5 Things
State and District Leaders Can Do to

Advance Strong and Diverse School Leadership

1 Set clear goals to increase school leader diversity & make diversity data more visible to stakeholders

2 Strengthen existing teacher pipelines that will in turn build principal pipelines

3 Develop high quality preparation programs for school leaders

4 Develop high quality professional development opportunities for school leaders

5 Invest in principal retention strategies

Recent research[1] has confirmed what students, families, educators, and advocates have always known to be true: School leaders really matter.[2] School leaders play a fundamental role in recruiting and supporting strong educators, driving rigorous instruction, creating school cultures that are inclusive and inviting, and working toward positive academic outcomes. School leaders of color, in particular, provide strong instructional leadership while creating an equity-oriented school environment and attracting and retaining more teachers of color, from which all students benefit[3] — especially students of color. Importantly, when school leaders of color lead students of color, these positive effects are magnified. Recent studies have found that having a leader of color at the helm is associated with higher math achievement,[4] greater access to gifted[5] programs, and lower suspension[6] rates for students of color. What's more, a school leader's reach extends beyond the school environment; they can also more easily establish[7] trusting connections with families and communities.

Students and teachers deserve to have access to strong school leaders from diverse backgrounds. Even more so, school leaders of color play an important role in the path to COVID-19 recovery. Over the last three years, students of color have disproportionately borne the brunt of the pandemic — experiencing loss of family members, economic hardship, mental health challenges, and significant unfinished learning.[8] Strong school leaders of color can create positive school environments that focus on learning acceleration while building solid relationships between teachers and students. But students of color are far less likely than their White peers to encounter a school leader who matches their race or ethnicity; nearly[9] 80% of principals in the nation are White.

District and state leaders can support and create pipelines for current educators to become school leaders. This document provides state and district leaders with an overview of five things they should do to foster opportunities to cultivate strong and diverse school leaders of color.

1   Set clear goals to increase school leader diversity & make diversity data more visible to stakeholders

State and district leaders should begin school leader diversity efforts by setting measurable and time-bound goals. Widely accessible, high-quality data will enable state and district leaders to set goals, measure progress, and establish accountability.

States and district leaders should:

✔ Share annual school-, district-, and state-level information about the diversity of the school leader workforce, including rates of turnover disaggregated by race. This information should be made available online in a dashboard, school report cards, or a state-developed report on the diversity of the educator workforce.

✔ Establish clear and numeric goal(s) for increasing the racial diversity of the school leader workforce and for ensuring students have equitable access to experienced leaders that are measurable, ambitious, achievable, and time bound.

State leaders should:

✔ Require principal preparation programs to publicly report the racial makeup of candidates attending and completing in-state or in-district principal preparation programs annually.

✔ Require local education agencies to set educator diversity goals and report their progress to the state periodically (e.g., annually or biannually).

Examples:

✔ Tennessee passed a law[10] in 2021 that requires all districts to set educator diversity goals and submit them to the Tennessee Department of Education annually.

✔ Jefferson County Public Schools in Kentucky developed a racial equity plan,[11] which includes a numeric and time-bound goal for increasing the number of school leaders of color. The plan also includes action steps for accomplishing the goal, such as establishing clinical partnerships with historically Black colleges and universities (HBCUs) and other universities.

✔ Massachusetts posts school-level data on the racial demographics of the educator workforce on a new dashboard[12] that displays educator data, including administrators, by race and ethnicity.

2 Strengthen existing teacher pipelines that will in turn build principal pipelines

Increasing access to strong and diverse school leaders begins with creating opportunities for strong teachers, and in particular teachers of color, to step into leadership opportunities. However, racist[13] promotion practices that favor White men can prevent teachers of color from being "tapped" to enter the school leader pipeline. District superintendents, who do most of the principal hiring, must intentionally create opportunities for teachers of color to be promoted. For example, Massachusetts invests in leadership pipelines for teachers of color through opportunities like the InSPIRED Fellowship for aspiring superintendents, Influence 100.[14]

State and district leaders should:

✔ Help school leaders understand[15] how their own biases may negatively affect who they are investing in and develop explicit plans to address those biases, including setting goals and engaging in open conversations.

✔ Establish a diverse search committee[16] to take part in the school leader hiring process and engage community stakeholders (including teachers, parents from underserved groups, and representatives from neighborhood nonprofits that serve youth) in meeting, interviewing, and/or providing input on candidates.

✔ Shift hiring timelines to earlier in the year to provide more time to prioritize diversity and attract stronger candidates; districts that hire school leaders earlier are often better able to attract high-quality applicants.

State leaders should:

✔ Incentivize collaboration between principal preparation programs and districts. State leaders can help build pools[17] of diverse and qualified candidates by encouraging preparation programs to systematically and proactively recruit teachers of color to become school leaders.

✔ Support teachers of color: To attract more school leaders of color, states and districts must expand the existing pool of candidates by recruiting and retaining more teachers of color[18]. Many states and districts have used several promising strategies to strengthen the teacher pipeline and increase the diversity of the workforce.

Actions to Expand Teacher Diversity

Diversifying school leadership begins with diversifying the educator workforce. State, district, and school leaders can take bold action to diversify their educator workforce by:

✔ Making educator diversity data visible and actionable to stakeholders; To increase the racial diversity of the educator workforce, states must create the right policy conditions to support educator preparation programs, districts, and schools in their efforts to prepare, recruit, and retain teachers of color.

✔ Setting clear goals at the state and district level to increase student access to diverse educators.

✔ Maintain consistency in educator preparation programs to increase enrollment and improve the preparation of teachers of color.

✔ Targeting resources to districts and schools to support efforts to intentionally recruit and hire a diverse teaching workforce.

✔ Investing in efforts to retain teachers of color including improving working conditions and providing opportunities for personal and professional growth for teachers of color.

For more information on how states can expand teacher diversity, see our 50-state data and policy scan at edtrust.org: Is Your State Prioritizing Teacher Diversity and Equity?

3   Develop high quality preparation programs for school leaders

State licensure and principal accreditation policies vary greatly from state to state. Regardless of specific policy, however, state and district leaders must ensure that school leader candidates are receiving rigorous training to become effective school leaders. Unfortunately, not all principal preparation programs are created equal, resulting in inequitable access to high-quality principal preparation programs. School leaders in higher-wealth schools across the country are more likely[19] to attend preparation programs that provide high-quality resources such as robust learning opportunities, problem-based or cohort-based preparation, and on-the-job mentorship or coaching.

District leaders should:

✔ Create district/university partnerships with preparation programs that use evidence-based practices to prepare school leaders. These programs can help improve both school leader preparation and practice by giving candidates access to high-quality learning experiences that are aligned with district standards including:

    ✔ Internships: Research suggests that internships might be the most valuable[20] part of a principal preparation program. Candidates can engage in mentored clinical practice aligned with university coursework while gradually taking on additional school leader responsibilities.

    ✔ Mentorship: Offering mentorship opportunities[21] can ensure school leaders are ready on day one, instead of "learning on the job." By pairing candidates with school leaders who have the knowledge, time, and commitment to provide day-to-day feedback and coaching, candidates can be prepared for a wide range of experiences and challenges they will face as school leaders.

State leaders should:

✔ Ensure that affordable pathways to principal licensure exist throughout the state. State agencies must approve all principal preparation programs.

✔ Set high standards for accrediting school leader preparation programs. States can hold principal prep programs accountable for preparing leaders who are ready to meet the needs of underserved students.

> ## *Examples:*
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> ✔ The Pennsylvania Department of Education has <u>funded principal residency programs</u> at four universities for the past three school years with the goal of increasing and retaining the number of qualified school leaders in the state. The funding can be used to provide financial support to principal candidates as they undergo a full year of clinical training, making these programs accessible to a broader and more diverse pool of candidates.
>
> ✔ After adopting its racial equity plan last year, Winston-Salem/Forsyth County Schools in North Carolina applied for and received a grant from the Wallace Foundation, part of which will <u>fund partnerships</u> with HBCUs and other state universities for training equity-centered school leaders and teachers. The area superintendent in Winston-Salem/Forsyth County who runs the assistant principal program said the district has worked to recruit and retain more schools leaders of color by <u>steering teacher-leaders of color into AP roles</u> and providing experiences that will help them to be successful.

4 — Develop high quality professional development opportunities for school leaders

High-quality professional learning opportunities can build school leaders' capacity to effectively lead and manage schools. These opportunities are important for leaders at all stages of their career, but for those who are in their first few years in a leadership role. Research indicates that principals who have access to high-quality professional learning opportunities are more likely to stay in the profession.[22]

States and districts should:

✔ Form partnerships with universities, including HBCUs or nonprofits to develop a pipeline and provide professional development for current leaders. Programs that are intentionally designed[23] to meet the needs of underserved students can help principals deepen their understanding of structural racism and barriers that students face.

✔ Invest in consistent professional learning opportunities aligned to the Professional Standards for Educational Leaders.[24] Even after the most rigorous pre-service training, new school leaders will need support to continuously improve.

✔ Allocate funding for continuous professional development. State and districts can — and should — use federal funding,[25] including up to 5% of their Title II, Part A funds for leader development, with an additional 3% of funds available for states to provide subgrants to districts specifically.

✔ Tap into COVID-19 relief funds[26] to provide high-quality professional development opportunities.

Example:

Faculty in the Educational Leadership Program at the University of New Mexico[27] collaborated with Native American students and tribal members in redesigning the program to reflect leadership values that align with traditional Indigenous values.

5 Invest in principal retention strategies

Principal turnover is common across the country:[28] 18% of principals leave schools each year, and half of new principals leave within three years. Principal turnover has cascading consequences, such as teacher turnover and disruption of school environments and student achievement. These challenges are exacerbated at schools with fewer resources, leading to higher than average[29] principal turnover rates. State and district leaders must invest in better principal retention strategies while ensuring that teachers of color can grow professionally to be promoted to school leaders who have the autonomy and support to create positive school environments where students and teachers thrive.

State and district leaders should:

✔ Ensure school leaders of color are not pigeonholed into disciplinarian roles. Educators of color have shared[30] that they are often sought out to address disciplinary incidents involving students of color often without being compensated for those additional responsibilities. The "invisible tax[31]" burden may push educators of color to leave.

✔ Establish affinity groups[32] to provide opportunities for leaders of color to problem-solve and share challenges in a safe and supportive environment.

✔ Create spaces to hear from school leaders of color through focus groups and periodic surveys, including exit surveys for all leaders of color, to identify their specific needs and what would make it more likely for them to stay in the leadership roles they hold.

Example:

The Leaders of Color Network[33] is sponsored by a district-university partnership between UC Berkeley's Principal Leadership Institute (PLI) and a school district committed to diversifying its principal workforce. PLI is focused specifically on promoting equity and recruiting more school leaders of color. In addition to network meetings, participants have access to university-led professional learning opportunities.

The Alliance for Resource Equity, a partner initiative of The Education Trust and Education Resource Strategies, has highlighted school leadership quality and diversity as one of the core factors shaping the student experience. To learn how to take action in your district based on local context and the unique needs of your students, see this Alliance for Resource Equity guidebook.

ENDNOTES

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