

Principals give high grades to alternative certification teachers

BY Catherine Kearney
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California principals overwhelmingly – nearly 90 percent – rank teachers currently going through an alternative route to certification program (or intern program) as good as or better than other beginning teachers, according to new employer data compiled by the California Commission on Teacher Credentialing (CCTC).**

This comes as no surprise to the [California Teacher Corps](#), the statewide organization representing California's alternative route to certification programs. Nor does this come as a surprise to the 55,000 teachers who entered the profession through this pathway over the last seven years, as well as our approximately 70 programs that recruited, trained, and effectively prepared these teachers to serve in hard-to-staff, high-needs public schools across the state.

Teacher Corps programs attract second-career professionals and other content experts who are committed to teaching in underserved communities. Our teachers, who might not have entered the profession if not for this pathway, most often come from the community in which they are serving and have the tools necessary to meet the diverse, and often challenging, needs of their students.

These teachers are dedicated to closing the achievement gap, and more often than not choose to be placed in the state's hardest-to-staff public schools. According to the same CCTC employer data, nearly 84 percent of hiring school districts believe that alternative route to certification programs help to meet their district and school improvement goals.

The characteristics we look for when recruiting professionals into teaching are content expertise, career and life experience, the ability to take charge of a classroom immediately, an understanding of the community in which they are teaching, and a long-term commitment to teaching – all attributes that we have found allow teachers to more effectively serve their students.

Our teachers must then undergo a rigorous, and selective, process that ensures they are well-prepared to teach in our public schools. This includes passing a comprehensive subject-matter competency test and completing the equivalent of a full semester's worth, or 160 hours, of instruction, most importantly pedagogy, classroom management, and lesson design. Upon entering the classroom, our teachers continue to take coursework, as well as participate in intensive mentoring and coaching from veteran educators for up to two years. This mentorship has been noted as a key driver in the high retention of our teachers: After five years, more than 70 percent of our teachers are still on the job, while nationally one in three teachers leaves the profession within five years.

Based on the same employer data by the Commission, employers also believed that teachers from alternative route to certification programs were as good as or better than other beginning teachers in planning and implementing instruction (91.1%), classroom management (90.1%), and providing effective teaching strategies (90.1%).

A critical source of STEM teachers

In California, the alternative pathway was originally established more than 20 years ago to increase the effectiveness of teachers by placing theory and practice more closely together in a teacher preparation program. Today, our programs are focusing on addressing California's critical need to fill math, science and special education teaching positions. Over the past few years, we have recruited and placed 1,300 math and science teachers; we have also retrained 1,500 laid-off general education teachers and shifted them into high-needs special education teaching positions.

These efforts have not gone unnoticed by the school districts we serve, with 85 percent stating that our programs have helped to meet their need for teachers in critical-shortage subject areas. We are able to do so because of the direct partnerships we form with these school districts, allowing us to tailor the recruitment and placement of teachers to the districts' individual needs.

We know that there are countless more second-career professionals who are interested in the teaching profession, but who are unaware of the availability of this pathway. They are lawyers, military men and women, scientists, bankers, and many more, who can pursue their dream of teaching and make a long-term commitment to the profession through the alternative pathway.

At a time when one-third of the state's teachers are on track for retirement over the next decade, it is important that we continue to tap this talent pool and provide them the best training and preparation we can to ensure they are effective in the classroom.

California's principals and school districts have weighed in – these teachers are an invaluable asset to our public school system. It is vital that we not only recognize the importance of having multiple pathways into the classroom, but that we continue to invest in these teacher preparation pathways and the committed teachers who are serving in our public schools. By doing so, we are taking the bold steps necessary to improve public education statewide.

*** The California Commission on Teacher Credentialing (CCTC) annually conducts a survey of hiring school districts for the purposes of program improvement. The data in this op-ed is based on the survey findings of principals at nearly 500 schools across California compiled in the spring of 2010. This data reflects the performance of more than 4,000 teachers placed from the California Teacher Corps' alternative certification programs last year.* <http://www.ctc.ca.gov/educator-prep/intern/default.html>

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The California Teacher Corps is a nonprofit organization established in 2009 with the goal of placing 100,000 highly qualified teachers in California's communities by 2020. The Teacher Corps provides a unified voice for the state's alternative certification programs, proactively addresses teacher preparation issues facing California, and recruits the best and the brightest professionals to teach in the public schools that need them most. For more information, visit the [California Teacher Corps](#).