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The Collection and Availability of Teacher Diversity Data: A Survey of 51 State Education Agencies

Abstract

Despite increasing attention being focused on the importance of teacher diversity in recent years, the federal government does not centrally collect district- or school-level data on teacher race and ethnicity. This means that responsibility for the collection and promulgation of teacher diversity data falls to individual states and/or districts. Based on our survey of state education agencies in 50 states and the District of Columbia, conducted in late 2017, we provide a comprehensive summary of whether these data are collected by states, and whether and how they are made available to the public. We find that six states—Alabama, Delaware, Maine, Vermont, Virginia and West Virginia—do not collect any district- or school-level data on teacher race and ethnicity. Two states, Nevada and North Carolina, collect only district-level data. In addition, of the 43 states that do collect school-level data, 38 make these data reasonably available to the public, and only 17 do so on their websites. In other words, roughly 1 in 4 states either does not collect or does not make public school-level teacher diversity data, and only about 1 in 3 makes these detailed data available without a request. We conclude with recommendations that all states collect school-level data on teacher race and ethnicity and post the data on their websites. We also recommend that the U.S. Department of Education begin centralized collection of these data as part of its Civil Rights Data Collection.

Introduction

In recent years, the issue of teacher race and ethnicity has received a great deal of attention in both the education policy and research arenas. This is partially because of research showing that teacher race and ethnicity, specifically the “match” between teachers and students, can be a positive factor in students’ academic performance (Dee, 2004; Hanushek et al., 2005), as well as in other outcomes, such as discipline (Lindsay and Hart, 2017) and teacher expectations (Dee, 2005; Gershenson et al., 2016).

Another reason for the increased attention is the somewhat concerning comparison of national teacher and student race and ethnicity distributions. Specifically, over the past 25 years, the share of students of color in public schools has roughly doubled, from 27 percent in 1987-88 to about 44 percent in 2011-12. Yet the representation of teachers of color in the workforce remains comparatively low, at around 17 percent in 2011-12, with this figure increasing only about five percentage points in the preceding two and a half decades (Albert Shanker Institute, 2015).

In short, teachers of color are underrepresented in the national teacher workforce, relative to the U.S. student population, and the gap is growing.

Available research indicates that these trends in the teacher race and ethnicity distribution are not attributable to a failure to recruit more teachers of color, but rather to retain them (Ingersoll and May, 2011). In fact, since the late 1980s, there has been a substantial increase in the number of teachers of color recruited into teaching, but these teachers also leave at higher rates than their white counterparts, mostly because teachers of color tend to teach in higher-poverty neighborhoods, where turnover is higher for all teachers. This has attenuated the increase in the minority share of the teacher workforce.

Regardless of the causes, there is general agreement that schools and districts need to recruit and retain more teachers of color. The availability of high-quality data on teacher race and ethnicity is crucial for targeting and monitoring the progress of these efforts. National and state-level estimates are available every four years via the federal Schools and Staffing Survey, but these data are insufficient.

Teacher race and ethnicity distributions, and trends in these distributions, vary widely by district and, of course, by school (Albert Shanker Institute, 2015). There is also some evidence that teachers are segregated by race and ethnicity between schools within the same district (Wysienska-Di Carlo et al., 2016).

State-level distributions, while useful, can mask interdistrict (and intradistrict) variation, as well as hinder efforts to pinpoint areas in which teacher diversity is lacking. In addition, if the teachers of color in a given state are disproportionately concentrated in a handful of districts, and/or if they are concentrated within certain schools within that handful of districts, this can have a rather dramatic influence on teacher/student race and ethnicity matches.

Properly measuring the state of teacher diversity, and trends over time, therefore requires more disaggregate data—i.e., at least district-level, and preferably school-level, estimates.

The U.S. Department of Education does not mandate that states collect teacher race and ethnicity data, nor are available data collected and made public in the department’s Civil Rights Data Collection. This means that responsibility for the collection and promulgation of these data is in the hands of individual states.

Throughout the second half of 2017, we conducted a state-by-state survey of the availability of data on teacher race and ethnicity (including those for charter schools). The purpose of this research brief is to share our findings.

Methods

The Survey

The first step of our survey was a search of the state education agency (SEA) websites of all 50 states (plus the District of Columbia). These searches were conducted in August and September 2017. We were looking specifically for district- and/or school-level teacher race and ethnicity distributions—that is, school-by-school (or at least district-by-district) counts or percentages of teachers by race and ethnicity.

Those SEAs that did not provide these data on their websites (or those on which we were unable to find data) were then sent a brief survey by email:

1. Do you provide data on your website on the breakdown of teachers by race and ethnicity, by school (and/or district)?
2. *If so*, can you please provide a URL for the webpage from which the data can be downloaded? *If not*, are these data available internally (i.e., the data are collected but not made public)?

This survey was first sent in late September 2017 to multiple email addresses at each SEA, usually the general inquiry address and that of the staff member responsible for fielding data inquiries. If no response was received, we sent out two additional sets of emails, the first in mid-October 2017, and the second in late October.

If we still received no response, we contacted SEAs via telephone throughout November 2017. Our final request to non-responders was a certified-mail letter, sent in late November, which informed SEAs that they could either complete the survey by the middle of January 2018, or the report would be published indicating that their state was unresponsive.

Eventually, we received definitive responses from all 50 states and the District of Columbia. In each case, we checked the data to ensure that they did not contain an inordinate number of schools (or districts) with missing race and ethnicity distributions in either the charter or regular public school sectors. We did not find any state in which the number of schools or districts with missing distributions was meaningfully high, at least among those states that provided the data.

Results

The full table of results, with state-by-state information, is available in the Appendix. We will summarize these results in terms of two dimensions: collection and public availability.

Collection

Table 1 presents the breakdown of states in terms of whether they collect teacher race and ethnicity data, and, if so, the level of data they collect (i.e., school- or district-level).

Out of 51 responding states (50 states plus Washington, D.C.), *six states reported that they collect neither school- nor district-level data on teacher race and ethnicity*. These states are: Alabama, Delaware, Maine, Vermont, Virginia and West Virginia.

TABLE 1 Data Collection <i>Number of states that collect teacher race and ethnicity data, and level of data collected</i>		
	Freq.	Percent
States that do <i>not</i> collect school/district-level teacher race and ethnicity data	6	11.8
States that collect teacher race and ethnicity data	45	88.2
<i>School- and district-level data collected</i>	43	84.3
<i>Only district-level data collected</i>	2	3.9

This means that there are currently six states in which there is no centralized means of monitoring annual teacher race and ethnicity data even at the aggregate district level. Two of these states (Delaware and Maine) reported that they had collected these data at some point in the past, but no longer do so.

As also indicated in Table 1, there are two states (Nevada and North Carolina) that do in fact collect teacher race and ethnicity data, but only at the district level. In other words, state officials can measure levels and trends in teacher race and ethnicity distributions for entire districts but not the schools constituting those districts. This is a particular concern in larger districts comprising many schools.

Public availability

We characterize the public availability of states' data on teacher race and ethnicity in Table 2. Note that our coding of availability does not account for the possibility that researchers affiliated with universities or other large organizations might be able to make a formal request for the data by special arrangement with the state (e.g., with approval and oversight from an institutional review board that ensures confidentiality and ethical use). Our standard was whether a member of the public had reasonably easy access to the data (even if there was a processing fee).

<p>TABLE 2</p> <p>Data Availability</p> <p><i>Number of states that make teacher race and ethnicity data available to the public, and whether they charge for access, by level of aggregation</i></p>				
	School-level		District-level	
	Freq.	Percent	Freq.	Percent
States that do <i>not</i> collect data	8	15.7	6	11.8
States that collect but do <i>not</i> make data available to the public	5	9.8	4	7.8
States that make data available to the public	38	74.5	41	80.4
<i>Available on website</i>	17	33.3	21	41.2
<i>Available by request, no charge</i>	18	35.3	19	37.3
<i>Available by request, for a fee</i>	3	5.9	1	2.0

The results in Table 2 include all 50 states plus the District of Columbia; the number of states listed as not collecting any school- or district-level data (the top row of the table) includes the six states that collect no data at all. Thus, as first shown in Table 1, among the 45 states that collect teacher race and ethnicity data (44 states plus D.C.), there are two (Nevada and North Carolina) that collect district- but not school-level data.

There are five states (Colorado, Hawaii, Rhode Island, Tennessee and Utah) that collect school-level data but do not make them available to the public (Colorado collects both school- and district-level data but does not make the former available). This means that 10 states do not provide the public with any information at all about teacher race and ethnicity below the state level, and 13 states in which school-level data are either not collected or not available.

Further, among the 38 states that do provide school-level data to the public, fewer than half (17) do so on their websites. The remaining 21 states require that one request the data, and three of these states (Kansas, Mississippi and South Dakota) charge a small processing fee (between \$60 and \$120). The situation is only slightly better for those seeking district-level data—21 of the 41 states that make these data public do so on their websites, but there are still 20 states that require a request for data even at this more aggregate level (all but one of which, of course, maintains the same requirement for school-level data).

To reiterate, most of these requests were filled in a relatively timely fashion and at no cost, but there were a few exceptions. For example, it took Alabama more than four months, despite almost two dozen email and phone communications, to inform us that the state does not collect the data. Yet, regardless of the speed at which the requests are filled, they represent an additional obstacle to obtaining this public information.

Summary of results

Teacher diversity is a prominent topic in today's education policy debate, and rightfully so. There is compelling evidence to suggest that it plays a role in meaningful outcomes such as student learning and teacher effectiveness. In addition, the racial and ethnic diversity of the public school student population is increasing more quickly than that of the teachers who serve them.

The availability of data on teacher race and ethnicity is, of course, absolutely necessary for understanding and addressing this problem, but national and statewide data tell us only so much. Attempts to improve teacher diversity via policy need to be targeted, and their effects monitored, at the district level or, preferably, at the school level. The data not only need to be collected centrally by states, but they should also be made available to parents, policymakers, researchers and other stakeholders.

We have compiled what is, to our knowledge, the first state-by-state (50 states plus D.C.) survey of teacher race and ethnicity data availability. On the surface, our results are encouraging. Out of the 51 entities, 45 do collect at least district-level data, with all but two of the 45 collecting these data for individual schools. In other words, the vast majority of states collect detailed data on teacher race and ethnicity.

On the other hand, that leaves *six states in which there is simply no centralized collection of teacher diversity data beyond the highly aggregate statewide level*. Teachers are hired and retained by districts and schools, not by states. Statewide data could mask substantial variation in teacher diversity within and among districts. And, without detailed data, it becomes extremely difficult, perhaps even impossible, to check if different districts' and schools' policies are more or less effective in improving diversity.

In addition, the situation is even less encouraging when viewed in terms of public availability. Of the 45 states that collect at least district-level data on teacher race and ethnicity, four do not make any of the data available to the public. That means that roughly 1 in 5 U.S. states either does not collect any teacher diversity data or does not make it publicly available. And, if you are seeking school-level data, there are another three states in which this information is not available (i.e., those that collect or share district- but not school-level data). That is approximately 1 in 4 states overall.

Finally, even among those 41 states that collect and make available at least district-level data, only 21 do so on their websites. Even worse, only 17 of the 38 states that collect the more detailed school-by-school data post this information on their websites. In other words, at best, about 2 in 5 U.S. states make at least district-level data available without a request, while individuals who want more disaggregate school-level figures will only find the data online in 17 states.

Policy Recommendations

Our results suggest four primary policy implications.

States that do not collect school-level teacher race and ethnicity data should begin doing so immediately. Given the sheer volume of data that are collected from schools every single year, there is no excuse for omitting teacher race and ethnicity, given its importance and the public attention it receives. The six states that do not collect even district-level data should begin planning to do so as soon as possible. Further, those states that collect only district-level data should transition to gathering school-level data, which, given how district-level data are collected (i.e., school by school), should not encounter insurmountable obstacles.

All states should make data on teacher race and ethnicity available on their websites. Parents, community members, researchers and other interested parties should have the easiest possible access to this information. Several of the 16 states that required data requests took quite some time to fill those requests, and three charged a small fee for the data. But even when the requests were filled relatively quickly and free of charge, the need to request the information places a burden on stakeholders seeking these data. State education agency websites are loaded with data on teachers, students and schools. If data on teacher race and ethnicity are collected, they should be available on SEA websites.

The U.S. Education Department should collect and report teacher race and ethnicity data as part of its Civil Rights Data Collection. The purpose of the Civil Rights Data Collection is to provide data relevant to providing equal educational opportunity to students. The collection currently includes data on teachers' certification/licensure, experience and salary. But it does not include teacher race and ethnicity. This must change. The research suggests that teacher race and ethnicity affect student outcomes, and this information therefore belongs among other teacher variables, such as experience, that can be used to gauge equal educational opportunity. Central, nationwide collection and promulgation of these data is the best way to ensure comprehensive availability to the public.

States should use data on teacher race and ethnicity to improve teacher diversity. The purpose of collecting these data should not be simply to monitor teacher diversity, but to improve it as well. This might include, for example, incorporating teacher diversity as one measure in the school "report cards" that most states now publish for the public. In addition, superintendents and principals can be held accountable for failing to improve the diversity of their teacher workforces, particularly in districts where teachers of color are underrepresented vis-à-vis the population. This is a problem that is unlikely to solve itself. Collecting the data is a necessary but insufficient step toward success in these efforts. The data should be used as well.

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Appendix

Collection and availability of teacher race and ethnicity data, by state

State	Any data collected	Any data publicly available	School-level data			District-level data			Request free/fee
			Data collected	Publicly available	Available online	Data collected	Publicly available	Available online	
Alabama	No	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
Alaska	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	No	Free
Arizona	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	n/a
Arkansas	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	n/a
California	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	n/a
Colorado ¹	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	n/a	Yes	Yes	Yes	Free
Connecticut	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	n/a
D.C.	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	No	Free
Delaware ²	No	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
Florida	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	n/a
Georgia	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	n/a
Hawaii	Yes	No	Yes	No	n/a	Yes	No	n/a	n/a
Idaho	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	No	Free
Illinois	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	n/a
Indiana	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	No	Free
Iowa	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	No	Free
Kansas	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	No	Fee
Kentucky	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	n/a
Louisiana	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	No	Free
Maine ³	No	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
Maryland	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	No	Free
Massachusetts	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	n/a
Michigan	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	n/a
Minnesota	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	n/a
Mississippi	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	No	Fee
Missouri	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	No	Free
Montana	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	No	Free
Nebraska	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	No	Free
Nevada ⁴	Yes	Yes	No	n/a	n/a	Yes	Yes	No	Free
New Hampshire	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	No	Free
New Jersey	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	n/a
New Mexico	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	No	Free
New York	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	No	Free
North Carolina	Yes	Yes	No	n/a	n/a	Yes	Yes	Yes	n/a
North Dakota	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	No	Free
Ohio	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	n/a
Oklahoma	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	n/a
Oregon	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Free
Pennsylvania	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	n/a
Rhode Island	Yes	No	Yes	No	n/a	Yes	No	n/a	n/a
South Carolina	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Free
South Dakota ⁵	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	No	Fee
Tennessee ⁶	Yes	No	Yes	No	n/a	Yes	No	n/a	n/a
Texas	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	n/a
Utah ⁷	Yes	No	Yes	No	n/a	Yes	No	n/a	n/a
Vermont	No	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
Virginia	No	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
Washington	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	No	Free
West Virginia	No	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
Wisconsin	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	n/a
Wyoming	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	No	Free

Notes: Values of "n/a" indicate that the answer to the question is not applicable due to answers to the left (e.g., question of whether data are available publicly is not applicable if data are not collected). See report text for more information on collection and coding of data presented in this table.

¹ State reports that they do collect school-level data but will not make it available to the public without suppressing frequencies for many schools.

² State reports that data have not been collected since 2012.

³ State reports that data were collected in the past but collection ceased.

⁴ State officials note that they cannot guarantee integrity of district-level data.

⁵ State does collect school-level data but will not make it available to the public without suppressing frequencies less than 10.00 FTE.

⁶ State reports that data not currently made public, but they are undergoing a review process, after which public availability is planned.

⁷ State does collect data but reporting is not mandatory and so data are too incomplete to be useful.

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