INCREASING SCHOOL LEADER DIVERSITY
IN GEORGIA

The Education Trust

New Leaders

ALL STUDENTS, REGARDLESS OF RACE OR ETHNICITY, BENEFIT FROM HAVING TEACHERS AND SCHOOL LEADERS OF COLOR. Since principals of color are often more likely[1] to hire and retain teachers of color, increasing school leader diversity is a key lever for addressing educational inequities.

To provide advocates and policymakers with context on this important issue, Ed Trust partnered with New Leaders to conduct a statewide and district-specific analysis of student and school leader demographics in Georgia public schools. This state has the potential to develop a strong pipeline of school leaders from diverse backgrounds: In addition to having a racially and geographically diverse student population, Georgia is home to 10 historically Black colleges and universities (HBCUs) and 10 current or emerging Hispanic-serving institutions (HSIs). This brief provides recommendations for state and district leaders in Georgia to develop these strong pipelines to create a diverse school leader workforce.

WHY SCHOOL LEADER DIVERSITY MATTERS

School leadership is one of the most important[2] in-school factors that affect students' social, emotional, and academic development. Access to same-race school leaders can positively shape education experiences for students of color, including higher math achievement[3] and greater representation in gifted programs.[4] Further, students of color should have the same opportunity that their White peers have to see same-race school leaders which can positively influence students' identity development and future aspirations.

In addition to their direct impact on students, school leaders are central to recruiting, retaining, and developing strong teachers. Increased school leader diversity can positively impact students by increasing the diversity of the teacher workforce,[5] which positively impacts student social, emotional, and academic development.

Recent data indicates that only 22% of principals[6] in the U.S. are people of color, compared with 54% of students.[7] As the nation continues to recover from the COVID-19 pandemic, state and district leaders must double-down their recruitment and retention efforts to ensure that students have equitable access to strong school leaders with diverse backgrounds who are focused on accelerating learning and building strong relationships with students.

ABOUT OUR ANALYSIS

To better understand the school leadership landscape in Georgia, we analyzed school-level data provided by the Georgia Department of Education. The data reflects the number of school leaders and students at each K-12 public school, disaggregated by race and ethnicity, for school years 2019-2020 and 2021-2022. For this study, we defined "school leaders" as principals or assistant principals, and "people of color" as those who identify as Black, Latino, multiracial, American Indian/Alaska Native, and Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander.

For all questions, we compared pre-pandemic data to 2021-22 data to gauge whether demographics have changed since before the pandemic. Overall, we found that the pre-pandemic (2019-20) data was consistent with data from the 2021-22 school year. As such, we focused on results from the 2021-22 school year. We also chose to focus most closely on Black and Latino students, as they represent the majority among students of color in Georgia.

OVERALL ACCESS TO SCHOOL LEADERS OF COLOR

Students of color lack equitable access to school leaders with diverse backgrounds in Georgia. Overall, 44% of all principals and assistant principals in Georgia identify as people of color, compared with 59% of students. On one hand, Georgia is making great progress with recruiting Black school leaders: about 41% of school leaders are Black, compared with about 36% of students, and 84% of Black students have access to at least one same-race school leader. However, there are stark disparities between Latino students and Latino leaders of color — just 2% of school leaders are Latino, compared with about 18% of students; and only 11% of Latino students have access to at least one same-race school leader.

FIGURE 1: Student and School Leader Demographics in Georgia, 2021-22
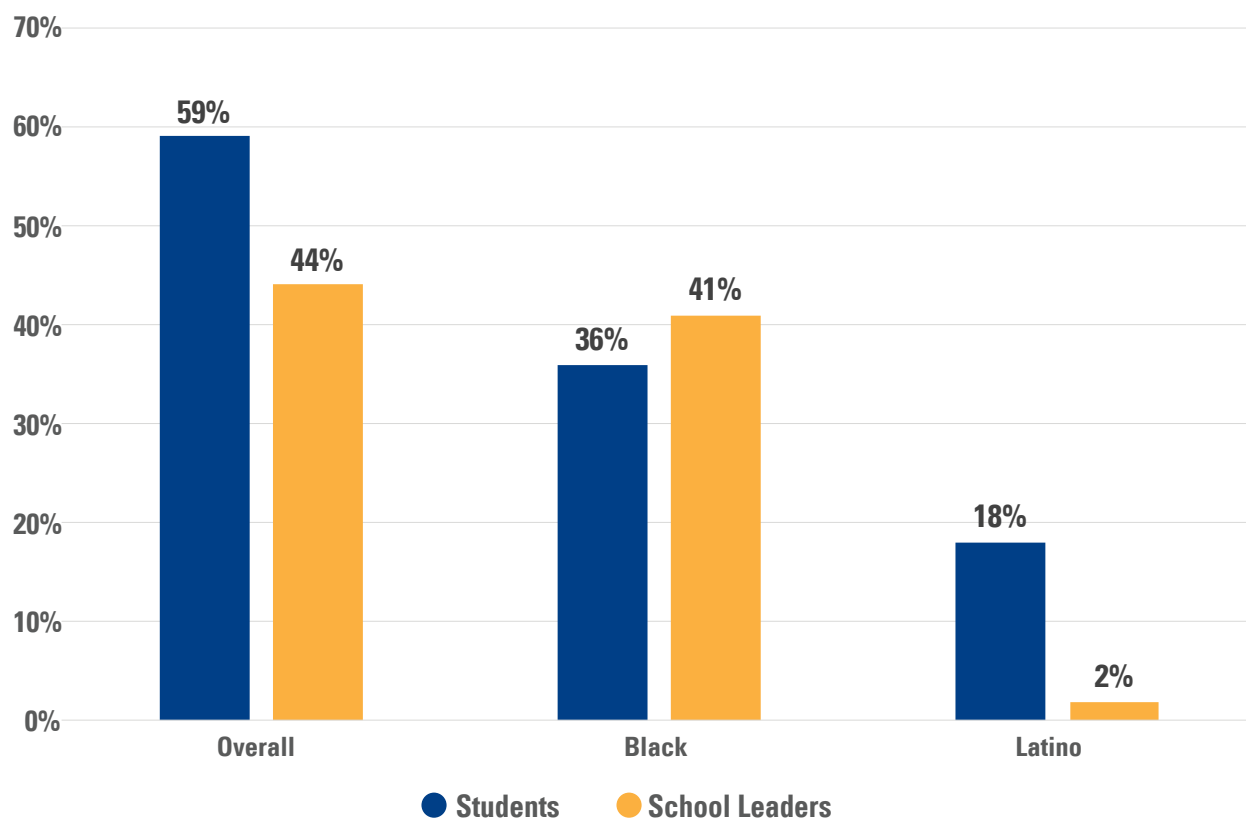

Reading this figure: 59% of public school students are people of color, compared to 44% of public school leaders; 36% of students are Black, compared to 41% of school leaders; and 18% of students are Latino, compared to 2% of school leaders.

Source: Ed Trust analysis of data from the Georgia 2021 Selected Administrator Position/Average Salary Data and Head Count/Demographic Breakouts, School Level report and the 2021 PK-12 Student Enrollment by Race/Ethnicity and Gender, School Level report.

MORE DIVERSE SCHOOLS TEND TO HAVE ACCESS TO AT LEAST ONE SCHOOL LEADER OF COLOR

We looked at the racial demographics of leaders in schools with low percentages (0-49%), medium percentages (50-74%), and high percentages (75-100%) of students of color. In 2021-22, 31% of schools with low percentages of students of color, 67% of schools with medium percentages of students of color, and 95% of schools with high percentages of students of color had at least one school leader of color on staff.

FIGURE 2: Percentage of Georgia Schools with at Least One School Leader of Color, 2021-22
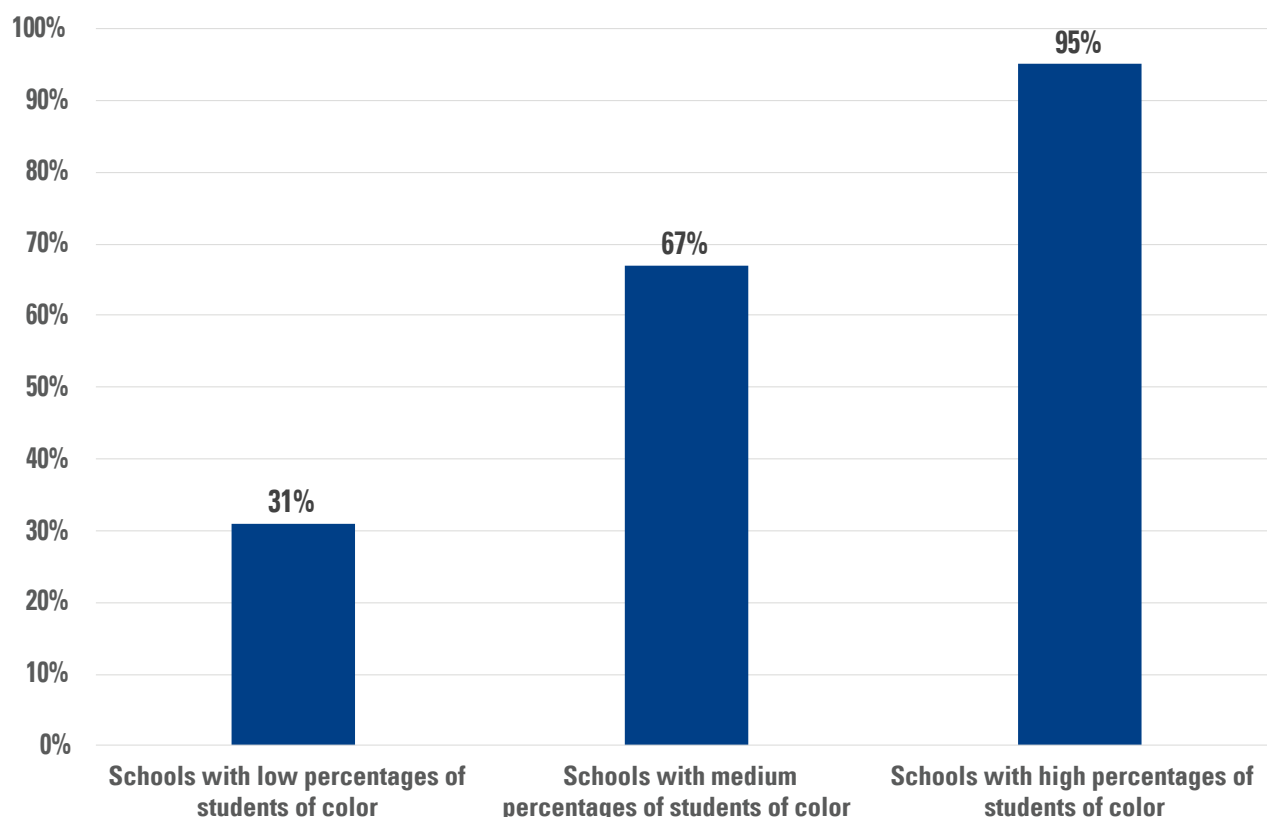
Reading this figure: 31% of Georgia schools with low percentages of students of color (0-50%), 67% of schools with medium percentages of students of color (50-75%), and 95% of schools with high percentages of students of color (75-100%) have at least one school leader of color on staff.
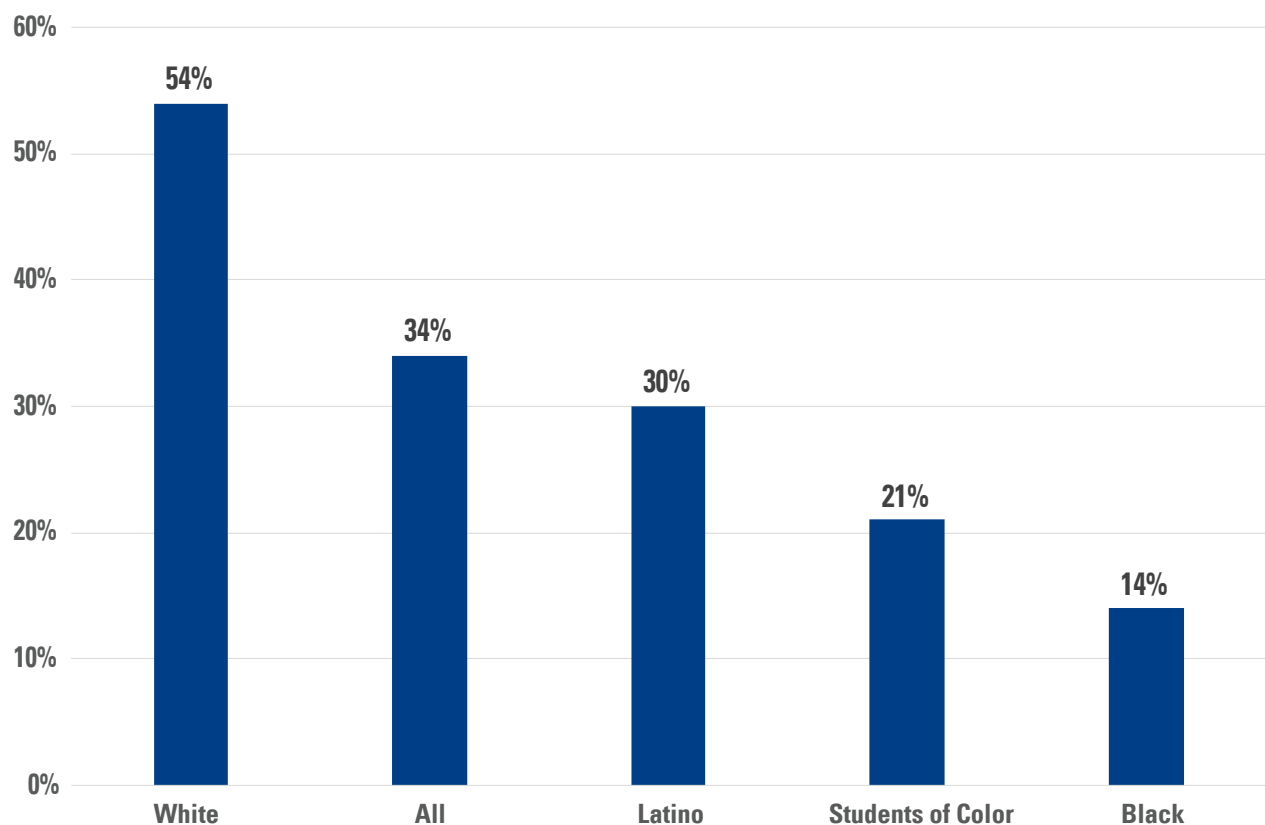
Source: *Ed Trust analysis of data from the Georgia 2021 Selected Administrator Position/Average Salary Data and Head Count/Demographic Breakouts, School Level report and the 2021 PK-12 Student Enrollment by Race/Ethnicity and Gender, School Level report.*

This data shows that many Georgia schools with medium and high percentages of students of color have at least one school leader of color. However, fewer than a third of schools with low percentages of students of color have access to at least one school leader of color, suggesting that students in most majority-White schools do not have access to diverse school leaders.

MANY STUDENTS DO NOT ATTEND SCHOOLS WITH EVEN ONE SCHOOL LEADER OF COLOR

We found that more than a third of all Georgia students—and the majority of White students—do not attend schools with even one school leader of color. We analyzed data within five different student groupings: all students, all students of color, White students, Black students, and Latino students. The data showed that 34% of all students, 21% of students of color, 54% of White students, 14% of Black students, and 30% of Latino students attended a school with no school leaders of color during the most recent school year.

FIGURE 3: Percentage of Students at Schools with No School Leader of Color

Reading the figure: 34% of all students, 21% of students of color, 54% of White students, 14% of Black students, and 30% of Latino students attend schools with no school leaders of color.

Source: *Ed Trust analysis of data from the Georgia 2021 Selected Administrator Position/Average Salary Data and Head Count/Demographic Breakouts, School Level report and the 2021 PK-12 Student Enrollment by Race/Ethnicity and Gender, School Level report.*

POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

Georgia is ripe for increasing equitable access to a diverse workforce of school leaders. State leaders can reduce inequities, create stronger school leader pipelines, and support school leader retention by taking the following actions:

Make data on school leader diversity publicly available and easily accessible at the state and district level. The Georgia Department of Education should commit to providing publicly available statewide data on school leader diversity. In addition, Georgia should require districts to provide publicly available information on school leader diversity. Statewide data can provide an overall snapshot of leader diversity but does not reflect varying levels of access to diverse school leaders across districts. For example, according to Ed Trust analyses, in Atlanta Public Schools, where 83% of students are of color, nearly all students (97%) have access to a school leader of color; on the other hand, in Columbia County, where 41% of students are of color, 57% of students have a school leader of color.

Identify educator preparation programs that are well-positioned to support districts in recruiting educators of color. Principal preparation programs are key to developing strong school leaders. Partnerships with institutions committed to the success of people of color can help make school leader preparation more impactful. The Georgia Department of Education partnered[8] with Albany State University, an HBCU, to improve principal preparation programs. Two other HBCUs — Clark Atlanta University and Morehouse College — have partnered with New Leaders to design an online principal certification and master's degree program to train the next generation of equity-focused school leaders who reflect the students they serve. The Georgia Department of Education should highlight successes from these partnerships to build on and establish relationships with select HBCUs or HSIs to help credential diverse candidates, especially Latino candidates, through high-quality programming.

Assess the impact of recent changes to school leadership preparation policies. In 2016, Georgia made changes to school leadership preparation policies, including the creation of a two-tier licensure system. The Georgia Department of Education should review the impact of these policies with an eye toward increasing the number of well-prepared school leaders with diverse backgrounds. Questions to explore include: Has the updated approach increased the quality and effectiveness of assistant principals and principals across the state? Has it created barriers into leadership and, if so, for whom? This data can be used to inform continuous improvement of both state policy and program implementation.

Provide resources to help districts examine recruitment and hiring systems and processes to ensure educators of color have equitable access to leadership development opportunities and the proper resources and support needed to navigate hiring processes. In a national survey of over 100 district leaders,[9] only half of them indicated that there is a defined pathway to the principalship. Absent this, leaders of color are left navigating unspoken expectations regarding the leadership presence and the expected experiences of future principals. Georgia can support districts by establishing communities of practice and offering technical assistance for districts on auditing and improving recruitment and hiring processes through an equity lens. Georgia can also consider providing resources and training directly to hiring teams at the district or school levels to promote best practices for building diverse candidate pools (e.g., on the importance of same-race mentorship) and reducing bias in hiring decisions.

Build communities that support and retain leaders of color. Georgia can establish statewide affinity networks,[10] fellowships, and communities of practice for leaders of color, and take steps to encourage districts to establish similar local cohorts. The state may also tap these networks of expert practitioners to help inform policy development.

Expand efforts to recruit and retain teachers of color: the future pipeline of leaders of color. Georgia must do more to build and support the pipeline of teachers of color.[11] This could include supporting the creation of Grow Your Own (GYO) programming and other pathways for non-teaching staff to secure teaching credentials. Often, paraprofessionals and after-school staff[12] are more racially and/or ethnically diverse than traditional teacher pipelines and they have real school-based experience and dispositions that are well-suited to teaching. Providing intentional support and defined pathways can support future educators in gaining necessary skills to move into teaching roles. (For more about how Georgia can prioritize educator diversity, see Ed Trust's 50-state teacher diversity data and policy scan: https://edtrust.org/educator-diversity/#GA.)

END NOTES

1. Brendan Bartanen and Jason A. Grissom, "School Principal Race and the Hiring and Retention of Racially Diverse Teachers," Brown University Annenberg, May 2019, https://edworkingpapers.com/ai19-59

2. Jason A. Grissom, Anna J. Egalite and Constance A. Lindsay, "How Principals Affect Students and Schools: A Systematic Synthesis of Two Decades of Research," The Wallace Foundation, February 2021, https://www.wallacefoundation.org/knowledge-center/pages/how-principals-affect-students-and-schools-a-systematic-synthesis-of-two-decades-of-research.aspx

3. Brendan Bartanen and Jason A. Grissom, "School Principal Race and the Hiring and Retention of Racially Diverse Teachers," Brown University Annenberg, May 2019, https://edworkingpapers.com/ai19-59

4. Jason A. Grisson, Luis A. Rodriguez, and Emily C. Kern, "Teacher and Principal Diversity and the Representation of Students of Color in Gifted Programs: Evidence from National Data," The Elementary School Journal, University of Chicago Press, March 2017, https://www.journals.uchicago.edu/doi/abs/10.1086/690274

5. "Is Your State Prioritizing Teacher Diversity & Equity," The Education Trust, last modified October 2022, https://edtrust.org/educator-diversity/

6. "Characteristics of Public School Principals," National Center for Education Statistics, last modified May 2020, https://nces.ed.gov/programs/coe/indicator/cls

7. "Racial/Ethnic Enrollment in Public Schools, National Center for Education Statistics, last modified May 2022, https://nces.ed.gov/programs/coe/indicator/cge/racial-ethnic-enrollment#:~:text=Of%20the%2049.4%20million%20students,Native%2C%20and%20180%2C000%20were%20Pacific

8. "ASU selected to participate in $47-million initiative to improve training for principals," Albany State University, last modified October 2016, https://www.asurams.edu/news/2016/asu-initiative-improve-training-principals.php

9. New Leaders. (2022). Invest in Leadership: Five Actions District Leaders Can Take to Increase School Leader Diversity. Retrieved from https://www.newleaders.org/reshaping-educational-leadership#district-leader

10. "ISBE Announces $2 Million Effort to Support and Retain Teachers of Color," Illinois State Board of Education, last modified February 2022, https://www.isbe.net/Lists/News/NewsDisplay.aspx?ID=1394

11. "Educator Equity & Diversity," the Education Trust, last modified May 2022, https://edtrust.org/issue/educator-equity-diversity/

12. "A Natural Fit: Supporting After-School Staff of Color in Teacher Pipelines," The Education Trust, last modified June 2021, https://edtrust.org/resource/a-natural-fit-supporting-after-school-staff-of-color-in-teacher-pipelines/