



*Great Public Schools for Every Child*

## Policy Recommendations for Adopting Educator Pipeline Priorities in the American Families Plan

The 3 million members of the National Education Association (NEA) enthusiastically endorse President Biden's American Families Plan and commends the bold commitment to investing in the professionals who educate the nation's children, including programs to support a robust, diverse educator pipeline and address the college affordability crisis. As committee instructions and allocations for the forthcoming budget resolution are finalized, we strongly urge Congress to support provisions outlined in the American Families Plan that we believe will help, recruit, retain, and support a diverse educator profession.

### **Recruiting, Retaining, and Supporting a Diverse Educator Profession**

**NEA believes that our nation's schools should reflect the diversity and identity of the communities they serve.** Unfortunately, that goal has not yet been possible to achieve, as the American public education system has been plagued with years of systemic divestment on multiple levels. This has contributed to a nationwide educator shortage, a multifaceted issue with several causes that has persisted for decades. Contributors to the shortage include inadequate compensation, increased demand for educators, declining enrollments in colleges of education, inadequate working conditions, and lack of comprehensive induction and mentoring programs that provide professional support to beginning teachers and other educators (e.g. paraeducators, specialized instructional support personnel).

Declining enrollments in colleges of education can be attributed to the rising cost of quality educator preparation programs, which has particularly impacted teacher candidates of color who often need financial and tuition assistance. These financial challenges mean candidates increasingly attend lower quality, less expensive preparation programs that inadequately prepare them for the needs of the 21st century learner, which often results in them leaving the profession sooner.

COVID-19 has only exacerbated what was already a critical shortage of teaching professionals. In an August 2020 nationwide poll, NEA found that 28 percent of educators said the pandemic has made them more likely to retire early or leave the profession. This includes one in five new or early career teachers, those with less than 10 years' experience.

The American Families Plan would make a once-in-a-generation \$9 billion dollar investment into uplifting the educator profession, marking a significant opportunity for Congress to ensure all students have access to a diverse, fully prepared and supported, stable, and profession-ready educator workforce:

- **Double the Maximum TEACH Grant Award from \$4000 to \$8000 per year and Fix the Grant Conversion Process.**

The cost of attending college today is greater than tuition, and the purchasing power of grant-based aid must be increased to reflect this reality. While increasing the maximum TEACH Grant amount will help,

the program has also been plagued with administrative issues, converting nearly two-thirds of TEACH Grant recipients' awards to unsubsidized direct loans, many of which were wrongly converted. To ensure an increase in grants will not exacerbate current problems with the program and inadvertently lead to more educator student debt, NEA recommends several reform measures that must accompany a doubling of TEACH Grants:

- Eliminate the loan conversion penalty (**S. 1780, The Diversify Act**)
- Codify the loan conversion reconsideration process, a procedure which would reinstate an educator's grant and discharge any accumulated interest and fees, if a grant was found to have been wrongly converted. (**S. 848, Consider Teachers Act**)
- Revise the employment certification process (**S. 848, Consider Teachers Act**)
- Provide time extensions to individuals to fulfill their service obligations if their employment was impacted or terminated due to COVID-19 (**S. 848, Consider Teachers Act**)

➤ **Invest in Grow Your Own programs and Year-long Paid Teacher Residency Programs.**

Teacher diversity benefits all students, and it is important to provide all communities with a [diverse educator workforce](#). Grow Your Own (GYO) programs focus on recruiting, preparing, placing, and retaining culturally knowledgeable and community-grounded teachers and are therefore an important means of attracting and cultivating educators of color. Potential candidates from GYO programs, including paraeducators seeking teaching certifications, often live in diverse communities and are familiar with the backgrounds and cultures of their students. Paraeducators are proven educators who work side by side with teachers and specialized instructional support personnel in crucial service and support to students. Given this fact, we believe they should also have additional supports within GYO programs.

NEA supports **S. 2244, the Preparing and Retaining Education Professionals (PREP) Act** and recommends this legislation for implementing this portion of the American Families Plan, as it would ensure investments will not go to programs that provide inadequate preparation.

➤ **Invest in Additional Teaching Certifications in High-Demand Areas.**

To cultivate a fully prepared and profession-ready educator workforce and provide a great public school education for every student, lifelong professional learning must be available. Providing financial support for educators pursuing advanced certification such as, National Board Certification, and in-demand credentials in shortage areas, such as special education and bilingual education, is a beneficial strategy for closing equity gaps and supporting student learning. These benefits should be made available as well for paraeducators and other support staff, who play crucial roles in supporting student learning. Financial support should also be given to partnering educator preparation programs and/or licensing bodies to provide licensure grants that will offset assessment costs for capstone assessments required for program completion or initial licensure (e.g. Praxis Subject Matter, edTPA, state licensure assessments, etc.).

➤ **Invest in Mentorship and other Leadership Opportunities for Veteran Educators.**

Comprehensive induction and mentoring programs that integrate an array of complementary components are a proven tool for developing teachers who provide high-quality instruction and remain in the profession. Numerous studies have demonstrated that the implementation of comprehensive induction [cuts new teacher turnover rates in half](#). However, many school districts only implement certain pieces of a

comprehensive induction program; a major funding investment would allow districts to work with educators and their unions to expand such programs and provide veteran educators and other school support staff with an opportunity to engage in leadership roles within their local school community linked to their previous experience and expertise. Any effort to invest in educational leadership should also compensate educators engaged in this work.

## **An Accessible and Affordable Higher Education for Aspiring Educators and All Students**

**NEA believes that all Americans should have access to higher education opportunities.** Access to higher education is crucial for supporting a strong educator pipeline, just as it is important for everyone in a diverse workforce to have the opportunity to attend and succeed in postsecondary education that best fits their needs. As more 21st century jobs and careers require college degrees or certificates, it is more essential than ever that all Americans have unrestricted access to higher education. If we as a nation are truly committed to expanding economic opportunity for all students, we must make significant changes to our current postsecondary structure.

Choosing to attend college should not be synonymous with going into debt; however, due to the rising cost of college, higher education is more out of reach than ever. This is especially true for students of color, under-resourced students, and first-generation college students; they all recognize that a postsecondary credential or degree often makes the difference between making *minimum wage* or earning a *living wage*. To strengthen the educator pipeline in our country, NEA recommends greater investments that support both access and affordability.

### ➤ **Invest in the Nation's Community Colleges.**

Community colleges are the nation's best hope for closing the equity gap. While students of color continue to make gains in enrollment in four-year institutions across the country, they still enroll at community colleges in record numbers. Community colleges offer a space to acclimate to the college environment before entering a four-year institution. They also offer transfer articulation agreements making it easier to transfer into a four-year institution, as well as the opportunity to receive a college education at a reduced rate. Nevertheless, community colleges remain out of reach for many students because of cost. For this reason, NEA supports the following measures that build on the American Families Plan:

- Two years of tuition-free access to community college or technical college programs that lead to a degree or industry-recognized credential (**S. 1396, America's College Promise Act**)
- Two years of subsidized tuition for students to attend an eligible four-year Historically Black College and University (HBCU) or other Minority Serving Institution (MSI) (**S. 1396, America's College Promise Act**)

### ➤ **Invest in the Nation's HBCUs and other MSIs.**

In addition to educating most Black professionals including professors, attorneys, judges, and educators, HBCUs, Hispanic Serving Institutions (HSIs), Tribal College and Universities (TCUs) and other MSIs serve first-generation and other underrepresented populations, despite having endowments valued at only one-eighth of those held by predominantly white institutions.

While we celebrate the permanent funding that HBCUs and other MSIs have recently received under the FUTURE Act (**S. 1279**), they remain woefully underfunded and continue to require federal dollars to provide their faculty, staff, and they with the resources they need to compete in a global economy.

Although they represent just 3 percent of all colleges and universities, [HBCUs produce over a third of all Black teacher candidates](#). The fact that they have done this with minimal funding and marginal support indicates that with more support and stronger financial systems in place, HBCUs can make even greater contributions to building a workforce that is truly representative of the students in our increasingly diverse nation. Therefore, NEA has supported the following measures that align with the American Families Plan:

- Free HBCU and MSI attendance to students who come from families that make below \$125,000 a year (**S. 1947 College for All Act**)
- Federal and state funded programs that make college attendance free (**S. 672 Debt Free College Act, and S. 1396 America's College Promise Act**)

These investments will enable America's HBCUs, HSIs, TCUs, and other MSIs to tackle longstanding inequities in postsecondary education, make the U.S. more competitive on the global stage, and allow greater opportunity for our nation's educators to look like the students that they serve.

➤ **Invest in Strengthening the Federal Pell Grant.**

Today's educators understand that college costs encompass more than tuition and fees, and include non-tuition expenditures, such as textbooks, school supplies, transportation, meals, childcare, housing, and other costs of attendance. While college costs continue to climb, federal financial aid has not kept the same pace making it increasingly difficult to afford a quality college education.

For many, the Pell Grant is the vehicle to a college education. While approximately 30 percent of white students receive the Pell Grant, [nearly double that number of Pell recipients are Black](#) students who must also take out loans to enroll in college in each year.

It is past time to increase the Pell Grant. NEA has for years supported and recommended increasing the Pell Grant maximum award, the salary threshold for Pell, and the total number of semesters a Pell Grant can be used (**S. 1136, Pell Grant Preservation & Expansion Act**).