

State Policy Flexibilities in Response to COVID-19: Avoid Failing the Next Cohort of New Teachers

SREB is identifying areas where we can be of help to states during the current pandemic. In order for this health and economic catastrophe not to worsen the already burdensome teacher shortage crisis, state leaders must act quickly to ensure that current policies do not prevent student-teachers from graduating and becoming licensed to teach in the upcoming school year. SREB convened a focus group of higher education and K-12 leaders from five states to discuss policy changes necessary to sustain the continued educational and professional support of the region's next cohort of teachers.

Provide Flexibility in the Short Term

There are four policy areas that state leaders must address immediately to provide vital support with temporary flexibility or waivers to state requirements that will affect some **60,000 graduating teacher candidates** entering the workforce next year in the SREB region:

What	How	Who	Why
Flexibility for Educator Preparation Programs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Permit educator preparation programs to continue co-teaching and practicum hours, student teaching observations and coursework requirements completely online for the remainder of the 2019-20 school year Temporarily remove or reduce the number of weeks and/or consecutive days of required in-person teaching experience (suggested cap is 10 weeks or less) Encourage and provide guidance for virtual instruction methods, tools and sources Allow institutions to maintain the same accreditation rating as last year 	Higher education governing board and/or department of education and state board of education; accreditation organizations; state legislators, if applicable	To allow colleges, universities and other preparation programs to use virtual student teaching experiences to meet minimum education requirements. Student-teachers who are adept at taking online classes may also provide much-needed help to current teachers with little or no virtual classroom experience.
Licensure and Graduation Testing Waivers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Allow colleges and universities to waive current teaching assessment requirements for graduation Waive testing requirements for initial licensure for at least one year 	Department of education, state board of education, and/or professional standards board	Because testing vendors like ETS have closed testing centers and postponed content and pedagogy testing until further notice.
Flexibility for Teacher Licensure and additional First-Year Teacher Support	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Examine your state's provisional teacher licenses and adjust or add a temporary license that allows first-year teachers to teach for up to one year before taking or passing content assessments like PRAXIS or pedagogical assessments like edTPA, PPAT For the 2020-21 school year, create or strengthen mentor programs for first-year teachers, focusing heavily on pedagogy and classroom management 	Department of education, state board of education, and/or professional standards board; state legislators, if applicable	To allow graduating teacher candidates to secure at least a temporary license to teach next year, while providing additional state-supported, in-class coaching once employed.
Supportive Budgets	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Pledge to not cut P-12 or higher education budgets for the upcoming school year Maintain or even increase funding to assist with virtual education support and technology 	State legislators	To prevent schools and institutions from issuing hiring freezes or making detrimental cuts due to budgetary stress.

Learn and Adapt for the Long Term

It is easy to add to the growing list of issues and challenges our educational system will face due to current closures, economic hardships and the unknown consequences of last-minute decision making. State leaders must adjust for the present but should not miss enduring solutions to the problems highlighted by the pandemic. The following long-term policy changes should also be addressed:

1. Establish and fund a five-year **study of the current cohort** of teacher candidates as they enter the teaching profession to determine if/where there are instructional deficiencies, significant student growth gaps, or decreased retention as compared to the previous two cohorts. This data should be used to provide and fund specific professional development, coaching, and resources for the current cohort to ensure they learn the skills necessary to become highly effective teachers.
2. Require all traditional and non-traditional educator preparation programs to **provide coursework and field experience in online teaching** in a virtual — or at least a hybrid — classroom. This experience should include exposure to a variety of technology platforms so teacher candidates can adapt to varying district-or school-selected vendors.
3. Require the creation of, or improvements to, a **statewide early-career teacher mentorship program**. At a minimum, all first-, second- and third-year teachers should be assigned a mentor to give them vital support and coaching to build their knowledge and skills. This strategy will provide individualized support, increase retention, and provide leadership roles for highly effective teachers.
4. Require all traditional and non-traditional preparation programs to **adhere to equal standards** for preparation and licensure. Policies that allow different preparation paths to follow unequal standards of entry cause long-term negative consequences to the quality of the teaching workforce.
5. **Radically redesign teacher licensure** to re-create a system that allows wide, open access into the teaching profession on a provisional basis regardless of preparation path; incentivizes and strongly supports the development of content knowledge and pedagogical skills in the early years; applies multiple outcomes based (not input-based) measures to professional, renewable licensure; and codifies advanced roles with increased pay minimums provided with state funds. This redesign would have dramatic effects on the preparation, recruitment and retention of teachers and could considerably lessen the growing teacher shortage crisis.

If your state already has policies reflecting the last four recommendations above, almost all the emergency policy changes listed on page one would not need to be addressed during a time of extended school closures and virtual education.

Our systems, schools, institutions, educators, students and even parents are faced with an onslaught of problems in the coming weeks, months and years. Do not miss the opportunity to learn and grow from this devastation — or to upgrade key areas of teacher workforce policies.

This brief was prepared by Megan Boren, SREB program specialist, education human capital strategies. Boren facilitates SREB roundtables in four states to help leaders address policy concerns across the teacher workforce continuum, from recruitment to retirement. For additional teacher workforce policy research, recommendations and data, please visit [SREB.org/TeacherWorkforce](https://www.sreb.org/TeacherWorkforce), or contact Stephen Pruitt or Megan Boren.

Additional Resources

Virtual Learning and Teaching Resources

Arkansas	Virtual Arkansas
Florida	Florida Virtual School and Instructional Internships at FLVS
Georgia	Georgia Virtual Learning and Just in Time for Teachers: Digital Learning Days
Kentucky	Kentucky Department of Education Non-Traditional Instruction Program and How University of Kentucky College of Education Students Are Completing Field Experiences During COVID-19 Closures
North Carolina	North Carolina Virtual Public School
Virginia	Virtual Virginia Cumulation of Guidance Related to Student Teaching During COVID-19 — live Google collaboration ISTE Standards for Educators — Defining digital age skills Virtual Learning Leadership Alliance — National Standard for Quality Online Learning
National	Council for the Accreditation of Educator Preparation — COVID-19 Guidance United States Education Department — COVID-19 Guidance SETDA — Coalition to Support Online Learning SREB CTE Resources — Virtual Labs, Simulations and Interactive Learning Objects

Literature Review

[Design and Development of Field Experiences in K-12 Online Learning Environments](#)

[Offering Preservice Teachers Field Experiences in K-12 Online Learning: A National Survey of Teacher Education Programs](#)

[Communication, Community, and Disconnection: Pre-Service Teachers in Virtual School Field Experiences](#)

[Field Experience in Virtual Schools — To Be There Virtually](#)

[Online Student Teaching with Undergraduate Preservice Teachers](#)