

My name is Isabel Laderman. I will be doing the ILP and MEd grad program for social studies in 2025 following my gap year next year. I had to take a gap year because of finances. Last summer, I had ankle surgery and a 2nd and 3rd degree burn on my foot. I am still recovering physically and financially. I had to take a gap year because I don't have enough savings to cover rent and food expenses while I'm working full time as an unpaid student teacher, on top of giving money to the school for tuition. While some are able to have jobs while in the program, the program itself discourages it. As a disabled person still recovering from these injuries, it is even more inaccessible for me to have another job on top of being a full-time student and student teacher. If student teaching was paid, it might be a different story and I could have joined the program right after graduation.

There have been a lot of new policies and grants created to incentivize new teachers to join the workforce, especially for teachers of color and LGBTQ+ teachers. I am both and I also have a disability. Through community-engaged work in local schools and Breakthrough Twin Cities, I have seen the power of having students see themselves reflected in teachers. I already know that my ethnicity has been a connective factor with my students, as I have Filipino (I use the e to create a gender-neutral term that still fits into the linguistic style) and Asian students who developed close relationships with me. One of the most heartwarming moments I've had is with a mixed (white and Filipino also) student who is nonbinary. They had always seen their race as the antithesis of their gender, as they were raised by a very catholic Filipina who does not believe in nonbinary identities. We had a long conversation and I shared some readings on precolonial Filipino gender identity, as trans women and nonbinary individuals in the Philippines were not only accepted but revered as spiritual leaders. When the Spanish Catholics conquered the Philippines, they decided these people were witches and tried to rid the Philippines of them. Yet, my student is proof that this did not work. They told me "I've known I was nonbinary since 4th grade, I just had this feeling in my chest. I refuse to use anything other than they/them pronouns in school because I want other people to know their options and that they can fix that feeling in their chest." It was one of the most inspiring conversations I had and caused me to come out with my own nonbinary identity and start using they/she pronouns, as I have always had that feeling but was too scared to do anything with it. This experience showed me the power of identity when it comes to teaching. Yet, if people can't afford to become teachers, especially those who have been historically marginalized and economically disenfranchised, how will this goal be met?

I want to be a teacher. It is my passion and my joy. The only thing holding me back from reaching that goal as soon as possible is finances, as I can't afford the grad program without saving a lot more beforehand. My story is only one of thousands, but I hope it is helpful in making the right decision. We are trusting teachers with our most precious resource: children and the future. I urge you to compensate teachers in training so we can learn to the best of our ability without being distracted by how we're going to pay rent or food.