RHODE ISLAND COLLEGE

SOCIAL POLICY HUB FOR
EQUITY RESEARCH IN EDUCATION

"If You Cannot Hope Radically, Do Not Apply":
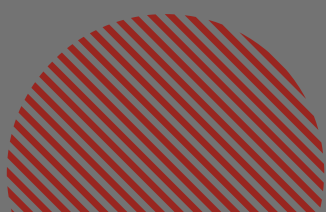## Retaining Educators of Color in Rhode Island Schools

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About SPHERE

The mission of SPHERE is to engage Rhode Island College students and faculty, in partnership with Rhode Island community members, in conducting and disseminating research for equitable educational and social policies. SPHERE endeavors to help Rhode Islanders understand, and become more involved in education policy decisions. SPHERE aspires to be a leading education and social policy institute in Rhode Island. As a policy hub, SPHERE connects with Rhode Island's education stakeholders in multiple spheres of influence by linking research, policy, and practice.

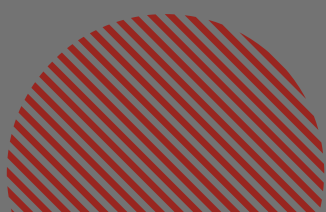# "If You Cannot Hope Radically, Do Not Apply":
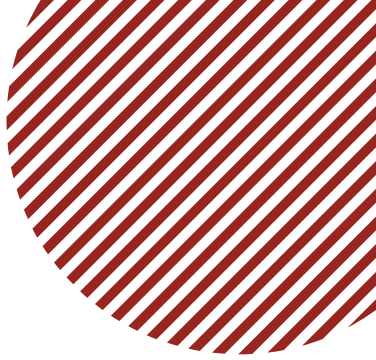## Retaining Educators of Color in Rhode Island Schools

Executive Summary

Teacher turnover is a national problem. Sixteen percent of teachers change schools or leave the field each year, with 55% of voluntary leavers citing dissatisfaction with the profession. Teachers of color leave at slightly higher rates, and are also more likely to change schools, which is significant since they are more inclined to teach in districts with large populations of students of color. Teacher turnover negatively impacts student learning and contributes to a cascade of problems, including increased class sizes, fewer class options, and disruption of the school environment.[1] The pandemic has increased stress for all educators, leading to one in four teachers considering leaving the profession by the end of 2020-21, compared to one in six in 2019.[2] Black teachers in particular have experienced especially high stress due to high COVID-19 death tolls in the Black community, higher rates of hate crimes, and police killings of Black people.[3] In addition, 2021 has brought attacks against teaching historically accurate portrayals of race and racism under the guise of being against Critical Race Theory.[4] These efforts to whitewash United States history put additional stress on educators of color.

Educators of color are an invaluable resource for school leaders, colleagues, and students. They are more likely to offer diverse perspectives, improve students' of color academic performance and help them feel welcome at school, provide culturally relevant teaching, and share positive perceptions of students of color.[5] When elementary students have teachers of their same race, attendance improves, suspensions go down, and college enrollments go up.[6] Teachers of color, particularly Black teachers, often see their work as a moral obligation to support their communities through racial uplift, so their positive impact on children of color

should not be underestimated.[7] Yet, hostile school climates and problematic educational policies in Rhode Island contribute to teachers of color feeling unwelcome, unappreciated, and disempowered, making it more likely that they will leave the field. Drawing on data from teachers across the state and national research on teacher retention, this report draws attention to the following:

There are very few educators of color in Rhode Island, particularly in districts with high numbers of students of color.
- Rhode Island students are racially and ethnically diverse: 3% identify as Asian/Pacific Islander, 9% Black, 28% Hispanic, 5% multiracial, 1% Native American, and 54% white. Yet 96% of educators in Rhode Island identify as white.[8] The problem of not enough educators of color is particularly evident in Providence, where only 8% of students identify as white but 73% of educators identify as white.[9]

We lack clear data on why districts struggle to retain educators of color.
- LEAs (local educational agencies) are not required to disaggregate teacher demographic data by race and ethnicity, which means that these data may be incomplete and inaccurate.[10]
- There is no system to collect and analyze data on why educators of color stay or leave a school, district, or the profession.

Educators of color and students of color regularly experience racial bias from school leaders and teachers, which creates hostile school climates.
- Racial bias, intentional or not, from colleagues and school leaders leads to self-doubt and burnout for educators of color.
- Educators of color feel responsible for mitigating racist talk about and to students.

Educators of color perform additional, uncompensated labor for students and families of color.

- Educators of color are often called upon to provide language interpretation for multilingual students and families, and provide social and emotional support for students of color navigating hostile school climates.
- Administrators and colleagues fail to see or value the time, expertise, and experience that educators of color provide students of color, in addition to their regular teaching duties.

Actions Rhode Island can take to develop policies and practices that support educators of color in K-12 schools.

- Develop a systematic approach to collecting and analyzing data on recruitment, hiring, and retention practices for educators of color;
- Invest in creating welcoming and affirming school climates for educators and students of color;
- Establish policies and expectations that mandate culturally responsive curriculum and instructional practices that target inequities and value diversity; and
- Compensate educators of color for work that supports ethnically, culturally, and linguistically diverse students and families.

Research Approach and Methodology

To better understand how to retain educators of color in Rhode Island's K-12 schools, this report summarizes policy documents and research studies from across the nation and particularly in New England. The focus group interviews with Rhode Island educators of color were consistent with national findings. The interviews, conducted in early 2020, were based on the following research questions:

- How do educators of color in Rhode Island describe and interpret their experiences in K-12 schools? In what ways do they think their race and ethnicity impact how school leaders, colleagues, and students view their work as teachers?
- What kinds of changes in policies, professional development, and other factors would they like to see from the state, districts, and schools?

The participants teach in urban, urban ring, and suburban districts, and in independent schools. The first focus group had three teachers (two Latinx, one Asian American); the second group had two Latinx teachers; and the third group had one Black teacher and one Asian American teacher. Five participants identified as women and two as men. Their classroom teaching experience ranged from two years to over 16 years. See the Appendix for additional details.

Findings
This research yielded four main findings:
- There is not an effective system for collecting and analyzing data on the demographics and experiences of educators of color in school districts.
- District and school cultures are often hostile and unsupportive, and educators of color regularly experience racial bias toward themselves and toward their students of color.
- Current educational policies that emphasize Eurocentric curriculum and teaching practices, require excessive testing, and do not support multilingual learners are detrimental to all teachers and students, especially people of color.
- Educators of color are asked to engage in additional, uncompensated labor for students of color, ranging from translation for multilingual students and families to mentoring, disciplining, serving as community liaisons, and helping colleagues.

Educators of Color within Context

The current lack of diversity in the field of teaching has its roots in the 1950s desegregation era. As Black children were moved into formerly white-only schools, white school leaders across the South refused to hire Black teachers from the formerly Black-only schools. While integration of white and Black students was seen by some Black thought leaders as leading to equal rights, losing Black role models from communities and classrooms has had long-term negative effects, particularly on Black students.[11] In the past, teaching was seen by people of color as a good profession and the opportunity to be a positive influence on children in their communities. Now, the field of education has become less desirable overall, and particularly so for people of color, for reasons outlined in this report.

Racially diverse teachers provide many benefits to all students, particularly their students of color. Educators of color have a positive impact on student achievement; high expectations for students; and provide a sense of belonging in schools.[12] Further, they are more likely to provide culturally relevant teaching, which includes attending to the social, ethnic, and racial diversity of students in the community; valuing students' strengths, intellectual capabilities, and prior accomplishments; and providing curriculum that addresses a wide range of cultural perspectives and contributions to a given discipline.[13] However, this work comes at a price. National research shows that educators of color typically work in underserved schools with poor working conditions and low salaries, and where accountability strategies result in constantly changing leadership and closing schools rather than making structural improvements.[14] Further, educators of color are often expected to support the emotional and social needs of their students, including serving as disciplinarians for all students of color.[15] All of these factors were reported by Rhode Island teachers in this study. Given these conditions and how valuable educators of color are to the knowledge base of the profession and student well-being and achievement, it is important that Rhode Island work toward policies and practices that will increase retention.

Finding #1: A Need for Better Data

In 2016, the U.S. Department of Education released a report predicting that white students will comprise only 46% of the K-12 public school student population by 2024, yet 82% of the nation's public school educators identify as white.[16] There are current efforts from across the state of Rhode Island to recruit educators of color, but few similar attempts at retention. LEAs (local education agencies) are not required to disaggregate teacher demographic data by race and ethnicity, which means that the data we do have are incomplete and inaccurate.[17]
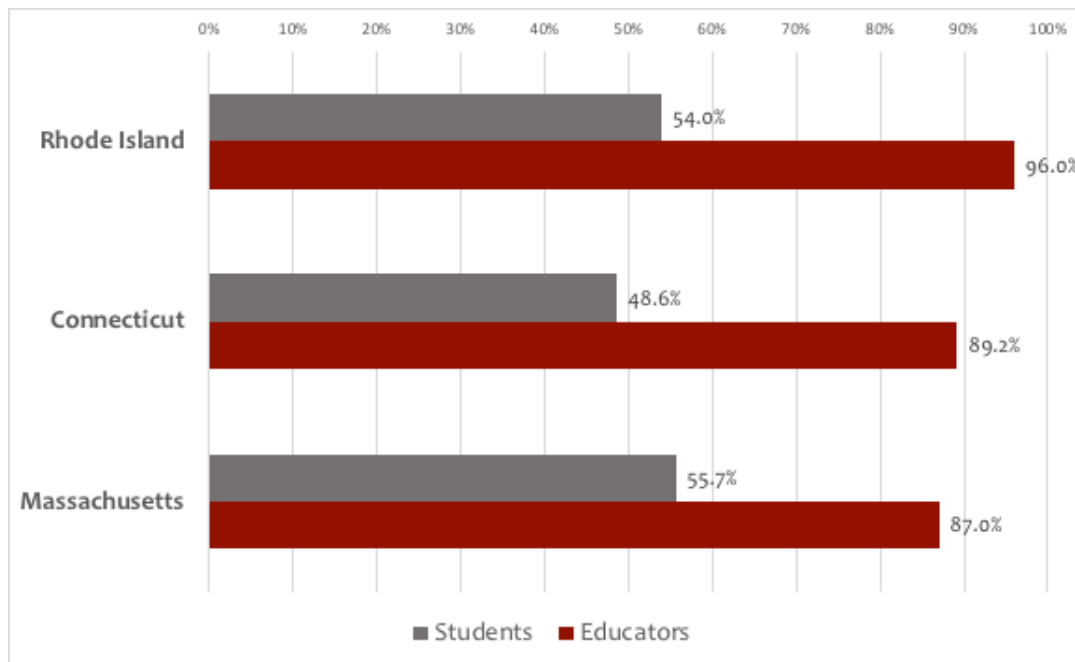
What we do know is that as of 2019, Rhode Island students are racially and ethnically diverse: 3% identify as Asian/Pacific Islander, 9% Black, 28% Hispanic, 5% multiracial, 1% Native American, and 54% white. Yet 96% of educators in Rhode Island identify as white.[18] As noted by the Johns Hopkins Report on the Providence Public Schools–the state's largest district with the largest number of students of color–racial equity was seen as a low priority by district, school, and state staff, as well as community partners. The authors write (italics theirs), "We heard from district, state, and school staff, and from community partners, that the system inadequately addresses, and at times actively avoids addressing, the mismatch between students of color and their teachers."[19] Interviews with teachers, parents, and school leaders indicated the need for more racially diverse teachers to create a more equitable learning experience for students of color.

Rhode Island is not alone; similar disparities exist in other New England states with significant populations of students of color. In Connecticut, less than 49% of students identify as white but more than 89% of educators are white.[20] In Massachusetts, about 56% of students identify as white, but 87% of educators are white.[21] White educators are overrepresented in public schools (see Figure 1).

Massachusetts provides a model for collecting data on state and district staffing by race, ethnicity, and gender. Staffing retention rates are updated yearly and each district has its own page that compares the numbers of staff in such categories as race,

Figure 1. Percentage of white students compared to percentage of white educators in K-12 public schools.

White educators are overrepresented in K-12 public schools compared to the white student population. Sources: Rhode Island KIDS COUNT Factbook, 2021; Connecticut Report Cards, 2021-22; Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, 2021-22. Rhode Island demographic data are from the 2019-20 academic year. Connecticut and Massachusetts data are from the 2021-22 academic year.

ethnicity, and gender.[22] RIDE should explore whether collecting data on Rhode Island staffing by race, ethnicity, and gender could be folded into existing staff positions, or by adding a position.

The problem of incorrect data on teacher hiring is not confined to teachers of color. Accurate data on teacher vacancies was supported by federal grant funding in the past, but once those funds were spent, no resources were dedicated to maintain this data collection.[23] We also lack data on why teachers leave. In Providence, for example, there is no formal exit interview process. According to district officials, teachers were sent an email survey after they left the district. If email access is discontinued upon separation from the district however, it is not possible for them to respond. The

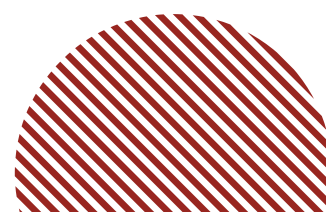district recently announced a change to this practice to make it easier for teachers who leave to fill out exit interview forms by mailing postcards with QR codes, and calling educators of color who leave the profession.[24] This shift in practice is needed given that during the 2020-21 school year, the district only received formal exit survey feedback from nine out of over 100 teachers who left.[25]

Summary

It is important to have correct data that is publicly available and user-friendly on overall teacher recruitment and retention rates to locate areas of success and concern in individual districts and schools. In addition, accurate data on educators of color experiences in schools will reveal shortages and areas of potential need. The Rhode Island Department of Education (RIDE) has recently begun using SurveyWorks to gauge teachers' perceptions of how students and teachers experience and learn about "races, ethnicities, and cultures" and asks teachers to rate equity-focused professional development.[26] This is a good first step; however, it would be beneficial to seek additional feedback from educators of color through surveys and exit interviews that specifically ask about their experiences with racial bias. This information would be helpful in creating targeted professional development in cultural competence. Both Connecticut[27] and Massachusetts[28] are in the process of using both quantitative and qualitative data to design and implement processes that address key questions of how to recruit and retain educators of color. For example, Massachusetts advises LEAs to consider short, targeted surveys of schools and communities, and also suggests doing interviews.

Finding #2: A Need to Address Hostile and Unsupportive Work Environments

One of the main challenges to retaining educators of color is a hostile work environment. Multiple national studies have found that educators of color often feel invisible and unappreciated, while at the same time are expected to do more than their white counterparts.[29] This happens when there is racial bias, no representation of people of color in leadership, and/or a lack of investment in students of color from administration. People of color often choose to teach in underserved schools with high populations of students of color, but historic and systemic racism has led to underfunding and lack of sufficient investments needed to support students and educators. Instead of leaving for suburban schools like many of their white counterparts, educators of color often leave the profession altogether.[30]

Racial Bias in Schools
Many educators of color feel disrespected and de-professionalized by their administrators, colleagues, and students' parents. Educators of color report having their credentials questioned, being expected to act as enforcers more than teachers, and taking on additional responsibilities to support underserved students.[31] These national findings were echoed in our research with Rhode Island teachers.

Racial Bias toward Teachers
The educators in the Rhode Island study felt targeted in multiple ways. Sometimes, they were asked to speak for their race. Other times, their racial differences were dismissed. Some were mistaken for students. In each case, white teachers projected their own realities onto their colleagues of color in hurtful ways, often through implicit bias.
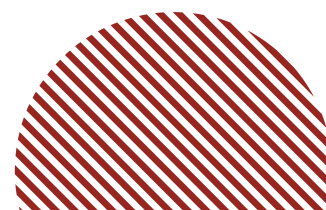
Citing individual actions as indicative for a group is an insidious form of racism. In one example, a Latinx teacher said, "Am I...speaking for an entire race?...That's so much

pressure…if I say the wrong thing they are going to have this vision of these kids that's incorrect." This teacher was expected to know and explain Latinx student behaviors to her colleagues and school leaders, which is problematic on a number of levels: that assumption lumps all Latinx students together instead of attending to cultural differences, for example, among Dominicans, Puerto Ricans, and Mexicans, all of whom attended her school. Further, being asked to speak for "an entire race" assumes that one can infer the behaviors of an individual reflect on the group, and makes groups responsible for the behavior of individuals.[32]

The opposite also occurred. An Asian American teacher said, "I don't want to pass [as white]. But I think that we exist in a culture where people want me to pass. They want to believe that I'm just like another white dude." Here, this teacher's colleagues were using the trope of colorblindness, a form of racism that ignores the different lived experiences of people of color and denies that person's reality by assuming their experiences are no different.[33] This teacher felt expected to comply with his colleagues' expectations of whiteness and not identify as a person of color in order to maintain their comfort. In another case, a teacher was told by her principal, "wouldn't it be better if we were just colorblind." These experiences demonstrate that many white educators do not understand how colorblindness is demeaning and another way of making people of color feel invisible.

A third indicator of racial bias occurred for two participants who found themselves mistaken for students by white teachers in the building. One teacher said, "Because almost all the educators are white and almost all of the students are of color, the automatic assumption is that I must be a student…[The other teachers] did not see me…as a person with authority in this space." This denial of an educator of color's role as an adult, not to mention a teacher, demonstrated the inability for white teachers to see their colleagues of color at their same level of power. The participants were clearly frustrated and saw that these incidents indicated a larger culture of racial bias. One teacher said, "For me…the whole racism thing comes from the top…monitoring your expressions, your voice, your demeanor, so you're not perceived as a threat…at the

core of all this is trust. They don't trust people who are different." Another teacher found something similar–much of the racism he witnessed and experienced was implicit. He said, "People aren't intentionally being racist or they don't even know or realize that they are. Are these the battles I want to have or is this just a thing I deal with?"

> *"[The other teachers] did not see me…as a person with authority in this space."*

It was difficult for these educators of color to work in spaces where they were not acknowledged as equals. In each of the above cases, their power was negated and they had to determine if this was a "battle" they wanted to fight or if it was "just a thing I deal with." Participants reported that these incidents made them feel as if their only choices were to confront what was said or ignore it in order to preserve peace and their jobs.

Racial Bias toward Students of Color
Educators of color in the Rhode Island study were deeply disturbed by their colleagues' talk about students of color. Certain teachers would make racist remarks to students, and the students would report these incidents to their teachers of color. One participant noted, "I think people don't realize how they talk to students or how they talk to you or what they're saying about students." Another educator from a different school said, "There were a lot of colleagues who felt like it was okay to talk any kind of way about kids in the teachers' lounge so I just stopped going there." In these cases, it was clear that their fellow teachers thought engaging in racially biased talk about students was acceptable, indicating that school cultures were not safe places for people of color.
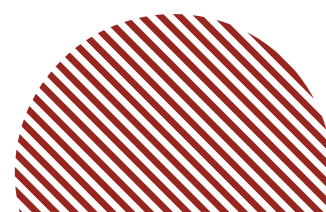
Students of color were fully aware of how they were seen by some of their white teachers. One participant noted, "It's really easy for students in [this community] to believe that the school is racist and that individual people are racist because [everyone] has an 'it felt weird the way they talked to me' story." Focus group teachers discussed how this undercurrent led to students of color deciding school was not worth their time. One teacher noted that this led to disengagement and distrust from his students of color. He said, "They...get treated as troublemakers, so it's a self-fulfilling prophecy...They are being treated differently, then they actually fall behind, and now they are failing. It just keeps snowballing."

As this teacher points out, students are sensitive to how they are seen and treated by others, including authority figures, and may take up deficit perspectives about themselves. They may resist this positioning through acting against the system in ways that are labeled disruptive.

Racial bias, combined with zero-tolerance policies, fuel the disproportionate rate at which Black and brown students are suspended or expelled.[34] The American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU) reports that Black students, who make up 16% of public school students in the U.S., are three times more likely to be suspended and make up 31% of school-based arrests in the U.S., a phenomenon known as the school-to-prison pipeline.[35] These statistics indicate that schools remain racially biased, which negatively impacts students of color and creates considerable emotional labor for the educators of color who support their students by attempting to make up for systemic inequities and racial bias from white teachers and administrators.

Summary
Educators and students of color in Rhode Island experience many forms of racial bias in schools, which creates a school climate that ranges from unpleasant to threatening. Teachers feel disrespected because they are asked to speak for an entire race, or conversely, their racial differences are ignored; their authority in school spaces is questioned; and they must listen to white colleagues routinely make racist remarks

about people of color, and specifically their students of color. This forces educators of color to determine whether and how to use their knowledge of inequity to confront their white colleagues, and to devote considerable time and energy to supporting their students of color who find themselves positioned in deficit ways.

Finding #3: A Need to Change Racially Biased Educational Policies

School climate is shaped by national, state, district, and school policies, and by fixed ways of thinking, talking, and behaving. That is, policies often reinforce how school personnel view Black and brown students and vice versa. For example, Black students are more likely to be classified as "emotionally disturbed" than white students.[36] Policies based on deficit perspectives of students of color have a negative impact on how these students experience school. One national study found that the best way to retain educators of color is to deliberately and explicitly establish policies that target inequities, value diversity, and are in the best interests of all students.[37] The teachers in this study described how many policies did the opposite, such as the focus on white, Eurocentric-oriented curriculums and pedagogical practices; too much emphasis on standardized testing; and lack of attention to the needs of multilingual learners and their families.

These educators also pointed out that some school district leaders would, on occasion, attend to cultural shifts brought on by movements such as Black Lives Matter; scholarly and professional organizations' standards and position statements; and the voices of progressive parents and students. However, those efforts were often undermined by these same leaders' reinforcement of racist policies through day-to-day practices in school buildings. As one teacher put it, school leaders "speak out of both sides of their mouth" depending on whether their audience is traditionally-minded parents or progressive constituents. This created a sense of distrust from teachers and students of color.

Eurocentric Curriculum
Many curriculums in Rhode Island are still centered upon white, Eurocentric understandings of the world, particularly in history and literature, despite research that shows all students--students of color and white students--benefit from culturally responsive teaching.[38] In 2021, some ideologues began taking up the

valuable time and energy of school leaders and school committees by claiming that educators are teaching Critical Race Theory (CRT). CRT is an academic legal theory that has also been used by educational researchers to look at systemic racism in schools. There is little to no evidence that CRT is taught in K-12 schools.

Nevertheless, CRT has become a catch-all for teaching practices that address race or culture, which endangers culturally responsive teaching practices. Culturally responsive teachers are socioculturally conscious and value how diverse cultures provide enhanced understandings of the world; engage in practices that support the intellectual, emotional, and social growth of all students; and accept their responsibility to make schools more equitable.[39] Culturally responsive teaching focuses on higher order thinking skills, along with social-emotional and relational skills. This approach does not teach divisiveness or anti-whiteness, as some critics claim, but instead highlights how people of color have been marginalized throughout history. This is a

> *One teacher's principal said to her and her colleagues, "I feel like you guys are getting too diverse in how you're approaching the topics." This was in spite of diversity being in the school's mission statement.*

key step to ensuring equitable access for all students, and is particularly important now, when straw man attacks on CRT are being used at the local and state levels to delegitimize race and racism in order to gain political power.[40]

Some educators of color in the Rhode Island study were actively discouraged from teaching authors of color. One teacher's principal said to her and her colleagues, "I

feel like you guys are getting too diverse in how you're approaching the topics." This was in spite of diversity being in the school's mission statement. Recently, the Rhode Island General Assembly passed a bill that, as of 2022, all students in Rhode Island will be taught about African heritage and history and the slave trade in Rhode Island.[41] This is an important first step in line with professional organizations for educators, including the National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE)[42] and the National Council for the Social Studies (NCSS), [43] which provide research-based position statements and standards that unequivocally support students of color and advocate for teaching students about diverse authors and perspectives. Recently, there have also been calls to include Indigenous peoples' history and experiences in social studies curricula, as the Narrangansetts, for example, preceded the colonists by 30,000 years in this state. Since this history is not a RIDE requirement, it is up to the districts or individual teachers to decide whether to teach the histories of the various tribes that were the original human habitants of this land.[44]

Teachers in this study felt that it was important for their students of color to see themselves in history and literature, and also for white students to see contributions from people of color. One teacher said, "This othering wouldn't happen as easily…[if] the kid sitting next to you is tied to some great literary or historical tradition rather than just an audience to what white people did." Offering multiple perspectives of how various cultures shaped the world we live in provides a more accurate depiction of history, science, and literature through de-centering whiteness. However, history and literature curriculums remain dominated by Eurocentric perspectives and authors.

Teachers of color are more likely to engage in culturally relevant teaching practices, which leads to better relationships with students through trust-building.[45] One teacher said, "I want [students] to come into my room and see something of themselves, something they can connect to so that they feel valued and their experience is heard." When students feel accepted through learner-centered instruction and curriculum

that values their background, they are more likely to buy into school. The new history curriculum that includes Black experiences is a strong first step, but will not substitute for efforts to create culturally responsive curriculums in other subjects and efforts to create a more inclusive school culture.

Testing

Another key obstacle for students of color is how standardized tests are used in Rhode Island. Tests such as the SAT are normed according to algorithms that systematically discriminate against Black students.[46] FairTest, an organization that researches the effects of standardized testing, analyzed how racially biased tests have particularly deleterious effects on students of color because they, on average, score lower on theses tests, which affects their ability to move up grade levels, graduate on time, and attend college.[47] The response to this problem has been teaching to the test instead of examining social and institutional practices that directly impact students of color and teaching independent learning and higher order thinking skills.[48]

One Rhode Island teacher, who had formerly worked in a public school with mostly students of color, now teaches in an independent school where the majority of students are white and wealthy. She said, "At [my current school], we were talking about getting rid of grades…at [the public school] that conversation would never happen because you have to judge brown people, right?" Here, she points out that most students of color attend underserved schools which emphasize testing instead of other forms of assessment. Nonetheless, reports show that white parents are more likely to have their students opt out of testing than Black parents. Even as Black parents recognize that standardized tests are biased and unfair, many see the tests as ways for their students to advance grade levels and expose differences in achievement. However, others point out that when schools report low scores, they often don't receive additional resources. Instead they are more likely to be taken over by the state or closed down. There is no evidence that testing, in and of itself, eradicates opportunity gaps.[49]

Many educators and parents agree that too much instructional time is devoted to assessments that address a narrow measure of what students know and can do. This is particularly true in schools that serve lower-income students and communities of color, so students lose out on other classes, such as social studies, physical education, art, and music. This process harms districts and schools as well: comparisons between districts that do not take into account biased tests punish the most vulnerable schools, further hampering their ability to mitigate structural inequities, such as food deserts and lack of health care. This continual criticism also further undermines the self-image of teachers, families, and students.[50]

Teaching students to become independent learners is necessary for success in post-secondary work and education. This means teaching and assessing in ways that develop skills and habits of mind to engage in complex academic tasks where students can apply their knowledge. Rhode Island already requires one performance-based assessment in order for students to graduate from high school. Assessments based on teaching that attends to students' cultural and linguistic backgrounds show particular promise in closing opportunity gaps.[51]

Multilingual Learners and Families
Curriculum and testing were not the only policies that teachers found harmful for their students. Those who taught large populations of multilingual learners were appalled at how their students were treated. One teacher said, "[Policies have been unfair for my multi-language learners] ...for most of them for most of their entire educational careers." This teacher witnessed her students' ability to learn English compromised by district leadership ignoring their learning needs. A U.S. Department of Justice Report lists 12 reasons why the Providence Public School District (PPSD) was out of compliance, including use of educationally unsound programs and failure to staff programs with qualified teachers.[52] This report listed new requirements for how the PPSD should better serve the needs of multilingual learners, including that teachers must become certified in English as a Second Language (ESL). However, the teachers in this study are skeptical about that requirement. One teacher said, "Do
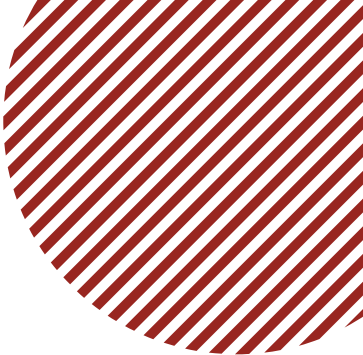
these teachers really want to teach multi-language learners, or are they taking those two courses just to keep their job and do the same things [that didn't work]?"

Current educational curriculums often do not include the experiences, histories, and stories of people of color. Furthermore, racially biased tests further alienate students of color. Even as RIDE is moving toward a list of "High Quality Curriculum Materials"[53] and the General Assembly passed a law that requires the teaching of African heritage and history, most curriculums are still not culturally responsive. Teachers need to be able to use their expertise to tailor their curriculum and teaching practices to the students they serve, and standardized testing needs to be de-emphasized. While some LEAs with large populations of multilingual learners now require ESL training for teachers, the educators in this study think that is not enough. They believe that following the laws for adequate programs and staffing is just the first step, and that there must be other work done to change school culture.

Appeasement Is Not a Substitute for Equitable Policies

Similar to other national studies, Rhode Island educators of color noticed that many white administrators only supported diversity and equity initiatives if those policies were in their political interest.[54] They described how school leaders attempted to appease multiple audiences, including white community members who believe that the current Eurocentric curriculum and standardized testing should be maintained; RIDE; and progressives like themselves. This vacillation felt self-serving and created a lack of trust. One teacher said,

Leadership is able to speak out of both sides of their mouth. They can...blow the dog whistle to the sort of establishment of white [citizens] who live in [this town] who might have some old-school traditional views of the world...and they're appeasing people with progressive minds who are culturally aware...they are under a microscope and RIDE is looking at them and they are political figures. And right now...there's some currency to them at least on the surface advocating for these ideals. I feel like leadership goes with whatever [is] happening right then.

The participants recognized that their administrators were under pressure from the communities and from RIDE to continue educational policies that participants saw as harmful to students' well-being and learning. However, they saw leaders' gestures toward cultural responsiveness as falling far short of what was needed, and felt that these actions were, for the most part, insincere and designed to appease them and other progressive advocates. As another teacher said, "The only time that leadership changes…is when…it's affecting their funding or it's affecting their power."

The mismatch between state and district leaders' (i.e., RIDE officials, and district superintendents and principals') professed commitment to inclusivity and culturally responsive schools and lack of action was clear to educators of color. They witnessed how these leaders refused to provide funding or support for this work; continued harmful policies such as testing and a Eurocentric curriculum; ignored the needs of multilingual learners; and took for granted that teachers, particularly teachers of color, would take care of the students who needed the most support.

This led to a lack of trust not just in leader actions, but in their intentions. One teacher said, "I don't trust them [policymakers]. How much do they actually want people to learn?" and another asked, "[Are these bad policies] done intentionally? Do you want us to fail?" It is one thing to believe that harmful policies are enacted out of ignorance, but it is another to think that these policies are done to make it more difficult for Black and brown students to be successful in schools.

The teachers in this study noted that leadership is key to creating fair and equitable environments. They all said there was a clear difference between leaders who showed their understanding and respect for what educators of color provided and required, and those who saw them as needing "to be feared or managed or controlled."

Summary

Educators of color in Rhode Island, like their counterparts across the nation, reveal that the focus on Eurocentric-oriented curriculums and pedagogical practices, along with standardized testing, negatively impacts students of color academically, socially, and emotionally. Those policies, along with LEAs ignoring federal requirements for attending to the needs of multilingual learners and their families, create significant barriers to learning and well-being for educators and students of color.

Furthermore, educators of color observed that many of their educational leaders changed their tone and language according to their audience. Educational leaders must earn trust by listening to racially diverse teachers' perspectives; examining policies with teachers, scholars, and community members to gather data on the effectiveness of these policies and provide alternatives; and be firm in their advocacy for students of color. Providing educators of color a seat at the table when it comes to making decisions on educational policies, particularly involving students of color, makes it more likely that they will stay in the profession.

Finding #4: A Need to Recognize & Compensate Educators of Color for their Extra Work

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Educators of color across the nation report a particular sense of responsibility to meet their students' non-academic and academic needs. Because there are so few educators of color and so many students of color, this burden can be especially heavy. Many of these teachers go far beyond their regular teaching duties to serve as informal, unpaid mentors, coaches, advocates, and counselors. In addition, educators of color are expected to serve on committees that focus on Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) work. However, these efforts are not often recognized or rewarded.[55] Some researchers call this the "minority tax" or "invisible tax" that requires educators of color to do exponentially more work without getting paid, such as being disciplinarians, community liaisons, and helping other teachers.[56]

Educators of color in Rhode Island serve as ambassadors for their culturally diverse students in the school, and ensure that parents feel empowered to receive federally guaranteed services. They also deliberately create safe spaces for students of color in their classrooms and maintain high expectations, along with addressing gaps in the curriculum that don't include contributions from people of color. These actions require skill and labor outside their normal teaching obligations. However, they reported receiving little acknowledgment or support from administrators and colleagues regarding the time, expertise, and experience they brought to this work.

One teacher discussed how her administrators relied upon her connections to students and willingness to be at school until late at night, but did not provide her with resources, recognition, or compensation. She said, "[If] I'm feeling disempowered, how do kids feel when people are dismissing their potential? Honestly, that is a required qualification for teaching. If you cannot hope radically, do not apply." This teacher left the profession, not because of the students, but because the lack of recognition and support left her

emotionally, physically, and mentally depleted. She said, "[After three years] I [tried] my best but honestly I just never came back...I love teaching but I [could not] do it within this structure, within this system."

Some participants also found it professionally dangerous to advocate for their students of color. One said, "I kind of had to throw in the towel and say, you know if I want to keep my job, I need to shut up." Another teacher said, "I need to get smarter about this stuff because I really don't want to get fired." This kind of self-silencing created more anxiety as participants felt they could not safely continue to advocate for their own and their students' well-being without paying a heavy price.

> *"[After three years] I [tried] my best but honestly I just never came back...I love teaching but I [could not] do it within this structure, within this system."*

Summary

The additional mental and emotional stress, or invisible tax, of supporting students of color in a hostile environment is a major contributor to burnout for educators of color. The extra time, skill, and energy they provide is often taken for granted and uncompensated. School leaders can take the time to recognize and reward the work it takes to support students in underserved communities, showing that this informal and yet crucial labor is visible and valued.

Policy Recommendations for Retaining Educators of Color in Rhode Island Schools

Educators of color are key to developing creative and open-minded young people as informed citizens, independent and critical thinkers, and skilled workers. As one Rhode Island educator of color noted, "We have to produce students who are smart and capable and ready to take on the world in ways that we aren't expecting yet." Educators of color working alongside culturally aware white educators can bring about important changes inside and outside the classroom. The findings and recommendations in this document emphasize educating and empowering *all* teachers to be culturally responsive and making schools healthy places for educators of color. Students will be the ultimate beneficiaries of these changes.

There is some evidence of progress from RIDE, some LEAs, and teachers unions. For example, RIDE established the Educators of Color Committee that seeks to address many of the findings cited in this policy document. Subcommittees on hiring and retention, race and culturally responsive professional development, accountability, and changing school cultures have also been created. The Providence Public School District (PPSD), through the Rhode Island Foundation, is offering new teachers of color up to $25,000 in loan forgiveness.[57] The district has also changed its approach to getting feedback when teachers exit the district.[58] As noted earlier in this document, the new SurveyWorks survey asks questions of teachers and students that specifically address race, ethnicity, and school climate. Furthermore, the National Education Association of Rhode Island (NEARI) established the Racial and Social Justice Committee to educate their members on the effects of systemic racism in schools and how to support their students, colleagues, and families.[59] In addition, legislation that requires students to be taught about Rhode Island's history with the triangle trade and slavery is an important step to making curriculums more inclusive.

The following policy recommendations acknowledge and build upon this work that is already in progress. These recommendations also provide ideas on strategic connections among different groups, especially the subcommittees of the RIDE Educators of Color Committee, to focus the work and ensure that more stakeholders are involved. Many of these recommendations could be paid for initially by The American Rescue Plan Elementary and Secondary School Emergency Relief (ARP ESSER) funds,[60] with the understanding that there needs to be a long-term plan to pay for them once the grant money runs out.

Develop a systematic approach to collecting and analyzing data on recruitment, hiring, and retention practices for educators of color.
- Enact legislation that requires and supports RIDE to partner with LEAs (Local Educational Agencies) to collect, analyze, and report data on staffing according to race, ethnicity, and gender. This should include data on teacher recruitment, hiring, and retention.
- RIDE and LEAs should work together to continuously monitor and provide accurate exit data. As other states have already shown, this could be done through surveys, and also include focus groups and interviews that address issues of climate and culture.

Invest in creating welcoming and affirming school climates for educators and students of color.
- LEAs should consider working with the RIDE Subcommittee on Hiring and Retention Support System for Educators of Color to ensure that educators of color are involved in hiring, professional development, and teacher evaluation decisions.
- RIDE and LEAs should empower educators of color by providing opportunities to develop support networks and affinity groups to curate their own professional development and mentorship.
- RIDE and LEAs should consider working with the RIDE Subcommittee on Race and Culturally Responsive Professional Development and Training and partner with

Rhode Island schools of education to provide professional development for school leaders and teachers that focuses explicitly on diversity, equity, inclusivity, and antiracism.

- LEAs should consider funding youth workers, culture coordinators, or other adults to work alongside educators of color to explicitly support students of color and their families.

Establish policies and expectations that mandate culturally responsive curriculum and instructional practices that target inequities and value diversity.

- RIDE and LEAs should identify educators of color for leadership roles in providing resources and training in culturally responsive pedagogical practices.
- RIDE should empower educators of color in choosing or creating high quality curriculum materials that are explicitly antiracist and culturally responsive, including texts authored by racially and ethnically diverse people.
- RIDE should hire educators of color to develop fair and equitable assessments that measure growth in student learning in multiple ways and provide a range of qualitative and quantitative data.
- Educators of color should be involved in creating teacher evaluations that include culturally responsive practices as one of multiple measures. Massachusetts, for example, has a cultural proficiency indicator that stipulates teachers "actively create and maintain an environment in which students' diverse backgrounds, identities, strengths, and challenges are respected."[61]

Compensate educators of color for work that supports ethnically, culturally, and linguistically diverse students and families.

- LEAs should recognize and compensate teachers who engage in diversity, equity and inclusion work. This could include financial incentives such as scholarships, grants, additional pay, and/or conference travel. Several states have enacted legislation in these areas.[62]
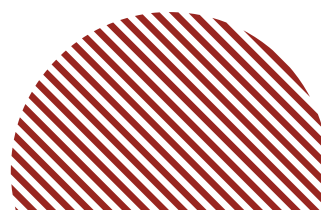
Appendix: Methodology

This study included three focus groups of educators of color who taught in different local educational agencies (LEAs) from across Rhode Island. One focus group had three participants and two had two participants, for a total of seven. Two focus groups were conducted in-person in late February and early March 2020, and the last was conducted over Zoom in early April. The researcher obtained Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval through Rhode Island College for data collection and followed established procedures to minimize risks and protect confidentiality, including written informed consent forms. The interviews ranged in length between one hour and 90 minutes.

Characteristics of Focus Group Participants
Participants used their own designations for race and ethnicity, and I used the terms urban, urban ring, suburban and independent as school descriptors. Several of the teachers taught at, and talked about, their experiences teaching in different kinds of schools. Other teachers indicated they would participate prior to the shutdown brought on by the pandemic, but then were not able to do so.

Characteristics of Focus Group Participants
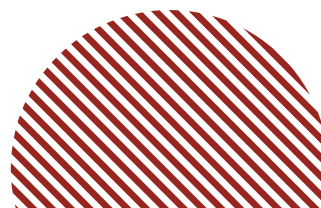*At time of interview, Spring 2020. Race/ethnicity was self-reported.*

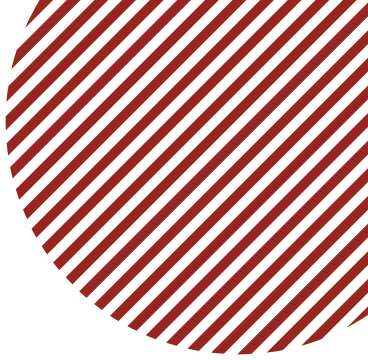| Race/ Ethnicity	Gender	Type of school	Total years teaching in RI (Range)
Dominican	Female	Urban middle school	11-15 years
Latino	Male	Urban ring high school	6-10 years
Asian-Pacific Islander/ White	Male	Urban ring high school	10-15 years
Mexican American	Female	Suburban middle school	Over 16 years
Latinx	Female	Independent middle school	Over 16 years
Black	Female	Urban high school	1-5 years
Asian	Female	Independent middle school	1-5 years

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