

Your Question:

You asked about alternative teacher preparation pathways, especially as it relates to paraprofessionals moving to full certification.

Our Response:

Teacher recruitment and retention is a topic consistently addressed by state policymakers across the country, especially as teacher shortages persist in certain schools and subject areas. State policymakers use a variety of policy levers in an attempt to recruit and retain a highly qualified teacher workforce. Expanding the pool of teacher candidates through alternative pathways is one of the levers many policymakers employ. Below, you'll find examples of state policies related to alternative teacher certification, and examples of state policies aimed at recruiting paraprofessionals into the teaching profession.

Alternative Pathways

There are a wide range of alternative programs available and, thus, a wide variety of requirements. According to a 2020 [report](#) from the National Council on Teacher Quality, 46 states and the District of Columbia permit alternative certification for teachers through state policy. According to the same report, nearly one in five teachers now enters the profession through an alternative route. [Research](#) shows that alternative programs also attract more teachers of color and male recruits, and these recruits may be more likely to choose to work in urban schools or schools that need the most support.

For example, [data](#) analyzed by TNTP shows that roughly 30% of teachers in traditional programs are teachers of color compared with 53% of teachers of color in alternative certification programs. However, [research](#) also shows that alternatively prepared teachers are more likely to leave their schools and the profession than teachers prepared through a traditional route. Below are examples of state policies related to alternative teacher certification.

- **Michigan** [Comp. Laws Ann. § 380.1531i](#) outlines requirements for alternative preparation programs to be approved. These requirements include: 1) providing an “intensive training program in teaching” that constitutes the equivalent of at least 12 college credit hours and includes training on child development or child psychology, family and community relationships, diverse learners, instructional strategies, and a form of field-based experience in a classroom setting; 2) having a proven record of producing successful teachers or being modeled after a program that has a proven record of producing successful teachers; and 3) participants have a cohort grade point average of at least 3.0 on a 4.0 scale or the equivalent on another scale; and 4) accepting only participants who hold at least a bachelor’s degree.
- **South Dakota** [S.D. Admin. R. 24:28:11:01](#) establishes the general education alternative certification and notes that an applicant for this certificate may teach as an elementary teacher in grades five through eight, as a secondary teacher or a K-12 teacher while pursuing alternative certification. Applicants are [required](#) to hold a valid preliminary certificate, receive an offer of employment, have at least a bachelor’s degree from a regionally-accredited institution of higher education, and complete at least 60 minutes of suicide awareness and prevention training if they have not done so in the last year. The certificate is valid for three years.

[S.D. Admin. R. 24:28:11:10](#) outlines requirements to advance from a general education alternative certificate to a professional teaching certificate, including: 1) completing at least 15 transcribed credit hours from a

regionally accredited institution of higher education with a C or higher in classroom management, teaching methods, student assessment, differentiated instruction, adolescent psychology and South Dakota Indian Studies; 2) pass the state-designated pedagogy test; 3) adhere to the South Dakota Code of Professional Ethics; 4) receive signoff from the employing school district; and 5) participate in a mentor program.

Pathways, Programs and Incentives for Paraprofessionals

Some states have policies specifically meant to assist individuals working as paraprofessionals in transitioning to full-time teaching. According to our [50-State Comparison](#) on teacher recruitment and retention, last updated in 2019, 23 states offer a pathway, program or incentive through statute or regulation to recruit paraprofessionals into the teaching profession. Examples of other statutes and regulations related to such pathways, programs and incentives are below.

- **Alabama** [Admin. Code 290-4-3-.01](#) requires professional learning to include activities that create programs to enable paraprofessionals to obtain the education necessary to become certified and licensed teachers.
- **Massachusetts** [Gen. Laws Ann. ch. 15A, § 19](#) requires the board of higher education to establish a program to provide grants to individuals working as paraprofessionals in public schools while pursuing a bachelor's degree at a public institution of higher education in order to become a certified teacher in the commonwealth. Statute also outlines eligibility requirements for the grant.
- **Nevada** [S.B. 352](#) (2021) requires the commission to adopt regulations that, among other things, allow a person who is currently employed as a paraprofessional and enrolled in a program to become a teacher to complete an accelerated program of student teaching in the area in which the person is currently employed as a paraprofessional.
- **New Mexico** [Stat. Ann. § 21-21P-5](#) outlines a Grow Your Own Teachers scholarship program for school employees who have not earned the appropriate educational credentials to be licensed as a teacher and who have demonstrated financial need. The scholarships are for up to \$6,000 per year for no more than five years. "School employee" is defined in statute to mean "a resident of New Mexico who is authorized to work in the United States and who has been employed by a public school in a position that works directly with students for at least two years and is in good standing with the school district and who is enrolled in or accepted by an undergraduate teacher preparation program at a regionally accredited public post-secondary educational institution in New Mexico."
- **Utah** [Code Ann. § 53F-5-205](#) creates the Paraeducator to Teacher Scholarship Program to provide scholarships of up to \$5,000 to paraeducators pursuing an associate degree or bachelor's degree program to become a licensed teacher. Paraeducator is defined as a school employee who "1) delivers instruction under the direct supervision of a teacher; and 2) works in an area where there is a shortage of qualified teachers, such as special education, Title I, ESL, reading remediation, math, or science." Statute also outlines eligibility requirements and other requirements for the scholarship.