

# **National Association for Alternative Certification Quality Indicators for Non-traditional Teacher Preparation Programs**

## **Overview**

### ***The Organization***

The National Association for Alternative Certification (NAAC) began its existence in the 1980s as a group of teacher educators working together to better understand the role of certifying teachers through non-traditional routes. It originated in the State of Texas where alternative routes to certification had been approved by the Texas Legislature in 1985. As more and more programs were approved in Texas, the leadership of these programs saw the need to meet regularly to network and support each other in these new endeavors. As more states began approving alternate routes to certification, this Texas group of teacher preparation professionals determined it was important to widen the scope of their network and in 1989, on South Padre Island in South Texas, professionals from states other than Texas were invited to join in their annual meeting. From this small, grass-roots beginning, the current association began. Currently, all fifty states and the District of Columbia have approved programs that are considered alternative routes to certification (Chait and McLaughlin, 2009). The National Association for Alternative Certification currently has over 400 members from over 40 states that represent program directors, preparation staff, field support staff, state department of education staff, policy makers, as well as interested community members. The members meet annually to learn from each other and to hear from policy makers and experts in the field.

The original mission of the organization was to create opportunities for visibility of alternate pathways to teacher certification and to bring about a better understanding of alternate pathways to certification. This effort was important in shaping the future of non-traditional teacher preparation programs.

Research was not an original goal of the organization, but within two to four years, the members determined that research was indeed necessary to help support the role that alternative routes to certification could play in decreasing the critical shortage of teachers. The current mission statement of the organization underscores this: “The National Association for Alternative Certification (NAAC) is the professional organization that advocates for the effective staffing of educators that enter Pre-kindergarten through Secondary schools via non-traditional routes of training and experience. NAAC utilizes data to inform practices and policies about the recruitment, preparation, certification, support and retention of high performing non-traditional candidates and teachers.”

The research about alternative programs continues to be scarce; however the research does support the need for quality alternative routes to certification. Currently, the United States is facing an unprecedented teacher shortage. In particular, urban and rural schools with diverse student populations are confronted with the problem of attracting and hiring highly qualified teachers, specifically those coming through the traditional routes (Clotfelter, Ladd, & Vigdor, 2002; Darling-Hammond, 2000; Sanders & Rivers, 1996). In California, one-third of the entire teacher work force, about 100,000 teachers, will retire over the next decade and need to be replaced (Peterson and Nadler, 2009). The National Council of Teachers of Mathematics

projects a shortfall of 280,000 qualified math and science teachers by 2015 (Peterson and Nadler, 2009). Even with a need established for the existence of alternative routes to certification, there is still the question of why standards would be needed for these programs.

Almost three decades ago, Birch and Reynolds (1982) suggested that a significant step in the distinction of teaching as a profession would be the formulation of professional standards, and the identification of, and preparation in, a common code of practice for all teachers. Several teacher educator organizations (NCATE, NCTE, NCSS, and NASTE, amongst others) embraced this charge to develop standards for the traditional preparation of teachers. Concurrently, alternative paths to teacher licensure have proliferated, with seemingly little attention to that same rigorous challenge of developing and adhering to appropriate program format or content, nor standards for teacher certification. This has not passed unnoticed by teacher educators who are required to raise the bar for their traditional programs in the “face of seemingly standards-free alternative preparation programs” (Rosenberg & Sindelar, 2001, p. 20). According to Melba Spooner (2005), “With more institutions of higher education developing unique alternatives for qualified individuals while continuing the traditional paths to teacher preparation, a focus can and should be on developing standards that correlate with and complement the two tracks – traditional and alternative” (p. 6 *Teacher education Yearbook XIII*, 2005).

In response to what was appearing in the literature, the membership-elected Board of Directors of NAAC began talking about Quality Indicators (QIs) for non-traditional route programs in the early years of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. It was about this same time that No Child Left Behind (NCLB) legislation was passed that required all teachers in the U.S. meet a Highly Qualified status in order to teach in America’s schools. This further heightened the concern about the number and types of programs receiving approval, and added to the impetus for the organization to develop a Quality Indicator document. Furthermore, NCLB substantially raised the stakes in America’s public schools for meeting national student achievement requirements. Quality teachers were needed if this national mandate was to be accomplished. McKinsey & Company issued a statement that “the quality of an education system cannot exceed the quality of its teachers” (McKinsey & Company, 2007). Embracing this concept, the NAAC leadership began conversations to better assure that teachers through alternative pathways were of the highest level of quality. Through these conversations, organization leadership realized there was no central mechanism that defined alternative certification, no substantial amount of valid research that was useable for establishing research-based criteria, and a large variety in program designs and implementations.