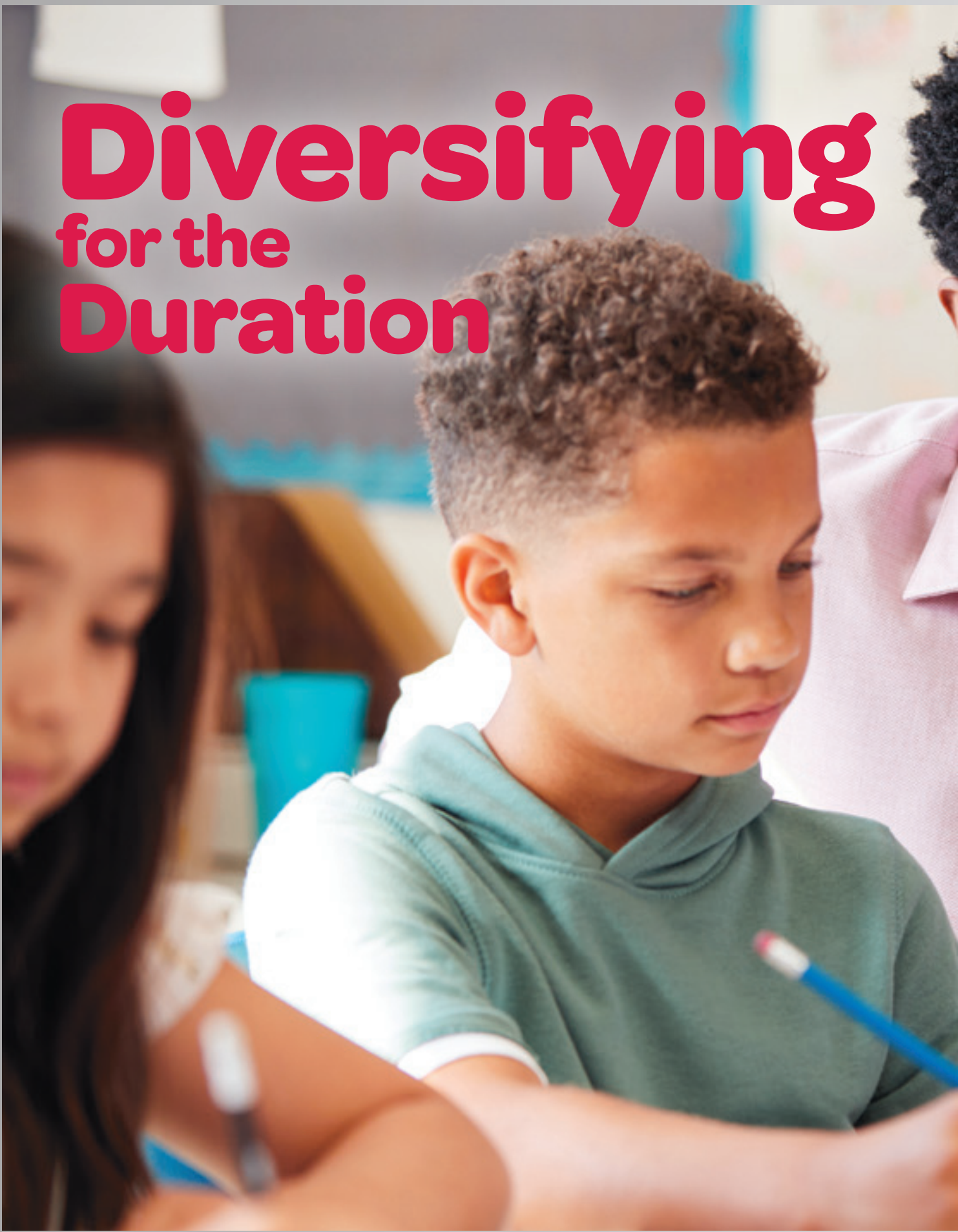


Diversifying for the Duration





Administrators can recruit and support teachers of color to reduce turnover

*By Desirée Carver-Thomas
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Brett McLean, an English teacher with Boston Public Schools, understands firsthand the challenges black male teachers must overcome to stay in the profession. “When I was the only [male teacher of color in my department], it was isolating,” he says.

The first few years of teaching can be difficult for any new teacher, but teachers of color face unique challenges that can lead to especially high turnover rates. At a time when states and districts across the country are increasingly recognizing the value of a diverse teacher workforce for all children—and the need for black male teachers, in particular—high turnover rates undermine recruitment efforts.

Research shows that school administrators play a critical role in helping to retain teachers of color because of their influence in establishing a schoolwide culture for teachers and students, setting priorities for professional development, and guiding hiring decisions. That was true for McLean; over the past few years, his school has hired more male teachers of color. “That has been really supportive,” he says. “We handle things in similar ways, and we talk about relationship-building and share strategies that work for different students.”

Teachers Enter, Teachers Leave

Overall, the number of teachers of color entering classrooms has been on the rise over the past three decades, yet high rates of turnover continue to undermine efforts to increase the overall percentage of teachers of color in the workforce. While people of color make up 40 percent of the overall population and 50 percent of students, only 20 percent of public school teachers are teachers of color. Black male teachers make up just 2 percent of the overall teaching population.

A growing body of research suggests that having teachers of color benefits all students, and especially students of color. Students of color and white students report having positive perceptions of their teachers of color, including feeling cared for and academically challenged. Further, having diverse role models in childhood can prepare students to work and live in a diverse and globalized society.

Several studies show that having teachers of color improves outcomes for students of color, including greater academic achievement and higher graduation rates, increased aspirations to attend college, fewer unexcused absences, and lower likelihoods of chronic absenteeism and suspension. Some research also suggests that teachers of color may experience greater satisfaction in schools with more diverse faculty, and that might encourage them to continue teaching in those schools.



CONSIDER THIS

Principals can play a key role in teacher preparation for candidates of color by:

- Advocating for service scholarships and loan forgiveness programs to offset the costs of preparation programs;
- Creating intentional and supportive learning environments for student teachers of color; and
- Providing leadership opportunities for veteran teachers of color.

Breaking Down the Barriers

Teachers of color can find barriers at all points of the teacher career continuum, however. During the recruitment phase, high teacher preparation costs, unsupportive college environments, and teacher licensure exams that have little relationship to teacher effectiveness can keep prospective teachers of color out of the field.

For beginning and veteran teachers of color, high turnover rates result from inadequate preparation and mentoring, poor teaching conditions, and displacement from high-need schools, where accountability strategies can include reconstituting staff or closing schools rather than investing in improvements.

Below, we address the barriers that school leaders have the greatest ability to influence.

Lack of comprehensive preparation.

Because the high cost of preparation can be especially prohibitive for teaching candidates of color, it might contribute to the large numbers of teachers of color who enter the

classroom through alternative preparation pathways that often lack student teaching and necessary coursework. One in four new teachers of color enter through these pathways—twice the rate of new white teachers. Unfortunately, teachers who enter without comprehensive preparation are about twice as likely to leave teaching as those who are able to enter fully prepared.

Challenging teaching conditions. Even once teachers of color enter the field, poor teaching conditions can push them out. Teachers of color are more likely to teach in schools that contend with accountability pressures and a lack of resources and support.

For teachers of color, turnover is also strongly associated with lack of classroom autonomy and school influence. In addition, several studies show that teachers of color can experience discrimination, such as being viewed as “behavior managers” first and teachers second. Studies show black male educators often report feeling “voiceless” and “incapable of effecting change in their schools,” according to a report in *Education Week*. These issues are common among teachers of color generally, and in schools at every grade level, including elementary, middle, and high schools.

Poor administrative support. Administrative support has one of the greatest impacts on teacher turnover. Teachers who cite a lack of administrative support are more than twice as likely to leave their school or the teaching profession as those who feel strongly that their administrator is supportive. “Administrators have helped support my instruction through keeping the focus on rigor and making sure I am pushing the students to the next level—pushing forward throughout the whole year,” McLean says.

Lending Intentional Support

Increasing the number of teachers of color in the workforce requires intentional preparation and hiring, as well as ongoing support in overcoming the barriers to recruitment and retention. Fortunately, these are key areas where school leaders can play a central role in supporting teachers of color and building a diverse workforce.

School leaders can establish relationships with teacher preparation programs to promote comprehensive preparation and supportive clinical practice opportunities that research says are fundamental to high-quality

teacher preparation. Specifically, administrators can look to build relationships with teacher preparation programs—especially those at minority-serving institutions—that provide ongoing support to graduates in the form of mentorship, tutoring, exam stipends, job placement services, and other supports that ensure the successful completion of preparation programs.

In addition to building relationships with universities, school leaders can help create greater access to quality teacher preparation for candidates of color by advocating for service scholarships and loan forgiveness programs that can help offset the costs of preparation and have been shown to support teacher retention.

School leaders can also create intentional and supportive learning environments for student teachers of color—thus building and connecting with a broader pool of well-prepared teacher candidates of color. To that end, school leaders can develop expert teachers into quality mentors with the skills needed to support new teachers. In doing so, their schools can (1) offer attractive placements for student teachers of color; (2) provide an early opportunity to vet and recruit candidates of color for hire; and (3) provide leadership opportunities for veteran teachers of color.

Proactive Hiring and Induction Strategies

In districts where school leaders can influence hiring timelines, they can work to shift them earlier in the spring with the goal of recruiting in-demand candidates of color, who tend to be available for hire earlier in the year. In addition, administrators can include teachers of color in the hiring process in meaningful and collaborative ways, such as by creating diverse hiring committees in which teachers of color can shape recruitment and hiring strategies. This can ensure greater fairness in the hiring process while also offering teacher leadership opportunities for veteran teachers of color.

Beyond these proactive hiring strategies, school leaders can offer extended mentoring and support for new teachers of color. Comprehensive induction programs have been shown to cut teacher turnover rates in half, according to the *Review of Educational Research*, and tailored supports can be designed to meet the needs of black male educators and teachers of color.


Programs such as Call Me MISTER in South Carolina, the Black Teacher Project

in San Francisco, and Fellowship: Black Male Educators for Social Justice in Philadelphia are examples of the tailored mentoring available to support early career educators of color, and black male educators in particular. In part, these programs provide social-emotional support and an opportunity to reflect on practice in service of student achievement.

Improving Conditions and Professional Development

Learning conditions are teaching conditions, and school leaders can best mitigate the pressures associated with test-based accountability by building school environments that support the factors teachers cite as important to returning to the classroom each year. These factors include working on a team with a shared purpose, feeling supported by administrators, and having input into decisions that affect their work. School leaders are also in a position to ensure that teachers of color—and especially black male educators—have opportunities for teacher leadership, collaboration, and decision-making.

For school leaders seeking to create a schoolwide culture that's supportive of teachers of color, establishing priorities for schoolwide professional development can also help build cultural understanding and bias awareness among all staff. Jefferson County Public Schools in Kentucky, for example, currently operates the Equity and Inclusion Institute, which provides cultural competency training for participating district teachers and staff. Ultimately, it is important for school leaders to build schools that not only have diverse educator workforces but also provide supports to ensure their schools are welcoming and supportive.

Recruiting and retaining black male educators and other teachers of color requires an intentional and sustained approach. By committing to such an approach, school leaders can create learning environments that benefit and support all students. 

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