

# BELIEVE IN BETTER, TOGETHER



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# Foreword

January 2024

Dear Friend,

So much has changed about education in America since we first launched 50CAN 13 years ago. What has remained constant are two things: our belief that a better education system for all kids is possible and our commitment to helping local advocates across the country reach this goal.

To do so, we've built a bipartisan, research-backed organization, driven forward by the work of a talented and diverse staff that are all focused on making positive change. We've forged strong local partnerships through our state campaigns and together we have made a real difference for kids.

Through these local campaigns we've dramatically expanded educational options for families, reformed the way education is funded to make it both more flexible and more equitable, made it easier for parents to know how their kids are performing and forged new pathways to the careers of tomorrow.

As energized as we are by these early results, we know we have a long road to travel to reach our destination. In this strategic plan, we draw upon what we have learned through our initial successes to provide a roadmap for the next three years.

For the journey ahead, we are organizing our efforts around a common policy vision and doubling down on the local leadership model that has proven so successful to date. We aim to both significantly grow the number of campaigns in the 50CAN network and also grow the number of organizations, leaders and partners in an ever-expanding community of education advocates and innovators. Working together, we believe the next three years can fulfill the hopes and dreams of millions of families for the education system their children deserve.

We look forward to walking with you on the road ahead.

Sincerely,



**Michael Phillips**  
Board Chair, 50CAN



**Lisa Graham Keegan**  
Board Member, 50CAN  
Board Chair, 50CAN Action Fund



**Marc Porter Magee**  
CEO and Founder, 50CAN



**Derrell Bradford**  
President, 50CAN

# Believing in Better, Together

- Advance a positive, unifying policy vision for the future of education.
- Work with more partners on shared goals across a nationwide movement.



There is no greater gift you can give a child than that of a great education. At 50CAN, we believe that with four million children born in the United States every year, we have the opportunity and obligation to help them become the best version of themselves by providing a dynamic education system that meets their individual needs at every step of their learning journey. Unfortunately, we are far from this reality for every child. We still have an education system in the United States where too many students, either because of their address, the color of their skin, or the school they're assigned to, never have the opportunity to reach their full potential.

Despite all the challenges we face as a country, we know we can create an education system where all of the nation's children have the opportunity to become the best versions of themselves. That's why the next phase of work at 50CAN is first and foremost an open invitation to people and organizations across the country to join in an education movement focused on the future, working across party lines, that always strives to put children first.

Together, we can build new coalitions across the nation to help turn the page both on the disruptions of the pandemic and the long-standing systemic flaws of the cur-

rent education system it revealed. If the harm of Covid is generational, so is the once-in-a-lifetime opportunity and responsibility to build the education system our nation's children deserve so we can right these wrongs. And the work to make that system a reality must happen in every community in our nation, with a rich and diverse coalition working in concert.

In 2011, 50CAN was founded on the belief that local advocacy across all 50 states was essential if, as a nation, we were going to create an education system that enables every child to live a life of meaning and value. For many years our network of committed state advocates, supported by 50CAN's national team, have worked to meet with thousands of parents to hear their needs, elevate their concerns, shift the public conversation over what students deserve and secure policy change that puts kids first. This goals-oriented, bipartisan approach has seen the network continue to grow despite considerable headwinds across the country to this pragmatic and inclusive approach.

In 2018, 50CAN released a strategic plan titled "Four Million Opportunities, Four Big Bets." Our "Big Bets"—More People, Greater Opportunities, Smarter Goals and Better Tools—built on what we had learned to empower a

larger universe of advocates, expand our efforts, choose better policy priorities and support all this work more efficiently. Most importantly, the plan was rooted in one of 50CAN's core values, optimism. The four million opportunities were the four million children born in America every year and their unlimited potential waiting to be unlocked by the power of education.

The plan might have remained unchanged if not for the organizational, political and educational challenges of the pandemic, which forced us to reevaluate everything at 50CAN from the way we did advocacy to the policy goals of our campaigns, while also challenging us to improvise and adapt in the face of a shifting landscape and dramatic new needs. While we have always prided ourselves on picking evidence-based policies to drive our goals, the pandemic also forced us to take a sharper view, across the organization, on what all children should obtain in a dynamic, responsive education system that can help them get back on track. After we published the policy briefs *Fund Everything* and *Measure Everything* in fall 2020, we set to work on a unifying vision that could guide our work in building the dramatically better education systems our kids need.

This vision of the future is grounded in the belief that all families should have access to the educational opportunities, experiences and support that have long been the norm among the elite: a range of choices for tutoring, summer camps, connectivity, mental health, after school enrichment and more to create a personalized educational journey for their children. It embraces learning and enrichment that happen outside of school, prioritizing a child's aspirations over their address and remakes education finance systems to unwind historic inequities

by giving all families more resources and control. And while it provides extra support to historically marginalized communities, it also embraces universalism to both build larger political constituencies of support and welcome all children into a system where we all benefit from each other's success.

From these principles, we developed our framework for the education system of the future, which is grounded in five promises to every child:



The education that's right for you, because every student learns differently.



Tutoring and care for every student in every community.



A world of open and connected learning, so that you have the tools you need to strengthen your community and succeed in life.



A family's right to know what's working—it's all about accountability.



A clear path to the career you choose. It's about finding your fit, and your pathway to a meaningful life.

Over the next three years, we aim to make "Believing in Better, Together" our North Star. That means our strategy will be to unite more aligned partners in more places around a positive policy vision for the future to ensure a vibrant, nationwide movement that gets results.

**Here is how we will get there.**

# FOUR STREAMS, ONE RIVER OF WORK

From its founding, 50CAN has prided itself on working in clear and measurable ways that add up to results for kids. To carry our work forward into this new era, we will organize our day-to-day efforts into four work streams of activity, which we call Advocate, Spark, Build and Serve. Each of these is designed to contribute to advancing our Believe in Better framework through our state campaigns and in partnership with organizations across the country.

These four work streams are more than the sum of their parts. And it is our belief that they are the essential elements needed to secure bold policy changes in education in every community and every state in the nation. Over more than a decade of work, we have found that when these four pieces are in place you get results: 1) Passionate local advocates who have a vision for their states and know how to get policy wins, 2) Compelling spokespeople who make the case for innovative ideas and change, 3) Diverse coalitions and strong proof of what's possible, and 4) Public officials willing to champion this vision in the halls of power. This is our recipe for healthy state advocacy and this plan is built on partnering with more people in more places to make it possible in the next three years.







# Advocate for the Future of American Education

- *Support and grow state advocacy campaigns.*
- *Collaborate on shared goals with partner organizations.*



"At my core, I'm an education geek and policy wonk and the national 50CAN network gives me the support I need to focus most directly on the mission-driven work that changes children's lives. In addition to taking the reins on operations and processes, our in-house comms team is top-notch and the development team is adept at communicating our wins, challenges and opportunities for impact."

– Paula White, Executive Director, JerseyCAN

50CAN's core work has always been supporting local advocates as they strive to build the future of education in their states. Our 10 state campaigns are all led by savvy directors who possess deep expertise in policy and politics, work across partisan divisions, have strong local knowledge and work relentlessly to get results every year for kids. Together, our network reaches one in six kids in America and has secured 235 policy wins since the founding of 50CAN in 2011.

These local efforts are supported by our national team, which takes the day-to-day work of running an organization off the plates of our local leaders so they can focus all their time and energy on the things only local advocates can do. This division of labor also allows us to leverage nationwide economies of scale to provide these services—like finance, operations, legal, development, communications and more—better and more cost effectively than would be possible in a single state campaign. By helping local advocates focus on what they do best, we help ensure that—year in and year out—we get big policy wins for kids.

With these campaigns working toward a shared vision in a variety of contexts—in states red, blue and purple—we can quickly learn what works and adapt our strate-

gies and tactics to increase the odds of success in a way few other organizations do. At the same time, it's clear that there is so much more to do in every state to reach "sticky scale," where the number of people benefiting from these policy changes is large enough that they cannot be rolled back.

To get there, through our own growth and by working with partners at the state and national level, we must build a true 50-state movement. One that promotes shared interests, shared goals, and mutual collaboration to forge a united movement for change.

**We call this policy change work **ADVOCATE**.**





# Spark New People, Voices and Ideas

- *Invest in new voices and new ideas that can support the next generation of education policy change.*
- *Bridge partisan and geographic divides.*
- *Extend reach of fellowships at the national, state and city level.*



“There aren’t many safe spaces to talk, debate, and question anymore. National Voices offers that space with a clear focus, hands-on training and a community to learn from, share with and have fun along the way. Because of National Voices, I know more clearly how to frame messages and build narratives that build bridges. I have people in my corner to whom I can ask any and all questions. I can get substantive feedback and support for my work in real time.”

– Aditi Goel, P16 Partners, National Voices Fellow

50CAN has a long history of using fellowships to support new voices and new leaders. In fact, three of the network’s current advocacy campaigns—in Delaware, Hawaii and New Mexico—were created by 50CAN fellows.

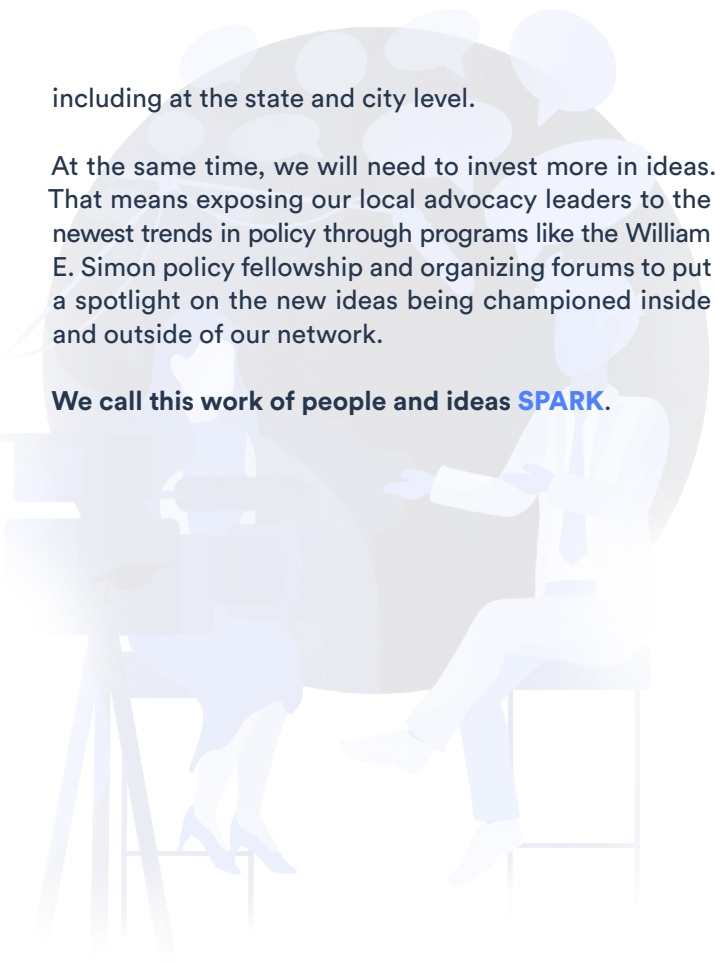
As political divisions have grown in the country, we have seen an increasing interest in fellowship programs that bring people together around concrete, positive, innovative ideas. This is important not only because a climate of heightened division threatens our work, but because the best spokespeople, advocates and policy experts will be people who know how to work across differences. Because new ideas spread more rapidly through deep social, professional and institutional networks, we have made building these bridges a core goal of our National Voices, Changemakers and EPIC fellowships. Scaling them up to meet growing demand will be a key approach to ensure we have the people needed to drive this movement forward.

Our fellows also need more support, both to maintain and strengthen their connections and to assume positions in professional, philanthropic, media and policy leadership to maximize their impact. This means building out this support capacity while broadening our ability to run fellowships in new and important contexts,

including at the state and city level.

At the same time, we will need to invest more in ideas. That means exposing our local advocacy leaders to the newest trends in policy through programs like the William E. Simon policy fellowship and organizing forums to put a spotlight on the new ideas being championed inside and outside of our network.

**We call this work of people and ideas **SPARK**.**







# Build Proof Points and Support Partner Organizations

- *Leverage our back office support to help advocacy entrepreneurs—big and small—get off the ground and do more.*
- *Help philanthropists build real world educational proof points that align with our Believe in Better vision.*



“Starting an organization is hard work but it’s a lot easier when you’ve got a team of partners at 50CAN who can help you, and it’s more than just the back-end support. Being part of the 50CAN network allows me to collaborate with a national network of values-aligned advocates, which is essential to my efforts to establish quality public education as a civil right for all children in America.”

– Ben Austin, Education Civil Rights Now

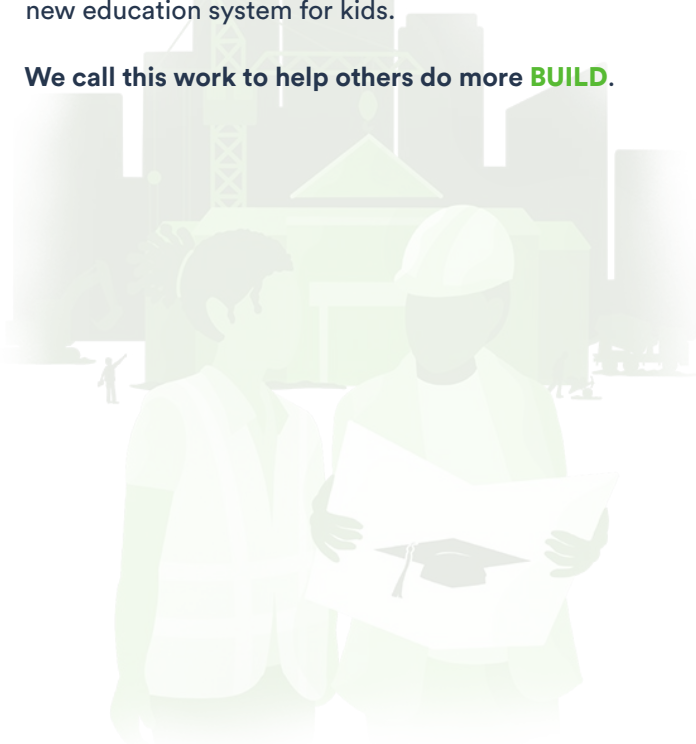
One way 50CAN has sought to advance change is by helping entrepreneurs do more by leveraging the financial, operational and legal service and support we also provide to our state campaigns.

In 2018, we opened this support to a small number of entrepreneurs through a fiscal sponsorship program. They bring the ideas and the drive, we provide a tested platform that helps them scale up quickly to meet demand. Today, we support a dozen initiatives across the country with these services. We do this as a way to grow the movement, allow advocates to focus on what they are best at, and to help smaller organizations get a foothold in the advocacy space as they grow and expand their work.

We’ve also always looked to bottom-up solutions—what we’ve historically called emergent networks—to inform our policy campaigns. These innovations and partnerships provide crucial evidence for a vision of the future, which is why we also work with philanthropists that want to create proof points that align with our Believe in Better goals. Leveraging our back office support, we can scale up quickly to help kids right away, and ensure that what we learn from this direct support will shape state policy across the nation in the long term.


Ushering in a new era for education in our country requires positive examples that make change concrete. Over time, enough quality proof points must be built and coupled with policy change in order to provide a whole new education system for kids.

**We call this work to help others do more BUILD.**



# Serve the Public

- *Identifying and supporting current and aspiring policy makers.*
- *Provide peer to peer opportunities for collaboration across states.*



“50CAN provides a unique environment for policy makers to learn, share best practices and be fortified in their efforts to improve educational outcomes for our children. It takes immense political courage to do this work. 50CAN is supporting our leaders while simultaneously creating a much needed community.”

– **Alisha Thomas Searcy, Former Georgia State Representative, Believe in Better Policy Fellow**

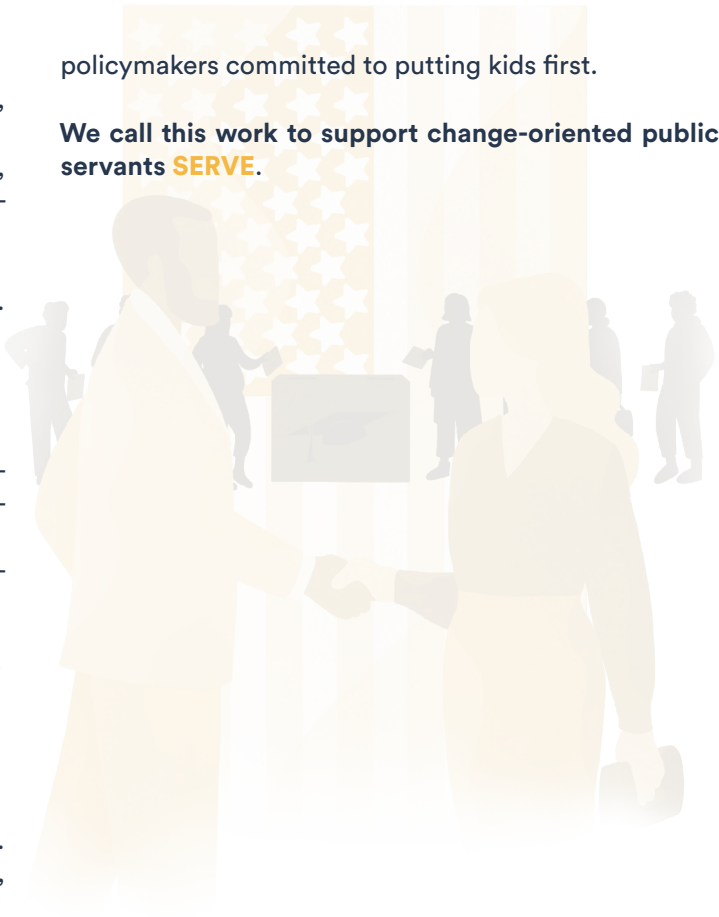
A policy vision can’t be enacted without policy makers who share your values, understand your motivations, believe in your goals for the future and are willing to take risks to help make them a reality. For this reason, the 50CAN Action Fund has built up a world class operation to support and inform policymakers in states across the nation. With the future of education on the line, we believe the time to expand and deepen this work is now.

The 50CAN Action Fund’s most familiar work has been at the state and local levels where local leaders have worked to support elected officials across 10 states who put kids first. A plan to usher in a brighter future for education must include expanding this capability substantially by growing the capacity to raise and spend funds for more campaigns in more places, and providing a one-stop-shop for electoral activity at any level.

At the same time, we believe there is an opportunity to provide greater support for those elected officials currently in office. That is why we have launched the Believe in Better Institute to identify and support current electeds who welcome the bipartisan environment and relationships necessary to bridge deep political divides. Grounded in the principle that “politics is about addition, not subtraction,” we aim to broaden the community of

policymakers committed to putting kids first.

**We call this work to support change-oriented public servants *SERVE*.**



These four activities—**ADVOCATE**, **SPARK**, **BUILD** and **SERVE**—are deeply connected, and they reflect what we believe state advocacy needs to be successful: strong local advocates with a growing universe of allies working on shared goals, compelling spokespeople and policy ideas, healthy organizations and proof points to spotlight, and aligned elected officials willing to take risks, work across divides and pass laws.



# HOW WILL WE KNOW?



The system of education we have today is one we know well, having spent more than a decade pushing to make sure children have access to its best parts while working tirelessly to expand opportunity for all children. For all of its success and failings the current system is, above all, one thing: familiar.

Yet, our journey to the future of education requires us to travel down uncharted paths and forces us to confront many questions, including perhaps the most important one:

**“How will we know if we are on the right track?”**

# Believe in Better Impact Metrics

At 50CAN, we have always measured success by sharing our annual campaign goals and reporting out on the results. This has helped us grow a culture of transparency and driven us forward with 235 policy wins and counting. But as advocates know, a policy win is just the first step, especially if you're trying to make sweeping and long-lasting change. That's why we also need to measure impact.

Leveraging our Believe in Better framework, we're working not only to track policy wins, but to craft a new way to define success that measures genuine change for kids in their lives and genuine reach for the policies we support. This is a new project for 50CAN and we will collaborate with partners and families in 2024 to develop a concrete rubric for success that we will use to track our progress and share with our partners as a way to enhance collaboration.

What follows are examples of the kind of measures we will be reporting back on annually.



## The education that's right for you.

- The percentage of kids with access to a full range of educational options including, but not limited to, their neighborhood district school, charter schools, independent schools, home schooling and other new and emergent options.
- The flexibility, portability and equity of each state's education funding system.



## Tutoring and care for every student.

- Percentage of kids that have received recurring tutoring.
- Percentage of kids that attend a summer learning program.
- Percentage of kids receiving academic instruction through high-quality instructional materials, such as instruction aligned to the science of reading and the percentage of teachers trained in these best practices.



## A world of open and connected learning.

- Percentage of kids with access to high-speed internet at home.
- Percentage of kids earning credit, certification or advancement from learning environments outside of school.
- Percentage of kids who participated in a volunteering or community service program in the past year.



## A family's right to know.

- Percentage of families who can access a suite of free, proctored tests across a range of subjects no matter where their kids are educated.
- Accessibility of school and district financial data to families.
- Percentage of families who can utilize technology to access real-time competency information for their students.



## A clear path to the career you choose.

- Percentage of middle or high schoolers enrolled in college and career pathway programs.
- Percentage of high schoolers with high-quality internships.
- Percentage of high schoolers earning college credit and/or an industry credential.



# Work Stream Metrics

## Advocate for the future of education

Ushering in a new era of education in the United States will take reaching more families, in more places, with greater speed, so that the change cannot be easily undone. While partnerships are vital, we believe to do our part requires growth of the 50CAN network as well by going from reaching one in six of the nation’s children in 2024 to one in four of them by 2026.

CANs growth plan:

- 2024: 11 (add 1)
- 2025: 13 (add 2)
- 2026: 15 (add 2)

Indicators of success:

- 100% of states secure at least 2 policy wins grounded in the Believe in Better framework annually and that at least 2 of these wins each year are nationally significant.
- Each CAN has a strong and influential local advisory board.
- Each CAN has consistent and growing local funding.

## Spark new people, voices and ideas

Growth plan for fellowships centered on new ideas, policy and communications:

- 2024: 4 fellowships
- 2025: 5 fellowships
- 2026: 6 fellowships

Indicators of success:

- Secure more than 50 print, podcast and television media stories promoting the Believe in Better policy framework and optimistic ideas for the future.
- A robust, supportive and self reinforcing fellowship alumni network, with 80% of fellowship alumni engaged formally twice annually.

## Build proof points and partner organizations

Fiscal sponsorship growth plan:

- 2024: 12 (+1)
- 2025: 14 (+2)
- 2026: 16 (+2)

Partnership in Believe in Better Coalition:

- 2024: 10
- 2025: 12 (+2)
- 2026: 15 (+3)



Metrics from the 50CAN Action Fund:

### Serve the public

- 2024: 10 policymakers trained, victories in 70% of elections contested.
- 2025: 20 policymakers trained, victories in 70% of elections contested.
- 2026: 25 policymakers, victories in 70% of elections contested.
- 100% of campaigns create plans for direct political activity each year.
- Secure a win rate of more than 70% in electoral campaigns.
- Identify and train at least eight policymakers per year in the Believe in Better framework through our policy fellowship.

# Organization

## Staff

2024: 38 full-time staff

2025: 44 (+6)

2026: 50 (+6)

- Develop and implement efforts to support and retain our staff as measured by a retention rate of 85% or above.
- At least 85% of staff on the annual staff survey will report feeling valued, supported and part of the team.
- At least 85% of staff on the annual staff survey will report that they are satisfied with the responsiveness and accountability for results in the organization and have a clear understanding when they can make decisions.

## Board

2024: 9 board members

2025: 10 (+1)

2026: 11 (+1)

## Budget

- Run all state and local campaigns in the black and ensure all core campaigns finish with six-month reserves.

2024:

- Core: \$11.0 million.
- Fiscal sponsorships: \$10-90 million.

2025:

- Core: \$12.0 million.
- Fiscal sponsorships: \$10-90 million.

2026:

- Core: \$13.0 million.
- Fiscal sponsorships: \$10-90 million.