

# Broken Promises: Teacher Diversity in Boston Public Schools<sup>1</sup>

Boston Public Schools (BPS) has taken insufficient steps to ensure teacher diversity in its schools. As this paper outlines, a racially diverse teaching force has a positive impact on all students, particularly on students of color. Despite these benefits, BPS' efforts to create and maintain a diverse teaching corps have been sorely lacking.

BPS is well aware of the academic and social benefits of teacher diversity—and indeed is under a longstanding court order that requires such diversity. The district's 2016 *Opportunity and Achievement Gap Policy* aims to recruit and retain “employees at all levels who reflect the demographics of the District’s students.”<sup>2</sup> However, Boston’s teaching corps is no more diverse than it was 10 years ago, with minimal increases in the presence of Latino and Asian educators, and *continued decline* in the presence of Black teachers. Given the findings below, it is high time that Boston—with a student body that is 86% Black, Latino, and Asian—align its values with its practices.

There is nothing magical behind the positive impact that teachers of color have on students of color. The root of it is in our troubled history with race, and the shared cultural norms that developed in part through decades of enforced racial and ethnic segregation in our neighborhoods and schools. All students benefit from exposure to teachers of all races. And all teachers need support and professional development, particularly in developing culturally responsive practices for the multi-racial classrooms they teach.<sup>3</sup> By no means are our concerns regarding teacher diversity limited to Boston Public Schools. Teacher diversity is lacking in many of the charter schools that serve Boston students and throughout much of the Commonwealth. As BPS is the largest school district in Massachusetts and under a desegregation order to improve the racial diversity of its teaching corps, it is the focus of this paper. It is time that Boston make its policies a reality, for the betterment of all of our youth.

## BACKGROUND

**Boston’s teaching corps is no more diverse than it was 10 years ago.** Despite a public push to increase teacher diversity, Boston’s teaching corps looks very much like it did 10 years ago. In the last decade, the presence of Asian educators—the least represented group of teachers in BPS—has increased by a mere percentage point (from 5.2% to 6.2%).<sup>4</sup> The presence of Latino teachers has

<sup>1</sup> The Lawyers’ Committee would like to thank Aimee Furdyna, Esq., a graduate student at the Harvard Graduate School of Education, for surveying the research on the positive impacts of a racially diverse teaching corps and drafting the *Research on Teacher Diversity* section of this paper.

<sup>2</sup> BOSTON PUBLIC SCHOOLS, 2016 POLICY TO ELIMINATE OPPORTUNITY & ACHIEVEMENT GAPS FOR STUDENTS OF COLOR, ENGLISH LANGUAGE LEARNERS, STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES, AND STUDENTS OF LOW SOCIO-ECONOMIC STATUS 3 (2016), *available at* <https://drive.google.com/drive/folders/OBxO07TXOPIYzSVFfSHIsTW9PbVU>.

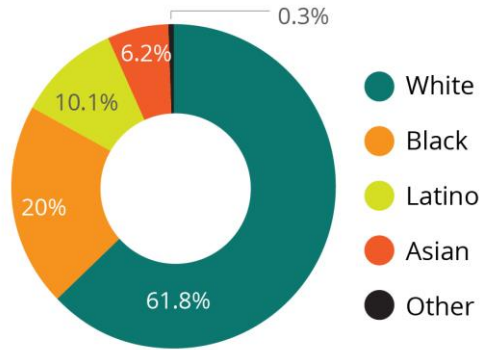
<sup>3</sup> See CADY LANDA, GASTÓN INST. FOR LATINO COMMUNITY DEV. & PUB. POL’Y PUBLICATIONS, CULTURAL PROFICIENCY IN EDUCATION: A REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE FOCUSED ON TEACHERS, SCHOOL LEADERS, AND SCHOOLS (2011).

<sup>4</sup> The percentages used in this comparison come from two different data sets: data BPS provided to the Boston City Council in response to specific questions about teacher diversity, and data that BPS provided to the Massachusetts



increased by only about a half point (from 9.4% to 10.1%).<sup>5</sup> The only significant change in the presence of teachers of color is the *continuing decline* in the presence of Black teachers, down from roughly 24% to 20%.<sup>6</sup>

**BPS Teacher Diversity Data** (Provided to Boston City Council)



School Year:	White	Black	Latino	Asian	Other
16-17	61.8%	20.0%	10.1%	6.2%	0.3%
15-16	61.7%	20.5%	10.0%	6.2%	0.4%
14-15	61.8%	20.6%	10.1%	6.0%	0.4%
13-14	62.2%	21.3%	9.9%	6.0%	0.4%
12-13	61.4%	22.4%	10.0%	5.7%	0.4%
11-12	61.5%	22.4%	10.1%	5.6%	0.4%

**BPS Teacher Diversity Data** (Provided to MA Department of Elementary and Secondary Education)

School Year:	White	Black	Latino	Asian	Other
07 - 08	61.20%	23.90%	9.40%	5.20%	0.20%

Department of Elementary and Secondary Education in response to its staffing surveys, the latter of which is missing data from the 2015-16 school year. MASS. DEP'T. OF ELEMENTARY & SECONDARY EDUCATION, 2016-17 RACE/ETHNICITY AND GENDER STAFFING REPORT BY FULL-TIME EQUIVALENTS (2018), *available at* [http://profiles.doe.mass.edu/state\\_report/teacherbyracegender.aspx](http://profiles.doe.mass.edu/state_report/teacherbyracegender.aspx).

<sup>5</sup> *Id.*

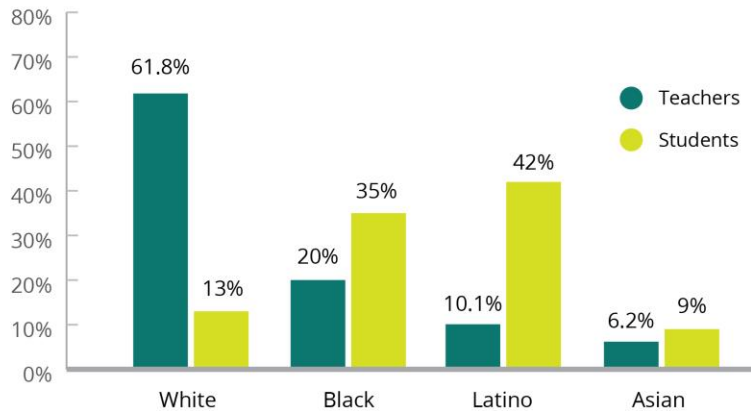
<sup>6</sup> *Id.*



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The gaps between the presence of teachers and students of the same race is disconcerting, particularly for Latinos, who comprise *4 times more* of BPS' student body than they do of its teaching corps.



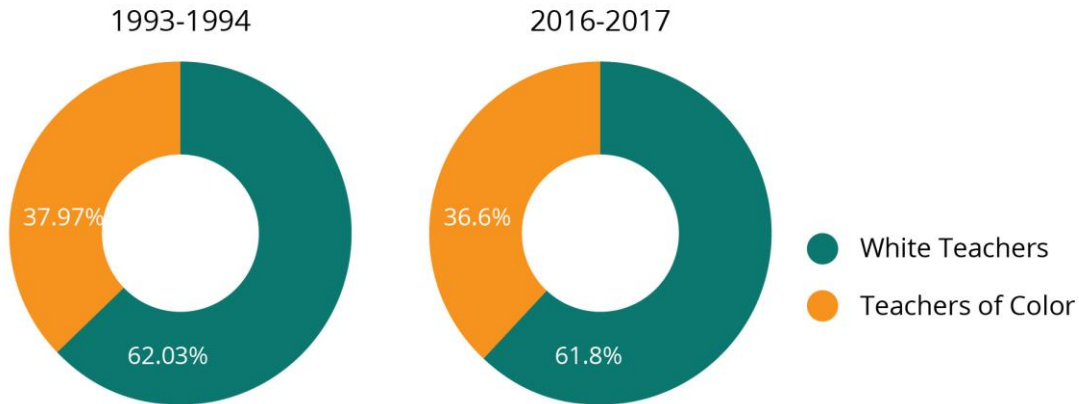
2016-17	BPS Teachers	BPS Students
White	61.8%	13%
Black	20.0%	35%
Latino	10.1%	42%
Asian	6.2%	9%
Other	0.3%	<1%
Non-Specified	1.6%	N/A

And while the presence of Black teachers may come closer to reflecting the percentage of same-race students in BPS, the diminished ranks of Black teachers is particularly troubling as the district falls further from complying with the diversity requirements of its desegregation order—which remain legally binding.<sup>7</sup> While BPS in the late 1990s and early 2000s appeared close to meeting the desegregation order’s requirements, it subsequently abandoned a number of practices that would have allowed it to maintain such diversity and fulfill its duty to desegregate its teaching force.

	Black Teachers
Desegregation Order Requirement	25%
2016-2017 Presence	20.0%

<sup>7</sup> Boston was ordered to desegregate its schools by federal court in 1974. *Morgan v. Hennigan*, 379 F. Supp. 410 (D. Mass. 1974). The Court required the district to increase the diversity of its teaching force to 25% Black and 10% “other minority” and maintain such numbers until the superintendent could certify that a 3% reduction in the teaching force would yield substantially the same percentages of teachers of color. *Morgan v. Burke*, 926 F.2d 86, 91 (1st. Cir. 1991). The superintendent was never able to certify this, despite BPS reaching the 25% threshold in the 1990s and early 2000s. As noted above, BPS has since slipped further out of compliance with the consent decree.

Indeed, despite some fluctuation among teachers of color, the presence of White and non-White teachers has hardly changed since the final judgment in Boston’s desegregation case *24 years ago*.



Moreover, as a large cohort of BPS’ current teachers of color were hired early in the district’s efforts to comply with the desegregation order, they are now of retirement age, and these numbers will only worsen with their retirement.

The desegregation order is not the only legal requirement BPS must comply with that relates to teacher diversity. BPS is under an agreement with the U.S. Department of Justice to improve its services to English Language Learners (ELLs), including actively recruiting “bilingual staff trained in working with ELLs, and staff with fluency in one or more of the languages of the District’s ELLs for relevant teaching and administrative positions, and in particular for positions as SPED teachers and aides.”<sup>8</sup> Increasing the presence of teachers with greater language diversity tends to increase the presence of teachers of color, and doing so would better position Boston to offer bilingual education under a new state law.<sup>9</sup> Finally, BPS has a duty under the Massachusetts Constitution to provide a quality education for Boston’s students. As the next section makes clear, increasing teacher diversity can help BPS meet all of these legal requirements.

*Boston can do better. It is required by law to do so.*

## RESEARCH ON TEACHER DIVERSITY

**Having teachers of the same race or ethnicity improves the academic performance of students of color.** Students with a teacher who shares their race are more likely to report that their teacher pushes them to work harder, not to give up, and expects nothing but their full effort in the classroom.<sup>10</sup> This leads to higher test scores, fewer students dropping out of school, and increased

<sup>8</sup> SUCCESSOR AGREEMENT BETWEEN THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA AND BOSTON PUBLIC SCHOOLS 21 (2012).

<sup>9</sup> Act of Nov. 22, 2017, 2017 Mass. Legis. Serv. ch. 138 (West) (providing language opportunity for our kids). There is significant overlap between the benefits of language diversity and racial diversity in the teaching corps, especially for the language minority students within any broader racial group. Their needs must be considered and met in any effort to improve teacher diversity.

<sup>10</sup> ANNA J. EGALITE & BRIAN KISIDA, THE BROOKINGS INSTITUTION, THE MANY WAYS TEACHER DIVERSITY MAY BENEFIT STUDENTS (2016).



graduation rates for students of color.<sup>11</sup> For example, studies show that having Latino teachers reduces the number of Latino students assigned to special education and increases their enrollment in gifted and talented programs, and having Black teachers increases Black students' enrollment in advanced math classes.<sup>12</sup>

It does not take long for these benefits to show—students show academic improvement after even just one year with a same-race teacher.<sup>13</sup> Students also report feeling generally happier, more cared for, and more engaged in the classroom, experiencing a strong interpersonal connection with their teachers.<sup>14</sup> This type of school connectedness—attachment to teachers and school—is a key factor in school completion.<sup>15</sup> Research shows that increasing the representation of teachers of color in a school increases feelings of school connectedness for students of the same race.<sup>16</sup>

**Teachers of color are role models.** Role models are important for students' cognitive development, and children are more likely to emulate a role model when they have a shared identity such as race.<sup>17</sup> Teachers of color are also more likely to have similar backgrounds and experiences as students of color, which is a valuable resource for teaching and learning.<sup>18</sup> And having a teacher who is demographically similar may cause students to raise their expectations of themselves and increase their own motivation.<sup>19</sup>

**Teachers of color are more likely to manage their classrooms in ways that do not exclude students from the classroom.** Biases may contribute to the disproportionately high rate of school disciplinary actions against students of color.<sup>20</sup> Black students receive more negative assessments of their behavior from White teachers than from Black teachers,<sup>21</sup> and are more likely to face disciplinary actions than other students.<sup>22</sup> Research suggests that this is the result of cultural mismatch between students and teachers of different demographic backgrounds, negative beliefs and expectations for behavior, and overreliance on negative stereotypes.<sup>23</sup> This increased level of discipline may also

<sup>11</sup> Danielle N. Atkins, Angela R. Fertig & Vicky M. Wilkins, *Connectedness and Expectations: How Minority Teachers Can Improve Educational Outcomes for Minority Students*, 16 PUB. MGMT. REV. 503 (2014) (internal citations omitted); ALBERT SHANKER INSTITUTE, *THE STATE OF TEACHER DIVERSITY IN AMERICAN EDUCATION* (2015) (internal citations omitted).

<sup>12</sup> ALBERT SHANKER INSTITUTE, *supra* note 12.

<sup>13</sup> Anna J. Egalite, Brian Kisida & Marcus A. Winters, *Representation in the Classroom: The Effect of Own-Race Teachers on Student Achievement*, 45 ECON. EDUC. REV. 44, 45 (2015).

<sup>14</sup> EGALITE & KISIDA, *supra* note 10.

<sup>15</sup> Atkins et al., *supra* note 11.

<sup>16</sup> *Id.*

<sup>17</sup> Atkins et al., *supra* note 11, at 505–506.

<sup>18</sup> RICHARD M. INGERSOLL & HENRY MAY, CONSORTIUM FOR POLICY RESEARCH IN EDUCATION, RECRUITMENT, RETENTION AND THE MINORITY TEACHER SHORTAGE (CPRE Research Report #RR-69 2011).

<sup>19</sup> Egalite, Kisida, & Winters, *supra* note 13.

<sup>20</sup> Dan Goldhaber, Roddy Theobald, & Christopher Tien, *The Theoretical and Empirical Arguments for Diversifying the Teacher Workforce: A Review of the Evidence* (Center for Educ. Data & Res., Working Paper No. 9, 2015); Anne Gregory, Russel J. Skiba, & Pedro A. Noguera, *The Achievement Gap and the Discipline Gap: Two Sides of the Same Coin?*, 39 EDUC. RESEARCHER 59 (2010).

<sup>21</sup> Littisha A. Bates & Jennifer E. Glick, *Does it Matter if Teachers and Schools Match the Student? Racial and Ethnic Disparities in Problem Behaviors*, 42 SOC. SCI. RES. 1180 (2013); see also Thomas S. Dee, *A Teacher Like Me: Does Race, Ethnicity, or Gender Matter?*, 95 AM. ECON. REV. 158 (2005).

<sup>22</sup> Goldhaber et al., *supra* note 20.

<sup>23</sup> Gregory et al., *supra* note 20.



contribute to the longstanding achievement gap for students of color.<sup>24</sup> We also believe that teachers of the same culture as their students are more likely to pick up on the cues of students who are struggling academically and/or emotionally but not externalizing their struggles in ways that others would expect.<sup>25</sup>

**It is not just good for students of color—it is good for all students to have teachers of color.** Having a diverse teacher workforce reduces implicit bias and provides role models for all students.<sup>26</sup> It builds social trust and creates a wider sense of community for White students, and it better prepares students for the increasingly diverse world we live in.<sup>27</sup>

## SOLUTIONS HAVE LONG BEEN AVAILABLE BUT IGNORED

Improving teacher diversity requires not only improving the recruitment and hiring of teachers of color, but improving their retention as well. Many of the solutions highlighted below have been raised with BPS over the last 10 years—indeed, some were successfully implemented in decades past - but many have been abandoned or left underfunded or untried. Boston has the power to change this, and is required by law to do so.

### Recruitment

**Strengthen BPS' recruitment of teachers of color.** Today, BPS lacks the infrastructure to meaningfully increase teacher diversity, especially in New England, and especially in a district that serves 57,000 students. BPS once maintained a staff of 3 recruiters, which helped to bring the district as close as it has come to complying with its desegregation order. BPS needs to hire more recruiting staff to conduct outreach *and ensure that recruits actually get interviews*. "Outreach" does not simply mean traveling to out-of-state teachers colleges to recruit teachers with no connection to Boston. While some outreach must be conducted outside both Boston and Massachusetts, there is much BPS can do from within to contact and screen BPS paraprofessionals and substitute teachers who want to become provisional teachers.

**Expand BPS' current pipeline programs.** BPS has established several promising teacher pipeline programs for BPS high school students, midcareer professionals, and paraprofessional educators, but these programs yield a small number of teachers. As the number of applicants for these programs well exceeds the number of seats available in them, these programs should be expanded to provide a steadily growing pool of well-prepared teaching candidates.

### Hiring

**Strengthen district oversight of—and accountability for—the teacher hiring process.** Under the *Opportunity and Achievement Gap Policy*, BPS is focusing its efforts to improve teacher

<sup>24</sup> *Id.* This is never to say that teachers of color should be relegated into disciplinary roles for students who share their race. See Travis Bristol & Marcelle Mentor, *Policing and Teaching: The Positioning of Black Male Teachers As Agents in the Universal Carceral Apparatus*, URB. REV. (2018), available at <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11256-018-0447-z>.

<sup>25</sup> See generally Ana Maria Villegas & Jacqueline J. Irvine, *Diversifying the Teaching Force: An Examination of Major Arguments*, 42 URB. REV. 175 (2010) (discussing the importance of culturally relevant teaching to help teachers identify and engage with students who might otherwise be disengaged from school).

<sup>26</sup> ALBERT SHANKER INSTITUTE, *supra* note 11.

<sup>27</sup> ULRICH BOSER, CENTER FOR AMERICAN PROGRESS, *TEACHER DIVERSITY REVISITED: A NEW STATE-BY-STATE ANALYSIS* (2014).





diversity in the schools whose teaching corps are the least reflective of their student body. These schools receive some coaching and support from the district in addressing their diversity gaps. To meaningfully increase teacher diversity, BPS will need to hold each school accountable for continuing diversity gaps. BPS must also play a more central role in approving hires, as its Office of Equity did in past decades.

### *Retention*

Retaining a diverse teaching force will require vigilance in considering and addressing the impact that any significant district- or school-level decision (e.g., school closures, school turnaround efforts, etc.) will have on its teaching corps. That said, research conducted in Boston Public Schools suggests that teachers of color may be more intent on remaining in their schools when there is a meaningful presence of same-race teachers there with them.<sup>28</sup> Successful recruitment and retention of teachers of color may well encourage the teachers' interest in remaining.

***Eliminate racial bias from the teacher evaluation process.*** It is well-known that subjective evaluation processes can allow racial bias to flourish. When BPS implemented its current teacher evaluation process in 2013, Black and Latino teachers, and older teachers, received disproportionately negative reviews. The Boston Teachers Union argued that the new process allowed for too much discretion and subjectivity from school administrators, and BPS has publicly stated its commitment to addressing bias in the evaluation system. It must follow through. To that end, BPS must ***redouble training for building administrators on diversity and implicit bias***, both to eliminate bias from teacher evaluations and to foster welcoming, diverse working and learning environments.<sup>29</sup>

***Offer "letters of reasonable assurance" and "letters of commitment" to proficient provisional teachers of color to inspire greater job security.*** Boston's newly hired teachers are hired with "provisional" status and awarded "permanent" status after three years and good evaluations. "Provisionals" have the least seniority, and their positions are most at risk for being cut during the BPS budget process. To retain provisional teachers, schools can offer them "letters of reasonable assurance" that their jobs will remain into the next school year. However, these letters are underutilized for teachers of color, even those with strong evaluations. Given the demand for teachers of color across New England, BPS should use these letters to lend job security to teachers of color before they need to look elsewhere.

Similarly, the district used to offer provisional teachers "letters of commitment" for a position at another school in the district when schools could not offer them letters of reasonable assurance. BPS abandoned this practice when it changed its hiring policies to reflect "mutual consent hiring," granting more autonomy to school leaders in the process. Sadly, this change was made with little consideration of the potential impact on the district's desegregation order. BPS should restore the use of "letters of commitment" and prioritize their use for teachers of color, particularly those with strong evaluations. At the very least, it should modify its "mutual consent" approach in ways that fully ensure teacher diversity.

<sup>28</sup> Travis J. Bristol, *To Be Alone or in a Group: An Exploration Into How the School-Based Experiences Differ for Black Male Teachers Across One Urban School District*, 53 URB. EDUC. 334 (2018); see also XIOMARA PADAMSEE & BECKY CROWE, UNREALIZED IMPACT: THE CASE FOR DIVERSITY, EQUITY, AND INCLUSION (2017).

<sup>29</sup> See Bristol, *supra* note 28.



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**Prioritize placement of "excessed" teachers of color.** School budget shortfalls continue to result in cuts to permanent teachers' positions. BPS should ensure that excessed teachers of color are placed into budgeted, long-term positions where they can be most effective and their skill sets can best be utilized.

**Strengthen professional development and mentoring for all teachers.** Boston has cut back on the mentoring it provides newer teachers. While BPS used to assign full-time former classroom teachers to actively mentor, it now relies on current teachers to mentor newer teachers part-time in their schools. This change is actually a return itself to a prior approach, then deemed ineffective by the district. More mentoring benefits all newer teachers, but, given the high attrition rates for newer teachers of color, more mentoring could make a real difference in retention. In addition, BPS needs to substantially expand preparation for Massachusetts' teacher certification exam as well as access to programs that assist teachers in acquiring the second and third licenses now necessary for growing numbers of teaching positions.

**Conduct exit interviews with departing teachers—particularly teachers of color—to identify their reasons for leaving the district, then identify and address the common reasons.** Boston needs to better understand why so many teachers of color leave the district. Asking common questions of departing teachers can help the district find and address common answers. Having a neutral questioner, perhaps a consultant external to the district, may yield more honest answers than would an interview with building administrator or central office staff. BPS should also survey all educators—whether they are staying in or departing the district—to report on their school based experiences related to race, gender, and sexuality.<sup>30</sup>

## CONCLUSION

We sincerely hope that we share both the goal of improving teacher diversity with BPS as well as the reasons behind it. It is time to lend this goal the urgency it deserves and to do right, not only by our laws, but by all of our children.

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<sup>30</sup> *Id.*



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