

Exploring Barriers in Recruitment & Retention Practices of Educators of Color



A YAASPA AURORA YOUTH COUNCIL WHITE PAPER

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Abstract

This white paper explores the systemic barriers that educators of color face within academic institutions. As students of color with firsthand experience, we recognize the profound impact these educators have in our educational journeys. Educators of color are more than just teachers—they are allies who provide crucial support and solidarity, drawing from shared lived experiences. But this support is often not given back to them within the school system itself. Issues with representation, recruitment, resources and marginalization¹ can push educators of color out of the school system.

The purpose of this project is to understand why there is an absence of teachers of color, in what ways they lack support in their positions, and more generally, the impact they have on student bodies. Through this project, we have found that students and educators of color alike undergo discouraging, racialized experiences that are only exacerbated by an evident lack of resources. These experiences contribute to the low retention rates that are observed across educators of color. While this research has highlighted the rather alarming aspects in education, it also shines a light on the impact that educators of color have on minoritized students.

With this research we aimed to shed light on the impact that the lack of educators of color has on all students, staff, and administrators in and out of academic settings. Our literature review process consisted of coding multiple scholastic articles revolving around racial injustice and inequity in hiring and maintaining an environment where educators of color can thrive the same as their white colleagues. Interviews with students and teachers of color were then conducted, transcribed, and coded using themes found throughout our literature reviews. The entirety of our research led us to the conclusion that white students and staff dehumanize the experiences and cultures of POC while continuing to set up barriers that prevent educators of color from entering academic spaces.

¹ Our working definition of “marginalization” is: a social process by which individuals or groups are (intentionally or unintentionally) distanced from access to power and resources and constructed as insignificant, peripheral, or less valuable/privileged to a community or “mainstream” society (Racial Equity Tools Glossary, 2024).

Background

YAASPA AYC INVOLVEMENT

The Aurora Youth Coalition (AYC) is a youth space within Young Aspiring Americans for Social and Political Activism (YAASPA) with a focus on community engagement and development of education equity research in Aurora School Districts. AYC has researched the impact educators of color have on students' educational/ academic careers, as well as the consequences of the lack of educators of color on student experiences.

The research was conducted to allow individuals to voice experiences sanctioned around the lack of representation in the education system via open ended questions for interpretations and tailored questions different to understand students, teachers and administrators.

MOTIVATING STATISTICS

It is well known that our country's teachers do not reflect our diverse student population. In 2021, of all teachers within the nation, only 19.0% of them were of color, yet 54.7% of students were of color (Gumber and Bekhusen 2022).

This project was motivated by several key statistics about the presence of teachers of color which reinforce and exacerbate these national trends in two local school districts in Aurora - the Cherry Creek School District (CCSD) and Aurora Public Schools (APS).

Figure 1: Nat'l Educator Demographics

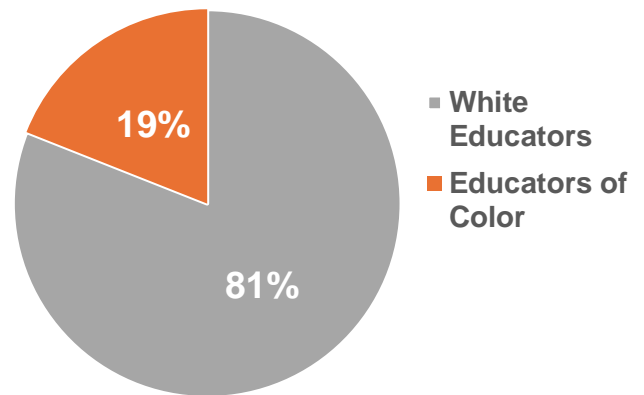
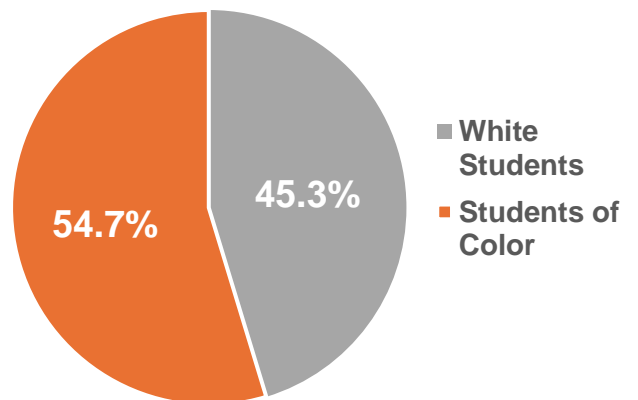


Figure 2: Nat'l Student Demographics



In CCSD in 2023, 85.0% of educators are white while the remaining 15.0% are of color (Cherry Creek School District 2023). This discrepancy does not correlate with the demographics of students, as 51.8% percent of students are of color. For a student body that is predominantly Black and Indigenous people of Color (BIPOC), there are simply not enough educators of color to support the diverse needs of their students.

In APS, however, this discrepancy is even more apparent.

Figure 3: CCSD Educator Demographics

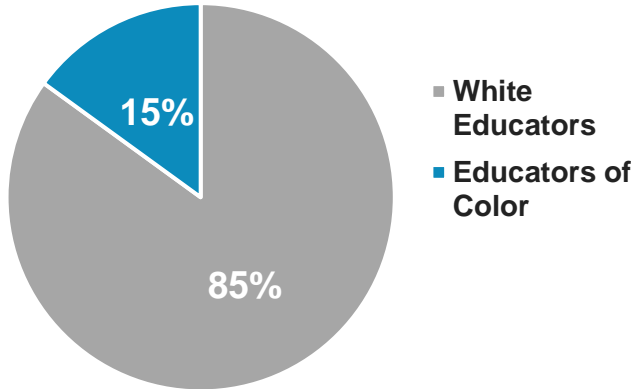


Figure 5: APS Educator Demographics

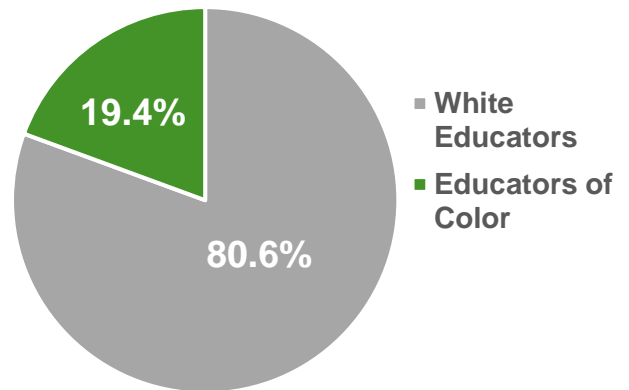


Figure 4: CCSD Student Demographics

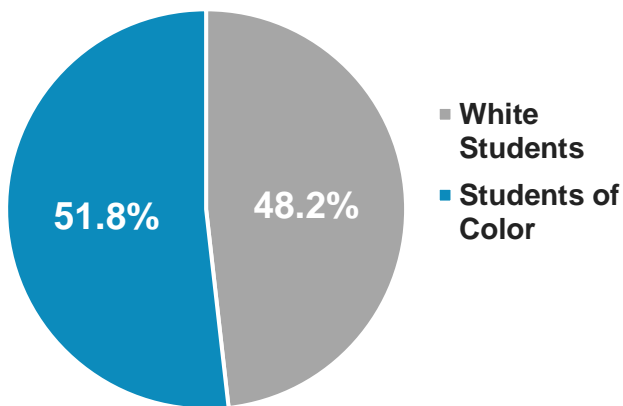
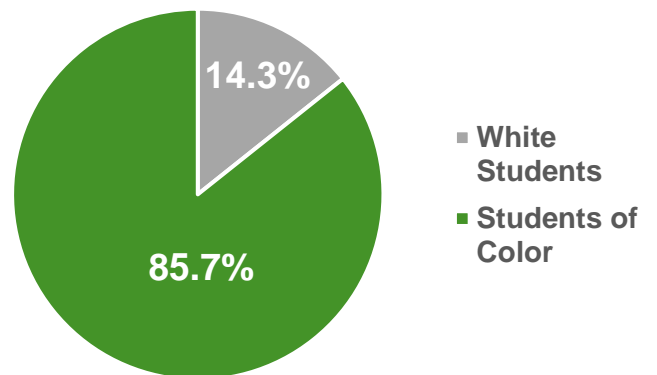


Figure 6: APS Student Demographics



As of 2023, 19.4% of educators are of color, yet 85.7% of the students are also of color (Aurora Public Schools 2023). Although the percentage of educators of color is slightly higher than that of CCSD, this discrepancy is nonetheless extremely polarized and necessitates a critical evaluation.

These statistics show the inconsistencies between educators and students of color. Diversity among educators of color should reflect the diversity of the youth they serve, but both locally in the two Aurora districts, as well as nationally, this lack of diversity is evident.

BIPOC students have better educational outcomes when taught and supported by educators that look like them. Sharing identities with a teacher allows students to be more comfortable in schools where most students and teachers may be white. Teachers are often role models for students, so having a trusted adult that BIPOC students can look up towards is extremely important in nurturing the education of these students. The current statistics in the United States do not encourage educators of color to be a part of academic settings and result in most youth of color not being able to connect as closely to their white teachers.

Literature Review

A comprehensive review of a variety of scholarly articles served to facilitate deductive coding and understand the established theoretical frameworks surrounding the research question. We sought various academic journals highlighting the lived experiences of individuals who have been impacted by the lack of educators of color. The literature review informed the coding of the participant testimonies, allowing researchers to thoroughly conduct data analysis and to identify any similarities across the literature reviewed. The following section describes each of these codes in detail.

REPRESENTATION

The literature review highlighted five categories of themes to be utilized as deductive codes. Representation, or perhaps the lack thereof, was a prominent theme throughout the literature as the minoritized participants felt as though their curriculum did not adequately reflect, and therefore represent, their identities. A curriculum fundamentally built by and for white people can never confer true representation for people of color (Pizarro and Kohli 2018, 11). Educators of color can play a crucial role in diversifying the curriculum by restructuring lessons to be more culturally inclusive, thereby allowing students to more closely engage with their identities, legacies, and communities while adhering to the standards of the curriculum.



Figure 7: Participant Testimony Word Cloud and Codes

Beyond the curriculum, educators of color are also important for representation as they bring their unique identities into their classrooms. These educators may represent similar identities, thus similar social experiences, to their students, making them well suited to teach these students, as they can offer personal insight to enrich their educational experience (Villegas and Davis 2007, 141). A Black educator, for example, can best resonate with the lived experience of Black students, which are often shaped by racial identity.

Because Black educators can utilize their experiences to construct culturally inclusive and race-conscious lessons, they can also facilitate positive racial identity development, helping Black students better understand and embrace their Blackness as they navigate academia.

This dynamic allows for educators of color to become role models for students of color within their community, which emphasizes the importance of representation in the classroom. This race-conscious approach in hiring educators of color has proved successful throughout its implementation; racially diverse teacher workforces correlate with improved academic performance, enriched cultural awareness, and reduced tendencies to hold implicit racial biases (Carver-Thomas 2018, 6). For Black male students specifically, having a teacher of the same race markedly reduces instances of exclusionary discipline (Lindsay and Hart 2017, 77).

RECRUITMENT

Ensuring the teacher workforce reflects the representation of minoritized bodies requires that the recruitment of educators of color become a priority. However, recruitment is merely a step towards ensuring that educators of color can enter spaces; educators must also be retained. Efforts to recruit educators of color must therefore encompass a strategic, actionable plan that outlines ways in which these very educators feel willing to remain in the workforce. In other words, recruitment should not be a mere effort towards diversifying the numbers; recruitment should be an intentional approach that invests in long-term outcomes for educators to be retained.

A vast body of literature emphasizes the importance of both recruitment and retention to ensure that they remain vital to a student's

education. When one of the two aspects are lacking, the entire stride towards diversifying the educational workforce consequently becomes futile (Griffin and Tackie 2017). Recruiting educators of color is only effective if they are retained; by the same token, retaining educators of color is only effective if enough educators are recruited. Thus, both recruitment and retention are complementary efforts needed for educators of color.

RESOURCES

The literature also discussed a lack of resources. While a school may focus on recruiting educators of color, their efforts would nonetheless fall short if educators are not provided with the resources to operate comfortably in educational spaces. These resources encompass diversity, equity and inclusion (DEI) training and support infrastructures. For example, a significant driving factor—albeit not the only factor—that pushes BIPoC educators out of schools are racialized school climates (Grooms, Mahatmya, and Johnson 2021). With this context, DEI training can prevent the racialization of educators of color while establishing support infrastructures to assist educators of color who have undergone these negative experiences. Without these resources, representation ultimately becomes empty tokenization (Villegas and Davis 2007, 143) whereby educators of color become mere statistics for diversity rather than adequately supported individuals.

MARGINALIZATION

Educators of color often face experiences related to the marginalization of their identity. This marginalization manifests in many different forms, ranging from micro- to macro- contexts. Microaggressions, for example, are the epitome of marginalization in the micro-context. Educators of color may be patronized—and effectively othered—from their departments simply for fostering enriched, culturally connected relationships with students who share similar identities (Pizarro and Kohli 2018). Educators of color are also overlooked for their abilities compared to their white counterparts.

These microaggressions, which transform noteworthy qualities to otherwise inappropriate stereotypes, foster negative environments that are detrimental to educators of color. However, microaggressions are not the only form of marginalization that BIPOC educators face. Marginalization may also exist within the macro-level as institutional racism that permeates the policies, functions, and systems of schools. Educators who undergo the marginalization of identity are consequently taxed physically, mentally, and emotionally, which impacts their professional lives (Pizzaro and Kohli 2018).

This literature review ultimately provides a nuanced understanding of the experiences of educators of color. The present research utilizes these themes to analyze the participant testimonies in a rich, methodical manner.

Description of Study

Our research investigates the systemic barriers that educators of color face in both entering and thriving within academic spaces. We deeply consider the dynamics of power within educational settings, examining how race and structures of oppression manifest and impact teacher retention, especially for educators of color. Our approach is grounded in culturally relevant pedagogy, which focuses on teaching through a critical reflection of how racial and cultural identities coalesce and coexist (Howard 2003, 196). This pedagogy values the cultural backgrounds of students and educators, integrates these perspectives into the learning process, and rejects a deficit mindset, thus making education more meaningful and accessible (Howard 2003, 197).

To conduct our youth participatory action research, we used various teaching and learning approaches that promote critical thinking, collaboration, and flexibility. We used inquiry-based learning to explore topics of interest and foster a deeper understanding and ownership of our research (Duffy and Raymer 2010). Peer review and peer teaching allowed us to effectively share knowledge and provide constructive feedback, ensuring all research was collaborative. Reflection and discussion-based teaching assisted in critical thinking and effective communication.

Flexible timelines accommodated our diverse needs and schedules, while engaging in complex thinking challenged us to effectively analyze and solve problems. Social constructivism underscored the importance of our interactions and collective construction of knowledge (Duffy and Raymer 2010). By integrating these approaches, we were able to create a supportive and dynamic research environment that embodied the principles of culturally relevant pedagogy.

Methodology

The methodology we utilized included:

- Interviews conducted with students and educators of color - which examined how the relationships between teachers and students varied based on their identities.
- Generating specific codes and transcripts based on data from the literature review
- Cultural Pedagogy which embraced teaching through a lens of cultural competence

We focused on students, teachers, and administrators who identified as people of color and experienced the effects of schools not prioritizing the retention and recruitment processes of teachers of color. When institutions prioritize the retention of educators of color, they foster a sense of belonging and preserve the knowledge and skills of educators of color, which will further benefit students.

While we do not deny the valuable insight that white students may have about the importance of teachers of color and the challenges they face, we must acknowledge how systemic barriers substantially affect students and educators of color.

Furthermore, each participant was compensated for their time and labor to participate in the research process. Our research aims to uplift the voices of individuals who experience a lack of representation in educational spaces. When conducting our interviews, we focused on asking open-ended questions tailored according to who we were interviewing. Tailoring each question according to our interviewees allows for a deeper understanding of individual experiences based on their positions within academic institutions. An example of the questions asked included:

- Student: How has the diversity—or perhaps the lack thereof—of teachers affected your academic success as a student?
- Teacher: Do you feel like you have extra responsibilities as a teacher of color for students of color?
- Administrators: What practices are you undertaking to ensure retention of teachers of color? For instance, how do you build a safe space for teachers of color?



Key Data and Findings

Through our data analysis, we identified four key takeaways:

1. Students and educators of color often feel like white students, educators and administrators marginalize their experiences, cultures, identities, and struggles;
2. Educators of color often leverage their shared cultural backgrounds or lived experiences to inspire and motivate students of color;
3. Educators of color experience being misunderstood, under-resourced, under-trusted and underrepresented in school systems, contributing to lower retention rates; and,
4. Inequalities and ignorance within the hiring and recruitment processes create barriers for educators of color to enter the workforce.

KEY TAKEAWAY 1: STUDENTS AND EDUCATORS OF COLOR OFTEN FEEL LIKE WHITE STUDENTS, EDUCATORS AND ADMINISTRATORS MARGINALIZE THEIR EXPERIENCES, CULTURES, IDENTITIES, AND STRUGGLES.

Our first takeaway is that students and educators of color often feel like white students, educators, and administrators marginalize and minoritize their experiences, cultures, identities, and struggles. Students and educators of color have shared testimonies that highlight the pervasive challenges and systemic issues they encounter within the educational system. These personal accounts shed light on the pressures, misunderstandings, and marginalization they experience, which deeply affect their academic and professional journeys:

“Definitely. I definitely felt like I put a lot of pressure to not be like other Black kids. That stereotype that's created about like Black kids are so rambunctious and they're so crazy and I definitely took it upon myself to be like, I'm gonna be smart and I'm not gonna be disruptive in class because I don't wanna be associated with those kids even though they are me.” - BIRACIAL STUDENT ALUMNI, CCSD

This quote highlights the internal pressure many students experience as a result of negative stereotypes. Societal stereotypes can impact behavior and manifest into internalized racism, particularly in educational settings.

“I think there's more of an understanding between teachers of color and how I am and how culturally I act. There's some tension with most white teachers that I do have because sometimes they say things that can be a little insensitive.” - BLACK STUDENT, APS

This quote highlights the challenges students of color face when interacting with white educators as they can tend to not be as understanding as BIPOC teachers. It underscores the importance of cultural competence and sensitivity in educators to create an inclusive learning environment.

“What comes first, the chicken or the egg? Because most, educators of color come from systems that have silenced them as students. So I'm not sure what comes first. I mean, you have to start somewhere, but when students don't feel like they have a voice, don't feel like they're seen, know that they're not heard, it's really hard for them to go into a college setting or graduate program when they're going to face the same thing.” – BLACK RETIRED EDUCATOR, CCSD

This quote amplifies the impact of systemic silencing from the perspective of a Black educator. A lack of support and ability to speak their minds discourages students from attaining post-secondary degrees and other goals. Ensuring that a student's voice is heard not only supports them in the moment but also in the future.

KEY TAKEAWAY 2: EDUCATORS OF COLOR OFTEN LEVERAGE THEIR SHARED CULTURAL BACKGROUNDS OR LIVED EXPERIENCES TO INSPIRE AND MOTIVATE STUDENTS OF COLOR.

Our second key takeaway is that educators of color and students of color often share similar backgrounds, whether that be through cultural similarities or their lived experiences. Often, educators of color leverage these similarities to inspire and motivate their students of color. By shining light on the similar cultural practices and lived experiences they have with the students, the educators use it to effectively show pathways of success and provide nurturing support to help them grow. This type of shared understanding allows educators to connect with their students of color on a deeper level, fostering an environment where students feel like they are understood and represented in the education system.

“I feel like it's [having educators of color] such an important thing to individual growth, to interact with people from different cultures and have an understanding of different perspectives on life. Especially from an educator, which is someone who we see as an intellectual authority. And you can see how they approach problems from a different way, and they approach developing an understanding of other people informed by your cultural context.” - HISPANIC/WHITE STUDENT ALUMNI, APS

“I feel like there's a lot of bias and just a lot of little problems in the American education system that can be fixed if we have the proper representation of Black people teaching about Black history. Like we can't have white people teaching history that's not theirs. So I feel like if we have more representation, then more stories can be told and more experiences can be shared and Black students and African American students growing up can just feel like they actually have a space in the classroom.” - BLACK COLLEGE STUDENT

The White Hispanic student brings up a crucial point on how educators of color, which students often see as authority figures, can bring different perspectives and cultures into the classroom, which can help students grow and develop as they become more exposed to many different cultural contexts and views.

This Black college student brings up an idea that is not talked about enough: that the education system should prioritize having educators that look like the people in history they teach. In this case specifically, having Black history be taught by Black teachers. Due to the depth and breadth of Black history, having a Black educator will help students feel like they can connect more easily to their heritage and ancestry. This is a shift from the traditional classroom environment, where instead of Black history only being discussed, it is represented with care.

“Some of my old students had come back to visit and were sad that I wasn't there. So she called me on my cell phone. One of my students was so excited to tell me that she was actually in school studying education all because I was her teacher. That was a really cool story of the power of representation that I hold onto when I am in need of energy.” –

*KOREAN-AMERICAN FORMER
EDUCATOR, CCSD*

This former Korean-American, discusses a heartwarming change they were able to make on their students by being a person that students of color could connect with, even inspiring students to pursue a career in education. This exemplifies how educators of color can be a role model and lead to new generations of passionate educators or someone in the education system.

KEY TAKEAWAY 3: EDUCATORS OF COLOR EXPERIENCE BEING MISUNDERSTOOD, UNDER-RESOURCED, UNDER-TRUSTED AND UNDERREPRESENTED IN SCHOOL SYSTEMS, CONTRIBUTING TO LOWER RETENTION RATES.

Our third key takeaway focuses on educators of color and their experiences within the school system. Many express feelings of being misunderstood, under-resourced, under-trusted, and underrepresented. These issues contribute to lower retention rates, ultimately reducing the number of educators of color entering and returning to the education system. Many educators of color claim feeling marginalized and their voices often being silenced or ignored and left in the background by admin and white co-workers. Unlike their white counterparts, who frequently receive more recognition, support, and accommodation, educators of color are left with the burden of fixing the problems they see themselves, with little to no support.

“And there was a perception that we were coddling the Black males because we had a different way to nurture them, to see them for all that they were in their brilliance.” -
BLACK LATINA EDUCATOR, CCSD

This Black Latina educator shines light on some of the microaggressions associated with being a teacher of color, especially when showing extra support to students of color. This extra support stems from the mutual understanding of what being a person of color in the United States means and educators of color having certain resources to help these students in a way white educators might not.

“At [REDACTED] this year, I was one of the first teachers to leave. Then another teacher of color left a couple weeks after me. I have a friend who's leaving this week, she's also a teacher of color. I think what we're seeing is that with the team leads being primarily white, their voices are more lifted and a lot of times, their frustrations are heard more frequently, taken into account more so than just a regular teacher. And so, a lot of the times that burden is placed then on the teacher to pick up the extra work.” - LATINX EDUCATOR, DPS

“I feel like those responsibilities are ones that I put on myself, because that's a big part of why I do the work that I do. So I do feel that it is my duty and responsibility to look out for young students of color.” - BLACK EDUCATOR, DPS

This Latinx educator illuminates why the number of educators of color in the school system is so low. Educators of color often grapple with their voices not being as prioritized as the predominantly white faculty and administration. This feeling of powerlessness brews frustration and burnout on educators of color to pick up the slack on where they should be getting support.

With all that being said, educators of color don't always perceive their work environment the same, such as this Black educator who focuses on why they feel like they are putting in more effort than their white counterparts since they see it as part of what they signed up for, as a educator of color. Since they feel like it is up to them to make the change they want to see and give the support their students of color need. It is important to not categorize all educators of color as a monolith. While this study skews to one perspective, it does not represent every educator of color across the country, or even across CCSD or APS.

KEY TAKEAWAY 4: INEQUALITIES AND IGNORANCE WITHIN THE HIRING AND RECRUITMENT PROCESSES CREATE BARRIERS FOR EDUCATORS OF COLOR TO ENTER THE WORKFORCE. Our fourth key takeaway is that inequities and ignorance within the hiring and recruitment processes, including practices of tokenization, create significant barriers for educators of color to comfortably and confidently enter the workforce. These systemic issues often perpetuate an environment that hinders their professional advancement.

However, improving measures to uphold Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, and Justice (DEIJ) can play a crucial role in mitigating the pervasive effects of white supremacy, ultimately helping to improve retention rates and foster a more inclusive and supportive educational environment. Measures such as cultural competency workshops, targeting needs of diverse staff, intersectionality training, LGBTQIA+ inclusivity training and more help enhance awareness and action towards creating a more inclusive workspace.

“I noticed indirectly that I was always interviewed or pictured as something. Then as I was leaving, there were discussions as to why I was even there. People were surprised that I came in the first place. People were surprised that I stayed as long as I did.” - BLACK PROFESSOR, University of Colorado at Boulder

This quote by a Black professor at the University of Colorado at Boulder highlights a broader issue of underlying biases within institutions that impact how BIPOC educators and students are seen. Reactions both during and beyond the recruitment process suggest expectations of who “belongs” in certain roles or spaces, reflecting issues of racial biases and cultural awareness/acceptance.

“You know, I think there's kind of a classic paper that they talk about the colorblind racism. If you ignore your students of color, if you ignore the color of their skin or their heritage or their origins, you are not racist. “I see everyone the same.” Like that. Like, that's not, that's not the answer. Right?” - ASIAN EDUCATOR, APS

This educator questions the concept of “colorblind racism.” They argue that colorblind approaches to society are not the solution to dismantling racial biases and discrimination, positing that there must be an alternative. By improving DEIJ measures educators can shift away from a colorblind mindset, as disregarding a student’s heritage and race can also erase parts of their identity, experiences, and culture.

“We try to do it every other month where we open space for all of our administrators of color to come together. Number one, just to bring socializing network. But then number two, to identify what they're experiencing in the system, what their needs are, and how we can help get them support so that they can continue to be successful.” - BLACK ADMINISTRATOR, APS

DEI initiatives, such as creating spaces for administrators of color to connect, can foster a sense of community and belonging in the workplace. By identifying needs and challenges, schools can begin to support teachers and staff.



Strategic Recommendations

Our data analysis of the impact of educators of color on students of color point to the important role they play in the classroom. Because educators of color can act as a role model and represent a historically marginalized identity, they can also hold a burden due to a lack of resources, support, or consistent racial/ethnological degradation. To maintain the presence of educators of color as time passes on, it is important to eliminate this burden that educators of color face. If these burdens lessen, more students (of all heritages) will be able to share community and learn from a valued educator of color. Thus, we pose three strategic recommendations to address the barriers that educators of color face and continue the fight for racial equity in academic spaces.

RECOMMENDATION #1: PRIORITIZE STUDENT PARTICIPATION (ESPECIALLY BIPOC STUDENT PARTICIPATION) AND LEADERSHIP ON HIRING COMMITTEES FOR EDUCATORS TO ENSURE THERE ARE VOICES ADVOCATING FOR THE IMPORTANCE OF EDUCATORS OF COLOR.

A key component of our analysis was the importance of the hiring committee and the hiring process. Inequities in the hiring process can have harmful effects on educators of color, even if they are well into their careers. Key finding #4 found that educators of color often feel like they are tokenized and are mistreated. Moreover, the hiring process can often marginalize educators of color more. Many educators of color noticed how their hiring committee emphasized a “colorblind approach,” where they simply ignored the concept of race. The issue with taking a colorblind approach in the classroom is that the real world is not colorblind. Racial dynamics and identity permeate through almost every system and interaction, so choosing to neglect race not only invalidates someone’s identity but does a disservice to students of color as they navigate specific barriers. Often, the only person who can appreciate the beauty of an identity is someone who holds that identity. Key finding #2 described how educators of color often motivate students of color by acting as a role model due to shared experiences.

Students understand that “Black [educators] teaching Black history” allows for more authentic and safe classroom discussions. Students of color often noted how they felt more comfortable to open up to an educator of color about the racism they experienced because they believed an educator of color would be more comforting and understanding. Students of color deserve empathetic, kind teachers to nurture them and prepare them to navigate white supremacy. Therefore, students of color having an active role in the hiring process is extremely beneficial. This role can look like many different things, from sitting in on hiring interviews and offering feedback to reading cover letters before an applicant has been selected for an interview. Beyond having students of color for educators of color seeking employment, students of color in the hiring process can be beneficial to white prospective applicants as well. White teachers, though maybe not sharing the same cultural backgrounds as students of color, still have a responsibility to respect students of color and celebrate their cultures. This will allow students of color to advocate for applicants they believe will maintain safe classroom space that respects their identity.

RECOMMENDATION #2: CLEARLY LAY OUT IN THE HIRING PROCESS A. THE PERCENTAGE OF EDUCATORS IN A GIVEN SCHOOL WHO ARE EDUCATORS OF COLOR AND B. THE SYSTEMS IN PLACE FOR EDUCATORS TO FILE COMPLAINTS AGAINST OTHER EDUCATORS/ADMINISTRATORS.

This recommendation addresses a common theme from key finding #3 which states that educators of color often felt unequipped to succeed in their schools. For example, one educator of color noted that they saw administrators uplifting the voices/opinions of white educators more than the educators of color. This is damaging because it makes educators of color feel less-than and reduces systems of accountability. If educators of color feel like administrators will ignore them regardless of what they say, that makes it harder to speak up. Another example that shows this is how one educator was often told she was “coddling” the Black male students – a demographic historically criminalized in school settings – because she exhibited a different level of care than white educators. Because white staff and administrators perpetuated this stereotype, it makes it harder for educators of color to bond with their students without the fear of being judged. Students of color already battle racialized stereotypes of being less intellectual or more rowdy – the consequences of which commonly involve increased discipline or justice system placement – so stigmatizing educators of color being more caring is detrimental. This recommendation addresses this because it communicates to educators of color what they are getting into before they accept the job.

In an ideal world, educators of color would enter academic spaces without any stereotypes or barriers. However, we do not live in this world. If the recruitment committee makes clear to an educator of color that only 2% of the staff is non-white, that allows educators of color to decide if they are comfortable taking the risk of teaching at that school. Moreover, if an educator of color understands that there is no system to file complaints without being punished, they can decide not to enter a certain school. Complaint systems alone are not enough. For example, educators can look for clauses in their contracts that protect them from administrations retaliating when they do file a grievance. Educators of color should be able to consult Human Resources at any time in a quick, non-judgmental manner. This finding is not to undermine the importance of educators of color, but rather to protect educators of color from emotional stress.

RECOMMENDATION #3: REQUIRE A COMPREHENSIVE, RACE-CONSCIOUS TRAINING FOR ALL EDUCATORS AND AT LEAST ONE RACE-CONSCIOUS LESSON FOR ALL STUDENTS, WITH A PARTICULAR FOCUS ON HOW MICROAGGRESSIONS ARISE IN THE CLASSROOM AND WAYS TO ACKNOWLEDGE AND CORRECT THEM.

A recurring theme across all the interviews was the idea of marginalization. As discussed in key finding #1, students of color lamented how because whiteness was seen as the norm, they “didn’t want to be associated” with certain characteristics. When a student of color is so scared of the threat of a stereotype that they suppress their culture and identity, that is damaging. Likewise, educators of color found themselves in similar positions as they navigated feeling like “[they] didn’t have a voice.” When you fear that your identity carries a negative stereotype before even stepping into the classroom, that hurts your sense of self. How can a student of color fall in love with school when their educators view them as lazy and disobedient? How can an educator of color want to continue teaching if their peers constantly question their place in the classroom and credentials? There are only so many “You are so articulate” backhanded compliments one can take before they decide enough is enough.

Therefore, race-conscious training will allow both educators and students to acknowledge that race and racism affect classrooms. While some people certainly have deep hatred in their hearts, many hold stereotypical beliefs due to generations of that stereotype going unquestioned. In these educational seminar-style trainings, educators and students will confront their assumptions about race and learn ways to nurture a racially inclusive environment. One possibility for these trainings is that they could be led by students. Many schools (such as schools in CCSD) have Students Organized Against Racism (SOAR), which are student-led clubs to ensure racial equity in education. These student groups can lead the trainings for both educators and students and can discuss a range of topics, such as the importance of culturally relevant pedagogy, microaggressions, and how to practice self-care. These trainings won’t solve racism completely, but they will give people the tools to identify and address examples of racism and white supremacy in educational spaces.

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