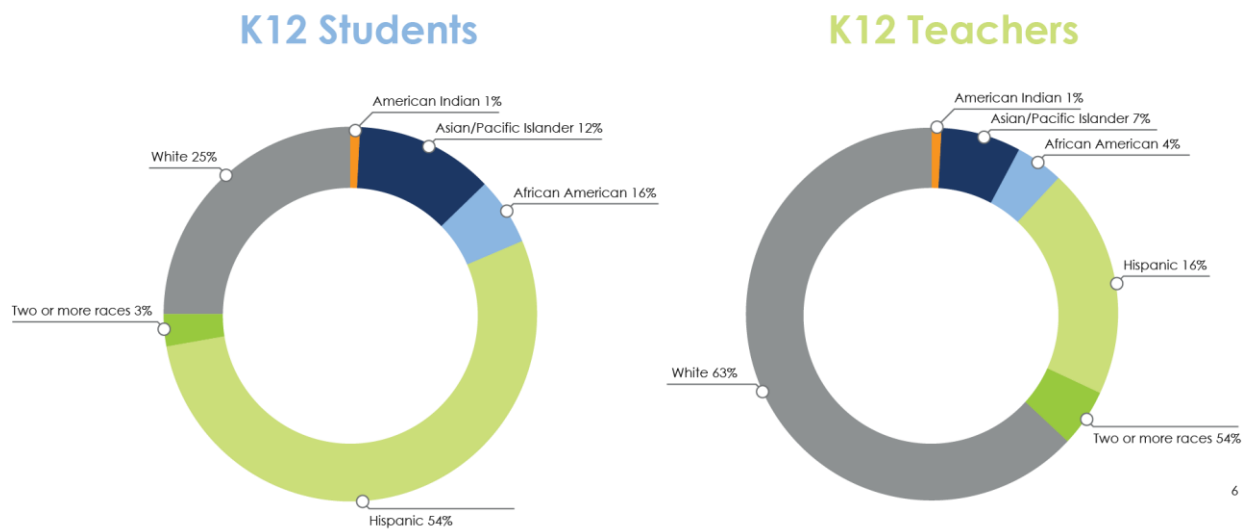


SUPPORTING AND RETAINING TEACHERS OF COLOR: DRAFT RECOMMENDATIONS FROM TEACH PLUS CALIFORNIA POLICY FELLOWS

+++++ BACKGROUND +++++

California is a diverse state in many ways, but this diversity is not reflected in the faces of educators in the classroom. This gap between students and teachers of color is problematic because numerous studies show that teachers of color have profound and positive impacts on the learners they serve, regardless of students' race or ethnicity.¹ Having just one Black teacher between 3rd and 5th grade makes a significant difference for students of color, including reducing a Black student's chance of dropping out of school by 39 percent.² Students who share the racial or ethnic identity of their teacher have been shown to increase their math and reading scores by three to four percentile points.³ Research has also shown that their graduation rates have increased, as have their aspirations to go to college.⁴



Source: California Commission on Teacher Credentialing, "Initial Employment and Retention of New Teachers in California", November 30, 2018

While only 25 percent of California's students identify as white, more than 60 percent of our teachers do, with just 20 percent identifying as Hispanic and four percent as Black.⁵ Not only is there a lack of diversity amongst the teachers entering the profession, but teachers of color tend to leave the profession at higher rates than their white counterparts.⁶

We are a group of five California Teach Plus Policy Fellows who teach and work in schools across Los Angeles serving a diverse group of students with a range of life experiences and needs. While we spend most of our time working to ensure that the students in our classrooms have great success, we believe it is important that we also advocate for our students by sharing our insights with the policymakers who have the power to shape our education system.

To identify strategies for recruiting and retaining excellent teachers of color, we conducted focus groups with twenty teachers of color in Los Angeles to ask about their experiences in the classroom and to gather their suggestions for reducing turnover of teachers of color. These educators work in both traditional district and charter schools, and represent various communities in Los Angeles. Below are our initial recommendations for California state leaders.

+++++++RECOMMENDATIONS+++++++

Recommendation 1: Invest in intentional strategies, like teacher residencies, that have been shown to improve teacher diversity and teacher retention.

Teachers in our focus groups repeatedly noted the lack of resources at their school sites, most notably the lack of mentors to help teachers of color grow in their profession. We therefore recommend that the state invest additional resources in the teacher residency programs designed to address the needs of districts with significant mismatches between the demographics of their student body and teaching force. Several studies have shown that high-quality teacher residency programs are effective both in bringing more teachers of color into the profession and in preparing them to stay long-term.⁷ Currently, the California Commission on Teacher Credentialing (CTC) has several Teacher Residency grants for specific types of educators, including special education and bilingual educators. This additional investment would help to ensure that teachers of color (and their mentors) are retained and supported.

"I think the number one factor in retaining a teacher past five years is support. I think schools need to do a better job of mentoring young teachers, and with respect to teachers of color, I think pairing them up with other teachers of color would be ideal..."

Recommendation 2: Prioritize learning opportunities for educators and support local districts to provide relevant, research-based professional development.

Almost all of the teachers we interviewed noted that they needed more opportunities to engage in relevant professional development. Data shows that teachers of color often work in high-need schools that experience resource scarcity.

"All teachers need constant valid, research-based professional development on meeting the needs of today's student. Students have changed over the years and our ability to constantly keep up with today's student needs to be supported."

Educators at these schools face challenges in serving the unique needs of their students, as well as difficult work environments.⁸ The teachers interviewed pointed to the need for meaningful professional learning focused on their students' needs – like training on implicit bias, social and emotional learning strategies, and trauma-informed practices. We believe that the state should invest in building the capacity of local leaders to offer this professional learning to ensure that educators of color are continuously developed and trained as they make their way through the profession.

+++++++CONCLUSION+++++++

Research has shown that having a teaching force of effective educators that also reflects the diversity of their students can have long-term benefits for our children. Teachers of color are most often found at schools serving high numbers of low-income students and students of color, and the organizational conditions at these schools are the strongest factor in whether teachers choose to stay.⁹ This is consistent with our own experiences as educators and with what we found in our focus groups. The biggest drivers for keeping teachers of color in the classroom are often tied to support and intervention that will improve outcomes for students. We urge the state to be intentional in identifying and supporting strategies, like teacher residencies and robust, targeted professional learning, that can help recruit and retain a more diverse body of excellent teachers for California's students.

+++++++ENDNOTES+++++++

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