

Higher Education Act Reauthorization Requests

NAfME and the Music Education Policy Roundtable view reauthorization of the Higher Education Act (HEA) as a critical opportunity to improve student access to high quality music education. Given HEA’s role in supporting PK-12 teacher and leader preparation, changes to HEA can support future music educators by responding to existing issues faced by the country’s education workforce. Recommendations for HEA reauthorization fall into three categories:

1. Align HEA teacher preparation policy with ESSA’s commitment to a Well-Rounded Education
2. Strengthen policies aimed at cultivating a more diverse teacher workforce
3. Simplify loan forgiveness programs to promote diversity, equity, and access in the education profession

In 2019, the House Education and Labor Committee took steps to address these issues by passing the College Affordability Act. Our organizations support this bill as a starting point for an HEA reauthorization process that ultimately supports a diverse and well-prepared music education workforce. Further recommendations are detailed below.

Align HEA Teacher Preparation Policy with ESSA’s Commitment to a Well-Rounded Education

Enacted in 2015, the bipartisan Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) makes clear that students should have a “well-rounded education” based in a broad curriculum, including music and arts. The law underscores the importance of a well-rounded education for all students.

HEA reauthorization must signal to Institutions of Higher Learning (IHEs) that strong teacher preparation programs for well-rounded subjects are important as a support for ESSA’s call for a well-rounded education. The College Affordability Act (CAA) did so, recognizing well-rounded subject areas under amendments to Title II.

The following CAA language should be included in future amendments to Title II—Teacher Quality Enhancement

- Specify that any well-rounded education subject (as defined in section 8101 of the Elementary and Secondary Act) can be considered a “high-need academic subject area” during the evaluation of an application for a Teacher Quality Partnership (TQP) grant under Title II, Part A.
- Include music as a “high-needs field” among subjects listed for which competitive priority is established in the awarding of grants under subparts of Title II, Part B.

26 states have reported music teacher shortages to the U.S. Department of Education since 2015, while 36 states plus the U.S. Virgin Islands and the District of Columbia have reported shortages in other visual and performing arts subject areas. Clarifying that music and all other well-rounded subjects can be considered high needs will ensure that federal grants intended to improve teacher preparation, including TQP grants and Hawkins grants, are more accessible in places where shortages of music and arts educators exist.

Strengthen Policies Aimed at Cultivating a More Diverse Teacher Workforce

Music education is most inclusive and impactful to all students when it encompasses many approaches to music making taught by a diverse music educator workforce. [Research](#) indicates multiple benefits tied to diverse school staffing, including: 1) students identifying with role models who look like them; and 2) improved classroom dynamics influenced by teachers and leaders bringing varied experiences to the school environment.

Federal data demonstrates that 53% of public-school students are children of color, while only 18% of teachers identify as people of color. In current music educator preparation programs, this disparity is even greater, with seven percent of music teacher licensure candidates being African-American, two percent Latino or Asian, and less than one percent Native American/Alaska Native, Pacific Islander, or Multiracial.

The following recommendations can help increase diversity in the music education profession:

- Reauthorize the Augustus F. Hawkins Centers of Excellence grant program so that funding may be provided in future congressional appropriations. Avoid the adoption of language which would limit institutions' ability to use funds for the preparation of teachers in all well-rounded education subject areas.
- Require teacher preparation programs to report demographic data of students who matriculate and students who graduate with certification to teach in given subject areas

The Hawkins Centers of Excellence grant program is intended to strengthen teacher preparation programs at Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs) and federally designated Minority Serving Institutions (MSIs), including Hispanic Serving Institutions, Tribal Colleges and Universities, and institutions that primarily serve Asian Americans, Black Americans, Native Americans, or Pacific Islanders. The program became law in 2008 under Title II, Part B of HEA but has yet to receive any funding in congressional appropriations. Funding for Hawkins grants is long past due.

HBCUs and MSIs produce higher rates of diverse educators than other institutions, so supporting their teacher preparation programs is key to creating a more diverse teacher workforce. Congress should fund the Hawkins grant program in its next appropriations package, then renew the program through reauthorization. It is also crucial that national data be collected and made available to track progress at the education profession's primary entry point—teacher education programs.

Simplify Loan Relief Programs to Promote Diversity, Equity, and Access in the Education Profession

Federal loan forgiveness programs are important to help encourage people of all backgrounds to enter the field of education. For many students depending on loans to pay for college, the promise of relief from burdensome student debt makes entering a lower paying profession such as teaching financially feasible.

The following recommendations would make better loan forgiveness available to more teachers:

- For the Teacher Loan Forgiveness Program, raise the amount of forgiveness to \$17,500 for all teachers, regardless of subject taught, who have served for five years at a low-income school or educational service agency.
- Adopt CAA amendments to the Public Service Loan Forgiveness Program (PSLF), including those which would allow teachers to count years of service simultaneously toward PSLF and another loan forgiveness program.

Providing equal opportunity for relief for teachers of all subject areas would lower a significant barrier of entry to the music education profession and support a more diverse music educator workforce. It is also imperative that Congress streamline teachers' eligibility for PSLF so that educators are more successful in having loans forgiven after meeting program requirements.