



HOW DO WORK ENVIRONMENT CONDITIONS AFFECT TEACHERS OF COLOR?

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According to the 2019 Biannual Teacher Supply and Demand Report, approximately 25% of teachers in Minnesota left the teaching profession for personal reasons. Although it is not clear what “personal reasons” entail and the Wilder Research group indicates that it needs to collect more data surrounding personal and unknown reasons, an updated report (The Seven Trends: The Transformation of the Teaching Force) helps us understand what is occurring at a national level that may be impacting Minnesota as well. Ingersoll indicates that a trend of teacher instability—particularly amongst teachers of color—is high and is shown to be influenced by working conditions. Ingersoll and Connor (2009) further discuss the impact of work environment by determining a lack of teacher classroom autonomy, administrative support, and faculty influence in decision making negatively impacted attrition rates of teachers of color.ⁱ Additional factors impact the working conditions of teachers of color and determine how likely it is they remain in a school, stay in the field, or exit the profession.

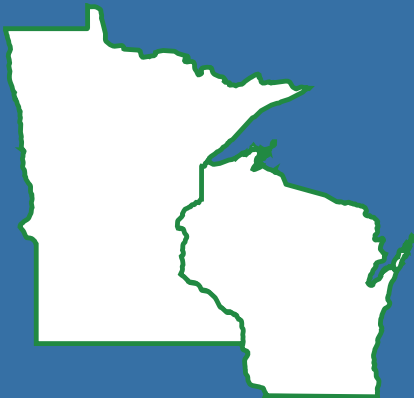
Lack of Autonomy

Teacher autonomy can be defined as “the extents to which teachers influence school decisions concerned with key educational issues,” and “the degree of individual autonomy exercised by teachers over planning and teaching within the classroom.”ⁱⁱ A well-cited study by Pearson and Moomaw found that as teacher autonomy increased, so too did empowerment and professionalism (i.e., viewing their work as a “true” profession).ⁱⁱⁱ The link between teacher autonomy and job satisfaction stems from work completed beginning in the mid-nineties and continues to be supported today as recent scholarship determined that teacher influence over policy impacts the turnover of new teachers. For teachers of color, this association was even stronger as teacher autonomy and school influence disparately impacted them leaving the teaching profession.^{iv}

Administrative Support Deficiency

Another significant factor impacting teachers’ work environment is the amount of administrative support available, such as having a level of “support matching the challenges.”^v Researchers state that having access to high level, high quality administrative support provides an enjoyable, less stressful work environment for teachers.^{vi} In fact, it tends to increase the levels of retention at school sites.

- i. Anderson, J. (1988). *The Education of Blacks in the South, 1860-1935*. University of North Carolina Press.; Walker, V. (1996). *Their Highest Potential: An African American School Community in the Segregated South*. University of North Carolina Press.
- ii. Ingersoll, Alsalam, Alsalam, Nabeel, & National Center for Education Statistics. (1997). *Teacher Professionalization and Teacher Commitment: A Multilevel Analysis*, SASS.
- iii. Pearson, L. C., & Moomaw, W. (2006). Continuing Validation of the Teaching Autonomy Scale. *The Journal of Educational Research*, 100(1), 44-51.
- iv. Liu, X. S. (2007), as cited in Achinstein et al. (2010), 80.; Ingersoll, R., Merrill, L., & May, H. (2016). Do accountability policies push teachers out?. *Educational Leadership*, 73(8), 44.
- v. Johnson, L. (2007), as cited in Achinstein et al. (2010), 88.
- vi. Pearson, L. C., & Moomaw, W. (2005). The relationship between teacher autonomy and stress, work satisfaction, empowerment, and professionalism. *Educational Research quarterly*, 29(1), 38-54.



Teachers who identify a lack of administrative support have a higher rate of attrition from school to school as well as from the teaching field altogether. Research highlights the importance and influence of the principal, including the importance of instructive feedback from the principal as being critical to new teacher success.^{vii} However, according to a study completed in 2005, many administrator training programs were found to be “among the weakest U.S. education school programs” and many prospective administrators felt the programs did not sufficiently prepare them for administrative leadership.^{viii} The inconsistencies of time invested ranged from as little as 45 hours to 300 hours for training,^{ix} creating a very uneven cohort of administrative leaders available to provide the necessary support to rookie teachers. Additionally, the lack of support from administrators allowed other teachers to scold teachers of color for embedding culturally responsive curriculum into their classrooms.

Administrative Trust

A study addressing school culture and climate in Wisconsin in 2019 by Wisconsin Effectiveness Research Partnership (WEERP) found that racial challenges existed within schools along the lines of trust. The research found that white teachers identified feeling less trust from a principal of color, while teachers of color were more likely to remain under leaders of color. Additionally, Black teachers were found to feel lower levels of trust with other teachers, exacerbating the risk-factor of exiting the school.

Regardless of race, the amount of trust instilled in the principal was found to be a large determining factor as to whether or not a teacher remained at a school. This is not to say that Minnesota experiences this the exact same way as Wisconsin, but the states are nearly identical demographic matches and these findings are therefore helpful in generalizing about what leads teachers to depart from the profession.

Discrimination and De-professionalization

A consistent thread throughout research is how teachers of color constantly and consistently face racial discrimination in their schools. Racial discrimination and stereotyping are repeatedly listed as a cause for attrition rates for teachers of color. A recent study by the Educational Trust identified that Black and Latinx teachers felt disrespected and deprofessionalized even though they felt they expended more physical and emotional labor in their job. For instance, they provided

additional support to minoritized students who were not receiving support from other staff and administrators. Though research indicates that teachers of color tend to feel compelled to teach at “hard-to-staff” schools that are lower resourced and serve predominantly students of color,^x the additional workload that extends beyond teaching can contribute to teachers leaving.

Teachers of color also shared the need to prove their worth to colleges and some parents as they were viewed as inferior to other teachers as well as only being beneficial for those of a race/culture match.^{xi} In other instances, their subject matter expertise was continually questioned and placed up for debate. Instead of accessing a fellow teacher of color’s expertise for teaching, teachers of color tend to be placed in disciplinary roles as there is an assumption that they can control students that white teachers cannot. The role of disciplinarian is, in some cases, an expectation from leadership and surrounding teachers. Many teachers of color felt their only purpose was to police Black and brown bodies.

Work Environment Enhancements

The literature presents a myriad of real issues that contribute to a toxic, oppressive, and ineffective workplace environment, resulting in teachers of color leaving schools and ultimately the workforce. In response to their workplace conditions, the literature offers some suggestions as to how to improve the work environment for teachers of color through professional development, affinity groups, and representation. This list is not exhaustive; however, we understand that this must be addressed on a case-by-case basis as for some it could be a simple building or district policy change, while for others larger systemic state and departmental policy may need to be addressed.

Professional Development

The literature emphasizes the necessity to create and foster professional development opportunities. Effective professional development is defined in the literature as, “structured professional learning that results in changes in teacher practices and improvements in student learning outcomes.”^{xii} A recent study by Darling-Hammond et al. found that well-designed, responsive professional development had the most notable impact. They highlight that externally-driven / designed professional development is not often effective, as it does not have the ability to know/respond to the needs of the teachers.

vii. Khalifa, M. A., Gooden, M. A., & Davis, J. E. (2016). Culturally Responsive School Leadership: A Synthesis of the Literature. *Review of Educational Research*, 86(4), 1272–1311.; Roberson, S., & Roberson, R. (2009), as cited in Towers, J. (2012). Administrative supports and curricular challenges: New teachers enacting and sustaining inquiry in schools. *Canadian Journal of Education*, 35(1).

viii. Levine, A. (2005), as cited in Carver-Thomas, D. (2017). Diversifying the Field: Barriers to Recruiting and Retaining Teachers of Color and How to Overcome Them. Literature Review. Equity Assistance Center Region II, Intercultural Development Research Association, (April), 14.

ix. The Wallace Foundation. (2016) as cited in Carver-Thomas (2017), 15.

x. Achinstein et al., 2010

xi. Carver-Thomas (2017), 15.

xii. Darling-Hammond, L., Hyster, M. E., & Gardner, M. (2017). Effective teacher professional development. Learning Policy Institute.

Darling-Hammond et al. provide an outlined approach to effective professional development:

1. Content focused.
2. Incorporate active learning strategies.
3. Engage teachers in collaboration.
4. Use models and/or modeling.
5. Provide coaching and expert support.
6. Include sustained-duration time for feedback and reflection.^{xiii}

It is just as important to note that the finding of this study excavates what causes professional development to fail. A lack of resources (money and time), lack of shared vision, and conflicting requirements are just a few aspects that could render professional development ineffective.

Affinity Groups

Affinity groups for teachers create growth opportunities, mentorship, and safe spaces for teachers of color. Affinity groups encourage teachers of color to connect and discuss how they navigate the oppressive and traumatic systems where they work. It is a space away from their school where healing can occur and support can be found as they move to more critical and cultural practices in education that resist white supremacy and are inclusive of all the students they serve.^{xiv}

Mentorship for teacher induction as well as teachers midway through their tenure is identified as important for enhancing the workplace environment. Numerous studies discuss the benefit for mentorship for teachers as they receive guidance, counseling, and emotional/professional support. Research also shows that having a cultural/racial mentor match could be even more effective as it initiates strong connections from Social Learning Theory. In short: if I can see it being done by someone who looks like me, then I can do it as well.^{xv}

Representation

Creating a trusting community for teachers of color requires increasing the number of leaders and teachers of color in schools. Racial and ethnic/cultural diversity at the highest levels of organizational leadership could serve

as a signal to future teachers and other stakeholders that the organization truly understands and values the community and members that they serve.^{xvi} Teachers of color also identified concern that representation does not extend into the classroom, as teachers do not reflect the students they serve. Several scholars have identified in depth the benefits that students of color receive by receiving instruction by someone with similar racial/cultural backgrounds. These benefits are not simply afforded to students of color, but their white peers as well by seeing and normalizing teachers of color as legitimate and learning from historically-minoritized epistemologies.

Teachers of color have also indicated that seeing representation in the classroom in other roles is also beneficial. Having paraprofessionals who are embedded in the community allows students to access their cultural capital as well as integrate community knowledge into the learning process. Making space for elders and other members of the community in schools helps create inclusive spaces that feel inviting and safe not only for the SOC, but the teachers and leaders of color as schools are diversified and are no longer viewed as “white spaces.”

Conclusion

The research of the workplace environment for teachers of color is still growing and further honing in on more specific and nuanced ways of understanding how they navigate school spaces. This brief is meant to assist schools and educational spaces with beginning to alter their workplace environments to become more inclusive, safe, and inviting for teachers of color in efforts not simply to recruit and retain them, but to systemically embed and normalize their contributions, value, and place in schools.

xiii. Darling-Hammond, L., Hyler, M. E., & Gardner, M. (2017). 23.

xiv. Farima Pour-Khorshid (2018) Cultivating sacred spaces: a racial affinity group approach to support critical educators of color, *Teaching Education*, 29:4, 318-329.

xv. Carver-Thomas, D. (2017). *Diversifying the Field: Barriers to Recruiting and Retaining Teachers of Color and How to Overcome Them*. Literature Review. Equity Assistance Center Region II, Intercultural Development Research Association, (April), 1-34.

xvi. Bourke, J., & Dillon, B. (2018). *The Diversity & Inclusion Revolution: Eight Powerful Truths*. *Deloitte Review*, (2), 19.