



## Pittsburgh Public Schools looks to improve teacher diversity



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Pennsylvania has one of the largest racial disparities between its students and teachers, says Angela Allie, Pittsburgh Public School’s Executive Director of Equity.

In Pittsburgh Public Schools, 50% of students are African American, yet more than 85% of the district’s teachers are white. Pittsburgh Public Schools has acknowledged the lack of diversity among district teachers over the past few years.

To improve its teacher diversity, the district is partnering with Teach Plus and participating in the nonprofit’s program, Equity Leadership Institute (ELI).

“We recognize we are confronted with a historical debt that is disproportionately affecting African American students,” Mrs. Allie said.

The institute will focus on recruiting more teachers of color and improving the retention rates in Pittsburgh Public Schools.

ELI is a program sponsored by Teach Plus, a national nonprofit organization that focuses on education equity through teacher leadership. The nonprofit's goal is to educate districts with large populations of students of color on education policy reform and how to advocate for equity leadership. It has partnered with districts in 13 states to improve school funding, inclusive curriculums and diverse teacher recruitment.

The institute will use [Teach Plus models](#) and findings from partnerships with other districts. However, the program will help Pittsburgh Public Schools create its own model and plans based on the district's data. ELI will connect teachers of color in the district with other teachers of color to help create, what Laura Boyce, the Pennsylvania Executive Director of Teach Plus, calls, "a safety net."

"We want to expose these districts to resources and promising practices but ultimately we want these district teams to have ownership of their own plans," Ms. Boyce said. "We are not going to be coming in with a one size fits all model. [Districts] are going to be supported through a continuous inquiry process where they are going to be looking at their own data to understand barriers and challenges."

At a meeting last week, the school board approved the plan, which will be paid for through grants for the next three years.

Nina Esposito-Visgitis, the president of Pittsburgh Federation of Teachers, said she supports the initiative to diversify teaching staff.

"This is a major issue across the country," she said. "Every time one of our African American teachers retires, my heart flops. It's important for not only African American kids to see diversity, but all of our students to see diversity."

Pittsburgh Public Schools will be connected with other districts participating in ELI. Sto-Rox School District and Propel Charter Schools have approved partnerships.

"This program is also to be able to provide a supporting network for teachers of color," added Aaron Johnson, the Teach Plus Program Director of Pennsylvania. "We are here so teachers have a support mechanism to

connect with one another so they can feel good about what they are doing in the classroom and districts.”

Mr. Johnson has already built a connection with many leaders in Allegheny County. Previously he has worked as Chief Strategy Officer for local nonprofits. He has experience hiring, recruiting and retaining teachers of color. As the program director for Pittsburgh, he plans to help districts in Allegheny County develop similar plans based on their own findings.

Teach Plus is expected to partner with at least six public and charter schools in Pittsburgh. Mr. Johnson will build teams of teachers and administrators at each school. The teams will meet with one another and Mr. Johnson quarterly to develop long-lasting models to improve education models.

Mrs. Allie and Ms. Esposito-Visgitis both said the partnership with Teach Plus and ELI is one of many attempts Pittsburgh Public Schools has made to diversify their teaching staff.

In 2017 the district created a plan to gain more teachers through the student-to-teacher pipeline here in Allegheny County. The district has offered scholarship incentives to Pittsburgh students pursuing education. The district has recruited future educators from Brashear High School’s teacher academy by promising jobs after five to 10 years of an education degree.

To increase diversity, the district has even started exploring recruiting teachers who have graduated from historically Black colleges and universities.

The district also developed the [On Track Equity Plan](#) of 2019 to explore more ways to improve equity within Pittsburgh Public Schools.

“This program, this institute is an opportunity for us to hear from teachers of color about their legit experiences which have been, what at times has inhibited their ability to stay or want to stay in the district,” Mrs. Allie said. “What has really connected them and allowed them to have longevity in our district? We do want to hear from them and we do want to find out ways we can approve in that area.”

The district has committed to the program for one year but can renew for at least two more years.

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