FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:

SXSW EDU® Adds Over 170 Sessions to 2026 Conference & Festival

Leaders such as Former Commissioner of the National Center for Education Statistics Peggy Carr, NBC News Correspondent Vin Gupta, Professional NASCAR Driver Armani Williams, The Lifestyle Lab, Inc. Founder Jésabel DC, and many others across education policy, media, sports, edtech, and more join SXSW EDU's growing lineup.

October 22, 2025 // Austin, Texas – South by Southwest EDU® (SXSW EDU) today unveiled its largest programming announcement of the season with the addition of 178 sessions to its 2026 program. Selected through the community-driven PanelPicker® process, which received more than 1,400 submissions and included 53,358 public votes, these sessions represent the range of discussions that will take place during the Conference & Festival's run from March 9-12, 2026.

The chosen sessions will span the SXSW EDU Conference & Festival's variety of formats and 12 tracks with **Teaching & Learning**, **Equity & Belonging**, and **Future of Tech** leading with the most sessions. They also address SXSW EDU's five focus areas spanning the learning lifecycle with **K-12 Education** and **Convergence**, the concentration on initiatives that address pathways between education levels, emerging as top categories.

"Today's programming announcement is a testament to SXSW EDU's commitment to representing the breadth of the education landscape," said **Julia Shatilo**, Senior Director of SXSW EDU. "Not only are the sessions a reflection of what the education community is most interested in, but they also speak to the larger trends that are emerging or ongoing within and around the education space. This year's themes range from the importance of soft skills in an AI-driven world, future of workforce pathways, and renewing faith in schools to student and educator burnout, rapidly shifting policy, and the role of local institutions."

Highlights of the sessions selected through PanelPicker® include but are not limited to:

Health & Wellbeing:

- ***Vital Lessons Live: Trust, Health, & Schools:*** **Randi Weingarten** (President, AFT) and **Vin Gupta** (Medical Correspondent & Pulmonologist, NBC News) host a fireside to model how schools and health experts can partner on student well-being, staff burnout, and community trust—without the jargon.

Policy & Advocacy:

- ***The Honesty Gap: Why Your Kid's Test Score Lied to You:*** **Dale Chu** (Independent Consultant, DC Strategies), **Aimee Guidera** (Secretary of Education, State of Virginia), **Peggy Carr** (Former Commissioner, National Center for Education Statistics), and **Bibb Hubbard** (Founder & CEO, Learning Heroes) explore how policymakers, researchers, and parent advocates can work together to ensure assessment systems tell the truth—and what's at stake if they don't.

Work Reimagined:

- ***Adult Charter Schools: Drivers of Economic Mobility:*** As 36 million American adults with low literacy live in the shadows of the U.S. economy, communities need new solutions. **Elizabeth Winn Bowman** (Chief Academic Officer, Briya Adult Public Charter School), **Lecester Johnson** (CEO, Academy of Hope Adult Public Charter School), and **Shawntice Jones** (Cybersecurity Associate & Apprentice, PeopleShores & Accenture) will share how they are leveraging adult public charter school programs to meet the city's community and economic goals. **Kavitha Cardoza** (Journalist, The Hechinger Report) will moderate the panel, exploring how DC's pioneering investments and outcomes can be replicated in other cities and towns.

Equity & Belonging:

- ***Beyond Handouts: Building a Culture of Basic Needs Support:*** **Justin Thomason** (Assistant Director, Residence Life, Central Michigan University) runs a hands-on workshop introducing the Best-in-Class Basic Needs Support Program, a transformative model for systemic change, and demonstrating how to use a trackable badging system as an engine to empower your entire educational community to become proactive allies for students.

Arts & Culture:

- ***Shifting Gears: a NASCAR Racer on Autism & Mediamaking:*** **Armani Williams** (Racecar driver, NASCAR), one of the few openly autistic professional athletes, and **Christina Cantrill** (Director of Partnerships, National Writing Project) showcase the power of storytelling to advocate for an America that helps all learners navigate towards freedom and opportunity at every turn.

Leadership for Tomorrow:

- ***Urban Superintendents on Leading, Lasting, & Learning:*** Urban superintendent turnover has historically been high but has increased since the pandemic, with 73% of urban school districts experiencing turnover from 2019 to 2023. **Ray Hart** (Executive Director, Council of the Great City Schools), **Roger León** (Superintendent, Newark Public Schools), **Gabriella Durán Blakey** (Superintendent, Albuquerque Public Schools), and **Aleesia Johnson** (Superintendent, Indianapolis Public Schools) discuss the root causes of this and what might help reverse this trend.

Community Initiatives:

- ***Unpaid, Unused, Unhinged: Reimagine Campus-Community Collabs:*** **Matt Leech** (Lecturer, James Madison University), **Marcia Zook** (Director of Exhibits, Explore More Discovery Museum), **Brooke Imber** (Outdoor Learning Spaces Coordinator, Harrisonburg City Public Schools), and **Amanda Leech** (President and CEO, United Way of Central Shenandoah Valley) talk through the messy truths about collaborations and how to close the gap between good intentions and meaningful outcomes that shrink the town-gown divide.

Teaching & Learning:

- ***Writing in the AI Age: Guiding Students Toward Thoughtful Use:*** **Jay Dixit** (Founder, Socratic AI) shares the 5 principles of Socratic AI—a practical framework that teaches students to use AI not to generate writing, but to surface their best ideas, question their reasoning process, and push them to articulate their thoughts with clarity and precision.

Accessibility Solutions:

- ***ADHD Is a Superpower: Young People Rewrite the Narrative:*** **Lindsy Ogawa** (Senior Director, Education Reimagined), **Susan Hart** (Principal, LaFayette Big Picture School), **Wesley Stevens** (Student, LaFayette Big Picture School), and **Stephanie Moltion** (Parent & Nurse Case Manager, LaFayette Big Picture School & Liberty Mutual Insurance) will share what happens when youth with learning differences become the experts of their own learning. This session elevates students and their educators experiencing learner-centered education to share the mindsets, relationship changes, and practical approaches that enable them to thrive.

Future of Tech:

- ***The Future is Low-Tech: Lessons from the Early 2000s:*** **Jésabel DC** (Queer Futurist, Tech Anthropologist, & EdTech Founder, The Lifestyle Lab, Inc.) explores strategies like non-addictive, low-tech, and nervous-system-friendly design—including attention regulation, slowness as a feature, autonomy-first mechanics, real-world interaction, and gentle feedback loops.

Global Initiatives:

- ***Learning Without Borders: Preparing Kids for a Global Future:*** What happens when learning breaks out of the classroom and into the world? This lively conversation featuring **Megan Miller** (Founder & Principal, MKM Strategies), **Rekha Magon** (Co-Founder & Head of Education, Boundless Life), **Ben Polansky** (Chief Operations Officer, EdOdyssey), and **Penelope Barton** (CEO & Co-Founder, Crimson Global Academy) will explore how place-based, culturally immersive, and interconnected learning

prepares children not just for test scores but for an uncertain, global future. Hear how AI, global mobility, accessibility, and cross-cultural engagement are shaping the next generation of global citizens.

Startups & Investment:

- ***Building a New, Future-Proof University in 2026:*** **Dan Futrell** (Founder, Polymath University), **Emily Balog** (Associate Professor, Rowan-Virtua New Jersey Institute for Successful Aging, Rowan University), **David Staley** (Associate Professor of History, The Ohio State University), and **Daris McInnis** (Instructor in Education, University of Pennsylvania) explore the journey from Alternative Universities' theoretical framework to Polymath University's operational reality—a debt-free, apprenticeship-based model.

For more information on the 2026 programming, registration, opportunities, and more, visit sxswedu.com.

Media accreditation is now open for SXSW EDU 2026 through February 13, 2026. Please visit our press center to submit your application.

About SXSW EDU:

The SXSW EDU® Conference & Festival is a reflection of the world's most critical social issues as seen through the lens of education. This year's event will bring together the learner, the practitioner, the entrepreneur, and the visionary to share their groundbreaking stories, tackle complex issues, and build reimagined paths forward. As a community of diverse people who are united around a like-minded vision for the future, SXSW EDU serves as a place for attendees to renew their purpose in practice from both a personal and professional perspective. It is a place to reinforce the core principles of teaching and learning as well as an opportunity to express your creativity and passion for education. Join the passionate and innovative community at SXSW EDU, March 9-12, 2026.

For more information, please visit sxswedu.com.

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