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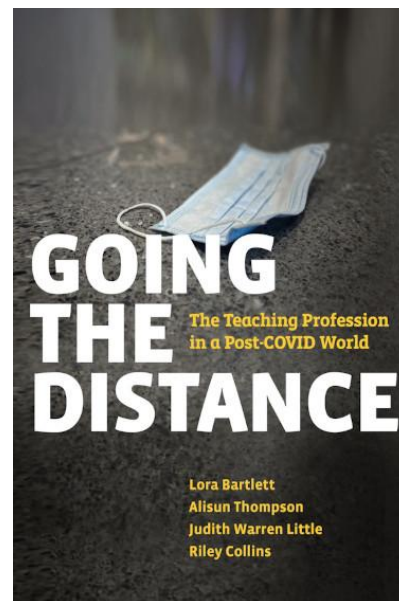
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The teaching profession is at an inflection point. Since the COVID-19 pandemic, teacher education programs have been struggling to recruit teachers, and schools have been struggling to retain them (Diliberti & Schwartz, 2025; Kraft & Lyon, 2024). *Going the Distance* is an essential book for this moment in time. It not only explains how we got here, but through its unique data and analysis, maps a path forward to shore up the teaching profession and strengthen schools.



The cover of *Going the Distance* features an image of a discarded disposable mask, an obvious symbol of the pandemic. Although the pandemic serves as the backdrop for the book, it is about much more than the pandemic. Indeed, this book highlights how the COVID-19 pandemic's disruption of schools revealed pre-existing cracks in the education system. The pandemic, as the authors argue, intersected with decades-long policy trends, including increased workload demands and the de-professionalization of teaching, trends that were already undermining teacher satisfaction and retention.

The authors offer a rare glimpse into teachers' working lives during an unprecedented crisis. They present unique longitudinal data from during and after the pandemic-induced school closures. Indeed, the nature of their data is a key strength of the book. Furthermore, to capture the variation in the pandemic's effects, they sought a diverse sample of teachers, capturing the experiences of 75 elementary and secondary school teachers across the U.S. in nine focal states that vary in union strength and COVID impact. Although their work began during the pandemic, they

ultimately captured data over two full school years, using a combination of surveys and in-depth interviews. Their timing and methods provide insights that few other researchers were positioned to capture. The result is that this work particularly valuable for understanding not just what happened during the pandemic, but what these experiences reveal about the deeper structural issues facing U.S. schools.

The authors are experts in teachers' work and organizations, and they leverage this expertise to contextualize teachers' work within the dynamics of organizations in crisis. They show how, unlike a hurricane or an earthquake, the COVID-19 pandemic was a different type of crisis, one with a slower onset over a longer period of time. This analytic lens aligns with related work, including our own, that has examined how intra-organizational dynamics, such as turnover, restructuring, or internal politics, can generate "creeping strain," which occurs through the slow buildup of internal pressure rather than from a sudden external shock (Jabbar & Holme, 2025; Kahn et al., 2018). COVID, too, with its peaks and moments of calm, slowly strained schools and the teachers who worked in them. The authors describe how the pandemic, like other crises, exposed already existing "social fissures and problems of inequity" (p. 7), revealing inequities that both predated and were intensified by the pandemic.

One of the book's most valuable contributions is the nuanced perspective it offers on teachers' commitment to the profession. Indeed, today's conversations about the teacher workforce are often focused primarily on statistics that quantify trends about turnover and retention, including debates about whether turnover has significantly increased since the pandemic. In this book, the authors go beyond these simplistic numbers to delve into the nuances within them, including new categorization of the "leavers," the "movers," and the "dissatisfied" stayers (teachers who remain in their positions despite significant frustration, dissatisfaction, and burnout). In this way, the authors raise a crucial question: Even if these teachers do not leave, and are thus not captured in turnover statistics, what does having many "dissatisfied stayers" mean for school morale, student relationships, and teacher teams?

The book's concluding chapters summarize the insights from their work by looking at how the pandemic both highlighted numerous pre-existing problems in the system *and* offered glimpses of hope and a path forward. The authors first describe the key problems exposed by the pandemic. They discuss the diminished professional status of teachers, as teachers went from being valued frontline workers to being seen as obstacles to the resumption of in-person learning. They further describe the deep misalignment between teacher and system priorities during the pandemic, a longstanding problem rooted in the past two decades of accountability pressures. This problem only intensified with the focus on quick academic gains to recover from learning losses, leading to teachers feeling de-professionalized and reconsidering teaching as a career. The increase in workload and stress from the pandemic also made the balance between life and work unsustainable, which the authors found to key in driving teachers out of the profession.

The final chapter, in contrast to the previous chapters that focused on the pressures of the pandemic, offers hope. The authors offer a path forward by focusing on what can be learned from teachers who weathered the crisis with their

commitment to teaching intact, i.e., the “satisfied stayers.” Aligned with prior research, the authors reveal how teacher networks, teacher voice, and supportive school systems bolstered teachers’ work during and immediately after the pandemic. For example, their data show how some leaders gave teachers autonomy to establish their own learning priorities or created policy cultures that prioritized local decision-making and used public-health measures and metrics in making operational decisions. These strategies made teachers feel valued, autonomous, and confident that their school leaders were making decisions aligned with the best public-health information available. By presenting these and other cases, the book provides a roadmap to an effective and respected teaching profession.

The authors conclude by arguing for the need to change policy to strengthen schools’ adaptive capacity, which “requires organizations to develop shared purposes, trust, resources, distributed leadership, and a culture of capitalizing on experience” (p. 196). This is a system-level call. Exactly what is required involves broader communication of respect for teachers and the profession, centering teacher voice, recognizing professional skills, and building collaborative workplace cultures where leadership is shared. Importantly, they argue that such efforts will help prepare the system for the next crisis.

Although *Going the Distance* is a substantial contribution to our understanding of teachers’ experiences during the pandemic, there are areas where readers might wish for deeper scrutiny. The authors touch on issues of racial inequality and the experiences of teachers of color, but these themes could benefit from more extensive analysis. Given the well-documented disparities in how COVID-19 affected different communities and the ongoing challenges facing teachers of color, a more thorough examination of how identity intersected with teachers’ experiences during this crisis would have strengthened the work.

Going the Distance offers critical insights into the current state of the teaching profession and provides evidence-based recommendations for addressing the systemic challenges that predated—and will likely outlast—the COVID-19 pandemic. The book would strengthen courses for researchers, graduate students, and practitioners on teachers’ work, organizational studies, education leadership, and education policy. It will also resonate with teachers who want to make sense of their experiences during the pandemic, perhaps validating what they lived through; its humanizing approach may help them feel “seen.” School and district leaders and policymakers can glean research-informed insights that can help them develop better strategies to support and retain teachers, such as concrete recommendations for cultivating the working conditions teachers desire and fostering resilient organizations in times of crisis.

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About the Reviewers

Huriya Jabbar is an associate professor of education policy at the Rossier School of Education at the University of Southern California. Her research uses sociological and critical theories to examine how market-based ideas in PK-12 and higher education shape inequality, opportunity, and democracy in the US. She is co-author of *Discredited: Power, Privilege, and Community College Transfer* (Harvard Education Press, 2024) and co-editor of *Research Handbook on Education Privatization and Marketization* (Edward Elgar Press, 2025). She is also a National Education Policy Center Fellow.



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About the Book Authors

Lora Bartlett is an associate professor of education at the University of California, Santa Cruz. Her research advances and develops knowledge related to teachers' professional commitment, conceptions of teacher professionalism, and the composition of the teacher workforce. As a teacher, she taught secondary school in the

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