The Landscape: Educator Diversity in North Carolina

In the 2015-16 school year, North Carolina’s public school student population became “majority-minority” for the first time as the number of students of color exceeded the number of white students. However, this change in the makeup of the student population has not been reflected in the teaching workforce. Data from the 2018-19 school year indicate that while 53 percent of students are nonwhite, this is true of only 22 percent of educators.

All of North Carolina’s 115 local education agencies (LEAs) have a greater share of students of color than educators of color, and for over three quarters of districts, this difference is greater than 20 percentage points. Two LEAs employ zero educators of color, and 23 LEAs do not employ a principal or assistant principal of color. Only eight LEAs in North Carolina have higher percentages of principals of color than students of color. This lack of diversity of educators and school leaders is reflective of North Carolina’s difficulty recruiting, preparing, supporting, and retaining educators of color.

A NATIONAL CONCERN

This is not an issue that is unique to North Carolina. According to the 2015-16 School Staffing Survey from the National Center for Education Statistics, 80 percent of our nation’s teacher workforce is white. In 2016, the U.S. Department of Education released a report analyzing the state of racial diversity in the teacher workforce and found that while the diversity of the teacher workforce is slowly increasing, the student population is diversifying at a much faster rate. Barring significant intervention, the gap between the racial and ethnic makeup of students and teachers may increase further.

Analyzing teacher diversity through generational cohorts adds another layer of concern for the issue of educator diversity. Despite millennials being the most diverse generation to date, baby boomer and Generation X teachers are actually more diverse than their millennial counterparts. This highlights the need for increased intervention as these more diverse cohorts are inching closer to retirement.

RECRUITMENT AND PREPARATION OF RACIALLY AND ETHNICALLY DIVERSE EDUCATORS IN NORTH CAROLINA

Recruiting a diverse pool of applicants has proven to be a challenge for educator preparation programs across the country. Within undergraduate institutions of higher education (IHE) nationally, colleges of education are less diverse than other departments in higher education. This trend holds true in North Carolina, where 81 percent of students enrolled in educator preparation programs in 2018 were white and 86 percent of those who were licensed through an educator preparation program that year were white.
Alternative certification programs, which allow professionals with degrees in non-teaching fields to become certified through a short, intensive training process, are more diverse, with prospective educators of color constituting 45 percent of those enrolled. However, across North Carolina’s various educator preparation pathways, 70 percent of all students enrolled are white.

**SUPPORT AND RETENTION OF NORTH CAROLINA’S EDUCATORS OF COLOR**

Both nationally and in North Carolina, school districts struggle with supporting and retaining educators of color. From 2004 to 2014, the retention rate among Black educators in elementary and middle schools in North Carolina was nearly 4 percentage points lower than that of white educators.\(^1\) Research suggests this is partially due to educators of color being placed in hard-to-staff schools that have higher proportions of underperforming students and are located in lower socioeconomic areas more frequently than their white peers. However, Black educators were more likely than their white counterparts to stay in schools that had a higher population of Black students, and if they did leave their school for another, they tended to go to schools with an even higher proportion of Black students.\(^2,3\)

**THE NEED FOR DISAGGREGATED DATA**

A significant challenge in understanding the scope of the issue of educator diversity is the lack of publicly available data in North Carolina and nationally. The most recent available national data regarding teacher demographics is from the 2015-16 school year. In 2019, the *Washington Post* attempted to amass state-reported teacher demographic data to better understand the state of teacher diversity; however, they found that states vary in how they collect and report teacher demographic data, and some don’t collect it at all. North Carolina only publicly shares teacher race and ethnicity in the categories of Black, white and other, marginalizing North Carolina’s Hispanic, American Indian, and Asian American populations and making it difficult to directly compare the racial and ethnic diversity of students and teachers.

Further, the state does not publicly release pertinent disaggregated data that are critical in identifying points along the educator pipeline where intentional support may be needed. These include a lack of disaggregated data regarding enrollment and completion within educator preparation programs, new teacher placement, years of teaching experience, or teacher turnover. Even when obscuring some data points to protect the privacy of those who make up a small percentage of the pipeline in their school or district, these descriptive statistics at the state or district level could offer tremendous insight into nuances of the issue of teacher diversity.

**The History: Educators of Color in North Carolina**

Prior to the landmark civil rights case, *Brown v. Board of Education*, educators of color who taught in and led segregated schools were faced with low salaries, inadequate funding, old textbooks, and inferior facilities. Due to the intentional efforts by the state to disproportionately fund Black schools, communities of color in North Carolina relied on northern philanthropic organizations like the Rosenwald Fund and the Anne T. Jeffes Fund to build schools and train and pay Black female teachers, respectively. With many states, including North Carolina, attempting to thwart the Court’s mandate to desegregate “with all deliberate speed,” integration did not begin in earnest until the early 1970s. States did not want to allocate the resources required to update the facilities of Black schools, leading to school closures and the firing of Black staff.\(^4,5\) It is estimated that the number of Black educators in the United States decreased by 31.8 percent as a result of desegregation. In fact, approximately 38,000 Black educators across the South lost their jobs following the *Brown v. Board* decision. Principals faced a similar trend, as an estimated 90 percent of Black principals in the deep south states lost their positions.

North Carolina’s decline in the number of educators of color was not tied solely to educators being replaced in newly integrated schools. The advent of new certification and licensure procedures all but explicitly discriminated against Black educators.\(^6\) Beyond the increased barriers to entering and remaining in the teaching profession, Black educators sought employment opportunities outside of the education sector due to the 1964 *Civil Rights Act* which prohibited racial discrimination in employment.

Prior to integration, American Indian students attended schools with Black students. American Indian educators were able to use North Carolina’s pro-segregation stance to garner funding for the Haliwa-Saponi Indian School in 1957. For over a decade, American Indian students were able to learn from primarily American Indian educators in a school that served as a rallying point for the community. However, with the inevitable integration of all schools in North Carolina, American Indian educators faced the same realities as their Black peers.
In all 115 of North Carolina’s LEAs, the share of students of color exceeds the share of teachers of color. The percentage point difference between student and teacher diversity in these LEAs ranges from 6 to 58 percentage points.
The Imperative: Why Having a Diverse Educator Workforce Matters

Extensive research has found that a diverse educator workforce is beneficial to all students, but especially students of color. Multiple studies have indicated that test scores improve in both math and reading in early grades when students are taught by an educator that reflects a student’s racial identity; this is especially true for lower-performing Black students. Educators typically assess same-race students more positively, leading to a higher rate of placement in gifted classes for students of color when they have an educator or principal that reflects their racial identity. This benefit continues at the high school level where students of color are more likely to enroll in a higher-level math course after geometry if they previously had at least one math educator who was Black. Having one 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 will aspire to attend a four-year college.

Beyond increases in academic achievement, studies also support the positive disciplinary impact of a diverse educator 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, leading to increased rates of exclusionary discipline practices. An analysis of student-level administrative data in North Carolina found that students served by educators of color exhibited increased attendance rates and fewer instances of exclusionary discipline, especially among Black students.

Educators of color often cite the importance of shared experiences that connect them to their students as a driver of their success. By developing these connections with students with whom they share a racial and ethnic identity, educators can establish bonds with both students and their families. These connections manifest in student associations, as students in urban districts reported more meaningful communication and guidance offered by educators.

While the most obvious impact of a diverse educator workforce pertain to students of color, the benefits of a diverse educator workforce extend to all students. In an increasingly multicultural world, racial and ethnic diversity across the educator continuum demonstrates to all students that knowledge and authority are not exclusive to one group. Experts suggest that simply taking a class with an educator of color leads white students to challenge previously held racial stereotypes, thus creating a more accepting and tolerant atmosphere for all students. Students of all races also tend to rate educators of color more positively than white educators, with students reporting that Black educators hold them to a higher standard than educators of other races.

Citations


