

Recommended Steps for Addressing your Staffing Shortages

Purpose

Staffing shortages, and special education staffing shortages in particular, have become a significant concern for many districts. This document summarizes regulatory and statutory provisions that can be leveraged to address staffing shortages. It also makes some suggestions regarding hiring practices.

Relevant Licensing Regulations and Statutory Provisions

The AOE has worked to articulate several alternate routes to licensure and staffing. Those options are summarized below.

Please note that local and federal special education funds such as IDEA Part B can be utilized to support tuition, professional development and peer review fees for employed professionals seeking special education licensure and/or endorsement. ESSER funding can also be used to pay for positions, selectively, along with staffing bonuses and signing bonuses.

Temporary Licensure

Many educators are able to teach under a [temporary license](#). These temporary licenses fall into three categories that are described below. Please note, this is a simplified list of requirements. Full requirements can be found in the [Vermont Standards Board for Professional Educators rules](#).

Category 1: Emergency Licenses

An emergency license should be considered a license of last resort. At the request of a hiring superintendent, an emergency license can be issued for an educator when no other suitable candidate can be found.

- Emergency licenses are limited to one year. All emergency licenses expire on June 30 of the school year in which they were issued.
- The educator seeking an emergency license must have at least a bachelor's degree.
- Some endorsement areas—including administration and special education—are not eligible for emergency endorsements.
- An educator issued an emergency license must have an assigned mentor.
- Please reach out to Ron Ryan (ronald.ryan@vermont.gov) at the AOE Licensing team with further questions.

Contact Information:

If you have questions about this document or would like additional information, please contact:

Patrick Halladay, Education Quality Division, at Patrick.Halladay@vermont.gov or 802-793-1191

Jacqui Kelleher, Student Support Services Division at jacqui.kelleher@vermont.gov or 802-828-5382

- An emergency license costs \$50 plus a \$50 application fee.

Category 2: Provisional Licenses

When a suitable candidate cannot be found, a provisional license can be issued to an educator at the request of a hiring superintendent when identified as the preferred candidate.

- Provisional licenses are limited to two years. All provisional licenses expire on June 30 of the school year after which they were issued.
- When there are extenuating circumstances, an additional one year provisional can be issued.
- An educator issued a provisional license needs to develop and submit a plan to move to a full professional license.
- To be eligible for a provisional license, the educator needs a minimum of a bachelor's degree and
 - An active or expired license from Vermont or another state,
 - A college major or minor in the endorsement area sought, or
 - A passing score on the appropriate Praxis II assessment.
- A provisional license can be issued in all endorsement areas; eligibility of individual educators depends on their specific qualifications.
- Please reach out to Ron Ryan (ronald.ryan@vermont.gov) at the AOE Licensing team with further questions.
- A provisional license costs \$100 plus a \$50 application fee.

Category 3: Apprenticeship Licenses

Apprenticeship licenses are unique to candidates being hired for Career and Technology Education Centers.

- Apprenticeship licenses are limited to four years.
- When there are extenuating circumstances, an additional one-year apprenticeship license can be issued.
- Apprenticeship licenses are specifically designed for educators coming from industry to teach in a CTE Center without teaching experience.
- Please reach out to Ron Ryan (ronald.ryan@vermont.gov) at the AOE Licensing team with further questions.
- An apprentice license costs \$200 plus a \$50 application fee.

Recruitment of Retired Educators

New legislation, [Act 173](#) of 2022, allows certain retired educators to return to classroom for one year without negatively impacting their retirement earnings.

- This is only applicable to retired educators who will be exceeding the Vermont Teachers Retirement System cap on earnings. (For reference, the FY22 cap was \$39,200.)

- Retired educators returning to the classroom is for emergency situations only; hiring superintendents need to be able to show there were no other viable candidates for the position.
- Placements can only be for the school year in which the returning teacher is hired. Retired teachers can be hired for a second year, but not for the same position.
- A returning teacher must have been retired at least six months to be eligible.
- Please reach out to Ron Ryan (ronald.ryan@vermont.gov) at the AOE Licensing team to determine most appropriate license for a returning teacher.
- Fees depend on the license required for the specific educator.
- Retirees should contact the Vermont Treasurer's Office Retirement Office for questions related to eligibility or impact on retirement benefits.

Temporary Special Education Provisional Waiver

The Vermont Standards Board for Professional Educators extended the [temporary special education provisional waiver](#) through the 2022/2023 academic year. This waiver allows a provisional license for candidates who would otherwise not be eligible for a special education endorsement. As these educators will be teaching our most vulnerable students, the Standards Board approved the following criteria for a waiver, to ensure educators entering the classroom under this endorsement will be as prepared as possible.

- Educators issued a temporary special education provisional waiver must:
 - Have at least a bachelor's degree,
 - Pass the Praxis II licensure content assessment for special education within 120 days of issuance of the license,
 - Have been admitted to an approved pathway to special education licensure,
 - Have a designated mentor committed to participating in the Vermont-sponsored Special Education Mentoring Program, and,
 - Complete Vermont Agency of Education-identified modules for introduction to federal special education law, policies, procedures and practice within 30 days of issuance of the license.
- As with other provisional licenses, temporary special education provisional waivers are limited to two years and expire on June 30 of the school year after which they were issued.
- For information on learning modules, please contact Jacqui Kelleher (Jacqui.Kelleher@vermont.gov)
- For information on mentoring support, please contact Sienna Tuinei (Sienna.Tuinei@partner.vermont.gov)

- For information on provisional licensure, please contact Ron Ryan (Ronald.Ryan@vermont.gov)
- For information on Praxis Testing, please contact Andrew Prowten (Andrew.Prowten@vermont.gov)
- As with other provisional licenses, a temporary special education provisional waiver costs \$100 plus a \$50 application fee.

Vermont Standards Board for Professional Educators Waiver Process

The Vermont Standards Board for Professional Educators has the authority to waive its rules under extraordinary circumstances.

- The Standards Board may consider waiving rules:
 - When strict application of a rule creates an outcome contrary to the intent of the Standards Board rules as a whole, or,
 - When strict application of a rule creates an undue hardship for a licensee, an applicant, an Educator preparation program, or SU/SD.
- A waiver request may be submitted either by [superintendents](#) on behalf of educators or by [educators](#) on their own behalf.
- Waiver requests are considered by the full Standards Board at their meetings (held most months during the academic year). Please submit a waiver request at least 10 days in advance of the meeting at which you would like the waiver request to be considered.
- Please contact Amy Scalabrini (amy.scalabrini@vermont.gov) with questions or to submit a completed waiver request form.

Recommendations on Hiring Strategies and Other Resources

The following strategies could be useful in addressing staff shortages.

- Expand advertising for vacant positions to non-education job boards and out of state job boards.
- Create more nimble and responsive hiring processes:
 - Eliminate steps in the hiring process such as performance tasks,
 - Reduce the size of hiring committees,
 - Expedite superintendent and board approval actions, and
 - Enable faster job offers and salary determinations.
- Offer hiring incentives and bonuses.

Specific Strategies for Special Education

- Consider regional sharing of evaluation services and other specialized supports and services (such as psychological and speech supports, etc.). See 16 V.S.A. § 267 (Joint agreements among supervisory unions).

- Utilize IDEA Part B ARP funds to develop district-level Grow Your Own pathway programs.
- Reorganize your provision of services, as opposed to denying or limiting services based on staffing limitations. Schools are still responsible for providing FAPE and for considering LRE, regardless of staffing limitations.

Contracting for Case Management

Some school systems are interested in contracting out for their case management services, so that their licensed teachers can devote more time to classroom instruction. Please check your collective bargaining agreement and with your local education association to ensure such contracting for services does not violate any existing contractual obligations.

Currently, the AOE is recommending that any contractor performing case management services have a valid Vermont special education license. For additional information about attaining licensure, please see the preceding sections of this document.

Additional Special Education Resources

The following resources can support a stability in special education staffing models.

Technical Resources

- [Professional development on staffing models](#) from the District Management Group (DMG). DMG also provides coaching and consulting on special education delivery systems at the request of school systems.
- The AOE recommends carefully selected professional learning modules utilizing OSEP-approved trainings developed by IRIS through Vanderbilt University. Completion of 30 hours of modules is required for new special educators serving under provisional licensure and is strongly encouraged for new teachers and for administrators. For more information on the modules and specific module topics required for new special educators on provisional licenses, contact Jacqui Kelleher, State Director of Special Education, at jacqui.kelleher@vermont.gov.
- Educational Benefit training is available for school systems who are interested in reviewing the appropriateness of their IEPs and related services. Contact special education program specialist Betty Roy at betty.roy@vermont.gov for more information.
- There are multiple recorded [State of the State webinars](#) with Dr. Jacqui Kelleher on the Special Education AOE website that cover all the requirements and clarifications about rules during COVID-19 and beyond the pandemic. New teachers and administrators will find updates from the federal government, Vermont initiatives, access to resources, and the latest OSEP guidance on this site. Consider watching these and the [Rule Changes webinars](#) and send inquiries or clarifying questions to AOE.SpecialEd@vermont.gov

Professional Development Opportunities

- Reach out to VCSEA and VT-HEC regarding a one-year New Leaders Academy for new special education administrators and the potential development of an academy for new special education staff. For more information, contact Darren McIntyre, VCSEA President, at Darren.McIntyre@uvm.edu, or Joy Wilcox at joy.wilcox@vthec.org.
- The AOE is coordinating the VTSEE Mentor Program for special education mentors. Strong induction programs that rely on well-trained mentors, provide systematic professional learning opportunities, and introduce new teachers into a collaborative school culture promote retention in the field and effective teaching, particularly when provided over a 2-year period. For more information, contact Sienna Tuinei, mentoring program coordinator and AmeriCorps VISTA member, at sienna.tuinei@partner.vermont.gov.

Online Courses and Licensure Programs

- The [Vermont Higher Education Collaborative](#) (VT-HEC) has several programs for educators and prospective educators who are interested in attaining special education credentials.
- Franklin Pierce University offers a 100% online, accredited Master's in Special Education leading to certification. Candidates can begin the program at four points during the calendar year. FPU is located in NH, but contracts with Vermont professionals for supervision. NH has reciprocity with VT; visit the [FPU website](#) for more information.

Additional Third-party Resources

- The Maryland State Department of Education has also developed a [resource](#) listing strategies to address special education staffing shortages. Some of these strategies overlap with the ones listed in this document, but the resource is still an excellent supplement to the Vermont recommendations. Topics covered include applications for supplemental funding; recommended staffing model best practices; and recommended scheduling practices.
- The New Teacher Project (TNTP) has developed the resource [Addressing Teacher Shortages for the Pandemic and Beyond](#). This document was released in 2022 and includes many helpful tips for school leaders to learn from and implement.

Contacting the Agency of Education

After articulating your staffing needs and identifying possible remedies to pursue or best practices to implement, you may wish to consult the AOE on the best way to move forward with taking advantage of licensure opportunities, implementing best practices, or assessing and responding to your systemic needs

The AOE Educator Quality Division has specialists available to answer your questions about licensure options. If you have questions, please contact AOE.LicensingInfo@vermont.gov or patrick.halladay@vermont.gov.

The AOE Special Education Team can provide technical assistance on special education rules, finance and systems design depending on capacity. Please complete a [Special Education TA form](#) to initiate this process.

The AOE VTmtss team can help you to assess your needs and develop a plan for responding to those needs and improving your systems. Please [reach out to the VTmtss team](#) to initiate this process.