

# SchoolSims<sup>TM</sup>

EXPERIENCE IS THE BEST TEACHER

LIVE WEBINAR

# From Research to Practice

Powerful Adult Learning via Simulations for Impactful PD



**M. Elizabeth Azukas**  
**Associate Professor**  
*East Stroudsburg University*

**Date: Thursday, May 22<sup>nd</sup>, 2025**  
**Time: 3:00 PM EDT | Noon PDT**  
**Location: Zoom**



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## Liz Azukas

**Associate Professor of Professional & Secondary Education & Instructional Design Technology at East Stroudsburg University of Pennsylvania**

**mazukas@esu.edu**

Dr. M. Elizabeth Azukas is an Associate Professor of Professional and Secondary Education and Instructional Design Technology at East Stroudsburg University of Pennsylvania. She holds an Ed.D. in Leadership and Innovation from Arizona State University and has held diverse leadership roles in education, including instructional supervisor, principal, curriculum director, and assistant superintendent.

Her research focuses on systems thinking, change leadership, digital and virtual leadership, online and blended learning, and the use of simulations and AI to enhance teaching and leadership preparation. She has led educational redesigns and innovation efforts across K-12 and higher education contexts, including international collaborations with schools and ministries of education.



## Ken Spero

**President & Co-Founder**

**kspero@schoolsims.com**

For over 30 years, Ken has leveraged simulation-based learning to help professionals develop critical decision-making skills in a risk-free environment. In 2008, he recognized an opportunity to apply this approach to K-12 leadership, addressing the high turnover of educational leaders and its impact on schools. By capturing real-world experiences and transforming them into interactive simulations, he created a way for school administrators to practice navigating complex challenges, balancing trade-offs, and experiencing consequences before facing them in real life. For the past 10 years, he has been focused on the Silent Crisis of Leadership in K-12, working to strengthen leadership capacity and critical thinking among school leaders.

## Simulation-Based Experiential Learning

# Practice Critical Decision-Making in a Safe Environment

SchoolSims transforms K-12 professional development and higher education curriculums through simulation-based experiential learning. These choose-your-own-adventure simulations immerse participants in realistic scenarios, offering 6-8 critical decision points that seamlessly bridge the gap between theory and practice. By experiencing the immediate and long-term consequences of their decisions, users develop deeper insights, enhanced problem-solving skills, and stronger leadership capabilities, connecting learning directly to real-world applications in educational leadership.



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# Is This Your PD Experience?

BORED  
TEACHERS

WAITING TABLES 101:  
HOW TO DOUBLE YOUR  
TEACHING SALARY

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# Foundations of Adult Learning and Professional Development

Adult learners:

- Self-directed, experience-rich, and goal-oriented (Knowles, 1980; Merriam & Bierema, 2014).
- Learn effectively through authentic, problem-based, and situated learning (Lave & Wenger, 1991).
- Engage in deep learning via experiential cycles (Kolb, 1984) and critical reflection (Mezirow, 1991).

# What Makes Professional Development Effective?

Effective PD is:

- Sustained & Job-Embedded: Long-term, integrated into daily practice (Desimone & Garet, 2015; Opfer & Pedder, 2011).
- Active & Collaborative: Engages educators through hands-on practice and peer learning (Darling-Hammond et al., 2017; Lave & Wenger, 1991).
- Reflective & Safe: Builds reflective habits in psychologically safe environments (Schön, 1983; Edmondson, 1999).
- Simulations offer sustained, iterative, and collaborative PD opportunities that foster deeper learning (Azukas, Dexter, & Gibson, 2024; Azukas & Spero, 2024).

# The Importance of Job-Embedd ed Learning

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Authenticity: Learning situated in real tasks leads to meaningful change (Garet et al., 2001; Lave & Wenger, 1991).

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Iterative Growth: Learning is cyclical—action, feedback, reflection (Kolb, 1984).

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Transfer: PD linked to practice is more likely to improve outcomes (Darling-Hammond et al., 2017).

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Simulations provide contextualized practice in leadership and teaching, enhancing systems thinking and equity-oriented competencies (Azukas, 2024; Azukas & Holben, 2022; Azukas & Gibson, 2024).



# Simulation-Based Professional Development: Research Insights

Our research demonstrates that simulations:

- Increase self-efficacy and confidence (Azukas, Dexter, & Gibson, 2024; Azukas & Holben, 2022).
- Enhance systems thinking and leadership capacity (Azukas, 2024 AECT).
- Make thinking visible through structured debriefing (Azukas & Spero, 2024).
- Support collaboration and reflection (Azukas, 2023 AECT).
- Provide authentic, risk-free environments for learning (Azukas & Holben, 2022; Azukas & Gibson, 2024).

# References (1 of 2)

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Azukas, M.E. (2023). Playing Around: An Examination of Student and Faculty Experiences with a Virtual Classroom Simulation. AECT.

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Azukas, M.E. (2024). Cultivating Culturally Relevant and Sustaining Education Competencies Among Principal Candidates. UCEA.

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Azukas, M.E. (2024). The Efficacy of Simulations in Enhancing Systems Thinking. AECT.

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Azukas, M.E., Dexter, S., & Gibson, D. (2024). Exploring How Affordances of Simulations May Strengthen the Principal Pipeline. UCEA.

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Azukas, M.E., & Gibson, D.M. (in press). Teacher talk: simSchool Implementation in teacher education. Technology, Knowledge & Learning.

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Azukas, M.E., & Holben, D.M. (2022). Exploring Simulations as Field Experience During Lockdown. AERA.

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Azukas, M.E., & Holben, D.M. (2022). Using Virtual Simulations in Teacher Education to Develop Equitable Teaching Strategies. SITE.

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Azukas, M.E., & Holben, D.M. (in review). I've got this under control: Using simulations to develop pre-service teachers' internal locus of control. Computers in Schools.

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Azukas, M.E., & Spero, K. (2024). Using Simulations for Active Learning. RECAP.

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# References

## (2 of 2)

- Darling-Hammond, L., Hyler, M. E., & Gardner, M. (2017). Effective teacher professional development.
- Desimone, L. M., & Garet, M. S. (2015). Best practices in teachers' professional development.
- Edmondson, A. (1999). Psychological safety and learning behavior in work teams.  
Garet, M. S., Porter, A. C., Desimone, L., Birman, B. F., & Yoon, K. S. (2001). What makes professional development effective?
- Kolb, D. A. (1984). Experiential learning: Experience as the source of learning and development.
- Knowles, M. S. (1980). The modern practice of adult education: From pedagogy to andragogy.
- Lave, J., & Wenger, E. (1991). Situated learning: Legitimate peripheral participation.  
Mezirow, J. (1991). Transformative dimensions of adult learning.
- Merriam, S. B., & Bierema, L. L. (2014). Adult learning: Linking theory and practice.
- Opfer, V. D., & Pedder, D. (2011). Conceptualizing teacher professional learning.
- Schön, D. (1983). The reflective practitioner: How professionals think in action.

# How Can SchoolSims Be Used?



**Synchronously**

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**Asynchronously**

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**In-Person**

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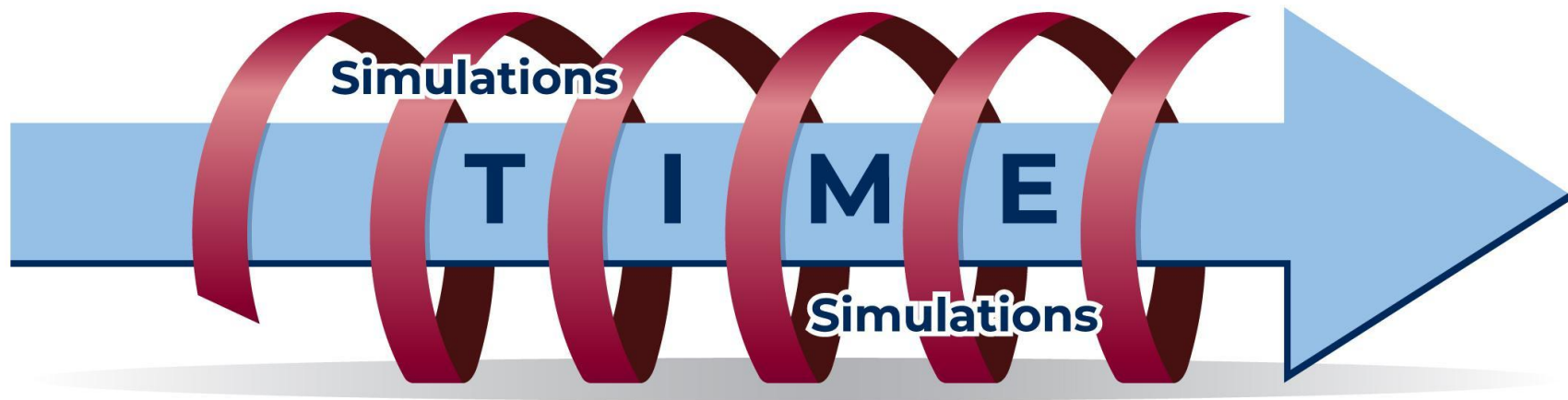


**Video Conference**

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SchoolSims is a flexible educational tool designed to enhance decision-making and leadership skills across diverse learning environments. It can be used synchronously in live classroom settings, asynchronously for self-paced learning, during in-person workshops, or through video conferencing. No matter the setting, SchoolSims empowers educators and learners with practical experiences, preparing them to address real-world challenges in educational leadership.

## Professional Development Content



**Coaching & Mentoring**

# Simulation Topics and Titles

## Simulation Topics

- Leadership Skills and Development
- Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI)
- Budgeting and Resource Allocation
- Teacher Evaluation and Development
- Classroom Management Strategies
- Building Inclusive Classrooms
- Special Education and IEP Facilitation
- Parent-Teacher and Stakeholder Communication
- Student Support and Crisis Management
- School Safety and Counseling Programs

## LeaderSims

- Synergistic Leadership
- Uncovering Hidden Inequity
- Navigating the Politics of Equity-Based Budgeting
- Cultural Competency
- Middle School Turnaround (Implementing Change)
- Value-Based Leadership
- Emerging Challenges of Distributed Leadership
- Managing Diversity in a Growing Community
- Middle School Budget Challenge
- Administrator: First Week on the Job
- Disruptive Teacher
- New Teacher Evaluation
- Academic Goal Setting
- Difficult Conversation: Race

## TeacherSims

- Building Inclusive Classrooms: Affirming Diverse Families
- Building Inclusive Classrooms: Positive Learning Environment
- Facilitating Alignment (IEP)
- Parent-Teacher Conference
- Special Education: Annual Case Review
- Classroom Challenge: Learning Loss
- Managing Classroom Disruptions
- Star Athlete

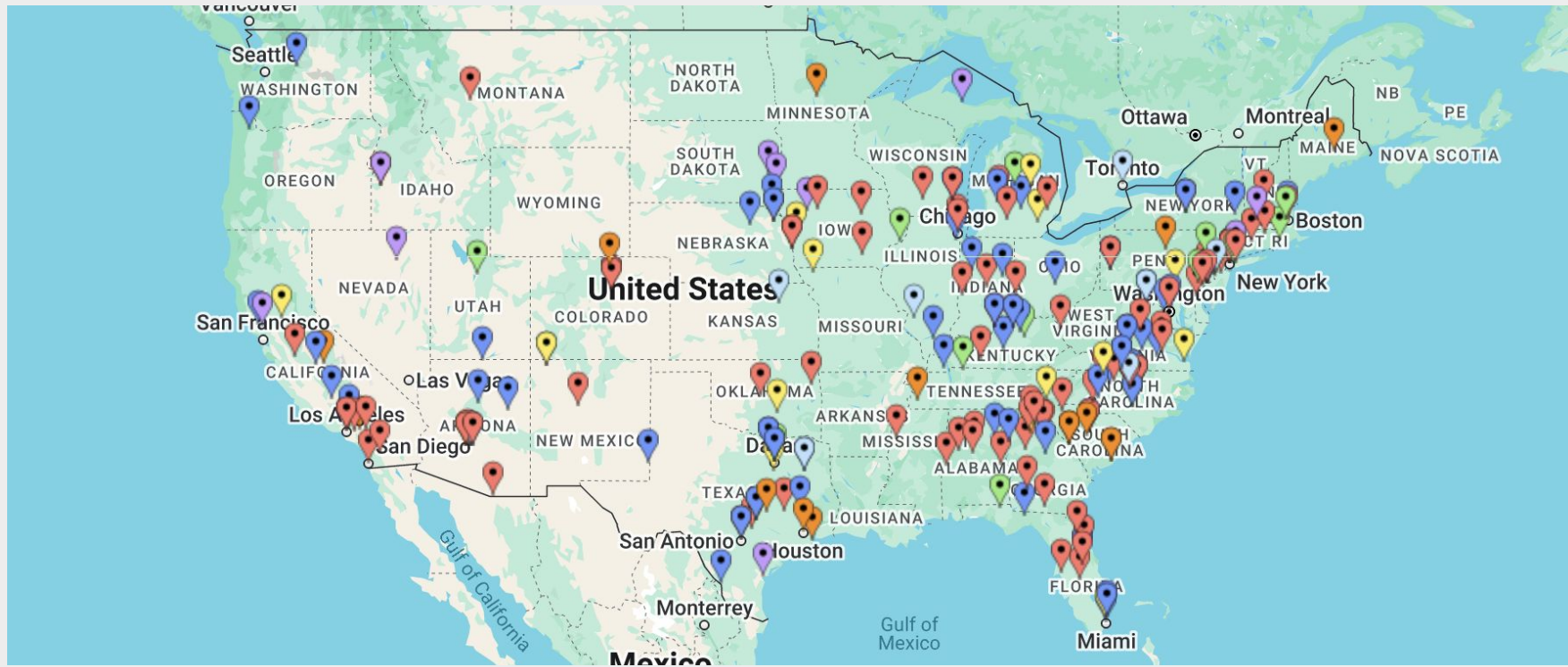
## CounselorSims

- Comprehensive Role of School Counselors
- Virtually Leading a School Counseling Program
- Data Driven Counseling
- School Safety
- Planning for Student Achievement
- Student Support (Transgender)
- Student in Crisis



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# Where Schools Are Using SchoolSims





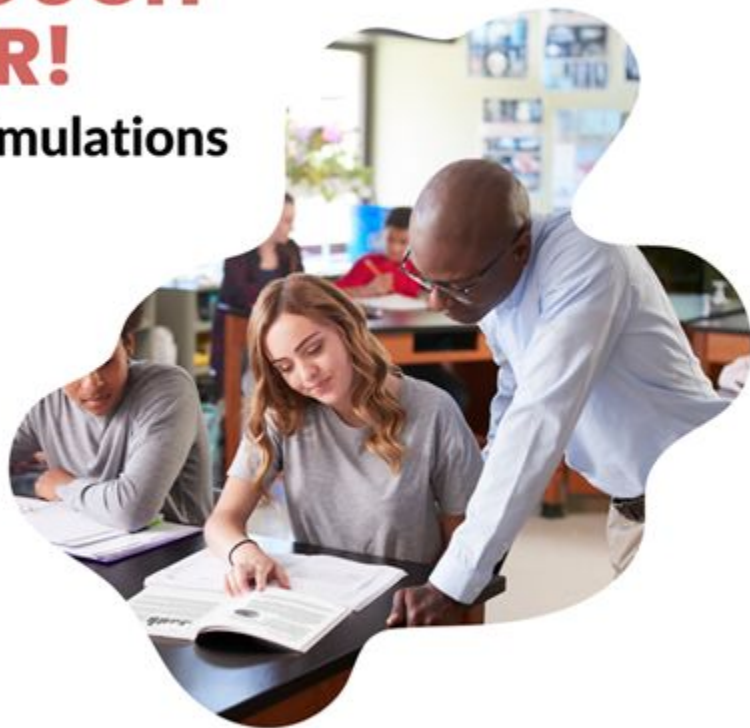
# GET TRIAL ACCESS THROUGH THE END OF THE SUMMER!

Experience the SchoolSims Library of Simulations

## What's Included?

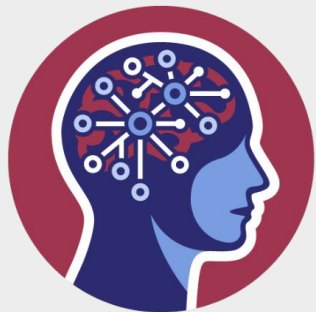
- Access to the SchoolSims Portal
- LeaderSims & TeacherSims Simulations
- Lock in Special Pricing when you move forward with a subscription

Start Exploring Today!



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## Additional SchoolSims Resources

### [Preview the SchoolSims Library](#)

This page offers interactive simulations that let educators and school leaders practice decision-making, navigate challenges, and refine their leadership skills.

### [Downloadable Resources](#)

This page provides downloadable resources to help educators and school leaders use simulations for professional development. Materials include guides, reports, and simulation overviews.

### [Simulation-Based Research](#)

This page highlights research on simulation-based learning in education, showcasing studies on its impact, applications, and benefits for educators and leaders.

### [Programs](#)

This page features simulation-based programs that help educators and school leaders build essential skills. Programs cover teacher induction, leadership development, culturally responsive training, and professional learning for independent schools.

### [Client Success Stories & Testimonials](#)

This page features testimonials from educators and institutions who have successfully integrated SchoolSims simulations into their programs. They highlight how these interactive tools enhance leadership development, decision-making, and real-world preparedness in educational settings.