



Policy Brief: Increasing Teacher Diversity

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Who We Are

Jimena Calderon (she/her) 2022-2023 Líderes Avanzando Fellow, UnidosUS.

- Jimena is a fourth-year student at the University of California, Davis majoring in political science–public service and Chicana/o studies. During her time at UC Davis, Jimena has worked to foster an inclusive environment for all students and to represent the diverse needs of the student body. Jimena is currently an UnidosUS *Líderes Avanzando* fellow.

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- Xalma is in her fourth year at the University of Michigan, majoring in political science and Latina/o studies. As an activist and leader in the Latinx community at the University of Michigan, Xalma's efforts helped to shape more inclusive financial aid policies, support for undocumented graduate students, and inclusion for incoming Latinx students. Xalma is currently an UnidosUS *Líderes Avanzando* fellow.

Summary

The achievement gap between students of color and their white peers has been a longstanding problem in our nation's educational system. The lack of diversity in the teacher workforce contributes to this problem. While there are programs through the Higher Education Act (HEA), such as the Augustus F. Hawkins Centers of Excellence program, and recently introduced legislation, such as the STRONG Act of 2021, that amend the HEA to increase funding, the programs remain underfunded and the legislation has yet to be passed. To address this issue, we urge Congress to increase funding for the Augustus F. Hawkins Centers of Excellence program by \$20 million and to pass the STRONG ACT of 2021 to increase support for teacher preparation programs and diversify the teacher workforce.

The Need

Significant gaps in educational achievement between students of color and their white peers continue to exist in the United States's educational system. For example, according to the Education Trust, “approximately 31% of Latino adults have less than a high school diploma compared to 6.2% of white adults.”¹ While the educational achievement gap is not caused by any singular factor, the lack of teacher diversity within an increasingly racially diverse K-12 student population is a persistent barrier that reinforces the gap. According to the Department of Education, 50% of students in public school are students of color, and only 21% of teachers are teachers of color. For the Latinx community, disproportionate representation is increasingly prevalent. In 2020, only 9.3% of the nation's public school teachers identified as Latinx, compared to the 28% of Latinx students in public schools.² Complicating the lack of diversity in our nation's teacher workforce is a prevailing teacher shortage exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic—a factor making the achievement gap even more critical.³

While increasing teacher diversity helps all students, it is particularly beneficial for students of color. Studies show that diverse teacher representation enables students of color to achieve better grades, higher test scores, be placed in gifted classes at higher rates, and experience higher educational attainment long term.⁴ Having proportional teacher representation will help close the achievement gap between students of color and their white peers.

At a state level, the need for racial diversification of the teacher workforce persists. In Michigan, a state with a growing Latinx population, Latinx students comprise 8% of the K-12 student population while only 1% of teachers identify as Latinx.⁵

Similarly, in California:

the nation's most diverse state, and one where Latinx people comprise 40% of the population—Latinx students make up 55% of the student population, while **only 20% of California's school teachers identify as Latinx.**⁶ Meanwhile, data suggests that 63% of California's teacher population is white, while only 23% of the student population is white.⁷

The disproportionate representation is worsened by the lack of diversity in teacher preparation programs. In all 50 states, enrollees in teacher preparation programs are 64% white, although white students make up only 47% of the public school population.⁸ It is necessary to identify ways of ensuring that aspiring teachers of color are encouraged and supported through the completion of their preparation programs to make a difference in the achievement gap for students of color.

Background

Title II of HEA is crucial in providing federal funding for teacher preparation programs and expanding teacher recruitment efforts. However, programs within the HEA that could help to achieve teacher diversity have never been funded or were only funded recently.⁹ Specifically, the Augustus F. Hawkins Centers of Excellence program, which supports high-quality teacher preparation programs at Minority Serving Institutions (MSIs), was established in 2008 but did not receive federal funding until fiscal year (FY) 2022. In FY22 Congress allocated \$8 million to the program. In FY23, President Biden proposed increasing funding by \$12 million for a total of \$20 million.¹⁰ The final FY23 appropriation was \$15 million, a \$7 million increase.

These initial investments will yield positive outcomes for teacher programs that will better prepare aspiring teachers of color and result in better support for POC students. However, in order for more significant outcomes to occur in closing the achievement gap between students of color and their white peers, a more sustained investment is needed for teacher support programs that better support teachers of color. Importantly, while there are other federal programs such as Grow Your Own and the Teacher Quality Partnership that support teacher education, the Augustus F. Hawkins Centers of Excellence will facilitate preparing and retaining teachers of color because it invests in MSIs, creating a pathway to support institutions that have a history, mission, and purpose that align with the empowerment and benefit of communities of color.

The STRONG Act of 2021, introduced by Representative Trahan (D-MA), authorizes additional funding for the Teacher Quality Partnership Program (TQP). The bill seeks to allow undergraduates with an academic major related to teaching to enter into TQP teaching residency programs and makes clear that students who graduate from TQP programs are eligible for the Public Service Loan Forgiveness program. While Black and Latinx students are more likely to need to borrow federal student loans, they are also among the most loan averse population, making them less likely to pursue education careers or take low-paying jobs after graduation. Loan adversity further contributes to the long-standing problem of teacher shortages that was exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic. Recent data estimates that there are approximately 36,000 vacant positions along with at least 163,000 positions being held by underqualified teachers.

Additionally, educators of color are leaving the profession at astonishing rates as a result of low pay and unfavorable working conditions. Without teachers of color, students in the high-need districts where teachers of color most often serve, suffer. Investing in the STRONG Act will improve the quality of education for students while supporting and retaining teachers of color. When we support and provide funding to increase teacher diversity, we increase the number of well-prepared teachers to improve student achievement, particularly in high-need schools and districts.

Our Ask

- **Increase funding for the Augustus F. Hawkins Centers of Excellence program** by \$20 million in FY24 to support additional grantees.
- **Reintroduce and pass the STRONG Act of 2021** to amend Title II of HEA to double the authorization of funding for teacher preparation and residency programs, and expand opportunities for prospective educators to be eligible for the Public Service Loan Forgiveness program.

Impact

Research suggests that a diverse teacher workforce produces positive educational student outcomes. For example, a randomized experiment from Tennessee reveals that Black students matched with a Black teacher increased their math and reading scores by three or four percentile points. Additionally, a study from North Carolina demonstrates that instruction from one Black teacher in elementary school cut high school dropout rates by 39% among Black boys, exemplifying that teacher diversity allows students to reach their full potential.

Evidence also suggests that the benefits of teacher diversity extend beyond academic achievement. Studies demonstrate that the exclusionary discipline rate for Black students decreased 15% with a Black female teacher and 18% with a Black male teacher.

Additionally, research suggests teacher diversity is linked to fewer absences. For example, a study conducted in a California high school district found that students missed fewer classes when their teachers were of the same demographic background. When students have teachers of color, they are more likely to have stronger connections with students and their families, thus producing positive socio-behavioral outcomes. More importantly, teachers of color understand their students' cultural circumstances and social-emotional needs more than white teachers.

While students of color significantly benefit from a diverse educator workforce, all students stand to benefit from a diverse educator workforce. Research suggests that white students show improved problem-solving, critical thinking, and creativity when they have diverse teachers. Teacher diversity is crucial to meet the socio-behavioral, academic, and aspirational needs of students in K-12 classrooms. It is necessary to fund programs like the Hawkins Centers for Excellence and the STRONG Act to provide a more comprehensive pathway that will allow teachers of color to remain in the profession, and consequently extend the benefits to positively impact the lives of students of color.

Endnotes

- 1 Jr., Marshall Anthony, and Kayla C. Elliott. "Broken Mirrors II: How Many Latino Students Are at Public Colleges & Universities? Not as Many as There Should Be." The Education Trust, October 18, 2022. <https://edtrust.org/the-equity-line/broken-mirrors-ii-how-many-latino-students-are-at-public-colleges-and-universities-not-as-many-as-there-should-be/> (accessed March 8, 2023).
- 2 Riser-Kositsky, Maya. "Education Statistics: Facts about American Schools." *Education Week*, January 17, 2023. <https://www.edweek.org/leadership/education-statistics-facts-about-american-schools/2019/01> (accessed March 2023).
- 3 Desiree Carver-Thomas, "Teacher Shortages Take Center Stage." *Learning Policy Institute*, February 24, 2023. <https://learningpolicyinstitute.org/blog/teacher-shortages-take-center-stage> (accessed March 8, 2023).
- 4 Kiesha N. Daniels, *Teacher Workforce Diversity: Why it Matters for Student Outcomes* (North Carolina: The Hunt Institute), August 2022. <https://hunt-institute.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/11/Kisha-Daniels-2-Teacher-Workforce-Diversity-Why-It-Matters-for-Student-Outcomes.pdf> (accessed March 8, 2023).
- 5 Malachi Barrett, "90% Of Michigan Teachers Are White. State Sets Goal to Fix 'Diversity Shortage' in Schools." *mlive*, September 28, 2021. <https://www.mlive.com/public-interest/2021/09/90-of-michigan-teachers-are-white-state-sets-goal-to-fix-diversity-shortage-in-schools.html> (accessed March 8, 2023).
- 6 "Diversifying the Teacher Workforce." *Diversifying the Teacher Workforce - Educator Excellence*. California Department of Education, September 6, 2022. <https://www.cde.ca.gov/pd/ee/diverseteteacherworkforce.asp> (accessed March 8, 2023).
- 7 Ibid.
- 8 Dan Weisberg, "Analyzing Teacher Preparation's Diversity Problem." *TNTP*, December 8, 2020. <https://tntp.org/blog/post/analyzing-teacher-preparations-diversity-problem#:~:text=Teacher%20preparation%20programs%20are%20significantly,school%20students%20are%2047%25%20white> (accessed March 2023).
- 9 *The Higher Education Act: A Primer*. Congressional Research Service. Washington DC, 2021. <https://sgp.fas.org/crs/misc/R43351.pdf> (accessed March 8, 2023)
- 10 *U.S. Department of Education Announces First-Ever Augustus F. Hawkins Centers of Excellence Program Grants to Strengthen Teachers of Color Pipeline and Address Teacher Shortage*. U.S. Department of Education, February 15, 2023. https://www.ed.gov/news/press-releases/us-department-education-announces-first-ever-augustus-f-hawkins-centers-excellence-program-grants-strengthen-teachers-color-pipeline-and-address-teacher-shortage?utm_content=&utm_medium=email&utm_name=&utm_source=govdelivery&utm_term= (accessed March 8, 2023)