

Speaker Biographies

Texas Student Leadership Summit

August 6-7, 2026

Chris Collins, CoolSpeak

Keynote Speaker

Chris is a speaker, author, and consultant with a message that is inspiring students across the country. His unique blend of humor, knowledge, and energy provide high impact moments with results that last long after the presentation. After overcoming challenging circumstances in his hometown of Chicago, Chris went on to serve in several leadership roles in college. He served as Chapter President of Alpha Phi Alpha Fraternity, Inc., a Resident Assistant, NPHC President, IFC Board Member, TRiO/Upward Bound counselor, NAACP College Chapter President, RA Leadership Council, a member of Texas State Universities Honor College, and Co-coordinator of the Texas State African-American Leadership Conference.

Chris graduated from Texas State University where he majored in International Business & Political Science. Professionally, Chris enjoyed a career as a Recruiter/HR professional having worked for two Fortune 500 companies. Chris' most important accomplishment is being a husband, father, and active member in his community. Chris has delivered talks to all types of crowds, including two of the largest High School districts in the country, national conferences, Fortune 500 companies, and colleges and universities of every shape, size, and hue. He doesn't always give speeches but when he does they're your favorite speeches favorite speech!

Bavu Blakes, Hip Hop Grew Up

Featured Performer

Bavu Blakes is a Scholar Emcee deliberately walking through the intersection of Hip Hop, education, and spirituality. As a middle school Humanities instructor, he is an award-winning teaching artist who constructs and conducts keynote speeches, interactive learning sessions, and multimedia projects.

As founder of the Hip Hop Grew Up educational agency, Bavu has emerged as a trusted mind and voice helping leaders across the United States move from language to labor, from academic to applicable. The antithesis of a sit-and-get lecturer, he is an "Editor's Pick" TEDx speaker celebrated for incorporating theatrical, musical, lyrical, and visual elements into learning facilitation as well as keynotes for state, national, and international conferences.

Originally moving to Austin, Texas, for journalism school, Bavu ascended to regional rap celebrity, becoming the first emcee in town to have a song added to daytime commercial radio. He has appeared on 21 vinyl records to date and released studio collaborations with several Grammy-winning producers including Adrian Quesada and Gary Clark, Jr., as well as people's champ Paul Wall.

Dr. Patrick Valdez, University of North Texas at Dallas

Master of Ceremonies

Dr. Patrick L. Valdez is an accomplished higher education leader with 25 years of experience in developing and executing academic and student success programs. He is currently the interim dean of

the University of North Texas at Dallas' School of Education. Dr. Valdez is former Chancellor and Professor of Education at the University of New Mexico - Taos. He has held senior-level positions at the College of Mount St. Vincent in New York City, the University of Texas at San Antonio (UTSA), the Hispanic Association of Colleges and Universities (HACU), the Association of Public and Land - grant Universities (APLU) and CUNY - Lehman College - developing and executing academic and student success programs. He is a graduate of St. Edward's University with a bachelor's degree in International Studies, a master's degree in student personnel administration from Teachers College, Columbia University, and a doctorate in higher education administration from The University of Texas at Austin.

Dr. Valdez has conducted research and practice on the challenges and obstacles facing first-generation college students, given presentations on executive leadership, African American faculty experience at a tier-one university, increasing the number of underrepresented students in STEM, and bridging the gap between higher education and the community. His primary research focuses on the policy formation of Hispanic Serving Institution (HSI) legislation and the role that HSI's will play in educating the nation's fastest-growing student population.

