

5 Things State Leaders Should Do to Advance Equity:

Access to Strong and Diverse Educators



1

Set – then meet – clear goals at the state and district level to increase access to strong and diverse educators.

2

Target resources to the districts and schools that struggle the most to provide students from low-income families and students of color with access to strong teachers.

3

Target resources to diversify the teaching workforce.

4

Set high standards for how teachers are prepared and licensed to improve teaching quality for students in high-need schools and in historically underserved groups.

5

Make educator quality and diversity data more visible and actionable.



As parents and students know, having the right teacher matters. [Research shows](#) that teachers are the No. 1 in-school factor for student success. Students with the strongest teachers receive what amounts to months' worth of additional learning each year. In addition, both research and the lived experiences of children show that teachers affect much more than academics. And yet, students of color and students from low-income families are less likely to have access to [strong, consistent](#) teaching than their White and higher-income peers (see more [here](#) and [here](#)).

All students benefit from having at least one teacher of color, and students of color are more likely to attend school regularly, perform higher on end-of-year assessments, be referred to a gifted program, graduate high school, and consider college when they have had a teacher of the same race or ethnicity. But students of color are far less likely than their White peers to encounter a teacher who looks like them. Today, [51 percent of students in U.S. public schools are students of color](#), but just [20 percent of teachers are teachers of color](#). As a result, students of all backgrounds miss out on the many academic and social-emotional benefits of a racially and ethnically diverse teacher workforce. The data is stark: Thousands of [Black and Latino students](#) attend a school where they have no same-race teachers. Even larger percentages of White students attend a school without a Black teacher and/or Latino teacher.

Although district and school leaders make many of the decisions about recruiting, hiring, placing, and supporting teachers, state education officials also play a critical role in shaping the teacher workforce. This document provides state leaders with an overview of five things they should do to elevate the teaching profession so that all students, including students from low-income families and students of color, are taught by [strong and diverse educators](#).



1

Set – then meet – clear goals at the state and district level to increase access to strong and diverse educators.

States must:

- ✓ Establish clear, numeric [state and district goals](#) that are ambitious and achievable to set the clear expectation that all students have access to strong teachers, as well as goals for diversifying the teacher workforce.
- ✓ Set clear timelines for reaching those goals and intermediate targets that allow the state — and the public — to monitor progress and make changes as necessary.
- ✓ Clearly communicate why goals are important — including to the public and underserved families and communities.
- ✓ Hold regular meetings to report progress toward reaching those goals.

Examples of State Targets

- ✓ In its [state plan](#) submitted under the Every Student Succeeds Act in 2017, Massachusetts reported that while only 12.7% of White students are assigned to a teacher with less than three years of experience, 17.2% of students of color are assigned to these teachers — a gap of 4.5 percentage points. By the 2021-2022 school year, Massachusetts' goal is to eliminate that gap, by closing it roughly 0.9 percentage points each year.
- ✓ By 2025, the [Mississippi Department of Education \(MDE\)](#) plans to increase the number of teachers of color in critical shortage school districts by 25%.





2

Target resources to the districts and schools that struggle the most to provide students from low-income families and students of color with access to strong teachers.

The assignment of students to teachers is a complicated process that often varies from state to state and district to district, but recruiting and retaining strong teachers in schools that have historically struggled to do so is a necessary commitment for all state leaders. This investment is critical for students as well as for communities' and states' futures. There are several promising, evidence-based strategies that can be effective depending on local context. States and districts will need to target resources to the districts and schools that are struggling the most to provide strong teachers to students from low-income families and students of color.

Strategies [might include the following](#):

- ✓ Focus teacher preparation efforts on the subjects, districts, and schools that have the highest rates of ineffective, out-of-field, or inexperienced teachers and the districts with the biggest gaps in access to strong educators between student groups.
 - For example, states or districts could provide dedicated funding for college students pursuing a career in special education or teaching English learners; or, states could provide support for partnerships between high-need districts and strong teacher preparation programs.
- ✓ Provide incentives to recruit and retain strong teachers and principals in high-need schools and subjects.
- ✓ Create teacher leadership roles in high-need schools that allow strong teachers that have demonstrated experience successfully teaching students from low-income families and students of color to advance professionally while remaining in the classroom.
- ✓ Offer competitive grants specifically for evidence-based teacher and principal support, professional development, and retention programs in high-need districts and schools.
- ✓ Given that we know that [satisfaction with school leaders is key to retaining teachers in high-poverty schools](#):
 - Offer competitive grants for high-need districts to create principal pipelines for strategically preparing, hiring, developing, and supporting school leaders (see, for example, the work funded by the Wallace Foundation in [six large districts](#) across the country).
 - Ensure that standards for principal preparation programs and professional standards for principals reflect the [skills necessary](#) to improve achievement in struggling schools and for historically underserved groups of students.

- ✓ Require all educators to be trained in using [racially and culturally sustaining practices](#) to make the school environment more equitable and inclusive for students and teachers.
- ✓ Engage diverse educators and staff in identifying challenges and solutions (through surveys or other methods) and responding by making timely changes to policies and programs (e.g., providing additional school counselors or mental health providers, wraparound services for students, fixing unsafe or unhealthy infrastructure, and improving school climate).

Teacher Leadership

The [Opportunity Culture \(OC\) initiative](#) aims to extend the reach of highly effective teachers by restructuring P-12 schools and providing direct professional development, collaboration, and planning time for these educators. Students who were taught by teachers in a team coached by an OC teacher [showed higher achievement](#) than those taught by teachers who didn't receive that coaching.





3

Target resources to diversify the teaching workforce.

To improve teacher diversity, state leaders should address gaps at each point in the teacher pipeline — through preparation, licensure, recruitment, and retention strategies, as well as support and development programs, and opportunities to grow and lead in the classroom. Regardless of the specific approach a state takes, it must engage in multiple strategies to improve teacher diversity.

Strategies might include the following:

- ✓ Provide substantial scholarships or loan forgiveness for teacher candidates in underrepresented racial, ethnic, or linguistic groups or who are eligible for Pell Grants, as these candidates, on average, have [greater student debt](#) than their peers.
- ✓ Make funds available for additional out-of-pocket expenses such as licensure fees, relocation expenses, and classroom supplies.
- ✓ Create “grow your own” pathways, in partnership with higher education programs, into the teaching profession for candidates from untapped sources (e.g., paraprofessionals, after-school staff, etc.) who are likely to reflect the student population and are already dedicated to serving students of color.
- ✓ Actively engage teacher preparation programs at minority-serving institutions, including historically Black colleges and universities, Hispanic-serving institutions, and tribal colleges/universities for strategic recruitment of graduating students and alumni.
- ✓ Create programs for districts to specifically support, provide professional development, and retain teachers of color, potentially including creating affinity groups and/or cohort hiring models that districts and schools can adopt to try to help retain teachers of color.

Affinity Groups

The [Building Our Network of Diversity \(BOND\) Project](#) is committed to advancing efforts to recruit, develop, support, and retain male educators of color at all grade levels within Montgomery County (MD) Public Schools. This affinity group focuses on recruiting, supporting, and retaining educators to uplift student success.

4

Set high standards for how teachers are prepared and licensed to improve teaching quality for students in high-need schools and in historically underserved groups.

States must set high standards for accrediting, or authorizing, and monitoring teacher preparation programs within the state so that districts and schools have a high-quality pool of candidates from whom to choose. They should do the following:

- ✓ [Hold these programs accountable for preparing teachers](#) who are ready to meet the needs of historically underserved students and high-need schools and districts by:
 - Including multiple measures of quality in accountability systems, including survey feedback from the schools and districts where graduates are hired after completing a program on their readiness to teach, and feedback from graduates on their own perceptions of readiness to teach students from low-income families and students of color.
 - Having three or more rating levels so that programs are not simply pass/fail.
 - Ensuring that graduates of their teacher preparation program mirror or exceed the level of diversity in the region as a whole.
- ✓ Require that supervising teachers (for teacher candidates) [have a track record of success](#) in teaching students from historically underserved groups.
- ✓ Align prep program accreditation to expectations for teachers in the classroom. For example, states should ensure that teacher preparation programs are not accredited if the program's curriculum is not aligned with what teacher candidates need to know to teach students the state's content standards, including [adequate preparation to lead reading instruction](#). This is an issue that disproportionately impacts high-need schools both because [novice teachers disproportionately teach there](#) and because [of the tiny fraction of preparation programs with the worst track record, they are disproportionately likely to prepare teachers for high-need schools](#).



As candidates exit preparation programs, the state has the power to ensure that the licensure process leads to stronger teachers.

For example, state leaders can:

- ✓ Require that exams or coursework required for licensure assess teachers' ability to teach a diverse array of learners.
- ✓ Prevent licensure advancement for teachers for whom there is evidence that they're consistently ineffective.

Use Caution

As states consider strategies to ensure that students of color and students from low-income families have access to strong educators, it is important to consider how actions to improve the strength of the teacher workforce may impact the diversity of the workforce, and vice versa. For example, a state may want to increase the score needed on a specific assessment used for teacher licensure because the state believes that will improve the quality of teacher candidates who ultimately teach in high-needs schools. However, if that assessment is racially or culturally biased, an increase in the minimum score may further decrease the diversity of the state's new teachers. Further, if the state is systemically underserving students of color throughout the P-12 system, increasing "cut scores" for teacher licensure is likely to negatively impact teacher diversity. This does not mean the state should not take action to improve the quality of teacher candidates, but it does mean that the state should simultaneously consider updates to the state test to reduce bias and provide additional support and resources for teacher candidates of color to fill any gaps in knowledge that the P-12 system created.



5

Make educator quality and diversity data more visible and actionable.

The only way for stakeholders to know if the strategies above are helping ensure that students of color and students from low-income families have access to strong, diverse educators is to have access to useful, timely, and transparent data. As keepers of state data systems, leaders of state departments of education are uniquely positioned to provide stakeholders with information on which students are assigned to strong teachers, potential causes of these patterns, and their impact on children.

The Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) requires state education agencies to evaluate annually whether students of color and students from low-income families are taught more often by ineffective, out-of-field, or inexperienced teachers compared with their higher income, non-minority peers. In addition, the law requires that annual report cards include information about the professional qualifications of teachers in all schools and be disaggregated for high- and low-poverty schools. For this information to be meaningful, it's important that the state annually publish analyses that do the following:

- ✓ Include a definition for each measure of teacher quality (i.e., “out-of-field,” “ineffective,” and “inexperienced”) that provides meaningful and different information. For example, states should ensure that increasing student learning is a meaningful part of the definition of “effective” or “highly effective” teaching.
- ✓ Identify the districts with the highest rates of ineffective, out-of-field, or inexperienced teachers and the districts with the biggest gaps in access to strong educators between student groups.
- ✓ Disaggregate data by teacher race and ethnicity at the district and school level and compare that data with students’ race and ethnicity at the district and school level.



States should also do the following:

✓ Report data on potential causes of disparities, including:

- educator turnover rates (at the school, not just district, level)
- school climate/working conditions from surveys
- school and district leadership quality

(These school- and district-level indicators should be disaggregated by teacher race/ethnicity.)

✓ Identify and report on “teacher deserts” (i.e., places within the state with few nearby teacher prep programs).

✓ Create data systems that go beyond tracking which types of schools rely on ineffective, out-of-field, or inexperienced teaching to tracking which students spend more time with which types of teachers, so that district and school leaders can address within-school inequities in teacher/student assignment.

Massachusetts Uses Data to Assess Student Experience

[Massachusetts’ Student Learning Experience Report](#) lets school- and district-level administrators see the characteristics of teachers who teach each student over a number of years, providing a real sense of the impact on students over time when they are not assigned to strong or diverse teachers. After all, it’s one thing to know that one-third of the teachers in a school are in their first year; it’s another altogether to know that a student who’s struggling had novice teachers for the last three years in a row (whether in the same district or another).

