

Closing the Racial/Ethnic Gap Between Students of Color and Their Teachers: An Elusive Goal

Ana Maria Villegas, Kathryn Strom, and Tamara Lucas

Montclair State University

This article examines minority teacher recruitment policies and programs of the past two decades and explores their influence on the racial/ethnic makeup of the teaching force in elementary and secondary public schools. The results show that while important progress has been made toward increasing the overall number and proportion of minority teachers in the public schools, those gains have been eclipsed by the rapid growth of the minority student population. As a result, the racial/ethnic gap between students of color and their teachers has actually increased over the years. The authors provide an overview of current minority teacher recruitment state policies and introduce the Teacher-Student Parity Index, a new metric for comparing the proportions of teachers and students from different racial/ethnic groups to gain a more textured understanding of the demographic reality of today's schools than is presently found in the literature. The authors conclude with recommendations for policy and research.

The need to diversify the teaching force has received national attention since the mid-1980s, when some scholars of color, educational leaders, and professional organizations put the spotlight on the clashing student-teacher demographics clearly evident at that time in elementary and secondary public schools (Carnegie Forum on Education and the Economy, 1986; Cole, 1986; Graham, 1987; Irvine, 1988; Witty, 1986). In 1972, the first year the U.S. Department of Education collected demographic data for the newly desegregated schools, students of color¹ accounted for 22% of total enrollments and teachers of color constituted 12% of the teaching force, a 10-percentage point gap between the two groups. A decade later, the disparity had grown to 17 percentage points, with students of color making up 27% of total enrollments and teachers of color accounting for only 10% of the workforce (National Education Association [NEA], 2003; U.S. Department of Education, 2001). Pointing to these conflicting statistics, early proponents of teacher diversity policies warned that without considerable intervention, the widening cultural gap separating students and teachers would only grow in the years ahead. In so doing, they articulated a critical policy problem—the shortage of teachers of color.

By the late 1980s, a number of workforce initiatives designed to recruit more people of color into teaching were set in motion. Early on, two powerful education organizations—the Carnegie Task Force on Teaching as a Profession and the National Commission for Excellence in Teacher Education—played a critical role by calling for the creation of special programs to attract capable

Address correspondence to Ana Maria Villegas, Montclair State University, Curriculum and Teaching, University Hall—2116, 1 Normal Avenue, Montclair, NJ 07043. E-mail: villegasa@mail.montclair.edu

people of color into teaching. Some colleges and universities responded by actively recruiting enrolled students of color into preservice teacher education and offering a range of services to help them complete all requirements for teacher certification (Clewell & Villegas, 1998). Arguing that many of these efforts were successful in recruiting only students of color already in college, the Education Commission of the States (1990) pushed for a bolder initiative—a comprehensive policy approach that would significantly expand the pool of students of color from which to draw future teachers by tapping a variety of recruitment strategies. Among the strategies this organization advocated were the following: (a) teacher cadet programs that targeted promising pre-college students, preparing them for college while motivating them to pursue a teaching career; (b) articulation agreements between two- and four-year colleges aimed at facilitating the transfer of students of color into programs of teacher education at four-year institutions; (c) career ladder programs for paraprofessionals seeking to become teachers; and (d) extensive use of financial incentives, such as scholarships, forgivable loans, and signing bonuses (Education Commission of the States, 1990). This proposal provided the impetus and framework for state-approved minority teacher recruitment policies that followed (Clewell & Villegas, 1998).

While states were instituting policies and programs to increase the diversity of the teaching force, private foundations and the federal government also contributed to this goal, especially in the 1990s. The majority of funding for recruitment programs early on came from private foundations. The largest of these initiatives was the Pathways to Teaching Careers Program, sponsored by the DeWitt Wallace-Reader's Digest Fund. Launched in 1989, this \$50 million effort involved 41 sites across 25 states and served nearly 2,000 individuals from non-traditional pools (e.g., paraprofessionals and uncertified teachers in urban schools) (Clewell & Villegas, 1999). Similarly, the Ford Foundation spent over \$22 million on its Minority Teacher Education Program, an initiative that supported 50 sites in eight states. Ford-sponsored programs primarily targeted promising high school students and paraprofessionals. Beyond producing several thousand teachers of color, the many programs funded through these two private initiatives served as demonstration sites where strategies for recruiting and preparing teachers of color from non-traditional pools were tested (Villegas & Clewell, 1998). During the past two decades, many other private foundations have invested in minority teacher recruitment programs, although at lower levels of funding.

In the early 1990s, states began to respond to the call to action by the Education Commission of the States, instituting policies to increase the diversity of the teaching force. This article provides an overview of those policy initiatives and examines the supply of teachers of color over the last two decades. Specifically, it addresses three questions:

1. What policies have been adopted by states during the past two decades to diversify the teacher workforce?
2. What trends in the representation of minority teachers in public elementary and secondary schools are evident during this period?
3. To what extent, if at all, has the racial/ethnic gap between students and their teachers been reduced over those years?

The article is organized into four sections. First, we consider arguments in support of devoting attention and resources to increasing the diversity of the teacher workforce. We then describe the methods used to collect and analyze data for this study. In the third section, we present and discuss our findings. This section gives an up-to-date profile of state-level minority teacher recruitment

policies nationwide and examines the racial/ethnic makeup of the public school teaching population over the 20-year period between 1987 and 2007 to determine the extent of progress made toward narrowing the racial/ethnic divide between students and teachers. This aspect of our analysis introduces the Teacher-Student Parity Index, a new metric designed to provide a more nuanced understanding of teacher diversity than is commonly found in the professional literature. In the concluding section, we summarize the findings and offer recommendations.

ARGUMENTS FOR INCREASING THE DIVERSITY OF THE TEACHING FORCE

The reasons articulated in the literature for increasing the representation of people of color in teaching can be organized into two broad arguments. One is that in a democratic society, teachers of color serve as critical role models for all children, especially for children of color. The second suggests that teachers of color are particularly suited to teaching students of color because they bring to their work an inherent understanding of the backgrounds and experiences of these learners. A discussion of these two rationales for diversifying the teaching force follows.

Teachers of Color Serve as Role Models for All Students

The role model argument for increasing the diversity of the teaching profession builds on the idea that, beyond transmitting academic knowledge, schools function to shape students' values in subtle but profound ways. Recognition of the powerful socialization function of schools led early supporters of teacher diversity policies to question the practice of exposing public school students to an overwhelmingly white teaching force (Graham, 1987). Work by Mercer and Mercer (1986) illustrates this line of thinking. These researchers argue that when students fail to see minority adults in professional positions and instead see them overrepresented in the ranks of non-professional workers, they implicitly learn that white people are better suited than people of color to hold positions of authority in society. This unspoken message reinforces existing social inequalities and clashes with the promise of equality in the United States, a theme that dominates the formal school curriculum (Carnegie Forum on Education and the Economy, 1986).

Cole (1986) discusses the dynamics through which teachers of color serve as role models for students of color. She argues that because many students of color come from economically impoverished backgrounds and have limited access in their communities to successful professionals who are racially or ethnically similar to them, exposure to teachers of color gives them hope that they, too, can aspire to hold responsible positions as adults, thus motivating them to strive for academic and social success. Cole further asserts that the presence of teachers of color decreases the sense of alienation that students of color—from both poor and affluent backgrounds—often experience in schools. This early justification for diversifying the teaching force was underscored a decade later by Richard Riley (1998), U. S. Secretary of Education under President Clinton, who asserted that the teaching population must reflect the diversity of the U.S. population. He reasoned: “If we are to be responsive to the special demands and great opportunities of our nation’s pluralistic makeup, we should develop a teaching force that is diverse. . . . Children need role models—they need to see themselves in the faces of their teachers” (p. 19).

Proponents of diversifying the teaching force in the 1980s argue that white students benefit from a racially/ethnically diverse teaching force as well. Irvine (1988) contends that by seeing people of color in professional roles, white children and youth have an opportunity to learn that adults of racial/ethnic minority backgrounds are responsible and contributing members of society. Waters (1989) argues that daily interactions with teachers of color could potentially dispel myths of racial inferiority that white students might have internalized about people of color from their socialization outside school.

Since it was articulated in the 1980s, the argument that teachers of color can serve as role models for racially similar students has been cited with frequency in the teacher diversity literature. With regard to their impact on students, preservice and inservice teachers of color have reported that their primary reason for becoming teachers is to serve as role models for students of color (Gordon, 2000; Ochoa, 2007; Su, 1997) and that, as role models, they see themselves as capable of motivating students of color to improve their academic achievement and broaden their career aspirations (Basit & McNamara, 2004). Teachers of color also have reported that as students, they were inspired by teachers of color who served as role models for them and whom they now want to emulate (Miller & Endo, 2005). Another perspective on teachers of color as role models comes from research examining the influence of minority teachers on a variety of academic outcomes for students of color. For example, Dee (2005), Hess and Leal (1997), Klopfenstein (2005), and Pitts (2007) argue that having minority teachers as role models is one likely explanation for the positive academic outcomes they report for minority students.

In sum, the literature documents the need for teachers of color as role models for all students—but especially for students of color. The argument emphasizes the role that teachers of color can play in bolstering the sense of worth of students of color, motivating them to strive for academic success, and encouraging them to envision professional careers for themselves. Given the racial/ethnic achievement gap that plague public schools in this country—as reflected in such indicators as test scores (KewalRamani, Gilbertson, Fox, & Provasnick, 2007), high school graduation rates (Swanson, 2005), and college admissions (Havey & Anderson, 2007)—the potential for teachers of color to help students of color see school success as a means to improve their life chances merits consideration.

Teachers of Color Are Uniquely Positioned to Teach Students of Color

The second major argument in support of increasing teacher diversity suggests that people of color are uniquely positioned to promote learning for students of color because they tend to bring to teaching an understanding of the students' cultural backgrounds and experiences (Gay, 2002; Nieto, 2000; Villegas & Lucas, 2002). This argument builds on a pragmatic view of culture. From this perspective, culture is seen as the way life is organized in a community or group, including the ways in which community or group members use language, interact with one another, relate to time and space, take turns at talk, and approach different tasks (e.g., learning) (Rosaldo, 1989). While this perspective on culture acknowledges that the organization of community life evolves continuously in response to changing societal conditions and that the ways of talking, interacting, and approaching tasks vary widely among members of any community (Moll & Gonzalez, 2005), it also recognizes that group patterns exist. Such patterns reflect the standards or norms that community members use to make sense of the world.

Admittedly, teachers of color vary widely in their familiarity with the backgrounds and experiences of the racial/ethnic minority students they teach; they cannot fully understand all the important influences on all their students—such as social class, geographic origin, age, and gender. Nevertheless, compared to their white counterparts, minority teachers are more likely to understand many aspects of the lives of minority students (Milner, 2006). For one thing, people of color bring to teaching personal experience with and insight into racism and ethnocentrism in society (Miller & Endo, 2005; Quiocho & Rios, 2000). In addition, because of the pervasive spatial segregation in the U.S., people of color are likely to have lived part of their lives in minority communities, even if they currently reside in more racially/ethnically mixed settings (Charles, 2003). Through these experiences, many teachers and students of color have been exposed to ways of using language, interacting, and approaching tasks (that is, cultural practices) that are distinct from those of most white teachers (Achinstein & Ogawa, 2011). White people, on the other hand, are more likely to live in racially insulated communities that offer limited opportunity for contact with people of color (Charles, 2003). Such insulation deprives them of a window into the day-to-day realities, interests, concerns, and struggles of racial/ethnic minorities.

The importance of helping students make connections between their home and school experiences is supported by research in the cognitive and learning sciences, which has fundamentally changed our understanding of how people learn (Donovan & Bransford, 2005; Donovan, Bransford, & Pellegrino, 1999). This research demonstrates that learning, far from being a personally passive act of receiving objective knowledge, involves the active construction of ideas within cultural contexts. Because students continuously use the experiences from their lives at home and in their communities to make sense of new ideas encountered in the classroom, those experiences are an essential resource for learning. Teachers who do not actively draw on this resource severely constrain their ability to engage students in making meaning of the school curriculum (Moll & Gonzalez, 2005). Teachers who are familiar with the lives of children and youth of color are better able to build these bridges to learning for those students. For example, teachers might explain new curricular concepts with illustrations or examples taken from the students' lives, embed new academic ideas and skills in problem-solving activities that are relevant and meaningful to them, select instructional materials that tap their interests, create classroom learning communities that take into consideration interaction patterns and approaches to learning prevalent in the students' homes and communities, and use a variety of evaluation strategies to maximize students' opportunities to show what they know in a manner that is familiar to them.

The notion that people of color are well suited to teach students of color not only is consistent with theories of learning but also receives support from a large body of qualitative research that illustrates numerous ways in which competent teachers of color draw on the cultural backgrounds of students of color to facilitate their learning. The teaching of Marva Collins, the celebrated African American teacher of African American children, whose work first drew considerable public attention during the 1980s, is a classic example of this bridge-building strategy. Ms. Collins was uniquely skilled at tapping her personal knowledge of her African American students' cultural background to create rewarding classroom experiences that were relevant to them (Hollins, 1982). For instance, she consistently incorporated in her teaching interaction patterns commonly found in the African American church. These patterns included choral reading, audience participation, emotionally charged discussions, figurative language, and the identification of a moral or personal message from passages read. Ms. Collins also encouraged her students to use community language patterns in the classroom. For example, she accepted "jive talking," the term used at that time

to describe a way of speaking based on improvisation with language, as a viable means of communication in class. By capitalizing on the language and interaction skills her African American students brought to school, this teacher successfully engaged those students in academic tasks they might have otherwise rejected, including activities focused on developing their mastery of Standard English. (For examples of culturally responsive practices of teachers from other racial/ethnic minority groups, see Au, 1980; McIntyre, Rosebery, & González, 2001; Nieto, 1999; Pewewardy, 1994; Philips, 1983; Rueda, Monzó, & Higareda, 2004).

Scholars also have argued that the personal insight that teachers of color have about racial and ethnic inequalities in society gives them more credibility with students of color than white teachers regarding these issues (Achinstein & Aguirre, 2008; Delpit, 1988; Foster, 1989.) As a result, teachers of color are better able than their white peers to challenge students of color to critically examine the consequences of not engaging academically (Foster, 1993; Gordon, 2000; Sleeter & Thao, 2007). According to Grant and Sleeter (2007), without such discussions many students of color do not commit to school learning.

Two points of clarification regarding our discussion are in order. First, the presence of teachers of color alone is not sufficient to improve the education of students of color. While the life experiences and insights of people from racial/ethnic minority groups can make them an asset to the teaching profession, it is likely that such a resource will have little payoff unless teachers of color are prepared to draw on those experiences in their work with students of color (Montecinos, 1994; Villegas & Davis, 2008). It would be unrealistic to expect teachers of color to develop culturally responsive teaching practices without the benefit of professional preparation to support this. Second, by highlighting ways in which teachers of color are well positioned to improve the educational outcomes of students of color and by advocating for teacher diversity, we are not suggesting that white teachers are incapable of teaching students of color. The literature includes numerous examples of white teachers who are highly successful teaching students from racial/ethnic minority groups (see Ladson-Billings, 1994; Landsman, 2001; Paley, 2000). Nor are we advocating assigning teachers to students on the basis of race and ethnicity. Instead, we believe that the teaching profession, as a whole, stands to gain from the diverse experiences and perspectives people of color can bring to it.

METHODS

State Policies

To identify states with policies that establish teacher diversity as a goal, we analyzed state education statutes regarding minority teacher recruitment. We collected these data in three steps. To help focus our review of this extensive body of legislative information, we first used the Teacher Recruitment and Retention State Policy Database created in 2005 by Learning Points Associates for the National Comprehensive Center for Teacher Quality (NCCTQ). We generated a report identifying states with statutes that explicitly call for minority teacher recruitment. For each state identified, the report listed the statute(s) and related regulations, the specific recruitment strategy or strategies used, and the date the reported data were last updated. Through this process, we identified 23 states with one or more statutes targeting people of color for recruitment into teaching.

In the second step of the data search process, we cross-referenced the information gleaned from the NCCTQ policy database with education statutes on state legislature websites for the 23 states on our list. This step allowed us to verify the accuracy of the information initially obtained through the NCCTQ database. In cases where statutes were unavailable through the state government websites, we accessed them through FindLaw, a reputable provider of online legal information. As a final step in the process, we searched the Department of Education websites of the remaining 27 states to confirm whether any of them had minority teacher recruitment regulations not included in the NCCTQ database and accessed the relevant statutes through FindLaw. This last set of activities added eight more states to the original list, bringing our total of states with minority teacher recruitment legislation to 31.

Our review of the data gathered revealed that states use five types of recruitment strategies to diversify the teacher workforce—offering financial incentives, creating government mandates, supporting specific types of recruitment programs, establishing recruitment centers, and promoting alternate certification programs as a pathway to teaching. Using these five strategies as an organizing framework, we developed a profile of the nature and scope of minority teacher recruitment policies nationwide.

Racial/Ethnic Diversity in the Teacher Workforce

To address our other two research questions, we gathered data on the racial/ethnic makeup of the teaching force from the Schools and Staffing Survey (SASS), administered by the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) periodically since 1987. Through SASS, NCES collects extensive data on public and private elementary and secondary schools in this country. For this study, we used data from the questionnaire administered to a nationally representative sample of public school teachers in 1987, 1993, 1999, and 2007. These dates are fairly evenly distributed across time, thereby facilitating the analysis.

To determine demographic trends in the public school teaching force, we first compared the total numbers and percentages of white and minority teachers across the years. Using the same procedure, we then compared and contrasted participation patterns of different minority groups over time. In the final step of the analysis, we used the Teacher-Student Parity Index developed by Villegas to gain a more nuanced understanding of the racial/ethnic makeup of the teaching population. The Index for each racial/ethnic group is calculated by dividing the percentage of teachers from that group (in the overall teaching force) by the percentage of students from the same group (in the overall student population) for a given year. By design, then, a value of 1.0 indicates parity in the proportions of teachers and students from the same racial/ethnic group. For example, if teachers from Group A comprise 20% of the teaching force and students from Group A also account for 20% of total enrollments, the Teacher-Student Parity Index would equal 1.0 (perfect parity in the proportions of teachers and students). If the Index is greater than 1.0, teachers of that group are overrepresented relative to the proportion of students of the same group within the overall student population. If the Index is below 1.0, teachers of that group are underrepresented relative to the proportional presence of students from the same group. By standardizing the representation of teachers from different racial/ethnic groups in this way, the Teacher-Student Parity Index provides a more accurate snapshot of the demographic landscape of schools and facilitates comparisons between and among different groups.

FINDINGS

State Policies Promoting Teacher Diversity

Table 1 summarizes the results of our systematic review of existing minority teacher policy documents nationwide. As shown, 31 states currently have recruitment policies in place that specifically target racial/ethnic minorities for teaching. Some of these policies were adopted in the early 1990s and have been retained since then; others were adopted more recently. Our analysis revealed that states use five types of policy strategies to move their teacher diversity agenda forward—financial incentives, government mandates, specific recruitment programs, recruitment centers, and alternative certification programs. The most common policy strategy (evident in 25 of the 31 states identified) involves the use of financial incentives in the form of scholarships, grants, and forgivable loans to pay for or to defray the cost of preparing and credentialing people of color for teaching. In some cases, incentive recipients are expected to spend three years or more teaching within the state, often in hard-to-staff schools and/or a subject area of high teacher shortage (e.g., special education, bilingual education). The overwhelming majority of states with financial incentive policies specifically target people of color as recipients (e.g., the Minority Teachers of Illinois Scholarship Program). A few of the states, however, frame this policy more broadly, offering financial support to qualified people preparing to become teachers, including minorities (e.g., the Kansas Teacher Service Scholarship Program).

A second strategy used widely across states to diversify the teaching workforce—noted in 17 states—is to adopt a government mandate requiring an agency (e.g., state commission of education, state board/department of education, professional standards commission, school district, district board of education, college/university) to take specific actions to support their teacher diversity goals. Such mandates include preparing a plan to recruit teachers of color, submitting a report with data about the number of minority teachers employed, conducting studies about strategies for recruiting and retaining minority teachers, and identifying the need for teachers in specific underrepresented groups. Three states in this group (AR, KY, and TN) have policies

TABLE 1
State Policies Supporting Minority Teacher Recruitment, 2010

States with Minority Teacher Recruitment Policies	AL, AK, AR, CA, CT, DE, FL, GA, IL, IN, IA, KS, KY, MA, MN, MO, NJ, NM, NY, NC, OK, OR, RI, SC, TN, TX, VT, VA, WA, WV, WI 31 of 50 states currently implement minority teacher policies.
	Specific State Policy Strategies for Recruiting Minorities into Teaching
Financial Incentives	AL, AK, AR, CA, CT, FL, IL, IN, IA, KS, KY, MA, MN, MO, NM, NC, OK, OR, SC, TN, VT, VA, WA, WV, WI (25 states)
Government Mandates	AL, AR, CT, DE, GA, IA, KY, MA, MN, MO, NY, OK, OR, RI, SC, TN, TX (17 states)
Specific State-Supported Recruitment Programs	AK, CA, FL, IL, KY, MA, MN, NC, SC, WA (10 states)
Recruitment Center/Office	AK, AR, CT, NJ, OK, SC (6 states)
Alternative Certification	CT, VA (2 states)
States with No Policies Specific to Minority Teacher Recruitment	AZ, CO, HI, ID, LA, ME, MD, MI, MS, MT, NE, NV, NH, ND, OH, PA, SD, UT, WY (19 states)

requiring school districts to establish minority teacher recruitment goals that equal the percentage of minority students enrolled. Oregon passed legislation that sets forth as a state goal attaining proportional parity between minority teachers and students.

Ten states have policies that establish one or more specific program(s) to attract minorities into teaching. Those programs target for recruitment (1) pre-college students through teacher cadet initiatives (AK, IL, KY, NC, SC, WA), (2) two-year college students through articulation agreements that facilitate their transfer to four-year colleges (CA, FL, IL), and (3) paraprofessionals through career ladder programs that typically include formal partnerships between the employing school district and a college/university (AK, CA, FL, IL, MA, MN). The programs are run at the state level or at the local level by a community college, four-year college, or school district (in collaboration with an institution of higher education).

Six states have created a recruitment center or office (at a regional state office, university, or other agency involved in education). Such centers are responsible for providing personnel from school districts or universities with technical assistance in developing recruitment plans or offering professional development (in the form of workshops, meetings, or conferences) on issues related to the recruitment, placement, and retention of teachers of color. Another important function of these centers is to coordinate support services among agencies working to produce teachers of color. Finally, Connecticut and Virginia have approved programs of alternative routes to certification that explicitly mention targeting people of color in their codes.

Our analysis shows that states configure their minority teacher recruitment policies in different ways. Twelve states use a single policy strategy (DE, GA, IN, KS, NJ, NM, NY, RI, TX, VT, WV, WI). Nineteen other states have adopted a policy package of two to four strategies. Of these, South Carolina has the most comprehensive policy package (including a government mandate, a specific recruitment program, financial incentives, and a recruitment center). As suggested by the frequency of their use, financial incentives and mandates seem to be the foundation of state policy initiatives to diversify the teaching force. All but one of the 31 states with a minority teacher recruitment policy (NJ) use one or both of these strategies.

The lack of a recruitment policy specifically targeting minority teachers does not necessarily mean a state is not concerned with the racial/ethnic diversity of its teaching force. Certain policies, even when not explicitly mentioning people of color, seem to draw members of this group. For example, a large percentage of teachers of color (mostly career changers) enter the profession yearly through programs of alternative certification (Zumwalt & Craig, 2005), even in states like Texas, New Jersey, and Florida, where the policy does not explicitly target minorities. Similarly, policies that create career ladder programs for paraprofessionals draw people of color since they comprise a large proportion of this population (Haselkorn & Fideler, 1996). Furthermore, policies that aim to recruit teachers for hard-to-staff schools tend to attract large numbers of people of color since minorities are often drawn into teaching to improve the education of students of color, the population typically served in hard-to-staff schools (Kauchak & Barback, 2003; Rios & Montecinos, 1999; Su, 1997).

A Longitudinal Look at the Racial/Ethnic Makeup of the Teacher Workforce

Table 2 summarizes information about the racial/ethnic makeup of the teaching population in elementary and secondary public schools for selected years between 1987 and 2007. The

TABLE 2
Racial/Ethnic Makeup of the Teacher Population in Elementary and Secondary Public Schools, by Selected Year (1987–2007)

Racial/Ethnic Group	Year								Overall% Increase
	1987		1993		1999		2007		
	#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%	
Comparison—Minority and White Groups									
Minority	299,627	13.0	344,689	13.5	470,680	15.7	575,364	16.9	92.0
White	1,994,389	87.0	2,216,605	86.5	2,531,578	84.3	2,829,140	83.1	42.0
Comparison—Minority Groups									
Am. Ind./Alaska Native	23,998	1.0	20,064	0.8	25,869	0.9	17,023	0.5	–29.0
Asian/Pac. Is.	20,709	0.9	27,510	1.1	48,281	1.6	47,663	1.4	130.0
Black	187,836	8.2	188,371	7.4	227,505	7.6	238,316	7.0	27.0
Hispanic	67,084	2.9	108,744	4.2	169,025	5.6	241,721	7.1	260.0
Two or more races	—	—	—	—	—	—	30,641	0.9	—

Sources: Coopersmith, 2009; National Center for Educational Statistics (NCES), 1990, 1993, 1996, 1997, 2002b, 2003, 2005, 2006, 2009

information in the top panel (Comparison—Minority and White Groups) is encouraging for those who advocate for diversifying the teaching force. The number of minority teachers rose consistently over the years, from 299,627 in 1987 to 575,364 by 2007, a 92% increase (or gain of 275,737 minority teachers). During the same time span, the number of white teachers grew by 42%, reaching 2,829,140 in 2007 up from 1,994,389 20 years earlier (a gain of 834,751 teachers). Because the size of the minority teacher population was considerably smaller than that of the white teacher population in 1987 (the baseline year against which we are measuring growth), the much larger relative increase noted in the representation of teachers of color gives an inflated impression of their actual growth. To provide a more balanced understanding of the teacher diversity increase reported above, it is helpful to consider changes over time in the percentage of teachers of color within the overall teaching force. As shown in Table 2, the proportional representation of minority teachers rose from 13% in 1987 to 16.9% in 2007. Thus, the numerical growth of the minority teaching population over the 20-year period represents an expansion of only 3.9 percentage points within the teacher workforce.

Table 2 reveals that the largest increase in minority teachers occurred between 1993 and 1999. During that six-year period a total of 125,991 new minority teachers were added to the group. As a result, minorities picked up 2.2 percentage points in the overall teacher population (going from 13.5% to 15.7%). It is probably no coincidence that this gain occurred precisely when private foundations were making a sizeable investment in minority teacher recruitment programs, as discussed above. During the eight-year period that followed, the minority teacher population continued to expand, although at a slower pace. Specifically, between 1999 and 2007 another 104,684 minority teachers were hired and their representation in the overall teacher workforce rose to a high of 16.9% (a gain of 1.2 percentage points from six years earlier).

Inspection of the data presented in the bottom panel of Table 2 shows that patterns of participation in the teaching force varied widely between and among the different minority groups during

the 20 years studied. Most of the growth in teacher diversity noted during this time resulted from the substantial expansion of the Hispanic teacher population. The number of Hispanic teachers rose steadily from a low of 67,084 in 1987 to a high of 241,721 by 2007 (an addition of 100,727 teachers). As a result, the share of Hispanics in the overall teaching force rose appreciably (from 2.9% to 7.1%). By 2007, Hispanics had become the single largest minority teacher group, surpassing the number of black teachers. This surge of Hispanic teachers occurred just as the Hispanic student population in elementary and secondary schools increased dramatically, rising from about 10% of total enrollment in 1987 to over 21% in 2007. In fact, Hispanics superseded their black peers as the largest minority student group in 2000. It is likely that this increase in Hispanic student enrollments prompted minority teacher programs to target people of Hispanic backgrounds for recruitment, thereby helping to explain the group's steady growth over the years.

Growth among teachers of Asian/Pacific Island backgrounds also contributed meaningfully to the diversification of the teaching force, although to a much lesser extent than that of Hispanic teachers. The number of teachers in the Asian/Pacific Islander group increased by 130% between 1987 and 2007 (an overall gain of 26,954 teachers). Most of the gains this teacher group made took place between 1987 and 1999. Since then, the group has experienced a loss both in their number and in their share within the overall teacher workforce.

Patterns of participation in the teaching profession observed from 1987 through 2007 among black and American Indian/Alaska Native teachers are noteworthy. Even though the number of black teachers trended upwards over the years (showing an overall 27% increase), the group was proportionally less represented in 2007, when black teachers made up 7.0% of the overall teaching force, than in 1987, when they accounted for a higher 8.2%. Of all racial/ethnic minority groups, American Indian/Alaska Native teachers were the only one to experience a reduction in numbers over time, going from a high of 20,064 in 1987 to a low of 17,023 in 2007 (a 29% loss). While these data show the declining representation of teachers from these two minority groups, they do not provide explanations for that decline.

Our analysis thus far has shown that the teaching population expanded over the years, but that expansion was distributed differently across racial/ethnic groups. The representation of minority teachers—collectively—grew at a faster pace than that of their white counterparts, especially between 1993 and 1999. Among minority teacher groups, Hispanics experienced the most growth, followed at a distance by teachers of Asian/Pacific Island backgrounds. While the number of black teachers increased over time, their white, Hispanic, and Asian/Pacific Island peers outpaced them. As a result, black teachers lost ground in their proportional representation within the overall teaching population. Finally, American Indian/Alaska Native teachers experienced both a numerical and proportional loss over the years. While these findings shed light on important changes in the demographics of the teaching force over the 20-year period in question, a lack of attention to the rapid growth over the years in the minority student population gives an incomplete and distorted picture of the demographic reality of elementary and secondary public schools. To address this problem, we used the Teacher-Student Parity Index in the second part of our analysis.

Figure 1 presents a visual representation of Teacher-Student Parity Indices for white and minority groups from 1987 to 2007, for selected years. As shown, white teachers were over-represented each year, with indices above the critical 1.0 level (from 1.30 to 1.50). For example, the 2007 index of 1.50 signals that the proportion of white teachers employed that year was one-and-a-half times that of white students. By contrast, minority teachers were consistently under-represented over time, with Parity Indices well below the decisive 1.0 level (in the range

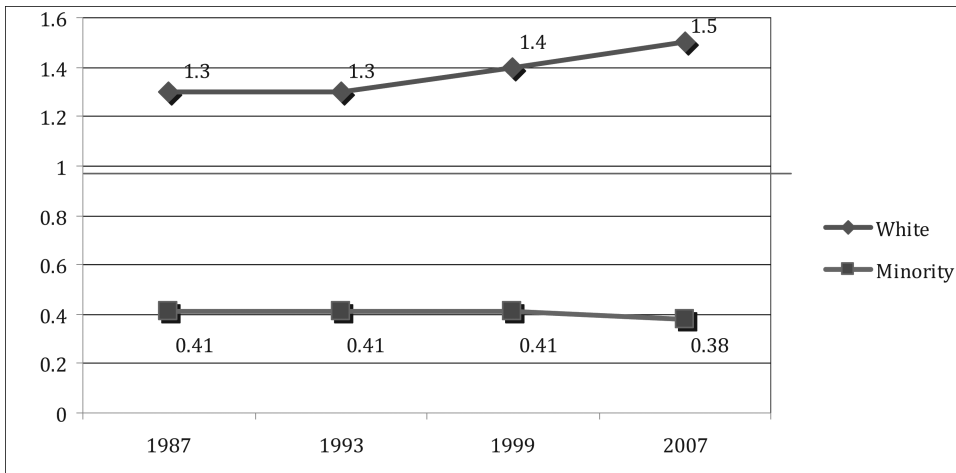


FIGURE 1 White and Minority Teacher-Student Parity Indices for Selected Years, 1987–2007; Sources: Coopersmith, 2009; NCES, 1990, 1993, 1996, 1997, 2002a, 2002b, 2003, 2005, 2006, 2009.

of 0.38 to 0.41). For instance, the .38 index shown in 2007 for minorities indicates that the public schools employed only 38% of the total number of minority teachers needed to match the proportion of minority students (i.e., to reach the critical 1.0 level). Minority teachers and students were in fact slightly closer to proportional parity in 1987 (with an index of 0.41) than they were in 2007 (with a lower index of 0.38).

To more fully grasp the magnitude of the underrepresentation of minority teachers nationwide, it is helpful to consider the numbers for a given year. In 2007, U.S. public schools employed a total of 3,404,504 teachers. To meet the parity goal, the schools would have needed 1,504,790 minority teachers (i.e., 44.2% of the teaching force to match the percentage of minority students enrolled in schools). However, schools employed only 575,364 teachers of color that year. Thus, an additional 929,428 minority teachers were needed to reach parity. Attaining proportional parity in the racial/ethnic makeup of the student and teacher populations appears to be an elusive goal. Nevertheless, parity provides a clear marker against which to measure progress made toward diversifying the teaching force (or lack thereof), and the Teacher-Student Parity Index is a tool that can help quantify such progress.

Beyond offering insight into the overall underrepresentation of minority teachers, the Index also facilitates comparisons of the relative representation of particular racial/ethnic groups. This point is illustrated in Figure 2, which displays Parity Indices for black and Hispanic teachers for selected years between 1987 and 2007. As the Figure shows, both groups were consistently underrepresented over the 20-year span, with indices noticeably below the 1.0 parity level. Black teachers were closest to parity with black students in 1987, when their index peaked at 0.50. Stated differently, the proportion of black teachers that year was half the proportion of black students. Since then, the Parity Index for Blacks has trended downward, reaching a low of .41 in 2007.

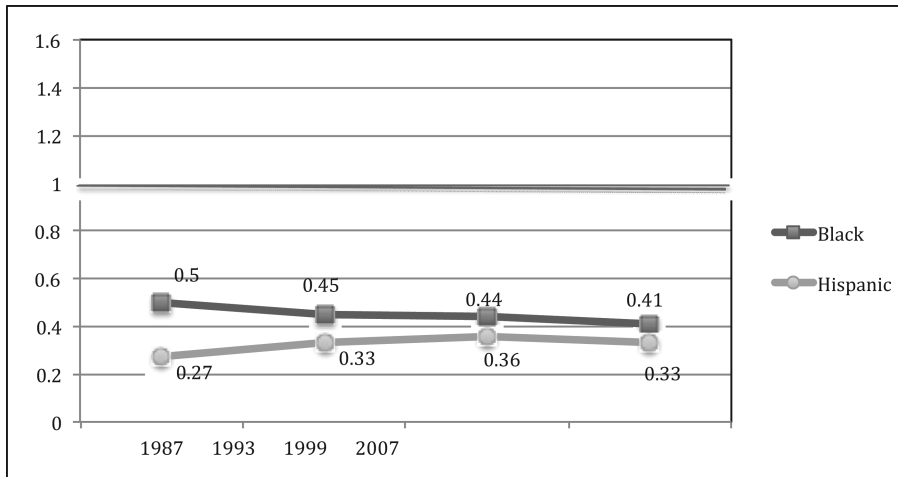


FIGURE 2 Black and Hispanic Teacher-Student Parity Indices for Selected Years, 1987–2007; Source: Coopersmith, 2009; NCES, 1990, 1993, 1996, 1997, 2002a, 2002b, 2003, 2005, 2006, 2009.

Figure 2 also shows that, despite the considerable expansion of the Hispanic teacher population discussed above, the group was even more underrepresented in the teaching force throughout this 20-year period than their black colleagues. Hispanic teachers were closest to proportional parity with Hispanic students in 1999 (with an index of 0.36). Still, to reach parity with Hispanic students that year, the schools would have needed nearly three times the number of Hispanic teachers employed. By 2007, the index had taken a downward turn, dropping to 0.33 (equal to that of 1993). Despite the unprecedented growth in the number of Hispanic teachers, they remained well below parity over time. Without that growth, the cultural mismatch experienced by Hispanic students in public schools would have been even greater.

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

In this study, we set out to identify minority teacher recruitment policies and programs developed over the past two decades, examine trends in the representation of minority teachers during this time, and determine the extent to which—if at all—the racial/ethnic gap between students and their teachers was reduced over those years. Our analysis showed that, by 2010, a total of 31 states had adopted minority teacher recruitment policies. Those policies provide financial incentives aimed at teacher diversification; mandate selected agencies to carry out particular actions in support of teacher workforce diversity (e.g., prepare recruitment plans for teachers of color, report data regarding the racial-ethnic diversity of the teaching force); promote specific recruitment programs (e.g., early outreach, career ladder options for paraprofessionals, community college-university agreements); create centers or offices that direct various efforts related to the recruitment, placement, and retention of teachers of color; and encourage the recruitment of

teachers of color through alternate route programs. Without question, policymakers took important steps during the past two decades to expand the supply of teachers of color. Recognizing the benefits of having teachers from minority groups, they helped develop an infrastructure to support minority teacher recruitment. Also important, their actions created some reliable sources of funding for minority teacher recruitment efforts.

Regarding the trend in minority teacher representation, we found that between 1987 and 2007, the number of minority teachers nearly doubled, although this growth translated into a gain of less than four percentage points in the teaching force. Much of this expansion is attributed to growth in the Hispanic teacher population. However, when we factored into the analysis the growth in the population of students of color (by using the Teacher-Student Parity Index), a different picture emerged. In this analysis, minority teachers were even more underrepresented in 2007 than they had been two decades earlier. Such underrepresentation was especially evident among black teachers who, as a group, experienced a loss in their share of the overall teaching force despite a 27% growth in their numbers over time. Thus, black teachers benefitted less than Hispanic or Asian teacher groups from the expansion of the teaching force experienced during the 20-year period in question.

Our findings suggest that, while helpful, policies and programs aimed at diversifying the teaching force could not keep pace with the striking growth of the minority student population. The data for Hispanic teachers, in particular, support this interpretation. Despite a sizable increase in their numbers over time, no appreciable change was evident in the Hispanic Teacher-Student Parity Index between 1987 and 2007. Thus, efforts to recruit candidates of color into teaching must be intensified if we are to have any hope of making serious progress toward proportional parity of minority teachers and minority students.

At the same time, strategies also are needed to retain teachers of color once they are in the classroom. In a recent analysis of data collected by NCES through the 2004–05 Teacher Follow-Up Study, Ingersoll and May (2011) found higher attrition rates for teachers of color than for white teachers. Their data show a loss of approximately 9.3% of all minority teachers employed in 2003–04. A number of factors may play a role in this high attrition rate, including the fact that minority teachers tend to be overrepresented in high-poverty, high-minority, urban schools (Villegas & Geist, 2008) where the conditions for teaching and learning are often very challenging for all involved. Whatever its cause, such a high attrition rate undermines efforts to recruit minority candidates into teaching. Thus, policymakers and educational leaders must attend to retaining teachers of color while also intensifying efforts to recruit them into teaching in the first place.

This study makes two important contributions. First, it provides insight into the complexity involved in understanding the racial/ethnic diversity of the teaching force. Our analysis has shown that different conclusions are logically derived from considering different metrics—the number of teachers of different racial/ethnic groups, the proportion of the total teaching force represented by teachers of different racial/ethnic groups, and the comparison of the proportions of teachers of different racial/ethnic groups and the proportions of students of those groups. This study has shown that multiple lenses are required to gain a full picture of the results of efforts to increase teacher diversity. The second contribution of this work is the introduction of a concrete metric—the Teacher-Student Parity Index—for analyzing the racial/ethnic makeup of the teaching force relative to the racial/ethnic makeup of the student population. The metric uses an index of 1.0 (perfect parity) as an anchor against which to determine progress or regress in

efforts to diversify the teacher workforce. The Index can be used to determine the racial/ethnic parity of teachers and students in the U.S. as a whole or of smaller populations of teachers and students (e.g., of states, regions, or school districts). We believe these two aspects of our study can give more substance to the larger conversation about the need for more teachers of diverse racial/ethnic backgrounds.

Several recommendations are suggested by the findings reported in this article. First, if as a society we see merit in reducing the racial/ethnic disparity and accompanying cultural gap between students of color and their teachers, renewed and focused attention must be given to minority teacher recruitment policies and programs. According to statistical projections, the population of students of color is expected to grow substantially in the years ahead. Based on conservative estimates, so-called “minorities” will become the numerical majority of the student population in public elementary and secondary schools by the year 2030 (U.S. Census Bureau, 2008). Our data suggest, however, that the teaching force is not likely to become much more representative of the diversity in the student population in the future without more aggressive intervention. Given the potential of teachers of color to help reduce the racial/ethnic achievement gap, the federal government should adopt a policy that supports efforts to diversify the teaching force. Recently, the Obama Administration announced that increasing the number of effective minority teachers, especially in low-performing schools, is one of its key education priorities (U.S. Department of Education, 2010). To this end, the administration has requested funding for Hawkins Centers of Excellence as part of its 2012 Higher Education Budget. If approved, the money would go to minority-serving institutions to increase the pool of effective teachers of color. It is unclear at the time this article is being written whether this request will survive the contentious budget approval process.

Second, states—especially those that serve large numbers of students of color—should regularly monitor the demographics of their teaching forces. Such monitoring ought to include gathering data on the representation of teachers of color not only within the total teaching population but also relative to the representation of students of color in the schools. That is, states should calculate the Teacher-Student Parity Index for, at least, the major racial/ethnic groups served. The results would yield important insight into the overall cultural disparity between students of color and their teachers, allowing policymakers to continuously adjust minority teacher recruitment policies with the goal of increasing the diversity of perspectives and experiences within the teaching profession.

Third, the proportional loss of black teachers noted over the years (despite their numerical gain) demands urgent attention. Devising an appropriate policy response to the relative loss of black teachers requires a clear understanding of the reasons for the problem. Is the decline in the proportion of black teachers within the overall teaching force due to higher rates of retirement among them? Unlike Hispanics and Asians/Pacific Islanders, who have come to teaching in notable numbers only recently, black Americans have a long history of participating in the teacher workforce. Those who entered teaching in the 1970s and early 1980s would have been eligible for retirement by the turn of the century. It is possible, then, that the retirement rate is higher for black teachers than for Hispanic and Asian/Pacific Island counterparts. Or are black teachers leaving the profession for reasons other than retirement? If so, what are those reasons? If the problem is one of recruitment rather than attrition, then what are the current barriers to recruiting black teachers? Research that can help answer these and other relevant questions has yet to be conducted.

Finally, research regarding the impact of different minority recruitment policies and programs on the racial/ethnic diversity of the teaching force is also largely nonexistent. Policy and programmatic strategies that aim to increase teacher diversity are severely hampered by a current lack of understanding of their effectiveness. To guide decisions about which of these strategies warrant the allocation of financial and other resources, policymakers and educators need evidence from carefully designed studies.

Based on our review of the evidence, we believe that increasing the racial/ethnic diversity of the teaching force has the potential to improve the school experience and educational outcomes of students of color. It would be unrealistic, however, to think that teachers of color could single-handedly eradicate the insidious racial/ethnic achievement gap that has persisted historically. More to the point, it would be unfair, if not unethical, to place full responsibility for successfully educating students of color on teachers of color. Efforts to diversify the teaching force should be seen as only one component—albeit a critically important one—in a broad and comprehensive policy designed to ensure that children who historically have been marginalized in schools receive the high quality education they deserve.

NOTE

1. Throughout this article, the term “students of color” is used interchangeably with students of racial and ethnic minority groups or simply minority students. Included in this broad category are African Americans, Hispanics, American Indians, Alaskan Natives, Asians, and Pacific Islanders. At times, African Americans are referred to as Blacks and Hispanics are referred to as Latinos. The same applies to the term “teachers of color.”

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Ana Maria Villegas is a professor in the Department of Curriculum and Teaching and Director of the Teacher Education and Teacher Development doctoral program at Montclair State University. Her research interests focus on culturally responsive teaching, teacher diversity, and teacher education policy.

Kathryn Strom is a doctoral student in the Teacher Education and Teacher Development doctoral program at Montclair State University. She specializes in the preparation of teachers for urban schools, supports and barriers to teacher learning during the novice phase, and social justice and equity in teacher education.

Tamara Lucas is a professor in the Educational Foundations Department and associate dean in the College of Education and Human Services at Montclair State University. Her research addresses issues related to the preparation of culturally and linguistically responsive teachers.