



Retaining Teachers of Color in Our Public Schools

A Critical Need for Action

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Introduction and summary

As a nation, we need to undertake strategic efforts to retain and increase the number of effective teachers of color in our educator workforce. Teachers of color are significantly underrepresented in the public school population, despite the fact that the number of students of color is growing rapidly. We must make sure that all students—especially this new stream of diverse learners from different cultural and language backgrounds—have access to not only high-quality education opportunities but also a high-quality and an equally diverse teaching force. Greater teacher diversity will help ensure that today’s students are prepared to succeed in the future workforce, some in various educator roles.

The first report in this series, “Teacher Diversity Revisited: A New State-by-State Analysis,”¹ explores the growing diversity of the student population in public schools, as well as the shrinking diversity of many state and regional teaching forces. The second report, “The Leaky Pipeline for Teachers of Color: Getting More Teachers of Color into the Classroom,”² tracks how people of color enter and negotiate the educator pipeline, examines critical junctures that limit or expand the participation of people of color in this pipeline, and highlights strategies that need further exploration and intervention.

This report, the third in the series, focuses on the need to retain teachers of color—specifically, those who effectively improve student achievement. It explores reasons for low teacher retention rates and discusses promising retention policies and practices to ensure that the most capable teachers of color enter and remain in our public schools. Our goal is to generate a serious dialogue among educators and policymakers, as well as within communities of color and among their representatives, about the actions necessary to appreciably increase the numbers of effective teachers of color in public schools. We need to be committed to retaining these teachers and ensuring that they are major components of a diverse and competent workforce.

This report's findings include:

- **Retention is key to retaining more teachers of color.** Research on the retention and turnover of teachers of color closely parallels research on new teachers, who also leave the profession at disproportionately high rates.³ It is critical that we give attention to the needs of both of these groups. While much has been done in the past 25 years to substantially increase the numbers of teachers of color in public schools, high levels of attrition offset these successes.⁴
- **Teachers of color are crucial to all schools.** Teachers of color are more likely to work and remain in high-poverty, hard-to-staff urban schools and districts than their white counterparts; in fact, they often consider it an important duty to do so.⁵ What's more, teachers of color are known to be personally committed to the success of children of color, and they affect a wide range of student academic outcomes. They also serve as powerful role models for all students and prove that teaching can be a viable career for people of color.
- **The conditions that teachers of color face in high-poverty, hard-to-staff urban schools and districts work against their success and longevity in these schools, as well as in the profession as a whole.**⁶ Factors that support teacher retention are amenable to social, cultural, financial, and human resource policy changes well within the capacity of schools and districts to address.⁷

Based on these findings, state, district, and school leaders, as appropriate, should take the following steps to increase the numbers of—and retain—effective teachers of color in our public schools:

- Provide innovative teacher-preparation approaches in university-based and alternative-certification programs, new frameworks for transitioning from trainees to fully functioning, effective teachers and supporting novice teachers, and career development for teachers of color that focuses on ways to explicitly support and retain educators who can be successful in schools with high proportions of students of color.
- Address conditions in urban, hard-to-staff schools that compromise the effectiveness and retention of teachers of color.

Communities of color, their advocates, and policymakers, should:

- Develop a priority focus on attaining a more diverse and representative teacher workforce, with the specific goal of having local and state workforces reflect the racial, ethnic, and linguistic compositions of classrooms.
- Require teachers to be well grounded in the subjects they teach and effective at ensuring our children learn and achieve.
- Press for actions to support and retain effective teachers.

Together, state, district, and local school leaders—as well as organized communities of color—can begin to remedy the low representation of people of color in the teaching force. States and districts can work to enforce needed changes in teacher preparation and support to increase the retention of teachers of color. For their part, communities of color can work to highlight the need to develop and support more effective teachers of color in our schools and steer more capable individuals toward the profession.

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