

Diversifying the Field – Barriers to Recruiting and Retaining Teachers of Color and How to Overcome Them

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Recruiting and retaining a diverse teacher workforce that includes teachers of color is crucial as teachers of color bring distinctive experiences and perspectives that support the learning of all students. However, faced with a national teacher shortage, schools across the country are struggling to hire a workforce of qualified educators that reflects the racial diversity of their communities (Sutcher, Darling-Hammond, & Carver-Thomas, 2016). While conditions in many states have contributed to shortages of teachers of all types, teachers of color encounter unique barriers to entering the profession and continuing to teach for the long haul. Fortunately, a variety of programs, policies, and practices hold promise for helping to bolster the pipeline of teachers of color. This literature review seeks to help readers better understand the research showing the systemic barriers interrupting or blocking pathways into teaching for persons of color and how state and local education agencies can engage certain research-based strategies to overcome those barriers.

An analysis of the most recent U.S. Department of Education Schools and Staffing Survey (SASS) 2011-12 and the SASS Teacher Follow-up Survey 2013-14, finds that teachers of color comprise an increasing share of the U.S. teacher workforce, but that share (18 percent in 2011-12) is disproportionately low compared to the proportion of students of color in public schools (49 percent) and people of color in the nation (37 percent). It is also too low to meet the demand from school districts and families (Goldring, Taie, & Riddles 2014; Ingersoll & May, 2011). High turnover rates have offset successful recruitment of teachers of color in recent years and continue to contribute to shortages of teachers of color (Ingersoll & May, 2011; 2016).

Why Increase Teacher Diversity? The Positive Impacts on Students

While all teachers require more intentional, culturally-based preparation to reach a growing diverse student population (Higgins, Shaffer, & Schlanger, 2017), increasing diversity in the teaching profession can also have positive impacts on student educational experiences and outcomes. Though this is especially true for students of color, having teachers of color benefits White students as well. Below is a summary of some of the benefits cited in the literature.

Many teachers of color report feeling called to teach in low-income communities of color, positions that are often difficult to fill (Villegas & Irvine, 2010). Three in four teachers of color work in the quarter of schools serving the most students of color nationally (Carver-Thomas & Darling-Hammond, 2017).

Some studies have found that teachers of color boost the academic performance of students of color (Dee, 2004; Clotfelter, Ladd, & Vigdor, 2007; Goldhaber & Hansen, 2010; Egalite, Kisida, & Winters, 2015; Fairlie, Hoffman, & Oreopoulos, 2014).

Students of color can experience social-emotional benefits to having teachers of color, such as fewer unexcused absences and lower likelihood of chronic absenteeism and suspension (Holt & Gershenson, 2015).

Teacher diversity also may benefit teachers of color experiencing feelings of isolation, frustration and fatigue (Simon & Johnson, 2015; Griffin & Tackie, 2016; Osler, 2016). Increasing teacher diversity may improve teacher satisfaction and decrease teacher turnover, a key contributor to teacher shortages and school instability (Ingersoll, 2001; Ronfeldt, Loeb, & Wyckoff, 2013; Sutcher, Darling-Hammond, & Carver-Thomas, 2016).

Barriers to Recruiting & Retaining Teachers of Color

The literature review discusses six primary barriers impacting the pathways and pipeline into teaching for teachers of color.

The Impact of Student Debt on Teacher Preparation Enrollment and Completion

College students of color are less likely to enroll in teacher preparation programs than are White college students, despite an increase in overall college enrollment over the past two decades for students of color (NCES, 2015, Table 306.10). The increasing debt burden associated with attending college may be playing a role in the disparity.

Obstacles to Completing College

Completion rates are low among those students of color who enroll in college generally and education programs specifically. Scholars have cited several causes: increased financial burdens (Santos & Haycock, 2016); being underprepared for college-level

coursework (Hargrove, Godin, & Dodd, 2008; Mattern, Marini, & Shaw, 2013); family responsibilities; transportation difficulties; dissatisfaction with little faculty diversity (Osler, 2016); and difficult environments that do not reflect or respect their culture or experience (Steward, Lim, & Kim, 2015).

Insufficient Teacher Preparation

Teachers who enter the field with little preparation are two to three times more likely to leave their schools than those who had comprehensive preparation (Ingersoll, Merrill, & May, 2012). Teachers of color are twice as likely to enter the profession through an alternative certification pathway as are White teachers, a trend that has increased over the past several years. While the comprehensiveness of alternative certification programs varies, entering the field through these programs is associated with higher turnover rates on average.

Teacher Licensure Exams

Common teacher licensure exams disproportionately fail Black and Latina/o candidates, and there is no definitive evidence that a teacher candidate's performance on these exams is associated with their students' achievement. About two-thirds of states include satisfactory performance on the Praxis as a requirement for a teaching credential (LPI analysis of Praxis website) and several more offer state-specific standardized exams. (National Research Council, 2001; Nettles, Scanton, Steinber, & Tyler 2011; Cole, 1986).

Challenging Teaching Conditions

Scholars have noted that schools with the greatest student of color populations often contend with a range of challenges, including accountability pressures and a lack of resources and support (Simon & Johnson, 2015; Ingersoll & May, 2011; Ronfeldt, Loeb, & Wyckoff, 2013). Teachers of color are more likely to teach in schools serving more students of color and students from low-income families.

School Closures

In 2012, in an era of school closings and layoffs in many cities, the rate of involuntary turnover was much higher for Black teachers than for all other teachers, constituting nearly a third of all turnover. Teacher layoffs during the recession and school closings in urban districts were largely due both to declining enrollments and sanctions for schools with low test scores under the No Child Left Behind Act (Executive Office of the President, 2012).

Promising Practices

Research illustrates the importance of supporting a pipeline of teachers of color at every stage of the teaching career, from preservice to veteran teaching status. Increasing the number of teachers of color in the workforce requires both intentional preparation and hiring and provision of ongoing support to

overcome the barriers to recruitment and retention described above. The following section describes policy strategies aimed at overcoming barriers to recruiting and retaining teachers of color.

1. Build high-retention, supportive pathways into teaching

Research shows that improving teacher retention begins with high-quality teacher preparation; however, in many cases, teachers of color are more likely to begin teaching without having completed comprehensive preparation. The review cites some ways state and local policymakers can both encourage more students of color to pursue a teaching career and to do so through a high-quality program, including (1) data systems designed to monitor racial diversity in teacher preparation programs; (2) adjusting teacher licensure requirement to engage in more authentic, performance-based assessments; (3) providing support, such as service scholarships and loan forgiveness programs; (4) developing critical teacher supports, including mentoring programs; (5) funding teacher residency programs; and (6) creating and supporting grow-your-own programs.

2. Create pro-active hiring and induction strategies

Once a prospective teacher is trained and certified, district and school hiring and support practices can influence their decisions to enter the teaching force and whether to stay in their schools. States and districts can influence several hiring conditions associated with effectively recruiting and retaining teachers, including timing of hiring, information in the hiring process, and licensure and pension portability (Podolsky, Kini, Bishop, & Darling-Hammond, 2016). In addition, districts can also offer comprehensive induction to support beginning teachers of color in their first years of teaching.

3. Improve school teaching conditions through improved school leadership

Teaching conditions, and administrative support particularly, play a key role in teachers' decisions to stay in a school or in the profession. Recent evidence shows that administrative support is especially critical in improving retention of teachers of color (Bednar & Gicheva, 2017). Some examples of ways states and districts can support school leaders to be prepared to create school environments where teachers want to stay, include: partnering with local universities to recruit talented, diverse prospective leaders; providing ongoing professional development to support school leaders; establishing holistic principal preparation program accreditation and licensure standards; utilizing Title II optional 3% percent leadership set-aside funds to strengthen the quality of school leaders; and investing in evidence-based school improvement strategies to improve instructional quality and supports for students without displacing teachers of color who most often teach in struggling schools (NAACP Task

Force on Quality Education, 2017; Lavadenz & Colón-Muñiz, 2017).

The IDRA EAC-South is available to provide technical assistance to state and local education agencies to help improve and increase pathways to teaching for faculty of color, among other capacity-building services addressing equity issues in race, national origin, sex/gender, and religion. For more information, please visit our website at www.idra.org/eac-south or send us at email to eacsouth@idra.org.

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