



Performance-Based Reduction in Force

Frequently Asked Questions | 2024

What is reduction in force (RIF)?

RIF refers to economically-driven layoffs of licensed staff, including teaching and administrative positions, because of conditions like decreased funding, decreased student enrollment, or the closure or reorganization of schools. Policies around RIF are set at the state and/or local levels.

What is a performance-based RIF?

A performance-based RIF means that educator lay-offs are primarily or solely based on measured aspects of an educator's performance (however the local district or charter school has defined educator performance).

Why is this policy important?

More than half of states allow or require RIF to occur based on the length of time an educator has worked in a district or if they have tenure status. This practice is often called "last in, first out," or LIFO. Basically, those who were hired most recently are the first to be laid off when RIF is necessary. A performance-based RIF helps ensure districts retain the most effective and diverse teachers.

Why shouldn't we use LIFO policies?

LIFO, though widely used, is an imperfect policy for many reasons:

- **Tenure does not equate to job performance.** LIFO is simple to implement but might mean that some early career teachers are let go despite performing better in the classroom than their more senior colleagues.
- Studies predict that use of LIFO policies during the Great Recession led to a **drop in interest in teaching** as a profession and a reduction in enrollment in training programs that continues to drive shortages today.
- Because of recent targeted recruitment efforts to create a more diverse workforce, states and districts using seniority-based systems are **more likely to let go teachers from minority backgrounds.**
- LIFO policies **disproportionately impact** students from low income backgrounds or students of color, who are more likely to be taught by early career teachers.

Are LIFO and performance-based RIF the only options?

No. Districts can use a combination of multiple factors in determining RIF and giving each factor a specific weight. However, **ExcelinEd's model policy** requires educator performance to be the primary factor that RIF is based on.

What performance measures should a state use?

Performance metrics should be defined and selected at the local level. Examples of metrics that a district or school could include, but are not limited to: student academic performance, student growth measures, or teacher performance evaluations.

Why should a state update its policy now?

There is a predicted “ESSER cliff” coming in 2024. Many schools used [ESSER funds to hire personnel](#) to support learning recovery. Because of this, it is predicted that [136,000 jobs](#) might soon be lost across the country, and more significantly in lower-income districts that were awarded greater ESSER funds. Districts will have to make difficult retention decisions; these decisions should be rooted in performance and ensuring students receive the highest quality education.

Can we avoid using RIF policies?

To an extent, but that does not mean a state should not have a policy in place. Thankfully, RIF does not happen often in practice. If a reduction in personnel is needed, districts should and will employ other tactics first to avoid teacher layoffs, such as reducing non-teaching central office roles before eliminating instruction roles or incentivizing experienced teachers to retire early. However, these methods can fall short during times of unexpected economic shortfall or severe decreases in population. Having a good RIF policy in place will ensure the best educators are the ones who remain in the classroom if layoffs become necessary.



Spotlight on [Georgia](#)

Georgia uses flexible and easy-to-understand language that requires educator performance to be the primary factor for RIF and allows for local control of RIF policies.



Spotlight on [Louisiana](#)

Louisiana includes more guidance for districts designing and implementing a performance-based RIF policy, including rights of employees and grievance policies that must be followed.

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