Recruitment and Retention of Potential and Aspiring Educators of Color

Executive Summary

Dr. Larry Walker

Since its inception the National Education Association (NEA) has been committed to supporting members, affiliates and providing resources to improve public education. Recently, NEA has worked tirelessly to examine the teacher pipeline. This includes training, recruitment and retention of educators from diverse backgrounds. While the country continues to experience economic growth, the current trend may not be sustainable if we do not ensure students have access to teachers with similar lived experiences. For example, a recent research study suggests that Black students who have a Black teacher in elementary school are more likely to attend college. The statistic highlights how education change agents can influence the trajectory of student’s lives. It also reflects how much more work we need to do in public education. The teacher workforce does not mirror the current student population. Overall, we must consider the following question: “What can we do to create a paradigm shift?”

Currently, eighty percent of teachers are White. In contrast, public schools serve majority-minority populations from under-served communities. The teacher workforce gap is problematic and must be addressed through data collection, intensifying recruitment and retention efforts, working closely with traditional and non-traditional teacher training efforts and collaborating with policymakers, teachers, parents and other stakeholders. NEA recognizes that the problem cannot be solved overnight. It will require a consistent effort to eliminate barriers and create opportunities for a new cadre of educators. For instance, NEA is working with Education Preparation Programs (EPPs) including historically Black colleges and universities
(HBCUs) to improve Praxis scores. This project is one of many that seek to close the teacher training and diversity gap.

The Tool Kit represents NEAs continued commitment to providing solutions to complex problems. This initiative identifies successful models, developed by education experts, focused on strengthening the teacher pipeline. NEA believes this must include early identification of students, specifically, from under-served communities that would be ideal teacher candidates. Far too often, society does not nurture the interests of minority students in PreK-12 settings that have a passion for learning and teaching. Creating and replicating successful recruitment and training tools is the key to improving public education.

For this reason, NEA consulted with experts to identify programs that provide a template to improve early identification of perspective teachers (PreK-12) and support systems for individuals (college and reentering the workforce) considering or committed to a career in education. The Tool Kit represents one piece in a larger system to do the following:

- Identify data driven programs with a history of success.
- Provide a roadmap that can help NEA members and affiliates develop new initiatives.
- Encourage members to collaborate with post-secondary institutions; local, state and federal policymakers; community-based organizations and others interested in early identification of future educators.
- Supplement NEAs work via the Great Teaching and Learning report.
- Encourage PreK-12 students from ethnic and racial backgrounds to consider a career in teaching.

Throughout the Tool kit NEA identified several programs with a history of success that have become regional or national models. They include:

- Pathways to Teaching, University of Colorado, Denver
- Call Me MISTER, Clemson University
- Educators Rising
- NEA Teacher Certification Initiative (Praxis Training and Support) – please email educatorsupports@nea.org for more information
- Teacher Cadets
The Tool Kit includes snapshots of each program. In addition, NEA created a link that encourages readers to share stories/programs that we could add to a comprehensive list to share with others.

**How Did We Get Here?**

Increasingly the student demographics throughout the United States reflect a tapestry of eager learners from ethnic, racial and linguistic backgrounds. Currently, public schools educate predominantly students from diverse backgrounds yet the teacher workforce hasn’t caught up with the swift changes. Ensuring students have access to diverse teachers in classrooms, school buildings and the surrounding community is vital. For example, researchers highlighted that there is a connection between the race of the teacher and student expectations, especially for Black learners.¹ We cannot ignore the role race plays in student outcomes including high school completion rates. Thus, creating a sustainable pipeline that recognizes and respects cultural norms, utilizes an ant-deficit approach, ensures groups feel welcomed and is data driven is key.

Encouraging members and affiliates to discuss this issue has significance considering we are celebrating the 65th anniversary of *Brown v. Board of Education* decision. The court case was a seminal moment in U.S. history, which theoretically ended *de jure* segregation.² Unfortunately the nation continues to struggle to provide equitable learning opportunities for students from economically disadvantaged communities. Fortunately, NEA has been at the forefront of confronting these issues and advocating for systemic changes at the federal, state and local level.

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Increasingly NEA believes in allocating funding to innovative programs that close the teacher diversity gap. This Tool Kit is the first step in a series of initiatives that will be dedicated to turning the tide in education.

The challenges associated with increasing the pool of teacher candidates is an ongoing problem. For example, some traditional and non-traditional Education Preparation Programs (EPP) have witnessed a decrease of individuals enrolling in their programs. The troubling trend requires a nationwide call to action. Historically the NEA has raised concerns regarding the teacher diversity problem. Over the last few years more state education agencies (SEAs), local education agencies (LEAs) and stakeholders have joined the fight. However, advocates must consider what other steps can be taken to dramatically increase the number of teacher candidates, specifically from diverse communities. The table highlights the current dilemma for states including Louisiana which witnessed an overall decrease in traditional and non-traditional teacher candidates from 5,307 (2013-14) to 4,618 (2015-16).³

³ U.S. Department of Education
How do we solve the perplexing teacher education dilemma? NEA believes in identifying and supporting programs that are data driven with a history of success. Far too often, programs work in isolation which could hamper efforts to collaborate and adopt them in other states. While there are post-secondary institutions among others seeking to increase enrollment numbers for candidates from various subgroups, the problem persists. Some research suggests that the recruitment problem is related to issues including 1) how minority groups are treated as students in PreK-12 settings; 2) stereotypes and misconceptions and 3) Limited resources dedicated to addressing the problem. Additionally, other factors including teacher pay and societal perceptions may negatively impact recruitment efforts.⁴

**Which Factors Contribute to the Dearth of Teachers from Diverse Backgrounds?**

The lack of teachers from various groups did not occur in isolation. Increasingly researchers have investigated the factors that created the problem. The decrease in overall numbers of teachers has been particularly problematic for Black preservice and in-service teachers. Since the 1950s the drop in Black teachers has contributed to a teacher diversity gap that could take a generation to correct. Similarly, efforts to recruit/retain Latino/Hispanic, Native American, Asian-American teachers has not kept pace with the growth of the student population. Each group represents the future of America. Thus, investigating early efforts to attract future educators must continue to be a priority.

Over the last few years several new initiatives including Grown Your Own (GYO) programs have attempted to shift the focus in education. Convincing students from underserved and marginalized communities to consider a career in teaching is critical. This is particularly important because they experience stressors that are not related to their academic acumen. Race/Ethnicity continues to be an issue that complicates the learning environment for astute students seeking to navigate PreK-12 settings. For example, Black students are suspended and expelled at higher rates than White students. While LEAs throughout the nation have take some steps to rectify the issue, the problem persists. How can you assure students that had a challenging experience in school to choose teaching as a profession?

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It’s a complicated issue that requires additional administrator/teacher training and honest conversations regarding implicit and explicit bias. NEA has worked with partners throughout the country to discuss and identify solutions to this persistent problem. The nation needs more students to choose teaching. However, without teacher support, few students would consider working as an educator. Changing perceptions must include recognizing that students from diverse backgrounds are the key to the nation’s economic future.

Public schools serve majority-minority populations that need teachers with similar lived experiences. Unfortunately, only 20% of teachers are from diverse backgrounds (Black teachers-6.7%, Hispanic teachers-8.8%, Asian teachers-2.3%, Pacific Islander-0.2%, American Indian/Alaska Native-0.4%, Two or more races-1.4%). More concerning, less than 2% of teachers are Black males. In contrast, 80% are White. Changing the education landscape will require identifying traditional and non-traditional approaches. NEA believes this Tool Kit is another resource that can be utilize by members, affiliates and other stakeholders. Further, NEA is committed to continuing to meet with researchers and other experts to find new solutions to a challenging issue. The table highlights the need for more diverse teachers in public schools.8

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8 U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics
Teachers from Diverse Backgrounds have a Positive Impact on Student Success

The importance of having a teacher from the same racial background cannot be overstated. Students benefit from teachers with similar lived experiences that understand cultural norms, familial relationships and various other challenges. Recently, some researchers have measured the long-term impact having a Black teacher can have on Black student’s outcomes. For instance, one study determined that Black students were more likely to graduate from high school while another suggested they are more likely to attend college if they have a Black teacher. The findings indicate that issues relating to expectations have a profound impact on students’ academic career arc.

For this reason, identifying, training and retaining prospective teaching candidates is vital. Students in PreK-12 settings that become teachers are uniquely prepared to give back to their communities because they understand how to overcome deficit narratives. Studies highlight the important role teachers play in the lives of students, specifically from underserved
communities. Ensuring they have access to individuals that understand their experiences is critical for their academic and socio-emotional development. For this reason, determining how to close the teacher diversity gap is one of the most important issues in education.

NEA has dedicated resources, convened events and collaborated with researchers to find an answer to this complicated problem. The organization recognizes that solving the issue is a long-term effort that requires work beyond the status quo. We need innovative thinkers with ideas/frameworks rooted in the experiences of the groups they serve. As a nation, ignoring the findings from the aforementioned studies will create an endless loop. Each year colleges, school districts and policymakers will lament how much work is needed to change the landscape, without much success. For this reason, dramatic changes must take place to protect the future of Americans youth.

NEA is proposing a multi-pronged approach to examining and solving a complex challenge. It’s important to note that the issue of teacher diversity doesn’t solely impact students from diverse backgrounds. Research suggest White students also benefit from having teachers from different communities. Strengthening the minority teacher pipeline is a national issue that school districts from rural, suburban and urban school districts must solve. Shifting demographics, global realignment and fewer restrictions on travel have changed the way we communicate and learn. The United States must remain at the forefront to transform public education, but this can only take place if we meet the needs of minority and underserved students.

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The Long-Term Implications for the Teacher Diversity Shortage

Frequently policymakers and corporate leaders raise concerns regarding preparing students for the global economy. The concerns reflect growing apprehension among various industries that the U.S. could fall behind other nations in critical disciplines including STEM.\(^\text{11}\) Avoiding a downward spiral must include recruiting and training a new cadre of educator leaders that reflect the changing demographics. Historically Americans associated an influx of immigrants as an issue that only impacts urban communities. However, rural and suburban neighborhoods have witnessed dramatic changes that require immediate solutions.\(^\text{12}\) This includes hiring teachers from linguistic backgrounds that students and parents can communicate concerns and/or challenges.

According to the U.S. Census Bureau the country will become majority-minority by 2044.\(^\text{13}\) For some the figure may be startlingly but the shift began years ago and will continue to shape the nation. Consequently, NEA believes the time to change district and school policies regarding early identification of teacher candidates is now. Students excel when they have teachers with strong content knowledge, high expectations and the ability to relate the material to student’s prior knowledge. Moreover, they benefit from relationships with educators that value cultural contributions and understand community challenges. The current teacher recruitment model must be fixed. If we continue to neglect the diversity dilemma there could be serious consequences.


This could include the U.S. losing its place as an economic superpower and groups from various nations choosing other places to bring their expertise. Fortunately, the NEA in addition to post-secondary institutions, school districts and stakeholders are committed to creating a new path that addresses the diverse teacher shortage. A strong nation includes a public education system that is inclusive, diverse and focused on systemic change. For this reason, this Tool Kit includes successful programs that can be used as a template to change the tide.

**National Models**

NEA is committed to identifying innovative programs at the forefront of education change. Throughout the U.S. there are post-secondary institutions, non-profit organizations and other programs focused on addressing the teacher diversity problem. Like the NEA, each stakeholder recognizes that strengthening the teacher pipeline is critical to preparing students for the global economy. Moreover, having a diverse workplace is consistent with democratic principles that ensure everyone is treated fairly and has the opportunity to succeed. Several programs including Pathways2Teaching, Call Me MISTER, Educators Rising among others are making a difference in education.

**Program: Pathways2Teaching**

**Website: [http://www.pathways2teaching.com/](http://www.pathways2teaching.com/)**

The program is the brainchild of Dr. Margarita Bianco, Associate Professor, University of Colorado, Denver. Dr. Bianco is an advocate for social justice and focused on strengthening the minority teacher pipeline. NEA is partnering with Pathways to teaching as part of the [Grow Your Own Collective](http://www.growyourown.org/). Since 2010 the initiative has provided opportunities for 11th and 12th grade students to enroll in a concurrent program. Students explore justice issues while earning college
credit. The program fosters a sense of community while encouraging the next generation of educators to make a difference. Pathways2Teaching created the template for other Grow Your Own (GYO) programs to follow. This includes developing student-centered principles that include the following: 1) Critical Lens/Pedagogy; 2) Inclusion; 3) Promote Teaching as an Act of Social Justice; 4) College Access and Readiness; 5) Mentors and Role Models and Family and Community.

Dr. Margarita Bianco, Associate Professor, University of Colorado, Denver

“For many students of color, schools do not always feel welcoming or safe. One only needs to examine national or state data by race, ethnicity and socioeconomic status to see the disproportionate rates of school disciplinary actions, suspensions, special education placements, and lower graduation rates for students of color to better understand the level of disenfranchisement often felt by these students. So how do we encourage students of color to come back to those very spaces as teachers? The marginalization students experience can become part of the curriculum and the catalyst for helping them understand how they can disrupt the inequities they have experienced.”

The comments highlight the importance of recognizing the lived experiences of underserved and marginalized communities while developing an asset-based approach. Participants have the chance to work with elementary school students to develop critical skills including communication, patience and solidarity. Because of Pathways2Teaching’s success jurisdictions throughout the nation have sought to replicate the program. Dr. Bianco’s is leading a data driven initiative that encourages students from diverse neighborhoods to teach while earning college credit. The program is a vital piece in the teacher preparatory pipeline.
Developed by Dr. Roy Jones the Call Me MISTER program seeks to increase the number of teacher candidates from diverse backgrounds to work in underserved schools. Throughout the program’s history, Dr. Jones has been credited for inspiring other colleges to replicate Clemson’s success. For example, several post-secondary institutions including Claflin University, South Carolina State University, Winthrop University and others have successfully recruited and trained diverse teachers.

The MISTER framework has inspired school districts, non-profit organizations and colleges to develop alternate programs that specifically focus on minority students. This is important because of the small number of teachers from various subgroups that serve in PreK-12 settings. Further, males of color benefit from supportive instructors/mentors and a community centered approach that allows participants to give back to school districts eager to hire them after graduation.

Recruiting, training and supporting diverse teacher candidates is paramount. They offer unique perspectives on important topics and have a strong content background. Since it’s creation the Call Me MISTER program has been recognized nationally for developing a new generation of change agents. Graduates excel in public schools and dispel misconceptions and stereotypes about certain groups. Furthermore, some participants have transitioned into leadership roles in school districts throughout the country. Considering the nation’s swift student demographic shift, initiatives like MISTER will continue to play an important role in diversifying the teacher workforce.
Program: Educators Rising

Website: https://www.educatorsrising.org/what-we-offer/edrising-academy-curriculum

Creating a network that allows aspiring teachers to connect with individuals with similar interests is critical. Educators Rising offers a free network that brings together students and mentors that participate in school-based educator focused programs. NEA co-developed the Educator Rising Standards and members participated on the curriculum development. According to Educators Rising there are more than 43,000 participants, which includes a significant percentage of students from diverse communities. In addition, several states have affiliates that encourage students to choose education as a career.

Dr. Shayla Cornick, Director, Educators Rising, Phi Delta Kappa International

“Educators Rising is transforming how America develops aspiring teachers. Starting in high school, the national network serves as a pipeline for talented, diverse educators, and offers national standards, teacher-developed curriculum, and a national conference that emphasizes leadership development and fundamental teaching practices that are critical for aspiring teachers.”

Educators Rising creating a platform that offers free networking opportunities for aspiring teachers. This is critical considering the national decrease in teacher candidates. Initiatives including the EdRising Academy Curriculum is a tool that school districts can utilize to focus on various teaching practices for high school students. The curriculum is flexible and allows districts to alter the completion timeline to fit local needs. Offering student centered activities that encourage aspirants from minority communities to consider teaching as a career.
choice is vital; far too often students from some groups don’t have positive experiences because of unhealthy school environments.

**Program: NEA Teacher Certification Initiative (Praxis Training and Support)**

NEA has convened several meetings with stakeholders from historically Black colleges and universities (HBCUs), affiliates and other institutions to identify programs that are improving minority student performance on the Praxis exam. This includes collaborating with states including Mississippi and Louisiana. Ensuring students from minority communities have the support systems in place to take and pass the test is important. NEA’s work includes providing funding and technical assistance to stakeholders seeking solutions to complicated problem.

Dr. Suzanne Harris, Coordinator, The Teaching and Learning Center

"*Louisiana Association of Educators shares NEA’s commitment to increasing teacher diversity in the schools. NEA provides quality resources like PRAXIS Test Prep training that help us to support minority teachers. We have helped hundreds of teachers on their path to certification."

For instance, NEA’s support allowed Louisiana to host trainings with 8 local associations throughout the state. Furthermore, the Louisiana Association of Educators sponsored training events in 6 school districts. Additionally, the association oversaw 56 leadership opportunities for members (facilitators) and worked with more than 200 participants.

**Program: Teacher Cadets**

**Website:** https://www.teachercadets.com/teacher-cadets-overview.html
Like Pathways2Teaching the Teacher Cadets program seeks to recruit, encourage and train a new cadre of future educators. Since the program was established in South Carolina in 1985-86 it has a strong record of producing quality educators. For instance, more than 60,000 students have participated in the program. High school students can enroll in a dual credit course and learn valuable lessons.

The Teacher Cadet program is important because it creates opportunities for students, especially students from diverse backgrounds. Identifying talented students in high school is the key to preparing them for a career in education. The success of the program has encouraged other states to adopt the framework. For instance, Colorado replicated the program to serve students throughout the state. Programs that can be developed in other states with data driven evidence can help solve the teacher diversity dilemma.

**Recommendations**

- Creating healthy PreK-12 school ecosystems that encourage students to consider a career in education.

Far too often, students from diverse backgrounds must navigate challenges in school settings that could impact their career choice. For example, Black and Latino students are expelled and suspended at higher rates than White students. If schools don’t create environments where students feel valued and welcomed they won’t choose education as a profession. Moreover, districts must ensure administrators, teachers and auxiliary staff have received comprehensive training on explicit, implicit bias and culturally relevant pedagogies.

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Public schools can become incubators for future educators, but they have to examine policies, procedures and perceptions that hinder opportunities for students from diverse communities. We need to ensure more students want to become teachers and contribute to their neighborhoods. The current model is not sustainable. Students from ethnic, racial and linguistic backgrounds are the future of our nation. Thus, school districts must adopt a proactive approach that encourages all students to learn.

- Changing the anti-deficit narrative that students from various subgroups don’t care about learning/improving their communities.

Frequently the experiences of minority students are framed utilizing deficit narratives. This includes stereotypes that they cannot excel because of family and/or neighborhood challenges. While diverse communities may encounter more challenges than others it doesn’t preclude students from improving their neighborhoods. Students are not responsible for systemic economic, education, housing or political barriers. The success of programs including Call Me MISTER, Teacher Cadets and Pathways2Teaching highlight the success of programs that are student centered.

Furthermore, each program empowers students to work in their communities to solve complex issues. Pathways2Teaching is centered within a social justice framework that gives students the tools to challenge economic, social and political barriers. Encouraging students through teaching to impact their communities is a sustainable model if we fund innovative programs.

- Teachers are a critical factor in facilitating the learning and academic achievement of all students regardless of their race, ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, religion, language, socioeconomic status, etc.

The nation is built upon principles including fairness and acceptance. Teachers are often
students first experience interacting in a structured environment. They model behaviors that students seek to emulate, which are consistent with the school culture. However, when teachers dismiss the importance of certain groups they don’t feel valued or welcomed. Embracing diversity is the key to eliminating barriers that hamper opportunities for certain groups.

Teachers that exhibit behaviors that exclude individuals from diverse backgrounds risk alienating the next generation of educational leaders. Fortunately, some public school teachers are taking the lead by encouraging students to consider education as a career by modeling positive behaviors.

➢ The importance of social justice and creating culturally responsive classrooms.

Increasingly school districts are providing culturally responsive training to teachers in PreK-12 settings. Ensuring teachers value the contributions of other groups while creating a healthy classroom environment is important. Nationally urban, rural and suburban school districts are serving students from various ethnic, racial groups and countries that value certain customs and beliefs.

NEA has worked with affiliates to ensure they have the resources to support creative programs that are centered within the experiences of students. Valuing norms allows teachers to introduce concepts including social justice that empower students to change the surrounding community. Programs including Pathways2Teaching use social justice to elicit interest from students from diverse backgrounds to become educators. Using social justice allows students to feel invested and prepared to change their career trajectory.

➢ Grow Your Own (GYO) programs.

Increasingly post-secondary institutions, school districts and non-profit organizations
are developing GYO programs to recruit and support students in high school. This includes dual enrollment opportunities and site visits to local schools. Exposing high school students to the benefits of teaching including serving the community is a valuable tool.

However, it is important to ensure the programs are data driven and mirror the success of Teacher Cadets and similar initiatives. NEA is committed to supporting GYO programs that are closing the teacher diversity gap. Further, we are working closely with stakeholders to identify new teacher diversity projects that encourage students to pursue a career in education.

➢ **Student loan debt.**

Nationally, debt has a debilitating impact on students, specifically from minority and underserved communities. Disproportionately students from underserved communities have to incur college costs that negatively impact their ability to save. Thus, it is imperative that national collaborators work closely with federal and state policymakers to support sensible loan forgiveness and repayment programs. NEA has been at the forefront advocating for policies that would allow students to choose teaching as a career without worrying about high student loan costs.

Through the NEA Student Program individuals can learn more about their options including access to relief resources. NEA believes in providing students with important information before they go into debt. Although there is an array of forgiveness programs we must do a better job ensuring pre-service teachers have enough information to make an informed decision.