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TEACHFORAMERICA

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## EXPANDING DIVERSITY OF TEACHER WORKFORCE A PRIORITY FOR TEACH FOR AMERICA—LOS ANGELES

*70 Percent of New Teachers Are People of Color; Nearly Half Come From a Low-Income Background*

**LOS ANGELES, August 11, 2014**—This year's Teach For America—Los Angeles corps is the most diverse in the organization's 24-year history, keeping pace with the ever-changing demographics of local public schools. The organization believes in the importance of engaging talented and committed individuals from all backgrounds and academic interests to bring diverse perspectives and experiences to the classroom. Teach For America also has found that maximizing diversity supports its effort to attract the country's top talent.

"Teachers who bring a diversity of experience and perspectives to their work enrich their students' education," said Teach For America—Los Angeles Executive Director Lida Jennings. "We've seen that great teachers come from all backgrounds and, when teachers share the backgrounds of their students, they can have an additional impact in the classroom and beyond as role models and mentors."

This year, 70 percent of Teach For America's incoming teachers in metro Los Angeles are people of color; nearly half come from a low-income background; half are the first in their families to graduate from college; and 10 have Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) status. More than a third bring post-graduate or professional experience to the corps; and 25 percent have a background in STEM (science, technology, engineering, and math).

Teach For America—Los Angeles welcomes 115 first-year teachers, who are beginning a two-year continuum of training in the 2014-15 school year. They join 145 teachers returning for their second year, and together they fill hard-to-staff teaching positions in 130 high-need, high-poverty schools across Los Angeles. Of the new teachers, 61 percent are teaching in the critical subject areas of math, science, and special education. These new teachers will receive ongoing training and support from Teach For America—Los Angeles in addition to the support they receive from their schools and districts.

"I've seen the difference it can make when a student is able to see him or herself reflected in that teacher in the front of the classroom," said Robert Whitman, principal at Manual Arts High School in the Los Angeles Unified School District. Whitman has hired a number of Teach For America corps members in the last three years, including 13 who begin this fall. "I applaud Teach For America for working hard to recruit a diverse group of talented and

dedicated teachers. The success we have had here at Manual Arts would not be possible without their partnership and the great teachers they help recruit.”

Teach For America’s applicant pool this year was its most diverse to date. Almost half of the more than 50,000 applicants identify as people of color, nearly half received Pell Grants, and more than one-third were the first in their family to attend college.

Teach For America continuously refines its approach to selecting candidates, informed by ongoing observation of the skills and practices of its most successful educators. The selection process is focused on identifying candidate strengths, and Teach For America has seen that educators can succeed with various combinations of skills and experiences. Some of the areas of strength that Teach For America looks for include a deep belief in the potential of all kids, often informed by experience in low-income communities; leadership; past achievement; perseverance in challenging situations; long-term commitment to reaching goals; excellent organization and critical-thinking skills; strong interpersonal skills; and an ability to work with individuals from a variety of backgrounds.

“A teacher has to earn the respect of the students from a personal standpoint before being able to make a dent in their academic outcomes,” said Kenya Jackson, a Teach For America alumna and principal at View Park Prep Middle School. “I have worked with great teachers from all backgrounds who do an excellent job building strong relationships with their students, but a teacher who starts with the commonality of a shared background is often going to have a leg up.”

“As a first-generation college graduate, I was in my students’ shoes not too long ago,” said Yahaira Navarro, an Animo Venice Charter High School graduate now teaching at Animo Leadership Charter High School. “I’m so excited to come back to teach in the school community from which I graduated. I am thankful for all of the teachers, including Teach For America corps members, who positively impacted my life and encouraged me to always believe in myself and my potential. My goal is to help cultivate a similar environment with my students—an environment that enhances student voices and empowers students to take control of their lives and their futures by becoming strong students and advocates for themselves and their community.”

The 2014-15 school year also marks a deepening of Teach For America’s partnership with LAUSD’s high-need Intensive Support and Innovation Center, L.A.’s Promise, and Partnership for Los Angeles Schools, with 30 teachers hired across those schools this year.

“Expanding our partnership could not have come at a better time,” LAUSD Superintendent John Deasy said. “For the first time in several years, we have significantly more teaching positions at our highest-need schools that need to be filled, and Teach For America provides us with one of the most diverse sources of teaching talent available to consider for those roles.”

Teach For America has nearly 520 alumni teachers in Los Angeles, including a 2012 National Teacher of the Year finalist. Nearly 60 alumni are principals, leading seven California Distinguished Schools. One hundred thirty-four alumni serve in leadership roles in district or charter management. For example, Ana Ponce (Los Angeles Corps ’91) reaches

3,500 students through her charter management organization; Camino Nuevo Charter Academy; Bernadette Lucas (Los Angeles Corps '91), director of the Common Core Technology Project, reaches the entire LAUSD and affiliated charters; and Tommy Chang (Los Angeles Corps '97) leads the Intensive Support and Innovation Center, the largest and highest-need district within LAUSD.

Nationally, the incoming corps is the most diverse in Teach For America history. Fifty percent of incoming corps members identify as people of color; 47 percent come from a low-income background; one-third are the first in their families to attend college; and another one-third are joining the corps from graduate school or with professional experience.

### **About Teach For America**

Teach For America works in partnership with communities to expand educational opportunity for children facing the challenges of poverty. Founded in 1990, Teach For America recruits and develops a diverse corps of outstanding college graduates and professionals to make an initial two-year commitment to teach in high-need schools and become lifelong leaders in the movement to end educational inequity. This fall, 10,600 corps members will be teaching in 50 urban and rural regions across the country while 37,000 alumni work across sectors to ensure that all children have access to an excellent education. For more information, visit [www.teachforamerica.org](http://www.teachforamerica.org) and follow us on [Facebook](#) and [Twitter](#).

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