The Shoulder Tap

Educators of Color on the Leadership Representation Gap—and What We Can Do About It

By Dr. Nina Gilbert, Jackie Gran, Dr. Andrea Lewis, and Dr. Daniel Teodorescu

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ABOUT

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Jackie Gran is the Chief Officer for Policy and Strategic Initiatives at New Leaders. In this role, she oversees federal policy, state regulatory policy, accreditation, and certification. She is also a steering committee member of the 1 Million Teachers of Color Campaign. Previously, Jackie served as National Director of Growth and Policy at New Leaders, where she oversaw expansion to new district partners, as well as federal and state policy. Jackie served at the U.S. Department of Education as a special assistant in the Offices of the Secretary and Deputy Secretary, and as a senior advisor in the Office of Planning, Evaluation, and Policy Development during the Obama Administration. She also served as a legislative aide to Senator Edward M. Kennedy on the Senate Health, Education, Labor, and Pensions Committee. Jackie taught middle school in New York City. She earned a bachelor's degree from Wellesley College and a master's degree from Pace University.

Andrea Lewis, Ph.D., is director of the Student Success Program and associate professor of education at Spelman College. Her professional experiences include elementary school teacher, public and private school administrator, and college faculty and staff. In addition to her work in Student Success, Dr. Lewis chairs the College Completion Action Team; co-chairs the Campus Assessment Response and Evaluation Team; co-directs the International Prestigious Fellowships; and organizes a Cuba Study Trip through the Gordon Zeto Center. A summa cum laude graduate of Spelman College, Dr. Lewis earned master's degrees from the University of Pennsylvania and Interdenominational Theological Center, and a Doctor of Philosophy from Georgia State University.

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Institutional Collaborators

Clark Atlanta University is a culturally diverse, research-intensive, liberal arts institution that prepares and transforms the lives of students. CAU is located in the heart of Atlanta which is the epicenter of the Civil Rights Movement and modern center of emerging technologies and innovation. Ignited by its history, CAU is committed to delivering education that is accessible, relevant, and transformative. The mission of the **Department of Educational Leadership** within the School of Education is to prepare candidates with knowledge, skills, and dispositions needed to serve as transformative leaders. The ultimate goal is to improve academic outcomes of students in diverse schools and communities locally, nationally, and internationally.

For more than 150 years, **Morehouse College** has developed young Black men ready to answer the call to serve and lead in their communities. As the epicenter for thought leadership on civil rights, Morehouse is committed to helping the nation address the inequities caused by institutional racism, which has created social and economic disparities for people of African descent. By launching a new **Center for Excellence in Education** and a robust digital transformation, Morehouse is making this distinguished calling to serve and lead more readily available to educators across the country.

New Leaders builds the capacity of equity-minded school leaders who are committed to the success of every child. Our leaders remove barriers to success for underestimated and underserved students, supporting students in fully realizing their futures as the next generation of great thinkers, innovators, and leaders for our society. In 20 years, we have trained more than 8,000 equity-focused leaders—sixty percent of whom identify as leaders of color. Our leaders impact more than 2 million students in the nation's PK-12 school system annually and serve as powerful and positive forces for change in their communities.

Spelman College, a historically Black college and a global leader in the education of women of African descent, is dedicated to academic excellence in the liberal arts and sciences and the intellectual, creative, ethical, and leadership development of its students. Through diverse learning modalities, Spelman empowers the whole person to engage the many cultures of the world and inspires a commitment to positive social change. The **Education Department** promotes academic excellence in the development and preparation of students to be change agents in the field of education through classroom, field-based, and experiential learning opportunities. Graduates become innovative teachers, critical thinkers and researchers, and educational leaders who have a commitment to the development of children and adolescents, and to the improvement and sustainability of schooling locally, nationally, and globally.

Acknowledgments

PROJECT OVERVIEW

Purpose and Research Methodology

Purpose

This paper aims to draw lessons from existing research on school leader diversity, and to supplement that evidence with new insights from the lived experiences of teachers, aspiring and practicing school leaders of color, and local and state administrators who oversee school leader recruitment and support. We elevate these perspectives to bring the research to life and to inspire policy makers to take effective, research- and experienced-backed actions to help districts and state education agencies close the school leader representation gap.

Research Methodology

This project began with a thorough review of the existing research on school leader diversity and representation. Two additional primary data collection methods were used: focus groups with teachers and school leaders and one-on-one interviews with district and state administrators.

We recruited participants from the alumni networks of our institutions (Clark Atlanta University, Morehouse College, New Leaders, and Spelman College), and 69 educators responded to an initial survey on the school leader representation gap that gauged their interest in participating in a focus group on this topic. Nearly all of the educators who responded to the survey identify as Black, Hispanic, or mixed race (including Afro-Latino and Cape Verdean). Three respondents identify as white and one as Pacific Islander or Native Hawaiian.

Five district and state leaders (four of whom identify as leaders of color and one of whom identifies as white) were selected based on their expertise and commitment to advancing educator diversity.

We conducted 11 focus groups with 23 educators and five interviews with district and state leaders from the summer of 2021 through the spring of 2022. The focus groups and interviews were conducted as semi-structured virtual discussions using a protocol vetted by educators, project staff, and a researcher (please see **Appendix**). The facilitator for each session posed probing questions on the basis of focus group or interview participants' responses to the protocol questions.

NOTES ON LANGUAGE

Diversity, Race and Ethnicity, and School Leaders

Diversity

Throughout this paper, we use the term diversity to refer to the racial, ethnic, and cultural identities and backgrounds of the students, educators, and communities who make up our nation's schools and society at large.

Race and Ethnicity

We use the terms people of color, school leaders of color, or educators of color when referring to individuals who self-identify as Asian American, Black, Hispanic, Indigenous American or Alaska Native, Native Hawaiian, Pacific Islander, multi-racial, as well as a range of specific national or cultural identities that are not white or Caucasian.

We use the term Black to describe people who self-identify as African American or have an African background or family ancestry. We use the term Hispanic to describe people who self-identify as having a background or family ancestry from any Spanish-speaking country.

To ensure we accurately captured a person's identity, we asked focus group and interview participants to tell us their racial, ethnic, and gender identities, which introduced identity descriptors such as Latino, Latina, or Latinx as well as Afro-Latino and Cape Verdean. We recognize that identity labels are highly individualized, and we aim to capture the identities of the people who participated in our research with the highest respect and fidelity. As such, where applicable, we use racial and ethnic terminology based on the source of the content (e.g., a research paper, data compilation, or an interviewee's self-identification).

School Leaders

We use the term school leaders to refer to principals, assistant principals, and other school leaders who are responsible for instructional leadership at the school level. This latter category may include other members of a school's leadership team as well as district leaders, such as principal supervisors.

CITATION AND LEGAL NOTES

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Legal Notes

The research conducted under this study received Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval from Clark Atlanta University, Solutions IRB, and Spelman College. We have followed all protocols and guidance to protect the rights, welfare, and privacy of the individuals who participated in this research. Of note, we have included identifying information on individuals in this report only when they expressly provided their consent to be quoted or otherwise attributed. In all other cases, personally identifiable information, including but not limited to name, location, race/ethnicity, and gender, may have been removed.

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"That tap on the shoulder—when someone you trust sees your brilliance and leadership potential—can be miraculous."

April D. Broussard

Spanish Teacher

A few years ago, Danielle Edwards began to notice that conversations about social justice and educational equity were taking place more frequently in her school system. A graduate of Spelman College, she was thrilled to have more opportunities to support social change not only in her classroom, but in her larger community as well—a value shared by many of her fellow graduates of other Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs) in Atlanta and across the country. She knew her voice mattered: "I was typically one of only a handful of Black people in the room for those discussions," she shares, adding that she was also often one of only a few people who had a direct relationship with students. Yet, as a teacher, she recognized the power dynamics at play that could limit her ability to effect change. She believed she could make an even bigger difference for her students by moving into a leadership role.

> "Everywhere I looked, leadership didn't look like me. But our students did."
>
> Danielle Edwards
> *Assistant Director of Diversity, Equity & Inclusion and Admission Counselor,*
> *Harvard Westlake School, Los Angeles, CA*

The lack of a clear leadership pathway and concrete guidelines complicated Edwards' desire to make a career move. Motivated by her students, she began to chart her own path. Edwards relied heavily on her network of Spelman sisters, who helped her navigate what she quickly learned were a series of "unwritten rules" and "unspoken expectations" for moving into leadership—insider information to which she may not have otherwise had ready access. "How can you win the game if you don't know it's being played?" she explains. Inspired by other Black leaders and encouraged by a network of like-minded colleagues who recognized her leadership potential and understood the unique barriers she faced as a Black educator working in a U.S. school system, Edwards successfully navigated the uncertain landscape. She now serves in a leadership position through which she can mentor future leaders of color and shape decisions in support of her students.

April D. Broussard is also motivated by a desire to make the greatest possible difference for her students. She has served as a teacher for nearly twenty years and is actively working toward a principal role. Broussard is grateful for the colleagues who have supported and sustained her over the years, celebrating her strengths and encouraging her when she decided to pursue leadership training and an opportunity to serve as the summer academy director for a teacher preparation program. She didn't get enough systematic support, she reflects, but the times when her talents were acknowledged and affirmed provided a powerful confidence boost to help her keep going.

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Looking back, Broussard is keenly aware of the missed opportunities. Namely, supervisors who didn't know about her career goals—who perhaps didn't recognize leadership potential in a young educator of color—and who didn't offer the type of professional development that could have fueled her leadership. She relied on a potent combination of relentless drive and self-motivation, but she thinks there is a better way. "As of late, I am reflecting on how important representation is to me," she shares. She wonders how her journey might have been different had she been surrounded by more colleagues and leaders who look like her, who saw the value in her unique background and skill sets, and who were positioned to offer explicit encouragement—a tap on the shoulder to say I think you've got what it takes!—along with concrete next steps to help her move forward on the pathway to school leadership.

Edwards' and Broussard's experiences are not unique. School systems across the U.S. continue to rely on practices and norms that can limit opportunities for students and educators with diverse racial, ethnic, and cultural backgrounds, and which contribute to persistent and alarming opportunity and achievement gaps.

Today, a majority of the PK-12 public school student population is Black, Hispanic, Asian American, Pacific Islander, Indigenous American, or multi-racial, and the U.S. Census projects that people of color will make up the majority of the U.S. population by 2045.[1] Yet as these demographic shifts take place, the racial and ethnic diversity of the education workforce has remained relatively constant: according to the most recent data from the U.S. Department of Education, about 79 percent of teachers are white,[2] as are about 78 percent of school principals[3]—reflecting little change from twenty years ago.

The COVID-19 pandemic, coupled with longstanding racial injustice, has laid bare the gaps and persistent inequities in our schools and society. According to data from the U.S. Department of Education, opportunity and achievement gaps have widened during the pandemic.[4] Teachers and school leaders who have been navigating crisis after crisis may now be poised to leave the profession in droves,[5] adding to the 47 million Americans who voluntarily quit their jobs in recent years.[6] Survey data suggests these workforce shifts may widen the teacher-student representation gap: larger proportions of Black and Hispanic teachers report they intend to leave the profession earlier than they had initially planned.[7] The statistics are dire, but they are not surprising: we have heard a great deal from students, educators, and parents about the disruption, overwhelm, frustration, and profound loss and grief they have experienced due to COVID-19.

We have also been buoyed by their many stories of resilience, progress, community, and hope. As we emerge from the throes of pandemic-era schooling, it's clear that America's education landscape is changing. To prepare for the demographic and labor market shifts that will influence how schools are staffed and managed in the years ahead, our nation's schools must be led by individuals who have the experiences, skills, and dispositions to direct and shape our ever-more racially, linguistically, and culturally diverse communities with courage, conviction, and, above all, an unwavering commitment to support all students in reaching their boundless potential.

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"Everywhere I looked, leadership didn't look like me. But our students did."

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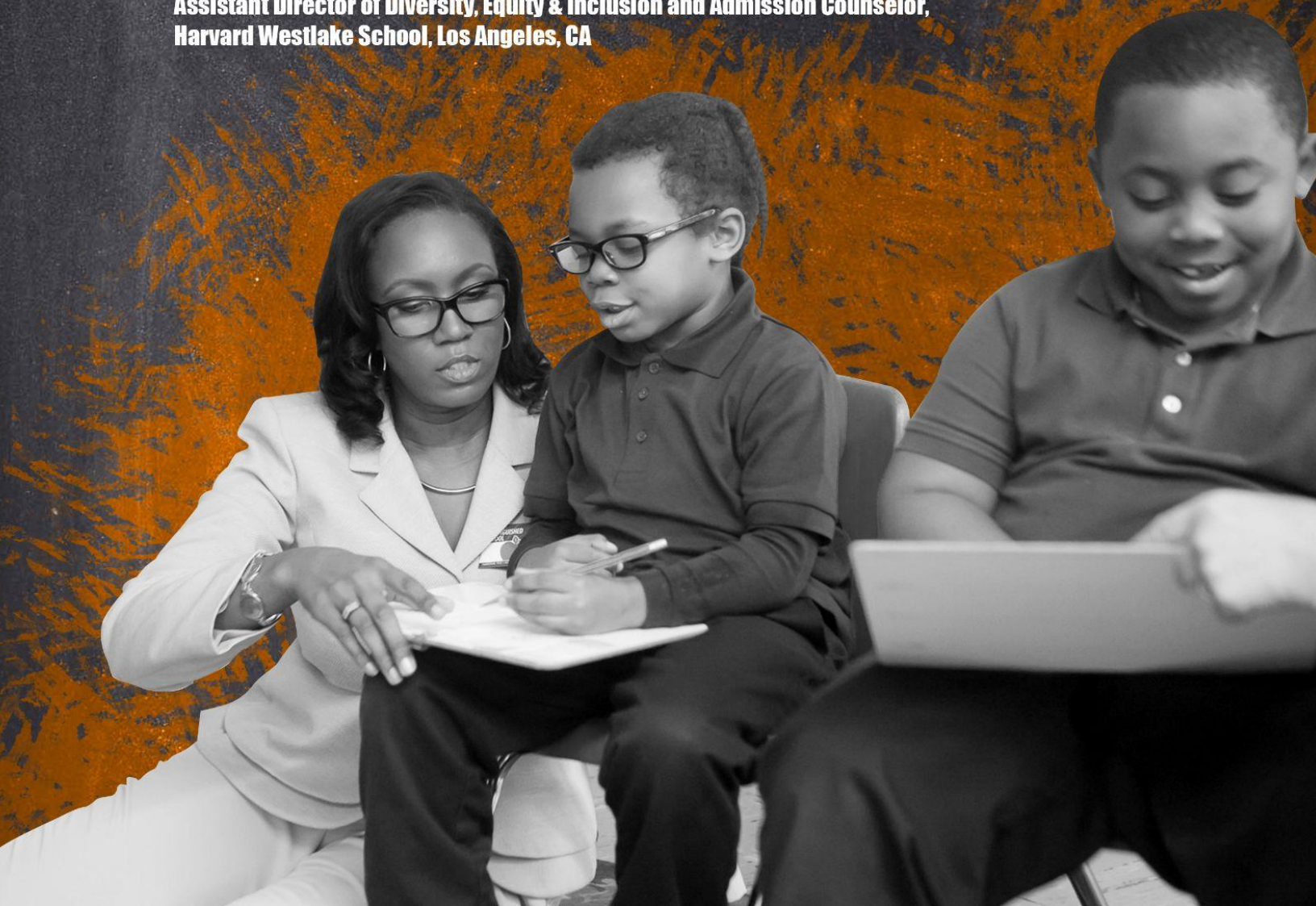
Great leadership, at every level of our school systems, is critical. No matter the task—accelerating student learning, tackling the mental health crises affecting children and communities, sustaining and retaining outstanding and racially/ethnically diverse educators, disrupting systemic inequities that have plagued our schools for far too long—outstanding leaders effectively marshal resources and tap into the expertise of their communities to realize measurable, sustained improvement. Decades of research affirm the profound effects of leadership: school leaders account for 25 percent of a school's impact on student learning,[8] and an above-average principal improves student achievement by 10 percentage points compared with an average principal.[9] School leaders also play an essential role in sustaining and stabilizing the educator workforce: 97 percent of teachers list principal quality as critical to their retention and career decisions—*more than any other factor.*[10]

We also know that leadership is a critical lever for advancing equity. The positive effects of strong leadership are most pronounced in struggling schools, which are more likely to serve marginalized students and communities[11]—those hardest hit by the pandemic. In fact, a landmark study found "virtually no documented instances of troubled schools being turned around without intervention by a powerful leader."[12] In addition, research has documented better school and student outcomes for teachers and children of color when a principal of color is at the helm. Leaders of color provide more rigorous academic opportunities for students of color,[13] while fostering school environments that are more supportive and sustainable for teachers of color,[14] who in turn promote better academic, social-emotional, and behavioral outcomes for students of color[15] and, critically, for all students.[16]

Whereas the positive effects teachers of color have on students, especially students of color, are well documented, the many benefits school leaders of color bring to their students and school communities have received less attention. This must change.

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In this paper, we show that recruiting and retaining school leaders of color is more urgent than ever. We explain the existence of a large and persistent representation gap between America's schoolchildren and the nation's school leader corps. And we describe a growing and powerful research base indicating that this gap does a profound disservice to our students and teachers, especially students and teachers of color, who have greater access to essential opportunities and support to help them succeed when a person of color leads their school.

Later in this paper, we explore the career tracks of Black and Hispanic educators from our institutions' alumni networks and showcase the experiences of school- and system-level leaders of color who work to disrupt recruitment, hiring, and management practices that perpetuate the representation gap. Many of these practices stem from unwritten and often unspoken rules that profoundly affect the ability of people of color to enter, navigate, and build a career as an educator or education leader. **The educators we spoke with overwhelmingly point to mentorship—specifically, getting a tap on the shoulder from a trusted colleague—as the first critical step on the path to leadership. Establishing clearer and more systematic processes to identify, cultivate, and sustain high-potential leaders is key to making progress in increasing school leader diversity.**

While we support all equity-driven school leaders, no matter their race or ethnicity, this paper focuses on the unique insights and experiences of educators of color. Too often, the voices of people of color are missing from important conversations that shape our schools and society at large. In sharing the perspectives and experiences of educators of color, we aim to supplement the research base with narratives about the barriers that can prevent stellar teachers of color from pursuing leadership roles (or, even earlier in their careers, classroom teaching positions), as well as the critical supports that facilitated and fueled the rise of the Black and Hispanic school leaders we interviewed.

We have synthesized the ideas and feedback we heard into themes and actionable takeaways, yet we must highlight that educators of color, like all educators, are not a monolith. Even where there is broad agreement on a problem, the educators we spoke with shared a wide range of experiences and perspectives on what the path forward can and should entail.

One thing educators do agree on is that strengthening and diversifying the educator workforce go hand in hand. To improve the educational experiences of schoolchildren across the country, we have to increase their access to teachers and leaders of color. By recruiting more people of color in education careers, we strengthen the caliber of teaching and leading in our nation's schools.

Our hope is that the research and stories we share in this report will inspire policymakers to prioritize school leader diversity and to advance a set of concrete policies and practices to create more equitable opportunities for educators of color to grow as leaders and advance in their careers. When this progress occurs, we can support all students, especially young people of color, in fully realizing their futures as the next generation of great thinkers, innovators, and advocates in service of a stronger, more equitable, and more just society.

WHAT WE KNOW

Current Research on School Leader Diversity

School leader representation matters. Leaders of color, however, are significantly underrepresented in U.S. schools, creating a barrier to improving the educational experiences and outcomes for students, especially students of color. While 52 percent of U.S. students identify as people of color,[17] just over 22 percent of principals do.[18] As we explain in this section, researchers have found that students and school communities have better outcomes when a principal of color is at the helm.

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KEY FINDING 1
There is a wide and persistent representation gap between principals and the students they serve.

In the 2017-18 school year—the most recent year for which data are available—78 percent of principals were white, 11 percent were Black, 9 percent were Hispanic, 1 percent were Asian American, 1 percent were American Indian or Alaska Native, and 1 percent identified as two or more races. In that same year, 48 percent of students were white, 15 percent were Black, 27 percent were Hispanic, 5 percent were Asian American or Pacific Islander, nearly 1 percent were American Indian or Alaska Native, and 4 percent identified as two or more races.[19] While there have been some small shifts in the diversity of principals in the past 20 years—the proportion of Hispanic principals, for example, has increased by 4 percentage points and the proportion of white principals decreased by 4 percentage points—the demographics of the principal corps have generally remained the same since the 1999-2000 school year. As illustrated by Figures 1 and 2, the racial/ethnic composition of the principal corps has not kept pace with the changing demographics of America's student population. According to the most recent data, more than half of America's public schoolchildren are now students of color,[20] compared with just 22 percent of school principals.[21]

The school leader representation gap may be exacerbated by pandemic-era working conditions. According to a poll conducted in June 2022 by the National Association of Secondary School Principals, half of all principals report that their stress levels are so high they are considering leaving the profession.[22] This recent survey data does not speak directly to the race or ethnicity of respondents; however, historical data before the pandemic shows that turnover rates for Black and Hispanic principals were higher than for white principals.[23] In addition, attrition rates for principals leading schools that serve large populations of students of color and students from low-income families were also higher than for principals serving whiter, more affluent schools.[24] This finding is not surprising, given that principals of color are more likely to serve in such schools,[25] which are too-often under-resourced despite serving children and families with greater need. Furthermore, added stressors on principals leading these schools and communities, who are more likely to be leaders of color, could widen the school leader representation gap in the coming years.

Figure 1: Percentage distribution of student enrollment in public elementary and secondary schools, by race/ethnicity: Fall 2000, Fall 2017
Source: National Center for Education Statistics
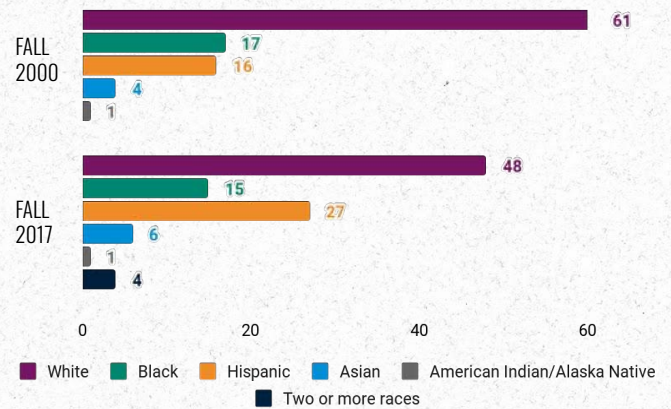
Figure 2: Percentage distribution of public school principals by race, 1999-2000 and 2017-2018
Source: National Center for Education Statistics
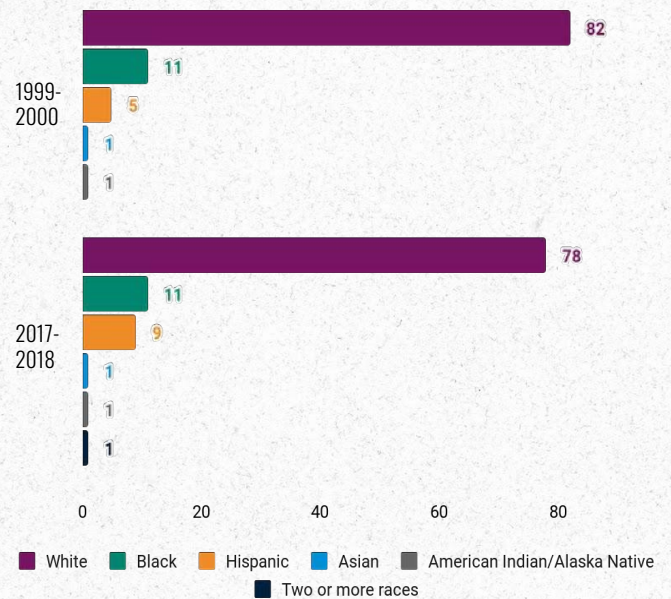
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KEY FINDING 2
Principals of color directly improve opportunities and outcomes for students of color.

A growing research base has found several important benefits for children of color who attend schools led by principals of color.
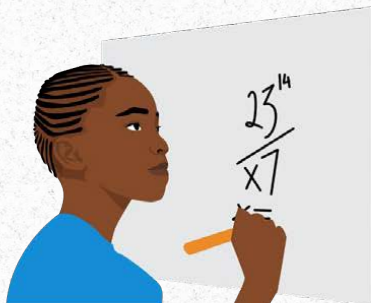
Black students' math achievement increases when they attend a school with a Black principal, even without direct instruction from a Black teacher.[26]

The representation of Black students in gifted programs is higher in schools led by Black principals.[28]

Hispanic students have higher attendance rates and are more likely to take advanced courses if they attend a school led by a Hispanic principal.[27]

Black students who attend schools led by Black principals are 1.5 percentage points less likely to receive in-school suspensions. Notably, students become even less likely to experience suspensions the longer a Black principal remains at the school.[29]

The lack of diversity in the principal workforce means we are failing to capitalize on a strategy for closing opportunity and achievement gaps for young people of color, who have been disproportionately affected by the deleterious impacts of pandemic-era schooling and life, from disrupted learning to the loss of family and friends. While all students have experienced significant "unfinished learning," equivalent to five months in math and four months in reading,[30] those already at a disadvantage before the pandemic—children of color, students with disabilities, English learners, young people from low-income families or rural communities—have had even less access to essential supports and are now even further behind their more well-resourced peers.[31] The need to prioritize efforts to accelerate learning for students of color, including via greater school leader diversity, is more urgent than ever.

26. Bartanen, B. & Grissom, J. (2019). *School Principal Race and the Hiring and Retention of Racially Diverse Teachers.* Annenberg Institute at Brown University. Retrieved from http://edworkingpapers.com/ai19-59.
27. Grissom, J., Rodriguez, L., and Kern, E. (2017).
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31. Office of Civil Rights. (2021). *Education in a Pandemic: The Disparate Impacts of COVID-19 on America's Students.* U.S. Department of Education. Retrieved from https://www2.ed.gov/about/offices/list/ocr/docs/20210608-impacts-of-covid19.pdf.

KEY FINDING 3
Principals of color attract and retain teachers of color, whose greater presence in schools improves student outcomes.

Principals of color are more likely to hire and retain teachers of color.[32] In turn, teachers of color promote stronger academic and other outcomes for all students,[33] and specifically for students of color.[34] In this way, principals of color indirectly help to improve student outcomes by managing stronger and more diverse teaching staffs.

It's important to highlight that the representation gap between principals and students illustrated above roughly mirrors the gap between teachers and students. In the 2017-18 school year, 79 percent of elementary and secondary public school teachers were white, 9 percent were Hispanic, and 7 percent were Black. While this represents a slight increase in the percentage of teachers of color since 1999-2000, it nowhere nearly reflects the diversity of the student population.[35] In addition, an astounding 40 percent of U.S. schools do not have a single teacher of color on staff.[36]

Principals of color can help to change this reality. Teachers of any race or ethnicity are less likely to leave their positions when their principal shares their race or ethnicity, reporting significantly higher job satisfaction.[37] Black teachers in schools led by Black principals, for example, report greater feelings of support and recognition, express more trust in their principals, and give the school leadership higher ratings.[38]

The transition from a white to a Black principal is estimated to increase the number of Black teachers working at a school by three percentage points; after five years, the proportion of Black teachers in a school can increase by up to 5.3 percentage points.[39] This change is due in part to Black principals' greater ability to attract, hire, and, crucially, retain Black teachers; in fact, Black principals are five to seven percentage points more likely to hire a Black teacher than white principals.[40] By contrast, changing from a Black principal to a white principal may lead to a decrease in the number of Black teachers.[41]

These findings have profound implications. Children of all races and ethnicities benefit from greater access to teachers of color,[42] and the positive effects of a more diverse teacher workforce are especially pronounced for students of color.[43] For example, research from North Carolina has found that when Black students have just one Black teacher by 3rd grade, they are 13 percent more likely to go to college; if they have two Black teachers, they are 32 percent more likely to enroll.[44] By recruiting and sustaining teachers of color at higher rates, principals of color can give students greater access to more teachers of color throughout their time in school.

32. Grissom, J.A., Egalite, A.J., & Lindsay, C.A. (February 2021). *How Principals Affect Students and Schools: A Systematic Synthesis of Two Decades of Research.* The Wallace Foundation. https://www.wallacefoundation.org/knowledge-center/Documents/How-Principals-Affect-Students-and-Schools.pdf.
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34. Will, M. (2022). Blazar, D. (2021).
35. National Center for Education Statistics. (2022). "Characteristics of Public School Teachers." *Condition of Education.* U.S. Department of Education. Retrieved from https://nces.ed.gov/programs/coe/indicator/clr.
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42. Blazar, D. (2021). *Teachers of Color, Culturally Responsive Teaching, and Student Outcomes: Experimental Evidence from the Random Assignment of Teachers to Classes* Retrieved from https://www.edworkingpapers.com/sites/default/files/ai21-501.pdf.
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KEY FINDING 4

Because they attract and retain teachers of color at higher rates, principals of color can help to diversify the school leadership pipeline—up to a point.

Teachers represent the future candidate pool for school leader positions. Therefore, teacher diversity—from pre-service preparation through on-the-job support—critically shapes the strength and diversity of the school leadership talent pipeline. As explained in the previous section, school leaders of color can help to increase the diversity of the teacher workforce by better supporting, sustaining, and retaining teachers of color. In this way, school leaders of color are themselves key to closing the school leader representation gap.

The influence of school leaders of color on the diversity of the teacher profession is nevertheless limited by obstacles to diversifying the teacher pipeline. The U.S. Department of Education reported in 2016 that not only are people of color underrepresented in teacher preparation programs from the outset, with post-secondary education degree enrollment populations less diverse than in other degree areas, but diversity continues to decrease at multiple points in the path to the classroom.[45] Standardized tests required of teaching candidates, for example, disproportionately keep candidates of color from joining the workforce.[46] A growing number of researchers argue that racial/ethnic disparities in test outcomes suggest "standardized tests may perpetuate a segregated teacher workforce and that the tests and testing environments may be biased against people of color" and that "[m]ost research finds that certification exams are not strong predictors of teaching effectiveness... and there is little evidence that testing translates to better teachers overall."[47]

Barriers persist even for those educators of color who make it to the classroom. Despite an increase in hiring teachers of color, the growth in recruitment is stymied by a comparatively high rate of attrition and reported negative working conditions.[48] The strongest complaints from teachers of color are a lack of collective voice in educational decisions and a lack of autonomy in their classroom.[49] Many of these issues can be addressed by principals: as noted previously, 97 percent of teachers list principal quality as essential to their retention and career decisions—*more than any other factor.*[50] At the same time, too many principals lack "balanced autonomy"—trust and discretion to implement policies and initiatives in ways that meet the distinct needs of their schools while maintaining core elements—which research has found is critical to their ability to institute supportive, energizing, effective school conditions where teachers and students can thrive.[51]

Furthermore, the transition from teacher to principal and beyond can be just as fraught. Data on principal licensure exams mirrors the data on teacher licensure exams: test takers of color are 12 percentage points less likely than similarly qualified white test takers to achieve the minimum score on the School Leader Licensure Assessment (SLLA).[52] The researchers "find little evidence that SLLA scores predict measures of principal job performance... [raising] questions about whether conditioning administrative licensure on SLLA passage is consistent with principal workforce diversity goals."[53] Further, once on the job, Black principal candidates are 18 percent less likely to be promoted than equally qualified white candidates, and they had to wait longer, on average, for those promotions to occur (5.27 years versus 4.67 years for white teachers).[54]

45. Policy and Program Studies Service. (2016). *The State of Racial Diversity in the Educator Workforce.* U.S. Department of Education. Retrieved from https://www2.ed.gov/rschstat/eval/highered/racial-diversity/state-racial-diversity-workforce.pdf.
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52. Grissom, J., Mitani, H., and Blissett, R. (2017). "Principal licensure exams and future job performance: evidence from the school leaders licensure assessment." *Educational Evaluation and Policy Analysis (39)2,* 248-280. Retrieved from https://www.jstor.org/stable/44983390.
53. Grissom, J., Mitani, H., and Blissett, R. (2017).
54. Bailes, L. and Guthery, S. (2020). *Held down and held back: systemically delayed principal promotions by race and gender.* American Educational Research Association. Retrieved from https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/full/10.1177/2332858420929298.

If more people of color do not enter and stay in the teaching profession to mature to leadership positions—and if barriers such as biased assessment instruments and hiring or promotion practices keep qualified educators from advancing in their careers—then the already small pool of candidates of color for school leadership roles diminishes even further. Pandemic-related effects may exacerbate these problems: the National Education Association reports that 55 percent of educators are ready to leave the profession earlier than planned, with greater proportions of Black (62 percent) and Hispanic/Latinx (59 percent) educators expressing this view.[55]

55. Jotkoff, E. (2022).

KEY FINDING 5
School system leaders recognize the importance of diversity in leadership and need help closing representation gaps.

In the summer of 2022, New Leaders deployed an anonymous survey to school system leaders. The survey was designed to ascertain whether local education leaders believe diversifying school leadership is a priority, and to better characterize the current state of leadership diversity in their districts or charter management organizations (CMOs). More than 100 leaders from across the country responded. Respondents served in a variety of senior leadership positions, including superintendent, assistant or associate superintendent, and chief academic officer, as well as directors overseeing curriculum and instruction, development and external relations, diversity and engagement, federal programs, human capital management, school improvement, and other functions.

Responses illuminated five key insights:[56]

(a) **There is a representation gap between district leaders and the students they serve:** Fewer than half of survey respondents indicated that their district/CMO leadership reflects the diversity of the student population they serve.

(b) **District/CMO leaders are personally dedicated to making progress:** Eight out of 10 respondents said that they are personally committed to improving the diversity of school leaders within their district or charter network. In fact, 73% of respondents indicated that diversity in leadership is "very important" to them.

(c) **There is a disconnect between the individual priorities of district/CMO leaders and those of the larger school system:** Despite overwhelming support from survey respondents themselves, only half reported that school leader diversity is "very important" to their school system as a whole.

Survey respondents offered some pertinent insights:

(d) **There is a need for clarity in leadership opportunities and pathways, especially for aspiring leaders of color:** Only half of survey respondents indicated that there is a clear leadership pathway for educators within their district or charter network. Only one-third told us that there are leadership pathways specifically for people of color.

(e) **School systems need support developing effective strategies for increasing diversity in leadership:** More than 60% of respondents indicated that their district or charter network simply does not know how to build a diverse pipeline of leaders.
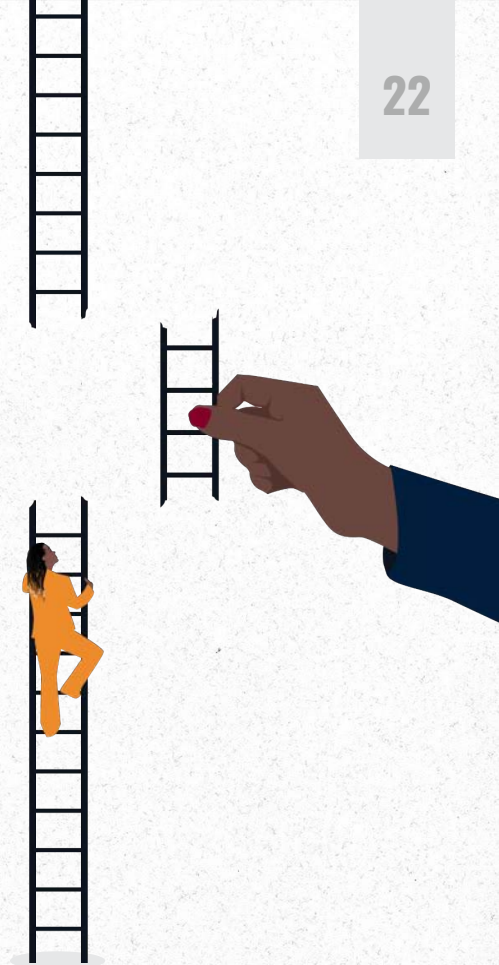
"While there is appreciation for racial diversity in our district, sometimes it is limited to that. Diversity in thought or experience is often seen as a threat."

"Our district has prioritized increasing representation for one group; however, it has neglected increasing representation for the group that represents the majority of our population."

"While the majority of our faculty/staff (including teachers, principals, and our superintendent) value diversity and equity, our school board is clearly opposed to exploring and embracing them."

56. New Leaders. (2022). Invest in Leadership: Five Actions District Leaders Can Take to Increase School Leader Diversity. Retrieved from https://www.newleaders.org/reshaping-educational-leadership#district-leader.

WHAT WE'VE LEARNED
Current Perspectives on School Leader Diversity

Next, we build upon this research base by elevating five key themes from our focus groups and interviews with teachers, school leaders, and district leaders of color. These themes roughly track the career trajectories of educators, from early exposure to a teaching career through on-the-job support for school leaders.

Across each theme, unwritten rules and expectations are present, as is the role of explicit encouragement—a tap on the shoulder—from a trusted mentor or colleague, whose acknowledgement can inspire that first critical step into leadership. As Harrison Peters, CEO of Men of Color in Education Leadership (MCEL) explains, unspoken expectations can "prevent qualified leaders of color from securing principal positions because of mysterious and indistinct definitions of the term 'fit.'" This has implications for the pipeline as a whole: promising leaders may be dissuaded from taking the leap into leadership if they regularly see exceptional educators of color passed over for principal roles. Further, if seasoned leaders of color continue to miss out on the opportunity to expand their reach and influence on behalf of students through promotions or high-profile assignments, they may decide to hang up the towel.

As we learned through our qualitative research, a shoulder tap can help educators of color overcome unwritten rules and unclear pathways to leadership. Yet as the experiences and perspectives highlighted in this section illustrate, we cannot rely on individual shoulder taps alone to close the representation gap. Instead, we must establish clear and systematic processes to identify high-potential leaders, cultivate their talents, and sustain them in their roles. Only then can we significantly increase the diversity of our nation's school leaders.

THEME 1
We can inspire and remove barriers for future leaders of color before they enter a classroom or school.

The educators we spoke with emphasize the need to intentionally nurture the early interest of potential teachers of color, backed up with attractive reasons to enter the education profession, as a critical first step to diversifying school leadership. In other words, they told us, diversifying leadership starts well before current educators consider moving into a leadership role.

> **"If we're not getting a strong pipeline of diverse teachers, we're not going to have the pipeline for principals."**
>
> Dr. Ventura Rodriguez
> *New Leaders alumnus, former Senior Associate Commissioner,*
> *Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education*

During his tenure with the Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, Dr. Ventura Rodriguez helped to design policy intended to diversify the educator workforce, from the classroom to the superintendent's office. He and his team started with strategies around the teacher pipeline, recognizing that the leadership pipeline starts with a future leader's entry into the education profession. "We really did see those as bookends that supported the broader work we were doing at the state level," he shares. The team developed strategies such as visiting universities with higher numbers of students of color and engaging directly with student groups in and outside of teacher preparation programs. One of their primary concerns was framing the benefits and barriers to sustaining a quality of life as a teacher. This was particularly important for children of immigrants whose parents wanted them to become doctors or lawyers. Rodriguez said moving forward will require expanding the dominant narrative in education, which focuses on how teachers affect the students in their classrooms, to one that emphasizes the many ways educators of color can positively influence students, schools, and entire communities across their careers.

> **"There's a tremendous challenge ahead of us. We need to figure out how to make the job more attractive."**
>
> Dr. Donald Fennoy
> *former Superintendent, The School District of Palm Beach County, FL*

Dr. Donald Fennoy, former Superintendent of The School District of Palm Beach County, says the financial incentives for teachers are not attracting educators the way they did in the 1960s. Coupled with the financial toll student loans take on individuals from low- to moderate-income households, he believes that the lack of racial and ethnic representation makes a career in education undesirable. "People are assessing their own lives," he reflects, "and realizing that there are other options available." With pensions and the promise of retirement savings no longer an allure for aspiring educators, he believes new approaches that reflect the needs of today's workers will be key in addressing gaps in recruitment and retention efforts for teachers and school leaders of color.
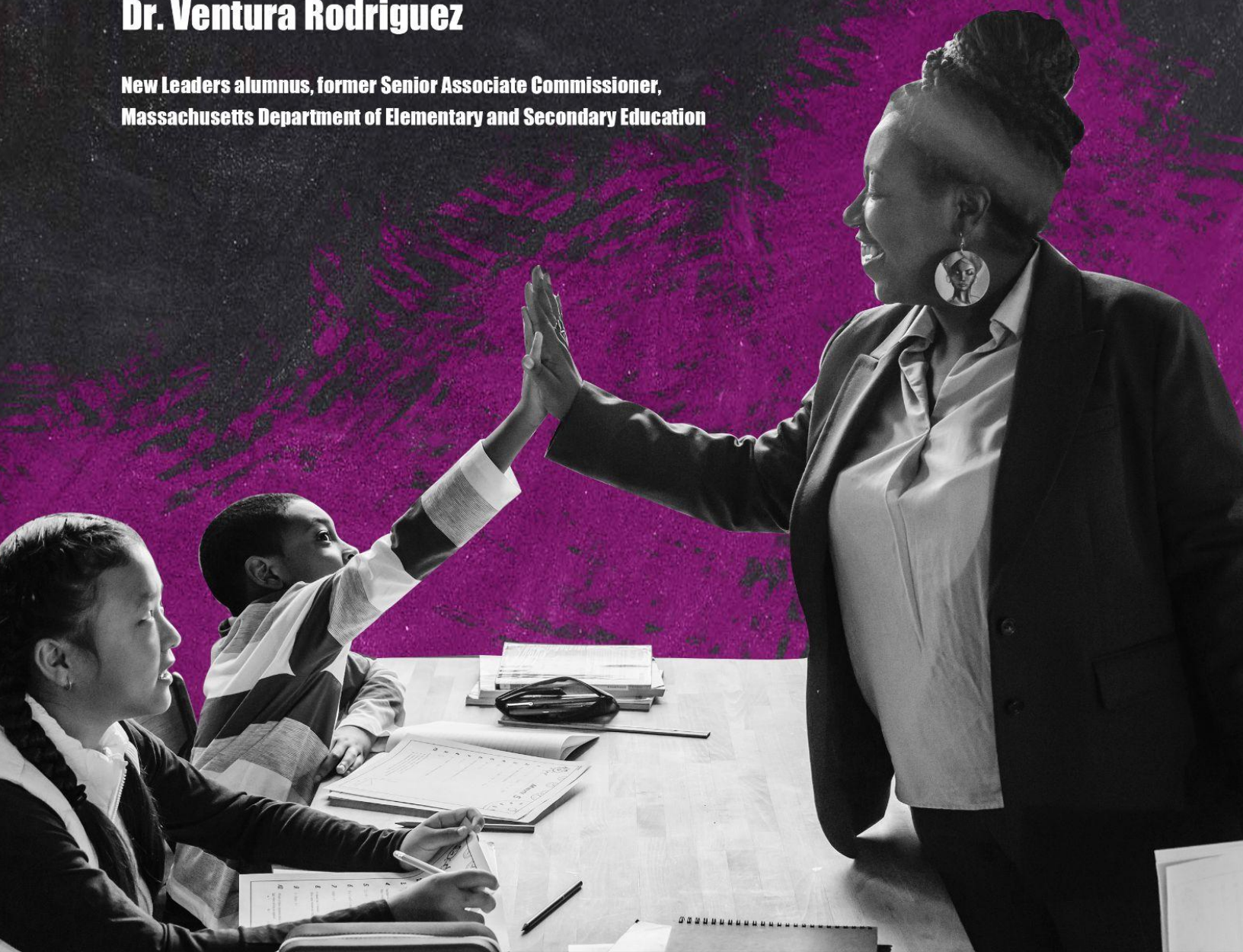
"If we're not getting a strong pipeline of diverse teachers, we're not going to have the pipeline for principals."

Dr. Ventura Rodriguez

New Leaders alumnus, former Senior Associate Commissioner,
Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education

Dr. Wayne Lewis, Kentucky's former Commissioner of Education, concurs. The reality, he shares, is that it's no longer true that a person will become a teacher and remain one for their entire career. Nevertheless, most benefit structures are built on this idea, he points out, and it is difficult for someone who wishes to switch careers and bring their earned benefits with them given that teacher retirement savings plans are neither flexible nor portable. He notes that these barriers make it especially challenging for someone who is interested in becoming a teacher after working in finance or healthcare, for example. "[Teaching] is constructed on a model for previous generations, and that doesn't make sense for younger people and current generations," Lewis explains. New educators and career changers, alike, will also be looking for other qualitative benefits such as career advancement and skills-based recognition to match the ones that are offered in other industries, he says, adding that "culturally, the idea that you would do any job and have the same level of responsibility on your first day as your 21st year on the job is not appealing" to today's workers.

The educators we spoke with acknowledge that education careers are incredibly demanding, which is both a draw and a drawback. There is an unspoken expectation that the needs of a school and its students come before all else. To excel while maintaining one's health requires balance and a disruption to the idea that "giving 110%" doesn't come with staggering consequences, as one interviewee noted. "It's been especially hard over the last 16 months," Principal Baba Olumiji shares, reflecting on the heightened work-life challenges that professionals across sectors have encountered during the COVID-19 pandemic. Acknowledging the realities of teaching and school leadership can help to prepare educators for the quality-of-life challenges they will need to navigate, and it can also prompt an important examination of the underlying currents that have made these conditions the norm. The educators we spoke with emphasized that teachers and principals of color want to make a difference, but they cannot be expected to be martyrs.

Several of the educators we interviewed described early exposure to classroom settings during volunteer opportunities offered by their undergraduate colleges as critical to their career decisions. Spelman College alumna Dr. Stephanie Wright didn't always want to be a teacher. She started her undergraduate studies in biology and history. It wasn't until she started volunteering as a youth tutor through Spelman-led programming that she was inspired to reconsider her career path. She took education classes at Spelman, which enabled her to be successful in a graduate-level teacher certification program.

Fellow Spelman alumna Danielle Edwards says she always knew she wanted to teach. But when she got to college, she was discouraged by teachers' salary caps. After exploring other career fields, the pull toward education remained strong. Through Spelman, she was able to volunteer in a variety of learning environments, giving her real-world exposure to the profound difference she could make in children's lives—and her community at large—through education. She cites the important role these experiences played in helping her overcome the real financial barriers that prevent many would-be educators from pursuing a career in education, especially those who lack the financial cushion of an affluent family for help with tuition or paying back student loans.

The educators we interviewed believe we can adapt the education profession to meet modern demands—making it more attractive and sustainable for today's workforce and, specifically, for people of color—and they acknowledge that it requires deep collaboration among teachers' unions, policymakers, other state and local decision-makers, and the educator workforce.

THEME 2
Cultivating the next generation of school leaders of color is deeply interpersonal work.

We asked focus group participants to talk about what inspired them to become school leaders. Nearly all of the educators we interviewed referenced encouragement from a teacher, principal, superintendent, or other trusted colleague or mentor of the same race/ethnicity. Rather than policies, initiatives, or other systematic approaches, most of the participants described happenstance encounters that built up their confidence and opened their eyes to their own leadership potential.

> "You're a leader. No, I'm a teacher. *No, you're a leader.*"
> Dr. Kamilah Hampton
> *New Leaders alumna, Principal, Richard J. Daley Academy, Chicago, IL*

Several of the school leaders we interviewed described a unique form of recruitment that led them into their current roles—something akin to being tapped on the shoulder or "volun-told," as Baba Olumiji calls it. As Dr. Kamilah Hampton shares, it was only after a colleague explicitly told her she had what it takes to be a leader that she really began to consider expanding her influence beyond the classroom. According to the school leaders we spoke to, when a colleague or close friend looks at you and tells you school leadership is something you should seriously consider, you take note. As mentioned previously, in many cases the mentor was a person of the same race or ethnicity. Hampton explains: "When you aren't considering it for yourself and someone you trust—someone who knows you and has been through it themselves—says this is a path you should go down, that you've got what it takes, it starts the ball rolling. It is a form of recruitment." This sentiment is echoed by Dr. Wright.

> "Seeing other Black women do the job—and do it well—was inspiring for me."
> Dr. Stephanie Wright
> *Spelman alumna, Director of Programs, Rainier Scholars, Seattle, WA*

In 2012, Dr. Frank Ortega decided to leave the predominantly white school where he had started his career after reflecting on the influence he could have teaching in an environment where he could be a role model to students. He also wanted to feel a greater sense of belonging. Ortega speaks both English and Spanish and wanted to use his skills to work with children and communities with whom he shared a cultural and linguistic background. During this moment of professional transition, a friend asked him whether he planned to be in the classroom for the rest of his career or if he had ever considered moving into leadership. His friend's affirmation that he would make a strong leader prompted him to enroll in the educational leadership program at Clark Atlanta University (CAU). In 2020, he received his doctorate and, today, after 25 years of teaching elementary school students, Ortega is an assistant principal at John Robert Lewis Elementary School in Atlanta, GA.

"When you aren't considering it for yourself and someone you trust—someone who knows you and has been through it themselves—says this is a path you should go down, that you've got what it takes, it starts the ball rolling. It is a form of recruitment."

Dr. Kamilah Hampton

New Leaders alumna,
Principal, Richard J. Daley Academy, Chicago, IL

In the absence of mentors and role models who recognized their leadership potential, many of the school leaders we interviewed believe they probably would have remained in the classroom—because they loved teaching and because they so thoroughly identified themselves as classroom teachers. Being inspired and encouraged to imagine themselves as instructional leaders outside of the classroom opened up new career paths with the potential for them to make an even greater difference for their students, schools, and communities.

The initial leadership potential identification phase must be followed by authentic, ongoing engagement with a mentor, an essential best practice[57] cited by many of the educators we interviewed. Some interviewees experienced success in school districts with a formal leadership pipeline. In these places, teachers have opportunities to self-identify their leadership potential and take advantage of district-provided mentors and coaches who supported them in considering a transition from the classroom into, for example, a resident principal role. School leaders emphasized the value of pairing the interpersonal side of early leadership cultivation with structured opportunities for mentorship and learning even before enrolling in a formal principal preparation program. By systematizing such opportunities, equitable—rather than haphazard—access to mentorship and early leadership opportunities becomes a defining feature of the school system's approach.

THEME 3
School leaders of color want pre-service preparation that focuses on addressing the dynamic needs of school communities and that recognizes their identities and lived experiences.

Traditional principal preparation programs increasingly emphasize many critical components of the job, from instructional leadership to staff development and strategic planning. But according to the educators we interviewed, too-often missing is an emphasis on how to navigate change, including the political burdens that come with being a school leader, especially a leader of color.

In reflecting on her experience, one focus group participant noted that every school has areas for improvement and that young people are always changing. She contends that pre-service principal preparation programs must equip principals to make adaptive moves that help them navigate change, both the expected and the unexpected. As principals work in the center of societal change, they often take on the frustrations, concerns, and hopes of the larger community. The school leaders we spoke with pointed to current debates around race in public education, mask mandates, book bans, and other political activity as only the most recent examples of social issues that make their way into schools. While many of the heated discussions portrayed in the news have taken place during monthly or quarterly school board meetings, the school leaders we spoke with emphasized the reality that they are on the front lines fielding questions and feedback from parents and community members *every day*.

> ## "If you don't know how to own your story, identify challenges, empower others, or measure progress, you won't be successful."

Dr. Maryam Thomas
New Leaders alumna, Principal, Ernest Everett Just Middle School, Mitchellville, MD

Not surprisingly, change management is high on the list of topics leaders of color want to see more coherently addressed in principal preparation programs. School leaders shared with us that a change management curriculum should include content on conducting diagnostics to better understand and even predict the challenges and opportunities ahead, more deeply understanding what school transformation realistically looks like through case-study analyses, and planning for change through strategic staffing, adaptable organizational structures, and clear, consistent, nimble communication with stakeholders. One focus group participant noted that principal preparation programs would be wise to acknowledge the likelihood, not the mere possibility, of conflict during periods of change, and to be explicit about how adaptive leadership strategies can mitigate inevitable tensions across the school community.

To address the reality that principals face pushback or lose their jobs if they don't successfully manage the politics of change, the school leaders we spoke to emphasized the importance of knowing both best practices in change management and how to consciously bring their own identities into play—a key asset in a principal's adaptive leadership toolkit. They argue that presenting change management through the more nuanced intersectional lens of race/ethnicity and gender could help school leaders of color even better prepare for the specific ways they encounter challenges inherent to organizational and community disruptions and transformation.

Focus group participants offered innumerable examples of the types of scenarios pre-service training could address. **For example:**

What happens when a Black or Hispanic leader fills a role formerly held by a white principal where the student population is predominantly Black or Hispanic? What happens when the student population is predominantly white?

What happens when staff don't embrace a new school leader's equity-focused approaches to leadership?

How can school leaders plan for conversations about race with students, parents, and communities of all races, ethnicities, and backgrounds?

How does my educational experience inform the way I lead in a school setting where most of the students share my racial background, and in one where they don't?

57.   SREB. (2007). *Good Principals Aren't Born — They're Mentored: Are We Investing Enough to Get the School Leaders We Need?* Retrieved from https://www.wallacefoundation.org/knowledge-center/pages/good-principals-arent-born-theyre-mentored.aspx.

"The work you have to do with yourself is ongoing. Identity work, coaching, therapy, how you were raised, how we show up as leaders—it's all deeply rooted in our personal experiences."

Dr. Ventura Rodriguez

Focus group participants stated clearly that they believe conversations about leadership dilemmas and opportunities should be facilitated in a way that explicitly acknowledges racial differences instead of waiting or hoping that race or racism doesn't surface.

Participants also highlighted that while school leaders are instructional experts, the transition from teacher to leader is significant—especially for leaders of color. One participant noted a certain amount of "unlearning" that takes place during this transition, as leaders-in-training reckon with their changing identity and their evolving influence over a school community, along with the greater scrutiny that comes with being in charge. For some of the leaders of color we spoke with, especially the female educators, the assertiveness that had won them praise in the classroom was interpreted as aggressive once they were in a formal leadership role. Others highlighted the careful way they have had to balance voicing their passion for ending educational injustice without being perceived as angry or threatening. Still other focus group participants highlighted the challenges associated with the perception of women, especially women of color, as nurturers, which can end up adding caretaking responsibilities onto their already full plates and making it difficult for them to set reasonable boundaries without being labeled as "cold."

Several of the educators we interviewed said these issues were manifestations of "double-consciousness," which W.E.B. DuBois defined as the internal conflict that Black people experience while simultaneously existing within and outside of a racialized white-dominant society.[58] Double-consciousness can help leaders of color understand the challenges underrepresented groups face in navigating spaces from which they've historically been excluded. Ideally, focus group participants explained, there would be conversations about double-consciousness and "imposter syndrome" (when qualified people who have experienced exclusion believe they aren't bright enough and have fooled their way into opportunity). These conversations could occur during leadership preparation so that educators of color have a chance to craft a leadership vision and style that sets them up for success in a white- and male-dominated world—and that enables them to bring their authentic selves in breaking down barriers to equity and justice, in our schools and society.

58. Dubois, W.E.B. (1903). The Souls of Black Folk.

THEME 4
District hiring and onboarding processes can pose formidable challenges for school leaders of color.

The educators we interviewed said they observed and experienced issues with existing principal recruitment, hiring, and early-tenure support practices, with implicit bias playing out in several ways during this pivotal phase in their careers.

> "You can't do the same thing and expect different results."
>
> Dr. Kettisha Jones
> *Spelman alumna, Senior Leadership Coach, Ensemble Learning*

One principal shared that she had been on a number of hiring committees and once saw a teacher who was not hired because they spoke with an accent. A talented and highly qualified teacher, the candidate did not make it through to the next phase of the recruitment process because their English did not sound like the mainstream idea of standard American speech. Because of the district-level systems in place at the time, the principal did not have any real recourse for raising her concerns about the hiring committee's decision-making protocols. She saw this as a missed opportunity to bring new experience and expertise to the school community—and the district's leadership pipeline—and a clear sign that system-level intervention was needed to address bias in hiring. The committee, after all, had followed all of the official guidelines.

Other focus group participants reflected on "unwritten rules" around how to network and take on a leadership voice, both of which were ultimately critical during the principal hiring process. One participant recounted working with a mentor principal who had said, "You need to volunteer, speak up, stay late, and help others in other departments." This advice helped her to develop qualities and engage in activities that were not made explicit during the principal recruitment process—and that she believed were especially important for her to exhibit as an aspiring leader of color. Focus group participants shared that the opportunity to hold a leadership position might not have become a reality for them had they not been explicitly advised to demonstrate a capacity to lead beyond the important work they were doing in their classrooms, along with other advice about how to demonstrate competence and show up as one's full self.

The path forward, the educators we interviewed argue, involves "making the implicit explicit." Josh Pacos, former Director of Schools for Rocketship Public Schools in Washington, DC, noted that transparency has been critical to the success of the professional development and aligned career advancement opportunities they provide across the school system. "It's not just where folks are today," he explains, "but what educators need to improve on." And making sure they have really specific information, feedback, and support to inform their growth and career development, he adds.

One focus group participant recounted their school leadership program experience as an example of how school leaders of color are primed to expect double standards—with potentially dire consequences. One of 22 educators in a leadership cohort waiting to receive a school placement, they were told directly that the hiring process would be harder for them because they are Black. Subsequently, they were one of the last three of their cohort to secure a principal placement. The fear of failure, of not being good enough, constantly loomed. As a result, they were initially slow to ask for help out of concern about appearing weak, when in reality the first year on the job is a time when all principals have lots of questions and benefit from intensive support. While this leader appreciated the heads-up about the biased placement process, it wasn't delivered by someone fluent in equity-centered work. Their transition to the principalship also was not paired with the high-quality onboarding and support structures they believed could have helped them—and others in their cohort—navigate the personal and professional transformation into a leadership role as a person of color.

According to our focus group participants, new school leaders of all races and ethnicities face challenges and need time to develop competencies that support their success and retention. But for leaders of color, mistakes come with a different set of consequences. They don't get as many opportunities to "fail forward," one participant explained, as the perception of being "less than" is implied. Many explained that their white colleagues seem to receive second chances or grace in ways that are not afforded to school leaders of color. To disrupt the way institutional bias negatively affects school leaders of color, school districts can create spaces where it's safe to make mistakes while coaching school leaders on how to recover without feeling like they'll lose their jobs. The educators we interviewed emphasized how critical such support is for leaders of color in their early years on the job.

Another participant shared their sense that giving all new school leaders two full years in the role before moving them to a different school could help, as transitions are highly disruptive to the early-career learning curve. Such an approach could have the added benefit of preventing school districts from disproportionately assigning school leaders of color to underperforming schools and expecting them to turn the school around quickly with minimal support, which several focus group participants named as a common unspoken expectation. Many of the principals of color we spoke with said that they *want* to lead underperforming schools; at the same time, they acknowledged that leading higher performing schools often comes with more prestige and less-intensive oversight—and performance expectations—from district leadership.

"**Find your role models and people who are doing this work. Talk to them, listen to them on panels. Find people who are in education and are succeeding in roles and enjoying work for the right reason.**"

Daniela Anello

**New Leaders alumna,
Head of School, DC Bilingual Public Charter School,
Washington, DC**
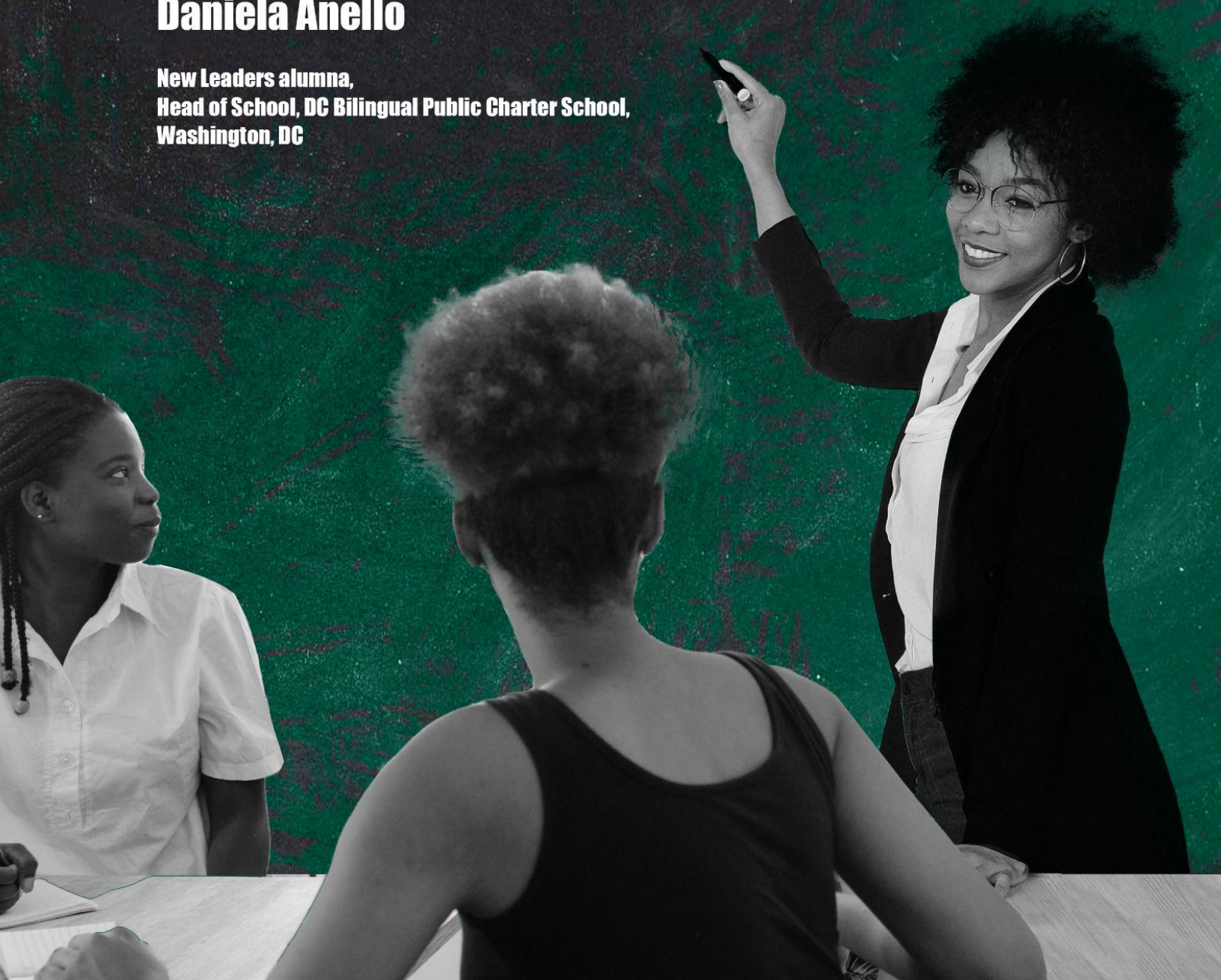
THEME 5
Networks of support, especially mentors, are critical for sustaining school leaders of color.

Retaining school leaders of color is not only about supporting them through thoughtfully constructed school leader preparation programs and equity-informed hiring and onboarding practices, but also about ensuring they have a network of support to lean on once on the job. All of the leaders we spoke with affirmed the value of mentors and affinity groups of like-minded leaders who share their background—formal and informal support structures that help them to problem-solve, share resources, vent, and voice their aspirations and fears in a safe, affirming space.

> "Get out of the mindset of working in silos and look out for one another. If a colleague fails, I fail."
>
> Yadira Guzman
> *New Leaders alumna, Principal, Whittier Dual Language Magnet School, Chicago, IL*

Principal Yadira Guzman emphasizes the importance of her network. She entered her role through New Leaders and a partnership with Chicago Public Schools (CPS). CPS has a large English learner and Hispanic student population. As a bilingual educator, Guzman shared that her cultural background and skill set was often conflated with knowing all answers to the challenges faced by the district's students. Relating to an aspect of a student's identity does not equal curriculum expertise, she explains. The weight of those expectations was heavy, and, at times, made it hard for her to seek out the support she needed to best help her students. She credits her New Leaders network with helping to alleviate the burden of those unspoken assumptions, and to access helpful resources and actionable advice on how to move forward. Her fellow New Leaders alumni had her back, and it made a huge difference.

Daniela Anello credits her leadership journey to the "fierce mentorship of fellow Latina educator" and New Leaders alumna Wanda Perez, who encouraged her to pursue the New Leaders Emerging Leaders program and supported her as a New Leaders Aspiring Principal Resident. This encouragement blossomed into deeper connection and camaraderie with the larger New Leaders alumni community, which she consults regularly for leadership advice, information sharing, and her own professional development, including transformative learning opportunities such as visiting bilingual schools in California to learn their approach to language acquisition.

CAU alumnus Dr. Frank Ortega also benefited from a formal support system. He credits his experience at CAU and his mentor for imparting generations' worth of knowledge. "The mentorship at Clark was by far the most life-altering thing for me," he shares. "They saw me. They allowed me to unapologetically be a person of color. I could say what I wanted to say and wasn't led to feel like I was crazy." Finding that person or people who stand in the gap between immense responsibility as a leader and unlearning messages about your community's capacity to succeed can make all the difference. This is especially true when on-the-job learning not only entails practical application of new skills, such as scheduling, but also soft skills such as managing conflict and communicating with authenticity and compassion.

Many of the school leaders we spoke to also described an impromptu form of creating their own professional development and support. They found mentors, developed relationships with school leaders in other cities, or reached out to people doing similar work.

> **"Find your role models and people who are doing this work. Talk to them, listen to them on panels. Find people who are in education and are succeeding in roles and enjoying work for the right reason."**
>
> Daniela Anello
> *New Leaders alumna, Head of School, DC Bilingual Public Charter School, Washington, DC*

Daniela Anello was grateful to have those people in her life when her career path faced an unexpected hurdle. After serving in various classroom and emerging leader roles at DC Bilingual, it seemed the opportunity to become principal had opened up. To her dismay, Anello learned that the board of the school was instead looking for a Head of School. "I felt that I was out of a job because I didn't train for that," she shares. Anello perceived the announcement as a defeat on both a personal and professional level. As a first-generation college graduate, she was deeply invested in the value of education as a means to a better life. She had taken the appropriate steps to become a school leader, but it suddenly seemed that her efforts were being swept away by this new management vision. Anello leaned on the support and encouragement of her expansive network of trusted colleagues and mentors—including members of the New Leaders network—to build her up and go after the position. They also helped her to navigate her new responsibilities once she had landed the job.

> **"I've come to acknowledge the luxury of a Black teacher starting out under the leadership of a Black principal."**
>
> Equel Easterling
> *Morehouse alumnus, Dean of Curriculum and Instruction,*
> *North Star Academy Clinton Hill Middle School, Newark, NJ*

Equel Easterling recognized the need to create his own network early in his career. Easterling attended Morehouse College and was accustomed to the strong network of support from other Black men committed to leading a life of purpose and service. As the Mathematics Instructional Leader at Uncommon Schools' North Star Academy Charter School in Newark, NJ, Easterling says he craved that type of support system. He sought out the only Black male principal nearby to talk about his career and, plainly, to feel the sense of connection that comes from engaging with someone who "gets" where you're coming from. Since officially joining the Uncommon Schools charter network, he has been with the same school and experienced a principal transition. His first principal was a Black woman, and Easterling recalls carefully observing her leadership style and how she navigated certain spaces with colleagues, staff, and families. She provided him with built-in support on the job that in many ways resembled the Morehouse community.

For the school leaders of color we spoke with, mentorship is by far the most salient practice they point to in sustaining them in their roles. While many professional learning programs have a mentoring component, the professional development that mentors receive requires more emphasis, as focus group participants shared. Providing mentors with substantial training in the same equity-centered principles that school leaders receive could help to build a common language and practice for mentoring. In addition, making space for mentors of color to debrief and convene with their colleagues can facilitate a network of support at all levels of the school system.

WHAT WE'RE SEEING
Bright Spots for Closing the School Leader Representation Gap

The following case examples are intended to demonstrate what is possible when school systems and partner organizations work together to move beyond informal shoulder taps to address systemic barriers to diversifying school leadership. District leaders from Baltimore, Cleveland, and Edcouch, TX, along with state leaders in Kentucky and Massachusetts, have offered insight on strategies for improving the recruitment, retention, and representation of school leaders of color in their communities.

We selected these examples because of the local leaders' strong commitment to increasing school leader diversity and their adoption of promising initiatives and programs that advance that priority, locally and statewide. Approaches to closing the representation gap vary across locales and elucidate the region-specific considerations in the education landscape. Funding, history, geography, and politics all influence these approaches and how quickly they lead to real change on the ground. The case examples offer important insight into how school systems that are actively addressing gaps in school leader representation see the problem and what more can be done to advance progress nationwide.

BALTIMORE CITY PUBLIC SCHOOLS

Like so many school districts across the country, Baltimore City Public Schools (City Schools) is grappling with how to address educator workforce representation gaps. Teacher diversity initiatives have been central to the district's efforts,[59] but they haven't stopped there.

Dr. Sonja Santelises, CEO of City Schools, believes strongly that increasing the racial and ethnic diversity of the district's principal corps requires her to strike a balance between quantity—that is, encouraging more teachers of color to pursue leadership—and quality approaches. She emphasizes ensuring that principals are matched to school contexts that best align with their unique strengths.

To that end, City Schools employs three key recruitment methods:

1 an assessment center, where principal candidates can obtain resources related to performance tasks or interview support, and benefit from explicit guidance and expectations that may be especially useful for candidates of color;

2 outside partnerships, including with Towson University and a collaboration between New Leaders and a consortium of Historically Black Colleges and University (HBCU) partners, including Clark Atlanta University (CAU) and Morehouse College, to recruit and prepare school leaders of color (for additional information on the National Aspiring Principals Fellowship, please see detail in the "**Promising Initiative**" callout); and

3 strategic collaborations with the Equity Office and the Wallace Foundation's Equity-Centered Pipeline Initiative,[60] through which the district gets support for offering equity-centered development to school leaders, including principal supervisors who identify assistant principals and other educators to recommend for pipeline training.

PROMISING INITIATIVE A National Aspiring Principals Fellowship

The National Aspiring Principals Fellowship is a principal certification and master's degree program designed by New Leaders in partnership with two preeminent Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs)—Morehouse College and Clark Atlanta University (CAU). The Fellowship was developed in response to the research-demonstrated need for greater equity-driven, representative school leadership. It integrates the 20-year research and evidence base of the nationally renowned principal preparation program run by New Leaders with the equity-centered conceptual frameworks of Morehouse and CAU. This transformative online program prepares diverse cohorts of aspiring principals across the nation to face the challenges of today's schools as they lead with equity and deliver exceptional results for their students and school communities.

Learn more at www.fellowship.newleaders.org.

59. Baltimore City Public Schools. (2019). Black Teacher Recruitment and Retention Working Group: Final Report June 2019. Retrieved from https://www.baltimorecityschools.org/sites/default/files/inline-files/BTRRWG-Report-Summary-06-18-19.pdf.
60. For more information, please visit: https://www.wallacefoundation.org/how-we-work/our-work/pages/school-leadership.aspx.

Using these three primary levers, City Schools focuses on developing a systematic approach to identifying principal candidates of color and nurturing those individuals along the way.

For Santelises, a key determinant of success is in identifying and developing school leaders who demonstrate competency in most, not just a few, critical leadership areas. The district's leaders have engaged in conversations to explore how, during recruitment and hiring, some candidate strengths are overemphasized and others deemphasized.

"If you can't connect with parents, you can't get to the instruction part of the job," Santelises shares. The ability to develop deep relationships with families became especially important with remote learning during the pandemic, and City Schools officials quickly learned that their principals needed additional support in this area, which had previously received less focus from the district than, say, expertise in driving instructional achievement.

"Coming back from the pandemic, if you aren't strong in culture, your school is going to blow up," she adds, noting another area the district did not emphasize enough in its principal recruitment and support systems pre-pandemic. When we don't balance our focus across leadership competencies, she explains, it's "hurting candidates across the board," and it does a real disservice to leaders of color serving our communities with so many needs on top of the academics.

"We are looking at the current context in addition to using the formal evaluation process to make the best possible decisions about recruitment, placement, and ongoing support for our school leaders," Santelises explains. The end goal is strong, sustained leadership in every school; in the process, Santelises knows they are also taking important steps toward closing the school leader representation gap.

CLEVELAND METROPOLITAN SCHOOL DISTRICT

Eric Gordon, CEO of the Cleveland Metropolitan School District (CMSD), shares that during the past 15 years CMSD has worked to diversify its school leadership via The Cleveland Plan.[61] He notes that while most of the teachers within CMSD are white, the majority of school leaders are Black. With fewer Hispanic teachers in the school district, it has been a challenge to recruit Hispanic school leaders.

Over the years, CMSD has tried various strategies to truly meet the needs of its community and student population, while diversifying and filling gaps in the principal pipeline. While it took a number of years to determine the appropriate size and scale of the initiative, the district eventually saw success with its Aspiring Principals Program. The program includes a summer intensive paired with an assistant principal (AP) position and salary. The program gives aspiring principals the opportunity to train with a leader who shares similar leadership competencies for ten months, followed by another month working with a school leader who has a very different set of competencies. Gordon says the program aims to thoughtfully recruit and prepare school leaders of color because "when leaders of color don't have support to succeed, they unfairly carry the mantle of failure."

Another strategy the district uses is screening résumés after each candidate's name is removed and replaced with a coded number. The goal of this strategy, employed across sectors,[62] is to mitigate implicit bias that can arise from assumptions about a name (e.g., the person's racial identity, whether a native English speaker or not, etc.).

In addition, although "promoting from within" is often a preferred recruitment strategy, CMSD found that attempts to hire school leaders solely from the existing teaching force was a barrier to increasing the diversity of its principal corps. Because a national recruitment strategy would be needed, district officials realized they would have to ensure that prospective school leaders want to move to Cleveland—not only for a job they sought, but also for a lifestyle. They launched TeachCleveland.org to market the Cleveland community to prospective teachers and school leaders, with specific emphasis on the experience of living in Cleveland for people of color and the LGBTQ+ community.[63] The district uses this compilation of resources and information to drive a broad recruitment strategy, which includes reaching out to affinity groups for educators of color at colleges/universities, direct outreach to candidates of color via LinkedIn, and contacting aspiring leaders of color who become available due to layoffs in other cities.

61.   For more information, please visit https://mycleschool.org/cleveland-plan-refresh.
62.   Grothhaus, M. (2016). "How "Blind Recruitment" Works And Why You Should Consider It." Retrieved from https://www.fastcompany.com/3057631/how-blind-recruitment-works-and-why-you-should-consider.
63.   For more information, please visit fttps://www.clevelandmetroschools.org/TeachCleveland.

CMSD is also beginning to employ a sponsorship strategy through which educators can recommend and support their colleagues for open positions. This process allows the district's talent recruitment team to build candidate pools designed to intentionally address specific categories that need diversification. For example, the team will build a pool of candidates to address the district's need for more women as science teachers, more men in early education, or more people of color in leadership positions. Because hiring managers have been trained on succession planning and identifying talent from within, they use a diversity, equity, and inclusion lens to invite candidates to apply to open positions. Gordon notes that the sponsorship concept is rooted in Black communal frameworks that center on lifting colleagues up and literally "sponsoring" one another.

Today, of CMSD's 189 school leaders, 65% percent are people of color,[64] including 58% who identify as Black/African American in a district where 65% of students are Black/African American.[65] They still have work to do, especially with regard to increasing the representation of Hispanic school leaders, but Gordon is proud of their progress to date.

64. Gordon, E. (July 27, 2022). Email Communication.
65. Cleveland Metropolitan School District (2022). "About Us." Retrieved from https://www.clevelandmetroschools.org/domain/169.
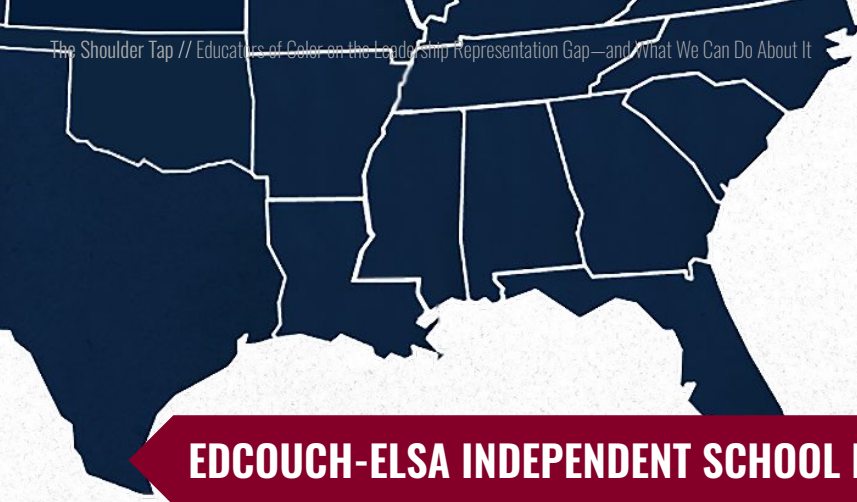
EDCOUCH-ELSA INDEPENDENT SCHOOL DISTRICT

In September 2020, Dr. Greg Rodriguez became superintendent of the Edcouch-Elsa Independent School District (EEISD) in Texas. He quickly learned that school leaders in the district were traditionally promoted after serving long terms at their campus, without full consideration of their talents and growth areas. Rodriguez immediately saw an opportunity to upend this practice and strengthen leadership districtwide. He made an intentional decision to orient EEISD's leadership systems—from recruitment and hiring, to ongoing support and promotions—around the Effective Schools Framework,[66] which outlines Texas's vision for what schools and districts can do to promote student achievement. Rodriguez brought in New Leaders to provide aligned professional development to sitting principals, and to help identify from among their leadership teams high-potential future leaders—those who paired strong instructional skills with an equity mindset and a deep recognition of education as transformative to one's life trajectory.

Rodriguez highlights educators who see bilingualism as a strength and English language acquisition as an opportunity to provide their students with a valuable skill as just one example of how an equity mindset shows up in school leaders. But it's not only about coming with that mindset, he argues. Finding and supporting educators who have the will to develop an equity mindset is also a top priority for his leadership and overall talent work in EEISD.

Rodriguez is also working with Texas State University to develop an emerging leadership cohort. Rodriguez previously worked with San Marcos Consolidated Independent School District to develop an emerging leaders program when he served as assistant superintendent there more than five years ago. Since then, San Marcos Consolidated ISD has partnered with two neighboring school districts to further expand the program. Rodriguez hopes to replicate that partnership model in EEISD while using remote learning and technology to reach aspiring school leaders, which he sees as critical for meeting the personal and professional needs of time-strapped working educators.

66. For more information, please visit https://texasesf.org.

Rodriguez is hopeful this partnership can help with another related top priority: increasing the representation of Hispanic school leaders within the district. As the first superintendent of color in Carlsbad, New Mexico, a predominantly Hispanic community, Rodriguez says that when teachers don't see school leaders represented in faculty or decision-making, it can negatively impact leadership pipelines. Teachers need to see others whose careers mirror their own, he explains. Often, that can mean a person with whom one shares a racial or ethnic background. Rodriguez knows this firsthand: he met his first Latino male teacher when he was in high school. "My role models were my teachers," he said. That teacher became the person who affirmed his desire to pursue a career in education. Knowing there is a model to follow motivates others to pursue leadership pathways and apply for school leadership positions.

He also focuses on targeted outreach to candidates of color who are bilingual from other communities. "Expecting people to apply for our roles without going out to look for them? That's where we drop the ball," he says. South Texas has an abundance of bilingual educators, but even with intentional recruitment it can be difficult to persuade them to move across districts when they have families and established networks in their current communities. He is exploring whether strategies such as covering relocation expenses could help. He also makes a point on his own of conveying that when a teacher enters the education field, they are contributing to a district's leadership pipeline—and he fully and publicly embraces the idea that a teacher's income should increase proportionally to their expertise and responsibilities. By being social and readily showcasing his values and beliefs, he hopes people can get to know him and establish connections that support his human capital goals for EEISD today and into the future.

KENTUCKY DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION

Kentucky has a unique history of shared decision-making practices, dating back to the 1990 passage of the Kentucky Education Reform Act (KERA).[67] That landmark piece of legislation swept in a broad set of reforms designed to address major deficiencies in the state's education system, from inequitable funding to school accountability, many of which were highlighted in the 1989 *Rose v. Council for Better Education* lawsuit.[68] School-based decision making councils were also introduced via KERA as part of a set of policy changes designed to limit the influence of politics in education and to reduce local corruption.

As research has documented since then, such shared, collective, and distributed leadership models can be a powerful strategy for improving school and student outcomes.[69] At the same time, Dr. Wayne Lewis, Kentucky's former Commissioner of Education, revealed the complexities of a policy that promotes shared power among community members specifically as it relates to hiring school leaders.

"Those councils play a major role in selecting principals," Lewis explains. "And council members have their own ideas about what good leadership looks like. Yet most people, including people of color, haven't had experiences with many leaders of color. As a Black educator, I recognize the model leader they have in their head probably doesn't look like me."

During his tenure at the Kentucky Department of Education, Lewis was committed to increasing the diversity of Kentucky's educator workforce, from the classroom to the principal's office. Ninety-five percent of Kentucky educators are white in a state where one-quarter of students are of color.[70] "Our theory of action was to first get more people of color in the teaching profession," he explains. "That increases the pool of candidates for the principal profession."
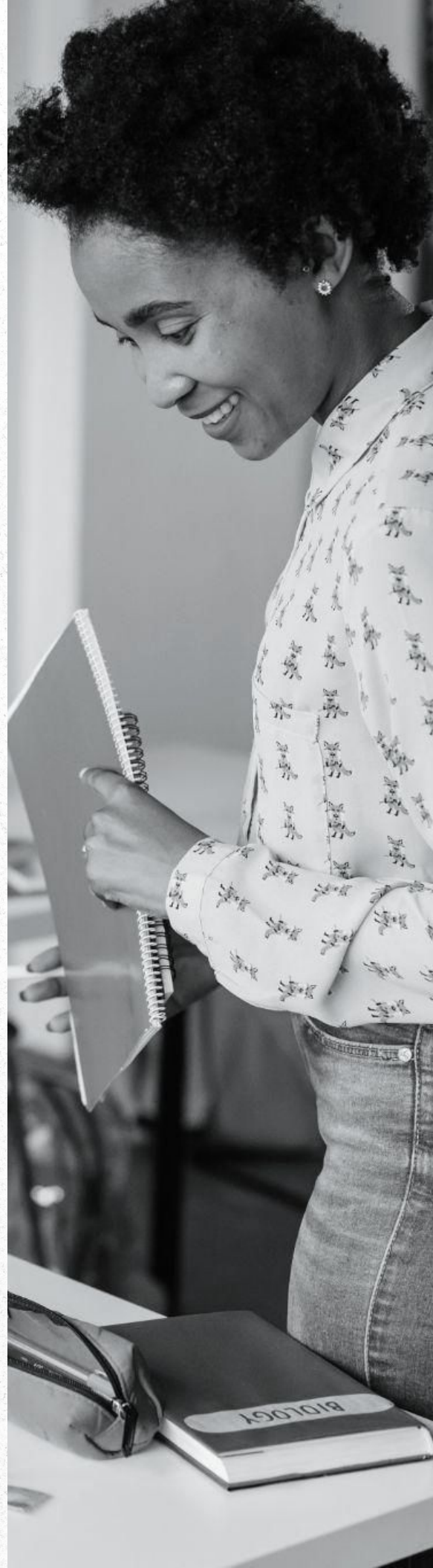
67. Miller, M. (1990). *A Guide to the Kentucky Education Reform Act of 1990*. Retrieved from https://eric.ed.gov/?id=ED327352.
68. For more information, please visit https://edlawcenter.org/litigation/states/kentucky.html.
69. Broin, A. and Jung, S. (2020). *Achieving More, Together: Improving School and Student Outcomes via Distributed Leadership*. New Leaders. Retrieved from https://info.newleaders.org/distributed-leadership-toolkit.
70. Kentucky Department of Education. (2022). *Kentucky Education Facts*. Retrieved from https://education.ky.gov/comm/edfacts/Pages/default.aspx.

Lewis launched Go Teach KY[71] to address educator shortages across the state and help diversify the teacher pipeline. He also supported legislation that increased the availability of nontraditional routes into the classroom, such as programs to help paraprofessionals (who are typically more racially and ethnically diverse than the existing teacher workforce) secure their teaching credentials. And he oversaw statewide professional development for assistant principals designed to prepare them to move into principal roles.

But there was one major problem. According to Lewis, the school-based decision making councils were often ill-equipped to make hiring decisions, including but not limited to principal selection, with a diversity and equity lens. Without experience and training in topics such as implicit bias, Lewis and other leaders were concerned the councils were overlooking qualified candidates with nontraditional experience and leadership styles.

"If you really want to move the needle on selection and recruitment of principals of color," Lewis explains, "you would have to provide training to every member of those councils." There are 1,477 schools across the state, and each council's membership must include a ratio of at least three teachers, two parents, and one administrator.

Lewis worked to support changes to the school-based decision making councils such that they would retain critical authority over a broad set of issues, while introducing greater staffing authority for the state's 171 local superintendents (from a professional development standpoint, a much more manageable figure). During Lewis' tenure, Jefferson County Public Schools, a school district that prioritized equitable hiring practices and increasing school leader diversity, became the first district in Kentucky where a superintendent was permitted to hire principals directly.

MASSACHUSETTS DEPARTMENT OF ELEMENTARY AND SECONDARY EDUCATION

For Dr. Ventura Rodriguez, former Senior Associate Commissioner with the Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE), educator diversity was a top priority that required a multi-faceted approach, from pre-service teacher recruitment to superintendent hiring and support.

In alignment with Commissioner of Education Jeffrey Riley's priorities and with his full support, Rodriguez and his team designed the Teacher Diversification Pilot Program Grant[72] to help schools identify more diverse talent from within their communities and support them as next-generation educators and education leaders. The competitive grant program provides tuition assistance to paraprofessionals (who Rodriguez notes tend to be more representative of the student body in terms of race and ethnicity than traditional teacher candidates) and provisionally licensed teachers to enroll in a state-approved preparation program. Grant funds can also be used for vouchers to pay for Massachusetts Tests for Educator Licensure (MTEL) preparation and exams, helping to remove financial barriers to teacher licensure. Pilot schools and districts may also use the grant funds to provide financial incentives such as loan payment reimbursement, relocation assistance, and signing bonuses to support local talent diversification strategies. Notably, the program *requires* participating schools and districts to undergo cultural proficiency training for district and school building leadership, including hiring managers, teachers, and principals.

72. For more information, please visit: https://www.doe.mass.edu/csi/diverse-workforce/pilot-grant.html
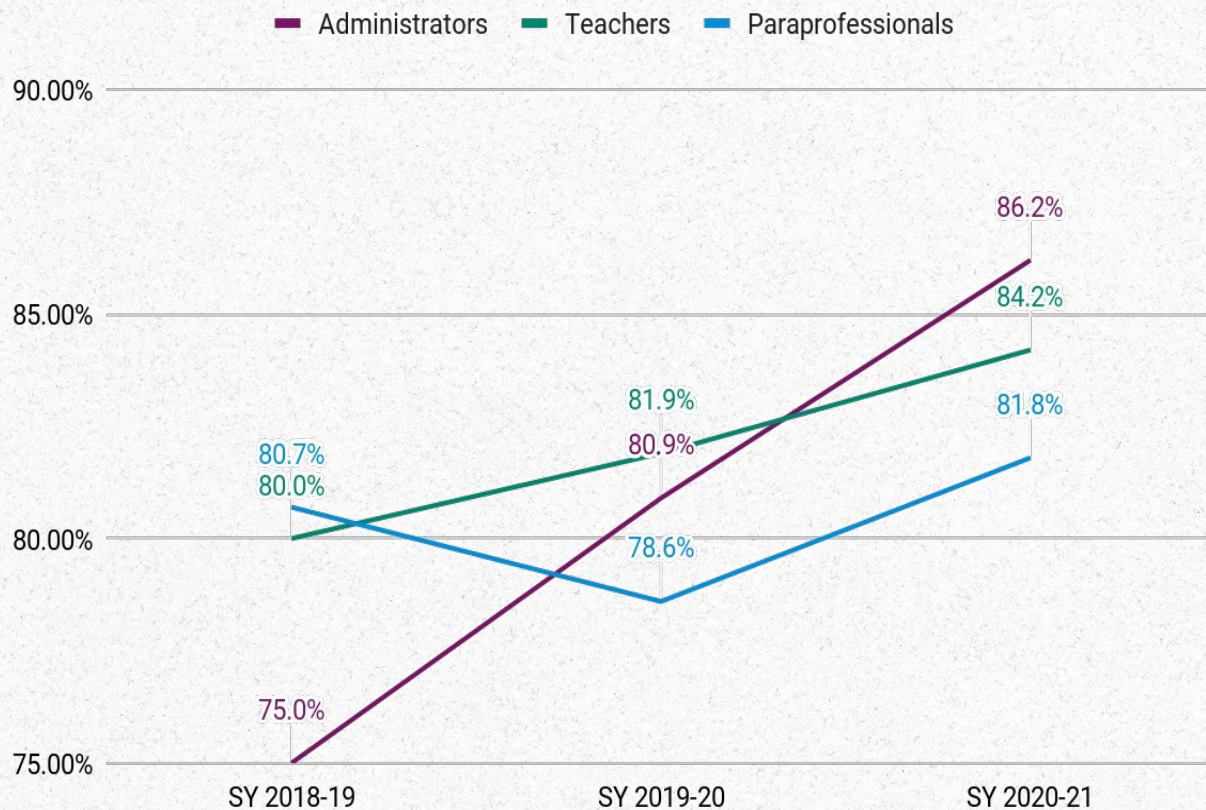
DESE also launched the InSPIRED fellows program for current educators of color interested in helping to increase the diversity of the state's educator workforce, which is 92 percent white (in a state serving 40 percent students of color). Fellows "leverag[e] their backgrounds and personal connections to communicate stories and calls to action to current and prospective educational leaders, helping them understand the impact of Black, Indigenous, Latinx, Asian, and multiracial educators on PK–12 students."[73] The fellows also serve as a cohort of practitioners who have built affinity spaces for teachers and principals of color from across the state to come together in a professional community.

Influence 100 is another fellowship and school district support program launched by DESE during Rodriguez's tenure.[74] The program recruits educators of color who aspire to the superintendency within the next five years and helps school districts increase their cultural responsiveness while improving strategies for diversifying their educator workforce. A first-year implementation report on Influence 100 found that Fellows experienced improvements on their equity mindset and personal efficacy as equity-focused leaders. When the program launched in 2019, a mere 4 percent of Massachusetts school superintendents were people of color. By 2021, the program reported a steady increase in the number of superintendents of color to over 5 percent.[75]

Since these programs launched, Rodriguez proudly shares that retention rates for racially and ethnically diverse administrators, teachers, and paraprofessionals have increased,[76] as illustrated in Figure 3.

Figure 3: Massachusetts Retention Rates for Educators of Color, 2019-2021

Source: Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education

73. For more information, please visit: https://www.doe.mass.edu/amazingeducators/inspired/apply.html#:~:text=InSPIRED%20Fellows%20are%20In%2DService,them%20understand%20the%20impact%20of.
74. For more information, please visit: https://www.doe.mass.edu/csi/diverse-workforce/influence100.html.
75. Johnson, J., Stein, J. and Ness, K. (2021). *Influence 100 Year-end Field Guide Report*. Retrieved from https://www.doe.mass.edu/csi/diverse-workforce/influence100.html.
76. Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education. (2021). "DESE Diverse and Culturally Responsive Educator Workforce Updates." Internal report.

WHAT'S NEXT
Policy Actions to Increase School Leader Diversity

We urgently need local, state, and federal action to increase school leader diversity. Research from the U.S. Department of Education reveals a long-standing underinvestment in leadership activities.[77] We need thoughtful new strategies—including investments, directives, incentives, and a wide range of policy levers available to local, state, and federal decisionmakers—to support the kind of change that can make a huge difference for students and school communities. The policy spotlight on the page that follows illustrates the dramatic shift in focus and investment that can occur when officials create greater awareness and opportunities for ongoing investments in leadership—one of the only times this has happened at the federal level.

77. U.S. Department of Education. (2015). *Findings From the 2014-15 Survey on the Use of Funds under Title II, Part A.* Retrieved from https://www2.ed.gov/programs/teacherqual/learport.pdf.

In this section, we outline high-impact policy actions officials at all levels of our education system can take to measurably improve the strength and diversity of our nation's principal corps. We highlight specific opportunities for local, state, and federal action based on the research and lived experiences of the educators and education leaders who contributed to this project.

Five Actions to Increase School Leader Diversity at the Local, State, and Federal Levels

Action 1 — Truly prioritize and measure school leader diversity.

Action 2 — Build a deeper, more diverse leadership pipeline.

Action 3 — Ensure that principal training programs prepare job-ready aspiring leaders of color.

Action 4 — Create more transparent and equitable recruitment, hiring, and onboarding practices.

Action 5 — Foster local conditions to support and sustain school leaders of color.

This is a critical time for education in the United States. Policy actions that increase access to—and advancement opportunities for—outstanding school leaders of color will support all students, especially young people of color, in fully realizing their futures as the next generation of great thinkers, innovators, and advocates in service of a stronger, more equitable, and more just society.

78. U.S. Department of Education. (2015).
79. U.S. Department of Education. (2021). *State and District Use of Title II, Part A Funds in 2019-20.* Retrieved from https://ies.ed.gov/ncee/pubs/2021011/pdf/2021011.pdf.

LOCAL ACTIONS TO INCREASE SCHOOL LEADER DIVERSITY

ACTION 1
Truly prioritize and measure school leader diversity.

Establish school leader diversity as a district/charter management organization (CMO) priority through public communications by the chief officer. In the initial announcement, include data showcasing the need, high-level goals and timelines, and a preview of specific strategies the district/CMO will employ in the months and years ahead to make meaningful progress on stated goals. Reinforce school leader diversity as a priority through consistent, ongoing communication and engagement by the chief officer and other leaders with school system staff, stakeholders, and the public.

Appoint a district/CMO leader to serve as point for school leader diversity, affirming there is an individual who is accountable for results and is coordinating the cross-system efforts and staffing required to execute strategies, engage with stakeholders, regularly review data, and adjust course, as needed. Ensure that this official is in a visible leadership role and directly oversees or is in regular communication with the department heads, staff, and other stakeholders who have day-to-day implementation responsibilities.

Request an audit of school leader diversity data from district/CMO staff to ascertain the current state of affairs and inform the chief officer's vision for addressing gaps. This request could come from the chief officer directly or from the local school board. In either instance, ensure that the board schedule includes time for periodic updates from district/CMO leaders and staff as well as for public input on strategies and progress.

Include school leader diversity as a key factor in hiring processes, especially at the executive level. For example, when sourcing search firms to manage chief officer recruitment and interviews, require that the search firms articulate their strategies for building a diverse pipeline of potential hires as part of the Request for Proposals (RFP). Once prospective hires have been identified, ensure protocols, scoring rubrics, and other components of the hiring process assess their readiness and fit for the job in part based on their vision and strategies for diversifying school leadership within the district/network.

78.   U.S. Department of Education. (2015).
79.   U.S. Department of Education. (2021). *State and District Use of Title II, Part A Funds in 2019–20.* Retrieved from https://ies.ed.gov/ncee/pubs/2021011/pdf/2021011.pdf.

ACTION 2
Build a deeper, more diverse leadership pipeline.

Establish partnerships with providers that demonstrate a commitment to and strong track record of recruiting and preparing racially/ethnically diverse groups of prospective teachers. Partnerships may be with teacher preparation programs at local colleges/universities, including Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs), Hispanic-Serving Institutions (HSIs), and other Minority-Serving Institutions (MSIs), or with national providers whose models align with local priorities. All programs should demonstrate evidence of effectiveness and a commitment to supporting local educator diversity goals.

Launch grow-your-own (GYO) and other programming to tap into the talent within local schools and communities. Consider opportunities to expose young people and other would-be educators to school-based work experiences, such as Americorps public service. Paraprofessionals are often more racially/ethnically diverse than traditional teacher pipelines and have real school-based experience, along with dispositions that are well suited to teaching. Provide intentional support and defined pathways to support these future educators in gaining necessary skills to move into teaching roles, including pairing them with same-race mentors and/or mentors who share an ethnic or cultural background, when possible.

Ensure locally negotiated agreements maximize incentives and remove barriers into teaching and leading. For example, salary schedules that maximize teacher pay earlier in educators' careers can make the profession more attractive to modern workers, and clear leadership pathways paired with flexibility (and additional compensation, time, and requisite support) can help educators advance in their careers.

Identify opportunities to create incentives or remove financial and logistical barriers for entry into the profession, including via public-private partnerships. For example, if needed, provide transportation for resident teachers from the campus of local college/university partners to district/CMO schools where they are completing their internships. Consider seeking out nonprofit organizations and civic-minded or B-corps companies to provide financial planning, assistance with purchasing a home, and support regarding other issues identified locally by educators of color.

ACTION 3
Ensure that principal training programs prepare job-ready aspiring leaders of color.

Establish partnerships with providers that demonstrate a commitment to and strong track record of recruiting and preparing racially/ethnically diverse groups of principals. Partnerships could be with principal preparation programs at mission-aligned local colleges/universities, including HBCUs, HSIs, and other MSIs. Also consider national providers whose programming and models align with local priorities. All programs should demonstrate evidence of effectiveness *and* a commitment to supporting local school leadership diversity goals. When selecting partners, ensure programming includes components identified by leaders of color as being critical to their success on the job, including change management and the racial/ethnic aspects of leadership and identity. Further, ensure that institutional or nonprofit partners will prepare all aspiring principals, regardless of their race/ethnicity, to be equity-focused leaders who create inclusive environments for staff, families, and students.

ACTION 4
Create more transparent and equitable recruitment, hiring, and onboarding practices.

Be intentional, explicit, and welcoming in recruiting educators of color, including through partnerships with local community organizations. Take steps to ensure that educators of color can feel truly welcomed in the district/network from their earliest recruitment touchpoint, especially if they may be among only a small number of people of color working in local school communities. Identify the right ambassadors to recruit educators directly out of preparation programs, and equip them with concrete information on the district's/network's plans for supporting educators of color. Consider establishing partnerships with local organizations that serve and support specific populations, and whose leaders and members can speak to their experience living and working in the local community.

Clearly articulate leadership pathways and create information hubs to share leadership opportunities and resources. Aggregate information on the districts'/CMOs' leadership pipeline, including the availability of specific leadership development opportunities as well as clear performance expectations for entry into leadership roles. Establish systematic approaches for individuals to nominate educators of color for leadership opportunities, and to pair these intentional nominator networks with 1:1 or affinity group mentoring by same-race education leaders and/or education leaders who share an ethnic or cultural background.

Provide training and resources to promote equitable recruitment and hiring practices. Provide direct training to hiring teams at the district/CMO and school level (including, as applicable, principal managers, principals, leadership teams, teachers, parents, and other community members) on best practices for building diverse candidate pools and reducing bias in hiring decisions. For example, address the reality that teachers of color, especially male teachers of color, are more likely to be tapped for non-instructional leadership roles (e.g., school discipline deans),[80] which can result in removing them from the pipeline to an instructionally-focused school principal position. Through training and/or professional development, explicitly encourage school and system leaders to consider whether their recruitment efforts uphold or break down such entrenched, inequitable practices.

Establish a leader tracking system[81] to support school leader diversity goals. Compile relevant data to inform and streamline district/network actions regarding school leader recruitment, training, hiring and school placement, performance evaluations, and on-the-job support, among other critical decisions. While such systems can support more effective strategy and operations across the school leader pipeline, research has found them to be especially beneficial for hiring, enabling district/CMO leaders to "unearth strong candidates who otherwise might not have been on hiring radar screens, to more easily make good matches between school needs and job candidates and to remove some bias from hiring decisions."[82]

80. Griffin, A. and Tackie, H. (2014). *Through Our Eyes: Perspectives and Reflections From Black Teachers.* Retrieved from https://edtrust.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/09/ThroughOurEyes.pdf.
81. Anderson, L., Turnbull, B., and Arcaira, E. (2017). *Leader Tracking Systems: Turning Data Into Information for School Leadership.* Retrieved from https://www.wallacefoundation.org/knowledge-center/pages/leader-tracking-systems-turning-data-into-information-for-school-leadership.aspx.
82. Anderson, L., Turnbull, B., and Arcaira, E. (2017).

ACTION 5
Foster local conditions to support and sustain school leaders of color.

Foster relationships to support and sustain leaders of color. Establish affinity networks and communities of practice for leaders of color in the district/CMO. Invest in intentional programming to support these cohorts, and pair collegial learning and collaboration with mentorship from same-race supervisors (i.e., principal managers), supervisors who share an ethnic or cultural background, and/or other veteran leaders of color within the district/CMO.

Provide school leaders with balanced autonomy. Ensure accountability and support systems for all principals, including principals of color, and provide them with sufficient flexibility to manage their schools, paired with support from an experienced supervisor who can help them grow, improve, and meet performance expectations for themselves and their school communities.

Make the job more energizing and manageable. Take steps to alleviate operational difficulties for all school leaders, including school leaders of color, by reducing red tape and administrative burdens through streamlined central office communications and reporting requirements. Identify funds principals can use to appoint office managers (e.g., School Administration Manager [SAM] project roles) so they can focus on instructional leadership and building school culture.

STATE ACTIONS TO INCREASE SCHOOL LEADER DIVERSITY

ACTION 1
Truly prioritize and measure school leader diversity.

Establish school leader diversity as a state priority through public communications by the chief officer. In the initial announcement, include data showcasing the need, high-level goals and timelines, and a preview of specific strategies the state will employ in the months and years ahead to make meaningful progress on stated goals. Reinforce the school leader diversity priority through consistent, ongoing communication and engagement.

Capture and share readily accessible data on school leader diversity at the state and district level. Using existing data reporting systems, require districts/charter management organizations (CMOs) to report on the race/ethnicity of their teachers and school leaders. Make data accessible to the public via existing mechanisms (e.g., state and local report cards), and use data in public communications to showcase progress and hold state and local officials accountable for making meaningful improvement over time.

ACTION 2
Build a deeper, more diverse leadership pipeline.

Create pathways for non-teaching staff to secure teaching credentials. Ensure that regulations regarding educator preparation program approval and licensure support paraprofessionals and other non-teaching school staff to pursue teacher licensure while serving in their roles. Provide or identify funding sources to cover the costs of training, licensure/certification, and additional support, as needed.

Provide funding for districts/CMOs to launch teacher leader initiatives aimed at increasing diversity in leadership. Using state-level funds, create a grant program specifically designed to support locally developed initiatives that encourage teachers of color to receive training and pursue leadership opportunities in their schools. Pair funding with resources to help districts design and implement high-quality approaches.

ACTION 3
Ensure that principal training programs prepare job-ready aspiring leaders of color.

Identify educator preparation programs that are well positioned to support districts in recruiting and preparing school leaders of color. Elevate the work of high-quality principal preparation programs with local and national reach that have a track record of recruiting and supporting school leaders of color. Consider such programs run by colleges/universities, including Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs), Hispanic-Serving Institutions (HSIs), and other Minority-Serving Institutions (MSIs), as well as nonprofit organizations with robust evidence of effectiveness. Highlight what these programs are doing well, and encourage districts/CMOs to establish partnerships to advance their school leadership diversity goals.

Ensure that principal preparation program approval and reporting requirements support high-quality, innovative models and hold them accountable for supporting statewide school leader diversity goals. For example, as part of program approval or renewal processes, ask providers to articulate how their programming will help diversify school leadership across the state. As part of program reporting, require providers to share data (e.g., pertaining to program completion, licensure, etc.) disaggregated by the race/ethnicity of participants. Establish feedback loops to share actionable information to help preparation programs continuously improve, including transparent data on whether graduates are hired as principals, how long they serve in their roles, and the progress of their schools.[83]

Ensure that principal licensure requirements support local strategies to diversify school leadership. For example, as districts/CMOs work to build a more diverse local leadership pipeline, they may prioritize recruiting school leaders of color who completed their principal preparation in another jurisdiction. Streamline reciprocity requirements to support the seamless transfer of an out-of-state principal license, or to recognize completion of an approved out-of-state principal preparation program and out-of-state licensure requirements. In addition, examine current testing instruments and results to assess for bias, and consider whether you have evidence such exams provide useful information on principal candidates' readiness and later effectiveness on the job. If not, explore other options for assessing school leaders' readiness for licensure.

ACTION 4
Create more transparent and equitable recruitment, hiring, and onboarding practices.

Provide resources and support to help districts/CMOs advance equitable recruitment and hiring systems and processes. Establish a statewide community of practice for district/CMO human resources staff and offer technical assistance on auditing and improving recruitment and hiring processes with an equity lens. Consider providing direct training to hiring teams at the local and school level to adopt best practices for building diverse candidate pools and reducing bias in hiring decisions.

ACTION 5
Foster local conditions to support and sustain school leaders of color.

Build statewide communities that support and sustain leaders of color. Establish statewide affinity networks, fellowships, and communities of practice for leaders of color, and take steps to encourage districts to establish similar local cohorts. The state may also tap these networks of expert practitioners to serve as a "practitioner cabinet" to help inform policy development across a wide range of issues, and specifically with regard to working conditions and supports for school leaders of color.

83. For additional information and resources, please see the SEP² Toolkit, developed by UCEA and New Leaders: http://www.sepkit.org.

FEDERAL ACTIONS TO INCREASE SCHOOL LEADER DIVERSITY

ACTION 1
Truly prioritize and measure school leader diversity.

U.S. Department of Education

Establish a grant priority to encourage and/or prioritize projects that increase school leader diversity, including through invitational, competitive, and absolute priorities deployed via a wide range of grant competitions (e.g., the School Leader Recruitment and Support Program [SLRSP], the Supporting Effective Educator Development [SEED] program, the Teacher and School Leader [TSL] Incentive grant program, the Education Innovation and Research [EIR] program, and the Augustus F. Hawkins Centers of Excellence program, among others).

Issue guidance on how states and districts/charter management organization (CMOs) can use formula funding to support school leaders and increase school leader diversity, including articulating allowable uses of funds in Title I-A, Title II-A, Title III, Title V-B, and Title VI of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act; Title III of the Higher Education Act (HEA); and Part B of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act.

Include in school leader guidance opportunities to improve data collection and sharing in support of local and state school leader diversity efforts. For example, issue guidance to address how to use state and local report cards to track progress in increasing school leader diversity across jurisdictions. Such guidance can also include information for states on how to include data on teacher and school leader diversity in state and institutional report cards under HEA Title II.

Update existing data collection activities to track critical school leader diversity measures, especially via the Civil Rights Data Collection (CRDC) and the Title II Use of Funds survey. The CRDC should ask for schools and districts/CMOs to report on teacher and school leader demographics, and the Title II survey should ask specifically about state and local investments in school leader diversity.

U.S. Congress

Fund the School Leader Recruitment and Support Program (SLRSP), the *only* federal program with an exclusive focus on preparing and supporting effective principals and other school leaders for the nation's highest-need schools. If funded at $40 million, as requested in the Administration's most recent federal budget proposal,[84] and paired with a priority focused on school leader diversity, the grant program could support the development of thousands of school leaders of color each year.

Increase funding for the Augustus F. Hawkins Centers of Excellence program, which supports educator preparation programs at Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs), Hispanic-Serving Institutions (HSIs), and other Minority-Serving Institutions (MSIs). Using statutory authority under the Higher Education Act (HEA) section 242(b)(6), direct the Department to include funding for programs that prepare principals and other school leaders of color. Using authority under HEA section 242(b)(3)(A) and (B), further direct the Department to prioritize projects designed to retain educators of color through high-quality early-career/induction supports and/or mentoring for school principals of color.

Reauthorize the Higher Education Act (HEA) to focus on innovation, effectiveness, and diversity. Support effective, high-quality, evidence-based programs for preparing and supporting teachers and school leaders. Amend the Teacher Quality Partnership (TQP) program to support—and make eligible for grant funding—programs that meet clear standards of quality, including those run by institutions of higher education as well as states, districts, charter management organizations, and nonprofits. Maximize the return on investment by directing HEA funds to effective, evidence-based interventions, using a definition of evidence consistent with section 8101 of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act. Amend section 205 to require state and institutional reporting on principal preparation programs on a limited number of meaningful indicators (e.g., data on enrollment numbers and the percentages of program participants who complete the program, become licensed, and get hired within three years). Further amend section 205 to require that program and graduate outcomes data be disaggregated by race, ethnicity, and gender, while protecting personally identifiable information.

ACTION 2
Build a deeper, more diverse leadership pipeline.

Continue investing in Americorps, and elevate public service as a pathway into teaching. Congress should continue providing robust funding for Americorps, which can support state and local initiatives to offer high-impact tutoring, after-school and summer programming, and other essential supports for students. The Department should partner with the Corporation for National and Community Service to encourage—through public communications, guidance, and other resources—states, districts/CMOs, and teacher preparation programs to establish strategies to recruit future teachers of color from among Americorps members and alums who served in schools.

Fund the Teacher Quality Partnerships (TQP) program to support GYO programming and increase the supply of English Learner (EL) teachers. Through the 2022 competition, the U.S. Department of Education clarified that TQP can be used to support GYO programs.[85] Congress should include report language in future appropriations bills that directs TQP funds toward effective GYO programming. Further, Congress should include report language that encourages TQP applications that support the development and strengthening of high-quality teacher preparation programs that enable graduates to meet licensure or certification requirements to teach ELs.

84.   U.S. Department of Education. (2022). *Innovation and Improvement: Fiscal Year 2023 Budget Request.* Retrieved from https://www2.ed.gov/about/overview/budget/budget23/justifications/f-ii.pdf.
85.   U.S. Department of Education. (2022). "Education Department Announces $35 Million Competition to Improve Teacher Quality." Retrieved from https://www.ed.gov/news/press-releases/education-department-announces-35-million-competition-improve-teacher-quality.

Continue offering incentives that help to remove financial barriers to entry into the profession. Congress should continue to fund TEACH grants, Perkins loan cancellation, and other federal loan forgiveness programs, including the Public Service Loan Forgiveness Program. The Department should continue taking steps to improve access to federal loan forgiveness, including by raising awareness about educators' eligibility for such programs and by providing streamlined resources and support for educators to get their loans forgiven once they have satisfied service and other eligibility requirements.

Create a federal grant program to support locally-driven teacher leadership initiatives. Such a program can invest in initiatives run by districts/charter networks, nonprofits, and other entities to support teachers to take on instructional leadership roles, including mentoring their peers and facilitating collaborative, evidence-based, sustained professional peer-to-peer learning. As a condition of receiving grant funding, local programs must be required to provide teacher leaders with time away from the classroom for leadership activities, including engaging in evidence-based leadership training specific to their role, along with compensation for their added responsibilities.

ACTION 3
Ensure that principal training programs prepare job-ready aspiring leaders of color.

Strengthen the Teacher Quality Partnership (TQP) program to better support diverse leadership. Congress should amend TQP to ensure eligible entities may choose to focus exclusively on principal preparation or support (vs. exclusively teacher development with leadership as an optional program component, as under current law). Further, Congress can include a priority for high-quality principal preparation and support programs run by HBCUs, HSIs, and other MSIs, as well as states, districts, CMOs, and nonprofits focused on recruiting and preparing educators of color. The Department can choose to run the TQP competition with such a priority even without Congressional action.

ACTION 4
Create more transparent and equitable recruitment, hiring, and onboarding practices.

Create guidance and tools to support districts/CMOs in making their recruitment and hiring systems and processes more equitable. The Department should highlight the responsibility of districts/CMOs to provide students with equitable access to effective teachers and school leaders, and make the connection between educator effectiveness and educator diversity explicit. The Department should further outline resources districts/CMOs can use to audit their recruitment and hiring processes, and elevate promising local and state efforts to create more equitable approaches.

ACTION 5
Foster local conditions to support and sustain school leaders of color.

Provide school leaders with access to loan forgiveness programs and other incentives. Congress should amend HEA to include principals, assistant principals, other school leaders, and teacher leaders in Title IV incentives currently designed for teachers, including TEACH grants, Perkins loan cancellation, and other federal loan forgiveness programs. Congress should continue funding—and offering the benefits of—other loan forgiveness programs for which school leaders are already eligible, including the Public Service Loan Forgiveness Program.

APPENDIX

Focus Group and Interview Protocols

Focus group questions for current teachers:

1) What drew you into the education field?

2) Do you aspire to become a teacher leader, an assistant principal, or a principal in your career?

    a) If so, what/who inspires you to take on those roles?

3) In what ways, if any, are you supported in building the knowledge, skills, and credentials needed to become a principal? (e.g., mentoring, professional development, district programs such as partnerships with universities, etc.)

    a) What supports should teachers have to become principals?

    b) Have the supports for professional advancement in place been impacted by the pandemic? If so, how?

4) What challenges do Black and Brown educators face in becoming school leaders?

5) Have you witnessed racial or other biases or discrimination in hiring and/or promotion practices? If so, please describe.

6) What guidance would you offer on how to expand the number of school leaders of color across the country?

Focus group questions for current school leaders:

1) What drew you into the education field?

2) What/who inspired you to become a principal?

3) Were you recruited into your role? If so, how?

4) In what ways, if any, were you supported in building the knowledge, skills, and credentials needed to become a school leader? (e.g., mentoring, professional development, district programs such as partnerships with universities, etc.)

    a) What supports should teachers have to become principals?

    b) Have the supports for professional advancement in place been impacted by the pandemic? If so, how?

5) In what ways would you have wanted to be supported to become a school leader that weren't in place? What challenges, if any, did you face to achieving your career goals?

6) What challenges, if any, do Black and Brown educators face in becoming school leaders? What challenges, if any, are there to retaining Black and Brown school leaders in their role?

7) Have you witnessed racial or other biases or discrimination in hiring and/or promotion practices? If so, please describe.

8) What guidance would you offer on how to expand the number of school leaders of color across the country?

Focus group questions for current district leaders:

1) What/who inspired you to progress up a career ladder in education?

2) Were you recruited into your role? If so, how?

3) How do you identify/recruit school leaders as open positions become available?

4) In what ways, if any, does your district support aspiring school leaders to build the knowledge, skills, and credentials needed to become principals or APs?

   a) Have the supports for professional advancement in place been impacted by the pandemic? If so, how?

5) What barriers, if any, do you see for teachers of color to become APs/principals?

   a) What solutions have you seen work to overcome these barriers, if any?

6) What challenges do Black and Brown educators face in becoming school leaders?

7) What, if any, are the potential pitfalls you see in school leadership recruitment that could allow for racial or other bias or discrimination in the process?

8) What, if any, potential barriers do you see in the retention of Black and Brown school leaders?

9) What guidance would you offer on how to expand the number of school leaders of color across the country?

Interview questions for district and state administrators:

1) How does your [state/district] address school leader recruitment and retention? Please include efforts related to developing the school leader pipeline, recruitment, onboarding, and/or in-service support.

2) Please describe the specific strategies and/or programs implemented in your [district/state] to increase the number of school leaders of color in your [district/state].

3) Your [district/state] has a [small/large] representation gap for school leaders of color. Why might that be?

4) Given your experience, what would you advise other [districts/states] do to close the representation gap?