

The Alternate Route: Flaws in the New Jersey Plan

The former director of New Jersey's alternate route academic centers at Trenton State College presents research suggesting that the New Jersey alternate route model produces ill-trained teachers.

JOE M. SMITH

The advent of "alternate routes" to teacher certification has brought new and increasing demands upon school districts to provide supervision, mentoring, and primary teacher training. Thirty-seven states claim some form of alternate route but the definitions of what is an "alternate" vary widely.

The most challenging models place the major burden for training upon the local school district. The district is required to design the training, find staff to closely supervise the trainee during the first year of teaching, and provide the daily support needed to enable the person to develop as a teacher. All this is supposed to take place during the "spare time" of the district staff. The creators of these new alternate routes seem to have a vision of schools as places with unlimited resources, unused expertise, and lots of extra space.

The two best known of the alternate route programs are those of New Jersey and Texas. Both require the school districts to prepare people who have never had any formal teacher training to be teachers. The districts are expected to provide the additional supervision and mentoring from their own staffs. The supervision usually comes from the existing supervisory staff and the mentoring comes from the instructional staff. No additional funds are provided by the state to support the district's training efforts. In New Jersey the provisional teacher pays the mentor teacher \$900 for the support training but pays nothing for the administrative supervision.

It is especially important to examine the New Jersey alternate route closely because it is the model most likely to be established in other states. President Bush is supporting a bill in Congress to procure \$25 million to replicate the New Jersey model throughout the country. The Southern Republican Exchange is advocating the New Jersey model in a number of states (Connors 1990). The Republican Exchanges in New England and the Midwest also support the New Jersey model.

Two separate studies discussed in this article show that New Jersey's program taxes school's resources while failing to provide adequate training to alternate route teachers. While Texas schools have acknowledged that their alternate route program drains their resources and, therefore, have cut back on the number of alternate route teachers they are training, New Jersey doesn't seem to recognize that quantity of teachers certified does not equal quality of teachers certified.

The New Jersey Model

In 1985 the New Jersey Department of Education implemented an alternate route to teacher certification, the Provisional Teacher Program. Former Governor Kean believed that by cutting the "red tape" of college course work, New Jersey schools could attract high-quality people. This program had a major distinction: no institutions of higher education helped design, implement, or monitor the program (Carlson

1990). The program was also to be operated totally by the Department of Education and local school districts.

The program has two basic purposes: (1) to eliminate the Emergency Certificate and the associated abuses by local school districts, and (2) to attract to teaching the better and brighter college graduates who work in business, industry, or other areas. To accomplish both purposes, the Department of Education developed a route to teaching employment in which one had to be a college graduate, pass the subject matter portion of the National Teacher Examination, and secure a job offer from a school district. The alternate route candidate then could become a provisional teacher able to draw a fully certified teacher's salary.

Two basic components of the program are the required training conducted by the local school district staff and the academic work directed primarily by the State Department of Education. These requirements are written into the New Jersey Administrative Code. The school district establishes a support team for the alternate route teacher at the local school to provide and/or direct all of the alternate route teacher's training. The chair of the support team is the school's principal. The support team has three members selected by the principal: the mentor teacher, a college professor or someone of "equivalent experience," and a curriculum expert.

The Department of Education identified three generic topics—curriculum evaluation, student learning and development, and classroom and school—to be used as an instructional basis for the development of the teacher, irrespective of the subject matter or grade level in which the provisional teacher was teaching or being certified (Boyer 1984), so that, for example, a kindergarten teacher and a high school chemistry teacher would learn exactly the

same pedagogy. The Department decided that discipline-specific pedagogy would be taught by the local school district. As Saul Cooperman, then Commissioner of Education in New Jersey, stated:

...there are important differences in the ways that various disciplines can be taught. But candidates for certification through the alternate route can learn the best ways to teach their subjects from their peer teachers on their support teams (Cooperman and Klagholz 1985).

Alternate Route vs. Student Teachers

In order to investigate the ability of school districts and supervisors to meet the demands of the alternate route teacher certification program, I conducted two separate studies (Smith 1990a and 1990b). In the first study, which was conducted over a two-year period (1987-1989), I focused exclusively on the alternate route teacher and examined the most intensive training period of supervision and mentoring required by the New Jersey alternate route—the first 20 days of teaching. In the second study, conducted in 1990, I also used the same research instrument to compare the first 20 days of the supervision provided to student teachers from college-based education programs to that provided to a new group of alternate route teachers.

The first study involved 105 participants who received their academic training at one of the four Central New Jersey centers. The second study involved 25 percent (73 of 288) of all alternate route teachers in the state beginning the fall of 1990. The results of both studies were extremely clear: the vast majority of alternate route teachers were not receiving the training, mentoring, and supervision required by the New Jersey Administrative Code. The key question was whether schools were *unable* or unwilling to provide these services.

Analysis of the supervision of the 53 college-prepared student teachers in the second study showed that they did receive the training, mentoring, and supervision required of the school districts. The crucial difference between the alternate route supervision program and the student teacher supervision program appeared to be in program design: the alternate route program did not recognize the demands the program made on the fiscal resources, staff time, and human endurance of the local school district staffs. The problem in the alternate route was that schools were unable to provide the services.

The immediacy and amount of teaching trainees perform are important distinctions between these two situations. Research has shown that novice teachers who are gradually inducted into the teaching process succeed better at learning how to teach than novice teachers who begin teaching full-time immediately (Borko and Livingston 1989, Livingston and Borko 1989, Griffin 1985). Thus, there is a serious problem in the implementation of the New Jersey alternate route program, as opposed to college-based programs.

The regularity of supervision is also an important issue. The research in the second study shows that 67 percent of the alternate route teachers were not supervised on a daily basis when they taught, while only two student teachers (4 percent) were not supervised daily.

The State Department of Education's Handbook, *New Jersey Provisional Teacher Program* (New Jersey Department of Education 1988), recommends that an inexperienced teacher not be permitted to teach a full day until the end of the second or third week. The development of the teacher trainee is to be gradual, with the assumption of regular full-time duties in the fourth week. The data show that 56 (77 percent) of the 73 alternate route teachers began teaching full-time in the first week. Seventeen (23 percent) of the alternate route teachers were never

observed by anyone during the entire 20 days. Yet the Department of Education provided lifetime teaching certificates to 98 percent of those who completed the program (Kuhles 1990). To justify this, one would have to believe that the vast majority of alternate route teachers were so "experienced" that they did not require supervised and gradual induction or that the neglect they suffered in the first 20 days was somehow compensated for later.

The Handbook stresses the importance of "good supervisory practices" (Cooperman 1986, New Jersey Department of Education 1988), yet the data show that few of these good supervisory practices are being implemented. All 73 alternate route teachers taught, yet only 11 percent of their instructional days were preceded by a pre-observation conference; in contrast, the student teachers had pre-observation conferences for 66 percent of their instructional days.

The Handbook specifies that alternate route teachers are to meet with their support team on a regular basis and receive direction on what training is needed and where to obtain it. They are also to meet independently with their mentor teacher for the discipline-specific instruction referred to by former Commissioner Cooperman.

Yet the data of the second study show that in the first week 49 (67 percent) alternate route teachers did not meet even once with their mentor, 43 (51 percent) never met their principal, and 72 (99 percent) had no meeting with the support team. This held true for the second week as well. In the third and fourth week, no alternate route teacher had a meeting with a support team. In addition, 26 (36 percent) of the alternate route teachers never met with their mentor teacher; 30 (41 percent) never met with the principal, and 17 (23 percent) never met with anyone. The only place the alternate route teacher would receive discipline-specific and/or grade-specific methodologies would be with the members of the support team.

(mentor, principal, curriculum supervisor, designated colleague).

Both the alternate route teachers and the student teachers are supposed to observe their mentors and other teachers performing in the classroom. The data show that while 100 percent of the student teachers performed these observations, only 55 percent of the alternate route teachers did. The 53 student teachers performed 5.5 times as many observations (2641) as the 73 alternate route teachers (488).

The data suggest that much of the

fault with the New Jersey alternate route program lies in its fundamental assumptions. Although former Commissioner Cooperman has a school district background, the program design does not consider the constraints under which school districts operate, especially urban districts, which are the heaviest program users (New Jersey Department of Education December 1989). The program assumes that school districts have the financial resources, available staff, and additional time to conduct novice teacher training on their own

while school is in session. To expect this of school districts, especially large urban districts, is at best naive. The data in these two studies show that the vast majority of the alternate route trainees have not received the most intensive phase of their field-based professional training.

Quantity Doesn't Mean Quality

The program design of the Texas alternate route program operated by the Dallas Independent School District is

The Alternate Route: Testimonial from

DENA E. FRANKE

Be careful," I playfully cautioned Renae, her fresh, eager face before me. "You'll fall in love. You will not be able to extricate yourself. It's very addictive, you know." The words out, I considered how they echoed typical advice given to a friend bent on a destructive relationship, one that could only leave her emotionally damaged, irrevocably hurt. Not exactly the message I wished to convey to this young woman with an interest in teaching—for, you see, teaching is my life, a love of mine.

I didn't require a university professor to instill this love or devotion. Always present, it waited only for my students to activate it. Fresh out of college, I discovered this love firsthand in the classroom without any of the "benefits" of Curriculum and Instruction or Educational Psychology.

I graduated with a B.A. in English with no idea of what career I might want to pursue. I was intent on leaving my options open, but soon found that all the "doors of opportunity" seemed

closed. And I needed money — oh, how I needed money!

A friend, noting my pecuniary situation, advised me to go into teaching. I had considered this previously, but had discovered to my dismay that a teaching certificate would entail another full year of college. Since neither I nor my pocketbook could withstand this, I dismissed the idea as impossible. But one day, in the confines of a campus restroom, the SECRET was disclosed: Yes, you could teach with just a degree, without certification. Incredible!

Snatching the phone book from a nearby pay phone, I quickly dialed four school districts near our rural community. Two wanted to interview me, and one verbally hired me over the phone. They interviewed me 45 minutes later, and I left, incredulous, with an official contract, a license to teach English as a Second Language, grades 6, 7, and 8.

The Alternative Certification Program

I became an alternative certification intern in a program in San Antonio, Texas—its second class of new

teacher graduates from the area. The experience gave me a sense of direction and provided me with a rewarding career full of personal challenge and the potential for advancement. That was five years ago, and yet, even though the alternate route program remains in place, countless individuals like Renae remain unaware of it, its benefits to both the individual and the public, its opportunities lying needlessly dormant.

Many individuals with content-specific knowledge shy away from pursuing a teaching certificate because of the 1-2 years of study often required by universities for a teaching certificate. They view the process as too time-consuming or expensive. At the same time, Texas suffers a critical teacher shortage (Texas Education Center 1990).

Alternative certification programs are implemented by teachers, district specialists, professors, and education service leaders. They offer a more accessible route to the teaching profession for a diverse population, including degreed graduates with content-based qualifications, mid-career professionals eager for a change, and minority and male candi-

similar to the New Jersey program (Lutz and Hutton 1989). The Dallas program began with 110 alternate route teachers who were selected after a nationwide search. Of the 110 who began the program, only 59 (54 percent) were certified at the end of the first year. The Dallas experience is informative in other ways. The school district found that the training drained their resources and they are now training fewer alternate route teachers.

The New Jersey Department of Education boasts that 98 percent of

those who began its program were certified at the end of one full year of teaching (Kuhles 1990)—it uses the 98 percent certification rate to prove the “success” of the program. But both my studies investigating the New Jersey program and my comparisons of the New Jersey program and the Texas program lead me to a different conclusion: The New Jersey alternate route program has standards so poorly enforced that it seems almost impossible for participants not to be certified.

This research has become quite

controversial, especially since I served as the director of the largest number of alternate route academic centers under contract to the New Jersey Department of Education for the first five years of the program, a position which enabled me to gather the data presented here.

I have been, and continue to be, a proponent of alternative teacher certification. However, the way things have been going, the New Jersey type of alternate route will continue to make training demands upon school districts that are already financially strapped, under-

a Texas Teacher

dates, who are largely underrepresented in the teaching profession. Programs like the Alternative Certification Program (ACP) in Texas allow such individuals the opportunity to become strong, self-motivated educators (Texas Education Center 1990).

Candidate Requirements

Entry requirements to ACP are straightforward and unwavering: Candidates must hold a bachelor's degree or higher from an accredited institution of higher education with a grade point average not lower than 2.5. They must pass all the domains (math, reading, and writing) on the TASB (a state-mandated basic skills test) and have the minimum or above of required semester hours in the field in which certification is sought (Texas Education Center 1990, p. 2).

At the Education Service Center in San Antonio, the program involves a personal investment of approximately \$2,500 deducted from the intern's salary during the course of the school year. The intern's responsibilities include payment for any extra coursework required for certification and securing employment within a participating school district (Education Service Center, Region 20 1991-92).

While interns receive beginning teacher salary, they must attend required seminars beginning each year in June and involving several Saturdays each month during the school year. These workshops focus on a vast array of educational concerns such as behavior modification, motivation, the lesson cycle, the appraisal instrument, and other targeted areas in public education (Texas Education Agency 1990).

To assist the intern, an on-campus supervising teacher periodically visits the classroom to offer constructive suggestions and classroom strategies. In addition, interns observe 20 hours of classroom teaching on their own campuses and at others within the school district. At the successful completion of the internship, the candidate is recommended for certification (Texas Education Agency 1990).

Diversity for the Teaching Profession

Perhaps the greatest advantage of the Alternative Certificate Program for schools hinges on the diversity of people brought into the teaching profession—individuals who, in many cases, have had high-powered, interesting careers and now have a strong desire to help

teach the next generation. ACP interns include former attorneys, dentists, doctors, bankers, realtors, geologists, architects, and a host of other professional individuals who have a desire to shape the future (Texas Education Agency 1990).

That our young people can benefit from their expertise is abundantly clear. We, as educators, can also learn from their varied experiences. The future growth of education lies within the power of the fresh, eager faces like Renae's—people who are intent on making a difference, who are willing to get involved. In many ways, ACP represents the future of Texas education. □

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Dena E. Franke is a 9th grade English teacher, Pleasonton Independent School District, 831 Stadium Dr., Pleasonton, TX 78064

staffed, and emotionally drained. School districts will take in alternate route teachers because there is no other way of filling positions—the emergency certificates for these jobs have been eliminated. Supervisors and principals will be asked to direct and to conduct the training without any additional support. The greatest frustration will be in knowing that no one cares whether the alternate route teacher is properly trained. The burden of caring is left to the local supervisor and staff who are not provided the time and resources to do the job.

Author's note: The Mid-Career Teacher Training Grants sponsored by the U.S. Department of Education now require collaborations among institutions of higher education, schools, and the private sector as a way to remedy the

teacher education problem. These grants offer hope for the alternative route. For further information write: Office of Educational Research and Improvement (OERI), Programs for Improvement of Practice, 555 New Jersey Ave., N.W., Washington, DC 20208; or call: 202-219-1558.

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Joe M. Smith is Associate Professor, Trenton State College, Department of Educational Administration and Secondary Education, CN 4700, Trenton, NJ 08650-4700.

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