



DIVERSITY TO THE FOREFRONT

Why It Matters + Recommendations for System-Level Leaders

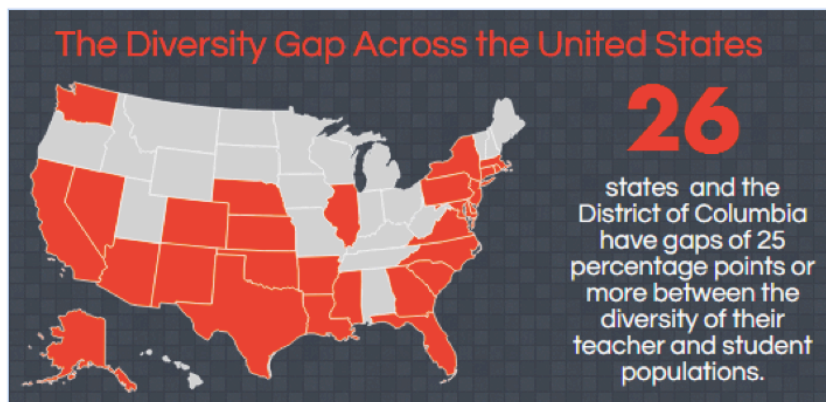
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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

For the first time in American history, the federal government projected that 51% of all students at the start of the 2014-15 school year were identified as non-white.¹ The United States Census Bureau reports that five short years from now whites will become a minority group amongst all children under age 18.² The diversity of this nation is one of the education system's greatest assets. Yet, the under-representation of people of color as teachers, principals, and system-level leaders across the education sector undermines the significant benefits a diverse society offers to all citizens.

In 2014, the Center for American Progress used its Teacher Diversity Index to quantify and rank states on the percentage-point difference between teachers and students of color. The analysis revealed that every state has a teacher diversity gap. As depicted on the map below, over half of all states in this nation have gaps of 25 percentage points or more between the diversity of their teacher and student populations.

Despite our nation's great diversity, the vast majority of system-level leaders in our school districts and state agencies remain white. This is especially troubling as research consistently illustrates the significant benefits of having a diverse teacher and leader workforce, and in particular individuals who share a similar race or ethnicity with the students and communities they serve. For example, increasing the diversity of the educator workforce at every level can build citizenship, provide role models and welcoming environments for students of color, encourage individuals to challenge the status quo, increase academic achievement, and shift teacher mindset and expectations.



Source: Center for American Progress.

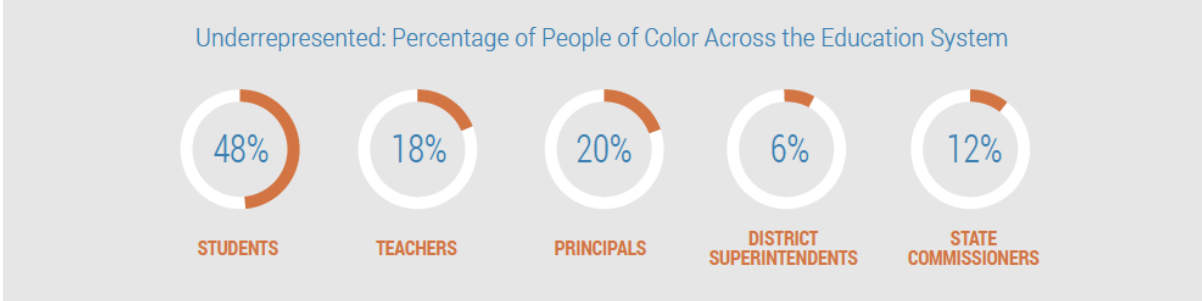
We need all system-level leaders to commit to implementing strategies and tactics that can attract, develop, place, retain, and advance education leaders of color.

In this brief, we aim to (1) surface the compelling data that reveal the lack of racial and ethnic diversity at all levels of the education system, (2) highlight the advantages of a more diverse workforce, and (3) emphasize the ways in which system-level leaders are already working to achieve greater diversity in their teachers and leaders.

While Chiefs for Change (CFC) believes that embracing all dimensions of diversity is vital, this brief focuses particularly on the importance of racial and ethnic diversity. Our members seek to lead through example and are dedicated to developing greater diversity within their leadership ranks.

Diversifying the educator workforce at every level is not simply a numbers game. It is a call to action for transformational systems change. We must challenge the underlying policies, practices, and mindsets that perpetuate an education system that hinders greater diversity amongst our workforce and renders too many of our students, especially those of color, in underperforming schools.

PROBLEM: DIVERSITY AT THE PERIPHERY



Source(s): National Center for Education Statistics; Council of Chief State School Officers; School Superintendents Association.

In less than 30 years, America will have no clear racial or ethnic majority, and more than half the population will be people of color.³ While diversity in America has grown, inequity and injustice for people of color has stubbornly persisted. The killing of Michael Brown and the protest that followed in Ferguson, Missouri, along with the #BlackLivesMatter campaign are recent reminders of the persistent racial tensions in America around disparities of opportunity. The disparities that are prevalent in the health, justice, and financial systems also exist at all levels of the education sector.

Schools Still Separate and Unequal

Sadly, more than 60 years after the ruling in *Brown v. Board of Education*, our nation's schools are still separate and extremely unequal. Of the 50 million students in the public education system, 52% of students are white, 24% of students are Hispanic, 16% of students are Black, 5% of students are Asian/Pacific Islander, and 1% are American Indian/ Alaska Native, according to the most recent figures available.⁴ Yet nationwide, schools are seriously segregated by race.⁵ What's more, 15% of Black students and 14% of Latino students attend schools where white students make up only 0 to 1% of the student body.⁶ We are also faced with double segregation by race and class, as schools serving mostly students of color tend to have higher concentrations of low-income students.⁷

The inequitable educational opportunities currently afforded to students of color and those in poverty are well known. Schools serving predominately low-income students and students of color are more likely to have less-

experienced and less-qualified teachers, high rates of teacher turnover, less funding per-pupil, and limited access to rigorous coursework. Students of color are more likely to be held back and receive harsh discipline. And they represent 57% of the population in "dropout factories"—schools that graduate fewer than 60% of their students.⁸

Lack of Diversity Among Teachers and System-Level Leaders

In addition to the lack of student diversity within classrooms, there is also a lack of diversity when scanning for the adults within the system. In public schools nationwide, one finds primarily white (82%) teachers and white (80%) principals.⁹ Diversity gaps, the difference between the number of teachers and students of color, are growing larger in most states, with some of the largest gaps found in urban districts. For example, in Santa Ana Unified School District in California, the teacher workforce looks almost nothing like its student population, with 93% of students identifying as Hispanic while only 26% of teachers did.¹⁰

Like we observe in the classroom, people of color are also strikingly absent from district and state leadership. They comprise 6% of district superintendents and 12% of state commissioners, according to the latest figures.¹¹

Greater diversity in the workforce has been shown to significantly improve outcomes in the workplace and student learning in the classroom for individuals of all demographic backgrounds. These statistics suggest that without systemic reform, America's education system will continue to do a disservice to all students.

CALL TO ACTION: DIVERSITY TO THE FOREFRONT

Inequitable education opportunities and the under-representation of people of color at all levels of the education system are neither acceptable nor inevitable.

We must act now. Our nation’s demographic shifts offer an opportunity to address inequity and reverse segregation.

A recent report developed by Koya Leadership Partners and Education Pioneers found that while many education non-profits value diversity,

very few have significant numbers of people of color in leadership positions or measurable practices in place to improve racial and ethnic diversity.¹² If the importance of diversity and inclusivity are understood across the education sector, our collective failure to exemplify these values is alarming.

The chart below highlights some of the many benefits to diversifying the educator workforce and embracing inclusivity, highlighting the momentous opportunity before us as a sector.

<p>BUILDS CITIZENSHIP AND MUTUAL UNDERSTANDING</p>	<p>Students who attend schools with a diverse population can develop an understanding of the perspectives of their peers from different backgrounds and learn to succeed in an increasingly multi-cultural and global society.¹³ Similarly, a more diverse workforce at all levels of the education sector may help adults within the system develop cross-cultural competencies as well as reduce stereotyping and bias.</p>
<p>SHIFTS TEACHER MINDSET AND EXPECTATIONS</p>	<p>When evaluating Black students, Black teachers are 30% more likely than non-Black educators to believe those same students will graduate from college.¹⁴ A more diverse workforce could help shift practitioners’ mindsets and increase their expectations for students of color.</p>
<p>IMPROVES ACADEMIC ACHIEVEMENT</p>	<p>Students of color do better on a variety of academic indicators if they are taught by teachers of color.¹⁵ “Student math and reading achievement is significantly, positively influenced by the race/ethnicity of their teacher.”¹⁶ In addition, practitioners of color can advocate for more culturally relevant and responsive curriculum and teaching.</p>
<p>MOTIVATES INDIVIDUALS TO TAKE RISKS AND CHALLENGE THE STATUS QUO</p>	<p>Companies with diverse leadership are 68% more likely to embrace input from diverse teams and 72% more likely not to fear challenging the status quo, according to the Center for Talent Innovation. These factors led employees to be 50% more likely to take risks and in turn generate improved and innovative results.¹⁷</p>
<p>PROVOKES THOUGHT AND SPURS INNOVATION</p>	<p>Diverse groups are more innovative than homogeneous groups. Interacting with individuals who are different forces members of the group to prepare better, to expect alternative perspectives, and to anticipate that reaching consensus will require effort.¹⁸</p>
<p>PROVIDES ROLE MODELS AND WELCOMING ENVIRONMENTS FOR STUDENTS OF COLOR</p>	<p>The power of students having role models who reflect their race, culture, and background cannot be understated. When students see teachers who share their racial or ethnic backgrounds, they often view schools as more welcoming places. Teachers, principals, and system-level leaders of color can serve as role models for students of color and create more inclusive learning environments.¹⁹</p>

Our Role in Diversifying the Educator Workforce

CFC is uniquely positioned to help diversify the educator workforce by supporting the development of system-level leaders committed to embracing and operationalizing the value of diversity. We aim to do this in two key ways:



1. Identify and build a diverse pipeline of Future Chiefs.



2. Support our members who are current Chiefs in architecting coherent systemic strategies that elevate and engender increased diversity.

As a sector, we must accelerate progress toward increasing academic achievement for all students as we close the demographic gaps that continue to persist between students and practitioners at the classroom, school, district, and state levels. We are committed to supporting our system-level leaders in building organizations that honor and celebrate difference and are inclusive of the communities they serve.

RECOMMENDED PRACTICES

Increasing diversity at all levels of the education sector will not be a short-term, quick fix to the many challenges that we face. Rather, it will require diverse practitioners, working collaboratively at all levels of the system over the long term, to have diligence, humility, and an unwavering conviction that every student can achieve academic success. We have a lot of work to do as a sector to achieve our goal, but we're already making progress. Several districts and states have developed strong theories of action and have identified strategies to diversify the ranks of education leaders.

In the section below, we outline recommendations for system-level leaders and highlight some of the ways in which two school districts, District of Columbia Public Schools and Denver Public Schools, are working to increase diversity. This list should not be seen as exhaustive, but instead indicative of some of the action steps Chiefs can take to move their systems forward.

Recommendations for System-Level Leaders

SET A CLEAR VISION AND STRATEGY TO BRING DIVERSITY TO THE FOREFRONT.	Ensure that all stakeholders are aware of the vision and that it is integrated into the comprehensive strategic plan. Resources should be allocated for implementation across the entire system.
ALIGN RECRUITMENT AND PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT PRACTICES TO VISION.	Confirm that talent management practices will effectively increase the racial and ethnic diversity of the workforce. Chiefs may expand their recruiting sources, diversify selection panels, and provide hiring personnel with training to combat bias.
DEVELOP STRATEGIES TO RETAIN TEACHERS AND LEADERS OF COLOR.	Implement promising strategies to retain staff of color such as financial incentives, leadership and growth opportunities, greater autonomy, and an inclusive workplace culture.
REQUIRE RACIAL AND CULTURAL AWARENESS AND DIVERSITY TRAINING.	Guarantee that learning sessions and professional development are consistently provided for all stakeholders, including leaders, to combat persistent inequities and structural racism.
COMMIT TO ONGOING, INTENTIONAL, AND MEANINGFUL DIALOGUE.	Ensure that both time and space are provided for all staff to have focused and sustained dialogue.
DESIGNATE A LEADER TO DEMAND AND TRACK ACCOUNTABILITY.	Appoint a leader who can focus on staff and organizational accountability for diversity and inclusion.
ELIMINATE BARRIERS AND CONTINUOUSLY IMPROVE.	Commit to identify and address systemic barriers, discrimination, and bias for continuous improvement system-wide.

Spotlight: Promising Practices

Denver Public Schools

Denver Public Schools (DPS) Superintendent Tom Boasberg has led his team to develop several integrated efforts to advance diversity, equity, and inclusion comprehensively across the entire system as outlined in the [Denver Plan](#). To ensure accountability and progress toward these goals, DPS established the [Office of Equity and Inclusion](#). This office, in collaboration with the Department of Organizational Culture and Effectiveness, focuses on the [retention and recruitment](#) of talented, diverse staff through alternative pathways and comprehensive support programs. For more information on its efforts to recruit a diverse teaching workforce watch this [video](#) developed by the district.

As part of its approach, DPS offers several [value-based leadership pathway programs](#) designed to help staff operationalize the district's core values: students first, integrity, equity, collaboration, accountability, and fun. In addition, DPS is working to improve its approach to coaching and mentorship by examining evaluation practices for bias and cultural competence. Externally, the district seeks to increase community conversations about race, privilege, inclusion, and power.

DPS seeks to be an advocate for equity and provide roadmaps for other districts, state agencies, and education organizations committed to this work. To learn more about DPS, visit: <https://www.dpsk12.org/>.

District of Columbia Public Schools

In a similar fashion, District of Columbia Public Schools (DCPS) is also leading the way in prioritizing equity through its strategic initiatives. Under the leadership of Chancellor Kaya Henderson, the district is forging innovative partnerships to bolster teaching and learning for students of color. For its most recent initiative, [Empowering Males of Color](#), DCPS has partnered with the Mayor's Office to "advance achievement and opportunity and reduce racial disparities for boys and men of color." The initiative has three core strategies including mentoring through literacy, targeted funding for promising approaches, and opening an all-male college prep high school.

In addition, DCPS is strengthening partnerships with the community through its [Community Action Team](#) in the Office of Family and Public

Engagement. The team is responsible for building and sustaining strategic relationships with key stakeholders, especially those who have been historically underrepresented in the district's decision-making process.

This work is complemented and strengthened by efforts at the Office of the State Superintendent of Education (OSSE) under the leadership of Hanseul Kang. Each year, OSSE publishes [equity report cards](#) for every school – charter and district – in the city to help ensure that all students, regardless of their demographic background or other factors, receive the same caliber of education. These reports provide schools, families, and communities comparable information that is transparent, easy to understand, and easy to use. To learn more about DCPS visit: <http://dcps.dc.gov/>. For more about OSSE, visit: <http://osse.dc.gov/>.

CONCLUSION

As an organization, our greatest assets are our members and partner organizations.

CFC is deeply committed to continuing in this work with current and aspiring system-level leaders who are committed to operationalizing the value of diversity, equity, and inclusion.

As an advocate for these shared values, we will facilitate continuous and meaningful dialogue around improving the education sector by bringing diversity to the forefront. We urge you to join us in this work. To learn more about us, visit chiefsforchange.org.

ENDNOTES

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- ⁷ Ibid.
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