



Making Educator Diversity a Kitchen Table Issue

*A nonpartisan path to a stronger,
more effective workforce.*

Jarvis Lundy

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As a K-12 student, I had only two teachers of color, both in elementary school. Yet their influence was transformative. They saw me, believed in me, and expected my best. That early affirmation helped me persist through a system that did not always reflect or affirm who I was.

Years later, as a kindergarten teacher and then a school leader, I saw the impact of educator diversity from another perspective. I watched students academically and socially thrive when they saw themselves reflected in their classrooms and in the people leading them. I saw how families trusted schools more deeply when educators understood their experiences. I saw how school culture and academic achievement grew stronger when diverse voices were included in decision making. Those experiences fuel the work I do today at the intersection of education policy and practice.

As director of educator diversity at The Hunt Institute, I support policymakers across the country in understanding and implementing state-level strategies to recruit, prepare, and retain educators of color. I approach this work knowing that increasing educator diversity is not a symbolic gesture but a policy imperative with measurable academic, economic, and social impacts.

Despite evidence demonstrating the important and positive impact on student outcomes of diversifying the educator workforce, the demographics of the US educator workforce remain largely unchanged.¹ Over half of public school students are students of color, but only about 20 percent of their teachers share that background.² Closing this gap is not just about recruitment, it is about reimagining systems.

To achieve this, a cradle-to-career strategy is essential, one that ensures every step of the pipeline is designed to support and sustain a diverse educator workforce. There are several steps state and local leaders can take:

- introducing the teaching profession in middle and high school through grow-your-own programs and career exploration opportunities;
- creating affordable, accessible, community-centered preparation pathways like teacher residencies

and paraeducator pipelines; and

- addressing the professional isolation, limited advancement opportunities, and uncompetitive compensation relative to other fields that disproportionately push teachers of color out of the classroom.

From working with states across the country, we at the Hunt Institute have seen that advancing educator diversity in today's political climate requires a common-sense, multipronged approach that centers on local leadership, leverages strong data and evidence-based narratives, and builds bipartisan support for policies that strengthen the educator workforce for all students.

In Delaware, Delaware State University's partnership with a New York-based high school is aligning its education preparation programs to meet local workforce needs.³ Jackson State University's newly announced collaboration with Jackson Public Schools is not only aiming to increase the number of Black teachers but is also building a sustainable pipeline rooted in the community.⁴ In rural New York, Corning Inc. is investing in a local grow-your-own initiative aimed at diversifying the educator workforce, demonstrating how public-private partnerships can drive local change.⁵ These are not abstract pilot programs; they are targeted strategies with the potential to scale.

Additionally, retention strategies like mentorship, affinity groups, leadership opportunities, and improved working conditions must be prioritized. Programs that support all educators, such as housing stipends or expanded licensure pathways, often disproportionately benefit teachers of color and should be pursued as bipartisan solutions. In North Carolina, Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools' At Home in CMS teacher housing assistance initiative is a strong example of this approach in action.⁶

To ensure buy-in for policies and initiatives aimed at diversifying the educator workforce, there must be clear, transparent data that identifies the scope of the problem and demonstrates the viability of solutions. Yet many states lack the data infrastructure needed to drive meaningful change. Data transparency is a core challenge and opportunity. No

one can close educator diversity gaps they cannot see. Both the One Million Teachers of Color (1MTOC) Data Dashboard and The Education Trust's Teacher Diversity and Equity Policy Scan highlight where gaps exist and where progress is possible.⁷ These tools provide leaders with actionable insights, not just data points, to inform legislation, funding, and accountability systems. Data should not just live in reports; it must drive results.

As education leaders more effectively leverage data to make inroads in diversifying the educator workforce, they must shape stronger, data-informed narratives that connect with public priorities and policy goals. One of the most important issues for parents and likely voters, as revealed in The Hunt Institute's most recent Across the Aisle survey, is ensuring that students have access to highly effective educators.⁸ This concern is universally shared across political lines, reflecting a deep desire to see all students thrive academically. However, there remains a disconnect between this desire and the reluctance to view educator diversity as a key factor in achieving that goal. Too often, policymakers and the public treat educator effectiveness and diversity as separate concerns. The reality is that teacher effectiveness is intrinsically linked to the diversity of the educator workforce.

Increased access to highly effective educators should be viewed as directly connected to increasing access to a more diverse educator workforce. To truly meet the needs of all students, especially those from historically underserved communities, our focus must shift to include the recognition that a diverse teaching staff is not just a beneficial addition but a critical necessity. Diversity in the educator workforce brings unique perspectives, strengthens classroom engagement, and enhances cultural awareness. These factors contribute to the overall effectiveness of teaching and learning, creating better academic outcomes for all students, regardless of their background.

Policymakers and the public must begin to recognize that enhancing educator diversity and improving educator effectiveness are not separate

goals, but two sides of the same coin. Bridging this gap will require a concerted effort to reframe educator diversity as a fundamental aspect of educational quality and to prioritize policies that foster a teaching workforce that reflects our rapidly diversifying student population.

Jarvis Lundy is the director of educator diversity at the Hunt Institute.

Notes

1 Desiree Carver-Thomas, "Diversifying the Teaching Profession: How to Recruit and Retain Teachers of Color," report (Palo Alto, CA: Learning Policy Institute, 2018).

2 Katherine Schaeffer, "Key Facts about Public School Teachers in the U.S.," Short Reads, Pew Research Center, September 24, 2024.

3 Danielle McLean, "NYC Public Schools Moves to Launch Early College Program with Delaware State," Higher Ed Dive, February 6, 2025.

4 William H. Kelly III, "Jackson State and Jackson Public Schools Launch Jackson Middle College Program," JSU Newsroom, August 1, 2023.

5 Corning Incorporated, "Corning Makes Good on Plan to Increase Teacher Diversity" (November 2024), <https://www.corning.com/worldwide/en/community-impact-and-investment/news/corning-makes-good-on-plan-to-increase-teacher-diversity>.

6 Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools, "CMS Employee Housing," web page.

7 One Million Teachers of Color, Data Dashboard, web page; Education Trust, Teacher Diversity and Equity Policy Scan, data tool, February 23, 2023.

8 Celinda Lake et al., Findings from Quantitative and Qualitative Research Nationwide Among Voters, Parents, and Teachers, presentation to The Hunt Institute, November 2024.

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