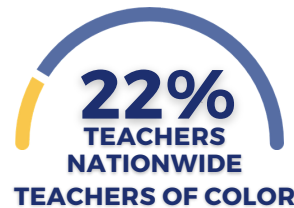
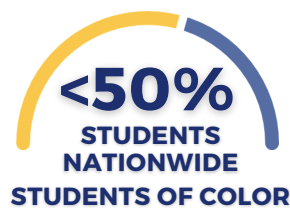


CLOSING THE GAP: HOW EVIDENCE-BASED PREPARATION FURTHERS REPRESENTATION

As teacher shortages persist nationwide, states have moved to fill classrooms quickly, often relying on emergency waivers that place underprepared educators in front of students. By 2025, this approach reached a significant scale as 48 states and the District of Columbia employed approximately 366,000 teachers who were not fully certified for their teaching assignments.



At the same time, the educator workforce remains far from representative of the students in today's classrooms: more than 50% of students nationwide are students of color, compared to just 22% of teachers.



In the rush to staff schools, the priority shifts from preparation and representation to simply filling vacancies, despite clear evidence that both are critical to student outcomes. Expanding evidence-based pathways such as Registered Teacher Apprenticeship Programs (RTAPs) offers a way to address these challenges simultaneously by strengthening preparation while diversifying the educator workforce.

Students of color taught by educators who share their backgrounds demonstrate higher achievement, stronger attendance, lower rates of suspensions, and are more likely to be placed in gifted programs. These benefits extend beyond any single group, as all students gain from teachers who bring diverse experiences and perspectives into the classroom. Yet the educator workforce remains far less diverse than the students it serves, limiting the potential impact of these advantages, and underscoring the need for pathways to bring more diverse candidates into teaching.

Studies found that Black students who have at least one Black teacher between kindergarten and third grade are 13% more likely to graduate from high school.

At the same time, evidence shows that high-quality, hands-on teacher preparation plays a central role in educator effectiveness. Evidence from Texas illustrates how central this is to student learning. A Texas Tech University study found that students taught by teachers who did not hold certification from a preparation program lost the equivalent of four months of reading instruction and three months of math instruction compared with peers taught by certified teachers. The study revealed another important insight – when uncertified teachers had prior school-based experience, such as working as paraprofessionals or substitutes, learning loss was significantly reduced. This demonstrates that classroom experience is not incidental to teacher effectiveness, but the linchpin, pointing to the value of preparation models that integrate sustained, on-the-job training. Candidates who spend time in schools before becoming teachers are measurably better prepared to lead classrooms. One of the biggest barriers sustaining these gaps is cost. Tuition, unpaid student teaching models, and student loan debt make it difficult for many aspiring educators to enter or complete preparation programs.

While many educators of color work in schools as paraprofessionals, aides, or support staff, traditional certification pathways can often make credentialing difficult to attain. The difficulty isn't due to lack of talent or commitment, rather, the structure of the pathway itself is the issue, highlighting the need for more accessible, earn-while-you-learn approaches to certification. These barriers are especially significant for paraprofessionals and other school staff who are already working with students but cannot afford to leave their existing jobs (and paychecks) to complete traditional preparation programs.

RTAPs offer a promising solution. By combining coursework with sustained, paid, on-the-job training under the guidance of experienced educators, these programs help remove the difficult choice between earning a living and completing teacher preparation to become a qualified teacher. By the time an apprentice steps in as the teacher of record, they have months of experience inside real classrooms learning

Research shows that these financial pressures fall disproportionately on candidates of color as 91% of Black teacher candidates and 82% of Latinx teacher candidates take out federal student loans for their education, compared to 76% of white teacher candidates.



(Percent of candidate federal student loan borrowers, by race/ethnicity)

the craft and harnessing new tools. The result is a pipeline that produces teachers who are better prepared.

Strengthening the educator workforce requires pathways that combine meaningful classroom experience, reduce financial barriers, and expand access to the profession. Teacher apprenticeships provide a strategy that achieves all three, creating a sustainable pipeline of well-prepared educators who reflect the students they serve.