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Diversifying the Education Workforce

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Background/Introduction*

While the demographics of students in public education in California shift toward a majority of Students of Color,¹ the diversification of the education workforce lags. In fact, diversifying the teacher workforce has failed to be a priority throughout U.S. history. This was especially the case in light of the 1954 *Brown v. Board of Education* ruling and school integration efforts in which Black/African American teachers were deemed unqualified to teach White children.² As a result, close to 40,000 Black teachers became unemployed in southern and border states. In the years between 1963 and 1970, nearly 50% of Black principals in Georgia, 90% of Black administrators in Kentucky, and 95% Black administrators in North Carolina lost their jobs.²

Research broadly suggests that Students of Color in public education benefit greatly from having Teachers of Color.^{2,3} More specifically, a growing body of research on Latina/o/x and Black students suggests that these students who are taught by Latina/o/x and Black teachers have better academic and learning outcomes, such as higher scores on standardized tests, increases in college attendance, and more diverse cultural and linguistic competence.³ Such positive outcomes are related to various factors, including cultural similarities between teachers and students, easier trust- and rapport-building, and Latina/o/x and Black teachers' use of culturally relevant pedagogy.⁴ Despite these promising findings, the majority of teachers in public schools remain White, even in schools attended mostly by Students of Color.⁵ More importantly, although schools have a shortage of Teachers of Color across the country, their hiring practices do not prioritize hiring Teachers of Color.⁶

The challenge of diversifying the education workforce also extends to educational leaders. One study found that Black assistant principals of any gender and women assistant principals of any race are promoted at a lower rate to principalships when compared to White male assistant principals,⁵ contributing to a predominantly White male school leadership workforce. With a predominantly White teacher and leadership workforce and a growing population of Students of Color in education, efforts to diversify the education workforce are timely and relevant.

In this brief, we share findings from 12 studies that highlight the challenges and opportunities in diversifying the workforce along the education pipeline. We conclude this brief with reflection questions for practice.

**For the purposes of this research brief we use the terms Black/African American and Latina/o/x consistent with how researchers cited in this brief used these terms in their research and to encompass how participants in these studies identified.*

Challenges and Opportunities in Diversifying the Educator Workforce: Lessons Learned from Research Findings

Finding #1

Hiring and retaining Teachers of Color

In the current standard hiring practices, filling the teacher shortage takes priority over teacher diversity, leading to a continued challenge in diversifying the teacher workforce.⁶ Although human resources officers acknowledge the challenge in hiring a diverse teacher workforce, they remain committed to standard hiring practices that they believe will ensure organizational fit and that the “right” teacher is hired for the “right” classroom.⁶ However, the standard hiring practices, such as making hiring decisions based on rubrics that are racially biased, can penalize excellent Teacher Candidates of Color, resulting in a less diverse teacher workforce.⁶ It is important to note that human resource officer participants in this recent study acknowledged the importance of diversifying the teacher workforce but also admitted that increasing teacher diversity is not always considered when making hiring decisions.⁶ In addition to these standard hiring practices, Teachers of Color are pushed out of the teaching profession through teacher credential requirements,² such as standardized testing that favors White and affluent individuals and has been a particular strategy used

to keep Black/African American teachers from teaching.⁷ These exclusive practices contribute to a predominantly White teacher workforce.

While hiring Teachers of Color is essential, equally important is retaining Teachers of Color after they enter the educator workforce. Nevertheless, school and work climates are frequently not inclusive spaces for Students of Color in teacher education programs and Teachers of Color once they are in service.^{2,8} For instance, teacher education programs tend to cater to White, English-speaking students and often exclude the experiences and knowledge of pre-service Teachers of Color,⁹ which in turn creates a hostile climate for them. Additionally, while in service, Teachers of Color often endure hostile racial climates at work, where they do not feel supported or valued and are overlooked for promotions.^{2,8} Racial climates, whether in teacher education programs or during service, help shape the way Students of Color and Teachers of Color experience exclusion, which in the end influences retention.

Finding #2

Recruiting paraprofessionals to become teachers to increase teacher diversity in schools

An often-overlooked group when recruiting Educators of Color are paraprofessionals. Of the few studies conducted, findings show that one way of helping meet the shortage of Teachers of Color in public schools is by retaining and/or directly recruiting Paraprofessionals of Color to become teachers.^{9,10} With training, Paraprofessionals of Color already possess experience and knowledge necessary for working with Students of Color in their schools.⁹ In fact, paraprofessionals are able to build positive relationships and rapport with Students of Color and understand the significance of these relationships;¹⁰ thus, paraprofessionals may have similar effects as teachers in terms of impact on students.

Some Paraprofessionals of Color participated in teacher education programs and found the experience to be exclusive of their ideas, backgrounds, experiences, and knowledge. One study found that Staff of Color who do not feel supported by teacher preparation programs end up leaving those programs,

identifying the lack of affirmation for their culture within the programs as a primary cause.¹⁰ Black participants, in particular, decided to leave their teacher preparation programs because the programs centered White participants and had less focus on their training experiences, resulting in Black teacher candidates feeling marginalized.¹⁰ However, the experiences of Paraprofessionals of Color may also vary. The same study found that some Paraprofessionals of Color who remained in teacher preparation programs reported that their participation in these programs helped validate and standardize the skills they already possessed.¹⁰ For instance, in these programs, participants receive test preparation for teaching certification exams, mentorship and coaching, and financial support in order to pursue the teaching profession.¹⁰ Furthermore, partnerships (e.g., “Grow Your Own” programs) between school districts and teacher preparation programs serve to increase teacher diversity through preparing paraprofessionals to become teachers.^{10,11}

Finding #3

Promoting/elevating Teachers of Color to administrator positions in diverse work climates

Students of Color are becoming the majority in public schools in California; however, they rarely see themselves reflected in their school leadership. A study through an intersectional lens found that while the majority of school leadership positions are held by White men, Black assistant principals of any gender, and women assistant principals of any race are less likely to get promoted to principalships.⁵ Moreover, women leaders are more likely to be placed as elementary school principals, a position statistically less likely to lead to superintendency.⁵ Teacher diversity can increase if leadership diversity is also increased. For instance, one study found that Black principals hire and retain more Black teachers—ultimately benefiting Black students in their academic progress, particularly in math, and boosting the number of Black students in gifted and talented programs.⁵ Yet, educational leadership, along with the education workforce, lacks diversity. Additionally, a lack of diversity persists at the highest levels of school administration because most superintendents are former high

school principals and most high school principals are White men.⁵

Work climates also bring their own hardships. Research demonstrates that many educational Leaders of Color navigate challenging racial climates and experience a lack of belonging.¹² For instance, most Leaders of Color are within the numerical minority in their leadership spaces, which results in feelings of professional and racial isolation.¹² Frequently, the labor of bringing awareness to issues of race falls on Leaders of Color. Additionally, Leaders of Color report being discouraged from sitting together during leadership meetings, causing a sense of tension and the feeling that there are no safe spaces for them.¹² Despite these challenges, building coalitions among the Leaders of Color enables them to feel empowered and confident to be advocates for Students of Color and pursue more equitable practices in their spaces.¹²

In light of these findings, we propose the following reflection questions for all educators to help in diversifying their education workforces.

Reflection Questions

Teacher Leaders:

- ▶ In what ways might experienced teachers support and mentor early-career Teachers of Color? How might this be different if you are White or a Teacher of Color?
- ▶ One study recommends the use of affinity groups for Teachers of Color as a way to retain them. What might the creation of affinity groups look like at your site? What are some constraints and challenges to overcome?

School Leaders:

- ▶ How might you prioritize the hiring of Teachers of Color alongside the priority of addressing teacher shortage at your site?
- ▶ What do recruitment policies and practices look like at your particular school?
- ▶ What policies and practices may be explicitly or implicitly biased towards Teacher of Color? What policies and practices need to be modified to increase the hiring of Teachers of Color?

District Leaders:

- ▶ What concrete steps might your district take to develop or improve its teacher recruitment strategies to recruit and retain Teachers of Color?
- ▶ How might your district partner with universities, teacher preparation programs, or local groups to create a Teacher of Color pipeline?
- ▶ What systems and structures are in place in your district to promote Teachers of Color into leadership roles?

About 21CSLA

The original California School Leadership Academy was established by Senate Bill 813 in 1983 and administered by the California Department of Education until 2003. Senate Bill 75 re-authorized the 21st Century School Leadership Academy (21CSLA) in 2019. The grant is dedicated to the professional learning and support of California's educational leaders—teacher, site, and district—to create more equitable learning environments that improve success for underserved students. Headquartered at UC Berkeley Graduate School of Education, 21CSLA is led in partnership with UCLA School of Education and Information Studies, the California Subject Matter Project, and seven Regional Academies across the state.

The 21CSLA initiative provides high-quality, equity-centered professional learning for educational leaders of schools and districts in California that receive Title II funds. Programs are free to participants and include leadership coaching, communities of practice, and localized professional learning to improve instruction and achievement outcomes for multilingual learners, students with disabilities, low-income students, and other historically marginalized students.

21CSLA Equity Statement

Leaders for equity transform education to improve access, opportunity, and inclusion for students and adults, especially those who are systemically marginalized and historically underserved, so that they can thrive.

21CSLA Bridging Research and Practice

21CSLA seeks to bridge the gap between research and practice in education, especially for educational leaders. These Research Briefs compile and present current research in a concise format. They also include reflection questions to help leaders adapt and adopt the information into their own practice. Companion Practice Briefs gather and lift the voices and the experiences of educational leaders for dissemination among researchers.

21CSLA also regularly produces Research-Practice Webinars in which scholars and practitioners engage in conversations about timely issues. For more information, visit <https://bit.ly/21csla-webinars>

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Recruitment

Are you an educational leader willing to share your experiences to be highlighted in our companion 21CSLA Practice Brief? Visit <https://tinyurl.com/sharewith21CSLAPracticeBrief> to let us know!