

# Seeing Myself

SEEING MYSELF: STUDENTS OF COLOR ON THE PROS AND CONS OF BECOMING TEACHERS



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# Seeing Myself:

STUDENTS OF COLOR ON THE PROS AND CONS OF BECOMING TEACHERS

“

*I think the way to get more students of color and Indigenous students into teaching is to have more diverse teachers and promote that. When kids see someone like them in the profession they might be more inclined to choose that profession.”<sup>1</sup>*

10TH GRADE STUDENT, OHIO

“

*Imagine if every single teacher that they had was an amazing teacher that was passionate about wanting to teach kids to learn. Imagine if all of us in this room never dealt with a teacher that was discriminatory. Imagine if we went to school and never dealt with microaggressions. I think that if that was the case, teaching would be a way more attractive professional area right now.”<sup>2</sup>*

11TH GRADE STUDENT, TEXAS

## Introduction

When we, as education researchers and advocates, sat down with groups of young people of color and Indigenous students to examine their perceptions of the teaching profession, we were inspired by how extraordinarily savvy, self-aware, and community-driven these young people are. We saw firsthand how Generation Z is “more vocal, values-driven and individualized than generations that came before them.”<sup>3</sup> They are living through significant political, societal, and environmental upheavals, and they have access to more technology and resources, to formulate their worldview and what they want in a career. Shouldn’t policymakers listen to the generation that is entering the workforce as the next generation of educators? And as they continue their efforts to maintain a diverse teacher workforce, shouldn’t policymakers especially listen to the nuanced perspectives of young people of color and Indigenous students, given that they are the majority of people under 18 in the United States?<sup>4</sup>



Four years ago, Teach Plus first asked educators of color what it would take to keep them in the teaching profession. In the seminal Teach Plus/Education Trust report, *If You Listen, We Will Stay: Why Teachers of Color Leave and How to Disrupt Teacher Turnover*, we learned more about what's keeping teachers of color from staying in the classroom including antagonistic work environments, lack of support, and significant financial barriers. Through this work and the following Teach Plus/Center for Black Educator Development report, *To Be Who We Are: Black Teachers on Creating Affirming School Cultures*, we highlighted several ways school leaders and other decision makers can support and affirm educators of color:



<p><b>Affirm a teacher's humanity and racial identity allowing teachers of color and Indigenous teachers to feel free to be their authentic selves.</b></p>	<p><b>Support community building through mentoring and affinity groups.</b></p> <p><b>Empower and invest in teachers, for example, 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.</b></p>
<p><b>Continually gather disaggregated quantitative and qualitative data from both students and teachers, and use that data to inform changes in curriculum, school policies, and everyday practices.</b></p>	<p><b>Ensure that curriculum, learning environments, and work environments are inclusive and respectful of all racial and ethnic groups.<sup>5</sup></b></p>

**Why is educator diversity important?** A growing body of research has shown that when teachers of color and Indigenous teachers are leading in classrooms and schools, all students benefit.<sup>6</sup> Exposure to teachers of color and Indigenous teachers has positive effects on assessment outcomes, graduation rates, and college-going aspirations for students who share the same race. In addition, exposure to teachers of color and Indigenous teachers can lead to reduced incidence of unfavorable outcomes for students of color and Indigenous students, such as suspension and chronic absenteeism. Yet districts and schools are still struggling to recruit and retain the diverse teachers that play such a critical role in the lives of students.<sup>7</sup> While our student body continues to grow in racial diversity, with more than 50 percent identifying as students of color and Indigenous students, nearly 80 percent of teachers are White.<sup>8</sup> Organizations like Teach Plus, The Education Trust, The Center for Black Educator Development, The Learning Policy Institute, and others have studied this phenomenon by looking at education data and speaking directly to educators and school leaders.<sup>9</sup>

**To continue our learning about educator diversity so that we can create smart, sustainable solutions to diversifying the teaching profession, we wanted to deepen our knowledge of the entire pipeline.**





**To do this, we need to understand the points of view of students.** Which is why in this paper, Teach Plus, in collaboration with The Center for Black Educator Development and Educators Rising, is elevating student voices by exploring their perspectives as these students reflect on their schools, the teaching profession, and what having diverse educators who share their identity means to them.

**One of our biggest takeaways is that while different generations often have wildly different worldviews, Gen Z students of color and Indigenous students share many of the same concerns as adults when it comes to improving the diversity of the teaching profession.**

The students we spoke with want their teachers to encourage them to be themselves, help them value and understand the culture of their peers, promote authentic connections with adults in their school building, and contribute to a respectful and inclusive classroom environment. For many students of color and Indigenous students, diverse teachers are the ones who most embody these characteristics. Moreover, research shows that teacher diversity can help enhance student learning for all students, particularly in schools with diverse learners.<sup>10</sup> Research also shows that teachers of color and Indigenous teachers help students of color and Indigenous students feel cared for and more academically challenged than in classes led by their White peers.<sup>11</sup> Finally, exposure to teachers of color and Indigenous teachers in K-12 helps prepare all students for civic engagement and the complexities and challenges of the workforce.

**Students make it clear: Many schools are failing to provide an excellent education to students of color and Indigenous students.** In our conversations with them, students raised serious concerns about the ability of their teachers to work with diverse students, the curriculum used to educate them, and their ability to feel safe, valued, and respected in their schools. At the same time, students of color and Indigenous students are also thinking ahead about the viability of teaching as a sustainable career and considering what it would mean to become a teacher.

Additionally, it is important to note the unique political context during which this research took place. As of this writing, legislatures in 16 states have passed laws restricting the teaching of certain

“divisive” topics, and 28 states have taken some kind of statewide action, resulting in book bans and limitations on the teaching of issues pertaining to race, racism, gender, and sexual orientation.<sup>12</sup> The students in our focus groups raised this political context as something that is weighing on their minds and those of their teachers.<sup>13</sup>

Students of color and Indigenous students are making decisions about the teaching profession based on what they observe of their teachers and in their schools right now. The way students are treated by adults in the building, the curriculum and instruction they receive, the opportunities to connect with fellow students, and how they see their culture reflected in their school all factor heavily into their decisions.

This report elevates the unique perspectives of high school students of color and Indigenous students as they reflect on the teaching profession.



*This might be a hot take, but I think the reason why [people of color], especially Black people, the main reasons why we never want to become teachers is one of the main reasons why we never want to become police officers. I think it has to do with our past experiences and the fact that, in the back of our minds, it's like, these are bad guys ... but with teaching, there's so much more we can do ... So I feel like if we get past that, the more I feel like we get past ourselves and realize that's something that can happen and finally realize that if you want to change things.”<sup>14</sup>*

12TH GRADE STUDENT, OHIO

## Research Approach and Methodology

Our research centered around the following research questions:

### RESEARCH QUESTION 1:

What experiences, values, or aspirations contribute to the perspectives of high school students of color and Indigenous students regarding teaching as a potential profession?

### RESEARCH QUESTION 2:

What aspects of the teaching profession do students of color and Indigenous students find appealing or unappealing?

### RESEARCH QUESTION 3:

How do students of color and Indigenous students perceive the role that teachers of color, in particular, play in schools?

### RESEARCH QUESTION 4:

What can schools do to better support the humanity of students of color and Indigenous students?

We used a focus group approach for this research study. We conducted focus groups with 103 high school students of color and Indigenous students from 18 states. Focus groups ranged in size from five to 14 participants. By students of color and Indigenous students we mean students who self-identified as Asian or Pacific Islander, Black or African American, Hispanic or Latino, Native American or Alaska Native, Middle Eastern or North African, or as more than one race. Students in our study were in grades 9-12.<sup>15</sup>

We worked to create a focus group experience that fostered trust and encouraged open dialogue. Teach Plus partnered with Educators Rising, an organization working to cultivate a new generation of highly skilled educators by guiding young people on a path from high school through college and into their teaching careers. The students in our study were attendees of the 2022 Educators Rising National Conference in Washington, D.C. Focus groups took place during the conference on June 24-26, 2022. Each focus group was facilitated by two trained Teach Plus teacher leaders or research staff.

Qualitative data from this research study was analyzed and coded by Teach Plus teacher leaders and members of the research team and compiled into the findings below. This report was written jointly by Teach Plus and the Center for Black Educator Development.





# Findings

In our report, we elevate five key findings that high school students of color and Indigenous students shared about their feelings toward the teaching profession and their views on how schools can better support them:

①

Students of color and Indigenous students value the unique benefit teachers of color and Indigenous teachers have on students' experiences in school and on their futures.

②

Students of color and Indigenous students are drawn to the teaching profession by a desire to build strong relationships and make a difference for future generations of students.

③

For students of color and Indigenous students, the low pay associated with teaching is a strong deterrent to choosing teaching as a future career.

④

For students of color and Indigenous students, the representativeness of the curriculum and teachers' level of agency in their own classrooms play an important role in shaping their school experience and influence their perspective on the attractiveness of the teaching profession.

⑤

Students of color and Indigenous students need their schools to provide safe and affirming environments that value and respect their cultural identity.

## FINDING 1:

**STUDENTS OF COLOR AND INDIGENOUS STUDENTS VALUE THE UNIQUE BENEFIT TEACHERS OF COLOR AND INDIGENOUS TEACHERS HAVE ON STUDENTS' EXPERIENCES IN SCHOOL AND ON THEIR FUTURES.**

Students report that teachers of color and Indigenous teachers are uniquely positioned to develop deep relationships with students of color and Indigenous students in ways that create a safe, engaging learning environment and inspire them to pursue careers in education.

They argue that teachers of color and Indigenous teachers are able to relate to students through their shared identity and experiences, understanding and empathizing with struggles that students may be facing. With teachers of color and Indigenous teachers, students in our focus groups feel better



understood and experience a sense of safety and belonging that enables them to engage more deeply in learning. Said an 11th-grade Nebraska student: ***“She was the only teacher I could actually relate to. The living conditions that I was actually in, she’s been through that ... that’s what made it easier to connect to her and make me want to come to school and not have the roadblocks that other students have not gone through.”***<sup>16</sup> With teachers of color and Indigenous teachers, students of color and Indigenous students find communication easier and feel comfortable asking questions and sharing their thoughts freely without fear of judgment or misunderstanding. They feel their teachers of color and Indigenous teachers are also able to leverage their understanding of the specific issues students of color and Indigenous students face, which allows them to better support students’ needs. ***“The ones who can speak my languages understood my culture the best. They were able to connect and help me the most, because they understood me,”*** said a 12th-grade student from Nebraska.<sup>17</sup> Students report that a supportive and compassionate environment frees them to focus on and enjoy learning.

“

***My school experience has been impacted negatively by not having any teachers of color and Indigenous teachers because Black children have to water down who they are to fit in where you get in. This sucks because it eventually impacts your education, it takes away a part of your self identity. You start to feel lesser than everybody around you and it makes you lose motivation.”***<sup>18</sup>

**12TH GRADE STUDENT, OHIO**

For some students in our focus groups, access to teachers with a shared identity helped them better navigate the school system. As one 12th-grade student from Texas shared:

***“While I was in the ESL program, I had many teachers who looked like me. It felt comforting to know I had teachers that could understand my language and communicate with my parents. However, once I moved out of the program, I rarely saw Hispanic teachers. My teachers could no longer communicate with me or my parents, which left me alone to struggle. Although the school tried, I was often left to translate phone calls and meetings at 9 years old. This created a lot of stress.”***<sup>19</sup>

Students also report that teachers of color and Indigenous teachers are often their only advocates when they experience racist incidents or microaggressions, addressing harmful experiences that make students feel unsafe and distract them from learning. Often, such incidents are overlooked, ignored, or even dismissed by other teachers, which damages trust and can contribute to an unwelcoming atmosphere. Said one 11th-grade Nebraska student: ***“I was bullied for looking different and my teachers were unsure of how to deal with it. I also felt like I was never able to fully connect with any of them.”***<sup>20</sup> Another 11th-grade student in Louisiana noted, ***“There are still some problems that are not addressed or pushed ‘under the rug’ by other faculty members.”***<sup>21</sup>

Students report that their career aspirations for the future depend on seeing teachers and administrators who share their identity and experiences. Without exposure to role models, many students do not consider careers in education under the misconception that the field is not available to them. As one 10th-grade Kentucky student put it: ***“I have never personally seen a Hispanic in a place of power such as a teacher or principal. This sometimes shows or tells me well, ‘Could I even do this?’”***<sup>22</sup> Seeing teachers and administrators of color inspires students to dream of following in their footsteps and fosters a belief in their own ability to achieve it. The safe and nurturing environment experienced with teachers of color and Indigenous teachers further solidifies students' pursuit of the profession, inspiring them to pass on the positive experiences to future generations.

““

***I used to always think to myself, ‘Why is there no one who looks exactly like me?’ I thought people like me could never be in this field. I thought it was just predominantly White people. But whenever I transferred over to public school, I saw more people and more kids who looked like me, and then teachers. And it made my experience better.”***<sup>23</sup>

**10TH GRADE STUDENT, MISSOURI**

““

***I didn’t have a Black teacher until like fourth grade. So I honestly thought all teachers were White ... So I honestly didn’t think about being a teacher. I didn’t think I could do something like that ... But when I did get that first Black teacher, I was so excited, and I feel like we were connected in some type of way ... I think it’s made me more comfortable with the idea of being a teacher.”***<sup>24</sup>

**12TH GRADE STUDENT, TEXAS**





## FINDING 2:

### STUDENTS OF COLOR AND INDIGENOUS STUDENTS ARE DRAWN TO THE TEACHING PROFESSION BY A DESIRE TO BUILD STRONG RELATIONSHIPS AND MAKE A DIFFERENCE FOR FUTURE GENERATIONS OF STUDENTS.

The students in our focus groups said a key reason for wanting to pursue the teaching profession was to impact students' lives. They also made it clear that the next generation of teachers depends on the current one. Students shared that their personal connections with teachers of color and Indigenous teachers have had a positive impact on their educational experiences, personal growth, and their consideration of teaching as a career. As one 10th-grade Connecticut student shared:

*"As of right now I am highly interested in becoming a teacher because I see how the school system is and how my school experiences are. I have been inspired by past teachers to want to inspire and create a connection with my future students."*<sup>25</sup>

One 12th-grade Kentucky student reported her encounter with a teacher who did more than inspire her to pursue a teaching career. She reflected that: *"[My teacher] ... allowed me to see real opportunities in the education field. She pushed me to be my best and also still [encouraged] me to follow my ... dreams of teaching. She has shown me that there is more to teaching than just making lesson plans. It's about impacting the lives of your students and allowing them to believe they can be anything they want!"*<sup>26</sup>





In particular, students emphasized the importance of teachers who prioritize relationship-building and students' overall well-being, regardless of race. As one 12th-grade Kentucky student stated: ***"The teachers who have made a positive impact on my life/learning experience have made efforts to create personal connections with me, followed-up on/remembered a detail about what I was involved in, and have offered spaces for my classmates and I to discuss current events in a safe place and supported us when vulnerable ... For example, my teacher asked me how I was after a funeral."***<sup>27</sup> As part of this, an important quality that students raised is teachers' ability to empathize with students and ***"treat their students as people and not just as students who are lectured at. These teachers are memorable because they truly show their empathy and care for the students in their classroom,"***<sup>28</sup> said an 11th-grade student from Texas.

Inspired by the major role teachers, and particularly teachers of color and Indigenous teachers, have played in their own growth, many students indicated they want to become teachers in order to be a role model for future students as their teachers have been for them. As one 12th-grade Washington student said, ***"I want to be a light for these students and a role model, especially for young Black girls. I want them to feel comfortable with themselves."***<sup>29</sup> Students recognize the importance of representation and are motivated to pass along their positive experience to the next generation. An 11th-grade student from Ohio shared, ***"I know that I want to make an impact on young children's lives and it's important for kids to see role models like themselves."***<sup>30</sup>

Overwhelmingly, regardless of the question, students continually focused on the importance of relationships in their decision to become a teacher. They all harkened back to an educator of color with whom they were able to find a true connection and who made them feel seen and validated. One 11th-grade Ohio student reported: ***"Some things that I find attractive about being a teacher is the relationships you build with students. I've seen how powerful those relationships are and the great connections that brings as well. As a teacher, you can also advocate for your students."***<sup>31</sup>

Today's teachers have the opportunity to positively change students' lives and to help recruit future teachers. In particular, teachers of color and Indigenous teachers can leverage their unique ability to connect with students of color and Indigenous students and serve as role models to inspire students to return to the classroom as teachers. Schools that nurture and support relationship-building now can inspire dedicated, passionate teachers to return in the future.

### FINDING 3:

#### FOR STUDENTS OF COLOR AND INDIGENOUS STUDENTS, THE LOW PAY ASSOCIATED WITH TEACHING IS A STRONG DETERRENT TO CHOOSING TEACHING AS A FUTURE CAREER.

Throughout the focus groups, students consistently highlighted the low-paying salary of teachers as a significant barrier to them entering the teaching profession. For these students, a low-paying job would not provide them the life experience they desire, or in some cases, what their families desire for them. As one 12th-grade Kentucky student shared:

*"[T]he only supporter I have about me being a teacher is my mom because everyone else is like, 'Oh you got to be a doctor or you got to be a lawyer, something that gives you money.' And that's just something that's not for me. So, I decided to follow my dreams."*<sup>32</sup>

Even if they are attracted to the mission of teaching, students want to provide a comfortable life for their families and face the pressure to choose careers that will provide financial stability. This is especially true for students who come from low-income families or are the first in their family to attend college. One 10th-grade Missouri student shared:

*"With a lot of our friends being [in a] low-income, high-poverty demographic, even if they did have the money to go to college, it doesn't make sense for them to pick something like teaching compared to the other fields, the other options within four years that will make you a lot more, especially for those who are first-generation college applicants and students."*<sup>33</sup>

As is the case with current classroom teachers, low pay rose to the surface as a major deterrent to becoming a teacher. This aligns with existing research that has shown that the teaching profession's low pay is the reason most high school students do not consider teaching. According to a study by ACT Research and Policy, nearly two-thirds of students not interested in teaching cited pay as one of the top three reasons. The concern about salary was also expressed by those "potentially" interested in teaching. When asked what would increase their interest, 72 percent of this group cited better pay as one of their top three motivators.<sup>34</sup> When we also consider the persistent racial wealth gap in the United States, it is not surprising to learn that teacher pay is an important consideration for students of color and Indigenous students in our focus groups.<sup>35</sup>

Low compensation is also a symptom of a larger issue that students raised: systemic lack of respect for the profession. Students cited disrespect from administrators, parents, and students as a factor deterring them from pursuing a teaching career. Students have witnessed a disregard for teachers as professionals, despite the importance of their role and the expertise required. Some students shared that they believe that teaching is the foundation for other careers and should be compensated accordingly. As one 11th-grade Mississippi student stated, *"I feel like if the teachers are teaching everybody how to do their job, why are they getting paid less?"*<sup>36</sup> As they contemplate their future, students are acutely aware of the message that teaching is less valued when compared with other professions. One student said: *"If they just showed that teachers are being more appreciated and valued, people would actually be attracted to the field because teachers get the underhand with everything. Honestly, they should be up there in value just as much as doctors or lawyers because they're important."*<sup>37</sup>





Students of color and Indigenous students believe teachers deserve respect and appropriate compensation for the work that they do, and it is clear that these issues must be addressed to convince more students to consider it as a career.

#### **FINDING 4:**

**FOR STUDENTS OF COLOR AND INDIGENOUS STUDENTS, THE REPRESENTATIVENESS OF THE CURRICULUM AND TEACHERS' LEVEL OF AGENCY IN THEIR OWN CLASSROOMS PLAY AN IMPORTANT ROLE IN SHAPING THEIR SCHOOL EXPERIENCE AND INFLUENCE THEIR PERSPECTIVE ON THE ATTRACTIVENESS OF THE TEACHING PROFESSION.**

Students of color and Indigenous students value a curriculum that is representative of the diversity of their schools and believe that teachers should be able to tailor the content and style of their teaching to best suit the needs of their students. Students in our focus groups want a richer, more representative learning experience and want their teachers to be able to exercise professional judgment in how to best meet the learning needs of their students. Too often, however, they find that this is not the case in their schools and perceive these issues of a limited curriculum and limits on pedagogy as unattractive aspects of the teaching profession.

In her article, “Mirrors, Windows, and Sliding Glass Doors,” author and educator Dr. Rudine Sims Bishop writes that: *“Books are sometimes windows, offering views of the worlds that may be real or imagined, familiar or strange. These windows are also sliding glass doors, and readers have only to walk through in imagination to become part of whatever world has been created or recreated by the author. When lighting conditions are right, however, a window can also be a mirror.”*<sup>38</sup> This analogy can also be applied to the teaching profession. Educators can also represent windows, and when students of color and Indigenous students look out, they may never see themselves reflected back. For many of our students, the world they see in their classrooms can often be

unfamiliar and strange to them. However, when that window becomes a mirror, and they are able to see themselves reflected back at them in that same classroom, their own human experience can be transformed. One 12th-grade Texas student said, ***"Having diverse teachers made me feel comfortable; they made me feel like I belong."***<sup>39</sup>

When they think about what is being taught in schools, students of color and Indigenous students not only want to see themselves reflected in the content, but want their White classmates to also have access to a rich and diverse curriculum. As one 12th-grade Texas student observed:

***"I feel like education should embrace the cultures of many people of color. I know ... a lot of elementary schools don't support or don't do anything like Black History Month. And even in high school, some of them aren't doing anything like that. Or being inclusive with their education. I feel like people who are people of color will actually draw closer to education if they knew that they were supported in that and that they could teach about their own culture as well."***<sup>40</sup>

As state and district policies are being enacted to further curtail curriculum and limit expression, students are taking note of how their classrooms and learning opportunities are narrowing. As one 11th-grade Ohio student noted: ***"We don't even talk about slavery anymore. Because it offends a lot of people, we don't get to learn it anymore."***<sup>41</sup>

Students we spoke with emphasized the importance not just of what was being taught, but how it was being taught. Specifically, they noted that they observed the restrictions being placed on teachers when it came to their ability to tailor their instruction to meet the needs of their students. As one 11th-grade Nebraska student shared:

***"I think the experiences of being a teacher are not really having a say so in your curriculum, maybe that's just in my high school district, but I know a lot of teachers and I've talked with teachers of color and Indigenous teachers, and they're like, 'We don't have a say-so in our curriculum. We can't teach what we want or how we want, and we have a lot of observations with our administration.' So it's not even like they can get any type of leeway. And so I think that's made me not want to be a teacher. I'd rather be one to change that policy or change that curriculum."***<sup>42</sup>

Another noted teachers' lack of autonomy: ***"I think the only reason why I don't really want to become a teacher, it's not really [the] kids. But it's just the curriculum and I can't really do it myself. I have to go off of what the principal, or the head, or superintendent, what they want me to do. And I don't really want to do that."***<sup>43</sup> When students observe their teachers being allowed to exhibit professional autonomy, it attracts them to the profession. One Kentucky student noted: ***"A lot of my English teachers throughout the years have shown how fun and entertaining English can be. Especially one teacher who would always go off the curriculum, her curriculum that was given to her. She would just go off of it a lot of times, which got her in trouble, but it really got the students more into English and it got me into wanting to become a teacher."***<sup>44</sup>

Students also notice when their teachers are perceived as less than the professionals that they are. ***"So earlier I was talking about my criminal justice teacher. She has to dress a certain way, she has to look a certain way ... she has to straighten her hair every day."***<sup>45</sup>



Not only do students of color and Indigenous students advocate for a more inclusive, culturally responsive curriculum, but they make clear that when working conditions are restrictive, when the education system is curtailing the ability of education professionals to authentically meet the learning needs of students, these serve to be significant deterrents to them choosing to become teachers.

### FINDING 5:

**STUDENTS OF COLOR AND INDIGENOUS STUDENTS NEED THEIR SCHOOLS TO PROVIDE SAFE AND AFFIRMING ENVIRONMENTS THAT VALUE AND RESPECT THEIR CULTURAL IDENTITY.**

Students of color and Indigenous students place high value on schools that are intentional about ensuring the physical and psychological safety of their students and affirming their cultural identity. School environments where they feel safe, respected, and welcomed are critical for attracting students of color and Indigenous students to teaching.

Students in our focus groups argued that school environments must be safe spaces, sharing that teachers with the biggest impact were those who focused on creating a caring and inviting environment. When schools and teachers make it clear that everyone is welcomed and accepted for who they are, regardless of their culture, students are engaged and enthusiastic about learning. In these safe spaces, students are comfortable voicing their thoughts and being vulnerable, asking questions freely without fear of judgment or failure. This aligns with previous research that found that a sense of belonging and the educational environment are highly influential in fostering engagement or disengagement for students.<sup>46</sup> As one 11th-grade Louisiana student shared, ***“My favorite teachers were always unbiased and they made their classrooms as comfortable as possible without it being a really chaotic room. They were my most memorable because I always enjoyed learning in those classes.”***<sup>47</sup>



Although some schools and teachers strive for this inclusive environment, students of color and Indigenous students reported that they are still often faced with harmful and insensitive environments and interactions. Numerous students voiced their frustration with microaggressions and racial incidents either perpetrated or overlooked by teachers and staff. Students observed the failure of leadership to meaningfully address these incidents as disrespectful and apparent discrimination. Furthermore, they shared that teacher and administrator silence only amplified their sense of feeling unsafe. This broken sense of safety weakens the student-teacher relationship and the overall educational experience of students, jeopardizing any motivation to return to the classroom as a teacher. ***“Make schools better environments for people of color, don’t let instances of discrimination or bias go unchecked.”***<sup>48</sup> –11th-grade student, Texas

Beyond the impact of individual teachers and staff, focus group participants also emphasized the importance of celebrating cultural diversity schoolwide and supporting students’ cultural identity development. Students recommended creating more culturally affirming schools by increasing representation of diverse cultures throughout the school, including curricular materials, books, events that highlight various holidays, and visuals like posters. The correlation between a sense of cultural safety and individual well-being has long been established in the literature.<sup>49</sup>

Students of color and Indigenous students see their identity development as a priority and expressed a desire for affinity spaces to support who they are and who they are becoming. Students suggested affinity groups can get started by ***“hosting social hours to learn and share about their experiences”*** or offering ***“clubs about kids’ interests even if it’s not academic related.”***<sup>50</sup> Research shows that affinity groups are a place to build relationships and process life with those who are safe and supportive. Students shared that when they meet peers and adults who have similar experiences and look like them, it helps them believe that they can do anything. Creating a safe and affirming environment for diverse cultural identities helps students of color and Indigenous students to see their schools as positive and uplifting places that can provide them with a promising future.



# Recommendations

Below, we provide specific recommendations for ways in which **school leaders**, **district leaders**, and **state and federal policymakers** can respond to the needs of students of color and Indigenous students in their schools, districts, and communities.

## WHAT CAN SCHOOL LEADERS DO?

School leaders are in a position to support teachers, reinvent schools, and create inclusive learning environments for students. Creating a culturally responsive classroom and school environment is a joint effort, particularly between school leaders and teachers, and it is an aspect of transformational leadership. Thus, a culturally responsive transformational leader would promote the conditions and a vision in a school that would be inclusive and validating for students of color and Indigenous students.

## RECOMMENDATIONS FOR SCHOOL LEADERS:

<p>①</p> <p>Proactively respect and support teachers of color and Indigenous teachers by recruiting a diverse faculty and creating a school environment where teachers of color and Indigenous teachers feel valued, respected, and protected.</p>	<p>②</p> <p>Encourage authentic relationships with learners that emphasize their identities and lived experience.</p>	<p>③</p> <p>Adopt a culturally affirming curriculum, and give teachers agency to adjust curriculum to reflect the cultures of their students.</p>
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### RECOMMENDATION 1:

**PROACTIVELY RESPECT AND SUPPORT TEACHERS OF COLOR AND INDIGENOUS TEACHERS BY RECRUITING A DIVERSE FACULTY AND CREATING A SCHOOL ENVIRONMENT WHERE TEACHERS OF COLOR AND INDIGENOUS TEACHERS FEEL VALUED, RESPECTED, AND PROTECTED.**

Students want to see teachers who look like them being respected. One 11th-grade Ohio student told us: ***"I believe that seeing someone that looks like you is extremely important. My fourth-grade teacher was a Black woman and seeing her in a professional role really inspired me. My sixth-grade math teacher was also a Black woman and she now has a position on my city school board. The school psychologist at my school is a Black man and he is doing the exact role I see myself pursuing when I get older, and it is great to see that."***<sup>51</sup>



In order for our school systems to begin to diversify the teacher workforce, school leaders must first recognize the unique value teachers of color and Indigenous teachers bring to the profession and prioritize the hiring and retention of teachers of color and Indigenous teachers. School and district leaders should advertise positions and jobs on platforms where people of color and Indigenous are present and engaged. They should reach out to specific networks and ask them to share positions and job postings in which people of color and Indigenous can access these opportunities. And they must create the infrastructure that will welcome and retain them once they acquire these positions, including professional development and leadership opportunities and the chance to be mentored by fellow teachers of color and Indigenous teachers.

One strategy school leaders should consider is affinity groups, which can foster a sense of belonging and mentorship. Affinity groups or affinity conversations provide structured opportunities for people with similar experiences to connect and find community, which can help them feel more comfortable in their environment.

In Delaware, the Center for Black Educator Development worked with two school districts to implement a train-the-trainer model for having affinity conversations designed to welcome, validate, and support Black educators, student teachers, and others interested in anti-racist pedagogy. Affinity conversations provided a structured way to reflect on their experiences, discuss mutual concerns, and explore how they could help one another fulfill their roles within work environments that can often be hostile. Results indicated that participants experienced a greater sense of belonging, an increase in supportive relationships, a greater sense that their voices were valued, and a desire to continue working in the district. They felt more affirmed and comfortable in the school community, more able to be their authentic selves, and more likely to encourage White teachers to use culturally affirming pedagogy. These districts will continue affinity conversations next year and hope to increase participation and implement suggestions from the group on a school and district level.<sup>52</sup>



In Illinois, Teach Plus, in partnership with the Illinois State Board of Education (ISBE), has launched 43 affinity groups across the state to boost retention for teachers of color and Indigenous teachers. Teach Plus has selected and is working with affinity group facilitators to bring together local educators of color to build a supportive community, examine current issues facing them in the teaching profession, and make recommendations to address those issues. And in Pennsylvania, Teach Plus recently launched the Philadelphia Affinity Group Network, a two-year program that will create culturally affirming, supportive spaces for educators of color to help retain them in the profession and in Philadelphia's schools.<sup>53</sup>

## RECOMMENDATION 2: ENCOURAGE AUTHENTIC RELATIONSHIPS WITH LEARNERS THAT EMPHASIZE THEIR IDENTITIES AND LIVED EXPERIENCES.

School leaders should also develop systems to facilitate relationship-building schoolwide. We heard clearly from students that relationship building is key both vertically across the school—including student-teacher, teacher-administrator, and student-administrator relationships—as well as horizontally, such as teacher-teacher and student-student relationships. Schools that invest in building relationships across the community are the kinds of positive spaces that students thrive in and to which they are likely to consider returning.

One way that school leaders can respond to the need for relationship-building in their schools is to ensure that educators are prepared to work with diverse students. Students we spoke with highlighted a desire for their teachers and other adults in their schools to receive designated training in supporting different student needs. Some of the areas they raised were working with students who are learning English, incorporating diverse materials into the curriculum, and training to help teachers recognize potential bias towards cultures outside of their own. According to students, a lack of cultural awareness often leads to instances of racial bias and stereotyping which negatively impact their school experience.

Students also shared that these types of supports are important for all adults, including administrators. As one 11th-grade Texas student shared:

***“Sometimes I feel like administrators should be also the ones to be learning about these things along with teachers because they’re the ones that are also allowing all of these things to happen. Teachers answer to them, but who’s going to call them out when everybody’s letting them and then we’re the ones that get in trouble for something that they’re letting happen?”<sup>54</sup>***

School leaders should encourage teachers to speak to students in honest terms that allow for authentic connections. To develop such relationships, school leaders must support teachers in understanding the identities and life experiences of their students, and also cultivate an environment that celebrates the diversity of students. This could mean that they express vulnerability and develop trust with students, allowing them to see them both as people and as committed educators. Sharing both the challenges and values of being an educator can help to inform how students see themselves and their role as future teachers.

Finally, students of color and Indigenous students shared a need for dedicated time and space to build relationships with each other. Having structured spaces in which students with shared identities can connect is a support that students of color and Indigenous students find meaningful in their schools. One 10th-grade Kentucky student shared:

*"I think that providing clubs for everyone so that everyone knows that they have a community within the school and everybody knows that they feel included within at least a single group of people. I think that's really important. Also, making sure that every teacher has an individual classroom to make their own."*<sup>55</sup>



Teach teachers to respect cultures other than their own and that students don't always need to be their source of cultural learning because it can be tiring for people, especially children, to constantly have to explain their lives to others."



Respond when there are racist or racially motivated things done at school."



Create spaces for people to share their culture."<sup>56</sup>



### RECOMMENDATION 3:

#### ADOPT A CULTURALLY AFFIRMING CURRICULUM, AND GIVE TEACHERS AGENCY TO ADJUST CURRICULUM TO INCLUDE THE CULTURES OF THEIR STUDENTS.

Students in our focus groups highlighted the importance of a culturally inclusive curriculum. Schools and districts should adopt such curriculums—and where they are not available, teachers should have the agency to adapt their instruction to best meet the individual needs of their students and represent the unique characteristics of their communities.

All 50 states include some elements of culturally affirming education in their state standards, but these elements are varied across states and can include things such as respecting student diversity, using culturally responsive pedagogy, or linking curriculum to students' culture.<sup>57</sup> Some states, including Alabama, Alaska, California and Washington, explicitly call on teachers to adapt their instruction to students' culture and background. Alabama's standards call on teachers to develop "culturally responsive curriculum and instruction in response to differences in individual experiences, cultural, ethnic, gender, and linguistic diversity, and socioeconomic status" and Alaska's standards include a guide to building pedagogy around the local culture, including specific provisions to help teachers meet the needs of Indigenous students.<sup>58</sup>



*[We need] more books and stories that relate back to students of color that the White students can look at, too. White students need to see diversity as well so it's not such an 'uncomfortable subject.' Diversity should be the core of every school. People of color should see themselves everywhere even if it's something small (books, posters, videos, history, math problems)."*<sup>59</sup>

**12TH-GRADE STUDENT, NEBRASKA**

The Pennsylvania Department of Education provides an example with its definition of culturally relevant and sustaining education (CRSE), describing it as education that ensures equity for all students and seeks to eliminate systemic institutional racial and cultural barriers that inhibit the success of all students—particularly those who have been historically underrepresented. CRSE encompasses skills for educators including, but not limited to, approaches to mental wellness, trauma-informed approaches to instruction, technological and virtual engagement, cultural awareness, and emerging factors that inhibit equitable access for all students.<sup>60</sup>

School leaders should be aware of the culturally affirming teaching standards outlined by their state, and ensure teachers in their school are supported and trained to implement culturally affirming curriculum for students.

To learn more about integrating culturally affirming curriculum, take a look at *New America's Culturally Responsive Teaching Reflection Guide*.<sup>61</sup>



## WHAT CAN DISTRICT LEADERS DO?

While the role of school leaders is essential in supporting and sustaining both current teachers and a new generation of prospective teachers at their schools, they cannot do their work without the support of district leaders. It is the leadership at the district level who create the conditions for equity, culturally relevant and sustaining education practices, and a culture of safety, inclusivity, and belonging in their schools.

## RECOMMENDATIONS FOR DISTRICT LEADERS:

1

Engage in equitable budgetary practices by investing in people and programs.

2

Leverage partnerships at all levels that support recruitment of a diverse teacher workforce.

3

Ensure professional development for teachers and school leaders prepares them to work with diverse students.

### RECOMMENDATION 1:

#### ENGAGE IN EQUITABLE BUDGETARY PRACTICES BY INVESTING IN PEOPLE AND PROGRAMS.

It is important to use district funding to support staff diversity and encourage students to learn more about teaching as a career. Equitable allocation of budget to support students of color and Indigenous students may involve initiatives like dual enrollment opportunities, test preparation for entry into colleges and universities, and apprenticeship programs that provide early access to the teaching profession. In our focus groups, we heard from some students that they would appreciate additional opportunities, similar to Educators Rising, in which they could learn more about teaching as a potential career while still in high school.

**RESOURCE:** The School District of Philadelphia is working with the Center for Black Educator Development to implement Teaching Academy, a year-round program for high school students interested in teaching. It uses curriculum from Black pedagogical frameworks and historical lens, monthly seminars geared toward educational equity, and partnerships with institutions of higher education that result in dual enrollment/Career & Technical Education opportunities. Results have shown a 35 percent increase in interest in teaching; 94 percent of students plan to attend a four-year college or university, and statistically significant increases in positive racial identity, knowledge of the Black pedagogy, and social justice orientation.<sup>62</sup>





Additionally, district leaders should invest in recruiting, selecting, and supporting diverse school leaders. In the same way that teachers of color and Indigenous teachers have a positive impact on the experiences of students of color and Indigenous students, having representation in school leadership benefits students as well. As one 12th-grade Mississippi student shared, ***“I think that’s why it’s important for more people of color to be in power in administration and have power, because [a lot of racism] definitely goes unnoticed.”***<sup>63</sup>

When district leaders consider educator diversity in their decision-making regarding hiring, budget allocation, and support to teachers and leaders in their districts, significant improvements can be made in the transformation of schools and in the attraction of prospective educators into the profession.

**RECOMMENDATION 2:**  
**LEVERAGE PARTNERSHIPS AT ALL LEVELS THAT SUPPORT RECRUITMENT  
OF A DIVERSE TEACHER WORKFORCE.**

The work to diversify our educator workforce needs to be a concerted effort in which district leaders engage all aspects of the ecosystem. School districts should work with institutions of higher education—particularly minority-serving-institutions, community leaders, families, and other invested partners—to change existing structures and create the conditions for teachers to remain in the profession and prospective students to enter the workforce. These collaborations provide schools with a sense of community and camaraderie, in which they can share ideas and best practices.

An exemplary model of this approach can be found in Pennsylvania. Collaboration between the Center for Black Educator Development, the Pennsylvania Educator Diversity Consortium, the Pennsylvania Department of Education, and over 250 additional organizations and 400 invested partners, has led to a unified agenda aimed at increasing racial diversity in the teacher-educator workforce, and promoting culturally relevant and sustaining education and systems. This partnership led all teacher preparation programs statewide to adopt CR-SE, and the state mandates the involvement of newly hired teachers in induction programs for culturally relevant and sustaining education practices.<sup>64</sup>

### **RECOMMENDATION 3:** **ENSURE PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT FOR TEACHERS AND SCHOOL LEADERS PREPARES THEM TO WORK WITH DIVERSE STUDENTS.**

Just as school leaders must work to build culturally affirming school environments, district leaders must also prioritize the adoption and implementation of culturally affirming policies and practices.

One strategy for promoting culturally affirming education is for districts to require all teachers to receive cultural competence training before working with students of color and Indigenous students to lessen the likelihood of harm and increase their sense of safety and belonging—and hold them accountable for building inclusive classroom environments. Specifically, the training should be two-fold, encompassing a macro-view of racism on students of color and Indigenous students and a micro-view of the specific campus needs. This approach will challenge teachers' privilege and bias while also encouraging them to foster a growth mindset of learning and respecting cultural identities that are not their own. Building teacher and administrator capacity for cultural competence can help prevent negative racial incidents and support the positive, inclusive spaces that will be more attractive to potential future teachers of color and Indigenous teachers.

District leaders must exhibit a willingness to make courageous decisions. Individuals who do not support the interests of students of color and Indigenous students have no place in the education profession, and this includes school leaders, district leaders, and school board members. Leaders must recruit, support, manage, and hold administrators accountable for creating culturally affirming environments for students, teachers, and other staff.

### **RESOURCES FOR SCHOOL AND DISTRICT LEADERS**

**Respecting Educator Activists of Color: The Anti-Racist Guide to Teacher Retention" from the Center for Black Educator Development<sup>65</sup>**

**"Building Culturally Affirming Schools: A Community Advocacy Toolkit by Teach Plus Pennsylvania Policy Fellows"<sup>66</sup>**

**"Culturally Sustaining Schools: Recommendations from Teach Plus Colorado Policy Fellows for Retaining Teachers of color and Indigenous teachers " from Teach Plus Colorado<sup>67</sup>**

**"Making Culturally Affirming Schools a Priority: Lessons from Teachers of color and Indigenous teachers in a Time of Crisis" from Teach Plus California<sup>68</sup>**





## WHAT CAN STATE AND FEDERAL POLICYMAKERS DO?

State and federal policymakers can also play an important role in building school systems that attract students of color and Indigenous students into the teaching profession. In particular, state and federal policymakers can use the power of the purse, as well as legislation, regulations, and technical assistance focused on culturally affirming curriculum and school environments, to accelerate districts' efforts.

## RECOMMENDATIONS FOR STATE AND FEDERAL POLICYMAKERS:

①

Increase teacher pay—especially in states where pay is lowest—and invest in high quality and affordable educator preparation options.

②

Prioritize culturally affirming and high-quality instructional materials and pedagogy, and support districts in building school environments that are safe and culturally affirming.

③

Establish incentives and provide technical assistance so that districts can establish systems for teachers to exercise agency and leadership.



### RECOMMENDATION 1:

**INCREASE TEACHER PAY—ESPECIALLY IN STATES WHERE PAY IS LOWEST—AND INVEST IN HIGH-QUALITY AND AFFORDABLE EDUCATOR PREPARATION OPTIONS.**

One critical way to recruit and retain teachers is to pay them a professional wage that is comparable to other professions that require similar dedication and preparation. For example, in 2022, the state of Mississippi increased teacher pay by more than 10 percent and built in larger raises every five years and 25 years to reward long-time teachers.<sup>69</sup>

Another method of increasing compensation is to differentiate pay increases to reward excellent teaching and/or attract teachers to the most under-served schools or harder-to-staff subjects, such as math and special education. In 2019, the state of Texas created the Teacher Incentive Allotment, which supported districts in providing significant raises for demonstrably effective teachers—especially those teaching in the highest-poverty districts.<sup>70</sup> In 2021, California invested in incentives for teachers with National Board Certification to teach in high-priority schools with large populations of English learners, foster youth, or students eligible for free or reduced-price meals.<sup>71</sup> The federal government could make it easier for high-need districts to increase teacher pay by increasing funds for Title I schools.

In addition to increasing teacher pay, states and the federal government can invest in high-quality educator preparation pathways and make them affordable or free. For example, the state of Tennessee invested in statewide, cost-free pathways into the teaching profession. The state invested in Grow Your Own programs and partnered with the U.S. Department of Labor to create a paid teacher apprenticeship program. Texas also has a grant program for the establishment of Grow Your Own Programs. The state of Illinois has invested in a Minority Teachers of Illinois Scholarship Program.<sup>72</sup>

The federal government also has opportunities to invest in a diverse teacher pipeline. The federal government offers loan forgiveness through the TEACH program, and Congress recently funded the Hawkins Centers for Excellence to invest in educator preparation programs at Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs) and Minority Serving Institutions (MSIs), and should provide an even deeper investment. Furthermore, Congress should invest in Grow Your Own Programs through legislation such as the SPROUT Act.<sup>73</sup>



## RECOMMENDATION 2:

**PRIORITIZE CULTURALLY AFFIRMING AND HIGH-QUALITY INSTRUCTIONAL MATERIALS AND PEDAGOGY, AND SUPPORT DISTRICTS IN BUILDING SCHOOL ENVIRONMENTS THAT ARE SAFE AND CULTURALLY AFFIRMING.**

States should adopt policies that encourage the adoption of culturally affirming and high-quality instructional materials. Some states such as Louisiana, Ohio, and Mississippi encourage or require districts to choose instructional materials that are aligned with rigorous state standards—such as those that are rated “green” by Ed Reports.<sup>74</sup> They should go one step further by requiring that the curriculum also be culturally affirming—and leave room for teachers to adapt their curriculum to reflect the diverse cultures in their own schools and districts. For example, the state of Rhode Island has released review tools that districts can use to identify curricula that adequately support culturally responsive-sustaining education.<sup>75</sup>

States should also ensure that schools of education and district-directed professional development train teachers in culturally affirming pedagogy. For example, the state of Pennsylvania adopted Culturally Relevant and Sustaining Education Competencies, which Teach Plus teacher leaders have advocated for, and have partnered with schools of education, districts, and philanthropy to ensure that teachers develop skills in these areas.<sup>76</sup> Similarly, the state of Illinois adopted Culturally Responsive Teaching and Leading Standards, which lay out guidelines for educator preparation programs, teachers, principals, and their managers, detailing how to build culturally responsive classrooms and schools. Illinois also passed the Racism Free Schools Act, developed by Teach Plus teacher leaders in response to an epidemic of hate crimes in our nation’s schools, which requires that all districts adopt racial harassment policies protecting teachers and students from hostile school environments.<sup>77</sup>





Preservice teachers benefit from training in cultural identity, implicit bias, microaggressions, developing culturally proficient relationships with students, and collaborating with families through a culturally proficient lens prior to entering the classroom. In 2021-2022, the Center for Black Educator Development conducted a pilot study of three e-learning modules across eight universities that included content from their professional development workshops. Participants were graduate and undergraduate pre-service teachers and liberal arts majors. Results indicated statistically significant growth in cultural competent mindsets and behaviors, especially in students in field placement and freshmen and sophomore students. Black students had the highest ratings of any student group for their overall experience of the modules. Faculty found the modules easy to integrate into their classes and appreciated having additional support and training accompanying the modules.<sup>78</sup>

Finally, states should repeal and refrain from passing laws or adopting regulations that limit the instruction of so-called “divisive topics” or ban books or other content. *“They need to teach about everything,”* said one 11th-grade Texas student. *“Stop banning books because they are ‘inappropriate.’”* Another Texas student shared:

*‘This is more for policymakers. They have to work with their communities in order to help them grow and improve rather than censoring ideas and concepts they don’t like.’<sup>79</sup>*

### RECOMMENDATION 3:

**ESTABLISH INCENTIVES AND PROVIDE TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE SO THAT DISTRICTS CAN ESTABLISH SYSTEMS FOR TEACHERS TO EXERCISE AGENCY AND LEADERSHIP.**

Aspiring teachers of color and Indigenous teachers 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. What’s more, students of color and Indigenous students noted that school and system leadership frequently build school environments that are hostile to students and





teachers of color and Indigenous students and teachers. Teachers should have both agency and the opportunity to lead alongside administrators so that they can build the classrooms and schools that teachers and students deserve.

State standards guiding principal and other administrator preparation, evaluation, and support should include guidelines for giving teachers agency to customize their curriculum for their student populations (while continuing to teach with grade-level materials and content). Administrator standards should also hold them accountable for preserving teacher and student agency in expressing their identities through their clothing, hair, and personal expression. (See the Teach Plus and Center for Black Educator Development paper *To Be Who We Are*.<sup>80</sup>)

Students, teachers, and school systems also benefit from teacher leadership. States and the federal government should create formal leadership opportunities for outstanding, diverse teachers to advise key decision makers—from governors to chief state school officers to legislators—on issues of teaching and learning. For example, the Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education convenes Teacher and Principal Advisory Cabinets each year that provide input on key decisions that affect teachers and students—and the U.S. Department of Education has hosted a School Ambassador Fellowship that engages current classroom teachers to advise and work with the Department.<sup>81</sup>

States and the federal government can also support districts in creating opportunities for teachers to lead in their schools and districts. For example, the state of North Carolina supports districts to create Advanced Teaching Roles that allow teachers to lead and students to succeed, and through the Mentor Program Allotment, the state of Texas provides funding for school districts to create mentorship programs in which experienced teachers support new teachers.<sup>82</sup> States should also provide technical assistance for districts seeking to create leadership roles for teachers. At the federal level, the Teachers LEAD Act, introduced by Representative Ruben Gallego (D-AZ) and



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Senator Ben Ray Luján (D-NM) and developed by Teach Plus teacher leaders, would create a competitive grant program to fund local education agencies seeking to create teacher leadership programs and increase teacher diversity.<sup>83</sup>

## Conclusion

Addressing the needs of students of color and Indigenous students calls for significant shifts in practices and policies. **If we thoughtfully and intentionally meet our current students' needs, we can help secure a pipeline of committed, diverse, and strong educators of color that will make a difference in the lives of all students in the future.** School and district leaders, as well as state and federal policymakers, must recognize the significance and urgency of these recommendations and make a commitment to integrate them into their policies and practices. As we have seen, when schools invest in these strategies, a transformational impact can be achieved. Our hope is that by creating the types of school environments in which students of color and Indigenous students thrive, we ultimately help grow a strong pipeline of teachers of color and Indigenous teachers committed to serving our students. Together, we can transform the profession by embracing and supporting educators of color and Indigenous teachers, and supporting all our students.





# Appendix A: Focus Group Protocol

## PART 1. Students' perceptions of the teaching profession

In this section, we are interested in hearing your thoughts and perspectives about teaching. We're curious to learn what you think of teachers, what you consider are the positives and negatives about being a teacher, and whether you are considering teaching as a potential career.

1. Take a moment to think about teachers who you liked or made a positive impact on you. What did you like about them and what made them memorable to you?
  - a. Script language: This could be a teacher who made school more enjoyable, a teacher who influenced your decision to become a teacher, a teacher who helped you improve academically, etc.
2. Have you ever had a teacher who shares your racial or ethnic identity?
  - a. Yes
  - b. No
3. How has your school experience been impacted by having or not having teachers who share your racial or ethnic identity?
4. Do you want to be a teacher? Please explain why or why not, including how any people or experiences may have contributed to your decision.
  - a. Think creatively: This could be any formal or informal experience helping others learn something (ex: tutoring, babysitting, teaching children's church etc.)

## PART 2. Students' ideas for improving the profession

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In this next section, we'd like to hear more about your thoughts on entering the teaching profession, what draws people to teaching and what can be changed to make teaching a more appealing career.

5. What are three things you find attractive about teaching as a career?
6. What are three things you find unattractive about teaching as a career?
7. Educational leaders and politicians are deeply interested in ideas for making teaching more attractive to students of color and Indigenous students. What would you change to make teaching more attractive and competitive when compared to other career options?
  - a. Think creatively: Are there things schools could do or opportunities schools could provide that might convince more students to consider teaching?

## PART 3. Prioritizing improvements to school environments

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Finally, we'd like to ask your opinions on how educational leaders can improve the school experience for students of color.

8. Please take a moment to reflect on your own experience as a student of color. What are three things that schools could change tomorrow to improve the educational experiences of students of color and Indigenous students?
  - a. Probe: Think broadly about educational experiences: School culture, academics, extracurricular activities, relationships with peers, preparation for the future.



# Appendix B: Student Demographics

State	
Alaska	1.0% (1)
Arizona	1.0% (1)
Arkansas	3.9% (4)
Connecticut	6.8% (7)
Delaware	1.0% (1)
Illinois	4.9% (5)
Kansas	1.0% (1)
Kentucky	20.4% (21)
Louisiana	3.9% (4)
Minnesota	1.0% (1)
Mississippi	2.9% (3)
Missouri	1.9% (2)
Nebraska	11.7% (12)
Ohio	6.8% (7)
Texas	22.3% (23)
Utah	1.0% (1)
Virginia	1.9% (2)
Washington	6.8% (7)
<b>Total</b>	<b>103</b>

Race/Ethnicity	
*As students were able to select as many options as applied to them, percentages may not sum to 100.	
Asian American or Pacific Islander	5.8% (6)
Black or African American	56.3% (58)
Hispanic or Latinx	38.8% (40)
Middle Eastern or North African	1.0% (1)
Native American or Alaska Native	7.8% (8)
Two or more races	28.2% (29)

Grade	
9th Grade	8.7% (9)
10th Grade	17.5% (18)
11th Grade	35.0% (36)
12th Grade	38.8% (40)
<b>Total</b>	<b>103</b>

**\*This research project was approved by an external Institutional Review Board (WCG IRB)**



## Endnotes

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17. See question 3 in the Appendix
18. See question 3 in the Appendix
19. See question 3 in the Appendix
20. See question 3 in the Appendix
21. See question 3 in the Appendix
22. See question 3 in the Appendix
23. See question 3 in the Appendix
24. See question 3 in the Appendix
25. See question 4 in the Appendix
26. See question 1 in the Appendix
27. See question 1 in the Appendix
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The mission of Teach Plus is to empower excellent, experienced, and diverse teachers to take leadership over key policy and practice issues that advance equity, opportunity, and student success. In pursuing this mission, Teach Plus is guided by the Student Opportunity Mandate: All students should have the opportunity to achieve their potential in an education system defined by its commitment to equity, its responsiveness to individual needs, and its ability to prepare students for postsecondary success. Learn more here: [www.teachplus.org](http://www.teachplus.org)



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Educators Rising is a Grow Your Own (GYO) program and Career and Technical Student Organization (CTSO) for middle school, high school, and higher education that provides future educators opportunities for career exploration, clinical experiences, dual credits, industry certifications, competitions, conferences, student leadership, honors and more. Districts may offer Educators Rising as a club or use the Educators Rising Curriculum in Education and Training Pathway courses. The curriculum introduces students to the professional skillsets and dispositions they need to be effective educators. Since 1994, more than 306,600 rising educators have been helped by this program, formerly known as Future Teachers of America. Around 137,700 of these students joined since 2015, when the program became Educators Rising. Nearly 3,000 aspiring educators attend the national conference to compete in more than 23 categories, join breakout sessions, visit with college representatives, and meet other rising educators from all over the United States. Learn more here:

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