

MARCH 2019

# Preparing Teachers for Diverse Schools

Lessons from Minority Serving Institutions



Max Marchitello and Justin Trinidad



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## Executive Summary

*Despite these and other accomplishments, a glaring, sad truth remains: We have a troubling and persistent problem with providing a high-quality education to students of color.*

The American education system has contributed to many notable achievements over its history, including supporting an economic middle class, enabling upward mobility, and driving widespread literacy rates. Despite these and other accomplishments, a glaring, sad truth remains: We have a troubling and persistent problem with providing a high-quality education to students of color. Many people assume this is a problem of the past, a relic of segregation and anti-immigrant statutes. It's not. These issues persist today in states and school districts around the country. Some notable progress has been made toward equity, of course, but large race-based achievement gaps continue to plague the American education system.<sup>1</sup> For example, according to the most recent results from the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP), only 11 and 16 percent of black and Hispanic public school students respectively perform at grade level in eighth-grade math compared with 30 percent for white students.<sup>2</sup> This inequity is not limited to urban districts. In rural and suburban as well as urban districts, black and Hispanic students on average lag significantly behind white students.<sup>3</sup>

A number of factors contribute to these achievement gaps, including inequitable access to resources such as school funding,<sup>4</sup> high-quality curriculum,<sup>5</sup> advanced courses,<sup>6</sup> and the most effective teachers.<sup>7</sup> The totality of that injustice, of course, cannot be laid at the feet of American educators; however, we must forthrightly acknowledge that most teachers are not prepared to work in diverse classrooms and communities of color. Schools of education and teacher preparation programs often fail to expose teacher candidates to diverse

perspectives and experiences. Additionally, their curricula and coursework do not always challenge teacher candidates' racial stereotypes and biases, which can further contribute to and reinforce inequities in our schools.

Overcoming these deficiencies in teacher training will help to provide all teachers with the essential knowledge and skills they need to effectively serve all the varied students they may have in their classrooms throughout their career.

How to address this? Obviously, one critical piece of the answer lies in building racial and ethnic diversity in the educator workforce. Currently, 80 percent of public school teachers are white, compared with 49 percent of public school students.<sup>8</sup> The consequences of this cultural mismatch can be severe and can impact the effectiveness of instruction students of color receive. Often teachers' cultural misunderstanding can lead to lower expectations for students of color, negative attitudes about students and their families, and the assumption that difficulties are the product of student deficiencies rather than social, economic, and structural inequalities.<sup>9</sup>

Recent studies have shown that educators of color tend to be more effective than other teachers at raising academic performance and graduation rates for students of color.<sup>10</sup> Moreover, a 2016 analysis found that all students prefer teachers of color to white teachers.<sup>11</sup> The authors theorize students feel this way because of the ability of teachers of color "to draw on their own experiences to address issues of race and gender."<sup>12</sup> This ability likely contributes to the effectiveness of teachers of color.

But while essential, diversifying the educator workforce is not a sufficient solution on its own. Recently the Brown Center on Education Policy at The Brookings Institute looked at what would happen to the teacher-student diversity gap if current trends were projected decades into the future. They found that by 2060 the diversity gap for black students would remain roughly the same, while the gap for Hispanic teachers and students would actually increase.<sup>13</sup> These data underscore that students in school now and in the near future cannot rely exclusively on building a more diverse educator workforce to address challenges experienced most acutely by students of color. Although the desired goal of a fully diversified educator workforce won't be realized for decades, the need for teacher training that better prepares candidates today is urgent. While schools should continue efforts to build diversity, in the near term schools of education must adopt policies and practices, such as revising curricula, to be more inclusive of the perspectives and expertise of educators of color and build stronger ties to the communities their graduates will one day serve. Schools of education and teacher preparation programs have a responsibility to better prepare all teachers, but particularly white teachers, to serve students and communities of color more effectively.

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While most teacher preparation schools and programs inadequately prepare teacher candidates to serve students of color effectively, many minority serving institutions (MSIs) have a long history of successfully preparing teachers to provide high-quality education to students of color.<sup>14</sup> The MSI designation is set under the Higher Education Act (HEA) and can qualify an institution for additional federal financial support. To qualify, at least 50 percent of an institution's total enrollment must be comprised of students from "minority" ethnic groups.<sup>15</sup> Under this definition, MSIs include both institutions with a longstanding mission and legacy of serving specific students and communities of color, as well as institutions simply with an enrollment comprising primarily students of color. In this paper, when we discuss MSIs, we are principally focused on the subset of MSI-designated institutions that have a mission and a history of serving students of color.

Many MSIs were founded because students from particular racial and ethnic backgrounds were barred from attending other institutions. For example, Cheyney University, the country's first historically black university, was founded in 1837 to provide black students with access to higher education otherwise unavailable to them. For many MSIs, this history and their important role in serving communities of color is embedded in their mission, and permeates their courses and curricula. Indeed, MSIs graduate a considerable proportion of all educators of color.<sup>16</sup>

These institutions, much like the majority of their students, are still struggling against the very problems of historical inequities that their founding was meant to redress. For instance, historically black colleges and universities (HBCUs) and other MSIs struggle with declining state financial support and an increased competition for students.<sup>17</sup> Many of these institutions do not have the same level of support from philanthropy and their alumni network that other schools enjoy. Contributing to this is the fact that MSIs disproportionately serve low-income and other marginalized student groups. The confluence of these challenges has led some MSIs to close in recent years, and others are struggling to remain viable.<sup>18</sup>

Given that their explicit mission is to educate underserved populations who far too often experienced low-quality K-12 education, it is not surprising that the schools can struggle to achieve the student success outcomes to which they aspire. As an example, a recent report from the Education Trust found that the average six-year graduation rate for black students at HBCUs is only 32 percent compared with 45 percent nationally. A closer examination of the data, however, reveals a more complicated story. Students at HBCUs disproportionately come from low-income backgrounds. After accounting for students' socioeconomic background, black students graduate from HBCUs at higher rates than black students at comparable predominantly white institutions.<sup>19</sup>

Despite these issues, many MSIs have a long track record of preparing teacher candidates to work successfully in communities of color. This paper examines the experience of MSIs and other institutions that are working with intention to grapple with how race, gender, and class impact education. We draw lessons that may be applicable across programs and types of institutions to better prepare teachers to educate today's students.

To understand how schools of education and teacher preparation programs can better prepare teacher candidates to work effectively in increasingly racially diverse schools, we conducted a comprehensive literature review and interviews with nearly 20 experts and practitioners, with an emphasis on those from MSIs. While some of these practices may appear intuitive and arise in policy and practice discussions of these issues, our research makes clear that they are not yet widespread, nor are they always implemented well. The challenge facing even those schools of education and other teacher preparation programs that are already pursuing some of these policies and practices is to move beyond singular or isolated efforts and toward a more comprehensive approach that embeds multicultural education across all aspects of the program. Indeed, methods and classroom management courses should include multiple perspectives and consider how best to convey the content effectively to diverse teacher candidates.

Based on our research, we found three key areas of focus to help schools of education and teacher preparation programs better prepare teacher candidates to serve students of color.

*While some of these practices may appear intuitive and arise in policy and practice discussions of these issues, our research makes clear that they are not yet widespread, nor are they always implemented well.*

**1 Incorporate well-designed courses dedicated to culturally relevant pedagogy as well as multicultural education and work to embed those principles throughout the program.**

- Conduct a comprehensive curricular review to incorporate diverse perspectives and experiences
- Incorporate well-designed courses dedicated to culturally relevant pedagogy as well as multicultural education and embed those principles throughout the program
- Guard against overburdening candidates of color with an unnecessary responsibility in helping their white peers examine their identities, stereotypes, and biases

**2 Design field experiences intentionally to ensure candidates engage with diverse students, contexts, and other educators.**

- Expose candidates to diverse settings, students, educators, and experiences across a variety of roles throughout their education and training
- Align field and classroom experiences and facilitate candidates' critical reflection on those experiences, what they're learning, and how it relates to their own perceptions and beliefs
- Build strong relationships with local districts, charters, families, and community organizations to better prepare candidates for the schools and students they will eventually serve

### **3 Increase diversity in program faculty and in the teacher candidates themselves.**

- Increase faculty and candidate diversity
- Provide trainings on diversity, equity, and inclusion for faculty members

These recommendations emerge from the literature and the experience of programs both within MSIs and in other types of institutions examined for this report. They are applicable not only to teacher preparation programs, but also to colleges and universities more generally. But considering the many inequities of our public education system, they are particularly important for teacher training. Rethinking and redesigning teacher preparation programs will be challenging, but given the significant impact an effective teacher can have on student learning and long-term outcomes,<sup>20</sup> it is critically important.



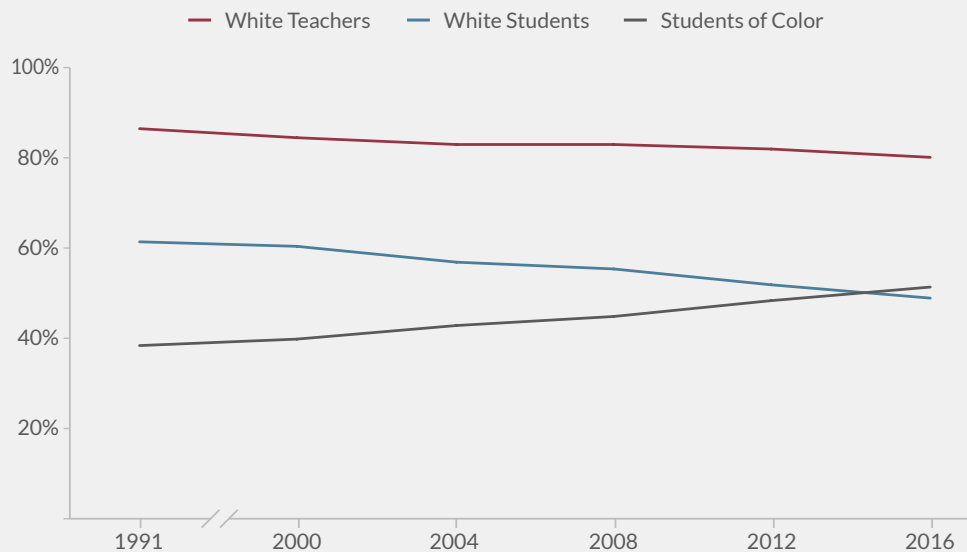
## Introduction

Today, students of color make up the majority of children enrolled in public schools. In 2016, more than a quarter of all public school students were Hispanic, 15 percent were black, and 5 percent were Asian.<sup>21</sup> It is important to keep in mind that this trend is not exclusively driven by growth in urban centers. Indeed, less than half of black and Hispanic students attend school in a city.<sup>22</sup> This is not to say, however, that every state is now a majority minority. The trend is primarily driven by states such as California and Texas.

While the diversification of American public schools has been a decades-long trend, the teacher workforce has not diversified in proportion to the changing student demographics. Indeed, as Figure 1 demonstrates, for the past few decades, at least 80 percent of the educator workforce has been white. Over that same period, however, the population of students of color grew dramatically.

Figure 1

## Teacher Workforce Remains Predominantly White as Racial and Ethnic Diversity Among Students Increases



Source: Authors' analysis of public school enrollment data from the National Center for Education Statistics: <https://nces.ed.gov/ccd/elsi/tableGenerator.aspx>.

Note: "Students of color" includes the following racial/ethnic groups of students: American Indian, Alaska Native, Asian and Pacific Islander, Hispanic, and black. Two or more race students were not included in this calculation since the data were unavailable for most years.

*Altogether, cultural misunderstanding, teachers' stereotypes, and biases can contribute to a lower-quality education for students of color.*

The racial and ethnic mismatch between students and their teachers is troubling for a number of reasons. There is a considerable body of evidence suggesting that teachers of color provide significant academic as well as social-emotional benefit to both students of color and white students.<sup>23</sup> Perhaps most importantly, the relative scarcity of educators of color contributes to a public school system that can ultimately do harm to students and communities of color. Altogether, cultural misunderstanding, teachers' stereotypes, and biases can contribute to a lower-quality education for students of color. The hallmarks of the resulting inequitable education include lower academic expectations,<sup>24</sup> higher and disproportionate suspension rates,<sup>25</sup> and lower access to advanced courses and other opportunities.<sup>26</sup>

Of course, this is not to say that all white teachers are simply inadequate to the task of educating students of color. We are also not asserting that teachers of color are inherently more effective in teaching students of color simply because of their own racial or ethnic identities. Rather, it suggests a skills and knowledge gap among many teachers, but

particularly white teachers that makes it difficult to consistently provide high-quality education to racially and culturally diverse students. Filling that gap is an important role for teacher preparation programs and schools of education.

To that end, what should schools of education and teacher preparation programs do differently?

In some cases, states and voluntary accrediting bodies have elevated increased focus on equity within program standards, a positive move for incentivizing change within the educator preparation field. For example, the Council for the Accreditation of Educator Preparation (CAEP) includes a focus on recruiting diverse teacher candidates among its voluntary accreditation standards,<sup>27</sup> and some states (Rhode Island provides one example<sup>28</sup>) include specific expectations around program components to build skills and knowledge to improve teacher candidates' effectiveness with diverse student populations. What's less clear is how pervasive these practices are across programs, nor the extent to which strategies are well-designed and implemented.

We interviewed nearly 20 experts and practitioners from across the country, with a particular emphasis on those who work at MSIs, to understand how schools of education can increase the readiness of teacher candidates to work in diverse schools. We also conducted a comprehensive literature review focused on culturally relevant pedagogy, effective fieldwork and practicum experiences, and how education programs can foster stronger ties with the community.

Our analysis focused on MSIs because they often intentionally design their education programs to serve communities of color. Simply put, other schools of education and teacher preparation programs can learn from MSIs' extensive experience and expertise in successfully preparing teacher candidates to work effectively in diverse schools.

While the primary concern of this paper is how to improve teacher training to better prepare white teachers for jobs in schools that predominantly serve students of color, we are not minimizing the critical role MSIs play in serving disadvantaged communities and advancing equity, nor are we discounting the importance of diversifying the educator workforce. On the contrary, we highly value how MSIs approach teacher preparation and hope that other institutions can learn from their example. Moreover, we see the goal of increasing educator diversity as an integral and complementary part of the larger project of improving the quality of education for students of color.

Yet, pursuing diversity alone is insufficient. Building skills among all teachers to meet the needs of every student, across contexts and cultural backgrounds, is another essential piece of the puzzle. And given the overwhelming demographics of the education workforce, something specific must be done in the preparation of white teachers.

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A number of major themes emerged from our research that point to three primary objectives for schools of education and teacher preparation programs to consider to better prepare their graduates to serve students of color:

- 1 Build teacher candidates' cultural awareness and provide them with the necessary skills to effectively educate students of color.**
- 2 Design field experiences intentionally to expose candidates to diverse students, contexts, and other educators.**
- 3 Increase diversity in program faculty and in the teacher candidates themselves.**

This paper is organized into three sections, each discussing an objective listed above. The conclusion is a discussion of eight recommendations designed to help teacher education programs train teachers for an increasingly diverse student population.

## Build Teacher Candidates' Cultural Awareness and Provide Them with the Necessary Skills to Effectively Educate Students of Color

*To successfully teach in increasingly diverse classrooms, teachers need to investigate how educational inequities are the result not of deficiencies in students, but rather of systemic and structural injustice.*

The first objective for schools of education and teacher preparation programs is to build knowledge and skills among teacher candidates. In particular, preservice teachers need exposure to and engagement with a diversity of perspectives, experiences, and expertise. But more than that, this requires all, but particularly white, teacher candidates to explore their biases and stereotypes and learn about how their unconscious bias can adversely affect their practice and most importantly, their students. To successfully teach in increasingly diverse classrooms, teachers need to investigate how educational inequities are the result not of deficiencies in students, but rather of systemic and structural injustice. To be clear, an individual's unconscious bias and structural inequity are distinct, but related phenomena. There is a substantial amount of critical literature on both topics and their relationship that is important to consider for those in education studies. However, a careful exploration of those issues is beyond the scope of this paper.

Based on our research, we made three critical observations regarding how schools of education and teacher preparation programs struggle to provide candidates with the necessary skills to effectively educate students of color.

## Curricula and Coursework at Teacher Education Programs Often Overlook the Expertise, Experiences, and Perspectives of Communities of Color

Schools of education and teacher preparation programs across the country, much like a typical high school English class, tend to use a similar set of texts. In general there is uniformity in what teacher candidates read, whose experiences are represented, and how they interpret those texts. To be sure, this is not necessarily bad, but it can be limiting. As Dr. Travis Bristol, assistant professor at UC Berkeley, pointed out, “There is a canon in teacher education. We rarely teach articles that center on the teaching practices of teachers of color. [Teacher candidates] rarely get a picture of what [educators of color] do and how they show care for their students of color.”<sup>29</sup>

This is not to say that teacher education looks the same in every school or program. The National Council on Teacher Quality (NCTQ) conducted a comprehensive national review of teacher preparation programs at colleges and universities and found considerable variance both in the content and quality of what is taught in these programs. NCTQ analyzed and rated schools across 18 standards ranging from program selection to curriculum. They found that less than 10 percent of schools earned 3 out of 4 stars. They found wide variety in approaches to reading instruction, and troublingly only about a quarter of schools use the best practices.<sup>30</sup>

What’s missing from this analysis and in the field more generally is an inquiry into how well schools of education and teacher preparation programs incorporate and represent the perspectives and experiences of educators and scholars of color. This is indicative of the larger problem: Teacher candidates are often ill prepared to serve students of color. The task then for schools of education and teacher preparation is to incorporate the voices, experiences, expertise, and perspectives of people of color throughout their curricula and coursework.

For teacher candidates to serve students of color effectively, it is critically important that schools of education and teacher preparation programs continuously provide opportunities for them to engage with and learn from the work of scholars of color, as well as the expertise and experience of effective educators of color throughout their program of study.

The work of embedding the perspectives of people of color and directly confronting societal inequities and injustices in an education program’s curriculum and coursework is in MSIs’ DNA. It’s not a strategy; it’s who they are as institutions and a key part of their histories and missions. Other types of institutions should consider how to learn from MSIs’ integrative approach to addressing race, power, gender, and other critical social and economic issues.

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In some instances, the social justice missions common to MSIs help to focus the curricula and course offerings directly on structural inequality, racism, and other forms of social injustice. This can lead the institutions' schools of education to require specific courses such as "Diversity in American Education"<sup>31</sup> and "Social and Political Issues of Urban Education,"<sup>32</sup> as well as to place a general emphasis throughout all of their course offerings on diverse perspectives with a particular focus on the intersections of power, race, and gender. These kinds of courses are designed to foster critical engagement with issues of structural inequality, multiculturalism, and power, and ultimately help preservice teachers to unpack their own biases to better serve their future students. There is some disagreement in the field as to the role and effectiveness of these types of courses in better preparing teacher candidates to educate students of color.<sup>33</sup> Their advocates, however, argue that courses focused specifically on multiculturalism and education inequity are most effective at addressing unconscious bias when they are carefully designed to help teacher candidates self-reflect and relate their classroom and field experiences together with broader concepts of diversity, power, and inequity.<sup>34</sup>

*To better represent and engage with a wide diversity of perspectives and experiences, teacher education and preparation programs should consider undertaking a comprehensive curricular and course review to identify how their program can better focus on equity and represent the plurality of thought on contemporary educational pedagogy and practice.*

For example, the School of Education at Howard University incorporates critical race theory (CRT) — a theoretical framework that helps unpack relationships between race, gender, and other manifestations of diversity with power — throughout its program. As Dr. Lisa Grillo, an assistant professor at Howard University's Educational Policy and Leadership program, put it, CRT provides a "lens to deconstruct the intersectionality of race, gender, and other bases for discrimination to help our students better understand and approach education in the urban context and offer solutions at the school, classroom, and district levels."<sup>35</sup>

The equity and social justice missions of MSIs attract both students and faculty with a similarly strong commitment to those goals. As such, discussing the role and consequences of racism, sexism, and other forms of discrimination is commonplace and often a central part of education at MSIs. "[Howard's] programs are focused on urban education. We delve deeply and unapologetically into discussions of poverty, racism, sexism, and cultural responsiveness," said Grillo.<sup>36</sup>

While this approach works well for Howard University, it may not for other schools or teacher preparation programs. To better represent and engage with a wide diversity of perspectives and experiences, teacher education and preparation programs should consider undertaking a comprehensive curricular and course review to identify how their program can better focus on equity and represent the plurality of thought on contemporary educational pedagogy and practice.

Rowan University is an example of a school that has taken these concerns seriously enough to dramatically redesign its school of education to orient toward equity and social justice.<sup>37</sup> A key feature of that transformation was a comprehensive curricular review that ultimately

led to a new vision and mission statement, tagline, and redesigned curriculum centered on equity and culturally responsive teaching and pedagogy.<sup>38</sup> Culturally responsive teaching and pedagogy is an approach to education that recognizes, values, and incorporates the culture, history, knowledge, and experiences of students, their families, and their communities in “all aspects of learning.”<sup>39</sup>

In addition to completely restructuring the curriculum, Rowan worked with the faculty to examine their own biases and beliefs. Over the course of a year, the faculty read new books together, engaged outside experts in critical discussions, and ultimately developed consensus on a theoretical and philosophical framework to guide their re-envisioning of the curriculum. The query guiding the college’s introspection was: What does a college focused on social justice and equity look like? One product of this process was the development of a new introductory course for the initial certification program that includes the identification of “anchor readings” for teacher candidates, reflecting the school’s equity framework (See “Case Study: Rowan University College of Education — Restructuring for a Community-Centered Approach,” page 21 for more detail).

Schools of education shouldn’t have to do this work alone; indeed, realizing the goals of improved teacher training requires large-scale institutional commitment and resources. The larger campus communities of the colleges or universities in which educator preparation lives should also examine the voices and perspectives that are included and excluded within their curricula more broadly and assess whether the school positions students to engage productively with difficult topics, such as racism, sexism, and social justice. Dr. Nyeema Watson, the associate chancellor for civic engagement at Rutgers University, Camden,<sup>40</sup> put it succinctly: “Given that racism, sexism, etc. are structural problems affecting almost everything, it should be hard for students to avoid these conversations. But too often the opposite is true, and actually having the discussion is what’s challenging. That needs to change.”<sup>41</sup>

Redesigning curricula to be more inclusive and reflective of a wider range of experience is at the core of preparing teacher candidates to teach in increasingly diverse classrooms. That said, it’s difficult work that requires ongoing commitment and effort from the program’s faculty and leadership. But if it’s done well, teacher candidates will graduate better prepared to serve students of color. Moreover, revamping curricula to be more responsive and representative of diverse educators may increase the attractiveness of the program to a range of prospective candidates by demonstrating a clear commitment to them, their experiences, and the students they hope to serve.



## Teacher Training Programs Often Do Not Do Enough to Facilitate Candidates' Examination of Their Own Racial Identities, Stereotypes, and Biases. This Omission Adversely Affects Teachers' Classrooms and Students.

One of the many challenges of education in general, but particularly for those who wish to become teachers, is to help identify the ways in which unconscious notions can influence the way we act and how we think. Indeed, one's own experiences of the world can help to determine how we encounter other people and their experience. Within a large social project, such as training new teachers, this complicated dynamic can sometimes lead to discrimination and even contribute to systemic inequality.

All too often, these unfortunate features of American society are reflected and just as often magnified or perpetuated unintentionally in its schools. Schools of education and teacher preparation programs need to provide teacher candidates with the skills necessary to grapple with their own biases and learn to navigate with awareness. This is particularly important given the role of educators as vital supports for students' learning and well-being.

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A significant barrier, particularly for white teachers, to successfully teach students of color is that many potential teachers have not explored their own racial identity, nor deeply engaged with the problem of structural inequality and the many ways it affects people of color and other marginalized communities.<sup>42</sup>

It is vital that schools of education and teacher preparation programs expose teacher candidates to these problems, helping them explore their own experiences with such issues and the impact on their worldview. Doing so will help teachers provide higher-quality support to their students through greater understanding and empathy for them, their families, and their communities.

While all teacher candidates would benefit from investigating how their worldview is constructed, it can be a difficult task for white teachers for a number of reasons. For one, white communities are increasingly segregated.<sup>43</sup> Indeed, many white teacher candidates have had few diverse or multicultural experiences when they enter a teaching preservice program.<sup>44</sup> Furthermore, the myth of "colorblindness" (a discourse, even if well-intentioned, that overlooks the implicit and structural nature of racism), serves to reinforce bias and systemic inequality rather than disrupt it.<sup>45</sup> In fact, many preservice teachers — like the general population — are wholly unaware of their biases.<sup>46</sup>

*“When a person of color confronts a white person on the issues of racism and white supremacy, the resistance is greater than if those same challenges were raised by another white person. In other words, a white person confronting another white person’s privilege can be pedagogically more effective, as both share the same power level.”<sup>47</sup>*

– Cesare Rossatto, associate professor, University of Texas, El Paso

It is important to keep in mind, however, that the task of learning to effectively engage with diverse communities and provide high-quality education to students of color is not strictly facing white teacher candidates alone. Indeed, it is a challenge for all preservice teachers. Dr. Cassandra Herring, founder and CEO of the Branch Alliance for Educator Diversity, put it plainly: “In my experience, all teachers need to learn a level of awareness and cultural competence. It is a mistake to assume that some folks innately have the ability to work in certain settings. All teachers, even those who look like the students they will teach, need the skills to understand and engage with families and communities.”<sup>48</sup>

Together the limited experiences in diverse settings and preconceived notions about themselves and the communities they will serve can produce significant challenges. For example, study after study finds that white teachers have lower expectations for their nonwhite students.<sup>49</sup> Additionally, some studies suggest white preservice teachers have “negative beliefs” about their nonwhite students.

These challenges are real and significant. Teacher preparation programs and schools of education should seek to help their students engage with them directly.

Addressing these issues at MSIs is almost unavoidable since their students are often those who experience the negative consequences of structural inequality. Indeed, most MSIs were founded as a specific response to the exclusion of people of color from institutions of higher education.

To be sure, the majority of schools of education and teacher preparation programs cannot simply replicate the historic significance and mission of MSIs. That said, they can incorporate dedicated classes, such as those focused on multicultural education, into their program and ensure that all of their students engage critically with the many problems of structural inequality.

For some schools, a first step could be to add a required multicultural education (MCE) course, or include a mandated class on culturally relevant pedagogy into schools’ teacher training programs. Fortunately, these kinds of classes are becoming more common. But it is important that schools of education require students to successfully complete their program. An MCE class can take many forms. A successful course facilitates self-reflection, embedding classroom learning within the larger context of field experiences. A high-quality MCE class provides ample support and feedback to teacher candidates as they challenge their previously held assumptions, biases, and worldview.

There have been a number of studies evaluating the impact of these courses on preservice teacher practice, as well as attitudes and perceptions toward diverse students and communities. The results have been mixed. In some cases, the studies revealed that MCE courses helped teacher candidates come to recognize their own social and economic privileges that are the product of structural inequality, and to acknowledge consequences of that inequity on education.<sup>50</sup> Others, however, have found that these courses can actually reinforce negative stereotypes,<sup>51</sup> or that white teachers tend to blame their students for their struggles rather than acknowledge the impact of societal inequities on student achievement.<sup>52</sup>

As shown by NCTQ's analysis of teacher preparation across the country, there is considerable variation nationwide in the quality and the curricula of schools of education. Schools may use a similar approach, text, or program and produce very different results because implementation truly matters. The same is true for MCE courses. Their efficacy will likely depend on the specific content of the course, its relationship to teacher candidates' field experience, and how well the central tenets of MCE feature throughout the other courses in the program.

Multicultural courses and the engagement with difficult topics can take many different forms. Whatever the methods, the key, according to Dr. Nives Wetzel De Cediél of the University of California, Berkeley, is to push teacher candidates "to be uncomfortable on purpose, and learn to share power, give up power, and disrupt power."<sup>53</sup> According to an analysis of more than two dozen studies of multicultural education, MCE classes need to help teacher candidates "connect race-based privilege with systemic inequities," and "push preservice teachers to examine their own individualized experience within a broader social context."<sup>54</sup> Of course, as has been mentioned previously, MCE courses alone are not sufficient to prepare teachers to serve students of color. But they may provide an important piece of the puzzle for some institutions.

### **Focusing on Unpacking Racial Stereotypes and Biases Can Be Challenging for Teacher Candidates of Color and Can Unintentionally Create an Unfair Burden on Them**

All teacher candidates enrolled in a school of education or a teacher preparation program are there for only one reason: They want to take the courses required to become a teacher. And since about 80 percent of teachers are white while most students are nonwhite, teacher preparation needs to involve serious engagement on how best to serve students of color.<sup>55</sup> This requires candidates to examine their own beliefs, racial identities, and assumptions about the communities they will serve.

The earnest attempts of schools of education and teacher preparation programs to facilitate candidates' grappling with these issues, while vitally important, may unintentionally alienate candidates of color, ask them to speak on behalf of their entire race or culture, or burden them with supporting their classmates' engagement with systemic racial inequality. That dynamic is unfair to teacher candidates of color and makes the teacher preparation classroom even more acutely focused on whiteness.<sup>56</sup>

This scenario, even though likely well intended, can make it difficult for candidates of color to participate in discussions,<sup>57</sup> and can create friction between different groups of students.<sup>58</sup> For example, a recent study of a course paired with a student teaching experience in candidates' second year of an education master's program found that the discussions led to the unintended consequence of polarizing the class over what and who truly constitutes a "social justice" educator.<sup>59</sup> The participants of color in particular reported feeling that the program did not address sufficiently actions and speech from their peers that they found racist, sexist, homophobic, or otherwise biased. Attempts to bridge the divide, including a town hall-style meeting, were insufficient to defuse the tension.<sup>60</sup>

*“Professors need to know their students, what their interests are, their ideologies, and what their triggers are to support them. That commitment needs to be program-wide. One or two faculty members cannot be the only ones who provide this kind of support to their students.”<sup>61</sup>*

– Joy Esboldt, PhD candidate, UC Berkeley, and former equity coach at a Minnesota school district

There is also the problem of specifically or even unintentionally “asking” particular students to speak for their race, gender, or group generally. As Dr. April Scott, a graduate of Tuskegee University and currently the associate director of mental health initiatives at the University of South Carolina, described it, this “can give [students of color] the sense that they’re not really a part of the class or school, that their culture and experiences are unimportant and secondary.”<sup>62</sup> Indeed, no group is a monolith and thus asking anyone to speak on behalf of a large group they belong to is reductive and serves to reinforce stereotypes. There are a number of protocols as well as conversation frameworks and guidance to help facilitate difficult conversations, particularly around race. The Pacific Educational Group, for example, developed Courageous Conversation to facilitate effective discussions about race.<sup>63</sup>

There is a case to be made that all teacher candidates, regardless of race or ethnicity, should receive some formal training in multiculturalism. However, Dr. Chezare Warren of Michigan State University offers an alternative view on this particular question. To avoid overburdening or alienating teacher candidates of color, he argues that “these courses tend to center the professional development needs of white teacher candidates. It might be beneficial to consider creating course sections of the same course that better build upon

and extend the knowledges of students of color, such that their interests and learning needs are more central.”<sup>64</sup> It is likely that as teacher educators become more adept at creating truly inclusive classrooms, this option would become less necessary since the courses would not alienate or overburden preservice teachers of color.

### Cultural Competence Is Not Only for White Teachers

*“I tend to shy away from the sense that white teachers in particular need to learn something others don’t. In my experience and in my reality, all teachers need to learn a level of awareness and cultural competence. Assuming that some folks naturally have access or ability to work in certain places is dangerous. Just because a teacher candidate looks like her future students does not mean she is equipped to teach those children. All teachers need to be equipped with the knowledge and skills to understand and engage with families and communities....Focusing exclusively on what white teachers need to know can let teachers of color off the hook. Teacher education needs to get beyond culture-blind approaches that avoid discussion of difference and move toward a framework that values diversity as an asset that enriches learning.”*

– Dr. Cassandra Herring, founder and CEO of the Branch Alliance for Educator Diversity

Building a program that successfully addresses systemic inequality will require a commitment from the program or school. It can be difficult for schools of education and teacher preparation to navigate the tension of helping their white teacher candidates confront structural racism and inequality, while not minimizing the education of candidates of color or forcing them to support directly the growth of their peers.<sup>65</sup> With that in mind, teacher educators will play an important role in balancing these two priorities. Professors need to be comfortable engaging with and facilitating difficult conversations with their students. It’s important that professors share the responsibility of challenging biases and stereotypes.

To prepare graduates to work successfully in increasingly diverse settings, schools of education and teacher preparation programs need to help candidates engage critically with complex issues such as power, race, and gender. That said, these programs must also be aware of and guard against creating learning environments that marginalize or overburden candidates of color.

# Rowan University College of Education — Restructuring for a Community-Centered Approach

*Rowan University, located in New Jersey, enrolls approximately 18,500 undergraduate and graduate students. Thirty percent of Rowan students are from historically underrepresented communities.<sup>i</sup>*

## Overview

After 90 years of successfully preparing teachers, Rowan University's College of Education recently dramatically restructured its program toward social justice and equity. Transforming its program required, among other efforts, redesigning departments, rethinking recruitment, and revising the curriculum, as well as prioritizing community perspectives and needs.

The university leveraged an upcoming national accreditation review and the launch of the Center for Access, Success, and Equity (CASE)<sup>ii</sup>, a technical research and assistance center housed within the College of Education to engage in meaningful discussions with various stakeholders, and as a result reimagined the entire college in order to meet student and community needs and advance equity. Rowan began this process five years ago, and the school constantly assesses its impact on students as well as the schools its graduates serve. Moreover, the university continuously seeks out feedback from the community to help the program grow and to understand how best to serve community members.

Below is a glimpse into a few of the many initiatives Rowan undertook to restructure its education program to better prepare teacher candidates to effectively serve students of color.

## Community Partnerships

The transformation of Rowan's College of Education relied heavily on community input and ongoing participation. To kick off its restructuring process, Rowan's school of education hosted town hall meetings across New Jersey, particularly in the southern region of the state, which it primarily serves. Faculty facilitated conversations about community needs, ideas for collaboration, and how Rowan can help prepare teachers to better serve their children.

## CASE STUDY

The data from the town hall meetings was analyzed and the major themes were used to develop strategic priorities for the College of Education and CASE. For example, the College of Education restructured departments to create a focus on interdisciplinary and inclusive education and science, technology, engineering, the arts, and mathematics (STEAM) education. The restructuring resulted in new programs that reflect the commitment of the college to issues of access and equity. The college now offers a bachelor of arts in inclusive education that provides certification in early childhood or elementary education and an endorsement in special education. Teacher candidates in the inclusive education program may also receive an undergraduate certificate in urban education or bilingual and bicultural education embedded within the program.

Rowan took community engagement a step further by expanding the Professional Development Schools network to include 11 schools across South Jersey. Each school has a Rowan Professor-in-Residence (PIR). The PIRs are university faculty or Ph.D. students with experience and expertise in teacher professional development. PDS schools now participate in the selection of teacher candidates for clinical practice placements, which represent the culminating experience in teacher education as well as the hiring of PIRs for their schools. In addition, the college launched the Community College Forum, which brings together representatives in teacher education from seven area community colleges. This approach fosters strong relationships between schools of education and the communities they serve.

One outcome of the forum is the new “three plus one” program, in which students can spend three years at a community college and then matriculate to Rowan University College of Education in their final year. Dean Shealey asserts that “[an institution] cannot be committed to access and affordability and not partner with community colleges.”<sup>iii</sup> Opening Rowan’s education programming to community college students will lead to a greater number and wider range of teacher candidates entering the classroom and likely contribute to diversifying New Jersey’s teacher workforce.

### **Commitment to Expanding Equity**

To deepen its focus on advancing education equity and more closely aligning teacher preparation with the communities graduates will serve, Rowan’s College of Education established CASE. The center includes a number of degree programs and other initiatives specifically designed to address local, state, and national challenges to access, success, and equity for historically underserved students.

In addition to a Ph.D. program on that topic, the center developed a master of arts in urban education and community studies. The program trains teachers and school leaders to better serve students in urban settings through close partnership with the community. This approach helps candidates to understand the complex historical and socioeconomic contexts facing many students in urban settings and to support them more effectively. Finally, through CASE Rowan University now participates in

## CASE STUDY

the American Association of Colleges for Teacher Education's (AACTE) Holmes Scholars program,<sup>iv</sup> which supports doctoral candidates from traditionally marginalized backgrounds. Altogether, CASE will help to better prepare educators and school leaders to serve communities of color through their comprehensive, contextualized, community-centric approach.

The Rowan College of Education has developed an innovative recruitment and retention program for diverse males in teaching. Project Increasing Male Practitioners and Classroom Teachers (IMPACT) is in its fourth year and has approximately 30 male teacher candidates in programs ranging from early childhood education to the master of arts in STEM education (an initial certification program for math and science majors). A full-time recruitment and retention specialist and the Men of Color network support the program. The network includes diverse male educators and leaders who provide individual and group mentoring to IMPACT Scholars. Project IMPACT is housed within the Office of Educator Support and Partnerships. This office also houses the Professional Development Schools Network and Rowan Urban Teacher Academies, a pipeline program for high school students interested in teaching.

- i "Rowan Fast Facts 2017–2018," Rowan University, [https://sites.rowan.edu/fastfacts/\\_docs/rowan\\_by\\_the\\_numbers.pdf](https://sites.rowan.edu/fastfacts/_docs/rowan_by_the_numbers.pdf).
- ii "Center for Access, Success, and Equity (CASE)," Rowan University, <https://academics.rowan.edu/education/CASE/index.html>.
- iii Monika Shealey (dean, College of Education, Rowan University), in discussion with the authors, October 8, 2018.
- iv "AACTE Holmes Program," American Association of Colleges for Teacher Education, <https://aacte.org/programs-and-services/holmes-program>.



## Design Field Experiences Intentionally to Ensure Candidates Engage with Diverse Students, Contexts, and Other Educators

*In addition to providing preservice teachers with real-world teaching experience, schools of education and teacher preparation programs should look to build strong, reciprocal relationships with districts, schools, and communities.*

Field experience is perhaps the most important feature of a preservice teacher's training. It provides candidates with an opportunity to practice and get feedback on what they've learned in a real-world setting. And more than that, field experience should introduce them to the schools, students, and communities they're likely to serve. Schools of education and teacher preparation programs should, as much as possible, intentionally design candidates' field experiences to expose them to a diversity of students, contexts, and other educators. It will be important, however, for teacher training programs to facilitate critical reflection on these experiences and for them to be sequenced carefully from shorter, lower-stakes engagement to student teaching.

In addition to providing preservice teachers with real-world teaching experience, schools of education and teacher preparation programs should look to build strong, reciprocal relationships with districts, schools, and communities. This kind of partnership will not only facilitate learning experiences for teacher candidates, but will also provide an opportunity for community perspectives to be included and to ensure teacher training programs adequately reflect their needs and values.

Our research revealed two critical observations regarding how schools of education and teacher preparation programs structure and provide candidates with diverse field experiences.

## Too Often Teacher Candidates' Fieldwork Is Short and Limited to Communities and Classrooms Similar to Those They Came From

There is no substitute for experience. We heard across all of our interviews that providing teacher candidates with ample opportunities, even as early as their first year in the program, to observe and work in diverse settings is critically important.

All teacher candidates can benefit and grow through their field experiences. However, for white preservice teachers, the fieldwork component presents a particularly significant opportunity since most have had few multicultural experiences, and unfortunately, teacher training programs often do not provide them.<sup>66</sup> For example, a recent study found that white teachers often do not receive training to work with diverse populations, and less than half are trained on how best to educate English learners.<sup>67</sup> Alarming, a 2012 study found that teachers' misunderstanding of Latino culture contributes significantly to the Latino-white achievement gap.<sup>68</sup>

While fieldwork is vitally important to the professional and personal development of preservice teachers, there is also a danger that it could harden teacher candidates' misconceptions and negative attitudes toward particular student groups. To work against this, research consistently suggests schools of education and teacher preparation programs directly address candidates' assumptions, beliefs,<sup>69</sup> and their own worldviews and biases.<sup>70</sup> To that end, fieldwork should be accompanied by guided reflection and inquiry. In short, classroom learning should inform field experiences, and discussions should reflect critically on students' observations and practice while in schools. Some research-based strategies include: teaching student ethnographic research skills and assigning a research project in diverse schools and communities; working and volunteering with community-based, youth- and family-serving nonprofits; and tutoring children in contexts distinct from one's own.<sup>71</sup> Generally speaking, diverse and multifaceted field experience improves candidate readiness to teach in a wide range of school and community settings. However, it is critical that programs pair such hands-on work with intentional reflection and guided analysis of candidates' experiences. Otherwise, evidence suggests these experiences may reinforce rather than upset stereotypes and biases.<sup>72</sup>

The typical teacher preparation model often only requires on average a single semester of classroom student teaching.<sup>73</sup> A number of alternative certification programs, such as Teach For America (TFA) or the Teaching Fellows program run by TNTP, have significantly less preservice field experience, ranging from five to eight weeks. As a result, many teacher candidates have limited experience working in schools prior to teaching. However, both TFA and TNTP embed ongoing professional learning while participants are teaching. Numerous studies of the effectiveness of these alternative teacher training programs have found that TFA- and TNTP-trained teachers tend to be at least as effective as traditionally trained teachers, and in some cases they are marginally more effective at raising student

*To that end, fieldwork should be accompanied by guided reflection and inquiry. In short, classroom learning should inform field experiences, and discussions should reflect critically on students' observations and practice while in schools.*

achievement.<sup>74</sup> Moreover, TFA and TNTP are mission-oriented organizations that intentionally place teachers in struggling districts and schools with vacancies and high teacher turnover.<sup>75</sup> Thus, graduates from these programs work in districts and schools serving the students with the most significant needs and who often face the greatest barriers to success.<sup>76</sup>

To ensure that its students access a wide variety of different classroom experiences, Grambling State University, an HBCU in rural Louisiana, formed partnerships with school districts across the state, from Shreveport to the Delta region.<sup>77</sup> Dr. Cheryl Ensley of Grambling State, the former assistant superintendent of DeSoto Independent School District in Texas, explained that the university seeks to provide a “plethora of experiences and exposure to the field beginning with students in [their first year] and running through [senior year].”<sup>78</sup> Dr. Elaine Foster of Grambling State added, “The more interactions [students] have with children of color, the better prepared they’ll be. Students are placed in sites to gain diverse, hands-on experience, and not only with children of color but a wide variety of settings during their preparation period.”<sup>79</sup>

## Sidebar 1

### Teacher Residency Programs

Residency programs are one way that some schools of education provide teacher candidates with robust clinical experiences. These programs can provide teacher candidates with significantly more experience with their future students, colleagues, and educators. This lengthier engagement can help candidates gain a greater understanding of the people and culture they hope to serve, which in turn can help them as teachers to provide higher-quality education and support.

Although there is no one single model of teacher residency programs, many share a number of key components: a close-knit partnership between the operator and the local education agency (LEA); control over the recruitment process; a yearlong clinical experience with an experienced mentor teacher; coursework tightly linked to the teacher candidate’s classroom experience, coaching, mentoring, and induction support; and placement in the partner LEA after the residency is complete.

A number of teacher residency programs actively recruit with the intention of building more diverse pipelines as well as appeal to more diverse candidates, including teacher candidates of color, candidates from a low-income background, and nontraditional career changers. According to the National Center on Teacher Residencies, more than 45 percent of residents in their network identified as teachers of color. Nearly 50 percent of Boston Teacher Residency candidates are teachers of color, compared to 38 percent of all teachers in Boston Public Schools.

*It is important to keep in mind that diversity can take many forms, ranging from racial and ethnic differences to geographic and varying socioeconomic statuses and experiences like serving in the military.*

It is important to keep in mind that diversity can take many forms, ranging from racial and ethnic differences to geographic and varying socioeconomic statuses and experiences like serving in the military. Too often conversations and efforts to improve diversity narrowly focus on the needs of urban communities. While that focus is of course important, it's a mistake to look only at that particular form of diversity. Doing so overlooks the many instantiations of diversity within and across groups. Grambling State designs its field experiences specifically to avoid this problem and to expose candidates to multiple communities and settings. According to Foster, "Candidates are placed in rural settings as well as larger settings to get that experience in interacting with diverse students at various levels." In order to effectively prepare teacher candidates to teach students from different backgrounds, faculty representing different perspectives create and support structures to help them.

The program at Mary Lou Fulton Teachers College at Arizona State University (MLFTC) is designed specifically to introduce teacher candidates to as many students, educators, and settings as possible throughout their program. In their first or second year, teacher candidates are required to engage in service learning, typically with a youth-serving nonprofit. In their third year, candidates conduct an internship, often with students who are culturally and ethnically different from them. And finally, their senior year is a full residency program. Dr. Carole Basile, dean of the program, said, "Classes about culturally responsive teaching are important venues to talk about the issues facing [candidates] when they enter diverse classrooms. But, in the end, it's really all about the experience [they] get during the program."<sup>80</sup>

Part of the redesign process of Rowan University's teacher education program included restructuring its field and clinical experiences. Rowan's School of Education faculty and leadership worked with Etta Hollins, the author of "Rethinking Field Experiences,"<sup>81</sup> to help the school build a program that accommodates the full continuum of field experiences across diverse settings. The school also developed protocols to supervise candidates and examine their practice. In their freshman year, candidates engage in 20 hours a week of observing and completing activities with students, families, and teachers. Candidate field experiences build on this foundation throughout the remainder of the program.<sup>82</sup>

Strong district partnerships are crucial to developing effective field experiences and are mutually beneficial to both teacher training programs and the districts themselves. These relationships can benefit a teacher preparation program by ensuring that teacher candidates have well-rounded practical experiences in the classroom and potential opportunities for placement upon graduation. School districts will be able to recruit from the program's teacher candidate pipeline, which will include many potential candidates who already have critical experience in their schools.

## Osage Nation Educational Leadership Academy (ONELA)

*Kansas State University*

This program recently was created in partnership between the Osage Nation, a Midwestern Native American tribe, and Kansas State University with the goal of training Osage education leaders. Program participants will earn a master's degree over two years. In addition to preparing candidates for early childhood and K-12 education settings, the program importantly focuses on training graduates in critically reflective approaches to cultural preservation, critical indigenous studies, and increasing tribal education capacities. Nine students graduated in 2018 with their master's in educational leadership.

There were several key conditions and strategies that supported the successful creation of ONELA. For example:

- **Strong norms for institutional partnerships.** Kansas State University's Department of Educational Leadership already developed a norm and process for partnership with school districts that could be adapted to collaborate with the Osage Nation.
- **Financial support with independence to develop the program.** To successfully develop ONELA, the program needed sustained and committed financial support from the university and the tribe, as well as the freedom to work with tribal leaders to build a program that meets the needs of all stakeholders. To that end, ONELA named a full-time liaison who is knowledgeable about the cultural, political, and economic landscape of Indian Country.
- **Partnerships with native faculty and other tribal communities.** The development of ONELA occurred in parallel with the revival of the Kansas Association for Native American Education and the formation of the Indigenous Faculty and Staff Alliance. Together these organizations signaled the need and helped to build a community of practice at the university, state, and regional level.

This program helps to develop a pipeline of educators from the Osage Nation who are well prepared to serve their community. Moreover, the program helps to introduce critical indigenous studies and other important perspectives into the school of education more generally, which can help all candidates learn how to more effectively serve Native students.

Building close relationships with indigenous communities and programs to support tribal education – which help Native nations become more active in the education of their citizens – is an urgent need across the country. Over 90 percent of Native students attend traditional public schools rather than tribal schools. And with over 570 federally recognized Native nations spread across more than 30 states, hundreds of colleges and universities are well positioned to partner with and more effectively serve Native students and communities.<sup>i</sup>

<sup>i</sup> Alex Red Corn (assistant professor, Kansas State University) in discussion with the authors, October 17, 2018.

Given demographic and geographic realities, it may be difficult for some schools of education to provide teacher candidates with a wealth of diverse classroom experiences. But the limited availability of these kinds of school environments should not completely restrict a program's ability to introduce candidates to students and schools in high-poverty, rural, urban, or racially segregated contexts. Programs can make use of videos, remote conferencing, and other technologies to introduce candidates to different students, teachers, and cultural settings. While imperfect, this approach would offer at least a window into different educational experiences and provide candidates with the opportunity to learn from current teachers across the country.

### **Schools of Education and Teacher Preparation Programs Too Often Have Transactional Relationships with the Communities They Serve**

Classroom observations and student teaching are the bedrock of most teacher training programs. Indeed, these field experiences are perhaps the most important and influential part of teacher candidates' education. To place candidates for field experiences, schools of education and other teacher preparation programs often have memoranda of understanding (MOUs) with school districts and charter organizations with which they work. Often the primary function of these relationships is to facilitate teacher candidates' field training experiences.

But that's not all they can or should do. Partnerships between districts and schools of education should not simply be for the benefit of preservice teachers. These placements should not solely be where candidates try out what they've learned. Instead, this should be a mutually beneficial relationship in which teachers, parents, schools, and the community can provide feedback and have a voice in the training of the teachers who will ultimately be responsible for educating their children. Setting aside the phenomenon of importing teachers to districts that experience rapid growth (something that falls outside the scope of this discussion on teacher preparation), teachers tend to teach in communities near where they completed their student teaching.<sup>83</sup> It is therefore important that teacher preparation programs have strong, positive relationships with schools and communities in order to provide high-quality clinical experiences and to reflect the values and aspirations of the communities they serve.

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One way to build that kind of relationship is to engage regularly with parents and community members, listen to their needs and concerns, and respond as necessary. This is not to say that parents should have decision-making power over which candidates a school of education admits to its program. Rather, this kind of reciprocity would help schools of education better respond to the specific needs of the communities they serve. For example, a close, reciprocal relationship could provide schools of education a better sense of the kind of teachers they need, such as a specific grade or subject. But perhaps even more importantly, through strong partnerships schools will come to know better the qualities,

characteristics, and experiences new teachers need to serve their children well. Schools of education tend to cater to the interests and desires of their teacher candidates, and they would be well served by also incorporating the needs of the people from the communities where their graduates will work.

Building the necessary trust for this kind of robust relationship will take time. It will be particularly important for the schools of education and teacher preparation programs to demonstrate their commitment to the communities they serve. For Rowan University, community engagement was central to the redesign of its education program and remains a critical component of the work it is doing. For a year Rowan education faculty held town hall meetings across the state. Faculty members hosted and recorded roundtable discussions to identify community needs, which informed the school's new strategic priorities and the launch of the Center for Access, Success, and Equity (CASE). Rowan also established an educator preparation advisory council with teachers, principals, alumni, and current students. In the end, Dean Monika Shealey, who led Rowan's school of education redesign effort, said, "The most important result of this work is that our communities now demand a real voice. They demand real engagement from the universities that serve them."<sup>84</sup>

There are other strategies schools of education and teacher preparation programs can undertake short of a complete overhaul. For example, Dr. Elaine Foster of Grambling State University suggested that schools seeking to build stronger community relationships should consider establishing a director of field experiences. This position could manage candidates' field placements as well as develop more robust relationships with schools, districts, and communities. Furthermore, a formal position empowered to develop strong partnerships would help to address the all-too-common problem that these relationships are often ad hoc, and driven by faculty members' personal connections.<sup>85</sup>

Strong district partnerships at the Mary Lou Fulton Teachers College (MLFTC) at Arizona State University helped identify needs and develop strategies for meeting them. A district partner, for example, wanted to introduce business owners within the district into the schools earlier in their students' careers to build mentorship programs. MLFTC helped facilitate that relationship, which eventually led to the school's development of a short training program to help prepare potential mentors to effectively serve in the community's schools.<sup>86</sup>

Another way for schools of education and teacher preparation programs to include the community is to train parents and other community members to fill a wide range of supporting roles in schools. This approach to developing the education workforce would lead to a greater number of adults in schools serving a range of roles, ultimately providing greater student support and stronger connections across the community, schools, and teacher training programs.

## Building Community Relations through Alternative Pathways into Schools

To build stronger relationships between schools and communities, as well as provide greater supports to students, the Mary Lou Fulton Teachers College (MLFTC) at Arizona State University is undergoing a process to restructure its educator training program. Their vision is to develop “teams of educators with distributed expertise, working in concert to better meet the personalized, academic, and social-emotional needs of P-12 students and the communities in which they live.”<sup>i</sup> In addition to the professional program that will provide teacher candidates with specializations, MLFTC is developing a number of alternative pathways into the classroom tailored to specific educational needs that can attract parents, former educators, and other community members to work in schools in various full- and part-time roles.

MLFTC’s alternative pathways are not designed for candidates to become teachers of record in the classroom. Instead, they are structured to train participants in the necessary competencies to fill a variety of roles in schools from mentors to playground supervisors.<sup>ii</sup> Overall, the program has identified more than 20 roles organized across eight different domains. For example, Targeted Roles are limited, part-time, and specific to tasks such as helping with homework. The program also has roles to connect schools with the community and real-world experience.<sup>iii</sup> According to Basile, the idea is to “create a set of roles for people in the community to come in and be a part of these educator teams and provide support, resources, and build relationships with students. But before they can do that, they need to be trained. MLFTC will prepare them for these roles.”<sup>iv</sup>

MLFTC’s approach to expanding the educator workforce is promising for a number of reasons. For one, it will build stronger ties between schools and the communities they serve. Students will have greater access to wraparound services and support. Finally, this strategy will likely increase the opportunities for teacher candidates to learn from members of the community.

i Carole Basile (dean, Mary Lou Fulton Teachers College, Arizona State University) in discussion with Max Marchitello, September 18, 2018.

ii Ibid.

iii Ibid.

iv Ibid.

Ultimately, the form and substance of these partnerships will vary considerably depending on the specifics of the teacher training program and the communities they serve. A one-size-fits-all approach simply wouldn’t work. These relationships are context specific. It became clear across our interviews and research that the key is for schools to build trust with the communities they serve, to maintain transparency, and ultimately to carefully respond to their needs and concerns to the best of their ability.



## Increase Diversity in Program Faculty and in the Teacher Candidates Themselves

As we've discussed throughout this paper, preparing teacher candidates to serve in increasingly diverse classrooms often requires introducing them to a variety of different contexts, communities, perspectives, and experiences. In addition to revising the curricula and intentionally exposing students to a variety of field experiences, schools of education and teacher preparation programs should seek to diversify themselves, both in the pool of candidates they prepare for the classroom and among the faculty who train them. A more diverse faculty can bring a wider range of perspectives to teacher candidates, as well as help to challenge their worldviews, biases, and stereotypes. In short, the more diverse the faculty and candidates are, the better the program will be able to prepare its graduates to serve effectively in today's classrooms.

### **Faculty at Schools of Education Often Lack Diversity, Which Can Make It Difficult to Prepare Teacher Candidates to Effectively Teach Diverse Students**

Diversity problems are not limited to teacher candidates. Indeed, the majority of faculty and staff at schools of education and teacher education programs are white. As of fall 2016, the 1.5 million faculty members in degree-granting postsecondary institutions were 76 percent white.<sup>87</sup> This fact presents several challenges for preparing candidates to work effectively in our increasingly diverse public schools. For one, a faculty that mostly looks like their teacher candidates and comes from a similar background can limit candidates'

*In order to better prepare all teachers to teach diverse students, schools of education and teacher preparation programs should review and consider revising their own hiring and admissions practices to increase faculty and candidate diversity.*

exposure to different perspectives and experiences. Moreover, a largely culturally homogenous faculty may unintentionally perpetuate worldviews, biases, and stereotypes their students may hold rather than challenge them.

In order to better prepare all teachers to teach diverse students, schools of education and teacher preparation programs should review and consider revising their own hiring and admissions practices to increase faculty and candidate diversity. Doing so will have a direct impact on the teacher preparation program and help teacher candidates to better serve diverse student populations.

In the previous sections, we highlighted the importance of a comprehensive curricular review, facilitating candidates' examination of their racial identity, and forging partnerships with diverse communities in order to better prepare white teachers to work in diverse schools. While these components are independently important, they are most effective and self-sustaining when paired with a diverse faculty.

Diversifying the faculty of a school of education can help shift programs and candidates away from curricula and practices that reinforce a deficit mindset – an attitude that attributes someone's shortcomings to a lack of effort and therefore overlooks systemic factors – and toward an asset-based framework instead. There is research demonstrating that when white teacher candidates are no longer the majority in their class, important shifts in their racial attitudes can occur. For instance, in a 2008 study, a researcher observed a teacher preparation program's classroom discussion of bilingualism in which white teacher candidates were the minority in a predominantly Latino classroom. In this discussion, white candidates shifted focus from the economic downsides of bilingualism to the moral necessity of dual language teachers when discussing the topic with Latino classmates. From these findings, the author recommends that teacher preparation programs hire more faculty of color in order to provide different perspectives from white teacher educators.<sup>88</sup> In addition to increasing faculty diversity, intentionally placing faculty of color in positions of power and leadership should help the program undertake curricular and structural changes necessary for white educators to serve communities of color. Higher education accreditation agencies have a role, but currently they're falling short of establishing and enforcing meaningful diversity standards across the country.<sup>89</sup>

While hiring diverse faculty members is critically important, there are not always open positions. However, that shouldn't stop schools of education and teacher preparation from investing in faculty development. One approach is to provide current faculty members with regular professional development both to acknowledge and interrogate their own biases, but also to learn how to facilitate similar exploration for the candidates they're teaching. According to Dr. Nyeema Watson, "Additional ongoing professional development needs to be provided. When we have implicit biases training, we need to be very specific for what goes on in those spaces. There need to be multiple trainings. White teachers need more

*A more diverse faculty will not only have an impact on the program itself, but will also help to reinforce and substantiate other efforts to restructure how teacher candidates are prepared for today's classrooms, such as revising the curricula and including courses on multiculturalism or culturally relevant pedagogy.*

training to become comfortable talking about whiteness and relating to experiences in classrooms.”<sup>90</sup> Training on diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) is necessary to reinforce anti-bias sentiments and develop and maintain a culture that is receptive to discussions of power, race, and gender. There are a number of resources available, such as studies of biases in academia and biases in personnel decisions, which provide information on unconscious bias.<sup>91</sup> Faculty and teacher candidates of color bring significant value to a teacher preparation program, yet it is important to note they should neither be responsible for educating their faculty about these issues, nor exclusively relied upon to teach multiculturalism or other similarly focused courses.

Undoubtedly, faculty diversity is an important element in successfully preparing teachers, particularly white teachers, to work in increasingly diverse schools. A more diverse faculty will not only have an impact on the program itself, but will also help to reinforce and substantiate other efforts to restructure how teacher candidates are prepared for today's classrooms, such as revising the curricula and including courses on multiculturalism or culturally relevant pedagogy. In conjunction with diversifying their faculty, schools of education and teacher preparation programs should provide training on diversity, equity, and inclusion. This will help faculty to investigate their own biases and the problems of structural inequality, as well as learn how to guide teacher candidates through a similar process.

## Recommendations

To respond to the diversifying student body and the fact that many white teachers struggle to effectively educate students of color, schools of education and teacher preparation programs need to adapt. They need to do a better job preparing white teacher candidates to teach in increasingly diverse schools and communities.

Our research and interviews with experts and practitioners across the country identified three key objectives for schools of education and teacher preparation programs to focus on: increasing exposure to diverse perspectives throughout the curricula; providing candidates with multiple field experiences across a variety of settings; and diversifying program faculty and candidates.

The path to pursuing those goals will look different from program to program. Below are eight recommendations designed to help schools of education and preparation programs respond to this urgent need and prepare white teachers for diverse classrooms.

**1 Conduct a comprehensive curricular review to incorporate diverse perspectives and experiences.** Simply put, it is vitally important that white preservice teachers prepare to educate and support students of color by learning from the expertise, experiences, and practices of educators of color. Too often schools of education and teacher preparation programs lack these critical voices. To remedy this, teacher training programs should review their curricula, identifying the present perspectives and those that are missing. Next, they should integrate additional perspectives on educational theory, pedagogy, and practice.

- 2 Incorporate high quality courses dedicated to culturally relevant pedagogy as well as multicultural education and embed their principles throughout the program.** A well-designed, well-implemented class on multicultural education or a similar topic can be a strong addition to a program’s course offerings. It is important, however, that the class be required. But a single class simply isn’t enough. To truly help teacher candidates confront their own biases and stereotypes, schools of education and preparation program need to integrate these principles throughout the curricula, even in methods courses.
- 3 Guard against overburdening candidates of color with unnecessary responsibility in helping their white peers confront their identities, stereotypes, and biases.** Teacher candidates of color, like their classmates, are enrolled in a teacher training program to become educators. And for their white colleagues, an important part of that training is for them to investigate their own racial identities, as well as structural inequality and its impact on marginalized students and communities. It is crucial that teacher preparation programs facilitate that important learning without unintentionally relying on candidates of color to guide their white colleagues. Some strategies include using protocols to facilitate difficult discussions, and affording teachers of color the chance to opt out of the course and engage in an alternative learning experience.
- 4 Expose candidates to diverse settings, students, educators, and experiences across a variety of roles throughout their education and training.** Experience is the best teacher. And given the increasingly segregated nature of American life, many preservice teachers enter a school or program with limited experiences in communities culturally and historically distinct from their own. With that in mind, teacher training programs should intentionally expose candidates to a wide range of classrooms. In addition to racially diverse schools, this includes introducing candidates to rural and urban contexts, as well as students with disabilities and English language learners. Finally, schools and teacher preparation programs should think carefully about pairing their candidates with educators from other backgrounds and with different perspectives to help show how they care for and support their students.
- 5 Align field and classroom experiences and facilitate candidates’ critical reflection on those experiences, what they’re learning, and how it relates to their own perceptions and beliefs.** Entering new and unfamiliar spaces can be difficult. This is particularly true for preservice teachers who are learning about their own biases, interrogating their privilege, and applying those lessons to their teaching practice. But the research is clear that for these efforts to be successful, teacher candidates need to receive ongoing guidance as they reflect on their experiences. This can include facilitated discussions, journaling, and affinity groups, among other initiatives.

**6 Build strong relationships with districts, charters, families, and community organizations to better prepare candidates for the schools and students they will eventually serve.** Perhaps the most important way to ensure that schools of education and teacher preparation programs prepare candidates effectively is to listen to the concerns and needs of the schools and communities they will serve. Close partnerships will help ensure that graduates have the knowledge, skills, relationships, and characteristics needed. Some community engagement strategies include: hosting town hall meetings, engaging parents and community leaders in a program advisory board, and partnering with community organizations to host candidates for preservice learning experiences.

**7 Increase faculty and teacher candidate diversity.** It is just as important to diversify faculty who prepare candidates to be teachers as it is to diversify the educator workforce itself. Indeed, the two efforts are probably related. A more diverse faculty at a school of education or teacher preparation program may encourage more people of color to apply, and help to retain them once they're admitted. Furthermore, a more diverse faculty will help to expose white teacher candidates to new points of view and challenge their own perspectives. To that end, schools of education and teacher preparation programs should actively recruit diverse candidates to join their faculty, ensure that hiring committees include people from diverse backgrounds, and examine their hiring processes to see if any rely on biased practices.

Teacher training programs should actively pursue diverse teacher candidates. As part of that effort, they should also examine the qualities, skills, and experiences for which their admission process selects. Candidates' GPA and the institution from which they graduated certainly can matter. However, these are not necessarily indicative of the precise characteristics that will make a candidate an effective teacher in a diverse classroom. As such, other experiences and qualities, such as empathy, humility, openness, and a desire to work with and learn from diverse communities should be considered when evaluating candidates for admission.

**8 Provide trainings on diversity, equity, and inclusion for faculty.** A key part of preparing all teacher candidates to serve diverse students is ensuring they have the skills necessary to support all students regardless of background and treat them with respect and dignity. However, many faculty members at schools of education and teacher preparation programs need additional training to do so effectively. To that end, school and organizational leadership should provide ongoing training on diversity, equity, and inclusion and incorporate what they learn into their classrooms and programs.

This list of recommendations is not exhaustive or one size fits all. Schools of education and teacher preparation programs will need to determine what adjustments and reforms make the most sense for them, their teacher candidates, and the communities they will serve. The key to success is less about the specific changes they undertake, than it is about their sustained commitment to increasing equity and ensuring that their graduates are ready to teach students of color.

## Conclusion

The problem is quite clear: Ample data show that in general, this country does a poor job educating students of color. There are large race-based achievement gaps. Students of color disproportionately attend under-resourced schools and have lower access to college preparatory courses. Our collective failures result in more than half of American public school students receiving inequitable and insufficient education.

One contributing factor is the cultural mismatch between our predominantly white educator workforce, and a student body in which students of color make up the majority. Research bears out the significant problems this reality presents for students of color and, as a result, its contribution to persistent race-based achievement gaps and other adverse outcomes.

Schools of education and teacher preparation are at the center of solving this problem. Part of the task is to recruit more teachers of color. In addition, all teacher candidates, but particularly preservice white teachers, need to be more effectively trained to serve students of color. Teacher training programs should look to minority serving institutions for policies and practices that successfully train teachers for diverse classrooms.

The historic role of MSIs serving often marginalized populations and their mission of advancing justice cannot simply be replicated by other institutions. That said, many of those institutions' approaches to teacher education can be adapted and implemented to fit

different contexts. Doing this successfully will require meaningful reforms, such as revising curricula, exposing candidates to a wider range of experiences and perspectives, and helping preservice teachers explore their own identities, privileges, and biases. Moreover, teacher training programs need to help candidates gain a better understanding of structural inequality and its consequences on their future students. Redesigning schools of education and teacher preparation programs will be challenging, but it is necessary to redress education inequity in this country.



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## Acknowledgments

**T**hank you to all those who offered feedback on earlier drafts of this paper, particularly Jennifer Schiess for her considerable contributions to this report. We would also like to thank the college and university Deans, Professors, and faculty we interviewed: Dr. Carole Basile, Dr. Travis Bristol, Dr. Nives Wetzel De Cediell, Dr. Red Corn, Dr. Cheyrl Ensley, Dr. Joy Esboldt, Dr. Elaine Foster, Dr. Lisa Grillo, Dr. Cassandra Herring, Dr. Leonard Newby, Dr. Cesare Rossatto, Dr. April Scott, Dr. Chezare Warren, Dr. Jeannette Soon-Ludes, Dr. Monika Williams Shealey, Dr. Nyeema C. Watson, and Dr. Mayida Zaal.

The Charles and Lynn Schusterman Family Foundation provided funding for this project. The views and analysis in this report are the responsibility of the authors alone.

## About the Authors



### Max Marchitello

Max Marchitello is a senior analyst on the Policy and Evaluation team at Bellwether Education Partners. He can be reached at [max.marchitello@bellwethereducation.org](mailto:max.marchitello@bellwethereducation.org).



### Justin Trinidad

Justin Trinidad is an analyst on the Policy and Evaluation team at Bellwether Education Partners. He can be reached at [justin.trinidad@bellwethereducation.org](mailto:justin.trinidad@bellwethereducation.org).



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Bellwether envisions a world in which race, ethnicity, and income no longer predict opportunities for students, and the American education system affords all individuals the ability to determine their own path and lead a productive and fulfilling life.

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