

WINTER 2024

DATA STORIES:

TEACHER DIVERSITY IN MASSACHUSETTS



INTRODUCTION

What's the significance behind teacher diversity?

State and nationwide studies overwhelmingly affirm the association between educator diversity and metrics such as test scores, dropout rates, gifted program representation, and student-teacher communication for students of color.¹ According to these studies, both staff actions and student reactions help account for these positive impacts.

BIPOC staff may have either heightened awareness of the need to advocate for BIPOC students or less implicit bias about students' abilities, leading them to recommend students of color for gifted programs at higher rates² and make a greater effort (consciously or unconsciously) to reach out to students of color and support their inclusion within schools and classrooms.^{3,4} Meanwhile, BIPOC students are more likely to view BIPOC staff as role models. This increased ability to project themselves into their teachers' shoes in turn raises their motivation and personal expectations while lowering stereotype threats.⁵

DESCRIPTIVE OVERVIEW

What does the data say about educator diversity in Massachusetts?

Over the last few years, the proportion of students of color in the Commonwealth has risen from roughly 41% to 45%. While staff of color have followed a similar upward trajectory, the gap between the proportion of racially/ethnically diverse students and staff has persisted; statewide, there have consistently been four times as many students of color as staff of color.

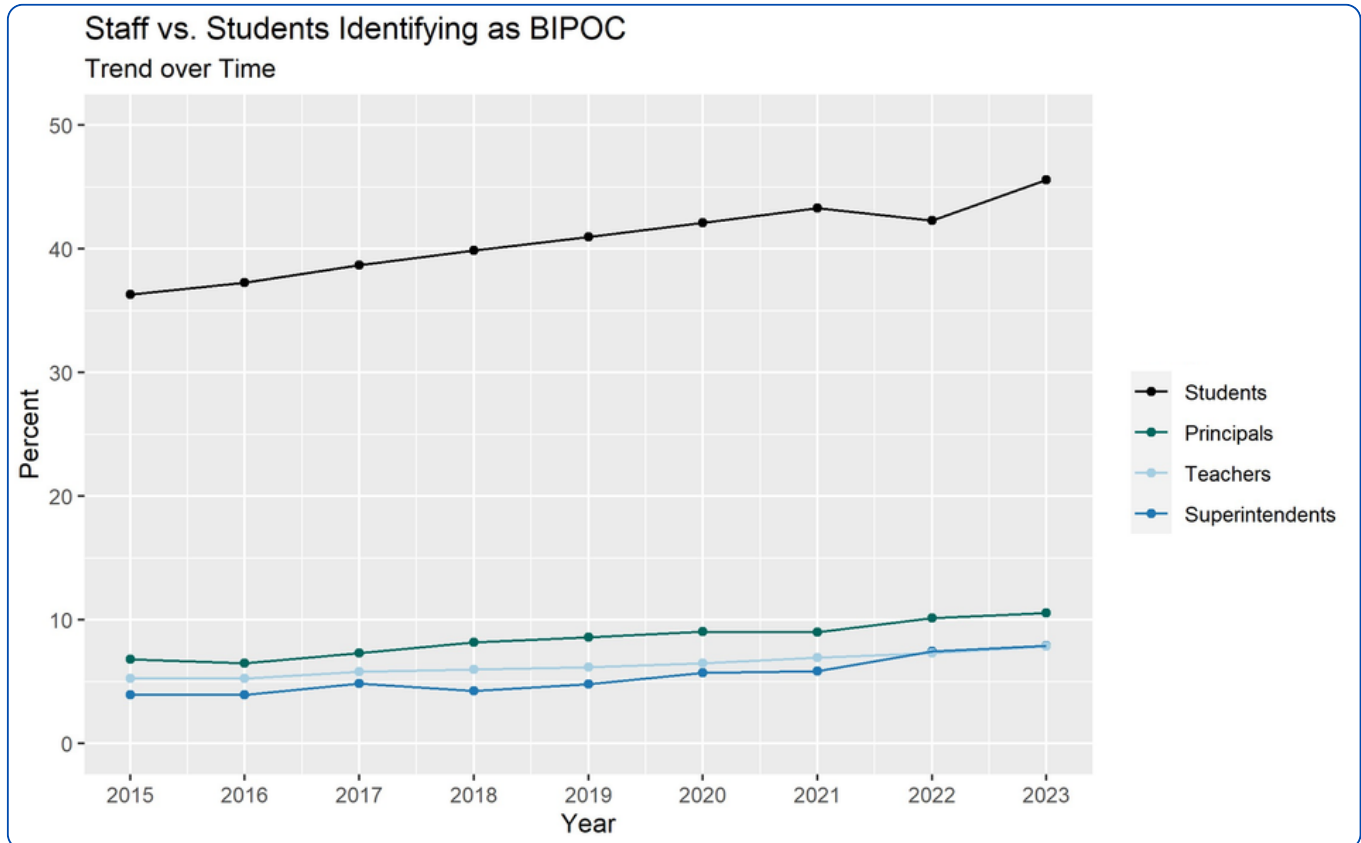


Figure 1: Univariate time series representation of the percentage of racially/ethnically diverse educators in Massachusetts from 2015 to 2023, compared to the reference points set by students.

To zoom in on the most recent school year for which there is data (2022-23), nearly half (884 out of 1832, or 48%) of schools in Massachusetts had less than 1% of staff identifying as African-American, and nearly one-third (518 out of 1832, or 28%) had less than 1% of staff identifying as Hispanic.⁶

Of course, districts also have widely varying percentages of students of color. While it is valuable for all districts—including those with a predominantly white student population—to seek a diverse workforce,^{7,8} from an equity perspective it is also interesting to compare the proportion of staff of color within a given district against the proportion of students of color in that same district.

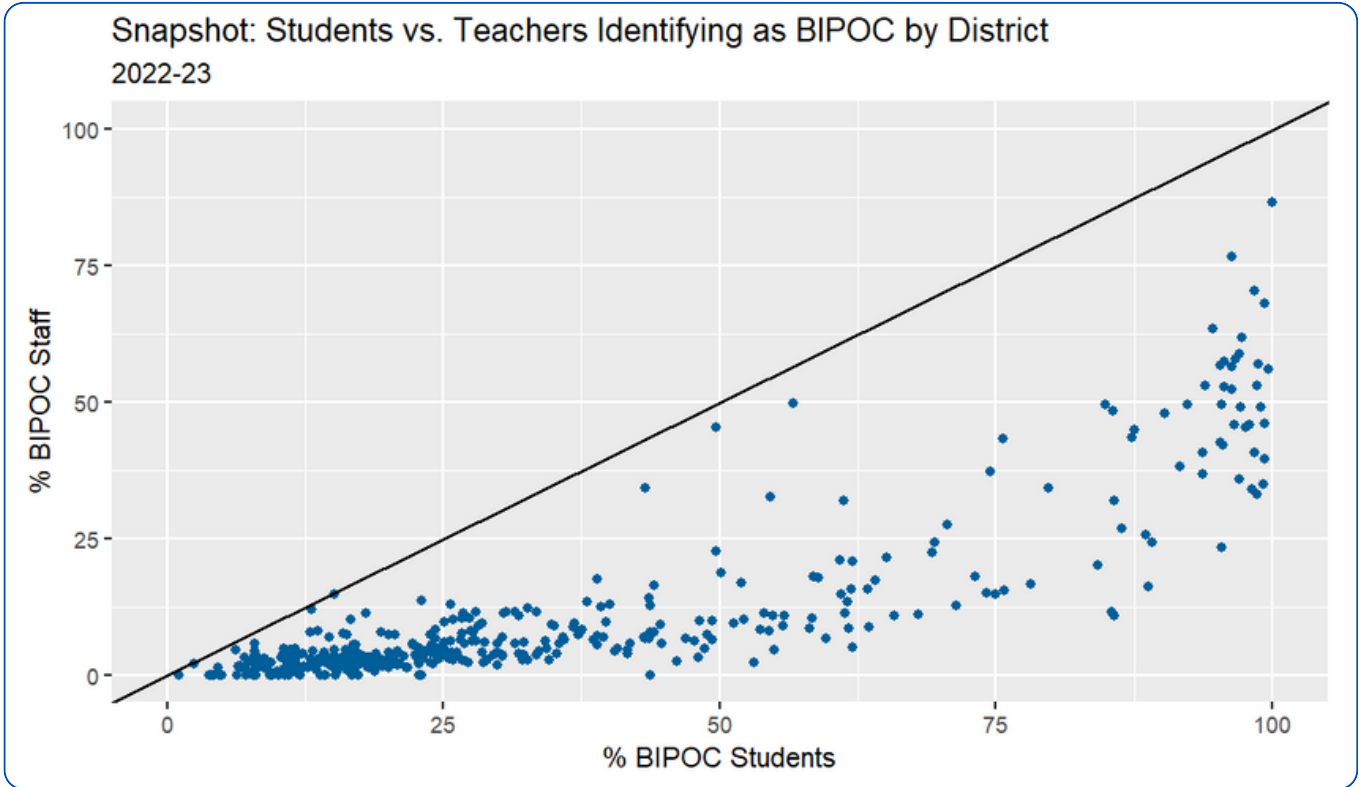


Figure 2: Bivariate comparisons (correlation between two variables) at the district level. Each district is a point on the graph.

Figure 2 presents a scatter plot comparing the proportion of BIPOC students in a given district (x-axis) to the proportion of BIPOC staff (y-axis) for all Massachusetts communities. Each dot on the graph represents a school district in Massachusetts, and the diagonal line identifies where students and staff would be equally represented. One critical observation is that all data points fall below the diagonal line, indicating that BIPOC teachers are underrepresented in all Massachusetts districts compared to the students who are served. However, some districts fall closer to the line than others.

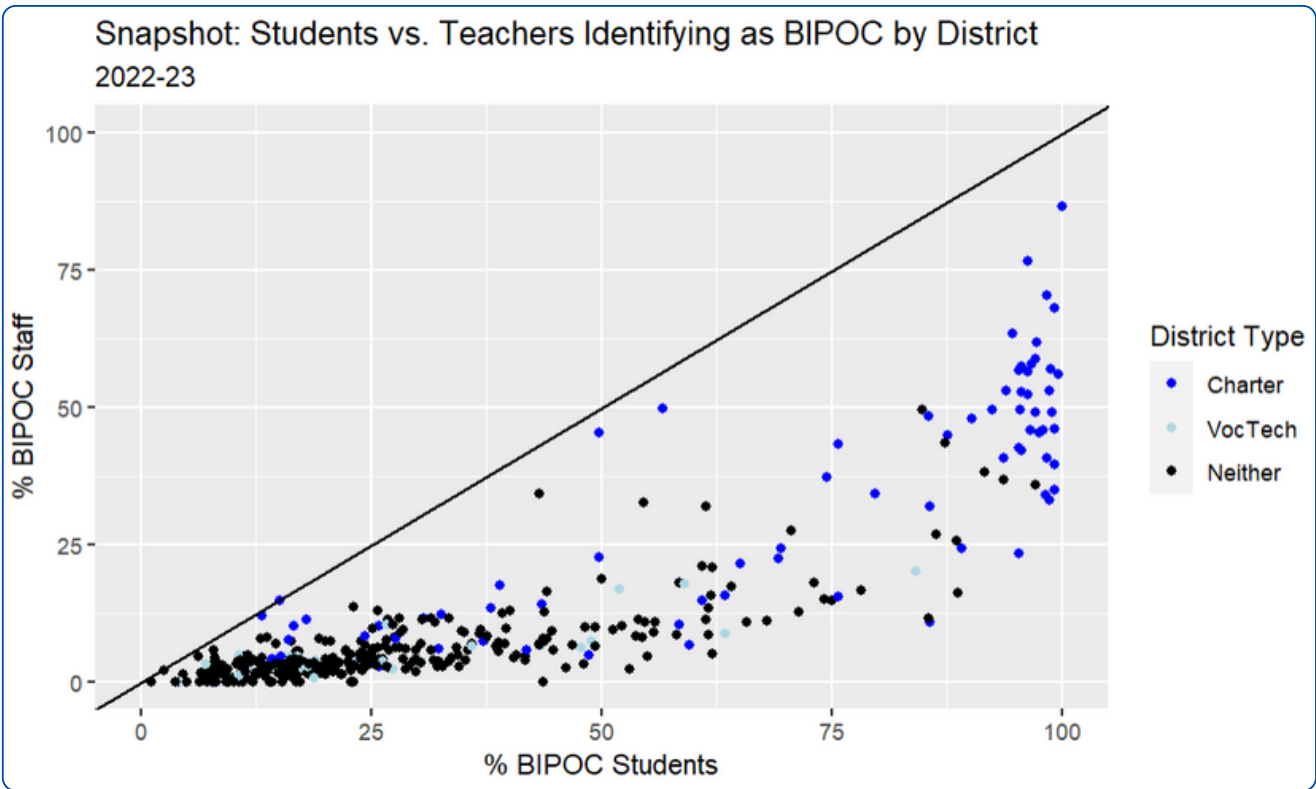


Figure 3: Bivariate comparisons (correlation between two variables) at the district level, presented by district type (charter, vocational-technical, and those that are neither). Each district is a point on the graph.

As seen from Figure 3 and Table 1 (above and below), charter school districts tend to fall closer to the diagonal line than other types of districts. However, when interpreting both, it is crucial to keep in mind that some of the districts appear close to the line because they have small sample sizes (i.e., a low number of FTEs, leading to high fluctuations in the percentage of BIPOC staff) and/or because they are close to the origin (i.e., they have a low percentage of BIPOC students).

Distance Away	District	District Type	FTE Staff	% BIPOC Staff	% BIPOC Students
0	Four Rivers Charter Public (District)	Charter	41.6	14.7	15.1
0.1	Boston Collegiate Charter (District)	Charter	124.4	49.8	56.7
0.1	Francis W. Parker Charter Essential (District)	Charter	66.9	12	13.1
0.1	Pioneer Valley Chinese Immersion Charter (District)	Charter	96.1	45.4	49.7
0.2	Helen Y. Davis Leadership Academy Charter Public (District)	Charter	29.8	86.6	100
0.3	Amherst-Pelham	Neither	262.7	34.2	43.3
0.3	Farmington River Reg	Neither	30.5	2	2.5
0.3	Phoenix Academy Public Charter High School Springfield (District)	Charter	27.7	76.5	96.4
0.4	Boston Day and Evening Academy Charter (District)	Charter	60.2	70.3	98.4
0.4	Wales	Neither	22.2	4.5	6.2

Table 1: Sorted by distance away from the diagonal line, this table presents ten districts with the highest percentage of BIPOC staff, after taking into account each one's percentage of BIPOC students.

RECENT EVENTS

How has the proportion of BIPOC teachers changed since COVID-19?

While the pandemic had a disproportionately negative impact on marginalized communities in many ways, it has not had the same effect on employment among K-12 teachers in the state. Instead, the percentage of teachers of color has continued to rise over the past few years, from 6.5% in 2019-20 to 7.9% in 2022-23 (a 22% increase).

Though there are many factors contributing to this trend, one is the expanded use of emergency licensure during the pandemic. When COVID-19 threatened to exacerbate staff shortages in 2020, Massachusetts legislators voted to establish an emergency license process that would allow educators to work within schools without needing to follow standard licensure procedures.⁹ Recent research has shown that “teachers of color were substantially more represented among new hires with emergency licenses than those with traditional licenses. Among newly hired teachers during the pandemic, 30 percent of those who held emergency licenses were people of color, while only 10 percent to 15 percent of those who held traditional early-career licenses were people of color.”¹⁰ Despite some earlier evidence that teachers who come to the profession through non-traditional routes tend to leave the classroom at higher rates than their counterparts,¹¹ in Massachusetts, “turnover rates among newly hired teachers holding emergency licenses were similar to those among new hires who held traditional licenses.”¹²

Two other potential factors leading to the continuing increase in BIPOC educators are highlighted below. Each one refers to Equation 1, presented on the right.

$$\text{PROPORTION OF BIPOC EDUCATORS} = \frac{\# \text{ BIPOC EDUCATORS}}{\# \text{ NON-BIPOC EDUCATORS} + \# \text{ BIPOC EDUCATORS}}$$

Equation 1: Breakdown of the proportion of BIPOC educators

- COVID-19 encouraged early retirement among some older educators.¹³ Given that the percentage of educators of color has risen over time, the pool of educators who are close to retirement age is likely to include more white educators when compared with younger cohorts. Referring to the equation above, as the number of non-BIPOC educators dropped, the denominator decreased more quickly than the numerator, leading to an overall increase in the proportion of BIPOC educators.
- Educators of color may have been less able to afford to leave the workforce—even temporarily—during the pandemic due to the need for an ongoing source of income. For example, they tend to carry a higher student loan balance than their white peers.^{14,15} Referring to the equation above, the number of BIPOC educators stayed relatively stable in both the numerator and denominator while the number of non-BIPOC educators dropped, leading to an overall increase in the proportion of BIPOC educators.

RELEVANT POLICIES

What initiatives and policies have been proposed to increase educator diversity in Massachusetts?

The Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE) has undertaken a number of initiatives aiming to diversify the educator workforce. For example, Public K-12 Educator Diversification Grants to higher education institutions and non-profit organizations aim to promote partnerships with local districts. The InSPIRED Fellowship and Influence 100 seek to connect staff of color with one another, and DESE has also facilitated home mortgage assistance between non-profits and younger staff. This financial support addresses possible pre-existing race-based income disparities, the same reasons discussed above that may have induced staff of color to work through the pandemic.

See DESE's website for more on these and other recent efforts to promote a diverse educator workforce: <https://www.doe.mass.edu/csi/diverse-workforce/default.html>

DESE's issuance of emergency licensure waivers during the pandemic, described above, may also have encouraged individuals who have been historically excluded or who face obstacles accessing the profession to join the teacher workforce. This strategy has the potential for long-term impact, since "it has been shown in Massachusetts that the largest drop in diversity has been occurring near the beginning of the educator pipeline."¹⁶

Within the legislature, one potential bill under consideration this term is the Educator Diversity Act (H.549), which is backed by a coalition of groups led by Latinos for Education. Among other changes, the bill proposes:

- New requirements for data collection regarding educator demographics and hiring targets for BIPOC educators;
- A pilot program focused on expanding alternative licensure pathways, which would qualify completers to teach in qualifying districts;
- Reconsideration of the competency standards for vocational-technical educators, including offering a choice between passing a series of written and performance tests or demonstrating proficiency through an alternative method determined by state officials; and
- New funding sources for districts seeking to diversify their workforce through tuition assistance, loan repayment, and signing bonuses.

See the Rennie Center's blog post for more information on the contents of the Educator Diversity Act: <https://www.renniecenter.org/blog/educator-diversity-act-what-you-need-know>

Beyond state policymakers, leaders from across Massachusetts are also taking action within their own communities to support a diverse educator pipeline. For one example, read more about UMass Lowell's "Grow Our Own" partnership in the box below.

Initiative Highlight: University of Massachusetts Lowell

In 2022, UMass Lowell staff initiated the "Grow Our Own" partnership with high schools across the state, primarily those in Lowell and Lawrence. This initiative offers college credit and financial assistance to high schoolers interested in teaching. In 2023, the initiative partnered with Education Rising to host their first annual conference in Massachusetts, garnering students from more than ten high schools.



According to program leaders, "One of the goals is to encourage students of color to return to their communities as educators. Another goal is for participants to learn how to lead classrooms where all students feel included."¹⁷ This program has expanded since its initiation, receiving a nearly half-million dollar grant in mid-2023.¹⁸

LOOKING AHEAD

What aspects of this issue require further exploration?

This Data Story aims to provide a snapshot of the progress in advancing educator diversity that is intentionally concise, highlighting some key data points and policy trends. As such, it does not reflect the heterogeneity of experiences across racial and ethnic groups (for instance, through the use of "BIPOC" as an aggregating term). Of course, educator diversity can be measured in various ways; for the purposes of this analysis, a school district consisting of 50% BIPOC staff, all of whom are Black, is considered to be identical to a district consisting of 50% BIPOC staff in which all of these staff are Hispanic. In the future, one worthwhile investigation would look at the extent to which the demographics of BIPOC staff mirror (or differ from) the specific racial and ethnic composition of the student body in Massachusetts districts.

In the meantime, for more data on staff diversity across the state, check out the Rennie Center's [Data Dashboard](#) or consult DESE's [Race/Ethnicity and Gender Staffing Report](#).

To read more Data Stories, visit our website:

<https://www.renniecenter.org/condition-education/data-stories>

ENDNOTES

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