

Change at the Speed of Trust

Advancing Educational Opportunity through Cross-Sector Collaboration in Louisville

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On the morning of June 4, 2018, the twenty members of Mayor Greg Fischer’s Louisville Promise Cabinet sat elbow-to-elbow around a conference table in a downtown office building.¹ The cabinet was two and a half years into an initiative to reimagine how Louisville would prepare its students for the workforce and higher education—and it was getting ready to hire its first executive director. To sustain itself well beyond Fischer’s tenure, its director would need the community’s trust and the ability to work with the cabinet’s diverse members toward its goals: coordinating “wraparound” support services and establishing “promise” scholarships that would guarantee at least two years of college funding to the 96,000 students attending Jefferson County Public Schools (JCPS). The work would include not just designing an organization, writing an operating budget, and raising funds, but also working through inevitable misalignments and misunderstandings between partners—and grappling with the ugly legacy of institutionalized racism.

The mayor, rushing from another community event, arrived late and took a seat as cabinet members discussed budgetary details, plans for summer learning and data sharing, and the school district’s new racial equity policy. The Kentucky Board of Education had concluded an audit of JCPS in April and recommended state management of the district, citing “deep-seated organizational and cultural challenges.”¹ Cabinet members wanted the state to understand that little could be done to improve Jefferson County’s educational outcomes without addressing the hours students spent outside school buildings and the entrenched inequities driving the achievement gap. 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, then shame on us.”²

New Louisville, New Goal, New Mayor

In 2000, voters approved a referendum to merge Louisville city government with Jefferson County government, creating a new metro-wide government. A subsequent effort to benchmark the new Louisville against peer cities revealed that the metro ranked fourteenth out of fifteen in percentage of the adult population holding a bachelor’s degree.³ This reality check helped spark then-Mayor Jerry Abramson’s 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.

¹ The cabinet was initially called the “Cradle to Career Cabinet.”

In May 2010, a consortium of leaders in education, business, and the nonprofit sector 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.) Mary Gwen Wheeler, Abramson's senior advisor for education and youth, stepped down from her post to serve as the executive director of 55,000 Degrees (55K), a new public-private partnership established as a "backbone" organization to staff and guide the collaborative effort. The mayor served as chairman of the board. Black community leaders 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 serve as mayor and (by extension) chair of 55K. 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 felt 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."⁴

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 a workforce investment board called KentuckianaWorks. (See Appendix 2 for an overview of Cradle to Career.) Each pillar reported quarterly to the mayor and participated in an annual 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 social, health, legal, and financial support services that families needed were still unavailable, uncoordinated, or inaccessible. Fischer wondered how he might bring together stakeholders more effectively and what role the mayor's office should play in orchestrating such an effort: "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 work with cities as "laboratories of innovation" to "test and refine [the Redesign Lab's] theory that meeting the complex array of children's needs and developing their interests and talents requires a city-wide approach."⁵ Each city participating in BAM was required to establish a "children's cabinet" chaired by the mayor to coordinate services. 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 this model as an opportunity 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 a way to turbocharge 55K's stalling efforts to move more JCPS graduates into higher education. She had begun exploring a partnership with Say Yes to Education (Say Yes), a foundation that was helping cities develop cross-sector approaches to student support services and create promise scholarships covering tuition at partner colleges to all high-school graduates. (See Appendix 4 for an overview of Say Yes.) "One of the clearest problems and barriers [for 55K] was the growing cost of college," said Wheeler.⁶ "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 decided to pursue partnerships simultaneously with both Say Yes and BAM. As one of six cities selected to work with BAM, the mayor's first step was to convene a cabinet that would bring together stakeholders from all corners of the city.

Refining the Governance, Keeping the Promise

Karen Wunderlin, Louisville's BAM facilitator, described the first version of the 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."⁷ 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."⁸ (See Appendix 5 for depictions of the cabinet's evolving configurations over time.) This concern resonated for Fischer, who viewed convening the cabinet as a first step toward shifting ownership of the Cradle to Career work out of his office. 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 a behavioral health working group. But just as work was getting underway, two major blows threw the cabinet's future into doubt. In February of 2017, after reporting suggested the school system had underreported incidents involving the restraint and seclusion of children, the state education commissioner announced its intent to audit JCPS management. Around the same time, it became clear that the city would not qualify for financial support from Say Yes because it did not have the fundraising capacity 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." 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 partners scheduled a retreat. The question they were trying to answer, according to Wheeler, was not just how to move forward, but "Are we still going forward?"

Even though the cabinet was already, in Wunderlin's words, "unwieldy," they opted to further expand the circle of stakeholders for the retreat. "We invited some others that hadn't been at the table," said Wheeler—including representatives from Latin American community groups and the metro government's Center for Health Equity—and together, "we developed a desired-results statement that really lifts up and unapologetically takes on the issues of systemic racism and poverty." After some

intensive thought and wordsmithing, the 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.”⁹

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.’” At the end of this exercise, eighteen organizations made up the official cabinet, including the mayor’s office, the four pillar leads, three major funders, four higher-education institutions, the Jefferson County Teachers Association, and several key community organizations and service providers. Only top executives for each organization or their designees would sit at the table, while staff and visitors sat around the perimeter of the room. A mix of executives, staff from key organizations, and consultants formed a core team that met weekly to manage the work of the cabinet and ensure, 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.”¹⁰

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. “She 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—we 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.”¹¹ 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 Ashley Parrott.¹² (See Appendix 6 for a list of Louisville Promise cabinet members and key staff.) 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 could 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.”¹³

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.¹⁴ (Hargens was succeeded by Marty Pollio.) In the summer of 2017, Wheeler’s father-in-law, who was the founder of Louisville’s only Fortune 100 company (Humana), 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.¹⁵ According to the United Way’s Teresa Reno-Weber, who sat on both SCALA and the cabinet, the report was misleading: “SCALA 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 on 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 management by the state only intensified the mistrust.

As the state prepared to announce the findings of its audit of JCPS in April, 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.”¹⁶ On April 30, Kentucky’s interim education commissioner 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 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.”¹⁷

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 cabinet members. “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 the 15K Initiative for Black scholars. “We’ve had facilitators in to talk about equality and equity and making sure that we understand the difference. There have been times when we kind of pause to make sure we understand what we say.”¹⁸

Some team members lamented the slow pace of progress confronting past and present racism. 15K Co-Chair Alice Houston, like Porter, had been educated in segregated schools in a redlined Louisville. She referred to the stubborn persistence of the achievement gap as “Groundhog Day.”^{iii,19} At every step, the cabinet had to consider not just how its plans pushed back against four hundred years of

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/>).

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.

institutionalized racism, but also how its own conversations, practices, and choices played into 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, an event seeking community input was presented as a “farmers’ market,” where attendees 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 coordinate support services set the partners down a path, but steering everyone 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 can hinder 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.’”²⁰

For several private-sector partners 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,” said Kent Oyler, president of Greater Louisville, Inc.²¹ Helton, who ran 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.” He pointed out that cabinet members from grantmaking foundations helped bring a degree of bottom-line discipline to the enterprise. Houston, also a 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 cabinet’s 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 decision to rely on data analysis from Weiss 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 across 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, became a model for the city’s high schools to help students get work experience in their areas of interest. Beyond

these, however, cabinet members 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 felt the cabinet should be taking on 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, thought the cabinet might be missing an opportunity to rally state support for higher education: “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.”²²

Even at the local level, 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 cabinet members 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 and leading its scholarship committee. One of the looming governance questions was whether there should 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.” After the MOU was signed, school administrators and cabinet members had hoped to make a unified announcement about Louisville Promise—both to raise community awareness of the work underway and to counter critical narratives coming from the state—but Weiss consultants warned them that an announcement might be premature. They had not yet resolved key questions or sought adequate community input. Most members referred to the body as the Louisville Promise Cabinet, but others, including the mayor, remained unsettled on the name. Moreover, 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

^{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.

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."

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

As time wore on, there was a growing sense that it was all taking too long. "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." Every cabinet member was acutely aware that children's futures were at stake, but there were no easy answers.

"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. 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 would the annual budget be? Should there be one board or two? How would fundraising be coordinated? Who would staff the work of building the organization? What would the relationship between 55K's board and a new scholarship board be? Where would the organization be physically located? What was the timeline for getting all 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. Virtually everyone on the cabinet was assigned to a committee that would 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.

Over the next six months, the cabinet laid the groundwork for its next phase. Nelson painstakingly conducted 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."²³ The admin team put together a creative brief for a branding initiative. The search committee spread the job description

through cabinet members' 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 7 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. 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."²⁴

To realize that promise, however, the cabinet would need to find a way to leverage its partnerships to provide the individualized supports JCPs students needed. "That is work no one in the country has figured out how to do as far as I know," said Gritton. "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."

"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. On the other hand, the mayor pointed out, "If you try to change too fast, 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, May 13, 2010



GREATER LOUISVILLE EDUCATION COMMITMENT

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.

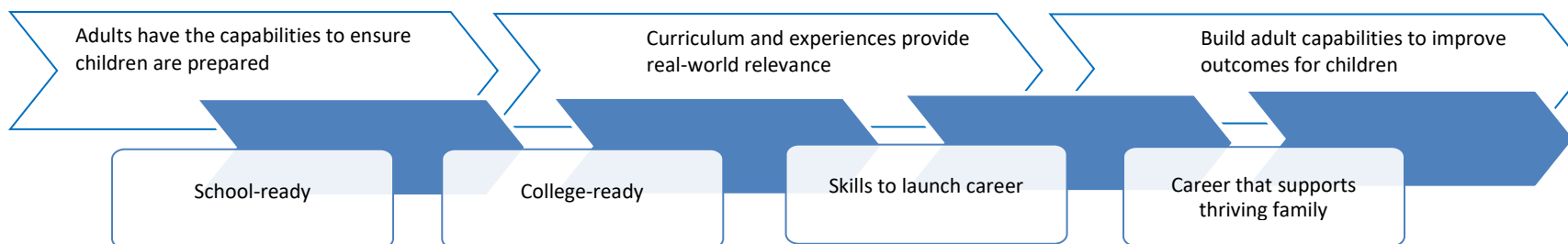
In undertaking this Joint Commitment, we will adhere to the following **Values and Principles of Collaboration**:

- **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.

Source: Greater Louisville Project (<https://www.greaterlouisvilleproject>); used with permission

Appendix 2 Cradle to Career “Four Pillars” Structure and Logic Model

Pillar	Early Care and Education/ Kindergarten Readiness	K-12 Success	High School to Postsecondary Transition & Completion	21 st Century Workforce & Talent
Convener	Metro United Way	Jefferson County Public Schools	55,000 Degrees	Louisville Metro Office of Civic Innovation
Goal	77% of kindergarten students will enter ready for school by 2020	All students graduate prepared	40% of working-age adults hold bachelor’s degree or higher and 10% hold associate’s degrees by 2020	Improve median annual wages to top half of peer cities by 2020
Objectives	<p>Increase the number of children involved in quality early care settings & education programs & experiences</p> <p>Increase the quality of early care & education programs</p> <p>Increase parents’ & caregivers’ knowledge of & involvement in helping their children become ready for kindergarten</p>	<p>Increase student proficiency in every subject</p> <p>Increase percent of students graduating to 90% by 2020</p> <p>Increase extended learning opportunities</p> <p>Increase percent of graduates that are college- or career-ready to 70% by 2020</p> <p>Increase percent of graduates going to college to 85% by 2020</p>	<p>Create college-going & completion culture</p> <p>Increase college readiness</p> <p>Use business leverage, particularly to increase adult enrollment & completion</p> <p>Increase access & affordability</p> <p>Increase persistence & completion</p>	<p>Improve labor-market intelligence to gather & communicate key economic & jobs trend data</p> <p>Increase pipeline of skilled employees to regional employers</p> <p>Increase trainings, apprenticeships, & education programs that lead to high-growth jobs at or above living wage</p> <p>Create a culture that supports career pathways from high school to postsecondary education to workplace</p> <p>Improve capacity to connect qualified job seekers to the best jobs</p>
Funders	Campaign funds, donors & foundations	Local, state, & federal	Foundations	Foundations
Outcomes	School-readiness	High school graduation rates College/career-readiness	Postsecondary success	Innovation Employment



Source: Mayor Greg Fischer’s Office (adapted for accessibility); used with permission

Appendix 3 By All Means

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.

Source: Paul Reville/By All Means website accessed in 2019; used with permission

Appendix 4 Say Yes

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 one hundred 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 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.

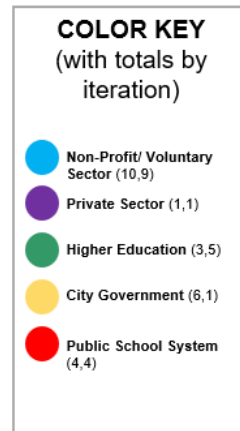
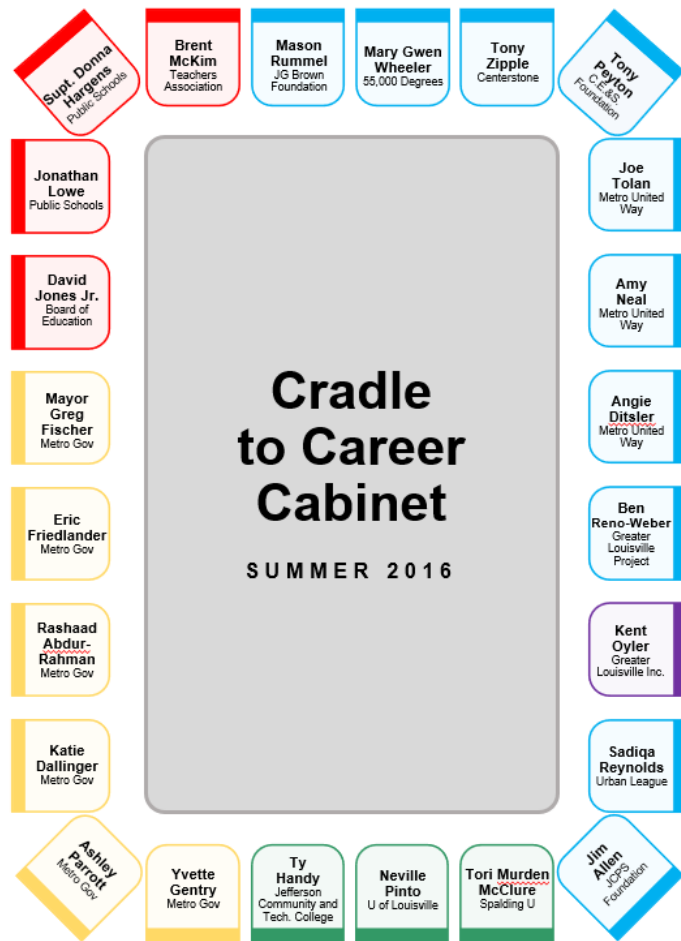
The Say Yes community-wide strategy is built on the following five principles:

- 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

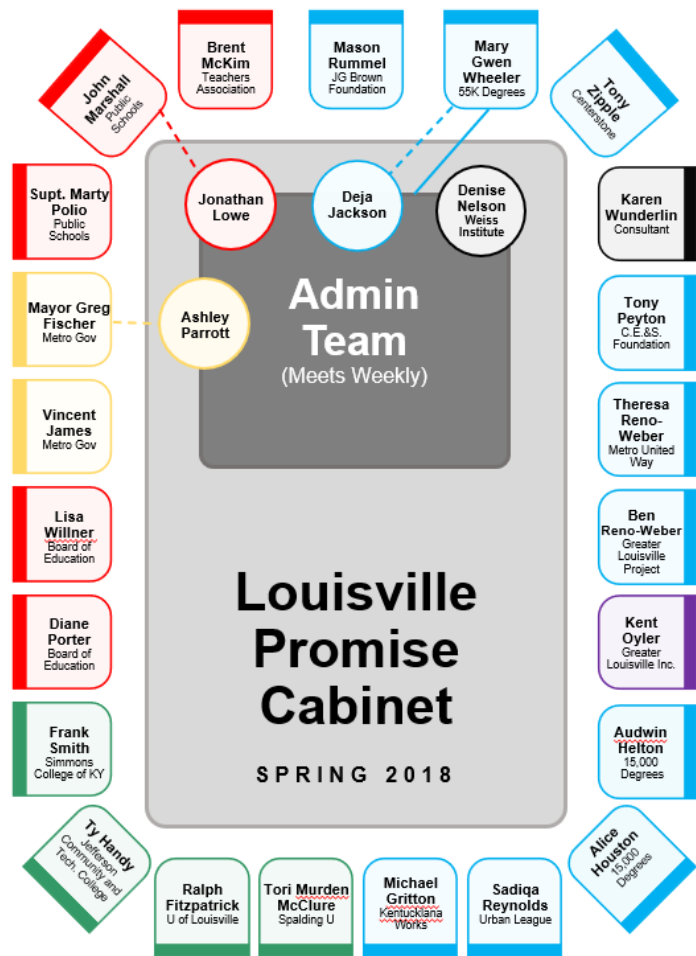
Source: Say Yes website accessed in 2019; used with permission

Appendix 5 Cabinet Configurations

2016-2017

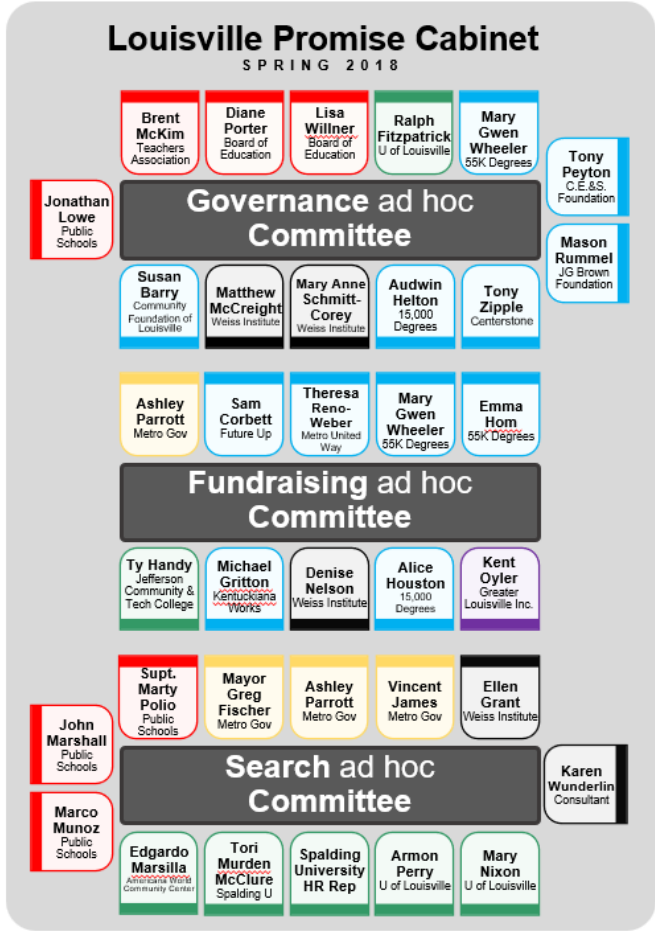


Spring/Summer 2018



COLOR KEY
(with totals for cabinet and committees, top to bottom)

- Non-Profit/Voluntary Sector (10,6,6,0)
- Private Sector (1,0,1,0)
- Higher Education (4, 1,1,5)
- City Government (2,0,1,3)
- Public School System (5,4,0,3)
- Consultant (1,2,1,2)



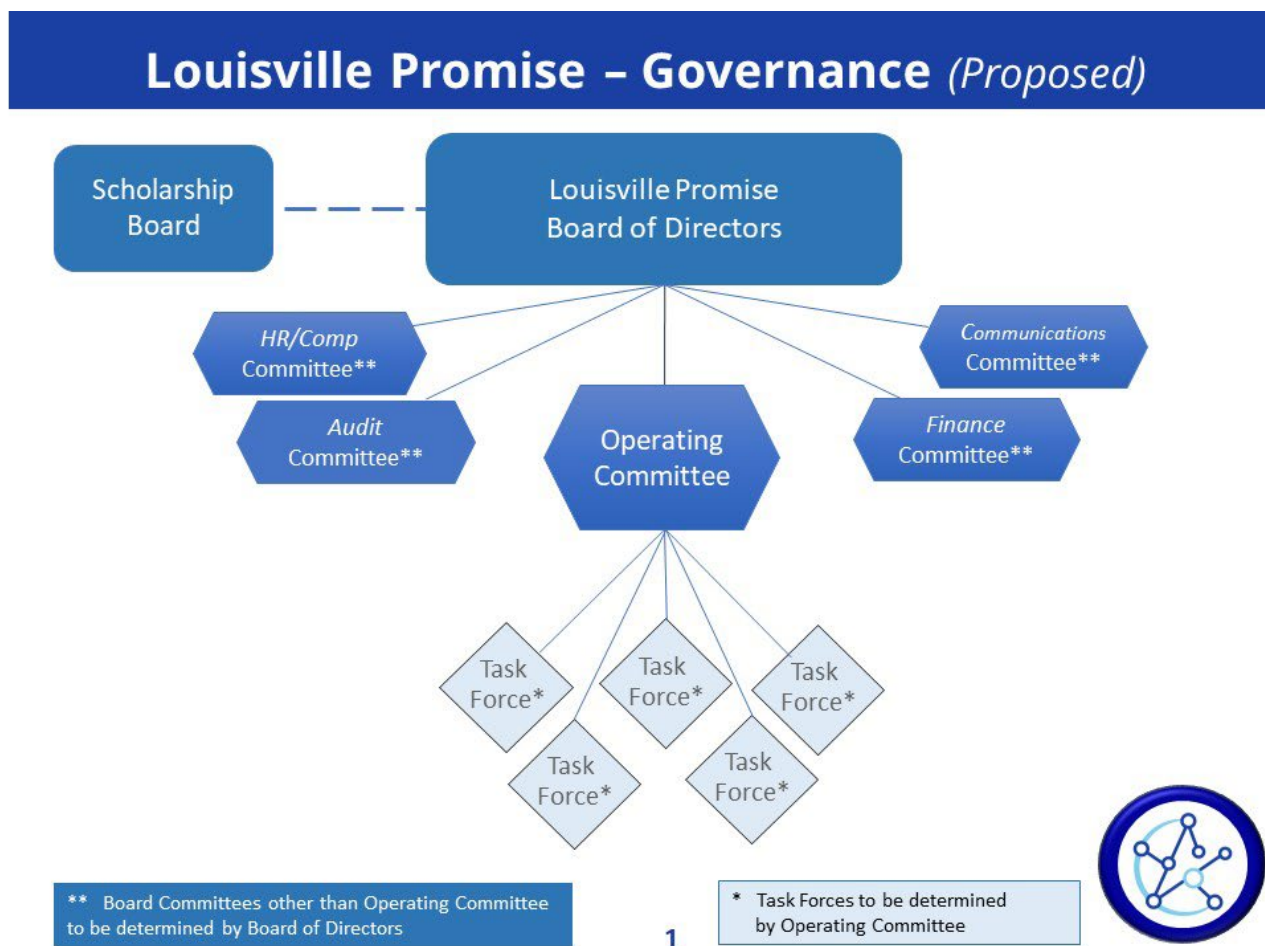
Source: Images created by case writers based on information from Mary Gwen Wheeler, 55,000 Degrees, and the Louisville Promise Cabinet

Appendix 6 Louisville Promise Cabinet Members

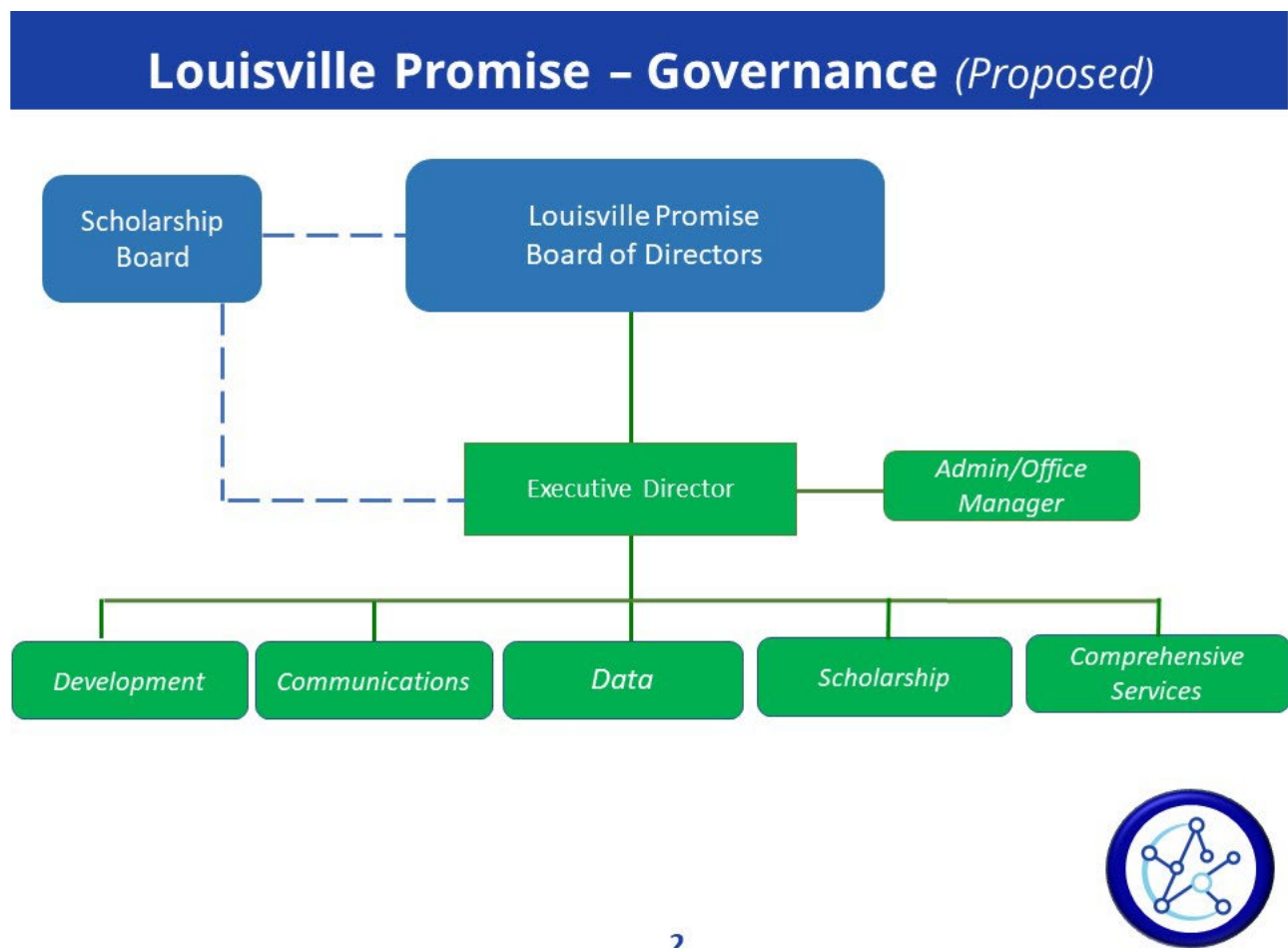
Jefferson County Public School District	Marty Pollio, Superintendent (Jonathan Lowe, Director of Strategy)
Louisville Metro Government	Greg Fischer, Mayor (Ashley Parrott, Senior Policy and Development Advisor)
Jefferson County Teachers Association	Brent McKim, President
15 th District Parent Teacher Association	Autumn Neagle, President
Metro United Way	Theresa Reno-Weber, President/CEO
55,000 Degrees (55k)	Mary Gwen Wheeler, Executive Director
Centerstone	Tony Zipple, CEO
Kentuckiana Works	Michael Gritton, Executive Director
James Graham Brown Foundation	Mason Rummel, President/CEO
C.E. and S. Foundation	Tony Peyton, Program Director
Community Foundation of Louisville	Susan Barry
Jefferson Community and Technical College	Ty Handy, President/CEO
University of Louisville	Ralph Fitzpatrick, Associate Vice President for External Affairs
Simmons College	Frank Smith, Executive Vice President
15,000 Degrees Initiative	Audwin Helton, Co-Chair Alice Houston, Co-Chair
Greater Louisville, Inc.	Kent Oyler, President/CEO
Spalding University	Tori Murden McClure, President
Louisville Urban League	Sadiqa Reynolds, President/CEO

Appendix 7 Proposed Governance Structure for New Organization

Board and Committees



Board and Organizational Chart



2

Source: Louisville Promise Cabinet and 55,000 Degrees; used with permission

Endnotes

- ¹ 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/>.
- ² Greg Fischer, meeting of the Louisville Promise Cabinet, June 4, 2018 (author’s notes).
- ³ 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>.
- ⁴ Greg Fischer, interview by authors. Unless cited otherwise, all quotes from Greg Fisher are from interviews by authors on May 15 and June 5, 2018.
- ⁵ 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.
- ⁶ Mary Gwen Wheeler, interview with authors, June 5, 2018. All further quotes from Wheeler are from this interview.
- ⁷ Karen Wunderlin, interview by authors, May 15, 2018. All further quotes from Wunderlin are from this interview.
- ⁸ Sadiqa Reynolds, interview by author, July 17, 2018. All further quotes from Reynolds are from this interview.
- ⁹ Louisville Promise, “What is Louisville Promise?” <http://louisvillepromise.org/>, accessed May 10, 2020.
- ¹⁰ Theresa Reno-Weber, interview by authors, June 5, 2018. All further quotes from Reno-Weber are from this interview.
- ¹¹ “Our Strategy,” Say Yes to Education, accessed December 27, 2018, <http://sayyestoeducation.org/strategy/>.
- ¹² Ashley Parrott, interview by authors, June 4, 2018. All further quotes from Parrott are from this interview.
- ¹³ Jonathan Lowe, interview by author, July 3, 2018. All further quotes from Lowe are from this interview.
- ¹⁴ Brent McKim, interview by authors, June 4, 2018. All further quotes from McKim are from this interview.
- ¹⁵ 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/>.
- ¹⁶ “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/>.
- ¹⁷ Diane Porter, interview by authors, July 2, 2018. All further quotes from Porter are from this interview.
- ¹⁸ Audwin Helton, interview by authors, June 5, 2018. All further quotes from Helton are from this interview.
- ¹⁹ Alice Houston, interview by authors, June 27, 2018. All further quotes from Houston are from this interview.
- ²⁰ Tony Zipple, interview by authors, June 5, 2018. All further quotes from Zipple are from this interview.
- ²¹ Kent Oyler, interview by authors, June 5, 2018. All further quotes from Oyler are from this interview.
- ²² Michael Gritton, interview by authors, June 5, 2018. All further quotes from Gritton are from this interview.
- ²³ Metro United Way, handout, June 4 meeting.
- ²⁴ 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/>.