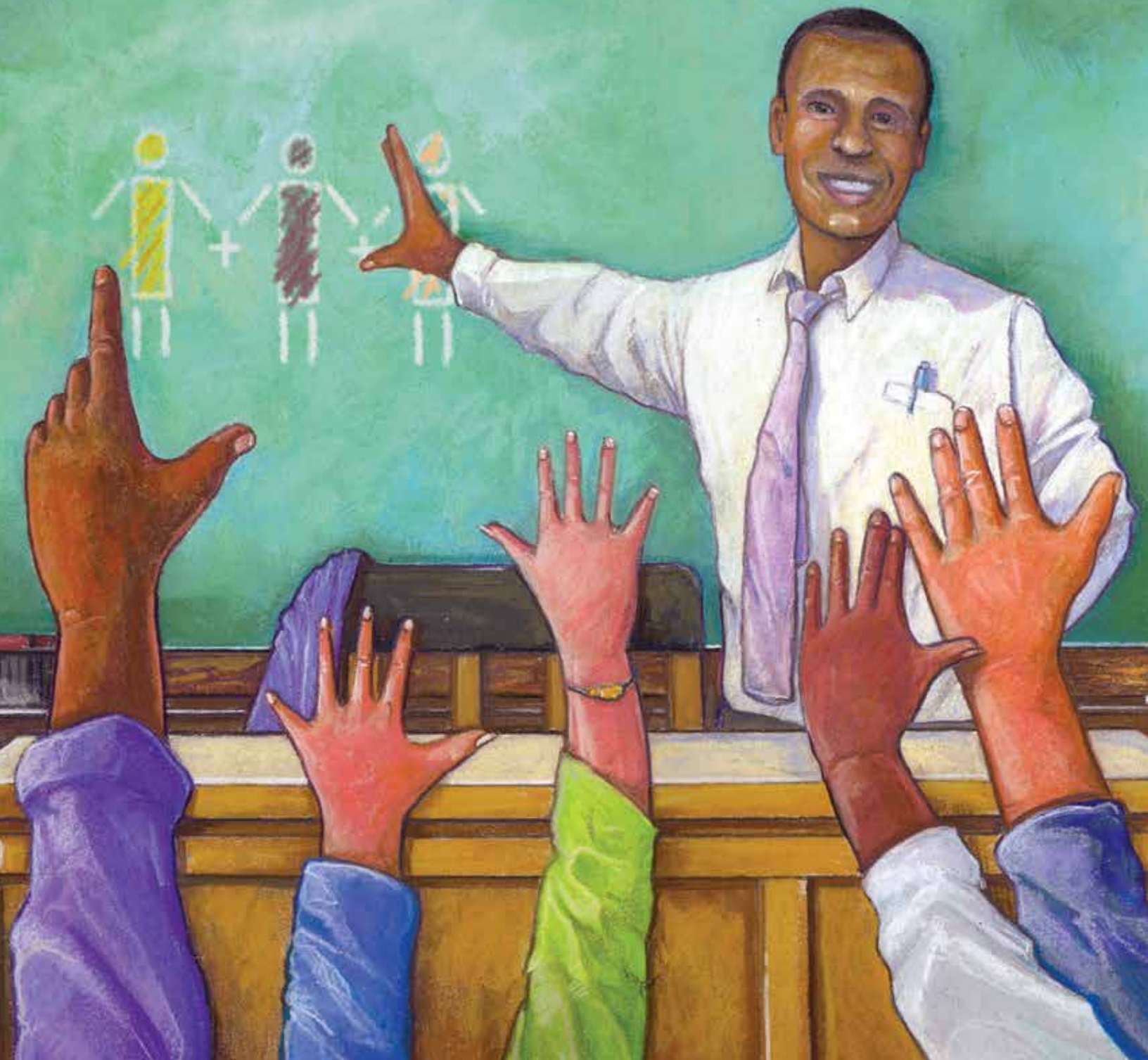


The Importance of Recruiting and Retaining Teachers of Color in All Schools

E. Chris Summerhill
BOSTON PUBLIC SCHOOLS

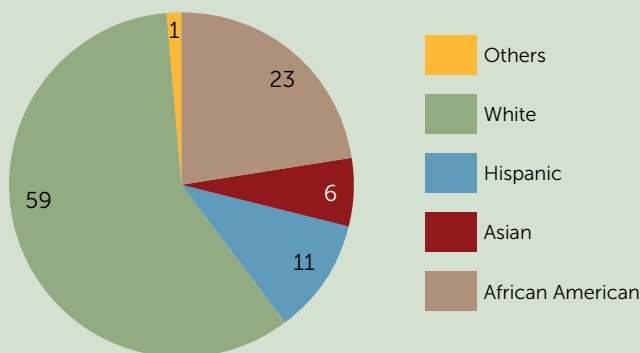


More than 40 years after the federally mandated desegregation of Boston Public Schools, the district is ramping up its efforts to diversify its teaching staff in an effort to meet the diverse needs of the students it serves.

Boston Public Schools (BPS) is the oldest public school district in the United States. The City of Boston, the Commonwealth of Massachusetts, and the surrounding New England states have led the way nationally in education since this country's inception. But Boston also has a long history of inequity in its many educational institutions. When federal district judge W. Arthur Garrity Jr. ordered busing to desegregate Boston's public schools, he stated that the school district "knowingly carried out a systematic program of segregation affecting all of the city's students, teachers, and facilities and ... intentionally brought about and maintained a dual school system."¹ The 1974 *Morgan v. Hennigan* ruling sought not only to end the inequalities that students experienced due to segregated schools, but it also mandated that the district teaching corps diversify in order to match the racial makeup of the envisioned integrated school system. The following year, Garrity's ruling in *Morgan v. Kerrigan* provided guidelines for the recruitment and hiring of black teachers.² Ten years later, it was reinforced in *Morgan v. Nucci*.³

Judge Garrity's ruling required that at least 35 percent of teachers in BPS be persons of color (25 percent black teachers and the remaining 10 percent unspecified). At the time of his ruling, the largest minority in the City of Boston was African American. Boston steadily made gains in the hiring of black teachers and staff after Garrity's mandate, but the number of black teachers was not quite 23 percent in the 2011–2012 school year, and it dropped to 21 percent in 2014.⁴ (See "Boston Public Schools: Teacher Race/Ethnicity 2011–2012.") Meanwhile, the student population in Boston Public Schools is currently only 14 percent white, whereas it is 41 percent Hispanic, 35 percent African American/Afro-Caribbean, and 9 percent Asian.⁵ Despite Boston's efforts, the gap between the teacher demographic and the student demographic is still striking.

Boston Public Schools: Teacher Race/Ethnicity 2011–2012



Source: Jeremy C. Fox, "Boston Struggles to Diversify Teaching Ranks," *Boston Globe*, August 24, 2015, with data from the Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education and the National Center for Education Statistics.

The Benefits of a Diverse Teaching Faculty

The push to recruit and hire more black teachers wasn't primarily about opportunity and access for the teachers. Nor was it only about bringing the proportion of black teachers in line with the percentage of black students in the school system. The push was about the idea that all students should have an opportunity to learn from educators of many diverse backgrounds.

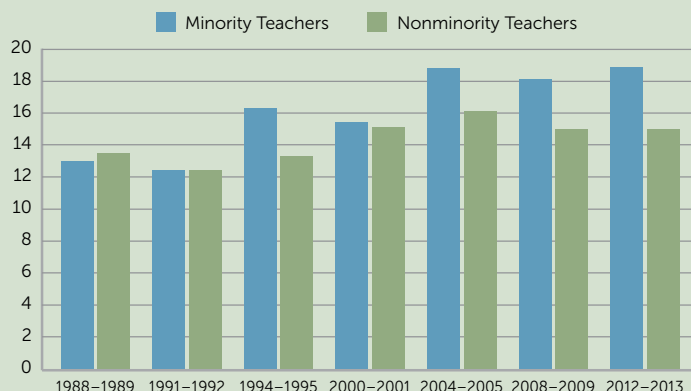
The recruitment and retention of a diverse teaching force isn't a problem unique to Boston. In September 2015, the Albert Shanker Institute released an extensive report on teacher diversity in the United States. "The State of Teacher Diversity in American Education" profiles nine urban districts, including Boston. It makes a compelling argument for why "teacher diversity is an educational civil right for students" and provides recommendations for addressing the lack of diversity in the American education system.⁶ The report summarizes existing research on the benefits of teacher diversity:

- Minority teachers may have greater motivation to work with disadvantaged minority students in challenging school environments, which may reduce teacher attrition in those schools.
- Minority teachers tend to expect more from minority students than nonminority teachers, which benefits the students.⁷
- Minority students benefit from seeing people from their own racial and ethnic groups as successful role models and from the greater familiarity those teachers have with the students' background.
- Positive exposure to people of different races and ethnic groups helps reduce stereotypes and unconscious biases and helps with cross-cultural social bonding.
- Exposure to teachers from a variety of backgrounds is good preparation for encounters in the wider world.

The report also identified the current problems preventing a surge in minority teachers nationally. The biggest issue is not recruitment and hiring of minority teachers, but attrition. Nationally, minority teachers are leaving the profession at much higher rates than their nonminority peers. (See "Percentage of Teacher Turnover by Race and Ethnicity.") The report's authors investigated why the attrition rate was higher for minority teachers and reached the following conclusion:

While students' race and ethnicity, poverty levels and school urbanicity are not factors in and of themselves, the same hard-to-staff, high-poverty urban schools that are more likely to employ minority teachers are also more likely to have less-desirable working conditions. And these less-desirable conditions, our data suggest, account for the higher rates of minority teacher turnover.⁸

Percentage of Teacher Turnover by Race and Ethnicity



Source: Richard Ingersoll, "What Do the National Data Tell Us About Minority Teacher Shortages?" in "The State of Teacher Diversity in American Education."

Boston's Diversity Efforts

Unlike 40 years ago, today Boston is making efforts to hire minority teachers not because of the federal mandate but because the district recognizes the value of having a truly diverse staff. Students in the system affirm the importance. Rachel Diaz, an eighth grader at the Tobin K-8 School in Roxbury, believes that the one teacher of color she had prior to this school year had a powerful impact on her. When speaking of him she noted, "[Mr. Donkor] cared about our education, and he would push us to do better because he wants us to be something in the future." Santiago Martinez, a junior at the English High School in Jamaica Plain, counted about nine educators of color during his time as a student. He shared his belief about their importance: "When I started to understand how our society is, I realized the importance of having [teachers of color], that if they can be successful adults, I have a chance at being anything I want to be."

The district has already begun implementing many of the recommendations of the report. It continues to aggressively recruit and retain high-quality teachers that match the diversity of its student body. There has also been a surge in the hiring of more diverse school leadership and district-level administrators.

My own experience as an educator speaks to these efforts. I am a graduate of BPS and Morehouse College, a historically black college, as well as the Boston Teacher Residency (BTR) Program. BTR's aim is to rigorously train diverse graduating classes of teachers to be career educators in the Boston Public School system. Its partnership with BPS aids in the district's goal to increase diversity. BTR maintains a minimum of 50 percent minority teachers in each of its class years. Its intensive practice-based model pairs teachers in training with veteran teachers in BPS. These veteran teachers serve as guides and mentors to aspiring teachers. They review and edit lesson plans and provide feedback on instruction, classroom management, and any number of other teaching responsibilities. BTR also tackles the attrition rate by requiring graduates to commit to at least three years to the district. The BTR model has been and continues to be replicated in urban districts across the country.

I am also a Boston Public School Recruitment Fellow through the Office of Human Capital. We are a diverse cohort of teachers

and guidance counselors who help the district with its recruitment efforts. We attend recruitment events, prescreen candidates, and conduct phone interviews on behalf of the district. Our work aims to recruit highly qualified diverse candidates. I am also a member of the planning team for ALANA (African, Latino/a, Asian, & Native American) Educators. Boston's ALANA program was created by Ceronne Daly, the director of Diversity Programs, through the Office of Human Capital. ALANA Educators are committed "to supporting the retention and promotion of a highly qualified workforce that reflects the racial, cultural, and linguistic diversity of our students."⁹ We do that by hosting monthly gatherings for the purpose of networking and connecting educators with the resources that they need to stay and grow within BPS—for example, we provide support around teacher licensure.

Both the Office of Human Capital and ALANA Educators have moved the dial toward creating a more diverse workforce at BPS.¹⁰ Twenty-five percent of the new teachers hired for the 2015–2016 school year were black. Apart from BTR, the district has created several channels that aim to increase that diversity even further by drawing promising teachers of color from Boston's own community.

It's worth noting that these efforts and initiatives would be equally worthwhile outside of an urban context, or a public-school context. Although the Shanker report studied urban school districts, the benefits of diversity that it highlighted are universal. Rural, suburban, private, parochial, and charter schools can all benefit from a workforce that accurately represents the diversity of our country. All students deserve and will benefit from a diverse educational experience that will prepare them for our diverse world.

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Endnotes

- 1 Laura Crimaldi, "1974 Busing Decision Led to Strong Opinions, Reactions," *Boston Globe*, June 21, 2014.
- 2 The text of the 1975 ruling is available online at <https://casetext.com/case/morgan-v-kerrigan-6>.
- 3 See <https://casetext.com/case/morgan-v-nucci-4>.
- 4 Jeremy C. Fox, "Boston Struggles to Diversify Teaching Ranks," *Boston Globe*, August 24, 2015; James Vansis, "Officials in Boston Seeking Black Teachers," *Boston Globe*, January 20, 2014.
- 5 Boston Public Schools Communications Office, "Boston Public Schools at a Glance, 2015–2016," November 9, 2015, <http://www.bostonpublicschools.org/cms/lib07/MA01906464/Centricity/Domain/4/BPS%20at%20a%20Glance%2015-1109.pdf>.
- 6 "The State of Teacher Diversity in American Education" (report, Albert Shanker Institute, Washington, DC, 2015).
- 7 The report cites Seth Gershenson, Stephen B. Holt, and Nicholas Papageorge, "Who Believes in Me: The Effect of Student-Teacher Demographic Match on Teacher Expectations," *Economics of Education Review*, March 11, 2016.
- 8 "The State of Teacher Diversity in American Education."
- 9 This is the ALANA Educators mission statement. For more on BPS's diversity efforts, see "Diversity in BPS," <http://www.teachboston.org/diversity-in-bps/>.
- 10 See "Human Capital Update" (report of Boston Public Schools to the School Committee, Boston, June 2015), http://s3.amazonaws.com/media.wbur.org/wordpress/1/files/2015/09/0914_school-committee-doc.pdf.

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