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QUALIFIED TEACHERS IN SHORTER SUPPLY IN CITIES, EDUCATION REPORT SAYS

Black public-school students, especially in metro areas, less likely than peers of having permanently certified teachers

By Tawnell D. Hobbs and Melissa Korn
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Public-school students in cities are less likely than their suburban counterparts to have qualified teachers with permanent certifications in math and reading – and the levels of such expertise have continued to drop, according to a new federal report.

Black students, especially those in metro areas, fared worse than other racial groups in their likelihood of having qualified teachers, according to the National Center for Education Statistics report released this month. The report compares 2013 and 2015 figures for students in fourth and eighth grades.

Fourth grade is considered a crucial stage in elementary education because it prepares students for more complex and abstract problem-solving in middle school.

Overall, the percentage of fourth-grade students who had math teachers with permanent certifications dropped to 91.9 percent from 93.4 percent nationwide, from 2013 to 2015.

Nationally, just over 86 percent of city-based fourth-grade black students had math teachers with permanent teaching certificates in 2015, down from 91.6 percent in 2013, according to the federal data.

Among white city students, that figure fell to 92.5 percent from 94.9 percent and Hispanic city students saw a drop to 90 percent from 93.3 percent.

Teachers without permanent certification typically hold temporary authorization, but need to complete additional coursework or student teaching.

The drop could be due to a teacher shortage in high-needs areas such as science, math, special education and bilingual education, said James Duke Laney, professor and department chair of Teacher Education and Administration at the University of North Texas.

“They’re having to fill the positions, because of the teacher shortage, with others that are not qualified,” he said.

The numbers can vary widely by jurisdiction. For example, just about 64 percent of fourth-grade black students had certified math teachers in Cleveland 2015, while in Austin, Texas, nearly 99 percent did.

For reading, 87.7 percent of black fourth-graders in city public schools had teachers with permanent certification in 2015, down from 91.4 percent in 2013.

Across all ethnicities, 91.2 percent of city students had reading teachers with permanent certification in 2015, compared with 93.2 percent two years earlier.

Eighth-grade black students in city schools were even less likely than their younger counterparts to have teachers with permanent certifications.

School districts and the federal government in recent years have focused on growing and recruiting highly qualified teachers.

In 2012, the U.S. Department of Education announced the award of nearly \$24.6 million for grants to boost student achievement by improving teacher and administrator effectiveness.

In 2009, the Education Department announced the award of \$43 million in grants to improve instruction in struggling schools, in part by reforming traditional university teacher preparation and teacher residency programs.