

Research Brief 2023 – 1: Racial Characteristics of School and District Leaders in Pennsylvania Ed Fuller, PhD

Introduction

While there has been increasing and widespread focus on the racial characteristics of teachers in the [US](#) and [Pennsylvania](#), far less attention has been given to [principals](#) and [superintendents](#). This lack of attention is problematic because a growing body of research has found that principals of color have fairly large impacts on outcomes for both teachers and students of color.

In Pennsylvania, only about 12% of principals and superintendents are leaders of Color. These percentages have remained stable from 2014 to 2022. Charter schools employ a greater percentage of principal and superintendents of Color than school districts.

Importance of Leaders of Color

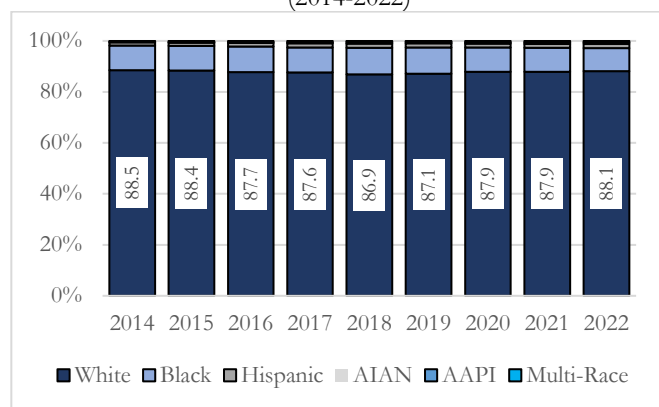
Regarding teachers, principals of Color are more likely to [hire](#) and [retain teachers](#) of Color as well as improve the perceptions of [working conditions](#) of teachers of Color. This, in turn, has positive impacts on [outcomes for students of Color](#). Principals of Color also have direct effects on the [outcomes](#) for students of Color, including achievement, attendance, placement in various special programs ([gifted and talented](#), [special education](#)), and inclusion in the [disciplinary system](#).

While there is little research on superintendents of Color, one would expect superintendents of Color are more likely to hire principals of Color. Moreover, having a superintendent of Color sends a power message about the importance of racial diversity students, teachers, principals, and community members of Color.

Racial Characteristics of Pennsylvania Principals and Superintendents Over Time

As shown in **Figure 1**, only *about 12% of principals were leaders of Color*. The greatest percentage of principals of Color was in 2018 (13.1%) while the lowest percentage of principals of Color was 11.5% in 2014. The change in the percentage of principals of Color from 2014 to 2022 was only -0.4 percentage points. Thus, there has been no change in the percentage of principals of Color over the last nine years.

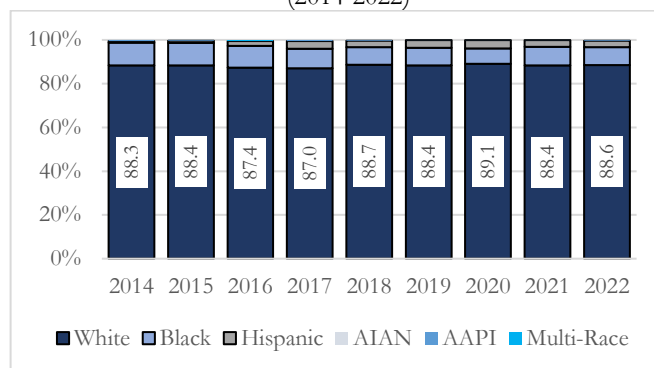
Figure 1: Percentage of Pennsylvania Principals by Race (2014-2022)



Data Source: PDE educator employment files; Analysis by author

As shown in **Figure 2**, only *about 12% of superintendents were leaders of Color*. The greatest percentage of superintendents of Color was in 2018 (13.0%) while the lowest percentage of principals of Color was 11.5% in 2014. The change in the percentage of principals of Color from 2014 to 2022 was only -0.4 percentage points. Thus, there has been no change in the percentage of principals of Color over the last nine years.

Figure 2: Percentage of Pennsylvania Superintendents by Race (2014-2022)



Data Source: PDE educator employment files; Analysis by author

Racial Characteristics of Pennsylvania Principals and Superintendents by District Type

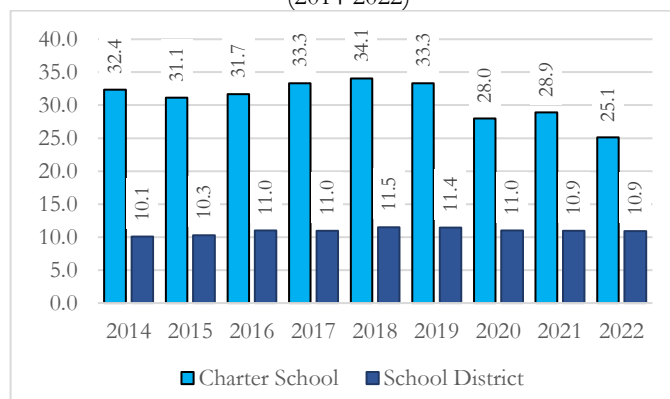
The racial characteristics of principals and superintendents varies by school- and district type. In the analyses below, I present the percentage of principals by racial characteristics for both charter schools and public schools and districts from 2014 through 2022.

As shown in **Figure 3**, the *percentage of principals of Color was greater in charter schools than in public schools*.

Although the percentage changed across time, about 30% of principals of charter schools were principals of Color compared to only about 11% in public schools.

Over time, the percentage of principals of Color declined in charter schools from a high of 34.1% in 2018 to a low of 25.1% in 2022. The percentage of principals of Color remained fairly constant for public schools—varying from 10.1% to 11.0%.

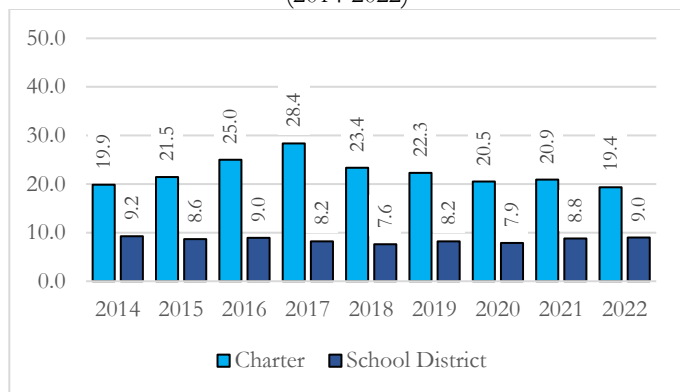
Figure 3: Percentage of Pennsylvania Principals of Color (2014-2022)



Data Source: PDE public and private school enrollment

As shown in **Figure 4**, a far **greater percentage of Charter CEOs were educators of Color compared to superintendents of public school districts**. While the percentages varied widely across years, the average percentage of CEOs of Color was 22.5% while the average percentage of superintendents of Color was only 8.5%. Interestingly, the percentage of CEOs of color increased from 19.9% in 2014 to 28.4% in 2017, then declined back to 19.4% in 2022. In contrast, the percentage of superintendents of Color remained stable across time at between 7.6% and 9.2%.

Figure 4: Percentage of Pennsylvania Superintendents of Color (2014-2022)



Data Source: PDE public and private school enrollment

Comparisons to National Averages

Based on [national data](#) on principals from 2021, about 22% of principals were educators of Color. This was at least five percentage points greater than the percentage of principals of Color in Pennsylvania. The percentage of principals of Color in US charter schools was about 33% which was similar to the percentages for principals in charter schools in Pennsylvania through 2019, but greater than the percentages for Pennsylvania charter school after 2019. The percentage of public school principals of Color in the US was 22%--double the average of about 11% in Pennsylvania.

A 2020 national survey of superintendents suggests about [8.5%](#) of superintendents are educators of Color. This is lower than the percentage of superintendents of Color although a lower percentage of survey respondents who were employed as charter CEOs could have depressed the percentage of superintendents of Color in the survey.

Comparisons to Pennsylvania Students and Teachers

Based on 2020 data from the Pennsylvania Department of Education, [Research for Action](#) found that slightly less than 6% of Pennsylvania teachers were educators of Color while one-third of students were children of Color. **Thus, the percentage of principals and superintendents of Color in Pennsylvania is greater than the percentage of teachers of Color, but substantially lower than the percentage of students of Color.**

Potential Solutions

Unfortunately, there are few proven strategies to increase the percentage of principals and superintendents of Color. However, the following strategies have shown some success and/or show promise in improving the situation.

1) **Expand the pool of teachers of Color and retain them in the profession.** Principals and superintendents often rise from the ranks of teachers, thus hiring and retaining more teachers of Color is critical.

2) **Tap teachers of Color to obtain their principal certification.** Many teachers do not enter a principalship program without being encouraged to do so by their own principals. School boards and superintendents should encourage and support their (largely white) principals in identifying and supporting teachers of Color to enter the principalship and should build and support an internal network of educators of Color to assist in this effort.

3) **Support assistant principals and facilitate their advancement to principalship positions.** Assistant principals of Color often never become principals or take much longer to do so than their white peers. To address this issue, Districts should address potential bias of hiring committees, ensure assistant principals of Color receive an appropriate mentor, and engage assistant principals of Color in all the experiences necessary to advance to the principalship.

4) **Provide training about bias on hiring committees and ensure educators of Color are included on hiring committees.** Research overwhelming suggests bias and discrimination play some role in the lack of hiring of educators of Color in all education positions, including assistant principal, principal, and superintendent. Districts need to ensure hiring committees have the appropriate training and oversight so that hiring processes are more meritocratic and equitable.

5) **Provide strong mentors to assistant principals and principals of Color.** As with assistant principals of Color, principals of Color need strong mentors who will help them be successful in aspire to the superintendency when appropriate.

6) **Ask educators of Color what they need and provide it.** Ask educators of Color what they need to stay in a job and then advance into leadership positions, then respond appropriately.

7) **Create partnerships with educator preparation programs.** School districts and preparation programs should partner to create pipelines of leaders of Color. The state should provide financial support for such efforts and seek philanthropic support.

8) **Hire clusters of educators of Color.** Research has shown racially isolated teachers tend to have greater attrition rates. Hiring clusters of educators of Color helps build a support network and increase retention.

9) **Set goals for hiring educators of Color.** Public goals help ensure the organization focuses on meeting those goals and school board members are held accountable for meeting goals of increasing the diversity of leaders.

10) **Build on the Work of the Center for Black Educator Development.** The Center, led by Sharif El-Mekki, has shown initial success in increasing the number of Black educators in Pennsylvania.

11) **Collect and Report Data.** While the Pennsylvania has embarked on collecting and reporting data on teachers of Color, the same information is important to collect and report for school- and district- leaders.

Suggested Citation

Fuller, E.J. (2023, January). Racial Characteristics of School and District Leaders in Pennsylvania. University Park, PA. Center for Education Evaluation and Policy Analysis.

Center for Education Evaluation and Policy Analysis

This brief is part of the CEEPA Research and Policy Brief Series that provides evidenced-based, peer-reviewed analysis of important educational issues in Pennsylvania and across the US. Dr. Ed Fuller is the Executive Director.