



Success Indicator CC10: The school leaders actively recruit applicants from diverse cultural backgrounds and ethnicities for positions in the school. (5869)

Overview: Teachers with minority backgrounds provide a variety of benefits for minority students, including increasing their academic achievement and self-esteem (Cole, 1986; Graham, 1987, Villegas & Davis, 2008). Statistics show, however, while almost half of K–12 students identify as non-White, only 17% of teachers are from minority backgrounds (Boser, 2014). This discrepancy may set a troubling example for English Learner (EL) students, many of whom are students of color or members of ethnic minority groups. By taking steps to promote and increase staff diversity, schools can help transform these messages and convey to EL students that they live in a multicultural society where all perspectives are valued, including those of historically marginalized groups (Carnegie Forum, 1986; Mercer & Mercer, 1986).

Questions: Does the cultural and ethnic makeup of my staff reflect the student body? Does it reflect America as a whole? How can my school solicit more diverse applicants? Are there people or organizations we can reach out to? Do EL students have role models on staff who share their cultural and linguistic background? Are there any non-native English Speaking staff that provide EL students with a positive model of language learning? How can we effectively leverage paraprofessionals who share language and/or culture with our EL students? Are teachers, especially minority teachers, given the freedom to bring culture into the classroom? How can I solicit the voices of staff who have specific cultural and linguistic knowledge relevant to my EL students in order to improve curriculum, instruction, and home-school relationships?

How can a diverse staff enhance ELs' school experiences and academic learning?

A staff consisting of individuals from different language, social, and ethnic backgrounds shows EL students that their strengths and perspectives are welcomed, and that success and authority are not reserved for individuals of a certain culture (Carnegie Forum, 1986). Minority staff serve as “exemplars of possibility” (Johnson, 2008) for minority students, role models for their futures. Villegas & Irvine (2010) add that all minority teachers model the fact that “adults of racial/ethnic minority backgrounds are successful and contributing members of society” (p. 177). EL children and youth, who are still learning about the world and what is possible, can greatly benefit from role models that show them that people of any background can achieve academic and social success.

This may be achieved indirectly or through conscious efforts as Achinstein & Ogawa (2012) demonstrates. Specifically, they found the minority teachers in their study made special efforts to show their students that minority women can be highly educated, that minority students can succeed in science and math, and that minority voices are valuable.

In addition to serving as role models, staff who share ELs' language and culture help them in concrete, practical ways. In a review of research, Villegas and Irvine (2010) identify five areas in which teachers who share cultural back-



grounds with their students are most successful:

1. Having high expectations of students
2. Using culturally relevant teaching
3. Developing caring and trusting relationships with students
4. Confronting issues of racism through teaching
5. Serving as advocates and cultural brokers.

These factors contributed to an overall finding that minority students who share cultural backgrounds with their teachers academically outperform minority students who do not (Villegas and Irvine, 2010). Often relating to students and their parents as family, Black and Latino teachers shared stories of being “another mother” to their Black and Latino students, and tended to inspire students and gain trust by explicitly acknowledging racism and encouraging students to struggle against it (Villegas & Irvine, 2010). Similarly, Ochoa (2007) found that many teachers of color feel a special mission to help others of their community or background.

For English learners in particular, teachers who are non-native English speakers (NNES) can be especially important resources. Exploring the contributions of NNES teachers to the learning experiences of ELs, Reves & Medgyes (1994) identified six positive attributes:

1. They provide a good learner model for their students
2. They are able to teach language learning strategies effectively
3. They are able to provide information about the language under study
4. They understand the challenges and needs of their students
5. They are able to predict student errors and language difficulties of students
6. In English as a foreign language settings, they can use the students’ native language to their advantage

Even if a NNES teacher does not share the same language or cultural background with his or her students, they have the shared experience of learning a language. Building on Reves and Medgyes’s theory, Faez (2012) found that non-native English speaking teachers reported feeling more connected to EL students and empathetic towards their experiences when compared to native-English speaking teachers. And they use their deep knowledge of what it is like to be an EL to tailor their lessons for these students.

Although discussion of staffing often focuses on teachers, paraprofessionals and other staff can also be a crucial resource for ELs. Paraprofessionals are often members of the community around the school, and may have knowledge of the realities of the area that a teacher lacks. They also can serve as a more diverse pipeline for future teachers than traditionally trained applicants (Schmitz, Nourse, & Ross, 2013). In one of the few studies of this topic, Rueda, Monzo, and Higuera (2004) found that Latino paraeducators provided a bridge between Latino students and their teachers, helping to communicate with families, elicit information from students, and arbitrate student disputes. As teacher diversity continues to lag, paraprofessionals and other staff can be valuable cultural resources.

What does the research say about current staffing in schools?

Boser (2014) reports that teachers who identify as White make up 87% of the workforce. Although efforts to diversify the teaching workforce have had some success, a study by the Brookings Institute (Putman, Hansen, Walsh, & Quintero, 2016) projects that the gap between the percentage of Hispanic students and the percentage of Hispanic teachers will actually widen significantly between now and 2060.

A lack of diversity in staffing can (unintentionally) convey the message or perpetuate the ideology that only certain types of people hold positions of authority in schools and society. Because English learners (ELs) are often marginalized in schools due to their minority status – and may already have their doubts about how they fit into American society – a lack of professionals or authorities who look like them and speak their language may be especially damaging (Carnegie Forum, 1986; Mercer & Mercer, 1986). Research has linked a lack of staff diversity to lower self-esteem and feelings of not belonging in school among minority students (Cole, 1986; Graham, 1987, Villegas & Davis, 2008).

Limits in staff diversity may also have negative effects on students who are members of cultural and linguistic majorities (Irvine, 1988). Majority students may not recognize minority communities contain valuable “funds of knowledge” (Moll, Amanti, Neff, & Gonzalez, 1992). When schools fail to hire minority staff, they miss opportunities to make such “funds of knowledge” visible and

to show how minority group members may contribute to the life of the school.

How might schools recruit more diverse teachers and staff?

Schmitz, Nourse, and Ross (2013) described in depth one high impact strategy for increasing the pipeline of diverse teachers: a Future Teacher Academy. This year-round initiative exposed non-White high school students to teaching as a profession and encouraged them to enroll in teacher prep programs. The academy includes an overnight visit to a school of education and an internship in the school district.

Bireda & Chait (2011) also describe locally grown programs as being effective. They suggest reaching out to nontraditional candidates without college degrees. They caution that all efforts are time- and labor-intensive, requiring a sustained commitment on the part of school leadership. Preferably, efforts should be statewide to overcome financially burdensome licensure costs.

Thus, schools can:

1. Create their own small, personalized programs at the high school level that target individual potential educators with strong, sustained mentorship.
2. Develop strong partnerships between preparation programs, both alternative and traditional, and local school districts to develop tight talent pipelines for teachers of color, through key representatives and programs – “connectors” (Simon, Johnson, & Reinhorn, 2015)
3. Lessen financial and other bureaucratic barriers for non-traditional applicants to become teachers (Bireda & Chait, 2011).

The strategies above are long-term, not short-term, as hiring alone will “barely nudge” the diversity gap (Hansen & Quintero, 2016). According to Hansen and Quintero (2016), college enrollment and completion, taking an interest in teaching as a career, and being retained in the classroom all would do more to close the teacher diversity gap than aggressively hiring new minority applicants. However, principals cannot expect to have intensive support from a district or state when conducting hiring for their own building. States may not even keep accurate information on teacher demographics, as was the case in one Massachusetts study (Simon, Johnson, & Reinhorn, 2015). Yet leaders can still set the foundations

long-term work within their own walls to make teaching seem like a more attractive profession to their current non-White students, even if they currently have mostly White teachers.

As for the recruitment process itself, principals can boost diversity by conducting it earlier and providing applicants with ample information about school climate and culture. These principals cultivate an information-rich rather than an information-poor process (Liu & Johnson, 2006). Both the school and the applicants should have time to assess each other – the process should not be rushed. Leaders working with off-campus “connectors” also need time to develop informal relationships in order to gain access to the best-matched candidates (Simon, Johnson, & Reinhorn, 2015). Principals should be open to asking teachers of color to serve in these ambassador positions if they themselves are not of color. Outreach can occur in traditional settings like hiring fairs, but they can also happen in local community groups and churches (Simon, Johnson, & Reinhorn, 2015).

Finally, schools seeking to boost diversity intentionally put applicants of color at the front of the hiring pack. They market their schools as inclusive communities, and they allow for open and honest conversations about race, ethnicity, and class. These schools are even willing to coach candidates and allow them to re-do parts of the hiring process (Simon, Johnson, & Reinhorn, 2015). They are not easily swayed by applicants who have little experience but have high test scores and GPAs. Still, hiring pools can remain limited depending on geography, and in-house training programs for high school or even college graduates can yield the most concrete results (Simon, Johnson, & Reinhorn, 2015).

What can school leaders do to maximize the impact of existing staff diversity?

In order to leverage the benefits of staff diversity, schools need to create a climate in which culturally responsive teaching is encouraged rather than merely tolerated. Several studies have found that teachers who want to tailor instruction according to students’ cultural backgrounds, advocate anti-racism, and bring minority “funds of knowledge” to the forefront can feel restricted in doing so by school leadership and other staff (Beauboeuf-Lafontant, 1999; Quiocho & Rios, 2000). For example, Achinstein & Ogawa (2012) found that administrators pressured minority teachers to eliminate culturally



relevant material or discussion of social justice in order to meet curriculum pacing guidelines and focus on test preparation. To counter this trend, school leadership may need to specifically invite minority voices into the conversation, and provide training to all staff on integrating culturally responsive content into their teaching (Ekiaka Nzai, Gómez, Reyna, & Kang-Fan, 2012).

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