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Foundations Support Teachers College Professional Training Institute on Teaching and Learning in Racially Diverse Schools

New York, NY – New York-area and national foundations have supported the Reimagining Education Summer Institute at Teachers College, Columbia University, a four-day professional development institute on teaching and learning in the racially and culturally diverse classrooms of the 21st century.

The Reimagining Education Institute’s main objective is to deepen teachers’ understanding of race and culture in order to advance learning in diverse classrooms. Developed by TC faculty and students across six of the College’s 10 departments, Reimagining Education provides the nation’s predominantly white teaching force with professional development and hands-on strategies (and continuing education credits) for making subject matter more relevant for America’s public school students, the majority of whom are students of color. The approaches range from grounding the curriculum in students’ own experiences and cultural understanding, to engaging students in in-depth research projects to help them demonstrate their genius.

More than 400 educators, policy makers, parents, and other education stakeholders from 24 states and 13 countries gathered at this year’s Institute, which concluded on July 19. They learned about new teaching tools and strategies from experts on racial and cultural diversity, and shared their own experiences and learned from one another about teaching in today’s K-12 public schools.

“The TC faculty and graduate students who have worked together to design and implement the Reimagining Education Summer Institute are extremely grateful to these organizations for enabling us to work side-by-side with practitioners in our fields to transform teaching and learning in our increasingly racially, ethnically and culturally diverse schools,” said Amy Stuart Wells, Professor of Sociology and Education and founding director of the Institute.

Five philanthropic organizations have donated a total of nearly \$200,000 to Reimagining Education over three years, forming a “mosaic of support for the Institute,” with each organization’s contribution aligned with its own work in the area of education equity, said Wells. “Each is coming to it from different perspective, and each has made the Institute stronger than it would have otherwise been.”

Financial support from the Booth Ferris Foundation helped launch the Reimagining Education Institute in 2016, while the Nellie Mae Education Foundation provided tuition support for a total of 30 fellows to attend the Institute in 2017 and this year.

The Rauch Foundation funded tuition scholarships for 25 Institute participants from the Long Island-based ERASE Racism, which leads public policy advocacy campaigns and related initiatives that promote racial equity in areas including public school education. Rauch also funded the development of an online advanced certificate program launched this year, which educators can complete by participating in the on-site Summer Institute, followed by three online classes throughout the academic year designed and taught by Teachers College faculty. In the final capstone class for this Certificate program, students develop an action plan for their schools and communities to be presented at the 2019 Institute.

A grant from the Deutsche Bank Americas Foundation enabled the Institute to conduct special outreach to teachers from the Latino community and supported strategic communications through the development of a pre-Institute trailer film and the filming of the 2018 Institute for future promotional videos and website images.

The Ford Foundation has funded Wells’s work with The Public Good, an organization supporting parent engagement and utilizing research to help schools in gentrifying promote equity and achievement for all young people and to find strength in their diversity, and meaning in their differences. Through its support for The Public Good Project, the Ford Foundation sends educators from the partner schools to the Reimagining Education Summer Institute for professional development.

“TC is becoming the go-to place, nationally and internationally, for this kind of work,” said Wells, who currently serves as President of the American Educational Research Association. “No other school of education could pull this off, because no other school of education has the breadth and depth of knowledge to do this work. And while other institutions discuss these issues, only we give teachers the opportunity and the credits to use this for professional development.”