

Hope & Hard Work Ahead:

Building a Strong & Diverse Teacher Workforce for Michigan Students



The background of the entire page is a repeating pattern of various educational icons in a light orange color. These icons include books, lightbulbs, calculators, globes, pencils, paper clips, scissors, atom symbols, backpacks, flasks, and rulers, scattered across the white background.

Equity Driven • Data-Centered • Student Focused

EdTrust-Midwest works for the high academic achievement of all Michigan students in pre-kindergarten through college. Our mission is to make Michigan a Top Ten education state for all groups of students, no matter their background, socio-economic status, or race.

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This research result used data structured and maintained by the MERI-Michigan Education Data Center (MEDC). MEDC data is modified for analysis purposes using rules governed by MEDC and are not identical to those data collected and maintained by the Michigan Department of Education (MDE) and/or Michigan's Center for Educational Performance and Information (CEPI). Results, information and opinions solely represent the analysis, information and opinions of the author(s) and are not endorsed by, or reflect the views or positions of, grantors, MDE and CEPI or any employee thereof.

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I. Executive Summary

Decades of research underscore how important teachers are in students' lives. They are, in fact, one of the most important factors contributing to student success in the classroom.¹ Teachers, particularly highly qualified and effective teachers, are a key ingredient in achieving student success. Yet, Michigan is facing a teacher shortage crisis, with the impact being felt most deeply among students who are the most underserved.²

Over the course of two years, EdTrust-Midwest sought to uncover the reasons behind this troubling trend. In a second installment of our work examining Michigan's struggles with teacher retention and recruitment, new analyses find that our state struggles to attract and retain teachers of color, in particular. These challenges to building a strong and diverse teacher workforce are especially troubling in a state where lackluster student outcomes are a growing concern.

Indeed, students of all grades who experience a diverse teacher workforce reap benefits, regardless of students' race or ethnicity. Diverse teacher workforces have been linked to quantitative improvements in test scores, fewer absences and suspensions, higher graduation and college enrollment rates, and increased trust between students and teachers.³

Yet, too few students experience a diverse teacher workforce, contributing to the teacher shortage crisis. And some students go through their entire PreK-12 experience never having a teacher of color at the front of their classrooms.⁴

Indeed, across the nation, while the majority of the nation's public school students are students of color, teachers of color make up just over 20% of the teacher workforce.⁵ Here in Michigan, the data are similarly troubling, according to a new analysis of publicly available data by EdTrust-Midwest.

Through this new report, *Hope & Hard Work Ahead: Building a Strong & Diverse Teacher Workforce for Michigan Students*, EdTrust-Midwest unpacks the reasons behind these troubling data and what it means for our students. Over the course of a year, researchers scanned the nation to uncover best practices to improve teacher diversity and considered how these practices could benefit Michigan. Their research led to a comprehensive set of recommendations for policymakers.

For more information on how EdTrust-Midwest defines teachers of color for the purposes of this report, refer to page 7.

Some of the key findings include:

- In 21.1% of U.S. school districts, there are no teachers of color at all, meaning over a million students go through their entire educational journey without learning from a teacher from another racial background.⁶
- The absence of teachers of color in schools nationwide is concerning, considering that by 2031, 58% of U.S. students will be students of color.⁷

Michigan follows the national trend. While the state's student body is growing increasingly diverse, the teacher workforce does not reflect that diversity.⁸ EdTrust-Midwest's new analysis found that:

- In 2024-25, only 11.3% of Michigan teachers were people of color⁹ compared to nearly 40% of the student population.¹⁰ These gaps persist across geographic regions in Michigan.
- As of the 2024-25 school year, fewer than 1% of Michigan students attend a school where there are no students of color.¹¹
- Conversely, about 11% of students go to a school where there are no teachers of color.¹² This means

that more than one in 10 Michigan students attend schools with no teachers of color at all.¹³

- While there have been slight increases in the representation of teachers of color in elementary and World Language certifications¹⁴, teachers of color still represent only a tiny proportion of all Michigan teachers.

Hope & Hard Work Ahead

While these data are troubling, there are some reasons for hope. Teacher diversity is improving overall statewide thanks to sustained state investment in programs that reduce barriers to teacher preparation programs and reduce the financial burden of joining the teacher workforce. Consider that between the 2015-16 and 2023-24 academic years, Michigan's teacher of color workforce increased 34%.¹⁵ Through joint efforts including policy changes, increased incentives, or other factors unrelated to preparation program efforts, Michigan teacher preparation programs have seen higher enrollment rates among candidates of color.¹⁶

These improvements are noteworthy, but there is much more work to be done. Despite improvements in enrolling candidates of color, completion rates for those candidates are more troubling. EdTrust-Midwest found that, in 2022-23, only 12% of those who completed a Michigan teacher preparation program were people of color.¹⁷

And at many steps along the teacher pipeline – coursework, student teaching, certification tests – the teacher candidate pool becomes less diverse. For instance, between advanced undergraduate education classes and student teaching, the proportion of Black students in Michigan's teacher pipeline dropped by more than half.¹⁸

The cost of training and credentialing also can outweigh the benefits of a career in education, especially for many students from low-income backgrounds, including students of color. The sections that follow provide more context for this challenge.

Once teachers have entered the workforce, teachers of color face unique challenges including feeling disconnected from the curriculum and constrained by an educational system that does not embrace culturally diverse teaching styles. Teachers of color also feel burdened with the weight of additional, and unique, responsibilities.¹⁹

District layoff policies can be another contributor to inequities in the teacher workforce. Seniority-based layoff policies, commonly known as "Last In, First Out" (LIFO), have the potential to undermine efforts by school districts to retain teachers of color, who are significantly more likely than white teachers to be early-career teachers.²⁰ While Michigan law currently bans seniority as being the sole factor in layoff decisions, this law could be strengthened with added provisions to protect early career teachers from bearing the brunt of difficult layoff decisions.²¹



What Michigan Can Do Now: 5 Priorities for Building a Strong and Diverse Workforce

These challenges, while complex, are not insurmountable. Through coordinated and targeted efforts, policymakers can invest in the following priorities to develop a high-quality, diverse teacher workforce that benefits all students, families, and communities.

For a strong teacher workforce to sustain, teacher preparation programs must reflect a broad set of identities and experiences, including those of future teachers and the students they serve.

Priority 1: Expand Intentional Recruitment of Teachers of Color

Through identification and recruitment as early as elementary school, state investment to reduce the financial burden of pursuing a career as a teacher, exploration of alternative routes to certification, innovative recruitment efforts like Grow Your Own programs and apprenticeship models, and building inclusive hiring practices, Michigan can grow and sustain a strong and diverse teacher workforce.²² Such efforts are already under way in Michigan and will be explored more deeply in the pages to come.

Priority 2: Create and Highlight Culturally Affirming Curriculum and Pedagogy for All Teachers

For a diverse teacher workforce to sustain, teacher preparation programs must reflect a broad set of identities and experiences, including those of future teachers and the students they serve. In addition to curriculum diversity, the state should strengthen its oversight of teacher preparation programs to adequately prepare new teachers for a diverse set of teaching contexts, as is outlined in the Michigan Department of Education (MDE) clinical experiences requirements.²³

Priority 3: Foster Inclusive Workplaces to Increase Teacher of Color Retention

Beyond preparation programs, professional learning opportunities should also showcase diverse

perspectives. The state, intermediate school districts (ISDs), and districts, if not already doing so, should offer relevant and inclusive professional development for a wide variety of backgrounds from which our teachers come. An inclusive workplace will reduce isolation, particularly among teachers of color, foster culturally diverse professional networks, and create more robust leadership opportunities. This will also help create a career growth pipeline.

Priority 4: Support and Organize Coalitions of Stakeholders Committed to Teacher Diversity

To ensure that teachers of color not only survive, but thrive, in schools across the state, support networks are essential. Michigan already has a teacher mentorship structure that pairs experienced teachers with early-career teachers. This existing structure could be leveraged to provide tailored support to teachers of color, as evidence supports the effectiveness of same-race early teacher mentoring relationships for new teachers of color.²⁴ Along with in-school supports, policymakers should create affinity groups for teachers of color at the ISD, state, and/or county level, and convene a network of aligned champions to disseminate best practices in diverse teacher recruitment and retention strategies.

Priority 5: Explore and Amend Policies Regarding Seniority and Teacher Diversity

Recruiting and hiring a diverse teacher workforce is critical, but it only makes an impact when teachers stay in their schools long-term to teach, mentor, and inspire generations of students. Seniority-based layoff policies are detrimental to building a strong and diverse teacher workforce, as evidence shows that teachers of color are significantly more likely than their white peers to be early career teachers.²⁵ While Michigan law bans the use of seniority as the sole factor in layoff decisions, these laws can be strengthened with added provisions that protect early-career teachers from bearing the brunt of layoffs. The state could explore adding protections for teachers in high-demand subject areas or teachers from Grow Your Own programs, which strengthen local teacher workforces by recruiting community members

for teacher training, with the intention that these newly trained teachers return home to work in their communities.²⁶

Finally, parents, communities, policymakers, and other stakeholders deserve honest and transparent information on how their school is doing when it comes to access to strong and diverse teachers. As EdTrust-Midwest advocates for strong, accessible, and transparent data systems, publicly reported district and school quality measures should include teacher diversity metrics.

In summary, Michigan students deserve the best teachers possible. Students, families, and communities benefit from a highly qualified, highly effective, and diverse teacher workforce. It is up to all of us – advocates, communities, and especially policymakers – to give our children the best opportunities possible to learn, grow, and thrive in our state. As Michigan works to be a top 10 state for education, policymakers must prioritize strengthening the teacher workforce, which includes recruiting and retaining teachers with diverse experiences and identities. When we have a foundation of strong teachers, our children are set up for a successful future.

Many staff and partners contributed to the research and development of this report including Senior Director of Strategic Communications and External Relations Jennifer Mrozowski, Senior Data Consultant Jacqueline Gardner, EdTrust P-12 Policy Analyst Nathan Kriha, and the EdTrust P-12 Policy Team. Special thanks to former staff members who contributed invaluable research, analyses, and insights for this report, including Dr. Jen DeNeal, Da'Stanza Murphy, Bradley Kingston, Emily Hatch, and Karolyn Davis, as well as to the Michigan State University Office of K-12 Outreach for providing data management and analytical support.

Teacher Diversity Defined

“Teacher Diversity” in this context is not focused on individuals, but rather the teacher workforce in its entirety. A single individual can be an effective or ineffective teacher, regardless of their race. For the purpose of this report, we define teachers of color and students of color as individuals who identify as non-white, including Black, Latino, Asian, Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander, American Indian or Alaska Native, or two or more races. At this time, there is not a reporting category for those who identify as Middle Eastern or North African, and many MENA individuals may self-report as white, or may be categorized as white in district-reported data.²⁷ However, the addition of the “Middle East/North Africa” category on the 2030 decennial Census may lead to more inclusive reporting as MDE works to meet federal data reporting requirements and align with best practices.²⁸



II. Hope & Hard Work Ahead: Building a Strong & Diverse Teacher Workforce for Michigan Students

By Charlotte Pierce, Senior Policy Analyst

Introduction

Building a strong and diverse teacher workforce is crucial to both improve student outcomes and address Michigan's teacher shortage crisis.

As part of a series on recruiting, retaining, and supporting highly qualified teachers across the state of Michigan, EdTrust-Midwest dives into the importance of growing a high-quality, diverse teacher workforce through this new report, *Hope & Hard Work Ahead: Building a Strong & Diverse Teacher Workforce for Michigan Students*.

Research demonstrates that teachers with diverse identities and perspectives enrich the classroom experience and broaden students' horizons, and these benefits show up regardless of the students' race. Yet Michigan struggles to attract and retain teachers, particularly teachers of color, which is contributing to a teacher shortage crisis in the state.

Through analysis of both publicly available and confidential data conducted over the course of more than a year, we highlight opportunities for improvement as well as notable state investments in the development of a diverse workforce that meets the needs of students, families, and communities statewide. This report also builds upon EdTrust-Midwest's recent report, [*Closing the Opportunity Divide: Addressing Michigan's Teacher Shortage Problem for Students Most in Need*](#).

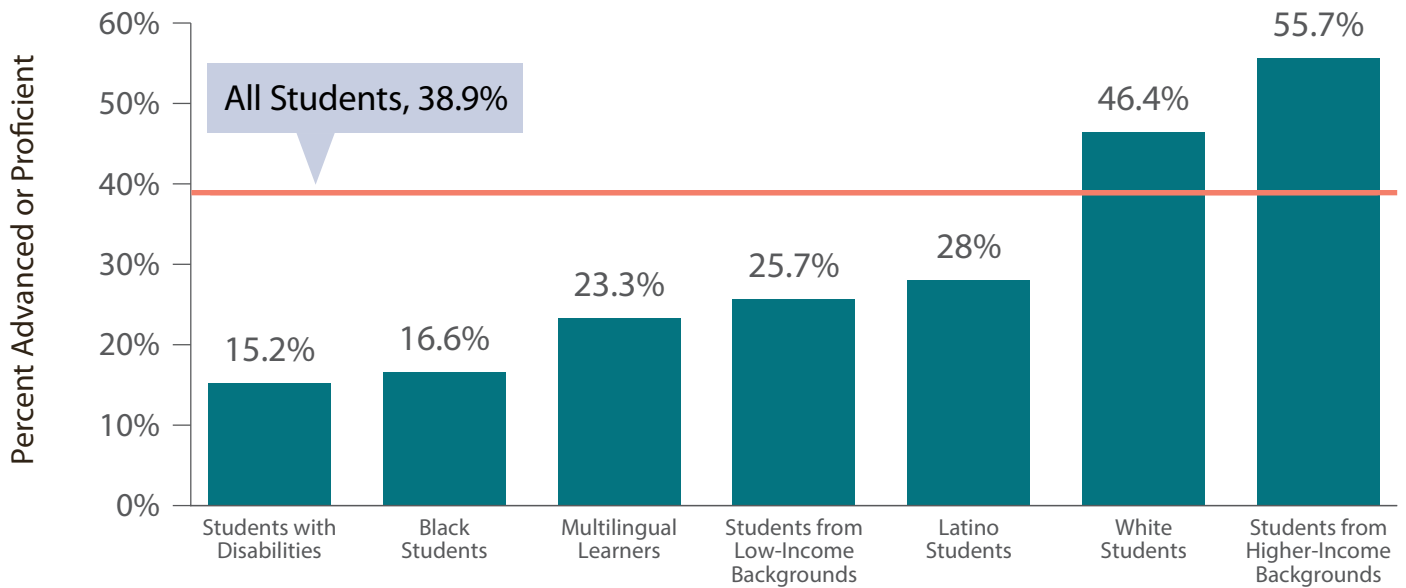
III. A Strong Teacher Workforce is a Diverse Teacher Workforce

Students of all grades who experience a diverse teacher workforce reap benefits, regardless of students' race or ethnicity. Importantly, teacher diversity supports student outcomes, particularly for students of color when they are taught by a teacher of the same racial background.²⁹ This is particularly important when considering how students of color too often have the least access to experienced and effective teachers, let alone teachers who share their racial or ethnic background.³⁰

Diverse teacher workforces have been linked to quantitative improvements in test scores, fewer absences and suspensions, higher graduation and college enrollment rates, and increased trust between students and teachers.³¹ Additionally, better communication and relationship-building, increased student aspirations for the future, more culturally relevant teaching, classroom engagement and, for white students, improved attitudes and understanding of race and racism are all associated with a more diverse teacher workforce.³²

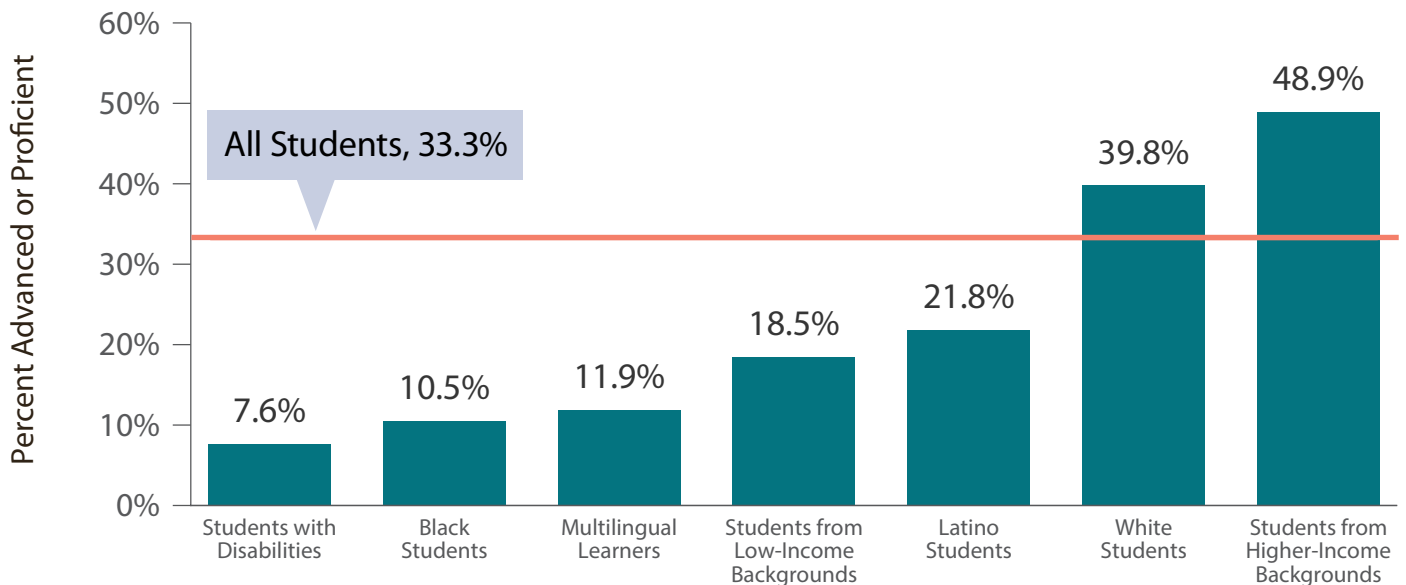
Further, the benefits of a diverse teacher workforce are important in a state like Michigan where 3rd grade reading and 7th grade math proficiency rates for students of color lag far behind their white peers.³³

3rd Grade M-STEP Reading Proficiency Rates by Subgroup 2024-2025



Source: Center for Educational Performance and Information, M-STEP Results 2025

7th Grade M-STEP Math Proficiency Rates by Subgroup 2024-2025



Source: Center for Educational Performance and Information, M-STEP Results 2025

Teachers of Color in the U.S.

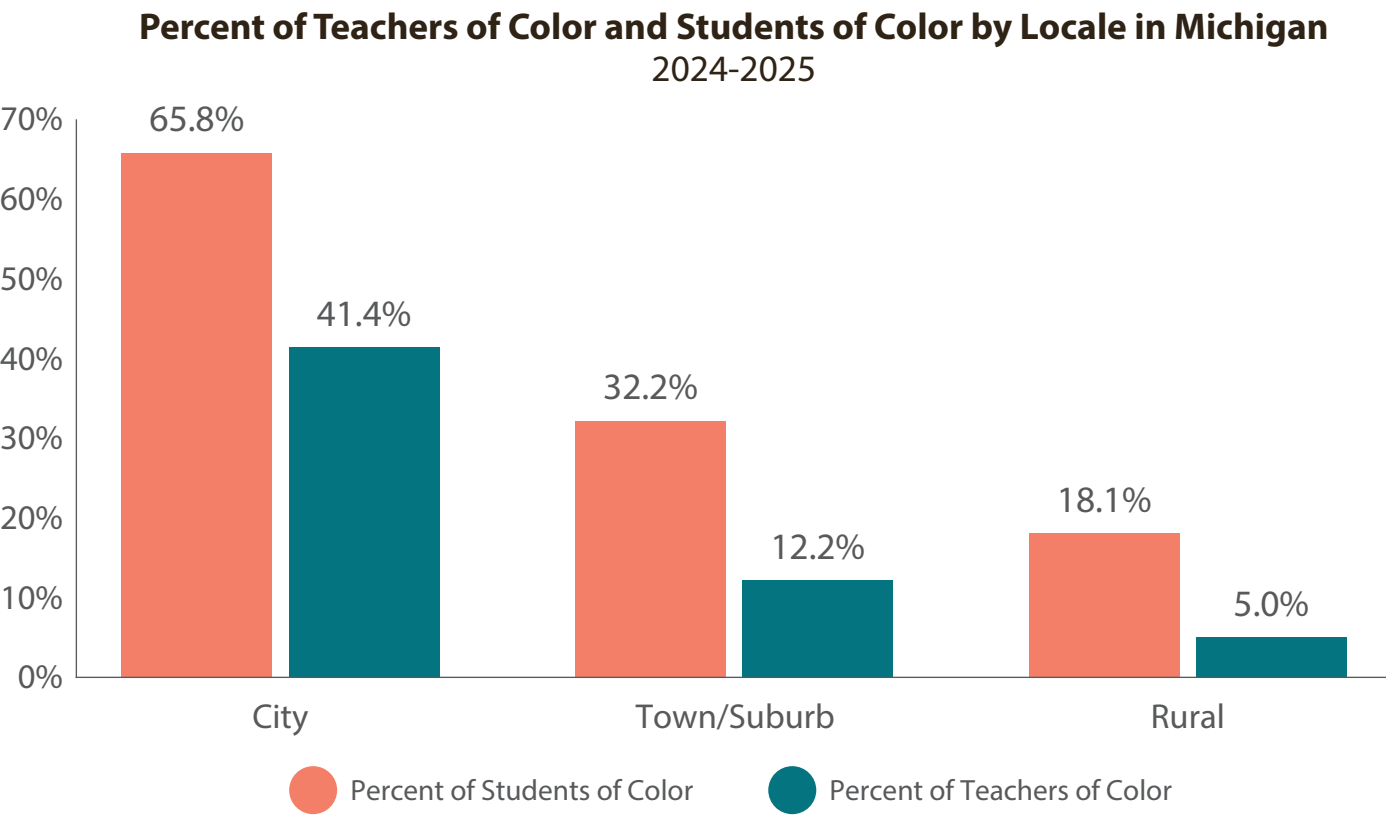
Despite the benefits of a diverse teacher workforce, the U.S. teacher workforce remains overwhelmingly white. Teachers of color comprise just 20% of the teacher workforce³⁴, but just over half – approximately 55% – of U.S. students are students of color.³⁵

In 21.1% of U.S. school districts, there are no teachers of color at all, meaning over one million students go through their entire educational journey without learning from a teacher from another racial background.³⁶ This disparity is concerning, and it’s also growing: by 2031, 58% of U.S. students will be students of color.³⁷ Research shows that the lack of teachers of color across the country is a detriment to all students.³⁸ As policymakers look for sustainable and innovative ways to support an increasingly diverse student body, a diverse teacher workforce is imperative to serve all students, families, and communities.

Teachers of Color in Michigan

The picture is equally concerning in Michigan. At a time when the racial composition of Michigan’s students is becoming more diverse, Michigan’s teaching force is not keeping pace. Michigan’s teachers are overwhelmingly white. In 2024-25, only 11.3% of Michigan teachers were people of color³⁹ compared to nearly 40% of the student population.⁴⁰ As of the 2024-25 school year, less than 1% of Michigan students attend a school where there are no students of color.⁴¹ Concerningly, approximately 11% of Michigan students go to a school where there are no teachers of color.⁴²

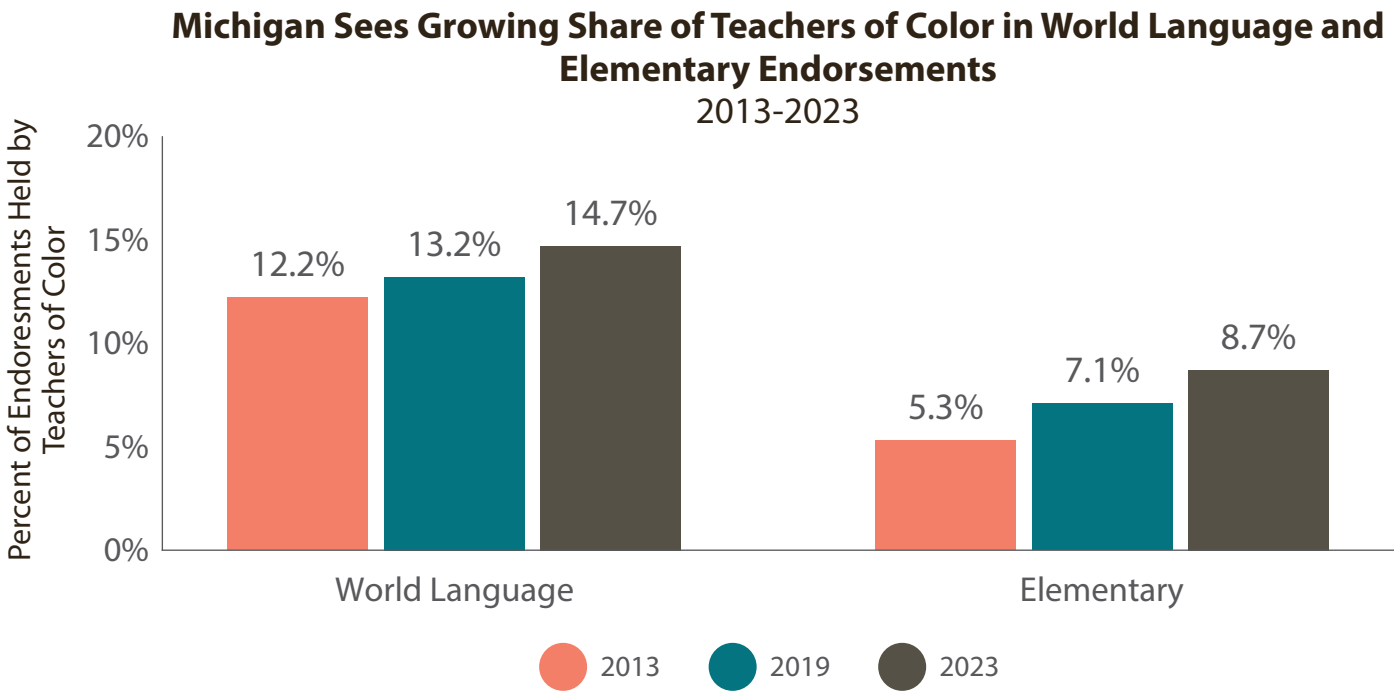
This misalignment between student racial demographics and the racial demographics of their teachers is pervasive across the state. Students of color in urban, rural, and suburban school districts are being shortchanged in terms of seeing themselves reflected in their teachers. White students are missing out on the crucial and enriching experience of learning from teachers who bring different cultures and perspectives.⁴³



Source: Center for Educational Performance and Information, 24-25 Staff and Student Headcount Report

While there are a few bright spots, including slight increases in the representation of teachers of color in elementary and World Language certifications⁴⁴, teachers of color still represent only a tiny proportion of all Michigan teachers.

White women continue to dominate the Michigan teacher workforce, but there is greater representation of white men in Math, Science, and the Social Sciences.⁴⁵ Teachers of color, particularly women of color, are more represented in English as a Second Language (ESL) and World Languages.⁴⁶



Source: Michigan Education Research Institute; 2013, 2019, 2023

Workplace Challenges as a Teacher of Color

There are many contributing factors to why teachers of color are underrepresented both nationally and in Michigan. Those include teachers of color feeling disconnected from the curriculum, constrained by an

educational system that does not embrace culturally diverse teaching styles, and burdened with the weight of additional responsibilities for which they are not compensated.⁴⁷ These factors impact teachers’ desire and willingness to continue in the profession, and in extreme cases contribute to their exit from the workforce entirely.⁴⁸



“Representation matters, and aligning staff diversity more closely with student demographics is not just a goal – it is a responsibility to ensure all students feel seen, valued, and supported.”

- Luther N. Mayfield II
Special Education Teacher
Lincoln Consolidated Schools

For instance, teachers of color across the U.S. often report feeling disempowered in their pedagogy.⁴⁹ Moreover, many teachers of color sometimes find themselves uneasy with being part of an educational system that perpetuates societal inequities.⁵⁰ As one teacher of color put it in an EdTrust focus group, "...I often feel as if I am not always able to make the changes I want as I am forced to operate within a system that seems unwilling to change. Furthermore, I also feel policed as an individual of color. I have to appease the dominant culture in regard to the way I communicate with my students, the way I dress, the assignments I choose to implement in the classroom."⁵¹

Some teachers of color may also experience an "invisible tax," which comes in the form of extra responsibilities, burdens, and roles for which they are not compensated.⁵² Some of these roles include translation services, counseling or social work, community outreach and attendance monitoring, or serving as student discipline coaches. In schools where there are too few staff members of color, many teachers find themselves in these roles by virtue of their racial identity.⁵³ While teachers of every identity feel stretched thin by the many responsibilities they take on beyond teaching, teachers of color may face the unique challenge of being the go-to resource for students of color, creating an additional emotional burden. Focus groups conducted

with teachers of color revealed that these additional burdens can contribute to feeling overwhelmed and undervalued in their schools and, eventually, to turnover.⁵⁴ In an EdTrust focus group, one Black teacher described the burden she feels to show up for Black students in a way that other teachers may not.⁵⁵ She noted the many hats she wears throughout the day, none of them being teacher, "So they come to Ms. H. I'm a nurse; I'm a therapist. One day I said it. I said, 'I don't think I taught today. I felt like I was a nurse, a therapist, a fan, a mentor.'"⁵⁶

Emphasis on school climate and culture could be a mitigating force against the burnout many teachers of color feel, ultimately addressing retention barriers to a diverse teacher workforce. School administrators are responsible for setting the tone of a safe and welcoming work environment for all teachers.⁵⁷ When leaders fall short of this responsibility, teachers of color may lack the support they need to be successful in the classroom.⁵⁸ In the face of retention challenges, strong leadership matters: research shows that in schools where most teachers were white, teachers of color were more likely than their white colleagues to switch schools when they perceived a lack of administrative support.⁵⁹ When administrative support was strong, retention rates were similar across white teachers and teachers of color.⁶⁰



"Students should have exposure to many cultures and backgrounds. Students should also be able to see themselves in the people teaching them. ...This adds to their experience and helps them feel connected and helps them see the benefit of education."

- Tanika Greisiger
English Language Arts Teacher
Benzie Central Schools

IV. Building Strong and Diverse Teachers: The Michigan Landscape

In Michigan and across the nation, even where there is strong support to have a diverse teacher workforce, barriers persist. In many steps of the teacher pipeline – from garnering early interest in prospective teachers, to preparation programs, to the student teaching internship, to becoming an early career teacher, to becoming an experienced teacher, and even in alternative routes to certification – Michigan faces challenges in building and sustaining a diverse teacher workforce. That's despite strong investments from the state of Michigan in programs that aim to reduce the cost burden associated with teacher preparation and the student teaching internship.⁶¹ Although there are identified gaps, particularly between teachers of color and their white peers, there is little consensus on the root causes of these challenges. In the pages ahead, EdTrust-Midwest identifies potential areas for innovation and further investment in building and sustaining a diverse teacher workforce.

Teacher Preparation: Barriers and Bright Spots Throughout the Pipeline

Supporting the entry point to the teacher pipeline is essential to the success of the workforce overall, and teacher preparation programs are the foundation for a strong supply of a high-quality, diverse teacher workforce.

It's a testament to Michigan's recognition of the need to grow the teacher pipeline that policymakers have committed significant resources, \$75 million in Fiscal Year 2026, to reduce the cost burden of postsecondary teacher training and student teaching.⁶² Additionally, state investments in alternative routes to certification and Grow-Your-Own programs demonstrate a commitment to building a diverse and high-quality teacher workforce.⁶³ While these strategies are moving in the right direction, more is needed to sustain a diverse teacher workforce.

One barrier to entry for a teaching career may be the cost of postsecondary education, a burden that is often heavier for students of color.⁶⁴ Ultimately, many students decide that entering a relatively low-paying profession such as teaching is simply not worth the economic risk of going into debt to receive their college education.⁶⁵ The cost of training and credentialing can outweigh the benefits of a career in education, especially for many students from low-income backgrounds, leading to considerable debt that often falls more heavily on students of color. For instance, though most

undergraduates finance at least part of their education through debt, Black students face a disproportionate burden of student loan debt,⁶⁶ which can cause racial wealth gaps to widen between Black and white college graduates.⁶⁷ Black college graduates owe an average of \$25,000 more in student loan debt than white college graduates, leading to higher loan payments, and higher default rates after graduation.⁶⁸

Yet, there are solutions underway to alleviate some of the disproportionate debt burden. For example, debt burden can be lessened by scholarships specifically targeted at students pursuing an education certification. The MI Future Educator Fellowship offers a \$10,000 annual scholarship to up to 2,500 students enrolled in a Michigan Department of Education (MDE)-approved teacher preparation program, which includes both traditional and alternative routes to certification.⁶⁹ Scholarship recipients commit to working in Michigan public schools for at least three and up to five years, ensuring that the state's investment directly benefits the next generation of Michigan students.⁷⁰ This scholarship, coupled with other state programs like the Michigan Achievement Scholarship⁷¹ and Michigan Reconnect⁷², signifies Michigan's commitment to making postsecondary education and training affordable amidst rising costs of college.

Michigan's student loan forgiveness program for teachers may provide an additional incentive for aspiring teachers to work in the state's public schools. In 2023,

Michigan started providing funds to offset federal student loan payments for teachers already enrolled in public service loan forgiveness, a federal program for government and non-profit workers.⁷³ Individual teachers must apply for the state program, and most teachers receive \$200 per month in additional loan payment assistance.⁷⁴ In Michigan districts with the highest concentration of poverty where at least 85% of the students are from low-income backgrounds, teachers receive \$400 per month in additional loan

payment assistance.⁷⁵ (Read more about Michigan's school funding system and weighted funding districts with high concentrations of poverty on pg. 19.) The Fiscal Year 2025 budget included \$25 million for the Student Loan Repayment Program, however the Fiscal Year 2026 budget did not include any continued investment in this program.⁷⁶ Future budgets should include restored, dedicated investment in reducing the loan burden for teachers across the state.

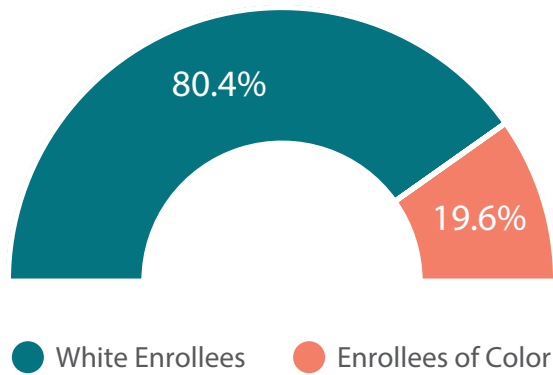


Compensation: A Barrier to Attracting and Retaining Teachers

To attract strong and diverse teachers, no prospective Michigan teacher should see low compensation as a barrier to joining the workforce. As EdTrust-Midwest explores the many challenges to diversifying Michigan's teacher workforce, teacher pay must be acknowledged as a deterrent to many young professionals choosing a career in education. Conversations with teachers of color uncovered the many challenges that come with low pay: the cost of training is harder to justify, stable housing is harder to obtain, and student perceptions of low pay make the profession less attractive to the next generation of teachers. These findings build upon our previous report, [Closing the Opportunity Divide](#), where we uncovered troubling disparities between teacher salaries and salaries of other bachelor's degree-holding professionals.⁷⁷ Further, in our [2025 State of Michigan Education report](#), EdTrust-Midwest found a \$7,000 salary gap between Michigan's highest and lowest poverty districts.⁷⁸ This multi-faceted challenge deserves sustained investment and continued conversation about what our teachers deserve for their intensive training and immense public service to Michigan communities.

Some bright spots are emerging amid efforts to diversify the teacher talent pool. Since 2016, 2,272 teachers of color have entered Michigan’s workforce, a 34% increase.⁷⁹ This increase is impressive, resulting in part from sustained investment in the teacher pipeline, notably in teacher preparation programs. These programs are beginning to improve in their recruitment of candidates of color. Consider that in 2022-23, approximately 19.6% of those enrolled in teacher preparation programs were people of color. That’s a considerable increase from 2018-19 when only 13.3% of those enrolled in Michigan’s teacher preparation programs were students of color.⁸⁰

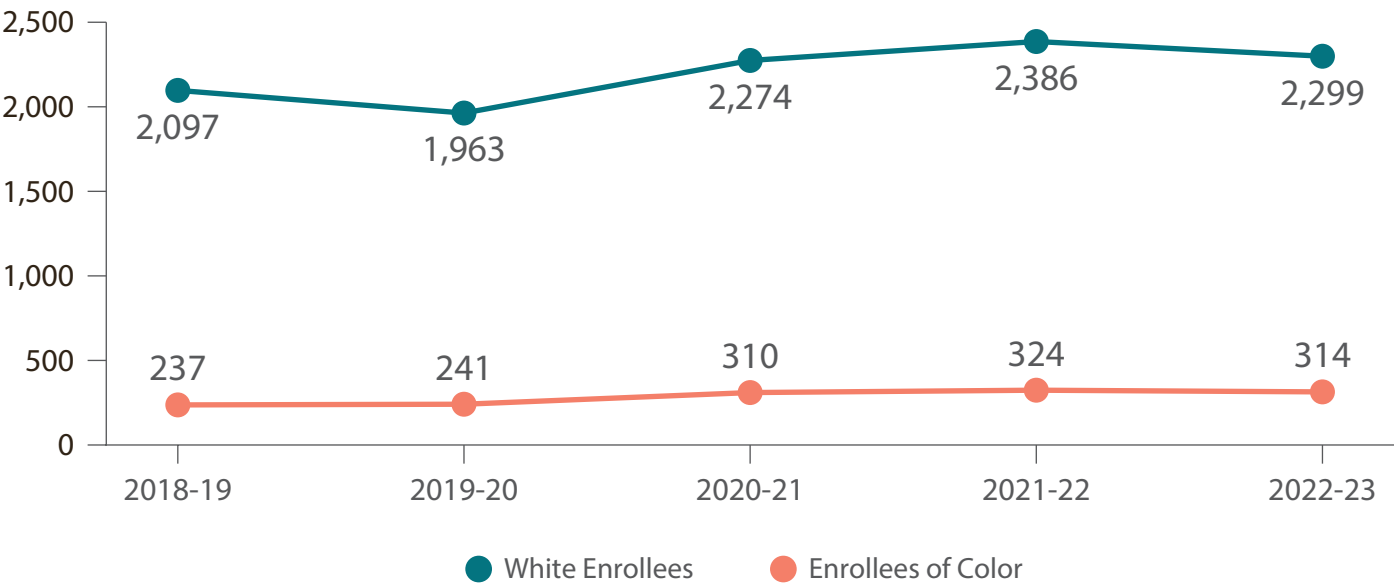
Diversity in Michigan Teacher Preparation - Program Enrollment
2022-2023



Source: MDE Educator Workforce Data Report, 2022-2023 Report Year
Note: Enrollment counts include those enrolled in a teacher preparation program with an MDE-approved provider. Approved providers are either traditional teacher preparation programs, which include programs at four-year universities and residency programs, or alternative route to certification programs.

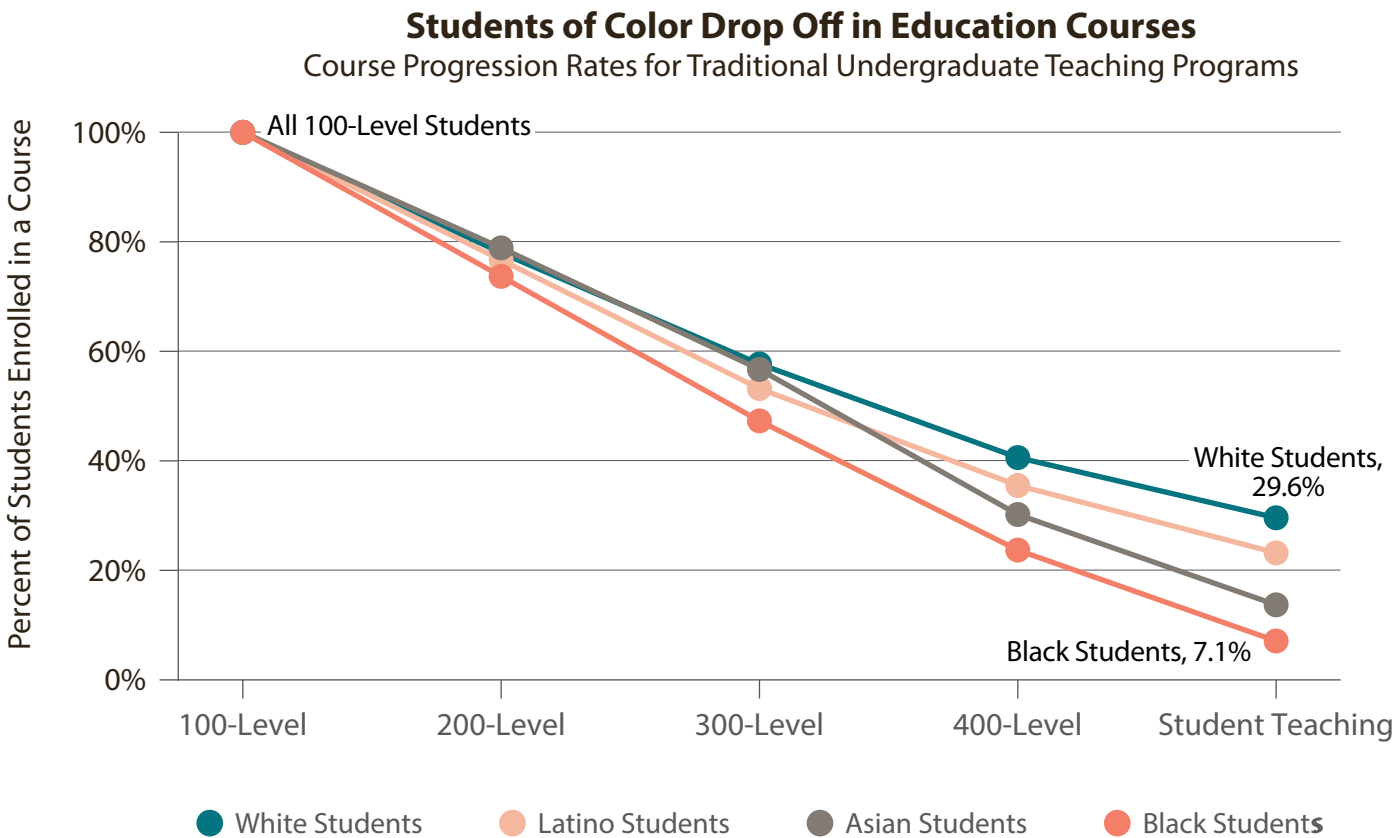
Despite improvements in recruiting candidates of color, completion rates for those candidates are more troubling. In 2022-23, only 12% of those who completed a Michigan teacher preparation program were people of color.

Diversity in Michigan Teacher Preparation - Program Completion
2018-2023



Source: MDE Educator Workforce Data Report for 2018-2019, 2019-2020, 2020-2021, 2021-2022, and 2022-2023 Report Years

At many steps along the teacher pipeline – coursework, student teaching, certification tests – the teacher candidate pool becomes less diverse. According to a 2023 EPIC analysis, between advanced undergraduate education classes and student teaching, the proportion of Black students in Michigan’s teacher pipeline dropped by more than half.⁸¹ Deeper analysis is required to understand the cause of this decline at every step in the pipeline, but there are broad themes which contribute to the overall decline.



Source: EPIC Tracking Progress Through Michigan’s Teacher Pipeline, June 2023 (Years of analysis: 2010-2022)

About This Chart:

This chart depicts the share of students who persist in education coursework among all students who take an introductory, 100-level education course. Not every student who takes a 100-level course in a given subject will choose to take higher-level courses in that subject. However, in education courses, we see that as the course levels increase, Black students drop out of the progression at a higher rate than their white peers. Of all the Black students who took a 100-level education course, only 7.1% of those students went on to student teach. Of all the white students who took a 100-level course, nearly 30% of them went on to student teach.

Among the identified barriers that potentially contribute to this decline is the required 600 hours of apprenticeships and student teaching, which can pose both financial and time constraints for students who cannot forgo part-time work to fulfill student teaching requirements.⁸² The Michigan Department of Lifelong Education, Advancement, and Potential (MiLEAP) administers the MI Future Educator Stipend, established in 2022, which provides a modest payment to student teachers while completing their required hours.⁸³ This is a promising step to supporting student teachers from all backgrounds, but it will take time to see the impact on the teacher preparation pipeline and, ultimately, Michigan’s teacher workforce.

Additionally, for the future of Michigan’s teacher workforce, it’s important to recognize that Black teacher

preparation graduates are more likely to enter and stay in Michigan's public school teaching workforce compared to white, Latino, and Asian teachers.⁸⁴ For instance, five years after becoming certified, 44% of Black teachers remained teaching in Michigan public schools, compared to 38% of white and Latino teachers.⁸⁵ While this persistence in the workforce is promising, the data suggest there are systemic forces that work against Black teachers' ability to persist throughout the preparation pipeline. For instance, inequitable prohibitive costs associated with earning a teaching degree and the lure of more lucrative career alternatives could result in Michigan public schools losing out on a talented pool of teachers.

Certification Exams, Passage Rate Gaps, and Systemic Barriers to Entry

For many teachers, the final step before becoming certified is passing one or more certification exams, yet there is a wide disparity in passage rates for teachers of color versus their white peers on various Michigan Test(s) for Teacher Certification (MTTC), Michigan's subject-specific teacher licensure exams. The state of Michigan has already taken measures to reduce the financial burden of certification exams, but the challenges go beyond cost barriers. This passage rate gap requires policymakers to understand and address the ways in which students of all backgrounds can be more successful on certification exams.

Consider that a 2023 analysis from EPIC that found that nearly 92% of first-time test takers passed an MTTC between 2018 and 2021, but only 54% of Black test takers received a passing score.⁸⁶ Compared to other races, the Black candidate pass rate is considerably lower.⁸⁷ The average pass rate for white candidates was 90%, Latino was 83%, and Asian was 87%. It is important to note that these pass rates only include test takers aged 26 or younger who attended traditional teacher preparation programs housed in Michigan's public institutions.⁸⁸ While it is unclear why the pass rate for Black candidates is so low, this discrepancy should prompt educator preparation programs to more deeply investigate this gap.

Additionally, institutions are required to report their test scores for their most recently graduated class of teachers, but those are not the only teachers taking an MTTC at a given time.⁸⁹ Testers can include those recently graduated from teacher preparation programs, teachers just starting their alternative route to certification, and those seeking their substitute permit. Further, as the state builds and promotes innovative alternative routes to certification, it is imperative that those teachers are properly supported by their alternative route program to have the knowledge and skills necessary to pass their MTTC.

One important way that MDE has invested in new teachers is by covering MTTC fees for first-time testers.⁹⁰ The state's investment of \$1.1 million in 2025 was an excellent way to reduce the cost barriers associated with teacher certification.⁹¹ However, this program was not included in the Fiscal Year 2026 budget, making all tests taken on or after October 1, 2025 ineligible for reimbursement.⁹² Future budgets should include this worthy investment in early-career teachers.

Last In, First Out Policies: An Undue Burden on Early-Career Teachers

Part of recruiting and retaining a strong and diverse teacher workforce is designing layoff policies that, in the unfortunate event they are needed, uphold equitable practices.

Creating such a system is more urgent in Michigan, given school districts' budget constraints. With the expiration of pandemic relief funds in 2024⁹³, coupled with declining student enrollment in Michigan, districts will likely be faced with financial conditions that require them to consider staff layoffs.⁹⁴

Last-in, First-Out (LIFO) policies, where teachers that are among the most recently hired are the ones that get laid off first, can be especially detrimental to early career teachers and teachers of color. Consider that teachers of color in Michigan are 32% more likely to be in their first two years of teaching, when compared to white teachers.⁹⁵

The fact that teachers of color are more likely to be early-career teachers means that they might be most impacted by seniority policies within districts because across the nation, seniority is one of the most common factors used by school districts in determining which teachers get laid off.⁹⁶ While Michigan law prohibits school districts from using seniority as the sole factor in layoff decisions, directing them to instead refer to effectiveness as measured by performance evaluations, state law could be strengthened.⁹⁷ Notably, Michigan school districts can use teacher seniority only as a tiebreaker if the layoff decision involves two or more employees with otherwise indistinguishable qualities.⁹⁸

While Michigan's current layoff policy seems to protect against the negative impacts of LIFO, consider that 99% of Michigan teachers were rated effective or highly effective in the 2023-24 academic year.⁹⁹ Therefore, the only required criteria for determining layoffs is rendered useless in that ratings for most teachers are indistinguishable in terms of effectiveness. Although Michigan recently updated its effectiveness rating system, it is too early to understand how this system may change effectiveness rates.¹⁰⁰ The new system is designed to allow school administrators to commit more time and resources to inexperienced and otherwise struggling staff who need more assistance in achieving an effective rating.¹⁰¹

Alternatives to LIFO include consideration of length of service in a grade level or subject area, but this is not a strong protection against LIFO: unless a veteran teacher has recently changed subject areas or grade level, they will still typically hold an advantage. Districts might also consider relevant factors like disciplinary records and relevant special training outside of required professional development.¹⁰² In the recommendations section to come, we explore how Michigan lawmakers should amend the existing layoff policy to add protections that can benefit early career teachers and teachers of color, including considerations for those working in high-need subject areas and teachers trained in Grow Your Own programs.

As discussed in our [previous report](#), the teacher shortage is highly localized, varying by district and even subject area.¹⁰³ This means that while some districts are struggling to hire and keep teachers, others will be making difficult cuts to their teaching staff, potentially jeopardizing teacher workforce diversity. It is imperative that district leaders support the recruitment, development, and retention of early career teachers to protect them from a LIFO policy.

Investing in Early-Career Teachers

In order to build a strong and diverse teacher workforce, there needs to be a strong pipeline of early-career teachers with the resources and mentorship required to grow into experienced and effective teachers. The implementation of a new and improved rating system makes it much more urgent that school districts provide support, including mentorship and training opportunities, to ensure that early career teachers thrive and reduce their chance of layoffs in their early career years. Recent state investments support efforts to increase early-career teacher effectiveness. In the Fiscal Year 2026 budget, the state extended \$50 million in one-time teacher mentorship grants, which districts can apply for and use through 2029, to support early career teacher growth.¹⁰⁴

Opportunity Index: The Next Step in Michigan’s Fair Funding Journey

Passed in 2023, the Opportunity Index transformed the way Michigan allocates what is known as “at risk” funding, making Michigan among the first ten states with funding formulas that include an index for concentrations for poverty.¹⁰⁵

The Opportunity Index divides school districts into six bands based on the concentration of poverty within each district. In each band, districts are given an additional percentage of the foundation allowance based on their concentration of poverty. Districts with higher concentrations of poverty are placed in higher bands and are given a larger percentage of the foundation allowance to be able to meet the additional needs of their students.¹⁰⁶

For instance, Opportunity Index band 1 includes Michigan public school districts that have 0%-19.99% of students living in poverty.

Band 6 includes districts where 85% to 100% of students are living in poverty.

Note that the law provides for higher funding weights amounting to an additional 35% to 47% based on districts’ concentration of poverty. However, the Opportunity Index system is not fully funded. Instead, the legislature approved prorated rates for each Band for Fiscal Year 2026. For instance, school systems in Band 6, which include Michigan’s highest poverty districts, receive an additional 21.46% funding above the foundation allowance for each student. The goal weight for that band is 47%.

Examples of districts in Band 6 during the 2024-25 school year include: Godfrey-Lee Public Schools, Detroit Public Schools Community District, Muskegon Public Schools, and Benton Harbor Area Schools.

Opportunity Index Band	% Economically Disadvantaged Students (Minimum)	% Economically Disadvantaged Students (Maximum)	FY26 Prorated Funding Weights*	Goal Funding Weights**
OI Band 1	0%	19.99%	15.98%	35%
OI Band 2	20%	43.99%	16.44%	36%
OI Band 3	44%	58.99%	17.12%	37.5%
OI Band 4	59%	72.99%	17.81%	39%
OI Band 5	73%	84.99%	19.18%	42%
OI Band 6	85%	100%	21.46%	47%

Source: [2026 School Aid Budget](#) & Michigan House Fiscal Agency

*This column includes the weights districts will actually receive in Fiscal Year 2026. They are prorated versions of the goal weights (see next note) calculated based on current funding available for the Opportunity Index.

**These weights are established in law as the “goals” for each Opportunity Index band. Current funding is not sufficient to provide these weights to school districts in Fiscal Year 2026.

V. Promising Programs Spotlight

Increasing teacher diversity in Michigan will take collective efforts from state leaders, nonprofits, intermediate school districts (ISDs), school districts, and the community. The following programs and investments are some examples of promising initiatives, both in Michigan and in leading states, that prioritize deep investment in strengthening the teacher workforce.

★ **Grow-Your-Own Spotlight: Future Proud MI Educator**

Michigan's commitment to investing in the teacher workforce, particularly teachers from diverse backgrounds and experiences, is evident in the Future Proud Michigan Educator (Future PME) program.¹⁰⁷ The program is intended to diversify the teacher workforce through supports that go beyond traditional teacher training programs. Four pathways guide different future teachers to and through the teacher pipeline:

- Individuals working in PK-12 schools, like paraprofessionals and support staff
- Career changers
- Teachers transferring certification from other states
- Students in grades 6-12 (e.g., the EXPLORE program)

The different branches of the Future PME program reflect the Michigan Department of Education's commitment to using innovative methods to build a strong and diverse teaching workforce. Future PME helps to address staffing

needs across the state through resources for Grow Your Own programs and by reducing barriers for aspiring teachers. For instance, the EXPLORE program supports districts and ISDs in developing experiences for students in grades 6-12 who are interested in the teaching profession. Future PME continues this support along the pipeline: recent EXPLORE graduates who are enrolled in a pathway to a traditional teacher certification program and are employed by the district may receive up to \$10,000 in tuition grants.¹⁰⁸ EXPLORE allows Michigan students to be nurtured into the teacher pipeline through hands-on learning and mentoring from local teachers.

Programs like PME EXPLORE are made possible through state support for Grow Your Own Student programs, which totals \$2.4 million to date awarded to 90 districts and ISDs and benefitting over 1,000 students.¹⁰⁹

★ **Grow-Your-Own Spotlight: Talent Together**

Michigan's Talent Together program is a vital tool to increasing diversity in the state's teaching workforce by expanding opportunities for school support staff to earn their teaching certification. An innovative partnership led by all 56 ISDs in Michigan, participants enroll in a registered teacher apprenticeship with the U.S. Department of Labor to earn the degrees and/or credentials necessary to become a certified teacher.¹¹⁰ Talent Together candidates are also more diverse than the current Michigan teaching pool: while only 11.3% of Michigan teachers identify as people of color,¹¹¹ 24% of the first Talent Together cohort were people of color. In

the second cohort, 41% of participants were people of color.¹¹²

Programs like Talent Together are made possible through state support for Grow Your Own Staff programs. Consider that as of Fiscal Year 2025, over 1,000 staff members have benefitted from over \$175 million in state investment, and over \$66 million dedicated to Talent Together.¹¹³

★ Promising Program: Boldly Moving Education Ahead (BMEA)

Boldly Moving Education Ahead (BMEA), formerly known as the Black Male Educator Alliance, is an exemplar of how to cultivate a strong support network and coalition of educational leaders to promote the well-being and retention of teachers of color. Through multiple avenues – one-on-one coaching, community-building with fellow educators, partnerships with schools, youth development, and policy advocacy – BMEA provides high-touch engagement with community partners to ensure that teachers and principals of color are holistically supported. These support pillars are

reflected in student performance on national tests, with exceptional academic growth among students of BMEA teacher fellows.¹¹⁴ The Youth Leadership Development Program creates a pipeline for Black male high school students to enter the teaching workforce through a high-engagement program that pairs students with a teacher mentor and provides academic support. The program results show a deep impact: high school participants reported a higher likelihood of attending college, a high level of interest in pursuing teaching or STEM careers, higher GPA, and lower levels of conflict with peers.¹¹⁵

Leading States Examples: Registered Teacher Apprenticeship Programs

By Nathan Kriha, P-12 Policy Analyst, EdTrust

Recognized by the U.S. Department of Labor, registered teacher apprenticeship programs (RTAPs) offer an innovative “earn and learn” model where apprentices receive paid work experience and progressively increasing wages, accumulating at least 2,000 hours of structured on-the-job training under experienced mentors. This practical training is often complemented by higher education coursework and leads to full state teacher certification at low or zero cost to the candidate. Due to their financial accessibility and often intentional efforts to recruit paraprofessionals, teacher apprenticeships are particularly promising for addressing barriers that have historically limited access to quality teacher preparation for candidates of color and candidates from low-income backgrounds, who are critically underrepresented in the educator workforce.

In a [new report](#) from EdTrust’s national office, interviews with over 30 registered teacher apprentices of color found that candidates consistently valued the extensive, job-embedded classroom experience of their program, especially when paired with trained and supportive mentor instructors.¹¹⁶ Importantly, the apprenticeship model afforded great financial accessibility for candidates, many of whom had considered becoming a teacher earlier in their careers but felt locked out of traditional teacher preparation pathways, unable to forgo regular paychecks and work-based benefits (like healthcare) and unwilling to accrue significant student loan debt.

To sustain and expand these nascent yet promising programs, state-level investments are paramount. Tennessee, a pioneer in the RTAP space, allocated \$5 million in 2023 for its teacher apprenticeship initiatives. Similarly, the Florida Department of Education awarded over \$5.4 million in late 2024 through its Pathways to Career Opportunities Grow Your Own Teacher Grants to bolster teacher apprenticeship programs across the state. Sustained strategic investments like these will highlight a commitment to making teaching more accessible and building an educator workforce that is representative of the student population.

VI. Where Do We Go From Here?

Policy Priorities to Build a Strong and Diverse Teacher Workforce

Regardless of students' race or ethnicity, strong and diverse teacher workforces benefit students of all grades. Diverse teacher workforces have been linked to quantitative improvements in test scores, fewer absences and suspensions, higher graduation and college enrollment rates, and increased trust between students and teachers.¹¹⁷ Students from low-income backgrounds, Black and Latino students, and students with disabilities deserve teachers who reflect their own lived experience. Cultivating a strong, qualified, and diverse teacher workforce requires policy change at every level of the teacher pipeline, from preparation programs to recruitment to retention.

From training to retaining qualified, experienced teachers, it is imperative that Michigan invest deeply into growing and sustaining a diverse teacher workforce. The policy recommendations ahead present a roadmap.

Priority 1: Expand Intentional Recruitment of Teachers of Color

1. Policymakers should encourage young people of color into the teaching profession as early as elementary school by designing and implementing career pathways for students of color.
 - This could include the expansion of funding for programs like [EXPLORE](#), an MDE-funded grant for school districts to develop programs for students in grades 6-12 interested in the teaching profession.¹¹⁸
2. The state should continue to support programs that lessen teachers' loan burden, especially for those working with a high concentration of students from low-income backgrounds.
 - The state should restore allocations that offset loan burden through the Student Loan Repayment Program in future budgets.
 - Continue to provide state-backed financial support for aspiring teachers through scholarships like MI Future Educator Fellowships and MI Future Educator Student Teacher Stipends.
3. Lawmakers should continue to support and develop local Grow Your Own programs with an intentional focus on candidates of color so that more students have the opportunity to learn from a teacher who is of the same identity or background and is committed to staying in the community.
 - The state should continue to support initiatives like Future Proud Michigan Educator that make it easier for aspiring teachers from diverse backgrounds and experiences to receive high quality training for the classroom.
4. The state should support school districts in using high-touch recruitment methods by providing resources for hiring managers to actively prioritize and follow up with prospective applicants of color, build relationships with them, and offer actionable support so that candidates of color have a positive recruitment experience.

Priority 2:

Create and Highlight Inclusive Curriculum and Pedagogy for All Teachers

1. Teacher preparation programs, both at universities and alternative routes to certification, should ensure that program curriculums are culturally and linguistically sustaining for candidates of color and include texts from a broad range of voices, including Black, Latino, and Indigenous authors, authors with disabilities, and those that center students with disabilities in both a special and general education context.
2. The state already monitors teacher preparation program effectiveness at multiple steps, but there is more work ahead to ensure programs evolve and innovate alongside a changing workforce and student body.¹¹⁹ The state should strengthen its oversight of teacher preparation programs to adequately prepare new teachers for a diverse set of teaching contexts, as outlined in MDE's Clinical Experiences Requirements.¹²⁰

Priority 3:

Foster Inclusive Workplaces to Increase Teacher of Color Retention

1. Professional learning opportunities should also showcase diverse perspectives. The state, intermediate school districts (ISDs), and districts, if not already doing so, should offer relevant and inclusive professional development for a wide variety of backgrounds from which our teachers come. These offerings should evolve alongside the school community and staff needs.
2. Research shows that supportive work environments can improve retention among teachers of color.¹²¹ Creating an inclusive workplace will reduce isolation by fostering professional networks and leadership opportunities for teachers of color. Districts, with state support and technical assistance, should ensure there are clear career ladders with pathways for leadership roles and professional advancement. This will help create a career growth pipeline, whether teachers strive to be a principal, instructional leader, district administrator, or another leadership role that allows teachers to stay in the classroom.

Priority 4:

Support and Organize Coalitions of Stakeholders Committed to Teacher Diversity

1. Districts and schools should encourage same-race early teacher mentoring relationships for new teachers of color.
 - The Boston Teacher Residency Male Educators of Color Network is a model for supporting Black male teachers with Black male teacher mentors.¹²² Through monthly professional development opportunities, teachers supported one another in navigating the challenges and demands of their school environment, with the goal of retaining Black male teachers in Boston Public Schools. Importantly, the program helped teachers focus on creating better learning conditions for their students, the majority of whom were students of color or students from low-income backgrounds. Michigan should consider how the state, ISDs, or districts could construct mentorship programs to better support their teachers of color and, ultimately, students of color.

2. The state should establish a network of aligned champions to disseminate best practices in diverse teacher recruitment and retention strategies.
3. State, ISD, and county leaders should create affinity groups for teachers of color to support individuals with the day-to-day challenges of teaching and provide a support network with professional development and mentorship opportunities.
 - The following organizations can serve as best practice models:
 - BMEA is a leader in offering mentorship and strategic support pillars for teachers and principals of color.
 - The [Illinois Affinity Group Facilitators Network](#) works to improve retention and provide community to teachers of color in different regions across the state.

Priority 5:

Explore and Amend Policies Regarding Seniority and Teacher Diversity

1. Policymakers should create systems to protect, as much as possible, effective teachers of color from layoff policies that can act as “Last In, First Out”.
2. Policymakers should explore opportunities to safeguard new teachers from layoffs by adding protections for teachers in high-demand subject areas or teachers from Grow Your Own programs.
 - Michigan’s teacher layoff policy already includes protections for teachers with relevant special training.¹²³ This policy could be strengthened by specifying the special training to include training in high-demand subject areas like mathematics or special education certifications.
 - In 2021, Oregon changed their layoff policy from seniority-based to a structure that added protections for teachers who have cultural and linguistic expertise.¹²⁴ For example, the policy protects teachers who speak a language that many of the districts’ students speak. Michigan could consider this policy as a way to enrich schools’ cultural diversity and expand students’ access to teachers who share their backgrounds and experiences.
 - Minneapolis Public Schools implemented a teacher layoff program in 2021 that included specific protections for graduates from the district’s Grow Your Own programs.¹²⁵ While this policy is specific to an urban district within the state, Michigan might explore opportunities to create statewide Grow Your Own protections so that Grow Your Own teachers can benefit without having to rely on their district passing their own policy.
3. Parents, communities, policymakers, and other stakeholders deserve honest and transparent information on how their school is doing when it comes to access to strong and diverse teachers. As EdTrust-Midwest advocates for strong, accessible, and transparent data systems, policymakers should include teacher diversity as a metric in publicly reported district and school quality measures.

VII. Conclusion

The evidence is clear that teacher diversity benefits all students. In addition to the direct academic benefits, like higher test scores, graduation rates, and college enrollment rates, research also finds that students with a diverse pool of teachers see fewer absences and experience greater trust with their teachers.¹²⁶ A diverse teacher workforce is especially beneficial for students of color, but the positive impact touches students from every background and identity.

While Michigan has certainly improved and demonstrated investment over the years, more can be done to improve teacher diversity, which will also help address Michigan's teacher shortage crisis. A variety of barriers at every step of the teacher pipeline continue to create challenges for aspiring teachers of color to join and stay in the workforce, ultimately limiting opportunities for students across the state to be exposed to a range of identities and experiences.

Ensuring that all students have access to a strong and diverse teacher workforce will necessitate statewide commitment. Successful programs present a roadmap. Policymakers should implement policies to support and duplicate those, while doubling down on investments that support data-informed strategies to strengthen and diversify the teacher talent pool.

For Michigan to reach its goal to be a top 10 state for education, which we know it can be, we owe it to all of our students – and our aspiring teachers – to begin building a pipeline now of strong and diverse teachers. Through coordinated and targeted efforts, policymakers can develop a high-quality, diverse teacher workforce that benefits all students, families, and communities. When we have a foundation of strong teachers, our children are set up for a successful future.



"Equitable access to a strong and diverse educator workforce is one of the key pillars which fosters strong cultural connections, supportive relationships and a strong sense of belonging that is needed by all students to support and enhance their academic and social/emotional needs."

- Alice Thompson

CEO, BFDI Educational Services Inc., Co-Chair of the Michigan Partnership for Equity and Opportunity Coalition, and Chair of the education committee of the Detroit branch-NAACP



"If we truly believe every child deserves a fair shot, then we have to invest in, support, and retain a teaching force that mirrors the brilliance and diversity of our students. When we have educators from different racial, cultural, and linguistic backgrounds leading classrooms, they bring with them a wealth of lived experience, empathy, and cultural intelligence that strengthens the entire school community. From my perspective, diversity in the educator workforce helps all students — not just those who share a background with their teachers. It broadens perspectives, deepens empathy, and prepares young people to thrive in a diverse world. For Black and Brown students especially, it affirms that they are capable, that their culture is an asset, and that education is a space where they can both see themselves and shape what comes next."

- Dr. Curtis Lewis

Founder/President, Boldly Moving Education Ahead (BMEA)



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