

The Honorable Lamar Alexander
Chairman
Senate HELP Committee
Washington D.C., 20510

The Honorable Patty Murray
Ranking Member
Senate HELP Committee
Washington D.C., 20510

Dear Chairman Alexander, Ranking Member Murray:

On behalf of the undersigned organizations, we express our support for Senator Doug Jones's bill S. 2887, the Classrooms Reflecting Communities Act. By funding Grow Your Own model programs, this legislation will help combat teacher shortages and increase teacher quality and diversity in rural, high-need schools by:

- Recruiting and incentivizing more people to join the teaching profession, especially people that reflect and know the community they'll be teaching in;
- Training teachers on culturally responsive pedagogy so they'll be ready to teach a diverse classroom;
- Collaborating with the local community to assess their needs and to get feedback on the program as it operates through the years.

Across the country, school districts are struggling with teacher shortages, especially in high-demand fields like special education, teachers of English learners, and STEM.¹ This issue is especially acute in rural communities, where school districts are more likely to report difficulty with filling vacancies in high-demand fields than non-rural schools.² Efforts to combat this issue are important because persistent teacher shortages have been shown to have negative effects on student achievement and diminish teacher effectiveness and quality.³

Additionally, the teacher workforce in many communities fail to reflect the racial diversity of their students. In 2015-2016, 80 percent of teachers nationally identified as white whereas 51 percent of students identified as non-white.⁴ Rural school districts tend to have even fewer teachers of color, as recent data suggests that teachers of color are more likely to teach in urban schools.⁵ Increasing teacher diversity is important given the clear evidence that a racially diverse teacher workforce is beneficial for all kids, and particularly for students of color. These benefits include improved academic achievement, increased access to talented and gifted programs, and improved attendance.⁶ As communities across the U.S., including rural communities, become more racially diverse, closing the diversity gap between the educator workforce and students becomes increasingly urgent.⁷

Although addressing teacher shortages and the lack of teacher diversity will require a multi-faceted approach, Grow Your Own model programs have proven to be an effective part of this strategy. By recruiting diverse, well-qualified teacher candidates from the community and supporting them through teacher licensure and certification, Grow Your Own programs

have helped school districts in many states employ and retain great teachers that are ready to address the needs of their specific community and school district.⁸

The Classrooms Reflecting Communities Act will create a five-year competitive grant program to help rural, high-need districts establish Grow Your Own programs. In addition to provide funding, this bill helps to outline some key components of a successful Grow Your Own program, including: training on culturally responsive pedagogy, adequate preparation for supporting students with disabilities and English learners, and providing high-quality mentoring through the first two years of teaching. Together, these provisions will help school districts make strides in addressing the teacher workforce needs of their communities in a way that boosts both diversity and quality.

The teacher workforce is an integral part of providing a quality education for every child in America. It's critically important to invest in efforts to bolster the teaching profession in a way that reflects our diverse communities and the needs of our students – this legislation would do just that. We urge the Committee to act on S. 2887 and bring the bill forwards for consideration.

Sincerely,

Alliance for Excellent Education
American Federation of Teachers
Center for American Progress
Council of Administrators of Special Education
Democrats for Education Reform
EDGE Consulting Partners
Educators for Excellence
Learning Disabilities Association of America
National Association of Secondary School Principals
National Association of State Directors of Special Education
National Center for Teacher Residencies
National Education Association
Next100
Phi Delta Kappa International - Educators Rising
Prepared To Teach

¹ James Cowan and others, "Missing Elements in the Discussion of Teacher Shortages," *Educational Researcher* 45 (8) (2016), 460-462, available at <https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/abs/10.3102/0013189X16679145> (last accessed April 2019); U.S. Department of Education Office of Postsecondary Education, "Teacher Shortage Areas Nationwide Listing 1990-1991 through 2016-2017," (Washington, DC: 2016), available at <https://www2.ed.gov/about/offices/list/oep/pol/tsa.pdf> (last accessed April 2019).

² Megan Lavalley, "Out of the Loop." (Alexandria, VA: Center for Public Education, 2018), available at <https://education.wsu.edu/documents/2018/12/center-public-education-rural-schools-report.pdf/>.

³ Emma Garcia and Elaine Weiss, “The teacher shortage is real, large, and growing, and worse than we thought” (Washington, DC: Economic Policy Institute, 2019), available at <https://www.epi.org/publication/the-teacher-shortage-is-real-large-and-growing-and-worse-than-we-thought-the-first-report-in-the-perfect-storm-in-the-teacher-labor-market-series/>.

⁴ A.W. Geiger, “America’s public school teachers are far less racially and ethnically diverse than their students” (Washington, DC: Pew Research Center, 2018), available at <https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2018/08/27/americas-public-school-teachers-are-far-less-racially-and-ethnically-diverse-than-their-students/>.

⁵ National Center for Education Statistics, “Table 1. Total number of public school teachers and percentage distribution of public school teachers, by race/ethnicity and selected school characteristics: 2015–16,” available at https://nces.ed.gov/surveys/ntps/tables/ntps_1t_051617.asp (last accessed March 2019).

⁶ Bayliss Fiddiman, Colleen Campbell, and Lisette Partelow, “Student Debt: An Overlooked Barrier to Increasing Teacher Diversity” (Washington, DC: Center for American Progress, 2019), available at <https://www.americanprogress.org/issues/education-postsecondary/reports/2019/07/09/471850/student-debt-overlooked-barrier-increasing-teacher-diversity/>.

⁷ Kim Parker and others, “What unites and divides urban, suburban, and rural communities” (Washington, DC: Pew Research Center, 2018), available at <https://www.pewsocialtrends.org/2018/05/22/demographic-and-economic-trends-in-urban-suburban-and-rural-communities/>.

⁸ Jenny Muniz, “Diversifying the Teacher Workforce with Grow Your Own Programs,” (Washington, DC: New America, 2018), available at <https://www.newamerica.org/education-policy/edcentral/diversifying-teacher-workforce-grow-your-own-pathways/>.