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Who becomes a teacher when entry requirements are reduced?

An analysis of emergency licenses in Massachusetts¹

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Abstract:

The COVID-19 pandemic disrupted teacher candidates' capacity to complete licensure requirements. In response, many states temporarily reduced professional entry requirements to prevent a pandemic-induced teacher shortage. Using mixed methods, we examine the role of the emergency teaching license in Massachusetts, which provided an opportunity for individuals to enter the public school teacher workforce with only a bachelor's degree. Our results show that emergency licenses increased the supply of teachers in two ways by: 1) providing an entry point for individuals who previously wanted to become teachers but could not meet traditional licensure requirements and 2) expanding the pool of individuals interested in the profession. Among those teachers hired with an emergency license, we find that they were substantially more ethnoracially diverse than their peers with traditional licenses, and they overwhelmingly intend to obtain permanent licensure and remain in the profession. These results suggest that rethinking initial entry requirements may be an effective policy tool to increase the supply of teachers, particularly among teachers of color.

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1. Introduction

The COVID-19 pandemic created unprecedented disruption for school systems, educators, and the students they serve. One such disruption relates to the licensure process for new educators. The closure of schools and test centers in 2020 interrupted many aspiring teachers' plans to complete traditional certification requirements, such as student teaching and licensure exams. As a result, many states offered temporary reductions in the traditional certification requirements to prevent a possible pandemic-induced teacher shortage (Slay, Riley, & Miller, 2020).

In Massachusetts, the context of the current study, an emergency teaching license was first authorized in June 2020, which substantially reduced the requirements for entering the teacher workforce. Individuals needed only a bachelor's degree to receive an emergency license and become eligible for teaching positions in public schools (An Act Relative to Municipal Governance During the COVID-19 Emergency, 2020). By offering emergency licenses, Massachusetts ensured that teacher candidates preparing to become educators in Spring 2020 could still enter the teaching workforce in Fall 2020.

While this policy change was intended to prevent a sudden disruption to the pipeline among those who otherwise would have entered the teaching profession, emergency licenses also provided a unique opportunity for a new supply of educators. For example, individuals who were interested in becoming a teacher, but would not have completed the typical licensure requirements, could now become teachers. It may have even expanded the supply of interested individuals if the traditional entry barriers dissuaded potential teachers (Goldhaber, 2011). Because traditional requirements disproportionately prevent teachers of color from entering the

profession (Cowan et al., 2020; Goldhaber et al., 2017a; Rucinski & Goodman, 2019), lowering barriers may have changed the composition of those entering the teaching workforce.

In this paper, we present novel mixed-methods evidence on the effects of this new emergency licensure pathway in Massachusetts. Using a combination of administrative data, survey responses, interviews, and focus groups, we investigate the characteristics of educators who obtained an emergency license during the first two years that the emergency license policy was in effect, their employment outcomes, and their plans to remain in the teaching profession. These questions are particularly relevant given the importance of employing a diverse teaching workforce on student outcomes (e.g., Dee, 2005; Gershenson et al., 2021) and the state's explicit goal to diversify the teaching workforce (Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, n.d.). With this in mind, we address the following research questions:

1. *Participation*: What are the characteristics of individuals who obtained emergency teaching licenses during the COVID-19 pandemic in Massachusetts?
2. *Hiring*: Conditional on obtaining an emergency license, how many individuals were hired as teachers, and what are the characteristics of those who were hired?
3. *Teaching Intentions*: Conditional on being hired as a teacher, what are emergency license holders' plans to remain in the teaching profession and obtain permanent licensure?

Our results reveal three key findings. First, we find that offering emergency licenses increased the total number of individuals who received a license and expanded the pool of individuals who were interested in teaching in Massachusetts. Between June 2020 and May 2021, over 12,000 individuals received a new teaching license in Massachusetts, of whom nearly half received an emergency license. This represented an overall expansion in the supply of all newly licensed teachers, which increased by 13 percent over the prior year, suggesting that offering the

emergency license increased the supply of educators in Massachusetts. Survey results reveal a wide range of reasons for obtaining an emergency license, with the most common reasons relating to challenges taking and passing the Massachusetts Tests for Educator Licensure (MTEL) requirements due to COVID-19-specific (e.g., test center closures) and non-Covid related (e.g., not being able to pass the test) factors.

Second, we find that newly hired teachers holding emergency licenses were more ethnoracially diverse than their peers with more traditional licenses. Though most teachers hired in Massachusetts in 2020-21 were White, those hired with an emergency license were less likely to be White and more likely to be Black or Hispanic/Latinx. For example, roughly one-quarter of newly hired emergency-licensed teachers were Black or Hispanic/Latinx, compared to only 5% and 10% of those hired with initial and provisional licenses, respectively. In line with prior work showing that licensure disproportionately prevents individuals of color from entering the profession (Cowan et al., 2020; Nettles et al., 2011; Rucinski & Goodman, 2019), this suggests that reducing licensure requirements played a role in diversifying the Massachusetts teaching workforce during COVID-19.

Finally, our survey results indicate that teachers holding emergency licenses overwhelmingly wanted to remain teaching in Massachusetts (86%) and wanted to convert their emergency licenses to traditional licenses before they expired (80%). These intentions align with existing work showing that teachers with emergency licenses tend to leave the profession at rates similar to their peers who hold traditional licenses, such as provisional and initial (Authors, 2022). Unlike existing work on alternative licensure, which primarily focuses on pathways that recruit teachers for a set period of time such as Teach for America (Redding & Smith, 2016; Redding & Henry, 2018), these results suggest that minimizing entry requirements does not

necessarily reduce the professional commitment among new recruits from this pathway. As states continue to grapple with policy decisions that influence the supply, diversity, and career trajectories of educators, this evidence provides valuable insights into the impacts of reducing traditional licensure requirements on the composition of the workforce.

1. Background

A. Literature on Teacher Licensure Requirements and the Workforce

Similar to workers in many other occupations related to health, safety, and the provision of public goods, classroom teachers in public schools are typically required to obtain state-specific teaching licenses. License requirements are implemented with the goal of ensuring that entrants into the teaching profession have at least the minimum level of skills to educate students. While each state sets their own requirements for teacher licensure, common requirements include demonstrating teaching ability through a student teaching practicum as part of completing a teacher training program, passing one or more standardized assessments of basic skills, pedagogy, or content knowledge, and, for a smaller number of states, passing the edTPA, a performance-based portfolio assessment (Aragon, 2017; DeArmond et al., 2023).

Beginning in the 1980s and throughout recent decades, states have introduced and expanded pathways into the teacher workforce through alternative teacher certification programs, such as Teach For America or The New Teacher Project's Teaching Fellows (Johnson et al., 2005; Redding, 2022). Some of these programs are seen as a "fast-track" to attaining a teaching license, as many deliver an "ultracondensed version of a traditional teacher education program," for example, in a 5-to-8-week summer session (Johnson et al., 2005, p. 65).

In theory, the creation and expansion of these programs reduced barriers to entering the teacher workforce, as teacher candidates no longer needed to have completed a traditional

university-based preparation program. As a result, alternative certification programs may also attract participants who differ from those who pursue traditional certification. Redding (2022), analyzing data from the Schools and Staffing Survey (SASS) and the National Teacher and Principal Survey (NTPS), shows that beginning teachers who were alternatively certified were more likely to be teachers of color, male, and have graduated from competitive colleges. Prior work has also documented that alternatively certified teachers are more likely to leave the profession (Redding & Henry, 2018; Redding & Smith, 2016); this is not necessarily surprising, as some programs recruit individuals for short-term teaching commitments (e.g., Teach For America's 2-year commitment).

While state licensing requirements have changed over the recent decades with the introduction and growth of alternative certification programs, nearly every state still requires the passing of at least one licensure exam to obtain a teaching license (Putnam & Walsh, 2021a). Extant research documents positive relationships between licensure exam scores and measures of teacher effectiveness (Clotfelter et al., 2007; Goldhaber et al., 2017b; Cowan et al., 2020), suggesting that licensure exams may be a useful tool for screening entrants to the workforce. However, the magnitude of the relationships is modest, such that some test-failing individuals may be screened out even if they would have become effective teachers, while some test-passers may gain entry despite becoming ineffective teachers.

Prior research suggests that licensure exams disproportionately act as a barrier for teacher candidates of color, with teacher candidates of color passing licensure exams at lower rates than white candidates (Cowan et al., 2020; Nettles et al., 2011; Rucinski & Goodman, 2019). Moreover, teacher candidates of color who fail are less likely to retake licensure exams as compared to their white peers (Cowan et al., 2020; Putnam & Walsh, 2021b, Rucinski &

Goodman, 2019). Prior literature also indicates that licensure exams can impede other school-based staff members, such as paraprofessional or teaching assistants, from becoming classroom teachers (Abbate-Vaughn & Paugh, 2009; Fortner et al., 2015).

B. Reduction in Licensure Requirements During the Pandemic

The onset of the COVID-19 pandemic disrupted many aspiring teachers' plans to complete traditional certification requirements. For example, many teacher candidates were unable to take licensure exams and complete student teaching requirements with the closure of licensure exam centers and schools in 2020. As a result, many states, including Massachusetts, waived or altered licensure requirements to prevent a possible pandemic-induced teacher shortage (DeArmond et al., 2023; Slay et al., 2020).

Prior to the pandemic, individuals seeking academic teacher roles in Massachusetts typically needed to obtain a *provisional* or *initial* license.² Provisional licenses require a bachelor's degree and passing all required Massachusetts Tests for Educator Licensure (MTELEs). Initial licenses require the completion of an educator preparation program and obtaining required endorsements, in addition to a bachelor's degree and passing required MTELEs.

To prevent a sudden clog in the teacher pipeline, Governor Baker signed an order in June 2020 creating an emergency teaching license, for which individuals need only a bachelor's degree to qualify (An Act Relative to Municipal Governance During the COVID-19 Emergency, 2020). In doing so, the state further reduced the barriers to entering the teacher workforce by removing the passing of licensure exams as a prerequisite for gaining a teaching license. While the emergency license was created to allow entry to candidates whose pursuit of traditional licenses were waylaid by the pandemic, it also created opportunity for licensure among those

² Experienced out-of-state teachers may enter the state teaching workforce with a *temporary* license.

who were previously kept out of the workforce by exam or preparation requirements. Just as alternatively certified educators differ from those with traditional certificates, those who seek emergency licenses may differ from those who obtain initial or provisional certificates, which have exam requirements.

However, emergency licenses in Massachusetts were intended to serve as short-term stopgaps during the COVID-19 pandemic public health emergency. Emergency licenses were originally offered between June 2020 and December 2021. Emergency licenses that were offered during this period expired in June 2023, but individuals could apply for a one-year extension through June 2024 so long as they made progress towards obtaining the license.³ To continue teaching after the expiration date, teachers must obtain initial or provisional licenses. Therefore, if reducing the minimum professional entry requirements expanded the supply of new teachers to those who are unwilling or unable to complete traditional license requirements, many may not remain in the workforce after June 2024.⁴

To our knowledge, only one other study examines how reducing teacher licensure requirements during the pandemic altered new entrants to the teacher workforce. Backes and Goldhaber (2023) use data from New Jersey to examine the creation of the Temporary Certificate of Eligibility (Temporary CE). Obtaining this certificate allowed teacher candidates who had a) enrolled in or completed a preparation program, and b) completed at least 50

³ Emergency licenses in six license areas within special education and English as a Second Language (ESL) were valid through June 2022 and required additional demonstration of subject matter knowledge for an extension. <https://www.doe.mass.edu/news/news.aspx?id=26639>

⁴ Since the initial wave of emergency licenses offered between June 2020 and December 2021, Massachusetts began offering “new” emergency licenses between May 2022 and November 2024 to individuals who do not already hold an emergency license. These “new” licenses are valid for one calendar year and may be extended up to two times. No new emergency licenses will be offered after November 7, 2024. Individuals obtaining a “new” license are not included in our sample, as described below. <https://www.doe.mass.edu/licensure/emergency/>

preservice hours to become a classroom teacher in a New Jersey school, while deferring licensure exam requirements to the following year.

Backes and Goldhaber find that Temporary CE holders were more likely to be Black and Hispanic than other novice teachers, a result which is consistent with our results in the Massachusetts context. They also find that Temporary CE holders were more likely to leave the teaching profession, which contrasts with Authors' (2022) work indicating that emergency license holders in Massachusetts had similar turnover to their peers. Importantly, Backes and Goldhaber also find that Temporary CE holders appear to be at least as effective at raising math or ELA test scores as other novice teachers. Temporary CE holders received lower performance ratings than other early-career teachers, though these lower ratings were partially attributable to the characteristics of the schools and classrooms in which they taught. Our present study adds to this nascent literature to provide a better understanding of those who entered the profession with an emergency license, their motivation to become an educator, and their long-term plans to remain in the profession.

2. Data and Methods

We use a sequential mixed methods design (Cameron, 2009) drawing upon MADESE administrative data on emergency license holders from June 2020 through January 2022 ($n = 8,870$), a survey sent to all emergency license holders who provided an email address to MADESE ($n = 1,444$) in the Spring of 2022, and follow-up interviews ($n = 14$) and six focus groups ($n = 31$) with a cross-section of emergency license holders representing a range of demographics and career pathways.

MADESE administrative data includes all school staff employed in the state between from 2019-20 through 2021-22, as well as licensure data which includes all emergency license holders

(ELHs) from June 2020 through January 2022. These records include a range of information on teachers including demographic information, current school, job type, and teacher licensure and preparation background. Summary statistics for teachers are presented in Appendix Table A1.

Survey data collected by the authors include responses to closed and open-ended questions focused on challenges and successes related to obtaining emergency and provisional/initial licensure, current and future employment plans, and demographics. A survey invitation was sent to all emergency license holders who provided a valid email address to MADESE ($n = 6,159$) in the Spring of 2022, and 1,444 individuals completed the survey. While the response rate was 23%, those who completed the survey were representative of the population of ELHs in observable characteristics in the administrative data, such as race and gender (See Appendix Table A2).

We supplemented the survey and administrative data with semi-structured interviews and focus groups with a subset of ELHs who completed the survey, using maximum variation sampling by race, gender, educator employment status, and retention plans (See Appendix Table A3). We conducted 14 individual interviews and held six focus groups with ELHs in from May through September 2022, with a total of 31 participants. Interviews and focus groups included questions on emergency licensure experience, teaching experience, experience pursuing additional licensure, future plans, and recommendations for improving the licensure process.

The quantitative administrative and survey data were analyzed to capture overall and disaggregated descriptive statistics. Qualitative data was analyzed to provide additional nuance and explanation to the quantitative findings. Open-ended survey responses were coded with initial open codes that derived from the data (Charmaz, 2014). A second round of focused coding grouped similar codes under common themes that connected to and expanded upon close-ended

survey responses. This coding structure provided the set of codes used for interviews. For example, codes under *benefits of emergency license policy* included *employment, gaining teaching experience, working with students, fulfills passion, school need, easy process, new opportunity*, and *professional growth*. Codes under challenges included licensure requirements (e.g., MTEs, educator preparation, student teaching, SEI endorsement), *time, getting and retaining employment, unclear information*, and *working conditions*. Finally, patterns and themes derived from the open-ended survey questions and interview transcripts were triangulated with administrative and close-ended survey data to confirm and further explain the quantitative trends.

3. Results

A) Participation

From June 2020 through May 2021, over 5,800 individuals received an emergency teaching license in Massachusetts, representing approximately half of all new teaching license recipients during this period. In total, 12,407 individuals received any new teaching license (i.e., initial, provisional, or emergency) from June 2020 through May 2021, which represents a 13 percent increase from the prior year.⁵ This substantial increase in the total number of licensed individuals suggests that offering emergency licenses expanded the pool of individuals who were eligible to become a teacher in Massachusetts.

To investigate the professional pathways leading to an emergency license, Figure 1 presents the prior employment records of ELHs in the statewide public school system. Among the population of 5,800 individuals obtaining an emergency license from June 2020 through May

⁵ Appendix Figure A1 presents counts of individuals obtaining an initial, provisional, or emergency license from 2012 through 2021. The total of 12,407 was the highest of all years examined. We exclude professional licenses because those licenses are only available to experienced teachers and our focus in this paper is on new entry to the profession.

2021, nearly two-thirds (63%) were not employed in a Massachusetts public school in the prior school year (2019-20). Of these ELHs who were not previously employed, only 33% (or 18% of all ELHs) had enrolled in an educator preparation program and/or took an MTEL exam within the prior three years. These results suggest that the emergency license primarily acted as a pathway for individuals new to the profession to enter, many of whom were not already in the traditional educator pipeline.

Figure 1 also shows that the emergency license served as a way for some individuals already working in Massachusetts public schools to become licensed teachers. Approximately 17% of ELHs were employed as a paraprofessional, and 16% were employed as a teacher under waived requirements in the prior year (i.e., employed with a waiver or charter school⁶). This highlights the second major pathway to teaching that the emergency licenses opened, which was to enable those already working in MA public schools to become licensed teachers. Survey results presented in Figure 2 provide more detail on the different motivations leading to an emergency license. The two most common reported reasons for obtaining an emergency license related to the MTEL license exam.⁷ Aligning with the core motivation for the creation of the emergency license, 35% of survey respondents indicated that they obtained an emergency license because they could not complete at least one of the required MTEL exams due to COVID-related test-center closures. As one ELH who had been enrolled in a master's program for Early Childhood Education shared, "Midway through my two-year program COVID hit, so I was looking into licensure as I was finishing up my program and the emergency license came out.

⁶ Individuals who do not hold a Massachusetts teaching license may work as a teacher in a Massachusetts charter school if they A) hold a bachelor's degree and B) pass the required MTEL(s) within their first year of employment.

⁷ Survey respondents could select multiple reasons for obtaining an emergency license, so results do not add to 100% across categories.

When I was kind of in the thick of that I figured I'd just apply because I still had a few MTELS to go, and I still do.”

Another one of the most common reasons that ELHs reported for obtaining the emergency license, reported by 40% of respondents, was that they could not pass at least one of the required MTEL exams, for reasons unrelated to COVID-19. This was reported in interviews and focus groups as well. As one aspiring classroom teacher shared: “I have been struggling to pass my general curriculum math subtest. That is what is holding back my entire career. All of my teacher friends all told me about the emergency license, and that’s what I did.” A career changer with a bachelor’s in early childhood education relayed a similar story:

I wasn’t able to pass the Early Childhood and the Foundations of Reading [MTEL]. So, they let me graduate with my bachelor’s, but I couldn’t do my student teaching, unfortunately. So, I decided to do a different career route... But that’s kind of how I got led to the emergency license. I wasn’t able to pass my MTELS, and that’s why I went for the emergency license at that point to hopefully restart my career.

This result aligns with prior work describing the challenge of passing MTEL exams even before COVID-19 (NCTQ, 2021). In Massachusetts, those seeking elementary licenses – the most common license among ELHs – must pass an MTEL specific to mathematics. Though three options exist for the mathematics subtest, the highest first-time pass rate of any of the three exams was 53 percent.⁸

⁸ The mathematics subtest of the General Curriculum assessment may be satisfied by passing any of the mathematics subtests: General Curriculum-Mathematics, Mathematics (Elementary), Mathematics (Middle School) or Mathematics. The first-time pass rates from September 1, 2018 through August 31, 2019 were as follows: General Curriculum-Mathematics: 53.4%, Elementary Mathematics: 46.1%, Middle School Mathematics: 41.2%.

Financial burdens were also a common reason for obtaining an emergency license, with 19% of respondents indicating the cost of taking the MTELEs or the emergency license being a cheaper option as playing a role. Given that ELHs reported substantial challenges passing the required MTEL exams, this financial burden may be particularly acute for those individuals who must take – and pay for – the exam multiple times to pass. Another 18 percent of ELHs reported obtaining an emergency license because of difficulties completing other requirements for initial licensure, such as educator preparation coursework or student teaching.

Figure 2 also highlights how the emergency license opened the door for individuals to transfer their teaching license from another state or try teaching as a career. About 13% of survey respondents reported obtaining an emergency license because they were a teacher in a different state who subsequently moved to Massachusetts. In these cases, the emergency license provided an additional pathway for experienced teachers who were new Massachusetts residents to become licensed without completing the state-specific testing requirements (e.g., the MTELEs). As one ELH who had moved from Canada to Massachusetts at the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic, and who was currently employed as a full-time teacher, shared in an interview:

I was licensed back in Canada, but I was not licensed down here. So [after I moved], I was able to work from January to the end of the school year. And then that's when the school board approached...saying that I could get the emergency license if I wanted to teach for another year with them while I started to go through the process of trying to get my licensing down here. So, that's how I got into the emergency license... It was more just so I could continue working because I have not finished the tests and all because we didn't have anything equivalent to that [in Canada]. Getting all four of the tests done in a very short time just did not seem feasible at the time... It's made it so it's a lot easier, a

lot less stress about trying to find a position and trying to get the other testing to be fully licensed done.

This was a common experience expressed among out-of-state license holders in open-ended survey responses, interviews, and focus groups, and is a common concern for teachers who move to states that lack license reciprocity agreements (Goldhaber et al., 2017c). For example, an ELH who moved from New York, shared: “I was working in [MA school district], and they had hired me without finishing my MTEs. I just had my license for New York. And again, COVID hit, and they said you may as well just go for the emergency license that they are offering at this point so that way some of the pressure of taking the MTEs would be off. And so, I did.”⁹

In addition, about 18% of respondents said that they obtained an emergency license because they wanted to try teaching, representing a meaningful share of ELHs who may have used this policy change as an entry point to a new career path. As one ELH noted in an interview:

I think it’s a nice way to figure out if it’s for you without having to do a lot of upfront investment and time and money to get credential otherwise. One of the big positives of the [emergency license] is that it’s a very effective, easy, and cheap way to get into the classroom and figure out is this something I want to invest my future in or not. Going to a graduate teaching program or something, doing all the classwork beforehand costs money and time. This cost neither, really.

⁹ Massachusetts offers a “temporary” license for experienced educators who are licensed in another state and have at least three years of experience working in the role of that license in that state. The temporary license is valid for one year and cannot be extended. Some of the individuals who received an emergency license may have also been eligible for a temporary license, but instead chose to receive an emergency license, perhaps due to the longer validity period and potential for renewal. Other teacher transfers may not have been eligible for a temporary license (e.g., did not hold a license for three years).

A career changer with a background in STEM similarly shared:

For me, I've always had it in the back of my mind in terms of this being a possible career change at some point in my life. The emergency licensure came...so I went ahead and just did it. I'm not planning on going back to school to getting a degree for those kinds of [licensure] requirements, so, yes, I'm aware there is a need, especially for STEM-type topics, which that is my background.

These findings indicate that the emergency licensure option not only enabled existing school staff to become licensed to teach, but also attracted prospective teachers from fields outside of education. These findings provide insight into the ways that emergency licensure lowered barriers and made the teacher labor market accessible to individuals who otherwise faced constraints in their ability to become licensed to teach in Massachusetts.

B) Hiring

While the creation of the emergency license appears to have increased the supply of individuals licensed to teach, Figure 3 illustrates the challenge of being hired as a teacher with a new and untested credential. Among individuals who obtained an emergency license between June 2020 and May 2021, only 51% were employed as public-school teachers in Massachusetts by the beginning of the 2021-22 school year. Another 13% were employed in a Massachusetts K-12 public school, though not as a teacher despite having earned a teaching license. Finally, 36% were not employed in a Massachusetts public school.

When comparing ELH hiring to hiring of individuals earning a provisional or initial license during the same period, the teacher employment rate is quite similar to those who earned a provisional license (52%), but lower than those earning an initial license (62%). This may reflect a preference among district human resources officials or school leadership to hire individuals with

training from an educator preparation program, which is the key distinction between an initial license and the other two licenses.

Survey results provide additional context to help understand the reasons why only half of ELHs were employed as teachers. One possible reason, for example, could be that the ELHs who were not hired simply did not apply for teaching positions. When barriers are lower, individuals with less investment in the profession may apply for licenses, but then ultimately decide not to apply for and pursue teaching. However, survey results indicate that among the ELHs who were not employed as a teacher, the vast majority (71%) reported having applied for teaching positions, but the reason they were not employed as a teacher is that they were not hired. In interviews and focus groups, many ELHs further indicated that they perceived school preferences for hiring traditionally licensed individuals to be a challenge in finding teaching employment. One interviewee, for example, believed that some schools were hesitant to offer classroom teaching positions to individuals without traditional qualifications due to the “lack the teaching experience that other candidates would have.” Likewise, an ELH who applied for full-time teaching positions within the district he was employed as a support staff shared: “while I made it down to the last interview for a few positions, the caveat was always, “If there is someone with more subject matter expertise and long-time teaching in that subject, they would likely get that spot.” Another ELH explained in a focus group, “when I applied for a couple of the jobs, they responded back saying that they were looking for someone with an initial license or a professional license.”

While only approximately half of ELHs were hired as teachers, those who were hired did represent greater ethnic/racial diversity than teachers hired with traditional licenses. Figure 4 shows the ethnic/racial composition of newly hired teachers in 2020-21 by license type. Newly

hired teachers with an initial and provisional license were 90% white and 85% white, respectively. In contrast, 71% of newly hired teachers with an emergency license were white. In particular, substantially more teachers hired with an emergency license were Black (13%) and Hispanic/Latinx (12%) compared to those with initial and provisional licenses.¹⁰ While still overwhelmingly white, the composition of emergency licensed teachers is more diverse than the historical composition of 4-year college graduates in Massachusetts (Rucinski, 2023) and represents a step towards the state's goal of increasing the racial diversity of the workforce (Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, n.d.).¹¹

C) Teaching Intentions

One concern about alternative pathways into teaching, such as emergency licensure, is that ELHs may leave the teacher workforce at higher rates because they are less invested in and committed to the profession. Prior research indicates, for example, that teachers with alternative certifications – such as Teach for America – are more likely to leave at the end of the school year than traditionally certified teachers (Redding & Smith, 2016; Redding & Henry, 2018).

Figure 5a presents results from a survey question asking emergency licensed teachers about their employment plans in the next school year. The vast majority (86%) indicated that they plan to remain teaching in Massachusetts, nearly all of whom indicated that they hope to keep their current teaching position in the next school year. These results are consistent with a

¹⁰ As shown in Figure 4, among newly hired initial license holders, 2.8% were Black and 3.6% were Hispanic/Latinx. Among newly hired provisional license holders, 4.8% were Black and 4.6% were Hispanic/Latinx.

¹¹ The increased ethnic/racial diversity shown in Figure 4 is the result of two forces. First, Black and Hispanic/Latinx individuals are more likely to obtain an emergency license than an initial or provisional license (Appendix Figure A2). Second, Black and Hispanic/Latinx ELHs are more likely than White ELHs to become employed as teachers. For example, by Fall 2021, about 60% of Black and Hispanic/Latinx ELHs held teaching positions, compared to about 50% of White ELHs (Appendix Figure A3). This pattern may also partly reflect the disproportionate hiring of ELHs in urban and charter schools, relative to suburban and rural schools (Appendix Figure A4).

contemporaneous study showing that one-year turnover rates in 2020-21 were similar for emergency licensed teachers and their peers with provisional and initial license (Authors, 2022). Additionally, Figure 5b presents results of a question about emergency licensed teachers' plans to obtain full licensure. Again, the vast majority (80%) plan to pursue provisional or initial licensure, which would allow them to continue teaching after emergency licenses expire.

Nearly all interviewees and participants from all six focus groups saw the emergency license as beneficial for allowing them to fulfill a passion for teaching and working with students; their love of the job may explain why the vast majority of participants plan to remain teaching and pursue provisional or initial licensure. As one focus group participant shared, "I was miserable in corporate America, and all I ever wanted to do was teach. That is all I have ever wanted to do...And that's my goal. I'll take the math MTEL a hundred times if I have to until I pass it because it's what I'm meant to do, teaching." Another participant agreed, saying, "I am ready to be a teacher for the rest of my life...I just hope that there is a way that I can either pass [the MTEs] with more support or they come out with something like the emergency license just to make it easier on people and a little less stressful. Because I don't really have any other intention to do anything else and I love what I do."

While both the quantitative and qualitative evidence suggest that emergency licensed teachers want to stay in the profession and are no more likely to leave than their peers in the near term, ELHs will need to convert their emergency license to an initial or provisional license to remain in the teaching workforce in the long run, namely when emergency licenses expire. Converting to either an initial or provisional license requires passing the MTEL examinations, which as discussed above, was the most common reason for pursuing an emergency license over a traditional license. Though the majority of ELHs in our sample did plan on converting to a more

permanent license, ELHs also identified barriers that they were facing in completing their MTEL requirements. Roughly 60% of survey respondents indicated that completing or passing the MTEL was going to be a major barrier to obtaining full licensure (Appendix Figure A5) and that they had less time to complete these requirements (e.g., prepare for and take exams) due to their full-time workload. About 50% identified financial costs as a barrier to more permanent licensure as well. In interviews and focus groups, multiple ELHs employed as full-time teachers worried about job security when the license expires. One teacher, who had completed an educator preparation program, said,

I'm just hoping that I can pass them before June because once this emergency license expires, I don't know what I'm going to do. So, I'm working in a public school currently, it's my second year there. I love it. And just knowing that I could potentially lose my job because I won't be licensed if I don't pass these MTEs, it makes me sick every day.

Another ELH corroborated this, saying, "Teachers and principals are saying to us, 'We need you, please pass.' And we're not passing [the MTEs]." A participant summed up the overall worry about the emergency license expiration as follows: "I think the system is going to lose very good educators and people once this emergency license is no longer in effect." These concerns suggest that, even if the vast majority of ELHs want to remain in the teaching workforce, they may not be able to if they cannot overcome the barriers that led them to an emergency license in the first place.¹²

¹² In a contemporaneous paper, we provide a more detailed qualitative focus on the challenges and supports related to converting emergency license. For more detail see Authors (2023).

4. Conclusion

Amid worries of teacher shortages, our results indicate that the creation of the emergency license attracted new individuals to the supply of available teachers, including some who were previously unable to pass licensure exam requirements, out-of-state educators, and some who wanted to try the profession. Our results also suggest that offering emergency licenses resulted in modest changes to the composition of newly hired teachers in Massachusetts. We find that roughly half of ELHs from the first year of the emergency license were hired as teachers in the fall of the 2021-22 school year, with Black and Hispanic/Latinx ELHs being more likely to be hired as teachers than white ELHs. Importantly, newly hired ELHs were much more likely to be Black and Hispanic/Latinx than newly hired initial or provisional license holders. While not the principal goal of offering emergency licenses, these results are particularly important given the benefits employing a diverse teaching workforce on student outcomes (e.g., Dee, 2005; Gershenson et al., 2021) and the explicit goal in many states – including Massachusetts – to diversify the teaching workforce.¹³

Despite potential concerns that ELHs may be less invested in the teaching profession given lower barriers to entry with lower upfront time and monetary costs, our survey results suggest that teachers with ELHs want to remain in the profession. Over 80% of teachers with an emergency license report planning to remain teaching, and plan to obtain a more traditional license (i.e., initial or provisional). Taken together, these results suggest that changes to licensure

¹³ As a key strategic priority, the state began offering grant funding to support local school and district efforts to strengthen and diversify existing teacher recruitment and retention programs. More detailed information on Massachusetts's efforts to diversify the teacher workforce are available here: <https://www.doe.mass.edu/csi/diverse-workforce/>

requirements – particularly those that loosen standardized licensure exam requirements – may be a fruitful path toward diversifying the teacher workforce.¹⁴

However, it is important to note that while ELHs' strong intentions to remain in the teacher workforce is encouraging, it is too early to determine whether these intentions will translate into long-term retention among ELHs. To remain as licensed teachers, ELHs will need to obtain a traditional license prior to the June 2024 expiration.¹⁵ Some survey respondents have identified challenges in doing so, indicating that they lack the time to complete requirements and face difficulty in passing the required licensure exams. State policymakers, district leaders, and school administrators will be crucial in identifying and implementing strategies to support ELHs who wish to obtain new licenses and remain in the workforce.

Finally, an important limitation of this study is that it cannot examine the effectiveness of this first cohort of ELHs (e.g., classroom observation scores, contributions to student test scores). While offering the emergency license achieved the immediate intended goal of maintaining a steady supply of teachers throughout the pandemic and even had the additional benefits of increasing the ethnic/racial diversity of the workforce, understanding any differences in effectiveness between ELHs and traditionally licensed teachers is an important component to understanding the full impacts of reducing licensure requirements. We hope future work will

¹⁴ For example, one recent option that Massachusetts began offering is the MTEL Flex, which is an alternative license exam for individuals who previously took and received a score that was just below passing in certain subjects. More information is available here:

https://www.mtel.nesinc.com/PageView.aspx?f=HTML_FRAG/GENRB_Announcement_Flex.html

¹⁵ As noted above, the ELHs examined in this report received their licenses during the first wave of emergency licenses, which cannot be extended beyond June 2024. Beginning in May 2022, the state began offering a second wave of emergency licenses for individuals who previously had not received an emergency license. This allowed the state to continue offering new emergency licenses through November 2024, but these individuals will also face a similar set of challenges to those who received an emergency license in the first wave. Notably, the second wave of emergency licenses are valid for one year and can be renewed twice. After this, all second wave ELHs will also have to obtain a traditional license.

examine this important factor and continue to provide valuable insights into the role of licensure requirements on the quality, diversity, and career trajectories of educators.

Main text word count: (5,879)

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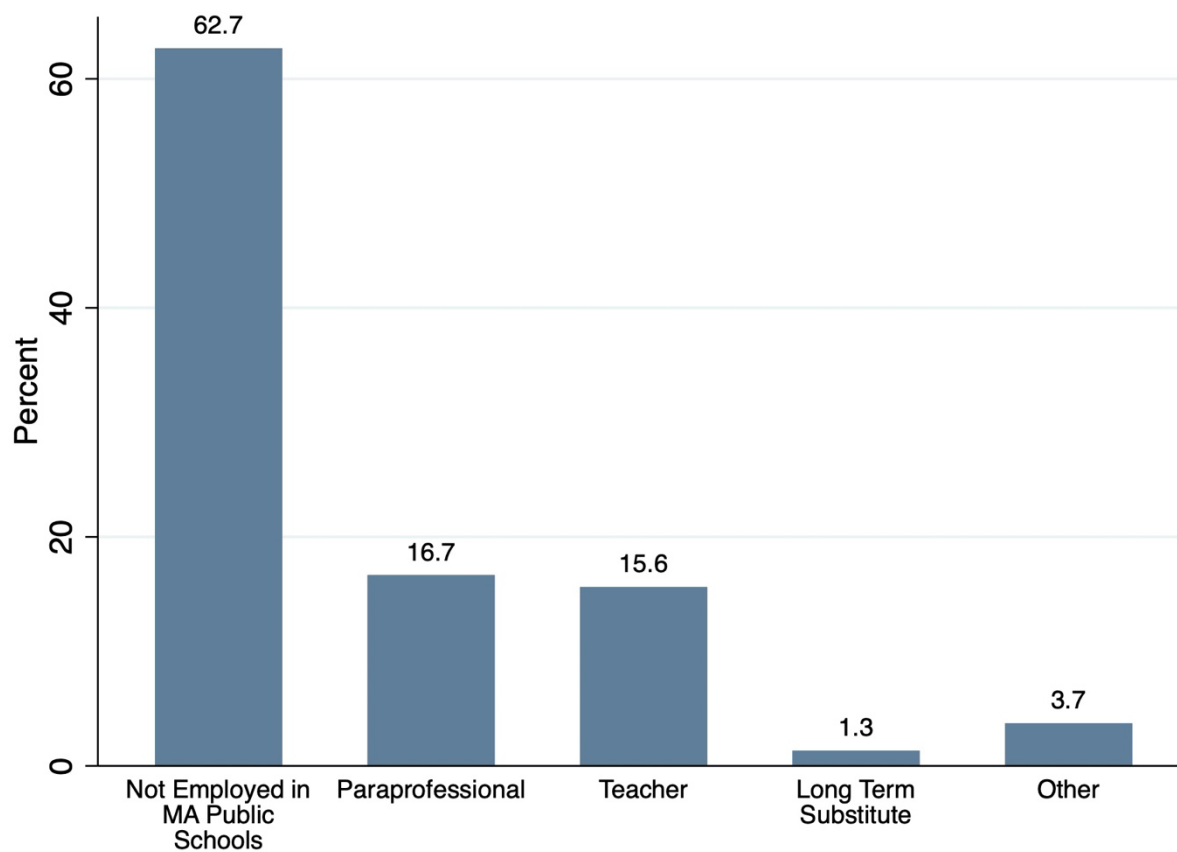
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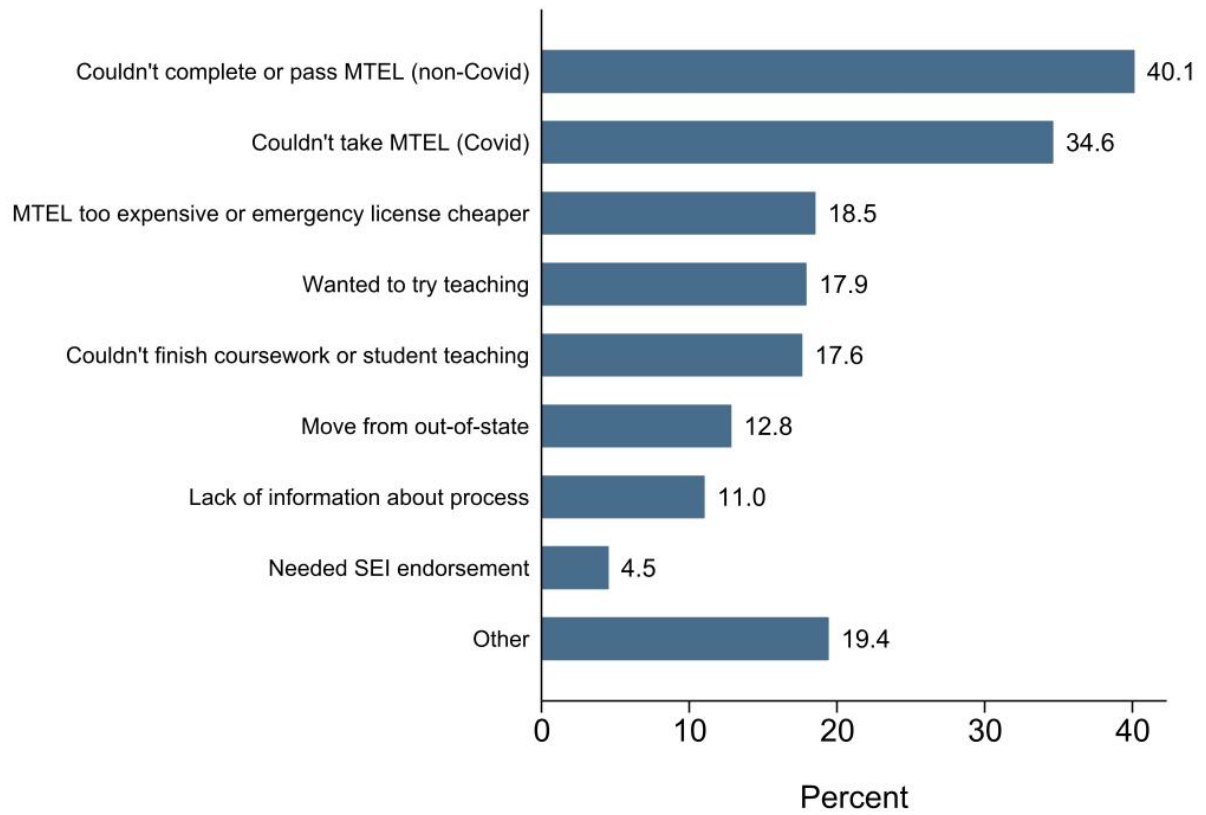
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Figures

Figure 1: Employment status among emergency license holders prior to obtaining emergency licenses.

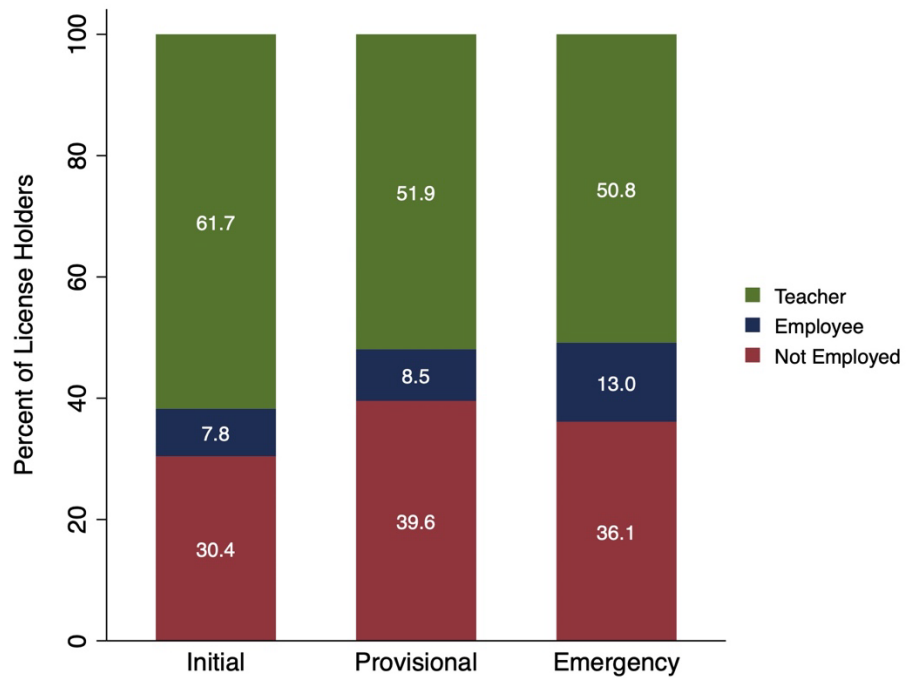


Notes: Data from MADESE administrative data.

Figure 2: Survey respondents' reported reasons for obtaining an emergency teaching license.

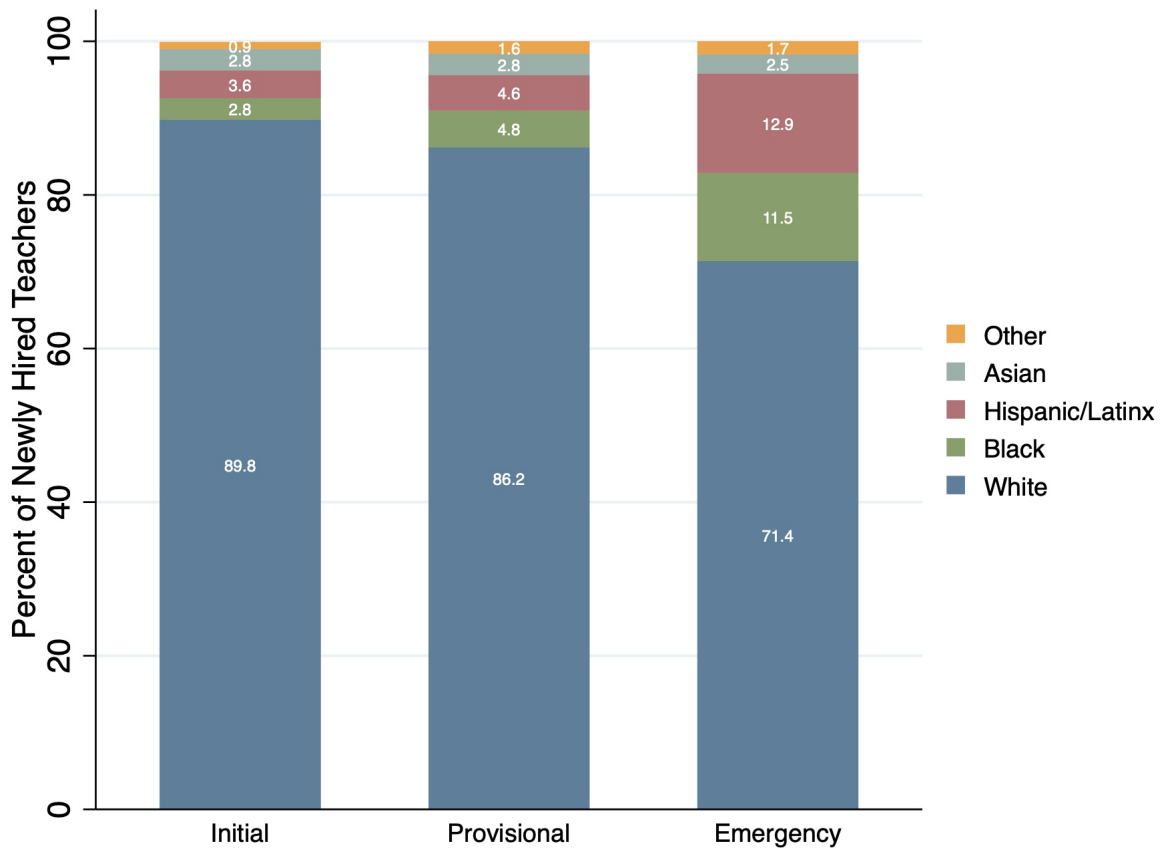
Notes: Data come from survey responses.

Figure 3: Employment status of emergency teaching license holders in Fall of 2021-22 by race/ethnicity.

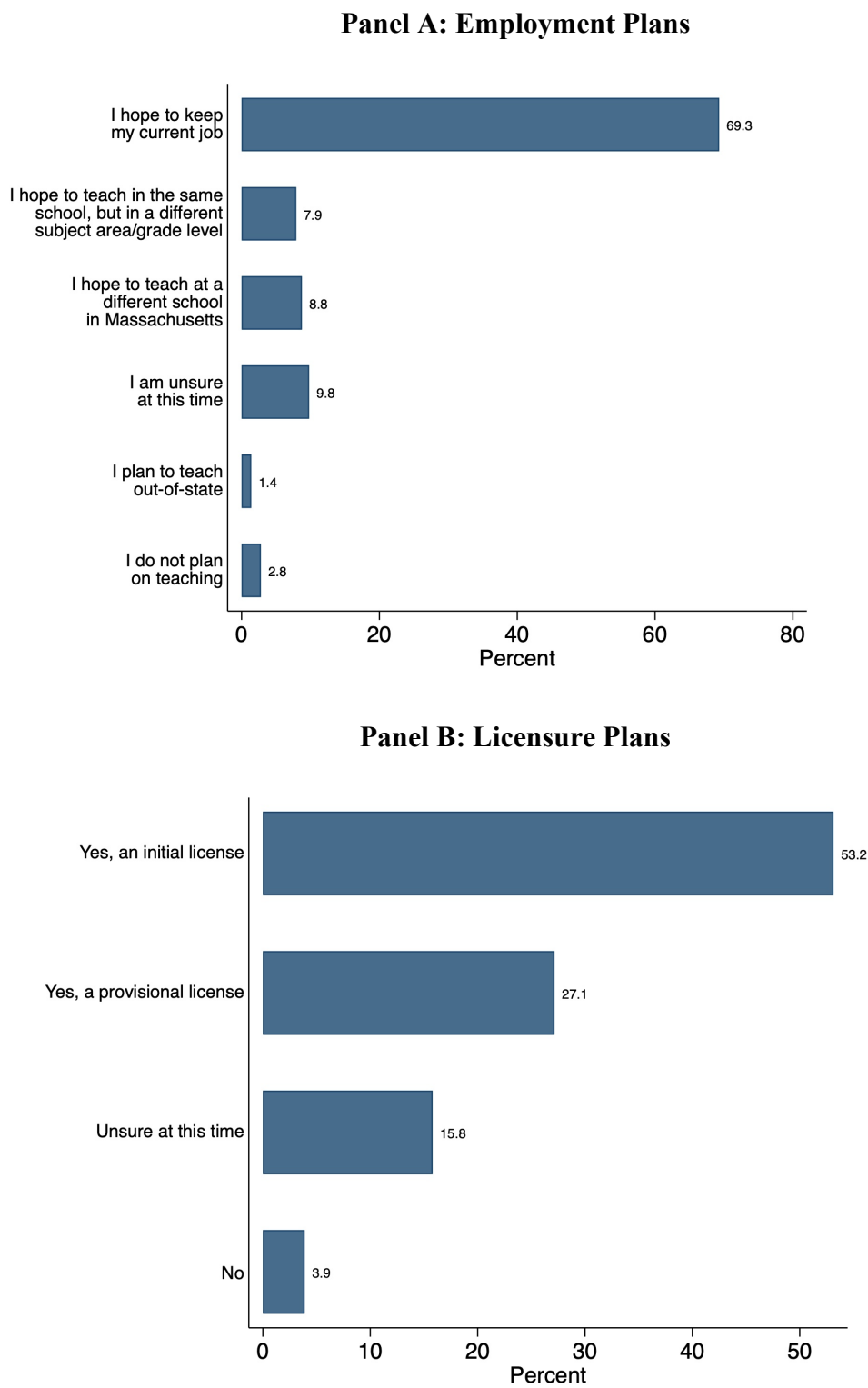


Notes: Data from MADESE administrative data.

Figure 4: Racial Composition of Teachers in the Fall of 2021-22 by License Type.



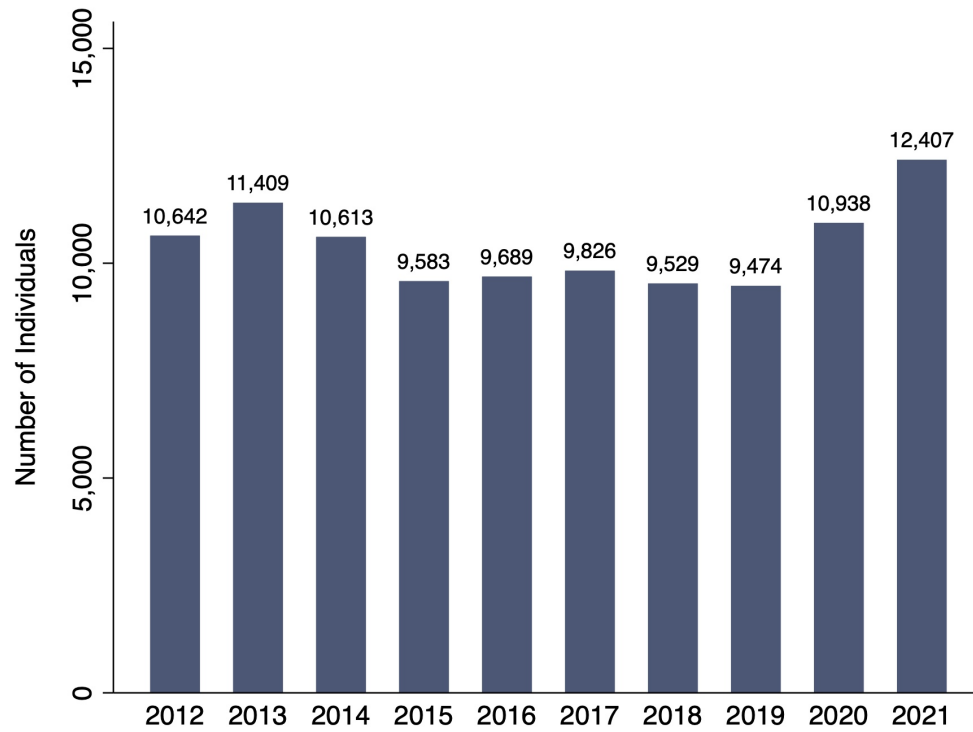
Notes: Data from MADESE administrative data.

Figure 5: Future employment and license plans

Notes: Data come from survey responses.

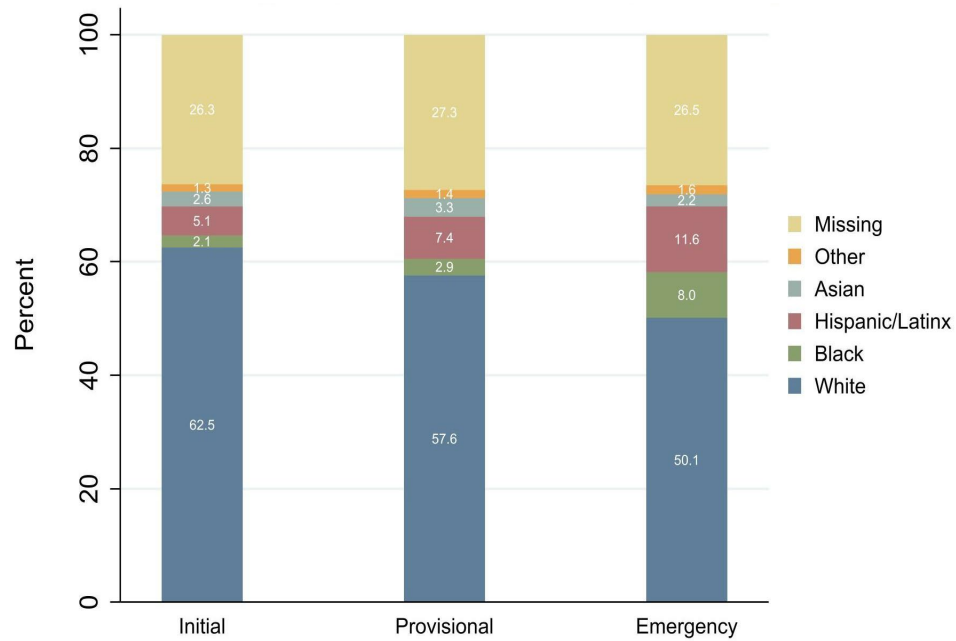
Appendix A

Figure A1: Total Counts of New Teacher License Recipients, by Year

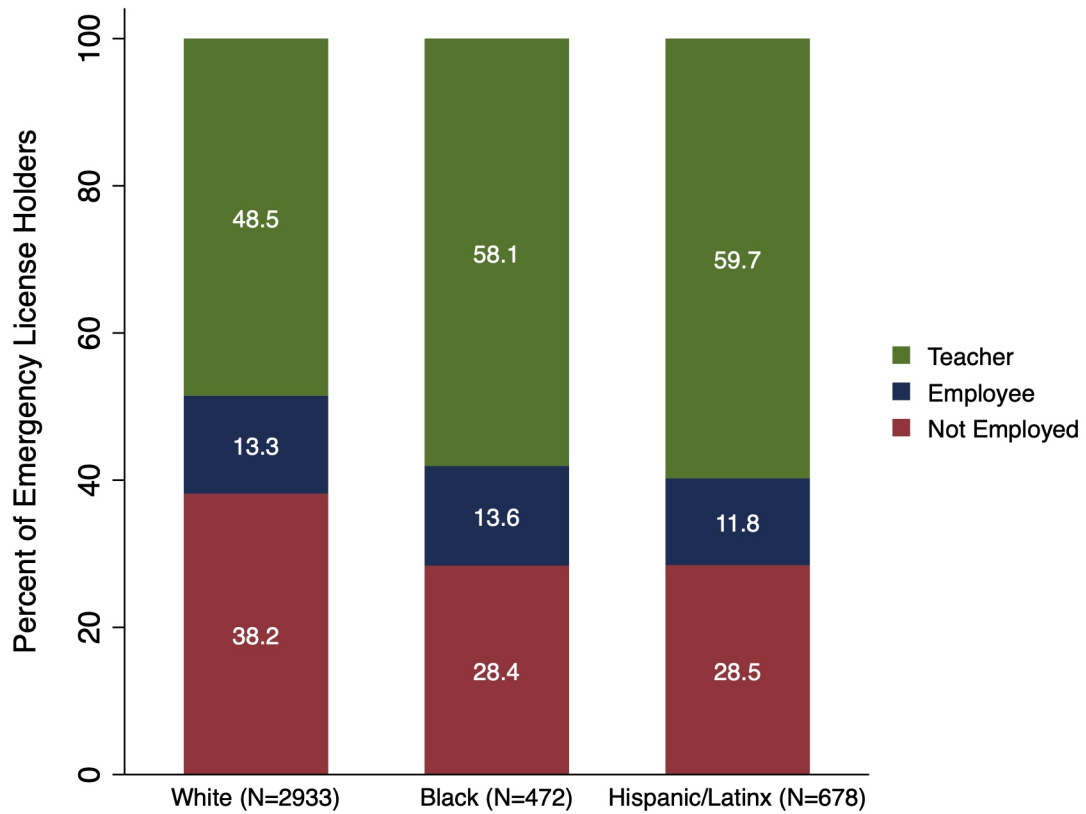


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Appendix Figure A2: Ethnic/Racial Composition, by License Type

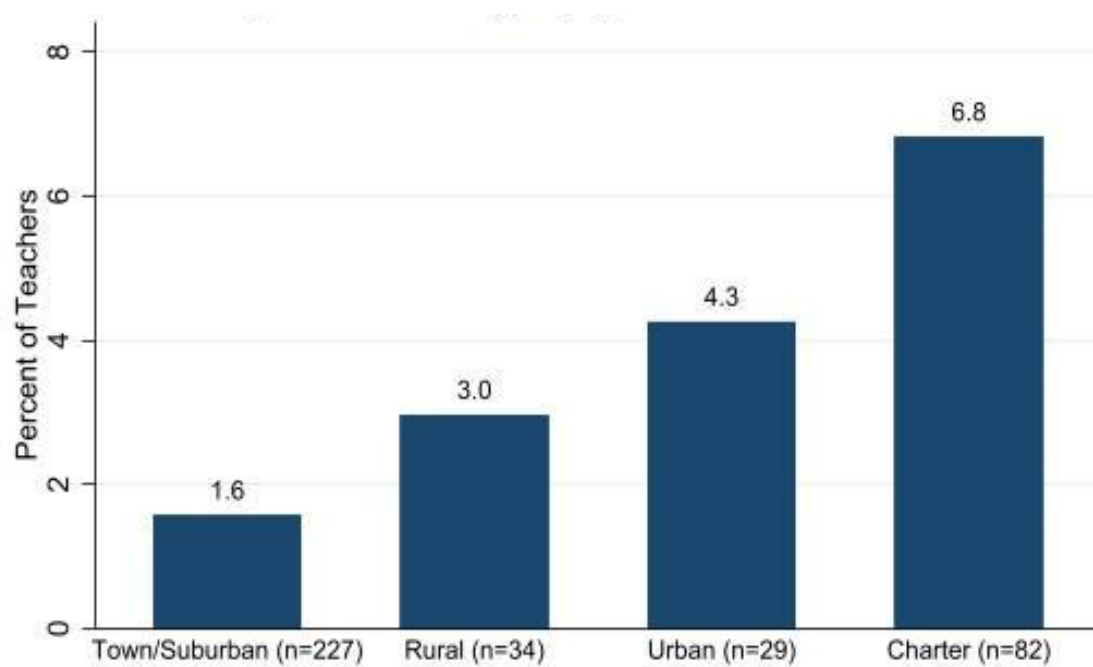


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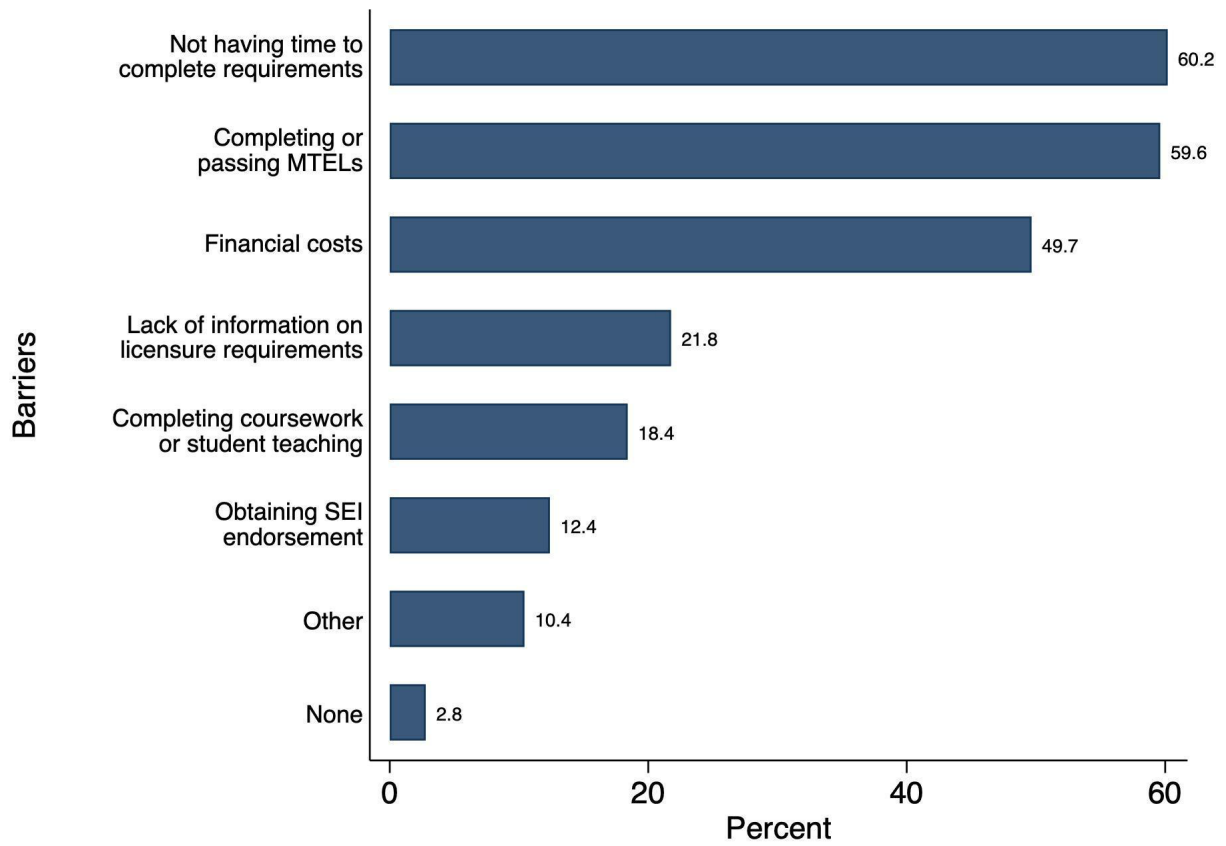
Appendix Figure A3: Fall 2021 Rates of Emergency License Hiring, by Race/Ethnicity

Notes: Data from MADESE administrative data.

Figure A4: Percentage of Teachers with an Emergency License, by District Geography and Charter Status



Notes: Data from MADESE administrative data.

Figure A5: Barriers to Converting an Emergency to an Initial or Provisional License

Notes: Data come from survey responses.

Table A1: Summary Statistics for 2020-21 to 2021-22

	2020-21	2021-22
Mean Experience (Years)	10.9	11.1
Std. Dev. of Experience (Years)	8.3	8.4
Newly Hired (%)	9.6	10.7
Newly Hired w/ Emergency License (%)	1.7	2.6
Female (%)	76.4	76.1
Black (%)	3.4	3.5
Asian (%)	1.6	1.7
Hispanic/Latinx (%)	3.7	4.0
White (%)	90.7	90.1
Other Race/Ethnicity (%)	0.7	0.7
N (teachers)	81,438	82,781

Notes: Sample includes MADESE teachers from 2020-21 through 2021-22.

Table A2: Demographic characteristics of emergency license holders

	Emergency License Holders	Survey Respondents
African American or Black	0.08	0.08
Asian or Pacific Islander	0.02	0.03
Hispanic/Latinx	0.12	0.11
White	0.50	0.53
Other race/ethnicity	0.02	0.03
Missing race/ethnicity	0.26	0.22
Female	0.62	0.65
Male	0.19	0.14
Gender non-conforming		0.01
Missing Gender	0.19	0.20
n	5,851	1,425

Notes: Other race/ethnicity includes American Indian and multiracial categories.

Table A3. Demographic Characteristics of Focus Group and Interview Sample.

Participant Characteristic	Total (n=45)	Focus Groups (n=31)	Interviews (n=14)
<i>Gender</i>			
Female	33	23	10
Male	11	7	4
Unknown	1	1	n/a
<i>Race</i>			
White	30	22	8
Black	3	1	2
AAPI	3	1	2
Latinx	2	1	1
Mixed Race	2	1	1
Unknown	5	5	n/a
<i>Pathway*</i>			
Traditional EdPrep	8	6	2
Career Changer	11	8	3
Out of State	12	9	3
Support Staff	9	3	6
Substitute	4	4	n/a
Unknown	1	1	n/a
<i>Retention Plans</i>			
Staying in Teaching	22	13	9
Unsure	8	5	3
Left/Leaving Teaching	4	3	1
Continuing Pursuing Teaching	5	4	1
Teaching in Private School	3	3	n/a
Other**	3	3	n/a

Notes:

*Tabulated as their last pathway, regardless of if they came from multiple pathways

** Includes retiring/adult education/substituting