

Union Role in
Diversifying
the Educator Workforce

Building from Within





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Our Mission

The **American Federation of Teachers** is a union of professionals that champions fairness; democracy; economic opportunity; and high-quality public education, healthcare and public services for our students, their families and our communities. We are committed to advancing these principles through community engagement, organizing, collective bargaining and political activism, and especially through the work our members do.

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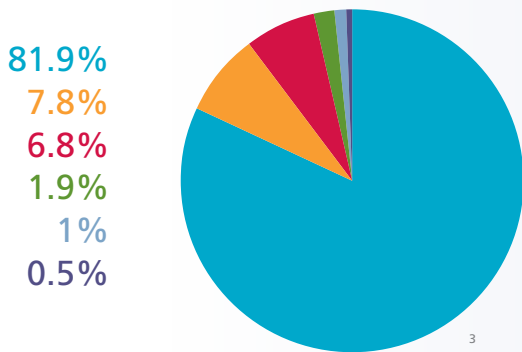
TEACHER SHORTAGE IN AMERICA

It is no secret that the United States is facing a teacher shortage. Student enrollment is up, teacher attrition is high and enrollment in teacher preparation programs has fallen.

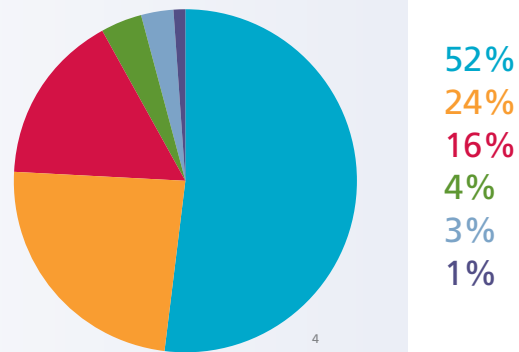
- **Student enrollment.** Teacher demand is growing, as student enrollment continues to increase. To compound this issue, subjects such as mathematics and science, and specialty areas such as bilingual and special education, continue to see an ever-growing need for teachers.
- **Teacher attrition.** Many teachers are leaving the profession due to poor teaching and working conditions. Nationally, the research shows that the biggest obstacle to greater teacher diversity is teacher attrition. Teachers of color are leaving, the evidence tells us, because of a lack of collective voice in decisions in their schools and a lack of professional autonomy.¹
- **Enrollment in teacher preparation programs.** There are not enough teachers entering the profession to replace those who are retiring.

Simply put, there are not enough qualified teachers applying for teaching jobs in all locations and fields.² Hard-to-staff schools are particularly vulnerable, as they are the schools with the fewest resources and serve largely high-poverty student populations.

Ethnicity of Public School Teachers, 2011

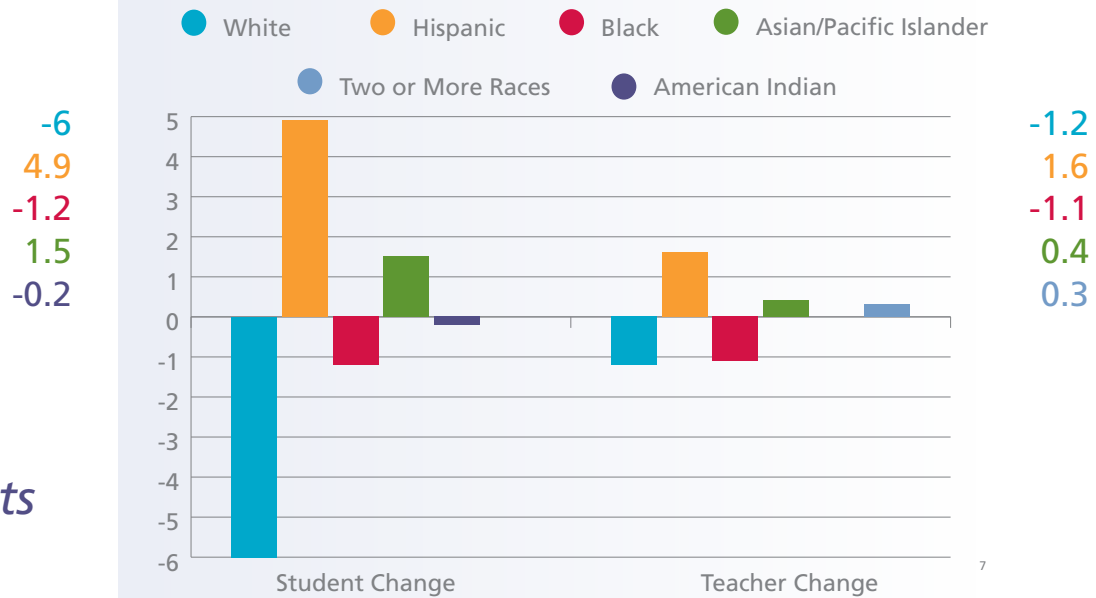


Ethnicity of Public School Students, 2011



While the sheer number of teachers continues to dwindle, teachers of color are underrepresented in our nation's public schools. According to the National Center for Education Statistics, students who are culturally and linguistically diverse comprise 45 percent of the nation's K-12 students. Meanwhile, 83 percent of the teaching force is white.⁵ Based on predictions from the U.S. Census Bureau, by 2025, the United States is projected to have a teacher shortfall of 145,000. Student enrollment is projected to grow by 3 million (to 53 million total) in the next decade.⁶ The AFT sees this as an opportunity to do what is right for all students, and that is to not only increase the number of public school teachers, but also diversify the teaching workforce.

Percent Change of Public School Students and Teachers by Ethnicity, 2003 to 2011



All students benefit from being educated by teachers from a variety of different backgrounds.⁹

WHY DIVERSITY? WHY NOW?

All students benefit from a more diverse teaching force. Research indicates that students, educators and the public school system all benefit from students having the opportunity to learn from a wide array of perspectives.

More specifically, teachers of color have a positive effect on students of color, providing academic, social and emotional benefits.⁸ There is value in shared culture and experiences. Many teachers of color know what it's like to be the "other" or "only." They have figured out how to navigate what can sometimes be difficult sociopolitical waters and can "talk the talk" because

they have walked through similar experiences. This is a benefit. This is of value and importance to the success of students. The world students are growing up in is rich with diverse cultures and languages, and our profession must represent this diversity. The AFT cannot underscore enough the importance of recruiting and retaining educators of color.

Ways to do this include:

- Creating programs to help paraprofessionals earn teacher licensure.
- Attracting high school students to the profession.
- Developing community-based partnerships.



ESSA AND TEACHER PREPARATION

Under the new Every Student Succeeds Act, federal dollars are repurposed to directly target local communities and increase workforce diversity. These funds can be used now not only for professional development, professional growth and leadership opportunities, but also on reducing class sizes, mentoring and recruiting a diverse teacher workforce.

ESSA AND CAREER AND TECHNICAL EDUCATION

Career and technical education programs prepare students for careers in skilled trades, applied sciences and technology—both for those who wish to work immediately after high school and for those who plan to pursue a two- or four-year postsecondary program. ESSA calls for career and technical education standards to be developed to match the respective state's academic standards. Understanding the varied trajectories of students, Title IV funding of ESSA can now be used specifically for CTE instruction and workforce development training.

THE UNION ROLE: “GROW YOUR OWN” PROGRAMS

In 2014, the AFT passed a resolution, “Promoting Teacher and PSRP Diversity in Early Childhood Education through Higher Education,” affirming its commitment to ensuring that the diversity of the educator workforce keeps pace with the changing demographics and needs of students.¹⁰ Today, AFT locals are answering the call and addressing the need for more teachers of color in a variety of ways. One successful model: “Grow your own” teacher preparation programs, which aim to recruit, mentor, support and retain minority educators.

The Pittsburgh Federation of Teachers has a long-standing commitment to diversifying the teaching workforce. The union’s efforts began nearly 30 years ago to attract and prepare young men and women for careers in education. Hannah McCarthy, who teaches at Pittsburgh Brashear High School and is a member of the PFT executive council, leads the teaching magnet program in the Pittsburgh Public Schools. High school students in the program take courses that prepare them for field experience during their senior year, and many students continue their teacher education through college and return to teach in the Pittsburgh school district.

Brashear Teaching Magnet,
Pittsburgh, PA



In Oklahoma City, AFT Vice President David Gray, who is also president of the Oklahoma City Federation of Classified Employees, is leading the charge. His local has partnered with Langston University to develop a program geared toward paraprofessionals interested in becoming teachers. The program will expand to include the recruitment and mentoring of high school students interested in pursuing teaching as a profession.

In New Mexico, Kathy Chavez, president of the Albuquerque Educational Assistants Association and vice president of AFT New Mexico, is spearheading a program on the paraprofessional-to-teacher pipeline. In addition to working with the state to pass legislation that provides state funding to help paraprofessionals who are taking classes to earn teaching credentials, she crafted contract language to ensure paraprofessionals continue receiving their salary during their full-time practicum.

The United Federation of Teachers' Success Via Apprenticeship program is a career and technical education teacher training program that has increased educator diversity in New York City schools. For the last 30 years, the UFT has worked with the New York City Department of Education and the City University of New York to prepare graduates of CTE high schools to become CTE teachers. This model can be duplicated across the nation to meet the needs of any hard-to-staff subject area, specialty area or school.¹¹

RESOURCES

AFT locals, in concert with school and community partners, can help grow the next generation of fired-up, skilled-up teachers. For example, through "teacher academy" programs such as the EdRising Academy, high school students can take courses to gain hands-on teaching experience while cultivating the skills they need to be durable, high-impact change agents. Students and their mentors can join the free Educators Rising Network to access resources that power up their journeys to great teaching; premium EdRising Academy subscriptions also are available at www.educatorsrising.org.

To support members who teach diverse student populations, the AFT has developed the following professional development tools and resources:

Meeting the Challenge:

Recruiting and Retaining Teachers in Hard-to-Staff Schools

www.aft.org/sites/default/files/hardtostaff_2007.pdf

Becoming a Teacher

www.aft.org/sites/default/files/becomingateacher0916.pdf

Moving Beyond Compliance: Lessons Learned from Teacher Development and Evaluation

www.aft.org/sites/default/files/movingbeyondcompliance.pdf

Raising the Bar

www.aft.org/sites/default/files/news/raisingthebar2013.pdf

**Promoting Racial and Ethnic Diversity in the Faculty:
What Higher Education Unions Can Do**

www.aft.org/sites/default/files/facultydiversity0310.pdf

Also, the AFT partners with other organizations that are working on improving teacher diversity. For example, the Hispanic Heritage Foundation provides mentors for students and recognizes a teacher of the year at its annual conference; the National Indian Education Association works to recruit and retain American Indian, Alaska Native and Native Hawaiian educators; and the National Alliance of Black School Educators has a mentoring program for African-American youth who plan to attend college and earn a degree in education.

For more information on teacher diversity, see:

**The State of Teacher Diversity in American Education,
a report by the Albert Shanker Institute**

www.shankerinstitute.org/resource/teacherdiversity

AFT-sponsored panel discussion on teacher diversity

www.aft.org/node/11037

Hispanic Heritage Foundation

www.hispanicheritage.org

National Indian Education Association

www.niea.org

National Alliance of Black School Educators

www.nabse.org

If you are interested in creating or expanding a “grow your own” program, please contact **Dyan Smiley**, in the AFT’s educational issues department, at dsmiley@aft.org.



END NOTES

- ¹ Albert Shanker Institute, *The State of Teacher Diversity in American Education* (2015).
- ² LeIb Sutchter, Linda Darling-Hammond and Desiree Carver-Thomas, *A Coming Crisis in Teaching? Teacher Supply, Demand, and Shortages in the U.S.* (Learning Policy Institute, 2015).
- ³ National Center for Education Statistics, *Digest of Education Statistics, "Percentage of Teachers by Race/Ethnicity, 2011-2012"* (2013).
- ⁴ National Center for Education Statistics, *The Condition of Education 2016* (2016).
- ⁵ National Center for Education Statistics, *Digest of Education Statistics, "Public Elementary and Secondary Enrollment, Student Race/Ethnicity, Schools, School Size and Pupil/Teacher Ratios, by Type of Locale: 2008-09 and 2009-10"* (2011).
- ⁶ LeIb Sutchter, Linda Darling-Hammond and Desiree Carver-Thomas, *A Coming Crisis in Teaching? Teacher Supply, Demand, and Shortages in the U. S.* (Learning Policy Institute, 2015).
- ⁷ National Center for Education Statistics, "Number and Percentage Distribution of Teachers in Public and Private Elementary and Secondary Schools, by Selected Teacher Characteristics: Selected Years, 1987-88 through 2011-12" and "Enrollment and Percentage Distribution of Enrollment in Public Elementary and Secondary Schools, by Race/Ethnicity and Region: Selected Years, Fall 1995 through Fall 2023," *Digest of Education Statistics* (2013).
- ⁸ Farah Z. Ahmad and Ulrich Boser, *America's Leaky Pipeline for Teachers of Color: Getting More Teachers of Color into the Classroom* (Center for American Progress, 2014).
- ⁹ Glenda L. Partee, *Retaining Teachers of Color in Our Public Schools: A Critical Need for Action* (Center for American Progress, 2014).
- ¹⁰ To read the resolution, see www.aft.org/resolution/promoting-teacher-and-psrp-diversity-early-childhood-education-through-higher.
- ¹¹ For more on the Success Via Apprenticeship program, see www.svapprogram.wixsite.com/svapprogram.



A Union of Professionals

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