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RESILIENT, REPRESENTATIVE LEADERSHIP™ APPENDIX: CRITICAL BACKGROUND RESEARCH

Resilient, Representative Leadership™ Guidebook

featuring the
10 Essential Competencies for Educational Leaders of Color ©

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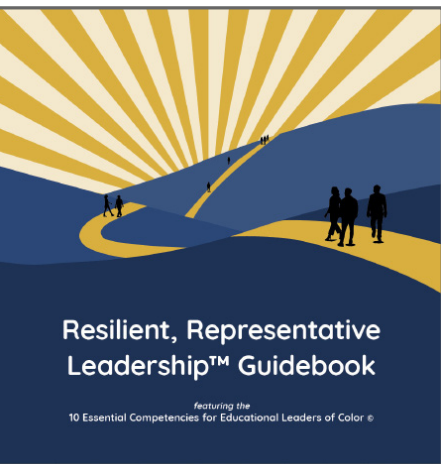
We believe that prioritizing the personal and professional development of leaders of color is among the most powerful investments we can make in our students, schools, and society at large. Anchored by the 10 Essential Competencies for Educational Leaders of Color ©, our Resilient, Representative Leadership™ Framework and Toolkit includes guides, tools, and other resources to help educators of color grow and thrive along our leadership journeys, including with the support of equity-minded allies and system-level officials.

Access the entire Resilient, Representative Leadership Toolkit: www.mcelleaders.org/RRLToolkit.

MCEL (Men of Color in Educational Leadership) is a national non-profit and network of educational leaders from across the educational leadership spectrum who are hyper-focused on eliminating achievement and opportunity gaps for all students. Based on research and lived experiences, MCEL supports male leaders of color who are uniquely positioned to disrupt current education ecosystems, lead through the lens of equity, and serve as critical levers to student success. Learn more at www.mcelleaders.org and access the entire Resilient, Representative Leadership Toolkit at www.mcelleaders.org/RRLToolkit.

WHY DO WE NEED A GUIDEBOOK FOR EDUCATIONAL LEADERS OF COLOR?

Young people thrive—in school and in life—when they have access to safe, supportive, inclusive learning environments in which they can engage with rigorous, culturally-relevant academic content and personal development. Educational leaders of color are exceptionally adept at cultivating such learning environments for students, especially students of color, but our schools are not set up to support our success.

1 | Decades of research shows that the caliber of our nation's school leaders matters a great deal for students and school communities.

The school principal accounts for one-quarter of a school's overall influence on student learning.[1] An above-average principal can improve student achievement by 10 percentage points compared to an average principal.[2] Replacing a below-average principal with an above-average one adds three months of learning in both math and reading for *every student, every year*.[3] Further, school leaders play an essential role in shaping the quality of teaching within their buildings. Ninety-seven percent of teachers say principal quality is critical to their career decisions—*more than any other factor*.[4] The effects of strong leadership are most striking in struggling schools, which are more likely to serve systematically marginalized children and communities.[5] In fact, a landmark meta-analysis found "virtually no documented instances of troubled schools being turned around without intervention by a powerful leader."[6]

2 | A strong and growing body of research demonstrates that educational leaders of color, in particular, have an outsized impact on critical school and student outcomes.

In schools led by principals of color, we see stronger community engagement;[7] safer and more supportive environments, especially for marginalized students;[8] more frequent hiring and, critically, retention of teachers of color, who promote better academic and other outcomes for all students;[9] and better outcomes specifically for students of color.[10]

3 | Despite these findings, the "representation gap" between school leaders and the students and communities they serve has remained stubbornly persistent over the past 20 years—even as our schools and society have become more racially, ethnically, and culturally diverse.

Today, just 22% of principals and 9% of superintendents[11] identify as people of color[12] compared to 52% of public school students.[13] While there have been some small shifts in the diversity of principals in the past 20 years, school leader demographics have generally remained the same since the 1999-2000 school year. Of note, while the proportion of Hispanic principals has increased by 4%, this increase has not kept pace with the rapidly growing population of Hispanic schoolchildren. The representation gap is most pronounced for men of color, who represent just 3% of our school leader corps: given the current trends, it is possible the U.S. education system will reach an extinction-level event for men of color in educational leadership by 2030.

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The barriers that prevent educators of color from accessing leadership opportunities are multifaceted. Unwritten rules and unspoken expectations shape—and hinder—our leadership journeys, and traditional leadership tools are helpful only up to a point.

1 | A lack of clear pathways into leadership can stymie educators' best efforts to advance in their careers, and it creates situations in which biases—rather than skill—determine who gets opportunities to lead.

Lack of Clear Leadership Pathways: An intentional and clearly defined pipeline into and through educational leadership opportunities offers guidance to educators on the knowledge, skills, and dispositions they need to develop in order to move into leadership roles outside of the classroom. Without systems and concrete guidance, talented educators are left to rely on informal guidance and word-of-mouth referrals. As a result, the most "connected" educators—those closest to privilege and power due to their race/ethnicity and social class—have a leg up.

Typecasting: Male educators of color are often "tracked" into disciplinary roles[14] v. those that capitalize on their instructional expertise. Because educational leadership roles are increasingly focused on instructional leadership, men of color may be "tapped" for leadership opportunities early in their careers, only to find they lack the specific type of experience hiring managers are looking for when recruiting for school and district leadership positions.

Mysterious and Indistinct Definitions of the Term "Fit": Without clearly defined measures of leader readiness that are correlated with actual effectiveness on the job, educators of color are routinely denied opportunities to advance in their careers as a result of deeply ingrained social conceptions of what a leader looks and sounds like.

2 | There is an invisible tax on educators of color that contributes to burnout and higher turnover rates.

Educators of color report being tasked with added responsibilities that do not come with additional pay or the time they need to plan for and carry out those responsibilities—for example, mentorship for students of color or managing diversity, equity, and inclusion initiatives. Often, these are activities about which educators of color may be quite passionate. Without adequate resources, however, these added leadership responsibilities can contribute to burnout and lower retention rates among educators of color. Student discipline, for example, is associated with a reduction in teachers' job satisfaction and lower teacher retention rates.[15] Black male teachers are disproportionately asked to step in as informal school discipline deans,[16] and they are now leaving the teaching profession at a higher rate than their peers.[17] The acute stressors of pandemic-era schooling may accelerate this trend in coming years.[18]

3 | There is real energy across the sector to increase educator diversity, but school system leaders don't have the information and support they need.

In a 2022 survey of district and charter network leaders, 8 out of 10 expressed a strong personal commitment to diversifying their leadership corps. Yet in that same survey, more than 60% of respondents said their system "simply does not know how to build a diverse pipeline of leaders."

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MCEL believes that the primary way to address dangerously declining numbers of leaders of color in educational leadership is to create a "culture of allyship" among organizations that are well-positioned to meaningfully improve our education sector so that we can attract more people of color into the profession and fuel and sustain our leadership over time.

1 | A national network of partners who share a set of core values and commitments amplify our efforts to measurably improve the conditions in which educational leaders of color work.

Together, we:

- Choose bold, clear, and unapologetic action over silence when leaders of color are faced with injustice;
- Amplify the voices of men of color in educational leadership by uniquely positioning them to have a larger influence on equity across systems; and
- Serve as advocates to create pathways for men of color to thrive, individually and collectively, including through research, training, policy analysis, and other innovative supports.

2 | Leaders of color need help right here, right now, and intentional networks of support can make all the difference.

Recent research[19] into the experiences of leaders of color has affirmed the value of mentors and affinity groups in fueling and sustaining us in our work. Educators of color highlight the critical role explicit encouragement from a trusted role model—a "tap on the shoulder"—plays in the launch of our leadership journeys. Further, leaders of color share the strong value of peer support as we venture through leadership, emphasizing the invaluable opportunities to "problem-solve, share resources, vent, and voice [our] aspirations and fears in a safe, affirming space." The study also found that mentorship was "by far the most salient practice [leaders of color] point to in sustaining [us] in [our] roles."

3 | There is tremendous appetite for resources and tools designed specifically to help educational leaders of color grow and flourish in our careers.

We've heard again and again from educational leaders of color that existing leadership frameworks are insufficient in addressing our distinct, shared experiences in navigating our educational ecosystem as people of color. Researchers have also uncovered an urgent need for common language, practices, and tools to facilitate productive conversations between leaders of color and our support networks.[20] That's where the Resilient, Representative Leadership™ Framework, Guidebook, and Toolkit come in. Rather than leaving leaders of color to go it alone, to navigate without a roadmap, we've taken a page out of the Green Books and the Jewish Vacation Guides: we've consolidated the deep expertise, diverse experiences, and profound wisdom of an exceptional national network of leaders of color to develop a practical guide to promote more effective, sustainable, joyous leadership journeys.

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