

**ALASKA STATE LEGISLATURE  
SENATE EDUCATION STANDING COMMITTEE**

April 19, 2023

3:30 p.m.

**MEMBERS PRESENT**

Senator Löki Tobin, Chair  
Senator Gary Stevens, Vice Chair  
Senator Jesse Bjorkman  
Senator Jesse Kiehl  
Senator Elvi Gray-Jackson

**MEMBERS ABSENT**

All members present

**COMMITTEE CALENDAR**

PRESENTATION(S): TEACHERS LIKE US~ STRATEGIES FOR INCREASING  
EDUCATOR DIVERSITY IN PUBLIC SCHOOLS

- HEARD

**PREVIOUS COMMITTEE ACTION**

No previous action to record

**WITNESS REGISTER**

LYNN OLSON, Senior Fellow  
FutureED  
Georgetown, Washington D.C.

**POSITION STATEMENT:** Provided the presentation Teachers Like Us.

**ACTION NARRATIVE**

[3:30:50 PM](#)

**CHAIR LÖKI TOBIN** called the Senate Education Standing Committee meeting to order at 3:30 p.m. Present at the call to order were Senators Gray-Jackson, Bjorkman, and Chair Tobin. Senators Kiehl and Stevens arrived thereafter.

**PRESENTATION(S):**  
**TEACHERS LIKE US, STRATEGIES FOR INCREASING**  
**EDUCATOR DIVERSITY IN PUBLIC SCHOOLS**

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CHAIR TOBIN announced the consideration of the presentation Teachers Like Us.

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LYNN OLSON, Senior Fellow, FutureED, Georgetown, Washington D.C., said FutureEd is a solution-oriented education think tank at Georgetown University. The organization is dedicated to independent analysis and innovative ideas for enhancing grades K-12 and higher education. She mentioned that the report she was going to discuss had examined barriers and opportunities for increasing teacher diversity across various states. Several studies had demonstrated that when students of color had teachers of color, there were improvements in attendance, reductions in disciplinary issues, increases in academic achievement, higher high school graduation rates, and greater college enrollment rates. She emphasized that teachers of color had a positive impact on all students, enhancing their sense of self-efficacy and their attitudes toward race.

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MS. OLSON turned to slide 2 and stated data from the report indicated that students of color made up over 50 percent of the student population, but 80 percent of the teachers were white. This resulted in a situation where, in many states, the majority of students were attending schools and districts that did not have any teachers of color on staff.

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MS. OLSON turned to slide 3 and explained that teachers recognized the significance of racial diversity in the nation's schools. She referred to results from a national survey conducted by the RAND Corporation on behalf of FutureEd, which revealed that 81 percent of K-12 teachers considered it important for students to be taught by teachers from diverse racial and ethnic backgrounds, and 79 percent believed it was important to have colleagues from diverse backgrounds. However, only 58 percent of respondents believed their school district was committed to promoting racial and ethnic diversity. She emphasized the need to consider every step of the teacher recruitment process, acknowledging that there was no one-size-fits-all solution and that addressing issues at various stages of the pipeline was essential.

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MS. OLSON turned to slide 4 and said numerous factors contribute to the underrepresentation of teachers of color in public schools, such as:

Disparities in high school graduation,  
College enrollment  
College completion  
Educator preparation programs

These factors then extend to:

Hiring practices  
Job placements  
Job retention

Many students of color receive lower-quality education compared to their white peers, resulting in reduced achievement and lower graduation and college attendance rates. The high cost of college and financial disincentives for entering teaching, especially when compared to more lucrative professions, discourage individuals from pursuing teaching careers. Black and Latino teachers often rely more on federal student loans, accrue higher loan debt, and face greater challenges in loan repayment, making teaching less appealing as a profession.

Furthermore, colleges of education, where most teachers are trained, are predominantly white. A study by the American Association of Colleges of Teacher Education found a significant diversity gap in teacher preparation programs, with only 28 percent of graduates being people of color in 2022. Additionally, a national report by The New Teacher Project (TNTTP) revealed a substantial diversity gap when comparing the racial and ethnic makeup of students, teachers, and colleges of education to the population of public school students in each state. This gap exceeded 10 percentage points in forty-three states.

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MS. OLSON stated that even when students of color graduate with teaching degrees, they encounter challenges. They tend to have a higher failure rate on state teacher licensure exams compared to their white peers. Additionally, they may face bias and discrimination in hiring practices and on the job. Teachers of color are often placed in under-resourced schools with high concentrations of low-income and minority students. These schools struggle to attract and retain teachers, leading to a disproportionately high number of novice teachers and higher

attrition rates. Consequently, teachers of color are more likely to leave the profession at higher rates than their white counterparts.

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MS. OLSON turned to slide 5 and explained the distinctions between "movers" (teachers who change schools) and "leavers" (teachers who leave the profession altogether). She pointed out that Black and Latino teachers were more likely to switch schools or exit the profession compared to white teachers. This observation underscored the need to address not only the recruitment of teachers of color but also their working conditions, opportunities for career advancement, and strategies for retaining them in the teaching profession.

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MS. OLSON turned to slide 6 and discussed the various solutions to the challenge of diversifying the nation's teaching force. She mentioned that in the FutureEd report strategies adopted by states between 2018 and 2022 to promote teacher diversity were examined. She emphasized the importance of each state gathering accurate and transparent data about the scope of its problem. Having clear data enables states, districts, and schools to set specific goals and benchmarks to track progress. For instance, Massachusetts publicly shared data on the racial demographics of the educator workforce on its website and enacted legislation requiring measurable diversity goals to be set.

She said Tennessee was recognized as a leader in setting measurable targets for increasing the number of teachers of color. The state required districts to establish goals and strategies for increasing teacher diversity, submit these plans to the State Department of Education, and provide annual reports on their progress. Additionally, the state's Educator Preparation Report Card evaluated teacher preparation programs based in part on the percentage of program graduates who were people of color.

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MS. OLSON turned to slide 7 and pointed out that addressing the high cost of attending college and earning a teacher education degree is crucial to overcome barriers in recruiting teachers of color and first-generation college students into the teaching profession. To tackle this issue, both federal and state governments have introduced service scholarships, grants, and loan forgiveness programs that alleviate tuition expenses in exchange for teachers committing to serve in high-need schools

or hard-to-staff subjects for several years. FutureEd's analysis revealed that 18 states enacted legislation between 2018 and 2022 to provide financial incentives for teachers of color. Six of these states specifically allocated funds for loan forgiveness or mortgage assistance, while the majority offered scholarships and financial assistance programs to mitigate the costs associated with becoming a teacher. Some states offered multiple financial incentives to support teacher diversity.

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MS. OLSON turned to slide 8 and said many states are also interested in Grow Your Own programs to try to increase the diversity of the teacher profession, particularly considering the strong competition for the limited supply of existing teachers of color. These programs aim to create a local talent pipeline by recruiting prospective teachers of color from the community, including high school students, paraprofessionals, after-school staff, and other community members. In exchange for preparing to become teachers, candidates typically receive financial, programmatic, and curriculum support and commit to working in the community after earning their teaching license.

According to the FutureEd analysis, at least 21 states have passed laws in the past five years that explicitly allow, establish, or fund Grow Your Own programs, with approximately half of these states specifying the goal of increasing diversity. As an example, California's classified school employee teacher credentialing program offers financial support of up to \$4,000 per year for up to five years to school staff, such as paraprofessionals, to earn a bachelor's degree and teaching credential. Since receiving funding in 2016, the program has assisted over 2,000 classified employees in becoming teachers, with nearly half of them being Latino.

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MS. OLSON turned to slide 9 and said states have also begun investing in teacher residency programs, often considered the gold standard in teacher preparation. Modeled after medical residencies, the intensive clinical preparation provides candidates on the job training under the mentorship of a master teacher while also doing coursework. Teacher residents are typically compensated during their yearlong internship, making the programs more accessible to students who cannot afford to entirely leave the labor market while attending school. Residencies attract and retain more teachers of color. About 49 percent of residents are people of color, more closely mirroring the student population. A challenge of the model is

affordability. Texas used some of its Elementary and Secondary School Emergency Relief (ESSER) funding to provide grants to districts to partner with teacher preparation programs to offer residency models. The districts are considering having residents work as substitute teachers or tutors to then funnel money back into the residency program. Some districts are using the money from existing teacher vacancies to explore teacher leadership models. Residents provide release time for highly skilled teachers to support other student teachers. The salary from the vacant position is then spread across multiple residency stipends. Through the US Department of Labor, registered teacher apprenticeships are now eligible for federal funding, which covers the expenses of job training, wages, transportation, and childcare. Industry recognized apprentices must pay at least federal, state, or local minimum wage and participate in structured work experience under the guidance of a mentor with related instruction. Tennessee won approval of its K-12 teaching apprenticeship model from the US Department of Labor in 2021. Eleven states are seeking recognition for apprenticeship models.

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MS. OLSON turned to slide 10 and discussed the various strategies that states can implement to diversify their teaching force, highlighting the success story of the Highline School District in Washington state. The Highline School District, which enrolls over 18,700 students, with over half being Black or Latino, significantly improved teacher diversity through strategic recruitment, hiring, and placement. Over the years, it increased its new hires of color from 12 percent in 2014-2015 to 35.7 percent by 2022-2023, resulting in 26 percent of the district's teachers being people of color.

Highline's diversity initiative featured several components, including offering earlier placements and hiring dates for schools looking to diversify their teaching staff. It began by scheduling early, providing specialized staff to work with school principals on their hiring plans, and changing its interview process to ensure fairness.

MS. OLSON recapped several of the avenues for states to consider when aiming to diversify the teaching workforce. The first strategy involves creating actionable data, goals, and targets to gain a comprehensive understanding of the issue's scope and the areas where state efforts are most needed. In addition to quantitative data, states can conduct surveys on teacher working conditions and utilize focus groups to gain insights into why

potential candidates may not enter the teaching profession or why teachers of color leave it.

Another strategy is to start early by funding programs that initiate outreach to students of color as early as middle and high school. This includes supporting early colleges of education, teacher academies, dual enrollment programs, and "grow your own" initiatives. States can also offer targeted scholarships and forgiveness programs to cover the costs associated with attending teacher preparation programs, as well as provide increased support for minority-serving institutions. States can expand pathways into teaching that support high-quality, diverse candidates by investing in "grow your own" programs, scaling teacher residency programs, and promoting registered teacher apprenticeships. It's crucial to enhance the percentage of candidates of color who pass teacher licensing exams by providing financial support and human resources to prepare aspiring teachers for these exams. States can also explore alternative approaches to licensure tests, such as portfolios, while maintaining high entry standards for the teaching profession.

MS. OLSON stressed the importance of not only recruiting more candidates of color into the teaching profession but also retaining them. This can be achieved by offering leadership opportunities, establishing career pathways specifically for teachers of color, and increasing the representation of leaders of color within the teaching profession.

[3:49:45 PM](#)

CHAIR TOBIN acknowledged Senator Stevens and Kiehl arrived.

[3:50:01 PM](#)

SENATOR STEVENS said about 50 percent of Alaska's population is Native and speculated that the number of Native teachers in Alaska is far less, perhaps 1-2 percent. Alaska is trying to get more young people to enter the teaching profession. Regarding the effectiveness of teachers of color on students of color, he asked whether the teacher and student needed to be of the same race.

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MS. OLSON replied that much of the original research looked at the effect of black teachers on black students. More recent studies looked at the effect of teachers from diverse racial and ethnic backgrounds, not necessarily matching the race and ethnicity of their students. These studies have discovered

similar findings, possibly due to certain characteristics identified in a study by David Blazer. Blazer's research, which involved surveys and classroom observations, revealed that teachers of color are more likely to believe in the malleability of student intelligence, invest time in building relationships with students and families, customize lessons based on individual student needs, and handle student misbehavior in constructive ways. This suggests that teacher behavior and expectations can have a positive impact on all students, not just those of the same race.

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SENATOR GRAY-JACKSON asked how teacher-preparation programs have impacted student learning and outcomes.

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MS. OLSON asserted that, due to the newness of the programs, few studies have examined the influence of the programs on student outcomes. Research primarily concentrated on whether the programs had enhanced the diversity of the teaching workforce and the duration for which candidates stayed in the profession. She highlighted that these studies indicated that teachers of color had a positive impact by improving student achievement, attendance, and graduation rates while also reducing discipline issues. Consequently, the programs seemed to hold promise for students.

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SENATOR GRAY-JACKSON said she recognized that as a legislator and a black woman, people who look like her respond to her a bit differently. Therefore, she can understand how the same is true with having a teacher in the classroom who looks like the students.

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CHAIR TOBIN stated she could also appreciate the benefits of racial diversity in the teaching profession. She stated she had a question regarding page two of the report, specifically the reference to a study discussing the impact equivalence of teacher race and reduced class size on student learning. She requested Ms. Olson elaborate on the similarities between the two different approaches.

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MS. OLSON replied that reducing class size is an expensive strategy to improve student learning outcomes, especially when it needs to occur on a large scale. Research shows that quality

of instruction and who teaches is important to student learning. Findings suggest that teacher characteristics, including race and diversity, should be considered part of the teacher quality equation. Seth Gershenson, an economist from American University, asserted that when evaluating teaching quality, administrators should not view teacher diversity as a separate or competing goal. Instead, they should consider a teacher's race as one of the measures of teacher quality, alongside more conventional criteria like years of teaching experience and demonstrated performance.

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CHAIR TOBIN said state teacher retention working group recommendations include leadership. She asked Ms. Olson if any research she evaluated addressed how having superintendents, support staff, and principals of color working for schools might improve education outcomes.

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MS. OLSON replied there have been studies on the importance of color in school leadership. The studies show that teachers of color are more likely to be hired by school leaders of color and experience a more favorable work environment. It is crucial to consider race not only for teachers but also school and district leadership. Surveys and discussions with teachers, especially teachers of color, emphasize the significance of career pathways to retain them in the profession. They highly prioritize strong professional development opportunities and clear career paths, which could facilitate their progression into leadership roles if they so desired.

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CHAIR TOBIN mentioned that the FutureEd report discussed various high school training programs and the concept of establishing an early pipeline for students to become educators. She asked Ms. Olson to share examples from the report and suggest ways to inspire young people to pursue education as a career.

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MS. OLSON replied that early intervention, particularly in relation to students of color, is important. She stressed the significance of introducing the idea of teaching as a viable career option as early as middle or high school to make it clear that a career in education is attainable. She mentioned specific programs such as the Center for Black Development. She mentioned two programs in Washington state that promote early exposure to teaching. One helped create teacher academies tailored to local

needs and the other aimed at recruiting bilingual high school students. She also touched upon other early exposure avenues to teaching, such as dual enrollment programs, early career high schools, Pathways in Technology Early College High Schools (P-TECH), and future teacher clubs, which collectively provide students with opportunities to explore teaching as a career choice.

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SENATOR STEVENS asked whether FutureEd saw improvement in teacher diversification since 2020.

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Ms. Olson responded that the most significant progress was observed in the number of Latinos entering the teaching profession. Although some headway was being made, a substantial gap persisted, partly because of the rapidly changing student population. [Inaudible]. Action would be needed on multiple fronts to change the trajectory all along the pipeline.

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CHAIR TOBIN said the February 2023 report Teachers Like Us has great examples of states working to support teacher pipelines.

[4:03:42 PM](#)

There being no further business to come before the committee, Chair Tobin adjourned the Senate Education Standing Committee meeting at 4:03 pm.