

National Agenda: Minority Teacher Recruitment, Development, And Retention

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ABSTRACT

Student diversity is significantly different than diversity in the teaching staff. Educational leaders must identify methods to bridge the gap in teacher diversity so that students of all backgrounds see adult role models and images of themselves in the classroom. Recruiting, developing, and retaining qualified minority teachers is an important practice that must be further enhanced for the benefit of all students. The authors discuss the importance of recruitment, development, and retention of minority teachers in public education.

Minority Teachers Bring Positive Images and Varied Perspectives

Diversity in our nation's school must be addressed. While the ethnic diversity of the school-aged population is increasing, the K-12 teaching population is becoming homogeneous in terms of ethnicity. Increasing numbers of culturally diverse students in the public schools create a corresponding need for well-prepared teachers who can communicate with students within the context of their cultures and/or native language (Talbert-Johnson, 2001). Minority students do not necessarily need a minority teacher to become educated, but diversity among teachers is important. Minority teachers bring positive images and varied perspectives to their students (SREB, 2003).

Defining Cultural Values as a Nation

The purpose of this article is to discuss the importance of recruitment, development, and retention of minority teachers in public schools. Between 1989 and 2000, the percentage of minority students increased in most southern states. In Texas, the proportion of minority students grew from 49 percent to 57 percent (SREB, 2003). During the same period of time, the teacher workforce in the southern region has become less diverse. According to data from the Southern Regional Education Board, the majority of states in the south have experienced a decrease since the late 1980's in the percentage of minority teachers (2003). To deal with diversity, we must abandon the quest for cultural homogeneity and define cultural values as a nation, while at the same time embracing our important differences as a diverse population (AACTE, 1990a).

School Districts Experience Critical Need for Teaching Professionals

In schools with diverse enrollments, districts continue to experience a critical need for many teaching professionals. Particularly, there is a great need for special education teachers, bilingual and ESL teachers, and math and science teachers (Haselkorn, 2000). Districts must be willing and able to identify methods to recruit, develop, and retain minority teachers in all areas so that the needs of all children are met.

Though quality teaching for diverse student populations depends on numerous factors, there are not enough teachers who are experienced and qualified to teach for diverse student populations and too few teachers have specific training in culturally responsive pedagogies (The Education Alliance at Brown University, 2004). The Southern regional Education Board reports that there are nearly 18 million African-American, Asian, Hispanic, and Native American students attend elementary and secondary schools in the United States. Minority students account for 43 percent of

students in the Southern regional states but only 21 percent are teachers (SREB, 2003). In states throughout the United States, the number of minority teaching professionals is not increasing as fast as the percentage of minority students.

A gap does exist and the gap is not narrowing. It is critical to address the recruitment, development, and retention of these minority teachers so that these professionals can bring positive images and varied perspectives to our schools (Uhlenberg & Brown, 2002).

Teacher Expectations Have Powerful Impact on Student Achievement

Studies indicate that teacher expectations have a powerful impact on student achievement (Good, 1981). If the schools do not see the importance of employing a diverse staff of professionals with high expectations for all students, then eventually the achievement ideology will shift to an unimportant value system with students not having any positive role models or familiar images who are doing positive things. Achievement and increasing the level of expectations can be addressed by insuring that a diverse population is represented on every level, including the teaching staff.

Concluding Remarks

In conclusion, student diversity is significantly different than diversity in the teaching staff. Educational leaders should identify ways to bridge the gap so that students of all backgrounds see adult role models and images of themselves in the classroom. These leaders and human resource professionals must be armed with a process that equips them with the tools to recruit, develop, and retain minority-teaching professionals.

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