

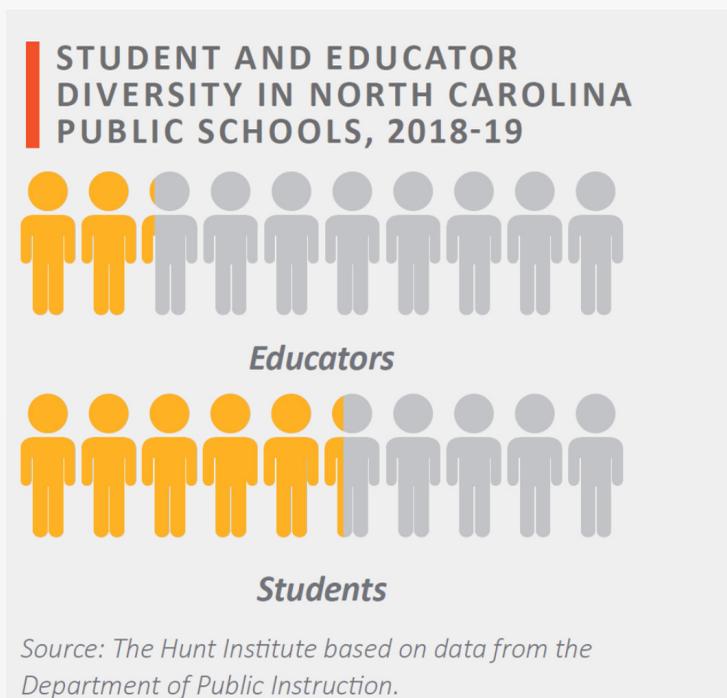
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# **TEACHER WORKFORCE DIVERSITY: WHY IT MATTERS FOR STUDENT OUTCOMES**

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Increasing the racial and ethnic diversity of educators serving students in our public schools is a promising strategy that is vastly underutilized. The research has repeatedly shown the importance of a diverse teacher workforce. However, the path to increase diversity of educators is complex and will take significant efforts and investments by policymakers and advocates to accomplish.

In North Carolina, teacher diversity does not currently reflect the student population. While the student population has become the majority-minority, the diversity of the teacher workforce lags behind both racially and ethnically - with approximately two teachers of color for every five students of color during the 2018-2019 school year. The implications of this mismatch pose concerns for student outcomes.



**Source**

Teacher diversity is beneficial for all students, but especially students of color. The evidence is clear that having a teacher that matches students' racial identity increases reading and math scores, reduces the use of exclusionary discipline practices, and increases the likelihood of graduating high school and matriculating into a postsecondary institution.

Knowing these positive impacts, many policymakers share the same goal of increasing teacher diversity. In North Carolina, Governor Roy Cooper signed Executive Order Number 113 to establish the Developing a Representative and

Inclusive Vision for Education (or DRIVE) Task Force, charged with creating and sustaining a diverse educator workforce. Efforts such as these also highlight the complexity of the issues that make it difficult to increase the diversity.

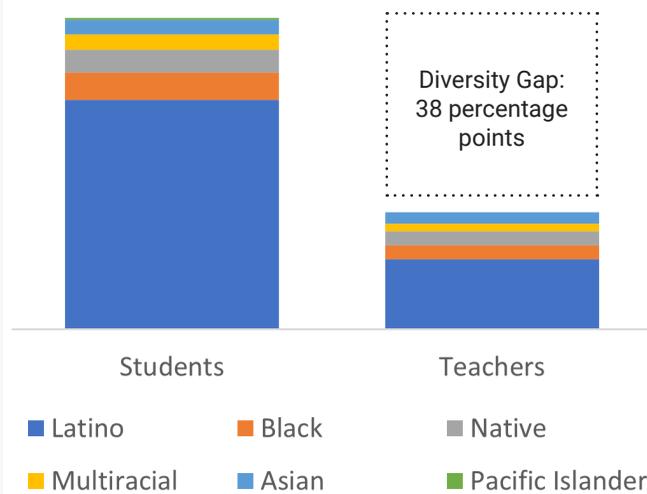
This brief seeks to address the importance of promoting a diverse teacher workforce by presenting the current state of teacher diversity in North Carolina and highlighting the benefits that it has on student outcomes. The brief concludes with recommendations for increasing teacher diversity among the educator workforce in North Carolina.

### DIVERSITY OF STUDENTS AND TEACHERS IN NORTH CAROLINA

In North Carolina, as in many other states, educator diversity lags student diversity. While nearly 51 percent of students identified as people of color in 2019, this was true of just 23 percent of teachers (The Education Trust, 2021). Two potential contributing factors for this gap are the rapidly changing student demographics and the slow increase in people of color entering the teaching profession. Simply put, recruitment and retention of diverse teachers is not on pace with the increase of students of color seen in the classrooms.

U.S. Census Bureau data projects that national and state-level racial and ethnic populations will become more diverse, and experts predict that North Carolina will become a “majority-minority” state by 2048 (DRIVE Task Force, 2021). Interestingly enough, the state’s public school student population was already majority-minority based on 2018-2019 school data (DRIVE Task Force, 2021). State-wide between 2010 and 2019, the white population declined, Black, American Indian, and Alaska Native populations remained constant, and the Hispanic and Asian and Pacific Islander populations increased. At the county level, the eastern part of North Carolina and metropolitan centers (Charlotte-Mecklenburg, Raleigh, and Durham) saw the largest increases in populations of color. The greatest surge was among the Hispanic population under the age of eighteen.

Student Diversity vs. Teacher Diversity in Arizona, 2019



Source

While the trend is clear that students of color are increasing, research shows it has far outpaced the diversity of teachers (Meckler & Rabinowitz, 2019). Over a fifteen-year period (between 2005-2020), the percentage of students of color enrolled in public schools increased from 43 percent to 53 percent. The same increases were not seen for teachers. During that same period teachers of color increased from 17 percent to 21 percent. In the 2018-2019 school year, all of North Carolina’s 115 local education agencies (LEAs) had a greater share of white educators than students of color (Department of Public Instruction, 2021).

Nationally, 99.7 percent of white students attend a district where the percentage of white teachers is equal to or greater than the percentage of white students (Meckler & Rabinowitz, 2019). By way of contrast, only .001 percent of Hispanic students attend school systems where the portion of Hispanic teachers is equal or greater than the percentage of Hispanic students. Though Asian and Black students fare better in this comparison, the gap is staggering (4.5 percent and 7 percent, respectively).

From a state-focused perspective, students of color in North Carolina are less likely to attend school in a district whose teachers reflect their racial and ethnic diversity. Data from the five largest public-school systems in North Carolina, Charlotte-Mecklenburg, Wake, Guilford, Winston-Salem/Forsyth, and Cumberland show as much as a 37-point diversity gap between student diversity and teacher diversity (see Table 1).

Together, these data indicate the wide gaps that exist between the teacher workforce and the students they serve. Students of color in public schools are also much more likely to be in schools where the percentage of white teacher far exceeds the percentage of teachers of color. The lack of diversity fails to reflect the students they serve and in doing is a missed opportunity to improve student outcomes.

### TEACHER DIVERSITY POSITIVELY IMPACTS ACHIEVEMENT

Robust research suggests that increasing the diversity in the educator workforce is beneficial to all students, but especially students of color. The benefits for students of color are not just academic but also include benefits such as a reduction in harsh discipline strategies and feelings of connectedness.

When racial identities match between students and teachers in early grades, test scores improve in both



Table 1

Students and Teacher Diversity in North Carolina's Five Largest School Districts, 2019-2020

	Charlotte-Mecklenburg	Cumberland	Winston-Salem	Wake	Guilford
White Teachers	65.4%	65.8%	74.2%	80.5%	63.4%
Teachers of Color	34.6%	34.2%	25.80%	19.5%	36.6%
Students of Color	71.9%	70.9%	62.1%	53.8%	67.8%

Notes: Teachers and Students of color include Black, Hispanic, Asian, Pacific Islander



math and reading, particularly for Black students who are considered low performing (Dee, 2004). The evidence also shows that there is a higher rate of recommendations for placement in gifted classes for students of color when they have an educator or principal that reflects their racial identity (Ouazad, 2014; Grissom, Rodriguez, & Kern, 2017). The benefits also have longer term effects on educational attainment. Having a Black educator in third, fourth, or fifth grade leads to a decrease in dropout rates among Black males and an increase in likelihood that they aim to attend a four-year college (Gershenson, et al., 2017).

The benefits extend beyond increases in academic achievement. Without a diverse workforce, non-Hispanic white educators are more likely to negatively assess externalizing behaviors (e.g., arguing in class, being disruptive) of Black students than an educator of color. This mismatch often leads to increased rates of exclusionary discipline practices (Bates & Glick, 2013). These harsh discipline practices are disruptive to the schooling experience and is a revolving door for the school-to-prison pipeline. A study conducted in North Carolina, found that Black students with same race teachers had reduced rates of exclusionary discipline, such as detention, suspensions, and expulsions

(Lindsay & Hart, 2017).

A driver of success for students is the connectedness they feel at school and to their teachers. Educators of color often reference the importance of shared experiences with their students as a key aspect of their success (Achinstein, et al., 2009). By developing meaningful connections with students, educators establish bonds with students and their families. These lead to positive perceptions of same-race educators. They report feeling cared for, more interest in their schoolwork, and meaningful communication and guidance from educators (Egalite & Kisida, 2018).

While students of color, particularly Black students, show significant successes with a diverse educator workforce, all students stand to benefit from a diverse educator workforce. Racial and ethnic diversity in the educator workforce powerfully demonstrates that knowledge and authority are not exclusive and can be shared by all individuals (Zumwalt & Craig, 2008). Simply taking a class with an educator of color leads white students to challenge racial stereotypes and creates a more accepting and tolerant atmosphere (Frankenberg, 2009). Students of all races report feeling more challenged and held to higher standards when educated by Black educators more so than with

white educators (Cherng & Halpin, 2016).

Given the benefits of a diverse educator workforce it is imperative that policymakers and advocates focus on matching the educator workforce to keep pace with the changing demographics of the student population in North Carolina.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

Promoting a diverse teacher workforce is critical for student outcomes. As North Carolina becomes more diverse the teachers who educate students must be reflective of the student body it serves. From the information presented in this brief, a diverse teacher workforce is greatly needed to ensure future success of North Carolina’s students.

Policymakers should consider establishing policies and practices that prioritize diversity in classrooms. In doing so it is critical to keep apprised of the scope and current practices. Collecting, analyzing, and publicly reporting teacher demographic data and having a body to keep accountable for the progress allow for effective investments in the efforts. The following recommendations are offered and will encourage both the diversification of the NC teacher workforce and tracking progress towards increasing teacher diversity.

■ **Create new programs that repair and/or develop new pipelines for teaching and teacher preparation.** Past programs may have increased the overall numbers of teachers, but they were not focused on minority teacher recruitment. Future efforts should leverage the expertise of Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCU) and Historically Minority Serving

Institutions (HMSI). These institutions should be consulted and fully supported in the development of new initiatives and pipeline programs.

■ **Increase funding to teacher preparation programs to recruit diverse minority candidates.** Funding support for students/candidates who are interested in teacher preparation programs that increase and sustain minority teacher recruitment and development may include:

- Summer program fellowships to take additional coursework
- Teacher assistant stipends for undergraduates
- Guaranteed, paid pathways to Master of Arts in Teaching (MAT) Programs
- Loan repayment - not just for teachers who work in the highest need schools, and/or room and board compensated living-learning communities for teacher preparation program candidates/ graduates that offer 2-3 year options to live and work in the city where candidates/graduates teach

■ **Increase the data and public reporting for indicators of educator diversity statewide** so that trends in the diversity gap between teachers and students can be monitored regularly. This would help identify progress and challenges to increasing the workforce diversity.

■ **Create an independent structure that monitors progress and is responsible for continuously improving** processes and evaluating the state’s efforts towards increasing diversity in the educator workforce.



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