



2026 Department Chairs Conference

September 14-15

Omni La Mansion del Rio, San Antonio, TX

the meeting room is located on the 2nd floor of the hotel

Day 1

September 14 | 12:30 – 1:00 p.m.

Conference check-in and light snacks (lunch is not provided today)

September 14 | 1:00 – 1:25 p.m.

Introductions and Welcoming

Concepcion

September 14 | 1:30 – 4:00 p.m.

The Shape of a Course: Designing the Journey Students Navigate

Concepcion Department chairs and teacher leaders see curriculum from a position no one else holds — close enough to know what's happening in classrooms, far enough back to see how it all fits together. Curriculum storyboards make that view actionable: a panoramic look at the journey students will take, unit by unit, across an entire course, so that every decision about sequence, emphasis, and experience is made with the whole arc in mind.

In this 2.5-hour session, participants explore what storyboards make possible, examine strong examples, and begin drafting one rooted in their own context. No design background required. Participants come in as practitioners and leave with a working draft and a new lens for the curriculum conversations they're already having.

Allison Zmuda

September 14 | 4:00 – 4:15 p.m.

Break



September 14 | 4:15 – 5:00 p.m.

Cohort Meetings

Concepcion Review today's content with people who work in the same area as you do: English, Math, Science, Social Studies, World Languages, Electives, etc.

September 14 | 5:00 – 6:00 p.m.

Reception at the Omni

September 14 | 6:00 p.m.

Dinner and evening on your own in San Antonio.

Day 2

September 15 | 7:30 – 8:30 a.m.

Concepcion Breakfast Buffet at the Omni

September 15 | 8:30 – 10:30 a.m.

Using Neuroscience to Support Faculty

Concepcion In today's evolving educational landscape, effective faculty mentorship must be grounded in what research tells us about how adults learn and grow. This session explores how principles from neuroscience and adult learning theory can be intentionally applied to faculty development and mentorship. Participants will examine what the research says about adult learning, motivation, teacher efficacy, and feedback, and how their insights can inform differentiated mentoring approaches for novice, mid-career, and veteran faculty.

Through guided discussion and applied examples, the session will explore strategies for tailoring feedback, supporting professional growth at different stages, and fostering sustainable practices. The workshop will also introduce and review mentorship structures, 1:1 coaching and mentoring, highlighting how these frameworks can offer reflection, collaboration, and long-term growth. Emphasis will be on practical application.

Caroline Miller, Director of Learning Services, St. Paul's School for Boys



September 15 | 10:30 – 10:45 a.m.

Break

September 15 | 10:45 a.m. – 11:45 a.m.

Hear from Your Peers

Concepcion Attendees pose questions in advance and they are answered by the group.

September 15 | 11:45 a.m. – 12:45 p.m.

Concepcion Lunch with your subject area cohort

September 15 | 12:45 – 2:45 p.m.

Giving and Receiving Feedback

Concepcion We want to change the way that people are talking to each other in schools. So often, in education, you are promoted into leadership because you are good at your current job. “You are a great teacher. You should be a department chair!” You begin to do this work, and you realize that leading, guiding, or coaching adults is complex. In this session, we will learn how to navigate the complexities of giving and receiving feedback. Additionally, we will continue to build our ability to hold space, manage up and down, and transform tension into trust.

Isaiah Noriega, Leadership + Design

September 15 | 2:45 p.m.

Adjourn and travel home

2025 Department Chairs Conference

Speakers

Caroline Miller



Dr. Caroline Miller is an educator and neuroeducation specialist at St. Paul's School for Boys, serving as their Director of Learning Services for grades 5-12. She holds a Doctor of Education, with a specialization in Mind, Brain, and Teaching, a CAGS in Mind, Brain, Teaching, and a Master's degree in special education from Johns Hopkins University. Her work centers on applying neuroscience, self-regulated learning, and teacher efficacy research to practical, inclusive, and evident-based professional learning models.

Isaiah Noriega



Isaiah Noriega is a partner at Leadership + Design. He is an experienced educator, counselor, and diversity, equity, and inclusion practitioner with a passion for student well-being and community building. Isaiah recently served as Dean of Community and Well-being, Chief Diversity Officer, and Founding Director of the Evergreen Institute at Indian Creek School, where he led initiatives that center student well-being, leadership development, and belonging. With a background in clinical-community psychology, Isaiah brings expertise in mental health and organizational psychology to his work. Before joining Leadership+Design full-time, he was a Fellow and a Leader in Residence. At the heart of Isaiah's work is a belief in the power of people—their stories, their leadership, and their potential to thrive when truly seen and supported. A certified life coach and trained restorative practitioner, Isaiah blends empathy with strategy to help communities move forward with clarity and purpose. Outside of work, Isaiah enjoys reading, sports, and spending time with his wife.

Allison Zmuda



Allison Zmuda is an internationally renowned curriculum consultant with over two decades of experience specializing in the design of curriculum, assessment, and instructional design that is both practical and meaningful for the school client. She collaborates with staff and students to design dynamic, engaging, and effective learning experiences from initial drafts to full implementation.

An accomplished author, Allison has written 12 books and numerous articles that provide fresh perspectives backed by actionable strategies and real-world examples that are grounded in her deep knowledge of Understanding by Design, Habits of Mind, and Personalized Learning.

In recent years, Allison has focused on addressing key questions educators face – streamlining curriculum to modernize learning and communicating effectively with both staff and students.

She addresses this in her most recent book, *Streamlining the Curriculum: Using the Storyboard Approach to Frame Compelling Learning Journeys*, co-authored with Heidi Hayes Jacobs. It was selected as an ASCD membership book in 2023 and sparked interest in a transformative approach speaking directly to staff and students using accessible, clear, and compelling language. Her work with schools around the world highlights the innovative use of curriculum storyboards, offering educators insights and opportunities to engage with her directly for consulting services.

As educators prepare students for a world of ambiguity and change, Allison's work amplifies attention to learning dispositions as essential for students to become increasingly self-directed, competent and capable partners in their learning journey. This influences her curriculum design work as well as her role as co-director of the Institute for Habits of Mind alongside Bena Kallick and Art Costa, where she works globally to integrate the 16 Habits of Mind into school culture.

Allison holds a Bachelor of Arts degree from Yale University and a Master of Arts in Liberal Studies from Wesleyan University.