

Opening Statement of Ranking Member Suzanne Bonamici (OR-01)

Subcommittee on Early Childhood, Elementary, and Secondary Education

Innovative Teacher Preparation: Properly Equipping America's Educators

2175 Rayburn House Office Building

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Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Thank you to our witnesses for being here today. I'm optimistic that we can have a meaningful, bipartisan conversation about the importance of growing and supporting a diverse and dynamic educator workforce that meets the complex needs of our country's students and provides them – all of them – with the opportunity for a world class education.

Ms. Pat Dorrian, my high school English teacher, changed my life. She instilled in me a love of language and poetry, but more importantly a love of learning. I expect that many of you in this room today have similar stories and remember a teacher or two who changed your lives. Teachers educate, mentor, inspire, nurture, and guide students. They are role models, community builders, and imparters of knowledge and critical thinking. Unfortunately, the path to becoming a teacher presents many obstacles. It typically requires years of expensive schooling, testing, and certification. The skyrocketing price of education acts as a significant barrier to many who hope to become educators. Certification can be expensive and complicated to obtain, with mountains of paperwork that deter prospective educators sometimes even before they begin their careers. And in many places teachers are notoriously underpaid. When adjusted for inflation, teacher salaries have been stagnant since 1990, while the cost of living rises every year and the cost of a four-year degree has nearly doubled since that time. Students do better when they see themselves reflected in their teachers. According to NC State College of Education Associate Professor Dr. Anna Egalite, and as we will hear in testimony today, students of color experience a variety of benefits when they are placed in a classroom with a teacher who shares their racial or ethnic background.

Yet despite 50 percent of students identifying as persons of color, educators of color make up just 19 percent of teachers in this country. Research also shows that a diverse teacher workforce benefits all student achievement regardless of race. Congress must do more to support prospective Black and Brown educators to better represent children of all demographics in schools.

When examining these problems, it might seem tempting to bolster the teacher workforce by “de-professionalizing” the job, whether that be by removing certifications or reducing educational requirements. That approach, however, would only harm students, who rely on well-trained teachers to guide them through their education. Instead of lowering the standards, we should streamline the process of becoming a teacher and recruit more students to be educators through apprenticeship and mentoring programs for new teachers, student loan forgiveness, and competitive compensation.

I’m not one to complain about a problem without offering a solution.

The Biden-Harris Administration has encouraged using effective and innovative teacher preparation programs, including strategies that focus on recruiting and retaining diverse candidates. Congress can build on this initiative by providing resources to help support successful innovative teacher preparation models across the country. The Build Back Better Act provided more than \$100 million for grants to fund “Grow Your Own” programs that support high-need schools and subject areas, as well as improve diversity within the teacher workforce.

To address the teacher shortage in this country, we must support Title I schools and expand loan forgiveness to support those who dream of becoming teachers. The *College Affordability Act*, which advanced through this committee in 2020, outlined ways to give aspiring teachers a hand as they pursue their education. The CAA would improve programs that recruit prospective teachers to address shortage areas, like STEM and special education. It would also improve and expand the Public Service Loan Forgiveness (PSLF) program to ensure that all teachers’ loan payments count toward their eligibility for loan repayment.

We should also strengthen Title II programs and initiatives that support recruiting and retaining diverse educators in our communities. The *Teacher Diversity and Retention Act*, introduced by members of this committee, would also bolster teacher recruitment programs by establishing grant programs for education students at HBCUs and other Minority Serving Institutions, as well as providing dual certification in special education and behavioral management so that teachers can meet the need of every student. There are also mentoring and coaching programs that support educators and improve retention.

I look forward to hearing from our witnesses and to a productive discussion today.

Thank you, and I yield back.