

# Education Matters

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## Creating New Paths, Attracting New Teachers

### Why teachers should support alternative teacher certification

by Carrie Lukas



We know that too many students, especially those trapped in inner city schools, don't receive a quality education. National test scores and graduation rates show millions leave K-12 public schools unprepared to succeed in college or the work force.

We also know that a good teacher is the master key to a student's success. Unfortunately, the system that governs too many school systems fails to put in place (and then retain) great teachers.

Expanding the pool of highly qualified candidates eligible to become public school teachers is a key to improving the quality of teaching. Traditionally, schools require that applicants have a teacher certification or a license. Getting those credentials require education-specific coursework, which can be a costly and time-consuming process, driving many potential teachers out of the field. Troublingly, research shows that a teaching certificate doesn't guarantee a teacher's classroom success, and isn't associated with better student performance.

One promising strategy for improving teacher quality is alternative teacher certification programs. These programs allow candidates to earn a license by meeting certain requirements—including having a college degree and passing a background check—and demonstrating mastery of subject-area knowledge. This makes it easier for many qualified candidates to apply.

A growing body of empirical evidence suggests that creating real alternative certification options for aspiring teachers

is a promising way to modernize a teaching profession, bring new talent into the classroom, and improve the overall quality of public education in America. That's great news for millions of enthusiastic, educated men and women who may want to consider jobs teaching, and for all the parents who want their children to get the education they need and deserve.

### Why You Should Care

Americans deserve the world's best education system, and that requires having the best teachers. Here's why you should support alternative teacher certification programs:

- **The High Cost of a Bad Education.** Poor public schools create the equivalent of a permanent national recession. It costs our country billions, and limits the life prospects for millions of children.
- **Teacher Quality Matters.** New research by Dr. Matthew Ladner confirms what parents know—good teachers matter. A student taught by low-performing teachers for three years will learn half as much as one taught by a teacher in the top 20 percent of the effectiveness scale.
- **Traditional Teacher Certification Doesn't Guarantee a High Quality Teacher.** Research doesn't support the idea that certified teachers are better teachers.
- **Better Prepared Students.** Alternative certification can



lead to better teachers in the classroom, and better student outcomes. And that's what our public school system is supposed to be about!

- **Opportunities for Women.** Many highly qualified women would love to teach if it were easier to get into the classroom. Dropping education-related course work requirement would free college women to explore different topics, giving them more professional options.

Consider the following hypothetical: Jennifer is a mother of two. She's been out of the work force for almost a decade but once worked on Wall Street. Always a whiz with numbers, she got a bachelor's in business and mathematics from Georgetown University. With her kids in school, Jennifer wants to go back to work but doesn't want to work on Wall Street. She wants to be a middle school math teacher. Jennifer hears that the local school district has a shortage of qualified mathematics teachers and thinks it's the perfect opportunity.

In most public school systems in America, the local principal wouldn't be able to consider Jennifer for the open math teacher position because she doesn't have a teaching license. Jennifer would likely have to complete 30 hours of education-related course work to earn a master's degree in education to become eligible.

Jennifer weighs the costs. Earning a master's degree in education would cost \$30,000 in tuition and take a year and a half. Despite her eagerness to become a teacher, she scraps her plan to go into teaching and looks for other opportunities. Of course, we don't know whether Jennifer would be a good math teacher, but the question is if the traditional strategy of certification and licensing is the best way to attract the best teachers into American classrooms. In short, wouldn't it be better if principals could consider applicants like Jennifer?

## The Current, Flawed System of Evaluating Teaching Candidates

Today, teaching candidates need teaching certificates to be considered in most public school districts. Generally, someone needs a college degree and to have completed education-related course work to get a teaching certificate.

Policymakers view this credentialing strategy as a reasonable way to create a qualified teaching work force. After all, in other professions such as medicine and the law, people rely on certification systems.

Yet it isn't clear that teaching certificates are related to being a good teacher. In fact, researchers (such as Dr. Jay Greene of the University of Arkansas) have concluded that "the presence or absence of a teaching certification on a teacher's resume does not make a noticeable difference in the classroom."

Dozens of evaluations compare the academic achievement of students taught by teachers who earned traditional certification and those who entered the profession through another route, such as alternative teacher certification. Overall, evidence from the American Educational Research Association suggests that traditional teacher certification isn't an accurate predictor of better teaching.

## Strategies for Bringing New Talent into the Classroom

So what can policymakers do to boost the performance of the teacher work force? One compelling strategy would be to expand the pool of candidates to give school officials more choices for open teaching positions. To return to our hypothetical example, policymakers should give principals the ability to consider aspiring teachers like Jennifer.

Strong alternative certification pathways allow qualified people to earn teaching certificates without jumping through all of the hoops of traditional certification. Simply put, alternative certification programs lower the costs associated with entering the teaching field. They provide people who want to become schoolteachers a way to earn certification without going back to school to earn a degree in education. They allow aspiring teachers to prove that they meet a basic standard for becoming an instructor at a particular level without needing to obtain education-specific degrees. And, indeed, alternative teacher certification programs are increasingly popular. Today, most states offer some form of alternative teacher certification, and one in five teachers enters the classroom through an alternative certification.

## The Benefits of Alternative Teacher Certification

While alternative certification programs are growing in popularity, they differ significantly in the types of programs available to aspiring teachers. In many states, the programs that qualify as "alternative certification" are not significantly different from the traditional teacher certification programs.

In 2008, Harvard University researchers surveyed state programs and reported that only twenty-one of the twenty-eight states provide what the researchers called "a true alternative pathway." These twenty-one states offered programs that let people earn a teacher's license without completing course work that is similar to that required by a traditional teacher certification program. Interestingly, the researchers found evidence to

suggest that having a real alternative certification program could be effective in improving educational outcomes for students.

### Improving Minority Representation in the Teaching Work Force

First, the Harvard researchers found that states with real alternative certification programs increase representation of minority groups in the teaching work force. Of the sixteen states that report the ethnicity of alternatively certified teachers, fourteen states reported that the percentage of minority candidates earning alternative certificates exceeded the percentage of minority teachers in the state overall. This could be key to improving classroom performance of minority children.

Researcher Thomas S. Dee examined the link between a teacher's race and the students' test scores, and concluded "The results are troubling. Black students learn more from black teachers and white students from white teachers, suggesting that the racial dynamics within classrooms may contribute to the persistent racial gap in student performance...." While the results may be troubling in terms of the role that race plays in America, this finding supports the notion that more minority teachers could benefit minority students.

### Overall Improvements in Academic Achievement

The Harvard University evaluation also found that states with real alternative certification options had seen greater improvement on the so-called "Nation's Report Card" examination. Students in states with real alternative certification programs improved their academic achievement on the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) reading and mathematics tests more than students in states that lack strong alternative programs.

### Why Women Would Benefit from Alternative Teacher Certification and a More Flexible Teacher Work Force

While everyone should be concerned about the quality of the American teacher work force, policies affecting teachers should be of particular interest to women. Seventy-nine percent of public school teachers were women in 2001. Some women may see alternative certification programs as a threat, creating new competition for teaching positions and lowering the value of education-related degrees (which are overwhelmingly earned by women). However, the benefits of a more flexible teaching field will outweigh perceived costs to women. First, research suggests women will still be more likely to participate in alternative teaching certification programs, particularly among career changers. (One estimate found that 65 percent of those pursuing alternative teacher certification were women.)

Women who are more likely to take time out of the work force to raise children are more likely to consider changing careers and would therefore benefit more from these new opportunities. The existence of alternative certification programs would also allow women who want to be teachers to pursue fields beyond education during college. For example, the ability to major in a noneducation subject and still become a teacher would give a person more flexibility throughout his career. In 2001, the U.S. Department of Education surveyed teachers about their willing-

## The Importance of Highly Effective Teachers

Academic research shows that a talented teacher can produce a significant improvement in a student's performance. These findings probably seem obvious to anyone who has spent time around a school. Moms and dads know instinctively the profound effect that having an engaging, highly motivated teacher can have by encouraging learning. They also know how an unmotivated, ill-equipped teacher can do the opposite. But for policymakers' sake, it's nice to have some specific data to back up and quantify this common sense finding.



Dr. Eric Hanushek of Stanford University found that having a highly effective teacher for five years in a row could erase the difference between low- and middle-income student performance.

Similarly, Dr. William Saunders of the University of Tennessee, a national expert in value-added assessments (which measure students' learning gains over time), found that a student who is taught by low-performing teachers for three years will learn approximately 50 percent less than a student who is taught by a teacher from the top 20 percent of the effectiveness scale.

These research findings suggest that policymakers should focus education reform strategies on bringing the most talented, effective people into the classroom.

ness to teach again. Among the respondents whose median age was 46, more than 20 percent said that they would "probably not" or "certainly not" be willing to teach again. This suggests that many teachers are not satisfied by their careers. If teacher certification had been flexible when they were in college, it is possible that many of these teachers would have pursued academic subjects in other fields and today would have more work force options. ■



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*She appears frequently on television and the radio, on shows such as Fox News Channel's Your World with Neil Cavuto, Fox Report with Shepard Smith, The O'Reilly Factor, Hannity and Colmes, CNBC's Kudlow and Company, and MSNBC's Hardball with Chris Matthews.*

# Back to School, Getting Involved

Make a new school year resolution to introduce colleagues to the benefits of AAE

By Paula Jackson-Eaglin

**B**ack-to-School is such a great time! When I reflect on my years in the classroom, I can't help but fondly recollect all the excitement of starting a new school year. The annual fresh start is a marvelous gift unique to educators. The beginning of a new school year can be a clean slate of sorts for a teacher. This year you can do those things you wish you'd done last time around. You can avoid making the same mistakes. You can reflect upon lessons learned and improve your practice. The world is your oyster so to speak. Choose to make this your best year ever. Choose to be an even better educator.

Here at AAE, we are also embracing Back-to-School as the opportunity to become better than we've ever been before. We hope you will join us in building an even more robust online community for our members by following us on Twitter, commenting on our daily blogs, and sharing on our Facebook page. Get involved with our advocacy and media relations efforts by sharing your thoughts on legislation or new trends in education in your state. Take advantage of AAE's professional development or apply for our scholarships and grants to improve your classroom. Most importantly, let others know about your professional association so that as educators, we can all become better together!

Here are some specific Back-to-School suggestions for getting involved:

**1 Opening Day.** Most school districts have some sort of beginning-of-the-year meeting, sometimes called an Opening Day, a Benefit Fair, an Orientation, a District Day, or similar title. Often, individuals or groups are allowed to set up tables to answer questions and distribute information. Wouldn't this be a great way for you to tell your colleagues about membership in AAE or about our scholarships and grants? Contact your central office and find out how to

participate. We will work with you to take care of the details.

**2 New Teacher Orientation.** Just before school starts, newly hired teachers participate in a New Teacher Orientation. Don't you think new teachers could really benefit from knowing they have a choice when it comes to professional associations? Find out who coordinates this for your district and ask how we can

can even provide AAE promotional items to include with your notes.

**5 Mailboxes.** Teacher mailboxes are a nonintrusive way to reach out to others. If your school policy allows it, why not distribute AAE membership brochures in teachers' mailboxes? We are happy to provide you with all the materials you need.

## Find Out How to Spread the Word about AAE.

Sign Up to Receive an AAE Back-to-School Box for Your School's Event!

[www.aateachers.org/back2schoolbox](http://www.aateachers.org/back2schoolbox)



be a part of the process. We will work with you on any special requirements or contributions.

**3 Faculty Meeting.** There's always that first Back-to-School faculty meeting for your building, too. It only takes a minute or two to tell your fellow educators about AAE and to pass out information. Wouldn't it be worth asking your principal if you could have two minutes at the end of the meeting to tell everyone about your professional organization? We can even provide you with suggestions of what to say and answers to frequently asked questions.

**4 Friendly Note.** We all love to get notes from a friend. Consider writing a welcome Back-to-School note to a fellow teacher or teachers, attaching an AAE brochure and a piece of candy, and leaving it on other teachers' desks. Who wouldn't want to be welcomed back to school? We

As always, we're here to support you. If any of the above ideas stand out as a way you'd like to get involved with making this AAE's best year ever, we have a Back-to-School Kit of materials available for you at our website.

Remember, Back-to-School is your new beginning, your blank chalkboard. Make your new school year resolution to share AAE with your colleagues and help us make this AAE's best year ever. ■



*Paula Jackson-Eaglin is National Membership Director for the Association of American Educators. In this role, Paula travels all over the country speaking with policy makers, administrators, and teachers about the non-union option. She is a National Board Certified Teacher and veteran educator.*

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# The Next Innovation

## Open educational resources

By DeLaina Tonks

**M**y mother is a teacher. My aunts, uncles, and cousins are teachers. And I knew I wanted to be a teacher from the time I was five years old and started bossing the neighbor kids into playing school, insisting that they do their “homework” which was nothing more than worksheets I had painstakingly scrawled out with my budding penmanship. This was my first foray into the world of open educational resources (OER), although I didn’t realize it at the time. Little did I know that years later I would become the director of the Open High School of Utah, the first secondary school to use an entire curriculum based on open educational resources.

### What are Open educational resources?

Open educational resources consist of “teaching, learning, and research resources that reside in the public domain or have been released under an intellectual property license that permits their free use or repurposing by others. Open educational resources include full courses, course materials, modules, textbooks, streaming videos, tests, software, and any other tools, materials, or techniques used to support access to knowledge” as defined in Wikipedia by the William and Flora Hewlett Foundation.

### Why would anyone use OER?

The objective behind open educational resources is to create free and simple access to knowledge and information through collaboration and innovation. The process of creating and sharing curriculum based on OER is similar to the advent of the printing press, which made information available to the masses rather than to just those who knew how to read.

The use of open resources also makes it possible to very easily modify the curriculum to meet student needs. It’s impossible to rip a chapter out of a textbook if it isn’t what students need, but, by using OER, teachers are able to pinpoint which lessons are effective through the data we gather from scores. Those lessons that do not meet learner needs are enhanced or scrapped completely, giving the teacher the opportunity to find or create something better.

### Who creates and/or uses Open educational resources?

The Open High School of Utah joins the ranks of other organizations like CK12, Curriki, OER Commons, and The National Repository of Online Courses, who are also committed to creating, promoting, or hosting open educational resources. Besides, just about every teacher I know supplements his curriculum with teacher-created materials in order to best meet learner needs. Despite the volumes of prepackaged textbooks, CDs, DVDs, practice books, test booklets, and all other manner of ancillary materials we receive in our toolkits, there is always a gap here or there. Teachers fill gaps. Those materials are OER. Everybody’s already doing it! For example, the Open High School of Utah re-

leases its curriculum at [www.ocw.openhighschool.org](http://www.ocw.openhighschool.org).

### How are teachers building their curriculum?

The Open High curriculum is built from open educational resources, the foundation for its content, and is aligned with Utah state standards to ensure the highest quality educational experience. The teachers enhance with cutting-edge technology, like screen-casts, which are the equivalent of the teacher’s introduction to the curriculum for each week. Teachers record themselves walking the students through what to expect, laying the groundwork for a successful lesson. Additionally, interactive components such as chats, discussion boards, and forums are included so students can collaborate with each other. Each course contains projects, service learning, and cross-curricular components that lend relevance to each assignment by allowing students to understand real-world practical applications.

### But, if it’s free, how good can it really be?

Any teacher who has sat on a textbook adoption committee knows full well that there is a complete range of textbooks to choose from. Some are phenomenal while others leave much to be desired. Some OER is sub-par; other resources can be just the thing you are looking for. The great thing is that you have the ability to modify it to meet your needs.

### So, then what?

Teachers worldwide are already creating OER, so what’s next? There is real power in collaboration. We are on the cusp of a movement poised to change the face of education and you can play a role. I invite you to add a creative commons ([www.creativecommons.org](http://www.creativecommons.org)) license to your teacher-created materials and post them online. Feel free to use a repository like Curriki ([www.curriki.org](http://www.curriki.org)), or toss it in a free Google document ([www.google.com](http://www.google.com)), then share the link with all the teachers you know. If you’re really tech-savvy, then you can tweet the link out under the #edchat hashtag. and teachers all over the world will have access to your work. This gives you the ability to indirectly influence the education of students worldwide! ■



The objective behind open educational resources is to create free and simple access to knowledge and information through collaboration and innovation.



*DeLaina Tonks is the director of Open High School of Utah. Prior to this, she taught French and Spanish in Utah public schools.*



## News from Washington, D.C. Reports from AAE's Office in the Nation's Capital

# Third Education Reform Bill Clears House Committee

By Alexandra Schroeck

In July, the U.S. House Committee on Education and the Workforce Chairman John Kline (R-MN) introduced H.R. 1891, otherwise known as “The State and Local Funding Flexibility Act.” It is designed to allow states and local school districts maximum flexibility in their use of federal education dollars. The bill is the third in the committee’s series of education reform bills designed to overhaul the current elementary and secondary education law, or No Child Left Behind Act.

“Superintendents and principals from across the nation repeatedly tell me they need more freedom to decide how federal education dollars should be used to support students,” remarked Chairman Kline. “Washington bureaucrats cannot dictate how money is best spent in the classroom—those decisions should be left to the teachers, school administrators, superintendents, principals, and state leaders who have an integral knowledge of the needs of our kids. The State and Local Funding Flexibility Act will help get the federal government out of the way of student achievement and encourage more innovative education reforms on the local level.”

Under current law, the federal government operates multiple elementary and secondary education programs, each with their own set of strict and complex rules mandating exactly how funds may be spent by local school districts and grant recipients. This process of funneling funding through separate streams severely limits states’ and school districts’ ability to apply federal funds to the local education priorities and attach federal dollars to specific projects. The State and Local Funding Flexibility Act will allow states and school districts flexibility

in the use of federal education funds, thus supporting more opportunities to fulfill local education priorities and needs as they arise.

After lively debate on Capitol Hill, the bill was pushed through committee with bipartisan support. Among the proponents of the bill and its focus on funding flexibility and local control are the American Association of School Administrators and individual school districts across the country. Advocates cite that in difficult economic times, the ability to funnel federal dollars into high-need education programs will best suit diverse school districts.

While the call to fix No Child Left Behind in Washington remains, congressional leaders hope that this series of smaller bills will do the necessary work in promoting flexibility and accountability in our nation’s schools. ■



*for the then ranking member of the House Congressional Committee on Education and the Workforce.*



### You are invited to participate in the 2011 AAE National Survey!

Join with teachers across America and voice your opinion on issues including school choice, pensions, curriculum, education funding, and collective bargaining.

*\*As a benefit of membership in the Association of American Educators, all active members are invited to participate in national surveys. Members are required to enter their Member ID as proof of active membership when submitting the survey. Survey results are anonymous. Results will be posted on the AAE website.*

To complete the survey, visit:

<https://www.surveymonkey.com/s/Q9JGS3F>

# Tenure Helps Conservatives

An AAE member responds to Chester Finn's question "Who Deserves Tenure?"

There were several problems with the article "Who Deserves Tenure?" (by Chester E. Finn, Jr., in the June 2011 *Education Matters*). The question is not about who deserves anything. Tenure is not, as the author states and is popularly believed, a right to lifetime employment. Tenure, or the right to not be fired without a cause and due process, is a tool designed to give the same stability to teaching, when the winds of philosophy blow back and forth, that judges need. It also is a cost containment tool.

I have seen situations in which teachers with a conservative philosophy were protected *only* because of tenure. The teaching profession—K-12 and higher education—is very much driven by philosophies, which regularly change. Tenure protects teachers, just like judges, from pressure to fire them because their philosophy becomes unpopular in the moment.

## Protecting Teachers from Whims of Change

I have seen administrators who, for instance, were pushing "new math" or "whole language" that would have fired good, experienced teachers who resisted the drive to impose that style of teaching. Many times newer principals or superintendents really believe in a purist view of a particular program or style, or they want to show how capable they are as an administrator by implementing a particular program quickly. Sometimes teachers just don't want to change, but I believe most of the time, teachers who are resisting have seen similar programs come and go or have valid reasons why a program is not in the students' best interest.

## Another Member's Perspective

I very much enjoyed Chester Finn's informative article on tenure in the June edition of *Education Matters*. I learned a lot, too. I strongly agree with his stand to eliminate tenure in the public schools, and I can see that I am not alone, as indicated by the 2010 AAE survey.

My particular situation is rare in that I teach special education and am directly affected by the behavior of, not teachers, but paraprofessionals who gain tenure and "work" alongside me in a classroom of children with special needs.

Just as Mr. Finn wrote, as tenure contributes to a principal's inability to determine who teaches in his school, it also contributes to a teacher's inability to make similar recommendations in respect to paraprofessionals.

The teacher has to pick up the slack of the paraprofessional, knowing that it will never improve. Tenure prevents it from ever improving. It is not only discouraging, but also extremely taxing on a teacher already dealing with children who have emotional, physical, and mental needs. I would be very interested in supporting every effort made to eliminate or radically overhaul tenure in the public schools.

—Diana Slavich

## Protection from Liberal Bias

I have observed curriculum leaders and college of education professors, who typically have a rather liberal philosophy, telling conservative legislators, board members, and others how terrible tenure is – that it makes it hard to implement reforms. Little do these policymakers realize that without tenure, these teacher trainers would more easily implement the very philosophies the policymakers oppose! Teachers are actually more conservative in general than those who train them. These trainers would dearly love to get rid of tenure, so they could strong-arm teachers into installing their ideas more fully.

It is ironic to me that conservatives are the loudest in calling for the elimination of tenure, but if tenure were eliminated, there would be many more liberal ideas than conservative ideas instituted because curriculum leaders and professors are the ones in the key positions to do it.

It is naïve to think that administrators would get rid of all the bad teachers and keep all the good ones. Often they are less experienced or more focused on climbing the administrative/political ladder than on building into the lives of children. To give them unrestrained power over a teacher's future would not be dissimilar to giving the President authority to remove justices because he disagrees with their decisions.

## Large Districts Need Downsizing

There are horror stories like "rubber rooms" for bad teachers. I submit that there are other causes for these problems, particularly the size of districts. In large districts, unions get too much power trying to compensate for the power of the bureaucracy. It is in large districts that poor teachers and administrators can hide. Smaller schools and districts have much less problem with this issue because people can't hide. They usually remove or improve on their own. Indeed, they feel the possibility of improvement, which is usually lacking in large bureaucracies.

If we really want to improve governance in education, we would study the absolute need to divide in order to grow. I have research available on this issue at [www.smallerschools.org](http://www.smallerschools.org). The source of the problem is not tenure. It is the size of the organization, and it has implications far beyond education alone.

Just like some who would throw out our form of government for supposed flaws they see, those who would throw out public education, yes, and tenure, despite their flaws would get something much worse. ■



David N. Cox is an AAE member, elementary teacher of thirty years, and a former Utah state legislator for eight years. He authored the legislation that has allowed Utah's largest school district to be divided. For more information, visit [www.smallerschools.org](http://www.smallerschools.org).



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