

Defining Leadership Roles and Retaining Teachers of Color

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School leadership plays an important role in the retention of teachers of color. In Delaware, teachers of color cite leadership as the most common major or moderate factor in their decision to leave their school or the classroom entirely. According to a Delaware Department of Education survey, school leadership is the largest reason teachers of color leave the profession followed by district leadership and/or policies, and teacher leadership and/or teacher involvement in decision-making.

This survey is just one example of the research that points to the theme of leadership's impact on retaining educators of color. This led us to question: What can we do to unpack and influence the impact of leadership on the retention of teachers of color in Delaware?

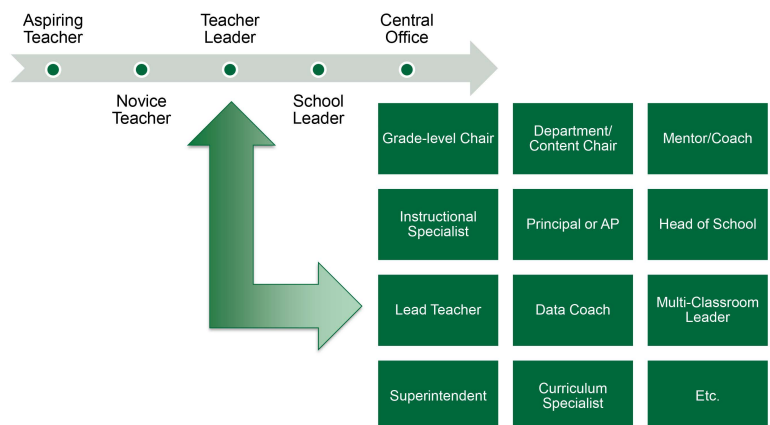
As we began our learning process, unpacking leadership's impact on retaining teachers of color in Delaware led us to discuss culturally responsiveness and leadership in schools. However, cultural responsiveness and school leadership go hand in hand. One cannot successfully lead in a school without being culturally competent and rooting one's self in cultural responsiveness for students and teachers.

Leading with cultural responsiveness is the responsibility of all leadership roles in schools, not just those typically thought of at the top. In order to understand the impact that leadership roles have on affirming, supporting, and retaining teachers of color and to create an eventual call to action around culturally responsive leadership, we must examine all leadership roles in schools and the attributes of school leaders, regardless of their title.

Before we dig into cultural responsiveness and leadership, we inquire: *How can we think differently about defining what constitutes leadership roles in schools? And what attributes should these leaders have, regardless of title, that empowers them to lead with cultural responsiveness?*

Leadership Roles in Schools

Leadership in schools is often thought of in a linear way, with traditional roles such as principal and superintendent coming to mind. But leadership in schools is often more complex than just the interdisciplinary roles traditionally recognized.



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Therefore, we've defined school leadership to be more inclusive of all leadership roles in a school or district building. School leadership is the broad umbrella of roles and responsibilities within a school building where equity and culturally aware individuals lead and guide students, families, teachers, and other school-based staff toward improving educational outcomes.

It is important to think more inclusively about the roles we define as leadership in schools to understand the impact **any** and all leadership roles can have on creating inclusive, affirming, and supportive place for teachers of color to thrive. Additionally, defining leadership roles more inclusively helps to:

- Connect and prioritize culturally responsive practices in all leadership positions, not just ones at the top of the decision-making chart.
- Lift up teacher roles that have either been historically included or in some cases, excluded from leadership.
- Eventually, understand the landscape to build better pathways to leadership roles for teachers of color.

Defining Leadership Roles

To help build our understanding of what it could look like to better define leadership in schools, our working group reviewed relevant research and reflected on our own experiences serving in schools. Through our discussions and research, we identified four primary areas of leadership opportunities within schools: 1) Instructional Leadership, 2) Climate and Culture Leadership, 3) Intersecting Leadership, and 4) Student Support Leadership. We want to note that many teachers of color carry on these responsibilities without recognition in their buildings. We should also note that recognizing and opening these positions is not enough. Equity-centered, culturally responsive, building-level leadership at the principal and assistant principal level is key to ensuring new roles are supported appropriately.

Leadership Area	Role Examples
Instructional Leadership <i>Leader possesses and uses skills and knowledge to effectively coach adults to ensure educational equity for all students, and works with teachers in constructive coaching by employing anti-racist mindsets to ensure all students have access to effective and responsive instructional practices.</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none">● Curriculum Lead/Specialist● Instructional Coach● Grade Level Chair● Department Chair● Content Lead● Content Specialists● Data Coach● Multi-classroom leader
Climate and Community Leadership <i>Leader is focused on building strong, culturally responsive beliefs, practices, patterns, and behaviors that build toward a collective effort to</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none">● Dean of Students● Equity Champion/Lead● Director of School Climate● Director of Family Engagement

<p><i>create a community where all students, families, teachers, and staff feel welcomed and belong.</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Parent Information Officers ● Community Services/Partnerships Manager
<p>Intersecting Leadership <i>Leader brings an equity-centered, culturally responsive lens that places the needs of students at the forefront of all decisions as they work to build a cohesive vision and strategy for success within the school.</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Principal ● Assistant Principal ● Superintendent ● Head of School ● Assistant Superintendent ● District Office Personnel, such as directors of: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Human Resources ○ Finance ○ Diversity, Equity, Inclusion ○ Operations ○ Communications
<p>Student Support Leadership <i>Leader works to ensure equitable access to services that support the whole student while ensuring regular, inclusive communication with students, families, and colleagues within the building.</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Director of Student Support ● Director of Student Services ● Mentor (for student or teachers) ● Lead Counselor ● Lead Psychologist ● SEL Coordinator ● Director/Coordinator of EL services ● Director of Special Education

Notes: (1) Some of these roles can be at the school and district level. (2) Some roles may be more commonly found at a traditional district or a charter school. (3) These are example roles found in schools and may not be the exact title of a person in the role. (4) Therefore, there may be variation in titles when looking from school to school. (5) This list is not all encompassing. There may be roles outside of this list that can be considered leadership roles in schools.

Defining Attributes of Leadership in Schools

As we note above, defining leadership in a more inclusive way not only means an expanded list of leadership roles, but specifying the attributes and characteristics of leadership in schools holistically. Leadership roles serve as the building blocks in creating a culturally responsive and inclusive environment for all teachers, but specifically teachers of color. Collectively, we have seen some examples of the above roles in our buildings and know that they are only successful when held by individuals who know and understand the students they serve, have the confidence and respect of their peers, and build trust with building leadership. Below, we begin to lay out the competencies that must be tied to any leadership role within schools. As with other parts of this brief, we have identified these competencies via combining relevant research with our own experiences.

The competencies below are intentionally broad and role-agnostic. Given that the responsibilities for leadership roles in schools differ, it is important to think about the following attributes and practices as critical to the success of a leader in any role in a school.

- Builds trust among their peers, students, families, and/or school community
- Builds on the assets of those they work with and support
- Engages in self-reflection of practices and behaviors
- Centers equity in practice, beliefs, and actions of those they work with and support
- Maintains connection to the classroom and students
- Centers the success of the whole child in leadership decisions and practices
- Practices vulnerability and creates space for those they lead to be vulnerable as needed
- Continues to seek feedback from peers, students, families, and/or school community to improve leadership and remain committed to the needs of those they lead

Items to Consider

This brief was developed and written thinking strictly about leadership roles in schools to inform future conversations on culturally responsive leadership and the retention of educators of color. However, we recognize this brief can help inform a multitude of other conversations happening in the state around topics like teacher leadership, compensation, and others. We encourage and welcome conversations where teachers can inform and influence decisions being made in this space.

With that in mind, here is the initial thinking from the working group on how this work could inform other conversations and potentially impact areas of progress we know are happening in the state. We recognize that there are numerous details that need to be addressed and these considerations should not be taken as comprehensive recommendations.

1. *Formalize more leadership roles within school buildings.* We know that teachers are often asked to take on more roles in their schools, many times without additional compensation. This is particularly true for teachers of color who often get asked to take on additional responsibilities, serve on committees, or be default leaders without additional pay, compensation, or recognition. By formalizing these roles as leadership roles in school buildings, it honors and respects the expertise and time teachers devote to these additional responsibilities. It also can uplift and empower teachers who are looking for opportunities to lead without leaving their classroom.
2. *Rethink teacher, teacher leader, and school leader compensation.* Critical to honoring and respecting the expertise, commitment, and humanity of teachers and leaders in schools is to address compensation issues. We acknowledge the existence of a compensation committee that is currently evaluating and engaging in discussion on this topic. We believe that this committee should consider how to appropriately and respectfully compensate the varied leadership roles in the school building that we outline above, with specific attention toward teacher leadership roles, while balancing local-

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control needs of Delaware school districts. When we begin to address and create ways for fair and appropriate compensation for varied leadership roles in schools, then we begin to honor the expertise of all those that serve students each day.

3. *Leadership, comprehensive induction, and teacher preparation initiatives.* We encourage the Delaware Department of Education to continue exploring innovative ways to streamline and align key initiatives related to the recruitment, training, and retention of teachers of color. We applaud the work already underway to update the state's comprehensive induction program and encourage the department to continue looking for ways to formalize and compensate teacher leaders in that program.

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Resources

- [Culturally Responsive School Leadership Institute \(n.d.\). Administrative Power in Schools: The Need for Culturally Responsive School Leadership.](#)
- [Culturally Responsive School Leadership Institute \(n.d.\). The Culturally Responsive School Leadership Framework.](#)
- [Khalifa, M., Gooden, M.A., & Davis, J.E. \(n.d.\). Culturally Responsive School Leadership Framework. University of Minnesota.](#)
- [The Leadership Academy \(2020\). Culturally Responsive Leadership: A Framework for School & School System Leaders.](#)
- [National Policy Board for Educational Administration \(2015\). Professional Standards for Educational Leaders 2015. Reston, VA: Author](#)
- [Public Impact. \(2014\). Teacher-led professional learning: To reach every student with excellent teachers — Defining teacher-leader roles. Chapel Hill, NC: Author.](#)
- [Teach Plus and the Center for Black Educator Development \(2021\). To Be Who We Are: Black Teachers on Creating Affirming School Cultures.](#)