

2024-2025 LEVERAGE LEADERSHIP INSTITUTE FELLOW PROFILES

Over the course of the fellowship year, there are three key objectives that will guide our collective work together in the Leverage Leadership Institute:

OBJECTIVE 1:

Define a Replicable Pathway for Excellence

Define the criteria and pathway for exceptional, replicable results by:

- ▶ Identifying and codifying a set of best practices that guarantee exceptional results (advanced implementation of Leverage Leadership)
- ▶ Identifying and honoring exemplary instructional leaders that have both exceptional results and advanced implementation of these codified, replicable best practices
- ▶ Continuously improving these best practices by implementing and replicating the practices of honored instructional leader

OBJECTIVE 2:

Create a Community of “Proof Point” Practitioners

Create a worldwide community of proof point practitioners to:

- ▶ Strengthen and increase the number of proof point models for success
- ▶ Keep exceptional leaders refreshed and energized by engaging with other quality leaders outside of their home district

OBJECTIVE 3:

Coach Others to Meet the Bar

Certify and train exemplary leaders to develop other leaders by learning how to:

- ▶ Have advanced implementation of the coaching levers needed to coach other school leaders
- ▶ Lead professional development of the highest quality on the levers of the Leverage Leadership model



Becky Berry

Principal
Portland Public Schools
Portland, OR

Becky Berry is the proud Principal of Sitton Elementary School located in Portland, Oregon. She was a Middle School Special Education Teacher and Language Arts Teacher for 10 years in Brooklyn, NY and Portland, OR and also served as an Instructional Specialist and Teacher Mentor before becoming an elementary Assistant Principal with Portland Public Schools in 2016. Becky holds a dual endorsement and Master’s Degree in Special and General Education from Bank Street College in NYC and is a proud alumna of the University of Oregon.

Becky is driven by the vision that all students feel a deep sense of belonging and academic identity in the general education classroom and alongside her leadership team has helped bring this vision into reality at Portland’s first neighborhood inclusion school. She is grateful for the opportunity to continue to learn and grow her leadership skills.

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Syrena Burnam

Principal

**Uncommon Schools: Camden Prep High School
Camden, NJ**

Syrena Burnam is the Principal of Camden Prep High School, a renaissance school in Camden, New Jersey and part of the Uncommon Schools network.

This past school year, Camden Prep High School, the youngest Uncommon high school, earned the third highest Interim Assessment results in the network. Burnam believes deeply in providing access to AP level rigor as a way to prepare her students to succeed in college and beyond. By the time her students become seniors, 90% of them have completed at least one AP course.

Before launching CPHS, Burnam spent eight years at North Star Academy's Washington Park High School, first as an AP Biology teacher, then as Science Instructional Leader and Department Chair, and then as Dean of Curriculum and Instruction. A Yale University graduate, Burnam once thought she'd go into medical research but tutoring middle school students in college sparked a love of education. Syrena Burnam is also a graduate of Relay Graduate School of Education, through which she earned a Master of Arts in Teaching.



Yanela Cruz

Principal

**Libertas Academy Charter School
Springfield, MA**

Yanela Cruz serves as the Middle School Principal of Libertas Academy Charter School located in Springfield, Massachusetts. After graduating Lehigh University, Yanela started her career as an AP Physics/Chemistry teacher in San Antonio through Teach for America. She went on to help found Libertas in 2017 - sitting in the principal role for the last 3 years.

Under her leadership, Libertas has moved from the 6% to 56% percentile of schools. By centering her leadership in data-driven thinking and purposeful vision setting and modeling - Yanela has built a team that is effectively and efficiently closing student achievement gaps year over year. Outperforming the sending district in both Math and ELA - Libertas is ranked 3rd in the state (1st amongst charter schools) for ELA growth and 5th (3rd amongst charter schools) for MATH growth.

Yanela holds a M.Ed from Harvard, and has participated in the Building Excellent Schools LENS fellowship. She is excited to continue to expand her leadership and learn from others who share the same passion for the work. Outside of the edu-hustle, Yanela is a proud wife and mother, and enjoys spending time adventuring with her family.

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Marie Culihan

Principal

**Albany City School District
Albany, NY**

Marie Culihan started her career serving students in the Schenectady City School District as a fourth-grade elementary teacher. She went on to become the district's administrative in-resident where she supported building principals with high-leverage practices to increase student outcomes. In 2013, she became an instructional coach where she wrote curriculum, trained new staff, and led staff development focused on implementing standards based instruction using data-driven instruction.

In 2017, Mrs. Culihan came back home to where she started her student teaching experience, Albany School of Humanities in Albany, NY, to become the elementary school principal for the last seven years. During her time at Albany School of Humanities, Mrs. Culihan, with the support of her school community, has transitioned the school from in-status to good standing. Most notably, in 2023, Albany School of Humanities achieved the prestigious honor of being named a National ESEA Distinguished School for demonstrating the highest growth on state testing and closing achievement gaps for two consecutive years in the state of New York. In 2024, she was recognized as the Empire State Administrators Association Principal of the Year for the Capital Area Region of New York.



Estrella De La Torre

Principal

**Uncommon Schools: Leadership Prep Ocean Hill Elementary
Brooklyn, NY**

Estrella De La Torre is a Brooklyn, NY native, and attended elementary, middle and high school at schools across Manhattan, Staten Island and Brooklyn. After completing high school, Estrella attended DePauw University in Greencastle, IN as a POSSE scholar. Before graduating, Estrella participated and completed the Summer Teaching Fellowship at Uncommon Schools NYC which ultimately landed her position as a Kindergarten Special Education teacher at Leadership Prep Ocean Hill Elementary in Brownsville, Brooklyn.

In her 10 years at LPOH, Estrella has served as a Kindergarten teacher, 4th grade lead teacher, 4th grade instructional leader, Dean of Curriculum and then Principal Fellow. In 2019 Estrella became the principal at LPOH. Over the past decade, she has been able to serve thousands of children in the beautiful neighborhood of Brownsville and was a part of the staff that led LPOH to being the first and only school in Brownsville to win the National Blue Ribbon Award in 2017. Estrella continues to stretch herself in her leadership by bringing new ideas to serve K-4 readers and mathematicians across Uncommon's Brooklyn region.

In her free time, Estrella loves to read, spend time with her friends and family and be a dog mom to her dog, Cash. Estrella is a lifelong learner and is always looking for the next opportunity to level up learning for scholars across Brooklyn.”

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Knick Dixon

Principal

**Guilford County Schools
Greensboro, NC**

Knick Dixon is currently the school leader of Otis L. Hairston Sr. Middle School in Greensboro, North Carolina. He began his career as a social studies teacher with Guilford County Schools and later taught a variety of literature, humanities, and history courses in the public and private education sectors. He has served as Founding High School Dean of Students, Curriculum Facilitator, Middle School Dean, and assistant principal at the elementary, middle, and high school levels. In 2020, he completed the highly selective New Leaders Assistant Principal Leadership Academy.

Knick earned his undergraduate degree from East Carolina University with high honors and was chosen as the Department of History Student of the Year. His graduate thesis explored the impact Brown vs. Board of education had on Black teachers and principals. Dixon earned his graduate degrees in Teaching and Learning, as well as Educational Leadership from Cumberland University. In his spare time, Knick enjoys all things related to sports, backyard grilling, and auto mechanics. He currently resides in the Piedmont Triad region of North Carolina with his wife and daughter.



Dr. Windy Dorsey-Carr

**Assistant Superintendent of Curriculum, Instruction & Accountability
Public Schools of Robeson County
Lumberton, NC**

Dr. Windy Dorsey Carr, Assistant Superintendent of Curriculum, Instruction, & Accountability has 25 years of experience in education. She was hired five years ago in this role to help support schools with school improvement efforts and school transformation in the Public Schools of Robeson County in North Carolina before moving into the role of Assistant Superintendent a year ago. Dr. Carr has a Doctorate of Curriculum and Instruction, a School Administration Add-on License, a Masters in Reading, a Bachelor of Elementary Education specializing in Special Education, and is Nationally Board Certified. She has a strong background in coaching through her work at the North Carolina Department of Public Instruction as an Instructional Coach with District School Transformation and Reading First. She also has previously worked as a special education teacher, elementary school teacher, and instructional coach.

Dr. Carr works collaboratively with all departments to ensure that professional development, curriculum, and support are provided to district staff to ensure that we provide inclusive, equitable, and meaningful educational experiences for all students. She helps lead the district's efforts in implementing the transformation work through the implementation of Relay's best practices.

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Dr. Kristie Edwards

Principal
District of Columbia Public Schools
Washington, DC

Dr. Kristie Edwards is the Principal at Randle Highlands Elementary School located in Washington, DC. In this role, Dr. Edwards is an avid equity worker for change and leads a group of motivated teachers and 368 students towards professional and academic success. Being an adamant believer that all students can succeed has motivated Dr. Edwards to create afterschool programs, tutor, coordinate volunteer opportunities for students and provide a forum for social justice issues. Through her work of developing a nurturing and innovative learning environment the school appeared on the Ellen Show receiving the 2019 Greatest Christmas Giveaway with Former First Lady Michelle Obama, received the Edfund Standing Ovation award for “Empowering Teams”, listed as the top 10 most improved schools in DCPS from EmpowerEd, appeared on the Kelly Clarkson show and most recently has been awarded School Leader of the Year for District of Columbia Public Schools 22-23SY.

Dr. Edwards has more than twenty-four years in the field of education. During this time, she has held positions as a special education teacher, teacher mentor, instructional coach, new teacher inductee, testing coordinator, assistant principal, principal mentor, education consultant and currently as Principal. Additionally, she serves as an adjunct professor for the University of the District of Columbia.



Kimberly Ellis

Principal
Corpus Christi Independent School District
Corpus Christi, TX

Kimberly Ellis is currently serving in her third year as principal with Corpus Christi ISD. With a comprehensive background in educational leadership, and a dedication to creating a positive, inclusive school culture, Ellis was recently awarded CCU40, Corpus Christi Top 40 Leaders Under Forty.

Prior to administration, Kimberly served as a special education teacher, supporting diverse learners to overcome the effects of poverty and reach their full potential. Equity, efficacy, and excellence are foundational principles at the core of her transformational leadership philosophy. As a result of her impact, Dawson Elementary achieved an overall TEA Accountability Rating of 89, in comparison to the 69 rating within her first year appointed as principal. Each of the levers have steered her campus to be one of academic excellence.

In between being a principal, Kimberly mostly enjoys spending time with her two boys’ Kha’Lil and Taj while keeping up with all things basketball!

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Paula Gómez

Head of Professional Development

Aptus

Santiago, Chile

Paula Gómez is Head of Professional Development at Aptus, a non profit educational organization in Chile. She leads the team designing professional development sessions for teachers and school leaders. Paula has extensive experience in instructional leadership and teacher training, previously serving as a coach and mentor for principals, principal supervisors and instructional leaders through Aptus Instructional Leaders Program (PFLI). The program is completely inspired by the Leverage Leadership model and its key levers: Data Driven Instruction, School Culture and Observation and Feedback. PFLI works with schools that serve students belonging to the poorest 30% in Chile; its national assessment results exceed schools with similar characteristics.

Paula holds a Master's in Primary Education from University College London and a teaching degree from the Pontificia Universidad Católica de Chile. She has also studied at the University of British Columbia and Penn Graduate School of Education. Prior to Aptus, she taught elementary school for several years in Chile and England. Paula is a mother of two children, enjoys running, and spending time with her family in Santiago.



Katie Harshman

Principal

Pueblo School District 60

Pueblo, CO

Katie Harshman is the proud Principal of Minnequa Elementary located in Pueblo, CO. A Pueblo native and proud product of Pueblo School District 60, Katie knew early on that she wanted to give back to a community that gave so much to her. Her call to serve began in Pueblo School District 60 in 2011 at Minnequa Elementary. Since then, she has served as a reading interventionist, classroom teacher, coach, assistant principal and now as the principal, all at Minnequa Elementary.

Previously earmarked for closure, Minnequa has been recognized by the State Commissioner of Education as a model school, the Governor of Colorado with the Governor's Bright Spot Award and State Performance Framework Rating all due to the turnaround made by the school's staff and scholars. By building a culture that is rooted in high academic and behavioral expectations, Minnequa has become a place for each scholar to be successful.

Katie is driven to make a positive impact on the lives of her staff, scholars, community and her family. She is enthusiastic about the ongoing development RELAY offers to continue to make a positive impact on her community.

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Alicia Iwasko

Principal
Dallas Independent School District
Dallas, TX

Alicia Iwasko is principal at Annie Webb Blanton Elementary in Pleasant Grove. Under Iwasko's principalship the last 6 years, the school has held a Breakthrough Campus designation for the last 5 consecutive years with at least 3 out of 6 state distinctions.

Iwasko's commitment to excellence earned her the title of "Master Principal", during the school years 2022-2023 and 2023-2024. During the 2023-2024 school year, she was named a Very Influential Principal and selected as the Principal of the Year for Region II, and District Principal of the Year in the Elementary Category.

Iwasko boasts a diverse academic background, holding a Bachelor's degree in Elementary School from Benemerita Escuela Normal de Coahuila, a Master's degree in Education Sciences from the Universidad del Valle de México, and a Master's degree in Educational Leadership from Southern Methodist University.

Iwasko's philosophy on public education revolves around equity and excellence. She firmly believes in the transformative power of education, viewing it as the key to empowering students, irrespective of their cultural background, socioeconomic status, or zip code. Her commitment to challenging the expectations set by statistics is evident in her daily efforts to uphold the school's motto: Labor Omnia Vincit, translating to "Hard Work Conquers All."



Latoya Jeems

Principal
Journey Community Schools
Memphis, TN

Latoya has been an educator for 17 years. During her tenure, she has served as a middle school science teacher, Professional Learning Coach, Assistant Principal and now Principal. While working as a middle school science teacher, Latoya was also nominated and named an "irreplaceable teacher" by Memphis City Schools in 2009. Currently, Latoya serves as proud principal at Journey Coleman School.

Upon being named principal at Journey Coleman School the TVAAS level has remained a level 5 and 4. Within the 2nd year as principal at JCS, the school received a distinct honor to exit the priority status based on consistent achievement and growth status. Latoya uses her passion, educational belief and her why to continue to lead schools in high poverty areas. It is with this belief she seeks to develop a tradition of excellence that empowers students to break through life's barriers making the impossible possible.

Latoya earned a BS in Biology from Mississippi Valley State University, a Masters in Education from The University of Memphis and an Ed.S. in School Leadership from Freed Hardeman.

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Siva Kotla

Senior Director of Schools
The Akanksha Foundation
Pune, India

Sivakami (Siva) comes with 20+ years of experience in nonprofit management, administration of multi-country projects, and community building. She has been instrumental in setting up a public-private partnership school model (PPP) in new geographies, strengthening organization systems and processes, and believes in leading people with a balanced approach of accountability and empathy.

While leading the new city expansion work at The Akanksha Foundation, Siva encountered experiences in different Government schools which pushed her to think about what she wants to do next. As a result, she decided to move out of Finance and ventured into school programs.

Currently Siva leads a network of 10 PPP schools which caters to over 7000 students from low-income communities and supports over 500 educators in the city of Pune. For the last 2 years her focus has been to turn around schools by driving alignment across the city, school leadership development and enabling schools to stay focused on instruction.



Jason Krause

Director of Elementary Schools; Collaborative Four
Denver Public Schools
Denver, CO

Jason, a dedicated leader in education, resides close to his roots in Denver, where he witnessed the complex impact of the Supreme Court's *Keyes v DPS* decision on school desegregation. Guided by principles of service, social justice, and equity, he embarked on a journey that led him to lead two schools within close proximity to his childhood and current home. His steadfast belief in the power of cohesive school teams to positively shape children's lives drove the successful transformation of both Smith and Columbine Elementary schools. Currently serving as a Director of Elementary Schools overseeing a portfolio of 11 institutions, Jason's commitment to education remains unwavering. He met his wife and fellow educator while teaching, and together with their two children, Norah (15) and Leo (11), they embrace the Colorado lifestyle, spending their time outdoors hiking, biking, camping, and enjoying quality family moments.

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Giovanni Outram

Principal
IDEA Public Schools
Fort Worth, TX

Giovanni Outram is a passionate and innovative educator, currently serving as the Principal of IDEA Achieve Academy in the DFW metroplex. With a robust background in educational leadership, Giovanni has successfully led his school from an 'F' to an 'A' rating, demonstrating a strong commitment to high standards and student success. Holding a graduate degree in education, he has over a decade of experience, including roles as a TFA teacher and regional math coach, where he provided differentiated support across multiple schools. A champion of culturally responsive pedagogy and social justice, Giovanni is dedicated to creating inclusive and vibrant learning environments. Outside of his professional achievements, he is a proud father of a 3-year-old and an excited soon-to-be husband.



Ritu Pasricha

Principal
The Akanksha Foundation
Pune, India

Ritu Pasricha embarked on her educational journey initially as a volunteer before transitioning from her corporate role to specialize in interventions. With eleven years of experience, she served as a teacher for five years and has been the School Principal for the past six years. Throughout her tenure, she navigated through challenging yet rewarding experiences. Ritu firmly believes that there is always scope for improvement.

She holds degrees in education and commerce from Delhi School of Economics, India, alongside certificate courses from institutions like Harvard Business School, the Morris Foundation, and McKinsey. She takes pride in the significant academic progress in English and Math, alongside fostering a transparent school culture and strong community bonds.

When not at work, she cherishes moments with her family, including her husband, Amit, and their two grown children, Rhea and Adi.

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Dr. Kenya Roberts

Principal
Caddo Parish School District
Shreveport, LA

Kenya is the principal at Dr. Joseph Samuel Clark Elementary School in Shreveport, Louisiana, owner of A&K Tax Services and owner of PACE Educational Consulting. Kenya obtained a bachelor's degree in Secondary Mathematics Education from Southern University and A&M College, a master's degree in Education focusing on Administration and Supervision from Louisiana State University in Shreveport, and a doctorate degree from Walden University in Teacher Leadership.

Kenya has taught mathematics students, taught alternate certification, been a math interventionist, a master teacher, an intervention specialist, and an assistant principal. Her experiences have enabled her to see what it takes to close the achievement gap for children. Kenya has received many accolades for work such as KSLA Educator of the Week, Greater Shreveport Chamber MBOA Top Business professional of the year, and Leverage Leadership Institute Proof Point Award for bringing up the school's performance score. She was selected as a 40 under Forty nominee in 2018 and participated in the Greater Shreveport Chamber Leadership Program in 2019.



Scott Schuster

Principal
Uncommon Schools: Kings Collegiate
Brooklyn, NY

Scott Schuster has been the Principal at Kings Collegiate Charter School since 2010. Prior to leading Kings, Mr. Schuster taught 6th and 7th grade Math at Kings, 2nd and 3rd grade at P.S. 42 in the Bronx, and 6th grade English Language Arts at KIPP Summit Academy in Oakland, CA. In addition to teaching, Mr. Schuster has served in various other school-based roles including grade leader, lead teacher, intervention consultant, and intervention specialist. Mr. Schuster is a Teach for America New York City alumnus and received his B.A. in Political Science from Colgate University and his M.S. in Teaching from Pace University.

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Toby Shepherd

Founder & Head of School
PVD Prep
Providence, RI

Toby Shepherd is the Founding Head of School at PVD Prep, a public charter middle school serving the City of Providence. Toby served as Executive Director of Nowell Academy, a charter high school serving pregnant and parenting young women and men with campuses in Central Falls and in Providence, Rhode Island. Previously, Toby served as Strategic Initiative Officer for Educational Success at the Rhode Island Foundation and as Director of Policy for the City of Providence where he developed the award-winning Providence Talks early childhood literacy program.

Toby began his career teaching second grade in Brooklyn, New York with the national service organization Teach for America. Toby holds a Masters in Public Policy from Harvard University and a Master of Science in Teaching from Pace University.



Taro Shigenobu

Principal
Henderson Collegiate High School
Henderson, NC

Taro Shigenobu has been in the field of education for 11 years. He has served as an 8th grade science teacher, Grade Level Chair, Instructional Coach, and is currently the Principal of Henderson Collegiate High School, a Title 1 school located in Henderson, North Carolina. Taro has been the Principal at HCHS the last 5 years and during that time has guided the school to maintain 100% acceptance into college, along with sustained growth both in AP class data and state-tested data.

Taro is proud of the team he has assembled over the years and believes the right pieces are in place to build a sustained championship team. Moreso, Taro is proud of the incredible students HCHS gets to work with every day.

Taro received his undergraduate degrees from Brown University and earned his Master's degree from Johns Hopkins University. Taro lives in North Carolina with his wife and two children.

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Melissa St. Joy

Principal
Atlanta Public Schools
Atlanta, Georgia

Melissa Joan St. Joy is the proud principal of Hutchinson Elementary School. In addition to being an instructional leader, Melissa is a motivator, a caregiver, a listening ear, an advocate for her school community, an advocate for her students, a teacher, and an advocate for her parents. As an educator, every child has the right to learn and deserves a safe space. Educators can choose to be tools of torture or instruments of inspiration. Melissa prefers to empower and build capacity in her fellow educators to impact student outcomes and achievement directly.

As an educator of 21 years, Melissa has spent 15 years in Atlanta Public Schools. She has contributed to the growth of APS by serving as Teacher Quality Coordinator, Model Teacher Leader, and Instructional Coach and as a 2nd and 4th grade. She has teacher Experience in Dekalb County Schools and the Los Angeles Unified School District.

Under her leadership, the Georgia Department of Education recently announced that Hutchinson Elementary is among 155 schools recognized statewide as a 2022-2023 Literacy Leader for their exceptional growth in third-grade reading.

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Kim Tymkowych

Principal
Thompson School District
Loveland, CO

Kim Tymkowych is an elementary principal in Thompson School District in Loveland, Colorado. She has been in education for 21 years as a classroom teacher, literacy instructional coach, math instructional coach, assistant principal and principal for the past 11 years. Kim has led her school through turnaround efforts over the past 7 years that she has been at Winona Elementary and is proud of the predictable learning environment and “warm demander” mindset that her staff contribute to. Kim’s passion is leading staff as an instructional leader through data-driven facilitated planning, leading professional development based on staff feedback, and providing real-time feedback while spending time in classrooms. Building relationships with staff, students and families has allowed Kim the opportunity to provide support as well as an equitable teaching, learning and working environment. In April, Kim was awarded the 2024 Thompson Education Foundation Educator of the Year Award.

Kim earned her undergraduate degree from the University of Northern Colorado, her masters in Curriculum, Instruction and Leadership from Walden University, and her Educational Specialist Degree in Educational Leadership from the University of Northern Colorado.



Micah Westerman

Principal
Center City Public Charter Schools: Brightwood Campus
Washington, DC

Micah Westerman has worked with Center City Public Charter Schools in Washington, DC since 2015, spending six years as an Assistant Principal before transitioning to the Principal role in 2021. Micah has been in education since 2001, and his previous roles include Director of Curriculum and Special Education for the Fort Frye Local School District in Ohio and Assistant Principal and co-founding teacher at KIPP Summit Academy in the Bay Area. He began his career teaching middle school math in Oakland, CA as a Teach for America corps member. Micah earned his BA from the University of Pennsylvania and his MA in Educational Leadership from the Principal Leadership Institute at the University of California, Berkeley.

In his spare time, Micah is an avid runner, hiker, and camper. He enjoys cooking, reading, and spending time with his husband and two best dogs Molly and Teddy.