

# Education Leader Profiles

## Bi-Partisan Working Group – K-12 Education Policy

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### Russlynn Ali – Vice President of the Education Trust; Founding Director of Education Trust-West

Russlynn Ali is the vice president of the Education Trust and founding director of the Education Trust-West, the west coast partner of the EdTrust. The organizations work for the high academic achievement of all students at all levels, with an emphasis on serving Latino, African American, Native American and low-income students.

Ali has held several senior positions at various organizations serving youth education, including: liaison to the president of the Children’s Defense Fund in Washington, DC; chief of staff to the Los Angeles Unified School District Board of Education President; and deputy co-director of the Advancement Project.

Ali attended Spelman College and graduated from the American University with a bachelor’s degree in Law and Society. She also holds a law degree from Northwestern University School of Law. Ali practiced corporate and civil rights law and served as an adjunct faculty member at the University of Southern California School of Law prior to her non-profit advocacy career.

Ali is a member of the State Bar of California and serves on the boards and advisory committees of a number of education related organizations, including the Los Angeles Unified School District Board of Education’s Curriculum and Instruction Committee and the California Governor’s Committee on Education Excellence.

### Michael Cohen – President of Achieve

Michael Cohen is a nationally recognized leader in education policy and standards based reform. He has been the President of Achieve since 2003. In 2006, *Education Week* ranked Achieve as the 6th most influential education policy organization in the nation, and ranked Achieve’s landmark report, *Ready or Not: Creating a High School Diploma That Counts*, as among the most influential research studies in the past decade.

Under Mike’s leadership Achieve formed the American Diploma Project Network, a growing network of 30 states committed to improving preparation for postsecondary education and 21st century careers. Governors, chief state school officers, and state higher education and business leaders in these states have committed to align high school standards, curriculum, assessments and accountability with the knowledge and skills high school graduates need for success in postsecondary education and careers.

Mike held several senior education positions in the Clinton Administration, including Assistant Secretary for Elementary and Secondary Education at the U.S. Department of Education, Special Assistant to the President for Education Policy at the White House, and Senior Advisor to U.S. Secretary of Education Richard Riley. He led the Administration’s effort to design, enact and implement Goals 2000, the first substantial federal initiative to



support state-led standards-based education reform. He also played an instrumental role in the development of all of the Administration's K-12 education initiatives.

Earlier in his career, Mike held key positions in several national organizations that work with state education policymakers, including as Director of Education Policy for the National Governors Association, and Director of Policy Development and Planning for the National Association of State Boards of Education. Mike began his career at the National Institute of Education, where he led the Effective Schools research.

### **John Deasy – Superintendent of Prince George's County Public Schools**

John Deasy is the Superintendent of Prince George's County Public Schools, Maryland's second largest school system and the nation's 18th largest district. He leads an organization that offers 134,000 children an innovative, technology-infused curriculum that has produced significant academic gains.

As Superintendent of the Santa Monica-Malibu Unified School District in California, he led a diverse student population. During his tenure, Dr. Deasy led district-wide reforms aimed at a highly focused set of strategies on the improvement of teaching and learning. These successful reforms have resulted in dramatic improvement of student achievement for all categories of students and the closing of the achievement gap. All Title I schools are reporting historically high student achievement, resulting in numerous national and state awards. In addition, both in Santa Monica and elsewhere, where Dr. Deasy has been a leader, he has led the development of standards-based administrator and teacher evaluation models, pay-for-performance, staff development and leadership training, development of a data-driven system for decision-making and implementation of research-based whole school reform initiatives. Most notably has been the redesign of large high schools into small learning communities.

Prior to this role, he served as Superintendent of the Coventry Public Schools in Rhode Island for five years. Dr. Deasy also served as a high school principal in two communities, director of personnel, and assistant superintendent of schools. Earlier in his career, he taught biology, chemistry, calculus, and English at the high school level, coached high school sports, and served as an assistant high school principal in New York.

Dr. Deasy is a Broad Fellow, was an Annenberg Fellow, State Superintendent of the Year, a presenter at numerous State and National conferences, a consultant to school districts undertaking high school reform and district-wide systemic improvement initiatives, and serves on numerous boards including Operation Public Education at the University of Pennsylvania and The Change Leadership Group at Harvard. He works for community and national service organizations, including the National Diabetes Association and his local parish. He is the author of numerous articles and research papers.

### **Jon Schnur – CEO & Co-Founder of New Leaders for New Schools**

Jon works with the New Leaders for New Schools team and community to accomplish our mission - To ensure high academic achievement for every student by attracting and preparing outstanding leaders and supporting the performance of the urban public schools they lead at scale. Since co-founding New Leaders for New Schools, he has



led the development of the organization's strategy, management team and board, core values, partnerships, and fundraising. Jon has served as Special Assistant to Secretary of Education Richard Riley, President Clinton's White House Associate Director for Educational Policy, and Senior Advisor on Education to Vice President Gore. He has developed national educational policies on teacher and principal quality, after-school programs, district reform, charter schools, and preschools. Jon graduated from Princeton University and a Wisconsin public high school.

### **Jim Shelton – Director of Education National Programs and Solutions for the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation**

Jim Shelton is a program director in the Education initiative at the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation. He manages new school creation and replications, East Coast grants and College Access.

Prior to joining the foundation, Shelton was a partner and the east coast lead for the New Schools Venture Fund. Before joining NewSchools, he co-founded LearnNow a school management company that later merged with Edison Schools. Shelton also spent over four years as a senior management consultant with McKinsey & Company.

He holds a bachelor's degree in Computer Science from Atlanta's Morehouse College, as well as master's degrees in Business Administration and Education from Stanford University.

