



Alternative Certification of Teachers

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

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May 2008

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The hiring of teachers not regularly certified by government agencies through traditional university-based training programs and endorsement has grown rapidly since 1985. More than 60,000 alternatively certified teachers are now employed in the nation's schools, both public and private. The chances that a private secondary school teacher is uncertified doubled (from 25% to 50%) in the 10-year period from 1993 to 2003.

Teachers without regular certificates or licenses tend to be clustered in poor urban schools with high minority enrollments. Some regression studies show a relationship between higher percentages of regularly certified teachers and higher academic achievement of their students.

A few experimental studies give conflicting findings on the ability of "Teach for America" teachers to produce higher achievement among their students. Discrepancies among the studies hinge on abstruse matters of statistical methods. There is little reason to expect any consensus on the question of relative effectiveness, or to expect test score data to quiet the debate over alternative certification.

Very little qualitative or ethnographic research on the lives of alternatively certified teachers has been published. What little exists takes issue with the very positive public relations messages from such organizations as Teach for America.

The growth in alternatively certified teachers is spurred on by both exigency (a shortage of teachers in poor urban and rural schools) and ideology (a political opposition to regulation by government agencies and to university-based pre-service teacher education programs that are perceived as too progressive). Whatever the motivation of those who push for greater use of alternatively certified teachers, the movement threatens to de-skill the profession of teaching and even to devalue public education.

It is recommended that policymakers:

- Monitor the placement of uncertified and alternatively certified teachers in high-need schools toward the goal of achieving more equitable distributions of teaching talent;

- Investigate the possibility of creating a nationwide accrediting agency for alternative certification programs that are not covered by existing teacher preparation accrediting agencies.