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## Certified teachers in short supply

### Minorities, poor are being taught by lesser-trained HISD educators, a study finds

By JASON SPENCER  
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Houston's poor and minority students are increasingly less likely than their white and wealthier classmates to be taught by certified teachers with the necessary training, according to a study released Friday by Stanford University researchers.

The study, based on Houston Independent School District data from 1995-2002, found that students taught by uncertified educators from Teach for America and HISD's Alternative Certification Program generally perform worse on standardized tests than those taught by certified teachers.

The researchers analyzed test scores for 55,000 third- through fifth-grade students and 4,400 teachers.

"It shows that you need to know what you're doing to teach well and you need preparation to be effective," said Linda Darling-Hammond, a Stanford professor who runs the university's teacher education program. Once they become fully certified, Teach for America and other teachers trained through the Alternative Certification Program perform at about the same level as other certified teachers, Darling-Hammond said.

The study is likely to be used as ammunition against education reform movements that advocate removing the training and education requirements that block some from entering the teaching profession. Urban school districts in recent years have relied heavily on uncertified teachers to staff their classrooms. Last school year, uncertified teachers held nearly 2,000 of HISD's 11,400 teaching jobs.

Teach for America officials and other researchers, however, said they have major doubts about the study's methodology and conclusions.

"I have serious questions based on everything I've heard from the research community on whether this study meets even ethical standards," said Wendy Kopp, who founded Teach for America as a senior at Princeton University in 1989. "From what I have heard, disseminating this study at this point in its current form, before it's been through a peer review, before the subjects of the study have been able to examine the results, is unethical."

HISD officials declined to comment on the study, saying they haven't had time to review it.

The Stanford study doesn't provide enough information for an outside analysis, said Dan Goldhaber, a University of Washington labor economist specializing in teacher labor markets and student achievement. Goldhaber also serves on the Teach for America advisory board.

"The way the information is presented is not standard," he said. "If you were to submit this to an academic journal for review, they would demand more information about ... the results than what is currently in the paper."

Darling-Hammond, who has published previous research on teacher quality and student achievement and other topics, said she followed research standards.

HISD began this school year with about 360 rookie teachers — including about 100 from Teach for America — trained in its Alternative Certification Program. The program provides an avenue for anyone with a four-year college degree to begin teaching once they pass a subject-matter test and get started on the year-long training regimen. Most don't become fully certified until after their first year on the job.

Darling-Hammond has been a long-time critic of Teach for America and President Bush's No Child Left Behind legislation that mandates every classroom be taught by a "highly qualified" teacher by next school year. Under Texas' standards, teachers can achieve "highly qualified" status by passing a competency exam, regardless of whether they've had any formal training or experience.

Teach for America has recruited more than 10,000 graduates fresh out of some of the nation's most elite universities and deployed them to classrooms in high-poverty, urban school districts including Houston. The recruits commit to two years of service and most of them move onto different careers when they're done.

"Unfortunately, most of them leave after they get certified, so the benefit of that knowledge isn't available to the Houston school children at any time," Darling-Hammond said.

The study found that black and white students were equally as likely to be taught by a certified teacher during the 1996-1997 school year, but that by 2001-2002, 76 percent of white students had certified teachers, compared to 61 percent of black students. That year, 61 percent of low-income students were taught by certified teachers, compared to 72 percent of students from wealthier families.

Other studies have concluded Teach for America recruits compare favorably to other teachers.

A 2004 analysis performed by the nonpartisan Mathematica Policy Research Inc. found that Teach for America recruits outperformed veteran teachers in math and equaled their performance on reading.

That study looked at test scores for nearly 2,000 students at the beginning and end of the 2002-2003 school year at 17 Teach for America schools in six cities, including Houston.

The problem with that study, Darling-Hammond said, is that it lumped all Teach for America teachers into a single category regardless of whether they were certified. And, the Mathematica study compared Teach for America teachers only to other teachers at the same poor schools, which are more likely to be staffed with untrained and uncertified teachers, she said.

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