animal



### **Amanda Morse, Esq.**

**Amanda Lynn Morse** graduated with highest honors from the University of Tennessee College of Law in 2013. During law school, Ms. Morse interned with the United States Attorney's Office of the Eastern District of Tennessee and the Federal Defenders of East Tennessee. Prior to attending law school, Ms. Morse was a severe child abuse investigator for the Department of Children Services. Ms. Morse joined the Knox County Law Director's Office in 2013 representing Knox County in a variety of civil legal matters.

### **Bar Admissions**

- Tennessee, 2013
- United States District Court, 2013

### **Education**

- Florida State University of Tennessee, B.A. 2005
- University of Tennessee, College of Law, *summa cum laude*, J.D. 2013

### **Associations**

- Knoxville Bar Association
- KBA Minorities Opportunities Committee
- Tennessee Bar Association
- Tennessee County Attorneys Association
- East Tennessee Lawyer's Association for Women
- Order of the Coif



**Taylor Jenkins, Esq.**

**Taylor Jenkins** is a Staff Attorney in the Tennessee Department of Education Office of General Counsel. He primarily focuses on issues involving special education and litigation. Prior to joining the Department, Taylor worked in the Education and Employment Division of the Office of the Tennessee Attorney General, where he represented state agencies, departments, and universities in federal and state court, including the Department in multiple IDEA lawsuits. Taylor graduated from Duke University in 2012 and Vanderbilt University Law School in 2015.



**Dr. April Ebbinger**

***Tennessee Department of Education***

**Dr. April Ebbinger**, a Nationally Certified School Psychologist, is the Director of School Psychology Services for the Tennessee Department of Education. Dr. Ebbinger has experience as a classroom teacher, school psychologist, district administrator, and higher education faculty. She has authored multiple journal articles and presented at state and national conferences. Dr. Ebbinger serves on the Board of the Tennessee Association of School Psychologists and was the 2020 Tennessee School Psychologist of the Year. In her free time, Dr. Ebbinger enjoys running with her dog, Daisy Mae, reading historical fiction, and cruising the Caribbean.



**Alison A. Gauld, Ed.D**  
***Tennessee Department of Education***

**Alison A. Gauld, Ed.D**, joined the Tennessee Department of Education as the Low Incidence and Autism Coordinator for Special Populations January 2014. She taught special education for children with low incidence disabilities within the public schools for over 20 years, most recently, students with significant disabilities within the public-school setting in Colorado. She created programs for individual student needs and collaborated with a variety of services, itinerate support personnel, and general education teachers to ensure LRE while teaching discrete skills in intervention. Alison also worked with the Colorado State Department of Education in the development of Extended Evidence Outcomes for the 1 percent population to guide instruction toward the standards as well as working on the development, refining, and revisions of the alternate assessment for the low incidence population. She has a BA in Special Education and a MA in Educational Leadership from Arizona State University and completed all the coursework for an Ed.D in Special Education at the University of Northern Colorado.

# **Vendors**

## **Platinum Sponsors:**

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Allied Instructional Services

## **Gold Sponsor:**

Presence

Thrive Therapies

TouchMath

## **Silver Sponsors:**

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EPS Learning

Moving with Math

PCG

Sidekick Therapy Partners

SESI Specialized Education Services Inc.

Stellar Therapy Services

TouchMath

Tennessee Association of School Psychologists

Tennessee Council for Exceptional Children