



Teacher Diversity Matters

A State-by-State Analysis of Teachers of Color

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Introduction and summary

At some point over the next 10 to 12 years, the nation's public school student body will have no one clear racial or ethnic majority.¹ In other words, students of color—students who are not classified as non-Hispanic whites, for purposes of this analysis—will constitute more than half of our primary and secondary students. This demographic trend is already manifest in some of the nation's most populous states, including California and Texas, where the majority of students are students of color.

But the makeup of the nation's teacher workforce force has not kept up with these changing demographics. At the national level, students of color make up more than 40 percent of the public school population. In contrast, teachers of color—teachers who are not non-Hispanic white—are only 17 percent of the teaching force.

This is a problem for students, schools, and the public at large. Teachers of color serve as role models for students, giving them a clear and concrete sense of what diversity in education—and in our society—looks like. A recent review of empirical studies also shows that students of color do better on a variety of academic outcomes if they're taught by teachers of color.²

Policymakers are increasingly concerned about the relatively low percentages of teachers of color working in the nation's schools. So we at the Center for American Progress set out to study this issue, conducting an analysis of the 2008 Schools and Staffing Survey, or SASS, a nationally representative survey of teachers and principals administered every four years by the National Center for Education Statistics.

The 2008 SASS data are the most recent available. We define students and teachers of color as everyone who is not white, including African Americans, Hispanics, Asians, and Native Americans. Here are our main findings.

Almost every state has a large teacher diversity gap

In California, 72 percent of students are of color. In contrast, only about 29 percent of teachers are of color, a gap of more than 43 percentage points. Texas has a similarly large diversity gap. In the Lone Star state, two-thirds of all kids in the school system are students of color, while only about one-third of those teaching them are teachers of color.

Such large differences between the numbers of teachers and students of color are common across the country. More than 20 states have differences of 25 percentage points or more between the diversity of their teacher and student populations.

To evaluate the states on their performance, we calculated a teacher diversity index, ranking states on the percentage point difference between teachers and students of color. So, for instance, Illinois has an index score of 35. To obtain that figure, we subtracted the percentage of teachers of color (11 percent) in Illinois from the percentage of non-white students (46 percent) in the state. For specific breakouts out by state, see Appendix A on page 13.

Alternative route programs help ensure diversity

Most states now have alternative route programs for teacher credentialing, which make it easier for college graduates and mid-career professionals to enter the classroom without conventional teaching preparation. These programs are proving to be successful tools to recruit teachers of color.

In 2008, 27 percent of all African-American teachers and 25 percent of Hispanic teachers came into the classroom through alternative routes. In contrast, only about 11 percent of white teachers were alternatively certified.

Teachers of color are far less likely to be satisfied with their salary and school management

Only 37 percent of African-American teachers and 46 percent of Hispanic teachers were satisfied with their pay. In contrast, 52 percent of white teachers are satisfied with the amount of money that they earn.

Part of the issue is that teachers of color are more likely to teach in public schools in urban, high-poverty communities, which often receive less than their fair share of school dollars.³ There could be other reasons as well, which are discussed in greater detail below.

Teachers of color also are far less satisfied than white teachers with the way in which their school is run. Only 70 percent of African-American teachers are satisfied with the way that their school is run, 8 percentage points lower than white teachers. Hispanic teachers as well as Asian and Pacific Islander teachers are also less likely than white teachers to say that they liked how their school was run.

What our findings suggest

Our findings suggest that the nation needs a two-pronged approach to improving teacher diversity. We need to expand high-quality recruitment programs, for starters, with some of this being done through the alternative certification programs mentioned above. We also need to do more to improve the professional experience of teachers of color. Our nation has a long way to go when it comes to ensuring a diverse and well-qualified teacher workforce. Solutions will not be easy. It will take hard work, smart policy, and above all, the political will to ensure that the nation has an effective and diverse workforce.

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