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PROTECTING PATHWAYS TO THE PROFESSION:

The Imperative of Maintaining & Strengthening Pipelines for Educators of Color

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UCLA Center for the Transformation of Schools

Introduction

In a recent New York Times guest essay entitled "The Trump Administration Is Trying to Unravel One of Our Greatest National Accomplishments," former U.S. Secretary of Education John King provides a cogent argument against the Trump administration's blatant attack on federal funding that supports teacher education pipelines and pathways (King, 2025).

He makes a compelling case for advocating and prioritizing existing efforts to attract and support prospective teachers. Secretary King also explains how teachers played a significant role in his life by helping him to stay motivated after losing both parents by age twelve, and that it was teachers who "provided a safe, nurturing, and academically rigorous environment" that contributed to his intellectual curiosities and motivated him as a young Black and Latino male to stay in school (King, 2025). To underscore the significance of powerful teaching and learning, Secretary King candidly and emphatically writes that he would have ended up "in prison or dead" without his teachers' support and familial role in his life. Undoubtedly, the positive impact of his teachers played a major role in influencing the policies he prioritized as our country's top educational leader: supporting funding for prison inmates to pursue college education, supporting our most vulnerable student populations, and working closely with the Biden administration to prioritize federal funding that supports the recruitment and retaining of teachers—especially grants to support teacher diversity.

former U.S. Secretary of Education John King

Protecting Educator Diversity Pipelines is a National & Moral Imperative

Educator diversity in the United States is at a critical juncture. Surveys consistently show that teachers are dissatisfied with their pay (Doan et al., 2024), lack institutional support (National Center for Education Statistics, 2024a), and face significant challenges with student discipline (Merrimack College, 2023).

In 2023, 55% of educators considered leaving the profession early, mainly due to stress and low salaries (National Education Association, 2023), and in 2025, a four-state study added lack of responsive school leadership and limited career advancement opportunities to reasons contributing to teacher attrition (Gist & Bristol, 2025). Similarly, in 2024, more than 60% of teachers reported seriously considering leaving in the past year; concerns about student behavior, lack of autonomy, and political pressures were cited as key stressors (Education Week Research Center, 2024).

The educator workforce remains overwhelmingly White and female, despite the fact that the majority of U.S. students are students of color (National Center for Education Statistics, 2023a). In California, while only 20% of students identified as White during the 2023-24 school year, 65% of the state's teacher workforce was White, with Hispanic or Latinx teachers comprising 20% and other racial groups making up the remaining 15% (California Department of Education, 2024a; National Center for Education Statistics, 2023b).

Research has long demonstrated that students benefit academically, socially, and emotionally from having teachers who reflect their racial or ethnic backgrounds (Gershenson et al., 2022). However, teacher shortages and persistent gaps in educator diversity are compounded by funding challenges that disproportionately affect teachers of color. Grants and financial assistance programs have historically helped offset the economic burden of entering and remaining in the profession, especially for educators from underrepresented backgrounds. Removing or reducing these investments, such as those supporting certification costs, residency stipends, or retention incentives, can significantly impact recruitment and retention efforts. For many teachers of color, these grants are not merely supplemental support but essential lifelines that make the profession financially viable (Carver-Thomas, 2018).

In 2024,

60%

of teachers reported seriously considering leaving in the past year.

(Education Week Research Center, 2024)

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Further, many of the stressors affecting all teachers are magnified for teachers of color, who often take on additional emotional labor, experience racial isolation in their schools, and work in under-resourced settings. In a joint survey with the California Teachers Association that included over 4,000 California educators, teachers of color reported high levels of fatigue, burnout, and dissatisfaction (Hart Research Associates & Mathews, 2022). These conditions, coupled with growing political opposition to Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) efforts at the federal level, threaten to undo hard-won progress toward building a more representative and resilient educator workforce.

Considering the shifting demographics in the US and California, it is important to ensure that students have access to teachers who are not only highly qualified to teach them (California Department of Education, 2024a; National Center for Education Statistics, 2024b); but also who reflect their racial and ethnic backgrounds, and are adequately prepared with the pedagogical mindsets that can support their social, emotional, cultural, and linguistically diverse backgrounds and development. Research has also validated the positive impact and benefits that teachers of color have on students of color (Gershenson et al., 2022). Given this, the need for a more diverse teaching workforce is critical as we prepare all students to become competitive in any workforce by acquiring the relevant critical thinking, problem-solving, and global-minded skills. However, with the elimination of key federal grants and funding, which will have lasting negative effects on students, schools, and school systems, efforts to recruit and retain diverse educators are increasingly uncertain.

In a recent survey, teachers of color reported high levels of ***FATIGUE, BURNOUT, AND DISSATISFACTION.***

(Hart Research Associates & Mathews, 2022)

Challenges in Recruiting & Retaining Teachers

Pathways to becoming a teacher vary greatly by state, but most require a bachelor's degree, at least a semester of student teaching, and passage of state-required tests (U.S. Department of Education, 2016). While student teachers are typically required to work full-time in schools, they still must pay university tuition, often increasing student debt. In California, teacher preparation is considered especially rigorous, often requiring a post-baccalaureate credentialing program equivalent to a master's degree (Lambert, 2024). These financial and structural barriers limit access to the profession for many prospective teachers, especially those from underrepresented backgrounds (Gist & Bristol, 2025). In addition, recruiting and retaining teachers of color under the Trump administration is projected to be even more challenging: Recent anti-DEI executive orders, currently being challenged as unconstitutional by a federal judge as of the publication of this brief, (Goldstein, 2025), threaten to cut $600 million in cuts to various education-related programs that support institutions and teacher education programs using models that prioritize culturally relevant and sustaining systems and approaches, including $148 million withdrawn from California (U.S. Department of Education, 2025c). Consequences included the loss of a $7.5 million grant to California State University, Los Angeles that was being used to certify 276 teachers to serve in high-need or high poverty schools in the Los Angeles and Pasadena Unified School Districts (Savage, 2025) and an $8.5 million grant to a Chico State University teacher residency program that prepares teachers to serve in high-poverty and hard-to-staff rural communities (Lambert, 2025). These programs are empirically sound and prepare educators to effectively teach in diverse classrooms, develop inclusive educational environments, and become highly qualified candidates who effectively teach culturally and linguistically diverse students.

The Teacher Quality Partnerships (TQP) program and the Supporting Effective Educator Development (SEED) grant under the Supporting Teacher Diversity, Quality, and Retention program are two major grants aimed at supporting student teachers and current educators nationally that have recently been terminated by executive orders. Together, these programs allocated $150 million to universities, educational organizations, and school districts (Sparks & Schwartz, 2025). TQP grants focused on partnerships between K-12 institutions and universities to address teacher shortages, which are often exacerbated by limited financial support during student teaching as well as lower teaching salaries (U.S. Department of Education, 2025a). The SEED grant funded higher education institutions that focused on improving academic achievement, graduation rates, and rates of postsecondary enrollment through evidence-based courses and resources (U.S. Department of Education, 2025b). While the exact number of teachers benefiting from these programs is unknown, some programs, such as the SEED grant, directly served 1,500 teachers and impacted over 90,000 students over their three-year duration (National Board for Professional Teaching Standards, 2022; U.S. Department of Education, 2025b). The loss of TQP and SEED funding, without replacement through alternative grants, could significantly impact several, often overlooked areas, such as rural teacher candidates from low socioeconomic backgrounds and diverse communities (Arundel, 2025; Sparks & Schwartz, 2025).

$600M

potential cuts to programs that support culturally relevant and sustaining systems and approaches

(U.S. Department of Education, 2025c)

Teacher Education Pipelines in Rural & Remote Districts

Rural schools, which already face some of the most severe teacher shortages (Ingersoll & Tran, 2023), will be particularly affected. Rural regions in the U.S. suffer the most from teacher shortages, as rural teachers are twice as likely to move out of rural schools compared to teachers moving from urban or suburban schools to rural schools (Ingersoll & Tran, 2023; Mathews et al., 2024). In California, for example, rural regions face pronounced teacher recruitment and retention challenges, largely due to their distance from teacher education programs (TEPs) and high poverty rates (Mathews et al., 2024). Research shows districts near TEPs benefit from greater access to qualified teacher candidates, leading to fewer vacancies and staffing difficulties (Goldhaber et al., 2018). Conversely, rural districts are less likely to host student teachers and are more reliant on educators with emergency credentials (Chan et al., 2017). This issue is particularly acute in California's rural schools, where teachers are nearly twice as likely to work outside their credentialed subject areas or under emergency waivers compared to those in non-rural areas (Lazarus, 2003). In addition, many rural counties of California, such as Lassen and Modoc, have the highest poverty rates at 17% (Lassen) and 20% (Modoc), and the average household income is $64,395 (Lassen) and $56,648 (Modoc), compared to the state average of $96,334 (U.S. Census Bureau, 2023). As a result, teacher salaries in these rural areas can be as low as $50,000, compared to nearly $100,000 in more expensive regions such as Riverside and Los Angeles (Reese, 2020). Although teachers' salaries in different regions are calculated based on the cost of living, the number itself also does not appeal to many teachers who may have student loans and mortgages.

Developing professional development opportunities and strong pipelines between teacher education programs and rural school districts is crucial to addressing these shortages. Hard-to-fill positions, especially in high-need subject areas like science, technology, engineering, mathematics (STEM), and special education, will also be negatively impacted. For example, the University of Houston and Houston Independent School District received a TQP grant in 2023 to prepare teachers for "rigorous, equity-focused mathematics instruction in elementary grades," an initiative that may now face setbacks due to funding cuts (Alarcon, 2023).

Rural teachers are

2X

as likely to **work outside their credentialed subject areas or under emergency waivers** compared to those in non-rural areas.

(Lazarus, 2003)

Diversity Among Preservice Teachers

Preservice teachers from lower socioeconomic backgrounds will also face increased barriers to entering the profession. Many TQP and SEED grant recipients offered tuition remission, scholarships, and stipends for preservice teachers, enabling them to focus on their training without needing secondary jobs. The loss of these supports could deter individuals from underprivileged backgrounds from pursuing careers in education. Teacher diversity will likely decline as well. Currently, approximately 80% of public school teachers in the U.S identify as non-Hispanic White, and 77% of teachers are women, with that figure rising to 89% in elementary schools (Schaeffer, 2024). TQP and SEED grants played a crucial role in recruiting and preparing teachers of color, who remain underrepresented in the teaching workforce.

The funding cuts will also undermine alternative pathways to teacher certification. While most TQP and SEED-awarded partnerships typically involve four-year institutions and school districts, some include community colleges in their teacher preparation pipelines. Community colleges serve diverse student populations and have long played an essential role in expanding access to the teaching profession (Dougherty & Townsend, 2006; Dowd, 2003; Magloire, 2019), positioning them uniquely to contribute to diversifying the teaching profession. For example, in 2023, UCLA's Center X received a TQP grant to strengthen its pipeline by collaborating with Hispanic-serving community colleges (McDonald, 2023). Without sustained funding, these efforts to diversify and expand teacher recruitment will be significantly undermined.

The loss of federal funding will hinder efforts to address educational disparities and reduce the pipeline of teachers equipped to serve diverse student populations (U.S. Department of Education, 2025c). This will, undoubtedly, disproportionately impact teachers of color, leading to the teacher population becoming less diverse, and school districts will face increased challenges in recruitment, retention, and innovative practices. Without federal support, many states will struggle to maintain critical teacher recruitment and retention programs, particularly those aimed at increasing diversity.

80%

of U.S. public school teachers identify as **non-Hispanic White.**

(Schaeffer, 2024)

State Reliance on Federal Funding and Matching Requirements

23%

of Mississippi's education funding comes from federal sources.

(USAFacts, n.d.)

These challenges extend beyond educator diversity: The reduction or elimination of federal education funding can have far-reaching consequences, disproportionately affecting states with limited local revenue sources. Understanding the broader financial context is crucial, as many states rely heavily on federal funding to support their education budgets and sustain teacher preparation programs. On average, federal funding constitutes about 11% of total revenue for elementary and secondary public schools. However, this percentage varies significantly across states. For instance, in the 2020–21 school year, Mississippi received over 23% of its education funding from federal sources, while New York received approximately 7.3% (USAFacts, n.d.). These discrepancies are influenced by per-student federal funding allocations and each state's capacity to generate local revenue.

Furthermore, certain federal funding programs require states to provide matching funds to receive federal dollars. For example, under specific proposals, states receive federal funding equal to 80% of the national average of tuition and fees at community colleges, contingent upon the state providing the remaining 20% themselves. Such arrangements are designed to encourage states to invest in their education systems alongside federal contributions (National Conference of State Legislatures, 2024).

In California, federal funds account for 13.3% of educational spending—roughly $8 billion in 2024–25, which is average compared to other states, though this translates to less per pupil due to the state's large population (Stavely & Wills, 2025).

Of this, $2.4 billion is allocated for supplemental educational funding for districts with at least 40% of students from low-income families and $1.5 billion for special education services (Stavely & Wills, 2025). Cuts to this funding would disproportionately hit the most vulnerable students, those from low-income families and with special needs, the hardest. In 2023, 18.2% of Hispanic and Latinx children and 14% of Black children in California were considered to be living in poverty (KidsData, 2025). Coupled with the aforementioned administrative changes as well as the financial threat to recruiting teachers of color in California, these cuts would make it significantly more difficult for vulnerable students to have educators who reflect their ethnic and cultural backgrounds. During the 2024–25 school year, 56.1% of California's student population was Hispanic or Latinx, yet the teacher workforce remains predominantly White (California Department of Education, 2025). In such a demographically diverse state like California, prioritizing the recruitment of teachers of color is essential.

Other states are even more dependent on federal funding. For example, Alaska received $4,369 per pupil from the federal government, the highest in the nation and accounting for nearly 20% of its spending per student (USAFacts, n.d.). Mississippi is the most reliant state on federal funding in terms of percentage; coupled with already having low K-12 spending compared to other states (ranking 45th in K-12 spending), the state is especially vulnerable to federal funding cuts (Ganucheau, 2025). Such dependence on federal education funding is particularly high in Republican-leaning states, with the 17 most reliant states having voted for Trump in the most recent presidential election (Greene, 2025).

Recommendations

A diverse teaching workforce is not just a matter of equity; it is a proven strategy for improving student outcomes (Gershenson et al., 2022).

As the student population in the U.S. continues to grow more diverse, ensuring that the educator workforce reflects this diversity is essential for closing achievement gaps and creating inclusive learning environments. By addressing funding challenges, strengthening teacher preparation pipelines, and supporting diverse educators throughout their careers, we can work toward a more equitable and effective education system for all students.

1. Advocate for Policy Changes at the Federal and State Levels

Education stakeholders—including school leaders, teacher unions, and advocacy groups—should:

- Push for the reinstatement of federal funding for teacher diversity programs.
- Lobby for state-level policies that prioritize educator diversity in funding decisions.
- Collaborate with policymakers to develop long-term solutions for sustaining teacher pipelines.

2. Advocate for Alternative Funding Sources

Since federal cuts have eliminated key grants like TQP and SEED, states and local education agencies should seek alternative funding streams, including:

- Expanding state-level teacher residency programs that provide financial support for student teachers.
- Partnering with private foundations and philanthropic organizations that prioritize diversity in education.
- Encouraging local businesses and industries to invest in teacher pipelines, particularly in STEM and special education fields, where shortages are severe.

3. Strengthen State and Local Commitments to Teacher Diversity

While federal funding plays a major role in educator diversity efforts, states can mitigate losses by:

- Expanding state-led Grow Your Own (GYO) programs that recruit teachers from underrepresented communities.
- Increasing state grants for teacher preparation, particularly for students of color and those from low-income backgrounds.
- Providing tuition remission or loan forgiveness for educators who commit to teaching in high-need areas, such as rural districts and urban schools.

3. Support Teacher Preparation at Community Colleges

Community colleges serve diverse student populations and can be a key component in strengthening teacher pipelines. To maximize their impact:

- More states should create seamless transfer agreements between community colleges and four-year teacher education programs.
- Scholarship programs should be expanded to support community college students transitioning into teaching.
- Alternative certification programs should be developed for paraprofessionals and teaching assistants with classroom experience.

4. Expand Mentorship and Retention Programs

Recruitment is only part of the solution—ensuring that diverse teachers remain in the profession is equally important. Schools and districts should:

- Implement mentorship programs that connect new teachers with experienced educators to increase teacher retention, particularly for teachers of color (Ingersoll & Strong, 2011; Carver-Thomas, 2018).
- Provide professional development opportunities focused on cultural responsiveness, classroom management, and teacher leadership.
- Offer mental health and well-being resources to prevent burnout, particularly for educators in high-stress environments.
- Support teachers in pursuing National Board Certification. In California, the state has taken steps to incentivize National Board Certification through the National Board for Professional Teaching Standards (NBPTS) incentive program, which offers financial support for teachers working toward certification and stipends for those who achieve it, particularly if they teach in high-priority schools (California Department of Education, 2024b).

5. Improve Compensation Structures and Financial Stability in High-Need Areas

Beyond scholarships and loan forgiveness, long-term solutions to the teacher shortage must include systemic improvements in how teachers are compensated and supported in high-need communities (Podolsky et al., 2016). States and districts should:

- Increase base salaries and offer competitive compensation packages in high-need schools to improve retention and make the profession economically viable.
- Implement salary incentives for hard-to-staff subjects such as special education, STEM, and bilingual education.
- Provide relocation stipends, housing assistance, or cost-of-living adjustments for teachers in rural and high-poverty districts to address regional disparities.

It is essential for states to have the funding and political will to fund these efforts, as failure to do so can result in catastrophic outcomes for many students and place more financial responsibilities on the state related to future homelessness, incarceration, and social safety nets.

Conclusion

The historical role of public education has been a cornerstone of our democracy. Education has played a major role in improving lives and affording citizens the opportunity to acquire skills, earn a living wage, and become productive citizens. Now, under the Trump administration, education—specifically teacher education programs—is under attack. Policies have been created to defund teacher diversity grants that have effectively recruited and retained teachers and educators of color. Trump's blatant attacks have intentionally targeted the progress that we have made in this country with respect to Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion initiatives and programs. Ensuring a diverse educator workforce must be a top-priority policy endeavor, irrespective of ideological and political parties, as teachers are responsible for developing the next generation of critical thinkers, problem solvers, and global citizens. They play a huge role in supporting students' social and emotional development, which is critical for students to have a positive affirmation of themselves. Given the recent attacks and defunding of teacher diversity grants that have been effective in diversifying the teacher workforce, we as a country have to ask ourselves this very important question: Who will be teaching our children?

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