

TEACHER DIVERSITY AND STUDENT SUCCESS

Formal schooling provides and develops many of the skills necessary for living a happy, fulfilling, and prosperous life. Americans like to think that our public schools facilitate the American Dream by providing all children the opportunity to learn and develop those vital skills. However, persistent and pervasive racial and ethnic disparities in test scores, dropout rates, and college enrollments suggest that access to quality education isn't as equal or universal as commonly assumed. This observation is not novel, of course, but one that motivates our thinking about how to reimagine education policy to ensure that everyone gets a fair shake. A new approach to closing these demographic gaps—one that ensures truly equal access to quality education—is long overdue.

Teachers play an outsized role in schools and in shaping student outcomes. Consequently, education policy is teacher policy, and vice versa. Districts, states, and the US Department of Education need to rethink teacher policy and what being an effective teacher means. A high-quality teaching force that is effective for—and accessible to—*all* students is a necessary condition for ensuring that all students truly have equal access to a quality education. For too long, teacher quality has been ill defined or defined in terms of what's best for white, relatively well-off students. We propose a dramatic rethinking of teacher policy—and how teacher quality is conceptualized—in ways that reflect the rapidly growing evidence that the racial and ethnic diversity of the teaching force matters greatly.

Students, particularly students of color, benefit from having teachers who look like them. Unfortunately, teachers of color are woefully

underrepresented in the teaching force, as nearly 80 percent of the nation's teachers are white—in contrast to less than half of the nation's students. Many Black and Latino students complete their elementary school years without ever having had a classroom teacher of the same race or ethnicity as a result. These students miss out on the myriad benefits of having a teacher who looks like them. These benefits include increased trust, better communication and relationships, higher expectations, and plain old better teaching, all of which translates to better test scores, fewer absences and suspensions, and higher graduation and college enrollment rates. These benefits also say nothing of how a more diverse teaching force would improve white students' attitudes toward and understanding of race.

The most obvious policy change involves a renewed, or in many cases new, commitment to creating (and then maintaining) a truly diverse and representative teaching force. This change is necessary to increase the frequency of exposures to same-race teachers for students of color. However, doing so will take time, and providing truly equal opportunities to all students is a pressing issue that can't wait another generation or two. In the meantime, schools must do what they can to make the existing teaching force more effective for all students. There are two general ways to do this:

- Rethink how students are assigned to classrooms, which will enable us to maximize student exposures to same-race teachers subject to the racial composition of the current teaching force.
- Provide thoughtfully designed workshops and training opportunities for both pre- and in-service teachers to improve teachers' competencies working with students of all backgrounds.

Increasing the diversity of the teaching force and the number of same-race student–teacher matches and also improving existing teachers' facility with an increasingly diverse student body are nuanced and complex problems. But these challenges are not insurmountable. In this book we chart a path forward. Designing and implementing these necessary policies require an understanding of how and why same-race teachers matter; this topic is discussed at length in the first two chapters of this book. Doing so also requires understanding and reckoning with the history of race in US education and teacher policy and of demographic trends in the teacher pipeline and in the population of teacher-eligible

college graduates; these issues are discussed at length in chapters 3 and 4. Finally, chapters 5 and 6 combine this background knowledge with existing evidence on related teacher diversity and professional development initiatives to describe what a reimagined teacher policy that acknowledges the benefits of a diverse teaching force and the idiosyncrasies associated with teaching a diverse student body should look like. Before we get too far into the weeds, though, let's take a step back to really plot the journey on which we're about to embark.

EDUCATION AND THE AMERICAN DREAM

Success in the modern economy requires a quality education. College degree holders tend to be healthier, earn more, have steadier employment and home lives, and have less involvement with the criminal justice system than their less-educated compatriots. Education is thus rightly lauded as a great equalizer that facilitates upward social and economic mobility. These outcomes are predicated on the idea that publicly provided education enables anyone with the necessary smarts, ambition, and drive, regardless of their family's background, the opportunity to work hard, improve their circumstances, and with a little luck ascend to the top of the economic ladder.

Indeed, one of the few things that nearly all parents agree on in an increasingly partisan society is a desire to provide the best for their kids, and this includes the best possible education. Parents want their children to attend good schools and to receive an education that provides the academic, social, and technical skills necessary for success in life. Ideally, this education will produce a credential that can be shown to prospective employers and proud grandparents. Parents' specific desires are borne out in surveys of what they want in schools. Universally, their top priorities include two things: a strong focus on reading and STEM (science, technology, engineering, and math) and the development of socioemotional skills such as study habits, self-discipline, critical thinking, and communication skills.¹

The reason is simple: no matter who you are or where you come from, educational credentials—and specifically college diplomas—open doors to safer, more secure, and higher-paying jobs. Coupled with the fact that education improves health and reduces risky behaviors, you can easily see why parents agree on the value of a quality education. Education improves their children's odds of success, and really that's all that any parent wants. In a

world full of uncertainty and risk, who wouldn't want to improve the odds in their progeny's favor?

In an era of rampant income inequality, many people remain steadfast in their belief that our nation's public schools provide equal access to quality education, and thus equal opportunities for learning, development, and life-long success, to all of our nation's children. Unfortunately, the "equal opportunities" aspect of this belief is wrong, and we'll return to this in a bit. First, we should address the broader question of whether education still matters in a world with rising costs of college attendance and home ownership, recent cohorts graduating into the throes of the Great Recession, and the general disruption and uncertainty caused by the Covid-19 Pandemic.² Combine these personal concerns with macro concerns about global warming and America's future as a leader in geopolitics and the world economy, and it's no surprise that the ability to improve one's lot in life by obtaining an education and working hard is in doubt. Still, that young people transitioning into adulthood, college, and the labor market face challenges and uncertainty is not new, even if the specific challenges and uncertainties are.

The reality is that education remains the best investment a young person (and a society) can make: it's the best predictor of improved life outcomes, the benefits of attending college still far outweigh the costs, and citizens and cities alike benefit from a more educated population.³ However, far too many children in this country do not have access to the type of *quality* K–12 education that is so critical to preparing them for college and for leading a happy, fulfilling, and economically secure life. This fact is apparent in whatever national data you look at: Black and Latino children increasingly experience different realities than their white counterparts. These differences are encapsulated by Harvard economist Raj Chetty and his team's epic analysis of the geography of opportunity in the US, which finds that upward mobility rates (i.e., the chances of doing better than your parents) are lowest in areas with low performing public schools, large Black populations, and high levels of racial segregation.⁴

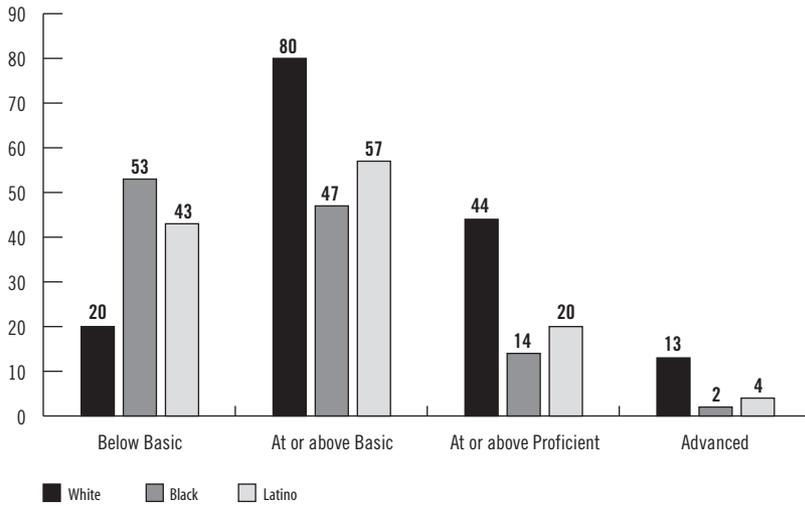
Demographic differences in mobility rates—and thus in the viability of the American Dream—are foreshadowed by analogous, stubbornly persistent achievement gaps in standardized test scores that emerge as early as kindergarten. Entire books have been written about racial and ethnic disparities in test scores and other educational outcomes in the US. Our focus

is instead on how schools might close those gaps by rethinking teacher policy, so we won't rehash the litany of studies that document all of the ways in which white students outperform their Black and Latino counterparts. The fact of the matter is that these disparities persist despite years of various federal and state educational initiatives, hundreds of millions of dollars invested in educational research and practice by nonprofit foundations and government agencies, court rulings on school finance and desegregation, and numerous technological and pedagogical innovations. It's high time to embrace a new approach that can credibly eliminate these disparities.

To make the ubiquity of these demographic achievement gaps concrete, consider the results of the most recent round of National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) testing conducted in 2019.⁵ A quick glance at the eighth-grade math score results by race and ethnicity highlights the severity and pervasiveness of the problem, though we would reach similar conclusions using data from any grade and subject.

White students outperform students of color on average, but more importantly white students are both more likely to do well and less likely to perform poorly than Black and Latino students. This means that achievement gaps are not due to a few outliers that pull up or drag down a group's average score but instead are the result of racial disparities at all levels of achievement. For example, 13 percent of white students' scores qualified as "Advanced" compared to only 2 and 4 percent of Black and Latino students' scores, respectively. Similarly, 44 percent of white students scored "Proficient or better," which is more than three times the proficiency rate of Black students and more than twice the proficiency rate of Latino students. To see how imbalanced these numbers are, consider that the share of white students who scored Advanced is essentially the same as the share of Black students who scored Proficient or better: 14 percent. Differences in the frequency of low performance are equally striking: only 20 percent of white students scored in the lowest category, Below Basic, while 43 percent of Latino students and more than half of Black students did. These disparities leap off the page when presented side by side, as in figure I.1.

Dismissing or rationalizing these disparities by saying "that can't be true in my state" or "racial disparities are only a problem in a few parts of the country" might be tempting. But that's wrong: these gaps are everywhere. Moreover, some of the largest gaps are in unexpected places: Black-white gaps are largest in the upper Midwest (Ohio, Michigan, Wisconsin,

FIGURE I.1 2019 Eighth-grade math NAEP achievement levels

Source: Authors' calculations using NAEP Data Explorer.

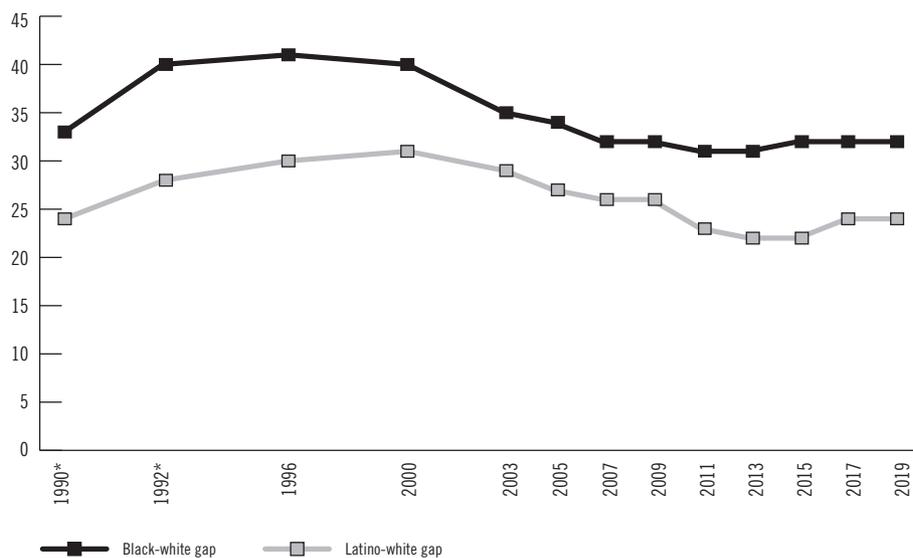
and Minnesota) and smallest in the Mississippi Delta and the South. The difference is perhaps surprising because racial prejudice tends to be greater in the South; however, achievement levels are lower across the board in the South, which compresses racial and ethnic gaps in the region. Nonetheless, the Black-white achievement gap is sizable everywhere, as even the smallest gaps observed in states like Texas and Tennessee are only slightly less than a full academic year's worth of learning. The gap is also large in what are often perceived as relatively liberal or progressive areas, like Washington DC, California, and the Pacific Northwest.

The Latino-white achievement gap is similarly pervasive. Once again, gaps tend to be smaller in the South and larger in places like Minnesota and California. There are also some notable differences from the geography of the Black-white achievement gap because the Latino-white gaps are large throughout the mid-Atlantic and New England regions. Still, the fundamental takeaway is that meaningful disparities are present in every state because even the smallest gaps observed in states like Arkansas and Kentucky amount to about a half school year of learning. This finding

underscores the ubiquity of racial and ethnic achievement gaps throughout the US.

Another tempting rationalization of these gaps is to assume that things have been improving over time and if left alone the gaps will naturally close in the next decade. This is wishful thinking. Both the Black-white and Latino-white achievement gaps have remained fairly stable over the past thirty years, despite widespread efforts at the state and federal levels to close them. The stubborn persistence of these gaps is demonstrated in figure I.2, which traces the average Black-white and Latino-white achievement gaps since 1990. The Black-white gap is consistently larger than the Latino-white gap, though both are sizable and fairly stable over time, ranging from 30–40 and 20–30 points, respectively. Though converting these gap figures into learning time estimates is a rough approximation, they amount to one and a half to two years of learning for Black students, and

FIGURE I.2 Average eighth-grade math achievement gaps, 1990–2019



Source: Authors' calculations using NAEP Data Explorer.

*Years in which exam did not permit accommodations

one to one and a half years of learning for Latino students to catch up. Both gaps peaked in the late 1990s, shrank in the 2000s, and were fairly stable in the 2010s. Ultimately, though, the continued presence of these gaps indicates that past approaches to closing them haven't worked and that they won't close on their own. It's time to try something new, as closing these gaps will benefit both individuals and society overall.

CLOSING DEMOGRAPHIC ACHIEVEMENT GAPS

Students who score 20 percent higher on low-stakes standardized math tests are about 30 percent more likely to enroll in college and 15 percent more likely to graduate high school.⁶ The predictive power of these tests is similar across demographic groups. This finding means that boosting Black and Latino scores by about 20 percent would eliminate demographic gaps in high school graduation and college enrollment rates. Thus, while standardized test scores are not particularly interesting or important in and of themselves, they reliably predict the long-run outcomes of ultimate interest. These findings are useful because they are available in real time, so policy makers and researchers don't have to wait ten years to see whether an elementary school student graduates from high school or enrolls in college.

Society should strive to close these gaps for several reasons. At a very basic level, access to education is a human right.⁷ The existence of racial and ethnic achievement gaps suggests that we're systematically depriving a subset of children of that right and of the myriad opportunities that education provides: good health, civic engagement, stable income and employment, less criminal involvement, and so on. But these gaps also suggest that we're squandering talent and imposing massive costs on society.

Lacking access to a quality education not only reduces children's chances at success but also harms the broader community. The average cost to US taxpayers of a single high school dropout is about \$300,000 over their lifetime due to lost income tax revenue, crime, and increased spending on public assistance.⁸ This is to say nothing of the spillover effects, or positive externalities, that a well-educated workforce has on wages, innovation, and productivity.⁹ A more educated society is more civically engaged.¹⁰ Better health and less crime lead to lower insurance premiums and less (and better allocated) public spending on health, emergency, and police services. The bottom line is that a more educated society improves

the quality of life for everyone. This is yet another reason to ensure that *all* children have access to a quality education.

School policy mostly amounts to teacher policy, so the path forward is simple: provide all students with access to high-quality, effective teachers. Teachers are the single most important component of schools, more important than funding differences, class size, accountability, or school choice. Teachers vary widely in their effectiveness and in what they affect: good teachers improve test scores, but more importantly they improve students' socioemotional skills and attitudes and even long-run outcomes like college enrollment and earnings.¹¹ We're not saying that other policy choices are irrelevant—they certainly matter—but at the end of the day they are less important than ensuring equal access to quality teachers. Access to effective teachers is a necessary step toward affording all students a quality education.

The biggest problem faced by public education in this country is that too many students—including a disproportionate share of students of color—do not enjoy regular access to quality teaching. This is true across state and district contexts and no matter how quality is measured. This problem is thorny for a number of reasons, not the least of which is that it's notoriously difficult to identify effective teachers, particularly early in (and prior to) their teaching careers. Credentials such as master's degrees and certification routes, which are favored in many hiring policies and salary schedules, are not particularly good predictors of teacher effectiveness. Data-driven measures of teacher effectiveness based on student test scores or classroom observations are more useful but can be biased, costly to obtain, and are observable only after a teacher has taught for a year or two.

Herein lies the challenge: schools can't recruit, train, and retain effective teachers when identifying who is or will be effective in the classroom is exceedingly difficult! However, one powerful, readily observed predictor of teacher effectiveness has been hiding in plain sight all along: teacher race and ethnicity.

A representative teaching force is an effective teaching force. Students benefit from seeing teachers who look like them in the front of the classroom, and the world views and racial attitudes of all students, including those of white students, improve when they see a diverse array of individuals in positions of esteem and authority. For too long, teacher diversity has been a secondary (at best) focus of teacher policy. We wrote this book to change that. Teacher race and ethnicity or, more specifically, having a

same-race or same-ethnicity teacher has large and long-lasting effects on the educational outcomes of students of color.

The evidence is particularly strong for Black students. For example, experimental data from Tennessee show that Black elementary school students who were randomly assigned to a Black classroom teacher were significantly more likely to complete high school, aspire to attend college, and actually enroll in college than their Black peers in the same school who did not have a Black teacher.¹² The randomization afforded by this experiment is important because it ensures that the observed effects are causal in nature and not the spurious result of some other school or student attribute. This result has been replicated in at least two other states, suggesting that this is not a fluke but rather a pervasive phenomenon.

This book is about leveraging the knowledge that students benefit from access to same-race and same-ethnicity teachers to close demographic achievement gaps and ensure truly equal access to quality education by increasing both the ability of all teachers to effectively teach an increasingly diverse student body and the number of students who are exposed to a same-race teacher. The latter requires increasing the diversity of the teacher workforce, though existing teachers of color could also be more strategically deployed. Effectively leveraging this information requires buying in to the idea that teacher diversity matters and understanding the reasons that same-race teachers matter; this is the focus of chapters 1 and 2. The evidence here is compelling and offers a clear path forward in the quest to eliminate achievement gaps and provide truly effective schooling to all children: all students must have at least some exposure to a teacher who looks like them. However, the current lack of racial diversity in the teaching force suggests that this goal is far from being realized.

Increasing the diversity of the teaching force to make it more representative of the students it serves must therefore be a policy priority. How to best do this requires an understanding of race's place in the history of teacher policy and the racial composition of teaching candidates in the past, present, and future; this is the focus of chapters 3 and 4. There are historical reasons that the teaching force looks the way it does, and policy makers must be cognizant of this history to avoid repeating past mistakes. A profound example is that in the aftermath of the Supreme Court's *Brown v. Board of Education* ruling, Black teachers were systematically removed from public schools during desegregation. Because teacher diversity and

teacher race were not explicitly acknowledged as measures of teacher quality, an unintended consequence of desegregation was that on a critically important dimension, the quality of Black children's teachers declined.¹³ The ramifications of this decision are still felt today.

We put all of this information together in chapters 5 and 6, where we outline possible policies; discuss the feasibility of enacting those policies; and offer some guidance for schools, districts, and states that wish to act on these ideas. Redefining teacher diversity as an element of teacher quality is and must be central to these efforts, for a variety of practical, political, and legal reasons. It is also critical that school leaders and policy makers distinguish between teacher diversity in the aggregate and the share of students who actually have at least one same-race K–12 teacher. While some states and districts have begun to take the issue of teacher diversity seriously, the challenge is far greater than most realize, and efficient solutions to the problem frequently run counter to people's beliefs. We therefore focus on the design and implementation of a variety of evidence-based policies that can achieve both greater diversity in the overall teaching force *and* increase the number of same-race teacher exposures with the existing teaching force as efficiently as possible.

Chapter 1 digs in to the surprisingly rich and compelling evidence on the importance of representation. The lack of diversity in many professions and positions of authority has serious consequences for a host of outcomes, some of which create insidious feedback loops that maintain a lack of representation in the profession. Chapter 1 begins with an overview of the many professions and circumstances in which individuals benefit from interacting with (or being assessed by) someone of the same background. This phenomenon has been documented everywhere from hospitals (where Black patients' health outcomes are significantly better when treated by Black physicians) to professional basketball games (where referees call fewer fouls on players of the same race).

Given the salience of race, the variety of sectors and interactions in which racial representation matters, and the personal nature of student–teacher relationships, we should not be surprised that race-match effects occur in schools. Indeed, it has long been common knowledge in many Black communities that Black children are better served by Black teachers. This is due to some combination of Black teachers' abilities to build trusting, meaningful relationships with students, understand the challenges

faced by Black youth in an often segregated and racist society, and be “warm demanders” who can hold and espouse high expectations for their students in a nurturing and authentic way.

Rigorous, causal research conducted in the past twenty years verifies this conventional wisdom. Multiple studies using data from different states and even some national surveys show that elementary school students’ test scores improve in years they are taught by a same-race teacher. A particularly convincing study by Professor Thomas Dee of Stanford University analyzed experimental data from Tennessee in which students were randomly assigned to classrooms.¹⁴ Dee finds that both Black and white students in kindergarten through the third grade score significantly higher on end-of-grade math and reading tests when taught by a same-race teacher. Similar effects of same-race teachers are observed in middle and high school.¹⁵ While our book is focused on K–12 teachers, it is noteworthy that race- and ethnicity-match effects are observed in higher education as well, in settings as diverse as community colleges, large state universities, and even a top-ranked law school!

This evidence is pretty compelling, as test scores and course grades predict long-run success, but it is nonetheless important that recent research also shows that same-race teachers affect more than just test scores. Specifically, same-race teachers in elementary through high school increase everything from attendance and behavior to high school graduation and college enrollments. One study conducted by two of the authors uses the same experimental data from Dee’s study to show that Black students who have even one Black classroom teacher in elementary school are significantly more likely to complete high school, aspire to attend college, and actually enroll in college than their peers in the same school who were not lucky enough to have a same-race classroom teacher.¹⁶ These effects are big, representing 7 and 13 percent increases, respectively, that are similar in size to the effects of other popular educational interventions such as class-size reductions. That having even one same-race teacher can make a long-run difference is notable, and a point to which we return, as it has implications for how to best deploy existing teachers of color.

The research on which this book and our policy prescriptions are based, then, is quite clear: at every level of schooling and in districts throughout the country, no matter how success is measured, students benefit from having instructors who look like them. This finding reaffirms our central

thesis: *teacher diversity is teacher quality*. Given that the teaching force is disproportionately white and will be for the foreseeable future, though, it would behoove us to understand why same-race teachers are so effective and see if some of those unique skills and practices can be taught to the teaching force at large.

Chapter 2 builds on the discussion of student–teacher race-match effects by thinking about why they occur and how this knowledge might inform teacher policy and pre- and in-service teacher training. Race-match effects, particularly for students of color, occur for many reasons that are not mutually exclusive. Teachers’ expectations play an important role in the learning process, and so racial biases in teachers’ expectations—explicit and implicit—explain some of the benefits that students of color accrue when they have a teacher of the same race or ethnicity. White teachers’ educational expectations for Black students are lower than Black teachers’, and this “expectations gap” reduces Black students’ school engagement, own educational expectations, and ultimately their likelihood of enrolling in and completing college.¹⁷ This observation suggests that there is room to close achievement gaps by augmenting teacher professional development programs with modules that encourage teachers to hold high expectations for all students.

Another reason for the ubiquity of race-match effects is—quite simply—that teachers of color are better than their white counterparts at teaching students of color. This effect is on top of teachers of color being less biased and having higher expectations. It’s about teaching styles and class content that are tailored to the needs and cultural background of the student body. Prominent here is the powerful concept of “culturally relevant teaching” pioneered by Professor Gloria Ladson-Billings of the University of Wisconsin–Madison.¹⁸ Some teachers might stumble upon or develop this form of effective teaching organically, but it might also be explicitly communicated to all teachers of all backgrounds. Among other things, this approach recognizes the strengths and value of students’ backgrounds and uses cultural examples that are familiar to students. Similarly, teachers of color might teach a “hidden curriculum” of nonacademic skills that are essential to students of color in navigating historically white spaces.¹⁹

Finally, same-race teachers matter to students of color for other reasons that are not easily adopted by white teachers. Importantly, the mere presence of a professional, college-educated role model of the same background

might alter students' perceptions of what's possible and increase their educational engagement and aspirations. Diversifying the teacher workforce and increasing the frequency of student–teacher race matches thus remain critically important, even if teacher training is improved in ways that allow all teachers to mimic some of the classroom practices and behaviors that lead to student–teacher race-match effects. Creating and sustaining a more diverse teaching force are complex tasks that require understanding the history of teacher policy and the changing demographics of high school and college graduates; we provide this background in the next two chapters.

Diversifying the teaching force is a worthy and necessary—if longer term—objective. Diversification is necessary because this is the only way to ensure that all students have at least some exposure to same-race and same-ethnicity teachers. This goal is longer term because it takes time to recruit and train these teachers at scale. In any event, achieving this goal requires some knowledge of the history of race in the teaching profession and an understanding of the teacher pipeline.

Chapter 3 provides some important context for understanding why the current teaching force looks the way it does. Here, we discuss the historical factors that have shaped the composition of the teaching force over time. We recount the experiences of Native American, Latino, Asian, and Black students and teachers. All of these groups have experienced periods of legally sanctioned and informally enforced exclusion from public schools, segregation, and assimilation. Since formal education is generally a prerequisite for becoming a teacher, unequal access to quality public education has and continues to contribute to the lack of diversity in the teaching profession today. Though many formal racial barriers to becoming a teacher have been reduced or eliminated over time, the racialized legal history of who can teach whom and the tumult of desegregation continue to loom over the profession.

Despite these longstanding impediments to achieving a diverse and representative teaching force, the overwhelming evidence that same-race teachers matter should implore schools to find ways to increase the number of same-race exposures between students and teachers of color. Achieving this outcome is easier said than done due to the aforementioned lack of racial diversity in the teacher workforce: teachers are not nearly as racially or ethnically diverse as the students they serve. For example, investigative reporting on Minnesota's teacher diversity shows, as of the 2017–18 school

year, a teacher force composed of 5 percent teachers of color serving a student body that is 34 percent students of color. This gap has grown over the last decade as students grow more racially diverse in this predominantly white state, while teacher diversity has hardly budged.²⁰ Minnesota's experience is emblematic of national dynamics. In 2014, US public schools passed a milestone, becoming "majority minority" as students of color first accounted for more than half of the student body. As the US population grows more diverse with each passing year, the share of students of color among public school students will continue to grow.

Teachers of color, on the other hand, comprise only about 20 percent of the national teacher workforce. This number has also been climbing over time, but more slowly than that of students, and at its current pace the representativeness of the teaching force is at risk of falling further behind if there's no significant policy intervention. In other words, if ignored by school leaders and policy makers, the lack of representation in the teaching force will grow worse and continue to hamper student achievement and exacerbate achievement gaps for decades and generations to come.

Like racial and ethnic achievement gaps, the lack of teacher diversity is a problem in nearly *all* schools and districts throughout the country. A common misconception is that only major cities have a real need for teachers of color. This mistaken belief probably stems from another common misconception: that Black and Latino students only attend inner-city schools. However, the need for teachers of color is universal, and if anything, it is actually greater *outside* of city centers because the majority of teachers of color already work in majority-minority urban schools. This fact is readily apparent in teacher-student parity indexes, which we report by locale in table I.1.

TABLE I.1 Student-teacher parity indexes by school locale

Race/Ethnicity	LOCALE				
	All	City	Suburb	Town	Rural
Black	0.44	0.51	0.40	0.38	0.39
Latino	0.35	0.38	0.36	0.29	0.27
White	1.66	2.41	1.66	1.39	1.30

Source: Authors' calculations using the National Teacher and Principal Survey, 2017–18 and the Common Core of Data, 2017–18.

The teacher-student parity index is the ratio of the share of teachers of a given background to the share of students of a given background in a specific geographical area, district, or school.²¹ It provides a measure of how well the teaching force represents a specific student group, where a value of one indicates perfect representation, values less than one indicate underrepresentation, and values larger than one indicate overrepresentation. When a group is underrepresented, these students have a lower chance of exposure to a same-race teacher, and vice versa.

The white parity index is well above one nationally, and in all locales, which means that the share of white teachers is greater than the share of white students in all parts of the country. Black parity indexes are notably higher than Latino parity indexes, suggesting that the need for Latino teachers is at least as great as the need for Black teachers, though both groups are underrepresented in all locales with indexes well below one. This point is an important corrective because many media reports about teacher diversity are told through the perspective of Black students, and the research base certainly has more evidence pertaining to impacts on Black students. We suspect, therefore, that policy makers and practitioners may view Black teachers as a priority group motivating the need for teacher diversity. However, the data clearly show that Latino and Asian students are both less likely than Black and Native American students to see someone who looks like them in the front of their classroom: the national parity index values are 0.44 for Black, 0.35 for Latino, 0.40 for Asian, and 0.51 for Native American groups.²² A key lesson of our book is a desperate need for more teachers of color of *all* racial and ethnic backgrounds.

The Black and Latino indexes are both higher in cities than in suburbs, towns, and rural areas. These numbers mean that the need for a more diverse teaching force is most acute in nonurban schools, as both Black and Latino students have better chances of exposure to same-race teachers in urban areas. Again, this fact runs counter to the narrative in many media accounts of the teacher diversity crisis. Nonetheless, the main takeaway here is that the level of teacher representation—and exposure to same-race teachers—is unacceptably low in the majority of communities across the country. The need for teachers of color is broad and not geographically limited to big cities, the South, or majority-minority states like California. Rather, the need for nonwhite teachers spans the entire country. All districts need to think seriously about how they might increase both the

frequency of student exposures to same-race teachers and the racial and ethnic diversity of their teaching forces.

Chapter 4 takes stock of the current production pipeline of teachers—from high school graduation to college to certification to student teaching to employment to ultimately leaving the classroom—to understand where and how teachers of color go missing. No singular flashpoint in the teacher pipeline causes the underrepresentation of teachers of color. Rather, potential teachers of color are systematically lost at every point along the pipeline. This loss is not an accident; the myriad disadvantages faced by students of color, who themselves are potential teachers of color, are the result of institutional racism that discourages people of color from entering the classroom. Accordingly, nothing short of a systemic evaluation of policies and practices across the pipeline—including input from the affected racial and ethnic minority groups—will bring about the changes needed to make the teacher profession more hospitable for people of color. As alluded to thus far, the knowledge that the teaching force is not representative of the student body motivates three general, complementary, and not mutually exclusive policy objectives: increase teacher diversity, increase student–teacher race matches, and improve all teachers’ (and particularly white teachers’) ability to effectively teach in diverse classrooms. All are important, since they can be implemented and improve student outcomes over different time horizons.

Chapter 5 provides a high-level overview of how to increase teacher diversity and reallocate teachers across schools while being mindful of teachers’ agency and preferences as well as legal considerations regarding racial discrimination. Here we discuss broad policies that can make the profession more enticing to people of color or remove obstacles that disproportionately affect candidates of color. Examples include expanded college loan forgiveness, relaxed certification standards, and better pay in certain “hard-to-staff” schools. These ideas would benefit all teachers, to be sure, but given the disparate barriers to entering the profession, these policies would almost certainly disproportionately benefit teaching candidates of color. Importantly, these efforts can be done legally, by branding diversity as quality so that a public benefit of the policy can be credibly claimed and documented.

A related line of high-level policy, which would require working closely with unions to revise collective bargaining agreements, is to change the

distribution of current teachers across schools to equalize the diversity of teaching staffs across districts and schools. This effort would also involve working closely with teachers themselves to ensure that their preferences are respected. Here, we propose ensuring that an index of teacher quality is roughly equal across schools, where teacher race is one element of that index. There seems to be an open policy window through which a broad coalition can build momentum for these sorts of broad changes to teacher policy. Such broad policy alone isn't sufficient to solve the teacher diversity crisis, however, because many smaller-scale policies and interventions must be considered as well.

Chapter 6 continues our discussion of policy responses to the various issues raised thus far: that teacher diversity is teacher quality and that the lack of diversity in the teaching force unnecessarily and unfairly prevents children of color from receiving the same high-quality education as their white peers. This more nuanced discussion of specific programs gets into the specifics of potential district- and school-level initiatives. Broadly, we discuss three categories of interventions, including those that

- bring more people of color into the teaching profession;
- engineer more student exposures to teachers of color; and
- (re)train white teachers to more effectively teach a diverse student body.

Teachers (and teacher candidates) of all backgrounds and in all types of schools can be involved in these policy goals in some way. None of these policies are mutually exclusive, though we introduce them separately for clarity. Indeed, these policies and objectives are complementary and should be implemented together to close the racial and ethnic gaps in educational success that plague our nation.

The concluding chapter summarizes these policy ideas and goals into concrete, actionable steps separately for school, district, state, and federal policy makers.

WHY DID WE WRITE THIS BOOK?

We conclude this introduction with a brief overview of why we wrote this book. We do so because some readers might wonder why, and why now,

given the existing research literatures and policy engagement on issues relating to achievement gaps, teacher diversity, and student–teacher race-match effects. Another reason is that our motivation for embarking on this project will provide some useful context for interpreting and acting on our recommendations. All told, we wrote the book for several reasons, not all of which are entirely obvious.

As for why now, many excellent scholars have written on various aspects of the benefits of student–teacher race matching and the teacher diversity issues that make such matches too rare for students of color. This research goes back several decades. For too long, though, this work has languished in small niches of academia’s ivory towers while receiving relatively little attention from journalists, policy makers, and school leaders. And even within academia, the different strands of this literature rarely interact with each other.

Moreover, a confluence of recent events has created a real opportunity for teacher diversity to take a central role in education policy. First, many important, credible empirical studies across multiple contexts have been published and widely circulated in the past five years or so that show that the benefits of same-race teachers are larger and longer lasting than previously thought. These results have been published in highly regarded, peer-reviewed academic journals, garnered much discussion in the popular press, and been casually cited in high-profile events like the 2020 Democratic Presidential Primary Debates. Second, the successor to the federal government’s 2001 No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB), the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA), passed in late 2015. The ESSA eased NCLB’s laser focus on school and teacher accountability and created a void of sorts where new approaches to school reform—including those not as dependent on test score results—can be explored.

The critical mass of research on teacher diversity (and the nonacademic public’s engagement with it) is already beginning to intersect with and influence real decisions in educational policy and practice. We’re writing this book to further catalyze that process by making the research evidence more accessible to policy maker and practitioner audiences and by offering thoughtful commentary about how to act strategically in light of the extant evidence and the newly opened policy window.

Another reason for writing this book is our desire to help steer well-intended actors away from potential pitfalls. We are encouraged by

the policy interest forming in several states and districts, though we are also cognizant of the risks that come with this opportunity. Ill-planned strategies won't meaningfully increase teacher diversity, nor will they increase exposures to same-race teachers or narrow achievement gaps, while burning lots of political and financial capital in the process. Another concern is that efforts to diversify the teaching force could be cast as a giveaway to liberal policy interests, potentially eroding historically bipartisan support for improving schools by increasing teacher quality. In short, schools should take advantage of the current policy opportunity, avoid unnecessary missteps, and create permanent policies that can create and maintain a truly representative teaching force.

Our fear of missteps is warranted, as many of the policies enacted to this point have fallen into one of two traps. The first is mistaking the means for the end and simply trying to increase or maximize teacher diversity. This approach is wrongheaded because teacher diversity is a necessary and important piece of the puzzle but not the ultimate goal. Rather, the end goal is to provide universal *access* to teachers of color, which the evidence indicates will narrow achievement and attainment gaps. Increasing teacher diversity is a necessary, but not sufficient, condition.

The second trap is a failure to distinguish between short-term and long-term solutions. As we fully articulate in chapter 4, teacher diversity is a necessarily long-term policy aim. However, many states and districts have put new targeted recruitment strategies in place or established hiring goals for teachers of color. These aggressive moves to diversify *their* teacher workforces are very likely good for *their* students. If these policies work immediately, though, they work by poaching teachers of color from other schools, districts, and states; they don't meaningfully increase the diversity of the teaching force at the national level. In other words, in the short term, these are zero-sum games that divert policy attention away from efforts that could make a real, lasting difference. Aggressive diversity-recruiting strategies might be useful if they were employed by locales where teachers of color were underrepresented and attracted teachers of color from districts in which they were overrepresented. This isn't what happens, though, as districts in urban settings with relatively diverse faculties are often the most aggressive recruiters of teachers of color. States and districts need to employ both long-term and short-term strategies to achieve meaningful change.

We wrote this book the way we did to offer a holistic perspective of the various systems that contribute to the lack of teacher diversity and the resulting inadequate opportunities that students of color have to see a same-race teacher in the classroom. Part of our holistic approach is to acknowledge many types of evidence. In addition to the rigorous empirical and theoretical academic studies, court rulings, and historical records discussed throughout the book, we also introduce each chapter with a quote or two from students and teachers that reinforce and contextualize key ideas. We hope that these quotes remind the reader that behind all of the numbers and statistics are lived experiences of real people. As researchers ourselves and in reviewing the large research literature on the topic, it's apparent that the recurring disadvantages faced by students and teachers of color are not accidents of the policy-making process; instead, they demonstrate systemic disadvantages that have their roots in racism and anti-Blackness. Serious policy solutions must address these systemic problems.

Similarly, we hope that the book makes an academic contribution as well. Many scholars from various disciplines have contributed to the vast body of knowledge that we draw on here. This research, as is true in much of the academy, is too frequently conducted in disciplinary silos. In the case of teacher diversity and student–teacher race-match effects, this research is largely conducted in two distinct academic circles—one composed mainly of education scholars housed in schools and colleges of education (who are largely people of color themselves) and one composed of applied economists and policy researchers housed in economics departments and schools of public policy (who are more likely to be white). There is relatively little interaction between these two circles, though they share similar research and policy aims. By highlighting potential areas for fruitful collaboration between these two groups, the research (and its real-world impact) stands to benefit from greater diversity of perspectives and approaches. Moreover, some of the research and ideas discussed in the book come from disciplines and scholars even more disconnected from the academic circles described earlier—including public administration, history, law, and sociology. We hope that this book facilitates connections between these sometimes disparate lines of inquiry into a singular, mainstream conversation about how to increase teacher diversity and leverage student–teacher race matching in the fight to close demographic achievement gaps.