

# Seeking a Shared Vision for Teacher Diversity in California

*Statewide leadership can create a cohesive whole of disparate local initiatives.*

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Since 2021, California has invested over \$1 billion in recruiting, training, developing, and retaining an ethnoracially diverse educator workforce that reflects its student population.<sup>1</sup> However, recruitment rates have not kept pace with the increasing ethnoracial diversity of the student population, nor have these efforts curbed rising teacher turnover. Even with economic uncertainty and a potential budget shortfall, California must continue to prioritize a policy agenda that further diversifies its educator workforce because it is essential to ensuring the academic success of all its students.

## Workforce Demographics

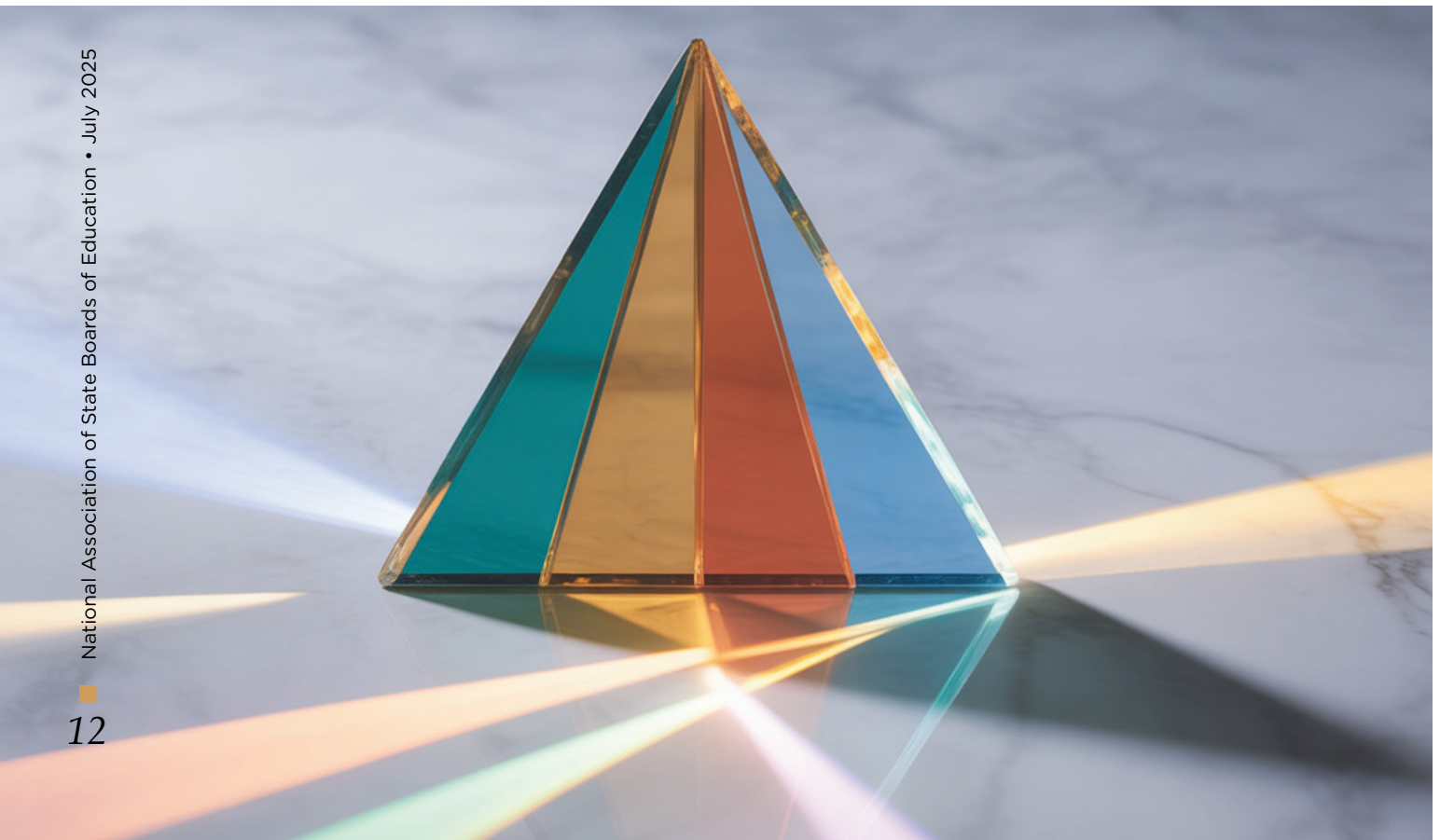
Teachers of color and Indigenous teachers (TOCIT) boost the test scores, graduation rates, and college aspirations of students of color.<sup>2</sup> Both students of color and White students view teachers of color positively, feeling supported and challenged.<sup>3</sup> Furthermore, greater

teacher ethnoracial diversity may reduce isolation and burnout, helping retain teachers of color.<sup>4</sup>

California's educator workforce is predominantly White (55.5 percent).<sup>5</sup> Latino educators constitute the second largest demographic (24.9 percent), followed by Asian educators (7.8 percent) and Black educators (3.8 percent). Yet 9.1 percent of schools do not employ any teachers of color. As of the 2022–23 school year, 36 percent of California's teaching population are teachers of color, while 74 percent of the student population are students of color, with 54 percent Latino and 23 percent White.<sup>6</sup> Education leaders aim to address this disparity in representation through targeted workforce initiatives.<sup>7</sup>

## Recruitment and Retention Initiatives

Several promising initiatives support educator ethnoracial diversity in California. Researchers at the



Learning Policy Institute highlight three that are focused primarily on recruiting and retaining an ethnoracially diverse teacher workforce:

- The Teacher Residency Grant Program supports residency programs in which educator preparation programs partner with local education agencies (LEAs) to train and support new teachers. The program offers stipends of at least \$20,000 and other financial support for residents who commit to teaching in the sponsoring LEA.
- The Golden State Teacher Grant Program provides \$10,000 to \$20,000 scholarships to teaching candidates enrolled in an educator prep program who commit to teaching in a priority school, where students who are low-income, English learner, or in foster care constitute more than 55 percent of the student body.
- The National Board Certified Teacher Incentive Program increases the supply of highly accomplished, effective teachers in high-need schools by offering a \$2,500 subsidy for teachers to pursue National Board certification and a \$5,000 annual salary incentive for board certified teachers who teach in priority schools for up to five years.<sup>8</sup>

California also emphasizes a grow-your-own approach, which helps school districts identify high school students for technical education programs leading to education careers. Another version focuses on transitioning paraprofessionals and afterschool staff into teaching roles. According to the California Department of Education, “This strategy has proven especially successful in filling two high-need teaching areas in California: special education and bilingual education.”<sup>9</sup>

While some data is available for the grant and incentive programs mentioned above, data about recipients’ backgrounds is not consistently available across all the programs. Because ongoing evaluation of program effectiveness is built in, the residency grant disaggregates data by ethnicity, gender, and subject matter and makes it publicly available.<sup>10</sup> The program

boasts about 60 percent residents of color in shortage areas such as special education, bilingual education, computer science, and STEM.<sup>11</sup> The other two programs do incorporate evaluations, but disaggregated data by race and gender are not collected nor are made publicly available. Thus, it is unclear whether these strategies are helping achieve a more ethnoracially diverse teacher workforce, either as proof of concept or part of continuous improvement efforts.

Moreover, short-term, one-time funding limits the long-term impact of these grant programs. For example, the Golden State Teacher Grant began at \$20,000 per candidate and now offers \$10,000 per candidate, with continuing funding uncertain. To be effective in incentivizing new entrants to the profession, the grants need to instill confidence in candidates that consistent levels of resources will be there for them as they enter the profession.

Beyond the state-led efforts, other innovative programs are expanding opportunities for educators of color.

- Urban Ed Academy’s Man the Bay Program recruits male teacher candidates from colleges and universities nationwide and supports their journey into the educator workforce during the four-year program. Man the Bay “aims to give every Black student at least one Black male educator in their lifetime.”<sup>12</sup> The fellowship model provides coaching, professional development, and support services to candidates and houses them in the communities where they teach. To date, the program works in 14 school sites and reaches more than 2,000 students each year.
- Nonprofit Reach University offers affordable bachelor’s degrees, teaching credentials, and master’s for California-based school employees. Its programs are designed with the full-time working adult in mind, offering online coursework in the evenings. The cost for the undergraduate degree program is \$900 a year or \$75/month. Reach’s Intern Teacher Credential Program costs \$7,500/

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year. This program supports district and charter school employees, such as paraprofessionals, in pursuing a bachelor’s degree and a California Preliminary Teaching Credential, and it offers the choice to earn a master of arts in teaching. Candidates can expect it to take two years, or 20 months, to complete. Interns who also receive the Golden State Teacher Grant can apply up to \$5,000 toward their costs of living in urban, rural, and low-income areas. Candidates may also be eligible for added grants to assist with a significant portion of the cost of the credential.<sup>13</sup> Recipients thus receive a living wage while working as a teacher and engaging in graduate-level coursework they can immediately apply to their professional practice.

## Addressing Persistent Challenges

Each of these programs and policies takes a different approach. They work at various entry points across the teacher career continuum—from preservice to in-service, and from recruitment, to professional development, to retention. Yet all work toward the broad goal of diversifying California’s educator workforce. However, the goal of diversifying the state’s educator workforce lacks a clear definition tied to meaningful measures of impact. As a result, these initiatives (and others like them) may be setting their own targets without a clear, unifying direction. This

absence presents an opportunity for California to provide more specificity about what diversifying the educator workforce means (e.g., in terms of ethnicity, gender, multilingualism, key strategies), and this definition could support more fruitful data collection, reporting, and evaluation.

Moreover, California needs more efforts, like the National Board Certified Teacher Incentive Program, to retain diverse educators. Known as the “gold standard” of teacher certification, National Board certification supports professional learning and stimulates changes in practice. It is also associated with better student academic outcomes when compared with teachers who are not certified. Board-certified teachers have reported improvements in their ability to deliver instruction, plan lessons, assess student learning, and grasp subject matter. They also find the associated professional learning community among peer Board-certified teachers to be quite impactful for their capabilities and sense of camaraderie.<sup>14</sup>

TOCITs leave the profession for a host of reasons. They have pointed to the importance of working in schools in which leaders prioritize creation of an affirming, culturally responsive learning environment.<sup>15</sup> In addition to mentoring, culturally relevant professional development aimed at retention is warranted.

## Recommendations

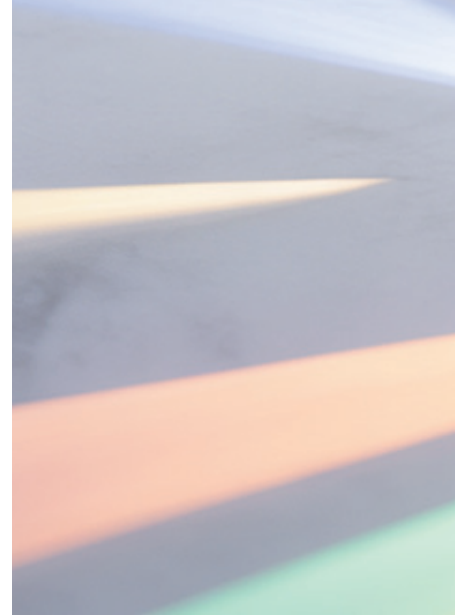
The work to recruit, train, develop, and retain an ethnoracially diverse and thriving teacher workforce is ongoing in California. A central concern that California community members expressed to us in discussions of educator diversity is the need for a shared vision, which acknowledges the role of local voices in linking research to responsive policymaking on educator recruitment and diversification. Many organizations are working at the state and local level to diversify teacher candidates. What is missing is statewide leadership that develops, promotes, and tracks educator workforce diversity initiatives and outcomes. Enduring, robust commitments from state leaders,

anchored in a plan with clearly defined educator workforce diversity goals and built-in accountability measures, could bring cohesion and continuous improvement to California’s teacher diversity efforts.

State and local education leaders must work along several critical, research-informed pathways to recruit, train, develop, and retain diverse teachers. Our recommendations are as follows:

- **Create a shared vision for education diversity.** Statewide leaders in the California Department of Education and the California Commission on Teacher Credentialing should work with local education leaders to develop a shared vision for teacher diversity in California. This vision should include demographic characteristics such as race, gender, ethnicity, and multilingualism; set measurable goals; and outline the support structures, such as personnel and budgets, needed to achieve these goals.
- **Collect and share educator diversity data.** As California makes progress in tracking education data and making it publicly available through its Cradle to Career Data System, state education agency leaders should ensure it includes information on the demographic composition of the educator workforce aligned to the statewide definition. Data on the scope and impact of statewide teacher initiatives should also be incorporated.
- **Continue to fund and expand educator workforce initiatives.** Legislators should sustain ongoing funding for existing programs to solidify their status as key levers in California’s teacher workforce diversity strategy, and state education leaders should advocate for this funding.
- **Increase scholarship amounts.** Considering that the cost to become a teacher is higher for educators of color, particularly special education educators, state and local education leaders should advocate for increasing the Golden State Teacher Grants beyond \$20,000.
- **Renew, extend, and expand the National Board Certified Incentive Program.** The governor and the state legislature should extend the June 30, 2026, encumbrance date to fully use the \$250 million appropriated in 2021. Allocate ongoing funding to establish it as a permanent element in California’s educator diversity strategy. The state education agency should offer incentives to LEAs to leverage Board-certified teachers as mentors and in other leadership roles, especially at high-priority schools.
- **Advocate for more TOCIT to pursue such high-quality certification** in learning communities designed to support diverse educators, such as those provided by the Center for Research on Expanding Educational Opportunity (CREEO). Additionally, tapping Board-certified teachers to mentor newly recruited TOCIT in their schools would present a wonderful opportunity to strengthen induction and promote retention.
- **Prioritize culturally relevant professional development.** Schools and district leaders should invest in culturally responsive training and professional development tailored for TOCITs, school staff, and administrators. Programs like the Race Education and Community Healing Network underscore this need while also championing efforts like restorative justice to combat exclusionary discipline.<sup>16</sup>
- **Strengthen administrator training and support.** School and district leadership significantly affects educators’ experiences.<sup>17</sup> Administrators should seek training and coaching to create supportive, caring learning and working environments for diverse educators.

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## Notes

- 1 Travis J. Bristol et al., “How to Increase the Diversity of California’s Educator Workforce,” report (California Department of Education, March 2022); Desiree Carver-Thomas, Melanie Leung-Gagné, and Danielle Jeannite, “Tackling Teacher Shortages: What We Know about California’s Teacher Workforce Investments,” report (Learning Policy Institute, December 31, 2024), <https://doi.org/10.54300/137.196>.
- 2 Conra D. Gist and Travis J. Bristol, “Handbook Introduction: Charting the Landscape of Research on Teachers of Color and Indigenous Teachers in the United States,” in Conra D. Gist and Travis J. Bristol, eds., *Handbook of Research on Teachers of Color and Indigenous Teachers* (American Educational Research Association, 2022), 1–8, <https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctv2xqngb9.5>.
- 3 Travis J. Bristol and Desiree Carver-Thomas, “Facing the Rising Sun: Black Teachers’ Positive Impact Post-Brown,” white paper (Spencer Foundation, Learning Policy Institute, California Association of African-American Superintendents and Administrators, 2024).
- 4 Desiree Carver-Thomas, “Diversifying the Teaching Profession: How to Recruit and Retain Teachers of Color,” report (Learning Policy Institute, April 19, 2018), <https://doi.org/10.54300/559.310>; Conra D. Gist et al., “Motivating Teachers of Color and Indigenous Teachers to Stay in the Field,” Kappan Special Report (October 2021).
- 5 California Commission on Teacher Credentialing, “Teacher Supply in California, 2022–23: A Report to the Legislature” (April 2024).
- 6 Learning Policy Institute, “The State of the Teacher Workforce: A State-by-State Analysis of the Factors Influencing Teacher Shortages, Supply, Demand, and Equity,” interactive map (July 31, 2024).
- 7 Gist et al., “Motivating Teachers of Color and Indigenous Teachers to Stay in the Field.”
- 8 Carver-Thomas, Leung-Gagné, and Jeannite, “Tackling Teacher Shortages,” 3.
- 9 California Department of Education, “Recruiting Teachers of Color,” web page (last review June 12, 2024).
- 10 California Legislature, Assembly Bill No. 130, Chapter 44, AB-130 Education Finance: Education Omnibus Budget Trailer Bill (2021–22), sections 45–46; WestEd, “California Teacher Residency Grant Program Dashboard,” web page.
- 11 Susan Kemper Patrick, Linda Darling-Hammond, and Tara Kini, “Educating Teachers in California? What Matters for Teacher Preparedness?” report (Learning Policy Institute, May 9, 2023), <https://doi.org/10.54300/956.678>.
- 12 Urban Ed Academy, “Educator Fellowship,” web page.
- 13 Reach University, “Reach Cuts Tuition to Enable B.A. Holders to Teach,” press release, July 30, 2024.
- 14 Linda Darling-Hammond, *The Flat World and Education: How America’s Commitment to Equity Will Determine Our Future* (Teachers College Press, 2015).
- 15 Davis Dixon, Ashley Griffin, and Mark Teoh, “If You Listen, We Will Stay: Why Teachers of Color Leave and How to Disrupt Teacher Turnover” report (TeachPlus and Education Trust, September 2019).
- 16 Michael Corral et al., “California Race, Education, and Community Healing (REACH) Network Baseline Report,” report (UCLA Center for the Transformation of Schools, October 7, 2024).
- 17 Bristol and Carver-Thomas, “Facing the Rising Sun.”