
Black Teacher Recruitment and Retention Working Group

In July 2018, a group of teachers, other educators, district office staff, advocates, and community members formed a one-year working group to develop new, supplemental ideas on how City Schools can recruit and retain more Black teachers. This report provides recommendations stemming from the last year's work.

Baltimore City Public Schools

**Final Report
June 2019**

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Introduction

Since the early 2000s, at least, there has been a persistent gap between the percentage of teachers who are Black and the percentage of students who are Black in Baltimore City Public Schools. The gap expanded with a decline in Black teachers between 2000 and 2010, and while the gap then decreased in the last ten years, a significant gap remains. Locally, regionally, and nationally, there are significant challenges and barriers to maintaining and increasing the number of Black teachers. The Black Teacher Recruitment and Retention Working Group formed to explore ways to better understand, address, and overcome these challenges and barriers. We researched and listened to the voices of Black teachers over the course of a year. We emerged with insight into potential strategies for increasing racial equity, and developed a dozen recommendations.

Statement of Purpose

Education research indicates that the social and academic achievement of Black students increases when they have even a single Black teacher with whom they can identify. In City Schools, there is a persistent gap between the percentage of teachers who are Black (45% today) and the percentage of students who are Black (nearly 80%). A contributing factor in the decline of the number of Black teachers teaching in our schools is systemic racism. Systemic racism forms barriers to recruitment and retention of Black teachers at every phase, including pathways into teaching, certification requirements, mentoring experiences, and working conditions. The Black Teacher Recruitment and Retention Working Group goals were to hear and share Black teachers' perspectives and experiences in Baltimore City, investigate causes for the gap, and create recommendations for district leaders to recruit and retain quality Black teachers so that City Schools will have a teaching population that reflects the students we serve.

Core Team Members

We engaged with over 250 individuals in the last year, guided by the work of the following core team members:

- Natalia Bacchus, Teacher Organizer, Teachers' Democracy Project
- Diamonté Brown, President, Baltimore Teachers Union
- Danielle Butler Neale, Student Wholeness Specialist
- Sarah Diehl, Executive Director, Recruitment & Staffing Services
- sharlimar douglass, Freelance Educator
- Cristina Duncan Evans, Library Media Specialist, James McHenry E/MS
- Tracey Fowlkes, Teacher, Baltimore Teachers Union
- Jeremy Grant-Skinner, Chief Human Capital Officer
- Angela Harvey-Bowen, Facilitator, ENCORE! Facilitation Partners
- Charelle James, Executive Director, Urban Teachers
- Drew Monger, Manager, Human Capital Strategy
- Anthony Peña, Manager, School Operations Support
- Lisa Smith-Sherrod, Manager, School Operations Support
- Rebecca Yenawine, Executive Director, Teachers' Democracy Project

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Recommendations

Certification

- Monitor state legislative and regulatory activity, including changes to certification requirements, to ensure that entrance exams and other certification-related exercises do not continue to affect Black teachers and teacher candidates inequitably;
- Fully implement a new Human Capital service model to provide timely, accurate, race-conscious certification supports directly to employees, reframing the traditional district certification role to supporting retention and advancement instead of screening candidates out;
- Work with the Maryland State Department of Education and with institutions of higher education to provide adequate information about necessary coursework to conditionally certified teachers.

Mentoring

- Provide full-time mentors in schools with the highest numbers of new, Black teachers and where turnover of Black teachers is persistently highest;
- Create a cohort-based support structure specifically for conditionally certified teachers to offer holistic supports that are uniquely targeted toward this group of new teachers with higher attrition risk;
- Increase the district office's involvement in the existing mentor selection and evaluation process so that more teachers more regularly have access to the highest quality mentors.

Pipelines

- Provide funding and cohort mentoring for paraeducators who wish to become teachers so that at least 20 paraeducators become certified to teach annually through a new, targeted Para-to-Teacher program.
- Maintain a full-time, full-release Baltimore Teachers Union (BTU) staff member focused exclusively on support for paraeducators, including a focus on coordinating and mentoring paraprofessionals and school-related personnel (PSRPs) in the para-to-teacher program;
- Spend time with a variety of stakeholders to reimagine the district's Teacher Academy of Maryland program and Career & Technical Education program that prepares future teachers.

Data

- Disaggregate human capital-related data by race with more frequency to uncover disparities, identifying district- and school-based human capital decisions that give some students and staff greater access than others to key resources, and annually report on racially disaggregated data;
- Work through the BTU Joint Oversight Committee to identify and remove barriers preventing Black teachers from applying and being selected for the Model teacher pathway;
- Administer an annual satisfaction survey to get regular feedback from teachers, publicly report on overall and disaggregated results, and engage in focus groups to learn more qualitatively from Black teachers.

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More broadly than the specific focus areas for which recommendations are listed above, we also recommend support for the new City Schools racial equity policy and the implementation of anti-racist and anti-bias training in order to maintain a focus on racial equity in the district's work with teachers. Additionally, Core Team members have interest in developing a process to examine how City Schools can prioritize teacher supports across bodies of work, including – for example – principal evaluations and professional development.

Additional Background

History

The Black Teacher Recruitment and Retention Working Group (BTRRWG) emerged after testimony from Teachers' Democracy Project, Baltimore Movement of Rank-and-File Educators, and partners was presented at the February 27, 2018 Baltimore City Public School board meeting. This testimony raised concerns related to the decline in Black teachers and helped to crystalize a need to focus on the issue, to not only better understand contributing factors, but also to determine how we could increase the recruitment and retention of Black teachers. This work was embraced by the Human Capital Office and a diverse working group was formed in the spring of the same year. An explicit goal was to include as many stakeholder perspectives as possible in a core team to guide a working group and to plan monthly public meetings open to all. Stakeholders included teachers, other educators, district staff, advocacy organizations, representatives from traditional and alternative teacher preparation programs, and community members.

As a core team, we established norms and values, identified the top four challenges that we thought most impeded the recruitment and retention of Black teachers and planned to focus our public sessions on each of these issues. Our topics were Certification, Retention, and Black student-to-teacher and Para-to-teacher pipelines. From our initial meetings, we learned more and saw the need to break our Core Team into task forces to address some of these needs. Our task forces became Certification, Mentoring, Pipelines, and Data. These groups took charge of research and planning in between public sessions, as well as reflecting on the rich stories we heard in public sessions in order to refine a list of overall recommendations.

Reflections

After our first public meeting, a teacher shared that she had never been to a district meeting like the Working Group meeting, where every voice was welcome and heard. Though the district regularly hosts sessions designed for receiving public comment, implementation of this group from start to finish was collaborative and without hierarchy; participants reported feeling this difference and we think it is reflected in our recommendations. This also meant that at times, the process was messy and the plan unclear. We ultimately hired a facilitator to assist us with our process so that we could strategically tackle our objectives. Monthly public forums were held in different school buildings throughout the city to ensure accessibility to all potential participants.

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Another important element of our work that made this process unique is that we isolated the needs of Black teachers. This made our process look and feel different. We knew that if we really wanted to hear the voices of Black teachers, we had to make room for Black culture and stories. This meant that when we hosted public sessions – even if there was a topic that involved a specific theme with some presentation and audience listening – that we needed to always make room for people to share their stories. We realized as we progressed that this public working group was itself an important supportive space for Black teachers, and that it reflected the principles of Critical Race Theory. Critical Race Theory is a legal and philosophical framework for analyzing institutional racism. In this framework, often-unheard stories provide a counter-narrative to white supremacy.

For many participants, this represented the first time they were aware that a district initiative looked so explicitly and singularly at a problem through a racial lens, and there were clear benefits. The issues we unearthed and the way we unearthed them made systemic problems more human. The district’s senior leadership was able to hear the people affected by district decisions and processes in ways that allowed for real perspective shifts to occur. This goes beyond concrete recommendations and we believe this approach is worth understanding and replicating.

In retrospect, we believe we would have benefitted from doing more to explore our own racial identities and experiences so we could have had a more solid foundation for working together across differences. We also would have benefitted from some more personal exploration of our understandings of race and what it means to center Black experiences. Though everyone was committed to a common vision, our different experiences, races, and identities created different working styles that are important to unpack when working as a team where all voices are valued.

Next Steps

Our report and recommendations are a milestone in our shared work to recruit and retain more Black teachers. We learned over this past year, and through this process, how important it is to listen to Black teachers. They are telling the district, their principals and stakeholders what they need to be excellent teachers for the students of City Schools. Our hope is that the district fully implements the recommendations from this report, which we believe will attract and retain more Black teachers in City Schools.

Some of the twelve recommendations are already on their way to being in effect. Other recommendations will require some more investigation. It is important moving forward that there is a structure or process for monitoring the implementation of recommendations. At a minimum, the working group will convene in six months and again in one year to check in on progress with implementation of these recommendations.