

Kim Reed

By: Ashmi Patel and Alison Kadlec
October 2020



Personal Story

Dr. Kim Hunter Reed, Louisiana's Commissioner of Higher Education, is the only female in the country who has led a system of higher education in more than one state. Reed was recently recognized nationally with the 2020 Exceptional Leader Award by the State Higher Education Executive Officers Association (SHEEO). She previously served as Deputy Undersecretary at the U.S. Department of Education during the Obama administration and led the White House Initiative on Historically Black Colleges and Universities. Reed has collectively served in various senior leadership roles under four governors.

Reed comes from a family of educators and refers to education as "the family business." Her grandmother, born in 1918, integrated a rural school in Louisiana – even though she, because of her race, was denied access to what would later become Reed's alma mater. This foundation makes Reed passionate about the role of education in our society and has led her to dedicate her life to eliminating inequities in education and opportunity.

Driven by a strategic focus on the intersection of policy, politics, and the press, Reed began early in her career to think about how to communicate an effective message and leverage it to move policy. She got her first taste of making a significant difference in public policy when she successfully leveraged her doctoral research to bring need-based aid to Louisiana in the mid-'90s. The satisfaction Reed got from making a real difference in the lives of students set her on a path of leading change in a variety of settings.

The wide range of experiences Reed brings to her work reflects a singular commitment to expanding real opportunity to more people through education. The work of driving systemic change is what brings Reed joy and fuels her in leading the hard work of lowering artificial barriers to student success.

"I am a living example of what happens when families have education and how education advances the next generation, and the next generation, and catapults you into opportunities that the previous generations did not have," she said. "It's up to us to make sure there's a path for every student, and to make sure that we're doing everything we can to lift education, the value of education, and to make sure that it's available far and wide."

As Louisiana's Commissioner of Higher Education, Reed is leading the state's efforts to develop its talent base in service of a more prosperous future for families and communities through increased educational attainment. With a focus on collaborative efforts to increase access, equity, and completion, Reed champions developmental education reform as a key strategy for Louisiana to reach its goal of doubling the number of postsecondary credentials awarded by 2030.

Supported by:



EDUCATION COMMISSION
OF THE STATES
Your education policy team.

Policy-Related Overview

One in five Louisianans lives in poverty, and 47 percent of the working adults in the state have a high school diploma or less as their highest credential of value. With Louisiana's economic future linked to its talent pipeline, the Board of Regents and Louisiana higher education leaders recently outlined in the Master Plan for Higher Education their commitment to "expand access to and success in completing postsecondary education, eliminate persistent and damaging equity gaps, and significantly increase the education level of adults." This Master Plan, approved by the Board of Regents in 2019, identifies developmental education reform and implementing Math Pathways as two top priorities for improving student outcomes.

Reaching the Master Plan's attainment goal of 60% of working-age Louisianans holding a high-quality postsecondary credential of value by 2030 will only be possible by improving outcomes for the state's underserved populations of low-income students, adult students, and students from persistently marginalized communities. During the 2018-19 academic year, of the more than 40,000 students who did not meet the minimum 19 Math ACT sub-score for enrollment in college-level math, 65% were low-income students, 62% were of color, and 20% were adults. Given that passing a college-level math course during the first year of study is closely related to student persistence and completion, maximizing opportunities for early success in college math is critical for Louisiana to reach its attainment goal.

Nearly 10 years after the Board of Regents introduced a pilot to support corequisite math and English, the outcomes vary widely across the state. With a concrete focus on accelerating the scaling of high-quality corequisite models in math, Reed and her team emphasize supporting institutional capacity to implement effective models, strengthening the state's understanding of the evidence base for multiple measures placement, and scaling differentiated Math Pathways aligned to the well-paying careers of today and tomorrow. The Board of Regents coordinates all public higher education in Louisiana, including 28 institutions which are required to submit annual action plans, and those plans will be used as the springboard to accelerate improvements in design and implementation of corequisite math.

Reed's motivation to scale evidence-based improvements that allow far more students to be successful than through traditional approaches is grounded in her conviction that no problem is too difficult to solve. With her ability to bring people together and drive collaborative teams, Reed continues to foster a culture of change and hope in Louisiana.

"What's exciting to me is that I continue to see people each and every day who are fired up about real system change, not just incremental change, who believe in education, who know that we can make a difference," she said. "And they don't see any mountain that's too hard, too high to climb. They're ready to roll up their sleeves. They are innovators. They're intellectually curious about the work. They just want to make it happen...Barriers are temporary. You can build a bridge over, you can build a tunnel under, but you have to get there."

Citation:

Kadlec, A. & Patel, A. (2020, October). Kim Hunter Reed (People in the Reform series). Denver, CO: Strong Start to Finish, Education Commission of the States.

Supported by:



EDUCATION COMMISSION
OF THE STATES
Your education policy team.