



America's Leaky Pipeline for Teachers of Color

Getting More Teachers of Color into the Classroom

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Introduction and summary

If you spend time in almost any major school district in America today, you will notice that the students often do not look much like the teachers. In fact, in some areas, the students don't look anything like their teachers. There is a significant demographic gap in the largely white teaching profession and an increasingly diverse student population.

To prepare American students for lives of high achievement, America's schools need a teaching corps that is not only highly effective but also racially and ethnically diverse. Progress has been made in recent decades in attracting people of color to the teaching profession. But major barriers—including a scarcity of high-quality, teacher-training programs targeted at teachers of color; the educational debt students of color must shoulder; and the general lack of esteem in our society for teaching—stand in the way of producing an optimal pool of teachers. Without vigorous policy innovations and public investment, the demographic gap will only widen to the detriment of children's education.

This report will describe how the shortcomings of today's education system and the underachievement of many of today's students of color shrink the future supply of teachers of color. Furthermore, it will offer policy recommendations through which federal and state education agencies and local school districts can address this critical problem.

As the most rapidly growing segment of the American population, communities of color can and should be one of our greatest assets in the 21st century economy. There is an opportunity to energize and infuse our teacher workforce with new cohorts of talented educators who are rigorously prepared and well supported in their careers.

In this report, we examine the critical points in the education pipeline that affect who does and does not become a teacher and we suggest interventions that can improve the flow toward a successful teaching career —particularly of highly qualified candidates of color.

Our aim is to begin a dialogue about how to diversify the teacher workforce to include highly effective teachers of all racial and ethnic backgrounds in elevating the achievement and attainment of the most rapidly growing segment of the American population—children of color. Specifically we find:

- There is a large demographic mismatch between students and teachers of color. This matters because students of color need teachers who not only set rigorous standards for them but teachers who also can provide models of professional success. Teachers of color have demonstrated success in increasing the academic achievement of students of similar backgrounds.
- Fundamental constraints limit the potential supply of highly effective teachers of color. Students of color have significantly lower college enrollment rates than do white students. Plus, a relatively small number of students of color enroll in teacher education programs each year. Finally, teacher trainees who are members of communities of color score lower on licensure exams that serve as passports to teaching careers.
- Teachers of color leave the profession at much higher rates than their white peers. Those who leave mention a perceived lack of respect for teaching as a profession, lagging salary levels, and difficult working conditions.

These findings are disturbing. Given an ever-diversifying student body, we need to do far more to diversity our teacher workforce. This leads us to some pressing policy recommendations:

For the federal government

- Create a national teacher corps similar to the public-private partnership model used by the Corporation for National and Community Service. Its goal would be to simultaneously improve educational outcomes for young people in disadvantaged communities and to provide paid opportunities for college graduates to receive high-quality teacher training.
- Fund the congressionally authorized Augustus F. Hawkins Centers of Excellence Program for competitive grants to teacher-preparation programs at minority-serving institutions to make such programs more rigorous—including raising entry and exit standards for the programs; at the same time, students would receive help in meeting those standards.

- Establish incentives for academically strong students of color to enter careers in teaching through scholarships such as the Presidential Teaching Fellows programs¹—a revised version of the TEACH grant program²—which provides scholarships to potential teachers in high-need fields and schools that serve students from low-income families.

For states and districts

- Provide generous scholarship support to future teachers that are tied to the effectiveness of the training program and of the teacher candidate, especially those in five-year programs. Improve articulation relationships between two-year and four-year post-secondary institutions, given the number of students of color at two-year schools.
- Attract the brightest, most resilient people of color into the teaching profession by changing the compensation packages so that teachers of color are paid comparable to other professions requiring similar knowledge, skills, and responsibilities.
- Support and encourage local and state efforts to attract and place effective teachers of color. For example, Call Me Mister—or Mentors Instructing Students Toward Effective Role Models—is a statewide initiative in South Carolina designed to increase the pool of teachers with more diverse backgrounds among the state’s lowest-performing elementary schools.³

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