

Closing the Representation Gap

A Series of Papers on
Reshaping Educational
Leadership for the Future



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The face of education leadership is changing, but not fast enough. Consider Dr. Miguel Cardona, the top education leader in our country who was an English-language learner when he was in school. Today, there are approximately five million students in the US who identify as English-language learners, just like Dr. Cardona, who can look to him as an example of what is possible. That kind of representation—the ability to see yourself reflected in the leaders around you—is invaluable when 54 percent of all K-12 public school students identify as people of color.¹ By diversifying our teacher and school leader pipelines, we empower more students to realize their futures as the next generation of leaders for our society.

What is Equitable Representation?

Equitable representation within a school occurs when the principals, teachers, or other school-based leaders reflect the racial and cultural diversity of the local communities they serve. When students of color, who have historically been underestimated and underserved in our nation's schools, see themselves in the teachers and leaders at their school, they imagine bigger and bolder dreams for themselves.

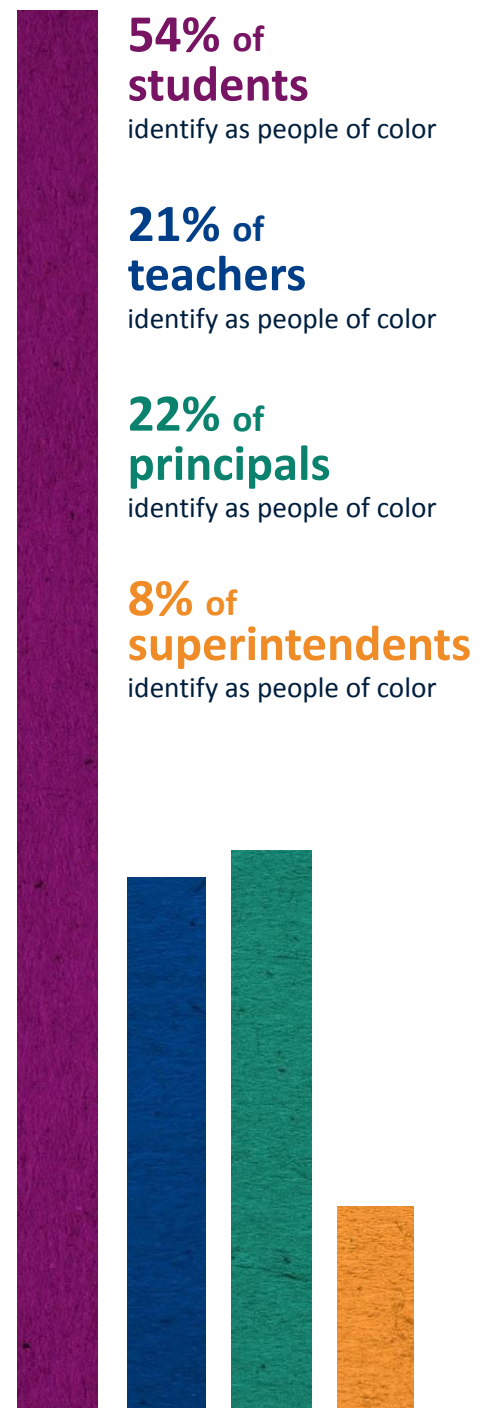
Yet, gaps in representation exist in school systems across the country. Forty percent of our nation's schools do not have any teachers of color. While the population of teachers in public schools in the US has grown slightly more diverse in recent decades, most teachers still identify as white.² This gap also extends into school and district leadership. In our nation's schools, where more than half of the student population identifies as students of color, only 22 percent of our nation's principals identify as leaders of color³: 11 percent African American, nine percent Latinx, two percent Asian American and other race/ethnicity. Eight percent of superintendents⁴ identify as leaders of color.

Why is Equitable Representation Important?

We know great principals are the cornerstone of great schools. When a school principal is a leader of color, research shows higher student achievement and better school outcomes, specifically for teachers and children of color.⁵ Teachers of color also have a powerful and lasting impact beyond their classrooms. A longitudinal study⁶ found that Black teachers in elementary schools increase the likelihood of Black students attending college and decrease the likelihood of Black students dropping out of high school, particularly among Black males. Yet, only two percent of teachers are Black males.⁷

When principals and teachers work together to cultivate a school culture that is free from bias and limitation, all students benefit. In these types of learning environments, students see leaders challenge stereotypes, replace inequitable systems, and foster respect, high expectations, and inclusivity. That kind of equity-focused leadership ensures all students thrive.

We know disparities within our K-12 education system limit access to resources, opportunities, and supports, resulting in lost potential in academic outcomes, high school and college graduation, and lifelong success. While representation does not fix these larger systemic challenges, it can fuel student success in classrooms and schools across our nation.



“ The scarcity of representative leadership in our schools is a national crisis that demands nothing less than our full attention and strongest commitment so that every student has a chance at success. ”

—Jean Desravines, CEO, New Leaders

Why Now?

In this era of the Great Resignation, when 42 percent of principals anticipate leaving their roles in the next three years and teachers of color are leaving the profession at higher rates than their white colleagues, we need to prioritize efforts that not only increase the diversity of teachers and school leaders, but invest in their development as well. Now is the time for us to rebuild strong pipelines and diversify educational leadership at every level.

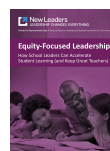
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At New Leaders, we believe education leaders, in partnership with the communities they serve, have an unparalleled impact on the academic success and well-being of their students. We are committed to building diverse leadership pipelines and preparing the next generation of equity-focused leaders who better reflect the students they serve.

Each of the papers in this series identifies how we can begin to close the representation gap at every level: from teachers of color taking on more leadership responsibility to district leaders building diverse pipelines and investing in job-embedded leadership development for aspiring principals.



Lead From the Seat You're In
How Teachers of Color Can Step Into Leadership



Equity-Focused Leadership
How School Leaders Can Accelerate Student Learning (and Keep Great Teachers)



Invest in Leadership
Five Actions District Leaders Can Take to Increase School Leader Diversity

About New Leaders

New Leaders builds the capacity of equity-minded school leaders who are committed to the success of every child. Our leaders remove barriers to success for underestimated and underserved students, supporting students in fully realizing their futures as the next generation of great thinkers, innovators, and leaders for our society.

In 20 years, we have trained more than 8,000 equity-focused leaders—sixty percent of whom identify as leaders of color. Our leaders impact more than 2 million students in our K-12 school system annually and serve as powerful and positive forces for change in their communities.

Our thanks and appreciation to the Barr Foundation, Clark Atlanta University, Morehouse College, and Spelman College with whom we are collaborating on school leader diversity research that will be released in fall 2022. That research inspired this series of papers which include quotes from alumni across these institutions.

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