

An Alternative Teacher Preparation Journey

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Abstract

The following report discusses one university's alternative pathway journey. Four candidates were accepted into the program the first year in the fall of 2003. Since then numbers have increased to over 175 active program participants. Such substantial growth evidences the need for highly qualified teachers, especially in particular content areas and geographic regions as highlighted in the following report. State guidelines and regulation requirements help ensure quality, rigorous programs.

Introduction

In 1983, eight states positively responded to a request by the National Center for Education Information regarding the availability of alternatives to the traditional college teacher education program route for certifying teachers. Many new programs came into existence throughout the 1980's to address shortages of teachers, recruit high quality candidates, relate theory to practice, support teachers during their early years, and eliminate mis-assignment of teachers during their early years (Dill & Stafford, 1996). According to NAAC, the National Center for Alternative Certification (2010) all 50 states and the District of Columbia reported some type of alternative route to teacher certification by 2007. NAAC claims over 130 alternate routes, implemented by 485 alternate route programs, are available in all 50 states and the District of Columbia. Further, participation in these programs nationwide started in the hundreds in the mid to late 1980's and exceeded 7,200 in 1997-1998. The number of participants jumped in the 1998-1999 school year to over 12,000 and has increased each succeeding year (NCEI, 2005). Today, it is estimated that nearly one-third of all new teachers hired in this country come through such alternative programs, many under the umbrella of a state-regulated program (Feistritzer, 2009).

The following report discusses one university's alternative pathway journey. Fort Hays State University joined the Kansas alternative pathway track in 2001 through involvement with a Kansas State Department of Education (KSDE) transition to teaching grant. Four candidates were accepted the first year in the fall

of 2003. Since then numbers have increased to over 175 active program participants.

Such substantial growth evidences the need for highly qualified teachers, especially in particular content areas and geographic regions as highlighted in the following report. Analysis of data regarding hiring of restricted license teachers leads to a better understanding of effective selection, recruitment, and retention processes.

State Distinctives

The KSDE established a unique "restricted teaching" license for alternative pathway candidates in 2001. Designed primarily for secondary teachers, this license is applicable to 5th – 8th grade, 6th – 12th grades, or P-12 levels. Complete regulations can be found at:

https://online.ksde.org/regs_statutes/Stat_Reg_Results.aspx?Statute=0&Regulation=91-1-201&rptype=2&search=&maxres=10&andor=AND

Kansas School Demographics

Almost half a million (473,772) children are educated in Kansas public schools each year, with over an additional 30,000 children attending one of the State's many accredited private or parochial schools (KSDE, 2010). Over 30%, or 112 school districts have a transition teacher either currently in our program or a graduate of our Transition to Teaching (T2T) program. Thus, Kansas's schools and the specific teacher shortages in our state are positively impacted by alternatively prepared teachers beginning their professional teaching career on restricted licenses.

Three hundred and sixty-five accredited high schools provide secondary education in the state. High school buildings are classified according to size based on the enrollment figures on the twentieth day of classes each fall for tenth, eleventh, and twelfth grades by the Kansas State High School Activities Association. The number of restricted license teachers in each size of school is detailed from the 2008 and 2009 cohort groups. The 2009 – 2010 data is provided below (Kansas State High School Activity Association, 2010).

Table 1

2010-2011 Kansas High School Classification Data (n=355)

Classification	6A	5A	4A	3A	2A	1A
# of Schools	32	32	63	64	64	100
Enrollment Range	1584-961	917-532	530-194	194-121	121-76	75-15
# of Restricted License Teachers	34	21	25	17	18	21

As the table above indicates, Kansas restricted license teachers are in a variety of school settings. Restricted license teachers are in urban, as well as isolated rural locations. Further, these teachers are in buildings of all sizes and classifications. Size of school and geographical location are important considerations for program development and subsequent curriculum reviews. T2T courses are designed to provide participants instruction and practice in working with diverse students. Courses early in the program provide instruction in designing differentiated instruction and a course later in the program focuses entirely on working with diverse students.

Restricted license teachers are working with children from diverse backgrounds. According to data provided on the www.ksde.org website for 2009-2010, Kansas school children are evenly divided regarding gender, with 48.5% of the children male and 51.5% female. Almost 46% are classified as economically disadvantaged, 9.1% English Language Learners, 1.1% migrant, and 13.6% are identified with a disability. Kansas school children are 68.9% white, 15.8% Hispanic, 7.5% African American, and 7.75% other. Coursework is designed to prepare candidates to effectively teach all children (KSDE, 2010).

At first glance, Kansas appears to have a homogenous student population. However, upon closer examination one finds that the student context varies widely in the individual building where our T2T students teach. Educating our restricted license teachers to be effective educators from the first day of classes in buildings with no ELL students or to those with over 88.25% of children learning English is a challenge. Likewise, the special needs populations vary greatly from building to building. Ethnic diversity also shows great variance from one geographical region to another. Fifty-seven buildings have over 90% of students

classified as white. Another 44 buildings are comprised of over 75% white students. Only 64 buildings have 25% or more white students (KSDE, 2010).

The demographics of the districts and school buildings served by restricted license teachers are taken into consideration as we develop and revise program curriculum. Understanding the great diversity across our state, as well as the individual differences in a particular building, is critical to the success of our restricted license teachers.

Program Distinctives

The alternative certification program provides an induction to teaching, on-line courses, local mentoring and university supervision. Candidates participate in an "Induction to Teaching" class on the campus prior to assuming their duties as teachers. Instructors model and provide quality instruction in best teaching practices including classroom management, cooperative learning, lesson planning, questioning strategies, confidentiality, diversity, and standards.

Candidates enroll in one on-line course and a one-hour of practicum experience each semester in the program. The on-line courses are designed to provide candidates opportunities to read and conduct research in best classroom practices, implement those practices and reflect on the effectiveness of their implementation. In addition, each hiring district is responsible to designate a local mentor for the T2T candidate. Many of the assignments in the first two courses require the candidate to visit with his/her mentor regarding application and evaluation of researched best practices.

Performance Assessment

By state regulation, all alternative candidates must pass the PRAXIS II content test during their first year in the program. Thus, no candidate may continue in the program without successfully meeting the state cut-score. Ninety-nine percent of the program's T2T students have met this timeframe requirement.

Additionally, the State requires a performance assessment prior to recommendation for an initial teaching license for all initial candidates regardless of their preparation program. The teacher work sample is implemented toward the end of the program to assess candidates' ability to design and plan effective instruction in their content area. This instrument and its timing for use are intended to provide a measurement that represents the culminating experience in the program for pedagogical and professional knowledge and skills. Candidates perform very well on this performance assessment indicating their achievement of content pedagogy and their impact on student learning. In the 2009-2010 cohort,

97.3% passed the performance assessment with the minimum cut score. The two students who did not pass on their first attempt were provided remediation and the opportunity to resubmit their work sample. Since 2005, first-time pass rates have ranged from 83.3 to 97.3%. This performance assessment documents teaching and learning in each classroom.

Summary

Since its inception in the early 2000's, alternative preparation programs in Kansas have grown and evolved. Institutions of higher education house all alternative preparation programs and must adhere to state regulations and state program review processes. Through the description of one institution's journey, it is evident that Kansas is preparing quality alternative pathway candidates who are making a positive impact on Kansas's schools. While each program has distinctives, the State has created guidelines and regulations to ensure quality, rigorous programs. Approved assessments, content tests, performance assessments, and supervised clinical experiences each play a role in quality assurance. Nontraditionally prepared teachers are impacting Kansas's classrooms everyday.

Further information about alternative programs in Kansas, can be located at the Kansas State Department of Education website:
<http://www.ksde.org/Default.aspx?tabid=320#altcontacts>

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