



Policy Brief 2018-3 Increasing Diversity in K-12 School Leadership

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Principals represent the most ‘visible’ form of leadership in schools, but current workforce data show that K-12 school principals are overwhelmingly white and fail to reflect the diversity within the student population. With increased policy focus on teacher diversity, equal attention must also be directed towards the lack of diversity within school leadership. This policy brief details why increasing diversity in K-12 school leadership can improve overall diversity in the teacher workforce and work to support empowered schools.

Policy Recommendations

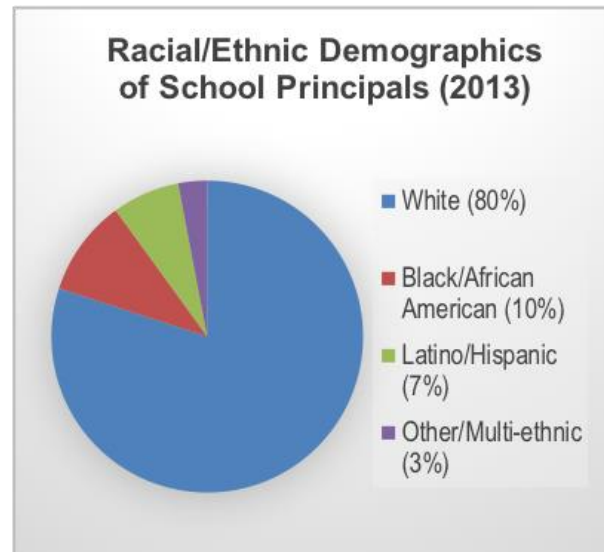
To address the inadequate number of diverse school leaders, several concrete policies at varying levels can be implemented to increase diversity in K-12 school leadership.

- **State and federal governments** can offer scholarships, tax breaks, and loan forgiveness to students who complete principal preparation programs, particularly those who commit to lead in high-poverty, diverse schools.
- **Institutions of higher education and school leader preparation programs** can foster partnerships with current school leaders and provide training opportunities to help them identify and recruit promising teachers of color into leadership programs.
- **Schools and districts** can develop teacher leadership and principal pathway opportunities for teachers of color and focus on early recruitment by closing the graduation and achievement gap at secondary and post-secondary levels. In addition, creating well-structured mentoring programs for teachers of color can increase the number of teachers who go on to pursue school leadership positions.

Current Demographics of School Leaders

Principals, like teachers, are mostly a racially homogenous group. The United States Department of Education [reports](#) that of the 89,000 principals in US public schools, 80% of school principals are white, 10% are Black, and 7% are Latino. At the same time,

students of color who identify as Latino (27.6%), Black (15.1%), and Asian/Pacific Islander (5.3%) together make up a greater share of total school-age enrollment, than white students (47.9%). For school superintendents, [the numbers are even more alarming](#). Only 6% of school superintendents self-identify as of color. This lack of diversity in K-12 school leadership has serious consequences beyond numerical parity.



Why Diversifying School Leadership Matters

Numerous studies show that educators from racially and ethnically diverse backgrounds:

- Positively change student and school [academic outcomes](#)
- [Increase attendance rates](#) for students of color;
- Enable students of color to advance and enroll in more rigorous coursework (see [here](#), [here](#), [here](#));
- Hold higher expectations of students of color (see [here](#) and [here](#))
- Minimize the number of Black and Latino students [referred to special education](#)
- Discourage the use of zero-tolerant school discipline policies and practices that disproportionately affect Black students (see [here](#) and [here](#))

Racial diversity in school leadership benefits all students, teachers, and communities

Diverse school leaders are more likely to bring perspectives of cultural competence and forms of capital which are highly regarded by families and communities, and specifically, within immigrant communities. These assets allow diverse school leaders to be [“cultural straddlers.”](#) enabling them to move within and across multiple environments. For example, one study showed that Latino school leaders can [“prompt Latino parents to change their view of the schooling experience—](#)which results in [high family and community engagement.](#)” These forms of cultural capital allow school leaders to foster stronger engagement with students and families, improving student outcomes, and community engagement.

Diversity in the Educator Workforce

School leaders with diverse cultural identities can change school conditions that lead to high rates of turnover among teachers of color. By emphasizing teachers’ unique cultural and local strengths, school leaders practice a form of [culturally responsive school leadership](#), which enables principals to improve collegiality and the relational aspects of school leadership among teachers and staff.

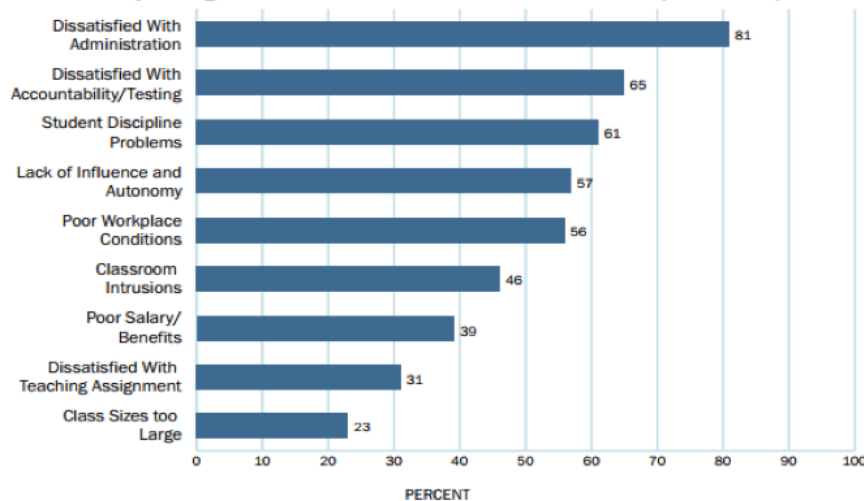
other teachers, an overwhelming number of teachers of color work in schools with greater poverty and less access to professional and developmental resources. Therefore, [teachers of color who are drawn to teaching](#) and aspire to become school principals, to be role models, to contribute to their communities, and to advance social justice in schools are deterred by difficult working conditions, limited classroom freedom, and lack of administrative support. However, instituting policies and practices that increase the number of diverse and culturally responsive school leaders can also support retaining diverse teachers by acknowledging and valuing their contributions to students and schools.

Problems Associated with Shortages and Turnover

Improving the state of diversity in school leadership requires multiple approaches that account for challenges in the existing workforce as well as problems of preparation and recruitment. The problem of the paucity of school leaders of color is multifold, beginning with the persistently inequitable public education system in which students of color graduate high school, and then attend and graduate college, at much lower rates than their white peers—thereby [reducing the pool of possible teachers](#) and ultimately leaders. In other words, a clear [pipeline issue](#) exists, wherein shortages at one end of the pipeline inevitably affect supply at the other end.

This is further compounded by the higher turnover and retention rates among teachers of color. Teachers of color

Of Those Minority Public School Teachers Reporting Dissatisfaction, Percent Reporting Particular Reasons for Their Turnover (2012–13)



Source: Ingersoll, May & Collins (2017). [Of Public School Teachers of Color Reporting Dissatisfaction, Percent Reporting Particular Reasons for Their Turnover \(2012-13\)](#)

Indeed, [recent turnover data show that](#) of the teachers of color who leave the profession because of job dissatisfaction, 81% report dissatisfaction with their school administration and 56% report poor workplace conditions as reasons for their turnover. Although teachers of color migrate, or leave teaching for [much of the same reasons](#) as

leave the profession or do not strive to become school leaders for a number of reasons, including: lack of culturally relevant leadership training among existing school and district administrators, limited mentors and role models, racism and resistance, wages and fewer promotion opportunities, and over-assignment to schools with difficult working conditions and fewer resources.

Initial pipeline shortages, along with high turnover, lead to fewer candidates who are ultimately available to fill leadership positions. Finally, the high costs of graduate school, reliance on biased measures of quality as admission requirements (e.g., standardized exams), and other institutional barriers further [reduce access to leadership positions](#) among aspiring leaders of color.

Recommendations

To address these challenges, early intervention and targeted approaches towards recruitment and retention by legislators and various organizations can increase diversity in K-12 school leadership.

State and Federal Government

- Offer scholarships, tax breaks, and loan forgiveness to students who complete principal preparation programs, particularly those who commit to lead in high-poverty, diverse schools
- Strengthen legislation that regulates principal preparation programs
- Pass legislation requiring alternative pathways to principalship to be robust and of high-quality
- Ensure states provide equitable funding and resources to schools and institutions of higher education to generate a strong, well-prepared pool of diverse principal candidates

Institutions of Higher Education and School Leader Preparation Programs

- Foster partnerships with current school leaders and provide training opportunities to help identify and recruit promising teachers of color into leadership programs
- Offer affordable and high-quality alternative teacher and principal certification options as well as scholarships, professional development grants, and research-practice-partnerships with local school districts
- Make programmatic and curricular changes to reflect context-based leadership approaches, like culturally responsive school leadership, critical race theory, leadership for social justice, and case-based leadership. These approaches will help prepare current and prospective school leaders to better support diverse students and teachers.

Schools and Districts

- Create and update data systems to identify diversity gaps in school leadership and roles
- Establish multi-level leadership opportunities for teachers to advance within the profession

- Focus on early recruitment and pathways by closing the graduation and achievement gap at secondary and post-secondary levels and partner with Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs) or Hispanic Serving Institutions (HSIs)

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