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Teachers of Color: In High Demand and Short Supply

What's Needed to Spur Recruitment and Retention?

New report released at Capitol Hill briefing sponsored by Senator Cory Booker

WASHINGTON, DC — Research shows that teachers of color help close achievement gaps for students of color and are highly rated by students of all races—a fact that is all the more relevant in light of the release this month of data from the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP). This year's NAEP results show persistent achievement gaps between students of color and from low income families and their peers who are White or from more affluent families. Unfortunately, although more teachers of color are being recruited across the nation, the pace of increase is slow and attrition rates are high, leaving growing gaps between the demand for such teachers and the supply.

These are among the findings in a new report by the Learning Policy Institute that examined national data and recent research on the barriers teachers of color face to both entering and staying in the profession. It includes recommendations intended to help policymakers increase teacher workforce diversity — an especially important strategy to advance greater cultural understanding and combat persistent achievement gaps in the United States.

The report, [*Diversifying the Teaching Profession: How to Recruit and Retain Teachers of Color*](#), by LPI researcher Desiree Carver Thomas, finds that while the population of teachers of color overall is growing, Black and Native American teachers are a declining share of the teacher workforce and the gap between the percentage of Latinx teachers and students is larger than for any other racial or ethnic group. The report also examines how the lack of diversity in the teaching workforce impacts students, and offers district and state policy solutions.

The report was released Thursday, April 19, at a [briefing hosted by Senator Cory Booker](#) (D-NJ) and co-sponsored by The Education Trust, National Black Child Development Institute, National Education Association, and UnidosUS.

“Increasing teacher diversity is a very important strategy for improving learning for students of color and for closing achievement gaps,” said LPI President and Stanford professor emeritus, Linda Darling-Hammond. “While White students also benefit by learning from teachers of color, the impact is especially significant for students of color, who have higher test scores, are more likely to graduate high school, and more likely to succeed in college when they have had teachers of color who serve as role models and support their attachment to school and learning. Students with racially diverse teachers also have fewer unexcused absences and are less likely to be chronically absent.”

Research Findings

The Benefits of Diversity in the Teaching Workforce

- Teachers of color boost the academic performance of students of color, including improved reading and math test scores, improved graduation rates, and increases in aspirations to attend college.
- Students of color and White students report having positive perceptions of their teachers of color, including feeling cared for and academically challenged.
- Teachers of color are resources for students in hard-to-staff schools. Many teachers of color report feeling called to teach in low-income communities of color where positions are often difficult to fill. Indeed, three in four teachers of color work in the quartile of schools serving the most students of color nationally.
- Greater diversity of teachers may mitigate feelings of isolation, frustration, and fatigue that can contribute to individual teachers of color leaving the profession when they feel they are alone.

Barriers to Recruiting and Retaining Teachers of Color

While schools and districts are recruiting more teachers of color than in years past, the efforts are not adequate. Barriers to recruitment and retention include:

- Inadequate teacher preparation when teachers enter through alternative routes and try to teach while they are in training, along with lack of ongoing support for new teachers, which drive high teacher turnover rates.
- Teacher licensure exams that disproportionately exclude teacher candidates of color despite little evidence that these exams predict teacher effectiveness.
- Poor working conditions and low salaries that discourage teachers from staying in their schools and in the profession.
- Displacement from the high-need schools they teach in, where accountability strategies have often resulted in staff reconstitution or closing schools rather than investing in improvements.

Promising Practices

Increasing the number of teachers of color requires intentional preparation and hiring, providing ongoing support, and addressing college affordability. Many programs and initiatives across the country provide evidence that an intentional and sustained approach to recruiting and retaining teachers of color can build a diverse and stable teacher workforce. Promising practices include:

1. High-retention, supportive pathways into teaching.

- Underwriting the cost of teacher preparation through service scholarships and loan forgiveness in exchange for a commitment to teach in high-need schools or subject areas, typically for at least 4 years.
- Funding teacher residencies—partnerships between districts and universities that subsidize and improve teachers’ training to teach in high-need schools and in high-demand subject areas.
- Implementing Grow Your Own programs at the district level that recruit teacher candidates from nontraditional populations (e.g., high school students, paraprofessionals, and after-school program staff). States can support these programs through university-based partnerships and other financial and programmatic policies and support.
- Providing state funding for intensive teacher preparation support programs offering ongoing mentorship, tutoring, exam stipends, job placement services, and other supports to ensure teachers of color successfully complete preparation programs.
- Making adjustments to state teacher licensure requirements to allow teaching candidates to demonstrate their competency through rigorous but more authentic performance assessments, such as the edTPA, that do not have the degree of racial disparity in pass rates that traditional exams have had.
- Creating state data systems that monitor and reward the racial diversity of enrollees in teacher preparation programs, as well as those who complete the programs. This creates an incentive for those programs to take innovative approaches to recruiting and supporting teacher candidates of color.

2. Hiring and induction strategies.

- Hiring earlier in the year. Research suggests that more in-demand candidates of color may be available for hire earlier in the year. Districts can offer incentives for teachers to announce their resignation, retirement, and transfer intentions in early spring so that they can recruit new hires earlier in the season.
- Partnering with local teacher preparation programs, including those at minority-serving institutions, to coordinate student teaching placements and vet candidates for hire before they graduate.
- Including teachers of color in the hiring process in meaningful ways, including creating diverse hiring committees or compensating teachers for attending recruitment fairs.

- Offering comprehensive induction to support teachers of color in their first years of teaching. Induction often includes being matched with a veteran mentor teacher and can also include seminars, classroom assistance, time to collaborate with other teachers, coaching and feedback from experienced teachers, and reduced workloads.

3. Improve school teaching conditions through improved school leadership.

- Supporting improved principal preparation at the state level by strengthening program accreditation and licensure standards to ensure that principals have clinical experiences in schools with diverse students and staff and learn to create collaborative, supportive work environments for the teachers with whom they work.
- Taking advantage of Title II's optional 3% leadership set-aside funds that can enable states to strengthen the quality of school leaders by investing in principal recruitment, preparation, induction, and development focused on supportive school leadership.
- Developing partnerships at the district level with local universities and teachers of color to actively recruit talented teachers into administrator preparation, especially those who have demonstrated a commitment to working in hard-to-staff schools.
- Providing ongoing professional learning opportunities for school leaders to develop the skills to support teachers effectively.

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About the Learning Policy Institute

The Learning Policy Institute conducts and communicates independent, high-quality research to improve education policy and practice. Working with policymakers, researchers, educators, community groups, and others, the Institute seeks to advance evidence-based policies that support empowering and equitable learning for each and every child. Nonprofit and nonpartisan, the Institute connects policymakers and stakeholders at the local, state, and federal levels with the evidence, ideas, and actions needed to strengthen the education system from preschool through college and career readiness.

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