

Leaders Critical Reflection Framework for Creating the Conditions Where a Culturally Responsive Diverse Educator Workforce Can Thrive



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The Midwest & Plains Equity Assistance Center (MAP Center) collaborated with Technical Assistance Advisory and Network partners to create this framework. This document serves as a guide to creating conditions where a culturally responsive diverse educator workforce can thrive. An inequitable work environment can be detrimental to educators' and students' mental and physical health. Creating the best conditions to recruit, support, and sustain culturally responsive and diverse educators takes work and change.

This framework includes what leaders should know, value, be, and practice. Each domain contains suggestions for best practices. These suggestions are not specific to a leadership level, and you are encouraged to use them in whatever way will be most helpful.



Key Terms

Minoritized: to make (a person or group) subordinate in status to a more dominant group or its member regardless of their numerical number.

Historically Marginalized: Individuals or groups who have been relegated to the lower or peripheral edge of society and/or denied full participation in mainstream cultural, social, political, and economic resources or opportunities

Diversity: Is not a proxy for race, but rather is an authentic, genuine, representation of different races, national origins, sexual orientations, religions, and individuals with dis/abilities.

Pluralism: A situation in which people of different social classes, religions, races, etc., are together in a society but continue to have their different traditions and interests



How to Use this Framework

Putting it into Practice:

In each section, you will find a scenario that depicts a different leader enacting elements of the domain.

Read about Westside Regional Schools:

Westside High School is a suburban district in the Chicago suburbs. The student body of Westside is comprised predominantly of students of color, while the teaching staff is predominantly white. Despite efforts to hire and retain teachers of color, many are leaving after just one or two years, indicating a need for deeper, systemic changes.



Some suggested uses for this tool include:

- Guiding professional development planning.
- Gathering structured feedback from key groups, including leadership teams, staff, parents, or students.
- Serving as a guided conversation tool to prompt self-reflection and action planning.
- Raising awareness to inform the governance of our school districts with school boards across the state.
- Informing new teacher training opportunities.
- Assisting in goal setting and evaluation for educators.
- Starting with higher-level leadership to ensure their support and involvement first.



When seeking more information on any of these topics, leaders should avoid exclusively relying on minoritized educators for education. Often, minoritized individuals are expected to educate others about issues related to their identities. It is important to recognize that when minoritized educators provide knowledge or insight, it constitutes professional expertise and should be adequately compensated.

Leaders Should Know

The development of critical consciousness is the first step toward meaningful change. Leaders can begin by building their knowledge of issues that educators who embody minoritized identities face; both through conversation with those educators and professional learning. These suggestions for what leaders should know are a starting point for leaders invested in growing their knowledge base surrounding these issues.

Putting it into Practice:

Dr. Rachel Coleman, the principal, noticed the high turnover rate among teachers of color and decided to act. She surveyed the staff and established a Professional Learning Community (PLC) specifically for teachers of color, which meets monthly. During these meetings, teachers shared concerns about the school's dress code policy, which they felt was marginalizing both students and faculty of color. For example, rules about "appropriate" hairstyles disproportionately targeted Black students and teachers, which could be interpreted as violating. Dr. Coleman brought these concerns to the district leaders, leading to changes in the dress code that removed any language policing hairstyles, thereby fostering a more inclusive environment.



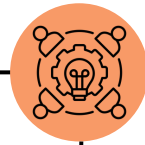
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Leaders Should Know



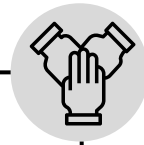
Leaders should know that educators who embody minoritized identities experience context-specific disparities in opportunities and support.

Examine any disparities in professional development opportunities, advancement pathways, and recognition of educators who embody minoritized identities. Implement targeted strategies to close these gaps and promote fairness.



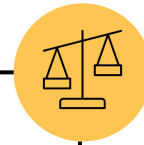
Leaders should know that educators who embody minoritized identities have unique expertise and skills.

Recognize and leverage marginalized educators' expertise and innovative ideas. Collaborate with educators who embody minoritized identities to co-create policies and practices that address their unique needs and challenges.



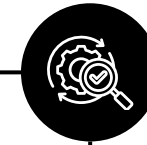
Leaders should know that community, history, and context are important factors for understanding the experiences of educators who embody minoritized identities.

Collect and analyze diverse data, including qualitative feedback, to identify systemic issues affecting educators with minoritized identities. Consider intersectional experiences to develop targeted interventions and policies for equity.



Leaders should know that educators who embody minoritized identities face contextual challenges.

Seek out an understanding of the unique challenges marginalized educators may face, such as biases, microaggressions, and a lack of resources. Tailor support and resources to address these challenges effectively.



Leaders should know the importance of understanding one's specific community for creating locally relevant, culturally responsive practices and policies.

Understand the communities served by marginalized educators to develop and implement culturally responsive practices and policies that honor their diversity. Partner with community organizations, leaders, and constituents to share resources and best practices.



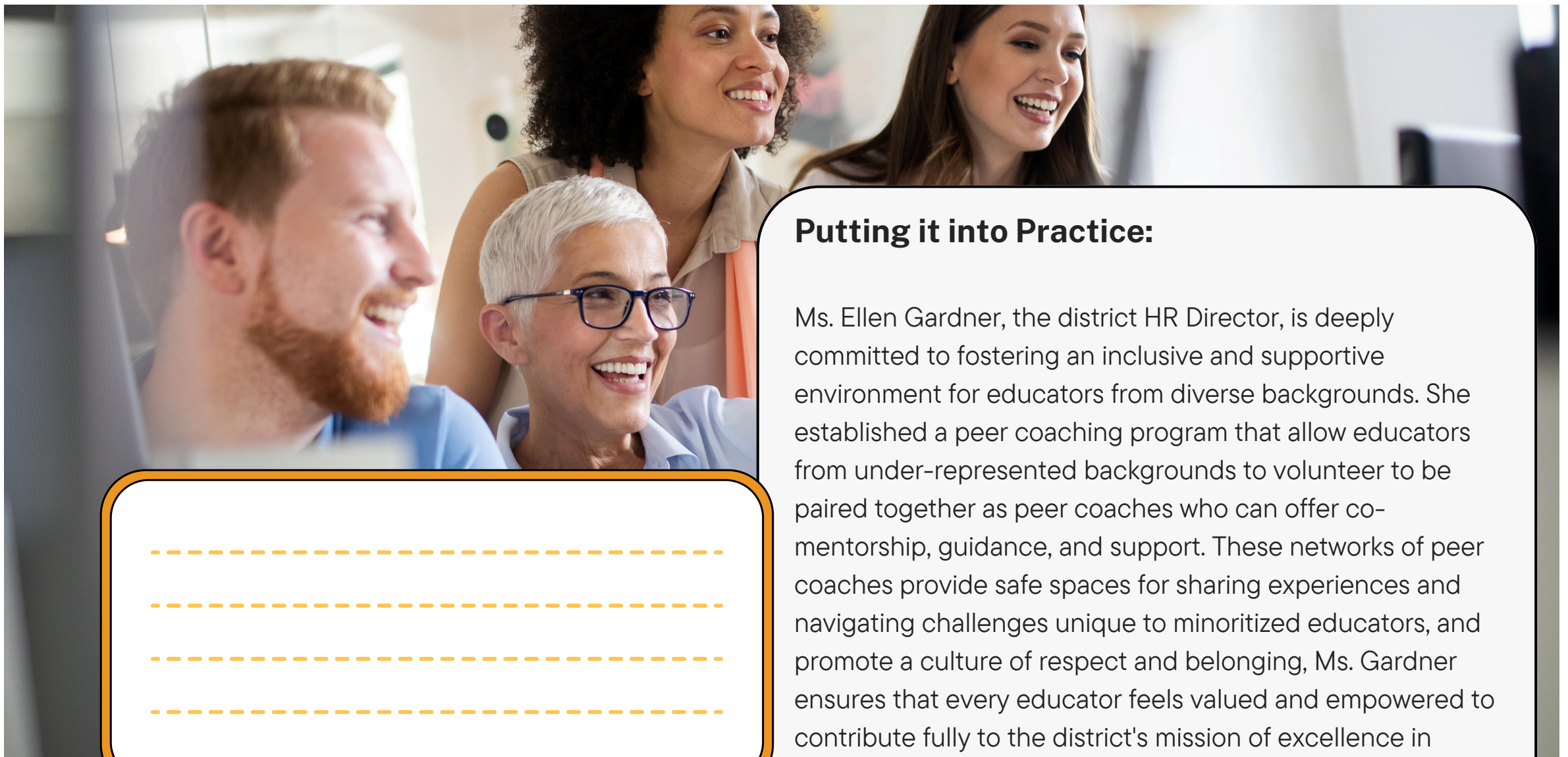
Leaders should know that comprehensive exploration of credible data sources is necessary to inform relevant practices, policies, and local improvements.

Be knowledgeable of credible data sources that accurately capture the experiences and perspectives of marginalized educators. Use these data to advocate for resources and support tailored to their needs.

Leaders Should Value



Equity-oriented leaders value environments that center belonging and inclusion for everyone, including educators who embody minoritized identities. This document was created to help build and sustain environments where those educators feel a sense of belonging, respect, and validation. Examining an organization's values helps foster a culture of inclusivity that celebrates diversity and promotes equity.



Putting it into Practice:

Ms. Ellen Gardner, the district HR Director, is deeply committed to fostering an inclusive and supportive environment for educators from diverse backgrounds. She established a peer coaching program that allow educators from under-represented backgrounds to volunteer to be paired together as peer coaches who can offer co-mentorship, guidance, and support. These networks of peer coaches provide safe spaces for sharing experiences and navigating challenges unique to minoritized educators, and promote a culture of respect and belonging, Ms. Gardner ensures that every educator feels valued and empowered to contribute fully to the district's mission of excellence in education.

Leaders Should Value



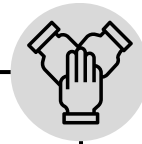
Leaders should value environments that center belonging and inclusion of educators who embody minoritized identities.

Build and sustain environments where educators who embody minoritized identities feel a sense of belonging, respect, and validation. Foster a culture of inclusivity that celebrates diversity and promotes equity.



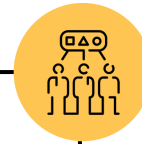
Leaders should value their own and other's growth through discomfort.

Value the importance and acknowledgment of discomfort and challenges faced by educators who embody minoritized identities. Support environments that enable educators to navigate and grow from these experiences while feeling valued and respected.



Leaders should value the pluralism of the experiences of educators who embody minoritized identities.

Center the experiences and perspectives of educators who embody minoritized identities. Create platforms for sharing stories, advocating for change, and amplifying their voices within the organization and the broader community. Collaborate to co-create policies and practices that address their unique needs and challenges.



Leaders should value diversity in team composition.

Consider, value, and achieve diversity in team identity composition, including identities related to race, gender, national origin, disability, religion, language, age, and experience. Ensure that the diversity of our country and our communities is represented in team composition.



Leaders should value servant leadership and support for others.

Employ servant leadership principles to prioritize the needs and well-being of all educators, with specific emphasis on educators who embody minoritized identities. Provide mentorship, professional development opportunities, and resources to support their growth and success.



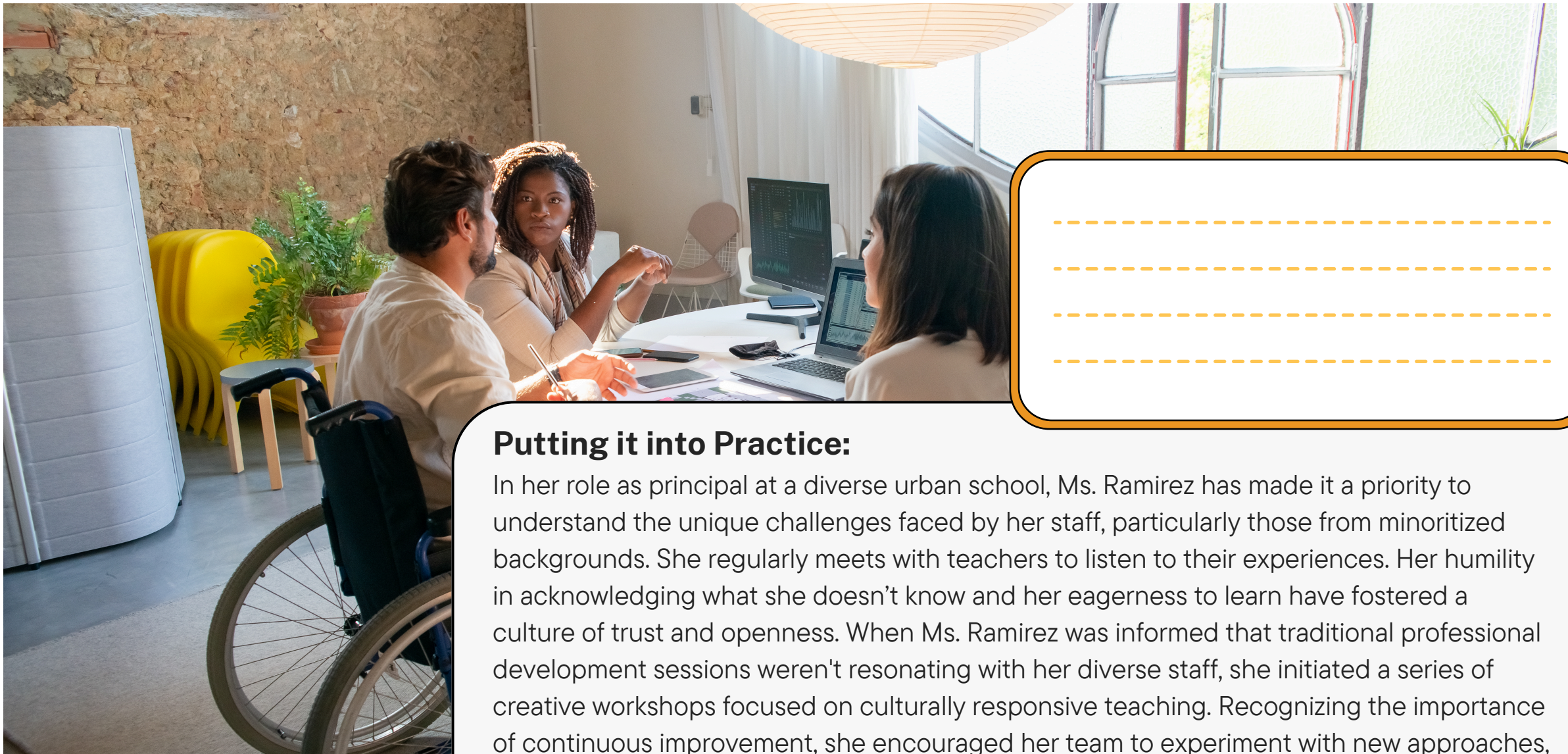
Leaders should value strengths and histories of minoritized communities.

Recognize and honor the strengths and histories of the communities served by educators who embody minoritized identities. Incorporate culturally relevant practices and initiatives that uplift these strengths and promote resilience.

Leaders Should Be



Knowledge and values are internal. How leaders act is a reflection of their internal processes. These recommendations address how leaders show up and their impact on the people and systems around them. Behaviors that demonstrate commitment to equitable practices strengthen the culture of inclusivity and support.



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Putting it into Practice:

In her role as principal at a diverse urban school, Ms. Ramirez has made it a priority to understand the unique challenges faced by her staff, particularly those from minoritized backgrounds. She regularly meets with teachers to listen to their experiences. Her humility in acknowledging what she doesn't know and her eagerness to learn have fostered a culture of trust and openness. When Ms. Ramirez was informed that traditional professional development sessions weren't resonating with her diverse staff, she initiated a series of creative workshops focused on culturally responsive teaching. Recognizing the importance of continuous improvement, she encouraged her team to experiment with new approaches, such as peer-to-peer coaching and collaborative lesson planning. This openness to change led to more dynamic, inclusive classrooms where students from all backgrounds felt seen and heard.

Leaders Should Be



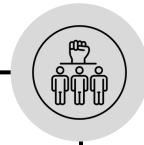
Leaders should be empathic and humble.

Demonstrate empathy and humility in understanding the experiences and needs of educators who embody minoritized identities. Cultivate a culture of empathy within which you and other leaders actively listen, show compassion, and take action to support well-being.



Leaders should be creative and open to change.

Embrace change and creativity in addressing systemic inequities and barriers faced by educators who embody minoritized identities. Encourage innovative solutions, experimentation, and continuous improvement to create more inclusive and supportive working conditions.



Leaders should be authentically present.

Be present and accessible to educators who embody minoritized identities. Promptly and actively engage in conversations and addressing concerns. Be available and accessible for support, guidance, and collaboration, fostering a culture of trust and partnership.



Leaders should practice transparency and cultural humility.

Practice transparency in decision-making processes and policies, especially those affecting educators who embody minoritized identities. Approach leadership with cultural humility, acknowledging and learning from diverse perspectives and experiences.



Leaders should be proactive and persistent.

Take a proactive approach to addressing issues and challenges faced by educators who embody minoritized identities. Demonstrate persistence in advocating for change and dismantling barriers to equity.



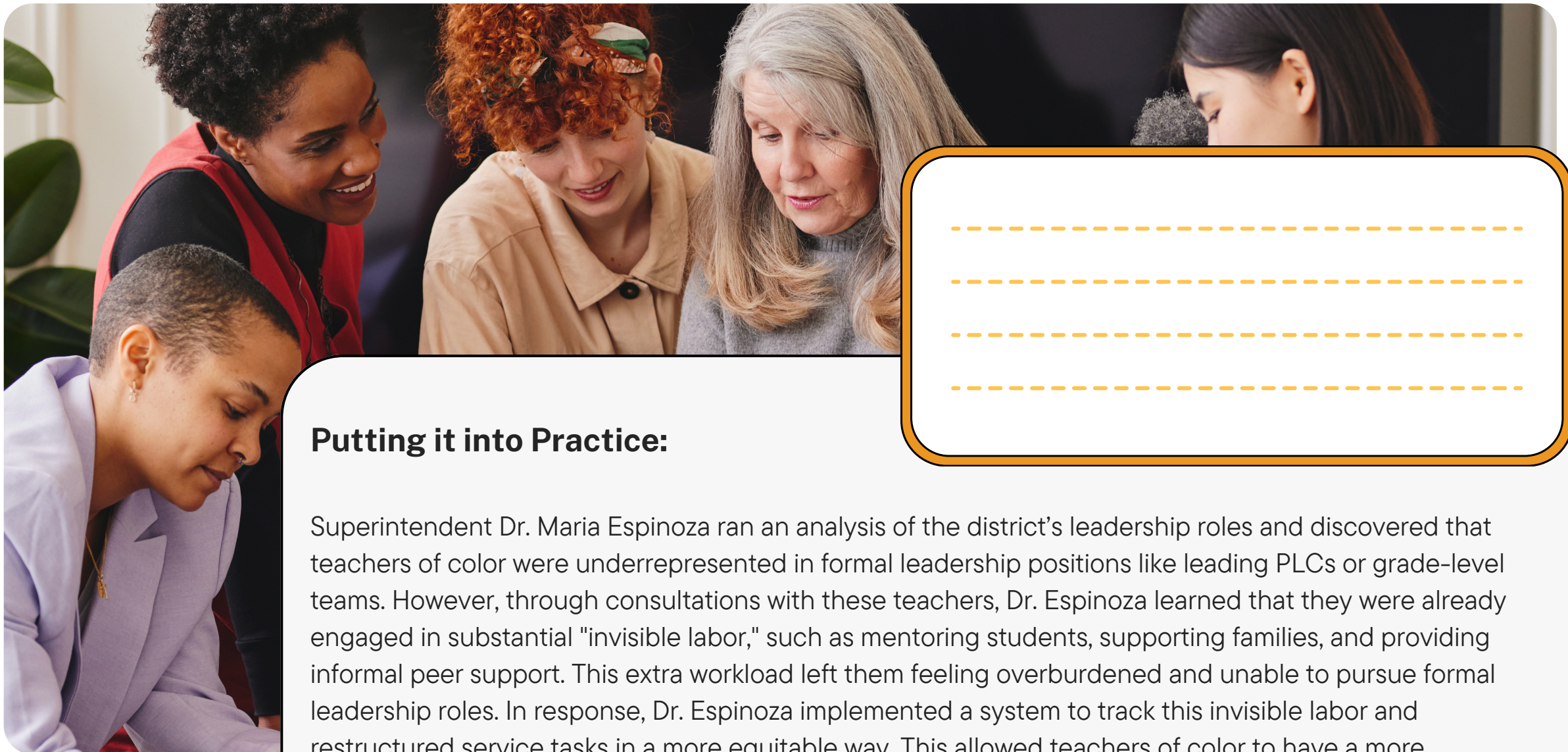
Leaders should be relentless in pursuing improvement.

Demonstrate a relentless commitment to pursuing improvement and equity for educators who embody minoritized identities. Continuously evaluate policies, practices, and outcomes, adjusting to ensure fairness, inclusivity, and responsiveness.

Leaders Should Practice



Practices are principles in action. When leaders deliberately create policies and follow practices that support and grow inclusivity and equity, they create conditions where a culturally responsive, diverse educator workforce can thrive. Practices are built through conscious repetition, and it's important to start from awareness and equity to ensure you are using best practices to achieve high outcomes.

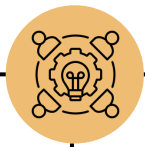
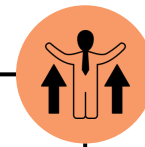
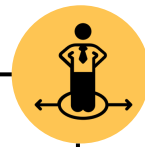
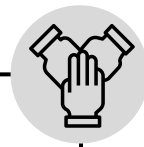
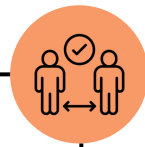
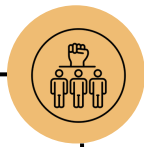


Putting it into Practice:

Superintendent Dr. Maria Espinoza ran an analysis of the district's leadership roles and discovered that teachers of color were underrepresented in formal leadership positions like leading PLCs or grade-level teams. However, through consultations with these teachers, Dr. Espinoza learned that they were already engaged in substantial "invisible labor," such as mentoring students, supporting families, and providing informal peer support. This extra workload left them feeling overburdened and unable to pursue formal leadership roles. In response, Dr. Espinoza implemented a system to track this invisible labor and restructured service tasks in a more equitable way. This allowed teachers of color to have a more manageable workload and the opportunity to take on formal leadership positions without being overwhelmed.

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Leaders Should Practice



Leaders should practice equitable distribution of learning and advancement opportunities.

Provide educators who embody minoritized identities with learning, growth, and advancement opportunities. Support career development, leadership pathways, and recognition programs that promote upward mobility and professional fulfillment.

Leaders should practice the cultivation and maintenance of safe and responsive spaces.

Establish safe and inclusive spaces where educators who embody minoritized identities feel valued, respected, and supported. Foster a sense of belonging through affirming practices, community-building activities, and mutual respect.

Leaders should practice shared decision-making to empower staff and the community.

Empower educators who embody minoritized identities and community members to co-create policies, programs, and initiatives related to sustaining educator well-being. Solicit their input, involve them in decision-making processes, and value their contributions to foster ownership and buy-in.

Leaders should practice reflexivity about their own positionality.

Reflect on personal biases, privileges, and positionality as a leader. Engage in ongoing self-reflection and learning to deepen understanding and promote equitable leadership practices.

Leaders should practice balancing high expectations with strong support.

Set high expectations for performance and outcomes while providing strong support and resources to help marginalized educators succeed. Address systemic barriers, provide ongoing support, and advocate for equitable policies and practices. Foster a culture of accountability, recognition, and continuous improvement.

Leaders should practice modeling rest, boundaries, and trust.

Model healthy work-life balance, boundaries, and trust in leadership practices. Encourage self-care, prioritize well-being, and demonstrate trust in the capabilities and agency of marginalized educators.

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