

Alternative Certification Isn't Alternative

Kate Walsh and Sandi Jacobs

with a foreword by Chester E. Finn, Jr. and Michael J. Petrilli



September 2007



THOMAS B. FORDHAM
INSTITUTE



National Council on
Teacher Quality



The Thomas B. Fordham Institute is a nonprofit organization that conducts research, issues publications, and directs action projects in elementary/secondary education reform at the national level and in Ohio, with special emphasis on our hometown of Dayton. It is affiliated with the Thomas B. Fordham Foundation. Further information can be found at www.edexcellence.net/institute, or by writing to the Institute at 1701 K Street, NW, Suite 1000, Washington D.C., 20006. The report is available in full on the Institute's website; additional copies can be ordered at www.edexcellence.net/institute/publication/order.cfm. The Institute is neither connected with nor sponsored by Fordham University.

Alternative Certification Isn't Alternative

Kate Walsh and Sandi Jacobs

September 2007



THOMAS B. FORDHAM
INSTITUTE



National Council on
Teacher Quality

Foreword

By Chester E. Finn, Jr., and Michael J. Petrilli

At first glance, the explosive growth of “alternative” teacher certification—which is supposed to allow able individuals to teach in public schools without first passing through a college of education—appears to be one of the great success stories of modern education reform. From negligible numbers twenty years ago, alternatively prepared candidates now account for almost one in five new teachers nationwide. That’s a “market share” of nearly 20 percent. By way of contrast, the charter school movement—just a few years younger—only recently surpassed a market share of two percent of public school students. By this rough measure, then, one might assert that proponents of alternative certification have been almost *ten times* as successful as charter school boosters.

As longtime supporters of alternative certification, we should be popping champagne, declaring victory, and plotting our next big win, right? Not so fast. As the old cliché says, if it looks too good to be true, it probably is.

• • •

Alternative certification first emerged a quarter-century ago. The concept was straightforward: make it less cumbersome for talented individuals without teaching degrees to enter the classroom.

Straightforward, yes, but plenty controversial. Education schools and their faculties took predictable umbrage at the suggestion that individuals could teach effectively without their tutelage. They felt disrespected and saw their livelihoods threatened. All those tuition dollars and state appropriations.

Their allies in teacher unions, government licensing agencies, and trade associations also voiced concern that such a move would diminish the “professionalism” of teaching. If specialized training were no longer necessary, it implied that “anyone” could teach—and thus that teaching was not truly a “skilled” vocation.

On the other side of the debate were those of us (well, Finn, at least; Petrilli was in grade school) who argued that the education school cartel was hindering talented people from becoming public-school teachers. Analysts found education-school students’ SAT scores to be among the lowest on campus; why not open k-12 classroom doors to academic high-flyers and career changers from diverse backgrounds, and see what happens? Why not find out whether top-notch individuals who lack conventional teaching credentials could outperform run-of-the-mill college-of-education products? After all, as a 2001 Fordham report by historians David Angus and Jeffrey Mirel illustrated, the expectation that every teacher would attend a preparation program based at an education school was itself an early-twentieth century invention by the profession, not something handed down from Mt. Sinai (or by Horace Mann or Thomas Jefferson). Education schools were themselves a sort of experiment at one time—an experiment worthy of critique and revision.

Ours wasn’t so much an argument against specialized training for classroom success—all new teachers still have much to learn about their craft—as an argument for acquiring most (or perhaps all) of that training on the job, in the context of real schools and kids. Well-regarded private schools had long employed this model with notable success. Furthermore, in some domains education schools actually appeared to be doing harm. By pushing endless

fads (e.g., whole language reading, values clarification, “new” math) and counterproductive attitudes (e.g., demography is destiny when it comes to education achievement), they were like anchors weighing down new teachers. Why not cut the lines and let talented teachers sail free?

Some policymakers acted. In 1983, New Jersey created the first alternate route to the classroom. It expedited the entry of well-educated individuals into public schools by hiring them as teachers straight-away, reducing or eliminating “theory” courses from their training, and using experienced teachers to mentor them during their first year or two on the job. At the end, the candidate either was awarded a full certificate or sought employment elsewhere.

That model proved effective. According to a Fordham Foundation report published in 2000 (authored by Leo Klagholz, the former New Jersey education commissioner who devised the Provisional Teacher Program), “New Jersey’s alternative certification program has markedly expanded the quality, diversity, and size of the state’s teacher candidate pool.”

A few more states soon jumped on board—including the goliaths of California and Texas with their soaring enrollments and singular teacher shortages—and steady growth followed. Before long, Teach For America (TFA) was born, and eventually came to epitomize alternative certification and its apparent success. (Considering TFA an “alt-cert” program has always been technically incorrect because TFA recruits, trains and places teachers but generally doesn’t certify them.) In 2007, TFA accepted a mere 16 percent of those who applied. A *New York Times* article called it “the postcollege do-good program with buzz.” Moreover, a TFA off-shoot, The New Teacher Project (TNTP), which helps districts identify and recruit mid-career professionals with strong subject-matter knowledge, is up and running in 23 states. Some of its programs (such as the one in New York City) accept only one in five applicants.

In many ways, TFA and TNTP represent the ideal that Klagholz and his fellow reformers had sought in the 1980s: they recruit smart, well-educated college graduates or mid-career professionals to serve in the nation’s neediest public schools—reducing teacher shortages and raising teacher quality at the same time, all at minimum cost to taxpayers and prospective teachers alike. Just as charter school supporters like to point to KIPP as a beacon of what’s possible, alternative certification supporters like to point to TFA and TNTP.

But here’s a sorry little secret: much like we came to suspect that few charter schools are as estimable as KIPP, so too did we come to wonder whether “typical” alternative certification programs are as strong as TFA or TNTP. During a recent stint in government, one of us oversaw a federal grant program for alternative certification programs, and noticed that education schools submitted most of the applications. Yet when one closely examined those proposals, they just didn’t seem all that alternative.

We picked up similar signals from friends involved in TFA itself, as its corps members had to enroll in sanctioned alternative certification programs in order to meet state requirements and to be deemed “highly qualified” under NCLB. Forced to shell out hundreds, if not thousands of dollars from their own pocketbooks for night-school classes on educational theory—after marathon days spent trying to teach high-need kids—the nation’s best and brightest were seeing the warts of the alternative certification movement up close and personal. One might fairly suspect that this unpleasant additional burden contributed to the propensity of more than a few TFAers to exit the classroom when they could.

Yet these were anecdotes. We wanted harder facts. How well do “typical” alt-cert programs reflect the original vision of the reformers who launched this movement? Are these programs academically selective? Do they require candidates to have strong subject-matter knowledge? Are they truly streamlined? And do they offer intensive new teacher support? In short, are they bona fide alternatives to traditional programs for certifying new teachers?

To find out, we sought out knowledgeable colleagues at the National Council on Teacher Quality—an independent, non-partisan research institute. (Finn serves on its board.) NCTQ President Kate Walsh and Vice President Sandi Jacobs authored this study; each is well-versed in the world of alternative certification. As a program officer at the Baltimore-based Abell Foundation, Walsh helped to start Maryland’s first alternate route program in the 1990s. Jacobs taught in New York City in TFA’s early days, then served for almost a decade in the U.S. Department of Education. We are grateful for their hard work, sound judgment, and keen analytic skills. We also appreciate the hard work of the many staff who contributed to this study, including NCTQ’s Whitney Miller and Fordham’s Martin Davis and Liam Julian.

Walsh and Jacobs created a purposeful sample of 49 alternative certification programs in 11 states, conducted phone interviews with their directors, and analyzed the results.

Their findings confirm our fears and suspicions. Two-thirds of the programs that they surveyed accept half or more of their applicants. *One-quarter* accept virtually everyone who applies. Only four in ten programs require a college GPA of 2.75 or above—no lofty standard in this age of grade inflation. So much for recruiting the best and brightest. Meanwhile, about a third of the programs for elementary teachers require at least *30 hours* of education school courses—the same amount needed for a master’s degree. So much for streamlining the pathway into teaching; these programs have merely re-ordered the traditional teacher-prep sequence without altering its substance, allowing candidates to take this burdensome course load *while* teaching instead of before. As for intense mentoring by an experienced teacher or administrator—long considered the hallmark of great alternate routes—only one-third of surveyed programs report providing it at least once a week during a rookie teacher’s first semester.

In other words, typical alternative certification programs have come to mimic standard-issue pre-service college of education programs. This shouldn’t be a surprise, however: fully 69 percent of the programs in the Walsh-Jacobs sample are *run* by education schools, roughly the same proportion as for alternate route programs as a whole.

That isn’t to say that programs run by other sorts of entities —such as local school districts or non-profit organizations—are all that terrific. Walsh and Jacobs found few significant differences by type of program. All kinds appear mediocre when set alongside reasonable criteria for optimal programs.

So alternative certification has been co-opted, compromised, and diluted. Education schools—brilliantly turning a threat into an opportunity—have themselves come to dominate this enterprise, blurring the distinctions that once made it “alternative.”

This is an old story in the world of monopoly power and happens in many industries. Consider the organic foods movement. For decades a small cohort of smallish companies provided organic products for a niche market. But in recent years, Whole Foods and a few other chains demonstrated (and created) growing demand for these goods, at

scale, among affluent shoppers. The annual growth rate of organic foods and drinks is now in the double digits, while the grocery business as a whole stagnates. Mainstream stores, such as Safeway and Wal-Mart, see a threat to their bottom line, but also an opportunity. So do food suppliers like Kraft and General Mills. So they are starting to offer organic products of their own. That's the way competition is supposed to work, you may say, prodding entities to offer consumers what they want.

But there's a downside, too: industry insiders and food experts accuse these big companies of quietly watering down the meaning of "organic." Consider the Aurora Organic Dairy, described by a 2005 *New York Times* article as "an offshoot of what was once the country's largest conventional dairy company." It resisted a move by the National Organic Standards Board to define "organic" milk as coming from dairy cows that have access to pasture. For good reason. "On a recent visit to Aurora's farm in Platteville, Colo., at the foot of the Rocky Mountains," the *Times* reports, "thousands of Holsteins were seen confined to grassless, dirt-lined pens and eating from a long trough filled with 55 percent hay and 45 percent grains, mostly corn and soybeans. Of the 5,200 cows on the farm, just a few hundred—those between milking cycles or near the end of their lactation—were sitting or grazing on small patches of pasture." Aurora's "organic" milk, however, sells for twice the price of regular.

On balance, co-optation is easier—and less risky, less expensive, more profitable—than true competition. So, too, in the world of teacher preparation. It's infinitely simpler, cheaper, and safer for education schools to repackage their regular programs into something called "alternative" than to embrace—much less succumb to—wholesale change. So they offer candidates a choice: either take their regular, cumbersome programs *before* teaching, or take their "alternative," cumbersome programs *while* teaching.

There's nothing inherently wrong with this. Just as "sorta" organic milk at Wal-Mart is finding a market, so too is the "sorta" alternative certification offered by education schools (and similar programs offered by some districts and non-profits). The thousands of teachers coming through these programs must be finding something they prefer, certainly including the chance to earn a salary while paying tuition instead of paying first and earning later. But here's the difference: Shoppers who want "true" organic foods can still find them at Whole Foods or other stores. Aspiring teachers who want "true" alternative certification are mostly out of luck—because the education school cartel is working overtime to regulate them out of business.

Consider the American Board for Certification of Teacher Excellence (ABCTE). (Discloser: we both were involved with its creation.) This initiative is today's closest simulacrum of the original New Jersey program. Candidates who pass an exacting test of subject matter and professional knowledge gain entry into the public-school classroom, where they receive ongoing mentoring. It's unadulterated alternative certification and, to date, seven states have adopted some version of it.

The education schools and their allies, however, again sensing a threat, have launched blistering attacks on ABCTE, keeping it out of most states by lobbying all the usual arguments against the program. (It "trivializes the profession" is the National Education Association's standard line.) To this they've added another talking point: we don't really need ABCTE, *because we already have alternative certification*.

No, ABCTE isn't the only answer. We also see promise in TFA and TNTP becoming official alternate route programs, capable of qualifying teachers for certification, as is happening in a handful of states. The charter school sector is also generating some praiseworthy preparation/certification models, such as the program run by California's High Tech High and a New York City collaboration involving Hunter College (an education school, to be sure), KIPP, and Achievement First. And, yes, there are some praiseworthy models within other education schools, too.

But policymakers, reform advocates, and philanthropists who think they have "won" the battle in favor of alternative certification should think again. Twenty-five years later, concerns about the quality of education schools remain—as does the need for bona fide alternatives: swifter, better, surer, cheaper ways to address teaching aspirations on the one hand and workforce quality and quantity problems on the other. So put away the champagne. Much heavy lifting lies ahead.

Executive Summary

The statistics seem impressive. Nearly all states—47, to be exact—now offer teachers alternate routes into the profession, compared to only a handful of states just a few decades ago. In fact, alternate route programs now prepare nearly one out of every five teachers. Two decades ago the numbers of alternate route teachers were so insignificant they were hardly worth measuring.¹

Unfortunately, today's numbers are misleading. The new programs are often “alternative” in name only. As this study shows, most alternate route teachers have had to jump through many of the same hoops—meeting the same “traditional” academic requirements and undergoing much the same training—as typical education school graduates.

...

While nearly all states now have something on their books labeled “alternate route to certification,” these programs defy standard definition due to their enormous variability. States differ in the types of candidates allowed to apply (e.g., career changers or recent college graduates) and in the academic backgrounds these individuals must possess. Further, the structure of alternate route programs varies enormously, from programs run by schools of education to those managed by school districts or private providers (both for-profit and not-for-profit). The requirements for completing a program run the full gamut as well, along with the support teachers receive once in the classroom.

With such variety, it is easier to define what alternative certification is *not*: it is anything but a four-year undergraduate program housed in a school of education.

Alternative certification was not always such an ambiguous concept. At its inception 25 years ago, there was clear consensus about what it *should* be: a responsible way to get smart, talented individuals into the classroom without requiring them to earn a second bachelor's degree or its equivalent. Alternative certification posed an immediate threat to teacher educators, who viewed it as both irresponsible and as the potential end to their own livelihoods.

They needn't have worried. A quarter century later colleges of education now operate most of the nation's alternate route programs, and teacher educators' jobs are not in jeopardy.

There are three possible explanations for this outcome: the teacher education establishment co-opted the alternative certification movement, or the teacher education establishment saw the writing on the wall and truly adapted its rigid traditional model to a new order. Or, it's also possible that a mix of the two occurred.

What was the true trajectory of the alternative certification movement? Did alternative certification come to earn its current mainstream status just because people grew accustomed to the idea? Or were the original tenets of the alternative certification movement substantially compromised?

To find out, we interviewed directors of alternate route programs across the country in early 2007. Because directors are most likely to portray their own programs in a positive light, the responses are remarkably revealing. In sum:

- **Most alternate route programs have become mirror images of traditional programs, while others closely resemble what used to be labeled as “emergency” routes to certification.**
 - The original notion that alternate route programs should eliminate any coursework not deemed essential to the new teacher has been lost, with many programs requiring about as much education coursework as a traditional program of study. About a third of the programs require new teachers to complete the equivalent of a master’s degree (30 hours) with another third requiring nearly as much coursework.
 - Little effort is made to streamline the coursework, focusing only on what alternate route teachers really need. Roughly three quarters of the programs require coursework that does little to help a new teacher, such as courses on such topics as “educational foundations.”
 - Programs with no reduction in coursework and no admissions criteria (described below) are no different from what used to be classified as emergency licensure.

- **Most alternate route programs are remarkably nonselective.**
 - Unlike the well-known Teach For America initiative, which accepts just one in six applicants, many alternate route programs accept nearly every candidate who fills out an application. Two-thirds of the programs do no better than one rejection per acceptance.
 - Though the intent of alternate routes was to attract talented individuals who otherwise were not choosing teaching, most programs look for the same academic performance that is expected of the traditional candidate, a 2.5 college GPA.

- **Many programs show little flexibility regarding candidate background.** Although attracting teachers with nontraditional backgrounds was the original intent of alternative certification programs, many current programs (guided by the state laws that define who can be admitted) do little to accommodate such persons. Half the programs require an explicit major in the subject to be taught, and only a quarter of these programs allow candidates to demonstrate their knowledge through a subject-matter test in lieu of a major.

- **Alternate route programs provide woefully inadequate training and support to their candidates.**
 - Less than half of the surveyed programs provide a practice teaching opportunity in the summer before participants start to teach.
 - While 83 percent of the programs claim to provide some kind of new-teacher support, most support appears marginal at best. Only about a third of the programs require a mentor to visit the new teacher’s classroom at least once a week, even during the first semester of teaching.

- **Buyer beware: The cost of these programs varies dramatically.** Several of the programs charge the new teacher nothing, while one charges as much as \$30,000. Most programs charged between \$5,000 to \$10,000.

- **No program fully meets the original intent of the alternative certification movement.** Because schools of education have come to dominate the management of alternative certification programs (including 69 percent of the programs in this survey), this “fox in the henhouse” could explain the disappointing results. Programs run by education schools are the least selective with admissions, require the most coursework, and cost more.

However, this doesn't mean that district- and privately-run programs stand out for their quality. They too are not sufficiently selective. They too require all sorts of irrelevant coursework, and, surprisingly, they are no more apt to provide a good mentoring program for new teachers. State regulations, not the choice of program operator, may contribute more to the quality of a program than does the type of program or choice of provider.

Recommendations

In order to ensure that alternate route programs provide a genuine alternative to traditional teacher preparation, state legislatures and departments of education should:

1. Limit the amount of coursework required of new teachers over the duration of the program, and especially during the first year;
2. Restrict course content in alternate route programs to those areas immediately relevant to new teachers;
3. Require that programs not exceed two years in duration and award a standard certificate to teachers upon completion;
4. Allow candidates to test out of coursework requirements;
5. Ensure that programs provide intensive new teacher support;
6. Restrict alternate route programs to only candidates with strong academic backgrounds;
7. Hold programs accountable, through collection and analysis of objective, measurable data on program and graduate effectiveness;
8. Permit various kinds of providers, not just colleges and universities, as long as programs meet all guidelines; and
9. Allow all types of teachers to be certified through alternate routes, without limitations to grade, subject, or geographic area.

Introduction

Before states began approving alternate routes to certification in the 1980s, earning a teacher's license was generally a straightforward proposition: get an undergraduate degree in education. For anyone who hadn't chosen teaching as a career by the age of 18, though, the path was not so clear. States would require a late-comer to complete an undergraduate degree or a lengthy and relatively expensive program of study that was designed to make up for the candidate's lack of an undergraduate education degree. Thus, such a program was usually impractical for anyone dependent on an income.

For decades, teacher preparation and certification faced withering criticism. In addition to the process being viewed as far too rigid, it took too much time, was too divorced from the reality of the classroom and, most critically, did not seem to add much value to a teacher's effectiveness.ⁱⁱ

By the 1980s, a combination of factors made the criticism harder to ignore. First, the criticism did not come from a few unhappy academics, easily dismissed as elitists, nor did it all come from external sources. Martin Haberman, a teacher educator by training, became one of the staunchest (and, indeed, more colorful) critics: "Better people will be attracted and offered a more practical preparation if they can avoid the piffle of traditional teacher ed programs."ⁱⁱⁱ "Piffle" may be one of the kinder descriptions of teacher preparation. Others included "intellectually bankrupt,"^{iv} or "puerile, repetitious, dull, and ambiguous—incontestably."^v Even *Newsweek* jumped on the bandwagon, stating in 1984 that "Teacher training is perhaps the biggest running joke in higher education."^{vi}

Hard evidence emerged to justify these harsh judgments. Significantly fewer talented individuals were choosing the profession. Two education professors, Phillip Schlechty and Victor Vance, used SAT data to document talented high school graduates' declining interest in the teaching profession, a finding that sent the profession reeling.^{vii}

The response from the teacher education community to these troubling findings was highly defensive. Schlechty and Vance were vilified and shunned by their colleagues. Drawing upon the profession's progressivist leanings, a rationale was spun, one which asserted that the profession's undeniable brain drain should not really matter, as it was more important for teachers to be sensitive and caring than to be smart or knowledgeable.^{viii} This defense proved to be very effective, still holding some sway to this day.

The quality problem coincided with a quantity challenge. There just weren't enough teachers to go around. Teacher shortages throughout the 1970s forced states to liberally issue "emergency" credentials.^{ix} Often these went to people with no formal preparation and, more often than state officials would have liked to admit, to individuals lacking *any* college degree.

The irony was stark. States had intentionally narrowed the path to the classroom to ensure entry only to professionally trained individuals, but then handed out emergency credentials to clearly unqualified people when the education schools couldn't meet the demand for new teachers.

Changes in the labor market explained many of the shortages—expanded opportunities for women and minorities meant that fewer of them were choosing teaching. But there was also some evidence (in addition to plenty of anecdotes) that the very process of becoming a teacher dissuaded talented individuals from considering the profession. For example, although public schools were no longer attracting their fair share of the nation's best and brightest, that wasn't the case for private schools operating outside the reach of state control.^x

All of these factors led policymakers across the nation to begin looking for ways to open the door wider to more and better teachers. The solution was “alternative” certification.

The idea behind alternative certification was straightforward: expedite entry into the public school classroom for well-educated individuals who were eager to teach but unwilling (or could not afford) to spend a great deal of time and money in education coursework, and strengthen the classroom support given to new teachers via mentoring and other induction activities.

In 1983 New Jersey was the first state to authorize an alternate route to certification. Following a design developed by then-head of teacher preparation and licensing (and later New Jersey commissioner of education) Leo Klagholz, the state legislature launched its “Provisional Teacher Program.” Under this plan, individuals who earned strong grade-point averages in college, who possessed a baccalaureate degree with a major in the teaching subject, and who achieved a passing score on a subject test could apply for teaching positions.

The idea picked up steam the following year when the California legislature passed its own version of alternative certification. It too aimed at bringing more talented people into the classroom by stripping down or eliminating professional coursework, and requiring that candidates undergo rigorous mentoring and other induction activities.

The education establishment immediately understood the challenge posed by alternative certification. This new movement dared to break the monopoly grip that colleges of education held over the state certification process. As Haberman succinctly explained, “The issue of alternative certification...represents a threat to the power of universities—and now we're on to goring a fairly vociferous ox in an area he has come to regard as his personal pasture.”^{xi}

Issue after issue of mainstream education journals—*Journal of Teacher Education*, *Phi Delta Kappan*, *Action in Teacher Education*—were devoted to this new phenomenon. With organization and funding from teacher unions and education schools, prominent opponents of alternative certification traveled the country to testify against proposals being considered by states. In 1990 Arthur Wise, head of the National Council for Accreditation of Teacher Education (NCATE), called Maryland's effort to develop an alternate route program similar to New Jersey's “a reactionary move, a regressive move, designed to degrade the quality of instruction which occurs in our schools.”^{xii} More famously, prominent teacher educator Linda Darling-Hammond declared war on Wendy Kopp, founder of Teach For America (TFA), which recruits the best graduates of top colleges and universities to work in troubled urban schools with just a summer's worth of training. Darling-Hammond, now a professor of education at Stanford University, described Kopp's young organization as “bad for teaching ... [and] bad for children.”^{xiii}

Despite this vigorous opposition, nascent education reform groups, particularly the Thomas B. Fordham Foundation's philosophical predecessor, the Educational Excellence Network, provided fertile soil for the reform's accelerated growth.^{xiv} Private foundations, such as The Abell Foundation in Maryland and the Challenge Foundation in Texas, provided the funding needed to start and operate alternate route programs in needy districts. Throughout the 1990s, the two sides pounded at each other.

A Movement Compromised

At first glance, it would appear that alternative certification has prevailed. Today, 47 states claim to have an alternate route into teaching. Nearly one out of every five teachers now comes into the profession via these pathways.^{xv}

Numbers, however, don't tell the whole story. Not long after alternate routes gained traction with lawmakers, some prescient leaders in the teacher education field realized that the new programs might not be a threat but instead an enormous opportunity. Rather than working to defeat the inevitable, these teacher educators embraced these routes and, in doing so, ensured that the traditional roles in teacher preparation were preserved. Routes were approved not in spite of teacher educators, but because of their close cooperation and endorsement.

Today, in addition to their longstanding traditional preparation programs, colleges of education appear to house most of the alternative programs. David Imig, longtime head of the American Association of Colleges of Teacher Education, understands that education schools must do this if they are to survive. In a 2002 essay, he said: "If we fail to respond, the policy community is fully committed to bypassing us and creating a world of alternatives and choices for the preparation of teachers and school leaders. They have the will and the resources to do so."^{xvi}

So education schools, aided and abetted by state policy, repackaged their traditional teacher preparation programs by re-arranging the timeline. Rather than take years of courses (and complete practice teaching) before entering the classroom, candidates would start teaching almost immediately and would take their professional coursework at night or on weekends.

But is it fair to call these modern-day programs "alternatives"? Do they stay true to the original goal of expediting the entry of well-educated individuals into public school classrooms? Or are these programs just traditional education programs completed backwards?

Those are the questions this study seeks to answer. It's not easy to do so, though, because it's hard to generalize about "alternative certification" circa 2007; these programs' details are truly diverse, which is in part a result of the variation in state policy.

For example, while some states do not specify the amount of required coursework in an alternate route program, others lay out precise amounts and topics to be covered. The range is striking: Mississippi and Georgia, for example, require only nine credit hours compared to Utah's 30. Twenty-seven states effectively require a Master's degree to complete an alternate route^{xvii}; one state (Florida) actually prohibits education coursework. While 12 states require alternate route candidates to provide evidence of above-average academic performance, 21 set no academic standards at all.^{xviii}

II. Study Design

To find out whether alternative certification programs offer a route to K-12 classrooms that is substantially different from that which is traditionally offered by colleges of education, we conducted a telephone survey of 49 alternative certification programs in 11 states. The program directors we spoke to seemed honest and forthcoming.

We then compared these programs to the ideal, as sketched by the early visionaries of the alternative certification movement. This ideal, and the rationale for our criteria, follows.

Defining a True Alternative Certification Program

What should an alternative certification program look like? We have identified four criteria that correspond to the original goals of alternative programs, and present them below.

1. **Academic Selectivity.** While pursuing alternate route certification, nontraditional candidates need to be able to focus on the acquisition of professional knowledge and skills. Candidates who have weak or even average academic skills may face an insurmountable learning curve, given the quick immersion into teaching that the route requires. Accordingly, candidates should demonstrate an above-average academic background; specifically, they should present stronger academic records than the 2.5 grade point average required of students entering most traditional education programs. That said, a mid-career candidate's grade point average should be given less weight, with more attention paid to work experience and job performance.
2. **Strong Subject-matter Knowledge.** Because alternative programs focus on building classroom prowess, candidates should already possess a firm grasp of subject matter in the field(s) they expect to teach. The availability of a test or other rapid means of demonstrating subject mastery, in lieu of course-work requirements and transcript reviews, is important for teachers coming from nontraditional backgrounds. A lawyer, for example, may be qualified to teach social studies, or an engineer to teach mathematics, though each might lack a major in social studies or mathematics.
3. **Streamlined and Practical Sequence.** Alternative certification programs should significantly reduce mandatory university coursework. Requiring new teachers to take many more than 12 credit hours during the first year (for example, 6 credit hours in the summer, 3 credit hours during the fall and 3 credit hours in the spring semester) fails to recognize the challenges new teachers face in the classroom. The coursework should focus only on those areas in which a new teacher needs to be competent (e.g., early reading instruction, grade-level seminars, methods, and classroom management). It should be possible to complete a program in no more than two years, with no more than 18 total hours of coursework, to keep both the cost and the time investment at a reasonable level.
4. **Intensive New Teacher Support.** Programs should provide a good practice teaching opportunity in the summer before candidates start to teach. If no practice teaching is possible, programs should assign a full time mentor to each new teacher during the first weeks of school. Even with practice teaching, a strong induction program is important, and ideally should include mentoring, a reduced teaching load for new teachers and their mentors, and release time for them to observe other teachers' classrooms. Furthermore, programs certainly should not require mid-career professionals to quit their jobs the winter before they start teaching so that they can practice teach without pay for an entire semester; such programs do not offer viable options for either recent college graduates or career changers.

TABLE 1

What distinguishes a genuine alternate route from other paths to licensure?

Route into teaching	Genuine alternate route	Traditional undergraduate program of preparation	Traditional post-baccalaureate program (e.g. Master's in Teaching)	Emergency license
Structure	Candidates with strong academic backgrounds begin teaching while completing streamlined preparation program.	Candidates complete subject area and education coursework and student teaching as an undergraduate.	Candidates pursue traditional preparation program at the graduate level rather than undergraduate level.	Virtually any candidate is given a temporary license to teach; standard certification requirements must be fulfilled to convert it to a regular license.
ACADEMIC SELECTIVITY				
Minimum GPA	Candidate has undergraduate GPA of at least 2.75—with some program flexibility for mid-career applicants.	Candidate has at least 2.5 GPA in freshman year.	Candidate has at least a 2.5 undergraduate GPA.	No minimal standard.
SUBJECT-MATTER KNOWLEDGE				
Requirement of major	Candidate already has a major in the subject; alternatively can pass a subject area test.	Elementary candidate earns degree in elementary ed; secondary candidate earns subject area major	Candidate already has major in the subject and/or passes a subject area test.	No requirement.
PROGRAM OF STUDY				
Amount of Coursework	Coursework requirements are kept to a minimum—no more than one lecture course at a time while teaching.	Coursework requirements of 30 to 45 credit hours.	Coursework requirements of at least 30 credit hours.	Candidate completes missing academic requirements while teaching.
Type of coursework	Practical education coursework only. No subject area courses.	Education coursework is both theoretical and practical. Also earns major in intended subject area.	Education coursework is both theoretical and practical. No subject area courses.	Education and subject area coursework.
Length of program of study	One or two years.	Three years (out of the four-year undergraduate experience).	Two years.	Three or more years.
NEW TEACHER SUPPORT				
Practice teaching	Student teaching in summer before placement.	One semester of student teaching.	One to two semesters of student teaching.	None.
Mentoring	Mentors assigned to teachers to provide intensive support.	Depends on the district.	Depends on the district.	Depends on the district.

About the Sample

In early 2007 we held telephone interviews lasting approximately one hour with directors from 49 randomly selected and diverse alternative certification programs in the 11 states most likely to hire alternatively trained teachers.^{xix} Program directors were given a small stipend in return for participating in the survey.

The sample included 34 programs run by colleges or universities, 10 programs run by school districts, and 5 programs run by private entities (see Table 2).^{xx} While some states only permit colleges or universities to offer alternate route programs, other states authorize school districts or private entities to operate programs, thus allowing non-traditional providers into the field. District-run programs can be tailored to the staffing needs and training realities of the districts' schools. Private entities running programs are generally non-profit organizations, although some states like Texas allow for-profit companies to operate programs.

There was tremendous variation in program size. Three programs run by colleges or universities had fewer than ten teacher candidates in their most recent cohorts, while one program run by a private organization had more than 2,000 (see Table 3).

TABLE 2

Types of Alternate Route Programs Interviewed by State and by Sponsor

	TOTAL *	INSTITUTION OF HIGHER EDUCATION	DISTRICT-BASED	PRIVATE
Alabama	1	1		
California	12	9	3	
Georgia	3	2	1	
Kentucky	3	3		
Louisiana	2	2		
Massachusetts	3	1	1	1
New Jersey	2	2		
New York	1	1		
Tennessee	4	4		
Texas	12	5	3	4
Virginia	6	4	2	
TOTAL	49	34	10	5

* As explained in Endnote 19, the more teachers a state certifies through alternate routes, the more programs we selected to study from that state. California and Texas certify the most teachers through alternate routes, by far.

TABLE 3

Size of Programs in Sample (n=49)

NUMBER OF TEACHERS	LESS THAN 10	10-30	31-100	100-499	500-999	1000+	DATA NOT AVAILABLE
Number of programs (Percentage of total programs studied)	3 (6%)	13 (27%)	11 (22%)	13 (27%)	2 (5%)	1 (4%)	6 (12%)

III. Findings

The results of our telephone survey follow, arranged under five categories. The first four correspond to the categories outlined above (see Table 1) for a model program. The fifth category, “Other Findings,” includes important information not easily placed in the previous four categories.

How well do today’s alternative certification programs line up with the model for genuine alternative certification programs? In short, not so well. None of the 49 programs that we surveyed met the criteria we established in all four areas (academic achievement, strong subject-matter knowledge, streamlined course of study, and intensive new teacher support) for a model program. Many alternate route programs have become mirror images of traditional programs, while others closely resemble what used to be labeled as emergency routes to certification.

Academic Selectivity

Genuine alternate route programs require entering students to have a higher grade-point average (a minimum of between 2.75 and 3.0) than students entering traditional teacher education programs. GPA should carry less weight with mid-career applicants.

- Alternate route programs too often admit weak candidates.

An impressive feature of alternate route recruitment organizations such as Teach For America and The New Teacher Project is their extraordinary selectivity. Teach For America accepts just one in six applicants. The New Teacher Project accepts just 12 percent of applicants to its New York program.

These selectivity rates do not apply to the programs we surveyed (see Table 4). Six programs (12 percent) accept *virtually anyone* who applies. An additional 14 percent of all programs report accepting between 90 and 99 percent of applicants. Thus, a quarter of all programs accept all, or almost all, applicants. Only 16 percent of programs accept fewer than half of their applicants.

Furthermore, colleges and universities appear to be less selective than district or private program operators. Of the programs with acceptance rates over 90 percent, 12 of 13 were run by higher education institutions. This is not surprising, since traditional education school programs have low entrance standards, too.

TABLE 4

Acceptance Rates* (for most recent cohort) (n=49)

100%	90-99%	70-89%	51-69%	BELOW 50%	DATA NOT AVAILABLE
6 (12%)	7 (14%)	12 (24%)	8 (16%)	8 (16%)	8 (16%)

*Program directors reported the number of applicants and the number of participants for their most recent cohort. These data were used to calculate acceptance rates.

Why are programs' standards so low? One hypothesis is that the state might be pressuring the programs to accept all or most candidates, in order to produce large numbers of teachers. Yet those running these programs do not support such a theory. When asked hypothetically if they would change admission standards if they could, the vast majority (80 percent) of program directors indicated they would not. Interestingly, program directors with relatively strong standards more commonly indicated they would like to raise standards than directors of programs with lower standards.

- Programs don't value strong demonstrated academic ability.

Given the abbreviated nature of alternate route preparation, candidates who have weak academic skills are at a real disadvantage. This is particularly troubling because it is well established that potential teachers are more likely to succeed in the classroom if they enter with good verbal ability, as measured by such instruments as the SAT and ACT (or even a simple vocabulary test.) In short, better students make better teachers.^{xxi}

However, using the SAT or ACT, tests taken at age 17, as the primary criterion by which to judge the capabilities of someone long out of college is problematic. Most programs consider grade point averages instead.

Grade point averages are a subjective measure, varying by choices of courses, difficulty of the selected major, and the selectivity of the institution, so the relationship between GPA and teacher effectiveness is far weaker. With this limitation in mind, though, GPA can still be used to demonstrate candidates' seriousness of purpose. Teach For America rarely accepts an applicant with a grade point average lower than a 3.0. The New Teacher Project, which targets mid-career teachers, requires a 2.75 GPA.

We found little evidence that strong academic ability is valued by the programs surveyed. While most programs (80 percent) reported a minimum GPA requirement for admission, that minimum was usually no higher than that required of candidates seeking entry into a traditional undergraduate program (typically 2.5). Only 19 programs (39 percent) require a 2.75 or above.

The rest of the programs we surveyed didn't stay true at all to the original idea that alternate route teachers should be more academically capable than the traditional candidate. Twenty percent of the surveyed programs either had no minimum GPA requirement or they used what directors described as a "holistic approach" to admissions that included consideration of GPA.

It is interesting to note that although 15 of the 19 programs with a high academic standard are run by colleges and universities, education schools also comprise most of the programs with no standard at all.

TABLE 5

Screening for Academic Ability: Programs Requiring a Minimum GPA (n=49)

NO MINIMUM	“HOLISTIC”	2.0-2.4 GPA	2.5-2.74 GPA	2.75-2.9	3.0+ GPA
8 (16%)	2 (4%)	0	20 (41%)	12 (24%)	7 (14%)

Strong Subject-Matter Knowledge

Genuine alternative certification programs allow potential teachers to demonstrate subject-matter knowledge via a test, as opposed to requiring a major in the subject to teach. While a major is a decent proxy for subject matter knowledge, programs lacking a test-out option fail to recognize that there are many ways to acquire content expertise besides undergraduate coursework.

- Not all programs ensure that alternate route candidates have strong subject-matter knowledge before they begin to teach middle or high school students.

Four programs surveyed (10%) did not require secondary teacher candidates to demonstrate subject-matter knowledge *either* by having a major or by passing a test before entering the classroom. Three programs allowed teachers without a major in the subject area they were teaching up to one year to pass a test in that area. The fourth program, run by a Texas university, only required a certain number of credits, but not necessarily a major, in the subject area. It is unclear if these programs (the Texas program in particular) meet the “highly qualified teacher” requirements of the No Child Left Behind Act.

- Three-fourths of programs that require a major for high school teaching candidates do not provide a test-out option.

Twenty programs (49 percent) required high school teaching candidates to have majored in the subject area they intended to teach, and 15 (34 percent) had the same requirement for middle school candidates.

A major is a reasonable and appropriate way to demonstrate subject-matter knowledge. However, alternate route programs are meant to serve nontraditional candidates; therefore, a major should not be the only way that individuals can demonstrate subject-matter knowledge. Yet, of the programs requiring a major for high school teaching candidates, only five allow a test-out option for subject-area knowledge. Thus, at the high school level, 15 programs (37 percent of the total) require a major but don’t allow for testing out.

The story is no better for candidates with undergraduate majors wishing to teach in “related fields”—for example, an engineering graduate who wishes to teach math. The vast majority (80 percent) of the programs that accept a

related major indicated that additional coursework would likely be required. Several programs indicated that while a related major was sufficient, the candidate would still have to complete coursework equal to a major in the subject area he or she intends to teach.

Given that alternate routes attract many mid-career candidates, we also expected to see some accommodation for professional experience related to the teaching position. Yet just three programs indicated that professional experience could be counted toward fulfilling the major requirement. Examples of professional experience accepted by these programs included a “war journalist” seeking licensure in history and an engineer intending to teach math.

TABLE 6

**Demonstrating Strong Subject-Matter Knowledge:
Program Requirements for High School Teachers (n=41)**

No major required	21 (51%)
Major required	20 (49%)
Of those programs which require a major	
Related major accepted, but may require additional coursework	20 (100%)
Professional experience counted toward major	3 (15%)
Test-out option for major	5 (25%)

TABLE 7

**Demonstrating Strong Subject-Matter Knowledge:
Program Requirements for Middle School Teachers (n=44)**

No major required	29 (66%)
Major required	15 (34%)

Streamlined Course of Study

Genuine alternative certification programs ask first-year teachers to take no more than 12 hours of coursework, and require no more than 18 hours for the total program. (See p. 15 for rationale.) Courses are limited to those immediately relevant to classroom teaching.

- Only 30 percent of elementary programs and 34 percent of secondary programs met our standard for a reasonable course load (18 credit hours or fewer for the total program).

Alternate route programs are intended to provide an expedited certification route to candidates who meet certain qualifications, such as already having a bachelor's degree. Consequently, the nature and extent of coursework requirements should be significantly different from the requirements of traditional programs. Because alternate route candidates are already teaching while completing their preparation, requirements should be the minimum necessary to provide sufficient training.

Most alternate route programs that we surveyed require excessive coursework. Even so, there is a considerable range in the total amount of coursework required by the programs in our sample.^{xxii} About one-third of the surveyed programs preparing elementary teachers require more than 30 credit hours, the equivalent of a college major or a master's degree (see Chart 1). The burden was significantly lower for secondary teachers, with only one in five programs requiring this much coursework (see Chart 2). Colleges and universities run 10 of the 13 programs requiring more than 30 credit hours for elementary teachers and 8 of the 9 programs requiring more than 30 credit hours for secondary teachers.

CHART 1

Credit Hour Requirements for Alternative Route Programs (Elementary) (n=40)

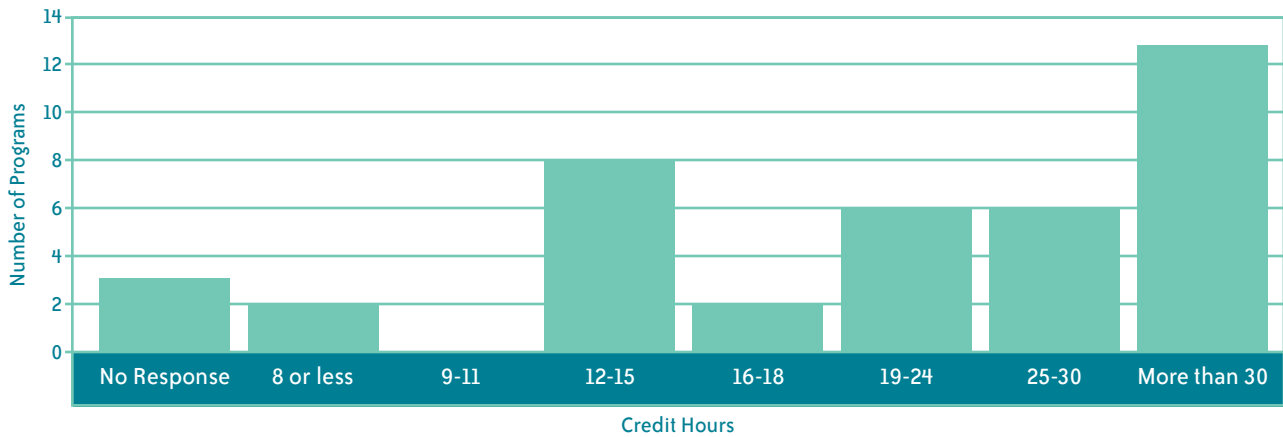
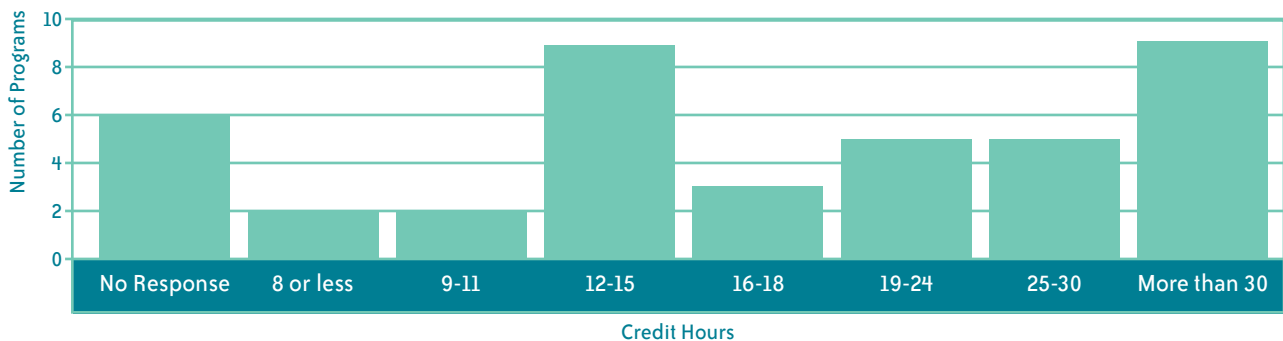


CHART 2

Credit Hour Requirements for Alternative Route Programs (Secondary) (n=40)



- Many alternate route programs require coursework of little relevance to new teachers.

Most programs reported that they had a standard sequence of courses that alternate route candidates must complete. While these sequences did include some practical coursework (for example, instruction on classroom management techniques or lesson plan development), much of the required coursework did not appear to be particularly relevant to the immediate needs of the new teacher. For example, of the 46 programs that provided detailed information about their coursework requirements, 74 percent required courses in educational foundations or theory, courses with little practical value.

This finding was not limited to programs operated on college campuses. District-based programs also required such coursework. Some districts provided this coursework themselves; others partnered with local colleges or universities. In addition, many programs included clearly non-essential coursework. One program required all elementary candidates to take a course in teaching kindergarten. Another included a course entitled “Service Learning in Public Schools,” and still another required the course “Schooling in America.” Numerous other programs required all candidates to take full courses in health education, physical education, and visual and performing arts. (These numerous requirements inflate the cost of these programs, too; see more on that in the “Other Findings” section.)

Many, but not all, programs offer some practical coursework, with 67 percent (31 out of 46) of programs providing instruction in classroom management. Most programs (77 percent) indicated that elementary-teacher candidates must take coursework in reading instruction, although a recent study by NCTQ raises questions about the quality of this instruction.^{xxiii}

We also asked directors about program participants’ attitudes toward the required coursework, and which coursework students found most and least helpful. The vast majority of program directors (78 percent), speaking on behalf of participants, stated that they found all, or nearly all, coursework to be valuable. As to which courses were most helpful, program directors reported participants found the more practical coursework (such as classroom and behavior management [51 percent]; teaching in the content areas [22 percent]; reading [14 percent]; and lesson planning [14 percent]; to be the most useful.

- Teacher candidates would have great difficulty completing the extensive coursework requirements of many programs in a two-year timeframe.

It is difficult to reconcile the reported length of programs with what program directors said about their programs’ total number of required courses and the amount of coursework that must be completed in the first year (see Table 8). The numbers simply do not add up, regardless of whether programs are offered by colleges or universities, school districts, or private providers.

Just four programs reported that students would need more than two years for completion, but numerous programs require as many as 30 credit hours to complete all the coursework. For the most part, it would not be possible for teachers employed full time to complete this coursework in the amount of time directors say it can be completed.

TABLE 8

Length of Program (as reported by program directors) (n=49)

1 YEAR	BETWEEN 1 & 2 YEARS	2 YEARS	MORE THAN 2 YEARS	VARIES	UNCLEAR	NO RESPONSE
11 (22%)	18 (37%)	11 (22%)	4 (8%)	1 (2%)	1 (2%)	3 (6%)

In addition to the coursework requirements, most programs place particularly burdensome demands on their first-year teachers (see Table 9). Only 27 percent (13 out of 49) met our standard of no more than 12 credit hours during the first year of teaching. Nearly as many programs require more than 18 credit hours *during just the first year alone*, our recommendation as the cap for the *entire* program. While it is possible that some program participants were not serving as the teacher of record, we found only one case where the new teacher was serving as an apprentice instead.

TABLE 9

Required Coursework in Credit Hours during the First Year (n=49)

UNDER 12	13-18	18-24	MORE THAN 24	NO RESPONSE/UNCLEAR
13	15	5	7	9

- Few alternate route programs allowed candidates an option to ‘test out’ of coursework requirements.

Many states have specific courses in state history or computer skills that candidates must take. Only eight programs surveyed (16 percent) indicated that alternate route candidates could test out of one or both these requirements. This included six university programs (five in California and one in Georgia), which permit candidates to test out of computer/technology requirements. The two other programs (a district-based program and a program run by a private entity) did not specify which requirements could be fulfilled by passing a test.

Intensive New Teacher Support

Genuine alternative certification programs offer practice teaching opportunities and/or strong induction programs, and they do not require teachers to quit their previous job before summer.

- Alternate route programs are not providing sufficient or appropriate support to new teachers.

Fewer than half the programs surveyed provided teacher candidates the opportunity to practice teaching the summer before entering the classroom. While almost all of the programs surveyed (83 percent) offered pre-service training, only 42 percent of these sessions included practice teaching opportunities. Of the programs that did provide practice teaching, few appeared to provide an amount that would be appropriate or reasonable for the alternate route teacher.

Four programs provided less than 10 hours of practice. Conversely, four programs required more than 150 hours, about eight weeks of full time teaching. All four of these programs required the individual to do the student teaching in the spring, an untenable requirement for anyone who could not afford to quit his or her job before beginning teaching in the fall. Six of the 21 directors of programs with practice teaching could not estimate how much time candidates spent practice teaching.

Almost all the programs surveyed (83 percent) reported that induction activities were part of their alternate route programs. All but one of these programs indicated that their induction activities included mentoring (see Table 10). Fewer than half indicated that their programs included release time for new teachers to observe more experienced teachers or to attend teacher seminars. Still fewer indicated that new teachers receive extra observation from the principal, and only two responded that first-year teachers have a reduced teaching load.

TABLE 10

Types of Support Alternate Route Programs Give New Teachers (n=49)

NO SUPPORT	PARTIAL TEACHING LOAD	MENTOR	EXTRA OBSERVATIONS	RELEASE TIME	SEMINARS	ADDITIONAL SUPPORT PROVIDER /SUPERVISOR FROM PROGRAM
8 (16%)	2 (4%)	40 (81%)	7 (14%)	13 (28%)	18 (36%)	18 (36%)

- The amount of contact between new teachers and their mentors reported by surveyed programs was generally minimal, and not indicative of sustained, frequent support.

Only 33 percent of programs provide new teachers with mentoring at least once a week in their first semester of teaching (see Tables 11 and 12). In a third of the programs, new teachers were mentored once a month, or less. Interestingly, since the logistics would seem to be easier, district-based programs did not report more frequent mentoring than other programs. Of the ten district-based programs surveyed, five reported mentoring once a month or less, and two did not respond or indicated there was no standard for the program.

TABLE 11

Frequency of Mentor Visits (First Semester) (n=40)

DAILY	ONCE OR TWICE A WEEK	BETWEEN ONCE AND TWICE PER MONTH	ONCE A MONTH OR LESS	NO STANDARD/ DIDN'T KNOW
1 (3%)	12 (30%)	7 (18%)	15 (38%)	5 (13%)

TABLE 12

Frequency of Mentor Visits (Second Semester) (n=40)

DAILY	ONCE OR TWICE A WEEK	BETWEEN ONCE AND TWICE PER MONTH	ONCE A MONTH OR LESS	NO STANDARD/DIDN'T KNOW
1 (3%)	10 (25%)	9 (23%)	15 (38%)	5 (13%)

In addition, our findings suggest reason to be concerned about not only the quantity but also the quality of mentoring provided to new teachers in alternate route programs. Only half of the programs offering mentoring reported that potential mentors must provide evidence of being effective teachers. Program directors seemed aware of these mentoring problems, as indicated by their response to a question about what they would change about their induction program (See Table 13).

TABLE 13

What Program Directors Would Change about their Induction Programs (n=41)

NOTHING	LENGTHEN SERVICES	REDESIGN MENTOR SELECTION	MORE MENTORING	TRAINING FOR MENTORS	OTHERS
9 (22%)	11 (27%)	6 (12%)	10 (20%)	2 (4%)	5 (10%)

We also asked program directors what their teachers believed worked best and least well about their induction activities. More than half of programs (56 percent) reported that teachers thought mentoring worked best, while 24 percent reported that teachers believed mentoring was the least effective part of their programs.

- Placement practices of alternate route programs are not conducive to effective support for new teachers.

When teachers are hired and how they are placed has a direct impact on the support new teachers receive and their ultimate success in the classroom. Yet we found that most placements occur in the summer when school is not in session (see Table 14). When it comes to placement, sooner is certainly better than later in order that the new teacher can properly prepare for a specific job. The quality of the selection and hiring process suffers as well, since the school environment cannot be properly gauged in the summer time with students and faculty absent.

This summer-placement finding is also true for district-based programs, which are placing teachers within the districts' own schools.

Consistent with other research,^{xxiv} one in five program directors reported that teachers in their most recent cohort were placed in jobs without being interviewed by the school principal. More than a few placements occurred right as school was beginning. And a number of programs report placing teachers after the school year had begun.

TABLE 14

Number of Teachers Placed During Summer When School Was Not in Session (n=49)

UP TO 25%	26- 50%	51- 75%	76-100%
5 (10%)	8 (16%)	24 (49%)	9 (18%)

TABLE 15

In the Most Recent Cohort, Percentage of Teachers with Assignments at least One Week before School Starts (n=49)

0-10%	11-30%	31-49%	50-69%	70-89%	90-100%	NO DATA
1	1	0	5	13	24	5

Fewer than one-fourth of the programs in our study (12 out of 49) reported that they make an effort to place multiple teachers in the same site, even though placing multiple teachers from alternate route programs in the same school can have many benefits, not the least of which is simplifying the logistics for providing mentoring and other induction activities. Teach For America, for example, presently has 94 percent of its corps members placed in a school with at least one other corps member.^{xxv}

Other Findings

Cost

- Program costs vary tremendously, from free (some district programs) to in excess of \$30,000 (a private university program).

While our survey showed great variance in the cost of these programs, many of their price tags appeared more consistent with those associated with traditional preparation programs than with a streamlined alternative.

We asked both about the total costs borne by teacher candidates, as well as the total cost of operating the program. The responses for costs paid by teachers are shown in Table 16. Three programs reported that teachers incur no costs (two of these programs were run by school districts, the other was a state program run by a university). Two other district-run programs cost under \$1,000. The 20 percent of programs (10 out of 49) costing \$10,000 or more were all run by colleges or universities.

TABLE 16

Total Costs Paid by Program Participants (n=49)

FREE	UNDER \$1,000	\$1,000 - 5,000	\$5,000 - 7,500	\$7,500 - 10,000	\$10,000 - 20,000	\$20,000+	\$30,000+
3 (6%)	2 (4%)	17 (35%)	10 (20%)	7 (14%)	6 (12%)	3 (6%)	1 (2%)

Most programs (59 percent) reported receiving no subsidies of any kind. Of those that did receive subsidies, eight, including four run by school districts, said they received their subsidies from school districts. Fourteen programs (28 percent) reported receiving state aid. In addition, three programs identified federal programs, including Transition to Teaching and Americorps, as a source of financial support. Thirty-one programs (71 percent) reported that participants were eligible for federal student aid, and 25 programs (51 percent) stated that participants were eligible for loan forgiveness.

We also asked programs about their actual operating costs. Most programs did not know or declined to share this information. Of the 21 programs that did respond, nine indicated that operating costs per teacher are greater than what teachers pay. (See Table 17.)

TABLE 17

Costs of Programs to Operate (n=21)

ACTUAL COSTS EXCEED WHAT TEACHERS PAY	ACTUAL COSTS ARE LESS THAN WHAT TEACHERS PAY	ACTUAL COSTS EQUAL WHAT TEACHERS PAY
9 (43%)	8 (38%)	4 (19%)

Given the high costs associated with some of these programs, it should not be surprising that program directors responded that “high costs” and “personal reasons” are the most common reasons given for declining to participate in the program.

The Relationship of Alternate Route Programs to School Districts and State Departments of Education

- Alternate route program directors report having generally good relationships with state departments of education.

The majority of directors responding to our study characterized their relationships with state departments of education as “helpful and cooperative” (see Table 18). Programs commented that state departments were supportive and encouraging of alternative certification programs and operated as a “true partner.” Only seven programs responded negatively, finding the state to be an obstacle to their efforts; five of these seven programs were run by colleges or universities. Although seven programs in Texas responded favorably, it is noteworthy that four of the seven programs that found their states to be an obstacle were also in Texas, with one noting that the state’s philosophy is, “If it ain’t broke, fix it until it is.”

TABLE 18

Program Relationship with the State Department of Education (n=49)

MAKES JOB HARDER	NOT A SIGNIFICANT FACTOR	HELPFUL AND COOPERATIVE	OTHER
7 (14%)	7 (14%)	33 (67%)	2(4%)

It's also important to know whether alternative certification programs have strong relationships with their ultimate consumers: school districts that hire teachers. Most surveyed programs (59 percent) indicated that they were designed to prepare teachers to teach anywhere in the state. Interestingly, this includes two district-based programs. Fewer programs had agreements with specific school districts, and only seven programs indicated they had an agreement with a single school district. Thus, these programs behave, by and large, like those in traditional education schools which prepare teachers for whatever job they might find.

Data Collection

- Alternate route programs are collecting only minimal data to evaluate program effectiveness.

We asked programs if they collect various performance data to evaluate overall program effectiveness and track the effectiveness of their graduates. They all gather data, but it does not appear to be terribly robust. Few programs use key information such as student achievement data tied to program graduates (which, admittedly, is still technically challenging); even more concerning, a quarter do not even track retention data, a critical indicator for any teacher preparation program (see Table 19).

TABLE 19

Data Programs Are Collecting (n=49)

NUMBER OF PROGRAMS COLLECTING DATA ELEMENT	
Pass rate on state licensing tests	42 (86%)
Raw scores on state licensing tests	28 (57%)
Grade levels and subject areas taught by participants	41 (83%)
Principal evaluations	33 (67%)
Participants' students' achievement data	10 (20%)
Evaluations of mentors	27 (55%)
Retention rate	37 (75%)
School demographics	20 (40%)

Programs also were unclear as to what data their states require them to collect. Answers to whether external authorities require the collection of certain data were highly inconsistent within states.

Contacting the Programs

- Alternate route programs are hard to find (literally).

It was surprisingly difficult to contact many of the alternate route programs identified on state department of education websites. The information provided was often incomplete or insufficient, and other resources, such as internet searches, were not always helpful in locating programs. In other cases, particularly with some institutions of higher education, finding someone who could speak about the program was difficult. Some department offices were unaware that there was an alternate route program, while others were unsure who directed the program. This is significant because alternate route candidates must use these same sources to locate available programs. Successful recruitment of program participants depends on the availability of good information.

IV. Conclusion

It has been nearly 25 years since New Jersey passed the nation's first alternative certification route plan, and the numbers suggest incredible success. Forty-seven of 50 states offer alternate routes to the classroom; one in five new teachers each year enter schools through alternative programs.

But numbers are deceiving. Many of today's programs are far afield from what Leo Klagholz and other early visionaries thought alternate route certification should look like—i.e., reduced professional coursework, more mentoring, and an emphasis on the knowledge that the teacher-candidate possessed in his or her subject area of interest. By contrast, today's alternate route programs set low academic standards, backload programs with excessive professional education courses, and provide too little mentoring.

In short, these programs have come to imitate the very education school programs and emergency licensure routes they were designed to replace.

Of the 49 programs we surveyed, not one met all the criteria for a genuine alternate program as outlined on page 16. Worse, few programs met more than one of the four components of a model program.

TABLE 20

Summary of Findings: Programs Having Characteristics of Genuine Alternate Routes

CHARACTERISTICS	DESCRIPTION	PERCENTAGE OF PROGRAMS WITH CHARACTERISTIC
Academic Selectivity	Requires a minimum GPA of 2.75 or greater	39%
Strong Subject-matter Knowledge	Requires candidates to demonstrate subject-matter knowledge before entering the classroom	90%
	Candidates can take test to demonstrate subject-matter knowledge	63%
Streamlined Course of Study	First-year coursework burden kept to minimum (No more than 12 credit hours in the first year)	27%
	Program is accelerated (No more than 18 credit hours in total)	30% of elementary programs; 34% of secondary programs
	Coursework is practical	67%
	Program length is less than two years	81%
Intensive New Teacher Support	Opportunity for practice teaching in summer	35%
	Weekly mentoring	27% ^{xxvi}

Recommendations

Looking across three types of programs (those sponsored by institutions of higher education, by districts, or by private entities) in 11 different states, we did not find a particular type of program—or the programs in any particular state—to be more likely to provide a genuine alternate route to certification. The deficiencies associated with alternate route programs are systemic in nature, resulting from a lack of clear and appropriate guidelines and oversight from all of the states. We have no doubt that high quality programs providing a true alternate route do exist, but the absence of any such programs from our study seriously calls into question the sufficiency of state policies that regulate alternate route programs. While individual programs certainly can and should work to improve their efficiency and quality, program-by-program modifications are not the solution.

In order to ensure that alternate route programs provide a genuine alternative to traditional teacher preparation, state legislatures and departments of education must:

1. Limit the amount of coursework alternate route programs can require of new teachers over the duration of the program, and especially during the first year;
2. Restrict course content in alternate route programs to those areas immediately relevant to new teachers;
3. Require programs not to exceed two years in duration and award a standard certificate to teachers upon completion;
4. Allow candidates to test out of coursework requirements;
5. Ensure that programs provide intensive new teacher support;
6. Restrict alternate route programs to only candidates with strong academic backgrounds;
7. Hold programs accountable, through collection and analysis of objective, measurable data on program and graduate effectiveness;
8. Permit various kinds of providers, not just colleges and universities, as long as programs meet all guidelines; and
9. Allow all types of teachers to be certified through alternate routes, without limitations to grade, subject or geographic area.

Notes

- ⁱ US Department of Education, Office of Postsecondary Education (2006) *The Secretary's Fifth Annual Report on Teacher Quality: A highly qualified teacher in every classroom*, (p.10) US Department of Education <http://www.ed.gov/about/reports/annual/teach-prep/2006-title2report.pdf>
- ⁱⁱ For some prominent examples, see: W. T. Weaver (1983) *America's teacher quality problem: Alternatives for reform*. New York: Praeger; Sowel, T. (1993) *Inside American education: The decline, the deception, the dogmas*. New York: The Free Press; Lee, J.B. (1984) *Tomorrow's teachers*. Washington, DC: US Dept of Ed (ED 346-082); Kerr, D.H. Teaching competence and teacher education in the United States, in L.S. Shulman and G. Sykes (Eds) *Handbook of teaching and policy* (pp 126-149). New York: Longman.; Duke, D.L (1984) *Teaching, the imperiled profession*. Albany NY: SUNY Press.; Joyce, BR and Clift, R (1984) *The phoenix agenda: Essential reform in teacher education*. Educational researcher, 13, 5-18, Boyer, E.L (1983) High School. New York: Harper and Row.
- ⁱⁱⁱ Haberman, M. (Summer 1986) "Alternative teacher certification programs" in *Actions in Teacher Education* 8 (2), page 15.
- ^{iv} Zeichner, K. (1983) "Alternative paradigms of teacher education." *Journal of Teacher Education*, 34 (3), page 3-9
- ^v Koerner, J. (1963) *The miseducation of American teachers*. New York: McGraw Hill
- ^{vi} "Why teachers fail." (1984). *Newsweek*, 104 (13), page 64-70.
- ^{vii} Schlechty, P. and V. Vance. (1983). "Recruitment, selection and retention: The shape of the teaching force." *The Elementary School Journal*, 83 (4), 469-487.
- ^{viii} E.D. Hirsch in his 1996 book *The Schools We Need* (Doubleday, New York) nicely chronicles the progressive strain in the field of education downplaying if not disparaging intellectual pursuits in the classroom. By extension, in responding to the new evidence of teachers' declining average academic ability, it wasn't a huge leap to assert that having intelligent teachers was much less important than having a caring, sensitive teacher.
- ^{ix} Vicky S. Dill and Delia Stafford (1996) *Alternative teacher certification, History, handbook & how-to* (The National Center for Alternative Teacher Certification Information: Houston) and Leo Klagoholz, (2000) *Growing teachers in the Garden State* (Thomas B. Fordham Foundation: Washington, D.C.)
- ^xBallou, D. and M. Podgursky. (1998, June). "Teacher recruitment and retention in public and private schools." *Journal of Policy Analysis and Management*, 17(3), 393-417
- ^{xi} Haberman (1986), page 16.
- ^{xii} Correspondence from Jane R. Stern, President of the Maryland State Teachers' Association to Robert C. Embry Jr., President, Maryland State School Board, December 3, 1990.
- ^{xiii} Darling-Hammond, L. (1994) "Who will speak for the children; How 'Teach for America' hurts urban schools and students" *Phi Delta Kappan* Vol. 76.
- ^{xiv} Edited by Chester Finn, now president of the Thomas B. Fordham Foundation and Diane Ravitch, the Educational Excellence Network's *Network News & Views* was a product of the Hudson Institute based in Indianapolis.
- ^{xv} *The Secretary's Fifth Annual Report on Teacher Quality*, page 10.
- ^{xvi} Imig, D., 2003. "Contextual Scan," American Association of Colleges for Teacher Education.
- ^{xvii} Either because they require a candidate to enroll in a university-based program which leads to a Master's degree or because they require a number of credit hours that comes so close to a Master's degree that it would be foolhardy not to complete a degree.

- xviii National Council on Teacher Quality, *State Teacher Policy Yearbook, 2007*, available at www.nctq.org.
- xix The sample included programs in Alabama, California, Georgia, Kentucky, Louisiana, Massachusetts, New Jersey, New York, Tennessee, Texas and Virginia, as these 11 states account for more than 85% of teachers certified through an alternate route nationally. State department of education websites served as the primary source for identifying programs in each state. Programs were then classified according to type (institutions of higher education, local school districts or private entities). We then randomly selected a sample in each state that included each type of program present. The number of programs selected from each state was proportionate to the number of teachers certified alternatively in that state each year. Since participation in the study was voluntary, not all programs selected in the original pool were in the final sample of 49.
- xx Texas allows private organizations to offer teacher preparation programs. The private program interviewed in Massachusetts was administered by a private school.
- xxi For example, see Wayne, A.J. and Youngs, P., 2003. "Teacher characteristics and student achievement gains: A review," in *Review of Educational Research*, Vol. 3, No. 1, pp. 89-122; Whitehurst, G.J., 2002. "Scientific based research on teacher quality: Research on teacher preparation and professional development." Paper presented at the White House Conference on Preparing Teachers; Walsh, K. and Tracy, C. (2003) *Increasing the odds: How good polices can improve teacher quality*. National Council on Teacher Quality (www.nctq.org) and Goldhaber, D., Perry, D., and Anthony, E., 2004. "NBPTS certification: Who applies and what factors are associated with success?" University of Washington, Center for Reinventing Public Education.
- xxii Some programs did not include credit-bearing courses and reported their coursework requirements in terms of clock hours. For purposes of comparison, clock hours were converted to credit hours at the rate of 15 clock hours per credit hour.
- xxiii NCTQ's recent study *What Education Schools Aren't Teaching About Reading and What Elementary Teachers Aren't Learning* found that in a large sample of education schools, most are not teaching the science of reading instruction.
- xxiv Edward Liu, (2003) "New teacher's experiences of hiring: Preliminary findings from a four-state study," Cambridge, MA: Harvard Graduate School of Education, Project on the Next Generation of Teachers, available online at http://www.gse.harvard.edu/~ngt/aera_conference.htm
- xxv http://www.teachforamerica.org/corps/placement_regions/placement_regions.htm
- xxvi This is the percentage of programs providing mentoring at least once a week, in and of itself a low standard for intensive mentoring.



1701 K Street, NW • Suite 1000 • Washington, D.C. 20006 • 202.223.5452 • 202.223.9226 Fax • www.edexcellence.net

*The Thomas B. Fordham Institute is neither connected with nor sponsored by Fordham University.
Copies of this report are available electronically or in hard copy by visiting our website, www.edexcellence.net/institute*