



# Teacher Diversity Matters

A State-by-State Analysis of Teachers of Color

Ulrich Boser November 2011





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Progress 2050, a project of the Center for American Progress, seeks to lead, broaden, and strengthen the progressive movement by working toward a more inclusive progressive agenda—one that truly reflects our nation's rich ethnic and racial diversity. By 2050 there will be no ethnic majority in our nation and to ensure that the unprecedented growth of communities of color also yields future prosperity, we work to close racial disparities across the board with innovative policies that work for all.



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# Introduction and summary

At some point over the next 10 to 12 years, the nation's public school student body will have no one clear racial or ethnic majority.<sup>1</sup> In other words, students of color—students who are not classified as non-Hispanic whites, for purposes of this analysis—will constitute more than half of our primary and secondary students. This demographic trend is already manifest in some of the nation's most populous states, including California and Texas, where the majority of students are students of color.

But the makeup of the nation's teacher workforce force has not kept up with these changing demographics. At the national level, students of color make up more than 40 percent of the public school population. In contrast, teachers of color—teachers who are not non-Hispanic white—are only 17 percent of the teaching force.

This is a problem for students, schools, and the public at large. Teachers of color serve as role models for students, giving them a clear and concrete sense of what diversity in education—and in our society—looks like. A recent review of empirical studies also shows that students of color do better on a variety of academic outcomes if they're taught by teachers of color.<sup>2</sup>

Policymakers are increasingly concerned about the relatively low percentages of teachers of color working in the nation's schools. So we at the Center for American Progress set out to study this issue, conducting an analysis of the 2008 Schools and Staffing Survey, or SASS, a nationally representative survey of teachers and principals administered every four years by the National Center for Education Statistics.

The 2008 SASS data are the most recent available. We define students and teachers of color as everyone who is not white, including African Americans, Hispanics, Asians, and Native Americans. Here are our main findings.

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## Almost every state has a large teacher diversity gap

In California, 72 percent of students are of color. In contrast, only about 29 percent of teachers are of color, a gap of more than 43 percentage points. Texas has a similarly large diversity gap. In the Lone Star state, two-thirds of all kids in the school system are students of color, while only about one-third of those teaching them are teachers of color.

Such large differences between the numbers of teachers and students of color are common across the country. More than 20 states have differences of 25 percentage points or more between the diversity of their teacher and student populations.

To evaluate the states on their performance, we calculated a teacher diversity index, ranking states on the percentage point difference between teachers and students of color. So, for instance, Illinois has an index score of 35. To obtain that figure, we subtracted the percentage of teachers of color (11 percent) in Illinois from the percentage of non-white students (46 percent) in the state. For specific breakouts out by state, see Appendix A on page 13.

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## Alternative route programs help ensure diversity

Most states now have alternative route programs for teacher credentialing, which make it easier for college graduates and mid-career professionals to enter the classroom without conventional teaching preparation. These programs are proving to be successful tools to recruit teachers of color.

In 2008, 27 percent of all African-American teachers and 25 percent of Hispanic teachers came into the classroom through alternative routes. In contrast, only about 11 percent of white teachers were alternatively certified.

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## Teachers of color are far less likely to be satisfied with their salary and school management

Only 37 percent of African-American teachers and 46 percent of Hispanic teachers were satisfied with their pay. In contrast, 52 percent of white teachers are satisfied with the amount of money that they earn.



Part of the issue is that teachers of color are more likely to teach in public schools in urban, high-poverty communities, which often receive less than their fair share of school dollars.<sup>3</sup> There could be other reasons as well, which are discussed in greater detail below.

Teachers of color also are far less satisfied than white teachers with the way in which their school is run. Only 70 percent of African-American teachers are satisfied with the way that their school is run, 8 percentage points lower than white teachers. Hispanic teachers as well as Asian and Pacific Islander teachers are also less likely than white teachers to say that they liked how their school was run.

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### What our findings suggest

Our findings suggest that the nation needs a two-pronged approach to improving teacher diversity. We need to expand high-quality recruitment programs, for starters, with some of this being done through the alternative certification programs mentioned above. We also need to do more to improve the professional experience of teachers of color. Our nation has a long way to go when it comes to ensuring a diverse and well-qualified teacher workforce. Solutions will not be easy. It will take hard work, smart policy, and above all, the political will to ensure that the nation has an effective and diverse workforce.



# Our demographic challenge

Our nation's demographics are changing rapidly. Take Arizona. Over the past two decades, the state's Latino population grew by 180 percent, and the state's racial composition shifted from 72 percent white to 58 percent white.<sup>4</sup> Communities of color are growing rapidly in other states as well. White students, once a majority, are now a minority in some early grade levels. For instance, earlier this year, the U.S. Census Bureau reported that 49.9 percent of all three-year-olds are white.<sup>5</sup>

Given these trends, teachers of color are not equally represented in the workforce. Part of the problem is the low rates of academic achievement and attainment among students of color, which inhibits them from moving into the teaching force. Consider that more than 78 percent of white students earn a high school diploma within four years. In contrast, the on-time graduation rate is 58 percent for Latinos and 57 percent for African Americans.<sup>6</sup>

College graduation rates for students of color also are low. But without both a high school and a college diploma, landing a job in teaching is almost impossible. For our nation to have a robust pipeline of teachers of color, we need to boost the academic performance of these students through our K-through-12 system.

Economic and cultural issues also play a role, and racial discrimination has limited the employment opportunities available to persons of color. A 2004 study found, for instance, that white-sounding names (like Emily) receive 50 percent more callbacks for interviews than African-American sounding names (like Lakisha). Callbacks are also more responsive to résumé quality for white names than other ones.<sup>7</sup>

So, too, does the history of the teaching profession. Parts of the problem can be traced back to the mid-20th century, when the teacher workforce had large numbers of teachers of color working in segregated schools who often had few options in the labor market because of employment discrimination.

Today, with far more careers open to people of color, the pool of prospective teachers is considerably different. Unfortunately, recruitment and retention efforts

have not changed to reflect this new reality. Few states and districts have made concentrated efforts to ensure the diversity of their workforce.

Before the recent economic downturn, school systems were on a hiring binge. Districts were recruiting more teachers than ever before in the two decades before the downturn.<sup>8</sup> This benefited teachers of color. Since the 1980s, their numbers almost doubled from about 325,000 to 642,000. This rate of growth was more than twice that of white teachers.<sup>9</sup> Yet given the far more rapid demographics changes taking place in the nation's schools, it has not been enough.

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### Strategies for diversifying the teacher workforce

There have been some successful initiatives to increase the diversity of the teaching workforce over the years. The successful characteristics of these programs are detailed in an accompanying study released with this paper by Saba Bireda and Robin Chait titled “Increasing Teacher Diversity: Strategies to Improve the Teacher Workforce.”<sup>10</sup> Briefly, though, those recommendations include:

- Increasing federal oversight of and increased accountability for teacher preparation programs
- Creating statewide initiatives to fund teacher preparation programs aimed at low-income and minority teachers
- Strengthening federal financial aid programs for low-income students entering the teaching field
- Reducing the cost of becoming a teacher by creating more avenues to enter the field and increasing the number of qualified credentialing organizations
- Strengthening state-sponsored and nonprofit teacher recruitment and training organizations by increasing standards for admission, using best practices to recruit high-achieving minority students, and forming strong relationships with districts to ensure recruitment needs are met

The need to act on these recommendations is clear given the key findings of the research of this paper, to which we now turn.

# The findings of our study

We wanted to examine the student-teacher diversity gap and localize the issue as much as much possible. We used a nationally representative survey because it was the most robust source of data available that allowed us to compare results between states.

To be sure, our data masks some variance. We were not able, for example, to examine district-level data. There were other limitations as well, including the age of the data and the limitations of using a survey instrument. The teacher data are also estimates. But our findings are clear despite these limitations. Specifically:

- Every state has a teacher diversity gap
- Alternative route programs help ensure diversity
- Teachers of color are far less likely to be satisfied with salary and school management

Lets examine each of these findings in turn.

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## Every state has a teacher diversity gap

We evaluated the 50 states and the District of Columbia on the relative diversity of their teaching workforce and found gaps between the percentage of students of color and the percentage of teachers of color in every state. In largely homogeneous states such as Vermont, Maine, and the Dakotas, the gaps tended to be relatively small.

But in most states—particularly larger states—the gaps were alarmingly wide. In California, for instance, almost 75 percent of students are of color. In contrast, only about a quarter of teachers are of color. Texas has a similar diversity gap. In the Lone Star state, about two-thirds of all students are students of color, while only about one-third of those teaching them are teachers of color.

To rank the states on their performance, we calculated a teacher diversity index, ranking states on the percentage point difference between teachers and students of color. So, for instance, Illinois has an index score of 35. To obtain that figure, we subtracted the percentage of teachers of color (11 percent) in the state from

**TABLE 1**  
**State teacher diversity index**

This index ranks states on the percentage point difference between the percentages of nonwhite teachers and nonwhite students.

VT	4
ME	4
WV	4
NH	6
KY	11
WY	12
MT	12
ND	13
SD	13
ID	13
IA	14
AL	15
MO	17
HI	18
UT	18
OH	18
WI	19
IN	19
DC	21
MN	21
MD	21
KS	21
MI	22
NE	22
AR	22
MA	22
PA	23
TN	24
MS	24
OR	24
WA	25
SC	26
NC	26
RI	27
OK	27
VA	27
FL	27
CO	27
CT	28
NM	29
GA	29
LA	29
DE	30
NJ	31
TX	32
AK	32
NY	33
AZ	34
IL	35
NV	41
CA	43

Note: By nonwhite, we mean all populations that are nonwhite, including African American, Hispanic, Asian, Pacific Islander, and Native American.

Sources: National Center for Education Statistics, School and Staffing Survey, Teacher Questionnaire, 2007-08 (Department of Education, 2008)

the percentage of students of color (46 percent) in the state. For specific breakouts out by state, see Appendix A on page 12.

The index shows that large gaps are common across the country. More than 20 states have gaps of 25 percentage points or more between the diversity of their teacher and student populations. There are, to be sure, a few bright spots. Some states, such as West Virginia, only have an overall gap of 5 percentage points between the diversity of their teacher and student populations. (See Table 1)

### Alternative route programs help ensure diversity

Most states have established alternative route programs for teacher credentialing, which make it easier for college graduates and mid-career professionals to enter the classroom without conventional teaching preparation. Consider that 27 percent of all African-American teachers and 25 percent of Hispanic teachers came into the classroom through alternative routes.

In contrast, only about 11 percent of white teachers were alternatively certified. While alternative education programs do not necessarily ensure a greater supply of more effective teachers, they clearly have the potential to attract much-needed new and diverse talent into the profession, often on an expedited basis.

### Teachers of color are far less likely to be satisfied with salary and school management

Only 37 percent of African-American teachers and 46 percent of Hispanic teachers were satisfied with their pay. In contrast, 53 percent of white teachers were content with the amount of money that they were paid.

Part of the issue is that teachers of color are more likely to teach in public schools in urban, high-poverty communities, which often receive less than their fair share of school dollars.<sup>11</sup> There

could be other reasons as well, including differences in experience and career opportunities. Whatever the case, it's clear that teachers of color are paid less on average. According to recent Census data, white teachers are paid \$49,570 on average, while African-American teachers are paid \$48,910 and Hispanic teachers receive \$49,260.

Teachers of color are also less satisfied with the way in which their school is run. Only 70 percent of African-American teachers are satisfied with the way that their school is run, 8 percentage points lower than white teachers. Hispanic teachers as well as Asian and Pacific Islander teachers are also less likely to indicate to say that they liked how their school was run. More research is needed to figure why exactly this is occurring.

This suggests that the nation must take a two-pronged approach to improving teacher diversity. We need to expand effective recruitment programs, for starters, following the advice of Bireda and Chait in their paper “Increasing Teacher Diversity.”<sup>12</sup> But we also need to improve professional experience, so that teachers of color feel more satisfied with their pay so that they stay in the classroom.





# Conclusion

Our nation's student body is rapidly diversifying, but our teaching workforce has not kept up with the trend. This must change. Students of all backgrounds deserve teachers of all backgrounds. Some initiatives are working to tackle this issue. But it's not enough to match our demographic future. Policymakers at the national, state, and local level must show the necessary leadership and answer the call for an effective and diverse teacher workforce.

## Appendix A

### Teacher workforce by state and race, 2008, AK-IA

(with standard errors)

State	White	Black	Hispanic	Asian/ Pacific Islander	Native American
AK	86.0	X	2.0*	2.0*	9
	2.0		0.7	0.6	1.6
AL	74.0	24*	X	X	X
	3.3	3.3			
AR	89.0	8.0	X	X	2.0
	1.9	1.7			0.7
AZ	79.0	3.0*	X	1.0*	X
	3.5	1.0		0.5	
CA	71.0	5.0	18.0	5.0	2.0*
	2.0	1.2	1.8	1.0	0.6
CO	89.0	X	7.0	X	X
	1.5		1.4		
CT	93.0	2.0*	4.0	X	1.0*
	1.4	0.6	1.0		0.7
DC	26.0	65.0	5.0	X	2.0*
	4.0	3.7	1.5		0.8
DE	83.0	12.0	3.0*	X	X
	3.4	2.7	1.3		
FL	73.0	13.0	12.0	1.0*	1.0*
	1.8	1.5	1.4	0.5	0.3
GA	75.0	24.0	1.0*	X	X
	3.2	3.1	0.4		
HI	37.0	X	7.0	54.0	X
	3.2	0.1	1.9	3.9	
IA	99.0	X	X	X	X
	0.5				

X Indicates that the standard error exceeds 50 percent of the estimate and the estimate is not considered reliable

\* Indicates that the standard error is between 30 percent to 50 percent of the estimate and the estimate should be interpreted with caution

Sources: National Center for Education Statistics, Institute of Education Sciences, and U.S. Department of Education, School and Staffing Survey, Teacher Questionnaire, 2007-08.

Note: By nonwhite, we mean all populations that are nonwhite, including African American, Hispanic, Asian, Pacific Islander, and Native American.

## Appendix A

### Teacher workforce by state and race, 2008, ID-MS

(with standard errors)

State	White	Black	Hispanic	Asian/ Pacific Islander	Native American
ID	95.0	X	4.0*	X	X
	1.3		1.3		
IL	89.0	4.0*	5.0	X	X
	2.2	1.3	1.4		
IN	95.0	3.0*	1.0*	X	1.0*
	1.1	1.0	0.5		0.3
KS	94.0	2.0*	2.0*	X	2.0*
	1.3	0.7	0.7		0.7
KY	94.0	4.0	X	X	1.0*
	1.3	1.1			0.6
LA	78.0	19.0	1.0*	X	1.0
	3.5	3.4	0.5		0.3
MA	93.0	2.0*	3.0*	1.0*	X
	1.9	0.8	0.8	0.6	
MD	68.0	25.0	X	3.0*	X
	3.8	4.4		1.6	
ME	98.0	X	X	X	X
	0.8				
MI	93.0	4.0*	2.0*	X	X
	1.6	1.1	0.8		
MN	97.0	X	X	X	X
	0.7				
MO	93.0	4.0	2.0*	X	2.0*
	1.4	1.0	0.5		0.6
MS	71.0	28.0	1.0*	X	X
	2.9	2.8	0.3		

X Indicates that the standard error exceeds 50 percent of the estimate and the estimate is not considered reliable

\* Indicates that the standard error is between 30 percent to 50 percent of the estimate and the estimate should be interpreted with caution

Sources: National Center for Education Statistics, Institute of Education Sciences, and U.S. Department of Education, School and Staffing Survey, Teacher Questionnaire, 2007-08.

Note: By nonwhite, we mean all populations that are nonwhite, including African American, Hispanic, Asian, Pacific Islander, and Native American.

## Appendix A

### Teacher workforce by state and race, 2008, MT-PA

(with standard errors)

State	White	Black	Hispanic	Asian/ Pacific Islander	Native American
MT	96.0 0.9	X	1.0* 0.5	X	2.0 0.7
NC	81.0 2.4	16.0 2.1	1.0* 0.6	0.0* 0.2	1.0* 0.4
ND	99.0 0.8	X	X	X	X
NE	97.0 0.7	X	1.0* 0.5	X	X
NH	98.0 0.8	X	1.0* 0.5	X	X
NJ	86.0 2.7	5.0* 1.9	6.0 1.9	X	X
NM	58.0 3.6	1.0* 0.3	36.0 3.4	1.0* 0.5	4.0* 1.3
NV	84.0 4.2	X	6.0 1.7	3.0* 1.6	X
NY	84.0 3.0	7.0* 2.3	6.0 1.8	X 1.1	X 0.6
OH	94.4 1.3	4.0 1.2	1.0* 0.2	X	X
OK	85.0 1.6	2.0 0.5	2.0 0.4	1.0* 0.2	10.0 1.8
OR	94.0 1.3	X	3.0 0.9	2.0* 0.7	X
PA	97.0 1.0	2.0* 0.7	0.0* 0.2	X	1.0* 0.5

X Indicates that the standard error exceeds 50 percent of the estimate and the estimate is not considered reliable

\* Indicates that the standard error is between 30 percent to 50 percent of the estimate and the estimate should be interpreted with caution

Sources: National Center for Education Statistics, Institute of Education Sciences, and U.S. Department of Education, School and Staffing Survey, Teacher Questionnaire, 2007-08.

Note: By nonwhite, we mean all populations that are nonwhite, including African American, Hispanic, Asian, Pacific Islander, and Native American.

## Appendix A

### Teacher workforce by state and race, 2008, RI-WY

(with standard errors)

State	White	Black	Hispanic	Asian/ Pacific Islander	Native American
RI	95.0	X	X	X	X
	1.6				
SC	79.0	18.0	1.0*	1.0*	X
	2.1	1.9	0.6	0.3	
SD	96.0	X	X	X	2.0*
	1.6				0.9
TN	92.0	7.0	X	X	X
	1.7	1.6			
TX	66.0	8.0	25.0	X	X
	4.2	1.8	4.3		
UT	97.0	X	2.0*	X	X
	0.9		0.7		
VA	84.0	12.0	2.0*	X	X
	2.7	2.2	1.0		
VT	98.0	X	X	X	X
	0.9				
WA	91.0	2.0*	2.0*	3.0*	2.0*
	1.8	0.9	0.7	0.9	0.6
WI	96.0	2.0*	2.0	X	X
	1.1	0.8	0.6	0.2	
WV	98.0	1.0*	1.0*	X	1.0*
	0.6	0.4	0.3		0.3
WY	96.0	X	3.0*	X	1.0*
	1.0		0.9		0.5
<b>U.S.</b>	<b>83.2</b>	<b>7.2</b>	<b>7.1</b>	<b>1.4</b>	<b>1.1</b>
	<b>0.52</b>	<b>0.46</b>	<b>0.463</b>	<b>0.218</b>	<b>0.114</b>

X Indicates that the standard error exceeds 50 percent of the estimate and the estimate is not considered reliable

\* Indicates that the standard error is between 30 percent to 50 percent of the estimate and the estimate should be interpreted with caution

Sources: National Center for Education Statistics, Institute of Education Sciences, and U.S. Department of Education, School and Staffing Survey, Teacher Questionnaire, 2007-08.

Note: By nonwhite, we mean all populations that are nonwhite, including African American, Hispanic, Asian, Pacific Islander, and Native American.

## Appendix A

### Percentage of student body by state and race, 2008, AK-MS

State	White	Black	Hispanic	Asian/ Pacific Islander	Native American
AK	54	4	6	7	24
AL	59	35	4	1	1
AR	67	23	8	2	1
AZ	45	6	42	3	5
CA	28	7	48	11	1
CO	61	6	28	3	1
CT	65	14	17	4	0
DC	5	83	10	1	0
DE	53	33	10	3	0
FL	46	23	25	2	0
GA	46	38	10	3	0
HI	19	2	5	73	1
IA	85	6	7	2	1
ID	82	1	14	2	2
IL	54	19	20	4	0
IN	76	12	7	1	0
KS	73	9	13	3	2
KY	84	11	3	1	0
LA	49	46	3	1	1
MA	71	8	14	5	0
MD	47	38	9	6	0
ME	94	3	1	1	1
MI	71	20	5	3	1
MN	76	9	6	6	2
MO	76	18	4	2	0
MS	46	51	2	1	0

Sources: National Center for Education Statistics, Institute of Education Sciences, U.S. Department of Education, Common Core of Data (2008).

Note: By nonwhite, we mean all populations that are nonwhite, including African American, Hispanic, Asian, Pacific Islander, and Native American.

## Appendix A

### Percentage of student body by state and race, 2008, MT-WY

State	White	Black	Hispanic	Asian/ Pacific Islander	Native American
MT	84	1	3	1	11
NC	55	28	10	2	1
ND	86	2	2	1	9
NE	75	8	13	2	2
NH	92	2	3	2	0
NJ	55	17	19	8	0
NM	30	3	56	1	11
NV	43	11	36	8	2
NY	51	20	21	7	0
OH	76	16	3	1	0
OK	58	11	10	2	19
OR	69	3	17	5	2
PA	74	16	7	3	0
RI	69	9	18	3	1
SC	53	39	5	1	0
SD	83	2	2	1	11
TN	69	25	5	2	0
TX	35	14	47	3	0
UT	78	2	15	3	2
VA	57	26	9	5	0
VT	94	2	1	2	0
WA	66	6	15	8	3
WI	77	10	8	4	1
WV	93	5	1	1	0
WY	84	2	10	1	3
<b>U.S.</b>	<b>56</b>	<b>17</b>	<b>21</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>1</b>

Sources: National Center for Education Statistics, Institute of Education Sciences, U.S. Department of Education, Common Core of Data (2008).

Note: By nonwhite, we mean all populations that are nonwhite, including African American, Hispanic, Asian, Pacific Islander, and Native American.

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## About the author

**Ulrich Boser** is a Senior Fellow at American Progress, where he analyzes education, criminal justice, and other social policy issues. Prior to joining the Center, Boser was a contributing editor for *U.S. News & World Report*, special projects director for the *Washington Post Express*, and research director for *Education Week* newspaper.

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