

Classrooms Reflecting Communities Act

Across the nation schools and communities are facing teacher shortages in high-demand fields and subjects. In the 2015-2016 school year, schools lacked approximately 64,000 qualified teachers. By 2020, 300,000 new teachers will be needed to fill crucial gaps in subjects like STEM, special education, and bilingual education.¹ Underqualified teachers that lack the necessary credentials are often hired to teach under emergency certificates. Uncertified teachers are also more likely to retire or quit, leading to high turnover rates that negatively impact student achievement and school district budgets.²

America's teachers also currently do not reflect the diversifying student body they are instructing – 82 percent of public school teachers are white, while white students make up only 51 percent of public school students.³ Both of these issues are particularly severe in rural areas. Thirty-nine percent of rural schools experiencing difficulties hiring teachers in every subject.⁴ Eighty-four percent of new classroom teachers in rural areas are white, in contrast to 75 percent white new classroom teachers overall.⁵ The Classrooms Reflecting Communities Act addresses shortages in teacher quality and diversity in rural, high-need schools through the Grow Your Own model.

The bill authorizes five-year, competitive grants to eligible partnerships to establish a Grow Your Own program, which recruits diverse teacher candidates from the community into the teaching profession and supports them as they work to receive a teacher certification or licensure. Grow Your Own programs, among other things, should:

- Prepare prospective teachers to teach in a culturally diverse classroom with pedagogy that reflects students' experiences;
- Prepare prospective teachers to support student with disabilities and English learners;
- Collaborate with the local community, schools, and other organization to identify education needs of the community;
- Provide a high-quality mentoring program for teacher candidates through their first two years of teaching; and
- Recruit and incentivize more people to consider entering the teaching profession, especially in high-need fields and underserved schools in rural areas.

¹ https://learningpolicyinstitute.org/sites/default/files/product-files/A_Coming_Crisis_in_Teaching_REPORT.pdf

² <https://learningpolicyinstitute.org/product/teacher-turnover-report>

³ <https://www2.ed.gov/rschstat/eval/highered/racial-diversity/state-racial-diversity-workforce.pdf>

⁴ <http://www.ncsl.org/research/education/tackling-teacher-and-principal-shortages-in-rural-areas.aspx>

⁵ <https://www2.ed.gov/rschstat/eval/highered/racial-diversity/state-racial-diversity-workforce.pdf>