

# Recruitment, Preparation & Retention of Teachers from Traditionally Underrepresented Groups in South Carolina

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## **RESEARCH TEAM**

Lienne Medford

Michelle Fowler

Converse College

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## + ABSTRACT

This working paper provides a synthesis of the state of evidence as it applies to promising practices in teacher recruitment, preparation, and retention for traditionally underrepresented populations. This paper defines “traditionally underrepresented” as individuals of non-white racial and ethnic identities. Much of the data available categorizes these populations as being African-American or Black, Hispanic, Asian, and Native American.

The focus of the paper is based on practices in the state of South Carolina, but national trends are also referenced. Methods used include a comprehensive literature review of current research on the topic and anecdotal evidence collected through personal communications. The paper ends with conclusions and recommendations for South Carolina to increase recruitment, preparation, and retention of teachers who are from traditionally underrepresented populations.

## + INTRODUCTION AND RATIONALE

In its most recent publication, The Education Trust stated in *Education Watch: South Carolina*, “Research shows that all students benefit from the opportunity to learn from teachers of other races and ethnicities—but it’s especially critical for students of color. Research also shows that students of color who have had a teacher of the same race or ethnicity are more likely to attend school regularly, perform higher on end-of-year assessments, graduate from high school, and consider college” (2019).

More specifically, in their 2018 article about racial matching and black student achievement, Lisa Yarnell and George Bohrnstedt of the American Institutes for Research reported that “With heightened interest in Black student achievement and that of Black males specifically, a series of studies over the past 15 years suggesting that educational achievement among Black students may be improved when they have a teacher of the same race becomes of critical relevance” (Clewel, Puma, & McKay, 2005; Chotfelter, Ladd, & Vigdor, 2007; Dee, 2004; Egalite, Kisida, & Winters, 2015).

In 2018 the U.S. Department of Education reported that in 2014 (the most recent year for which data were available) there were 49, 917, 157 public school students in the U.S. Of that number, 24, 753, 318, or 49.59% were students of color. In 2017 the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) reported that 20% of teachers were of color in 2016, an increase from 16% in 2000.

In South Carolina, 2017 demographics reported by the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) showed that 48.34% of students were of color in 2015-16 and the South Carolina Department of Education reported that in 2016-17 only 21.63% of teachers, or 10, 910 out of 50, 438, were considered members of traditionally underrepresented groups. This includes teachers who were Black, Asian, Hispanic, or Native American. Among this group, the largest number of teachers were Black (7, 651) followed by Hispanic (783) Asian (522) and Native American (84) teachers. In South Carolina 32% of teacher education majors were of from this population (National Center for Educational Statistics, as cited in Partelow, Spong, Brown, & Johnson, 2017). In addition, a third of these students are not expected to complete their teacher education programs (Garrett, 2019).

If half of South Carolina’s school students are from traditionally underrepresented populations and one fifth of their teachers are from these populations and only one third of current teacher education candidates are from these populations, these data support that there is indeed a need to recruit more teachers from traditionally underrepresented groups and to retain the teachers from those groups that the state already employs.

“Teacher Residency Programs, which began to appear in the early-2000s, sought to incorporate the advantages of M.A.T. programs and Alternative Certification Programs, while at the same time avoiding their disadvantages.”

## + INFORMATION SOURCES AND METHODS

The first part of the Information Sources and Methods section of this paper is a literature review compiled after evaluating the most persuasive national research on the advantages of recruiting minority teachers. There was very little literature available, particularly empirical research, about the actual recruitment of teachers from traditionally underrepresented populations (Ingersol & May, 2011). Therefore, Section I of the review seeks to establish the need for recruitment and retention of teachers from these groups, particularly in the state of South Carolina. Section II of the review discusses the literature generated by efforts to recruit teachers of from these groups nationally and within South Carolina.

The second part of the Information Sources and Methods Section of this paper comes from personal communications between the researchers and a variety of individuals in the state of South Carolina: deans of colleges of education, professors in higher education, members of teacher advocacy groups, in-service teachers and in-service administrators. Many of those interviewed are persons from traditionally underrepresented groups, some of whom wished not to be identified by name. Those interviewed were very forthcoming about their thoughts and concerns.

## + LITERATURE REVIEW

### Section I

Although earlier research indicated little correlation between student achievement and their teachers' race (Dee, 2001), more current research has found that same-race pairings among students and teachers can have significant impact not just on student achievement (Dee, 2001; Ikegulu, 2009) but also on identity and social development (Wright, Gottfried, & Le, 2017; Yarnell & Bohrnstedt, 2018).

In his seminal work on the relationship among teacher and student race and student achievement, Thomas Dee (2001) investigated 6300 kindergartners participating in Tennessee's Project STAR experiment. He found that "assignment to an own-race teacher was associated with large and statistically significant achievement gains for both Black and white students" (p. 22), not only as short-term gains but also longitudinal improvements over time. Dee identified two primary categories of teacher racial effects: *passive*, such as the role-model effect that engages student effort, confidence, and enthusiasm (p. 7); and *active*, race-specific patterns of behavior (p. 8). Dee also acknowledged that the inherent "unobserved dimensions of teacher quality that happen to vary with a teacher's race" make it nearly impossible to pinpoint and specify all the possible impacts to student achievement that can and do occur (p. 22).

In "Hearing the Silenced Dialogue: An Examination of the Impact of Teacher Race on Their Experiences," Maryann Dickar utilizes a qualitative research methodology (interviews with 17 educators, nine Black and eight white, as well as class and staff meeting observations) to evaluate teacher perspectives of their races' impacts on their student and peer interactions. Dickar's results concurred with previous research on the topic that Black educators feel a "strong sense of racial solidarity with their students" (p. 115) but that they also "experience tensions between their role as educator and their racial identity" (p. 129), which Dickar identifies as indicative of the need for professional development addressing the relationship of race to professional experience.

T. Nelson Ikegulu (2009) investigated 220 students and 19 fourth grade teachers from elementary schools in southeast Texas during the 2007-8 school year. Using a regression model to evaluate students' math achievement, Ikegulu found that, when taught by minority teachers, minority students outperformed their non-minority peers regardless of the teachers' level of experience or longevity.

In “A Kindergarten Teacher Like Me: The Role of Student-Teacher Race in Social-Emotional Development,” Adam Wright, Michael Gottfried, and Vi-Nhuan Le (2017) analyzed data from the Early Childhood Longitudinal Study—Kindergarten Class of 2010-2011, created by NCES. Unlike many of the other research studies featured in this review, this particular study focused not on student achievement but on the social-emotional development of students, particularly their internalizing and externalizing behaviors, and it concluded that student-teacher race matching dramatically impacts minority students’ externalizing behaviors, often viewed as “acting out” by white teachers.

Lisa Yarnell and George Bohrnstedt (2018) analyzed the 2013 NAEP Grade 4 Reading Assessment data to determine correlation among teacher race, student race, and student achievement (research sample of 165,410 students and 23,710 teachers). Their model “for the racial matching hypothesis at the student level is consistent with the theory and research on passive and active teacher effects on achievement and with developmental literature” (p. 314). Yarnell and Bohrnstedt also acknowledged the underrepresentation of ethnic minorities in the current population of U.S. teachers.

## Section II

Despite the fact that a disparity between the percentage of students from underrepresented populations and the percentage of teachers from these groups continues to exist, recruitment failures are not to blame (Ingersoll & May, 2011). In fact, the number of non-white teachers has nearly doubled, unlike the numbers of white teachers, and the majority of these teachers are employed in high-poverty, high-minority public schools (Ingersoll & May, 2011), the hardest type of school to staff (Bireda & Chait, 2011). Though national, state, and district recruitment of teachers from traditionally underrepresented populations has been highly successful, teacher growth in this category (12.4% in 1987 to 20% in 2016) has not kept up with growth in the same category of students (28% in 1987 to 49.89% in 2014) (Ingersoll & May, 2011; US Department of Education, 2018). Thus, successful recruitment measures at the national and state levels should be continued, and even expanded, in order to further close the gap between numbers of teachers in traditionally underrepresented populations and white teachers.

Ingersoll and May (2011) identified several successful nationwide recruitment initiatives, such as those led by the Education Commission of the States (2003), the American Association of Colleges of Teacher Education (1999), and the National Educational Association (National Collaborative on Diversity in the Teaching Force, 2004). In their report *Increasing Teacher Diversity: Strategies to Improve the Teacher Workforce* (2011), Bireda and Chait conduct extensive case studies of nationwide recruitment programs such as Teach For America, one of the country’s largest alternative certification programs, as well as statewide/regional recruitment programs such as the Urban Teacher Enhancement Program in Alabama and the North Carolina Teaching Fellows program. Bireda and Chait also feature one of South Carolina’s leading recruitment programs, Call Me MISTER, lauding their success in linking Black male graduates of area colleges to high-minority, high-poverty schools around the state. Bireda and Chait assert the value of such partnerships between institutes of higher education and individual school districts. (For more information on Call Me MISTER, see the Descriptive Examples of Promising Practices in South Carolina section of this paper.)

As of the early 2000s, 36 states have adopted policies with the goal of recruiting more individuals from traditionally underrepresented populations into the field of teaching (Villegas & Irvine, 2010). While some states’ initiatives likely replicated those previously in place within other states, without longitudinal empirical and qualitative investigation of each and every initiative, it is nearly impossible to deduce which are the “most” successful, hence the goal of this paper: to describe recruitment initiatives currently in place within South Carolina and to prescribe future recruitment activities based on their characteristics and success.

Bireda and Chait (2011) identify the key challenges for any minority recruitment efforts:

1. Recruitment is a time-consuming and costly process that requires significant investment in human capital without guarantee that the investment will yield substantial “return.”
2. The best candidates for minority recruitment programs most likely have multiple career options, most of which promise to be more lucrative and prestigious than teaching.
3. Turnover rates for non-white teachers are higher than the turnover rate for white teachers, due to a variety of factors (Bireda & Chait, 2011; Ingersoll & May, 2011). Recruitment success does not simply mean getting minority teachers in the classroom; it also means keeping them there.

Despite the relative success of recruitment of individuals from traditionally underrepresented groups during the past two decades, teacher turnover is still a significant challenge in the field of education, particularly among this population of teachers, whose turnover rate increased by 28% and remains higher than the turnover rate of white teachers (Ingersoll & May, 2011). Though some degree of turnover is healthy for organizations, it can be costly (Ingersoll & May, 2011), and teacher recruitment measures that do not yield longstanding teacher employment are merely a stop-gap solution to a long-standing problem. In South Carolina, overall teacher turnover from year to year continues to increase, with the 2018 turnover rate growing by 10% (Moore, 2019). Obviously, the statewide teacher retention crisis must be overcome if the particular challenge of retaining teachers from traditionally underrepresented populations is to be ameliorated.

### **Personal Communications**

Much of the information gathered for this paper was done through personal communications: some in person, some on the phone, and some via e-mail. A good faith attempt was made to contact as many individuals from as many perspectives as possible. Individuals representing specific practices were sought for comment when available. Most of this information is referenced in the *Descriptive Examples* and the *Conclusions and Recommendations* sections of the paper. Communications were conducted in November and December 2018 and January, February, and March 2019 by the lead author.

## **+ DESCRIPTIVE EXAMPLES OF PROMISING PRACTICES IN SOUTH CAROLINA**

Currently, there are several initiatives under way to improve South Carolina’s statistics. The most established is the Call Me MISTER (Mentors Instructing Students Through Effective Role Models, or CMM) program, headquartered at Clemson University. The director of CMM, Dr. Roy Jones, recently has been awarded funding for a Center of Excellence from the South Carolina Commission on Higher Education for the Recruitment and Retention of Diverse Educators. There is also the South Carolina Program for the Recruitment and Retention of Minority Teachers at South Carolina State University (SC-PRRMT), also supported by the South Carolina Commission on Higher Education.

Call Me MISTER was established in 2000 at South Carolina’s historically black colleges and universities (HBCUs) as a way to recruit African American males into the state’s elementary school classrooms. At the time less than one half of one percent of K-6 teachers in South Carolina were men of color. Since 2000, approximately 225 CMM graduates have gone into the classroom, and more recently the ranks of public school administration in South Carolina. At least four CMM graduates have received their doctorate and two teach in higher education in teacher education; several more MISTERS are enrolled in doctoral programs.

From its HBCU origins, in 2019 the program has grown to 24 “chapters” at 15 four-year schools and nine two-year technical and community colleges in South Carolina. CMM also has member institutions outside of South Carolina, but this report does not include them in its discussion. Several chapters, such as those at USC Upstate (USCU) and Spartanburg Community College (SCC), have a partnership with a specific district, as USCU and SCC have with Spartanburg District 7. CMM currently has 170 undergraduate men enrolled in its South Carolina chapters. Winston Holton, CMM’s Field Coordinator, states that an infusion of funds from a recent grant and the Center of Excellence should enable them increase their numbers dramatically over the next few years (Personal Communication, February 4, 2019).

CMM is relatively well known in the state, but even so, Dr. Jones and Mr. Holton actively recruit. Most recently, they have chosen to focus on rural high schools. They feel these schools provide candidates who are more malleable and not fixed on a goal yet. Well-meaning counselors are often funneling these men toward traditional paths such as the military and tech/vocational programs. Perhaps these students have not considered teaching (Personal Communication, February 4, 2019). The teaching profession is known and may still be respected in these communities. CMM’s new tag line is to *Educate, Empower, Entrust*, and CMM hopes to return these men to their hometowns to enrich their local communities. CMM is able to provide some financial support and the new Center for Excellence is providing funding for standardized testing workshops. The idea of a cohort of men from traditionally underrepresented populations is also an attractive recruiting tool. CMM provides on-campus mentors at each chapter site and seven-week summer internships based at Clemson that allow for additional support and bonding among all participants.

South Carolina State University’s SC-PRRMT is working with Marion County School District to offer nontraditional students (teacher aids, technical college transfer students, and career path changers) the opportunity to receive bachelor’s degrees and certification in early childhood, elementary, and special education. This is a hybrid program at SCSU’s Marion site. In spring 2018 they had 15 students and hope to grow the program (McFadden, 2018).

UofSC has also started Apple Core Initiative (ACI) with a pilot program in 2018 ready to go at full capacity in Fall 2019. This program will provide scholarships to students from traditionally underrepresented populations already accepted to the UoSC main campus who choose to major in education. ACI seeks to recruit, enroll, and retain high school students from South Carolina’s historically underrepresented populations, who may also be first generation college attendees, into undergraduate teacher education majors (Margo Jackson, Personal Communication, March 1, 2019). The ACI web site states that the program will provide mentoring and professional development in a cohort model.

Several South Carolina colleges and universities have or have had National Science Foundation Noyce Teacher Scholarship Grants. These grants seek to increase underrepresented populations in STEM (science, technology, engineering, and math) teaching by providing scholarships for STEM majors who go into teaching and agree to teach for a minimum of two years. Noyce grants focus on women as well as other groups, and provides funding for recruitment of these populations into teaching, so the researchers thought it should be mentioned. The following South Carolina institutions have or have had Noyce grants: Clemson, Converse, Newberry, The Citadel, USC, and Winthrop.

## + CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Despite the positive efforts currently under way in South Carolina by a variety of groups, organizations, and individuals, it is the conclusion of these authors that enhanced educational outcomes for students that encompass recruitment of teachers from traditionally underrepresented populations suffer in great part from systemic issues and that major improvements are contingent upon making changes in the culture of the state.

Personal communications from those on the front lines (in-service teachers and administrators, higher education faculty and administrators, representatives of organizations that advocate for teachers) agree that several things need to happen before South Carolina can successfully recruit and retain the number of teachers from traditionally underrepresented populations it needs:

- The status of the education profession must be elevated.
- Pay for teachers must be competitive with other professions that are available to high achieving candidates from traditionally underrepresented groups.
- Districts must “grow their own” candidates from willing but perhaps less prepared demographics so that these individuals are prepared for teacher preparation at the undergraduate level.
- Current teachers from traditionally underrepresented groups need to feel valued, supported, and recognized for their service to the profession.

As one HBCU Dean of Education stated, “I don’t have trouble recruiting education majors, I have trouble graduating education candidates.” Virtually all higher education personnel interviewed stated that getting education candidates from traditionally underrepresented populations to pass Praxis Core is difficult and limits the number of these graduates from their programs. The South Carolina Education Association (SCEA) holds Praxis workshops at least once a semester and the number of attendees from these groups is disproportionate. At the November 2018 workshops in Columbia, all the attendees for the reading and writing sessions were from these groups.

The South Carolina Department of Education (SCDE) is aware of this concern as expressed by numerous groups, including the South Carolina Education Deans Association (SCEDA). The SCDE is considering a composite cut score that will allow candidates who pass two of three core sections (math, reading, writing) to use any “extra” points toward the third area where they may be lacking, rather than requiring a separate passing score on each test. This may help.

However, as bullets 1, 2, and 3 collectively point out, right now the best and brightest of South Carolina’s students from traditionally underrepresented populations are not going into teaching. Students from these groups who could “ace” the Praxis Core are choosing other occupations that are more prestigious and pay more. Very few recruiting strategies can overcome those hurdles, but the ones described below might provide a start.

Some districts, such as Spartanburg 7, are seeking to “grow their own” teachers by providing financial support and the promise of a job when a teaching degree and certification are awarded. Through partnerships with other entities (CMM, USCU, and SCC for male students and Converse College for female students) District 7 is looking at first generation college students, providing support (both financial and for testing) and hoping to keep local talent in its district classrooms.

CMM is also purposefully looking at a specific recruiting pool: rural high schools. CMM feels it may be able to recruit some of the higher performing male graduates from these schools. The HBCU Dean of Education quoted above feels that “second tier” students, often first generation college students, are a good bet, but they must arrive at institutions of higher learning prepared to enter teacher education programs without too much remedial work, which sets them back from timely graduation and is often dispiriting (Personal Communication, January 28, 2019). This dean suggested that students who show interest in teaching careers, such as those in Teacher Cadet programs, receive extra attention from their own teachers and counselors to score well enough on the SAT or ACT to place out of Core Praxis.

Although the primary focus of this paper was teacher recruitment, retention of teachers from traditionally underrepresented groups is also important, and current teachers from these groups may be one of the state's most powerful means of recruitment if they can provide mentorship to teacher education candidates from these same groups through Teacher Cadets or other yet to be created programs. This focuses on valuing service to the profession.

There is a wide variety of opinions about the current status of teachers from traditionally underrepresented groups in South Carolina. Some say they have a supportive administrator and feel valued and respected. Many do not feel this way. However, as one interviewee pointed out, "There is a difference between being valued and feeling valued." Communication that allows for teachers to voice what will make them feel valued and administrators being able to state what they may already value but not express well, is important. There may be a "disconnect" here that causes teachers of color to feel undervalued when they are not. An increase in the number of administrators from traditionally underrepresented groups may help with this. CMM graduates have been steadily moving into administration and some districts, such as Greenville County Public Schools, appear to be making efforts to promote individuals from traditionally underrepresented groups into administrative positions, particularly at the assistant principal level.

An additional recruiting idea, raised by several sources, was tapping into local faith-based institutions, asking to speak to youth groups and making young congregants aware of opportunities in education. Making contact with local clergy and asking if a representative from an institution of higher learning or a school district with a partnership to speak to youth groups might bring in some applicants. And this approach might set up opportunities for community mentoring. Another stakeholder of "grow your own," faith-based groups might be interested in keeping local talent local and might even provide some aid for tuition. A number of individuals specifically mentioned Black churches, but every region has its own possibilities. In Spartanburg, for example, there are at least two Catholic churches that have large Vietnamese populations.

The suggestions offered above "nibble around the edges" of a large issue. There is no magic bullet to increase teacher pay or elevate the teaching profession. However, there are promising ideas and programs, some already underway, which could make a difference in teacher diversity in South Carolina's classrooms in the next decade and beyond.



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