Facing the Rising Sun: Black Teachers' Positive Impact Post-*Brown*

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This year, 2024, marks the 70th Anniversary of the landmark court decision in education which sought to end legal segregation, *Brown v. Board of Education*. At the time, the hope was that ending segregation would address the vast and deep inequities in educational resources by race that had long been the legacy of schooling in the United States. Getting to the *Brown* decision was a long, hard battle, fought by civil rights attorneys, but also by educators, social psychologists, and members of the Black community—parents and students. And yet, despite the hopes for resource equity and higher quality education for Black students, inequities by race still plague our education system, and the promises of *Brown* remain substantially unfulfilled.

This paper is a part of a series, titled *Brown* at 70: Reflections and The Road Forward. The series consists of nine papers by leading scholars of educational equity, and each takes an honest look at the progress since *Brown*, documenting the shifts over time on key aspects of education including segregation levels of schools across the country, achievement trends in relation to policies and practices over time, the diversity of the teaching force, access to resources, the role of Black scholars and community activism, and the relationship between democracy and education. Taken together, the set of papers offers both an historical look at the impacts of the *Brown* decision, and, importantly, also offers guidance for the road ahead—promising policies, practices, and directions for the schools we need.

The cover art for this series is a reproduction of the Jacob Lawrence painting from 1960, *The Library*, which depicts the library as a vibrant learning setting for Black community members, and signifies the important of reading, learning, and education in the Black tradition.

— **Na'ilah Suad Nasir, Spencer Foundation President**
   Linda Darling-Hammond, Learning Policy Institute President

Abstract

This chapter begins by characterizing the current sociopolitical moment in U.S. race relations, 70 years after the *Brown v. Board of Education* decision, as the "Second Nadir." It then centers the historic and current role Black teachers have played in interrupting anti-Black beliefs in their classrooms as one effort, among many, to actualize the American Project: an inclusive multi-ethnoracial democracy in which the government works actively to remove structural barriers to ensure all persons have equal opportunity to move from the margins to the center. The chapter reviews the large body of qualitative and quantitative research on Black teachers' positive impact on the schoolbased academic and social outcomes of Black students, students of color, White students, and White teachers. Given Black teachers' positive impact on all students, the chapter highlights changes in enrollment trends of Black teachers in preparation programs and in U.S. public schools from the *Brown* decision to the present. The chapter ends by identifying federal, state, and local policy and practice efforts to recruit, develop, and retain Black teachers.

Sing a song full of the faith that the dark past has taught us, Sing a song full of the hope that the present has brought us; Facing the rising sun of our new day begun, Let us march on 'til victory is won.

— **James Weldon Johnson**[1]

Introduction

The question "What is the importance of Black teachers in the 21st century?" is seemingly rhetorical, and yet particularly relevant given that scholars have termed this moment in U.S. history, 70 years after the *Brown v Board* decision, the Second or New Nadir of race relations in the United States.[2] This naming is in response to Rayford Logan, who in 1954 characterized as "the Nadir" the period, after Reconstruction through the early 1900s, in which anti-Black racism was on public display, most notably through the rise of the Ku Klux Klan, the Supreme Court's 1896 *Plessy* ruling that sanctioned racial segregation, and Southern states' rescinding of voting rights.[3]

The current sociopolitical climate is one in which pundits[4] and policymakers[5] have publicly shared their playbook to push back against Black social and economic progress. Individuals and governmental institutions have presented affirmative action as reverse discrimination; enacted state and local legislation to ban books that centered the contributions of Black Americans (see Florida's House Bill 1467[6]); legislated against diversity, equity, and inclusion policies and practices in both the public and private sectors; coordinated the forced resignation of Harvard University's president Claudine Gay, a Black woman[7]; increased voter suppression in predominantly Black communities[8]; and ruled in the Supreme Court to end affirmative action policies in higher education. These extensive examples are clear and present indications that we are in a Second Nadir.

As many of the essays in this series note, Black teachers were often the community members whose clarion calls about the assault on Black Americans' lives and liberties spurred a generation of Black students to demand that this country work on bringing to fruition the American Project: an inclusive multi-ethnoracial democracy in which the government works actively to remove structural barriers to ensure all persons have equal opportunity to move from the margins to the center. Black teachers served as an important source of knowledge and supported their students to understand the role of racism in shaping Black people's experiences. Schools staffed by Black teachers and administrators, in turn, were places to strategize and receive moral and practical support in the fight for equity. Black educators have taken part in the freedom struggles in this country, both as educators and individuals. However, the work of Black teachers has a cost.

In this current moment, a Second Nadir, Black teachers have one of the highest turnover rates among all groups of teachers. According to the most recent data from the U.S. Department of Education, Black teachers and Native American teachers were the subgroups of teachers whose percentage had the largest declines when compared to other groups of teachers.[10] Numerous circumstances account for this trend. Black teachers serve in the schools with the most administrator turnover and the least fiscal resources with which to do their work.[11] Black teachers are often asked by their colleagues to serve a multiplicity of roles to their students, such as educator, but also discipline enforcer and cultural translator.[12]

The working conditions of teachers, and Black teachers in particular, are related to these trends. These pressures create the stressful and poorly compensated working conditions in which Black teachers find themselves.

Over the past 60 years, one consistent finding from the research on Black teachers stands out: Black teachers have positive impacts on the academic, social, and emotional outcomes for all students. In this chapter we draw attention to the extensive body of qualitative and quantitative research on Black teachers' impact for Black students as well as all students. We then present trends in Black teachers' representation in the workforce post-*Brown*. Next, we share more recent research on current issues related to recruiting and retaining Black teachers. We end by identifying federal, state, and local policy and practice efforts that can inform a comprehensive set of policies to recruit, develop, and retain Black teachers. Finally, it is important to note that as we draw attention to the importance of Black teachers for all children in U.S. public schools, simply being a Black teacher is not enough. As the research evidence below makes clear, Black teachers are skilled professionals who think deeply about their practice and how to make their practice relevant and rigorous to their students.[13]

Qualitative Impact of Black Teachers for Black Student Success

Researchers have long documented the impact, or the transformational role, skilled and caring Black teachers have on Black students' lives[14], a point underscored by Ladson-Billings in this series. Historians have described how Black teachers and administrators in segregated schools before the *Brown* decision supported and prepared their Black students to navigate a society that was hostile to their very existence.[15] Black students in de jure racially segregated schools in Washington, D.C., Beaufort, North Carolina, Little Rock, Arkansas, and Louisville, Kentucky, recounted how their Black teachers provided them with a schooling characterized by educational excellence in underresourced publicly funded schools.[16]

Moreover, education historians Vanessa Siddle Walker and Jarvis Givens, through archival analysis, have drawn attention to the mechanisms used by Black teachers to support their Black students' academic and social and emotional learning in de jure segregated schools before *Brown*. Siddle Walker notes that Black teachers in the South taught rigorous curriculum, maintained high expectations, and consistently reminded their Black students that they had an innate capacity to succeed. As Daisy Durrah, a Black North Carolinian who attended segregated schools, recounted her Black teachers saying, "You can do anything you want to if you try hard enough. Not because you're Black necessarily, but because you're you."[17] (Siddle Walker, 1996, p. 151).

While some of the research on the impact of Black teachers on their Black students examines the schooling experiences in the South during de jure segregation, before the *Brown* decision, a similar body of research has underscored the importance of Black teachers for the success of Black students in the North during what continues to be de facto segregation, post-*Brown*.[18] This research, often centered in urban centers, describes how Black teachers, like their peers in the South, created learning environments that supported their Black students' academic success and social and emotional learning.[19] During the late 1960s in the Ocean Hill-Brownsville area of Brooklyn in New York City, a predominantly Black and Puerto Rican community, Black parents, community activists, and administrators described how Black teachers held higher expectations for their Black students when compared to their White teacher colleagues.[20] Similarly, in northeastern urban centers such as Philadelphia[21] and Boston[22] as well as in Midwestern cities like Chicago[23], researchers have documented how, in the 1970s and 1980s, Black teachers organized their classrooms to support Black and Latine students' sociopolitical development and learning.

Michele Foster's 1997 book *Black Teachers on Teaching* builds on the burgeoning literature of the late 20th century. In this work, she draws attention to the practices that Black teachers employed to create the classroom conditions that supported student learning. Foster draws on the life histories of 20 veteran and novice Black teachers. One novice teacher, Leonard Collins, describes how he challenged the prescribed curriculum when teaching about Christopher Columbus "discovering" America: "[The textbook] does not discuss the disease and pestilence that they brought over from Europe. I have students examine that same historical event from but from a different perspective. I present an alternate perspective and let the students come to their own conclusions."[24] Black teachers like Collins have organized their classrooms to support rigor and relevance in service of student learning.

More contemporary scholarship on Black teachers continues to underscore their qualitative impact on their Black students.[25] Researchers have documented how Black teachers' redesign of their content enables the enactment of culturally sustaining practices to increase engagement and learning.[26] Black teachers draw on their Black students' lived experiences to create classroom environments that center and celebrate Blackness[27] and center and celebrate politicized care.[28] Black teachers, who continue to work in schools that have been underresourced by state and local governments, also support their students' sociopolitical consciousness.[29]

In response to the learning environments Black teachers create, Black students describe how their Black teachers create schooling environments that center care and attention to their social and emotional well-being.[30] McKinney de Royston and colleagues capture how one Black student's experience with a Black man teacher shows care for his social and emotional learning: "He taught us, like it's better to let out stuff than hold in stuff…like it's better to cry to let out your feelings."[31]

While Black students believed that all their teachers had the capacity to care for them, they also believed that Black teachers' demographic congruence meant that their Black teachers could also relate to their experiences navigating the world.[32]

In addition to believing that their Black teachers cared for them, Black students also pointed to these teachers' expectations that students meet high academic standards.[33] Goings and Bianco's interviews with Black students capture the specific practices their Black teachers used to maintain rigor. One Black student reflected on their experience with Ms. Bailey, a Black woman teacher:

> Like Ms. Bailey has pushed me but she's a teacher of color who I can say in my whole life has pushed me to the college level. I can turn something in and she can be like this isn't college work. This needs to be redone. She's one of the only teachers I know who will push me to do that.[34]

For Black students, Black teachers' added value is not only evident in seeing these teachers as role models, but also experiencing the rigor, relevance, and care extended towards them.[35]

Qualitative Impact of Black Teachers for All Students

While there is a large body of research on the qualitative impact Black teachers have in the lives of their Black students,[36] there is less research in this area that explores how students who are not Black experience their Black teachers. One possible reason for the dearth of research could be that the hyper-ethnoracial segregation of teachers and students in U.S. public schools (as Noguera and Noguera's paper in this series notes) makes it challenging for researchers to gather qualitative data in this area. Another explanation is that qualitative researchers continue to center Black students' experiences with Black teachers, with less attention, to date, to understanding how students who are not Black perceive their Black teachers. Nonetheless, scholars have underscored the importance of Black teachers for all students, particularly White students. Such sentiments were captured in the Carnegie Forum's 1986 analysis of what students who are not Black lose when they do not have opportunities to be taught by a Black teacher:

> The race and background of their teachers tells [sic] them something about authority and power in contemporary America. These messages influence children's attitudes towards school, their academic accomplishments and their views of their own and others' intrinsic worth. The views they form in school about justice and fairness also influence their future citizenship.[37]

Approximately 32 years later, Gloria Ladson-Billings once again raises the urgency and underscores the importance of White children learning from Black teachers.

> It is important for White students to encounter Black people who are knowledgeable and hold some level of authority over them. Black students ALREADY know that Black people have a wide range of capabilities. They see them in their homes, their neighborhoods, and their churches. They are the Sunday School teachers, their Scout leaders, their coaches, and family members. But what opportunities do White students have to see and experience Black competence? [38]

Given this sociopolitical moment, our Second Nadir, White children need skilled Black teachers who can interrupt their anti-Black beliefs[39] as one effort, among many, to actualize the American Project. A limited number of studies investigate perceptions of Black teachers by students of other races and ethnicities. Carey explores Black and Latino young men high schoolers' perceptions of the pedagogies of their Black and Latino men teachers. In one instance, a Latino student reflects on the impact of his Black man teacher: Lucas, whose parents were born in El Salvador, describes Mr. Webber's class as "Engaging. You learn. It's not boring, man. You learn. You're supposed to have, you have group discussions with your table. Mr. Webber, he adds humor to it. He's funny, man. And it's fun, man."[40] Lucas, like his peers, describes how a Black teacher leverages humor to engage students. Given the limited number of empirical articles in this area, future qualitative studies should examine how students who are not Black perceive their Black teachers. As we highlight below, a growing body of quantitative research measures Black teachers' impact on their students who are Black and of other ethnoracial groups.

Quantitative Impact of Black Teachers for Black Student Success

Over the last 50 years, there has been a clear body of quantitative research that finds that Black teachers have higher academic and social and emotional expectations of their Black students when compared to teachers of other ethnoracial groups.[41] An analysis of surveys administered to Michigan teachers in the late 1970s found that when compared to White teachers, Black teachers were more likely to expect that their Black students would enter and complete college.[42] Subsequent studies in school districts in urban centers such as Baltimore, Maryland, and Rochester, New York, found that when compared to their White peers, Black teachers hold higher academic expectations of their Black students.[43] More recent studies have analyzed national data sets and corroborated these early findings.[44] For example, one analysis of the Early Childhood Longitudinal Study-K: 1998, a nationally representative sample of U.S. kindergardeners through 5th graders and their teachers, found that Black teachers, when compared to other teachers, had higher perceptions of Black students' math and reading abilities.[45]

Using this same data set, Grissom and Redding found that Black students were more likely to be assigned to gifted and talented programs when their teachers were Black compared to when their teachers were not Black.[46] This pattern persists through high school: An analysis of the National Longitudinal Study, a nationally representative study of U.S. 10th graders, found that Black teachers had higher expectations about Black students' potential educational attainment than teachers from other ethnoracial groups.[47]

Beyond a greater belief in Black students' academic and social and emotional potential, Black teachers, when compared to their colleagues, rely less on exclusionary discipline practices towards Black students than teachers of other races.[48] One of the initial quantitative studies of state-level (North Carolina) administrative data found that when Black elementary, middle, and high students had a Black teacher they experienced less exclusionary discipline than students taught by a White teacher.[49] These findings on the reduced likelihood of Black students' suspension when matched to a Black teacher also extend to local school districts. An examination of a decade of data in the country's largest school district, New York City, found that assignment to a Black teacher decreased the likelihood of suspension for Black elementary students compared to Black students assigned to teachers who are not Black.[50] Hayes et al.'s more recent study of Black middle and high school students in a large California urban school district and Hwang et al.'s study of K–5th graders in Indiana both find that Black students have a lower probability of receiving a referral or suspension when their teachers are Black, as opposed to White.[51]

Perhaps in response to Black teachers' high expectations, Black students, in turn, are more likely to report higher degrees of personal effort, happiness in class, feeling cared for and motivated by their teacher when their teacher is Black compared to when their teacher is not Black.[52] Black students are more likely to attend school in years when they have a Black teacher than in years when their teacher is not Black.[53] The presence of Black teachers teaching an honors course is associated with an increased likelihood of Black students enrolling in that course compared to an honors course taught by a teacher who is not Black.[54] Black high school students in a remote learning credit recovery course were more likely to remain logged into the digital platform and to attempt lessons when their online instructor was Black compared to when their teacher was not Black.[55] Finally, Black teachers' effect on their Black students extends beyond one academic year. Black elementary students in Tennessee who were randomly assigned to one Black teacher were more likely to graduate from high school and to matriculate into college when compared to their Black peers who were not assigned to a Black teacher.[56]

In addition to the social and emotional benefits Black teachers provide to Black students[57], Black teachers are more likely to improve Black students' learning and achievement when compared to teachers from other demographic groups.[58] Ehrenberg and Brewer's 1995 analysis of James Coleman's 1966 report to Congress entitled *Equality of Educational Opportunity* found a positive relationship between the concentration of Black teachers and standardized scores for Black students; similarly, the researchers found that Black students in schools with a higher percentage of White teachers had lower gain scores then their Black peers in schools with larger numbers of Black teachers.[59] Hanushek, in 1992, found that Black teachers, when compared to White teachers, were more likely to improve Black students' reading achievement. To this end, Hanushek concludes, "[W]hite teachers do significantly worse than [B]lack teachers." A study during the mid- to late 1960s that focused on a standardized high school economic literacy exam found that Black teachers increased Black students' achievement, when compared to White teachers.[61]

In the 21st century, several studies have explored Black teachers' impact on Black students' achievement.[62] One of the earlier studies was Dee's 2004 reanalysis of a Tennessee randomized control trial around class size in which he found that when Black elementary school students were assigned to Black teachers, their math and literacy scores increased, as compared to the scores of Black children with a White teacher.[63] Subsequent studies that have used nationally representative data, state administrative data from Florida and North Carolina, and local school districts' administrative records in Texas and in California, continue to produce one consistent finding.[64] Black teachers, when compared to outcomes for Black students with White teachers, are more likely to increase Black students' achievement. It is important to note that since these studies, for the most part, control for a host of variables, such as teacher preparation and school characteristics, they show that having a Black teacher alone is *not* necessarily sufficient to produce positive student outcomes, but rather provides an added benefit on top of the range of conditions that matter for student success.

Black Teachers' Impact on *all* Students

Schools remain hyper-segregated by race in 2024, as Orfield's essay in this series notes. Despite the large body of evidence on the positive impact Black teachers have on their Black students' achievement and social and learning, our primary premise is not to propagate the resegregation of schools or suggest that there be only Black teachers for Black students. In fact, Black teachers are associated with more positive outcomes for students of all races and ethnicities. One early study, using random assignment, examined the impact of the Houston Independent School District's 1960s and 1970s teacher desegregation policy on student learning. Researchers found that Latine and White students' achievement, as measured by the Iowa Test of Basic Skills, increased when taught by Black teachers who were not required to transfer schools. The author concludes that Black teachers were "more effective with all students."[65]

In an analysis of survey responses from students across six large urban school districts, researchers found that Asian American, Black, Latine, and White students have more favorable perceptions of Black (and Latine) teachers when compared to White teachers. Students, across all ethnoracial groups, also reported that Black teachers were more likely to hold them to higher academic standards and support their efforts to reach those standards. The largest and statistically significant effects were among Asian American students who reported that Black teachers, when compared to White teachers,[66] challenged them academically, made content more engaging, and made connections across content that deepened learning. Black teachers' impact on Asian American students was also evident in Shirrell and colleagues' 2023 analysis of a longitudinal data set of New York City Department of Education teachers and students; Asian American girls were less likely to be suspended in the years they were assigned a greater proportion of Black teachers. Finally, Blazar employs random assignment of teachers and students in a statewide data set and finds that assignment to Black teachers, when compared to White teachers, reduces the likelihood of chronic absenteeism, and increases math and ELA achievement for Asian American, Latine, and White students.[67]

While there continues to be a growing body of research on Black teachers' positive impact on academic outcomes for *all* students, one recent study has measured Black teachers' impact on White novice teachers' student outcomes.[68] Analyzing North Carolina administrative data, researchers find that when White beginning teachers (1–3 years) have a Black teacher on their grade level team, their Black students' math and reading achievement increases and the number of suspensions decrease.

As we have shown, a substantial body of research demonstrates that Black teachers are essential to the teacher workforce. Not only do Black teachers support the achievement and social–emotional development of Black students and students overall, but Black teachers also do the important work of helping American society live up to its ideals. In bringing a wealth of knowledge and personal experience to bear in the classroom and with colleagues and in serving as role models of Black leadership to students of every background, Black teachers enrich public education. As we will show, however, the Black teacher population has been in decline, jeopardizing the important role Black teachers play in our nation's schools and communities.

Trends in the Representation of Black Teachers since *Brown*

Over the past three decades, one of the most profound changes to the teacher workforce has been the steady decline in the share of Black teachers. Based on an analysis of federal teacher survey data from the U.S. Department of Education National Center for Education Statistics' National Teacher and Principal Survey (2015 to 2020) (NTPS) and its predecessor, the Schools and Staffing Survey (1987 to 2012)[69], the proportion of Black teachers has dropped by nearly a third, from 8.6% of teachers in 1990 to 6.1% in 2020 (see Figure 1). In contrast, the proportion of teachers of color overall has increased dramatically since 1987 (from about 13% to 20%) and more new teachers are teachers of color today than were 30 years ago. This growth has been primarily driven by increasing numbers of Latine and Asian American teachers, while the share of Black teachers has been in decline.[70]

Figure 1. *The Share of Teachers of Color in the Teacher Workforce: 1987–2020*
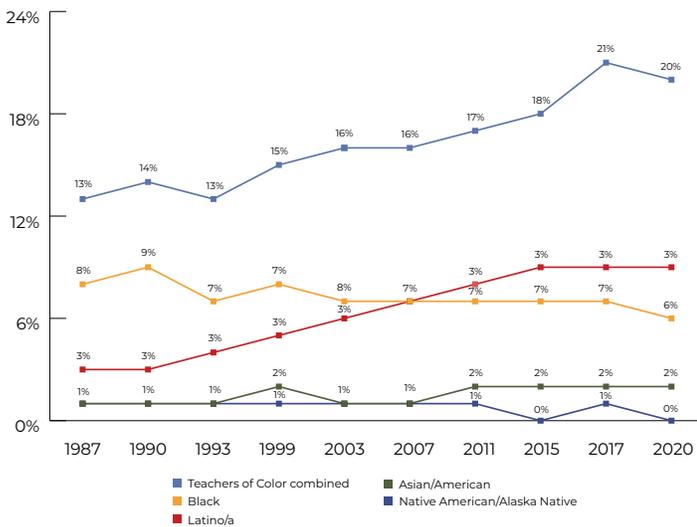

Note: Analysis by Learning Policy Institute. "Teachers of Color" combined includes all non-White teachers, including Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander teachers and teachers reporting two or more races.

Sources: National Center for Education Statistics reports (see endnotes for complete list of sources)[71]

As a result of the shrinking share of Black teachers in the workforce, they are underrepresented with respect to the Black population in the United States, which was about 13% in 2020 (see Figure 2). The Black student-aged population was nearly 14% of children ages 5 to 17 in 2020. Black first-year teachers made up about 7% of first-year teachers, suggesting that if new Black teachers stay in the profession over time, the ranks of these teachers might be able to grow marginally.

Figure 2. *Percentage distribution of the U.S. population (2020) and of teachers (2020–21) by race/ethnicity*
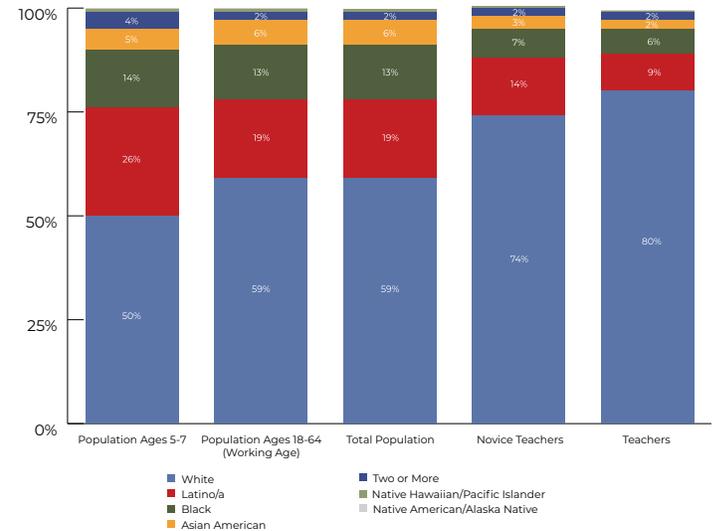
Notes: Hispanics are of any race (Hispanic origin is considered an ethnicity, not a race). Other races are non-Hispanic. Shares are built using U.S. Census Bureau, Population Division (2018). Shares for teachers are obtained from the NTPS 2020–21 and include full time, part time, itinerant and long-term substitute teachers. Novice teachers are teachers in their first year of teaching. Shares for Native American/Alaska Native populations are as follows: 0.8% ages 5-17, 0.8% ages 18-64, 0.7% total population, 0.4% novice teachers, 0.4% teachers. Shares for Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander are as follows: 0.2% ages 5-17, 0.2% ages 18-64, 0.2% total population, 0.2% novice teachers, 0.2% teachers.

Sources: Own analyses of the National Teacher and Principal Survey, 2020–21; U.S. Census Bureau, Population Division. (2018). *Main Projections Series for the United States, 2017-2060 Projected Population by Single Year of Age, Sex, Race, and Hispanic Origin for the United States: 2016 to 2060* (NP2017_D1). File: 2017 National Population Projections. U.S. Census Bureau, Population Division. https://www.census.gov/data/tables/2017/demo/popproj/2017-summary-tables.html.

The Role of Teacher Turnover

High turnover rates threaten to undermine any gains made through increased Black teacher recruitment efforts. Based on nationally representative survey data, Black teachers indicated that they were more likely than White teachers to consider transferring schools or leaving the teaching profession. In the 2017–18 NTPS, more than 35% of Black teachers agreed that they think about transferring schools, compared to 34% of teachers of color overall and 32% of White teachers.[72] Further, about 41% of Black teachers reported they would leave teaching for a higher paying job, compared to 38% of teachers of color overall and 34% of White teachers. These figures are significant, because a difference of even 1 percentage point in teacher turnover rates can amount to tens of thousands of teachers transferring school and leaving the teaching profession, creating demand for new teacher hires and increasing the likelihood that schools suffer from teacher shortages.[73] It is important to note, however, that these desires to either move schools or leave teaching may not necessarily reflect actual teacher turnover rates.

In addition to greater desires to transfer schools or leave teaching reported in the 2017–18 teacher survey, 2021 survey data also show higher turnover rates among Black teachers. Between 2020–21 and 2021–22, approximately 8% of all teachers transferred schools and another 8% left the teaching profession (see Figure 3). These proportions were about the same for White teachers. Black teachers, however, had higher turnover rates, with about 9% of these teachers moving schools and nearly 11% of Black teachers leaving teaching.[74] Unless more Black teachers both enter the profession and persist in it, the downward trend in the share of Black teachers is likely to continue.

Figure 3. *Percentage of Teachers who Moved Schools or Left Teaching, 2020–21 to 2021–22.*
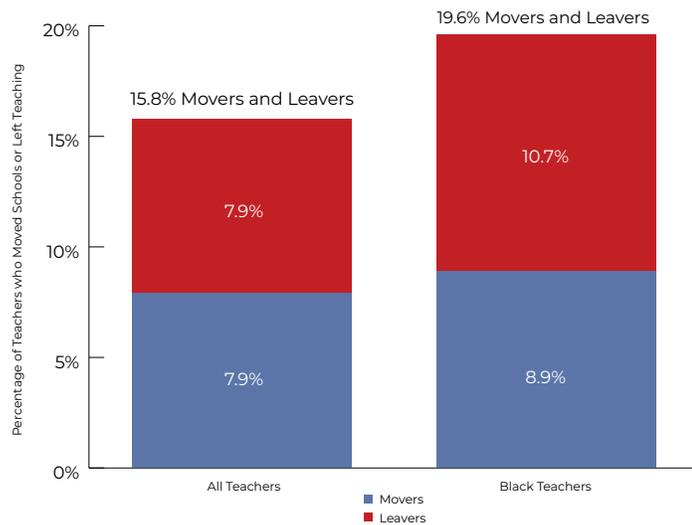
Notes: Data are weighted estimates of the population. "Movers" are teachers who were still teachers in the 2021–22 *Teacher Follow-up Survey* (TFS) school year but had moved to a different school from their 2020–21 NTPS school. "Leavers" are 2020–21 NTPS teachers who were no longer teachers in the 2021–22 TFS school year. Detail may not sum to totals because of rounding.

Source: Taie, S., & Lewis, L. (2023). *Teacher attrition and mobility. Results from the 2021–22 Teacher Follow-up Survey to the National Teacher and Principal Survey* (NCES 2024-039), Table A-2. U.S. Department of Education. National Center for Education Statistics. https://nces.ed.gov/pubsearch/pubsinfo.asp?pubid=2024039

It is important to note that high turnover rates among Black teachers are not just a recent phenomenon. An analysis of 2012 data, for example, shows that between the 2011–12 and 2012–13 school year, nearly 22% of Black teachers either transferred schools or left the teaching profession entirely, a rate nearly 50% greater than the non-Black teacher turnover rate that year.[75]

In 2012, in an era of school closings and layoffs in many cities, the rate of involuntary turnover was much higher for Black teachers than for all other teachers, constituting nearly a third of all turnover.[76] Twelve percent of Black teachers who left the profession did so involuntarily, while 10% of teachers on average did.[77] While about 30% of all movers left their schools involuntarily, over 50% of Black teachers moved involuntarily.[78]

High involuntary turnover rates were substantially a function of teacher layoffs during the Great Recession, and of school closings in urban districts due both to declining enrollments and sanctions targeted to schools with low test scores under No Child Left Behind.[79] Closures of traditional public schools reportedly increased from 717 in 2000-01 to 1,069 in 2010-11, an increase of about 50%.[80] Further, closures disproportionately impact schools serving more Black students—where Black teachers are more likely to teach—especially when closures are related to accountability measures.[81] Indeed, evidence from school closures in Chicago Public Schools indicates that Black teachers were disproportionately impacted by school closures in the district, making up more than 51% of teachers terminated.[82] Large scale layoffs of Black teachers thus contribute to significant declines in the Black teacher workforce.

Decreases in the numbers of Black teachers have been proportionally much greater than decreases in the size of the overall teaching force in some of the nation's largest cities, listed in Table 1. In New Orleans, more than 7,000 teachers—most of whom were Black—were fired en masse after Hurricane Katrina. They were replaced by predominantly young, White teachers brought in to teach in the charter schools that replaced the district schools.[83] As a result, the number of Black teachers declined there by more than 62%. In other major cities, the number of Black teachers declined by anywhere from 15% to 39%.

Table 1. *Percentage change in teacher population by race and ethnicity, 2002 to 2012*

City	Overall	White	Black	Hispanic
Boston	-3.3	-0.8	-18.3	1.1
Chicago	-13.4	-3.2	-39.2	6.4
Cleveland	-17.4	-12.0	-33.9	-9.4
Los Angeles	-16.9	-28.0	-33.2	6.5
New Orleans	-44.4	3.3	-62.3	43.5
New York City	-2.0	-1.9	-15.1	2.4
San Francisco	-11.9	-21.9	-32.4	8.1

Source: Bond, B, Quintero, E., Casey, L., & Di Carlo, M. (2015). *The state of teacher diversity in American education.* Albert Shanker Institute. http://www.shankerinstitute.org/resource/teacherdiversity

**Current Issues in Recruiting and Retaining Black Teachers**

Decades of research show that several factors are associated with recruiting and retaining teachers, including access to comprehensive preservice preparation, supportive teaching conditions, ongoing professional development, and competitive compensation.

Access to Comprehensive Preservice Preparation

Prior research shows that access to comprehensive preservice preparation is associated with greater retention rates among teachers, in addition to supporting school stability and student achievement.[84] In what follows we investigate the extent to which Black teachers have had access to preservice preparation, currently and over time. We also highlight the role that college debt may play in these trends.

Black teachers are less likely than White teachers to complete preservice preparation and to be fully certified. Black teachers are also more likely than White teachers to enter the profession through an alternative route, which typically offers little, if any, preservice coursework, or student teaching. A staggering 45% of beginning Black teachers entered through such a route in 2017–18, compared to 38% of teachers of color overall and just 24% of beginning White teachers (see Figure 4).[85]

Figure 4. *Percentage of Beginning Teachers who Entered Teaching Through an Alternative Route to Certification Program*
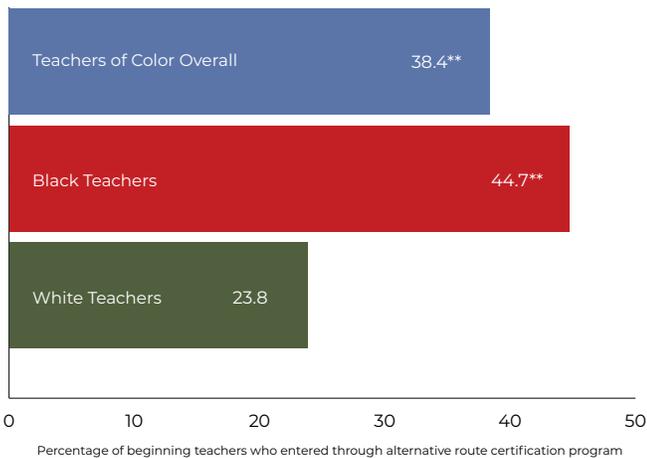
Notes: Sample includes teachers who are full time, part time, or itinerant, in public schools. Beginning teachers are teachers with 3 or fewer years of experience. Statistical tests were conducted to compare Black teachers and teachers of color overall with white teachers. * p<.05, ** p<.01

Source: LPI analysis of the 2017-18 *National Teacher and Principal Survey* (NTPS) microdata from the U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics. https://nces.ed.gov/pubsearch/pubsinfo.asp?pubid=202032

Overrepresentation in alternative certification programs likely explains why beginning Black teachers were less likely than White teachers to have taken any preservice coursework (47% of beginning Black teachers did vs. 56% of beginning White teachers), and less likely to have done any student teaching (62% vs. 83%). Beginning Black teachers were also less likely to have access to the most comprehensive student teaching duration. About 38% students taught for 12 weeks or more compared to 64% of beginning White teachers. Just 68% of beginning Black teachers are fully credentialed (holding either a regular or probationary certificate) in their state compared to about 84% of beginning White teachers. Having less access to preservice preparation is associated with higher turnover rates, undermining growth of the Black teacher workforce.

The Burden of Student Loan Debt

Access to financial supports likely plays a role in whether teachers of color are able to access teacher preparation.[86] According to a study of college loan debt, even expecting the same debt burden and postgraduation salary, Black undergraduate and graduate Black students were more likely than White students to report that loans limited their choice of educational institution.[87] Black students were more likely to report that they wished they had borrowed less to fund their postsecondary education, that they changed their career plans because of their loans, or that their loan payments were burdensome. Given the persistent and growing racial wealth gap for Black families, in particular, it is not hard to imagine that even with the same debt and salary expectations as White students, the cost of college and debt can present a greater relative burden.[88] In 2016, the median White family had a net worth about 10 times as great ($171,000) as a median Black family.[89] Having less of a safety net to rely on, on average, may explain why Black college students are more likely to report feeling burdened by loans.

Based on the 2020–21 NTPS, Black teachers were more likely than other teachers to have taken out a student loan to pay for their undergraduate or graduate education (see Table 2). About 71% of Black teachers had taken out student loans compared to about 60% of teachers of color overall and 60% of White teachers.[90] Black teachers were also more likely to still owe all the amount they had borrowed. Among student loan borrowers, nearly half (44%) of Black teachers who had taken out loans still owed all their loan amount compared to 32% of teachers of color overall and just 15.6% of White teachers. Further, Black teachers were far more likely to report that they experienced a high or very high level of stress regarding their student loan debt (72%) compared to White teachers (58%). Black teachers were also more likely to report that they took a less desirable job due to their student loan debt, although the survey instrument does not ask teachers to detail what makes these roles less desirable.

Table 2. *Student loans and debt by race/ethnicity, 2020–21*

	Black Teachers	Teachers of Color Overall	White Teachers
Did you take out any type of student loans for undergraduate or graduate education?	70.5**	60.1	59.8
(Of borrowers) Do you still owe all of the amount that you borrowed?	44.1**	32.2**	15.6
Level of stress regarding loan is high or very high	71.8**	66.8**	57.7
Did you have to work at more than one job at the same time because of student loan debt?	39	37.5	36.5
Did you take a less desirable job because of student loan debt	28.6**	26.6**	20.5

Source: Analysis of the 2017-18 *National Teacher and Principal Survey* (NTPS) microdata from the U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics. https://nces.ed.gov/pubsearch/pubsinfo.asp?pubid=2020321

Notes: Teacher counts are rounded to the closest 10. Sample includes teachers who are full time, part time, or itinerant, in public schools. Statistical tests were conducted to compare Black teachers and teachers of color overall with White teachers. * p<.05, ** p<.01.

Teaching Conditions

Even when Black teachers enter the profession fully prepared, challenging teaching conditions can discourage persistence in the classroom.[91] The conditions Black teachers experience on the job, including, for example, school characteristics and support from school leaders can influence their decisions to stay in teaching.[92]

School Characteristics

There is substantial evidence showing that school resources and characteristics play a role in teacher retention and attrition.[93] Although prior research shows that Black teachers often report feeling drawn to teach in schools serving more students of color and students from working class families[94], teacher attrition is often higher in these schools where resources are often strained.[95] Prior research shows that Black teachers in underresourced schools experience high levels of stress that can reduce job satisfaction and increase the likelihood of teacher turnover.[96]

Although the NTPS data do not provide details on school funding levels, the data indicate that Black teachers, on average, are more likely to teach in settings that tend to receive inadequate resources. As noted, schools with more students of color and students from working class families tend to receive inadequate funding relative to their need, and the magnitude of underfunding can be substantial.[97]

For Black teachers, about 80% of students in their schools are students of color, compared to about 43% for White teachers. Notably, this overall average masks just how concentrated Black teachers are in a fraction of schools. Nearly two-thirds of Black teachers teach in schools with more than 75% students of color (see Figure 5). By comparison, just 17% of White teachers teach in those settings. On the other end of the spectrum, just 3% of Black teachers teach in schools with 25% or fewer students of color compared to more than 35% of White teachers. The disparity in school characteristics is similar, though less extreme, for teachers of color overall.

Figure 5. *Distribution of Teachers by Percentage of Students of Color, 2017–18*
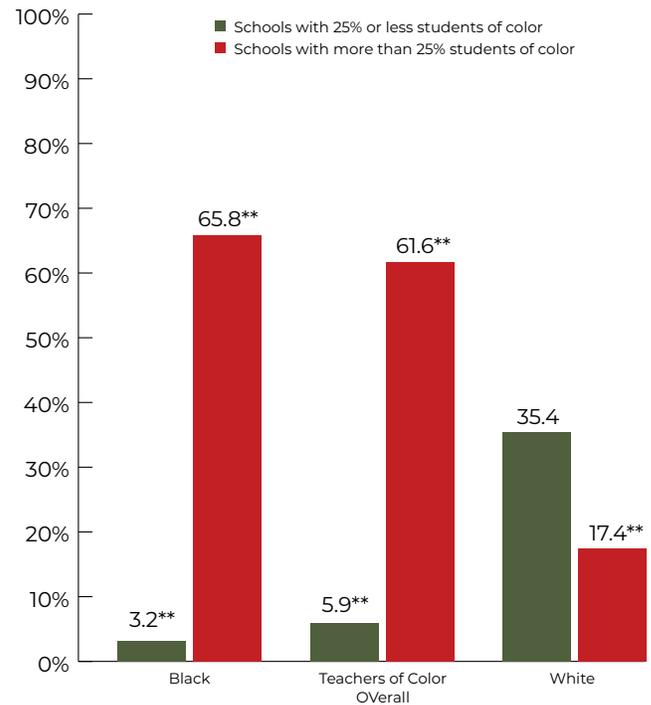
Source: Analysis of the 2017-18 *National Teacher and Principal Survey* (NTPS) microdata from the U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics.

Notes: Sample includes teachers who are full time, part time, or itinerant, in public schools. Statistical tests were conducted to compare Black teachers and teachers of color overall with White teachers. * p<.05, ** p<.01

NTPS data show that Black teachers are also more likely to teach students from low-income families, as measured by eligibility for free- and reduced-price lunch (FRPL).[98] Nearly 60% of Black teachers teach in schools where more than 75% of students are eligible for FRPL compared to just 23% of White teachers. Black teachers were the least likely to teach in low-poverty schools which are likely to have disproportionately high resources (5% of Black teachers versus 21% of White teachers).

Job Satisfaction and Stress in the Workplace

To examine Black teachers' experiences in schools requires, first, an understanding of the context in which they teach. As described above, the current conditions under which Black teachers teach, when compared to teachers of other ethnoracial groups, particularly White teachers, remains separate and unequal. There are at least two mechanisms that contribute to Black teachers being overrepresented in underresourced schools and underrepresented in well-resourced schools.[99] Discriminatory practices in the hiring process often prevent Black teachers from teaching in more resourced schools, thereby tracking Black teachers into historically underresourced schools.[100] At the same time, Black teachers are also attracted to schools that serve large numbers of Black and Latine students, further concentrating Black teachers into schools that tend to be underresourced.[101]

Despite having to make bricks without straw, Black teachers describe the joy they experience from teaching.[102] Like their predecessors who taught in de jure segregated schools, contemporary Black teachers in de facto segregated schools point to the transformative changes they are making in the lives of their predominantly Black and Latine students, as the North Star in their work.[103] Black teachers see the urgency of educating the next generation of Black students who, like them, can uplift the race.[104] These teachers see their presence as a counternarrative to the anti-Black beliefs to which their students are exposed from the media and other societal voices.[105] Black teachers also see how their work contributes to the work of Black community building.[106] Black parents, for example, describe the impact that Black teachers make for their students and share those appreciations with Black teachers.

While the school-based experiences that Black teachers have with their students are, on average, quite positive, this is less true in their interactions with colleagues who are not Black.[107] Black teachers describe ongoing racial micro- and macroaggressions they experience with their White colleagues.[108] These micro- and macro- forms of aggression include being tasked to be the school's de facto disciplinarian or having colleagues use racial epithets to describe students.[109] These challenging school-based experiences may influence why a Black teacher who is the lone Black teacher on their faculty is less likely to ask colleagues for help around curricular concerns when compared to Black teachers working in schools with many more Black teachers.[110] Compared to White teachers, Black teachers were less likely to strongly agree that they "like the way things are run at this school," an indicator of school leader support. Just 24% of Black teachers strongly agree that they like the way things are run at their school compared to 25% for teachers of color overall and about 28% for White teachers. Black teachers were also more likely to somewhat or strongly agree that stress and disappointments at their school were not worth it. More than 31% of Black teachers somewhat or strongly agree that stress and disappointments at their school aren't really worth it, compared to 30% for teachers of color overall and 27% for White teachers. (See Table 3.)

Table 3. Teacher Satisfaction Indicators by Race/Ethnicity, 2017–18

	Black Teachers	Teachers of Color Overall	White Teachers
I like the way things are run at this school			
Strongly Agree	24**	25.2**	27.8
Somewhat Agree	46.0	45.2	44.2
Somewhat + Strongly Agree	70.0	70.4	72.0
The stress and disappointments involved in teaching at this school aren't really worth it			
Strongly Agree	8.4**	7.4**	5.6
Somewhat Agree	23.1	22.8	21.8
Somewhat + Strongly Agree	31.5**	30.2**	27.3

Source: LPI analysis of the 2017-18 *National Teacher and Principal Survey* (NTPS) microdata from the U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics.

Notes: Statistical tests were conducted to compare Black teachers and teachers of color overall with white teachers. * p<.05, ** p<.01

Black teachers also point to their administrators as being another source of challenge to their school-based experiences. The adage "Teachers don't leave their students, but their principals," also applies to Black teachers. Black teachers who talk about teaching in schools with challenging working conditions describe principals, from all ethnoracial groups, as policing their practice to ensure fidelity to mandated scripted curriculum.[112] While it is the case that principals are, on average, enacting policies dictated by the district or charter management organization, Black teachers lay some of the blame on their principals for their in-school experiences. Finally, Black teachers also believe their principals are unable to create school environments that are responsive to their racialized experiences inside of the school.

In response to their challenging workplace environments, novice Black teachers have found refuge and guidance from more seasoned Black teachers in their schools. These school and district-based efforts[113] informed non-regulatory guidance tied to the 2015 Every Student Succeeds Act around providing time and space for differentiated support for all teachers, including affinity groups.[114] States, supported by the Council of Chief State School Officers' Diverse & Learner-Ready Teachers Initiative[115] and local school districts (New York City Department of Education's NYC Men Teach[116] and Boston Public Schools' Women Educators of Color program[117]) as well as nonprofits such as the Black Teacher Project[118] and the Center for Black Educator Development[119] began to create professional learning communities for teachers, and in particular Black teachers. These professional learning communities provide social–emotional support to Black teachers and a space to reflect on practice—in service of student learning.[120]

Discussion

The evidence, as we have provided above, makes clear Black teachers' present-day positive impact on the academic and social–emotional outcomes of Black students, students of color, and White students, and in aid of the continued work of this American Project. The characteristics of the schools in which many Black teachers teach is a sobering story. Seventy years after the *Brown* decision ruled that separate *and* equal schools were inherently unequal, Black teachers continue to teach in separate and unequal schools. In this Second Nadir of race relations in the United States, where Black teachers' workplace experiences are characterized by micro- and macroaggressions, we echo Justice Ketanji Brown Jackson's dissent in the Supreme Court case *Students for Fair Admissions v. Harvard* (2023): "Race still matters."[121] We aimed in this chapter to underscore not only that Black teachers matter, but how they matter in the lives of our nation's children.

We know that our country continues to demonstrate its capacity to solve big problems when there is a will to do so. In the Space Race, after the Soviet Union sent a satellite into space, the United States responded 12 years later by sending a person to the moon. In one year, the U.S. developed the SARS-CoV-2 vaccine to end a once in a lifetime pandemic. Black teachers' positive impact on American society and the higher rate at which they leave the profession when compared to their peers underscores the challenges our country faces related to retaining, and by extension, supporting and recruiting, Black teachers. What we choose to do as a country to meaningfully and to comprehensively address these challenges is a matter of will. For current Black teachers, enacting policies and practices to support and retain them speaks both to the faith of the past and the hope of the present for improvements in the conditions under which they educate all children.

Policy and Practice Recommendations for Recruiting and Retaining Black Teachers

We end by offering policy and practice recommendations for recruiting and retaining Black teachers, given the urgency of having skilled Black teachers in our current sociopolitical moment, the body of research revealing Black teachers' positive impact for all students, and the constraints around entering and staying in the profession. Recent data indicates that Black teachers, on average, are significantly less likely to have access to comprehensive preservice preparation that offers a comprehensive body of coursework and supervised student teaching. In addition, Black teachers are more likely to teach in underresourced schools that are associated with challenging teaching conditions. Despite this, evidence suggests that federal, state, and local agencies can improve the conditions to recruit and retain more Black teachers. Policies that increase access to comprehensive preparation by underwriting the cost of preparation have been shown to increase both the recruitment and retention of new Black teachers.

In addition, on-the-job supports and opportunities for advancement through National Board certification can help to retain current Black teachers. Finally, given the disproportionate rate at which Black teachers leave their schools when compared to their peers and the central role school leaders play in shaping teachers' decisions to stay or leave their schools, building the capacity of principals to create positive working conditions will be critical.

Teacher Residencies and Apprenticeships

High quality teacher residencies are partnerships between districts and universities that subsidize and improve teachers' training to teach in high-need schools and in high-demand subject areas.[122] Participants spend a year working as residents with highly effective mentor teachers while completing related coursework at partnering universities.[123] Research on teacher residency programs shows that they are effective both in bringing more teachers of color into the profession and in preparing them to stay for the long term. Nationally, about 49% of residents are people of color, far more than the 20% of teachers who are people of color nationally.[124] Principals find graduates of residency programs to be well prepared and, in many cases, to be better prepared than typical new teachers. In addition, a review of residency program evaluations shows that residents tend to have higher retention rates over time than nonresident teachers.[125]

A registered apprenticeship is a new avenue for teacher preparation, approved by the federal government in 2021.[126] States and districts can create apprenticeship programs and receive federal funding that goes toward wages, textbooks, and other supports. At Austin Peay State University in Tennessee —the first registered teaching apprenticeship in the country —apprentices can complete their teacher preparation free of charge, while they earn a salary and benefits working as educational assistants at partnering Clarksville-Montgomery County school district. States can also use the funds to support grow-your-own programs that support high school students to begin earning college credit before completing their teacher preparation at a partnering university. Much like residencies, the apprenticeship model addresses the student debt burden that disproportionately discourages potential teaching candidates of color from pursuing the profession, while providing the kind of comprehensive teacher preparation that builds the foundation for a successful career in teaching.[127]

Service Scholarships and Loan Forgiveness

Service scholarship and loan forgiveness programs have also been used to help teaching candidates of color to enter the profession with comprehensive preparation. These programs cover or reimburse a portion of tuition costs in exchange for a commitment to teach in high-need schools or subject areas, typically for 3 to 5 years. At the federal level, this includes the *Teacher Education Assistance for College and Higher Education* (TEACH) Grant Program, the *Teacher Loan Forgiveness* (TLF) Program, and the *Public Service Loan Forgiveness* (PSLF) Program, all of which have service commitments ranging from 4 to 10 years. Research indicates that loan forgiveness and service scholarship programs are effective at recruiting teachers, especially when they underwrite a significant portion of educational costs.[128]

The TEACH Grant Program provides scholarships of $4,000 per year to undergraduate and graduate students who are preparing for a career in teaching and who commit to teaching a high-need subject in a high-poverty school for 4 years.[129] It excludes early educators and contains a harsh loan conversion penalty for those who do not complete their service commitment, which can be a disincentive for postsecondary students to use the program and ultimately go into teaching. Congress could make the TEACH Grant Program more effective by ending the automatic cuts to the award and increasing it to $8,000, reforming the loan conversion penalty, and ensuring early educators are eligible for benefits.

The TLF and PSLF programs require teachers to toil through years of monthly payments on low salaries before having part or all their federal student loan debt canceled. The PSLF Program, last significantly updated by Congress in 2007, requires 10 years of monthly payments while serving in a public service position before completely retiring the remaining federal loan balance. These programs could be reconstituted to have the federal government make teachers' monthly loan payments until they meet the service requirement to retire their debts completely. Doing so would save teachers hundreds of dollars each month and thousands of dollars over time while delivering a much-needed boost to both recruitment and retention.

National Board Certification

Increases in federal and state funding for teachers to pursue National Board Certification as well as increased compensation for teachers who attain and maintain certification can be one lever to recruit and retain more Black teachers. Established in 1987, National Board Certification serves as the "gold standard" of teacher certification. While just 3% of teachers pursue and receive Board certification, of these teachers more than 88% are White, which is higher than the 80% of White teachers who comprise the U.S. public schools workforce. The body of evidence shows that National Board Certification is associated with better student academic outcomes when compared to teachers who are not certified.[130]

Recent investments at the federal level and in several states seek to increase the number of teachers of color who pursue Board certification. For example, a 2022 $14 million grant from the *U.S. Department of Education*'s (USDOE) *Supporting Effective Educator Developmen*t (SEED) had an explicit focus on engaging and supporting educators of color.[131] In 2023, California[132] increased its incentives, up to $25,000 over five years, for teachers who earn Board certification, and have provided resources to support teachers to pursue certification if they teach in a priority school (i.e., a school serving a majority of students who qualify for free or reduced lunch). These investments and policy efforts are leading to increases in educators of color pursuing Board certification. For example, the number of teachers in California pursuing National Board certification in high-priority schools increased from 415 in 2020–21 to 1,727 in 2021–22. During that same period, the number of *Black, Indigenous, and People of Color* (BIPOC) teachers pursuing National Board certification in California increased from 356 to 1,432. With the return on the public's investment in California that continues to increase the number of teachers of color pursuing Board certification, more states should consider expanding their fiscal incentives for teachers who work in high priority schools to become NBCTs.

Building the Capacity of School Leaders

Finally, given the evidence that Black teachers have higher turnover than their peers[133] and cite school principals as a primary reason for leaving their schools[134], national, state, and local policy efforts should focus on building the capacity of school leaders to create more positive teacher working conditions. There have been promising investments at the state and local levels that must be maintained and expanded. For example, the Department of Education's 2022 SEED Grant recipients reflected, quite possibly, the USDOE's priorities around building the capacity of school leaders. Of the 22 multimillion-dollar grants awarded, 11 went to organizations and programs focused on school leadership.[135] Grantees included WestEd's Statewide Supports for Future Illinois Principals of Color and the University of Kansas's Supporting Effective School Leaders through Professional Learning and Resources for Equity Leadership & Educator Well-Being.

Several states, including Maryland, Massachusetts, Michigan, North Dakota, Ohio, Tennessee, Idaho, and Louisiana, have used their *Every Student Succeeds Act* (ESSA) funding to develop or to expand principal leadership programs.[136] More states should use their ESSA Title II funds to invest in school leadership. These state investments in building the capacity of school building leaders are a critically important lever to improve school working conditions. Many of these states have targeted their investments to principals working in schools that have been historically underresourced. As states develop and expand their principal leadership programs, they should follow the USDOE's lead and prioritize funding to programs that center equity and seek to expand the number of teachers of color, in particular Black teachers, who want to become principals.

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