

Finding strategies to bring Teachers of Color and Indigenous Teachers into the profession

By Conra D. Gist, Travis J. Bristol, Margarita Bianco, & Ramon B. Goings

Across the United States, traditional university-based teacher preparation programs tend to enroll disproportionately large numbers of white students. In recent years, many of those programs have ramped up their efforts to diversify their enrollments. Further, a number of other pathways into the profession have become prominent, and advocates hope that some of them will bring more diverse populations into the teacher workforce. These include the many grow-your-own programs established by states and districts, which aim to recruit new teachers from the ranks of paraeducators and teacher aides (Abbate-Vaughn & Paugh, 2009); community activists (Skinner, Garretton, & Schultz, 2011), and high school students (Goings & Bianco, 2016). Further, they include various federally funded initiatives such as the Mini-Corps Teacher Assistant Program (which aims to recruit bilingual educators; Ginsberg, Gasman, & Samayoa, 2018); teacher residency programs (LiBetti & Trinidad, 2018); alternative certification programs (Gist, 2017), and programs that focus on increasing the number of men in the educator workforce (Jones, Holton, & Joseph, 2019; Waite, Mentor, & Bristol, 2018).

However, as it pertains to Teachers of Color and Indigenous Teachers, the research into these kinds of programs has aimed mostly to keep track of who participates in them to see which of them tend to enroll a particularly diverse population of teaching candidates. To date, relatively few studies have examined how those programs are *designed* and *implemented* to see how responsive they are to the needs, interests, and motivations of potential Teachers of Color and Indigenous Teachers.

Two important strands of research on the recruitment of Teachers of Color have recently emerged, one focusing on the recruitment of high school students and the other on

efforts by schools and districts to recruit college and university students enrolled in preservice teacher education programs. Six recent studies on recruitment, described at greater length in the *Handbook of Research on Teachers of Color and Indigenous Teachers* (Gist & Bristol, forthcoming, 2022), expand the research base in this area.

What the recent research shows

The first study focuses on a youth participatory action research (YPAR) project in which a group of high school Students of Color examines the best practices of highly effective educators nearby, while also studying racial injustices and inequities in both a local school district and across the United States. Researcher Van Lac finds that the students learned about concepts such as institutionalized racism, white privilege, and racialized tracking in public education, which both informed them about specific challenges they will face as teachers and also strengthened their resolve to enter the profession.

In another study, Brian Lightfoot and Terrenda White examine how a high school grow-your-own program engages Students of Color in reflecting on their own difficult educational experiences and researching inequities in their own schools using critical race theory (a conceptual framework that guides scholars in analyzing the ways in which the historical legacy of racism continues to affect various aspects of American life, including education). Further, participants learn about teaching strategies that aim to challenge unjust policies and practices, and they work with younger children as tutors and mentors. The researchers find that the program has led students to become significantly more motivated to pursue teaching careers and to view teaching as a means of

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. **MARGARITA BIANCO** is an associate professor in the School of Education and Human Development at the University of Colorado Denver and founder of Pathways2Teaching. **RAMON B. GOINGS** is an assistant professor in the language, literacy, and culture doctoral program at the University of Maryland, Baltimore County.



promoting societal change. Much like Lac, Lightfoot and White conclude that a promising way to interest high school Students of Color in teaching as a career is to give them opportunities to study their own schools and communities and identify specific inequities that ought to be challenged.

A number of recent studies of preservice teacher education also suggest that when faculty show genuine commitment to diversity and inclusion and when they explicitly define teaching as a means of pursuing social justice, they tend to be more successful in recruiting aspiring Educators of Color and motivating them to complete the certification process and apply for teaching positions.

Research by Jennifer Robinson and Carolina Gonzalez focuses on the recruitment of aspiring Teachers of Color into a traditional teacher education program. They explore what contributes to (and hinders) the success of these teaching candidates from an institutional and organizational perspective, and they analyze the factors that support or impede their recruitment into the program. It is not sufficient, they conclude, for colleges of education simply to state a commitment to social justice in their mission statements. Rather, that commitment must be evident in the ways faculty leverage and validate students' personal histories, advocate for Students of Color, and provide opportunities for the voices of marginalized populations to be heard. In addition, regardless of their own ethnoracial identity, faculty and staff must be culturally competent. Further, the researchers find that 3rd- and 4th-year teacher candidates of color who have a deep interest in teaching; who value inclusion, equity, and social justice, and who demonstrate leadership qualities are often effective peer mentors, serving as role models for 1st- and 2nd-year students and assisting with recruitment activities to attract more Students of Color to the teaching profession.

Kimberly Williams Brown and colleagues examine the recruitment of international Teachers of Color and document how their experiences gaining access to the profession offer a counternarrative to common portrayals of immigrant teachers. They report that U.S. public schools currently employ roughly 20,000 international teachers on temporary J-1 visas, recruited largely from Latin American, African, and Caribbean countries. These international Teachers of Color disprove common (and negative) assumptions about specific

immigrant groups, such as those describing women from the global south as money-seeking and easily replaceable. In fact, the researchers find, these teachers tend to have an enormously positive influence in U.S. schools, and as they navigate their immigration status while teaching, they often provide their local communities with powerful examples of effective advocacy and activism.

Focusing specifically on the recruitment of science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) Teachers of Color, a research study by Vincent Basile and Ricki Ginsberg examines the obstacles these aspiring teachers often face during their undergraduate studies, such as introductory courses that are designed to “weed out” students rather than provide them with support that would help them succeed. Such courses disproportionately harm Students of Color, derailing their plans to become STEM educators. Drawing from the larger evidence base on college student success, the researchers recommend that recruitment programs ensure aspiring STEM Teachers of Color will be provided with close-age peer mentors who can guide them through the transition from high school to college, from STEM college student to being hired as a STEM educator, and from novice to experienced STEM teacher.

Similarly, Jamaal Young and colleagues examine the recruitment and retention of STEM Teachers of Color, focusing specifically on the Robert Noyce Teacher Scholarship Program (NTSP), a federal initiative sponsored by the National Science Foundation. They find that individual NSTP program directors tend to express a strong desire to recruit Students of Color to become STEM teachers who will serve their local communities; show a commitment to cultivating those students' pedagogical and leadership knowledge, and have a successful track record. Young and colleagues add that federal programs can serve as effective mechanisms to recruit Teachers of Color and Indigenous Teachers when university and program leadership commit to supporting their pedagogical, leadership, and social-emotional needs during the preservice years.

Overall, the recent research has begun to clarify not just *how many* Teachers of Color and Indigenous Teachers have been recruited through various programs but, more importantly, what a high-quality recruitment program entails. Specifically, recent evidence suggests that high school pathways designed to recruit Teachers of Color should create opportunities for students to engage in curricular and pedagogical approaches that are community centered and provide avenues to challenge educational inequities. And preservice teacher education recruitment should provide a variety of support structures as teaching candidates progress through the program. These may include encouraging students to connect with students from school communities, providing mentors, and extending opportunities for teacher candidates to make sense of the historical legacy of racism in the United States by engaging in action research and social justice projects that investigate ways to address educational inequities.

Research topics to explore

- Consider theoretical frameworks that inform the design of effective recruitment programs focusing on Indigenous Teachers and Teachers of Color. This could include exploring the roles and impact of each of the important stakeholders (e.g., program directors, human resource officers, family members, and community members) on the hiring of Teachers of Color and Indigenous Teachers as well as the relationships that exist between and among recruitment strategies, selection models, and program structures.
- Explore the demographic profiles of Teachers of Color and Indigenous Teachers within and across geographic contexts and regions.
- Examine the various narratives, images, and messages used in recruitment materials that seek to attract aspiring Teachers of Color and Indigenous Teachers into preparation and certification programs.
- Study the variance in recruitment strategies related to program type (such as alternative certification, grow-your-own programs, residency programs, and traditional educator preparation) and disciplinary background (such as English language arts, science, mathematics, or art).
- Identify differences in selection and hiring practices that are designed to value the cultural assets and strengths of Indigenous Teachers and Teachers of Color.

What we don't know yet

While researchers have built a strong foundation of evidence in this area, the knowledge base still has a number of gaps. We need to learn more about the incentives that can bring more young people of color into the teaching profession and about the narratives and messages (for example, appealing to their desire to be heroes and saviors, to revitalize their communities, to pursue social justice, or to close achievement gaps) that those young people find most compelling and persuasive. Further, we know little, as yet, about the kinds of personal experiences, attributes, dispositions, and knowledge that programs highlight during their recruitment efforts, and which they emphasize when deciding whether to admit or reject applicants.

Nor do we know much, to date, about the ways in which teacher preparation programs can affirm and tap into the cultural assets that candidates of color bring with them from their communities, or whether recognizing those assets

might improve access for nontraditional students who've experienced barriers to entering the profession.

Implications for policy and practice

- Federal policy makers should create a national loan forgiveness policy for Teachers of Color and Indigenous Teachers.
- State policy makers should invest in culturally responsive teacher licensure assessments, allocate resources to recruit Teachers of Color and Indigenous Teachers, and put in place accountability mechanisms to measure how well their state is living up to its commitments.
- District-level policy makers should invest in racial diversity hiring training for school district human resource officers and school principals, and they should ensure the transparency of all data at each juncture of the hiring process — for example, who applied for a given position, who was interviewed, and who was hired.
- District-level human resource or talent recruitment offices should enter into formal agreements with their local grow-your-own programs to offer priority hiring agreements for qualified candidates. ■

References

- Abbate-Vaughn, J. & Paugh, P.C. (2009). The paraprofessional-to-teacher pipeline: Barriers and accomplishments. *Journal of Developmental Education*, 33 (1), 14-27.
- Basile, V. & Ginsberg, R. (forthcoming, 2022). STEM siren songs: A conceptual framework of the differential racialization of preservice science, technology, engineering, and mathematics teachers of color. In C.D. Gist & T.J. Bristol (Eds.), *Handbook of research on Teachers of Color and Indigenous Teachers*. American Educational Research Association.
- Brown, K.W., Beck, M., & Nganga, C. (forthcoming, 2022). Transnational feminist understandings of the neoliberal recruitment of international women teachers of color. In C.D. Gist & T.J. Bristol (Eds.), *Handbook of research on Teachers of Color and Indigenous Teachers*. American Educational Research Association.
- Ginsberg, A., Gasman, M., & Samayoa, A.C. (2018). "It's in your heart": How the California mini-corps program and Hispanic-serving institutions are transforming migrant student education. *Teacher Educator*, 53 (3), 244-262.
- Gist, C.D. (Ed.). (2017). *Portraits of anti-racist alternative routes to*

teaching in the U.S.: Framing teacher development for community, justice, and visionaries. Peter Lang.

Gist, C.D. & Bristol, T.J. (Eds.) (forthcoming, 2022). *Handbook of research on Teachers of Color and Indigenous Teachers.* American Educational Research Association.

Goings, R.B. & Bianco, M. (2016). It's hard to be who you don't see: An exploration of Black male high school students' perspectives on becoming teachers. *Urban Review*, 48 (4), 628-646.

Jones, R., Holton, W., & Joseph, M. (2019). Call me mister: A Black male grow your own program. *Teacher Education Quarterly*, 46 (1), 55-68.

Lac, V. (forthcoming, 2022). A teacher action research study on critical hope in a teacher pipeline program for minoritized youth. In C.D. Gist & T.J. Bristol (Eds.), *Handbook of research on Teachers of Color and Indigenous Teachers.* American Educational Research Association.

LiBetti, A. & Trinidad, J. (2018). *Trading coursework for classroom: Realizing the potential of teacher residencies.* Bellwether Education Partners.

Lightfoot, B.A. & White, T.C. (forthcoming, 2022). Critical pedagogy in a GYO program: Identity, sociopolitical development, and

transformational resistance in Latinx students' aspirations to teach. In C.D. Gist & T.J. Bristol (Eds.), *Handbook of research on Teachers of Color and Indigenous Teachers.* American Educational Research Association.

Robinson, J.J. & Gonzalez, C.E. (forthcoming, 2022). A place where people care: A retrospective and vision on recruiting and retaining teachers of color. In C.D. Gist & T.J. Bristol (Eds.), *Handbook of research on Teachers of Color and Indigenous Teachers.* American Educational Research Association.

Skinner, E.A., Garretton, M.T., & Schultz, B.D. (2011). *Grow your own teachers: Grassroots change for teacher education.* Teachers College Press.

Waite, S., Mentor, M., & Bristol, T.J. (2018). Growing our own: Reflections on developing a pipeline for male educators of color. *Journal of the Center for Policy Analysis and Research*, 1 (1), 148-166.

Young, J., Tholen, A., Ortiz, N.A., Harmon Jr., W.C., & James, M.C. (forthcoming, 2022). Recruiting teachers of color in science and mathematics for high need schools: Lessons learned from the Robert Noyce teacher scholarship program. In C.D. Gist & T.J. Bristol (Eds.), *Handbook of research on Teachers of Color and Indigenous Teachers.* American Educational Research Association.

Research studies to conduct

- **Interpretive studies:** Field-based observations, focus groups, and other methodologies — such as photovoice essays by Teachers of Color and Indigenous Teachers, testimonies and narratives, social dreaming sketches, and critical documentaries — can be used to explore a number of avenues into teaching. They might look at the stakeholders involved in the recruitment process; analyze the images, language, and placement of recruitment messaging in local, state, and national programs, and explore how teachers have experienced various recruitment and selection protocols. Further, we need to have a better understanding of the messages individuals of color receive about the teaching profession, from whom they receive these messages, and how those messages influence their desire or reluctance to enter the field.
- **Intervention studies:** Researchers and their partners can develop recruitment interventions for groups of Teachers of Color and Indigenous Teachers that are aligned to district, school, or community needs. These interventions can then be linked with a selection process and a teacher development instrument that assesses teachers' strengths, assets, and areas of growth before they enter the program and that tracks their progress as they matriculate through graduation.
- **Effect studies:** Researchers and their partners can examine the number of Teachers of Color and Indigenous Teachers recruited annually from different recruitment pathways. They can explore program completion rates; the time it takes to complete the program; the program teachers' placement in schools, and the impact of program teachers on student learning, parent engagement, and school culture. Large data sets collected at the district, state, and national organizational levels are recommended for these studies.

Example: If the problem of practice is the limited number of Indigenous Teachers entering the educator workforce in certain districts, then partners could design a series of interpretive studies to understand teacher education programs that produce significant numbers of Indigenous Teachers and the types of structures within those programs that could increase these teachers' representation and retention in the districts. Additional research partners for this type of project could include tribal colleges and universities, Indigenous cultural institutions grounded in the local community, and Indigenous parent and student organizations.