

LEARNING FROM OUR DIVERSITY  
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At the midpoint of my term as NCSS President, I want to focus on the challenge I issued to those who attended the annual conference in December: **To increase NCSS's membership, especially among underrepresented constituencies.**

The NCSS Strategic Plan has included the goal of increasing and diversifying our membership since 1987. While overall membership has increased, we have made little progress in recruiting new members from underrepresented groups. While 40 percent of K-12 students are students of color (1), only 11 percent of NCSS members who report demographic data represent diverse ethnic groups.

This pattern is consistent with what we know about teachers nation-wide (2). Although there are proportionately more teachers of color in large urban school districts, 40 percent of schools report having no teachers of color on staff. Worse yet, while the percentage of students of color is increasing, the diversity of the teaching force is decreasing. More teachers of color are retiring each year than are joining the profession.

**Why is this trend so alarming?**

Both researchers and practitioners agree that teachers of color meet critical needs. They serve as role models for students, counter negative stereotypes, provide intercultural experiences, and encourage minority students to consider teaching as a career. The 2004 Teachers of Color Summit Report found that minority teachers have a "profound, positive impact on the achievement and retention of students of color due to culturally-based practices, higher expectations, and roles as cultural mediators and advocates." (3) As Professor G. Pritchey Smith has written:

"The problem is not that a 95% white teaching force cannot teach minority children, but that the traditional informal interactions between the teacher and the community will be severed. Historically, minority teachers who have lived where they worked have had a powerful presence and encouraged, even exhorted, children and parents alike to attend to the business of school achievement." (4)

**What has NCSS been doing to increase the diversity of its membership?**

In 2006, the NCSS Board of Directors formed an Ad Hoc Committee on Underrepresented Groups to develop strategies for attracting educators from the following groups: African, Asian, Latino, and Native American teachers, rural and urban educators, elementary teachers, and international educators. Based on the committee's recommendations, NCSS has taken a number of steps to increase its diversity.

1. The Ad Hoc committee has reached out to professors who prepare social studies teachers at historically black colleges to recruit new members.
2. NCSS has begun a scholarship program to help teachers from diverse ethnic groups and/or who teach in high-poverty schools attend the annual conference for the first time. We plan to increase both the amount and number of scholarships in the coming years.
3. Many sessions and speakers at the 2007 Conference focused on issues of importance to underrepresented groups. We learned about critical attributes for effectively integrating social studies and literacy and other promising practices into elementary classrooms. We were challenged to adopt culturally relevant pedagogy and integrate our students' home and community culture into the school curriculum. We saw examples of how to bring African American literature and history into the curriculum for ALL students. We heard about an exciting teacher education program that prepares urban educators to address the needs of diverse students. We explored the challenges facing immigrant students in our schools, and the critical role of caring teachers.
4. NCSS has established an International Visitors Task Force to welcome and work with international visitors attending the annual conference.

#### **What should NCSS do next?**

The Ad Hoc Committee on Underrepresented Groups has developing a long-term campaign to reach out to underrepresented groups. This campaign calls on NCSS and its members to:

1. Continue soliciting annual conference sessions and speakers that address the concerns of a diverse membership and promote best practices with diverse learners.
2. Extend professional development opportunities to underrepresented groups through podcasting selected conference sessions and expanding summer workshop offerings.
3. Expand NCSS's marketing network to include all institutions that prepare teachers of color.
4. Collaborate with other professional organizations and state departments of education to attract more candidates of color into the teaching profession.
5. Support state councils with targeted assistance for membership recruitment and retention.
6. Collaborate with international members who wish to develop NCSS communities or attain affiliated council status.

These initiatives are just a starting point. Now I want to hear from you on how best to meet the challenge of becoming a more inclusive organization. You can email me at [gthieman@ncss.org](mailto:gthieman@ncss.org).

Notes:

1. Education Commission of the States Teaching Quality Policy Center. (January, 2003). Recruiting Teachers of Color: a 50 State Survey of State Policies. Denver, CO. Retrieved from <http://www.communityteachers.org/reports/50StateSurvey.pdf>
2. National Collaborative on Diversity in the Teaching Force. (October, 2004). Assessment of Diversity in America's Teaching Force. Washington, DC. Retrieved from <http://www.nea.org/teacherquality/images/diversityreport.pdf>
3. The 2004 Teachers of Color Summit Report. (November, 2004). Retrieved from <http://www.colorado.edu/education/pdfs/2004%20Teacher%20of%20Color%20Summit.pdf>
4. G. Gay, J. Dingus, C. Jackson. (July, 2003). The Presence and Performance of Teachers of Color in the Profession. Retrieved from <http://www.communityteachers.org/reports/PresPerfTeachersofColoringProfess.pdf>