

**SPECIAL ISSUE**  
**Research on Teachers of Color and Indigenous Teachers**

education policy analysis  
archives

A peer-reviewed, independent,  
open access, multilingual journal



Arizona State University

Volume 32 Number 52 September 17, 2024

ISSN 1068-2341

**Research on Teachers of Color and Indigenous Teachers:  
Developing and Fortifying Policies that Diversify the  
Educator Workforce**

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**Citation:** Gist, C., Bristol, T.J., & Kulkarni, S. (2024). Research on Teachers of Color and Indigenous Teachers: Developing and fortifying policies that diversify the educator workforce. *Education Policy Analysis Archives*, 32(52). <https://doi.org/10.14507/epaa.32.8826> This article is part of the special issue, *Research on Teachers of Color and Indigenous Teachers*, guest edited by Conra Gist, Travis Bristol, and Saili Kulkarni.

**Abstract:** This special issue expands upon the *Handbook of Research on Teachers of Color and Indigenous Teachers* (Gist & Bristol, 2022a) and the practitioner-focused *Phi Delta Kappan* special issue, “Learning from the Voices of Black, Indigenous and People of Color Educators: Charting New Directions for Research, Policy, and Practice” (Gist & Bristol, 2021). The co-created articles in this special issue highlight the combined expertise of policy makers and education researchers.

Journal website: <http://epaa.asu.edu/ojs/>  
Facebook: /EPAAA  
Twitter: @epaa\_aape

Manuscript received: 6/30/2024  
Revisions received: 21/8/2024  
Accepted: 21/8/2024

While the *Handbook* featured empirical research, and the *Phi Delta Kappan* special issue featured research briefs and teacher testimonies, the policy-driven articles in this special issue explore how research can be applied at district, state and national levels. A primary goal of this special issue is to provide evidence-based policy recommendations to support policymakers with strategies to address ethnoracial diversity related to one or more of the *Handbook's* 11 research domains (i.e., recruitment, program design, mentorship, professional development, retention, pedagogical and leadership practices, induction and human resource development, intersectionalities, educational impact, minority serving institutions, and policy).

**Keywords:** Teachers of Color and Indigenous Teachers; ethnoracial educator diversity; education policy

### **Investigación sobre Maestros de Color y Maestros Indígenas: Desarrollo y fortalecimiento de políticas que diversifiquen la fuerza laboral educativa**

**Resumen:** Este número especial amplía el *Handbook of Research on Teachers of Color and Indigenous Teachers* (Gist & Bristol, 2022a) y el número especial de Phi Delta Kappan centrado en los profesionales, “Learning from the Voices of Black, Indigenous and People of Color Educators: Charting New Directions for Research, Policy, and Practice” (Gist & Bristol, 2021). Los artículos co-creados en este número especial destacan la experiencia combinada de los responsables de políticas y los investigadores de la educación. Si bien el *Handbook* presentó investigaciones empíricas y el número especial de Phi Delta Kappan presentó informes de investigación y testimonios de docentes, los artículos impulsados por políticas en este número especial exploran cómo se puede aplicar la investigación a nivel distrital, estatal y nacional. Un objetivo principal de este número especial es brindar recomendaciones de políticas basadas en evidencia para ayudar a los responsables de las políticas con estrategias para abordar la diversidad etnoracial relacionada con uno o más de los 11 dominios de investigación del *Handbook* (es decir, reclutamiento, diseño de programas, tutoría, desarrollo profesional, retención, prácticas pedagógicas y de liderazgo, inducción y desarrollo de recursos humanos, interseccionalidades, impacto educativo, instituciones que atienden a minorías y políticas).

**Palabras-clave:** Maestros de Color y Maestros Indígenas; diversidad de educadores etnoraciales; política educativa

### **Pesquisa sobre Professores de Cor e Professores Indígenas: Desenvolvendo e fortalecendo políticas que diversifiquem a força de trabalho educacional**

**Resumo:** Esta edição especial expande o *Handbook of Research on Teachers of Color and Indigenous Teachers* (Gist & Bristol, 2022a) e a edição especial focada em profissionais da Phi Delta Kappan, “Learning from the Voices of Black, Indigenous and People of Color Educators: Charting New Directions for Research, Policy, and Practice” (Gist & Bristol, 2021). Os artigos cocriados nesta edição especial destacam a expertise combinada de formuladores de políticas e pesquisadores educacionais. Enquanto o *Handbook* apresentou pesquisa empírica, e a edição especial da Phi Delta Kappan apresentou resumos de pesquisa e depoimentos de professores, os artigos orientados por políticas nesta edição especial exploram como a pesquisa pode ser aplicada em níveis distrital, estadual e nacional. Um objetivo principal desta edição especial é fornecer recomendações de políticas baseadas em evidências para dar suporte aos formuladores de políticas com estratégias para abordar a diversidade etnoracial relacionada a um ou mais dos 11 domínios de pesquisa do *Handbook* (ou seja, recrutamento, design de programa, mentoria, desenvolvimento profissional, retenção, práticas pedagógicas e

de liderança, indução e desenvolvimento de recursos humanos, interseccionalidades, impacto educacional, instituições que atendem minorias e política).

**Palavras-chave:** Professores de Cor e Professores Indígenas; diversidade de educadores etnoraciais; política educacional

## **Research on Teachers of Color and Indigenous Teachers: Developing and Fortifying Policies that Diversify the Educator Workforce**

Teachers are an integral part of the U.S. economy and broader educational landscape. They impart critical knowledge and skills that equip students to enter the workforce and live fulfilling lives. Teachers provide important academic and social-emotional learning opportunities for students, preparing them for the transition to post-secondary education and work. Yet one of the challenges teachers face is providing meaningful instruction to all students, including those who come from a variety of cultural, racial, linguistic, and ability profiles. Public schools are made up of over 50% Black Indigenous People of Color (BIPOC) students (National Center for Education Statistics, 2024), yet educational outcome data indicate that these students are consistently behind in educational attainment goals (National Center for Education Statistics, 2022). According to research, a policy lever that benefits BIPOC students is to be taught by Teachers of Color and Indigenous Teachers (TOCIT)<sup>1</sup> (Easton-Brooks, 2019; Gershenson et al., 2017; Hart & Lindsay, 2024; Redding, 2019).

To better understand the growing research base on ethnoracial educator diversity, and its implications for policy and practice in schools, the *Handbook of Research on Teachers of Color and Indigenous Teachers* (hereafter the *Handbook*) charted the research landscape by identifying 11 research domains of inquiry: recruitment, program design, mentorship, professional development, retention, pedagogical and leadership practices, induction and human resource development, intersectionalities, educational impact, minority serving institutions, and policy (Gist & Bristol, 2022a). Recognizing the importance of framing teacher development as an interlocking system along a continuum, this scholarship project provided constructs for studying the varying domains of inquiry necessary for ensuring the supports and resources are in place for Teachers of Color and Indigenous Teachers (TOCIT) to successfully matriculate their programs and be placed in schools where they can thrive and remain in the profession. Building on this body of work, this special issue brings together the *Handbook* contributors and policy makers with a commitment to diversifying the teaching workforce. Sharing both existing research related to TOCIT, and drawing important policy implications, the aim of this special issue is to spotlight research-based policies that support the development, mentorship and retention of Teachers of Color and Indigenous Teachers in P-12 schools.

### **Educator Diversity Policy Context in the United States**

The Biden-Harris Administration has prioritized diversifying the ethnoracial composition of the educator workforce. As early as 2021, the administration outlined in its Build Back Better agenda investing in teacher preparation at Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs), Tribal Colleges and Universities (TCUs), and Minority-Serving Institutions (MSIs), such as Hispanic-

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<sup>1</sup> As we note in the *Handbook of Research on Teachers of Color and Indigenous Teachers* (Gist & Bristol, 2022a), we intentionally capitalize Teachers of Color and Indigenous Teachers (TOCIT) “to acknowledge a shared collective history and legacy of pedagogical commitment in the face of arduous professional and social contexts” (p. 5).

Serving Institutions (HSIs) with the intention to “improve the quality of new teachers, increase retention rates, and grow the number of teachers of color” (White House, 2021). In 2022, the Biden-Harris Administration, working with the 118th Congress, secured funding for the Augustus F. Hawkins Centers of Excellence (Hawkins) Program. The Hawkins program provides funding to support capacity building at the aforementioned institutions of higher education to recruit, support, and retain future BIPOC teachers. While initially authorized in 2008 in the Higher Education Act, the Hawkins program had gone unfunded until 2022 (U.S. Department of Education, 2024).

The U.S. Department of Education (USDOE), under Secretary of Education Miguel Cardona, turned the Biden-Harris Administration’s professed commitments into action through a number of key policy priorities. For example, in 2022, the USDOE named as a priority the building and sustaining of a diverse teacher workforce in its annual Supporting Effective Educator Development (SEED) and Teacher Quality Partnership grants. SEED 2022 awardees such as the National Board for Professional Teaching Standards and the National Center for Teacher Residencies received \$4 million and \$1.8 million, respectively, for their efforts aimed at increasing the number of Board-certified and future Teachers of Color and Indigenous Teachers (U.S. Department of Education, 2022). Secretary Cardona also launched Raise the Bar, his signature policy to reduce educator shortages. A key pillar of the Secretary’s Raise the Bar efforts is aimed at bringing together state teams to develop data-driven state and local policy and practice levers aimed at diversifying the educator workforce. The USDOE’s particular effort around organizing capacity building opportunities is a necessary, but important departure from its previous efforts that focused primarily on direct funding for educator diversity efforts. In this current policy moment concerning national educator ethnoracial diversity, the USDOE is focused on building the capacity of U.S. states to develop an infrastructure that will advance educator diversity at the state and local levels.

At the national level, the executive (i.e. Biden-Harris Administration and Secretary Cardona) and legislative branches (i.e. 118th and 119th Congress) have communicated their commitments to advancing educator diversity as well as authorizing funding for these efforts. However, the Supreme Court’s recent ruling to end affirmative action (*Students for Fair Admissions, Inc v President and Fellows of Harvard College*, 2022) has left more questions than answers regarding policies within institutions of higher education that promote diversifying the educator workforce. While the Court’s decision restricts the use of race as a primary factor for undergraduate college admissions, some higher education leaders are unclear how the Court’s decision will impact policy efforts to diversify the education workforce (Pendharkar, 2023). Beyond the potential curtailment of policies aimed at diversifying the educator workforce that stem from recent Supreme Court decisions, the nation’s current sociopolitical climate, characterized as the second nadir<sup>2</sup> in U.S. race relations (Connolly, 2018), has also constrained efforts to increase the number of Teachers of Color and Indigenous Teachers (Bristol & Carver-Thomas, 2024). Far-right pundits have openly described their efforts to end and weaponize diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) policies as reverse discrimination against European Americans (Rufo, 2023). This national discourse has trickled down to states and influenced state (e.g. Florida) legislation banning books that center the experiences and contributions of people of color (Oliva, 2022). Within institutions of higher education, rhetoric around how DEI policies have harmed the US, some have argued, led to the forced resignation of President Claudine Gay, Harvard University’s first Black president (Blow, 2024).

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<sup>2</sup> Rayford Logan (1954) described “the Nadir” as the period after Reconstruction through the early 1900s, in which anti-Black racism was on public display, evident through the rise of the Ku Klux Klan, the Supreme Court’s 1896 *Plessy* ruling that sanctioned racial segregation, and Southern states’ rescinding of voting rights.

## Learning and Applying Lessons from Research: State Handbook Policy Convenings

In light of this national context for educator diversity policies, lessons from the evidence base on Teachers of Color and Indigenous Teachers (TOCIT) remain instructive as we resolve to ensure each generation of students in the United States has the opportunity to access just and transformative learning experiences in the nation's schools. Expanding efforts to diversify the educator workforce remains a vital education reform mechanism, and the following themes from the *Handbook* spotlighted possible considerations for future policy efforts. First, TOCIT are not a monolithic group and require *differentiated support systems and structures*; second, the real-life implications of race and structural racism present challenges for the academic and professional development of TOCIT, which means *representation without structural, policy, and programmatic interventions are insufficient*; third, the psychological, social, and emotional *experiences of TOCIT must be holistically addressed* to support their ability to thrive, remain, and be effective as educators; and fourth, the unique local problems facing TOCIT can be addressed by *forming intentional, strategic, and genuine research-practice partnerships* to develop interventions to study and address ethnoracial educator diversity (Gist & Bristol, 2022b).

Further, to extend learnings of the *Handbook* (Gist & Bristol, 2022a) beyond the academy, we engaged in translational scholarship and critical policy work that would guide decision making for practitioners and policymakers (Darling-Hammond & Sykes, 2003; Turner et al, 2024). We organized three state-level convenings that curated agenda-setting frameworks and resources to advance educator diversity in Texas (January 2024), California (February 2024), New York (May 2024), and a culminating national convening in Washington DC with all state partners, including Pennsylvania (July 2024). For these convenings, we focused on a combination of ideologically diverse states to move beyond partisan divides recognizing that a representative educator workforce was critical for *all* children regardless of whether they lived in red (i.e. Texas) or blue (i.e. California and New York) states. Moreover, in addition to policymakers and researchers, the convenings were also designed to engage practitioners, parents, and middle, high school and college students.

To bridge silos in the research, policy, practice, parent, and student advocacy spaces, we identified partner organizations that had heretofore worked on recruiting, supporting, and retaining an ethnoracially diverse educator workforce: the Hunt Institute, a national education policy organization; the Council of Chief State School Officers (CCSSO)/ National Teacher of the Year program; the National Parents Union, a national parent advocacy organization focused on elevating the voices of parents in education policy and practice discussions; Latinos for Education, an education advocacy organization focused on developing Latino leaders in education; Education Trust, an education policy and advocacy organization; and Teach Plus, a policy organization focused on developing teachers to influence state policy. Finally, we partnered with two scholars, Dr. Justin Coles (University of Massachusetts, Amherst) and Dr. Cherise McBride (Stanford University), given one of our professional commitments is to expand the network of education scholars who study teacher diversity.

Across these state policy convenings, we organized four panel sessions aligned to the *Handbook* themes. The first panel was moderated by youth (i.e. high school or college students) and focused on centering BIPOC voices on educator diversity. Here, an ethnoracially diverse panel underscored the *Handbook* theme that BIPOC teachers are not a monolithic group. The second panel was led by a community-based educator in the state and explored “collective equity dreaming.” Here, the moderator invited conference attendees to imagine and describe a world where students attend diverse and equitable schools. This equity dreaming session aligned with the *Handbook* theme on how real-life implications of race and structural racism present challenges for the academic and

professional development of BIPOC teachers. The third session elevated innovative approaches to advancing educator diversity. Here, local school districts, teacher preparation programs, and teachers shared the successful practices they used to recruit, support, and retain teachers of color or Indigenous teachers. These strategies, in many ways, responded to the *Handbook's* theme on how the psychological, social, and emotional experiences of TOCIT must be holistically addressed to support their ability to thrive, remain and be effective as educators. During the final session, representatives from the aforementioned partner organizations engaged in local action planning around policies that would enable the recruitment, support, and retention of TOCIT. We designed this session to be responsive to the *Handbook's* theme, unique local problems facing teachers can be addressed by forming intentional, strategic and genuine research-practice partnerships with nearby education scholars to study teacher ethnoracial diversity. Moving forward, the *Handbook State Policy Convening Series* will engage at least one additional state, and organize the development of dissemination products (e.g., podcasts series, praxis briefs and educator testimony archive) generated for, by and with our partners to curate national, state, and community-based advocacy networks dedicated to educator diversity.

### **Special Issue: Policies for the *Handbook's* Research Domains**

Expanding upon the *Handbook* (Gist & Bristol, 2022a) and the practitioner-focused *Phi Delta Kappan* special issue (Gist & Bristol, 2021), the co-created articles in this special issue highlight the combined expertise of policy makers and education researchers. While the *Handbook* featured empirical research, and the *Phi Delta Kappan* special issue featured research briefs and teacher testimonies, the policy-driven articles in this special issue explore how research can be applied at district, state and national levels. A primary goal of this special issue is to provide evidence-based policy recommendations to support policymakers with strategies to address ethnoracial diversity related to one or more of the *Handbook's* 11 research domains (i.e., recruitment, program design, mentorship, professional development, retention, pedagogical and leadership practices, induction and human resource development, intersectionalities, educational impact, minority serving institutions, and policy).

The first article by Gist et al. addresses the policy research domain by synthesizing the historical origins of educator diversity policies in the United States, and examining present-day manifestations of these efforts in the sociopolitical context of state and federal level policy trends. In particular, the authors describe recent developments within state and federal policies, such as Grow Your Own (GYO) programs, and the challenges and possibilities related to ethnoracial educator diversity in schools. Next, Mensah et al. highlight the program design research domain, by exploring a range of teacher education program models and how national policy levers can deepen and extend the programmatic elements that support the preparation of Teachers of Color and Indigenous Teachers. The manuscript ends by describing an exemplary case, the UCLA Teacher Education Program Ethnic Studies Teaching Pathway.

Anchored in the minority serving institutions research domain, the article by Mawhinney et al. describes how the Hispanic-Serving Institution (HSI), New Jersey's Rutgers University-Newark, expanded undergraduate credentialing course offerings to include an English as a Second Language (ESL)/bilingual education program, which increased access for biliterate students. Moreover, the authors outline how institutions of higher education across New Jersey should redesign policies to create similar programming to recruit and support a more linguistically and ethnoracially diverse educator workforce.

With a focus on the human resource development research domain, Cueto et al.'s article draws attention to how a local school district's human resources policies enable and constrain

recruiting, hiring, and inducting TOCIT into the profession. Additionally, authors draw attention to policy levers in Illinois, such as investments by the legislature to increase teacher pathways and scholarships for future TOCIT, and the Illinois State Board of Education's requirement to include state and district-level teacher ethnoracial demographic data on the state's education report card. Kohli et al.'s article addresses the professional development research domain, underscoring the role of professional development in sustaining current Teachers of Color and Indigenous Teachers. The researchers draw attention to the limitations in current state policy around supporting an ecosystem that facilitates professional learning for TOCIT, and highlight the work of the Institute for Teachers of Color Committed to Racial Justice, a collective and horizontal professional learning community for Teachers of Color.

Kulkarni et al.'s article explores the critical role of intersectionality on research for Teachers of Color and Indigenous Teachers. The authors incorporate national and state policy impacts with a focus on the first author's Minority-Serving Institution in California and its launching of an Institute for Emancipatory Education. Finally, with a focus on the recruitment and retention research domains, the article by Carver-Thomas et al. provides a synthesis of national, state, and local policies and practices that facilitate enabling conditions for recruiting, supporting, and retaining Teachers of Color and Indigenous Teachers. Equally important, this manuscript outlines federal and state policies that, if enacted, would increase efforts to recruit and retain Teachers of Color and Indigenous Teachers.

Collectively, these special issue contributions represent some of the possibilities for developing and fortifying policies that diversify the educator workforce. If we are to continue improving the U.S. education system, ongoing research and policy efforts in these areas are critical for scholars, policymakers, and educational advocates committed to education reform that creates impactful and sustained change for children.

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**SPECIAL ISSUE**

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education policy analysis archives

Volume 32 Number 52

September 17, 2024

ISSN 1068-2341



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