

ALTERNATIVE CERTIFICATION

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WHAT IS ALTERNATIVE TEACHER CERTIFICATION?

The term “alternative certification” has been utilized to describe programs ranging from immediate issuance of emergency certification to well-developed, highly professional training programs designed to bring new people into the profession. Because of the mandate to place highly qualified teachers in every classroom, the issue of alternative certification has become even more prominent and there is now more consistency in the academic rigor of alternative certification program across the nation. In this state, *TeachArkansas* serves as a clearinghouse for the various programs that enable an individual who did not out to be a teacher to become certified (see www.teacharkansas.org).

HOW DOES ALTERNATIVE TEACHER CERTIFICATION WORK IN ARKANSAS?

To obtain alternative certification in Arkansas, the applicant must have previously completed a bachelor’s degree, and participate formal instruction in the theory and practice of teaching, working closely with a mentoring teacher. The program is restricted to participants who can meet current needs (shortages) in particular grade levels and/or subject areas. The Non-Traditional Licensure Program (NTLP), administered by the Arkansas Department of Education (ADE), seeks to attract and train well-qualified recent college graduates and/or mid-career professionals who do not hold a bachelor’s degree in education, but are interested in becoming classroom teachers. Completion of the NTLP involves a two-year process of assessment, in-depth training, and classroom teaching experience, augmented by weekly meetings with a mentoring teacher. (See Table 1 for a description of the Arkansas NTLP requirements).

Table 1: Requirements for Arkansas Non-Traditional Licensure Program (NTLP)

Arkansas Non-Traditional Licensure Program (NTLP) Admission Requirements:

- Completion of a bachelor’s degree with a 2.5 GPA or better.
- Passing scores on (Basic Skills Test) and Praxis II (content area) teacher examinations.
- Submission of application materials and fees to www.teacharkansas.org.

Arkansas Non-Traditional Licensure Program (NTLP) Completion Requirements:

- Successful completion of two years of teaching experience (for which a two-year provisional license is issued) and a teaching portfolio
- Successful completion of two years of summer intensive and weekend (one Saturday a month) teacher preparation modules; completion of all modules is required for certification
- Successful completion of a two-year teaching mentorship program, facilitated by a site-based certified mentor teacher, who provides weekly consultation, support, and guidance
- Successful completion of college coursework in teaching reading skills and/or Arkansas history is required for certification in some subject areas and/or grade levels

Arkansas Non-Traditional Licensure Program (NTLP) Certification:

- An Initial Arkansas License is issued to participants who complete all program requirements
- A Standard Arkansas License is issued to participant who successfully complete the Praxis III assessment in addition to all other requirements

Source: Arkansas Department of Education; see <http://arkedu.state.ar.us/pdf/NTL%20web%20overview.pdf>.

HOW DOES ALTERNATIVE TEACHER CERTIFICATION WORK IN OTHER STATES IN THE REGION?

In comparison with those of neighboring states, Arkansas' alternative certification program is as rigorous most, and more rigorous than some. Eight nearby states have programs similar to that in Arkansas (AL, KY, MS, SC, FL, GA, LA, MS.), while six have tailored programs that involve review of an applicant's transcript and resume, then formulation of an individualized plan for attaining required competencies (GA, KS, KY, LA, MO, OK); some states offer both options. Since 2001 (the inception of the No Child Left Behind Act), Arkansas has issued licenses to more than 300 teachers through the alternative route. By comparison, neighboring states have issued the following numbers of alternative certificates: Mississippi, 756; Louisiana, 612; Oklahoma, 1256; and Missouri, 180. No figures were available for Tennessee.

The State of Georgia has a particularly interesting alternative certification program for persons interested in becoming an early childhood educator (pre-K through primary grades) in an urban, high-need school. Georgia State University, in collaboration with the Georgia Teacher Alternative Preparation Program and Teach for America, offers an intensive graduate program resulting in initial certification at the end of one year, and a Master's degree in early childhood education and full certification at the end of two years. A cohort of participants begin the program in May with an immersion into teaching theory, followed by an internship with close supervision in an urban elementary summer school program. During the school year that follows, each member of the cohort teaches full-time while continuing to participate in graduate level course work and a mentoring program, culminating in initial certification. Participants who complete the second year of the program will earn a graduate degree in early childhood education and can apply for full teacher certification.

NATIONAL PROGRAMS FOR ALTERNATIVE CERTIFICATION

Teach for America

Arkansas participates in two national programs that promote alternative certification as well, Teach for America and Troops to Teachers. Teach for America (TFA) seeks to eliminate educational inequality by recruiting outstanding college seniors and recent graduates who are willing to commit two years to classroom teaching in low-income rural and urban communities. Because the program is affiliated with AmeriCorps, participants also receive an AmeriCorps education stipend of \$4,725 for each year of service completed. Four Arkansas counties in the Mississippi Delta area have Teach for America sites; these include seven districts in Chicot, Lee, Phillips, and St. Francis counties. In 2004, Teach for America placed 134 teachers in the Delta region, 43% at the elementary level and 57% at the secondary level. In the 13 years that Teach for America has operated in the Delta region, approximately 50% of participants have completed the alternative certification within two years. (See <http://www.teachforamerica.org/delta.html>.)

Troops to Teachers

The Troops to Teachers (TTT) program is designed by the U.S. Department of Defense to assist personnel leaving military service to consider a second career as a teacher. The program attempts to connect participants with mentors who have completed the TTT program. In Arkansas, the Troops to Teachers program partnered with *TeachArkansas* and participants may pursue certification through the Arkansas Non-Traditional Licensure Program (NTLP) (see www.teacharkansas.org).

Thus, recent college graduates and mid-career professionals who would like to enter the education profession may pursue one of several alternative paths to full state certification as classroom teachers.

Primary Reference:

Feistritzer, C. E.; Haar, J. J. Hobar; S. E. Lovelyring, Eds. (2004) *Alternative Teacher Certification: A State-by-State Analysis 2004*, Washington, D.C.: National Center for Education Information. Available: <http://teach-now.org/frm2004TableofContents.asp>