

PRESS RELEASE

Press Release: PACE Announces Lupita Cortez Alcalá as New Executive Director

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PACE ANNOUNCES LUPITA CORTEZ ALCALÁ AS NEW EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

[Policy Analysis for California Education](#) (PACE) proudly welcomes [Lupita Cortez Alcalá](#) as its new executive director. With more than 25 years of leadership experience in California education policy, Alcalá brings deep expertise, unwavering commitment to educational equity, and proven ability to bridge the worlds of education research, policy, and practice.

Alcalá assumes leadership of PACE at a pivotal moment for California's education system as it faces both the challenge of ongoing postpandemic renewal and the strain of navigating a shifting and increasingly polarized political landscape. At a time marked by diminished federal commitment to public education as well as growing division over the direction of education, rigorous research must inform policy decisions that affect the lives of students, families, and educators across the state. Meeting this moment requires more than evidence alone: It demands a concerted effort to mobilize the research community around the urgent task of informing policy with clarity, relevance, and purpose.

"Adding Alcalá's deep expertise in education policy to the educational research expertise and institutional leadership of [PACE's faculty directors](#) will strengthen and advance our capacity to produce and share high-impact research that leads to improved education policy and practice across California," comments [Julie Marsh](#), PACE executive faculty director and professor of education policy at the Rossier School of Education and Sol Price School of Public Policy at the University of Southern California.

In light of the evolving educational landscape and pressing need for research to meaningfully shape policy, PACE has intentionally turned to a leader with not only demonstrated experience leading California's education systems but also the strategic insight required to respond thoughtfully to today's challenges. Alcalá brings a wealth of knowledge from her work across the education continuum. Previously, she made history as the first Latina chief deputy superintendent at the California Department of Education. She has also held executive roles at the California Student Aid Commission, where she championed college affordability and

financial aid reform. Most recently, she served as director of education policy and outcomes at WestEd, where she co-led the development of the California Master Plan for Early Learning and Care.

A first-generation college student and multilingual learner, Alcalá has a personal understanding of the transformative power of public education. She holds a bachelor's degree in political science from the University of California, San Diego, and a master's degree in planning administration and social policy from the Harvard Graduate School of Education.

Sharing her perspective on this new role, Alcalá states: "Now more than ever, it's important to be unapologetic about the value of research—its power to drive innovation and its transformational education and economic impacts. I look forward to leading PACE to elevate that message and ensure that evidence-based insights guide strategic policy decisions, strengthen educational systems, and expand opportunities for all learners."

Under Alcalá's leadership, PACE will continue to deepen its impact as a thought leader and collaborator, bringing rigorous research to support decision-makers, elevate practitioner insights, and ultimately improve student learning. Former PACE Executive Director [Heather Hough](#) states: "I cannot imagine a better leader for PACE in the period ahead. I have long admired Alcalá's deep knowledge of California's education landscape and her unwavering commitment to students. Her experience, vision, and dedication make her the right person to guide PACE's next chapter, strengthening its influence and helping California meet the challenges ahead."

Alcalá will work closely with PACE Faculty Directors [Ben Domingue](#) at Stanford University, [Michal Kurlaender](#) at UC Davis, [Julie Marsh](#) at the University of Southern California, [Cecilia Rios-Aguilar](#) at UCLA, and [Michelle Young](#) at UC Berkeley to inspire and lead the next chapter of PACE's journey as well as to broaden PACE's impact. "Lupita is exactly the kind of visionary leader PACE needs; her strong commitment to bridging research, policy, and practice will elevate PACE's influence and impact at this critical moment for education," says Michal Kurlaender, PACE faculty director and chancellor's leadership professor of education policy at UC Davis. Together, this leadership team will advance PACE's long-standing mission while renewing our commitment to research that informs policy, empowers practice, increases equity, and improves the lives of children and youth statewide.



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