

Black and female principal candidates more likely to experience delayed and denied promotions

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Black and female assistant principals are systematically delayed and denied promotion to principal, compared to their White or male

counterparts, despite having equivalent qualifications and more experience on average, according to a new study. The findings were published in June in *AERA Open*, a peer-reviewed, open access journal of the American Educational Research Association.

For their study, authors Lauren Bailes at the University of Delaware and Sarah Guthery at Texas A&M University—Commerce assessed the probability of and time to promotion for 4,689 assistant principals in Texas from 2001 to 2017, using data from the Texas Education Agency. The authors identified assistant principals serving in their first year and analyzed their progress to promotion, if it occurred. While principal promotion processes vary by district, assistant principals in the study had earned a master's degree and acquired a principal's license, which are the minimal credentials needed to qualify for promotion to principal in Texas.

Bailes and Guthery found that after holding education, experience, school level, and school location constant, Black assistant principals were 18 percent less likely to be promoted than White candidates who were equally qualified. When the Black candidates were promoted, their average time to promotion was 5.27 years, while the average wait time for their White peers was 4.67 years, leaving a 0.6-year gap attributable to race.

The authors found a difference in promotion by gender when they looked specifically at high school principalships. While women comprised half of high school assistant principals—and nearly two-thirds of all assistant principals—in Texas, women were 5 to 7 percent less likely to be promoted into high school principalships than men. As women gained more years of experience as assistant principals, their likelihood of promotion, in fact, decreased relative to their male peers. Women who did become high school principals waited longer, spending 5.62 years as an assistant principal versus 4.94 years for men, leaving a

0.68-year gender gap.

"Even though more diversity in the teacher and principal workforce has been shown to improve teacher retention and student outcomes, our findings indicate that there are still systematic race- and gender-based inequities within the profession," said Guthery, an assistant professor of education at Texas A&M University-Commerce. "This is despite a teacher corps that is overwhelmingly female and becoming more racially diverse."

While prior research has identified gaps in promotions at the top levels of education leadership, such as principals and superintendents, Bailes and Guthery identified inequities much earlier in the education leadership pipeline by focusing on time to and probability of promotions once an individual has self-selected into the leadership track.

The authors found that women and Blacks had more years of experience even before becoming assistant principals. Men who became high school assistant principals had 1.25 years less experience on average than women who entered high school principalships. In elementary and middle schools, the gender gap was even larger, mounting to 1.62 years.

"At every point of promotion, the pool of candidates is whiter and more male, especially compared to the teacher workforce," said Guthery. "We find that diversity exists in the pipeline, but the pipeline tends to squeeze out women and Blacks much earlier than studies of school leadership usually capture."

Bailes and Guthery also examined the differences between women's promotions across elementary, middle, and high schools to identify the ways in which women are promoted within education careers. They found that even when women worked as assistant principals in high schools for a longer time and had more career experience than their [male](#)

[counterparts](#), they were more likely to be promoted to principal in elementary schools than in high schools. This had implications for their future opportunities in higher levels of leadership, according to the authors.

"Because a high school principalship is so often viewed as requisite for district leadership, [women](#) who lead elementary schools are less likely to be tapped for superintendentcies and other district leadership positions," said Bailes, an assistant professor at the University of Delaware.

The authors note that considering the enormous influence that principals exert on teachers and students, the systematic non-promotion of Black principal candidates imposes consequences for Black teachers and students throughout the entire school system.

"Because principals and district leaders are more likely to identify educators of their own race for promotion, the underrepresentation of minority groups is likely to ripple throughout schools and districts," said Bailes. "Prior research also shows that hiring more Black principals can help close the achievement gaps between White and non-White students nationally."

According to the authors, the patterns of disparities in leadership identified in their study suggest that state and district policymakers should consider establishing metrics of success within their school systems that rate equity in promotion for equivalently qualified individuals who aspire to [school](#) leadership.

"Administrators, such as principals and district leaders, need to identify and actively nurture diversity in all levels of [leadership](#)," Bailes said. "It is crucial that districts monitor inequities in their [promotion](#) practices."

More information: Lauren P. Bailes et al, Held Down and Held Back:

Systematically Delayed Principal Promotions by Race and Gender,
AERA Open (2020). [DOI: 10.1177/2332858420929298](https://doi.org/10.1177/2332858420929298)

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