

# MAKING TEACHER DIVERSITY A PRIORITY: RECOMMENDATIONS FROM TEACH PLUS CALIFORNIA POLICY FELLOWS

## +++++ INTRODUCTION +++++

Today's youth are faced with living and learning in an increasingly polarized nation, where students are marginalized due to their race, language, gender, or sexuality. For our most vulnerable student populations, California public schools can be the sanctuaries that offer safe haven and acceptance. This is especially true in schools where students are taught by a diverse teaching faculty that reflects the range of life experiences, languages, and cultural traditions held by their pupils.

We, a group of five California teachers of color and 2019-20 Teach Plus California Policy Fellows, strive to ensure our students have this affirming educational experience, while also accomplishing high levels of learning. We believe it is important to advocate for our students with policymakers who have the authority to shape our education system. We hope that by sharing our recommendations and vision of a teaching force more reflective of the demographics of our student body, we can do just that.

## +++++ BACKGROUND AND CONTEXT +++++

For the last 30 years, there has been a nationwide conversation about the lack of diversity in our teaching force. Our nation is enriched with more diversity in our student population. At the same time, changes in the composition of our teaching force are marginal at best. In 1999, only 24 percent of California teachers identified as an ethnicity other than White, and after twenty years that percentage has crept up to 39 percent. Unfortunately, the proportion of teachers of color in the workforce continues to lag far behind the share of students of color in our schools. In California, only 23 percent of students identify as White, while 61 percent of teachers do. Additionally, the percentage of African American teachers has dropped from five to four percent during that same period.<sup>1</sup> Moreover, research has shown that teachers of color are leaving the workforce at a higher rate than white teachers.<sup>2</sup>

A growing body of research consistently shows that teachers of color matter for all students. Teachers of color have profound and positive impact on the learners they serve, regardless of students' race or ethnicity.<sup>3</sup> A report from the Learning Policy Institute identified the benefits for students of having diverse teachers as "higher test scores, higher graduation rates, lower dropout rates, lower suspension rates, and more interest in post-secondary education."<sup>4</sup>

Studies have also shown that educators of color can have positive effect on overall school climate. Teachers of color tend to provide culturally responsive instruction and understand the social and cultural narratives that students of color face. Teachers of color serve as cultural ambassadors and liaisons that shape a positive culture and

climate for students of color and they tend to view students of color positively, with a comprehensive eye toward the whole child.<sup>5</sup>

## +++++ POLICY CONTEXT +++++

We have been encouraged to see more state leaders recognize this robust body of research and discuss the need to diversify the teaching force. Superintendent Thurmond has publicly named teacher diversity as a goal: “The data shows when kids see a teacher who looks like them it makes a huge difference.”<sup>6</sup> To this end, state and local policymakers should prioritize a teaching force that is representative of California’s student population. And yet, upon review of the Education Code, it is clear that California state law includes very few references to fostering teacher diversity.

California has enacted a number of policies intended to reduce barriers to entry into the teaching force, specifically to address overall teacher shortages in key disciplines and regions. Some of these investments have included:

- + \$20 million for the California Classified School Employee Teacher Credentialing Program (Enacted 2016)
- + \$10 million for the Integrated Teacher Preparation Program (Enacted 2016)
- + \$75 million for Teacher Residency Grant Program (Enacted 2018)
- + \$50 million for Local Solutions Grant Program (Enacted 2018)
- + \$89.8 Million for the Golden State Teacher Grant Program (GSTG) (Enacted 2019)

Many of the strategies reflected in these laws have been cited as promising practices for bringing more teachers of color into the workforce.<sup>7</sup> However, in none of these cases was increasing the number of teachers of color named as an explicit goal or a measure of success of the program. If state leaders are serious about creating a more representative teaching force, there are steps they can take to establish the foundation to make that priority a reality.

## +++++ RECOMMENDATIONS +++++

### **Recommendation 1: Make the goal of diversifying the California teaching force explicit with clear improvement expectations for leaders at all levels.**

Setting expectations for equitable access to a diverse teacher workforce must include clear numeric goals for increasing recruitment and retention of teachers of color, timelines for reaching those goals, and intermediate targets that allow the state — and the public — to monitor progress.

There are several levels at which California can focus on teacher diversity. For any investments that seek to address the teacher pipeline or teacher shortages, there should be an explicit expectation that those investments are intended to recruit more teachers of color than existing pipelines have traditionally produced in California. Moreover, the state can direct local leaders to make recruiting and retaining teachers of color a priority by providing explicit guidance for Local Education Agencies (LEAs) to set goals in their Local Control and Accountability Plans (LCAPs) for diversifying the teaching force.

Finally, the state can make it clear that educator preparation programs should make diversifying the educator pool a priority. As part of its accreditation Common Standards, the California Commission on Teacher Credentialing (CTC) states that each education preparation program “purposefully recruits and admits candidates to diversify the educator pool in California and provides the support, advice, and assistance to promote their successful entry and retention in the profession.” While having the standard is important to send a signal to the preparation programs, there are no clear metrics by which that standard is assessed. Instead of just a document review with a report of met or not met, the CTC should direct preparation programs to set clear measurable goals, in order for the CTC and the public to more effectively monitor progress.

**Recommendation 2 - Provide more meaningful information about teacher preparation and pathways to allow more effective examination of how practices and policies are addressing state, local, and student needs.**

Because data regarding teacher preparation, employment, and recruitment is scattered among various educator preparation programs, the CTC, the California Department of Education, and LEAs, it is difficult to understand the changes in and impact of our teacher preparation pathways. Such data needs to be organized, analyzed, and routinely reported on in clear, transparent language. If we want to respond to the needs of students and districts, we need clearer information on the current trends in recruitment and retention centrally located and disaggregated by teacher race/ethnicity.

As the state has invested hundreds of millions of dollars in addressing teacher shortages using strategies that should also help with diversifying the teaching force, state leaders should request more robust and frequent assessments of these investments with clear questions regarding the impact on demographics of the candidate pool. The statutory language usually includes a version of, “The commission shall conduct an evaluation of .... to determine the effectiveness of these programs.” There should be a much more comprehensive assessment on the impact of these programs to address the identified shortages and gaps in our teaching force, individually and in relation to one another, so policymakers (and candidates) can make informed decisions.

## +++++ CONCLUSION +++++

As Teach Plus Policy Fellows, we recognize that California's economic and social prosperity is directly linked to our racial and ethnic diversity. We must be unwavering in our push for greater diversity among public school teachers to best serve our students. This belief is upheld by a growing body of research that suggests all students, but particularly those of color, are served best by a teaching faculty that includes highly-trained educators of color providing rigorous, culturally responsive, and linguistically appropriate instruction. We must be clear in our goals and relentless in advocating for an education system that actively recruits, retains, and prepares ethnic and cultural minorities to enter the California teaching field, supports their retention in the teaching profession, and assesses and reports on our progress in doing so. Only then can our policymakers ensure that California is cultivating the unique economic, social, linguistic and cultural potential that our students hold.

## +++++++ ENDNOTES ++++++

<sup>1</sup> California Department of Education, DataQuest. Retrieved from: <https://dq.cde.ca.gov/dataquest/dataquest.asp>.

<sup>2</sup> Alexandria Neason (2014, December 17). "Our Teacher Diversity Problem Is Not Just About Recruitment. It's About Retention," Slate. Retrieved from: [http://www.slate.com/blogs/schooled/2014/12/17/teacher\\_diversity\\_accomplishing\\_it\\_is\\_not\\_just\\_about\\_recruitment\\_it\\_s\\_about.html](http://www.slate.com/blogs/schooled/2014/12/17/teacher_diversity_accomplishing_it_is_not_just_about_recruitment_it_s_about.html).

<sup>3</sup> Dee, T. (2004). Teachers, race and student achievement in a randomized experiment. *The Review of Economics and Statistics*, 86(1), 195–210.

<sup>4</sup> Carver-Thomas, D. (2018, April 19). Diversifying the Teaching Profession: How to Recruit and Retain Teachers of Color. Learning Policy Institute. Retrieved from: <https://learningpolicyinstitute.org/product/diversifyingteaching-profession-report>.

<sup>5</sup> Mary E. Dilworth and Marcus J. Coleman (2014). "Time for a Change: Diversity in Teaching Revisited" Washington: National Education Association. Retrieved from: [https://www.nea.org/assets/docs/Time\\_for\\_a\\_Change\\_Diversity\\_in\\_Teaching\\_Revisited\\_\(web\).pdf](https://www.nea.org/assets/docs/Time_for_a_Change_Diversity_in_Teaching_Revisited_(web).pdf).

<sup>6</sup> See note 4.

<sup>7</sup> Fensterwald, J. (2019, May 3). "First on new California state superintendent's long agenda: getting more men of color in the classroom: Tony Thurmond reaches out for ideas on 13 education challenges," EdSource. Retrieved from: <https://edsources.org/2019/first-on-new-california-state-superintendents-long-agenda-getting-more-men-of-color-in-the-classroom/611884>.

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