



# One district's path to a diverse staff

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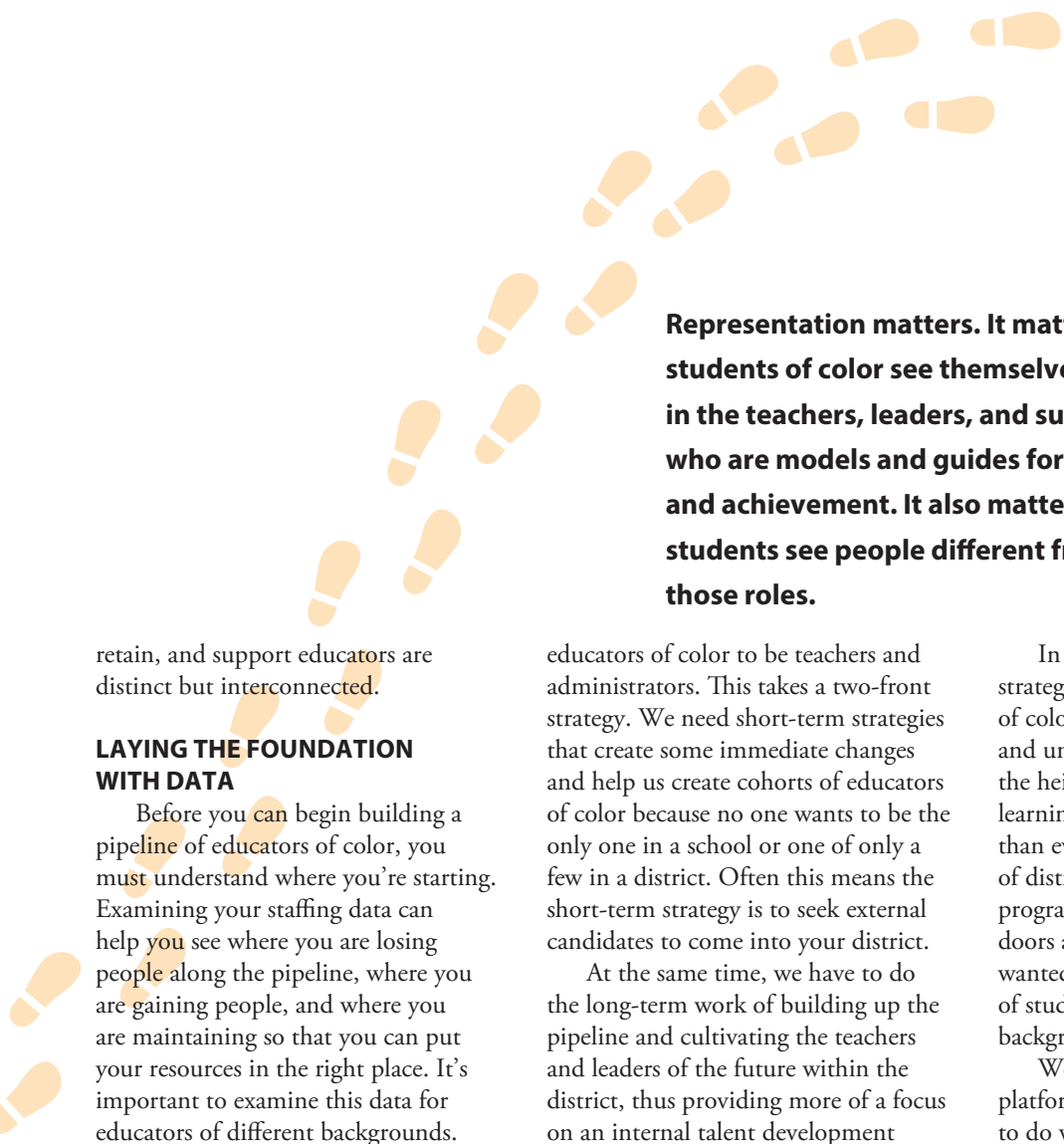
In North Carolina's Winston-Salem/Forsyth County Schools, we believe that employing a diverse staff is key to reaching all five of our overarching district goals: student achievement, equity and access, community engagement, human resources development, and climate and safety. Recruiting, retaining, and supporting educators of color is an important part of our human resources

strategy and a key lever for addressing barriers to success for every student.

Representation matters. It matters that students of color see themselves reflected in the teachers, leaders, and support staff who are models and guides for learning and achievement. It also matters that white students see people different from them in those roles. This is why we are striving to have the demographics of the staff be

proportionate to the demographics of the student population.

We are taking a comprehensive approach to having our student and staff population mirror each other. Using both short- and long-term strategies, we are working to build the whole educator pipeline, from middle school (when students typically begin thinking about future careers) through the principalship. Our efforts to recruit,



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retain, and support educators are distinct but interconnected.

### **LAYING THE FOUNDATION WITH DATA**

Before you can begin building a pipeline of educators of color, you must understand where you're starting. Examining your staffing data can help you see where you are losing people along the pipeline, where you are gaining people, and where you are maintaining so that you can put your resources in the right place. It's important to examine this data for educators of different backgrounds.

For example, you might find that you are losing Latinx educators at the college stage, so you would put more effort into collaborating with universities to increase their recruitment of Latinx students to take courses in the school of education. If you find that Black educators are hitting a ceiling at the assistant principal level, you might invest in figuring out why they aren't making it to the principalship and how you can change that trajectory. Or, you may find that you have gaps at every stage of the pipeline and need to invest some resources at every stage.

### **RECRUITING EDUCATORS OF COLOR**

Diversifying the staff begins with intentionally recruiting more

educators of color to be teachers and administrators. This takes a two-front strategy. We need short-term strategies that create some immediate changes and help us create cohorts of educators of color because no one wants to be the only one in a school or one of only a few in a district. Often this means the short-term strategy is to seek external candidates to come into your district.

At the same time, we have to do the long-term work of building up the pipeline and cultivating the teachers and leaders of the future within the district, thus providing more of a focus on an internal talent development strategy.

#### **Short-term recruitment strategies**

In the short term, we conduct targeted recruitment for both teachers and leaders. We are building relationships with schools of education at historically Black colleges and universities and Hispanic-serving institutions and recruiting teachers from their graduating classes.

We also look to our noncertified teaching staff (i.e. paraprofessionals), who are more likely to be people of color than certified teaching staff, and support them to become credentialed teachers. And we look both inside and outside our district to recruit talented principals and assistant principals of color.

In addition, we are intentional and strategic about placing student teachers of color, even during these stressful and unusual times. Last year, during the height of the pandemic and virtual learning, we had more student teachers than ever before. At a time when a lot of districts paused student teaching programs, we flung open our virtual doors and were explicit about saying we wanted to work with all different kinds of student teachers from all different backgrounds.

We trained them on our technology platforms and helped them learn how to do virtual teaching. We found that they not only did very well, but ended up supporting many of our credentialed teachers on how to use the technology platforms. It was an important lesson for us: Even in a crisis, don't give up on student teachers. Leverage them as current and future assets.

Leveraging assets is a core strategy of all our recruitment work. We involve educators and administrators of color in reaching out to, interviewing, and selecting new educators, especially those principals and assistant superintendents who are great at motivating people. We have to be careful not to ask too much of or overextend these leaders of color because, too often, educators of color are asked to go far above and beyond their typical job responsibilities.

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But unlike with some of the other duties they are unfairly assigned, such as serving as disciplinarians, many of the leaders of color we work with tell us that building a cadre of excellent educators of color is highly rewarding and even renewing. Even so, we are thoughtful about collaborating with leaders to create strategies that work for them, within their other responsibilities and in ways that are gratifying.

These efforts are beginning to pay off. For example, we have had some success with increasing the number of Latinx principals, assistant principals, and principal supervisors in our district, largely as a result of being targeted in our external recruitment. So far, most of these leaders have been women, so we are developing strategies for also attracting more Latino men.

#### **Long-term recruitment strategies**

To develop a more robust pipeline of educators of color, we need to attract more young people to the profession, and that work must start early — far earlier than most traditional teacher recruitment efforts.

In my previous district, we started with encouraging middle school students to consider careers in education. For example, we created what we called a precadet teacher program in one of our language immersion programs because we know that we need more multilingual teachers and the need will continue to grow as our student population continues to become more diverse. This program is designed to generate interest among young adolescents in a career in education.

At my current district, we have a teacher cadet program for high school students, which is overseen by a dedicated and long-serving teacher, Stephanie Wallace, who has been a mentor to many future educators. Many of her former cadets — a lot of whom are people of color — have come back to the district as teachers. We are always looking for ways to expand

and deepen this effort, and one of our current goals is to help find scholarship money for teacher cadets to attend college at schools of education.

At my previous district, scholarships were a part of the effort to support the development of future administrators. The district secured scholarships for Latinx teachers who were interested in becoming principals to attend administrator training programs. The number of our teachers entering assistant principal programs began to grow, and the district is now working to support high-potential assistant principals with the next steps on their journeys.

#### **SUPPORTING AND RETAINING EDUCATORS OF COLOR**

Of course, recruiting educators of color into the pipeline isn't enough. We need to work hard to support and retain them. Education is a stressful profession for everyone, but there are added pressures on teachers and leaders of color, especially in settings where they are in a distinct minority among the faculty. In addition to our universal strategies for supporting all of our educators and their career development, we also offer supports tailored to the needs of educators of color.

For example, we have recently entered into a partnership with the nonprofit organization Profound Gentlemen to provide extra support and community for Black male teachers. Black men make up a tiny fraction of teachers in American schools, yet research suggests they have a beneficial impact on Black male students. Profound Gentlemen provides tools, coaching, and other kinds of support to Black male teachers to help increase their satisfaction and retention in the profession.

We are also planning to partner with Men of Color in Educational Leadership, which focuses on providing networking and professional development for male leaders of color to lift up their voices and help create professional pathways.

In addition, Effie McMillan, executive director of equity, has recently led the launch of a local affiliate of the National Alliance of Black School Educators. This professional organization is dedicated to furthering the success of all students, but especially those of African descent, through educator professional learning, consulting, conferences, and other forms of support.

Any educator working toward Black students' success can be a part of the organization, but Black educators in particular find a community of peers who provide support, mentorship, and allyship.

#### **HOLISTIC SUPPORT FOR EDUCATORS**

As a human resources office, we see the staff in our district as assets to be developed for the benefit of all students. But we also value our educators for their own humanity, and we aim to support our educators holistically, especially in these stressful times.

In addition to policies that support our staff members' well-being, we believe this includes opportunities for ongoing professional learning and support. From our efforts to help paraprofessionals meet their long-term career goals to our participation in The Wallace Foundation's Principal Pipeline Initiative to nurture the next generation of school leaders, we aim to act on our belief that every educator is crucial to the journey of meeting every student's needs. Students need the wisdom and skill of our educators of color, and those educators need our care and support.

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