

Our Mission

Since 1867, the mission of Southern Education Foundation has been to advance equitable education practices and policies in the South through research, advocacy, and leadership development to help every student attain a high-quality education that propels them toward the opportunity-rich life they deserve.




Our Vision

For all students in the South – especially historically underserved students of color and those from low-income families – have access to a high-quality education and the same opportunities to succeed as their peers.




Our Strategies

GOVERNMENT AFFAIRS & ADVOCACY

 The educational challenges that face historically marginalized children and their families are too great for one organization or group to tackle alone. Success requires strategic ongoing multi-sector collaboration working across various systems. SEF engages in a range of partnerships and coalitions that work to address the root causes of educational inequities by strengthening the capacity of


advocates and policymakers. We advocate for local, state, and federal policies and legislation that lead to effective systems change, especially for Black students and all students from low-income families in the South.

RESEARCH & POLICY

 SEF provides the field with thoughtful analysis of key issues and the timely dissemination of solutions that offer the greatest impact for students. Our published reports

and presentations across the country help to empower policymakers to use empirical research to support innovation and creativity in education that is just and centered on equity. SEF's leadership helps keep race and class at the center of education debates because these remain key factors in inequities in education.

LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT

 As a core tenet of the organization, SEF's leadership development efforts span

nearly 150 years. We subscribe to the belief that advancing education equity and social justice requires a constellation of bold leaders equipped with the perspective, understanding, and skills necessary to navigate the complex landscape of public education and the inherent challenges in addressing racial and social inequity. Leaders are a critical lever for advancing authentic and enduring equity-centered systems change. Therefore, SEF offers research-based, practitioner-informed fellowships and professional learning opportunities for rising leader, school district executives, and others to grow their capacities to lead for racial equity and ensure deeper learning outcomes for every child:

The Southern Education Leadership Initiative (SELI) is an intensive, eight-week, paid summer fellowship for emerging leaders interested in advancing racial equity and improving education from early childhood through college. Placed within nonprofit organizations, school districts, higher education institutions, or state education agencies in the South, SELI Fellows spend the summer developing as leaders, engaging with valuable stakeholders, and acquiring practical job skills through direct learning experiences. Over SELI, talented

and diverse young fellows have conducted important research, policy analysis, advocacy, and organizing efforts for more than 100 partner organizations. SELI alumni can be found today working as educators, policymakers, researchers, community organizers, and committed civic leaders dedicated to improving the life chances of all children.

The Racial Equity Leadership Network (RELN) is a 15-month, cohort-style fellowship program for school district leaders in the South committed to addressing persistent disparities in their school systems and ensuring that race and class are no longer the most reliable predictors of student success. Over the course of their fellowship, RELN fellows attend in-person convenings focused on the essential levers for equity-centered leadership and system transformation. The fellows also receive customized coaching and technical assistance to support the planning and implementation of an action plan addressing their unique equity challenges.

Innovative Initiatives

OUTCOMES BASED CONTRACTING (OBC)



SEF is partnering with school districts to use Outcomes

Based Contracting (OBC) to provide additional academic support for students. Participating districts require a substantial part (at least 40%) of payment to a service provider to be contingent on meeting agreed upon student outcomes. This approach helps ensure public dollars deliver academic impact, even if providers take several attempts to achieve it. OBC empowers districts to contract for clear student outcomes and compels mutual accountability for achieving them.

THE EQUITY ASSISTANCE CENTER-SOUTH AT SEF (EAC-SOUTH)



Under a five-year federal grant, SEF is home to a

center that works with school districts to help eliminate disparities in education based on students' race, national origin, sex, and religion – promoting greater access and opportunity. The EAC-South offers professional development workshops for educators, resources on equity-related topics, and district consultation upon request.