
RETENTION OF TEACHERS OF COLOR:



BACKGROUND, RECOMMENDATIONS, AND THE WISCONSIN CONTEXT

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KEY FINDINGS FOR BEST PRACTICES AND RECOMMENDATIONS

- Increased mentorship and belonging opportunities for teachers of color
 - Cohort models and affinity groups for new teachers of color
 - Intensive mentorship and coaching for new teachers that recognizes the difficulties of teaching in high poverty areas.
- Equity Audits
 - Combine metrics into tools that school and district leadership can use to address inequity
- Professional development for white teachers
 - Training white teachers to be culturally aware, reduce micro-aggressions, understand and move towards an anti-racist environment for teachers of color

INTRODUCTION

In the Americas, people have been locked in a struggle against colonialism and White supremacy since Europeans first arrived on these shores. In a modern context the institution of education, like all U.S. institutions, is inextricably linked with this history of exploitation and discrimination. This is true of the student body, where students of color face higher rates of punishment and higher likelihood of being tracked into special education pipelines or other programs. This is true for families of color where those who do not have the same resources and accumulated wealth and connections are much less likely to be able to attain higher education. It is also true on the side of the education professionals as well. Across the United States, teachers of color are less likely to be hired, more likely to be laid off (U.S., 2016), and face a higher rate of burnout due to microaggressions, discrimination and lack of institutional trust (Walker, 2012). From where do these realities stem? They are tied to historical policies which successfully furthered the project of white supremacy. They are also a product of more modern policy's failure to fully address the various sides of the problem so as to find solutions which can overcome the inertia of white supremacy as well as bend the arc of the education universe towards justice.

In order to discuss the modern situation as it applies to recruitment and retention of teachers of color it is important to examine the history. The modern goal is diversifying the ranks of teachers and to help educational institutions reflect the communities that they serve. But why is it necessary to do this? In modern terms, this issue can be traced back to the handing down of the *Brown v. Board of Education* decision in 1954. As districts were forced to integrate schools, it was often Black teachers who suffered. By 1972 the employment rate for Black teachers across the United States had declined by 31.8% (Thompson, 2019). This mass exodus of Black teachers from the classroom created a shortage which has never been fully rectified and a pattern which repeats during times of major reform or economic hardship across school districts (Harrison-Jones, 2007). All of this despite the data which shows that having Black teachers, and a more diverse teacher corps in general, improves student outcomes (Gershenson, et al., 2017).

To this day, this injustice has never been rectified. Similar modern events which have caused upheaval in the hiring and retention of teachers such as the 2008 recession or the COVID-19 pandemic have had a more severe impact on teacher diversity as teachers of color are more likely to be shuffled to different schools or laid off altogether. At this stage, despite nascent programs aimed at recruiting teachers of color, the number of teachers who identify as Black males, the most underrepresented demographic category, has gone down. This has significant effects for students of color as well; white students remain the only demographic category which can be assured of having teachers of their own race throughout their school experience. Given these truths, it is not enough to create programs that continually recruit more and more teachers of color without also addressing the issue surrounding the retention of teachers of color. For one, as structural racism within schools and districts goes unaddressed,

fewer graduates of color, informed by their experiences of racism within the schools they attended, are willing to become teachers. Perhaps more importantly, failing to direct policy work towards retaining education professionals of color risks wasting the human capital that our schools need to move forward.

In the face of these difficulties, our goal is to provide pathways toward racial equity in the teaching profession. Though the issues facing our teachers of color are vast and complex, we hope to show that a way forward is possible as long there is strong support from policymakers and school stakeholders.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The factors that lead to a teacher leaving the profession are many, and it can be immensely difficult to parse out the specifics of the process so that policy can be made to mitigate the effects. It can be even more difficult to gather the factors that lead to a teacher of color not persisting in the teacher workforce. While teachers of color are also experiencing the pressures that all teachers face, such as certification challenges, low wages for the required education levels, and challenging and stressful workplaces, the negative aspect of existing as a person of color in historically white institutions is additive and can even exacerbate the typical reasons that one decides they no longer wish to be a teacher. We attempt to address both typical reasons for attrition and factors that relate specifically to young teachers of color.

THE CERTIFICATION PIPELINE

One of the largest threats to the state of K-12 education in the United States is the shortage of teachers. In response to the drop in the number of teachers entering Educator Preparation Programs at accredited universities, many states have instituted plans to reform the pathways to earn the certification needed to teach. In response to their teacher shortage crisis, in 2019 Alabama authorized the Teacher Shortage Task Force to investigate ways to alleviate the effects of the teacher shortage and increase the number of young people entering the profession (ATQQR, 2020). One important recommendation that the taskforce gave was to increase the access to non-traditional pathways that can be used to enter the teaching profession, such as allowing state educator programs to receive credits for introductory courses from an expanded assortment of colleges and working with community college members to create teaching degree pathways that lower the cost of the teaching degree.

While these are admirable steps that are taken in a time of crisis there is research that shows that retention of these alternative pathways leads to higher attrition than traditional degrees. Guili Zhang and Nancy Zeller (2016) researched the relationship between teacher preparation and teacher retention. They found that, while in the short term the retention of teachers from traditional and alternative programs were similar, over the long-term teachers who earned their degree in an alternative program were less

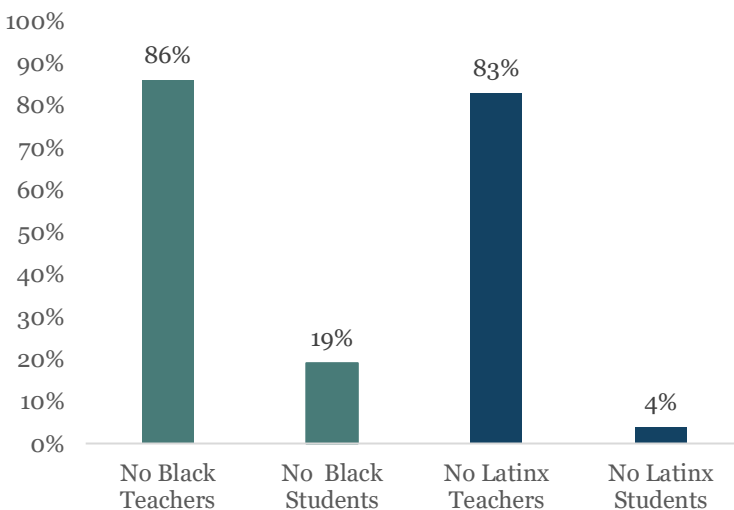
likely to remain in the teaching profession. They find that “the primary reason that lateral entry teachers are retained at a lower rate than regularly prepared.... teachers may be that they simply are not as well prepared for the classroom” (pg. 88). This should be at the forefront of policy makers minds as they increase access to lateral entries to the education workforce; good things can come of it, but only if the proper funds are invested in these programs that supply our youth with a real opportunity to succeed.

SPATIAL PLACEMENT OF TEACHERS OF COLOR

In many states, teachers of color are mostly living and working in urban high-poverty areas; Wisconsin is no different. Teacher education programs in these areas can educate their students in what to expect in working within high-poverty schools, but the incessant wear and tear involved with the daily exposure to poverty is a difficult thing to teach even for the best of programs. Freedman and Appleman (2008), in their study of teachers in high-poverty schools, found that it was absolutely crucial that educator programs prepare their student teachers not just for what they will face in the classroom, but also “offer students strategies for dealing with micropolitics, [and] integrate political savvy into the knowledge base for beginning teachers” (pg. 123).

When student teachers are able to learn not just how to educate the children in their classrooms, but also how to deal with the grueling realities of urban education, they are much more likely to remain in the classroom and in the teaching profession. With strong support from educator programs, we think students can retain the skills and have the support needed to fulfill their life goals.

Percent of Wisconsin Public Schools
with no Black/Latinx Teachers and
Students



THE WISCONSIN CONTEXT

In Wisconsin, a strategy for retaining teachers of color cannot be discussed without also discussing recruitment of teachers of color. Currently, the vast majority of teachers of color are employed within Milwaukee Public Schools (MPS), with 71% of all Black teachers and 39% of all Latinx teachers working in MPS (Jones, 2019). Outside of MPS,

only 0.6% of Wisconsin teachers are Black and 1.3% are Latinx. 86% of all Wisconsin

schools do not have any Black teachers and 83% do not have any Latinx teachers -- a stark contrast to student enrollment, where only 10 schools across the entire state (0.5% of all public schools in Wisconsin) do not enroll any students of color (Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction, 2021). Simply stated, many public schools across the state do not have teachers of color, particularly Black and Latinx teachers, to retain. Any effective program for many school districts in the state must pair a retention strategy with a recruitment strategy.

Despite the large need for recruitment of teachers of color in many districts, it would be a mistake to solely focus on recruitment in those districts. Retention strategies must be in place as teachers of color enter employment with a school district, as differences in the retention rate of teachers in public education by race/ethnicity of the teacher appear very early on in an educator's career. Research from the Wisconsin Educator Effectiveness Research Partnership (WEERP) at UW-Milwaukee found that the retention gap between white teachers and Black and Latinx teachers is established in the first two years of teaching (Jones, 2019). This makes having an effective teacher retention program in place that responds to the challenges that teachers of color face as teacher recruitment takes place vital to the success at long-term increases in representation of teachers of color across Wisconsin school districts.

TEACHERS OF COLOR LEAVING THE PROFESSION

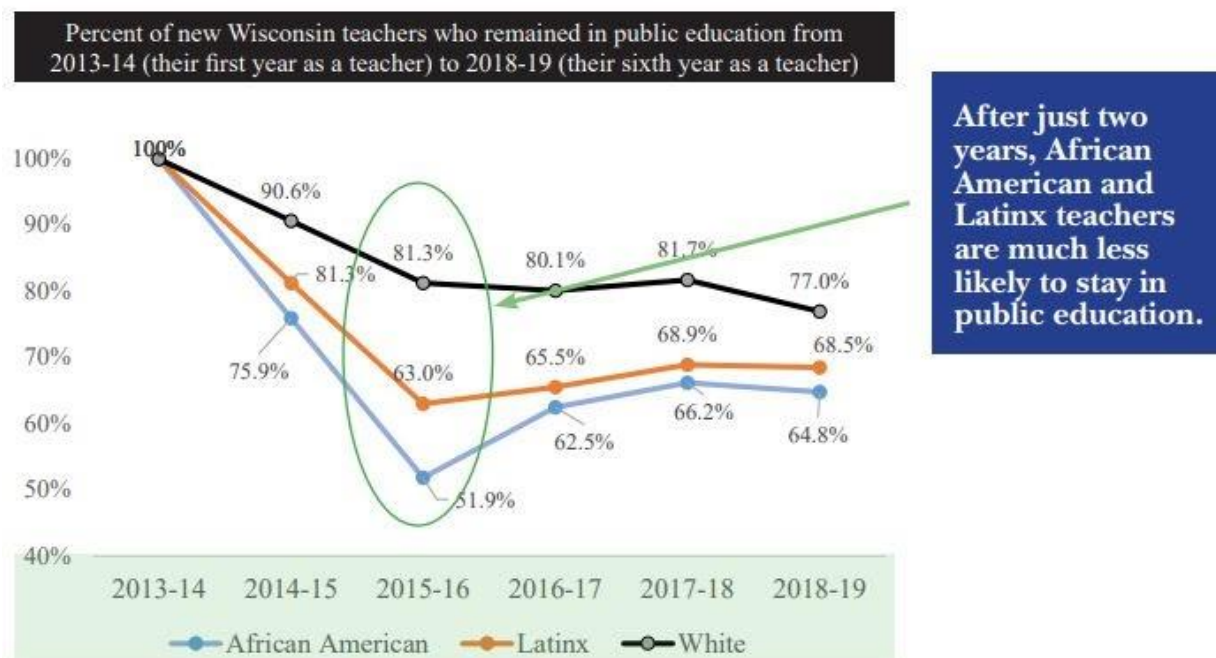


Chart from a Wisconsin Educator Effectiveness Research Partnership, UW-Milwaukee (Jones, 2019).

Why do teachers of color in Wisconsin leave the teaching profession? While the national literature on teachers of color certainly can apply to teachers in Wisconsin as

well, several organizations have focused on this question specifically within a Wisconsin context. Broader findings on teacher attrition in Wisconsin reveal several reasons for leaving, including the following: salary issues, working parent challenges, and job burnout due to both a lack of preparation for the challenges of teaching as well as changing demands and expectations of teachers including increased standardized testing, accountability, and performance-metrics (Yeado, 2016). While these reasons certainly can apply to teachers of color within the state, research focused specifically on retention to teachers of color in Wisconsin reveal additional reasons that are important to consider when developing teacher retention programs.

WEERP research on teacher retention revealed that trust with colleagues and leadership within a school is a defining characteristic of why teachers are not retained, and teachers of color indicate they have lower perceptions of trust with white teachers and white principals within their schools (Jones, 2019). In the same study on relational trust among teachers, WEERP also found that white teachers are less likely to stay in schools with a principal of color, more students of color, and more teachers of color. This chasm in trust between teachers of different racial and ethnic backgrounds is a necessary area of focus in any teacher retention program in Wisconsin. Without addressing this issue teachers will continue to leave due to a lack of belonging and job satisfaction within their workplaces. As detailed later in this report, issues of trust can be addressed through programs focusing on cultural competency, anti-racist practices, and understanding biases among white teachers in the state, which will serve to improve the environment for teachers of color.

BELONGING IN THE WORKPLACE

Additional research from the Wisconsin Policy Forum's recent report, *Open Doors*, identified additional issues that are challenges to retaining teachers of color including a lack of sense of belonging in their work environment, feelings of isolation, and a lack of mentorship and coaching in the early years of an educators' career (Chapman, 2021). This is consistent with findings from a group from Madison Teacher's Incorporated, MTI-CENTRS, whose work focuses on anti-racism and retention and success of staff of color in the Madison Metropolitan School District. Kerry Motoviloff, project lead for MTI-CENTRS, was quoted in a local news article on changes to district layoff and surplus policy, saying "It is not through surplus and layoff that we're losing our staff of color, it is through lack of support and lack of feeling belonging" (Beyer, 2021). Wisconsin Policy Forum's report recommends a focus on training in culturally responsive practices for all teachers, intensive mentoring and coaching for new teachers, and the creation of cohorts and affinity groups in order to create networks of mutual support for teachers of color.

An exploration of many school district websites within the state will find evidence of a mission statement or strategic plan that expresses a commitment to diversity. Far fewer have public-facing information available that backs up those statements with action around diverse teacher recruitment and retention. The Madison Metropolitan

School District (MMSD), provides two examples addressing the problem of retention of teachers of color from two different aspects. First, a recent change to the layoff/surplus policy is designed to reduce the chances that teachers of color, who typically have fewer years of service within the district, are subject to layoff or surplus when budgetary cuts come along. Previously, the district operated under a policy that was last in, first out, meaning teachers of color disproportionately were impacted by layoffs and surplusing. The new policy evaluates teachers on their culturally responsive practices, student learning objectives, seniority, additional language proficiency, and academic credentials (Girard, 2021). Second, the Opening Doors report from Wisconsin Policy Forum cites MMSD's work to tailor supports provided to first-year teachers based on specific challenges they might face, such as being a teacher of color in a school with students and staff that are predominately white. Additional support for second- and third-year teachers provides mentorship to teachers with veteran teachers within their own schools (Chapman, 2021). These two strategies approach the problem of retention of teachers of color from two avenues: a practical policy front and one that addresses a sense of belonging and support necessary for job satisfaction.

PROMISING PRACTICES AND RECOMMENDATIONS

There are promising possibilities in terms of policies which might be able to address the issue of retention of teachers of color. While implementation of these policies across the country and in Wisconsin lag behind those aimed at increasing recruitment, in recent years there has started to be an increase in schools and districts that are attempting to use policy to improve conditions which teachers of color face.

It should be noted that these strategies can and should be implemented as a part of broader teacher recruitment and retention efforts that are not specifically targeting teachers of color. Promising practices such as “grow your own” programs, student loan forgiveness programs, and programs designed to help with home purchases can be effective resources at retaining all teachers, including teachers of color. The recommendations below are additional, specific steps that can be taken to address retention issues that are specific to the experience of teachers of color.

MENTORSHIPS FOR TEACHERS OF COLOR

Lack of exposure to mentorship opportunities consistently ranks high amongst reasons why teachers leave the profession (Borman & Dowling, 2017). This is often seen even more so among teachers of color (Frank, et al., 2021). Crucially, among teachers of color, this means access to mentorship in three ways. First is a connection with colleagues who are further along in their career, which can be difficult if there are few or often no other teachers of color in a given school. Second is a supportive relationship with administrators or supervisors, which the literature suggests is a relationship that is often strained between teachers of color and white administrators. Third is opportunities to mentor young students in the way in which teachers choose. One of the biggest effects that Frank and her colleagues (2021), found was that teachers of color

often feel an extra burden because they are witness to the marginalization of students who they see as a younger version of themselves. For this reason, these teachers often seek opportunities to mentor young students, especially students of color. However, it is important that these education professionals not be thrust into mentorship opportunities of color without their input. This sort of involuntary racial labor can have the opposite effect on teacher burnout as well as negatively affecting relationships with school leaders.

EQUITY AUDITS

Another solution that may prove helpful in crafting policy which helps retain teachers of color is equity audits. Equity audits became popular during the past several decades as a way of applying quantitative analysis to social problems such as systemic discrimination. Skrla, McKenzie & Scheurich (2009), suggest that equity audits, “are designed to provide insight into, discussion of, and practical responses to systemic patterns of inequity...”. Equity audits involve comparing data across categories as a, “way of finding oppressive practices and structures in schools...looking at ways students, parents, & communities are marginalized” (Khalifa, 2018). For example, if your audit examined the rates of teacher attrition by racial demographic and compared it with the rates of finding affordable housing, you might find that teachers of color are forced to leave the classroom because of difficulty in finding suitable housing. Such examination points clearly at a policy path forward: to create policies focused on increasing opportunities to secure housing for teachers of color.

PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT FOR WHITE TEACHERS

The final recommendation which is necessary to include is professional development for white teachers. The need for white teachers to do the work of dismantling white supremacy is unambiguous if for no other reason than that they represent far and away the majority of education professionals in most school buildings. As a result, it becomes important to shift focus away from teachers of color and why they are leaving the profession and more closely examine their environment and what aspects about it affect teachers of color negatively. Policies which mandate training for white teachers on cultural competency, reducing and challenging micro-aggressions, fostering inclusivity and understanding biases can have a huge potential impact on the negative climate which causes so many educators of color to leave the classroom (Chapman, 2021).

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