



An Overview of the Alternative Teacher Certification Sector Outside of Higher Education

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Introduction and summary

Teachers have a greater impact on student achievement and even long-term outcomes such as college attendance and future salaries than any other in-school factor.¹ Despite the importance of teachers, the preparation programs intended to train them and provide them with the foundational skills they need to grow into high-quality educators vary in format, curriculum offered, quality, and more.²

Alternative teacher certification programs that are run outside of institutions of higher education (IHE) are an especially varied group that have enjoyed steady growth in enrollment in the past decade. Unfortunately, analysis from this report has found that a majority of students in the non-IHE alternative certification sector are enrolled in programs run by for-profit organizations, the largest of which operates fully online. Online, for-profit entities have been problematic actors in the higher education space for years: This means that their prevalence in the non-IHE alternative certification sector may be cause for concern for policymakers.³ Interest in this sector may also grow as states look for alternatives to solely in-person instruction as they continue adjusting to providing teacher preparation during the COVID-19 pandemic. Learning more about the non-IHE alternative certification sector is crucial to understanding how to better hold actors within it accountable and to ensure that talented and diverse teacher candidates are completing these programs well-prepared for the classroom.

Therefore, the Center for American Progress analyzed the non-IHE alternative certification sector to find which types of operators manage programs, the role of for-profit organizations, in which states these programs are operating, and how enrollment in these programs varies by race and ethnicity and gender. The key findings of this analysis are as follows:

- Non-IHE alternative certification programs exist in 32 states and Washington, D.C. Only seven states host 10 or more programs, and six states host only one program.
- Individual schools, districts, and regional education service agencies run the largest number of non-IHE alternative certification programs and collectively enroll about 19 percent of students in these programs.

- Programs run by for-profit organizations enroll about 68 percent of the students in this sector while only managing about 12 percent of the programs in this sector. For-profit organizations also manage programs in only nine states.
- Alternative certification programs enroll a higher percentage of students of color than traditional teacher preparation programs, but white students still make up the majority of enrolled students in all types of teacher preparation programs.
- Traditional programs, IHE-based alternative certification programs, and non-IHE alternative certification programs all enroll at least twice as many female students as male students.

These findings provide a starting point for policymakers looking to understand what the non-IHE alternative certification sector looks like in individual states and what trends exist nationally. One notable finding is that large programs operated by for-profit organizations dominate enrollment in the sector. Given existing concerns about the practices of for-profit operators in higher education, the existence of large for-profit, non-IHE alternative certification programs presents a red flag for the states in which they are located and for states into which they are looking to expand.⁴ This report provides a preliminary analysis, but state policymakers should build off the findings to identify areas for further research and data collection in order to create targeted solutions to improve the teacher preparation programs in their state.

A note on the data source

When Congress reauthorized the Higher Education Act (HEA) in 2008, a requirement was included that all teacher preparation programs across the country—traditional and alternative alike—have to report on a number of metrics to the state in which they operate, which then reports those data to the federal government.⁵

Included within the reported data are enrollment numbers for programs in each state, disaggregated by race and ethnicity and gender, and nondisaggregated completion numbers, among other metrics.⁶ In addition to the 50 states and Washington D.C., data for traditional programs and IHE-based alternative certification programs include, when present, the outlying U.S. territories of American Samoa, Guam, the Marshall Islands, Micronesia, the Northern Mariana Islands, Puerto Rico, and the Virgin Islands.

The authors used the most current available data for this report, which as of this writing are from the 2017-18 academic year and were reported in 2019.⁷ Figures for this report are labeled with the year reported rather than the academic year.

Additionally, in this report, “enrollment” encompasses all students who were enrolled in a program during the academic year, including those students who completed the program during that year. This is slightly different from how these data are presented on the HEA Title II webpage, where enrollment and completion are shown as two separate, mutually exclusive categories.⁸ The decision to define enrollment this way was made based on advice from Westat, which administers the dataset for the U.S. Department of Education.⁹

Lastly, there is a large for-profit, non-IHE alternative certification operator labeled as A+ Texas Teachers in the dataset. This is the former name of an organization now called Texas Teachers of Tomorrow.¹⁰ This program reports enrolling 58,133 students in 2019, which is just more than double the size of the next largest teacher preparation program of any type. Given the size of this operator, the authors have presented the results of the analysis in most sections with and without Texas Teachers of Tomorrow to provide information on trends in the non-IHE alternative certification sector with and without this outlier.

An overview of the teacher certification landscape

To better understand the growing non-IHE alternative certification sector, it is important to first situate it within the broader teacher preparation landscape. A 2019 CAP report, “What To Make of Declining Enrollment in Teacher Preparation Programs,” analyzed enrollment trends in teacher preparation programs, which were categorized by states as one of three types: traditional programs, alternative certification programs based at an IHE, and alternative certification programs not based at an IHE (non-IHE).¹¹

Teacher preparation program types

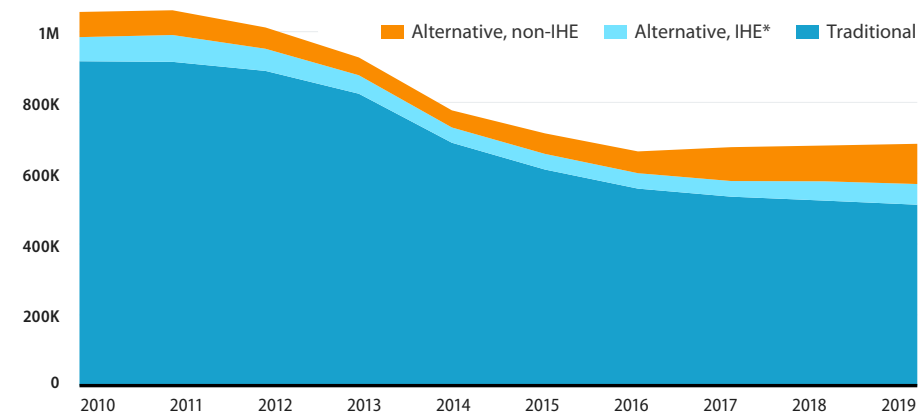
When reporting for the HEA, states sort teacher preparation programs into three categories:

- Traditional teacher preparation programs are typically based at an IHE and often constitute a major or pathway that is part of a bachelor’s degree or master’s degree. Teachers who graduate from these programs do not start teaching until they have finished all of their certification requirements.¹²
- Alternative certification programs typically provide individuals who already have a bachelor’s degree with an alternative pathway to certification and licensure that does not require them to obtain another bachelor’s degree. In these programs, candidates begin teaching before completing all of their certification requirements. Alternative certification programs can be run by a postsecondary institution, a type that is defined in this report as an IHE-based alternative certification program.
- Alternative programs can also be run by organizations and actors not based in a postsecondary institution; these are defined in this report as non-IHE alternative certification programs. Requirements such as length of time, coursework, and training for these alternative certification programs can vary widely depending on state laws for teacher licensure and programs’ design.¹³

The previous report showed that the non-IHE alternative certification program sector was experiencing different trends than the other program types. Whereas the traditional and IHE-based alternative certification sectors experienced an overall decline in enrollment between 2010 and 2019, non-IHE alternative certification programs saw nearly a 60 percent increase in enrollment during the same period.¹⁴

FIGURE 1
Change in enrollment varies by teacher preparation program type

Teacher preparation program enrollment by program type and year, 2010–2019



* Institution of higher education.

Note: Enrollment totals in traditional and alternative IHE programs includes enrollment in the outlying U.S. territories of American Samoa, Guam, the Marshall Islands, Micronesia, the Northern Mariana Islands, Puerto Rico, and the U.S. Virgin Islands.

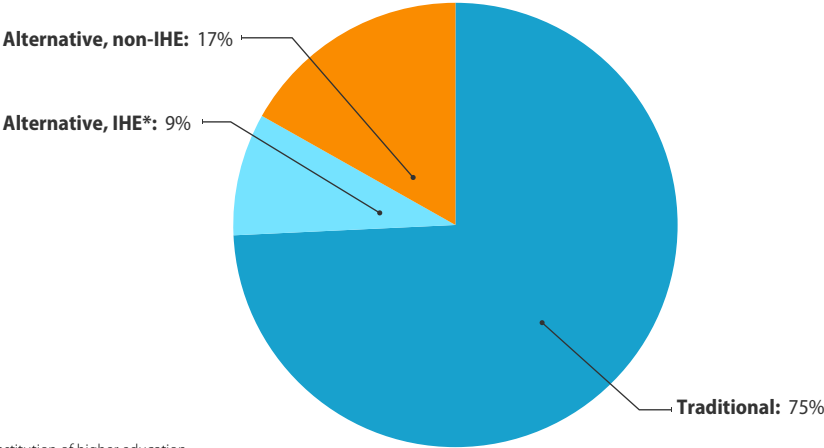
Source: Authors' calculations based on U.S. Department of Education, "Title II Reports," available at <https://title2.ed.gov/Public/Home.aspx> (last accessed October 2020).

Despite the recent growth of the non-IHE alternative certification sector, most teachers are still prepared in traditional programs: As of 2019, about 75 percent of enrollment in teacher preparation programs was in a traditional program. (see Figure 2) More specifically, in 2019, there were 1,466 traditional programs that enrolled a total of 455,332 students, and 118,674 students completed a program in this sector.¹⁵

In comparison, the alternative certification sector is smaller and contains fewer programs. There are 705 alternative certification programs that enrolled 153,330 students, and 34,105 students completed an alternative certification program. Within this total number, IHE-based alternative certification programs made up 486 of these programs and enrolled 52,803 students—about 9 percent of total enrollment in teacher preparation programs—and 15,183 completed a program in the sector.¹⁶ (see Figure 2)

Non-IHE alternative certification programs made up the remaining 219 programs and enrolled a total of 101,247 students, and 18,922 students completed a program in this sector. Overall, non-IHE alternative certification programs constitute about 10 percent of teacher preparation programs nationally and enroll about 17 percent of students in teacher preparation programs.¹⁷ (see Figure 2) Non-IHE alternative certification programs were also responsible for about 12 percent of students who completed a teacher preparation program.

FIGURE 2
Of all teacher preparation programs, traditional ones enroll the most students
Percentage of total enrollment in teacher preparation programs by program type



* Institution of higher education.
Note: Enrollment totals in traditional and alternative IHE programs includes enrollment in the outlying U.S. territories of American Samoa, Guam, the Marshall Islands, Micronesia, the Northern Mariana Islands, Puerto Rico, and the U.S. Virgin Islands.
Source: Authors' calculations based on U.S. Department of Education, "Title II Reports," available at <https://title2.ed.gov/Public/Home.aspx> (last accessed October 2020).

The non-IHE alternative certification sector

Now that the non-IHE alternative certification sector has been situated in the broader teacher preparation landscape, this section contains a deep dive into which types of operators manage programs in the sector, the role of for-profit organizations, in which states these programs are operating, and how enrollment in these programs varies by race and ethnicity and gender.

Program operators in the non-IHE alternative certification sector

For this section’s analysis, the authors grouped non-IHE alternative certification programs based on the type of program operator, such as a nonprofit organization. This means that programs in different operator groups can share certain characteristics—for example, both nonprofit and for-profit organizations can operate residency programs—but the authors categorized programs based exclusively on operator type.

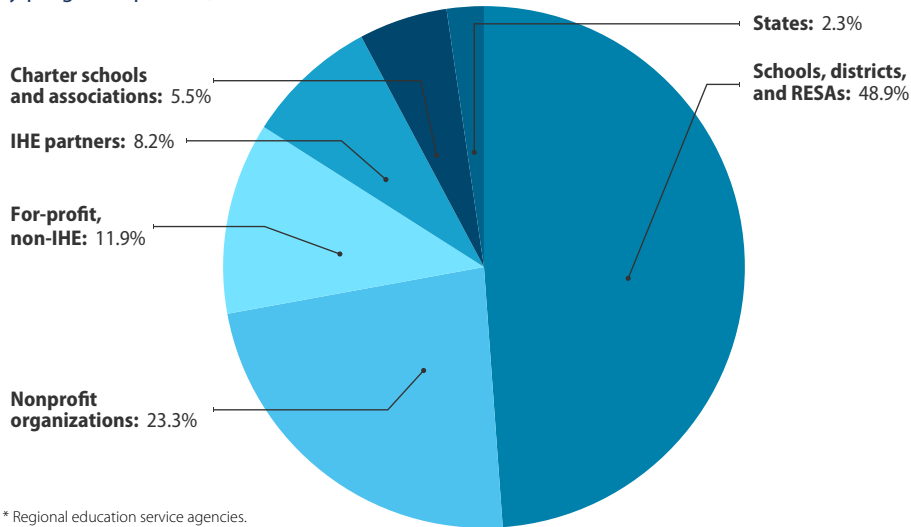
One of the operator types identified by the authors is called “IHE partner.” The programs in this group are affiliated in some way with an IHE, most frequently a community college, but are not considered IHE-based. Based on the details of the program and how states have defined what counts as an IHE, these few programs have been categorized by their individual states as an “alternative, not IHE-based” program. Therefore, they have been included in CAP’s analysis.¹⁸

The authors analyzed the program operators based on three measures: percentage of total programs, percentage of total enrollment, and percentage of total completers. As shown in Figure 3, individual schools, districts, and regional education service agencies (RESAs) manage 107 programs, which is just less than half of all non-IHE alternative certification programs. Nonprofit organizations manage 51 programs, which amounts to just less than one-quarter of all programs. For-profit organizations are third, operating 26 programs, or about 12 percent of all programs.

FIGURE 3

Individual schools, districts, and RESAs* operate the largest number of programs

Percentage of the total number of non-IHE** alternative certification programs by program operator, 2019



* Regional education service agencies.
** Institution of higher education.

Source: Authors' calculations based on U.S. Department of Education, "2019 Title II Reports," available at <https://title2.ed.gov/Public/Home.aspx> (last accessed October 2020).

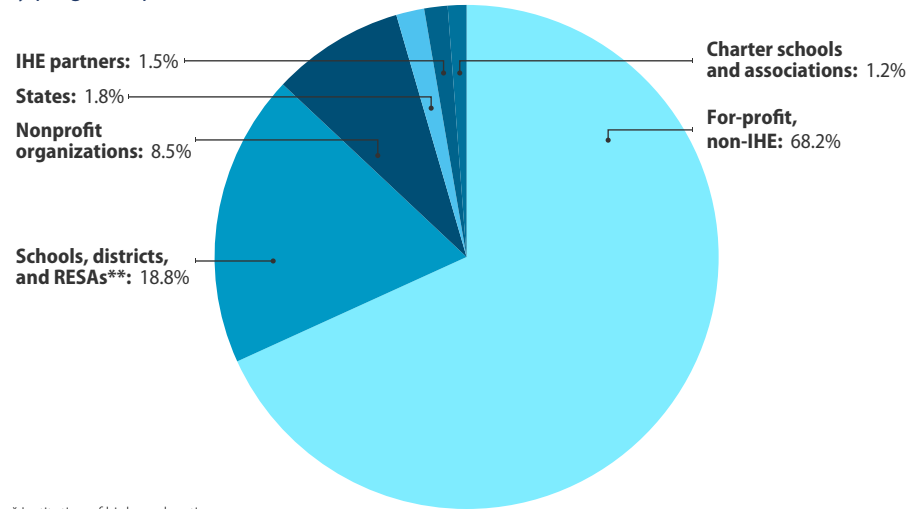
However, when it comes to percentage of total enrollment, for-profit organizations enroll 69,004 students, which is just more than two-thirds of all students in non-IHE alternative certification programs. Individual schools, districts, and RESAs enroll 19,020 students, which is about 19 percent of total enrollment in this sector. Nonprofit organizations enroll 8,553 students, which is only about 8 percent of students. (See Figure 4)

Texas Teachers of Tomorrow, the large for-profit operator mentioned in the data source text box, is largely responsible for for-profit organizations enrolling such a high percentage of students in alternative, non-IHE-based programs. Excluding this program, individual schools, districts, and RESAs enroll the largest percentage of students at 44 percent, while for-profit organizations enroll 25 percent of students and nonprofit operators enroll 20 percent.¹⁹

FIGURE 4

Programs operated by for-profit, non-IHE* organizations enroll the largest share of students in the sector

Percentage of total enrollment in the non-IHE alternative certification sector by program operator, 2019



* Institution of higher education.

** Regional education service agencies.

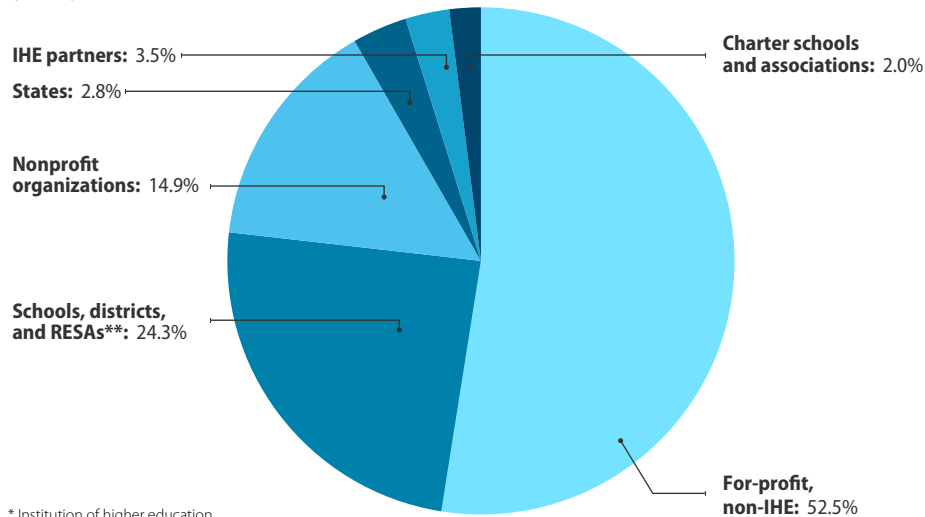
Source: Authors' calculations based on U.S. Department of Education, "2019 Title II Reports," available at <https://title2.ed.gov/Public/Home.aspx> (last accessed October 2020).

When examining program completion alone, the authors found that 9,932 students—just more than half of all students—who complete a non-IHE alternative certification program do so in a for-profit organization. (see Figure 5) Roughly 24 percent of completers—4,598 students—attended programs run by individual schools, districts, and RESAs. Fifteen percent of completers—2,826 students—attended programs run by nonprofit organizations. When Texas Teachers of Tomorrow is removed from this analysis, the largest percentage of completers finish programs run by individual schools, districts, and RESA operators instead of for-profit organizations. In this scenario, 36 percent of completers graduate from programs run by schools, districts, and RESAs; 30 percent graduate from programs run by for-profit organizations; and 22 percent graduate from programs run by nonprofit organizations.

FIGURE 5

The largest share of students completing programs in the sector do so in for-profit, non-IHE* organizations

Percentage of total completion in the non-IHE alternative certification sector by program operator, 2019



* Institution of higher education.

** Regional education service agencies.

Source: Authors' calculations based on U.S. Department of Education, "2019 Title II Reports," available at <https://title2.ed.gov/Public/Home.aspx> (last accessed October 2020).

Taken together, the results of these analyses paint a clearer picture of the non-IHE alternative certification sector. Across all three analysis measures, individual schools, districts, and RESAs; for-profit organizations; and nonprofit organizations are consistently the largest program operators. Still, there are significant differences in scale between these three operator categories. These differences are particularly striking for enrollment, with for-profit operators enrolling more than two-thirds of the students in this sector while only operating 12 percent of programs. In the next section, the authors take a closer look into for-profit, non-IHE alternative certification programs.

For-profit, non-IHE alternative certification programs

As noted in the previous section, for-profit organizations operate 26 non-IHE alternative certification programs and enroll about two-thirds of all students in this sector. These 26 programs are located in just nine states, with 17 programs operating in Texas alone. The other eight states with for-profit programs are Arizona, Hawaii, Indiana, Louisiana, Michigan, Nevada, North Carolina, and South Carolina. The number of states that have non-IHE alternative certification programs run by for-profit organizations has increased since 2018, when programs only existed in five states.²⁰ These four new states have all added a non-IHE alternative certification program run by Teachers of Tomorrow LLC, the for-profit organization that operates the large outlier program Texas Teachers of Tomorrow.²¹

In six of these states—Arizona, Hawaii, Indiana, Louisiana, Michigan, and Texas—for-profit programs enroll a majority of students in the state’s non-IHE alternative certification sector. (see Figure 6) In fact, in Michigan, for-profit programs are the only type of program in the non-IHE alternative certification sector. In Texas, for-profit programs enroll just more than 93 percent of the 71,500 students in Texas’ non-IHE alternative certification sector. Texas Teachers of Tomorrow plays a large part in the domination of this sector: Without its inclusion, for-profit providers in Texas enroll 64 percent of students in the sector. The remaining three states where for-profit organizations do not enroll a majority of students in the non-IHE alternative certification sector are North Carolina, South Carolina, and Nevada. It is worth noting that North Carolina and South Carolina both had new programs that were included for the first time in 2019, and given the aggressive growth of other programs operated by Teachers of Tomorrow, it’s possible these programs will grow with time.

The authors also compared enrollment in the for-profit, non-IHE alternative certification sector to enrollment in the teacher preparation program sector as a whole in these nine states. In Texas, for-profit, non-IHE alternative certification programs enroll about 63 percent of the 106,256 students in teacher preparation programs. Without the large Texas Teachers of Tomorrow program, the share of students in for-profit, non-IHE alternative certification programs in Texas drops to about 18 percent. In Louisiana, for-profit, non-IHE programs enroll 15 percent of the 6,760 students in state teacher preparation programs, with the share being even lower in the remaining seven states: Hawaii at about 8 percent; Nevada at about 6 percent; Michigan, South Carolina, and Indiana all at about 2 percent; Arizona at 0.42 percent; and North Carolina at 0 percent because its one for-profit, non-IHE program did not report any students enrolled in 2019. (see Figure 6)

FIGURE 6

In most states that have it, enrollment in for-profit, non-IHE* programs is a large share of enrollment in the non-IHE alternative certification sector but a small share of enrollment in teacher preparation overall

Enrollment in for-profit, non-IHE alternative certification programs as a share of enrollment in the non-IHE alternative certification sector and the teacher preparation sector, by state

State	For-profit, non-IHE alternative certification program enrollment	Share of enrollment in non-IHE alternative certification programs	Share of enrollment in all three types of teacher preparation programs
Arizona	175	58.1%	0.4%
Hawaii	138	61.6%	8.2%
Indiana	219	96.5%	2.2%
Louisiana	1,026	55.6%	15.2%
Michigan	238	100.0%	2.5%
Nevada	381	33.8%	6.3%
North Carolina	0	0.0%	0.0%
South Carolina	163	11.0%	2.2%
Texas	66,664	93.2%	62.7%

* Institution of higher education.

Source: Authors' calculations based on U.S. Department of Education, "2019 Title II Reports," available at <https://title2.ed.gov/Public/Home.aspx> (last accessed October 2020).

Teachers of Tomorrow LLC

Overall, the authors found that for-profit operators actually exist in a very limited number of states, despite being responsible for a high percentage of enrollment in the non-IHE alternative certification sector. However, in the past year, non-IHE alternative certification programs run by for-profit organizations have expanded from five to nine states—largely due to the expansion of programs run by Teachers of Tomorrow LLC into more states. In most of the nine states where for-profit, non-IHE alternative certification programs are operating, they dominate the non-IHE alternative certification sector but remain a small share of the broader teacher preparation sector.

Texas is the exception, largely because the Texas Teachers of Tomorrow program is so big that it makes the for-profit, non-IHE alternative certification sector a significant presence in the Texas teacher preparation sector. CAP's previous report on enrollment in teacher preparation programs dives deeper into some concerns about Texas Teachers of Tomorrow, including the low percentage of students who complete their program and the program's questionable academic rigor.²² Coursework for this program is entirely online, with modules consisting only of PowerPoint slides and videos that students click through at their own pace. There is no formal observation or supervised teaching experience necessary before students can enter the classroom and teach on their own as they finish complet-

ing program requirements.²³ The COVID-19 pandemic has forced many teacher preparation programs to adapt to the potential loss of in-person coursework and clinical experience in schools. Although it may be tempting to consider teacher preparation programs that have moved online as a result of the pandemic as now comparable to programs such as Teachers of Tomorrow, it is important that policymakers incentivize teacher preparation programs to retain an emphasis on quality and to continue to provide teacher candidates with supervised teaching experience and in-depth instruction to the extent that it is safe and possible.²⁴

Teachers of Tomorrow LLC is actively looking to expand into more states and has seen some success already between 2018 and 2019. Given existing concerns about this model and for-profit institutions that operate primarily online, policymakers should be wary of welcoming for-profit teacher preparation programs into their state and be thoughtful about maintaining strong regulations on or oversight of existing programs.²⁵

The non-IHE alternative certification sector across U.S. states

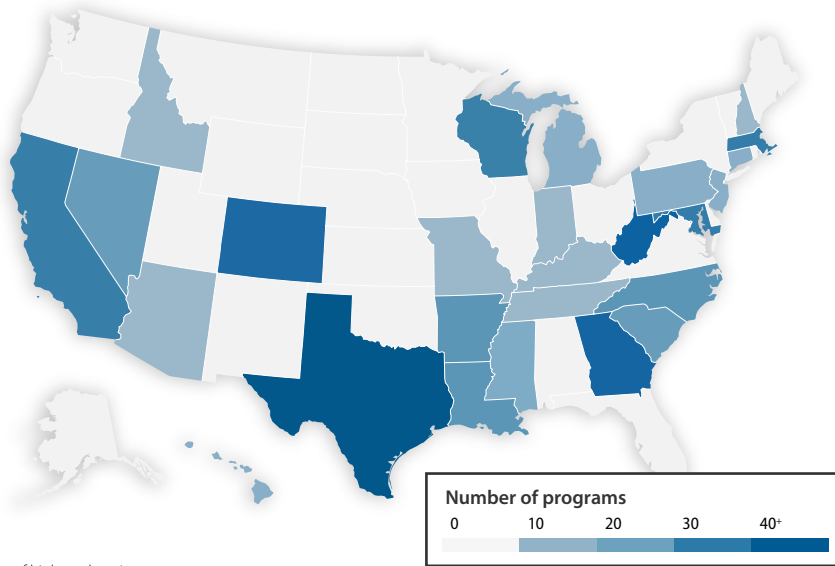
With a better understanding of the operators in the non-IHE alternative certification sector, the authors next wanted to know in which states these programs are operating. As shown in the map below, non-IHE alternative certification programs operate in 32 states plus Washington, D.C. Most of them have relatively few non-IHE alternative certification programs, with about 79 percent operating fewer than 10 programs. In fact, six states operate only one program in the non-IHE alternative certification sector. In contrast, seven states have 10 or more programs in the non-IHE alternative certification sector. Texas leads that group with the most programs at 42; the other six states with at least 10 programs are West Virginia, Georgia, Colorado, Maryland, Massachusetts, and California.

In addition to the number of programs, the authors also analyzed what enrollment in non-IHE alternative certification programs looks like across states. About 70 percent of states have less than 1,000 students enrolled in their non-IHE alternative certification sector, while 10 states have more than 1,000 students enrolled. Texas again has the greatest enrollment with 71,500 students, followed by North Carolina with 7,530 students; Florida with 3,163 students; Georgia with 2,509 students; Louisiana with 1,844 students; South Carolina with 1,484 students; California with 1,474 students; Nevada with 1,126 students; Missouri with 1,063 students; and Idaho with 1,010 students.

FIGURE 7

Thirty-two states and Washington, D.C., have a non-IHE* alternative certification sector, most with a relatively small number of programs and enrolled students

Number of programs and enrollment in non-IHE alternative certification sectors, by state



* Institution of higher education.

Source: Authors' calculations based on U.S. Department of Education, "2019 Title II Reports," available at <https://title2.ed.gov/Public/Home.aspx> (last accessed October 2020).

For all states, the authors also analyzed the percentage of enrollment in non-IHE alternative certification programs as part of the statewide enrollment total in all three types of teacher preparation programs. The results found that eight of the 10 states identified above as having the highest enrollment in non-IHE alternative certification programs are also among the top 10 states where enrollment in non-IHE alternative certification comprises the greatest share of total enrollment in teacher preparation. Texas once again leads the group, with enrollment in Texas' non-IHE alternative certification programs comprising about 67 percent of the state's total enrollment in teacher preparation. North Carolina has the next highest share, with enrollment in non-IHE alternative certification programs comprising about 38 percent of total enrollment in statewide teacher preparation programs. The percentages for the remaining six high-enrollment states are as follows: 27 percent in Louisiana; 25 percent in Idaho; 20 percent in South Carolina; 19 percent in Nevada; 17 percent in Florida; and 16 percent in Georgia.

Similar to previous analyses, Texas Teachers of Tomorrow plays a large role in non-IHE alternative certification programs enrolling a majority of the students in Texas teacher preparation programs; without Texas Teachers of Tomorrow, enrollment in Texas non-IHE alternative certification programs would comprise about 28 percent of statewide enrollment in teacher preparation programs instead of 67 percent.

Only three states—Texas, Georgia, and California—have both high enrollment in non-IHE alternative certification programs and a high number of these programs. Other states have either many smaller programs or a few big programs. Colorado, for example, has 18 programs enrolling only 725 students, while Florida has one program that enrolls 3,163 students.

This analysis provides a preliminary overview of what the non-IHE alternative certification sector looks like in the states that have such programs. The sector is not present in every state, and in the majority of states where it is present, there are usually only a small number of programs operating. Again, Texas stands out as a state that has a lot of programs in the non-IHE alternative certification sector, and enrollment in these programs is high even compared with the teacher preparation sector generally in the state.

Race and ethnicity in non-IHE alternative certification programs

Although most teachers of color graduate from traditional preparation programs, which enroll about 75 percent of teacher preparation program students, alternative certification programs—both IHE-based and non-IHE-based—enroll a higher percentage of students of color than do traditional programs.²⁶ Students of color, in this report, refers to students who did not identify as white. The authors analyzed enrollment numbers disaggregated by race and ethnicity provided as part of the HEA Title II reporting for the three types of teacher preparation programs. Race and ethnicity labels in this section reflect those used by Title II.

As a note, in this section, enrollment does not include completers because data on completers is not disaggregated by race and ethnicity. Additionally, reporting race and ethnicity information is voluntary, and the sum of disaggregated enrollment in each teacher preparation program sector does not equal the reported total enrollment in the sector. Therefore, there is a certain percentage of enrollment that is taken up by people who chose not to report their race and/or ethnicity.

As shown in Figure 8, IHE-based alternative certification programs enroll the highest percentage of students of color at 44.7 percent. Students who identified as white represented 50.8 percent of enrollees. Enrollment of students who identified as Hispanic or Latino represented the largest group of students of color at 20.3 percent of all enrollees. Students who identified as Black or African American represented 12.8 percent of enrollees; students who identified as multiracial represented 6.7 percent of enrollees; and students who identified as Asian represented 3.9 percent of enrollees. American Indian/Alaska Natives and Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islanders were the smallest percentages of enrollees at 0.7 percent and 0.4 percent, respectively. In addition, 4.5 percent of enrollees chose not to report their race and/or ethnicity.

Non-IHE alternative certification programs were not far behind, with people of color comprising 43.8 percent of enrolled students. Students who identified as white represented 43.6 percent of enrolled students. Enrollment of students who identified as Black or African American represented the largest group of students of color at 20.4 percent of enrollees; students who identified as Hispanic or Latino represented 18.2 percent of enrollees; students who identified as Asian represented 2.6 percent of enrollees; and students who identified as multiracial represented 1.9 percent of enrollees. American Indian/Alaska Natives and Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islanders were again the smallest percentages of enrollees at 0.5 percent and 0.1 percent, respectively, and 12.6 percent of enrollees chose not to report their race and/or ethnicity.

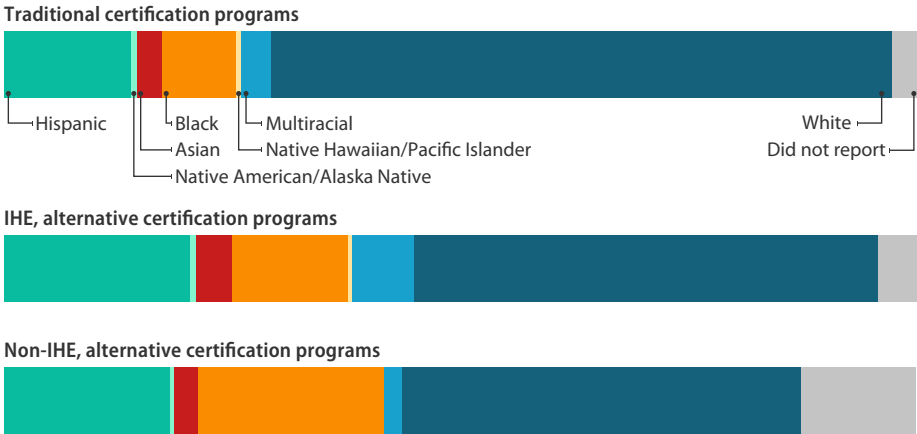
Traditional programs serve the lowest percentage of students of color at about 29 percent, although it is worth noting that since enrollment is greater overall in traditional programs than in alternative certification programs, traditional programs still enroll the most students of color. Students who identified as white represented about 68 percent of enrolled students. Enrollment of students who identified as Hispanic or Latino represented the largest group of students of color at 13.8 percent of enrollees; students who identified as Black or African American represented 7.9 percent of enrollees; students who identified as multiracial represented 3.3 percent of enrollees; and students who identified as Asian represented 2.8 percent of enrollees. American Indian/Alaska Natives and Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islanders were again the smallest percentage of enrollees at 0.7 percent each. In addition, 2.9 percent of enrollees chose not to report their race and/or ethnicity.

Among students of color, Black and Hispanic students make up the highest percentage of enrollees in teacher preparation programs. IHE-based alternative certification programs enroll the highest percentage of Hispanic students at 20.3 percent, and non-IHE alternative certification programs enroll the highest percentage of Black students at 20.4 percent. No teacher preparation sector is enrolling a particularly high percentage of American Indian/Alaska Native, Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander, or Asian students. Enrollment of Asian students in all three program types came to somewhere between 2 percent and 4 percent. Enrollment of American Indian/Alaska Natives and Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islanders was less than 1 percent in all program types.

It is worth noting that nationally as of 2017, Asian children made up about 5 percent of school-age children, American Indian/Alaska Native children were about 1 percent of school-age children, and Pacific Islander children were less than 1 percent of school-age children.²⁷ That said, there is still a need for more teachers from these communities, especially in districts where enrollment of students from these communities exceeds the national averages.²⁸

FIGURE 8
Alternative certification programs enroll a larger share of students of color than traditional teacher preparation programs

Enrollment in certification programs by race and ethnicity and teacher preparation program type, 2019



* Institution of higher education.

Note: Enrollment totals in traditional and alternative, IHE programs includes enrollment in the outlying U.S. territories of American Samoa, Guam, the Marshall Islands, Micronesia, the Northern Mariana Islands, Puerto Rico, and the U.S. Virgin Islands.

Source: Authors' calculations based on U.S. Department of Education, "2019 Title II Reports," available at <https://title2.ed.gov/Public/Home.aspx> (last accessed October 2020).

Alternative certification programs enroll a higher percentage of students of color, possibly because they feature benefits such as greater flexibility and lower initial costs, which may be attractive to students of color who face a high student debt burden.²⁹ That said, across all three types of teacher preparation programs, white students are the biggest race and/or ethnicity group enrolled in these programs and only in non-IHE alternative certification are there about as many students of color enrolled as white students. As a previous CAP report noted, enrollment is also declining across racial groups, which is especially troubling since schools already struggle to attract and retain teachers of color.³⁰ A priority for the teacher preparation sector as a whole should be addressing potential barriers faced by students of color in order to increase their enrollment and completion rates.

Gender diversity in non-IHE alternative certification programs

In addition to the need for greater racial diversity in the teaching profession, there is a need for greater gender diversity. Currently, the profession is 77 percent female. Where race and gender intersect, the statistics are even more striking: Black male educators make up about 2 percent of the teaching profession nationally.³¹ Increasing the number of male educators is likely good for students in ways that mirror the benefits of a racially and ethnically diverse teaching profession.³² Additionally, there is currently no national data available on how many transgender, nonbinary, and gender-nonconforming people there are in the teaching profession. Federal and state data collection efforts should be more inclusive in the future so that calculations about the gender diversity of the profession can be more representative of the full gender spectrum.³³

The authors analyzed enrollment data disaggregated by gender in traditional programs, IHE-based alternative certification programs, and non-IHE alternative certification programs. In this section, terms including “male,” “female,” and “gender” reflect their usage in the Title II data source, and the term “enrollment” excludes completers because information about completers was not disaggregated by gender in the dataset. Additionally, a certain number of people chose not to report their gender or may not have been represented by the limited choice of “male” or “female” offered in federal data collection surveys. Therefore, there is a small discrepancy between the sum of female and male enrollment and the reported total enrollment across the three program sectors, and the authors did not have the ability to disaggregate people who identify as nonbinary or transgender.

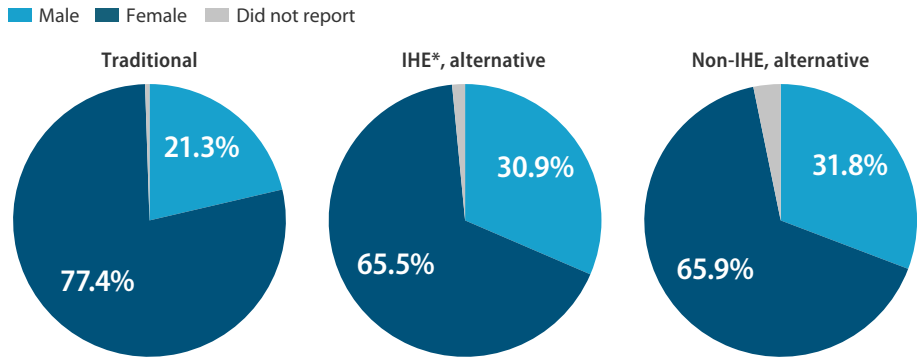
As shown in Figure 9, female enrollment is more than double that of male enrollment in all three program types. In traditional programs, female enrollment is more than three times that of male enrollment, accounting for about 77 percent of total enrollment in traditional programs, with male enrollment trailing at about 21 percent. In addition, 1.3 percent of enrollees did not report their gender.

In IHE-based alternative certification programs, female enrollment is about double that of male enrollment, accounting for about 66 percent of total enrollment, with male enrollment accounting for about 31 percent. In addition, 3.6 percent of enrollees did not report their gender.

In non-IHE alternative certification programs, female enrollment is also about double that of male enrollment, accounting for about 66 percent of total enrollment and male enrollment accounting for about 32 percent. In addition, 2.2 percent of enrollees did not report their gender.

FIGURE 9
All types of teacher preparation programs enroll at least twice as many women as men

Percentage enrollment in teacher preparation programs, by gender and program type



* Institution of higher education.

Note: Enrollment totals in traditional and alternative, IHE programs includes enrollment in the outlying U.S. territories of American Samoa, Guam, the Marshall Islands, Micronesia, the Northern Mariana Islands, Puerto Rico, and the U.S. Virgin Islands.

Source: Authors' calculations based on U.S. Department of Education, "2019 Title II Reports," available at <https://title2.ed.gov/Public/Home.aspx> (last accessed October 2020).

The gender imbalance found in the teaching profession is mirrored by the enrollment numbers for all three types of teacher preparation programs. Alternative certification programs had a slightly smaller gap between female and male students, but female enrollment was still double that of male enrollment, and the existing gender imbalance is already heavily skewed toward women. Therefore, in addition to increasing gender diversity in teacher preparation programs, all teacher preparation programs should engage in efforts to recruit and retain more male educators, especially male educators of color. Additionally, the education research field should move toward greater inclusivity of transgender and nonbinary identities when collecting information about gender so that the picture of the profession is more accurate.

Conclusion

This preliminary overview of the non-IHE alternative certification sector provides a starting point for policymakers and education researchers looking to understand what trends exist in this sector that warrant further research or legislation.

Notably, the presence of large and growing for-profit, non-IHE alternative certification programs—even those that are not as large as Texas Teachers of Tomorrow—raises a red flag for the sector. Despite only operating in nine states, for-profit organizations currently enroll 68 percent of all students in this sector. Given what previous reports have shown about the deceptive and harmful practices of for-profit higher education programs, policymakers should examine where big for-profit, non-IHE alternative certification programs are operating, determine whether their model really benefits students, and consider where laws may be needed to prevent them from expanding further.³⁴ There is a possibility that as the COVID-19 pandemic forces many traditional, IHE-based teacher preparation programs into virtual learning, interest in for-profit, non-IHE alternative certification programs could increase, as they are often less expensive than traditional programs and already operate mostly online. Policymakers should resist the impulse to lower standards for teacher preparation programs as a response to the pandemic and should instead continue to apply a critical lens to the quality of the teacher preparation programs they authorize to operate in their state.

Currently, non-IHE alternative certification programs exist in 32 states and Washington, D.C. Individual schools, districts, and RESAs operate the most programs in this sector. Given that state policymakers are largely responsible for approving and setting the requirements for K-12 teacher preparation programs in their states, there could be room for collaboration between states and local education actors to ensure that these programs are continuing to meet the needs of teacher candidates and their future students. Additionally, state and local education funding may face significant cuts in response to the pandemic, so policymakers should take time to ensure that non-IHE alternative certification programs run by local education actors are still being funded. Otherwise, a majority of promising non-IHE alternative certification programs may face financial difficulty at a time when the teaching profession greatly needs more incoming teachers.

The alternative certification sector enrolls more students of color than traditional teacher preparation programs. As all teacher preparation programs strive to recruit and graduate more students of color, it is important to try to understand what barriers alternative certification programs may be successfully addressing, while also noting that some methods of addressing these barriers—such as operating completely online—can have drawbacks for educational quality and graduation and completion rates. Additionally, future analysis on the efforts of teacher preparation programs to diversify the profession should go deeper into how programs are helping students who are currently underrepresented in teaching to graduate, meet licensure requirements, and enter and remain in classrooms.

Finally, teacher preparation programs across all three sectors enroll at least twice as many female students as male students. Future research into what barriers are preventing men—especially men of color—from entering teacher preparation programs and the profession itself are needed to start fixing this gender imbalance. Additionally, there needs to be greater inclusivity of transgender and nonbinary identities when collecting information about educators to allow for proper representation and a more accurate picture of the profession.

This analysis aims to provide a starting point for further research into and legislating around the non-IHE alternative certification sector. As most decisions about teacher preparation programs are made at the state level, additional state-specific research should be conducted to better understand how the data highlighted in this report are shaped by individual state policies. Overall, better data and a better understanding of existing non-IHE alternative certification programs can help policymakers as they work on ensuring that all programs in this growing and variable sector are supporting teacher candidates and preparing them to succeed in the classroom.

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