

Centering race and racism in educator diversity policies

By **Conra D. Gist, Travis J. Bristol, Anthony L. Brown, & Keffrelyn D. Brown**

Historically, well-intended education policies have often had unforeseen and negative consequences, leading to greater inequities (Anyon, 2005; Nieto, 2005) and less teacher diversity (Dillard, 1994; Irvine, 1988) in public education. Indeed, scholars commonly note that while the 1954 *Brown v. Board of Education* decision, which put an end to legally sanctioned school segregation in the United States, was a great achievement, it prompted many white state and district officials, especially in the South, to enact blatantly racist and inequitable educator hiring and placement policies, which resulted in the displacement of tens of thousands of Black educators and steep reductions in teacher diversity in the late 1970s and early 1980s (Dilworth & Brown, 2008; Fultz, 2004).

Increasingly, since then, advocates have called upon federal, state, and local policy makers to invest in more carefully designed and effective approaches to recruiting, preparing, hiring, and retaining Teachers of Color and Indigenous Teachers (Ingersoll & Merrill, 2017; Putman et al., 2016). In recent years, many new policy approaches aimed at diversifying the educator workforce have been introduced across the country, such as the Council of Chief State School Officers' Diverse and Learner-Ready Teachers Initiative, the California Department of Education's cosponsorship of Assembly Bill 520, the California Diversifying the Teacher Workforce Grant Program, and the New York City Department of Education's NYC Men Teach. State and local education agencies have led these efforts in response to a glaring disconnect between their mostly white teaching force and the fast-growing diversity of their student enrollments (Noonan & Bristol, 2020; Washington State Professional Educators Standards Board, 2019).

As yet, a relatively small number of studies have been conducted into the effects of these initiatives, but one clear finding has emerged from the research: Policies designed to improve the recruitment of Teachers of Color and Indigenous Teachers have opened doors to the teaching profession, but the creators of those policies have given too little thought to the kinds of schools those teachers will enter, the conditions in which they will be required to teach, and the kinds of supports they will need. As a result, while the country has seen increased recruitment of Teachers of Color in recent years, these gains have been largely offset by leaks in the teacher development pipeline and high rates of teacher attrition. Six recent studies highlighted in the *Handbook of Research on Teachers of Color and Indigenous Teachers* (Gist & Bristol, forthcoming, 2022) expand the research base in the area of policy.

What the recent research shows

A pair of studies begin the *Handbook's* policy section by providing historical overviews of policy initiatives designed to diversify the educator workforce, as well as analyses of the *outcomes* of those initiatives. Diana D'Amico Pawlewicz and colleagues examine both formal and informal decision making in public school systems over the last 50 years, showing how specific decisions created barriers that inhibited racial diversification among teachers. Through a case study of hiring reforms intended to bring Teachers of Color into New York City schools during the 1970s, the authors reveal that it was not just the *Brown* decision that led to a dramatic reduction in the numbers of Black educators — specific district-level policy decisions had the effect of reducing the number of Black teachers. These policies included relying on teacher

CONRA D. GIST is an associate professor of teaching and teacher education in the College of Education at the University of Houston. **TRAVIS J. BRISTOL** is an assistant professor in the Graduate School of Education at the University of California, Berkeley. **ANTHONY L. BROWN** is a professor of curriculum and instruction in social studies education, and affiliated faculty in African American Studies, and the Department of African and African Diaspora Studies at the University of Texas. **KEFFRELYN D. BROWN** is a professor and distinguished university teaching professor of cultural studies in education in the Department of Curriculum and Instruction at the University of Texas, Austin. She holds a faculty appointment in the Department of African and African Diaspora Studies, the John L. Warfield Center for African and African American Studies, and the Center for Women and Gender Studies.

certification examinations as the primary criteria for entering the profession and union rules such as “last-in-first-out,” which, during an economic downturn, privileges veteran teachers, most of whom are white, and disadvantages recently recruited teachers, many of whom are People of Color.

Looking back over the past 15 years, Mary Dilworth examines why *federal* policy makers have done little to enact policies designed to increase teacher diversity. One reason is that federal policy makers have been unwilling to pass race-based policies because race continues to be our country’s most divisive issue. To gauge what might prompt them to take more action in this area, Dilworth interviewed government officials and policy advocates who have succeeded in influencing federal education policy making on other topics. She concludes that if advocates were to emphasize the ways in which teacher diversity benefits all students, if a handful of well-placed officials were to champion this issue, and if advocacy organizations were to demonstrate a strong and consistent commitment to teacher diversity, then federal policy makers could be moved to establish robust programs and policies to support it.

There is also a body of research considering whether recent state and local policies have prevented many aspiring Teachers of Color and Indigenous Teachers from entering the profession even at a time when growing numbers of local education leaders are calling explicitly for more teacher diversity. In an analysis of recent demographic data on new teachers, focusing on members of the millennial generation, Michael Hansen and Diana Quintero find that the newest cadre of public school teachers is even more disproportionately white (relative to the overall population of same-age college graduates) than were teachers of previous generations. Surprised by this finding, Hansen and Quintero go on to explore whether demographic and policy trends in recent decades — including the erosion of real teacher salaries, increasing student diversity outside of urban centers, and the expansion of charter schools — may have hindered efforts to diversify the teacher workforce. Unlike D’Amico Pawlewicz and colleagues, Hansen and Quintero find no evidence of specific policies that have had this effect, leaving them uncertain as to why fewer Teachers of Color are entering the profession. However, their analysis calls attention to the urgency for policy makers to respond to this new trend and to consider whether existing policies may be having unintended consequences for teacher diversity.

Focusing on one policy in particular — states’ use of teacher certification exams — Yukari Takimoto Amos gauges the psychological toll that these exams take on aspiring Teachers of Color and Indigenous Teachers, who tend to pass them at lower rates than white aspirants. Amos finds that for teacher candidates who fail multiple times, this part of the licensure process tends to become a major preoccupation, distracting them from other aspects of their professional preparation and creating prolonged emotional distress. In the face of unsuccessful attempts and continued emotional distress,

Teacher Candidates of Color persisted until they passed the certification exams.

Similarly, Amber Kim and colleagues examine how a common policy strategy — supporting alternative teacher certification programs — has affected teacher diversity. Specifically, their study focuses on Teach for America (TFA), a national corps that trains teachers and places them in racially and economically marginalized communities. In their analysis, the researchers highlight a tension that they find to be inherent to this approach: On one hand, TFA has publicly espoused the need for greater teacher diversity, as well as its successful recruitment of Teachers of Color; on the other hand, the authors find that the organization, in its preparation of teacher candidates, upholds white supremacist ideas, which are manifested in instructional practices centered on direct instruction as well as classroom management focused on policing the bodies of Children of Color. Moreover, TFA promotes a deficit view of the communities of color that they serve, portraying them as lacking in the knowledge, skills, and expertise that TFA recruits bring to local schools. This often leads the program’s recruits to become disillusioned with teaching, the study concludes, as they find that TFA’s good intentions, promotion of diversity, and support for culturally relevant teaching are contradicted by its assumptions about and attitudes toward local communities.

Finally, a study by Amaya Garcia and colleagues focuses on specific parts of the teacher preparation process that often present challenges for aspiring Teachers of Color (specifically for Latinx aspirants in Washington State), asking what state policies might help patch these leaks in the teacher pipeline. First, they argue, state policy makers should create programs designed to help aspiring Latinx teachers make a successful transition from high school to college teacher preparation programs, and from college programs to their initial classroom placement — according to their data, these tend to be the leakiest points in the pipeline. Second, they argue that policy makers should make it a priority to provide college and university students with better social-emotional, academic, and financial supports, which tend to be crucial to the persistence and success of Students of Color in higher education overall and particularly in teacher preparation programs. Finally, they argue that policy makers should create initiatives specifically designed to recruit community members to teach in their local schools, as well as to fund their preparation and help them meet certification requirements, which often pose obstacles for racially and linguistically diverse individuals who show an interest in working in nearby schools.

What we don’t know yet

Recent experience suggests that policy supports for *recruiting* more Teachers of Color and Indigenous Teachers are not sufficient to build and sustain a more ethnoracially diverse teacher force. Researchers have begun to shed light on what

Research topics to explore

- The variation in federal, state, and district teacher diversity policies in their racial and social justice commitments.
- The similarities and differences between past education policies that created the underrepresentation of Teachers of Color and Indigenous Teachers and current teacher diversity policies and their implications on the educator workforce of the future.
- The varied political commitments, organizing processes, and knowledge products advanced by education reform funders who espouse support for educator diversity initiatives.
- The effects of various education reform policies on the recruitment, preparation, retention, and professional advancement of Teachers of Color and Indigenous Teachers.
- The positioning of teacher diversity as a *policy* problem and equity and justice problem, related to teacher learning and organizational and leadership capacity in schools.

other kinds of federal, state, and local policies are needed, and to show which policy strategies have created more obstacles for Teachers of Color and Indigenous Teachers. However, we urgently need more studies in this area, especially into policies designed to help all aspiring educators succeed in the teacher preparation and certification process and to promote equitable hiring and promotion practices, support systems for new teachers, and professional development systems (Gist et al., 2021). Further, we need more research into how best to ensure that new policy strategies include Teachers of Color and Indigenous Teachers, that they respect diverse school communities, and that they avoid the sorts of harmful, if unintended consequences of previous policy initiatives.

Implications for policy and practice

- Future policy work must articulate the ways in which racial and educational justice commitments drive policy when policy makers are committed to the academic and professional advancement of Teachers of Color and Indigenous Teachers.
- We must move beyond thinking about educator diversity as a simple policy problem. Instead, we must grapple with the complexity of the issue. Policy

makers must keep in mind how all aspects of a teacher's formation — teacher learning, school organization and leadership, and cultural norms in the professionalization of teaching — can be mired in race and racism in ways that obstruct equitable access to and support in the profession. ■

References

- Amos, Y.T. (2018). *Latina bilingual education teachers: Examining structural racism in schools*. Routledge.
- Anyon, J. (2005). What "counts" as educational policy? Notes toward a new paradigm. *Harvard Educational Review*, 75 (1), 65–88.
- D'Amico Pawlewicz, D., Hosford, D., & Guiden, A. (forthcoming, 2022). In search of Black teachers: The irony of recruitment and hiring policies post-*Brown*. In C.D. Gist & T.J. Bristol (Eds.), *Handbook of research on Teachers of Color and Indigenous Teachers*. American Educational Research Association.
- Dillard, C. (1994). Beyond supply and demand: Critical pedagogy, ethnicity, and empowerment in recruiting teachers of color. *Journal of Teacher Education*, 45 (1), 9–17.
- Dilworth, M.E. (forthcoming, 2022). The absence and probability of effective public policies for teacher diversity. In C.D. Gist & T.J. Bristol (Eds.), *Handbook of research on Teachers of Color and Indigenous Teachers*. American Educational Research Association.
- Dilworth, M.E. & Brown, A.L. (2008). Teachers of color: Quality and effective teachers one way or another. In M. Cochran-Smith, S. Feiman-Nemser, D.J. McIntyre, & K.E. Demers (Eds.), *Handbook of research on teacher education: Enduring questions in changing contexts* (3rd ed., pp. 424–467). Routledge.
- Fultz, M. (2004). The displacement of Black educators post-*Brown*: An overview and analysis. *History of Education Quarterly*, 44 (1), 11–45.
- Garcia, A. Muniz, J., & Garza, R. (forthcoming, 2022). Plugging the leaks: Washington's policy approach to strengthening the Latinx teacher pipeline. In C.D. Gist & T.J. Bristol (Eds.), *Handbook of research on Teachers of Color and Indigenous Teachers*. American Educational Research Association.
- Gist, C.D. & Bristol, T.J. (Eds.). (forthcoming, 2022). *Handbook of research on Teachers of Color and Indigenous Teachers*. American Educational Research Association.
- Gist, C.D., Garcia, A., & Amos, Y.T. (2021). An essential but overlooked workforce: Elevating the need to investigate the career development of paraeducators. *Journal of Career Development*.
- Hansen, M. & Quintero, D. (forthcoming, 2022). Policy risks and opportunities in attracting Millennials of Color into the teaching

profession. In C.D. Gist & T.J. Bristol (Eds.), *Handbook of research on Teachers of Color and Indigenous Teachers*. American Educational Research Association.

Ingersoll, R. & Merrill, L. (2017). *A quarter century of changes in the elementary and secondary teaching force: From 1987 to 2012*. National Center for Education Statistics.

Irvine, J.J. (1988). An analysis of the problem of disappearing Black educators. *Elementary School Journal*, 88 (5), 503–513.

Kim, A. Brewer, T.J., & Heilig, J.V. (forthcoming, 2022). Planting toxic seeds in fertile soil: The knowledge acquisition, achievement, and behavioral beliefs inculcated into Teach for America corps Members of Color. In C.D. Gist & T.J. Bristol (Eds.), *Handbook of research on Teachers of Color and Indigenous Teachers*. American Educational Research Association.

Nieto, S. (2005). Public education in the twentieth century and beyond:

High hopes, broken promises, and an uncertain future. *Harvard Educational Review*, 75 (1), 43–64.

Noonan, J. & Bristol, T.J. (2020). "Taking care of your own": Parochialism, pride of place, and the drive to diversify teaching. *AERA Open*, 6 (4), 1-12.

Putman, H., Hansen, M., Walsh, K., & Quintero, D. (2016). *High hopes and harsh realities: The real challenges to building a diverse workforce*. The Brookings Institution.

Takimoto Amos, Y. (forthcoming, 2022). "THAT test is stopping me from becoming a teacher!": Emotions, teacher licensure testing, and Latina/o teacher candidates. In C.D. Gist & T.J. Bristol (Eds.), *Handbook of research on Teachers of Color and Indigenous Teachers*. American Educational Research Association.

Washington State Professional Educators Standards Board. (2019). *Equity initiatives*. www.pesb.wa.gov/innovation-policy/equity-initiatives

Research studies to conduct

- **Interpretive studies:** Researchers can develop ethnographies and case studies that investigate the influence of particular educator diversity policies on the representation of Teachers of Color and Indigenous Teachers along the teacher development continuum — recruitment, preparation, retention, human resource development and induction supports, mentorship, professional development, pedagogical and leadership practices, and educational impact. They can examine the subjective experiences of teachers interacting with these policies using nondominant and decolonial methodologies, such as teacher testimonios, narratives, autoethnographies, journals, storytelling, and photovoice. They can create longitudinal studies that examine how teacher diversity educational policies — their initiation, implementation, conclusion, and aftermath — have affected the lived experiences of Teachers and Students of Color.
- **Design-based studies:** Researchers can design methodological interventions that explore past teacher diversity policy and how the successes and failures of such policies can inform policy solutions going forward. They can subsequently develop and test teacher diversity policy interventions designed to increase the representation and retention of Teachers of Color.
- **Effect studies:** Researchers can examine evidence of causal relationships among state, diversity, and federal teacher development policies (for example, online alternative certification programs, certification exams, micro-credential programs, loan forgiveness, incentive pay, affinity hiring, and placement groups) and variation in outcomes related to hiring rates; movement, attrition, and retention rates; student loan debt and income increases; type of schools and working conditions; outcomes on academic and nonacademic factors, and evaluation scores, promotion, and advancement. These studies would account for differences in preparation pathway, geographic regions, and intersectional identities.

Example: If the problem of practice at the state level is the high number of Teacher Candidates of Color and Indigenous Teacher Candidates who fail certification exams in comparison to white teacher candidates, and if these outcomes coincide with new certification testing requirements in state educational policy, then partners might develop interpretive and effect studies to determine which features and mechanisms of the certification policy are most closely associated with the disparate exam outcomes. On the basis of their findings, the partners may decide to develop and implement design-based policy interventions for Teacher Candidates of Color and Indigenous Teacher Candidates throughout the state to address these disparities. Possible research partners for this type of project may include state, district, and/or national boards of education, teacher policy groups, critical and social justice-oriented think tanks, and education and public policy scholars.