
Educator Diversity Policy 5.700

The Background:

Across the state, one of the challenges facing school districts is the growing mismatch between an increasingly diverse student body, and the diversity of the educators who serve Tennessee's students. According to a 2018 Department report, students of color made up 37 percent of Tennessee's K-12 student population, but only 13 percent of Tennessee teachers were people of color (Tennessee Department of Education, 2018).

Research indicates that a racially and ethnically diverse teaching force can have a variety of positive impacts on students, including in the areas of academic achievement (Dee, 2004; Egalite, Kisida, & Winters, 2015; Weiher, 2000), discipline (Lindsay & Hart, 2017; Roch & Pitts, 2012), and social/emotional development (Bristol & Martin-Fernandez, 2019). Furthermore, there is evidence that increasing educator diversity can reduce teacher vacancies in rapidly diversifying schools.

Based on this evidence, in 2019, the Tennessee General Assembly passed legislation to address educator diversity in the state. T.C.A. § 49-1-302(g) requires the Commissioner to recommend, and the State Board to adopt, a policy to address educator diversity. According to law, the policy must include:

- Strategies for LEAs to use in the recruitment and retention of minority educators;
- A requirement that each LEA set a goal for educator diversity that takes into consideration the diversity of the students that the LEA serves; and
- A plan to monitor educator diversity in the state.

Over the last several months, the Tennessee Department of Education has collaborated with various stakeholder groups to develop a policy that both addresses the requirements in law and builds a foundation for continued efforts to address educator diversity throughout the state.

The policy requires LEAs to set goals for educator diversity and report those goals to the Department. Additionally, the policy offers multiple strategies for the recruitment and retention of minority educators that LEAs may use to meet their goals. Finally, the policy outlines several ways the Department will monitor and report on educator diversity in the state, and how it will develop tools and resources to support LEAs in setting and meeting goals for recruitment, employment, and retention of minority educators.

The Department and State Board recognize the crucial role that Tennessee's Educator Preparation Providers (EPPs) play in addressing educator diversity in Tennessee. This policy is designed to align with similar efforts to address educator diversity in Tennessee's EPPs, including primary EPP/LEA partnerships tailored toward recruitment and training of educators of color, and a state-level EPP accountability framework and that monitors and holds EPPs accountable for the diversity of the teacher candidates they recruit and train.

Between first and final reading, the Department gathered additional stakeholder feedback to incorporate into the policy. Based on feedback, changes on final reading include:

- Addition of “two or more races” in the definition of “minority educator” to reflect that educators may select more than one race when reporting demographic information in TNCompass.
- Encouraging LEAs to post their educator diversity goals publicly.
- Identifying additional strategies LEAs may use to support their educator diversity goals.
- Removing the requirement that the Department create an Educator Diversity Working Group. The Department recognizes the important work of already existing educator diversity working groups in Tennessee, and based on stakeholder feedback will shift to providing assistance and partnership to these groups in order to foster educator diversity in the state.
- Minor clerical revisions.

The Fiscal Analysis Impact:

T.C.A. § 49-1-212 requires that the Department prepare a fiscal analysis of any policy, rule, or regulation proposed to the State Board of Education. This item has no financial impact on an LEA.

Policy Justification:

T.C.A. § 4-5-230 requires that justification for adopting an item as a policy instead of a rule be submitted to the chair of the Government Operations Committee. This item is proposed to be adopted as a policy because it defines or explains the meaning of a statute or rule and/or concerns only the internal management of state government that does not affect private rights or privileges.

The Recommendation:

The Department of Education recommends approval of this item on final reading. The SBE staff concurs with this recommendation.