

# Students Today, Educators Tomorrow

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Improving Educator Diversity in Connecticut



## About the Teacher Policy Team

We are a diverse team of nine teachers who met over the course of six weeks in the spring of 2018 to craft recommendations for how Connecticut and Bridgeport Public Schools can improve teacher diversity, better support students of color, and encourage them to pursue teaching as a career. We surveyed more than 60 E4E-Connecticut member and nonmember teachers and spoke with external stakeholders to gather critical information about current policies and practices. Additionally, we conducted extensive research to inform our recommendations for the district and the state.

**Ryan Brown**, Seventh-Grade Math Teacher,  
Read School

**Katherine Bucheli**, Spanish Teacher,  
Harding High School

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**Dusty Rader**, Former English Teacher,  
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**Dear Connecticut state leaders, fellow teachers, and students,**

Every one of our students enters the classroom with his or her unique family history, culture, and interests. We recognize and honor that these differences are what makes our students individuals — and they are beautiful. As teachers, we strive every day to do our absolute best to provide our students with an education that will prepare them for college and careers, but also one that represents their histories. Ideally, this means they should benefit from an education that reflects and values their identities. Unfortunately, we know that, at times, our schools fail to meet these standards, leaving students of color unable to see themselves reflected in their learning. This must change.

While not all of the members of our team are teachers of color, each of us recognizes the importance of having teachers and school leaders of color. Our home district, Bridgeport Public Schools, is experiencing a serious teacher diversity gap, with only 25 percent of teachers identifying as people of color, while students of color make up 85 percent of the district's student population.<sup>1</sup> Districts across the state are facing similar challenges. Research shows that both students of color and white students benefit from having people of color as strong role models in positions of authority.<sup>2</sup> We want our students to enter a learning environment every day that is inclusive, exposes them to new ideas and cultures, and allows all students to see themselves in their curriculum.

If we want our students of color to see teaching as a viable profession, we must make their educational experience reflective of their histories and identities. And if we want more teachers of color to stay in the profession, we must increase support and create pathways that help recruit and retain them in the classroom. A lack of culturally responsive teaching and the teacher diversity gap are intimately intertwined, and we are committed to advocating for change so that every Connecticut student can receive the quality education he or she deserves.

Our students of color today are the educators of color tomorrow. Now is the time to create strong, navigable pathways for today's students to become the excellent, diverse, and culturally competent educators Connecticut so desperately needs.

Sincerely,

2018 E4E-Connecticut Teacher Policy Team

# The Problem

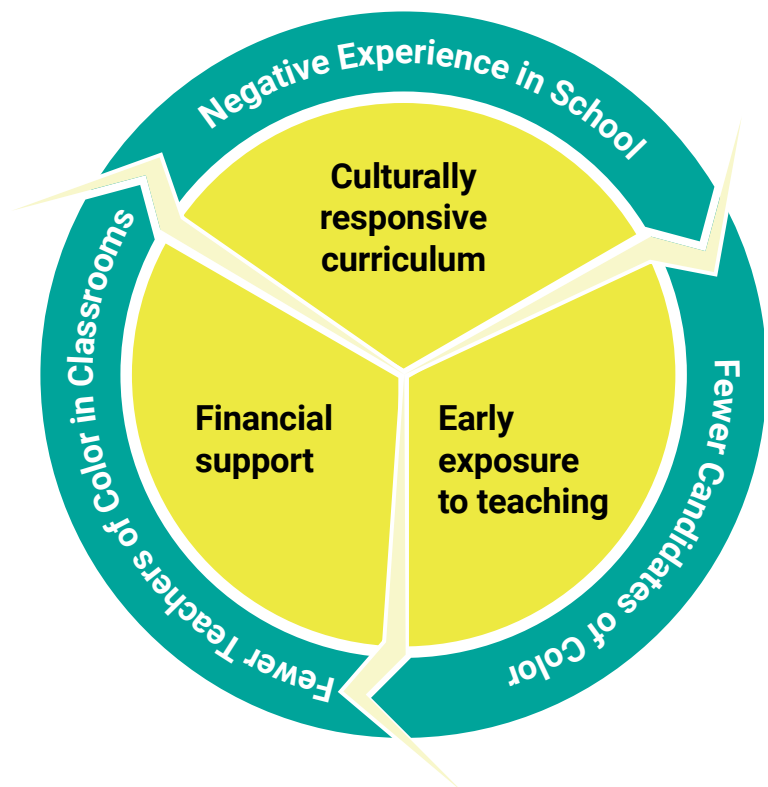
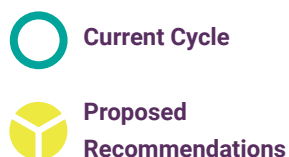
In Connecticut, teachers of color comprise only 8 percent of the educator workforce, while over 40 percent of students today are children of color.<sup>3</sup> Our student population continues to become more diverse, yet our state and school districts struggle to reflect that diversity among teachers. This failure has profound implications for all our students — both students of color and white students. The long-term benefits of being taught by high-quality teachers of color are clear. When students of color are taught by teachers of the same race, they feel more comfortable, show more interest and effort in their schoolwork, and have higher college aspirations.<sup>4</sup> And a recent study showed that white students tend to have more favorable perceptions of their black and Latinx teachers than their white teachers.<sup>5</sup>

Sadly, our students of color are experiencing a vicious cycle — too many in Connecticut classrooms receive an education that fails to expose them to teachers of color who can serve as positive role models. Subsequently, we end up with few students of color who see education as a viable career path and not nearly enough teachers of color recruited to join the next generation of educators.

We can take both immediate and long-term steps to engage today's students of color and set them on the path to become tomorrow's teachers of color. To accomplish this goal, we must immediately ensure that our curriculum and instruction reflect our students' diverse cultural heritages and equip all teachers with competencies in culturally responsive teaching. We must also do more to support and retain the teachers of color already in the profession. Without these actions, we will only perpetuate a cycle whereby our students of color are denied the chance to see their own identities reflected in their learning and in the shared backgrounds of their teachers.

## Breaking the Cycle

Our students of color experience a vicious cycle that keeps many of them from entering the teaching profession. Our recommendations target each phase of the cycle.





# 1. **Ensure culturally relevant standards-based teaching is integrated in curriculum and professional development throughout the district**

Students of color are the majority in K-12 classrooms nationally and now make up 42 percent of the population in Connecticut schools.<sup>6</sup> Despite the growing numbers, our schools are severely lacking multicultural and culturally relevant curriculum. The growing diversity of our student population requires that all educators be equipped with the tools to deliver curriculum and instruction that represents all students.

**In Connecticut, teachers of color comprise only 8 percent of the educator workforce...**



**...while over 40 percent of students in Connecticut are children of color.**



## OUR RECOMMENDATIONS

- Unions, informed by student and teacher feedback, should negotiate for culturally responsive professional development in district contracts.
- Districts should create a position for a culturally responsive pedagogy coach to research quality and multicultural curriculum and to work with and train teachers to implement curriculum throughout the district.
- Districts should form teacher teams focused on implementing culturally relevant teaching. These teams should routinely meet with their colleagues and community members, such as parents and advocates, to gather feedback, suggestions, and concerns through surveys, focus groups, or other means.

## WHAT THIS COULD LOOK LIKE

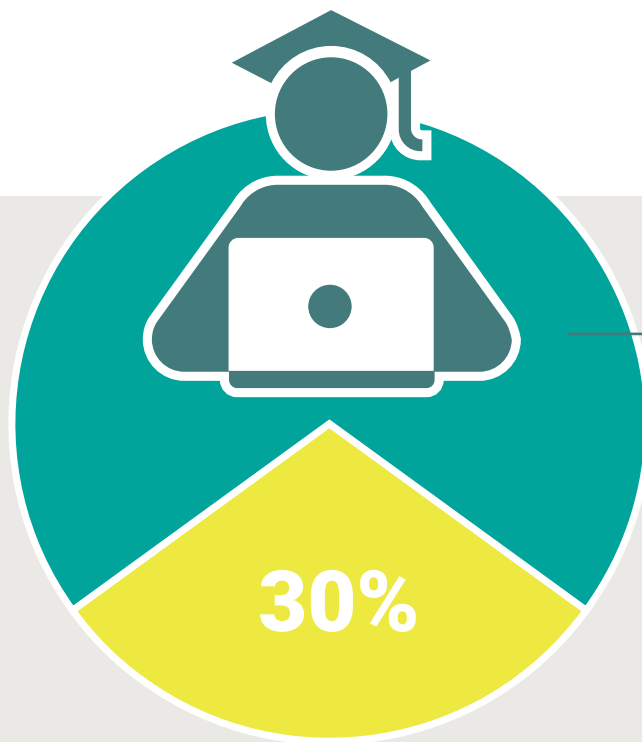
- **Union leadership:** Teachers unions could solicit, collect, and aggregate information about desired professional development on culturally responsive instruction from parents, students, teachers, and community stakeholders via surveys and town-hall meetings. Union leadership could then generate recommendations and contract proposals based on this information. Union leadership could also strengthen their negotiating position for these recommendations and proposals with a public relations campaign and member mobilization. For example, in 2014, the St. Paul Federation of Teachers successfully negotiated a review of student assessments for their cultural relevance in its contract with the district.<sup>7</sup>
- **Centralized curriculum:** Districts could appoint one or more staff to oversee the curriculum in order to provide consistency, quality control, and accountability through teacher feedback and site meetings with instructional teams. Many districts across the country have offices of black or Latinx student achievement that, among other priorities, work to improve culturally responsive pedagogy across the district.
- **Instructional teams:** Districts could create instructional teams at each school site tasked with implementing culturally responsive pedagogy tailored to their specific school site's needs. School-based teams would provide a space for a collaborative model for teachers, open discussions, and provide insight that is closer to the classroom. Teacher leaders could develop a student-focused plan to submit to the district central office for approval and be regularly observed by a culturally responsive coach. For example, in 2012, Pittsburgh Public Schools committed to improving student achievement by implementing the Collaborative Action Research for Equity Team (CARE). The team consisted of four to six teacher leaders who participated in collaborative research to develop and distribute culturally relevant learning and teaching practices.<sup>8</sup>

## What is culturally responsive pedagogy?

A student-centered approach to teaching in which students' unique cultural strengths are identified and nurtured to promote student achievement and a sense of well-being about the student's cultural place in the world.<sup>11</sup>

## 2. Pilot teaching assistant programs for high school students of color to broaden the base of teacher of color candidates

According to a 2015 ACT survey of high school graduates, only 4 percent of students said they planned to become teachers, counselors, or administrators.<sup>9</sup> Mikkaka Overstreet, a professor in the College of Education and Human Development at the University of Louisville, noted that teaching is not typically presented as a career path to students of color, and until a teacher of color opens the door, the idea is not considered.<sup>10</sup>



More than 70 percent of teachers surveyed by E4E-Connecticut said that they support providing opportunities for high school students to intern in classrooms, introducing them to teaching before college.



## OUR RECOMMENDATION

The state of Connecticut should create programs that provide students of color an opportunity to work directly with teachers whom they respect and can learn from as mentors.

## WHAT THIS COULD LOOK LIKE

Schools can begin to identify and recruit promising high school students based on criteria that screen for skills such as tutoring, leadership, and collaboration. Similarly, mentor teachers should be identified based on effectiveness and be provided with a stipend for the additional responsibility. Participating students should be tracked longitudinally to understand how many students pursue education professionally.

For example, Boston Public Schools (BPS) is one of the most racially diverse school systems in the nation — 87 percent of BPS students are students of color, but only 38 percent of teachers are people of color.<sup>12</sup> With the belief that the next generation of teachers are in our classrooms right now, BPS created the High School to Teacher Program, which identifies and supports a cohort of diverse high school students (participants reflect the cultural, racial, and linguistic diversity of BPS) who are committed to return to BPS as teachers once their education is complete. Identified by school leaders, participants receive support and development beginning in the 11th grade, continuing through college graduation and once they return to teach at BPS.<sup>13</sup>

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“There is a widening gap between our state’s increasingly diverse student population and our teacher workforce. We must prioritize bringing more students of color into the teaching profession.”

— Dusty Rader, Former English Teacher at Canton High School



### 3. Create incentives and supports to retain teachers of color in schools and the community

Not only are there too few teachers of color in the classroom, but they also leave the workforce at a higher rate than their white peers.<sup>14</sup> Teachers who work in high-need schools with more challenging work environments experience higher rates of turnover and an early exit from the classroom.<sup>15</sup>

There are several strategies and supports that, if implemented, will help keep strong educators in our Connecticut schools. Such supports include high-quality onboarding, relevant professional development, and mentor/mentee opportunities. These supports, paired with higher salaries and opportunities for growth, could go a long way toward recruiting and retaining teachers of color.



## OUR RECOMMENDATION

The state of Connecticut should offer financial support to programs that demonstrate success in recruiting educators of color to teach in high-need schools or in shortage areas that occur when there are not enough teachers to teach a given subject.

## WHAT THIS COULD LOOK LIKE

- **Alleviating financial barriers:** The district could implement “grow your own” or teaching residency programs. These university-based preparation programs focus on recruiting candidates from nontraditional pathways, such as paraprofessionals. Such state-funded initiatives could reduce the financial burden on diverse teacher candidates by subsidizing tuition for preparation programs.

For example, when faced with a teacher shortage, the Colorado State Department of Education developed a plan to recruit and retain quality teachers of color by focusing on alleviating financial barriers. Colorado provided compensation to teachers working in hard-to-staff schools (schools that have consistent vacant teaching positions); provided scholarships for teachers who planned to teach in shortage areas that occur when there are not enough teachers in key subjects, such as math and science; and waived licensure exam fees for prospective educator preparation programs.

- **Housing subsidies:** Research shows rising rent and housing costs have made teaching jobs in pricey urban districts increasingly difficult for schools to fill.<sup>16</sup> In Connecticut, housing costs are well over the national average. In the Bridgeport-Stamford-Norwalk-metro area, a one-bedroom apartment costs 1.5 times the national average. However, the average teacher salary for a Bridgeport Public Schools teacher is only 1.03 times more than the national teacher average.<sup>17</sup> The state could provide incentives, such as paid housing for educators in schools with the highest populations of our most vulnerable students.

For example, recognizing that educators across the city are faced with rising rent and housing costs, last year the mayor of San Francisco proposed turning unused housing into affordable housing for the city’s educators.<sup>18</sup> The city moved forward with construction this spring.

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“Providing financial aid to students of color pursuing higher education is critical in order to make sure our future classrooms reflect our students.”

— Ryan Brown, Seventh-Grade Math Teacher, Read School

# Conclusion

With an ever-widening diversity gap between Connecticut's student population and its teacher workforce, we must take intentional steps to realize our vision of educating students while valuing their cultural backgrounds. A critical first step is bringing more teachers of color into the classroom. We must work urgently to build an inclusive and effective teacher pipeline for students of color. We believe this can be accomplished by implementing culturally responsive pedagogy, recruiting and retaining teachers of color, and creating early opportunities to encourage students of color to pursue education as a career — breaking the cycle that has kept too many people of color from entering the profession.

We see our students of color today and envision them as our teachers of color tomorrow. We require the combined efforts of our district and state leaders, union and school leaders, teachers, and families to achieve our vision. Will you join us?



# Endnotes

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## Endnotes

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While research shows that classroom teachers are the single most important in-school factor in improving student achievement, their diverse voices are consistently left out of education policy decisions. For far too long, teachers have been treated as subjects of change rather than as agents of change.

Founded by public school teachers, Educators for Excellence is a growing movement of more than 30,000 educators, united around a common set of values and principles for improving student learning and elevating the teaching profession. We work together to identify issues that impact our schools, create solutions to these challenges, and advocate for policies and programs that give all students access to a quality education.

Learn more at [e4e.org](http://e4e.org).



