

AERA Division K Town Hall Meeting
Summit on the Current and Future Landscape of Teaching and Teacher Education
Perspectives from the National Association for Alternative Certification
May 1, 2010

Thank you for inviting me to participate in today's panel. It's a pleasure to continue the conversations we started at the Division K Summit in Washington last fall on the Current and Future Landscape of Teaching and Teacher Education.

The National Association for Alternative Certification is a professional organization that advocates for standards-based and research-driven best practices and policy related to non-traditional routes for educator recruitment, selection, preparation and support. We focus on effective staffing of educators that enter -- and are retained in -- PK-12 schools via non-traditional routes.

We consider a program to be a non-traditional or alternative pathway if it shares certain key characteristics:

- The candidate or intern holds a baccalaureate degree in a field other than education
- The intern is hired into a school district as a fully paid teacher of record
- The intern is assigned a teacher in the same school who will serve as a mentor, and generally receives other extensive support from the preparation program for at least one full year
- Interns participate in an ongoing preparation program that leads to full certification
- Non-traditional programs *capitalize* on a candidates' prior work and life experiences;
- Candidates are generally prepared to meet the specific staffing needs of local school districts.

Just as is true for traditional teacher preparation programs, non-traditional teacher preparation programs cannot be described by a specific model; they vary significantly from state-to-state, within states, and within institutions.

Currently, approximately one third of all new teachers hired by school districts come from non-traditional programs. The majority of those teachers are concentrated in a handful of states.

In November 2009, the California Commission on Teacher Credentialing published a report detailing the prevalence of alternate route programs, their impact on teacher demographics, and results of a survey exploring certain outcomes. In California, in 2008-2009, 7,962 teachers were certified through state-approved internship -- or alternative certification -- programs. California has 68 internship programs; 60 are based at universities (and account for approximately 80% of all alternate route teachers) and 8 are based in school districts (and account for approximately 20% of all interns).

California's internship programs are having the intended outcome of attracting a significant percentage of males into the profession. In 2008-09, 47.5% of single subject candidates were male, 29.4% of special education candidates were male and 23.5% of multiple subject candidates were male in SY 2008-2009. The programs also attracted more older adults into the profession, with more than half of the interns 30-years or older. As for principal ratings, one measure of successful outcomes, the school leaders surveyed indicated that more than 90% of the intern teachers at their schools were as good as or better than other beginning teachers who taught at schools where they had been administrators.

In Texas, alternate routes now provide the majority of all newly certified teachers. According to the Texas State Board for Educator Certification, 13,382 teachers were certified through approved alternate route programs in 2008-2009. This compares to 10,396 certified through traditional routes, and an additional 1,945 through post-baccalaureate programs.

Alternate route programs have also resulted in attracting more males into the profession in Texas. In SY 2008-2009, 1,827 males were certified through alternate route programs, as compared to 1,502 in traditional programs and 1,140 in post-baccalaureate programs. Moreover, the alternative certification programs in Texas recruited and prepared 967 African American candidates in 2008-09. Traditional programs certified 501 African American teachers, while post-baccalaureate programs certified 483.

Texas also reports promising numbers on the role of alternative certification programs in expanding the pool of teachers in high need subjects. In 2008-09, 1,315 Bilingual education certificates were earned through AC Programs, while 783 were earned through traditional programs and 169 through post-bac programs. Finally, 1,658 Special Ed certificates were earned through AC programs, twice the number earned through traditional and post-baccalaureate programs combined.

Underscoring the point that AC programs provide candidates geared toward the immediate needs of the school districts they serve, Texas reports that the highest initial employment rates were for alternative certification programs -- specifically, over 90% of AC teachers were teaching in their first year after certification.

So, the Current and Future Landscape of Teaching and Teacher Education, from our vantage point, includes an ever-increasing number of candidates from non-traditional pathways and a more diversified pool of beginning teachers. The primary issue for researchers and policy makers is ensuring that quality prevails – quality in the candidates selected, quality in the preparation and support provided, and quality measured by student outcomes. I'll expand on the issue of program quality in a few minutes. First I'd like to give an overview of NAAC's current work in the area of research.

NAAC began publishing a journal in 2006. Called the *Journal of the National Association for Alternative Certification*, or JNAAC, it's the only peer-reviewed research publication focused solely on non-traditional routes for teacher preparation. It can be found at www.jnaac.org/jnaac/. Manuscripts are accepted for review on a rolling basis.

NAAC awards two research grants each year, and the winners are invited to present their findings at the NAAC annual conference. In addition, we periodically sponsor invited research sessions at the conference. Information on the grants can be found on our website at alternativecertification.org, under the Grants tab.

Because many non-traditional teacher preparation programs are focused particularly on recruiting, preparing and supporting secondary math and science teachers for positions in hard-to-staff schools, NAAC has an ongoing interest in the role of business/education partnerships that aim to address the national shortage of STEM educators. We recently published a paper on the benefits of creating more partnerships, including models for effective partnerships, like the IBM Transition to Teaching program, in STEMing the Tide of Teacher Shortages.

This year, at the annual conference in January, we held our first research forum. Attendees included representatives from state departments of education, Research One institutions, district-based programs, and professional organizations. The discussions launched the development of a new NAAC

Research Committee. Simultaneously, the board appointed a Policy Committee, and the two committees have begun working hand-in-hand on an agenda to expand research that will impact policy related to nontraditional teacher preparation.

NAAC has identified a two-pronged research agenda, that includes 1) Studies that address policies at the local, state, and national level, and 2) studies that empirically assess teacher preparation practices and performance-based outcomes. Within this research agenda, seven foci are identified:

1. Supply and Demand
2. Retention
3. Program Implementation and Assessment
4. Attributes of Candidate Populations
5. The Impact of Nontraditional Educators on Student Learning Outcomes
6. Employment, Support, and Performance Issues, and
7. The Impact of Nontraditionally prepared educators on the Overall Educator Workforce

Currently, NAAC's predominant focus is the development of Quality Indicators that specify key characteristics of effective nontraditional teacher preparation programs. It is critically important to identify and define measures of quality that can be used by nontraditional providers for program self-assessment and continuous improvement. The Quality Indicator tool enables a program to collect data around four program components -- recruitment, selection, preparation and support -- and apply data-driven analyses of teacher performance in terms of student outcomes, then develop action plans for continuous program improvement. The Quality indicators are outcome-based measures that recognize that enhanced student growth is the goal of an effective teacher preparation program. A primary goal of the Quality Indicators work is to promote focused research on teacher and teaching quality. NAAC is currently pilot testing the quality indicators tool and building the online learning management system that will enable its application.

It is often said that the research on quality teaching and teacher preparation is thin or inconclusive. This past week, the National Research Council released its new publication, *Preparing Teachers: Building Evidence for Sound Policy*, a report culminating six years of study by a panel of 24 distinguished scholars. The panel found that there is not enough evidence to determine whether certain pathways produce teachers who are better or worse than other teachers, and not enough data and research to draw conclusions about which approaches to teacher preparation are effective or how to design better ones. The panel determined that, "Better data collection and more research would provide a firmer foundation for policy and practice in the future," especially research illuminating factors that may ultimately affect student learning.

In March 2010, the US Department of Education released, "A Blueprint for Reform: The Reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act." This framework delineates the current administration's plan for a re-envisioned federal role in education. In the opening sentence of the first paragraph the report emphasizes four points, the first of which is "Improving teacher and principal effectiveness to ensure that every classroom has a great teacher and every school has a great leader." (p.3) In underscoring the priority placed on "Great Teachers and Great Leaders in every School," the Blueprint states, " We need more effective pathways and practices for preparing, placing, and supporting beginning teachers and principals in high-need schools. States will monitor the effectiveness of their traditional and alternative preparation programs, and will invest in programs whose graduates are succeeding in the classroom, based on student growth and other factors."

According to the blueprint, States and districts will be required to put in place specific policies, including “State-level data systems that link information on teacher and principal preparation programs to the job placement, student growth, and retention outcomes of their graduates.”

Both states and districts would be required to publish report cards at least every two years that provide information on key indicators, including among others “teachers and principals hired from *high-performing pathways*.” The blueprint does not define “high-performing pathways” or how that status might be determined, but it seems clear that policy makers will be looking for evidence of the “performance” of different pathways measured in terms of student growth, teacher job placement, and retention.

NAAC advocates research that measures teacher characteristics and teacher preparation methodologies to discern variables that positively impact student lives. We should focus on what factors of ANY teacher preparation program lead to the nurturing of highly effective educators.

References

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