



# Beyond Programs: Regional Nonprofits as Architects of Systems Change for Educational Equity

*Lessons from Teach Western Mass and the Pioneer Valley*

**MassINC**  
Policy Center

**30** YEARS

# Agenda

- *Welcome*
- *Presentation: TWM Case Study*
- *Panel Discussion*
- *Q&A*
- *Closing & Next Steps*

# Presentation: TWM Case Study



***Pema Latshang***

*Greg Torres Senior Fellow  
Founder, PDL Consulting*

# Teach Western Mass Case Study Findings

---

LESSONS IN SYSTEMS CHANGE & EDUCATOR DIVERSITY

**Pema Latshang**, MassINC, Senior Fellow  
PDL Consulting, Founder & Consultant  
*February 24, 2026*

**MassINC**  
Policy Center

---



# INTRODUCTIONS

---



*Greg Torres Senior Fellow – MassINC Policy Center  
Founder & Consultant – PDL Consulting*

## **Pema Latshang**

Pema's career in education has ranged from the classroom to district administration, reform advocacy, and beyond. In 2016, she founded Teach Western Mass (TWM) and in 2018 the TWM Residency, to provide a holistic approach to teacher training and promote educational equity in the Western Massachusetts region, with a particular focus on educator diversity in Springfield and Holyoke.

Pema (she/they) holds a B.A. in Public Policy with Honors from the University of Chicago, and dual master's degrees in Educational Leadership (Baruch College–CUNY) and Elementary Education (Pace University). She is a TFA and AmeriCorps alum, and a member of the 2025 Nellie Mae Education Foundation Speakers Bureau and the MassINC Senior Fellowship. In 2023, she was appointed to Governor Healey's Thriving Youth and Young Adults Transition Committee.

Pema is skilled at building innovative systems, programs and organizations that produce quality education for all students and support educator practice and well-being. For her work she was recognized as a 40 Under 40 Western Mass award recipient. As a former teacher, Pema knows that dedicated, quality teachers are pivotal in paving the way for inclusive and transformative learning experiences that are the launchpad to economic mobility for all.

Pema is the mother of two amazing girls (and two dogs) and is recently married. She lives in Cambridge with her family.



## OUR CHARGE

---

Together, we can ensure a quality, diverse and representative teacher workforce for the benefit of all of our students and communities here in the Commonwealth (and beyond).



# CONTEXT

---

The increasing diversity of students in Massachusetts makes growing a diverse educator workforce a critical policy goal for the Commonwealth.

State and local education leaders recognize the imperative of increasing educator diversity to give all students the opportunity to learn from teachers with similar racial, ethnic, and linguistic backgrounds, as well as teachers who have varying experiences and perspectives.

Over the past decade, our leaders have met the educator diversity challenge with focus and determination.

*In Pursuit of Greatness*, a report by a MassINC-WEPC-L4E research team, shines a light on these advances and the urgent need to double down on them, illuminating useful data and strategies.

Teach Western Mass (TWM) and the Diverse Teacher Workforce Coalition (DTWC) of Western Mass are examples of approaches that resulted in regional success for teacher diversity.

Today we will hear more about this work, the findings in the TWM Case Study published by MassINC and the implications for replication across the state and beyond.



# THE IMPACT OF A DIVERSE TEACHER WORKFORCE

## Why Teacher Diversity Matters

- **Improves Student Outcomes:**
  - Students of color perform better academically and socially with teachers of color.
  - Black students with at least one Black teacher in elementary school are more likely to graduate high school and attend college.
- **Reduces Discipline Disparities & Boosts Attendance**
- **Increases Engagement for Struggling Students:**
  - Same-race and same-gender teacher-student pairings yield especially strong gains.
- **Higher Expectations, Less Bias:**
  - Teachers of color often hold higher expectations and reduce unconscious bias.

## Emotional & Social Impact:

- Students of color feel more welcomed and connected in diverse schools.



# BROADER BENEFITS OF TEACHER DIVERSITY

---

## Benefits Beyond Students of Color:

- White students benefit from:
  - Exposure to diverse perspectives
  - Increased empathy and reduced racial bias
  - Greater academic gains from individualized instruction

## System-wide Advantages:

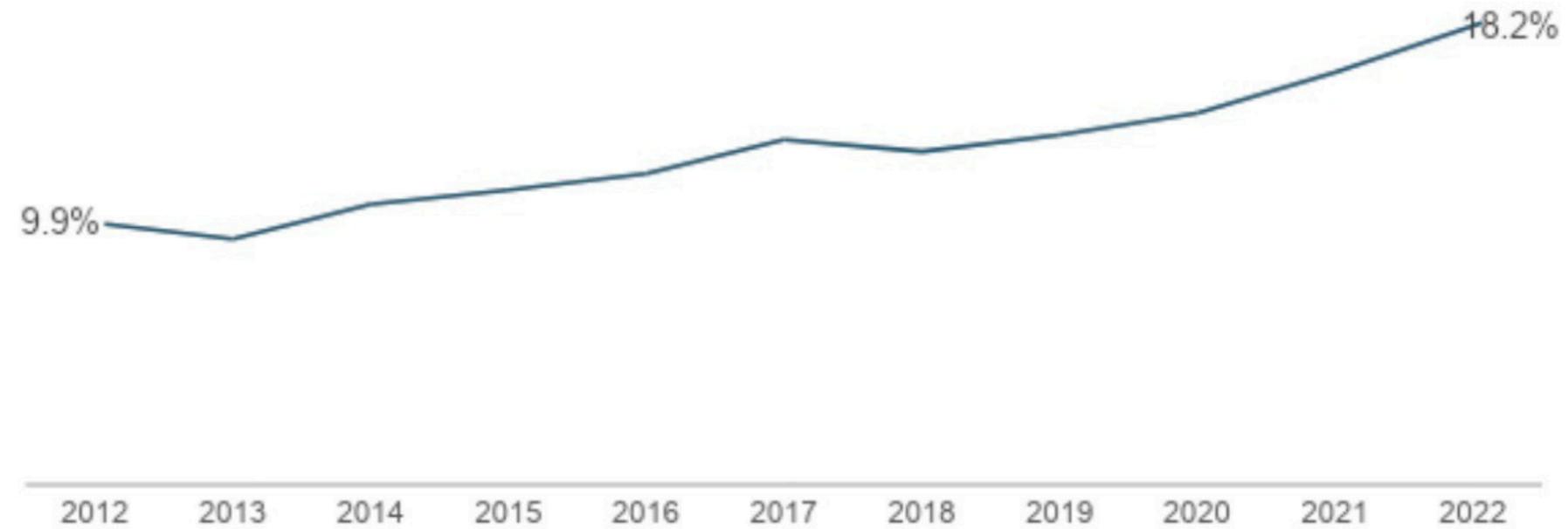
- Higher parent engagement
- Lower teacher turnover
- More teachers of color rising to leadership roles
- Stronger school-wide performance from diverse leadership



Educator Diversity Data in Massachusetts

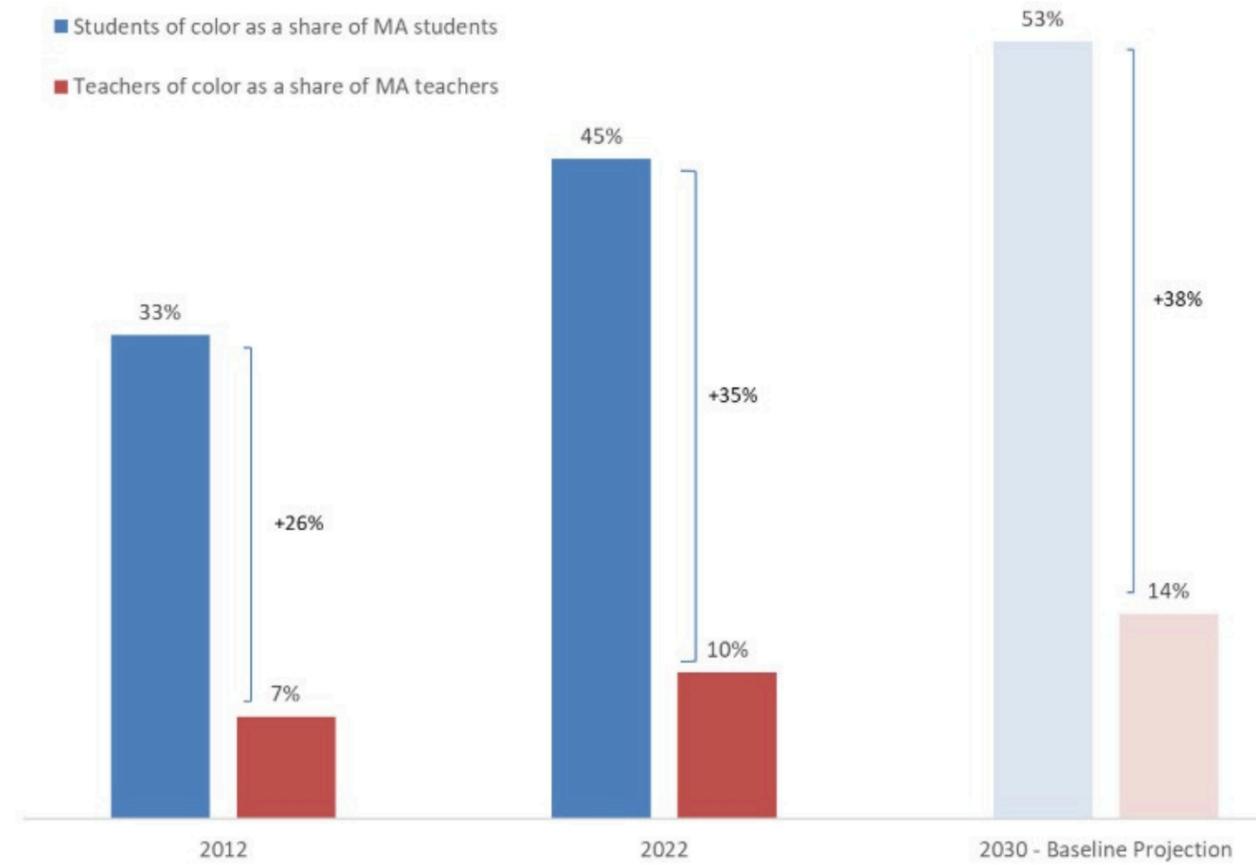
**From 2012 to 2022, Massachusetts doubled the number of teachers of color hired each year.**

**Teachers of color as a share of new hires in Massachusetts, 2012-2022**



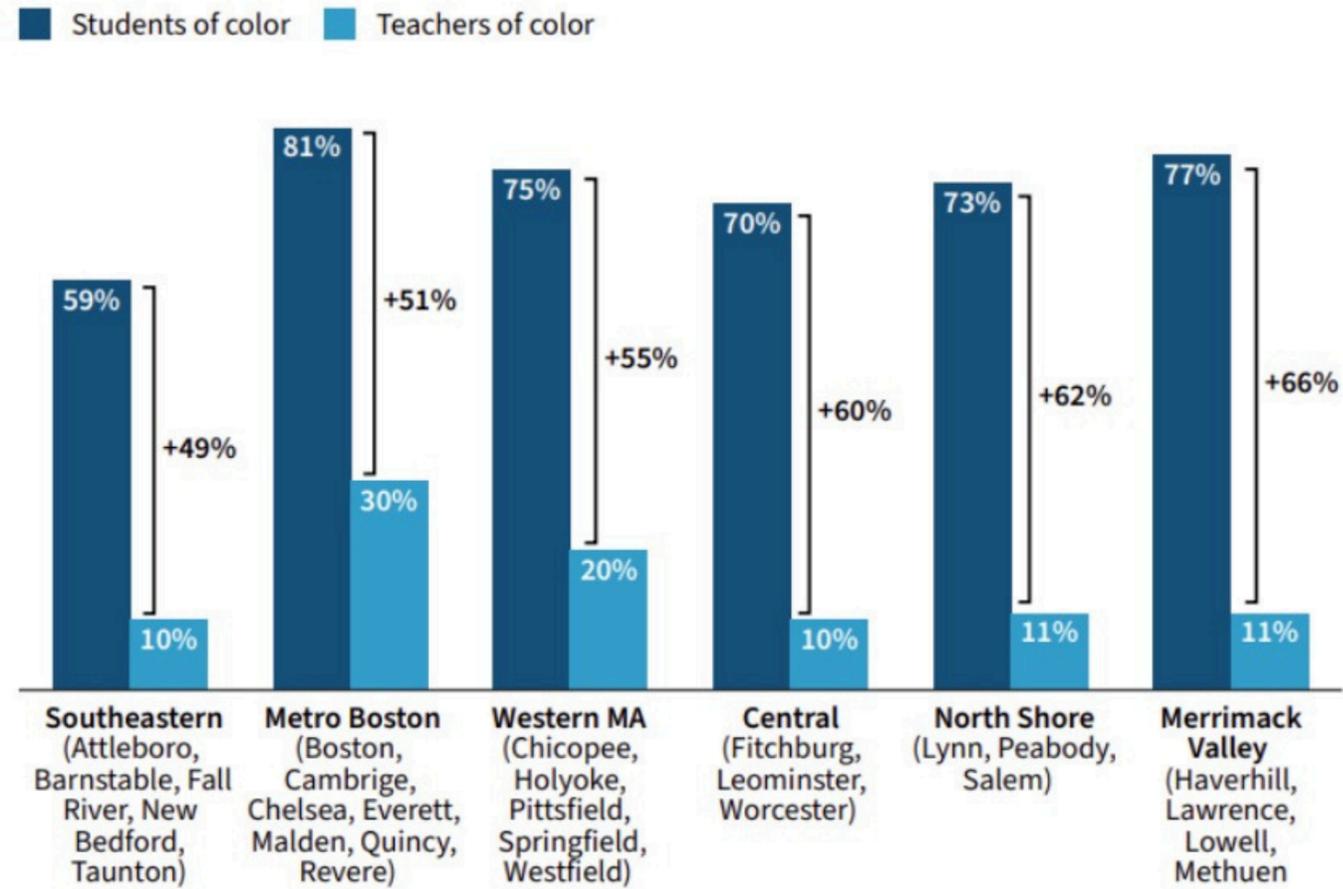
Source: WEPC analysis of data from the Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education

## Student diversity grew faster than teacher diversity, leading to larger gaps.



Source: WEPC analysis of data from the Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education

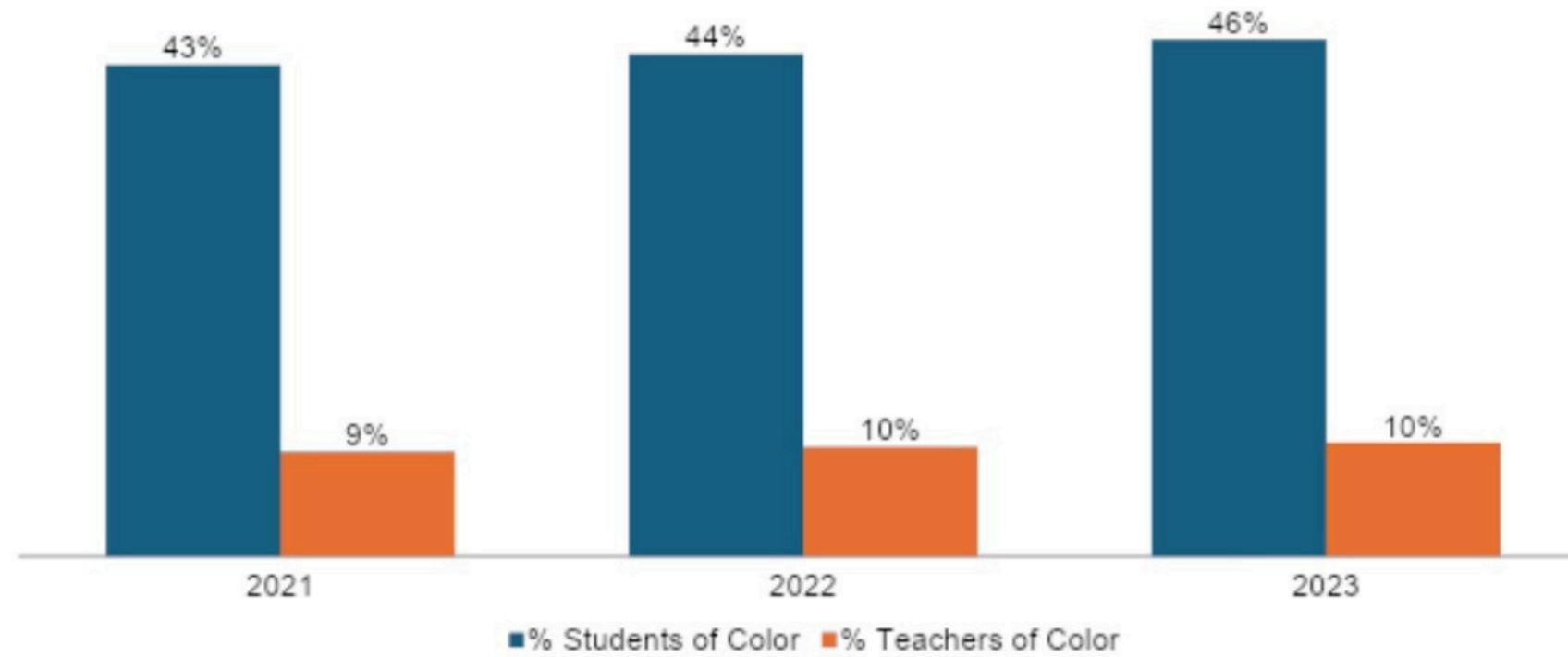
## Gaps among student and teachers of color in urban districts, 2022



Source: MassINC's analysis of data from the MA Department of Elementary and Secondary Education

## So where are we now as a state in 2023?

Massachusetts % of students and teachers of color, 2021 - 2023



Source: E2C HUB, Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education data

# WHAT IS TEACH WESTERN MASS (TWM)?

---

- A nonprofit focused on increasing the quantity, quality, and diversity of educators in the Pioneer Valley (Holyoke & Springfield, MA).
- Launched in 2016 in response to severe staffing shortages in high-need schools.
- Mission rooted in systems-change — addressing multiple barriers across the teacher pipeline.



# TWM'S MISSION & VISION

TWM envisions a vibrant community where all students and educators are equipped to lead the life they dream of. In order to make this vision a reality, TWM recruits, prepares and supports the quality, diverse teacher workforce that schools need.



# WHY IT MATTERS-THE PROBLEM?

---

- Urban school districts struggled: roughly 1 in 3 teachers left annually, relying heavily on inexperienced/unlicensed hires.
- Lack of diverse, stable educators contributes to inequitable student outcomes.



# TWM TIMELINE

---

■

*Founded*  
**2016**

Founded to recruit more high-quality teachers to fill teacher vacancies.

Several partnerships and pipeline programs founded.

■

*Residency Began*  
**2018**

Federal SEED grant w. TNTP to start alternative teacher licensure program in High Needs areas and increase diversity. Recruits and trains primarily career changers.

■

*Strategic Shift*  
**2019**

New Strategic Plan-no more pipeline programs.

Focus on recruitment, consulting and Residency.

■

*Strategic Shift*  
**2023**

New Strategic Plan-only Residency, shift to teachers in schools, more explicit focus on diversity.

■

*Leadership Change*  
**2025**

Founding E.D. departs. Deputy Directors take over.



# TWM CORE STRATEGY

---

## Systems Change Approach

- Engage partners: districts, higher ed, state agencies
- Create a teacher residency program- intensive, culturally responsive, and practice-based
- Build recruitment pipelines, coaching supports, affinity groups, and policy advocacy



# KEY ACCOMPLISHMENTS

---

- **Residency program success:** Strong placement and hiring outcomes; increased diversity among participants.
- **TWM shifted regional narratives** to elevate educator diversity as a shared priority.
- Partnered with districts and colleges to build capacity around recruitment and retention.



# STRATEGIC DECISIONS & ADAPTATIONS

---

TWM faced resource constraints that led to:

- Narrowing focus to **core programs**, especially the residency and recruitment.
- Major strategic planning shifts in response to pandemic dynamics.
- Adapting residency to support teachers with **emergency/waiver licensure** (expanded pathways).



# FOUR KEY LESSONS (TAKEAWAYS)

---

## 1. Relationship Management Matters

- Balancing partnerships and autonomy was essential but challenging.

## 2. Capacity Influences Strategy

- Limited staff/resources pushed TWM toward program delivery over broader system change.

## 3. Culture and Sustainability

- Human-centered practices protected staff but pointed to limits of nonprofit infrastructure for systemic work.

## 4. Ecosystem Support Is Critical

- Systems change requires **policy and philanthropic alignment** with regional leaders.



# A NOTE ON EQUITY

---

- TWM became an unexpected leader in promoting teacher diversity, even though it wasn't in the original mission.
- Programs like BLEC Fellowship and AmeriCorps supported educators of color.



# CHALLENGE & LIMITS

---

- Small nonprofit capacity struggles prevented full systems transformation.
- The pandemic and emergency licenses shifted landscape and program demand.



## WHAT'S NEXT (IMPLICATIONS)

---

- **Massachusetts & other regions** need regional workforce intermediaries to tackle persistent staffing and equity gaps.
- Supports for leadership, infrastructure, and policy alignment essential for long-term change.

**Closing:** The TWM story offers a powerful case for intentional, resourced systems change around educator workforce equity.



# Thank you!

---

**LET'S MEET AGAIN!**



**Pema D. Latshang**  
Founder & Consultant

[pema@pdlconsulting.org](mailto:pema@pdlconsulting.org)

(617) 302- 7549

Cambridge, MA

Introducing our illustrious panel ...



# Discussion



**Pema Latshang**  
**Moderator**

Greg Torres Senior Fellow  
Founder, PDL Consulting



**Ashanta Ester**  
TWM Residency Alum  
Special Ed. Teacher,  
Holyoke Public Schools



**Nadia Harden**  
Chief of Staff,  
New Commonwealth  
Fund



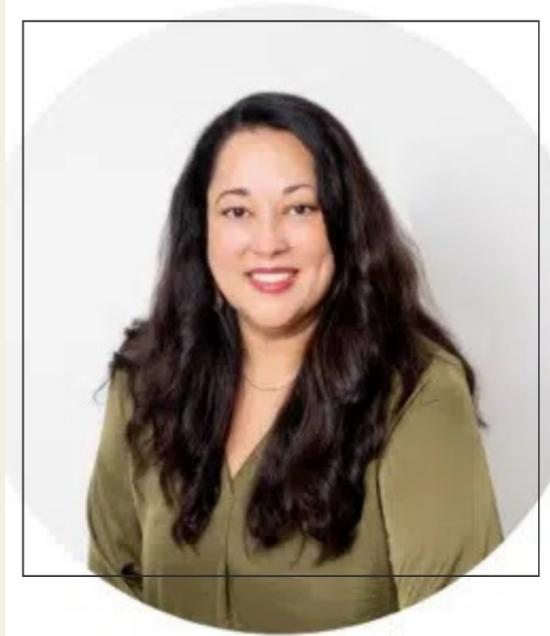
**Migdalia Diaz**  
COO, Latinos for Education  
Interim Executive Director,  
Latinos for Education MA



**Paulina Murton**  
Executive Director  
Great Schools Partnership

# INTRODUCTIONS

---



*Chief Operating Officer & Interim E.D. Massachusetts, L4E*

## **Migdalia Diaz**

Born in Puerto Rico, Migdalia moved to the mainland United States at the age of three, where she was raised by a resilient and hardworking mother who instilled in her a deep sense of determination, integrity, and a passion for giving back. Determined to pursue higher education and serve her country, Migdalia enlisted in the Connecticut Army National Guard, where she proudly served for eight years.

Following her military tenure, Migdalia spent 17 years in the private sector, where she cultivated her expertise in operations while actively engaging in initiatives to uplift the Latino community. Her commitment to service led her to the Association of Latino Professionals for America (ALPFA), where she served as President of the Boston Chapter from 2013 to 2015 before stepping into the national role of Chief Operating Officer. In 2017, Migdalia transitioned to public service as Chief of Staff then Chief Operating Officer for the Executive Office of Labor and Workforce Development for the Commonwealth of Massachusetts. Through this role, she deepened her understanding of the interconnectedness of education, housing, and healthcare in shaping the economic mobility of Latino communities.

Continuing her mission, in August 2023, Migdalia became the Chief Operating Officer for Latinos for Education, a national nonprofit dedicated to closing the equity gap for Latinos in education. In this role, she strives to expand opportunities for Latino families and educators, ensuring that future generations have the resources they need to thrive.

Beyond her professional endeavors, Migdalia remains deeply committed to community empowerment. She serves on the boards of Junior Achievement of Northern New England and WeReach, the Corporate Advisory Board for ALPFA Boston, and actively mentors students and professionals, championing the advancement of communities of color through leadership, advocacy, and service.

# INTRODUCTIONS

---



*TWM Residency Alumna  
Special Education Teacher, Holyoke Public Schools*

## **Ashanta Ester**

Ashanta is a Springfield native and a Special Education Teacher at Holyoke Public Schools. Currently in her fourth year of teaching, she leads a sub-separate classroom for students with ASD. Ashanta is a Teach Western Mass Cohort 6 Residency Alum with licensure in Moderate Disabilities and Early Elementary Education.

Ms. Ester holds a bachelor's degree in biology/premed from Our Lady of the Elms College and a master's in biology from Smith College. She worked at Smith for five years doing molecular-based research and diagnostics of Lymphatic filariasis and soil-transmitted helminths prior to becoming a teacher.



# INTRODUCTIONS

---



## *Chief of Staff, New Commonwealth Fund*

### **Nadia Harden**

As Chief of Staff, Nadia's work focuses on leveraging collective capacity and team management to deepen current partnerships, manage resources, and strengthen collaboration and leadership.

Nadia joined NCF from the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston where she was Sr. Manager of Audience Development & Engagement. In this role, she designed opportunities to engage new and existing audiences at the MFA by developing, supporting, and maintaining relationships with community and neighborhood organizations.

Prior to the MFA, Nadia served as the Campaign & Annual Fund Manager, and the Corporate & Community Engagement Manager for Boston Public Schools (BPS), Office of External Affairs. Her work focused on designing and executing engagement opportunities to increase individual, corporate, and institutional commitment to BPS. Nadia also managed the BPS Street Team, the district's marketing and community engagement teen fellowship. Nadia has also worked with Research for Action (RFA), performing policy research and as a Graduate Student Fellow with the Youth Sentencing and Reentry Project in Philadelphia, PA.

Nadia has a B.A. in International Studies from Spelman College and her M.S. in Social Policy from the University of Pennsylvania, School of Social Policy and Practice.



# INTRODUCTIONS

---



*Executive Director, Great Schools Partnership*

## **Paulina Murton**

Paulina has over two decades of experience as an educator, having worked as a teacher, instructional coach, and non-profit leader in a variety of school settings throughout New England and in Texas. She is passionate about teacher training, family engagement, joyful learning for students and working to ensure the diversity of our students is reflected in the teacher workforce.

In her work with the Breakthrough Collaborative, Paulina managed partnerships with school leaders across multiple districts, oversaw an intensive teacher training program, and supported a program team in their work with students and families. In her most recent role as a managing director of engagement and networking at Great Schools Partnership, Paulina oversaw school district contracts and partnerships as well as supported the work of the operations, network, and communications teams.

She graduated with a B.A. in American literature from Middlebury College, completed her MAT in secondary English from Brown University and earned a certificate in social impact, management, and nonprofit leadership from Tufts University. She is a fluent Spanish speaker and lives in Portland, Maine.



# Evaluation



Share your feedback  
about today's event.

# Thank You



Subscribe to MassINC's  
newsletter