

Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20515

February 4, 2016

President Barack Obama
The White House
1600 Pennsylvania Ave., NW
Washington, DC 20500

The Honorable Dr. John King
Acting Secretary of Education
United States Department of Education
400 Maryland Ave., SW
Washington, DC 20202

Dear Mr. President and Acting Secretary King:

We write to urge the Administration to convene a White House summit to discuss the importance of increasing teacher diversity.

The Administration's recently released Plan for Teacher Education and Improvement correctly stated that "our teaching force does not reflect the increasing diversity of America's students." The alarming lack of diversity in the teacher workforce and its impact on student achievement is an issue that demands national attention and real solutions. According to a recent report from the Albert Shanker Institute:

- Between 2002 and 2012, the number of African-American teachers dropped significantly in nine of America's largest cities;
- Latino children are almost one in four students in our country's public elementary and secondary schools, yet Hispanics represent only 8% of the teacher workforce; and
- Less than 2% of teachers identify as Asian American Pacific Islander.

Research clearly shows the impact of teacher diversity on student outcomes. According to the Center for American Progress, when African American students had teachers of color, fewer African Americans were placed in special-education classes, suspended, or expelled and more African American students were placed in gifted and talented programs and graduated from high school. Teachers of color are also known to be personally committed to the success of children of color. They affect a wide range of student academic outcomes serving as powerful role models for all students, and proving that teaching can be a viable career for people of color. In addition, teachers of color are more likely to work and remain in high-poverty, hard-to-staff, urban schools and districts than their white counterparts.

Diversifying the teaching field will impact our nation's schools by shaping perspectives, curriculum, and culture in a transformational way that raises expectations for student learning and improves school climate. The Shanker Institute reports that, "minority students derive academic benefits from having access to demographically similar teachers," on a variety of outcomes, including increased test scores, graduation rates, college matriculation rates, school attendance, and enrollment in academically demanding classes. Racially and ethnically diverse teachers also provide culturally relevant perspectives for all students, not just students of color, which is important to fostering a better understanding and appreciation for diversity.

According to the U.S. Department of Education, by the year 2022, nearly 55 percent of public school students will be minority. Research shows not only that a student's teachers are the most influential factor in his or her academic success, but also that when teachers share cultural norms and common backgrounds with their students, student learning increases. Now is the time to support the diversification of a high quality teacher workforce in order to provide all our students from each and every background an education that prepares them for college and career. We believe that a White House convening of educators, researchers, policy makers, and students focused on issues of system capacity and teacher recruitment, preparation, and retention will be an important step in elevating the national dialogue on this pressing civil rights issue.

Our students deserve a teacher workforce that is diverse and culturally competent; one that will support all students of all backgrounds to fulfil their academic potential. Like you, we are committed to educational excellence and opportunity for each child. We stand ready to work with you as we rise to meet the challenge of increasing teacher diversity, and we look forward to your response.

Sincerely,

Susan A. Davis

Susan A. Davis
Member of Congress

Robert C. "Bobby" Scott

Robert C. "Bobby" Scott
Member of Congress

Raúl M. Grijalva

Raúl M. Grijalva
Member of Congress

Mark Takano

Mark Takano
Member of Congress

Gregory W. Meeks

Gregory W. Meeks
Member of Congress

Elizabeth H. Esty

Elizabeth H. Esty
Member of Congress

Ruben Gallego

Ruben Gallego
Member of Congress

Tony Cardenas

Tony Cardenas
Member of Congress

Katherine M. Clark

Katherine Clark
Member of Congress

Keith Ellison

Keith Ellison
Member of Congress

Juan Vargas

Juan Vargas
Member of Congress

Corrine Brown

Corrine Brown
Member of Congress

Hank Johnson

Hank Johnson
Member of Congress

Mike Honda

Mike Honda
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Charles Rangel
Member of Congress

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Denny Heck
Member of Congress

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Grace Meng
Member of Congress

John Yarmuth

John Yarmuth
Member of Congress

Ron Kind

Ron Kind
Member of Congress

Terri Sewell

Terri Sewell
Member of Congress

Gwen Moore

Gwen Moore
Member of Congress

G.K. Butterfield

G.K. Butterfield
Member of Congress

Marcia Fudge

Marcia Fudge
Member of Congress

Frederica S. Wilson

Frederica Wilson
Member of Congress

Bonnie Watson Coleman

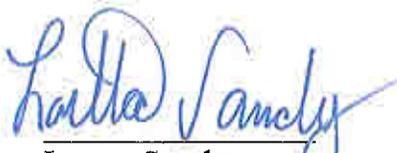
Bonnie Watson Coleman
Member of Congress

Suzanne Bonamici

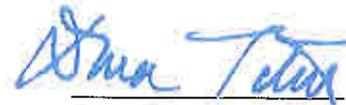
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Member of Congress

Linda T. Sanchez

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Member of Congress


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Member of Congress


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Member of Congress


André Carson
Member of Congress


Patrick Murphy
Member of Congress

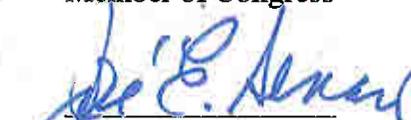

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Member of Congress


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Member of Congress


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