



TRAILBLAZER
COALITION

PREPARING A MORE DIVERSE
TEACHING FORCE FOR NASHVILLE

2016

TRAILBLAZER COALITION RESEARCH PROJECT on Teacher Diversity

Before developing strategies to improve teacher diversity in Middle Tennessee, the Trailblazer Coalition felt a need to listen to teachers, students and educational leaders, ensuring our goals reflected the needs of schools and communities in Nashville. While research has focused on this issue in other cities, the Trailblazer Coalition sought to answer specific questions about the unique context of teacher diversity in our city.

The Trailblazer Coalition conducted two prongs of research:

- A survey project to assess perceptions of the profession with area high school & college students
- A series of focus groups with area candidates, teachers, and leaders to understand barriers candidates face and supports they receive on their path to teaching



The survey project was administered to students in three MNPS high schools: Glencliff, Overton, and Antioch. These schools were targeted because they have significant diverse student populations. Three college sites were selected: Tennessee State University, Lipscomb University, & FUTURO, a club for Latinx students at Middle Tennessee colleges. A total of 419 students were surveyed across all six sites.

Key findings from the survey were:

- the **number one message** that students hear about teaching is that it has low pay, and this message comes directly from their own classroom teachers.
- Students also believed you had to “love” teaching in order to do it and have a sense of vocation and certainty that does not align with the nature of uncertainty most teenagers feel.
- Students also noted that **patience was the teacher characteristic most strongly needed**, and each believing they lacked this quality, viewed themselves lacking in the needed skills to be a teacher.
- In examining interest in the profession, more college students were interested in teaching than high school students; typically conversations focus on the need to encourage career interest in students earlier, but these findings suggest targeting freshmen & sophomores in college as they are deciding on majors. Also, while a gender gap exists among white students in terms of interest in the profession, **no gender gap exists among students of color, with female & male students equally interested.**

Learning from these findings are:

- **current classroom teachers are frontline recruiters** for the profession who are under-utilized, nor are they aware they are actively dissuading students from pursuing the profession.
- It also indicates that in order to change the messages students are receiving, teachers need to be capable of projecting job satisfaction, therefore **the mental health of teachers matters**; we should be teaching future teachers about this responsibility and how to do self-care and coaching principals to care about joy and mental health of their staff.





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The series of focus groups reached 78 participants through 19 focus groups, which included the following stakeholders among others:



- Latino, African American, and Arabic-speaking parents
- Latino and African American community leaders
- Latino and African American candidates, teachers, and administrators
- recruiters & African American faculty in educator preparation programs.

Focus groups' compiled responses shed light on a variety of topics.

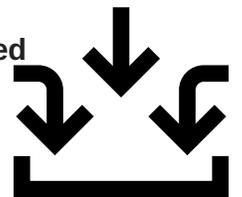
- Discussions around salary with teacher candidates and new teachers made clear that the narrative of “low salary” is all relative and dependent upon the background of the teacher. For teachers changing careers from the non-profit industry and candidates from low-income, first generation backgrounds, they were pleasantly surprised by their starting salary.



- They thought it would be helpful to spend more time sharing what starting salaries are for teachers because they are competitive in comparison to many other service industry and “helping” industry careers. While financial barriers are a key component to solving this puzzle, the “low salary” situation is not exactly the barrier it is often perceived to be.

Another theme was that relationships are key.

- Recruitment is done through informal networks and leveraging a recruiter’s personal relationships in communities. It’s important to **have recruiters from the communities we are looking to target**. It’s important we leverage community leaders in each community who can understand the concerns and questions of families.
- Recruiters from within communities would **also help close the information gap** - many communities do not understand the pathways to becoming a teacher and there is no central information source available currently. Mentoring and relationships within teacher preparation programs and schools are critical for candidates and new teachers.
- They each overcame discrimination and serious negativity - **they could have benefited from mentoring and support systems along the way** – and would still today. Teacher retention initiatives, including affinity groups, are a key strategy that would reduce the currently high rates of attrition among newer teachers.
- **Current teachers & principals of color are powerful role models and untapped recruiters**. They need to be leveraged as such by teacher preparation programs. One Latina teacher shared that she had a student she knew at her middle school but lost contact with for five years. This student tracked her down through three school moves to ask her help as a senior in high school applying to college. Her former Latina counselor was the one person she thought could truly help her. That speaks volumes about the need for teachers who come from first generation, low-income, and/or immigrant backgrounds.
- Finally, a repeating theme was that **solutions are multi-dimensional**; there are many barriers at play, so any solution must address multiple barriers simultaneously. Increased scholarships would help. More accessible loan forgiveness would help. More mentoring programs and affinity groups for teachers of color would help. Test preparation support would help during licensure. None of these alone will move the needle; **all of these solutions are needed**.



For more information on our work, a list of members, and to read our 2016-2017 Year End Report, please visit our website: <http://tnedequity.org/trailblazer-coalition/>