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SXSW EDU® ANNOUNCES ADDITIONAL FEATURED SESSIONS AND MENTOR PROGRAM DETAILS FOR THE 2026 CONFERENCE

Jennifer B. Wallace, Award-Winning Journalist and Bestselling Author, Will Deliver the Crossover Day Keynote.

Featured Session Speakers Include Frances Messano, Aneesh Sohoni, Timothy Knowles, Ted Mitchell, Walt Hickey, Alma Cooper, Aisha Bowe, Scarlin Hernandez.

December 10, 2025 // Austin, Texas – South by Southwest EDU® (SXSW EDU) today announced three new Featured Sessions for the SXSW EDU 2026 Conference & Festival (March 9-12), as well as Mentor Program opportunities and details on the SXSW EDU Clubhouse.

“This week’s announcement showcases some of the most important issues facing education and the workforce today,” said **Julia Shatilo**, Senior Director of SXSW EDU. “From the future of public education to the reprioritization of student outcomes and opening doors through diverse role models, attendees will hear powerful conversations from diverse and thoughtful experts that inspire action. Combined with our mentorship and networking programs, attendees will leave equipped to address education’s most pressing challenges.”

Featured Sessions

Reasons to Believe: Reclaiming Optimism in Public Education—At a time when belief in public education is eroding, this conversation explores why optimism is both justified and essential. **Frances Messano**, CEO of NewSchools Venture Fund, and **Aneesh Sohoni**, CEO at Teach For America, will deliver actionable insights, renewed hope, and a deeper understanding of the bold ideas fueling student learning and shaping the future of public education.

Redefining Success: A New Social Contract for Higher Ed—The Carnegie Classifications will now determine institutional excellence not simply on prestige, student selectivity or degrees awarded, but on how well schools set their students up for success in the real world. **Timothy Knowles**, President of the Carnegie Foundation, and **Ted Mitchell**, President of the American Council on Education (ACE), will discuss this new framework that will evaluate institutions based on what matters most—student outcomes.

From the Stage to the Stars: A New Script for STEM—As AI reshapes classrooms and student disengagement grows, tired metaphors like train speeds and baseball stats fall flat. **Walt Hickey**, Pulitzer-prize winning journalist; **Alma Cooper**, former Miss USA and Stanford University Knight-Hennessy Scholar; **Aisha Bowe**, Founder & CEO of STEMBoard; and **Scarlin Hernandez**, award-winning astronautical engineer, will use real-world stories to show how visibility, storytelling, and diverse role models can help more students see themselves in STEM and spark inclusive, innovative outcomes.

To see the full list of conference sessions announced to date, visit the SXSW EDU schedule [here](#).

Mentor Program & Networking Opportunities

SXSW EDU today unveiled details on the Mentor Program as part of the 2026 networking opportunities, with more than 120 one-on-one mentors and 12 roundtable discussions designed to share personalized insights, advice, and the opportunity to collaborate more closely on career advancement and other goals. Mentors include **Armani Williams**, NASCAR Driver; **Sheridan Gibson**, Producer at Complexly; **Sophia Remee**, Head of Gen AI Studio at College Board; **Steve Osborn**, Student Opportunity Officer at Rhode Island DOE; and **Tracie Dean Ponder**, Founder & CEO at Learn Collaborate, INC.

With more than 30 Meet Ups, plus Pop-Up Dinners, Socials, Walking Tours and more, there's plenty of networking opportunities to make the most of your time at SXSW EDU. For more information, visit the schedule [here](#).

SXSW EDU Clubhouse

This year, SXSW EDU will have its own Clubhouse located at the historic Antone's Nightclub from March 8-11, open daily 9am to 6pm CT. The SXSW EDU Clubhouse is a central gathering point for attendees hosting performances, gatherings, livestreams and more, including the SXSW EDU Opening Party on March 9, with conference programming located conveniently nearby.

Crossover Day

Thursday, March 12 will be Crossover Day, where the final day of SXSW EDU coincides with the first day of SXSW, offering special access and co-programming available to SXSW and SXSW EDU attendees. This year, with all SXSW programming running simultaneously across Innovation, Film & TV, and Music, for the first time ever SXSW EDU attendees will have access to SXSW Innovation, Film & TV and Music programming (with some exclusions) on Crossover Day.

Announced last week, **Jennifer B. Wallace**, award-winning journalist, bestselling author and founder of The Mattering Institute, will deliver the Crossover Day Keynote on mattering: the feeling that we are valued and have an opportunity to add value. Wallace will introduce a new framework to confront the loneliness, burnout, and lack of purpose so many of us face today

and share the importance of finding meaning and value in your work, education and in life. For more on Jennifer B. Wallace and her keynote, view her speaker page [here](#).

Featured Sessions co-programmed by SXSW and SXSW EDU include:

- ***Moonshots that Move the Needle***—Arati Prabhakar, Kumar Garg, Jamie Sterling, and Eden Xenakis will discuss how to design and fund programs that use moonshot-centered models to turn potential into impact and accelerate breakthroughs in teaching and learning.
- ***Strategy in the Times of Chaos: Imagining Futures of Education***—Marina Gorbis and Dr. Maisha T. Winn will share foresight techniques for imagining radically different futures and detecting signals of reinvention and scholarship on how communities depicted as under-resourced create practices and institutions of their own.

Additional information and programming for Crossover Day will be announced in the coming weeks.

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.

Media accreditation is now open for SXSW EDU through February 13, 2026. Please visit [sxswedu.com/press/accreditation](#) to submit your application.

Press Contacts

SXSW

Brett Cannon

Alex McClure

press@sxswedu.com

One Strategy Group

Liz Stein

liz.stein@onestrat.com

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