

Diversifying by Investing in Educators and Students to Improve outcomes For Youth Act (DIVERSIFY) Sponsored by Senator Cory A. Booker and Reps. Chuy García and Jahana Hayes

The Challenge

Teachers are the [most important](#) in-school resource for student achievement, which makes a well-prepared, stable, and diverse educator workforce key to closing opportunity and achievement gaps. Yet nationally, in recent school years, [1 in 8 teaching positions](#)—or about 425,000 positions—were either unfilled or filled by teachers not fully certified for their assignments. Schools predominantly serving low-income students and students of color historically bear the brunt of shortages, as they are often staffed by a revolving door of [underprepared](#) and [inexperienced teachers](#).

Additionally, despite the fact that a diverse teacher workforce [improves student achievement and school climate](#), our teacher workforce does not encompass the diversity of the adult workforce or our student body. The most [recent data](#) show that only 20% of teachers are teachers of color, compared to 41% of U.S. workers and 50% of K–12 students. This means we are missing out on the many benefits of a diverse educator workforce. For example, [research](#) shows that Black teachers have a positive impact on Black student achievement and attainment, and Black and Latino/a teachers improve school climate and outcomes for all students.

One of the barriers to a well-prepared, stable, and diverse teacher workforce is the high cost of college, affordability barriers, and student loan debt. These factors impact whether individuals enter the profession, how well they prepare, and their likelihood of turning over. [Research tells us](#) that as the amount of loan debt students can expect to incur increases, the likelihood that they pursue [lower-paying jobs](#) like teaching decreases. For those who choose to pursue teaching, affordability barriers often push them into less comprehensive preparation pathways associated with less effective teaching and [higher turnover](#). Similarly, those who have student loan debt are [more likely to leave teaching](#) than those without debt. Today, 6 in 10 teachers [enter the profession having taken out student loans](#), and nearly 40% of teachers still owe some or all of their loan balances.

Due to systemic inequities, teachers of color [face higher college affordability](#) barriers and [carry heavier loan burdens](#) than their white counterparts. As a result, teachers of color are more likely than white teachers to enter the profession through [less comprehensive routes](#) that lack key elements of high-quality preparation like supervised student teaching. They also face higher debt burdens than white teachers. For example, [31% of Black teachers still owe at least their entire student loan balance](#), which is nearly 3 times larger than the share of all teachers who owe their full balance. This loan debt can contribute to financial pressures that lead to turnover. These inequitable college affordability barriers and loan debt burdens carried by teachers are undermining student access to a well-prepared, stable, and diverse educator workforce that matters for student learning.

The Solution

Service scholarship programs that truly offset the cost of teacher preparation are [proven](#) to be successful in recruiting diverse teachers to commit to teaching in high-need fields and schools. These programs provide upfront aid that can lower barriers to affording the high-quality preparation that matters for effectiveness and retention. Likewise, reducing the need to borrow can help alleviate the financial pressures that influence teacher turnover. Ultimately, service scholarships help school districts provide students with a well-prepared, stable, and diverse educator workforce.

Our nation's service scholarship for teachers, the TEACH Grant Program, was created by the bipartisan College Cost Reduction and Access Act of 2007. This program provides scholarships of \$4,000 per year to undergraduate and graduate students who commit to teaching a high-need subject in a high-poverty elementary or secondary school for 4 years.

Unfortunately, the award has not increased since it was created nearly 20 years ago. Not only has it failed to keep up with the rising cost of college, but since 2013 it has also been cut annually. Meanwhile, since 2007, college costs have continued to climb and the total student loan debt owed [has increased by more than \\$1.2 trillion](#). The failure to protect and increase the award amount limits the program's potential.

The DIVERSIFY Act Will Help Create a Well-Prepared and Diverse Educator Workforce by:

- (1) Aligning the TEACH Grant's maximum award with the cost of college today—[which exceeds \\$31,000 a year at four-year colleges and universities](#)—by increasing it to \$8,000 per year.
- (2) Ending annual cuts to the TEACH Grant award, which this year alone resulted in a decrease to the maximum award of over \$225. Without Congressional action, these cuts [will continue through 2029](#).
- (3) Eliminating the harsh loan conversion penalty, which can serve as a deterrent to entering the program, and therefore teaching.
- (4) Ensuring that the TEACH Grant program effectively covers the full cost of comprehensive preparation and reduces debt burdens by amending the program to cover the full cost of attendance, rather than just tuition, fees, and institutionally owned housing.
- (5) Requiring the Secretary of Education to send TEACH Grant recipients who have completed their service an electronic certification noting this accomplishment.
- (6) Supporting early educators by ensuring that they are eligible for TEACH Grants by including service in a high-need early education program, in addition to serving in a high-need school, as an eligible service area and adding early childhood education as a codified shortage subject.
- (7) Ensuring that only educator preparation programs at public and private nonprofit institutions of higher education are eligible to participate in the TEACH Grant program.

These reforms will help to ensure that students furthest from opportunity have access to a well-prepared, stable, and diverse educator workforce.