



## NJDOE News

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### **DOE Releases Alternate Route Certification Study**

New Jersey's Alternate Route (AR) teacher certification program has allowed school districts to find more candidates for hard-to-fill positions and has brought more diversity to the teaching profession, according to a report on a study of the program conducted by The College of New Jersey and released recently by the Department of Education.

The report also notes that the methods by which novice teachers receive classroom training and mentoring should be strengthened and made more consistent throughout the state. It is available on line here: <http://www.nj.gov/education/license/research/>.

"This study contains very valuable information that will help us in our ongoing efforts to improve the alternate route teacher program and attract even more people to the teaching profession," said Education Commissioner Lucille E. Davy.

New Jersey's AR program was launched in 1985 to help increase the quality and quantity of the teaching pool by attracting talented liberal arts graduates and people from other fields seeking to make a career change to education. Candidates are required to hold a bachelor's degree and pass a Praxis test in the subject area they wish to teach in order to receive a provisional license.

Once employed, they complete a mentor-guided induction period and receive 200 hours of formal instruction in subjects such as teaching techniques, classroom management, lesson development and student motivation before receiving a permanent teaching license.

Approximately 40 percent of the newly-hired teachers in New Jersey are AR teachers.

The two year study included questionnaires and interviews with more than 1,400 AR teachers, AR instructors, AR mentors and district administrators. It was funded by a US Department of Education Teacher Quality Enhancement grant.

Among the findings in the report:

- Half of New Jersey's AR teachers work in urban school districts, 41 percent teach in suburban districts and nine percent teach in rural districts.
- Demographic data in the study make it clear that the pool of AR teachers is more diverse than general teaching population. There are more men and more minority individuals among the AR teachers.
- The greatest demand for teachers, both in New Jersey and nationally, is at the middle school and high school levels. Forty-one percent of New Jersey's AR teachers are teaching in high schools and 29 percent are teaching in middle schools.
- Of the AR teachers surveyed, 13 percent have multiple bachelor's degrees, 21 percent have both a bachelor's degree and a master's degree and four percent had earned doctorates. In terms of the fields of their bachelor's degrees, 11.5 percent of the teachers in the sample held degrees in business, 10.9 percent in English/Language Arts, 9.8 percent in world languages, 9.6 percent in science and 8.9 percent in psychology.
- Interviews with district administrators indicate that many AR teachers are seen as having exceptional energy and passion for their jobs. They bring a heightened level of commitment, maturity, dedication, enthusiasm and perseverance to their work.

The study also found that there was a high degree of inconsistency from district to district in the quality of the mentoring experience that AR teachers receive.

Only 46 percent of the teachers rated their mentors as "very effective." Many expressed concerns about their own abilities to deal with some of the more complex aspects of teaching – such as dealing with students with limited English proficiency or emotional or learning disabilities, interpreting and implementing Individualized Education or 504 (special education) plans, and interpreting and using standardized test scores – even after receiving their 200 hours of outside training.

Administrators surveyed said that satisfaction with AR teachers' performance was higher at the high school and middle school levels; many AR teachers at the elementary level seemed to require a better understanding of child development issues in order to increase their effectiveness.

The administrators also recognized that while all novice teachers need support, AR teachers tended to need more assistance, particularly in the areas of classroom management, instructional planning and accommodating students with special needs.

Based on recommendations in the report, DOE officials plan to implement the following additional steps in order to strengthen the AR program and improve the department's overall teacher recruitment efforts:

- Form an advisory committee to review the study in detail and assess other needs of AR teachers.
- Research and build upon effective local programs here in New Jersey and throughout the country.
- Improve the mentoring support program for AR teachers and extend the mentoring protocols to focus on teachers' individual needs.
- Require AR candidates to complete training on managing classroom learning environments before they begin working in a school in order to become eligible for a provisional license, and revise the AR program approval requirements and processes, including curricula reviews and on-going program monitoring.
- Improve the communication among AR teachers, mentors, instructors and district administrators in order to create a more individualized education plan for each teacher.
- Plan for the creation of a data base for all teachers and fill in the gaps in our data collection on provisional teachers.
- Strengthen the state's teacher recruitment strategies for high-needs areas and expand the capabilities of NJHire, DOE's online teacher recruitment system.