



Cleveland Schools Pick Indianapolis Academic Chief Warren Morgan as New CEO

Move adds another Teach for America veteran to district leadership as longtime CEO Eric Gordon departs

By Patrick O'Donnell

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The Cleveland school district has chosen Warren Morgan, chief academic officer of Indianapolis Public Schools as its new CEO, making him the third Teach for America veteran in a major leadership position in the Ohio city.

Morgan, who had previously worked for the Cleveland schools from 2014 to 2016, served as Executive Director of Teach For America's St. Louis branch for three years before joining the Indianapolis district in 2020 during the pandemic.

For three years he has overseen Indianapolis' academic recovery from the pandemic, with Indianapolis' 2022 state test scores rebounding to 2019 pre-pandemic levels.

Raised in Chicago, Morgan started his career teaching science in St. Louis public schools as a Teach for America recruit, years before leading the program there. Teach for America has drawn national attention for its model of recruiting strong students from non-teacher training programs at universities, giving them a crash course in teaching.

But reviews have been mixed in the program's 30 years, with some educators praising the energy and insights that new recruits bring to schools that often have trouble finding good teachers. The program has churned out school leaders, including former Washington, D.C., schools chancellor Michelle Rhee, former Louisiana State Superintendent John White and Morgan's current boss, Indianapolis Public Schools Superintendent Aleesia Johnson. Others, including teachers unions, have said teachers are not well prepared and that many leave the profession after their two year term.

In a press conference announcing Morgan's selection, outgoing Cleveland CEO Eric Gordon pointed out he hired Morgan for his first school district administration job in 2014. Morgan responded he was glad for the chance to come "home."

"I can't describe how excited I am for this opportunity," Morgan said as Gordon pulled a baton from a gift bag and handed it to him. "I'm extremely humbled, honored. But above all,

just extremely grateful.”

Morgan cautioned, however, that he does not want to force Indianapolis solutions on Cleveland and that he would launch a listening tour to hear parents, staff and students. Though he presented a “first 100 days” plan in interviews for the job, it was not immediately available.

In two interviews, one with parents and one with students, Morgan highlighted a commitment to extracurricular activities and making sure schools in every neighborhood have the resources to offer quality education.

Mayor Justin Bibb said Morgan’s humility and ability to listen helped win the job, along with his commitment to equity between schools and “making sure that we do everything we can to accelerate and address the learning loss that we see coming out of COVID-19.” Bibb avoided discussing how much Morgan’s Teach for America work was part of the decision. Bibb, 36, a former member of Ohio’s Teach for America board, had also tapped another veteran, former Cleveland TFA leader Holly Trifiro, as his main education advisor. A press release about Morgan becoming one of two finalists for the job conspicuously did not name Teach for America, saying only that Warren had worked for an “education nonprofit in St. Louis.”

Morgan was chosen over Rocky Torres, a Cleveland native and also a former Cleveland schools administrator, now Assistant Superintendent of Student Services with Seattle Public Schools.

Morgan will start as CEO July 1 when Gordon, who has led the district since 2011, steps down. Gordon, 53, was named Urban Educator of the Year in 2016 by the **Council of the Great City Schools, the nation’s association of large urban districts.**

Until Bibb took over as mayor last January, Gordon had served as CEO only under former Mayor Frank Jackson. Last spring, Bibb said in an interview with The 74 that he would review whether any school official, even the highly-regarded Gordon, was the best fit for the district.

Gordon then announced last fall that he would leave after this school year, giving Bibb and the board time to pick a successor. He has not revealed plans for after his departure. Along with his multiple leadership positions in Teach for America, Morgan has worked as a department chair and principal in Chicago Public Schools and spent two years in Cleveland overseeing some of the district’s “investment schools,” which received wraparound social services and other supports to improve.

Cleveland’s mayor has more say in the selection of the district head than other districts in the state. Though school districts in Ohio have elected school boards, Cleveland was the first to change to mayoral control in the 1990s. State law calls for the mayor to pick school board members and for new CEOs to be chosen by the board in concurrence with the mayor.