

# NCTQ Databurst: State Oversight of Alternate Routes into Teaching

December 2020

*In compliance with state guidelines during the pandemic, many alternate route programs have modified admissions and preparation requirements and policies. In some instances, testing requirements have been temporarily suspended for enrollment and instruction has moved online. Much of the data for this databurst was collected prior to the pandemic and therefore does not reflect COVID-related policy changes. For more information on how states are addressing the impact of COVID on the teaching profession, visit our [COVID-19 response hub](#).*

All but four states in the nation now permit teachers to come into the profession through an “alternate route,” compared to only a few 30 years ago.<sup>1</sup> Alternate routes into the classroom have grown so acceptable that about one in five teachers now enters the profession through one of these programs, which offer some real benefits to the profession. Nearly double the percentage of teacher candidates in alternate route programs identify as Black and more than double identify as Latino as compared to traditional teacher preparation programs (15% vs. 8%, and 13% vs. 5%, respectively).<sup>2</sup> Additionally, alternate route candidates often fill jobs in hard-to-staff subjects and schools.

When it comes to requirements for alternate routes, states must balance between upholding standards for educators regardless of how they come into the profession with providing flexibility by differentiating the requirements they place on these programs from traditional pathways. Since alternate route candidates typically become a teacher of record immediately or shortly after they enter into a program, establishing strong entrance requirements and specifying essential supports are important levers states should exercise.

This brief explores how states fare in the balancing act between appropriate oversight and flexibility.

## State exemplars

While no state earns a perfect rating for meeting all five of the recommended practices for alternate route programs, a few states stand out. Notably, **Louisiana** and **Ohio** rise to the top, not only by requiring programs to verify teacher candidates' subject matter knowledge prior to admission, but also by setting policies that require support structures for alternate route candidates. (See *state exemplars box* for more about the model requirements in these two states.)

**Michigan** too has held strong on admission standards. For alternate route candidates, Michigan requires both a 3.0 GPA and passage of a subject-matter exam to gain entry into a program.

**New Jersey** is a forerunner by requiring training for candidates before they become teachers of record. For example, New Jersey requires that prior to becoming a teacher of record, teacher candidates must engage in 20 hours of planning and delivering instruction through an individual or co-teaching model, as well as 50 hours of a pre-professional experience. This training is important to build a candidate's toolbox before stepping into a classroom of eager students.

<sup>1</sup> Alaska, Oregon, and Wyoming have no alternate routes into the teaching profession. Utah's alternate routes to licensure were discontinued in 2020 and have yet to be replaced.

<sup>2</sup> Characteristics of Public School Teachers Who Completed Alternative Route to Certification Programs. (2018, May). Retrieved from [https://nces.ed.gov/programs/coe/indicator\\_tlc.asp](https://nces.ed.gov/programs/coe/indicator_tlc.asp)



## Limiting the amount of coursework

All 47 states with alternate route programs require some type of coursework to be taken while also serving as a teacher of record. State policies should aim to make sure that the amount of coursework is not burdensome. States need to limit coursework focusing only on the immediate needs of new teachers, such as classroom management and pedagogy. There are 19 states that tailor required coursework, but 28 states do not.

### State tailors its professional course work requirements to the immediate needs of a first-year teacher

✓	✗
AL, DE, FL, GA, IL, IN, IA, LA, ME, MD, NV, NH, NC, OH, OK, RI, SD, TX, WV	AZ, AR, CA, CO, CT, DC, HI, ID, KS, KY, MA, MI, MN, MS, MO, MT, NE, NH, NM, NY, ND, PA, SC, TN, VT, VA, WA, WI

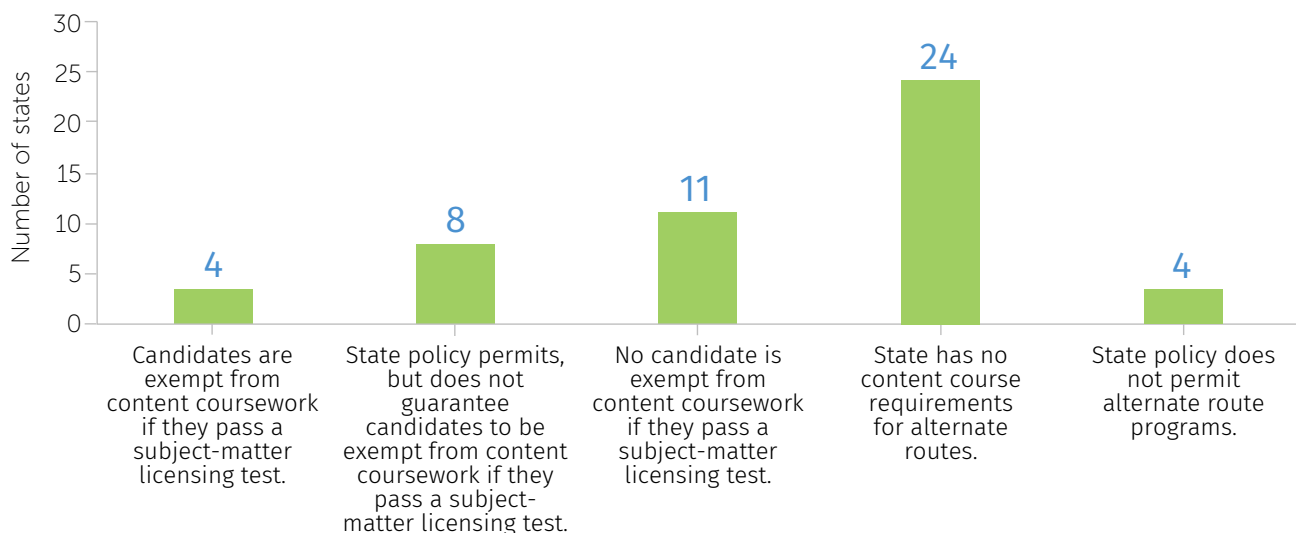
State policy does not permit alternate route programs: AK, OR, UT, WY

## Timing of coursework

One way states can make preparation more manageable for alternate route teachers is to require coursework prior to becoming a teacher of record. Coursework taken before an individual becomes a teacher of record is important to not only give them the knowledge they need, but also lessen the burden once they are teaching on a daily basis. For example, **Iowa** does a reasonable job limiting coursework required prior to teaching. Iowa's alternate route teachers must take coursework in understanding how learners grow and develop, content knowledge, classroom management, competence in planning and preparing for instruction, and using a variety of methods to monitor student learning. Conversely, **Indiana's** policies are more burdensome, requiring not only those topics but others as well, and does not limit coursework once alternate route candidates are teachers of record.

## Testing out of coursework

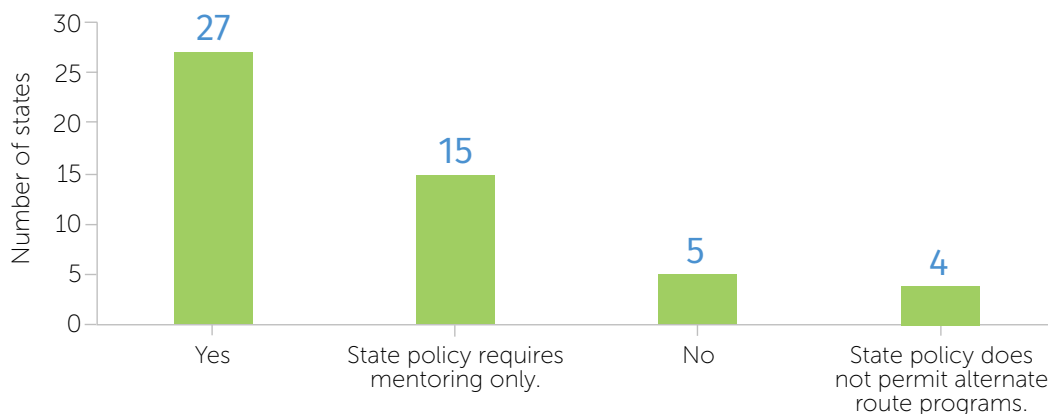
Another flexibility states can provide to reduce a teacher's load is to allow candidates to reduce content-related coursework once they demonstrate their subject-matter knowledge through an assessment. For example, **Maine** requires that middle and high school teacher candidates take 24 semester hours of coursework related to their intended teaching area; however Maine waives these coursework requirements if a candidate achieves a passing score on the relevant subject-matter exam. While 12 states allow alternate route candidates flexibility by waiving content-specific coursework if candidates can pass a subject-matter licensing exam, 11 lack these test-out options for all candidates.



## Clinical practice and induction support

Requiring some clinical practice prior to becoming a teacher of record and designating targeted supports for alternate route candidates is of course critical. Whereas most traditionally trained teachers get at least 10 or more weeks of practice, only **Minnesota** and **Nebraska** have similar requirements for some alternate route teachers, with most states requiring little to no practice teaching hours for those entering through an alternate route. One way to compensate for reduced practice time is to provide more support after the start of teaching, particularly during the first few months of school. Twenty-seven states have specific requirements for mentoring and induction for alternate route educators, while five states have none (**Hawaii, Indiana, Michigan, Montana, and Vermont**). However, even among the 27 states, there is significant variance in how much support must be required. **Massachusetts** requires alternate route candidates to receive orientation, support from a mentor, and release time to observe other teachers, whereas **Pennsylvania** requires its alternate route candidates to be observed each month during their first year in the classroom.

### State outlines specific induction and mentoring requirements



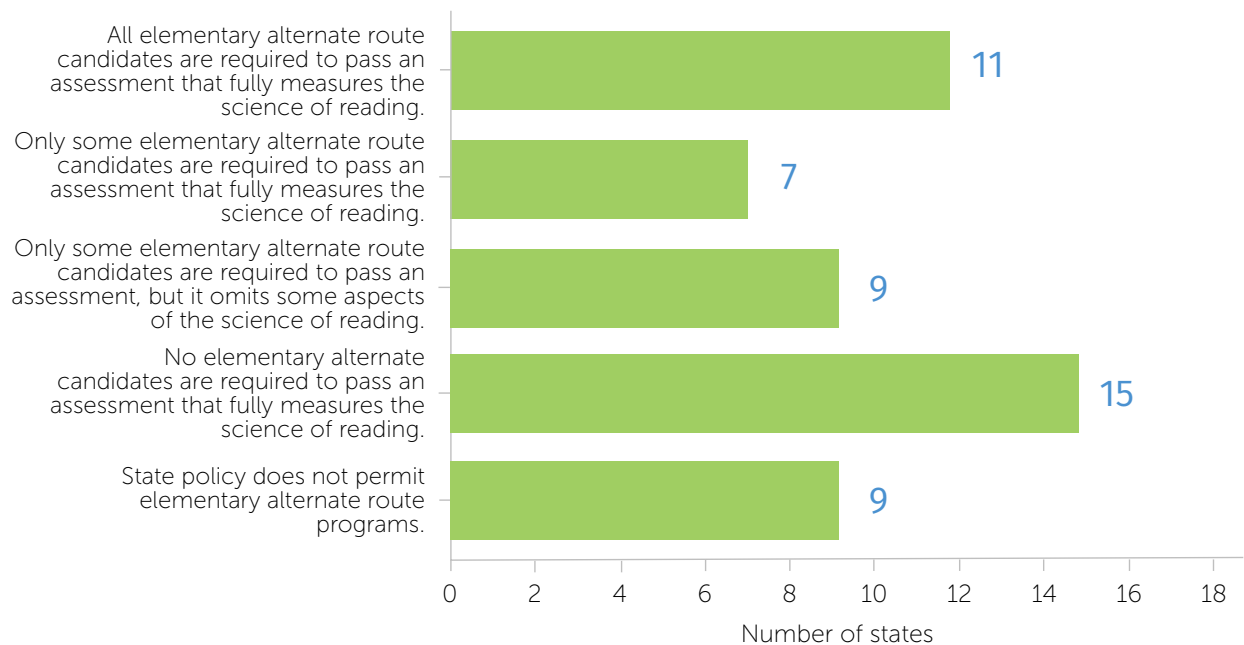
## Knowledge of how to teach reading

Requiring elementary teachers to demonstrate that they have learned the science behind effective reading instruction is one of the most important policy acts a state can take. When it comes to demonstrating knowledge of how to teach reading, alternate route teachers should be held to the same standard as every other teacher.

Of the 42 states that allow alternate route programs for elementary certification, only two states (**Mississippi** and **Texas**) require that all alternate route teachers pass a test that fully measures the science of reading before becoming a teacher of record.

Another 9 states delay the requirement until the teacher has formally completed the program, often a year or two after they start teaching. States should prioritize requirements regarding instruction on the science of reading and minimize delays so teachers do not spend a year or more teaching students without any verification by the state that they possess this critical knowledge. There are 24 states with alternate routes that do not adequately test teachers' knowledge of reading instruction at any point, either because they do not require a reading test of any teacher candidate or the test they do require does not adequately measure the science of reading. To learn more about what states can do to support reading, check out [The Four Pillars to Reading Success](#).

## Elementary reading state requirements for alternate routes



### Recommendations

- **Set content knowledge requirements prior to admission into a program.** States should ensure that all alternate route candidates pass relevant subject-matter licensing tests as a prerequisite for admission into a program. Postponing this requirement until the end of the formal program can be a disservice to candidates who have expended time and money in the pursuit of a career, only to be denied a license in the last step of the process. Further, most alternate route programs are not geared to address major gaps in content knowledge.
- **Waive unnecessary coursework requirements.** States should waive content knowledge coursework requirements for candidates who demonstrate sufficient subject-matter knowledge on a licensing test. Exacting coursework requirements, such as a major, in a particular subject area could dissuade talented individuals who lack precisely the right courses but possess the requisite subject-matter expertise from pursuing a teaching career.
- **Require elementary teacher candidates to know how to teach reading prior to becoming a teacher of record.** States should require alternate route elementary teachers to acquire and demonstrate knowledge of the science of reading, through an assessment that fully measures the five components of scientifically based reading instruction. For more information on which assessments meet that benchmark, click [here](#).
- **Establish an induction experience for all new alternate route teachers.** States should provide specific induction guidelines to ensure that all novice alternate route teachers receive the additional support needed to facilitate their success in the classroom. Effective strategies include intensive mentoring with full classroom support in the first few weeks or months of school, a reduced teaching load, and release time to allow new teachers to observe experienced teachers.
- **Limit required coursework.** States should ensure that all novice alternate route teachers' coursework is relevant to the immediate needs of new teachers. Appropriate coursework would include grade-level or subject-level content, methodology in the content area, classroom management, assessment, and instruction in the science of reading.

**CONTENT KNOWLEDGE**

**SCIENCE OF READING**

<b>STATE</b>	<b>State policy requires all alternate route candidates to pass a subject-matter test prior to admission into the program.</b>	<b>State policy requires elementary alternate route candidates to pass an assessment that fully measures the science of reading.</b>
Alabama	Only some alternate route candidates are required to pass a subject-matter test prior to admission.	All elementary alternate route candidates are required to pass an assessment that fully measures the science of reading.
Alaska	State policy does not permit alternate route programs.	State policy does not permit alternate route programs.
Arizona	No alternate route candidate is required to take a subject-matter test prior to admission.	No elementary alternate route candidates are required to pass an assessment that fully measures the science of reading.
Arkansas	Only some alternate route candidates are required to pass a subject-matter test prior to admission.	Only some elementary alternate route candidates are required to pass an assessment that fully measures the science of reading.
California	Only some alternate route candidates are required to pass a subject-matter test prior to admission.	All elementary alternate route candidates are required to pass an assessment that fully measures the science of reading.
Colorado	Only some alternate route candidates are required to pass a subject-matter test prior to admission.	Elementary alternate route candidates may be required to pass an assessment, but it omits some aspects of the science of reading.
Connecticut	Only some alternate route candidates are required to pass a subject-matter test prior to admission.	All elementary alternate route candidates are required to pass an assessment that fully measures the science of reading.
Delaware	No alternate route candidate is required to take a subject-matter test prior to admission.	No elementary alternate route candidates are required to pass an assessment that fully measures the science of reading.
District of Columbia	Only some alternate route candidates are required to pass a subject-matter test prior to admission.	Elementary alternate route candidates may be required to pass an assessment, but it omits some aspects of the science of reading.
Florida	Only some alternate route candidates are required to pass a subject-matter test prior to admission.	Only some elementary alternate route candidates are required to pass an assessment that fully measures the science of reading.
Georgia	Only some alternate route candidates are required to pass a subject-matter test prior to admission.	No elementary alternate route candidates are required to pass an assessment that fully measures the science of reading.
Hawaii	No alternate route candidate is required to take a subject-matter test prior to admission.	No elementary alternate route candidates are required to pass an assessment that fully measures the science of reading.
Idaho	Only some alternate route candidates are required to pass a subject-matter test prior to admission. <sup>1</sup>	No elementary alternate route candidates are required to pass an assessment that fully measures the science of reading.
Illinois	All alternate route candidates are required to pass a subject-matter test prior to admission.	No elementary alternate route candidates are required to pass an assessment that fully measures the science of reading.
Indiana	Only some alternate route candidates are required to pass a subject-matter test prior to admission.	Only some elementary alternate route candidates are required to pass an assessment that fully measures the science of reading.
Iowa	No alternate route candidate is required to take a subject-matter test prior to admission.	State policy does not permit alternate route programs. <sup>2</sup>
Kansas	All alternate route candidates are required to pass a subject-matter test prior to admission.	State policy does not permit alternate route programs. <sup>2</sup>
Kentucky	Only some alternate route candidates are required to pass a subject-matter test prior to admission.	Elementary alternate route candidates may be required to pass an assessment, but it omits some aspects of the science of reading.
Louisiana	All alternate route candidates are required to pass a subject-matter test prior to admission.	Elementary alternate route candidates may be required to pass an assessment, but it omits some aspects of the science of reading.
Maine	Only some alternate route candidates are required to pass a subject-matter test prior to admission.	State policy does not permit alternate route programs. <sup>2</sup>
Maryland	All alternate route candidates are required to pass a subject-matter test prior to admission. <sup>1</sup>	All elementary alternate route candidates are required to pass an assessment that fully measures the science of reading.

1 Alternate route candidates are required to pass a subject-matter test prior to becoming a teacher of record.

2 State policy does not permit alternate routes for elementary teachers.

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<b>STATE</b>	<b>State policy requires all alternate route candidates to pass a subject-matter test prior to admission into the program.</b>	<b>State policy requires elementary alternate route candidates to pass an assessment that fully measures the science of reading.</b>
Massachusetts	All alternate route candidates are required to pass a subject-matter test prior to admission.	Elementary alternate route candidates may be required to pass an assessment, but it omits some aspects of the science of reading. <sup>3</sup>
Michigan	All alternate route candidates are required to pass a subject-matter test prior to admission.	No elementary alternate route candidates are required to pass an assessment that fully measures the science of reading.
Minnesota	No alternate route candidate is required to take a subject-matter test prior to admission.	No elementary alternate route candidates are required to pass an assessment that fully measures the science of reading.
Mississippi	All alternate route candidates are required to pass a subject-matter test prior to admission.	All elementary alternate route candidates are required to pass an assessment that fully measures the science of reading.
Missouri	No alternate route candidate is required to take a subject-matter test prior to admission.	No elementary alternate route candidates are required to pass an assessment that fully measures the science of reading.
Montana	No alternate route candidate is required to take a subject-matter test prior to admission.	No elementary alternate route candidates are required to pass an assessment that fully measures the science of reading.
Nebraska	No alternate route candidate is required to take a subject-matter test prior to admission.	No elementary alternate route candidates are required to pass an assessment that fully measures the science of reading.
Nevada	No alternate route candidate is required to take a subject-matter test prior to admission.	No elementary alternate route candidates are required to pass an assessment that fully measures the science of reading.
New Hampshire	No alternate route candidate is required to take a subject-matter test prior to admission.	Only some elementary alternate route candidates are required to pass an assessment that fully measures the science of reading.
New Jersey	All alternate route candidates are required to pass a subject-matter test prior to admission.	Elementary alternate route candidates may be required to pass an assessment, but it omits some aspects of the science of reading.
New Mexico	No alternate route candidate is required to take a subject-matter test prior to admission.	Only some elementary alternate route candidates are required to pass an assessment that fully measures the science of reading.
New York	All alternate route candidates are required to pass a subject-matter test prior to admission. <sup>1</sup>	No elementary alternate route candidates are required to pass an assessment that fully measures the science of reading.
North Carolina	No alternate route candidate is required to take a subject-matter test prior to admission.	All elementary alternate route candidates are required to pass an assessment that fully measures the science of reading.
North Dakota	No alternate route candidate is required to take a subject-matter test prior to admission.	No elementary alternate route candidates are required to pass an assessment that fully measures the science of reading.
Ohio	All alternate route candidates are required to pass a subject-matter test prior to admission.	State policy does not permit alternate route programs. <sup>2</sup>
Oklahoma	No alternate route candidate is required to take a subject-matter test prior to admission. <sup>4</sup>	State policy does not permit alternate route programs. <sup>2</sup>
Oregon	State policy does not permit alternate route programs.	State policy does not permit alternate route programs.
Pennsylvania	No alternate route candidate is required to take a subject-matter test prior to admission.	Only some elementary alternate route candidates are required to pass an assessment that fully measures the science of reading.
Rhode Island	All alternate route candidates are required to pass a subject-matter test prior to admission.	Elementary alternate route candidates may be required to pass an assessment, but it omits some aspects of the science of reading.
South Carolina	Only some alternate route candidates are required to pass a subject-matter test prior to admission.	Elementary alternate route candidates may be required to pass an assessment, but it omits some aspects of the science of reading.

1 Alternate route candidates are required to pass a subject-matter test prior to becoming a teacher of record.

2 State policy does not permit alternate routes for elementary teachers.

3 Candidates in Massachusetts have the option of meeting the reading test requirement by passing the Foundations of Reading or the MTEL Reading Specialist test. The Reading Specialist omits some aspects of the science of reading instruction.

4 In Oklahoma, alternate route candidates are required to pass a subject-matter test prior to becoming a teacher of record. However, these candidates may apply for an exception if they have a "substantially comparable" advanced degree.



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South Dakota	No alternate route candidate is required to take a subject-matter test prior to admission.	No elementary alternate route candidates are required to pass an assessment that fully measures the science of reading.
Tennessee	No alternate route candidate is required to take a subject-matter test prior to admission.	All elementary alternate route candidates are required to pass an assessment that fully measures the science of reading. <sup>5</sup>
Texas	Only some alternate route candidates are required to pass a subject-matter test prior to admission. <sup>1</sup>	All elementary alternate route candidates are required to pass an assessment that fully measures the science of reading.
Utah	State policy does not permit alternate route programs.	State policy does not permit alternate route programs.
Vermont	All alternate route candidates are required to pass a subject-matter test prior to admission.	Elementary alternate route candidates may be required to pass an assessment, but it omits some aspects of the science of reading.
Virginia	Only some alternate route candidates are required to pass a subject-matter test prior to admission.	All elementary alternate route candidates are required to pass an assessment that fully measures the science of reading.
Washington	No alternate route candidate is required to take a subject-matter test prior to admission.	All elementary alternate route candidates are required to pass an assessment that fully measures the science of reading.
West Virginia	All alternate route candidates are required to pass a subject-matter test prior to admission.	All elementary alternate route candidates are required to pass an assessment that fully measures the science of reading.
Wisconsin	Only some alternate route candidates are required to pass a subject-matter test prior to admission.	Only some elementary alternate route candidates are required to pass an assessment that fully measures the science of reading.
Wyoming	State policy does not permit alternate route programs.	State policy does not permit alternate route programs.

5 Teacher candidates in Tennessee must pass a test prior to renewing the practitioner license or advancing to the next license.