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Alternative Routes to Teacher Certification in Washington State: Final Report

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The term alternative teacher certification describes programs that allow adults with college degrees to become teachers without enrolling in a traditional teacher training program. Other states established alternative certification to address teacher shortages and to attract mid-career professionals and minorities into teaching. Typically, these programs involve intensive summer coursework to prepare interns for teaching the following autumn. When the school year begins, the interns are the paid teachers of record, although they continue to take evening or weekend classes. These interns usually have a veteran mentor teacher. Interns receive full certification in one to two years.

In 2001, when the Washington State Legislature designed its alternative route programs,¹ the spirit of alternative teacher certification was maintained. Washington's programs include the following:

- Intensive on-the-job training under the supervision of a mentor;
- Curriculum adapted for full-time internships in K–12 classrooms; and
- Emphasis on performance as opposed to class “seat time.”

However, Washington's alternative route programs differ from most alternative certification programs in two ways. First, interns are not the paid teachers of record. Second, Washington's routes include programs for paraeducators with associate's degrees so they can earn a baccalaureate degree and become certified to teach.

Funding. For the 2001–03 biennium, the Legislature appropriated \$2 million to support interns in alternative routes to teacher certification. Additionally, in December 2001, the Office of the Superintendent of Public Instruction (OSPI) received a \$1.2 million federal grant to help mid-career professionals become part of the teaching force. The Professional Educators Standards Board (PESB) decided to use both sources of funds for the alternative route programs.

The programs were operated with two distinct funding streams and rules. Interns received either state or federal support. For the first cohort (2002–03), the state allocated the equivalent of a starting teacher's salary for each intern. The state-funded intern received 80 percent of the salary (\$22,654), and the mentor received 20 percent (\$5,664). The federal grant provided \$8,500 per intern, including a \$500 payment to mentors.

In 2003, the Legislature replaced the stipend with an \$8,000 conditional scholarship.² These scholarships are loans that are forgiven if the graduate teaches for two years in Washington public

¹ E2SSB 5695, Chapter 158, Laws of 2001.

² SB 6052.

schools. Mentor compensation was reduced to \$500. Thus, the program now costs Washington State \$8,500 per graduate, comparable to the federal program.

Exhibit 1 provides a summary of funding and program graduates in Washington’s alternative routes. The 148 graduates of the 2002–03 cohort represent two percent of all new teachers the following school year.³

Exhibit 1
Funding and Graduates of Washington’s
Alternative Routes to Teacher Certification

School Year	Appropriations		Graduates
	State Funding	Federal Funding*	
2002–03	\$2,000,000	\$1,200,000	148
2003–04	\$761,000	NA	95
2004–05	\$1,079,000	NA	181**

* Federal funds not spent in 2002–03 carried over into subsequent program years.

** This number represents those enrolled; they have not yet graduated.

Findings

Who Are Washington’s Alternative Route interns? A Look at the 2002–03 Cohort

In terms of demographics, the initial cohort of interns resembled the teacher workforce in Washington:

- 13 percent were racial or ethnic minorities;
- 28 percent had been paraeducators;
- 31 percent were male; and
- Median age was 41.

Of those with previous college degrees, 47 percent had degrees in technical fields, 33 percent had advanced degrees, and 38 percent had taught under limited certificates.

How Do Washington’s Alternative Routes Partnerships Work?

As outlined in the legislation authorizing alternative routes to teacher certification, programs are established as partnerships between colleges of education and local school districts or Educational Service Districts (ESDs). While the Legislature set the goals, the PESB implemented the programs. Partnerships submitted proposals to the PESB, which then selected partnerships to receive funding.

Six partnerships began in 2002, all in Western Washington. Funding covered only stipends in 2002–03 and forgivable loans since 2003. Before 2004, partnerships received no money to cover resources necessary for administering programs.

³ A total of 7,741 certificates were issued to new teachers in Washington in 2003-04. Rick Maloney, Draft of *Annual Report 2003–2004: Certificates Issued and Certificated Personnel Placement Statistics* (Olympia, WA: Office of the Superintendent of Public Instruction, unpublished).

Tuition ranged widely for the first cohort, depending on the college and the route, from \$7,200 to \$35,000. The most expensive program was for paraeducators earning their baccalaureate degrees as well as training for teacher certification.

Have Alternative Route programs Met Legislative Intent?

How well the programs met legislative objectives is based mainly on surveys of the first cohort of interns (2002–03). These initial programs were put together quickly, with only two to four months between receiving grant awards and the beginning of the programs. In that time period, partnerships had to redesign curriculum to accommodate a year-long internship, arrange for faculty to teach coursework, recruit and screen applicants, recruit mentor teachers, and work out logistics for funding and other responsibilities.

Despite the short time for program development, alternative routes met most of the legislative objectives. Some of the individual programs met *all* the objectives. The Legislature outlined four main objectives for alternative routes.

- **Fill teacher shortages.** Most who enrolled (88 percent) completed their program. Most graduates (86 percent) are certified to teach in shortage areas, and an even greater number (92 percent) reported working as teachers, according to the Washington State Institute for Public Policy's (Institute) Spring 2004 Intern Survey. This percentage is comparable to graduates of conventional programs in Washington State and higher than the 60 to 70 percent commonly reported in other states.
- **Meet the same state standards for certification as traditionally prepared interns.** Alternative route interns must meet the same requirements as teachers certified through traditional programs. At five of the six original programs, interns were also required to pass a new pedagogy assessment, which is still being field-tested.

Alternative route interns were at least as well prepared, if not better prepared, to teach than new teachers from traditional programs, according to field supervisors (88 percent), mentors (76 percent), and principals in schools where the new teachers were later employed (96 percent).

- **High-quality preparation.** Alternative route programs required a considerable time commitment. During the school year, interns took about 15 credits in addition to their full-time K–12 classroom responsibilities. Programs also required more intensive field training than traditional teacher programs. Interns spent considerably more time in the K–12 classroom, averaging 28 weeks compared with 10 to 16 weeks for traditional routes.

In terms of coursework, the number of required credit hours was similar to that of traditional programs. Course subjects and content were also similar. However, course schedules were modified to accommodate the time interns spent in the k–12 classroom, and most programs provided performance-based rather than class time options for earning credits. Alternative route interns rated the value of their coursework about the same as students completing traditional teacher programs.

Mentors were experienced teachers who had taught an average of 14.5 years. Over half (57 percent) had served as mentors before. Despite intentions to train all mentors, nearly a third of mentors to the first cohort reported receiving no training.

Interns tended to view their mentored internships as more valuable than their coursework in preparing them to teach. The more time interns spent with their mentors, the more valuable they deemed the experience.

- **Flexibility and expediency.** The first alternative route programs varied greatly in terms of flexibility, adaptability to an individual's pre-existing knowledge and skills, waiving of coursework, and affordability. For example, in one program none of the interns were able to waive coursework while in another, 83 percent were able to waive coursework. This suggests that some programs had more difficulty creating alternatives to their traditional curriculum than other programs.

“Interns do the same work as the regular post-baccalaureates, but they do it in a year instead of 18 months.”

—*Field Supervisor*

In the 2002–03 cohort, 20 percent of interns with at least a baccalaureate degree at enrollment earned a teaching certificate before the end of the school year.

Changes Since the First Cohort (2002–03)

Alternative route programs have evolved since initial implementation. Two of the six original programs are no longer operating; however, in 2004–05, two new consortia were established in Eastern Washington. Aware of fiscal constraints in administering the first programs, the PESB garnered funding from a variety of sources to support the involvement of ESDs in these new programs.

Programs have made efforts to guarantee that all mentor teachers receive training specific to alternative routes. Programs continue to modify the ways they balance competing interests of adequate preparation through coursework and year-long, full-time internships.

Alternative route programs have the flexibility to adjust to specific local shortages. For example, in 2004–05, one program partnered with a local school district to design a program for music and drama teachers—teaching under conditional permits—while they continued to teach in the schools.

In most alternative routes, interns are not the teacher of record. However, the 2004 Legislature changed the law to permit enrollment of individuals holding conditional certificates.⁴ These interns are allowed to continue to work as the teacher of record and receive their salaries.

The PESB continues to provide oversight. To ensure that all partnerships maintain programs consistent with legislative intent, the PESB issued a Request for Proposals (RFP) in November 2004. The RFP requires all partnerships, including those operating in 2004–05, to compete for funding.

⁴ SSB6245, Chapter 23, Laws of 2004