

Alternative Teacher Certification

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I. Introduction

Six out of every 100 freshmen entering a Chicago Public School (CPS) will have a college degree by their 25th birthdayⁱ. Approximately 54% of CPS students graduate high school within five yearsⁱⁱ. Only 35% of CPS students who went to college earned their Bachelor's degree in six years, compared to the national average of 64%ⁱⁱⁱ. These statistics, while abysmal, are not particularly shocking to anyone with even the most limited exposure to CPS. Schools in poverty-stricken neighborhoods, primarily on Chicago's south and west sides, fail to provide their students with the most basic necessities. These schools lack textbooks, cram thirty students or more into classrooms, provide a pipeline to the city's jails and juvenile detention centers, and perhaps most damaging of all, there are not enough adequately qualified teachers available to the neediest students.

The definition of an adequately qualified teacher varies, but the notion that teachers are one of the most important and influential elements of a high-quality education does not. According to research done on what makes a good school, high-quality teachers sit alongside intensely involved parent communities, small schools and class sizes, and diversity^{iv} as the most important factors. Since it is clearly a well-established fact that qualified teachers are necessary, the next question is what are school districts doing to recruit these teachers?

CPS consists of 23,727 teachers. The applicant pool for the district is a competitive one, and as such hiring is a very selective process. According to The New Teacher Program (TNTP), between 2004 and 2006 CPS hired approximately 17% of the 10,786 applicants^v. Thirty-six of those 10,786 hopefuls held Masters degrees and the average GPA was a 3.3^{vi}. Despite these impressive characteristics, CPS is losing top quality teachers for several reasons. TNTP cites late hiring as the main reason why CPS fails to attract the best teachers. While the applicant pool

consists of very qualified candidates, it must be noted that the overall applicant pool shrinks every year. According to an April 30, 2006 New York Times article, the amount of incoming teachers would need to increase by 35% in order to keep the student-teacher ratios at their current level^{vii}. Many people involved in the education reform movement believe that the best way to recruit qualified teachers who will help bridge the achievement gap in low-income public schools is to direct focus away from traditional teacher certification and focus on new, innovative teacher programs.

II. Background of CPS

The Chicago public school system is the third largest district in the country with 407, 955 students enrolled in pre-school through high school, which accounts for 18.4% of all Illinois public school students^{viii}. The district is made up of overwhelmingly of minority and low-income students. African-American students account for 46.2% of the student body; Latinos account for 41.2%; Whites account for 8.9%^{ix}. Furthermore, 84.3% of the students come from low-income households^x. The district has an operating budget of \$4.855 billion – \$2.108 billion of which comes from local funds, and 1.733 billion comes from the state^{xi}. Each year, the per-pupil expenditures are approximately \$11,033^{xii}. The per-pupil expenditure number gets put into perspective when looked at alongside the per-pupil spending in the wealthier Chicago suburbs.

The per-pupil spending at Highland Park High School on Chicago's North Shore is \$18,808^{xiii}. Highland Park High School's student population differs greatly from public high schools in Chicago. 80.3% of the students at Highland Park are white, 14.6% are Hispanic, and 2% are Black^{xiv}. 10% of all students are low income, the average teacher experience is 12.4 years, and the average teacher salary is \$92,954^{xv}. As a comparison, Uplift Community High

School in Chicago's Uptown neighborhood has a student population that is 74.1% Black, 16.2% Hispanic, and 2.5% White^{xvi}. 91% of the students come from low-income households, the average teacher experience is 12.3 years, and the average teacher salary is \$74,839^{xvii}. In some respects these schools are inverse mirror images of one another. Uplift Community High School is a new school – the first senior class will graduate this year. Currently, Uplift is on Academic Early Warning Status (AEWS) which means that the school has not made Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) for the last two years and may be subject to state sanctions^{xviii}. The percentage of students whose PSAE scores meet or exceed standards in District 113 (Highland Park) consistently hovers around 80% whereas the percentage in District 299 (CPS) is around 30%^{xix}. Not surprisingly, districts such as Highland Park attract extremely qualified teachers, while it is more of a struggle for the city of Chicago.

III. Certification Processes

A. Traditional Certification

The Illinois State Board of Education governs teacher certification, both traditional and alternative. The Illinois Compiled Statutes has a chapter on Schools and School Code and within that chapter there are several statutes dealing with the qualification and certification of teachers who wish to teach in the Illinois Public School system^{xx}. The qualification of teachers statute reads as follows^{xxi}:

§ 21-1. **Qualification of teachers.** No one may be certified to teach or supervise in the public schools of this State who is not of good character, of good health, a citizen of the United States or legally present and authorized for employment, and at least 19 years of age. An applicant for a certificate who is not a citizen of the United States must sign and file with the State Board of Education a letter of intent indicating that either (i) within 10 years after the date that the letter is filed or (ii) at the earliest opportunity after the person becomes eligible to apply for U.S. citizenship, the person will apply for U.S. citizenship.

No one may teach or supervise in the public schools nor receive for teaching or supervising any part of any public school fund, who does not hold a certificate of qualification granted by the State Board of Education or by the State Teacher Certification Board and a regional superintendent of schools as hereinafter provided, or by the board of education of a city having a population exceeding 500,000 inhabitants except as provided in Section 34-6 and in Section 10-22.34 or Section 10-22.34b.

There are five different types of teaching certificates available: early childhood, elementary, secondary, special, special education special certificate^{xxii}. The traditional route to obtaining any of the certifications in Illinois requires prospective teachers to attend a college or university where they enroll in a program that prepares them to teach the subject and grade level of their interest^{xxiii}. The State Teacher Certification Board must approve all programs^{xxiv}. Upon completion of an approved program the prospective teachers must pass the Illinois test of Basic Skills, a test on the content they wish to teach, and the Assessment of Professional Teaching.

Teacher certification exists as a method of ensuring that students are benefiting from qualified and trained professionals. Good teachers are especially important for low-income students who see the achievement gap between them and their wealthier counterparts grow each year. According to some estimates, three years in a row of good teachers (those in the 85th percentile of teachers) would overcome the average achievement gap^{xxv}. Eric Hanushek is a fellow at Stanford University's Hoover Institute who specializes in education policy expert and education economist. Hanushek introduced the now-common method of measuring teacher effectiveness by the learning gains of their students. Hanushek has conducted extensive research on teacher quality and he discounts the idea that many policy makers support, which is to increase the requirements to become a certified teacher^{xxvi}. Hanushek's *Teacher Quality* study addresses the "input policies" that the public education system has relied on for decades and points out their shortcomings. Reduction of class sizes and increasing teacher certification requirements are two traditional input policies that received and continue to receive lots of public

and legislative support^{xxvii}. Since 1960 teacher-to-student ratios have fallen by nearly a quarter, but student performance on the National Assessment of Educational Progress has stayed the same in math and reading and dropped in science^{xxviii}. While teacher-to-student ratios dropped, the number of teachers with Masters degrees rose. Hanushek's research indicates that school districts need to move away from these input policies and focus on student performance instead^{xxix}. His research shows that while increasing certification requirements is a popular policy aimed at improving teacher quality, it does not ultimately achieve this goal^{xxx}. Increasing certification requirements may filter out some bad teachers, but it also discourages many people who would be qualified and effective teachers from entering the profession^{xxxi}. Hanushek, and many other education policy researchers, believe that in order to make advances in low-income schools the focus needs to switch from input to output policies, with the most important focus placed on the output of student achievement instead of the input of teacher certification credentials^{xxxii}.

B. Alternative Certification

Alternative certification is a relatively new concept. One third of all the current alternative certification programs in the U.S. have been created after 2000^{xxxiii}. The National Center for Education Information began collecting data on alternative certification in the early 1980s^{xxxiv}. New Jersey's Provisional Teacher certificate, created in 1985, came under fire by the media and many teacher colleges who resisted the idea that alternative methods of certification could be created by the state^{xxxv}. By the late 1990s the alternative certification movement was established and had developed into many different programs. The alternative methods consist of rigorous and intensive training programs and high standards for their applicants. The most common alternative certification routes across the country are collaborative programs requiring

the cooperation of state certification boards, colleges and universities, and individual school districts^{xxxvi}. The number of people issued alternative teacher certifications jumped from a mere 275 in 1985-86 to 59,000 in 2005-2006^{xxxvii} By 2007 all fifty states, and Washington D.C., reported some form of alternative teacher certification method.

Alternative certifications exists for those who did not necessarily plan on being teachers, but are graduates of accredited colleges or universities and have at least five years experience in their field of study^{xxxviii}. Additionally, the alternative certificate may waive the five-year employment requirement if the applicant applies to teach in a school district located in a city with more than 500,000 residents^{xxxix}. While alternative certification originally came under fire, it is now generally viewed as an excellent program for people changing careers or entering not-for-profit organizations.

The Illinois State Board of Education alongside the State Teacher Certification Board governs the alternative certification process in Illinois. The statute governing alternative certification reads as follows:

§ 21-5b. Alternative certification. The State Board of Education, in consultation with the State Teacher Certification Board, shall establish and implement an alternative certification program under which persons who meet the requirements of and successfully complete the program established by this Section shall be issued an alternative teaching certificate for teaching in the schools. The program shall be limited to not more than 260 new participants during each year that the program is in effect. The State Board of Education, in cooperation with a partnership formed with a university that offers 4-year baccalaureate and masters degree programs and that is a recognized institution as defined in Section 21-21 and one or more not-for-profit organizations in the State which support excellence in teaching, shall within 30 days after submission by the partnership approve a course of study developed by the partnership that persons in the program must successfully complete in order to satisfy one criterion for issuance of an alternative certificate under this Section. The Alternative Teacher Certification program course of study must include the current content and skills contained in the university's current courses for State certification which have been approved by the State Board of

Education, in consultation with the State Teacher Certification Board, as the requirement for State teacher certification.

The alternative certification program established under this Section shall be known as the Alternative Teacher Certification program. The Alternative Teacher Certification Program shall be offered by the submitting partnership and may be offered in conjunction with one or more not-for-profit organizations in the State which support excellence in teaching. The program shall be comprised of the following 3 phases: (a) the first phase is the course of study offered on an intensive basis in education theory, instructional methods, and practice teaching; (b) the second phase is the person's assignment to a full-time teaching position for one school year; and (c) the third phase is a comprehensive assessment of the person's teaching performance by school officials and the partnership participants and a recommendation by the partner institution of higher education to the State Board of Education that the person be issued a standard alternative teaching certificate. Successful completion of the Alternative Teacher Certification program shall be deemed to satisfy any other practice or student teaching and subject matter requirements established by law.

A provisional alternative teaching certificate, valid for one year of teaching in the common schools and not renewable, shall be issued under this Section 21-5b to persons who at the time of applying for the provisional alternative teaching certificate under this Section:

- (1) have graduated from an accredited college or university with a bachelor's degree;*
- (2) have successfully completed the first phase of the Alternative Teacher Certification program as provided in this Section;*
- (3) have passed the tests of basic skills and subject matter knowledge required by Section 21-1a; and*
- (4)(i) have been employed for a period of at least 5 years in an area requiring application of the individual's education or (ii) have attained at least a cumulative grade average of a "B" if the individual is assigned either to a school district that has not met the annual measurable objective for highly qualified teachers required by the Illinois Revised Highly Qualified Teachers (HQT) Plan or to a school district whose data filed with the State Board of Education indicates that the district's poor and minority students are taught by teachers who are not highly qualified at a higher rate than other students; however, this item (4) does not apply with respect to a provisional alternative teaching certificate for teaching in schools situated in a school district that is located in a city having a population in excess of 500,000 inhabitants. Assignment may be made under clause (ii) of this item (4) only if the district superintendent and the exclusive bargaining representative of the district's teachers, if any, jointly agree to permit the assignment.*

IV. Teach for America

Teach For America began in 1990 just as the alternative certification movement was taking off. Wendy Kopp developed the not-for-profit organization for her senior thesis at Princeton University. She raised \$2.5 million to start the program and the first year 500 recent college graduates taught in six low-income school districts^{xi}. Today, Teach For America consists of 6,000 current corps members, and 14,000 alumni, serving 29 low-income urban and rural school districts serving as placement sites^{xli}. Teach For America recruits some of the brightest and most successful recent college graduates to join the corps. The 2008 corps members had an average SAT score of 1320, an average GPA of 3.6. Most corps members did not plan on being teachers before applying to Teach For America and they lack the requirements for traditional teacher certification. Corps members spend five weeks over the summer before their first year teaching at a TFA summer institute. The institute consists of courses on leadership, classroom management, diversity, learning theory, literacy development, and teaching practice^{xlii}. After successfully completing the summer institute program, corps members continue their training through state and district approved alternative certification programs. In Chicago, corps members must pass Illinois state certification exams before beginning teaching^{xliii}. Corps members spend their first year teaching on a provisional alternative certificate, which is good for one year^{xliiv}. After completing one year of teaching along with coursework from an accredited university and a performance-based portfolio, corps members receive an Initial Alternative Certification, which is good for four years^{xliv}. 60% of Teach For America corps members choose to continue their university coursework and obtain a Masters degree^{xlvi}.

Since it's creation in 1990 Teach For America has tried to help diminish the achievement gap between low-income students and their wealthier peers. In order to achieve this goal the organization focuses on student achievement and student progress. This reinforces Eric

Hanushek’s research which calls for result oriented solutions instead of input solutions.

Mathematica Policy Research, Inc. conducted the most thorough and comprehensive study on Teach For America’s impact on student achievement in 2004. The study posed the question, “Do TFA teachers improve (or at least not harm) student outcomes relative to what would have happened in their absence”^{xlvi}? In order to answer this question, the study looked at the outcomes of students taught by TFA teachers compared to students in the same grade and same school who were taught by “control teachers”^{xlvi}. 70% of TFA teachers graduated from a “most, highly, or very competitive college” compared to only 2.4% of control teachers^{xlvi}. However, 45% of all control teachers student taught for ten or more weeks compared to only 4.3% of TFA teachers^l. Despite the differences in certification and preparation, TFA teachers had a positive impact on their students’ math achievements; TFA teacher’s students’ math scores were significantly higher than students of the control teachers^{li}. TFA teachers and control teachers had the same impact on the average reading achievement – about one percentile^{lii}. Overall, the impact of TFA teachers was equal to or greater than the control teachers^{liii}.

V. Conclusion

Mathematica’s study shows what many others have been saying for years – that Teach For America, and other alternative certification methods, provide a low-cost option for school districts looking to attract high quality teachers to low-income school districts. The debate surrounding alternative certification certainly has more supporters than opponents. Finding studies related to the success of programs such as Teach For America and The New Teacher Program is simple, but finding research or studies opposed to these programs proves much more difficult. Oftentimes the critics of these programs have had first-hand experiences with an alternative certification program so they have a wealth of anecdotal evidence but no data to

reinforce their opinions. A former corps member cited the total lack of preparation prior to beginning teaching and lack of any administrative support as the two main reasons she left after just one year of teaching. She spoke of the other corps members as agenda-driven and said many of them were participants because it would look good on a resume. A veteran history teacher at a CPS high school in the city's Uptown neighborhood does not share the glowing praise that others have for Teach for America corps members. He is a certified teacher, the school's union representative, and is currently enrolled in a Masters program. He hopes to become a National Board Certified Teacher but he also recognizes the potential risks that might pose to his career. When asked about the Teach for America members at his school he dismisses them as overconfident, and claims that their inexperience and lack of training hurts their students. This opinion contrasts sharply with the many published studies documenting the enormous success that Teach for America members have achieved over the past twenty years. So who is right? Is it those who believe that teachers should go through traditional forms of certification? Or is it those who think excellent teachers can be made out of the best and brightest of today's elite college graduates?

The right to a minimally adequate education includes access to high quality teachers who are dedicated to helping children in poor neighborhoods thrive academically. Alternative certification allows non-traditional teachers to help achieve that goal. Teach for America and other programs of the like are not easy; the programs are demanding and challenging. These programs help provide a crash course in teaching by providing the essentials over an intensive five week summer program and throughout the year in Masters programs at accredited colleges and universities. Teach for America corps members come in with far less experience than those who planned on being teachers during college, but the passion and intelligence these young

teachers bring to struggling schools helps overcome any shortcomings that may exist as a result of the lack of traditional training. Alternative certification provides students access to highly qualified teachers who can help diminish the achievement gap – to deny them that benefit would be to deny them access to a minimally adequate education.

ⁱ Luppescu, Stuart, and Holly Hart. *CCSR's 2007 Survey Reports for Chicago Public Schools*. Rep. Chicago: University of Chicago, 2007.

ⁱⁱ *Id.*

ⁱⁱⁱ *Id.*

^{iv} Class Notes, January 14, 2009, Prof. Kaufman.

^v The New Teacher Project. *Hiring, Assignment, and Transfer in Chicago Public Schools*. Publication. New York: The New Teacher Project, 2007.

^{vi} *Id.*

^{vii} Kristof, Nicholas. "Opening Classroom Doors." New York Times 30 Apr. 2006.

^{viii} "At-a-Glance." Chicago Public Schools At-a-glance. Chicago Public Schools. 1 May 2009 www.cps.edu

^{ix} *Id.*

^x *Id.*

^{xi} *Id.*

^{xii} *Id.*

^{xiii} "Interactive Illinois Report Card." Interactive Illinois Report Card. A+ Illinois. 2 May 2009 www.aplusillinois.org.

^{xiv} *Id.*

^{xv} *Id.*

^{xvi} *Id.*

^{xvii} *Id.*

^{xviii} *Id.*

^{xix} *Id.*

^{xx} 105 ILCS 5/21-1-5

^{xxi} 105 ILCS §5/21-1

^{xxii} *Educator Certification*. Illinois State Board of Education. 3 May 2009, www.isbe.state.il.us/certification.

^{xxiii} *Certification Requirements*. Illinois State Board of Education. 3 May 2009, www.isbe.state.il.us/certification.

^{xxiv} *Id.*

^{xxv} Hanushek, Eric. "Teacher Quality." Teacher Quality. Palo Alto: Hoover Press, 2002. 1-11.

^{xxvi} *Id.*

^{xxvii} *Id.*, 7

^{xxviii} *Id.*, 6

^{xxix} *Id.*, 8

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- ^{xxx} Hanushek, Eric & Rivkin, Steven, *How to Improve the Supply of High Quality Teachers*. Brookings Paper on Education Policy, Brookings Institute, 2003
- ^{xxxi} *Id.* 14
- ^{xxxii} *Id.*
- ^{xxxiii} "Alternative Routes to Certification." National Center for Alternative Certification. 5 May 2009. www.teach-now.org.
- ^{xxxiv} "Alternative Teacher Certification: A State by State Analysis." Alternative Teacher Certification: A State-by-State Analysis. National Center for Education Information. 2 May 2009 www.ncei.org.
- ^{xxxv} "Alternative Routes to Certification." National Center for Alternative Certification. 5 May 2009. www.teach-now.org.
- ^{xxxvi} *Id.*
- ^{xxxvii} "Alternative Teacher Certification: A State by State Analysis." Alternative Teacher Certification: A State-by-State Analysis. National Center for Education Information. 2 May 2009 www.ncei.org.
- ^{xxxviii} 105 ILCS 5/21-5b
- ^{xxxix} *Id.*
- ^{xl} Our History. Teach for America. 3 May 2009. www.teachforamerica.org.
- ^{xli} *Id.*
- ^{xlii} Decker, Paul T., Daniel P. Mayer, and Steven Glazerman. *The Effects of Teach for America on Students: Findings from a National Evaluation*. Publication. Princeton: Mathematica Policy Research, Inc., 2004.
- ^{xliii} Placement Regions. Teach for America. 3 May 2009. www.teachforamerica.org
- ^{xliv} *Id.*
- ^{xlv} *Id.*
- ^{xlvi} *Id.*
- ^{xlvii} Decker, Paul T., Daniel P. Mayer, and Steven Glazerman. *The Effects of Teach for America on Students: Findings from a National Evaluation*. Publication. Princeton: Mathematica Policy Research, Inc., 2004.
- ^{xlviii} *Id.*
- ^{xlix} *Id.*
- ^l *Id.*
- ^{li} *Id.*
- ^{lii} *Id.*
- ^{liii} *Id.*