

THE STATE OF TEACHER DIVERSITY IN AMERICAN EDUCATION



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SECTION I:

Executive Summary

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

More than 60 years after the ruling in *Brown v. Board of Education* was handed down, its promise remains unfulfilled. In many respects, America's public schools continue to be "separate and unequal." Indeed, the growing re-segregation of American schools by race and ethnicity, compounded by economic class segregation, has become the dominant trend in American education.

Recent research documenting this growing school segregation has received some public attention (though arguably less than such a weighty matter should command).¹ Comparatively little attention has been paid to an important related issue, however—the state of racial and ethnic diversity in America's teaching force. For the general public, basic facts about teacher diversity remain inaccessible and even somewhat mysterious. This report was undertaken to draw attention to this issue and provide a factual basis for public discussion and further research.

TEACHER DIVERSITY IS AN EDUCATIONAL CIVIL RIGHT FOR STUDENTS

Existing research in the fields of education, social psychology and sociology make a compelling case for the benefits of a diverse teacher force, in which "minority" racial and ethnic groups—Blacks, Hispanics, American Indians, Asians and Pacific Islanders²—would be much more robustly represented (Section II). While there is reason to believe that Black, Hispanic and American Indian students would be the greatest beneficiaries of a diverse teaching force, there is evidence that all students—and our democracy at large—would benefit from a teaching force that reflects the full diversity of the U.S. population. The research finds that:

- Minority teachers can be more motivated to work with disadvantaged minority students in high-poverty, racially and ethnically segregated schools, a factor which may help to reduce rates of teacher attrition in hard-to-staff schools.
- Minority teachers tend to have higher academic expectations for minority students, which can result in increased academic and social growth among students.
- Minority students profit from having among their teachers individuals from their own racial and ethnic group who can serve as academically successful role models and who can have greater knowledge of their heritage culture.
- Positive exposure to individuals from a variety of races and ethnic groups, especially in childhood, can help to reduce stereotypes, attenuate unconscious implicit biases and help promote cross-cultural social bonding.
- All students benefit from being educated by teachers from a variety of different backgrounds, races and ethnic groups, as this experience better prepares them to succeed in an increasingly diverse society.

TEACHER DIVERSITY: THE NATIONAL PICTURE

At the national level, progress is being made toward a more diverse teaching force, but at a relatively modest pace (Section III).

1 Of particular note in this regard is the important work on school segregation by the Civil Rights Project at UCLA (<http://civilrightsproject.ucla.edu>).

2 See "A Word on Nomenclature" at the end of this summary.

- Over the 25-year period from 1987 to 2012, the minority share of the American teaching force—including Black, Hispanic, Asian and Pacific Islander, American Indian and multiracial teachers—has grown from 12 percent to 17 percent.³
- The minority share of the American student population also grew during these 25 years, albeit not at the same tempo as increases among minority teachers. Minority students now account for more than half of all public school students.
- As a consequence of the growing minority student population, however, progress toward reducing the substantial representation gaps between minority teachers and students has been limited. Minority teachers remain significantly underrepresented relative to the students they serve.
- The most significant impediment to increasing the diversity of the teacher workforce is not found in the recruitment and hiring of minority teachers: Nationally, minority teachers are being hired at a higher proportional rate than other teachers. Rather, the problem lies in attrition: Minority teachers are leaving the profession at a higher rate than other teachers.
- Minority teachers are not evenly distributed across schools: They tend to be concentrated in urban schools serving high-poverty, minority communities. But analyses of survey data show that minority teachers are not leaving the profession at a higher rate because of the poverty or the race and ethnicity of their students but because of the working conditions in their schools. The strongest complaints of minority teachers relate to a lack of collective voice in educational decisions and a lack of professional autonomy in the classroom.

TEACHER DIVERSITY IN NINE CITIES

- The nine cities studied in this report—Boston, Chicago, Cleveland, Los Angeles, New Orleans, New York, Philadelphia, San Francisco and Washington, D.C.—followed the national patterns of teacher diversity in their broadest strokes (Section IV). As a general rule, minority teachers—especially minority male teachers—are underrepresented in these urban workforces, with substantial representation gaps between minority teachers and minority students.⁴ These patterns are generally more manifest for Black and Hispanic teachers than for Asians, and more pronounced in charter schools than in district schools.
- When examining teacher diversity trends over the course of the 10 years in our study—from 2002 to 2012—a number of disquieting trends become evident. In every one of the nine cities studied, the Black share of the teacher workforce declined, at rates from the very small to the quite large—from roughly 1 percent in Boston’s charter sector and Cleveland’s district sector, to more than 24 percent in New Orleans (combined sectors) and nearly 28 percent in Washington, D.C. (combined sectors). Losses in the population (i.e., number) of Black teachers were even greater, ranging from a low of 15 percent in New York City (combined sectors) to a high of 62 percent in New Orleans (combined sectors).⁵ The available evidence suggests that seniority-based layoffs played little or no role in these declines.
- In the nine cities we studied, trends for Hispanic teachers were more positive than those for Black teachers, but still well short of the need. Over the course of the 10 years in our study, the Hispanic shares of the teacher workforces across the selected cities were basically stable or showed modest growth. The one exception was Los Angeles, where the Hispanic share of the teacher population grew markedly in both the district and charter sectors. In contrast to Black teachers, the actual numbers of Hispanic teachers in the cities also grew during these years, with Cleveland being the lone exception. However, given that Hispanics currently represent the fastest-growing share of the American student population, substantial additional growth of the Hispanic teaching force would be required to narrow

3 The national data are drawn from the Schools and Staffing Survey and the Teacher Follow-Up Survey, both administered by the National Center for Education Statistics in the U.S. Department of Education.

4 The report used data obtained through freedom of information requests for the 10-year period from 2002 to 2012, as well as data that had already been published. Although state and city educational agencies for five of the nine cities were compliant with the law and provided the requested data for at least a portion of the years requested, problems arose with educational agencies for the other four cities. Consequently, there are gaps in the data available for the study, especially for charter schools.

5 We were unable to obtain the data to calculate the Black teacher population loss in Washington, D.C. As Washington, D.C., had the largest loss of the share of Black teachers, it might very well also have the largest decline in the population of Black teachers.

the representation gap with Hispanic students.

- While the analysis of the national data points to the high attrition rates of minority teachers as the main obstacle to improving the diversity of the teaching force, the underrepresentation of Black and Hispanic teachers among new hires also appears to be a serious problem in many of the cities. Approaches to improving teacher diversity in these cities will need to address both minority teacher recruitment and hiring, on the one hand, and minority teacher retention, on the other hand.
- Across our nine cities, teachers of all races and ethnicities tended to teach in schools with high concentrations of students who were low income and minority. As a general rule, Black and Hispanic teachers taught in schools with at least modestly higher concentrations of low income and minority students.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The recommendations growing out of this report are aimed at policymakers at the federal, state and district levels (Section VI).

FEDERAL GOVERNMENT

- As part of its Civil Rights Data Collection, the U.S. Education Department should collect and report data on the race and ethnicity of the teaching force in all public schools, district and charter.

STATE GOVERNMENT

- State educational agencies must ensure the accuracy and integrity of the data they collect from all public schools, district and charter—including data on the race and ethnicity of teachers—and they must fulfill their legal responsibilities to make those data available to the public.
- Governors, state legislatures and state departments of education should review education-related legislation and policy for their impact on teacher diversity, and amend or modify them to promote diversification and avoid the unintended consequence of diminishing diversity.

BOTH FEDERAL AND STATE GOVERNMENT

- To increase the number of highly qualified minority teachers—and particularly Black, Hispanic and American Indian teachers—entering the profession, the U.S. Education Department and the state departments of education should invest in and support high-quality teacher education programs at historically Black colleges and universities (HBCUs), the nation’s Hispanic-serving institutions (HSIs), tribal colleges and universities (TCUs) and public colleges and universities serving large numbers of minority students.
- To ensure that novice teachers are well prepared to enter the classroom and receive the mentoring and support they need to be successful, the U.S. Education Department and the state departments of education should establish incentives for close partnerships between colleges of education, on the one hand, and school districts and charter networks, on the other hand. Particular attention needs to be paid to providing adequate mentoring, support and training in culturally responsive practices to novice teachers—of all races and ethnicities—working in the challenging conditions of high-poverty, de facto racially segregated schools.
- To both increase the number of minorities who are well prepared to enter the teaching profession and ensure that novice minority teachers receive the mentoring and support they need to be successful and remain in teaching, the U.S. Education Department and the state departments of education should support the development and expansion of programs with evidence of helping to recruit, mentor and support minority teachers, such as those described in Section V of this report.
- To increase the numbers of Black and Hispanic teachers who are well prepared to enter the profession, the U.S. Education Department and the state departments of education should support “grow your own” teacher preparation programs and career ladders for educational aides and paraprofessionals seeking to become teachers.

LOCAL SCHOOL DISTRICTS AND SCHOOLS

- School districts and schools, working collaboratively with local teacher unions and community, need to develop strategic plans for the diversification of their teacher workforces. These plans should include specific actions that will be taken and programs that will be developed and supported to improve teacher diversity in all schools, with a particular focus on the educational needs of students from disadvantaged minority groups, especially Black and Hispanic youth.
- School districts, charter schools and teacher unions should use contract negotiations as a vehicle for increasing teaching diversity, incorporating programs and features, such as paraprofessional career ladders, that serve to increase teacher diversity.
- Accountability systems for schools and evaluation systems for administrators with authority over teacher recruitment and hiring should include measures of how recruitment and hiring practices have affected teacher diversity. Evaluation systems for district and school leadership should also include measures of teacher retention and attrition and how these trends have affected teacher diversity.
- The institutional arrangements for the recruitment and hiring of new teachers vary across different school districts and charter schools, with varying responsibilities accorded to human resources departments, school principals and school staffs, depending on the district or charter network. Whatever the particulars, systems of accountability for the leadership and staff of school districts and charter networks must include the effect of recruitment and hiring practices on teacher diversity, as appropriate.
- Urban school districts, district schools, charter networks and charter schools should develop close partnerships with colleges of education to ensure that an increased supply of well-qualified Black and Hispanic teachers are prepared to teach in city schools.
- School districts, district schools, charter networks and charter schools should work to develop and support programs for the recruitment and support of new Black and Hispanic teachers, such as described in Section V of this report.

A WORD ON NOMENCLATURE:

Under ordinary circumstances, the terms “African American,” “Latino,” “Native American,” and “people of color” might be used in this document, following what we understand to be the current preference of the preponderance of people in each of these groups. As the reader will see, we have used the terms “Black,” “Hispanic,” “American Indian,” and “minority” in this report, a choice which requires a word of explanation.

In everyday conversation, these two sets of terms are seen as synonymous. But as concepts of social science, they are not. Mixed together in those terms are different systems of classification: races defined by a set of physical features such as skin complexion, ethnic groups defined by a shared cultural heritage, linguistic groups defined by a common language, and sociological groups defined by a social status. These categories overlap to a significant degree, but they are not the same.

We are bedeviled here by the nature of racial categories: they have always been fundamentally arbitrary ways of classifying human beings – as a matter of biological science, there are few differences less important in human beings than our skin complexion – but remain powerful social forces shaping our lives nonetheless. Racial categories emerged at the center of discourses of justification for oppression and exploitation, and will remain powerful so long as that oppression and exploitation continue.

But the fact remains that data on race and ethnicity in the United States is generally collected using the categories employed by the U.S. Census Bureau—White, Black, Hispanic, Asian and Pacific Islander, and American Indian. This was the case in our datasets, right down to the fact that the term “multiracial” was introduced by most cities after the U.S. Census Bureau adopted it. Since these terms and their common alternatives are not synonymous in this context, we use the U.S. Census Bureau terms “Black,” “Hispanic,” “American Indian” and “minority” throughout this report.



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