



Policy Memorandum: Increasing Teacher Diversity to Increase Student Achievement

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Who We Are

We are Latino educators who work at Title 1 schools within similar communities in the cities of Los Angeles and Oakland, California, supporting students who are predominantly first- and second-generation immigrants from Mexico and Central America. The students we serve are mainly English learners (ELs) from diverse cultural backgrounds which include Latino, Vietnamese, Chinese, Hmong, and Ethiopian, to name a few. We come from similar backgrounds and experiences as the students we serve, which fuels our desire to improve access to more culturally responsive teaching staff. We are fellows with the National Institute of Latino School Leadership (NILSL) at UnidosUS, which seeks to bridge the divide between policy and practice and train effective advocates for policies and reform efforts to strengthen educational outcomes for Latinos students.

Background

As highlighted in the Pew Research Center analysis of Census Bureau data, the population of the youngest Latinos, those under 18 years old, grew by 22% from 2006 to 2016, bringing the under-18 Hispanic population to (18.3 million). According to the National Center for Education Statistics, the percentage of public school students in the United States who were ELs was higher in fall 2017 (10.1%, or 5.0 million students) than in fall 2000 (8.1%, or 3.8 million students). Given the demand, we must ensure that policies meet the needs of Latinos and ELs to ensure all students succeed.

The purpose of Title II of the Higher Education Act (HEA) is to provide federal assistance for traditional teacher programs and alternative routes to state teacher certification programs; hold such programs accountable, and support states to improve their teacher preparation programs and expand the teacher workforce.

Our Ask

- Pass the STRONG Act of 2020 H.R. 8468: To amend the HEA of 1965 to allow certain students enrolled in an institution of higher education to apply for teaching residency programs, and for other purposes.
- Increase funding for the Higher Education Act of 1965 Title II to \$600 million to increase funding for teacher preparation programs.

The Need

Public schools in the United States are more diverse than ever, and these schools need diverse teachers who are able to be culturally responsive to students and their families. Teachers who can do more than empathize, and who can also relate to students and their families, speak the same language, and understand the experience of growing up in an immigrant household will be crucial in keeping students and families engaged in student's education. Inequalities in educational opportunity, including technology access, long pre-existed the COVID-19 pandemic, and has disproportionately impacted Black, Latino, Native American, and low-income families.¹ In addition, the Black and Latino communities have been and continue to be disproportionately affected by the COVID-19 pandemic. For example, of the 1,375 coronavirus cases in San Francisco where a race had been determined, 45% were Latino, compared to 15% of the overall population, according to public health and census data. In Alameda County, 43% of cases with a known race were Latino, compared with 22% of the population. And in Santa Clara County, Latino people made up 45% of cases with a listed race, but 25% of the population.²

Given the current number of COVID-19 infections in the country, most schools have opted to provide a distance learning option, or to switch completely to a distance learning platform. COVID-19 is a virus that has had widespread, devastating impacts across different sectors. According to The Learning Policy Institute there could be a minimum projected loss of 320,000 teaching positions nationwide (or 8% of the national teacher workforce), which is nearly triple the downsizing that the teacher workforce experienced during the Great Recession.³ This attrition of teachers will impact students, especially Black and Latino students, who are likely to be enrolled in districts that are twice as likely to have a funding gap of more than \$5,000 per pupil.⁴ Not only do these students attend schools with funding gaps, but they are likely to attend schools where most teachers are not from similar backgrounds.⁵ According to the National Center for Education Statistics, 7.8% of teachers are Latino, while 25.8% of students are Latino.⁶ Thus, the need to expand teacher preparation programs to recruit and effectively train more teachers of color is greater than ever, in order to prepare for a future through and after COVID-19.

Growth of Latino students, where are the Latino teachers?

As the Hispanic/Latino student population rises, the number of Hispanic teachers has not grown at a rate comparable to the student population. According to the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES), 82% of teachers are White.⁷ A Latino teacher diversity gap exists in 40 of the 41 states with available data. The four states with the largest gaps—California, Nevada, Arizona, and Texas—contain more than half of the country's Latinx population.⁸ As the school system slowly adjusts and ultimately returns from the COVID-19 pandemic, the dynamics of the Latino and Black population will demand that school systems work to infuse cultural competence into both classroom instruction and schoolwide systems to adapt and recover from the residual academic dips due to COVID-19.

Obstacles to increasing the Latino teacher pipeline

Although much of the research demonstrates the benefits of teacher diversity, many Latino students rarely encounter teachers who share their ethnic background.⁹ There still remain multiple obstacles in creating a vibrant pipeline for teachers of color. For example, the time it takes to complete a teacher certification program, coupled with the high costs of graduate school, makes it much more difficult for Latino college graduates, many of whom come from low-income households, to commit to a profession with so many costs and so little compensation.

Impact

STRONG ACT

The STRONG Act of 2020 H.R. 8468 would amend the HEA of 1965 with an increase in funding to \$600 million, allowing certain students enrolled in an institution of higher education to apply for teaching residency program supports and other high-quality routes to state certification or licensure. This funding would create more accessible pathways for our future Black, Latino, Native American, and low-income teachers.

High Quality Routes Lower Gaps by Being More Affordable

Other high-quality routes to teacher state certification are often more affordable and accessible for future Black and Latino teachers. According to a report, Latino borrowers are more likely to drop out because they or their families are more likely to face financial pressures than White borrowers, and overall, 31% of Latino students with student debt dropped out of college in 2009 (the most recent data available).

Other quality routes, such as teacher residency programs, demonstrate higher teacher retention rates, which in turn lowers the gaps between Latino students and Latino teachers. Without added public investment into innovative alternative methods for certifications, the teacher diversity gap will only widen as the numbers of Latino K-12 students continue to rise as their needs do as well.

Teachers of Color Boost the Academic Performance Of Students Of Color

Teachers from similar backgrounds are a rich resource in hard-to-staff schools. Studies have found that teachers of color boost the academic performance of students of color. Teachers' influences include improved reading and mathematics test scores, improved graduation rates, and increased aspirations to attend college.¹⁰ Teachers of color can connect and motivate students early, serve as community ambassadors to families, and contribute to school-wide cultural improvements. In the current COVID-19 pandemic crisis and the future stages of recovery, the need to bridge cultural gaps to deal not only with distance learning, but also with the dissemination and collection of information and health updates to families of color, demands a focus on the need to increase the number of teachers of color. To prepare for the growing diverse American student population, America's schools need a teaching corps that is not only effective through quality training, but that is also racially and ethnically diverse.

Endnotes

- 1 Rhitu Chatterjee, "How The Pandemic Is Widening The Racial Wealth Gap," npr.org, NPR, September 18, 2020, <https://www.npr.org/sections/health-shots/2020/09/18/912731744/how-the-pandemic-is-widening-the-racial-wealth-gap>.
- 2 Joaquin Palomino and Tatiana Sanchez, "Bay Area Latinos, Black People Are Hit Hardest by Coronavirus. Why?," *San Francisco Chronicle*, May 10, 2020, https://www.sfchronicle.com/bayarea/article/Bay-Area-Latinos-hit-hardest-by-coronavirus-15252632.php?utm_campaign=CMS+Sharing+Tools+%28Premium%29.
- 3 "Raising Demands and Reducing Capacity: COVID-19 and the Educator Workforce," Learning Policy Institute, <https://learningpolicyinstitute.org/blog/covid-raising-demands-reducing-capacity-educator-workforce> (accessed November 20, 2020).
- 4 The Century Foundation et al., "Closing America's Education Funding Gaps," The Century Foundation, July 22, 2020, <https://tcf.org/content/report/closing-americas-education-funding/?agreed=1>.
- 5 Constance A. Lindsay, Erica Blom, and Alexandra Tilsley, "Diversifying the Classroom: Examining the Teacher Pipeline," Urban Institute, October 5, 2017, <https://www.urban.org/features/diversifying-classroom-examining-teacher-pipeline>.
- 6 "Digest of Education Statistics, 2014," National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) Home Page, a part of the U.S. Department of Education (National Center for Education Statistics (NCES), accessed November 20, 2020, https://nces.ed.gov/programs/digest/d14/tables/dt14_209.10.asp?current=yes.
- 7 National Center for Education Statistics, "Table 1: Total number of public school teachers and percentage distribution of school teachers, by race/ethnicity and state: 2011-12," 2013, https://nces.ed.gov/surveys/sass/tables/sass1112_2013314_t1s_001.asp.
- 8 Pew Research Center, "Demographic and Economic Profiles of Hispanics by State and County," 2014, <http://www.pewhispanic.org/states/> (last accessed January 2018).
- 9 Valerie Strauss, "The Troubling Shortage of Latino and Black Teachers - and What to Do about It," *The Washington Post*, April 18, 2019, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/answer-sheet/wp/2016/05/15/the-troubling-shortage-of-latino-and-black-teachers-and-what-to-do-about-it/>.
- 10 Thomas S. Dee, "Teachers, Race and Student Achievement in a Randomized Experiment," *Review of Economics and Statistics* 86, no. 1 (2004): 195-210.