

# DAY ONE PROJECT

A Focus on Teacher Effectiveness,  
Shortages, and Cultural Proficiency

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The Day One Project offers a platform for ideas that represent a broad range of perspectives across S&T disciplines. The views and opinions expressed in this proposal are those of the author(s) and do not reflect the views and opinions of the Day One Project or its S&T Leadership Council.

## Summary

Addressing inequality, closing achievement gaps, and tackling opportunity gaps in schools requires a highly effective educator in every classroom, a diversified teacher workforce, and an implementation of culturally responsive policies and practices. The 2015 Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) requires State Education Agencies (SEA) to identify and close gaps in equitable access to effective teachers but does not offer specific definitions about what constitutes teacher effectiveness. There is an opportunity to build on state equity plans and collaboratively work with districts, schools, educator preparation programs, and other stakeholders to close the gap in access to effective educators, diversify the workforce, and ensure that the training of educators includes a focus on culturally proficient practices.

## Challenge and Opportunity

Teachers are the most important within-school factor for student achievement.<sup>1</sup> Studies find that students who are assigned to effective teachers are more likely to graduate high school, attend college, and earn higher salaries.<sup>2</sup> In addition, evidence suggests that by assigning disadvantaged students to effective teachers, the income and racial achievement gap can close within five years.<sup>3</sup> Strong evidence exists suggesting that low-income students, students of color, English language learners, and students with disabilities are more likely to be assigned to unqualified, inexperienced, and ineffective teachers.<sup>4</sup>

In addition, while students of color are expected to make up 56% of the student population by 2024, the elementary and secondary educator workforce is still overwhelmingly comprised of white teachers. The most recent U.S. Department of Education Schools and Staffing Survey (SASS), a nationally representative survey of teachers and principals, showed that 82% of public-school teachers identified as white (2015). Research shows that all students benefit from having a diverse group of teachers that come from a variety of backgrounds.<sup>5</sup> A racially diverse teacher workforce is a necessary step to advance educational equity.

Finally, effective teachers also demonstrate cultural proficiency and have the skill set to meet the needs of diverse learners. Teachers who embrace culturally relevant practices help students make meaningful connections between what they learn and the student's culture, language, and life experiences. Culturally responsive practices help students access rigorous curriculum and

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<sup>1</sup> McCaffrey, et al. (2014) "Evaluating value added models for teacher accountability"; Rivkin, Hanushek, Kain, "Teachers, schools, and academic achievement". 417–458.

<sup>2</sup> Chetty, Friedman, & Rockoff (2011). "The long-term impacts of teachers: Teacher value added and student outcomes in adulthood".

<sup>3</sup> Hanushek. (2013). "Boosting teacher effectiveness". 23–35.

<sup>4</sup> Goldhaber, Lavery, & Theobald (2015). "Uneven playing field?" 293–307; Goldhaber, Quince, & Theobald. "Reconciling different estimates of teacher quality gaps based on value-added"; Isenberg, et al. "Do low-income students have equal access to effective teachers? Evidence from 26 districts."; Sass, et al (2012). "Value added of teachers in high-poverty schools and lower poverty schools", 104–122.

<sup>5</sup> Cherng (2016). "The importance of minority teachers: Student perceptions of minority versus white teachers," 407-420.

develop higher-level academic skills. In a culturally proficient school, each student sees themselves as a valued member of the learning community. The culturally competent school personnel seek to understand and adapt to the non-dominant cultures represented among their student body so that students from all cultural subgroups will thrive.<sup>6</sup>

## Plan of Action

There are several statutory and funding levers that the U.S Secretary of Education can utilize to address this matter including: regulations, guidance, and funding opportunities in Title I, Title II, Title III, and Title IV, Part A. In addition, the Department of Education (ED) can use the ESSA's requirements that states ensure that low-income and minority students are not disproportionately taught by ineffective and inexperienced teachers to establish regulations and guidance that

- 1) Define *ineffective*, with attention to the incorporation of the domain of cultural competence and prioritize competitive funding for teacher training programs that seek to increase culturally proficient practices.
- 2) Define and raise awareness about what constitutes culturally competent practices through the establishment of a national technical assistance center.
- 3) Set targets for ensuring that all students have access to effective teachers, which may include requiring State Education Agencies to identify gaps in access to effective teachers by spring 2022 and requiring States to commit to a robust gap reduction goal each year until all students have access to effective teachers.

With regards to diversifying the educator workforce, ED can use discretionary grants and competitive priorities to incentivize states and local school districts to take steps to increase recruitment of teacher candidates from underrepresented backgrounds, improve teacher preparation and placement, and retain talented and diverse teachers in the teaching profession. Several organizations are focusing on these issues including the Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development, Council for Chief State School Officers, American Institutes for Research, Learning Policy Institute, and Aspen Institute.

To launch these policy goals the Office of the Secretary, should consider

1. Requesting a list of all upcoming discretionary grant competitions that will occur in 2021 and 2022 to identify opportunities for the inclusion of competitive priorities related to diversifying the teacher workforce and cultural proficiency.
2. Working with the Office of Elementary and Secondary Education, Office of Special Education Programs, Office of English Language Acquisition, and Office of Planning,

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<sup>6</sup> Landa (2011). "Cultural proficiency in education: A review of the literature focused on teachers, school leaders and schools".

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- Evaluation, and Policy Development to establish a Technical Working Group (TWG) comprised of teachers, administrators, and subject matter experts to discuss robust metrics for teacher effectiveness, including metrics that focus on cultural proficiency. Targeting completion of the TWG report by June 2021 will help facilitate the next steps.
3. Solidifying stakeholders' buy-in by mobilizing senior staff at the agency to embark on listening tour in the summer of 2021 to discuss the policy recommendation from the TWG and gather additional feedback.
  4. Developing new regulations once the recommendations from the TWG and the listening sessions are compiled. The Office of the Secretary should work with the Office of Elementary and Secondary Education to draft regulations for Title I and potentially Title II, submit the draft regulations for public comment, and then publish the final regulations by the first quarter of 2022.
  5. Having a contracting vehicle to support State Education Agencies and districts with technical assistance that will enhance implementation of the changes.



## About the Author

**Monique M. Chism, Ph.D.** is a Vice President for Policy, Practice, and Systems Change at the American Institutes for Research (AIR) in Washington D.C. With more than 24 years of experience in education, Dr. Chism is a renowned expert in educational equity, statewide systems of support, supporting effective teachers and leaders, creating safe and healthy schools, and turning around low-performing schools and districts. Prior to joining AIR, she served as Deputy Assistant Secretary in the Office of Elementary and Secondary Education for the U.S. Department of Education.



## About the Day One Project

The Day One Project is dedicated to democratizing the policymaking process by working with new and expert voices across the science and technology community, helping to develop actionable policies that can improve the lives of all Americans, and readying them for Day One of a future presidential term. For more about the Day One Project, visit [dayoneproject.org](http://dayoneproject.org).