

Roundtable News

Developing a Diverse Pipeline of Educators

Gladys Cruz, a member of the Roundtable who began her career as a teacher in Puerto Rico, serves as district superintendent of Questar III BOCES in New York State. She will officially become president of AASA on July 1. At Questar, she provides leadership to 23 local school districts and oversees the delivery of more than 275 programs and services across the state.



Dr. Gladys Cruz

She intends to use her platform as AASA president to highlight the need for a much more diverse cadre of educators, at all levels, from teaching assistant to leadership. It all begins with paying attention to the pipeline of potential teachers and administrators, she says.

The Crying Need

“We’ve all seen the headlines that there is a teacher shortage in American schools,” she observed at the outset, throwing up a slide of alarming headlines from around the nation:

- Never seen it this bad. America faces catastrophic teacher shortages
- Overworked, underpaid? The toll of burnout is contributing to teacher shortages nationwide
- Schools’ New Normal: Teacher Shortages...late buses, canceled classes
- Even Schools Flush with Cash Can’t Keep Up With Teacher Shortage

This isn’t a trivial problem, obviously, and it’s complicated by demographic dynamics and more severe shortages in some areas than in others.

The diversity challenge is particularly troubling. Since 1987, the contrast between the demographic makeup of the student body and the teaching force has

grown dramatically. By 2019, 88% of the teaching force was made up of White teachers, although fewer than 50% of students were White. The proportion of Black, Hispanic, Asian and Pacific Islander teachers represented 50% or less of students in those demographics. And, she said, we know that only “24% of superintendents are women and only 8% are people of color.”

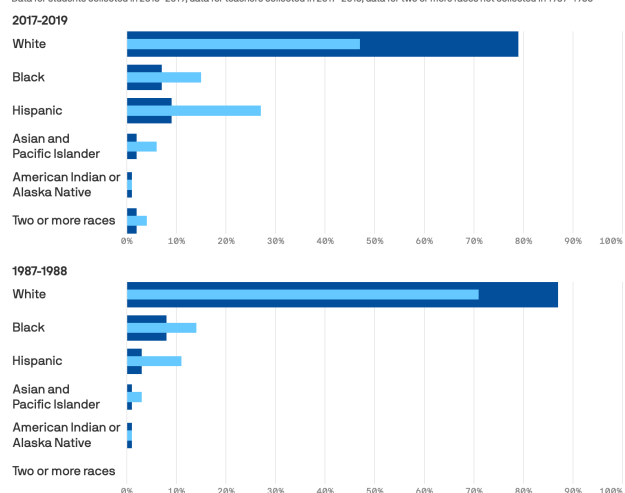
“So, why is this important,” asked Cruz? “As you all know, the research is very clear. When you have diverse educators, there are better student outcomes.”

What We Need to Do

What we need to do, and what she hopes to do at AASA, said Cruz, is develop and sustain a new generation of educators from diverse backgrounds. “We need to take these new and aspiring leaders under our wings as mentors. And we need to ground ourselves in this work on behalf of our diverse student population.” This diversity, she insisted, is essential to creating a more equitable and inclusive education system that supports the success of *all* students.

Percentage of public school teachers and students, by race

Data for students collected in 2018-2019; data for teachers collected in 2017-2018; data for two or more races not collected in 1987-1988



Data: U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics; Chart: Baldi Wang/Axios

Source: <https://www.axios.com/2022/01/23/teachers-schools-students-diversity>

National Efforts. Starting in July, Cruz plans to put her shoulder behind several ongoing national efforts sponsored by AASA. An Urban Superintendents Academy and several Aspiring Superintendents academies, including one for female leaders and another for Latino and Latina leaders. Roundtable member Zandra Jo Galvan of Greenfield Union School District, California, is a program leader and mentor of the academy for Latino and Latina leaders, noted Cruz. Each of the academies, which brings “superstar” superintendents to every session to speak to aspirants, ensures mastery of professional standards for school leaders.

Endorsements of the value of these efforts came from academy participants. “It was very powerful to ground ourselves in understanding how our culture influences our leadership, as an asset and not as part of a deficit mindset,” said Jusmar Rodriguez Maness, deputy chief of schools, Guilford County Schools, North Carolina. Robert Quinones, Casa Grande Elementary School District, Arizona, noted, “The most valuable part of the program was connecting with diverse groups of mentors and mentees across the nation.”

“You know,” said Cruz, “I remember one of our aspirants thanking us because for the first time in the person’s professional life, he felt embraced, he felt he belonged. The importance of these affinity groups stuck in my mind because it touched my heart.”

Acting Locally. Superintendents should also act locally, urged Cruz, citing a partnership Questar has entered with the University of Albany. The program is designed to help teaching assistants and CTE teachers from the trades become certified teachers. “We wanted stackable micro-credentials with college credit attached to them. And we did not want something taken off the shelf.”

A very successful program, Cruz started out hoping for 12 students to enroll; 20 showed up, and a waiting list had to be developed. Beginning with three courses, she learned students wanted more. “I wasn’t going to stop anyone learning! So I went back to the university, and we launched another three-course series of stackable credentials.”

One teaching assistant in the program hailed the value of the cohort model of the program since “typically you really don’t know the individuals of the classes you take.”

Another, a CTE candidate entering education from the world of heavy equipment, commented on how valuable he found the introduction to dealing with students—how to be a role model and deal with difficult situations.

Superintendent Searches and Mentoring. Finally, Cruz noted that she works with 22 local school boards in three counties on superintendent searches. “In the last eight searches, boards have wound up hiring six diverse district leaders—including an Indian-American born in India, a Black male, a Puerto Rican female, and an African-American female.” The message: If you put your mind to it, you can accomplish a great deal.

In addition, Questar has a highly effective mentor program for administrators in the region. She teams up new principals and superintendents with those with more experience and brings in experienced administrators to share their knowledge with new people.

Other Models. Cruz’s presentation offered Roundtable members an opportunity to discuss their own efforts.

Karen Cheser, Durango School District, Colorado, highlighted a Grow Your Own program that offers high school students a dual college enrollment program that takes students to schools once a week to see what teaching is all about. Fully 70% of the students are from under-represented groups.

Gudiel Crosthwaite, Lynwood Unified School District, California, described a working partnership of the district with the Alder Graduate School of Education. “It’s actually been able to help both systems—university and district.”

To retain teachers, we need to give them leadership opportunities, was the message from Kirk Koennecke, Indian Hills Exempted Village School District, Ohio. He pointed to six teachers happily on special assignments outside the classroom.

Warned by Edison Learning’s Matt Krise that many teachers are seeking jobs in the technology sector as a route out of the schools, Cruz closed by noting that Krise’s warning demonstrated the importance of districts “mounting very robust and powerful onboarding and mentoring programs.”

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