



Recruiting And Retaining Black Male Educators

Leveraging Lessons
from the Mississippi
Teacher Residency

NCTR

About the Authors

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About NCTR

The National Center for Teacher Residencies is a nonprofit organization dedicated to developing, launching, supporting, and accelerating the impact of teacher residency programs. Headquartered in Chicago, NCTR's mission is to disrupt historical educational inequities by advancing the teacher residency movement to prepare effective, diverse, culturally responsive educators. For more information about NCTR, please visit www.nctrresidencies.org.

Background

Funded by the W.K. Kellogg Foundation, this project was designed to develop a teacher residency in Mississippi (Mississippi Teacher Residency [MTR]). Additionally, the project established an advisory group to analyze and ultimately document the efforts by MTR to recruit, prepare, and retain Black educators, particularly Black male educators.

In May 2021, the National Center for Teacher Residencies (NCTR) facilitated a convening of MTR stakeholders. *Community Conversation: Recruiting and Retaining Black Male Educators in Mississippi & Beyond* over two days to share their work and lessons learned. This report synthesizes those conversations and provides recommendations to state, district, and local policymakers to enhance the recruitment, preparation, and retention of Black male educators.

Special thanks to the Mississippi Department of Education (MDE), Mississippi Association of Educators (MAE), panelists, and participants, without whom this publication and the insights shared would not be possible.

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On the Cover: Le Marquee Le Flora is a teacher resident at the Memphis Teacher Residency. This photo was taken at Kingsbury High School.

NCTR's Work

While the national student population is becoming increasingly diverse, the teacher workforce has remained overwhelmingly white and female. Over half of all United States' students identify as Black, Indigenous, or People of Color (BIPOC) (U.S. Department of Education, Institute of Education Sciences, National Center for Education Statistics, 2021a). Teachers today are 79% White and 76% are female, and only slight improvements to teacher diversity have been made in the last 25 years (Albert Shanker Institute, 2015, U.S. Department of Education, Institute of Education Sciences, National Center for Education Statistics, 2021b). Most staggering is the absence of Black male teachers, where only two percent of our nation's teacher workforce are Black men. Many Black students, especially males, never experience having a teacher who looks like them (Meckler & Rabinowitz, 2019, U.S. Department of Education, 2016). Nonetheless, the research is clear - Black teachers yield tremendous benefits to Black students. Black students who have a single Black teacher in grades three through five are more likely to graduate from high school and consider college. Results were most notable for African American males who were 39% more likely to graduate from high school (Gershenson, Hart, Lindsay, & Papageorge, 2017). Black teachers have also been shown to have significant effects on Black student achievement in both reading and math, with lower-performing students benefiting substantially from a teacher of the same race (Egalite, Kisida, & Winters, 2015). Yet, there are simply not enough Black male educators to allow students to see themselves reflected in our schools.

The dual challenges of recruitment and retention represent major hurdles to diversifying the teacher workforce. Teacher residencies represent a unique and research-based teacher preparation route that has been shown to both diversify the field and ensure that those teachers are hired and are retained in high-needs schools. New teacher candidates, called "residents," are selectively recruited and then work alongside an effective, experienced teacher mentor who is the teacher of record. For a full school year, residents take on increasing amounts of responsibility in the classroom. The coursework provided by a higher education partner is tailored to the needs of the district and aligned with the clinical realities of the classroom, with residents practicing and receiving coaching regularly from their mentor and residency program staff. Residents commit to teaching in the high need partner district where they trained, in exchange for financial assistance and sustained professional support as they launch their career.

Teacher residencies have been recognized as a solution to recruiting and retaining teachers of color and improving training for teachers in high-needs subjects and high-needs schools (Carver-Thomas, 2018). Research on the outcomes of teacher residency graduates shows promising trends: graduates are more likely to come from diverse backgrounds, to teach in shortage subject areas, to remain in the classroom, and to earn high principal satisfaction ratings (LiBetti & Trinidad, 2018).



▶ Emmanuel Williams, Carrie Rose, Leah Jones, and Angie Torres are teacher residents at the Nashville Teacher Residency. This photo was taken at West Creek Middle School.

NCTR and its Black Educators Initiative (BEI)

The National Center for Teacher Residencies (NCTR) is the country's leading national non-profit dedicated to developing and expanding high-quality teacher residencies to prepare and support a generation of diverse, effective teachers. Founded in 2007 to build, support, and scale teacher residency programs, NCTR has evolved to see the power of the teacher residency as a model to improve teacher preparation and as a lever to address the enduring and systemic inequities facing children of color and children living in poverty. Today, within NCTR's network of over 40 residencies across the nation, 56% of residents are BIPOC, 27% of residents are Black, and 7% are Black males, far outpacing the teacher workforce. Although the vast majority of teachers are hired within Title I schools, these teachers remain in the classroom, and 86% of residency graduates are teaching three years later, despite research that over half of teachers leave similar high-needs schools within three years (Allensworth, Ponisciak, & Mazzeo, 2009).

In 2019, NCTR launched its Black Educators Initiative (BEI), a five-year, \$20-million effort to recruit, develop, and retain 750 new Black teachers through its national network of teacher residency partners. In the third year of the initiative, the impact has scaled, growing from eight participating residencies in 2019 to an expected 20 residencies in 2021-22. In the first two years of the initiative, residencies have utilized \$5.9 million to reduce

financial barriers for aspiring Black educators to enter and remain in the profession. The funds assist with scholarships and stipends, help expand “homegrown” recruitment pipelines that reflect the communities served, improve teacher effectiveness through rigorous preparation, improve retention through affinity groups that build community, and empower Black teachers to lead transformation in their schools and communities.

Mississippi Teacher Residency

In 2019, the Mississippi Department of Education (MDE) partnered with NCTR to help support the design, launch and scaling of the Mississippi Teacher Residency (MTR).

The mission of MTR is to create opportunities for individuals who aspire to become an effective teacher in diverse classrooms and provide the students of Mississippi a deserved world-class education. MTR is a 24-month program, in which all candidates receive a full scholarship and earn a degree from one of three Mississippi universities. After they complete their respective programs, they commit to teach for at least three years in the partnering district. Since 2019, MTR has recruited more than 75 residents, and over 80% identify as a person of color.

The Mississippi Association of Educators (MAE) partnered with NCTR to hire a Teacher Recruitment and Retention Specialist that was responsible for developing unique and tailored programming that would recruit and support Black male teachers for the Mississippi Teacher Residency. Our work with the Mississippi Teacher Residency, its partners and practitioners, revealed important learnings and promising practices in regards to recruiting, preparing, and retaining Black male educators.

A Community Conversation

In May of 2021, NCTR, the Mississippi Department of Education (MDE), and the Mississippi Association of Educators (MAE) invited Black leaders, including MTR program coordinators, principals, mentors, and Black male residents, to present their work and share their experiences through the program. These participants highlighted promising practices that have been employed in Mississippi in the recruitment and retention of Black male educators, with an explicit focus on the Mississippi context.

On day two of the Mississippi Community Conversation, programs associated with NCTR's Black Educators Initiative (BEI) presented their work from the past school year. NCTR convened five BEI working groups throughout the year, with one of the major goals being to share and co-develop resources that will benefit both fellow BEI grantees and the broader NCTR community. MTR stakeholders attended those presentations to find connections to and extensions of their promising practices in recruiting, preparing, retaining male educators of color.

Key Insights and Recommendations

Community Conversation: Recruiting and Retaining Black Male Educators in Mississippi and Beyond allowed Black male educators and leaders to share their experiences from their career and residency programs - what brought them into the field, and what can keep them teaching.

These findings and recommendations can help provide teacher preparation programs, universities, districts, states, and teacher unions/associations guidance on how to diversify the educator pipeline. The recommendations below, based on the learnings from the Mississippi Teacher Residency, are aligned to NCTR's core mission to Recruit, Prepare and Retain effective, diverse, and culturally responsive teachers.

Recruiting Black Male Candidates

From recruitment efforts and strategic partnerships, to residency model design and support for Black male educators, intentionality emerged as a particularly effective theme in focusing on the needs of Black male educators.

Principals intentionally recruit Black men to provide more role models and opportunities for their students to see Black men more prominently in their educational experience. One Black male principal noted,

“When I was hired as principal, I wanted to hire as many Black males as I could. I wanted our scholars to see Black men in a different perspective, to see Black men in a positive light; it has had an impact on our young Black males.”

Black male educators themselves expressed the need for intentionality in recruiting educators of color. One Black male leader who was recruited by Teach For America stated, the recruiter “...came to my campus to look for me. The recruiter made me feel seen.” The recruiter knew his name, what he was studying, and targeted him. The MDE articulated promising practices such as making high school visits so that Black men know their options and opportunities to enter the profession early. MAE emphasized the intentionality

“If I could go back to myself in college, I would tell myself that education was my path.”

— BLACK MALE DISTRICT LEADER

of recruiting, reflecting that Black Men are not a monolith. Black Men must be approached as individuals and recruited based upon their unique needs and desires. Another recommended approach is seeking out Black Men enrolled in universities who have not declared a major and may well be interested in teaching. Similarly, another promising recommended practice that is focusing on career changers—individuals that are already in schools working as staff or as support personnel but may possibly become an outstanding teacher. One Black male district leader said, “If I could go back to myself in college, I would tell myself that education was my path.”

Black men were also attracted into the field to provide role models for their students and have a positive influence on their students. One residency graduate saw the need for Black male role models, “I started as a substitute, I saw there was a shortage [of Black men]. At one school, I was the only man there besides the custodian, but the majority of the class were Black kids. There was a need, and there was something I needed to do.” A career changer graduate said, “I saw I could impact them, be a spokesperson for them, show them the right way. The MTR program opened doors for me. It went from burnout [at my previous job] to a rewarding experience.” These men wanted to have a positive influence on other Black males in their community, and MTR gave them a pathway to teaching that allowed them to achieve that goal.

In addition, all Black male educators emphasized the need for financial support for effective recruitment. MTR eliminates all financial barriers to entry, providing full scholarships for all residents and covering all the costs for books, testing, and certification, which Black male residents cited as particularly critical. An emerging theme here is that many Black male candidates could become exceptional teachers if given affordable pathways to do so.

Partnerships across the state also facilitated the recruitment of Black male educators. MAE recognized the importance of its close university partnerships with the University of Southern Mississippi, Delta State University, and the University of Mississippi. The MAE provided the university recruiters a two-page list of research-based strategies to recruit Black Men on college campuses and then supported them to implement a recruitment plan. The MAE



► **Derrick Hearn is a teacher resident at the Chicago Public Schools Teacher Residency. This photo was taken at Mt. Vernon Elementary School.**

emphasized the need to do the research first - other people have done at least some of this work in knowing how to recruit Black Male educators, and there are research-based strategies and methodologies already available. MDE developed recruitment support plans based upon the needs of the district and community, highlighting the intentional focus in their recruitment efforts. These district/university partnerships also help to make sure the residency is right for the candidate and that stakeholders can recruit those candidates who are committed to the community.

Recommendations for Recruiting Black Male Candidates

Mississippi leaders were clear that leadership opportunities and career pathways beyond teaching and administration need to be clarified, expanded, and communicated to recruit Black males. Recruitment efforts need to intentionally target and meet the various and unique needs of Black men. These efforts can begin at early ages, such as during high school or in college (known as “Grow Your Own” programs), where recruiters can let students know the vast array of opportunities available in education, such as policy and advocacy, technology, and instructional coaching. “Grow Your Own” programs are well situated to:

- Provide scholarships to Black males who commit to returning to their community to teach after college.
- Expand scholarships, stipends, and loan forgiveness for Black male educators or educators who teach in high-needs districts and optimally eliminate all financial barriers to entry. States can also offer scholarships or financial exemptions for licensure exams.
- Expand residency programs in two-year colleges to provide an on-ramp into teaching for community college students.
- Design a high school pathway, so high school students can start the process of becoming a teacher.
- Reach out to four-year college students during their Junior year before they have accepted other job offers but when they are starting to think about life beyond college.
- Reach out to college students who have not yet declared majors particularly at Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs) and Minority Serving Institutions (MSIs).

“The mentor has been awesome. Anytime I need something or have a question, I just need to talk with her. She has helped me in every aspect of my teaching.”

— BLACK MALE RESIDENCY GRADUATE

Preparing Black Male Candidates

Residency program design should intentionally center the assets and needs of the Black male candidates.

Two Mississippi university partners worked to develop a graduate program while another operates as a two-year undergraduate model, based upon whom they can recruit from their local communities and what experience those candidates already bring. Mississippi realizes that one type of program cannot meet the needs of local districts and adjusted to make sure that the program design could be tailored for the unique context.

MDE cited strong district and university partnerships through the MTR program. This foundational component of the residency model helps to better meet the needs of the local community and ensure better alignment across coursework and the clinical experience. It has proven effective for MTR - one university completely “flipped” its teacher preparation program to be entirely clinically based. Another hired district coordinators as adjunct professors. MDE hopes to expand MTR’s partnerships with other universities throughout the state to be able to enhance its impact. Funding was also a factor that allowed for greater participation, and Black male educators highlighted the need for targeted support, including but not limited to financial support. Emergency funds and stipends were shown to be critical to ensuring that Black candidates could complete the program.

Additionally, the role of mentors during the preparation period is essential for this initiative to be successful. One Black male MTR residency graduate noted, “The mentor has been awesome. Anytime I need something or have a question, I just need to talk with her. She has helped me in every aspect of my teaching.” Others cited a principal or a department chair who would walk them through the certification process and hold them accountable. One district leader said, “The biggest obstacle is understanding the certification requirements and overcoming the certification barriers. Being able to provide support to pass their exams and point them in the direction of the correct endorsement is critical.”

Recommendations for the Preparation of Black Male Candidates

As Mississippi has shown by example, collaboration among the state education agency, school districts, educator preparation programs, the teachers’ association, philanthropic partners, and legislators helped to launch the Mississippi Teacher Residency.

¹NCTR’s support of Network partners through the BEI includes the provision of funding to provide “emergency funding” to Black residents. This strategy is proving to be an impactful retention strategy for residencies. The ability to help residents eliminate often minor financial obstacles is allowing residents to stay enrolled and persist. This past year, BEI grantees participated in working groups, one of which was focused on the use of emergency funding as a retention strategy. The use of emergency funding is documented in [NCTR’s BEI Annual Report](#).

The state played a leadership role in ensuring coordination across three university-district partnerships while providing the vision for the residency. MDE has also worked with the state legislature to expand opportunities to gain certification, including expanding educator preparation program entry requirements to allow a 3.0 GPA as an alternative to basic skills licensure tests. In summary:

- Prioritize adequately compensating residents so there is no need for emergency funds. States can think about how to allocate funds for teacher candidates, especially Black male teacher candidates.
- Be intentional about partnerships across state departments of education, universities, and local districts so there is tight alignment in the clinical preparation of candidates and that candidates are prepared to meet the needs of local districts.
- Ensure clinical preparation includes mentors and role models, particularly for Black men.
- Provide a continuum of support for candidates throughout the certification process, from providing mentors to clarify expectations to preparing candidates for certification tests while covering the cost of exams.
- Have emergency funds available for residents or teacher candidates. For an average of \$600 per emergency incident, teacher preparation routes can offer these funds to ensure teacher candidates can, for example, repair their car, pay for a babysitter, or pay for a hospital visit and thus complete their preparation program.

“Mentoring itself acts as a retention strategy. It’s being able to make a contribution to the education community and giving purpose to the work. The biggest reward is our students, but it’s also being able to share that with another teacher.”

— BLACK MALE RESIDENCY GRADUATE

Retaining Black Male Candidates

Centering the individual needs of Black male educators in induction supports and career growth coaching after they enter the profession is critical to ensuring they stay in the classroom and schools.

The MAE partnered with the MDE to hold a Black Male Educator Conference, with the focus of supporting current teachers to take care of themselves so they can then take care of students. The conference included a specific focus on allowing Black men to have a space for themselves and to take care of one another as Black men. An essential aspect of retention, for Black male educators, includes both being a role model and being invited to share their experiences. One Black male leader shared.

The MAE also established an Early Career Learning Lab exclusively for Black male Educators, the first in the country. The lab supports and trains teachers with up to five years of experience and uses a problem of practice model focused on the needs of early-career Black male educators, to support them once they have already entered the profession. Thus, induction supports focused on the needs of Black male educators can help to meet their holistic needs and retain these teachers.

In its mentorship program, MAE asked state legislators to join in order to hear from Black male educators directly. Black male educators were empowered to share their experiences with legislators and advocate for change, positioning them as leaders in the field. MAE emphasized that community image and paygrade matter in acquiring Black male educators to embark on the profession and to keep them in the classroom.

Finally, and perhaps most importantly, leadership pathways are crucial to keeping Black male teachers in the profession. Black male educators and leaders cited the need for multiple career pathways and leadership opportunities such as mentorship, counselor roles, micro-credentialing, school leadership, and other jobs in education. This visibility provides mirrors for Black students to see themselves reflected in school and empowers Black male educators. One district leader stated, “You may not want to be a principal, but there are lots of other opportunities.”

Recommendations for Retaining Black Male Candidates

Centering the individual needs of Black male educators in induction supports and career growth coaching after they enter the profession is important. Although financial support is critical to getting Black males into the profession, a continuum of support focused on their unique needs helps retain them in the classroom. Black male educators affirmed the need for support beyond recruitment. In summary:

- Provide multiple pathways into the profession and multiple classroom leadership opportunities once in the profession.
- Expand and financially reward micro-credentialing to help support Black male educators to remain in the field.
- Coordinate strategic residency partnerships across the state education agency, universities, districts, and union/teachers association to provide a clear vision for both recruiting and retaining Black male educators.
- Provide a continuum of support to Black male educators across their career trajectory, beginning with recruitment into the field.
- Provide spaces and platforms for Black male educators to speak to systems-level structures.

- To prevent attrition into leadership positions or other careers, states can consider how to use a variety of funds to ensure teachers are adequately paid.

Conclusion

Community Conversation: Recruiting and Retaining Black Male Educators in Mississippi and Beyond allowed Black male educators and leaders to share their experiences from their career and residency programs - what brought them into the field, and what can keep them teaching. These findings and recommendations can help provide teacher preparation programs, universities, districts, states, and unions/teacher associations guidance on how to diversify the educator pipeline and ensure Black students, and especially Black male students, have the role models that research substantiates they need. We hope you can learn from the experiences and voices of Black male education leaders and work to transform your educational community.

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