

Assuring Successful Students through Effective Teaching Act (S. 1716)

Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs)

1. **QUESTION: Why do we still need the “Highly Qualified Teacher” label if we should be focusing on effectiveness? What parents really care about is whether a teacher is effective, not whether a teacher is certified and fully-prepared.**

Answer: Parents want their child’s new teacher to be fully-prepared and ready to teach skillfully on day one, not a year later. They want equal access to both fully-prepared and effective teachers.

Without a doubt, parents want their child to be taught by an effective teacher. Parents and students want states and districts to evaluate teacher quality and to equitably distribute well-qualified and effective teachers. But parents also want their children to be taught by a highly qualified (fully prepared, fully certified) teacher who knows how to teach the content matter from day one, and who has the knowledge to teach students with a range of needs.

A focus on just teacher effectiveness rather than initial preparation ignores the reality that states’ evaluation systems won’t be up and running for at least a few years and, once implemented, will require a few years of classroom data from which to determine an individual teacher’s effectiveness. Current language allows students to be taught by alternate route teacher-in-training for 2-3 years, at the end of which the teacher (1) may have left the classroom without ever completing their training and/or (2) been deemed ineffective. Low-income students, students of color, and students with disabilities—who will continue to be disproportionately taught by these teachers—will in the meantime have lost out on 2-3 years of education. Parents and students don’t want their child’s school to be the place where alternate route trainees learn to teach.

2. **QUESTION: Do credentials matter in terms of teacher effectiveness?**

Answer: Fully-certified teachers are more effective in raising achievement than less well-prepared teachers, including those still in training in alternative route programs.

The studies favored by those who argue that credentials don’t matter don’t hold up to rigorous review. These studies *generally compare alternative route teachers with a comparison group with even less training (often within the same poorly staffed school) or examine the effectiveness of alternative route teachers after they have graduated from the program.*¹ Teachers who become certified after completing a high-quality alternative program are often just as effective as those who complete traditional programs. But studies have consistently found that teachers-in-training are less effective before they have completed their preparation than those who enter teaching fully prepared, and that these teachers are primarily assigned to low-income and minority students who may experience untrained beginners year after year.²

A recent study of high school students in North Carolina, for example, found that students’ achievement was significantly higher if they were taught by a teacher who was fully prepared upon entry, certified in his

¹ See generally Heilig, J.V. & Jez, S.J. (2010). *Teach For America: A Review of the Evidence*. Education and the Public Interest Center & Education Policy Research Unit, available at <http://epicpolicy.org/publication/teach-for-america>

² Clotfelter et al. (2007); Decker et al. (2004); Boyd et al. (2006); Darling-Hammond et al. (2005); Heilig, et al. (2010).

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or her teaching field, and had taught for more than two years.³ One of the greatest disadvantages to students was being taught by a new teacher from the state’s “lateral entry” route into teaching, which allows more than 1000 people to enter teaching each year without prior training, mostly teaching students of color in low-income schools.

Not only are alternative route trainees less effective than fully-certified teachers, but they have higher attrition rates, thereby subjecting low-income and minority students and students with disabilities to a churn of underprepared, inexperienced teachers. A nationwide study by the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) found, for example, that among recent college graduates, 49% of those who entered teaching without certification, left the profession within five years, as compared to only 14% of certified entrants. In the Teach for America program, published studies show that more than 80% of TFA teachers have left their districts after three years.⁴

3. QUESTION: Does S. 1716 eliminate alternative route programs?

Answer: No. Alternate route programs will continue to play an important role in addressing teacher shortages. But if these teachers-in-training are to be called highly qualified before they have completed their training, they must prove their competence by passing a teacher performance assessment (available in about 25 states). Otherwise, they must be adequately supervised and equitably distributed—and parents must be informed that their child is being taught by a teacher who is not highly qualified.

Under the bill, if a teacher-in-training can demonstrate they are competent to teach by passing a rigorous teacher performance assessment, then they can earn the label “highly qualified” even before they have completed their program. If alternative route programs can prepare teachers who know their subject matter and how to teach it effectively, they can demonstrate it by having their teachers pass the teacher performance assessment before they take charge of their own classrooms. It is important to note that the most effective alternative certification programs are three year programs that include an initial 1-year residency requirement where participants are not the teacher of record so that they can obtain the skills and the training they need to lead their own classroom.

Alternative route programs with a mission to serve where there are teacher shortages will still be able to complete that mission. Alternate route teachers-in-training will still be able to serve in shortage areas. Both No Child Left Behind and the bill passed by the HELP Committee contemplate this in recognizing there won’t be 100% of highly qualified teachers and calling for reporting and equitable distribution of non-highly qualified teachers. S. 1716 would simply require that these teachers-in-training be (1) adequately supervised, (2) equitably distributed, and (3) disclosed to parents. If these teachers-in-training are effective, there should be no harm in disclosing who and where they are and letting parents and local communities know about the inequitable distribution. It is also beneficial to their practice that they receive the necessary support and guidance.

³ Clotfelter, C., Ladd, H.F., & Vigdor, J.L. (2007). *Teacher credentials and student achievement in high school: A cross-subject analysis with student fixed effects*. Cambridge: National Bureau of Economic Research, available at <http://www.nber.org/papers/w13617>.

⁴ Id.