

Recruitment and Retention: Impact of Pilot Solutions Designed by Teachers of Color Phase II Report

May 2024



Table of Contents

- Introduction.3
- Why a Diverse Teacher Workforce?4
- The Challenge of Teacher Diversity5
- Inclusive Innovation6
 - Inclusive Innovation as a Multi-Stage Process7
 - Four Distinct Initiatives from Four District Education Ecosystems8
- Case Studies of Inclusive Innovation Projects9
 - Teaching is My Favorite Color (Avonworth School District, Hampton Township School District, and South Fayette Township School District)9
 - Admiral Squad (Black Male Fellowship Program at Middletown City)11
 - SPECTRA (Mentoring Programs for Teachers at Princeton City)12
 - Latino/a Affinity Group (Huntley 158)13
- Implications.15
- Conclusion16
- References17

Suggested Citation

Iloh, C. (2024, February). *Recruitment and Retention: Impact of Pilot Solutions Designed by Teachers of Color (Phase II)*. Digital Promise. <https://doi.org/10.51388/20.500.12265/216>

Introduction

From education policy to the public imaginary, there has been vast conversation regarding the need for a teacher workforce that reflects the diversity of students in schools. Fueling this discourse is the prevailing underrepresentation of teachers of color in the K-12 education ecosystem. Although students of color are expected to make up 56% of the student population by 2024, the elementary and secondary educator workforce is predominantly Caucasian.¹ Specifically, a majority of this country's public school students are students of color, but less than 20% of teachers are of color.²

Three of the domains that most shape barriers to diversity in the teacher workforce are these:

1. postsecondary education and teacher training,
2. recruitment/hiring of teachers of color, and
3. retention of teachers of color.

For the past three years, Digital Promise has embarked on an expansive and human-centered endeavor to empower school districts to cultivate context-relevant solutions to the teacher of color workforce disparities. Fostering teacher diversity will take context-driven and participatory efforts by districts to resolve teachers of color challenges.

Through Digital Promise's Inclusive Innovation approach, teachers of color from various school districts were engaged to develop and implement meaningful solutions to the conundrum of training, recruiting, and/or retaining teachers of color. While the previous report on this endeavor illustrated the design of these four initiatives, this report captures the implementation and impact of the solutions. The result is four compelling case studies that reflect targeted solutions for addressing training, recruitment, and retention dilemmas for teachers of color.

This report aims to bring to life these co-constructed efforts by implementing the following:

1. Situating the concerns shaping and contributing to a lack of teachers of color in schools.
2. Illuminating Digital Promise's Inclusive Innovation approach that guided the inquiry, cultivation, and implementation process of these district-driven initiatives.
3. Describing the four districts and their solutions as case studies and elucidating the problems of practice each district addressed. These case studies will include interview and outcome data that reflect the impact of these distinct initiatives.
4. Concluding with a discussion of how Digital Promise intends to scale these efforts for broader impact.

¹ Office of Planning, Evaluation and Policy Development (ED), Policy and Program Studies Service. (2016). (rep.). *The State of Racial Diversity in the Educator Workforce*.

² Dixon, R.D., Griffin, A.R., & Teoh, M.B. (2019). *If You Listen, We Will Stay: Why Teachers of Color Leave and How to Disrupt Teacher Turnover*. The Education Trust and Teach Plus, Washington, D.C.

Why a Diverse Teacher Workforce?

We know from the plethora of research on K-12 educational environments that a racially diverse teacher composition produces a myriad of benefits to students and society. Research indicates students, regardless of race, report feeling seen, supported, and academically challenged by teachers of color.³ Within the education enterprise, teachers of color offer perspectives necessary for deep and well-rounded learning, model a diverse world to students, instill culturally-sustaining pedagogies, and foster a sense of belonging.^{3,4,5}

Students of color especially benefit academically from teachers of color. In particular, when taught by teachers of color, students of color have higher grades, are more likely to graduate from high school, and have a stronger likelihood of participating in college.^{3,6,7} Black teachers are also “less likely than non-Black teachers to perceive Black students’ behavior as “disruptive” and more likely than non-Black teachers to have a higher opinion of Black students’ academic abilities” (Huebeck, 2020, as cited in Partelow et al., 2017). Thus, the advantages teachers of color bring to education environments are manifold for students overall and for students of color especially.

³ Carver-Thomas, D. (2018). Diversifying the Teaching Profession: How to Recruit and Retain Teachers of Color. Palo Alto, CA: Learning Policy Institute. <https://doi.org/10.54300/559.310>

⁴ Dilworth, M.E., & Coleman, M.J., (2014). Time for a Change: Diversity in Teaching Revisited. Washington, D.C.: National Education Association. <https://vtechworks.lib.vt.edu/server/api/core/bitstreams/a10bbe1a-07fa-4488-9f89-290a5b2f34ee/content#:~:text=This%20background%20paper%20explores%20the,a%20basis%20for%20recommending%20change>

⁵ Blazar, D. (2021). Teachers of Color, Culturally Responsive Teaching, and Student Outcomes: Experimental Evidence from the Random Assignment of Teachers to Classes. Annenberg Working Paper No. 21-501.

⁶ Cherng, H. Y. S., & Halpin, P. F. (2016). The importance of minority teachers: Student perceptions of minority versus White teachers. *Educational Researcher*, 45(7), 407-420.

⁷ Blazar, D. (2022). How and Why do Black Teachers Benefit Students?: An Experimental Analysis of Causal Mediation. Annenberg Working Paper No. 22-501.

The Challenge of Teacher Diversity

To be sure, increasing racial diversity in the teacher workforce is a complex challenge with multiple areas of concern. These concerns span across the teacher pipeline and trajectory, such as teacher preparation, recruitment, hiring, and retention.

Higher education is the most likely vehicle for aspiring educators to gain the ability to become teachers in the United States. Within the realm of postsecondary education, teacher preparatory programs are largely white-facing. Research efforts have found that most teacher education programs have a strong majority of white students and *“numerous programs even have extreme racial homogeneity—programs where more than 90% of enrollees identify as white.”*⁸

It is well reflected throughout the literature and policy reports that the teacher profession has become a revolving door, especially for educators of color. Some of the reasons stated as to why these teachers of color leave the workforce include the following:

- “(1) experiencing an antagonistic school culture;
- (2) feeling undervalued;
- (3) being deprived of agency and autonomy;
- (4) navigating unfavorable working conditions; and
- (5) bearing the high cost of being a teacher of color” (see Footnote 2).

One frequent rationale put forth to explain attrition for teachers of color is how under-resourced education environments provide untenable work conditions for racially minoritized teachers.⁹ Racially minoritized teachers are often motivated to work in high-need schools with working conditions that often impede the teachers’ ability to make the impact they desire.¹⁰

Undoubtedly, there are immense challenges with the recruitment and retention of teachers of color. Better *“recruiting, hiring, and retaining of diverse teachers is possible when schools and districts use data-driven, targeted strategies to inform their efforts.”*¹¹ Unfortunately, there are scarce solutions rooted in the context of specific education ecosystems.

⁸ TNTP Reimagine Teaching. (2020). A Broken Pipeline: Teacher Preparation’s Diversity Problem. <https://tntp.org/publication/a-broken-pipeline/>

⁹ Ingersoll, R.M., May, H., & Collins, G. (2019). Recruitment, employment, retention and the minority teacher shortage. Education Policy Analysis Archives, 27(37). Retrieved from <https://epaa.asu.edu/index.php/epaa/article/view/3714>

¹⁰ Simon, N., Johnson, S.M., & Reinhorn, S.K. (2015). The Challenge of Recruiting and Hiring Teachers of Color: Lessons From Six High-Performing, High-Poverty, Urban Schools [Working Paper]. The Project on the Next Generation of Teachers, Harvard Graduate School of Education. Retrieved from https://projectngt.gse.harvard.edu/files/gse-projectngt/files/the_challenge_of_recruiting_and_hiring_teachers_of_color_diversity_july_2015.pdf

¹¹ Greenberg Motamedi, J. (n.d.) 9 Strategies for Recruiting, Hiring, and Retaining Diverse Teachers. Education Northwest. <https://ies.ed.gov/ncee/edlabs/regions/northwest/pdf/teacher-attrition.pdf>

Inclusive Innovation

Digital Promise's Inclusive Innovation model is

“an equity-centered R&D approach that engages communities—students, parents, families, and community leaders—in partnership with district leaders, educators, researchers, and developers to create novel solutions to complex educational challenges. The model prioritizes the voices and lived experiences of those who have been historically and systematically excluded to ensure the process and outcomes reflect their needs, hopes, and expertise.”¹²

Thus, through Inclusive Innovation, Digital Promise asserts that a co-constructed and multi-stage process can facilitate sustainable and meaningful change necessary for resolving inequities.

Inclusive Innovation expands the “who,” “what,” and “where” of innovation and organizational change. By redefining the “who” and redistributing power, agency, and influence, Inclusive Innovation makes innovation itself a collective effort. Those most impacted by vast inequities in the teacher workforce are treated as agents of change and experts of their experience. Inclusive Innovation reframes “what” counts as innovation by centering equity. Inclusive Innovation also constructs a holistic “where” of innovation because it places primacy on ideas from communities and contexts close to the phenomenon.

Inclusive Innovation does not position educational change and solutions to pervasive inequities as that which can be resolved through one-size-fits-all methods. Ultimately, Inclusive Innovation allows districts to prioritize and pursue the problems of practice most pressing in their immediate environments.

¹² Bland, J. & Smith, K. (2023, February). Recruitment and retention: Pilot solutions designed by teachers of color (Phase I). Digital Promise. <https://doi.org/10.51388/20.500.12265/168>

Inclusive Innovation as a Multi-Stage Process

Inclusive Innovation reflects a five-stage design process: connect and commit, inquire and investigate, design and develop, implement and iterate, and sustain and scale. These five stages are respectively captured in Figure 1.

Figure 1. The Digital Promise Inclusive Innovation Model

	Connect & Commit	Inquire & Investigate	Design & Develop	Implement & Iterate	Sustain & Scale
Goal	Build relationships, trust, and a shared commitment to tackling a challenge.	Deeply investigate the challenge from multiple perspectives and arrive at target outcomes for addressing and measuring progress against the challenge.	Create one or more prototype solutions that can be tested for the target outcomes.	Implement one or more prototypes, tracking multiple progress indicators and target outcomes to iterate and improve.	Implement refined solution(s) in multiple contexts, improving local implementations and gathering knowledge for scaling.
Equity-first practices	Engagement				
	Capacity Building				
	Reflection				
	Recognition				

This report illuminates the efforts of four distinct education ecosystems that implemented the Inclusive Innovation model to address recruitment and/or retention issues concerning racially minoritized teachers. Accordingly, the phase of Inclusive Innovation most reflected in this report is ‘implement and iterate’.

Four Distinct Initiatives from Four District Education Ecosystems

The purpose of this work was to enable these districts to cultivate context-driven approaches to address educator workforce inequities. All four districts shared the characteristic that their student body is more diverse than their teacher population (see Footnote 12). Below are the names of these four initiatives and problems of practice they sought to address.

Black Male Fellowship Program (Middletown City)

Middletown City Schools, situated in Middletown, Ohio, boasts both cultural and socioeconomic diversity. The problem of practice Middletown City School District sought to address is the shortage of Black male educators. Accordingly, Middletown City focused on cultivating diverse teacher workforce solutions to increase the number of Black men in the profession.

Regional Teacher of Color Network (Avonworth, Hampton, South Fayette)

The districts empower educators through authentic experiences and professional development to become innovative thinkers and creative contributors in their schools and district. They aim to enhance educator recruitment and retention methods to reflect the diversity of the Southwestern Pennsylvania Region

Mentoring Programs for Teachers (Princeton City)

Princeton City Schools in Cincinnati, Ohio, focused on mirroring their educator workforce with the diverse demographics of their student population. This district collaborated with their teachers of color to foster and implement the SPECTRA (Supporting Princeton Educators of Color through Training, Relationships, and Affirmation) Initiative.

Latino/a Affinity Groups (Huntley 158)

The problem of practice that Huntley 158 pursued was connecting with Latino/a teachers in the school. Through the process, Huntley 158 desired to help teachers build a community of support within the district through the implementation of an affinity group and increase the retention rate of Latino/a teachers.

Case Studies of Inclusive Innovation Projects

The purpose of using case studies is to illustrate the efforts and contributions of these four school districts and their teachers in a way that honors the process and product of their work. The following case studies will provide insight into the nature of the recruitment and retention-related dilemmas each school district sought to resolve with their own unique initiatives and strategies. The case study approach demonstrates how Inclusive Innovation enables capacity-building, criticality, and new directions that had not existed prior for teachers of color.

Teaching is My Favorite Color

(Avonworth School District, Hampton Township School District, and South Fayette Township School District)

There is a shortage of teaching professionals in the greater Pittsburgh area. Moreover, teachers of color are even more scarce. Accordingly, three school districts in the Pittsburgh region came together in response to the growing shortage of teachers of color. The specific school districts that were involved in this collective are Avonworth School District, Hampton Township School District, and South Fayette Township School District. By taking this collective approach, these three districts combined resources and insights to more robustly attract and retain teachers of color. As a result of their brainstorming and efforts, Avonworth, Hampton, and South Fayette Township developed “Teaching is My Favorite Color.”

Teaching is My Favorite Color was cultivated as an initiative to create a holistic ecosystem of support for teachers of color across the Southwest Pittsburgh region, including new teachers of color.

This initiative had four vital elements:

- 1) empowerment and amplification of voices;
- 2) building a sense of belonging;
- 3) professional development opportunities; and
- 4) attracting and retaining diverse teachers. Each of the domains is tied to the impact of Teaching is My Favorite Color.

Teaching is My Favorite Color has a programmatic emphasis on the empowerment of teachers of color and cultivating a sense of belonging and support for them. Through this initiative, these three districts wanted to convey that teachers of color are not only desired in these ecosystems but will be supported and successful. Ultimately, Teaching is My Favorite Color serves as a platform for fostering a racially heterogeneous teaching population that in turn benefits students and the Pittsburgh region.

It cannot be understated that what is particularly innovative with this collective’s approach is that they sought to support and amplify the experiences of new teachers of color. Teaching is My Favorite Color serves as a powerful early mentorship and learning platform for those who are new or early-career teachers. Overall, through networking opportunities, spaces to learn from leaders and luminaries in the educational industry, and dedicated training around best practices, Teaching is My Favorite Color modeled continuous and lifelong learning for educators whose needs far too often go unaddressed.

On one occasion, the initiative hosted a “Teaching is My Favorite Color” social hour. This event worked toward the benefit of allowing these educators within the initiative to have time to build community.

Dr. Aaron Johnson, the Pennsylvania program director for Teach Plus, was the guest speaker for the event. This powerful networking and community event was the first of several notable events held under the Teaching is My Favorite Color effort.

Teaching is My Favorite Color also brought conference-style learning and opportunities to its constituency through its first convening. The novel and powerful educational space had education luminary Dr. Valerie Kinloch as a keynote speaker. Some of the breakout sessions for this convening included "Reflections From The Classroom," "Having an Affirming Classroom for Students of Color," "A Sense of Belonging," and "Building a Community."

In an interview with a Latina woman teacher of 12 years in Hampton School District, she explained how Teaching is my Favorite Color provided a safe space for racially minoritized teachers to not feel alone even if they are the only ones in their school. *"I am proud of our convening, especially in October. We just had so many people there having the same aha moment. They think they are the only one and realize they are not the only one. We see that we need to do more and be more to each other through this process. I spoke to a teacher who said, 'I'm not the only one,' and asked, 'What can I do to not be the only one anymore?' So we want to keep recruiting and making this bigger and better."*

She later added that Teaching is My Favorite Color has been pivotal for her growth in being authentic to her identity in her educational environment and professional praxis.

"Now I am being seen as more of myself. I am meeting others who are seeing the whole me and not just part of myself. I am being seen as more of my authentic self. I do not feel like I always have to conform to expectations. Meeting all the other teachers and being accepted for who I am allows me to be more accepted elsewhere. And if someone doesn't accept it...tough! I am still thinking about that teacher who is the only one in her school, and the only time she can be herself is with us. I also see who I am does not take away from what I do, but it adds to it."

A superintendent noted that the power of Teaching is My Favorite Color is that *"Our teachers of color in our region are usually the only ones in our district, so their experience is very different as a teacher of color. You can never really understand what the experience is like living in their shoes. When you are alone as one of the only teachers of color in a district, they are still alone. I have learned the value of creating this network and how valuable it is for these educators of color to connect. I have learned that I can't rely on what I see. It's the conversations that unearthed the realities of teachers of color that I may feel are doing just fine."*

He shared that the initiative has created a positive shift because of the connectivity it has built and how important it is for districts to play an invested role in building community for their teachers of color. He also addressed how Teaching is My Favorite Color has fundamentally changed him as a leader and his attentiveness to inequities. *"You may think what you are doing is equitable, but people may still have an inequitable experience."*

Admiral Squad (*Black Male Fellowship Program at Middletown City*)

Middletown City Schools in Ohio is positioned within a hybrid suburban/urban community with a population that reflects economic and racial heterogeneity. Every facet of this community cares about learning, whether it be its local businesses, parents, or community partners. Included within the student population of Middletown City schools are African American, Latinx, white, and Asian students. Many of these students live in households that are at or below the poverty line.

Middletown City Schools sought to employ the Inclusive Innovation model to make use of their platform and efforts to create community for current Black male educators and a pipeline for Black male educators. Middletown City had already noted a scarcity of Black male teachers in its ecosystem. Accordingly, Admiral Squad, the initiative created, was developed to increase the number of Black male educators in Middletown City Schools. This district only has 32 Black men among its education personnel that is composed of over 650 educators, substitute teachers, and paraprofessionals.

Through Admiral Squad, Middletown City was able to cultivate a rare and unique space for Black male educators. Specifically Admiral Squad provides recognition of Black male educators' intersectional identities and contributions to Middletown City. Admiral Squad also provided a strong professional learning community, including support and access to crucial development opportunities, in order to ensure participants' continuous growth and career fulfillment. The Admiral Squad attended college fairs to have a presence in the collegiate ecosystem as well as providing education, reflection, and professional development opportunities for current members of the Admiral Squad.

Middletown City Schools saw Admiral Squad as a means to bolster its number of Black men educators. The district has a goal of hiring an additional 25 Black men throughout its next five hiring cycles. Middletown City Schools already has the qualitative insights to indicate that this initiative is on track to increasing its Black male educators.

The benefits of Admiral Squad spanned from visibility and education to advocacy. For example, one 22-year-old Admiral Squad Black male educator and former veteran said, *"Before Admiral Squad, I didn't realize the Black male presence in education. I really didn't realize it was that deep. Admiral Squad is helping to show the need for Black male educators and recruit for us. We are 2% of educators in the country. It's not just low numbers of Black male educators here but everywhere."* He also mentioned the information and awareness he gained through Admiral Squad, highlighting that, *"Black male educators are often pushed more towards sports,"* such as being gym teachers. He also shared how Admiral Squad has tremendously improved his praxis through confidence and an enhanced sense of purpose.

"When I joined Admiral Squad and [its] other Black male educators, my confidence shot up, and I had a sense of belonging. That confidence improved my leadership, and I saw results in my coaching. When I came back from Admiral Squad, it made me want to better myself and hold myself to a higher standard. Having those resources really shapes you as a leader." While pondering what it is like to be a Black male educator and the community and recognition gained from Admiral Squad, he said, "There is not a lot of us. So when you see others of us, you get that connection. A lot of these kids who look like me see me, and they see a big brother. The only other Black male I saw in my context was a counselor."

One of the early byproducts of the Admiral Squad, which is roughly a year old, was the exposure to Black male educators that it provided to future generations of educators. “I am King,” in particular, was a program developed from Admiral Squad that focuses on early exposure and mentoring for students in early grade levels. “I am a King” seeks to nurture a sense of inspiration and possibility by providing young students with direct interactions with Black male educators.

The example of the “I am a King” initiative within Admiral Squad highlights the unique contributions and importance of Black male educators. “I am a King” fosters and cultivates a new generation of Black male educators and educators of color by providing possibility models utilizing these Black male educators. Accordingly, a passion for teaching is maintained and supported for the Black male educators and college interns involved, while the “I am a King” space also serves as potential motivation for youth to pursue the teaching profession in years to come.

SPECTRA (*Mentoring Programs for Teachers at Princeton City*)

Princeton City Schools, located in Cincinnati, Ohio, sought to bolster their recruitment and retention of teachers of color. Princeton City was interested in both recruiting racially minoritized teachers while also cultivating environments in which they would want to stay. As stated by a Princeton City education leader, *“There is a need to enhance our teacher/educator recruitment and retention methods in order for our teacher/educator workforce to more closely mirror the diversity of our student body.”* Princeton City Schools ultimately developed and cultivated SPECTRA (Supporting Princeton Educators of Color through Training, Relationships, and Affirmation).

The central team involved in bringing SPECTRA to life consisted of district-level leaders and teachers. These groups of partners were important in ensuring that SPECTRA could be developed as an endeavor that was both meaningful and expandable. Princeton City’s implementation of the Inclusive Innovation approach was pivotal in building a multi-step approach: exploration, ideation, and implementation.

During the exploration stage, Princeton City Schools engaged in empirical research to better understand the issues and nature of the teacher of color recruitment and retention challenges. During this phase, the district and teachers engaged individuals within their collectives to better understand the challenges and opportunities associated with recruiting and retaining teachers of color, which informed their subsequent actions and decision-making. Through ideation, Princeton City Schools held brainstorming sessions and deliberations on how to best bring their research insights and motivations to life. During the ideation phase, Princeton City Schools developed practices and protocols that could provide the necessary inclusion for teachers of color within schools across the district. Lastly, during the implementation phase, the district created and executed the SPECTRA Initiative, which reflects a program dedicated to training, development, and affirmation for racially minoritized educators within the district.

SPECTRA not only provided a solution for how to address recruitment and retention for teachers of color; it provided teachers with agency in addressing the scarcity of educators of color within Princeton City. One interview with a Black woman teacher of over 15 years in Princeton City (and pioneering member of SPECTRA) illuminated the profound impact the initiative had in her ability to support others like her. In her current teaching environment she is the only teacher of color, which is a departure from previous schools in which she has worked.

She said,

“It has been different to not see others and have people to talk to that look like me. So SPECTRA came at a perfect time in my life. When the opportunity to participate in the SPECTRA design studio came, I thought, well, why not because I would love to give my feedback on what I think would help from my perspective, in some of the things I have experienced. It has been such a joy to see some of the ideas and content from the design studio come to life.”

When discussing SPECTRA’s impact, she stated, “SPECTRA means a lot to me, but I will summarize in three words: purposeful, intentional, and culturally responsive. What we do know is that our district is diverse. We know our teaching population is not diverse. Why are we not able to pull teachers of color into our environment? So when we partnered with the Thurgood Marshall Fund to give them a tour and spotlight our district to see if they would be interested and look at the talent that’s out there ... I thought that was an amazing experience. And I thought all districts should be doing this ... Districts need to be following this same model.” Her description of SPECTRA and the value it adds reflects how, through strategic design combined with intentional solutions, they could make progress toward attracting and retaining teachers of color.

Latino/a Affinity Group (Huntley 158)

The Huntley Community School District 158 (Huntley 158) is located just west of Chicago, IL, and has seen a steady growth of Latino/a families over the years. However, The percentage of faculty and staff does not match the shifting students demographics. To meet the needs of Latino/a staff and to increase the representation of Latino teachers in the Huntley 158 district over the next five years the school district initiated the development of a Latino/a Affinity Group. The Affinity Space aimed to foster connections and support among Latino/a teachers, creating a sense of belonging and networking opportunities across the district to improve staff retention.

The Latino/a Affinity Group emerged as a needed addition to the district’s retention strategy from the design studio facilitated by Digital Promise. This innovation provided educators with a platform for personal and professional growth. A teacher within the district emphasized the pivotal role of these groups in addressing the question of retention and job satisfaction, stating, *“For me, it was the retention, like why am I going to stay in this district? Why do I want to keep working here?”* This sentiment underscores the profound influence of the affinity group in cultivating a sense of belonging among educators.

The impact on teachers of color has been particularly noteworthy, as highlighted by the superintendent. The teacher shared their transformative journey, noting the newfound empowerment and voice gained through the Latino/a Affinity Group emphasizing the shift toward a more inclusive and participatory environment. This speaks to the broader influence of the Latino/a Affinity Group in creating a space where diverse voices are acknowledged and actively encouraged.

Beyond personal growth, the initiatives have cultivated a collaborative culture among educators. The teacher, feeling “like a leader,” exemplifies the ripple effect on their ability to share insights and strategies with colleagues. The collaborative environment fostered by the Latino/a Affinity Group facilitated knowledge exchange, as the teacher highlighted, *“I can go to my other language colleagues or even my*

monolingual colleagues and say, 'Hey, this is what we're doing in my classroom. What are you doing in your classroom?'" This interconnectedness contributes to a more enriching and supportive professional community. More specifically, providing the affinity group members time and space to meet with other members who work in different school locations allowed them to compare and contrast their teaching practices, career trajectories, and work climate and offer a deep level of support for each other with a more attuned level of cultural awareness.

The impact extends beyond the teacher community, resonating in events designed for Latino/a Affinity Group students. The teacher in the Huntley 158 district shared a heartening example of a dance performance by fourth-grade students, showcasing the tangible connection and inclusion facilitated by the affinity group. This space and time allowed for the affinity group members to not only host the event but also see intersections of their identity to be centered in the work in their roles as educators and community members. *"It's that connection where they see that they're part of the school too,"* (he or she) said, capturing the essence of creating an environment where every student feels valued and integral to the broader district community. This event also provides an opportunity for staff between grade level and school sites time to connect in authentic collaboration with students, staff, and families.

Furthermore, the impact of the Latino/a Affinity Group resonates in its ability to address systemic issues related to diversity and inclusion.

As highlighted by the superintendent, the district's strategic approach reflects a commitment to navigating the equity journey with sensitivity to the community's unique dynamics. The district is making significant strides by strategically focusing on internal structures and relationships. This nuanced strategy allows for progress while maintaining community support, showcasing the Latino/a Affinity Group's effectiveness in navigating complex sociopolitical contexts.

The superintendent expressed pride in the district's achievements and the impact of the Latino/a Affinity Group, aligning with the lived experiences and perspectives of the teaching staff. The transformative journey reflects a commitment to diversity and inclusion and tangible progress in cultivating a supportive, collaborative, inclusive educational environment in Huntley, Illinois. It serves as a testament to the multi-faceted positive outcomes of the Latino/a Affinity Group.

Implications

The initiatives captured through these case studies are not unique in the challenges they sought to address. The nation districts are all navigating how to resolve their own challenges with aligning the diversity of their workforce with the country's diverse student population. The initiatives demonstrated the opportunity to leverage Inclusive Innovation to create context-relevant solutions to supporting, recognizing, hiring, and retaining teachers of color as well.

There are many powerful lessons from these four initiatives that can be useful to educational environments hoping to grow their own successful programs to support teachers of color. A member of the Teaching is My Favorite Color effort emphasized how building and establishing a safe space where people can be their authentic selves was integral to the success of their initiative. Another educator said of replicating the work they did with Admiral Squad that others need to, *"Define your goals. What makes your district special? How would this appeal to Black male educators?"* He also suggested having the leadership in place and properly scheduling professional development days.

Multiple interview responses emphasized the power of involving people, whether in appealing to others or leveraging the resources of others. An interviewed Black male educator in Admiral Squad advised, *"Try to get buy-in and get people to believe in what you all are doing."* This was echoed by a teacher within SPECTRA. This teacher of over 15 years said that a pivotal aspect to SPECTRA success was dedicating time to relationship development, which made its capacity-building possible. She suggested that other districts,

"Create space and time to meet together. Educate people in the process of meeting together about where you are going. You also have to find your stakeholders that have connections to people. They are going to be the ones to help people to understand who you are. You have to know who is connected to what. When you are in a district you have a bunch of people. So moreover, these leaders too have to get to know the people. So you have to pinpoint those people you can make contact with who can lead those initiatives in making those contacts. You have to figure out who can bring in your human capital and capital."

Digital Promise hopes to continue to scale its efforts reflected in these four case study examples. It is through being an incubator to these remarkable projects that partners, leaders, and educators can see the promise that exists in pivoting from a one-size-fits-all approach to educational equity and thinking critically about inequities and ways to resolve them in distinct education cultures and contexts with their own unique constraints and opportunities. With additional capital, capacity, and exposure to other unique districts, Digital Promise aspires to continue supporting ecosystems to ideate and iterate sustainable change.

Conclusion

As the first section of this report indicates, there are many difficulties with realizing equity for teachers of color since there are myriad barriers to access, equity, and inclusion for teachers of color. In the 21st century landscape, districts and education ecosystems are challenged with how to best address this issue in a manner that is context-driven and sustainable. Digital Promise, through the Inclusive Innovation process, provided multiple districts and education ecosystems with a template for how they can examine and address the most pressing teacher of color challenges in ways that are human-centered and participatory. The education collectives amplified here are a significant reminder that with careful attention to the possibilities and power contained already within educational spaces, there is immense capacity to create sustainable change for teachers of color in the present and future.

References

- Bland, J. & Smith, K. (2023, February). Recruitment and retention: Pilot solutions designed by teachers of color (Phase I). Digital Promise. <https://doi.org/10.51388/20.500.12265/168>
- Blazar, D. (2021). Teachers of color, culturally responsive teaching, and student outcomes: Experimental evidence from the random assignment of teachers to classes. *Annenberg Working Paper No. 21-501*.
- Blazar, D. (2022). How and why do Black teachers benefit students?: An experimental analysis of causal mediation. *Annenberg Working Paper No. 22-501*.
- Carver-Thomas, D. (2018). *Diversifying the teaching profession: How to recruit and retain teachers of color*. Palo Alto, CA: Learning Policy Institute. <https://doi.org/10.54300/559.310>.
- Cherng, H. Y. S., & Halpin, P. F. (2016). The importance of minority teachers: Student perceptions of minority versus White teachers. *Educational Researcher*, 45(7), 407-420.
- Digital Promise (2023). Teacher of Color Project Website. <https://digitalpromise.org/inclusive-innovation/teachers-of-color-project/teachers-of-color-project-avonworth-hampton-and-south-fayette/>
- Dilworth, M.E., & Coleman, M.J., (2014). *Time for a Change: Diversity in Teaching Revisited*. Washington, D.C.: National Education Association. <https://vtechworks.lib.vt.edu/server/api/core/bitstreams/a10bbe1a-07fa-4488-9f89-290a5b2f34ee/content#:~:text=This%20background%20paper%20explores%20the,a%20basis%20for%20recommending%20change>
- Dixon, R.D., Griffin, A.R., & Teoh, M.B. (2019). *If you listen, we will stay: Why teachers of color leave and how to disrupt teacher turnover*. The Education Trust & Teach Plus, Washington DC.
- Greenberg Motamedi, J. (n.d.) *Nine strategies for recruiting, hiring, and retaining diverse teachers*. Education Northwest. <https://ies.ed.gov/ncee/edlabs/regions/northwest/pdf/teacher-attrition.pdf>
- Huebeck, E., (2020, June 30). *Recruiting and Retaining Teachers of Color: Why It Matters, Ways to Do It*. Education Week.
- Ingersoll, R. M., May, H., & Collins, G. (2019). Recruitment, employment, retention, and the minority teacher shortage. *Education Policy Analysis Archives*, 27(37).
- Partelow, L., Spong, A., Brown, C., & Johnson, S. (2017). *America needs more teachers of color and a more selective teaching profession*. Center for American Progress. <https://www.americanprogress.org/issues/education-k-12/reports/2017/09/14/437667/america-needs-teachers-colorselective-teaching-profession/>
- Office of Planning, Evaluation and Policy Development (ED), Policy and Program Studies Service. (2016). (rep.). *The State of Racial Diversity in the Educator Workforce*.
- Simon, N., Johnson, S. M., & Reinhorn, S. K. (2015). *The challenge of recruiting and hiring teachers of color: Lessons from six high-performing, high-poverty, urban schools [Working paper]*. The Project on the Next Generation of Teachers, Harvard Graduate School of Education. Retrieved from https://projectngt.gse.harvard.edu/files/gse-projectngt/files/the_challenge_of_recruiting_and_hiring_teachers_of_color_diversity_july_2015.pdf
- TNTP Reimagine Teaching. (2020). *A Broken Pipeline: Teacher Preparation's Diversity Problem*. <https://tntp.org/publication/a-broken-pipeline/>

Suggested Citation

Iloh, C. (2024, February). *Recruitment and Retention: Impact of Pilot Solutions Designed by Teachers of Color (Phase II)*. Digital Promise. <https://doi.org/10.51388/20.500.12265/216>



[Attribution-NonCommercial-NoDerivs 4.0 International](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/4.0/)



Washington, D.C.:
1001 Connecticut Ave. NW, Suite 935
Washington, D.C. 20036

Redwood City, CA:
702 Marshall St., Suite 340
Redwood City, CA 94061

Website: <https://digitalpromise.org/>