

# One License – Many Routes: NEA and Alternative Routes to Licensure

*Improving state policies to recruit, retain, and reward quality teachers is essential if we are to offer a great public school to every student. NEA opposes fast-track alternate routes to licensure that not only fail to provide candidates the training they need to be successful educators, but also shortchange our students and cost states money they can ill afford for retraining or replacing poorly prepared teachers.*

—NEA President Dennis Van Roekel

## **E**very student deserves a high-quality teacher.

Debate about “traditional” versus “alternative” routes to the teaching profession may obscure a more troubling dilemma: the lack of rigorous



standards for teacher preparation and licensure that are required for all beginning teachers—regardless of the route taken to the profession. Quality public schools

require knowledgeable and well-prepared teachers, but the lack of uniformly applied standards for beginning teachers jeopardizes the quality of instruction available to all students.

The National Education Association advocates for rigorous licensure standards for entry into the teaching profession. While coursework, field experience, and test score requirements vary by state, the one constant in the profession is a license to teach. All teachers must be licensed by the state in which they teach once they complete the specified courses. NEA believes these standards, ideally established by professional licensing boards, must include:

- Demonstrated high academic performance
- Extensive clinical experience
- Demonstrated knowledge of subject matter, pedagogy, and child development.

Research shows that teacher quality is the single most important school-related variable affecting student achievement.<sup>1</sup> Assuring that beginning teachers possess the knowledge and skills necessary to serve effectively as teachers of record means that preparation and licensure systems should be current, comprehensive, and enforced. Unfortunately, the unchecked proliferation of alternative route programs has resulted in a dizzying array of options for prospective teachers, some of which openly circumvent state standards. These licensure loopholes were created in response to selected teacher shortages, or as part of a broader strategy to deregulate the teaching profession.

NEA policy states that “Every candidate, including those entering the profession via alternative routes, should meet every standard prior to being granted a teaching license.”<sup>2</sup> NEA’s rejection of fast-track shortcuts to teaching that do not equip beginning teachers for effective practice is *not* a rejection of alternative routes to licensure. Rather, NEA recognizes the need for alternatives to the traditional preparation programs for mid-career recruits or others possessing substantial training and expertise in a discipline. Established standards governing teacher licensure must be consistent, regardless of the preparation and licensure route taken.

Most classroom teachers enter the profession through comprehensive teacher preparation

programs, most often four- or five-year university-based programs, which are structured to enable graduates to meet state licensing requirements. Alternative routes to licensure are typically more condensed training programs and often target individuals with certain subject area/content majors. There are programs for career changers, military retirees, undergraduates who want short-term commitments, and individuals who want to take a test and teach immediately. The ultimate goal for prospective teachers in both comprehensive and alternative route programs is the same: to obtain a state license to teach.

### The teachers we need

#### **Every student deserves a well-prepared teacher.**

Approximately 200,000 teachers must be hired every school year to replace those who leave the profession, retire, or transfer to other schools.<sup>3</sup> According to the National Center for Alternative Certification, the number of teachers entering the profession through alternative route programs almost tripled between 2001 and 2006, growing from 20,000 to almost 60,000 teachers annually.<sup>4</sup> The growing number of teachers entering the profession through alternative routes and the range of experience each brings to the classroom creates new challenges for states and districts committed to recruiting and retaining quality educators.

NEA believes in the academic potential of all students and insists on high standards for teacher preparation and licensure to ensure that all students truly do have access to well-prepared teachers. To promote uniform quality, in 2008, NEA's Professional Standards and Practice Committee established the following criteria to govern all state licensure requirements – regardless of the route taken to meet them:

- Every candidate must obtain a bachelor's degree that includes a liberal arts curriculum that ensures adequate basic skills in reading, writing, and computation.

- Every candidate must have preparation in and demonstration of subject matter knowledge in core teaching area and have an academic major in that same teaching area.
- Every candidate must have preparation in and demonstration of professional and pedagogical skills, knowledge, and ability.
- Every candidate must participate in supervised clinical practice via an internship, student teaching, and/or mentoring program.
- Every candidate must participate in a new teacher induction program that includes mentoring from a qualified teacher in addition to support and/or mentoring from university faculty, school administrators, and new teacher peers.
- A candidate receives a full professional license only after demonstrating effective classroom practice as a teacher of record.

Recruiting and retaining well-prepared teachers to staff high-needs schools is especially challenging, but fast-track programs only exacerbate the problem of the “revolving door” of teacher turnover by emphasizing short-cut preparation and short-term commitments in the very environments that need teacher stability the most.

One promising strategy for attracting, developing, and retaining high-quality teaching recruits is the urban teacher residency model. Residency models incorporate critical components of NEA's policy into their programs in that they screen, recruit, and support talented college graduates who seek long-term teaching careers in urban school districts. The teacher residents participate in a year-long, paid residency during which they study under a master teacher, take coursework at a partner university, and ultimately teach in the master teacher's class. There is ongoing communication between the master teacher and the residency sponsor, with the candidate's field experience and coursework

leading to state licensure and a master's degree. Established programs currently exist in Denver, Boston, and Chicago.<sup>5</sup>

For all students to have access to well-prepared teachers, states must insist on the same high standards for all preparation programs. The National Council for the Accreditation of Teacher Education (NCATE), which has developed national standards for teacher preparation programs<sup>6</sup>, works with state agencies and educator groups to integrate its standards into state licensure systems. Through its professional accrediting process, NCATE determines which programs meet its rigorous standards for preparing teachers and other school specialists. It has experience working with both comprehensive and alternative preparation programs.

### NEA's Principles of Professional Practice can guide policy decisions

#### Great public schools need great teachers.

Quality teacher preparation and licensing are not about the route chosen but about the training and experiences that these programs provide. To guide policymakers and educators in their development of systems to prepare, license, induct, and continually support classroom teachers, the NEA advances its *Principles of Professional Practice*. To meet the needs of the next generation of learners, we need teaching professionals who:

- Design and facilitate instruction that incorporates the students' developmental levels, skills, and interests with content knowledge.
- Develop collaborative relationships and partners with colleagues, families, and communities focused on meaningful and deep learning.
- Provide leadership and advocacy for students, quality education, and the education profession.
- Demonstrate in-depth content and professional knowledge.

- Participate in ongoing professional learning as an individual and within the professional learning community.
- Utilize multiple and varied forms of assessment and student data to inform instruction, assess student learning, and drive school improvement efforts.
- Establish environments conducive to effective teaching and learning.
- Integrate cultural competence and an understanding of the diversity of students and communities into teaching practice to enhance student learning.
- Utilize professional practices that recognize public education as vital to strengthening our society and building respect for the worth, dignity and equality of every individual.
- Strive to overcome the internal and external barriers that impact student learning.<sup>7</sup>

All students should be taught by teachers who have been fully trained through quality preparation programs and licensed through systems based on high and consistent professional standards. Fast-track preparation and licensure programs fail to address the components of quality teaching and do not assure a great public school for every student.

### References

<sup>1</sup> National Commission on Teaching and America's Future (NCTAF), *What Matters Most: Teaching for America's Future*. New York: New York, 1996, [www.nctaf.org/documents/WhatMattersMost.pdf](http://www.nctaf.org/documents/WhatMattersMost.pdf).

<sup>2</sup> NEA Handbook, Resolution G-3, Licensure, 2008.

<sup>3</sup> "The Power of Preparation: Teacher Training Gives New Educators a Head Start," *Edutopia.org*, August 2001, [www.edutopia.org/power-preparation](http://www.edutopia.org/power-preparation).

<sup>4</sup> National Center for Alternative Certification, *Overview of Alternative Routes to Teacher Certification in Alternative Teacher Certification: A State-by-State Analysis* 2008.

<sup>5</sup> Berry, B., Montgomery, D., Curtis, R., Hernandez, M., and J. Wurtzel. *Creating and Sustaining Urban Teacher Residencies: A New Way to Recruit, Prepare, and Retain Effective Teachers in High-Needs Districts*, The Aspen Institute and Center for Teaching Quality, August 2008, [www.aspeninstitute.org/atf/cf/%7Bdeb6f227-659b-4ec8-8f84-8df23ca704f5%7D/CREATINGANDSUSTAININGUTR.FINAL.PDF](http://www.aspeninstitute.org/atf/cf/%7Bdeb6f227-659b-4ec8-8f84-8df23ca704f5%7D/CREATINGANDSUSTAININGUTR.FINAL.PDF)

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Darling-Hammond, Linda, "A Future Worthy of Teaching For America," *Phi Delta Kappan*, June 2008, 730-736.

<sup>6</sup> [www.ncate.org/institutions/unitstandardsrubrics.asp?ch=](http://www.ncate.org/institutions/unitstandardsrubrics.asp?ch=)

<sup>7</sup> NEA Professional Standards and Practice Committee, *Principles of Professional Practice*, Washington, DC, Adopted July 2008.

## Resources

**Center for Teaching Quality (CTQ)** seeks to improve student learning and advance the teaching profession by promoting teacher leadership, conducting timely research, and crafting policy — all in an effort to ensure that every student in America has a qualified, well-supported, and effective teacher. [www.teachingquality.org](http://www.teachingquality.org)

**National Council for the Accreditation of Teacher Education (NCATE)** is the profession's mechanism to help establish high quality teacher preparation. NCATE's performance-based system of accreditation seeks to foster competent classroom teachers and other educators who work to improve the education of all P-12 students. NCATE believes every student deserves a caring, competent, and highly qualified teacher. [www.ncate.org](http://www.ncate.org)

**National Center for Alternative Certification (NCAC)** is a clearinghouse for information about alternative routes to certification in the United States. Through a toll-free call center and an interactive Web site, NCAC provides answers to questions and guidance for individuals interested in becoming teachers, as well as for policymakers, legislators, educators, researchers, and members of the public. [www.teach-now.org](http://www.teach-now.org)

