

# Education Students and Diversity: A Review of New Evidence

A SUPPLEMENT TO  
*COLLEGES OF EDUCATION: A NATIONAL PORTRAIT*

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# Introduction

One of the most striking findings of AACTE's signature report, *Colleges of Education: A National Portrait*, is the lack of diversity among education students, particularly at the bachelor's and master's levels that together account for 80% of all degrees and certificates conferred in education in the United States. The *National Portrait* identified the field of education as one of the least diverse major fields in higher education at those key levels.

This issue brief takes advantage of a newly released U.S. Department of Education survey to examine the characteristics of students working toward bachelor's and master's degrees in education, to compare these students to the general student population, and to identify key differences by race/ethnicity. This new data source, the National Postsecondary Student Aid Study: 2015-16 (NPSAS), encompasses 99,000 undergraduate and 23,000 graduate students, a survey population large enough to isolate education majors.<sup>1</sup>

These data provide valuable insights for schools, colleges, and departments of education, and may prompt leaders in these programs to conduct similar analyses of their own student populations.

## ABOUT AACTE: The American Association of Teacher Education

AACTE is a national alliance of educator preparation programs dedicated to high-quality, evidence-based preparation that assures educators are profession-ready as they enter the classroom. Nearly 800 member institutions include public and private colleges and universities in every state, the District of Columbia, the Virgin Islands, and Guam. Through advocacy and capacity building, AACTE promotes innovative and effective practices that strengthen educator preparation.

AACTE members are committed to increasing the diversity of their faculty and the educators they prepare so that they more accurately reflect the diversity within PK-12 schools. As AACTE looks ahead to the future, this report documents significant challenges that all schools, colleges, and departments of education around the country will face as they prepare professionals for increasingly diverse and complex educational environments. AACTE believes this issue brief will assist deans and program chairs as they navigate and manage an ever-changing educator preparation landscape. AACTE's goal as an association is to build a portfolio of programs, products, and services to help educator preparation leaders thrive in this dynamic environment, and this issue brief is an installment in that growing portfolio.

Learn more at [www.aacte.org](http://www.aacte.org)

## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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## Section 1

### BACHELOR'S DEGREE STUDENTS

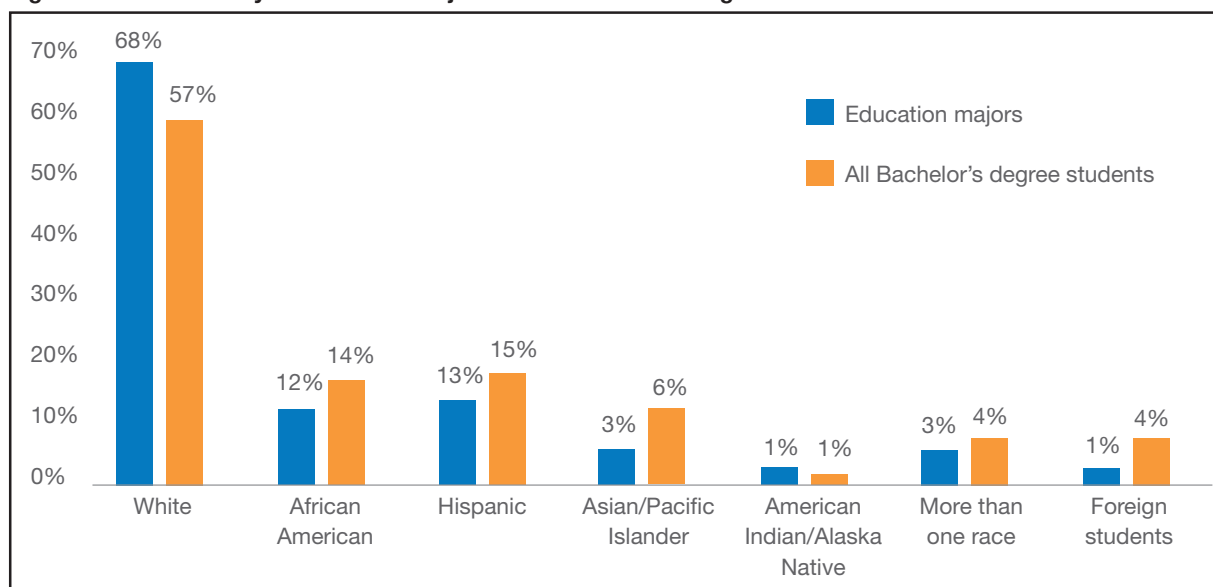
The vast majority of students earning bachelor's degrees in education are preparing to become PK-12 teachers. However, majoring in education and preparing to become a teacher are not synonymous; students majoring in other subjects can and do complete programs to become teachers. Nonetheless, three out of four students completing educator preparation programs have majored in education, so this paper's focus on education majors does provide a valuable window into the population of students who will teach America's young people.



## PERSONAL CHARACTERISTICS AND FAMILY CIRCUMSTANCES

As described in the *National Portrait*, education is one of the least diverse fields at the bachelor's degree level. **Figure 1** shows that education majors are more likely to be White and less likely to come from any other racial/ethnic group than all bachelor's degree students generally, with the exception of American Indian and Alaska Native students.<sup>ii</sup>

**Figure 1. Race/ethnicity of education majors and all bachelor's degree students**



Women constitute three out of four education students, with no significant variation among the largest racial/ethnic groups. However, it is worth noting that, in the general student population, women are also the majority and that the size of that majority varies considerably by student race/ethnicity, ranging from 52% female among Asian/Pacific Islander students to 61% female among African American students. So the extent to which men are underrepresented in the field of education varies depending on their presence in the general student population.

Education students are also younger than bachelor's degree students generally and more likely to be considered financially dependent on their parents. Seventy-three percent of all education students are age 23 or younger, compared with 69% of all bachelor's degree students. Similarly, 65% of all education students are considered dependent for financial aid purposes (meaning that they are age 23 or younger, are unmarried and do not have

children or other dependents), compared with 63% of all bachelor's degree students. However, there is considerable variation in dependency status among education students by race/ethnicity, as illustrated in **Figure 2** on page 6.<sup>iii</sup>

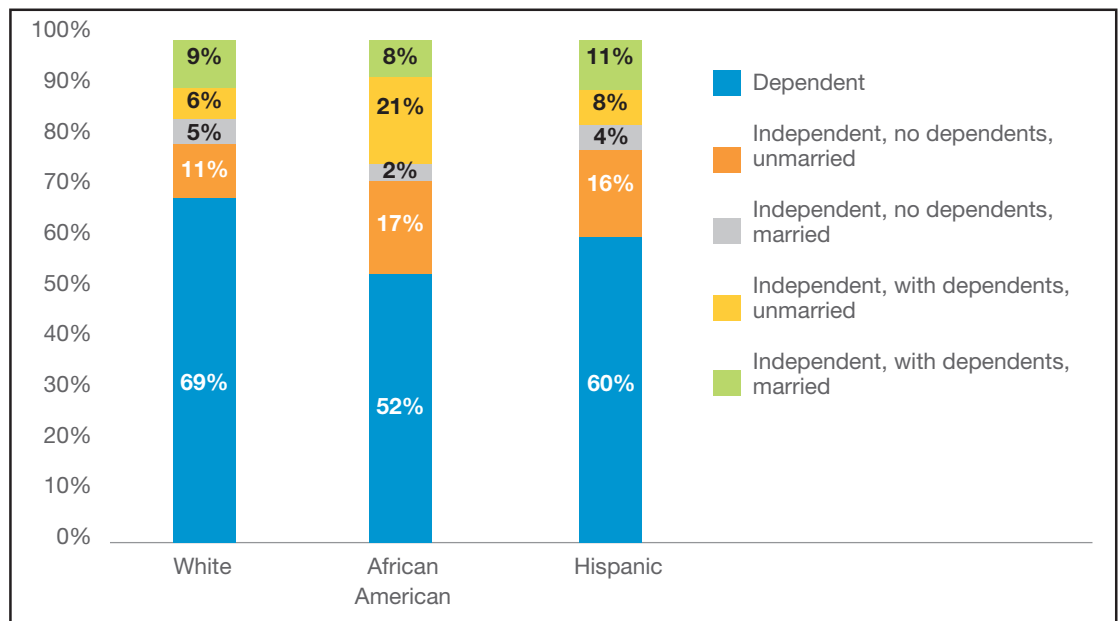
African Americans are far less likely to be dependent students than either their White or Hispanic counterparts, and are far more likely to be single parents. Hispanic and African American students also are more likely than White students to be independent students who are unmarried and have no dependents.

The share of education students who have children ranges from 15% among White students to nearly 30% among African Americans. Among those education students who are parents, almost half have at least one child aged 4 or younger. The proportion of these parents who have young children ranged from 42% among White students to 58% among Hispanic students. While teaching is

# Bachelor's Degree Students

traditionally regarded as a profession that is friendly to working parents, raising young children while doing the academic and clinical work necessary to become a teacher presents special challenges. This is, of course, particularly true for those students who are single parents, making the dedication and accomplishments of those individuals all the more remarkable.

**Figure 2. Education student dependency and marital status by race/ethnicity**



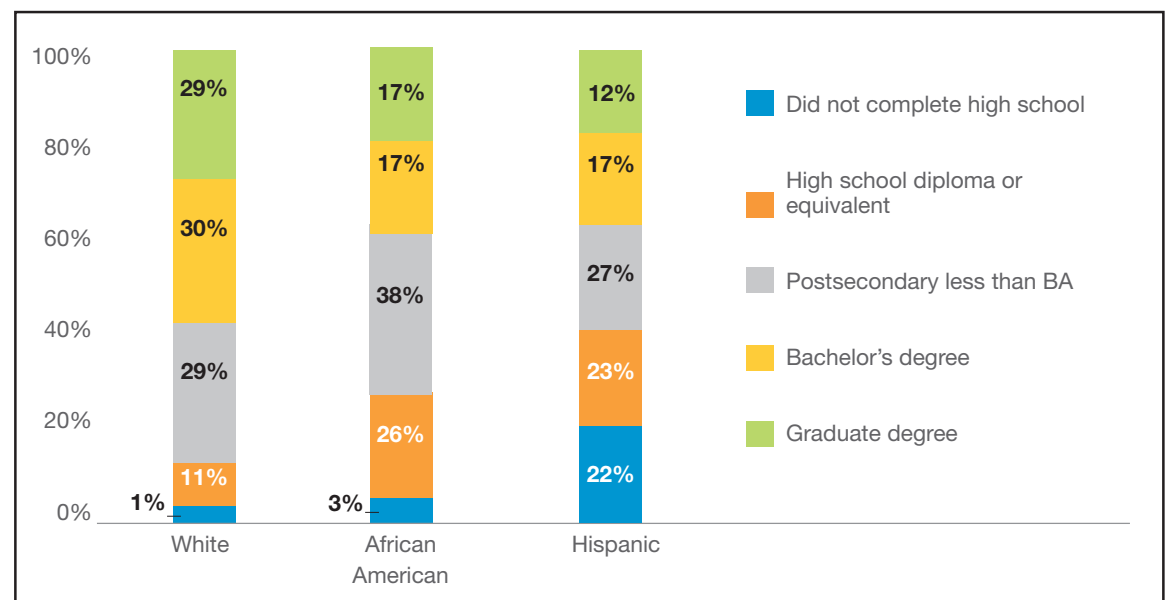
## PARENTAL EDUCATION AND FINANCIAL STATUS

The family background of education students varies considerably by race/ethnicity, as illustrated in **Figure 3**. Most notably, 22% of Hispanic education students have parents who did not complete high school and 45% are first-generation college students.

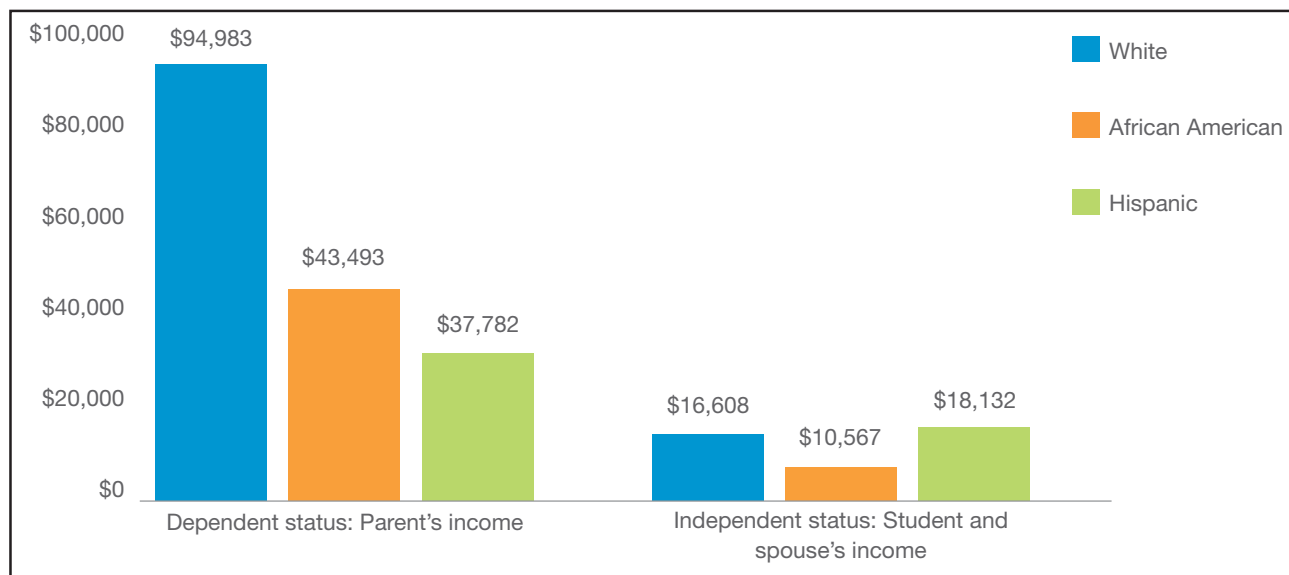
In contrast, only 12% of White students are first-generation college students, and only 1% have parents who did not complete high school. The proportion of Hispanic education majors whose parents did not complete high school is higher than the general population of

Hispanic bachelor's degree students (22% versus 14%), suggesting that working in education may have a special appeal to students whose parents were unable to complete their education.

**Figure 3. Education students' highest level of parental education by race/ethnicity**



**Figure 4. Median annual income of education students by race/ethnicity**

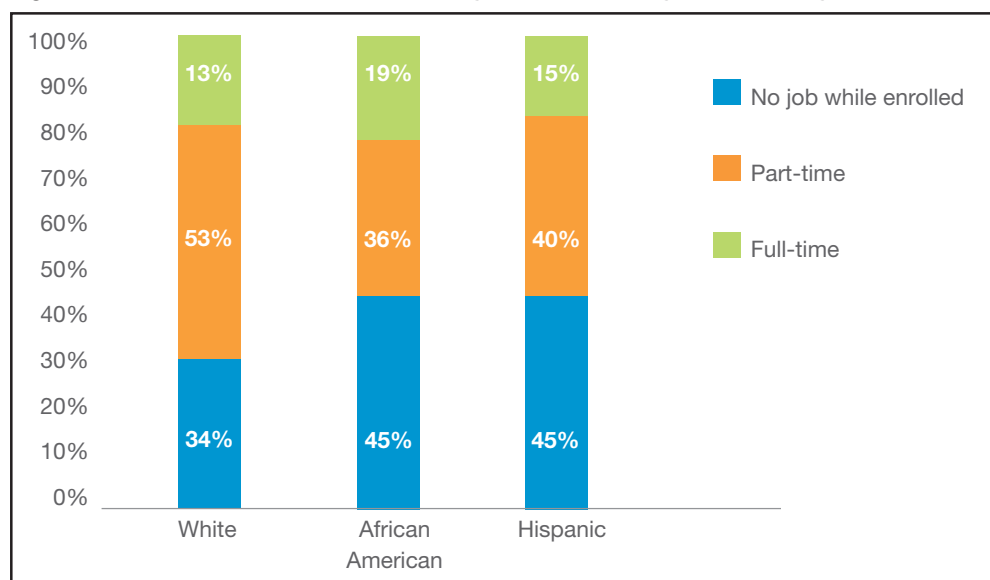


Reflecting their parents' differing levels of educational attainment, dependent students' median family income varies dramatically—with White education students benefiting from median parental income that is more than double the median income of their African American and Hispanic peers (see **Figure 4**). Among independent students, differences by race/ethnicity are not nearly as large. Hispanic independent students have the highest median income of the three groups examined, most likely because they are more likely to be married than either White or African American students (see **Figure 2**).

## EMPLOYMENT AND ATTENDANCE

Despite the significant differences in their financial circumstances, White education majors are more likely to work part-time while enrolled than either their African American or Hispanic peers (see **Figure 5**). This may be at least somewhat reflective of the fact that White students are less likely to have family responsibilities. It is notable that almost one in five African American education students work full-time while enrolled.

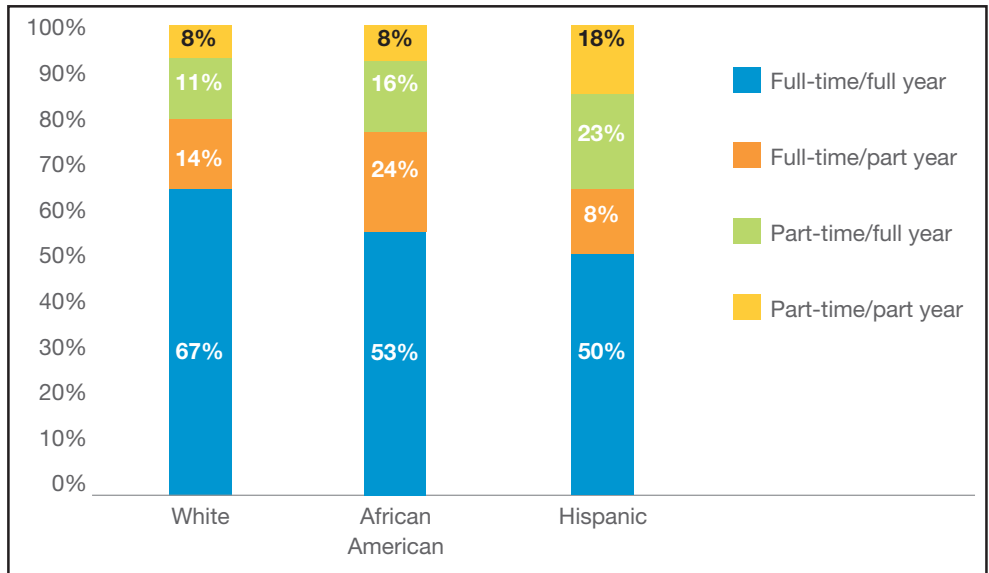
**Figure 5. Education students' work intensity while enrolled by race/ethnicity**



# Bachelor's Degree Students

Despite being more likely to work, White education students are also more likely to attend full-time and for the full academic year than either African American or Hispanic students. As shown in **Figure 6**, two-thirds of White students attend full-time/full year compared to half of African American and Hispanic students. One quarter of African American students attend full-time but for only part of the academic year. Hispanic students are most likely to attend part-time; 42% attend part-time and almost one in four attend college for only part of the academic year.

**Figure 6. Attendance of education students by race/ethnicity**



Two plausible explanations for these findings are 1) that African American and Hispanic students are more likely than White students to have family obligations that preclude them from attending full-time and 2) that cost may impede African American and Hispanic students from attending full-time.

**Table 1. Attendance Pattern of Education Students by Employment and Race/Ethnicity <sup>iv</sup>**

	Attendance Pattern		
	Full-time/Full Year	Full-time/Part Year	Part-time/Full or Part Year
<b>White Students</b>			
Do not work	67%	12%	21%
Work part-time	73%	12%	15%
Work full-time	57%	18%	25%
<b>African American Students</b>			
Do not work	52%	25%	22%
Work part-time	58%	19%	23%
Work full-time	46%	28%	25%
<b>Hispanic Students</b>			
Do not work	56%	5%	39%
Work part-time	54%	8%	38%
Work full-time	35%	15%	50%

Even when controlling for work, there are significant differences in attendance by race-ethnicity. For example, White education students who work full-time are as likely to attend college full-time as Hispanic students who do not work at all and are more likely to attend college full-time than African American students who do not work (see **Table 1**). These findings suggest that lack of family resources may impede African American and Hispanic students from attending college full-time and that African American and Hispanic students have family or other obligations that also impede their ability to attend college full-time.



## SUMMARY AND IMPLICATIONS

In summary, students pursuing bachelor's degrees in education are less diverse than the bachelor's degree population as a whole and there are significant differences among education students by race and ethnicity. The most striking findings include the following:

- White students are more likely than African American and Hispanic students to be considered dependent because they are aged 23 or younger, are unmarried, and do not have children. Half of African American students and 40% of Hispanic students are considered independent because they are age 24 or older, are married, and/or have children; one in five African American education students is a single parent.
- Forty-five percent of Hispanic education students are first-generation college attendees, and 22% have parents who did not complete high school. This is considerably higher than the general population of Hispanic students pursuing bachelor's degrees.
- The median family income of White, dependent education students is more than double that of their African American and Hispanic peers.
- White students are most likely to work part-time while enrolled, and nearly 20% of African American education students work full-time while enrolled.
- White students are more likely to attend college full-time and for the full academic year than either African American or Hispanic students, despite being more likely to work. This pattern likely reflects greater family financial resources—and fewer family caretaking obligations—among White students than among their African American and Hispanic counterparts.

These findings suggest that African American and Hispanic education students face significant financial and personal hurdles as they work to become professional educators. Services such as academic advising, on-site childcare, and financial aid are important to providing the support that these students—many of whom are the first in their families to attend college—need to be successful. In particular, these students need support and resources in order to attend as close to full-time as possible so that they can maintain momentum toward completing their degrees.

In addition to providing key services, the nation's schools, colleges, and departments of education must consider how to support students as they pursue both academic and clinical preparation. As educator preparation programs seek to expand clinical practice, an important consideration is how to support students of color so that they can afford—both financially and in terms of their other obligations—to devote additional time to working in a school setting. Already, African American and Hispanic students are less likely than White students to study full-time and for the full academic year. This tendency could be exacerbated as programs expand clinical practice requirements.



## Section 2

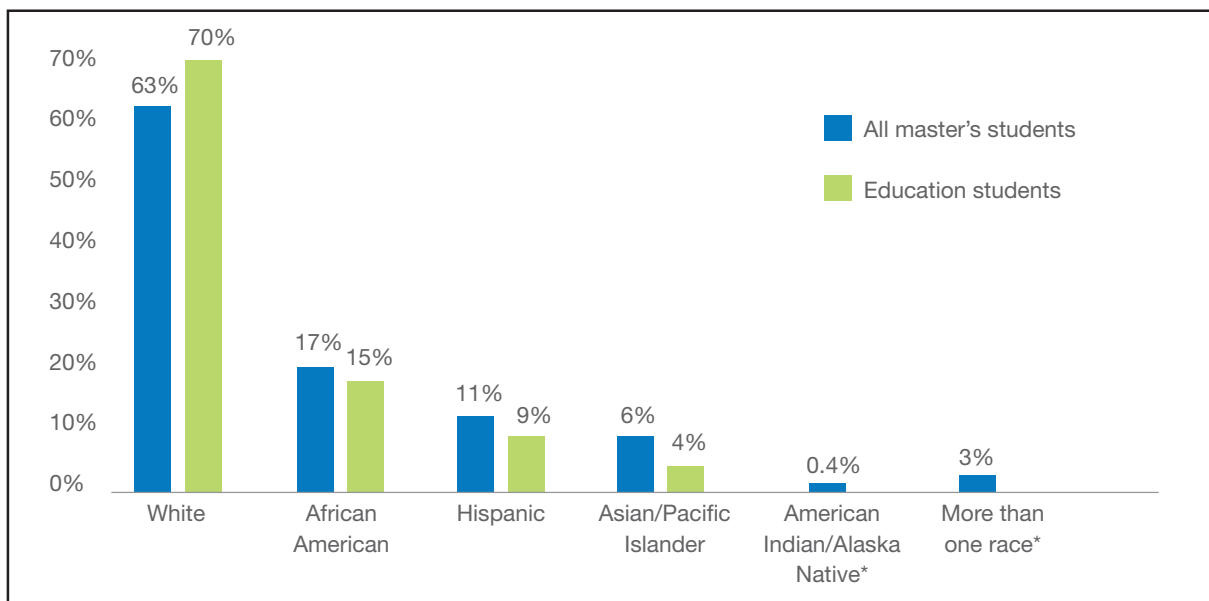
# MASTER'S DEGREE STUDENTS

Students pursuing master's degrees are the largest group within the field of education, earning half of all degrees and certificates awarded at the graduate and undergraduate levels. The array of careers for which students prepare at the master's level is more diverse than among undergraduates, but teaching is still popular, representing 42% of master's degrees conferred according to the *National Portrait*. Other popular specialties include curriculum and instruction, educational administration, and counseling.

## PERSONAL CHARACTERISTICS AND FAMILY CIRCUMSTANCES

As described in *The National Portrait*, education is one of the least diverse large fields at the master's degree level. As shown in **Figure 7**, education students are more likely than all master's students to be White and less likely to come from the other largest racial/ethnic sub-groups.<sup>v</sup>

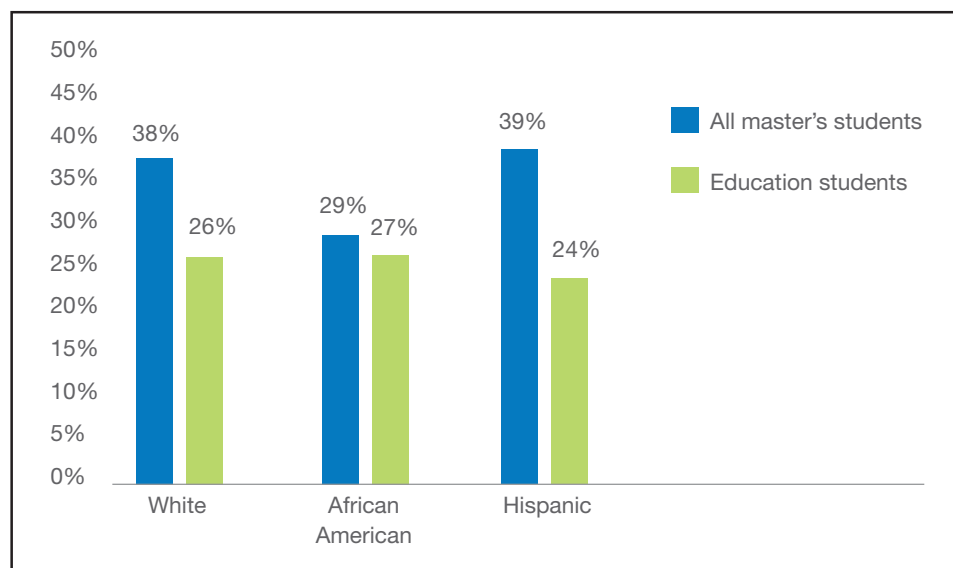
**Figure 7. Race/ethnicity of all master's degree students and education students**



\* No estimate for education students due to insufficient sample size.

Only one out of four education master's degree students are male, with no significant variation by race/ethnicity. As illustrated in **Figure 8**, men also are in the minority among master's degree students generally, but there is some variation by race/ethnicity in the percentage of students who are male. As a result, the level of male underrepresentation in education varies considerably, with White and Hispanic men more underrepresented, as a share of the master's student population, than African American men.

**Figure 8. Percentage of master's degree students who are male by race/ethnicity**

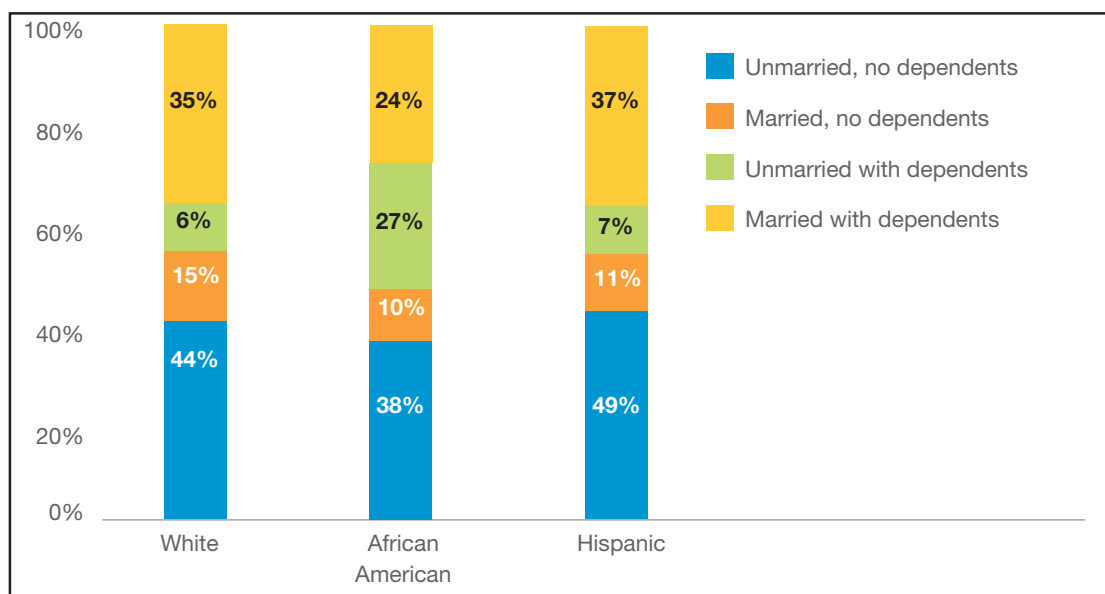


African American students tend to be older than their White and Hispanic peers, with 38% aged 40 or older, compared with approximately 20% of White and Hispanic students.<sup>vi</sup>

# Master's Degree Students

As among undergraduates, African American students are more likely to be single parents than either their White or Hispanic peers (see **Figure 9**). White and Hispanic students are more likely to be single and childless and to be married with children. Because they tend to be older than undergraduates, master's students who are parents are somewhat less likely than undergraduate parents to have children under the age of 5. Nonetheless, a sizable minority of the master's students who are parents, ranging from 36% among African Americans to 41% among Whites, have a child aged 4 or younger. Like their

**Figure 9. Family circumstances of education students**

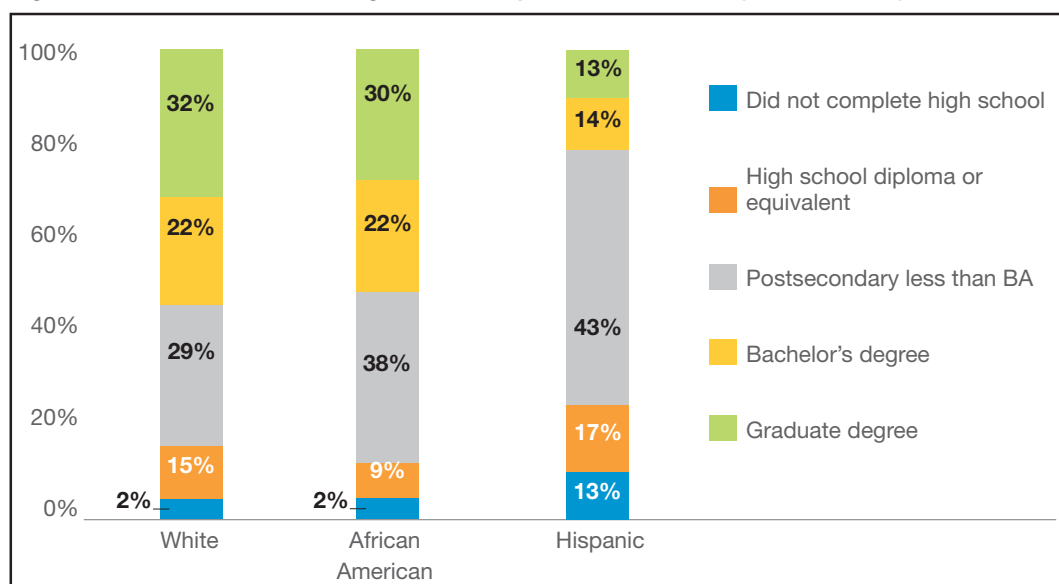


undergraduate peers, master's students who are parents—and in particular those raising children without a spouse—face the challenge of balancing many obligations.

## PARENTAL EDUCATION AND FINANCIAL STATUS

Like their undergraduate counterparts, Hispanic master's degree students come from families with lower levels of education than either White or African American students (see **Figure 10**). Hispanic students are much more likely than White or African American students to be the first generation in their families to

**Figure 10. Education students' highest level of parental education by race/ethnicity**



attend some form of postsecondary education (30% of Hispanic students versus 17% and 11% of White and African American students, respectively). Further, 13% of Hispanic students have parents who did not complete high school, compared with only 2% of White and African American students. By completing an undergraduate degree and continuing to graduate school, these students have demonstrated

# Master's Degree Students

their commitment to education and their ability to succeed as first-generation college students.

Analyzing the income of graduate students is challenging because only the student's income (and the income of a spouse if the student is married) is considered. This makes it difficult to distinguish people who come from privileged backgrounds, or who have had high-paying jobs but have a temporary drop in income due to being a student, from those who are truly economically disadvantaged. Nonetheless, one can see in **Figure 11** that White master's students have a higher income profile than either African American or Hispanic students. About half of White students have an annual income of \$50,000 or more, compared with 27% of African American students and 29% of Hispanic students.

**Figure 11. Annual family income of education students**

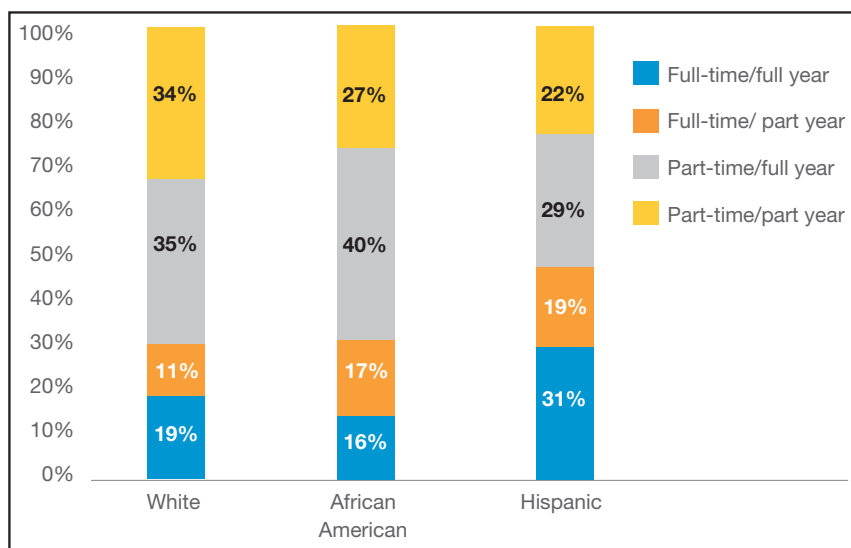


Combining these data with the information on parental education and family composition seems to suggest that a sizable portion of Hispanic students may have low income because they come from families with low levels of education and that African American students may have low income because of low parental education and/or because they are unmarried. Unfortunately, the number of education master's degree students in the NPSAS study is not large enough to support the detailed analysis necessary to confirm these hypotheses.

## EMPLOYMENT AND ATTENDANCE

Employment is an area in which there are no major differences among the three largest racial/ethnic groups. Most students work full-time while enrolled. The share of students who worked while enrolled ranged from 81% of African American students to 88% of White students, and the average amount of time students spent working ranged from 34 hours per week for Hispanic students to 38 hours per week for White and African American students. A challenge for schools, colleges, and departments of education is to accommodate the heavy work schedules of their students.

**Figure 12. Attendance status of education students by race/ethnicity**





# Master's Degree Students

As illustrated by **Figure 12**, most master's degree students accommodate their work schedules by attending graduate school part-time. Interestingly, Hispanic students are most likely to attend full-time, for either all or part of the academic year. It would be helpful to analyze attendance patterns by employment, as in **Table 1** on page 8, but the number of education master's degree students in the NPSAS sample is insufficient to support that analysis. Nonetheless, while the differences are notable, the overriding conclusion is that the vast majority of master's degree students work full-time and attend graduate school on a part-time basis.

## SUMMARY AND IMPLICATIONS

Because the sample size of graduate students in NPSAS is smaller than for undergraduates, it is more difficult to draw firm conclusions from the analyses presented for master's degree students. Nonetheless, some important patterns are evident:

- Seventy percent of master's degree students are White, making education one of the least diverse large fields at this level. This finding is in line with information presented in the *National Portrait*.
- Only one in four students majoring in education at the master's level is male; White and Hispanic men make up a significantly smaller minority among education students than among master's degree students generally.
- African American education students tend to be older than their White and Hispanic counterparts and are more likely to be single parents.
- The share of master's degree students who are parents ranges from 39% among Hispanics to 52% among African Americans; about 40% of master's students who are parents have at least one child aged 4 or younger.
- White students have a higher income profile than both African Americans and Hispanics, a disparity that is likely understated for master's degree students because only the student's income is considered.
- As among undergraduates, Hispanic students are most likely to be the first generation in their family to attend college and to have parents who did not complete high school.
- Regardless of race/ethnicity, education master's students work while enrolled, averaging 34 or more hours per week. Most attend school part-time for either all or part of an academic year, with Hispanic students being most likely to study full-time for the full academic year.

As with undergraduates, these findings suggest a significant need for financial and other supports to help students balance their academic, work and family obligations. A particular concern is helping students who work full-time and study part-time to maintain momentum toward completing their degrees. This challenge is especially pressing for students who are single parents and/or have young children.

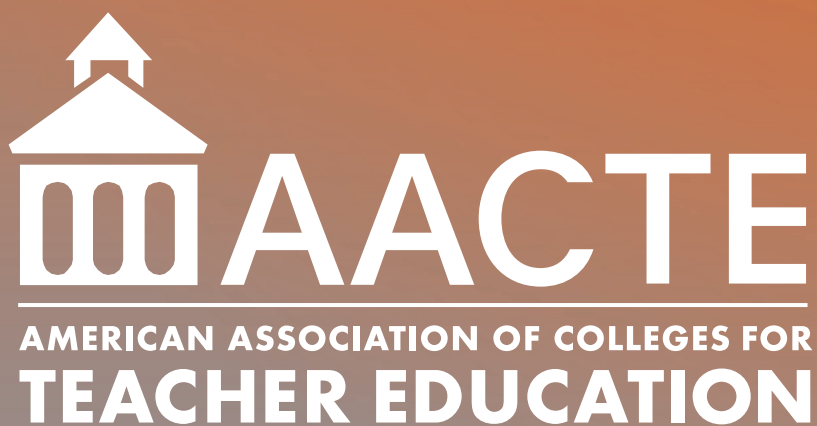
These data also point to a significant shortcoming of the current financial aid system with regard to graduate students. Since parental income is not considered in making financial aid decisions, it may be difficult to target the relatively small amount of grant assistance that exists for master's level students to those in the greatest need. As colleges consider their own financial aid programs, finding ways to identify students with the greatest need is an important concern.

# Conclusion

These new data document the significant financial challenges and family obligations that students of color in education programs confront, and point toward the need for targeted support services to enable these students to thrive in educator preparation programs. As schools, colleges, and departments of education continue to improve the richness and rigor of educator preparation, they also must ramp up the support services that will enable a diverse array of students to take advantage of comprehensive professional preparation.

## END NOTES

- <sup>i</sup> The National Postsecondary Student Aid Study: 2015-16 (NPSAS) is large enough to examine students who are enrolled in undergraduate and graduate programs in the field of education. It does not allow for analysis of students who majored in other fields but are enrolled in an educator preparation program.
- <sup>ii</sup> The source for all figures cited in this issue brief is U.S. Department of Education, National Postsecondary Student Aid Study: 2015-16. Findings on education students who are Asian/Pacific Islander, Native American/Alaska Native, or more than one race or who are foreign students should be interpreted with caution due to small sample size and are omitted in most cases. Details may not add to 100% due to rounding.
- <sup>iii</sup> Students who are separated are considered unmarried.
- <sup>iv</sup> Estimates for African American and Hispanic students who attend full-time/part year should be interpreted with caution due to small sample size. The part-time/full year and part-time/part year categories were combined due to small sample size.
- <sup>v</sup> In many fields—but not education—foreign students make up a significant portion of the graduate student population. Across all fields at the master's level, 13% of students are foreign. In contrast, only 4% of education master's students are foreign. This pattern distorts the differences between education students and their peers with regard to the major U.S. racial/ethnic categories, so foreign students are excluded from Figure 7. Throughout the remainder of this section, students who are Asian/Pacific Islander, American Indian/Alaska Native and of more than one race are excluded due to insufficient sample size.
- <sup>vi</sup> Dependency status is not described because all graduate students are considered independent.



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