

White math teachers treat students differently in predominantly black schools

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White math teachers in predominantly black middle schools are more likely to respond negatively to students' behavioral or academic issues—and this may have long-term negative consequences for student performance, according to a Rutgers-led study that highlights the need to recruit more black teachers.

The study, published this month in *Harvard Educational Review*, observed video data collected from 2009-2011 of 25 mathematics classrooms in [middle schools](#) that were either predominantly white or black.

White teachers in predominantly black schools were more likely than white teachers in predominantly white schools, or black teachers in predominantly black schools, to respond in negative ways to [student](#) behavior, emotions and ability. For example, their response to behavioral issues was more likely to include multiple, intense back-and-forth exchanges more apt to escalate problems than solve them.

"The implications for black student learning are clear: Black students will likely continue to experience impoverished teacher-student relationships with the overrepresentation of white teachers. This, in turn, will harm their [academic achievement](#)," said Dan Battey, lead author of the study and an associate professor of elementary mathematics education at Rutgers University-New Brunswick's Graduate School of Education.

"The need for targeted recruitment of [black teachers](#) is as critical as ever—as is the need to train teachers of all backgrounds to handle conflicts in ways that encourage student success without showing racial bias. This can include learning to avoid drawing the class' attention to an individual student's behavioral issues, and learning not to unnecessarily escalate conflicts with threats to call home or send a student to the principal. Instead, they can try to understand the cause of

the behavioral issue, handle it privately with the student, and approach the student with warmth," Battey said.

Battey noted that educators and policymakers focus on mathematics content but often forget relational or emotional aspects of helping students excel in math—even though many adults remember their math classes with strong positive or negative emotions.

More information: DAN BATTEY et al, Racial (Mis)Match in Middle School Mathematics Classrooms: Relational Interactions as a Racialized Mechanism, *Harvard Educational Review* (2019). [DOI: 10.17763/1943-5045-88.4.455](https://doi.org/10.17763/1943-5045-88.4.455)

Provided by Rutgers University

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