

United States Senate
WASHINGTON, DC 20510-4607

July 20, 2021

The Honorable Charles Schumer
Senate Majority Leader
S-221, The United States Capitol
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Mitch McConnell
Senate Minority Leader
S-230, The United States Capitol
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Majority Leader Schumer and Leader McConnell,

As you work to craft legislation that will improve our country's physical and human infrastructure, we write to strongly urge you to include a \$9 billion investment in a well-prepared, diverse, supported, and stable educator workforce, as outlined in President Biden's American Families Plan.

Research on high-performing countries has demonstrated that at the center of a strong education system is a well-prepared, skilled, stable, supported, and diverse educator workforce. The United States has [invested far less than other countries](#) in the educator workforce, providing little support for training, mentoring, and professional learning. As a result, even before the pandemic, [teacher shortages were widespread](#), with more than 100,000 classrooms staffed by substitutes or teachers without training, and high teacher attrition rates, especially in schools serving children in poverty. Moreover, [nearly every state](#) reported shortages of teachers in high-need subjects like special education, math, science, and English language instruction. Further, our country's rich diversity—where people of color are 40 percent of our population and more than half of our public school students—[is not reflected](#) in our educator workforce where only 20 percent of teachers are people of color.

Students of color, low-income students, students with disabilities, and other historically underserved students bear the brunt of these inequities. Research shows that schools with high enrollment of students of color [are four times](#) as likely to employ uncertified teachers as schools with low enrollment of students of color. Similarly, schools with high enrollment of students of color have less experienced teachers, with [one in every six teachers](#) at the beginning of their career, compared to one in every 10 teachers in schools with low enrollment of students of color. In Title I schools, teacher turnover [is nearly 50 percent greater](#) than in non-Title I schools. In high-need subjects like math and science, teacher turnover rates are nearly [70 percent greater](#) in Title I schools than in non-Title I schools.

These inequities have many causes. They include a disproportionate concentration of teachers [lacking thorough preparation](#) in high-need schools, many of whom bypass comprehensive preparation because of its costs. Teachers who enter the profession through less comprehensive pathways are [two to three times](#) more likely to leave their schools than those who had comprehensive preparation. Moreover, due to structural inequities, including inequitable college affordability barriers, teachers of color [are more likely](#) to be placed in the situation of entering the profession through less comprehensive pathways than white teachers. Additionally, under resourced schools are often unable to offer competitive salaries to retain experienced teachers who can support student achievement and can support novice teachers, leaving these schools with a disproportionate concentration of beginning teachers still struggling to learn their craft. Further, these schools—which face shortages of fully certified teachers—often lack funding to support teachers in obtaining certifications in shortage areas and those that

reflect advanced expertise, like National Board Certification, which [are associated with increased academic achievement](#). Finally, many seasoned and effective teachers can support beginning teachers in becoming stronger but lack leadership opportunities to do so.

The American Families Plan presents an opportunity for Congress to help close equity gaps in student access to a well-prepared, diverse, supported, and stable educator workforce. As such, we urge Congress to provide \$9 billion over ten years to close these opportunity gaps in the following ways:

1. [**Invest \\$2.8 billion in comprehensive preparation programs through the Teacher Quality Partnership Grant Program \(TQP\)**](#). This investment should support teacher residency programs and Grow Your Own (GYO) programs. Teacher residency programs are high retention and diverse pathways into teaching that prepare prospective teachers to serve in high-need schools and subjects. Teacher candidates work as paid apprentices alongside expert teachers while completing tightly aligned and integrated coursework. By leveraging teacher candidates' existing connections to the communities they plan to teach in, GYO programs are another effective strategy to recruit and retain well-prepared and diverse teachers. Finally, it is important to note that TQP has been chronically underfunded. Over the past decade, there has been a cumulative gap of over \$2.5 billion between TQP's authorization and funding levels.
2. [**Provide \\$400 million to the Augustus F. Hawkins Centers of Excellence**](#). Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs), tribal colleges and universities (TCUs), and other minority-serving institutions (MSIs) are a long-standing source of well-prepared and diverse educators. For example, despite making up just 3 percent of institutions of higher education, HBCUs prepare 50 percent of the nation's Black teachers. Despite HBCUs', MSIs', and TCUs' [integral role](#) in supporting student access to well-prepared and diverse teachers, the only federal program designed to specifically support comprehensive teacher preparation at these institutions has never been funded since it was authorized in the bipartisan reauthorization of the Higher Education Act in 2008.
3. [**Allocate \\$900 million to the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act \(IDEA\), Part D's personnel preparation program**](#). In the 2017-2018 school year alone, [nearly every state](#) reported shortages of teachers in high need subjects and fields, including special education. Further, special education teacher turnover rates are [80 percent higher](#) in schools with the greatest concentration of students of color than in those with the lowest. Sustained investments of this level in IDEA Part D's personnel preparation program would help grow programs that prepare specialized instructional support personnel, teachers of students with disabilities, early educators, and the higher education faculty and researchers that support their preparation. Further, with many grantees dedicating [65 percent of grant funds](#) to student financial support, this investment can help lower affordability barriers for prospective educators, including prospective educators of color.

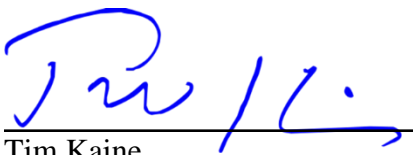
In addition to these specific investments, we encourage you to consider increasing aid to educators in exchange for teaching high-need subjects in high-need schools so future educators have access to affordable comprehensive education preparation at institutions of higher education. Today, two-thirds of those entering the education field must take out loans to afford their higher education, resulting in [an average debt](#) of \$20,000 for those with bachelor's degrees and \$50,000 for those with master's degrees. Due to systemic inequities, the cost of comprehensive preparation and student loan debt [are higher barriers](#) to entering and staying in the education profession for people of color. Fortunately, [research shows](#) that service scholarships that underwrite all or most of the cost of comprehensive preparation

and are well-administered are effective at attracting and retaining teachers that serve in high-need areas. Further, in the past, budget reconciliation [has been used](#) to create service scholarships for teachers.

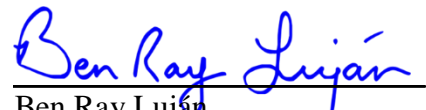
Congress should also consider providing dedicated funding to increase student access to certified, experienced, effective, and empowered teachers. Students of color and low-income students are more likely to be taught by uncertified and inexperienced teachers than white students. The cost of earning certifications in shortage fields and those that reflect advanced expertise are a barrier for some teachers' efforts to complete preparation programs in these and other areas. Dedicated financial support provided to states to support the attainment of certifications in high-need subjects would ultimately enable stronger teaching for students who are otherwise taught in larger classes or by substitutes and teachers hired without preparation. Likewise, financial support for advanced certifications like National Board Certification would provide more students with greater access to teachers who have demonstrated effectiveness in increasing student achievement and who can also [support novice teachers in becoming more effective](#). Finally, seasoned and effective teachers have the background and skills to support their colleagues but often lack access to formal opportunity to serve as leaders. Congress should also consider providing additional funding to support states and districts in providing teachers the ability to serve as leaders through opportunities like high-quality teacher mentorship programs, which research shows supports [teacher retention](#) and [improves student outcomes](#).

Decades of data have made clear that students of color and students from families experiencing low incomes lack equitable access to a well-prepared, diverse, supported, and stable educator workforce. We urge you to seize this moment and invest in the most important in-school factor to student learning – educators – by including a \$9 billion investment in a well-prepared, diverse, supported, and stable educator workforce in an infrastructure package.

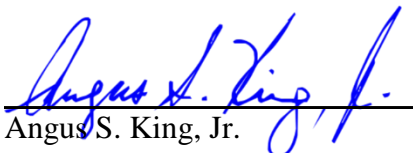
Sincerely,



Tim Kaine
United States Senator



Ben Ray Lujan
United States Senator



Angus S. King, Jr.
United States Senator



Tina Smith
United States Senator



Chris Van Hollen
United States Senator



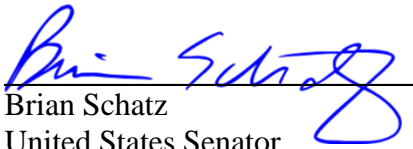
Benjamin L. Cardin
United States Senator



Amy Klobuchar
United States Senator



Cory A. Booker
United States Senator



Brian Schatz
United States Senator



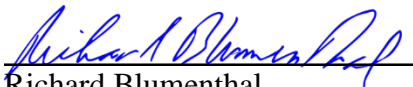
Elizabeth Warren
United States Senator



Mazie K. Hirono
United States Senator



Alex Padilla
United States Senator



Richard Blumenthal
United States Senator



Raphael G. Warnock
United States Senator

CC:

The Honorable Patty Murray, Chair
Senate Committee on Health, Education, Labor,
and Pensions
United States Senate
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Richard Burr, Ranking Member
Senate Committee on Health, Education, Labor,
and Pensions
United States Senate
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The Honorable Bernie Sanders, Chair
Senate Committee on the Budget
United States Senate
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The Honorable Lindsey Graham, Ranking Member
Senate Committee on the Budget
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