



The Educated Guess

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Special Ed Option for Laid Off Teachers

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April 14, 2010

Posted in [Teacher Development](#)

A one-year-old nonprofit is serving as a matchmaker between an abundant supply of soon to be laid-off teachers and a critical shortage of special education instructors. As a result, at least several thousand vacant special ed positions likely will be filled this fall by teachers who would otherwise be looking at unemployment or substitute teaching.

The California Teacher Corps announced this week that it is expediting efforts at retraining teachers who are interested in becoming certified to teach special education. The Corps represents alternative certification programs, which are particularly suited for individuals seeking second careers as teachers and, in this case, for teachers interested in working with handicapped children.

Unlike traditional certification programs, which require student teaching before getting a credential, alternative programs can place candidates immediately in a classroom, as interns, as long as they are intensively coached by veteran teachers throughout the year. There are 70 alternative certification programs in California. Some are run by county offices of education; some California State University campuses operate others.

The Corps is working as an intermediary between districts and the programs. Rather than lose some of their best and brightest young teachers because of seniority rules, some districts may encourage teachers to consider a special education credential. Last year, 3,500 special ed teachers received their credential via an alternative certification route; an additional 4,500 got other credentials through alternative programs. In most districts, subjects facing critical shortage, including math, science and special ed, are exempt from seniority rules.

California Teacher Corps President Catherine Kearney said that the Corps has agreements with most of the state's districts for alternative certification placements.