

Recruitment and Retention:

Pilot Solutions Designed by Teachers of Color Phase I Report

February 2023



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Executive Summary

A large body of research, including a detailed report commissioned by Digital Promise in 2020, points to the importance of diversifying the teacher workforce across the U.S. Too often, though, state- or district-level teacher workforce diversity initiatives are applied in broad strokes and do not center the experiences of teachers of color in the locations where they are being implemented. Understanding that teachers of color in a given district or charter network are uniquely qualified to define challenges and to ideate and iterate on solutions regarding their local teacher of color pipelines, the Center for Inclusive Innovation at Digital Promise is working to support a cohort of six local education agencies (LEAs) to design and implement locally contextualized strategies for recruiting and retaining teachers of color using its Inclusive Innovation model. The model intentionally prioritizes the perspectives, experiences, and ideas of those who are most impacted by a challenge. As such, it provides a valuable framework for engaging teachers of color directly in researching and designing solutions.

Through the Inclusive Innovation process, each participating LEA assembled a Design Team. The teachers of color on the team were key to informing and advising on the inclusion of additional team members. LEA Design Teams then created solution goals to address their problems of practice that had a high potential for impact, and they developed theories of action (the “what”) that linked their problems of practice to their solution goals through specific initiatives or practices that the LEAs would put in place. Through additional design studios in spring 2022, the LEAs iterated on their problems of practice, solution goals, and theories of action. They also began to flesh out exactly how they would implement the initiatives they had decided on. This work has continued into the summer and fall of 2022 through regular Design Team meetings and targeted team coaching from Center for Inclusive Innovation staff. As of early fall 2022, LEAs were working to launch and iterate on their initiatives; this early implementation work will be discussed in a subsequent report published in 2023.

The LEA-developed initiatives included numerous teacher of color affinity groups, a teacher of color mentoring program, a mentoring program for Black male students, a Grow-Your-Own program for paraprofessional staff to become teachers, and multicultural fairs. Several key themes emerged from the LEAs based on what they had discovered by participating in the Inclusive Innovation process. One theme is that centering the voices of teachers of color—first, foremost, and throughout the design and implementation process—is of paramount importance. Another theme that arose addresses how focusing on conditions related to teacher of color retention can pay subsequent dividends with recruitment by creating a culture where teachers of color want to work. Additionally, participants revealed how the

design and details matter when creating events to foster teacher of color recruitment and retention, and they discussed how receiving regular coaching from an external partner has been tremendously helpful with accountability and idea generation.

The efforts of each LEA in the cohort profiled here have been intensive and quite meaningful for the participants, with learnings that are expected to endure. As one superintendent summarized, “The design process has shifted my thinking as an equity-minded leader so that my future processes are just as involved and focused.” For LEAs beginning their own teacher of color pipeline work, as well as for partner organizations and anyone interested in proof of concept of the Inclusive Innovation process, a great deal can be learned from the experiences of these LEAs.

Introduction

A large body of research, including a detailed report commissioned by Digital Promise in 2020, points to the importance of diversifying the teacher workforce across the U.S.¹ Not only do studies single out the particular advantages, for example, the positive impact Black teachers have on Black students in improving academic outcomes and reducing disciplinary encounters,² but having a teacher of color also imparts academic, social, and emotional benefits for all students. One example is a teacher of color serving as a positive role model and imparting cultural knowledge to an entire class.³ As the 2020 Digital Promise report states:

... the benefits of diversity in the teacher workforce are considerable for all students, regardless of their race or ethnicity. Schools that are more ethnically and racially diverse produce better academic results, create environments with reduced anxiety levels and help improve students' social and emotional learning. Similarly, a diversity of teachers in students' lives builds social trust among people from different racial and ethnic backgrounds and creates a wider sense of community. The exposure to diversity better prepares all students for life and work in an increasingly global and diverse world."⁴

Yet, the most recent national data available from the 2017-18 National Center for Education Statistics Teacher and Principal Survey reveal that only 21% of the U.S. teacher workforce that year was made up of teachers of color.⁵ This is in stark misalignment with the 40% of people of color in the U.S.,⁶ let alone the 54% of students of color in the U.S. public K-12 education system as of fall 2020—a proportion which is projected to continue to rise.⁷

In addition to the broader need for diversity in the teacher workforce, there are frequently large and growing misalignments between the proportion of teachers of color and the proportion of students of color in a given district or school. This deprives all students of the benefits of a racially diverse teacher workforce, and in particular deprives students of color of the opportunity to see role models in the classroom who look like

¹ Digital Promise. (2020, April). *Pipeline and retention of teachers of color: Systems and structures impeding growth and sustainability in the United States*. https://digitalpromise.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/04/Teacher-of-Color-Lit-Rev-Rpt_FINAL.pdf. For a more thorough synthesis of this research, see, e.g., Carver-Thomas, D. (2022, May 25). *Written testimony before the House Appropriations Subcommittee on Labor, Health and Human Services, Education, and Related Agencies, U.S. House of Representatives, Subcommittee Hearing; Tackling Teacher Shortages*. <https://docs.house.gov/meetings/AP/AP07/20220525/114831/HHRG-117-AP07-Wstate-Carver-ThomasD-20220525.pdf>

² See, e.g., Dee, T. (2004). Teachers, race and student achievement in a randomized experiment. *The Review of Economics and Statistics*, 86(1), 195–210; Gershenson, S., Hart, C. M. D., Lindsay, C. A., & Papageorge, N. W. (2017). *The long-run impacts of same-race teachers* [Discussion Paper Series]. IZA Institute of Labor Economics.

³ Carver-Thomas, D. (2018). *Diversifying the teaching profession: How to recruit and retain teachers of color*. Learning Policy Institute.

⁴ Digital Promise. (2020, April). *Pipeline and retention of teachers of color: Systems and structures impeding growth and sustainability in the United States*. https://digitalpromise.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/04/Teacher-of-Color-Lit-Rev-Rpt_FINAL.pdf For a more thorough synthesis of this research, see, e.g., Carver-Thomas, D. (2022, May 25). (p. 5-6).

⁵ Taie, S., & Goldring, R. (2020). Characteristics of public and private elementary and secondary school teachers in the United States: Results from the 2017–18 National Teacher and Principal Survey [NCES 2020-142]. U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics.

⁶ U.S. Census Bureau. (2020). National population characteristics: 2010–2019. U.S. Department of Commerce. <https://www.census.gov/data/tables/time-series/demo/popest/2010s-national-detail.html>

⁷ U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, Common Core of Data (CCD), "State Nonfiscal Survey of Public Elementary and Secondary Education," 2009–10 and 2020–21; and National Elementary and Secondary Enrollment by Race/Ethnicity Projection Model, through 2030. See *Digest of Education Statistics 2021*, table [203.50](https://nces.ed.gov/ipeds/data/nces/ipeds/datafiles/2021/tables/203.50). <https://nces.ed.gov/ipeds/data/nces/ipeds/datafiles/2021/tables/203.50>

them. Accordingly, states and districts are working to address this challenge through a range of promising recruitment and retention initiatives. The 2020 report commissioned by Digital Promise details several of these approaches, including partnerships with teacher credentialing programs at minority-serving institutions and Grow-Your-Own programs that recruit teacher candidates to teach in their local communities and support them in their preparation.⁸

However, too often these state- or district-level initiatives are applied in broad strokes and do not center the experiences of teachers of color in the locations where they are being implemented.⁹ With teachers of color in a given district or charter network uniquely qualified to define challenges and to ideate and iterate on solutions regarding their local teacher of color pipelines, the Center for Inclusive Innovation at Digital Promise is working to support a cohort of local education agencies (LEAs) to design and implement contextualized strategies for recruiting and retaining teachers of color using its Inclusive Innovation model.

Addressing the Teacher of Color Pipeline Challenge: The Inclusive Innovation Model

The Center for Inclusive Innovation at Digital Promise defines its Inclusive Innovation approach as:

An equity-centered R&D model that engages communities—students, parents, families, and community leaders—in partnership with district leaders, educators, researchers, and developers to create novel solutions to complex educational challenges. The model prioritizes the voices and lived experiences of those who have been historically and systematically excluded to ensure the process and outcomes reflect their needs, hopes, and expertise.¹⁰

The Inclusive Innovation approach encompasses five phases: connect and commit, inquire and investigate, design and develop, implement and iterate, and sustain and scale.¹¹ Digital Promise facilitates LEAs working in partnership with educators and communities to engage in the equity-centered R&D approach. The model (Figure 1) intentionally prioritizes the perspectives, experiences, and ideas of those who are most impacted by a challenge. As such, it provides a valuable framework for engaging teachers of color directly in researching and designing solutions.

⁸ Digital Promise. (2020, April). *Pipeline and retention of teachers of color: Systems and structures impeding growth and sustainability in the United States*. https://digitalpromise.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/04/Teacher-of-Color-Lit-Rev-Rpt_FINAL.pdf. See also, for example, Steiner, E. D., Greer, L., Berdie, L., Schwartz, H. L., Woo, A., Doan, S., Lawrence, R. A., Wolfe, R. L., & Gittens, A. D. (2022). *Prioritizing strategies to racially diversify the K-12 teacher workforce: Findings from the State of the American Teacher and State of the American Principal Surveys*. RAND Corporation. https://www.rand.org/pubs/research_reports/RRA1108-6.html.

⁹ See, for example, Haddix, M. M. (2017). Diversifying Teaching and Teacher Education: Beyond Rhetoric and Toward Real Change. *Journal of Literacy Research*, 49(1), 141–149. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1086296X16683422>; Ladson-Billings, G. J. (2005). Is the Team All Right? Diversity and Teacher Education. *Journal of Teacher Education*, 56(3), 229–234. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0022487105275917>.

¹⁰ Digital Promise. (n.d.). *Inclusive innovation model*. <https://digitalpromise.org/inclusive-innovation/inclusive-innovation-process/>

¹¹ Angevine, C., Cator, K., Liberman, B., Smith, K., & Young, V. (2019, November). *Designing a process for inclusive innovation: A radical commitment to equity*. Digital Promise. <https://digitalpromise.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/11/Designing-a-Process-for-Inclusive-Innovation.pdf>

Figure 1. The Digital Promise Inclusive Innovation Model

| | Connect & Commit | Inquire & Investigate | Design & Develop | Implement & Iterate | Sustain & Scale |
|------------------------|--|--|--|---|--|
| Goal | Build relationships, trust, and a shared commitment to tackling a challenge. | Deeply investigate the challenge from multiple perspectives and arrive at target outcomes for addressing and measuring progress against the challenge. | Create one or more prototype solutions that can be tested for the target outcomes. | Implement one or more prototypes, tracking multiple progress indicators and target outcomes to iterate and improve. | Implement refined solution(s) in multiple contexts, improving local implementations and gathering knowledge for scaling. |
| Equity-first practices | Engagement | | | | |
| | Capacity Building | | | | |
| | Reflection | | | | |
| | Recognition | | | | |

Two years ago, Digital Promise’s Center for Inclusive Innovation invited LEAs from its League of Innovative Schools, a nationally known network of more than 150 districts that are advancing teaching and learning through innovative systems transformation, to apply to be selected for a unique cohort of LEAs to design, build, and pilot recruitment and retention solutions designed by teachers of color. Five school districts and one charter network were selected to participate. The goals of the project focused on the generation of solution concepts in phase one (2020-2021) and on the design and implementation of pilot programs in phase two (2022-2023).

This report profiles the experiences of these five public PreK-12 LEAs across the U.S. that participated in the Teacher of Color Recruitment and Retention cohort to create locally contextualized strategies, designed by teachers of color. With one exception, each LEA is in a location where their student population is diversifying faster than their teacher population (see Figure 2 below to better understand the extent of the challenge in each LEA). The LEAs were selected to participate in a year-long initiative in 2020 to identify possible solution concepts to address teacher of color pipeline issues. Each LEA identified a teacher to participate on the advisory council as a project leader. Digital Promise worked with the teachers to host a series of design studios with groups of teachers of color at each LEA. This 2020 work—detailed in 2021 in a summary report entitled *Inclusive Innovation: Increasing Recruitment and Retention of Teachers of Color*¹²—generated more than 20 ideas for recruiting and retaining teachers. Strategies for recruiting teachers of color that emerged included improving school culture to be more inclusive for students of color; developing innovative methods to engage middle and high school students in the teaching profession; creating diverse hiring committees; developing more intentional hiring practices; and creating grow-your-own teacher training programs. Strategies for retaining teachers of color that emerged from this work included supporting efforts

¹²Digital Promise. (2021, February). *Inclusive Innovation: Increasing recruitment and retention of teachers of color. Summation of Digital Promise design studios with teachers of color.* <https://digitalpromise.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/02/FINAL-Draft-Teacher-of-Color-YR1-Report.pdf>.

to develop robust networks for teachers of color; creating safe spaces for teachers of color to address concerns and generate new ideas; creating opportunities for policymakers to shadow teachers; supporting the mental health needs of teachers of color; developing effective mentorship programs; and creating diverse career pathway opportunities for teachers of color.¹³ In late 2020, Digital Promise co-hosted a national **Teachers of Color Showcase: Reimagining Recruitment and Retention**, where teachers of color presented their solution concepts and LEAs were able to establish relationships with BIPOC-led teacher recruitment and retention organizations. This work from 2020 led directly into the work to develop the pilots that are profiled here.

This report is focused specifically on the design and launch of the recruitment and retention pilots. It is structured into five subsequent sections:

I. Background and Context: Background on the LEAs and the design process for the Teacher of Color Recruitment and Retention solutions.

II. The Pilot Models: Overviews of the models applied in each LEA's Teacher of Color Recruitment and Retention initiative.

III. LEA Discoveries: Key discoveries to date from the participating LEAs beginning pilot implementations.

IV. Key Themes and Takeaways: Themes that arose across LEAs during each step of the design process, including successes and opportunities for modifications in future iterations of this work.

V. Implications and Next Steps: A brief discussion of implications from the report's findings and a preview of subsequent work to document implementation of the pilot strategies.

The findings discussed in this report arise from interviews with members of each LEA's Design Team and with Digital Promise staff as well as a review of documents that each LEA has created.

¹³Digital Promise. (2021, February). *Inclusive Innovation: Increasing recruitment and retention of teachers of color. Summation of Digital Promise design studios with teachers of color.* <https://digitalpromise.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/02/FINAL-Draft-Teacher-of-Color-YR1-Report.pdf>. (p. 6-10).

I. Background and Context: Demographics and Problems of Practice

Participating LEA Demographic Snapshot

The participating school districts and charter network come from a range of geographic locations and serve different student populations. Figure 2 contains basic demographic information about each of the LEAs highlighted in this report (note that the first row of Figure 2 contains demographic information from three districts that are collaborating on their Teacher of Color Recruitment and Retention work). To encourage project participants to speak candidly about the process and their LEA contexts, interviewee names and LEA names have been omitted.

Figure 2. Participating LEA Demographic Information

| LEA Size | Approx. proportion of non-white students | Approx. proportion of non-white staff |
|-----------------|--|---------------------------------------|
| 1,900 students | 10% | 5% |
| 2,700 students | 8% | 2% |
| 3,400 students | 30% | Data unavailable |
| 8,500 students | 28% | 5% |
| 27,000 students | 30% | 9% |
| 6,200 students | 47% | 7% |
| 6,000 students | 82% | 18% |
| 425 students | 98% | 98% |

The demographic information in Figure 2 reveals that most of the LEAs whose Teacher of Color Recruitment and Retention efforts are discussed in this report have higher proportions of non-white students than non-white teachers. In several LEAs, the non-white student population has been growing especially quickly over the last few years, which has increased the delta between the proportions of teachers versus students of color in those LEAs. Such demographic shifts were described as a motivating factor for LEAs to increase their teacher diversity to more closely reflect the diversity of their student populations. As an administrator in one LEA shared, “When we think about the distribution of [teachers of color] as far as kids seeing a manifestation of themselves on a day-to-day basis, that still needs a lot of work.”

Figure 3. Participating LEA Problems of Practice

| |
|--|
| There is a need to enhance our teacher/educator recruitment and retention methods in order for our teacher/educator workforce to more closely mirror the diversity of our student body. |
| Black and brown students in our school system and region have very limited access to Black male mentors or Black male educators. |
| Study and dismantle the stigma associated with teachers of colors being hired in [our LEA]. Implement efforts to ensure teachers of color feel valued in their schools, including an acknowledgement of why diversity is important to [us]. |
| Connecting with a wider candidate pool of teachers with diverse backgrounds, including a deeper pool of teachers and student teachers of color, helping them learn about [our LEA], and attracting them to employment opportunities within [our LEA]. Can be difficult to attract to the region with lack of diversity. |
| The percentage of Black teachers is in significant decline. This decline is dramatic in the following areas: enrollment in teacher preparation programs, [and] graduation rates from teacher preparation programs, with significant disparity between white teachers and teachers of color. Currently teacher licensure exams have shut out 63% of Black teachers from entering the teaching field in [our state]. |

Design Team Participants and Problems of Practice

Through the Inclusive Innovation process described above, each of the five participating districts and the charter network assembled a Design Team. The teachers of color on the team were key to informing and advising on the inclusion of additional team members. Because the work was focused on moving from an idea to solution design, a broad group of stakeholders were recruited to include additional LEA leaders, principals, post-secondary institutions, and recruitment and retention partners. With the teachers of color co-leading the work, each LEA's Design Team identified a problem of practice affecting their LEA's current ability to recruit and/or retain teachers of color. Figure 3 displays the problems of practice identified by each LEA.

LEA Design Teams then created solution goals to address their problems of practice that had a high potential for impact and developed theories of action (the "what") that linked their problems of practice to their solution goals through specific initiatives or practices that the LEAs would put in place. Through additional design studios in spring 2022, the LEAs iterated on their problems of practice, solution goals, and theories of action, and began to flesh out exactly how they would implement the initiatives they had decided on. This work has continued into the summer and fall of 2022 through regular Design Team meetings and targeted team coaching from Center for Inclusive Innovation staff. As of early fall 2022, LEAs were working to launch and iterate on their initiatives; this early implementation work will be discussed in a subsequent report published in 2023.

A key element of the Inclusive Innovation process that surfaced in each Design Team's work has been the centering of teachers of color as the experts to lead the process of designing pilots to address their problems of practice and to ensure the solutions are truly aligned and effective in targeting their needs. As a Center for Inclusive Innovation staff member explained:

"We basically made the commitment that teachers of color are the only ones that actually know how to get to the right recruitment and retention solutions for teachers of color ... And we know all the issues and the barriers, and we didn't want to spend a lot of time rehashing that, but we want to acknowledge that. We wanted to move pretty quickly to thinking about what do you need, and what can help."

II. The Pilot Models: Teacher of Color Recruitment and Retention Solutions

The Teacher of Color Recruitment and Retention models that the LEAs ultimately piloted resulted from considerable iteration on their initial solution goals and theories of action to best address their local needs. This section provides a snapshot of the pilot models across the LEAs.

Teacher of Color Affinity Groups

Teacher of color affinity group structures arose as, by far, the most common strategy among the participating LEAs to center the lived experiences of teachers of color and foster their belonging within the LEAs. With teachers and administrators from multiple LEAs having explicitly mentioned the need to focus on fortifying teacher of color retention efforts before turning their attention to recruitment, affinity groups were described as compelling vehicles for building the type of culture that would aid in teacher of color retention and potentially help with teacher of color recruitment down the road. As an administrator from one LEA explained:

“Our ultimate goal is to ensure teachers of color have a place where they can be vulnerable to share about their experiences and get support and advocate for students and staff, feel validated for the experience they bring to the table as teachers, and are shown that they are valued through meaningful structures that schools implement to ensure that teachers of color feel appreciated.”

Echoing a common theme, one teacher of color explained how the idea of creating affinity groups arose directly from the experience of participating in the initial Digital Promise Teacher of Color Recruitment and Retention design work:

“I felt so invigorated, and I felt so enlightened to know that there were other teachers who felt like me. There were other people who looked like me in education in this area. It felt really good to have a community.”

To this end, four of the participating LEAs developed an explicit affinity group structure, and another developed a teacher of color mentorship program that has aspects in common with the affinity groups established elsewhere. The following are examples:

Black Male Fellowship Program: One LEA is working toward a specific goal to increase the number of Black men in LEA teaching positions—by 25 in the next 5 years—and has created multiple initiatives in service of this goal, including an affinity group for all of the LEA’s Black male teachers, administrators, and staff. The program is intended in part to create “a very authentic safe space” for these educators with the ultimate goal of building a brotherhood that helps retain Black males in the profession and the LEA. The fellowship is scheduled to meet four times during the school year, for two hours each, and during the workday so as not to impose additional demands on members’ time. The LEA’s Teacher of Color Design Team was very deliberate about designing an initial experience for the fellows that would support deep engagement with

the group, in part by taking them through exercises that require personal vulnerability. As an administrator explained prior to the first meeting, “We’re going to create an environment in the room where we activate the [fellows] and amplify their voices from the beginning so they have complete buy-in and ownership.” According to a teacher of color on the Design Team who participated in that meeting, this effort was highly successful:

“It was beautiful ... we shared our personal stories, my process of getting to where I am now. We also let each other know that we need to make sure we’re all accountable. We need to look out for one another. We’re going to be intentional about everything we do. It felt genuine, and it felt real, and it was nice to see how it was received.”

The fellowship is also intended to be both a vehicle for showcasing Black males as role models in the community—planned efforts include hosting tailgates at football games and having fellows help out in elementary classrooms across the LEA—and for recruiting additional Black male teachers to the LEA. LEA administrators anticipate that the fellows will be working closely with Black Student Unions at local colleges and universities as well as with educator preparation programs to get the LEA’s name out in front of these groups and establish connections with prospective educators. As an LEA administrator explained, “It’s a way for [us] to support the programs for the universities, to provide us the opportunity to mentor, serve, influence, and recruit those Black students.”

Affinity Groups Within and Across Cultures and Experiences. Another LEA is working to increase participation in an affinity group with teachers of different races and ethnicities to build a more inclusive culture. The design is centered on creating a space for teachers only so that teachers can be their authentic selves. It is predominantly comprised of educators of color, with some allies. The group started organically after the murder of George Floyd, with a group of teachers coming together monthly to provide one another with support and an opportunity for dialogue. To increase participation, teachers who are currently a part of the group have begun to engage in targeted outreach to teachers of color by recruiting during summer and beginning-of-year professional learning events that the LEA holds for teachers, and the LEA is working on a communication plan to support teacher recruitment. The facilitators also receive coaching from Digital Promise to plan each meeting and engage in post-meeting reflection to ensure that the participants’ time is being used thoughtfully and well.

Yet another LEA is sponsoring two affinity groups—one for teachers of color and one for LGBTQ+ teachers. The rationale for the affinity groups, according to a member of the LEA’s Teacher of Color Design Team, is that,

“We want to build a structure to allow teachers to... have regular [touch points] surrounding what it’s like to be in our [LEA], trying to build and foster that connectivity.”

A letter sent to all of the LEA's staff inviting them to join the affinity groups provides further detail, describing them as "an optional discussion space in which participants unpack what it means to have membership within a racial or intersectional group, build relationships, and have an opportunity to work towards our collective mission." The intent for the affinity groups is that teachers will eventually be able to engage as facilitators, participants, or allies. For now, though, an administrator explained that it's important to the Design Team that teachers of color really build structures they're comfortable with before allies are allowed to jump in. An additional goal for the affinity groups is "to foster a two-way conversation of what teachers of color experience in the [LEA] and what they're hoping to see with members of the [LEA's] cabinet, so we can turn that into action." The LEA has secured a local restaurant for the initial affinity group meetings, with the intention of making participants feel like the LEA is investing in a high-quality, thoughtful event and has a target of 15 to 25 initial participants for each affinity group.

Regional Teacher of Color Network. A group of districts in the same region collaborated on the Teacher of Color Recruitment and Retention initiative by electing to host a series of regional convenings for teachers of color (necessary to achieve critical mass since the number of teachers of color in each district is so low). The districts are co-hosting two initial regional convenings, with the first held in October 2022 and the second in January 2023. The goal is to invite teachers of color from districts across the county into one room to share their experiences and build community. Teachers of color on the districts' Design Team talked about how they wanted the convenings to be meaningful, infused with professionalism, and overall a "first-class experience," where teachers of color attending each convening would feel welcome and valued. The districts are holding the all-day convenings at a university to facilitate collaboration with a regional partner. They are catering meals from minority-owned businesses and bringing in speakers, including the dean of a local school of education who is herself an educator of color. In addition to speakers and facilitated conversations, a large portion of the first meeting will be dedicated to ensuring teachers meet each other more informally and speak candidly about their experiences. The districts were strategic about planning the first convening on what is a professional development day for most districts in the region so that teachers would not need to be pulled out of their classrooms. The districts were also intentional about having teachers of color plan the convenings, with district administrators getting out of the way, to ensure the events would authentically represent the experiences of teachers of color and address their needs.

Mentoring Programs for Teachers and Students

Mentoring programs are another Teacher of Color Recruitment and Retention strategy being developed by multiple LEAs. In one case, teachers of color themselves are the mentors and mentees, while another LEA is implementing a mentoring program where high school students of color mentor younger students of color. In both cases, the goal is to foster a sense of belonging among both mentors and mentees, with immediate implications for teacher of color retention in the LEA pursuing the teacher mentoring program and eventual implications for teacher of color recruitment in both LEAs.

Teacher of Color Mentoring Program. The initiative one LEA has been iterating on most closely through their partnership with Digital Promise is aimed at helping teachers of color feel more connected to peers with similar experiences in the LEA, in service of improving teacher of color retention. As a teacher of color on the Design Team explained,

“We want to create a safe space for teachers of color to have conversations about some of their challenges, and to get some guidance from the folks who’ve been in the system a long time. It’s developing this kind of network of trust and interdependence and really capitalizing on the strengths of everybody.”

To this end, the program’s specific mission was articulated by the [LEA’s] Design Team as twofold. The first goal is: “To create in program leaders, mentors, mentees, and other participants a critical consciousness of the common challenges that they are likely to encounter by virtue of their racial, cultural, or ethnic status. Common challenges include feelings of isolation; tokenism; biased perceptions about ability, authority, or expertise; and perceptions of the value of teaching or service.” The second goal is: “To support new educators of color as they begin their careers [in the LEA].” In addition, longer-term objectives for the program include a forum for collaborating with LEA staff to ensure the voices of teachers of color are heard.

Teacher input has been important in the development of the program. In spring 2022, the LEA held a meeting with interested teachers of color to get feedback on what they thought was important to incorporate into a teacher of color mentoring program. As of early September 2022, the LEA had reached out to all of its teachers of color to determine what type of role(s) they’d like to play in the program: mentee, mentor, panelist for group discussions, and/or planner or participant in professional development, among others. Members of the LEA Teacher of Color Design Team have articulated and shared a list of essential duties for mentors to ensure that prospective mentors know what they are signing up for. An initial kickoff meeting was held over dinner to underscore the LEA’s investment in the program and its intent to create a compelling experience.

Black Male Youth Mentoring Program. Another LEA is focusing on retaining and recruiting Black male educators and has established a partnership with the He is Me Institute that includes a mentorship program called I Am King. The mentorship program focuses on developing Black male high school students as mentors for younger students through I Am King, with the intention of ultimately encouraging the high school student mentors’ early entry into teacher preparation programs (a research-validated approach known as Grow-Your-Own). As an administrator explained:

“The data say that Black males do not see the teaching profession as being a viable [career path]. So we are starting from step one and trying to inspire young Black males to see education as a valuable, viable profession. Our early entrance point is the partnership with He is Me. The idea is that young Black males come in and provide mentorship to youth, but they discover their passion, too, to work with youth. And we take advantage of the opportunity to inspire them and get them to understand that education is a profession they should highly consider. It’s the entry point into the teacher preparation programs at the local higher ed institutions.”

Initially, the LEA is paying a fee to He is Me to help facilitate the work, funded with passthrough grant dollars from Digital Promise. To make this work sustainable, the LEA has created a site coordinator position to oversee the mentoring program. The site coordinator is situated at the LEA’s high school to assist with the recruitment of Black male students into mentoring roles.

Multicultural Fairs

In one LEA that planned multiple initiatives, teachers of color on the LEA's Design Team brainstormed a multicultural fair for the LEA and broader local community as a way for teachers of color to feel more connected. The rationale behind the multicultural fair, as explained by a LEA administrator, is that, "Our teachers of color want everyone to know who they are, what makes them who they are, through a celebration of culture that makes it easy to connect ... and really have an appreciation of our cultural differences." The multicultural fair is tentatively planned for spring 2023 and is viewed by the LEA's Teacher of Color Design Team as a retention initiative.

Grow-Your-Own Program for Classified Staff to Become Teachers

Another LEA is implementing a Grow-Your-Own (GYO) program structured to set up pathways for classified staff to earn credentials—in part because classified staff in the LEA are, on the whole, more diverse than classroom teachers. The GYO program specifically focuses on teacher assistants who have their college degrees. The LEA has entered into partnerships with four higher education institutions and the state teacher's union, with an LEA administrator explaining that,

"They all have these varieties of transition to teaching licensure programs that we felt could serve as a diverse array of opportunities to fit the learning and work-life balance of folks who wanted to go back to school."

This initiative is already in progress, with the aforementioned LEA administrator estimating that the LEA currently has 15 to 20 classified staff members working toward earning their teaching license and explaining that, "they are going to serve as a pool of individuals to feed into our teacher pipeline down the road."

III. LEA Discoveries and Learnings

Several key themes emerged from the LEAs based on what they discovered by participating in the Inclusive Innovation process. Based on interviews with teachers and administrators on the Teacher of Color Design Teams, key discoveries include:

- Centering teacher of color voice throughout the design and implementation process is of paramount importance;
- Focusing on conditions related to teacher of color retention can pay subsequent dividends with recruitment;
- The design and details matter when creating events to foster teacher of color recruitment and retention; and
- Regular coaching from an external partner can be extremely valuable in advancing the work.

First, foremost, and throughout, center teacher of color voice.

The most frequently discussed and the most broadly appreciated aspect of the Teacher of Color Design Teams is the distributed leadership element, and specifically, the importance of continually centering teachers of color as leaders, designers, and implementers. This research-validated practice is integral to ensuring that LEA Teacher of Color Design Teams are able to effectively and authentically identify problems of practice, solution goals, theories of action, and associated initiatives that are genuinely needed and are locally relevant. As an administrator from one LEA illustrated, centering teacher of color voice has "... allowed us to get some very authentic input from two [teachers of color] who are within their first three years in the profession. That really allowed us to get some very deep personal understanding of how we need to frame out the idea of the pipeline here." An administrator from another LEA shared, "We wanted to be very careful that we [as administrators] don't want to be the ones driving how to solve the problem. We feel like the best solutions come from the teachers of color who are living this experience."

Participating teachers noted and appreciated this role shift, especially from high-level LEA staff who were involved in the work. As one teacher of color explained:

"Our [leadership] really quieted down and let us lead the work as a teaching team. We really got to set out what our vision was, what we'd like to see happen, and where."

This appreciation was echoed by a teacher of color on another LEA's Design Team:

"It was very intentional on [the administrators'] part to let us speak first. It's not, 'I'm leading this,' it's, 'Ok, I may have an idea, but I'm not going to share my idea until you tell me what you think first.' It felt very natural and easy to work this way."

Administrators across several LEAs shared how valuable it was that teachers of color on the Design Teams were willing to be vulnerable in the experiences they shared. As one administrator articulated, “Our teachers [on our LEA’s Design Team] have been very open and are willing to share, which I’ve really appreciated. Oftentimes people are hesitant about truly opening up while administrators are in the room. I was pleased about [our teachers’] willingness to openly share and feel safe enough to do so.” Creating space for this level of vulnerability requires skillful facilitation and should not be taken for granted by LEAs looking to replicate this work. Coaching (discussed later in this report) was identified as an especially helpful tool for LEA leaders in building their facilitation skills.

Focusing first on teacher of color retention can help create the conditions for strong recruitment.

Notably, all five of the LEAs’ theories of action ended up addressing the issue of needing to build community within their LEA among teachers of color. Four LEAs are working to achieve this through affinity group structures, while one is building a staff mentorship model. While these efforts are focused most explicitly on retention, teachers and administrators across the LEAs’ Teacher of Color Design Teams were quick to explain that retention is connected to recruitment, and that they believed shoring up retention efforts would pay dividends in recruiting teachers of color down the road. The idea is that if each LEA can build a reputation for being a comfortable place for its current teachers of color and create visible structures to foster belonging among teachers of color, the LEAs will become more attractive places for incoming teachers of color to work.

Details and design matter when creating and implementing events to foster building a teacher of color community.

In each of the LEAs whose experiences are highlighted in this report, members of the Teacher of Color Recruitment and Retention Design Teams shared the importance of focusing on the details of event planning that would make events feel high in quality and help foster a sense of pride and value among participating teachers. Efforts included selecting offsite locations that would feel more special than holding events in school or LEA spaces; making choices about food that would appeal to attendees, including taking care to select and elevate BIPOC vendors; and selecting compelling outside speakers.

Similarly, LEAs shared that language and branding around broader initiatives was important for creating engagement. To this end, for example, the LEA that created the Black Male Fellowship has put substantial energy into its branding and publicity, which has included developing a logo infused with meaning based on the LEA’s colors (Figure 3); creating branded swag in the form of hoodies and other gifts for each fellow; and establishing a social media presence. The choice of hoodies was deliberate. According to an administrator, “We thought about polos, we thought about dress shirts, but we’re going to be our authentic selves.” Similarly, the LEA that created the teacher of color mentoring program talked about the meaning and intentionality behind its acronym and logo. As an administrator explained, “We’re playing on this concept of a spectrum of light and how the colors differentiate when they go through a prism and get distributed at different wavelengths.”

Receiving regular coaching from an external partner has been tremendously helpful with accountability and idea generation.

One theme universally acknowledged across the participating LEAs was that monthly coaching led by Digital Promise staff has held LEA Teacher of Color Design Teams accountable for making progress and meeting milestones on work that would otherwise have taken longer. According to a Teacher of Color Design Team member from one LEA,

"The 1:1 coaching ... has held our feet to the fire in terms of the small incremental steps that we need to take to ensure that we continue to progress." Another explained, "The regularity of touch points throughout the year has been great. It keeps you on pace." A third concurred: "[Our coach]'s consistency of being there and guiding us has been a huge part of our success. That's been a very important piece to keep us moving."

Another theme that frequently arose when LEA Teacher of Color Design Team members were talking about coaching was that the coaches offered ideas no one else in the room had thought to bring up, which has advanced Design Teams' thinking in productive ways. As a Teacher of Color Design Team member from one LEA explained, "I don't know how any of this would have worked without [our coaches]. They add nuances to our team, things we didn't think of or examine. It's helped us clarify our ideas." Added another, "Our coach has provided some powerful insight." A third concurred, stating that, "[Our coach] provides a critical perspective to the work."

LEAs were also especially appreciative about how thoroughly coaching was situated in their local LEA context and needs. "[Our coach's] understanding of who we are and what we're chasing and trying to build really fit in nicely with what we needed," said an administrator from one LEA. According to a teacher on another LEA's Teacher of Color Design Team,

"[Our coach] has really pushed our thinking to get a very close, intimate understanding of our problem of practice—to slow the conversation down. We spent one entire meeting focusing on personifying the experience of young [BIPOC] educators as they enter the profession, and personifying those who are the farthest away from the opportunity to be successful."

IV. Cross-Cutting Findings by Phase of the Design Process

Numerous themes arose across LEAs during each step of the design process, including successes as well as opportunities for modifications in future iterations of this work. This section details these themes, organized by phase of the work:

- Designing and maintaining local Teacher of Color Design Teams;
- Defining and iterating on the challenge by identifying a problem of practice, creating solution goals, and identifying desired outcomes;
- Creating theories of action that connect the problems of practice and solution goals;
- Continuing to iterate through design studios and 1:1 coaching; and
- Beginning to implement and further iterate on the initiatives.

Designing and Maintaining Local Teacher of Color Design Teams

LEAs' Teacher of Color Design Teams range from approximately five to 15 people. They each include key administrators from the LEA office who help remove barriers and push through the implementation of the work; teachers of color from the LEA, who are the authentic voices that identify challenges and solutions regarding BIPOC human capital in the LEA; and depending on each LEA's solution goals, representatives from nonprofits and/or local higher education institutions that can speak to BIPOC teacher pipelines and recruitment from the educator preparation program side. These teams generally meet anywhere from weekly to monthly, depending on what is in the works and how quickly planning needs to occur. Beyond these full team meetings, subsets of the teams meet with one another and with Digital Promise staff in a coaching context.

A Digital Promise staff member noted that scaffolding the conversations to foster and elevate teacher voice has been central to their efforts, and it does not just happen on its own: "We can't just get excited about the plan and skip to the next step. We're constantly trying to center the teachers of color, and it remains a challenge even though the LEAs are committed to it. These plans—the teachers really birthed them, and so I think the takeaway is that [teachers of color] have to be there at the beginning, the middle, and the end. That may sound obvious, but it's so important." As this Digital Promise staff member explained, the centering of teachers of color throughout the design work has paid dividends but required explicit scaffolding with LEA leaders at the beginning since it's such a different model from how other LEA teams or committees tend to work:

"Some of the work was getting [administrators] thinking about how a team comes together—to get them to say, your leadership here does not come from putting all your ideas on the table. Your leadership is to bring folks to the table who are uniquely positioned and have perspectives to talk about the needs and solutions that teachers of color are going to be best served by. You will be an equal participant together sitting alongside them, which is a little bit different for a superintendent or LEA leader."

Another Digital Promise staff member added that this scaffolding includes ensuring that LEA leaders—especially the superintendent or whoever is leading this work—are humble about what they know relative to what their staff knows:

“As a leader—I don’t care if you’re a white leader, a Black leader—you may have been a teacher, you may have come up through the ranks 10, 15, 20 years ago. But you’ve got to have some level of being able to say, ‘I don’t know how to do this,’ and so there’s a humility there. There’s a recognition that you don’t know and that you need to have this process in place. You’ve got to know that you need to listen to your teachers of color and get out of the way. And if you’re going to be in the room, you have to have a mindset of, this is the process taking shape, and you have to be able to respect that.”

Beyond the importance of bringing teachers of color to the table to share their lived experience and develop solutions rooted in that experience, some LEAs specifically pointed to the importance of having young teachers of color— in their first three to four years in the profession—represented in the teacher of color pipeline work. The idea here is that while veteran teachers of color have the most experience and institutional history to share, newer teachers are best positioned to discuss recruitment and retention challenges, since they are closest to recruitment and since teacher turnover tends to be highest in the first few years after initial teaching assignment.¹⁴

As addressed in the section on theories of action, issues of divergent thinking versus convergent thinking arise during the teacher of color team meetings. While larger groups may be helpful for divergent thinking—when idea generation is paramount—either smaller groups or different scaffolding can be more helpful for activities that call for convergent thinking—when a specific decision must be made. This is an area for teams to be more deliberate about in the future, likely with coaching support.

Another area to consider in any replication of this work involves acknowledging that different teams need different amounts of external support to get to a place where they can productively work through the teacher of color pipeline design process. As a Digital Promise staff member shared, “Some of them have a high capacity on their teams, and they want to do a lot on their own. Some of them need more support. I think for us, that means having to throttle up and down and figure out [what level and type of support to provide.]” Another Digital Promise staff member also discussed the utility for others who may do this work in the future of “bringing in partners not just from universities, but from entities like city councils who can think about cost of living challenges and creative solutions to recruit and retain mid-career people of color who want to become teachers.”

¹⁴ See, e.g., Ingersoll, R. M., Merrill, E., Stuckey, D., & Collins, G. (2018). *Seven trends: The transformation of the teaching force – updated October 2018*. CPRE Research Reports. https://repository.upenn.edu/cpre_researchreports/108

Defining and Iterating on the Challenge: Problems of Practice, Solution Goals, and Outcomes

The first step for LEA Teacher of Color Design Teams has been to define the challenge in their LEAs. This has been achieved in each LEA through an inquiry-based process that includes first identifying problems of practice, then developing associated SMART solution goals (i.e., solution goals that are specific, measurable, achievable, relevant, and time-bound), and then identifying specific desired outcomes connected with those SMART goals.

Ultimately, each of the LEAs ended up defining problems of practice and associated solution goals/outcomes associated with retaining teachers of color already working in their LEAs. Some also addressed recruitment, but retention became a universal goal as the LEAs' Design Teams came to realize how important it was to build a culture where teachers of color would feel at home and want to stay. One LEA in particular described a marked shift in the LEA's problem of practice and resulting theory of action and solution goal that arose from the first design studio, where teachers of color had described feelings of isolation within their buildings. This made LEA administrators realize they needed to focus first on retaining the teachers of color that they had:

"We had university partners, we had some community partners, we were all ready to go on, 'how can we attract teachers of color?' But as the feedback came in from teachers in our [LEA], we realized that they don't necessarily feel part of their buildings and connected. They at most feel a part of a program that is housed in the building. And that's when the lightbulb kind of went off for us: How can we focus on recruiting teachers of color when we need to make the teachers of color that are with us already feel as if they're part of the [LEA] family and retain them?"

A Digital Promise staff member described how the local contextualization of problems of practice is crucial in this work. As he explained, inquiry-based investigation of problems of practice within each specific LEA cannot be given short shrift:

"I think when thinking of issues of equity and diversity in [LEAs], there is a desire to just say, 'give me the playbook and tell me how to do it,' or like, 'surely there's somebody who's done it, and we will implement it.' So I think it's harder to contextualize it for each [LEA], the idea that it can look different in each place for what it means to recruit a diverse workforce, that there might be different factors we're addressing. So given that fact, the multifacetedness of it, the inquiry process is really important."

Another Digital Promise staff member concurred about LEAs needing to clearly establish the "what" and the "why" before they move on to the "how": "One of my key takeaways is that, particularly when it comes to equity, you have to stay in the process. You have to let it really take shape. Because if you let the solution get too far ahead of the process, then you're going to see these equity plans really dissipate." A leader in an LEA that had shifted their planned problem of practice and solution goals after listening closely to dialogue from teachers of color about challenges they face in the LEA concurred: "It's been a process of some very

passionate leaders that are dedicated to our work in our [LEA] coming to the realization that some of the people that work in our [LEA] don't feel as connected as we want them to. That process has been hugely important, and it's going to take some very intentional actions [to address]."

In addition to spending sufficient time defining problems of practice, Digital Promise staff identified the importance of pivoting to adapt to each LEA's team context, pace, and needs. To address this, a Digital Promise staff member explained how they have worked to maintain fidelity to the Inclusive Innovation model while still making space for meeting the LEAs where they are:

"We have a lot of conversations about this notion of fidelity to the model, and I feel like it's actually serving the fidelity of the model to have some flexibility. It's about applying protocols in a flexible and adaptable way. We've had to call a lot of audibles—where, for example, we knew we were going to be doing inquire and investigate, then design and develop. But we actually said, you know what, the [LEAs] actually need more help unpacking their problems of practice first."

Creating and Evolving Theories of Action

Creating theories of action—the "what" connecting the problem of practice and the solution goal, according to Digital Promise Inclusive Innovation staff, that would then lead to the "how"—felt intuitive to some LEAs. To others, it was more of a challenge, depending on how far they had already iterated with their problems of practice and solution goals. If an LEA's problem of practice and solution goal were more vague, creating a theory of action tended to be more of a challenge. Members of Teacher of Color Design Teams also spoke about "the importance of having the right people at the table" as a factor that made it easier to create theories of action—a theme that carried through each step of the design process LEAs engaged in. Alongside their theory of action, LEAs were also asked to create indicators that would help identify whether they were reaching their outcome goal; this process was also highly variable in the level of specificity LEAs were able to get into. According to a Digital Promise staff member:

"It's pretty straightforward to talk about the goal, but I think the theory of action was not that straightforward for people to do. I think the LEAs are very much problem solvers, and I think the way they tend to approach problems is they see the problem and they immediately identify the solution, and they pick something to focus on—they want to move at the speed of urgency. And so this process kind of helps them slow down and see what they need to do the transformative work. I also think that they think on the outcome side and the indicators. I think there could have been some sharpening there."

A couple of LEAs as well as Digital Promise staff reasoned that creating theories of action may have felt more difficult than some of the other steps due to challenges with group decision making. A Digital Promise staff member explained that the previous steps in the process were more rooted in divergent thinking, where everyone brainstorms separate ideas. Even though LEAs were asked to come to some consensus on problem of practice and solution goal(s), the initial iterations of the problems of practice and solution goals

were often sufficiently broad that they still covered a lot of people's ideas. On the other hand, the theory of action step requires more convergent thinking, where people need to come to a consensus. For some LEAs' Teacher of Color Design Teams, the sudden shift to convergent thinking was a more challenging shift.

As a result, a Digital Promise staff member explained how they would recommend restructuring and shifting the theory of action element if they were to lead LEAs through this design process again: "Moving forward, I would put a more structured process in place to take them through a theory of action farther upstream in the process. I would let them iterate [even] more on the 'what' before they get to the 'how.'" Another Digital Promise staff member went on to explain the importance of local context and the role of meeting LEAs where they are in informing a given LEA's theory of action: "It helps to have the Inclusive Innovation playbook and some of these things to pull from, but there's no definitive protocol that says, 'if you do this, if you get to the end of this process, you will be more inclusive.' So there's a reason that the theories of action don't look uniform."

Design Studios: Iterating on Problems of Practice and Potential Solutions

In the winter and spring of 2022, each of the LEAs' Teacher of Color Design Teams participated in two three-hour design studios. The 2022 round of LEA design studios were created with several intermediate goals in mind as LEAs iterated on their problems of practice, the solutions they were working toward, and how they proposed to implement those solutions. Objectives for the first design studios were to revisit a problem that had been previously defined in the LEA's 2020 work; draft a solution concept; and brainstorm ideas for bringing that solution concept into fruition. Objectives for the second design studios focused on guiding the Design Teams through defining each aspect of their solution, engaging in conversations about how to implement that solution, and determining if subject matter experts or other partners would be needed and how they could be engaged. Above all, the design studios were intended to build momentum for LEAs in creating the solution.

The design studio agendas were created with a great deal of intentionality and framed in a way that centered the assets of each member and the group writ large. They included:

- A mix of icebreakers and team-building activities designed to deepen relationships and trust. For example, in one activity, each team member brainstormed and shared what assets/skills/experiences as well as what blind spots/biases/preferences they might bring to the work.
- "Landscape scans" and "inspiration tours" tailored for each LEA's team that described successes other organizations had experienced when building similar programs and experiences.
- Opportunities for teachers of color to share and center their experiences with and perceptions of recruitment and retention in their LEA, and for the group to dig deep on and react to those teachers' stories.
- Activities where groups brainstormed solution concepts and strategies for achieving them.
- Activities where groups came together, reviewed the brainstorming, and made some decisions about what initiative the LEA would be developing and how to build out an action plan.

LEAs were consistently effusive about the progress that they made during the design studios. “I think the design studios really helped us take a big step,” said a Teacher of Color Design Team member from one LEA. According to another, the design studios “were very helpful because we were able to talk through anything, including any concerns anyone was having.” As with the composition of the Teacher of Color Design Teams, the importance of centering teacher of color voice through the design studios was consistently noted and appreciated. “The design studio ... created the safe space for our teachers of color to give very authentic feedback,” said one administrator, echoing comments made across the LEAs. An administrator in another LEA described the importance of the design studios in centering the experiences of the LEA’s teachers of color in the subsequent work: “The design studios were essential to our creation of solution goals. During the design studio earlier this year, a listening space was created where we heard the journey stories of several of our current teachers of color ... This was the most important aspect of the design studios ... Grounding our solution ideas in the reality of their experiences helped us to create more meaningful goals.”

Because the design studios were facilitated by Digital Promise staff, members of the LEA Design Teams—including administrators who are accustomed to running such meetings—were participants, but were not in charge of how the event unfolded. This was largely well-received. For example, a superintendent was very pleased about how, “I got to be a learner just like everyone else.”

Notably, there was a palpable sense of optimism and momentum in each LEA after their design studios—a theme that came through in interviews with LEA teachers of color and administrators as well as in the conversations that Digital Promise staff had with participants in the days and weeks after the events. One Digital Promise staff member described the predictability of the momentum that is built during design studios and explained that this will be important to anticipate, harness, and use to accelerate the LEAs’ work in future such initiatives.

Looking forward, a couple of LEAs also mentioned that they would like an additional opportunity to work through a design studio now that they have launched and are iterating on their Teacher of Color Recruitment/Retention initiative. As a Teacher of Color Design Team member from one LEA explained, “I would welcome one additional iteration of the design studio now that we are in early implementation to see if our solution is still aligned with what we set out to pursue in the very beginning.”

1:1 Coaching

Both administrators and teachers on LEAs’ Teacher of Color Design Teams were consistently appreciative of and enthusiastic about the level of 1:1 or small group coaching they had received from Digital Promise staff. Coaching calls occur one to two times per month, typically with at least an administrator leading the work and one of the teachers of color leading the work. Digital Promise staff explained that the frequency and content of coaching arose from a recognition that the Teacher of Color Design Teams in each LEA would benefit from ongoing support to ensure continued engagement by teacher of color leaders and to build momentum to plan and execute events. As one Digital Promise staff member explained, “At the beginning, this level of coaching was not baked into the model, but when we got closer in, we thought... they’re going to benefit a lot from this.”

As an opportunity to improve the process during future work in this vein, Teacher of Color Design Team members from a couple of LEAs identified the value of having other kinds of coaching or partnerships to supplement their work with Digital Promise staff. Ideas include near-peer coaching with similarly situated

LEAs as well as opportunities for professional development credit that contributes to administrative licensure renewal for doing this work. An administrator from one LEA elaborated: “I would say if I could change anything—it’s already time intensive, but I would love to consult with someone from [an LEA] who’s already experiencing a degree of success in a similar journey, and being able to allow them to inspire some thoughts in our work.” Explained an administrator from a different LEA, “Because the work is so involved, and the reading and research and dialogue is so involved, it would be nice if there were a university partner in all this work that could say, ‘You’ve done so many hours, we’re going to give you graduate credit, and then we could take that credit and put it toward renewing our licenses and credentials.’”

Implementing Solutions: Progress to Date

As of the January 2023 publication of this report, each of the LEAs were in the early stages of implementing at least one of the Teacher of Color Recruitment/Retention initiatives they had designed. Through a combination of outreach from LEA leaders and more targeted strategies above, recruitment has been underway for a regional teacher of color convening in one LEA, affinity groups for teachers of color in several others, the I Am King student mentoring program in one LEA, and a staff mentoring program in one LEA. Each of these groups had already met or were scheduled to hold a kick-off meeting when LEA staff were interviewed in early fall 2022.

One implementation question that has arisen across LEAs is how to entice teachers of color to attend the initial events they are putting on. The prevailing idea is that once these teachers are in the room, the content of the event will provide a sufficient “hook” to foster further participation. Administrators and teachers from multiple LEAs mentioned that the flow-through dollars from the grant funding for this initiative are helping to create more compelling events. This funding has supported event components like catered food, honoraria for speakers and facilitators, the rental of appealing off-campus venues, and branded swag, all with the intention of making participating teachers feel valued and imparting a sense of community. In terms of when to hold the events—during the school day, after hours on a school day, or on an in-service day or weekend—LEAs have varied depending on their local contexts and what Design Teams perceive would make staff feel valued, rather than imposed on.

Implications and Next Steps

The efforts of each LEA in the cohort profiled here have been intensive and quite meaningful for the participants, with learnings that are expected to endure. As one superintendent summarized, “The design process has shifted my thinking as an equity-minded leader so that my future processes are just as involved and focused.” For LEAs beginning their own teacher of color pipeline work, as well as for partner organizations and anyone interested in proof of concept of the Inclusive Innovation process, a great deal can be learned from the experiences of these LEAs.

Findings from early implementation efforts, including initial outcomes, successes, challenges, and opportunities to be considered in subsequent iterations of this type of work, will be detailed in an ensuing report to be released in 2023. The specific stories of each LEA will also be released on the Digital Promise website in spring 2023.