

## RESEARCH

## previews

NEW FINDINGS FROM COPSSE

## Special Education Teachers Who Prepared Through Alternative Certification Routes

### What Do We Know About Them?

... Since the mid 1990s, alternative routes to special education teacher certification have proliferated—due in large part to their potential for reducing chronic teacher shortages. Estimates suggest that alternative special education preparation programs prepare 25,000 new teachers annually and the numbers are rising.

Alternative routes provide access to teacher certification that circumvents traditional preparation programs; they allow individuals without undergraduate teacher preparation to enter the profession. With the growth and diversity of these programs—in 1999-2000, teachers who prepared through alternative routes constituted almost 20 percent of the special education teaching force, compared with fewer than two percent of teachers in 1993-1994—it is reasonable to ask, “Who are these individuals and how do they differ from their traditionally prepared counterparts?”

Periodically, the National Center for Education Statistics conducts Schools and Staffing Surveys (SASS) to gain an understanding of the teaching workforce. The SASS 1999-2000 findings describe the changing trends for special

education teachers who have prepared through alternative routes. Read on to gain insights from COPSSE research.

### Alternative Route Teacher Demographics

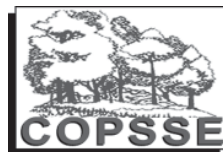
“The research confirms what we intuitively know about alternative route special education teachers,” says COPSSE researcher **Vincent Connelly**. “These programs are attracting more males, individuals from ethnic and multicultural backgrounds, and individuals who are older.” Specifically, teachers who have prepared through alternative routes differ from their traditionally prepared counterparts in several ways:

- **Gender:** More males have prepared through alternative routes than through traditional ones (approximately 21 percent versus 13 percent).
- **Ethnicity:** Slightly more non-white teachers have prepared through alternative routes than through traditional ones (approximately 18 percent versus 13 percent). The number of non-white teachers seeking certification through alternative routes has shown a steady increase since 1993-

## THIS JUST IN

Research offers an inside look at who is being prepared through alternative special education certification routes.

FEBRUARY 2005  
RP-01



CENTER ON PERSONNEL  
STUDIES IN SPECIAL  
EDUCATION

1994, when the percentage was not quite 10 percent. The largest increase was observed for African Americans, with an increase from less than one percent in 1993-1994 to 11 percent today.

- **Age:** Teachers who have prepared through alternative routes tend to be older than those who have completed traditional programs. Approximately 65 percent of teachers who have pursued alternative routes are more than 40 years of age—an increase from 29 percent in 1993-1994.
- **Degrees:** Bachelors degrees are held by almost all teachers, regardless of preparation route; however, fewer teachers who have prepared through alternative routes hold a master's degree (approximately 52 percent versus 60 percent for traditional programs), although trends suggest that this is changing.

## Where Alternative Route Teachers Teach

“Typically, the percentage of teachers who have prepared through alternative routes and traditional programs is similar in relation to school location (e.g., rural, town, urban fringe, central city),” Connelly tells us. “How-

ever, when the percent of minority enrollment at their schools is considered, some differences are evident.” Examples include:

- **Schools with a 0-25 percent minority enrollment:** In 1993-1994, 28 percent of teachers trained through alternative routes taught in schools with a 0-25 percent minority enrollment; by 1999-2000, that percentage had grown to 51 percent. In 1999-2000, 52 percent of traditionally prepared teachers worked in such schools, down from 57 percent in 1993-1994.
- **Schools with more than a 26 percent minority enrollment:** In 1993-1994, more than 70 percent of teachers who prepared through alternative routes taught in schools with minority enrollments that exceeded 26 percent; by 1999-2000 that percentage had dropped below 50 percent.

## Alternative Route Teachers' Feelings of Preparedness

Traditionally prepared teachers tend to rate their preparation higher than do teachers who have prepared through alternative routes. In general, traditional programs are longer and require more coursework, observations,

and practice teaching. However, does this make a difference in alternative route teachers' sense of preparedness, satisfaction, and intent to remain in teaching?

“We developed and tested a model that analyzes teachers' perceptions of preparedness and their intent to remain in teaching,” Connelly says. “We identified one key variable—establishing control—that significantly predicted satisfaction. We found that satisfaction significantly predicted subsequent attrition from the profession for teachers who had prepared through alternative routes.”

One explanation for this finding is that teachers who have prepared through alternative routes tend to have limited experience in the classroom before teaching. Connelly explains, “They may not feel ready to take full control of a classroom. To prevent attrition, more school-based support may be needed to help alternative route teachers deal with control issues.”

## For More Information

Information reported in this preview was based on research that COPSSE researchers—**Vincent J. Connelly, Paul T. Sindelar, and Michael S. Rosenberg**—crafted into professional presentations (available on the COPSSE web site at [www.copsse.org](http://www.copsse.org)).



CENTER ON PERSONNEL  
STUDIES IN SPECIAL  
EDUCATION

### About COPSSE

The Center on Personnel Studies in Special Education is funded by the Office of Special Education Programs of the U.S. Department of Education [cooperative agreement #H325Q000002]. COPSSE research is designed to inform scholars and policymakers about beginning teacher quality, effective initial preparation, and the effects of preparation alternatives. The Center is directed by Drs. Paul Sindelar and Mary Brownell. The research previews are produced by Warger, Eavy & Associates.



Opinions expressed herein do not necessarily reflect the views of the U.S. Department of Education.