

Dr. John B. King Jr.

Prior to becoming President and CEO of The Education Trust in 2017, John B. King Jr. served as U.S. Secretary of Education for President Barack Obama. In tapping him to lead the U.S. Department of Education, President Obama called King “an exceptionally talented educator,” citing his commitment to “preparing every child for success” and his lifelong dedication to education as a teacher, principal, and leader of schools and school systems. As secretary, King focused on: equity and excellence throughout pre-kindergarten, K-12 education, and higher education; lifting up the teaching profession and school leadership; and access, affordability, and completion in higher education.

In the development of regulations, guidance, and technical assistance to support states’ implementation of the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA), King worked to ensure states would use their new flexibility in service of equity in order to deliver a high-quality, well-rounded education to all students no matter their race, zip code, socioeconomic status, language spoken at home, or disability status. King championed department initiatives to expand access to quality early learning, combat chronic absenteeism through mentoring, reduce the use of exclusionary discipline, support the success of homeless and foster youth, and strengthen partnerships between schools and community-based organizations to provide wrap-around supports. King was a strong advocate for evidence-based grant-making, education research, and the use of data — including the Civil Rights Data Collection (CRDC) survey — to inform policy. King promoted the benefits of socioeconomic and racial diversity in schools, including launching a new grant program to support districts working to reduce socioeconomic and racial isolation of students.

To lift up the teaching profession and school leadership, King acted to require states to strengthen the quality and transparency of teacher preparation programs; supported states in using federal resources for stronger induction programs, evidence-based professional development, and career ladder initiatives for teachers and principals; and promoted the department’s Teach to Lead initiative to support teacher voice and help teachers lead in their schools and districts from the classroom.

In higher education, King championed department initiatives to increase completion rates through evidence-based supports for students, provide second chance opportunities to incarcerated students, and expand access to early college programs for high school students. He established an enforcement unit to protect students and taxpayers from bad actor institutions, made changes to the FAFSA to make it simpler to complete and provide families with earlier information about financial aid, oversaw the implementation of gainful employment regulations ensuring accountability for outcomes for career programs, and took steps to strengthen the role of accreditors and states in ensuring higher education accountability.

Before becoming secretary, King served at the department as principal senior adviser. In that role, he carried out the duties of the deputy secretary, overseeing all preschool-through-12th-grade education policies, programs, and strategic initiatives, as well as the operations of the department. He carried out this work with a focus on increasing equity, improving educational outcomes for all students, and closing achievement gaps through implementation of key administration priorities in areas including early learning, elementary and secondary education, special education, English language acquisition, and innovation.

In performing the duties of the deputy secretary, King also oversaw the department’s work leading cross-agency collaboration for President Obama’s My Brother’s Keeper task force,

which seeks to address persistent opportunity gaps faced by boys and young men of color, and to ensure that all young people are able to reach their full potential.

Prior to his arrival at the U.S. Education Department in January 2015, King served as the commissioner of education for the state of New York. In that role, he served as chief executive officer of the State Education Department and as president of the University of the State of New York, overseeing the state's elementary and secondary schools (serving 3.1 million students), public, independent, and proprietary colleges and universities, libraries, museums, and numerous other educational institutions. At the time of his appointment in May 2011, King was one of the nation's youngest state education leaders and the first African American and Puerto Rican to serve as New York State education commissioner.

As commissioner of education, King worked with the Board of Regents to pursue an ambitious education improvement agenda. During his tenure, New York State was a national leader in many facets of education: investing in high-quality early learning; raising standards for teaching and learning; supporting teachers and school leaders through strong professional development, access to rich instructional resources, and innovative educator career ladder models; expanding career and technical education in high-demand fields; and increasing educational opportunity for students in the highest-need communities. Under his leadership, New York deepened collaboration between the state's preschool-through-12th-grade (P-12) schools and its institutions of higher education, including strengthening teacher and principal preparation, and raising the bar for teacher and principal certification.

King brings to his role extensive experience leading urban public schools that are closing the achievement gap and preparing students to enter, succeed in, and graduate from college. Prior to his appointment as senior deputy commissioner at the New York State Education Department in 2009, he served as a managing director with Uncommon Schools, a nonprofit charter management organization that operates some of the highest-performing urban public schools in New York, New Jersey, and Massachusetts. Earlier in his career, he was a co-founder and co-director for curriculum and instruction of Roxbury (Massachusetts) Preparatory Charter School. Under his leadership, Roxbury Prep became one of the highest-performing urban middle schools in the state, closed the racial achievement gap, and outperformed not only the Boston district schools but also schools in the city's affluent suburbs. King began his career in education teaching high school social studies in San Juan, Puerto Rico and Boston, Massachusetts.

King earned a Bachelor of Arts in government from Harvard University, a Master of Arts in the teaching of social studies from Columbia University's Teachers College, a J.D. from Yale Law School, and a Doctor of Education degree in educational administrative practice from Columbia University's Teachers College. He was a 1995 Truman Scholar and received the James Madison Memorial Fellowship for secondary-level teaching of American history, American government, and social studies. Prior to joining the department, in February 2011, King was appointed by U.S. Secretary of Education Arne Duncan to serve on the U.S. Department of Education's Equity and Excellence Commission. In addition, he served on the board of New Leaders for New Schools from 2005 to 2009, and is a 2008 Aspen Institute-New Schools Entrepreneurial Leaders for Public Education Fellow.

King's life story is an extraordinary testament to the power of education. Both of his parents were career New York City public school educators, whose example serves as an enduring inspiration. His parents both died from illness by the time he was 12, and he struggled to cope with their loss as he moved between family members and schools. He credits New York City

public school teachers — particularly his teachers at P.S. 276 in Canarsie and Mark Twain J.H.S. in Coney Island — for saving his life by providing transformative educational experiences and giving him hope about the future. His belief in the centrality of educational opportunity to the American Dream and the vital necessity of second chances for our young people has its foundations in his own experience of overcoming so many challenges and going on to graduate from Harvard, Yale, and Columbia and become a teacher and education leader.

For his leadership on issues of educational equity, King has been honored with the Ann S. Kheel Award from the New York Urban League, the Eugene M. Lang Lifetime Achievement Award from the "I Have A Dream" Foundation, the New York Immigration Coalition Builders of the "New" New York Award, and the Robin Hood Foundation Heroes Award.

King lives in Takoma Park, Maryland, with his wife and two children, who attend local public schools.