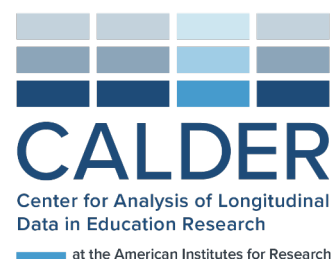


Emergency Licenses, Mixed Results: Additional Evidence from COVID-era Licensure Waivers

Research One-Pager
April 2024



Most states granted emergency licenses to aspiring teachers when COVID struck.

Unable to administer the typical tests and requirements, most states put their licensing rules on hold at the start of the pandemic in spring 2020. Instead, they granted emergency licenses to aspiring teachers so they could start working in fall 2020 (DeArmond et al., 2023).

Early studies of teachers with pandemic-era emergency licenses found they were more diverse and just as effective as other teachers.

Using data from Massachusetts and New Jersey, early studies suggested that emergency licenses, which remove barriers to teaching, may have made the profession more appealing and accessible for candidates of color. These studies also found that teachers who bypassed standard certification requirements could be just as successful as traditionally credentialed candidates at raising student test scores (Backer-Hicks et al., 2023; Backes et al., 2023).

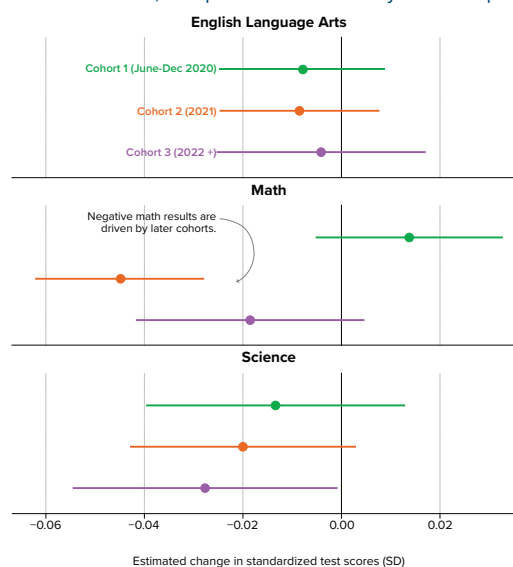
A newer study offers a more nuanced picture. Subsequent cohorts of emergency licensed teachers in Massachusetts appear to be less effective than earlier groups.

CALDER researchers recently re-examined Massachusetts' "Emergency license" policy (Backes et al., 2024). This time, they analyzed data from *multiple* cohorts of Emergency licensed teachers from 2020 to 2023. Consistent with prior studies, they found Emergency licensed teachers were more likely to be teachers of color and to be assigned to classrooms with higher shares of students of color and low-income students. In short, the new data reinforced the idea that removing barriers to teaching could help diversify the teacher workforce.

But unlike prior studies, the new study found that Emergency licensed teachers in Massachusetts were less effective at improving student test scores and received lower evaluation ratings than their traditionally licensed peers. On closer examination, these results appear to be driven by more recent cohorts of Emergency licensed teachers.

differences in student math and science outcomes for Emergency licensed teachers, broken out by cohort (all results are compared to traditionally licensed teachers with similar experience in the same school). As the figure shows, Cohorts 2 and 3 had lower student outcomes—especially in math—than Cohort 1.

FIGURE 1. Predicted student test outcomes by emergency licensure cohort in Massachusetts, compared to traditionally licensed peers.



A possible explanation for the differences between cohorts is that teachers in the initial cohort were nearing the end of their training and licensing requirements when the pandemic began; their Emergency licenses just helped them complete the process. But as the state extended the policy, Emergency licenses drew in applicants with less involvement in the traditional teaching pipeline and from more varied backgrounds.

The Bottom Line.

Emergency licensure can expand access to teaching for diverse candidates. But new evidence suggests the policy can also inadvertently compromise student outcomes. If states continue to issue emergency licenses—and the pool of teaching candidates continues to diverge from traditional pathways—leaders should look to better equip and support emergency-licensed teachers to support their success in the classroom.

Figure 1 illustrates the point by showing the predicted

Go Deeper: <https://caldercenter.org/publications/four-years-pandemic-era-emergency-licenses-retention-and-effectiveness-emergency>

Bacher-Hicks, A., Chi, O. L., Tichnor-Wagner, A., & Baloch, S. (2023). Teacher licensure and workforce quality: Insights from Covid-era emergency licenses in Massachusetts. WEPC Working Paper 2024-1.

Backes, B., & Goldhaber, D. (2023). The relationship between pandemic-era teacher licensure waivers and teacher demographics, retention, and effectiveness in New Jersey. CALDER Working Paper No. 286-0623.

Backes, B., Cowen, J., Goldhaber, D., Theobald, R. (2024). Four years of pandemic-era emergency licenses: Retention and effectiveness of emergency-licensed Massachusetts teachers over time. CALDER Working Paper No. 299-0424.

DeArmond, M., Goldhaber, D., & Payne, S. (2023). COVID's under-the-radar experiment with teacher licensure. CALDER Policy Brief No. 33.