



1625 K Street NW, Suite 400  
Washington, DC 20006

info@50can.org  
www.50can.org



## **FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

### **50CAN and StudentsFirst Merge to Strengthen Support for Local Education Leaders Across the Country**

***Organization Is Dedicated to Delivering High-Quality Education to All Children, Regardless of Address***

March 29, 2016

**Washington D.C.** - 50CAN: The 50-State Campaign for Achievement Now and StudentsFirst, two leading education advocacy networks, announced today a merger to establish a stronger and more influential nationwide network of state advocacy campaigns. The merger will build upon the locally led campaigns and leadership development efforts pioneered over the past five years.

Marc Porter Magee, Ph.D., founder and CEO of 50CAN, will serve as the CEO of the combined organization with 50CAN's Vally Varro serving in the role of president. Sandy Vargas, president and CEO of the Minneapolis Foundation, will serve as the board chair.

"This merger is the next phase of an evolution in our movement where local leaders in communities across the country work together to create an education system where all children receive a high-quality education, regardless of their address," said 50CAN CEO Marc Porter Magee. "We are grateful to StudentsFirst for their tireless work over the last five years towards this shared mission. We believe kids across the country will benefit from this merged organization's focus on advocacy campaigns that are locally grown,

locally led and locally sustained."

The combined network brings together local education advocates from across the country, supported by a national team of policy, communications and advocacy experts. The national organization will go by the name 50CAN, with state affiliates of StudentsFirst continuing to use their local brands.

Jim Blew, who has served as president of StudentsFirst for the past year, will serve as a senior advisor to the organization. He will focus on integrating StudentsFirst's political and electoral skill set into the 50CAN network and building a locally led effort in California, his home state. Michelle Rhee, the founder of StudentsFirst and a leading voice in education advocacy, will be working with Marc, Vallay and Jim to provide strategic guidance grounded in her lifelong career in public education.

"This merger is a significant opportunity for the education reform movement to improve state policy affecting millions of students across the country," said Jim Blew. "In the new federal policy environment under ESSA, where state policy is more important than ever, this merger ensures we'll be able to represent student interests as effectively and efficiently as possible. I've known and worked with Marc Porter Magee for nearly 10 years and I'm confident he is the right person to guide this network into this exciting new era."

"I am very proud of the work we are accomplishing at StudentsFirst," said Michelle. "Over the past five years we have succeeded in doing exactly what the organization was created to do: change the education landscape for kids everywhere. From my earliest days as a teacher in Baltimore, I have seen first-hand the importance of building local leadership that is capable of partnering with the communities our classrooms are meant to serve. I look forward to helping Marc, Vallay and the entire team on the important work ahead."

50CAN will announce more details of the merger in the coming weeks, including additions to the 50CAN board of directors and details about the organization's strategic vision for the road ahead.

### **About 50CAN**

Marc Porter Magee, Ph.D., founded 50CAN in January 2011 after serving as ConnCAN's chief operating officer since its founding year in 2005, to bring the success of ConnCAN's campaigns to other states around the country. 50CAN has grown into a nationwide network with local advocacy campaigns and education advocacy fellowships across 12 states, powered by more than 40 full-time staff and over 50 local advisory board members. With support from over 150 philanthropists and dozens of coalition and partner organizations, 50CAN has built truly locally grown and sustained advocacy campaigns that have secured 47 policy victories that positively impact the lives of

millions of children, especially those who are traditionally underserved. 50CAN has also deepened the bench of education advocacy by training over 500 citizen advocates in education advocacy and policy through its popular advocacy fellowship programs and courses.

### **About StudentsFirst**

Michelle Rhee founded StudentsFirst in December 2010 after resigning as the Chancellor of D.C. Public Schools, where she and the AFT's Randi Weingarten negotiated a revolutionary teacher contract that rewards highly effective teachers, moves ineffective teachers out of the classroom, and helps all teachers perfect their craft. StudentsFirst was launched because students deserve an organization that will champion their interests above all. Since its founding, the organization has helped pass over 220 policies across 18 states, dramatically changing the way more than 23 million children will receive their public education. They have also changed the political landscape by helping elect 135 pro-reform leaders and built a movement of parents, teachers, students and everyday citizens who have become a significant presence in key state houses.

### **Contact**

Lisa Gibes: [lisa.gibes@50can.org](mailto:lisa.gibes@50can.org), (586) 805-1115

Kellen Arno: [karno@studentsfirst.org](mailto:karno@studentsfirst.org), (916) 710-1573