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## To Diversify the Teacher Workforce, Start Early

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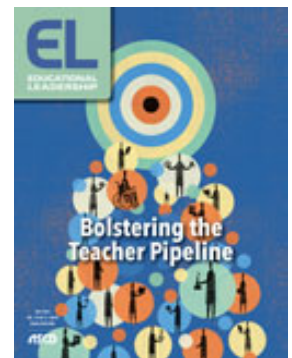
**This grow-your-own program offers a model for disrupting inequity by attracting high school students of color into teaching.**

U.S. schools today are experiencing a significant student demographic shift. Students of color are predicted to make up 55 percent of the public school population by 2024 (Kena et al., 2015). Unfortunately, the teacher workforce doesn't reflect this diversity. For instance, in the 2011–2012 school year, 80 percent of teachers were white, whereas 51 percent of students were non-white. Black and hispanic students make up 16 and 24 percent of the student population respectively, but black and hispanic teachers only account for seven and eight percent of the teacher workforce, respectively (U.S. Department of Education, 2016).

### Why Diversify?

Some pundits ask why diversifying the teaching workforce is so important. As educators specializing in teacher pipeline issues, we contend that diversifying the teaching profession is an act of disrupting educational inequities. Teachers of color have a particularly positive effect on students of color: They have been found to hold higher expectations for students of color and to be both more likely to refer students of color into gifted and talented programs and less likely to refer them for suspension and special education (Ford, 2010; Grissom & Redding, 2016).

But teachers of color can equally benefit white students. Given the deficit stereotypes placed on men and women of color, being taught by a teacher of color can provide white students with positive images of different racial groups—which is crucial if we want to disrupt inequities in education and society at large. Yet under the current teacher-staffing paradigm,



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many white students could go their entire educational career without being taught by a teacher of color.

Diversifying the teacher workforce is also an essential step in diversifying the school-leadership pipeline. A report from the U.S. Department of Education (2016) found that in the 2011–2012 school year, 80 percent of school principals were white, 10 percent black, and 7 percent hispanic. Equity-driven educators must ask ourselves what type of message we are sending students about who can serve in positions of power if it's likely students will only encounter white teachers or school leaders? Diversifying the teacher workforce must be treated as an act of social justice, ensuring that students see themselves reflected in all aspects of their educational experience.

## Sparking Interest

In response to concerns about the lack of diversity of the teaching workforce, the U.S. Department of Education created the TEACH campaign, which seeks to broaden the teaching pool. Although this type of national initiative is noteworthy, we need to do much more: If education leaders don't spark people's interest in entering the teacher workforce until potential teachers are college students or career changers, it may be too late.

If we want to see more diverse teachers in our schools, we must focus on developing grow-your-own teaching programs for high school students. This is the purpose of Pathways2Teaching, a program created by author Margarita Bianco that has an intentional focus on diversifying the workforce by aiming to bring students of color back to their communities as teachers. Many well-established programs aim at recruiting high school students into teaching; Pathways2Teaching is one of the few that purposefully recruits students of color.

## A Social Justice Lens

"I never thought about becoming a teacher before and as a Latino, now I want to become that teacher—the teacher who becomes a role model for other young Latinos and encourages them to become teachers too!"—Adriane, Latino 12th grade student

Pathways2Teaching was launched during the 2010–2011 academic year as a pilot through a partnership between the University of Colorado Denver and Denver Public Schools. At first, it consisted of one course, Introduction to Socially Just Education, at an urban high school. This course encourages students of color to explore teaching as a career through a social justice and equity lens. It presents teaching as an avenue for engaging with, giving back to, and disrupting inequities within students' communities.

In the first year, 29 students, all black or Latino/a, participated. In the second year, the program expanded within the district to two schools, with 70-plus students participating. Every year since, the program has grown; it now enrolls several hundred students across high schools in six Colorado school districts and includes an affiliate program in Nashville, Tennessee. These potential future teachers differ demographically from the majority of current teachers. Nearly 65 percent of our current and former students are Latino/a, 27 percent are black, and 36 percent are males.

In addition to courses on teaching, Pathways2Teaching now offers college credit for these high school classes, a focus on college-readiness skills, and field experiences working with children in the community.

## Strategies to Encourage Youth of Color

If a program's purpose is to attract black and Latino students to teaching, it must acknowledge straightforwardly that schools haven't always been a welcoming or safe space for these youth. This is especially true for students of color who live in poverty and for black, Latino, and Native American males, specifically. Much has been written about the disenfranchisement that students of color experience in schools. How do we invite these same students back to work in the same environment that has, in many ways, failed them? In Pathways2Teaching, we have found that when students openly examine and critique these issues, they come to better understand how, by becoming a teacher, they have the power to disrupt the kind of inequities they've personally experienced. We remind students that it is *because* of their lived experiences that they have great potential to become the kind of teacher who their communities need most.

Besides opening up discussion about how schools have faltered at welcoming non-white learners, the Pathways2Teaching program sets itself apart in other important ways:

### A Focused Curriculum

Because Pathways2Teaching was designed to encourage high school students of color to consider becoming teachers, its curriculum development was informed by a comprehensive review of research examining *why* teachers of color enter the field, the pedagogical strengths they bring to classrooms, and the important roles they play for all students. Curriculum developers examined research on the barriers students of color face on the pathway to becoming teachers and theoretical frameworks that focus on critical examinations of educational inequities.

### Opportunities to Help Fund College

A major barrier students face in attaining higher education is the financial burden associated with attending college full time. To address this issue, as of the 2017–2018 academic year, the Pathways2Teaching curriculum has expanded to include three elective courses leading to a

paraprofessional certificate. In their junior year, students complete the course Introduction to Socially Just Education, and in their senior year, they complete two courses focused on language and literacy acquisition for diverse learners and an introductory course on special education. This certificate program includes 80 hours of fieldwork experience and grants students the credentials needed to work as a paraprofessional in a school in their community while they attend college.

## Six Guiding Principles

The literature review conducted as the Pathways2Teaching curriculum was formed led to six guiding principles that inform how that curriculum is implemented.

### 1. Focus on Educational Justice

Many teachers of color enter the field because of their commitment to issues of social justice. We feel it is important to nurture this commitment early. Throughout the year, students are provided with readings and guided discussions that critically examine policies and practices in schools that label, sort, marginalize, and oppress students. As part of their ongoing research, students learn to critically examine the social and historical contexts of their education through individual research projects and reflections. They participate in conference presentations with doctoral students to report their findings regarding issues such as the lack of teacher diversity in education.<sup>1</sup>

The curriculum is informed by a critical theoretical framework that includes the perspectives of influential education theorists (Duncan-Andrade & Morrell, 2008; Giroux, 2011; Watts, Williams, & Jagers, 2003; Yosso, 2002). This theoretical perspective empowers students with an intellectual framework that nurtures what Freire (1990) described as *critical consciousness*, a way to link knowledge to agency and power.

We sense that this curricular approach speaks to students. Alejandra, a recent Pathways2Teaching graduate and current sophomore in a teacher-preparation program, was recently asked about her aspirations. She said her goal was to "return to my high school and teach in the Pathways2Teaching program so I can help other students understand the injustices taking place in our community and inspire other first-generation Latinas to become teachers."

### 2. Promote and Elevate the Profession

This program is committed to portraying teaching as an important and noble profession, one that provides an opportunity to engage in social justice. The public's opinion of teachers is lower than it's ever been. This wasn't always the case, especially in communities of color, which have historically held the profession in high regard (Lewis, 2006). Gordon's research (2000) illustrates that students of color are no longer encouraged to enter the teacher workforce by their communities, families, or, in many cases, their teachers.

To combat negative perceptions of teaching, students are introduced to readings that help them understand how and why teachers of color play significant roles in the lives and education of all students. Additionally, throughout the year, students engage in a weekly field experience working with local elementary students. Pathways2Teaching students are paired up with elementary students as "reading buddies" to work one-on-one on improving reading and writing skills, building vocabulary, and mentoring. During their field experience visits, Pathways2Teaching students actively work with their reading buddies toward goals established by the elementary classroom teacher. This has been a powerful motivator for students to consider entering the teacher force.

### 3. Provide College Access and Readiness

Pathways' course requirements are rigorous, which equips students with the academic writing skills they will need to succeed in college. For example, students are taught to conduct research and investigate critical issues (of their choice) in education that affect their own lives and communities. Past topics have included the impact of poverty on students' education and the school-to-prison pipeline.

It's also important to demystify the college experience. Many Pathways2Teaching students are the first in their family to graduate from high school. Our students tour local colleges, interact with undergraduate and graduate students and faculty, and learn about the college application, admission, and scholarship processes.

### 4. Focus on Inclusion

We are unapologetic about this fourth guiding principle. To disrupt educational inequities, school leaders need to evaluate their school policies and eliminate barriers that restrict access to Advanced Placement courses, International Baccalaureate programs, and other pre-collegiate opportunities. We work closely with teachers and school leaders to remove barriers and ensure that *every* interested student, regardless of GPA or other exclusionary criteria (such as disciplinary record) has access to college-level coursework and a clear pathway to teaching. In fact, some of our most enthusiastic students are the very students who may have otherwise been excluded from a dual-enrollment course because of their low GPA.

### 5. Offer Access to Role Models and Mentors

Pathways students have access to support from undergraduate, graduate, and doctoral students at the University of Colorado Denver. University students regularly visit high school classrooms, assist with students' research projects, and help demystify the college experience by talking about what it's like for them. Pathways2Teaching alumni often share their college experiences.

### 6. Encourage Family and Community Engagement

Given the importance of close connections between schools, communities, and families, Pathways2Teaching instructors are selected (from teachers at their high schools) because of their close relationships with students and families. School leaders look for teachers who are active agents of change within their community to lead within the program. Pathways2Teaching instructors often bridge the divide that exists between schools and low-income communities.

## Teaching and Leading for Change

Pathways2Teaching seeks to create a new generation of diverse, community-responsive educators dedicated to disrupting educational inequities in and for their communities. Angel Magana, a recent graduate of Pathways2Teaching and current paraprofessional in a Denver public school, is a testament to the changing tide of educators entering the workforce. "I wanted to be the change ... why not me?" he states. "Why can't I go forward and teach and inspire kids, especially Latino males, and show them that this field, this life, is very giving and fulfilling?" (Will, 2018). And Maria Gonzales, a current Pathways2Teaching student, is determined to crush stereotypes attributed to individuals in her Latino/a community by returning to her high school to teach math and be a role model to young students of color. "The main point," she asserts, "is to let people know that we can do it. That we're not like they say, that we're not 'lazy' or 'don't have good jobs' ... that we can be someone important in life ... I really want to be a teacher. That's my main goal."

We're pleased to see a growing national focus on diversifying the teaching profession, and we are committed to community-focused programs rather than outsourced recruitment efforts. As the grow-your-own teacher model increases in popularity, we urge school districts to partner with universities and community agencies that focus on diversifying the profession through an equity lens.

As Goings (2015) asserts, simply changing the racial makeup of teaching won't bring about the change needed. Teachers must have the foundation to disrupt inequities in classrooms, schools, and school districts. We need more efforts that not only develop teachers, but also develop educators who will teach for change.

### EL Online

For more discussion of grow-your-own, see "[The Grow-Your-Own Game Plan](#)" by Dan Brown.

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## Endnote

<sup>1</sup> Through interviews with Pathways2Teaching students, we have learned that their research projects and regular interaction with college students are factors that help these youth feel ready for college.

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