

# Growing the Next Generation

A Program Encourages Students of Color to Become Teachers



BY BETTYE PERKINS

**I**n a country with an increasing population of nonwhite students, there are far too few teachers of color. The numbers are particularly distressing when it comes to finding male teachers of color, who are essential role models for black boys. As a result, black and Latino children sitting in classrooms with white teachers, day after day and year after year, can't help but get the message: teaching, and the educational attainment and authority it reflects, is not for people like them.

More than 20 years ago, the lack of diversity in the teaching force prompted me to start Today's Students Tomorrow's Teachers (TSTT), an organization that taps diverse and economically challenged students to consider teaching as a profession.\*

To find future teachers of color, TSTT relies on teachers and

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*Bettye Perkins is the founder and chief executive officer of Today's Students Tomorrow's Teachers. A former middle school teacher, she was an executive with IBM for 20 years.*

guidance counselors who know their students best and, as a result, are TSTT's primary recruiters. Our program then helps to nurture and mentor these students every step of the way, from high school through college. There are no shortcuts; this work requires extensive amounts of time and effort. But the payoff is great.

TSTT currently enrolls nearly 300 high school students who come from more than 45 high schools in Connecticut, Massachusetts, New York, and Virginia. The program also enrolls more than 300 college students who attend 21 partner institutions.

Our students are ethnically and socioeconomically diverse: approximately 47 percent are African American, 35 percent are Hispanic or Latino, 13 percent are white, and 3 percent are Asian/Pacific Islander. Twenty-three percent are male, and 75 percent

**The above photo and the ones that follow show students participating in various Today's Students Tomorrow's Teachers events.**

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\*To learn more about TSTT, visit [www.tstt.org](http://www.tstt.org).

are the first in their families to attend college. Since its inception, TSTT has succeeded in placing more than 150 men and women of color in classrooms across the country.

## Humble Beginnings

I never imagined I would develop a program that would have such a profound impact on children of color, children like me and my brothers and sisters.

I grew up in acute poverty in the small, segregated town of Gadsden, South Carolina. My father died when I was 5, leaving my mother to raise six children alone. My mom worked tirelessly as a housecleaner and a nanny, the few occupations available to her. She even pressed soldiers' uniforms at a nearby army base.

Since my mother worked long hours, we children spent a lot of extra time at school, where teachers looked after us. One teacher, Mrs. Anderson, took me under her wing. She encouraged me to join the Future Educators of America club. Thanks to her, I found my calling. The desire to be a teacher, along with her encouragement, motivated me to graduate from high school and college.

After I earned my teaching certification in 1970, I felt I was on my way. I was keenly aware that I had far surpassed my parents' educational level, since I was the first in my family to graduate from college.

I took a job teaching middle school, about an hour from where I grew up. Life was quiet but good. While grading papers one Sunday afternoon, I was listening to the radio. James Clyburn, then the state's human affairs commissioner and now a Democratic congressman from South Carolina, came on the air. He talked about how IBM was looking for qualified applicants. I had never heard of IBM, but I was intrigued by Clyburn's message; he urged young black men and women to seek opportunities that he and others were working hard to make possible.

Soon after that radio address, I called IBM and landed an interview. I was offered a job on the spot—as a secretary. I quickly turned that down, seeing it as a step below teaching. But a few days later IBM called me back. Would I consider another position? One where I would work with customers along with the sales and marketing staff? That sounded interesting. I was young, curious, and thought I had nothing to lose. I signed on in 1975 in Columbia, South Carolina, 20 miles from Gadsden.

Ultimately, James Clyburn changed the trajectory of my life. Even though my new path led me away from education, the attention I had received from my teachers prepared me for other job opportunities.

IBM was fascinating. While working in Columbia, and in Atlanta, Georgia, I held jobs in marketing, management, and personnel. I also worked as a systems analyst. After numerous promotions, I was eventually transferred to the national headquarters in Armonk, New York—a long way from my hometown.

In Armonk, I was asked to lead a management and executive training program where I designed courses taken by more than 60,000 managers and other leaders, including school superintendents. I was teaching again! I remembered the sense of fulfillment I had felt as an English teacher so many years ago.

At this point (1993), I had spent nearly 20 years at IBM. I realized I was restless and ready for a new purpose. After meeting the superintendents in the training program, I thought, "I could do that!" By becoming a superintendent, I could unite my early train-

ing and love of education with my management experience. The first step would be to obtain a principal's license. So I enrolled in a program at Pace University.

One of my professors at Pace introduced me to Robert Roelle, the superintendent in Ossining, New York, a small community in Westchester County. He invited me to complete my required internship in his district, where the enrollment was about 23 percent black at the time yet the faculty included very few black teachers. He asked me to focus on minority teacher recruitment.

During my internship, I researched the issue and came up with a few short- and long-term strategies, including starting a future teachers club, so the district could "grow its own" minority teachers. After hearing this idea, Roelle asked me to make a presentation to neighboring superintendents. They were intrigued.

Shortly after my presentation, I left IBM and worked as a consultant to start future teachers clubs in two high schools in northern Westchester. I recruited students of color and gave them experience tutoring other children, with their own classroom teachers as mentors. I soon saw that the students I recruited felt

If I could light a spark in high school and nurture that flame through college, I knew I could produce excellent teachers who would stick with the profession.

isolated, so I began to bring together students from different high schools across Westchester under the banner Today's Students Tomorrow's Teachers.

After I earned my master's degree in educational administration and supervision at Pace, I enrolled at Fordham University, still on a path to becoming a superintendent. The chair of the graduate school and my dissertation mentor, Barbara Jackson, suggested I document the work I was doing with minority students for my doctoral dissertation, which I completed at Fordham in 2003.

I continued to focus on the design, development, and implementation of TSTT. I kept recruiting high school students from racially and culturally diverse and economically disadvantaged families. I gave students individual attention, found them teacher mentors, and arranged internships where they could work with younger children. I took them on college visits and helped them with their college applications. I watched my first cohort of high school graduates go off to college, with a sigh of relief and a swell of pride.

However, I quickly realized they would need continued mentoring and financial support to succeed in college. I knew that I needed



to find a way to see them through. Armed with a little marketing experience, I began to call on college presidents in the area to support these students. I asked them to give a minimum 50 percent tuition scholarship to qualified TSTT high school graduates who met admissions standards. Miraculously, they agreed.

The scholarships were a big incentive. I then formalized what high school students would need to do to qualify, which included working as a teacher back in a TSTT school for at least one year after becoming certified.

During TSTT's first years, I had worked with high school juniors and seniors. But I realized I needed more time to recruit, mentor, and train students to ensure their academic success, so I decided to enroll students as early as ninth grade. I wanted students to have more time to see if teaching was a good fit. The earlier start also enabled me to help students prepare for college.

To me, teaching is a calling. Especially in some urban districts or isolated rural areas, it's imperative that teachers be caring, committed, and competent. If I could light a spark in high school and nurture that flame through college, I knew I could produce excellent, dedicated teachers who would stick with the profession. And even if not all our recruits became teachers, the attention and mentoring we provided would help them reap benefits no matter what path they pursued.

I watched and learned, and strengthened the program. Eventually, TSTT became my doctoral thesis. As part of my dissertation, I researched nearly 245 future teacher programs across the country and discovered that none continued to provide the necessary financial and emotional support students so desperately needed to complete college. In writing my dissertation, I realized I had created a new model. In 1999, I incorporated TSTT as a nonprofit organization.

My background at IBM provided me with the skills to approach businesses and banks to fund TSTT. I explained that an educated workforce would benefit the community and increase workplace diversity. I also explained the enormous power of a great teacher and the need for more effective teachers and role models who could help students reach their potential.

**If corporations want capable workers, they should financially support students of color who demonstrate the potential to graduate from college.**

I acknowledged that not all TSTT graduates would become teachers, and that some would change course and enter careers in business, finance, law, or other professions. I said that if corporations wanted capable, prepared workers for the future, then they should not only invest in teachers to inspire and train the next generation, but also financially support students of color who had demonstrated the potential to graduate from college and become productive citizens.

Businesses and foundations responded favorably. Many gave me the funding to strengthen the program and support students through college.

The program first expanded throughout the Greater Hudson Valley region in New York state. Then JPMorgan Chase, an early supporter, approached us about replicating it elsewhere.

TSTT works thanks to regional advisory councils, led by a regional coordinator. The council includes representatives from each TSTT participating school district—preferably superintendents, a representative from area college partners, TSTT representatives (including the executive director), and business and/or community representatives. Each district has a mentor who serves on the advisory council, acts as a liaison to TSTT on program policies and procedures, and assists with recruitment of



teacher mentors and hiring of TSTT teachers. Regional program managers, coordinators, and team leaders also implement the model in each area, while our headquarters in White Plains, New York, provides oversight.

The districts we partner with vary in size and location. For instance, Ossining, our first TSTT partner, is a small district with fewer than 5,000 students. Another of our partners, Prince William County Public Schools in Northern Virginia, has 87,000 students and 12 high schools.

When school officials in Prince William were looking to hire minority teachers, they invited me to speak with their school board. That was nine years ago. TSTT is now part of the district's "Growing Our Own" initiative designed to hire former students. The district plans to hire 1,000 teachers this school year, and it will rely on TSTT for qualified candidates of color who will help the district achieve its goal of diversifying the teaching staff.

In addition to growing geographically, TSTT has launched a male teacher of color initiative to help fill the shortage of African American and Latino male teachers. Sadly, African American male teachers account for only 2 percent of today's educator workforce.<sup>1</sup>

Two years ago, we also launched a middle school program in Westchester called the Student Leadership Movement (SLM) to recruit potential teachers earlier. SLM links middle school students with TSTT high school students who act as tutors and mentors as well as encourage them to consider becoming teachers.

### **A New and Comprehensive Model**

TSTT provides a comprehensive, eight-year-plus teacher preparation program designed to recruit, mentor, and train low-income, ethnically diverse students from high school through college, and place them in teaching jobs in their communities. Because of its ability to not only recruit but retain teachers of color, the program is one of eight focused on increasing diversity that are highlighted in "The State of Teacher Diversity in American Education," a report published by the Albert Shanker Institute. (For more on the report, see page 18.)

After 20 years, the program has enabled me to meet hundreds of kindred souls who share the passion and purpose of helping our next generation to succeed. Ray Sanchez now serves as the superintendent in Ossining, where the first TSTT program began. Last year, when we honored the district at our 20th-anniversary breakfast, he said, "I'm a believer. TSTT is an investment in the future."

Today, just like in 1995, the district is still very concerned about diversifying its teaching staff. Over the years, the district has hired 14 former students of color, six of whom were recruited and mentored by me. I'm proud to say they have been teaching for more than 10 years.

To remain eligible for participation in the TSTT program, students must maintain a B+ average by the end of their senior year of high school, engage in job shadowing and summer internships, tutor two hours each week during the school year, attend regional TSTT workshops, and commit to teach in a participating school district for one year after receiving teaching credentials.

Participants meet weekly with peers, a TSTT program manager, and a teacher mentor. They engage in character development activities, as well as goal-setting and service learning opportunities. Students learn study and time-management skills, and they participate in team-building activities.

Students also plan for college and visit campuses. They receive admissions guidance and SAT preparation training. And because this program is geared toward preparing future teachers, students learn about what teaching entails. They study lesson planning and curriculum mapping, media and technology in education, conflict resolution strategies, and diversity issues in the classroom.

Once in college, students are assigned a mentor, usually an administrator or a professor. They return to their home districts for check-ins, mock interviews, resumé guidance, portfolio presentations, and professional etiquette workshops. TSTT also helps place college students in teaching-related summer internships.

By the time TSTT students earn their teaching certifications, they are ready to work, and TSTT helps them land a job, often at one of our more than 50 partner schools. TSTT graduates proudly



## TSTT graduates proudly tell me they are often better prepared for college and teaching careers than their classmates.

tell me they are often better prepared for college and teaching careers than their classmates. And superintendents tell me that if they see an applicant is a TSTT graduate, they are confident in hiring that individual.

Currently, school districts pay a per-student fee of \$3,000 to join the program. Each district agrees to identify ninth-graders who have the academic and leadership skills to succeed as teachers, along with a willingness to explore the teaching profession.

The mentor-mentee relationship is one of the program's strengths. We pay our mentors, who follow our curriculum. Over the years, many mentors and students have become friends, colleagues, and part of a strong support network that lasts long after the formal program ends. The students' relationships with mentors are among the reasons why the program has such high retention rates.

Of the high school students who have enrolled in TSTT over the years, more than 90 percent complete the eight-year program. Of those students, 97 percent go on to college, and nearly 80 per-

cent graduate from college, with about half of those students becoming teachers. (For TSTT success stories, see page 17.)

TSTT has a 100 percent job placement rate for highly qualified graduates who attend good teacher preparation programs. If they earn the TSTT "stamp of approval," they will get a job.

While teacher turnover is a huge problem across the country, TSTT graduates stay in the classroom longer than average. In January 2015, the Center for American Progress reported that, nationally, 30 percent of teachers leave teaching within five years,<sup>2</sup> but only 10 percent of TSTT teachers do so. And only 7 percent of TSTT teachers leave the teaching profession within three years, compared with the national rate of 20 percent.

**T**STT sets high expectations for students, who rise to the level we set. We show students we care about them, and we stay with them for eight years. We witness their trials and tribulations, and we become their true champions. Because of TSTT, our students understand the value of giving back.

As the first in my family to complete college, I am driven every day to help another young person be the first in his or her family to do so. Part of my drive also stems from wanting to play a significant role in improving educational outcomes for the next generation. I tell TSTT students to remember the purpose of their work and to be sure their love and passion shine through in all that they do.

Thanks to TSTT, I discovered my God-given purpose in life and forgot about becoming a superintendent. What a blessing! □

### Endnotes

1. "Number and Percentage Distribution of Teachers in Public and Private Elementary and Secondary Schools, by Selected Teacher Characteristics: Selected Years, 1987–88 Through 2011–12," in National Center for Education Statistics, *Digest of Education Statistics*, 2014, table 209.10.
2. Robert Hanna and Kaitlin Pennington, "Despite Reports to the Contrary, New Teachers Are Staying in Their Jobs Longer," Center for American Progress, January 8, 2015, [www.americanprogress.org/issues/education/news/2015/01/08/103421/despite-reports-to-the-contrary-new-teachers-are-staying-in-their-jobs-longer](http://www.americanprogress.org/issues/education/news/2015/01/08/103421/despite-reports-to-the-contrary-new-teachers-are-staying-in-their-jobs-longer).

# Success Stories from Today's Students Tomorrow's Teachers

In 1995, **Jeffrey Cole** was one of TSTT's first recruits. At the time, he was an unmotivated high school student in Westchester County, New York. According to his worried mother, he had no particular career goals.

Thanks to his guidance counselor's encouragement, he joined TSTT, a new program that tapped diverse and economically challenged students to consider teaching as a profession. Jeffrey soon found himself in a summer internship tutoring younger children—and he loved it. He went on to attend college on a scholarship arranged through TSTT. He eventually became an elementary school teacher and is now an assistant director of special education in a large urban school district.

One of the first TSTT graduates to reach the 10-year mark in the teaching profession is **Emerly Martinez**. After college, he returned to teach social studies in the high school from which he graduated, and he is now an assistant principal in a nearby district.

Among the most enthusiastic of TSTT's participants is **Merica Neufville**. She likes to tell me, "TSTT saved me!" Born in Jamaica, her mother moved the family, after the death of Merica's father, to the United States, where her mother worked many jobs to support her family. Merica also worked to help pay bills. She hoped to attend college but thought it would take years to save enough money.

When TSTT came to her large urban school, she joined as one of the first recruits. At her school, guidance counselors had little time for individual students, so the program helped her prepare for college, and the 50 percent tuition scholarship made the difference in her enrolling. We supported her through good days and bad and eventually helped her get a job as a math teacher in a TSTT district. She immediately became a teacher mentor to "pay it forward," giving advice, support, and encouragement to the program's participants.

Today, she stays in touch with many of the students she has mentored. Their relationships have become genuine friendships; she recently organized a bridal shower for one of her former students, and she meets with others throughout the year. We need dedicated teachers like Merica in the poorest, least resourced districts so they can provide students with the education to help them climb out of poverty.

Merica is currently an administrator, pursuing a doctorate in education leadership; she is one of our many success stories.

—B.P.



Emerly Martinez and Bettye Perkins



Merica Neufville



Jeffrey Cole

# A Look at Teacher Diversity

BY THE ALBERT SHANKER INSTITUTE

More than 60 years after the ruling in *Brown v. Board of Education* was handed down, its promise remains unfulfilled. In many respects, America's public schools continue to be "separate and unequal." Indeed, the growing resegregation of American schools by race and ethnicity, compounded by economic class segregation, has become the dominant trend in American education.

Recent research documenting this growing school segregation has received some public attention (though arguably less than such a weighty matter should command).<sup>1</sup> Comparatively little attention has been paid to an important related issue, however—the state of racial and ethnic diversity in America's teaching force. For the general public, basic facts about teacher diversity are difficult to understand or inaccessible.

The Albert Shanker Institute, working with Richard Ingersoll of the University of Pennsylvania, undertook the challenge of pulling together what research there is, and conducting original research where data were lacking, in order to provide a factual basis for public discussion and further research.

In September 2015, the institute published *The State of Teacher Diversity in American Education*, a major report (summarized here) that found teacher diversity in the United States to be an area of concern. The teacher workforce has become less ethnically and racially diverse and more female over time, a development that has adversely affected students, particularly males of color.

Based on Ingersoll's national analysis of data, limited progress toward greater diversity is being made, but not nearly enough to meet the need for more teachers of color.

*The Albert Shanker Institute is committed to four fundamental principles: vibrant democracy, quality public education, a voice for working people in decisions affecting their jobs and their lives, and free and open debate about all of these issues. This article is excerpted from The State of Teacher Diversity in American Education, which the institute published in 2015. Richard M. Ingersoll, a professor of education and sociology at the University of Pennsylvania, contributed to this report. To read the full report, see [www.shankerinstitute.org/resource/teacherdiversity](http://www.shankerinstitute.org/resource/teacherdiversity).*

## Research Supports Teacher Diversity as Crucial for Student Success

Existing research makes a compelling case for the benefits of a diverse teacher workforce, in which "minority" racial and ethnic groups—African Americans, Latinos, Native Americans, Asians, and Pacific Islanders—would be much more robustly represented. While there is reason to

stereotypes, attenuate unconscious implicit biases, and promote cross-cultural social bonding.<sup>5</sup>

- All students benefit from being educated by teachers from a variety of different backgrounds, races, and ethnic groups, as this experience better prepares them to succeed in an increasingly diverse society.<sup>6</sup>

## Teachers of color remain significantly underrepresented relative to the students they serve.

believe that students of color would be the greatest beneficiaries of a diverse teaching force, evidence suggests that all students—and our democracy at large—would benefit from a teaching force that reflects the full diversity of the U.S. population. The research finds that:

- Teachers of color can be more motivated to work with disadvantaged minority students in high-poverty, racially and ethnically segregated schools, a factor that may help reduce rates of teacher attrition in hard-to-staff schools.<sup>2</sup>
- Teachers of color tend to have higher academic expectations for minority students, which can result in increased academic and social growth among students.<sup>3</sup>
- Students of color profit from having individuals from their own racial and ethnic group, who can serve as academically successful role models and who can have greater knowledge

of their heritage culture, among their teachers.<sup>4</sup>

- Positive exposure to individuals from a variety of races and ethnic groups, especially in childhood, can help reduce

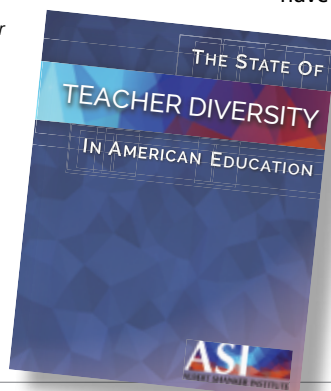
## Teacher Diversity: The National Picture

Nationally, progress is being made toward a more diverse teaching force, but at a relatively modest pace. Over the 25-year period from 1987 to 2012, the minority share of the American teaching force—including African American, Latino, Native American, Asian, Pacific Islander, and multiracial teachers—has grown from 12 percent to 17 percent.<sup>7</sup> The minority share of the American student population also grew during these 25 years, albeit not at the same tempo as increases among minority teachers. Students of color now account for more than half of all public school students.

As a consequence of this growing student population, however, progress toward reducing the substantial representation gaps between teachers of color and students of color has been limited. Teachers of color remain significantly underrepresented relative to the students they serve.

The most significant impediment to increasing the diversity of the teacher workforce is not found in the recruitment and hiring of teachers of color: nationally, they are being hired at a higher proportional rate than other teachers. Rather, the problem lies in attrition: *teachers of color are leaving the profession at a higher rate than other teachers.*

Moreover, teachers of color are not



evenly distributed across schools. They tend to be concentrated in urban schools serving high-poverty, minority communities. But analyses of survey data show that they are not leaving the profession at a higher rate because of the poverty or the race and ethnicity of their students. Instead, *they are leaving because of the working conditions in their schools*. Their strongest complaints relate to a lack of collective voice in educational decisions and a lack of professional autonomy in the classroom.

### Teacher Diversity in Nine Cities

As part of the larger study, the Albert Shanker Institute selected nine cities—Boston, Chicago, Cleveland, Los Angeles, New Orleans, New York, Philadelphia, San Francisco, and Washington, D.C.—to examine the state of racial and ethnic diversity in their teaching workforces. These nine cities followed the national patterns of teacher diversity in their broadest strokes. As a general rule, teachers of color—especially males—are underrepresented in these urban workforces, with substantial representation gaps between minority teachers and minority students.<sup>8</sup> These patterns are generally more manifest for African American and Latino teachers than for Asians, and more pronounced in charter schools than in district schools.

When examining teacher diversity trends over the course of the 10 years in our study—from 2002 to 2012—a number of disquieting trends become evident. In all nine cities studied, the African American share of the teacher workforce declined, at rates from the very small to the quite large—from roughly 1 percent in Boston’s charter sector and Cleveland’s district sector, to more than 24 percent in New Orleans and nearly 28 percent in Washington, D.C. (combined sectors—i.e., district schools and charter schools combined). Losses in the number of African American teachers were even greater, ranging from a low of 15 percent in New York City to a high of 62 percent in New Orleans.<sup>9</sup> The available evidence suggests that seniority-based layoffs played little or no role in these declines.

In the nine cities we studied, trends for Latino teachers were more positive than those for African American teachers but still well short of the need. Over the course of the 10 years in our study, the Latino shares of the teacher workforces were basically stable or showed modest growth. The one exception was Los Angeles, where the Latino share of the teacher population

grew markedly in both the district and charter sectors. In contrast to African American teachers, the actual numbers of Latino teachers in the cities also grew during these years, with Cleveland being the lone exception. However, given that Latinos currently represent the fastest-growing share of the American student population, substantial additional growth of the Latino teaching force would be required to narrow the representation gap with Latino students.

While the analysis of the national data points to high attrition rates as the main obstacle to improving the diversity of the teaching force, the underrepresentation of African American and Latino teachers among new hires also appears to be a serious problem. Approaches to improving teacher diversity in these cities will need to address teacher recruitment, hiring, and retention.

Across our nine cities, teachers of all races and ethnicities tended to teach in schools with high concentrations of low-income students of color. As a general rule, African American and Latino teachers taught in schools with at least modestly higher concentrations of low-income and minority students.

### Recommendations

The following recommendations are aimed at federal-, state-, and district-level policymakers, working collaboratively with local teachers unions and communities:

- *Address the serious problem of a lack of accurate data:* As part of its Civil Rights Data Collection, the U.S. Department of Education should collect and report data on the race and ethnicity of the teaching force in all public schools, district and charters alike.
- *Review education-related legislation and policy for their impact on teacher diversity,* and amend or modify them to promote diversification and avoid the unintended consequence of diminishing diversity.
- *Invest in high-quality teacher education programs* at the nation’s historically black colleges and universities, Hispanic-serving institutions, tribal colleges and universities, and public colleges and universities serving large numbers of minority students.
- *Incentivize close partnerships* between colleges of education and school districts/charter networks to provide

mentoring, support, and training in culturally responsive practices to all novice teachers.

- *Support the development and expansion of evidence-based programs* to help recruit, mentor, support, and retain minority teachers, including “grow your own” teacher preparation programs.\*
- *Use contract negotiations as a vehicle for increasing teaching diversity,* incorporating programs and features, such as paraprofessional career ladders, that serve to increase teacher diversity.
- *Incorporate recruitment and hiring practices into accountability systems* for the leadership and staff of school districts and charter networks.

(Endnotes on page 43)

\*See Section V of the full report for descriptions of such programs. One of these eight programs profiled is Today’s Students Tomorrow’s Teachers, a “grow your own” model described on page 12.



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# The Case for a Teacher Like Me



Professional educators—in the classroom, library, counseling center, or anywhere in between—share one overarching goal: ensuring all students receive the rich, well-rounded education they need to be productive, engaged citizens. In this regular feature, we explore the work of professional educators—their accomplishments and their challenges—so that the lessons they have learned can benefit students across the country. After all, listening to the professionals who do this work every day is a blueprint for success.

BY HARRY F. PRESTON V

**I**t's safe to say that as a black male teacher of high school engineering, I am considered an anomaly. If you dig through all of the statistics about black male teachers nationwide and compare them with the number of science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) teachers of color, you will find very few teachers like me.

My uniqueness is predicated on a few heartbreaking numbers. The 2012–2013 high school graduation rate for black males was

59 percent, compared with 80 percent for white males.<sup>1</sup> The college graduation rate for black males is also abysmal: of students entering college in 2008, only 35 percent of black males completed their degrees within six years, compared with 60 percent of white males.<sup>2</sup> Given these statistics, it's hardly surprising that only 2 percent of the entire teaching population is comprised of black males.<sup>3</sup> And while 16 percent of public school students are black, of students who earned bachelor's degrees in STEM fields in 2013–2014, just 4 percent were African American males.<sup>4</sup>

Keeping in mind all of the socioeconomic and other factors that contribute to these statistics, simple math suggests that a teacher like me has a very slim chance of existing. And yet here I am, a black male high school teacher of science in Baltimore City Public Schools.

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I've had my share of twists and turns in my educational trajectory. I was raised in Columbia, South Carolina, where I attended an

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*Harry F. Preston V teaches engineering and cochairs the career and technical education department at Edmondson-Westside High School in the Baltimore City Public Schools district. An alumnus of Teach for America, he is the head of the Baltimore City Project Lead the Way Engineering Design and Development Symposium, and he participated in the AFT's Teacher Leaders Program. He is also the executive vice president of vocational education for the Baltimore Teachers Union.*

elementary school led by a black male principal (another anomaly). He and I spent many a day together, so much so that I even had my own desk in his office. Let's just say I was a very inquisitive and energetic child.

The passing of years and shifting perspectives have certainly changed my understanding as to why I spent so much time in the principal's office. I remember for the most part being a happy child but very different from my classmates and my teachers. I was one of the few black students at my school, and my family was not as affluent as the families of my peers. As a child, I could not grasp entirely how socioeconomic differences affected my relationships with my classmates; however, I recall seeing the houses and cars of my classmates' parents, and I knew we were from different worlds.

In class, I recall having difficulty understanding the need to follow certain directions or why I had to wait to do things. As an enthusiastic student, I wanted to learn on my own terms and in my own ways. I wanted to move faster at times, but at other times I needed to move more slowly. I usually learned quickly, and my pace rarely matched that of my classmates. Once I felt I had mastered a subject or a concept, I had trouble staying patient until my peers caught up with me. But instead of being placed in a more challenging environment, I was often called a "difficult child." Even as a young child, the label stung.

It wasn't until I became a teacher that I understood my experience was not unique. My story is similar to the stories of many other black males in schools with precious few black male teachers.\*

Only recently have researchers and policymakers decried the significant numbers of black boys being labeled disruptive and/or hyperactive, and the dearth of these students being accepted into honors and/or gifted programs. These negative labels, compounded with the lack of opportunities for black boys to flex their mental prowess, generate a cycle of referrals and suspensions that lower students' self-esteem and impede student learning.†

In a system that has too often viewed black males negatively, these students especially need educational role models to help guide them.

\*For more on the importance of black males in the classroom, see "The Need for More Teachers of Color" in the Summer 2015 issue of *American Educator*, available at [www.aft.org/ae/summer2015/vilson](http://www.aft.org/ae/summer2015/vilson).

†For more on school discipline and related statistics, see "From Reaction to Prevention" in the Winter 2015–2016 issue of *American Educator*, available at [www.aft.org/ae/winter2015-2016/skiba\\_losen](http://www.aft.org/ae/winter2015-2016/skiba_losen).

When I was a child, my principal was that role model for me. He knew all the right things to say to keep me on track. At the time, I felt he understood me in ways my other teachers never did. Throughout the rest of my elementary and secondary education, I didn't have another black male leader or teacher until Benedict College, a historically black college in Columbia, South Carolina, where I majored in physics. I chose the college because I wanted the experience of having faculty members who were black like me.

There, I excelled and graduated with honors in biological and physical sciences. It was a long way from the principal's office.

But that principal was one of the major reasons I later went to Johns Hopkins University to pursue a master's degree in urban education and administration.

Earning my advanced degree in education prompted me to think about my mediocre performance in primary and secondary education and my eventual college success. In high school, I was a middle-of-the-road student who graduated in the middle of my high school class of 300-plus students.

Despite my average grades, I loved science and math; I even read science and math books for fun. I conducted physics experiments at home daily, and I was intrigued by engineering. Yet, my guidance counselor continually recommended I take lower-level, less challenging classes, I assume because of my athletic ability (I played football, wrestled, and ran track). I honestly wanted to believe that was the logic for not encouraging me to take honors classes—which might have only four black students in a class of

It's safe to say that as a black male teacher of high school engineering, I am considered an anomaly.



30. I was lost in a system that was fine with me being lost.

But a summer experience at Ohio University in Athens, Ohio, opened up a world of possibilities for me, and I wish all students had access to such a life-changing opportunity. I was able to attend a program focused on encouraging minority male high school students who were interested in engineering to pursue careers in education. For the first time, I was around other students of color who shared a love of science and math.

As a black male teacher in a STEM field, I believe that getting more teachers like me in classrooms today boils down to expectations and access. The truth is that students who are held to higher expectations reach higher levels of success. "Who Believes in Me? The Effect of Student-Teacher Demographic Match on Teacher Expectations," a study published last year by researchers at American University and Johns Hopkins University, bears this out.

The study brought to light some long overlooked issues on the impact of race and educational expectations. In a blog post explaining the findings, one of the study's authors, Seth Gershenson, writes that "when a black student is evaluated by one black teacher and by one non-black teacher, the non-black teacher is about 30 percent less likely to expect that the student will complete a four-year college degree than the black teacher."<sup>5</sup>

"These results are not meant to, nor should they, demonize or implicate teachers," Gershenson continues. "Biases in expectations are generally unintentional and are an artifact of how humans categorize complex information."\* The study's findings simply "highlight the need to better understand how teachers form expectations, what types of interventions can reduce or eliminate biases in teacher expectations, and perhaps most importantly, how such expectations and biases affect the long-run student outcomes of ultimate import."<sup>6</sup>

**B**ecause I am a black male educator who teaches at an urban high school where almost all of my students receive free or reduced-price meals, I understand the importance of providing access to additional opportunities and supports, as well as to images of success. Students cannot imagine future educational and career opportunities if they've never seen them firsthand.

That's why I never say to my students, "Your only limit is your imagination." To me, the old cliché is inherently biased. Many of my students come from families with so few educational or financial resources that their imaginations are understandably confined by their experiences. And for many black male students in particular, those experiences have been especially limited.

However, in recent years there has been a shift in thinking among young black males regarding careers they can pursue. Thanks largely to the success and popularity of President Obama, young black students are seeing more black professionals in increasingly prominent roles, and as a result, they are beginning to consider pursuing such roles for themselves.

While Obama's presence alone has been inspiring, his My Brother's Keeper program has become possibly the biggest "call

to action" in support of black males.<sup>†</sup> Just as important, U.S. Secretary of Education John King—also a black man—has emphasized the need for more educators of color to help change the trajectory of our black boys. King has shared publicly that the issue is personal for him. In May, I had the distinct honor of introducing him at this year's National Summit on Teacher Diversity in Washington, D.C. The audience and I listened to him describe the profound impact his educators had on his educational path. He stressed in no uncertain terms how important a strong, diverse teaching force is to ensuring our students engage in their learning and personal growth.

Other males of color, such as public intellectuals, can make such an impact as well. For instance, the famous astrophysicist Neil deGrasse Tyson, who is of African American and Puerto Rican descent, had a powerful effect on me. Though I never met him, I could really connect with him—something clicked—when he talked about science on television.

That same connection can occur in the classroom. An educator of color can give students of color—especially black males—a concrete image of possibility. To turn that possibility into reality, we must ultimately change the conversation about who's in education—and change who's in the conversation about education. □

## An educator of color can give students of color—especially black males—a concrete image of possibility.



### Endnotes

1. Schott Foundation for Public Education, *Black Lives Matter: The Schott 50 State Report on Public Education and Black Males* (Cambridge, MA: Schott Foundation for Public Education, 2015), 7.

2. "Graduation Rate from First Institution Attended for First-Time, Full-Time Bachelor's Degree-Seeking Students at 4-Year Postsecondary Institutions, by Race/Ethnicity, Time to Completion, Sex, Control of Institution, and Acceptance Rate: Selected

Cohort Entry Years, 1996 through 2008," in National Center for Education Statistics, *Digest of Education Statistics*, 2015, table 326.10.

3. "Number and Percentage Distribution of Teachers in Public and Private Elementary and Secondary Schools, by Selected Teacher Characteristics: Selected Years, 1987–88 through 2011–12," in National Center for Education Statistics, *Digest of Education Statistics*, 2014, table 209.10.

4. "Enrollment and Percentage Distribution of Enrollment in Public Elementary and Secondary Schools, by Race/Ethnicity and Region: Selected Years, Fall 1995 through Fall 2025," in National Center for Education Statistics, *Digest of Education Statistics*, 2015, table 203.50; and "Number and Percentage Distribution of Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics (STEM) Degrees/Certificates Conferred by Postsecondary Institutions, by Race/Ethnicity, Level of Degree/Certificate, and Sex of Student: 2008–09 through 2013–14," in National Center for Education Statistics, *Digest of Education Statistics*, 2015, table 318.45.

5. Seth Gershenson, "The Alarming Effect of Racial Mismatch on Teacher Expectations," *Brown Center Chalkboard* (blog), Brookings Institution, August 18, 2015, [www.brookings.edu/blogs/brown-center-chalkboard/posts/2015/08/18-teacher-expectations-gershenson](http://www.brookings.edu/blogs/brown-center-chalkboard/posts/2015/08/18-teacher-expectations-gershenson).

6. Gershenson, "Alarming Effect."

\*For more on biases, see "Understanding Implicit Bias" in the Winter 2015–2016 issue of *American Educator*, available at [www.aft.org/ae/winter2015-2016/staats](http://www.aft.org/ae/winter2015-2016/staats).

<sup>†</sup>For more about My Brother's Keeper, see <http://1.usa.gov/1ccwQXO>.

# Teacher Diversity

(Continued from page 19)

## Endnotes

1. Of particular note in this regard is the important work on school segregation by the Civil Rights Project at UCLA ([www.civilrightsproject.ucla.edu](http://www.civilrightsproject.ucla.edu)).
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3. Gloria Ladson-Billings, "Landing on the Wrong Note: The Price We Paid for Brown," *Educational Researcher* 33, no. 7 (2004): 3–13; Franita Ware, "Warm Demander Pedagogy: Culturally Responsive Teaching That Supports a Culture of Achievement for African American Students," *Urban Education* 41 (2006): 427–456; Elizabeth Bondy and Dorene D. Ross, "The Teacher as Warm Demander," *Educational Leadership* 66, no. 1 (2008): 54–58; Amy Carpenter Ford and Kelly Sassi, "Authority in Cross-Racial Teaching and Learning (Re)considering the Transferability of Warm Demander Approaches," *Urban Education* 49 (2014): 39–74; Thomas S. Dee, "Teachers, Race, and Student Achievement in a Randomized Experiment," *Review of Economics and Statistics* 86 (2004): 195–210; Eric A. Hanushek, John F. Kain, Daniel M. O'Brien, and Steven G. Rivkin, *The Market for Teacher Quality* (Cambridge, MA: National Bureau of Economic Research, 2005); and Beatriz Chu Clewell and Michael J. Puma, "Does It Matter If My Teacher Looks Like Me? Same-Race Teachers and Student Achievement" (paper presentation, Annual Meeting of the American Educational Research Association, Montreal, April 14, 2005).
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6. Patricia G. Devine, Patrick S. Forscher, Anthony J. Austin, and William T. L. Cox, "Long-Term Reduction in Implicit Race Bias: A Prejudice Habit-Breaking Intervention," *Journal of Experimental Social Psychology* 48 (2012): 1267–1278.

7. This is drawn from an updated earlier study undertaken with Henry May that analyzed two decades of national data from the late 1980s to 2009 on minority teacher recruitment, retention, and shortages. See Ingersoll and May, *Recruitment, Retention, and the Minority Teacher Shortage*; and Richard M. Ingersoll and Henry May, "The Minority Teacher Shortage: Fact or Fable?," *Phi Delta Kappan* 93, no. 1 (September 2011): 62–65. The data analyzed came from the nationally representative Schools and Staffing Survey (SASS) and its longitudinal supplement, the Teacher Follow-Up Survey, both administered by the National Center for Education Statistics in the U.S. Department of Education.

8. The report used data obtained through freedom of information requests for the 10-year period from 2002 to 2012, as well as data that had already been published. Although state and city educational agencies for five of the nine cities were compliant with the law and provided the requested data for at least a portion of the years requested, problems arose with educational agencies for the other four cities. Consequently, there are gaps in the data available for the study, especially for charter schools.

9. The research team was unable to obtain the data to calculate the black teacher population loss in Washington, D.C. As Washington, D.C., had the largest loss of the share of black teachers, it might very well also have the largest decline in the population of black teachers.

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