



Dr. Denise Watts is a passionate and committed education professional, practitioner and consultant. Her experience and track record as a leader at the school and district level has focused on significantly improving the quality and culture of education for school-age children, especially those in traditionally underserved communities.

Watts' 20-year career has focused on serving children. As a teacher, athletic coach and principal and school district leader, she has demonstrated an unrelenting dedication to cultivating the conditions in which children can maximize their limitless potential in school and in life.

Denise Watts currently serves as Chief of Schools in the Houston Independent School District, serving over 194,000 students in 274 schools. She oversees principal supervision, magnet schools and innovation and strategy. Prior to this, she was the Chief of District Support for the University of Virginia's Partnership for Leaders in Education. In this role, she worked to assist school districts from around the country in efforts to improve student outcomes through innovation and best practice.

Formally, Watts was employed by Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools as the leader of Project L.I.F.T. (Leadership and Investment for Transformation), a philanthropic initiative composed of leaders from Charlotte's largest community and family foundations aiming to accelerate student achievement in up to 29 schools serving the district's most educational and economically disadvantaged students. Under the leadership of Dr. Watts, Project L.I.F.T. schools were among the first in the nation to implement Opportunity Culture, a model that leverages district support systems to re-design career pathways and compensation to extend the reach of excellent teachers to more students within budget. This strategy yielded a positive impact on student achievement as well as the recruitment, retention and development of teachers in Project L.I.F.T. schools. It is now being replicated in CMS and over 20 districts across the country.

In her career trajectory, Dr. Watts was recognized for her leadership as the North Carolina's NASSP Middle Level Principal of the Year in 2008. In her first year as a principal, she led Mint Hill Middle School to be a National School to Watch. In 2019, she was also tapped for Strategic Staffing, CMS's nationally recognized turnaround initiative that placed top leaders and teachers in its most challenged schools.