



Leave, Move, or Stay? An Examination of Retention Factors Among Novice Dual-Certified Teachers of Color

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Abstract: Novice teachers of Color (TOC) leave the profession at higher rates than their White peers, often due to inadequate preparation, poor working conditions, and racialized school climates. Guided by Bronfenbrenner’s ecological systems theory, this study investigates how structural factors influence the decisions of novice dual-certified TOC who leave, move, or remain in the profession. As part of a larger research project, in this quantitative study, we surveyed 17 participants who completed a dual general and special education undergraduate program at a Historically Black College and University (HBCU). Through our analysis we identified four primary drivers of retention: educator preparation; mentorship; administrative and district support; and diversity, equity, and inclusion. Findings provide empirical evidence that novice dual-certified TOC navigate unique challenges and supports that influence their professional trajectories. Implications emphasize the importance of educator preparation, intentional mentorship, and systemic reforms at school and district levels, with recommendations for future research to address teacher attrition and retention.

Keywords: Novice teachers, Teachers of Color, Special education, Attrition, Retention

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The demographic landscape of the American PK-12 education system has evolved over time, indicating significant changes in student populations. These changes are particularly evident in the increasing diversity of both general and special education students (National Center for Education Statistics [NCES], 2023). However, this shift is not reflected in the teaching workforce. Despite some progress in the past several decades, the teaching profession has never mirrored the diversity of the U.S. student population, including special education students (Data USA, n.d.). In fact, only one in five teachers across the United States are from historically underrepresented backgrounds (Noble et al., 2024). In addition, 40% of the nation's public schools do not have a single teacher of Color (TOC) on record (Education Trust, 2022). Currently, TOC comprise just 20% of the national educator workforce and only 18% of special education teachers, resulting in a profession still dominated by White teachers (Education Trust, 2022; NCES, 2023).

The predominance of White, middle-class, monolingual, female teachers fails to represent the varied backgrounds and experiences of the students they serve (de Brey et al., 2021; Wang et al., 2022). The persistent lack of diversity and cultural competence among the current teacher workforce contributes to disparate educational outcomes for students of Color, both with and without disabilities, and perpetuates systemic inequities within the education system (El-Mekki, 2023; Kozleski & Proffitt, 2020). For example, Black and Brown students are often subjected to disciplinary removal, experience high dropout rates, increased special education referrals, and are least likely to be considered or identified as gifted compared to their White peers (Annamma et al., 2014; Ford, 2014; Hart & Lindsay, 2024; OSEP, 2023; Reddig, 2024). Further, research shows that exposure to general and special education TOC positively impacts the social and academic progress of all students, and especially students of Color (Farinde-Wu et al., 2020; Redding, 2019). For instance, students of Color benefit from having teachers who mirror their race or ethnicity (Redding, 2019), as TOC are more likely to hold higher expectations for students of Color, resulting in higher reading and math achievement scores, and increases in high school graduation and college enrollment rates (Gershenson et al., 2021). Additionally, TOC who share similar backgrounds and cultural experiences with their students are more responsive to students' mental health needs and less likely to make referrals for minor disciplinary infractions, which often contribute to systemic inequities and harsher punishments (Blazer, 2021). TOC are also less inclined to use exclusionary discipline practices or refer students for special education services (Annamma et al., 2013; Cormier, 2021; Griffin & Tackie, 2017; Lindsay & Hart, 2017). Likewise, TOC who share cultural identities with their students are more attuned to community and home cultural norms as well as students' lived experiences (Farinde et al., 2016; Griffin & Tackie, 2017; Kea et al., 2024).

It is clear that general and special education TOC play a critical role in meeting the needs of diverse students who remain the most underserved in our schools. However, the rising diversity of the student population and an overwhelmingly White female teacher workforce (Data USA, n.d.) presents a clear problem for the education system. Moreover, the teaching profession continues to face high turnover, with annual attrition rates of about 7%, with novice and special education teachers leaving at two-to-three times the rate of their peers (Carver-Thomas & Darling-Hammond, 2019; Diliberti & Schwartz, 2025; Mockovciak et al., 2023). Additionally, TOC leave the profession at higher rates than their White peers (Steiner & Woo, 2021), creating a retention crisis that threatens the future diversity of the teaching workforce. To address the critical need of retaining TOC, it is essential to examine the factors leading to their attrition in both general and special education spaces, and develop strategies that foster their long-term commitment to the profession. To this end, we sought to answer the following research question: What are the main drivers of attrition and retention for novice teachers of Color who completed an undergraduate dual certification program in general and special education at a Historically Black University?

Review of Literature

In recent years, there has been an increase in research exploring the factors influencing attrition and retention for both general and special education teachers (e.g., Bettini et al., 2017, 2018; Billingsley, 2004; Billingsley & Bettini, 2017; Boe et al., 2007, 2008). For example, comprehensive literature reviews have described the current crisis in teacher retention by examining both qualitative and quantitative studies of novice teachers' attrition, retention, or mobility rates (e.g., Billingsley & Bettini, 2019; Bettini et al., 2021; Scott et al., 2021). However, few studies have investigated why TOC, especially novice dual-certified educators, choose to leave, move, or remain in the profession. This study addresses that gap in the literature.

Challenges Influencing Teacher Attrition and Retention

Novice teachers often encounter significant challenges during their first five years in the profession. They must learn to master curriculum content, design lesson plans, deliver culturally responsive instruction, manage student behavior, and build relationships with administrators, colleagues, and diverse communities (Jones et al., 2013; Youngs et al., 2011). For those working in special education, these challenges are compounded by the responsibility of meeting the unique needs of students with disabilities (Cormier, 2021; Fore et al., 2002). Compared to their general education peers, special educators report higher levels of role ambiguity, professional isolation, and dissatisfaction with mentoring and induction programs (Brunsting et al., 2014; Youngs et al., 2011). They frequently cite excessive caseloads, insufficient administrative support, and overwhelming paperwork as reasons for leaving the profession (Carver-Thomas & Darling-Hammond, 2017, 2019; Ingersoll & May, 2016). Many also describe inadequate preparation and limited access to instructional resources, which hinder their ability to address student needs effectively (Billingsley & Bettini, 2019). In addition, feelings of isolation are common, as special educators often lack opportunities for collaboration and experience a diminished sense of belonging within their school communities (Billingsley & Bettini, 2019; Hester et al., 2020; Sutchter et al., 2019). The emotional and physical demands of the special educator role contribute to heightened risks of burnout among these educators (Billingsley & Bettini, 2019). Collectively, these systemic issues not only create difficult working conditions for all novice teachers but exacerbate the shortage of qualified special educators, negatively

affecting outcomes for students with disabilities (Cormier, 2021; Fish, 2017, 2019; Gershenson et al., 2018, 2021; Redding, 2019). Importantly, these substantial obstacles are magnified for TOC, who remain underrepresented in urban, diverse, and underserved classrooms nationwide (Bettini & Park, 2021; Scott et al., 2021, 2022).

Teachers of Color

Research demonstrates that TOC face systemic barriers, including racial bias and daily microaggressions, that contribute to racial battle fatigue, job dissatisfaction, limited retention, and, ultimately, attrition (Bettini et al., 2020; Farinde-Wu & Fitchett, 2018; Ingersoll et al., 2021; Scott et al., 2024; Scott et al., 2023). Despite increased recruitment efforts, retention rates of TOC remain disproportionately low and continue to pose a significant challenge (Kohli, 2018). Many TOC report that the absence of same-race peers and the lack of cultural competence among administrators and staff foster feelings of isolation and a diminished sense of belonging, further accelerating decisions to leave the profession (Cormier, 2021; Dixon et al., 2019; Griffin & Tackie, 2017). Specifically, studies focusing on novice general and special education TOC have indicated that attrition is driven by difficulties with students and families (e.g., navigating complex family dynamics), colleagues and administrators (e.g., limited support, lack of collegiality, inadequate mentoring), and curriculum and pedagogy (e.g., exclusionary practices), in addition to broader issues such as challenging working conditions, insufficient preparation, and racial battle fatigue (Bhana-Lopez et al., 2024; Bettini et al., 2021). These challenges often manifest differently across teaching contexts, with general and special education TOC navigating distinct yet overlapping barriers that impact their career trajectories and decisions to stay, move, or leave the profession.

General Education Teachers

General education TOC face persistent challenges in recruitment and retention, driven by both structural and racialized barriers (Dixon et al., 2019). The Voices from the Classroom report notes that few TOC enroll in education programs due to financial constraints and loan debt, and among those who do enter the field, only 43% plan to remain long term compared to 86% of White peers (Educators for Excellence, 2022). Salary is a top reason for White teachers to stay (78%), but only 22% of TOC identify it as central to their decision-making; instead, they emphasize leadership opportunities (41% vs. 8% of Whites) and access to meaningful professional development and support (41% vs. 7%). At the same time, many teachers cite heavy workloads as a primary reason for leaving. These trends are echoed in studies of Black teachers, who are leaving the profession at disproportionately high rates (Terada, 2021). Interviews with Black female teachers highlight lack of administrative support, limited advancement, unsupportive school climates, and overwhelming workloads as key drivers of attrition (Farinde et al., 2016). However, satisfaction among these teachers increased in urban schools with stronger racial-cultural alignment and supportive leadership (Farinde-Wu & Fitchett, 2018). Beyond workload and pay, racism and daily microaggressions often weigh most heavily in TOC's decisions to remain in or leave the profession (Frank et al., 2021). Other studies highlight that novice general education TOC frequently describe antagonistic school cultures, feelings of being undervalued, and a lack of agency and belonging as central to attrition (Dixon et al., 2019; Steiner & Woo, 2021).

Special Education Teachers

The experiences of special education TOC, particularly those in their early careers, remain largely overlooked in research, even though their pathways into and through the profession differ significantly from their peers. Despite this, very little scholarship has directly examined their trajectories. For example, we found just one study that focused specifically on the challenges faced by novice special education TOC during their first three years in the classroom (i.e., Scott, 2020). This leaves much about why special education TOC stay, move, or leave the profession unexplored in both quantitative and qualitative literature. Expanding this lens, Scott and colleagues (2021) conducted a meta-analysis of 47 studies on special education teacher retention, finding that only four explicitly addressed race and ethnicity in relation to attrition and retention for Mexican American and Black teachers (i.e., López-Estrada & Koyama, 2010; Scott, 2020; Scott et al., 2020; Scott & Alexander, 2019).

For example, López-Estrada and Koyama (2010) reported that Mexican American special education teachers drew on bilingual skills, prior paraprofessional experience, administrator support, and collegial “la familia” networks as supports for remaining in the profession (p. 95). Studies of Black special education teachers further highlight how cultural identity, mentorship, and advocacy influenced retention. For instance, Scott and Alexander (2019) found that Black men pursued special education to challenge stereotypes of Black boys, provide culturally relevant instruction, and assume leadership roles. Mentorship from fellow Black educators proved to be critical to these teachers’ persistence. Similarly, Scott and colleagues (2020) showed that Black special education teachers across career stages were motivated by advocacy for students and families of Color, but many also described systemic bias, professional isolation, and limited belonging as major barriers. These barriers appeared most consequential for novices, as Scott (2020) documented in a study of early-career Black special education teachers, where inadequate mentoring, racial battle fatigue, role abuse, cultural insensitivity, and insufficient classroom resources contributed to early departures from the profession. Overall, these findings suggest that while special education TOC often enter the profession with a deep commitment to supporting students with and without disabilities, systemic inequities and oppressive school structures continue to undermine their retention.

Educator Preparation at Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs)

Only 7% (5% females, 2% males) of the public-school teachers in the U.S. identify as Black/African American (Carr, 2022; Farinde-Wu et al., 2020; Terada, 2021). Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs), which represent just 3% of U.S. higher education institutions, produce 50% of the country’s Black teachers, play a pivotal role in addressing persistent teacher workforce shortages, particularly among teachers of Color (Copridge et al., 2023). Research suggests HBCUs are especially effective in recruiting, preparing, and retaining Black educators by embedding culturally affirming frameworks into their curricula and faculty practices (Ladson-Billings, 1995, 2021; Lee, 2019). However, a critical gap remains in the preparation of Black teachers. In 2019, only 3.6% of bachelor’s degrees in special education were awarded to Black/African American students, compared to 80.6% to White students and 8.7% to Hispanic/Latino students (Cormier et al., 2021). Thus, strengthening Educator Preparation Programs (EPPs) at HBCUs is critical to increasing the number of Black teachers in the profession. However, the lack of representation, coupled with a general shortage of well-qualified teachers (Billingsley & Bettini, 2019; Peyton et al., 2020), presents a significant challenge to providing culturally responsive and effective education for students with disabilities.

The attrition and retention of Black dual-certified general and special education teachers prepared in undergraduate preservice programs remains underexamined. Expanding research in this area is critical to better understanding the challenges novice Black teachers face as they enter and navigate the profession, as their experiences are markedly different from those of their White peers.

Theoretical Framework

We employed Bronfenbrenner's (1979) ecosystems perspective to view novice TOC experiences as existing within a broader system of educational settings. The model provided a multi-layered framework for understanding these teachers' experiences at various levels of interaction. Although Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory was originally developed to explain the developmental experiences of children, its emphasis on nested social systems and multilevel environmental influences makes it particularly appropriate for examining the complex, systemic factors that shape the professional trajectories of novice dual-certified TOC. This framework allowed us to analyze how individual experiences are situated within broader institutional, community, and societal contexts that influence decisions to leave, move within, or remain in the teaching profession. The framework posits that a person's development is an ongoing process occurring within overlapping and concentric social spheres (Bronfenbrenner, 1979).

Utilizing this model, we come to understand novice TOC experiences through microsystem interactions, which directly affect them (e.g., relationships with their students, families, colleagues, and administrators). These interactions are further influenced by the mesosystem, which represent the relationships between components of the microsystem, such as the connections between families, colleagues, and administrators within the broader school community. Together, these interconnected relationships impact the daily experiences and professional environments of novice TOC.

Beyond these immediate environments, the exosystem and macrosystem introduce wider external influences that affect novice TOC experiences. The exosystem consists of indirect factors such as district-level administration and local or state government policies related to education. While these influences do not involve direct engagement with the teacher, they significantly impact working conditions, job expectations, and available resources. The macrosystem, at the highest level, includes larger societal structures, such as cultural norms, socioeconomic factors, economic systems, and federal policies, which affect educational institutions and the overall climate in which novice TOC operate. These macrosystem influences often perpetuate systemic or structural oppressions that may manifest through institutional racism, discriminatory practices, and limited access to resources and opportunities (Edwards, 2021; Xu et al., 2024). Understanding these systemic dynamics is essential to addressing the structural challenges that affect novice TOC attrition and retention.

Method

This research is part of a larger mixed-methods study that investigated the systemic and structural factors contributing to the attrition and retention of novice TOC who were dual-certified in general and special education. While the larger study incorporated both quantitative and qualitative components to capture the complexity of novice dual-certified TOC experiences, the present paper focuses solely on the quantitative analysis. Specifically, this study employed a cross-sectional survey design (Creswell & Creswell, 2018) to analyze data from an original

instrument developed to examine patterns and relationships among factors influencing teacher retention, mobility, and attrition. Guided by Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory (1979), the analysis situates participants' experiences within interconnected systems, including individual characteristics, classroom interactions, school climate, district structures, and broader sociopolitical contexts.

Context of Study

The study was conducted as part of Project Culturally Responsive Exceptional Educators for Diversity (CREED), a federally funded personnel preparation grant housed within the Department of Educator Preparation at a large HBCU in a Southeastern state. The institution serves a predominantly underrepresented minority student body, with 89% identifying as African American, Hispanic, Native American, or two or more races, while the remaining 11% identify as Asian, non-citizens, unknown, or White. Reflecting this demographic composition, Project CREED aimed to prepare culturally responsive educators to serve diverse families, schools, and students in urban communities by recruiting, mentoring, and supporting students from traditionally underrepresented groups and those with disabilities. Participants pursued a Bachelor of Science (B.S.) degree with licensure in Elementary Education (K-6), Special Education General Curriculum (K-12), and Special Education Adapted Curriculum (K-12). The 120-credit-hour dual general and special education undergraduate preservice program was extended to 4.5 years instead of the typical four, requiring scholars to complete three additional courses, two extended field-based experiences, 300 professional development hours, and a yearlong student teaching internship in Title I high-need school settings.

Participants

Scholars funded by the federal grant agreed to participate in the present study by completing an online survey. Of the 17 participants, 13 identified Black/African American, one Biracial, one Hispanic/Latino, one Multiracial, and one White. Sixteen were female and one was male, ranging in ages between 25–29 years ($n = 11$) and 20–24 years ($n = 6$). Three acknowledged having a disability (e.g., attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD): 2; learning disability (LD): 1). Participants graduated from the EPP between 2016-2021.

Participants' School Demographics

At the time of completing the survey, the participants in this study primarily worked in urban, high-need educational settings, with the majority serving in Title I schools ($n = 14$; 82%). The participants, divided into three cohorts, represent a range of experiences in both general and special education, with most having 0-4 years of teaching experience. Further disaggregating their teaching experience, 12 participants were teaching in special education settings (six for 3–4 years and six for 1–2.5 years) and five were teaching in general education settings. The instructional settings included separate day school ($n = 2$; 12%), adaptive classroom ($n = 3$; 18%), self-contained ($n = 4$; 23%), inclusion classroom ($n = 7$; 41%), general education classroom ($n = 8$; 47%), special education resource ($n = 15$; 88%), and other ($n = 2$; 12). Those in general education later transitioned to special education positions to fulfill grant service obligation requirements.

Positionality Statement

Our research team consists of scholars from both HBCUs and Predominately White Institutions, with backgrounds in special education, educator preparation, and educational research. As former educators and current faculty members, we bring a range of perspectives shaped by our diverse racial and institutional affiliations. Some team members have direct ties to the HBCU where participants completed their preparation, offering valuable insight into the program's structure and objectives. However, we recognize that these affiliations, along with our shared professional experiences, may have influenced our research lens and data interpretation. We also acknowledge that participants' awareness of our connections to the institution may have impacted their responses, particularly regarding their perceptions of their preparation. In addressing our relationality, we utilized survey instruments grounded in established research frameworks, ensured participant anonymity, and incorporated researchers without direct program ties in data analysis. While our backgrounds provide important context for understanding novice TOC retention, we prioritized empirical rigor to ensure our findings reflect participants' authentic experiences rather than our expectations. By remaining critically aware of our positionality in relation to this study, we aimed to contribute data-driven insights that inform the attrition and retention of novice dual-certified TOC.

Survey Development

To answer the question underlying this study, an online Project CREED Impact Survey™ (Kea et al., 2021) was developed in the following five stages. First, we conducted an extensive review of empirical studies on specific attrition, retention, and support factors shared by novice and seasoned general and special education TOC. Second, the first author consulted with experts (Griffin & Tackie, 2017) to review relevant literature and methodologies to inform the development of the survey questions. Third, input was sought from Project CREED's all-Black eight-member (six females; two males) Advisory Board, who were viewed as content experts due to their levels and years of teaching experience as special educators, ranging from 8–15 years of classroom experience prior to administrative roles (i.e., district exceptional children's program area coordinator, principal, retired university professor, and school special education department chair). Each board member was asked to read three studies (i.e., Dixon et al., 2019; Griffin, 2018; Griffin & Tackie, 2017) prior to scheduled Zoom sessions and to generate survey questions individually. During the Zoom sessions, Advisory Board members leveraged their collective expertise in special education to refine the survey. They clarified questions, eliminated duplications, restated items for clarity, and developed additional inquiries based on their experiences in the field.

The first and fourth authors categorized the survey questions into nine sections: (a) demographics; (b) school factors; (c) racial battle fatigue; (d) mentorship; (e) leavers, movers, and stayers; (f) cultural competence; (g) professional development; (h) educator preparation programs (EPP); and (i) induction and mentoring support from EPP, district, and school. The Advisory Board members engaged in an additional three review rounds to refine the questions to be included in the final survey. An internal validity check was done between the Advisory Board members serving as content experts and two graduate research assistants. The CREED Impact Survey Instrument™ resulted in a 130-item questionnaire to gather data on novice dual-certified TOC. This research serves as an initial study that aligns with a series of related studies focused on attrition and retention among novice TOC. This study contributes to the limited body of

quantitative research on novice TOC by examining critical factors influencing whether they leave, move, or stay in the teacher workforce.

Data Collection

All 17 Project CREED alumni were invited to participate in a one-hour online Project CREED Impact Survey™. To encourage full participation, a \$50 gift card was provided as an incentive for completing the survey. This approach yielded a 100% response rate, ensuring complete and representative data from the entire alumni cohort.

Independent Variables

The study investigated retention factors of novice TOC using three independent variables: Leaver, Mover, and Stayer. *Leavers* were defined as special education teachers who exited the teaching profession within 4 years. *Movers* were defined as special education teachers who transitioned to new roles within the field while remaining in the profession. *Stayers* were those who continued teaching in the same school or district without changing positions.

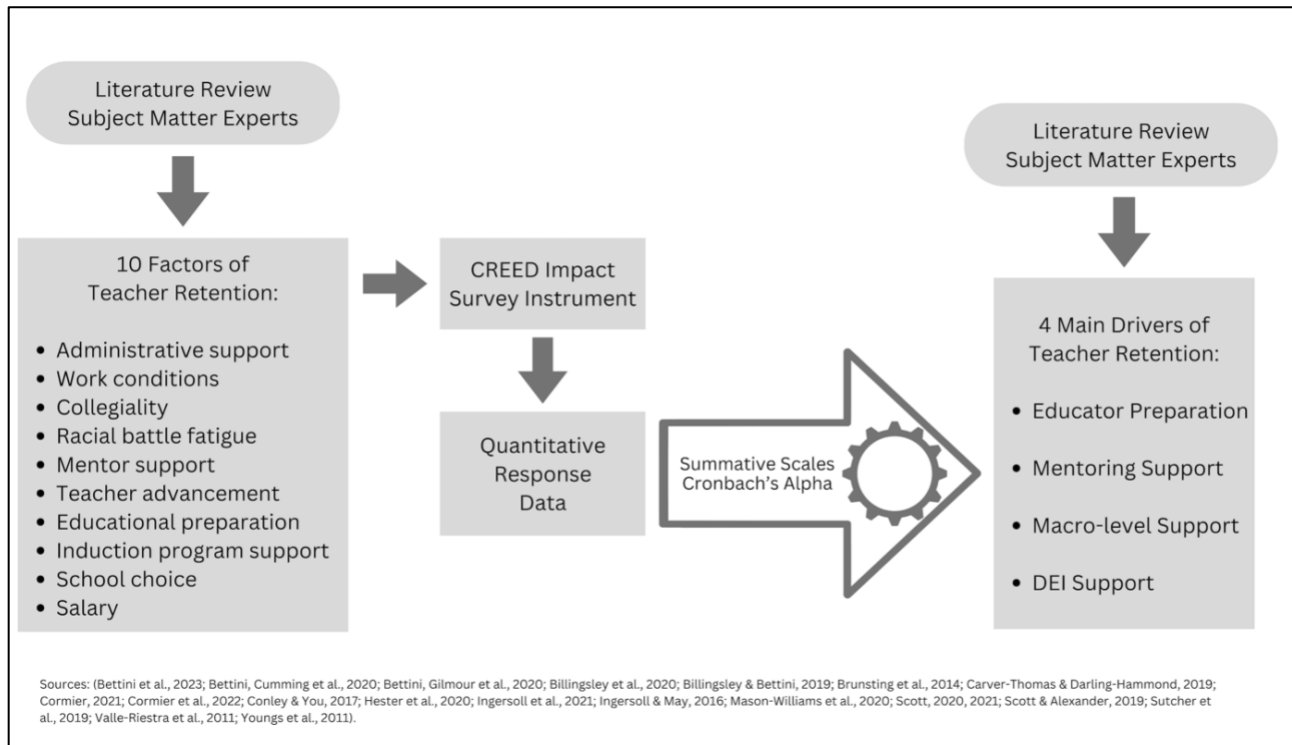
Data Analysis

Figure 1 illustrates how an initial set of ten critical factors, identified through a broad review of the literature (see figure for full list of sources), was refined through survey analysis into four main drivers of teacher retention. We reviewed research on teacher retention and attrition to identify the most common factors influencing why teachers remain, move, or leave the profession. Searches were conducted in ERIC, Education Source, and Google Scholar using combinations of key terms such as *teacher retention*, *teacher attrition*, *teacher turnover*, *teachers of color*, *general education teachers*, and *special education teachers*. This review included four major literature syntheses (Billingsley, 2004; Billingsley & Bettini, 2019; Bettini et al., 2021; Scott et al., 2021), practitioner-focused studies (Dixon, 2019; Griffin, 2018; Griffin & Tackie, 2017), and studies on Black female teachers' experiences (Farinde-Wu et al., 2016, 2020; Farinde-Wu & Fitchett, 2018). To ensure comprehensive coverage, we conducted ancestral searches of reference lists and progeny searches to identify newer studies citing these key publications. In total, 35 peer-reviewed articles were identified: 25 focused on general education teachers of color and 10 on special education teachers of color.

Each article was summarized in a data extraction chart that documented study purpose, design, sample demographics, and key findings. Using an inductive qualitative approach, we examined the extracted data for recurring themes related to teacher retention and consolidated them into ten key factors: (a) administrative support, (b) work conditions (e.g., caseload, paperwork, resources), (c) collegiality, (d) racial battle fatigue (e.g., isolation, microaggressions), (e) mentor support, (f) teacher advancement, (g) educational preparation, (h) induction program support and professional development, (i) school context and location (rural, suburban, urban), and (j) salary.

Figure 1

Process of Identifying the Four Key Drivers of Teacher Retention



Guided by the ten literature-derived factors, we analyzed survey responses to identify four primary drivers of teacher retention. We categorized responses according to these factors and aligned them with the ecosystems model adopted for the study (see Table 1). To determine which factors most strongly influenced teacher retention, we conducted a multi-step statistical analysis that involved testing internal consistency with Cronbach’s alpha and retaining only scales with reliability scores of $\alpha \geq 0.75$. The resulting composite scales revealed educator preparation and mentorship as primary determinants of retention. Responses concerning administrative and district-level supports were combined under administrative and district support, while items addressing racial battle fatigue were consolidated into a broader diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) category. In the final stage, descriptive statistics were used to compare mean scores for the four identified drivers: (a) educator preparation, (b) mentor support, (c) administrative and district support, and (d) DEI, across three participant groups identified as Leavers, Movers, and Stayers. These comparisons revealed systemic conditions most strongly associated with teacher satisfaction and decisions to remain in or leave the profession.

Table 1

Four Driving Factors of Retention and Subquestions

Factor	Questions	Cronbach’s α
Education preparation program	Please rate the following statements: My educator preparation program prepared me to ...	0.928

- Develop a community of learners when my class consists of students from diverse backgrounds.
- Design instruction that matches my students' developmental needs.
- Design a classroom environment that reflects a variety of cultures.
- Use my students' cultural background to help make learning meaningful.
- Use examples that are familiar to students from diverse cultural backgrounds.
- Explain new concepts using examples that are taken from my students' everyday lives.
- Critically examine curriculum to determine whether it enforces negative cultural stereotypes.
- Revise instructional material to include a better representation of cultural groups.
- Design a lesson that shows how other cultural groups have made contributions.
- Teach students about their culture's contributions.
- Work within a variety of educational settings.
- Work with a diverse set of students & families.
- Collaborate well with other educators & staff.

Have you been prepared to maximize your cultural and linguistic assets in the classroom?

What could EPPs do to support teachers during their induction years? Please respond to the following statements

- EPPs should provide ongoing professional development during the induction years.
 - EPPs should conduct on-site visits with graduates during the induction years to hold annual focus group meetings with alums 1, 3, and 5 years after graduation.
 - EPPs should invite alums to speak in classes as guest lecturers and conduct workshops with future teachers.
-

	<p>Please rate how well your EPP, school, or district provided induction & mentoring support.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> EPP supported my transition to teaching. <input type="checkbox"/> School/School district supported my transition to teaching. <input type="checkbox"/> I had resources needed to transition as a new teacher. <input type="checkbox"/> I had time & support I needed to build meaningful relationships as a new teacher. <input type="checkbox"/> My school collaborates effectively with special education services. 	
Mentor support	<p>Did you have an assigned mentor during your induction years?</p> <p>Which best describes the mentor's roles and responsibilities?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Assisted with goal setting <input type="checkbox"/> Identified resources <input type="checkbox"/> Provided motivation and guidance <input type="checkbox"/> Gave emotional support <input type="checkbox"/> Modeled demonstration lessons <input type="checkbox"/> Provided feedback <input type="checkbox"/> Assisted with classroom management and setup <input type="checkbox"/> Helped with clerical responsibilities <input type="checkbox"/> Provided orientation to expectations and protocols <p>How beneficial was it to have a mentor? How would you rate the importance of an effective mentor?</p> <p>Overall, how satisfied were your mentee/mentor experiences during your induction years?</p> <p>I had the time & support I needed to build meaningful mentoring relationships as a new teacher.</p>	0.896
Administrative and district supports	<p>Please rate the following statements in terms of how important they are for staying in a position as a special educator:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Compensation and loan forgiveness <input type="checkbox"/> Administrative support & strong leadership <input type="checkbox"/> Leadership opportunities & decision-making <input type="checkbox"/> Mentorship & relationships with staff <input type="checkbox"/> Professional development & training 	0.777

	<input type="checkbox"/> Instructional resources & materials <input type="checkbox"/> Clearly defined roles & responsibilities <input type="checkbox"/> Positive school culture & school policies <input type="checkbox"/> District level support & policies	
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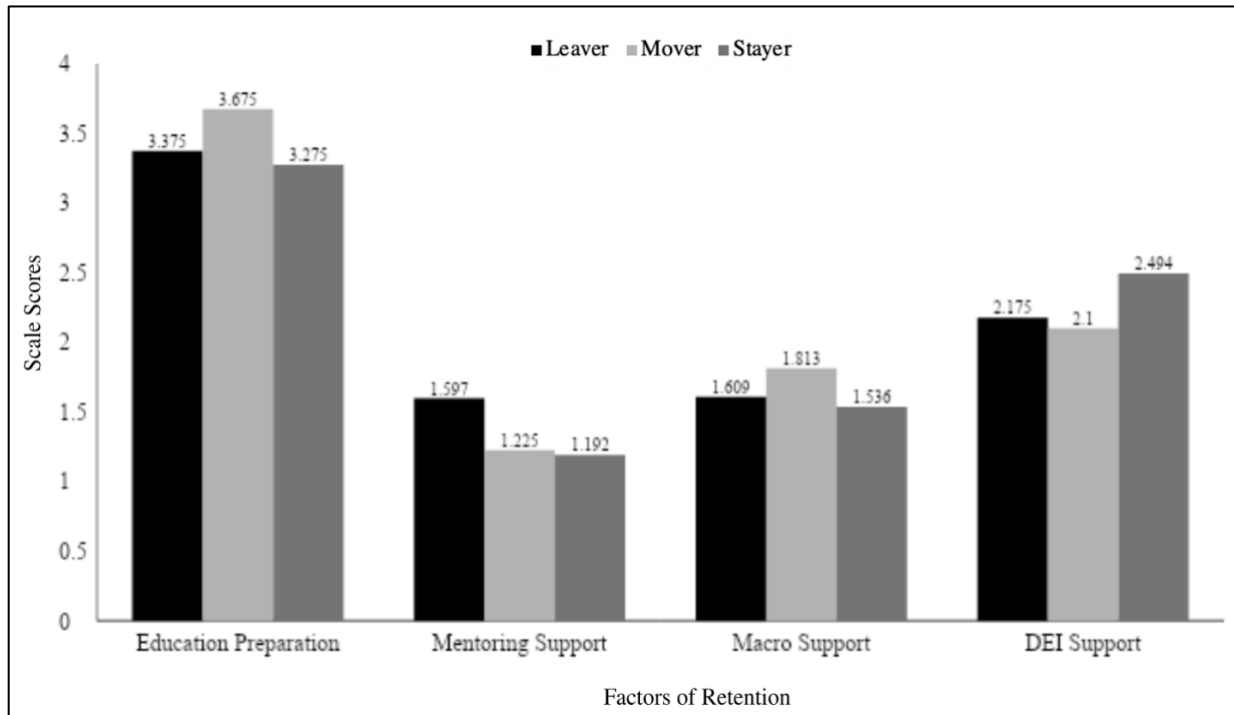
DEI support	<p>Please respond to the following based on your experience with the leadership team at your school: The team has had adequate training in culturally responsive leadership.</p> <p>Have you encountered hurdles embedded in the realities of your teaching context (e.g., curricula, colleagues, administrator expectations) that reflect limiting views?</p> <p>Please rate how strongly you agree or disagree with these statements in your special education school setting ...</p> <input type="checkbox"/> General educators in my school consistently implement culturally responsive instruction. <input type="checkbox"/> Special educators in my school consistently implement culturally responsive instruction. <input type="checkbox"/> The leadership team at my school embraces diversity & equity. <input type="checkbox"/> Special educators in my school embrace diversity & equity. <input type="checkbox"/> The general educators in my school embrace diversity & equity. <input type="checkbox"/> The special educators communicate well with diverse families & communities. <input type="checkbox"/> The students of color at my school feel a sense of belonging. <input type="checkbox"/> I feel a sense of belonging.	0.900
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Findings

Our analysis of the survey data yielded valuable insights into the factors affecting TOC retention. We identified four key drivers that emerged as crucial influences on novice dual-certified TOC decisions to leave, move, or stay in the profession. We then examined the key drivers in relation to participants’ retention status, revealing important patterns and correlations that shed light on the complex dynamics of teacher retention (see Figure 2). These factors, which span various levels of Bronfenbrenner’s ecological model, served as the dependent variables in our analysis.

Figure 2

Scales of by Retention Status



Education Preparation

We identified educator preparation as the first key driver about EPPs (Cronbach’s alpha = 0.928), operationalized as the coursework, field experiences, and training designed to prepare teacher candidates for the educator workforce. The questionnaire included items such as “Please rate the following statement: ‘My educator preparation program prepared me to develop a community of learners when my class consists of students from diverse backgrounds’” and “Please rate how well your EPP, school, or district provided induction and mentoring support.” This driver yielded the highest overall scores, with a range of 2.50 to 3.85 and a mean of 3.40 (*SD*: 0.41) across participants. We did not reverse-code any items. Educator preparation scores were high and did not vary in any meaningful way across retention status, suggesting that the participant’s EPP effectively prepared them for the classroom. Movers had the highest scores (3.675), indicating they felt most prepared by their EPP experiences, yet still chose to leave their initial positions. Leavers and stayers had similar scores (3.375 and 3.275), suggesting that preparation alone may not be enough to keep teachers in their roles long-term.

Our analysis of this key driver revealed how initial teacher preparation influenced educators’ readiness for diverse classrooms. We examined how the participants’ EPP equipped them during their preservice education to navigate culturally and linguistically diverse teaching environments, and how this preparation affected their classroom confidence and competence. The high overall scores implied that participants generally had positive experiences with their EPP, particularly in areas related to culturally responsive teaching and induction support. The findings indicate that EPPs are instrumental in preparing novice dual-certified TOC for diverse classrooms. These results emphasize the impact of preservice training on their confidence and competence during the critical first five years of teaching. Thus, the ability of EPPs to prepare

preservice teachers for real-world challenges may be a determinant in their long-term persistence in the profession.

Mentor Support

We identified mentor support as the second driver (Cronbach's alpha = 0.896), defined as a supportive relationship in which experienced educators provide professional, instructional, and emotional guidance to novice teachers. The questionnaire included items such as "How satisfied were you with the following aspects of your mentee/mentor relationship?" with sub-questions addressing "Level of Experience," "Communication," "Assistance/Support Provided," "Activities/Classroom Strategies Suggested," and "Level of Cultural Responsiveness." Participants' scores averaged 1.43 (*SD*: 0.58), ranging from 0.50 to 2.10. We did not reverse-code any items. Mentoring scores showed mixed results, indicating that a single mentor may not be sufficient to support retention when faced with other, more pressing factors. Although leavers reported slightly higher mentoring support than movers and stayers, all groups rated their experiences poorly (below 2.0). Movers (1.225) and stayers (1.192) had the lowest ratings, suggesting that inadequate mentorship may have contributed to both instability and movement in their careers. The low mentoring scores across all groups indicate that insufficient mentoring may be a systemic issue impacting retention.

Our analysis of this key driver examined the impact of mentorship and professional relationships on novice dual-certified TOC development and retention. We evaluated the quality and availability of mentoring during the induction period, as well as the nature of professional guidance and peer support. The findings of this key driver suggested that mentor support is critical for novice dual-certified TOC growth and sustainability, yet participants reported less favorable mentoring experiences. Low ratings in mentor experience, communication, support, and cultural responsiveness indicated that many of them may not have received adequate or relevant mentorship during their induction years. Therefore, the quality and availability of mentorship may have been inconsistent, possibly leaving participants without the necessary support to navigate the complexities of being a novice teacher and their professional growth.

Administrative and District Support

We identified administrative and district support as the third driver (Cronbach's alpha = 0.777), conceptualized as the structures (e.g., school leadership teams) that influence novice TOC dual-certified experiences. The questionnaire included items such as "Please rate the following statements in terms of how important they are for staying in a position as a special educator: 'Administrative support and strong leadership' and 'Leadership opportunities and decision-making.'" Participants' scores ranged from 1 to 2, with a mean of 1.63 (*SD*: 0.31). We did not reverse-code any items for this driver. Movers had the highest scores (1.813), meaning that with macro-level supports in place, even teachers who are unhappy with their current placement remain in the field, albeit potentially moving to another setting. Leavers (1.609) and stayers (1.536) had similar low scores, suggesting that lack of administrative and district support is a key factor in attrition. The fact that stayers did not rate this driver much higher than leavers indicates that even those who stayed in the profession may not feel adequately supported by their schools or districts.

Our analysis of this key driver investigated the broader administrative and institutional backing that sustains novice dually TOC. The relatively low mean score indicates that participants perceived these supports as limited or inconsistent, potentially contributing to

workplace dissatisfaction. Additionally, participants highlighted mentorship, leadership opportunities, and inclusion in decision-making as essential aspects of administrative and district support that influenced their experiences. The findings from this key driver indicate that administrative and district-level support significantly influence novice TOC's job satisfaction and risk of burnout. Moreover, differences in the effectiveness and accessibility of these supports may affect their long-term retention in the profession.

Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Support

We identified DEI as the fourth driver (Cronbach's alpha = 0.900), described as the policies and practices enacted by schools and districts that foster representation, fairness, and inclusion for novice dual-certified TOC. The questionnaire included items such as "Please respond to the following based on your experience with the leadership team at your school: The team has had adequate training in culturally responsive leadership" and "Have you encountered hurdles embedded in the realities of your teaching context (e.g., curricula, colleagues, administrator expectations) that reflect limiting views?" Participants' scores ranged from 0.9 to 3.4, with a mean of 2.31 (*SD*: 0.31). We reverse-coded one item: "Have you encountered hurdles embedded in the realities of your teaching context (e.g., curricula, colleagues, administrator expectations) that reflect limiting views?" Stayers had the highest DEI support scores (2.494), suggesting that stronger DEI efforts in schools are associated with higher retention. Leavers (2.175) and movers (2.1) had lower DEI scores, implying that a lack of DEI support may contribute to teacher transitions and attrition. Schools with stronger DEI practices may foster a more inclusive environment, which can contribute to higher retention rates among novice dual-certified TOC.

Our analysis of this key element assessed how cultural competencies, systemic equity, and inclusion efforts within the educational environment influenced novice dual-certified TOC's experiences. We examined the extent to which schools and districts promoted and practiced DEI principles, including addressing systemic racism, fostering inclusive curricula, and supporting diverse student populations. Participants reported mixed experiences, with some describing supportive environments while others encountered challenges such as inadequate culturally responsive leadership training and systemic barriers within their teaching contexts. These results highlight the varying levels of DEI implementation across schools and districts, implying novice dual-certified TOC's workplace experiences are influenced by the extent to which DEI principles are actively promoted and practiced.

Discussion

Our findings affirm the extant literature on teacher retention, provide additional depth and complexity to this phenomenon, and highlight some important differences regarding the unique factors influencing novice dual-certified TOC decisions to leave, move, or stay in the field. Using Bronfenbrenner's ecological model, we were able to (a) examine participants' experiences within their unique school environments, including relationships with students, colleagues, and administrators, as well as access to resources, lesson adaptation, and collaboration with staff at the micro and mesosystem levels; (b) assess how larger societal structures and cultural norms at the macrosystem level, including systemic racism, educational policies, and societal attitudes toward diversity in education, impacted their experiences; and (c) explore how their experiences were influenced by and connected to broader institutional factors, such as school district policies, professional development opportunities, and community

involvement at the exosystem level to understand their experiences and retention in the field. Our analysis underscores that novice dual-certified TOC encounter systemic and professional barriers that influence their early career trajectories.

Educator Preparation

At the microsystem level, participants' EPP equipped them with foundational knowledge and skills while also linking them to mesosystem supports in academic and professional contexts. Our findings align with prior research indicating that EPPs, particularly those at HBCUs, play a critical role in competency-building and culturally responsive preparation (e.g., Bettini et al., 2021; Billingsley & Bettini, 2019; Roegman et al., 2017). However, retention outcomes revealed that preparation alone does not overcome systemic barriers, including inequitable workplace conditions, limited mentorship, and restricted leadership opportunities, which were especially challenging for dual-certified novice TOC. Participants who felt most prepared by their EPPs were more often movers, indicating that strong preparation may give teachers the confidence to seek better aligned opportunities instead of remaining in unsupportive roles or schools.

Mentor Support

Mentorship represented a critical direct interaction within the microsystem level, yet our findings revealed a complex relationship between the participants' experiences and retention. Prior research highlights the importance of strong mentoring relationships for novice teachers, particularly when mentors share their racial or cultural identity and can provide content expertise (e.g., Bettini et al., 2021; Billingsley & Bettini, 2019; Coffey & Farinde-Wu, 2016; Scott, 2020), and EPPs based at HBCUs are well positioned to instill the value of culturally responsive support. In this study, however, more than half of the participants were paired with White mentors, and many did not have mentors within special education, which may have influenced how support was perceived and applied. Although participants reported moderately positive experiences, only a minority rated their mentorship as highly beneficial, and those with the most positive ratings often became leavers, suggesting that mentorship alone did not determine retention. Instead, mentorship appeared to interact with mesosystem and exosystem factors such as administrative support, district policies, and workplace conditions that shaped participants' long-term career decisions. Strengthening mentor-mentee relationships within schools and districts, particularly through intentional pairing of novice dual-certified TOC with experienced educators who possess subject-matter expertise and engage in culturally responsive practices, may help ensure that mentorship more effectively supports TOC in their early careers.

Administrative and District Support

Support from administrators and district leadership represented a crucial component of the macrosystem that influences novice dual-certified TOC retention. Our findings suggest that novice teachers experience increased stability when macrosystem supports are reinforced through exosystem practices like access to administrators, professional development, and decision-making opportunities (Billingsley & Bettini, 2019; Bettini et al., 2020; Farinde-Wu & Fitchett, 2018). Participants who placed the greatest importance on these macro level supports were primarily movers, seeking better-aligned positions rather than leaving the profession altogether, consistent with prior research showing that inadequate support often results in school transfers rather than full attrition (Farinde et al., 2016). Leavers in our study reported weaker perceptions of exosystem supports, while stayers described somewhat stronger backing. Amid a

teaching profession that remains majority White (Data USA, n.d.; de Brey et al., 2021), novice TOC face compounded challenges, echoing Scott's (2020) findings on racial battle fatigue and early career departures among Black special educators. Together, these results indicate that exosystem supports frame teachers' immediate environment, whereas macrosystem structures set the broader policy and cultural context in which those conditions are experienced.

Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Support

Stronger DEI support was closely linked to higher retention rates, reflecting macrosystem influences (i.e., policies, values, ideologies, and systemic norms) on the importance of inclusive school environments in sustaining a diverse educator workforce. While previous studies on TOC (Farinde et al., 2016; Scott, 2020) have primarily used qualitative case studies to examine racialized experiences, the quantitative nature of this study strengthens the empirical connection between DEI practices and novice TOC retention. The strongest correlation between variables and retention outcomes was tied to participants' perceptions of how well their schools supported racial DEI. Stayers reported more favorable perceptions of DEI practices, such as culturally responsive pedagogy, engagement with diverse families, and affirming school cultures, while leavers were more likely to describe limited DEI support, suggesting that the absence of inclusive policies and practices contributes to early career departures. These findings illustrate how exosystem factors, such as school and district policies and professional development offerings, shape teachers' day-to-day contexts, while macrosystem set the conditions for whether those local policies are affirming or exclusionary.

The findings also align with Bettini et al. (2021) and Roegman et al. (2017), who emphasized the role of equitable workplace conditions and culturally affirming leadership in retention, as well as Farinde-Wu and Fitchett (2018), who confirmed the positive influence of diverse leadership representation. In a context where DEI initiatives face increasing scrutiny and reduction at the macrosystem level (Green, 2024; Dhanani et al., 2024; Wong & Ma, 2025), these findings validate the potential consequences of limiting these efforts. Effective DEI policies across various institutional levels may help create inclusive environments where novice dual-certified TOC feel valued and supported, while diminishing commitments to these policies and practices poses risks to sustaining a diverse educator workforce.

Limitations

Several limitations warrant consideration in the research design and findings. First, while the use of quantitative methodology was effective for identifying patterns, it limited a deeper understanding of novice dual-certified TOC's personal experiences and decision-making processes. Incorporating the qualitative data (e.g., interviews or focus groups) from the larger study could have provided richer insights into their nuanced perspectives, motivations, and challenges that quantitative measures alone may overlook. Additionally, the small sample size (N=17) drawn from a single HBCU restricts the generalizability of findings to broader populations (Lakens, 2022). Although this limitation reduces external validity, it also serves as a strength. Few studies have focused on this issue, making our findings a valuable contribution to this underexplored area.

Another limitation is researcher positionality. Due to personal associations between researchers and participants, there was a potential for response and selection bias. Participants may have consciously or subconsciously reported feeling well-prepared due to their familiarity

with the researchers. Therefore, the familiarity may have influenced participants' responses, limiting the objectivity and generalizability of the findings.

Further, the survey instrument had limitations in capturing microsystem influences on teacher retention. For example, the survey did not include questions on the participants' family dynamics (e.g., emotional support, cultural expectations, or financial pressures), parent or family partnerships, or teacher-student relationships, all of which could have yielded deeper insights into support systems and barriers. Finally, limitations also exist at the macrosystem level. Our survey did not account for broader sociocultural influences such as religion and community-based organizations, which could significantly impact teachers' decisions to stay, leave, or move within the profession—providing an opportunity for future studies to expand on this research.

Implications

As our data illustrate, the pipeline approach to diversifying the teacher workforce by recruiting and graduating candidates from quality EPPs is insufficient to guarantee the success and retention of novice dual-certified TOC once they enter the profession. Our findings suggest that retaining novice dual-certified TOC may require implementing robust supports across multiple levels of the education ecosystem. The study results point to several implications across our four key drivers to strengthen retention.

Educator Preparation Programs

Our examination of educator preparation reveals several critical implications for EPP reform. Given that novice dual-certified TOC described persistent challenges including daily cultural insensitivity, disrespect for diverse communities served, curriculum and pedagogy centered on dominant narratives, and exclusionary practices, EPPs must fundamentally transform their approach to preparing future TOC for unwelcoming and oppressive educational systems that can erode professional commitments. This transformation is both urgent and achievable, as evidenced by our finding that novice dual-certified TOC who strongly endorsed their EPP preparation were more likely to move positions within the field rather than leave entirely, demonstrating the retention benefits of comprehensive preparation. Therefore, EPPs should expand their curricula beyond traditional teaching skills by acknowledging and demonstrating to preservice candidates how schools function as microcosms of a larger society that has historically supported race-based privilege through systemic inequities, exposing students to non-Eurocentric ideologies within educational frameworks to signal that diverse cultural perspectives are valued, and providing concrete tools for creating social and structural change. Creating well-designed, developmentally appropriate, anti-racist EPP curricula that explicitly connect systemic inequities and race-based privilege to student outcomes is foundational to comprehensive transformation (Bennett et al., 2017; Williams, 2021).

Schools and Districts

The impact of mentoring on novice TOC retention has critical implications for practice and policy at the microsystem, mesosystem, and exosystem levels. Novice dual-certified TOC considered their mentorship experiences inadequate, inconsistent, and often misaligned due to mismatched mentor-mentee pairings, limited subject-specific guidance, and the absence of systemic supports across their schools and districts. Schools and districts should intentionally assign mentors who reflect their racial and cultural backgrounds, when possible, and have relevant teaching experience to better support novice TOC. Additionally, districts should create

leadership pathways for novice TOC to build a stronger mentor pipeline, while principals must ensure mentors have the time and resources to provide meaningful support. Since racial/ethnic identity alignment is not always feasible in the mentee-mentor partnership, culturally responsive mentor training can improve mentor-mentee relationships and enhance TOC retention efforts. Strengthening mentorship structures supports novice TOC while also contributing to long-term approaches for sustaining a diverse education workforce.

Furthermore, support from administrators and district leadership emerged as an important element in novice dual-certified TOC retention, as participants emphasized the importance of access to professional development, inclusive decision-making, and supportive workplace conditions. Yet, many lacked strong administrative support and meaningful leadership opportunities, contributing to instability in their early careers. Schools and districts should look beyond preparation and strengthen the structures novice TOC encounter once they enter the profession to enhance retention. Expanding leadership pathways, increasing teacher participation in decision-making, and strengthening mentorship programs are concrete ways schools and districts can create more supportive environments. Improving these supports across ecosystem levels can improve workplace conditions and provide novice TOC with the resources needed to succeed and advance within the profession.

Lastly, with recent measures at the state and federal levels to roll back and restrict programs, policies, and pedagogy that promote DEI in higher education, our education system is at increasing risk of losing ground on recruiting and retaining TOC and potentially sacrificing student outcomes in the process (Farinde-Wu et al., 2020; Ginsberg, 2025; Jackson, 2025; Redding, 2019; Sayman, 2025). This underlines the need for policy reforms at the school and district levels to improve the teaching experience of novice TOC to ensure retention. Policies must go beyond DEI rhetoric and address school racial climate to ensure novice TOC feel a sense of belonging. Schools should implement policies that promote cultural competency training, equitable leadership opportunities, and structured support systems for novice TOC. Moreover, at the district level, policies should require transparent tracking of staff and leadership diversity and establish confidential mechanisms for gathering novice TOC feedback. Additionally, culturally responsive training in classroom management and family engagement should be mandated to reduce the burden on novice TOC as cultural brokers. Establishing measurable DEI benchmarks and regular policy evaluations will be critical for sustaining progress in TOC retention.

Future Research

Novice TOC who experience strong school (microsystem & mesosystem) and district (exosystem) support are more likely to transition within the field rather than leave the profession entirely. Future research should explore how EPP provides explicit objectives and goals across program courses and field-based internships to develop dispositions, knowledge, and skills to work equitably with culturally different communities, families and students to promote social and structural change during the induction years. Future research should explore how administrative leadership, professional development, workload expectations, and collaboration contribute to long-term retention. Examining exosystem-level supports (e.g., leadership pathways, advancement opportunities) alongside microsystem and mesosystem supports (e.g., workload management, access to resources, peer collaboration) could provide greater clarity into the conditions necessary for sustained engagement in the profession.

Mentorship continues to be essential for teacher retention, yet racial/ethnic identity alignment between mentors and mentees remains an underresearched area. Future research should examine how shared identity characteristics, such as race, gender, and area of expertise, impact job satisfaction and career commitment. Additionally, investigating the effectiveness of culturally responsive mentorship training could provide insight into best practices for supporting novice TOC when mentor-mentee identities do not align. Understanding how mentorship structures contribute to long-term retention may help districts strengthen support systems for new teachers.

While this study emphasizes the role of DEI in teacher retention, further research should examine how belonging (DEIB) and accessibility (DEIA) contributes to sustained engagement and professional growth for novice TOC. Exploring how workplace culture, leadership practices, inclusive policies, and accessibility measures (e.g., access to facilities, technology, and professional supports) influence retention could provide informative findings for improving school environments. Employing mixed-methods approaches and larger sample sizes would allow for greater insight into understanding how DEIB or DEIA initiatives impact teacher retention and overall job satisfaction.

Conclusion

Given our findings and those of related studies (e.g., Billingsley & Bettini, 2019; Bettini et al., 2021; Scott et al., 2021), the way forward is clear: the retention of novice dual-certified TOC depends on well-developed educator preparation and school, district, state, and federal-level policies and practices that affirm diversity while fostering a sense of belonging for all educators, students, and families. Beyond recruitment, sustained efforts are needed to create supportive environments through mentorship, leadership opportunities, and structural supports that address workload and professional development needs. Schools and districts must move beyond rhetoric to actionable, evidence-based strategies that reduce barriers for novice dual-certified TOC and ensure they have the resources and supports necessary to stay within the profession.

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