

News Release

For immediate release: October 2, 2025

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Chef Ann Foundation Panel “Feeding Kids Like We Give a Damn: Transforming School Food” Selected as Featured Session at SXSW EDU® 2026

CEO Mara Fleishman brings together national leaders in government, academia, and youth advocacy to reimagine school food as a lever for nutrition, equity, and sustainability



Boulder, CO – The Chef Ann Foundation is proud to announce that its panel, “Feeding Kids Like We Give a Damn: Transforming School Food,” has been selected as a featured session at SXSW EDU® 2026, one of the world’s premier stages for exchanging ideas shaping the future of education.

Led by Chef Ann Foundation CEO Mara Fleishman, this curated session convenes a powerhouse lineup of leaders from government, academia, nonprofit advocacy, and youth activism to take on one of the nation’s most urgent and overlooked public health challenges: school food reform.

Featured panelists include:

- **Congressman Jim McGovern** – U.S. Representative for Massachusetts’s 2nd District, Ranking Member of the House Rules Committee, and senior member of the Agriculture Committee. A national leader in the fight against hunger, he co-chairs the bipartisan House Hunger Caucus, helped organize the 2022 White House Conference on Hunger, and authored key legislation expanding school meals and nutrition programs.
- **Dr. Norbert Wilson** – Director of the World Food Policy Center and Professor at Duke University, whose expertise focuses on equitable food systems, nutrition, and climate resilience.
- **Maya Miller** – Nationally recognized youth advocate for sustainable, plant-forward school meals.
- **Mara Fleishman** – CEO of the Chef Ann Foundation and a national leader in school food reform.

“This panel is about reimagining what’s possible. For too long, school food has operated in the shadows of our public systems – underfunded, undervalued, and misunderstood,” said Mara Fleishman, CEO of Chef Ann Foundation. “We’re seeing a groundswell of change, from local districts to national policy conversations. Being invited to SXSW EDU signals that this work isn’t just relevant; it’s urgent, it’s innovative, and it belongs in the spotlight.”

Every day, more than 30 million kids eat in nearly 100,000 school cafeterias across the U.S.—making school food the largest restaurant system in the country. What’s on the tray affects everything from chronic disease and classroom behavior, to agriculture and environmental sustainability. Yet school food remains chronically underfunded, highly processed, and largely invisible in national conversations.

This panel asks the question: What are healthy kids worth?

Panelists will explore how scratch-cooked, plant-forward school meals, smart policy, and bold community action can turn cafeterias into powerful engines for change. From kitchen infrastructure to workforce wages, they’ll break down the systemic barriers—and share the real success stories already happening in districts nationwide.

SXSW EDU will take place March 9-12, 2026, in Austin, Texas.

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About Chef Ann Foundation

[Chef Ann Foundation](#) is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit working to ensure that school food professionals have the resources, funding, and support they need to provide fresh, delicious, scratch-cooked meals that support the health of children and our planet. To date, the organization has reached more than 16,000 schools and 4.4 million kids in all 50 states with healthy school food programming.