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EXPLORING EQUITY ISSUES
Recruiting and Retaining Millennial Teachers of Color in Our Classrooms: Challenges and Efforts to Foster Improvement

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PART I: BACKGROUND

In 2012 there were approximately 80 million millennials and about 70 million baby boomers (Schawbel, 2012). Schawbel estimates that by 2025 three of four workers will be of the millennial generation. By 2041, which is during the lifetime of most millennials, America's population is projected to become majority Brown and Black (Kundu, 2014). Already in 2019, teachers of color are underrepresented in our K-12 classrooms and are leaving those classrooms to pursue more lucrative and less stressful work experiences. The retention of millennial teachers of color in the public-school systems is often stymied by systemic factors that exist in the licensing, preparation, hiring processes, working conditions, and lack of autonomy of teachers of color in schools.

Why is it important to have millennial teachers of color in K-12 classrooms? Egalite, Kisida, and Winters (2015) found that when students and teachers are of the same race, student achievement, as measured by test scores, improves, particularly at the elementary level. It is critical that classrooms have effective teachers that reflect the spectrum of diversity that exists in our world. Exposure to teachers of color in school settings is especially important as diverse teachers provide all children with models of commitment and achievement (Egalite et al., 2015).

Several factors have an impact on the recruitment and retention of millennial teachers of color: hiring and placement practices; school working conditions, and state legislative actions.

Status of Hiring and Placement

Disproportionality has been found to exist in the selection and placement of millennial teachers of color in schools. This opinion is

supported by the work of D'Amico, Pawlewicz, Earley, and McGeehan (2017) as well as Klein (2017). Black teacher candidates simply are not hired in the same proportions as White teacher candidates. Moreover, when teachers of color are hired, they are often placed in the most challenging settings and circumstances. (Klein, 2017; D'Amico et al., 2017; Ingersoll & May, 2011).

D'Amico et al., (2017) analyzed the extent to which race was associated with principals' hiring decisions in a large district, including the rates at which Black and White candidates applied for teaching positions, the rates at which they are hired, and the demographics of the school district (Ingersoll & May, 2011). They found that Black candidates were less likely to receive a job offer. When Black teachers were offered teaching positions, they were most often placed in struggling schools with large marginalized and/or poor populations.

Klein (2017) has focused on the role of racial/ethnic discrimination in the hiring process used by many school districts in the selection of millennial teachers of color. She cites teacher employment data for an unnamed school district in 2012 in which Black and White teacher applicants were equally qualified to teach but White teachers received a disproportionate number of jobs offers. She further found that, "[a]lthough 13 percent of job applicants were black, only 6 percent received offers. On the other hand, 70 percent of applicants were white, and 77 percent received offers. Black teachers disproportionately received job offers from

schools with black principals. Black teachers were also disproportionately hired in schools with high rates of low-income and minority students. Hispanic and Asians candidates were hired at a proportional rate to the number of applicants, making the imbalance unique to black teachers" (Klein, 2017).

School Working Conditions

National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) survey findings reported by Aragon (2016) reveal that teachers of color leave their schools at higher rates than non-White teachers. Teachers of color self-reported that they are disproportionally assigned to schools with high percentages of students of color, high percentages of socio-economically disadvantaged students, and limited resources (Ingersoll & May, 2011). Attrition rates for teachers of color can be attributed, according to White (2015), to three policy-related sources: school and student characteristics, school working conditions, and accountability mandates and sanctions. Ingersoll and May (2011) concurred that organizational conditions, such as the level of teacher involvement in decision-making and the individual classroom autonomy, were more significant factors in teacher turnover than were salary or professional development.

Boyd, Grossman, Ing, Lankford, and Wyckoff (2010) studied the influence of school administrators on first-year teachers' decisions to remain teaching within the context of multiple measures. The authors found that working conditions (work environment, safety, infrastructure, etc.) and

administrative support were important in the retention of teachers. In terms of relative risk factors, ineffective administration was statistically significant for first-year teachers who left the school district or transferred to another school in the district. The study noted that it was not the student composition of the schools but the quality of school leadership and its engagement with and support of faculty in the school that made a difference in whether teachers stayed or left.

The climate/culture of schools that are racially/ethnically diverse can play a role in the comfort level of teachers of color who cross all the hurdles to be employed as teachers. Teachers of color sometimes find themselves in positions that require them to engage in policies with which they do not agree, or policies that affect themselves or their students negatively (French, 2017). French cited antiquated policies and the absence of resources as factors that teachers cited as the basis for their dissatisfaction and ultimate departure from the teaching profession.

Successful recruiting efforts have been stifled by high turnover rates of teachers of color who teach in high poverty, high racially marginalized school settings (Aragon, 2016). Meeting the differentiated needs of children who are less ready or prepared for school is challenging. Exacerbating this situation is that these schools often have crumbling infrastructures with many resource needs. Moreover, most teachers have little to no say in what and how they teach which

eliminates or limits the creativity inherent in teaching. The additional effort required to teach in such settings is stressful and can result in burnout. Teachers with other options leave schools such as these.

State Legislative Actions that Affect Recruitment and Retention

Efforts to recruit and retain millennial teachers of color are being addressed by state governments as they develop and implement educational policy. White (2015) reported that 31 states have approved legislation focused on the recruitment of teachers of color. The pathways that states are using to support teacher recruitment include implementing financial incentives, creating government mandates, supporting specific types of recruitment programs, establishing recruitment centers, and designing alternative certification programs. The efforts at the state level have contributed to the success that has occurred nationally in recruiting teachers of color into classrooms.

Several states have also begun to look at cultural and statistical bias in the licensing tests that many states require teachers to pass as well as to provide supportive experiences, alternative certification policies, and scholarships to help millennial students complete their college degrees and enter the profession. State legislatures also make funding decisions to address infrastructure issues and resources needed by schools that may have an impact on school climate and work environments for teacher retention.
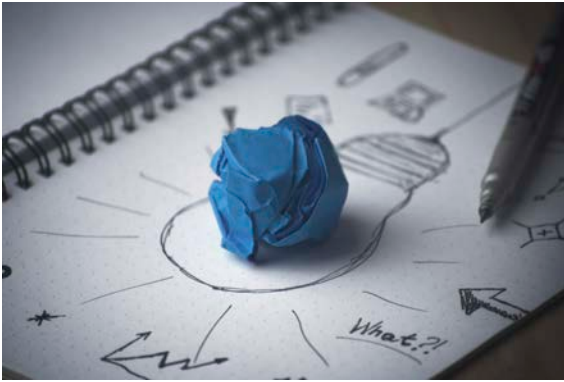
There are several things we can do to increase the retention of millennial teachers of color in our schools.

ASSIGN TEACHERS OF COLOR ACROSS YOUR SCHOOL DISTRICT

Develop a recruitment and selection process that provides teachers of color a fair chance to be selected and placed in the same schools as White candidates. Teachers of color should not be placed disproportionally in the lowest performing, resource-deprived schools in a district simply because the children in those schools might look like them. Schools should be staffed so that all students are exposed to White, Black, Brown, and other racial/ethnic groups in the teaching-learning process. In addition, shift how teacher professional development funds (e.g., ESEA Title II funds) are spent at the district level to focus on strategies that will provide early exposure of millennial teachers of color to teacher development/incentive programs.

STRENGTHEN PRINCIPAL LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT AND PREPARATION

Principals make the difference. Good school leadership encourages teacher retention (Ingersoll & May, 2011). More funding should be provided to strengthen principal leadership development and preparation. These principals need to provide a setting that nurtures and supports students as well as teachers. The environmental stresses of working in an environment that seems more like a jail than a school defeat the purpose of why teachers want to work in the field of education.

DISTRIBUTE RESOURCES EQUITABLY ACROSS YOUR DISTRICT

Money to schools. Legislatures need to provide more funding to support the instructional resource needs in classrooms as well as to improve school infrastructure. Schools in the most impoverished areas should have certain minimum resources and an equitable distribution of support personnel to deal with the additional challenges that enter school buildings in high poverty communities.

Money to teachers. Productive practices identified by the Education Commission of States (ECS) in the recruitment and retention of millennial teachers of color include generous scholarship support for teacher education, improved compensation packages on par with other professions requiring similar degrees, flexible spending under the Every Student Succeeds Act to support a variety of learning opportunities for teachers, and reduced costs for teacher certification. In

addition, Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs) and those institutions serving Hispanics/Latinx students are sources of millennial teachers of color, particularly when these institutions can prepare future teachers to function in challenging teaching and learning environments.

INCORPORATE AND INCLUDE TEACHERS OF COLOR IN SCHOOL DEVELOPMENT

Make teachers of color integral to the teaching and learning process that takes place in their schools. The millennials who choose to work as teachers do so because they want to make a difference in the lives of the children that they teach. Give them the flexibility to make a difference.

Final Thoughts

Teachers of color reported that they felt supportive retention strategies included innovative teacher education programs that prepare teachers of color to work in urban or high poverty, high minority settings; improved working conditions, including teacher participation in school decision-making; greater instructional autonomy for teachers; and professional development focused on the experiences that teachers of color face in the classroom and school environments (Aragon, 2016). Our public school populations will become majority minority in a decade or so. It is critical that classrooms have effective teachers that reflect the spectrum of diversity that exists in our world.

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