

As North Carolina works to strengthen the pipeline into the teaching profession, it must also be thoughtful and intentional about how it is supporting and retaining the racially, ethnically, and linguistically diverse educators who are already serving students across the state. Overall, this includes inducting, developing, and sustaining educators of color in a manner that is conducive to encouraging a long-term career in education.

Both nationally and in North Carolina, school districts struggle to support and retain educators of color. From 2004 to 2014, the retention rate among Black educators in elementary and middle schools in North Carolina was nearly four 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.² 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.^{3,4}

While many states have worked to improve their efforts in recruiting, supporting, and retaining a diverse educator workforce over the last decade, [the COVID-19 pandemic has washed away those gains](#) in some areas as states and districts have faced budget cuts and subsequent teacher layoffs, disproportionately impacting teachers of color.

Barriers to Retention

In addition to the daily challenges faced by all teachers, educators of color face a number of additional barriers that make the profession unsustainable. In addition to making up a disproportionately low percentage of those entering the profession, educators of color are less satisfied with their jobs and are more likely to exit the classroom.⁵

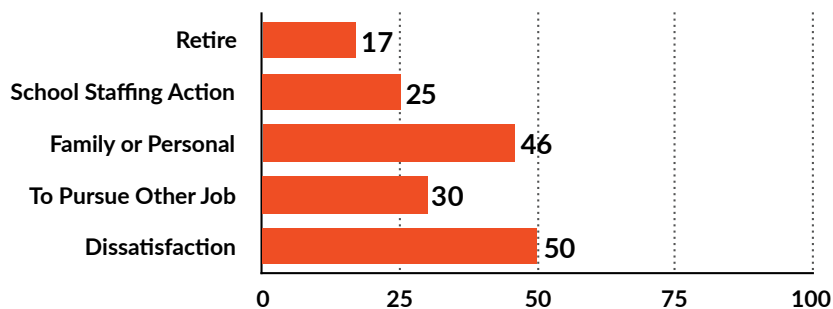
THE INVISIBLE TAX

Educators of color may also find themselves compelled to serve in additional support roles outside the scope of their position as educators. For some, being an educator of color means you are expected to be the expert on all things related to cultural diversity. Bilingual educators often serve as a linguistic intermediary, translating official school documents and filling in as an interpreter for interactions with parents and families with no additional compensation.⁶ Moreover, male educators of color often assume a disciplinarian role due to the perception that they can better connect with particular students, especially Black males.⁷ Known as the “invisible tax,” this is a burden borne by teachers of color that leads to burnout and an early exit from the profession. These additional responsibilities increase the demand on educators’ time and energy, a common concern among those who exit the profession.

ISOLATION

In effect, the lack of diversity in the educator workforce perpetuates racial, ethnic, and linguistic homogeneity within the teaching population, as educators of color who serve in predominantly white schools are left feeling isolated in a system dominated by their white peers. Minneapolis Public Schools’ 2018 [Equity and Diversity Impact Assessment](#) found that teachers of color in racially isolated spaces felt vulnerable, excluded, and unwelcome. Without fellow staff or school leaders who share their racial and ethnic identity, these educators often lack a professional peer support network who can empathize with their experiences and share best practices in navigating these spaces. These feelings of isolation are exacerbated when educators of color are working in a toxic or unsupportive work environment. This isolation can expand beyond the school community when teachers are serving in rural areas that may be in less diverse communities and have [housing shortages, transportation challenges, and limited access to amenities](#).

PERCENT OF PUBLIC SCHOOL TEACHERS OF COLOR REPORTING GENERAL REASONS FOR THEIR TURNOVER, 2012-2013



Source

LACK OF LONG-TERM EARNING POTENTIAL

Educators of color often lack the generational wealth afforded to their white colleagues, and thus [face an uphill battle in paying down student loan debt](#). This generational wealth gap exacerbates the issue for those who shoulder the additional responsibility of supporting family members. The [limited long-term earning potential](#) and higher chance of student debt may keep educators of color from entering and remaining in the profession.

INEFFECTIVE SCHOOL LEADERSHIP

Across the United States, educators of color who exit the classroom and cite job dissatisfaction list frustration with school administration as the most frequent determinant in their departure. This is not unique to educators of color, as the lack of professional autonomy and faculty decision-making influence are cited as the most frequent motives for leaving the classroom among all educators. However, educators of color are more likely to be placed in schools that are designated as high need and may face organizational challenges like staffing limitations, insufficient funding, and increased demands for educator accountability. These additional stressors serve as drivers of dissatisfaction between educators and administrators, and thus lead to educator departure.⁸

BIAS AND DISCRIMINATION

Qualitative studies examining the experiences of both [Black](#) and [Hispanic](#) educators found that educators of color reported facing discrimination and stereotyping in the workplace, and felt undervalued by their white colleagues and broader school community. A [May 2019 study](#) of teacher evaluations in Michigan found that teachers of color in schools with predominantly white staff were more likely to receive lower evaluation scores than their white peers. In some cases, these challenges can preclude educators of color from opportunities for advancement when advanced teaching roles require teacher minimum evaluation scores.

Lessons from the Field | Highlights of Successful Programs Nationally and in North Carolina

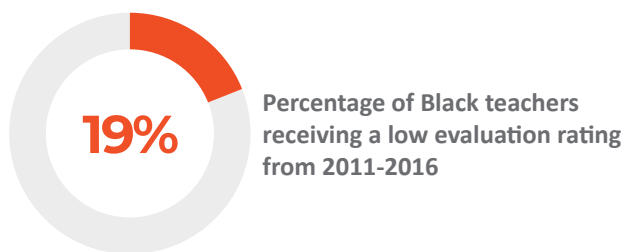
Retention of educators of color must be treated as a human capital priority in school and district planning. Intentional supports that focus on inducting, developing, and sustaining educators of color so that they feel empowered, valued, and excited for a long-term career in education must be designed and implemented. Efforts are underway across the nation to do just that, providing a framework for how stakeholders can approach retaining racially, ethnically, and linguistically diverse educators.

ESTABLISH COMMUNITIES OF SUPPORT

To aid educators of color in overcoming feelings of isolation, particularly in schools with a predominantly white staff, districts and non-profit organizations have worked to create affinity groups and networking opportunities. By creating a space for educators of color to share their experiences and hear from others who face similar professional challenges, these groups are able to make the profession more sustainable. The North Carolina Association of Educators (NCAE) Educators of Color Academy establishes a statewide support network for NCAE members who identify as an educator of color. Through this three-year commitment, members of the academy receive leadership development, tangible strategies to have a successful, life-long career in education, and opportunities to network and collaborate with their peers.

At the district level, Durham Public Schools have created [DPS Latinx](#), a program designed to recruit and retain educators who identify as Hispanic or Latino/a by creating a safe space in which educators can gather, network, collaborate, and grow as professionals. A core element of this program is embracing identity and culture while celebrating, inspiring, and supporting the diversity of the Durham Public Schools' community.

COMPARISONS OF MICHIGAN TEACHER EVALUATIONS BY RACE, 2011-16



50%↑ Educators of color 50 percent more likely to receive low evaluation ratings than white teachers within the same schools.

CREATE CULTURALLY AFFIRMING AND SUSTAINING SCHOOL ENVIRONMENTS

Just as educator preparation programs must address the systemic and institutional biases that are rooted in white supremacy and serve as obstacles for Black and brown students, schools and districts must engage in the self-reflection necessary to develop anti-racist and anti-biased policies that facilitate the retention of educators of color. This begins with school leaders fostering a working environment that is welcoming, inclusive, and addresses the inherent biases of their organization and staff. This includes advancing culturally responsive and sustaining curricula, and holding professional development sessions that discuss race, gender, and bias.⁸ On a more granular level, this also means creating an environment in which teachers can be unapologetic in their authenticity and feel comfortable expressing themselves through the way they dress, wear their hair, and present lessons to address issues of race, social justice, and equity.

Minnesota's [Increase Teachers of Color Act](#)

In an effort to increase educator diversity, the Increase Teachers of Color Act was introduced to the Minnesota legislature in 2020. This legislation includes language requiring districts to develop plans to “ensure curriculum, learning, and work environments are inclusive and respectful of all racial and ethnic groups.”

RETHINK COMPENSATION

Teacher compensation has been an important topic in North Carolina and across the nation and will continue to be a driving factor in educators' decisions to remain in the field. For educators of color, the pay they receive does not reflect the work they do for their students and school communities through the “invisible tax.” These additional responsibilities should be monetized, and educators must be compensated for their work outside of their traditional role as a classroom teacher. Further, the discussion around compensation for educators of color should not be limited to teacher salary. Loan forgiveness programs, loan repayment incentives, and relocation incentives can help address the disproportionate loan burden faced by educators of color and serve as a draw for these teachers to work in more remote areas that often struggle to recruit and retain a diverse educator workforce.

PRIORITIZE INDUCTION AND MENTORING

Studies show that induction and mentoring programs have a positive impact on educator development and retention.¹⁰ North Carolina provides a comprehensive three-year [Beginning Educator Support Program](#) in each district, however, these programs do not provide supplemental supports or programming for educators of color. A vital part of induction is pairing novice educators of color with veteran mentors to engage with someone who looks like them, teaches similar content, or has faced similar challenges. In some cases, schools must look outside of their community to find racially, ethnically, and linguistically diverse mentors that are able to meet the needs of their diverse novice teachers.

Encouraging (and compensating) mentor teachers of color is critical for the support of novice educators, but also provides leadership and coaching experience for career educators of color who may want to transition into administrative roles. When schools create advanced teaching roles, they are actively working to retain teachers of multiple experience levels. However, schools must be diligent in encouraging and empowering educators of color to apply for these roles.

[Profound Gentlemen](#)

Recognizing the need for additional mentoring opportunities once educators enter the workforce, two former educators from Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools established [Profound Gentlemen](#), an organization aimed at improving the academic performance of students by [providing support to male educators of color](#). The program places its members into cohorts that engage in 20 hours of mentoring and support, focusing on character development, content development, and community impact. Educators also have access to a mobile app and one-on-one or small group support that is tailored to their needs and interests. [Profound Gentlemen](#) has expanded its reach across the state and region, and recently announced [Profound Ladies](#) to support female educators of color.

IMPROVE SCHOOL CONDITIONS BY INCREASING DIVERSITY AMONG SCHOOL LEADERS

Strong school leadership that provides effective mentoring, high-quality professional development, and preserves faculty decision-making influence is a significant indicator of retention for educators. One of the most direct ways to combat negative perceptions of the workplace for educators of color is to recruit and retain administrators of color. Black educators are more likely to report feeling supported and encouraged by Black principals than white principals, as well as an increased level of autonomy in their classroom and greater feeling of recognition for their work. There is no such parallel for Black or white educators who work for white principals.¹¹ A [recent study](#) found that Black teachers serving in schools led by a Black principal stayed in their roles longer, and in the five year period following a change from a white to a Black school leader, schools saw a five percent increase in the share of black teachers.

REPORTED REASONS FOR TEACHER TURNOVER AMONG TEACHERS OF COLOR WHO LEFT DUE TO DISSATISFACTION, 2012-2013

81% Administration

57% Lack of Influence and Autonomy

56% Poor Workplace Conditions

Source

In the short term, schools and districts should provide training for school administrators in diversity, equity, and inclusion to address underwritten biases. In the long-term, the state must continue to build its pipeline of diverse school leaders. One promising model is that of the [New Leaders' Aspiring Principals Program](#), which provides a year-long internship complete with mentorship and coaching that extends into a new principal's first year at the helm of a school. Within the program, 64 percent of participants are educators of color, far outpacing the national average of 20 percent. Principals from this program had [positive impacts on student achievement](#) and were more likely to stay in their schools for three or more years compared to other newly placed principals. With an increase in race representation and retention within the administrative workforce, educators of color are better equipped to tackle the challenges of high-need school placements.

COLLECT AND ANALYZE DISAGGREGATED DATA

To better understand the depth and breadth of the issue, schools and districts should collect and disaggregate data on school climate and institute exit interviews to examine factors that may lead to attrition of educators of color. This data will be invaluable in determining why teachers of color are leaving and how school and district leadership can respond to address systemic issues and create more inclusive and sustaining work environments.¹²

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