

If You Listen, We Will Stay:

Why Teachers of Color Leave and How to Disrupt Teacher Turnover

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Countless studies show that teachers of color matter for all students, and especially for students of color. Yet, the proportion of teachers of color in the workforce continues to lag far behind the share of students of color in schools across the nation. Today, 51 percent of students in U.S. public schools are students of color, but just 20 percent of teachers are teachers of color. Recruiting teachers of color only gets them into the building. We must pay equal, if not more, attention to their retention to make long-lasting change in the diversity of the workforce. In this report, Teach Plus and The Education Trust set out to learn why teachers of color are leaving schools, what teachers of color believe would help solve the turnover problem, and what strategies exist in schools and school systems that are intentionally working to retain faculty of color.

The report is rooted in two modes of inquiry. First, Teach Plus Policy Fellows, all of whom are classroom teachers, conducted focus groups with teachers of color across five states. The participants shared their own experiences and perspectives on why teachers of color leave, as well as strategies that schools, districts, and states can use to keep them in the field. Second, researchers conducted case studies in schools and districts to surface promising and best practices for supporting and retaining teachers of color.

For the focus groups, *five challenges* emerged that teachers of color face in the workforce:

- 1) *They experience an antagonistic work culture that leaves them feeling unwelcome and/or invisible.*
- 2) *They feel undervalued because they take on more than their fair share of responsibility but are not recognized or compensated for the work that they do.*
- 3) *They feel that they are deprived of agency and autonomy in their schools because of an inability to tailor their teaching to the population of students they serve.*
- 4) *They feel that they are navigating unfavorable working conditions, which lack the supports needed for them to grow as professionals.*
- 5) *They bear the high cost of being a teacher of color, which takes a toll on them financially and psychologically.*

In the case studies, *five solutions* emerged that could keep teachers of color in the workforce:

- 1) *Schools should be places that culturally affirm teachers of color, i.e., where the goals and values of the school match up with the goals and values of the teachers.*
- 2) *Schools should be places that affirm a teacher's humanity and racial identity allowing teachers of color to feel free to be their authentic selves.*
- 3) *Principals should create schools where they empower and invest in teachers, i.e., by providing pathways to leadership, informal and formal opportunities for mentorship, and the freedom to tailor teaching to the population of students in the classroom.*
- 4) *School leaders should place a premium on building a schoolwide family where it's easy to build relationships, find a mentor, and hold each other accountable.*
- 5) *District leaders need to make retaining teachers of color a priority by emphasizing methods of compensation for the extra work these teachers take on, and prioritizing hiring and placement of teachers of color to build cohorts and reduce isolation.*

What school, district, and state leaders can do to retain teachers of color:

- 1) *Value teachers of color by providing loan forgiveness, service scholarships, loan repayment incentives, and relocation incentives for teachers coming into the field.*
- 2) *Collect and disaggregate data (by race/ethnicity) on teacher recruitment, hiring, and retention.*
- 3) *Invest in the recruitment, preparation, and development of strong leaders committed to positive working conditions for a diverse workforce.*
- 4) *Empower teachers of color by ensuring that curriculum, learning environments, and work environments are inclusive and respectful of all racial and ethnic groups.*

What Teachers Can Do :

- 1) *Share this report with your principal, and ask your school's leadership team to address its findings and recommendations, including leadership positions and mentoring, culturally relevant pedagogy, and other solutions to help retain teachers of color.*
- 2) *Share this report with your superintendent (or people in your district who oversee human resources, manage principals, and/or address racial equity), and ask them to create a task force to address the findings.*
- 3) *Invest in the recruitment, preparation, and development of strong leaders committed to positive working conditions for a diverse workforce.*