

# Responding to COVID-19

## Three recommendations for educator-preparation policy

Uncertainty created by the COVID-19 pandemic is affecting how we prepare future teachers. States are responding to immediate challenges, and the Deans for Impact COVID-19 policy [database](#) provides a summary of what's taking place in the short-term. But looking out into the future, we see three critical policy questions related to teacher preparation that states should begin to plan for now:



### Providing meaningful clinical experiences

How can we ensure teacher-candidates engage in meaningful practice-based preparation, particularly if schools are not fully reopened?



### Supporting novice teachers

How can we support novice teachers who begin their careers in dramatically atypical circumstances?



### Expanding the educator workforce

How can we ensure we have enough caring adults to support our students?

## HERE'S WHAT DEANS FOR IMPACT RECOMMENDS:



### Providing meaningful clinical experiences

In response to COVID-19, many states are allowing candidates to engage in virtual instruction to fulfill clinical requirements. While virtual instruction cannot replace the value of in-person practice with students, members of Deans for Impact believe these experiences are providing valuable learning opportunities for their teacher-candidates, and K-12 students. **We recommend that all states allow well-designed virtual experiences to satisfy clinical teaching requirements.**

What constitutes “well designed”? The **Building Blocks** of effective teacher preparation identify key components of clinical experiences that are as true for virtual experiences as they are for in-person teaching. Namely, teacher-candidates should observe effective instruction **modeled** by skilled teacher-educators; teacher-candidates should get opportunities to **practice** with students; and they should receive **feedback** on their teaching. All of this can be done virtually.

New York State provides an emerging case study on how policy can create flexibility for educator-preparation programs without sacrificing quality. The New York State Education Department is encouraging programs to use virtual instruction, provided they develop specific plans outlining the design of the experiences that teacher-candidates will receive. We urge states to not be overly burdensome in their expectations around this, but we see value in requiring programs to articulate the structure of how they will prepare teachers using online tools.

“As we shifted to virtual field experiences in response to COVID-19, candidates in our program engaged immediately. Despite inevitable challenges, they have been incredibly positive, sharing that they are learning so much about innovation, creativity and flexibility. There is a level of ownership and pride in our candidates’ work in these new circumstances that is truly inspiring.”

**Sara Quay**  
Dean, Endicott College



## Supporting novice teachers

Although we do not know with certainty when schools will reopen, we know that when they do teachers, principals, and parents will be grappling with the effects of lost learning time, trauma, and other consequences stemming from COVID-19. This will challenge even the most seasoned educators -- so imagine now how daunted novice teachers will feel. They will need support. ***We recommend states provide specific professional development and induction support to new teachers grounded in the science of learning.***

Here's why: Despite all the changes wrought by the pandemic, what hasn't changed is the process by which students learn. Our scientific insights into cognition are as true now as they were before March 2020. As such, we believe teachers who possess a firm scientific understanding of how their students learn will be better able to adapt their practices in response to whatever school conditions they face. Resources such as [The Science of Learning](#) and [The Science of Early Learning](#) outline specific and enduring principles of learning science and their implications for practice. We believe novice teachers will be much better equipped to grapple with the coming complexity if they know this science and its translation to ambitious, content-rich instructional practice.

How can states help make this happen? An interesting international example points the way. The United Kingdom has adopted an [Early Career Framework](#) for new teachers that identifies key concepts around how students learn, the critical role of curriculum, and others that are grounded in evidence, and the Department for Education is currently rolling out aligned professional development related to this framework. Early stage teachers are being given time to attend workshops and receive free learning-science materials, and mentor teachers are receiving stipends to support this work. We recognize budgets will be under strain, but this investment is critical to preserve our future.



## Expanding the educator workforce

The upcoming school year will be different than any other we have ever experienced. We will need an expanded educator workforce to meet the needs of our students.

To address this, in part, ***states should adopt policies that allow teacher-candidates to provide online tutoring to students.*** There is an unexpected opportunity here. As noted previously, teacher-candidates need clinical practice opportunities as part of their preservice preparation. If as we suspect students will be moving between in-person and online instruction throughout the upcoming school year, states should make use of the “teacher workforce in training” at educator-preparation programs and allow these teacher-candidates to tutor students online. This tutoring should be done under the supervision of teacher-educators, and using evidence-informed practices. Teacher-candidates can provide relational and content-rich instructional support to students while also developing their skillfulness as educators.

**While COVID-19 has upended much of our present-day reality, we know that the need to educate our children, and to have well-prepared teachers capable of doing so, will endure long after this crisis abates. We know state officials are under tremendous strain, but are heartened to see so many states working hand in hand with educator-preparation programs to balance short-term flexibility with longer-term expectations. Deans for Impact will continue to provide resources to the field to help inform these efforts, and we offer our help to any state that seeks our input. We will get through this -- and we will have outstanding future teachers, too.**