

# Teach Louisiana Consortium: A Fifth Year Program Evaluation

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## *Abstract*

*This article describes a fifth year program evaluation of a private provider program for teacher certification in Louisiana. The study sought to evaluate the success of the Teach Louisiana Consortium program in terms of teacher placement, teacher retention, administrative satisfaction, teacher attitudes, and teacher pedagogical knowledge. Initial teacher provided data, state provided data, teacher survey data, and administrator survey data were used in the study. Overall, it was found that the program was positively perceived by both teachers and administrators and it was successful in terms of teacher retention. Areas that need to be addressed as the program develops include diversity, assessment, classroom management, and attrition of teachers from high-need areas.*

*Keywords: alternative certification program; teacher preparation; program evaluation*

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This study sought to evaluate a single alternative route to teaching, the Teach Louisiana Consortium (TLC), five years after its creation. The TLC program requires candidates to take an intensive summer preparation program and a summer student teaching position along with a year-long internship in which a supervisor evaluates their teaching. During the candidates' internship they attended learning team meetings to discuss pedagogy and any issues the candidates encounter during their internship year. The purpose of this study was to examine the TLC practitioners, their perceptions about their preparation in the alternative route to teaching program, and the hiring administrators' beliefs about the effectiveness of the TLC practitioners as classroom teachers. This examination of the alternative route candidates, their perceptions, and their effectiveness follows previous research that has been done on alternative route programs and offers insight into areas of strength and areas of improvement as this private provider of teacher credentials continues to prepare future teachers.

### **Literature Review**

Feistritzer and Haar (2008) offered an overall view of the research that has been done on alternative routes to teacher certification. The study reported the findings of the National Center for Education Information's (NCEI) survey in 2004/2005 of alternative route teacher certification, which found that most of the participants came from fields outside of education, were teaching subjects and areas in which there is the greatest demand (mathematics, science, and special education), and had more overall job satisfaction than the general public school teaching population. Moreover, 82% of alternatively certified teachers were found to recommend entering teaching through an alternative route.

In regard to effectiveness, the achievement and classroom performance in classrooms of alternatively certified teachers were found by previous studies to be no different from traditionally certified teachers' classroom performance and student achievement (Brown, Edington, Spencer, & Tinafero, 1989; Goebel, 1986; Miller, McKenna, & McKenna, 1998; Qu & Becker, 2003). Cochran-Smith and Zeichner (2005) found no difference in teacher efficacy or teaching competence, and also found alternatively certified teachers were more willing to work in low-SES schools than were traditionally certified teachers.

The findings of administrator perceptions of alternatively certified candidates are mixed. Laraway (2003) and Finn (2009) both found alternatively certified candidates were viewed as being as effective as traditional candidates. Arrington (2010), building on those findings, found administrators reported feeling confident in their alternatively certified teachers and variation had more to do with individuals than the programs that certified them. Other researchers found administrators' perceptions to be less favorable toward alternatively certified candidates. Brown, Bolen, Lassiter, and Burke (2006) found administrators rated alternatively certified teachers lower in every area compared with traditionally certified teachers on the revised *Teacher Performance Appraisal Instrument* (White, Stuck, Wyne, & Coop as cited in Brown et al., 2006). Likewise, based on pre-Hurricane Katrina data, Mahatha (2005) found New Orleans principals perceived alternatively certified teachers were less effective than traditionally certified teachers, except when it came to human relations skills.

## Research Question

This study examined both teacher and administrator perceptions of one specific alternative certification program, Teach Louisiana Consortium (TLC). The research question for this study was: What is the quality of the TLC program in regard to teacher placement, teacher retention (years one to four), administrative satisfaction, teacher attitudes, and teacher pedagogical knowledge?

## Methods

### Participants

Forty-six percent of the 251 TLC practitioners for years one to four (Y 1-4) returned the survey ( $N = 115$ ). Nearly 70% of the surveys were from recent years, Y3 and Y4. The survey respondents had a higher percentage of post graduate degrees than the total TLC population. In fact, 86% (24 of 28 TLC practitioners) of those with master degrees and 60% (3 of 5 TLC practitioners) of those with doctoral degrees responded to the survey, but only 40% of those with bachelor's degrees responded. Most respondents were born in the U.S. (96%), female (85%), Caucasian (85%), and between the ages of 20 and 40 (74%).

### Research Design

This evaluative study collected data from mid-October 2007 until mid-February 2008. Surveys were mailed to all 251 of the TLC practitioners. The survey was a compilation of a number of surveys and specific questions. The practitioner survey included a section with a Likert-type survey that asked practitioners how well prepared they felt based on the Louisiana Components of Effective Teaching, a second section asking about field experiences, and finally another survey, which was the Guskey Responsibility Survey (1981), and examined if the practitioners took responsibility for what occurred in their classroom. The content validity of the survey was obtained through peer review.

### Methods

In order to measure teacher retention, initial teacher placement data were collected from the TLC database. The context demographics of the initial placement sites were then determined based on the Louisiana Department of Education Accountability ratings of the various schools. Teacher retention was examined by determining if initially placed practitioners continued to work as teachers for each year following their initial placement. This placement was determined through survey questions that asked if they were still teaching, if they had changed schools, and the name of their current schools.

In addition, ratios were found for the following:

1. Teachers who stayed in teaching at their initial placement job site;
2. Teachers who stayed in teaching but transferred to a different site;
3. The demographic differences in the job sites from initial placement to Y4.

To determine administrators' perceptions about the practitioners and toward the TLC alternative certification program, a researcher-created administrator satisfaction questionnaire was mailed to the administrators to measure their attitudes towards the completers. The questionnaire had administrators rate the TLC practitioners on their level of proficiency in their professionalism, how well they instructed for achievement, their content knowledge, how effective their teaching methods were, their classroom management skills, and their overall proficiency. This survey was mailed to the administrators once the teacher survey was returned to the researchers.

A researcher-created teacher attitude survey, based on the Louisiana Components of Effective Teaching, measured teachers' beliefs about their preparation and teaching ability as well as their view of the certification process through the TLC program. Teacher beliefs about their TLC preparation were explained on a 15-item, five-point Likert scale ranging from 1-the least prepared to 5-the most prepared, in regard to planning, management, instruction, evaluation, and field experiences. In addition, Guskey's (1981) measure of teacher responsibility was included in the survey, which was a 30-item survey that had the practitioners attribute percentages of responsibility to the teacher and to others for a variety of different classroom scenarios.

Finally, teacher knowledge of theory and methodology was measured based on the participants' mean Principles of Learning and Teaching (PLT) Praxis test scores (or Louisiana State required equivalent examination).

## **Procedures**

The study began with the collection of teacher names, contact information, initial placement sites, and PLT Praxis test scores, which was available through the TLC database. School rating of the initial placement sites was gathered through the Department of Education website. Surveys were mailed to the practitioners, and coupons for free professional development workshops were offered for returning the survey. Once the surveys were returned, the teachers' Y4 placements were determined based on survey responses. In addition, the administrator survey was mailed to the administrators at the practitioners' current teaching site.

Discrete point responses were analyzed using descriptive statistics. However, because this study envisioned improving the program, areas of weakness were examined more closely. Because the data did not meet the criteria of homogeneity for inferential statistics, examining for significant differences in the mean scores in areas of weakness needed non-parametric measure. Since the means compared come from repeated measures of the same sample, the mean scores of areas of apparent weakness were analyzed throughout using a Wilcoxon signed-rank test to determine if areas of weakness were significantly different from other mean scores. The open-ended data were unitized and then analyzed using content analysis wherein emerging themes of responses were noted.

## Results

### Profile of the Teacher

Over half of the respondents had never taught before joining the TLC program. For those who had taught before there was an average of 3.18 years of teaching experience prior to entering the program. The respondents were asked the reason they waited to become certified, and the most common response (40%) was they had been working toward certification in a university-based program, but the program took too much time. The second most common response was they did not need certification (10%). The respondents were asked how they knew of the TLC program, and nearly half of the respondents said they found the TLC program through friends and colleagues, online, advertisements, and other media.

Fewer than half of the candidates changed schools since finishing the TLC program. Most of the candidates only taught within their areas of certification (86%), but a quarter of the candidates added additional areas of certification after TLC, which tended to be either elementary certification or certification in a high-need area (mathematics, science, and second languages).

### Teacher Knowledge of Theory and Methodology

The majority of the candidates (82%) passed a PLT or Education of Exceptional Students: Core Content (EES) examination, and another 4% passed the Early Childhood Examination (ECE). Only 13% of the candidates had not passed their last Praxis examination when the pre-survey study database was completed.

On comparison of the practitioners' scores on the examinations to the national scores, the practitioners were shown to compare favorably. The mean percentage of correct responses on both the PLT and the EES examination for practitioners was 86.2%, which is within the nationwide mean of 83% to 90%. Candidates who took the ECE had a 71.1% mean percentage of correct answers, which is above the nationwide mean of 61% to 69%.

### School Placement and Movement

As stated previously, fewer than half of the candidates changed schools since finishing TLC. In regard to the initial placement of the population, over 59% of the TLC practitioners were placed in high-need schools, those rated by the state as not acceptable (zero stars) to one star schools, which is the second lowest rating based on the Louisiana School Accountability Rating (see Table 1).

Table 1  
*Initial Placement School Ratings by Year in Program*

School Ratings	0 unacceptable	1 star	2 stars	3 stars	
YEAR					Total
1	9 (26%)	11 (31%)	9 (26%)	6 (17%)	35

2	5 (12%)	26 (60%)	6 (14%)	6 (14%)	43
3	12 (16%)	24 (33%)	21 (29%)	16 (22%)	73
4	13 (17%)	35 (46%)	17 (22%)	11 (15%)	76
Total	39 (17%)	96 (42%)	53 (23%)	39 (17%)	227

Examining the current school of the survey respondents showed a much-changed picture regarding the type of school at which the practitioners were teaching. Only 35% of the current respondents were teaching in high-need schools. Unacceptable schools went from having 17% to only 5% of TLC teachers (see Table 2). However, since this could have been due to the sample, the data were further analyzed.

Table 2  
*Current Placement School Ratings by Year in Program*

School Ratings	0 unacceptable	1 star	2 stars	3 stars	Private	Out of State
YEAR						
1		4	10	6		20
2		7	5	1	1	14
3	1	9	16	7		33
4	5	13	10	8	6	1 43
Total	6 (5%)	33 (30%)	41 (37%)	22 (20%)	7 (6%)	1 110 (>1%)

Upon further analysis it was found there was a definite shift of the sample population from high-need schools to higher-rated schools and private schools. Of the 14 participants who were initially placed in “unacceptable” schools, only five of them remained. Four of those five were in Y4, which means they had not yet taught the two years in their district typically necessary before the districts will allow them to transfer. This trend is also apparent with one star schools. Whereas 41 of the participants were initially placed in one star schools, only 22 remained, of which 13 of them were in Y4 and still not allowed to transfer. There were four instances of students moving from more highly-rated schools to lower-rated schools, three instances of moving from two star schools to one star schools, and one instance moving from a three star school to an unacceptable school (see Table 3). Overall, the definite trend appears to be a move from higher-need schools to lower-need schools as soon as the two-year transfer requirement is met.

Table 3  
*Movement of Participants from Initial Placement to Current Placement*

Year	Initial Stars	Total initial stars	To 0 star schools	To 1 star schools	To 2 star schools	To 3star schools	To Private schools	Out of state
Year 1	0	2			1	1		
	1	8		3	3	2		
	2	6			6			
	3	4		1		3		
	Total	20		4	10	6		

Year 2	0	2		1	1			
	1	7		5	1		1	
	2	3			3			
	3	1				1		
	Total	13		6	5	1	1	
Year 3	0	5	1	1	2	1		
	1	9		5	3	1		
	2	12		3	9			
	3	6			1	5		
	Total	32	1	9	15	7		
Year 4	0	5	4	1				
	1	17		12	2	2	1	
	2	9			6	1	1	1
	3	8	1		2	5		
	Total	39	5	13	10	8	2	1

### Administrator Beliefs

Over one half of the administrators surveyed responded to the administrators' questionnaire (67 of 114). Ninety-four percent of administrators who responded to the survey questionnaire found the TLC participants to be "about the same" or better than traditionally certified hires. None of the administrators described participants as "much worse," although four administrators did rate participants lower than traditionally certified teachers. By contrast, nearly one-third of administrators described TLC participants as better than traditionally certified hires (see Table 4).

Table 4  
*TLC Teachers Comparison with Traditionally Certified Teachers*

	Frequency	Percent
Much Worse Than Traditionally Certified		
Worse	4	6%
About the same as traditionally certified	41	63%
Better	14	22%
Much better than traditionally certified	6	9%
Total	65	100%

Sixty-four of administrators said they would hire the TLC practitioner again and only three said they would not. Only five administrators said they would hire again, but they had reservations. The problems the administrators mentioned included classroom management issues, difficulty meeting the diverse needs of the students, and attitudinal issues such as lacking enthusiasm and not being open to suggestions. However, 88% of administrators had no reservations about rehiring any of their TLC practitioners (see Table 5).

Table 5  
*Frequency of Response for Hiring the Teacher Again*

	Frequency	Percent
No	3	4.5
Yes	59	88
Yes, but	5	7.5
Total	67	100

Administrators were asked to identify the biggest problem with TLC practitioners, but only 44 % of the administrators responded. There were four main themes that emerged in the administrators' responses. First, one-quarter of the respondents wrote that there were no problems. The other three issues included teaching methodologies and classroom management, the lack of preparation (namely the inadequacy of the summer school student teaching), and the difficulty of meeting the diverse needs of the students. This was the second time classroom management and meeting students' diverse needs had emerged.

Administrators were asked the best aspect about TLC practitioners with 80% responding. Again, four main themes emerged from the responses. First, the most prevalent theme included general positive comments about the candidates being well-prepared, efficient, and effective. The next two themes were affective issues. Administrators said TLC practitioners were open to ideas and willing to learn. Equally, they mentioned the TLC practitioners' dedication, enthusiasm, and work ethic. Finally, the last main theme was TLC practitioners' life experience allowed for different perspectives and a very strong content knowledge. A less prevalent theme, but mentioned by 10% of the respondents, was TLC made their jobs easier because they could find prepared certified candidates to fill vacancies.

Administrators rated the TLC practitioners on their level of proficiency in their professionalism, how well they instructed for achievement, their content knowledge, how effective their teaching methods were, their classroom management skills, and their overall proficiency. All of the areas were rated between satisfactory (3) and exceptional (4). The highest means scores were in professionalism and content knowledge, which corresponds to the administrators' previously stated positive views of the practitioners' affective attributes and content knowledge. The weaker areas were on effective teaching methods with a mean score of 3.33 and on effective classroom management with a mean score of 3.42 (see Table 6).

Table 6  
*Mean Proficiency Scores as Rated by Administrators*

	Professionalism	Instructs for achievement	Content Knowledge	Effective methods	Management	Overall
Total Mean	3.64	3.5	3.57	3.33	3.42	3.51
N	67	67	67	67	67	67
SD	0.51	0.64	0.53	0.70	0.76	0.56

1-Unsatisfactory, 2-Emerging, 3-Satisfactory, and 4-Exceptional



## Teacher Attitudes

Teacher beliefs concerning their TLC preparation were measured using a five-point scale ranging from 1-the least prepared to 5-the most prepared. For planning the TLC practitioners' mean scores ranged from 3.57 to 3.75. Their strongest perceived area of planning, in direct contrast to the administrators' beliefs, was in planning for differences and diversity (mean score 3.75). Their weakest perceived area of planning was in planning for long/short term evaluation (mean score 3.57). This area had a lower mean score than planning for differences and diversity, which had the highest score of 3.75 (see Tables 7 and 8). *P*-values were at the .05 level.

Table 7  
*Planning*

Question	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>N</i>
Plan objectives & activities	3.70	1.14	112
Plan for differences and diversity	3.75	1.06	113
Plan short/long term evaluation	3.57	1.16	111
Understand and use developmental characteristics in planning.	3.71	0.96	113

1 = the least prepared and 5 = the most prepared

Table 8  
*Significant Differences Found in Planning Areas*

	Plan for short/long term evaluation and Plan for differences
<i>Z</i>	-2.40
Asymp. Sig. (2-tailed)	0.02

There was a significantly lower perception in practitioner preparation to manage student behaviors and their preparation to organize a classroom. This perception corresponds to administrators' beliefs that candidates had a weakness in their classroom management (see Tables 9 and 10).

Table 9  
*Management*

	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>N</i>
Organizes an effective classroom	4.04	0.94	113
Manages student behavior	3.91	1.01	113

1 = the least prepared and 5 = the most prepared

Table 10  
*Significant Differences Found in Management Areas*

	Manages student behavior and organizes classroom
<i>Z</i>	-2.29
Asymp. Sig. (2-tailed)	0.02

The TLC practitioners believed they are well prepared for instruction with mean scores varying from 3.72 to 4.27. Their strongest areas in instruction were “using a variety of teaching strategies” (mean score 4.27) and “providing for student involvement” (mean score 4.24). The weakest area, which corresponds to their beliefs about their planning, is in the area of assessment and evaluation (mean score 3.72). The mean score in assessment was significantly lower than all other areas of instruction (see Tables 11 and 12).

Table 11  
*Instruction*

	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>N</i>
Understands & conveys knowledge	4.07	0.83	113
Uses a variety of teaching strategies	4.27	0.87	113
Provides for student involvement	4.24	0.89	113
Stimulates higher-order thinking	4.02	0.95	112
Uses developmentally appropriate...	4.14	0.91	113
Uses technology to enhance learning	3.90	1.04	113
Effective on-going assessment	3.72	1.04	113

1 = the least prepared and 5 = the most prepared

Table 12  
*Comparison of Assessment and Evaluation to Other Areas of Instruction*

	Assessment and Technology	Assessment and Developmentally Appropriate	Assessment and Higher Order Thinking	Assessment and Student Involvement	Assessment and Variety of Teaching Strategies	Assessment and Knowledge
<i>Z</i>	-2.22	-4.85	-3.49	-5.75	-5.98	-3.86
Asymp. Sig. (2-tailed)	.027	.000	.000	.000	.000	.000

Finally, the TLC practitioners rated whether their teaching experiences “contributed substantially” (5) or “did not contribute” (1) to their teacher education preparation. The practitioners believed that their first year on their practitioner’s license contributed substantially to their preparation with a score of 4.59, while field experiences contributed less to their training with a significantly lower score of 3.59. This corresponds to the administrators’ views that the summer school preparation/field experiences are insufficient preparation for teachers (see Tables 13 and 14).

Table 13  
*Field experiences*

	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>N</i>
Rate field experiences	3.59	1.39	110
Rate 1 <sup>st</sup> year on practitioners license	4.59	0.74	112

1 = did not contribute and 5 = contributed substantially

Table 14

*Comparison of Field Experience to Practitioner Year*

	Field experiences and Practitioner Year
Z	-5.93
Asymp. Sig. (2-tailed)	.000

The survey also examined the practitioners' perceptions of responsibility for their students' successes or failures. The survey measured the percentage of responsibility that respondents accept for occurrences. Practitioners took more responsibility for positive occurrences (68.59%) rather than negative occurrences (56.14%) in their classrooms. If one considers that students in high-need schools have a more difficult time achieving success in the classroom, this low negative responsibility score corresponds with the movement of TLC practitioners out of high-need schools. If a practitioner does not feel responsible for negative occurrences in a situation where they occur frequently, this would create a classroom situation in which the practitioner would feel disempowered.

### Open Responses from Practitioners

Seventy-five practitioners responded to the statement "Please add any additional comments or critiques that you think would help to improve the TLC program." Seven themes emerged from their responses. The most prevalent response was "praise and recommendation." Over half the respondents indicated how well prepared they felt because of the program and how they would recommend the program to friends. This is important since nearly half of practitioners heard about TLC via recommendations from friends and colleagues.

The second most prevalent theme was a criticism concerning "field experiences." Forty-five percent of practitioners mentioned the summer school experience not being as useful in preparing them to teach as they would have liked. A few of the practitioners offered suggestions to help with the summer school experience, such as having specific criteria during student teaching in which they must generate lessons and teach classes on their own, which was an area also mentioned as a program weakness by the administrators.

While practitioners did not indicate they felt their field experiences prepared them for teaching, they did indicate they felt they were well prepared in regard to research-based teaching methods and strategies, and nearly 20% of the practitioners mentioned this area as a strength of the program. The practitioners who were critical of the methods and strategy preparation were only critical about a mismatch of preparation to the level of students they wanted to teach (middle and high school). The only suggestion given for teaching strategies was TLC should reference the National Board for Professional Teaching Standard's assessment program. While practitioners perceived teaching methodologies as a strength, about a quarter of the administrators who responded indicated it was a weakness.

About one-third of practitioners indicated they were not well prepared in lesson planning, assessment, diversity, and classroom management. While classroom management was a concern, nearly all practitioners acknowledged they received preparation in this area, but it was a challenge for them when they began teaching. Since the administrators mentioned this area twice

as a weakness for the practitioners it would appear that the practitioners have a realistic view of their initial classroom management skills and may need more preparation in this area.

Suggestions for help with planning and assessment usually entailed specific Louisiana criteria for helping practitioners work with the comprehensive curriculum and the Louisiana Teacher Assessment Program (LA-TAAP). One interesting suggestion for classroom management, which would also help with field experiences, was to videotape an entire school day to allow practitioners to view themselves teaching.

Similar to classroom management, support was perceived as both a strength and a weakness of the TLC program. The TLC staff were overwhelmingly perceived positively. Nearly 20% of the respondents mentioned the support they received from TLC as a strength of the program. In fact, one of the most repeated suggestions was that practitioners wanted another year of support from that staff. However, an equal number of respondents mentioned support as a weakness of the program, but there were only two aspects of the program they mentioned: learning team meetings and mentors. The learning team meetings were not perceived to be as useful to the practitioners as they would have liked. The biggest critique of the learning teams was they were not allowing the practitioners to address the issues and problems that were currently occurring in their classrooms. Rather, learning teams were run more like professional development workshops at a time when practitioners needed to discuss problems they were having. Another criticism of the support given by TLC was although the mentors were mentioned within the positive comments of support, a larger number were mentioned in the negative comments. There were two negative perceptions of mentors that emerged. The first, similar to the learning team meeting, was mentors were perceived as not offering practical solutions for practitioners in crisis. The second criticism was the mentors were too lenient and not offering enough criticism. It was overwhelmingly apparent that the practitioners wanted problem solving support, which corresponds to the administrators' views that the TLC practitioners were willing to learn and were motivated.

The final theme that emerged from the responses was the importance of affective preparation in the program. Nearly 15% of the practitioners mentioned affective areas as either strength or weakness in the program. A few of the practitioners mentioned that TLC emphasizes motivating their practitioners and letting them know that it is going to take enthusiasm and dedication to succeed. This reflects the administrators' positive perceptions of the practitioners' attitudes. However, 12% of the practitioners indicated they did not feel they were prepared in regard to affective variables in coping with the bureaucracy and administrative pressures within the school setting. One candidate said it was "the jump through the hoop syndrome." They were frustrated not about teaching, but about the context in which they were teaching. This might explain the overwhelming movement of practitioners from the pressure intensive high-need schools to the higher-rated schools. It also reiterates the idea, brought up in the discussion of the responsibility scale, that when negative occurrences appear to be out of control of the practitioners it might motivate them to change their context.

## Conclusions

Overall, it appears the TLC candidates and their administrators were overwhelmingly pleased with the preparation offered by TLC. However, there are areas that need to be addressed. Practitioners mentioned they received preparation on classroom management and diversity, but it would seem more application is needed. Hence, a more applicable student teaching experience that emphasizes classroom management, and teaching for diverse needs and assessment (in particular creating a LA-TAAP work sample-essentially a complete unit plan with pre/post test to measure acquisition) would address most of the weaker areas that emerged in this study. Furthermore, allowing learning teams to work through negative occurrences, instructional or administrative, within the school might help the teachers to feel empowered, particularly in the high-need schools where teachers are needed the most. The TLC practitioners and the administrators were open to listening to ideas for solutions. The timing of giving them ideas when they need it most and creating situations in which they can apply the ideas given to them are vital to the continued improvement of this very popular and well received program.

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