



SXSW EDU® ANNOUNCES NEW KEYNOTE AND FEATURED SESSION, PLUS DETAILS ON SPECIAL PROGRAMS

Monica J. Sutton, Of “Circle Time with Ms. Monica,” Will Deliver Opening Keynote On Learning In The Digital Age

Newly Announced Featured Speakers Include Nikole Hannah-Jones, Chantale Zuzi, Samih Daher, Tamara Höfer, And Yemi Dele Akinyemi

February 18, 2026 | Austin, Texas — South by Southwest EDU® (SXSW EDU) today announced the opening Keynote, a new Featured Session and featured speaker, and details on Special Programs for the 2026 SXSW EDU Conference & Festival (March 9-12).

In the SXSW EDU opening Keynote, **Monica J. Sutton**, the creator and host of the hit YouTube show *Circle Time with Ms. Monica*, will trace her journey from the preschool classroom to reaching families worldwide. As AI transforms education and early childhood stands at a crossroads, Sutton will examine how technology can expand, not flatten childhood, and will connect her experience in traditional early learning education with modern digital learning spaces.

For more on Sutton's keynote, ***Reimagining Early Learning: Connection in a Digital Age***, visit the SXSW EDU schedule [here](#).

“At SXSW EDU 2026, we are highlighting the voices and stories actively reimagining the future of education. From Monica J. Sutton's journey in early childhood education, to deep dives into literary freedom and student leadership, to hands-on AI workshops, this year's program is designed to empower educators and students to lead with agency and creativity,” said **Julia Shatilo**, Senior Director of SXSW EDU. “Our special programs are designed to provide the inspiration and networking needed for attendees to return to their work or school with a renewed sense of purpose and the authentic connections necessary to build a better future for all learners.”

Featured Sessions

Highlights from the SXSW EDU Featured Sessions include:

When Young People Lead: Rethinking Education Systems—Young leaders reshaping education across diverse contexts will explore how lived experience, research, and community-rooted innovation drive systemic change. **Samih Daher**, Founder of The SAPHe Community, **Chantale Zuzi**, Founder of Refugee Can Be, **Tamara Höfer**, CEO & Founder of

Richtungswechsel, and moderator **Yemi Dele Akinyemi**, CEO & Founder of Moonshot Platform, will examine how education can move beyond access to empower young people.

Beyond Bans: Defending LGBTQ+ Stories & Literary Freedom—As discriminatory book bans continue to target LGBTQ+ literature and stories, Pulitzer Prize-winning reporter and author of The 1619 Project, **Nikole Hannah-Jones** joins this panel to moderate a discussion with **Brian Bond**, CEO of PFLAG National, New York Times bestselling author **Casey McQuiston**, and **Sam Helmick**, President of the American Library Association, exploring actionable solutions for preserving access to diverse stories that help LGBTQ+ youth feel safe, seen and valued.

For more on the SXSW EDU Conference & Festival programming, visit the [schedule](#) now to start planning your experience.

Special Programs

SXSW EDU programs special experiences designed to provide inspiration, networking, and creative immersion for attendees. This year's programs include:

A Culture of Learning in Central Texas—The Central Texas Lifelong Learning Awards, hosted by Austin Community College's **Donald Tracy**, Dean for Continuing Education, and **Terra Garcia**, Manager of Community Programs, bring together libraries, nonprofits, schools, and community leaders to recognize individuals leading the way in building a culture of learning.

How Data, Education, & Industry Partners Shape Austin Talent—**Caroline Alexander**, CEO of Alexander Research & Consulting, **Dena Shirley**, Workforce Development Manager for Ascension Texas, **Jennifer Ruiz**, VP of Garza EMC, and **Gilbert Zavala**, VP Education & Talent Development at Opportunity Austin, will discuss how growing demand in advanced manufacturing and semiconductors, tech, health sciences, and infrastructure sectors requires regional coordination to ensure we have a deep well of talent where students are prepared for in-demand careers in these industries.

Leadership Journeys at SXSW EDU 2026—An evening social and networking event focused on sharing the inspirational stories of educators and leaders of color, presented by **Big Picture Learning**. The event will highlight three storytellers—**Meisha Porter**, Senior Visiting Fellow at the Center for Education Innovation (CEI), **Nancy Gutiérrez**, President & CEO of The Leadership Academy, and **Byron Sanders**, CEO of Arete Health—sharing their personal journeys with attendees in a multi-media, DJ-fueled collaboration.

Reimagining Learning by Building AI Support for Your Context—In this a hands-on session attendees will use open-source AI tools to either build from scratch or remix an existing app to support their students, with help from leading educators at each station who have built tools that their schools now use.

For more on special programs, visit the SXSW EDU schedule [here](#).

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.

Note: Media accreditation applications are now closed for SXSW EDU 2026, and will open up later this year for the 2027 season.

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