



A PORTRAIT OF A CULTURALLY RESPONSIVE SCHOOL SYSTEM



Empowering leaders. Transforming schools for every student.



"For there is always light, if only we're brave enough to see it. If only we're brave enough to be it."

-Amanda Gorman, American poet and activist



American education is in a critical moment, one of urgency and opportunity. As we enter our third school year in a far-reaching global pandemic, we are more aware than ever of the longstanding inequities in student access to challenging, engaging and supportive learning experiences. Covid-19 exposed and exacerbated many of these inequities and calls for us to tackle them head on.

The pandemic forced many changes to how we do school – from using technology to educate students when school buildings were forced to close to shifting how we discipline students and grade their work. We have seen that innovation and transformation, while not easy, are possible. And it is essential for ensuring that every student of every race, ethnicity, gender identity, linguistic background, ability, income level has access to inclusive, rigorous, and relevant learning experiences.

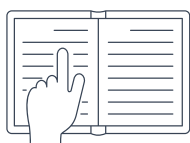
So how can we leverage this momentum? How can we push forward the approaches that have grown from educators' response to the pandemic and the deeper awareness of inequities and racial injustices we now have?



Based on our research and nearly 20 years of experience supporting and developing leaders across the country, the Portrait is grounded in eight critical action areas of a culturally responsive school system leader.

This **Portrait of a Culturally Responsive School System** offers a roadmap for intentionally building school systems that ensure children of every race, ethnicity, language or other characteristics of their identity, have what they need to achieve academic, social, and emotional success. This Portrait offers a broadened definition and updated expectations of school in these times, encouraging system leaders to push beyond physical walls, and traditional seat time, school zones, and standardized exams.

The system described in this guide is designed to consciously disrupt systemic racism and decenter dominant culture. In the words of Brazilian educator Paulo Freire, rather than provide the traditional western "banking" education of filling up minds like piggy banks until they are full, the most effective education is one that inspires learners to think critically, inquisitively, and freely. Someone who is educated within a culturally responsive environment is encouraged to reflect on the world they live in and to challenge inequitable structures in ways that will help bring about change.



KEY TERMS

BIAS: An implicit bias is any unconsciously held set of associations about a social group. Implicit biases are the product of learned associations and social conditioning. They often begin at a young age, and most people are unaware that they hold them. Importantly, these biases do not necessarily align with personal identity. It's possible to unconsciously associate positive or negative traits with one's own race, gender, or background.

CULTURALLY RESPONSIVE PRACTICE: The use of this term is specific and deliberate and requires that education leaders understand and simultaneously attend to:

- **A strong foundation of cultural understanding.** Culturally responsive leaders understand the dimensions and impact of cultural constructs in society and continuously cultivate and revisit their own personal understanding of the impact of culture on their own identity and the ways in which it shapes their approach to their professional practice.
- **The academic success of all students.** Culturally responsive leaders center student learning and academic rigor across every school, classroom, and learning environment in their system. They cultivate and value content expertise. They understand and apply college- and career-level standards and select high quality instructional materials aligned to standards. They hold, model, and communicate consistently high and transparent expectations for all learners. They develop the capacity of the system and the educators within it to know where each student is in relation to those expectations and use that knowledge to provide appropriate learning supports.
- **Cultivating and deepening the cultural competence** of themselves and the adults they lead. Culturally responsive leaders affirm the cultures of students and adults through the learning opportunities they provide, the materials they use, the environment they build, and their skill in using cultural understandings to support learning. They build authentic rapport and trust with students, staff, families, and the community, affirming the multiple identities of individuals, and support and guide others in doing the same.
- **The cultivation of sociopolitical consciousness.** Culturally responsive leaders cultivate and support students' ability to question and critique social norms, values, practices, and systems that produce and maintain inequity. They facilitate adult and student talk about culture and identity and consistently look for and utilize opportunities to generate inquiry about inequity, oppression, and change.



The purpose of this tool is to

support school system leaders and their team in creating schools by, with, and for their students. School leaders and their teams can use this guide at any point in their school system's journey to becoming more culturally responsive. Use it as a baseline to create aspirational goals; an accountability tool to assess progress against goals; and a celebration tool to show quick wins.

As you work through this guide, please note that the indicators and reflection questions offered here are not an exhaustive list. Please use the Portrait as a jumping off point from which you and your team can identify the indicators relevant for your context and create new indicators and reflection questions that will help you engage in analysis, conversation, and action.

We are eager to continuously refine this tool, so please let us know what successes and challenges you have with it and how you have tweaked it for your own context so we and other leaders can learn from you as well. Thank you for being a part of this movement to create systems of culturally responsive schools that serve every student.

CULTURALLY RESPONSIVE LEADERSHIP: A culturally responsive leader recognizes the impact of institutionalized racism on their own lives and the lives of the students and families they work with and embraces their role in mitigating, disrupting, and dismantling systemic oppression.

DOMINANT CULTURE: Dominant culture is an artificial, historically constructed culture and refers to socially accepted dominant language, religion, behavior, values, rituals, and social customs. These traits, such as those of white, heterosexual, Christian, able-bodied, cis-gendered, English as a first language, U.S.-born, etc., are often seen as the norm for society as a whole. Dominant culture is promoted and perpetuated as the right way of being and suppresses all other aspects and intersections of identities and cultures.

EQUITY: Every school and school system is intentionally built to ensure children of every race, ethnicity, language or other characteristics of their identity, have what they need to achieve academic, social, and emotional success.

HYBRID LEARNING: Students are engaged in learning both inside and outside of the physical school classroom, leveraging a variety of synchronous and asynchronous experiences and technology facilitated by one or more teachers in collaboration with the students' caregivers.

HYBRID TEACHERS: Teachers are teaching students in the physical school classroom at the same time they are teaching students in remote learning.

LEARNING ENVIRONMENT: Refers to both remote and in-person learning, used interchangeably with "school" in this document.

MINORITIZED: The term minoritized is used throughout the guide to emphasize what the school systems and other systems within the United States have overtly and covertly done to Asian, Black, Indigenous, Latinx and Students of Color. The term minoritized was coined by Michael Benitez, Jr. He explains, "I utilize the term 'minoritized' as opposed to 'minority' to refer to the process [action vs. noun] of student minoritization. My choice of text in this case assumes that there is a history of structural and institutional actions that have over time limited access to, and led to a lack of presence among students of color in higher education labeled as racially and ethnically different from the norm. Doing so also challenges the physical and spatial fixture often associated with how 'minority' is often employed in most literature focused on similar issues to a more critical understanding of how 'minority' came to be constructed socially over the course of history and how students continue to be minoritized in contemporary spaces of higher education." (Benitez)

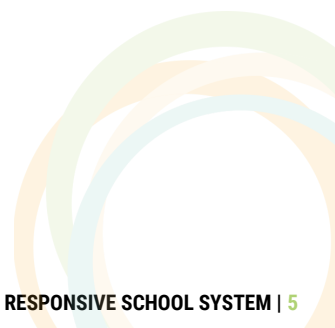
REMOTE LEARNING: Students are engaged in learning outside of the physical school classroom leveraging a variety of synchronous and asynchronous experiences facilitated by a teacher in collaboration with the students' caregivers.

SOCIOPOLITICAL CONSCIOUSNESS: Ability to question and critique social norms, values, practices, and systems and facilitate conversations that generate inquiry about inequity and change in the context of their schools.

SYSTEMIC RACISM: A system in which public policies, institutional practices, cultural representations, and other norms work in various, often reinforcing ways to perpetuate racial group inequity. Systemic racism is part of the social, economic and political systems in which we all exist. (The Aspen Institute: <https://www.aspeninstitute.org/wp-content/uploads/files/content/docs/rcc/RCC-Structural-Racism-Glossary.pdf>)

WHITE DOMINANT CULTURE: White dominant culture is the idea that white people and the ideas, thoughts, beliefs, and actions of white people are superior to People of Color and their ideas, thoughts, beliefs, and actions. It is the glue that binds together white-controlled institutions and systems. [adapted from Sharon Martinas and the Challenging White Supremacy Workshop]

WHITENESS: Whiteness, like “colour” and “Blackness,” is essentially a social construct. The power of whiteness is manifested by the ways in which racialized whiteness becomes transformed into social, political, economic, and cultural behaviour. White culture, norms, and values in all these areas become normative naturally. They become the standard against which all other cultures, groups, and individuals are measured and usually found to be inferior (adapted from Racial Equity Tools).





PRACTICE AREAS

AREA

1

EQUITY AND ACCESS

Culturally responsive school systems are built by, with, and for students.



REFLECTION QUESTIONS

- What does a culturally responsive system look and sound like? How are we working with our community to envision our path to cultural responsiveness?
- How have we integrated the concepts of equity, cultural competence and sociopolitical consciousness into all functions of the system?
- How do we center student, family, and community voice in decision-making about system policies and practices?
- How do we ensure that our stakeholder engagement efforts are inclusive and representative of the students we serve across the system?
- What protocols are in place to support equity-based resource allocation across the system?
- How do we ensure all students have the technological resources they need to thrive in all learning environments? (in-person, hybrid, or remote)
- How do we monitor the presence of bias within our systems and practices related to identification for gifted and talented, special education, language development services, enrichment and other programming?



SAMPLE INDICATORS

- All governing bodies (school board, parent advisory councils, etc.) are representative of the student demographics.
- A variety of stakeholders (students, staff, families and community) are central to revising, adding or changing system policies and rules.
- The system in partnership with the greater community has identified and dismantled norms of dominant culture to create an inclusive environment that cultivates a sense of belonging among all members of the community.
- The system supports families in finding needed services (continuing education, employment, housing, family counseling, technology, etc.).
- All educators and administrative staff are familiar with the varied demographic groups in the system, the neighborhoods students live in, and the cultural and linguistic traditions each possesses.
- All educators and administrative staff members take responsibility for helping eliminate social-emotional stress from stereotype threat and microaggressions for students, families and adults.
- The goals of system-level discipline policies and practices are to support student learning and development and to repair community rather than to punish or exclude students.

- All school staff members use restorative practices to strategically approach discipline and learning environment management.
- All school staff members regularly communicate with all students, families and fellow staff members and in ways that are easily accessible to all. The system prioritizes resources and/or seeks out public/private partnerships to ensure that all students and families have access to appropriate digital devices and high-speed Internet service.
- The approach to remote learning is based on current context and community/family needs and not a replication of in-person learning.
- The system communicates clearly to the community that all school administrators, teachers and staff members will be trained in and observed for their use of positive and restorative disciplinary practices.
- The system identifies and dismantles structural and systemic inequities (i.e., access to AP, gifted & talented programming, exam-based school admissions).

AREA

2

MISSION, VISION, AND CORE VALUES

Culturally responsive school systems have a mission, vision, and core values for culturally responsive teaching and learning that supports all students in accessing and achieving rigorous college- and career-ready academic standards.



REFLECTION QUESTIONS

- Do our mission, vision and core values articulate a commitment to becoming a culturally responsive school system?
- Do all stakeholders know our commitment to being a culturally responsive system?
- Do we leverage our system mission, vision and core values when reviewing data and making decisions?
- How are we re-imagining ourselves as a culturally responsive system that transcends the traditional borders of “schooling”? How does this new vision shape our mission and core values? How are we communicating about them?



SAMPLE INDICATORS

- Mission, vision and core values are created and updated in collaboration with families, students, staff, and other members of the community.
- The system’s mission, vision, and values focus on equity, inclusion, belonging, and articulate the conditions and actions to which the system aspires in order to ensure equitable access to, and achievement of, rigorous college- and career-ready academic standards for all students.
- System leadership shares publicly and with staff and community their commitment to ensuring that all schools and school system staff expect that children can learn and perform at high levels.
- School system leaders communicate that central office leaders, teachers, principals and staff members will continuously learn and build their culturally responsive practice.

- Regular systems and routines are in place for consistent disaggregated data analysis to identify areas in which the mission is and is not being realized and areas in which progress is and is not being made toward the vision.
- All planning processes, including cycles of continuous improvement, grant projects, and system, state, and federal program planning are anchored to the system’s mission, vision, and values.
- Decisions are made by aligning the shared decision-making structure to the system’s mission, vision, and values.
- All adults share the system’s vision of being creators of a culturally responsive system and act on their vision through their daily decision-making.
- The system’s mission, vision and values are used to guide decision-making in moments of crisis.
- The system’s mission, vision and values are evident in all learning environments.

**AREA
3**

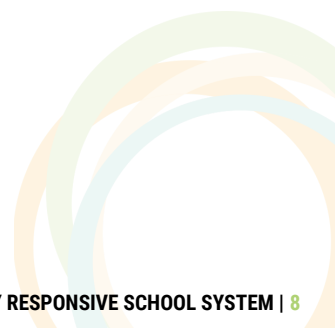
INSTRUCTION

Culturally responsive school systems have support systems, structures, and routines that prioritize and focus the alignment and coherence of culturally responsive curriculum, high-quality instructional materials, instructional practice, and assessment to support all students in accessing and achieving rigorous college- and career-ready academic standards.



**REFLECTION
QUESTIONS**

- Have we reviewed and revised our instructional frameworks to represent culturally responsive pedagogy, and do we have a process set up for doing this in an ongoing way?
- Have we built the capacity of our school and other instructional leaders to support teachers in engaging in equitable grading practices?
- Have we reviewed our core curricula materials to ensure representation of the range of cultural and other identities across the system?
- Have we reviewed all areas of the curriculum to ensure they are inclusive of multiple perspectives of history?
- How are we using our curriculum to ensure we are building students’ and teachers’ ability to question and critique social norms, values, practices, and systems and facilitate conversations that generate inquiry about inequity and change in the context of their schools?
- Do our formative and benchmark assessment practices provide students with multiple ways to demonstrate mastery of the standards?
- Do our annual goals and targets reflect a commitment to narrowing specific opportunity gaps for student groups and increase achievement for all students?





SAMPLE INDICATORS

- High quality, culturally responsive instructional curriculum and materials are provided, adopted and supported.
- Curriculum and instructional frameworks are anchored in the tenets of culturally responsive practice.
- All curriculum is audited regularly to ensure it reflects the range of culture and diversity across the system and the world.
- School system level data is disaggregated by student groups to identify disparities by race, ethnicity, language, ability and other characteristics.
- Data is shared widely indicating what achievement or opportunity gaps exist and the plans for addressing those gaps.
- There are targeted, multi-tiered systems of support to provide equitable and universal access to culturally responsive learning opportunities that support the achievement of rigorous college- and career ready academic standards for all students.
- Monitoring processes are designed to ensure students are being given appropriate interventions and are not being improperly referred to special education, and if students of color are disproportionately referred, there is a process for examining why that is.
- System leaders clearly communicate to the community that all teachers and staff members are expected to create inclusive, researched-based, flexible and goal-oriented learning experiences, as is modeled in Universal Design for Learning (UDL) practices.
- School and other instructional leaders are supporting teachers to pose critical thinking questions that lead students to research and debate their findings and varied perspectives.
- Students are engaged in project-based learning that centers solving community problems of interest to students.
- Students have the opportunity to share their solutions to community challenges with families, local experts and community members, gaining their feedback.
- Students experience teachers' high expectations for grade-level work and beyond as well as the individualized support and feedback needed to meet those expectations. Similarly, teachers experience principals' high expectations as well as their individualized support and feedback.
- In-person and remote instructional approach nurtures student agency, self-directed learning, and sociopolitical consciousness.
- System leaders critically analyze the utility and limitations of standardized assessments and make decisions about their administration and use of instructional time for preparation based on maximizing long-term student outcomes and opportunities.
- A variety of media and online platforms are leveraged to support student learning.
- Student mastery of standards and competencies are prioritized over "seat time."
- Competency-based pathways are utilized for graduation requirements. In systems where graduation requirements are set by the state, system leaders work with their school board to advocate for competency-based pathways to graduation.
- Core courses are not siloed but integrated for students to see connections across all content areas.
- System communicates commitment to having exceptional teaching for every child in every classroom.
- Targets are set that aim to narrow gaps for specific groups of students and increase achievement for all children.
- Students, families and staff are surveyed regularly to gauge how connected, respected, and embraced they feel at school. Staff reflect on the results, create an action plan to address concerns, monitor actions and revise plan as needed.

AREA

4

ADULT LEARNING AND DEVELOPMENT

Culturally responsive school systems provide evidence-based professional learning and coaching as well as goals-based evaluation to teachers and school staff to ensure equity of opportunities and outcomes for all students.



REFLECTION QUESTIONS

- Does the school system have a comprehensive professional development plan to build capacity in culturally responsive practices across the system?
- Do all adults across the system receive high-quality, job-embedded professional learning?
- How do we make decisions about the professional learning opportunities we provide?
- Have we created multiple, on-going opportunities for ALL staff members to learn about and reflect on their biases?
- Do our performance evaluation frameworks include the core elements of equitable and culturally responsive practices?



SAMPLE INDICATORS

- Professional learning is based on latest research on adult learning: 1) Adults learn most deeply from experience and reflection; 2) Learning to be a leader must be a social process; 3) The most transformative learning comes with challenges; 4) Adults rely on stories to make meaning; and 5) Adults learn best when they play a role in leading their own learning.
- All staff members individually and collaboratively examine and challenge their own assumptions and biases in light of disconfirming evidence.
- Performance expectations for staff are aligned to the system's mission, vision, and values which are consistent with culturally responsive practice, high professional standards, and educational research.
- Multiple data points are used to diagnose and assess teaching and school leader effectiveness, including the ability to directly confront biases that impede students' ability to learn and achieve rigorous college- and career ready academic standards.
- Central office staff effectiveness is assessed on multiple data points related to student, teacher and leader outcomes.
- Various learning modalities are used to design flexible, ongoing, and just-in-time learning for educators, administrators and support staff.
- Evaluations of staff across the system reflect progress towards culturally responsive practice.



**AREA
5**

OPERATIONS AND RESOURCES

Culturally responsive school systems manage school operations and resources to ensure equitable access to, and achievement of, rigorous college- and career-ready academic standards for all students.



**REFLECTION
QUESTIONS**

- How will the decision we just made impact the students, families and communities that we are serving?
- Are we prioritizing the needs of our most vulnerable populations in our decision making?
- Are we making fiscal decisions with the students and families that will be most affected in mind?
- Are there multiple voices and perspectives included in the decision-making process?
- Are we respecting and leveraging the perspectives and experiences of all staff members in the school system?
- Are we respecting and leveraging the perspectives and experiences of a diverse set of community members?
- Do we hire and make teaching and leadership assignments based on the needs of students?
- How do we seek out and/or prioritize resources to ensure that all students have access to digital devices and high-speed Internet service both at home and at school?
- How have we leveraged the collective wisdom and experience of our entire community, including families, students, staff and community partners, to establish and communicate robust contingency plans for ensuring continuity of learning and student support during times of crisis and disruption to in-person schooling?
- How has our leadership team and Board worked together to create policies that ensure access to enrichment and exceptional schooling experiences for all students?



**SAMPLE
INDICATORS**

- All staff are part of strategic planning and decision-making processes.
- Structures and processes are in place to ensure that every student has access to the learning opportunities, culturally responsive teachers, and supports required for their individual success.
- Cross-functional committees are established and comprised of stakeholders from across the community to review student group access to accelerated learning experiences, such as through enrollment data and available transportation, and to recommend policy changes as needed to increase access.

- Data on and system plans for closing opportunity gaps are monitored and shared with the community twice a year.
- Human and material resources are allocated to eliminate disparities in all minoritized populations.
- Composition of system staff is representative of the racial/ethnic/gender/disability composition of the student body and larger school community and are distributed equitably across the various job classifications.
- Leadership uses competencies in educational equity as an integral part of how they assess staff member performance.
- Time is structured across the day, week, and year to provide different opportunities for adult learning and development.
- System leaders negotiate teacher contracts to include plans for supporting struggling teachers and removing them from classrooms if they are unable to improve.
- People at different job levels, paid or volunteer, are treated with comparable respect.
- Schools with the greatest needs are assigned the most experienced and/or skilled staff, teachers, principals, and principal supervisors.
- Schools are inclusive of students of every gender identity, such as by providing gender neutral bathrooms and ensuring gender fluid and non-binary people are represented thoughtfully in print resources, policies and practices.
- Expanded/personalized student learning opportunities are available beyond the school learning environment, e.g., internships, online learning, dual enrollment, flipped classrooms, field experiences.
- The system calendar aligns with family work schedules, students' social and emotional needs and community holidays.
- Students are allowed to carry and use school-owned digital devices at home.
- The system ensures access to high-speed Internet in students' home environments through public-private partnerships and/or the provision of mobile hotspots.
- Structures such as remote learning are leveraged to maximize student access to engaging and challenging learning experiences, such as advanced courses that are not offered in their school building but that students can access remotely.
- The system budget reflects commitment to equity and is designed to provide safe, healthy, and accessible buildings and classrooms for students and families of all abilities.
- School system leaders and staff work with school leaders, with input from the entire school community, to develop and communicate clear and specific contingency plans for potential crisis and disruption. These plans address and prioritize the health and safety of students, families and staff; establish mechanisms for continuing teaching and learning when regular attendance in school buildings is not possible; detail the processes and procedures to continue provision of nutrition, health and counseling services for students and families; and address the social and emotional well-being of students, families and staff.
- The priority of transportation is to provide equitable access to opportunity for all communities.
- System leaders collaborate with local transportation agencies to ensure public transportation is safe and affordable for families, and that students who walk to school can do so safely and that necessary sidewalk repairs and assistance from safety personnel are available.
- Transportation is provided to after school centers.
- System leaders promote policies, such as controlled choice, that allow families from every neighborhood to access the system's highest performing schools and programs.



AREA 6

PERSONAL LEARNING AND DEVELOPMENT

Culturally responsive school systems have staff who make it their personal responsibility to develop and nurture the skills and dispositions needed to be antiracist leaders to support students and families.



REFLECTION QUESTIONS

- What personal biases are we holding about students, staff and/or families that may be getting in the way of us being able to be culturally responsive leaders?
- What biases do we hold related to approaches to learning that may be getting in the way of us being able to be culturally responsive leaders?
- Are we regularly seeking out learning opportunities to improve how we support students, families and communities?
- How do staff reflect on their own self-work in personal identity development and the understanding of their personal beliefs, assumptions, biases, and behaviors?



SAMPLE INDICATORS

- All staff members recognize their personal triggers around intersectional identities similar to and different from their own.
- All staff members know and own their cultural lens.
- All staff members recognize their position, privilege and power and their impact on their decision-making.
- All staff members understand that student learning drives the system and that every action is in service of ensuring that all students have the opportunities, access, and supports needed to meet rigorous college- and career-ready standards.
- All staff members remain current and knowledgeable of research to inform instructional and organizational decisions, including those that focus on issues of equity and student academic outcomes.
- All staff members work with supervisors to set personal measurable goals aligned to the mission, vision, values, and performance metrics of the school and system.
- All staff members actively pursue personal professional learning opportunities directly linked to organizational needs with specific attention to the student populations served.
- All staff members actively seek to understand and build competency in equitable and antiracist leadership practices, such as by seeking feedback and looking for low-inference evidence to help reflect on how they are leading for equity.
- Central office members are transparent about their own introspection, development and learning and share their goals and growth publicly.
- All staff continuously examine and reflect on how their roles in the system might contribute to or support inequitable practices, and how privilege, power, and oppression operate historically and currently in education and recognize the privileges they hold based on position, identity, or background.
- System leaders provide the space, tools, consistent professional learning opportunities, and support for staff to reflect on their own personal beliefs, biases, assumptions, and behavior, especially those who have been historically minoritized, and to develop and deepen culturally responsive teaching practice.

- All staff use language that promotes a belief in the ability of each student and adult to achieve, particularly those from groups that have been historically marginalized.
- All staff openly value the diversity of all members of the community they serve.
- All staff model vulnerability by acknowledging where there are gaps in their knowledge and skills related to equity.
- School system leaders create an environment that encourages risk-taking and creates space for others to have open dialogue about race and address hard-to-discuss topics.
- All staff seek to learn about the identities and communities of students in our school(s).
- When decisions are being made, all staff push the decision maker to question which groups are benefitting or being left out, and why.
- System leaders create the conditions for regular courageous conversations around equity, including building staff capacity to learn and practice language and behaviors that are responsive to differences across lines of race, ethnicity, language, class, religion, ability, gender identity and expression, sexual orientation, and other aspects of identity.
- All staff confront behavior that openly or covertly promotes inequity, colorblindness, and deficit-thinking.
- All staff regularly examine system-level data for signs of inequity with system leadership team.
- All staff establish high expectations (performance and behavioral) for adults and students of every identity and background in their school(s).

AREA 7

STRATEGIC CHANGE AND CONTINUOUS IMPROVEMENT

Culturally responsive school systems use multiple sources of data to identify successes and challenges in working toward the school’s mission and vision and engage staff, students, and families in strategic planning and continuous improvement activities designed to mitigate those challenges.



REFLECTION QUESTIONS

- Where is racism currently operating in our school community?
- What policies, structures, biases and practices do we need to dismantle in order to provide a more equitable experience for students?
- What is the story being told from the data we typically analyze? Whose story is being told? Whose isn’t? Are we considering achievement data as well as other data that helps us understand the students’ learning experiences such as discipline data and enrollment in higher level coursework?
- What process(es) are in place for evaluating existing system policies, practices, and procedures for cultural responsiveness? What prompts us to make changes? What inhibits us from making changes?
- How are we building a coalition of stakeholders to build an equitable school system?
- How are we analyzing data to identify challenges and make decisions?
- How are we taking an iterative approach - utilizing short-term cycles of continuous improvement and/or design thinking - to harness the potential to learn from new and rapidly evolving challenges?
- How are we ensuring that all stakeholders’ voices and perspectives are being heard as part of the improvement process?
- How does each decision made by leadership and leadership team have the potential to create, sustain, or disrupt inequity?

- How do leadership teams look to innovative tools and the latest resources to co-create an equitable remote and in-person experience for students?
- How do leadership teams and professional learning communities address new and emerging challenges through real-time documentation, reflection, quick feedback loops and course correction?
- How do leadership teams recognize and analyze societal and communal data and its impact on student data?



SAMPLE INDICATORS

- There is an active equity-focused senior leadership team representative of student demographics, grade levels, academic content, and student support services provided in the schools.
- Analysis of student attendance, behavior, and achievement data by student group is frequent with specific attention to patterns of disproportionality (i.e. an overrepresentation of Black boys in special education classes) and identification of root causes.
- Leadership recognizes and analyzes societal and communal data and its impact on student data.
- Leadership team members engage community, including families and local organizations that serve children and families, to build a coalition of supporters in decision-making.
- Leadership and leadership team navigate resistors and demonstrate empathy for diverse perspectives without personalizing resistance.
- All teams use cycles of continuous improvement and principles of design thinking and systems thinking to review data and identify areas of inequity and necessary action.
- Leadership and leadership team implement strategies for the inclusion of staff, families, and other stakeholders in planning processes.
- Leadership teams and professional learning communities address new and emerging challenges through real-time documentation, reflection, quick feedback loops and course correction.
- Leadership considers each decision's potential to create, sustain, or disrupt inequity.
- Leadership teams look to innovative tools and the latest resources to co-create an equitable remote and in-person experience for students.
- Part of strategic thinking and planning involves turning inward and seeking community-based solutions.
- Leadership team members hold themselves mutually accountable and offer one another feedback on their culturally responsive practice.
- New enrollment policies and practices are regularly monitored for their impact on children from all groups.

AREA

8

COMMUNITY CARE AND ENGAGEMENT

Culturally responsive school systems have an inclusive and caring school culture that facilitates a sense of belonging among staff, students, and families.



REFLECTION QUESTIONS

- How are we ensuring families and communities are key collaborators in improving the school experience for all students?
- How do we involve and engage families and community members in student learning and community events?
- Are family and community advisory groups representative of our student population?
- How do we ensure that all students and families can access system communications in their native language?
- How do our school buildings represent the language diversity of our students and families to create an accessible and welcoming environment? What services can we make available in the online space as well?
- How do we build relationships and equip families with the resources to be partners in supporting student learning?
- How do we center culturally responsive social emotional learning and support mental health within our school system?



SAMPLE INDICATORS

- The people involved in planning system-level events and programs are representative of the school community by race, ethnicity, language, gender, disability, and socioeconomic status.
- The code of student conduct is collaboratively created and processes are in place to ensure it is applied fairly and equitably to all students.
- School system emblems, mascots, team names, and other symbols are free from racial, ethnic, gender, sexual orientation, or disability bias.
- Remote and in-person events, special programs, and speakers reflect the diverse nature of the system.
- System-level events, including athletics, the arts, public service, PTA/PTO, etc., are scheduled to provide opportunities for families with varied work and home commitments to attend and participate. They are held at varied locations, including having events in all parts of the system outside of the school grounds.
- Families are provided with transportation to ensure they can attend school events, such as parent-teacher conferences and curriculum nights.
- All system-level communications are sent using a variety of accessible technology and available in multiple languages, Braille, or audio versions to ensure every community member can access the communication.

- Leadership and leadership teams seek and utilize the expertise and resources of community groups that represent and serve students and their families.
- System leaders build trust with family members through on-going, positive and varied communication, and expect school leaders and teachers to do the same (e.g., starting the school year by calling parents and guardians with good news about each student's learning).
- School leaders are given feedback on ways they can more effectively engage family members.
- System leaders regularly assess the effectiveness of family engagement programs and adjust them as needed to increase effectiveness.
- All staff members interact with students and families on a regular basis to learn about and respond to their experience of the system, including student learning, their feeling of belonging, and ideas for creating a more culturally responsive and equitable environment.
- System-level leaders collect and analyze feedback from families, students, and staff about which practices have built stronger learning partnerships between schools and families and should be continued in the future.
- System-level leaders communicate to staff the importance of reaching out to all families and the belief that all families add value to the school community. Families are seen not only as a group to be consulted but as partners in critical system decisions.
- Terminology around family engagement includes a variety of family arrangements and ways of engaging parents and guardians. System-level leaders believe and support their staff in believing that all family members want the very best for their children, although they may communicate this in different ways.
- Events are designed to offer parents the opportunity to see what their children are learning.
- School leaders and teachers are given training to help family members support children's learning at home.
- Teachers, counselors and principals are offered differentiated training on research-based, culturally responsive best practices for family engagement and on biases and how those biases may impact their work with families.
- Social emotional learning and supports for students and educators decenter norms of dominant culture and center vulnerability, healing, joy and community.
- System sees its role not only as providing education, but also as facilitating access to wrap-around services such as health care, mental health support, language and job training that is needed for families to thrive.
- System leaders partner with local government agencies and organizations to create a common set of objectives and measures to best serve the community.

RESOURCES

The Aspen Institute <https://www.aspeninstitute.org/wp-content/uploads/files/content/docs/rcc/RCC-Structural-Racism-Glossary.pdf>.

Benitez, M., Jr. (2010). Resituating culture centers within a social justice framework: Is there room for examining Whiteness? In L. D. Patton (Ed.), *Culture centers in higher education: Perspectives on identity, theory, and practice* (pp. 119-134). Sterling, VA: Stylus.

Benson, T. A., & Fiarman, S. E. (2020). *Unconscious bias in schools: A developmental approach to exploring race and racism*.

Fergus, E. (2016). *Solving Disproportionality and Achieving Equity: A Leader's Guide to Using Data to Change Hearts and Minds*. Corwin.

Hammond, Z. (2015). *Culturally Responsive Teaching and The Brain: Promoting Authentic Engagement and Rigor Among Culturally and Linguistically Diverse Students*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin Press.

Honig, M. & Rainey, L. (2020) *Supervising Principals for Instructional Leadership: A Teaching & Learning Approach*. MA: Harvard Education Press.

Kania, J., & Kramer, M. (2011) *Collective Impact*. Stamford Social Innovation Review.

Kendi, Ibram X. (2020). *How to be an Antiracist*. Vintage.

Ladson-Billings, Gloria. (2009). *The Dreamkeepers: Successful Teachers of African American Children* (2nd Edition). Hoboken, NJ: John Wiley & Sons.

Learned-Miller, C. (2017) How to support the social-emotional well-being of students of color. Research and best practices from inter-district integration programs. National Coalition on School Diversity. Research Brief, No. 11, July 2017. Retrieved at <http://files.constantcontact.com/fd62f02c001/65c1ca0b-ba96-425a-a2e0-ab9b91132373.pdf>.

Learned-Miller, C. (2016). "Cambridge Public Schools: Pioneers of Equitable Choice." The Century Foundation.

The Leadership Academy (2019). *Equity at Work*. <https://www.leadershipacademy.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/10/New-Equity-at-Work.pdf>

The Leadership Academy (2021). *Portrait of a Culturally Responsive School*.

<https://www.leadershipacademy.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/03/Portrait-of-a-Culturally-Responsive-School.pdf>

The Leadership Academy (2020). *Culturally Responsive Framework, Superintendent Actions*.

<https://www.leadershipacademy.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/09/Culturally-Responsive-Leadership-Actions-2020.pdf>

The Leadership Academy (2021). *Equity Leadership Dispositions*. <https://www.leadershipacademy.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/11/Rebrand-Version-Equity-Leadership-Dispositions.pdf>

Love, B. L. (2019). *We want to do more than survive: Abolitionist teaching and the pursuit of educational freedom*.

Lucas Education Research. <https://www.lucasedresearch.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/01/KIA-Research-Brief.pdf>.

Mapp, K. (2007). *Beyond the Bakesale*. The New Press.

Novak, K. & Rose, D. (2016) *UDL now! A teacher's guide to applying universal design for learning in today's classrooms*. Chicago: CAST Professional Publishing.

Racial Equity Tools, <https://www.racialequitytools.org/glossary>.

Radd, S., Generett, G., Gooden, M., & Theoharis, G. (2021). *Five Practices for Equity-Focused School Leadership*. ASCD.

Singleton, Glenn E. (2015). *Courageous Conversations About Race: A Field Guide for Achieving Equity in Schools* (Second Edition). Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin Press.

Tatum, Beverly Daniel. (2017). *Why Are All the Black Kids Sitting Together in the Cafeteria? And Other Conversations About Race* (Twentieth Anniversary Edition). New York, NY: Basic Book Group.