

Leveraging the Power of Coalition for Teacher Diversity

Lessons and Recommendations from the Paradigm Shift Initiative

JUNE 2021



Appreciations

This work would not be possible without the ideas, time, energy, and resources of many individuals and the institutions they represent.

Paradigm Shift participants—Black and Latinx educators—are the most essential partners in our work. They take the time on top of jobs, college courses, licensure test preparation, and familial duties to inform and work with us to create a system of evolving supports for their journeys to licensure.

The Paradigm Shift Leadership Team (see inside back cover) is both brains and brawn of the effort, which would not exist without the collective commitment of its members. From attending meetings to coordinating events, recruiting Paradigm Shift participants, leading teams, and contributing to proposals, presentations, and reports, team members provide the vision, knowledge, and hard work needed to make Paradigm Shift happen.

Diverse Teacher Workforce Coalition members from an array of the region's organizations birthed the vision that became Paradigm Shift. They enthusiastically continue to provide ideas, input, and support for our activities. District leaders play an especially important role, supporting this work in the form of staff hours and offering their voices at important moments and meetings. See page ii for the list of Coalition member-organizations.

Five Colleges, Incorporated directors and staff provide the structure and support that have made innovation possible and implementation practical.

Consultants to the initiative are key contributors to our success. Green River Research provides its extensive evaluation expertise, often going above and beyond because of dedication to our goal. The Interaction Institute for Social Change helps us to grow as a network and keep racial equity at the forefront of what we do. Our creative consultants, Murre Creative, B Strategic Communications, Beetle Press, and TSM Design, have helped us professionalize our presence and effectively communicate our messages to constituents.

Finally, we appreciate the financial support we have received from the Community Foundation of Western Massachusetts; the Irene E. and George A. Davis Foundation; the Beveridge Family Foundation; Five Colleges, Incorporated; and, through our partner school districts, the Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education. Further, the financial contributions of Mount Holyoke College; Springfield College; the Collaborative for Educational Services; Teach Western Mass; and partner districts in the form of tuition discounts, tuition assistance, or other support for Paradigm Shift participants have helped make it possible for these participants to enter and succeed on the route to teaching.



Leveraging the Power of Coalition for Teacher Diversity

An invitation to our readers

Since 2017, the Diverse Teacher Workforce Coalition of Western Massachusetts (the Coalition) has sought to address the urgent need to create a more diverse teacher workforce in Hampden, Hampshire, and Franklin counties. While the children in our schools increasingly represent the global majority (people of color), most of our teachers are white. The problem is starkly evident in cities like Holyoke and Springfield where students of color comprise the clear majority, but it is also important in towns such as Amherst, Northampton, and Greenfield, where students of color face obstacles as a minority group in a predominantly white environment. For students of color, having educators who look like them meaningfully improves their achievement and their opportunities. Further, a diverse teacher workforce improves education for all students by developing necessary 21st century global competencies. As our region's population changes and a large wave of current teachers retires, school districts want to attract and support a more diverse pool of new teachers to enter and succeed in their schools. At the same time, teacher preparation programs do not currently attract enough traditional college-age students of color to fill the need.

Fortunately, we have a ready, diverse source of teachers already working in our schools. As data show, paraprofessional educators (paraeducators) are significantly more culturally diverse than is the teacher corps. Paraeducators already know and like to work with our students, have experience in critical need areas such as special education and ESL, and are often long-term residents of our communities. However, paraeducator positions are low paying, with significant barriers to advancement. The main highway that could lead paraeducators to a productive teaching career—traditional educator preparation programs—has few on-ramps for paraeducators who wish to enter. Even if they succeed in getting onto the road to becoming highly qualified teachers, financial and environmental barriers obstruct their ability to attain licensure.

To build a diverse teacher workforce with urgency, we need to reduce those barriers and create additional entry points for paraeducators in our communities.

This report describes Paradigm Shift, a multisectoral initiative designed to advance teacher diversity in western Massachusetts and across the Commonwealth by helping Black and Latinx paraeducators and teachers-on-waiver to become licensed teachers.

In our regional, coordinated, grow-your-own effort, districts and teacher preparation programs have found ways to cooperate for the greater good. Currently, many good potential teachers do not consider—or they abandon midway—a teaching career, because each individual teacher preparation program offers a limited menu of programming options that may not conform well to the needs of working paraeducators. By creating pathways designed to attract, accommodate, and retain those paraeducators who would otherwise be left out, we are now casting a wider net, fostering change in and pooling the resources of individual programs, and thereby serving a larger, more diverse population.

We share here what we have learned about diversifying the teacher workforce, in order to help motivate, inform, and equip other institutions and stakeholders working toward this goal. The lessons and recommendations in this report are aimed at K–12 and post-secondary educators, administrators, policy makers, funders, community and educator union leaders, and workforce development professionals who currently engage with, or would like to take on, the multifaceted challenge of building a diverse and inclusive teaching workforce. Achieving this goal requires recruiting people of color into the teaching profession, creating supportive pathways toward licensure, and transforming school environments so that newly licensed educators of color not only stay but, more importantly, succeed and thrive over the long term.

Current Coalition Members, 2021

SCHOOL DISTRICTS

- Amherst-Pelham Regional Public Schools
- Holyoke Public Schools
- Northampton Public Schools
- Springfield Public Schools (and the Springfield Empowerment Zone)

EDUCATOR PREPARATION AND SUPPORT

- Collaborative for Educational Services
- Elms College
- Journeys into Education & Teaching
- Lower Pioneer Valley Educational Collaborative
- Mount Holyoke College
- Smith College
- Springfield College
- Teach Western Mass
- University of Massachusetts Amherst
- Westfield State University

EDUCATOR UNIONS

- Amherst-Pelham Education Association
- Holyoke Paraprofessionals Association
- Northampton Association of School Employees
- Springfield Federation of Paraprofessionals

COMMUNITY COLLEGES

- Holyoke Community College
- Greenfield Community College
- Springfield Technical Community College

WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT

- MassHire Franklin-Hampshire Career Center
- MassHire Franklin-Hampshire Employment Board
- MassHire Regional Employment Board Hampden County
- Springfield Works

COMMUNITY ORGANIZATIONS

- Community Education Project
- Holyoke-Chicopee-Springfield Headstart
- Home City Housing
- New North Citizens' Council, Incorporated
- Springfield Partners for Community Action
- The Literacy Lab
- The Urban League of Springfield

STATE AGENCIES

- Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education

CONVENER

- Five Colleges, Incorporated

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"I always loved school and wanted to be a teacher, but I never thought I could really be a teacher until fourth grade when I had a Black teacher. When I saw her in that role, I knew my dreams could come true. It was really exciting because I had never seen a teacher who looked like me. I still have a picture of the two of us on my desk.

I became a teacher so I could influence people's lives, like my fourth-grade teacher influenced mine. I am still one of a very few people of color on staff at my school. I was thrilled when I learned about the Diverse Teacher Workforce Coalition and wanted to be a part of it."

*Instructional Leadership Specialist and
Paradigm Shift Leadership Team member*

Rationale for Our Approach

Why teacher diversity?

Educational success for students of color is significantly improved by working with educators who share their backgrounds. Research shows, for example, that if a Black boy has even one Black teacher in third, fourth, or fifth grade, he is 60 percent more likely to graduate high school.¹ In addition to serving as important role models, teachers of color increase students' positive perceptions of the value of an education, have higher expectations for students of color, and are more likely to develop culturally relevant curricula.² But the vast majority of current teachers throughout the United States are white. In Massachusetts, only 8 percent of teachers identify as people of color, while 42 percent of students do.³ In Paradigm Shift's four⁴ partner school districts, the gap is equally or more significant, as this chart⁵ shows.

HOLYOKE	SPRINGFIELD	AMHERST	NORTHAMPTON
Students 84% Black & Latinx	Students 87% Black & Latinx	Students 29%* Black & Latinx	Students 19%* Black & Latinx
Teachers 75% White	Teachers 77% White	Teachers 80% White	Teachers 96% White

* Other students of color increase these percentages to 48% in Amherst and 30% in Northampton.

1. Gershenson, S., Hart, C.M.D, Lindsay, C.A., & Papageorge, N.W. (2017). *The long-run impacts of same-race teachers*. Discussion Paper No. 201630. IZA Institute of Labor Economics. <http://ftp.iza.org/dp10630.pdf>

2. Egalite, A.J., & Kisida, B. (2016). *The many ways teacher diversity may benefit students*. Education Next. <https://www.educationnext.org/the-many-ways-teacher-diversity-may-benefit-students/>

3. The New Teacher Project and Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education. (October 2020). *Promising recruitment, selection and retention strategies for a diverse Massachusetts teacher workforce* (p. 1).

4. In the list of Coalition partners on p. ii, we show the Springfield Empowerment Zone (SEZ) as a semi-independent part of the Springfield Public Schools district to acknowledge the autonomous administrative structure of SEZ within Springfield and the participation in the Coalition of leaders specifically from SEZ. For the purpose of demographic statistics, however, SEZ is considered part of the larger Springfield district.

5. Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education. *School and district profiles*. <https://profiles.doe.mass.edu/>

The institutions and individuals that became the Diverse Teacher Workforce Coalition brought awareness of and a commitment to teacher diversity to the table. This report details how we made that commitment the central focus of our work in ways that matched the needs and opportunities in our local communities.

Why paraeducators?

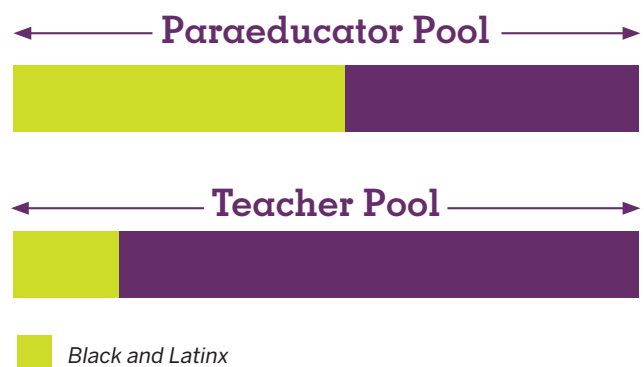
The individuals who assist teachers and provide nurturing support to students for their academic, physical, and emotional well-being are known as paraprofessionals, paraeducators, teacher aides, or education support professionals. In our initiative and in this report, we choose to call them paraeducators. They do not hold teaching licenses, but the range of services they provide to schools makes them a critical part of the education system and crucial to student success. Paraeducators have indispensable classroom experience and have already acquired effective practices from teachers and their own experiences.

Paraeducators work closely with students who struggle socially, emotionally, or academically. These experiences strengthen their passion and skill for helping all children reach their full potential. Notably, two-thirds of Paradigm Shift participants pursue licenses in special education, a designated high-need licensure in Massachusetts.

Paraeducators are a valuable and invested source of new teachers of color. In addition to having rich experience working with students, they frequently reflect the racial and ethnic diversity of student populations. They are often multilingual and connect easily with students and families. They tend to stay in the schools and districts where they are hired because they live in district communities. And

in most locations, they are a more diverse workforce than the teaching corps. In our four Coalition partner districts, over half of paraeducators identify as people of color, while about 18 percent of teachers do.

And yet, paraeducators rarely move into licensed teaching positions. Multiple obstacles impede progress from paraeducator to teacher: a confusing licensure system and high-stakes tests, financial constraints, competing life responsibilities, and unsupportive workplace environments. Those who were themselves ill-served by a traditional one-size-fits-all K–12 education that failed to represent their cultural experiences and strengths either do not see themselves as teachers or do not want to commit to a teaching career. Paraeducator salaries are among the lowest in the profession, and the paraeducator role is widely undervalued. Not surprisingly, many paraeducators who would be excellent teachers may never have considered a teaching career.



Paraeducators' commitment to their students and their communities

“We’re with the students all the time. It can be stressful, but you know, I had a kid who just dropped on me, just hugged me, because it was after he’d had a stressful time. There’s...a lot of bonding with these kids.”

“I want to be a part of the narrative of kids’ lives.”

“It is such a strong message we are sending to students who are Black and Latinx, that we understand the journey and inspire them to pursue higher goals.”

“Since age 15, [this city] gave me the opportunity to become a paraprofessional when other places didn’t want me, so I feel like I owe them for giving me that chance. There were a lot of great teachers. I learned a lot from them as a para. I like the kids; they are all my own. They come from Puerto Rico. I feel like this is where I belong.”

At the same time, teacher preparation programs do not attract enough traditional college-age students of color to fill the need. Our vision is that supporting paraeducators of color to become teachers will not only be a sustainable way to help remediate teacher shortages but will also diversify the workforce enough to make teaching attractive to students of color and retain other teaching colleagues of color.

Who our paraeducators are

We have the privilege of working with a multifaceted group of current and former paraeducators and have become closely acquainted with their stories. These

individuals come from a variety of places, including the United States, Central America, South America, and East Africa. Their previous professional experiences include employment as a lawyer, counselor, architect, and social worker, among others.

A few individuals came to us having already earned master’s degrees. Some have been ill-served by educational institutions, while others report having been well-prepared for academics by their school experiences. Despite this broad range of backgrounds and experiences, the paraeducators have two things in common: commitment to the children and communities they serve and the desire to fulfill that commitment as teachers.

Overview of Paradigm Shift

Paradigm Shift is the inaugural initiative of the Diverse Teacher Workforce Coalition of Western Massachusetts (the Coalition), a network whose seeds were planted in 2013 and formally organized in 2017. It is an innovative, multisector, regional collaboration for teacher diversity driving change through shared learning and resources.

By helping Black and Latinx paraeducators and teachers-on-waiver to become licensed teachers, Paradigm Shift seeks to build sustainable routes to teacher diversity, increasing opportunities for students of color to thrive.

Who we are

At the time of this writing, the Coalition includes four school districts, four educator unions, six teacher education programs at colleges, three community colleges, three alternative teacher preparation programs, four workforce development agencies, and seven community-based organizations. Coalition membership grows and changes as new institutions see a place for their work within the Coalition's goals and come to recognize the benefits they gain by partnering. Our current membership is listed on page ii. The graphic on page 5 shows the network's development since 2013.

What we do

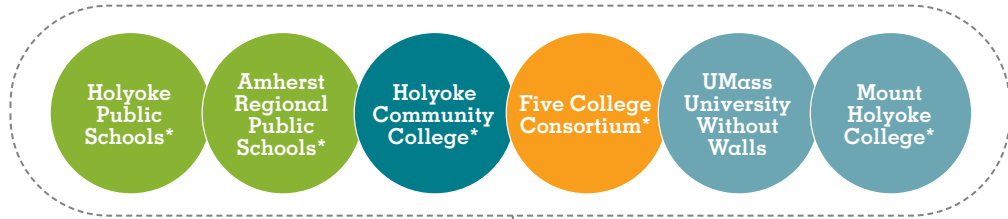
In 2017, the Coalition identified an important opportunity to increase teacher diversity in our region by helping Black and Latinx paraeducators who already hold bachelor's degrees to become licensed teachers. To achieve immediate and broad impact, we sought to support and influence existing teacher preparation programs rather than undertake the time-consuming process of creating a new one with narrow reach. To be responsive to district needs, we aimed to reinforce close cooperation between districts and teacher preparation programs.

To date, five teacher preparation partnerships have signed on as the Paradigm Shift "pathways" we refer to throughout this report:

- Urban Teacher Pathways, a partnership between Holyoke Public Schools and Mount Holyoke College's Master of Arts in Teaching Program, which was the pilot model for Paradigm Shift.
- The Working Teachers Program, a partnership between Springfield Public Schools and Springfield College's Master of Arts in Teaching Program, which increased its focus on paraeducators when Paradigm Shift began.
- Amherst FUTURES, a partnership between Amherst Regional Public Schools and Mount Holyoke College's Master of Arts in Teaching Program, which was created when Paradigm Shift began.
- Northampton Public Schools' partnership with the Collaborative for Educational Services' Licensure Program, a partnership that created a pathway for paraeducators in the third year of Paradigm Shift implementation.
- Teach Western Mass, a teacher preparation residency program that partners with Holyoke Public Schools, the Springfield Empowerment Zone, and selected charter schools in Springfield and became a partner pathway in the third year of Paradigm Shift implementation.

Development of the Coalition Network, 2013–present

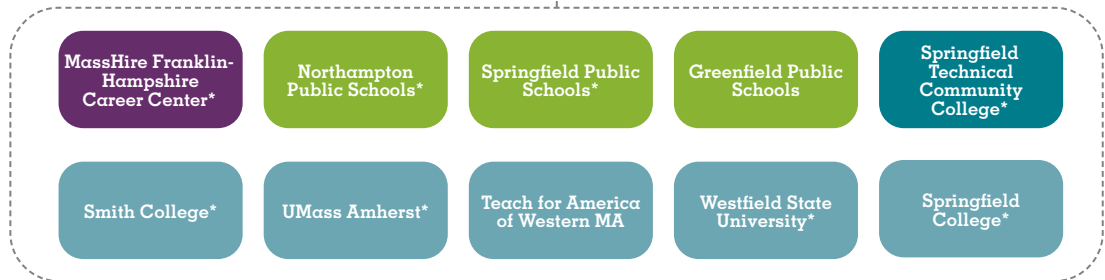
**Joined in
2013–14** ➡➡



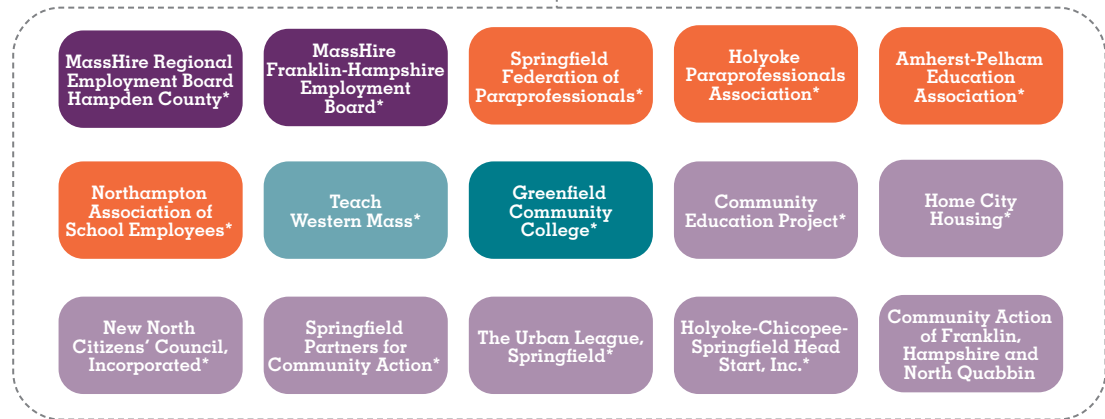
**Joined in
2015** ➡➡



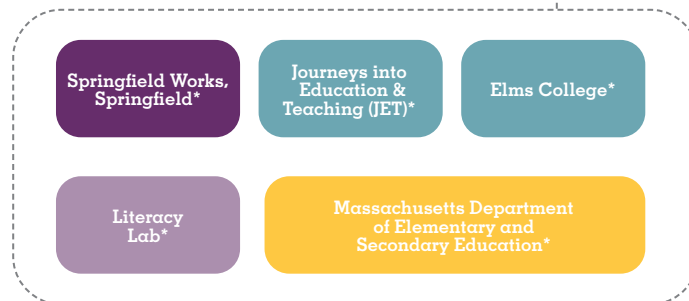
**Joined in
2016** ➡➡



**Joined in
2017** ➡➡



**Joined in
2019** ➡➡



➡➡ **Joined
in 2020**

* Current Coalition members

■ **School Districts**
■ **Workforce Development**
■ **Community Colleges**

■ **Educator Unions**
■ **Educator Preparation
and Support**

■ **Convener**
■ **Community Organizations**
■ **State Agencies**

Each pathway provides Paradigm Shift participants with tuition assistance, drawing from college, school district, and other sources.⁶

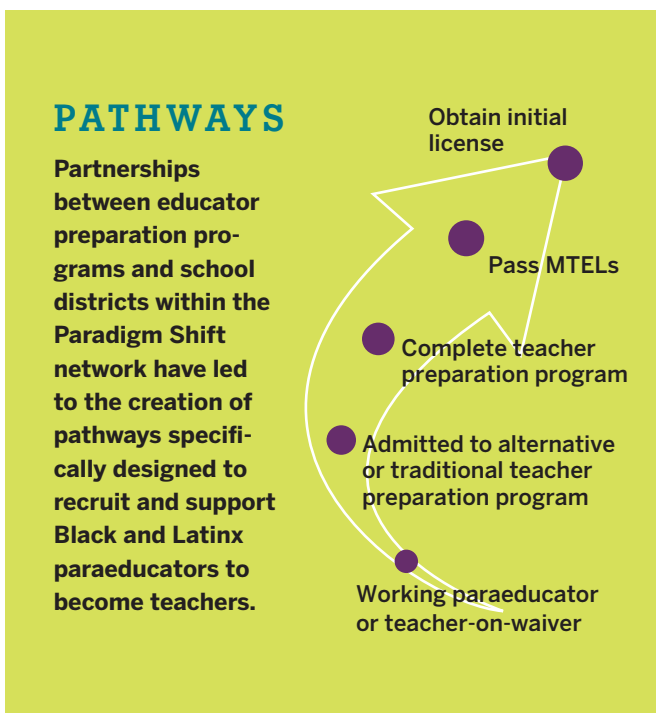
Paradigm Shift seeks to build a sustainable means for Black and Latinx paraeducators to obtain licensure through these pathways, working through four strategies:

Strategy I: Recruitment and Communications

Paradigm Shift raises Black and Latinx paraeducators' awareness of the importance of a teaching career and their potential to become teachers, along with recruiting and directing them to an appropriate licensure program.

Strategy II: Paraeducator Support

Paradigm Shift provides a system of extra support to the Black and Latinx paraeducators who seek licensure through these five pathways. The support includes Massachusetts Tests for Educator Licensure (MTEL) test preparation, MTEL test fee payments, recognition events, and individualized guidance.



Strategy III: Culture Change: Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion

Paradigm Shift utilizes regional learning events and communications to enhance Coalition districts' ability to recruit, hire, support, and retain new Black and Latinx teachers, particularly those who were paraeducators.

Strategy IV: Coalition Building for Systems Change

Paradigm Shift seeks to influence policy and practice in the region and at the state level through our newsletter, Coalition meetings, networking within the western Massachusetts region, and engagement in statewide groups and with the Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE).

How we organize ourselves

Paradigm Shift's leadership is provided by representatives from the broader Coalition, including leaders from the cooperating district-teacher preparation program partnerships and the workforce development agencies. The Leadership Team is accountable to the full Coalition for learning and outcomes, reporting at least annually in a full Coalition meeting. The Leadership Team meets monthly to make strategic decisions, with strategy teams working between meetings to carry out those decisions and in turn provide recommendations for further action.

What we've achieved thus far

Since 2018, Paradigm Shift has built momentum in diversifying the teacher workforce:

- Recruited and provided financial, mentoring, and test preparation support for more than 50 Paradigm Shift participants.
- Increased the percentage of Black and Latinx candidates in partner teacher preparation programs, from 15 percent to 39 percent in one program and from 19 percent to 26 percent in another.
- Helped 120 administrators across our four districts to create more equitable, inclusive, and actively anti-racist workplaces that can retain and nourish a diverse teaching staff.
- Influenced regional and statewide conversations about diversification.

6. For clarity, we do not identify specific pathways and partners in the text, with a few exceptions: The Holyoke Public Schools–Mount Holyoke College partnership was the original model on which our successive work was based; the Community Foundation of Western Massachusetts is our original funder; Five Colleges, Inc. plays a central coordinating role for the Coalition.

In just three years, we have increased the number of teachers of color in our partner school districts.

- Ten Paradigm Shift participants have obtained licenses with a master's degree and are teaching as fully qualified educators.
- Thirty-eight more Paradigm Shift participants are progressing toward completion; more than half of these have been promoted as teachers-on-waiver, while their graduate coursework and licensure completion are in progress. See following chart.

Movement building

While these numbers are encouraging, they are not the only or even the most important results. To create better opportunities for students of color, Paradigm Shift is leading a movement for a diversified teacher workforce in western Massachusetts through information and advocacy, cross-sector collaboration, and anti-racist culture change.

The next section summarizes what we have done, why we have done it, and what we have learned. We move quickly through the early years, describe one planning year, and then summarize the work of the four strategies.

“Growing your own” creates sustainable outcomes for students

“Why would we engage in this collaboration if it didn’t contribute to outcomes for kids? I would love to say in five years from now that [our district’s] work was not about outsiders coming in to do improvement but instead about tapping the local talent. It’s not about importing people to fix the problem. It’s about unleashing the potential of the people. That’s how sustainability will be achieved.”

—District administrator

Paradigm Shift Participants and Alumni by Graduation Year and District

	Licensed	Completed prep program; working on MTELs	2021 Graduation	2022 Graduation	Total	Currently holding emergency license*
TOTALS	10	8	14	16	48	23
Amherst	5	1	4	1	11	2
Holyoke	4	1	3	7	15	7
Northampton	0	0	0	1	1	0
Springfield	1	6	7	7	21	14

* In Massachusetts, a district that is unable to recruit a licensed educator for a particular position can apply for a hardship waiver to permit employment of an educator who does not yet hold the appropriate license. Since the COVID-19 pandemic forced a delay for those individuals needing MTELs to demonstrate progress, in 2020 the state temporarily replaced the waiver system with Emergency Licenses, freeing districts and educators from the burden of waiver applications.

Paradigm Shift's Evolution

What we did and what we learned

This section contains a fuller discussion of our processes, highlighting pivotal decisions and emergent lessons. We have intentionally documented our process because *what* we learned is intertwined with *how* we learned. In addition, within an innovation framework, one of our aims has been to learn from our experimentation and share that learning with others working toward teacher diversity.

In exploring our learning, we place special emphasis on the power and challenges of working collaboratively. Moving toward sustainable teacher diversity involves deep systemic change: Current roadblocks are embedded in the history of the road itself. This kind of change cannot be achieved by one organization or program or at a single stage of the teacher pipeline.

GROUNDWORK (2013–2016)

A School District's Request for Help, 2013

In 2013, a request from the superintendent of Holyoke Public Schools sparked the creation of the Diverse Teacher Workforce Coalition and Paradigm Shift:

We have a teacher retention challenge in the district, and we know it harms our students, especially those most vulnerable. How can you help us help the educators who already know our students and are committed to the community to become licensed teachers?

A group of initial collaborators began meeting to explore programming responses to the request. The school district urgently needed good teachers that it could retain. A Massachusetts Advocates for Diversity in Education report and other sources suggested that in many communities, paraeducators were a far more racially diverse group than were teachers *and* they already had experience.⁷ As a test of this possible source of new teachers, the group organized

an information session for paraeducators and teachers working on waivers in Holyoke on how to become licensed.

Emergent lesson: We assumed we would attract mostly paraeducators of color, because most paraeducators *were* people of color. But most of the session attendees were white, and only a handful of paraeducators were present.

Following this experience, we began to focus more clearly on the goal of diversifying the teacher workforce and to consider paraeducators as key components of a strategy to do so. The Five College's Partnership Programs Director, whose job is to generate collaborative programming between the colleges and K–12 schools, organized conversations and kept the momentum going.

A Funder Catalyzes a Regional Approach to Teacher Diversity, 2014–2016

The Community Foundation of Western Massachusetts (CFWM) Innovation Fund was looking for regional, “game-changing” approaches to large, entrenched

7. Massachusetts Advocates for Diversity in Education (2014). *Task Force Report*, January 17, 2014.

problems and encouraged the involvement of multiple organizations to achieve broad impact across the counties CFWM served. We drafted a concept paper around the goal of building a diverse teacher workforce in western Massachusetts. We committed to pooling resources and expertise to achieve this goal. Further, we understood that workforce development was important to our region, with many underemployed and unemployed individuals looking for career pathways. The regional workforce development agencies were excited to work on educator pathways and started to influence how they were shaped. They proposed connecting with educator unions. Our district and higher education partners believed they would benefit by cooperating rather than competing for the same students and the same prospective teacher hires.

A teacher preparation program's commitment to its community

“When I came to [the teacher preparation program], our goal was to have a student demographic similar to the schools we work with. Mount Holyoke College is just over the river from the city of Holyoke, and I come from South Africa where we had similar divisions in apartheid—where either a river or a road gave people access to either a good education or a bad education—and I thought to myself, we really need to get over this little bridge and find out what’s happening in Holyoke so we can learn more about what we need to do.”

—Teacher preparation program leader

By 2015, Mount Holyoke College and Holyoke Public Schools had developed a partnership specifically designed to recruit paraeducators into teaching for the district. Mount Holyoke College adjusted its program to allow for part-time two-year completion to accommodate working paraeducators and teachers-on-waiver, and offered a tuition discount to match a state-grant-funded Holyoke Public Schools contribution. The district did not limit admission to the program to educators of color, given its urgent need for more licensed teachers, even though the goal was to encourage the large proportion of paraeducators who reflected student demographics to enroll.

The Mount Holyoke College and Holyoke Public Schools partnership conducted an information session to recruit candidates into their new pathway. But the experience of the previous information session repeated itself when this new partnership enrolled its first cohort. Again, our original assumption that program candidates would reflect the demographics of the district’s paraeducators was tested, and the assumption proved wrong. While 56 percent of all paraeducators in the district identified as such, only two paraeducators of color attended the initial information session and only two candidates of color were among the cohort of 10 scheduled to start in January 2016. Both candidates of color soon discontinued.

Pivotal decision: We knew we would have to do something different if we were to truly work on increasing teacher diversity.

We centered this intention when we convened an early 2016 regional teacher diversity summit of school districts and teacher preparation programs to generate a priority list of strategies around which these institutions might be willing to collaborate. In late 2016, we applied for the CFWM Innovation Grant with a razor-sharp focus on teacher diversity, as evidenced in this statement from the proposal:

We seek to close the gap between the percentage of teachers of color and the percentage of students of color in Hampden, Hampshire, and Franklin counties by developing an effective career pathway for paraeducators from groups underrepresented in the teacher workforce to become licensed teachers and, secondarily, for other unemployed/ underemployed community residents to enter education careers. Our proposed solution focuses on changing who’s on the highway and helping them successfully stay on the road. The result will be a more diverse corps of teachers who mirror our students, believe in our students, respect

our students' cultures and traditions, and have a desire to succeed in their community school districts, which helps all of our students to thrive.

Such major highway reconstruction involves systemic change: Current roadblocks are embedded in the history of the road itself. In order to go beyond partial repairs, we propose a regional, multisector partnership cooperating to pool resources and to build new systems among all partners critical to finding a transformative solution. (Innovation Fund Preliminary Application, October 2016)

In January 2017, CFWM awarded an innovation planning grant to Five Colleges, Incorporated, as the convener of the now-named Diverse Teacher Workforce Coalition of Western Massachusetts, which we refer to as the Coalition.

THE PLANNING YEAR (2017)

The goal of the planning year was to be invited to apply for a CFWM Innovation implementation grant. If selected, we would then prepare a full implementation proposal. At this point, we didn't know exactly *how* we would help paraeducators of color become teachers, so we needed to clarify the specific actions we would take.

The Coalition agreed to meet regularly throughout the planning year. At our first meeting, we formed a Steering Group with at least one representative from each type of organization in the Coalition. The Steering Group would meet monthly. Periodically throughout the year, the Steering Group would share what we were learning with the full Coalition. Four full Coalition meetings would be held during the year, facilitated by a network-building consultant.

Pivotal decision: We formalized our name and further clarified working relationships, having received funding and committed to preparing a longer-term proposal.

Pivotal decision: We invited an outside consultant who brought deep expertise in network building and operations. It was important that our planning year be used effectively to build a strong, committed network, as this was core to our argument for increased impact through collaboration.

During the year, we conducted research to inform our strategy planning. Steering Group members conducted exploratory conversations in their home institutions,

surveyed paraeducators about their interest in becoming teachers, and examined the demographics of four of our member school districts, including the demographic makeup of students, teachers, and paraeducators. A workforce development member of the Coalition brought examples of career pathways from that sector, one in health and one in manufacturing careers, as models for what we could develop for teaching, along with suggestions of processes for developing our own.

Pivotal decision: We concluded that our focus should be on recruiting more Black and Latinx teacher candidates *primarily* but that districts could designate candidates from other underrepresented student populations as they felt appropriate.

Pivotal decision: Based on our earlier experiences, we no longer operated from the assumption that teacher candidates would mirror the population of the broader paraeducator population. We determined that we had to specifically name the groups we intended to reach and then do the work to reach them.

We also engaged a research consultant to collaborate with members of the Steering Group in developing and implementing a research plan. We recognized that we needed to understand more deeply local paraeducators' needs and possibilities in order to create an effective programmatic response.

Pivotal decision: Engaging a research consultant ensured that our decisions would be data-driven and responsive to the realities of Paradigm Shift participants. To capture formative feedback, we would continue to launch surveys and to conduct interviews and focus groups as the initiative evolved.

With the consultant, we moved through a collaborative and iterative process of data collection and analysis, culminating in our collective understanding of the significant obstacles that paraeducators face on the route to becoming teachers and promising practices currently in use. We learned with each new phase of research, using document review, interviews, and focus groups with paraeducators and Coalition members.

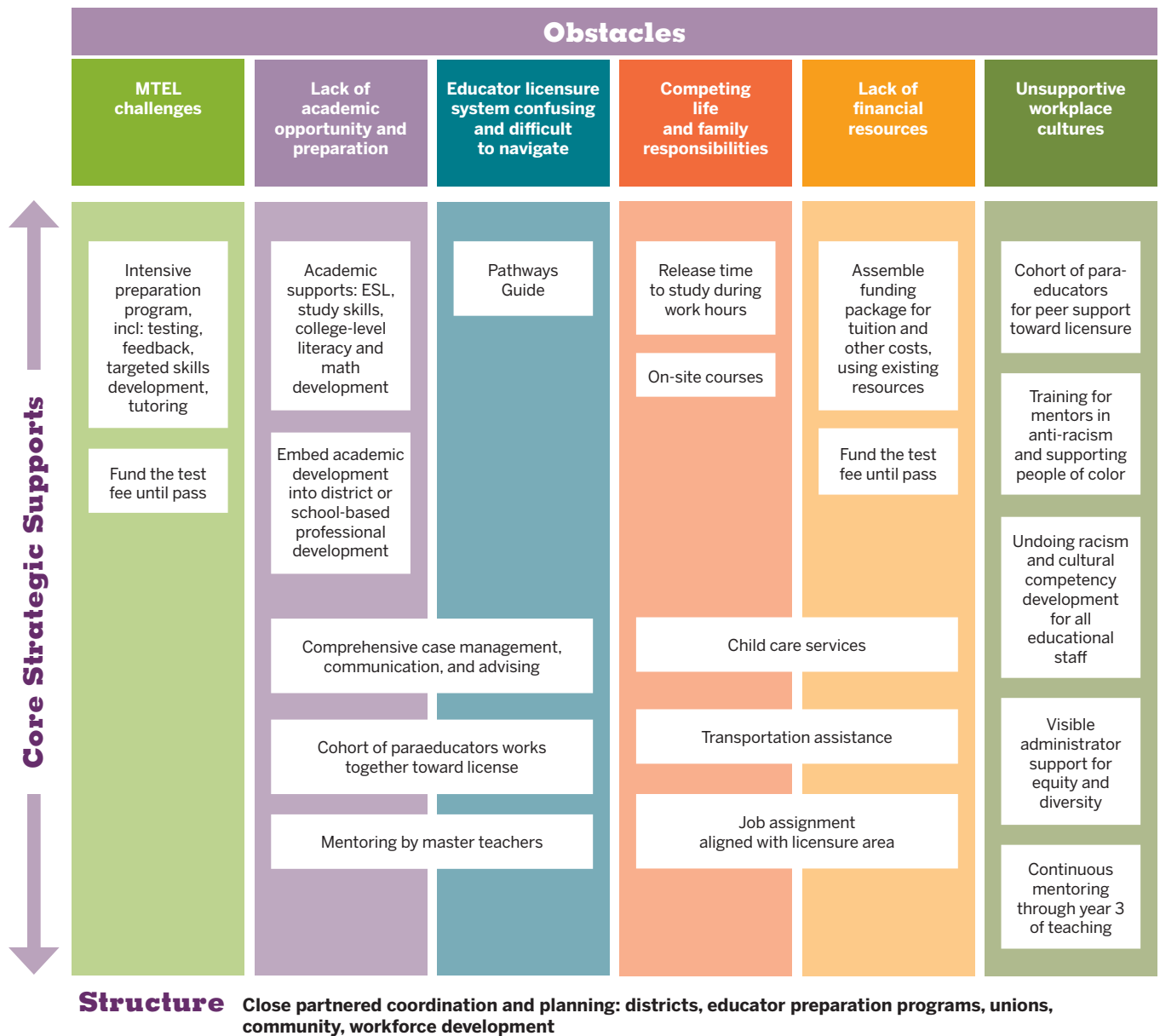
At our final Coalition meeting of the planning year, we discussed the obstacles and strategies we had identified to date (see Obstacles on the Pathway

chart below). We knew we would not be able to implement them all right away under the limited funds of the Innovation Grant. We prioritized three of the obstacles that prevent paraeducators from becoming teachers:

- A confusing licensure system
- Difficult Massachusetts Tests for Educator Licensure (MTEL)
- Unsupportive workplace cultures

We would address other obstacles that had emerged from our research—lack of academic opportunity, lack of financial resources, and competing responsibilities—within our individual institutions and be mindful of these obstacles while planning our collective actions.

Obstacles on the Pathway, with Recommended Strategies (August 2017)



The work of completing the proposal over the subsequent month led us to define the major strategy areas that have shaped our work to date:

- Strategy I: Recruitment and Communications
- Strategy II: Paraeducator Support
- Strategy III: Culture Change: Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion
- Strategy IV: Coalition-building for Systems Change

Pivotal decision: We determined that we would focus on paraeducators with bachelor's (BA) degrees, rather than including individuals who had not completed undergraduate education, even though the pool of candidates lacking BAs was larger than the pool of those holding degrees. This decision reflected the districts' desire to fill teaching positions quickly and the funder's desire to produce short-term results, within the maximum possible 3-year grant horizon.

Pivotal decision: We would build on work already being done by partners rather than create a new, stand-alone program or project.

Pivotal decision: We determined to support multiple pathways, as no one program would meet the needs of all the paraeducators we hoped to reach.

INNOVATION

The simple definition of innovation is "the introduction of something new." However, we understand the process of innovation to incorporate exploring complex problems, trying new solutions, learning from their success or failure, then adapting and continuously improving the solutions.

At the final meeting of the year, Coalition members realized the unique approach they were adopting. While our research showed that others had attempted to support paraeducators and advance diversity, these projects had undertaken the work as individual institutions or small collaborations. The Diverse Teacher Workforce Coalition, by contrast,

embraced the challenge by working on a regional scale, pooling members' collective expertise and resources, to change the *regional* teacher workforce landscape, moving beyond the limits of their own institutions. A Coalition member explained, "The Coalition is the innovation!"

Emergent lesson: Our regional approach differs from single institution-based approaches and maximizes the opportunity to transform the regional landscape. The shift from competition between organizations and toward collaboration ensures sharing of resources and expertise leading to distributed benefits for a wider pool of teacher candidates and leaders.

The Community Foundation of Western Massachusetts awarded us the first year of implementation funding, and we began that implementation in 2018. We were subsequently awarded funding for a second year of implementation at the end of Year 1, and funding for a third year at the end of Year 2. Each award was based on CFWM's estimation that we were making considerable progress, as evidenced by both quantitative measures and our continuous learning.

IMPLEMENTATION (2018–2021)

In this section, we summarize how we implemented the strategies from past to present.

- Year 1: 2018
- Year 2: 2019
- Year 3: 2020–21

Strategy I: Recruitment and Communications

In Year 1, to address the confusing licensure system, we planned to create and disseminate a pathways-to-licensure resource guide. The resource guide would define steps and resources irrespective of an individual's educational achievement level and would serve as a recruitment tool for the pathways. However, the grant period started in February 2018, in the middle of an academic year and too late for our two colleges' fall recruitment season. We did not want to wait for the next recruitment cycle to begin offering support to eligible teacher candidates in the pathways.

Pivotal decision: While the funder's timeline did not align with the realities of Paradigm Shift participants and partners, we opted to move forward with the teacher candidates

we could immediately support, those already enrolled in the pathways. At the same time, we would design mechanisms to recruit more candidates.

We engaged a communications consultant who helped us understand the need to raise awareness of our work. To this point, we had been known as the Diverse Teacher Workforce Coalition of Western Massachusetts. The consultant led us through a branding process, and we chose to name the initiative Paradigm Shift. The “para” component was word play on our focus on paraeducators, while the concept of a paradigm shift effectively represented the fundamental systems change we felt was needed to achieve our goals.

Our communications consultant held focus groups with Black and Latinx paraeducators in our partner school districts and was struck by the degree to which many of the paraeducators lacked confidence in their ability to move into a teacher position. The consultant worked with us to create a flyer and a website (www.paradigmshift-teach.org/) with a predominant theme and tone of “You can do it!” and “We need you to be a teacher!” By November 2018 we were ready to recruit a 2019 cohort.

Pivotal decision: Recognizing the need to target our communications to the population we intended to reach—paraeducators with BAs—and taking resource constraints into account, we reduced the scope of the guide, transforming the broad and comprehensive pathways guide into a recruitment website.

In Year 2, our overall purpose was to distribute a now-completed flyer and drive traffic to the website—moving into full awareness-building and recruitment mode. The scope of this strategy team’s oversight responsibility was broadened from development of our pathways guide to cover all outreach and communications. We intensified our efforts to communicate with paraeducators and a broader audience, but in particular we focused more attention on reaching principals.

Emergent lesson: Our understanding of the important role principals played in recruiting and supporting paraeducators through our pathways to teaching was growing, as was our understanding of the challenges of reaching them. Principals recruit and hire, and sometimes act as gatekeepers. Principals could adjust paraeducators’ schedules and school-based work responsibilities to accommodate the demands of the teacher preparation track (e.g., completing the practicum).

Paraeducators feel undervalued

“Teachers get credit for the work that paras create with students.”

“There’s really a perception that paras are not teachers. We don’t go to IEP meetings. Teachers don’t ask for our suggestions.”

“I’m the only one that speaks Spanish so I go to the meetings to translate, but then I see this message that says we aren’t allowed to speak to the families. It’s not my place.”

“Teachers attend all kinds of professional development that’s interesting and relevant to our kids. And they get paid to attend, and they’re supposed to come back and share what they’ve learned, but it doesn’t really work that way.”

Each of our partners had a slightly different recruitment calendar and process, as did each district.

Pivotal decision: We tailored our communications to harmonize with the systems and processes we encountered rather than expecting to use a uniform approach for all partners.

By Year 2, we saw that many of our paraeducators were being promoted to “teachers of record” right before or after enrolling in their teacher preparation program.

Emergent lesson: We realized that we would have to modify our recruitment language to reflect the new “teacher of record” titles (though those promoted still had the relatively precarious status of teachers-on-waiver). Feedback from some individuals reflected their strong preference for being referred to as “teachers” instead of “paraeducators.” They were well aware of the negative connotations that came with the paraeducator title and wanted to be addressed by the title they felt commanded more respect.

Pivotal decision: We expanded the breadth of our recruitment efforts and, more broadly, our conceptualization of our targeted audience, by including the newly identified teachers of record in our outreach and support services. We no longer limited our vision to individuals currently employed as paraeducators, though our main recruitment focus was on paraeducators, and most Paradigm Shift participants have served as paraeducators at some point.

In spite of our intensified efforts to spread the word, we discovered in our late summer 2019 survey of Paradigm Shift participants that some *still* were not aware of Paradigm Shift and all the resources available to them.

In Year 3, the COVID-19 public health crisis arose, and we utilized our newsletter to let Paradigm Shift participants know we were still operating and to communicate important messages to a broader audience. For example, as a plea for districts not to lay off paraeducators—a trend that we feared—our April newsletter highlighted the increasing importance of paraeducators’ role under remote learning, given their connections to children and parents. Our districts did manage to avoid layoffs of paraeducators, at least by the end of 2020, and none of our participating paraeducators have lost their positions as of this writing.

Emergent lesson: We realized that, with our strong collective voice, our communications could play an important role in continuing to raise awareness about the needs and interests of the paraeducators.

Since in-person get-togethers were no longer an option, we added more opportunities for Paradigm Shift participants to interact with us virtually.

Strategy II: Paraeducator Support

The Paraeducator Support strategy addressed Massachusetts Tests for Educator Licensure (MTEL) challenges and the confusing licensure process, and, to some extent, lack of academic preparation and opportunity and competing life and family responsibilities. MTEL preparation courses and tutoring, mentoring, and cohort building were the main components of the strategy. How we designed and implemented these components evolved as we experimented and learned.

MTEL PREPARATION COURSES

In Year 1, we partnered with a school district’s existing MTEL preparation program, utilizing its experienced instructors. We used grant funds to expand in-person MTEL course offerings, using the Zoom virtual meeting platform to allow off-site participation in those courses, in an attempt to breach the access, geographic, and time barriers Paradigm Shift participants faced. We hired a teacher to guide a remotely located pod of Amherst paraeducators, linking them as a group through a single computer to the live course in Springfield.

A college partner’s math teacher education program had been successfully using Zoom for hybrid in-person/distance learning for several years, and we built on their idea. Feedback, however, told us that that learning model was not effective for our remote learners and was challenging for the instructor.

Emergent lesson: While we had committed to using resources that already existed rather than duplicating effort, we realized that we could not assume that practices and tools could be easily transferred from one context to another. We experienced the value of soliciting formative feedback and being open to modifying our efforts in response.

Pivotal decision: Based on participant feedback, we decided to implement changes in Year 2: to offer courses at multiple sites and to make recorded webinar versions of each course available to Paradigm Shift participants for use on their own time.

In Year 2, we noticed that Paradigm Shift participants were not utilizing MTEL support at the rate anticipated, so we made additional changes to our strategy:

- We purchased MTEL vouchers for candidates so they could avoid paying out of pocket test fees for later reimbursement.
- We assembled a support team for each candidate, to meet with the candidate at enrollment and then regularly.
- We developed a template for candidates to plan test dates, preparation time and resources.

Participants appreciated the webinar courses, the MTEL vouchers, and in-class tutoring (see MTEL Tutoring), in particular. The planning template was distributed to Paradigm Shift participants but not really followed. We saw some evidence that registration for required tests increased, but Paradigm Shift participants still did not take MTELs at the rate we had planned for.

Emergent lesson: True to the innovation principles undergirding our work, we found that not all of our new ideas would yield the positive results we sought, but Paradigm Shift participants appreciated our ongoing efforts, and we were reminded of the value of continuing to seek feedback and modify accordingly.

Emergent lesson: The process of soliciting feedback and modifying our plans along the way required a substantial amount of time. Interestingly, the more we modified our plans and checked in with Paradigm Shift participants, the more we realized that the time investment paid off in increased trust and more genuine working relationships.

In Year 3, we transferred MTEL courses to Zoom-only format in light of COVID-19, which worked well for both our instructors and Paradigm Shift participants. This returned us to our original strategy of utilizing distance learning to make MTEL courses more widely available, this time in a virtual-only format. In addition, we launched our final two course areas in the fall, General Curriculum: Math and English as a Second Language. These were among the most challenging tests for Paradigm Shift participants.

Emergent lesson: Although our first way of combining in-person rooms with Zoom had failed due to lack of appropriate equipment in linked classrooms, an all-Zoom format was successful.

MTEL TUTORING

In Year 1, only one partner institution, an educator preparation program, had an in-house MTEL tutoring service. Because of our regional scope, we were able to increase

Paraeducators on MTEL, time, and financial challenges

“I was hoping to study for the MTELs while taking classes, but that’s proving not to be possible.”

“I need more time and less work. It just doesn’t fit with being a working parent.”

“Having more time to study for MTELs would be very supportive, because I have a heavy workload as a teacher, I have college course work in addition to studying for MTELs. This is really tough to do, because I cannot spend sufficient time preparing for my test when I have so many other things to get done as well.”

“I need a grant or a scholarship to pay for MTELs. I have a bachelor’s, I plan to do my master’s, but now I have MTELs in front of me. \$100 would mean a lot.”

“Four tests is about \$400. In December, there are two weeks I don’t get paid. So I’m down two paychecks, and I have to catch up. So I can’t take the tests in January. Maybe February? Except there’s another vacation week when I don’t get paid.”

teacher candidates' access to tutors: We used our resources to develop a corps of new MTEL tutors and invited Paradigm Shift participants to work with them. Applying our principle of building on partners' existing strengths, the tutors were trained by the existing program's MTEL coordinator and tutors. These veterans brought to our initiative their deep knowledge about how to navigate specific MTEL tests.

Ultimately, Paradigm Shift participants used tutors at a lower rate than we had anticipated. We learned from them that lack of awareness of the resources we offered accounted, in part, for the lower usage rate, and we planned to enhance our communication about resources to Paradigm Shift participants.

In Year 2, both campuses planned to integrate tutoring hours into college courses, so that Paradigm Shift participants could get extra help without adding time to their schedules. Ultimately, only one institution integrated tutoring hours into college courses, and that institution had been doing so on a smaller scale already.

Emergent lesson: Institutional models might not be successfully standardized, or it might take more time for them to adapt a new support component to fit their context.

In Year 3, tutoring continued remotely, but Paradigm Shift participants used the tutors at a lower rate than in previous years because MTEL testing was suspended for several months under COVID-19 restrictions.

Emergent lesson: While we worked to raise Paradigm Shift participants' awareness of resources, lower than anticipated utilization rates were due not only to lack of

awareness of resources but also to the multiple time commitments they were managing.

MENTORING

Our vision was to have mentors *of color* helping our candidates successfully navigate their graduate programs' and schools' racial and educational cultures. In Year 1, we invited experienced teachers of color from each of our districts to co-design the mentoring component. The strategy team assigned Paradigm Shift participants to mentors based on location. Our assumption that Paradigm Shift participants would form a relationship with an assigned mentor was flawed, however. Some Paradigm Shift participants indicated that they already *had* a mentor in their school—someone they trusted—and so felt no need for an additional mentor. Others found it inconvenient to have a mentor who did not work in their building. Some Paradigm Shift participants challenged the criteria we had used to choose the mentors: Did the mentors have more experience or special qualifications than they did?

Emergent lesson: While we had developed the mentoring component based on participants' expressed interest and evidence from other initiatives, we realized that our design had missed the mark. In particular, we missed the notion that Paradigm Shift participants might already have established relationships with individuals who would be potential mentors.

Emergent lesson: We were reminded that we needed to keep listening to Paradigm Shift participants' voices as we implemented and, when possible, include them in the planning to begin with. And we were learning just how important relationships were: We had to get to know Paradigm Shift participants better.

Authentic, consistent support makes a difference

“My tutor was relentless and kind. If he had given up on me, we would never have met. I knew he was led by the desire to help me. He said, ‘Don’t forget I’m here, any time, you don’t have to do this alone.’ Because of his persistence, we met several times. He guided me and helped me focus on where to study, and he followed up with ‘How did it go?’” —A Paradigm Shift participant

Pivotal decision: In Year 2, in response to participant feedback, we replaced our original practice of assigning Paradigm Shift participants to a mentor with a system whereby Paradigm Shift participants could name a mentor they were working with or wanted to work with who would then receive a Paradigm Shift stipend. Still, only a few Paradigm Shift participants asked us to provide this support.

Pivotal decision: We knew we needed to do more to connect with Paradigm Shift participants and decided that systematic one-to-one outreach was the necessary formula. Genuine relationships mattered to Paradigm Shift participants—and we needed to improve ours.

In Year 3, we set up an intensified individualized outreach and follow-up system, as planned. We created an Outreach and Recruitment Specialist role. The Specialist and the Program Coordinator divided up the Paradigm Shift participants by district, conducting meetings with each participant. This strategy worked well. Our annual participant survey now showed that Paradigm Shift participants increasingly knew who we were and what we did, and were connected with their individual support person at Paradigm Shift.

COHORT BUILDING

In an effort to help Paradigm Shift participants connect with their peers, in Years 1 and 2, we organized a celebratory dinner. In Year 2 we carried out an orientation to the initiative, and in Years 2 and 3, we invited Paradigm Shift participants to Coalition meetings and to select meetings with the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE). Attendance at the first year's dinner was robust, but attendance at subsequent events was fairly low.

In Year 3, we found that there was a loss of certainty for Paradigm Shift participants: Though most stayed enrolled and employed, for the first time, on our survey, some reported not being sure they could achieve their goal of being a licensed teacher. Although we cannot be certain that this sentiment is COVID-influenced, it is reasonable to assume that the disruptions imposed by the pandemic contributed to teacher candidates' loss of confidence. Many were afraid of losing their jobs and/or were struggling to educate their own children at home. MTEL testing centers closed from March to August, and no online option appeared until October, leaving Paradigm Shift participants uncertain about how and when to move forward on licensure testing.

As an additional source of support, we offered weekly virtual office hours for Paradigm Shift participants. For several sessions, they brought concerns ranging from financial aid challenges to worry about losing their jobs. We discontinued the sessions once they had outlived the need but then launched a follow-up round of one-to-one outreach.

Emergent lesson: The constraints on Paradigm Shift participants' time, given the responsibilities of day-to-day life coupled with their licensure program requirements, strongly affected their ability to commit to group events. We continue to experiment with various options (e.g., changing venues, dates) because those individuals who did show up reported that they benefited from attending.

Strategy III: Culture Change: Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion

The goal of our culture change strategy is to foster collective learning across institutions regarding diversity, equity, and inclusion and, in particular, to train principals to hire for racial and ethnic diversity and equity. Our Year 1 plan was to hold five diversity leadership summits wherein school district teams would acquire new knowledge and skills, design action plans, report out on progress, and help one another problem-solve. Districts would then work independently and bring their learning to the next summit.

Due to the complexities of planning with multiple districts, we ultimately conducted one summit in September 2018, "The Paradigm Shift Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Leadership Summit." Attendees included paraeducators, teachers, administrators, and union representatives, *but only one principal*.

During the summit, we had frank exchanges about racism in the districts, based on a keynote talk on critical race theory. There were rich cross-institutional dialogues about how to support teacher candidates of color.

Paraeducators and teachers largely reported that their understanding of Paradigm Shift's work increased after attending the summit.

Emergent lesson: Planning for the summit offered a lesson in working with multiple—and very different—complex school districts. It required substantially more time and effort than we had originally anticipated. We envisioned planning just one summit for Year 2.

Emergent lesson: Our understanding of the important role that principals play in educational workforce development continued to grow. We recognized the need to increase principals' awareness of their power to advance teacher diversity and to equip them with additional skills and knowledge to do so.

Pivotal decision: Our failure to attract principals to the Summit helped us shape a very different approach to principal engagement for Year 2.

We went into Year 2 with the intention of reaching as many principals as possible. We would reach principals when and where they were already meeting. Some district-based members of the Leadership Team (who were already meeting with principals) requested that we attend already-scheduled meetings to present our initiative and explore how Paradigm Shift could be of service to them.

We also increased our frequency of communication with principals, and we planned another summit designed—

this time—with principals at the center. We knew if we wanted to get principals into the room, this event would have to be built into their professional development calendar and sanctioned by the districts. So, the group worked hard to get districts to commit to a common date for a district-mandated professional development that all principals would attend. We found a common day that worked for two of our districts—the largest, highest-need districts. We then invited administrators from our two smaller districts to attend, if possible.

Emergent lesson: Not all partner districts will be interested in all opportunities at the same level or at the same time. We sometimes had to move forward with part of our membership in order to accomplish a goal.

To further enhance the attractiveness of this new summit, we requested district input about how the summit could be useful to them and built an agenda based on that and our growing knowledge of what principals needed.

Emergent lesson: District commitment was conditional on evidence that we would use the time well—specifically, that attendees would leave the event equipped with practical, relevant tools.

As a result of this planning, the 2019 summit, the “Paradigm Shift Regional Day of Practice: Our Students, Our Schools, Our Talent,” was a notable success:

- Nearly all of the invited principals from the two districts attended, as well as many district and school administrators, including both superintendents.
- The two districts made the event mandatory for principals, elevating collaboration and teacher diversity to the top of a long list of priorities.
- DESE officials participated in force, including an opening presentation by the Commissioner, raising the profile of teacher diversity efforts in western Massachusetts and solidifying our relationship with DESE. A cohort of other DESE leaders also attended, hearing and seeing the collective impact of our work.
- Most important, attendees learned about recruitment and hiring practices for diversity and equity and had honest conversations about the changes in school cultures that are necessary to retain a diverse teaching staff. Because these are changes that school administrators can effect at the building level, this learning is a critically important contributor to the growth and sustainability of a diverse teacher pipeline.

Paraeducators on the importance of administrators to their career trajectories

“If the principal doesn’t know you and know your plans, you might not even be invited to the table.”

“I received total support from my district. They made everything possible, giving us all the help we needed. And they made sure we got a position as teachers of record that cascaded into our current positions as teachers.”

- Because of the timing of the event (August), school leaders and districts were able to use the information learned at the Day of Practice to make commitments for the upcoming school year.
- After the summit, two-thirds of the principals who evaluated the experience expressed an interest in more opportunities to interact with principals outside their districts.

Emergent lesson: Principals value the exchange of knowledge and experiences afforded through cross-district conversations. The two participating districts are located in the same region and face some common challenges, but principals, unlike superintendents, had rarely enjoyed the opportunity to meet and share learnings.

Emergent lesson: Principals fulfill many responsibilities, and their time is at a premium. Incorporating the event into principals' regular workday and mandatory professional development schedule was an effective strategy to ensure their participation.

Emergent lesson: The investment of time and effort to coordinate across districts and identify a mutually workable date for the summit proved invaluable.

As 2020 began, this strategy team intensified its focus on integrating new practices into our partner institutions. We knew that institutional commitment of human and financial resources was important to the growth and sustainability of the pathways. We planned to document and describe new practices that had already been integrated into our partner institutions and then to facilitate agreements for future plans. Activities planned included collecting information from districts and educator preparation partners, a second regional Day of Practice to further school administrators' ability to build and sustain a diverse paraeducator-to-teacher pipeline, and strategic collaboration with district superintendents and DESE officials.

But the real 2020 began on March 13 with the shutdown of schools, colleges, and offices throughout Massachusetts. Our partners were overloaded, moving learning online, figuring out how to get food to low-income students and families, and if, when, and how to provide an education to students. Our institutionalization planning came to a virtual stop. We could not hold our second Day of Practice under COVID restrictions. Instead, we designed and offered a series of online workshops geared toward the needs of principals in the live crisis. But it was hard to get

Principals' changed thinking and renewed commitments at Regional Day of Practice

“What opportunities are there for flexibility? How can that be built into any program? Can [teacher candidates] come and go at different stages? Are supports available at every level, in response to needs and in anticipation of needs? Para-professionals are seriously considering whether they can do this, whether they can make the commitment.”

“I will seek out qualified para-professionals and candidates of color.”

“As a new administrator, I plan to focus on paraeducators and developing and supporting them in becoming educators.”

“I will help to develop the system to identify and support paras in the district.”

participation, given the overload. The most robust participation was from the district that had already prioritized equity learning for its principals. Superintendents were otherwise occupied and could not meet with us.

Pivotal decision: We communicated our ongoing commitment to the work, but we opted to slow our planned pace—especially regarding institutionalization and sustainability—in the face of the public health emergency, allowing our partners to manage their home institutional crises first.

In a positive step toward sustainability and integration, three partner districts coordinated their requests for DESE Teacher Diversification Grants for the first time and worked directly with us to include in their requests shared costs for core Massachusetts Tests for Educator Licensure (MTEL) support activities of Paradigm Shift. All three received awards.

Pivotal decision: We invested substantial time into coordinating with three partner districts to develop Teacher Diversification Grant applications. Multiple planning meetings were necessary to identify costs appropriate to the grant, by institution, and to develop cost-sharing agreements. This was an example of how Paradigm Shift could leverage the resources of multiple partners, in the interest of reaching a larger pool of teacher candidates.

We used some of these funds to support an ESL course, which moved a dial on institutional integration. A college partner proposed to design the course as a public offering. Paradigm Shift subsidized the course to guarantee slots for Paradigm Shift participants and considered this a win for the long-term viability of this newly designed MTEL preparation course.

These DESE Teacher Diversification Grant allocations from districts helped us extend our support to Paradigm Shift participants at least through the summer of 2021. And given inevitable delays in implementation, we sought and were granted a no-cost extension of our CFWM grant, through August 2021.

The challenge of sustaining the practices we had learned were helpful underlined our need not only to continue to push forward on institutionalization but also to disseminate our learning in a systematic way to the field.

Strategy IV: Coalition-building for Systems Change

In Year 1, we renamed the Steering Group the Leadership Team, to represent the shift from planning to action. The Leadership Team continued to meet once a month.

We formed three strategy teams—one for each of strategies I–III—with each group led by two members of the Leadership Team. We developed a scope of work and memos of agreement with strategy team leaders. We established meeting schedules and protocols for strategy team leaders to keep the Leadership Team apprised of progress. The three strategy teams would meet separately and then report back to the full Leadership Team. Membership in the strategy teams largely consisted of interested Leadership Team members; members of the full Coalition contributed time and expertise, as needed.

In Year 1, when our website was created, we encountered an early indication of the complexity inherent in working as a multiorganizational Coalition. When it came to disseminating the website, we saw that communications protocols were unclear and our identity was somewhat atypical. We were neither a funded stand-alone project nor a recognized teacher preparation (or other) institution.

Questions were also raised when it came to recruitment correspondence being sent directly to paraeducators. Was it Paradigm Shift or the school districts that would send letters or emails? Who would sign the emails and letters if they went to district-employed paraeducators? How many layers of approval would we have to go through to send messages through the district's internal email system? The process was sometimes too slow to meet our needs, which inhibited our ability to communicate as frequently as we would have liked with key constituencies: the paraeducators and principals.

Emergent lesson: We learned flexibility and that we could not operate the same way in every district. We customized our approach based on each district's needs, practices, norms, and structure. As a result, we moved more slowly than we had anticipated, but, importantly, we developed relationships with key actors who would lead recruitment in each context.

In Year 2, we moved from gaining visibility to fuller engagement with a broader set of partners. Our network

expanded (see page 5), and we extended our range of communications to an ever-greater set of constituents, including supporters and champions. We were not only seeking new partners but were consulted by others for our expertise and cumulative learning. DESE reached out to ask for our input on an upcoming request for proposal (RFP) to incentivize districts' efforts to diversify. We presented at the first DESE Diversity Network gathering.⁸

CHANGES IN MEMBERSHIP OF THE LEADERSHIP TEAM

Changes in the Leadership Team influenced our capacity to drive change. In Year 2, one member of the Paraeducator Support strategy team, who had been deeply involved in the initiative from the early days, left her home institution for a neighboring higher education institution that had already engaged, to some extent, with the Coalition over previous years. She would begin to explore possibilities for extending teacher diversity efforts at her new institution, increasing its involvement in the Coalition. Her replacement at the previous institution took her place on the Paraeducator Support strategy team, ensuring institutional continuity and minimal disruption of our plans for the year, because the institution itself reaffirmed its commitment.

The loss of another member of our Leadership Team had a more challenging, though ultimately favorable, influence on our work. A Paradigm Shift founding member (a participant in the 2016 early exploratory work with deep personal commitment to our vision) left both her institution (one of our largest school districts) and the Coalition in Year 2, leaving the district's participation on the Leadership Team in flux for several months. It took time to fully orient the new district representatives who joined the Leadership Team on a temporary basis. The new members held more senior-level positions within the district than the departing member had, which prevented them from being as closely engaged with Paradigm Shift as their predecessor had been. By contrast, their higher positions on the district's organization chart helped us to secure district buy-in when planning our Day of Practice, because the decision moved through fewer administrative layers. Further, in the wake of these personnel changes, the district's growing focus on teacher diversity—fostered in no small part by Paradigm Shift—spurred the creation of a new position. A new Talent Acquisition and Diversity Manager assumed his new role the very week we held the Day of Practice and has been an essential contributor to Paradigm Shift since then.

Emergent lesson: The composition of the strategy teams and Leadership Team matters: Individuals bring institutional history and knowledge to the table; swapping out one for another carries both challenges and opportunities. These changes also highlighted the importance of institutional, as well as individual, commitment.

Emergent lesson: We saw that structural and other change within our partner institutions was something we would have to work with on an ongoing basis. Some of these changes favored our work and were perhaps influenced by it. In other cases, they might cause a setback.

In Year 3, because the COVID-19 public health crisis brought unanticipated challenges to our region, closing schools and bringing regular business to a halt in March, we were able to move forward with some of our goals and not others. In every case, our approach or timing had to change as our partners tried to stay upright in the shifting sands. We, like everyone, had to practice patience, a patience we did not always have as we saw the increasing evidence of the importance and also scarcity of racial equity and justice in our society.

Emergent lesson: Working against racism in the educational system, including diversifying the teacher workforce to better reflect and serve the actual young population of our country, could not wait. The dual conditions of the COVID-19 pandemic and growing societal awareness of racial injustice reinforced the need to reach our goal, support one another, and adjust our activities with changing needs.

DISSEMINATING OUR LEARNING

We planned to undertake systematic documentation of accomplishments and learning through Ripple Effect Mapping and other methods. We would disseminate results through a report, presentations, meetings with key partners, an e-newsletter, and press releases. This area of activity would help us expand our influence by sharing what we had learned with others who were also working toward teacher diversity.

The Ripple Effect Mapping Workshop was held March 9, 2020, four days before our institutions closed their doors, with 43 attendees. At the workshop, we collected information about effects of the initiative, connected with Paradigm Shift participants and connected them to each other, and

8. The Diversity Network is a group of districts meeting voluntarily under the guidance of DESE's Center for Strategic Initiatives to work on teacher diversity.

reinforced the importance of what we were doing. A DESE leader attended, witnessing the testimonies of Paradigm Shift participants and partners alike.

We engaged our evaluator to conduct interviews with key partners, reaching “invisible partners” at higher levels of each of our key institutions to understand to what extent commitment was institutional and what resources could be leveraged going forward. The evaluator also conducted a follow-up survey of the Day of Practice attendees and our annual survey to Paradigm Shift participants.

We began writing the report in late summer—the very report you are reading now—and worked with our communications consultant to shape it to our goals. What we learned through this last phase of interviews, participant survey, and the Ripple Effect Mapping workshop is embedded in the Lessons and Recommendations section, along with other learnings.

HELPING ONE ANOTHER IN TROUBLED TIMES

The trust and collaboration we had developed meant that our collective served as a powerful support resource for Coalition members when the pandemic hit. Racial injustice conversations at Leadership Team meetings were intense and direct, and opportunities for contributions to public dialogue appeared just as we contemplated launching our newsletter. Additionally, members shared with one another the resource lists they were compiling to address the COVID-19 crisis at their home institutions. Most important, members of the Leadership Team continued to show up, expressing that in spite of their attention being demanded by a multitude of crises, the current context reinforced for them the importance of the work and they felt supported by connecting with the Paradigm Shift team and the movement we were leading.

INFLUENCING POLICY AND LEVERAGING STATE RESOURCES

In the wake of growing acknowledgement by white-dominated institutions that racial injustice infected our society as much as the COVID-19 virus did, Paradigm Shift gained a foothold as DESE stepped up its outreach to educators of color across the state. In June 2020, DESE called for partners like Paradigm Shift to help it recruit educators of color for an advisory board and understand how to amplify the voices of teachers of color in our part of the state. We responded with more organization and energy than they had anticipated, but they met our energy and, in July, DESE's Educator Effectiveness and Center for

District administrators emphasize need for inclusive, equitable, accessible teaching pathways

“Education has made it seem like it's untouchable to enter the profession if you didn't receive specific training. Instead, tell people this is a place you want to be and here's a pathway for you. And be very clear about the need. Demonstrate the demand for people who look like our students and are bilingual. Sell the importance of this work.”

“We want to show people a path where they can see themselves, can see that it's not too complicated for them...People want to be teachers with us but they see obstacles. We need to show clarity around that path.”

“There is a need for coordination at every step of the way. What will it take to move people from where they are to where they want to be? What do we need to be mindful of from the start to ensure that people succeed? How can we develop a community of learners to support one another?”

Strategic Initiatives teams met with representatives of Paradigm Shift. We invited Paradigm Shift participants to the meeting to elevate their voices along with those of educators of color on our Leadership Team. DESE recognized the importance of what we were doing and how we could help them include the communities of the western part of the state, often neglected in favor of the larger urban centers including and surrounding Boston.

This recognition improved our potential to influence policy and funding. DESE included us directly in the Diversity Network's Year 2 activities, whereas previously our participation hinged on an invitation from a district. DESE approved all three of our districts' requests for Paradigm Shift funding from Teacher Diversification Grants, demonstrating increased support for the paraeducator-to-teacher pipeline. This pipeline became more prominent in policy statements and lists of promising practices. The DESE Educator Effectiveness team sought regular quarterly meetings with Paradigm Shift. Finally, in November 2020, Paradigm Shift was invited to serve on the Educational Personnel Advisory Council (EPAC) to DESE, providing us a seat at the table on matters related to educator preparation in the state.

We were invited to join a statewide advocacy network, Open Opportunity MA (OOMA). We became part of OOMA's Educator Empowerment Working Group, whose focus was teacher diversity, and later were invited to join that group's steering committee. The OOMA agenda was state policy and budget, a domain we had not yet been able to reach, so this was a big step forward for us. In return, OOMA members valued the western Massachusetts reach and influence our Coalition represented and the effectiveness of our strategies, both of which they hoped to learn from. Our affiliation with OOMA also offered the potential to surmount an ongoing funding challenge: As a small, local initiative we could not command the attention of large national foundations that were supporting racial justice and diversity work in education. We hoped that OOMA would be truly collaborative in the way our Coalition was, sharing funding ideas and working together to increase the size of the pool of teacher candidates for everyone. In a first demonstration of *our* willingness to play that way, we brought their attention to a large funding opportunity and stated our commitment to help obtain it for the benefit of teacher diversity across the state.

Two positive things happened at the DESE level that influenced our ability to ensure candidates achieved licensure.

- In response to the COVID-19 crisis and subsequent district hiring challenges, in the spring of 2020, DESE instituted an emergency license to meet schools' needs for teachers. Twenty-three of our candidates qualified for and obtained the emergency license for the 2020–21 school year.
- Further, the state's Board of Education approved a pilot period for Massachusetts Tests for Educator Licensure (MTEL) alternatives in October.

With our strengthened relationship with DESE officials, we were positioned to talk and plan with them about how to maintain momentum for candidates with emergency licenses as well as the process and shape of MTEL alternative pilots to be approved. The ideal scenario would be a strong MTEL alternative process that would fully certify all 23 of our candidates who held emergency licenses, some of whom were being held back by a single test they had taken several times.

In early 2021, DESE announced it would extend emergency licenses for 2021–22, making the preceding scenario all the more possible.

Emergent lesson: It takes time to achieve visibility and gain credibility. Our presence in state-level policy circles only came to full bloom in Year 3, and we were prepared at that time to make a substantive contribution based on our prior experience and the accomplishments we had achieved to date.

Lessons and Recommendations

LESSON 1: Naming race is key because messages “for all” are not interpreted as “for me.”

In our earliest attempts to recruit candidates, we were not explicit about wanting to recruit Black and Latinx educators, and the majority of our applicants were white. We had not expressed the message that Black and Latinx educators were welcome, much less truly needed. When we did consider naming these populations specifically, we heard from some school districts that they could not support *only* Black and Latinx candidates because white employees would perceive preferential treatment of their colleagues of color. “What about everyone else?” they asked.

To arrive at naming race, racism, and Black and Latinx candidates as our intended population, we had to have many long, direct, sometimes uncomfortable conversations; understand the racist and other forces operating in our institutions that stood in the way of this naming; and look at data to analyze and substantiate the need as it related to K–12 students’ experiences and the possibilities as reflected in paraeducator demographics in our districts. Finally, at a major meeting during the planning year to finalize our goals, we simply stepped out and stated that we would prioritize Black and Latinx applicants. A superintendent was in the room and echoed the message. Others, then, came on board. The numbers of candidates of color recruited in each of the pathways increased once we had clearly and publicly articulated our intent.

IMPLICATIONS

➤ **Resources should be devoted to supporting the intended candidates, and communications should express an explicit intent to recruit them.** Otherwise, the pace of change will continue to be slower than we want; the majority white candidates will likely continue to outnumber their colleagues of color. Black and Latinx paraeducators may not see themselves as being wanted or included. Due to prior experiences with educational systems and broader social institutions, they may not expect general recruitment messages to be intended for them. Based on their role and their race, they may not be convinced that they are supported and valued.

➤ **Data should be used to demonstrate the rationale—and provide evidence—for naming the problem and crafting strategies.**

RECOMMENDATIONS BY STAKEHOLDER GROUPS

S P D N H F W E C

➤ Learn to have the difficult conversations about race and racism. Endeavor to build anti-racist school and work environments.

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S P N H F W C

➡ Name the specific populations you seek to engage. Express an explicit intent to recruit and support the populations you hope to engage and who have historically been marginalized.

➡ Devote resources specifically to those populations.

S P D N H W E C

➡ When making a case for teacher diversity or a paraeducator-to-teacher pathway, data talks. Use it.

LESSON 2: Crafting solutions based on participant input builds trust, reinforces the message that the pathways are designed for the candidates, and fosters effectiveness. This is critically important when building pathways to attract teacher candidates from historically marginalized groups.

To facilitate engagement, it is important to understand—and design for—the realities of Paradigm Shift participants' lives. The challenges of enabling paraeducators to participate in Paradigm Shift activities mirror the barriers that prevent paraeducators from being able to participate in higher education in general (e.g., competing life and family responsibilities, inflexible work schedule, transportation challenges). Facing and working with these challenges helped us deepen our understanding about what it takes to support paraeducators to become successful, licensed teachers.

To develop this understanding, we continuously sought input via formal data collection and informal listening. We did not ask just for basic feedback on activities but also for descriptions of the issues in Paradigm Shift participants' work environments and lives that affected their ability to meet their goals. We learned that the stereotypes of paraeducators are nothing more than that—stereotypes. Rather, paraeducators are individuals with individual needs and only by knowing those needs could we be truly supportive.

Paradigm Shift participants decided what supports they wanted, needed, and would use on an ongoing basis.

We learned a great deal when Paradigm Shift participants ultimately did not utilize certain support structures they had told us they needed during the planning phase, such as cohort gatherings and mentors.

- Developing a Paradigm Shift cohort identity was hard, given busy lives. In spite of our planning orientations and cohort activities, participation in these events was varied. Our intent was to help Paradigm Shift participants feel a part of something larger and draw strength from their peers, but their life circumstances affected their ability to participate in the events as we had planned them. And because they moved through the program at different paces, some of our candidates did not progress with their original cohort.
- Mentoring also did not work as we had envisioned. We hoped to build a network of colleagues of color that Paradigm Shift participants could rely on throughout their careers. But our model (assigning mentors) was too prescriptive and competed with the more naturally occurring mentoring relationships that Paradigm Shift participants enjoyed in their workplaces and colleges.

We adapted based on what we learned, shaping options that were flexible enough to fit Paradigm Shift participant needs and circumstances.

For both programming and data collection, we had to *go to our Paradigm Shift participants*, not expect them to come to us.

- Focus groups were held in each home district, making it easier for Paradigm Shift participants to attend.

- We compensated their time when we asked them to attend meetings outside of their work hours, valuing them as professionals and making it more possible for them to attend.
- Accessible times and locations for Massachusetts Tests for Educator Licensure (MTEL) support activities helped make these activities effective. Scheduling MTEL preparation courses late in the afternoon allowed more paraeducators to participate. Slowing the pace of the math course to accommodate Paradigm Shift participants' work and study schedules contributed to more effective instructional time.

IMPLICATIONS

➔ **It is reasonable to expect that not all teacher candidates will utilize all of the supports they are offered. Evaluation metrics should anticipate this trend.**

Because no one size fits all, an initiative should not be negatively judged if utilization rates are low. Not every participant needs all of the supports. And, we learned that even if Paradigm Shift participants do not use a service, they still appreciate that we offer it. Having the service available is part of making them feel valued and supported, which is an equally if not more important measure of progress than utilization of the practical support service itself.

➔ **An initiative's design should incorporate learning and flexibility.** We were able to change along the way based on Paradigm Shift participant feedback. We did not waste time and resources on strategies that did not work and instead created others that might fit better. This flexibility and learning should be ongoing.

RECOMMENDATIONS BY STAKEHOLDER GROUPS

S P D N H F W E C

➔ Be flexible when creating a new structure or initiative, because you will learn and have to change along the way.

S P D N H W E C

➔ When building a paraeducator-to-teacher pipeline, follow an interactive process of data collection and action. Seek feedback from participants on a regular basis and in multiple ways. Modify plans through timely response to feedback.

LESSON 3: When administrators and others pay authentic attention to—and build authentic relationships with—paraeducators of color, the paraeducators are more likely to make the decision to become teachers and to persevere through the process of obtaining licensure. Paying attention matters because paraeducators of color face both role-based and race-based inequities.

Paraeducators often feel a lack of support and respect within their individual schools and school districts. Paying authentic attention to them, therefore, makes a difference. We are recruiting teacher candidates of color from a role constituency that is neglected within the system

(paraeducators). In so doing, we are addressing both racial/cultural inequities and also status/role inequities and seeing how the two are intertwined. Working with a paraeducator-to-teacher pipeline can positively influence how paraeducators are viewed in the system. Leaders and

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innovative programs can have great impact if we influence, even a bit, how paraeducators are viewed and supported in their districts.

People and personal relationships matter.

In surveys for Years 2 and 3, the five most highly rated supports were “my professors,” “staff at the college,” “my family,” “outreach/individual meetings with Paradigm Shift,” and “staff at my school.” Overall, Paradigm Shift participants found that these support mechanisms contributed to their progress to a great or very great extent. Paradigm Shift participants provided ample advice to administrators (get to know your staff) and to everyone (listen and understand) in this regard.

In our initiative, providing flexible options was important to Paradigm Shift participants but not sufficient. Relationships mattered too. For example:

- We wanted paraeducators to attend centralized meetings of the Coalition during the planning year, but very few were able to. The monetary support we offered helped, but more important were personal relationships with district administrators who reached out and invited them to come.
- Holding the focus groups in districts was helpful, but these also required a good deal of effort on the part of district representatives to ensure full participation. The insider relationships again made a difference.
- In designing and implementing our one-to-one outreach, we modeled an approach Paradigm Shift participants told us worked well when their principals used it: demonstrating an interest in paraeducators’ goals and sharing relevant information, tools and resources with them. Feedback from Paradigm Shift participants about this one-to-one outreach has been consistently positive.

Principals play a key role in encouraging paraeducators of color to become teachers.

Many Paradigm Shift participants were first noticed and then mentored by their building principal. This has led some principals to reconsider the paraeducator’s role in their school and to hire paraeducators with an eye to building a career ladder for them into teaching.

One supportive principal or administrator can make all the difference to a paraeducator’s success.

The importance of a particular person in the journeys of Paradigm Shift participants cannot be overstated. Sometimes, an administrator ensured that paperwork was completed on time and with necessary signatures. Often, that person was a principal who recognized what the paraeducator could offer in the classroom and was willing to go the extra mile to help them become a teacher. Support from principals included creating opportunities for professional growth, showing an interest in individuals’ goals, and sharing relevant information, tools, and resources. Examples include:

- Assigning the paraeducator their own homeroom or advisory so they could get a taste of success as the leader of a classroom.
- Showing an interest in the paraeducators’ goals, offering professional development and other opportunities for professional growth.
- Helping paraeducators pay test fees.
- Helping paraeducators apply to a licensure program.

IMPLICATIONS

➤ **Programs should be designed with relationships at their core.** A pathways structure has to allow for relationship building. Administrators are overloaded; school systems are under duress. While these conditions may not be conducive to relationship building, efforts to overcome these barriers and develop authentic relationships will be well rewarded. In addition, it is useful for a pathway program to have a staff person as a “navigator” (similar to our coordinator’s role), a central point of contact and source of support who can help obtain access to all other available support.

➤ **A pathway will be more successful if it deeply engages principals who already champion paraeducator professional growth and who reach out to colleagues to encourage them to do the same.** A principal-to-principal peer training and support process could be very effective.

RECOMMENDATIONS BY STAKEHOLDER GROUPS

S P N H E

➡ Relationship building requires an investment of time: Spend time with paraeducators and learn about their professional goals. When seeking to encourage paraeducators to become teachers or involve them in activities, go to where they are so they don't always have to come to you.

S P N H W

➡ Within a paraeducator-to-teacher pathway, develop real relationships with teacher candidates. Center their needs and build programs based on their input. Hire a central person to serve as a “navigator” to provide consistent contact and relationship building over time.

S P W E

➡ Foster paraeducators' interest in becoming teachers by giving them developmental opportunities, encouraging them, and providing information about teacher preparation.

- Include paraeducators in decision making in the school, as a valued teacher would be.
- Create opportunities for paraeducators to get solo experience leading students, such as giving them their own homeroom or advisory so they can get a taste of success as a leader.
- Get to know the educator preparation programs that recruit and support paraeducators. Feed information about these educator preparation programs to promising paraeducators. Help them apply if needed.
- Recommend paraeducators to educator preparation programs.
- Hire paraeducators of color with the vision that they are your future teachers.

LESSON 4: Some teacher candidates who otherwise demonstrate teaching proficiency do not overcome the Massachusetts Tests for Educator Licensure (MTEL) gatekeeping hurdle. The MTEL requirement reflects an assumption that competency is demonstrated solely through passing required tests. It is a barrier to diversification of the teacher workforce and should not make or break a career.

In our experience, teachers who previously struggled with MTELs have received positive performance evaluations from their supervisors. Failing a test did not indicate lack of intelligence or knowledge and did not predict future success as a classroom teacher.⁹ The high-stakes nature of the test does, however, negatively affect Paradigm Shift participants' confidence. Some Paradigm Shift participants postpone taking a test, while others do take it eventually but are then discouraged after failing by just one or two

points. They report that this contributes to declining confidence, increased anxiety, and reluctance to register for the next test. This mindset persists despite their demonstrated success in graduate-level courses and in the classroom. These otherwise well-qualified candidates do not achieve licensure in a timely manner, and the longer it takes to do so, the less likely they are to complete the process. These factors indicate the need to rethink the gatekeeping function of the MTEL tests.

9. The issue is controversial. A full review of literature on MTEL predictiveness is beyond the scope of this report.

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IMPLICATIONS

➡ **Policy change is urgently required. We encourage the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE) to capitalize on momentum generated by two recent developments. Through these developments, DESE, in partnership with districts and teacher preparation programs, now has the opportunity to dramatically increase the diversity of the Commonwealth's K–12 teacher workforce.**

- First, DESE's granting of emergency licenses during 2020–21 kept teachers-on-waiver in classrooms where they were needed and allowed paraeducators to assume full teaching roles. DESE has now authorized the extension of these licenses for an additional school year. This may encourage these candidates to remain in teaching and allow them to take advantage of the second important trend, which is currently underway.
- Second, DESE has approved an MTEL alternative piloting period; guidelines were announced in February 2021. The extension of the emergency license will allow programs to design comprehensive, rigorous alternative assessment processes and administer them to emergency license holders who have met all other requirements for their degree and licensure. From Paradigm Shift alone, this would add 23 Black and Latinx educators to the permanent corps of teachers for our four districts. Many in other programs will benefit as well.

RECOMMENDATIONS BY STAKEHOLDER GROUPS

D

➡ Approve rigorous, viable alternatives to the MTEL and make them available without stigma. Candidates should not be required to take the test first and fail it in order to become knowledge-certified by another means. All means to certification should be treated as equally prestigious and accessible. Otherwise, alternatives will act as an elitist ranking system among new teachers.

➡ Ensure continuation of current emergency licenses as long as teachers are making satisfactory progress in teacher preparation programs and/or toward meeting MTEL requirements, until those who hold them can complete teacher preparation and meet licensure requirements.

H

➡ Develop MTEL alternative assessments under the new Department of Elementary and Secondary Education pilot guidelines. Offer alternatives to candidates regardless of whether they have taken or passed the relevant test.

➡ While teacher candidates are working under an emergency license, offer them extra support to complete licensure requirements and courses to ensure that they obtain licensure in a timely way.

➡ Provide MTEL preparation courses and tutoring as a regular part of a teacher preparation program.

LESSON 5: Redesigning systems for racial equity requires change from the macro levels of policy to the many complex micro levels of practice, requiring leadership and resources. It is not a quick fix. Systems resist.

Changing the cultures of school districts, individual schools, and colleges to support true diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) for their staff and students is a monumental undertaking. Though the work proved challenging, we implemented our DEI strategy for the sake of retention.

Absent this strategy, we would have been working to license new teachers without increasing the likelihood that they would stay in their schools and in the profession, and that others would follow in their footsteps.

We learned a great deal about why the systemic change we envisioned was challenging:

- Race is a hot-button public issue and discussions about inequities touch a tender spot; districts, schools, and colleges risk embarrassment or possibly even censure by admitting they do not have it all figured out. White-led institutions want to show they are committed to diversity and equity, but it is often difficult for white people to have conversations about race and racism. People of color in white-majority institutions often find the lack of authentic conversation discouraging.
- Anti-racist change efforts compete with other priorities for attention, financial resources, and time—exactly the components needed to leverage deep, sustainable change.
- School systems and the individuals in them are overloaded. Jobs are too big and staff have little time to reflect, let alone transform anything. In particular, staff members who have “diversity” in their titles may be carrying an inappropriate level of responsibility for transforming the institution.
- School districts and educational institutions are complex systems, layered in bureaucracy. The pace of change is slowed by the need to move through multiple layers.
- Change processes bump up against resistance points: Systems do not embrace change if they can avoid it. Inertia, support for the status quo, resistance to a perceived shift in power, and maintaining habits are powerful forces.

IMPLICATIONS

➔ **Leadership matters. Leaders—from the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE) to districts to institutions of higher education—need to set an anti-racist agenda and create transparent, public accountability structures.**

- Processes and systems that track decisions, include measurable goals and indicators, and provide public report-outs build trust and drive change over the long term. We have seen a significant shift in local thinking, action, and resources related to teacher diversity in the past two years since DESE moved teacher diversity

up on its priority list. We sorely felt the absence of DESE leadership when we started this work in 2013, and we feel the strength of its presence now. DESE and leaders across the institutional landscape should demonstrate commitment to and accountability for an anti-racist mission.

- Equally important, as the leaders responsible for curating the learning environment in their school, principals can ignite paraeducators’ interest in becoming teachers and champion their professional growth toward licensure. Paradigm Shift participants reported that supportive principals share information, encourage them, track their progress, publicly acknowledge their work, and guide them to appropriate teaching positions. Principals can build an environment in which even more educators of color join and stay at their school.

➔ **All institutional policy makers should set expectations about the human resource capacity needed to do significant equity and inclusion work.** It takes people-time and relationships to mobilize beyond superficial change and towards transformation.

➔ **Recognizing the rich resource that paraeducators represent, personnel policy reforms are needed to encourage paraeducators to move into teaching positions.**

- Districts should consider building district-wide career ladder structures for paraeducators in the same way they do for teachers.
- DESE should incentivize career ladder structures and similar personnel policy changes.

➔ **A long-term, intentional, sustained, well-resourced approach to teacher diversity is needed.** This comprehensive approach should direct resources consistently so districts and their partners can plan with certainty and build momentum. Real change toward teacher diversity takes this kind of investment. Rather than building foundations—only to abandon them in the pursuit of a next round of short-term funding—we could follow our carefully laid plans, learn as we go, apply that learning, and move steadily toward long-term change. There is no quick fix and districts’ ability to implement real change hinges on DESE’s demonstrated commitment and leadership.

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➡ **State-level mandates carry the potential to advance equity, but the mandates need to be funded. To be feasible and have impact, resources must be dedicated when great change is expected.** At the time of this writing, the Educator Diversity Act is being brought to the Massachusetts House and Senate, mandating a variety of measures including infrastructure within districts to work on teacher diversity. However, should funding not accompany this mandate, it is unclear how soon and how effectively such infrastructure could be developed.

➡ **Evaluation approaches should acknowledge the magnitude of the problem of redesigning cultures and systems for equity.**

RECOMMENDATIONS BY STAKEHOLDER GROUPS

Leadership matters.

D

- ➡ Continue and intensify your current efforts, driving progress, setting increasingly higher goals, and accelerating the pace toward increased teacher diversification statewide.
- ➡ Incentivize and reward change at the school district level.
- ➡ Demonstrate commitment to and accountability for an anti-racist mission.

S

- ➡ Ensure institutionalization of the paraeducator-to-teacher pipeline across the district.
- ➡ Incentivize and reward change at the school level.
- ➡ Authorize multiple forms of support, ranging from financial resources (e.g., tuition assistance) to practices such as professional development planning, all aligned with the goal of promoting paraeducators.

- ➡ Demonstrate commitment to and accountability for an anti-racist mission.

P

- ➡ Exercise your considerable influence to build a paraeducator-to-teacher pipeline.
- ➡ Employ practices designed to advance diversity of the staff, to the extent that you have authority over recruitment and hiring.
- ➡ Hire paraeducators of color with the vision that they are your future teachers.
- ➡ Champion paraeducators of color within the school district; advocate for them with human resources personnel.
- ➡ Demonstrate commitment to and accountability for an anti-racist mission.

H

- ➡ Intensify your efforts to build programs that not only are accessible to Black and Latinx paraeducators but also incorporate their wealth of experience in classrooms and schools.
- ➡ Prioritize the creation of clear articulation agreements between two-year and four-year institutions, in the interest of supporting a paraeducator-to-teacher pipeline.
- ➡ Demonstrate commitment to and accountability for an anti-racist mission.

Set expectations about the considerable human resource capacity needed for diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) work.

S P D N H F W E C

Institutional leaders:

- ➡ Demand that resources be made available to support that level of capacity.
- ➡ Give your representatives time to carry out the work.

Personnel policy reforms are needed.

S P E

Institutionalize ways to promote paraeducators to teacher positions:

➡ Build a career ladder for paraeducators, rewarding those (through pay scale steps) who obtain professional development to enhance their skills toward becoming a teacher. Establish measures such as:

- Offering salary grade hikes for various steps toward becoming a teacher.
- Counting years of paraeducator service toward years of teaching experience.
- Counting teaching experience outside of the mainland United States.
- Providing release time for studying during the work day.
- Creating a standardized agreement on how the paraeducator can complete the practicum without losing their job.
- Encouraging district-sponsored professional development relevant to the individual's professional, academic and Massachusetts Tests for Educator Licensure (MTEL) needs.

➡ Include in negotiated contracts for paraeducators:

- Funding for licensure programs.
- Release time for studying during the work day.
- A standardized agreement on how the paraeducator can complete the practicum without losing their job.
- District-sponsored professional development relevant to the individual's professional and academic and MTEL needs.

➡ If policies do not permit counting paraeducators' years of experience as teaching experience, advocate for this policy change.

➡ Work together—district leaders, principals, and union leaders—to help institutionalize paraeducators' progress toward teaching.

S P

➡ When seeking to involve paraeducators in activities or training, pay them for their professional time. This both sends the message they are valued as professionals and helps them financially, increasing the likelihood they can become teachers should they want to do so. Consider this an equity practice, especially given the low pay rate for paraeducators.

A long-term, intentional, sustained, well-resourced approach to teacher diversity is needed.

D

➡ In addition to the creation of three-year pilot programs such as the Teacher Diversification Grant and the Massachusetts Tests for Educator Licensure (MTEL) alternatives, adopt a longer-term plan and provide a consistent flow of resources to schools and districts over at least a 10-year period.

H

➡ Diversify your own teaching staff, and change your curriculum to address or increase focus on equity, cultural responsiveness, and racial justice.

➡ Adapt your program to the needs of working adults, especially paraeducators.

- Allow for part-time participation in your program. For example, if your program is a one-year intensive, modify it so it can be completed in two years part-time.
- Provide classes in evenings, on weekends, and possibly in hybrid format so they are easily accessible to working educators.
- Locate classes and services in school districts if possible.
- Provide scholarships and tuition discounts for non-traditional students.

➡ Work on articulation agreements between community colleges and four-year institutions that support the

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paraeducator-to-teacher pipeline for teacher diversity at the undergraduate level.

State-level mandates need to be funded.

D

➤ Support districts to invest in the kinds of changes and pipelines that are appropriate in their local contexts. No unfunded mandates.

Evaluation approaches should acknowledge the magnitude of the problem.

D F

➤ Adopt an approach to evaluating DEI investments that acknowledges the scale of the problem, allocates sufficient time and resources, and legitimizes changes in attitudes, skills, and perceptions that sometimes precede observable changes in practice.

LESSON 6: Working in coalition leads to shared learning, pooling of resources, and regional solutions for regional problems while raising challenges of commitment, clarity, and communication.

Working collaboratively is the central element of our model. While individual institutions have for years grappled with the challenges of diversifying the teacher workforce—with only modest success—our model instead pools the collective expertise and other resources of all Coalition members into a network of support. Working in this way is important and beneficial in our context for a number of reasons.

The benefits of collaboration include shared learning, the potential to impact multiple contexts, and growth from spin-off efforts and ripple effects.

No one institution has all the answers. In our model, partners learn from one another and value that learning exchange. In the Coalition, all school districts offer and receive expertise, and the Coalition levels the playing field, creating conditions in which all districts share equally, regardless of their particular struggles, budget size, geographical spread, wealth, or public perception.

We believe that we make faster progress and have broader impact by building on and strengthening multiple approaches already in use by our various member organizations. Instead of creating a stand-alone, externally funded program that might fade away once that funding dissipates, we have created a network of support for innovative implementation in several institutions. We share and learn from the results in those varied contexts. And since representatives of those institutions sit on the Leadership Team,

we can embed promising practices within the institutions rather than depending on external resources long-term.

In addition, network structure allows for flexibility: Not everything can or should be done together. We foster and support independent initiatives and sub-group collective action as well as doing the core program work of Paradigm Shift. With many organizations working and learning together, the core collective work inspires related spin-off efforts and outcomes in those individual organizations, spreading the benefit further.

Working collaboratively, however, raises challenges: complexity of systems, membership, communications, identity, and transitions.

Each institution has a unique culture and protocols, as well as unique entrenched barriers to racial justice. This makes it hard to create a uniform approach that is feasible in all partners' contexts. Navigating and building shared practices among these varied institutions requires skilled coordination and facilitation, as well as the ability to understand both the intricacies of each partner's context and the big picture of the whole system.

Defining membership in the Coalition was complex.

Individuals came to the group because of their role in their institutions, their professional and personal commitment to the issue, or by direct invitation. Coalition

member-institutions agreed to be part of (and be listed within) our funding proposals, but we did not otherwise formalize relationships with the member-institutions. For example, we did not write agreements such as memos of understanding (MOUs) or set expectations about how much time each member would commit either to the broad Coalition or to the Leadership Team. This led to some lack of clarity and the need to constantly navigate the commitments we could hold one another to, both internally and externally:

- Agreements we thought we had made within a strategy team did not always stick, even among willing partners. For example, team members may have planned to check their institution's availability for a date, but follow-up was inconsistent, causing delays in planning and organizing.
- Given that there was no stated expectation of the number of meetings a superintendent would grant us, for example, we had to devote substantial time to requesting and scheduling meetings, often without success.

With few exceptions, true to the dynamic nature of our initiative, we pursued our work on the basis of figuring it out as we went, with individuals making themselves available whether or not their home institutions had officially included Paradigm Shift in their regular duties. Pre-set agreements might have saved us some wrangling, but we needed time to clarify the work to be done, and it became increasingly apparent that developing relationships before any formal agreements were drafted would be more effective. We may not have accomplished all we accomplished without those relationships.

Communication was not always timely or straight-forward. Because of the many administrative layers we had to work through, communication was sometimes delayed. Because of our partners' differing systems, we could not assume that a communications solution we had found in one instance would work in the next, nor that a procedure favored by one district would be approved in another.

The question of who would speak for Paradigm Shift in communications with partner institutions and Paradigm Shift participants arose frequently.

Early in our recruitment process, we had to decide who would write an email to all principals and paraeducators advertising Paradigm Shift. We waded through this type of question whenever a new communication goal or task arose. Was it better to communicate from within a district, with a superintendent or human resources director authoring (or at least being the signatory to) the communication, for example, or to have Paradigm Shift be the author? The latter represented more accurately the source of the communication, but, as outsiders, we were less recognizable than someone within the district, so we could not be sure that people would see or read our communications. Using a district's internal distribution system often required time-consuming approvals, however. The process was sometimes too slow to meet our needs, which inhibited our ability to communicate as frequently as we would have liked with key constituencies: the paraeducators and principals.

Our atypical structure—an initiative within a larger coalition—meant that we were not easily recognized or understood.

Some identity issues were solved by naming the initiative (Paradigm Shift), which clarified its purpose. However, it was not an entity that principals and others would typically recognize. For example, Paradigm Shift is not a single teacher preparation program or college. It is an infrastructure and set of additional supports to *help partners* successfully recruit and retain Black and Latinx teachers.

Transitions on the Leadership Team posed certain challenges to our work, but also offered benefits.

These issues related to the pace of our work and changing institutional involvement:

- **Sometimes transitions caused a setback in the pace of our work.** Bringing a new person on board caused delays, as we oriented the new member to past work and the ways in which the institution had participated, and allowed them time to adjust to their new circumstances (e.g., if assuming a new position).
- **Sometimes transitions changed the level of an institution's involvement, for better or worse.** Given

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the lack of clarity about institutional membership, sometimes commitments changed when individuals moved in or out of roles. If a new member was not authorized to act as independently as the departing member, activities stalled. If the new member had more authority, the institution became more actively engaged in the ongoing work. When members moved to new organizations, they had the potential to bring that new organization into the Coalition in a stronger way. For example, three original members of the leadership team moved to new institutions—and in each scenario, moved into senior leadership roles—and then brought those new institutions to the Coalition.

IMPLICATIONS

➤ **Working collaboratively on diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) change efforts promises the important benefits of fostering regional learning, mutual accountability, and shared responsibility to support inclusive, equitable teaching environments.** Because the goal is persistently elusive and calls for an urgent response, it is useful to work together publicly, learn from one another, and be accountable to one another across institutional boundaries. Our impact will be greater if we collaborate rather than continuing to work in isolation. Members engaging in our cross-district efforts learned a great deal and felt a stronger network of support by learning together with peers from other districts. Doing it together with other districts can also save money, as you can pool resources for opportunities you organize together. External accountability supports change.

➤ **From a communications and identity standpoint, it may take time for networks or coalitions to develop clarity about who they are and what they do, and to clearly express those notions to partners and constituents.**

➤ **Working collaboratively requires constant renewal of mutual expectations as well as transparent discussion of accountability.** Collaborative work requires honesty, time, transparency, and organized tracking. But it will always be messy and nonlinear, which is part of its beauty and benefit. A network is a real-world system. Our network-building consultant made a significant difference: We did not have to always reinvent the wheel and he freed core staff from facilitation roles at pivotal meetings so they could fully participate. Similarly, the Paradigm Shift director brought experience facilitating complex groups

to the initiative and led the Coalition's evolution based on that expertise.

➤ **Increased funding for collaborative work is needed.**

This complex work requires time and skill, but, unlike more isolated endeavors, it leads to more public sharing of learning and therefore carries the potential to catalyze faster and deeper change.

➤ **Sufficient resources should be allocated to ensure that learning from complex endeavors is adequately captured.** Our Coalition includes many organizations and partners, and fosters and supports independent initiatives and sub-group activities. Interactions between members or outside stakeholders may lead to changes affecting other members or stakeholders, and these spin-off changes or ripple effects expand the Coalition's impact beyond the core work of the network. For example, a Coalition principal indicated having recently shared resumes of candidates of color she could not hire with other principals in the district.

➤ **Evaluation designs for coalitions and networks should include broad-based inquiry, casting a wide net by exploring network members' reflections and emergent changes in practice through time.** Evaluation designs should anticipate that discovering associated changes may be more challenging than in other settings.

- Evaluators and even leadership team members are necessarily a step removed from the actions of all members, and these members may not report all of their learnings through formal data collection activities. For example, some recently licensed teachers reported that they now nurture respectful relationships with the paraeducators in their own classrooms.
- The intent to foster integrated, sustainable change necessarily implies that changes will remain somewhat under cover. If the initiative is successful, partners will "own" their practices and carry them out as part of their routine work without reporting to an external monitor or seeking external approval. For example, two Coalition principals were inspired to attend a national convening of Black educators hosted by the organization led by our keynote speaker at the Regional Day of Practice, whom they had met at that event. We learned about this more than a year later when we interviewed one of the principals to profile him for our newsletter. These are exactly the integrated changes we hope to inspire, but this one nearly eluded us.

RECOMMENDATIONS BY STAKEHOLDER GROUPS

Working collaboratively on diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) change efforts promises important benefits.

S

➡ Create networks of support, learning, and accountability with other districts to support administrator learning on diversity, equity, and inclusion and how to create a paraeducator-to-teacher pipeline.

S

P

➡ Create partnerships with educator preparation programs for a “grow-your-own” paraeducator pipeline.

H

➡ Establish and nurture close partnerships with school districts for preparation of a diverse pool of teacher candidates, working closely with districts’ needs and data. Connect with key individuals in the district who are committed to diversifying the teacher workforce.

➡ Develop relationships with principals who are the eyes and ears for scouting out great potential teachers among paraeducators.

➡ Participate actively in statewide networks for teacher diversity, both state-run and otherwise. Contribute your learning and learn from others.

N

➡ Partner with principals as champions of the pathway. They have great ideas and are key to making it work within their schools. If possible, create a peer training and support process among principals for building teacher diversity.

➡ Don’t underestimate the value of the coalition. Get clear about what you gain from it and what you do for it, then broadcast it. Working collaboratively is challenging but creates broader impact, more complete learning and more shared learning, economy of scale and pooled resources, potential for sustainability, and a support and accountability network for long-term change.

It may take time for networks or coalitions to develop clarity about who they are and what they do.

N

➡ Clarify, first, what your network does and your leaders’ own roles. Then, champion, liaise, and represent consistently within your institutions.

➡ Champions of your initiative (outside of direct network leadership but inside network member institutions) must really champion. Convince them to do so, and make the role clear. Make sure they use consistent language. And keep your champions connected to one another, as that can boost momentum.

S

P

➡ Given the importance of being known and understood, adequate time, financial resources, and expertise should be dedicated to clear messaging. Know that communications will be important and take a lot of your time. Consider hiring a full-time communications person.

Working collaboratively requires constant renewal of mutual expectations as well as transparent discussion of accountability.

N

➡ Attempt to clarify, from the outset, the rights, responsibilities, and agreements that comprise membership in the collective and revisit your shared understanding and satisfaction with these terms on an ongoing basis. Create tools for tracking and accountability of those expectations.

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➡ Be intentional about developing transparency and honesty around difficult topics, such as how resources are shared, competing interests of individual members, and diversity and equity within the team. Strive to distribute financial awards (e.g., grants) and clarify individual members' capacity and willingness to provide in-kind or financial resources at each phase. Sharing funding helps to create buy-in, especially in the early stages of an initiative. If it is not possible for this distribution to be equitable or proportional, the conversation should at least be transparent.

➡ Know that it will be messy. You need skilled network weavers (process facilitators with specialized network-building skills) to convene and coordinate.

➡ To ensure effective collaboration, design (meetings, gatherings, work plans) thoughtfully, and make sure you have strong facilitation, coordination, documentation, and communication. Keep weaving the network.

➡ When working on DEI professional development across multiple organizations:

- Be conservative with your goals and recognize small achievements as they occur.
- Present concrete, practical actions that are infused with anti-bias ideas, so progress happens even if individuals in those systems can't dig deep into anti-racist work.
- Get school districts to commit to specific DEI activities and plan them far enough in advance so it works with their professional development schedules and internal work on DEI.

Increased funding for collaborative work is needed.

D F

➡ Reward and incentivize school district-higher education and cross-district collaborations, particularly in regions where teachers often move among districts throughout their careers. This makes for broader and more coordinated results.

➡ Solicitations should be crafted with an eye toward encouraging coalitions and networks. RFPs and other invitations to bid should incentivize broad-based approaches to systems change.

Sufficient resources should be allocated to ensure that learning from complex endeavors is adequately captured.

N

➡ Plan early on how to track network activity and its extended results, including how to assign attribution for unplanned changes, such as the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education's increased funding and focus on teacher diversity.

Evaluation designs for coalitions and networks should include broad-based inquiry and should anticipate that discovering associated changes may be more challenging than in other settings.

N

➡ Consider frameworks and methods such as quantitative and qualitative inquiry, network analysis, Ripple Effect Mapping, and participant observation to gain understanding of the network's results and impact.

➡ Track network activity and unexpected results (ripple effects) as they occur.

➡ Track effects of the coalition within member organizations.

N F

➡ Acknowledge the scale of the problem and the time horizon needed to effect change.

LESSON 7: The contributions of supportive funding partners are fundamental to the genesis and growth of innovative initiatives, though the funder practice of awarding short-term grants impedes systems change.

One funder can have a profound influence on an initiative's growth and evolution. The Community Foundation of Western Massachusetts (CFWM) sought innovative models and a regional approach to our region's problems, principles that became increasingly central to our work. And because CFWM is the hub of a wheel of foundations in the area, having initial funding from this foundation positioned us to garner funds from additional sources, as well as to attract the attention and respect of the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE). Our movement was intensified when CFWM expressed interest in—and helped focus—our strategies to meet the need for teacher diversity in the region. CFWM's financial backing and spirited engagement with our ongoing learning helped us to connect with ever more partners and is to a great extent responsible for our continued momentum.

While the influence of our funders was largely positive, it is important to note that when external funding is sought, there is influence.

In a few ways, we might have proceeded differently with a different set of expectations from the funder:

- We had originally considered devoting one year to building a comprehensive career path with articulation agreements between institutions, spanning the whole pipeline from high school graduate to paraeducator to teacher. Ultimately, we focused instead on supports for paraeducators who already hold bachelor's degrees. Even though a majority of the paraeducators in partner school districts had not completed an undergraduate degree, we opted for the quickest return on investment, both because the districts needed teachers as soon as possible *and because the funding horizon was limited to three years*. This choice was not necessarily negative, but it did mean that we would not initially work with the

larger group of paraeducators who still need to complete a first university degree. That need persists, and it is only now that institutions—Coalition members and others—are starting to address it systematically.

- When DESE launched its Teacher Diversification Grant pilot program in 2018, teacher diversity initiatives moved forward in our partner districts. A largely positive influence, spending stipulations nonetheless determine which efforts this program will and will not support, thus influencing direction and progress at the local level. For example, some districts covered individual outreach and some did not. Some prioritized Massachusetts Tests for Educator Licensure (MTEL) tutoring and others only MTEL courses. Staff time to organize these supports was not covered by these grants.

Short-term funding cycles and the timetables that structure spending and reporting constrain programming.

CFWM allocated funding yearly, based on the prior year's accomplishments. The need to reapply for funding each year of a limited three-year grant term, as well as to look for matching funds from other sources, limited our ability to do long-term planning, consumed valuable time, and meant that we tended to over-promise on goals and results. This tendency is just part of the competition for soft money but can lead to frustration and misalignment with what is really necessary and possible to achieve. Fortunately, CFWM was flexible with respect to our changes of plans and results under the innovation model, which was valuable to us.

The funding year (February through the following January) did not align well with the rhythm of our work, the school year. We found ourselves preparing reports at moments that were actually optimum for data *collection* rather than *analysis and synthesis*.

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As our CFWM funding now comes to a close, we are finding that some donors prefer new programming. The reluctance to fund established programming means that tried and tested efforts either repackage themselves or run the risk of being aborted, just as they are hitting their stride.

IMPLICATIONS

➤ **Systems change requires long-term, integrated funding efforts.** Groups that take on the challenges of dismantling a system that has been in place for generations will need substantial resources.

➤ **Evaluation approaches should take into account the long-term nature of the change effort** but are hampered by short-term funding cycles.

RECOMMENDATIONS BY STAKEHOLDER GROUPS

Systems change requires long-term, integrated funding efforts.

D F

➤ Design long-term (multi-year) opportunities that automatically renew annually, thereby creating long-term investment and long-term relationships that support such change.

➤ Fund long-term systems change. Incentivize work that yields attitudinal and other less tangible changes that make a difference along the way, instead of prioritizing short-term quantifiable gains.

➤ Commit to multi-year engagements with systems change initiatives wherein organizations are guaranteed funds for the period it will take to make change. For example, though we appreciate the generous three years of funding we had, we believe now that any initiative called “innovation” should be at least a 10-year period. In 3 years, you’re just getting started.

➤ Frame opportunities for innovation—with flexibility, opportunity for learning from failure, and adaptability counting as “success.” Incentivize new ideas to attack longstanding problems.

➤ Generously fund staff positions within initiatives, both central staff and those in member institutions working on the initiative. The big cost of doing systems change is people’s time.

F

➤ Align spending schedules as closely as possible with the implementation rhythm of the funded work. If spending timetables cannot be changed, at least work with grantees to align as best as possible, setting up a reporting schedule that better matches implementation rhythm.

S P D N H F W E C

➤ Promote collaboration and network activity.

N H E C

➤ Acknowledge that considerable time and other resources will necessarily be devoted to the pursuit of funding opportunities. Seek out funders who understand and support collaborative and network initiatives.

➤ In navigating the demands of funding possibilities, develop the skills to protect the integrity of an idea while demonstrating enough flexibility to align with opportunity.

S P N H W C

➤ Keep innovating and seeking grant funding to support programs that diversify the teacher workforce and increase the cultural competence of all institutional members.

Evaluation approaches should take into account the long-term nature of the change effort.

S D N H W C

➤ Create and invest in evaluation processes that:

- Measure the intangible (e.g., participants feel more valued and supported) as well as tangible (they pass tests) results of the supports you offer. Both are important when changing entrenched systems and habits of mind.
- Capture learning over time.

LESSON 8: The concept of innovation provides a framework that legitimizes learning and adaptability, elements that are necessary for effecting systems change to promote teacher diversity.

The Community Foundation of Western Massachusetts funded us under its Innovation Fund, betting that our way of approaching the problem would produce useful insights or strategies. While the funder did express the desire for results within the three-year grant horizon, it was also expecting that we would learn as we went, and that when efforts appeared less than promising, we would adapt. These notions matched our own vision, allowing us to proceed in the spirit of innovation.

The innovation framework gave us the flexibility we needed to experiment: to try certain interventions and to revise them when we learned something new from Paradigm Shift participants or other stakeholders.

We were free from the expectation that all of our activities would be successful or would stick; we were able to incorporate failure—as it would be defined in a more traditional funder context—as learning, a core tenet of innovation. With this freedom, we could then attempt some formidable systems-level changes; if we did not succeed at first, we regrouped and tried again, equipped with new knowledge and understanding. For example, we modified our actions in the following ways:

- We had originally planned five cross-district collaborative diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) events in the first year, which proved overly ambitious. Instead, we later directed all our attention to creating one single event (the Regional Day of Practice of 2019) that set a precedent for school districts working together on large problems affecting them all and, based on feedback, generated valuable learning.
- We designed a mentoring component aimed at building a supportive network for Black and Latinx educators,

but Paradigm Shift participants informed us that because we had assigned them to prospective mentors, the relationships were artificial and would be impractical or of little value to them. So, we redesigned that component to incorporate the Paradigm Shift participants' choice of mentor.

- At first, we tried to transcend geographical boundaries by offering hybrid (remote and in-person) versions of Massachusetts Tests for Educator Licensure (MTEL) preparation courses but found that neither remote nor in-person students were well served by this model. Subsequently, we rejected the hybrid model and opted for either an in-person or remote delivery method, with improved results.

“The Coalition is the innovation.”

We realized, during our planning year, that our approach differed from more typical efforts led by individual institutions or limited partnerships and was, in that sense, innovative. Coalition members opted to work on a regional scale, pooling their collective expertise and resources, to change the *regional* teacher workforce landscape, moving beyond the limits of their own institutions.

IMPLICATIONS

➔ **Framing an initiative as innovation can empower institutions such as school districts, DESE, and higher education to take risks and to try previously untried strategies, anticipating that new methods might yield new and better results.** This framing opens the door to experiment, fail, learn, and try again. Ironically, formal education systems typically do not allow for such experimentation and learning. In order to gain traction and reward

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attempts to make progress on the seemingly intractable problem of teacher diversity, the education sector could take a page from other sectors that readily embrace innovation, recognizing that all wins—and failures that lead to learning—are important.

RECOMMENDATIONS BY STAKEHOLDER GROUPS

Framing an initiative as innovation can empower institutions such as school districts, Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, and higher education to take risks.

D F

➡ Incentivize innovative approaches to deep-seated problems, inviting, for example, cross-institutional collaborations (e.g., rather than single school district grants) and cross-sectoral collaborations (e.g., educators work with workforce development representatives).

F

➡ Evaluate investments from an innovation perspective: expect failure and value persistence, continuous learning, adaptation, and revised implementation.

S P N H W E C

➡ Don't hesitate to try something bold, though you may have to change it along the way. Experimenting and learning contribute to progress.

Next Steps

EXPAND CAREER PATHS FOR PARAEDUCATORS

Paradigm Shift started with bachelor's (BA) degree holders in order to address the need for teacher diversity with urgency, but the larger number of promising Black and Latinx paraeducators do not yet have an undergraduate degree. Some paths exist, but articulation and coordination problems make the process of becoming a teacher especially daunting for candidates without a BA. For example, while community college graduates may enroll directly in four-year state universities, they often arrive at the four-year institution without the right credentials because the institutions have not coordinated requirements. Teacher candidates without extensive financial resources or time must take new courses in subject matters they already completed at the community college level.

We are beginning to foster regional collaborative problem-solving of these issues by organizing meetings of the stakeholders to develop resource, policy, and practice recommendations that ensure that programs meet the needs of prospective teachers of color, resources are maximized, and institutions learn from one another's promising actions. The outcome of this planning will be, in the short term, a set of recommendations to make BA completion leading to teacher licensure more possible for Black and Latinx paraeducators. In the long range, we hope to provide an operational model and action plan for a comprehensive career path from community resident to paraeducator to teacher that would include community members from a range of educational starting points.

SUPPORT ALUMNI SUCCESS AND RETENTION

The early years of teaching can be difficult, especially for teachers of color, even those as experienced as Paradigm Shift alumni. Turnover rates for teachers of color are higher than those for white teachers. Statewide in 2016–2017, school districts had an overall teacher attrition rate of 12.5 percent. However, the rate for Latinx teachers was 17.4 percent and for Black teachers was 23.5 percent.¹⁰

Research shows that two main factors influence attrition of teachers of color: lack of collegial support and racism in the workplace. Building on our experience with recruitment, preparation, and hiring, our next stage of innovation focuses on ensuring the ongoing success of these well-qualified new teachers of color. By summer 2021, we will have 21 Paradigm Shift alumni working as licensed teachers. We hope to plan two interrelated initiatives to promote success and retention of our alumni in these districts: professional development for Paradigm Shift alumni teachers, including development of an alumni association, and anti-racism training for Supervising Practitioners of teacher candidates.

CONTINUE INTEGRATION OF NEW PRACTICES

Due to the delays experienced under COVID-19 restrictions and effects, our process of institutionalizing the supports offered by Paradigm Shift to both individuals and districts is still underway. We hope to continue our ongoing process to understand what changes have occurred in institutions and engage partner-leaders in committing to further changes; devise a model for those changes to be ongoing; and make commitments of resources to ensure sustainability of the changes.

10. Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education. (2019). Educator workforce diversity. Memorandum. <https://www.doe.mass.edu/bese/docs/fy2019/2019-05/item1.html>

FUTURE DIRECTIONS FOR THE COALITION

In Coalition meetings, members have named a number of needs surrounding increasing teacher diversity that the Coalition could fulfill, with appropriate resources. These include:

- Research, both generating and commissioning research and serving as a clearinghouse for relevant research by others.
- Technical assistance for districts and institutions of higher education.
- Information exchange and referral.
- Information sharing about funding opportunities, encouraging collective applications as useful and appropriate.
- Collective professional development.
- Advocacy.

We welcome new partners in our continued pursuit of the goal of diversifying the teacher workforce. We invite exploratory conversations and considerations of potential commitments that would allow us to continue moving the work forward. Please feel free to reach out with any initial thoughts, questions and reactions. We look forward to hearing from you!

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Further Reading

These materials are available on our website (www.paradigmshift-teach.org) should you be seeking more in-depth information about the history and process of our Paradigm Shift initiative.

Visit www.paradigmshift-teach.org/2021-report

1. Diverse Teacher Workforce Coalition Pathways Map, October 2017
2. Current recruitment flyer
3. Performance Management Plan for Community Foundation of Western Massachusetts, February 2018
4. Diversity Leadership Summit Agenda, September 2018
5. Executive Summary, Diversity Leadership Summit Evaluation, September 2018
6. Program, 2019 Regional Day of Practice, August 2019
7. Executive Summary, Evaluation Report, 2019 Regional Day of Practice, October 2019
8. Executive Summary, Year 3 Participant Survey Report, January 2021
9. Paradigm Shift Two-page Overview, November 2020
10. Ripple Effect Map shared May 2020
11. Education career pathways poster developed by MassHire, 2019—example of ripple effect
12. Springfield Public Schools paraeducator to teacher recruitment flyer, Spring 2021—example of institutionalization

Leadership Team Members

Titles listed are their positions at the time they served on the team

- *Kate Anderson** *Director of Recruitment and Engagement, Teach Western Mass*
- *Teri Anderson** *Executive Director, MassHire Franklin-Hampshire Career Center*
- *Beverley Bell** *Initially Director, Master of Arts in Teaching Program, Mount Holyoke College, currently Assistant Dean of Educator Preparation, College of Education, University of Massachusetts Amherst*
- José Bou** *Manager of Equity, Family, and Community Partnerships, Holyoke Public Schools*
- Mellisa Brooks** *Paraeducator, Amherst Regional Public Schools*
- *Nicole Christoforo** *Chief of Talent, Springfield Empowerment Zone*
- David Cruise** *President and Chief Executive Officer, MassHire Regional Employment Board Hampden County*
- Doreen Cunningham** *Assistant Superintendent, Amherst Regional Public Schools*
- *Kelly Curran** *Human Resource Manager, Recruitment and Payroll, Holyoke Public Schools*
- Tiffani Curtis** *Chief of Schools, Holyoke Public Schools*
- *Linda Davis-Delano** *Director and Professor, Educator Preparation and Licensure, Springfield College*
- *Joan Giovannini** *Education Faculty and Department Chair, Holyoke Community College*
- *Tyra Good** *Associate Professor and Executive Director, Center for Equity in Urban Education, Elms College*
- *Damany Gordon** *Diversity and Equity Specialist, Amherst Regional Public Schools*
- *Matthew Grimes** *Human Resource Administrator for Talent Acquisition, Diversity and Inclusion, Springfield Public Schools*
- *Sam Intrator** *Professor and Chair, Education and Child Study Program, Smith College*
- *Suzanne Judson-Whitehouse** *Director of Licensure and Credentialing Programs, Collaborative for Educational Services*
- *Pema Latshang** *Founding Executive Director, Teach Western Mass*
- Stephanie Logan** *Chair and Associate Professor, Education Department, Springfield College*
- Catherine Mastronardi** *President, Springfield Federation of Paraprofessionals*
- Kathleen O'Sullivan** *Senior Administrator for Human Resources, Springfield Public Schools*
- *Vanessa Otero** *Director, Urban Education Initiative, Smith College*
- Lucy Perez** *Human Resource Administrator for Recruitment and Retention, Springfield Public Schools*
- *Danielle Phillips** *Program Coordinator, Paradigm Shift, Five Colleges, Incorporated*
- Kristin Reardon** *Senior Administrator for Human Resources, Springfield Public Schools*
- *Desiree Robinson** *Instructional Leadership Specialist in Mathematics, Springfield Public Schools*
- *Marla Solomon** *Director of Partnership Programs, Five Colleges, Incorporated*
- Carol Soules** *Resident Engagement Manager, Home City Housing*
- Julie Spencer-Robinson** *President, Northampton Association of School Employees*
- *Catherine Swift** *Director, Teacher Licensure Programs, Professional and Graduate Education, Mount Holyoke College*
- Michael Taylor** *Recruitment Manager, Teach Western Mass*

** Currently serving*



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Coalition of Western Massachusetts

June 2021