



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

OPENING DOORS

*Strategies for advancing racial diversity
in Wisconsin's teacher workforce*



WISCONSIN
POLICY FORUM

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This is the second of a pair of Wisconsin Policy Forum reports that address the lack of racial and ethnic diversity in Wisconsin's teacher workforce. The impetus for this research is both long-standing racial disparities in educational outcomes that have persisted in Wisconsin for decades and a growing body of evidence pointing to the benefits that a racially diverse and representative teacher workforce can bring to efforts to mitigate those disparities. Studies have linked students' access to teachers from their own race and ethnic background with a variety of beneficial outcomes – from higher rates of academic achievement, attendance, high school graduation, and college enrollment, to lower rates of suspension, dropout, and discipline referrals.

The first report, [*A Teacher Who Looks Like Me: Examining racial diversity in Wisconsin's teacher workforce and the student-to-teacher pipeline*](#), showed that while students of color have been rising as a share of Wisconsin's public K-12 student population, its teacher workforce has remained overwhelmingly white. We found similar gaps in representation for individual race and ethnic groups and throughout the state in rural, suburban, and urban communities.

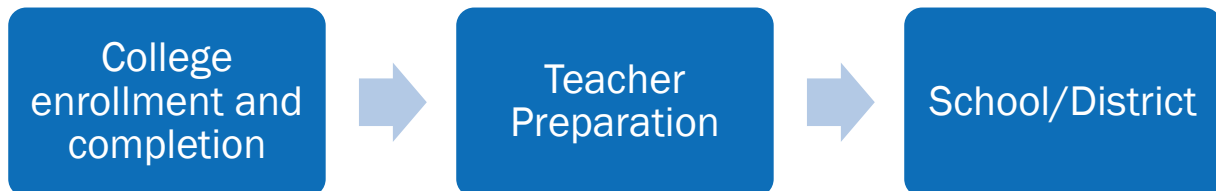
This report seeks to address three broad questions raised by *A Teacher Who Looks Like Me*:

- What are the conditions and barriers that prevent candidates of color from joining the ranks of teachers and building a long-term career in the profession?
- What are schools, districts, higher education institutions, and others doing to change those conditions?
- And what more could be done, in particular by Wisconsin's state government, to move the needle on this important component of educational equity?

To answer these questions, we gathered perspectives from a broad array of Wisconsin teachers, school and district leaders, teacher education faculty, higher education administrators, state leaders, and others through focus groups and in-depth interviews. These perspectives, coupled with a national scan of policy research and policy initiatives in other states, inform a range of policy options that hold promise as potential instruments of change in Wisconsin.

Barriers and challenges

We found individual and institutional barriers to teacher diversity in Wisconsin along three principal stages of the teacher career continuum.



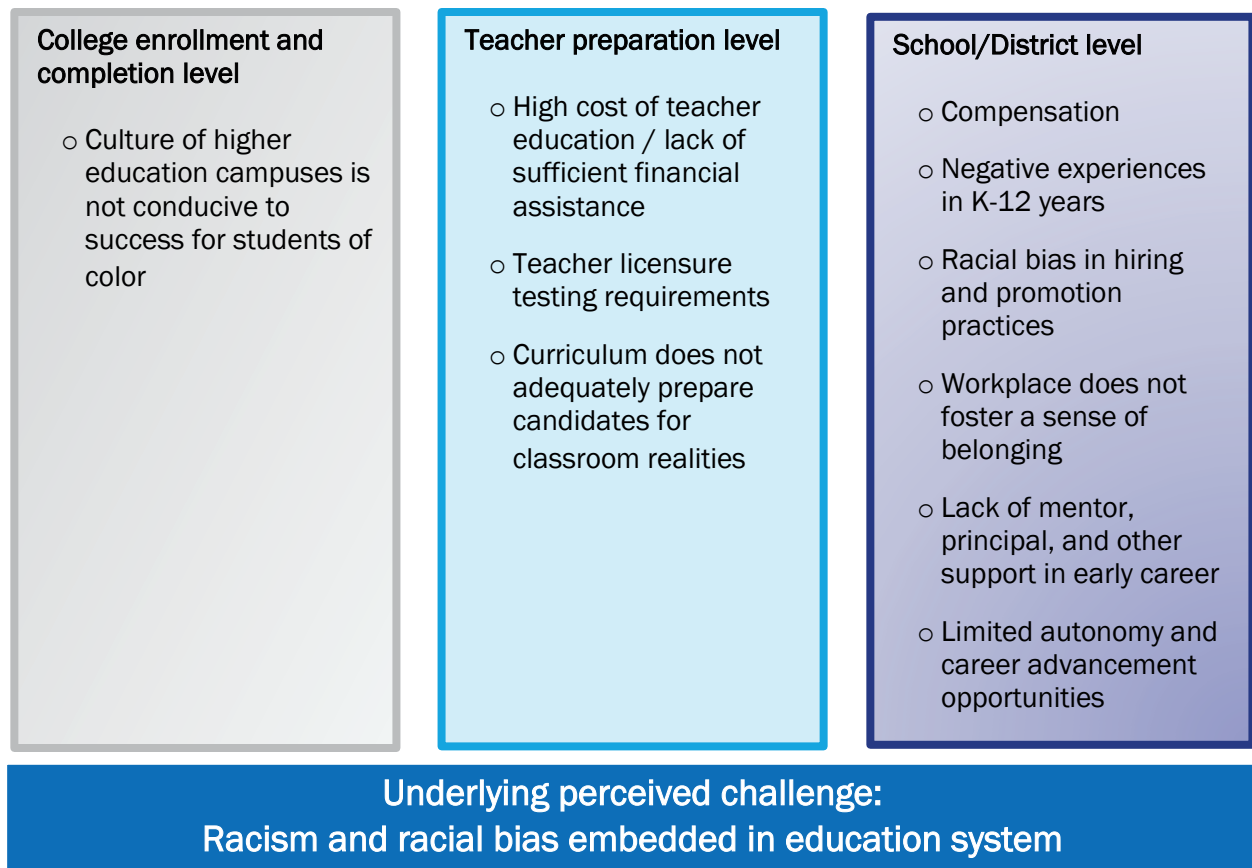
Starting upstream in the teacher pipeline, our interviews and focus group responses indicated that racial disparities in college enrollment and completion (the first key prerequisites to becoming a teacher) stem, in part, from a lack of policies and initiatives on college campuses that address the specific financial, academic, and social-emotional needs of students of color. These students also

encounter barriers to success in teacher preparation programs that range from high cost and lack of financial assistance, to licensure tests that disadvantage students of color, to insufficient preparation for the realities of teaching in a multicultural classroom.

Finally, teachers of color experience a range of barriers and challenges that discourage them from pursuing a teaching career or contribute to disproportionately high attrition from teaching positions in schools. Our interviewees and focus group participants cited negative experiences they had with teachers during their own K-12 years, relatively low compensation, implicit racial bias in school hiring processes, experiences of isolation and interpersonal racism in their school or community, lack of support from mentors and principals, and limited autonomy and opportunity to advance professionally.

Despite individual and institutional efforts to mitigate the impact of these challenges on communities of color, most of our key informants cited a perceived undercurrent of racism and racial bias that persists in Wisconsin's educational institutions and that can deter people of color from joining the teaching profession or building a long-term teaching career. The diagram below summarizes our findings on these conditions.

BARRIERS AND CHALLENGES TO TEACHER DIVERSITY IN WISCONSIN



Local strategies and solutions

We found a wide variety of initiatives that schools, universities, and other entities are undertaking to remove the barriers and challenges that impede progress toward enhanced teacher diversity throughout the teacher pipeline.

Some of these local efforts target funding and support to individual teachers or teachers-in-training. Key among such **individual supports** are financial supports such as salary premiums for teachers in high-poverty schools as well as loan forgiveness and service scholarships funded by the state, local institutions, or community partners that expand access to teacher education programs. Other key strategies include one-on-one intensive mentoring and coaching during the first few years as a licensed teacher; and cohort programs that establish networks of mutual support for teachers of color.

Other approaches aim to effect systemic or organizational change as a way to enhance the conditions and organizational cultures that welcome and foster success for teachers of color. At the teacher training level, a particularly promising example of these **institutional approaches** is the establishment of teacher residency and Grow-Your-Own programs that emphasize developing teaching talent from within the community by providing intensive training while removing barriers related to cost and flexibility. Enhanced training in culturally responsive practices and alternatives to licensure tests such as performance-based assessments of teaching ability also hold promise.

Strategies to support and retain licensed teachers often begin with efforts to foster equity throughout a school or district through decision-making procedures guided by anticipated impacts on equity; a commitment to organizational cultural competence; and efforts to develop a racially diverse and equity-minded cadre of school and district leaders. Finally, schools and districts can enhance the racial and ethnic diversity of their teaching staff by revamping hiring and staffing processes and procedures to remove racial bias and attract and retain high-quality teachers of color.

The diagram on the next page encapsulates our findings on these strategies and solutions, emphasizing how they stem from earlier discussion on the barriers and challenges that persist throughout Wisconsin's educator pipeline.

PATHWAYS TO TEACHING

Traditional routes

- Majority of teachers enter this way
- 3 main steps:
 - Complete bachelor's degree from a university/college school of education
 - Obtain teaching license
 - Seek teaching position

Alternative routes

- May or may not be tied to higher education institution
- More flexible
- Less costly
- Less time-consuming
- Often assigns trainees as teachers prior to licensure

Teacher retention

BARRIERS AND CHALLENGES

College enrollment and completion

- Culture of higher education campuses is not conducive to success for students of color

Teacher preparation level

- High cost of teacher education / lack of sufficient financial assistance
- Teacher licensure testing requirements
- Curriculum does not adequately prepare candidates for classroom realities

School/District level

- Compensation
- Negative experiences in K-12 years
- Racial bias in hiring, layoff, and promotion practices
- Workplace does not foster a sense of belonging
- Lack of mentor, principal, and other support in early career
- Limited autonomy and career advancement opportunities

**Underlying perceived challenge:
Racism and racial bias embedded
in education system**

LOCAL STRATEGIES AND SOLUTIONS

Target funding and financial assistance for teachers and teacher candidates

- Salary premiums for teachers who agree to teach in high-poverty and hard-to-staff schools, classrooms, subjects
- Review demographics and compensation policies to identify/rectify any racial disparities
- Loan forgiveness and service scholarships for teacher candidates
- School-university partnerships leveraging state grants to support teacher candidates

Expand pathways to teaching through school district-higher education partnerships

- Teacher residencies
- Grow Your Own programs

Embed equity and cultural responsiveness in teacher preparation and professional development

- Ongoing training in culturally responsive practices for both teacher candidates and licensed teachers
- Facilitate licensure of non-English-dominant multilingual teachers
- Participatory design: Ask communities being served what teacher need to know/do

Foster culture of equity throughout school-level practice and policy

- Center educational equity in all decision-making
- Institution-wide efforts to infuse cultural competence
- Diverse, distributed school leadership

Support for teachers during critical early years

- Hiring processes and policies: Post positions early, remove racial bias
- Intensive mentoring and coaching for new teachers
- Cohorts and affinity groups: networks of mutual support for teachers of color

State-led policy solutions

While K-12 schools, higher education institutions, and community partners across the state have taken several creative steps to address the challenges that are impeding teacher workforce diversity, the scale of Wisconsin's teacher diversity challenge suggests an opportunity for action at the state level to advance teacher diversity beyond what localized approaches can accomplish alone.

Drawing from the insights we gathered from state and local education stakeholders in Wisconsin as well as a national scan of promising policy levers in other states, we propose a number of ways the state could support local institutions in Wisconsin that have been working to mitigate these barriers. Below and in the graphic on the next page, we offer options for state policymakers to consider along five interrelated fronts:



Elevate teacher diversity as a top education priority in Wisconsin by convening key stakeholders to establish a common definition of the state's teacher diversity challenge; a vision to guide and coordinate disparate local programs and legislative strategies; and specific state/local goals, transparency and accountability measures, and metrics for tracking progress.



Target state investments to support both individuals and institutions. The state could invest in loan forgiveness and service scholarships that both reduce the cost of college and teacher training and provide incentives for teachers to serve Wisconsin schools with particularly acute staffing needs. The state also could invest in programs that expand or support high-retention residency and GYO teacher education models as well as strategically leverage federal funds to bolster state and local investments.



Provide both flexibility and rigor in teacher preparation and evaluation. The state could consider eliminating or offering alternatives to teacher licensure tests that historically have blocked or discouraged students of color from entering the teaching profession. Another strategy is to allow districts the flexibility of running their own teacher preparation programs designed to prepare teachers for district-specific needs and context. This could be accompanied by measures to hold districts accountable for ensuring their teachers demonstrate rigorous state standards of teaching competency.

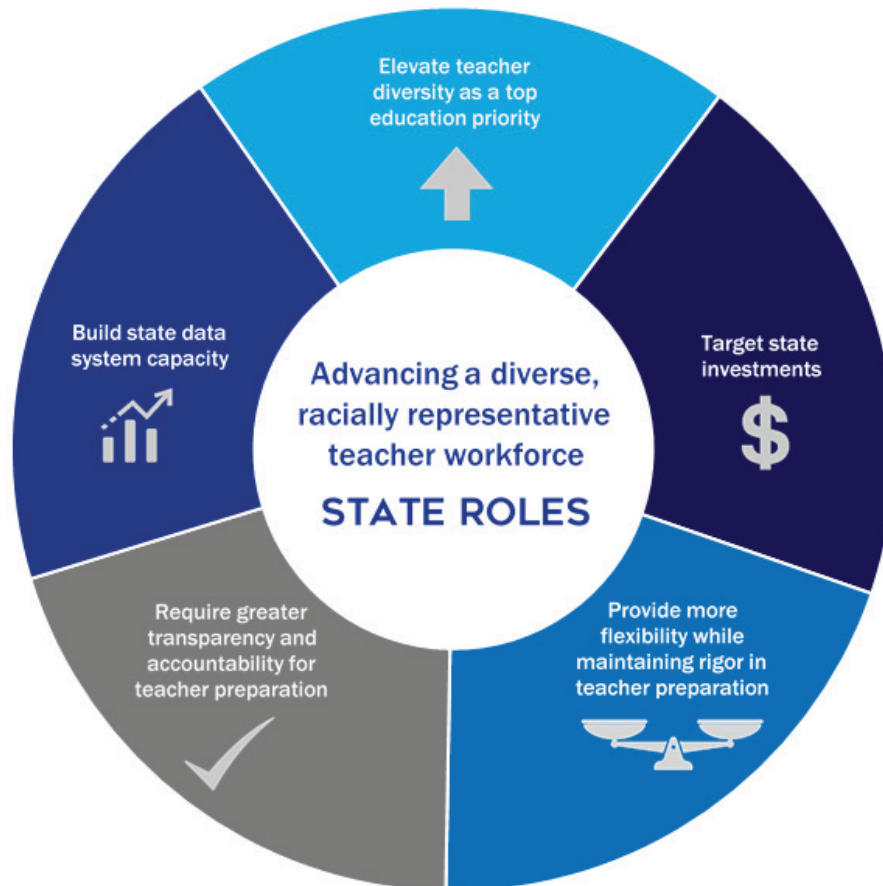


Require districts and teacher training programs to demonstrate greater transparency and accountability for teacher diversity. State reporting requirements could be fortified to foster greater public transparency and accountability surrounding performance by race in teacher preparation program enrollment, completion, and licensure tests. Analogous provisions could be implemented to require school districts to report and/or demonstrate improvement on measures of teacher diversity. The state could further facilitate transparency and accountability by providing user-friendly public access or dashboards to related state and local data.



Build state data system capacity: In an effort to build state-level capacity to carry out data-driven policymaking and monitor progress toward greater teacher diversity in Wisconsin, the state could consider leveraging its authority and resources to build a cohesive statewide data system that connects a fragmented array of independent data silos.

STATE POLICY OPTIONS FOR ADVANCING TEACHER DIVERSITY



Elevate teacher diversity as a top education priority

- Convene statewide stakeholders to set a common vision and align efforts around it
- Explore legislative solutions

Target state investments to support both individuals and institutions

- Provide financial assistance to help students complete college and teacher preparation programs
- Fund grants to institutions to incubate or expand programs that expand the pipeline of teachers of color
- Leverage federal funds to support state and local efforts to improve teacher diversity

Provide both flexibility and rigor in teacher preparation and evaluation

- Eliminate or offer alternatives to existing teacher licensure tests
- Provide greater flexibility with regard to state requirements for shortage areas

Require greater transparency/accountability for teacher preparation programs & school districts

- Require teacher preparation programs to report and improve completion rates by race for all teacher certification programs.
- Require school districts to both report and be accountable for various measures of teacher diversity

Build state data system capacity

- Build a comprehensive K-20 data warehouse that connects a fragmented system of data silos

Taken together, these five areas offer avenues for the state of Wisconsin to lead in advancing policy that addresses the state's specific teacher diversity challenges. We present these considerations as Wisconsin, along with the rest of the world, passes the one-year anniversary of efforts to respond to an unprecedented global pandemic. At the same time, we have seen the ways in which COVID-19 has disproportionately harmed communities of color and exacerbated longstanding disparities in many aspects of American life, not least of which is educational opportunity.

As Wisconsin's leaders forge a post-pandemic path going forward, they should consider the importance of a racially representative teacher workforce as a component of a high-performing system of K-12 education that mitigates educational opportunity gaps based on race and ethnicity. Our research suggests Wisconsin has a long way to go to improve the diversity of its teacher workforce, but that local institutions are taking meaningful steps, and actionable state policy options hold promise to help meet that goal. We hope this report helps guide practitioners and policymakers working to advance racial equity at all levels of Wisconsin's education system.