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# The Impact of Principal Race on Teachers<sup>1</sup>

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## Abstract

This study examines how the race of school principals impacts teachers, using data from a nationally representative sample of public schools. We find that teachers report higher job satisfaction and turnover less often when supervised by an own-race principal. We also find that being of the same race impacts the tangible and intangible benefits teachers receive, and, moreover, it impacts white and African American employees differently. Additionally, we find evidence that black teachers earn substantially less in supplemental pay when they work for a white principal, even when compared to white teachers in the same school.

## Introduction

Numerous public policies exist to overcome the historical disadvantages—economic, educational, and otherwise—of minorities in the United States. Ultimately, the success of these policies depends on the ability of implementing organizations to serve the needs of minority clients. A rich literature shows that the representation of minorities within an organization increases the ability of the organization to address minority client needs (e.g., Dee, 2004; Hinderer, 1993; Meier, Stewart, & England, 1989; Selden, 1997). Addressing the needs of minorities

is especially important in the public school setting. Minority children have consistently lagged behind non-minority children on a variety of educational outcomes (e.g., Fryer & Levitt, 2004; Lee, 2002), and several studies suggest increasing the stock of qualified minority teachers as a strategy for addressing these gaps (e.g., Dee, 2004; Meier, Wrinkle, & Polinard, 1999; Pitts, 2007). Given the role of minority teachers in promoting the achievement of minority students, it is important to understand what factors contribute to the job satisfaction of minority teachers. We hypothesize that an important factor for the retention and satisfaction of minority teachers is increased numbers of minority principals. This study will examine the impact of principal race on teacher satisfaction, turnover rates and the benefits teachers receive.<sup>2</sup>

## Teacher Satisfaction and Turnover

We first examine whether teachers who share the same race as their principals express greater job satisfaction and exhibit lower probabilities of leaving their jobs. On the whole, we find that teachers who share the same race as their principal are significantly more satisfied than similar teachers who are not of the same race as their principal. We find that these results are concentrated in schools led by African American principals.

<sup>1</sup> This report was prepared by Jacob Cronin, Policy Analyst. It is based on "A Supervisor Like Me: Race, Representation, and the Satisfaction and Turnover Decisions of Public Sector Employees" *Journal of Policy Analysis and Management*, Vol. 30, No. 3, 557-580 (2011). For more information contact Dr. Lael Keiser at [KeiserL@missouri.edu](mailto:KeiserL@missouri.edu)

<sup>2</sup> The data used in this study comes from the restricted-use versions of the 2003-04 Schools and Staffing Survey (SASS) and the 2004-05 Teacher Follow-up Survey (TFS), both of which are administered by the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES). The 2003-04 collection contains responses from approximately 43,000 teachers in every grade in 8,300 schools from across the country.

We did not find evidence that the principal's race was important for job satisfaction when the principal was white, regardless of the race of the teacher. In general, sharing the same race as the principal in determining worker satisfaction appears much more relevant for African American teachers than white teachers.

These differences could be driven by differences in how they are managed and the teacher's perception of administrative support and encouragement, classroom autonomy, and recognition. We examine this in more detail later. In terms of turnover, teachers of the same race as their principal are associated with a slightly lower turnover rates than other teachers. For example, a black teacher who has a black principal is less likely to quit within the next year than a black teacher who has a white principal.

### Salary and the Perception of Other Benefits Received

Next we look at the impact of principal race on the distribution of benefits potentially available to teachers. We look at the distribution of both tangible and intangible benefits. Tangible benefits are defined in terms of salary and intangible benefits are the teacher's perception of: administrative support and encouragement, autonomy in classroom decision-making, and recognition for good job performance.

First, we examine the distribution of tangible benefits. Because nearly all districts calculate base pay as a function of experience and degree attainment, we use supplemental pay to measure tangible benefits. Supplemental pay, which likely has a large element of principal discretion, is any additional compensation from the school system for extracurricular or additional activities such as coaching, student activity sponsorship, or teaching evening classes. We find that high school teachers who share the same race as their principals receive between \$400 and \$500 more per year in supplemental salary than teachers who do not share those race characteristics.<sup>3</sup> Furthermore, when we separate the results by race, we find that white teachers supervised by white principals receive approximately \$540 more in supplemental pay than African American teachers in the same school, but we find no evidence that African American teachers with African American principals receive more supplemental salary than white teachers. Digging a little deeper, we find that white teachers who are supervised by white principals are more likely to take on non-teaching duties, so there is some evidence that teachers who share the same race as their principal take on opportunities to earn supplemental pay more frequently. There are different possible

explanations for this. White teachers, for example, may be more comfortable requesting discretionary opportunities from white principals. White principals may also be more likely to encourage applications and/or more likely to hire white teachers because of higher comfort levels and shared values. White principals may also hold negative stereotypes of black teachers. We cannot draw conclusions about why the relationship between extracurricular activities and race congruence exists with existing data.

It is also unclear why a similar process would not be at work in schools with African American principals, except perhaps that those principals may command fewer resources, and therefore, less discretion in allocating supplemental pay. Whatever the mechanism, the outcome is that black teachers are earning less in sum than their observationally equivalent white colleagues.

We find different patterns for intangible benefits, which are the teacher's perception of administrative support and encouragement, classroom autonomy and recognition for good job performance. In general, the results are consistent with the idea that teachers tend to perceive greater intangible benefits from their principal when he or she is of the same race. Again, these results are concentrated in schools run by African American principals. African American teachers supervised by African American principals are more likely to perceive their principal providing them with support and encouragement. They also feel that they are given more autonomy in their classroom, and they report feeling greater recognition for a job well done. In contrast, we find no evidence that white teachers perceive greater intangible benefits when supervised by a white principal as opposed to a black principal.

### Conclusion

Race appears to play an important role in how principals treat teachers and how teachers perceive the treatment they get, resulting in inequities of treatment and recognition of those inequities within schools. Teachers who share the same race as their principal are generally more satisfied, turnover less often, and receive more benefits, both tangible and intangible. However, separating the results by race reveals more information. Teachers are substantially more likely to stay in schools run by a principal of the same race, an effect that appears to be stronger for schools with black principals. Teachers who share the same race as their principal also report higher job satisfaction, again particularly in African American-run schools, an association that may be driven by differences in how they are managed, given that teachers

<sup>3</sup> Because supplemental pay is concentrated at the secondary level, results are based only on responses from high school teachers.

who share the same race as their principal report feeling somewhat higher levels of administrative support, autonomy and recognition than other teachers report. A potentially more troubling result is that white teachers who share the same race as their principal receive a higher salary (in terms of supplemental salary) than teachers who are not of the same race as their principal. A closer look at supplemental activities shows evidence that these differences derive largely from white teachers being more likely to participate in non-teaching duties than their non-white colleagues when the principal is white. Our data do not allow us to discern exactly why that is.

**Table 1**

	Schools Run by an African American Principal	Schools Run by a White Principal
<b>Satisfaction</b>	Black teachers are more satisfied than white teachers	Black and white teachers have roughly the same job satisfaction levels
<b>Turnover Rates</b>	Slightly lower turnover rates for black teachers	Slightly lower turnover rates for white teachers
<b>Salary (Supplemental Pay)</b>	Roughly the same pay for both white and black teachers	White teachers receive more supplemental pay than black teachers
<b>Intangible Benefits*</b>	Black teachers perceive more intangible benefits than white teachers	Black and white teachers perceive roughly the same level of intangible benefits

\*Intangible benefits are defined as the teacher’s perception of: administrative support and encouragement, autonomy in classroom decision-making, and recognition for good job performance.

Looking at table 1, we separate our results by the race of the principal, which allows us to look at how a teacher’s experience differs in schools run by an African American principal compared to a white principal. As previously indicated, race plays a significant role in the principal-teacher relationship. African American teachers are more satisfied, turn over less often, and perceive more intangible benefits when supervised by an African American principal. Hence, African American teachers generally have a more positive experience when the principal is of the same race. Increasing the number of minority teachers, as previous research indicates, is beneficial in promoting the achievement of minority students. Our results illustrate that an important factor in maintaining the racial diversity of teachers is the diversity of the principals that supervise these teachers. Hence, these findings could provide justification for policymakers to undertake programs targeted at increasing the flow of minority teachers into the principal pipeline.

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