# National Council on Teacher Quality

# A New Roadmap for Strengthening Teacher Diversity

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## INTRODUCTION

We live in a diverse country. Our backgrounds—including where we grew up, what we value, our traditions and beliefs, and the languages we speak, among many other factors—contribute to our nation's richness and complexity. Racial identity represents one important dimension of diversity, especially among our nation's students and teachers.

One might reasonably expect our teacher workforce to be representative of the racial diversity we see in the broader population of working-age adults, or more specifically, working-age adults with college degrees. Yet while one in three (35%) working-age adults identifies as American Indian/Alaska Native, Black/African American, Hispanic, Islander/Pacific Native or two or more races, only about one in five teachers (21%) across the country is from these historically disadvantaged groups. What's more, the NCTQ Teacher Diversity Dashboard reveals a troubling trend: The racial diversity of the teacher workforce is growing at a slower pace than the racial diversity of college-educated adults. **This trend indicates that, increasingly, Black and brown adults who earn college degrees are either choosing other professions or electing to leave the classroom after becoming teachers.**

We know teacher diversity matters to all students, especially students of color, and many states and districts have been trying to reach the goal of increasing teacher diversity. This data signals that we are off course from that destination.

# IS TEACHING LOSING ITS APPEAL FOR PEOPLE FROM HISTORICALLY DISADVANTAGED GROUPS?

There's a common narrative among education leaders that the reason we can't increase the diversity of our teacher workforce is because there just aren't enough people of color enrolling in and graduating from college; the pool to choose from is too small, they say. It's true that colleges need to do more to recruit and support Black and brown students to pursue and attain college degrees. Yet data suggests that a growing number of college-educated people of color—people who could be teachers—are opting out.

In the 1980s and early 90s, Black and Hispanic college graduates were more likely than white and Asian people to choose a career in teaching.[1] Despite this past trend, the teacher workforce has recently become less racially diverse than the broader population of college-educated adults.

## College graduates from historically disadvantaged groups are moving away from teaching
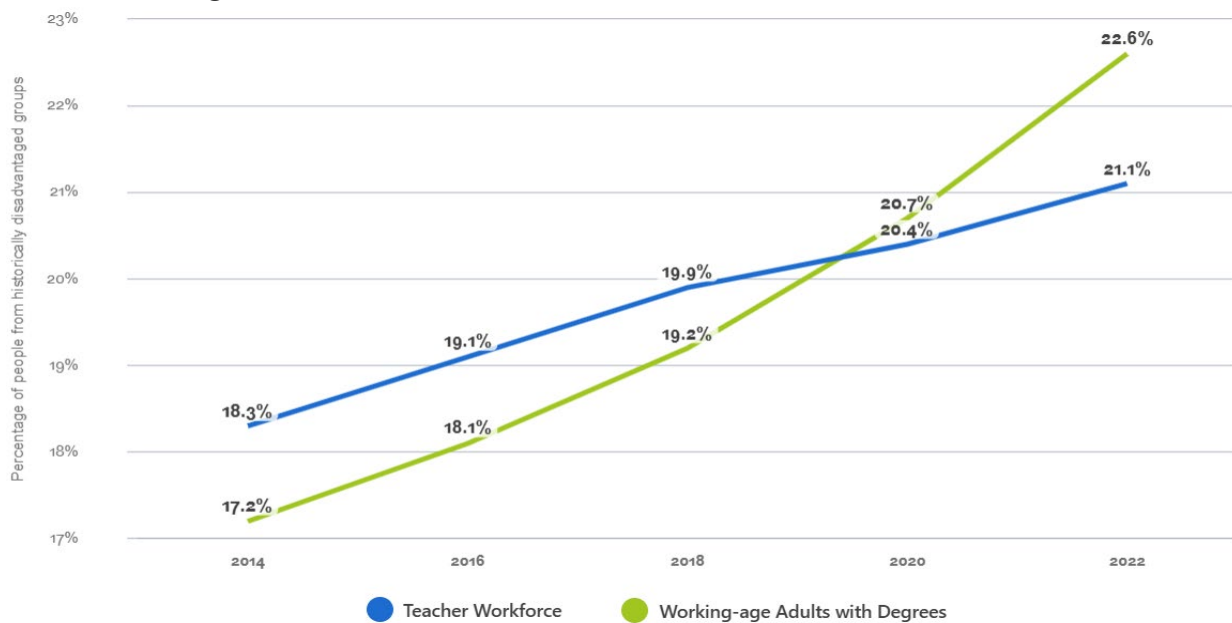


*Years in the table represent the final year in a five-year average. For example, 2020 represents the average percentage from 2016 to 2020.*

The intersection of the two lines in the chart raises deeper questions about why Black and brown graduates are turning away from teaching. These trends reflect long standing issues in the teaching profession:

- **Low Pay and Status**: Relative to other professions requiring a college degree, teaching is perceived as a low paying and low status career. Are graduates of color choosing other fields for higher economic security and perceptions of greater professional status?
- **"Invisible Tax[2]"**: Teachers of color often face added responsibilities, such as mentoring students of color, disciplining students, interpreting for families, and advising on school culture—all of which are uncompensated. Are these additional burdens driving talented educators away from the profession?
- **Inequitable Hiring**: Research suggests that improving teacher diversity is not solely about the pipeline, but also a matter of demand.[3] Are hiring practices in schools disadvantageous to teachers of color who are fully qualified for vacant positions?

Addressing these factors is essential to realigning the teacher workforce with our national diversity.

## Teacher Diversity Matters

The research is clear about the benefits of a diverse teacher workforce:

- Teachers of color have a positive impact on *all* students' academic outcomes regardless of students' race.[4] The impact is particularly pronounced for students of color, as measured by higher reading and math test scores,[5] as well as enrollment and passage rates in advanced coursework.[6]
    - For example, Black students who have at least one Black teacher in K–5 achieve higher reading[7] and math scores.[8]
- Teachers of color may positively impact students of color across a number of nonacademic factors as well, such as improved attendance,[9] social-emotional outcomes such as increased sense of belonging,[10] and behavioral outcomes such as lower rates of discipline.[11]
- Students of color who have experiences with teachers of color are more likely to achieve life milestones like high school graduation, college enrollment, and even college completion.[12]
    - For example, Black students who have just one Black teacher in grades K–3 are 13% more likely to graduate from high school and 19% more likely to go to college.[13]
- When educators share the ethno-racial identities of their students, they are likely to hold their students to high academic expectations,[14] while also nurturing a positive and caring classroom environment.

# INCREASING TEACHER DIVERSITY REQUIRES SETTING THE RIGHT BENCHMARKS

The teacher workforce does not look much like the adult population or the students they serve. Across the country, only 21% of teachers are from historically disadvantaged racial groups compared to 35% of working-age adults and 49% of students. Simple math suggests that the diversity gap between students and teachers will only close when teachers from historically disadvantaged groups enter the workforce at a faster pace than the student population is diversifying.

Since only working-age adults (defined as individuals ages 21–65) can serve as teachers, the 14 percentage point gap between students and working-age adults from historically disadvantaged groups cannot be overlooked when setting both ambitious and data-driven goals for teacher diversity.

Also worth noting, the diversity gap between teachers and the larger population of working-age adults from historically disadvantaged groups is equal in magnitude (14 percentage points) to the difference between students and adults, representing tens of thousands of adults from historically disadvantaged groups who could potentially become teachers. By comparing the diversity of the teacher workforce in each state to the diversity of the adult population at large, state leaders and policymakers can identify opportunities specific to the needs of their respective states and set goals and make plans to increase teacher diversity.
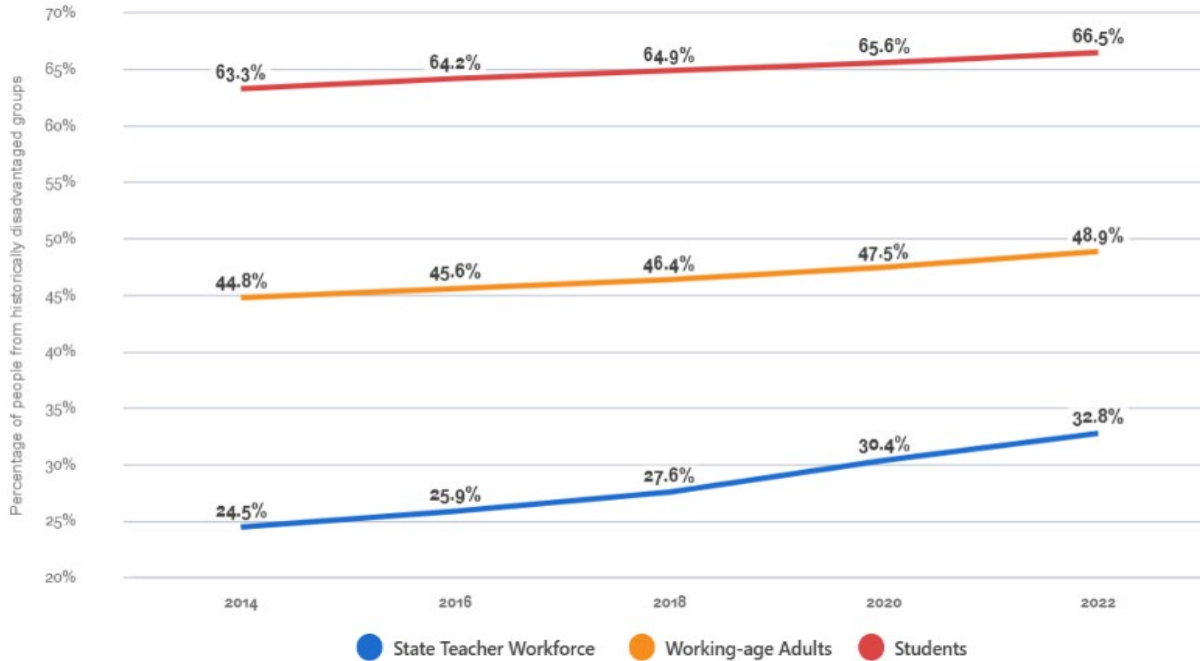
The graph below depicts the persistent diversity gaps between students, adults, and teachers that NCTQ has previously highlighted.[15]

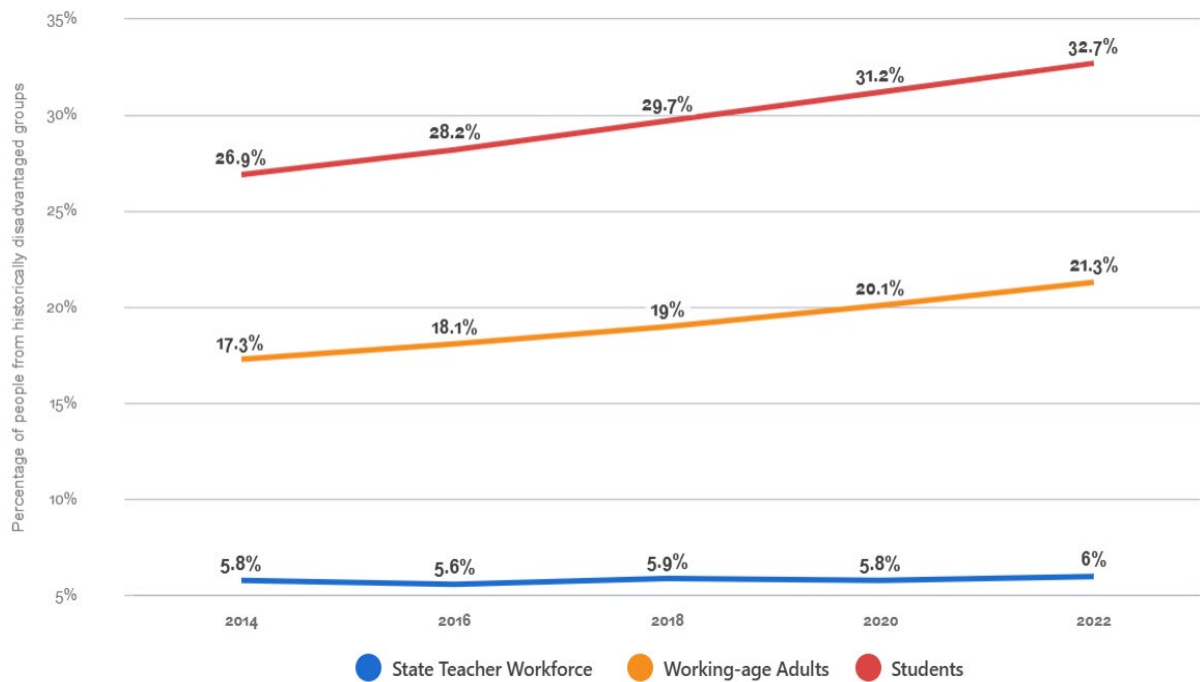# Student and adult populations are diversifying more quickly than teachers
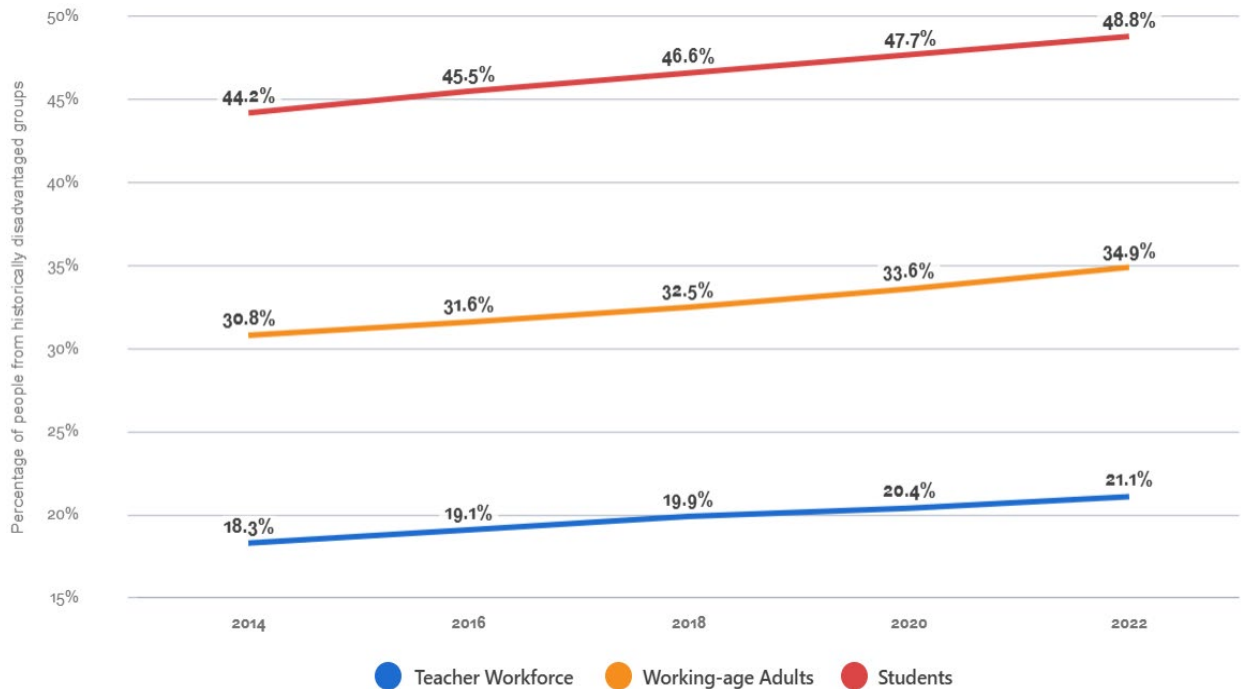


The national data provides an aggregate view of teacher diversity, one that is composed of unique state stories. NCTQ's earlier work on state teacher diversity policy revealed significant differences in how states are working to improve teacher diversity and their very different starting points. Take, for example, the cases of California and Pennsylvania. The two graphs below show the same three data points: the diversity of students, working-age adults, and the teacher workforce. In both states, the percentages of the student and adult populations from historically disadvantaged groups are increasing, albeit at a higher rate in Pennsylvania. Yet, the upward slope of the teacher workforce trendline in California provides encouragement, while the diversity gap continues to grow in Pennsylvania (as we see in the flat blue line).

# California workforce trends for teachers from historically disadvantaged groups



Percentage of people from historically disadvantaged groups

| | 2014 | 2016 | 2018 | 2020 | 2022 |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Students | 63.3% | 64.2% | 64.9% | 65.6% | 66.5% |
| Working-age Adults | 44.8% | 45.6% | 46.4% | 47.5% | 48.9% |
| State Teacher Workforce | 24.5% | 25.9% | 27.6% | 30.4% | 32.8% |

● State Teacher Workforce ● Working-age Adults ● Students

# Pennsylvania workforce trends for teachers from historically disadvantaged groups



Percentage of people from historically disadvantaged groups

| | 2014 | 2016 | 2018 | 2020 | 2022 |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Students | 26.9% | 28.2% | 29.7% | 31.2% | 32.7% |
| Working-age Adults | 17.3% | 18.1% | 19% | 20.1% | 21.3% |
| State Teacher Workforce | 5.8% | 5.6% | 5.9% | 5.8% | 6% |

● State Teacher Workforce ● Working-age Adults ● Students

"Attempting to address the diversity gap between students and teachers is not enough. Advocates and policymakers must consider how teacher diversity compares to the broader workforce if they want to truly understand and address the startling gaps in representation—gaps that have led, and continue to lead, to poor academic outcomes and larger racial economic disparities."

**Sharif El-Mekki**,
Founder and CEO, Center for Black Educator Development

# PROMISING STRATEGIES FOR CREATING A MORE DIVERSE TEACHER WORKFORCE

A comprehensive approach to ensuring all students have access to a diverse teacher workforce begins with improving the K–12 educational experience for students of color. Providing these students with excellent instruction from effective teachers, the support they need to be college and career-ready, and opportunities to explore teaching careers while in high school will promote a more diverse teacher pipeline. It will increase students' rates of high school graduation and college matriculation, strengthen the teacher pipeline, and increase the diversity of the pool of available talent for the teaching profession.

Recruiting a diverse student body must be a priority for all colleges and universities. After all, undergraduate teacher preparation programs, which typically admit students after they complete their sophomore year, can only admit candidates based on who is already enrolled in their institution. There are also thousands of people from historically disadvantaged groups with some college experience who were unable to earn their degrees. Strategies to shore up the teacher pipeline must include support for students to

persist in their college studies through graduation, such as financial assistance, inclusive campus life, diverse higher education faculty, and academic support systems to help candidates successfully complete coursework and pass teacher licensure tests.

Once Black and brown students are enrolled in a teacher preparation program, they must be provided with high-quality clinical experiences so they are prepared to meet the demands of a modern classroom, increasing the likelihood they will remain in the profession. NCTQ's Clinical Practice Framework specifically identifies actions states, districts, and prep programs can take to support teacher candidates of color—and all aspiring teachers—through their teacher prep and clinical practice experiences.

Additionally, there must be multiple, high-quality pathways into teaching to meet the needs of all people who may be interested in the profession. Newer models, such as registered teacher apprenticeships and grow-your-own programs, seek to make teacher preparation accessible to a broader population of aspiring teachers and may contribute to a more diverse teacher workforce.[16]

Efforts to build a diverse teacher pipeline count for little in the long run if schools cannot retain teachers of color. Nationally, annual turnover is greater for teachers of color (19%) than white teachers (15%).[17] Strategies designed to support teachers of color include improving school climate and principal leadership[18] and dismantling "last in, first out" layoff policies, which disproportionately impact teachers of color.[19] Some states have enacted policy and funding streams for affinity groups and mentorship programs designed to support retention efforts.[20]

In short, the components of a strong and diverse teacher pipeline include:

- K–12 educational experiences that lead to college and career readiness.
- Embedding in high school opportunities for students to explore teaching careers.
- Supporting students to graduate high school and matriculate into college.
- Supporting college-enrolled students to explore and succeed in teacher preparation.
- Helping college-enrolled candidates persist in their studies through graduation.
- Identifying multiple, high-quality pathways into teaching, such as registered teacher apprenticeships and grow-your-own programs.
- Retaining teachers of color through a range of strategies, including improving school climate and leadership.

**Spotlighting success: The Center for Black Educator Development**

*With thanks to Sharif El-Mekki and Mimi Woldeyohannes for their contributions*

### Rebuilding the Black teacher pipeline

Recognizing the positive impact of Black teachers on students' academic and life outcomes, the Center for Black Educator Development (CBED) is working to rebuild the Black teacher pipeline. The Philadelphia-based nonprofit seeks to achieve educational equity and racial justice through all parts of the teacher pipeline, including the recruitment, preparation, hiring, and retention of quality Black educators. Through their programming, CBED partners with states, schools and districts, and charter school networks to implement comprehensive strategies for diversifying the teacher workforce.

Their work to rebuild the Black teacher pipeline is rooted in history: Beginning in 1954, more than 38,000 Black educators lost their jobs following the Supreme Court's decision in *Brown v. Board of Education,* ending racial segregation in our public schools. When Black-only schools closed, their Black teachers were dismissed and future generations of Black people were discouraged from entering the teaching profession.[21] Today, CBED is rebuilding the Black teacher pipeline, starting in the earliest years of schooling through college, and identifying mid-career entry points into teaching for Black men and women looking to change careers. The nonprofit uses an intergenerational model, tapping into experienced teachers to mentor high school and college students interested in teaching, and providing these aspiring educators with pathways, resources, and ongoing support.

CBED aims to strengthen the Black Teacher Pipeline through the following three initiatives:

### Teaching Academy

This year-round career and technical education (CTE) course is designed for high school students interested in pursuing teaching careers. Since its inception in 2019, the program has provided 444 students (about 90% of whom identify as Black or brown) with a rigorous academic curriculum focused on Black pedagogy and practical teaching experiences, preparing students for a future in education. By partnering with higher education institutions, the Teaching Academy offers dual enrollment opportunities, enabling students to earn college credits while still in high school. This gives them a head start on their higher education journey, with the possibility of graduating with an associate degree in education. The Teaching Academy not only equips students with necessary knowledge and skills but also instills a sense of purpose and commitment to the teaching profession. As one Teaching Academy Future Teacher said recently, "I have gained a deep understanding of the teaching process."

## Freedom Schools Literacy Academy (FSLA)

This summer program, offered for K–2 students in Philadelphia and virtually, enhances literacy skills among young learners and offers valuable teaching experience for aspiring educators. CBED's faculty of dedicated Black teachers mentor and support the professional development of Black high school and college students interested in teaching careers, with extensive training in culturally responsive practices. The Black teacher apprentices, in turn, provide early literacy instruction to young Black scholars. By participating in FSLA, future educators can develop and refine their teaching methods, ensuring they are well-prepared to create inclusive and effective learning environments. Since the launch of the program in 2018, 621 teacher apprentices (both high school students and college students) completed the program. In the most recent program in 2024, 25% of the teacher apprentices are Black and brown males, a notable difference compared to the national average of 1.3% Black male educators. By the end of the 2024 Summer FSLA program, 61% of high school students and 73% of college students reported an interest in teaching. One apprentice noted, "FSLA helped me realize that I can work with kids, which is now a part of my future goals." Another apprentice affirmed, "The most important thing I learned was that I can teach kids. A part of me was anxious when I started because I didn't think I would be able to, but I was quickly affirmed of my abilities."

## Black Teacher Pipeline Fellowship

In collaboration with the United Negro College Fund (UNCF), CBED offers the Black Teacher Pipeline Fellowship, a robust program designed to support and sustain aspiring Black educators. The Black Teacher Pipeline Fellowship provides financial assistance to fellows of up to $5,000 annually for four years, significantly reducing the financial burden on students pursuing education degrees. Additionally, fellows receive up to $20,000 in stipends at the beginning of their fifth year of teaching to support their retention. Beyond financial support, the fellowship includes comprehensive academic support and professional coaching. This holistic approach helps fellows excel academically in their undergraduate program and also prepares them to become effective and influential educators. As one fellow put it, "We're really going to change the field of education rapidly. I'm just excited about what's to come. I want to see Black and brown students go to college, I want to see more diversity in education."

During the 2024–25 academic year, 25 Black Teacher Pipeline Fellows received a cumulative total of $125,000 in scholarship funds. Since the fellowship was launched in 2022, CBED and UNCF have supported approximately 55 fellows.

> "I think it's important for students to have Black male teachers because it allows them to see themselves. When I saw my Black teachers, it was more than just somebody doing a job to teach me. It was like being with my uncle, my family."
>
> CBED Black Teacher Pipeline Fellow

The strategies CBED is employing to generate interest in teaching, support aspiring teachers through high-quality preparation, make teaching a financially viable career, and promote strong working conditions to increase retention rates offer important lessons for state policymakers and advocates seeking to diversify the teacher workforce.

# DIG DEEPER

The National Council on Teacher Quality's new Teacher Diversity Dashboard reveals critical trends that deepen our understanding of where we are and what course corrections we need to make to strengthen teacher diversity and ultimately improve outcomes for students.

State leaders, researchers, advocates, and teacher preparation program leaders can use the Teacher Diversity Dashboard as a rearview mirror—reflecting where they've been in teacher diversity over past years and how closely their teacher workforce demographics match those of the broader adult population of college graduates. They can also use it as a roadmap, showing them which prep programs are leading the way toward a more diverse teacher workforce and which are adding roadblocks to diversity by making the teacher workforce more white. Teacher prep programs can use this data to compare the diversity of their enrollees and program completers to the teacher workforce in their respective states.

**The end of affirmative action in higher education**

Lagging data will delay our understanding of the impact of the Supreme Court's decision in *SFFA v. Harvard* and *SFFA v. University of North Carolina (UNC),* which ended affirmative action in higher education. However, early reporting from colleges and universities across the country suggests many are about to become less diverse. The Teacher Diversity Dashboard will allow users to track and understand the implications of the Court's decision over time, in terms of both the impact on each state's pool of potential teachers and teacher pipeline as well as each institutions' ability to contribute to the diversity of their state's teacher workforce.

The Teacher Diversity Dashboard adds to the existing discussion about student and teacher diversity gaps by offering additional comparisons by which to examine trends in teacher diversity and the overall health of the teacher workforce. In particular, the dashboard can provide insights into the attractiveness of a career in teaching for people of different racial identities in each state, which relate to both the recruitment and retention of a diverse workforce. In addition to allowing users to compare teacher and student demographic trends, the Teacher Diversity Dashboard includes three additional comparison groups:

| New teachers *Teachers in their first year of service after being newly hired or rehired after a break in full-time service* | Working-age adults with degrees *Adults ages 21–65 who hold at least a bachelor's degree* | Working-age adults *Adults ages 21–65* |
|---|---|---|
| Comparing the representation of specific demographic groups within the teacher workforce to the population of new full-time teachers allows users to assess the likelihood of the teacher workforce becoming more or less diverse over time. | Comparing the diversity of the teacher workforce against that of working-age adults with degrees provides direct insight into the success of diversification efforts since working-age adults with degrees represent people who could serve as teachers. | Comparing the diversity of the teacher workforce against that of working-age adults shows how representative the teaching profession is of the adult population in a given locale, which can help users understand the trajectory of efforts to close the diversity gap. |

## Understand the story of your state

Use the Teacher Diversity Dashboard to:

Benchmark where efforts to diversify the workforce stand and set specific, data-driven goals for the future

Gain insight into where policies are succeeding and focus attention on targeted diversity initiatives

See how your state is performing in efforts to diversify the teacher workforce over time

Understand how teacher prep programs in your state are contributing to the diversification of the teacher population

Identify state and national trends for individual or collective demographic groups

Compare trends of adult populations (those who can pursue teaching) to the teacher workforce (those who are teachers).

## What you can expect from NCTQ

- **Regular updates.** NCTQ will keep the Teacher Diversity Dashboard current by regularly updating the underlying data as the federal government releases new data reports. By regularly updating the dashboard, we will keep the inherent lags in the data to a minimum.
- **Periodic briefs.** NCTQ will publish briefs using data from the dashboard to share national and state-specific insights related to teacher diversity.
- **Teacher Prep Review: Program Diversity**. In early 2025, NCTQ will release a new *Teacher Prep Review:* Program Diversity report using data from the dashboard. The report will assess nearly 950 institutions across the country on their contributions to the diversity of their state teacher workforce.

# ENDNOTES

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[3]For example, one study of a large school district found Black applicants were significantly less likely than their white counterparts to secure a job offer. D'amico, D., Pawlewicz, R. J., Earley, P. M., & McGeehan, A. P. (2017). Where are all the Black teachers? Discrimination in the teacher labor market. *Harvard Educational Review, 87*(1), 26–49. https://cmepr.gmu.edu/wp-content/uploads/2017/07/Where-Are-All-the-Black-Teachers.pdf

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[15] The graph includes the trendline for working-age adults from historically disadvantaged groups to show how the adult and student populations are changing in a similar manner, but students remain a much more diverse population.

[16]Edwards, D. & Kraft, M. A., (2024). *Grow Your Own teacher programs: What are they, and what can (and can't) they accomplish?* Brookings. https://www.brookings.edu/articles/grow-your-own-teacher-programs-what-are-they-and-what-can-and-cant-they-accomplish/

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