

Results in Brief:

Highly Qualified Teachers Enrolled in Programs Providing Alternative Routes to Teacher Certification or Licensure

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Alternative pathways to teacher certification, which typically allow candidates to serve as teachers of record in a classroom while they complete their coursework for full state certification or licensure, are intended to expand the pool of potential teachers and enable a more diverse array of people to enter the teaching profession. Teachers who are enrolled in alternative route programs may, if the programs have certain minimum elements, meet the certification requirements to be considered a highly qualified teacher (HQT) under the *Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA)*, as amended by the *No Child Left Behind Act of 2001*. Some policymakers have raised concerns that teachers enrolled in alternative route programs may be disproportionately assigned to teach students with greater needs. At the same time, because one purpose of alternative route programs is to recruit teachers to fill critical shortage areas in hard-to-staff schools and subjects, it may not be surprising if high-need schools have above-average percentages of such teachers. To better understand this issue, Congress asked the U.S. Department of Education to provide data on the extent to which students with disabilities, English learners, students in rural areas, and students from low-income families are taught by teachers currently enrolled in alternative route programs and classified as “highly qualified” under *ESEA*. In response to the request from Congress, this report examines data for the 2013–14 school year reported by 49 states and jurisdictions.

STUDY QUESTIONS

1. What percentage of highly qualified teachers are enrolled in alternative route programs, overall and for special education teachers, Title III teachers, teachers in high-poverty school districts, and teachers in rural school districts?
2. How many states and districts have highly qualified teachers enrolled in alternative route programs? How many have relatively high percentages of such teachers?
3. How does the percentage of highly qualified teachers enrolled in alternative route programs vary across districts? Are they more prevalent in high-poverty districts or rural districts?

STUDY DESIGN

This study analyzed district- and state-level data reported to the Department by states through a new data collection on the numbers of full-time equivalent (FTE) highly qualified teachers who were enrolled in alternative route programs for three groups of teachers: (1) all teachers, (2) special education teachers, and (3) teachers in language instruction educational programs for English learners (ELs) under Title III of the *ESEA* (Title III teachers). States were asked to report these data because the Department determined that most states did not have the capacity to report data on the numbers of *students* taught by various types of highly qualified teachers.

To supplement state-reported data, the Department calculated estimates for high-poverty districts and rural districts by incorporating district-level classifications from extant data sources.

Highlights

- While most states employed some HQTs who were enrolled in alternative route teacher preparation programs, these teachers made up a small proportion of total HQTs, both overall as well as for the four subgroups of HQTs examined in this study.
- Overall, across 48 states and the District of Columbia, 1.5 percent of HQTs were enrolled in alternative route programs. The average percentage of HQTs enrolled in alternative route programs was 1.9 percent for special education teachers, 1.3 percent for Title III teachers, 2.3 percent for high-poverty school districts, and 1.3 percent for rural school districts.
- A majority of the responding states reported that less than 1 percent of all HQTs were enrolled in alternative route programs. Four states reported that none of their HQTs were in alternative route programs, while 12 states had one or more HQT subgroups in which 4 percent or more were enrolled in alternative route programs.
- Most LEAs had no HQTs enrolled in alternative route programs. In the LEAs that did have such teachers, most had fewer than five such teachers, and they usually accounted for less than 4 percent of all HQTs in the LEA.
- High-poverty school districts had higher percentages of HQTs enrolled in alternative route programs (2.3 percent), on average, than districts with low poverty rates (1.0 percent).
- Across all rural school districts, there was a lower percentage of HQTs enrolled in alternative route programs than in all urban districts (1.3 percent vs. 2.2 percent, respectively).

KEY FINDINGS

States reported that a small percentage of HQTs were enrolled in alternative route programs, for all HQTs and for the subgroups examined in this study.

Table 1. Percentage of highly qualified teachers who were enrolled in alternative route programs

Type of teacher or LEA	Mean	Median
All HQTs	1.5	0.9
Special education HQTs	1.9	0.6
Title III HQTs	1.3	0.0
High-poverty LEAs	2.3	1.1
Rural LEAs	1.3	0.7

A majority of the responding states and jurisdictions (30 out of 49) reported that less than 1 percent of all HQTs were enrolled in alternative route programs. The same was true for special education HQTs (25 states), Title III HQTs (27 states), and HQTs in rural areas (31 states). Twenty-one out of 49 states reported that less than 1 percent of all HQTs were enrolled in alternative route programs in high-poverty LEAs.

Four states reported that none of their HQTs were enrolled in alternative route programs (Connecticut, Massachusetts, Minnesota, and Wyoming).

Table 2. Number of states by percentage of highly qualified teachers who were enrolled in alternative route programs

Type of teacher or LEA	Zero	>0 to <1%	1 to <4%	4% or more
All HQTs	4	26	15	4
Special education HQTs	15	10	16	7
Title III HQTs	22	5	8	3
High-poverty LEAs	4	17	18	8
Rural LEAs	9	22	14	2

Although most states had relatively low percentages of HQTs enrolled in alternative route programs, 12 states reported that one or more subgroups of teachers examined in the report had 4 percent or more of HQTs enrolled in alternative route programs.

The state with the highest percentages of HQTs enrolled in alternative route programs varied by the type of teacher and LEA. For all LEAs, the highest percentage was in the District of Columbia (5.5 percent). For the four HQT subgroups, the highest percentages were: special education HQTs, 10.7 percent in New Mexico; Title III HQTs, 8.9 percent in New Jersey; HQTs in high-poverty LEAs, 8.2 percent in Alabama; and HQTs in rural LEAs, 4.5 percent in Alabama and Texas.

Across all LEAs, the average percentage of HQTs enrolled in alternative route programs in districts in the highest poverty quartile was 2.3 percent, compared with 1.0 percent in the lowest poverty quartile.

Across rural LEAs, the average percentage of HQTs enrolled in alternative route programs was 1.3 percent; in comparison, the percentage was 2.2 percent in urban LEAs, 1.5 percent in town districts, and 1.1 percent in suburban districts.

As with state-level findings, most LEAs (71 percent) had no HQTs enrolled in alternative route programs. Among LEAs that did have such teachers, they usually accounted for less than 4 percent of all HQTs (see Table 3), and most (75 percent) had fewer than five such teachers.

Table 3. Percentage of LEAs by percentage of highly qualified teachers who were enrolled in alternative route programs

Type of teacher or LEA	Zero	>0 to <1%	1 to <4%	4% or more
All HQTs	71	7	12	11
Special education HQTs	93	<0.5	2	5
Title III HQTs	99	<0.5	<0.5	1
High-poverty LEAs	67	6	15	13
Rural LEAs	77	3	10	10

STUDY LIMITATIONS

States and districts are not required to maintain and report statewide or districtwide data on the characteristics and credentials of all teachers. Since states had not reported these data to the Department previously and many states did not have data systems that tracked teacher highly qualified status linked with certification status, the Department permitted states to use alternative definitions and methods if they said they were unable to report the required data.

The data used in this report have several limitations.

Non-reporting states: Two states and two jurisdictions did not submit data for this data collection — Mississippi, Pennsylvania, Puerto Rico, and the Bureau of Indian Education. Based on state-reported data submitted to the Office of Postsecondary Education, these entities accounted for 6 percent of the nation’s teachers and 5 percent of all teachers enrolled in alternative route programs.

Missing data: Five of the responding states explicitly reported missing some data on HQTs enrolled in alternative route programs, and it is possible that other states or LEAs may have reported zeros or blanks in cases where they did not have information on HQTs enrolled in alternative route programs.

Differing definitions: Nebraska, New Hampshire, and Texas reported teacher headcounts instead of FTEs, and Nevada reported classes taught by HQTs. Additionally, Montana and Nevada reported data for 2012–13, and Texas reported data for 2014–15.

Limited data on Title III HQTs: Only 16 states reported having Title III HQTs enrolled in alternative route programs and over three-fourths of such Title III HQTs were in just four of those states (Florida, New Jersey, New Mexico, and Tennessee). As a result, the data presented in this report for Title III HQTs enrolled in alternative route programs should be viewed with caution as they largely represent patterns in four states.

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

The complete report is available online at www2.ed.gov/about/offices/list/opepd/ppss/reports.html.