

Exploring workforce diversity and hiring practices in Lower Merion School District

**LOWER MERION SCHOOL DISTRICT EQUITY, DIVERSITY, AND INCLUSION
CONTINUOUS IMPROVEMENT PROJECT RESEARCH BRIEF NO. 3**

December 2022



Understanding Equity in Lower Merion School District

Education Northwest partnered with Lower Merion School District (LMSD) to review district practices and policies related to building an equitable and inclusive learning environment. From late 2020 to early 2021, LMSD leadership engaged the community in a collaborative process to identify three critical focus areas to guide Education Northwest's study.



Curriculum, instruction, and pedagogy



Professional learning



Staff diversity and hiring

Education Northwest will share findings from the equity review in a series of four research briefs. This first brief focuses on **staff diversity and hiring practices in LMSD**.

Exploring equity in the workforce

To explore LMSD's efforts to diversify the workforce, we asked the following questions:

1. What are the impacts of ongoing recruitment and retention efforts related to diverse teaching candidates, administrators, and staff members?
2. What are the strengths and areas of growth related to recruiting and retaining candidates from majority groups who have an aptitude for equity and inclusion?
3. What are the strengths and areas of growth related to recruiting and retaining candidates of color?
4. What are the impacts of staffing and hiring on students and educators?

Background

LMSD is a suburban school district located in southern Montgomery County, Pennsylvania, adjacent to Philadelphia. As of the 2020-21 school year, approximately 8,500 students are enrolled in LMSD, which provides educational and related services to those students across six elementary schools, three middle schools, two high schools and one virtual academy program. LMSD employs approximately 870 professional employees who are certified by the Pennsylvania Department of Education to provide instructional, educational, counseling, psychological, health and other related services to students. Approximately 700 support staff are also employed by LMSD as bus drivers, aides, nutritional services workers, staff nurses, custodians, building maintenance, grounds, information technology and other positions supporting the operations of the district. The district also employs dozens of temporary and substitute workers across all departments.

LMSD is subject to a Collective Bargaining Agreement (CBA) with its staff, all of whom are represented by Pennsylvania State Educational Association (PSEA), a National Education Association affiliate and one of the two largest educational unions in the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania. All the eligible employees in the district—professional and support—are covered under one wall-to-wall CBA and represented by PSEA, operating through its Local Lower Merion Educational Association (LMEA). All terms and conditions of employment, including salary, in LMSD are subject to collective bargaining between the District and the Union, LMEA, in accordance with State and Federal Labor Laws. As is consistent with a union environment in education, terms and conditions exist within the boundaries of the CBA and related documents, and through School Board-issued policy.

LMSD was a founding member of Delaware Valley Consortium for Equity and Excellence (DVCEE), a regional resource through University of Pennsylvania Graduate School of Education. The district engages in committee work with the public and other stakeholders related to equity issues. One example is the Committee to Address Race in Education (CARE) which meets monthly to discuss issues of race that have implications for education, advise the district on issues of policy and practice, report about district programming, and educate all stakeholders on efforts to increase understanding and bring all students to the highest possible levels of achievement. LMSD sought to engage in an equity, diversity, and inclusion review to identify areas of growth to continue to further move its work forward in a strategic and meaningful way.

Culturally responsive data collection: An overview

Research suggests that a racially, ethnically, and linguistically diverse teacher workforce benefits all students. When students of color have teachers who share some characteristics of their identities, they experience positive outcomes, including higher test scores and reduced likelihood of disciplinary issues (Goldhaber et al., 2015). Bilingual teachers, particularly those who can work in dual-language immersion settings, can engage linguistically diverse students and foster cultural appreciation and academic growth in the classroom (Villegas & Irvine, 2010). The positive benefits of a diverse teacher workforce extend to all students because exposure to multiple perspectives in diverse learning communities can improve problem solving, critical thinking, creativity, social and emotional skills, and civic engagement (Phillips, 2014; Wells et al., 2016). However, districts face challenges to recruiting and hiring a diverse teacher workforce, including national teacher shortages, limited resources to devote to recruitment efforts, or district policies and practices that do not support the recruitment and retainment of diverse candidates (Bireda & Chait, 2011; Konoske-Graf et al., 2016; Palaich et al., 2014).

Given the positive student outcomes related to educator diversity, we explored, at LMSD's request, the district's efforts to recruit and retain staff members of color to identify strengths and areas for growth. Below, we detail findings in two areas: **recruitment and hiring and retention**.

At every phase of the study, Education Northwest sought insight and guidance from the LMSD community. In collaboration with LMSD, Education Northwest established a 12-member advisory group of parents, educators, counselors, school board members, and community leaders. The advisory group met regularly with Education Northwest to provide feedback on the study plan, inform data collection efforts, and develop recommendations for the district.

We conducted 8 **focus groups** with 42 educators and staff from LMSD. We used a purposeful sampling approach to recruit participants for focus groups. Two focus groups were conducted in person at LMSD. One consisted of 15 educators who identify as Black, Indigenous, or people of color (BIPOC), another consisted of five administrators who identify as BIPOC, and one included three staff members from the human resources department. We then conducted five virtual focus groups with teachers and staff members. The focus groups were broken down by grade and role. With teachers, we conducted two focus groups at the elementary level, one at the middle school level,

and one at the high school level. We also conducted one focus group with counselors. One **interview** was also conducted with three Administrators from the human resources (HR) department to understand the policies and practices LMSD uses to recruit, hire, and retain diverse staff members. Focus groups and interviews ranged from 60 to 120 minutes.

An **educator survey** was distributed to all educators across the district. Eight hundred and sixty-six educators were invited to complete the survey, and 744 responded for a response rate of 86 percent. About 74 percent of survey respondents identified as white, 10 percent identified as BIPOC, and 16 percent elected to self-describe their racial identity. In addition, **student and caregiver surveys** were distributed to students in grades 4–5 and 6–12 and to caregivers for all students in the district. A total of 1,158 students in grades 4–5, 3,485 students in grades 6–12, and 1,043 caregivers completed the survey.

Finally, Education Northwest conducted a **document review** of recruitment, hiring, and onboarding documents provided by LMSD. Documents included job postings, job descriptions, board policies, hiring handbooks, and onboarding documents. In addition, we analyzed the demographic trends of individuals who applied, interviewed, and were hired at LMSD.

Perceptions of LMSD workforce diversity

To explore LMSD’s efforts to diversify the workforce, Education Northwest distributed a survey to all educators across the district, students in grades 4-12, and caregivers for all students in the district. Twelve percent of educators who were surveyed participated in a hiring committee for positions at LMSD during the past three years.

Respondents to the district-wide staff survey were aware of these disparities in staffing: About 65 percent of respondents felt that the district needs more diverse staff members (figure 1).

Figure 1. Most educators felt that the district needs more diverse staff members

● Not at all ● A small extent ● A moderate extent ● A great extent



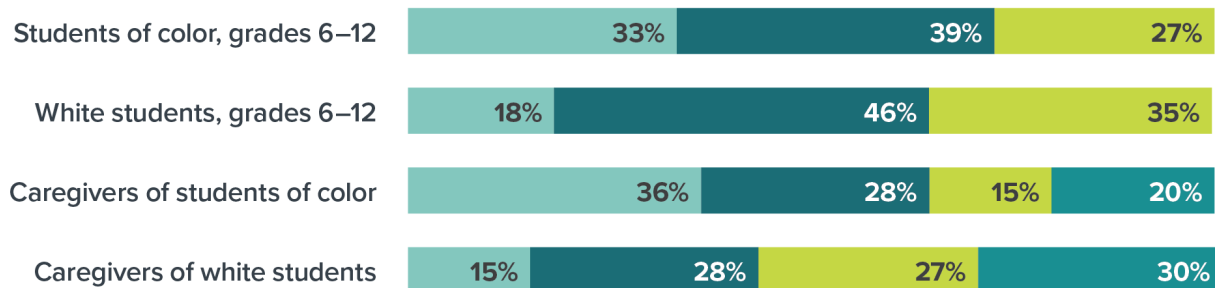
Source: Education Northwest analysis of LMSD educator survey (n = 672)

Students expressed a similar desire for workforce diversity. Around 65 percent of the surveyed students felt that LMSD needs more diverse staff members (figure 2), and about one-quarter of surveyed students indicated that they did not have at least one teacher who shares their racial and gender identity (figure 3).

Figure 2. Many students of color agreed that LMSD needs a more diverse staff

To what extent do you agree with the following statement? LMSD needs a more diverse staff.

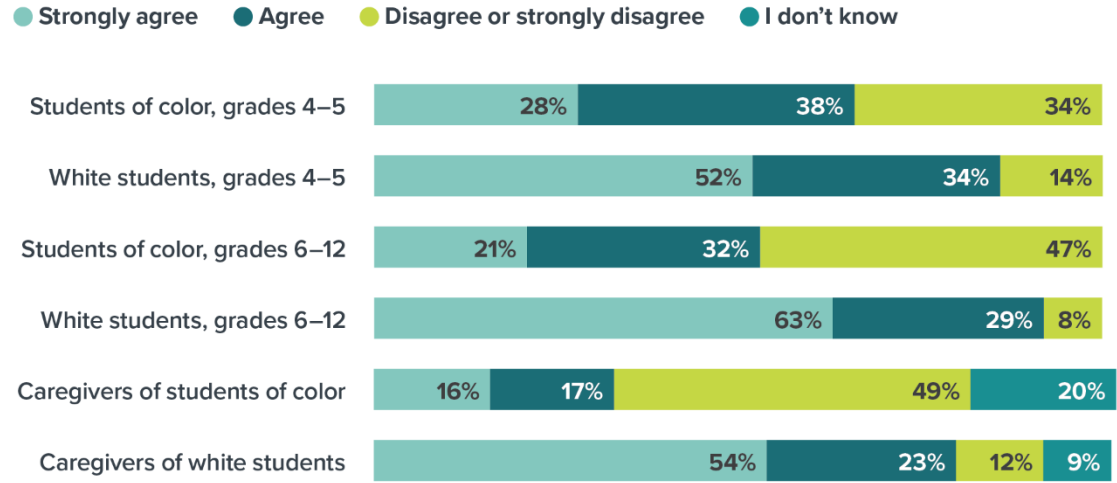
● Strongly agree ● Agree ● Disagree or strongly disagree ● I don't know



Source: Education Northwest analysis of LMSD survey for students in grades 6–12 (n = 3,485) and caregiver survey (n = 1,043)

Figure 3. Fewer students of color agreed that they had at least one teacher who shares their racial and gender identity

To what extent do you agree with the following statement? I have at least one teacher that has the same racial and gender identity as me.



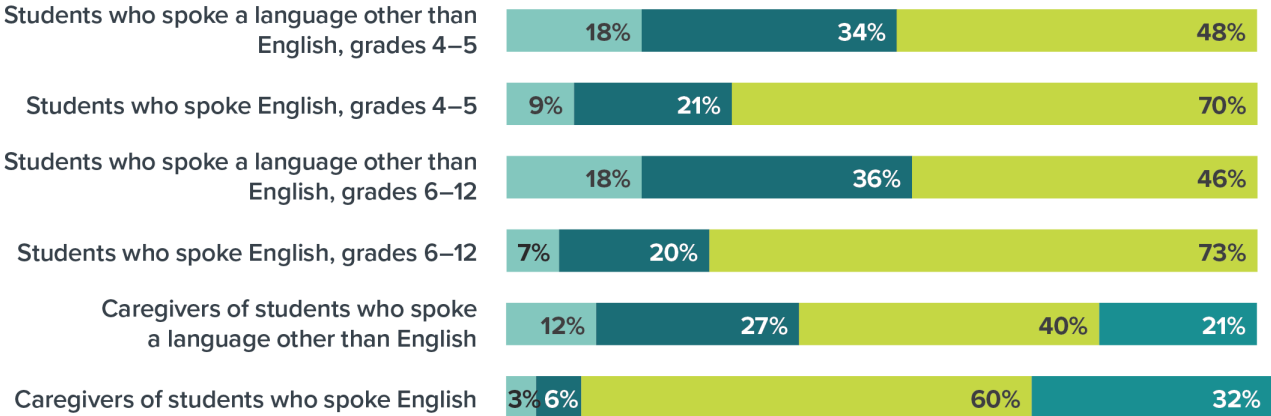
Source: Education Northwest analysis of LMSD survey for students in grades 4–5 (n = 1,158), survey for students in grades 6–12 (n = 3,485), and caregiver survey (n = 1,043)

Likewise, about 60 percent of students and caregivers who speak a language other than English at home wished that more of LMSD’s teaching staff spoke their language.

Figure 4. Most students and caregivers who speak a language other than English at home wished that more of LMSD’s teaching staff spoke their language

To what extent do you agree with the following statement? I wish I had more teachers who spoke the same language as me.

● Strongly agree ● Agree ● Disagree or strongly disagree ● I don’t know



Source: Education Northwest analysis of LMSD survey for students in grades 4–5 (n = 1,158), survey for students in grades 6–12 (n = 3,485), and caregiver survey (n = 1,043)

While educators and students alike expressed a need to diversify the LMSD workforce, 56 percent of survey respondents who participated in an LMSD hiring committee over the past three years did not think that LMSD had a sufficient number of diverse candidates to fill open positions. In the next section, we review general market dynamics alongside the applicant and employee demographics of LMSD.

Recruitment and hiring

We start this section by presenting the market dynamics for hiring in the Southeastern region of Pennsylvania. We then move to demographics of applicants and hires at LMSD. Next, we describe the strategies LMSD uses to recruit and hire staff members, particularly staff members of color. Then, drawing from focus groups, interviews with HR personnel, and districtwide surveys, we detail staff and administrator perceptions of issues that impact the recruitment and hiring of diverse staff members.

Market dynamics

Southeastern Pennsylvania and the Philadelphia Region is a densely populated area with many municipal and regional school districts competing over staff at all levels and all demographics. Due to the location, most school employees benefit from union representation.

In Pennsylvania, educators must be certified by the PA Department of Education (PDE) in order to teach in PA public schools. The number of certified teachers in PA has decreased by 62% in recent years. According to the PDE *Staff Study Pursuant to Act 82 of 2018*, between 2010-2011 to 2017-2018, the number of Instructional I Certificates issued decreased from 21,045 to 7,970. This past year, PDE reported issuing only 5,000 teaching certificates.

Applicant and employee demographics

LMSD provided demographic employment data for the district as of December 2021, see table 1. Data from the PDE (2018) indicates that educators of color comprise between 4-6% of active certified teachers in Pennsylvania.

Table 1. LMSD demographic employment data as of December 2021 and Pennsylvania Public Schools (2016-17)

	Total number of staff	Number of staff identifying as Hispanic or Latino/a/x	Number of staff identifying as BIPOC
Professional Staff, Pennsylvania Public Schools	-	1%	5%
Administrators, District-wide	76	0	10 (13.1%)
Building-level Administrators (Principals, Assistant Principals, etc.)	28	0	4 (14.3%)
Professional Staff, District-wide	841	13 (1.55%)	84 (10.1%)
Support Staff, District-wide	661	14 (2.1%)	168 (25.4%)

Source: Education Northwest analysis of employment demographic data from December 2021 provided by LMSD district office and Pennsylvania Department of Education

Education Northwest analyzed employment data provided by the district, including demographic characteristics of those who applied to, were interviewed by, and ultimately hired at LMSD from March 1, 2021, to August 31, 2021. Approximately 4,266 certified job applications were submitted during the time period. Most applicants, interviewees, and hires were white, non-Hispanic, and female. White applicants made up 79 percent of applicants, 69 percent of interviewees, and 73 percent of hires (table 2). Similarly, respondents who identified as non-Hispanic or Latino/a/x made up 81 percent of applicants, 79 percent of interviewees, and 84 percent of hires. Gender differences were also apparent, with respondents who identified as female making up 73 percent of applicants, 63 percent of interviewees, and 65 percent of new hires. About 15 percent of applicants, interviewees, and hires did not report their demographics.

Table 2. Most applicants, interviewees, and hires were white, non-Hispanic, and female

	Applicants	Interviewees	Hires
<i>Race</i>			
BIPOC	6%	10%	12%
White	79%	69%	73%
No response	17%	21%	14%
<i>Ethnicity</i>			
Hispanic or Latino/a/x	2%	3%	8%
Not Hispanic or Latino/a/x	81%	79%	84%
No response	16%	18%	8%
<i>Gender</i>			
Female	73%	63%	65%
Male	17%	23%	29%
No response or decline to identify	10%	14%	6%

Note: No applicants identified as American Indian, Alaska Native, Native Hawaiian, or other Pacific Islander.
 Source: Education Northwest analysis of application, interview, and hiring data from 3/1/2021 to 8/31/2021 provided by LMSD district office applicants (n = 4,266), interviewees (n = 847), and hires (n = 49)

Strategies to Recruit and Hire Candidates of Color

LMSD uses a variety of methods to recruit and hire diverse candidates. Key strategies highlighted in interviews include recruitment fairs, partnerships, job postings, and principal engagement. Below, we provide examples of LMSD strategies for recruiting and hiring diverse candidates, but it does not include the full spectrum of approaches.

Recruitment fairs. Representatives from the district attend educator recruitment fairs both locally and out of state. Some of the recruitment fairs focused on hiring educators of color include the recruitment event sponsored by [Delaware Valley Consortium for Excellence and Equity](#) (DVCEE), a collaborative association of educational institutions in greater Philadelphia. Montgomery County Intermediate Unit also hosts an annual diversity recruitment fair.

Partnerships. LMSD was a founding district in the DVCEE collaborative and partner with the human resources committee. Other partners include historically Black colleges and universities which the HR Office reaches out to every spring to provide anticipated open positions, links to the job posting website and other pertinent information.

Advertising. The district posts jobs on their website and external sites, such as the [Regional Education Applicant Placement](#) (REAP), a nationwide advertising board for education. LMSD also advertises on the DVCEE Job Board, on Indeed.com, in state-wide trade association job boards such as PASBO and PASPA, with the Montgomery County Intermediate Unit, and depending on the job posting may also advertise through HBCUCareers.com, NEMNET, the Philadelphia Inquirer, Monster.com, LinkedIn, Facebook, and other outlets.

Principal engagement. School principals are integral to LMSD recruitment efforts. Principals describe reaching out to potential educators in their professional network or school districts in the Philadelphia area. According to the human resources personnel, the school principal's "intentional, focused follow-through" in the recruitment process "is what matters most" in getting high-quality candidates.

THE DISTRICT INVESTS IN TEACHERS' SALARIES AND BENEFITS

Interviewees described the district as one of “choice” because of the salaries, benefits, and resources provided to educators. Research suggests that districts that invest in all teachers’ salaries can improve retention and reduce costly staff turnover (Grissom et al., 2016; Konoske-Graf et al., 2016). One HR staff member said LMSD offers educator salaries that are “higher than most districts in the state” in addition to a high-quality benefits package. In interviews, educators noted that one of the reasons they chose to work at LMSD was because it is a “higher-paying district.”

EXTERNAL ISSUES CAN IMPACT RECRUITMENT EFFORTS

Interviewees said that teacher shortages and a small pool of diverse candidates can impact the recruitment of diverse educators. These structural issues limit the number of applicants of color LMSD receives (see table 1). One administrator said, “I think we’re being very active in thinking about ways to recruit and retain candidates of color. We’re always open to new ideas. It’s just there’s a lack of candidates out there.”

In addition, one administrator discussed how the lack of diversity in the district can deter candidates of color:

My impression is that LMSD is taking vigorous measures to find diverse candidates and to support them once hired. There seems to be a popular conception that there are millions of diverse candidates out there, waiting to be hired by any district that has an interest in doing so. The reality is that, for systemic reasons, there are not as many diverse educators as would be ideal. Many of them do not choose to work in a predominantly white suburban district.

SELECTING FOR DIVERSITY, EQUITY, AND INCLUSION

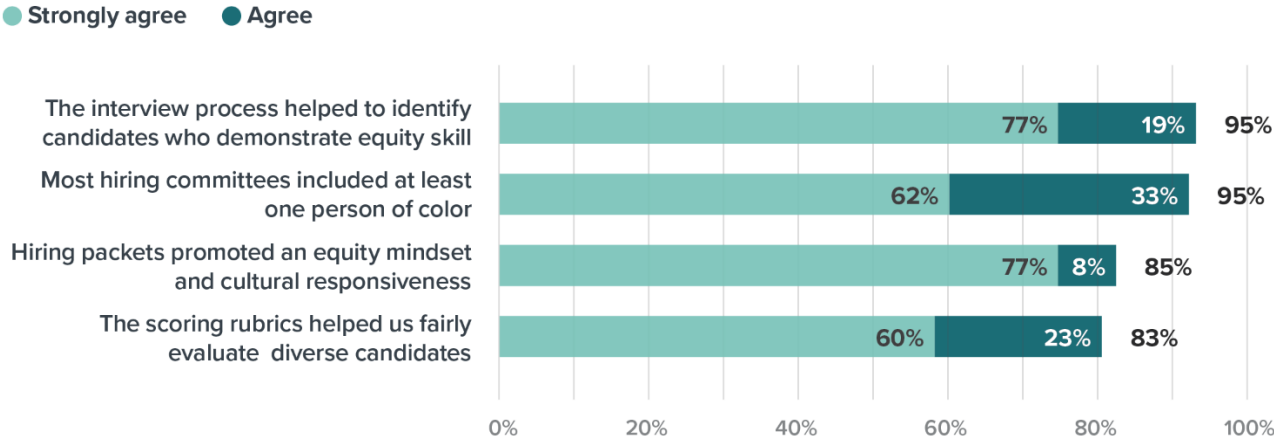
LMSD thoroughly screens candidates. Interviews with HR personnel and a document review revealed four steps in the interview process: screening interview, demo lesson and comprehensive interview and writing sample, interview with supervisor, and interview with HR.

Interviewees noted the importance of intentionally selecting candidates who have an aptitude for diversity, equity, and inclusion to improve the school’s racial climate. One LMSD educator focus group participant noted:

We need to take it back to the application and hiring process, as far as what questions are being asked when people are interviewed. You can’t force everyone to be on the same page, but there’s a huge difference between teaching a lesson that you feel is real, and then just doing it because you have to teach this cultural proficiency lesson.

Interviewees and survey respondents said LMSD had made progress toward intentionally screening for educators with equity skills. For example, interviewees spoke of the District’s Achievement Imperative Taskforce’s work developing standard diversity, equity, and inclusion questions to ask all potential hires. In addition, survey respondents who participated in District hiring committees in the last three years agreed that the scoring rubrics helped to fairly evaluate diverse candidates, the interview process helped to identify candidates who demonstrate equity skill, the hiring packets promoted an equity mindset, and that most hiring committees included at least one person of color (figure 5).

Figure 5. Most survey respondents said interview tools helped to identify candidates who demonstrate equity skill and to evaluate diverse candidates fairly



Source: Education Northwest analysis of LMSD educator survey (n = 672)

Challenges with recruitment and hiring

As summarized above, LMSD utilizes a variety of strategies to recruit and hire candidates of color. Some interviewees recalled challenges with recruitment and hiring processes. Key opportunities for growth, based on those interviews, are described below.

SUPPORT DURING THE HIRING PROCESS

Interviewees recounted issues that they faced during hiring, including feeling confused about why particular steps were required for certain positions or experiencing microaggressions within the interview process. For example, one educator with over seven years of experience described being required to take a math test as part of the teacher interview process. After starting at LMSD, she found that others were not required to take a competency test before being hired. Other educators recalled hiring committee members commenting that they may not be a “good fit” for the position; as a result, they questioned whether they would be successful at LMSD. Researchers have documented the lack of support, microaggressions, and biases present in a predominately white profession, which can lead to educators of color leaving the field (Marrero, 2018; Simon et al., 2015).

Interviewees recommended that the district encourage educators of color to apply for open positions and support applicants through the hiring process. Interviewees identified relationships with current employees as a key support in this process. One educator focus group participant noted:

I wouldn't have made it through the process if I didn't have existing relationships at the districts. That is something that needs to be considered if you're trying to get a person of color into a predominantly white institution. There has to be a process helping them navigate it, to have the courage to approach it because it already comes with barriers that are invisible.

A NEED FOR TRANSPARENCY

In multiple instances, interviewed educators of color voiced confusion around how hiring decisions are made. For example, some educators described recommending staff of color for positions at LMSD. However, when these candidates applied for open positions, they ultimately did not receive offers of employment. The lack of clarity around hiring decisions left educators confused as to how LMSD makes determinations around which candidates were invited for an interview and ultimately hired. One educator focus group participant noted:

We need to not only find people that we know, recommending them, and then following through because that initial step of, submit your whatever to HR, it's not enough. Because, I've had people submit their resumes and also follow up on a call ... We have to reach out to the principals for anything to even get moving.

Similarly, educators of color often felt unsure about how LMSD made salary determinations. While LMSD offers competitive compensation and benefits, specific salary ranges are not always included in job postings. LMSD staff are unionized, and salaries are set in the publicly available collective bargaining agreement. However, where professionals are placed on the salary scale is determined by prior experience and other factors. One HR staff member shared:

The job posting doesn't say, this is the salary for the position. The discussion about salary comes much later in the process. For the most part, we try very hard because there's such an investment in the process by the time the candidate gets to us, that is the candidate of choice. We take steps to make sure that the compensation is never a factor and, to my knowledge, I don't know that we've not gotten someone to come in based on what we've offered.

Educators of color described inconsistencies and confusion around how salary determinations are made. Upon hire, some saw differences in what step-level they were placed in compared to their white peers or contracts that were incommensurate with their level of experience. A LMSD educator focus group participant recalled:

I was hired four years ago. It was a long hiring process. By the time I got to my fourth round of interviews, I thought, "I'm probably not going to get the job." Then, they offered me the job contract... it was a long-term sub position. And I said, "I can't take this. I'm already tenured at my job." It wasn't until I said I'm not going to take it that they did offer me a contract position at the same salary that I was making at my other school.

Along the same lines, interviewees said they were unsure whether to push back against offered salaries and that they felt unable to advocate for pay commensurate to their teaching experience.

A SHARED NARRATIVE ABOUT THE DISTRICT'S HIRING PRACTICES

Confusion and lack of transparency around hiring could lead the school community to believe that LMSD does not make adequate efforts to recruit candidates of color. However, staff members and administrators noted that there are many reasons why a candidate of color may not be hired. One administrator focus group participant stated:

I think Lower Merion is doing more than any of the districts that I've been in, in terms of recruitment and retention ... I think sometimes what happens is we get candidates who come in, for whatever reason may not take a job or may not get the job. And that causes agita with folk who say, "Well, you haven't increased the numbers." And what I often say to people is, "Well, who are you talking to? Where are you getting your stories from? Because there are a number of reasons why a candidate may not get a position.

As this interviewee noted, assumptions and unconfirmed stories about why a candidate did not take a position at LMSD can lead people to create a narrative around the district's hiring practices. While human resource personnel note several legal and confidential constraints to sharing specific candidate information with others, greater transparency around the process of how hiring decisions are made could dispel false narratives and showcase the work LMSD is doing to recruit and retain candidates of color.

Retention

In this section, we describe issues related to staff retention, particularly for staff members of color. Key strategies to retain diverse staff members, including onboarding, mentoring, and affinity groups, are described in table 3.

Table 3. Examples of LMSD strategies for retaining diverse staff members

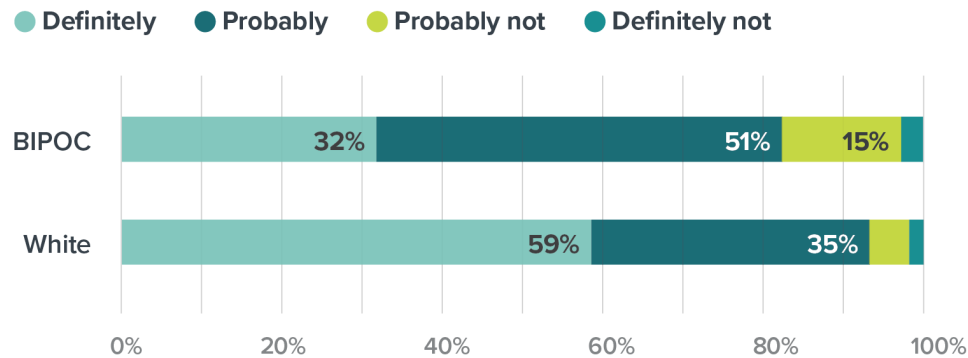
Strategy	Description of strategy
Onboarding	At the beginning of each school year, there is a one-week training that every teacher must attend, particularly new hires. Included in the training is onboarding to district policies, general information, and curriculum requirements. In addition, the district has started a new equity training for new hires.
Mentoring program	All new staff members are assigned a mentor or buddy who the new hire can connect with throughout the year.
Affinity groups	MOSAIC, an affinity group for teachers of color, was created to provide a space for staff members of color across the district to connect, provide mutual support, and learn from one another.
Employee relations position	In 2021, LMSD developed a new employee relations position to oversee and further develop onboarding practices. The district took this initiative to support diverse staff members and establish a set of onboarding activities that promote equity.

Source: Most of this information is based on focus groups and interviews with LMSD administrators, staff members, and human resources personnel

While LMSD is taking actions to retain staff members of color, the districtwide staff survey revealed differences in attitudes toward retention between white and BIPOC staff members. Respondents were asked whether they would recommend LMSD as a place to work for diverse candidates. Only 5 percent of white respondents indicated that they would “probably not” recommend LMSD, compared to 15 percent of BIPOC respondents (figure 6). Likewise, 59 percent of white respondents would definitely recommend LMSD as a place to work for diverse candidates, in contrast to only 32 percent of BIPOC respondents.

Figure 6. Fewer educators of color would recommend LMSD as a place to work for diverse candidates

Would you recommend LMSD as a place to work for diverse candidates?



Source: Education Northwest analysis of LMSD educator survey (n = 672)

In the following sections, we draw from the districtwide staff survey and focus groups with BIPOC educators and administrators to outline key areas that could affect the retention of staff members of color: isolation, cultural taxation, and leadership opportunities.

Isolation

Despite efforts to recruit more diverse educators, BIPOC staff members remain significantly underrepresented in the LMSD workforce. As one LMSD educator focus group participant noted:

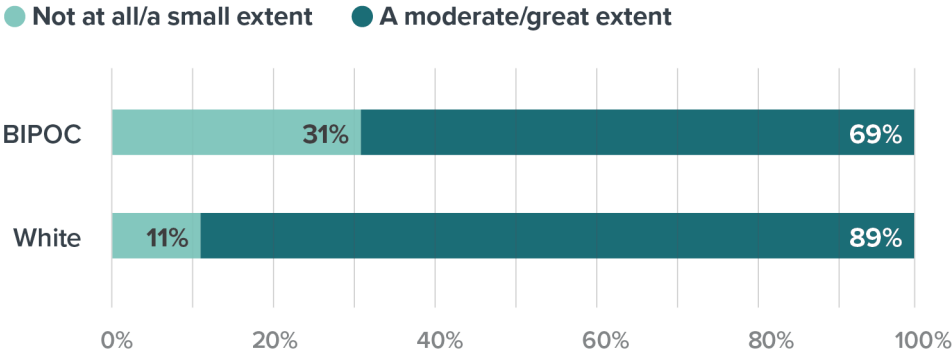
I work in a bubble. I don't know what any other building does. I'm the only Black person I see all day long, all year long.

Often, BIPOC educators are one of only a few educators of color at their school, which can create a climate of isolation. Many of the interviewed educators of color said they felt “alone” and “isolated” as one of the only people of color in their schools. LMSD educator focus group participant shared:

Everyone has been really kind to me in all my positions, but it was a cultural shift. I'm one of the youngest staff members, and I'm one of the only African American male teachers. It's just like, you feel alone and isolated.

Likewise, when survey respondents were asked the extent to which they felt LMSD is a safe place for diverse staff members, only 11 percent of white staff members indicated “not at all/a small extent” compared to 31 percent of BIPOC staff members (figure 7).

Figure 7. BIPOC staff members were less likely to indicate that LMSD is a safe place for staff members from diverse backgrounds



Source: Education Northwest analysis of LMSD educator survey (n = 672)

In addition to feeling isolated as a teacher of color in a predominantly white district, educators felt guilty for leaving schools in more diverse areas, such as Philadelphia, for LMSD. One LMSD educator focus group participant noted:

I think a lot of us feel that guilt and I don't know if it is really discussed. Being one of a few in this rich, suburban school district, you feel some sort of guilt about the resources that we know are not given to the kids we used to teach.

Ongoing feelings of isolation and guilt, without school or administration support, can negatively impact staff retention.

OPPORTUNITIES FOR CONNECTION

To mitigate feelings of isolation, LMSD could provide more opportunities for connection. Many educators said there is little opportunity to connect with other educators of color across the district. Interviewees recommended that the district develop supports that bring educators of color together to learn and connect, such as intentionally pairing mentors with other teachers of color. A LMSD educator focus group participant noted:

There are things that could be put in place. We could be ambassadors. We could be mentors. I'm a mentor and a buddy teacher right now to two different teachers. They're not teachers of color.

Other educators suggested that the district develop an affinity group for educators of color to connect across the district and learn from one another. One staff survey respondent wrote:

Start a group where teachers of color can meet to voice/document/share their experiences. Then, learn from those experiences and make changes based on what they say.

For example, MOSAIC was created by staff members of color to learn from one another and hear about the work happening within the district. However, many interviewees noted that the group has “sputtered off” in recent years. Interviewees recommended that the district continue to develop MOSAIC and other groups specifically to support staff of color. Under the direction of the new DEI Director, MOSAIC is becoming an active support for staff of color.

Cultural taxation

BIPOC educators feel an added burden from district staff and families to promote equity efforts and represent students of color. As one administrator noted, “Losing one or even two Black teachers is a significant drop in terms of the number of Black staff. So, I think that weighs heavy. There’s an unspoken burden.” The burden can also come from students and families. Interviewees commented on feeling the weight of being one of the few educators of color to advocate for families. One administrator discussed the historical mistrust of the district and the resulting pressure on educators of color. A LMSD administrator focus group participant stated:

There’s a huge discord and distrust between some of my families of color and the school district from a history of systemic racism from families that grew up through the district. And there’s a huge distrust. I get a lot of personal letters from families of color saying, “Thank you so much. We’re so happy you’re in this position now because you will support us.”

Further, BIPOC educators are tasked with an overwhelming amount of racialized labor by the district and other staff members. The racialized labor, or “token tax,” is imposed on BIPOC educators, who are often burdened with school activities related to diversity and anti-racism. A LMSD educator focus group participant noted:

The token tax, or the expectation that you have to bear the responsibility of additional duties. In addition to everything else you do, you are now the Black mentor for everything Black in the building. From a retention standpoint, it’s overwhelming.

Often BIPOC teachers describe feeling overburdened with racial equity work. Feeling undervalued, stressed, and overworked can result in burnout and fatigue, which can ultimately push teachers of color out of the district (Kohli, 2018; Lisle-Johnson & Kohli, 2020).

EQUITY WORK SHOULD BE SHARED BY ALL STAFF MEMBERS

Rather than placing the burden on educators of color, equity work should be shared by all staff members within the district. As a LMSD educator focus group participant noted:

We need to not make the work of supporting students of color the responsibility of staff of color, but rather a true shared responsibility that people are accountable for with innovative initiatives that provide a more equitable school experience.

To lessen the burden on BIPOC educators, the district should provide all staff members with professional development opportunities on racial equity to improve school climate.

Leadership opportunities

Interviewees described a lack of a “formal pipeline” to leadership opportunities at LMSD. Instead, staff members are often asked to gain experience in another district before returning to LMSD.

Some interviewees describe LMSD as a “demanding” or “high profile” district. One LMSD Administrator focus group participant shared:

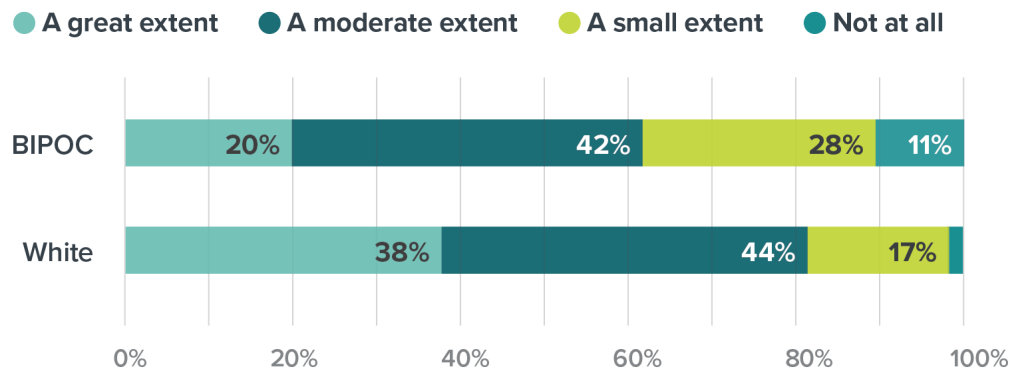
We'll see someone who isn't necessarily of the caliber that we want to see. And we don't necessarily feel that we have the resources to develop them here. But, that's not unique with respect to educators of color. I could name a number of different people that left the district to get leadership opportunities because we don't have a formal pipeline to speak of. Because it is such a demanding district with parents with high expectations, I think we're often fearful of allowing someone to take lumps in a high-profile role here.

The feeling that the district and its families have “high expectations” can lead to hesitancy in allowing newer staff members into leadership positions.

While interviewees note that they do not view this phenomenon as unique to educators of color in the district, survey respondents demonstrated differing attitudes toward leadership opportunities. For example, 23 percent of surveyed BIPOC staff members do not believe the district supports diverse staff members who are interested in becoming administrators and leaders (figure 8). In contrast, only 3 percent of white staff members thought the district did not support diverse staff members in becoming leaders. Likewise, a higher proportion of white educators felt that they were able to grow professionally at LMSD compared to BIPOC educators.

Figure 8. More white educators feel they can grow professionally at LMSD

To what extent do you feel you are able to grow professionally at LMSD?



Source: Education Northwest analysis of LMSD educator survey (n = 672)

Perceptions of district efforts to recruit diverse staff members

In the districtwide survey, about half of the respondents (about 300) provided recommendations for the district to recruit and retain diverse staff members. Of those respondents, approximately:

- 10 percent were happy with district efforts to recruit and retain diverse staff members
- 30 percent were unsure what could be done to increase diversity or thought something should be done but gave no specific recommendations
- 15 percent emphasized that the district should hire based on qualifications and experience, rather than diversity
- 15 percent identified issues with district culture that impact the hiring and retention of diverse staff members
- 25 percent identified the need for more intentional recruitment and retention strategies

Staff members who recommended that LMSD should hire based on qualifications and experiences rather than diversity pointed to the “high-pressure environment” that educators work in. A LMSD staff survey respondent shared:

At the end of the day, we need staff and administrators that are going to be able to handle our clientele. We are expected to be the best, and work with the best. So, we need to hire the best. In many cases the best will be minority candidates. They are out there, but the question is do they want to work with our clientele? In the high-pressure environment, we work in?

While around 70 percent of survey respondents who provided recommendations signaled a need to diversify the LMSD workforce, the other 30 percent said they did not see a need to change LMSD recruitment and retention practices. This demonstrates differing views on the appropriateness of the district’s recruitment and retention practices.

Recommendations

A key conversation point among participants in this study and the advisory group was how to improve recruitment, hiring, and retention of educators of color by the district. This section highlights the recommendations that emerged from interviewees, the districtwide staff survey, and the advisory group. It should be noted that the district is currently undergoing work on these recommendations.

Recruiting and hiring staff members of color

INTENTIONALLY RECRUIT EDUCATORS OF COLOR

- **Create strategic institutional relationships.** While most students enrolled in teacher preparation programs are white, districts can boost their workforce diversity by partnering with local and national institutions that enroll a diverse student body (Carver-Thomas, 2018; Marrero, 2018; Simon et al., 2015). Likewise, interviewees suggested that LMSD partner with historically Black colleges and universities, local colleges, the Center for Black Educators, and Philadelphia schools to recruit diverse educators.
- **Use multiple methods to advertise open positions.** Research suggests that sharing information on job openings locally and across the country through social media, local news sources, town and district websites, educator networks, community-based organizations, and other outlets can lead to a more diverse applicant pool. In addition, interviewees emphasized the importance of minority recruitment fairs in targeting candidates of color and suggested that LMSD expand these efforts.
- **Conduct ongoing relationship-based recruitment.** Interviewees reflected on the importance of principals reaching out to recruit candidates of color. Similarly, research suggests that districts may wish to build personal relationships with students of color at higher education institutions prior to posting a job (American Institutes for Research, 2016).

ENSURE EQUITY THROUGHOUT THE HIRING PROCESS

- **Involve teachers of color in the recruitment and selection of new candidates.** Survey respondents who participated on hiring committees largely agreed that the LMSD hiring process helped to identify candidates that demonstrate equity skill and promoted an

equity mindset and cultural responsiveness. Interviewees recommended that the district continue to look closely at hiring committees to ensure representation of diverse identities and that interview questions examine the applicant's aptitude for equity and diversity. Further, interviewees recommended that the district extend conceptions of diversity beyond race to understand teachers' backgrounds and mindsets.

- **Support educators of color throughout the hiring process.** Interviewees recounted challenges navigating LMSD's hiring process, including confusion around why particular steps were required for certain positions or applicants and feeling unable to advocate for pay commensurate to their teaching experience. Research has documented that educators of color can experience a lack of support, microaggressions, and biases in the predominately white profession, which can lead them to leave the field (Marrero, 2018; Simon et al., 2015). To address this, interviewees recommended that the district encourage educators of color to apply for open positions and support applicants through the hiring process.
- **Increase transparency around candidate selection, pay equity, and promotion guidelines.** Interviewed educators described confusion around how LMSD chooses candidates for teaching positions, as well as how the district determines pay and promotions. Interviewees called for greater transparency in candidate selection, pay, and promotion guidelines. An investigation of salary data could illuminate any disparities across staff demographics.

Retaining staff members of color

STRENGTHEN ORGANIZATIONAL CAPACITY TO PROVIDE MENTORING AND TRAINING SUPPORT TO STAFF MEMBERS OF COLOR

- **Implement early support and onboarding for staff members of color.** Dealing with a lack of support, microaggressions, and bias leads to feelings of dissatisfaction and burnout, particularly for new educators of color (Marrero, 2018; Simon et al., 2015). Interviewees and survey respondents suggested developing supports for BIPOC educators, including formal and informal mentoring opportunities to build community among teachers. Likewise, researchers find that providing new teachers of color the opportunity to collaborate with other educators and be mentored by qualified colleagues can support retention (Marrero, 2018; Simon et al., 2015; Wurtzel & Curtis, 2008).
- **Develop affinity groups for educators of color.** Interviewees described feeling isolated as one of the few educators of color in their schools. To foster connections and mutual support,

interviewees recommended that LMSD expand current affinity groups for educators of color, like MOSAIC. Affinity groups can provide a space for teachers of color across the district to connect and learn from one another. Further, LMSD could provide opportunities for teachers and administrators to network with others across the state to discuss best practices, challenges, and opportunities for growth.

EQUITY WORK SHOULD BE SHARED

- **Equity work needs to be shared by all staff members.** Interviewed educators of color described feeling overwhelmed with racialized labor and shouldering the burden of equity work within their district. LMSD should work to respect and learn from BIPOC educators and share the responsibility of improving the school's racial climate (Lisle-Johnson & Kohli, 2020). The district can provide all staff members with professional development opportunities on racial equity to improve school climate.

DEVELOP PATHWAYS TO LEADERSHIP OPPORTUNITIES

- **Develop pathways to leadership that are more open to candidates of color.** Interviewees describe LMSD as a high-profile and demanding district. This can lead administrators to recommend that less-experienced candidates seek experience elsewhere before returning to pursue leadership opportunities at LMSD. However, a lack of opportunities to grow professionally can lead educators of color to leave the district altogether. Interviewees recommended that the district create networks and professional development opportunities for BIPOC educators to develop leadership skills and support these teachers to become school and district leaders.

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For questions about this research brief, please reach out to the Education Northwest study author.

Emi Fujita-Conrads, *Senior Researcher*

emi.fujita-conrads@ednw.org