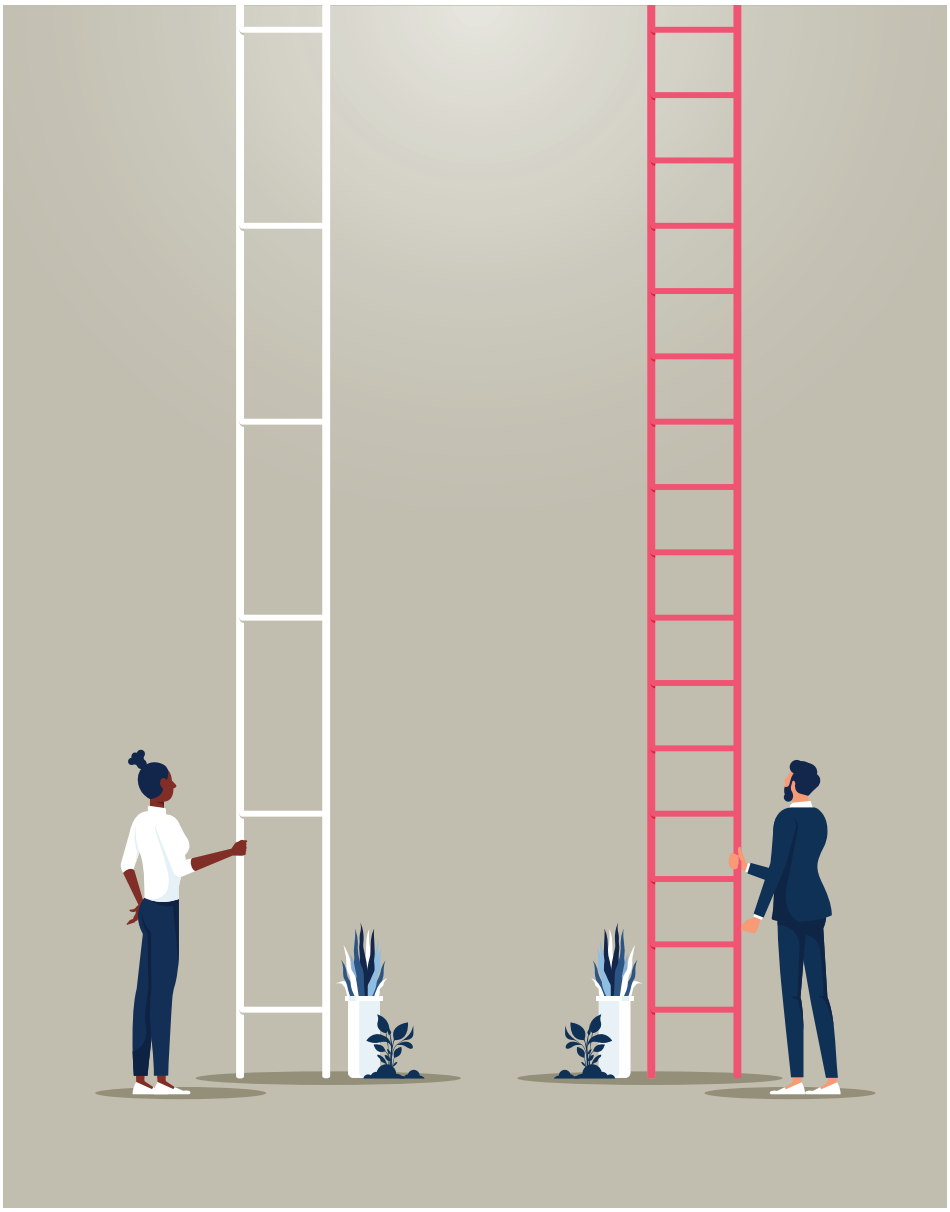

State statutes impede students' equitable access to profession-ready teachers.

The Uneven Landscape of Teacher Preparation

Leslie T. Fenwick

In a recent landscape analysis of policies in 50 states and the District of Columbia, I found that states vary significantly in how they authorize, review, and approve teacher preparation providers and programs.[1] What these policies have in common is a requirement that all programs meet the same standards. But in practice, they do not. Too often, alternative certification program

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providers—particularly those that are not college or university based—are able to take advantage of state statute and regulatory loopholes that allow them to skirt rigorous standards.

There is a reason for state boards of education to be concerned about the disparities across programs and providers—traditional and alternative as well as those based in colleges or universities and those that are not. Despite compelling language in state constitutions that commits states to providing a quality education, more than 30 years of research shows that in schools serving students of color where 50 percent or more receive free and reduced-price lunches, students are 70 percent more likely to have a teacher who is not certified or does not have a college major or minor in the subject area they teach.[2] This finding holds true across mathematics, English, social studies, and science.

Conversely, approximately 84 percent of African American students (who are disproportionately poor) live in states that require high-stakes high school graduation tests, while only 66 percent of White students are in such states. How can states continue to raise the bar on what students are expected to know and do while lowering standards for the adults who teach them?

Teacher quality has long been recognized as one of the most significant factors affecting students' academic achievement, and it is clearly tied to students' opportunity to learn in four categories: quality of resources, school conditions, curriculum, and teaching of that student's experience.[3] According to the Schott Foundation, Native American, Black, and Latinx students taken together have just over half the opportunity to learn compared with White non-Latinx students in the nation's best-supported, best-performing schools. Additionally, the Schott study found that low-income students of any race or ethnicity have just over half of the opportunity to learn compared with the average White, non-Latinx student.

Nearly a decade ago, the 9th Circuit Court of Appeals indicated that the appellants in *Renee v. Duncan* provided compelling evidence that 41 percent of interns in California taught in 25 percent of schools with the highest concentration of students of color. Further, 61 percent of California's teacher interns taught in the state's poorest schools. The court starkly stated: "We conclude that the Appellants established injury in fact. This disproportionate distribution of interns…results in a poorer quality education than Appellants would otherwise have received."[4]

It is more important than ever to ensure that students of color and students experiencing poverty have fully credentialed, profession-ready, caring, effective teachers. The pandemic and racial injustice protests revealed just how much further the nation has to go in order to fulfill children's rights to equal educational opportunity.[5] Yet the pandemic, coupled with mass shootings at schools and increasingly public, politicized scrutiny about what teachers teach, placed inordinate demands on teachers, exacerbating teacher shortages. Under these circumstances, will states and districts be forced to barter away teacher quality and the equitable assignment of high-caliber teachers just to have warm bodies in front of classrooms?

Preparation Program Trends

For the 2018–19 academic year, states reported to the U.S. Department of Education (ED) that 2,178 teacher preparation providers offered 21,508 state-approved teacher preparation programs (TPPs) in the United States. These programs enrolled 560,500 students and produced over 150,000 program completers.[6] While a bit higher than in 2017–18, these numbers are lower than a decade ago, when states in 2010–11 reported that slightly fewer providers (2,163) delivered 25,000 programs, enrolled more than 622,000, and produced more completers, at about 205,000. In sum, by 2018–19 there were slightly more providers offering fewer programs to fewer students and producing fewer program completers.

ED requires that states report providers and their programs that are low performing and at risk of closure based on an inability to meet state standards. According to the 2020 Title II report, 16.7 percent of traditional and 34 percent of alternative route programs were low performing and at risk. Texas had the largest number of low-performing and at-risk providers and programs,

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followed by California, Indiana, South Carolina, and Georgia.

A disproportionate share of low-performing and at-risk providers are regional education service agencies (RESAs), nonprofits, and in Texas, school districts. At present, about 70 percent of TPPs in the U.S. are traditional university-based programs. The remaining 30 percent are alternative route programs, with 20 percent of total programs based in institutions of higher education (IHEs) and 10 percent not based in IHEs. Those not based in IHEs tend to fall into one of seven sponsorship categories: local public school districts; public and for-profit charter schools; state education agencies and RESAs; collaboratives between two or more entities, sometimes IHEs; local education agency–based residency programs; community college systems and community college foundations; and nonprofit programs, most of which operate in multiple states. Sponsorship categories are continuing to grow and overlap, producing new breeds of sponsoring organizations and programs that aim to deliver teacher preparation.

IHE-based alternative route program enrollment declined from 24,792 to 18,316 students over the last decade. Enrollment in alternative programs that are not IHE-based declined from 17,870 to 15,586. Traditional route programs also experienced an enrollment decline of nearly 63,000 students. Although traditional programs prepare the lion's share of teachers, the percentage of students enrolled in these programs has declined slightly, from 80.8 percent in 2008–09 to 77.2 percent in 2018–19. The percentage of students enrolled in alternative route programs (IHE and non-IHE based) rose from 23.7 percent in 2008–09 to 29.4 percent in 2018–19. The number of alternative route providers (IHE and non-IHE based) outnumber the number of traditional route providers in nine states: Arkansas, Colorado, Hawaii, Idaho, Louisiana, Mississippi, Nevada, New Mexico, and Texas.

Traditional versus Alternative

The 2021 landscape report lists TPP review, approval, and authorizations standards and processes (as defined by state statute) and analyzes similarities and differences between traditional and alternative route programs (IHE and non-IHE based).[7] All 50 states and the District of Columbia specify that all providers and programs must meet the same standards. Yet even in states that have an agreement with a national accrediting body, all programs do not meet these standards.

At least three practices provide a loophole for alternative route providers and their programs not based at IHEs to skirt rigorous standards and accountability:

- The state's statute or regulation is bifurcated, requiring traditional IHE-based programs to meet national accreditation standards (which are aligned with state standards) and alternative route programs not based at IHEs to meet delineated state standards but not national accreditation standards.
- The state allows programs two options: meet state standards or meet state standards and national accreditation standards.
- The state offers provisional approval to providers, enabling them to offer programs for up to three years without having to meet the standards imposed on traditional program providers. After the three-year period, provisionally approved providers are required to show evidence that they are meeting state standards or making progress toward completing the application for eligibility for national accreditation. In practice, how states treat alternative route programs that are not based at IHEs is so nuanced that it is difficult to capture all the variations. All states exhibit at least one of these nuances.

A review of the typical requirements for traditional and alternative program admission, matriculation, and completion reveals just how different these requirements are.

A review of the typical requirements for traditional and alternative (not IHE based) program admission, matriculation, and completion reveals just how different these requirements are in the "amount and substance of coursework requisites, quantity of field experience obligations, length of time spent student teaching,"[8] and time devoted to reflective, supervised practice under a fully certified, prepared preK-12 teacher (usually with at least three years of successful teaching experience) and university faculty member. It is clear that these two routes are not producing similar calibers of teachers

and, even if they were, the alternative route program places an undue burden on preK-12 students who are assigned a teacher-in-training/intern as their full-time teacher of record.

In interviews, state education officials commonly express concerns about the significant politicization of TPP authorization, review, and approval and teacher credentialing. State legislators set the parameters for TPP evaluation, and state education agencies (SEAs) must implement policy within these parameters. Where state boards and not SEAs oversee implementation, the state board often comprises one elected official (a superintendent of public instruction) and several gubernatorial appointees. These political relationships lead to a variety of authorization, review, and approval outcomes on an increasingly shifting terrain.

Findings and Recommendations

Five findings emerged from my analysis:

- Traditional and alternative route TPPs and providers differ in each state and are highly idiosyncratic, subject to state legislative changes, and deeply reflective of each state's policy context—so much so that it is difficult to capture all the nuances in surveys, interviews, or political modeling.
- Alternative route program providers that are not based at IHEs are growing and spawning new provider types.
- Alternative program graduates have a higher probability than traditional program graduates of teaching in schools serving students of color, students experiencing poverty, and students with disabilities.
- The practice of disproportionate placement of alternative route teachers in training with these groups of students does harm to these students by depriving them of the right to a profession-ready, fully credentialed teacher.
- For a variety of reasons that appear to be related to the nuances of states' legislative processes, rulemaking, and changes in external factors, many states do not post up-to-date, accurate TPP review, approval, and authorization requirements. In these cases, public-facing information can be inaccurate.

Based on the report's findings, I recommend six policy actions:

- Employ federal and state regulations to enforce *Renee v. Duncan*. Enforcement would entail ceasing the practice of placing teachers in training as teachers of record.
- Incentivize states to approve only those providers and programs that meet national accreditation standards.
- Incentivize states to work with districts to develop plans that equitably distribute fully certified, profession-ready teachers.
- Require states to maintain public-facing portals with up-to-date, accurate TPP regulations.
- Incentivize states to remove entrance licensure examinations that disproportionately bar teachers of color from entering the profession.
- Increase federal and foundation funding to historically black colleges and universities (HBCUs) to strengthen the pipeline of Black teachers. HBCUs constitute 3 percent of the nation's colleges and universities yet prepare 50 percent of the nation's Black teachers. Increased fiscal resources could further expand these institutions' recruitment, preparation, and graduation efforts and outcomes. Without these strong engines, the nation is not likely to reach its educator workforce diversity goals.

Conclusion

State constitutions define the right to an education in evocative language. Eighteen states declare that the state's provision of a public and free education is a democratic imperative. Other states use the language of "fundamental value" and "paramount duty" (see box).

State education leaders have a choice: They can tinker at the edges of the current order and attempt a return to a pre-pandemic sense of normalcy, or they can use the moment to do something different. The former approach will not serve the majority of today's public school students well, as they have not benefited from the prevailing order. In sustained, systematic ways, Black and Latinx students' lack of access to the best educational resources—high-quality teachers—has stymied their opportunity for a

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Box 1. Commitments in State Constitutions

In their state constitutions, Arkansas and California offer some of the nation's most eloquent, inspiring language about education. Arkansas proclaims that "intelligence and virtue are the safeguards of liberty and the bulwark of a free and good government, and that the state shall adopt suitable means to secure to the people the advantages and opportunities of education." California links schooling to liberty and scientific advancement: "A general diffusion of knowledge and intelligence is essential to preservation of the rights and liberties of the people and that the Legislature shall encourage by all suitable means the promotion of intellectual, scientific, moral, and agricultural improvement."

Tennessee's constitution asserts an "inherent value" to a free education. Maryland's declares that education must be "thorough, efficient, free, and that its funding be kept inviolate." Georgia proclaims that provision of public education is a "primary obligation of the state." Virginia declares that its educational programs must be of "high quality and continually maintained."

quality education, as it has for students of families experiencing poverty.

These students are more likely than their White peers to be taught by teachers in training who are enrolled in alternative TPPs, which differ from traditional TPPs in at least one significant way: Most alternative-route teacher interns become teachers of record before completing substantive teacher training. That is, they are not profession-ready on day 1, and they are training on the backs of students who most need a profession-ready teacher.

Not only are a disproportionate share of students of color saddled with teachers in training, nearly 40 percent of special education teachers come from alternative preparation routes. So even when special education students and students with disabilities come to school ready to learn, their teacher likely is only learning to teach.

The Black, brown, and poor children who are languishing in too many schools will soon be the majority of Americans. They already constitute the majority of public school students. What will it mean for American democracy when these young people—many of whom have been pushed and held at the margins of the social, political, and economic order—are the majority? Will their commitment to democracy and public schooling be resonant or absent? ■

[1]Leslie T. Fenwick, "A Tale of Two Cities: State Evaluation Systems of Teacher Preparation Programs (National Academy of Education and American Association of Colleges for Teacher Education, November 2021), https://www.aacteconnect360.org/HigherLogic/System/DownloadDocumentFile.ashx?DocumentFileKey=15dec4c0-a648-ec4a-2057-2402c7505f68&forceDialog=0. For details on each state's regulations as of November 2021, see "State Evaluation Systems of Teacher Preparation Programs Appendix" on page 5, https://aacte.org/resources/research-reports-and-briefs/state-evaluation-systems-of-teacher-preparation-programs-appendix/.

[2]Leslie T. Fenwick, *Jim Crow's Pink Slip: The Untold Story of Black Principal and Teacher Leadership* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard Education Press, 2022); Jacqueline Jordan and Leslie Fenwick, "Teachers and Teaching for the New Millennium: The Role of HBCUs," *Journal of Negro Education* 80, no. 3 (2011): 197; C. Kirabo Jackson, "Student Demographics, Teacher Sorting, and Teacher Quality: Evidence from the End of School Desegregation" *Journal of Labor Economics* 27, no. 2 (2009): 213.

[3]Schott Foundation for Public Education, "Lost Opportunity: A 50-State Report on the Opportunity to Learn in America" (Cambridge, MA: Author, 2011).

[4]Renee v. Duncan, 686 F.3d 1002 (9th Cir. 2012).

[5]National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, "Task Force on Education: Hearing Report" (Washington, DC: NAACP, June 2017).

[6]U.S. Department of Education, "2021 Title II Report: Academic Year 2019–2020 Data," web page, https://title2.ed.gov/Public/Home.aspx.

[7]Fenwick, "Tale of Two Cities."

[8]Carlyn Ludlow, "Alternative Certification Pathways: Filling a Gap?" *Education and Urban Society* 45, no. 4 (2011): 441.

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