

The New Jersey Alternate Route Program: An Analysis of the Perspectives from Alternate Route Teachers, Instructors, and Mentors

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New Jersey is First in the Nation

- In September 1985, NJ launched the Provisional Teacher Program with the dual purpose of enhancing the quality and quantity of teaching candidates.
- Candidates were required to have a bachelor's degree, a liberal arts major and proof of passing subject area tests.
- Once employed, the candidate completed a mentor-guided internship supplemented by study of core professional knowledge.

Preparation of Teachers in New Jersey Today

- About 60% complete traditional teacher education programs while about 40% come through the Alternate Route.
- Teachers who come through the Alternate Route complete the pedagogy for the license being sought through 200 hours in the Regional Training Center, or
- Take courses for credit in a college-based program for Pre-K through Grade 3 Early Childhood, Special Education, Bilingual, English as a Second Language.
- Teachers receive mentoring in a district, including 20 days of initial, intensive mentoring and 30 weeks ongoing (some programs provide a pre-service component).

Evaluating the Alternate Route

- A thorough evaluation of the Alternate Route has not taken place since its inception.
- In 2003, NJDOE received a Teacher Quality Enhancement Grant, which funded this study.
- As the higher education institution partner of this grant, The College of New Jersey was selected to carry out this comprehensive evaluation.

The study addressed these questions:

- Is the Alternate Route working?
- Is it having an impact?
- Is the method of program delivery the best?

The study addressed these questions (cont.):

- Is the Alternate Route accomplishing what it's supposed to accomplish in terms of preparing teachers?
- Are principals, supervisors and superintendents satisfied with the quality of Alternate Route teachers?



Findings from the Evaluation

Where AR Teachers Work

- Half of New Jersey's alternate route teachers work in urban school districts, 41% teach in suburban districts and 9% teach in rural school districts.
- One-third of alternate route teachers teach in an Abbott District

School Level Teaching

- The greatest demand for teachers is at the middle and high school levels. Alternate Route teachers in New Jersey, as well as across the nation, are meeting these needs.
- 41% of teachers entering through Alternate Routes in New Jersey are teaching in high schools; and
- 29% are teaching in middle schools.
- This compares with 20% of all teachers who teach in high schools and 22% who teach in middle schools nationally.

Academic Backgrounds of AR Teachers

- Academic backgrounds of the AR candidates in our sample varied
- 12% had associate degrees in addition to more advanced degrees.
- 13% had multiple bachelor's degrees, 21% had both a bachelor's degree and a master's degree, and 4% had earned doctorate degrees.
- Bachelor's degrees cover a variety of fields with the greatest concentration in business (11.5%), English/Language Arts (10.9%), world languages (9.8%), science (9.6%), and psychology (8.9%).
- Math degrees were held by 5.4% of the AR teachers in the sample.

(Note: due to the multiple response nature of the question, these percentages do not add to 100%).

Alternate Route Instructors

- Instructors were experienced in working with AR teachers: 25% had worked in program for more than 6 years, 50% for 3-5 years
- Instructors represented varied professional roles, including PreK-12 teachers, college/university professors, and school administrators.
- More than half of the instructors teach 21-30 AR teachers per training session.

Alternate Route Mentors

- Mentors in the NJ Alternate Route Program were experienced teachers, most of whom received their certification to teach in New Jersey (78%).
- 77% of mentors received their certifications through an Alternate Route program.
- Experience levels varied; one-fifth of mentors had more than 30 years of teaching experience.

The First 20 Hours of Formal Instruction: “Survival Skills”

- 16% said they received this instruction prior to the first day of school;
- 34% reported that this period of formal instruction occurred during the first 5 weeks of beginning teaching in a school;
- 12% indicated they never received this period of formal instruction; and
- 12% did not answer the question.

The Length and Methods of Formal Instruction

- About half (52%) of AR teachers surveyed reported that the length of the formal instruction period (200 hours) was “just right” and
- About half (46%) thought it was too long.
- The most effective methods of formal instruction reported were instructor feedback (62%), cooperative learning (59%), and peer feedback (58%).
- The frequency of use of these three methods was rated “just right” by 80% of AR teachers.

The Mentoring Experience

- There are considerable differences in when, if ever, AR teachers get this phase of mentoring.
- 35% reported their 20-day mentoring phase started on the first day of teaching;
- 38% reported it started after the first day of teaching; and
- 13% of AR teachers surveyed reported that it never happened. (13% did not answer the question.)

The Mentoring Experience (cont.)

- The frequency of meetings between AR teachers and mentors varied considerably, with the highest percentage (38%) reporting that they met “typically once a week.”
- Almost half of AR teachers (46%) said they had been given released time or planning time to meet with their mentors;
- Only 41% of mentors said they had been given released or planning time to meet with their AR teachers.
- 46% of AR teachers rated their mentors as “very effective”; 31% reported “somewhat effective.”

Capabilities Related to Professional Teaching Standards:

AR teachers reported they felt “**very capable**” in these areas:

- Ability to teach the subject matter (85%)
- Collaborate with colleagues to enhance student learning (70%)
- Create a classroom environment in which students with differences such as those listed above feel respected and welcomed (73%)
- Engage in meaningful professional development activities (69%)
- Ability to plan and develop effective lessons (66%)
- Employ classroom management techniques that focus on positive relationships, cooperation, and purposeful learning to be successful (64%)
- Motivate students to engage in learning activities (62%)

AR teachers reported feeling “not at all capable” or “not very capable” in these areas:

- Identifying multiple strategies to help students of all intelligence levels and learning styles learn the same concept (9%)
- Adapting teaching, materials, and classroom environments to meet the needs of non-native English speakers (28%) and students with emotional disabilities (16%), learning disabilities (15%), and visual and perceptual differences (12%).
- Interpreting and implementing Individualized Education and 504 Plans (24%)
- Employing technology to improve student learning (13%)

AR teachers reported feeling “not at all capable” or “not very capable” in these additional areas:

- Interpreting standardized test scores to communicate with students and parents and to guide their teaching (23%)
- Differentiating among the uses of criterion-referenced, norm-referenced, and performance-based tests to assess student achievement (18%)
- Using summative assessments to communicate with students and parents about student progress (11%)
- Using formative assessments to guide teaching (11%)

Intent to Remain in Teaching

- Nearly all (96%) of AR teachers surveyed said they planned to teach “next year.” Fewer than 1% said “no” and 3% said they were not sure.
- Asked how long they planned “on working as a classroom teacher,” 56% reported 10 years or more; 22% said 3-9 years; 2% said 2 years or less. About one in five (19%) said they were not sure how long they would be a classroom teacher.



Answers to Evaluation Questions

Is the Alternate Route working? Yes.

- Administrators report that they can find AR candidates for hard-to-fill positions in math, science, foreign language, special education and ESL for middle and high schools.
- AR teachers and their instructors report that they are capable of implementing all but a few of the New Jersey Professional Teaching Standards (NJPTS).
- Statistics show that more than one-third of newly hired teachers each year in New Jersey are Alternate Route teachers.

Is it having an impact?

Yes.

- Demographic data make it clear that AR teachers are more diverse with respect to number of non-white/minority candidates and number of males brought into teaching.
- The administrator interviews add that these AR teachers have an energy/passion including higher levels of commitment, dedication, enthusiasm and perseverance not found in Traditional Route teachers.

Is the method of program delivery the best?

The delivery method is good, but from both the teachers and the administrators we heard that it would be better if it were:

- (1) more consistent across regional training centers; and
- (2) more consistent in the mentoring provided by districts.

Is the Alternate Route accomplishing what it's supposed to accomplish?

- Yes. It is doing its job with respect to filling positions in shortage areas, especially in math, science, and foreign languages in middle and high schools.
- Yes. It is doing its job with respect to attracting a more diverse group of candidates into teaching.

Is the Alternate Route accomplishing what it's supposed to accomplish?

- No. It is not doing its job with respect to the “in-class mentoring” mandated for the first twenty days of the AR teachers’ classroom experience. This is mentoring districts cannot afford to provide.
- No. It is not doing its job with respect to AR teachers acquiring the critical skill of classroom management, according to administrator interviews. However, teachers, themselves, report they are capable in management techniques and motivating students.

Are principals, supervisors and superintendents satisfied with the quality of Alternate Route teachers?

From interviews with principals and superintendents:

- Yes. At the middle and high school levels administrators are impressed with their in-depth subject knowledge, maturity, and enthusiasm.
- No. Satisfaction is lower at the elementary level where good understanding of child development is essential and appears to be missing.
- While administrators recognize that all novice teachers need support, AR teachers seem to need more, especially with respect to classroom management, instructional planning, and being able to accommodate students with special needs.

Recommendations

- Require Alternate Route teachers to complete Phase IA, Survival Strategies, *before* entering their classrooms, *unless* their district can guarantee full time mentoring for their first 20 days. They should also complete coursework in pedagogy and child development related to their area of endorsement.
- Create and maintain a unit record database that tracks AR teachers from initial application through certification through tenure.
- To improve consistency across programs, create models for program design and delivery and share them with AR providers.

Recommendations (Cont.)

- Revise program approval requirements; examine the alignment of the curriculum to standards; the hours of classroom time devoted to each standard; and how candidates are assessed on those standards.
- Monitor the AR site visit process and make adjustments.
- Strengthen the mentoring component: Utilize the NJ DOE Mentoring Toolkit; enhance the Mentoring Toolkit by adding a section on mentoring AR teachers as part of the school district induction of novice teachers; hand pick mentors for AR teachers and provide mentor training.
- Broaden the pool of individuals entering teaching in New Jersey.

Next Steps -- Strengthening the Alternate Route

The following plans are based on the recommendations from the AR evaluation:

- Require AR candidates to complete training in “Survival Skills,” child development, and pedagogy in order to be considered for a Certificate of Eligibility.
- Improve mentoring support for AR teachers; extend mentoring toolkit to focus on unique needs of AR teachers.
- Improve the communication among AR teachers, instructors, mentors, and district administrators to create a more individualized education plan for each teacher.

Next Steps (cont.)

- For all teacher candidates:
 - Fill the gaps in our data collection on provisional teachers and integrate the data to enhance its usability; research creation of a teacher database.
 - Strengthen our teacher recruitment strategies for high needs areas and expand the capabilities of NJHire, our online teacher recruitment system.
- Create a task force to address needs of Alternate Route
- Research and build upon effective program models in New Jersey and elsewhere.
- Revise the AR program approval requirements and processes, including curricula reviews and ongoing program monitoring.