

Bridgeport's Action Plan to Increase Representation of Black & Latino Educators

Pathways to Teaching Careers
July 27, 2015

Bridgeport Action Plan to Increase Representation of Black and Latino Educators

Abstract

Provide a summary of your plan in 500 words or less.

Bridgeport Public Schools is the largest school district in Connecticut. It services well over 20,000 students and has an ethnic/racial breakdown of which 78% are Latino and African American. In stark contrast to this the district's 2,107 educator staff is 20% Latino and African American.

The district has recognized the need to increase its representation of Black and Latino educators. However, it has faced the same challenges many other districts have experience: teacher poaching, the inability to pay higher salaries, and the lengthy processes for certifying out of state/country candidates. To that end, the district, in parallel to its recruitment and retention plan to hire talented minority administrators and excellent multicultural teacher candidates, will imitate its Pathways to Teaching Careers Program.

The program will focus on the district's 384 currently employed paraprofessionals. From this pool, the program will formulate two cohorts with plans to transition them through the Inform, Prepare, Educate and Hire processes of the district's two-year implementation plan. The program has secured internal and community partners, and it expects to receive applicants that are prepared to make this program a successful venture.

Section 1: Introduction

- A. *Describe your district and community context as it pertains to Black and Latino Educator and student representation. This introduction should include a brief history of your previous efforts to increase representation of teachers of color.*

Bridgeport is a dense, diverse and economically distressed community with a population of approximately 147,216, making it the largest and poorest city in the state. The district services well over 20,000 students and is the largest in the State of Connecticut. Bridgeport Public Schools' (BPS) current ethnic/racial breakdown is 38% Latino; 40% Black; 22% White; 4% Asian; and .6% Alaska Native.

In contrast to its student racial composition, the district's 1454 teaching staff is 9.9% Latino; 18.7% Black; 77.4% White; 1.7% Asian; .14% Alaska Native and .27% identify as two or more races.

The district's overall improvement plan contains the theory of action "*If we cultivate a Professional Learning Community led by exemplary Leaders who acquire and apply knowledge of data process/analysis and an understanding of emotional intelligence, then all stakeholders will be able to make decisions that effectively inform instructional practices, and student achievement will increase*". In 2014, at the behest of the Superintendent, the district's Human Resources department presented a new professional recruiting initiative: Recruiting and Retention Plan: Rethinking How to Attract, Develop, and Retain Highly Effective Educators. The document noted the district's commitment to attracting and hire talented minority administrators and excellent multicultural teacher candidates.

As part of the program, BPS has established the new position of Staff Recruiter. That recruiter, a Latina, reaches out to potential staff through the use of community outreach, media, and social network interactions in an attempt to identify culturally diverse individuals with the potential to be great teachers. Human Resources also assists out of state certified teachers and others through the certification process. The Staff Recruiter attends minority recruitment events and personal networks, such as the Fairfield County Puerto Rican Parade Committee, the National Committee of Puerto Rican Affairs in New York City, National Association of Black Educators, National Association of Bilingual Educators, Catholic University of Puerto Rico – West Coast, Historically Black Colleges, and other organizations all of which have assisted in seeking superlative, experienced ethnic teachers. The district works with colleges/universities in the tri-state area to facilitate its search for a diverse teacher workforce.

To this end, it has been and will remain important that Bridgeport Public Schools provide a greater percentage of diverse teachers in order to maintain a culturally responsive stance, sustain multicultural points of view, continue to reduce ethnic, racial, and economic isolation, and vastly improve the academic achievement of its students.

- B. *Provide an overview of the process by which your district developed its plan. You may choose to include observations or reflections about what distinguishes this plan from previous efforts to address the issue of recruiting and retaining Black and Latino educators.*

There is significant competition between school districts, both nationally and state-wide, in

attracting educators of color. As an urban district, Bridgeport cannot compete with salaries and programs offered by surrounding suburbs. It costs a district approximately \$15,000 to provide professional development, support and mentoring for each new teacher hired. There is currently a plan in place to provide these services; however it is not enough to continue the attraction of teachers of color as they can get hired in other districts at higher salaries and better opportunities.

Attributable to the social and racial makeup of the community in which the district operates, BPS has always sought to recruit and retain teachers that are a representative reflection of the district's student population. A motto of the district is, "the talent lies within." Bridgeport believes that tapping into the abundant resource of talented paraprofessionals will not only alleviate the shortage of minority teachers, but also contribute to the success of our students and community. The district arrived at this insight based on the internal data, and industry trends on recruitment of internal staff to teaching positions.

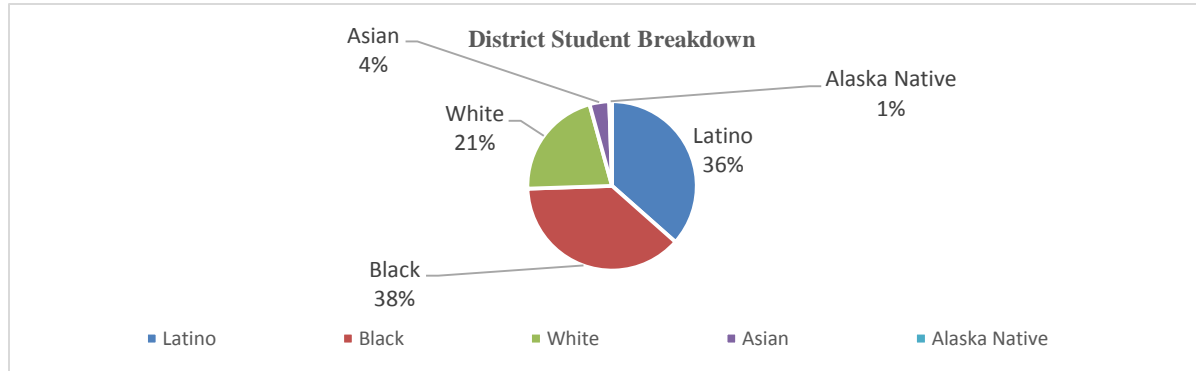
During the planning stages of this program, the district's team kept these primary views at the forefront of their thoughts, for this reason they decided to pursue the track of targeting ethnically diverse non-certified staff as a dominant group to develop and transition into teaching. Currently, there are 384 paraprofessionals (61% are either Black and Latino), of which an estimated 110 have Bachelor's degrees, 10 with Master's, and 13 have 60+ college credits. Additionally, the team calculated the cost of onboarding a BPS paraprofessional to a teacher would \$8,000 per person. In the end, it was unanimous that BPS non-certified and paraprofessional employee base serves as an excellent resource to build the district's representation of teachers of color. Research has shown (Southern Regional Education Board, Christine Smith, April 2003) that paraprofessionals make great teachers because they:

- Are deeply rooted in the community
- Have a high retention rate
- Can fill critical shortage areas – Special Education, and Bilingual Education
- Have more "hands on" experience working with students

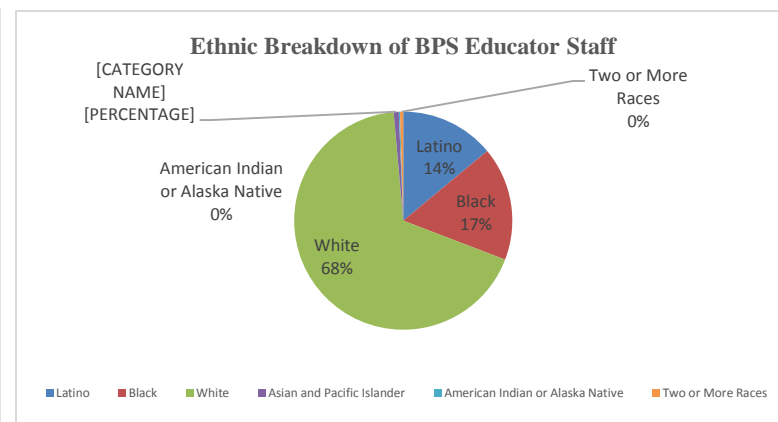
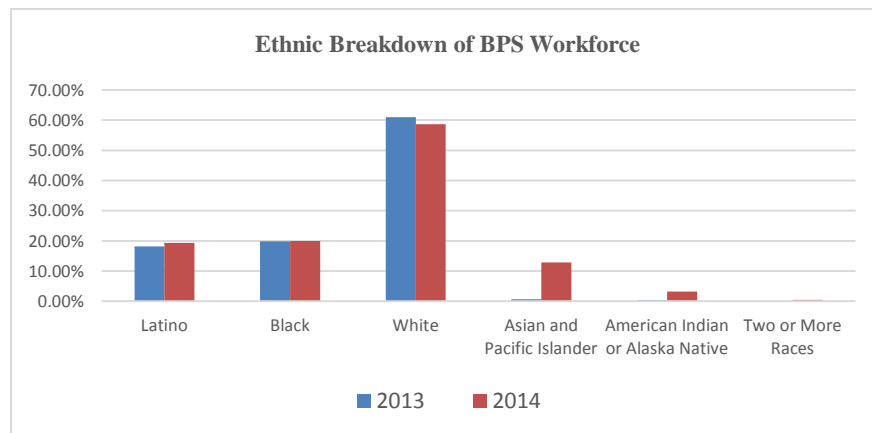
Section 2: Review of District's Workforce Data

A. Present current data that describe your district's educator workforce.

Bridgeport's ethnic breakdown of its current 21,127 students shows 38.4% Latino, 39.9% Black, 22.32% White, 3.95% Asian, 0.56% Alaska Native. An ethnic breakdown of the educator staff shows 13.85 % Latino, 16.70% Black, 67.20% White, 1.56% Asian or Pacific Islander, 0.18% American Indian or Alaska Native and .47 Two or more races.

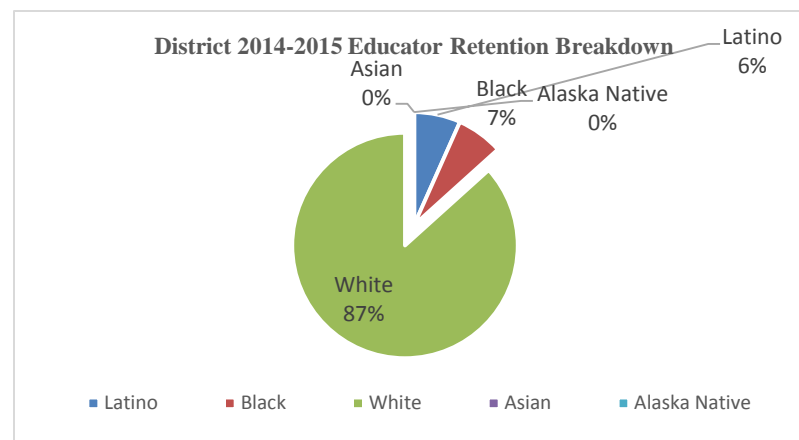
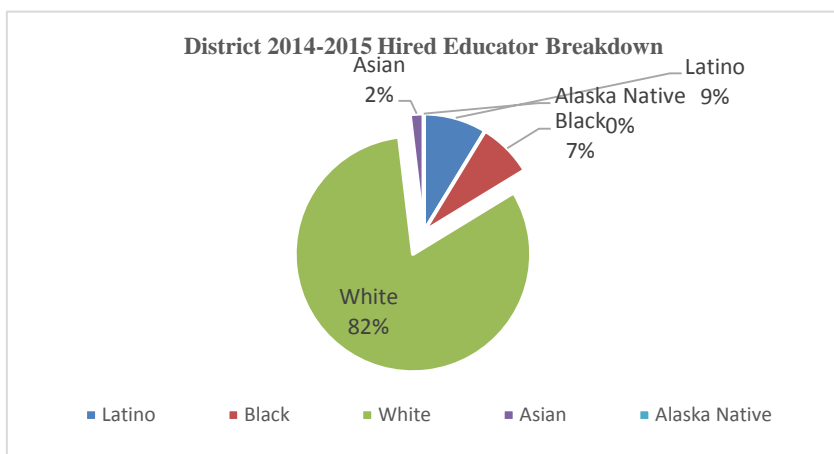


A review of the district's employee workforce data showed that in 2013, 18.19% Latino, 19.88% Black (38% total Latino and Black), 60.93% White, .7% Asian, and .3% American Indian or Alaska Native. The 2014 data showed 2014 19.27% Latino, 19.98% Black (39% total Latino and Black), 58.69% White, 12.9% Asian and Pacific Islander, 3.22% American Indian or Alaska Native and .42% Two or more races. An ethnic breakdown of the educator staff shows 13.85 % Latino, 16.70% Black, 67.20% White, 1.56% Asian or Pacific Islander, 0.18% American Indian or Alaska Native and .47 Two or more races.

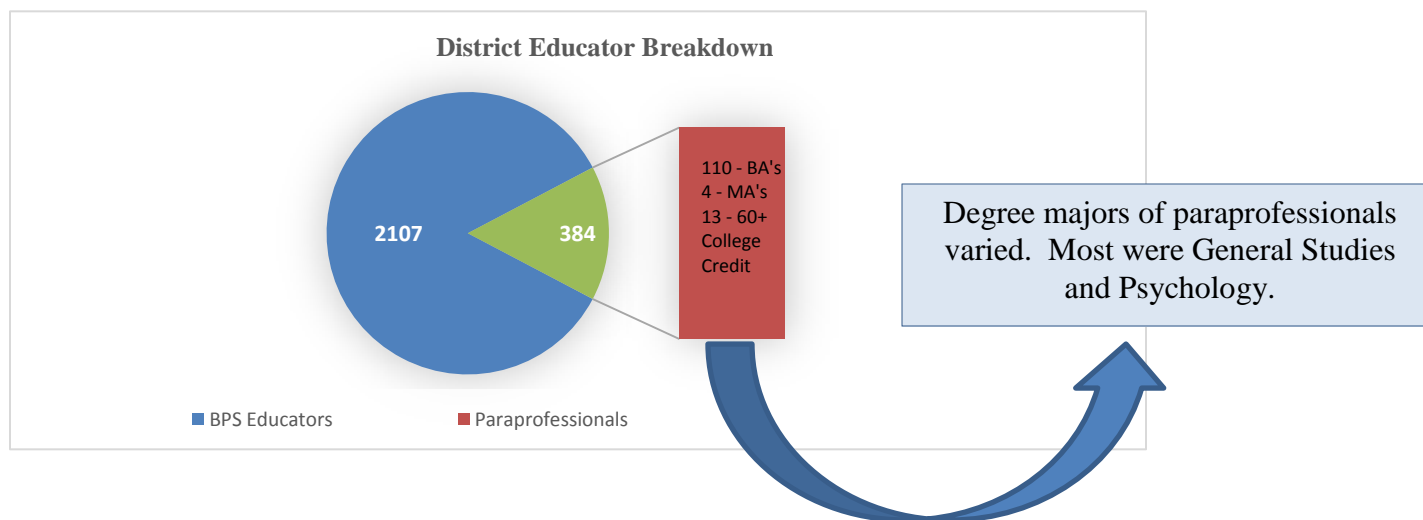


Bridgeport Action Plan to Increase Representation of Black and Latino Educators

In the 2014-2015 school year, the district hired 264 new educators, 82% of which were White. At the end of the 2014-2015 school year, 88.63% of the educators were retained. Of these figures, the largest migration from was due to newly recruited White educators. In contrast, the district saw only four minorities leave after their first year teaching in the district. This data point was important as it highlighted that the district could keep Black and Latino candidates.



In preparation for this program, the district reviewed the collected data of its currently employed paraprofessionals. It was able to decipher that out of its 384 paraprofessionals, 127 possessed various degrees of education that with additional educational assistance and tutoring could prepare them to become teachers.



B. *Discuss in detail what these data reveal or suggest to your planning team.*

For Bridgeport, it is very apparent that a teaching staff that is culturally responsive to the majority of its students is necessary. An analysis of the district’s educator staff found that only 21.70% in 2013 and 20.49% in 2014 were Black and Latino. BPS further disaggregated educator staff to extract that currently there are 384 paraprofessional on staff, of which 59.1% are either Black or Latino.

In an analysis of the first year starting salaries of surrounding districts, BPS paid at least \$9,693 less for a first year teacher with a Bachelor degree, than Trumbull.

Location	Bachelors	Masters
Trumbull	\$52,545	\$57,516
Norwalk	\$50,219	\$52,668
Westport	\$49,059	\$52,662
Fairfield	\$46,230	\$50,853
Bridgeport	\$42,852	\$44,101

Due to the fierce competition for teachers in the State, and the district’s awareness of its inability to currently pay more for both a first year Bachelor or Master educated teacher, the district used its analysis of its internal data to conclude that it could expand its minority candidate teaching pool if it began to look within the district. To that end, the plan of targeting paraprofessionals to help fill the minority educator gap was developed. BPS found this to be a viable path as further analysis showed that of the current 384 paraprofessionals, 110 have Bachelor’s degrees, 4 with Master’s, and 13 have 60+ college credits. These attributes meant that the district could transition these paraprofessionals to teaching jobs with the appropriate program that included education evaluation, preparation, professional development and mentoring.

C. *Referring to the RFP’s Dual-Capacity Framework for Increasing Representation of Black and Latino Educators, include two (2) to three (3) broad questions that these data raised for your district.*

Based on the referenced framework, the central questions Bridgeport raised were:

- How can the district increase its representation of minority educators, without competing with other districts for their teaching talent?
- How can the district interest its paraprofessional talent pool (already a large minority pool) in pursuing a career as a teacher?
- How can the district work with its community partners (The American Federation of State, County and Municipal Employees (AFSCME), Connecticut Educators Association (CEA), Consultants (Professional Development, Evaluators etc.) and local colleges and universities) to help the interested paraprofessional talent pool prepare to become BPS teachers?

Section 3: Actions That Will Address Recruitment and Retention Challenges

- A. *Referring to the broad questions developed in Section 3, describe the process you carried out to generate ideas about how to tackle these questions.*

In our attempt to launch Paraprofessionals to Teachers Program, BPS developed a survey that was sent to all district paraprofessionals and non-certified staff. The questions ranged from the length of employment, the educational background, and issues that prevented them from pursuing a teaching certification.

Simultaneously, the Human Resources team (Executive Director Human Resources, and HR Specialists) sought the expertise of the proposed community partners. The University of Bridgeport provided an overview of transcript evaluation, examination preparation, and general State certification guidelines; AFSCME provided insights on how to engage the district paraprofessional staff and follow-up procedures; CEA provided assistance in navigating the certification process; BEA provided information on possible program mentors; and the district's Bilingual and Special Education Directors provided insights on subject area certifications and educational programs interested candidates could pursue. Three meetings were held where the committee discussed the development of support and educational programs to assist paraprofessional in the steps to achieve teacher certification.

Additionally, three outreach meetings were held with district paraprofessionals. The last meeting had well over 44 attendees, with roughly 75% of the participants interested in the program. These stakeholder engagement meetings granted the planning team direct access to current paraprofessionals who were interested in transitioning to teachers. The team was able to take into consideration the many factors that paraprofessionals face on becoming a teacher. The major challenges were financial factors, related to tuition and maintenance of their current salaries and insurance benefits; the length of time that it would take for an interested person to complete all of the educational, certification and student teacher requirements; availability of weekend, night and online classes; and certification exam preparation.

- B. *Explain how your team prioritized the ideas generated through your stakeholder engagement activities. Describe how you determined which activities are most feasible and/or could have the most impact in the short or long term. This discussion must consider how the proposed activities intersect with the current education reform initiatives that your district is undertaking. It must also describe whether your district has gathered any preliminary evidence or used research that shows your selected activities hold promise for addressing your district's recruitment and/or retention challenges.*

As noted above, the team received many ideas from both its community partners, and primary stakeholders – paraprofessionals. This BPS team gathered the information from stakeholder and team meetings in order to generate a master list of priorities. The list was circulated among the planning team, decisions based on team consensus were made on which items would be initially pursued, as well as which would be relegated to midway project tasks, and future items. The team felt strongly that in order to have a robust program, the first major task breaks the plan into three major steps -- Inform, Prepare and Educate, and Hire. These items and their required subtasks were further prioritized based on each section's necessities. For example, in order to inform the staff of the program, the team realized that it needed to prioritize the engagement of

media for advertising, as well as the need to build an interest survey.

BPS was able to decipher that through the development of the master implementation plan (see section 3C) the district formulated a plan that was the most feasible and would yield the best short and long-term impact on the district.

The implementation plan for this program is closely aligned with other current minority hiring, and educational assistance programs the district currently participates in. The transition of paraprofessionals to teachers is not a new concept. However, this program will be the first of its kind established to track a cohort and hire them once they have completed the program.

The district felt strongly that pursuing this plan of action to recruit its current paraprofessionals to teachers was feasible due to the myriad pieces successful programs on the topic. The district identified the California Paraprofessional Teacher Training Program and adopted it somewhat as its model. The Paraprofessional Teacher Training Program (PTTP), is California's funded program that assists paraprofessionals with a career ladder program that leads to a teaching credential. The participants may already have a Bachelor's Degree but have not done any teacher preparation coursework; or Graduate degrees. The program provides assistance with college/university tuition, fees, and books, as well as other support services to increase success in the program. The 2014 California School Paraprofessional Teacher Training Program report, indicated that "...over the past eighteen years the PTTP has produced more than **2,200** educators for the State of California..."

C. Include a two-year implementation timeline that depicts (1) the goals and 'objectives your district will carry out to achieve the priorities presented in Section 4B, (2) the district personnel in charge of each goal/objective, (3) the community and higher education partners that will be included, and (4) the sequence of activities, including the month(s) and year(s) during which they will take place.

Paraprofessionals to Teachers Implementation Project Plan 2015 - 2017 School Years		
Key Tasks	Person(s) Responsible	Timeline
Outcome Level I		Year 1 One Month
<p>INFORM Paraprofessionals about educational career options: Bridgeport will make the process of accessing information, and becoming involved in pre-certification flow smoothly. BPS' key strategy will be to establish a robust informational plan that becomes familiar to our paraprofessionals and communicate this new program effectively to them. The steps for success in this initiative are as follows:</p>		
1. Notify all district paraprofessional staff of the path to becoming a teacher. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Through media, postings, notifications through AFSCME and district email. 	Exec. Director – Human Resources, HR Specialist	1 Month
2. Ask interested parties to complete an interest survey. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Questions will include: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Highest level of education ○ Degree Major ○ Length of service in District ○ Expectations of the program 	Exec. Director – Human Resources, HR Specialist	1 Month
Outcome Level II		Years 1 & 2 1.5 Years
<p>PREPARE & EDUCATE Paraprofessionals in order to increase eligible educators for hire in District: A rigorous course of preparation, tutoring & education to bring paraprofessionals from the point of interest in teaching to the point of having completed all the steps required to be ready for an interview is needed. The steps to complete this process are:</p>		
1. Interested candidates will deliver transcripts to Human Resources for review by University of Bridgeport	Interested Paraprofessionals	1 Month or Less
2. Review with Paraprofessional(s) their necessary coursework, and/or preparation that is required for paraprofessionals to transition to employed teachers.	Paraprofessional(s), HR, Certificate Evaluators – University of Bridgeport	1 Month or Less
3. Qualified paraprofessionals complete a program entrance application, submit an interesting statement, agree to commit at least three years to the district once the program is completed, and go through a screening process. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The screening process would entail an interview by the committee (they will 	Paraprofessional(s), HR, and rest of committee	1 Month or Less

Bridgeport Action Plan to Increase Representation of Black and Latino Educators

<p>be asked to be established questions (your philosophy on education, why did you chose this field, what have they learned about education as a paraprofessional), and review of submitted application documents. A scoring rubric will be created to rate each candidate. The top five most prepared candidates will be accepted into the initial cohort.</p>		
<p>4. Work with each accepted Paraprofessional to develop an individual professional development plan</p>	<p>Paraprofessional(s), HR, University of Bridgeport Dept. Chair</p>	<p>1 Month or Less</p>
<p>5. Pair each Paraprofessional with a mentor and commence monthly mentoring sessions.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mentors will be currently employed teachers who were former district paraprofessionals. They will receive an annual \$1,000 stipend for their continued participation in the program. • Every effort will be made to match candidates with appropriate mentors. 	<p>Paraprofessional(s), Mentors</p>	<p>1.5 Years</p>
<p>6. Five paraprofessionals will initially begin the program.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Based on their educational backgrounds and admissions evaluation, the paraprofessionals will either start school or begin to receive tutoring for certification exams. 	<p>Paraprofessional(s), Local Universities</p>	<p>1.5 Years</p>
<p>Outcome Level III:</p>		<p>Year 2 Four Months</p>
<p>HIRE Paraprofessionals from the cohort that are ready to become teachers.</p>		
<p>1. Receive, evaluate and review transcripts and examination results of each paraprofessional who has completed the program.</p>	<p>Paraprofessional(s), HR</p>	<p>1 Month or less</p>
<p>2. Prepare eligible paraprofessionals for interview coaching, and final committee screening interviews.</p>	<p>HR, AFSCME, Uni. of Bridgeport</p>	<p>1 Month</p>
<p>3. Interview and hire qualified paraprofessional for the role(s) as a teacher in the Bridgeport school system with a three year commitment</p>	<p>HR, District Hiring Committee</p>	<p>2 Months</p>

Section 4: Expected Outcomes

Impact Outcomes

A. *Explain in detail how your district will define its baseline when measuring progress toward increasing representation of Black and Latino educators.*

The District plans to track the number of paraprofessionals who transition to new roles as teachers. It will use baseline data gathered from the 2014/2015 school year. Without the assistance of the paraprofessionals to Pathways to Teachers Careers Program, three minority paraprofessionals will be teachers in the district for the 2015-2016 school year.

At the onset of the program, the district will begin to track the number of minority paraprofessionals that enter the program, their educational levels at the beginning, during and end of the program.

B. *Once your baseline is explained and established, state the targets that you will commit to meeting at the end of Year 1 and Year 2 of implementation. Your targets must be actual numbers that will demonstrate your progress in increasing Black and Latino representation. These targets must be realistic and attainable.*

Based on the current interest levels throughout the district, BPS has determined that roughly 20 employees are ready to enter a proposed program, of that number 17 are minorities. However, many of these interested parties are in need of extended preparation to transition into teaching positions. Therefore, the district proposes a cohort of five new teachers in year one and ten new teachers in year two. During year one the district will be formalizing all of the program plans and asking new community partners to join the effort. Therefore, it has a reserved a smaller cohort in year one to ensure the program is completely satisfactorily, with room for expansion in the 2nd year.

Intermediate Outcomes

C. *Describe the intermediate outcomes that you will commit to meeting during the implementation phase. Intermediate outcomes demonstrate that you are using a logical approach to achieving your impact targets.*

	Impact Target	Outcomes
1.	Notification to staff on Pathways to Teaching Careers Program	Record the influx of paraprofessional interest in program
2.	Completion of Pathways to Teaching Careers Program survey	Aggregate the data generated from applicant responses
3.	Evaluation application documentation	Record the total number of applicants received in order to choose the initial five cohort candidates.
4.	Cohort's progress	Gather data on: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Program entrance/exit date(s) <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a. Entrance and exit interviews 2. Education and examination commencement/termination 3. Mentoring Progress <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a. Proof of session attendance b. Program entrance and exit survey 4. Hiring eligibility documentation 5. Program attendee disposition at the end of 2 years <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a. Determination of if paraprofessional is hired

Bridgeport Action Plan to Increase Representation of Black and Latino Educators

		<p>or if further education/mentoring is still in progress.</p> <p>6. Support and goal attainment</p>
5.	Planning team progress	<p>Gather data on:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Provision of support and guidance to paraprofessionals 2. Implementation and use of technology to track program data

Section 5: Monitoring and Reporting

- A. *Describe the mechanisms and frequency by which your district will monitor its progress toward the outcomes stated in Section 6. Include details about who will be responsible for ongoing monitoring and how your district will continue to incorporate stakeholder feedback into the implementation of the plan.*

The district plans a series of monitoring procedures to ensure the project stays focused on ushering qualified minority paraprofessional candidates into teaching positions in the district.

Item	Rationale	Mechanism	Frequency	Responsible Parties
Paraprofessional Progress Review	To evaluate the progress of the program’s enrolled paraprofessionals	Meeting	Quarterly	Human Resources
Paraprofessional Mentoring Meetings	To provide support to the enrolled paraprofessionals	Meetings	Ongoing	Individual Paraprofessionals & Mentors
Paraprofessional Current Employment Evaluation	To assess if the enrolled paraprofessional is still performing their current role.	Phone call	Quarterly	Human Resources & Paraprofessional Current Supervisor
University Support Evaluation	To review the university support to enrolled paraprofessionals	Meeting	Quarterly	Human Resources
Planning Team Review	To review the program plan, and make necessary adjustments when needed.	Meeting	Quarterly	Program Team

- B. *Describe how frequently, to which audiences (including local school boards), and through which mechanisms your district will publicly report on its progress.*

The district’s Human Resources team will provide bi-annual (at the beginning and end of school year) reports to the Superintendent. The Superintendent, (close to the noted timeframes) will present updates on this program during the “Superintendent’s Report” agenda item at the Bridgeport Board of Education meetings.