

# Report finds recruitment of Black teachers failing in NYC schools

By Tanangachi Mfuni, *Amsterdam News*, 31 August 2006. English Language.

The percentage of new Black teachers hired by New York City this year is the lowest in over a decade.

According to Department of Education (DOE) numbers, in the 2001-2002 school year, 27.2 percent of the approximately 8,000 new teachers hired were Black. This year the number is down to 14.1 percent, a 13-point drop in five years. The decrease is prompting concern from both the teachers' union and Black education activists.

"It is a very, very critical situation," said Dr. Sam Anderson, education director at the Medgar Evers Center for Law and Social Justice. "As the Black teachers diminish, the white teachers increase," Anderson said, comparing the number of Black and white new teacher hires.

In the past five years, the number of new Hispanic teachers has also declined, dropping from 14.3 percent in the 2001-2002 school year to 11.7 percent this year. While rates of new Asian teachers climbed slightly from 4.9 to 6.1 percent over the last five years, rates of new white teachers made the largest leap during the same period. During the 2001-2002 term, 53.3 percent of all new teachers hired by the city were white. This year that number soared 12 points to 65.5 percent.

So why are the numbers of new Black and Hispanic teachers falling? The Department of Education has stated that among several factors, the certification requirement the state approved in 2001 – requiring all teachers to be certified by 2005 or be terminated – contributed to the decline.

"Over 15 percent of New York City teachers were uncertified in 2001-2002, and the Department of Education began to let significant numbers of these teachers go over the next four years," DOE spokesman Keith Kalb stated in an e-mail to the *Amsterdam News*.

Although Kalb did not state what percentage of these uncertified teachers were Black or Hispanic, one year after certification became mandatory, the number of new Black hires tumbled 7 percent. Rates of Hispanic teachers dropped two points. In subsequent years, both numbers have steadily declined.

Activists like Anderson maintain the state-issued Liberal Arts and Sciences Test (LAST), among several required teacher certification exams, discriminate against people of color. Currently the subject of a drawn-out legal battle, a court panel found that while whites passed the exam at a rate of 91 percent to 94 percent, African-Americans' passing rates were significantly lower, ranging from 51 percent to 62 percent. Hispanics fared even worse, with average passing rates of 47 percent to 55 percent, according to the Center of Constitutional Rights' website.

Despite the decline, Kalb claimed the department's teacher diversity numbers are above the national average, which he cited to be around 9 percent. He further indicated the downward trend of new Black and Hispanic teachers was reflective of a widespread pattern.

"Nationwide, the available pool of minority candidates has dwindled significantly in the past decade," stated Kalb, adding that people of color are turning away from the profession.

"A second factor in the change in the number of available minority teacher candidates has been the attraction of other careers," Kalb said, citing a 2004 report on "Minority Teacher Recruitment," released by the Washington D.C.-based American Association of Colleges of Teacher Education.

Pointing to moderate wages, Anderson agreed that fewer people of color are drawn to teaching, but he also argued the Department of Education can change this. Anderson criticized the department for

focusing its recruitment campaigns outside the state, in locales as far away as Spain, Puerto Rico and the Philippines.

"Millions of campaign dollars are being spent in other states," said Anderson, who believes the Department of Education should concentrate on recruiting in local communities of color.

While the department said it has also tried to increase the recruitment of teachers of color by reaching out to historically Black colleges and universities and partnering with the United Negro College Fund, it also maintained it will continue to hire "from the best available pool of certified candidates, regardless of race."

Speaking on behalf of United Federation of Teachers President Randi Weingarten in regard to the dwindling Black and Hispanic new teacher hires, union spokesman Stuart Marquez said, "this confirms what she (Weingarten) has been seeing over the last three years in her interactions with new teachers. It's something she's concerned about."

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