



## **The Value of Comprehensive, University-Based Teacher Education Programs (TEPs) for Oklahoma Children**

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What kind of preparation should teachers in Oklahoma have before teaching in our public schools? This is a difficult question when considering the challenges that schools have had staffing classrooms in the past few years. Starting with the premise that all of our children should have an effective teacher in their classrooms each year from day one, this paper provides evidence of the value of comprehensive teacher preparation. Considering that even the earliest learning experiences can affect children for the rest of their lives, we urge you to consider the educator you want for your own children or grandchildren. Educator preparedness matters for children.

### **The Role of the Comprehensive, University-Based Teacher Education Program**

Students thrive when their teachers are well-prepared to meet their instructional and developmental needs. Comprehensively prepared teachers delve deeply into subject area knowledge, they understand teaching and learning (pedagogy) including assessment and data-driven decision making, and they successfully apply that understanding. They practice and participate with increasing levels of responsibility with students in schools, learning the art and science of teaching from excellent school-based and university-based mentor teachers. Teacher Education Programs (TEPs) offer comprehensive preparation that integrates future teachers' developing knowledge of students and classrooms with hands-on experiences that prepare them to be excellent beginning teachers. Their success as novices more likely encourages their commitment to this immensely challenging and profoundly rewarding profession.

Accurate content knowledge is important. In university-based TEPs, future teachers demonstrate content knowledge across the curriculum before and during their education coursework and field-based experiences; this enables them to develop skills that put their content knowledge to use in working with students.

Teachers in our evidence-based, comprehensive programs study not only how to teach but why they would choose one approach over another, gaining a full and rich understanding which fosters effective decision making to serve student learning. Comprehensively prepared teachers develop and deliver culturally relevant and inclusive curricula to foster the success of all children and demonstrate respect for our richly diverse communities. Further, fully prepared educators are ready on day one to utilize reliable, responsive classroom management strategies through which children learn to self-regulate, effectively collaborate, and resolve conflict. Those completing comprehensive teacher education

become professionals through a thoughtful and experiential approach that readies them to work with Oklahoma public school children and teens, including those with adverse childhood experiences (ACEs). Finally, it is crucial for students to have teachers who have demonstrated successful performance in socio-economically and ethnically diverse settings *before* they meet their own first class of Oklahoma children or teens.

### **The Proliferation of Emergency Certification in Oklahoma**

As most Oklahomans are aware, each year since 2009, the number of unprepared and underprepared teachers entering classrooms has skyrocketed, reaching 3,038 approvals for emergency certification in 2018-2019 (OSSBA, 2019) with record-setting approvals for June and July totalling 1,666 for this school year that's just beginning (Eger, 2019).

The purpose of this white paper is not to criticize those who have stepped up to enter into this challenging, rewarding profession through emergency certification; these individuals are both needed and appreciated. The alternative would be empty classrooms or even larger class sizes, which would certainly not allow appropriate attention to students or help retain a district's existing teachers. In fact, several of our institutions have already launched programs to work with districts to support and retain those who have entered via this route, including onsite cohorts and fully online options. However, we must address the concern that the vast majority of new teachers entering Oklahoma classrooms at this time are through a route that is intended to be extremely rare in extenuating circumstances. We cannot accept employing untrained teachers as the new normal for Oklahoma's children and teens.

For those entering through emergency certification, no preparation is required before becoming a teacher. Applicants need to hold a bachelor's degree, which may or may not be in the content area of instruction. A 2019 law added the requirement of six clock-hours of professional development prior to beginning, though this will be difficult to enforce given last-minute hiring. They may or may not have any background in how to teach.

### **Oklahoma Data and the Research on the Impact of Preparation on Children's Learning**

A large-scale study that examines the effects of emergency certification or other sub-standard teacher credentialing (Podolsky, Darling-Hammond, Doss, and Reardon, 2019) found a clear, significant, and negative impact on student achievement with an increase in the number of teachers entering via such pathways after controlling for other variables. By contrast, the authors report a significant increase in the likelihood of high student achievement in districts with comprehensively prepared educators. Districts that were outliers in their high success rate for serving children of color were districts with very high numbers of comprehensively prepared teachers.

Darling-Hammond, Holtzman, Gatlin, and Heilig (2005) found clear "benefits to recruiting fully prepared teachers who can launch their careers at a higher level of effectiveness" (p. 23). We cannot offer our children back those years of school while underprepared educators attempt to learn the complex work of teaching without comprehensive, university preparation or internships that offer an understanding of and ability to apply culturally relevant (Ladson-Billings, 1995) approaches to teaching and learning. Emergency credentialed instructors serving in historically marginalized communities' classrooms may be particularly harmful, as it is likely to fuel the dangerous but prevalent myth of a culture of poverty, which serves to blame students and families for the so-called "achievement gap" while ignoring the systemic issues that have denied those same communities equitable learning opportunities for generations

(Ladson-Billings, 2006). Statistically, the data are clear that teacher education affects student learning. Researchers have found that with the increase of emergency certified teachers, student performance decreases in mathematics and reading.

Further, administrators rated university educator preparation program graduates as more strongly prepared in their methods of teaching. Teachers' self-assessments affirmed these findings (Wilson, Floden, & Ferrini-Mundy, 2002, p. 193). Student performance in Oklahoma took a recent downward trend that appears to reflect these findings. "Student performance in the year-over-year snapshot in math shows an overall slight downward trend (mean Oklahoma Performance Index, or OPI, score) and a steeper downward trend in English language arts (ELA) performance from 2017 to 2019." Superintendent Hofmeister (personal communication, 2019) goes on to note, "It is important that we keep these results in perspective as we move forward, united in our efforts to ensure every child in an Oklahoma public school has the opportunity to achieve academic success that leads to a bright future."

The studies' findings are also echoed in the 2018 Oklahoma's Administrator/Mentor First Year Teacher Survey Data. Statistical analyses indicated that among all four domains of the Oklahoma-mandated [InTASC Standards](#) (The Learner & Learning, Content, Instructional Practices, and Professional Responsibilities), university prepared educators were rated at a significantly higher level than their alternatively certified colleagues by their mentors or administrators. When ranking mean scores in each domain, university-based TEPs were rated highest, followed by either the alternative or para-professional route depending on the domain. In all four domains, emergency certified educators' means and Teach For America educators' means were rated second lowest and lowest, respectively, by administrators or mentors.

When first year teachers rated their own preparation and effectiveness in teaching on a related survey, self-ratings were significantly higher among university-prepared educators when compared to alternative routes (Debacker, 2018). Fully prepared teachers are more likely to stay in the profession (DeAngelis, Wall, & Che, 2013; Ingersoll, Merrill, & May, 2014, as cited in Kim & Corcoran, 2017), are more confident in their practice (Darling-Hammond, 2006, as cited in Kim & Corcoran, 2017), and are better rated by employers (Patterson & Bastian, 2014, as cited in Kim & Corcoran, 2017). Although Oklahoma does not currently have a longitudinal data system, Oklahoma's university-based TEPs are required to produce valid and reliable data regarding impact on student learning.

The differences in Oklahoma teacher success persisted when considering certification test scores as well (based on data from the 2013-2014 academic year through the 16-17 academic year). Educators from university-based programs performed at the highest levels for all exams, with the largest margin of difference occurring on the Oklahoma Subject Area Tests (OEQA, 2018). It is also important to note that while university candidates must take their exams prior to beginning teaching, emergency certified educators do so after they have begun teaching, with up to three years to pass state required teaching exams (see Table 1 for details). These data debunk the non-evidence-based claim that those in teacher education programs do not have strong content knowledge. In fact, university programs provide extensive instruction and practice using content knowledge, pedagogy, and professionalism. Our innovative programs address the rapidly changing needs of Oklahoma's children, teens, and schools by utilizing extensive quality assessment systems that are valid and reliable, peer-reviewed, and responsive to our school partners.

Oklahoma's comprehensively prepared educators conduct, on average, 146 hours of field experience under the guidance of expert mentors *before* completing a full-time internship for an average of almost

fifteen weeks. In addition, experiential practices are woven throughout their programs. University TEP faculty have taught as full-time P-12 educators for an average of over 10 years; further, they spend an average of 33 hours in Oklahoma P-12 schools during each school year (OEQA, 2018). The interaction, coaching, and feedback from effective mentor teachers in a variety of settings offers university-prepared teachers a deep understanding of how to effectively address the learning needs of all children. They have greater confidence to make appropriate decisions as professional educators, knowing that children's learning may not neatly follow a textbook or pacing guide.

### **The Need to Keep Fully-Prepared Educators in Oklahoma Classrooms: The Urgency of Restoring Respect for the Profession in Oklahoma**

As a short-term solution, we recognize that the emergency certification route is a necessary means to fill vacant teaching posts. To keep an eye toward long-term solutions, however, we need a thriving, diverse pipeline of comprehensively-prepared educators who will stay in Oklahoma long term. Statewide retention rates demonstrate that university prepared teachers stay in our classrooms longer than emergency certified teachers (State Dept. of Education Teacher Shortage Task Force, 2018).

While the task force report notes a 68% three-year retention rate for TEP graduates, the number does not tell the whole story. Teachers and administrators often voice the concern that their workload is greatly intensified by the necessity to mentor teachers who have not been comprehensively prepared before entering the classroom, which can contribute to increased stress and decreased job satisfaction. With a national teacher shortage, our comprehensively prepared teachers are actively recruited by out-of-state school districts. Texas has begun placing billboards all over Oklahoma.

Theresa Cullen's research found that those who had been teaching in Oklahoma and then left earned \$19,000 more annually than they had previously earned (Hardiman, 2017). As Superintendent Hofmeister has noted, while the much needed pay raises (\$6,000 and \$1,200, plus \$70 million for the funding formula over the last two legislative sessions) are an important step in the right direction, additional needs include smaller class sizes and continued investment in Oklahoma classrooms. In the face of a national teacher shortage, the intense competition for the best prepared teachers is not likely to wane soon.

Another challenge is a problematic narrative that deprofessionalizes teaching and teachers. As the shortage has brought a lowering of teacher education standards (see [CAEP Standards](#)), fewer young professionals see teaching as a valued career. The notion that preparation is not required to teach has been utilized to justify the exponential growth of emergency certification; the idea that "all a teacher needs is kindness" is disrespectful to our profession. While kindness is a necessity for educators, it does not replace the ability to develop instruction to facilitate learning for students at different levels and with different needs. Additionally, kindness does not replace the ability to behave professionally, even in challenging circumstances, as practiced by university teacher candidates collaborating with a mentor for over 700 hours of hands-on work in classrooms before certification.

The positive economic impact of university teacher education candidates' unpaid time in schools is over \$12.25 million dollars for the 2016-2017 cohort of university completers based on the state's paraprofessional salary rate. Our future teachers in Oklahoma's universities are typically supporting themselves financially and are working to make ends meet, especially during the semester of their unpaid, full-time internships. They deserve our respect and financial incentives so they can pay bills, including costs associated with certification requirements and entering the profession.

Candidates seeking comprehensive preparation are all too often urged *not* to teach or encouraged to enter the profession through an alternative pathway, since the pay and certification are ultimately identical. However, it's important to note the value of university teacher education graduates who have already demonstrated their effectiveness in the classroom. Hanushek (2010) estimates that an effective teacher's economic contribution, based on a large class of 30 students, would be \$1 million *per year*. We'd be wise as a state to consider this investment. That may sound like a large sum until we consider that effective schools reduce our criminal justice costs, the need for state aid, and any number of other personal and political challenges tied to poor educational outcomes.

At the fore of our thinking is an immense respect for the teaching profession and all those in it. Teachers focused on children's learning and development shoulder an incredible responsibility. Parents, community members, and local businesses count on graduates from our public schools to be ethical, independent, contributing citizens; the quality of the classroom teacher impacts these outcomes.

This is a matter of equity for our children.

We owe an educational debt to our historically marginalized communities (Ladson-Billings, 2006). Until we ensure that low-income children and children of color have the best-prepared teachers, rather than the least prepared, we are exacerbating a systemic inequity. Enrollment in Oklahoma's highly regarded comprehensive university TEPs must be incentivized in order to attract a diverse, thriving pipeline of teachers ready to facilitate the complex learning needs of children in today's and tomorrow's classrooms. Oklahoma City Public Schools (OKCPS), the Foundation for OKCPS, and three universities (UCO, MACU, and OSU) partner to offer the Urban Teacher Preparation Academy (UTPA) in which interns participate in intensive, paid professional development that is context-specific throughout their senior year, plus their first three years employed with the school district. Eighty-seven percent of teachers who completed UTPA were still in OKCPS at the end of three years (Pennington, 2019). Most of those not retained in OKCPS remain in the profession.

As with any profession, there must be standards that are maintained in order to enter. Were the authors of this white paper to decide to pursue a career in law, we would fully expect to go to law school and pass the bar exam. While well-educated individuals, we are not *yet* prepared as professionals in that field. The same is true for teaching. While we navigate the immediate needs of the teacher shortage, we must also implement long-term plans to restore the pipeline of comprehensively prepared teachers. In the meantime, universities will continue to support and collaborate with districts to retain the committed teachers they have, whatever their pathway.

It is also critical to note that universities have long recognized that alternative certification career changers are needed and have much to contribute to students, *after* they are prepared. Universities have been collaborating with school districts and the OSDE to offer courses to meet that need. As the shortage has intensified, universities have responded by providing greater accessibility to preparation targeted for alternatively or emergency certified teachers – including on-site district cohorts, hybrid courses, summer options, and fully online offerings. We are helping districts retain emergency and alternatively certified teachers, while addressing the need to incentivize and recruit candidates in comprehensive preparation programs.

By widely promulgating other pathways which remove requirements for effective preparation for beginning teachers, we are diminishing teacher quality and likely decreasing the attractiveness of the

profession. As emergency certification and other pathway numbers have increased, enrollment in university-based, comprehensive preparation dropped approximately 39% from 2008 to 2018 (OK Policy, 2019). In addition to declining enrollment in university TEPs, teacher retention is suffering.

Our children and our teachers deserve better.

### **OACTE Recommendations for Recruiting and Retaining Effective Educators**

The teacher shortage will not be solved by reducing standards; that approach will result in a teacher *quality* shortage in addition to a numeric shortage. Normalizing the emergency certification process is not a long-term solution. To achieve better schools and better student outcomes, there are several approaches that need to be pursued simultaneously. We must prioritize incentives for teachers to enter the classroom fully prepared from day one. Oklahoma's 23 TEPs are an essential piece of any viable set of solutions.

Improved per-pupil funding and increased teacher salaries are essential. To incentivize university-based programs and best serve our children/teens, we recommend these solutions:

- Offer state-funded **loan forgiveness and/or scholarship funds** for university-prepared teachers who commit to employment in Oklahoma public schools.
- Allocate state funds for university-based teacher candidates' **certification exam costs**.
- Provide state-funded **signing bonuses** for the first 3 years in OK public schools for university-prepared teachers, as theirs is the only pathway required to have met all of the profession's entry requirements **before** they begin teaching.
- Provide state funds for **paid student teaching internships** to ease fiscal stress of university-based candidates while avoiding the cost to districts and possible recruitment inequities among districts.
- **Restore induction/mentoring support** for new teachers via school/university partnerships -- a proven retention effort in which OK led the nation.
- **Increase diversity** in teacher education programs. A more diverse teacher workforce is not only good for children of color; research demonstrates that all children benefit from more diverse educators (Sebastian Cherng & Halpin, 2016).
- Provide **funding for career changers** with a bachelor's to certify by acquiring a university micro-credential or master's.
- **Incentivize the return of 30,000 teachers** who left schools within 6 years.
- Encourage **retired educators** to return by offering the option of a full salary.
- **Empower fully prepared professional educators** to innovate and make decisions to maximize student learning.

Table 1: Requirements before *beginning* teaching full-time.

Requirements <b><i>before beginning to teach</i></b> by certification pathway:	Comprehensive University-Based Teacher Education	Alternative Certification	Teach For America (TFA)	Emergency Certification	Para-Professional Certification	Substitute Teachers
Hold a bachelor's degree	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	?
Complete an accredited TEP	YES					
Complete 15 weeks, on average, full-time internship in P-12 classrooms with carefully selected mentor	YES					
Complete 146 hours, on average, in P-12 classrooms before student teaching	YES		*			
Pass the OGET (content exam) and OSAT (subject exam for content teaching)	YES	YES	**			
Demonstrate a concentration of coursework in the content area in which seeking certification	YES	YES				
Pass the OPTE or PPAT test/assessment (professional exam on how to teach)	YES					
Complete coursework on student learning, classroom management, assessment, and students' personal/developmental needs	YES					
Complete dyslexia training (early childhood, elementary and special education) and pass the Oklahoma Reading Test (special education)	YES					
Complete child welfare-related training: trauma-informed instruction, FERPA, substance abuse, child abuse, professional ethics & school law, etc.	YES					

\*5 week institute includes up to one hour per day (up to 25 hours total, then) co-teaching a child/children, though may or may not be in the content area or grade level where placed. The institute is typically led by TFA alumni, a small percentage of whom completed university-based teacher prep programs.

\*\*Must take and pass two Praxis exams prior to teaching.

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## **Appendix A: Alternative and Emergency Certification Defined/Distinguished**

In this paper we have discussed the necessity of comprehensively prepared educators through university-based preparation. Importantly, however, we need to clearly define terms, as the phenomenon of emergency certification, while it has exploded in sheer numbers, is still a relatively new and unfamiliar term. It is important to distinguish between alternative certification and emergency certification. Alternative certification is a long-standing pathway to certification designed primarily for career changers. Alternative certification applicants must have taken and passed the OGET and the OSAT in the subject area in which they intend to teach.

They must hold one of the following degrees:

- a bachelor's degree with a minimum retention GPA of 2.5
- a bachelor's degree from an institution recognized by the Oklahoma State Regents plus 2 years of qualified work experience in a related field
- a terminal degree from an accredited institution

In order to demonstrate competency in the subject area, an alternative certification applicant must successfully complete one of the following:

- "An academic major in a field that corresponds to a certification area (or 30+ relevant credit hours on higher education transcript).
- An academic minor (or 15+ relevant credit hours) in a field that corresponds to a certification area, plus at least 1 year of qualified work experience or relevant volunteer experience (volunteer experience may be confirmed by verifiable references).
- At least 3 years of qualified work experience and/or relevant volunteer experience, plus a written recommendation from an employer or volunteer coordinator.
- Publication of a relevant article in a peer-reviewed academic or trade journal.
- Other documentable means of demonstrating competency, subject to the approval of the State Department of Education" (OSDE, 2019).

Once approved to pursue alternative certification, applicants must pass the OGET and OSAT before beginning in the classroom. Once in the classroom, "participants in the Alternative Placement program must complete 6 to 18 college credit hours of professional education, or 90-270 clock hours of professional development approved by an Oklahoma school district, depending on prior education and experience. Professional education requirements must be completed within 3 years after entering the Alternative Placement program. NOTE: All participants will be required to complete a college credit course addressing classroom management and a college credit course addressing general or subject-specific pedagogical principles, or approved equivalents." (OSDE, 2018) Finally, alternative certification applicants must also pass the OPTE exam within the first 3 years of entering the Alternative Placement program.

While those who are emergency certified must ultimately carry out the above should they wish to pursue long-term certification, prior to entering the classroom, the sole mandate is any bachelor's degree (with a recently legislated requirement (2019) of minimal professional development, though this will be difficult to enforce given hiring dates), which may or may not be in the content area the applicant wishes to teach. Thus, upon beginning with one's own classroom of children or teens, an emergency certified teacher may or may not have taken and passed any certification exams, may or may not have demonstrated any form of content knowledge through coursework or otherwise, and may or may not have any background in pedagogy -- the body of knowledge on teaching and learning and its successful

application. While districts certainly do their best to find applicants who have demonstrated the appropriate knowledge, skills, and professional dispositions, none of these are *required* for emergency certification as a teacher begins independently working with children or teens. And while districts do their best to support all new teachers, those entering through emergency certification need a much greater level of mentoring support and professional development than districts have historically needed to provide.