

Donnell D. Cannon

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My purpose: To create subversive hope in the world that allows people to imagine the futures they deserve. My purpose is to help create a coalition of people who believe that another world exists and hold a burning desire to pivot aggressively towards equity, freedom, and liberation for all people.

Profile: I am an enthusiastic school leader committed to rallying others to the cause of educational equity. Having witnessed the profound impact of education on my own life, I continue to work vehemently to design schools and systems that children deserve. I believe that education can be transformative—for kids, for families, for our society. I hold an unrelenting optimism alongside an assessment that our current approach to school is not yet realizing our aspirations. Embracing that tension, I have chosen action. I have chosen curiosity, learning, and a commitment to contributing to the next horizon.

EDUCATION

In Progress

North Carolina State University

Doctorate in Education (Ed.D.)

2019

Harvard Graduate School of Education

Certification in Closing the Achievement Gap

2018

Harvard Graduate School of Education - Harvard Business School

Certification in School Management and Leadership

2014 - 2016

North Carolina State University, Northeast Leadership Academy (NELA)

Master of School Administration

- NELA is a Top Educational Leadership Preparation Program in the U.S. Out of over 774 principal preparation programs nationally, NC State is one of only 5 universities to ever earn the distinction of being named "Exemplary" by the University Council for Educational Administration (UCEA).

2013 - 2014

East Carolina University

Alternative Licensure Program

2007 - 2011

Norfolk State University

Bachelor of Arts in History Education

LEADERSHIP EXPERIENCE

Transcend's Rural Schools Collaborative | January 2021

Cohort Facilitator

Transcend's inaugural Rural Schools Collaborative is an opportunity for pioneering rural school communities to co-create with Transcend a ten-month cohort program to reimagine school, running from August, 2021 to May, 2022. As one of the cohort facilitators, my role is to help lead school communities towards bold, innovative ideas by helping communities exploring high-impact topics--such as leading a community-led school design process to

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achieve equitable results for all students, the skills and mindsets young people will need in order to thrive in and transform the 21st century, the community's aspirations and needs, the science of learning and development, and learning from innovative school models across the country, while also providing space for teams to collaborate and exchange ideas--and use the insights from those topics to build towards schools of the possible future.

The North Carolina Principal Fellows Program and the Equity Collaborative | December 2020

Program Consultant

The NC Principal Fellows Program, in collaboration with the Equity Collaborative, is developing a new approach to learning and growth for its Fellows. Across the state, all Fellows will engage in a competency-based, individualized, and experiential learning process. This approach is based on research-based learning theory and applied with an intentional focus on continuous quality improvement to programming, engagement, and impact. As a consultant to the equity design work, I was responsible for: Identifying a core set of competency experience, application, and reflection tasks, providing guidance on equity-based framing for each competency, and piloting competency exploration and application activities.

EducationNC's The Hummingbird Story Podcast | November 2020

Founder and Cohost

I currently serve as the co host and executive producer of The Hummingbird stories. This podcast is edited and produced by EdNC. The Hummingbird Stories explores how schools and communities work together to create transformative experiences with young people, work to bend the system, and chase the question: What will it take for every child in North Carolina to not only have a sound basic education, but to have catalytic experiences that drive them to step boldly into the futures they deserve and create a better world? My podcast host and I interview school designers, community organizers, learning engineers, and education activists to learn what educators should think about when it comes to reimagining the future of schools and the steps we can take today to create better schools, better childhoods, and better people tomorrow.

Edgecombe County Public Schools Principal of the Year | October 2020

I was selected as the 2020-2021 Principal of the Year for Edgecombe County Public Schools in my first year eligible for the award.

Triangle Business Journal's 40 Under 40 | July 2020

Leadership Award Winner

I was awarded the TBJs 40 under 40 award. TBJ 40 under 40 award recognizes outstanding professionals under the age of 40 for their contributions to their organizations and to the community.

Barnhill Family Foundation Grant | July 2020

Grant Writer

I prepared, wrote and submitted a grant proposal to the Barnhill Family Foundation on May 12, 2020. The grant was written to support the North-Phillips School of Innovation's redesign efforts. We were awarded the grant on July 14, 2020, in the amount of \$410,195.42 over three years. This funding provides students in grades 6-12 with radically different signature learning experiences.

UCEA Excellence in Educational Leadership Award | June 2020

Award Winner

In June 2020, I was awarded the UCEA Excellence in Educational Leadership Award. The award is for practicing school administrators who have made significant contributions to the improvement of administrator preparation.

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Each year, the UCEA Executive Committee invites members of university faculties to select a distinguished school administrator who has an exemplary record of supporting school administrator preparation efforts.

Profound Ladies | March 2020- Present

Board Member

Profound Ladies focuses on the recruitment and retention of BIPOC women in education. Profound Ladies is dedicated to equipping women of color educators with the mentorship, training, and access to leadership/career pathways in education so that more students of color experience the impact of having a thriving women of color leading in education.

North Carolina State Board of Education, Greensboro, NC | November 2019

Closing Keynote Speaker

I served as the keynote speaker for the NC State Board of Education Fall Planning session. I wrote the keynote speech to provide a message of inspiration and illuminate innovative approaches that could be leveraged to ameliorate a few of our state's growing challenges while satiating the demands of the future.

As the keynote speaker at the NC State Board of Education meeting, I presented data on the growing inequities among NC students and provided a set of strategies for turning around low-performing schools.

Edgecombe County Public Schools (ECPS), Edgecombe, NC | September 2019 - Present

Design Team Coach

Throughout the 2019-2020 school year, four school leaders and their school design team have committed to exploring the frontiers of learning science, proven approaches, provocative learning communities, and the demands of the 21st century. During this journey, the teams question the ways they use time, space, people, technology, and resources in service of world-class outcomes for children. The teams then use their new insights to build—crafting a reimagined learning experience that is inclusive of the hopes and dreams their community have for itself. As a problem of practice, the teams forge a path forward—determining how, as design teams, they will take the next leap in their own context and how, as a school, they will continue the learning and momentum they have built as a community. The ECPS superintendent selected me to serve as an ongoing thought partner, design and facilitation support, running buddy, and connector to additional experts and resources to ensure their school design is successful.

BestNC Education, Raleigh, NC | September 2019

Innovation Lab Presenter

This state-wide convening brings together thought leaders from around the state of NC and the nation to imagine innovative solutions for teacher recruitment and retention in NC. I presented before 70 current and former educators from across the state whose passion, ideas and experiences informed the lab's agenda and laid the groundwork for BestNC's strategic plan for the year. As a presenter and facilitator of this event, I shared piloted strategies on leveraging the human-centered design process to raise high expectations for students. During this session, participants engaged in facilitated discussion around the challenges of scaling innovation in schools and identified stakeholders who would need to be engaged if scaling were to be successful.

Hunt Institute, Raleigh, NC | 2018 - 2020

K-12 Advisor

As the Hunt Institute's K-12 Advisor, I am responsible for carrying out responsibilities and duties to support the Hunt Institute's policy work and programming related to K-12 curriculum. I engage and support educators and school leaders across states. I also collaborate with them regarding the development and implementation of effective and efficient practices and strategies to drive equity in schools. In partnership with the President & CEO and other Institute staff, I have played a critical role in coordinating and driving progress on The Hunt Institute's strategic priorities. I have also consulted with Institute staff on strategies to work with schools, districts, state leaders, and policymakers to offer professional development, policy, and research support that are tailored to local contexts. I also provide leadership on K-12 initiatives in policy and research and foster internal and external relationships that

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expand the reach of The Hunt Institute's programs, products, and expertise. I have contributed to the design and development of major Institute policymaker convenings, including state legislative retreats as well as cross-state and national events for senior state policymakers.

Public Impact, Chapel Hill, NC | 2018 - Present

Opportunity Culture Fellow

Opportunity Culture is “extending the reach of excellent teachers and their teams to more students, for more pay, within budget. Teachers gain time to plan and collaborate, everyone gets more support, and students get personalized, high-standards instruction” [Opportunity Culture](#). Opportunity Culture Fellows are multi-classroom leaders, principals, and others in Opportunity Culture roles who have achieved strong results and been leaders in their schools and districts. We provide support to Public Impact in the ongoing development of their Opportunity Culture initiative, write columns about our experiences, and speak locally and nationally about Opportunity Culture roles. Our feedback and leadership help improve the Opportunity Culture initiative and all materials related to it.

Transcend + NewSchools | 2017 - 2018

Collaborative Cohort Member

Every child deserves an education designed to unleash their greatest potential - one that empowers them to achieve their dreams and improve the world around them. And yet, most schools in America were built for a different time and purpose. This disconnect requires innovation, which requires bold leaders and organizations to question our current practices and imagine new models that work for our students as well as meet the demands of the 21st century. I partnered with NewSchools and Transcend to accelerate that innovation. This cohort opportunity was designed for forward-thinking school leaders to imagine the learning outcomes our students most need. Cohort members immersed themselves in the latest learning science research and its implications for school design. We then used design methods to generate a powerful new vision and action plan for bold innovation across the country.

Teach For America, Raleigh, NC | 2017 - 2019

The Collective Eastern North Carolina Board Member

The Collective is Teach For America's national association for alumni of color. We grew leadership capacity, strengthened community, and increased access to opportunities—all in the interest of serving students in eastern NC. As a board member, I performed the following responsibilities: event planning, board governance, fundraising, professional networking, strategic relationship building and storytelling, non-profit budget management, community organizing, institutional organizing, social venture building, DEI (diversity, equity, & inclusiveness) competencies, and applying leadership & development strategies in adult learners. I am able to build a pipeline of social justice change agents in eastern NC through local partnerships, networking, and organizing around issues, assets, and challenges unique to our community. I have the opportunity to lay the foundation for the kind of collective action among people of color that results in systems-level change applied through a local context. As a board member, I am part of an incredibly talented, motivated, passionate, and innovative community of leaders.

Edgecombe County Public School District, Edgecombe County, NC | 2017 - Present

Blue Ribbon Commission (BRC) on Educational Equity

The Blue Ribbon Commission is a diverse group of Edgecombe County stakeholders tasked with leading an ongoing conversation in the community about our collective vision for ECPS graduates. The Commission works in collaboration with school and district leaders to reimagine the future of education in Edgecombe County. The BRC collaborates with the broader community to define the future we imagine for our students; learn about the opportunities and challenges we face in pursuit of that vision, specifically in the areas of equity; educate the whole child; and attract, retain, and develop human capital. We make informed recommendations to the ECPS Board of Education and Central Services staff about district priorities for the next three years.

Education NC, Raleigh, NC | 2016 - Present

Board of Directors

EducationNC (EdNC) works to expand educational opportunities for all children in NC, increase their academic attainment, and improve the performance of the state's public schools. We provide citizens and policymakers with nonpartisan data, research, news, information, and analysis about the major trends, issues, and challenges bearing on

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education. We gather and disseminate information employing the most effective means of communication, primarily through the Internet. In addition to the content distributed, we encourage an active and connected community of those interested in education policy and practice throughout the state. Our work encourages informed citizen participation and strong leadership on behalf of the school children of NC. As a member of the Board of Directors, I hold the following responsibilities: ensuring prudent use of all assets, including facility, people, and goodwill; ensuring that the organization's activities and transactions are, first and foremost, advancing its mission; recognize and disclose conflicts of interest; make decisions that are in the best interest of the organization, not in the best interest of the individual board member (or any other individual or for-profit entity); ensuring that the organization obeys applicable laws and regulations; follows our own bylaws; and that the nonprofit adheres to its stated corporate purpose/mission.

North Edgecombe High School, Edgecombe County, NC | 2016 - Present

Principal

I currently serve as the proud principal of North Edgecombe High School (NEHS). Since assuming the role as the principal, NEHS has exceeded growth for two consecutive years; the first time NEHS exceeded growth since the ushering of the NC Ready Model in 2012. In my first year of principalship, NEHS students doubled their overall proficiency. In addition, the state removed NEHS from its low-performing list. In 2018, NEHS school performance grade (SPG) transitioned from a low D SPG rating to a C SPG rating, which marked the second-best performance grade in the district and the highest performance among traditional high schools in ECPS. Two years prior, NEHS was one of the lowest-performing high schools in the state. NEHS ranked in the top 15% in the state in overall student growth at the end of the 2018 - 2019 school year. As the principal of NEHS, I have explored the frontiers of learning science, proven approaches, provocative learning communities, and the demands of the 21st century. I have questioned the ways we use time, space, people, technology, and resources in service of world-class outcomes for children. I have also used new insights to craft a reimagined learning experience that is inclusive of the hopes and dreams our community has for itself.

Opportunity Culture: Serve as a member of both the district design team and school level design team to implement ECPS Opportunity Culture initiative. As a member of both teams, I provide overall direction and oversight of the Opportunity Culture effort. I oversee key decisions and activities including: establishing the overall vision for the initiative; identifying potential schools to pilot the effort; communicating the proposed approach with school leaders; sharing relevant district-level policies (e.g. design parameters) with schools; working directly with school design teams to monitor progress of model development, including staffing structures, compensation, scheduling, technology, and communication; problem-solving with schools around design and implementation challenges; identifying necessary resources for implementation; identifying gaps and barriers in district-level practices, such as human resource systems, budgeting, and others identified in the planning process, and organizing changes to them; monitoring progress and acting to ensure success in design, implementation, and scale; and overseeing NEHS implementation of the model

iZone Initiative: Serve as a key designer on the superintendent's task force to improve the Northside feeder pattern by launching innovative initiatives that help to create rigorous, authentic learning environments where students will develop into the architects of their own lives. The task force designed programs and systems in the three lowest-performing schools in the district to support the following areas: school culture, core curriculum and assessment, and supporting structures.

Co-founder of the North-Phillips Micro School of Innovation: As a founder, researcher, and designer, I helped to create a Micro School to pilot a radically different school model for Phillips Middle School (PMS) and NEHS. The primary focus is on project-based, interdisciplinary learning and building student resilience. The components of the model were tested during the 2018 - 2019 school year, with the expansion during the 2019 - 2020 school year, and full implementation of the new model at NEHS and PMS during the 2020 - 2021 school year. I will share learning from this pilot throughout the school district, which will have an impact on schools throughout ECPS.

How does learning in the Micro School differ from traditional school models?

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- **Project-Based Learning:** Students partner with teachers to identify their passions and design projects to explore these passions. Students monitor their learning as they pursue their purpose. Teachers ensure the required NC standards are integrated into the projects.
- **Standards Labs:** Students use a dedicated portion of their project time to master prioritized skills/standards. These labs incorporate a blended approach; students receive individualized 1:1 and small group instruction from teachers and engage in personalized online work.
- **Genius Bar:** When students, teachers, or experts decide students need targeted support during projects or Standards Labs, they go to the Genius Bar where an expert guides them along their learning journey.
- **Meta-Moment Communities:** Students begin and end their day interacting with a caring adult they feel deeply connected. Students answer the questions, “Am I safe? Am I loved? Am I ready to learn?”
- **Roses in Concrete:** Students engage in an in-depth social-emotional learning curriculum.

Southeast Halifax High School, Halifax, NC | 2015 - 2016

Principal Resident- Full-Time Paid Administrative Internship

Assumed duties of school executive, including conducting formal and informal teacher observations, facilitating professional development, collecting and presenting student academic and behavioral data, serving as a school-level NC Virtual Public Schools administrator, and participating on the hiring committee.

School Improvement Team

Analyzed school improvement plans and report card data to determine school-wide strengths and areas for improvement. Developed academic goals, instructional strategies, and behavior support to ensure student academic success. Worked to include all stakeholders in the school improvement process.

Instructional Leader

Served as a coach for all beginning teachers, provided each teacher in the building with lesson plan feedback, classroom instructional support and resources, and review of professional development plans.

Children’s Defense Fund Freedom Schools at Peacemakers Family Center, Rocky Mount, NC | 2013 - 2015

Site Coordinator & Assistant Executive Director (NELA Summer Community Internship - 2015)

Designed and coordinated parent workshops and other parental involvement initiatives. Managed day-to-day activities. Provided guidance, instructional support, encouragement, and targeted feedback to classroom facilitators. Connected students and parents to the resources of their community. Maintained a safe, positive and engaging environment, both physical and emotional, for the scholars. Conducted daily debrief sessions. Built relationships and maintained communication with Site Partners and site volunteers. Maintained communication with and reported to the Region Director. Oversaw records and attendance maintenance on children and families for reporting and evaluation. Implemented evening Parent Meetings/Parent Involvement Activities, as planned. Ensured the classroom facilitators appropriately delivered the Integrated Reading Curriculum (IRC) with regular weekly observations.

Weldon Middle School, Weldon, NC | 2012 - 2015

7th Grade Social Studies Teacher

Used the *Understanding by Design* framework to develop 6th - 12th-grade social studies curricula that focused teaching on the developing and deepening of student understanding and transfer of learning. Achieved 83% proficiency on 7th-grade social studies NCFE in 2015. Chosen by district leaders to present at the 2015 NC Association for Middle-Level Education Conference. Served three years as the social studies department chair and two years as the grade-level chair.

School Improvement Team Co-Chair

Worked with the principal, co-chairperson, and team to implement school improvement standards. During my tenure, Weldon Middle School exceeded growth on state measured assessments.

Roanoke River Valley Education Consortium Aspiring Leader Intern

Worked with district leadership to design rigorous curriculum maps for immediate implementation. Received leadership mentoring and coaching by executive-level district leaders. Participated on Weldon City Schools

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superintendent's leadership team and attended executive staff meetings. Facilitated staff professional development sessions. Participated in bi-monthly meetings with district staff to assess the value of internship/summer projects.

Teach for America, Eastern, NC | 2012 - 2014

Teach For America Corps Member

I became a Teach For America Corps Member (TFA) upon graduating from Norfolk State University. TFA recruits outstanding and diverse leaders who commit to expanding educational opportunity, beginning with at least two years teaching in an under-resourced public school. Working shoulder-to-shoulder with students, educators, and community members, corps members go beyond traditional expectations to support the academic and personal growth of their students. TFA seeks high performing college students who have the values and experiences necessary to expand opportunity and access for children. Among the leadership traits, TFA seeks individuals with a deep belief in the potential of every child, a strong record of achievement, and perseverance in the face of challenges.

ARTICLES

Building community one bus ride at a time

<https://www.ednc.org/search/Community+Bus+rides/>

Where we start: Empowering all our students

<https://www.ednc.org/2018/05/25/where-we-start-empowering-all-our-students/>

A principal's first year of leading and serving

<https://www.ednc.org/2017/01/09/principals-first-year-leading-serving/>

North Carolina State Board gets master class in school turnaround

<https://www.ednc.org/how-equity-can-drive-school-turnaround/>

Keeping Students at the Center in the Time of Coronavirus

<https://www.teachforamerica.org/stories/keeping-students-at-the-center-in-the-time-of-coronavirus>

Perspective | NC education stakeholders weigh in on racial equity

<https://www.ednc.org/perspective-nc-education-stakeholders-weigh-in-on-racial-equity/>

A Journey into Educational Innovation with Edgecombe County Public Schools and Transcend

<https://drive.google.com/file/d/1U8Fykp0cYCwhzHOr8Xvt02SWI8XELEpN/view?usp=sharing>

VIDEOS

Donnell Cannon: The Time is Now

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4IXz55cSmRY&feature=youtu.be>

Equity Meets Education

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BJYD10cpBvc>

Meet Greg - North Edgecombe High School Student

<https://twitter.com/EducationNC/status/1192857775551975425/video/1>

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We Drive It- Inside the North Phillips School of Innovation

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LgXh5YRSOnk&feature=youtu.be>

2019 Excellence Education Innovation Lab- Topic

https://www.youtube.com/watch?time_continue=472&v=F5q_lAfqFLO