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It's the Biggest Opportunity Since Brown v. Board

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This back-to-school season, more than 700 million students across the globe will attend primary schools (representing 90 percent of school-age children worldwide), with another half billion students attending secondary schools. This all serves to remind us of the essential role their teachers will play in their academic success. Finding and keeping these teachers represents one of the greatest challenges facing the global community today.

On World Teachers Day 2016, the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) issued a fact sheet, ["The World Needs Almost 69 Million New Teachers to Reach the 2030 Education Goals,"](#) alerting the world to a global teacher shortage.

In the United States that same year, the Learning Policy Institute (LPI) issued the seminal report, ["A Coming Crisis in Teaching? Teacher Supply, Demand, and Shortages in the U.S."](#) That report served as a canary in the coal mine, alerting school districts and the profession to a growing demand for teachers that is projected to exceed an unprecedented 300,000 teachers a year.

The problem is compounded by the precipitous drop in the number of new teachers entering the profession. Perhaps the most definitive bellwether of this is the federal [Title II Report](#), which tracks the number of teacher candidates and students majoring in teacher preparation across the United States.

NOT ENOUGH TEACHERS-IN-TRAINING

Between 2009 and 2016, the number of candidates or majors enrolled in teacher preparation programs went from 725,518 to 441,439—a 61 percent decrease.

Meanwhile, U.S. public school enrollment is increasing. In May 2018, the U.S. Department of Education's National Center for Education Statistics issued a report, ["The Condition of Education 2018,"](#) which projects that enrollment in pre-K through 12th grade will rise 3 percent by 2027, to 52.1 million students.

The other major challenge facing the teaching profession today is how to increase the number of teachers of color in the classroom. In a June 2018 report, ["Characteristics of Public Elementary and Secondary Teachers in the United States,"](#) the U.S. Department of Education's National Center for Education Statistics provided the most current data available on the demographics of public school teachers, based on their 2015-16 national survey of teachers and principals.

The report found, of the 3.8 million public school teachers in the U.S., a little over 80 percent were non-Hispanic White; 8.8 percent Hispanic; 6.7 percent non-Hispanic Black; and 2.3 percent non-Hispanic Asian. In addition, 76.6 percent of the teachers were female and 23.4 percent male; with an average age of 42.4, and a median age of 41.4. In total, the teachers had an average of nearly 14 years of experience, with an average of slightly over eight years at their current school.

WHILE THE RAW NUMBERS OF TEACHERS OF COLOR ARE INCREASING, THEY REMAIN FAR SMALLER THAN THE NUMBERS OF STUDENTS OF COLOR IN K-12 SCHOOLS.

While the raw numbers of teachers of color are increasing, they remain far smaller than the numbers of students of color in K-12 schools. Earlier this year, LPI issued the April 2018 research brief ["Diversifying the Teaching Profession Through High-](#)

Retention Pathways," which found teachers of color comprise a growing percentage of the overall profession.

In total, approximately 20 percent of teachers in 2015-16, almost double of what it was three decades earlier, are teachers of color. That percentage, however, is still significantly lower, proportionately, when compared to the percentage of people of color in the nation, i.e., approximately 40 percent in 2016.

Additionally, while the fastest growing demographic of teachers are Latinx, an increase from almost 3 percent of teachers in 1987 to nearly 9 percent in 2015, their numbers are not proportional to the number of Latinx students in K-12 classrooms, which was 25 percent in 2014.

Moreover, a potential hurdle in the attempt to increase the number of teachers of color is the disproportionately lower number of students of color in teacher preparation programs in colleges and universities across the U.S.

In a September 2017 report, the [Center for American Progress](#) found White students comprise the majority of college enrollment, i.e., 58 percent, with Hispanic enrollment at 19 percent, and Black enrollment at 14 percent. Enrollment in teacher education programs is even more disproportional for students of color, as reflected in the recent [Title II Report, AY 2015-16](#), which showed 69 percent of teacher education candidates/majors are White, 14 percent Hispanic/Latino, and 10 percent Black or African-American.

Increasing the supply of well-prepared teachers for classrooms across the U.S.—including teachers of color—represents one of the biggest challenges and opportunities public schools have faced since the [Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka](#) decision, which called for the desegregation of public schools. That challenge was met, however, and new opportunities were eventually afforded to African-American students as a result of the dismantling of the principle of segregation in the U.S.

The challenge we face today is a different one. However, it will still require the same determination and commitment needed to ensure all students are taught in classrooms staffed by well-qualified teachers—including teachers who, in the words of many students, “look like me”—who have the requisite preparation, resources and support needed to be successful.