



# Recruitment of a Racially Diverse Minority Health Student Pipeline Serving Underserved Populations

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## KEYWORDS

- Prenursing students • Black • High school student • Diversity • Underserved
- Culturally competent

## KEY POINTS

- Culturally competent health care for minority populations is critical to reducing disparities in health outcomes.
- Increasing diversity in the health workforce will improve the health of unrepresentative populations, as well as the nation.
- Recruitment of Black/African American high school students can create a pipeline of potential culturally competent nursing students.
- Underrepresented students benefit from both emotional and tangible support.
- Appropriate, sound, and successful recruitment strategies require assessment of, and implementing solutions to, challenges.

## INTRODUCTION

Disparities in the quality of health care for the Black population have been apparent for many decades,<sup>1,2</sup> evidenced by the high mortality and morbidity rates for the Black/African American community.<sup>3</sup> Major health care organizations have recognized that a culturally diverse nursing workforce is essential to improve the health of this community.<sup>3-5</sup> Recruitment of prenursing students from the Black population is vital to building a diversified workforce sensitive to the community's needs. In recent years, innovative projects have evolved to increase the nurse workforce's diversity by recruiting Black/African American students.<sup>6</sup> This article will provide background, identify challenges, recommend solutions, and showcase successful programs.

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unjust punishment.<sup>20</sup> Stereotyping, discrimination, and bias undermine adequate academic preparation for the rigor of nursing school that impacts recruitment of Black students. Students who lack the preparation for college-level courses may not have the grades to qualify for nursing school. For example, poor training in mathematics and science courses and lack of college-level reading, writing, and communication classes can impede access to nursing school.<sup>9</sup> Black students may not be aware of the type and number of required courses in science, math, and English that they must complete at the high school level. In college, freshman and sophomore nursing students have the highest attrition rates due to failure in required science courses.<sup>9</sup> The dropout rate is likely higher among students with inadequate preparation because of substandard education.

***Community and social context: shortage of mentors/role models***

Black/African American students are bombarded with images of sports figures, musical artist, and acting celebrities as role model representations of viable career options. These glamorous role models may make nursing look less appalling. The nursing pro-

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belonging and often have first-hand experience of a Black student's challenges.<sup>9,19,26</sup> As mentors, they can be effective recruiters and can provide one-one support not only to the student but also to the student's family.<sup>19,26</sup> These nurses, who are working professionals, can provide students with the appropriate intellectual stimulation, challenge, and academic rigor to create meaningful learning opportunities.<sup>6,22,27</sup>

Peer mentors are just as important as a professional mentor because students can identify with them and there are fewer power differences in their relationship as mentor and mentee.<sup>27</sup> Peer mentors, who may look like the student or come from the students' community, are often able to engage in respectful conversation, understand student concerns (eg, socioeconomic challenges or safety issues), and have the student feel valued as prenursing/nursing student. Peer mentors can help socialize the student to the prenursing environment so that students can be successful.<sup>10,26</sup> Another advantage is that some mentors can double as role models.

### **Role Models**

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Role models are different from mentors because they serve as an example who can be emulated by students. Ideally, they should inspire students and demonstrate the ability to overcome obstacles; as such it may be helpful for mentors to resemble the student's physical attributes or share other characteristics so they can visually see themselves in the nursing role. This strategy can help the student relate, enhance student confidence and self-efficacy, and excite them about the possibilities.<sup>28</sup> Role models illustrate the process of personal and professional development because they exemplify commitment, good decision making, and how to overcome obstacles. Role models can motivate the student with their stories on how they make it in nursing and navigate through the challenges.<sup>27,28</sup> Mentors are teachers, but accomplished role models can go beyond teaching by modeling skills and behaviors and presenting a positive image of nursing.<sup>28,29</sup>

Good role models are a critical component of successful recruitment because students can see the possibilities of becoming a nurse. Black/African American nurses can empower the student by role modeling, setting standards, leading by example, and exhibiting a personal drive to succeed.<sup>25-29</sup> Role models not only demonstrate personal and professional success but also can help counteract the poor or inconsistent images, especially for male nurses.<sup>28,29</sup> For example, one study documented that male African American counselors view nurses as the lowest profession and 1 in 3 counselors admitted not knowing much about nursing.<sup>27</sup> An excellent example of a contemporary role model is Ernest Grant, PhD, RN, the 36th president of the American Nurses Association, the nation's largest nurses' organization, and an African American male. Dr Grant was the youngest of 7 to a single mother and started his nursing career as a licensed practical nurse.<sup>29</sup> Suitable role models and strategic partnerships can enhance a recruitment and retention program.

### **The Power of Partnerships**

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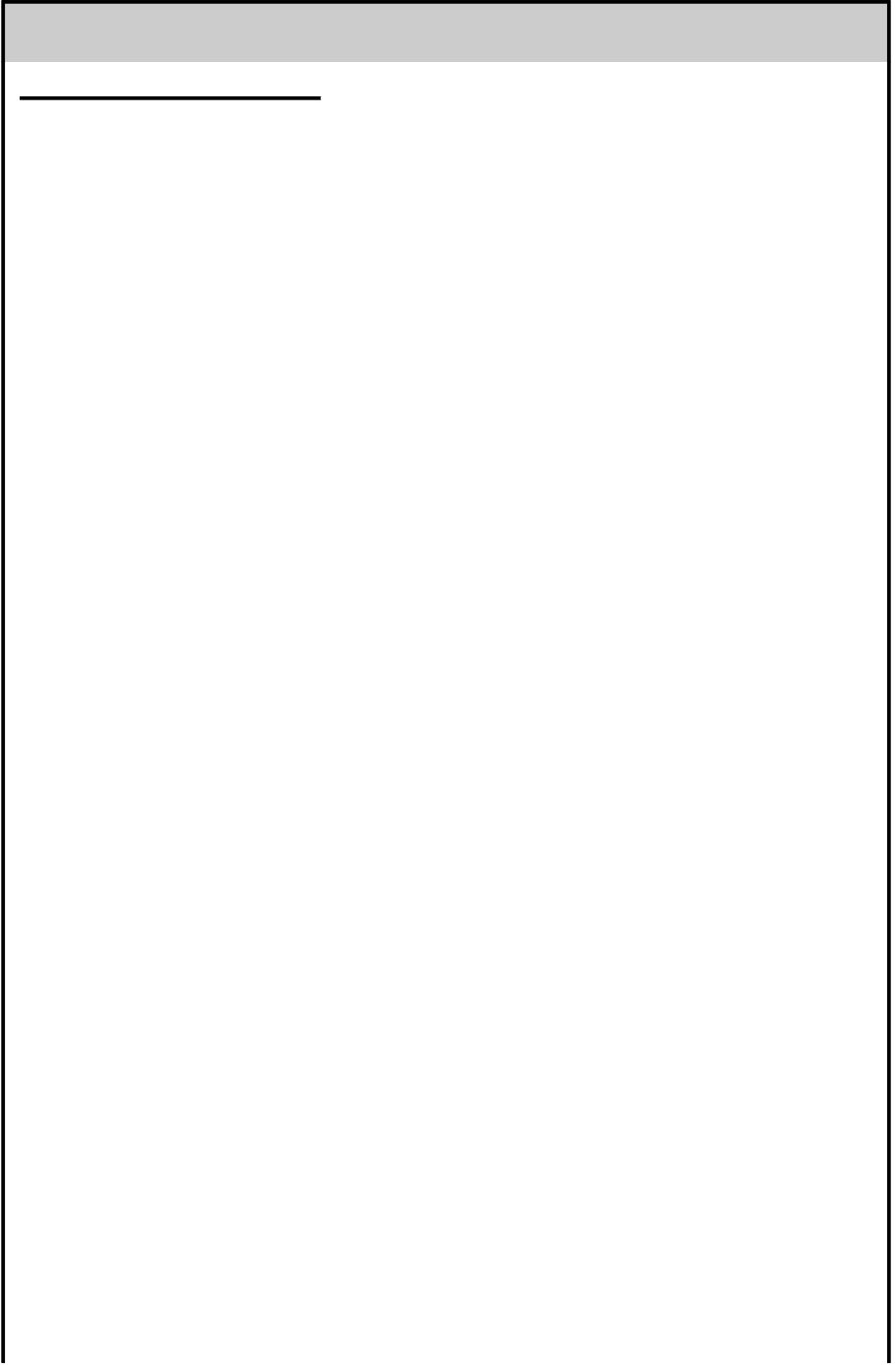
Collaboration with partners from a variety of community organization, academic institutions, and professional and social groups can strengthen the recruitment effort.<sup>26,30,31</sup> Community organizations include the neighborhood school, community church, health care facilities, and higher education institutions. The neighborhood church is embedded in the community, well-positioned to improve the congregation's health,<sup>32</sup> and may be committed to recruitment students into nursing. Academic institutions with nursing schools have nurse mentors and role models, peer mentors, and financial resources that may be leveraged for recruitment. Nursing social and professional organizations can supply mentors, role models, and financial resources.<sup>12,19,26,28</sup> Health care facilities



Other financial support students need that could enhance student engagement and retention is funding for college.<sup>9,26,33</sup> The cost of college should not stop a student from attending nursing school. There are financial aids and scholarships available,

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resources. For example, programs may have different methods and vary in length, partnerships, and services. **Table 1** summarizes the elements and the outcomes of several successful programs.

**SUMMARY**



- Understand what social determinants of health model can identify barriers for Black/African American students
  - Financial instability: Students need income to meet the cost of living and school expenses
  - Education inequality: Black children are less likely to have equal access to quality education
  - Black high school students endure various forms of stereotypes, discrimination, and bias
  - Community and social context: Shortage of mentors/role models
- Define goals to enhance enrollment of Black/African American students in nursing schools
- Create a plan using an evidence-based solution

### CONFLICT OF INTEREST STATEMENT

The authors declare that the article was conducted in the absence of any commercial or financial relationships that could be construed as a potential conflict of interest.

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