



Landscape Analysis: Teachers of Color in Kansas City

UERC URBAN EDUCATION
RESEARCH CENTER



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Introduction

As we work to improve educational outcomes in Kansas City, policymakers are increasingly pointing to teacher diversity as a key strategy to close the opportunity gap. Fifty years of research shows that effective teachers are the most important schooling variable associated with student academic success (Goldhaber, 2016). Teachers of color are a key part of our teacher workforce and their capacity to influence student outcomes, especially for students of color, is well documented. When students of color are taught by teachers of color, their math and reading scores are more likely to improve (Egalite et al., 2015). They are more likely to graduate from high school and aspire to go to college (Gershenson et al., 2017). Students of color and white students are more likely to have positive perceptions of their teachers of color, including feeling cared for and academically challenged (Cherng & Halpin, 2016).

While more teachers of color are being recruited, in Kansas City and nationally, their turnover rates are high. The reasons are complex - insufficient preparation, lack of in-school and out-of-school supports and mentoring, poor teaching conditions, additional student mentoring burdens, and instability in the high-need schools in which they teach. Emerging research suggests that a combination of policy and programmatic changes aimed at eliminating challenging teaching conditions, punitive accountability policies, and building high-retention pathways in the field will be key to addressing the teacher of color retention problem (Partee, 2014; Carver-Thomas, 2018).

This study was commissioned by the [Latinx Education Collaborative](#) to better understand teacher diversity in the greater Kansas City metropolitan area. Researchers from the Urban Education Research Center used 2019 teacher workforce data, provided by the Kansas State Department of Education (Educator Data Collection System) and the Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (Educator Core). The analysis focuses on full-time elementary, middle, and/or secondary teachers. School support staff and school specialists are not included in this report. To identify teachers of color, researchers use the state's teachers' self-report data. For this study we use the term Latinx to describe teachers from all Latin American communities, backgrounds, and identities. The study examines the demographic characteristics, retention rates, and school placements of teachers in the Kansas City metropolitan area. The report focuses on Kansas and Missouri rates; interactive maps and graphs are available by accessing the links in the report.



Foreword

There's a special something that happens when a young person gets to learn from a teacher who looks like them. And it is not just about a special sort of "magic" that happens. We also know that shared racial and ethnic identity between teachers and students helps enhance academic outcomes for young people. But perhaps the real strength is in the mirror. Young people getting to see themselves in their teachers sends a signal that they can and should aspire toward intellectual greatness and a lifetime of learning. This is especially the case when it comes to students who come from traditionally marginalized communities and identities, who then experience school curricula that implicitly and explicitly centers on what they lack, rather than the infinite promise and brilliance that they hold.

As a public-school graduate, former public-school special education teacher and current mom of two public school students, I have seen the harm that a lack of teacher diversity brings. I have seen students and their families othered simply because they come from another country. I have seen microaggressions and blatant discrimination come as a package deal with fluently speaking a language other than English. Cultural and linguistic strengths easily become deficits in a system that has roots in white dominant culture and xenophobic ways of being and knowing. It is this strength and power of the system to minoritize and erase young people of color that requires us to be more intentional about shifting the lack of racial-ethnic representation in our teaching force.

While we may know we need policy and systems change to address this issue, we just can't know, until we really know. To this end, intentionality is critical. Intent is fundamental to manifesting any far-reaching change and engaging teacher diversity work is no exception. We cannot claim to want to impact this problem in any sustainable way without precise, unmitigated intent in our hearts and minds. Intentionality begins, in the teacher diversity context, with establishing a baseline. To get to the bare bones of the matter, we need to be able to answer questions like, well where do we stand with this? How deep is this issue and how much effort is resolution actually going to take? Understanding the landscape, the sheer numbers as they currently exist, however grim they might be, is empowering. Yet, the numbers and percentages are just the beginning.



Baseline data not only gives us the knowledge we need to begin understanding a teacher diversity issue, it also offers us the transparency we need to hold systems, and the people who run them, accountable for making the actual progress young people require. For example, knowing that there are 57 Hispanic/Latinx teachers for 28,157 Hispanic/Latinx students in the districts who comprise this study, shows us the quantitative nature of this issue for Kansas' students. But we can't just focus on the lack of representation itself. The numbers urge us to look at the extent to which teacher pipelines may be fissured, causing viable teachers of color to fall through the cracks. The numbers force us to not only look at how many teachers of color we have now, but also how many of them we tend to lose and from where. This is especially



important when students and teachers of color are concentrated in urban areas, which studies show, is where teacher attrition tends to be at its height. Baseline data puts us in the know and can ultimately lead us to unearthing the root causes we need to address in order to cultivate teacher diversity with fidelity and genuine care.



This report is a lighthouse for Kansas City. It casts a light on the landscape in a way that says, yes, we see this issue and now we cannot and must not unsee it. It affords Kansas City and its neighboring locales a grand opportunity to hold itself accountable to its teacher diversity challenge, a challenge that it shares with other spaces across the nation. Accordingly, while Kansas City gets the benefit of being able to tackle this problem with an incredibly informed lens, it also gets to share its journey

with the field. We all then get to learn from its growing pains and the success that is sure to come as a result of the knowledge this report provides.

Most importantly, young people, and Black and Brown young people especially, may finally get the type of educational experiences they deserve as the norm and not the exception. That special something that is born from the dynamic of a young person seeing themselves in a teacher and a teacher seeing themselves in their students can take root and transform our school communities. True diversity then becomes more than an aim, it gets to pave the pathway for the educational environments and future we need to take us further, together.

In Solidarity,

Dr. Patrice E. Fenton
Board Member, Latinx Education Collaborative





A message from the President

The Latinx Education Collaborative (LEC) was founded on the principle that Representation Matters. When students see themselves reflected in the teachers that serve them, they have better educational outcomes. In the beginning days of the LEC, I had to use national data to make the case that Latinx education professionals are underrepresented in our community. Nationally, the number of Latinx educators hovers at 8% of the total teaching population. As you will read in this report, only 1% of teachers across all of the Kansas City metropolitan area are Latinx. This number pales in comparison to the ever-growing number of Latinx students.

I would like to thank our partners at the Urban Education Research Center for their work on this report. I would also like to thank Dr. Kelly Ocasio and Dr. Patrice Fenton, current LEC board members, for their thoughtful review and contributions to this report.

This report highlights the current representation gap experienced by students of color and is critical to both building awareness of the issue, while also providing a baseline for the task ahead. As the LEC continues to scale and center our work in ways that will lead to positive student outcomes. To that end, we will utilize data from this and future reports to measure our impact and refine our strategies.

The LEC believes we can build a world where every student has access to a thriving community of Latinx educators. I hope you will join us in this effort.

Respectfully,

Edgar J. Palacios, MBA
President & CEO, Latinx Education Collaborative



Why Does Teacher Diversity Matter?

Teacher diversity is critical to the academic success of students and the learning opportunities available to them. A growing body of research demonstrates that teachers of color provide unique benefits to all students through the lived experiences they bring to the classroom and the explicit, implicit, and null curricular strategies (see below for description) they employ in their teaching. Each of these curricular strategies shape the teaching and learning in which students participate in school (Einser, 1994; Milner, 2015).

- **Explicit curriculum** - Teaching aligned to objectives found in school, district, or state documents, policies, and guidelines (i.e., syllabi, state standards, etc.).
- **Implicit curriculum** – Teaching that is intended or unintended and is not stated or written down. Learning that occurs as a result of classroom discussions, current events (e.g., connecting lived experiences to events occurring locally and/or nationally; developing cultural awareness), inquiry and/or interests raised by students in classroom.
- **Null curriculum** – Opportunities students **do not** receive within the curriculum because the learning experience is simply not provided. Educational researcher Rich Milner (2015) describes it as, “what students do not experience in the curriculum becomes a message for them....if students are not taught to question, critique, or critically examine power structures, [they] are learning something” (p. 215). An example of a null curriculum is when teachers teach the story of Thanksgiving through the lens of the conquerors. The null curriculum is the Thanksgiving story from the perspective of the indigenous people living in North America.

Teachers of color bring their lived experiences and cultural backgrounds into their teaching and approach to learning. As historically underrepresented and marginalized persons who are more likely to have experienced null curricula, teachers of color are more prone to make those learning opportunities (i.e., critical thinking, life skills, academic readiness) more explicit (McCutcheon, 2002). As a result, their race, ethnicity, and experiences within educational spaces and society at-large influences “why and how” they approach the curriculum and engage students in the learning process (McCutcheon, 2002; Milner, 2015).

Teachers of color are often more aware of the need to approach teaching through a culturally responsive lens, intentionally connecting students with the knowledge, intersections of identities, and experiences they value and bring into the classroom (Brown, Brown & Rothrock, 2015). As a consequence, all students benefit from exposure to a variety of scholars (gender, race, ethnicity, ability), frameworks and applications relevant to the curriculum. In addition, the ability and resiliency of students of color are better supported when there are teachers of color available for them to engage them (Andrews, Castro, Cho, Petchauer, Richmond, & Floden, 2019; Billingsley, Bettini & Williams, 2019; Carver-Thomas, 2017). The visibility and integration of teachers of color into the school setting has a positive influence on the collective academic success experienced by students of color.



Where Do Teachers of Color Work in Kansas City?

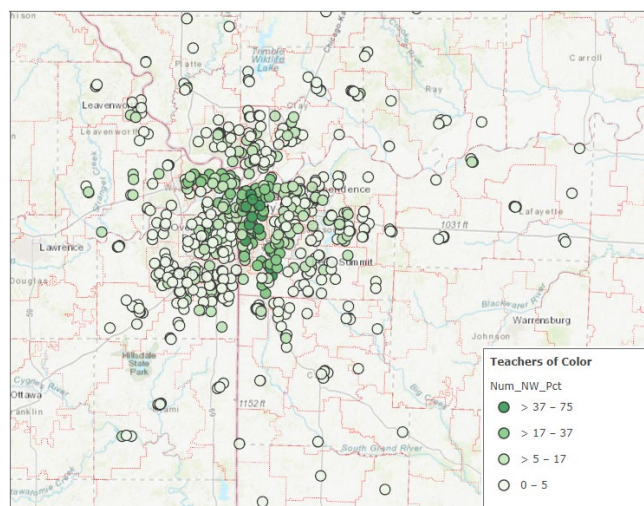
In the Kansas City metropolitan area, there are more than one hundred public schools. Approximately two thirds of these schools have at least one teacher of color in the building. Data for the 2018-2019 year show that teachers of color are spread out unevenly across districts and their schools in the Kansas City metropolitan area (see Chart 1, or the ArcGIS interactive map at the following link: <https://arcg.is/1CnGea>).

Two counties, Wyandotte County (KS) and Jackson County (MO), stand out for having the highest representation of teachers of color. Jackson County has the highest percentage of teachers of color (9%).

Among school districts in Jackson County, Kansas City Public Schools has the highest percentage of students and teachers of color (96% and 36%, respectively). Kansas City Public Schools is followed by Hickman Mills School District and University Academy. In these two school systems, the percentage of students of color is above 90%, and the percentage of teachers of color is approximately 32%.

In general, urban schools have more teachers of color than suburban schools. For example, the percentage of teachers of color in Independence, Blue Springs, and Lee's Summit, three large suburban districts in Jackson County, ranges from 3- 7%. In these areas, the percentage of students of color ranges from 25-44%.

Chart 1. Percentage of teachers of color in the Kansas City metropolitan area, by school building



Latinx Teachers

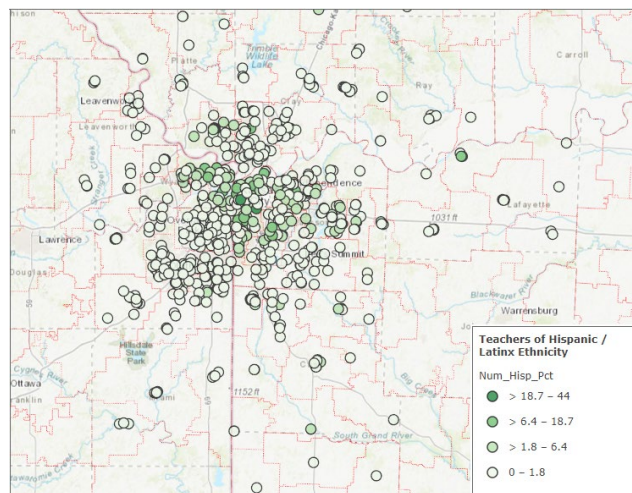
Chart 2 (also available at <https://arcg.is/e0qqz>) depicts the geographical placement of the Latinx teachers within the KC metropolitan area. In total there are 261 Latinx teachers. The Latinx student population includes 51,198 students in grades K-12.



Two counties—Jackson County and Wyandotte County —together employ the largest number of Latinx teachers as their combined share of the total percentage of Latinx teachers in Kansas City is 87%. Jackson County employs 174 Latinx teachers, which is 67% of the total Latinx teacher population. Wyandotte County employs 54 Latinx teachers (21%). It is followed by Platte and Cass counties, where the population of Latinx teachers is 10 and 9 individuals. Johnson County is the third largest region in the Kansas City metropolitan area in terms of the population of Latinx students. This region, however, employs only three Latinx teachers.

Two school districts - Kansas City, Kansas Public Schools and Kansas City Public Schools - employ more Latinx teachers than all other districts in the KC metropolitan area. In these school districts, the percentage of Latinx teachers in the building ranges from 5-10%. Guadalupe Centers has the highest percentage of Latinx teachers with an average of 12% across all of their buildings.

Chart 2. Percentage of Latinx teachers in the Kansas City metropolitan area, by school building



African American / Black Teachers

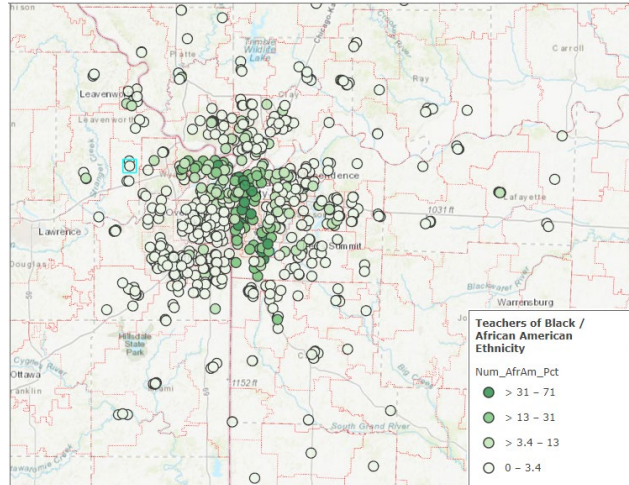
In total there are 1,184 African American/Black teachers employed in the schools of the Kansas City metropolitan area. The African American/Black student population is 53,293 students in grades K-12.

Jackson County and Wyandotte County employ a sizable proportion of African American/Black teachers, 803 and 229, respectively. These counties are followed by Johnson, Clay, and Platte counties, which combined employ 124 African American/Black teachers.

The major school districts in which African American/Black teachers are significantly represented are Kansas City Public Schools, Kansas City Kansas Public Schools, Hickman Mills, University Academy, Lee A. Tolbert Community Academy, and KIPP Endeavor Academy. In these districts and schools, the percentage of African American/Black teachers ranges from 30% to 50% (see Chart 3 or interactive map at <https://arcg.is/001G1i0>).



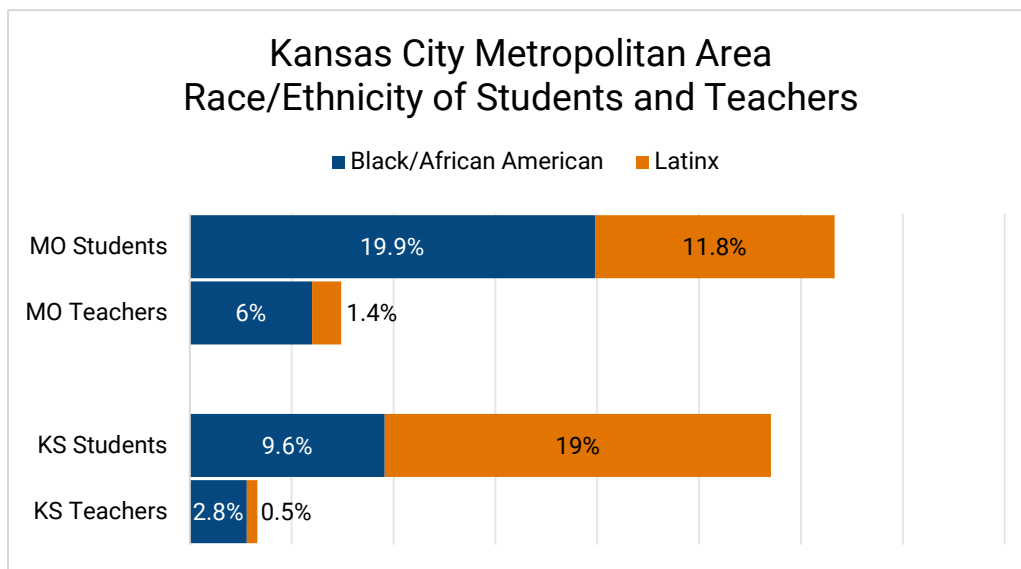
Chart 3. Percentage of African American/Black teachers in the Kansas City metropolitan area, by school building



To What Degree do Teachers Reflect the Demographics of Their Students?

Chart 4 provides a snapshot of the percentage of Latinx and African American/Black students and teachers in the Kansas City metropolitan area. On both sides of the state line, the percentage of Latinx and African American/Black teachers is significantly lower than the percentage of Latinx and African American/Black students. The mismatch between the percentage of students of color and teachers of color is consistent across schools in the KC metropolitan area (for school level details, see <https://arcg.is/1CnGea>). A state level analysis is provided below:

Chart 4. Demographic discrepancies between students and teachers

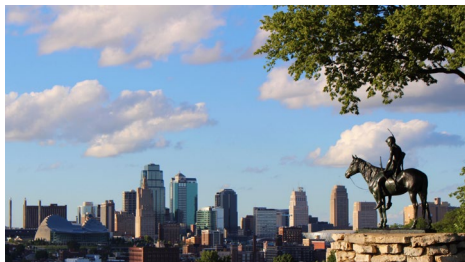




Teachers and Students of Color in Kansas Schools

Five counties - Johnson, Leavenworth, Linn, Miami, and Wyandotte - comprise the twenty-four school districts on the Kansas side of the Kansas City metropolitan area. Students of color make up 38.6% ($n=57,376$) of the student body enrolled schools across these districts. Teachers of color employed in these districts represent 4.9% ($n=542$) of the teaching workforce.

Among K-12 students, Latinx students make up 19% ($n=28,157$) of the population and African American/Black students make up 9.6% ($n=14,217$). Latinx teachers are 0.5% ($n=57$) of the teaching workforce, while African American/Black teachers represent 2.78% ($n=307$) of the workforce.



Teachers and Students of Color in Missouri Schools

On the Missouri side of the Kansas City metropolitan area, there are nine counties - Bates, Caldwell, Cass, Clay, Clinton, Jackson, Lafayette, Platte, and Ray - in which 83 school districts or charter schools reside. Students of color in these districts/schools represent 40.1%

($n=77,877$) of the enrolled student body. Teachers of color in these same districts represent 8.7% ($n=1,220$) of the overall teaching workforce.

African American/Black students comprise 19.9% ($n=38,637$) of the student body and Latinx students comprise 11.8% ($n=22,864$). African American/Black teachers represent 6% ($n=838$) of the teaching workforce, while Latinx teachers represent 1.4% ($n=200$).

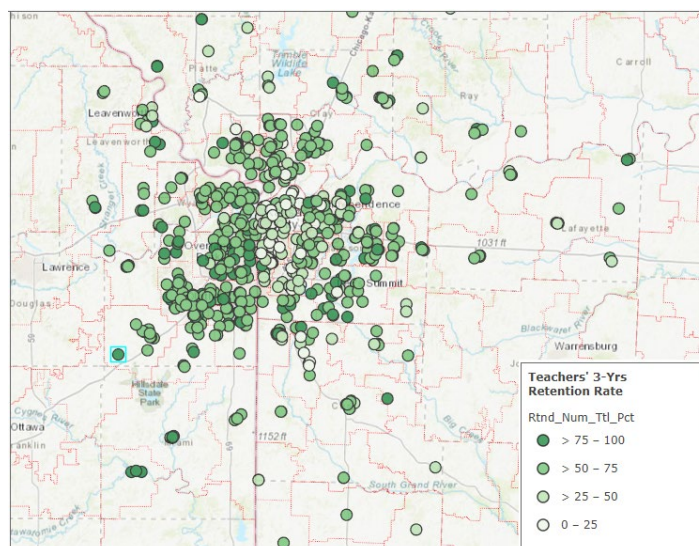
What is the Retention Rate of Teachers in Kansas City?

Researchers requested retention rates for teachers of color and were provided with overall retention rates. A follow-up data request has been submitted. The following data provides a snapshot of retention rates across the Kansas City metropolitan area.

Among all counties in the greater Kansas City metropolitan area, the three-year retention rate (3YRR) is lowest for Jackson County (interactive map link: <https://arcg.is/qG4SH>). Wyandotte County, which is similar to Jackson County in percentage of students and teachers of color, has a higher 3YRR. The retention rate in Wyandotte County is relatively high (60+% on average) and this is comparable to the rates of nearby counties such as Johnson County, which has a 70% 3YRR on average.



Chart 5. Three-year teacher retention rate for schools in the Kansas City metropolitan area



To further understand the retention rate data, the research team examined the correlations between retention rates and the demographic characteristics of students and teachers. The correlational analysis revealed a significant and negative relationship between three-year retention rates and the percentage of students of color ($r = -.43, p < .01$) and the percentage of teachers of color ($r = -.45, p < .01$). Results indicate that three-year retention rates are moderately associated with the percentage of students and teachers of color in a building. That is, schools with higher percentages of teachers and students of color have lower retention rates. Further examination of this topic, with a fuller array of teacher retention and demographic variables and a more robust set of analyses, is suggested for future studies.

What Schools Are Leading the Way in Recruiting and Retaining Teachers of Color?

To help grow a diverse teacher workforce, it is important to identify the schools in Missouri and Kansas that are attracting and retaining teachers of color. For this report, we looked at schools with a teacher retention rate of 50% or above and at least 25% students and teachers of color. In

State	School	Rate of Retention	TOC		SOC	
			#	%	#	%
MO	Conn-West Elementary	80.8%	8	30.8%	332	82.0%
MO	University Academy - Middle	52.2%	10	47.6%	255	100.0%
MO	Grandview Middle	53.5%	16	39.0%	511	83.5%
MO	Garfield Elementary	57.9%	17	35.4%	450	93.2%
MO	Center Elementary	70.4%	7	28.0%	296	90.5%
KS	McKinley Elementary	69.2%	7	26.9%	326	93.7%
KS	Welborn Elementary	57.1%	11	26.2%	428	83.1%
KS	Quindaro Elementary	69.0%	7	27.6%	372	97.6%
KS	Wm A White Elementary	69.6%	5	26.1%	248	88.9%
KS	Northwest Middle	54.7%	18	37.7%	458	96.8%



Missouri and Kansas, these schools were elementary and middle schools. The table below shows the schools leading the way in serving students of color, attracting teachers of color, and retaining teachers for at least three years.

Summary

This study provides a snapshot of teachers of color in the Kansas City metropolitan area – where they work, the demographics of their schools, and their overall three-year retention rates. The school-level data and interactive maps were developed for teachers, administrators, educational advocates, parents and policymakers to inform policy and practice.

The Kansas City metropolitan area is not unique in its struggle to recruit and retain teachers of color. Like many cities, our student population is becoming more racially/ethnically diverse but our teacher population is not. Findings from this report indicate:

- The percentage of teachers of color is not keeping pace with the growing percentage of students of color. In 2018, 39.5% of students in the Kansas City metropolitan area were students of color. Only 7.1% of our teachers were teachers of color. The percentage of Latinx teacher is particularly low with only 1% of teachers across all of the Kansas City metropolitan area.
- Teachers of color are unevenly employed across our region. One third of KC schools do not have a teacher of color in their building. Jackson and Wyandotte counties have the highest density of teachers of color. Teachers of color in suburban and rural settings experience the most isolation, on average representing 5% of the teacher population in their districts.
- Retention rates are highest in schools with a higher percentage of white teachers. The underlying reasons for this relationship are unclear and warrant further investigation.
- Kansas City has a group of schools that show considerable promise in recruiting and retaining teachers of color. A better understanding of the recruitment and retention practices might shed light on promising practices for the region.

Next Steps

To further our understanding of recruitment and retention efforts in the region, the Latinx Education Collaborative and the Urban Education Research Center will conduct additional analyses in the next year, including:

1. ***Examine trends in the recruitment/retention of teachers of color.*** Extending the work of this study, we will develop a database that will include teacher and student data for the period of 2015-2020. This database will allow us to track teacher demographic characteristics, student demographic characteristics, and teacher retention in the KC metro. Researchers will use this data to evaluate the progress regionally to increase the number of teachers of color.



2. **Conduct landscape analysis of teacher certification programs.** To understand the region's pipeline of teachers of color, we will gather data from postsecondary institutions in Kansas and Missouri. An analysis of the number and demographic characteristics of students receiving Bachelor's degrees in education will help us understand which institutions are producing significant numbers of teachers of color to fill open positions in Kansas City.
3. **Conduct focus groups with teachers of color in the region.** This study identified ten schools doing a good job attracting teachers of color and retaining their teacher workforce. The purpose of the focus groups would be to better understand teachers of color's experiences and the practices, policies, and supports in place that help them thrive as teachers. Findings would be used to identify regional best practices for recruiting and retaining teachers of color.

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