Window of Opportunity

How States and Localities Can Use Federal Rescue Plan Dollars to Diversify Their Teacher Workforce

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Introduction

Parents know, and research shows, that teachers are an essential part of student learning.[1] Teacher effectiveness matters more to student achievement than anything else schools do. Teachers also matter in intangible ways to the student experience, and the diversity of adults that students experience is one part of their schooling. That is why as states and school districts deploy the unprecedented allocation of federal dollars in the American Rescue Plan Act signed by President Biden on March 11, 2021, one option they should consider is how these dollars, $123 billion, could launch or accelerate robust efforts to diversify the K-12 teacher workforce before they sunset. Even though these are one-time dollars, used strategically these funds can help school districts and states move teacher diversity from a "what if" issue to an actual plan of action.

This policy brief is a road map for local education agencies (LEAs) and state education agencies (SEAs) to use ARP Elementary and Secondary School Emergency Relief III (ARP ESSER III) funds to build and sustain a high-quality teacher workforce that not only reflects all of America's public school students, but is also better equipped to meet their educational needs and raise academic achievement. We first lay out some contextual issues and then offer ideas for tangible solutions policymakers and education leaders can pursue, including ways to use other federal dollars to support these efforts. We also include case studies of promising initiatives underway nationwide.

Teacher Diversity Matters

Over the past decade, new research is quantifying something many people had assumed at a gut level: Teacher diversity matters for students. In fact, it increasingly is clear *all* students benefit from teacher diversity — but especially historically underserved students in American education, in particular Black students. There are many reasons for this but some evidence suggests nonwhite teachers have higher expectations and a better cultural understanding of students of color than their white counterparts.[2] What is more, representation matters to students of color who do better in school when they have at least one teacher of the same race that they are, resulting in higher attendance, reduced suspensions, and better performance on standardized tests.[3] White students also accrue the benefits of a diverse teacher workforce, which exposes them to an inclusive environment and the opportunity to see teachers from different races and ethnicities in respected roles.[4] Increasing teacher diversity can provide more perspectives and prepare students for postsecondary education and the workforce, where they will encounter the diverse tapestry of America.[5]

There is also evidence that teacher diversity is a workforce strategy. For instance, retention of Black teachers is greater in schools with a more diverse workforce,[6] which in the long term will help with overall recruitment. Being the sole or one of just a few persons of color in an otherwise all-white environment can carry with it challenges and often expectations for additional work — for instance, being frequently asked to take on roles such as the disciplinarian or mentor for nonwhite students.[7] This is one reason why even a one-time infusion of money focused on diversifying the teacher workforce will pay dividends over time through improved talent recruitment and retention efforts downstream.

Despite the intrinsic value of a diverse teacher workforce and progress made over the past 30 years, there is still a demographic mismatch between teachers and students in America's public schools. Overall, fewer than half of all public school students in the nation are white, versus 80% of public school teachers. (Compare Figure 1 and Figure 2.)[8]

Figure 1 Percentage Distribution of Students Enrolled in Public Elementary and Secondary Schools, by Race/Ethnicity: Fall 2002, 2012, and 2024
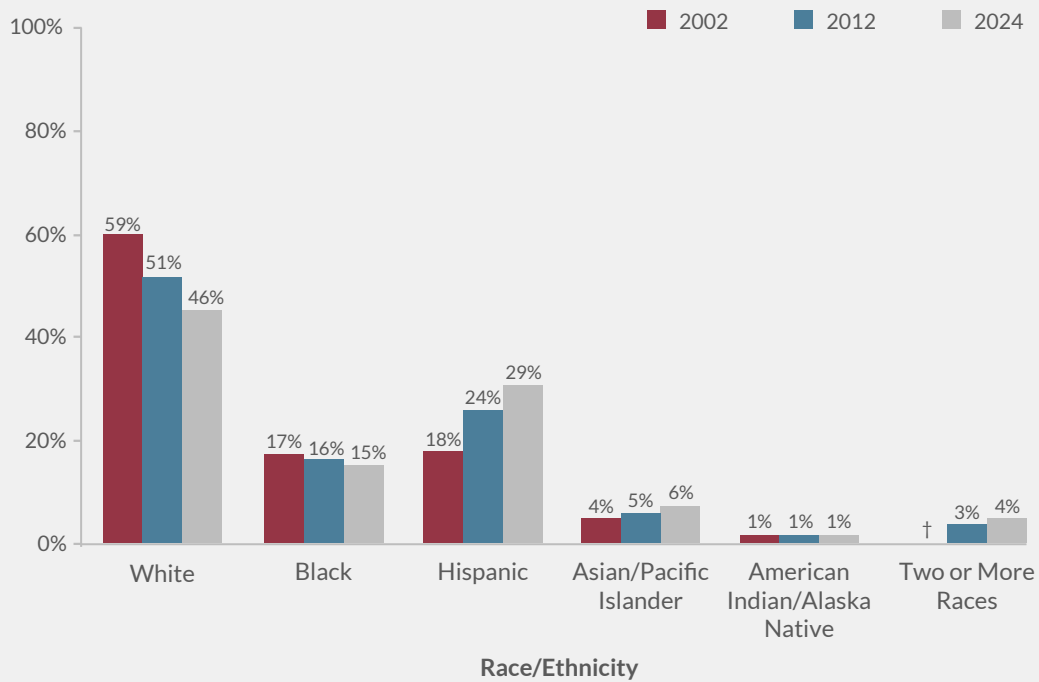
Source: US Department of Education, Office of Planning, Evaluation and Policy Development, Policy and Program Studies Service, *The State of Racial Diversity in the Educator Workforce* (Washington, DC: Department of Education, 2016), https://www2.ed.gov/rschstat/eval/highered/racial-diversity/state-racial-diversity-workforce.pdf.

Figure 2

Percentage Distribution of Teachers in Public Elementary and Secondary Schools, by Race/Ethnicity: Selected Years, 1987-88 through 2011-12
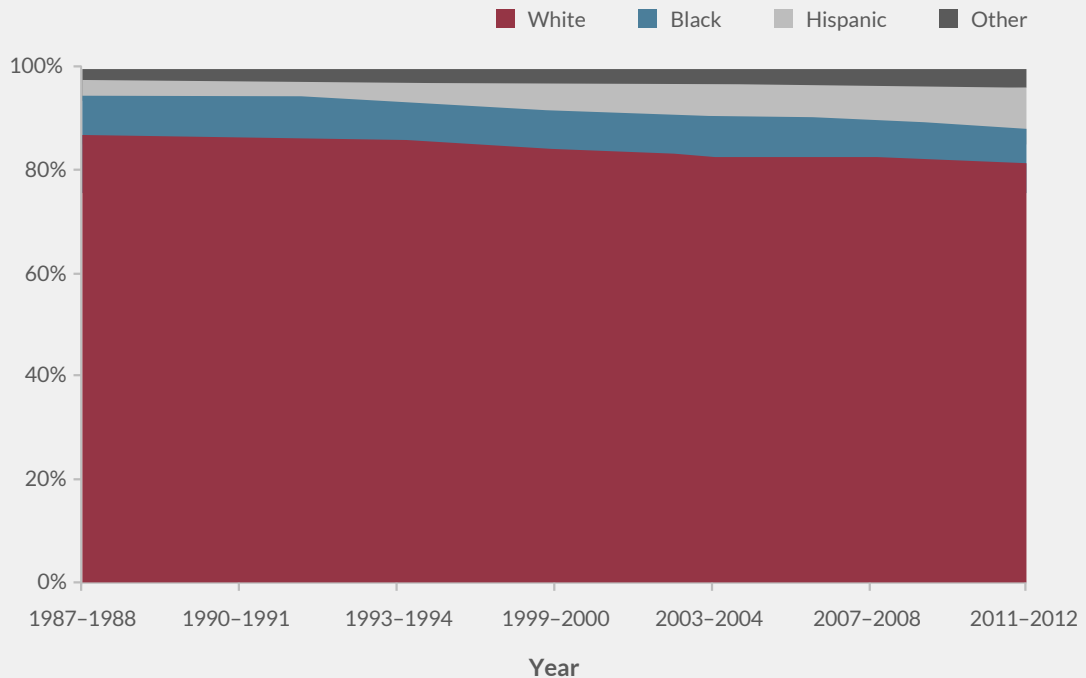
Source: US Department of Education, Office of Planning, Evaluation and Policy Development, Policy and Program Studies Service, *The State of Racial Diversity in the Educator Workforce* (Washington, DC: Department of Education, 2016), https://www2.ed.gov/rschstat/eval/highered/racial-diversity/state-racial-diversity-workforce.pdf.

We should caution that there are limits to the utility of the rather blunt analysis above. And these data can make the challenge seem more acute than it is and solutions consequently harder to achieve. For starters, the goal is not one-to-one representation because teachers do not teach just one student each. With each teacher reaching 20 or 25 students in the early grades, and multiples of that in middle and high school, the numbers become less daunting.

Time also works in favor of diversity. The country is changing and older generations of Americans, today's teachers, are not as diverse as today's younger generation of students. As the country diversifies, so, too, will its workforce.

In addition, for a variety of reasons ranging from demographic patterns to formal policies that reinforce segregation, diversity within communities and within states varies considerably. In practice this means at the state level, the diversity of the teacher workforce and the teacher-student race gap can vary by region. For example, in Table 1, you can see that in California, where 75% of public school students are persons of color, the teacher-student diversity gap (% of students of color - % of teachers of color) is 40 percentage points. In contrast, in Alabama, where 44% of the student body is made up of students of color, the gap is just 23 percentage points.

Table 1

Racial Diversity of Students and Teachers in Public Schools
Share of nonwhite students and nonwhite teachers in public schools, by state

State	School Year	Nonwhite Students	Nonwhite Teachers	Share of Nonwhite Students	Share of Nonwhite Teachers
Alabama	2015-16	330,197	9,971	44%	21%
Alabama	2014-15	325,342	9,764	44%	21%
Arkansas	2016-17	N/A	3,330	N/A	10%
Arkansas	2015-16	180,322	3,337	38%	10%
Arkansas	2014-15	184,459	3,425	38%	10%
California	2014-15	4,696,066	103,339	75%	35%
Colorado	2015-16	413,175	6,371	46%	12%
Colorado	2014-15	404,665	6,245	46%	12%
Connecticut	2014-15	231,813	4,268*	43%	8%
Connecticut	2013-14	226,990	3,502	42%	8%
Delaware	2014-15	71,467	1,238	53%	14%
Florida	2015-16	1,689,670	72,057	61%	42%
Florida	2014-15	1,648,632	50,327	60%	30%
Illinois	2015-16	1,051,933	21,107	51%	17%
Illinois	2014-15	1,033,414	22,692	51%	17%
Indiana	2015-16	339,024	4,693	30%	7%
Indiana	2014-15	312,206	4,596	30%	6%
Kentucky	2015-16	137,685	1,944	21%	5%
Kentucky	2014-15	144,959	1,861	21%	5%
Maryland	2014-15	525,308	14,476	60%	24%
Massachusetts	2015-16	355,985	4,253	37%	7%
Massachusetts	2014-15	347,391	4,369	36%	7%
Michigan	2015-16	N/A	8,329	N/A	9%
Michigan	2014-15	523,638	9,838	34%	10%
Minnesota	2015-16	271,425	2,412	31%	4%
Minnesota	2014-15	260,427	2,320	30%	4%
New Jersey	2015-16	735,969	17,664	54%	15%
New Jersey	2014-15	716,500	17,949	52%	16%
Oregon	2014-15	205,198	2,368	36%	8%
South Carolina	2015-16	367,166	10,581	48%	21%
South Carolina	2014-15	362,457	11,197	48%	22%
Texas	2014-15	3,717,697	133,767	71%	38%
Washington	2015-16	475,943	5,524	44%	10%
Washington	2014-15	459,708	5,156	43%	10%

* This number also includes staff who are not teachers.

Source: Center for American Progress, "Revisiting The Teacher Diversity Problem: Tables and Sources," (2017), https://www.americanprogress.org/issues/education-k-12/news/2017/09/28/415203/revisiting-persistent-teacher-diversity-problem/.

At the local level, we see similar patterns in the teacher-student race gap, but with variations depending on the different demographic makeup of each city (see Table 2). White teachers are still in the majority in the cities listed here, except in Los Angeles, where they compose only 43% of all teachers. One-third of Los Angeles' teachers identify as Hispanic, more than double that of New York City, the city with the next-largest contingent of Hispanic teachers. In San Francisco, 27% of the teachers identify as Asian, more than any other city listed here, and closely resembling the student body, which is 40% Asian. What the data show is that, while there is an imbalance between the race of teachers and the race of students, the picture varies quite a bit from city to city, thus presenting us with the challenge of finding solutions that are tailored for each context.

Some cities have also been more successful at diversifying their teacher workforce so that it more closely resembles their student body. For example, Fort Lauderdale, Florida, and Milwaukee, Wisconsin, have roughly the same proportion of Black school children in each city (around one-third of all children), yet the former has a larger proportion of Black teachers (22% of the district's workforce) than the latter (8%).[9] The variation could be a result of multiple factors, including differences in college completion, district incentives, and/or hiring practices, among others.

Table 2 > **Snapshot: Share of Teacher and Student Population in All Public Schools by Race and Ethnicity**

City	White		Black		Hispanic		Asian	
	Teacher	Student	Teacher	Student	Teacher	Student	Teacher	Student
Boston	63.1	11.7	21.3	36.5	9.5	41.8	5.6	7.9
Chicago	51.5	8.8	26.3	41.4	16.1	43.9	3.8	3.4
Cleveland	71.0	14.5	23.7	67.6	3.1	13.8	1.8	0.8
Los Angeles	42.9	11.0	10.5	10.2	33.5	70.7	12.3	6.2
New Orleans	50.9	6.2	42.8	87.9	3.3	3.2	1.8	1.8
New York City	59.6	14.3	19.2	28.4	14.8	39.5	6.1	15.1
Philadelphia	63.1	14.3	21.3	57.2	9.5	18.1	5.6	6.5
San Francisco	52.2	10.8	6.0	9.5	14.2	25.9	27.1	40.8

Note: For Boston, Chicago, Cleveland, and Los Angeles, the final year is 2011-12; for New Orleans, New York City, Philadelphia, and San Francisco, the final year is 2012-13.

Source: Albert Shanker Institute, *The State of Teacher Diversity in American Education,* September 2015.

Still, we must be cognizant of the scale of the challenge and issues.[10] Despite the changing demographics of the workforce mentioned above, student demographics are changing more quickly. In addition, the variety of doors that are now open to Black and Hispanic Americans that were closed a generation ago are an obvious point of progress. However, as with workforce changes creating greater opportunities for women a generation ago, it is one more reason schools must step up their efforts to recruit talent in a competitive labor market. It is also important to note that studies showing the benefits of teacher diversity take teacher effectiveness as a constant. In other words, the challenge of diversifying the teacher workforce is in addition to the generalized challenges schools face in finding talent.

Since the first step toward becoming a teacher is obtaining a bachelor's degree, one of the barriers to increasing the number of teachers of color is reducing the degree attainment gap, where disproportionately more whites and Asians hold bachelor's degrees compared to Blacks and Hispanics. That is changing rapidly as degree attainment rates rise among Black and Hispanic students. For instance, degree completion tripled for Hispanic students between 2001 and 2016, and by 75% for Black students during the same time period.[11] In education specifically, although obtaining a postsecondary degree in education is not necessarily a requirement to teach, the proportion of graduates majoring in education still skews largely toward white students, though it is changing.[12] Another critical factor to consider is student debt; among students who have debt, Black college graduates have on average $25,000 more in college loans than white college graduates.[13] More debt can cause students to seek other higher-paying professions and, more generally, students choose career paths for a variety of reasons, so education should only expect to see fractional gains even as more Black and Hispanic Americans complete college.

The opportunity is for policymakers and education leaders to focus on what programs and policies will yield the greatest impact toward building an effective *and* representative workforce. This policy brief outlines policy ideas and strategies for making progress toward this goal.

It is important to note that in this policy brief we focus mostly on Black and Hispanic teachers given the broad demographics of the United States, public school student demographics, and the teacher workforce. Local communities, however, should think about representation in a local context. For instance, schools serving a lot of Arab American students must consider diversity and representation in that context as should likewise schools serving Southeast Asian populations, or students with Central or South American or Persian populations. The core point is that diversity in general terms, and representation in specific terms, matters for young people and the strategies we outline here are broadly applicable in achieving those goals.

The American Rescue Plan Act Opportunity

The historic pool of federal education funds now available, either as part of the Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security (CARES) Act and the Coronavirus Response and Relief Supplemental Appropriations (CRRSA) Act in 2020 or the ARP in 2021, as well as from previously existing categorical ESSA and Higher Education Act (HEA) funding streams, mean school districts and states have an unprecedented opportunity — right now — to recruit, train, and retain more Black and Hispanic teachers.

While the majority of these funds are going to local education agencies, both LEAs and SEAs have a role to play in shaping policies and practices that will promote a more diverse educator workforce. These funds are primarily designated to address challenges resulting from COVID-19; however, they are flexible enough to also address long-standing systemic issues exacerbated by the pandemic. To date, states have or will receive around $190 billion in recovery funds to support K-12 education.[14] Given how many states and school districts have experienced a limited financial impact from the pandemic — and in some cases are running *surpluses* — there is an enormous opportunity to use these funds strategically.[15]

Interrogating Diversity Data in Pennsylvania and New Jersey

With the support of a federal Teacher Incentive Fund (TIF) grant, Mastery Charter Schools in Philadelphia and Camden, New Jersey, developed a comprehensive talent management system to strengthen its teacher workforce. Mastery's talent management system focused on improving teacher diversity to better represent its 14,000-strong student population, 73% of whom are Black, 20% of whom are Hispanic, and 87% of whom are economically disadvantaged.

As the Mastery network expanded, it became harder to recruit diverse talent with the experience or potential to be highly effective teachers. Mastery's team turned to a multifaceted approach. Leadership began by asking, "What is the value proposition for working here? Is this a good job?" With these foundational questions in mind, the team embarked on an ongoing data review cycle examining how recruitment practices impacted diversity. By putting the value proposition ahead of diversity outcomes, Mastery strengthened its approach to:

- **Outreach**, recognizing that most Black and Hispanic candidates applied through referrals and other mission-aligned organizations.

- **Hiring timelines**, reducing the time from application to hire from 40 to 20 days.

- **Hiring for diversity, equity, and inclusion**, defined as valuing relationship-building (particularly across lines of difference), identifying and interrogating biases and their impact, and evaluating candidates' identity and role as an anti-racist educator for social justice.

- **Annually refining recruitment questions** based on observations from check-ins with all new teachers, monitoring new teacher performance, and conducting new talent reviews with principals to assess hiring satisfaction and effectiveness aligned to core competencies.

- **Marketing themselves** through recruitment materials, a revised website, and an enhanced set of interview questions that emphasize the importance of Mastery's mission and values, quality of leadership, and opportunities for growth and development.

- **Growing a robust talent pipeline** through a teacher residency, with more than half of residents being people of color.

- **New teacher mentoring**, ensuring that new Black and Hispanic teachers in particular are recognized for their unique contributions.

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- **Salary clarity**, ensuring that Mastery's performance-based pay system (which allowed teachers to earn up to $90,000 within six to eight years), was sufficiently transparent. This enabled educators to predict and calculate anticipated pay raises and ensured that all teachers, regardless of race, could access the same information about pay and promotion parameters.

- **Candidate signing bonuses** totaling $2,500 for each of the first two years for teachers in high-need subjects and approximately $1,500 for alumni of partner networks such as Teach For America (although not a strategy specifically targeted at teacher diversity, it did allow Mastery to make more attractive offers).

- **Benefits packages** covering a whole family's health insurance, including nontraditional coverage for diverse populations, such as gender-affirming surgery.

- **Retaining Black and Hispanic teachers**, ensuring ongoing conversations with principals that encourage them to remain in the classroom.

- **Improving principal diversity**, as Mastery's exit interview data highlighted that a lack of leadership diversity left Black and Hispanic teachers unable to see a leadership trajectory for themselves.

Mastery reviewed not just its hiring outcomes, but also every stage of the hiring process through a diversity lens. From the initial phone screening interview to the demo day and beyond, Mastery reviewed data on how the demographics of the applicant pool changed to proactively identify where hidden bias might exist. Similarly, Mastery examined hiring criteria and asked if certain elements of it were systematically disadvantaging Black and Hispanic applicants and, if so, if those criteria were essential for effective teaching. Leadership implemented a process of continual improvement based on this data.

What worked best? The TIF grant evaluation found that the most effective strategies included the signing bonuses (particularly for bilingual/Spanish-language applicants), Mastery's shortened hiring timeline, and its improved website as a necessary-though-insufficient resource. Together, these data-driven talent management system strategies allowed Mastery to hire a new class of 2020-21 educators that is 58% teachers of color (compared to 6% statewide), at least 8% of whom are Black males.

Overview of Recovery Funds

Since March 2020, states have received an influx of funding related to mitigating disruptions caused by the pandemic. Starting with the CARES Act, the funds are meant to help prevent, prepare for, and respond to COVID-19-related disruptions (e.g., address learning loss, prepare schools for reopening and testing, and prepare and upgrade projects to improve air quality in school buildings). The $31 billion allocated to the Education Stabilization Fund, which must be obligated by states and subrecipients by Sept. 23, 2021, is divided into four grant programs:

1. The ED Stabilization Fund Discretionary Grants

2. Governor's Emergency Education Relief Fund

3. ESSER I Fund

4. Higher Education Relief Fund

A second round of aid — $54 billion via CRRSA — was approved in December 2020 to provide additional funding for the ESSER II Fund. (Again, states and subrecipients must obligate these funds by Sept. 23, 2022.)

The latest round of funding (ARP ESSER III), enacted on March 11, 2021, allocates nearly $123 billion to states to keep addressing "the most urgent needs of students, teachers, and staff while making the kinds of investments that build state, district, and school capacity in ways that sustain meaningful and effective teaching and learning."

Table 3 Overview of Recovery Funds

Topic	ESSER Fund (CARES Act)	ESSER II Fund (CRRSA Act)	ARP ESSER and Higher Education Emergency Relief Fund Act (HEERF)
Amount (Bil)	$31	$54	$123 (+$39 for Higher Education)
Authorizing Legislation	Section 18003 of Division B of the Coronavirus Aid Relief, and Economic Security (CARES) Act	Section 313 of the Coronavirus Response and Relief Supplemental Appropriations (CRRSA) Acts	Section 2001 of the American Rescue Plan
Available for Obligation through…	Sept. 30, 2021	Sept. 30, 2022	Sept. 30, 2023
SEA Must Award Funds…	Within one year of receipt, which is between April through June 2021, depending on award date.	Within one year of receipt, which is by January 2022.	For the 90% to LEAs, to the extent practicable, not later than 60 days after the SEA receives funds; the rest within one year.
LEA May Use Funds for…	Preventing, preparing for, and responding to COVID-19; same allowable purposes as ESSER II and ARP ESSER, including hiring new staff and avoiding layoffs; no required reservations of funds.	The same allowable purposes as ESSER and ARP ESSER, including hiring new staff and avoiding layoffs; addressing learning loss, preparing schools for reopening, and testing, repairing, and upgrading projects to improve air quality in school buildings; no required reservations of funds.	No less than 20% to address learning loss through the implementation of evidence-based interventions; remaining funds used for the same allowable purposes as ESSER and ESSER II, including hiring new staff and avoiding layoffs. Note that section 2001(e) specifically authorizes an LEA to use ARP ESSER funds to develop strategies and implement public health protocols in line with guidance from the CDC for the reopening and operation of school facilities.

Source: US Department of Education, "American Rescue Plan Act of 2021: Elementary and Secondary School Emergency Relief Fund (ARP ESSER)," fact sheet, 2021, https://oese.ed.gov/files/2021/03/FINAL_ARP-ESSER-FACT-SHEET.pdf

SEAs must adhere to the following parameters under ARP ESSER III:

- Allocate no less than 90% of their total allocation to LEAs according to each LEA's respective share of funds received under Title I, Part A of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965 (ESEA) in fiscal year 2020.

- Direct at least 5% of their total allocation toward the implementation of evidence-based interventions aimed specifically at addressing learning loss, such as summer learning or summer enrichment, extended-day programs, comprehensive after-school programs, or extended school year programs; 1% toward evidence-based summer enrichment programs; 1% toward evidence-based comprehensive after-school programs; and no more than 1% toward administrative costs and emergency needs as determined by the state to address issues related to COVID-19.[16]

Although LEAs also have spending parameters, they have latitude about how they allocate money. Like SEAs, LEAs must reserve a portion of their funds (20%) to address learning loss through the implementation of evidence-based interventions and ensure that those interventions respond to students' social, emotional, and academic needs, while addressing the disproportionate impact of COVID-19 on underrepresented student subgroups (each major racial, ethnic, and gender group, children from low-income families, children with disabilities, English learners, migrant students, students experiencing homelessness, and children and youth in foster care).[17]

Remaining LEA funds may be used for a wide range of activities to address needs arising from COVID-19, including any activity authorized by the ESEA, the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), the Adult Education and Family Literacy Act, or the Carl D. Perkins Career and Technical Education Act of 2006. Funds may also be used to develop strategies and implement public health protocols including, to the greatest extent practicable, policies in line with guidance from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) on reopening and operating schools to effectively maintain the health and safety of students, educators, and other staff.[18]

It may seem as though the opportunity to leverage these funds is already lost with the fast-moving deadlines and concern about a lack of high-leverage strategies for these dollars. The turnaround time for SEAs to submit their plans was just a matter of weeks, and 27 states and D.C. met the June 7, 2021 deadline. As of the writing of this policy brief, SEAs have already received $81 billion in funds, but they will not receive their portion of the remaining $41 billion until their plans are approved. However, the U.S. Department of Education considers the plans "living documents" and acknowledges that SEAs may need to amend them in the future. Similarly, LEAs may also need to revise their plans, in which case SEAs will have the discretion to determine the amendment and approval process so long as the LEAs' plans continue to meet the statutory and regulatory requirements. In other words, there is flexibility for states and LEAs that want to use these dollars in a high-leverage way. In addition to the $123 billion for K-12, another $39 billion was committed to postsecondary education as part of the Higher Education Emergency Relief Fund (HEERF).

In addition to these funding categories, states must demonstrate in their applications to the U.S. Department of Education for the ARP ESSER III funds how they are supporting the educator workforce, and explain how the state will further support LEAs in expanding the educator pipeline and diversity while addressing the immediate needs of those students who are most affected by the pandemic (e.g., recruiting teaching candidates to provide intensive tutoring or implementing residences for teacher candidates).
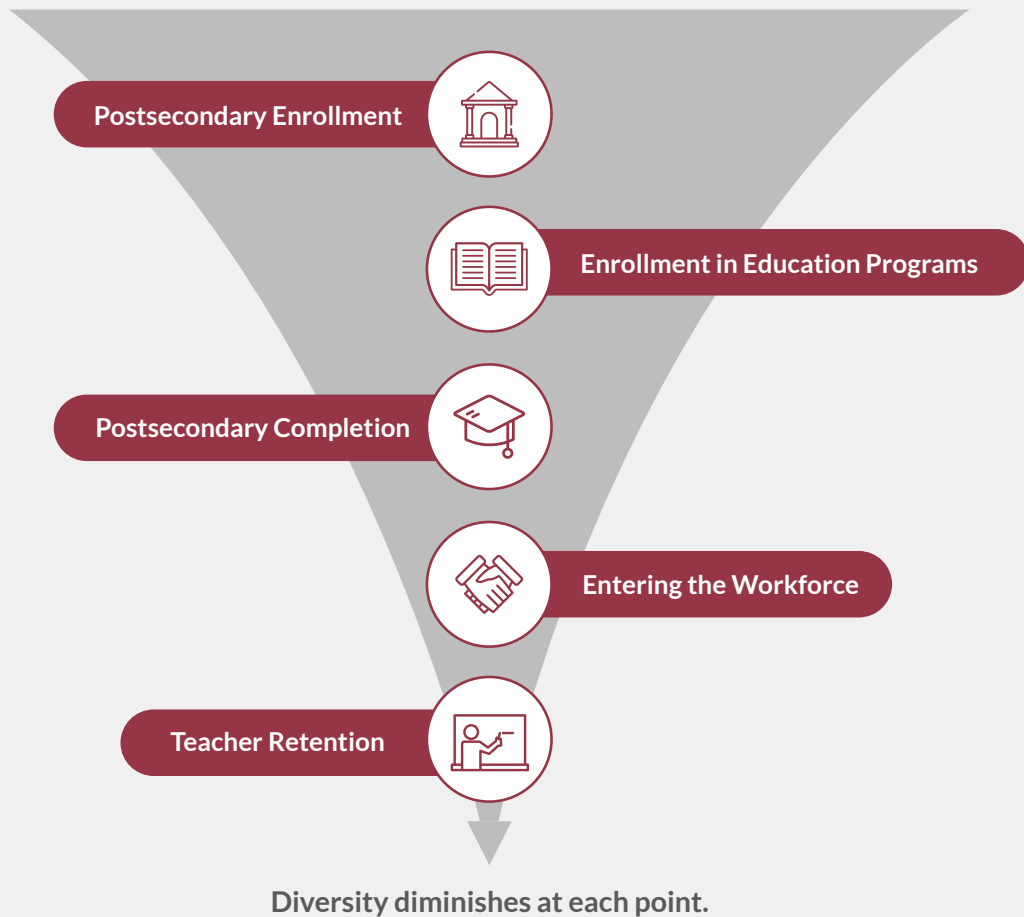
Ways to Use ARP Funds

- Implement COVID-19 prevention strategies to safely reopen schools and maximize in-person instruction, in alignment with public health guidance, including upgrading school facilities for healthy learning environments.

- Address the impact of lost instructional time by supporting the implementation of evidence-based interventions that respond to students' social, emotional, and academic needs.

- Address the disproportionate impact of COVID-19 on students of color, students from low-income backgrounds, students with disabilities, English learners, students who are migratory, students experiencing homelessness, students in correctional facilities, and students in foster care.

- Provide after-school, or other out-of-school time, programs that address students' social, emotional, and academic needs.

- Address the mental health needs of students, including through using funds to hire counselors and other staff.

- Provide integrated student supports, including through the use of full-service community schools.

- Provide students with evidence-based summer learning and enrichment programs, including through partnerships with community-based organizations.

- Connect K-12 students to high-quality home internet and/or devices.

- Stabilize and diversify the educator workforce and rebuild the educator pipeline.

- Provide children and youth experiencing homelessness with integrated student support services and assistance with attending school/participating in activities.

- Provide for any activities allowed under the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965, as amended (ESEA), the Strengthening Career and Technical Education for the 21st Century Act (Perkins V), and the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA).

This brings us to the present moment: States have recently submitted or are in the process of submitting their plans to the U.S. Department of Education for review and approval.[19] States must explain how they will maximize their ARP ESSER funds to implement evidence-based strategies to address the academic impact of lost instructional time, provide summer learning and enrichment programs, and provide comprehensive after-school programs. In turn, SEAs must also approve and monitor each of their districts' plans to address these needs.

The window of opportunity is now for SEAs and LEAs to make educator diversity a priority — and for education advocacy groups to push them to do so. A preliminary first step would be to analyze the teacher pipeline (see Figure 3) and the workforce in terms of diversity, assess and coordinate related initiatives and investments, and then determine which of the following will have the greatest return on investment. States can undertake this work or outside advocacy groups can build a case for action.

Figure 3 | **Key Points Along the Educator Pipeline**

Postsecondary Enrollment

Enrollment in Education Programs

Postsecondary Completion

Entering the Workforce

Teacher Retention

Diversity diminishes at each point.

Source: US Department of Education, Office of Planning, Evaluation and Policy Development, Policy and Program Studies Service, *The State of Racial Diversity in the Educator Workforce* (Washington, DC: Department of Education, 2016), https://www2.ed.gov/rschstat/eval/highered/racial-diversity/state-racial-diversity-workforce.pdf.

Guiding Support Staff on Their Pathway to Teaching in San Bernardino, California

Five years ago, San Bernardino Unified School District (SBUSD) in California sought to solidify its practices for improving teacher diversity. The district, which serves a student population of 53,000 — of whom 78% are Hispanic, 11% are Black, 5% are white, 1% are Asian, and 5% are other races — wanted to recruit from the community as much as possible to ensure that teachers understood and had empathy for students' experiences. District leaders intentionally recruited high school students enrolled in SBUSD's Teacher Pathway Program, providing "intent" contracts with guaranteed in-district interviews once eligible students earned teaching credentials.

When the State of California launched a Teacher Shortage grant competition, SBUSD, along with its county office, submitted an application to partner with the California State University system and support the tuition of classified district personnel (e.g., paraprofessionals, secretaries, clerks, and custodians), wishing to upgrade their skills and education to become teachers. Now in its third year, the state grant is supporting 21 classified employees, more than 60% of whom are either Black, Hispanic, Asian, or Pacific Islander. (Note: The program is not a true career ladder; roughly 75 additional classified personnel expressed an interest in applying to become teachers in SBUSD if the criteria for selection had not required holding a bachelor's degree.)

Building on the momentum, SBUSD applied for another grant in partnership with the University of California, Riverside to provide tuition support for individuals on the path to pursuing a special education certificate. The district targeted the opportunity for substitute teachers looking to become full-time special education teachers with experience in SBUSD's special education classrooms.

The district also focuses on another teacher pipeline support to provide tuition reimbursement for alumni working as substitute teachers in SBUSD as they pursue a teaching degree. Eleven substitute teachers are working toward teaching in SBUSD, with several hired already, in just two years of the program.

During the launch of SBUSD's teacher diversity initiatives, two challenges arose. The first was centered on messaging; although district alumni were preferred hiring candidates, the district needed to take greater care in messaging that the most highly qualified applicant would be offered the teaching position and to communicate with unsuccessful alumni applicants in ways that would mitigate feelings

of disenfranchisement. The second challenge was the onslaught of tough questions as SBUSD focused on growing a diverse teacher workforce. It was important for the district to articulate its vision and objectives on teacher diversity and to address questions such as, "Is the district only hiring nonwhite teachers now?"

While the original Grow Our Own initiative was championed by a school board member in 2015, in 2019 SBUSD's human resources director endeavored to scale the effort, launching a Teachers of Color campaign. The Teachers of Color campaign was guided by two overarching questions: (1) How can we attract more Black, Hispanic, and other teachers of color and educators wishing to serve in high-need communities to the district?; and (2) How can we retain them in the district? A Teachers of Color Committee was created, comprising each district department, charged with improving student learning and strengthening partnerships with local community colleges and universities, and community partners, such as city council members, faith-based organizations, and other community leaders. Faith-based organizations were particularly important partners as community hubs.

The Teachers of Color Committee meets monthly to discuss progress on agreed-upon action items and to ensure accountability. Representatives from California State University, San Bernardino and San Bernardino Valley College focus on maintaining a pipeline of diverse teachers from among the district's student alumni, while community leaders focus on how to secure the support of civic, faith-based, and policy leaders. Eventually, SBUSD hopes to strengthen student engagement, encouraging students and alumni in the district to become ambassadors by elevating these innovative programs through word-of-mouth outreach among peers in the community.

Approaches to Diversifying the Teacher Workforce

There are two primary areas[20] that must be addressed to create a more diverse teacher workforce:[21]

① Increasing the pipeline of Black and Hispanic teachers into the profession.

② Providing support to retain current teachers from diverse backgrounds.

From a recruitment perspective, the issue is not just one of replacing a focus on finding highly effective teachers with a new one on race or ethnicity. Rather, it is about using the current moment to identify highly effective teachers while also ensuring that this process incorporates a conscious effort to create a level of diversity that research has shown to have a positive impact on students.

Federal guidance calls out in its documentation the potential to use federal funds to address the staffing needs of schools as a result of departures brought on by the pandemic, exacerbating teacher shortages. These actions include supporting, "LEAs in expanding the educator pipeline and educator diversity."[22] Other federal funds, like Carl D. Perkins monies, can be used to recruit teachers.

Greater diversity and excellence as well as increasing the rigor of the requirements for becoming a teacher and diversifying the workforce are synergistic goals. Overall, we have seen that in a majority of states, there is an increase in the percentage of Black and Hispanic students majoring in education across the board since 2011. This growth has also occurred in the states with an increased rigor in the requirements for entry into these programs.[23]

Is This Legal?

People may wonder if programs aimed at diversifying the teacher workforce are legal. As a broad rule, programs and initiatives designed to remedy the effects of historic discrimination based on race and to ensure that public institutions are representative of the people they serve are permissible. Programs that focus on achieving workforce diversity through targeted recruitment, selection, and training are typically considered lawful, falling under the umbrella of affirmative action policies, as they are considered *narrowly tailored* to meet a *compelling government interest*, which is the U.S. Supreme Court's legal test for race-based classifications.

The Supreme Court's interpretation of the U.S. Constitution provides the underlying legal authority for these race-conscious approaches and all federal statutes or regulations must comply with that interpretation. Furthermore, some states have additional or supplemental laws specific to matters of state government — keep in mind that because of the federalist design of the Constitution, states can always provide more protection than a federal law but they cannot limit the guarantees and protections of federal law.

Program design is primarily (though not exclusively) constrained along three big dimensions:

1. What are the laws of the state in which the program operates?
2. What kind of entity offers or administers the program?
3. How is the program funded?

Depending on the answers to those questions, LEAs and SEAs should be mindful of specific legal constraints as they design teacher diversity programs.

There has been extensive state and federal litigation leading to these interpretations and rules. It is important to seek legal advice to better understand the laws that apply in order to design initiatives that can withstand legal challenges.

The competitiveness of programs and increasing diversity occurred simultaneously. A recent study by the National Council on Teacher Quality (NCTQ) found considerable variation among different teacher preparation programs, with some doing a better job than others at contributing to a more diverse pipeline of teachers. Teacher preparation programs in rural areas are doing a much better job at increasing the diversity of the candidate pool in their local areas than programs in either urban or suburban areas.[24] There also seems to be a mix of public and private programs that have the potential to change the trajectory. In New York City, for instance, at New York University (a private university) and Queens College (a public city university), the percentage of teacher candidates of color[25] enrolled in each program is greater than or equal to the diversity of the teacher workforce/local population in their state and local communities.[26] Overall, NCTQ found nearly 200 programs that were at once selective in their admissions criteria and diverse in their pool of candidates.

Both states and localities can play a leadership role to make progress diversifying their teaching force. LEAs can, as the case studies included with this policy brief show, create their own initiatives to attract and retain teachers or help resident talent upskill to become teachers. If a hundred 1% solutions achieve the same goal as a single 100% solution, then it may be ambitious LEAs that are best positioned to move the needle based on their local context if state leaders do not champion broader statewide efforts.

States, though, do have a powerful role to play. Statewide campaigns, incentives for recruitment and retention, and efforts to support effective teacher preparation are all areas where states can lead. Perhaps what is most striking about the policy solutions we lay out below is that they can be led and supported by governors, SEAs, or LEAs. In 2021, the challenge is less the ability to make progress or resources to support that work than it is political will.

From a retention perspective, schools and districts need to find ways to retain a diverse workforce. While high teacher turnover is a challenge for teachers in all districts, teachers from underrepresented backgrounds can experience unique stressors that cause them to leave the profession at higher rates. The quality of the school climate for teachers further influences recruitment; the better the environment in the school, the higher the likelihood that new teachers will come to work in the district and stay. In addition, teachers need access to support networks, mentors, and others to help them be successful in the workplace and to advance in their careers.

Learning From Racial Affinity Groups in San Francisco

San Francisco Unified School District (SFUSD) launched its teacher diversity work in 2013, when a post-recession economic boom led to rapid gentrification driving Black and Hispanic communities outside of the city limits. Then-mayor Ed Lee created a commission to address the issue, resulting in the school district, among other city departments, being charged with creating job opportunities to stem the exodus of Black and Hispanic San Franciscans.

In response, Swen Ervin, SFUSD's human capital analyst for diversity initiatives, launched focused outreach groups, called the FOG, in 2013. Ervin combed the list of Black and Hispanic teacher applicants and reached out to them directly, informally interviewing them and directing their résumés to school sites looking to diversify and offering stellar applicants an on-the-spot contract for a guaranteed position in that year's FOG cohort. Ervin would visit their classrooms once they were hired to personally check on teacher well-being. Annual FOG cohorts were launched for each of the subsequent three years.

Based on previous trends, Ervin anticipated teacher retention challenges for FOG cohorts. He began this work by reviewing staffing data. One glaring finding was that, with 250 Black teachers spread across 140 schools, many were the only Black teachers in their school. So Ervin added to the districtwide new teacher orientation a workshop specifically designed for teachers of color (including all races/ethnicities), where new hires were encouraged to exchange numbers and form friendships to overcome what might otherwise have been an isolating start to a new job. Ervin also built upon existing site-based affinity groups to create districtwide racial affinity groups among teachers to support community, friendship, and professional and personal growth. By 2017, the FOG achieved a retention rate of 65% for participating teachers, with departing members most commonly citing rising cost of living as the reason for leaving the district and cohort.

In addition, it became clear that paraprofessionals were a powerful untapped resource for improving teacher diversity in SFUSD. But principals needed a change in perspective; too often they viewed paraprofessionals as a different type of educator, less suitable for a classroom teaching position. Principals needed help seeing the cultural capital strength paraprofessionals brought, many of whom were former SFUSD students and knew the community well. Ervin worked to change the hearts and minds of principals while also holding a workshop for paraprofessionals, central office secretaries, and other classified staff with an interest in becoming a classroom teacher. SFUSD reimbursed costs of

the Basic Educational Skills Test and supported candidates in earning state credentials via the SFUSD Pathways to Teaching Grow Our Own program. The current Pathways to Teaching cohort comprises 68% nonwhite teachers.

One of the top lessons learned? In the words of Ervin, "There is not six degrees but *two degrees* of separation in minoritized communities. This work is grassroots." Connecting early on with community-based organizations, such as the NAACP, UnidosUS (formerly The National Council of La Raza), and employee resource groups helped increase awareness. Individuals who had been connected with the district for years wanted to learn more about pathways into teaching.

One notable partner, the Black Teacher Project, helped SFUSD retain Black teachers. With its support, Ervin surveyed all Black teachers in the district to learn about their experiences, likes/dislikes, and what supports would keep them in SFUSD. The district also paid for teachers to attend summer institutes hosted by the Black Teacher Project to further strengthen community and share best practices for supporting and retaining Black educators within and beyond SFUSD.

In 2017, when the SFUSD superintendent charged district leaders with closing the Black-white achievement gap, it created a natural extension of the teacher racial affinity groups to the central office. Central office leaders in SFUSD, who are further away from the classroom, needed a space to grapple with the roles they play in creating and reinforcing policies and processes that lead to inequitable outcomes for students and to think about transformative system change.

What began as a convening of 20 teachers in 2014 has expanded to 400 educators and central office staff building meaningful community through retention efforts. Many members have participated in a form of SFUSDwide or site-based racial affinity spaces. The district now has a dedicated Black educator recruitment workstream that supports a pipeline of more than 70 Black candidates who aspire to teach in SFUSD, attends historically Black college and university (HBCU) teacher recruitment events nationally, and leads targeted outreach with Black student organizations and local universities to continue to grow this pipeline.

Recruitment

There are five areas with promising solutions for increasing the diversity of the teacher pipeline:

1 Early career exposure.

2 Grow-your-own (GYO) programs.

3 Partnerships.

4 New pathways.

5 Addressing student debt.

Early Exposure: Actively recruit high school students to the profession.

Rather than wait until they start college, districts can begin the process of recruitment while students are still in high school. Recruiting diverse teachers often focuses on adult learners rather than middle or high school students. Most programs focus on adults who already have a degree because they can upskill quickly. Programs designed to expose current students to the teaching profession at an early age are not as common. There are models that execute thoughtful strategies in diversity and focus on secondary students, including the Center for Black Educator Development in Philadelphia, for example. Another is the Pathways2Teaching program, which focuses on the social justice aspect of teaching and getting young students to see teaching as an opportunity to disrupt inequities in education.[27]

Some of these programs also pay for high school students' dual enrollment/dual credit participation.[28] While dual enrollment/dual credit may play a role in GYO strategies, it can also be a standalone strategy to incentivize course-taking in schools of education and be an effective strategy for growing a pool of highly qualified and diverse candidates. Furthermore, offering students dual enrollment opportunities shortens their time to degree completion; early enrollment into education programs would also accelerate students' time to certification and increase the number of teachers in the pool.

Efforts around dual credit are also an example of how such initiatives can make use of different pots of federal money beyond K-12 funds. That is because states can use the higher education funds through HEERF to support these efforts.

Early college high schools can also build a pipeline of qualified teachers that better reflect the demographic makeup of the community.[29] For example, North Carolina's Charlotte Teacher Early College program's mission is to provide access to college coursework for first-generation-college and economically disadvantaged students and to expand the local and

state pipeline. The Recruiting Washington Teachers (RWT) program in that state is a high school teacher academy that recruits, develops, and supports students from underserved backgrounds to pursue teaching.[30] Along with the Bilingual Educators Initiative (BEI), the state's Professional Educator Standards Board oversees the implementation of the RWT and BEI programs via grants to districts that support developing partnerships among high schools, teacher preparation programs, students, families, and community-based organizations. Both programs are successfully recruiting diverse groups of students: 73% of participants identify as students of color; 55% as Black or Hispanic.

High school and dual-enrollment programs provide an opportunity to both make students aware of teaching as a profession and to give them a leg up in the process of applying for and completing their training in college or university. They also provide an opportunity to reframe education for young students of color, who may have had negative experiences throughout their K-12 career, including feeling marginalized and disenfranchised in a system with few role models.[31] To change this situation, high school teacher programs can include a curriculum that helps students see education as a vehicle for social change and as a meaningful and fruitful career with the potential for advancement into leadership roles outside of the classroom.

Even a slight increase in the number of diverse teachers today could change the way many high school students view the profession, setting into motion a process that will lead to more teachers of color down the road.

Grow Your Own: Create and/or expand on programs increasing pathways to teaching.

The past two decades have seen the growth and success of alternative teacher training programs across the country. Outside of large programs like Teach For America or Relay Graduate School of Education, some states and districts are also expanding pathways to the profession, and leveraging GYO models as a way to increase the diversity of the teacher pipeline and take advantage of existing talent.[32] GYO educator programs seek to both broaden and diversify the pool of candidates by recruiting from local communities, including high school students, paraprofessionals already working in schools, and other community members.

Often, GYO programs involve collaborations among school districts, higher education institutions, and communities. But states can play an important role in supporting their development, not only in terms of funding but also in sharing best practices and policies. For example, in 2020, the Tennessee Department of Education launched a competitive grant program to facilitate and expand GYO programs across the state. The $2 million initiative supported partnerships in 37 districts, covering teacher candidates' training and paying them for their participation in a variety of residency models. For example: [33]

- Tennessee State University created a pathway for graduating high school seniors to earn a bachelor's degree with an initial licensure in biology or chemistry and either a Special Education or ESL endorsement.

- Austin Peay State University's and Lipscomb University's partnership with Clarksville-Montgomery County will maximize the number of education assistants and high school seniors who are able to enroll in GYO programs.

- The University of Tennessee–Knoxville created an LEA partnership targeting education assistants as an existing talent pool of future licensed teachers, with an emphasis on meeting the demand for teachers in STEM: math, biology, chemistry, physics, and earth science.

- Lincoln Memorial University's various partnerships will allow education assistants with a bachelor's degree to receive a Master of Education degree while receiving initial Tennessee licensure in visual arts, physical education, elementary education, or secondary education, as well as a teaching endorsement in special education.

Each of these examples highlights different approaches to growing the educator workforce and can be customized to a particular state and/or district and with a specific focus on increasing and retaining educator diversity. States can use their set-asides to incentivize this work, and LEAs can leverage their states' investment while implementing their own individualized programs.

GYO programs provide a lower ramp to enter the teacher workforce, making it easier to get members of the community who better represent the student body into the classroom. In many cases, these community members are already working in the school or district as paraprofessionals, coaches, or other roles, but lack the proper education or certification for becoming a teacher despite having life experiences that will help them connect with students of color.

In addition to GYO programs, states could use funds to support teacher residencies which have also been effective at increasing the diversity of the teacher corps. ESSER funds could be used to seed new, high-quality clinical programs that would better prepare teachers for the classroom, reducing turnover. This could allow districts to use the savings each year — in part due to increased retention — to continue the programs and transition residents into full-time staff.[34]

Partnerships for Preparation: Provide grants that facilitate partnerships between districts and institutions of higher education (IHEs), particularly minority serving institutions (MSIs) and HBCUs, to better prepare candidates to join the LEA.

States can do a much better job working with IHEs to both ensure greater diversity in teacher preparation programs and prepare student teachers for the classroom. States can start by entering into agreements with IHEs that would allow them to partner on student recruitment, curriculum, and student-teacher training. One urgent area of need is preparing aspiring teachers of color for state licensure exams. In general, Black candidates fail the assessments at higher rates than white candidates do; this pattern is seen for both state content assessments as well as the practice-based edTPA.

The tests, however, are widely supported by educators and others, and, along with other measures of achievement, are predictive of teacher performance.[35] Hence, states need not consider throwing out licensure exams, which have potential for identifying highly effective teachers. Instead, states should support candidates by providing them with more resources — mentorship, tutoring, and guidance — to pass assessments.[36] Candidates of color are also less likely to retake the certification exam if they do not pass the first time (partly due to costs). Recent evidence from NCTQ also shows that 25% of the test takers who fail state content elementary exams do not retake them within the allotted three-year window.[37] In addition, one-third of test takers of color[38] who fail do not retake the test. This is a missed opportunity to help candidates who offer considerable potential but need support to clear this hurdle.

These partnerships could further start with MSIs and HBCUs, which have historically been influential in producing Black teachers. About 38% of all Black teachers are graduates of MSIs, which produce around one-fifth of all college graduates in the U.S.[39] States could offer competitive grants to school districts that form innovative partnerships with universities and teacher training programs to build a closer pipeline from training to work, to invest in data systems that would support these collaborations, and to fund staff time for professional development.[40]

It is important to note that all of these partnership efforts will be insufficient unless they are coupled with a commensurate effort on the part of the state to hold teacher preparation programs accountable for their quality.

Investing in High School Students' Teaching Pathways in Chicago

Teacher diversity has been a priority in Chicago Public Schools (CPS) for at least a decade. By 2019, the district realized that, despite its ongoing efforts, the diversity of the teaching corps was not rising above 50%. The student population that, as of 2019, was 64% economically disadvantaged, 36% Black, 47% Latino, 11% white, and 6% other, was matched by a teaching population that was 21% Black, 21% Hispanic, 50% white, and 8% other. Bigger, bolder change was needed. The school district's director of teacher talent pipelines, Felipe Perez, realized that the most diverse pool of talent in the state was CPS' student body and that the most diverse pool of college students was at its sister institution, City Colleges of Chicago.

The district's talent office began asking a series of important questions: "Have we been thinking too small-scale in our approaches to recruiting and retaining diverse teachers? Have we been underestimating CPS student interest in teaching? Could we go all-in on investing in students with a passion for pursuing a career in teaching right here in Chicago?" For Perez, the answer to all was a resounding yes. There was an undeniable and overwhelming interest in the district's teacher residency program — more than 5,000 individuals expressed interest in just 150 residency positions. Perez reviewed the district's survey of high school students. Teaching was the No. 2 career choice, with one in 10 students expressing interest in the job. Perez engaged in listening sessions at CPS' seven teaching pathway career and technical education academies. From these sessions it became clear: CPS students were eager, yet intimidated, to pursue a teaching career.

The vision that emerged is Teach Chicago Tomorrow (TCT), a bold initiative that connected the CPS Talent Office and Office of College and Career Success, Community Colleges of Chicago, and four-year colleges in removing the logistical and financial barriers to navigating the pathway into teaching. Formally launched in 2021, the TCT program supports seamless transitions to and through high school, two years of community college, two years at a four-year college that includes a full year of student teaching, and a full-time CPS teaching placement. Community Colleges of Chicago decided to invest in the TCT model, creating the Supporting Emerging Educator Development scholarship, which provides students $3,000 per year, removing tuition and fees as a barrier to obtaining a teaching credential (though not the opportunity costs of foregone income). The homegrown model means students can keep living costs low as well. TCT also uses a cohort model to create a support network and professional learning community with current and alumni participants in order to address students' intimidation stemming from the prospect of a career in teaching. One district leader

describes TCT as "Grow Our Own on steroids." The first TCT cohort will support 100 students in 2021-22, with the goal of supporting 500 teachers a year, fully meeting CPS' typical demand for new teachers by 2025.

TCT was designed to simultaneously address the K-12 need for increased teacher diversity and the postsecondary sector's need for greater success and equity in college enrollment, persistence, and completion. Currently, community colleges are the No. 1 destination of CPS graduates, with over one-third of graduates who enroll in college enrolling at a Community College of Chicago; TCT works within this established pathway to ensure that students will thrive in community college. In launching the initiative, the CPS Talent Office shifted from a recruiter approach that focused on persuading 22-year-old Black and Hispanic college graduates to work in CPS and toward a developer approach that focused on the perspective of 17-year-old high school students' dreams and fears and the district's deep belief in the talent of its own students. A key lesson? For 17-year-old CPS students, a $3,000 scholarship got their attention.

As a homegrown CPS student, teacher, principal, and district leader who credits her own decision to teach in part to a teaching scholarship, CPS CEO Dr. Janice Jackson was a natural champion. But while support from top leadership was key to securing the higher-ed partnerships, support from neighborhood partners on the ground was key to building awareness and encouraging students to take their first steps into the teaching profession.

New Pathways: Coordinate workforce development efforts to design and implement pathways to teaching.

The post-COVID-19 labor market in education may also lead to a surge in hiring as schools reopen in-person classes and the economy begins to bounce back.[41] States could take advantage of an increase in labor mobility and focus their attention on getting career switchers who are leaving their jobs to enter the field of education.[42]

To support this trend, states can also leverage and coordinate recruitment efforts and pathway options within their state's workforce initiatives. In addition to ESSER funds, states are receiving other ARP funding streams that can be used for this purpose, including Career and Technical Education (CTE) dollars.

With the new federal funding, states can provide multiple pathways to becoming an educator.[43] This can start early in high school (as previously mentioned), where students could earn credentials that will be recognized in a postsecondary institution as credit toward their major in education. It may also mean providing opportunities through community college programs for adult learners who are transitioning into new areas of the workforce after a disruption in their careers.

One high-impact option is through the development of a tutoring corps to address learning loss experienced by students, particularly in underrepresented communities. Not only has high-dosage tutoring been shown to improve student outcomes, but massive hiring of high school and college graduates to work as tutors in schools could stimulate the local economy[44] and create an opportunity to build a pipeline from tutor to teacher.

Overall, states can use this moment as a new opportunity to reform workforce development efforts — and CTE — to provide training in the skills and competencies that are necessary for an innovation economy.

Addressing Student Debt: Commit resources to actively educate prospective teacher candidates with comprehensive information about underutilized federal and state subsidies, especially federal TEACH grants and loan forgiveness programs.

One of the biggest barriers to entry into teacher preparation programs is high student loan debt students are saddled with upon graduating from an IHE. On average, Black students have higher student debt than white students.[45] Black, Latino, and Asian students are more likely to mention student debt as a factor limiting their choice of postsecondary educational institution. Blacks are also more likely to have made a change in their career plans due to their education loans, a situation that would potentially inhibit their decision to become a teacher.[46] States could support teacher training programs with additional information and workshops to help prospective candidates form strategies for making their degrees work for them.

New federal funds could further be used to expand and even increase TEACH grants — subsidies of up to $4,000 that support students in completing coursework on their pathway to becoming a teacher. Students are required to teach after their degree for a certain number of years. At a minimum, federal stimulus dollars could be used to provide prospective students with information about TEACH grants and other financial support.

Retention

While building a diverse pipeline is critical for increasing numbers, it is only one side of the coin. The other is keeping teachers — both new and seasoned educators — in the profession. The new federal funds could be used to ensure incoming teachers who find jobs in schools stay in their roles and grow in the profession. We have identified three core areas that provide the potential for a high return on investment for schools and districts seeking to diversify their teacher workforce:

1. Professional development.

2. Build networks and communities of practice.

3. Leadership training.

Professional Development: Fund meaningful affinity networks and mentoring.

As noted in an earlier brief from the Learning Policy Institute[47] on the importance of diversifying the workforce, high-quality professional development opportunities and support are a critical investment toward retaining all teachers, especially teachers from underrepresented backgrounds. Teachers of color have a turnover rate of around 19%, compared to 15% for their white counterparts. Black teachers[48] have one of the highest rates of turnover, and Black male teachers are leaving the teaching profession at a higher rate than their peers.[49] Effective professional development opportunities can reduce the isolation reported by teachers, help with retention efforts, and increase learning conditions for students.

States can use their set-asides to fund grants designed to help school districts implement voluntary affinity networks and mentoring programs for teachers from underrepresented backgrounds. In addition to or separate from state aid, districts can also invest in these programs and offer stipends to participate. Why are these programs needed? Black and Hispanic teachers in primarily white schools may find themselves isolated and lacking opportunities to build their professional network or simply share similar experiences with like-minded professionals.[50] Voluntary affinity groups offer more than just a social group; they are a vehicle to build social and professional capital, enhancing teachers' career aspirations and supporting their teaching as well. Affinity groups also offer teachers of color a place to address issues, including difficult ones around race, openly without fear of retribution.[51]

Districts can also invest in professional mentoring programs — engaging seasoned teachers to support the professional goals of new teachers and help them navigate the pathways to advancement, whether that includes moving to leadership roles or staying in the classroom to train future generations. Mentoring programs and other forms of professional development will further enhance the reputation of the district, increasing the likelihood of attracting new teachers of all races in the future.

Build Networks and Communities of Practice: Support opportunities for teachers to participate, including covering out-of-class time.

Teachers cite a lack of support and collaboration in their schools as one reason for leaving the profession. However, some programs/initiatives show that facilitating and creating networks can keep teachers engaged. Communities of practice allow teachers to connect with peers around a particular challenge or problem they face in teaching and learning for which they can brainstorm solutions through a structured process. In contrast with an affinity group, communities of practice engage teachers outside of their schools and districts, sometimes even with teachers across the country.[52]

States could and should support the creation and development of communities of practice in LEAs as opportunities for bottom-up innovation by teachers to come up with their own solutions to the challenges they face in the classroom. Such initiatives provide teachers with the agency they seek and a chance to demonstrate their leadership potential.

Now is an ideal time for states to support the creation of communities of practice as LEAs build on the momentum of one of the more positive outcomes of COVID-19 — a more digitally savvy teacher workforce that can participate in remote forums across geographical lines. In addition, schools and districts may choose to focus their community of practice on issues of diversity in the teacher workforce, borrowing, for example, from a recent initiative that was held earlier this year.[53] In this way, LEAs could also build on the overall national awareness of diversity and the role of education in addressing inequity.

Leadership Training: Provide opportunities to build principals' capacity to create an inclusive workplace culture.

School leadership has a major influence on teacher turnover. One of the main reasons teachers quit is the lack of support from their principals, more so than their salaries or dissatisfaction with their job assignment.[54] This is true for all teachers, including Black and Hispanic teachers, though the research suggests that the latter experience different and unique challenges related to bias; this may include being pigeonholed into certain roles (for example, as the school's disciplinarian) or being asked to focus their efforts on Black and Hispanic students.[55]

One of the key attributes for a successful school with low turnover is the creation of an inclusive work culture where leadership provides teachers with both support and a high level of autonomy in decision making in the classroom.[56] Such an environment would provide increasing opportunities and support for Black and Hispanic teachers to introduce innovative and culturally relevant curriculum, further engaging their students in much deeper ways, changing their perspective on education. This would, in the end, support the potential recruitment of young Black and Hispanic students into education, either through high school apprenticeship programs or in college.

Figure 4 > **The Diverse Teacher Workforce Ecosystem**
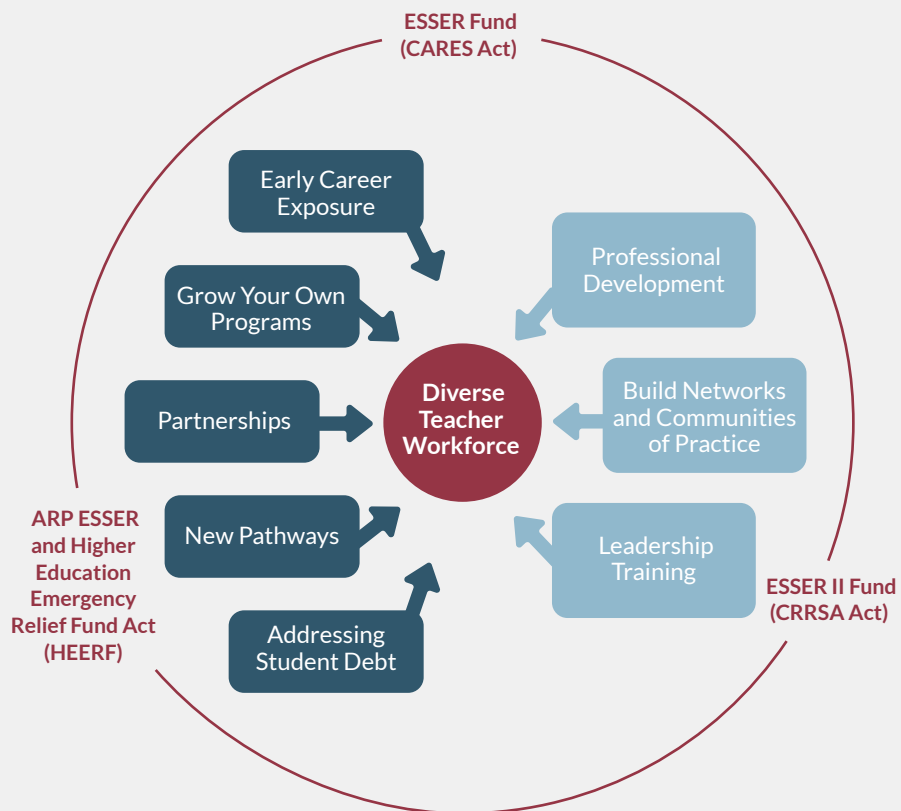
Attracting Diverse Teachers Through Compelling College Loan Repayments in Providence, Rhode Island

In the spring of 2021, the Providence Public School District (PPSD) launched a college loan repayment incentive program to improve the recruitment and retention of diverse teachers to better match district demographics of its 24,000 students (of whom 68% are Hispanic, 15% are Black, 6.5% are white, 4% are Asian, 5.5% are multiracial, 1% are Native American, and 86% are considered economically disadvantaged). Through this initiative, newly hired full-time teachers of color (including all nonwhite teachers), may receive up to $25,000 in loan repayment incentives in their first three years in PPSD. Specifically, up to 25 new-to-the-district teachers can expect to have up to $6,000 of their college loan debt paid off after completing year one of teaching, up to an additional $8,500 after completing year two, and up to an additional $10,500 after completing year three.

The initiative grew out of a state takeover of PPSD several years ago. A Community Design Team comprising district and state education agency staff developed a district turnaround action plan that highlighted the need for improved teacher diversity. In October 2020, PPSD created a district Diversity, Hiring, and Retention Task Force. The task force is home to biweekly meetings with human resource officers and the district's chief equity officer to advance the district's teacher diversity efforts. Around this time, the Rhode Island Foundation learned of a local donor with an interest in recruiting diverse teachers through college loan repayment. The foundation coordinated with additional donors and PPSD to secure $3.1 million for the initiative.

The importance of student loan repayment as a PPSD recruitment strategy became apparent in conversations with newly hired teachers in previous years. A large majority of Black, Hispanic, and multiracial recruits grappled with college debt, and the district found itself balancing the need to support them with relocation, licensure, or other incentives. Repaying student debt was determined to be the most impactful tactic, particularly since the Rhode Island Foundation directly pays the state's student loan authority. Relieved of having to track receipts and administer reimbursements, teachers and district leaders could devote greater attention to teaching and learning.

In addition to overseeing the student loan repayment program, the PPSD taskforce oversees a portfolio of related recruitment and retention efforts. These include recruiting out-of-state teachers and within-state professionals who were not planning to become teachers; offering support sessions for teachers to renew their teaching certificates and pass the Praxis tests; training school leaders on relationship-building and school-based onboarding; reigniting a new teacher support program;

creating affinity groups, including for new teachers of color in order to improve retention; and working with local partners, such as Educators Rising, which cultivates the interests of local high school students in teaching careers.

Meanwhile, the Rhode Island Foundation supports the Equity Institute and College Unbound, which last year launched a TA to BA Fellowship program that supports 13 PPSD teaching assistants and substitute teachers in earning their bachelor's degrees and teaching certification. Specifically, the TA to BA Fellowship supports teaching assistants in completing two college classes per semester toward obtaining the bachelor's degree from a local college, provides a full-group lab component, and covers all but $1,000 or less of tuition. Interest among teaching assistants soared from just 16 applicants in year one to 60 applicants in year two — a 275% increase.

The $3.1 million foundation initiative will fund the launch of the student loan repayment program with the hopes that the initial spark will lead to longer-term financial support. An additional two-year, $110,000 annual grant will fund a new PPSD diversity and pipeline design specialist position to coordinate personnel, marketing, and collaboration with partners, staff, and family engagement as well as implementation of new diverse teacher incentives and supports. With this position just filled in June 2021, it is still too early to assess progress and impact for this promising initiative.

PPSD hopes to hire more than 125 teachers over the next five years through the program, an effort that, if successful, would constitute approximately 14% of new teacher hires districtwide. As of June 2021, the program is off to a promising start: 18 new PPSD teacher hires identified as nonwhite (including eight candidates who identified as Hispanic, five as multiracial, four as Black and one as Asian) and qualified for the college loan repayment program, representing 31% of new hires (double the original goal).

Conclusion

The latest round of funding represents the largest one-time federal investment in education in American history. Spending these dollars in a high-leverage way is important for students, and for the political case for future education dollars. Efforts to diversify the teacher workforce, which we have mapped out in this paper (see Figure 4), accomplish both of those goals.

If used strategically to invest in a set of retention and recruitment strategies, ARP funds and other federal dollars can catalyze systemic changes to the educator pipeline without incurring substantial ongoing obligations that could lead to falling off a fiscal cliff once the aid disappears.

Ideally, these investments will build on and/or be coordinated within a broader state- and districtwide plan to address educator workforce diversity. However, absent an overall plan to recruit, develop, and retain more teachers of color, states and districts can, at a minimum, test many promising practices and policies to inform which educator diversity investments will yield the most effective and sustainable impacts long after the funds sunset. In addition, a portion of the funds must be dedicated to building data systems that monitor and track spending in ways that foster a more diverse teacher workforce.

In the end, a diverse teacher workforce is a *better* workforce — more effective and equipped to address the needs of all young people public schools serve.

Endnotes

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Acknowledgments

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About Bellwether Education Partners

Bellwether Education Partners is a national nonprofit focused on dramatically changing education and life outcomes for underserved children. We do this by helping education organizations accelerate their impact and by working to improve policy and practice.

Bellwether envisions a world in which race, ethnicity, and income no longer predict opportunities for students, and the American education system affords all individuals the ability to determine their own path and lead a productive and fulfilling life.