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# Assessing Readiness for Antiracist Leadership:

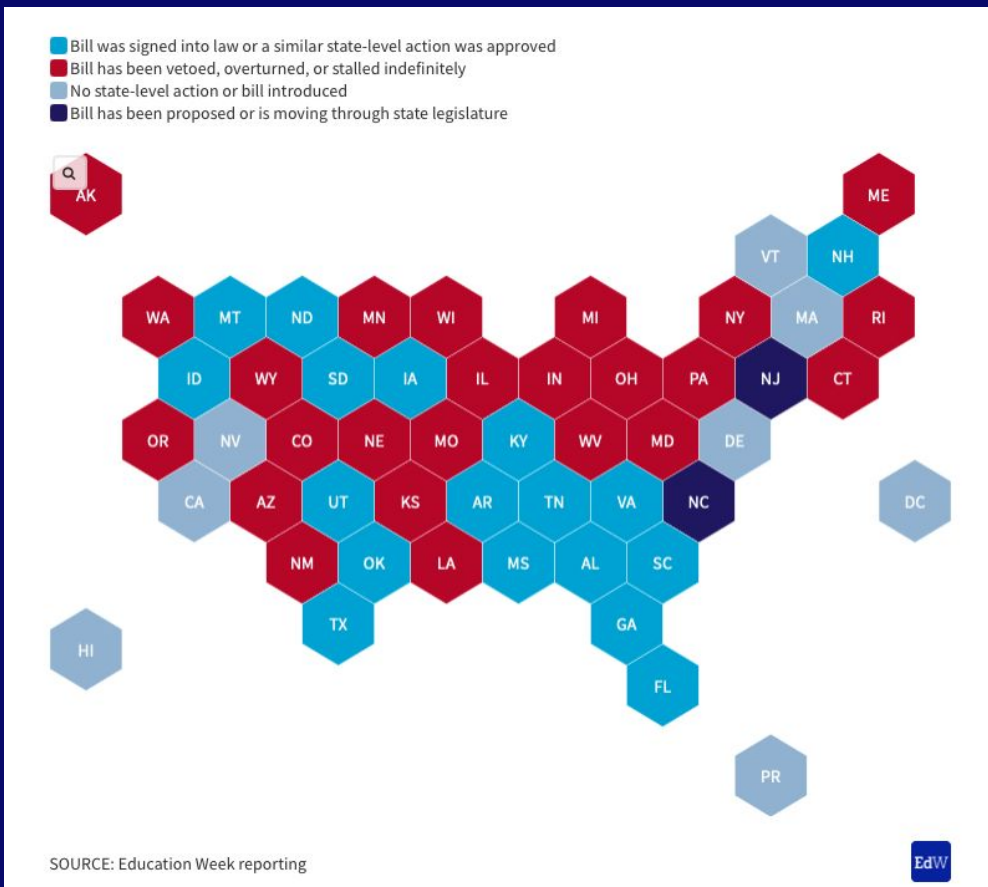
Candidates Reflect on New Leadership  
Preparation Standards in Massachusetts

**Megin Charner-Laird, James Noonan & Jacy Ippolito**  
AERA | April 11, 2024

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# The Context of School Leadership

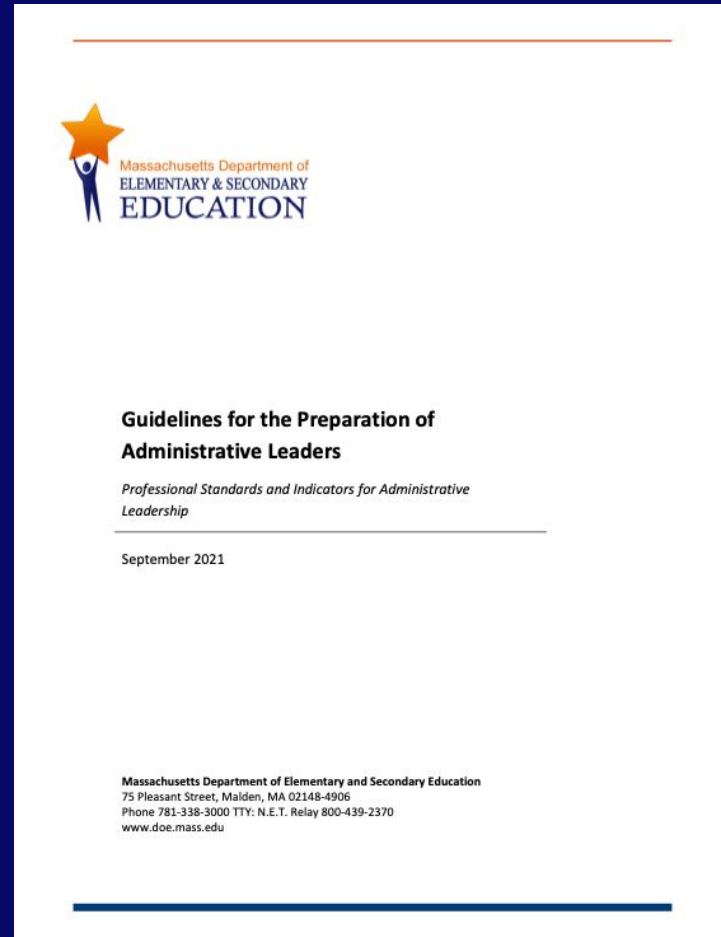


Currently, 44 states have taken steps to limit how educators could discuss racism and LGBTQ+ rights, with bans passed in 18 states

# School Leadership in MA

In 2021, Massachusetts revised its standards for school leadership to focus explicitly on preparing “anti-racist leaders who understand and embody anti-racist competencies, strategies, and mindsets” (MA DESE, 2021, p. 7)

<https://www.doe.mass.edu/edprep/resources/guidelines-advisories/leadership-guide.pdf>



# Revised Leadership Standards

2011 Indicators	2021 Revised Indicators
<p><b>f. Data-Informed Decision Making.</b> Uses multiple sources of evidence related to student learning, including state, district, and school assessment results and growth data, to inform school and district goals and improve organizational performance, educator effectiveness, and student learning.</p>	<p><b>E. Data-Informed Decision Making:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><b>a.</b> Uses multiple sources of evidence, <b>including but not limited to measures of student learning, student and family experiences, and school culture and climate, through close analysis of disaggregated data,</b> to inform school and district goals, <b>interrupt historically systemic racial inequities,</b> and improve educator effectiveness and student learning.</li> </ul>
<p><b>i. Managing Conflict.</b> Employs strategies for responding to disagreement and dissent, constructively resolving conflict, and building consensus throughout a district/school community.</p>	<p><b>F. Managing Conflict</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><b>a.</b> Employs strategies <b>when</b> responding to disagreement and dissent that constructively resolve conflict and build consensus throughout the district/school community, <b>while maintaining a commitment to decisions that are in the best interest of promoting racial equity and advancing student well-being</b></li> <li><b>b.</b> Consistently examines and mitigates power inequities rooted in race and identity that may affect both parties in professional conflict</li> <li><b>c.</b> Develops and nurtures a culture in which staff members continuously reflect on how their identities, biases, and practices can impact peer interactions</li> </ul>

# Theoretical Framework

Kegan (1982, 1994) theorized that adult development is characterized by an increasing capacity to manage complexity and take perspective on oneself and one's environment

Drago-Severson (2004, 2009, 2023) has extensively documented these “ways of knowing” among educational leaders



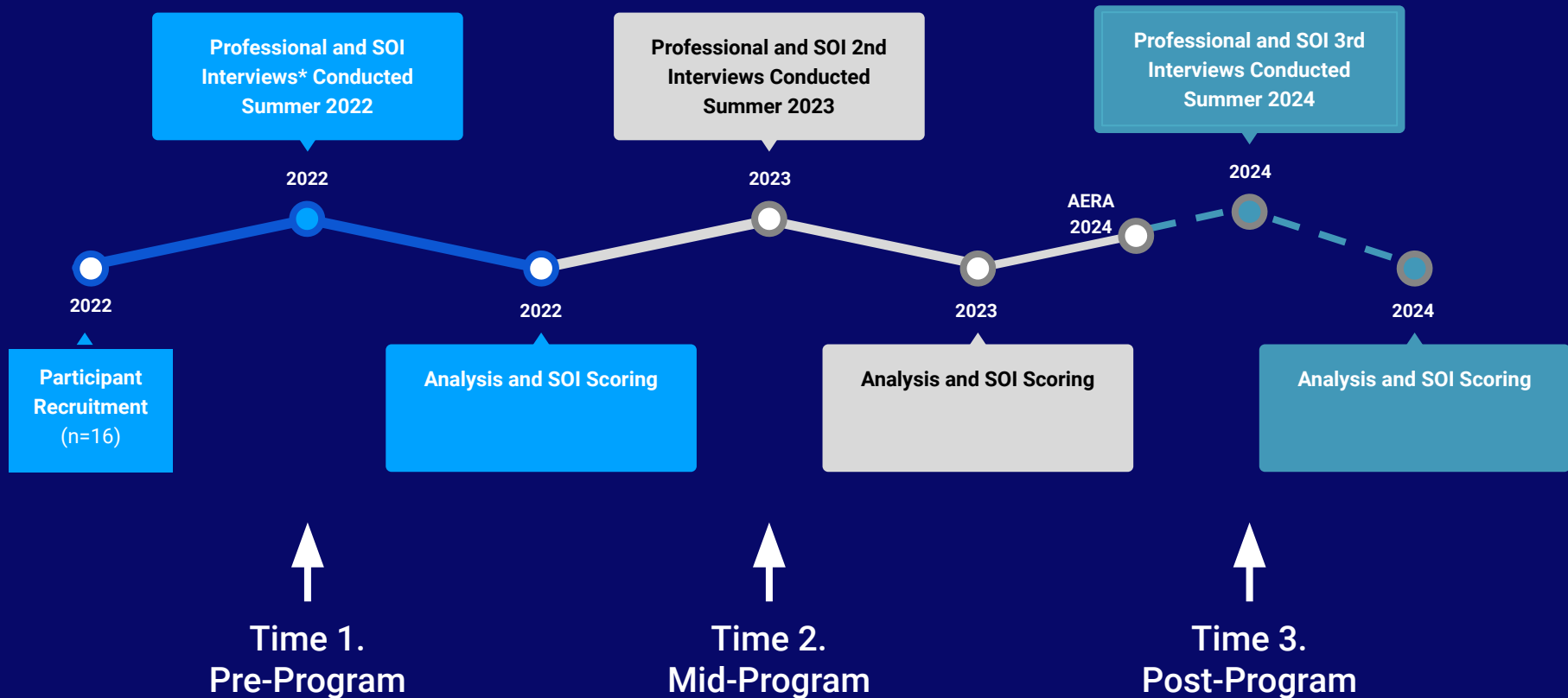


# Constructive-Developmental Lens for Overarching Longitudinal Study

	Sense of Self	Key Question	Relationships	Experiences of Support	Experiences of Challenge
Self-Transforming (5) ↑	Incompleteness, continuous learning	"How can you help me grow?"	Can consider one's goals in context of broader societal goals; sees across & integrates many belief systems	Appreciates opportunities to challenge oneself, wrestle with & synthesize multiple competing notions	Committed to continual growth and sees conflict/opposition as opportunities for evolution
Self-Authoring (4) ↑	Coherent value system	"Am I true to myself?"	Can consider other perspectives but still articulate one's own perspective and vision; Able to tolerate ambiguity	Appreciates chance to clarify and articulate own goals/vision, connect with others to clarify own goals	Feels discomfort when internal goals are challenged; competing commitments seen as challenging
Socializing (3) ↑	Valued others	"Will you still like me?"	Can collaborate with others, with awareness of own and others' needs; able to prioritize group needs	Appreciates chance to learn with/from others; may not know what's "right" w/out consulting others	Feels discomfort with conflicting viewpoints; critique perceived as a threat to identity
Instrumental (2) ↑	Adherence to rules, norms	"Is this right?"	Others are supports/obstacles to getting what one wants/needs. Tit-for-tat thinking.	Appreciates concrete feedback, clear directions or pathways for improvement	Feels discomfort when clear directions are not articulated by someone else

[Read more](#)

# Methods



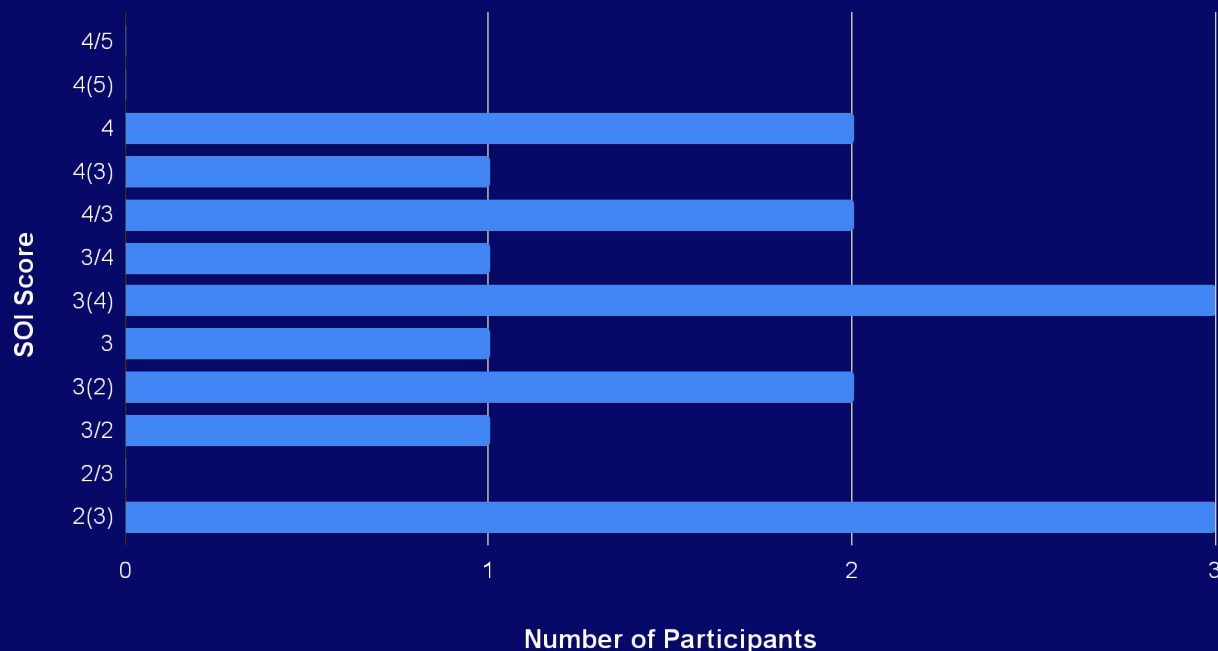
\* Lahey, L., Souvaine, E., Kegan, R., Goodman, R., & Felix, S. (2011). *A guide to the subject-object interview: Its administration and interpretation*. Minds at Work



# Findings

## A Range of Development (first look, pre-program)

Distribution of Adult Developmental Stages, Time 1 (n=16)



Candidates' developmental capacities spanned Kegan's ways of knowing

These initial SOI scores were then matched with 2023 "professional" interview data related to discussions of race, equity, and social justice.

# Findings

## Making Meaning of *Learning* in Anti-Racist Leadership

### Candidate A

#### Stage 2(3)

In terms of... any type of equity, and you know, programs or whatever we have... **I'm a learner as well**. If I'm in a position of leadership, **definitely utilizing anybody around that has expertise**, you know. We're all learning this together. We're all trying to take steps forward, and just being understanding of where everybody is in their learning with that, but also sort of with the expectation, like we all have somewhere to grow with this.

### Candidate B

#### Stage 4/3

Equity drives all of our work all of the time. ...We are implementing a new ELA curriculum this year... The books all have some really difficult conversation embedded within them around equity.... Part of my work this year is **[helping] teachers prepare for those difficult conversations**... [But] we have to have those conversations amongst ourselves and be prepared and **feel comfortable with being uncomfortable**, and practice how we then are able to have those conversations with students without doing harm.

# Findings

## Making Meaning of *Self* in Anti-Racist Leadership

### Candidate C Stage 2(3)

I've done **a lot of work on myself**. Working with a diverse population, I do feel an advantage in that sense. Recognizing differences, differences in culture, recognizing that difference is a huge part of it and being able to—you can't say these kids are all the same color to me. 'Cause they're not. Being able to recognize that is huge. **Being able to talk about it, that's something I need to continue to work on**, but it is also something I feel I have developed an ability to do.

### Candidate D Stage 3

I don't think as a white woman I should be a school leader in my district. I think **I'm very aware of my whiteness and my privilege...** So, navigating those crucial conversations and those difficult conversations, I think I need to learn more about... **But also, thinking about equity, it's not just race by any means.**

# Findings

## Making Meaning of *Systems* in Anti-Racist Leadership

### Candidate E

#### Stage 3(2)

A lot of my vision for leadership comes from Ibram Kendi's work on *How to Be an Anti-Racist*. I don't think he phrased it this way, but **you just destroy racist systems, right? Identify them and you just completely destroy them.** One of my favorite things to do is just identify systems that are harming my students. My students are 90%, actually, probably even more than 90% students of color. When a system is harming [my district's] students, it is a racist system. **I love just taking a sledgehammer** and showing other people how harmful these—with the things that we're doing or to our kids and just finding a way to turn it around.

### Candidate B

#### Stage 4/3

Part of my work this year is [helping] teachers prepare for those difficult conversations in front of students ... **We've done a lot of anti-racist, anti-bias work as a school community, but it's felt—to me it's a very surface level.** It's a lot of necessary work of thinking about our own biases. **I think we need to dig deeper now** into how do we now begin to help students think that way. How do we begin to do the work—to move this forward?

# Summary of Findings

Candidates' developmental capacities informed how they talked about and undertook anti-racist leadership



## Instrumental/Socializing

- More individualistic
- More self-focused
- More vague terminology
- Race-evasive or race-adjacent focus
- Tendency toward moral certainty

## Socializing/Self-Authoring

- More systems-focused
- Better able to hold themselves object
- More aware of positionality
- Better able to use explicit race/racism terminology
- Better able to tolerate ambiguity & sit with discomfort

# Implications for Policy

## Limits of Mandates





# Implications for Practice



We – as leadership programs – need to help candidates move from simplistic/individualistic to complex/systems-focused thinking

However, complex thinking alone does not ensure an anti-racist stance or anti-racist leadership work. We still had candidates who framed “equity without race.”

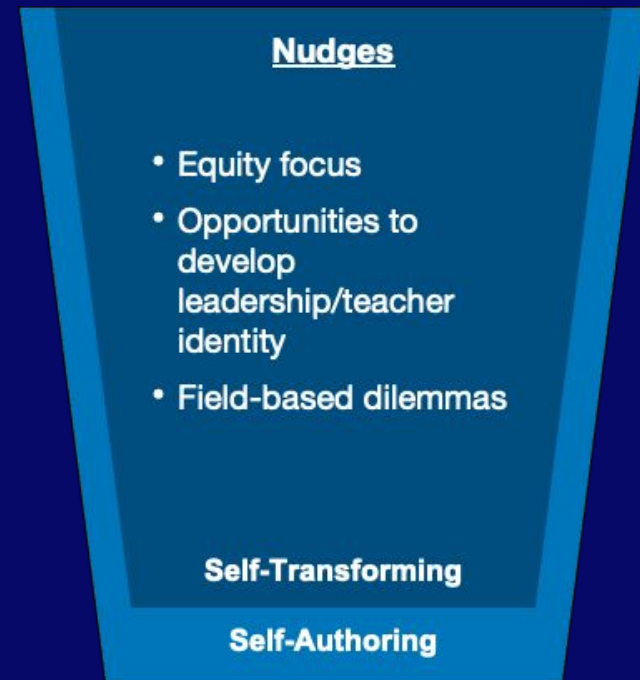


Therefore, preparation programs must be explicit about communicating the importance of anti-racist values and incorporating “supports” and “nudges”

# Implications for Practice

## Supports and Nudges

“What causes people to develop? I would say, at a practical level, it is the experience of optimal conflict in the context of optimal support” (Kegan, 2003, p. 44)



# Thank you

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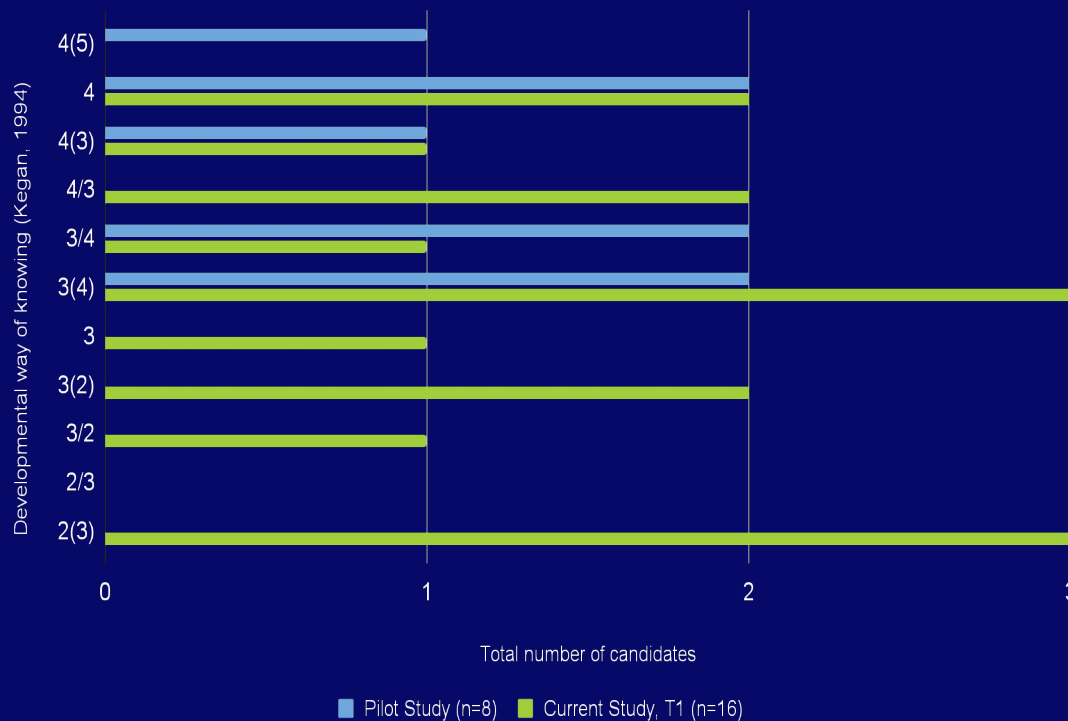
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# Findings

## Comparing recent graduates with new candidates

Comparing developmental capacity of recent grads and new candidates



Developmental capacity of recent grads seems higher, on average, than new candidates, suggesting the possibility of growth within the program.