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Principals praise alternative teacher credentialing

An annual survey released today by the California Commission on Teacher Credentialing gives high marks to beginning teachers who've entered the profession through fast-track alternative certification programs.

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The vast majority of public school teachers still earn their credentials after they study at university-based schools of education. But about 6,500 beginning teachers in California, many of them second-career teachers, didn't take that route. They've completed programs that propel them more quickly into in-demand teaching positions.

Dale Janssen, head of the Commission on Teacher Credentialing, said his group's survey indicated that more than 90 percent of principals found these teachers as good as or better than beginning teachers with more traditional training. "The intern programs, at least according to the administrators, are functioning in their classrooms very well. They are providing instruction, that they are as good as or better than an individual who may have come through a university program."

The umbrella group for alternative credentialing programs wants to place 100,000 alternative credential teachers in state public schools during the next decade. Margo Pensavalle of USC's School of Education expressed concern about the on-the-job training that characterizes these programs. "I don't know how it can be OK that we send teachers in to teach schools if they haven't had a foundation of learning theory and social context and how children learn and how to adapt to pedagogy for highest outcomes."

The commission's Dale Janssen said enrollment in university teacher training programs has slipped, possibly because of bad news in the teaching job market. But California still has a shortage of math, science, English, and special education teachers, especially in poorer, urban public school districts.