



Policy Brief

Diversifying the Teacher Workforce in Metro Nashville Public Schools

Executive Summary

A [Metro Human Relation Commission Report](#) released in March of this year showed that the ratio of teacher diversity in Metro Nashville Public Schools (MNPS) does not match the diversity of the student body. While MNPS students represent the most diverse school district in Tennessee with 31.8% White, 42.2% Black, 21.5% Hispanic, and 4.7% Asian students, the racial breakdown of teachers is broken down as 73.9%, 23.5% Black, 1.4% Hispanic and .9% Asian respectively.

Diversifying the teacher workforce of MNPS will require a large-scale examination of the multiple primary reasons that contribute to “leaks” in the teacher pipeline. To be successful, MNPS and stakeholders must consider teacher diversity an urgent long-term policy goal.

At a Glance:

- Research overview on challenges to diversity along different points of the teacher pipeline
- Four Educator Preparation Program case studies
- Research snapshot on Recognizing obstacles posed by entrance exams for candidates of color
- Three recommendations for the Trailblazer Coalition

Introduction

Conexión Américas is pleased to invest in The Trailblazer Coalition’s efforts to increase teacher diversity in Metro Nashville Public Schools (MNPS) by building a strong local pipeline of MNPS graduates of color who are trained locally and return to teach in their home communities. By way of the Equity & Excellence sub-grants, The Trailblazer Coalition - made up of Lipscomb University, Nashville Teacher Residency, and Metro Nashville Urban Teacher Residency at Belmont University- will gather and guide Educator Preparation Programs (EPP) in Nashville through critical internal analysis around recruitment and retention methods in general, and in particular for candidates of color.

The Trailblazer Coalition will work to address patterns seen across the country: a growing gap in racial and ethnic distribution for teachers and students. By examining other EPPs across the country already working to increase the amount of successful and persisting educators of color, The Trailblazer Coalition may incorporate certain models into their strategic plan. The following brief will provide current research on what is contributing to educator gaps, a snapshot of case studies of EPPs, and address certain barriers for candidates of color.

Challenges to Building a Diverse Teacher Workforce

A recently released [study from the Brown Center on Education Policy at the Brookings Institution](#) examined what it would take to achieve a national teacher workforce that is as diverse as the student body. The study looks at four opportunities along the teacher pipeline: college attendance and completion, majoring in education or pursuing a teacher preparation pathway, hiring into a teaching position, and staying in teaching year after year. Each point of the teaching pipeline is examined to provide insight on how current and potential minority teachers exit from the pipeline, contributing to the diversity gap.

Key takeaways from the study:

- The major problems that cause “the leaks in the pipeline” are: a smaller proportion of the Black and Hispanic population earn college degrees; interest in a teaching career among college students and graduates is lower than whites; Black and Hispanic teachers are hired for teaching jobs at lower rates than white teachers; Black and Hispanic teachers are retained in teaching jobs at lower rates than white teachers.
- Failure to understand both the primary reasons for the shortage of Black and Hispanic teachers have resulted in initiatives by districts, states and the federal government that are not fully effective.
- Teacher quality should not be sacrificed for quantity. Lowering standards in an effort to diversity could potentially undermine the benefits of diversity policies, since teacher quality itself has a much greater effect across all students than racial matching.
- Districts and school leaders should put strategies into place designed to mitigate the possibility of teacher biases influencing student outcomes.
- Districts and teacher preparation programs should provide trainings on subtle cultural biases and how they may shape teachers interactions with their students. Educating teachers about biases and building awareness can be the beginnings of ensuring students receive equitable educational experiences.
- Ensuring a diverse teacher workforce must be a long-term policy goal with broad, proactive strategies that address all root causes of the problem, while also ensuring short term strategies are employed to combat biases in the absence of a diverse teacher workforce.

EPP Case Studies

The following case studies highlight several strategies used to recruit and retain candidates of color in Educator Preparation Programs.

Teach For America

Teach for America recruits college graduates to teach in underserved areas across the country for two years. Known as the largest and most selective alternative certification program, TFA has also experienced success in recruiting and retaining minority teachers. Starting in 2009, TFA began targeted outreach to

underrepresented minority groups with the help of funding. TFA's recruitment strategy is aligned with the current demographics at the most selective colleges in the U.S.

Recruitment goals for TFA are 11% African American and 8.5% Latino. Through intensive relationship building and a reliance on alumni to recommend potential candidates, TFA has seen an increase in the candidates of colors that apply and enter program.



Urban Teacher Enhancement Program



Knowledge that will change your world

Birmingham metropolitan area. The program recruits mid-career professionals, recent college graduates who did not major in education, and works with paraprofessionals and other school staff in partner school districts.

The curriculum of the Urban Teacher Enhancement Program is centered on developing the competencies needed by educators working in high-need urban schools. Coursework is co-taught by university faculty and high-achieving teachers from partner districts.

To recruit minority candidates, the Urban Teacher Enhancement Program asks partner districts to refer promising staff. They also reach out to community leaders, and recruit undergraduates from math and science programs. They engage directly with undergraduates through information sessions and promotional videos.

The Urban Teacher Enhancement Program, established in 2004, is a partnership between the University of Alabama at Birmingham and three high-needs school districts in the

North Carolina Teaching Fellows Scholarship Program

The North Carolina Teaching Fellows Scholarship Program was enacted by the North Carolina General Assembly in 1986. The mission of the program is to recruit talented high school graduates into teaching and to help them develop leadership skills. The program receives state funds, and provides a \$6,500 annual scholarship to 500



participants for four years. Funding also supports summer learning experiences.

Selected participants must be accepted to one of the 17 public and private colleges or universities in North Carolina that participate in the program, and complete a teacher preparation program at one of these schools. Participants must agree to teach for four years after college graduation in one of the state's public schools, or repay the scholarship with 10% interest.

The staff members of North Carolina Teaching Fellows Scholarship Program aggressively recruit a high

proportion of minority and male candidates. The program's Director of Recruitment is charged with increasing minority participation. One primary recruitment strategy is called Project Teach. Project Teach recruiters identify school districts with a high population of minority students that have average to above-average achievement. By engaging school liaisons that help students apply to college and to the program, Project Teach is addressing an identified leak in their teacher pipeline of students that they were targeting that hadn't taken the steps they needed to apply to college.

Teach Tomorrow in Oakland



A partnership between Oakland's mayor's office and Oakland Unified School District, Teach Tomorrow in Oakland is working to recruit and retain excellent teachers who reflect the ethnic and cultural diversity of Oakland. Teach Tomorrow In Oakland works with universities and community partners to recruit candidates who have lived in Oakland for at least five years, and who are committed to "ensuring that all students achieve high levels, professional development, and long-term

employment within OUSD." Participants make a five-year commitment to teach in Oakland or pay back tuition they received.

The program includes four recruitment strands: Oakland alumni and community members, middle and high school students, OUSD employees, and student teachers.

The Teach Tomorrow in Oakland Program recruits heavily from the communities where they want to place teachers. They also hire recruiters who reflect the diversity of the candidates they hope to attract. Some tactics used by the program include: inundating local schools with flyers and advertising in Spanish speaking newspapers and churches.

Research Snapshot: Recognizing Obstacles Posed by Entrance Exams for Candidates of Color

An abundance of research shows that standardized testing in K-12 years disproportionately impacts underrepresented population. It can be assumed that the same would be true in higher education, with entrance exams being another barrier for professional degrees, teacher certification, and technical careers (Cochran-Smith, Piazza, & Power, 2013).

- Teacher testing reduces the percentage of new Hispanic teachers (Angrist & gruyan,2008)
- Teacher testing disproportionately affects Blacks and males (Goldhaber & Hansen, 2010).
- Minority students disproportionately fail the teacher licensure exams (Earley, Imig, & Michelli, 2011).
- The Praxis Core pass rate is 55% for White students, 35% for Latinos and 21.5% for Blacks. (Harris, 2015).
- On the PACT, women scored significantly higher than men (Pecheone & Chung, 2007), and people of color and English Learners fail at disproportionate rates (Berlak, 2012).
- Candidates of color and those from underrepresented groups face an added barrier through entrance examinations, which may contribute to the growing teacher diversity gap (Au, 2013).

Source: Polly, Drew. 2016. Evaluating Teacher Education Programs through Performance-Based Assessments. IGI Global. <https://www.safaribooksonline.com/library/view/evaluating-teacher-education/9781466699298/>

Conclusion

Faced with teacher shortages, especially of qualified candidates of color, many cities have adopted “grow your own teacher” programs. Recruitment for the teaching workforce can begin as early as middle school, with targeted programs to encourage local students to consider teaching as a profession. By investing in the existing pool of students, programs that stay focused locally ensure that the community is adapting to provide a pipeline of teachers from their own communities.

As Nashville grows in size and demographic diversity, programs like those spearheaded by the Trailblazer Coalition will be imperative to ensuring urgent and effective response to the growing diversity gap among educators and students in MNPS.

Ensuring that Educator Preparation Programs are aware of the barriers to candidates of color along every step of the teacher pipeline, and advocating for proactive action at each phase will ensure that the Trailblazer Coalition will have long-term impact with partner programs. Already, the Trailblazer Coalition has drawn together many elements of successful programs around the country – promoting a working partnership between lead agencies, ensuring a local focus, and promoting the needs of candidates of color.

As the Trailblazer Coalition develops a strategic plan for all phases of the pipeline, more research work will be needed on retention strategies.

Recommendations

- Develop a five-year strategic plan that will identify areas of impact including MNPS policies, along with city and state policies. Examine the viability of seeking state funding for sustainability of the program.
- Educators and researchers agree on the critical importance of teaching experience and mentorship for developing effective teachers, and retaining candidates of color. Ensuring that such research-backed methods are adopted as policy changes by EPPs in Nashville should be priority as the Trailblazer Coalition guides EPPs in considering changes to their strategic plans.
- Examine the current standing of the Teaching as a Profession Pathway in MNPS schools, and craft an advocacy plan, with implementation goals for expanding the program across MNPS schools.
- Consider incorporating ongoing professional development opportunities specifically for candidates of color to receive additional, and targeted support along the teacher pipeline.

References

- Achinstein, Betty, Ogawa, Rodney T., Sexton, Dena, & Freitas, Casia. 2010. *Retaining Teachers of Color: A Pressing Problem and a Potential Strategy for "Hard-to-Staff" Schools*. Review of Educational Research. <https://cset.stanford.edu/sites/default/files/files/documents/publications/achinstein-retainingteachersofcolorapressingproblem.pdf>
- Au, Wayne, Brown, Anthony, L., & Calderon, Dolores. Reclaiming the Multicultural Roots of the U.S. Curriculum: Communities of Color and Official Knowledge in Education (Multicultural Education). Teacher College Press. July, 2016.
- Barth, Patte, Dillon, Naomi, Hull, Jim, & Holland Higgins, Breanna. 2016. *Fixing the Holes in the Teacher Pipeline: An Overview of Teacher Shortages*. Center for Public Education. <http://www.centerforpubliceducation.org/Main-Menu/Staffingstudents/An-Overview-of-Teacher-Shortages-At-a-Glance/Overview-of-Teacher-Shortages-Full-Report-PDF.pdf>
- Bireda, Saba, & Chait, Robin. 2011. *Increasing Teacher Diversity: Strategies to Improve the Teacher Workforce*. Center for American Progress. <http://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/ED535654.pdf>
- Dammu, Indira. 2016. *Why More Teachers of Color Should be a Priority for Tennessee*. State Collaborative on Reforming Education. <http://tnscore.org/why-more-teachers-of-color-should-be-a-priority-for-tennessee/>
- Boser, Ulrich. 2011. *Teacher Diversity Matters: A State-by-State Analysis of Teachers of Color*. Center for American. Progress. <http://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/ED535665.pdf>
- Jacobs, Anna W., Hearne, Brittany. 2016. *IncluCivics Report: Metro Nashville Public Schools*. The Metro Human Relations Commission. <http://www.tlacc.org/assets/inclucivicsmnpns-final-web-032316.pdf>
- Polly, Drew. 2016. *Evaluating Teacher Education Programs through Performance-Based Assessments*. IGI Global. <https://www.safaribooksonline.com/library/view/evaluating-teacher-education/9781466699298/>
- Putman, Hannah, Hansen, Michael, Walsh, Kate & Quintero, Diana. 2016. *High Hopes and Harsh Realities: The Real Challenges to Building a Diverse Workforce*. Brown Center on Education Policy at Brookings Institution. <https://www.brookings.edu/research/high-hopes-and-harsh-realities-the-real-challenges-to-building-a-diverse-teacher-workforce/>
- SCORE. 2016. *Preparation to Practice: Research on Improving Effectiveness of Early-Career Teaching*. <https://www.joomag.com/magazine/preparation-to-practice/0919271001468881416?short>
- Valenzuela, Angela. Growing Critically Conscious Teachers: A Social Justice Curriculum for Educators of Latino/a Youth. Teacher College Press. March 2016.