

April 2, 2020

The Honorable Roy Blunt
Chairman
Senate Labor-H Approps. Subcom.
Washington, D.C. 20510

The Honorable Patty Murray
Ranking Member
Senate Labor-H Approps. Subcom.
Washington, D.C. 20510

The Honorable Richard Shelby
Chairman
Senate Appropriations Committee
Washington, D.C. 20510

The Honorable Kay Patrick
Ranking Member
Senate Appropriations Committee
Washington, D.C. 20510

Dear Chairman Blunt, Ranking Member Murray, Chairman Shelby, and Ranking Member Leahy,

Despite the research that shows that all students and our nation benefit from a diverse educator workforce our current teacher workforce does not represent our nation's vibrant diversity. Today 40% of our population and a majority of our public school children are people of color yet only 20% of our educator workforce is comprised of teachers of color.ⁱ As leaders of the Senate Appropriations Committee you have the opportunity to support state and local efforts to ensure all students have access to a well-prepared and diverse teacher workforce. As such, we the undersigned organizations ask that you make the following increased investments and reforms to the federal programs that are essential to ensuring all schools have a well-prepared and diverse educator workforce. This can be achieved without negatively impacting other education programs by supporting a robust allocation to the Labor HHS-Education subcommittee that adequately funds education within Labor HHS-Education.

Research shows that a diverse teacher workforce benefits all children's learning, and that teachers of color have a particularly impactful role on students of color who show greater academic achievement and social and emotional development in classes with teachers of color.ⁱⁱ For example, the Tennessee STAR class size study found that Black elementary students with Black teachers had reading and math test scores 3 to 6 percentile points higher than students without Black teachers and that gains accumulated with each year students had Black teachers.ⁱⁱⁱ Research also shows similar patterns in higher education. For example, underrepresented community college students of color (Black, Latinx, Native American, and Pacific Islander students) fared better when taught by underrepresented faculty of color.^{iv}

In addition to academic benefits, research shows students of color can experience social and emotional benefits from having teachers of color. A recent study of students in North Carolina schools found that Black students with more Black teachers were less likely to experience exclusionary discipline.^v Research also shows that students who have diverse teachers are less likely to hold implicit biases in adulthood.^{vi} Further, we know that leading American companies value diversity^{vii} and being taught by a diverse teacher workforce can help all students develop dispositions that prepare them for civic life and the workforce.^{viii} Finally, evidence shows that growing the pipeline of new teachers of color may also support students' access to a diverse teacher workforce as it may improve satisfaction of teachers of color currently in the workforce^{ix} who in studies have expressed feelings of isolation, frustration, and fatigue when there are few other teachers of color in their schools.^x

While the population of teachers of color as a collective group is growing, Black and Native American teachers are a declining share of the teaching force. While, the percentage of Latinx teachers has increased from 2.9% of teachers in 1987 to 8.8% in 2015, the gap between Latinx teachers and students is larger than any other racial or ethnic group. While the share of Asian American and Pacific Islander teacher has increased over the same period, they only comprise 2.3% of our teacher workforce.^{xi}

Fortunately, the fiscal year (FY) 2021 appropriations process presents the following opportunities to adequately fund and support a number of federal programs that can help ensure all students have access to a well-prepared and diverse teacher workforce.

Recommendation #1: Support Minority-Serving Institutions of Higher Education in Building a Pipeline of Well-Prepared and Diverse Teachers.

Minority-Serving Institutions of higher education (MSIs) play an important and outsized role in preparing teachers of color, for example, preparing nearly 40% of Black teachers with bachelor's degrees in the United States.^{xii} Yet MSIs are often under-resourced while at the same time are serving high percentages of students with financial need and who are first-generation college students.^{xiii} We appreciate the advances made last Congress through the FUTURE Act (P.L. 116-91) and the 15% increase to discretionary programs in Title III and Title V of the Higher Education Act in FY2020 that support MSIs generally. Given the important and outsized roles that MSIs play in building a diverse teacher workforce we recommend a 20% increase over the FY2020 allocation for Title III and Title V MSI Programs authorized for appropriations in Section 399 and 528 (Tribally Controlled Colleges and Universities, Section 316; Alaska Native and Native Hawaiian-Serving Institutions, Section 317; Predominantly Black Institutions, Section 318; Native American-Serving, Nontribal Institutions, Section 319; Asian American and Native American Pacific Islander-Serving Institutions, Section 320; Strengthening Historically Black Colleges and Universities, Title III Part B Section 323; and Hispanic-Serving Institutions Title V-Part A).

Recommendation #2: Remove College Affordability as a Barrier to a Well-Prepared and Diverse Educator workforce by Addressing Challenges with the TEACH Grant Program.

Today, two-thirds of teachers take on student loan debt with an average debt of \$20,000 for a bachelor's degree and \$50,000 for a master's degree.^{xiv} Further, research shows that the high cost of college and student loan debt disproportionately impacts students of color. For example, we know that students of color are more likely to come from families unable to contribute financially to their higher education^{xv} and for many teachers of color student loans are a greater barrier to high quality teacher preparation programs than their white counter parts.^{xvi}

Research also shows that students make decisions about their careers based on the amount of student loan debt they will take on, with the higher debt to be accrued, the less likely they are to go into lowering paying careers like teaching.^{xvii} The high cost of college and student loan debt also affects the kinds of teacher preparation that prospective teachers can afford. The lack of affordable options discourages students of color from pursuing high-quality preservice preparation programs, and instead encourages entering through less comprehensive alternative certification programs that often bypass extensive clinical experience and key coursework. In fact, 20% of teacher candidates of color enroll in alternative certification programs compared to 10% of white teacher candidates. Research shows that teachers who enter through these programs are less likely to continue teaching in their schools, further exacerbating shortages of teachers of color and negatively impacting student learning.^{xviii}

Authorized by Subpart 9, part A of Title IV of HEA, the TEACH Grant program is the nation's teacher service scholarship program that is designed to incentivize students to teach high-need subjects in high-need schools and can serve to diversify the teaching profession by helping to remove college affordability barriers to entering the profession.^{xxix} The TEACH Grant program is authorized to provide scholarships of \$4,000 per year (for up to 4 years) to undergraduate and graduate students who are preparing for a career in teaching and who commit to teaching a high-need subject^{xx} in a high-poverty elementary or secondary school for 4 years.

A key component of effective service scholarships is that they be administratively manageable.^{xxi} Unfortunately, the TEACH Grant program's effectiveness has been hampered by poor implementation by the U.S. Department of Education (the Department) and poor servicing by the TEACH Grant's loan servicer. However, the Department has proposed new regulations that hold promise if adopted and implemented properly by the Department and the loan servicer. As such, to ensure that the Department has a plan to implement these regulations on the TEACH Grant program once issued, that the servicer for the TEACH Grant Program is held accountable for delivering clear, accurate, and timely information to TEACH Grant recipients, as well as high-quality service, and that recipients do not have their grants erroneously converted to loans (and know that they can contest an erroneous conversion), we recommend that the Committee include the following language in the Student Aid Administration section, requesting action and briefing by the Department:

“Within 90 days of enactment of this law the Department is directed to brief the authorizing and appropriations committees on its plan to make sure that the loan servicer that administers the TEACH Grant program is aware of the new regulations for the program and has a plan in place to provide clear communication and high-quality service to TEACH Grant recipients. Further, the Department should continue to bolster transparency through the Federal Student Aid Data Center by supplementing current reporting with, at a minimum, semiannual reports beginning no later than 90 days after enactment of this Act on outreach efforts to TEACH Grant recipients regarding information on their obligation to serve and the need to file the requisite documentation, the number and percentage of recipients in grant status, the number and percentage of recipients who have had their grant converted to a loan and whether such conversion was done by request or done through nonfulfillment of the service requirement, the number and percentage of recipients who have contested a conversion of their grant to a loan and the result of such contention, including whether it was in error, and an analysis of grant to loan conversions by higher education sector (public, private non-profit, and proprietary).”

Another key component of effective service scholarship programs is that they underwrite all or most of the cost to prepare to teach.^{xxii} Unfortunately, for a majority of the program's existence the TEACH Grant award amount has been subject to automatic, yearly cuts under the Budget Control Act of 2011.^{xxiii} For example, the maximum award amount is capped at \$3,764 this year instead of the authorized \$4,000.^{xxiv} The annual cut makes the program less effective at drawing students into the profession,^{xxv} particularly students of color who have higher college affordability barriers than white students, because it does not adequately underwrite the cost to prepare. We recommend that the Committee acts to end these cuts by including the following language:

“Section 255(h) of the Balanced Budget and Emergency Deficit Control Act of 1985 (2 U.S.C. 255(h)) is amended by inserting after the item relating to “Supplemental Security

Income Program (28–0406–0–1– 609).” the following new item: “TEACH Grants under Subpart 9, Part A, Title IV of the Higher Education Act of 1965.”

Recommendation #3: Support High-Quality Pathways into the Teaching Profession Under the Teacher Quality Partnership Grant Program and the Augustus F. Hawkins Program

The Teacher Quality Partnership Grants (TQP) program under Title II, Part A of HEA authorizes a number of competitive grants to improve teacher education programs, including the establishment of high-quality teacher residency programs. Residency programs under TQP must make available to teacher residents 1-year stipends to obtain graduate-level teacher training in exchange for agreements to serve for three years in a high-need school.^{xxvi} These residencies are partnerships between institutions of higher education (IHEs) and high-need school districts where prospective teachers engage in rigorous coursework leading to a degree that is tightly aligned to a year-long teaching apprenticeship under the guidance of an expert teacher. Teacher residency programs are a pathway into teaching that helps to prepare diverse cohorts of teachers, increase teacher retention, and produce more effective teachers than less comprehensive preparation routes.^{xxvii} In fact, while only 20% of all teachers nationally are teachers of color, 49% of residents are teachers of color.^{xxviii} Further, a review of teacher residency program evaluations shows that residents tend to have higher retention rates over time than nonresident teachers.^{xxix}

Unfortunately, TQP has been chronically underfunded, with a cumulative gap over the past decade of more than \$2.5 billion between TQP’s authorization and funding level. To help build a well-prepared and diverse teacher workforce we recommend that TQP be funded at \$500 million in FY2021. We also recommend that this increased funding include a grant priority for teacher residency programs that include explicit admissions goals, as permitted in current law, for populations underrepresented in the teaching profession. To ensure that TQP is targeted to teacher residencies that also have diversity admissions goals and program completion strategies we recommend the following language:

“The Committee notes that high-quality teacher residency programs are a high-retention teacher preparation pathway that helps prepare diverse and effective^{xxx} cohorts of teachers and can be used to target staffing towards high-need schools. While only 20% of all teachers nationally are teachers of color, 49% of residents are teachers of color.^{xxxi} Further, a review of teacher residency program evaluations shows that residents tend to have higher retention rates over time than nonresident teachers.^{xxxii} As such, the Committee directs the Department of Education to prioritize grants under the Teacher Quality Partnership Grant Program, Section 202 of the Higher Education Act, for applicants that apply to fund high-quality teacher residency programs as authorized under Section 202(e) of the Higher Education Act. The Department is further instructed to include a priority for teacher residency program applicants that include explicit admissions goals and priorities, as permitted by Section 202(e)(2)(A)(vi)(II), for the consideration of teacher residency applicants from underrepresented populations in the teaching profession, and strategies for supporting their program completion.”

Another program, the Augustus F. Hawkins Centers of Excellence Program (HEA, Title II, Part B) awards grants to minority serving institutions of higher education (MSIs) with teacher preparation programs to help MSIs improve their programs and prepare teachers. We recommend that Congress fund the currently unfunded Augustus F. Hawkins Centers of Excellence program at \$40 million in FY2021. In doing so we recommend prioritizing funding to applicants that seek to start or expand high-quality

teacher residency programs and provide scholarships or grants to support students of color in accessing and completing high-quality teacher preparation pathways.^{xxxiii} To accomplish this we recommend including the following language:

“The Committee recognizes the importance of high-quality teacher preparation on student learning and teacher retention, and therefore directs the Secretary to prioritize grants to eligible institutions that propose to establish or scale up a high-quality teacher residency program, as outlined in Section 202(e) of the Higher Education Act. The Committee also directs the Secretary to prioritize grants to eligible institutions that will provide scholarships or grants to students based on financial need, for use in students accessing high-quality teacher preparation pathways that offer extensive preservice clinical training and mentoring by exemplary teachers.”

Recommendation # 4: Support the Retention of Teachers of Color by Adequately Funding the Supporting Effective Instruction Program

Teaching conditions, and administrative support in particular, play a key role in teachers’ decisions to stay in a school or in the profession. Recent evidence shows that administrative support is especially critical in improving the retention of teachers of color.^{xxxiv} School administrators are responsible for making hiring decisions, being instructional leaders, setting norms for students and staff, nurturing a positive and encouraging culture, keeping schoolwide systems running smoothly, and more. Additionally, poor teaching conditions like unreasonably high-class sizes are a driver of teacher turnover. This impacts teachers of color as they teach in schools that serve large numbers of students of color (in fact, three in four teachers of color work in the quartile of schools serving the most students of color nationally) that are often under-resourced, and often struggle with poor working conditions, including large class sizes.^{xxxv}

The Supporting Effective Instruction program, or Title II-A of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA), provides formula-based grants to states to fund programs and activities like high-quality professional development and funding for reducing class sizes, that can help educators better serve their students.^{xxxvi} Despite a bipartisan reauthorization of ESEA in 2015 that placed a greater emphasis on evidenced-based practices and created an optional 3% state set-aside to strengthen the quality of school leaders in Title II-A, this Administration has consistently proposed eliminating funding for it completely.

We appreciate Congress acting in a bipartisan manner to fund Title II-A at \$2.132 billion in FY2020 and request that you fund Title II-A at a minimum, at its authorization level of \$2.295 billion. States would then be better positioned to take advantage of Title II’s optional 3% leadership set-aside funds to strengthen the quality of school leaders, including by investing in principal recruitment, preparation, induction, and development focused on supportive school leadership. Funds under Title II-A can also be used to reduce class sizes to a level that is evidence-based while ensuring each class is taught by a well-prepared and certified teacher.^{xxxvii} Together, these two uses of Title II funds can help ensure teachers of color are well-supported and work in good conditions, which in turn can help schools across the country retain teachers of color.

We appreciate the opportunity to provide recommendations on how FY2021 appropriations can support our shared goal of every student having access to a well-prepared and diverse teacher workforce. We urge you to support the research-based recommendations in this letter that include: **(1) increasing funding for MSIs so they can continue to play their critical role in preparing teachers, including**

teachers of color; (2) ensuring better implementation of the TEACH Grant program so that it can effectively remove college affordability as a barrier to a well-prepared and diverse teacher workforce; (3) ending cuts to the TEACH Grant program resulting from the Budget Control Act; (4) increasing funding for TQP and the Augustus F. Hawkins Program to ensure that prospective teachers have access to high-quality programs that enable them to be effective in the classroom and serve for the long-haul; and (5) supporting the retention of teachers of color by adequately funding the Supporting Effective Instruction Program.

We look forward to working with you on these recommendations that are vital to our children's and our nations' collective success.

Sincerely,

AASA, The School Superintendents Association
AESA, The Association of Education Service Agencies
American Federation of Teachers (AFT)
ASCD
The Association of Latino Administrators and Superintendents (ALAS)
The Civil Rights Project
Council of Administrators of Special Education
EDGE Consulting Partners
Higher Education Consortium for Special Education (HECSE)
The Hunt Institute
IntegrateNYC
Latinos for Education
Learning Disabilities Association of America
The Learning Policy Institute (LPI)
Metropolitan Center for Research on Equity and the Transformation of Schools
Michelle Burris, The Century Foundation
National Association of Elementary School Principals (NAESP)
National Association of Secondary School Principals (NASSP)
National Association of State Directors of Special Education (NASDSE)
National Black Justice Coalition
National Center for Learning Disabilities (NCLD)
The National Center for Teacher Residencies (NCTR)
National Council of Teachers of Mathematics (NCTM)
National Education Association
National Writing Project
New America, Education Policy Program
New York Appleseed
NREA, The National Rural Education Association
NREAC, The National Rural Education Association Action Committee
PDK International/Educators Rising
Public Advocacy for Kids (PAK)
Teacher Education Division of the Council for Exceptional Children
UnidosUS
Voluntary Interdistrict Choice Corp. (VICC)

Endnotes:

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- ^{xx} High-need fields under this program include bilingual education and English language acquisition, foreign language, mathematics, reading specialist, science, and special education, as well as any other field that has been identified as high-need by the federal government, a state government, or a local education agency, and that is included in the annual *Teacher Shortage Areas Nationwide Listing (Nationwide List)*.
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