

## TEACHER DIVERSITY A STRUGGLE FOR SCHOOLS

### Rochester City School District looks to expand by growing more of its own

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The recruitment of diverse teachers and the development of anti-racism and implicit bias training are both areas of concern for districts large and small throughout the country — if they are being addressed at all.

There are no districts that have “solved” either problem. Schools in the South tend to have more black teachers and schools in the Southwest tend to have more Hispanic teachers, both largely a result of regional demographics. Big cities like New York and Chicago have greater numbers of diverse teachers, both because they can grow more of their own and because those cities are attractive to national job seekers.

Otherwise, there are few districts comparable to Rochester that have succeeded in bringing in more black teachers. U.S. census data shows that 12.6 percent of teachers working in the city of Rochester are black, compared with 10.3 percent in Buffalo and 7.3 percent in Syracuse.

For further inspiration, Rochester City School District might look to its own past. In 1969, when only 7 percent of RCSD teachers and administrators were black, the district embarked on an ambitious recruitment effort similar to what it is doing today. That included a year-long internship program for college students.

“Although there is merit in bringing in new blood, I’ll be happier when we grow our own,” William Young, director of the Center for Cooperative Action in Urban Education, said then. “It’s a bad reflection of our schools when more of our students don’t go into teaching.”

The Teaching and Learning Institute at East High School is an established effort to do just that; it has several alumni currently teaching in RCSD, and the district hopes to expand it.

As for professional development, one of the cities at the forefront is Charlottesville, Virginia, site of a deadly white supremacy rally in 2017. Even before then, the Albemarle County Public Schools had created a “Culturally Responsive Training” team meant to ensure that “all students (are) able to partake in a curriculum that is accessible, engaging and culturally relevant.”

That Charlottesville team includes one teacher, Leslie Wills-Taylor, who was recognized as a fellow in the national Teaching Tolerance program. Rochester has such a teacher as well in Chris Widmaier, a science teacher at World of Inquiry School 58 who helped organize Black Lives Matter at School Day last year.

In Pennsylvania, meanwhile, Teacher Action Group – Philadelphia is a more teacher-led movement with a similar emphasis on anti-racism. It held a training event last year to help teachers “confront white supremacy in ourselves, our classrooms and schools and our city.”

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**Rochester has room for improvement in the diversity of its teaching ranks, but performs better than Buffalo or Syracuse. Yanelys Ortega leads her class to their lunch time at School 17 on Orchard Street.**  
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