Atlanta researchED 2026

Speaker Bios, Master Schedule, Breakout Sessions

Real Teaching • Real Evidence • Real Results

researchED

Freedom in education

Master Schedule

Time	Session
9:00 - 9:30 AM	Registration / Check-In / Coffee
9:30 - 9:45 AM	Freedom in Education: Welcome & Opening Remarks
9:45 - 10:15 AM	Tom Bennett: Setting the Stage: What researchED Is and Why It Matters
10:15 - 11:00 AM	Keynote: Doug Lemov: The Why and How of Science of Learning
11:00 - 11:10 AM	Transition Break
11:10 - 11:55 AM	Breakout Block 1
12:00 - 12:45 PM	Lunch & Networking
12:50 - 1:40 PM	Breakout Block 2
1:40 - 1:50 PM	Transition Break
1:50 - 2:40 PM	Breakout Block 3
2:40 - 3:00 PM	Snack Break and Networking
3:00 - 3:50 PM	Breakout Block 4
3:50 - 4:30 PM	Closing Mainstage Session Panel + Live Q&A

Featured Speakers

Tom Bennett

Founder of researchED and internationally recognized author and consultant focused on school culture, classroom management, and evidence-informed teaching.

Doug Lemov

Founder of Teach Like a Champion and bestselling author known for his influential work on instructional practice and classroom excellence.

Sir Nick Gibb

Former UK Minister for Schools who led major national reforms focused on knowledge-rich curriculum and evidence-based teaching.

John Mighton

Award-winning mathematician, bestselling author, and founder of JUMP Math, internationally recognized for his groundbreaking work in math education.

Breakout Sessions

Breakout Block 1

11:10 - 11:55 AM

Sir Nick Gibb - International Lessons in Raising Standards

Sean Morrisey - Building Words, Building Minds

Laura Stam - Key Elements of a Knowledge-Building Lesson

Nathan Gwinn - Science of Learning 101

Matthew Kirby - Visual Thinking as a Teaching Strategy

Ben Zulauf - Explicit Language Instruction as the Engine of Reading Growth

Breakout Block 2

12:50 - 1:40 PM

Tom Bennett - Behavior, Research, and Classroom Management

Gary Houchens - Aristotle's Classroom: The Ancient Origins of Modern Learning Science

AJ Pettway - Masterful Modeling: Making Thinking Visible

Sean Morrisey - Building Words, Building Minds

Laura Stam - Key Elements of a Knowledge-Building Lesson

Nathan Gwinn – Science of Learning 101

Matthew Kirby - Visual Thinking as a Teaching Strategy

Breakout Block 3

1:50 - 2:40 PM

John Mighton - Math Fluency and Mastery

Ben Zulauf - Productive Struggle: The Origin Story and Appropriate Uses

Gary Houchens - Small Steps, Ancient Wisdom: Classical Education in Any Classroom

AJ Pettway - The Mighty Mini-Whiteboard: Getting Every Student Thinking

Sean Morrisey - From Surface to Structure: Explicit Vocabulary

Laura Stam - Implementing Efficient Daily Math Facts Routines

Breakout Block 4

3:00 - 3:50 PM

Nathan Gwinn - The Cognitive Edge: Analog Instruction

Matthew Kirby - The Future of Learning: AI for Educators

Ben Zulauf – Productive Struggle: The Origin Story and Appropriate Uses

Gary Houchens - Aristotle's Classroom: The Ancient Origins of Modern Learning Science

AJ Pettway - Masterful Modeling: Making Thinking Visible

Speaker Highlights

Tom Bennett

Author, Consultant, and Founder of researchED

Professional Bio

Founder of researchED and author of Running the Room. Internationally recognized for his work on behavior and school culture.

Session Topics

- **Behavior, Research, and Classroom Management**

Sir Nick Gibb

Author, Consultant, and Former UK Minister for Schools

Professional Bio

As former UK Minister for Schools, Sir Nick Gibb led major national education reforms focused on a knowledge-rich curriculum and evidence-based teaching, helping drive significant improvements in student outcomes across England.

Session Topics

- **International Lessons in Raising Standards**

Nathan Gwinn

Teacher, Senior Advisor for Curriculum and Instruction at Freedom in Education

Professional Bio

Nathan Gwinn is a teacher and former Principal, and he serves as the Senior Advisor for Curriculum and Instruction at Freedom in Education, where he advises states on evaluating instructional materials and developing robust academic frameworks. His expertise is rooted in extensive experience, having taught grades 5 through 12 in public schools and having served as an administrator across all K-12 levels. He leverages this on-the-ground perspective as a lead educator, developing model standards in mathematics and science. By bridging the gap between high-level educational policy and classroom reality, Nathan equips education systems nationwide with the practical, high-quality tools needed to drive student achievement.

Session Topics

- **The Cognitive Edge: Analog Instruction.** Somewhere between the 1-to-1 device rollout and the app-for-everything era, classroom management became a lost art. This session explores how strong leadership and ironclad procedures reduce cognitive load and create classrooms built on trust, efficiency, and human connection.
- **Science of Learning 101: Simple, Evidence-Based Strategies for Every Classroom.** Designed for educators with little to zero prior experience with the topic, this straight-forward, fluff-free introduction strips away the complex neuroscience and academic jargon. Instead, we focus on the foundational basics of how the human brain processes, connects, and stores new information for the long haul. You will walk away with a clear understanding of the learning process and a toolkit of simple, high-impact strategies you can implement on Monday morning to boost student outcomes without adding to your daily prep load.

Gary Houchens, PhD

Professor and Director, Educational Leadership Doctoral Program, Western Kentucky University

Professional Bio

Gary Houchens, PhD, is a professor and director of the educational leadership doctoral program at Western Kentucky University. A member of the Freedom in Education advisory board and former member of the Kentucky Board of Education, Gary writes regularly on the intersection of education, faith, and public life. He is also the founding board chairman of the Chesterton Academy of Bowling Green.

Session Topics

- **Aristotle's Classroom: The Ancient Origins of Modern Learning Science.** This session explores how classical educators addressed the challenge of teaching students how to think and how modern learning science has rediscovered many of those same principles.
- **Small Steps, Ancient Wisdom: Bringing Classical Education Into Any Classroom.** Participants will learn practical classroom tools rooted in the classical tradition that support character formation alongside academic instruction.

Matthew Kirby

Associate Professor

Professional Bio

Matthew Kirby is an Associate Professor in the Arts and Humanities department at Southcentral Kentucky Community and Technical College. He teaches Art and Art History courses that make complex concepts accessible and engaging. He also serves in academic leadership roles and has presented on artificial intelligence in education.

Session Topics

- **Visual Thinking as a Teaching Strategy.** This session explores the Picture Superiority Effect and how sketching concepts can dramatically improve memory retention across content areas.
- **The Future of Learning: AI for Educators.** Participants will explore artificial intelligence tools through guided experimentation and discussion grounded in the science of learning.

Doug Lemov

Author, Consultant, and Founder of Teach Like a Champion

Professional Bio

Chief Knowledge Officer and Founder of the organization, Teach Like a Champion, and the author of the international bestseller Teach Like a Champion—now in its 3.0 version—and The Coach's Guide to Teaching. He is the co-author, with TLAC colleagues, of Practice Perfect, Reading Reconsidered, Teaching in the Online Classroom, and Reconnect.

Session Topics

- **Keynote**

The Why and How of Science of Learning

John Mighton

Award-Winning Mathematician, Author, and Founder of JUMP Math

Professional Bio

Dr. John Mighton is an award-winning mathematician, bestselling author, and founder of JUMP Math, internationally recognized for his groundbreaking work in building children’s confidence, skills, and success in math.

Session Topics

- **Math Fluency and Mastery**

Sean Morrisey

5th Grade Teacher | Creator of the Word Mapping Project Curriculum

Professional Bio

Sean Morrisey is a fifth-grade teacher at Pinehurst Elementary School near Buffalo, New York. A former school psychologist, he has spent the past 18 years refining literacy instruction grounded in the Science of Learning and Science of Reading. He is the creator of the Word Mapping Project curriculum, a morphology-rich approach to vocabulary and literacy development.

Session Topics

- **Building Words, Building Minds: Morphology, Word Sums, and Matrices in Action.** This session demonstrates how morphology instruction can strengthen decoding, spelling, vocabulary, and long-term word learning.
- **From Surface to Structure: Explicit Vocabulary Instruction with Word Pairs, Semantic Maps, and Robust Teaching.** Participants will explore explicit vocabulary instruction routines that deepen word knowledge and strengthen academic language development.

AJ Pettway

Instructional Coach | Evidence-Based Teaching

Professional Bio

AJ Pettway is an instructional coach and education consultant with over 20 years of experience in international and U.S. public and private schools. He has worked as a science teacher and instructional coach in Mozambique, China, Colombia, Chile, and the United States. AJ specializes in helping schools strengthen instructional coaching and professional learning systems by leveraging the science of learning and its practical implications for building teacher expertise. His work focuses on instructional design and delivery, formative assessment, and classroom-level evidence to support teacher growth and improve student learning.

Session Topics

- **Masterful Modeling: Making Thinking Visible.** Effective modeling makes thinking visible, reduces cognitive load, and prepares students for independent success.
- **The Mighty Mini-Whiteboard: Getting Every Student Thinking.** This session demonstrates how structured participation strategies can make every student's thinking visible.

Laura Stam

Third Grade Teacher | Goyen Fellow | Founding Board Member, The Reading League Wyoming

Professional Bio

Laura Stam is a third-grade teacher in Wyoming, a 2024–2025 Goyen Fellow, and a founding board member of The Reading League Wyoming. She writes The Knowledge Exchange and hosts the Wyoming Science of Teaching and Learning Collaborative conference. Laura collaborates on multiple instructional projects and regularly presents on evidence-based teaching practices.

Session Topics

- **Implementing Efficient Daily Math Facts Routines in the Elementary Classroom.** This session focuses on efficient math fact routines that improve fluency, engagement, and success.
- **Key Elements of a Knowledge-Building Lesson.** Participants will explore how to design knowledge-building lessons that activate prior knowledge and strengthen text analysis.

Ben Zulauf, EdD

Director of Teaching and Learning, Cicero School District 99

Professional Bio

Ben Zulauf is the Director of Teaching and Learning in Cicero School District 99, where he leads the district's shift toward evidence-based literacy practices. He has served in multiple instructional leadership roles and has presented at local, state, and international conferences while consulting with school districts across the Midwest.

Session Topics

- **Reading: Explicit Language Instruction as the Engine of Reading Growth.** This session explores how explicit language instruction drives reading growth.
- **Productive Struggle: The Origin Story and Appropriate Uses**. Productive struggle is one of the most well-known terms when it comes to math instruction, but its implementation in many classrooms has lethally mutated into a practice that was never intended. This session will the original intent of productive struggle and what successful implementation could look like in your classroom.