

Celebrating Progress on Educator Diversity in New York

Educator diversity is an essential driver of improved academic outcomes, social-emotional well-being, and cultural consciousness for students of all racial and ethnic backgrounds. The educator workforce in New York public schools does not come close to representing the racial and ethnic diversity of students in the state. Recent data analysis by The Education Trust—New York on [teacher diversity](#), [teacher retention](#), and [school leader diversity](#) shows that this issue has persisted for years and there is still more work to do to improve educator diversity.

Most encouraging, however, is that greater educator diversity in schools across the state is a focus for the New York State Education Department (NYSED), local school districts, institutions of higher education, schools, and advocates. [Recently passed state legislation](#) addresses educator diversity through focused policies, programs, and initiatives. Although there remains work to enhance educator diversity in New York, it is crucial to acknowledge and draw lessons from the progress made across the state in offering increased opportunities for teachers and school leaders from diverse backgrounds.

Promising Practices

In New York, educator diversity does not represent the racial and ethnic diversity of the student population in public schools, and far too many students are left without access to any educators of color. Yet there are examples of innovative strategies and promising practices in how educators of color are recruited and retained emerging across the state as NYSED, school districts, and school leaders are working to improve educator diversity.



Recruitment

Improving educator diversity starts with better recruitment of educators of color. Legislative wins, state programs, and school district initiatives aim to improve recruitment using “Grow Your Own” programs, higher education grants, and community collaboration to find and support qualified candidates of color.

LEGISLATIVE WIN — GROW YOUR OWN

In September 2023, Governor Kathy Hochul signed the [Teachers and Educators Aiding the Communities they call Home\) Act \(TEACH\)](#) into law. The legislation instructs the commissioner of education, in collaboration with higher education institutions, to provide guidance to school districts for the creation of “Grow Your Own” initiatives. “Grow Your Own” programs can be designed to encourage high school students to pursue careers in education, or to support paraprofessionals and those in other roles in schools to pivot to teaching. The programs recruit participants from a school’s immediate community, making it far more likely that future teachers who complete the program will better reflect the diversity of students. The additional promise is that school staff, teaching assistants, and paraprofessionals who are interested in teaching are already likely to be invested in the success of a school and its students.

STATE GRANT PROGRAMS

NYSED provides grants to higher education institutions to improve both teacher and school leader diversity. The [Teacher Opportunity Corps \(I & II\)](#) provides funding to higher education programs for students pursuing teaching certification, identified as underrepresented or underserved in the teaching profession. This includes Black/African American students, Latinx students, and American Indian/Alaskan Native students. There are also provisions for prioritizing students from economically disadvantaged backgrounds. Another round of funding has been made available to applicants in 2023, among the 2021-2026 cohort of programs.

COMMUNITY COLLABORATION

Several districts in the state have committed to improving educator diversity, have higher than average four-year retention rates for teachers of color, and have higher shares of teachers of color relative to their student bodies, as highlighted in the New York Equity Coalition’s [Teacher Diversity Tool](#). The Education Trust–New York asked these school districts about their most promising recruitment and retention practices. The districts implement a wide array of strategies to reach candidates of color, rather than relying on a singular point of recruitment.

- The districts lean on recruitment partners from colleges and universities that include HBCUs and CUNY schools, as they have higher shares of students of color enrolled.
- The districts share open teaching positions with local churches and community organizations and encourage teachers to recommend qualified candidates of color.
- The districts partner with local diversity committees and guarantee screening interviews to any qualified candidates brought forth by the committee and local organizations.
- Finally, the districts have started chapters of Today’s Students Tomorrow’s Teachers, a “Grow Your Own” program for high schoolers to promote early interest in teaching careers.

In recruitment, all districts have multi-pronged approaches that lean on community ties to find qualified candidates of color, including parent groups, community-based organizations that support marginalized groups, local colleges and universities, alumni, and teacher recommendations.

Retention

Retaining teachers of color already in the workforce is fundamental to keeping any gains made to improve educator diversity in New York thus far. New state initiatives, as well as innovations by school districts, are targeting retention by providing teachers with opportunities for continued professional development and training for leadership roles.

STATE INITIATIVES

The Diversity Leadership Initiative, announced this year, is a partnership between five downstate universities funded by NYSED to improve school leader diversity in K-12 schools. The initiative will provide funding for current teachers to enroll in a school leadership graduate program at Stonybrook at a reduced cost, town hall meetings with stakeholders to identify challenges in the recruitment and retention of school leaders of color, professional development programs for current and aspiring school leaders, and research to better understand challenges and success strategies in diversifying the pool of school leadership in the state.

SCHOOL DISTRICT PROGRAMS

The school districts that have higher than average four-year retention rates for teachers of color shared the successful strategies they have implemented to retain teachers of color, acknowledging that improving teacher diversity does not stop at the recruitment of qualified candidates of color.

- The districts accept internships for current teachers who are pursuing administrative degrees for school leadership positions and assign those who have administrative certificates to interim positions to provide them with experience.
- Some districts have launched an aspiring leadership series for a cohort of teachers with monthly seminars, coaching, and an action project they presented to program participants.
- Some districts have employment assistance programs, which provide counseling and follow-up services, and note that their utilization is high. Teachers are utilizing the benefits of mental health support available to them at a time when burnout in the field is high.



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- The districts have committed to strengthening their “Grow Your Own” pipeline programs across multiple roles in schools, including teacher to school building leader, and school building leader to school district leader, providing professional development opportunities for teachers seeking leadership roles.

To retain teachers, all the districts provide orientation and mentorship to new teachers, host teacher-leader programs, and promote learning opportunities that can lead to promotion or lateral movement throughout a teacher’s career. All the districts shared their explicit commitment to improving educator diversity in their schools in service of greater educational equity for their students.

Keeping the Momentum

Many stakeholders across the state are working to improve educator diversity within their different capacities. The state education department has been tasked with partnering with institutions of higher education to provide guidance to school districts on how to create their own promising programs to increase educator diversity by drawing on talent from local communities. Districts that have already created “Grow Your Own” programs have been sharing their learnings about the most effective strategies they have implemented with partner organizations. The state education department has also been investing in grant programs aimed at making teacher and school leadership certification more financially viable for candidates from underrepresented groups. School districts have been intentional in their recruitment, hiring, and retention strategies in the hopes of welcoming more educators of color to their schools. Teachers of color have been willing to share their first-hand accounts and their ideas to make sure teaching remains a viable, vibrant, and exciting profession for future generations of teachers. There are a few more opportunities to keep the momentum of all this vital work going:



- **The state can help districts have a clearer picture of who is entering the teacher workforce by creating transparent data systems on current student-teachers in our state’s institutions of higher education seeking certification.** Some districts are partnering with colleges and universities directly to recruit future teachers because there is no repository of demographic data on soon-to-be graduates who will be available for hire. This information should be available publicly so that districts and their partners can craft data-informed recruitment strategies to improve the diversity of their teaching workforce.
- **As the state and higher education institutions begin to draft guidance for districts to create their own “Grow Your Own” programs, they can ensure the guidance comes from evidence-based research by working with organizations that have already implemented programs in New York.** [Take a Look at Teaching](#) has worked with over 40 New York teacher associations to create “Grow Your Own” projects in partnership with local colleges, SUNY schools, and high schools. The [Kennedy Children’s Center](#), part of the [Grow Your Own Educators National Network](#), provides training and support for community members interested in teaching assistant certification, and college

support for aspiring teachers who are already certified teaching assistants. Many districts in the state have also implemented their own versions of “Grow Your Own” programs. These organizations have been capturing data, and testing strategies, and are already operating within the local context and can share promising practices that may be scalable in other communities.

- Districts with disproportionately low shares of teachers of color can support recruitment and hiring by adopting multi-pronged approaches to cast wider nets for qualified potential teachers of color.** Districts are finding success by joining forces with the local community to find candidates, committing to equitable practices in hiring, and providing opportunities to their current staff in roles outside the classroom.
- Schools can do their part to retain teachers of color by listening to their recommendations about improving the school environment, without prejudice.** Teachers are dedicated to making their schools engaging and welcoming for students, not only for the academic benefits but also as members of a school community and employees in a place of work. Teachers have shared how vital the school environment is to their motivation to remain in the profession, that they want to be part of functional and supportive teams, and that they want opportunities to continue to learn and grow.
- State leaders can make teaching in New York more attractive by considering compensation structures for teachers that include cost savings in child care, tax deductions, more robust and accessible student loan forgiveness, and housing programs, among other policies that could elevate public education as an attractive field for current and future educators.** Teachers have strong skillsets and qualifications that make them prime candidates for higher-paying careers in the private sector, and they are in high demand in education-adjacent roles, like in education technology, that would take them out of the classroom. To retain high-quality teachers and attract public service-minded students into the classroom, there are cost-saving and wealth-building opportunities to help maintain teaching’s status as a stable, solid, and secure career choice. Teaching is rewarding but needs to keep pace as a profession that can provide financially stable futures in uncertain economies so that teachers can remain in the classroom long-term.



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