

2018 April 4



Leadership Matters

Investing in Sustained
School-Systems
Leadership





LEADERSHIP MATTERS

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Students benefit measurably when their school systems are led by bold superintendents and state Chiefs of education who put the needs of young people at the center of decision making, and those benefits are even greater when that leadership is sustained through leadership transitions. Yet, as a nation, we're doing so little to build a pipeline of well-prepared education leaders, diverse in race and gender, from all ends of the political spectrum who are ready on their first day in the Chief's job to make a difference for kids. That has to change.

The evidence shows that it can be done. **A new analysis shows students in school systems led by Chiefs for Change leaders — state and district Chiefs committed to student-focused change — are achieving far better results than students nationally.** Between 2005–2015, on the National Assessment of Educational Progress:

- In math, grade 4 students in states led by Chiefs for Change members grew more than twice as fast as their peers around the country.
- In math, grade 4 students in states where Chiefs for Change members had been at the helm of state education agencies for a decade or more grew more than three times as fast as their peers nationally.
- In reading, where the national grade 4 growth average was 1.8 percent, states led by Chiefs for Change had a growth rate of 3.1 percent, and states where Chiefs for Change members led for 10 or more years had a 5.1 percent growth rate.

These results suggest the power of visionary leadership, especially when it is sustained — and hence the need to do more to ensure we have sustained, student-focused education leadership in place around the country. A key problem is that we don't have enough of these individuals ready to do the job or enough opportunities to help them develop the complex set of knowledge and skills needed to effectively lead school districts and state education agencies, and we don't have systems in place to adequately identify prepared, emerging leaders at the rate our systems require. That means when these top jobs come open, which unfortunately happens on a too-frequent basis, the search process is typically limited to a predictable slate of candidates that hardly reflects the talent and diversity the country has to offer. The large majority of school system leaders are white men, a remarkable fact in 2018 when most of the nation's public-school children are students of color. Evidence has shown students do markedly better in schools with more racially-representative teachers. Committing to diversity in school system leadership should be part of any strategy to diversify the teaching profession.

The large majority of school system leaders are white men, a remarkable fact in 2018 when most of the nation's public-school children are students of color.

Addressing this problem will take more than one solution. At Chiefs for Change (CFC), we are working on this issue on several fronts,

including through our Future Chiefs program. Our efforts prioritize spreading effective leadership throughout the country and building a pipeline of diverse, well-prepared candidates who can carry a district's or state's vision forward, including during times of transition. From supporting highly effective, bold sitting Chiefs to intentionally building the next generation of leaders, CFC is investing in leadership as a critical agent of change for America's students. Our members are excelling in bipartisan state and district policy contexts.

Students across the country are 49 percent female and 51 percent male, and 50 percent are students of color.¹ Within urban districts, 80 percent are students of color.² This is in contrast to trends found in the education system, where men typically represent more of the leadership roles in buildings, districts, and states, and are more likely to be white. The most current demographics at all levels of education reflect:

- Teachers: 76 percent women and 18 percent teachers of color³
- Principals: 52 percent women and 20 percent leaders of color⁴
- District Superintendents: 25 percent women and 8 percent leaders of color⁵
- State Chiefs: 43 percent women and 10 percent leaders of color⁶

We at CFC have made a commitment to preparing cohorts of Future Chiefs that are at least 75 percent leaders of color and 50 percent women.

of Chiefs for Change state members being women.⁷ Because there are so few high-quality pipelines focused on ensuring a more diverse generation of leaders, we at CFC have made a commitment

to preparing cohorts of Future Chiefs that are at least 75 percent leaders of color and 50 percent women. It is extremely important that we focus our efforts on identifying and supporting the most talented, diverse emerging leaders and giving them the sets of experiences and preparation that will enable school systems to choose courageous, skilled, ready leaders. As detailed in our Diversity to the Forefront brief,⁸ when the diversity of our adults mirrors the diversity of our students, students benefit.

The implications are clear: States and districts must be far more intentional about investing in, and drawing from, pipelines of well-prepared, bold-thinking, diverse Chief candidates. This is not a feel-good take-away; it's a conclusion based on the impact such leaders are having on students. The Chiefs for Change Future Chiefs program offers one example of how to build such a pipeline, based on a these key elements:

- Individualized monthly coaching from former district and state Chiefs
- Shadowing current Chiefs for Change members
- Training in public speaking, media preparation and board relations
- Consultancies to work through case studies of problems of practice with Chiefs for Change members and partners
- Access to the Chiefs for Change network of members and partners
- Support in search and placement for Chiefs roles, including portfolio building and transition support

The call to action is straightforward: **At every level, policy makers, stakeholders, and current education leaders can serve students better by investing in and drawing from new and stronger career pathways, superintendent-development programs, and coaching trees within districts and state education agencies.** America's public education system needs a stronger bench of courageous and effective systems leaders. But that won't happen until we prioritize diverse education system leadership and develop it.

INTRODUCTION

State and district school systems in America shape the lives and potential of millions of children, and with them, the economic health of the nation. Yet far too often, we as a country act as if finding and preparing leaders, and setting up succession plans for these systems, are of little importance. After one Chief's brief tenure, school systems lurch to another with a different vision. What remains consistent is that in most cases, the Chief's chair will be occupied by a white man⁹ — all the more troubling in a country where the majority of public school students are nonwhite. It's a situation that flies in the face of everything we know about the importance of leadership, the value of thoughtful preparation, and the power of diversity.

It doesn't have to be this way.

Great sports teams and high-performing businesses operate in a way that makes it clear the coaches and executives running them know that leadership matters. They invest thoughtfully in leadership development and succession planning, allowing future head coaches and CEOs to experience high-level coaching and mentorship so they're ready to step into the top job.

We believe that the success of our schools is at least as important as that of businesses and sports teams — so we built a coaching and mentoring program for school system leaders. The program is still young, but it's making a difference. Unfortunately, it's one of only a few of its kind. We as a country can and must be more intentional about diverse, well-trained leadership pipelines.

New data revealed in this report are suggestive of how greatly leadership matters. A clear, student-centered vision, a willingness to make hard decisions based on children's needs — that kind of leader makes a difference that shows up in the data about students' learning. These bold leaders are able to “bust the cage” of regulation, rules, and routines to make changes and decisions to benefit students.¹⁰ And when that leadership is sustained, the positive relationship between the student-centered vision and student learning is even greater.

Yet clear pathways and succession plans for state and district education chiefs are far and few between.¹¹ State department of education leaders serve an average of 2.5 years,¹² and leaders in urban districts serve an average of 3.2 years.¹³ When they leave, too often finding the next leader is a scramble.

During that scramble, there are far too many instances where the pool of candidates is limited and supplied from the same group of placement firms. The search process ends up mirroring and exacerbating the institutional system challenges. Challenges that include a lack of racial and/or gender diversity from all ends of the political spectrum, and limited ability and courage to carry out bold

policies and governance reforms that will move education systems forward.

That's not how it works in other fields where success is non-negotiable. When a head coach leaves a team, the team knows where to look — either they have been training a replacement or they can look to the coaching tree of another respected leader. Under this model, head coaches mentor assistant coaches, who go on to lead a team themselves. Take, for example, what happened when the Indianapolis Colts needed a new coach in 2009. They found one in Jim Caldwell, who started his career as Tony Dungy's quarterback coach with the Tampa Bay Buccaneers. Beyond Caldwell, Dungy can claim 6 NFL head coaches, as of August 2016, as part of his coaching tree, and 5 of those 6 were coaches of color.¹⁴

Great businesses cultivate future leaders and manage leadership transitions the same way. When Starbucks CEO Howard Schultz decided to step down, the company's board didn't look far for its next leader. Kevin Johnson was the company's No. 2 and his office connected to Schultz's, the better to pass on lessons and foster

Chiefs for Change Core Beliefs

a student-focused agenda

- **Access to Excellent Schools:** All students, irrespective of geography or economic means, have fair access to all schools and real pathways to college and meaningful careers.
- **Quality Curriculum:** All students deserve a learning experience that challenges them, feels relevant to them, ignites their curiosity and prepares them for college, meaningful careers and life.
- **Fully Prepared and Supported Educators:** Educators who are prepared in the classroom setting by school-based educators, rewarded for their skills, afforded opportunities to develop, and supported with timely, meaningful feedback and evaluation.
- **Accountability:** Schools should be evaluated based on student learning, in unambiguous terms and according to standards benchmarked against those of high-performing states and countries.
- **Free from Fear, Free to Learn:** Safe and welcoming communities that foster informed, civil debate, teaching students to engage with different points of view.

continuity. In many companies, having a deep bench of talent for all senior roles is a must, and these coaching trees are what drive sustained organizational success.

The idea that leadership matters isn't new. It's a critical lever that moves organizations across all industries, private and public, and that's why great teams and strong companies do not leave leadership transitions to chance.

Chiefs for Change — a network of district superintendents and state education Chiefs committed to advocating for change in education that benefits students — is working to strengthen leadership within education systems, ensure there is sustained success, and address the diversity crisis in school system leadership.

States with Chiefs for Change members at the helm are achieving results sharply different and better than others. And, where there has been continuity of vision across multiple CFC leaders in a given state or district, results are even more impressive. We believe CFC's core beliefs offer a useful portrait of the shared philosophy and orientation of these leaders. The core beliefs unite CFC members around an agenda focused intently on improving teaching and learning. It's clear that when leadership is rooted in these core values, which put purpose over politics and students at the center of decision-making, and is combined with meaningful time in office — the benefits to students are overwhelming.

Leaders of color comprise only 8 percent of district superintendents¹⁵ and 10 percent of state Chiefs,¹⁶ while a majority of the student population consists of students of color — a figure that

is expected to continue to rise to 55 percent over the next eight years.¹⁷ And, while our student population is 49 percent female and 76 percent of teachers are women, only 25 percent of district superintendents are women. State leaders fare better, with 43 percent being women.¹⁸

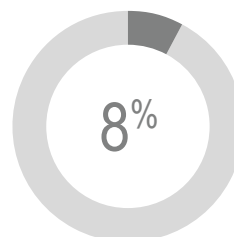
Chiefs for Change is making this commitment to diversity because we know it matters. As laid out in our [Diversity to the Forefront](#) brief,¹⁹ the evidence is compelling that students benefit when adults in schools reflect the populations they serve. Diversifying the workforce leads to higher expectations for all students, improves academic achievement, and creates inclusive learning environments, among other benefits. In stark contrast to district and state leadership nationally, CFC district membership is made up of 73 percent leaders of color and state membership is made up of 22 percent leaders of color. Additionally, our commitment to diversity is evident in our Future Chief cohort composition goals — we select cohorts that are at least 50 percent women and 75 percent leaders of color.

Given the findings on the relationship between continuity of vision and student results, there is an urgent need for skilled, diverse system leaders to step into Chief jobs as they open up. However, stepping in requires preparing for the job. Aspiring leaders need to develop skills and knowledge about board management, academics, personnel issues, politics and more. Yet, there are few programs that foster this blended set of skills in leaders. That's why the work Chiefs for Change is doing to help current system Chiefs build coaching trees, ones that are diverse in race, gender, and political ideology, really matters. Doing so is the best shot at ensuring that

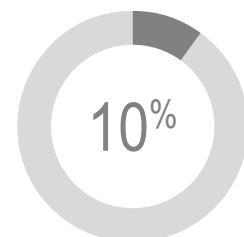
PERCENTAGE OF PEOPLE OF COLOR ACROSS THE EDUCATIONAL SYSTEM

Half of America's public school students are nonwhite, but the leadership of school systems doesn't reflect that reality.

NATIONALLY

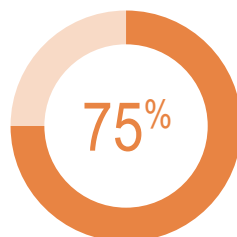


District Chiefs

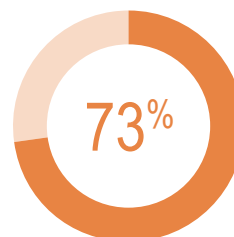


State Chiefs

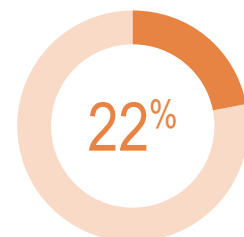
CHIEFS FOR CHANGE



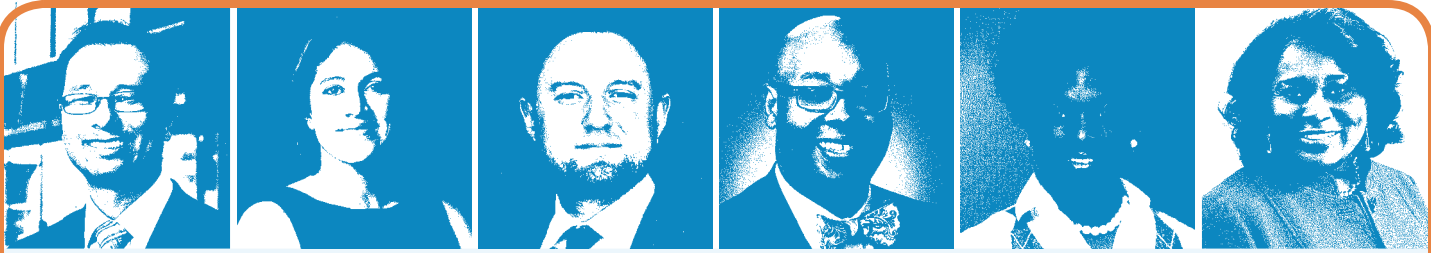
Future Chiefs



District Chiefs



State Chiefs



BUILDING A PIPELINE OF THE NEXT GENERATION OF EDUCATION CHIEFS

The **Future Chiefs** program is building a diverse pipeline of school systems leaders by identifying bold, innovative, budding state and district education leaders. Over the course of a 12-month program, Chiefs for Change provides 8–10 leaders in each cohort with collective learning opportunities that include coaching and mentorship from outstanding current Chiefs, leaving them far more prepared to step into vital top leadership roles. This allows these emerging leaders to develop the skills and networks they will need to build on their existing success and prepare them for the challenge of their roles ahead. #FutureChiefs

when education system leaders leave their posts, their efforts are sustained and continuously strengthened by the next generation.

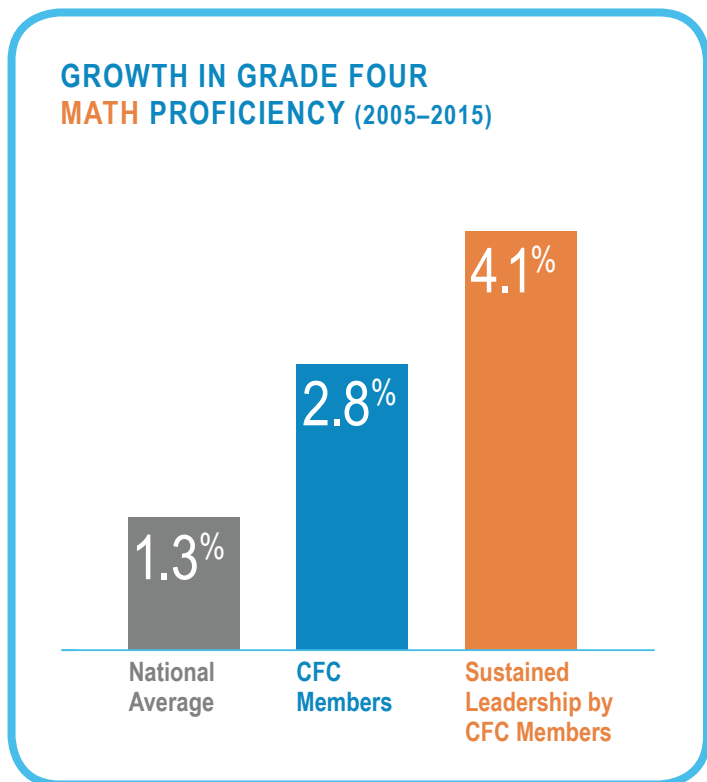
When leaders are prepared and qualified, data suggests they get results — even more so when that comes with the will and courage

to implement a bold, innovative agenda. With this in mind, collective efforts must go to strategically developing and intentionally placing talented, prepared, diverse leaders who can best represent the communities they serve and ensure a student-focused agenda. So, what do the numbers say?

THE CASE FOR TALENT

Looking at the numbers,²⁰ students that have been served by sustained Chiefs for Change leadership²¹ are achieving results sharply different and better than others. Comparing the 10 years of student

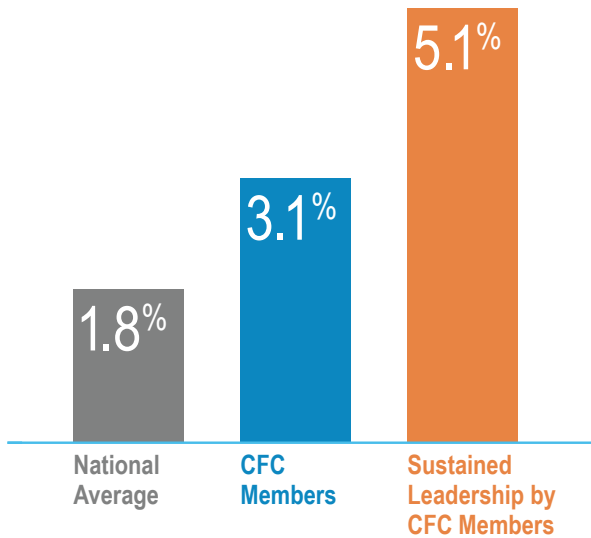
growth between 2005–2015, students in CFC’s member states²² grew in grade 4 math proficiency more than twice as fast as the national average on NAEP.



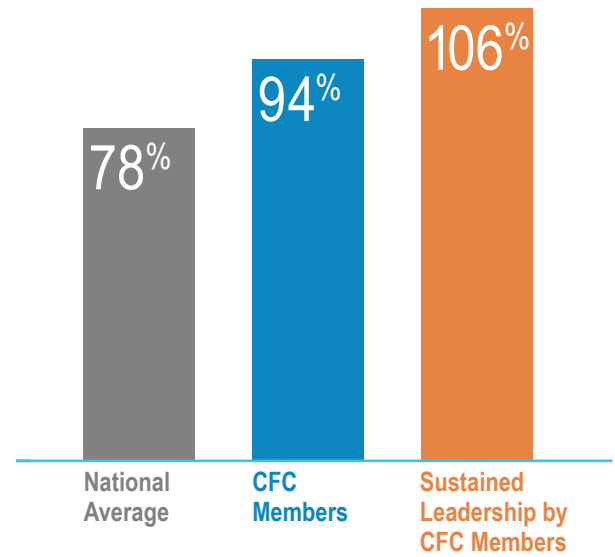
In states where there’s been 10+ years of sustained CFC leadership, the results are even better. Over the same 10 years, students in CFC member states with sustained leadership experienced 4.1 percent growth in grade 4 math proficiency between 2005 and 2015, which is more than three times as fast as the 1.3 percent national growth average. Nationally, states increased their overall grade 4 math scores by only 3 points on a 500-point scale. CFC member states increased their scores by 6 points, and CFC sustained leadership states increased their scores by 10 points, all within the same 10-year period. As the need for and importance of science, technology, engineering, and math (STEM) grows in America, these differences in math growth rates associated with sustained leaders with a bold vision are striking.

Examining the results in reading between 2005–2015, a similar pattern of amplified growth emerges for grade 4 proficiency, which is critical as early-grade reading achievement is a predictor for later-life success. Over a 10-year period, students in Chiefs for Change member states grew nearly twice as fast as the national average in grade 4 reading proficiency. States with sustained leadership by CFC members experienced 2 percent more growth in grade 4 reading proficiency than all states led by CFC members, and grew nearly three times as fast as the national average. Translating these growth rates to

GROWTH IN GRADE FOUR READING PROFICIENCY (2005–2015)



GROWTH RATE OF STUDENT AP PARTICIPATION (2007–2016)



states' overall grade 4 reading scores out of 500, the national reading score increased by 4 points, while the CFC member state average score increased by 6 points, and the CFC member states with sustained leadership average score increased by a striking 11 points.

Aligning to the quality curriculum pillar of the Chiefs for Change core beliefs, CFC member states are increasing college and career readiness for students, through intentionally expanding Direct Student Services (DSS) to foster greater access and support for Advanced Placement (AP) courses. As a result, AP participation in CFC member states has nearly doubled in the last 9 years, but the real standouts are those member states with sustained leadership, where AP participation has more than doubled. The chart above exhibits the percentage of grade 9–12 students participating in AP courses between 2007 and 2016,²³ and illustrates the remarkable growth in AP access seen under sustained leadership. The growth has been so fast that the percentage of students participating in AP courses in CFC sustained member states exceeds the national average. Access to AP courses signals an increase in rigor and expectations for all students, especially students of color and students in poverty, and is positively associated with higher rates of college enrollment and persistence.²⁴ Students say they feel more confident in college after taking AP courses and that it is not just the potential college credit but the academic skills, such as critical analysis and advanced writing, that are benefits of AP courses.²⁵

Despite differences in student demographics and leader experiences and backgrounds, Chiefs for Change members are asso-

ciated with faster growth on major student achievement indicators than their non-CFC peers nationwide.

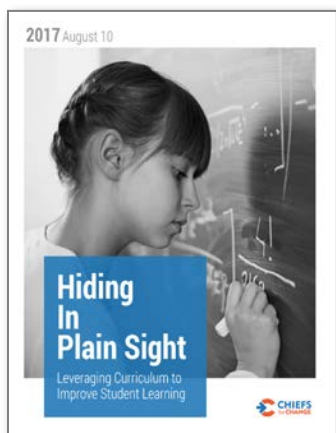
Sustained leadership focused on bold change allows innovative strategies to take hold and students to experience significant growth. The following targeted case studies highlight the case for sustained leadership. These case studies spotlight some of the key policies implemented over a steady period of time and show how those reforms built a strong foundation for these education systems and the students they serve.

School Choice and Teacher Leadership in Louisiana and the Recovery School District

Louisiana's success story over the past decade begins with Chiefs for Change alumnus member Paul Pastorek's appointment as State Superintendent in 2007. The years prior to Pastorek's appointment were marked by persistent low performance for Louisiana, where fewer than 25 percent of grade 3–8 students achieved mastery in ELA, math, science, and social studies between 1999–2007²⁶ and the 2006 graduation rate hovered around 50 percent.²⁷ There were historic gains in academic achievement and a 14 percent increase in graduation rates to 71 percent by the time of Pastorek's exit in 2011.²⁸ Pastorek was known for his courage to take on bold reforms and for unwaveringly serving the needs of Louisiana's kids, from raising accountability standards to increasing school choice options for students trapped in low-performing schools. The school choice reforms that he advanced included growing charter schools

and creating open enrollment systems within districts that required low-performing districts to offer students the ability to enroll in other districts.²⁹

After Pastorek's exit, John White succeeded him and continued to build on the strong work of his predecessor, including the implementation of open enrollment and parental choice efforts. The number of educational options for students continued to rise, with a 25 percent rise in the number of charter schools from 119 in 2011 to 149 in 2017, and a 30 percent increase in the number of magnet schools from 33 in 2011 to 43 in 2017.³⁰ White immediately launched "Louisiana Believes," which continues to this day as the state's education improvement agenda. The agenda's core is, "the premise that Louisiana students are just as capable as any students in America." It builds upon Pastorek's legacy of accountability and school choice through rigorous curriculum reforms aimed at ensuring students are college and career ready and developing the leadership of those closest to students in classroom, the teachers.³¹



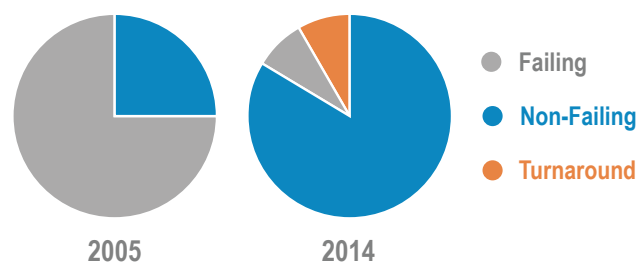
Louisiana blended the implementation of rigorous standards with the recruitment of teacher leaders to lead adoption and buy-in at the local level of high-quality, aligned curricular resources, and the success of this strategy is detailed in the Chiefs for Change brief [Hiding in Plain Sight](#). The RAND Corporation measured the success of this effort and found Louisiana math teachers were 30 percent more likely to use state-approved resources

than their peers in other states. The widespread adoption of rigorous state standards further contributed to the increase in college and career readiness in one of the poorest states in the country.³²

After 10 years, Louisiana is seeing noteworthy results from these reforms. The results are seen in the upper grades with the number of students taking AP classes nearly tripling between 2011-2017 and an additional 6 percent increase in graduation rates under John White, increasing the overall graduation rate by 20 percent to 77 percent in 2016 from 57 percent in 2006.

Documented in studies by U.S. Department of Education's Institute for Education Sciences,³³ the National Council on Teacher Quality,³⁴ and the Education Research Alliance,³⁵ Louisiana is most significantly and famously known for the work that has happened in the Recovery School District (RSD). One of Paul Pastorek's main duties when he assumed the State Superintendent position in 2007 was to oversee the Recovery School District and the schools of New Orleans

PERCENT OF SCHOOLS AT STATE RATING LEVELS—RECOVERY SCHOOL DISTRICT



ans after Hurricane Katrina's devastation. Aligned to Pastorek's state agenda, the RSD welcomed charter schools as a way to increase school choice and implemented a centralized open enrollment policy across the district to ensure equity of access.

Prior to taking on the state role, John White oversaw the RSD. When White transitioned to the state Chief role in 2012, he appointed the first leader of color to the RSD, Patrick Dobard, who was a New Orleans native and confidential assistant to Pastorek. Dobard brought a renewed community confidence to the Recovery School District and led the district as it became the country's first urban all-charter district.³⁶ In 2017 the RSD transitioned to leadership by [Kunjan Narechania](#), a mentee of White and alumna of Chiefs for Change's Future Chiefs program. Prior to taking on the CEO role at the RSD, Narechania worked as Assistant State Superintendent under White and with Dobard, who she says provided her with, "support and guidance."³⁷ She continues the work of the leaders who came before her and is ensuring the sustainment of a bold results-oriented agenda as the district transitions to local control under the Orleans Parish School Board. Narechania cites RSD's sustained and "unrelenting focus on equity for all students," as the factor that has made the most difference for students in New Orleans.³⁸

In the 10 years that the RSD has overseen New Orleans schools, RSD was ranked as the leading district in 2015 Brookings' Education Choice and Competition Index.³⁹ The district decreased the percentage of students in failing schools from 74 percent in 2005 to 8 percent in 2014,⁴⁰ narrowed the proficiency gap between RSD and Louisiana state averages by 21 percent, and increased the percentage of students eligible for the state's TOPS⁴¹ scholarship from 6 percent in 2005 to 24 percent in 2015. The continuity of vision for RSD provided needed stability in disaster-torn New Orleans for students to learn.

Teacher Leadership in Tennessee

Under the sustained leadership of two Chiefs for Change members, Commissioners Kevin Huffman and Candice McQueen, Tennessee has made truly impressive progress in student achievement over the better part of the past decade, which is a testament to the vision for and dedication to student growth. The Tennessee Department of Education made it a priority to incorporate teacher voice into a variety of initiatives aimed at improving schools and the teaching practice. Kevin Huffman was appointed Tennessee Education Commissioner in 2011 in a time when only 30 percent of grade 4 students were proficient in math and only 26 percent in reading.⁴² Huffman was appointed after Tennessee became one of two states to win Race to the Top funding in March 2010. This funding was used as a catalyst for Huffman's key policy moves: a new accountability system, a new teacher evaluation model (Tennessee Educator Acceleration Model), the transition to higher academic standards, and a change in governance strategies, including charter school expansion and the launch of the Achievement School District.

Common amongst all of Huffman's key policies was an explicit focus on student growth. The new accountability system aligned systems that involved teachers, principals, districts, and the state all focused on student growth. The new teacher evaluation model also included student growth as a measure of effectiveness and was predicated on frequent and consistent classroom observation. These systems held the adults accountable for student growth, and the adoption of rigorous academic standards and growth in choice options provided students the opportunity to make gains. The expansion of choice came along with an adoption of two new governance strategies: the creation of a turnaround zone, the Achievement School District, and charter school expansion. More on those governance strategies can be found in a recent Chiefs for Change brief, [The Hidden Equation in School Improvement](#).

The state developed intensive training and support aligned to the new standards and evaluation model to support the success of Huffman's agenda. The Tennessee Department of Education established a system that emphasized the power of the most effective educators as experts and leaders whose work is central to meaningful school improvement. Then in 2013, Tennessee systematized their teacher leadership model, Tennessee Instructional Leadership Standards (TILS), and launched the Teacher Leader Network. Tennessee's Teacher Leader Network was predicated on State Education Agency (SEA)-led professional development, followed by high-quality alignment and coherence to the state's vision by Local Education Agencies (LEAs).

By the time of Huffman's departure in 2015, grade 4 math proficiency rose 10 percent to 40 percent and reading proficiency rose 7 percent to 33 percent since 2011.⁴³ Candice McQueen succeeded Huffman in 2015 and continued to build upon the focus on account-

ability, student growth, and rigor by strengthening and growing the Teacher Leader Network, which is detailed in Chiefs for Change's brief, [The Network Effect](#).

McQueen further developed the network and added key programs such as the Tennessee Teacher Fellows and the Tennessee Teacher Leader Summit. The network has grown from 6 LEA-led teacher leadership models in SY13–14 to 59 districts involved in SY17–18.⁴⁴ Now, McQueen is leading the teacher leadership work through utilizing Title II-A funds in Tennessee's ESSA plan and in her fierce federal-level advocacy for the preservation of Title II-A funds in the federal education budget. With teacher leadership as a key piece of their ESSA plan, Tennessee received top scores by Bellwether independent reviewers.⁴⁵

The statewide efforts, which provide support for district-led programs, have empowered teachers to take ownership of policy, curriculum, technology use, and data through a "network of networks." At a time when the state was working to improve standards and raise expectations across the board, teacher leadership was key to successfully developing, launching, and sustaining reform efforts at the local level.

Tennessee's students continue to see strong outcomes under McQueen, and the state even boasts the fastest-improving student achievement on the NAEP between 2011 and 2015.⁴⁶ With sustained Chiefs for Change leadership with Kevin Huffman and Candice McQueen, Tennessee saw a record high graduation rate of 89.1 percent and highest-ever average ACT score at 20.1 in 2017,⁴⁷ and the state's growth is expected to continue as the Teacher Leader Network expands and advances.

Innovation under the Denver Plan in Denver Public Schools

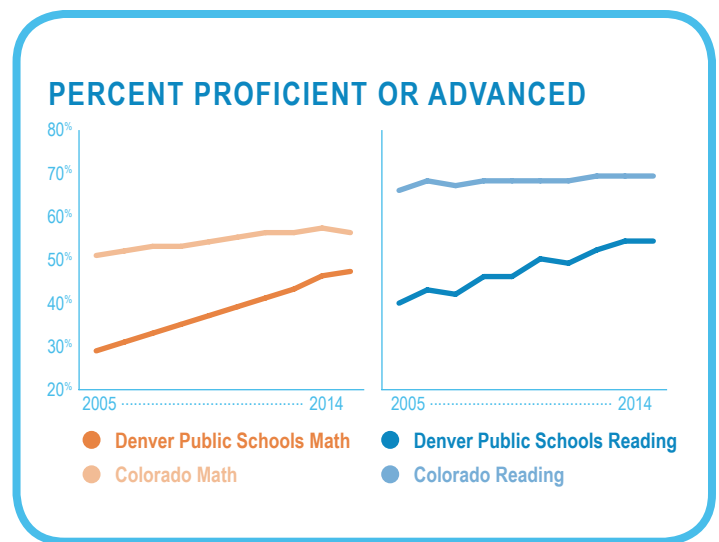
In 2005, then-Superintendent of Denver Public Schools Michael Bennet developed an innovative education reform strategy called "the Denver Plan." Bennet's plan looked to close large gaps for Denver students, which in 2005 lagged behind the rest of Colorado by 26 points in reading, 24 points in writing, and 22 points in math on the Colorado Student Assessment Program (CSAP). The plan has since been updated twice under Chiefs for Change member Tom Boasberg, since his appointment in 2009, and has put Denver on the map as a city of innovation producing outcomes. During the decade in which the plan has been in place, Denver has experienced steady academic progress with continued gap closing and strong outcomes for low-income students, students of color, students with disabilities, and English language learners. Additionally, the district has closed achievement gaps between itself and state averages, such as an 11-point gap closure in reading proficiency and a 13-point gap closure in math proficiency.⁴⁸

After Colorado passed a 2008 law giving school districts autonomy to set up innovative school models, Denver implemented a portfolio

strategy for its schools, in which the district cultivates a high-quality mix of traditional, charter, and innovation schools to allow for more educational approaches and more autonomy at the local level.⁴⁹ This portfolio strategy has given all schools, specifically traditional schools, more autonomy and flexibility with curriculum and personnel decisions and has been cited as a way to promote student-centered, personalized learning at the local level. The portfolio model requires a long-term strategy, and Denver has experienced positive outcomes following the multi-year commitment to the portfolio model by Tom Boasberg.

Building on this strategy, the most recent Denver Plan 2020 aims to increase college and career readiness of students through developing new high school models. Initiatives include an apprenticeship program, which provides on-the-job-training in new fields, and early-college programs, which allow high schoolers to graduate with a diploma and an Associates' degree. As a result, Denver has seen rising ACT scores, increasing AP enrollment by African-American, Latino, and American Indian/Alaska Native students, and triple the number of dual-enrollment courses taken.⁵⁰

To support the district's work, Denver has greatly invested in developing leaders from within starting at the teacher level, including partnerships with local universities, foundations, and by creating teacher residency programs. These programs have built a strong pipeline of school and systems leaders that are creating positive outcomes for students.⁵¹ Beyond general district talent development, Denver's Superintendent Tom Boasberg has also committed himself to coaching diverse leaders to take ownership of the equity agenda that runs deep in Denver. Boasberg's coaching tree



includes Deputy Superintendent of Denver Public Schools [Susana Cordova](#) (Future Chiefs Cohort 2), a 2018 Education Week Leader to Learn From.⁵² The innovative practices, the resulting gains for students, and the development of diverse leaders is the legacy of the sustained and student-focused leadership of Tom Boasberg.

Throughout Louisiana, Tennessee, and Denver, a common thread is the continuity of vision, intentional “coaching trees,” and a strong commitment to a bold agenda that is focused on equity and student needs and outcomes. These case studies show that it is not just about sustaining a single policy or a long-tenured leader, but ensuring that policies enacted and leaders chosen have the courage to carry out bold policies and governance reforms that are associated with positive gains for students.

THE CALL TO ACTION

The evidence for sustained leadership focused on ensuring all children have access to great schools is clear and compelling, but what now? To achieve the goals of strong leadership and continuity of vision, America needs a pipeline of great, diverse leaders, and school systems must invest in developing them. In lessons from the efforts of Chiefs for Change, three strands of work emerge that cultivate and encourage sustained, effective, and diverse leadership.

Establish Coaching Trees

Chiefs of state education agencies or school districts should establish coaching trees within their organizations as a vital way to develop future leaders who share a long-term vision for helping children excel and bringing more equity into their education systems. These coaching trees can ensure a continuity of vision for a state or local education agency over multiple leadership changes and can be leveraged to provide exposure and access to more racially and gender diverse leaders. This would allow effective approaches to take hold and be continuously

improved upon over many years, which is essential to realizing strong outcomes for kids.

Coaching trees encourage the development of skilled and ready leaders as future state education Chiefs and district superintendents through observation, apprenticeship, and mentorship. Further, coaching trees offer opportunities to increase diversity, as female and non-white candidates, too often excluded from networks of power, have a clearer path to the executive suite.

Successful coaching trees are evident in New Mexico and in Louisiana's Recovery School District. Former New Mexico Secretary of Education Hanna Skandera understood the importance of having a successor who would carry on her bold reforms. So, when she stepped down in the summer of 2017, Christopher Ruszkowski, an alumnus of the Future Chiefs program, was prepared and ready to be appointed to the position.



As part of Skandera's coaching tree, Ruszkowski served as her Deputy for Policy and Program and helped shape the state's plan under the federal Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA), leading it to become the top-rated plan in the country.⁵³ Today, Ruszkowski continues Skandera's vision for change, including building out a strong teacher leadership network that was recently highlighted in a Chiefs for Change brief, [Sustained, Bold](#)

[Reform](#). Since Skandera's entry into New Mexico in 2011, the evidence that these policies are working is compelling. New Mexico experienced an 8 percent increase in graduation rates, which hit an all-time high of 71 percent, and an AP course enrollment growth of 90 percent in 2017.⁵⁴

In Louisiana, prior to becoming Chief Executive Officer of the Recovery School District (RSD), Kunjan Narechania was part of John White's coaching tree, having served in White's cabinet as Assistant State Superintendent for the Louisiana Department of Education. When Narechania took the helm of RSD last year, White said of his mentee, "I can think of no better individual to lead this work than Kunjan." Narechania was an architect of Louisiana's comprehensive plan for school improvement, Louisiana Believes, and critical in the development of the state's ESSA plan. At the helm of RSD, Narechania is charged with aligning the district with these two key state plans.

The establishment of coaching trees provides the opportunity for states and districts to experience sustained leadership that is focused on improving teaching and learning. Just as states and districts are working to develop teacher and principal leadership programs, in which new teachers and aspiring school leaders learn from those excelling in the job, states and districts should formalize such approaches to developing system leaders.

Coaching trees only work, however, where there is intentional effort to build talented, diverse leadership. Stale coaching trees, reliant on cronyism and maintaining the status quo, don't disrupt closed systems and traditional privilege, they exacerbate it. State and district Chiefs already on the job should take the opportunity to intentionally and purposefully invest in racially and gender diverse coaching trees. When bold leaders represent the communities they serve, positive student outcomes are amplified. CFC's Chiefs are demonstrating that a commitment to aligned beliefs coupled with developing the next generation of courageous leaders results in stronger impact across political lines and policy contexts.

Build Leadership Pipelines

Beyond coaching trees, school systems are lacking in sheer numbers of skilled, ready, and diverse leaders to succeed current Chiefs. Looking at the education landscape, there aren't enough leadership development programs, and too few aspiring Chiefs are getting help developing the practical skills or the exposure and access needed to lead local and state school systems. It doesn't make sense when you consider what's at stake. State and district superintendents have a huge influence over the lives of the 50 million American children who attend public school. Looking across the country, Chief vacancies are frequent. In November 2018, more than 70 percent of states will be holding gubernatorial elections, which means that in many instances searches for new state Chiefs will begin nationwide. The average tenure of a state school systems Chief is only 2.5 years.⁵⁵ The bottom line is that America's schools need more individuals ready to take on state and district Chief roles.

Understanding that it takes time to build pipelines, more investment needs to be made to prepare committed individuals to be successful at the highest levels of education system leadership. More focused efforts and investment in results-proven leadership programs, such as CFC's Future Chiefs program, are needed to help aspiring leaders develop the critical skills needed and to establish an adequate pool of ready individuals to take on Chief roles. Districts and states have made important strides in developing teacher and principal leadership programs aimed at developing school leaders, but as a nation we haven't placed that same intentional focus on building out leadership at the highest levels of education systems — on finding and preparing excellent candidates for state Chiefs and district superintendents. That's a mistake. Great system leaders won't come out of nowhere. Like other professionals, they have to be trained, mentored, and given opportunities to lead.

Importantly, developing great leaders shouldn't stop after Chiefs are named or appointed but must continue into the early months and years of an individual's tenure to ensure these Chiefs outlast the dangerously low national average of tenure length. Because there is so little practical preparation for these top jobs, far too

In today's education landscape, leadership at the state and local levels is a significant factor in helping all of our kids reach their full potential, and building a pipeline of skilled and qualified future education Chiefs is more important now than ever before.

—Hanna Skandera,
former New Mexico
Secretary of Education

many new Chiefs find themselves isolated and without a community of support to turn to once they are on the job. Collective efforts must focus on getting more talented, diverse leaders into the top of education system leadership and then helping them grow and remain on the job for as long as possible. Lorain, Ohio, provides an example of how this can work. An alumnus of the Future Chiefs program, David Hardy Jr. recently stepped into the Chief Executive Officer role in Lorain after serving as assistant superintendent in St. Louis Public Schools. As he began building his intervention plan for Lorain, Hardy leveraged his access to the Chiefs for Change network — members and his Future Chiefs cohort members — to gather advice, support, and lessons on developing a strategic and operational plan. His use of his Future Chiefs resources positioned him well for his first year on the job. With greater investment, opportunities like this could become the norm in educational leadership transitions and ensure that more talented leaders are positioned for long careers at the top level of these systems.

Developing Leaders for the Top Position

Lessons from the desks of the nation's top education leaders can help inform the creation and refinement of development programs for Chief roles. It is clear that the requirements of the top jobs at state and local education agencies are starkly different from the requirements faced by the second or third in command, and explicit knowledge-building and training is needed. System leaders need to learn how to be the public face of a district or state education agency and how to make purposeful and strategic choices regarding how to spend time, energy, and resources given their broad mandate. In addition, district and state Chiefs have to balance relationships and negotiations among various stakeholders while aligning their decisions to a vision and set of core values. Some leaders also have to learn how to navigate the privilege of power and rising through the ranks as a woman and/or leader of color.

That is why the Future Chiefs program aims to match potential Chiefs, candidates who have demonstrated success at system-building and shown a deep commitment to equity and excellence, with successful sitting and alumni Chiefs to learn these skills through shadowing and mentoring opportunities. The Future Chiefs program builds upon significant work undertaken over the past two decades by other organizations aiming to boost leadership skills and capacity-building at each level of the education system. Future Chiefs maintains a focus on cultivating those talented, diverse leaders who are one to two career steps away from becoming a district or state Chief. Giving the Future Chiefs access to the nation's only membership of exceptional state and district-level leaders provides our Future Chiefs unique, unparalleled access to transformational leaders and high-impact education organizations. As Chiefs for Change continues to refine and advance the program, lessons from our Chiefs, especially those new to the top position, will be essential to further understanding the reality of the job and building new leadership programs.

Future Chiefs: One Approach to Building a Pipeline of Qualified, Diverse Leaders

Chiefs for Change launched the Future Chiefs program to develop coaching trees, build pipelines of diverse leaders, and prepare emerging leaders for the top positions in school districts and state education agencies. These leader candidates are strategic systems builders with a clear focus on excellence and equity and a commitment to developing the skills and networks needed to succeed as a student-focused Chief.

Chiefs for Change provides 8–10 leaders in each year-long cohort with collective learning opportunities that include coaching and mentorship from outstanding current Chiefs, leaving them thoroughly prepared to step into vital leadership roles. Between cohorts 1 and 2, 50 percent of Future Chiefs have been promoted or placed in district or state Chief roles, illustrating the success of the preparation and overall program.

Future Chiefs benefit from learning experiences that include individual coaching, shadowing, and participation in virtual and in-person peer-to-peer sessions. Through coaching and shadowing, Future Chiefs gain valuable insider knowledge from former and current Chiefs in our network, such as navigating board politics, managing a diverse portfolio of work, and handling the personal challenges that come with the top role. The virtual and in-person training sessions delve into executive communications, media, personnel management, and promising practices in education. Throughout the program, Future Chiefs have access to the Chiefs for Change network, partners, and policy tools to further their professional development and ensure they can make the transition from an exceptional number two, into a transformational number one. The most important element of the Future Chiefs program is helping to place and support participants in Chief roles. Once Future Chiefs are selected as Chiefs, Chiefs for Change members provide transitional supports to ensure their long-term success.

The Future Chiefs program represents an important and impactful model to diversify and prepare the school systems leaders that our nation needs.

Future Chiefs will help better prepare a diverse group to step up and lead schools, districts, and states so that we continue to improve both equity and excellence for students.

—John B. King Jr.,
former U.S. Secretary
of Education

THE COMMITMENT

Chiefs for Change is committed to playing a long-term role in diversifying and further strengthening the education leadership pipeline. To achieve strong, sustained leadership and diversity, we must invest in and call for leader coaching trees, leadership pipelines at district and state agencies, and leader-development programs like Future Chiefs. In this next stage of education reform, we must give aspiring leaders a set of experiences and the kind of preparation that will enable them and our school systems to thrive. To meet the need of immediate and upcoming Chief vacancies, we must develop a pool of prepared, diverse candidates to take the helm of our states and districts and lead with courage. Chiefs for Change is looking forward to forging new partnerships in this endeavor. It will take stakeholders from every level of the education system to invest in these leaders and say that leadership matters.

With state plans now submitted under the federal Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA), sustained, student-focused, and diverse leadership will be essential to carry forward the adoption and implementation of the reforms and policies states are proposing to enact. Louisiana State Superintendent John White and the late Massachusetts Commissioner Mitchell Chester wrote that the kind of radical change some state Chiefs are advocating for in their plans is “reliably doable” in the presence of disciplined leadership.⁵⁶ State ESSA plans include proposals to strengthen accountability, improve chronically struggling schools, advance teacher and school leadership, invest in evidence-based practices, and expand quality educational options for families.⁵⁷ All of this will take bold leadership and diverse voices.

America faces a critical time, during which diverse and sustained leadership is needed to make good on the promises of ESSA for students nationwide. And the impact of bold leadership is evident. State plans that are getting exceptionally high marks from independent reviewers include ambitious efforts by Tennessee and New Mexico to advance personalized learning and teacher leadership and a real commitment in Louisiana to identify underperforming schools and raising expectations over time. Yet plans, while essential, are only a beginning. Setting these ambitious plans instills hope for our most struggling students, but sustaining the vision through leadership sets the stage to realize actual outcomes.

It’s already clear what a difference well-prepared, courageous leadership can make — and the positive relationship is even clearer when it can be sustained over many years and multiple Chiefs. Such intentional, thoughtful approaches to preparation, coaching, succession planning, and transition are the norm for leading organizations in other fields — and they must become the norm in education, too, combined with a focus on increasing racial and gender diversity of system-level leadership. It makes a real difference for kids, and the knowledge, the practice, already exists in many places. Now, our states and districts must invest in — and draw candidates from — training and pipeline efforts that will help to produce bold, sustained, diverse leadership. Not because it feels good, or is easy, or is politically convenient — but because it helps kids.

ENDNOTES

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