REL Appalachia Ask-A-REL Response

Rural, Teacher Preparation, Teacher Workforce
October 2017

Question:

Are there effective strategies/approaches to teacher licensure (e.g., waivers or alternative teacher certification) that facilitate rural localities' ability to attract and retain teachers?

Response:

Thank you for your request to our REL Reference Desk regarding evidence-based information about alternative teacher certification in rural school districts. Ask-A-REL is a collaborative reference desk service provided by the 10 Regional Educational Laboratories (RELs) that, by design, functions much in the same way as a technical reference library. Ask-A-REL provides references, referrals, and brief responses in the form of citations in response to questions about available education research.

Following an established REL Appalachia research protocol, we searched for research reports and descriptive study articles on teacher licensure, including waivers and alternative teacher certification, in rural school districts. We focused on identifying resources that specifically address the use of alternative teacher certification in rural school districts as it relates to teacher recruitment and retention. The sources included ERIC and other federally funded databases and organizations, research institutions, academic research databases, and general Internet search engines. For more details, please see the methods section at the end of this document.

The research team did not evaluate the quality of the resources provided in this response; we offer them only for your reference. Also, the search included the most commonly used research databases and search engines to produce the references presented here, but the references are not necessarily comprehensive, and other relevant references and resources may exist.

References

Boggan, M. K., Jayroe, T., & Alexander, B. (2016). Best practices article: Hitting the target with transition to teaching in Mississippi's poorest school districts: High retention rates through program support, resources, and strategic recruitment. *Journal of the National Association for Alternative Certification, 11*(1), 21–29. Retrieved from https://eric.ed.gov/?id=EJ1100870

From the abstract: "In order to assist in alleviating the teaching shortage in poor, rural school districts, also known as Local Education Agencies (LEAs), faculty in the College of Education at Mississippi State University sought funding that would provide financial support for a new alternate route teaching program. This program, known as Learning and Educating through Alternative Programs (LEAP), would address preparation and retention issues in teacher preparation. This article will tell the story of how this transition to teaching program used effective support, resources, and strategic recruiting in order to yield high retention rates in [a] partner school district, often at nearly 90 percent during the first three years of teaching."

Burkett, C. & Gimbert, B. G. (2009). South Carolina's Program of Alternative Certification for Educators (PACE): Pedagogical content knowledge and post-employment performance. *Journal of the National Association for Alternative Certification, 4*(1), 18–53. Retrieved from https://eric.ed.gov/?id=EJ1053408

From the abstract: "This research evaluated South Carolina's Program of Alternative Certification for Educators (PACE). Specifically, the study analyzed this nontraditional teacher preparation pathway's outcomes: to recruit, train, and retain effective beginning teachers who fill the growing teacher vacancies in rural South Carolina. From an in-depth review of the literature that has addressed alternative certification pathways since mid-1980, criteria were developed to identify effective characteristics of successful programs. Survey instruments were researched and applied to assess the pedagogical content knowledge by participants and K–12 administrators. Post-employment performance-based evaluation scores of PACE participants were compared to the survey results. Five recommendations were proposed to assist the PACE program to prepare effective teachers for the classroom. One major recommendation included the need to add more depth and frequency to targeted areas of the PACE curriculum such as classroom management, long-range planning, and development of assessments."

Dai, C., Sindelar, P. T., Denslow, D., Dewey, J., & Rosenberg, M. S. (2007). Economic analysis and the design of alternative-route teacher education programs. *Journal of Teacher Education, 58*(5), 422–439. Abstract retrieved from https://eric.ed.gov/?id=EJ778013; full text available at http://citeseerx.ist.psu.edu/viewdoc/download?doi=10.1.1.492.1145&rep=rep1&type=pdf

From the abstract: "Few studies have addressed the effects of teacher education generally, no less the specific program elements necessary to prepare competent and caring teachers. As a result, to address teacher shortages in science, mathematics, and special education, alternatives to traditional preparation have been proposed, and their development has proceeded apace. In the absence of guidance from research, alternative program designs have dramatically varied, even on such fundamental considerations as program length and the amount of preparation trainees require before becoming teachers of record. However, research on teacher education is only one potential source of guidance for program design. In this article, the authors use economic research and theory to identify principles of effective design. Considerations include program location, candidate selection, program

cost, financial support, program requirements, practice teaching, and mentorship. They use these principles to compare and contrast fast-track programs and programs for midcareer changers."

Fry, S. W. & Anderson, H. (2011). Career changers as first-year teachers in rural schools. *Journal of Research in Rural Education, 26*(12), 1–15. Abstract retrieved from https://eric.ed.gov/?id=EJ961839; full text available at http://jrre.vmhost.psu.edu/wp-content/uploads/2014/02/26-12.pdf

From the abstract: "The challenges novice teachers face as they adjust to inservice teaching are well documented. However, relatively little attention has been given to beginning teachers in rural schools who have had previous careers in other professions. We used qualitative methods to examine the professional experiences and perceptions of four career-changing first-year teachers in rural schools, seeking to identify significant issues in their professional developmental processes. Three primary themes emerged: evidence of effectiveness as teachers; mentoring career changers; and adjustment to rural school and community. We conclude with implications and recommendations for educators working to support this unique population of educators in preservice preparation programs and rural school districts."

McCarty, W. L. (2013). Transition to Teaching in Nebraska: Findings from the first decade. *Journal of the National Association for Alternative Certification, 8*(1), 3–15. Retrieved from https://eric.ed.gov/?id=EJ1053307

From the abstract: "Nebraska's alternative teacher certification program, Transition to Teaching, is housed at the University of Nebraska at Kearney. After 10 years in operation, program evaluation was deemed necessary to assess responsiveness to the needs of teacher candidates and the school districts within the state and effectiveness in meeting those needs. Results of this study showed both strengths and challenges and provide clear direction for the future of alternative teacher certification in Nebraska."

National Center to Inform Policy and Practice in Special Education Professional Development. (2010). *Alternative route special education certification programs: An opportunity for school-university partnerships.* Retrieved from https://eric.ed.gov/?id=ED531926

From the abstract: "The majority of Alternative Route Certification (ARC) programs are designed to fill personnel needs in either a certain discipline (e.g., special education teachers) or in specific geographic areas (e.g., rural, urban). ARC programs provide access to a teaching credential by circumventing traditional preservice preparation. In general, ARC programs tend to differ from traditional programs in the following ways: (1) Length and structure of the program; (2) Delivery mode; and (3) Candidate population. Partnerships between higher education teacher preparation faculty and school faculty can enhance the efficacy of ARC programs. In fact, there is some evidence that more ARC candidates who participate in programs characterized by strong partnerships tend to remain in special education positions than do those candidates who participate in stand-alone district-sponsored programs. In general, they report feeling prepared to teach, and principals give

them high marks. This paper discusses the challenges and opportunities associated with ARC partnerships."

Sawyer, G. B. & Gimbert, B. G. (2008). Policies and practices for selecting highly effective teachers for alternative certification programs. *Journal of the National Association for Alternative Certification, 3*(1), 9–29. Retrieved from https://eric.ed.gov/?id=EJ1053437

From the abstract: "A dramatic shift in the past fifteen years in teacher education has been the move toward people beginning their teacher preparation later in life and in their academic careers. In response, the number of alternative certification programs has increased to reduce teacher shortages in critical content areas such as mathematics, science, bilingual education, and special education, as well as teacher shortages in rural and urban schools. This research report explores the independent and interdependent processes of teacher screening and selection and, explicitly, identifies existing literature that has addressed the relationship between pre-employment decisions and post-employment outcomes for predicting alternatively certified teacher success. In addition, recent scholarship is analyzed that pertains to the use of interviews in the teacher screening process, particularly in alternative teacher preparation programs, often described as alternative routes or pathways to teacher certification. Specifically, the report affords the reader an assessment of the relative importance of three interview protocols in the selection process as the mechanism of merit that transcends the usual qualifications of degree, grade point average and test scores to discern those life experiences and intrinsic beliefs that predispose an alternative certification candidate to be an effective teacher."

Scribner, J. P. & Heinen, E. (2009). Alternative teacher certification: A program theory analysis. *Teacher Education Quarterly, 36*(2), 179–197. Retrieved from https://eric.ed.gov/?id=EJ857483

From the abstract: " 'Alternative teacher certification program' (ATCP) is widely used as a term for a variety of programs designed to train and credential teachers in expedited fashion. In practice, however, ATCPs consist of a loose confederation of programs and practices ranging from 'emergency certification to very sophisticated and well-designed programs that address the professional preparation needs of the growing population of individuals who already have at least a baccalaureate degree and considerable life experience who want to become teachers.' The policy rhetoric suggests that these programs address teacher shortages, improve teacher quality, increase diversity of the teacher pool, and increase retention rates. While these goals are laudable, the underlying assumptions of the policy have been challenged. Studies question assumptions about the effectiveness of alternative certification policy to attract teachers of higher quality than traditionally trained teachers. However, the antecedent assumption that ATCPs are substantially similar in structure and function remains tacit and under-explored in policy circles, among practitioners, and in large part in extant research. This article presents findings from the initial phase of a longitudinal research program designed to evaluate alternative teacher certification policy in one state. The study used program theory evaluation (PTE) to investigate policy assumptions, program logics and dilemma points from

alternatively certified teacher training to teacher practice. The authors specifically explored how and why ATCPs differed in form and function by presenting an emergent framework to make sense of these differences. Gaining a better understanding of ATCP variation is critical given national, state, and local pressure to address teacher shortages "and" improve teacher quality. The following questions guided the authors' exploration into ATCP theories: (1) what are the program theories that guide practice in the five largest ATCPs in Missouri? and (2) what factors contribute to formation of these program theories. In their discussion the authors consider the implications their findings have for the practice of alternative teacher certification. As this study shows, policy makers and ATCP directors must address the external factors that shape program logics and the contradictions these influences can create."

Additional Organizations to Consult

National Association for Alternative Certification: https://www.alternativecertification.org/

From the website: "The National Association for Alternative Certification (NAAC) is the professional organization that advocates for standards-driven nontraditional educator preparation leading to effective school staffing. NAAC reviews trends and issues to inform practices and policies relevant to recruitment, preparation, certification, support, assessment, and retention of high-performing educators."

Additional Ask-A-REL Responses to Consult

Ask-A-REL Southeast at the Florida Center for Reading Research. (2014). *What are effective strategies for recruiting teachers in rural areas?* Retrieved from http://rel-se.fcrr.org/_/ask-a-rels/11-14/Ask%20A%20REL%20Teacher%20recruitment%20in%20rural%20schools.pdf

Ask-A-REL Southwest at SEDL. (2016). *Potential indicators that predict successful recruitment of new teachers by rural districts and retention of tenured teachers in rural schools.* Retrieved from http://relsouthwest.sedl.org/ask_archive/06-2016_AskRELSW_Rural_Teacher_Recruit_Retain.pdf

Methods

Keywords and Search Strings

The following keywords and search strings were used to search the reference databases and other sources:

- ("Alternative teacher certification" OR "teacher licens*") AND rural AND (attract OR recruit* OR retain)
- ("Alternative teacher certification" OR "teacher licens*") AND rural AND "career change"
- "Waiver" AND rural AND ("teacher certification" OR "teacher licens*")

- "Waiver" AND rural AND ("teacher certification" OR "teacher licens*") AND ("teacher retention" OR "career change" OR recruit* OR attract OR retain)
- Rural AND "teacher recruit*" AND strategies
- Rural AND "teacher retention" AND strategies
- Rural AND teacher AND licens* OR certification

Databases and Resources

We searched ERIC, a free online library of more than 1.6 million citations of education research sponsored by the Institute of Education Sciences (IES), for relevant resources. Additionally, we searched the academic database ProQuest, Google Scholar, and the commercial search engine Google.

Reference Search and Selection Criteria

In reviewing resources, Reference Desk researchers consider—among other things—these four factors:

- Date of the publication: Searches cover the most current information (i.e., within the last ten years), except in the case of nationally known seminal resources.
- Search priorities of reference sources: Search priorities include IES, nationally funded, and certain other vetted sources known for strict attention to research protocols. Applicable resources must be publicly available online and in English.
- Methodology: The following methodological priorities/considerations guide the review and selection of the references: (a) study types—randomized controlled trials, quasi experiments, surveys, descriptive data analyses, literature reviews, policy briefs, etc., generally in this order; (b) target population, samples (representativeness of the target population, sample size, volunteered or randomly selected), study duration, etc.; (c) limitations, generalizability of the findings and conclusions, etc.
- Existing knowledge base: Vetted resources (e.g., peer-reviewed research journals) are the primary focus, but the research base is occasionally slim or nonexistent. In those cases, the best resources available may include, for example, reports, white papers, guides, reviews in non-peer-reviewed journals, newspaper articles, interviews with content specialists, and organization websites.

Resources included in this document were last accessed on October 16, 2017. URLs, descriptions, and content included here were current at that time.