



The Education Trust



Leveraging the Perspectives of Teachers of Color and Policy Opportunities to Recruit and Retain BIPOC Teachers

For the first time since launching the *Voices from the Classroom 2022* survey, this year Educators for Excellence conducted a parallel survey of BIPOC (Black, Indigenous, and people of color) teachers to better understand how their perspectives differ from the larger national sample. In many places throughout the survey, the sentiments of the BIPOC sample varied in profound and important ways, particularly in questions about how to recruit and retain educators.

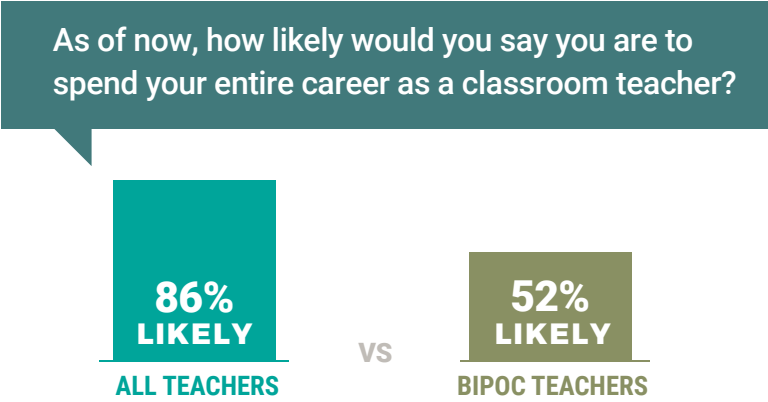
We know that recruiting and retaining BIPOC teachers is critical. More than 50 percent of the students in public school classrooms across the United States identify as people of color, while only 20 percent of their teachers¹ (and principals²) do. And while the share of BIPOC educators has increased over the past several decades, it hasn't kept pace with the increasing share of students of color—the gap between the two has grown since the 1980s.³ Research on the importance of narrowing this gap is clear. Students of color who have teachers who look like them have higher reading and math achievement scores⁴ and are more likely to graduate high school and to enroll in college.⁵ And all students, including white students, benefit socially, emotionally and academically from having teachers of color at the front of the room.⁶

Knowing all that we know about the importance of BIPOC teachers, this moment presents a particularly threatening and unique challenge. Across the country, enrollment in teacher preparation programs is dropping, and due to the widespread contract stipulation that teachers who were most recently hired are laid off first, all the work districts have done to increase the percentages of BIPOC teachers in recent years may be undone.⁷ Together with The Education Trust, an organization that fiercely advocates for the high academic achievement of all students—particularly those of color or living in poverty—we outline the relevant findings from *Voices from the Classroom 2022* pertaining to the stated needs of BIPOC educators and provide calls to action to improve recruitment and retention of BIPOC teachers in order to meet the needs of our students who are most underserved by our school systems.⁸

Recruitment of BIPOC Teachers

Despite their critical importance, we lose BIPOC teachers at each step of their journey toward becoming a teacher. Due to a number of systemic barriers, [people of color are less likely than their white counterparts](#) to enroll in bachelor’s degree programs, to enroll specifically in education preparation programs, and to complete that program if they do enroll.⁹ Because [people of color graduate with more student debt than white graduates do](#),¹⁰ some researchers hypothesize that the [low pay makes teaching an “impractical choice” for BIPOC graduates](#), thus driving them away from the profession.¹¹

In order to change this equation and increase the number of students taught by teachers who look like them, we must elevate the voices and opinions of BIPOC teachers. In *Voices from the Classroom 2022*, BIPOC teachers report starkly different answers regarding how long they plan to stay in the classroom than the overall national sample. While 86 percent of the national sample reports that they are likely to spend their entire career as a classroom teacher, only 52 percent of BIPOC teachers report the same.



Q.11 VOICES FROM THE CLASSROOM 2022



“I feel a lot of stress as a person of color in my school building. I have an intense empathy for my students, so I try to be there for them in many ways, both inside and outside of school. If I had more colleagues who looked like me and my students, the burden on me to be all things for all of my students would decrease.”

Genelle Faulkner, sixth-grade Science Teacher, Boston, MA

How do BIPOC teachers think that school systems should recruit talented and diverse candidates to the teaching profession? They report that leadership pathways, additional pathways for school aides and paraprofessionals to become teachers, and making it easier to leave and return to the profession are all key to recruiting teachers. [Pathways to becoming teachers for after-school staff](#) have also proven to be a promising strategy for recruiting BIPOC teachers.¹²

What is most likely to attract talented and diverse teachers to the profession?

RESPONSES OF BIPOC EDUCATORS

- 41%** Leadership pathways
- 34%** Making it easier to leave and return
- 33%** Pathways for school aides and paraprofessionals
- 28%** Residency programs
- 26%** Streamline certification
- 21%** Alternative certification pathways
- 17%** Raising the bar for entry

Q.12 VOICES FROM THE CLASSROOM 2022

Another area in which BIPOC teachers responded very differently than the national sample was around the need for policymakers to consider housing support as a way to both recruit and retain teachers. In places like Chicago, where teachers are required to live in the city to teach in the school system and the cost of living is high, the need to consider housing support is even more crucial. In the survey, 73 percent of BIPOC teachers listed housing support as one of their top three financial levers for both recruiting and retaining teachers, compared to only 32 percent of the national sample.

Would housing support be most effective in recruiting and retaining teachers?



*percentage of surveys in which "housing support" was one of the top three choices

Q.14 VOICES FROM THE CLASSROOM 2022

Retention of BIPOC teachers

Once they are in the classroom, BIPOC teachers are also *less likely*¹³ to stay.¹⁴ The Education Trust report *If You Listen, We Will Stay: Why Teachers of Color Leave and How to Disrupt Teacher Turnover* identifies five key levers that cause BIPOC educators to leave the classroom:

1. Experiencing an antagonistic school culture.
2. Feeling undervalued.
3. Being deprived of agency and autonomy.
4. Navigating unfavorable working conditions.
5. Bearing the high cost of being a teacher of color.¹⁵

In *Voices from the Classroom 2022*, BIPOC teachers report needing very different resources and support to keep them in teaching than their white counterparts need. In the national sample, salary was the clear top mechanism that would retain teachers, with 78 percent of teachers saying it would keep them in the profession. However, only 22 percent of BIPOC teachers noted salary as one of their top choices, and instead chose leadership pathways (41%) and more professional support for teachers (41%) as their top choices.

Which of the following do you think would be most likely to keep teachers in the profession?		
	NATIONAL	BIPOC
Higher salary	78%	22%
More time for collaboration and planning	19%	20%
More support staff	17%	16%
More mental health support for educators	10%	17%
More professional development and support	7%	41%
More autonomy in the classroom	15%	11%
More leadership opportunities while continuing to teach	8%	41%
More supportive administration	21%	12%
More societal respect for the profession	26%	20%



“In my school, as much as we talk about diversity, the people promoted to administration look a certain way, even though the teachers coming in look differently. Over time, BIPOC teachers are not going to stay in their schools if they don’t see BIPOC teachers moving to teacher leadership and admin roles.”

Arthur Everett, high school History Teacher, Brooklyn, NY

Another threat to retention of teachers of color is an impending perfect storm of decreasing student enrollment, a looming fiscal cliff, and the use of seniority to determine layoffs in many districts and states. Across the United States, [public school enrollment continues to decline](#),¹⁶ especially in major urban areas, where [there is a greater concentration of teachers of color](#).¹⁷ The current influx of emergency federal funding for schools must be committed by 2024, which will lead to layoffs as the funds districts have been using to hire new staff dry up. In The 74’s recent report *Those Kids Did Not Come Back* Los Angeles Unified School District Superintendent Alberto Carvalho called this a pending “Armageddon” for district budgets.¹⁸

Seniority-based layoffs are synonymous with “last in, first out,” or LIFO, in which teachers are dismissed based primarily on years of experience. These LIFO clauses are widespread in teacher contracts. In 2010, [a study of 100 large school districts by the National Center for Teacher Quality](#) found that 75 used seniority as the primary determinant for layoffs.¹⁹ [Seniority-based layoffs are known to disproportionately lay off teachers in high-need schools](#), who are also more likely to be teachers of color.²⁰ Teachers of color are also more likely to be in the early stages of their career, given the recent efforts to hire more of them, putting them at particular risk of being laid off based on their lack of seniority. The bottom line is that recent efforts to increase teacher diversity are at great risk of being significantly undermined.

Moving Forward

State- and Local-Level Opportunities to Protect Teacher Diversity

While many states have invested heavily in efforts to recruit teachers of color, these efforts are compromised when districts and schools have difficulty retaining them. States can improve retention of teachers of color by investing in programming that provides ongoing support and growth opportunities and improves poor working conditions that disproportionately impact teachers of color.

The table below outlines proven approaches for improving retention of teachers of color at the state and local levels, along with an example of where they have been successfully implemented.

STRATEGY	SPOTLIGHT
High-Retention Pathways: States should invest in high-retention pathways to teaching, including residency models and alternative certification programs that traditionally support and develop teachers of color.	California has invested in residency programs to recruit, develop support systems for, provide outreach and communication strategies to, and retain a diverse teacher workforce. ²¹

STRATEGY

Induction and Mentoring: States should invest in induction and mentoring programs that provide support specifically for teachers of color early in their careers.

SPOTLIGHT

Minnesota invested \$6 million in 2022 and 2023 for districts to develop mentorship programs that prioritize teachers of color.²²

STRATEGY

Leadership Pathways: States should invest in opportunities for teachers of color to grow and develop in their abilities and their qualification for leadership roles, including targeted professional development, cohort models, and continuing education opportunities.

SPOTLIGHT

Massachusetts has launched a program to build a pipeline of educators of color into the superintendent field.²³

STRATEGY

Modification of LIFO Policies: When allowable under state law, districts should work with their union to modify their contract to protect teachers of color from the impact of seniority-based layoffs, thus avoiding a cycle of laying off the same group of diverse teachers that was hired the previous spring.

SPOTLIGHT

After two years of E4E members' advocacy, **Minneapolis Public Schools** has modified its contract with the Minneapolis Federation of Teachers to provide an exception to seniority-based layoffs for any teacher who is "a member of a population underrepresented among licensed teachers."²⁴

Federal-Level Opportunities for Change

Between March 2020 and March 2021, the federal government invested almost \$200 billion to support state and local efforts to provide high-quality instruction during the pandemic and to support long-term recovery from the inequitable impacts of the COVID-19 crisis. The largest of these investments—the [American Rescue Plan](#), signed into law in March 2021—provided more than \$120 billion of funding to states and districts through a third investment of Elementary and Secondary School Emergency Relief funds.

Some of this funding can—and should—be utilized to fund efforts to [increase the racial diversity of the educator workforce](#) through short- and long-term solutions.²⁵ Each state has submitted an ARP plan to invest funding to address several issues, including building strong and diverse workforces, and many states have already invested these funds in efforts to invest in teacher diversity strategies to [prepare](#),²⁶ [recruit](#),²⁷ and [retain](#)²⁸ teachers of color since March 2021.

Beyond the short-term relief funds provided to support schools through 2025, there are several existing federal funding streams that states can use to support the strategies listed above to recruit, retain, and support educators of color. For example, states can apply for grant funding through the [Teacher Quality Partnership \(TQP\) program](#)²⁹ to support [residency](#)³⁰ models and other high-leverage recruitment and retention strategies. States can also use [ESEA Title II-A](#)³¹ funds to invest in [Grow Your Own Programs](#)³² and strategies to ensure that School and Prep Program Leaders are [Culturally Responsive in practice](#)³³ to better prepare and support educators of color. For more examples of state investments using federal funding from COVID-19-relief dollars and other existing federal funding streams, visit the [Ed Trust Teacher Diversity and Equity 50 state scans website](#) for a comprehensive list and additional best practices.³⁴

Additionally, federal leaders can take further action to support the recruitment and retention of BIPOC teachers. To recruit BIPOC teachers, they can provide additional federal funding on top of the current \$8 million investment from the fiscal year 2022 omnibus for the [Augustus F. Hawkins Centers of Excellence program](#)³⁵, which provides competitive grants to historically Black colleges and universities and other higher education institutions to train teachers of color. [Institutions eligible for these grants produce 50 percent of our nation's teachers of color](#); by providing them additional funding to train teachers of color, we can increase the number of teachers of color entering the workforce each year.³⁶ Additionally, federal legislators can support the Teachers LEAD Act ([S.3881](#)³⁷/[H.R.7122](#)³⁸), which would create a grant program for districts and other eligible entities to create teacher leadership programs, which BIPOC teachers report are an effective mechanism for retaining them.

Advocacy Opportunity

Teachers, school staff, and school and district leaders can click [HERE](#) to ask their federal legislators to support funding for Augustus F. Hawkins Centers of Excellence and the Teachers LEAD Act.³⁹

Endnotes

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VOICES FROM THE CLASSROOM

A SURVEY OF AMERICA'S EDUCATORS

Designed by teachers for teachers, Voices from the Classroom 2022 was conducted with a nationally representative sample of 1,000 full-time public school teachers, plus an oversample of 300 BIPOC (Black, Indigenous, and people of color) teachers. The sample reflects the nation's district and charter public school teachers and aligns with key demographic variables of gender, race/ethnicity, age, and years of teaching experience. The poll was taken in January 2022 during the height of the omicron variant outbreak of COVID-19. While teachers designed this survey, Gotham Research Group helped ensure it was valid and reliable.



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The Education Trust acts as fierce advocates for the high academic achievement of all students—particularly those of color or living in poverty.

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