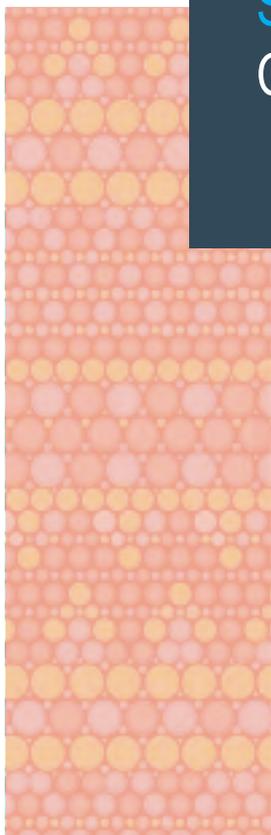
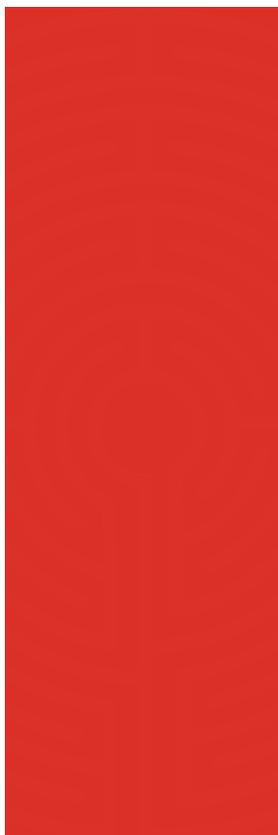


Unpacking
the Pennsylvania
Culturally Relevant and
Sustaining Education
Competencies



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Like life, racial understanding is not something that we find, but something that we must create. A productive and happy life is not something you find; it is something you make.”

Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.

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Introduction

No matter their background, every child in Pennsylvania deserves the opportunity to learn in a welcoming, inclusive environment that affirms their identity and helps them learn to navigate an increasingly diverse world. In order to provide such environments, Pennsylvania teachers need training and support to ensure they can meet the needs of all learners, especially those from historically marginalized backgrounds. To that end, in 2022, the State Board of Education approved new educator certification regulations that support current and future teachers in becoming culturally relevant and sustaining educators.

This guide offers research-based justifications for why each competency is important, what each entails, as well as some recommendations for putting each one into practice. We are aware that this is difficult work. Our intention was to produce a document that would be simple to access and enable all stakeholders in the educational system the chance to analyze their own cultures as well as that of other people.

Although it shouldn't be used as a comprehensive manual for a single training on diversity, equity, inclusion, and belonging, our goal is for this guide to be used in a way that encourages ongoing reflection and implementation. One recommendation for generating purposeful practice is to tackle one competency per month over the course of a school year.

We made an effort to include as many different viewpoints as we could in the resources and suggestions areas. Although we fully acknowledge that it is hard to portray each and every distinct perspective with relation to each competency, issues of intersectionality lie at the core of these competencies. While some of the advice and resources may speak specifically to problems with certain positionalities in your area, it is our goal that you will be able to scale these suggestions to fit your particular context.



COMPETENCY | 1

Reflecting on One's Cultural Lens



1

REFLECTING ON ONE'S CULTURAL LENS

Why it's important?

Critical reflection regarding one's cultural lens allows educators to “deeply understand the ways in which their teaching styles enhance their ability to challenge the traditional mode of practice and [helps them define] how they will grow toward greater effectiveness as teachers.”¹ Authentic reflection allows educators to better understand how their cultural lens shapes the interactions they have with their students, parents, colleagues, and any other stakeholders.

What does it really mean?

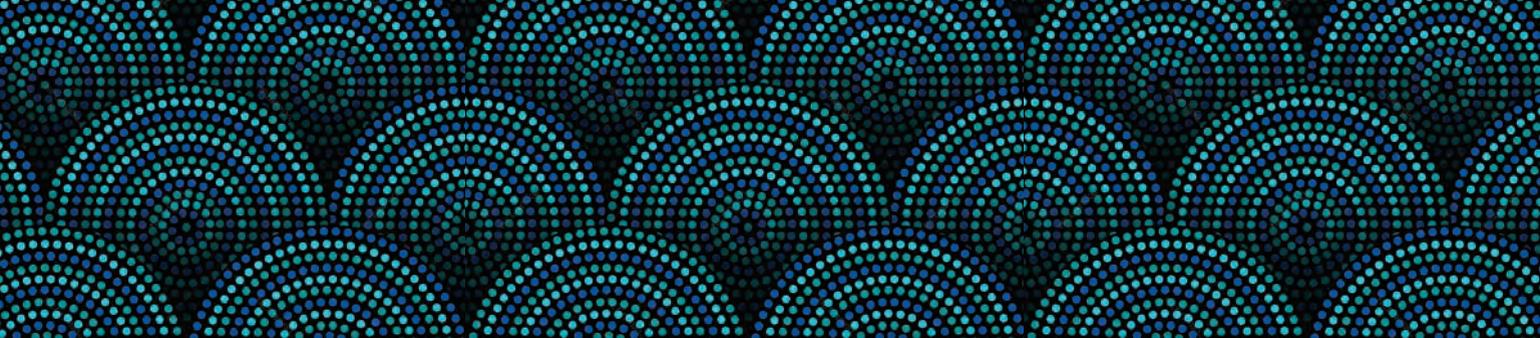
At the simplest level, our cultural lens refers to how we each view the world. A key aspect of our cultural lens is our ability to generate and develop self-awareness. The more that we understand our own personalities, culture, stereotypes, and implicit bias, the more we can understand those same things in others. We need to be aware of how our personal cultural lenses impact how we respond to the world and how the world responds to us.

Suggestions

- Provide opportunities for school stakeholders to create and share “Who Am I” presentations throughout the school year.
- Encourage participants to use “Reflective Journaling” in their work.
- Implement activities that encourage discussion about student backgrounds and cultures.

Resources

1. [Examine your LENS: A Tool For Interpreting Cultural Differences](#)
2. [Culture in the Classroom](#)
3. [Getting to Know You Activities for Adults](#)
4. [Connect with Students by Sharing from a Cultural Lens](#)
5. [Raising Race Questions: Whiteness and Inquiry in Education](#)
6. [The Benefits of Developing a Reflective Routine](#)
7. [Social Identity Wheel](#)
8. [Identity Signs Activity](#)



COMPETENCY | 2

Identify, Deepen Understanding of, and Take Steps to Address Bias in the System

Why it's important?

While the student population in the United States is becoming increasingly diverse, the teaching force is still White-dominant by a large margin.² In 2020-21, over 1,400 Pennsylvania schools (48% of all schools) and 178 entire school districts (36% of all districts) employed zero teachers of color.³ This White-dominant population of teachers is tasked with educating increasing numbers of students of color from diverse backgrounds. In this way, racial bias (as one example) remains invisible in a system that presents what are really biases as the “typical” way of operating in schools. The same can be said for a bias against any group that does not fit what we have come to define as the “norm” in educational spaces.

2

IDENTIFY, DEEPEN UNDERSTANDING OF, AND TAKE STEPS TO ADDRESS BIAS IN THE SYSTEM

What does it really mean?

All school stakeholders must think critically about how to identify, understand, and address biases that stem from a system where middle class, heterosexual, cisgender, whiteness is the reference point for normalcy.

Suggestions

- In the classroom and/or professional development spaces, this looks like educators having conversations about the following:
 - Implicit bias
 - Social identity markers such as race, gender identity, language, ability, class, etc.
 - Privilege
 - Systemic racism
- Develop an anti-racism policy to combat racism at institutional or structural levels.
- Conduct curriculum audits to remove bias.
- Examine school data on discipline, broken down by racial demographics, to determine if the data is representative of the school population.
- Review current student and staff handbook for potentially inequitable practices and policies such as school dress code.

Resources

1. [Government Accountability Office's Study on Dress Code](#)
2. [Understanding Implicit Bias by the New York Times](#)
3. [The Person You Mean To Be: How Good People Fight Bias by Dolly Chugh](#)
4. [Bad Boys: Public Schools in the Making of Black Masculinity of](#)
5. [Watch: How to overcome our biases? Walk boldly toward them](#)
6. [Project Implicit](#)
7. [Teaching Tolerance Anti-Bias Framework](#)



COMPETENCY | 3

Design and Facilitate Culturally Relevant Learning that Brings Real World Experiences into Educational Spaces

Why it's important?

Research also illustrates that instructional materials, assignments, and texts that reflect students' backgrounds and experiences are critical to engagement and deep, meaningful learning.⁴ It would be devastating to convey to our students of color and others from historically marginalized groups that the classroom is not a place where they can express their anxieties and fears and their joys triumphs. Classrooms are places that can fundamentally change the lives of students for the better in extraordinary ways. However, classrooms are also places that can single-handedly destroy a student's concept of self and deplete their self-worth. Ignoring and thus devaluing the lived experiences of any student ensures that the latter is a greater possibility.

3

DESIGN AND FACILITATE CULTURALLY RELEVANT LEARNING THAT BRINGS REAL WORLD EXPERIENCES INTO EDUCATIONAL SPACES

What does it really mean?

At a time where students of color and others from historically marginalized groups see so few if any teachers that look like them, it is more critical than ever to choose curricular material and design learning experiences that honor, celebrate, and validate the lives of these groups. Teachers must intentionally create spaces for students to draw from their lived experiences and become agents of change in their communities, giving opportunities for students to solve real world problems.

Suggestions

- In classroom and professional development spaces, this looks like conversations about:
 - Real world, lived experiences
 - Reactions to current events
 - Identity and heritage
- Develop instructional resources and assessments in order for students to:
 - Solve problems in their communities (Project Based Learning)
 - Develop self-efficacy, civic responsibility, and advocacy skills
 - Connect content area knowledge to students' daily lives
 - Incorporate students' cultural backgrounds, personal perspectives, family traditions
 - Practice deep listening and empathy through sharing lived experiences
- Designing educational spaces with literature, bulletin boards, holiday celebrations, displays, etc to be culturally inclusive of learners' diverse identities.

Resources

1. [Ground Rules for BRAVE Conversations in the Classroom and Beyond](#)
2. [DEI Filtering Tool for School Curriculum](#)
3. [Culturally Responsive Teaching Checklist](#)
4. [Culturally Responsive Curriculum Scorecard Audit from NYU](#)
5. [Read: Windows, Mirrors, or Sliding Glass Doors](#)
6. [Teaching Strategy: Window or Mirror](#)
7. [Social Justice Standards for K-12](#)



COMPETENCY | 4

Provide All Learners with Equitable and Differentiated Opportunities to Learn and Succeed

Why it's important?

Equitable education does not just mean access. Equity implies that there is opportunity to thrive in any environment. It cannot just be about teaching kids to be successful on tests. It has to include a strong focus on empowerment and agency in ALL of our student achievements. The Center for Professional Education of Teachers (CPET) states that “Creating equitable education and assessment practices doesn’t end with offering students what they need or deserve to succeed. Equitable policies and practices aim to empower students to recognize and develop their own talents and skills; and to become agents of change for their futures. Equity means achieving lasting results for all people, regardless of their socioeconomic, racial, ability and ethnic backgrounds.”⁵

4

PROVIDE ALL LEARNERS WITH EQUITABLE AND DIFFERENTIATED OPPORTUNITIES TO LEARN AND SUCCEED

What does it really mean?

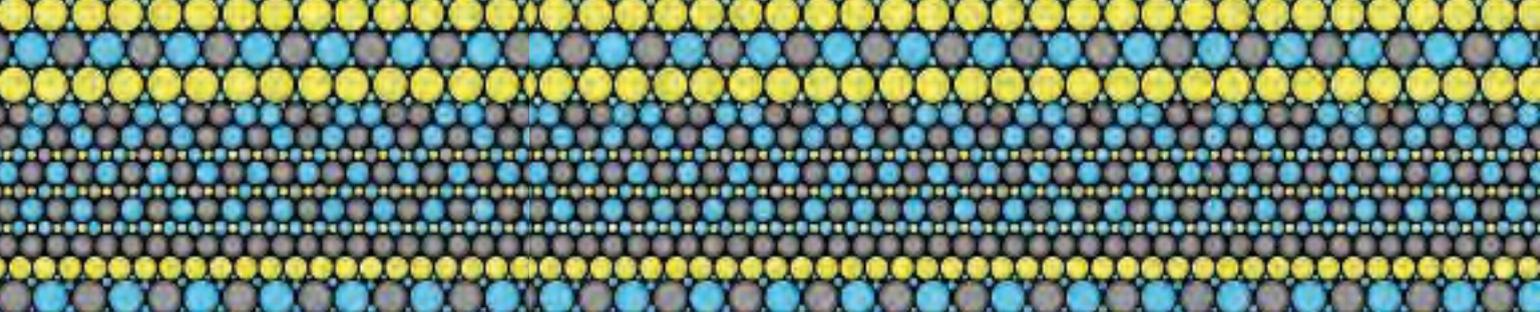
Culturally responsive educators must always recognize that not every student learns the same way and implement strategies that are in line with diverse learning styles and backgrounds. It is first helpful to look at the class/school demographics to make necessary adjustments. One of the best ways to implement equitable opportunities is to find creative projects and assessments that can give opportunities for students to show understanding of content outside of standardized testing.

Suggestions

- Provide support and resources for ALL students regardless of ability level.
- Focus on growth mindset vs. fixed mindset to help students celebrate growth at a more manageable rate.
- Set high expectations and implement scaffolding strategies to help students get there over time rather than at a fixed point of a unit.
- Provide meaningful feedback on student performance that includes specific details of recommendations and strengths.
- Consider mixing in mastery learning with traditional learning.

Resources

1. [Grading for Equity](#)
2. [Equity vs. Equality](#)
3. [Visualizing Equality vs. Equity](#)
4. [How to Differentiate Instruction in the Classroom](#)
5. [Equity and Assessment](#)



COMPETENCY | 5

Promote Asset-Based Perspectives about Differences

Why it's important?

Asset-based perspectives start with the realization that our differences are strengths and not weaknesses. Instead of viewing our differences as shortcomings that need to be overcome, an asset-based approach encourages us to see our different talents, diverse backgrounds, and abilities as unique and worth sharing and celebrating. “Asset-based teaching seeks to unlock students’ potential by focusing on their talents. Also known as strengths-based teaching, this approach contrasts with the more common deficit-based style of teaching which highlights students’ inadequacies.”⁶ Understanding different perspectives allows educators to respect people’s boundaries and viewpoints. It also encourages people to realize that differences can help provide context and understanding. In unpacking and sharing our differences, we can step back and see where possible areas of connection are needed. Ensuring equity for an increasingly diverse student population relies on today’s educators viewing student differences as assets and not deficits.

5

PROMOTE ASSET-BASED PERSPECTIVES ABOUT DIFFERENCES

What does it really mean?

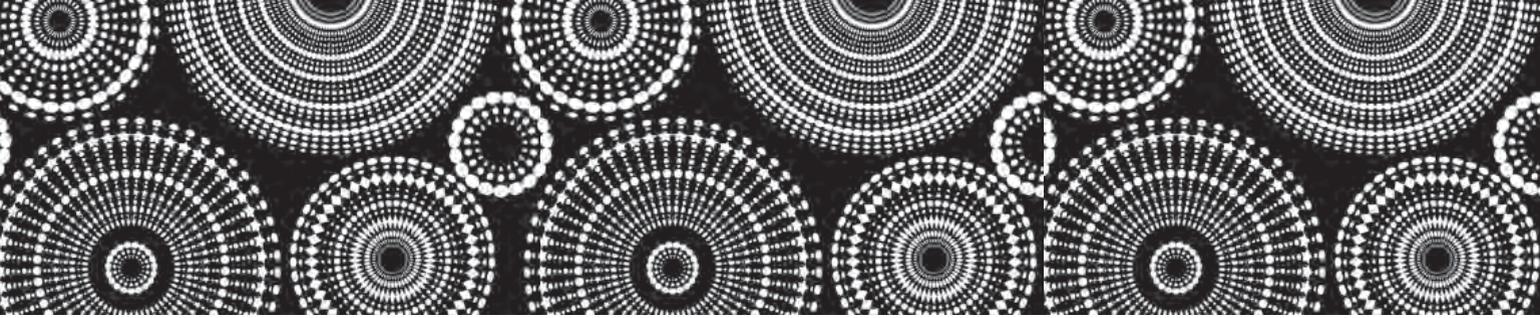
“We know that the best and most organic learning builds on what students already know,” said Diana Turk, Director of Teacher Education at NYU Steinhardt. “In order to reach students, we have to know what they know – not just what they don’t know. We need to see them – and have them see themselves – as capable learners who can learn and do anything.”⁷ An asset-based approach helps students find personal meaning and relevance in learning and supports them in meeting the goals they have for themselves.

Suggestions

- Multicultural event: Showcase different cultures, storytelling, abilities, and food.
- Create an interracial union where students from all backgrounds can safely and courageously share stories and experiences.
- Have students tell their stories.
- Allow all students to discuss their cultures and abilities in all classes.
- Social Emotional Learning/Community building daily warm up.
- Student surveys throughout the year.
- Incorporate community building activities throughout the year.
- Begin units with a diagnostic learning activity that will provide information on what students know and can do.

Resources

1. [Asset-Based Approach to Education](#)
2. [The Power of Storytelling to Facilitate Human Connection and Learning](#)
3. [Asset-Based Pedagogies](#)
4. [3 Steps to Developing an Asset-Based Approach to Teaching](#)



COMPETENCY | 6

Collaborate with Families and Communities through Authentic Engagement Practices

Why it's important?

Success occurs when there is trust in the relationship between schools and home communities. Engaging families in schools can lead to improved attendance, higher grades and test scores, better social skills, increased student motivation, and improved behavior.⁸ Along with collaborating with caregivers and families, it's crucial to first learn how they want to be involved.

6

COLLABORATE WITH FAMILIES AND COMMUNITIES THROUGH AUTHENTIC ENGAGEMENT PRACTICE

What does it really mean?

Culturally Responsive educators value the communities that their students come from, value the communities that they teach in, and believe in having a collegial relationship with the families to ensure student success.

Suggestions

- Invite family and communities to co-create and amend operational policies during planning meetings (e.g. dress codes since not every family can afford clothes that meet the dress code, discipline policies, attendance, lunch menus, etc) and invite families and communities to curriculum development meetings.
- Make PTA/PTO/Parent meetings available on a rotating time of the day and via Zoom to accommodate all parties and various work schedules.
- Prepare an alternate location for extra family members (younger children; older parents/guardians) to be engaged while event is happening.
- Educate staff about cultural norms and costumes (e.g. dress code, writing in red, gender roles, etc.)
- Ask parents how they wish to collaborate with the school district.

Resources

1. [Building Parent-Teacher Relationships](#)
2. [Teacher-Parent Communication Strategies](#)
3. [Handbook on Family and Community Engagement](#)
4. [A Guide to Home Visits](#)
5. [The Role of the PTA](#)



COMPETENCY | 7

Communicate in Linguistically and Culturally Responsive Ways that Demonstrate Respect for Learners, Educators, Educational Leaders, and Families

Why it's important?

If handled with respect and cultural sensitivity, communication between school staff, students, and families provides an opportunity to live out the values of inclusivity and equity, which are at the heart of anti-bias education. “Culturally responsive teachers seek to understand how culture influences education both in verbal ways (e.g. the tone of voice, rhythm and vocabulary used) and non verbal ways (e.g. the amount of space between the speaker and listener, eye contact, body movements and gestures) to avoid miscommunication and over disciplining. They also honor and accommodate multilingual students and families with translation services”.⁹ Additionally, strong communication with all families offers teachers an opportunity to invite family involvement and share curricular goals, materials and resources.¹⁰

7

COMMUNICATE IN LINGUISTICALLY AND CULTURALLY RESPONSIVE WAYS THAT DEMONSTRATE RESPECT FOR LEARNERS, EDUCATORS, EDUCATIONAL LEADERS, AND FAMILIES

What does it really mean?

Tending to culturally sensitive communication supports two of the four anti-bias domains: Identity and Diversity. Culturally relevant family engagement strategies communicate to students that their family identities are understood and valued. It also demonstrates respect for families with a diverse range of backgrounds and structures.

Suggestions

- Provide opportunities to acknowledge and celebrate all holidays and a space for those who don't.
- Have translators / interpreters available who are proficient in the family's home language. Be sure to include ASL translators (written and otherwise)
- Ask all parents for their preferred form of communication (use home language).
- Add signage around the building that is reflective of students' backgrounds
- Offer foreign language and/or English language acquisition to:
 - Students
 - Parents
 - Staff

Resources

1. [Supporting Linguistically and Culturally Diverse Learners in English Education](#)
2. [Learning for Justice: Family and Community Engagement](#)
3. [Talking Points App](#)
4. [VHS Classes for Foreign Language Classes](#)



COMPETENCY | 8

Establish High Expectations for Each Learner and Treat Them as Capable and Deserving of Achieving Success

Why it's important?

In 2019, Davis and Museus¹¹ defined deficit thinking as a mindset that “holds students from historically oppressed populations responsible for the challenges and inequalities that they face.” These perspectives serve to negatively impact a teacher’s ability to see all students as capable of learning at the highest level. In order to provide equitable learning spaces for all students, it will be important for educators to employ these standards in both the way they perceive and instruct students.

8

ESTABLISH HIGH EXPECTATIONS FOR EACH LEARNER AND TREAT THEM AS CAPABLE AND DESERVING OF ACHIEVING SUCCESS

What does it really mean?

Educators must recognize that students from marginalized groups are vulnerable to negative stereotypes about their intelligence, academic ability, and behavior.¹² These stereotypes influence our perception of our students and the expectations we have for them, which also influences students' perceptions of their own abilities.¹³ Stakeholders must also consider the ways they might be misplacing accountability on students rather than on “oppressive structures, policies, and practices within educational settings.”¹⁴

Suggestions

- Empower students to set high expectations for themselves through goal setting journal activities.
- Include student input in the making of assessment rubrics.
- Nurture students' creativity through authentic assessments.
- Establish authentic relationships with learners via activities such as an attendance question of the day and displaying students' photos in the classroom.
- Incorporate social emotional learning opportunities into lessons.
- Include families and community members in strategic planning, creating and facilitating school activities, and providing input on school policies and procedures.

Resources

1. [Serving Neurodiverse Students](#)
2. [Growth Mindset Activities](#)
3. [Fixed and Growth Mindset in Education](#)
4. [Universal Design for Learning Framework](#)
5. [We Want to Do More Than Survive by Bettina Love](#)
6. [Fundamentals of Social Emotional Learning](#)



COMPETENCY | 9

Educate Oneself About Microaggressions and their Impact on Diverse Learners, Educators, and Families, and Actively Disrupt the Practice by Naming and Challenging its Use

Why it's important?

Microaggressions in the school setting can disrupt student's ability to engage in the learning process because their feelings of belonging are called into question.¹⁵ It is imperative that all children feel welcomed and supported in the school community.

9

Educate Oneself About Microaggressions and their Impact on Diverse Learners, Educators, and Families, and Actively Disrupt the Practice by Naming and Challenging its Use

What does it really mean?

- “Microaggressions” are the everyday slights, insults, put-downs, invalidations, and offensive behaviors that people from marginalized groups experience in daily interactions with generally well-intentioned members of dominant identity groups who may be unaware that they have engaged in demeaning ways.
- “Macroaggressions” refer to systemic and institutional forms of racism which are represented in the philosophy, programs, policies, practices and structures of the school/school district.

Suggestions

- Educate staff about offensive terms/words/phrases that are harmful to the cultural and gender identity groups that their students represent.
- Have explicit/implicit training for staff throughout the school year to address microaggressions in the classroom; heavy emphasis at the start of the school year
- Have a system in place to address when people experience microaggressions.
- Educate staff on the diverse classroom expectations of different cultures.
- Encourage restorative practice with discipline, such as alternative suspension

Resources

1. [Ronald Berk’s Microaggression Trilogy \(Part I, Part II, Part III\)](#)
2. [UPenn’s Respecting Pronouns](#)
3. [TED Talk: Eliminating Microaggressions](#)
4. [“For White Folks Who Teach in the Hood” - Christopher Emdin](#)
5. [The Restorative Practices Handbook - IIRP](#)
6. [Don’t Suspend Me!: An Alternative Discipline Toolkit Second Edition - by Jessica Hannigan](#)

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ABOUT TEACH PLUS

Teach Plus is dedicated to the mission of empowering excellent, experienced, and diverse teachers to take leadership over key policy and practice issues that advance equity, opportunity, and student success. Since 2009, Teach Plus has developed thousands of teacher leaders across the country to exercise their leadership in shaping education policy and improving teaching and learning, to create an education system driven by access and excellence for all. | www.teachplus.org



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