Diversifying the Teacher Workforce to Benefit North Carolina Public Schools

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While North Carolina is becoming increasingly diverse, the K–12 educator workforce has lagged behind. In 2020, 49% of children (ages 18 and under) were Black/African American, Hispanic/Latinx, Asian, American Indian, Pacific Islander, or Biracial. While the student population in North Carolina is racially diverse, the educator workforce is 77% white. In short, many students in North Carolina schools do not see themselves represented in the educators that teach them every day.

In 2020, North Carolina Governor Roy Cooper commissioned a task force to understand the state of the educator workforce and identify opportunities for growth for North Carolina with regard to diversity in the educator workforce. We have an opportunity to take the lead in diversifying our educator workforce so that every student in North Carolina is taught by the best educators that represent the diversity of our state. To best educate our students in North Carolina, we should invest in recruiting a diverse teaching workforce.

Benefits of a Diverse Teacher Workforce for Students and Schools

We need educators of color to teach our racially diverse student body in North Carolina. In research in education

Key Takeaways

- The educator workforce in North Carolina is overwhelmingly white and does not represent the racial diversity of our students.

- When students are taught by educators from racially diverse backgrounds, they have better academic and non-academic outcomes in school.

- College students who intend to be science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) majors are at risk of dropping out. Rather than dropping out completely, this group can be a vital group to recruit into the field of education.

and psychology, we find that students who feel good about going to school and feel like they belong as students in the classroom have better academic, social, and emotional development and outcomes. In my own research, we find that student belonging can be supported through the *institutional* structure of the school, the *instructional* curriculum and pedagogy, and *interpersonal relationships* between educators and students. Educators shape student belonging at each level. Teachers and administrators set the tone and culture of the school, implement curriculum, and develop relationships with students. Unfortunately, we find in research that these experiences that support belonging in schools are not uniform for all students and

teachers. For example, researchers find that Black teachers have higher expectations of Black students than white teachers, especially in mathematics. These differential expectations undermine Black students' sense of belonging and achievement. Also, for Black students, having a Black or Hispanic teacher is related to higher reading achievement scores and having a Black teacher is related to less reported problematic classroom misbehavior (like disrupting instruction). Further, schools with more Black and Hispanic teachers and administrators have more Black and Hispanic students in gifted education programs, respectively. Placement in gifted education programs prepares students for college and career readiness and provides academically challenging environments. These findings show that *who* is teaching students is just as important as *what* they are teaching. Ultimately, a more racially diverse teaching workforce in North Carolina will improve academic, social, and emotional outcomes for students, preparing our next generation for college, careers, and life as positive and productive community members.

Recruitment of New Educators of Color – A Solution

Recruitment and retention of a more racially diverse teacher and educator workforce should be a priority. A focus on recruitment will help "pull in" more educators of color who have been excluded from the profession. Studies in education show that white college graduates are twice as likely to major in education than Black and Latinx college graduates. Recruitment strategies, then, should focus on structural changes that showcase the pathway to a career as an educator and bring prospective educators of color into the field. Here I focus on recruitment of an untapped pool of potential educators: college students who want to switch majors.

There is an opportunity to recruit more educators of color through traditional university teacher preparation programs by creating specific pathways to education from other fields, especially science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM). According to the National Center for Education Statistics, 28% of beginning college students intend to major in STEM fields, while just 13% intend to major in education. It is also common for students pursuing a Bachelor's degree to switch their intended major. In education, 42% of students switch majors. In some majors, however, students do not just switch their major; they leave college without earning a degree. For instance, in STEM fields, 48% of students leave their STEM major – 28% stay in college and switch into another field and 20% leave college all together. While students leave the education major, previous STEM majors are prime candidates for the field of education. Of those who switch from a STEM major, only 6% switch into education.

Recommendation

Currently enrolled college students of color are an important group to consider as future educators. As many students switch majors, particularly out of STEM fields, teacher education programs should 1) implement programs that increase awareness of the education major and pre-service teacher requirements for students of color, and 2) create and advertise specific pathways into the education major for students coming from STEM fields. Students who leave STEM fields are more likely to leave college without a degree and are more likely to be underrepresented students of color and from low-income backgrounds. By providing clear pathways into education, teacher education programs can contribute to the overall graduation rates of students of color while simultaneously building up the workforce of educators of color.

For more information, visit these sources:

1. North Carolina DRIVE taskforce: https://hunt-institute.org/equity-in-education/drive-taskforce/

2. National Center of Education Statistics Report on switching majors: https://nces.ed.gov/pubs2014/2014001rev.pdf

3. Institutional, Instructional, and Interpersonal Opportunities for Belonging: https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/10.1080/00461520.2017.1421466

4. Changing the Narrative on Diversifying the Teaching Workforce: https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/full/10.1177/0022487118812418