

Julia Rafal-Baer, Ph.D., has dedicated her career to helping all children achieve their potential. After beginning her career as a special education teacher in the Bronx two decades ago, Dr. Rafal-Baer is now a top education advisor who leads high-performance, high-impact organizations nationwide. She is a trusted confidante to the nation's most effective state education leaders and superintendents, directly coaching more than 75 leaders into the superintendent and state commissioner roles, 80 percent are leaders of color and 65 percent are women. Dr. Rafal-Baer frequently speaks and writes on the need to advance more women leaders in senior roles.

Dr. Rafal-Baer is the co-founder and CEO of ILO Group, a women-founded, leadership-focused education policy and strategy firm. She is also the founder and CEO of Women Leading Ed, a national network of women education leaders, and a co-founder and partner at The Forum for Educational Leadership. During the Covid-19 pandemic, Dr. Rafal-Baer served as a top education advisor to school districts and state education agencies across the country and as an expert advisor to the [COVID Collaborative](#). She also supported a national effort during the pandemic to safely reopen schools, accelerate learning, and strengthen critical support for students.

Previously, Dr. Rafal-Baer served as Chief Operating Officer at Chiefs for Change, a nationwide network of district and state education leaders. She built the organization from a start-up to a high-impact nonprofit, raising over \$110M in philanthropic funds, and developing core programming and initiatives, including the Future Chiefs and Women in Leadership program. She provided intensive technical assistance, direct systems support, coaching, and strategic advising support to state and district leaders and their leadership teams across the nation on topics including strategic planning, policy changes, finance and operations, school improvement, human capital, crisis management, and organizational development.

Dr. Rafal-Baer served as Assistant Commissioner of the New York State Education Department under Commissioner John B. King, Jr, where she was responsible for the strategy, management, and implementation of teacher and leader initiatives, overseeing more than \$150M in federal funds. She currently sits on the national board for the Association of Marshall Scholars; and the Education Week Board of Directors; and the advisory committee for the Center for Education Policy and Research at Harvard University. In 2020, Dr. Rafal-Baer was appointed by the U.S. Secretary of Education to a four-year term on the [National Assessment Governing Board](#), and in 2024, she was re-appointed to a second term. Her appointments, which span administrations from both Democratic and Republican leadership, reflect broad, bipartisan recognition of her expertise and dedication to improving education outcomes. In 2022 she was named a [Pahara Fellow](#).

Dr. Rafal-Baer graduated summa cum laude from the George Washington University with a B.A. in Psychology and holds a dual M.S. from CUNY: Lehman College in Special Education and Childhood Education. She also holds a Master of Philosophy in Education Research, and a Ph.D. focused on comparative education policy from the University of Cambridge, where she was a Marshall Scholar.