

COVID-19 Education Trend Report: Teacher Recruitment and Retention November 30, 2020

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Executive Summary

In response to the COVID-19 pandemic and the constantly changing landscape of teacher recruitment and retention, this trend report acts as an overview of policy changes and proposals for superintendents and other school system leaders. Specifically, the following text focuses on the state legislative policies and emergency declarations made by governors and state boards of education in response to recruiting and retaining teachers throughout the COVID-19 pandemic.

The data in this paper is from the Education Commission of the States (ECS), the National Conference of State Legislatures (NCSL), and state Department of Education (DOE) websites. The paper overviews policies from states in the areas of teacher candidate clinical requirement changes and exam waivers, substitute teacher recruitment, and retention scholarships in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic. We intend for this document to serve as a resource for school system leaders and educational advocates interested in understanding the state policy trends impacting LEAs during the 2020-21 school year. Please note that this report is not exhaustive, but rather, shows a snapshot of the current U.S. policy landscape.

Changes to Clinical Requirements

One of the biggest concerns relating to teacher recruitment and the pandemic is how students in education preparation programs (EPPs) can transition into roles as teachers if their courses and fieldwork requirements have been halted due to the pandemic. Many states have begun initiatives that allow for future teachers to surpass or alter their fieldwork requirements to compensate for school closures or lower access to student-teaching positions. The main theme across states is that EPPs can arrange a waiver for student teaching length requirements, as well as provide temporary alternative placements, virtual learning opportunities, or implementing alternative assignments or instruction to meet clinical requirements. This allows schools to recruit from a larger base of eligible teachers.

States such as [Connecticut](#), [Delaware](#), [New Hampshire](#), [New Jersey](#), Pennsylvania, and [South Carolina](#), as well as the [District of Columbia](#), have created similar emergency amendments or provisions to certification requirements that allow EPPs to modify their programs to include alternatives to student teaching to ensure successful completion of the program. For example, Pennsylvania enacted [Act 13 of 2020](#) to ensure that EPPs may modify their programs to include alternatives to student teaching, including simulation experiences, additional assignments and projects, and virtual collaboration with mentors for teacher candidates graduating by April 30, 2020. Under this act, EPPs are also expected to complete a summative evaluation for all candidates to demonstrate progress and satisfactory completion of required activities.

Some states have scheduled to revisit these policies to account for continued school closures from the pandemic. One specific example, Maryland, has made amendments to the [Code of Maryland Regulation \(COMAR\) 13A.12.01.14 Waivers and Special Certification Provisions](#) on an emergency basis, establishing an emergency certificate designed to allow those educator candidates who have completed all required coursework the ability to enter the classroom as a teacher of record while they complete the required assessments and any remaining clinical experiences. Specifically, teacher candidates experiencing interruptions to clinical experience

may pursue any of these options to meet program requirements: provide instruction in alternative settings such as child care centers that remain open during the pandemic; develop and deliver online instruction in collaboration with partner schools; or complete a creative initiative surrounding education during the pandemic.

Figure 1:

State	Policy Action	Description	Date of Action	Status
CT	Announcement	The Connecticut State Department of Education is temporarily waiving length of placement requirements and any hour requirements associated with opportunities provided through EPPs for student teaching, clinical internships and/or fieldwork in public schools.	3/19/2020	N/A
DE	Announcement	Alternative experiences and/or assignments to ensure that teacher candidates meet clinical residency requirements.	5/10/2020	N/A
NH	Memorandum	EPPs have flexibility to develop a plan that meets their students' unique needs to complete clinical requirements, including the use of alternative experiences and/or assignments.	3/26/2020	N/A
NJ	Announcement	EPPs have discretion to modify program schedule and make other arrangements including virtual simulations or assignments for candidates in their final semester to ensure they meet clinical requirements.	6/30/2020	N/A
SC	Announcement	EPPs can arrange temporary alternative placements, provide virtual learning opportunities or implement alternative assignments or instruction to meet clinical requirements.	3/24/2020	N/A
DC	Announcement	EPPs may use virtual learning opportunities, implement alternative assignments and instruction, and arrange temporary placements in other settings to allow for teacher candidates to meet clinical/fieldwork requirements.	4/26/2020	N/A
PA	SB 571	EPPs may modify their programs to include alternatives to student teaching, including simulation experiences, additional assignments and projects, and virtual	3/27/2020	Enacted

		collaboration with mentors for teacher candidates graduating by April 31, 2020.		
MD	Announcement	Teacher candidates experiencing interruptions to clinical experience, may pursue any of these options to meet program requirements: (1) provide instruction in alternative settings such as child care centers that remain open during the pandemic; (2) develop and deliver online instruction in collaboration with partner schools; and (3) complete a creative initiative.	4/28/2020	N/A

Teacher Candidate Exam Waivers

Though some teacher candidates were able to complete their clinical requirements, either before COVID or under the previously mentioned adjustments, many education testing centers closed, preventing them from taking exams required for certification or licensure. This is concerning for districts that are seeing an increase in teacher retirement due to teachers over the age of 65 being at higher risk.¹ Increased teacher retirement mixed with teacher candidates unable to enter the classroom could exacerbate existing teacher shortages across the country.² To ensure qualified candidates can still enter the classroom for the 2020-2021 school year, many states temporarily waived exam requirements.

Most states with exam waivers are providing certificates or licenses to teacher candidates who have completed their EPP and been recommended by their program to teach. In [Maryland](#), for instance, superintendents may issue emergency certificates to recent graduates, which is valid until 6 months after the state of emergency is declared over. [Delaware](#) updated their state of emergency to allow for teacher candidates who have met all EPP requirements, except taking and passing required exams, to receive an initial license and emergency certificate for the 2020-2021 school year. [New York](#) is exempting those impacted by COVID-19 from taking their certification exams and will issue certificates to candidates once all other requirements for certification are met. Similarly, the [New Hampshire](#) Department of Education has declared that candidates who made satisfactory progress in their clinical experiences may apply for licensure. Mississippi, New Jersey, Rhode Island, South Carolina, and Texas are just a few of the states that have also issued exam waivers.

Figure 2:

State	Policy Action	Description	Date of Action	Status
MD	Announcement	Recent graduates of EPPs who have completed all coursework have six months	4/28/2020	N/A

¹ <https://www.edweek.org/ew/articles/2020/05/07/teachers-at-higher-risk-for-covid-19-worry.html>

² <https://learningpolicyinstitute.org/blog/covid-raising-demands-reducing-capacity-educator-workforce>

		from the time that the state of emergency is lifted to complete assessments (Praxis).		
DE	Announcement	Teacher candidates who have met all requirements to exit their EPPs with exception of taking and passing the required examinations are eligible to receive an Initial License and apply for an Emergency Certificate for the SY 20-21.	5/10/2020	N/A
NY	Announcement	Teacher candidates whose EPPS were impacted by COVID-19 are exempt from the certification exams, including candidates who already took, but did not pass, one or more exams. Those candidates exempt from the certification exams will be issued their respective certificate(s) upon completion of all other certification requirements.	3/30/2020	N/A
NH	Announcement	Candidates who have met program requirements with exception of taking and passing assessments like Praxis and EdTPA (and have been recommended for licensure by their EPP) may submit an application for licensure.	3/30/2020	N/A
MS	Announcement	The Mississippi State Board of Education granted approval to the MDE to suspend the licensure testing criterion only, for all complete applications received in the MDE Division of Educator Licensure on or before December 31, 2021 for Five-Year Standard Licenses sought by way of the completion of an approved traditional or nontraditional educator or administrator preparation program as defined by the Mississippi State Board of Education.	3/26/2020	N/A
NJ	Announcement	NJDOE waived the performance assessment (edTPA) for teacher candidates, including out-of-state candidates applying for certification in New Jersey. Candidates must be recommended by their program to receive standard certification.	6/30/2020	N/A
RI	Announcement	Teacher candidates who will graduate in spring or summer 2020 and have not yet taken or passed the required tests for certification will be eligible to receive a one (1)-year Temporary Initial certificate.	4/24/2020	N/A

SC	Announcement	EPPs may submit recommendations for certification prior to candidates earning a successful score on the subject area and pedagogy tests if they've successfully completed the program and their degree has been conferred, earned a successful overall grade for their clinical experience, and met the requirements of the summative ADEPT evaluation.	3/24/2020	N/A
TX	Announcement	Governor Abbott issued a waiver allowing certain educator certification candidates to qualify for a one-year probationary certificate without meeting some requirements so they may be certified for the 2020–21 school year. Candidates must be recommended by their EPP.	8/10/2020	N/A

Substitute Teacher Recruitment

Due to an increase in teacher retirement and a hesitancy from substitute teachers to cover the classrooms of sick teachers amidst COVID-19 concerns, many districts are experiencing substitute teacher shortages as they return to in-person instruction. According to a recent report from the EdWeek Research Center and Kelly Education, districts are currently only able to fill 54 percent of daily teacher absences, meaning they need new ways to recruit substitutes.³ In response, States are making it easier for people to acquire substitute teaching certification, especially those who do not hold a teaching credential. In 2013, only 43 percent of districts in a sample from the National Council on Teacher Quality allowed those without a bachelor’s degree to be a substitute teacher.⁴ As of September 2020, that number is 60 percent.⁵

An analysis of recent announcements from governors and state boards of education indicate that states are beginning to issue emergency substitute certificates with lower requirements and extended day limitations. One example is [Iowa](#) Governor Kim Reynolds’s Proclamation of Disaster Relief which was updated in July 2020 to increase flexibility for substitutes. The update removes day limits for short-term and long-term substitutes, lowers the degree requirement to an associate’s degree, and lowers the age requirement from 21 to 20. [Missouri’s](#) State Board of Education went a step further, lowering the education requirement from 60 semester hours or more of college-level credit to only requiring a high school diploma or equivalent and completion of a 20-hour state-approved substitute teacher online training. Money from the State’s COVID Relief Funds are also being used to reimburse substitutes for the \$50 application fee. The [New York](#) State Education Department already allowed those with no college education to earn a substitute certificate, but issued additional flexibilities for substitute teacher certifications, extending the amount of time substitutes with only a high school diploma and no teaching

³ <https://kellyservicespr.gcs-web.com/static-files/ac250501-12e7-457f-894c-a6e433816e75>

⁴ <https://www.nctq.org/blog/Substitute-teachers-during-the-pandemic:-requirements,-benefits,-and-pay>

⁵ *ibid*

certificate may be employed by a school district from 40 days to 90 days if a certified candidate cannot be found.

In March 2020, [New Mexico](#) passed SB 111, allowing retired employees to be day-to-day substitutes without their retirement benefits being suspended. Other states may consider similar amendments to education retirement law, but superintendents should keep in mind the hesitation from older teachers to re-enter the classroom during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Figure 3:

State	Policy Action	Description	Date of Action	Status
IA	Announcement	Governor Kim Reynolds has issued a new proclamation which allows for increased flexibility in the use of substitute teachers during the disaster emergency period. Day limits are removed, degree requirements are lowered, age requirements are lowered, and paraeducator certificates are accepted. Substitute authorization course is still required.	7/17/2020	N/A
MO	Announcement	Individuals who possess a high school diploma or equivalent may complete a 20-hour state-approved substitute teacher online training to be eligible for a substitute certificate. COVID Relief Funds (CRF) are being used to reimburse the \$50 application fee. Those with valid Missouri teaching certificates no longer need to apply for a substitute certificate.	8/18/2020	N/A
NY	Announcement	Substitute teachers who do not hold a valid teaching certificate and are not working towards certification, but hold a high school diploma or its equivalent, may be employed by the school district beyond the 40-day limit, for up to an additional 50 days (90 days total in a school year), if the district superintendent certifies that the district has conducted a good faith recruitment search for a properly certified candidate and determined that there are no available certified teachers that can perform the duties of such position.	7/12/2020	N/A
NM	SB 111	The Act allows certain retirees to return to work without a suspension of retirement benefits, exempts employees considered to	3/2/2020	Enacted

		be substitutes from the requirements of the Educational Retirement Act.		
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Teacher Retention Scholarships

Many states and districts are needing to reevaluate their efforts for teacher retention due to potential economic impacts of funding and available teaching positions from the COVID-19 pandemic. Research has shown that teacher cuts during the last recession disproportionately impacted districts and schools serving students of color and students from low-income families.⁶ This also had the result of creating higher rates of teacher turnover in schools with the highest concentrations of students in poverty, further undermining their learning.⁷ States and districts are beginning to institute policies that ensure that districts and schools serving the students with the highest need are protected as much as possible from the effects of layoffs.

One example of states working toward retaining teachers within their system is Arizona. [Arizona](#) has passed a bill that establishes an Arizona teachers academy for postsecondary institutions to award scholarships to students pursuing teaching certification. Scholarship recipients commit to teaching in Arizona public schools. Focusing more on areas of need rather than just retaining teachers in any school system, [Georgia](#) has passed a bill relating to scholarships, loans, and grants for postsecondary education, so as to establish a loan forgiveness program for teachers who agree to teach in a turnaround school in a high demand subject area. Finally, some states are even focusing specifically on retention of teachers in specialized areas. The North Dakota Department of Public Instruction has allocated \$350,000 for a special education teacher scholarship program to address the shortage of qualified special education teachers in the state.

Figure 4:

State	Policy Action	Description	Date of Action	Status
AZ	SB 1492	The Act establishes an Arizona teachers academy for postsecondary institutions to award scholarships to students pursuing teaching certification. Scholarship recipients commit to teaching in Arizona public schools.	6/5/2020	Enacted
GA	HB 736	A bill relating to scholarships, loans, and grants for postsecondary education, so as to establish a loan forgiveness program for teachers who agree to teach in a turnaround school in a high demand subject area; to provide for requirements for participation; to provide for payment; to provide for related matters; to repeal conflicting laws; and for other purposes.	3/5/2020	Enacted

⁶ <https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/10.3102/0013189X16670899>

⁷ <https://learningpolicyinstitute.org/blog/impact-covid-19-recession-teaching-positions>