

Diversifying by Investing in Educators and Students to Improve outcomes For Youth Act (DIVERSIFY) Sponsored by Senator Cory A. Booker and Reps. Chuy García and Jahana Hayes

The Challenge

All students should be taught by expert teachers and attend schools where the rich diversity of our nation is reflected in the teacher workforce. [Research demonstrates](#) that, in terms of influence on student achievement, expert teachers are the most important, yet most inequitably distributed, resource. For example, schools predominantly serving historically underserved students are often staffed by a revolving door of underprepared and inexperienced teachers. Additionally, while a majority of public school students are children of color, only 20% of all teachers are people of color. All students benefit by learning from teachers of color. The impact is [especially significant for students of color](#), who have higher test scores, are more likely to graduate high school, and more likely to succeed in college when they have had teachers of color.

One of the barriers to a well-prepared and diverse teacher workforce is the high cost of college and student loan debt. [Research tell us](#) that college students' potential debt burdens influence their decisions about what profession to enter – with the more debt likely to be incurred the less likely they are to pursue low-paying jobs like education, after graduation. For those that choose to teach, the high cost of college and student loan debt often causes them to select lower quality pathways, resulting in less effective teaching and high turnover rates, exacerbating teacher shortages. The high cost of college and increasing student loan debt burdens [hits students of color especially hard](#) as due to systemic inequities they are more likely to come from families that are unable to contribute financially to their higher education.

Further, prior to the pandemic, college affordability had reached crisis levels with [more than two-thirds](#) of individuals entering the field of education borrowing money to pay for their higher education, resulting in an average debt of about \$20,000 for those with a bachelor's degree and \$50,000 for those with a master's degree. COVID-19's disproportionate impact on communities of color and those from low-incomes backgrounds threaten to exacerbate longstanding inequities in the ability to afford comprehensive educator preparation. The latest federal data show that undergraduate enrollment this spring is down [by nearly 6%](#) and a [Census Bureau survey](#) details that along with a shift to distance learning and the fear of contracting COVID, the inability to afford higher education due to a loss of income factored into students' decisions' to forgo college in the fall of 2020.

The Solution

Service scholarship programs that truly offset the cost of teacher preparation are proven to be successful in recruiting diverse teachers to commit to teaching in high needs fields and schools. And in addition to benefiting students, [these investments save money](#), as better prepared teachers can save districts the expense of replacing those who leave, which can run up to \$20,000 per a teacher or nearly \$8 billion a year.

Our nation's service scholarship for teachers – The TEACH Grant Program – was created through the budget reconciliation process by the bipartisan College Cost Reduction and Access Act of 2007. This program provides scholarships of \$4,000 per year to undergraduate and graduate students who commit to teaching a high-need subject in a high-poverty elementary or secondary school for 4 years.

Unfortunately, since 2007 the grant award has not been increased to keep up with the rising cost of college. Instead, from 2013 on it has been cut annually. Meanwhile, since 2007, college costs have continued to climb and the total student loan debt owed has [increased by about \\$1 trillion](#). The failure to protect and increase the award amount limits the program's potential.

The DIVERSIFY Act Will Help Create a Well-Prepared and Diverse Educator Workforce by:

- (1) Aligning the TEACH Grant's maximum award to the cost of college today – [which exceeds \\$28,000 a year at four-year colleges and universities](#) – and President Biden's [American Families Plan proposal](#) by increasing it to \$8,000 per year.
- (2) Ending annual cuts to the TEACH Grant award which this year alone resulted in a decrease to the maximum award of over \$225. Without Congressional action these cuts [will continue through 2029](#).
- (3) Eliminating the harsh loan conversion penalty which can serve as a deterrent to entering the program, and therefore teaching.
- (4) Ensuring that the TEACH Grant program effectively covers the full cost of comprehensive preparation and reduce debt burdens by amending the program to cover the full cost of attendance, rather than just tuition, fees, and institutionally-owned housing.
- (5) Requiring the Secretary of Education to send TEACH Grant recipients who have completed their service an electronic certification noting this accomplishment.
- (6) Supporting early educators by ensuring that they are eligible for TEACH Grants by including service in a high-need early education program, in addition to serving in a high-need school, as an eligible service area and adding early childhood education as a codified shortage subject.
- (7) Ensuring that only education preparation programs at public and private non-profit institutions of higher education are eligible to participate in the TEACH Grant program.

These reforms will help to ensure that students the furthest from opportunity have access to diverse teachers who have completed high-quality pathways into the profession.