

Diversifying by Investing in Educators and Students to Improve outcomes For Youth Act (DIVERSIFY)
Act (H.R. XXXX) *Rep. Garcia, Illinois*

The Challenge

All students should be taught by expert teachers and attend schools where the rich diversity of our nation is reflected in the teacher workforce. Research demonstrates that, in terms of influence on student achievement, expert teachers are the most important, yet most inequitably distributed, resource. For example, schools predominantly serving historically underserved students are often staffed by a revolving door of underprepared and inexperienced teachers. Additionally, while a majority of public school students are children of color, only 20% of all teachers are people of color. All students benefit by learning from teachers of color. The impact is especially significant for students of color, who have higher test scores, are more likely to graduate high school, and more likely to succeed in college when they have had teachers of color.

One of the barriers to a well-prepared and diverse teacher workforce is the high cost of college and student loan debt. Research tell us that college students' potential debt burdens influence their decisions about what profession to enter – with the more debt likely to be incurred the less likely they are to pursue low-paying jobs like education, after graduation. For those that choose to teach, the high cost of college and student loan debt often causes them to select lower quality pathways, resulting in less effective teaching and high turnover rates, exacerbating teacher shortages. The high cost of college and increasing student loan debt burdens hits students of color especially hard as they are more likely to come from families that are unable to contribute financially to their higher education.

These facts come at a time when college affordability has reached crisis levels. Today, more than two-thirds of individuals entering the field of education borrow money to pay for their higher education, resulting in an average debt of about \$20,000 for those with a bachelor's degree and \$50,000 for those with a master's degree. Students that take on this debt then enter a workforce where teachers earn about 30% less than individuals with college degrees who enter other fields.

The Solution

Research suggests that service scholarship programs can be successful in recruiting diverse teachers to commit to teaching in high needs fields and schools. To be effective research shows that award amounts must substantially offset the cost of the preparation program and the service scholarship must be administratively manageable. In addition to benefiting students, these investments save money, as better prepared teachers can save districts the expense of replacing those who leave, which can run up to \$20,000 per a teacher or nearly \$8 billion a year.

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, since 2007 the grant award has not increased to keep up with the rising cost of college. Since 2007, the total inflation-adjusted net cost (tuition, fees, room and board) of attending a public four-year institution of higher education for an in-state student has increased by nearly \$3,000 and total student loan debt owed has increased by about \$1 trillion. Failing 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) Increasing the maximum TEACH Grant award to \$8,000 per year to align with the full cost of college today – which exceeds \$20,000 a year.
- (2) Protecting the TEACH Grant award from being cut by the Budget Control Act which this year alone resulted in a decrease to the maximum award of nearly \$250.

These reforms will help to ensure that students the furthest from opportunity have access to diverse teachers who have completed high-quality pathways into the profession.