April 2024
To: The Arkansas State Board of Education and
LEARNS Educator Effectiveness Rulemaking Group
From: Teach Plus Arkansas Teacher Leaders

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+PLUS

Introduction:

There is a concerning trend in Arkansas that is hurting our students: an escalating departure of teachers from the profession. Notably, the retention of teachers of color is a pressing concern: 68 out of 262 public school districts in Arkansas lacked a single teacher of color in the 2020-2021 academic year.[1] We believe there must be a strong focus on recruitment and retention of teachers of color in Arkansas in order to better represent the diverse student body we serve and so that students can see themselves in their teachers, guidance counselors, librarians, and principals and can find a more inclusive and safe climate at school. Research also shows that exposure to teachers of color can have positive impacts on academic outcomes for students of color, and their presence benefits all students.[2] To remain in schools, all teachers and especially teachers of color need an established culture-building process in order to foster climates that encourage acceptance for all.[3] Providing equitable working environments for teachers serves students. Each school district is required by DESE to have a Teacher and Administrator Recruitment and Retention Plan (TARRP) that must be renewed every three years; one of the goals of this plan is to retain teachers who reflect the diversity of the district's students.[4] Here, we provide recommendations on how to achieve this in a transparent and direct manner in order to support and retain teachers of color in our state.

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[1] Statewide Information System Reports. (2024). Arkansas Department of Education Data Center. Retrieved from: https://adedata.arkansas.gov/statewide/

[2] Stuart Wells, A., Fox, L., & Cordova-Cobo, D. (2016). How Racially Diverse Schools and Classrooms Can Benefit All Students. The Century Foundation. Retrieved from: https://tcf.org/content/report/how-racially-diverse-schools-and-classrooms-can-benefit-all-students/?gclid=Cj0KCQ jwuNemBhCBARIsADp74QSqM_ZtpNKnvQYM7rb8rMHFwQeILkykB43fnR2crkk9XJZZiEJpL5IaAn6gEALw_wcB; Ravenell, A. et al. (2023). Seeing Myself: Students of Color on the Pros and Cons of Becoming Teachers. Teach Plus. Retrieved from: https://teachplus.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/10/Seeing-Myself_Final.pdf

[3] Mason, S., et al. ``To Be Who We Are: Black Teachers on Creating Affirming School Cultures." Teach Plus and The Center for Black Educator Development, Sept. 2021.

[4] Teacher and Administrator Recruitment and Retention Plan. (2024). Arkansas Department of Education Division of Elementary and Secondary Education. Retrieved from: https://dese.ade.arkansas.gov/Offices/educator-effectiveness/administrator-information/teacher-and-administrato r-recruitment-and-retention-plan

Recommendations:

Providing teachers with culturally responsive, research-based mentoring programs as well as conducting routine school culture surveys can promote a safe and inclusive teaching environment. Based on our research, we offer the following recommendations:

- Incorporate Culturally-Responsive TARRP plans with an emphasis on mentoring programs
- Establish routine studies to assess school culture

Culturally-Responsive TARRP Plans:

It is imperative for each school to incorporate a structured onboarding procedure focused on diversity and inclusion within their Teacher Attrition Reduction and Retention Plan (TARRP).[5] Data indicates that teachers entering the profession without adequate support are more likely to leave.[6] Schools without supportive onboarding programs will see higher attrition rates for teachers; U.S. districts lose $8.5 billion per year on teacher turnover.[7] Organizations with strong onboarding programs experience 62 percent greater new hire productivity and 50 percent greater new hire retention. Effective onboarding goes beyond the initial weeks and includes ongoing support, regular check-ins with mentors, access to professional learning communities, and opportunities for continuous improvement. School districts should:

1. Provide long-term, research-based mentorship opportunities and other supports[8]:
    a. Match experienced, highly effective educators with novice teachers for guidance and an exchange of effective teaching methods for the first three to five years of their career.
    b. Provide access to personalized sessions with instructional coaches or mentors; work to create these connections via professional affinity groups with a sensitivity to culture in mind.
    c. Reinforce the state's professional learning community efforts with an emphasis on culturally-sensitive practices[9] in the workplace.

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[5] Developing Your Teacher and Administrator Recruitment and Retention Plan (TARRP): A Guide for districts and open enrollment charter schools. Arkansas Department of Education. Retrieved from:
https://dese.ade.arkansas.gov/Files/TARRP_Process_Webinar_-_17_May_2022_slides_Legal.pdf

[6] Podolsky, A., Kini, T., Bishop, J., & Darling-Hammond, L. (2016). Solving the Teacher Shortage: How to Attract and Retain Excellent Educators. Learning Policy Institute. Retrieved from:
https://learningpolicyinstitute.org/sites/default/files/Teacher_Exodus_Infographic.pdf#:~:text=Beginning%20teachers%20with%20little%20or,the%20top%20reason%20for%20leaving.

[7] How the right onboarding can increase K-12 teacher retention. (2023). Power School. Retrieved from:
https://www.powerschool.com/blog/how-the-right-onboarding-program-can-increase-k-12-teacher-retention/#:~:text=Effective%20Onboarding%20Increases%20Retention&text=When%20done%20well%2C%20onboarding%20programs,their%20social%20and%20professional%20skills

[8] Evans, J. (n.d.). *Five ways schools can retain more black educators*. Greater Good.
https://greatergood.berkeley.edu/article/item/five_ways_schools_can_retain_more_black_educators

[9] Cultural Sensitivity in the Workplace. (2019, March 29). Penn State Extension.
https://extension.psu.edu/cultural-sensitivity-in-the-workplace

2. Address systemic biases and promote diversity, equity, and inclusion, as outlined in Desiree Carver-Thomas's research[10]:
   a. Implement professional development workshops focused on culturally responsive teaching methods and leadership skills.
      i. Establish avenues for teachers of color to pursue leadership positions within the district, such as departmental leadership, instructional coaching, or administrative roles.
   b. Form hiring committees that reflect the diversity of the student population and community. Include teachers, administrators, parents, and community members from diverse backgrounds in the hiring process to minimize bias.
   c. Recognize and celebrate diverse perspectives and cultural contributions; listen to concerns and provide opportunities for input in decision-making.

3. Promote access to Supportive Teacher Pathways such as:
   a. Education Preparation Program (EPP)[11]
   b. 1 Million Teachers of Color (1MToC)[12]

Routine Studies on School Culture

Research[13] suggests that school culture plays a pivotal role in teacher satisfaction and retention; a positive school culture significantly correlates with higher teacher morale and job satisfaction. We believe schools should identify areas for improvement and implement targeted interventions to create a supportive environment for all staff members:

1. The purpose of a diverse school staff taking a survey is to analyze the workplace and use data to offer recommendations on how the workplace may be improved.
   a. Implement the Organizational Culture Assessment Instrument or similar. While results are neither "good or bad," this information can assist school leaders in creating a climate that retains teachers, notably teachers of color, in their schools.[14]

   The results can provide concrete ways to improve school culture and show the barriers teachers of color navigate, which eventually play a role in their departure from the classroom.

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[10] Carver-Thomas, D. (2016). Diversifying the Teaching Profession: How to Recruit and Retain Teachers of Color. Learning Policy Institute. https://learningpolicyinstitute.org/product/diversifying-teaching-profession-report

[11] cjrw.com, C. -. (n.d.). Transforming Educator Preparation. Forward Arkansas. Retrieved March 27, 2024, from https://forwardarkansas.org/case-studies/transforming-educator-preparation/

[12] Grissom, J. A., Rodriguez, L. A., & Kern, E. C. (2017). Teacher and Principal Diversity and the Representation of Students of Color in Gifted Programs: Evidence from National Data. The Elementary School Journal, 117(3), 396–422. https://doi.org/10.1086/690274

[13] Working Conditions Related to Positive Teacher Well-Being Vary Across States: Findings from the 2022 Learn Together Survey. (2023). RAND Corporation EBooks. https://doi.org/10.7249/rra827-15

[14] Cameron, K. S., & Quinn, R. E. (2011). Diagnosing and changing organizational culture : based on the competing values framework. Jossey-Bass, Cop.

2. Exit interviews provide essential information[15] for districts to determine the reason behind teacher departure. Results should be analyzed annually to determine if systematic issues exist and contribute to departures. The Arkansas Department of Education does not require exit interviews; we believe these should be mandatory and should have two modes: face-to-face "exit conversations" or a remote survey. The departing employee may choose whether to conduct their exit conversation in person or the survey.

Conclusion:

Retaining high quality teachers in Arkansas, particularly teachers of color, requires urgent attention; this issue ultimately affects the educational experience for students and inhibits clear pathways for students of color to feel secure in their places of learning. By embracing the proposed solutions, we have an opportunity in Arkansas to cultivate a diverse and inclusive teaching and working environment for our educators. Our students, teachers, and communities deserve an educational landscape that provides an enriching and successful learning journey for all.

Respectfully submitted,

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Toya White, Jacksonville North Pulaski School District
Michael Flowers, Pulaski County Special School District
Emily Garrison, Bentonville School District

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[15] Curbing K-12 Turnover: The Role of Stay Conversations and Exit Interviews | New Leaders Blog. (n.d.). Www.newleaders.org. Retrieved March 27, 2024, from https://www.newleaders.org/blog/curbing-k-12-turnover-the-role-of-stay-conversations-and-exit-interviews