

A row of colorful, stylized human figures of various ethnicities and ages, holding hands in a line. The figures are rendered in a simple, flat style with different colors for their bodies and clothing. The background is a light teal color.

HIGH-QUALITY TEACHING

In classrooms in which deeper learning is the goal, meaningful academic content is paired with engaging, experiential, and collaborative learning experiences. Such teaching requires a much more extensive repertoire of skills and practices than teaching for superficial coverage of content. In addition, teaching complex skills to students with diverse learning needs requires well-informed judgments about what and how different students are learning, how gaps in their understanding can be addressed, what experiences will allow them to connect what they know to what they need to know, and what instructional adaptations will be needed to ensure that they can reach common goals.

These sophisticated pedagogies are typically the product of high-quality teacher preparation rooted in knowledge about child development and learning as they unfold in cultural contexts. But teachers who have been prepared to teach in these ways — demonstrated by [Ted Pollen at Midtown West](#) — are both scarce and inequitably distributed, limiting these kinds of deeper learning experiences largely to students in affluent communities that can pay higher salaries while providing smaller classes and better working conditions. Indeed, the ability of under-resourced schools to attract and retain teachers like Ted has relied, in substantial part, on civil rights litigation over a number of years.

Competent Educators

Across the country, in nearly every state, teachers in schools serving large concentrations of students of color and students from low-income families are typically less qualified, and in times of recurring teacher shortages, large numbers of individuals are allowed to enter these schools on emergency permits without the necessary training to provide quality instruction. Data from the most recent Civil Rights Data Collection show that schools serving the largest number of students of color employ four times as many uncertified teachers and nearly twice as many inexperienced teachers as those serving the fewest. These data are used to inform both federal investigations of equitable access and state actions.

In addition, the “comparability” provisions of the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) are aimed at ensuring that students from low-income families are not taught by more inexperienced, out-of-field, or ineffective teachers than those in more affluent schools within the same district. ESSA also requires each state to develop an Equity Plan explaining how it will create more equitable access to teachers who are fully prepared and credentialed. However, these provisions are rarely

enforced, and more leverage is needed to ensure that all students experience teachers who are prepared to teach equitably and effectively.

Culturally Responsive Instruction

To create equity within schools, even when they have been adequately resourced, students of color must be treated with the respect and care that support positive whole-child development. Even with a Supreme Court mandate, desegregation has not been without costs. As Khiara Bridges notes:

“For Black children, desegregation meant being plucked out of all-Black environments that, while underfunded relative to their counterparts, were supportive and nurturing. Instead of learning in friendly and warm Black schools, Black children were being placed into unfriendly and unwelcoming White spaces [and] when Black students were sent to White schools, the predominantly Black schools that they previously had attended usually were closed. Black teachers, administrators, and principals — folks who had dedicated their lives to educating black children — lost their jobs and their livelihoods.”

The imbalance created by losing so many Black educators supporting Black students in safe spaces has often undermined learning for children who need culturally sustaining experiences. In today’s context, efforts to improve schools that students of color attend must include the equalization of resources, the humanization of the school environment, and a robustly culturally competent and sustaining teacher workforce.

When students can engage in culturally relevant learning that allows them to critically examine their experiences and cultural histories, meaningful benefits accrue. Studies in California have found significant academic gains for White, Black, Latinx, and Asian students taking ethnic studies courses, including large gains in attendance, grades, credits earned, graduation rates, and college enrollment. A study of participation in Mexican American studies courses in Arizona found similarly positive outcomes for achievement and graduation.

Stable Workforce

The ability to develop teachers like Ted Pollen also depends on high-quality and affordable preparation programs that enable teachers to learn the sophisticated skills of teaching challenging content to students who learn in different ways and come from different contexts.

In high-performing countries like Finland and Singapore, a coherent set of policies supporting teacher recruitment, preparation, compensation, and ongoing development creates an infrastructure that enables teaching in support of deeper learning and equity to become the norm.

Most now provide high-quality, graduate-level teacher education designed to ensure that teachers can effectively educate all of their students. Preparation is free for entrants, often with a salary or living stipend, and includes a year of practice teaching in a clinical school connected to

the university, much like a teaching hospital. Schools are designed and funded to provide coaching and joint planning time for beginners as well as veterans. Salaries are competitive with other professions and are higher in hard-to-staff locations. Similar policies are needed in the United States, where progress could be modeled on the federal government's long-standing support in medicine, which includes subsidies for medical training to fill shortages and to build teaching hospitals and training programs in high- need areas.