



MAKE THE CASE
**SCHOOL LEADERSHIP
QUALITY & DIVERSITY**

Access to **strong and diverse school leaders** and principals benefits all students, particularly students of color, who often thrive in classrooms and schools led by teachers and leaders who share their racial and cultural background.

Principals and school leaders set the tone for equitable and effective learning experiences.

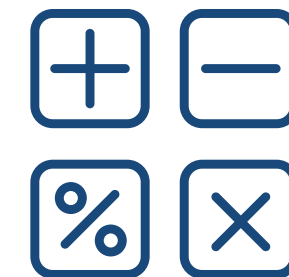


Effective school and instructional leaders **support great learning** — highly effective principals can add two to seven months of learning in one school year.¹



Leaders set expectations. Highly effective principals **emphasize teacher collaboration**, address conditions that improve teacher effectiveness, and inform the attitudes that **profoundly impact school culture** — a key component in teacher retention, including for teachers of color.²

Principal and school leader diversity can **positively shape education experiences for students of color**.



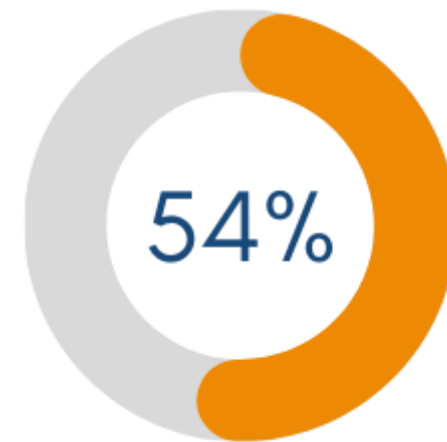
A Black principal can **positively impact math achievement for Black students**, even when Black teachers are not present.³ Schools with a Black principal are more likely to have greater representation of Black students in advanced courses.⁴



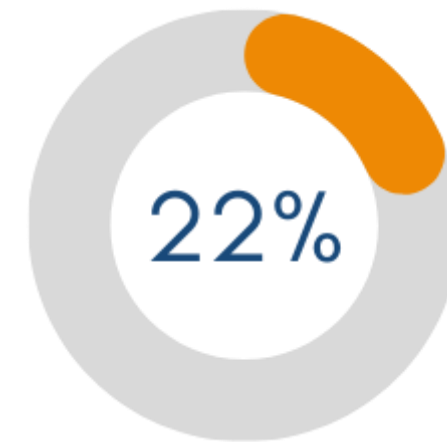
Diverse, same-race principals are more likely to **recruit teachers of color** via more inclusive hiring practices, and **retain those teachers** by creating equity-oriented school environments that lead to higher job satisfaction and lower turnover.⁵

The racial diversity of principals and school leaders is not representative of our student body, and individuals of color face significant barriers to advancement, including unclear hiring pathways and weak leadership pipelines.

The diversity of the principal workforce does not reflect the diversity of the student population.



Percentage of students of color in our nation's schools



Percentage of principals of color in our nation's schools

Students of color make up more than 50% of the K-12 public school student population, while principals of color comprise only 22% of the principal workforce.

Aspiring principals and school leaders of color often navigate unclear pathways into principalship or leadership positions.



1 in 2

district leaders said that there is no defined pathway to principalship, according to a survey of 100 district leaders.

Absent defined principal pathways, leaders of color are often left to meet unspoken expectations, seek leadership opportunities, and navigate the leadership pipeline on their own.⁶



Many leaders of color do not make it past the assistant principal role, which can often be a “career-killer.” Many male assistant principals of color are often responsible for discipline, and miss out on professional experiences related to instructional choices and budgeting considerations.⁷

Making the case for improving **School Leadership Quality & Diversity** hinges on effectively communicating their importance, urgency, and connection to your community.

3 Key Elements of Effective Messaging



Keep it simple.



Know your audience.



Make an emotional connection.

3 Key Elements of Effective Messaging

Know your audience.

Who is your audience?

- District leaders and policymakers?
- School board members?
- Other advocates?
- Parents, students, families?

What publications do they read? What media do they consume?

- Education Week?
- Boston Herald?
- Dallas Morning News?
- TikTok? Twitter/X?

What does your audience care about?

- Start with what they value.
- Connect their values with your advocacy message.

Make an emotional connection.

Don't rely on statistics to make your point.

"Show, don't tell" how this current issue (or your proposed policy solution) impacts students.

- Create an emotional response — make it clear why we all need to care!
- Use real stories about students to highlight the urgency of addressing inequities.

Tell your personal story.

- Why do you care about this issue? Did you have a similar experience in school?
- How does this impact you as a parent, advocate, or community member?
- Ultimately, who are the people on the ground being affected, and how can you lift up their voices and stories to move people to act?

Keep it simple.

Your messages need to be short.

- Describe your main advocacy point in 10 words or less.
- Make your messages quotable and easy to remember.
- Think of what you would say in a tweet.

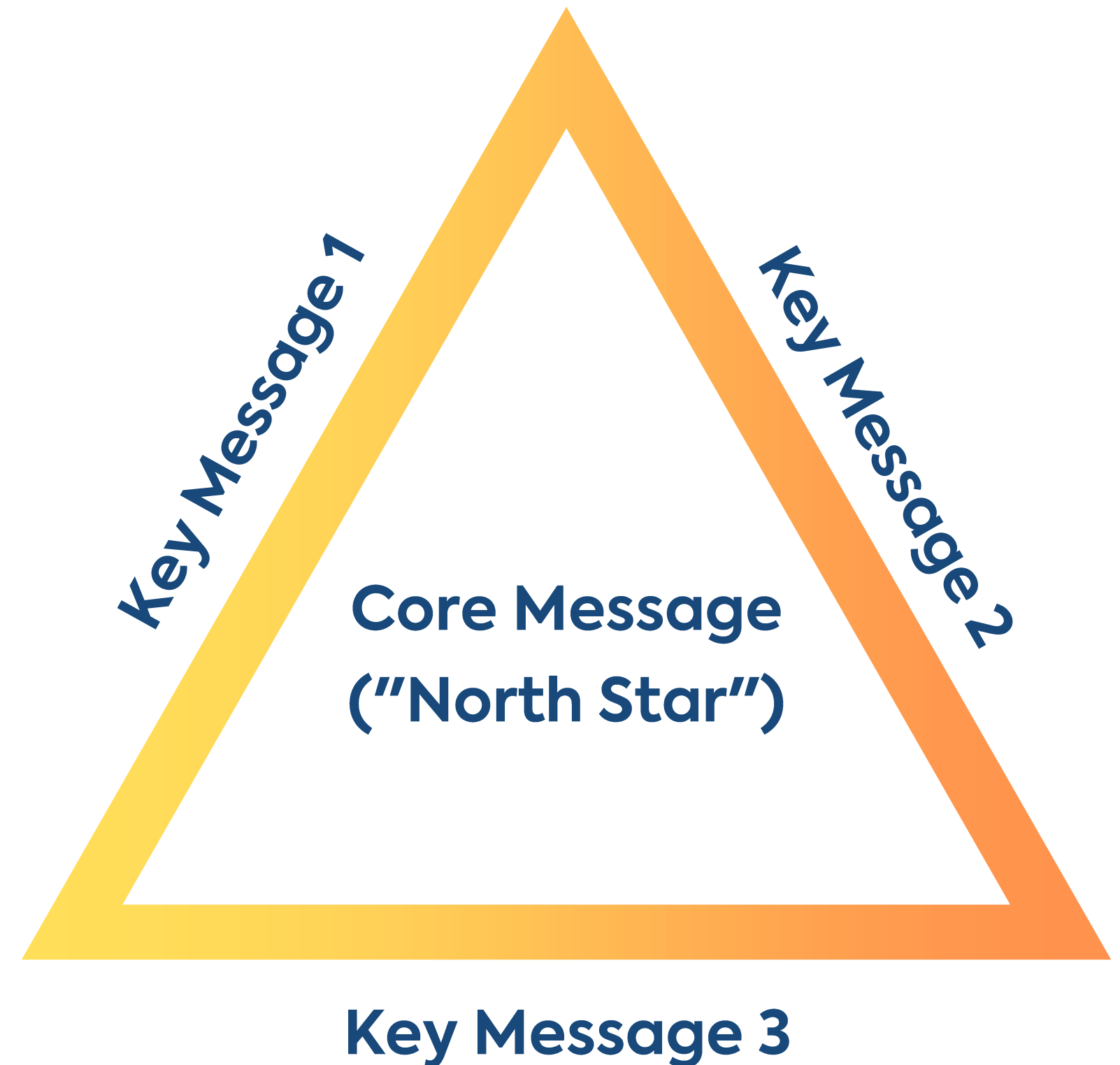
Avoid jargon and education speak.

Message Triangle Fast Facts

- Based on the principle that it is easier to visualize an image than it is to memorize a lot of words.
- Structured specifically **for social change and advocacy messages**: provides a structure to frame issues in a way that resonates with people's core values, makes the message personal, and can be tailored to a specific audience.
- Helps identify and home in on **1 core message and 3 supporting, key messages** that are compelling, credible, and concise.
- Offers structural focus but is not intended as a script.

Your core message is the North Star message you are trying to get across.

Your 3 key messages are what will move your audience toward your ultimate objective.



Creating a Message Triangle to Tell Your District's Story



Review Key Questions

Review the Alliance for Resource Equity's Key Questions on School Leadership Quality & Diversity:

- **Key Question 3.1:** Does each student have access to strong school leaders?
- **Key Question 3.2:** Does the school leadership workforce reflect student and staff diversity?

Identify your "North Star" or Core Message

Determine what you want to communicate. What is the underlying vision?

- Consider reiterating the Alliance for Resource Equity's vision:

Each student has access to strong school leadership from principals and instructional leadership teams who meet their needs, so all students can reach high standards and thrive, and the school leadership workforce reflects students' racial and linguistic diversity.

Support Messages With Data

Use available data to create 2 messages that outline the problem and its impact or relevance.

- See Appendix A for list of data metrics.
- Prepare a powerful data metric, soundbite, and narrative for your key messages.

Create a Call to Action

The last key message should prompt people to act.

- What action are you requesting from your district?
- What is the most immediate next step?
- What do you want your audience to do?

Forming Key Messages 101

1

Start by analyzing metrics (Appendix A) to help answer the key question in the dimension.

For instance, comparing the % of school leaders of color and the % of students of color by individual race/ethnicity could help determine the answer to **Key Question 3.2: “Does the school leadership workforce reflect student and staff diversity?”**

2

Consider the available data points.

What story do they tell? How directly do they speak to the issue?

Let’s suppose we learn that 16% of the district’s school leaders are people of color, while 73% of students are students of color, and the disparity is largest among Hispanic students and leaders. **We decide to use these data points to inform our key messages.**

3

Solidify the message.

- **Key Message 1 identifies the issue:** The racial and linguistic diversity of our school leaders do not reflect the racial and linguistic diversity of our students.
- **Key Message 2 explains why this matters:** Principal and school leader diversity can positively shape education experiences for students of color and can play an important role in hiring a more diverse teacher workforce.
- **Key Message 3 advances a call to action:** Our district must diversify our school leader workforce.

4

Prepare additional elements to use as needed for each of your key messages. For Key Message 1, this could look like:

- An illustrative data metric: “Our district serves 73% students of color, while only 16% of school leaders identify are people of color. This discrepancy is especially pronounced when comparing the percentage of Hispanic students (37%) to the percentage of Hispanic school leaders (5%).”
- A punchy soundbite to use for an interview: “There is a clear and problematic lack of racially and linguistically diverse school principals and instructional leaders in our schools.”
- A powerful narrative element: Highlight how the district’s lack of school leaders of color has influenced community members’ perception of their school system.

District X Example

Key Message 1

The racial and linguistic diversity of our school leaders do not reflect the racial and linguistic diversity of our student body.



DATA METRIC: 73% of the students in our district are students of color, yet only 16% of the district's school leaders are people of color. This disparity is largest when comparing the percentage of Hispanic students (37%) to the percentage of Hispanic school leaders (5%).



SOUNDBITE: "There is a clear and problematic lack of racially and linguistically diverse school principals and instructional leaders in our schools."



NARRATIVE: Highlight how the lack of school leaders of color in the district has influenced community members' perception of their school system.



DATA METRIC: Leaders of color across the country often say they were reliant on personal relationships/mentorships to help them advance into more senior positions because the leadership pathways were not clear.



SOUNDBITE: "If we want our schools to champion equity for our students, our district leaders must do a better job of defining pathways for prospective leaders of color to advance into leadership positions."



NARRATIVE: Urge the district to examine additional data patterns and develop a purposeful approach to increase leader diversity.

Core Message ("North Star")

Each student has access to strong school leaders, principals, and instructional leadership teams who meet their needs, so all students can reach high standards and thrive, and the school leadership workforce reflects students' racial and linguistic diversity.

Key Message 3

Our district must intentionally diversify our school leader workforce.

Key Message 2

Principal and school leader diversity can positively shape education experiences for students of color and can play an important role in hiring a more diverse teacher workforce.

DATA METRIC: For instance, studies indicate that schools with a Black principal are more likely to have greater representation of Black students in advanced courses. Studies also suggest that principals of color are better able to recruit teachers of color via more inclusive hiring practices, and retain those teachers by creating equity-oriented school environments.



SOUNDBITE: "Having diverse, high-quality principals matters. Yet our district is not being strategic about leveraging their expertise to advance educational equity in our district."



NARRATIVE: Share how access to a same-race principal has impacted a student of color's social, emotional, and academic development in school.



Message Triangle Checklist

Does your message triangle do ALL of the following?



Align with the shared values of your audience?

- Shared values allow the conversation to start from a place of agreement.
- This requires knowing your audience first!



Define the impact?

- Do your supporting facts (data metrics, narratives, soundbites) explain how those shared values are being undermined? Clearly outlining the consequences and inequities helps convey a sense of urgency without exaggerating the problem.



Asset-frame the issue?

- Define the scope of the issue in terms of systems and structures, not students, and avoid defining marginalized communities using deficit-based language.



Highlight the benefits?

- After establishing the issue/problem, explain how your solution SUPPORTS your shared values. Explicitly stating the value helps reaffirm tangible outputs your stakeholder cares about.



Include a call to action?

- A positive vision helps your audience realize what's possible and recognize the role they play in sparking the change.

Dismantling Opposition and Avoiding Traps

- **Bad information:** Don't repeat the negative, incorrect, or inflammatory language. Instead, find a positive spin in your response and/or calmly correct misinformation before moving to your positive response.
- **Speculation:** Instead of trying to predict the future, reiterate your key message and the information you do know.
- **Irrelevant Question:** Use a bridging statement to connect back to your key message.



- Question/concern that ...
- Distracts from key issue
 - Introduces dangerous line of opposition
 - Expresses different mission/goal

BRIDGING STATEMENT

Your response, which hits on your key messages in service of core "North Star" message

- "I find the more important issue to be..."
- "Let me emphasize again..."
- "What matters most in this situation is this: ..."
- "What I've said comes down to this..."
- "And that reminds me..."
- "Here's the real problem..."
- "I think it would be more accurate (or correct) to say..."
- "It all boils down to this..."
- "While ___ is important, it's also important to remember that..."
- "Before we leave this subject, I need to add..."



Question/concern that ...

- Distracts from key issue
- Introduces dangerous line of opposition
- Expresses different mission/goal

BRIDGING STATEMENT

Your response, which hits on your key messages in service of core "North Star" message

We should be focusing on the quality of school/district leaders, not their race.

I think it would be more accurate to state that these are not two differing, opposing aims.

Leadership quality and diversity are intertwined, inseparable goals. For all students, and especially for students of color, having an effective school leader means having a principal or other leader who looks like them. Access to same-race school leaders can positively shape education experiences for students of color. For example, it can lead to higher math achievement and greater representation in gifted programs. Principals of color are also more likely to hire teachers of color, which, by extension, might ultimately open more pipelines to diverse school administration and instructional leadership positions as well.

Leadership positions are open and individuals of color are welcome to apply. We can't do much if the candidate pool is not diverse.

It's not quite that simple. One thing that is important to recognize in this discussion is that...

Educators and future leaders of color often rely on other school administrators and leaders to help them advance into more senior positions. If districts do not have equity plans or purposeful means to increase leader diversity, it can be hard for individuals of color to advance on their own. Districts can be proactive about partnering with HBCU's and other MSI's (minority-serving institutions) to build a diverse school leadership pipeline. Districts can also provide and recommend educators of color for high-quality professional development opportunities and school leadership fellowships.

We aren't hiring leaders of color because we can't find any leaders of color to hire.

If we take a step back and think about the leadership pipeline, it becomes more apparent that...

Many leaders of color are grown from within a school, so providing equitable and accessible professional development targeted at teachers and faculty of color can help increase diverse leader candidates. As noted above, districts also need to be more proactive about hiring diverse candidates, which could involve partnering with HBCU and MSI principal-preparation programs.

FAQ's

Why does this sample message triangle work?

- All key messages connect to one another.
- Each key message includes a data metric, soundbite, and narrative element.
- Each element is concise and uses asset-framing.
- Each key message speaks directly to the core message in center of triangle.

What if we don't have access to the information we need for the data metrics?

- Ask your district to provide the data to you.
- Use this message triangle to push for better data transparency.
- In the meantime, rely on national data trends instead.

What makes for an effective narrative element?

- The best story to share is your own!
- But don't get bogged down by the details. Ask yourself what you are trying to communicate, what emotions you want to evoke, and why this specific issue matters to you.

What makes for a compelling sound bite?

- Define your objectives — what do you want others to remember?
- Be concise (aim for 10 seconds or less), clear (avoid jargon, acronyms, technical terms), and catchy (consider using a quick story, anecdote, metaphor, etc. to help illustrate your point.)
- Practice! The best sound bites are authentic but not off the cuff.

What do you mean by asset-framing? How do I do that?

- Data doesn't frame itself ... and is susceptible to misinterpretation.
- This misinterpretation is especially harmful to historically marginalized communities.
- Key messages should highlight the systems and structures within your district that act as barriers to equitable opportunities and outcomes. This "structure-not-student" approach is known as **asset-framing**.
- Asset-framing places the responsibility on leaders and systems, emphasizing system-level action and does not blame or fault students.

How do I use this message triangle?

- Make it the backbone of your messaging efforts.
- Use it to practice, practice, practice articulating the issue.
- Use it to stay focused on key points, especially when the opposition tries to throw you off course.
- Use it alongside the Alliance for Resource Equity [diagnostic tool](#) to more thoroughly assess the state of [school leadership quality and diversity](#) in your district, as well as in combination with the [guidebooks](#) to dig deeper into root causes and potential actions.

What is the Alliance for Resource Equity? How do I learn more?

- The Alliance for Resource Equity is a partnership between EdTrust and Education Resource Strategies.
- We focus on 10 key dimensions of resource equity — providing tools and resources to help advocates and districts work together to consider how resources (people, time, and money) are spent and distributed.
- Learn more at www.educationresourceequity.org.

Endnotes

1. Gregory F. Branch, Eric A. Hanushek, and Steven Rivkin. "School Leaders Matter." *Education Next*, 2013. <http://educationnext.org/school-leaders-matter/>
2. Roland G. Fryer Jr. "Management and Student Achievement: Evidence from a Randomized Field Experiment." Harvard University, 2017. https://scholar.harvard.edu/files/fryer/files/mgmt_20170515_with_tables_figures.pdf; Marianna Valdez, Alexandria Broin, and Kathleen Carroll. "Untapped: Transforming Teacher Leadership to Help Students Succeed." *New Leaders*, 2015. https://newleaders.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/09/NewLeaders_Untapped.pdf; Tim Waters, Robert J. Marzano, and Brin McNulty. "Balanced Leadership." Mid-Continent Regional Education Lab, 2003. <https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/ED481972.pdf>; Karin Chenoweth and Christina Theokas. "Getting it Done: Leading Academic Success in Unexpected Schools." Harvard Education Press, 2011. https://www.hepg.org/hephome/books/getting-it-done_147; Kenneth Leithwood, Karen Seashore Louis, Stephen Anderson, Kyla Wahlstrom. "How Leadership Influences Student Learning." Center for Applied Research and Educational Improvement, 2004. <https://eric.ed.gov/?id=ED485932>
3. Brendan Bartanen and Jason Grissom. "School Principal Race and the Hiring and Retention of Racially Diverse Teachers." Annenberg Institute at Brown University, 2019. <https://edworkingpapers.com/sites/default/files/ai19-59.pdf>
4. Jason A. Grissom, Luis A. Rodriguez, and Emily C. Kern. "Teacher and Principal Diversity and the Representation of Students of Color in Gifted Programs: Evidence from National Data." *The Elementary School Journal*, 2017. <https://www.journals.uchicago.edu/doi/abs/10.1086/690274>
5. Brendan Bartanen and Jason Grissom. "School Principal Race and the Hiring and Retention of Racially Diverse Teachers." Annenberg Institute at Brown University, 2019. <https://edworkingpapers.com/sites/default/files/ai19-59.pdf>
6. Superville, D. (2021). "Principals of Color Are Scarce. Here's What Districts Are Doing About It." *Education Week*.
7. Ibid.

Key Question	Data Metric	Data Source
<p>Key Question 3.1 Does each student have access to strong school leadership?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Scatterplot of district principals' years of experience (x-axis) and % students of color • Scatterplot of district principals' years of experience (x-axis) and % students from low-income background (y-axis) • Stacked bar chart of district principal's years of experience by school type 	<p>State DOE report cards may include a measure of principals' and/or administrators' years of experience.</p>
<p>Key Question 3.2 Does the school leadership workforce reflect student and staff diversity?</p>	<p>Stacked bar chart of racial/ethnic distribution of school leaders beside distribution of students' racial/ethnic distribution</p>	<p>Urban Institute/NCES provides student demographic information. Check State DOE report card for district-level data on school leaders, and/or rely on personal knowledge for demographics of school leaders.</p>

DATA NOTES: For this dimension, there are no strong federally maintained data sources. Rely more heavily on your own personal experiences, general knowledge, and popular news sources to help fill out the gaps in data. While the lack of data may lead to only an imperfect data metric in your message triangle, it can still help surface foundational information and develop lines of inquiry where a key message becomes clear. If no district data exists and personal knowledge is limited, advocates can point to national trends and highlight the lack of local data transparency on the issue.

YOUR DISTRICT:

Key Message 1



DATA METRIC: _____



SOUNDBITE: _____



NARRATIVE: _____

**Core Message
("North Star")**

Key Message 3

Key Message 2

DATA METRIC: _____



SOUNDBITE: _____



NARRATIVE: _____



DATA METRIC: _____



SOUNDBITE: _____



NARRATIVE: _____

