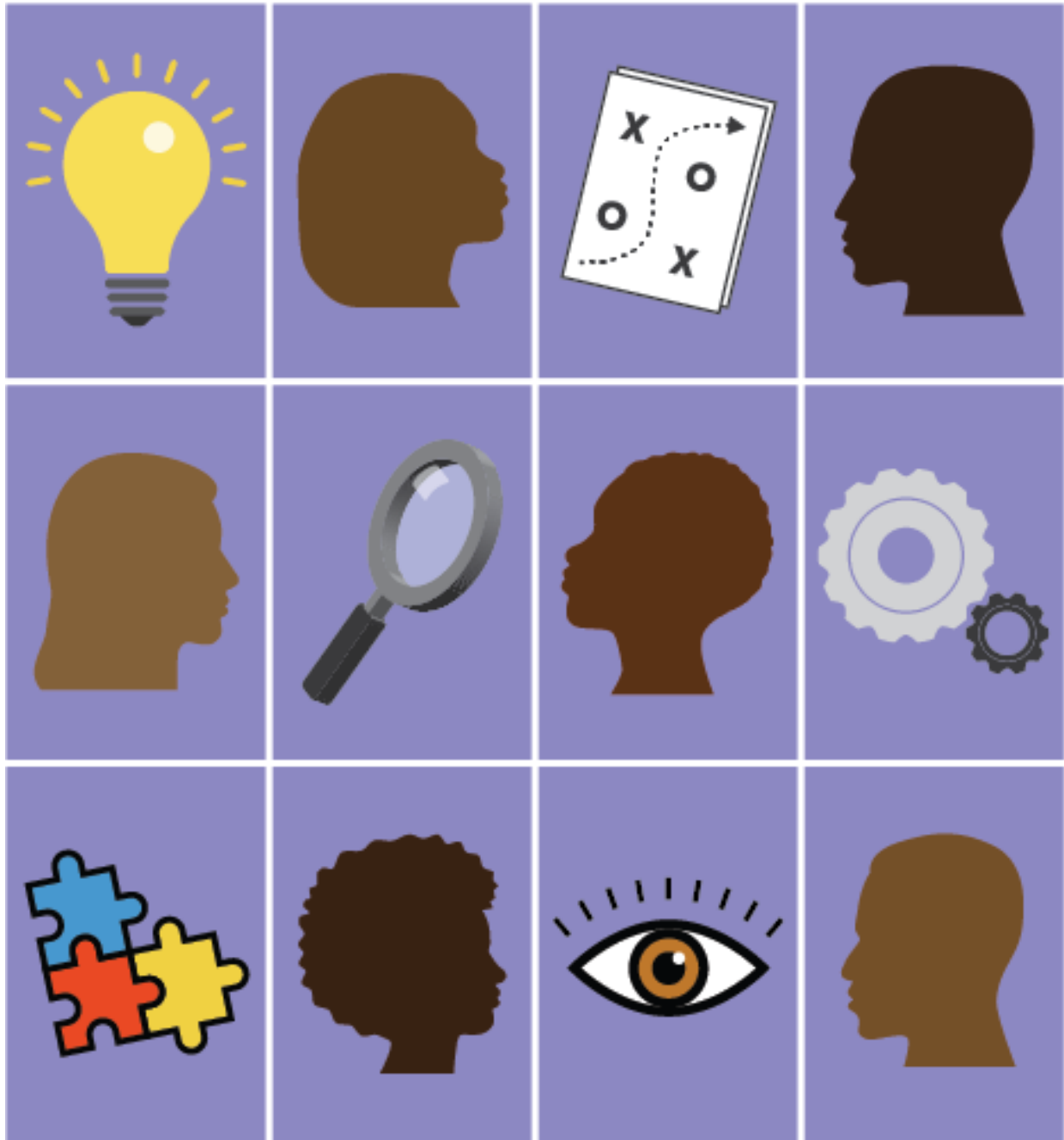


Inclusive Innovation: Increasing Recruitment and Retention of Teachers of Color

Summation of Digital Promise Design Studios with Teachers of Color
January 2021



INTRODUCTION

The lack of systemic efforts to support and increase the recruitment and retention of teachers of color (TOC) is an issue undermining the capacity of education systems in the United States to provide access to high quality equitable education. This challenge has plagued American education for generations, particularly since *Brown v. Board of Education* (1954), which mandated the desegregation of schools without protections for the more than 80,000 Black teachers and principals working in segregated schools who lost their jobs (Carter et al., 2019). Today, while approximately 20 percent of all teachers working in the U.S. identify as people of color (POC), over 50 percent of all students identify as students of color (SOC). The impact of this imbalance is felt in multiple ways across schools and districts resulting in negative impacts on SOC. The urgency to address the shortage and retention of TOC has been prompted by the increasing awareness of the inequities in education.

The COVID-19 pandemic exacerbated the systemic racism inherent in the U.S. education system as millions of low-income and children of color experienced remote learning in very different ways -- from the lack of a basic computer and Wifi to households with multiple children sharing devices to not logging on at all. On top of the racial injustice, the murders of George Floyd, Breonna Taylor and countless others whose names often go unheard have forced a reckoning to address the racial inequities in education.

To address the inequities in the teaching workforce and the importance of ensuring that all students experience learning from diverse teacher perspectives, Digital Promise launched an initiative, with the support of the Walton Family Foundation, to invite and engage teachers of color in designing solutions to the recruitment and retention issue.

INVITATION TO TEACHERS, DISTRICTS AND CHARTER SCHOOLS

We invited districts from the League of Innovative Schools and charter schools from the National Charter Collaborative to apply to participate based on their demonstrated commitment to increasing their pipeline and support for teachers of color. The districts and charters that were selected follows:

Participating Districts and Charter Schools

Avonworth School District	Colleton County School District
Princeton City School District	Hampton Township School District
Huntley Community School District 158	Legends Academy Charter School
Middletown City School District	St. Michael Archangel High School
Lexington County School District One	4C-Ferguson Early Head Start

In addition, we invited teachers of color from each participating district and charter school to join a Teacher of Color Advisory Council to lead and advise us on the work.

Teacher of Color Advisory Council

Monique Belin Chesak & Martian Elementary School Illinois	Dr. Susan Scott White Knoll High School South Carolina
Lorenzo Foster St. Michael the Archangel High School Louisiana	Patrick Thomas Colleton County High School South Carolina
Cametrice Hill Legends Academy Charter School Florida	Michael Warren Pittsburgh King Pre K-8 Pennsylvania
Kim McCullom Lincoln Heights Elementary School Ohio	Ayesha Winfrey Middletown Middle School Ohio
Ashley Pate 4C-Ferguson Early Head Start Florida	Deshanna Wisniewski Wyland Elementary Pennsylvania

THE PROJECT

Digital Promise hosted Teacher of Color Design Studios across the country in collaboration with participating school districts and charter schools. The focus of the Design Studios was to engage teachers of color in an iterative process of identifying innovative solutions to recruitment and retention challenges. Each Design Studio took place over two days, starting with the teachers identifying challenges by creating need statements and then progressing to idea generation and ending with the creation of solution concepts for future exploration. This report provides an overview of the district context, participants, and a summation of the ideas and concepts.

INCLUSIVE INNOVATION

The core focus of the Design Studio was to develop ideas and concepts to address the shortage and retention of TOC by engaging in an [Inclusive Innovation approach](#). Traditional approaches to education innovation are frequently led by people and organizations who come from outside of the community and are not directly affected by the issue being examined and addressed. Their process of problem identification, hypothesis generation and solution identification lacks the perspective of those with lived experience and is more likely to miss the mark. As a result, using traditional innovation methods, solution ideas fail to address the core issues, a situation that is particularly relevant for low-income and of-color populations.

To address this gap in the innovation process, Digital Promise created the [Center for Inclusive Innovation](#), a research and development lab that centers the lived experiences of Black, Brown and Indigenous communities in the research and design process to address core issues in education. The focus of the Center is to resource communities working in collaboration with districts and schools to co-design solutions that are contextually and culturally relevant. Additionally, Inclusive Innovation solutions are designed for eventual scale.”¹ The “power of Inclusive Innovation is that it doesn’t just invite underrepresented voices and perspectives into the innovation ecosystem; it places them at the center of it.”²

THE PARTICIPANTS

The nine school districts and charter schools participating in the project represent a diverse cross section of the school population in the United States. The districts are located in urban, suburban, and rural areas in five different states including Ohio, Illinois, Pennsylvania, Florida, and Louisiana. The diversity of the teacher workforce and student bodies in these different areas also varied considerably from each other. In 4 of the districts, the teacher workforce is at least 90 percent white. In the other districts, the teacher workforce ranges from 11 percent to 38 percent non-white.

Table I: Characteristics of the Participating Districts, by Race

District	Gaps in Representation by Race (Percent)		Level of Diversity (Percent)	
	Black & Latino (Students - Teachers)	All Non-white (Students - Teachers)	Non-white students	Non-white teachers
Huntley	12.0	21.9	27.0	5.0
East Baton Rouge*	22.0	21.0	59.0	38.0
Colleton	29.0	24.0	58.0	35.0
Lexington 1	14.0	19.0	28.0	11.0
Avonworth	1.4	5.7	10.0	4.0
Hampton Township	-0.2	4.3	7.0	7.0
Orange County	31.0	35.0	75.0	41.0
Middletown	26.4	38.2	44.4	6.5
Princeton City	59.5	65.0	80.0	15.0

Source: Data provided by individual districts. *Includes: Ascension, EBR, WBR, Iberville, Livingston, Pointe Coupee Parishes

¹ <https://digitalpromise.org/inclusive-innovation/>

² <https://digitalpromise.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/11/Designing-a-Process-for-Inclusive-Innovation.pdf>

The gap between students of color and teachers of color also varied in the districts in the study. The gap between the proportion of Black and Latino students and teachers ranged from 0 to nearly 60 percentage points. The gaps were even greater when we include all non-white students and teachers. Here the gap ranged from 4 to 65 percentage points. The districts with the lowest gaps were also those with the lowest level of diversity in their student body.

A total of **88** teachers participated in the Design Studio project. All of the teachers identified as persons of color. They represented considerable diversity in their experience, ranging from one-to-over 30 years as a teacher. They also taught different grades and topics from elementary to high school as well as early childhood, head start and other programs. See **Table I** for a summation of the participating districts and schools and population demographics.

THE METHODOLOGY

The research for the project engaged the participating teachers in six different Design Studios to identify the core issues around the pipeline and retention of teachers of color and generate solutions ideas and concepts. The Design Studio process is based on Digital Promise's Inclusive Innovation model which centers the ideation and design in individuals with lived experience -- hence, the importance of teachers of color leading the Design Studios. The Design Studios for this study were organized into three phases:

❑ Phase I: Need Statements (aka “madlibs”)

- ❑ Need statements helped teachers identify the key issues underlying the shortage and retention of Teachers of Color. The issues were addressed by the perspective of teachers who took on different personas (students, administrators and teachers).
- ❑ An example “Mad Lib”: Black teachers need a way to identify their needs and learn of leadership opportunities within their school and district.

❑ Phase II: Solution Ideas

- ❑ Teachers were invited to “stretch” their ideas to be bold and innovative. Participants then had an opportunity to select one of these personas for a deeper dive within breakout groups to identify **ideas** for solutions.
- ❑ During the second day, participants returned to present their **final ideas** for discussion and feedback.

❑ Phase III: Solution Concepts

- ❑ Teachers from the Advisory Council then created Solution Concepts from the ideas by describing the value proposition, success statement, outcomes, and benefits.

THE CHALLENGES

In our 2020 literature review, [Pipeline and Retention of Teachers of Color: Systems and Structures Impeding Growth and Sustainability in the United States](#), we outlined some of the key findings in the research that address the leaky pipeline and lack of retention of teachers of color in the United States (Digital Promise, 2020). Some of the reasons range from student preference -- students of color are reluctant to enter the teacher workforce, in part, because they prefer other, more lucrative professions, a factor that has become more relevant as students consider not only future earnings but their own student loan burdens. For those that are interested in the teaching profession, studies have found more structural barriers to entry, particularly in the certification process, which has been documented to disproportionately affect SOC. Finally, racial discrimination in hiring practices has also been cited as a major factor in the research. A study by D'Amico, et al., (2017) found that, despite having the same or better credentials than their white competitors, African American candidates were less likely to receive job offers.

The Design Studios provided an opportunity to surface additional issues that impact the recruitment of TOC that did not emerge in the original scan of the literature. One of these factors is the impact of school climate on students' decision to pursue education as a career. SOC disproportionately have negative experiences in school compared to their white classmates, particularly in relation to discipline. As a result, SOC had a potentially negative perception of the teaching profession not only in terms of the salary but also in terms of the quality of life of the career.

In addition, in predominantly white communities, districts are growing increasingly concerned about the lack of diversity in their schools and the impact of this on white and non-white students. These districts are actively seeking to diversify their teacher workforce to meet the needs of the population of SOC, as well as white students, who also benefit from the experience of diversity in the classroom. Administrators in these districts, however, lack the know-how, resources and networks to create more intentional hiring strategies to identify and recruit more TOC. Smaller, more rural and white districts have to compete with urban districts for talent as highly qualified TOC often bypass rural areas to work in larger cities with better pay and more diversity in the teacher workforce and communities.

In terms of the challenges around retention, the literature discusses factors such as pigeonholing TOC into disciplinarian roles. "African American teachers are frequently pressured to work primarily with students of the same race and often in a disciplinary or counselor role, which inhibited them from working on their planning or instruction" (Digital Promise, 2020 p.12-13). TOC also experience an "invisible tax" as they manage their own teaching responsibilities while also being called on overwhelmingly to take on additional tasks to address the needs of SOC in their schools. For many teachers this role comes with mixed feelings as they are eager to support the needs of the SOC in their schools, but also acknowledge the burden of the dependency on TOC to solve all issues.

The conversations that emerged during the Design Studios supported many of these findings from the research, while also highlighting a number of new areas, including the mental health

needs of TOC, particularly when working in predominantly white districts. TOC report experiencing racism on the job and the resulting mental toll that extends from their professional to their personal lives. TOC discussed the critical importance of districts directly addressing racism embedded in their education systems -- from conducting audits of district practices and rules to mandatory racial equity professional development. However, TOC also discussed the need for personal support to address the inevitable emotional challenges that comes from working in a racist environment. These emotional challenges need to be addressed with the same systemic-level policies as other workplace hazards by providing teachers of color with support and paid time off. TOC also can benefit from mentoring and other professional support to help them navigate the progression of their careers, whether that includes advancing into administrative roles or growing in their teaching positions. In addition, many teachers shared that such mentoring opportunities may already exist, but they were not aware of or even considered eligible for them.

THE SOLUTION IDEAS

A core focus of the Design Studios was to not just discuss the challenges, but to come up with actionable ideas to directly address the issues surrounding the recruitment and turnover of TOC.

Participants in the Design Studios were asked to brainstorm ideas that could address their need statements. The solutions were not meant to be perfect or able to be immediately implemented, but to spark a conversation about the current state of the challenges and to identify opportunities for change.

The Design Studios culminated with a national virtual convening held on December 11, 2020 where the solution concepts were presented to an audience of nearly 1,000 participants, including educators, high education professionals, non profit organizations, and administrators from participating districts. Following is a summary of the solutions that were identified during the Design Studios, organized by themes.

RECRUITMENT

To address the challenges posed by the leaky pipeline of TOC into the education system the participants came up with a number of solutions under the following recruitment themes: changing school climate and culture, developing programs to engage youth in the field of education, developing diverse hiring committees, launching more intentional hiring practices and developing grow-your-own teacher preparation programs.

- **Changing school culture to be more conducive for students of color (SOC).** One of the biggest challenges in encouraging SOC interest in teaching is to create a school culture that is more representative of their lived experience. Participants offered a host of initiatives to create inclusive environments, including crafting culturally inclusive curriculum and recognizing the achievements of people of color. As one participant teacher said:

By implementing cultural concepts into the lesson plans, teachers will show all students that they are willing to learn about all students and teach all students. This will allow students to feel like their culture matters and is celebrated.

Other initiatives include extending the focus on diversity beyond curriculum to other aspects of schools, including adapting school lunch menus to be more representative of different cuisines and cultures.

- **Innovative methods to engage students in the teaching profession.** As mentioned previously, one of the key challenges that schools and districts face is the lack of interest among students of color (SOC) to enter into the teacher workforce, due primarily to the lack of representation within their schools. As one of the participants argued, “Schools need to intentionally cultivate and nurture students of color to explore the teaching profession across different settings through peer mentorship, course credit and compensation.” To counteract this, participants identified the concept of creating programs that would provide students with an initial experience in the work of a teacher. One example is a Teacher Cadet program that would provide students with initial training and opportunities to shadow teachers during the school day.

The participants also highlighted the importance of building apprenticeship programs that provide students with opportunities to build their leadership skills through tutoring other students or participating in decision-making opportunities in the school. Participants also mentioned the importance of schools organizing real world learning opportunities including internships and jobs with community organizations and leaders. Through these experiences, students gain valuable skills from the leaders and elders of their community, many of whom they admire and look up to. Thus, even if the student chooses to not pursue teaching, they will gain exposure to work in advocacy and social justice, equipping them to work in other organizations in support of education. Finally, participants noted the critical importance of getting teacher buy-in when building student apprenticeship programs. As one participant in the Design Studios mentioned:

In order to have a successful student to teacher pipeline program, schools must have a teacher corp willing to serve in the mentor capacity. By providing a financial incentive to teachers recommended by the admin, it will encourage said teachers to participate and truly invest in interested students.

- **Diverse hiring committees.** Participants identified that one of the key weaknesses of the hiring process in K-12 education is the nature of the hiring process and the leadership involved in hiring committees. Administrators, the participants argued, “need purposeful intention and commitment to diversity and anti-racism with systemic policies and practices and empathy and an appreciation for diversity.” To address this challenge, participants came up with the idea of creating hiring committees that include the voices of TOC as core members and advisors. In addition, participants suggested that hiring committees should work with existing TOC to tap into their networks and leverage their connections and knowledge. As the face of the hiring process, TOC would have a

greater chance of attracting other TOC and would also be able to provide frank and honest perceptions about teaching in their respective districts.

- **More intentional hiring practices.** In addition to inviting a more diverse body to conduct the hiring process, it was also suggested by the participants that districts conduct more intentional hiring efforts. This includes spending more time on the road visiting HBCUs, MSIs and other higher education institutions in an effort to build more brand recognition of their district, a factor that is often lagging with smaller, more rural areas. In addition, participants suggested that districts form more partnerships with higher education institutions to create a pipeline from school to careers. This latter option would also provide opportunities for the district to offer student teaching opportunities and other ways for SOC to engage with the school and its community before they graduate from college.
- **Grow your own teacher training programs.** One of the leading reasons to create local teacher preparation programs is a recognition of the challenges that people of color face in making significant career changes. As one of the participants in the Design Studios wrote:

As people change careers for many different reasons, becoming an educator requires time and money that many adults may not have, which can deter people of color from becoming educators. States offer alternative licensing programs for superintendents and principals. The same concept should be available for teachers, as more people of color would seek employment in the field of education.

One approach that was discussed was identifying members of their existing community to pursue certification, including paraprofessionals, lower level administrators and individuals working in local community-based organizations who would be interested in working in the classroom but do not have the time or resources to go back to school. In addition, GYO programs were presented as a way to address the challenges posed by onerous certification processes. Participants suggested that a key focus of GYO programs would be to provide support for teacher trainees.

RETENTION

The solution concepts developed to address high turnover of TOC touched on a number of issues that the participating TOC currently face in their careers and jobs. These ideas included building their capacity to network with other teachers, creating safe spaces to address racism, mentoring, mental health and career pathways. Participating teachers also addressed the need to build the awareness of policymakers of the issues impacting TOC.

- **Supporting TOC efforts to develop robust networks.** TOC often encounter challenges, particularly in schools where the teachers are majority white, to build a professional network with other educators. As one of the Design Studios solutions argued:

With the lack of Teachers of Color in schools, a lot of teachers feel isolated and alone. Teachers of Color need to network with other Teachers of Color to share challenges, communicate common issues or experiences and advocate for policies and practices that support teachers of color. With a lack of connections, Teachers of Color feel alone which decreases the desire to stay in education.

In order to address this challenge, participants in the Design Studios proposed a networking platform that would enable teachers to make connections with other TOC and explore career opportunities and advancement.

- **Creating safe spaces for TOC to address concerns and generate new ideas.** One concern that participating teachers raised during the Design Studios was around the freedom to address concerns around racism in the classroom and to know that they have a safe space to do so.
- **Opportunities for policy makers to shadow teacher.** One of the biggest challenges facing school districts is the distance between policymakers and teachers and the general lack of understanding that the former has about the daily work lives of the latter. This distance affects TOC in unique ways as policymakers frequently avoid addressing difficult issues around racism and bias in schools. This “discomfort,” however, has larger implications and detrimental effects on TOC. As one participant remarked:

Many Teachers of Color’s voices are stifled and dismissed by administrators and policymakers which affects students’ and teachers’ sense of safety and acceptance in the school system. Policymakers and administrators turn a blind eye because they feel uncomfortable addressing these issues, but the result is detrimental to all individuals of Color.

A key focus of this initiative is to build more trust between TOC and administrators. As another participant said:

Policymakers and Administrators open up to experiencing first-hand the challenges of teachers of color and build trust with teachers to encourage the teachers to trust the administrators intention to elevate their voices in the district. Then the policymakers can open doors and encourage teachers of color to advance in the career opportunity.

- **Supporting TOC mental health needs.** In addition to professional support, participants overwhelmingly discussed the need to provide TOC with resources that address the emotional challenges they face in their schools. The teacher participants mentioned challenges brought on by the stress that comes with the responsibility of addressing the needs of SOC in their schools as well as the stress of working in an environment where they encounter racism and bias from colleagues, students and parents. “School Districts,” one group of participants argued, “will see less TOC turnover and/or burnout by providing resources and professional development specifically to support their self-care and mental health.”
- **Effective mentorship programs.** The key for employee retention in many professions involves a system of mentorship to ensure that new entrants to the profession are given

the right guidance and support (Vierstraete, 2005). When TOC come into a new school or district, their success can depend heavily on whether they are paired up with the right mentor:

Each year, new teachers are required to partake in some sort of new teacher orientation. Many teachers are paired with a new teacher based on the subject that is taught, sometimes based on who is available to mentor new teachers. This is challenging when a new teacher of color is paired with a veteran teacher who is not a teacher of color, as there are many things the veteran teacher may not be able to relate to when it comes to the new TOC experiences.

- **Creating diverse career pathway opportunities for TOC.** Many teachers hope their career pathway trajectory eventually result in roles in administration as principals. However, many teachers are interested in staying in the classroom, advancing their careers in their instructional roles, as lead teachers or in hybrid positions, taking on more leadership roles while remaining in the classroom. For some of these teachers, there is a concern that moving into an administrative position will result in one less TOC in a school and therefore one less opportunity to work with SOC.

THE SHOWCASE

National Teachers Of Color Showcase: Reimagining Recruitment And Retention

After the Design Studios, the solution concepts developed by the Advisory Leads were presented at a forum for educators, policymakers, activists and others concerned about the pipeline and retention of teachers of color. The event, the **National Teachers of Color Showcase: Reimagining Recruitment and Retention**, was attended by 1000 participants from a broad spectrum of districts, including superintendents from the districts participating in the Design Studios, non-and-for-profit organizations, higher education representatives and state and local policymakers.

Collaborating host partners included:

- The Council of Chief State School Officers
- The Center for Black Educator Development
- The State Higher Education Executive Officers
- UNIDOS US

The focus of the event was to:

- Learn about concepts developed in Design Studios across the country led by the Teacher of Color Advisory Council;
- Hear directly from teachers of color on what it will take to create a robust teacher talent pipeline and sustain a supportive, anti-racist school culture;

- Learn about Black, Brown, Indigenous-led organizations who are working with districts and schools on recruitment and retention;
- Leave with real connections, ideas, and ways to move the work forward.

The teacher of color advisory council presented fourteen solution ideas to address recruitment and retention. The ideas were captured in solution concept boards such as the one below:




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Host Region

Design studios were held in Orlando, FL

Teacher Population

White	59%
Black	18%
Hispanic	18%
Asian/Pac Islander	2%
Native American/Alaskan Native	0%

Student Population

White	25%
Black	24%
Hispanic	43%
Asian/Pac Islander	5%
Native American/Alaskan Native	3%

Focused Mental Health Supports

The Challenge

Lack of recognition that being a teacher of color creates unique types of stressors and levels of stress

The Solution

- **Acknowledge that the impact of stressors such as racism** that can arise from peers, students, parents, and others is harmful
- Collaborate with other local districts to **provide comprehensive support resources (e.g. counseling)** specifically to help teachers of color by supporting their self-care and mental health
- Provide **professional development opportunities designed** for teachers of color to reduce turnover and/or burnout
- Establish a district-wide teachers of color **self-care support system and collaborative that engages weekly or monthly**

Proposed Outcomes

- Superintendents work collaboratively with teachers of color in a region to define, invest in, and provide shared mental health resources designed for teachers of color
- Teachers of color engage in a support system and encouragement to teachers of color across a district, city, county, or region

Teacher Council Leads

Cametrice Hill
Teacher
Legends Academy Charter School

Ashley Pate
Teacher
4C-Ferguson Early Head Start

In addition to the teacher presentations, fifteen organizations led by Black, Brown and Indigenous leaders were showcased to include:

Partner Organizations Participating in the Showcase

Capitol Region Education Council (CREC)	Latinos for Education	Special Education Leadership Fellowship (SELF)	The Teachers Lounge
Center for Black Educator Development	Latinx Education Collaborative	Teach Western Mass	Profound Gentlemen
Equity Institute	National Indian Education Association	Teach Chicago Tomorrow	He is Me Institute
Future Leaders Incubator (FLI)	NYC Men Teach	Technology Access Foundation	Branch Alliance for Educator Diversity

CONCLUSIONS

The urgency to diversify the American teacher workforce is critical to advancing American education. The situation is particularly pressing for SOC, who make up more than 52 percent of the nation's school children. Thus

While white students also benefit by learning from teachers of color, the impact is especially significant for students of color, who have higher test scores, are more likely to graduate high school, and more likely to succeed in college when they have had teachers of color who serve as role models and support their attachment to school and learning. Students with racially diverse teachers also have fewer unexcused absences and are less likely to be chronically absent (Darling-Hammond, 2018).

The research has further elicited a number of factors contributing to both the lack of recruitment of TOC as well as their high turnover rates, ranging from racist hiring practices to difficult working conditions that tax TOC with extra work, emotional stress and barriers to career advancement. These challenges are evident across the country, in large urban areas, suburbs and small towns.

Using an Inclusive Innovation approach, the Design Studios engaged TOC in a process to generate powerful, meaningful and actionable concepts to increase recruitment and reduce the turnover of TOC. The ideas that emerged targeted pipeline and retention issues, from a multidimensional perspective, examining different solutions designed to engage students, teachers, administrators and policymakers to result in greater impact. For example, a solution like a teacher cadet program for students will not only increase student interest in education as a career, but provide them with opportunities to develop leadership and other competencies that are critical for future success. Similarly, grow-your-own teacher training programs provide a way to build an educator pipeline and create opportunities for career changes.

The next step in the effort to increase recruitment and retention of TOC involves three key steps:

- **Collaboration:** Effecting change in the teacher workforce will require a strategy that engages multiple stakeholders, from teachers unions to district leaders to community based organizations. The challenges facing the recruitment and retention of TOC are interrelated and long term success will require partnerships that build on mutual trust.
- **Accountability:** For the solutions to stick, there has to be a process for monitoring and measuring success. Too often in education, great ideas fall by the wayside if they lack the oversight and attention by school leaders, policymakers and others. For this reason, we need clear processes and metrics that will guide and assess the implementation of innovative solutions.
- **Bold Steps:** Inclusive Innovation recognizes that the most powerful solutions come by sourcing ideas with those who have lived experiences. In this way, the Inclusive Innovation approach is not just an effective effort to address the recruitment and retention of TOC, but a model for social and education innovation moving forward.

Digital Promise will engage teachers of color and districts in the design and implementation of solutions and will share our learnings and outcomes in a future report.

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