

RESEARCH

previews

NEW FINDINGS FROM COPSSE

Special Education Alternative Route Certification Programs

What Do We Know About Them?

... Increasingly, traditional university degree programs are not keeping pace with the growing demand for special education teachers. Alternative route certification programs have begun to fill the void and today account for approximately 20 percent of new teachers.

“Alternative route certification programs are here to stay,” asserts COPSSE researcher **Michael Rosenberg**. “It is not a matter of whether or not to do them, but of how we should conduct them so that they have the greatest positive impact on new teachers.”

Beyond the basic purpose of providing access to teacher certification that circumvents traditional preparation programs, alternative route programs may differ in design features and characteristics. What do we know about special education alternative route programs? To answer this question, COPSSE researchers have been indexing and describing the breadth and depth of alternative route programs currently offered throughout the United States. Their initial study yielded survey information about 101 programs located in 37 states and the District of Columbia. Read on to gain insights from COPSSE research.

Program Development— General Trends

Most special education alternative route certification programs are fairly new, with 51 percent in operation five years or less. According to Rosenberg, “There are many creative initiatives and exciting partnerships between institutes of higher education (IHEs), state education agencies (SEAs), and local education agencies (LEAs). In fact, IHE/SEA/LEA partnerships are responsible for one-third of all programs.” Only 14 percent of programs do not involve IHEs.

Funding comes from a variety of sources, including funds from IHEs, SEAs, LEAs, and tuition. Federal funds support slightly fewer than one-third of the programs. About one-third of funded programs target particular groups (e.g., African American and Hispanic individuals are targeted for funding by half of programs; retired persons are targeted for funding by almost two-thirds of programs).

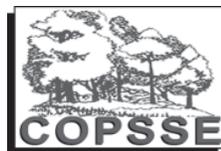
In most programs (88 percent), nationally recognized teaching standards are used. The most common of those are:

- Council for Exceptional Children (72 percent).

THIS JUST IN

Research offers an inside look at new trends in alternative route program design.

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- Interstate New Teacher Assessment and Support Consortium (INTASC) (31 percent).
- National Board for Professional Teaching Standards (NBPTS) (30 percent).

In addition, 52 percent of programs are approved by the National Council for Accreditation of Teacher Education (NCATE).

Program Length and Intensity

Not all alternative route certification programs are created equal. A slight majority (52 percent) report only three months or less of training time before candidates are expected to assume teaching responsibilities. In about 15 percent of all alternative route programs, candidates are expected to assume teaching responsibilities with no prior training. Variance also is seen within programs that target selected groups. For example, in programs with a high proportion of mid-career changers, and in programs with a high proportion of African American individuals, candidates typically assume teaching responsibilities within four months of beginning the program. By contrast, programs with few individuals from these two groups tend to assume teaching responsibilities within 8 ½ to 10 months.

Program length also varies. Approximately one-third of alternative route programs require 24 months for certification, and another one-third require less than 18 months.

“There is concern that some alternative route programs may not allow enough time for candidates to develop their knowledge and skills, or to apply their skills in classroom settings prior to completion, which can add to their vulnerability as beginning teachers,” Rosenberg cautions. “Unlike general educators who can rely in part on their content expertise to help them address unique needs of students with disabilities, mid-career changers—the largest group of alternative route candidates—may have little or no experience to draw from when taking over a classroom where there may be students with emotional disturbance or severe and profound disabilities, and therefore they will be at even a greater disadvantage.”

Program Characteristics—General Trends

The majority of alternative route certification programs (66 percent) have a completion rate of 90-100 percent. However, only a little more than half of these programs offer a degree. Programs

of longer duration tend to have higher completion rates than programs that provide for early entry into the classroom.

Supervised fieldwork and university coursework are mainstays of the majority of programs. Mentoring also figures significantly in program design, with 91 percent from LEAs and 58 percent from universities.

Financial support for candidates is observed in 90 percent of the programs. Examples include:

- Tuition assistance (54 percent).
- Salary payments (40 percent).
- Stipends (31 percent).

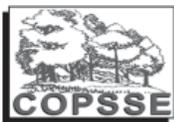
For More Information

Information reported in this preview was based on research that COPSSSE researchers—**Michael S. Rosenberg, K. Lynn Boyer, Paul T. Sindelar, Vince Connelly, Sunil K. Misra, and Val Sharpe**—crafted into professional presentations (available on the COPSSSE web site at www.copsse.org).



TX, CA, GA, and LA have the largest number of alternative route programs—and each state evidences double-digit teacher shortages.

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About COPSSSE

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]. COPSSSE 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.