

Identifying School Level Factors Associated with Diversity in Dental Education

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ISSUE

Black and Hispanic dentists are underrepresented in the workforce and in dental schools. This study aimed to identify school level characteristics associated with greater diversity and to better understand the facilitators and barriers of dental schools with more diverse graduates.

METHODS

In this concurrent mixed methods approach, the authors estimated the relationships between the diversity of current graduates, using 2017-2019 Integrated Post-Secondary Education System (IPEDS) data, and characteristics of dental programs, using both IPEDS data as well as survey data from the Commission on Dental Accreditation (CODA). The authors calculated a Diversity Index to account for differences in state demographics and public/private status. In the qualitative phase, in-depth interviews were conducted with school leaders of 5 dental schools that had high levels of Black and Hispanic graduates or had shown substantial improvements.

FINDINGS

Sixty-one dental schools were analyzed during the quantitative phase of the study. Public schools and schools with the lowest quartile of tuition had a higher percentage of Black graduates whereas private schools and schools in the highest quartile of tuition had a higher percentage of Hispanic graduates. Schools that received a HRSA grant also had a higher percentage of Black and Hispanic graduates. An analysis of interviews revealed that leadership, building a culture, developing a critical mass and sustainable funding facilitated the increase in diversity while internal opposition, small applicant pool and lack of faculty diversity, and limited financial support were barriers.

DISCUSSION

This study finds that contextual factors, such as location, and school-specific factors, such as tuition, play a role in supporting higher levels of diversity. Leadership at the university or school level can help foster an inclusive culture and build a critical mass of students, which in turn supports ongoing enrollment of more diverse students. Federal and state policies also impact the ability of dental schools to improve diversity.

Key Words: Diversity; dental education; mixed methods