




THE PRINCIPAL STORY



CONVERSATION GUIDE

Closing the
Achievement Gap:
Oregon's Bold Plan





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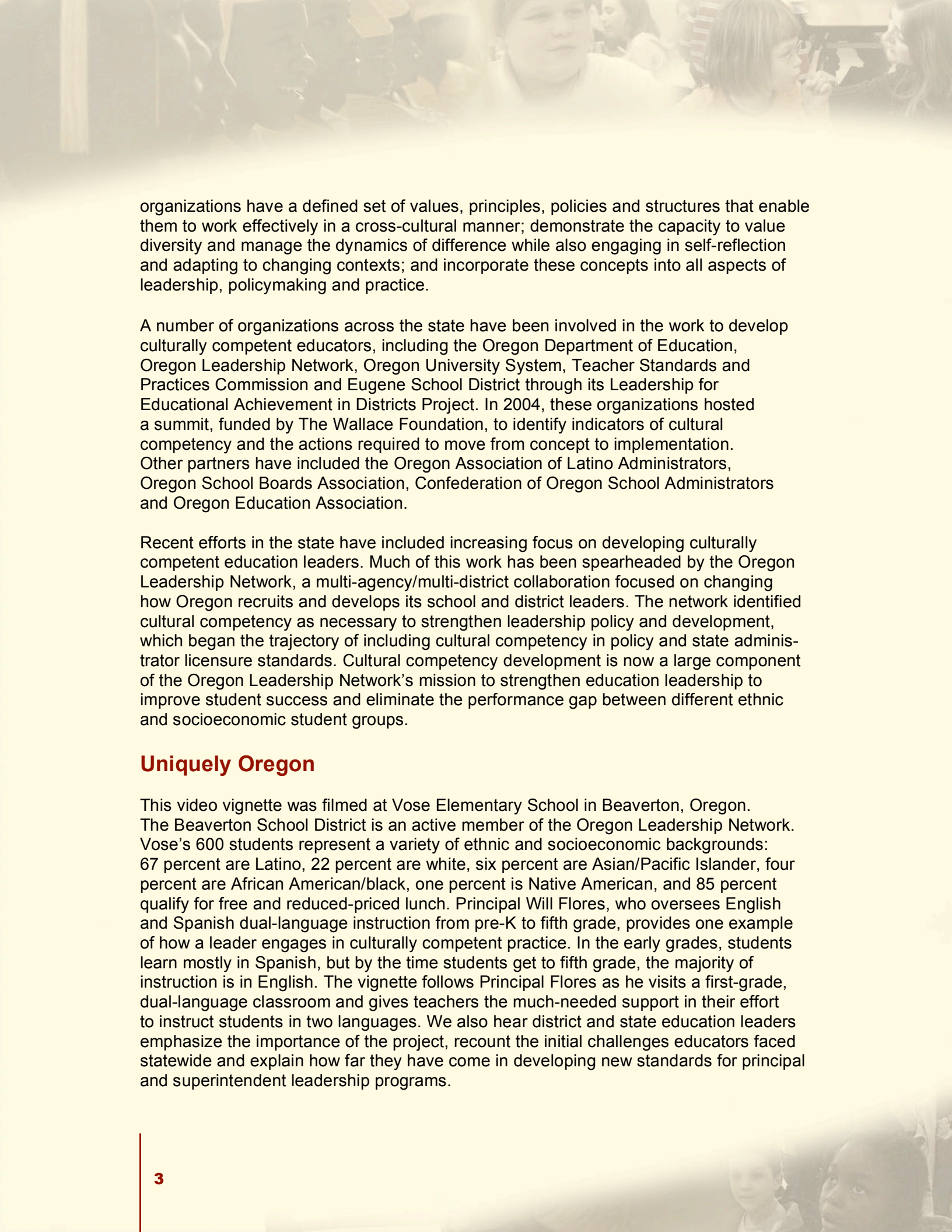
What Is the Issue?

School principals are critical to establishing school environments in which all students can learn and succeed. But as student demographics change and achievement gaps between white and minority students remain wide, principals face growing challenges to serve an increasingly diverse population. While more diversity is an opportunity for school districts, school leaders must develop skills and receive support to effectively lead in this environment. What knowledge and skills do principals need to address large performance gaps between students from different racial, ethnic and socioeconomic backgrounds? What skills do they need to lead schools where a majority of students are English language learners? How does culturally responsive leadership benefit a school community where cultures, races and ethnicities intersect?

This video vignette, available on the accompanying DVD, features a state's effort to embrace its rapidly changing student demographics by preparing its school leaders to meet this challenge. Since the early 1990s, the number of Hispanic students has increased over 200 percent, and the overall minority population has doubled. With this large influx of minority students, state political and education leaders realized Oregon needed to support these underserved and often vulnerable students. This video illustrates an unprecedented statewide effort to develop education leadership to address the needs, ability levels and talents of students from different racial and ethnic backgrounds. Watch Principal Will Flores at Vose Elementary School in Beaverton, Oregon, lead dual-language instruction. Hear from district and state leaders who stress the need for leaders who are responsive to student needs and statewide standards for principal and superintendent leadership that reflect the current environment.

Background of the Program

For over 30 years, the State of Oregon has been committed to developing a diverse K-12 educator workforce with the skills necessary to educate all students – that is, educators who are “culturally competent.” While the definition of cultural competency is complex and a constant work in progress, it most simply refers to the ability of principals and teachers to successfully educate students of all backgrounds and cultures. Developing that ability is a process that evolves over time and requires that individuals and



organizations have a defined set of values, principles, policies and structures that enable them to work effectively in a cross-cultural manner; demonstrate the capacity to value diversity and manage the dynamics of difference while also engaging in self-reflection and adapting to changing contexts; and incorporate these concepts into all aspects of leadership, policymaking and practice.

A number of organizations across the state have been involved in the work to develop culturally competent educators, including the Oregon Department of Education, Oregon Leadership Network, Oregon University System, Teacher Standards and Practices Commission and Eugene School District through its Leadership for Educational Achievement in Districts Project. In 2004, these organizations hosted a summit, funded by The Wallace Foundation, to identify indicators of cultural competency and the actions required to move from concept to implementation. Other partners have included the Oregon Association of Latino Administrators, Oregon School Boards Association, Confederation of Oregon School Administrators and Oregon Education Association.

Recent efforts in the state have included increasing focus on developing culturally competent education leaders. Much of this work has been spearheaded by the Oregon Leadership Network, a multi-agency/multi-district collaboration focused on changing how Oregon recruits and develops its school and district leaders. The network identified cultural competency as necessary to strengthen leadership policy and development, which began the trajectory of including cultural competency in policy and state administrator licensure standards. Cultural competency development is now a large component of the Oregon Leadership Network's mission to strengthen education leadership to improve student success and eliminate the performance gap between different ethnic and socioeconomic student groups.

Uniquely Oregon

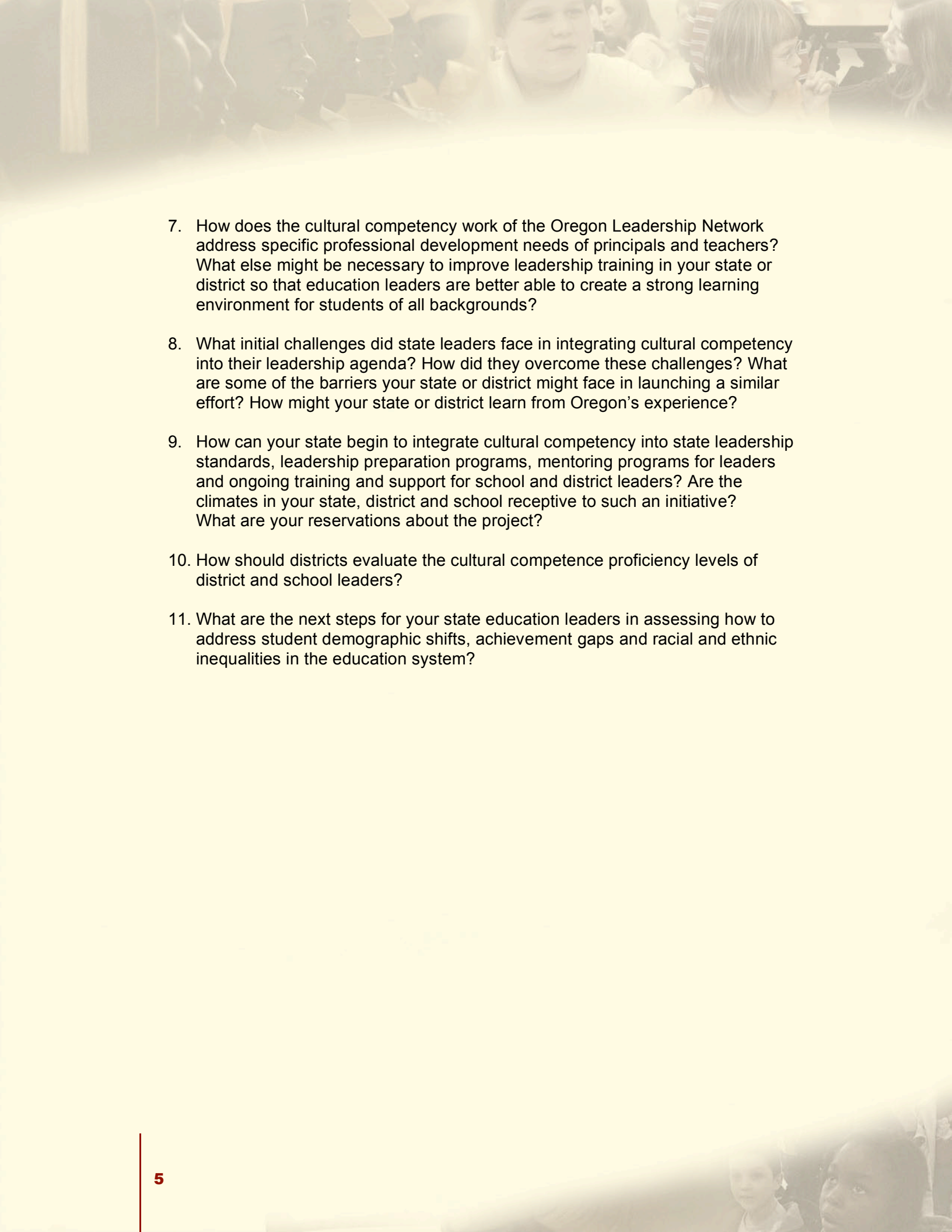
This video vignette was filmed at Vose Elementary School in Beaverton, Oregon. The Beaverton School District is an active member of the Oregon Leadership Network. Vose's 600 students represent a variety of ethnic and socioeconomic backgrounds: 67 percent are Latino, 22 percent are white, six percent are Asian/Pacific Islander, four percent are African American/black, one percent is Native American, and 85 percent qualify for free and reduced-priced lunch. Principal Will Flores, who oversees English and Spanish dual-language instruction from pre-K to fifth grade, provides one example of how a leader engages in culturally competent practice. In the early grades, students learn mostly in Spanish, but by the time students get to fifth grade, the majority of instruction is in English. The vignette follows Principal Flores as he visits a first-grade, dual-language classroom and gives teachers the much-needed support in their effort to instruct students in two languages. We also hear district and state education leaders emphasize the importance of the project, recount the initial challenges educators faced statewide and explain how far they have come in developing new standards for principal and superintendent leadership programs.



Conversation Questions

After watching the video vignette about Oregon's work to develop culturally competent education leaders on the accompanying DVD, viewers might discuss the questions below.

1. Demographics are changing nationwide. By 2050, Latinos, African Americans/blacks and Asians/Pacific Islanders will make up the majority of the U.S. population. How are student demographics changing in your school and district? What are some of the challenges and issues that surround these shifts?
2. A key component of Oregon's effort to combat racial, ethnic and socioeconomic inequalities in education is the Oregon Leadership Network. Should training leaders and educators in cultural competency be a statewide priority? Do you think that Oregon's approach will be effective in preparing leaders who can reduce academic inequalities at both the system and classroom levels?
3. This vignette explores issues of race, ethnicity and socioeconomic inequalities. How does or might your state or district define cultural competency? What other issues may need to be explored in your state or district, and what type of training will be needed for leaders to address these issues?
4. Beaverton Superintendent Jerry Colonna states, "It's incumbent upon us to make each individual feel comfortable here, [which] means we have to understand that culture is a very big factor in allowing equal access." Is it realistic to expect that leaders can create an environment where all students feel equally comfortable, particularly when students have many different backgrounds? How can a principal of a different background than the majority of his or her students effectively lead a school? What specific behaviors should district leaders, community members and parents expect from "culturally competent" principals?
5. For the majority of students at Vose Elementary, English is their second language. What are some of the major hurdles for these students in school? How can cultural competency training help superintendents and principals better address these challenges?
6. Dual-language learning has shown to be an effective way to make education meaningful for the majority of students at Vose Elementary. How does cultural competency training help Principal Flores effectively lead Spanish and English dual-language instruction? What are some of the ways he supports teachers?

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7. How does the cultural competency work of the Oregon Leadership Network address specific professional development needs of principals and teachers? What else might be necessary to improve leadership training in your state or district so that education leaders are better able to create a strong learning environment for students of all backgrounds?
 8. What initial challenges did state leaders face in integrating cultural competency into their leadership agenda? How did they overcome these challenges? What are some of the barriers your state or district might face in launching a similar effort? How might your state or district learn from Oregon's experience?
 9. How can your state begin to integrate cultural competency into state leadership standards, leadership preparation programs, mentoring programs for leaders and ongoing training and support for school and district leaders? Are the climates in your state, district and school receptive to such an initiative? What are your reservations about the project?
 10. How should districts evaluate the cultural competence proficiency levels of district and school leaders?
 11. What are the next steps for your state education leaders in assessing how to address student demographic shifts, achievement gaps and racial and ethnic inequalities in the education system?

Additional Resources

- For more resources on cultural competency, visit www.ode.state.or.us/search/page/?id=711.
- To learn more about the Oregon Leadership Network, visit www.ode.state.or.us/search/results/?id=220, or contact:

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- To learn more about a tool that identifies actions that culturally competent education leaders can demonstrate based on the education leadership standards for the State of Oregon, visit the Oregon Leadership Network's website beginning June 2009.
- To learn more about how to prepare and support culturally competent leaders, download the Institute for Educational Leadership's Preparing and Supporting Diverse, Culturally Competent Leaders: Practice and Policy Considerations at www.iel.org/pubs/diverseleaders.pdf.

This project is part of THE PRINCIPAL STORY outreach campaign, which is made possible by a generous grant from The Wallace Foundation, a source of ideas for improving school leadership. Visit www.wallacefoundation.org/principalstory.



For more information and research about education leadership, visit the Wallace Knowledge Center at www.wallacefoundation.org.



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