



## Why Aren't There More Black and Hispanic Principals?



The statistics are stark: More than three out of four of the nation's public school principals (**78%**) are White, but less than half of public-school students (**44%**) are White. By contrast, **29%** of the student population is Hispanic, compared to just **9%** of the principal population. And **15%** of students but only **10%** of principals are Black.

In a recent brief in the peer-reviewed journal *Educational Evaluation and Policy Analysis*, [Andrew Pendola](#) of Auburn University and NEPC Fellow [David DeMatthews](#) of the University of Texas at Austin explain why this imbalance is happening and is a concern.

“A racially representative school principal can play a crucial role in fostering an inclusive and equitable educational environment,” they write.

When principals share racial and cultural identities and experiences with their students and communities, they are more

often better equipped to understand and address the unique cultural and social student needs and foster an environment conducive to learning. Principal representation can enhance students' sense of belonging, improve teacher representation and culture and reduce disparities in disciplinary outcomes, special education identification and placement, and other administrative aspects where racial biases can shape important decisions.

The temptation might be to review principal hiring practices to ensure that they are fair.

But Pendola and DeMatthews present evidence that this is not sufficient: While unfair hiring practices may play a role, other factors also come to the fore.

To start with, younger populations are more racially diverse than older cohorts. Due to differences in birthrates and immigration, 55% percent of children under the age of four are White as compared to 84% of adults aged 85 or older. By contrast, the under-four population is 29% Hispanic and 15% Black while the 85-plus cohort is 8% Hispanic and 8% Black.

Of course, most principals are not in their 80s; they tend to be between the ages of 45 and 55. However, relative to the population of adults in this age group, White principals are still overrepresented and Black and Hispanic principals are underrepresented.

The authors also note that not every adult is eligible to become a principal. A bachelor's degree is almost always required. Relative to the population of college-educated adults ages 25 and up, Black principals are overrepresented—meaning the percentage of principals who are Black is higher than the percentage of college-educated adults who are Black. Hispanic and White principals are proportionately represented. Disparate pathways emerge before principal hiring decisions are made.

Because teaching is the most common pathway to the principalship, Pendola and DeMatthews also compare the share of White, Hispanic, and Black teachers with the share of White, Hispanic, and Black principals. Using that measure, Blacks are again overrepresented—meaning that the share of Black principals is higher than the share of Black teachers.

White and Hispanic principals are proportionately represented.

“While arguments for improving student racial representation in school leadership are well-founded, critiques of schools and districts for lack of progress would benefit from the caveat that population composition may simply differ between students and the potential principal labor pool,” the researchers conclude. “Moreover, the source of representational differences may be partially located in both the college-attainment and teacher pipelines, rather than certification and hiring practices alone.”

In other words, if districts want to increase the odds that principal demographics will resemble student demographics, they cannot merely address principal hiring practices. They will also need to examine teacher hiring and retention practices and consider ways to enable more Black and Hispanic students to earn bachelors’ degrees—something that should be a societal goal, not just a goal of school districts seeking more representative school leadership.

## NEPC Resources on School Leadership and Management

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