

America Needs More Teachers of Color and a More Selective Teaching Profession

By [Lisette Partelow](#), Angie Spong, [Catherine Brown](#), and [Stephenie Johnson](#) Posted on September 14, 2017

SOURCE: <https://www.americanprogress.org/issues/education-k-12/reports/2017/09/14/437667/america-needs-teachers-color-selective-teaching-profession/>

Introduction and summary

For the past three decades, two concerns have dominated the national conversation about the teaching workforce: diversity and talent. The teaching profession is not as racially diverse as it needs to be. In most states, there is a large and growing gap between the percentage of students of color¹ and the percentage of teachers of color.² Efforts to increase teacher diversity have led to marginal increases in the percentage of teachers of color—from 12 percent to 17 percent from 1987 through 2012—but this positive statistic obscures other troubling facts, such as the decline in the percentage of African American teachers in many large urban districts and the lower retention rates for teachers of color across the country.³

Simultaneously, calls for raising the bar for entry into the U.S. teaching profession have grown more numerous in recent years, in part because of the nation's middling results compared with other educational systems around the world. On the 2015 Program for International Student Assessment—an international study of 15-year-old students' knowledge and skills—the United States placed 35th in mathematics, 24th in reading, and 25th in science.⁴ Many countries—such as Canada, Finland, Japan, Singapore, and South Korea—have outperformed the United States on the assessment for years, while others—including Poland and Germany—have caught up to and surpassed the United States' scores more recently.⁵ Countries such as Canada are high-performing due in part to their focus on teacher quality; countries such as Poland have improved their scores by focusing on the quality of the teacher workforce, which in turn influences the quality of instruction that students experience in the classroom. What all of these countries have in common is an intense focus on the quality of the teacher workforce, which in turn positively influences student achievement.⁶

Top of Form

Bottom of Form

This focus starts at the very beginning of teachers' careers with their admittance into teacher preparation programs. High-performing countries tend to have more rigorous selection processes for admission into teacher preparation programs compared with the processes in the United

States.⁷ A program can be selective in many ways: It can admit only a small number of candidates; it can set a high bar for admission; or it can include qualitative or performance-based assessments of a candidate's knowledge and skills. High-performing countries vary in the extent to which they utilize these various selectivity measurements, but what they have in common is that they use one or more of them to set the standard that makes teaching a selective profession.⁸

Currently, America's teaching profession is not selective enough. Traditionally, prospective teachers apply to teacher preparation programs during their second year of college, similar to declaring a major. In 2013, the average minimum GPA requirement for entrance into such a program offering a bachelor's degree in education was 2.6.⁹ This requirement is well below the 3.24 average GPA of the students who are actually admitted into teacher preparation programs,¹⁰ demonstrating that programs are not adopting rigorous selection processes. Despite what the lack of action on this issue suggests, however, there is widespread public support for increasing the selectivity of teacher preparation programs: 60 percent of Americans believe that preparation programs should make their entrance requirements more rigorous.¹¹ While there has been some recent evidence of a shift, the average SAT scores of college students pursuing education degrees have historically been lower than those of students entering other professions.¹²

Recent data suggest marginal progress in relation to the goals of increasing both the diversity of the new teacher pool and the academic profiles of those entering it.¹³ But a new question has emerged: Are the two goals compatible? Calls for making the selection process more rigorous have often been met with skepticism. Many educators, policymakers, and other stakeholders worry that increasing selectivity may lead to a less racially diverse teacher workforce, as minority candidates generally score lower on many of the current selectivity metrics used by teacher preparation programs.¹⁴ Others maintain that the diversity gap will only continue to grow in the decades to come, even with a focus on the recruitment and retention of the current generation of prospective teachers.¹⁵ Instead, those skeptical of the United States' ability to attain both goals offer solutions such as increased cultural competency among the existing teacher workforce to inspire and encourage a more diverse generation of future educators.¹⁶

This report examines the case for making candidate diversity and ability equally important criteria in the recruitment and selection of teachers. Looking at available evidence, the report shows that rigorous recruitment and thoughtful selection processes can achieve increased diversity and selectivity simultaneously. It also includes examples of states, institutions, and organizations that have done an exemplary job of setting a high bar for admission and ensuring the diversity of their teacher candidates and the emerging teacher workforce.

A more diverse teacher workforce is crucial for all students

Racial diversity benefits every workforce,¹⁷ and teaching is no exception. Teachers of color tend to provide more culturally relevant teaching and better understand the situations that students of color may face. These factors help develop trusting teacher-student relationships.¹⁸ Minority teachers can also serve as cultural ambassadors who help students feel more welcome at school or as role

models for the potential of students of color.¹⁹ These children now make up more than half of the U.S. student population in public elementary and secondary schools.²⁰

Teachers of color tend to have more positive perceptions of students of color—both academically and behaviorally—than other teachers do. A recent study found that African American teachers are less likely than white teachers to perceive African American students' behavior as disruptive.²¹ Likewise, when a black student has both a nonblack teacher and a black teacher, the black teacher tends to have a much higher estimation of the student's academic abilities than the nonblack teacher.²² In both of these studies, the reverse did not hold true: Perceptions of white students' behavior and academic ability were similar regardless of their teacher's race.

The lack of diversity in the teaching profession, combined with these differing interpretations of student ability and behavior, may partially explain why students of color are suspended or expelled from all levels of school at disproportionate rates.²³ Such harsh discipline practices place them at higher risk of subsequent academic disengagement and increase the probability that they will later drop out.²⁴ While these mindsets may be unintentional, their prevalence greatly affects students' performance and behavior. Known in education research literature as the “Pygmalion effect,” a teacher's higher or lower expectations of a student are significantly predictive of the student's future academic outcomes.²⁵

These findings may partially explain why there is a significant positive effect on the standardized test scores of students of color when they are taught by teachers of color. When Florida researchers analyzed a massive data set of about 3 million students and 92,000 teachers over seven years, they found a positive effect in both reading and math scores when black students were taught by black teachers. For students who performed at the lowest levels, the effect of having a teacher of the same race was even larger.²⁶

North Carolina researchers analyzing another large data set found similar results in 2007.²⁷ More recently, in a study published by the Institute of Labor Economics, researchers and university economists found that low-income black male students in North Carolina who have just one black teacher in third, fourth, or fifth grade are less likely to drop out of high school and more likely to consider attending college. In fact, the study estimates that instruction from one black teacher in elementary school cuts high school dropout rates by 39 percent among black boys from low-income backgrounds. These same students were 29 percent more likely to express a desire to pursue a four-year college degree than their peers who had never been taught by a black teacher.²⁸

Increasing the percentage of teachers of color in the workforce is not just important and beneficial for students of color. Students of all racial backgrounds can benefit from a diverse teacher workforce that represents the nation's overall demographics. Because the vast majority of American social networks are made up exclusively—or nearly exclusively—of people of the same race or ethnic background,²⁹ many children and adults miss out on the opportunity to interact with people of other races. This segregation exists in the teaching profession as well: In 40 percent of U.S. schools, there are no teachers of color on staff.³⁰ As a result, white students—and teachers—

in these schools may miss opportunities to question assumptions about race, class, and privilege that they might encounter in their communities and to break down stereotypes about people of color.³¹ Certainly, it is not the responsibility of teachers of color to facilitate conversations about race and disprove assumptions, but greater diversity within the teaching profession supports the overall effort.³²

A major 2009 meta-analysis exploring the efficacy of interventions designed to reduce racial bias found the greatest support for interventions that involve significant “cross-race contact and cooperation.”³³ Other studies suggest that building a relationship with someone of a different race who counterbalances prevailing stereotypes is particularly effective in neutralizing unconscious bias; these studies also suggest that such positive effects occur most powerfully in young people.³⁴

For all the reasons outlined above, increasing teacher diversity is an important aspect of improving educational equity for all students—especially for students of color. Another important aspect of a quality education is ensuring that teachers have the knowledge and skills to provide excellent instruction, which can be accomplished in part by more carefully selecting who becomes a teacher and how that person achieves that role.

A high bar for entry is a crucial component of a modernized teaching profession

Nations with high-performing education systems carefully choose who is allowed to become a teacher. In Singapore, for example, 100 percent of new teachers are selected from the top academic third of their class.³⁵ Finland uses a multiround selection process that includes both academic- and competency-based components and admits only the top 10 percent of applicants.³⁶ After a concerted effort to increase the selectivity of its teaching profession, Canada now consistently recruits a majority of its prospective teachers from the top 30 percent of their college classes.³⁷

These countries have responded to a growing body of evidence demonstrating the importance of great teaching for students, particularly those from disadvantaged backgrounds. While high-performing teachers in the United States—the top 25 percent currently in classrooms—help students achieve an average of 1.5 years’ of academic growth, students with less-skilled teachers achieve only a half year’s worth of academic progress on average. Put simply, this means that the best teachers close achievement gaps, while the worst teachers widen them.³⁸ And these results are not just a matter of which teachers receive the less challenging teaching assignments: A major, multiyear study from the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation showed that high-performing teachers remained so across schools, regardless of whether those schools were high- or low-poverty.³⁹

In the United States, students who are fortunate enough to have a great teacher for even one year are more likely to matriculate to college, attend more prestigious colleges, and earn more later in life.⁴⁰ Unfortunately, though they stand to benefit most from great teaching,⁴¹ disadvantaged students are more likely to be taught by inexperienced or ineffective teachers than nondisadvantaged students.⁴² As a result, they far too often miss out on these benefits.

Raising the bar for entry into the teaching profession is one potential way to ensure that more teachers are able to accelerate students' learning. While there is not a clear causal effect between a teacher's own academic record and his or her ability to achieve the kinds of learning gains that help students excel, most studies do find a correlation between higher GPA and teacher effectiveness.⁴³ Taken in aggregate with other factors, such as experience and rank of undergraduate school, some studies have found larger positive impacts, especially for math achievement.⁴⁴ For this reason, a high GPA should not be the only factor that determines entry into the profession. As later sections of this report discuss, a number of other measures that could better predict future teaching ability are currently in development.

The high bar for entry into teaching in high-performing countries coupled with highly professional treatment of in-service teachers—such as quality training, professional development, leadership and advancement opportunities, and adequate pay—sends a signal to prospective teachers and to parents, students, and society at large that teachers are smart, deserve respect, and should be granted the same trust and autonomy as those in other professions that attract high-achieving individuals. Unfortunately, the United States has a leaky pipeline for high-achieving students. Students at top-tier colleges are less likely than their peers at other colleges to go into education; high-achieving college graduates are less likely to go into teaching; and those who do become teachers are less likely to stay in the profession long term.⁴⁵ In recent polling, high-achieving Millennials revealed much of the thinking that goes into this drop-off: They reported that they do not believe teaching is a good career option for high-achieving students, and they feel that the status of the teaching profession is in decline.⁴⁶

These trends have led researchers,⁴⁷ journalists,⁴⁸ multinational consulting companies,⁴⁹ and teachers unions⁵⁰ alike to call for changes to raise the bar for entry into the teaching profession.

Recent attempts to raise standards for entry into the teaching profession

- **American Federation of Teachers (AFT):** The AFT released a report in 2012 titled “Raising the Bar: Aligning and Elevating Teacher Preparation and the Teaching Profession,” in which they called for a bar exam-like test for licensure. Specifically, the report calls for a universal process for entry into the profession that includes an assessment of subject and pedagogical knowledge as well as a performance component.⁵¹
- **Council for the Accreditation of Educator Preparation (CAEP):** For programs to meet CAEP accreditation requirements, the teacher preparation candidate cohort must meet or exceed a minimum 3.0 GPA. The cohort must also demonstrate an average group performance in the top 50 percent of ACT, SAT, or GRE scores. As of the 2016-17 academic year, the teacher preparation program determines whether these criteria are measured at admission or at some other time before program completion.⁵²
- **Council of Chief State School Officers (CCSSO):** The CCSSO's Network for Transforming Educator Preparation calls for states to reach a consensus on greater

selectivity standards for licensure, including performance assessments that include multiple measures of educators’ ability to perform.⁵³

- **S. Department of Education:** Under proposed regulations issued by the Education Department during the Obama administration, compliance with a set of outcomes-based

TABLE 1
Points of selection into the profession

Selectivity criteria	When assessed	What states require
Test of academic proficiency normed to college-bound population	Varies. Three states require such an assessment before program entry, but others require it at some point before program completion.	Eighteen states and the District of Columbia require a test of academic proficiency normed to the general college-bound population.
GPA requirements	As of the 2016-17 academic year, in states seeking CAEP accreditation, providers can determine whether to assess this criterion at entry or at some other time before program completion.	Thirty-four states have GPA requirements for admission into teacher preparation programs, and 28 of these states require a cohort or individual GPA of 3.0 or higher, either through CAEP accreditation or state statute.
Licensure tests	Typically given after completion of a teacher preparation program; sometimes required for successful graduation from program.	All states require candidates to pass one or more exams to become a licensed teacher, although some states allow emergency credentials or extend teaching permits to nonlicensed teachers if districts receive hardship approval. In a few states, teachers may complete a performance assessment in lieu of one or more of the licensure tests.
State requirements for entry into the profession through alternative certification programs	Alternative certification programs require candidates to have bachelor’s degrees and often have a rigorous application process. Upon completion of such a program, states can mandate licensure tests or other steps before granting full licensure.	Forty-six states and the District of Columbia have at least one alternative teacher certificate program, which may or may not be based in an institution of higher education, or IHE. Many require that programs be for those who already have bachelor’s degrees, be clinically oriented, and have rigorous screening procedures for acceptance.
State requirements for emergency certification	Assessed prior to the teacher beginning to teach without supervision in a classroom; emergency certifications allow the person to begin teaching immediately, once granted, for up to one year.	Most states have implemented alternative programs to address projected teacher shortages and replace emergency certification pathways. For those states that offer emergency certification, requirements vary, but in most states, teachers must have a bachelor’s degree.

Sources: Authors’ analysis is based on Kate Walsh, Nithya Joseph, and Autumn Lewis, “Within Our Grasp: Achieving Higher Admissions Standards in Teacher Prep” (Washington: National Council on Teacher Quality, 2016), available at http://www.nctq.org/dmsView/Admissions_Yearbook_Report; Sandi Jacobs and others, “2015 State Teacher Policy Yearbook: National Summary” (Washington: National Council on Teacher Quality, 2015), available at http://www.nctq.org/dmsStage/2015_State_Teacher_Policy_Yearbook_National_Summary_NCTQ_Report; Sandi Jacobs and others, “2015 State Teacher Policy Yearbook: Executive Summary” (Washington: National Council on Teacher Quality, 2015), available at http://www.nctq.org/dmsView/2015_State_Policy_Yearbook_Executive_Summary; Kate Walsh, Nithya Joseph, and Autumn Lewis, “Within Our Grasp: Achieving Higher Admissions Standards in Teacher Prep: Executive Summary” (Washington: National Council on Teacher Quality, 2016), available at http://www.nctq.org/dmsView/Admissions_Yearbook_Executive_Summary_FINAL_649463; Educational Testing Service Praxis, “State Requirements,” available at <https://www.ets.org/praxis/states> (last accessed December 2016); EdTPA, “State edTPA Policy Overview,” available at https://secure.aacte.org/apps/rl/res_get.php?fid=1014&ref=edtpa (last accessed December 2016); U.S. Department of Education, “2015 Title II Reports: National Teacher Preparation Data,” available at <https://title2.ed.gov/Public/Home.aspx#> (last accessed December 2016); Office of Postsecondary Education, *Preparing and Credentialing the Nation’s Teachers: The Secretary’s Ninth Report on Teacher Quality* (U.S. Department of Education, 2013), available at <https://title2.ed.gov/titleiireport13.pdf>; National Education Association, “Research Spotlight on Alternative Routes To Teacher Certification: NEA Reviews of the Research on Best Practices in Education,” available at <http://www.nea.org/tools/16578.htm> (last accessed June 2017).



requirements aligned to CAEP accreditation standards would have been part of the eligibility conditions for preparation programs that wish to provide students with federal Teacher Education Assistance for College and Higher Education (TEACH) grants. These grants provide up to \$4,000 per year to students in low-income schools who are preparing to enter

the teaching workforce.⁵⁴ In March 2017, President Donald Trump signed a bill overturning these regulations through the Congressional Review Act.⁵⁵

- **National Council on Teacher Quality (NCTQ):*** Since 2009, NCTQ has provided an analysis of each state’s teacher preparation and licensing policies and assigned a corresponding grade to each state based on that analysis. To receive a passing grade in its rankings of teacher preparation programs, programs must require teacher candidates to demonstrate that they are in the top 50 percent of their college-bound class—in the top 50 percent of SAT or ACT scores or with at least a 3.0 GPA—for entry.⁵⁶

As a result of these calls for improvement, many states and preparation programs have begun to make significant changes. In 2011, only two states had set a high academic bar—either through GPA requirements or through an assessment—for admission into teacher preparation programs. By 2015, however, 25 states had done so.⁵⁷ These changes came in many forms, as there are many measures of selectivity in the teaching profession. Table 1 captures selectivity requirements for admission into teacher preparation programs and entry into the profession.

As states begin to make changes to various entry points into the teaching profession, some experts in the education policy community worry that these changes may have the unintended consequence of reducing the profession’s diversity. The academic foundation that prepares future teachers is cumulative. Unfortunately, this means that racial disparities in academic opportunities in elementary and secondary schools, high school graduation rates, and scores on entrance exams for postsecondary programs affect not only diversity in postsecondary programs but also diversity in the teaching pipeline.⁵⁸

The Center for American Progress (CAP) has previously called for more selectivity in the teaching profession and increased diversity of the teacher workforce.⁵⁹ Therefore, when some in the education policy community raised these concerns, CAP decided to take a look at the data. But first, this report acknowledges and responds to some of the challenges that exist when working toward these equally important goals.

NOTE: Rest of the pages deleted. If you wish to read the full report you can access it [here](#).