



# Resilient by Design

Creating the Conditions  
for Exceptional Leadership

**FY26 Annual Report**



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## A LETTER FROM OUR CEO

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Dear Friends, Partners, and Champions,

The past year has reaffirmed something we have long believed at MCEL United: when we invest in leaders, we invest in the future of our schools, our communities, and our nation.

Across the country, educational leaders continue to navigate extraordinary complexity. They are called to improve outcomes for students, cultivate thriving school cultures, develop future leaders, and respond to the evolving needs of their communities. These challenges demand more than technical expertise—they require resilience, meaningful support, and systems intentionally designed to help leaders succeed.

At MCEL United, our mission is clear. We partner with leaders and systems to design supportive, inclusive environments that value diverse leadership and ensure every student has access to the opportunities, resources, and experiences needed to thrive in school and in life. This mission guided every aspect of our work throughout 2026.

This year, we expanded the National Leadership Institute, convened educational leaders from across the nation through Leaders Developing Leaders, and our National Convening, strengthened district partnerships, advanced research with national partners, and continued investing in innovative approaches that strengthen leadership at every level.

Perhaps most importantly, we continued to build spaces where leaders feel seen, supported, and empowered. Independent research affirmed what our members have shared for years—that MCEL provides an environment where leaders experience authenticity, affirmation, belonging, and professional growth.

With gratitude,  
Harrison Peters  
Chief Executive Officer & Co-Founder



## Our Mission

We partner with leaders and systems to design supportive, inclusive environments that value diverse leadership and ensure every student has access to the opportunities, resources, and experiences needed to thrive in school and in life.

## Our Vision

MCEL envisions a transformed educational ecosystem where leaders of color and their allies have the infrastructure, resources, and support to create transformative learning spaces that reflect the diversity of our students and prepare all young people for successful, purpose-driven futures.

## Our Theory of Change

Leadership changes lives. Strong leaders create stronger schools. Strong schools create stronger communities. Yet exceptional leadership does not happen by chance. It requires intentional investment, meaningful support, and systems designed to help leaders grow throughout their careers. MCEL drives change through three pillars:

### Quality

We strengthen leaders and systems so students, schools, and communities experience stronger outcomes and greater opportunities to thrive.

### Quantity

We expand and strengthen the pipeline of exceptional educational leaders prepared to serve schools, districts, and communities.

### Care

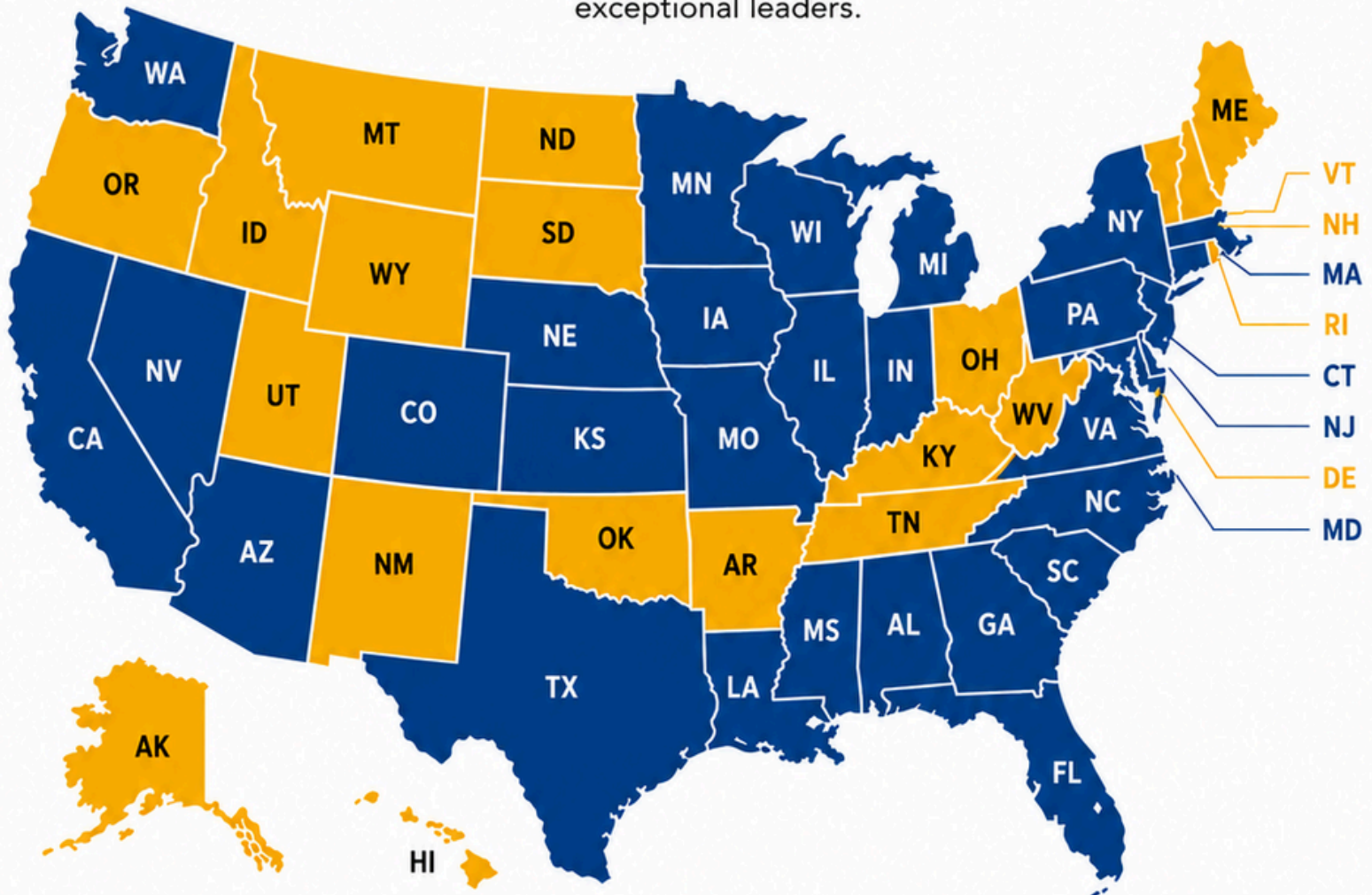
We cultivate environments where leaders experience belonging, authenticity, affirmation, and sustained support—because resilient leadership begins with caring for the whole leader.



# OUR FOOTPRINT

## A NATIONAL MOVEMENT. A GROWING IMPACT.

MCEL is building a powerful network of members, chapters, and district partners committed to developing and advancing exceptional leaders.



### STATES IN BLUE

States with MCEL members, chapters, affiliates, or district partnerships.



### STATES IN GOLD

States where MCEL is building relationships and exploring future opportunities.



**30**

**STATES**

Represented



**12**

**DISTRICT PARTNERSHIPS**

Engaged



**1,800+**

**MEMBERS**

Nationwide Network



**750,000**

**STUDENTS IMPACTED**

Through Strong Leadership

**QUALITY • QUANTITY • CARE**



“

"Truly one of the best weeks I have ever experienced. One of the first times I genuinely have been seen, heard, and valued in a space like this. Keep leaning on each other—already missing the fellowship."

— National Leadership Institute Fellow

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Participants consistently described MCEL as a space where they experienced authenticity, affirmation, belonging, and psychological safety—allowing them to grow as both leaders and individuals.

— American Institutes for Research



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# Our Impact

During 2025-2026, MCEL United continued to expand its national reach and deepen its impact by investing in educational leaders and the systems that support them.



FY26 BY THE NUMBERS

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1,800

Members Nationwide

1,250

Leaders Served

750,000+

Students Impacted

12

District Partnerships

30

States Represented

250

National Convening Participants

19

National Leadership Institute Cohort 3  
Graduates

40%

National Leadership Institute Cohort 3  
Fellows Promoted

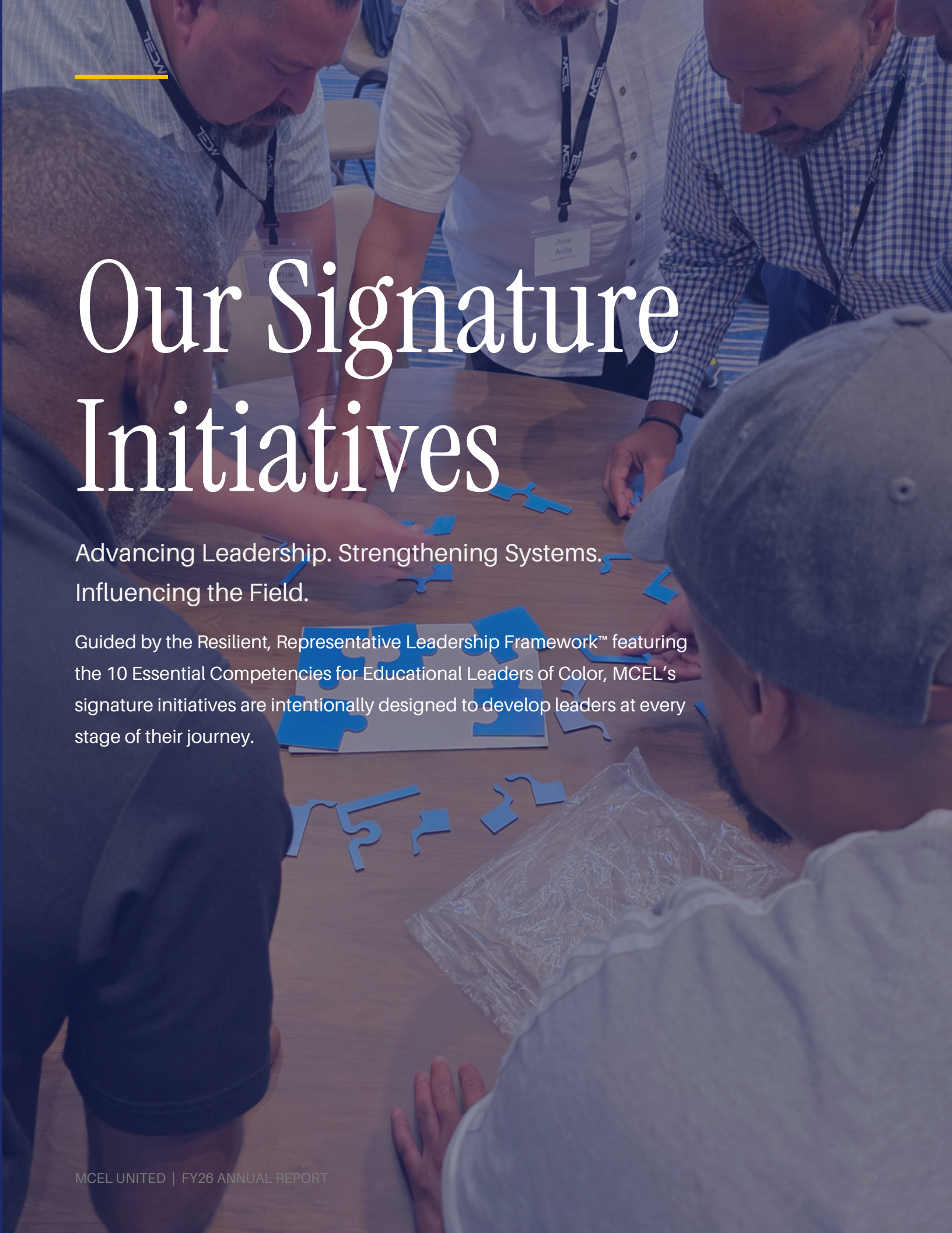
21

National Leadership Institute Cohort 4  
Fellow Participants

20%

National Leadership Institute Cohort 4  
Fellows Promoted





# Our Signature Initiatives

Advancing Leadership. Strengthening Systems.  
Influencing the Field.

Guided by the Resilient, Representative Leadership Framework™ featuring the 10 Essential Competencies for Educational Leaders of Color, MCEL's signature initiatives are intentionally designed to develop leaders at every stage of their journey.

# Developing the Next Generation of Educational Leaders

The National Leadership Institute (NLI) is MCEL’s premier nine-month fellowship designed to prepare and support educational leaders through an experience that is as transformative personally as it is professionally. Grounded in the Resilient, Representative Leadership Framework™ featuring the 10 Essential Competencies for Educational Leaders of Color, the fellowship combines executive coaching, the MCEL 360 Assessment, immersive learning experiences, and a national network of peers committed to leading with authenticity, courage, and excellence.

Unlike traditional leadership programs that focus primarily on technical skills, the National Leadership Institute develops the whole leader. Fellows are challenged to strengthen their leadership identity, deepen their self-awareness, navigate complex organizational dynamics, and lead from a place of purpose.

## FY26 Highlights

- Celebrated the graduation of 19 leaders from Cohort 3
- Welcomed 21 fellows into Cohort 4
- Continued executive coaching for every fellow
- Administered the MCEL 360 Assessment
- 40% of Cohort 3 fellows earned promotions
- 20% of Cohort 4 fellows advanced into new leadership opportunities

## Impact

Fellows consistently report increased confidence, stronger leadership identity, greater self-awareness, and a deeper commitment to leading authentically. AIR’s Year 1 evaluation found that participants experience MCEL as a place where leaders are affirmed, supported, challenged, and equipped to grow professionally while building lasting networks of trust and collaboration (**AIR an external evaluator by the American Institutes for Research**).



"This experience reminded me that leadership doesn't have to be lonely. I leave this fellowship with greater confidence, a stronger sense of purpose, and a brotherhood that will continue long after this week."

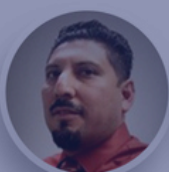
— National Leadership Institute Cohort 3 Fellow



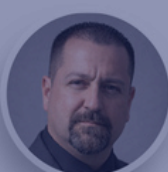
Keith Abrahams



Cuahtemoc Arroyo



Jose Avila



Ernesto Bernal



Tony Booker



Jamal Easley



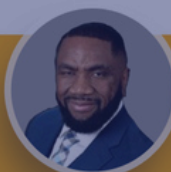
Larue Fitch



Durrell Harris



Michael Harrison



Eric Johnson



Keith Jones



Damu Mike



Kelvin Moore



Anthony Outler



James Payne



Dennis Perry



Daniel De Los Reyes



Curtis Rodriguez-Porter



Reginald Sample



Charles D. Smith



Raymond Stanley



Marcus Wright

"Thank you for an incredible week. I truly appreciate the wisdom, authentic conversations, and the way each of you challenged and stretched my thinking. I'm grateful to be part of this brotherhood and look forward to continuing this journey together."

— National Leadership Institute Cohort 4 Fellow

# Who Has the Principal's Back?

The Leaders Developing Leaders (LDL) Summit is MCEL's national convening dedicated to strengthening one of education's most important leadership relationships—the partnership between principals and the leaders who support them. Each year, the Summit brings together superintendents, executive cabinet members, principal supervisors, high-performing principals, researchers, policymakers, and higher education partners.

Hosted in partnership with Baltimore City Public Schools and The Wallace Foundation, the 2026 Summit centered on the question, **Who Has the Principal's Back?** Participants explored how school systems can create greater coherence, strengthen principal support, and ensure that leadership development remains one of the highest-leverage investments districts make.

## FY26 Highlights

- 98% of survey respondents shared the Summit was a quality professional learning experience
- 98% of survey respondents identified specific strategies to improve their school system's practices in order to better support and develop principals
- 93% of survey respondents developed a concrete action plan to improve their personal practice or school system / organization / university practice
- 100% increase in attendance vs. previous year
- Partnered with Baltimore City Public Schools & Wallace Foundation
- Launched inaugural University Strand led by Morgan State University
- Convened national policy conversations with The Hunt Institute
- Launched the Leaders Developing Leaders Principal Supervisor Lab

## Impact

The Summit continues to reinforce MCEL's belief that improving schools begins by strengthening the systems that support principals. District teams examined how central office leadership, principal supervision, organizational coherence, and policy alignment collectively influence principal success and student achievement.



# Building a National Community of Educational Leaders

The **MCEL National Convening** is the organization's premier annual gathering, bringing together educational leaders from across the nation to learn, connect, celebrate, and strengthen a growing movement committed to resilient, representative leadership. More than a conference, the National Convening serves as a space where leaders find community, share experiences, and renew their commitment to serving students and communities with courage and authenticity.

The Convening reflects MCEL's belief that leadership is strengthened through relationships. By creating intentional spaces for professional learning, networking, reflection, and celebration, the Convening fosters a national community united by a shared commitment to advancing educational excellence.

## FY26 Highlights

- Featured Dr. Eddie S. Glaude Jr. as keynote speaker
- Presented the Resilient Leader Award to Dr. Pedro Martinez
- Hosted the Hispanic Male Leadership Summit
- Expanded opportunities for networking and collaboration
- Continued to strengthen MCEL's growing national network
- Launched MCEL's Men's Health Summit with a focus on Physical, Financial, and Mental Wellness.

## Impact

The National Convening continues to serve as the heartbeat of the MCEL community. Participants engage in meaningful conversations, deepen professional relationships, and leave with renewed purpose and practical strategies for strengthening leadership within their schools and districts.

AIR's evaluation found that the Convening also serves as an important entry point for leaders to engage with MCEL's leadership resources, increasing participants' familiarity and confidence with the organization's tools and frameworks.

# Strengthening Leadership Where It Matters Most

MCEL partners directly with school districts, charter organizations, nonprofit organizations, and educational agencies to strengthen leadership capacity and build systems that better support educational leaders. Through customized professional learning, executive coaching, leadership team development, and strategic consultation, MCEL works alongside organizational leaders to create sustainable conditions for leadership excellence.

Every partnership is grounded in the belief that lasting improvement occurs when organizations invest not only in individual leaders but also in the systems that support them.

## FY26 Highlights

- Partnered with 12 school districts and organizations
- Delivered customized professional learning and executive coaching
- Supported executive leadership teams and organizational improvement
- Expanded leadership development through district-based partnerships
- Continued implementation of the Resilient, Representative Leadership Framework™

## Impact

District partnerships extend MCEL's impact far beyond individual programs by embedding leadership development within educational systems. AIR's Year 1 evaluation found that districts view MCEL's work as complementary to their existing priorities while helping leaders rethink how they attract, support, develop, and retain educational leaders.

*“MCEL has become woven into the fiber of what is happening in our district.”*

— District Leader, Fresno Unified





# Advancing the Field

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Shaping Research. Influencing Practice.  
Informing Policy.

Lasting change occurs when ideas influence practice, research informs decision-making, and organizations contribute to shaping the future of the profession. Throughout FY26, MCEL continued to expand its influence beyond professional learning by contributing to national research, informing policy conversations, and elevating promising practices.

# Partnering to Build the Evidence Base

MCEL's partnership with the Wallace Foundation and the American Institutes for Research (AIR) represents an important investment in understanding the impact of professional learning designed specifically for educational leaders of color.

Throughout FY26, AIR continued its independent evaluation of MCEL's programming, documenting how the organization's work strengthens leadership identity, builds professional networks, and equips leaders with practical tools to improve their practice. Rather than measuring participation alone, the evaluation examined how leaders applied their learning within their schools, districts, and communities.

Early findings reinforced what participants consistently describe: professional learning is most powerful when leaders feel affirmed, challenged, supported, and connected to a community of peers. Participants reported increased confidence, stronger leadership practices, greater self-awareness, and a renewed commitment to leading authentically.

The evaluation also highlighted the value of the Resilient, **Representative Leadership Framework™** featuring the **10 Essential Competencies for Educational Leaders of Color** as a practical resource for leadership growth and organizational improvement.



# Contributing to the National Conversation

MCEL continues to serve as a trusted voice in conversations about educational leadership, principal support, and leadership development. Through publications, presentations, and collaborative partnerships, the organization is helping shape how educational systems think about developing and supporting leaders.

During FY2026, MCEL contributed to national conversations through thought pieces including [Principal Supervision Is Not a Solo Act](#) and [Who Has the Principal's Back?](#), elevating the critical role of principal supervisors and the systems that support school leadership.

The Wallace Foundation's report, [Promising Practices for the Design and Implementation of Equity-Centered Leader Pathways](#), highlights MCEL's contributions to strengthening leadership pathways and expanding opportunities for educational leaders.

These contributions reflect MCEL's commitment to ensuring that effective practices developed through its work are shared broadly so that leaders, districts, universities, and policymakers can learn from one another and continue strengthening educational leadership across the country.



# Expanding Our Collective Impact

MCEL believes that meaningful change happens through collaboration. Throughout FY26, the organization continued to deepen partnerships with school districts, universities, philanthropic organizations, and national education leaders who share a commitment to improving educational leadership.

As an active participant in the Education Leadership Network (ELN), MCEL collaborates with organizations across the country to exchange ideas, examine emerging challenges, and identify innovative strategies that strengthen leadership across the profession.

## Council of Ambassadors

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The MCEL Council of Ambassadors ensures that the voices of practitioners remain central to the organization's work. Comprised of leaders representing school districts, charter and private schools, higher education, nonprofit organizations, and educational agencies, the Council serves as a strategic advisory body to MCEL's leadership and Board of Directors.

Throughout the year, Council members provide feedback on emerging needs within the field, inform the design of MCEL's professional learning experiences, strengthen connections with educational leaders across the country, and serve as ambassadors for the organization's mission.

By intentionally engaging leaders from diverse sectors and experiences, the Council helps ensure that MCEL remains responsive to the realities facing today's educational leaders while continuing to innovate and expand its national impact.



## Our Partners

1 Million Teachers of Color Campaign  
American Institutes for Research (AIR)  
Ankeny Community Schools  
Aurora Public Schools  
Baltimore City Schools  
Belleville Public Schools  
BLOC  
Broward County Schools  
Broward Education Foundation  
Cambiar Education  
Cedar Rapids Public Schools  
Center for Creative Leadership  
Charles and Lynn Schusterman Family Philanthropies  
Charter Schools USA  
Chicago Public Schools  
Chiefs for Change

Council Bluffs Public School  
DC Public Education Fund  
DC Public Schools  
DeKalb Public Schools  
Durham Public Schools  
Education Leaders Network (ELN)  
Educators Rising  
Fairfax County Public Schools  
Fresno Unified School District  
Harrisburg School District  
Helios Foundation  
Jacksonville Public Education Fund  
Kansas City Kansas Schools  
KIPP Atlanta  
KIPP Philadelphia  
Learning Forward

Lloyd A. Fry Foundation  
Los Angeles Unified School District  
Morgan State University  
New York City Public Schools  
Paterson Public Schools  
Prince George County Public Schools  
Rush Henrietta Central School District  
School District of Philadelphia  
Suncoast Credit Union  
The Hunt Institute  
The Wallace Foundation  
TNTP  
Uplift Charter Schools  
Waukegan Public Schools  
Winston-Salem Forsyth County Schools  
Winston-Salem Foundation



A man with a beard and a striped shirt is laughing heartily while sitting at a desk with a laptop. In the background, there are posters on a blue wall. One poster features Cuahlemoc Arroyo, a man with glasses, with the text 'Cuahlemoc Arroyo' and 'Los Angeles Unified School District'. Another poster features Reginald Moore, a man in a suit, with the text 'Reginald Moore' and 'City Schools'. The overall scene is dimly lit with a blue tint.

# Looking Forward

Our Work Continues.



## LOOKING FORWARD

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Every milestone we celebrate in this report represents something much greater than an accomplishment—it represents a leader who is better prepared to serve a school, a district that is investing more intentionally in its people, and students whose opportunities are expanded because of stronger leadership.

While we are proud of what we accomplished during FY26, we know our work is far from finished. Across the country, educational leaders continue to navigate unprecedented challenges while carrying the responsibility of creating schools where every student can thrive.

As MCEL looks ahead, we remain focused on expanding our reach, strengthening our partnerships, and advancing innovative professional learning experiences that prepare leaders to meet the demands of today while shaping the possibilities of tomorrow. We will continue to elevate research, influence policy, strengthen leadership pipelines, and build communities where educational leaders are affirmed, challenged, and equipped to lead with excellence.

Our vision has always extended beyond developing individual leaders. We are building a national movement dedicated to ensuring that resilient, representative leadership becomes the standard—not the exception—in America's schools.

The progress reflected in these pages would not be possible without the commitment of our members, fellows, district partners, sponsors, philanthropic supporters, university collaborators, volunteers, Board of Directors, Council of Ambassadors, and the countless educational leaders who trust MCEL to be part of their leadership journey.

To each of you, thank you.

Together, we are developing leaders.

Together, we are strengthening systems.

Together, we are expanding opportunity for students  
and communities across the nation.

And together, we are just getting started.

## A FINAL WORD FROM OUR CO-FOUNDERS

Leadership has never been about a title. It is about service. It is about courage. It is about choosing to invest in others, even when the work is difficult.

Each year, we have the privilege of witnessing extraordinary leaders who continue to show up for their schools and communities with resilience, compassion, and an unwavering belief in what is possible. Their stories remind us why MCEL exists.

This report reflects a year of meaningful progress, but more importantly, it reflects a growing community of leaders who are committed to making a lasting difference. Whether through our professional learning experiences, district partnerships, research collaborations, or national convenings, one truth remains constant: when leaders grow, schools improve, communities are strengthened, and students benefit.

Thank you for believing in this mission and for partnering with us to advance educational leadership across our nation. We look forward to continuing this journey with you.

With gratitude,  
Steve Gering & Harrison Peters  
Co-Founders  
MCEL United

“Together, we are building a future where every leader is prepared, supported, and empowered to ensure every student reaches their full potential.”









# Thank You

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