

Quality Alternatives in Teacher Preparation:

Dodging the “Silver Bullet” and Doing What Is Right for Students

Searching for Quality Alternatives

Policymakers across the United States are focused on growing teacher shortages and new evidence that links teacher quality to student achievement. They are also rightfully vexed about what to do—especially in terms of recruiting, preparing, and retaining teachers with requisite knowledge and skills necessary for teaching the increasing numbers of diverse students filling our nation's classrooms. The solutions are clear departures from the status quo.

By 2005, America's schools will be serving more children (54 million) than ever before, with the total number of teachers growing to over 3.5 million (up from 2.5 million in 1980). To maintain this level, we will need to

recruit 200,000 teachers annually. About half of these are likely to be newly prepared teachers, and about half will be migrants or returnees from the reserve pool of teachers.

While shortages are not occurring everywhere, and some of our recruitment problems could be solved if we better managed the supply, demand, and distribution of teachers, there is no question that an inability to fill teaching positions is already causing significant problems, especially in inner cities, in the South and West, and in particular subject fields. Such shortages are causing many states and districts to scramble to find the teachers they need. A case in point comes from a recent report out of Kentucky, where it was discovered

that 665 special education teachers were not certified in that field, and 265 of them were issued emergency or probationary certificates in 1999 alone.¹ A recent analysis showed that during the last decade at least 50,000 emergency or substandard licenses were issued annually by states.²

As teacher shortages escalate, policymakers have become more aware of the growing body of research suggesting that not only do schools make a difference, but they do so primarily because of the quality of their teachers.³ These research findings, which have only recently surfaced, deliver an even more striking message: Minority students and those of color are far more likely to be assigned unqualified teachers, despite the fact that

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effective teachers substantially reduce the minority and socioeconomic achievement gap in our schools.⁴ But there is even more to this complex story:

- Colleges and universities routinely produce teachers in fields that are not in demand.
- States do not collaborate with each other in tracking supply, demand, and quality data and issues.
- Few states and higher education institutions target scholarships and incentives to recruit and to prepare teachers for shortage areas and for teaching jobs in hard-to-staff poor, urban, and rural schools.
- While our nation annually produces many more new teachers than its schools hire, only about 60 percent of newly prepared teachers actually enter teaching jobs after they graduate. At the same time, we lose about 30 percent (up to 50 percent in the inner cities) of all new teachers in their first five years of teaching.⁵

There are good reasons for policymakers (as well as practitioners and the public) not to be pleased with traditional teacher education policies and practices. Indeed, the National Commission on Teaching & America's Future spoke boldly to inadequate teacher education programs found across the United States. The Commission pointed out that colleges and universities treat education programs as cash cows whose excess revenues are spent on the training of other professionals. Lax teacher education standards and lack of leadership have yielded too many programs that are quite remiss in connecting subject matter and teaching knowledge and providing for extensive clinical training under the supervision of expert teachers in diverse school settings.⁶ With such problems in our training institutions combining with significant teacher shortages, it is no wonder that policymakers are searching for quality alternatives in teacher recruitment and preparation.

Yet the solutions to all of these dilemmas will require *the launching of a set of interlocking policies and practices that begins to put together a coherent system of teacher development*—with serious implications for more coordinated local, state, and regional action. But this is not easy to accomplish. H.L. Mencken said it best: “For every complex social problem there is

a simple solution—that is wrong!” This is indeed the case in recruiting, preparing, and retaining teachers.

Dodging the Silver Bullet

There is always pressure for policymakers to seek the “silver bullet” in school reform. Such strategies are usually more understandable to the public and they are easier to enact and implement, but the results usually leave us searching for yet another strategy to ensure quality teaching and improve schools and student learning.

And this appears to be the case for policymakers in their current search for alternatives to traditional teacher preparation—in hopes of finding the silver bullet that will fill classrooms more quickly and with presumably talented adults who presumably do not need a lot of teaching knowledge to be effective.

We need to dodge this silver bullet.

In 1998, a polling of state departments of education revealed that 41 states offered some type of alternative certification, and over the last decade more than 80,000 teachers have entered teaching via this route.⁷ These alternative programs have ranged from graduate level teacher education programs to shorter term alternative certification programs that reduce the requirements for a state license to traditional emergency hiring practices—sometimes euphemistically called “alternatives”—that fill vacancies in any way possible.

In these truncated programs, teacher candidates tend to get 4 to 8 weeks of basic training in classroom management, instruction on how to develop lessons plans, and a general introduction to the complex world of teaching. They are then thrust into classrooms as fully independent teachers and usually assigned to the most challenging classrooms filled with the most disadvantaged learners. In too many of the short-cut teacher preparation programs, mentors tend not to be available, and the education courses that these novice teachers take—at night and on weekends—tends not to be connected to their practice. Granted, as older adults with more extensive life and work experience, their teaching knowledge needs may be different than 22-year-olds just finishing their college degree and only four years out of high school themselves. But there is still much more for the older candidates to learn—especially in terms of

representing their knowledge in ways that make sense to diverse learners.

Weighing the Evidence

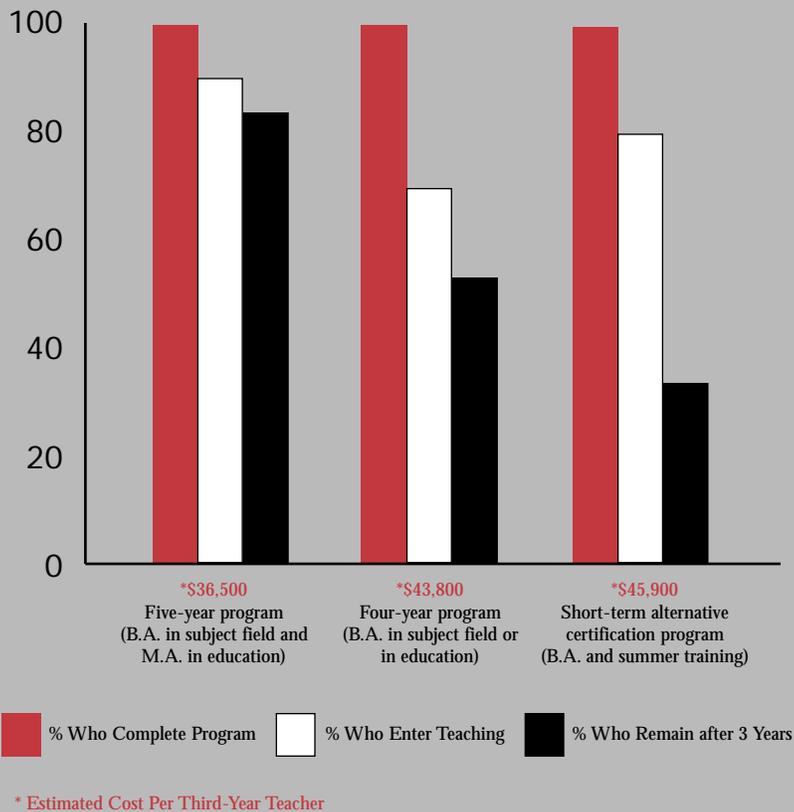
The evidence is clear. Alternative entrants are not necessarily the most academically abled; they are less likely to remain in teaching; and by virtue of their limited training, they do not possess the knowledge and skills needed to reach all students.

A recent analysis of a national sample of teachers who entered teaching through short-term alternate routes revealed that they tended to have lower academic qualifications than those who entered through other routes, were less likely to stay in teaching, and more likely to be teaching in inner-city schools that serve more economically disadvantaged students.⁸ Other studies have shown that alternative certification recruits in mathematics and science have lower grade point averages than their traditionally prepared counterparts and were reported to enter teaching because jobs were available, not because of an interest in children and their learning.⁹

While some recent news reports offer stories of academically strong people entering teaching,¹⁰ there is ample evidence that these lesser prepared teachers are less likely to be effective and more likely to leave. A study of the performance of alternative certification candidates in Dallas who were prepared in a summer program prior to entering teaching found that candidates were rated lower than traditionally trained new teachers on such factors as their knowledge of instructional techniques and instructional models. A much greater share—from 2 to 16 times as many—was rated “poor” on each of the teaching factors evaluated.¹¹

In addition, Linda Darling-Hammond's assessment of short-cut alternative certification programs revealed that about 60 percent of individuals who enter teaching through such programs leave the profession by their third year, as compared to about 30 percent of traditionally trained teachers and only about 10 to 15 percent of teachers prepared in extended five-year teacher education programs. She found that “the actual cost of preparing a career teacher in the more intensive five-year programs is actually significantly less than that of preparing a greater number of teachers in shorter-

Average Retention Rates for Different Pathways into Teaching



Estimates based on costs of teacher preparation, recruitment, induction, and replacement due to attrition. L. Darling-Hammond, *Costs of Recruiting Teachers through Different Teacher Education Pathways* (forthcoming).

term programs who are less likely to stay—and, not incidentally, are also less successful in the classroom¹² (see chart).

Occasionally, one hears of studies that show alternatively certified teachers doing as well as other teachers on measures of student achievement. There are few of these studies. Most have not been published. Some of those that do show discrepant findings have serious methodological problems—like comparing a group of first-year, traditionally trained teachers with alternatively trained teachers who had up to *seven* years of experience or comparing traditionally and alternatively prepared teachers without controlling for student pre-test scores.¹³

But the most compelling evidence against these short-cut programs may be reams of research studies revealing that both content and teaching knowledge matter for student achievement. Studies in these areas have shown that knowledge of subject matter and of teaching and learning acquired in teacher education are

strongly correlated with teacher performance in the classroom,¹⁴ and that teacher education coursework is sometimes more influential than additional subject matter preparation in promoting student's mathematics and science achievement.¹⁵

In addition, there are a wide range of other investigations showing that effective teachers understand: (1) subject matter in ways that allow them to organize it and make it accessible to students, many of whom learn in different ways; (2) how students think and behave, what they find interesting, what they already know, and how to motivate them to learn more; and (3) student differences that may arise from culture, language, family background, and prior schooling and adapt lessons based on that understanding.¹⁶ While these findings come from notable researchers specializing in human learning, any parent would tell you the same.

To be sure, traditional teacher education programs vary considerably in quality from one another and many have

major flaws. Too many traditional programs disconnect the learning of subject matter (arts and sciences) from learning to teach (teacher education). Too many programs do not emphasize the assessment of student learning as the core function of learning to teach. Too many programs are under-funded for the increases in diverse clinical experiences needed to be prepared to teach in diverse schools. Too many programs prepare teachers for jobs that do not need to be filled. All of this is true. But the good news is that much progress is being made to remedy these chronic ills and the long-standing neglect of teacher education in our colleges and universities.¹⁷

However, “on-the-job” preservice training leaves teachers seriously under-prepared. Some alternative recruitment and preparation programs, with a few weeks of “boot camp-like” training in the summer before entering the profession, *may* attract *some* future teachers with sound academic knowledge in the fields they intend to teach. However, these truncated programs do not prepare teachers to work with seventh-grade science students who are reading at the fourth-grade level, or ninth-grade math students who need to master algebra but still struggle with fractions, or students who have any one of a number of learning disabilities or whose primary language is not English. These truncated programs do not prepare teachers to work with parents, score student performance assessments reliably, use instructional technology appropriately, or review the work of their peers.

All of this does not mean we should not create high-quality alternative preparation programs for more mature, mid-career entrants into teaching. In fact, we know how to create high-quality alternatives to teacher preparation—evidenced by the many promising programs that have been launched across the country for recruiting and retaining well-prepared alternative route teachers. It is just that policymakers should not be fooled by the wide variation in the alternative strategies currently in place across the nation. Policymakers must insist on approaches that expect non-traditional teacher candidates to meet the same standards and pass the same assessments as their traditionally prepared counterparts.

Creating High-Quality Alternatives

Effective alternative licensure programs, serving primarily mid-career changers and non-traditional teacher education candidates who are from fields ranging from law and banking to securities and diplomacy, tend to be nine to fifteen months in length and stage the entry into the profession for the novice. These effective programs:

- include strong academic and pedagogical coursework that provides teachers with the subject matter and teaching knowledge needed to help students reach the state's curriculum teaching standards;
- provide intensive field experience in the form of an internship or student teaching under the direct daily supervision of an expert, veteran teacher;
- ensure that candidates meet all of the state's standards for subject matter and teaching knowledge required for a standard certificate for entry into teaching before becoming a teacher of record; and,
- ensure that the new teacher meets all of the state's quality standards for program approval, including those that pertain to teacher candidate test performance and other outcomes.

Examples of these programs include Bank Street College's fifth-year master's program, as well as *Project Promise* at Colorado State University, and George Washington University's secondary education internship program (see box for brief descriptions). These programs attract high-quality, mid-career candidates and give them the tools to connect their subject matter and more extensive life experiences with much needed teaching knowledge. These effective alternative route programs provide a tightly structured program of coursework and student teaching that ensures that people get an introduction to teaching that includes intensive work with a mentor.

What is critical in learning to teach is the opportunity to assess what one is doing in the classroom, why, and to what effect. The National Commission on Teaching & America's Future studied exemplary teacher education programs and found them to be grounded in substantial knowledge of child and adolescent development, while recognizing that different subjects require different teaching and learning

strategies. These programs have extended clinical experiences (at least 30 weeks in real classrooms) that are carefully chosen to support the ideas and practices presented in simultaneous, closely interwoven college coursework. They rely on the extensive use of problem-based learning, case study methods, teacher research, and performance assessments to assure that what their students are learning applies to the real work of classroom teachers.¹⁸

Alternative preparation programs must have these same quality teacher education principles applied to them, albeit the mid-career entrants may very well be able to meet standards through alternative means and on an alternative timetable. The key to quality control—and ensuring that a revolving door of lesser prepared recruits are not foisted on those students who need the most effective teachers—is to ensure that no teacher is made the teacher of record until he or she has met standards.

There are many implications of state action and inaction in this very complex arena of teacher recruitment and preparation, as well as assessment and support. With this in mind, I will suggest a set of policy principles that can support high-quality alternatives to teacher preparation.

Incentives for Recruiting, Preparing, and Supporting

A critical issue in creating alternative route programs is recruiting academically able people with a commitment to children into teaching and then preparing and supporting them in a coherent training and induction program. To do so as described previously may require states to fund alternative route candidate positions at a higher cost ratio in order to offer scholarships for talented and committed candidates, to provide intensive pre-service training, and to offer a paid internship that allows for supervised teaching and time and space to learn. One alternative would be to allocate a full-time equivalent salary for the interns, but pay them at half salary (of a first-year teacher) and use the remaining dollars to free up mentoring support and the like. Another would be to pay the interns full pay and allocate an additional .5 FTE per alternative route recruit. The additional investments will pay for recruitment incentives, tuition for academic coursework, mentor support,

The Crystal City Secondary Teacher Education Program at George Washington University has prepared retiring military personnel and other technically trained professionals for teaching since 1985. Recruits completing this nine-month program come from all of the armed forces. Between 1986 and 1993, the 200 graduates were 89 percent male, with an average age of 44. Most entered with professional degrees, having been military officers or managers. These sophisticated consumers of education rate their training program highly, especially after they enter teaching and realize how much they use the course-work and student-teaching they experienced.

Colorado State University's *Project Promise* recruits prospective teachers from fields as diverse as law, geology, chemistry, stock trading, and medicine. The ten-month program emphasizes problem-solving, cultural awareness, and student needs as well as subject matter and pedagogical preparation. Candidates cycle through four or five intensively supervised teaching practicums in very different settings for up to nine weeks each. They also engage in regular peer coaching. Evaluation is based on demonstrated performance, not credit hours or seat time. Faculty members mentor graduates in their first and second year of teaching, bridging the infamous gap between preparation and induction. Outcome data show that recruits feel exceptionally well-prepared to teach, and they enter and stay in teaching at levels far exceeding the average for traditional teacher education students. More than 90 percent enter the profession, and 80 percent stay over a five-year period. It is no wonder that districts from across the country try to recruit *Project Promise* teachers (adapted from *What Matters Most: Teaching for America's Future*).

and team teaching in the internship year. If the state is going to attract and retain the talented candidates it seeks through this strategy, then the additional investments will be worth the expense.

Data for Decision-Making

As states work to improve their teacher recruitment and preparation systems, they are each impaired by inadequate data, varying definitions used for

indicators, differing data collection methods, and various reporting formats. Comprehensive, accurate, and timely data and accountability systems are critical to managing the supply, demand, and distribution of teachers; understanding the impact of various approaches to teacher preparation; and supporting the policy development process. A number of states offer a wide variety of alternative routes; some of them are quite effective, while others are not. States need to know more clearly what types of programs attract what kinds of candidates. Data are needed on demographic and academic profiles, placement and attrition rates, and candidate performance indicators.

Performance Indicators

It makes sense that mid-career entrants may very well be able to meet standards through alternative means and on an alternative timetable. One way to do this and ensure quality control is to institute a full range of performance assessments that yields information about the candidates' knowledge of subject matter and teaching. Unfortunately, most states use tests that do not fully measure candidates' knowledge of teaching. However, many are piloting the more performance-oriented Test of Teaching Knowledge (TTK), an open-ended response test that more fully captures whether or not teachers possess essential teaching knowledge and can be used in simulated situations. Although this new test will go far beyond any current teaching licensing examination in attempting to measure an examinee's readiness to teach, it will still be a paper-and-pencil exam. But the test will do a much better job of measuring a beginning teacher's professional preparation in areas such as child development, theories of teaching and learning, and diagnostic skills. While this test is more costly (at least \$150-\$200 per teacher), it can offer pre- and post-program information on candidates' teaching knowledge and can serve as a readiness screen for a supervised teaching experience. Perhaps the TTK, along with other assessments, could be used to test some alternative candidates out of certain coursework requirements.

In addition, like other new teachers, alternative route candidates should be expected to pass other assessments as well. In the case of states that are launching the

INTASC (Interstate New Teacher Assessment and Support Consortium) performance assessments, there will soon be an ideal mechanism to assess whether or not novice teachers are adept at analyzing student work samples and teaching and learning across a series of lessons using videotapes. States like Connecticut and Indiana are at the cutting-edge of developing these new standards-based teaching assessments, and their efforts are well worth following given that the assessment process they are using has the potential to reinvent both traditional and alternative preparation.

In closing, it is important to hone in on a few key issues. First, any adult who we call a teacher should know how to teach and have met the full set of teaching standards before he or she becomes a teacher of record and becomes responsible for children's lives. Second, poor college-based teacher education programs deserve competition, and if they cannot meet standards they should be put out of business. However, because we have poorly designed and implemented traditional teacher education programs, it does not follow that all alternative certification programs are effective. Third, no matter whether a program is traditional or alternative, one cannot learn to teach by being told about teaching. One learns to teach by seeing and working with a master teacher for an extended period of time—preferably a whole school year, but no less than a semester—and having ample opportunities to learn how to know children, how they learn, and how to help them reach high academic standards. The children, all of them, deserve no less.

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