



*A Union of Professionals*

## **Licensure, Retention and Teacher Diversity** COVID-19 CLOSURE WORKING PAPERS

Given the detrimental effect of COVID-19 on state and local economies, it is imperative that we consider not only a school reopening plan but also a plan to retain as many teachers as possible. We know that in times of economic strife, it is the least-wealthy districts that suffer the deepest cuts, which means the most vulnerable students are left to attend deeply understaffed and under-resourced schools—yet again.

The Learning Policy Institute has laid out what is likely to be the new teacher shortage in its most [recent report](#), which reaffirms what we know: Students in economically insecure districts will be hit the hardest and harmed the most by teacher layoffs. This is an equity issue. These students are already at a disadvantage thanks to the design of the system. We cannot sit idly by and accept the inevitable further destruction to their education. As we develop plans for addressing learning ranging from distance to social emotional, to safe and healthy practices such as social distancing and frequent hand-washing, we must simultaneously create a plan for retaining teachers in good standing. These teachers, particularly teachers of color, are more than just educators—they often are community brokers as well.

This document is also meant to call attention to the most vulnerable teachers in terms of continued employment: those working with a provisional license. We know from the literature that teachers of color often fall in this category for a host of reasons: the main cause being Praxis. We also know that there is no correlation between successfully completing a licensure exam such as Praxis and the ability to effectively teach students. Licensure exams have shown themselves to be barriers to entry. There is a lack of evidence to support the notion that passing an exam with an arbitrarily set cut score, will deliver on well-prepared teachers with strong content and pedagogical knowledge.

Given the importance of increasing teacher diversity, every effort should be made to retain teachers of color and ensure they are not overrepresented if district cuts are made. There is already immeasurable disruption to students' academic and social lives. Districts that have teachers of color who have demonstrated effective teaching, as determined by their district's teacher evaluation program, should be retained. Every effort must be made to prioritize teacher diversity even in a time of budget constraints.

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The **American Federation of Teachers** is a union of professionals that champions fairness; democracy; economic opportunity; and high-quality public education, healthcare and public services for our students, their families and our communities. We are committed to advancing these principles through community engagement, organizing, collective bargaining and political activism, and especially through the work our members do.

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A handful of states have provided guidance around licensure and certification. While not exactly a friend of the AFT, Deans for Impact has created a [useful database of state-level policy guidance](#) for candidates entering the profession, and it contains information that is also useful for those who are currently teaching without a standard or full license. States are beginning to relax their deadlines in favor of waivers and extensions. For example, Virginia has extended expiring provisional licenses for one year to June 30, 2021. The District of Columbia has extended its deadline to March 1, 2021, but with this caveat: Principals have the authority to override the extension and replace any provisionally licensed teachers.

While we acknowledge there are budget-cutting policies that must be followed in every state, we should advocate for states to consider what students need most: their teachers. If there was ever a time we didn't need to reduce staff and have fewer adults for kids—it is now.

## State and District Policy Recommendations

AFT state and local affiliates should consider the following policies and positions in advocating with states and districts, and planning for staffing during and beyond the pandemic:

**Issue No. 1: Current teachers who do hold not a standard license due to inability to pass Praxis.**

**Policy recommendation:**

States should review and relax the cut score to broaden window to range of -5 points. The rationale is many test-takers are within a mere few points of passing. There is no evidence that someone who scores a few points below an arbitrarily determined cut score does not know the content well. Therefore, evidence of successful teaching is what districts should use to determine staffing, and is what states should consider. There should be greater value placed on experience and the ability to successfully teach students, including the ability to build healthy, caring relationships with them. Reduce the overreliance on test scores as the key determinant of successful teaching.

**Issue No. 2: Many general education teachers hold additional licenses that may be inactive (e.g., special education) due to the cost to maintain, etc.**

**Policy recommendation:**

Identify shortages and overages, and determine where teachers should go (where cuts are necessary) to include operating on an expired license. This would be an efficient use of current staff in good standing, and reduce the number of new hires. A timeframe should be established for when teachers who wish to stay in a new area would need to renew their license.

**Issue No. 3: Teacher turnover in underserved, under-resourced schools that disproportionately affects Black and brown kids. This question must be answered: Who benefits if teachers of color are retained with intention?**

**Policy recommendation:**

Develop a retention formula with consideration to the following:

- Prioritize the budget for classroom teachers and support staff, and decrease the budget for central office administrative personnel.
- Licensure granted (-5 points) or extension for teachers in good standing (more data than evaluations alone). Collective bargaining agreements should be consulted for language used to signal “good standing” and criteria.
- Stability of student body; academically and socially as realities have changed.

**Issue No. 4: Pre-service candidates who were unable to complete a traditional clinical experience or residency program.**

**Policy recommendation:**

States with perennial shortages, (to include teachers of color in general and specialty areas, such as special education, bilingual education, math, science, etc.) that cannot be filled with in-service teachers, should consider a waiver for candidates who have experienced an interruption to their clinical experience. Caveat: States must require districts to provide induction support for anyone who becomes a teacher of record under this condition.

New teachers entering the profession in the upcoming 2020-21 school year will need extraordinary support to include, but not be limited to, distance learning, safe social distancing and healthy practices for students, as well as social and emotional learning. All teachers will require significant support, but new teachers will require greater support that most districts have not had the bandwidth or the budget to provide in the past.

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