

# MERIA JOEL CARSTARPHEN

## EXECUTIVE PROFILE

More than 20 years of successful leadership and management experience, fourteen serving in chief executive officer positions, reporting to and building effective relationships with elected and appointed Boards. Extensive experience setting, achieving, and surpassing strategic goals to improve dramatically organizational outcomes. Highly effective at innovation, fundraising, strategic partnerships, and advocacy for optimal organizational success.

### SKILL HIGHLIGHTS

- Chief executive leadership
- Charter & traditional experience
- School portfolio management
- Fundraising and partnerships
- Financial management
- Leadership team development
- Accountability and assessment
- Policy and legislative strategy
- Board governance
- Equity, diversity, and inclusion expertise
- Entrepreneurial and transformative change management
- Branding and social media
- Bilingual - professional working Spanish

### CORE ACCOMPLISHMENTS

**Entrepreneurial leadership.** Led complex efforts to shape vision and establish goals with creativity and bold solutions aligned to key tenets of equity, diversity and inclusion resulting in innovative transformational school models for traditional district and in partnership with charter schools, showcase-level events, and campaigns to raise awareness and resources for critical needs and innovative revenue models.

**Strategic planning.** Partnered with Boards and stakeholders to develop multi-year strategic plans for educational institutions up to 86,000 students. Implemented supporting systems, including aligned financial plans, longitudinal data warehouses, student information systems, data dashboards, smart cloud computing environments and state-of-art curriculum and assessment platforms.

**Fundraising.** Successfully secured special revenue resources (private grants, state, and federal government awards) through innovative partnerships and fundraising in the hundreds of millions of dollars. Effective long-term investment strategy resulting in private commitments of \$30M in St Paul Public Schools; \$45M in Austin ISD; \$72M in Atlanta Public Schools. Passed multiple capital campaigns, including \$546M capital projects referendum, \$489M in new bonds, a \$180M referendum with an accountability system and \$500M special purposes local option sales tax referendum.

**Financial stability.** Successfully stabilized, balanced, and managed budgets ranging from \$625M to \$1B. Secured high financial ratings by Moody's and Poor's achieving AAA and Aa1 bond ratings.

**Partnerships and advocacy.** Established alliances with diverse partners to achieve local, state, and national impact in early childhood education, literacy, whole child development, career and technical education pathways, high school completion, college readiness and completion, health and wellness, safety and security and wraparound supports. Examples of partnerships: Anti-Defamation League, National Commission of Social Emotional and Academic Development, National Institute of Justice, Collaborative for Academic Social and Emotional Learning, Council of Great City Schools, Georgians for Refuge, Action, Compassion and Education Commission and Connect with Kids Network.

**Student achievement.** Improved student performance and percentage of students staying in school, graduating on time, and being accepted to college in majority minority and high poverty school systems as part of the GradNation Initiative. Improved graduation rate by 21.2 percentage points to 80.3%, achieved highest ever rates of performance on state assessment and increased college acceptance rate 11 percentage points to 62% in Atlanta. Achieved 86.3% all-time high graduation rate in Austin.

## SUPERINTENDENT/CHIEF EXECUTIVE OFFICER EXPERIENCE

[www.meriacarstarphen.com](http://www.meriacarstarphen.com)

**2020-current**

Provide executive, management, and entrepreneurial leadership as founder and Chief Executive Officer of a consulting group focused on achieving transformational outcomes in education. Serve in roles such as Executive in Residence, Senior Scientist, and Executive Producer for national and global enterprises. Advise on strategy, leadership, and quality implementation for restructuring organizations and supporting executives and other clients to achieve their goals. Most recent projects include strategy for ending generational poverty, leadership development, school system transformation, ESSER accountability, COVID response, educational technology, and DEI platforms.

**Atlanta Public Schools, Atlanta, GA**

**2014-2020**

A diverse, urban public school district with \$1B in annual operating funds, 6,000 employees and 52,000 PreK-12 students in 89 traditional schools and learning sites. Authorized, supported, and provided oversight to evaluate performance, monitor compliance, and enforce the terms of 18 charter school contracts. In addition, launched six innovative charter partnership school designs including some with extended community revitalization components. Recruited to rebuild integrity and rebrand the organization following nation's largest cheating scandal in public education. Achieved growth in community engagement and in desired performance outcomes: academic achievement, graduation rates and overall well-being. Reduced teacher and leader turnover and significantly improved morale –

increasing employee engagement from 5<sup>th</sup> to 57<sup>th</sup> percentile in Gallup's national education database. Revitalized school district foundation to increase special revenue investments tenfold.

### **Austin Independent School District, Austin, TX**

**2009-2014**

A diverse, urban public school district with \$1B in annual operating funds, ~\$800M investment portfolio, 11,600 employees and 86,000 PreK-12 students in over 120 schools and learning sites. Successfully navigated worst state budget deficit in Texas in over 50 years, while still improving student outcomes. Exceeded state average on student achievement and state targets for high schools. Ranked first and second in 4<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> grades on National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP); and improved attendance rates at all levels (95% all-time high). Restored school district foundation through Board recruitment, establishing bylaws, raising money, and issuing grants. Authorized one charter school.

### **Saint Paul Public Schools, Saint Paul, MN**

**2006-2009**

A diverse, urban public school district with an annual budget of \$625M, 6,500 employees and 40,500 PreK-12 students in over 100 schools and learning sites. Authorized and provided oversight to evaluate performance, monitor compliance, and enforce the terms of several charters. Made student performance gains. Improved achievement and graduation rate. Maintained balanced budget during state funding reductions. Rebuilt a donor-advised school district foundation fund after years of inattention, led fundraising and shaped vision for grantmaking. Authorized and evaluated for accountability purposes charter schools.

### **OTHER PROFESSIONAL EXPERIENCE**

- **Chief Accountability Officer**, District of Columbia Public Schools, Washington, DC, 2004-2006
- **Executive Director for Comprehensive School Improvement and Accountability**, Kingsport City Schools, Kingsport, TN, 2003-2004
- **Research Consultant** for a family foundation while completing dissertation, Schott Foundation, Boston, MA, 2001-2002
- **Special Assistant to the Superintendent**, Columbus Public Schools, Columbus, OH, 1999-2001
- **Teacher**, Middle School, Selma City Public Schools, Selma, AL, 1992-1996

### **EDUCATION**

**Doctor of Education in Administration**, Planning and Social Policy Concentration in Urban Superintendency, Harvard University Graduate School of Education, Cambridge, MA - Herold Hunt Fellowship, 1998-2002

**Master of Education in Administration**, Planning and Social Policy, Harvard University Graduate School of Education, Cambridge, MA - John E. Stevens Fellowship, 1998-1999

**Master of Education in Administration of Elementary and Secondary Schools**, Auburn University, Auburn, AL - Graduate Research Assistant, Truman Pierce Institute, 1996-1997

**Bachelor of Arts in Political Science and Spanish**, Tulane University, Newcomb College, New Orleans, LA - Class Speaker at Commencement, 1988-1992

### **COMMUNITY LEADERSHIP**

Southeast Regional Educational Laboratory, Governing Board Member, 2022-Present; Governor's GRACE Commission for Human and Sex Trafficking Prevention Campaign, 2019-2021; President's Council, Tulane University, 2018-Present; Commissioner, Aspen Institute for Social Emotional and Academic Development, 2016-2019; Council of Great City Schools Member, 2004-2020 and Board of Directors and Executive Committee, 2006-2014; Atlanta Ballet, Board Member, 2015-Present; Woodruff Arts Center, Board Member, 2015-Present; Rotary Club of Atlanta, 2015-Present; Harvard Graduate School of Education Visiting Committee, 2015-2019; Educational Testing Service, Board of Trustees, 2008-2016; Austin Ballet, Board Member 2011-2014; Council of the Chief State School Officers, 2004-2006; Harvard Graduate School of Education Admissions Committee, 2000; Industrial Areas Foundation Labor Relations Training, 1994

### **AWARDS and DISTINCTIONS**

National Down Syndrome Congress Honoree (2020); Atlanta Magazine's "Atlanta Power 500" (2019); Atlanta Business Chronicle's "Power 100 – Most Influential Atlantans" (2019); Wellspring Living Hope Award (2019); AFSCME and GA Federation of Public Service Employees Superintendent of the Year (2018); Newcomb Alumnae Association at Tulane University Outstanding Alumna Award (2018); National School Public Relations Association Communication Technology Award (2018); Anti-Defamation League Torch of Liberty Award (2017); Georgia Trend Magazine's "Top 100 Most Influential Georgians" (2016-2019); Cool Girls Cool Woman of the Year (2016); Jackson Foundation Phoenix Award (2015); Atlanta Business Chronicle Most Admired CEO (2015); NAACP DeWitty/Overton Award (2013); African American Youth Harvest Foundation Award (2013); Texas Legislative Black Caucus Outstanding Texan Award (2013); Greater Austin Chamber of Commerce Regional Superintendent of the Year Award (2011); The University of Texas at Austin, Community Leadership Circle Award (2011); Austin NAACP Education Leadership Award (2010); Scholastic Administrator Magazine's "Top Educational Leader Under 40" (2009); Girl Scouts Women of Distinction Honoree (2009); Faculty Fellowship with National Geographic Magazine and Freelance Photographer (1997-2000); and Southern Community Partners of the Lyndhurst Foundation Fellowship (1993-1995)