



Assessing the Potential Impact of Seniority-Based Reduction in Force Policies on the Changing Teacher Workforce in Connecticut Schools

OVERVIEW

Over the last decade, policymakers and education leaders in Connecticut have prioritized efforts to improve the quality and diversity of the teacher workforce.¹ Persistent focus and targeted investments in strong teacher pipelines have helped increase teacher diversity from 8% in 2014 to 12% of the workforce identifying as teachers of color in 2024.

Through a research partnership with the Wheelock Educational Policy Center (WEPC) at Boston University, the Connecticut State Department of Education (CSDE) has monitored workforce trends and rigorously evaluated policy initiatives aligned with state priorities. In light of district budget shortfalls and discussions of teacher layoffs across Connecticut in spring 2025, CSDE engaged WEPC to examine:

What is the potential impact of seniority-based reduction-in-force policies on the composition, distribution and effectiveness of the teacher workforce within the state?

For this analysis, WEPC focused on the 15% of teachers newly hired into a Connecticut school district in the last three years, as this group is likely to be let go first.² Findings suggest that compared with the overall teacher workforce in the state, **newly hired teachers in Connecticut are:**

- Twice as likely to be teachers of color
- More likely to work in higher-need schools and serving historically marginalized students
- Just as likely to be licensed in high-need shortage areas like special education and English as a Second Language
- Equally likely to be highly effective, as measured by student performance on standardized assessments

Given these statewide patterns in the composition, distribution, and effectiveness of newly hired teachers, layoffs that prioritize seniority are likely to cause disproportionate disruption to the teacher workforce in Connecticut, especially in schools serving vulnerable populations.³

KEY FINDINGS

Compared to the overall workforce, **newly hired teachers** in Connecticut are:

MORE LIKELY TO BE:

- Teachers of color
- Work in high-needs schools

JUST AS LIKELY TO BE:

- Licensed in shortage areas (SPED, ESL, etc)
- High-performing

CONTEXT FOR ANALYSIS

Reduction in force (RIF) efforts—commonly referred to as teacher layoffs—are typically a last-resort strategy for balancing district budgets. However, they are becoming increasingly frequent due to rising costs, declining enrollments, and shifts in federal funding.⁴

In many states and school districts throughout the United States, teacher layoffs are governed by policies outlined in state law and/or local collective bargaining agreements that often prioritize employees by their length of service in the district.⁵ These seniority-based approaches, known as last-in-first-out (LIFO) policies, mean that the most recently hired teachers are more likely to be laid off.

Originally designed to provide a clear, fair, and legally defensible framework, research indicates that LIFO policies overlook teacher effectiveness and school-specific needs, with potentially negative consequences for student outcomes.⁶

Connecticut state law (CGS 166 Sec. 10-151) provides districts some flexibility to consider factors other than seniority in layoff decisions, but largely defers to locally negotiated collective bargaining agreements. This means that while a district could consider other factors in layoffs, seniority may

still be the driving preference in most reduction-in-force actions throughout the state. For example, in spring 2025, both New Haven and Bridgeport public schools—the two largest districts in the state—publicly discussed teacher layoffs, and both have seniority-first preferences in their recently negotiated teacher contracts.⁷

Given the changing composition of the teaching workforce over the last decade and the state’s focus on encouraging and supporting new, more diverse individuals into the field, it is worth examining the potential impact of any large-scale seniority-based approach to teacher layoffs in the state.

Twenty-two percent of newly hired teachers in Connecticut identify as a person of color. This is roughly 1,500 teachers of color who may be subject to a last-in-first-out layoff.

Research conducted during the last period of widespread teacher layoffs (Great Recession, 2007-2009) suggests:

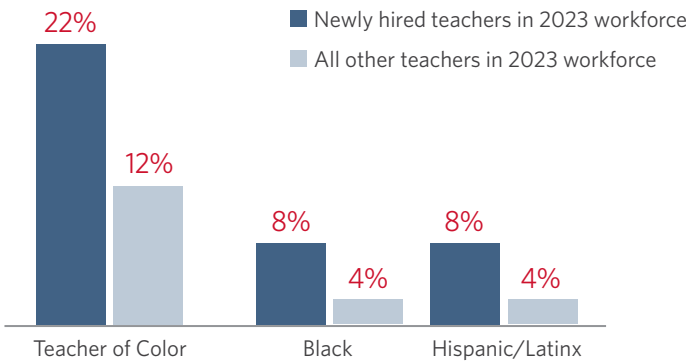
- Both simulated studies and actual analyses find that a seniority-based approach negatively affects student achievement (Boyd et al, 2011 & Goldhaber, 2011)
- A study in Charlotte, NC, found that when school administrators are allowed to consider multiple factors, districts were able to keep more effective and high-performing teachers than if seniority had been the sole criterion (Kraft, 2015)
- A LIFO approach also often means laying off more teachers to meet budgetary thresholds, meaning more drastic impacts across the system (Roza, 2023)
- Even the threat of layoffs destabilizes the workforce and induces mobility and churn (Goldhaber, 2016 & Strunk, 2018)

THE COMPOSITION OF NEWLY HIRED TEACHERS IN CONNECTICUT

Connecticut has seen a substantial increase in teachers of color over the past decade. As of the 2024 school year, there were approximately 1,700 more teachers of color in Connecticut classrooms than ten years prior. Many of these individuals are part of the cohort of newly hired teachers. As shown in Figure 1, people of color make up 12% of the

overall teaching workforce but represent 22% of newly hired teachers. This pattern holds for specific groups: Black and Hispanic/Latinx teachers each comprise 8% of recent hires—double their 4% representation in the overall workforce.

Figure 1: Racial and Ethnic Composition of Connecticut Teacher Workforce



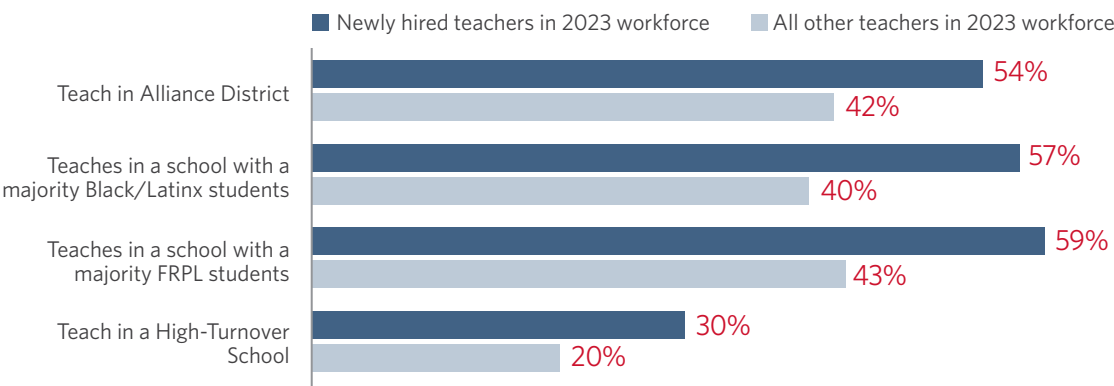
Note: Figure shows comparison of newly hired teachers versus all other teachers. Teachers of Color Includes teachers who identify as “Black or African American,” “Two or more races,” “Asian,” “Hispanic or Latino of any race,” “American Indian or Alaska Native,” “Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander.”

DISTRIBUTION OF NEWLY HIRED TEACHERS BY SCHOOL/DISTRICT TYPE AND ROLE

Prior research has documented the uneven and inequitable sorting of teachers to schools, roles, and students based on various characteristics such as experience, licensure, effectiveness, etc. (Goldhaber et al, 2015). Figure 2 illustrates these disparities within Connecticut.

For example, 54% of newly hired teachers work in one of the state’s lowest-performing Alliance districts, compared with only 42% of all teachers. Nearly 60% of new hires are employed in a school where the majority of students are economically disadvantaged, versus 43% overall.

Figure 2: Newly Hired Teachers District, School, and Student Assignment Patterns

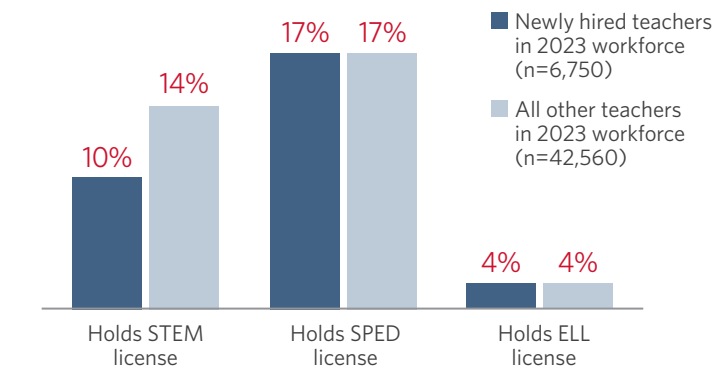


Note: Figure shows distribution across Alliance Districts, high-turnover schools, and schools with majority economically disadvantaged students

Figure 3 displays licensure credentials for newly hired teachers. Newly hired teachers hold special education and English as a Second Language licenses at similar rates as the overall workforce. This is true statewide and within the Alliance Dis-

tricts (see Appendix, Table 1). A seniority-based RIF could potentially displace more than 1,100 special education and 250 ESL-certified teachers from the workforce, exacerbating existing statewide shortages in these critical areas.

Figure 3: Newly Hired Teachers by License Held



Note: Figure shows percentage holding STEM, Special Education, and ESL licenses

THE EFFECTIVENESS OF NEWLY HIRED TEACHERS

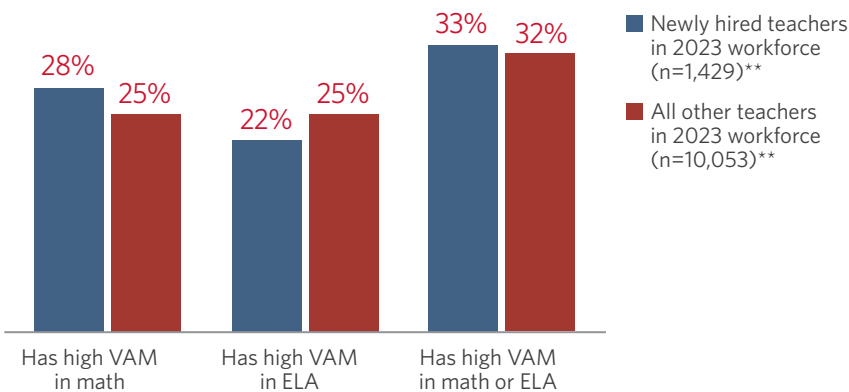
To assess the potential impact on student learning of a seniority-based approach to layoffs, we estimated teacher effectiveness through a value-added model (VAM). Using this model, we estimate the impact an individual teacher has on student outcomes while controlling for various school, student, and teacher characteristics.⁸

Figure 4 shows the percentage of recently hired teachers in Connecticut with high VAM scores. In the rightmost set of bars, 33% of newly hired teachers have high VAM in either ELA or Math, which is roughly similar to the percentage of

teachers who were not recently hired. There are approximately 1,200 newly hired teachers statewide who demonstrate above-average student performance.

While Figure 4 highlights the highest performing teachers, additional analysis also showed similar patterns for the overall distribution of effectiveness, meaning that even the average newly hired teacher appears relatively similar in effectiveness to teachers employed for three or more years in a district.

Figure 4: Newly Hired Teachers with High VAM Scores



Note: Figure shows percentage with high VAM scores in ELA, Math, and either subject. “High VAM” refers to teachers in the top quartile (25%) of VAM scores. There are different cutoffs for math and ELA, see appendix.

CONCLUSION

This analysis suggests that a seniority-based reduction in force approach may undermine gains in teacher diversity and quality and disproportionately affect the state's highest need students. While these findings reflect statewide trends, impacts will inevitably vary across districts given the unique composition and distribution of their local workforce. In some contexts, such as the Alliance districts, these impacts may be even more pronounced.

As districts navigate difficult budget decisions, these findings point to several considerations. Teachers hired in recent years bring critical skills and diversity that align with the state's longstanding workforce priorities. A seniority-based approach to reduction in force may inadvertently work against these priorities, particularly affecting schools and students with the greatest needs. Districts facing layoffs may wish to consider how their local policies balance fairness, effectiveness, and equity goals.

Connecticut's statute provides districts with flexibility to incorporate multiple factors into layoff decisions beyond seniority alone. Where collective bargaining agreements allow, districts might explore approaches that consider teacher effectiveness, school-specific staffing needs, and critical shortage areas alongside years of service. Such balanced frameworks have been implemented in other states while maintaining transparent and legally sound processes.

The data presented here can inform local discussions as districts and unions negotiate policies that serve their communities. Understanding the composition and distribution of newly hired teachers provides important context for decision-making that balances multiple priorities during challenging budget cycles.

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APPENDIX: KEY DEFINITIONS

Teacher of Color

Includes teachers who identify as “Black or African American,” “Two or more races,” “Asian,” “Hispanic or Latino of any race,” “American Indian or Alaska Native,” “Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander.”

Alliance District

Alliance Districts are school districts that either rank among the lowest in the state on the Accountability Index or were previously designated as Alliance Districts for years ending between June 30, 2013, and June 30, 2017. These are designated by the state each year.

High-Turnover School

School turnover from [CT Public Attrition Data](#). High turnover defined as the top quartile of turnover percentage.

Licensure

Holding a license in a subject does not necessarily indicate that a teacher is currently teaching that subject.

High VAM (Value-Added Measure)

Based on Math and ELA scores for SY 2023–2024. Teachers in the top quartile (25%) of VAM scores were considered “High VAM.”

- Math VAM top quartile cutoff: 0.182
- ELA VAM top quartile cutoff: 0.141

Table 1. Characteristics of Newly Hired Teachers within Alliance Districts

	Newly Hired Teachers Alliance Districts (n=3,663)		All Alliance District Teachers (n=17,752)	
	n	%	n	%
Teacher of color (Black, Hispanic/Latinx, Asian, Native American, Multiracial, etc.)	994	27.14%	3,142	17.70%
Black	350	9.56%	1,117	6.29%
Hispanic/Latinx	423	11.55%	1,249	7.04%
Holds STEM license	365	9.96%	2,171	12.23%
Holds SPED license	605	16.52%	3,006	16.93%
Holds ELL license	205	5.60%	1,285	7.24%
Has high VAM in math or ELA*	282	34.60%	1,494	32.15%

*Differences in VAM scores are not statistically significant

ENDNOTES

- 1 WestEd. (2024). Impact Story: Connecticut's educator workforce now more diverse with comprehensive center support. Region 2 Comprehensive Center. <https://tinyurl.com/ymvhrmjrr>
- 2 There are 6,750 newly hired teachers in the sample. Newly hired teachers were defined as those that showed up as employed in the role of a teacher for the first time in the state's administrative records in 2021-22, 2022-23 or 2023-24 but not previously (dating back to 2012). Teachers with less than three years of experience typically do not have professional/tenured status and are therefore more likely subject to reduction in force actions. Notably, this definition excludes teachers who may have moved districts during this period despite the fact that they are also unlikely to have protected tenure status. This means there may even be an undercount of individuals without tenure who could be impacted by seniority-based layoff preferences.
- 3 These findings reflect statewide trends and do not reflect potential variation that may exist within individual districts. Since reduction in force decisions are made locally and vary by district context, impacts are likely to differ.
- 4 Merod, A. (2024, March 26). Teacher layoffs are growing—and won't be going away anytime soon. K-12 Dive. <https://www.k12dive.com/news/teacher-layoffs-growing-budget-cuts/711352/>
- 5 TNTP & Educators for Excellence. (2023). Rethinking layoff policy to protect teacher diversity: So all students thrive. https://tntp.org/assets/blog/TNTP_Rethinking-Layoff-Policy_2023.pdf
- 6 Dan Goldhaber, Roddy Theobald (2020). The COVID-19 Crisis and Teacher Layoffs: Research on How to Mitigate Harm. CALDER Policy Brief No. 20-0620
- 7 New Haven 2023-2026 Teacher Contract, Article XV, Section 2 and Bridgeport 2024-2028 Teacher Contract, Article X, 10.1.2-10.1.5.
- 8 To calculate a teachers value-added contribution they must be assigned to teach in a tested-grade (4-8) and subject area (ELA and Math). Roughly 25% of the overall workforce is included in this sample.

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