



Policy Brief: Increasing Teacher Diversity by Funding Minority Serving Institutions

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Who We Are

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- Julianna is a senior in the University of Michigan's Ford School of Public Policy, with a focus on K-12 education policy and a minor in Latinx studies. Julianna centers her Afro-Latinx identity in her work on school curricula and funding reform. After she graduates from U-M, she plans to complete her master's in educational leadership and at the University of Texas at Austin.

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- A public policy advocate, Zimar is the program associate at the Washington Regional Association of Grantmakers (WRAG) and is in his first year of a master's program in public policy at The George Washington University Trachtenberg School of Public Policy and Public Administration in Washington, DC. He aspires to become a policy analyst to solve the most pressing challenges that the United States faces while fighting for equitable education and fairness for students of color.

Executive Summary

A shortage of 250,000 teachers is predicted within the next decade. While we continue to face challenges from the COVID-19 pandemic, this prediction has accelerated its course, as teachers are leaving the profession in higher numbers. There is also a growing concern for financing college and advanced teacher certifications. To address these barriers, we ask Congress to pass the STRONG Act of 2021 H.R. 5242, which expands financial support given to students enrolled in teacher preparation and certification programs, including \$600 million in funding to support teacher residencies and teacher preparation, loan forgiveness, service scholarships, loan repayment incentives, and relocation incentives for teacher candidates.

The Need

There are expected to be more than 250,000 vacant teacher positions by 2025 in part due to employee burnout, a large portion of teachers reaching retirement, and additional challenges from teaching during the COVID-19 pandemic. This number has been calculated using state-by-state vacancies as well as the decline in enrollment in teacher preparation programs.¹ This data is coming from 2019 and does not account for the potential ramifications of the COVID-19 pandemic, but recent data shows that 40 states reported teacher shortages in the 2020-2021 school year.² Though the statistic does not explicitly state how the teacher shortage affects the Afro-Latinx community, other studies have found that teachers of color, particularly Black and Latinx, have been leaving the profession at higher rates than their white counterparts. The population of Black teachers is shrinking, and though the Latinx population of teachers sits at around 7.8% this has not kept pace with the number of Latinx students in the K-12 population, which is just above 25%.³

The teacher shortage, which has been exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic, compounds existing hurdles that hinder the success of Black and Latinx youth in schools, including but not limited to under-resourced schools lack internet access for online learning during lockdowns. To best support Black and Latinx youth in schools, the United States needs a plan to address the teacher shortage by recruiting more Black and Latinx people into the profession.

One of the biggest hurdles toward recruiting a diverse population of teachers is the cost of teacher preparation and certification programs. In the 2017-2018 school year, the average amount of student loan debt an aspiring teacher could expect was \$50,000, while the average teacher salary that same year was \$39,249.⁴ The cost of tuition to attend college has increased dramatically in the United States, where Black and Latinx students wanting to become teachers don't have other alternatives than to take loans to pursue higher education. Becoming a teacher then requires additional advanced degrees and certification programs that pose a significant hindrance to particularly loan-averse Black and Latinx communities.⁵

Background

Though the Higher Education Act (HEA) is typically associated with college finance through Pell Grant, work-study, and student loan programs, this piece of legislation provides a potential path forward in addressing teacher workforce diversity and teacher of color retention. Proponents for federal action to support teacher diversity point to HEA's Title II, "Teacher Quality Partnership" grants.⁶ These grants have been distributed to high-need districts and institutions of higher education and can be used to recruit Black and Latinx students into teaching. Additionally, HEA provides funding to minority-serving institutions (MSIs) to improve their teaching preparation programs. We believe additional adjustments to the HEA would support the diversification of the teacher workforce pipeline by supporting Black and Latinx students throughout their undergraduate programs, teacher certification, and early career.

Nationally, 19% of teachers of color move schools or leave the profession annually as compared to 15% of their white counterparts.⁷ Black and Latinx teachers are underrepresented, more likely to leave the profession, and teacher preparation programs are not on track to replace those leaving. One study shows that in order to yield 100 Black and Latinx teachers, there need to be 263 and 175 in teacher preparation programs respectively due to passing rates on licensing exams.⁸ A report from The New Teacher Project found that 48 out of 50 states have higher percentages of white teacher

preparation program enrollees than white public school students.⁹ They also found that 40% of American public schools do not have a single teacher of color.¹⁰ Both of these findings demonstrate that teacher diversity is a national issue that deserves national attention because the more students supported through the education pipeline the more our economy will benefit. One study found that each new high school graduate has a net benefit of \$100,000 to taxpayers,¹¹ and another study found that having just one Black teacher increased the likelihood of Black students graduating by 33%.¹² Increasing teacher diversity broadly would greatly improve student of color graduation rates and workforce engagement thus greatly benefiting the economy. The combination of these two findings makes the compelling argument that increasing teacher diversity has demonstrated social and economic benefits for everyone, not just students of color.

Our Ask

- **Pass the STRONG Act of 2021 H.R. 5242:** Expand financial support given to students enrolled in teacher preparation and certification programs, including \$600 million in funding to support teacher residencies and teacher preparation, loan forgiveness, service scholarships, loan repayment incentives, and relocation incentives for teacher candidates.¹³
- **Increase funding for the Augustus Hawkins Centers of Excellence Grant program** by \$40 million, which provides increased clinical experience and financial aid to prospective teachers of color at MSIs. MSIs are uniquely positioned to address the teacher diversity gap, with historically Black colleges and universities accounting for nearly half of the country's Black teachers and Hispanic-serving institutions enrolling 39% of Latinx teacher candidates in 2016-2017.¹⁴

Impact

Creating a diverse pool of teachers would drastically improve educational outcomes for students of color. Students do better when they have teachers that look like them, a randomized control trial from Tennessee demonstrated that students of color performed 3-4 percentage points better on math, science, and reading tests when learning from a teacher of their own race.¹⁵ Research shows that Black and Latinx students are more likely to enroll in advanced placement courses, receive higher scores on standardized tests, and graduate from college when taught by teachers who share their racial/ethnic identities.¹⁶ Supporting students of color achievement in schools is particularly important when considering students of color have been the hardest hit during the COVID-19 pandemic, which has exacerbated existing disparities in school funding and other school resources.¹⁷ It is important that many avenues for supporting student achievement are considered, and investing in teacher diversity provides a viable solution to support students of color in their academics.

Having teachers with shared cultural and ethnic backgrounds not only supports students' academic outcomes but also supports their socio-emotional development. A report published by the *Hispanic Journal of Behavioral Sciences* found that Afro-Latinx students in grades seven through 12 experienced symptoms tied to depression due to the lack of cultural resources that identify with their culture by virtue of being double minorities.¹⁸ This experience can be minimized through having a more diverse teaching force, who are better able to connect with students culturally, support positive identity development, and provide additional positive effects in academic performance.

Increasing teacher diversity also supports parent-teacher engagement and outcomes. The report established by Better Together Central Oregon states that having school staff

members that are more representative of the communities they serve also creates a strong sense of belonging for parents in the district. Parents of students of color feel more included and are more likely to be partners in helping their children succeed. They value volunteering opportunities as a form of family engagement more than when their child has a non-diverse teacher-staff. One family talked about partnering up with their child's teacher on an informational session to provide access to interpretation and quality translation to linguistically diverse families. Increased teacher diversity increases parent engagement and student academic and socio-emotional development outcomes, leading to more students from underrepresented communities reaching their fullest potential.¹⁹

Overall investment in increased support for Black and Latinx teacher preparation will not only lead to increased diversity in the teacher workforce but also more positive academic experiences for students of color and their parents.

Endnotes

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