

TEACH Grants: Improving their Effectiveness in Supporting and Diversifying the Educator Workforce

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Background: Lack of Diversity, Educator Shortages, and Inequity

Inequitable access to well-prepared and diverse educators has been a feature of our country's education system. In fact, the latest civil rights data collection shows that students of color have inequitable access to experienced and certified teachers. [A recent report](#) found that schools with high enrollment of students of color were four times as likely to have uncertified teachers and were more likely to have inexperienced teachers than schools with low enrollments of students of color. Moreover, prior to the pandemic [almost all states](#) suffered teacher shortages, as 47 states reported shortages in math teachers, 46 in special education, 43 in science, 40 in world languages, and 32 in English language instruction. These shortages and the lack of access to certified and experienced teachers are concentrated in schools that serve the students furthest from opportunity and translate into inequitable opportunities to learn, which are evident in civil rights data concerning [access to advanced course work](#) and [unsupportive and discriminatory learning environments](#).

A cornerstone of guaranteeing that all students – especially students of color, students from low-income backgrounds, and students with disabilities – have access to a well-prepared, diverse, supported, and stable educator workforce is ensuring that prospective educators have access to comprehensive educator preparation that research shows is tied to greater retention, effectiveness, and diversity.

Barrier: Cost of College

One of the barriers to this high-quality workforce is the high cost of college and student loan debt. Postsecondary students make decisions about what the careers they go into [based in part on](#) the salaries they can expect and the student loan debt they will take on. Educators can expect to [make 30% less](#) by mid-career than similarly credentialed professionals. Two-thirds of those that go into the education field take on debt, averaging between [\\$20,000](#) and [\\$50,000](#), for bachelor's and master's degrees, respectively. Driven in large part by costs and student debt, [from 2009 to 2017](#), 340,000 fewer students enrolled in educator preparation programs.

For students of color these barriers for entering the education profession and doing so through a comprehensive preparation program are higher. Due to systemic factors, students of color are more likely come from families with less wealth to help finance their higher education. In fact, compared to other racial and ethnic groups, white students [are the least likely to come from families](#) that are unable to contribute to their higher education. Student loan debt also disproportionately impacts students of color. [For example](#), Black undergraduates finish school with \$7,400 more in student loan debt than their white peers. Over four years this gap expands to \$25,000 and in twelve years it quadruples, where Black graduates owe more than \$43,000 than white graduates.

Result: Higher Turnover for Less Prepared Teachers

Due to inequitable affordability and student loan barriers, students of color who do go into teaching are disproportionately placed in the situation where they enter teaching through less comprehensive pathways, entering teaching through these pathways [at twice the rate](#) of white candidates. These less comprehensive pathways are associated with higher turnover which in turn decreases student access to a well-prepared, diverse, and stable educator workforce.

TEACH Grants

Fortunately, the TEACH Grant program can incentivize diverse candidates to go into teaching and provide them the ability to afford the comprehensive preparation necessary to teach for the long-haul. The TEACH Grant Program was created through budget reconciliation, by the College Cost Reduction and Access Act (CCRA) of 2007 (P.L. 110-84). It provides scholarships of \$4,000 per year (for up to 4 years) to undergraduate and graduate students that are preparing for a career in teaching. In exchange for this grant aid recipients commit to teaching a high-need subject in a high-poverty school for 4 years within an 8 year period. This grant is converted to a Federal Direct Unsubsidized Stafford Loan (with interest accrued from the date each grant was awarded) if a teacher does not fulfill their commitment. In [the 2019-2020 academic year](#) nearly 27,000 students, at 741 institutions, received over \$79 million in aid, with an average award of \$2,974.

The program's effectiveness has been stymied by inadequate regulations, poor administration by loan servicers, and a reduced grant award. Fortunately, [new regulations](#) are being implemented (some of which [are being codified into law](#)) and by the end of the year the program's loan servicer will [no longer service](#) federal aid programs .

Improvements Needed for TEACH Grants

It is now up to Congress to make the program more effective by aligning its aid with the cost of comprehensive preparation today. This can be done by increasing the grant award, ending automatic cuts to the annual award, and allowing the grant to cover the full cost of preparation. The program's grant award has not increase since it was created in 2007, and since 2013, the annual award has been automatically cut to help reduce the federal deficit. Since 2007, college costs have [increased by](#) 31% at public institutions and 23% at private institutions, and student debt has [grown by over \\$1 trillion](#).

Congress can further incentive service and simplify the program by eliminating the program's loan conversion penalty. To ensure only programs of quality can access the program Congress should limit eligibility to public and non-profit private institutions of higher education. Finally, on the cusp of a federal expansion of pre-K it can amend the program to fully include early educators so that our youngest students have access to a high-quality, diverse educator workforce.

[Improvements to the TEACH Grant program](#), including doubling the award amount, reforming the loan conversion penalty, and fully including early educators are a key component of the Biden-Harris Administration's [\\$9 billion proposed investment in the educator workforce](#) detailed in the American Families Plan.

Below, please find seven specific recommendations to help the TEACH Grant program better support student access to a well-prepared, diverse, supported, and stable educator workforce.

(1) Recommendation: Increase the award amount to \$8,000 to reflect today's cost of comprehensive educator preparation and to lower inequitable college affordability barriers.

Suggested Legislative Language:

In section 420M(a) of the Higher Education Act

(1) PAYMENTS REQUIRED.—The Secretary shall pay to each eligible institution such sums as may be necessary to pay to each teacher candidate who files an application and agreement in accordance with section 420N, and who qualifies under paragraph (2) of section 420N(a), a TEACH Grant in the amount of ~~\$4,000~~ \$8,000 for each year during which that teacher candidate is in attendance at the institution.

In section 420M(d) of the Higher Education Act

(d) PERIOD OF ELIGIBILITY FOR GRANTS.—

(1) UNDERGRADUATE AND POST-BACCALAUREATE STUDENTS.—The period during which an undergraduate or postbaccalaureate student may receive grants under this subpart shall be the period required for the completion of the first undergraduate baccalaureate or post-baccalaureate course of study being pursued by the teacher candidate at the eligible institution at which the teacher candidate is in attendance, except that—

(A) any period during which the teacher candidate is enrolled in a noncredit or remedial course of study as described in paragraph (3) shall not be counted for the purpose of this paragraph; and

(B) the total amount that a teacher candidate may receive under this subpart for undergraduate or post-baccalaureate study shall not exceed ~~\$16,000~~ \$32,000.

(2) GRADUATE STUDENTS.—The period during which a graduate student may receive grants under this subpart shall be the period required for the completion of a master's degree course of study pursued by the teacher candidate at the eligible institution at which the teacher candidate is in attendance, except that the total amount that a teacher candidate may receive under this subpart for graduate study shall not exceed ~~\$8,000~~ \$16,000.

(2) Recommendation: End the annual cuts to the TEACH Grant award which, without Congressional action these cuts [will continue through 2029](#). This year alone the maximum award was cut by over \$225.

Suggested Legislative Language:

Exemption of Program From Sequestration.—[Section 255\(h\) of the Balanced Budget and Emergency Deficit Control Act of 1985 \(2 U.S.C. 905\(h\)\)](#) is amended by inserting after the item relating to "Supplemental Security Income Program (28-0406-0-1-609)." the following new item:

(a) TEACH Grants under subpart 9 of part A of title IV of the Higher Education Act of 1965.

(b) Applicability. — The amendment made by this section shall apply to any sequestration order issued under the Balanced Budget and Emergency Deficit Control Act of 1985 (2 U.S.C. 900 et seq.) on or after the date of enactment of this Act.

(3) Recommendation: Ensure that the TEACH Grant program effectively covers the full cost of comprehensive preparation and reduce debt burdens by amending the program to cover the full cost of attendance, rather than just tuition, fees, and institutionally owned housing.

Suggested Legislative Language:

In section 420M(b)(3) of the Higher Education Act

(3) DISTRIBUTION OF GRANTS TO TEACHER CANDIDATES. — Payments under this subpart shall be made, in accordance with regulations promulgated by the Secretary for such purpose, in such manner as will best accomplish the purposes of this subpart. ~~Any disbursement allowed to be made by crediting the teacher candidate's account shall be limited to tuition and fees and, in the case of institutionally owned housing, room and board. The teacher candidate may elect to have the institution provide other such goods and services by crediting the teacher candidate's account.~~ Any disbursement allowed to be made by crediting the teacher candidate's account shall be used for the full cost of attendance (as defined in section 472).

(4) Recommendation: Eliminate the harsh loan conversion penalty which can serve as a deterrent to entering the program, and therefore teaching. Incentivize service by requiring the Secretary of Education to send TEACH Grant recipients who have completed their service an electronic certification noting this accomplishment.

Suggested Legislative Language:

In section 420N of the Higher Education Act

~~(2) in the event that the applicant is determined to have failed or refused to carry out such service obligation, the sum of the amounts of any TEACH Grants received by such applicant will be treated as a loan and collected from the applicant in accordance with subsection (c) and the regulations thereunder; and~~

~~(3) contains, or is accompanied by, a plain language disclosure form developed by the Secretary that clearly describes the nature of the TEACH Grant award, the service obligation, and the loan repayment requirements that are the consequence of the failure to complete the service obligation.~~

~~(c) REPAYMENT FOR FAILURE TO COMPLETE SERVICE.— In the event that any recipient of a grant under this subpart fails or refuses to comply with the service obligation in the agreement under subsection (b), the sum of the amounts of any TEACH Grants received by such recipient shall, upon a determination of such a failure or refusal in such service obligation, be treated as a Federal Direct Unsubsidized Stafford Loan under part D of title IV, and shall be subject to repayment, together with~~

~~interest thereon accruing from the date of the grant award, in accordance with terms and conditions specified by the Secretary in regulations under this subpart.~~

(c) Certificate. — Upon the completion of the service requirement in subsection (b), the Secretary shall send to the recipient of a grant under this subpart an electronic certificate documenting the completion of such service.;

(X) by redesignating subsection (d) as subsection (e);(D) by inserting after subsection (c) the following:

(d) Prohibition. — The Secretary may not institute or create a monetary penalty for failure or refusal to complete the service requirement under subsection (b).

(5) Recommendation: Increase access to strong early educators by ensuring that they are eligible for TEACH Grants by including service in a high-need early education program, in addition to service in a high-need school, as an eligible service area and adding early childhood education as a codified shortage subject.

Suggested Legislative Language:

In section 420N(b) of the Higher Education Act

(b) AGREEMENTS TO SERVE.—Each application under subsection (a) shall contain or be accompanied by an agreement by the applicant that—

(1) the applicant will—

(A) serve as a full-time teacher for a total of not less than 4 academic years within 8 years after completing the course of study for which the applicant received a TEACH Grant under this subpart;

(B) teach in a school described in section 465(a)(2)(A) **or teach in a high-need early education program (defined in section 200(9));**

(C) teach in any of the following fields—

(i) mathematics;

(ii) science;

(iii) a foreign language;

(iv) bilingual education;

(v) special education;

(vi) as a reading specialist; ~~or~~

(vii) another field documented as high-need by the Federal Government, State government, or local educational agency, and approved by the Secretary; **or**

(viii) early childhood education;

(6) Recommendation: Ensure that only education preparation programs at public and private non-profit institutions of higher education are eligible to participate in the TEACH Grant program.

Suggested Legislative Language:

In section 420L of the Higher Education Act

For the purposes of this subpart: (1) ELIGIBLE INSTITUTION.—The term “eligible institution” means an institution of higher education, as defined in section 102 (except that such term does not include an institution described in subsection (a)(1)(A) of section 102), that the Secretary determines

(7) Recommendation: From 2007 to 2020, the maximum TEACH Grant award remained the same while the inflation rate increased over 24%. Indexing the TEACH Grant award to inflation, in addition to doubling the award, will ensure these award dollars do not diminish in value as the cost of college increases and wages remain flat.

Suggested Legislative Language:

In section 420L of the Higher Education Act

(4) ANNUAL ADJUSTMENT PERCENTAGE – The term “annual adjustment percentage” as applied to an award year, is equal to the estimated percentage change in the Consumer Price Index (as determined by the Secretary, using the definition in section 1087rr(f) of this title) for the most recent calendar year ending prior to the beginning of that award year

In section 420M(a) of the Higher Education Act

(1) PAYMENTS REQUIRED.—The Secretary shall pay to each eligible institution such sums as may be necessary to pay to each teacher candidate who files an application and agreement in accordance with section 420N, and who qualifies under paragraph (2) of section 420N(a), a TEACH Grant in the amount of ~~\$4,000~~ \$8,000 and increased by a percentage equal to the annual adjustment percentage based on the preceding year and continue for subsequent award years for each year during which that teacher candidate is in attendance at the institution.

In section 420M(d) of the Higher Education Act

(d) PERIOD OF ELIGIBILITY FOR GRANTS.—

(1) UNDERGRADUATE AND POST-BACCALAUREATE STUDENTS.—The period during which an undergraduate or postbaccalaureate student may receive grants under this subpart shall be the period required for the completion of the first undergraduate baccalaureate or post-baccalaureate course of study being pursued by the teacher candidate at the eligible institution at which the teacher candidate is in attendance, except that—

(A) any period during which the teacher candidate is enrolled in a noncredit or remedial course of study as described in paragraph (3) shall not be counted for the purpose of this paragraph; and

(B) the total amount that a teacher candidate may receive under this subpart for undergraduate or post-baccalaureate study shall not exceed ~~\$16,000~~ \$32,000 and

increased by a percentage equal to the annual adjustment percentage based on the preceding year and continue for subsequent award years.

(2) GRADUATE STUDENTS.—The period during which a graduate student may receive grants under this subpart shall be the period required for the completion of a master’s degree course of study pursued by the teacher candidate at the eligible institution at which the teacher candidate is in attendance, except that the total amount that a teacher candidate may receive under this subpart for graduate study shall not exceed ~~\$8,000~~ \$16,000 and increased by a percentage equal to the annual adjustment percentage based on the preceding year and continue for subsequent award years.

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