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Diversifying Wisconsin's Teacher Workforce: Existing Hurdles, Local Strategies, State Options
Districts trying to match teacher workforce with student diversity; State measures could help

Hurdles to diversifying Wisconsin's teacher workforce exist throughout the teacher career pipeline, and while local schools and teacher training programs are taking steps to overcome them, a concerted response by state policymakers could enhance this momentum, according to a new Wisconsin Policy Forum report.

Focus group participants and key stakeholders interviewed for the report indicated that prospective teachers of color encounter interpersonal and institutional obstacles that reinforce racial disparities on college campuses, in teacher preparation programs, and within the schools and districts that employ them.

"The consequence has been a narrowing stream of people of color throughout the student-to-teacher pipeline," the new report says.

Schools, universities, and other entities are seeking to change this with initiatives to support prospective teachers of color at the individual and organizational levels. While these steps show promise, the scale of the challenge points to an opportunity for state-level leadership.

State action could begin by convening key stakeholders to set a state-level vision and goals for diversifying the teacher workforce. Other state policy levers could include increasing financial assistance for students to complete college and teacher preparation programs, expanding high-retention teacher residency and grow-your-own training models, re-examining teacher licensure requirements, boosting accountability for districts and teacher education programs, and building a comprehensive state education data clearing house, the report finds.

This is the second report of a pair of Forum reports addressing the lack of racial and ethnic diversity in Wisconsin's teacher workforce relative to its student population. The impetus for this research is both long-standing racial disparities in educational outcomes that have persisted in Wisconsin for decades, and a growing body of evidence that a racially diverse and representative teacher workforce can help mitigate those disparities.

The first installment, "A Teacher Who Looks Like Me: Examining racial diversity in Wisconsin's teacher workforce and the student-to-teacher pipeline," found that while students of color have been rising as a share of Wisconsin's public K-12 student population, its teacher workforce has remained overwhelmingly white. Similar gaps in representation for individual race and ethnic groups were found throughout the state in rural, suburban, and urban communities.

This report seeks to address three broad questions raised by the first installment:

- What are the conditions and barriers that prevent candidates of color from joining the ranks of teachers and building a long-term career in the profession?
- What are schools, districts, higher education institutions, and others doing to change those conditions?

- And what more could be done, in particular by Wisconsin's state government, to move the needle on this important component of educational equity?

The report's findings are based on perspectives gathered from Wisconsin teachers, school and district leaders, teacher education faculty, higher education administrators, and others through focus groups and in-depth interviews. These perspectives, coupled with a national scan of policy research and initiatives elsewhere, inform the state policy options cited as potential instruments of change in Wisconsin.

Interviewees cited several barriers to teacher preparation for students of color, such as high cost and lack of financial assistance, licensure testing requirements, and lack of adequate training for classroom realities. Additional factors that may discourage students of color from pursuing teaching careers may include negative experiences with teachers during their own K-12 years, relatively low compensation, limited autonomy and advancement opportunities, lack of support from mentors or leaders, implicit racial bias in school hiring processes, and experiences of isolation and interpersonal racism in their school or community.

Initiatives being pursued by schools and other institutions to address these forces include mentoring for new teachers, financial support for teachers or teachers-in-training, and establishing cohorts of mutual support for teachers of color. Measures to effect institutional change include efforts to develop teaching talent from within local communities, diversify school leadership, increase cultural competence among faculty and staff, provide alternatives to teacher licensure tests, and revamp hiring and staffing processes.

The report details state policy options that could bolster and expand efforts at the local level to improve racial and ethnic diversity throughout the teacher pipeline.

“Our research suggests Wisconsin has a long way to go to improve the diversity of its teacher workforce, the report says, “but that local institutions are taking meaningful steps, and actionable state policy options hold promise to help meet that goal.”

[Go here to read the report.](#)

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