Eliminating Barriers for Teachers of Color in Minnesota

Lessons from Aspiring Black Teachers

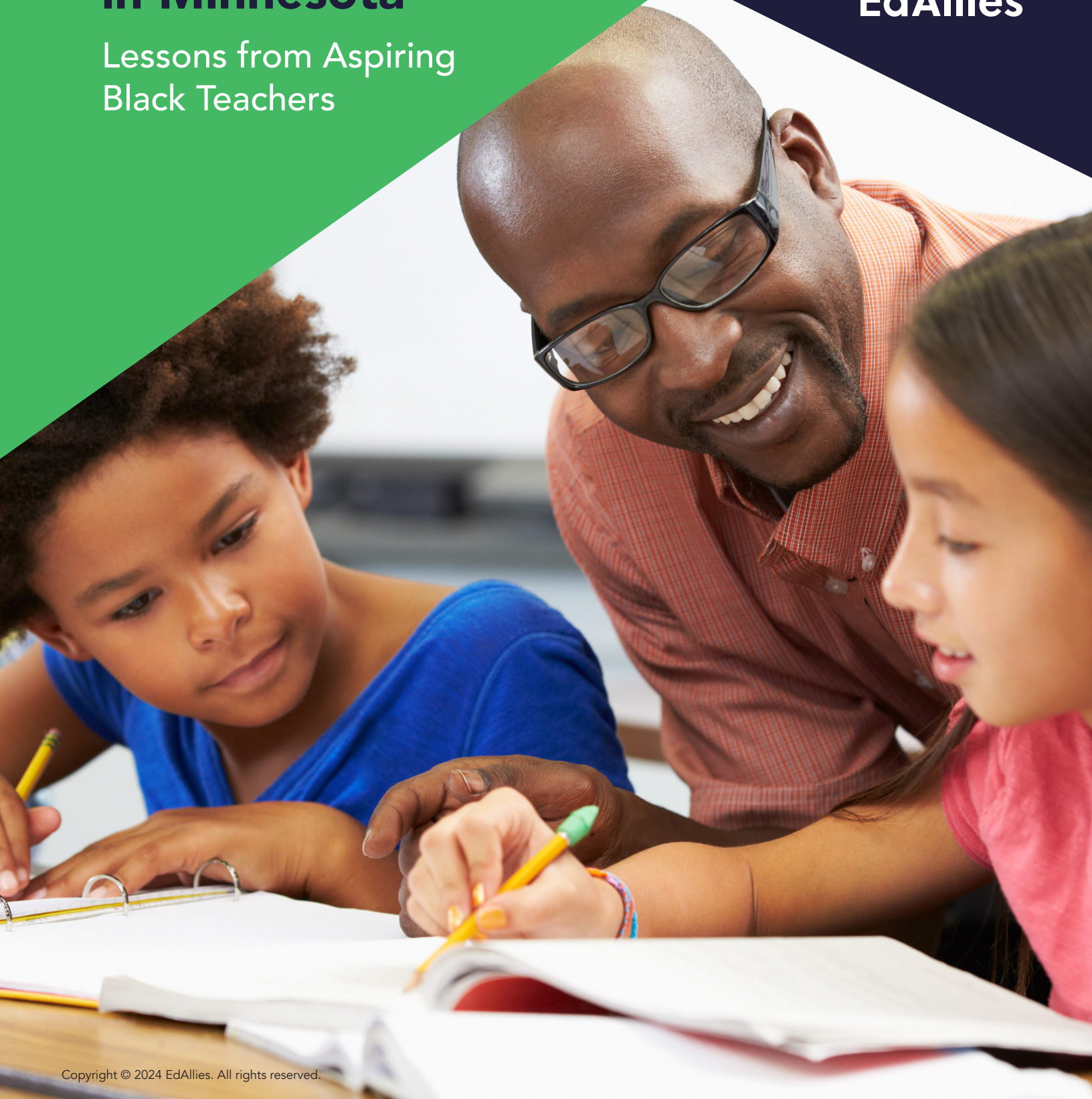**EdAllies**

Table of Contents

Eliminating Barriers for Teachers of Color in Minnesota
Lessons from Aspiring Black Teachers

Author and Community Action Team Facilitator: **Alex Jacques**

▸ ### Marquita Cammon
Enterprise Solutions Lead, Saint Paul & Minnesota Foundation

Marquita is an Operations Lead bringing over a decade of experience in the public and non-profit sectors. Marquita began her career volunteering for local elections, working in afterschool programs across the Twin Cities, and working alongside various nonprofit organizations in Minneapolis. This early involvement in community increased Marquita's awareness of public service, transparency, equity, and community led solutions.

▸ ### Danyal Clark
Director of Operations, 21st Century Academy

Danyal Clark is the Director of Operations for K-8th grade scholars at 21st Century Academy in North Minneapolis. In this role she provides leadership support, provides a warm and caring atmosphere, assists program scholars, individually or in groups, with homework and related activities, and prepares activities that are developmentally appropriate for the age of the scholars. Also in her role, she communicates with 21st Century Academy families and conducts school visits to monitor and stay on top of scholars' progress while in school.

▸ ### Daniel Hodges
Nonprofit Administrator and High School Speech Coach, Twin Cities

Daniel has been a nonprofit professional for over 10 years as an administrator, performing arts educator, and fundraiser. Through his work, he's dedicated to giving young people what was given to him—opportunity and the resources to succeed. Daniel began his career in St. Louis, Missouri, where he worked in program development and fundraising for organizations like Jazz St. Louis and the Center of Creative Arts. Most recently, he worked in development for MacPhail Center for Music, the Friends of the Saint Paul Public Library, and Planned Parenthood. Daniel holds degrees in English and Communication Studies and Theatre from the University of Sioux Falls and a master's in Performance Studies from Washington University, St. Louis. He's also a professional actor, singer, and a dedicated high school speech and debate coach at Apple Valley High School.

Jocelyn McQuirter
Acting Community Engagement Manager, Local Government

Jocelyn's background pays homage to a lineage of Black educators who emphasize(d) knowledge is power, and to rise, we need each other. As an African American and product of Minneapolis Public Schools, Jocelyn is an alumna of Clara Barton and North High School. McQuirter is a project manager in local government where she leads behavioral health projects including multimillion dollar investments funding culturally specific mental health providers, pioneering community engagement practices, and managing a mental health awareness campaign.

Crown Shepherd
Author and Marketing Specialist, Wise Ink Creative Publishing

Crown Shepherd is an author, publisher, bookseller, and reading advocate. Shepherd has dedicated her life to closing the illiteracy rate within the Black community. Shepherd believes if you can read, you can learn, if you can learn, you can grow, and if you can grow, you can be anything!

Broderick Williams
Youth Coordinator and K-4 Facilitator, 21st Century Academy

Broderick Williams is a lower school educator at 21st Century academy located over north Minneapolis. With over a decade of educational experiences, Broderick has showcased his skill sets with some of the most illustrious Freedom Schools, also doing facilitating and volunteering work, taking college accredited courses and training yearly to sharpen teaching skills, and serving on the ministry board at a local church. While navigating new career choices Broderick still facilitated educational spaces amongst high schoolers involved in the Minneapolis Youth Congress, while learning from Alex Pate's "The Innocent Classroom" workshop.

Winter Olaofe
Education Support Professional, Independent School District 287

At the request of the contributor, bio and photo not included

Dear Reader,

Our students cannot afford for us to fail when solving for the critical lack of teachers of color in the state of Minnesota. As of 2023, students of color and indigenous students comprised approximately 38% of public school enrollment in Minnesota, but teachers of color and indigenous teachers made up only 6% of licensed teachers—an increase from 4% just 5 years ago, but still well short of the state's goal.[1,2,3]

All students experience improved academic, social/emotional, and behavioral outcomes with teachers of color in front of the classroom—a fact affirmed by studies as recent as 2022. Moreover, when students of color have teachers of color, they're more likely to be placed in gifted programs and less likely to experience exclusionary discipline referrals. They also feel more cared for and interested in their homework, and are ultimately more likely to graduate high school. These trends are especially pronounced for Black students and Black teachers. On the flip side, when gaps in racial representation persist, students of color and Indigenous students suffer disparities in program placement, discipline, and ultimately academic opportunity and performance.[4]

While significant resources and policies at the state and local levels have aimed to recruit and retain teachers of color, latent barriers to the teaching profession still prevent Black and other underrepresented candidates from becoming teachers. As once-prospective teachers of color, we have firsthand experience with the very real barriers that block interested candidates from advancing in the profession, and the systemic failures that we can and must address at different stages of the teacher talent pipelines.

This report represents the culmination of a series of meetings where we identified shared experiences, analyzed specific barriers, and envisioned actionable solutions. Addressing these systemic problems will improve Minnesota's efforts toward a more diverse, high-quality teacher force.

In partnership,

The Community Action Team

The Current Reality

As of 2023, students of color and indigenous students made up about 38% of Minnesota's K-12 population, but teachers of color and indigenous teachers made up only about 6% of the total workforce.[5,6] In 2022, 67% of students in Minneapolis Public Schools were students of color, yet only 16% of tenured teachers identified as people of color.[7] Saint Paul has 80% students of color, compared to 20% teachers of color.[8] This gap exists in and affects communities beyond the metro area as well. For example, Worthington, Minnesota has a student population made up of 65% students of color, and only a handful of teachers of color. Austin, Rochester, Duluth, and other areas beyond the metro have similar gaps.[9]

These gaps have well-documented consequences for student outcomes, especially for Black students. A student is over 13% more likely to graduate high school and enroll in college if they have just one Black teacher between kindergarten and 3rd grade; if they have two within that time period, that rises to a 32% greater likelihood. Having one Black teacher before 5th grade, decreases the likelihood of a student who experiences poverty dropping out of high school by 39%.[10] Despite the positive impact Black teachers have on student outcomes, Black teachers make up only 1.5% of the teaching corps in the state of MN.[11]

Based upon their experience as once-aspiring Black educators, many of whom previously or currently work in schools in other capacities, all members of the Community Action Team (CAT) recognize the critical need to address gaps in representation and, by doing so, narrow opportunity and outcome gaps facing students of color and Indigenous students.[12] Each member of the team expressed conviction that positive learning outcomes increase relative to the relationships between students and teachers; that positive relationships between students and their teachers are built on a foundation of cultural understanding and responsiveness; and that only a diverse corps of teachers can provide Minnesota students with these benefits.

Members' experiences and convictions are confirmed by a large body of research that shows unique academic, behavioral, and social benefits for Black and non-Black student groups when

there is a diverse teaching staff. A 2022 study found that when Black teachers are in front of classrooms, Black students are 26% less likely to be chronically absent, and that discipline and special education referrals decrease. Moreover, Black students who experience just one Black teacher before 3rd grade are 9% more likely to obtain a high school diploma and 6% more likely to enroll in post-secondary education.[13]

In addition to academic benefits, students also experience social and emotional benefits. Black teachers serve as meaningful role models in students' academic and personal development. Studies have documented how Black teachers can boost the self-worth of their Black students and help them strive for social success.[14] Importantly, non-Black students also experience positive impacts when taught by Black teachers. In fact, all students benefit in areas of attendance, standardized test scores, advanced-level course enrollment, and college enrollment rates when they have a Black teacher.[15]

Significant resources have been invested to address this issue in Minnesota, including meaningful efforts to change policy and remove barriers for prospective teachers of color and build a corps of teachers that reflects the diversity of Minnesota students. As a result of these efforts, all candidates—including teachers of color—have enjoyed greater access to pathways to licensure.

However, it is the cohort's experience that this isn't enough. Many of the barriers plaguing Minnesota's teacher preparation systems are built into existing preparation programs, standards, policies, and expectations. Because barriers are structural and long-standing, we must do more than tinker with our broken systems, and instead re-vision them from the ground up with the needs of teachers of color at the center.

Methodology

The CAT cohort held convenings throughout 2022-2023, including sessions on the public narrative and need for narrative change on the recruitment and retention of Black educators, analyzing and activating the research and subsequent data, and policy barriers and necessary changes.

- Narrative Change, Sessions 1-2
- Research, Sessions 3-4
- Policy Change & Implementation, Session 5 and beyond

The group shared their personal narratives in written and oral form, identified commonalities and trends between their experiences, pointed out what resonated across the group, and ultimately, the roots of the current barriers preventing Black teacher candidates from reaching licensure.

The cohort then analyzed the similarities and differences between their experiences in the teacher candidate pipeline, and inventoried opportunities for change. The group then looked at current nationwide data and reporting on policy recommendations regarding teacher diversity. They took stock of what existing practices and policies hold promise for Minnesota based on their experience and windows of opportunity, paying special attention to what was missing. Then, members of the cohort identified possible recommendations. They winnowed these recommendations down to arrive at a list of solutions to be implemented at the school, district, preparation program, and state levels.

Barriers Along the Pathway to Licensure

"

BARRIER:
Financial and Time Capacity Barriers

The intense financial and time commitments required to complete teacher preparation were by far the most common barrier members of the CAT cohort experienced—which many members found incompatible with competing demands in their lives.

> **"**
> I was sold a story about becoming a teacher and having a classroom of my own. The barriers to teaching were structural. I made it so close to the finish line, but the economic demands of student teaching weren't feasible."

Members reported that, while enrolled in teacher preparation programs, they were unable to afford tuition, living expenses, and childcare without income from a part time job. However, onsite clinical and practicum requirements often interfered with members' ability to maintain a part-time work schedule. For example: The University of Minnesota–Duluth's field placement requirements, which meet Minnesota state licensing requirements, range from 30 to 100 hours of volunteering and observation per semester in addition to eight classroom hours per week. Adding to these demands, members of the cohort described difficulties finding transportation to and from their school placement site, and navigating complex schedules of on-campus studies, family duties, and part-time jobs.

Many cohort members are working parents who returned to school after starting families. These members report being forced to choose between their studies or clinical requirements like observing classroom teachers, and several describe their attempts to balance licensure obligations with other paid jobs necessary to provide for themselves or their families. Several members were forced to cut paid hours or leave paid positions entirely to complete practicum requirements.

For these members, the number of unpaid hours required for observation and student teaching created a formidable barrier that forced many into other career paths.

One cohort member shared her experience working through the teacher preparation system while being a mother and the breadwinner of her family:

> "I was sold a story about becoming a teacher and the possibilities of one day having a classroom of my own. The story fell short. The barriers to teaching were circumstantial and structural. I made it so close to the finish line and the means to student-teach weren't economical. I was the breadwinner of my family. The mother to a young son. I made it so close and couldn't quite navigate the (licensure) portfolio complexities; the tests; the time demands. I made it so close, yet, the costs outweighed the potential gains. A dream dimmed."

Another cohort member, also a single parent, echoed this sentiment. They describe the "final straw" as their fundamental inability to balance their basic needs: "pay for school, pay for the experience needed to attain my degree and licensure, and pay for everyday living as a single parent."

Even for members able to cope with the financial demands of licensure, time requirements were sometimes too high for prospective teachers, and especially prospective teachers of color, to meet. As one cohort member described:

> "Being in school this past Spring studying education, classes that I had to take became very overwhelming and somewhat pointless just to become a teacher. I found myself stressing everyday and not sleeping because of the work. I was letting my other work fall behind just to keep up with the work for that one class. I love working with kids, but figured that I can provide the same care and love to them without being a teacher."

Rigorous teacher preparation demands, coupled with little support during the process and lower salaries than other career options post-licensure create an environment where candidates must carefully weigh the relative costs of completing their journey—particularly for candidates of color who are more likely to have expensive and time-consuming family care obligations.[16] For many prospective teachers of color, the numbers are not adding up.

Rigid and Unaccommodating Teacher Preparation Systems

Despite recent efforts to diversify the teacher workforce, the profession is still disproportionately white and female. As a result, white cultural norms and practices shape not just school climates, but also the teacher preparation experience.

> **Maybe the reality was this place didn't care about anything but my athletic talent. The lack of communication from my counselor revealed a lot."**

Members of the cohort noted that, while there is considerable external pressure to diversify the teacher workforce in Minnesota, that pressure has failed to produce systemic change. Members described rigid and unaccommodating teacher preparation programs that systemically marginalize Black candidates—and often rebuff attempted anti-racist interventions. Their stories highlight two distinct ways that individual and institutional bias create barriers for prospective teachers of color: first, through the lack of supports that would help Black candidates acclimate to existing white-dominated pathways; and, more significantly, through barriers to developing new, flexible, affirming, and anti-racist preparation systems.

When talking about their experiences in Minnesota's teacher preparation system, cohort members described systems characterized by high or unclear expectations and low support.

One cohort member described how he felt, as a young Black student-athlete, when his grades suffered because of low institutional and academic support: "No counselors helped me, no one had my best interest, and also I wasn't motivated…Maybe the reality was this place didn't care about anything but my athletic talent. The lack of communication from my counselor revealed a lot." This cohort member left his postsecondary degree program after two years. When he later enrolled in a community college to continue working towards licensure, he encountered many of the same barriers and ultimately exited the preparation process.

While this cohort member attributed his challenges to issues with "personal timing," his story highlights the ways that Minnesota's teacher preparation pathways are tailored to candidates pursuing normative educational trajectories, and therefore present barriers to students who experience interruptions in their postsecondary education or who wish to approach the profession from other avenues outside the walls of postsecondary institutions. Current programs too often fail to provide Black students with the support and guidance necessary to succeed within the confines of traditional pathways.

Another cohort member put it bluntly:

> "Being honest the school system isn't set up or designed for people of color."

The cohort also acknowledged that effective support for prospective teachers is undermined by the lack of educators, trainers, and mentors of color in teacher preparation programs. The lack of postsecondary faculty diversity is a nationwide problem that mirrors challenges at the K-12 level: In 2021, 73% of full-time faculty were white, and only 13% were Black, Latino, or Indigenous.[17] Similarly, the lack of diversity in K-12 classrooms means that candidates of color are routinely matched with white faculty for their observation and teaching requirements, limiting opportunities for contact with mentors and trainers of color.

Lack of diversity at the postsecondary level also has implications for teacher preparation curriculum, with most programs being designed by white faculty—shaped by their lived experiences and personal and cultural lenses, and the implicit biases that come along with them. CAT cohort members described postsecondary curricula and pedagogies that did not align with their anti-racist values, either by underplaying the significance of race in the K-12 classroom or by reinforcing practices and attitudes that are rooted in anti-Black racism.

Because of the lack of support in traditional teacher preparation pathways, and climates that can be unwelcoming, some candidates of color might be nudged into alternative pathways to licensure, like Grow Your Own programs. But despite the barriers that characterize traditional teacher preparation pathways in Minnesota, and in postsecondary programs nationwide, members noted that alternative pathways entail their own challenges and place tight restrictions on who can enter and where those candidates can ultimately be employed.

BARRIER:

"The Invisible Tax" in K-12 Settings

For some members of the CAT cohort, implicit bias, structurally racist practices, unwelcoming climates, and examples of anti-Blackness in teacher preparation settings and curricula not only represented a significant barrier to licensure, but also caused broader harm. Many cohort members also discussed a related challenge in K-12 settings, which they described as an "invisible tax."

> I challenged the system and the infrastructure that wasn't centering the Black scholars, and was met with pushback. I ultimately stopped participating and quit my journey to the classroom."

Cohort members shared a common experience of mentors, administrators, and other colleagues turning to them, as Black educators, to do additional work related to diversity, equity, and inclusion—including discipline, equity work, curriculum design, and communication with Black parents. Members described feeling "the weight" of their Blackness from the moment they entered the K-12 school setting, and they identified unpaid labor, repeated microaggressions, and other forms of marginalization as institutionally-tolerated behaviors that constituted a "tax" on their identity.

Many members of the cohort, and Black women in particular, described the expectation—sometimes implicit, but often explicitly stated—that they act as cultural liaisons and disciplinarians for Black students. While cohort members expressed a desire to support Black students and insulate them from anti-Black bias, they also described this work as emotionally taxing and sometimes even physically risky: members of the cohort reported expectations from colleagues and school leaders that they should be the first responders to physical confrontations, especially between Black students. After assuming these emotional and physical risks, some cohort members reported that they were expected to return to their classrooms or other job functions immediately, in contrast to experiences where white counterparts—most often white women—were debriefed, consoled, allowed to be examined by the nurse, and sometimes allowed to stop work for the remainder of the day.

Because of these experiences, members of the cohort described feeling "stuck" between the responsibility to insulate Black students from a system that marginalizes and dehumanizes them, and anger that white staff consistently de-prioritized the development of culturally adaptive skills and practices. At least one member cited this dynamic as the primary reason she ended her journey to becoming a fully licensed teacher.

The "invisible tax" comes both from additional demands and from persistent anti-Black stigma, and it causes real and material harm to Black people who work in white-dominated spaces. As Pulitzer Prize winning journalist Isabel Wilkerson writes, "The stigma and stereotypes [Black workers] labor under expose them to higher levels of stress-inducing discrimination in spite of, or perhaps because of, their perceived educational or material advantages."[18] American Studies scholar George Lipsitz affirms: "Increases in income do not necessarily produce increases in health; middle class African American men and women are more likely to suffer from hypertension and stress than those with lower incomes."[19]

The invisible tax is not attributable to a few racist "bad apples" in the teacher preparation system, but rather to anti-Blackness embedded deeply within practices and conventions that, to most white educators for whom these practices were implicitly designed, may appear neutral or simply "how it is." Education researcher Rita Kohli explains: "Programs don't always own that they have constructed policies, practices, and content that neglect the realities of race and racism, and that they often hire teacher educators of color to do this labor, which leads to resistance, racial stress, and racial harm."[20] The upshot is that white teachers are incentivized to fall back on old practices and resist efforts at systemic change, without acknowledging that by defending institutional norms, they often implicitly channel anti-Black attitudes and behaviors. Not only does this dynamic create barriers to entry for future Black candidates, it also creates hostile environments for candidates currently in the preparation system.

One member of the CAT cohort described working in a support position at a charter school with a large number of white teachers and a student body that was 80% Black:

> "There was already a system at play but to me school wasn't fun because it was riddled with tests and dictatorship. Scholars had to move a certain way, dress a certain way, answer questions in a certain way… I tried to implement fun things and bring some life, but I was often met with 'that's too loud' or 'we don't have to do all that extra stuff' or 'you don't need to give that much information to parents.' I was fired, without explanation."

The same cohort member described multiple experiences like this while working in support roles and trying to complete teacher preparation. He recalled how, even when school leaders and colleagues called upon him to reflect the needs of Black students and their caregivers, his advocacy was met with resistance:

> "As my time grew longer…I was a part of some teams that regarded scholars I.E.P.s, and I had a very hard time with these spaces. For one, the meetings were run by old white people who were not in the classroom with these scholars, and were using outdated ways to engage. I challenged the system and the infrastructure [that wasn't centering Black students], and I was met with pushback. I ultimately stopped coming to the meeting because I felt they weren't putting the priority on the scholars."

In the view of this former teacher candidate, the disproportionate whiteness of the teaching staff meant that the school's cultural norms and practices were implicitly built around white identity. As he describes, this implicit bias fostered environments—like I.E.P. meetings—that were not culturally responsive to students and their caregivers, where deficit-based language and other microaggressions were commonplace. As the cohort member notes, while white staff did not explicitly acknowledge these norms, they were nevertheless rigorously policed: When the cohort member called out bias and advocated for more student-centered and race-conscious practices, he lost his job.

This member's experiences highlight the self-perpetuating nature of the lack of diversity in Minnesota's teacher workforce: Without a critical mass of Black educators in Minnesota classrooms and teacher preparation pathways, Black candidates often struggle in white-dominated environments, and the cycle repeats.

Members' observations, taken as a group, demonstrate tensions between demands—from school leaders, colleagues, instructors, and programs—for hyper-visibility on the one hand, and invisibility on the other. First, members noted the expectation for Black people to lead institutional conversations about equity, conduct communication with Black families, and serve as the disciplinarian for Black students. At the same time, members felt pressured to refrain from discussing racial trauma, providing feedback on white allyship and solidarity, and raising concerns about anti-Black leadership trends. Many cohort members shared confusion and disappointment when recalling experiences where their voices would be valued, only to have their input ignored or rejected when it challenged normative processes and assumptions.

One cohort member acknowledged this tension and spoke about the ways trauma and stigma compound for Black teachers and defy normative boundaries between 'personal' vs. 'professional' spheres:

> "Many teachers deal with a lot in their personal life way before they even enter the building of the schools they work for, then have to put up with a lot at work on a daily basis. For teachers of color, it's not appealing. For some they want to know that they will be ok—financial wise, personal, and emotional."

Members' narratives map onto existing research about Black educators' experiences in the K-12 classroom. We know that Black educators disproportionately carry the labor of leading DEI discussions; are often asked to serve as a default "cultural liaison" for students and families of color; experience repeated microaggressions and marginalization; and suffer a lack of care, culturally responsive mentorship, and prioritization of inclusion and representation.[21]

After encountering these barriers, many members of the cohort were forced to face a difficult decision: to deal with the career-long, racialized stress resulting from the reality of K-12 environments, or find another path that allows them to experience less daily discrimination and is, therefore, a healthier option for them.

Recommendations to Remove Barriers

Many of the cohort's recommendations mirror the recommendations laid out in several recent reports on teacher diversity nationwide. However, the CAT cohort's work is distinct because it explores and discusses recommendations from the perspective of Black people who tried to become teachers through various existing professional pathways, but ultimately terminated their candidacy because of institutional barriers. Indeed, this report is the first to center the perspectives of Black former teacher candidates.

The cohort's recommendations focus on systems-level changes within K-12 settings, colleges and universities, state policy, and more—approaching teacher diversity and representation as a strategy to advance the community. The success of the sum of the community and the success of the individual cannot be separated. Both are critical components to improve the wellbeing of individuals within the community, which is necessary to improve the pipeline for pre-service teachers permanently. From that perspective, the cohort agreed that incremental approaches to improving teacher diversity can only deliver limited results. The recommendations below begin from that assumption, demonstrating the cohort's focus on creating conditions for a critical mass of Black educators.

ACTION:

Addressing Financial and Time Capacity Barriers

1. INCREASE DIRECT FINANCIAL SUPPORT

▸ **Eliminate paternalistic restrictions on access.** Many financial aid and educator support programs carry unnecessary requirements or hurdles. For example, financial support dollars are often restricted to certain needs and expenses, like licensure exams and tuition reimbursement, often for specific licensure areas. Some programs also require burdensome

procedures like tracking, saving and submitting receipts, and getting in-person signatures from supervisors. Cohort members recommended eliminating these rules and stipulations to allow students more flexibility to use financial aid in whatever way will most benefit and empower them to become teachers—including housing, food, childcare, transportation, and other expenses that presented financial barriers to the profession.

Leaders should co-design assistance programs that meet the actual needs of candidates with significant and diverse financial barriers, and that meet candidates where they are.

▸ **Expand state grant/scholarship programs and related outreach.** Current state grant and scholarship programs offer significant benefits, but many prospective candidates of color do not have access to information about programs and receive little to no culturally-responsive support throughout the application process.

About half (56%) of all incoming postsecondary students are the first in their family to go to college, and more than half (54%) of all those students are students of color—meaning that nearly 1 in 3 college students are both first generation college students and students of color.[22] Because parents and family members of first-generation college students are often unable to help their student prepare for and navigate college, first-generation students must rely on others—including school staff—for information.[23] And because first-generation college students have less family wealth than their peers, they are more likely to rely on financial aid and the limited support of their family members to complete the teacher preparation process.[24]

With this in mind, cohort members recommended that post-secondary programs expand their partnerships with Black and other underrepresented educators to plan outreach, coordinate marketing, and provide hands-on support to help prospective candidates navigate the application process. They should also build strong relational support structures—for example, quarterly coaching meetings or easy access to an expert who can field questions. Finally, policymakers should use data to direct aid to programs demonstrating the most success in helping educators of color attain a license, secure a teaching job, and stay in the profession.

▸ **Provide a living-wage stipend for student teaching.** During student teaching, aspiring educators are generally paying tuition for college credits while working in a full-time student teaching placement—with schedules that generally make it difficult or impossible to maintain paid employment. Black students are more likely than their white peers to work full-time while completing their degree. The expectation that they put a pause on their income to work as a full-time, unpaid student teacher and pay tuition represents an insurmountable challenge.[25]

To address this, policymakers should increase funding for Student Teacher Grants—expanding the program to cover all underrepresented student teachers— to ensure ongoing compensations during this 12-week licensure requirement.

▸ **Ensure financial support is sizeable enough to match the cost of living.** Where financial aid does exist, it does not stack up against the cost of living— especially for students with children. For example, one cohort member reported that their university provided students with bus tokens to cover the cost of commuting to school. The cohort member explained that, because their family life demanded a car, financial support would have been more beneficial had it been more flexible and more commensurate with the real cost of transportation: insurance, gas, parking, and maintenance—in some cases for travel that was essential to getting to student teaching placements.

Cohort members were firm on this point: The aim of financial support should be to fully support candidates of color and reduce or remove financial barriers—including for students with interrupted academic trajectories, students with families, students who need to work full time, students enrolled in alternative preparation programs, and other students entering teaching from unconventional paths and backgrounds. In this regard, partial measures like bus tokens may be a nice gesture, but they are not enough to make it feasible for many Black candidates to complete the preparation process.

2. COVER ANCILLARY COSTS

▸ To ensure that direct financial support is adequate, preparation programs, the state, and school districts must be prepared to cover ancillary costs that are both directly and indirectly related to the licensure process—like filing fees, test fees, and related expenses that can create significant burdens for candidates with limited means. Unlike current subsidy programs that can be narrowly targeted to specific types of fees, CAT cohort members emphasized that funds should be flexible, and ample enough to include indirect costs like transportation to and from a field placement and childcare while a candidate is attending class and completing program requirements.

3. SUPPORT EARLY CAREER TEACHERS

▸ The average salary for first-year teachers in Minnesota is $44,383. According to a University of Minnesota study, the average teacher with a bachelor's degree earned $50,900, while the average Minnesota worker with a bachelor's degree earned $68,1000. The average teacher with a master's degree earned $71,750, while the average Minnesota worker with a master's degree earned $86,750.[26] While many enter teaching because of a deep connection with

and commitment to the profession and their communities, the financial realities push many who start down teacher preparation pathways to ultimately change course and enter a different profession.

Several CAT members reported that the promise of stipends to supplement earnings, or scholarships to pay for additional schooling that would help them climb the salary schedule, which is often based on academic degrees and seniority only, would have incentivized them to stay on their path to the classroom.

Moreover, salary incentives to teach in "high-impact" schools would aid in the recruitment and retention in schools where teachers of color are needed most. This could include:

- Districts with the largest gaps in racial representation between students of color and their teachers;
- Districts with the lowest percentage of teachers of color; or
- Districts with the greatest number of students of color.

ACTION:

Addressing Rigid and Unaccommodating Systems

1. ACCLIMATE CANDIDATES TO TEACHER PREP PROGRAMS

▸ **Create mentorship within teacher preparation.** In the absence of a critical mass of Black instructors capable of interrupting and transforming white-dominant educational spaces, it's critical that programs invest resources to support Black candidates, and other first generation and students of color, in acclimating to the norms, practices, and expectations that might otherwise create exclusionary barriers, both implicit and explicit.

Cohort members recommended tailoring orientation sessions to ensure they provide accessible and culturally-relevant support and resources. One suggestion was to pair senior-level Black candidates with new students—during both the orientation and the program— to provide a touchstone of cultural familiarity and support within new, white-dominated environments that are sometimes difficult for Black students to navigate and thrive.

▸ **Hold teacher preparation programs accountable to the success of aspiring teachers of color.** The lack of teacher diversity in Minnesota is a policy choice that plays out on a variety of stages, including on the state, district, and teacher preparation program levels. CAT cohort members, surveying norms and practices at all levels, identified a need to hold individual preparation programs accountable for their implementation of diversity-related reforms and the success of their Black participants, and teachers of color more broadly. Members recommended that state funding be contingent on creating and successfully executing plans around recruiting, supporting, and matriculating the students of color certain programs are meant to target. Members also recommended that programs be required to adjust their policies and support mechanisms if candidates of color are leaving a program or changing their academic majors before graduation at higher rates relative to their white peers.

2. INCREASE PREP PROGRAM INSTRUCTOR DIVERSITY

▸ The CAT cohort reported being marginalized within white-dominant cultures—from curriculum to program policies—at colleges and universities where Black instructors, and instructors of color in general, are rare. CAT members recommended, therefore, that preparatory programs create more culturally nourishing and sustaining environments on campuses for pre-service educators by:

- Ensuring that preparation programs recruit, retain, and promote program leaders and instructors of color, including Black leaders;
- Identifying and promoting teacher preparation programs that successfully employ and retain leaders and instructors of color;
- Making racial demographics of college and university prep program faculty public with robust data; and
- Creating communities of practice for program leaders who center anti-racism in teacher prep programs.

To incentivize diverse faculty recruitment, cohort members recommended investing state dollars into traditional and alternative programs with a track record of recruiting, retaining, and promoting faculty, advisors, mentors, and instructors of color, allowing those programs to scale their practices. Members also discussed investing state dollars into grants for programs wishing to improve their efforts to diversify their faculty and staff, allowing them to adapt and implement the best practices incubated at other institutions and programs.

3. IMPROVE PARTNERSHIPS BETWEEN TEACHER PREP PROGRAMS AND HIGH SCHOOLS

▸ CAT cohort members reported that they did not ever encounter or hear from representatives or recruiters from teacher preparation programs when they were making post-secondary plans in high school. Because of this, members believed Black students are less likely to consider teaching as an accessible profession and less likely to be aware of opportunities, resources, and support to help them navigate the application process and tuition requirements.

Cohort members agreed that, to ensure that more Black students enroll in preparation programs, resources and support should be provided to programs that license teachers to build relationships with high school students of color and familiarize them with teaching as a viable option, and the requirements and opportunities students must consider before pursuing teaching. Members noted the importance of authentic and consistent relationships between students and program representatives, characterized by intentional follow-up and engagement.

4. PROVIDE ROBUST SUPPORT AND PREPARATION FOR TEACHER CERTIFICATION EXAMS

▸ In Minnesota, Black candidates have an average pass rate of about 67% on their content and pedagogy licensure exams compared to 92% for white candidates.[27] However, members of the cohort reported that they received little to no support from their programs when preparing for licensure examinations.

Cohort members agreed that preparation programs should extend their support through the entire licensure process, and even to the first few years as teachers. Preparation programs should consider investing in structured, tailored supports like study groups, test preparation, and differentiated interventions and preparation for content-area and general knowledge exams. Cohort members acknowledged that the exams themselves are not culturally responsive, and that preparation programs have little power to intervene in exam content. Nevertheless, members noted that preparation and support can be responsive and effective when these resources are: communal, fun, consistent, intentional, and connected to compelling reasons for mastering each content area and standard.

5. REQUIRE THAT TEACHER PREP PROGRAMS SET CANDIDATE DIVERSITY GOALS AND REPORT ON ANNUAL PROGRESS

▸ CAT cohort members acknowledged the importance of transparency in ensuring that preparation programs meet state and district-level targets for teacher diversity. Members recommended that programs receiving state funding should be required to set diversity goals, create a plan for reaching those goals, and report on their progress to state officials.

Not only will reporting requirements improve transparency and accountability within preparation programs, it will also allow leaders at the Professional Educator Licensing and Standards Board to identify struggling programs and provide program leaders with hands-on support. Cohort members imagined that support might look like:

- Communities of practice for creating diversity goals and strategic plans;
- Troubleshooting implementation; and
- Providing relevant case studies.

To ensure accountability, members proposed a "carrot and stick" approach combining supports to teacher preparation programs to achieve ambitious diversity goals with reduced funding or other interventions for programs who consistently underperform on diversity goals.

ACTION:
Addressing "The Invisible Tax" in K-12 Settings

1. REFORM PERSONNEL POLICIES THAT HARM TEACHERS OF COLOR

▸ **Move away from seniority-based layoffs.** Seniority-based layoffs have a disproportionate adverse impact on teachers of color, simply because newer teacher cohorts tend to be more diverse. Losing young teachers of color not only disrupts the diversification of the workforce but also hinders the development of strong, supportive connections between Black educators and Black students and, ultimately, a supportive and empowering environment for Black candidates on the path to licensure. Addressing these inequities is crucial to promoting inclusive and equitable education for all students, and to creating a critical mass of Black educators that can support new, pre-service educators.

▸ **Build effective mentorship models for new teachers**. Mentorship—especially for Black educators and Black teacher candidates—plays a crucial role in supporting and retaining teachers who are in school buildings and on a teacher preparation path. For many Black educators, including members of the cohort, entering the teaching profession can be particularly challenging due to systemic inequities and a lack of representation.

Researchers have found that mentoring programs, when designed to facilitate diversity and inclusion, help to reduce isolation felt by new Black teachers and provide them with on-going opportunities for inquiry, self-reflection, and professional development.[28] Cohort members noted that these relationships should be distinct from mentorship models as traditionally imagined, many of which also include elements of performance evaluation. According to researchers at the Penn Center for Minority Serving Institutions and Huston-Tillotson Teacher Education Program:

> "Even though most new teachers are assigned a formal 'mentor' or 'supervising' teacher to work with by their school or school district, these relationships are very limited in scope and time… While there are different kinds of mentoring programs for new teachers, very few of them are centered specifically on issues of equity and social justice."[29]

Mentors can offer practical advice on classroom management, curriculum development, and professional growth, helping new Black teachers navigate the complexities of the educational landscape. Moreover, mentorship fosters a strong sense of community and support, which can be pivotal in overcoming the unique challenges that Black teachers may face. By offering mentorship, schools not only enhance the job satisfaction and retention rates of new Black teachers but also contribute to a more diverse and enriched teaching workforce, ultimately benefiting all students through improved cultural responsiveness and equitable educational opportunities.

▸ **Ensure anti-racist evaluation and professional development models—both for teacher prep instructors and within K-12 systems.** CAT cohort members observed that there is little accountability or follow through at the teacher preparation program level to ensure anti-racist curriculum, values, and inclusive environments. Members reported that teachers in preparation programs frequently committed anti-Black microaggressions, for example, but members found no performance management mechanisms in place to give feedback,

set goals for improvement, or provide support for teachers struggling to work effectively in racially diverse settings.

Anti-racist performance management systems within the K-12 system, once educators are on the job, are also critical for retaining Black educators. Administrators routinely rate Black educators lower than their white colleagues based on classroom evaluations grounded in traditional performance metrics. Despite evidence that Black teachers have a positive impact on student learning, a recent study of nearly 500,000 teacher performance evaluations in Tennessee found that women received higher evaluations than men; white teachers received higher evaluations than Black teachers; and Black men were the lowest-rated group.[30]

Implementing higher-quality teacher evaluation systems that incorporate an anti-racist framework is a pivotal step in increasing the number of Black teachers in classrooms. These systems not only hold educators accountable for their performance but can also play a critical role in fostering inclusive and equitable school environments that support the success and retention of Black educators. When teacher evaluations are fair, transparent, and free from bias, Black educators are more likely to receive the recognition and opportunities they deserve, and white educators are held accountable for creating a safe and inclusive classroom, building, and profession. This, in turn, can improve school climate for current Black educators, and motivate Black candidates to remain in the profession and complete requirements to become licensed.

▸ **Actively engage in discussion about race and ethnicity.** The CAT cohort indicated that, to ultimately increase the number of Black teachers in the teaching profession, it is likely necessary for school districts to incorporate social and emotional learning (SEL) frameworks in professional development and performance management that confront and address race-evasiveness—the norm, created to preserve white comfort and privilege—of not explicitly discussing race, identifying white supremacy, or directly addressing racial inequity. Researchers examining the experiences of preservice K-12 math teachers have described it this way:

"Race-evasiveness ideology can manifest when actively avoiding discussions of race altogether, but also when [individuals] de-emphasize race's importance, either through stressing similarities of people across races, or ignoring the differences in their experiences. Race-evasiveness can occur in more covert ways, by discussing race only as one of many listed elements of culture, or by using proxies or umbrella terms to account for race without otherwise discussing it."[31]

The cohort operated from the assumption that equitable education systems recognize the importance of representation and the value of diverse perspectives in the classroom. When educational institutions actively engage with race-related issues, openly discuss systemic racism, and prioritize SEL programs that encourage empathy, understanding, and inclusivity, they create an environment where, in addition to benefitting all students and staff, Black educators feel welcomed and valued.

▸ **Improve school climate as evidenced by disciplinary actions.** Our cohort indicated a clear connection between poor school climate caused by racist exclusionary discipline policies and their experience of fatigue, burnout, and, ultimately, departure from their licensure pathway. It is well-documented that Black students are disproportionately subjected to harsh, exclusionary disciplinary measures, such as suspensions and expulsions, for subjective behaviors for which their white peers are not disciplined. Black educators and personnel are also often assigned the duties to discipline students in often punitive and exclusionary ways. This contributes to a hostile educational environment for Black students and Black teachers. These disparities not only perpetuate educational inequities but also create an atmosphere that discourages Black students from considering teaching careers.

When schools actively address these disparities by implementing alternatives to dehumanizing, exclusionary discipline, like restorative practices and adopting other equitable approaches, they can foster a more inclusive and supportive environment. In doing so, they not only improve outcomes for students but also make the teaching profession more appealing to potential Black educators.

2. CREATE PATHWAYS FOR EXISTING, UNLICENSED SCHOOL STAFF TO CONTINUE TO WORK WHILE PREPARING FOR LICENSURE

▸ Unlicensed school staff are often more diverse than the licensed teachers in the building. Cohort members saw this as an opportunity to increase teacher diversity by supporting the growth of Black staff who are already working in K-12 schools. Members suggested funding promising preparation programs to build intentional partnerships with schools that have diverse cohorts of unlicensed staff—with a focus on relationship building, knowledge, and support.

Members of the CAT cohort observed that a simple visit from preparation program leaders to the school where they are currently working as non-licensed staff would go a long way in helping to build the understanding and relationships required for them to enroll in a teacher preparation pathway, as long as it is paired with effective follow-up.

One member described an experience with a recruiter from an alternative pathway. They had a great meeting, and the candidate was excited to take the next step and apply for the program—but the recruiter didn't follow up. Months later, the cohort member received a form letter from the recruiter asking him to apply before the deadline. The absence of the initial relational approach discouraged the candidate who ultimately elected not to apply. He was left feeling tokenized and strung along by the obviously transactional interaction with the recruiter.

3. PROVIDE CULTURALLY-RELEVANT MENTAL HEALTH SUPPORT FOR STAFF

▸ Throughout the course of their work as a group, cohort members expressed that, because of negative and sometimes traumatic personal experiences in the K-12 system, they needed to seek out culturally-affirming, anti-racist mental healthcare during their training experience.

As a result, supporting access to mental healthcare could be a significant step toward better supporting Black teachers. The experience of navigating a profession where they are not only historically underrepresented, but continue to experience systemic racial biases can take a significant toll on the mental well-being of Black educators. Indeed, studies have shown that teachers of color, including Black teachers, often confront workplace discrimination, microaggressions, and feelings of isolation.[32]

Standard therapeutic practices based in white-dominant research are not enough. They need Black-centric mental health services that include affirmation of their identities, cultural contributions, and acknowledgement of the systemic marginalization they experience. When Black teachers receive effective support and care, they are better equipped to provide nurturing and culturally responsive education over the long term.

Conclusion

Minnesota has been slowly moving the needle on teacher diversity, but we are still far from where we need to be to effectively serve an increasingly diverse student population. Minnesota must create and support innovative pathways to the classroom capable of preparing, licensing, and welcoming a teacher corps that matches the diversity of our students. Welcoming school and classroom environments depend on a workforce that represents the diversity of our state and our students, and vice versa. To create lasting change, cohort members said that it is necessary to focus on systems-level solutions.

Given the urgency of the task and the limited success of past efforts, it's more important than ever to bring new, directly impacted people into the conversation. Policymakers will benefit from the CAT cohort's insights contained in this report, which captures the experiences of Black prospective teachers who were pushed out of teacher preparation pathways because of financial, cultural, and institutional barriers to access.

The cohort's work calls on advocates, researchers, and policymakers not only to invest in new pathways to the classroom, but to look critically at the pathways Minnesota currently has in place. As the cohort recognized, it is not only a matter of widening existing pathways or even of building new ones. It is also necessary to identify anti-Black barriers in existing pathways and rebuild those processes and institutions in ways that support and welcome future teachers of color.

Footnotes

[1] Minnesota Report Card, 2023 Enrollment by Race/Ethnicity, Accessed 12/4/2023. https://rc.education.mn.gov/

[2] 2023 Tiered Licensure & Permissions Report, Professional Educator Licensing and Licensing Standards Board. https://mn.gov/pelsb/assets/2023%20Tiered%20Licensure%20Report.post_tcm1113-597358.pdf

[3] CHAPTER 55, H.F. No. 2497 (Omnibus Education Bill), Minn. Stat. § 120B.117 (2023). https://www.revisor.mn.gov/laws/2023/0/55/laws.2.9.0#laws.2.9.0

[4] Blazar, David. (2022). How and Why Do Black Teachers Benefit Students?: An Experimental Analysis of Causal Mediation. (EdWorkingPaper: 21-501). Retrieved from Annenberg Institute at Brown University: https://doi.org/10.26300/jym0-wz02

[5] Minnesota Report Card

[6] 2023 Tiered Licensure & Permissions Report

[7] Klecker, M., & Tribune, S. (2022, August 24). Lawsuit alleges Minneapolis Public Schools discriminates by protecting teachers of color. Star Tribune. https://www.startribune.com/lawsuit-alleges-minneapolis-public-schools-discriminates-by-protecting-teachers-of-color/600200637/#:~:text=Last%20school%20year%2C%20people%20of,27%25%20of%20its%20probationary%20teachers.

[8] Eischens, R. (2020, February 18). Minnesota teachers still overwhelmingly white as student population becomes more diverse. Minnesota Reformer. https://minnesotareformer.com/2020/02/14/minnesota-teachers-still-overwhelmingly-white-as-student-populations-becomes-more-diverse/

[9] Mahamud, F., Webster, M., & Tribune, S. (2018, December 3). Minnesota schools struggle with widening racial gap between students and teachers. Star Tribune. https://www.startribune.com/as-minnesota-students-become-more-diverse-teachers-remain-mostly-white/498947601/

[10] Gershenson, S., Hart, C. M. D., Hyman, J., Lindsay, C. A., & Papageorge, N. W. (2018). The Long-Run impacts of Same-Race Teachers. https://doi.org/10.3386/w25254

[11] 2023 Tiered Licensure & Permissions Report

[12] Gershenson, The Long-Run impacts of Same-Race Teachers

[13] Blazar, David. (2021). Teachers of Color, Culturally Responsive Teaching, and Student Outcomes: Experimental Evidence from the Random Assignment of Teachers to Classes. (EdWorkingPaper: 21-501). Retrieved from Annenberg Institute at Brown University: https://doi.org/10.26300/jym0-wz02

[14] Gershenson, S., & Papageorge, N. (2022, February 4). The power of teacher expectations. Education Next. https://www.educationnext.org/power-of-teacher-expectations-racial-bias-hinders-student-attainment/

[15] Blazar, David.

[16] "Education for What?" Lumina Foundation, Gallup, www.luminafoundation.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/08/Education.for_.What_.pdf. Accessed 7 Aug. 2023.

[17] National Center for Education Statistics. (2023). Characteristics of Postsecondary Faculty. Condition of Education. U.S. Department of Education, Institute of Education Sciences. Retrieved August 30, 2023, from https://nces.ed.gov/programs/coe/indicator/csc

[18] Wilkerson, Isabel. Caste: The Origins of Our Discontents. Large print edition. Waterville, ME, Thorndike Press, a part of Gale, a Cengage Company, 2021.

[19] Lipsitz, George. The Possessive Investment in Whiteness: How White People Profit from Identity Politics. Temple University Press, 1998.

[20] Kohli, R., & Pizarro, M. (2022). The Layered Toll of Racism in Teacher Education on Teacher Educators of Color. AERA Open, 8. https://doi.org/10.1177/23328584221078538

[21] Dixon, R.D., Griffin, A.R., & Teoh, M.B. (2019). "If you listen, we will stay: Why teachers of color leave and how to disrupt teacher turnover.", The Education Trust & Teach Plus, Washington DC.

[22] Schuyler, Sophie W.; Childs, Jonique R.; and Poynton, Timothy A. (2021) "Promoting Success for FirstGeneration Students of Color: The Importance of Academic, Transitional Adjustment, and Mental Health Supports," Journal of College Access: Vol. 6 : Iss. 1 , Article 4.

[23] Falcon, L. (2015, June). Breaking Down Barriers: First-Generation College Students and College Success | The League for Innovation in the Community College. https://www.league.org/innovation-showcase/breaking-down-barriers-first-generation-college-students-and-college-success

[24] Schuyler, Sophie W.; Childs, Jonique R.; and Poynton, Timothy A. (2021)

[25] Ibid.

[26] Minnesota Educator salary Study | University of Minnesota Law School. (n.d.). https://law.umn.edu/institute-metropolitan-opportunity/studies/schools/minnesota-educator-salary-study

[27] Minnesota Professional Educator Licensing and Standards Board. 2023 Teacher Preparation Program Report. Available at: https://mn.gov/pelsb/assets/2022%20Teacher%20Preparation%20Report_tcm1113-560298.pdf

[28] Ginsberg, A. Budd, E. Center for Minority Serving Institutions (2020) "Mentoring New Teachers of Color: Building New Relationships among Aspiring Teachers and Historically Black Colleges and Universities" Available at: https://cmsi.gse.rutgers.edu/sites/default/files/Mentoring%20Teachers%20of%20Color%20.pdf

[29] Ibid.

[30] Grissom, J.A. and Bartanen, B. (2022), Potential Race and Gender Biases in High-Stakes Teacher Observations. J. Pol. Anal. Manage., 41: 131-161. https://doi.org/10.1002/pam.22352

[31] Carman, L., & Anderson, R. K. (2023). Between race-evasiveness and the pursuit of racial competence: Secondary mathematics preservice teachers' understandings of race in an introductory methods course. Social Sciences & Humanities Open, 8(1), 100603. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ssaho.2023.100603

[32] Kohli, R., & Pizarro, M. (2022). The Layered Toll of Racism in Teacher Education on Teacher Educators of Color. AERA Open, 8. https://doi.org/10.1177/23328584221078538

EdAllies

EdAllies partners with schools, families, and communities to ensure that every young Minnesotan has access to a rigorous and engaging education. We advance policies that put underserved students first, remove barriers facing successful schools and programs, and foster an inclusive conversation about what's possible for students.

EdAlliesMN.org