

The COVID-19 pandemic has caused major disruption to education at all levels, and the potential impact on student outcomes will be felt for months and possibly years ahead. The SCORE series of COVID-19 Impact Memos analyzes challenges, examines potential responses, and highlights student-centered solutions.

# COVID-19 Impact Memo 1: Teacher Preparation

## Spring 2020

### Educator Preparation In Tennessee

There are 39 educator preparation providers (EPPs) across the state of Tennessee that produce more than 3,000 teacher candidates every year. The Tennessee State Board of Education reports on multiple performance metrics for a three-year cohort of early-career teachers who were prepared by any State Board-approved educator preparation provider in the annual Educator Preparation Report Card.<sup>1</sup>

State Board-approved EPPs include traditional and alternative preparation programs that provide professional coursework and clinical experience. High-quality educator preparation is critical to ensure candidates are ready to teach students effectively on their first day in the classroom.

#### Teacher Practitioner License Requirements

- Bachelor's degree from a regionally accredited college or university
- Completion of the program from a State Board-approved educator preparation provider
  - Including at least 15 weeks of student teaching, or clinical, experience with a highly effective teacher
- Recommendation for licensure by an approved educator preparation provider
- Qualifying scores on required assessments, which may include:
  - Praxis content-area exams
  - edTPA performance-based assessment

These licensure requirements are the most common for the practitioner's license but do not include requirements for out-of-state candidates, candidates with a bachelor's degree major in an area of endorsement, and candidates in a job-embedded program.

### COVID-19 Pandemic Impact

In March 2020, Governor Bill Lee declared a state of emergency in Tennessee in response to the COVID-19 pandemic. As a result, colleges and universities, as well as K-12 school districts across Tennessee, closed for the duration of the academic year, with significant implications for teacher candidates pursuing licensure:

- These closures effectively ended student teaching placements, making it impossible for candidates to complete the clinical experience requirement or film lessons for one of the required pedagogical assessment options, edTPA.
- Praxis testing centers across the state have closed testing locations for the foreseeable future. Some candidates may have already completed their testing requirements, but these closures present a clear barrier for licensure eligibility for any candidates who have not.
- Many large urban districts across Tennessee typically start the academic year with over 100 teaching vacancies, so it is important that candidates have a pathway to licensure in order to begin teaching in the fall.<sup>2</sup>

To address these barriers to licensure eligibility, the State Board of Education announced emergency rules on April 9, 2020, related to educator preparation:

- Candidates who complete an approved educator preparation program in 2020 are eligible to obtain a one-year provisional practitioner license that is valid through August 31, 2021, if recommended by the EPP
- Required assessments are waived
- Interrupted or shortened clinical experiences will not deem a candidate ineligible
- Provisional licenses will automatically convert to three-year practitioner licenses if a license holder submits qualifying scores on all required assessments before August 31, 2021

### Teacher Readiness Impact

Between 2016 and 2018, Tennessee EPPs graduated 9,944 new teachers who began their careers in Tennessee public schools.

- Less than half of those teachers said they felt well prepared by their preparation programs overall<sup>3</sup>, and feelings of preparedness were driven by clinical experience. Based on waived clinical requirements, **teachers entering the profession this year may feel underprepared to effectively lead their classes.**
- Nationally, about 90 percent of teacher candidates pass their licensure assessments within two attempts. Considering that many candidates are likely to have completed the required content assessments, the required **assessments waiver is not likely to impact the quality of candidates entering the teaching profession.**
- Historically, just over half of early-career teachers have met expectations for student growth, based on TVAAS data for teachers in tested grades and subjects. Most first-time teachers entering the classroom this fall will have had limited experience teaching students under the supervision of an effective mentor teacher and will not have actively worked in a classroom for more than five months. **Teacher effects on student growth may be impacted for the new cohort of teachers entering with less clinical experience.**

### Teacher Induction Impact

As a result of school closures and the abrupt transition to distance learning, school leaders have been tasked with developing responsive action plans to ensure their staff is prepared to provide effective instruction for the duration of the school year. Given the closure of schools for this academic year, most K-12 students will miss 50 or more instructional days. When summer break is factored in, Tennessee students will be without classroom instruction for 19 consecutive weeks, or more than a third of the calendar year.



While districts are understandably focused on meeting first-order needs, such as feeding students and resuming learning from afar, leaders can also begin planning related to hiring strategies and first-year teacher induction. Research shows that quality induction is critical to the success of early-career teachers and their students.<sup>4</sup>

To make up for some of the missed experiential learning, leaders can consider some proven strategies to support first-year teacher readiness:

1. **Quality mentorships**, with established, highly effective teachers in the same subject area, are proven to boost early-career teacher effectiveness and feelings of preparedness.
  - Research shows that new teachers who have access to high-quality mentors during their clinical experience are more effective when they enter the workforce and are more likely to be retained in future years.<sup>5</sup> School leaders must prioritize the facilitation of mentor relationships, as well as instructional coaching, for new teachers who are entering the classroom with reduced clinical practice.
  - The Tennessee Department of Education’s *Mentors Matter* initiative continues to explore this work and provide strong evidence for the effectiveness of mentor relationships when they provide increased opportunities for pedagogical feedback, regular communication, and collaboration.
2. **Structured training and development**, through EPP-district partnerships, will ensure first-year teachers have sufficient opportunities for refining their instructional practice.
  - Districts and EPPs should work together to develop training and professional learning opportunities for first-year teachers to receive expert coaching on their pedagogical practices and gain experience in delivering instruction in a virtual setting.
  - Research indicates that induction programs designed to support new teachers through a combination of orientation, mentoring, professional development, and evaluation can improve new teacher practice, reduce attrition, and positively impact student learning.<sup>6</sup>
3. **Preparation for the future** in case of additional school closures in the 2020-21 academic year.
  - Beyond the current pandemic, partnerships must be prioritized between EPPs and school districts to provide creative problem-solving in the interest of preserving learning opportunities for both K-12 students and future teachers.<sup>7</sup>
  - Arizona State University provides an example of innovation by shifting to virtual student teaching in order to minimize lost experiential learning for teacher candidates – a practice they plan to continue in some form post-pandemic to provide increased opportunities for classroom practice earlier in their program.

## Conclusion

With Tennessee public schools remaining closed for the remainder of the 2019-20 school year, student teacher opportunities for the state’s prospective teachers have been cut short. The State Board of Education’s emergency rules address the licensure barriers that many current completers are facing, but many candidates will lack the clinical experience and support to be effective on the first day in the classroom, where students may be facing learning loss and social emotional challenges. Although the COVID-19 situation is unique, and the student needs are greater than before, there are research-supported strategies that can be used this fall to foster greater effectiveness in new teachers. School districts and educator preparation programs must work



together to deliver robust training, mentorship, and induction support to the 2020 cohort of new teachers.

## Endnotes

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<sup>1</sup> Educator Preparation Program Report Card. *Tennessee State Board of Education* (2020).

<sup>2</sup> Kebede, Laura Faith. "Memphis teacher salary proposal would boost starting pay and compensate advanced degrees." *Chalkbeat* (December 2019).

<sup>3</sup> Educator Preparation Program Report Card. *Tennessee State Board of Education* (2020).

<sup>4</sup> Ingersoll, Richard M. and Michael Strong. "The Impact of Induction and Mentoring Programs for Beginning Teachers: A Critical Review of the Research." *Review of Educational Research* (June 2011).

<sup>5</sup> Ronfeldt, Matthew, Stacey L. Brockman, and Shanyce L. Campbell. "Does Cooperating Teachers' Instructional Effectiveness Improve Preservice Teachers' Future Performance?." *Educational Researcher* (2018).

<sup>6</sup> Ingersoll, Richard M. and Michael Strong. "The Impact of Induction and Mentoring Programs for Beginning Teachers: A Critical Review of the Research." *Review of Educational Research* (June 2011).

<sup>7</sup> *Prepared for Day One: Improving the Effectiveness of Early-Career Teaching*. Tennessee SCORE (2016).

