



Increasing Teacher Diversity

Strategies to Improve the Teacher Workforce

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Introduction and summary

In the fall of 2010, U.S. Secretary of Education Arne Duncan launched a national initiative, Teach.gov to recruit the “next generation” of teachers. Duncan emphasized one particular objective for the program—building a more diverse teaching force:

I'm very concerned that increasingly, our teachers don't reflect the great diversity of our nation's young people, and so making sure we have more teachers of color and particularly more men, more black and Latino men, coming into education is going to be a significant part of this Teach Campaign.¹

Secretary Duncan's charge reflects a growing concern about the number of teachers of color in America's classrooms. Nationally, minority students make up 40.7 percent of the public school population. Although many schools (both urban and rural) are increasingly made up of a majority of black and Latino students, black and Latino teachers represent only about 14.6 percent of the teaching workforce.² The scarcity of minority teachers is not limited to any one type of school—in over 40 percent of public schools there is not a single teacher of color.³ And in urban and high-poverty schools where minority teachers are disproportionately employed, teaching staffs are still predominately composed of white teachers.⁴

The lack of diversity in the teaching force is troubling for several reasons. Fewer minority teachers may indicate that few minorities are interested in pursuing a career in teaching. The low number of minority teachers also may indicate that there are fewer minority candidates with the skills and qualifications to enter the field. The inability to retain highly effective minority teachers, like all teachers, is also a challenge for many schools and districts and may indicate high turnover of certain teachers.

Increasing the number of teachers of color is not only a matter of a philosophical commitment to diversity in career opportunities. Teachers of color provide real-life examples to minority students of future career paths. In this way, increasing the number of current teachers of color may be instrumental to increasing the

What does diversity mean?

America's public schools grow increasingly more diverse every day. The authors recognize that diversity in the teaching workforce and among public school students includes a multitude of individual characteristics. The authors have chosen to focus on the shortage of African American and Latino teachers because the majority of available research on teacher diversity addresses these two groups. We do believe, however, that the recommendations offered in this paper do apply across the spectrum of under-represented groups in the teacher workforce.

number of future teachers of color. And while there are effective teachers of many races, teachers of color have demonstrated success in increasing academic achievement for engaging students of similar backgrounds.⁵

Policymakers concerned with staffing at challenging schools also have another incentive to increase the number of teachers of color. High minority, high-poverty schools are often the hardest schools to staff and research indicates that minority teachers at the schools are more likely to pursue employment at schools with high minority student populations. Often these schools are in low-income areas or districts.⁶ The successful recruitment and retention of effective minority teachers at struggling schools may prove to be a powerful tool in creating a stable workforce and thereby increase student achievement.

The Center for American Progress has consistently called for a national agenda to increase the number of effective teachers staffed at high poverty, high minority schools. Research demonstrates that effective instruction has more influence on student performance than do other resources within the school. Federal, state, and local policymakers have gradually begun to recognize this fact and have started developing methods to assess teacher effectiveness, incorporate effectiveness into human capital policies, and create pathways and incentives for effective teachers to work at the schools where they are needed the most. The Center for American Progress has discussed other retention strategies, such as providing mentoring and induction programs, creating career ladders and diverse roles for teachers, and differentiating pay, in previous work.⁷ Strategies to increase the number of minority teachers must also operate in this framework and focus on developing training and tools to ensure these teachers will be effective in the classroom.

As Secretary Duncan's quote denotes, there is a push on both the national and local level to increase the number of teachers of color. The recruitment of such teachers can be a difficult and time-intensive task. States and districts across the country, as well as a number of national organizations, have devised successful strategies for recruiting teachers of color.

These strategies appear to have had some impact on diversity. There was a 96 percent increase in the number of minority teachers over the past 20 years, compared with a 41 percent increase in white teachers.⁸ But the news on the other end is decidedly negative. Recent research on teacher retention reveals that schools may be losing minority teachers just as they are pulling more into the classroom. University of Pennsylvania professors Richard Ingersoll and Henry

May's research on the minority teacher shortage found that while the overall number of minority teachers has increased, turnover rates are significantly higher for minorities than for white teachers.⁹

During the 2003-04 school year, for example, about 20 percent more minority teachers left the field than entered.¹⁰ Such high attrition rates can neutralize the effective recruitment strategies resulting in a teacher workforce that does not reflect America's student population.

Ingersoll and May's research highlights the importance of approaching the minority teacher shortage with dual strategies of recruitment and retention. The reasons for teacher attrition are varied and implicate a number of factors, including district/school dysfunction, pay, and personal career objectives. We know that teachers at high-poverty schools are especially at risk for turnover as such schools present teachers with a unique set of challenges. Schools and districts that do not provide teachers with support will continue to face high turnover.

Recruitment alone will not solve the minority teacher shortage, but highly effective strategies may increase the number of entering teachers to a rate that outpaces turnover. Finely tuned recruitment efforts that seek teachers who are likely to succeed and provide support while in the classroom, even in challenging schools, can help in increasing retention. This paper will highlight elements of these innovative recruitment strategies, present brief case studies of programs, and suggest recommendations for state and local policy to support such programs and strategies.

These recommendations include:

- Increasing federal oversight of and increased accountability for teacher preparation programs. This is the first step in ensuring that minority teachers emerge from teacher preparation programs with the skills needed to be effective teachers. The federal government can also take the lead on requesting programs to report on diversity efforts.
- Creating statewide initiatives to fund teacher preparation programs aimed at low-income and minority teachers.
- Strengthening federal financial aid programs for low-income students entering the teaching field.

- Reducing the cost of becoming a teacher by creating more avenues to enter the field and increasing the number of qualified credentialing organizations.
- Strengthening state-sponsored and nonprofit teacher recruitment and training organizations by increasing standards for admission, using best practices to recruit high-achieving minority students, and forming strong relationships with districts to ensure recruitment needs are met.

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