

Culturally Responsive Leadership in Schools

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School leadership plays a critical role in retaining teachers of color and the academic success of students of color. As stated in [our previous brief](#), “one cannot successfully lead in a school without being culturally competent and rooting one’s self in cultural responsiveness for students and teachers.” [One study highlights](#) how important it is to apply a broad view of the leadership of a school, including teachers as leaders who can help shape a culturally responsive school culture that benefits students and contributes to retaining a racially diverse teacher workforce.

In this resource, we aim to explore what culturally responsive leadership should look like in Delaware and provide leaders in schools with a resource to support them in aligning their practice with that vision.

Culturally Responsive Leadership in Schools

Culturally responsive education is a product of [decades of research](#) demonstrating the importance and benefit of viewing cultural differences and lived experiences through an asset-based lens in education. This work stems from Gloria Ladson-Billings, who created [a framework for culturally relevant pedagogy](#) in education. Many researchers have built on the work of Ladson-Billings, including Geneva Gay, who coined the term [culturally responsive teaching](#) to describe the use of students’ “cultural characteristics, experiences, and perspectives” for more effective teaching.

With the abundance of research on this topic, there are many definitions of culturally responsive education, but at the core, it is about creating and maintaining school communities that affirm the cultural identities of those who are a part of it. School communities must view a student's or educator's culture from an asset lens and [leverage customs, characteristics, experiences, and perspectives](#) as tools for a better, inclusive learning environment.

The [Delaware Department of Education defines “culturally responsive”](#) as *“intentionally acknowledging and valuing the diversity, contributions, and experiences of every educator and learner by providing opportunities for individuals to see themselves and others in their learning, leading to academic achievement, cultural competence, and socio-political consciousness.”*

Culturally responsive education is widely discussed in the context of a classroom, but cultural responsiveness is an essential component of school leadership roles; it is not an add-on or separate practice. Our students and educators deserve leaders in their buildings who view cultural identities as assets and are willing to combat systems of inequity and oppression. Leaders must ensure that all staff actively and intentionally create culturally responsive learning environments. This applies to all school leaders, not just those in “traditional” leadership roles.

Example Attributes of Culturally Responsive Leaders in Schools

There are attributes of culturally responsive leaders in schools that apply to all leaders regardless of different roles and responsibilities. For example, this competency from [The Leadership Academy](#) applies to both instructional leaders and school principals: *Actively seeks to learn how privilege, power, and oppression operate historically and currently to create and sustain inequity*. Regardless of responsibilities or titles, cultural responsiveness is critical to leadership at every level in a school community.

To understand the attributes of culturally responsive leaders, **regardless of title**, we examined national research, leadership standards, and frameworks. Considering the variety of roles that take on leadership responsibilities in schools, we narrowed our findings to the following attributes of culturally responsive leaders.

Key attributes include:

- Actively seek to learn how privilege, power, and oppression operate historically and currently on personal and systems levels that create and sustain inequity. (Adapted from [The Leadership Academy](#) and [New America](#))
- Confront and alter institutional biases of marginalization, deficit-based schooling, and low expectations associated with race, class, culture and language, gender and sexual orientation, and disability or special status. ([NPBEA](#))
- Recognize, respect, and employ each student's strengths, diversity, and culture as assets for teaching and learning. ([NPBEA](#)) Leaders should also recognize and respect each colleague's strengths, diversity, and culture from an asset-based lens.
- Practice vulnerability and continuously engage in critical self-reflective practices in their own life and as a school leader, and support other educators and school staff to do the same. (Adapted from [The Center for Black Educator Development & Teach Plus](#) and [New America](#))
- Use the community as an informative space from which to develop a positive understanding of the communities and culture of your students, families, and colleagues. (Adapted from [New America](#) and [Khalifa, Gooden, Davis, Gardiner & Enomoto](#))

These are not the only attributes of culturally responsive leaders. For example, not included above are role-specific attributes of specific leadership roles. To view more attributes or learn more about role-specific culturally responsive competencies specific to leadership roles, view the resources below.

What follows is a series of questions aligned to these attributes for school leaders, regardless of title, to reflect upon. It is a resource to be used by leaders as they build inclusive, culturally responsive school cultures and communities in Delaware.

Self-Reflection, Bias, and Leadership Roles

Below are questions to help leaders reflect on the intersection of their role, actions, and experiences through a culturally responsive lens.

Related Attributes		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Actively seek to learn how privilege, power, and oppression operate historically and currently to create and sustain inequity (The Leadership Academy). ● Practice vulnerability and continuously engage in critical self-reflective practices as a school leader and support other educators and school staff to do the same (Adapted from The Center for Black Educator Development & Teach Plus). 		
Reflection Question	Reflection	Evidence
How do my personal experiences impact my approach to equity in my role? Do I actively seek to understand the impact of my biases?		
How do I recognize, be conscious of, and respond to my uncomfortableness, resistance, and emotions that might arise as I continue to examine and increase awareness of my own biases and stereotypes? (Pennsylvania Culturally Relevant and Sustaining Education Competencies)		
What specific actions will I take to increase my ability to identify, deepen my understanding of, and address bias (my own and at the interpersonal and institutional levels of the system)? What resources can I find and utilize to help me accomplish these goals (who might I enlist as an accountability partner)? (Adapted from Pennsylvania Culturally Relevant and Sustaining Education Competencies)		

Building Capacity and Culturally Responsive Systems

Below are questions to help leaders reflect on the intersection of their role, actions, and experiences through a culturally responsive lens.

Related Attributes		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Actively seeks to learn how privilege, power, and oppression operate historically and currently to create and sustain inequity. (The Leadership Academy) Practice vulnerability and continuously engage in critical self-reflective practices as a school leader and support other educators and school staff to do the same. (Adapted from The Center for Black Educator Development & Teach Plus) 		
Reflection Question	Reflection	Evidence
How can I help others (e.g., leaders, staff, educators, counselors) in schools to be culturally responsive? (Adapted from New Leaders)		
Am I building capacity from others within the school or district to become equity-focused? (New Leaders)		
Have I created the systems, processes, and structures in my role to support my team and those I lead to build a more equitable and culturally responsive school culture? (Adapted from New Leaders)		

Centering Voices of Students, Families, Educators, and Community

Below are questions to help leaders reflect on the intersection of their role, actions, and experiences through a culturally responsive lens.

Related Attributes		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Recognize, respect, and employ each student's strengths, diversity, and culture as assets for teaching and learning (NPBEA). Additionally, leaders should recognize and respect each colleague's strengths, diversity, and culture from an asset-based lens. Uses the community as an informative space from which to develop a positive understanding of students and families (Khalifa, Gooden, Davis, Gardiner & Enomoto). 		
Reflection Question	Reflection	Evidence
Am I centering the voices of those I lead in the work I do? How do I do this on a daily basis?		
Have I created multiple ways for the voices of those I lead to engage and/or provide feedback, and do I intentionally incorporate that feedback into decision-making?		

Reflecting on Data, Solutions, and Bias

Below are questions to help leaders reflect on the intersection of their role, actions, and experiences through a culturally responsive lens.

Related Attributes		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Actively seeks to learn how privilege, power, and oppression operate historically and currently to create and sustain inequity (The Leadership Academy). Confront and alter institutional biases of student marginalization, deficit-based schooling, and low expectations associated with race, class, culture and language, gender and sexual orientation, and disability or special status (NPBEA). 		
Reflection Question	Reflection	Evidence
How often am I engaging in data analysis, drilling down to root causes, assessing gaps and disparities, and implementing evidence-based, human-centered interventions with fidelity? (Dr. Monique Martin)		
What are the inherited gaps versus those created? What am I doing to create gaps and disparities? What am I doing to disrupt inequities and eliminate gaps and disparities? How am I supporting those I lead to do the same? (Dr. Monique Martin)		

High-Level Reflection

Below are questions to help leaders reflect on the intersection of their role, actions, and experiences through a culturally responsive lens.

Reflection Question	Reflection	Evidence
What do these attributes look like in my day-to-day role?		
What evidence do I see of these attributes in my role? Am I taking action in my leadership role to practice/exhibit these attributes?		
Which attributes have emerged as strengths? How might I leverage those to support areas of development?		
What attribute do I need to develop? What are my short- and long-term goals for developing that attribute? What resources will I need to accomplish these goals? (Adapted from New America)		

Additional Resources

- [But That's Just Good Teaching! The Case for Culturally Relevant Pedagogy](#)
- [Strengthening Your Equity-Focused Leadership: 6 Questions for Self-Reflection](#)
- [Equity-focused Leadership: What Does it Look Like in Action?](#)
- [Making Culturally Affirming Schools a Priority: Lessons from Teachers of Color](#)
- [Culturally Centered Education: A Primer](#)
- [Delaware Department of Education Culturally Responsive Education Tools](#)
- [Culturally Responsive Education Resources for Federal, State, and Local Stakeholders](#)
- [Culturally Responsive Leadership Framework](#)
- [Culturally Responsive Leadership: A Framework for School & School System Leaders](#)
- [New York State Culturally Responsive-Sustaining Education Framework](#)
- [Culturally Sustaining Schools: Recommendations from Teach Plus Colorado](#)
- [The Pennsylvania Culturally Relevant and Sustaining Education Competencies](#)
- [Respecting Educator-Activists of Color: The Anti-Racist Guide to Teacher Retention](#)
- [Culturally Responsive Teaching: A Reflection Guide](#)
- [Equity-Focused Leadership: How School Leaders Can Accelerate Student Learning \(and Keep Great Teachers\)](#)

Acknowledgements:

- **Working Group Members: Chantalle Ashford, Tameka Wingo, Melodie Miller, Melissa Morris, and Ashley Lockwood.**

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