



LEGISLATIVE REPORT
EMERGING PATHWAYS GRANT PROGRAM

Report to the General Assembly

February 23, 2024

Submitted by:

Heather A. Bouchey, Ph. D.

Interim Secretary of Education

LEADERSHIP

SUPPORT

OVERSIGHT

Executive Summary

The Emerging Pathways Grant Program was created pursuant to [Act 78, Sec. B.1101](#), and represents the state's response to the changing education landscape. Faced with workforce challenges exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic, the Agency of Education (AOE) has undertaken measures to address declining enrollment in traditional Educator Preparation Programs (EPPs), disruption in licensure pathways, and the immediate need for qualified educators. Collaborative efforts with the Vermont Standards Board for Professional Educators (VSBPE), strategic utilization of federal ARP-ESSER funds, and partnerships with organizations like GrowVT-Ed and the Vermont Rural Education Collaborative (VREC) showcase a multifaceted approach. Reforms in licensure rules, including expanded reciprocity and revised testing requirements, highlight a commitment to maintaining high standards while enhancing flexibility. The Emerging Pathways Grant Program aims to further support and diversify the educator workforce, aligning with national best practices and emphasizing equity and inclusion. The AOE is current, currently developing a competitive application process for the program.

Legislation

This report is submitted pursuant to [Act 78 of 2023, Sec. B.1101](#) which appropriated \$500,000 from the General Fund to the Agency of Education for the purpose of funding the Emerging Pathways Grant Program to encourage and support the development and retention of qualified and effective Vermont educators with the goal of increased program completion rates and increased rates of licensure of underrepresented demographics. These grants are designed to expand support, mentoring, and professional development to prospective educators seeking licensure through the Agency of Education's emerging pathways, including peer review and apprentice path.

Background and Needs Assessment

While Vermont has historically been insulated from national teacher shortages, the COVID-19 pandemic has changed this trend. Schools across Vermont continue to struggle finding qualified staff to fill vacancies at all levels. While some school systems (i.e. supervisory unions and independent schools) have started the school year with all teaching positions filled, they are pulling from a smaller applicant pool with few, if any, professionally licensed teachers.

Vermont's educator workforce recovery has been slower than most other states. The [U.S. Department of Education](#) has identified Vermont as second to last in the nation in progress towards returning to pre-pandemic staffing levels, showing a -9.6% change in local government education employment over the course of the pandemic, adjusting for child population change.

Since the appropriation of the Emerging Pathways Grant funds, Agency staff have been identifying and analyzing Vermont educator workforce data, reviewing current research, and collaborating with national organizations and other states to ensure a maximum impact of the Grant Program. This work has revealed a number of troubling trends in our workforce data, but also promising strategies to invest in.

It is no secret that traditional Institute of Higher Education (IHE)-based Educator Preparation Programs (EPPs) have had declining enrollment for decades. Figure 1 documents a two-decade trend identified through Title II State Reports resulting in approximately 50% fewer EPP completers from undergraduate and post graduate programs compared to the early 2000's.

Figure 1: Decline in Traditional Program Completers

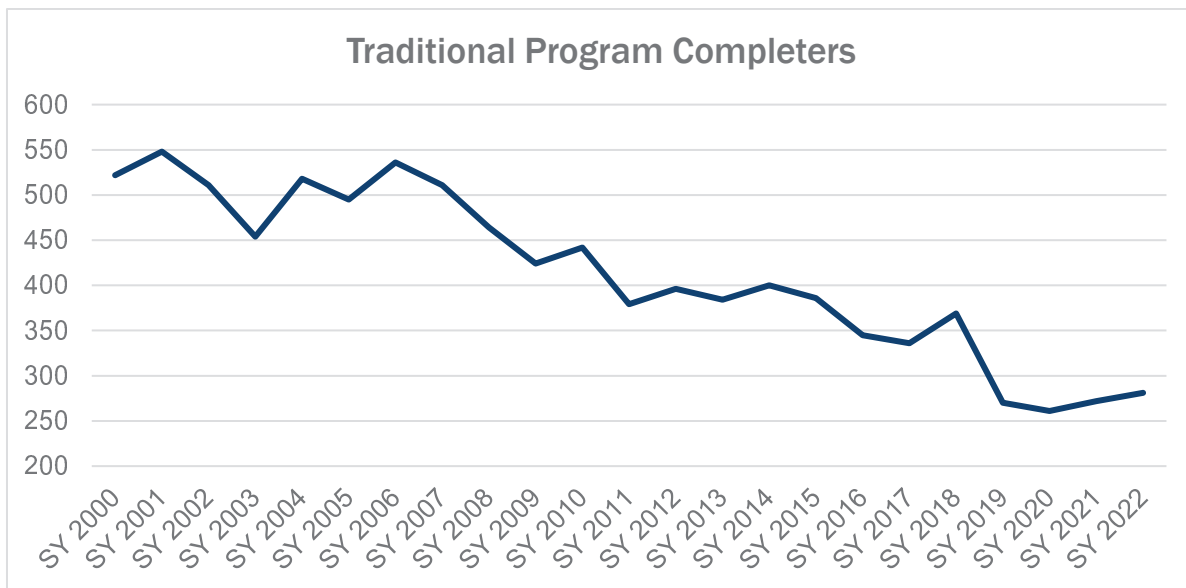


Table 2: Decline in Traditional Program Completers

Year	Traditional Program Completers
SY 2000	522
SY 2001	548
SY 2002	511
SY 2003	454
SY 2004	518
SY 2005	495
SY 2006	536
SY 2007	511
SY 2008	464

SY 2009	424
SY 2010	442
SY 2011	379
SY 2012	396
SY 2013	384
SY 2014	400
SY 2015	386
SY 2016	345
SY 2017	336
SY 2018	369
SY 2019	270
SY 2020	261
SY 2021	272
SY 2022	281

What this historic trend does not capture is the acute damage caused by the COVID-19 pandemic. Figure 2 shows the pandemic’s impact on Vermont EPP graduates who were issued a professional level, or “initial,” license through the Vermont AOE’s licensing office. These data are a more accurate representation of educators entering the Vermont workforce than program completers as individuals may not immediately seek a license after graduation. Graduates may move out-of-state, start a family, or start their careers in a different field, then seek licensure later in life. For example, Figure 1 shows only 336 individuals graduated from a traditional licensure program in academic year 2016-17, however Figure 2 shows 504 Vermont program graduates received a license the following year.

Figure 3: VT EPP Graduates Issued a Professional Teaching License

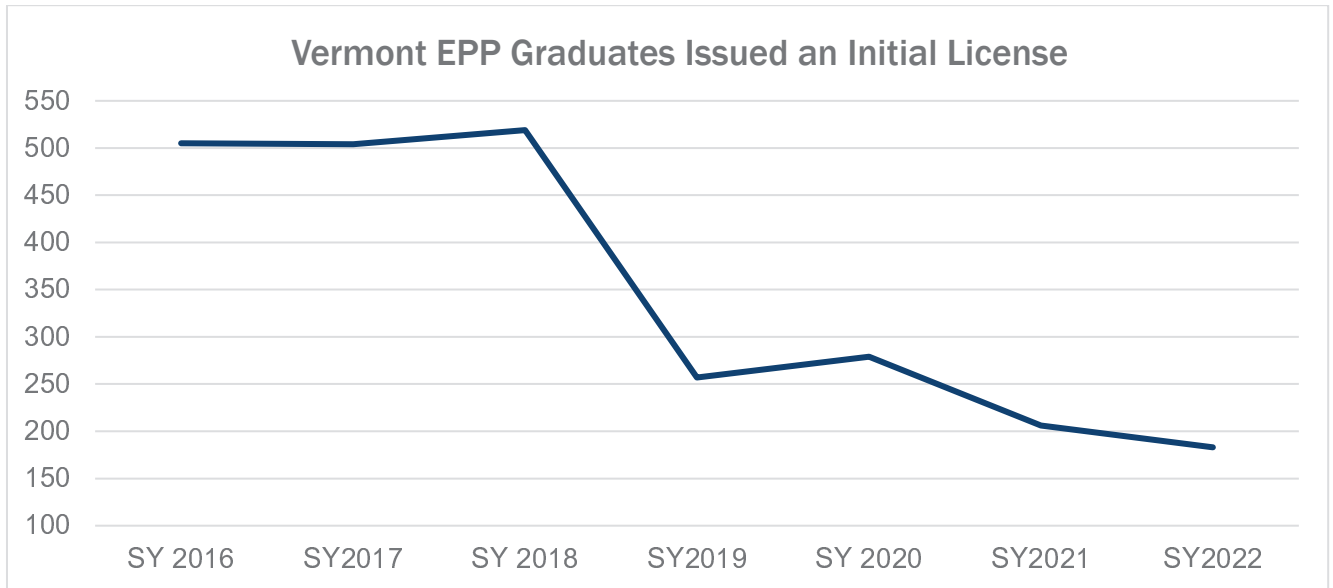


Table 2: VT EPP Graduates Issued a Professional Teaching License

Year	Professional Licenses Issued
SY 2016	505
SY 2017	504
SY 2018	519
SY 2019	257
SY 2020	279
SY 2021	206
SY 2022	183

Figure 2 also demonstrates the immediate and stark impact of the COVID-19 pandemic and lack of workforce recovery. Prior to the pandemic, Vermont would consistently issue at least 500 initial licenses to Vermont EPP graduates each year. In the first year of the pandemic, license issuance numbers were immediately halved, and have continued to decline. Between September 1, 2022, and August 31, 2023, there were only 183 initial licenses issued to Vermont program graduates. Even though there is evidence of a slight increase of program completers in the past three years (which is true nationally as well), the number of these completers seeking a license has decreased significantly.

Over this same time, the number of provisional and emergency licenses issued by the Vermont Agency of Education each year have nearly doubled. These licenses are a more effective measure of individuals entering the teacher workforce because provisional and emergency licenses are only issued at the request of a superintendent, Career Technical Education (CTE) director, or head of an approved independent school to fill a specific position. It should be noted that a licensed teacher can be issued a provisional license if they are working in a new content area; however, the proportion of these provisionals has decreased in this time from 54% of provisional license holders to fewer than 40%.

Figure 4: Provisional and Emergency Licenses Issued

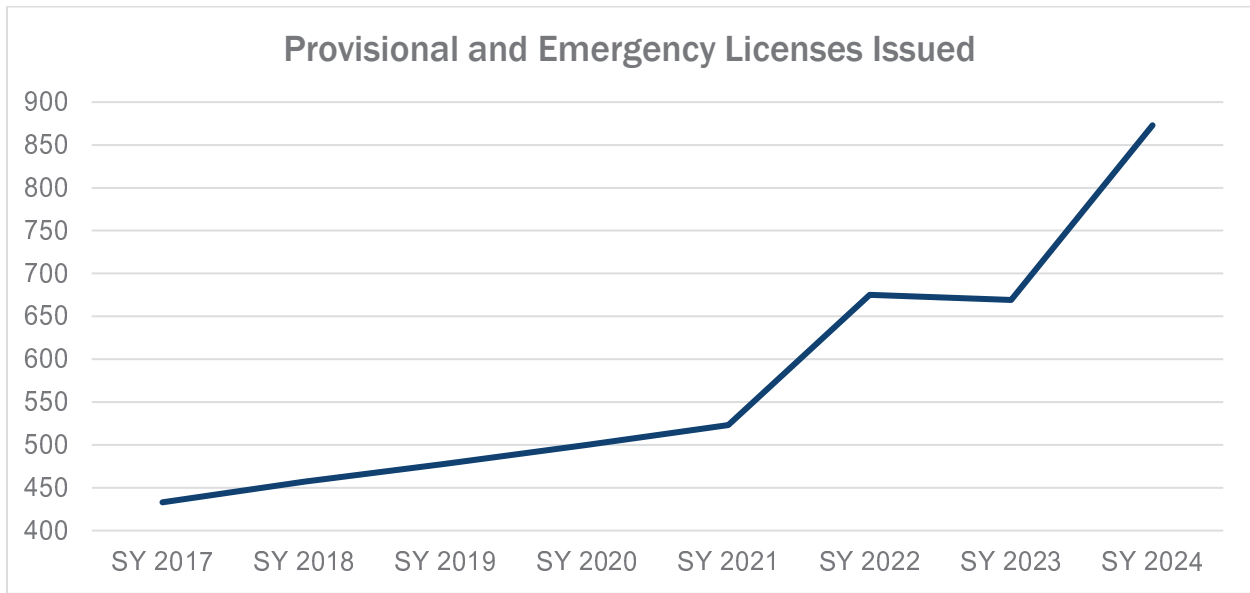


Table 5: Provisional and Emergency Licenses Issued

Year	Provisional and Emergency Licenses Issued
SY 2017	433
SY 2018	457
SY 2019	478
SY 2020	500
SY 2021	523
SY 2022	675

SY 2023	669
SY 2024	873

Out of approximately 7000 licensed teaching full time equivalent (FTE) positions statewide, newly issued provisional and emergency license holders now make up at least 12.5% of FTE positions this school year. This figure does not account for individuals working in their second or third year under a provisional license granted in a prior year, meaning the number is potentially as high as 15-20% of all Vermont classroom teachers who are not professionally certified for their position. This estimate also does not account for positions that remain unfilled, or that have been eliminated due to years of vacancies.

Anecdotal reports tell us that many licensed educators currently working in Vermont schools earned their license outside the state of Vermont. Figure 4 documents the past 14 years of Title II State data of licensure through reciprocity. With numbers ranging from 34 individuals to over 500, data shows that reciprocity is wildly inconsistent on a year-to-year basis.

Figure 6: Initial Licenses Issued via Reciprocity

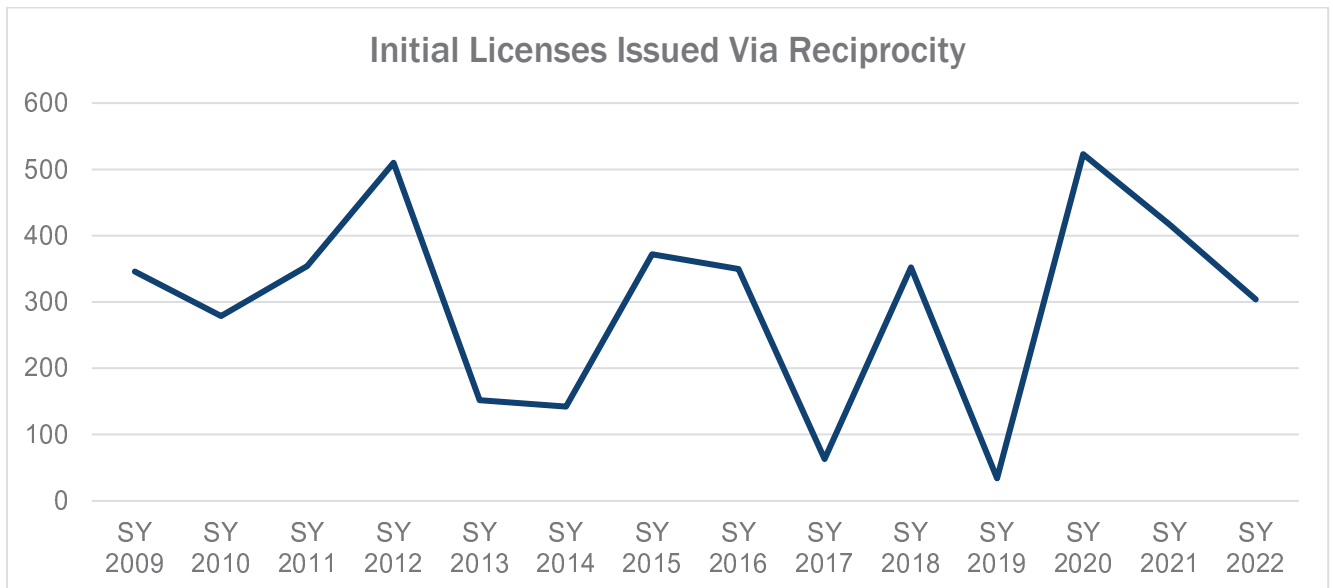


Table 7: Initial Licenses Issued via Reciprocity

Year	Initial Licenses Issued Via Reciprocity
------	---

LEADERSHIP · SUPPORT · OVERSIGHT

SY 2017	346
SY 2009	279
SY 2010	354
SY 2011	510
SY 2012	152
SY 2013	142
SY 2014	372
SY 2015	350
SY 2016	63
SY 2017	352
SY 2018	34
SY 2019	523
SY 2020	417
SY 2021	304
SY 2022	304

The Agency of Education collects more specific data for special education positions. Each October, Special Education Directors respond to the Special Education Personnel survey for various positions that provide services to students with special needs. The data below focuses just on the Grade K – Age 21 Special Education Endorsement. The survey collects total numbers for “fully certified” staff who hold a professional level license, “not fully certified” who hold a provisional license, and vacancies. Figure 5 shows there is not only a decrease in professionally licensed special educators working in Vermont schools, but there is an overall increase in FTE positions statewide. At the same time, licensing data from May 2023 shows there were 2450 individuals holding a professional special educator license for grades K - age 21, which is nearly twice as many individuals than FTE positions statewide.

Table 5: Special Education Personnel Survey, Special Educators Age 6-21

Year	Fully Certified	Not Fully Certified	Vacancies	Total FTE Positions	% FTE Certified
SY 2018	1210.9	39.8	17.7	1268.4	95%
SY 2019	1166.6	52.6	22.5	1241.6	94%
SY 2020	1202.4	76.3	26.6	1305.2	92%
SY 2021	1236.4	45.5	30.5	1312.4	94%
SY 2022	1205.8	73.5	49.2	1328.5	91%
SY 2023	1162.1	109.4	74.0	1345.4	86%
SY 2024	1155.5	153.8	59.5	1368.8	84%

Work-to-Date

In addition to identifying and reviewing data, AOE staff have been collaborating with stakeholders, revising rule and policy, and securing additional funding sources to support workforce development and pilot new supports and pathways.

Licensure Rule

Over the course of the pandemic, the Vermont Standards Board for Professional Educators (VSBPE) has made sweeping reforms to streamline licensure processes. The Board has been intentional not to lower standards, but rather to maintain a high bar, with a wider gate. This work has involved rule and policy changes to expand full reciprocity to all U.S. States and Territories, leading to Vermont being one of the most flexible states for licensed educators to seek licensure through reciprocity. Additionally, the VSBPE has fully revised Praxis testing requirements to eliminate the high stakes nature of the assessment, which disproportionately affects educators of color, first generation college students, and individuals with disabilities. While at least one attempt is still required, a candidate for licensure who does not pass a Praxis assessment is able to seek a license with support from an EPP or SU/SD under Vermont’s Multiple Measures policy. This policy has been highlighted by The National Association of State Directors of Teacher Education and Certification (NASDTEC) as an exemplar for other states to follow.

ARP-ESSER Funds

The Agency of Education has also utilized Federal ARP-ESSER funds to enter contracts with local organizations to support the Educator workforce.

To address the immediate short-term need, the AOE created a contract with the Vermont NEA to provide support for educators working under a provisional license and seeking licensure through the AOE's Peer Review Program. Known as GrowVT-Ed and lead by Dr. Juliette Longchamp, the NEA has successfully developed a strong network of experienced educators who are providing the necessary support for these educators in real time. To date, GrowVT-Ed participants have had a 100% success rate when submitting their final portfolio through Peer Review.

Separately, the AOE has contracted the Vermont Rural Education Collaborative (VREC) to engage in strategic planning and coordination with SU/SDs in the Northeast Kingdom to develop and pilot a new "Grow Your Own (GYO)" licensure model that can serve as a model for other regions. VREC continues to engage with IHEs based in Vermont and surrounding states in hopes of securing a partner committed to innovation and low-cost programming for individuals seeking a Bachelor's degree, but it is preparing to pilot a licensure pathways for college graduates in partnership with NEK SU/SDs and the AOE utilizing existing local and state resources.

Vermont Department of Labor

The AOE has also secured additional federal funding in partnership with the Vermont Department of Labor (VDOL). AOE and VDOL Staff collaborated in an application for the US Department of Labor's State Apprenticeship Expansion Formula (SAEF) Grant. State Education Agencies (SEAs) across the nation are partnering with their state departments of labor counterparts to utilize this federal grant opportunity to develop Registered Apprenticeships Programs (RAPs) for teaching. A form of GYO programming that supports community members to become teachers, RAPs are specifically designed to be employer-based training programs that allow individuals to "Earn-and-Learn," rather than work as unpaid student teachers. VDOL and AOE are currently developing an MOU to transfer a portion of the funds for a one-year AOE position to support the administration of the Emerging Pathways Grant Program, and to facilitate DOL registration of existing and emerging licensure programs.

Emerging Pathways Grant Program

Due to a high interest from multiple EPPs, school systems, and other educational organizations to utilize these limited funds, the Agency is currently developing a competitive application process for the Emerging Pathways Grant (EPG). AOE staff across multiple divisions are working to determine the highest areas of need as we create the grant application.

AOE staff have been collaborating with their counterparts from other state agencies to learn of their efforts to address similar needs in their states. In addition to SAEF Grants, many state legislatures have appropriated funds similar to the EPG program. [The US Department of Education](#) report which identified Vermont as a state of concern for progress towards returning to pre-pandemic staffing shows that Delaware has seen an increase of staffing of 5.1%. Delaware staff recently completed a similar competitive grant process for their “Delaware Grow Your Own Educator Program.” Delaware Department of Education staff have been advising Vermont AOE staff in the development of our Emerging Pathways Grant Program.

AOE staff are also consulting with the Great Schools Partnership (GSP) in the process to ensure the grant process addresses the legislation’s emphasis on supporting teacher candidates from underrepresented demographics and focusses on diversity, equity, and inclusion. GSP has been a strong partner with the AOE, and several school systems across the state, in our and their efforts to support educators of color, and to [increase the racial, ethnic, and linguistic diversity of the educator workforce](#) to be more reflective of student populations and statewide demographics.