

The pandemic is exacerbating educational inequities in our education system, so it is essential that state leaders respond in ways that prioritize our most vulnerable students.

This guide can help.



TEACHER EQUITY AND DIVERSITY

Teaching quality can impact student learning more than any other in-school factor, especially for students who are further behind. All students benefit from a diverse and high-quality teacher workforce. The benefits are especially important for students of color, who are more likely to attend school regularly, perform higher on assessments, be referred to a gifted program, take Advanced Placement courses, graduate from high school, and aspire to attend college when they have a teacher of the same race or ethnicity.

State budget shortfalls may disproportionately affect districts serving large populations of students of color and students from low-income backgrounds, which [rely the most on state aid](#). States should take action to avoid this by protecting the most impoverished districts from cuts. However, in districts where funding cuts do occur, [staff layoffs are a real possibility](#), given that teacher salaries and benefits make up [more than half of total school spending](#). For example, during the Great Recession, nearly [300,000 educators](#) lost their jobs. If things are not done differently this time, schools serving more students of color and students from low-income backgrounds may bear the brunt of hiring freezes and layoffs, [as many did following that recession](#), because they tend to have higher vacancy rates and more novice teachers. Teachers of color may be [particularly vulnerable to layoffs](#), since [they are more likely to be novice teachers](#), concentrated in high-need schools, and subjected to systemic racism. Additionally, states and districts that invested in efforts to diversify the educator workforce [will put those efforts at risk](#) if they reduce budgets without a strategy to protect recent improvements.

While the magnitude of the anticipated recession and budget cuts remains unknown, it is critical for advocates to draw attention to lessons learned and prompt district leaders to make decisions around teacher layoffs, hiring freezes, and professional learning and support that protect the needs of schools serving students of color and students from low-income backgrounds.

EQUITY PRINCIPLE: Every student — especially students of color, students from low-income backgrounds, English learners, students with disabilities, and students experiencing homelessness — has access to strong teaching, which includes having skilled, well-supported teachers who reflect students' racial and linguistic diversity, are able to meet their students' distinct needs, and provide engaging, culturally responsive, and standards-aligned instruction.



EQUITY ACTIONS:

- Require that districts receiving additional federal funding and state dollars **protect high-need schools from disproportionate staffing cuts and hiring freezes** and require all districts to **collect and publicly report data on any personnel reductions due to COVID-19**, including the racial and ethnic demographics of those personnel and of the students in the school in which those personnel worked.
- **Assess state-level policies** that could cause districts to implement reduction-in-force policies in ways that disproportionately impact high-need schools and [educators of color](#).
- **Increase funding for programs that provide high-quality, comprehensive [pathways into the teaching profession for teachers of color](#)**, such as teacher preparation programs at HBCUs and MSIs and Grow Your Own Programs. **Increase funding for training and support programs for teachers of color** to improve working conditions, create school cultures that are inclusive and culturally affirming, and ensure that efforts to increase the diversity of the workforce are not undermined.
- **Collect and publicly report data on the placement of teachers entering the field under modified certification requirements, including which requirements were modified or waived** (as a result of interruptions to teacher preparation programs in 2020), and whether those teachers were placed in high-need schools.
- **Provide COVID-related support** (e.g., guidance, ready-to-use toolkits, exemplars) **to districts and schools, deliver professional learning and mental health supports** for educators as they recover, and work to support students' academic, social, and emotional recovery from the pandemic. For example, equity-focused state leaders could provide guidance to district and school leaders on [reducing bias](#) and developing anti-racist mindsets.

Nine states require districts to ignore student need in layoff decisions and 19 states allow districts to decide. What are the layoff policies in your state? Check out this [resource from the National Council on Teacher Quality](#) to find out.

