



FACT SHEET:

Targeted Grants for Educational Excellence Program

By Bayliss Fiddiman and Lisette Partelow | August 23, 2021

All students deserve access to a quality education, which includes experienced and fully certified teachers.¹ However, good teaching is not equitably available to all students. Research shows that students who are Black, Indigenous, or other people of color (BIPOC) have less access to experienced, fully certified teachers² and are more likely to attend schools with fewer resources and with high teacher turnover.³ Similar patterns exist in schools serving predominantly students from families with low incomes. One study found that students who were eligible for free and reduced price lunch were more likely to be taught by inexperienced or ineffective teachers than children from families with more resources.⁴

To address this problem, the Center for American Progress proposes a Targeted Grants for Educational Excellence program. This competitive grant program seeks to improve working conditions in schools with the highest teacher turnover in order to increase retention of highly qualified educators. By creating ideal working conditions for teachers, schools receiving this grant funding could improve the quality of teaching, enhance student learning, and ultimately boost student achievement. Under this program, schools and districts would be required to implement research-supported strategies and interventions noted below to improve recruitment and retention.

Eligibility

This program consists of two types of competitive grants: districtwide grants and school-based grants. Local education agencies (LEAs) or consortia of LEAs would be the recipients of and fiscal agents for both types of grants, but the funds for each type would be used differently:

- **Districtwide grants** would provide funding for districts with a high proportion of schools experiencing difficulty attracting and retaining good teachers, high turnover, and/or persistent low achievement among students.
- **School-based grants** would target a school or schools within a district that are acutely experiencing the issues described above, even if these problems are not present in rest of the district.

To receive funding, schools must serve students whose families earn low incomes. Additional factors to consider include:

1. Socioeconomic opportunities in the broader community
2. Student achievement and attendance
3. Teacher turnover
4. Difficulty filling vacancies
5. Vacancies disproportionately filled by substitute teachers or teachers who are not fully certified

Application

The application for this program would require that the school and community receiving the funds are committed to making the changes using the strategies and interventions outlined below. To apply, districts would need to work with participating schools to solicit input and buy-in from educators, students, parents, and other relevant community stakeholders.

How to use funding

Grant program funds would be used for both district and school activities to support improved conditions for teaching and learning in schools that have high teacher turnover.

District activities

Districts participating in the grant program would receive a set-aside for districtwide activities, determined by the number of students served in participating schools within the district. These activities could include providing support to participating schools for recruitment and hiring as well as for teacher training and professional development.

School activities

The majority of funds from the grant program would flow through the district to participating schools. Schools must implement the following shifts in policy and practice:

- Providing professional salaries
- Improving recruitment and hiring practices
- Investing in high-quality, intensive teacher training and development
- Structuring and staffing schools to recognize teachers' professionalism and the demands on their time
- Making changes that improve the school's climate and learning conditions, including:
 - Fostering a warm and welcoming school culture and community
 - Building and sustaining partnerships with teacher preparation programs
 - Providing strong supports for students, including sufficient mental health supports and personnel to serve the needs of schools, and holistic supports to address the needs determined by schools and communities

In implementing these changes, schools and districts must avoid school closures, school takeovers, and large reductions in the workforce.

Program evaluation

After three to five years, grantees should conduct an evaluation to determine whether the program has improved teacher working conditions, teacher effectiveness, and student learning. The evaluation should incorporate metrics such as:

- An evaluation and reflection of the implementation process
- Student achievement and growth on standardized assessments
- Measures of student engagement, achievement, and educational attainment
- Feedback from teachers, administrators, and parents on the policy changes
- Teacher turnover rates and teacher engagement once the program has been fully implemented
- The professional qualifications of teachers in the school

Finally, a national evaluation of the program should measure the above metrics for all participating schools as well as whether the program has had a broader impact on other, nonparticipating schools within districts and on teacher working conditions in other districts.

Conclusion

The Targeted Grants for Educational Excellence program could be integrated into current federal competitive grant programs administered, or it could be structured as an entirely new competitive grant program within the Elementary and Secondary Education Act. The purpose of the program is to provide resources to schools that need them the most, with direction on how to attract and retain great teachers. Through addressing the working conditions that contribute to high teacher turnover, schools can retain the best educators and ensure that students have access to the best teaching.

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Endnotes

1 Scott Sargrad and others, "A Quality Education for Every Child: A New Agenda for Education Policy" (Washington: Center for American Progress, 2019), available at <https://www.americanprogress.org/issues/education-k-12/reports/2019/07/02/471511/quality-education-every-child/>.

2 Jessica Cardichon and others, "Inequitable Opportunity to Learn: Student Access to Certified and Experienced Teachers" (Washington: Learning Policy Institute, 2020), available at <https://learningpolicyinstitute.org/product/crdc-teacher-access-report>.

3 Desiree Carver-Thomas and Linda Darling-Hammond, "Teacher Turnover: Why It Matters and What We Can Do About It" (Washington: Learning Policy Institute, 2017), available at <https://learningpolicyinstitute.org/product/teacher-turnover-report>.

4 Eric Isenberg and others, "Access to Effective Teaching for Disadvantaged Students" (Washington: U.S. Department of Education Institute of Education Sciences, 2013), available at <https://ies.ed.gov/ncee/pubs/20144001/pdf/20144001.pdf>.