

# Report: Diversifying teacher workforce, linking preservice to later performance among 'high-priority issues'

National Academies research notes having same-race teachers benefits students of color, but also suggests all teachers should recognize the "assets students are bringing into the classroom."

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Teachers are expected to have strong content knowledge, to create deeper learning experiences for their students and to understand their social-emotional development — demands that weren't placed on educators 20 years ago, according to a report released Wednesday by the National Academies of Science, Engineering and Medicine.

But teacher preparation programs generally don't have ways of tracking how their graduates perform in the classroom, and there is little evidence newer preservice models, such as residencies and online programs, are effective at preparing students for increasingly diverse classrooms, the authors conclude.

"Teaching has always been complicated and difficult, but it's gotten even more so in a number of ways," said Robert Floden, dean of the College of Education at Michigan State University and chair of the 13-member ad hoc committee that wrote the report.

A collaboration between the Board on Higher Education and Workforce and the Board on Science Education, the 15-month

project looked at how the teacher workforce has changed over the past two decades and what it means for teacher training programs and those providing professional development once they are in the classroom.

### **A ‘shifting population of students’**

Not surprisingly, the report highlights that U.S. schools now serve a far more diverse mix of students. In 2000, 61% of K-12 students were white, compared to 49% in 2015. But the racial and ethnic composition of the teacher workforce — 80% white and almost 77% female — has remained fairly stable.

The authors call the low percentage of black teachers in the workforce — which has dropped slightly since 1987 — “a cause for concern.” They note research linking desegregation to the loss of black teachers, but also note the issues are complex and include factors like other career opportunities and competency testing required for earning a license.

The teaching field, however, has seen an increase in the percentage of teachers who are Hispanic — from 2.9% of the workforce in 1987 to 8.8% in 2016.

The authors highlight research on the benefits of students of color having same-race teachers. But “it is important that all teachers are able to recognize and leverage the various assets students are bringing into the classroom, and receive some preparation to respond to the shifting population of students,” the authors argue. “Central to the work of teachers is for them to know what their students know.”

Floden said he was surprised to find the age range of teachers has also remained fairly stable, with the average age of teachers at about 41.

The report also stresses the localized nature of the teacher labor market and notes while there are some overarching trends — such as an oversupply of elementary teachers — “staffing challenges” depend on a variety of factors including teacher licensing, seniority, tenure and pension rules.

“The strong state role in influencing teacher labor markets results in labor market conditions that vary from state to state and sometimes even from city to city,” the report says.

### **‘Supportive communication’ important**

As other reports and studies have concluded, the committee notes PD is often not relevant to teachers’ daily work in the classroom or to the specific groups of students they are teaching. But when PD is content-focused, involves actual instructional materials, and is flexible enough to respond to local needs, it’s more effective.

The committee’s conclusion reinforces why in recent years, Learning Forward, the leading organization for educators and officials providing PD — has stressed professional learning communities should prioritize instructional materials over other topics.

The authors also highlight induction for new teachers — including activities such as mentoring, participating in seminars, and having common planning time with same subject or grade-level peers — as a key aspect of creating a supportive workplace. “Receiving supportive communication from school leadership” has also been found to contribute to teacher retention, they wrote.

Marcy Garza Davis, principal at John F. Kennedy Elementary School in Corpus Christi, Texas, was the only school administrator on the committee. She said it was important to her the committee address changing expectations and accountability demands on

teachers, but also the types of support teachers need “to ensure they don't leave the profession in one to five years.”

Her school, for example, offers “Bear Tips Academy” for teachers in their first three years, as well as mentors for all first-year teachers.

Calling it “an amazing experience that helped me grow professionally,” Davis was recommended for the project because of her work with Texas A&M University-Corpus Christi, in which her school hosts both preservice and inservice teacher training programs. Similar partnerships exist between the university and other schools in the West Oso Independent School District.

“I always tell my teachers that the relationships they build with students are just as important as the lessons they teach,” Davis said, adding the relationship she has built with JoAnn Canales, the former founding dean of the College of Graduate Studies at the university, “has helped my campus, my district and my professional experiences.”

As a Latina, Davis added that her perspective on the committee was important “when we were discussing culturally responsive teaching.”

### **Creating a ‘feedback loop’**

The report doesn't include a long list of recommendations, partly because there is disagreement on what student outcomes policymakers should focus on to determine whether a teacher prep program is effective, and partly because there's not enough evidence on which program models lead to better outcomes.

But the authors do identify four “high-priority issues”:

- Preparing teachers to meet changing expectations.

- Diversifying the workforce.
- Ensuring more equitable distribution of teachers so low-achieving students aren't taught by less-qualified teachers.
- Creating systems for linking teacher prep to student outcomes.

Floden said he's not suggesting a "nationwide data system," but teacher prep programs could focus on certain features of their programs the how teacher candidates from those programs fare once they are teaching. The report calls it a "feedback loop."

For the K-12 system, Floden said the report has implications for how districts, teacher prep programs and PD providers work together to prepare and then support teachers.

"I'm hoping," he said, "for more discussions between preservice, inservice PD providers and districts around what is it teachers need to know now and where are they going to learn that."