

Appendix B

Recommendations for Alternate Route Programs

Approved by the VSBPE on June 23, 2006

Preface

Today's educators are no longer prepared solely through four-year programs run by the education departments of institutions of higher education. Alternative or non-traditional preparation programs now offer candidates the opportunity to enter the teaching profession through a wide-variety of paths. In January of 2006, the Commissioner of Education, Richard Cate, directed the Vermont Standards Board for Professional Educators (VSBPE) to develop recommendations for an alternate route to licensure for the State Board of Education to consider, a directive that emerged from one of the focused strategies noted in the Vermont Department of Education's Strategic Plan. The route, Cate posed, should transition teaching candidates into the classroom sooner than existing Vermont preparation programs currently do. Interested candidates, in this way, could earn a salary while working towards their license in collaboration with an institution of higher education. The VSBPE was also given the following criteria to consider when making their report: candidates should possess a BA, but it need not be specific to the education field; prior to entering a classroom, candidates should receive intensive instruction in pedagogy; candidates will complete additional coursework at an institution of higher education while teaching; and mentors will support candidates in the classroom.

With these criteria in mind, the VSBPE examined eight existing alternative route programs across the country in conjunction with the available research on quality alternatives in teacher preparation. Having reviewed the research, the Board chose to carefully analyze three specific alternate route programs: Connecticut's ARC, New York's Bank Street Internship Certificate Credential, and North Carolina's NC TEACH. The VSBPE then used the experiences of these highly regarded programs and the research of experts to guide its own formulation of what a quality alternate route program in Vermont should look like. The document that follows is not intended to describe a specific alternate route. Instead, the Board hopes that its recommendations will be used as a starting point for the creation of an alternate high quality teacher preparation program.

Introduction

Institutions of higher education across Vermont currently offer high-caliber traditional and alternative teacher preparation programs at all levels. Examples of the alternative routes that Vermont offers include the following: post-baccalaureate, transcript analysis, and Peer Review. As these alternate programs are approved teacher preparation programs, Vermont does not designate them "alternative programs," though another state may so label a similar program. Vermont's Peer Review process is currently considered Vermont's only alternate route to licensure, though it too will undergo the program approval process this fall. Candidates seeking entry into the teaching profession clearly have many options.

The VSBPE is well aware, however, of the growing problem of teacher shortages and the issues surrounding educator quality across the country. While shortages are not widespread in Vermont, it is clear that there are fewer highly qualified candidates in particular fields and that some schools remain hard-to-staff for a variety of reasons. Mid-career changers entering the

profession can certainly benefit our schools with their valuable life experiences and willingness to serve where they are needed. To garner full support for a new route to licensure then, the VSBPE recommends that any alternate program first be designed to address the needs specific to Vermont schools.

The VSBPE also feels strongly that candidates entering the profession through whatever means be held to the same standards. Current applicants for a Vermont professional educator license must meet the general requirements detailed in sections 5231 through 5240 of the Vermont regulations. Although candidates in alternate programs may not meet these requirements through conventional means, they should be held accountable for them. Such a condition assures that Vermont students are taught by an effective teacher and that schools are served by a committed educator.

Entrance Requirements

It is of critical importance that an alternate teacher preparation program only admits candidates who can successfully learn to teach in an abbreviated time period while working in the classroom. Research shows that the brevity of most alternative programs necessitates that candidates be selected with the “content knowledge, prior experience, skills, and attitudes that would make the expectation of quick entry and on-the-job training realistic.”¹ With this in mind, the VSBPE reasons that the selection process must carefully first evaluate a candidate’s aptitude for teaching and then his or her suitability for the program’s particular structure. The application process might, for instance, include a tool designed to specifically measure the candidate’s attitudes and disposition. The program should also only select candidates who possess: a baccalaureate with a major in the liberal arts and sciences, a 3.0 GPA, passing Praxis I and II scores (as applicable), three letters of recommendation, and sustained experiences working with children or adolescents. This rigorous selection process should further identify talented candidates through an interview process, writing sample, and by reviewing transcripts for the endorsement requirements. Applicants selected with academic deficiencies ought to develop a formal plan to address them as condition for admission.

The ultimate success of the program will, no doubt, depend in large part on the thoroughness of this admissions process. The VSBPE agrees with one Bank Street faculty member who says: “We have a responsibility to children and to the profession. It’s better to take time in the selection process and avoid having to counsel people out of programs later on.”²

Professional Knowledge Development

A strong alternative program will assure that its candidates complete an ongoing, demanding sequence of courses or seminars that address the essential knowledge base of teaching. Research shows that effective programs design a solid curriculum that covers classroom basics and pedagogy initially with more challenging information and instruction provided as candidates progress.³ The VSBPE recommends that prior to becoming the teacher of

¹ Susan Moore Johnson, et al., “A Difficult Balance: Incentives and Quality Control in Alternative Certification Programs,” *Project on the Next Generation of Teachers*, Harvard Graduate School of Education, April 2003.

² Darling-Hammond, L., & MacDonald, M., “Where There Is Learning There Is Hope: The Preparation of Teachers at the Bank Street College of Education.” In L. Darling-Hammond (Ed.), *Studies of Excellence in Teacher Education: Preparation at the Graduate Level* (pp. 1-95). Washington, DC: American Association of Colleges for Teacher Education.

³ “Alternative Routes to Teacher Certification,” U.S. Department of Education Office of Innovation and Improvement, <<http://www.ed.gov/admins/tchrqual/recruit/altroutes/report.pdf>>, accessed on February 6, 2006.
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record candidates have an understanding of the following: child and/or adolescent development, appropriate teaching methods/pedagogy, curriculum planning and assessment, teaching of students with special needs, learning theory, diversity, and classroom management. It is our expectation that additional study while the teacher of record will enable educators to gain the knowledge and skills needed to meet the *16 Principles for Vermont Educators* and the competencies and requirements for the endorsements.

Early Field Experience

Candidates must have intensive experiences in the field in their endorsement area before becoming a classroom teacher. These clinical experiences should provide program participants the opportunity to observe and practice pedagogical skills under close monitoring. The VSBPE proposes that a formal evaluation occur at the conclusion of this experience to verify candidate readiness for placement in the classroom. A candidate may be asked to leave the program at this point if it is evident that, despite interventions and mentoring, she or he is unprepared to continue. This performance assessment functions as a kind of quality control for both the students and schools of the district where candidates will be employed.

Supervision and Mentoring

School placements during the “internship year” need to offer teachers rich, sustained support in order for them to flourish.⁴ A formal partnership must exist between the alternate program and school districts to guarantee such quality experiences. Additionally, the program should create a strong system of mentoring and supervision for the new teachers in the alternate route. Mentors need to be an integral part of the new program, working in conjunction with the program administrators to facilitate candidates’ development of pedagogical skills in their endorsement area. As program faculty members, mentors will be able to assure continuity, quality on-site coaching, and continual supervision of the candidates as teachers. The VSBPE also desires that mentors use state standards and regulation to guide instruction and assessment of the candidates. Plainly, the alternate program will need to support such mentors through a careful selection process, training, and assessment. In addition to mentors, the program should utilize “candidate evaluators” to provide periodic, formal evaluations of the candidate in order to assure that students are being taught by a competent teacher of record. Such “candidate evaluators” will also need to regularly communicate with both the mentor and the candidate.

Exit Requirements

The VSBPE expects that all candidates exiting the proposed alternate route program document their knowledge and skills by completing a *Level I Teaching Licensure Portfolio*. Candidates will also need a recommendation from their “candidate evaluator.” Building supervisors, however, will make the final recommendation allowing candidates to move from an “internship certificate” to a Level I Teaching License.

⁴ Susan Moore Johnson and Sarah Birkeland, “Fast Track Certification: Can We Prepare Teachers Both Quickly and Well?” Education Week, February 15, 2006.
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Additional Recommendations and Concerns

While the VSBPE looks forward to the opportunities a new alternate program presents to Vermont schools, the Board cautions its creators that the first year of operation should serve as a pilot year. Data on the route's efficacy will need to be collected and analyzed as part of an overall program assessment strategy. The Board also has serious concerns regarding the financial feasibility of the program and its impact on the state of Vermont, school districts and institutions of higher education.