

The Honorable Patty Murray
Chairwoman
U.S. Senate Committee on Health, Education,
Labor and Pensions; Senate Appropriations
Subcommittee on Labor, Health and Human
Services, Education, and Related Services

The Honorable Richard Burr
Ranking Member
U.S. Senate Committee on Health,
Education, Labor and Pensions

The Honorable Roy Blunt
Ranking Member
Senate Appropriations Subcommittee on
Labor, HHS, Education & Related Agencies
U.S. Senate
Washington, DC 20510

Honorable Rosa DeLauro
Chairwoman
Subcommittee on Labor, Health, and
Human Services, and Education
House Appropriations Committee

Honorable Tom Cole
Ranking Member
Subcommittee on Labor, Health, and
Human Services, and Education
House Appropriations Committee

July 2, 2021

Dear Chairwomen and Ranking Members,

As you consider provisions in the upcoming American Families Plan, we are writing to respectfully request that you include and advocate for language that secures the proposed \$9 billion to train, equip and diversify the American teaching force.

The U.S. education system has been plagued by inequities in funding and resources – students, teachers and other educational employees have borne the brunt of these systems. The education system faces a deficiency in diverse teachers who reflect the identities and experiences of the students they teach¹. Schools with larger populations of students of color are disproportionately served by ineffective, out-of-field, or inexperienced teachers.² These factors combine with others to perpetuate educational inequity amongst our most underserved students.

The COVID-19 pandemic has exacerbated challenges leading to teacher attrition. According to the National Education Association Poll³ in August 2020, 28 percent of all teachers and 43

¹ <https://edtrust.org/educator-diversity/#US>

²

<https://www.google.com/url?q=https://www2.ed.gov/about/offices/list/oese/oss/technicalassistance/educatoreguity.html%23overview&sa=D&source=editors&ust=1623194197269000&usg=AOvVaw1tgVed6gLdLWEUvF7Vmp3T>

³ <https://www.nea.org/advocating-for-change/new-from-nea/safety-concerns-over-covid-19-driving-some-educators-out>

percent of Black teachers said they were more likely to retire early or leave the profession. Effective teacher leadership programs retain effective teachers, support all teachers, build positive school culture, and build a talent pipeline with benefits for years to come. Research indicates that teachers of color improve social and emotional learning as well as achievement for all students⁴. Finally, research demonstrates that high quality teacher preparation programs such as teacher residencies increase racial diversity and improve teacher retention.

We the undersigned support the Biden-Harris Administration's inclusion of the American Families Plan for Education and Preparation for Teachers, starting with making a down payment in the FY22 appropriations budget. *While the following numbers represent the FY22 appropriations budget, we completely support the overall \$9 billion allocated in the American Families Plan.* We recommend the following initiatives be included in that section of the Plan:

- **Address teacher shortages, improve teacher preparation, and strengthen pipelines for teachers of color.**
 - Invest \$280 million in Grow Your Own (GYO) programs and year-long, paid teacher residency programs that emphasize the research-based components of comprehensive preparation programs and include intensive clinical practice that is tightly integrated with coursework on teaching. This plan should target \$40 million for teacher preparation at HBCUs, TCUs, and MSIs through the Augustus F. Hawkins Centers of Excellence Grant program and \$90 million for training of special education teachers. Such investment is outlined in the Teacher Diversity and Retention Act (H.R. 1197). GYO program funds should be prioritized for under-resourced districts and include opportunities for paraeducators who are interested in pursuing teaching certifications.
 - Ongoing professional learning opportunities to advance culturally responsive teaching, relationship-building, use of multi-tiered systems of support and adoption of research-based and equitable alternatives to harmful disciplinary practices. Additionally, we recommend the inclusion of school support staff for professional learning opportunities. School support staff, who often live in the same communities as the students they serve, make up one-third of the K-12 workforce, and staff heavy student engagement areas such as buses, hallways, classrooms, cafeterias, front offices, and playgrounds.
 - States and district prep-partnerships should be required to report on: goals for increasing racial diversity of the educator workforce and data on, the number of candidates who enter programs, the number of candidates who graduate programs, first time passage rates and scale scores on assessments used for teacher and school leader certification or licensure and the number of candidates who enter schools and remain in schools five years later, all disaggregated by race and ethnicity.
 - Residency programs should require rigorous selection and training of teacher mentors, intensive pre-service preparation grounded in culturally responsive pedagogy focused on the specific needs of teachers in high-need schools with a

⁴ <https://www.edworkingpapers.com/ai19-93>

- diverse set of students and aligned induction support.
- Provide administrative support for states and districts to implement demonstrably effective alternative routes to certification that include strong year-long clinical experiences that are tightly aligned with the coursework on teaching delivered by an educator preparation program and allow experienced paraeducators to remain in their current positions, worksites, and communities, while pursuing certification.
- Support high-quality evidence based alternative educator preparation pathways and programs which yield diverse and demonstrably effective new educators.
- Significantly increase financial assistance for aspiring educators, including those in grow your own programs and design or strengthen programs that provide educational financial assistance to prospective educators.
- **Invest in educator leadership.**
 - Invest \$200 million to support: teacher leadership opportunities and differentiated career pathways that support student success and teacher agency and high-quality peer-to-peer mentorship programs for teachers. Investments in leadership and peer mentoring opportunities should also be available for school support staff and specialized instructional support personnel. Funds should be prioritized for educator leadership roles in high-need schools and districts, and schools and districts should be required to demonstrate alignment with state-wide goals to increase the diversity of the workforce. Additionally, states and districts should expand evidenced-based mentorship opportunities for all staff of color and ensure they are led proportionately by leaders of color.
- **Help current teachers earn in-demand credentials.**
 - Provide financial support for teachers pursuing in-demand credentials in shortage areas, advanced certification like National Board Certification, and incentives for teachers with in-demand and advanced credentials to remain in the classroom. Financial support and professional learning for in-demand student services (e.g., supporting students with special needs, supporting English language learners, etc.) should also be made for paraeducators and other support staff. Specifically, these supports should be prioritized for prospective and current educators in high-poverty schools or schools experiencing teacher shortages.
 - Provide financial support for administrative credentials for diverse teachers.

Where possible, hold recipients of funds accountable to include input from a diverse set of educators and research-based methods, and to report on outcomes, disaggregated by race and ethnicity. These issues can be immediately addressed with the intentional and thoughtful allocation of resources. The proposed solutions above are rooted in the needs and opinions of teachers. Below is the rationale for these solutions:

Address teacher shortages, improve teacher preparation, and strengthen pipelines for teachers of color.

Teachers of color are leaving the workforce at a higher rate than their white counterparts.⁵ The Augustus F. Hawkins Centers of Excellence Grant program would provide essential resources to HBCUs, TCUs, HSIs and other MSIs that can be used to enhance educator preparation programs by providing extensive clinical experience amongst other things. While there should be a strong emphasis on teacher recruitment, it is important that we look for solutions to retain teachers, especially teachers of color. In a report by Teach Plus and the Education Trust,⁶ teachers of color reported that one key lever for retaining teachers of color is mentorship for new teachers.

High-quality preparation programs are key to increasing the recruitment pipeline and retention of diverse teachers. Clinical programs give prospective students access to culturally relevant, social emotional learning and training on data-based practices.

Grow Your Own programs that focus on paraeducators could help sustain and diversify the K-12 teacher workforce, while also providing a career pathway for paraeducators who are already committed to the profession and want to pursue a teaching degree. A focus on paraeducators can also help lift working women, especially women of color, out of poverty by helping them obtain higher-paying jobs. At least 65% of paraeducators have household incomes that are twice the poverty level; 88% are women; and 40% are persons of color.

In addition to innovation in teacher preparation programs, there is room to innovate in teacher licensure assessments. In particular, licensure policies should be examined for racial bias and adopt elements that increase diversity while maintaining quality and rigor. Portfolio-based assessments have been effective at helping teachers hone their skills as they work through their portfolios.

Invest in educator leadership.

Effective teacher leadership programs support new teachers, retain effective teachers, build strong school culture (beyond the teacher population to include students and school staff) and build a talent pipeline with positive benefits for years to come.

It is imperative that we work with teachers and their unions create the ecosystem that allows teachers to lead in their schools, districts, and states, while still honoring their time. Educators, particularly educators of color, often take on work that stretches beyond classroom walls; but this “invisible tax” is rarely recognized and appropriately compensated.

Reimagining teacher leadership structures means that we facilitate and empower teachers to:

- Lead professional learning for colleagues;
- Lead teams that analyze data, set goals, and work to support student success;
- Serve on school leadership teams;
- Tailor instructional practices and curricula, while still meeting required standards;

⁵ https://teachplus.org/sites/default/files/downloads/teachers_of_color_retention_.pdf

⁶ <https://teachplus.org/DisruptTeacherTurnover>

- Join paid advisory committees to advise state and district leaders;
- And other pathways created using educator feedback.

The expectations for reimagining teacher leadership structures means that we invest by:

- Compensating teachers for their intentional time and efforts; holding the expectation that school, and district leaders commit to creating these opportunities for teachers; and
- Ensuring there is a federal investment in strategies to assist leaders in implementing these expectations.

Research demonstrates that culturally responsive teaching benefits students.⁷ These benefits range from motivating and engaging students to promoting a sense of safety and belonging. Teachers around the nation are working every day on refining their lessons and interactions with their students. Teachers should be given financial support and incentives to create lessons and practices that can be shared with colleagues through collaboration and professional learning.

Help current teachers earn in-demand credentials.

Vacancies in special education, bilingual education, science, and math are being filled by teachers who lack preparation and certification for those positions. Many are filling these roles by attaining an emergency credential, such as a waiver or a permit. According to California’s educator equity plan, in 2013–14, nearly twice as many students in high-minority as in low-minority schools were being taught by a teacher on a waiver or permit (a teacher not yet even enrolled in a preparation program).⁸ In addition, high-poverty schools are more likely to experience vacancies across the board.⁹ This constitutes a shortage. More importantly, this constitutes an inequity to our most vulnerable students – students of color, learning English, in poverty and/or in need of special education services.

Fourteen percent of students nationwide need some type of special education service – yet special education teachers are leaving the profession at almost double the rate of general education teachers.¹⁰ General education teachers rely on the expertise of these teachers to receive guidance on how to best accommodate these students. There is a shortage of special education teachers in our education system, along with other in demand educators like those who teach math, science, and bilingual education.

We must create a sustainable pipeline that will incentivize prospective and current educators to attain in-demand credentials. While we believe recruiting teachers and financing their in-demand credentials is essential, we need to adopt other measures proposed in this letter to

⁷ <https://www.newamerica.org/education-policy/edcentral/5-ways-culturally-responsive-teaching-benefits-learners/>

⁸ https://learningpolicyinstitute.org/sites/default/files/product-files/A_Coming_Crisis_in_Teaching_REPORT.pdf

⁹ <https://caldercenter.org/missing-elements-discussion-teacher-shortages>

¹⁰ <https://soeonline.american.edu/blog/special-education-teacher-shortage#:~:text=Several%20factors%20are%20driving%20the,and%20support%20also%20factor%20heavily.>

retain these essential educators and recruit paraeducators with certifications or training in special and bilingual education to the teaching profession. Finally, we must also nurture and compensate those teachers who have already attained in-demand credentials and are actively leading important work in classrooms across the United States.

Ensure resource accountability.

We recommend that funds and programs that are authorized under the American Families Plan be met with institutional scrutiny and accountability.

Teachers are asking for an investment in their profession, support, and time – in signing this letter we signal to them that we stand with them and their students. We hope you can stand with them in advocating for effective legislation to meet their needs.

Sincerely,

Teach Plus
The Center for American Progress
The Education Trust
The National Center for Learning Disabilities
New America
National Education Association
Teach For America
UnidosUS
Alliance for Excellent Education
American Psychological Association
Association of Latino Administrators and Superintendents (ALAS)
Association of School Business Officials International (ASBO)
BellXcel
Council of Administrators of Special Education
EDGE Consulting Partners
Educators for Excellence
The Hunt Institute
Latinos For Education
Learning Heroes
Mass Insight Education & Research, Inc.
National Alliance for Public Charter Schools
National Association of Elementary School Principals
National Association of Secondary School Principals
National Center for Teacher Residencies
National Superintendents Roundtable
National Urban League
National Writing Project
New Leaders
TNTP