

Change at the Speed of Trust

Advancing Educational Opportunity Through Cross-Sector Collaboration in Louisville

GAYLEN MOORE, JORRIT DE JONG, PAUL REVILLE, LYNNE SACKS, AND ANNA BURGESS

On the morning of June 4, 2018, members of Louisville Mayor Greg Fischer’s Louisville Promise Cabinet assembled around a U-shaped table in a downtown office building.¹ The cabinet—two and a half years into a collaborative process of reimagining the way that Louisville supports its students and prepares them for the workforce and higher education—was about to hire its first executive director. It would soon emerge from its chrysalis as a brand-new organization that would direct and streamline “wraparound” health and social services for students and provide “promise” scholarships, guaranteeing at least two years of college funding to graduates of Jefferson County Public Schools (JCPS).

What had begun under the previous mayor as part of a city-wide effort to raise the status and economic muscle of Louisville among peer cities, had become an integral part of Fischer’s vision: a city where the values of compassion, health, and lifelong learning were paramount. The hope was that the cabinet would soon become an institution capable of sustaining itself well beyond Fischer’s tenure. But there was an organization to design, an operating budget and a scholarship fund to pay for, and what one cabinet member called the “2,000-pound gorilla” of systemic racism to reckon with.¹ Further, the school board was fighting the Kentucky state government over what the board viewed as a politically motivated and legally dubious takeover attempt.

The mayor, coming from another community event, arrived late and took a seat at the table. He spoke briefly about the qualities the cabinet should look for in an executive director and listened as cabinet members discussed budgetary details, plans for summer learning and data sharing, and the school district’s new racial equity policy.

The state government had concluded an audit of JCPS in April and cited “deep-seated organizational and cultural challenges” in its recommendation for state management of the district.² The cabinet members wanted the state to understand what they knew: little could be done to improve Jefferson County’s educational outcomes without addressing the hours students spent outside school buildings and the systemic racism that was driving the achievement gap.

¹ The cabinet, which arose out of Mayor Fischer’s “Cradle to Career” initiative, was in its earlier days referred to as the “Cradle to Career cabinet.”



Fischer made it clear that he heard the cabinet members and shared their concerns—and some of their frustration. As the meeting drew to a close, with the specter of takeover hanging heavy over the table, he spoke bluntly. “If we don’t use this opportunity to move this work forward,” he said, “then shame on us.”³

New Louisville, New Goal, New Mayor

In 2000, voters approved a referendum to merge Louisville city government with Jefferson County government and, two years later, elected Louisville’s previous three-term mayor, Jerry Abramson, to lead the new metro government. In preparation for the merger, Louisville’s philanthropic community began working with Abramson, a workforce investment board called KentuckianaWorks, and Greater Louisville Inc. (GLI, the city’s chamber of commerce) to benchmark Louisville metro against fourteen peer cities. A report by the Brookings Institution confirmed what GLI leadership had been hearing for years whenever the city lost out on contracts with developers: Louisville did not have enough educated people in its workforce. In fact, Louisville ranked fourteenth out of fifteen in percentage of the adult population holding a bachelor’s degree.⁴ Out of this benchmarking effort came the Greater Louisville Project, which identified education as one of four “deep drivers” of progress and became a catalyst for cross-sector collaboration in the city over the next decade.

In May 2010, a consortium of college and university presidents, public and parochial school superintendents, and business and nonprofit leaders joined Abramson in signing the Greater Louisville Education Commitment, pledging to work toward a goal of 55,000 new degrees (40,000 bachelor’s degrees and 15,000 associate degrees) by 2020. (See Appendix 1.) A backbone organization called 55,000 Degrees (55K) was established to guide the collaborative effort with Mary Gwen Wheeler, Abramson’s senior advisor for education and youth, at the helm and the mayor as chairman of the board. An African American delegation from the roundtable created a partner organization called 15,000 Degrees (15K) to ensure that 15,000 of those new degrees would be held by African Americans.

In November 2010, as Mayor Abramson stepped down to run for lieutenant governor, Louisville elected Greg Fischer, an entrepreneur and investor, to take the reins of metro government. As the new chairman of 55K, Mayor Fischer challenged the organization’s partners and the broader community to make specific commitments and pledges to boost college enrollment and completion, and 55K tracked progress. With a few years of trend data in hand, Fischer, a self-described “systems thinker,” started wondering why so many students coming out of the public-school system were not prepared for college. He recognized that 55K might be too narrow a lens for the work: “I said, ‘We need to expand our view beyond just a college degree into what a broader system of lifelong learning is all about.’ . . . As we looked into why kids aren’t ready . . . poverty kept coming back—under-resourced children, either economically or from a family support system. That’s the constraint.”⁵

Fischer’s answer was an initiative called Cradle to Career, launched in January 2015. The initiative comprised four pillars, each with a lead organization to coordinate and monitor action in particular domains: kindergarten readiness led by Metro United Way; K-12 success led by JCPS; postsecondary transition and completion led by 55K; and twenty-first century workforce and talent led by KentuckianaWorks. (See Appendix 2.) Each pillar reported quarterly to the mayor and participated in an annual Cradle to Career summit with stakeholders from all sectors.

Yes, By All Means!

At the first Cradle to Career summit in September of 2015, the message from the community, according to Ashley Parrott, the mayor's senior policy and development advisor, was clear: The effort still paid limited attention to providing the social, health, and legal services that families needed or otherwise addressed the social and economic determinants of youths' ability to succeed. "It took a little while to get people to understand that the full system of learning is more important than any individual pillar," Fischer noted. This observation led him to consider how he might bring together stakeholders more effectively and what the appropriate role of the mayor's office should be in orchestrating such an effort: "There started being questions like, 'Who owns this work? Is it adequate for the mayor's office to be driving this work? What if there's a new mayor?'"

The following month, Fischer gave a talk on the Cradle to Career Initiative at a conference sponsored by the US Conference of Mayors. The conference also featured a presentation on a new initiative out of Harvard's Education Redesign Lab, called By All Means (BAM), which aimed to help cities design and implement individualized systems of support and opportunity to ensure children's success in school and life. BAM envisioned participating cities as "laboratories of innovation" that would "test and refine [the Education Redesign Lab's] theory that meeting the complex array of children's needs and developing their interests and talents requires a city-wide approach."⁶ Each participating city was required to establish a "children's cabinet" chaired by the mayor to coordinate services, and BAM offered twice-yearly convenings with other partner cities and a part-time facilitator to assist the work in each community. (See Appendix 3 for an overview of BAM.) Fischer immediately recognized BAM and the children's cabinet as opportunities to bring more players from the health, social services, business, and philanthropic sectors into the Cradle to Career work.

Meanwhile, back in Louisville, Mary Gwen Wheeler was looking for something to turbocharge 55K's efforts: "We did reach this point . . . where we've been making incremental progress, but we're not going to hit the goal. We've got to accelerate; we've got to look more deeply."⁷

She began exploring a partnership with Say Yes to Education (Say Yes), a foundation that helped cities develop cross-sector efforts to provide wraparound services for students, and promise scholarships guaranteeing college tuition at partner colleges to all high-school graduates. "One of the clearest problems and barriers [for 55K] was the growing cost of college," said Wheeler. "We had a [state] government that was continuing to disinvest . . . so the cost of education got higher and higher, and the value proposition got lower and lower."

Fischer, Wheeler, and JCPS Superintendent Donna Hargens met and easily came to the decision to pursue partnerships simultaneously with both Say Yes and By All Means. The first step was to convene a cabinet that would bring together stakeholders from all corners of the city.

Refining the Governance, Keeping the Promise

The mayor's office, hedging its bets, cast a wide net. Karen Wunderlin, Louisville's BAM facilitator, described the first version of the Cradle to Career Cabinet in the summer of 2016 as "kind of the way you put together your Thanksgiving table when you don't want to leave anyone out."⁸ Cabinet member Sadiqa Reynolds, president and CEO of the Louisville Urban League, concurred, sounding a note of caution: "You have to be really strategic about how you get . . . buy-in, because you don't want the table so large that it's really nobody's responsibility to get the work done."⁹ (See Appendix 4 for a picture of the cabinet's first configuration.)

This was a concern because the mayor viewed the convening of the cabinet as a first step toward shifting ownership of the Cradle to Career work out of his office. Though metro government continued to offer administrative support through the end of 2016—convening a small group of cabinet members weekly to work on the Say Yes application—Fischer understood that an undertaking with such broad, long-term goals could not depend on any one elected official. "The community has got to show that it owns this," he said.

In its first few months, the cabinet worked with BAM to launch an asset-mapping project and, responding to reports of increasing behavioral incidents and suspensions in JCPS, a behavioral health working group, as well. But just as work was getting underway, two major blows threw the cabinet's future into doubt.

In February of 2017, the state education commissioner announced that the state would begin a full audit of JCPS management, after a news report alleged that the school system had underreported incidents involving the restraint and seclusion of children. Around the same time, it became clear that the city did not have the capacity to raise enough funds to establish an endowment to pay for promise scholarships. "Originally, we thought it was going to be \$125 to \$150 million, and that was a doable number, I thought," said Fischer, "but once all the numbers came . . . we needed . . . \$500 to \$600 million. That's a big foundation or a big endowment for a city our size, or probably any city." Without sufficient fundraising strength, the city would not qualify for financial support from Say Yes. Up until that point, much of the cabinet's energy had focused on how the city would pursue Say Yes. With that door seemingly closed, the state auditing JCPS, and the cabinet becoming increasingly difficult to fit inside the mayor's conference room, the group scheduled a retreat. It was time to regroup, define the cabinet's goals, and refine its model of shared governance. Going into the February 2017 retreat, according to Wheeler, the question was not just how to move forward, but "Are we still going forward?"

Even though the cabinet was already, in Wunderlin's words, "unwieldy," facilitators further expanded the circle of stakeholders for the retreat. "We invited the head of the Center for Health Equity," said Wheeler. "We invited some others that hadn't been at the table . . . some of the Latino groups . . . and we developed a desired-results statement and out of that, a sort of mission . . . that . . . really lifts up and unapologetically takes on the issues of systemic racism and poverty."

After some intensive thought and wordsmithing, the final desired-results statement read, “Every child in Louisville is prepared for college, career, and a successful, productive life.” The mission statement read, “We will provide the caring, belief, access, and supports each student needs to achieve and succeed and will work to remove and mitigate systemic barriers of poverty and structural racism.”¹⁰

With that settled, Wunderlin felt it was time to revise the cabinet structure. “There was a moment where I said, ‘Okay guys, . . . This is the worst meeting you’ve ever come to. Next week we’re going to put As, Bs, and Cs, and we’re going to figure out who has to be at the table.’” Eighteen organizations, including the mayor’s office, the four pillars, three major funders, four higher-education institutions, the Jefferson County Teachers Association, and several key community organizations and service providers made up the official cabinet. The rule established was that only the top executives for each organization or (if unable to attend a meeting) their designees would sit at the table. Others could take seats around the perimeter of the room. The outer circle included many staff members who played key roles as members of a team that met weekly to manage the work of the cabinet. This core team ensured that, in the words of Theresa Reno-Weber, CEO of Metro United Way, “there was just a constant train moving down the track . . . trying to make progress.”¹¹ (See Appendix 5 for a picture of the cabinet’s second configuration.)

Because the mayor needed to move the administrative work out of his office to protect the long-term prospects of the enterprise, he had to find an organization willing to serve as the cabinet’s backbone. The obvious choice was 55K, but Fischer acknowledged that this was a lot to ask of Wheeler, her staff, and the organization’s funders and board members. “When we decided to liberate the effort to be full Cradle to Career, and not just 55K, [Wheeler] could’ve dug in her heels and said, ‘Look, I’m funded on 55K, I’m measured on 55K. So, while all this stuff is interesting, that’s not my mandate.’” Instead, Wheeler “was very thoughtful. . . . She said, ‘There’s a bigger picture here.’” Taking part in the BAM initiative alongside five other cities was a powerful motivator for Wheeler: “That sense that there were other cities struggling with [fixing their education system] too, and that this was something worth doing . . . to break that ironclad tie with poverty and education. . . . [W]e said, ‘Yes.’”

By the spring of 2017, the cabinet had come to a consensus that in spite of the financial obstacles, it would continue to pursue the Say Yes theory of action: increasing post-secondary participation and completion through promise scholarships; cross-government and cross-sector collaboration; strategic uses of data; and “comprehensive academic, health, financial, and social/emotional supports.”¹² (See Appendix 6 for the Say Yes strategy and theory of action.) Say Yes was launching a consulting arm called the Weiss Institute (Weiss) to conduct research and offer retail technical assistance to communities, and the cabinet agreed to make Louisville the first city to work with Weiss. In September, the eighteen members signed a memorandum of understanding with Weiss as the “Louisville Promise partners” and began calling themselves the Louisville Promise Cabinet.

Establishing Trust: “An Epidemic of Artificial Harmony”

As Fischer’s Cradle to Career Initiative evolved into Louisville Promise, cabinet members had to feel their way through collective governance and decision making. “Sometimes you have to talk in circles and circles until people get comfortable,” said Parrott.¹³ Wunderlin put a finer point on it: “There is an epidemic of artificial harmony in Louisville [. . .]. People are really gracious to each other in person, but we don’t ever get to the real conversation.”

Members of the cabinet may have been able to count on one another to be cordial, but they had to work to build trust. “Trust has been one of the rate-limiting factors in the collaboration,” said Brent McKim, president of the Jefferson County Teachers Association (JCTA). “We’ve been able to have adequate—sometimes barely—trust to move things forward.” Jonathan Lowe, director of strategy for JCPS, agreed: “There are complicated political tensions in the cabinet that are very Louisville-specific.”¹⁴

For instance, according to McKim, some felt that JCTA had played a role in the ouster of Wheeler’s husband as chair of the Jefferson County Board of Education in November 2016 and the subsequent resignation of Superintendent Hargens at the end of the 2016-2017 school year.¹⁵ Hargens was succeeded by Dr. Marty Pollio.

In the summer of 2017, Wheeler’s father-in-law, David Jones, Sr., (the founder of Humana, Louisville’s only Fortune 100 company) quietly co-founded the Steering Committee for Action on Louisville’s Agenda (SCALA) as a 501c3 loosely made up of seventy or so influential community members, with his son chairing its subcommittee on education. The mayor was not a member but attended some meetings.

In January 2018, *Insider Louisville* publicized the group’s existence in a report suggesting that SCALA supported a state takeover of JCPS.¹⁶ According to Reno-Weber, who sat on both SCALA and the cabinet, the report was misleading: “We hadn’t, as a group, even figured out, do we vote on things? Are we taking public policy positions?” But the damage was done. There was already a perception among some on the school board and in the teachers’ union that Fischer had flipped his position to one supporting a charter school bill the union opposed.ⁱⁱ The idea that the mayor and other cabinet members had ties to a group perceived to be advocating state management sowed intense mistrust.

As the state prepared to announce the findings of its audit of JCPS in April 2018, Fischer made a public statement unequivocally opposing a state takeover and stating that “the changes driven by Dr. Pollio as well as JCPS’s implementation of the audit findings should be given a chance to work.”¹⁷ On April 30, Interim State Commissioner on Education Wayne Lewis recommended state management of JCPS. Pollio held a joint press conference with Diane Porter, chair of the Jefferson County Board of Education. Asked what they would do tomorrow, Porter said that they would show up and work for the

ⁱⁱ Fischer had spoken out against provisions in the state’s charter school bill, but after hearing his thoughts on it, state legislators added language giving the mayors of Louisville and Lexington power to authorize charters: (<https://www.courier-journal.com/story/news/politics/metro-government/2017/03/07/jcps-board-says-mayor-greg-fischer-blindsided-them-charter-schools-stance/98812406/>).

students of JCPS. “My education started in a segregated Jefferson County,” said Porter, “So this is real important for me, for our kids, that we not take any steps back.”¹⁸

The achievement gap between Black and white students and the question of how to address it—or even talk about it—was another area in which trust remained fragile among members of the cabinet. “I’m very proud of the fact that from day one at Louisville Promise we said, ‘each, every, and all,’” said Audwin Helton, co-chair of 15K. “We’ve had facilitators in to talk about equality and equity and making sure that we . . . understand the difference [. . .]. [T]here have been times when we kind of pause to make sure we understand what we say.”¹⁹

At a May 2017 BAM convening at Harvard, the Louisville team sought to meet with keynote speaker Michael McAfee, president of PolicyLink, an organization devoted to advancing racial and economic equity. They wanted to discuss “their need to confront the historical and ongoing reality of racism in their community.”²⁰ Progress in addressing this reality was painfully slow. Alice Houston—co-chair of 15K, and, like Porter, educated in segregated schools in a redlined Louisville—referred to the stubborn persistence of the achievement gap as “Groundhog Day.”ⁱⁱⁱ²¹ At every step, the cabinet had to consider not just how its plans pushed back against 400 years of systemic racism, but also how its own conversations, practices, and choices played into issues of bias and equity. “We had exercised our collective impact muscle,” said Wheeler. “The muscle we hadn’t really developed was an equity muscle [. . .]. We begin with an equity stance. It’s very much embedded in our thinking, but our practice is not all that strong.”

For example, as the cabinet began working with Weiss to develop a new backbone organization to carry the work forward, an event planned to seek community input was presented as a farmers’ market, where participants could wander among the “issue areas” they were interested in learning about. Wheeler explained, “We got feedback that going to the farmers’ market is a pretty upper-middle-class thing to do, and it left a number of people feeling out of place.” Even worse, “when you looked around the room at who was facilitating each area, we were all white—except for Ashley [Parrott]. We just kind of blew it.”

Integrating Perspectives: “Everybody Wears Their Hat”

The cabinet’s decision to work with BAM and Weiss to pursue promise scholarships and provide support services set the partners down a path, but steering all of its members in the same direction was no simple matter. “What makes it easy is the commitment to do better,” said Porter. “What makes it hard is everybody wears their hat.”

Tony Zipple, president of Centerstone Kentucky, Louisville’s largest provider of behavioral health services, pointed out that in a relatively poor state like Kentucky, a scarcity mindset hinders collaboration: “People often tend to be quite protective of their turf and territory . . . : ‘I’m willing to collaborate as long as it doesn’t cost me anything.’”²²

ⁱⁱⁱ *Groundhog Day* is a 1993 movie in which the main character is forced to live the same day in his life over and over again.

For a number of those working in the private sector, whose core business was not directly related to the cabinet's work, the time commitment was too great. "You've got to keep it interesting and relevant for folks whose day job is not doing this thing,"²³ said Kent Oyler, president of Greater Louisville Inc., the city's chamber of commerce. Helton, who runs a geographic information systems business, said, "The business case for everything we do with 55K and Louisville Promise is that we want a better pool of candidates in the workforce, and improving educational outcomes is the way to get there." But, he added, "I'm not seeing a great number of CEOs sitting at the table."

Helton also pointed out that the foundations in the cabinet bring a bottom-line discipline to the enterprise that comes from the private sector. Houston—who was also business owner and board member of the James Graham Brown Foundation—cautioned the cabinet that if it could not demonstrate that students were prepared to take advantage of promise scholarships, the funds would not materialize.

Some working in JCPS felt that the Louisville Promise focus on governance and fundraising drew energy away from important work that already was or could be happening in schools in the short term. One reason for this was the cabinet's commitment to using Weiss's data analysis capabilities to determine the optimal mix of wraparound services. Securing authorization to share student data with the cabinet and Weiss was a sensitive, time-consuming process that required many rounds of consultation throughout the public-school bureaucracy.

The cabinet did help JCPS make headway on some important initiatives, such as the Backpack of Success, which created individualized electronic portfolios that allowed students to demonstrate mastery in a variety of twenty-first century skills. Another initiative, Academies of Louisville, was a model for the city's high schools to help students get work experience in their areas of interest. But despite this progress, the cabinet seemed reluctant to invest in new initiatives—even some that seemed like easy wins to those working in schools—before the analytics came back from Weiss.

Some nonprofit service providers in the cabinet questioned the lack of focus on changing state-level policy. "We know that doing good, intensive, wraparound work—it makes a difference here," said Zipple, "but Medicaid and the Department for Community-Based Services and the rest of the system has been slow to move. State-level advocacy is hard to do in this town." Michael Gritton, executive director of KentuckianaWorks, also wondered if state government had a role to play: "We didn't identify the problem as a state legislative problem." He pointed out that neighboring Tennessee had already made community college free for eligible students. Meanwhile, "University of Louisville and Jefferson Community and Technical College were taking yearly budget cuts, and we never really did anything about it."²⁴

Even within Louisville, it was not always clear that metro government was aligning its policy with its aspirations. Reno-Weber, who became CEO of Metro United Way after serving for five years in the mayor's office as chief of performance and technology, explained, "For all that the mayor is focused on that is different from every other mayor that has been in place. . . there was no statistical difference in

terms of the way he allocated his budget.”^{iv} Sadiqa Reynolds of the Urban League noted, “We can’t do this work without a focus on policy. Otherwise, we’re just another Band-Aid organization. We’ve got to change the policy that creates the need in the first place.”

Finally, some in the cabinet perceived an existential threat in the decisions to be made about governance and scholarships. Some of those representing higher education institutes saw one another as competitors, and worried that cabinet decisions to partner with one school or another for scholarships would not be in their best interests. For its part, 55K had been putting the lion’s share of its time and energy into supporting the cabinet’s work, serving as its “backbone” and leading the ad hoc scholarship committee. One of the looming governance questions was whether there should ultimately be one board to oversee all aspects of Louisville Promise or whether the scholarship board should remain a separate entity. If the board remained separate it would serve as a home for 55K and its staff, but if the cabinet chose a single-board model the fate of 55K was uncertain.

Everybody came to the enterprise with the interests of students at heart, but the true level of consensus, in the words of Zipple, “depends on your altitude of view. [. . .] As you get down onto the runway, it’s still a little messier.” With state officials vilifying JCPS, both school administrators and the cabinet wanted to speak with one voice about the cabinet’s work and the changes it sought but was not entirely prepared to do so. Some, including the mayor, remained unsettled about what the cabinet should call itself. A plan to make a public announcement on Louisville Promise shortly after the signing of the memorandum of understanding was canceled on the recommendation of Weiss, because the cabinet had not yet resolved key questions or sought adequate community input.

Not everyone was entirely sold on the idea of “last-dollar” scholarships for every student. “My concern was growing the wealth gap,” said Reynolds. “Because if you think about the lens that I’m looking through, it’s how do I grow wealth for people who have generally not been in a position to really be empowered or transfer wealth in this country? . . . [If] you’re going to give . . . the last dollar to everybody, then you’re not talking about leveling the playing field at all.”

Gritton shared some of Reynolds’ concerns. He was uncertain about how the city would leverage Weiss’s research to ensure the right balance of wraparound services and define a process for selecting scholarships. “That is work no one in the country has figured out how to do as far as I know. . .” he said. “Now you’re asking [the new executive director] to do that, and oh, by the way . . . raise [an endowment] and build scholarships and [establish eligibility rules]. That’s too much.”

^{iv} As the cabinet prepared to launch as its own organization, city government earmarked funds for the new organization as well as programs relevant to its goals.

Are We Not Moving Fast Enough or Is It Just Me?

As time wore on, there was a pervasive sense that it was all taking too long. It was lost on no one that children's futures were at stake. "We're basically trying to address the wrongs of our history and education system," said Fischer. "So, it's not like we're just collecting a little bit of data on some things and making a decision. But then, on the other side, you have the urgency of our school system failing our kids. So, we can't study this away."

"The nature of these collective models is not speed," Fischer acknowledged. "What kind of leadership do you bring to these massive collective-impact models? Most of them fail, it seems to me, as I look at them around the country." Turnover in the cabinet particularly frustrated the mayor. "A lot of progress has been made about the vision and what we want. But then people start turning over and you bring in new people [. . .]. So, you're getting consensus on something that there was consensus on about two years ago." The mayor's preference for action was often at odds with the pace of the cabinet's work. "I find myself wondering, 'Are we not moving fast enough or is it just me?'"

"It took me a year to figure out that Fischer would not yell at us for trying something even if it failed," said Gritton. "He would only be irritated or frustrated if you weren't moving fast enough to try stuff." Wheeler described the mayor's approach to leading the collaborative effort with a mix of amusement and empathy: "He's a businessman. He's tried to apply to a community total quality-management structures, continuous improvement models. [. . .] In a single organization, you can drive those things." Collaborative governance was a different story. "This stuff's pretty messy and hard," said Wheeler. "And I'm pretty tired of it, too."

In January, 2018, the cabinet laid out the essential questions around its future as a nonprofit: How many staff positions would it include? What will the annual budget be? Should there be one organization or two? How will fundraising be coordinated? Who will staff the work of building the organization? What will the relationship between 55K's board and a new scholarship board be? Where will the organization be physically located? What is the timeline for getting all of these questions resolved?

The cabinet divided the work of establishing the new organization among three groups: an executive director search committee, a governance committee, and a fundraising committee. (See Appendix 7.) Virtually everyone on the cabinet was assigned to a committee, and committees were to meet weekly. A smaller core group (called the "admin team") made up of Wheeler, Parrott, Wunderlin, Lowe, and Denise Nelson of Weiss, continued to staff and coordinate the wider initiative. (See Appendix 8.)

Over the next six months, the cabinet laid the groundwork for its next phase. Nelson painstakingly carried out the sensitive business of signing parties on to data-sharing agreements that would allow Weiss to carry out fiscal and educational "pathway" analytics and make recommendations. Reno-Weber kept the cabinet up to speed on Metro United Way's United Community initiative "to create a shared technology platform that removes barriers to access and enhances navigation of services by coordinating across the health, education, and human services sectors, enabling seamless referrals between agencies to meet every type of care need."²⁵ The admin team put together a creative brief for a branding initiative. The search committee spread the job description for the executive director

position through professional networks. The governance committee drew up organizational charts and—using the school district’s new racial equity policy to ensure representation—began populating a board of directors, a scholarship board, and an operating committee. (See Appendix 9 for the proposed governance structure.) The fundraising committee scrambled to raise a three-year operating budget.

By the cabinet’s June 2018 meeting, as Fischer looked toward a possible third term, the cabinet was at last quietly putting years of talk into action and crossing its fingers that it would find the right director and patch together enough funding to make Louisville Promise a reality, scholarships and all. (See Appendix 10 for a timeline of events.)

A week before the start of the 2018-2019 school year, Superintendent Pollio addressed community members and JCPS staff at the Kentucky Center for African American Heritage. The school district, he said, was getting ready for what he hoped would be its *60 Minutes* moment: “I believe we will be featured as one of the best districts in America.”²⁶

“In the South we say, ‘If you always do what you’ve always done, you’ll always get what you’ve always got,’” said Wunderlin. But changing the system, she acknowledged, “takes forever.”

“If you try to change too fast,” said the mayor, “things break. [. . .] Would I like to have been here six months ago? Yes, because one year in a kid’s life in school is too long.” Asked how his choices around the Cradle to Career initiative played out in Louisville’s political context, the mayor shrugged: “I don’t know if I’m a good politician or not. I believe in setting noble goals, pulling people together, and working like hell to meet the goals.”

Appendices

Appendix 1



GREATER LOUISVILLE EDUCATION COMMITMENT

PREAMBLE

More than ever before, success in the global economy of the 21st Century depends on education attainment for both individuals and communities. In order to attain its highest aspirations for its citizens and the region, Louisville must overcome historically low levels of education attainment and accelerate the pace of change to move its education profile into the top tier of American cities.

The Goal is to move the Louisville region into the top tier among its peer cities by raising education attainment so that by 2020 at least

- 40% of working-age adults hold a bachelor's degree (40,000 more)
- and 10% hold an associate's degree (15,000 more).

To accomplish that transformation, all leaders from across the region must come together to raise and support the education and career aspirations of students and of the community. We must build a common and widespread understanding of the link between education and future success, engaging parents, families, educators, and mentors in supporting that message.

To provide every child with ample opportunities to succeed, we must address challenges that range from better student preparation to alignment of elementary, secondary, and postsecondary curricula and requirements, and from stronger student supports at all levels to accessible and affordable postsecondary education.

We must ensure equal opportunity to succeed for all individuals, resolving historic disparities based on race, ethnic origin, socio-economic status, and other factors that have an impact on college attainment, particularly in the African-American community. We must embrace diversity in all its forms as an important asset for economic vitality, a healthy democracy, and a vibrant community.

We must confront the barrier of cost at the postsecondary level ensuring that the real cost of education is affordable and the opportunities for support are optimized. In addition, we must tailor new incentives and supports to adults so that they can return to school and earn degrees.

Finally, we must undertake these challenges through a sustained effort that engages all sectors of the community in a common goal and plan of action.

EVENTS AT THE NATIONAL, STATE, AND LOCAL LEVELS HAVE CREATED A UNIQUE OPPORTUNITY THAT MAKES THIS THE RIGHT MOMENT TO CONFRONT THESE CHALLENGES AND THE COMING DECADE THE RIGHT TIME TO RAISE EDUCATION ATTAINMENT IN OUR REGION.

COMMITMENTS

THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED THAT

WE, A COLLABORATIVE OF BUSINESS, EDUCATION, CIVIC, AND COMMUNITY LEADERS, COMMIT TO THE FOLLOWING:

A **Vision** for a world-class, seamless and coordinated education system that provides ample opportunities for developing creativity and critical thinking, skilled workers, engaged citizens, and civic leaders.

A **Common Purpose** to galvanize education, business, faith, civic, and community leaders and organizations in support of a common agenda to increase education attainment, prosperity, and the quality of life.

A **Goal** to move Louisville into the top tier among its peer cities by raising education attainment so that by 2020 at least **40%** of working-age adults hold a bachelor's degree and **10%** an associate's degree.

Recognizing that achieving the Goal requires adding at least 40,000 more bachelor's degrees and 15,000 more associate's degrees, we commit to bring about the following Objectives:

- **Create and support a college-going culture.**
- **Use the business community's unique points of leverage to accelerate attainment.**
- **Prepare students for success in college, career, citizenship, and life.**
- **Make postsecondary education accessible and affordable.**
- **Increase educational persistence, performance and progress.**

We will undertake the following **Strategies** to initiate this effort with the full intention to expand the scope and scale of the effort as it unfolds:

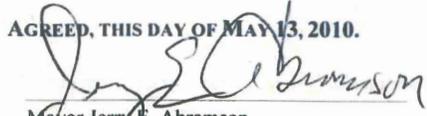
1. Develop and deliver go-to-college themes and messages to promote positive attitudes toward education through practices such as the following:
 - Use survey results and data to identify the themes.
 - Develop messages for media campaigns.
 - Mobilize a network of personal advocates to support students to go to college.
 - Provide students with experiences to enhance college-going aspirations and understanding.
2. Create a community of education-oriented employers who will encourage education attainment through practices such as the following:
 - Support employees in returning to school.
 - Promote the value of education for all students.
 - Develop programs that expose students to the connection between education and workplace success (internships, job shadowing and worksite visits).

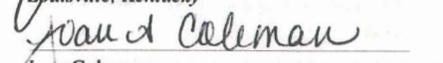
3. Align education systems to better enable students and adult learners to move successfully from one level to the next through practices such as the following:
 - Create a shared rubric for determining college readiness based on Common Core readiness standards and factors identified by colleges in the region.
 - Implement, evaluate and accelerate initiatives and interventions to improve college readiness.
 - Support the work of college and university faculty to enhance the quality of teaching of first year students.
4. Ensure that all individuals in the region can access and afford postsecondary education through practices such as the following:
 - Provide 10th through 12th graders and their families with effective, accurate information about affordability.
 - Establish scholarship funds to help more students go to college and earn degrees.
 - Leverage employers' ability to increase college access and affordability for their employees.
5. Provide retention and transition-planning and supports for students throughout their academic careers:
 - Expand the use of best practices for retention of students.
 - Expand the use of best practices on transferring among institutions.
 - Update and communicate articulation agreements.

In undertaking this Joint Commitment, we will adhere to the following **Values and Principles of Collaboration:**

- **Commit to equity in education attainment.** To succeed, we will be intentional in removing barriers based on race, ethnic origin, gender, socio-economic status, and other factors.
- **Embrace diversity as a resource for learning in P-16 education.** We will support programs that foster equitably diverse schools, colleges, and universities.
- **Start Early.** Recognizing that school success begins with school readiness and that school readiness begins before birth, we will support student success from cradle to career.
- **Engage all sectors.** Rather than asking educators to bear sole responsibility, we will involve all sectors of the community and align our efforts around common goals of preparing 21st Century workers, entrepreneurs, leaders and citizens.
- **Leverage the power of collaboration through honest and mutually respectful communication.** We will work together to address issues and challenges, shape dynamic and sustainable partnerships, and develop systemic solutions.
- **Use data to guide action and investment.** We will use local data and effective practice research to guide our work, make evidence-based decisions to improve it, and continually measure and report our progress.
- **Design effective approaches.** Because this Joint Commitment requires working across sectors and institutional boundaries, it will require devising new approaches to forge partnerships, remove institutional barriers, and re-allocate resources.
- **Acknowledge and support programs that advance the goal.** Collaborating within a larger community of organizations and programs already focused on education, we will seek additional partners, promote related programs, and advocate for collective efforts.

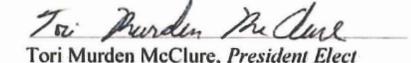
AGREED, THIS DAY OF MAY 13, 2010.

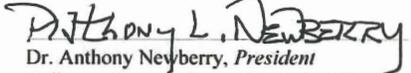

Mayor Jerry E. Abramson
Louisville, Kentucky

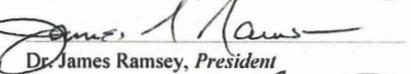

Joan Coleman
Kentucky Chamber's Post-Secondary Task Force

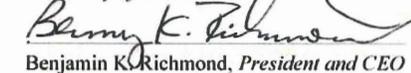

David A. Jones, Jr., Chairman of the Board
Humana Inc.
Chair, Business Leaders for Education

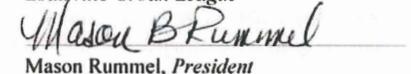

Alice Houston, President and CEO
Houston-Johnson Inc.
Co-chair, Business Leaders for Education

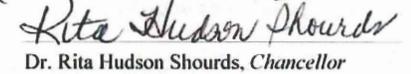

Tori Murden McClure, President Elect
Spalding University

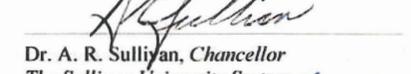

Dr. Anthony Newberry, President
Jefferson Community and Technical College

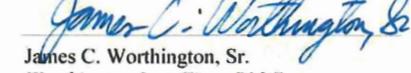

Dr. James Ramsey, President
University of Louisville


Benjamin K. Richmond, President and CEO
Louisville Urban League

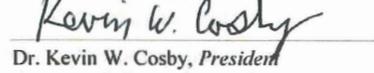

Mason Rummel, President
James Graham Brown Foundation
Chair, Greater Louisville Project

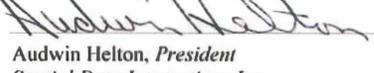

Dr. Rita Hudson Shourds, Chancellor
Ivy Tech (Indiana)

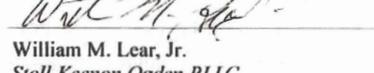

Dr. A. R. Sullivan, Chancellor
The Sullivan University System

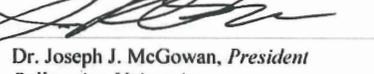

James C. Worthington, Sr.
Worthington Law Firm, PLLC
Chair, KentuckianaWorks Board


Dr. Sheldon H. Berman, Superintendent
Jefferson County Public Schools

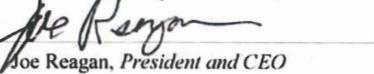

Dr. Kevin W. Cosby, President
Simmons College of Kentucky
Senior Pastor, St. Stephen Church

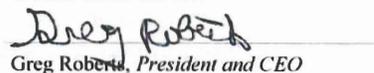

Audwin Helton, President
Spatial Data Integrations Inc.
Chair, JCPS School to Career Task Force


William M. Lear, Jr.
Stoll Keenon Ogden PLLC
Co-chair, Business Leaders for Education

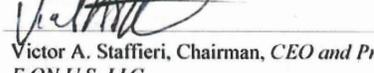

Dr. Joseph J. McGowan, President
Bellarmine University


Dr. Sandra R. Patterson-Randles, Chancellor,
Indiana University Southeast


Joe Reagan, President and CEO
Greater Louisville Inc.

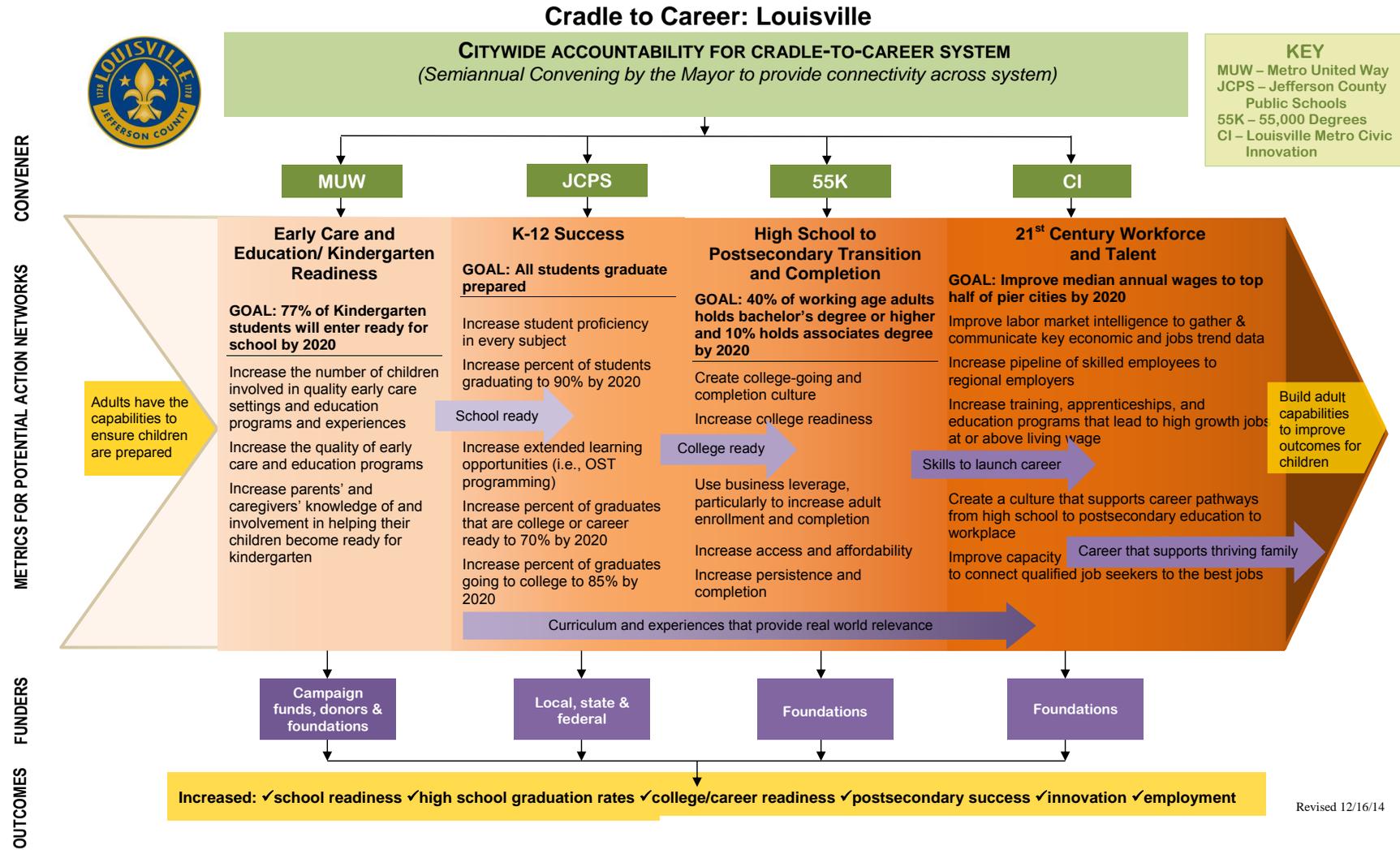

Greg Robert, President and CEO
Muhammad Ali Center
Co-chair, YouthPript


Leisa Schulz, Superintendent of Schools,
Archdiocese of Louisville


Victor A. Staffieri, Chairman, CEO and President,
E.ON U.S. LLC
Kentucky Chamber's Post-Secondary Task Force


Joseph Tohan, President and CEO
Metro United Way

Appendix 2



Appendix 3



The Harvard Graduate School of Education launched By All Means in February 2016, run by the Education Redesign Lab, to rethink education and child development systems. The initiative is addressing the iron law correlation in the U.S. between a child's socioeconomic status and his or her prospects for educational achievement through several key strategies: research and dissemination, policy and advocacy, deep field work in six cities—Louisville, KY; Oakland, CA; Providence, RI; and Salem, Somerville, and Newton, MA—and a series of national convenings at the Harvard Graduate School of Education.

Overview

This initiative is addressing system redesign and implementation, with a focus on these questions:

What can be done to create new systems of education and support to help disadvantaged students overcome the obstacles of poverty?

Who must come together to do the work?

What systems of governance are best suited to the new system?

How do we build systems of education that genuinely prepare all children to be successful?

Asking such questions is a bold statement from a school of education, as it acknowledges that the current approach to education does not serve many of our children well and it broadens the conception of what is needed to ensure children's success to domains not typically considered part of the education system.

The City Consortium

The goal of this work is to bring together entrepreneurial and committed city leaders, from a select group of six cities, dedicated to achieving systemic, integrated improvements in services for children, and connect them with the expertise of Harvard faculty and national leaders. Participating cities are launching ambitious plans for change that include components of the Education Redesign Lab's strategy for systemic change: creating student-centered, customized learning experiences for students; integrating social, emotional, and health services with education; providing easily accessible, high quality expanded learning and enrichment experiences for all children; and creating governance structures that will support this integrated model of services.

Led by their respective mayors, each of these communities creates a Children's Cabinet, works with a consultant funded through our Lab, establishes several initiatives in support of the theory, agrees to work on documentation and to be evaluated, and comes to the Harvard Graduate School of Education twice annually to work with national experts and the other community teams on advancing this work. Participating communities in By All Means are Oakland, CA; Louisville, KY; Providence, RI; Newton, MA; Salem, MA; Somerville, MA and the Partnership for Resilience in Illinois.

Convenings

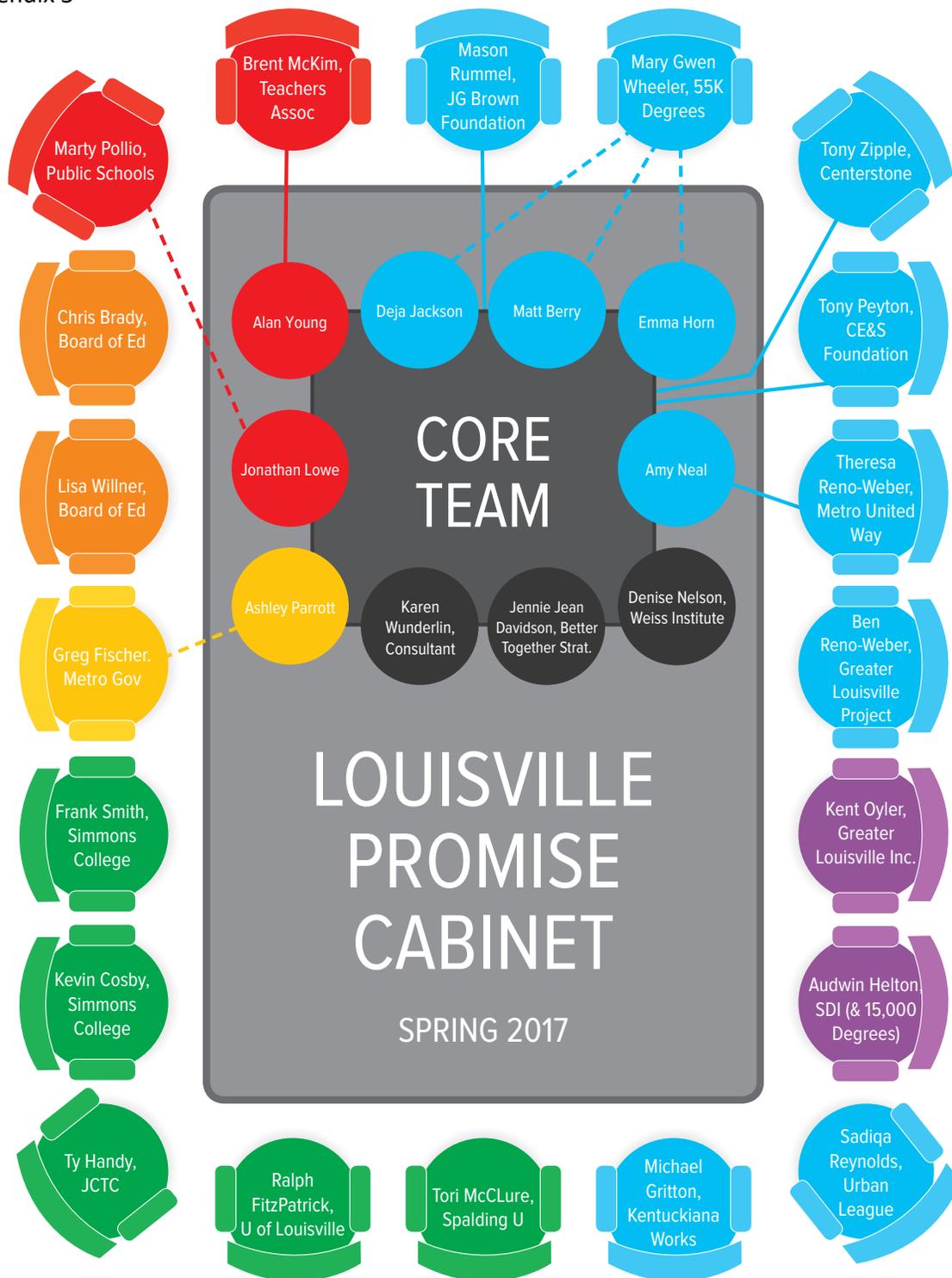
To accelerate the work, the Harvard Graduate School of Education is hosting a series of five convenings over 2.5 years that bring together policymakers, educators, and community leaders to re-envision public education and its governance.

Appendix 4



KEY	PRIVATE SECTOR	HIGHER EDUCATION	NON-PROFIT SECTOR	PUBLIC SCHOOL SYSTEM	CITY GOVERNMENT	BOARD OF EDUCATION
	●	●	●	●	●	●

Appendix 5



KEY	PRIVATE SECTOR	HIGHER EDUCATION	NON-PROFIT SECTOR	PUBLIC SCHOOL SYSTEM	CITY GOVERNMENT	BOARD OF EDUCATION
	●	●	●	●	●	●

Appendix 6



Say Yes was founded in 1987 by money manager George Weiss, who boldly promised 112 sixth graders at a Philadelphia elementary school that he would pay to send them to college if they graduated high school. Weiss also provided those economically-disadvantaged students and their families with the academic and social-emotional support services necessary to seize that opportunity. He made similar promises, over the next two decades, to five additional cohorts of public school children, and in each instance, these students were far more likely than other students in the district from similar economic backgrounds to graduate high school and earn college degrees.

In 2008, Say Yes embarked on a far more ambitious effort: extending its strategy across entire communities – at scale, and in a way that would be sustainable, year after year. Public high school graduates who gain admission to in-state public colleges and universities are guaranteed free tuition – regardless of family income and after federal and state aid have been taken into account – through a locally-raised scholarship fund. Similar, “last dollar” tuition scholarships are made available to students who qualify based on family income (typically those whose households earn less than \$75,000 annually) by the more than 100 private colleges and universities of the Say Yes Higher Education Compact.

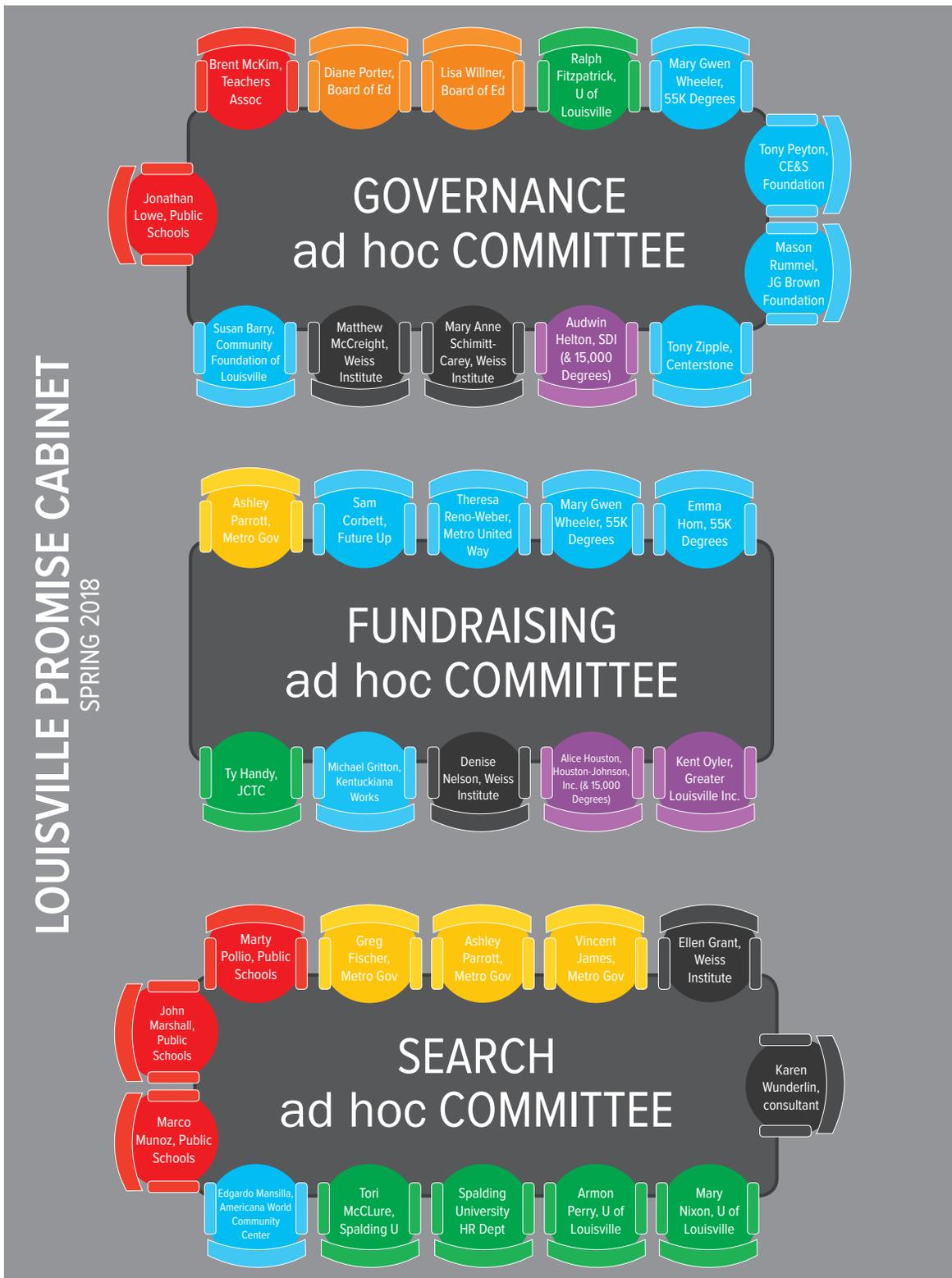
Working with the national Say Yes organization, the local Say Yes partnerships leverage those scholarships and other incentives (including \$15 million in seed capital from Say Yes National) to bring a community’s stakeholders together to give all public school students and their families access to a menu of support services. Beginning as early as kindergarten, and continuing through 12th grade and beyond, the services may include tutoring; after-school programming; summer camp; school-based medical care and counseling; advice on college admissions and financial aid; and free legal assistance.

Say Yes also helps communities develop a pathway of milestones to post-secondary readiness – and create systems for analyzing data to ensure that students remain on track to graduate. Those who fall behind can receive support services from a range of local partners, with the goal of eliminating predictable barriers to achievement. Say Yes and its partners now provide access to support services and postsecondary scholarships to more than 130,000 public school students.

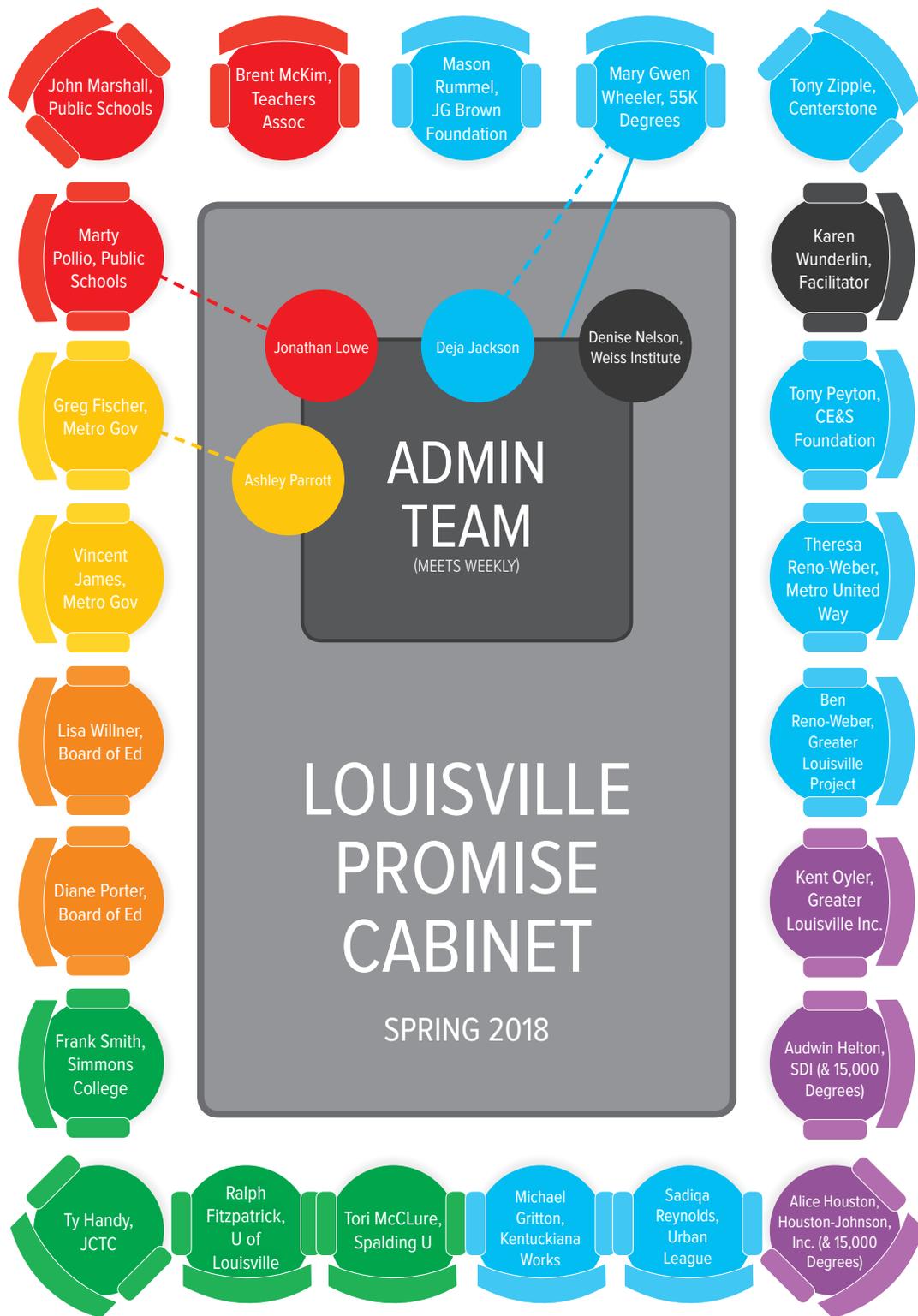
Theory of Action

- Say Yes focuses on the city as the unit of change. Say Yes and its partners seek to develop dynamic, cross-sector alliances that include city and county government – as well as school districts and school boards; parents; the local business community; unions; higher education institutions, and faith-based and other philanthropic organizations. In each Say Yes community, these stakeholders meet together around a common table on a regular basis, in support of moving successfully along the predictive path to postsecondary and life success.
- Most strategies that have sought to improve urban schools have proved to be short-term and disjointed, lacking in infrastructure and administered in silos that do not connect the dots between developmental stages (such as early childhood, K-12, and postsecondary credentialing) or critical service areas (education, health, mental health). Say Yes seeks to promote a comprehensive, coordinated and sustainable community-wide approach.
- The Say Yes community-wide strategy is built on the following five principles:
 - Postsecondary Access and Success for All
 - Data-Driven Continuous Improvement
 - Pathway to Success (Prenatal to Career)
 - Cross-Sector and Cross-Government Collaboration
 - Scale and Sustainability

Appendix 7



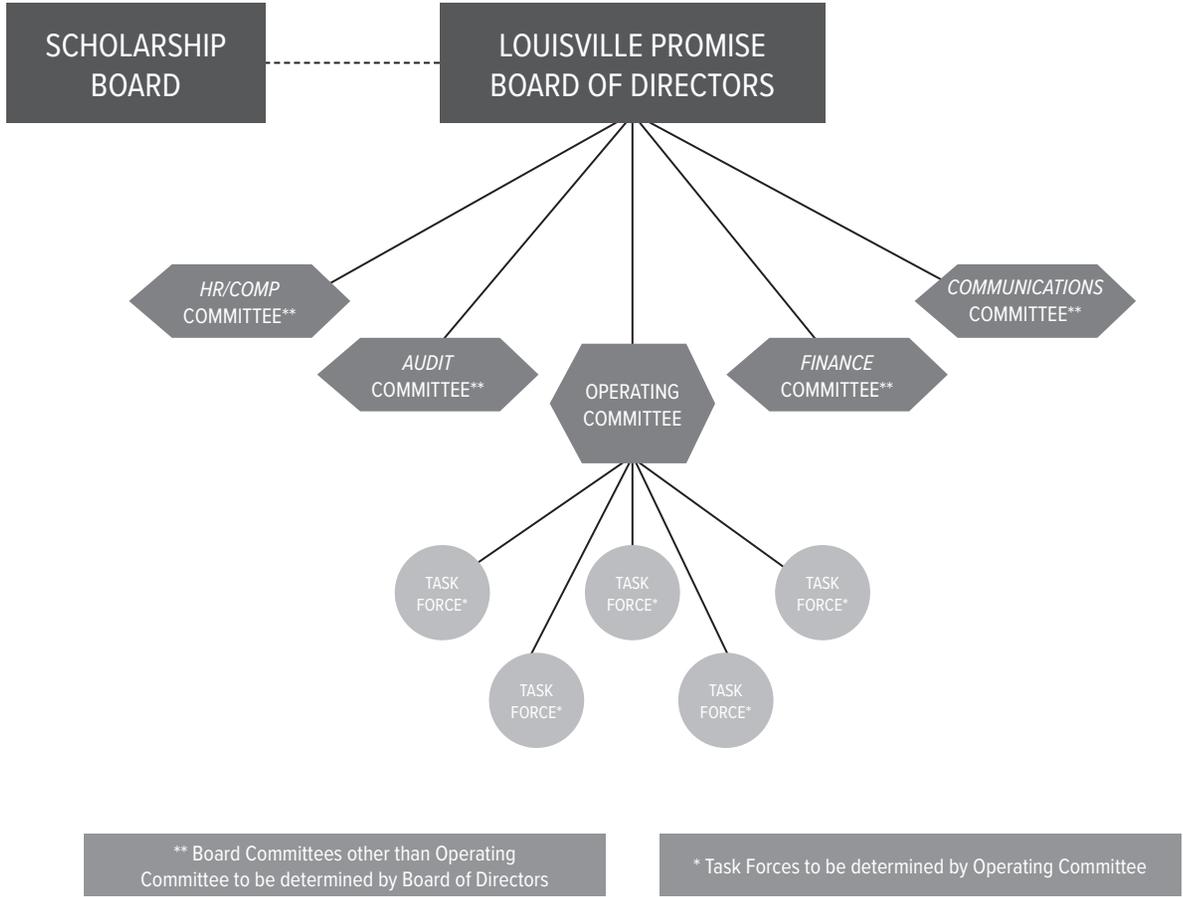
Appendix 8



Appendix 9

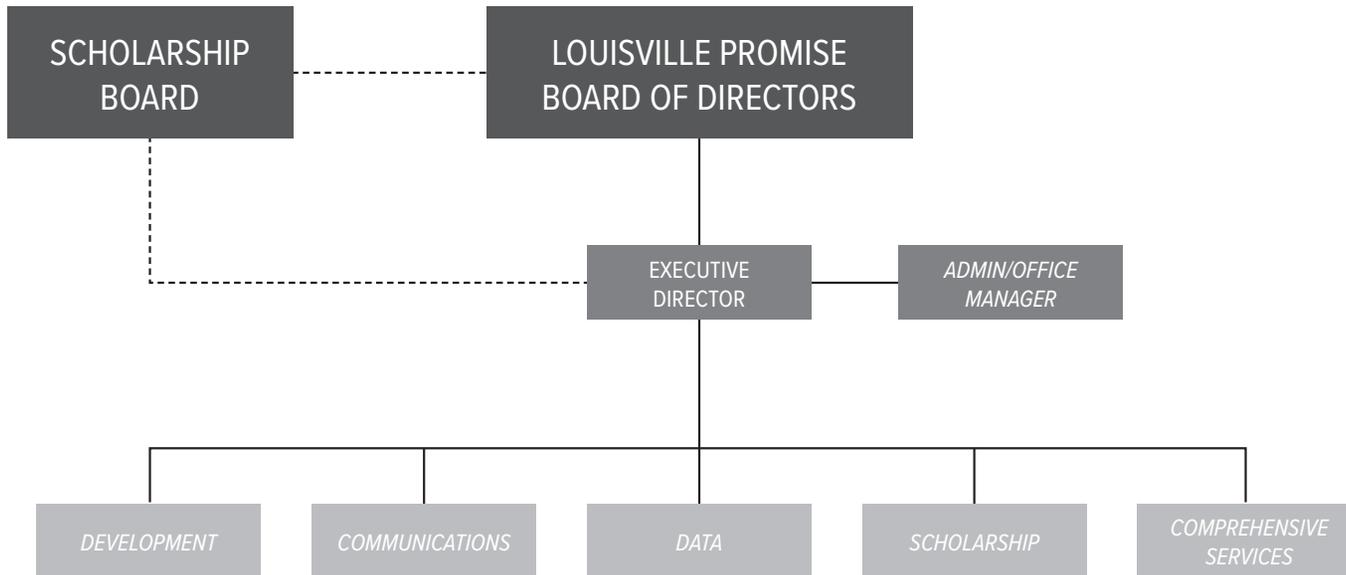
LOUISVILLE PROMISE- GOVERNANCE

PROPOSED FOR FALL 2018



LOUISVILLE PROMISE- GOVERNANCE

PROPOSED FOR FALL 2018



Appendix 10

Case Timeline

Education and Workforce Development	Cradle to Career Initiative
<p>2003</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Louisville and Jefferson County merge into single governance structure under Mayor Jerry Abramson • Greater Louisville Project identifies education as one of four “deep drivers of change” to “inform our civic agenda”ⁱ <p>2008</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Creation of Mayor Abramson’s Education Roundtable <p>2010</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • May 13: Mayor Abramson signs Greater Louisville Education Commitment affirming goal of 55,000 degrees by 2020 • 55,000 Degrees public-private partnership is established as backbone organization, with mayor as chair • Greg Fischer elected mayor of Louisville metro government 	
<p>2015</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • JCPS releases five-year plan, <i>Vision 2020</i>, targeting Kindergarten readiness, early literacy, and college/career readiness 	<p>2015</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • January: Mayor Fischer establishes Cradle to Career Initiative • September: First Cradle to Career summit • October: Mayor Fischer presents Cradle to Career Initiative in Boston; Paul Reville presents Education Redesign Lab and <i>By All Means</i> initiative (BAM) • Louisville pursues partnerships with BAM and Say Yes to Education
<p>2016</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • July: State education commissioner orders management review of JCPS 	<p>2016</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • February: Louisville becomes one of six cities participating in BAM • May: First BAM convening • June: First cabinet meeting, facilitated by Karen Wunderlin • Fall: Cabinet launches asset-mapping project and behavioral health working group as first BAM focus area

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Administrative responsibility for cabinet’s work moves from mayor’s office to 55K
<p>2017</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • February: State education commissioner announces full audit of JCPS • March 21: Governor signs Kentucky’s first charter school bill • April: Superintendent Hargens announces attention to resign • May: Marty Pollio named interim superintendent • June: Charter school bill goes into effect, with authorizing power to the mayor • July: Hargens departs • July: Steering Committee for Action on Louisville’s Agenda (SCALA) registers as a non-profit, lists education among top 3 priorities 	<p>2017</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • January: Cabinet hits financial roadblock in bid to become a Say Yes city • February: Cradle to Career Cabinet retreat, facilitated by Wunderlin, focuses on defining goals, shared governance model, commitment to Say Yes theory of action and contact with Weiss Institute; elects to pare down official cabinet membership to chief executives of stakeholder orgs & their designees only; “core team” created to carry staff work and momentum • April: Cabinet commits to creating data sharing agreements • May BAM convening: Team meets with Michael McAfee of PolicyLink about confronting racism • May: Preparing to sign contract with Weiss Institute as first partner city for Say Yes support around data systems, financial analysis, asset mapping, governance
<p>2018</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • January: <i>Insider Louisville</i> reports SCALA is in favor of state management of JCPS • February: Pollio named superintendent of JCPS • April 30: State recommends takeover of JCPS after completing audit, citing “deep-seated organization and cultural challenges”; school board to continue to serve in “advisory capacity” • May 8: School board unanimously adopts system-wide racial equity plan, establishing a racial equity advisory council • Superintendent Pollio predicts “we will be featured as one of the best districts in America” 	<p>2018</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • January: Cabinet begins making plans to become a nonprofit • Weiss helps establish data-sharing agreements, works on fiscal and educational “pathway” analytics • Cabinet members seeded onto ad hoc committees to work between cabinet meetings to lay groundwork for transition, propose governance structure • Small “admin team” takes over administrative work

ⁱ <http://greaterlouisvilleproject.org/about/>

Endnotes

- ¹ Author's notes, meeting of the Louisville Promise Cabinet, June 4, 2018 (hereafter "June 4 meeting").
- ² Ryland Barton and Roxanne Scott "Kentucky's Interim Education Commissioner Calls for State Takeover of JCPS," *WFPL News Louisville*, April 30, 2018, <https://wfpl.org/kentuckys-interim-education-commissioner-calls-for-state-takeover-of-jcps/>.
- ³ June 4 meeting.
- ⁴ The Brookings Institution Center on Urban and Metropolitan Policy, *Beyond Merger: A Competitive Vision for the Regional City of Louisville* (Washington DC: Brookings Institution, 2002), 39. <https://www.brookings.edu/wp-content/uploads/2016/06/louisville.pdf>.
- ⁵ Unless cited otherwise, all quotes from Greg Fisher are from interviews by authors on May 15 and June 5, 2018.
- ⁶ Lynne Sacks and Jessica Boyle, *Building City-wide Systems of Opportunity for Children: Initial Lessons from the By All Means Consortium* (Cambridge: The President and Fellows of Harvard College, 2018), 21.
- ⁷ Mary Gwen Wheeler, interview with authors, June 5, 2018. All further quotes from Wheeler are from this interview.
- ⁸ Karen Wunderlin, interview by authors, May 15, 2018. All further quotes from Wunderlin are from this interview.
- ⁹ Sadiqa Reynolds, interview by author, July 17, 2018. All further quotes from Reynolds are from this interview.
- ¹⁰ Louisville Promise, "What is Louisville Promise?" <http://louisvillepromise.org/>, accessed May 10, 2020.
- ¹¹ Theresa Reno-Weber, interview by authors, June 5, 2018. All further quotes from Reno-Weber are from this interview.
- ¹² "Our Strategy," Say Yes to Education, accessed December 27, 2018, <http://sayyestoeducation.org/strategy/>.
- ¹³ Ashley Parrott, interview by authors, June 4, 2018. All further quotes from Parrott are from this interview.
- ¹⁴ Jonathan Lowe, interview by author, July 3, 2018. All further quotes from Lowe are from this interview.
- ¹⁵ Brent McKim, interview by authors, June 4, 2018. All further quotes from McKim are from this interview.
- ¹⁶ Caitlin Bowling, Boris Ladwig, and Joe Sonka, "By Invitation Only: Meet Louisville's Power Brokers," *Insider Louisville*, January 29, 2018, <https://insiderlouisville.com/education/by-invitation-only-meet-louisvilles-power-brokers/>.
- ¹⁷ "Mayor Greg Fischer 'Opposed to State Takeover' of Jefferson County Public Schools," Mayor's office, video, 0:46, <https://www.courier-journal.com/videos/news/education/2018/04/27/mayor-greg-fischer-opposed-state-takeover-jefferson-county-public-schools/559786002/>.
- ¹⁸ Diane Porter, interview with author, July 2, 2018. All further quotes from Porter are from this interview.
- ¹⁹ Audwin Helton, interview with authors, June 5, 2018. All further quotes from Helton are from this interview.
- ²⁰ Lynne Sacks and Jessica Boyle, *Building City-wide Systems*, 29.
- ²¹ Alice Houston, interview by authors, 6/27. All further quotes from Houston are from this interview.
- ²² Tony Zipple, interview by authors, June 5, 2018. All further quotes from Zipple are from this interview.
- ²³ Kent Oyler, interview by authors, June 5, 2018. All further quotes from Oyler are from this interview.
- ²⁴ Michael Gritton, interview by authors, June 5, 2018. All further quotes from Gritton are from this interview.
- ²⁵ Metro United Way, handout, June 4 meeting.
- ²⁶ Mandy McLaren, "Marty Pollio: Dramatic Changes Ahead for JCPS," *Louisville Courier Journal*, August 9, 2018, <https://www.courier-journal.com/story/news/education/2018/08/09/superintendent-highlights-changes-jcps-takeover-deal/946120002/>.