

A Culturally Responsive School Leadership Approach to Developing Equity-Centered Principals: Considerations for Principal Pipelines

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Foreword

Research over the last 20 years makes clear that the school principal has enormous impact on the life of a school. Excellent principals attract and retain high-quality teachers, produce higher levels of teacher satisfaction, and counsel out ineffective teachers. They build productive school climates that welcome students and their families, support professional learning, and engage with local communities. Besides enacting leadership, principals also develop it within their buildings: providing guidance and support to assistant principals, curriculum specialists, teacher leaders, and a wide array of aspiring leaders.

But great principals are made, not born. They are the product of many interacting forces, not least the systems of development that recognize, prepare, support, and reward high-quality school leadership. It is for this reason that The Wallace Foundation has, for more than 20 years, invested in finding ways to develop and support effective principals. Researchers at the RAND Corporation and Policy Studies Associates studied one such initiative in which Wallace helped fund six large school districts to build what we have come to call “comprehensive, aligned principal pipelines” focused on producing principals as instructional leaders. Pipelines were *comprehensive* because they encompassed seven key domains of district principal-development activity—from rigorous standards for the principalship to on-the-job evaluation and support through coaching and mentoring—and *aligned* because the seven domains were intentionally redesigned to reinforce one another. The research found that student achievement benefitted across the districts taking part and especially in schools with new principals.¹ Principal retention rates also increased.

If the RAND study found that comprehensive, aligned pipelines focused on principals as instructional leaders could produce such positive outcomes, how, we wondered at Wallace, could such systems be designed to produce equity-centered instructional leaders—principals who could address disparities in student opportunities and outcomes. The work of such school leaders would cut across a range of issues central to student welfare, including participation in advanced coursework; reduction in suspensions and punishment; academic achievement; and culturally responsive and intellectually rigorous classroom instruction. Wallace is today funding eight districts and their partners over a five-year period to explore the possibilities, and we hope their work will not only benefit their own schools but also generate new research-based findings useful to other districts dedicated to making educational equity a reality.

Although a focus on equity-centered principal pipelines is new territory, scholars have for decades documented the need for and approaches to equity-centered school leadership and principal preparation. To learn from this work, we commissioned a team of scholars to review the literature and develop research-based considerations for designing equity-centered pipelines. This analysis of the kinds of actions school systems can take in each of the seven domains of a principal pipeline draws primarily upon the influential Culturally Responsive School Leadership framework developed by Mark Gooden, Muhammad Khalifa, and James Earl Davis. Though not yet empirically tested in the context of the principal pipeline, we believe that their compelling research analysis and resulting design considerations can provide valuable tools for thinking about, conceptualizing, designing, and testing ways to embed equity in principal pipelines.

We deeply thank the authors for their insights, their contributions, and their commitments to young people.

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¹ Pipeline schools with newly placed principals outperformed comparison schools by more than six percentile points in reading and almost three percentile points in math, a statistically significant margin. In *Principal Pipelines: A Feasible, Affordable, and Effective Way for Districts to Improve Schools*, RAND said it knew of no other district-wide intervention that showed similar benefits for student achievement.

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Principals are important. A recent synthesis of two decades of research on school leadership has documented that effective principals can have a positive impact on school climate, teacher satisfaction and retention, and student academic and other outcomes such as attendance and disciplinary behaviors (Grissom, Egalite, & Lindsay, 2021). Earlier research found that adopting a particular district-wide approach to principal development—known as building “a comprehensive, aligned principal pipeline”—was a powerful way to recruit and support a large corps of effective school leaders (Gates et al., 2019). The research about this approach, however, stopped short of fully addressing one of the most pressing issues in American education: educational equity, where all students learn and flourish in a welcoming, caring, and inclusive environment. Equity requires a commitment to fair and just treatment of each student, a willingness to address structural barriers to their success, and the delivery of resources aimed at providing equitable outcomes.

Educational inequities are pervasive across schools and are often blended into the status quo, thus requiring some effort to recognize and address them to answer the need to change. Some examples are:

- Students of color are more likely to be suspended or expelled than their White peers, starting in preschool and continuing through high school (Skiba et al., 2014).
- When students of color challenge racial injustices, their voices and opinions are often silenced or stifled (Lac & Fine, 2018).
- Students of color are more likely to face challenges and forms of oppression that disrupt or interfere with their success in schools, ranging from a lack of internet access at home to inadequate housing to health problems (Horsford, Scott, & Anderson, 2019).

Principals cannot solve all the societal problems that lead to educational inequities, but they can address key factors in schools that perpetuate inequities. How can systems be designed to produce and support equity-centered school leaders who can meet one of today’s most pressing educational challenges?

Equity-centered leadership contains a critique of oppressive practice, a commitment to fairness, and an understanding of community and the knowledge within it.

The Culturally Responsive School Leadership (CRSL) Framework

This report considers how an existing research framework on equity-centered school leaders can be applied to a school district enterprise such as building and sustaining an effective principal pipeline.

Culturally Responsive School Leadership is a framework developed in 2016 by scholars Muhammad Khalifa, Mark Gooden, and James Earl Davis in response to a growing recognition of the importance of culturally responsive school practices, at both the classroom and school building level, and the critical role of school leaders in supporting these practices (Khalifa et al., 2016). It grew out of a literature review of studies of certain behaviors of leaders who sought to improve schools by making them more culturally responsive.

Research associated with the Culturally Responsive School Leadership (CRSL) framework argues that equity-centered leadership involves closely interrogating the role educational systems play or have played in creating and maintaining systemic inequity. The framework has identified four different strands of behavior that define equity-centered leadership:

1. **Developing Critical Consciousness**—Developing a deep understanding of systems of historical oppression to better conceptualize how to create equity based on the current conditions and resources of a school.
2. **Ensuring Inclusive School Environments**—Cultivating spaces to be welcoming to all by committing to collaborating with individuals facing historical and existing barriers to inclusion to together reimagine and create a more culturally affirming context.
3. **Providing Culturally Responsive Instructional Leadership**—Supporting teachers as they reimagine existing pedagogy and curricula so that both honor knowledge associated with people of color, including their contributions and ways of engaging, thus challenging systems that exacerbate inequities by ignoring, misrepresenting, or rendering different approaches as marginal.
4. **Enacting Culturally Responsive Leadership Engagement in Community Contexts**—Establishing partnerships with school communities that lead to a collaborative effort to define educational justice for the schools’ children. Principals tend to define community outreach as working with parents. And indeed, modifying how parental involvement is defined and fostered can increase participation of marginalized parents. But CRSL calls on principals to engage across the entire community to learn how racial marginalization, unequal power dynamics, and oppression have affected its members. This often involves the principal’s sharing power with parents and community members who have been historically excluded from the school environment or made to feel less welcome. These equitable collaborations are a central way for leaders to shift practices to achieve implementation of equitable schooling and equitable outcomes for students.

What is culturally responsive instruction?

Culturally relevant pedagogy (Ladson-Billings, 2009) and culturally responsive teaching (Gay, 2018) have created a foundational body of scholarship that has sought to describe how classroom teachers can better address the unique learning needs of minoritized students. Teachers seek to value students’ identities, activate their prior knowledge, and make learning contextual. Enhancing teaching in this manner results in students developing critical consciousness or the ability to identify, analyze, and solve real-world problems, especially those that result in societal inequalities. Additionally, this scholarship calls for a need, beyond teaching, to be sensitive to culture in transforming other aspects of schooling, such as funding, policymaking, and leadership, thus pointing to a need for culturally responsive school leadership. This creates the question: What does it mean for leaders to not only support but also actually lead this work themselves? To be completely effective, CRSL suggests that principals need to set goals designed to disrupt inequities that have disproportionately impacted historically underserved Black, Indigenous, and people of color (BIPOC) students and their communities. Importantly, this learning and processing benefit White students as well, because they too can benefit from a greater understanding of social inequalities and the political and historical context within which they exist.

Applying CRSL to Comprehensive, Aligned Principal Pipelines

From 2011 to 2017, The Wallace Foundation funded a major initiative that supported six large school districts to develop “comprehensive, aligned principal pipelines”—“comprehensive” because they covered a full spectrum of district activities to boost school leadership; “aligned” because these activities served to reinforce one another. Extensive research on this initiative identified seven areas, or “domains,” of activity involved in building these pipelines. These domains range from development of leader standards to use of leader tracking systems that can help district officials make informed decisions about career pathways for school leaders, both potential and sitting. Research found that instituting this systematic approach led to significant benefits for student achievement, according to a comparison of schools in pipeline districts with schools in non-pipeline districts in the same state (Gates et al., 2019).

For this report, we reviewed the educational equity literature underpinning CRSL to identify how each of the seven domains could be redesigned with a goal of preparing and supporting equity-centered school leaders.

Seven Domains of a Comprehensive, Aligned Principal Pipeline



Some domains (such as principal preparation and leader standards) have robust research to support recommendations for specific actions. In others (such as leader tracking systems and principal supervisors), the research is less robust but provides a sufficient basis for the authors to surmise how these domains might use a CRSL lens to help produce equity-centered leaders.

The equity-focused research cited in this paper was identified through a review of literature in education leadership, which positioned equity as part of a theoretical construct to be better understood (e.g., Brown, 2004; Shields, 2010; Theoharis, 2009), as an outcome to be pursued (e.g., Santamaría, 2014; Skrla et al., 2004), or as a set of lessons to be applied (Galloway & Ishimaru, 2015; Khalifa, 2018; Pazey & Cole, 2013). These three related areas of mostly qualitative research suggest that how equity is defined and framed for education leaders can be widely encompassing. However, common elements imply equity-centered leadership contains a critique of oppressive practice (Khalifa, 2018), a commitment to fairness (Gooden, 2014; Green, 2017), and an understanding of community and the knowledge within it (Ishimaru, 2020).

In the next section, this report will provide:

- A brief explanation of each domain of a comprehensive, aligned principal pipeline and its role in ensuring principals support the development of all children;
- Findings in the equity research that inform or suggest how the pipeline can create principals who lead equity-centered schools; and
- Specific CRSL-oriented considerations for districts working within and across the seven domains of a comprehensive, aligned principal pipeline.

With these facets taken together, this report is intended to inform districts as they seek to prepare and support principals to do the hard work of addressing historic and persistent inequities so that, ultimately, each student will learn and flourish.

LEADER STANDARDS

About the Domain

Standards name the competencies and expectations for each principal, defining the professional knowledge and skills that principals need to create an environment where each student learns and flourishes. At the national level, the Interstate School Leaders Licensure Consortium's (ISLLC) principal standards were first published in 1996. In 2015, they were updated and renamed the Professional Standards for Educational Leaders (PSEL). State boards of education are expected to use PSEL to help guide their licensure and professional development programs. PSEL aim to establish expectations for leaders, their professional associations, supporting institutions, policymakers, and even the public. Therefore, these standards, which essentially outline what effective educational leaders should know and be able to do, may be adopted voluntarily by districts.

Findings in the Literature

The first version of the ISLLC standards did not address systemic issues and factors that led to inequitable education of BIPOC students (Davis, Gooden & Micheaux, 2015). The 2015 draft posited that principals needed to address inequities, but it treated equity as a value rather than as an essential element of school leadership with specific behaviors and measures necessary to achieve it (Galloway & Ishimaru, 2015). This approach left districts, school leaders, and supporting institutions without a clear understanding of how to set goals designed to disrupt inequities that have a greater impact on historically underserved Black, Indigenous, and people of color (BIPOC) students and their communities. While the final version of the 2015 PSEL standards still had limited mention of race as originally charged by equity-centered research (Davis & Micheaux, 2012), there was now a clear reference to equity. For example, Standard 3 states “that effective educational leaders strive for equity of educational opportunity and culturally responsive practices to promote each student’s academic success and well-being” (NPBEA, 2015).

Equity-centered research provides insight into how to fill in the gaps in the leader standards with a robust set of expectations for equity-centered leaders. It describes these leaders as inclusive and transformative as well as culturally responsive and interested in examining their own identities and biases.

Across their work, equity-centered school leaders exercise critical consciousness and embrace instructional leadership that values and draws from the knowledge of students’ heritage and community (Atchison et al., 2017; Corson, 2001; Gooden, 2002; Noguera & Noguera, 2018; World Health Organization [WHO], 2020). They also create an inclusive environment by promoting equitable practices across all forms of diversity: race, gender, social class, sexuality, ability, immigration status, language, and religion. They reject the assumptions that students have deficits inherent in their race, ethnicity, or other aspects of their identity. They recruit racially diverse staffs, encourage teacher-to-teacher professional learning, and promote inclusive instructional experiences for students.

As instructional leaders, equity-centered leaders recognize that mainstream curricula have historically ignored, misrepresented, and marginalized the contributions of people of color. They lead efforts to enact curricula that teach in culturally relevant and responsive ways and set high expectations for students while eliminating the deficit thinking about students and their communities (Green, 2017; Ishimaru, 2020, Khalifa, 2018; Welton & Freelon, 2018).

CRSL Approaches to Developing Leadership Standards

The CRSL framework identifies several specific practices that could be included in equity-centered school leadership standards, whether at the national or local level. For example, standards could specify expectations for a principal to develop:

Critical Consciousness

- Demonstrates a strong understanding of how race and racism, along with other social and political factors, create inequitable opportunities for students to learn.

- Seeks to understand how privilege, power, and oppression operate to create and maintain historical inequities in school and society.
- Engages in examining racial and cultural identities, values, biases, assumptions, and privileges.
- Acts as a change agent who reads and negotiates social and political contexts while addressing concerns outside of school that impact students, their families, and their communities.

Inclusive School Environments

- Creates school cultures that respect differences across race, gender, social class, sexuality, ability, immigration status, language, religion, and other sociocultural markers for students, staff, and families.
- Enacts inclusive practices that resist inequities by creating a vision acknowledging the humanity of students, their families, their communities, and the school team members who educate them.

Culturally Responsive Instructional Leadership

- Embodies strong knowledge of teaching and curriculum and applies it to learning.
- Seeks to cultivate students' academic, cultural, and sociopolitical knowledge.
- Fosters an environment where teachers enact culturally relevant and anti-racist instructional and curricular practices that affirm students' complex identities.

Culturally Responsive Community Engagement

- Establishes relational trust and builds authentic, working, and collaborative relationships with students, staff, families, and communities.
- Involves communities and embraces their unique heritages and the knowledge that students bring to school.
- Leverages community resources to amplify support for learning.

PRINCIPAL PREPARATION

About the Domain

The preparation of principals involves ensuring that future principals have the leadership skills required to create a vibrant social and academic culture. Principal preparation programs are typically offered in one of three contexts: through university programs, alternative (intermediary) programs, and district-based programs.

Findings in the Literature

Most school leaders and principals are prepared in educational leadership programs at higher education institutions (Baker, Orr, and Young, 2007). Across these programs, there has been a steady increase in equity-focused research in preservice preparation to push the field to explore social justice, even if sometimes narrow in focus (Bustamante et al., 2009; Capper et al., 2006; Furman, 2012; O'Malley & Capper, 2015). These programs frequently emphasize the need to address educational inequities, but they do not always prepare school leaders with an understanding of equity or address behaviors in all the four CRSL strands. As social justice has become a priority in higher education,

many university-based preparation programs are starting to address educational equity. For example, programs promote and define social justice by examining racial equity (Boske, 2010; Dantley & Green, 2015; Evans, 2007; Gooden, 2012; Gooden & O'Doherty, 2015; Green & Dantley, 2013); language equity (Callahan et al., 2019); gender (Rusch, 2004; Young et al., 2006); cultural responsiveness (Brooks & Arnold, 2014; Khalifa, 2018; Khalifa et al., 2016); sexual identity (Koschoreck, 2003; Lugg, 2003; Marshall & Hernandez, 2013); ability (Cramer et al., 2018; Crockett, 2002; Sirotnik & Kimball, 1994; Theoharis, 2007); and social class (Lyman & Villani, 2002). Finally, equity-focused scholars also include attentiveness to communities and families (Green, 2017; Ishimaru, 2019; Khalifa, 2012). Yet some equity scholars note that these programs fail to address social constructions of disability, homophobia, and language diversity (Capper et al., 2006). Even with the increased attention to equity, many university programs are narrowly focused on individual aspects of equity and may fail to adequately prepare principals to recognize and examine systemic inequities in schools, like tracking of students based on biased rules.

Alternative preparation programs are often designed to prepare newly appointed principals who have not received formal training in educational leadership. Several national nonprofit organizations partner with school districts, usually urban school districts, to provide a combination of on-the-job, experiential, and structured learning. They have different ways of evaluating their impact, but most focus on the student test scores in buildings led by the principals who are prepared under their model (Clifford et al., 2016; Corcoran et al., 2013; Daugherty et al., 2020; Gates et al., 2014). A CRSL lens would argue vigorously that this sole focus will not necessarily produce leaders who practice equity-centered leadership. In fact, the opposite could be true. For example, principals who see student test scores as the measure of effectiveness often adopt solutions of more tutoring for low scorers (a “fix the child” approach) as opposed to also examining quality of instruction and providing low scorers with access to the best teachers, which are systemic issues.

A select group of alternative programs, however, do intentionally address equity-centered leadership. One program we found prepares its participants to take actionable steps to advance equity, including challenging them to reflect on their personal biases, initiate conversations about equity and bias, seek out diverse perspectives, and address power dynamics within the community. Likewise, another alternative program has developed an aspiring principals' program, which works collaboratively with school district leaders to design and deliver programs customized to their communities' needs.

Research on district-led programs suggests that most programs are not prioritizing the hiring and retention of BIPOC candidates to lead their schools. District-led programs benefit when they operate in partnership with universities, and a feature of strong university-district collaboration involves co-selecting aspiring principal candidates (Davis, 2016). This problem is multifaceted. First, universities are a crucial part of the principal pipelines and they must become more intentional about recruiting BIPOC and minoritized leaders. Second, biases in the ways applicants are screened must be addressed; hiring committees often critique minoritized candidates in ways that White candidates are not critiqued. Third, when minoritized candidates accept jobs as leaders, White district leaders must work hard to promote a culture of inclusion so that they are supported to stay in the positions.

CRSL Approaches to Principal Preparation Programs

The CRSL framework identifies several specific approaches principal preparation programs could take to prepare leaders to lead with equity (Gooden et al., 2018). For example, programs could incorporate a focus on:

Critical Consciousness

- Review the admissions criteria to eliminate or reduce the weight of requirements that could screen out BIPOC candidates but have little correlation with leadership, such as GRE scores.
- Require candidates to grapple with equity issues as part of the admissions process with interview questions about equity challenges, role-playing activities, and an analysis of existing inequities.

Inclusive School Environments

- Use a rigorous communal assessment process (e.g., an assessment center) that includes a broader community

of district leaders, current and former program students, program professors, and perhaps community members.

- Teach candidates to assess inequities through climate surveys, focus groups, and equity audits.

Culturally Responsive Instructional Leadership

- Prepare candidates to identify equity-focused instructional practices with culturally relevant pedagogies that can be sustained in the school community.

Culturally Responsive Community Engagement

- Prepare candidates to discover historical or existing oppressions in communities through engaging research activities, such as community audits, neighborhood histories, and interviews with community leaders.

SELECTIVE HIRING AND PLACEMENT

About the Domain

Ensuring equity-centered school leadership requires making holistic changes in hiring and placement. Without equity-minded principals who understand and are connected to their students' lives and communities, visions of equity are unlikely to be realized.

Findings in the Literature

Some research has documented the lack of minoritized school leaders serving students of color (Grissom et al., 2021) and suggests that hiring diverse candidates is a way to solve the oppressive practices, such as disproportionate disciplinary practices, in schools serving minoritized students (Brion, 2022; Milner, 2006). Other research suggests that hiring is only the first step; the next requires moving beyond the racial composition of school leadership to conversations about what BIPOC communities know and want from their principals. This research finds that the community should play an instrumental role in all aspects of the hiring and placement process. Without the community's sharing their knowledge and experiences of past oppressions, districts cannot achieve equity in the hiring and placement of school leaders (Marschall, 2006; Shen et al., 2014).

Equity-centered research related to hiring and placement of leaders can be divided into two categories. The first focuses on hiring and placing principals who possess, or don't, historical and community knowledge and connections. Community is made up of those who live, care about, and understand the particular dynamics of the geographical space surrounding the school and can educate the leader on aspects like community histories and ancestral knowledge. For example, they could be elders, religious leaders, small business owners, community organizers, grandparents and others whose voices have not traditionally been sought for advice. These studies outline how communities can play a role in the hiring and placement of principals, using the experiences and knowledges within the community to support the process. They call for (a) increasing the hiring of minoritized principals to align with district, community, and national demographics; (b) placing principals in schools where they will be sensitive to issues in the communities that they serve; and (c) selecting principals who are instructional leaders and can support and develop culturally responsive teachers who know how to access knowledge from students' and their communities' ancestral and experiential history (Khalifa, 2018; Marshall & Khalifa, 2018).

The second body of research focuses on the role that the community can play in defining and influencing the tasks and behaviors of principals within and around schools. This role involves (a) applying learnings from community histories to the assessment and placement of principals; (b) assessing candidates' experience and their capacity and willingness to become culturally responsive; and (c) providing the community a voice to express opinions throughout the selection process.

CRSL Approaches to Hiring and Placement

The CRSL framework suggests a number of ways that districts can hire for equity-centered leadership as well as how they can include community participation in every step of the process of hiring and placing school leaders. The suggestions below assume that individuals doing the hiring have some familiarity with the CRSL. In that case, they could, for example, hire for:

Critical Consciousness

- Include interview questions in the hiring process to learn about candidates' capacities to identify and confront oppressive practices such as expectations related to personal biases.

Inclusive School Environments

- Evaluate whether the candidates have the understanding to effectively assess cultural responsiveness in the school, such as pointing out inequities in curriculum access for special education students.
- Assess candidates' experience with equity and whether they demonstrate behaviors required for equity-centered leadership, such as articulating a vision of how to address tracking systems and over-representation of students of color in lower tracks.

Culturally Responsive Instructional Leadership

- Establish a review process with the community by which the candidate is evaluated on their support of culturally responsive curricula and teachers.
- Create questions that ask candidates about their understandings, perceptions, and experiences with equity leadership and its impact on instruction.

Culturally Responsive Community Engagement

- Assess how the candidates intend to learn from the community and apply those learnings to improve the lives of students.
- Include community representatives on interview panels, in reference checks, in reviews of candidates' portfolios outlining a project that resulted in equity across a school, and in the final selection of the new principal.

ON-THE-JOB SUPPORT AND EVALUATION

About the Domain

This domain covers a wide range of activities that help principals improve their leadership: mentoring, coaching, and providing induction programs and professional learning. It also includes developing the process and the metrics to evaluate the principal's job performance.

Findings in the Literature

The research regarding on-the-job principal support is mixed. There is limited evidence that professional development improves principal performance (Herman et al., 2017; Levin et al., 2020; Steinberg & Yang, 2020). However, mentoring programs are associated with improvements in instructional leadership and management, job satisfaction, professional growth, and collegiality (Darling-Hammond et al., 2007; Grigsby et al., 2010; Hansford et al., 2003; Parylo et al., 2012; Taylor et al., 2014). In one study, on-the-job support was helpful for principals with less than three years of experience (Johnston et al., 2016).

Widely used evaluation tools typically do not explicitly address equity-centered leadership. For example, the McREL Balanced Leadership Framework includes several responsibilities that relate to equity-centered leadership, such as being a change agent, creating a culture of learning, and conducting outreach to community members (Waters & Cameron, 2007). But none of these behaviors is framed in a way to center educational equity goals as part of the assessment process (Jacob et al., 2014). Similarly, the Vanderbilt Assessment of Leadership in Education (Val-ED) requires the evaluation of several factors related to equity, such as high standards for student learning, a rigorous curriculum, quality instruction, a culture of learning and professional behavior, connections to the community, and accountability for performance. But the evaluation instrument is designed to assess only learning-centered leadership and does not evaluate equity-centered leadership as well (Porter et al., 2008).

CRSL Approaches to On-the-Job Support and Evaluation

For on-the-job support and evaluation to fully address equity, the CRSL framework would suggest that they need to be reframed to be responsive to the needs of minoritized students. For example, districts could adopt the following on-the-job support and evaluation practices that promote:

Critical Consciousness

- Support principals in the process of doing personal identity work to unearth biases; explore values, assumptions, and mental models; and increase self-awareness.
- Support and evaluate principals' efforts to challenge the dominant political and social context and to confront racism and address systemic inequities.

Inclusive School Environments

- Support and evaluate principals' efforts to build relationships with teachers and students, and to challenge current practices that marginalize students based on race, gender, social class, sexuality, ability, immigration status, language, and religion.
- Assist principals in using culturally responsive assessments of teaching and the school environment to identify and address power dynamics that operate to marginalize students.

Culturally Responsive Instructional Leadership

- Develop school leaders' capabilities to support the creation and organizing of efforts to carry out a vision of equity-focused instruction.
- Coach and develop school leaders on the need for professional development to prepare teachers to be culturally responsive in their classrooms.
- Use equity visits to provide clear guidelines and data collection tools for investigating the ways instructional practices, structures, and beliefs lead to inequitable educational experiences—and on how these are often masked in the day-to-day life of schools and districts.

Culturally Responsive Community Engagement

- Support and evaluate school leaders to work with a range of stakeholders, particularly minoritized communities, and encourage them to play leadership roles in the school.

PRINCIPAL SUPERVISION

About the Domain

Building effective supervisory systems for equity-centered principals requires districts to structure the role of the principal supervisor to understand, recognize, and support principals' equity practices. This necessitates attention to the hiring, support, and evaluation of principal supervisors.

Findings in the Literature

Across the principal supervision literature, there is no explicit explanation of how to evaluate and supervise principals in their roles as equity-centered leaders. Current efforts typically focus on metrics related to teaching and learning and do not comprehensively address equity or hold principals accountable for the equity-centered leadership practices. The 2015 Model Principal Supervisor Professional Standards (MPSPS) aim to transform evaluation from ensuring compliance with rules to improving outcomes primarily related to student achievement (CCSSO, 2015, p. 2). While it is encouraging that the standards list being "equity-minded" as a core disposition for a principal supervisor, they do not address how the supervisor can promote equity-centered leadership.

The equity-focused school leadership literature suggests that leaders need to challenge bias, improve academic performance, and build climates that address inequities that are embedded in schools (Clifford & Ross, 2011; Honig & Rainey, 2019; Roegman et al., 2020; Sinnema & Robinson, 2012; Zepeda et al., 2014). Doing so requires equity-centered leaders to be supported and supervised to focus on ameliorating inequities in all aspects of the school: its structure, curriculum, pedagogy, and procedures. All this would require that supervisors incorporate within their emphasis on student outcomes an equity-centered approach. For example, are there discrepancies in achievement outcomes that appear to align with students' social identities like race, class, or culture? Obviously a first step begins with supervisors with demonstrated experience recognizing and addressing inequities, and one way to achieve this goal is by providing equity training for principal supervisors.

CRSL Approaches to Principal Supervision

The CRSL framework suggests that to prepare principal supervisors to support equity-centered leadership, districts could emphasize:

Critical Consciousness

- Confirm that principal supervisors have been given ample support and time to develop their own cultural competence and ability to lead and sustain change for equity.
- Confirm that supervisors understand the district's vision for equity and are able to implement equity-centered goals as well as plan to provide equity support in each school.

Inclusive School Environments

- Prepare and support supervisors to regularly reference school climate surveys as a part of principal supervision.
- Prepare and support supervisors to evaluate whether the principal intervenes to address the root causes of inequities.

Culturally Responsive Instructional Leadership

- Prepare and support supervisors to improve how the principal supports teachers to use culturally responsive practices and monitor classrooms to ensure they are applied in all classrooms.

- Prepare and support supervisors to review students' surveys to discover whether classroom practices are inclusive and how the principal gathers feedback to inform instruction.

Culturally Responsive Community Engagement

- Prepare and support supervisors to assess the degree to which the principal engages with the community and require them to conduct community audits.

LEADER TRACKING SYSTEMS

About the Domain

Leader tracking systems are designed to collect and organize data that will identify future leaders, track their progress toward becoming school leaders, and monitor their performance once they become principals. Although there is some variation in the use and structure of leader tracking systems, they often have three key common components: (a) a database to track the recruitment, preparation, hiring, support, and evaluation of school leaders; (b) positions or offices dedicated to school leadership issues; and (c) professional development and support for aspiring principals (Gates et al., 2020).

Findings in the Literature

Because leader tracking systems are a relatively new tool in the system, the literature on them is relatively sparse. In a survey of 192 public school districts, about half reported having a tracking system in place, and just seven percent reported having comprehensive tracking systems (Gates et al., 2020). Studies have found that district satisfaction with the candidate pool for principal jobs is higher in districts that provide support for aspiring principals (Barnett et al., 2017; Gates et al., 2020; Hayes & Burkett, 2020). Others suggest that assistant principals who participated in leadership development activities showed confidence in their leadership capabilities (Hayes & Burkett, 2020). One study concluded that assistant principals who worked for a highly rated principal are more likely to succeed if they themselves become a principal (Grissom et al., 2020).

So far, none of the studies has investigated how leader tracking systems are being used to create equity-centered school leaders. But equity scholars have begun to conceptualize how these tracking systems could start to address inequities (Peters-Hawkins et al., 2018; Petrides et al., 2014; Sorby et al., 2017). For instance, tracking systems could be used to identify and then invite a wide range of district employees to leadership development activities, which would expand the candidate pool for school leaders beyond assistant principals.

CRSL Approaches to Leader Tracking Systems

With leader tracking systems in their infancy, the CRSL framework would suggest that district leaders take the following steps to ensure that the systems monitor and encourage equity-centered leadership. In doing so, they should emphasize:

Critical Consciousness

- Examine and document the district's pathways to selecting a principal by ensuring districts provide fair and equitable access and that the process of selection is known and transparent.
- Provide training for district officials on the appropriate use of data in the tracking system so that data capture the full potential of all candidates.
- Track important indicators on the time it takes for aspiring leaders to enter the principalship for all candidates.

Inclusive School Environments

- Offer professional development on how to examine leader tracking systems data so they support plans that can foster inclusive school cultures.

Culturally Responsive Instructional Leadership

- Track participation in professional development on culturally responsive teaching.
- Track assigned principal mentors for aspiring principals.

Culturally Responsive Community Engagement

- Involve communities as appropriate in the trajectory of aspiring BIPOC leaders and make clear how their development will lead to more leadership opportunities.
- Immerse aspiring school leaders in communities as a part of their development of, support for, and learning about equitable systems.

SUSTAINABILITY

About the Domain

Equity-centered school leaders are not superheroes. The sustainability domain suggests that school leaders need ongoing support from the district to redress systemic problems and ensure all students have an equitable educational experience. Moreover, districts committed to creating comprehensive and aligned principal pipelines need to attend to the infrastructure that can sustain them (Mitgang et al., 2003).

Findings in the Literature

In the limited academic literature on building infrastructure to sustain equitable systems, researchers have identified how some districts are working to create equitable systems. For example, some districts are creating a clear vision of the characteristics of an equity-centered leader and are communicating their commitment to equity widely (Rigby et al., 2019). Others have focused on reallocating budgets, talent, and other resources to align with their equity goals and to prepare principals to be equity-centered leaders through training and a focus on hiring minoritized principals (Kissell & Trujillo, 2020). As part of district infrastructure efforts, some districts have made structural changes to reduce bureaucracy and decentralize authority over school leaders (Meyers et al., 2019).

Some districts have set up methods to regularly monitor instructional practices and student achievement data to ensure that instruction is appropriate for students (Rigby et al., 2019). This includes a wide range of activities, from auditing the curriculum to holding “learning walks” to see how students respond to the curriculum in the classroom. Data in these processes must have explicit and quantifiable equity categories. Additionally, some studies have found that when superintendents promote engagement across all communities and forge partnerships with universities, faith-based organizations, and other community organizations, the system’s equity-centered improvements as a whole increase.

CRSL Approaches to Sustainability and District Infrastructure

Although the overall literature has not evaluated how current district infrastructures promote equity through the school leadership pipeline, the CRSL framework suggests that the following district actions could help to build an equity-centered infrastructure:

Critical Consciousness

- Make a commitment to equity and communicate this commitment clearly and consistently to all constituents in the district, schools, and the community.
- Engage district and school leaders in equity-centered professional learning opportunities.
- Define equity-centered leadership and share it widely across all constituents.

Inclusive School Environments

- Reorganize the district structure to align with the district's vision for equity.
- Identify equity-centered competencies required of school leaders and develop policies and hiring practices to ensure all principals meet those competencies.

Culturally Responsive Instructional Leadership

- Establish ongoing professional learning opportunities to help instructional leaders adopt anti-racist and other equity-centered values in the curriculum.
- Audit the curriculum, instructional materials, and assessments regularly to ensure they offer equitable learning opportunities.

Culturally Responsive Community Engagement

- Ensure all stakeholder voices are represented, heard, and appreciated.
- Ensure that district policy and practice changes are made collaboratively with principals, parents, community leaders, and other local partners.

CONCLUSION

In this report we examined research relevant to building comprehensive, aligned principal pipelines that could produce and support equity-centered school leaders. We end this report sharing key takeaways for each of the seven domains described in that research.

Our first takeaway is that by focusing on CRSL—and explicitly on equity commitments and justice—leadership standards have the power to influence scholars and practitioners interested in leadership development. We suggest that those who develop and adapt leader standards continue the pivot toward equity by boldly including specific aspects of identity like race within new revisions.

The high-quality preservice preparation domain for leaders is challenged by CRSL to infuse equity from the very beginning of the recruiting, selection, and admissions process so that it adequately and intentionally influences the racial and cultural diversity of who is recruited and selected for programs and how they are trained to be equity-focused leaders throughout the process. Universities partnering with districts to prepare principals must also become forcefully intentional about centering equity within their curricula and learning activities.

Hiring and placement as a domain should construct specific ways to recruit, interview, and assess candidates with equity in mind if we are to keep the conversation centered after leaders are trained in equity and apply for jobs, or if they are not exposed to equity-focused leadership and still apply. We must also include the community in this hiring and placement process.

According to CRSL scholarship, supervising, supporting, and evaluating principals must all happen with equity at the center of these processes. These domains speak more to the work of current principals, and they are very important in influencing leaders who may not have been engaged in learning about equity-focused leadership in their graduate programs, which is highly likely.

Leader Tracking Systems remind us to use data and examine pathways, whereas CRSL emphasizes that using an equity lens with Leader Tracking Systems can help with the interpretation and evaluation of those systems and influence career trajectories in ways that can support the creation of a diverse pool of principals. Finally, systems of support should ensure the work of equity-infused comprehensive pipelines is institutionalized at the district leadership level, meaning equity becomes part of the culture of change of school districts seeking to become more equitable and equity-focused.

In this conclusion, we have presented aspirations of how research on equity might strengthen principal pipelines. We also recognize that the field is increasing its research and adding leaders who are taking up equity, sometimes with and sometimes without the benefit of access to developing research. We hope this report adds to the excitement of making schools more equity-centered by recognizing that indeed, leaders, and those who support them, have a great deal of work to do.

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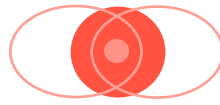
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<https://doi.org/10.59656/EL-LS5949.001>