

Barriers to Racial Equity for Teachers of Color and Indigenous Teachers in California’s Teaching Pipeline & Profession

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Executive Summary

Like the rest of the United States, the diversity of California’s teaching force continues to lag behind its student population. While students of Color make up 78% of the state’s K-12 population, Teachers of Color and Indigenous Teachers (TOCIT) comprise just 34% of the teaching workforce¹ (California Department of Education, 2018), a statistic that has dominated the teacher shortage narrative. Although there is promise in the fact that TEP enrollment is more diverse than the state’s current educator workforce, it’s still 27% less diverse than the state’s K-12 students. As demand for greater representation increases, so have the initiatives to recruit and retain more racially diverse teachers. In the past few years, California has spent billions in an effort to diversify its teacher workforce, including Assembly Bill 520, which allocated \$15 million to be distributed to school districts to develop and implement programs that diversify teaching staffs, and Assembly Bill 130, which appropriated \$350 million over the next five years to create or expand Teacher Residency Programs, a pathway that has been shown to recruit and retain higher numbers of TOCIT (California Legislative Information, 2023). But even with these measures, the realities of higher rates of burnout, turnover, and early retirement among TOCIT force us to explore what other factors might be contributing to their departure, or in some cases, their noticeable absence.

This study sets out to 1) explore how current policies, structures, practices, attitudes, and ideologies across the pipeline and profession impede the recruitment and retention of TOCIT, and 2) better understand the racialized experiences and perspectives of pre-service and in-service

¹ Teacher of Color and Indigenous Teacher data from 2018-2019 academic year
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Teachers of Color and Indigenous Teachers. The following paper is based on a mix of qualitative and quantitative data collected from system leaders in teacher preparation, pre-service teachers, in-service teachers, and former teachers over the course of approximately one year: spring 2021 to summer 2022. What follows is a brief summary of our key findings and recommendations:

Financial

Growing tuition fees, unpaid student teaching, mounting student debt, meager salaries, and the relentless rise of inflation and living expenses is undoubtedly felt by teachers at all levels. However, this financial challenge, for historical and social reasons, is disproportionately magnified for the pre-service and in-service TOCIT.

Recommendations:

The state must place a high priority on establishing debt-free pathways for pre-service and in-service TOCIT, ensuring that they can start their careers without being burdened by substantial financial obligations. The state should also closely collaborate with school districts to implement stipend programs, addressing cost-of-living adjustments (COLA) while providing improved healthcare coverage and higher initial salaries, especially in costly regions like the Bay Area, to support new teachers as they embark on their teaching careers.

A dedicated “G.I. Bill” tailored for teachers can be introduced, offering comprehensive coverage that includes tuition and support for future professional development, living expenses, housing stipends, tax breaks, and dependent tuition grants. This bill should also prioritize enhanced social benefits and recognition for teachers, acknowledging their invaluable contributions to society.

Structural Racism

In our data, structural racism emerged in the form of various practices, policies, and institutional norms that disproportionately impacted people of Color and Indigenous people.

Through a process of predatory inclusion and the exploitation of under-resourced and unwaged

labor, pre-service and in-service TOCIT are underserved, undercompensated, and devalued throughout the teacher pipeline and profession.

Recommendations:

Once acknowledged, the best way to combat racial exploitation is to fairly compensate TOCIT for their labor. This includes paying for their student teaching, providing stipends for their supplemental and support work, such as translation services, discipline duties, and mental health guidance for students.

Teacher preparation programs should implement a reasonable enrollment cap to ensure institutions have the capacity to provide students with appropriate supports, financial or otherwise. In particular, programs that reside within historically White institutions should have their own program-level office of support for historically underrepresented students that is overseen by administrators of Color and Indigenous administrators.

Culture & Climate

In this paper, culture and climate refer to the ideologies, customs, norms, policies and practices that govern how people and systems operate and interact with each other. Our findings suggest that through systemic and institutional norms, pre-service and in-service TOCIT experience pervasive microaggressions, discrimination, and dehumanizing situations within largely race-evasive environments.

Recommendations:

Districts should maintain a reliable database of incidents and complaints, similar to what the Equal Employment Opportunity/Affirmative Action Office has for the UC system. Such databases

should be monitored regularly for repeat offenders and to track what actions have been taken to address the issues.

Implement a state-mandated annual cultural responsiveness training (similar to Sexual Assault Prevention training conducted by all UC schools) for all public-school teachers, including supervisors, superintendents, and regional representatives, by 2030.

Curriculum & Pedagogy

A lack of representation within TEP and K-12 curriculums, along with having to contend with outside political pressure and limited support for their pedagogical style, has left TOCIT struggling to identify with their courses and their work.

Recommendations:

TEP programs and K-12 schools and districts should consider establishing mandatory three-to-five-year audits of curriculum to ensure material is culturally relevant, accurate, and inclusive. Have at least one reviewer that works outside of the organization and has a background or expertise in diversity, equity, inclusion, ethnic studies, cultural sustainability, and/or anti-racist practices. The review committee should also be composed of teachers, students, and parents.

K-12 administrators should stand firm on ideals and policies that best support students in cultivating critical awareness and critical consciousness. Schools should be preparing students for life outside of the classroom and assisting them in understanding, negotiating, and navigating their way through concepts and living systems of power, equity, and justice.

Testing

The teacher licensure exams have proven to be formidable barriers for entry, imposing stress, time constraints, and financial burdens, particularly on pre-service TOCIT. Likewise within their teaching careers, academic testing for K-12 students has encroached upon teacher pedagogical

and curricular autonomy, contributing to the attrition of in-service TOCIT, especially for those working in under-resourced schools and communities.

Recommendations:

Alternative methods for in-service teachers to fulfill credential requirements should be made available, such as demonstrating subject-matter and teaching competency through college coursework or program completion. Furthermore, the state should mandate that all scorers receive training that includes diverse examples of teacher/student interaction, lesson study, and pedagogical practice.

For the benefit of students and teachers, the use of standardized tests should be dramatically reduced and supplemented with more authentic and relevant performance assessments. Performance-based assessments allow for more student-centered learning and give teachers more opportunities to employ the use of culturally responsive teaching practices, which may alleviate their frustrations of having to “teach to the test.”