

ILLINOIS PRINCIPALS ASSOCIATION

Diversity & Equity Committee Progress Report

ilprincipals.org



September 2026

“ To be the type of leader our organizations need, **we need to acknowledge that there are systemic disparities where students, staff, and even some leaders continue to be marginalized.** We must **continually question the structures and practices** that exist in our schools. As the leaders of our organizations, we need to **make a commitment to address any disparities or injustices** in our organizations. We have been called to take charge and **create the changes necessary** so in 10, 20, or 30 years, we are not where we are today.



— **Sonia Ruiz, Chairperson**

IPA Diversity & Equity Committee &
2026 National Middle Level Principal of the Year

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HISTORY, goals and vision

The IPA values diversity, equity, and inclusion in our schools and in our Association. To this end, the IPA Board of Directors created the statewide Diversity & Equity Chair position in October 2018, later codifying the position in the IPA Constitution in the fall of 2019. Denise Michelle Gamble, retired Chicago Public Schools principal, was seated as the IPA Board's first Diversity & Equity Chair in January 2019 and immediately began encouraging the IPA's 21 Regions to seat their own Diversity and Equity Chairs. Region Diversity & Equity Chairs began meeting as the IPA's Diversity and Equity Committee in 2020 with the expressed purposes of:

- Ensuring the IPA's leadership and membership were reflective of the profession.
- Providing critical input into the development of the IPA's professional learning program, Model Student Handbook procedures, and legislative positions.
- Supporting the IPA Regions with their diversity, equity, and inclusion efforts.



OUTCOMES and strategies

Duties of Diversity and Equity Chairs

The IPA Region Diversity & Equity Chair is a volunteer position providing an educational leader the professional opportunity to serve fellow educational leaders and IPA Members in a specific location of the State of Illinois. During their term of service, Region Diversity & Equity Chairs advocate for and encourage diversity and equity among fellow educational leaders. Duties include:

1. Attend all Region Board Meetings.
2. Attend all State Diversity & Equity Committee Meetings. Report association diversity and equity goals and initiatives to the Region Board.
3. Coordinate diversity and equity initiatives/events in their Region.
4. Within their Region, continue to encourage involvement and solicit support for their Region Board and the IPA by extending invitations to Black, Latinx, Asian, and other marginalized communities to meetings and opportunities to lead initiatives.
5. Lead efforts in their Region to grow the educator pipeline, especially among Black, Latinx, Asian, and other marginalized communities.
6. Provide input into the development of the IPA's professional learning program to ensure all members' needs are being met.
7. Provide input into the development of the IPA's legislative positions to ensure the Association views all policy issues through an equity lens.
8. Ensure a smooth transition of leadership when their term as Diversity & Equity Chair ends.

Resources

- The IPA Diversity & Equity Committee has curated numerous resources for members that can be found on the IPA website.

Professional Development and Region Events

In addition to providing ongoing resources for personal and professional development, the IPA Diversity & Equity Committee has worked to encourage regions and committee members to create programming within regions to examine issues of diversity, equity, and inclusion. Professional development and regional event information follows.

Alignment with IPA Legislative and Membership Committees

The IPA Diversity & Equity Committee seeks to work closely with IPA Legislative and Membership Committees to ensure work in the committees is focused on diversity, equity, and inclusion.

- The Diversity & Equity Committee will help review and provide guidance for positions on pending legislation.
- The Diversity & Equity Committee will work to ensure a welcoming environment for school leaders of diverse backgrounds to become involved in the association and seek out leadership opportunities.

DIVERSITY & EQUITY-FOCUSED professional development

Over the last several years, IPA has focused much of its professional development offerings on promoting diversity and equity. Following are Administrator Academies, Micro-Credentials, Webinars, and Ed Leaders Network (ELN) Courses that address aspects of working with diverse learners, addressing implicit biases, family engagement, exposing students to diverse literature, relationship-building, and more.

In addition, IPA has included a monthly equity challenge in the School Leader Calendar which serves as a resource for administrators to remember important dates and continue their professional and personal growth through guided questions and prompts throughout the year. Challenges include reviewing data on diverse cultures that exist within the learning organization (students and staff), asking staff to help set one equity goal, exploring personal biases, and reviewing academic, attendance, discipline, and other relevant student data with a focus on any disparities based on race, socio-economic status, or other factors.

Administrator Academies

- 2025 Finding, Growing, and Sustaining Leaders (and Teachers) of Color
- Be the Thermostat, Not the Thermometer: Leadership, Belonging, and Results
- Building Trusting Relationships with At-Risk Students
- Caring Connections: A Whole School Approach to Mental Health and Wellness
- Classroom Management Strategies: Supporting Restorative Practices ON-DEMAND
- Culturally Responsive School Leadership: Moving from Theory to Practice
- ECE: Cultural & Linguistic Diversity in Early Childhood Education
- ECE: Early Childhood Inclusion: Supporting Children's Special Needs in High-Quality Early Learning Environment
- ECE: The Foundation of MTSS (Multi-Tiered System of Supports) in Early Learning Environments
- Equity ON-DEMAND
- Equity and Racial Literacy for School Leaders and Staff to Maximize Student Learning
- Family Engagement: Meaningful, Ongoing Involvement in PreK-8 Schools
- Five Key Practices for Every Teacher That Works with English Learners
- From Words to Action – Antiracism in Schools: Extending the Conversation (Course 2)
- From Words to Action: Your Response to Racism in Schools (Course 1)
- High School MTSS: A Path to Equity in Action
- Humanity and Leadership: A Holistic Path Forward During a Mental Health Crisis
- Igniting School Leadership: Navigating Individual, School, Community, and Political Contexts
- Journey to Anti-Racist Education ON-DEMAND
- Leading Equity Work in a Majority White School
- Leading Restorative Practices at Your School
- Leading with Grace: Identity, Courage, & Sustainable Impact
- Leading with Justice for All: Are You Prepared? LGBTQ Sensitivity, Bias & Response
- Our Students Matter: Ensuring Your Equity Plan is Set for Success
- Programming the Future: Leading Equitable Computer Science Education for English Learners
- Tackling Chronic Absenteeism: Leveraging Data and Implementing Proven Strategies
- Three Levels of Support for ELL: Classroom, School, District
- Unsupervised and Unstoppable: What All Leaders Can Learn from Women in Leadership
- Using Student Growth Data from Diverse Populations in Teacher Performance Evaluation
- Women in Leadership: Learning, Leading, Living!

Micro-Credentials

Equity Micro-Credential Stack – Culture

- Leading an Equitable Learning Culture
- Exemplifying Equitable Behavior
- Constructing and Growing Equity

Global Mindedness Micro-Credential Stack – Culture

- Embedding a Global-Minded Culture
- Exemplifying a Global-Minded Culture

Ed Leaders Network Webinars/Courses

- Amplifying Equitable Behavior
- Anti-Bias Education
- Autism Professional Learning and Universal Supports Project (A+)
- Becoming a Global Leader
- Bias and Microaggressions in the Classroom
- Black Girl Blues
- Celebrating and Honoring Students of All Backgrounds in Difficult Times
- Creating an Inclusive and Diverse Space with Classroom Media Content
- Creating Inclusive Classrooms
- Cultivating an E-Team with Equity at the Center
- Cultivating Student Agency Through Intergenerational Activism
- Curriculum Violence
- Developing and Cultivating an E-Team with Equity at the Center
- Empathy, Equity, and Agency in K-12
- Ensuring Success in Schools
- Exemplifying Equitable Behavior
- From Words to Action: Your Response to Racism in Schools
- Inclusion 101 and the Ability Inclusive Mindset
- Intentional Equity Centered Leadership Planning
- Introduction to Cultural Competency
- Journey Toward Anti-Racist Education
- Modernizing Your ESL, Bilingual, Dual Program Design
- Navigating Difficult Conversations About Race, Implicit Bias, and Microaggressions
- Racism Free Schools (coming soon)
- Reaching Diverse Learners in the Math Classroom
- Restorative Justice in Schools
- Shadows of Power: Trauma-Informed Leadership, Gender Equity, and the Crisis Facing Boys in Schools
- Supporting Refugee and Immigrant Students in Schools
- Sustaining an Equitable Learning Culture
- The Emergence of Equity, Race & Cultural Diversity Initiatives Positions in District Level
- The Inclusion Solution
- What is CRT?



More than 22 percent of our Administrator Academy presenters are leaders from underrepresented groups.

STATEWIDE efforts

I-Grow Summit for Educational Leaders and Teachers of Color

The 5th annual I-Grow Summit for Educational Leaders and Teachers of Color was held in Bloomington and attended by 76 individuals. The event continues the specific goal of growing, retaining, and recruiting teachers and educational leaders of color. The Summit represents a partnership between the following entities: Be the Thermostat Consulting, LLC; Illinois Association of Latino Administrators & Superintendents (IALAS); Illinois Association of School Administrators (IASA); Illinois Association of School Boards (IASB); Illinois Association of School Personnel Administrators (IASPA); Illinois Coalition of Educational Equity Leaders (ICEEL); Illinois Education Association (IEA); Illinois Federation of Teachers (IFT); Illinois Principals Association (IPA); Illinois State Board of Education (ISBE). The event received financial support from Army ROTC, Illinois Principals Foundation, Illinois State Board of Education, Illinois Affinity Group Network, Illinois Association of School Personnel Administrators, Illinois State University, Olivet Nazarene University, and Southern Illinois University Edwardsville.

WELL Summit

The 8th annual WELL Summit (Women in Education: Leading and Learning) was held in Peoria and attended by 284 individuals. Supported by 18 statewide organizations, the mission of the event is to empower, connect, inspire, support, celebrate, and develop women in educational leadership. The Summit represents a partnership between the following entities: Ed-Red; the Illinois Alliance of Administrators of Special Education; the Illinois Association of Regional Superintendents of Schools; the Illinois Association of School Administrators; the Illinois Association of School Boards; the Illinois Association of School Business Officials; the Illinois Association of School Personnel Administrators; the Illinois Digital Educators Alliance; the Center: Early Childhood; the Illinois Elementary School Association; the Illinois High School District Organization; the Illinois Music Education Association; the Illinois Principals Association; the Illinois Resource Center; the Illinois State Board of Education; the Large Unit District Association; the Legislative Education Network of DuPage; and the South Cooperative Organization for Public Education. The event received financial support from DLA Architects, Guin Mundorf LLC; PMA; Stifel; the Illinois Principals Foundation; Denise Gamble, the Illinois Association of School Personnel Administrators, the Illinois Alliance of Administrators of Special Education, the Illinois Digital Educators Alliance, and Roxy & Lola.

Principal Mentoring Grant

Through its statewide capacity to reach principals, the Illinois Principals Association provided mentoring to 77 first-year principals during the FY26 program year (July 1, 2025-March 31, 2026). Operating under an ISBE Title II mentoring grant administered through Sangamon-Menard ROE 51, the program paired each first-year principal with an experienced, IPA-approved mentor who provided structured, individualized support aligned to the demands of the principalship. Every mentoring pair was contracted for a minimum of 40 hours of mentoring contact, and all mentors were verified as qualified and trained prior to placement.

Seventy-three protégés completed the program year, and all 73 (100%) met the 40-hour minimum. Sixty-nine mentors delivered 2,960.5 total mentoring hours statewide, an average of 40.6 hours per completing protégé. Mentor-protégé pairs were located an average of 32 miles apart, reflecting the Association’s effort to match participants within reasonable proximity while prioritizing alignment on school level and context.

Gender Information

	Number	Percentage
Female	43	56%
Male	34	44%

Race/Ethnicity

	Number	Percentage
White	63	82%
Black or African American	8	10%
Hispanic	6	8%

School Context

	Number	Percentage
Urban	10	13%
Suburban	39	51%
Rural	28	36%

Grade Setting

	Number	Percentage
Elementary	38	49%
Middle School	22	29%
High School	17	22%

Principal Recruitment Grant

The Illinois Principals Association supported principal preparation candidates through the ISBE Principal Recruitment Grant during FY26 (July 1, 2025-June 30, 2026). FY26 funding supported the first year of the program's third cohort of 100 participants.

IPA received 134 applications for Cohort 3. All applications were reviewed by a team of college and university professors and individuals in statewide leadership roles, with each candidate's application, narrative, resume, and references analyzed by at least two readers. The top 100 candidates were notified of their selection. Three candidates withdrew during the grant year citing personal reasons; because of the early timing of their withdrawal, three candidates from the waiting list were added, maintaining 100 participants. Aspiring leaders who committed to completing a principal preparation program and working in underperforming and/or hard-to-staff schools were given acceptance preference.

The cohort was selected through a rigorous process and committed to:

- Becoming a school leader (principal, assistant principal, dean, etc.) upon completion of their preparation program.
- Gaining acceptance into a state-approved principal preparation program.
- Completing all principal preparation program requirements.
- Being mentored by an experienced Illinois school leader.

Participants received the following benefits during the grant year: \$7,400 of tuition support; 20 hours of mentoring by an experienced Illinois school leader; \$500 to offset professional development opportunities so the aspiring leader can engage in IPA leadership activities; IPA Aspiring Membership, connecting the aspiring school leader to the largest professional learning network of school leaders in Illinois.

Gender Information

	Cohort 3		State of Illinois (2025)*	
	Number	Percentage	Principals	Students
Female	79	79%	61%	48.6%
Male	21	21%	39%	51.4%
Non-Binary	0	0%	0%	0%

*<https://www.illinoisreportcard.com/state.aspx?source=profile&Stateid=IL>

Race/Ethnicity

	Cohort 3		State of Illinois (2025)*	
	Number	Percentage	Principals	Students
White	54	54%	74.4%	44.3%
Black or African American	18	18%	14.5%	16.3%
Hispanic or Latino	27	27%	6.6%	28.6%
Asian	1	1%	1.1%	5.7%
American Indian or Alaska Native	0	0%	.2%	.2%
Pacific Islander	0	0%	.1%	.1%
Two or More Races	0	0%	1.4%	4.5%

*<https://www.illinoisreportcard.com/state.aspx?source=profile&Stateid=IL>

School Context

	Cohort 3	
	Number	Percentage
Urban	47	47%
Suburban	39	39%
Rural	14	14%

Grade Setting

	Cohort 3	
	Number	Percentage
Elementary	37	37%
Middle	26	26%
High	37	37%

University Programs

- Aurora University
- Chicago State University
- Concordia University
- DePaul University
- Eastern Illinois University
- Governors State University
- Illinois State University
- Lewis University
- Loyola University-Chicago
- McKendree University
- National Louis University
- New Leaders
- North Central College
- North Park University-Chicago
- Northeastern Illinois University
- Northern Illinois University
- Rockford University
- Roosevelt University
- Southern Illinois University-Carbondale
- Southern Illinois University-Edwardsville
- University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign
- University of Illinois Chicago
- University of Illinois Springfield
- University of St. Francis
- Western Illinois University

Graduation and Placement

Cohort 3 includes 100 participants who began coursework in FY26. Except for the seven participants in the University of Illinois Chicago program, all participants expected to complete their programs within the two-year standard timeframe. With the loss of funding for the FY27 year, the expected time to graduation has significantly changed for most participants as they seek alternative funding such as student loans or delay/suspend their degree work.

Region Updates

CIV Region:

- Quarterly discussions and collaboration to build a bank of resources to be used by those within the region. The goal was to quickly provide simple solutions and resources to questions regarding groups of students and how we can serve them better (special education students, multilingual learners, students identified as low socioeconomic, etc.).

Southwestern Region:

- Monthly acts of service shared and collaborated on among school districts.
- Cultural Proficiency trainings made available for school districts to help minimize and remove barriers.
- Districts held book studies and made intentional plans to better support and connect with families.

Diversity & Equity Committee

This past year, the IPA Diversity & Equity Committee continued its commitment to creating opportunities for leaders of color to connect, build relationships, and support one another. The committee hosted its first IPA Leaders of Color Meet-Up during the 2025 IPA Conference, bringing together educational leaders from across Illinois. The gathering provided a welcoming space for leaders to connect, share experiences, and build community.

Building on the success of its first gathering, the Diversity & Equity Committee hosted a virtual Leaders of Color Meet-Up on February 4, 2026. It was another great opportunity to connect and fellowship with fellow leaders from across the state. The committee looks forward to continuing to create spaces where leaders of color can build meaningful connections, support one another, and grow together throughout their leadership journeys.

NATIONAL **efforts**

National Principals Association

The National Principals Association (NPA) is the leading national professional organization for school leaders across the United States and beyond.

Sonia Ruiz, Principal of Jane Addams Middle School, was named 2026 National Middle Level Principal of the Year.

Dr. Marcus Belin, Principal of Huntley High School, is a member of the NPA Executive Committee and was recently elected to serve as President-Elect for this year and will serve as President of the NPA Board of Directors for the 2026-2027 year.

The NPA hosts regular Leadership Networks for School Leaders of Color, LGBTQ+ School Leaders, and Women in School Leadership. Visit principals.org for more information.