PORTRAIT OF A SCHOOL SYSTEM:

A Culturally and Linguistically Responsive Guide

THE LEADERSHIP ACADEMY

PURPOSE

When The Leadership Academy released the first edition of this guide in 2021, school systems were entering the third school year in a far-reaching global pandemic — a pandemic that ultimately exposed and exacerbated the longstanding inequities in student access to challenging, engaging, and supportive learning experiences. Today, American education remains at a critical moment of urgency and opportunity. The student population is becoming more diverse and multilingual, artificial intelligence is expanding, supporting mental health is critical, and literacy remains fundamental to the core of PK-12 education. Innovation and transformation in this environment are essential to ensure that every student of every race, ethnicity, language, ability, income level, and other identity characteristics has access to inclusive, rigorous, and relevant learning experiences.

Portrait of a School System: A Culturally and Linguistically Responsive Guide leverages this momentum to support school system leaders and their teams in creating schools by, with, and for their students, and it offers a roadmap for intentionally building school systems that ensure every child has what they need to achieve academic, social, and emotional success. Like our corresponding culturally and linguistically responsive guides that paint a Portrait of a Classroom and Portrait of a School, this depiction of a school system offers a broadened definition and updated expectations of school, encouraging system leaders to push beyond physical walls, traditional seat time, school zones, and standardized exams.

This guide is grounded in The Leadership Academy's eight critical actions of a culturally responsive leader and the corresponding practices of a culturally responsive school. These evidence-based actions and practices are rooted in academic excellence and in our more than two decades of experience preparing, coaching, and supporting leaders across the country. They have also been found to create conditions for learning and success for all students, especially those who have been minoritized.

Considerations For Using This Guide

This guide is written for school system leaders and their teams, for use at any point in their system's journey to becoming more culturally and linguistically responsive. Consider 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 the importance of working from the reflection questions posed.

Understanding Culturally & Linguistically Responsive Practice

The use of this term throughout the guide is specific and deliberate, and it is imperative to ensure that you and your team have a shared understanding of what it means before you begin to look for the actions and corresponding practices. Culturally and linguistically responsive practice requires that education leaders understand and simultaneously attend to four focus areas:

The academic success of all students. 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 (HQIM) aligned to standards. Leaders hold, model, and communicate consistently high and transparent expectations for all learners. They also develop the capacity of the system and the educators within it to know where each student is in relation to those high expectations and use that knowledge to provide appropriate learning supports.

Cultivating and deepening the cultural competence of themselves and the adults they lead. 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. They 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 professional practice.

Helping students develop a critical consciousness. Leaders cultivate and support students' ability to question and critique social norms, values, practices, and systems that produce and maintain inequity, and challenge the status quo of the social order. (Ladson-Billings, 2009) (Ladson-Billings, 1995) They facilitate adult and student talk about culture and identity and consistently look for and utilize opportunities to generate inquiry about inequity and change. (Ladson-Billings, 2009) They help students to not simply be aware of painful truths but to turn awareness into power. (Brann, personal communication, competencycollaborative.org/crse) This is also referred to as "socio-political consciousness."

Supporting the learning, development, and engagement of students from diverse linguistic backgrounds. They understand language, assess the language needs of multilingual learners, and support learners in gaining language proficiency through scaffolding. (Lucas & Villegas, 2011) Linguistic responsiveness includes support for the continued development of children's home or tribal languages by authentically incorporating children's languages into the learning environment. Furthermore, linguistically responsive practices facilitate English acquisition and prepare students for the global economy. (U.S. Department of Health & Human Services, Head Start, n.d.)

Glossary of Key Terms Used in this Guide

Ability: Existing competence or skill to perform a specific physical or mental act. Although ability may be either innate or developed through experience, it is distinct from capacity to acquire competence. (American Psychological Association, 2023) Ableism is a set of beliefs or practices that devalue and discriminate against individuals with physical, mental, developmental, and/or learning disabilities that are characterized by the belief that these individuals are broken and need to be fixed, (Smith, n.d.), while anti-ableism includes the strategies, theories, actions, and practices that identify ableism, challenge ableism, and actively counter ableism to promote full inclusion and participation in society. (Simmons University Library, n.d.)

Dominant culture: 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. Dominant culture is an artificial, historically constructed culture which expresses, justifies, and binds together the United States white supremacy system. It is the glue that binds together white-controlled institutions into systems and white-controlled systems into the global white supremacy system. (Martinas, n.d.)

Equity: Every school and school system is intentionally built to ensure children of every race, ethnicity, language, and other identity characteristics have what they need to achieve academic, social, and emotional success. (The Leadership Academy)

High-Quality Instructional Materials (HQIM): Coherent, user-friendly, curricular materials that allow students to engage with high-cognitive demanding standards and that lead to college and career readiness. These materials reflect pedagogical approaches and effective instruction grounded in evidence-based research. (Doan et al, 2022)

Implicit Bias: 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. (American Psychological Association, n.d.)

Intersectionality: The complex, cumulative way in which the effects of multiple forms of discrimination combine, overlap, or intersect — especially in the experiences of minoritized individuals or groups — to produce and sustain complex inequities. (Crenshaw, 1989)

Neurodiversity: The unique variety of ways the brain works in which no two can ever be exactly alike due to the influence of environmental factors. The term neurodiversity frames students' unique learning experience as different, not deficient. (Singer, 1998)

Learning environment: The conditions and surroundings in which learning takes place, including both remote and in-person learning. (Isba & Walsh, 2013)

Minoritized: This term is used throughout the guide to emphasize what the school systems and other systems within the United States have overtly and covertly done to Black, Indigenous, and students of color, who have been told that they are not good enough, smart enough, or important enough to receive a high-quality education. The use of the term minoritized is to recognize the need to pay particular attention to the experiences of these students in all that a leader does, including: developing and maintaining policies and structures; data analysis; selection of staff, curriculum, and materials; and all other aspects of the school system. (Gunaratnam, 2003)

Multilingual Learners: An expansive term that encapsulates the varied linguistic backgrounds, abilities, learning stages, and experiences of students in the education system. It includes recognition that students are developing multiple languages and that students' proficiency in a language may vary across language dimensions (listening, speaking, reading, and writing). (Yankelowitz, 2023)

Science of Reading: A body of research from the fields of education, cognitive psychology, developmental psychology, and neuroscience that explains both how individuals learn how to read and best practices for reading instruction. (Gentry & Ouellette, 2019) When considering proficient reading, consider Dr. Hollis Scarborough's Reading Rope, which provides a clear illustration of the multiple strands of proficient reading and consists of lower and upper strands.

(Really Great Reading, n.d.) The word-recognition strands (phonological awareness, decoding, and sight recognition of familiar words) work together as the reader becomes accurate, fluent, and increasingly automatic with repetition and practice. (Scarborough, 2001) Concurrently, the language-comprehension strands (background knowledge, vocabulary, language structures, verbal reasoning, and literacy knowledge) reinforce one another and then weave together with the word-recognition strands to produce a skilled reader. (Gough & Tunmer, 1986)

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. (Aspen Institute, 2016)

Portrait of a Culturally and Linguistically Responsive School System

A culturally and linguistically responsive school system is one that 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 and linguistically responsive environment is encouraged to reflect on the world in which they live and to challenge inequitable structures in ways that will help bring about change.

- In using this guide, reflect on each of the eight listed action areas. Contemplate the listed guiding questions as you think about the cultural and linguistic responsiveness of your school system.

- Then, together with your team, generate corresponding look-fors that will help you engage in analysis, conversation, and action. If you are having difficulty generating look-fors, consider the list of suggested possible look-fors on page 19 as a starting point.

  - It is important to note that the list of possible look-fors is not exhaustive, nor should it supersede any look-fors you and your team generate on your own within the context of your learning community. Instead, it may be helpful in identifying the specific questions and refining the look-fors that may be relevant in the context of your own school system.

Action Area 1: Lead for Equity and Access

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

REFLECTION QUESTIONS	CORRESPONDING LOOK-FORS
1. How do we ensure all teaching and learning is grounded in a belief system of high expectations of all students recognizing their individualized skills and assets?	
2. How do we solicit and use student, family, and community voices in decision-making about system policies and practices?	
3. How do we ensure that the system, in partnership with the greater community, has identified and dismantled norms of dominant culture to create an inclusive environment that cultivates an authentic collaboration with all members of the community?	
4. How do we ensure the system supports families in finding needed services?	
5. How do we ensure all educators, including support and administrative staff, are deepening their understanding with the varied demographic groups in the system, the neighborhoods students live in, and the cultural and linguistic traditions each possesses?	
6. How do we hold all educators and administrative staff members accountable to take responsibility for helping manage social-emotional stress from stereotype threat and microaggressions for students, families, and adults?	

Action Area 2: Align Mission, Vision, and Core Values

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

REFLECTION QUESTIONS	CORRESPONDING LOOK-FORS
1. How was our mission, vision, and core values created, updated, and communicated in collaboration with families, students, staff, and other members of the community?	
2. In what ways has our system's mission, vision, and values been systematized to create the conditions and actions to ensure equitable access to, and achievement of, rigorous college- and career-ready academic standards for all students?	
3. What 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?	
4. How are we re-imagining ourselves as a culturally and linguistically responsive system that transcends the traditional norms of "schooling?"	
5. How are all adults supported in working toward the system's vision of being creators of a culturally and linguistically responsive system?	

Action Area 3: Focus on Instruction

Culturally and linguistically responsive school systems have support systems, structures, and routines that prioritize and focus the coherence of culturally and linguistically responsive curriculum, and instructional practices and assessments to support all students in accessing and achieving college- and career-ready academic standards.

REFLECTION QUESTIONS	CORRESPONDING LOOK-FORS
1. How have we engaged a committee that is representative of the student population to review and revise our instructional frameworks to represent culturally and linguistically responsive pedagogy, and do we have a process for doing this in an ongoing, collaborative way?	
2. How are we using, adapting, and scaling high quality curriculum to ensure instructional practices support implementation and equitable participation in the classroom for all students, and more specifically for our school's minoritized students?	
3. How do our formative/benchmark assessment practices provide students with multiple ways to demonstrate student strengths, areas for growth, and mastery of the standards?	
4. In what ways do our grading practices or indicators of success drive planning at a unit and lesson level and approach this planning from an asset-based mindset?	
5. How do our annual goals and targets reflect a commitment to narrowing specific opportunity gaps for minoritized students and increase achievement for all students?	

Action Area 4: Facilitate Adult Learning and Development

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

REFLECTION QUESTIONS	CORRESPONDING LOOK-FORS
1. How is the school system's comprehensive professional development plan for all teachers, coaches, and leaders building their capacity in culturally and linguistically responsive practices across the system?	
2. How is curriculum-based professional learning utilized for teachers to skillfully implement instructional materials to meet the needs of students?	
3. In what ways do teachers, administrators, and support staff receive ongoing, job-embedded professional learning and support to implement evidence-based practices (e.g., Science of Reading, culturally responsive and linguistically responsive practices, etc.)?	
4. How do our performance evaluation frameworks include the core elements of equitable and culturally and linguistically responsive practices?	

Action Area 5: Manage Operations and Resources

Culturally and linguistically 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	CORRESPONDING LOOK-FORS
1. How are we using processes and frameworks to support equity-based resource allocation across the system? Are we keeping students and families who will be most affected in mind? (e.g., school time, master schedule, program processes, etc.)	
2. How are cross-functional committees established to include members 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?	
3. In what ways is the process to hire and make teaching and leadership assignments based on the needs of students?	
4. How does the composition of system staff represent the racial/ethnic/gender/language/ability composition of the student body and larger school community? Are staff distributed equitably across the various job classifications? What processes are in place to support goals of representation and distribution?	
5. How has our leadership team and Board worked together to create policies that ensure access to enrichment and exceptional schooling experiences for all students?	

Action Area 6: Engage in Personal Learning and Development

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

REFLECTION QUESTIONS	CORRESPONDING LOOK-FORS
1. How do staff reflect on their own self-work in personal identity development and the understanding of their personal beliefs, assumptions, biases, and behaviors?	
2. What efforts are made to ensure that all staff members understand that student learning drives the system, and that every action is dedicated to providing opportunities, access, and support for all students to meet rigorous college- and career-ready standards?	
3. How do system leaders foster an environment conducive to regular courageous conversations around equity, which includes enhancing staff capacity to learn and apply language and behaviors that are sensitive to differences across lines of race, ethnicity, language, class, religion, ability, gender identity and expression, sexual orientation, and other aspects of identity?	
4. How do all staff members actively engage in understanding and developing competency in equitable and antiracist leadership practices?	

Action Area 7: Strategize Change and Continuous Improvement

Culturally and linguistically 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	CORRESPONDING LOOK-FORS
1. In what ways do leadership and leadership teams navigate resistors and demonstrate empathy for diverse perspectives without personalizing resistance?	
2. What story does our typical data analysis tell and are we considering both achievement data and factors like discipline records and enrollment in advanced coursework to comprehensively understand students' learning experiences?	
3. What process(es) is/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?	
4. How do we learn from new and rapidly evolving challenges? 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?	
5. How are leadership members informed of the current political climate and managing change in the community, and how do they strategically collaborate with partners in consideration of that climate to support all students?	

Action Area 8: Cultivate Community Care and Engagement

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

REFLECTION QUESTIONS	CORRESPONDING LOOK-FORS
1. In what ways do leadership and leadership teams seek and utilize the expertise and resources of community groups that represent and serve students and their families as key collaborators in improving the school experience for all students?	
2. How do our school buildings represent the language diversity of our students and families to create an accessible and welcoming environment?	
3. How do we build relationships and equip families with the resources to be partners in supporting student learning?	
4. How do we center culturally and linguistically responsive social-emotional learning and support mental health within our school system?	
5. How do system leaders build trust with family members through ongoing, positive, and varied communication, and expect school leaders and teachers to do the same?	
6. How do system 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?	

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Acknowledgements

Possible Look-Fors to Consider When Reflecting on the Cultural and Linguistic Responsiveness of a System

As noted earlier in this guide, you are encouraged to develop your own look-fors to correspond with the reflection questions. However, if you and your team are having trouble doing so, below are some options you may wish to consider as you think through the questions. It is also important to keep in mind that these possible look-fors should not supersede the look-fors you and your team generate on your own.

» Action Area 1: Lead for Equity and Access - Guiding Questions and Corresponding Possible Look-Fors

1. **How do we ensure all teaching and learning is grounded in a belief system of high expectations of all students recognizing their individualized skills and assets?**

   - The system, grounded in high expectations for all, ensures access to high-quality pedagogy, instructional materials, and learning experiences for every single student, recognizing their individualized skills and assets. (Hammond, 2014)

2. **How do we solicit and use student, family, and community voices in decision-making about system policies and practices?**

   - A variety of community members (students, staff, families, and community partners) are central to revising, adding, or changing system policies and rules. (Bryk & Schneider, 2002; Mapp & Kuttner, 2013)

   - Students, families, and staff are surveyed regularly to gauge how connected, respected, and embraced they feel at school. School and system leaders reflect on the results with staff and create an action plan to address concerns. The effectiveness and impact of actions are monitored, and plans are revised as needed and shared publicly. (Bryk, et al., 2015)

3. **How do we ensure that the system, in partnership with the greater community, has identified and dismantled norms of dominant culture to create an inclusive environment that cultivates an authentic collaboration with all members of the community?**

   - All governing bodies (school board, parent advisory councils, etc.) are representative of the student demographics. (Bryk et al., 2015)

   - Leadership monitors, publicly reports, and acts upon the presence of bias and disproportionality within school systems and practices related to identification for gifted and talented, special education, English learners, enrichment and other programming. (Fergus, 2016)

   - The system dismantles structural and systemic inequities through the determination of root causes, the creation of improvement plans to address the inequities, and monitors progress toward addressing the inequities. (i.e., language support, transportation access, exam-based school admissions). (Bryk et al., 2015; Fergus, 2016; Sarif & Dugan, 2021)

4. **How do we ensure the system supports families in finding needed services?**

   - The system has staff dedicated to understanding the needs of families by building trusting and caring relationships between families and schools. (Turnbull et al., 2015)

   - The system has established resource centers within schools to provide information and support related to continuing education, employment, housing, family counseling, technology, translation, and interpretation, etc. (Christenson & Sheridan, 2001)

   - The school system actively collaborates with community organizations and agencies to establish a network for service referrals. This includes regular coordination with local nonprofits, health providers, and social service agencies to ensure families have access to a wide range of services, from healthcare to counseling. (Mapp & Kutner, 2013)

Action Area 1: Lead for Equity and Access - Guiding Questions and Corresponding Possible Look-Fors *cont.*

- The system works with the community to design and organize regular sessions on topics relevant to families' needs that help them understand how to access community services, digital literacy, language services, and mental health resources. (Epstein, et al., 2018)

5. **How do we ensure all educators, including support and administrative staff, are deepening their understanding with the varied demographic groups in the system, the neighborhoods students live in, and the cultural and linguistic traditions each possesses?**

- Teachers and administrators conduct empathy interviews, asset mapping, home visits (when appropriate and not intrusive), coordinating with families to bring cultural traditions into school activities so that they become more familiar with the cultural diversity, educational experiences and perspectives on schooling of their students and families. (Ambroso et al., 2021)

- The system uses surveys, town hall meetings, and other forums to understand families' experiences with the education system, both past and present, and to learn about their hopes and dreams for their children. (Ambroso, et al., 2021)

6. **How do we hold all educators and administrative staff members accountable to take responsibility for helping manage social-emotional stress from stereotype threat and microaggressions for students, families, and adults?**

- The system has clear policies and procedures regarding microaggressions along with other forms of discrimination. (Sue, 2010)

- The system's evaluation and performance reviews include criteria related to developing cultural competency and helping students, families, and adults manage social-emotional stress (Berg et al., 2019; Blyth, 2018)

- The school system conducts regular equity and inclusion training and assessments for educators and administrative staff, focusing on stereotype threat, microaggressions, and strategies to manage social-emotional stress. Staff are evaluated based on their participation in these training sessions and their ability to apply the knowledge and skills gained. (Benner et al., 2015)

- All educators can facilitate restorative circles or conversations to help individuals express their feelings and experiences and repair any harm done. (Wachtel, 2013)

» **Action Area 2: Align Mission, Vision, and Core Values - Guiding Questions and Corresponding Possible Look-Fors**

1. **How was our mission, vision, and core values created, updated, and communicated in collaboration with families, students, staff, and other members of the community?**

   • The system established a steering committee — through intentional outreach and recruitment — that is representative of the students, families, and community. (Bryk et al., 2010)

   • Information from student, family, staff and community member surveys, focus groups, and interviews is evident in the crafted mission, vision, and core values. (Epstein, et al., 2002)

   • The system has created and employs a clearly defined, transparent process that involves families, students, staff, and other community members in regular review, revisions, and updates to the mission, vision, and/or core values. (Fullan, 2014; Mitra, 2004)

   • The system uses this vision as a guidepost for both modular and integrated decision-making. (Grissom et al., 2021)

   • The system uses various communication avenues to ensure that the vision is widely known throughout the community. (Henderson et al., 2007)

2. **In what ways has our system's mission, vision, and values been systematized to create the conditions and actions to ensure equitable access to, and achievement of, rigorous college- and career-ready academic standards for all students?**

   • There is clear alignment between the system's mission, vision, and core values, the rigorous college- and career-ready academic standards, and equity principles. (Darling-Hammond, 2017)

   • The system has articulated its aspirational conditions and concrete actions that indicate progress toward the equitable environment it seeks to create. (Moll, et al., 1992)

3. **What 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?**

   • The system leadership, in concert with site-level leadership, has established a routine of data analysis which involves various quantitative and qualitative data sources, such as academic achievement, behavior, social-emotional data, walkthroughs, empathy interviews, focus groups, etc. (Dreier et al., 2019; Grissom et al., 2021)

   • The system demonstrates data transparency, regularly reporting to students, families, staff, and community members to enhance communication of progress and ensure accountability for maintaining alignment with the mission and vision. (Grissom et al., 2021; Kurland et al., 2010)

4. **How are we re-imagining ourselves as a culturally and linguistically responsive system that transcends the traditional norms of "schooling?"**

   • The system incorporates the ideas and feedback from parents, students, staff and the community into designing solutions that operate in new and innovative ways that work for the community, e.g., community-based learning that engages students in real-world projects and community service, partnerships with local organizations that extend learning beyond the classroom, and flexible learning environments. (Boudett, et al., 2013; Wayman et al., 2006)

   • System leaders use a Design Thinking process to inform their understanding of the problem and design a system that has cultural and linguistic responsiveness built-in from the beginning. (Brown, 2008; Korean & Anderson, 2019)

Action Area 2: **Align Mission, Vision, and Core Values - Guiding Questions and Corresponding Possible Look-Fors** *cont.*

5. **How are all adults supported in working toward the system's vision of being creators of a culturally and linguistically responsive system?**

   - 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. (Ladson-Billings, 2021)

   - School system leaders communicate that central office leaders, teachers, principals and staff members will continuously learn and build their culturally and linguistically responsive practice. (Krownapple, 2017; Lindsey et al., 2018)

   - The system's mission, vision and values are used to guide decision-making in both day-to-day practice and in moments of crisis. (Hattie & Timperley, 2007; Smith & Riley, 2012)

» Action Area 3: Focus on Instruction - Guiding Questions and Possible Look-Fors
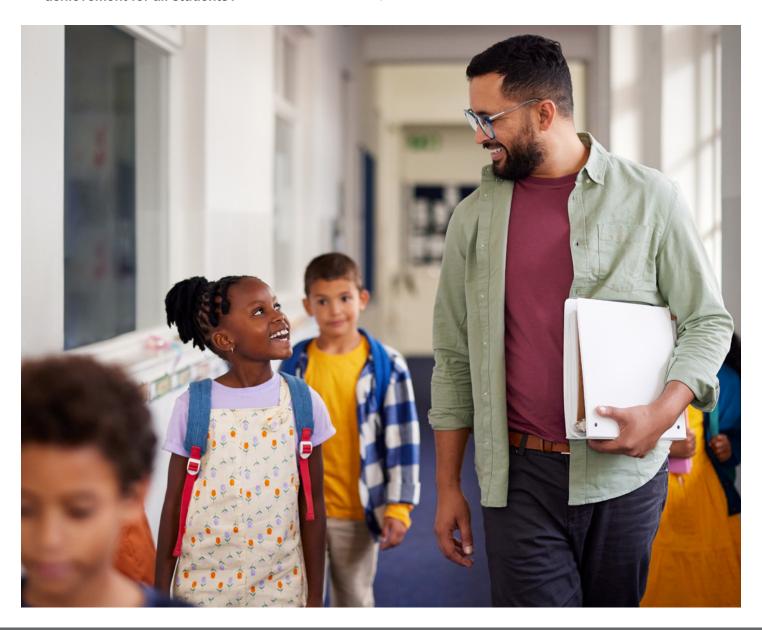
1. **How have we engaged a committee that is representative of the student population to review and revise our instructional frameworks to represent culturally and linguistically responsive pedagogy, and do we have a process for doing this in an ongoing, collaborative way?**

    - The school system has established a regular meeting schedule for the committee and feedback loops to ensure ongoing collaboration. The committee works collectively to review instructional frameworks, provide input, and monitor progress. (Bryk et al., 2011; Epstein et al., 2002)

    - A process is in place to determine the extent to which Universal Design for Learning (UDL) is present within materials and works to incorporate UDL practices to support students with learning differences. (Evmenova, 2018; Kieran & Anderson, 2019)

    - Diverse historical perspectives are comprehensively integrated into all facets of the curriculum, ensuring inclusivity across every subject area. (Hammond, 2015; Hollie, 2018; Ladson-Billings, 2021)

    - The reading curriculum and professional learning supports are aligned to evidenced-based strategies that can support the literacy needs of specific students. (Muhammad, 2020)

2. **How are we using and adapting our curriculum to ensure instructional practices are being utilized to support implementation and create equitable participation in the classroom for all students, and more specifically for our school's minoritized students?**

    - Curriculum and instructional frameworks are anchored in the tenets of culturally and linguistically responsive practice. (Ladson-Billings, 2021; Hammond, 2015; Hollie, 2018)

    - Objectives and standards from curriculum resources are aligned seamlessly, ensuring a cohesive and progressive learning experience for students throughout the day and across grade levels. (Marzano & Kendall, 2007)

    - The curriculum is regularly audited to identify and address any biases, gaps, or inequities, with a focus on the integration of diverse perspectives, cultures, backgrounds, and languages to make learning more inclusive and relevant to students. (Ladson-Billings, 1995, 2021)

    - Teachers are supported to use selected materials and also adapt, modify, and/or enhance in ways that are guided by culturally and linguistically responsive practices and tenets (Ladson-Billings, 2021; Rose & Meyer, 2002)

    - The system builds on the strengths of neurodiverse students as opposed to remediating areas of deficiency. (Armstrong, 2010)

3. **How do our formative/benchmark assessment practices provide students with multiple ways to demonstrate student strengths, areas for growth, and mastery of the standards?**

    - School and other instructional leaders have the capacity to support teachers in engaging in equitable grading practices. (Brookhart, 2017; Ladson-Billings, 2006)

    - School and other instructional leaders expect and support teachers in incorporating multiple assessment types and methods/practices that account for the diversity and assets of students, such as the varied needs among linguistically diverse and neurodiverse student populations. (Guskey, 2008; Tomlinson, 2000)

4. **In what ways do our grading practices or indicators of success drive planning at a unit and lesson level and approach this planning from an asset-based mindset?**

    - The teacher uses grades as a tool to identify trends across student performance and uses these trends to inform instruction. The teacher relentlessly works with others to understand why students–particularly students who have traditionally been underserved– are getting stuck. (Guskey, 2008)

Action Area 3: Focus on Instruction - Guiding Questions and Possible Look-Fors *cont.*

- The school leader and teacher do not allow students to lose points for issues unrelated to the assignment or assessment, e.g., late submission, missing full name, slight variation in presentation, etc. (Wormeli, 2018)

- The teacher allows students to resubmit and/or use a different method of submission to demonstrate their understanding or mastery of content. (Brookhart, 2017)

5. **How do our annual goals and targets reflect a commitment to narrowing specific opportunity gaps for minoritized students and increase achievement for all students?**

- Goals are informed by data, utilizing assessment results and other relevant information to strategically target areas where opportunity gaps exist and align interventions accordingly. (Boudett, et al., 2013)

- The system has identified and conducted root cause analyses regarding specific gaps affecting diverse student groups using disaggregated data. (DuFour, et al., 2006)

- School leaders and staff create short cycles of improvement involving focused action to close the specific gaps identified. (Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching, 2017)

» **Action Area 4: Facilitate Adult Learning and Development - Guiding Questions and Corresponding Possible Look-Fors**

1. **How is the school system's comprehensive professional development plan for all teachers, coaches, and leaders building their capacity in culturally and linguistically responsive practices across the system?**

   - The system's professional development plan includes several focus areas, such as knowledge and skill-building in culturally responsive pedagogy, language accessibility, and bias and stereotype reduction, all explicitly connected to the system's curriculum. (Gay, 2002)

   - The school system offers diverse learning opportunities such as workshops, seminars, and leveraging professional learning communities that provide time for knowledge and skill building. (Zemke, 2007)

2. **How is curriculum-based professional learning utilized for teachers to skillfully implement instructional materials to meet the needs of students?**

   - Curriculum-based professional learning develops teachers' ability to enhance/adapt materials in linguistically responsive and evidence-based ways. (Short, 2022)

   - Professional learning is based on latest adult learning research: a) Adults learn most deeply from experience and reflection; b) Learning to be a leader must be a social process; c) The most transformative learning comes with challenges; d) Adults rely on stories to make meaning; and e) Adults learn best when they play a role in leading their own learning. Adults are empowered to lead their own learning. (Zemke, 2007)

3. **In what ways do teachers, administrators, and support staff receive ongoing, job-embedded professional learning and support to implement evidence-based practices (e.g., Science of Reading, culturally responsive and linguistically responsive practices, etc.)?**

   - Various learning modalities are available and used to design flexible, ongoing, and just-in-time learning for teachers, administrators, and support staff. (Zemke, 2007)

   - The system provides professional development that can address concerns and the stated goals raised by the community, students, and parents. (Brown, 2008)

   - Inquiry cycles are practiced regularly with a focus on identified priority issues and priority student groups. (Boudett, et al., 2013)

4. **How do our performance evaluation frameworks include the core elements of equitable and culturally and linguistically responsive practices?**

   - The system's evaluation and performance review frameworks include criteria aligned with its vision of equitable instruction, emphasizing cultural and linguistic responsiveness. (Villegas, A.M., 1991)

   - The system's evaluation and performance review framework provides guidelines for evaluators to assess how well teachers incorporate diverse perspectives and address the needs of linguistically diverse students. (Villegas, A.M., 1991)

›› **Action Area 5: Manage Operations and Resources - Guiding Questions and Corresponding Possible Look-Fors**

1. **How are we using processes and frameworks to support equity-based resource allocation across the system? Are we keeping students and families who will be most affected in mind? (i.e., school time, master schedule, program processes, etc.)**

   - 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. (Darling-Hammond, L. 2010)

   - Resources are available to ensure that all students have access to digital devices and high-speed Internet service both at home and at school. (Lai, J. & Widmar, N.O., 2020)

2. **How are cross-functional community-inclusive committees established to review student group access to accelerated learning experiences (such as through enrollment data and available transportation), and to subsequently recommend any necessary policy changes to increase access?**

   - Strategic planning and decision-making processes are transparent in ways to ensure community members are knowledgeable about the content, decisions made, challenges, etc. The use of internal microsites, forums, surveys, etc. can be used to ensure this engagement. (Radd, et al, 2021)

   - Teams or committees with collective wisdom and experience of our entire community, including families, students, staff and community partners, are established and communicate robust contingency plans for ensuring continuity of learning and student support during times of crisis and disruption to in-person schooling. (Bryk et al., 2010)

3. **In what ways is the process to hire and make teaching and leadership assignments based on the needs of students?**

   - The most skilled staff and appropriately certified and trained teachers, principals, and principal supervisors are assigned to the schools with the greatest needs, based on context-specific data that demonstrate a misalignment with the school's vision and mission. (Plecki, et al., 2009)

- Staffing assignments and school time/schedules are aligned to meet the entitled services of students. (Darling-Hammond, L., 2010)

- Staffing assignments and school time/schedules ensure meaningful and commensurate support based on root cause analysis or learning needs. (Plecki, et al., 2009)

4. **How does the composition of system staff represent the racial/ethnic/gender/language/ ability composition of the student body and larger school community? Are staff distributed equitably across the various job classifications? What processes are in place to support goals of representation and distribution?**

   - The system has clear diversity goals that are designed to reach a greater reflection of the student body across different identities such as race, ethnicity, language, and disability. (DRIVE Task Force, 2021)

   - The system encourages and supports diverse staff members to pursue leadership roles and provide clear paths for advancement. (Perrone, 2022)

5. **How has our leadership team and Board worked together to create policies that ensure access to enrichment and exceptional schooling experiences for all students?**

   - Leadership teams and the Board advocate for policies at the district, state, and national levels that: support diversity in hiring; address systemic barriers to cultural and linguistic diversity in the education workforce; and include publicly reporting on progress toward diversity goals. (Maharaj, 2019)

   - Leadership and the Board regularly meet to ensure that organizational policies and practices support diversity, equity, inclusion, and belonging efforts. (DuFour, et al., 2006)

   - Leadership teams and the Board communicate progress toward goals related to diversity, equity, inclusion, and belonging. (Moll, et al., 1992)

» **Action Area 6: Engage in Personal Learning and Development - Guiding Questions and Corresponding Possible Look-Fors**

1. **How do staff reflect on their own self-work in personal identity development and the understanding of their personal beliefs, assumptions, implicit biases, and behaviors?**

   - All staff members can name their personal triggers around intersectionality and identities similar to and different from their own, and articulate them in department or grade-level meetings, self-assessments related to evaluation, and/or coaching conversations. (Radd, et al, 2021)

   - All staff members know and own their cultural lens and demonstrate this awareness and ownership through: regularly seeking others' perspectives (students, parents, colleagues); welcoming others' engagement with content and conversations in different ways. (Howard, 2003)

   - All staff members: recognize their position, privilege, and power; recognize their impact on decison-making by acknowledging their privilege and power in a space; regularly delegate this power to others who don't typically have it. (Radd, et al, 2021)

2. **What efforts are made to ensure that all staff members understand that student learning drives the system, and that every action is dedicated to providing opportunities, access, and support for all students to meet rigorous college- and career-ready standards?**

   - Learning resources are coherent and prioritized within the system, including how time is used, the placement of people, and the type and amount of materials that are deployed to meet the needs of schools' student populations. (Marzano & Kendall, 2007 & Darling-Hammond, L. 2010)

   - Inclusive planning and decision-making involve staff and possibly interdisciplinary teams to construct actions taken to meet the needs of diverse student populations. (Boudett, et al., 2013)

   - All meetings include conversations about student progress/impact/needs. (Boudett, et al., 2013)

3. **How do system leaders foster an environment conducive to regular courageous conversations around equity, which includes enhancing staff capacity to learn and apply language and behaviors that are sensitive to differences across lines of race, ethnicity, language, class, religion, ability, gender identity and expression, sexual orientation, and other aspects of identity?**

   - System leaders demonstrate a commitment to equity within the district and community, reflecting the system's mission, vision, and core values. This is evident through their decision-making processes, personal learning, reflection and articulation of their own identities, power, privilege, etc. (Fergus, 2016)

   - System leaders facilitate open dialogue by promoting active listening and engaging in respective discourse. (Kegan, & Laskow Lahey, 2016)

4. **How do all staff members actively engage in understanding and developing competency in equitable and antiracist leadership practices?**

   - Leaders at the system-level lead with transparency and vulnerability by openly sharing their development goals, admitting mistakes, and inviting feedback that grows trust and encourages reflection in others. (Drago-Severson, 2012)

   - Staff members actively seek feedback and use low-inference evidence to reflect on their own actions aimed at promoting equity. (Kegan & Laskow Lahey, 2016)

» **Action Area 7: Strategize Change and Continuous Improvement - Guiding Questions and Corresponding Possible Look-Fors**

1. **In what ways do leadership and leadership teams navigate resistors and demonstrate empathy for diverse perspectives without personalizing resistance?**

   • The focus is on common goals among those leading and engaged in the work, rather than on conflicts and 'winning' arguments among resistors. (Kotter, 1996)

   • Leaders and leadership teams stay solutions-focused and identify solutions collaboratively that can overcome the concerns that seem to be resistant. (Bolman & Deal, 1984)

   • Concerns are acknowledged and are sought to be deeply understood by asking open-ended questions that surface the roots of the concerns. (Kotter, 1996)

2. **What story does our typical data analysis tell and are we considering both achievement data and factors like discipline records and enrollment in advanced coursework to comprehensively understand students' learning experiences?**

   • A deepened data literacy is used to get closer to the student experience rather than the more system-level data sources. (Safir & Dugan, 2021)

   • School systems review data such as disciplinary data, extracurricular participation, honors course enrollment, etc. to identify any over/under representation across racial groups. (Skiba et al., 2011)

   • School systems review the curriculum and instructional materials used to ensure that they represent multiple perspectives and do not reinforce racial stereotypes. (Parker, 2022)

   • Systems conduct comprehensive reviews of their policies and practices that reinforce racial discrimination and feed racial stereotypes, such as disparities in academic achievement and access to advanced courses or gifted programs among different racial or ethnic groups. (Oakes & Lipton, 2007)

   • School systems engage the school community in open and direct conversations about how they feel race has impacted their experience. (Mapp & Kuttner, 2013)

   • School systems engage in a review of the allocation of resources, including funding, facilities, and extracurricular opportunities, to ensure equitable distribution among all racial and ethnic groups. (Losen & Orfield, 2002)

3. **What process(es) is/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?**

   • System leadership uses cultural responsiveness frameworks to conduct comprehensive audits of existing system policies, practices, and procedures. (Radd, et al., 2021)

   • Data from these audits are made available to the public to create transparency and accountability for changing policies, practices, and procedures. (Radd, et al., 2021)

4. **How do we learn from new and rapidly evolving challenges? 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?**

   • Leadership teams and professional learning communities address new and emerging challenges through real-time documentation, reflection, quick feedback loops, and course correction by utilizing short-term cycles of continuous improvement and/or design thinking. (Boudett, et al, 2013)

5. **How are leadership members informed of the current political climate and managing change in the community and how do they strategically collaborate with partners in consideration of that climate to support all students?**

   • System leadership regularly meets with community organizations, nonprofits, and local agencies to understand the climate and develop joint strategies that support student needs. (Ishimaru, 2019)

   • System leaders monitor local media outlets to stay informed about local issues, incorporating what they learn in system-level decisions and outreach efforts. (Ishimaru, 2019)

›› Action and Practice Area 8: Cultivate Community Care and Engagement - Guiding Questions and Corresponding Possible Look-Fors

1. **How do leaders/leadership teams collaborate with community groups that represent and serve students and families in order to improve the overall school experience for all students? In what ways do we seek out and utilize the expertise and resources provided by these groups?**

   - The people involved in planning system-level events and programs are representative of the school community by race, ethnicity, language, gender, disability, neurodiversity, and socioeconomic status. (Mapp & Kuttner, 2013)

   - 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, and with translators, if needed, including having events in all parts of the system outside of the school grounds. (Ishimaru, 2019)

2. **How do our school buildings represent the language diversity of our students and families to create an accessible and welcoming environment?**

   - All system-level communications are sent using a variety of accessible technology and available in multiple languages, Braille, and/or audio versions to ensure every community member can access the communication. (Ecke, 2018)

   - School buildings feature multilingual signage, labels, and communication materials that reflect the languages spoken by the student and family population. (Ecke, 2018)

   - The school provides language access services such as interpreters and translated documents for families who speak languages other than English, ensuring they can fully engage in school activities and communication. (U.S. Department of Education, 2015)

   - Terminology around family engagement includes a variety of family arrangements and ways of engaging parents and guardians. (Mapp & Bergman, 2021)

   - Schools connect families and caregivers to resources and strategies to promote home language learning and literacy. (Mapp & Bergman, 2021)

3. **How do we build relationships and equip families with the resources to be partners in supporting student learning?**

   - System leaders build trust with family members through on-going, positive and varied communication, and expect school leaders and teachers to do the same. (Ambroso, et al., 2021)

   - Schools provide ways to communicate student progress and understanding of academic needs in ways that are accessible to students and their families or caregivers. (Mapp & Bergman, 2021)

   - The school establishes two-way communication channels that allow families to share their insights and concerns while also receiving information about their child's education. This may include text messages, online announcements, and/or video announcements in multiple languages. (Henderson & Mapp, 2002)

4. **How do we center culturally and linguistically responsive social-emotional learning and support mental health within our school system?**

   - Schools use the cultural and linguistic diversity of students as the basis for designing lessons and student and family events. (Hammond, 2014)

   - Teachers, administrators, and counselors regularly collaborate to better understand and address the social-emotional and mental health needs of students within the school system. (Blyth, 2018)

   - The school system actively engages with the broader community (such as local and national mental health organizations, community leaders, and parents) to create partnerships and resources that support culturally responsive social-emotional learning and mental health initiatives. (Minkler & Wallerstein, 2008)

Action Area 8: Cultivate Community Care and Engagement *cont.*

5. **How do system leaders build trust with family members through ongoing, positive, and varied communication, and expect school leaders and teachers to do the same?**

   - Teachers and leaders start the school year by calling parents and guardians with good news about each student's learning. (Ambroso, et al., 2021)

   - System leaders use multiple and regular modes of communicating clear information that are responsive to family members' needs. (e.g., website, text messages, social media, phone calls, translation services, culturally sensitive communications, virtual meetings, flexible scheduling, forums and workshops for parents, etc.) (Mapp & Bergman, 2021)

6. **How do system 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?**

   - Teachers and administrators conduct home visits so that they become more familiar with their students' and families' cultural diversity, educational experiences, and perspectives on schooling. (Ambroso, et al., 2021)

   - The system uses surveys, town hall meetings, and other forums to understand families' past and present experiences with the education system and learn about their hopes and dreams for their children. (Ambroso, et al., 2021)

THE LEADERSHIP ACADEMY