

# San Francisco Chronicle

## Teachers take alternate route into classroom

By Jill Tucker

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Lila Morris was nearly 40 when the real estate market tanked in the late 1990s, leaving her unemployed.

She had always thought teaching would suit her, but she couldn't give up a salary for a year to go back to college for a teaching credential.

So instead, she went through a back door straight into an Oakland classroom.

Morris earned her credential through an alternative certification program - a way for midcareer professionals to start teaching almost immediately.

More than 8,000 teachers each year participate in 70 state internship programs, including 10 in the Bay Area, said Catherine Kearney, president of the California Teacher Corps, a nonprofit organization launched Wednesday to support alternative certification.

Participants get about 160 hours of preclassroom training before starting the school year and then they are heavily coached and supported once they get assigned to a school, Kearney said.

While many are experts in their field - scientists, lawyers, accountants, business executives - they still need the basics: pedagogy, classroom management, lesson planning and how to work with English learners, for example.

"They want to get into teaching right away," Kearney said. "They have the life experience and the content expertise, and they're ready."

Traditional teacher-education programs on average require a year of post-bachelor's degree schooling and student teaching. All teachers must pass the California Basic Educational Skills Test.

Morris taught in Oakland as an intern while earning her credential at then-California State University, Hayward. She is now a fully credentialed reading teacher at Oakland's Bret Harte Middle School.

Raised in San Francisco's Bayview-Hunters Point neighborhood, she said she understands the violence, poverty and drugs that many of her students see in their

neighborhoods. "I connected with them because I grew up in similar situations," she said.

Now 49, she said she understands those who might think they're too old to start a new career, especially one that requires additional education and 30 or so children waiting to learn.

"I think that experience you bring to the classroom is so valuable to you," she said. "You're never too old. Students want to hear your story."

### **Learn more**

For more information about alternative teacher certification programs, go to [cateachercorps.org](http://cateachercorps.org).

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