



A Closer Look at Clinical Opportunities

Traditional Graduate Programs (Student Teaching Standard), Residencies and Alternate Route Programs (Supervised Practice Standard)

KEY FINDINGS: When it comes to providing a positive clinical experience to their teacher candidates, most programs leave too much to chance. With only six percent of programs as the exception, traditional graduate programs give too much ground on two elements of an effective student teaching experience that should never fall victim to compromise: 1) the need to assign a great classroom teacher to mentor the student teacher and 2) ensuring that the teacher candidate gets frequent feedback on their progress. Residencies perform much better, with about a third paying attention to both of these basic, but crucial elements of a great clinical experience. Alternate route programs do not fare much better than traditional programs, in part constrained by quickly placing their candidates in charge of their own classrooms. Only two percent of these programs consider these two elements nonnegotiable. For-profit alternative programs are most cavalier — 90 percent of those we evaluated took neither of these crucial steps.

Why teacher prep programs should provide high-quality support during teachers' transition into the classroom

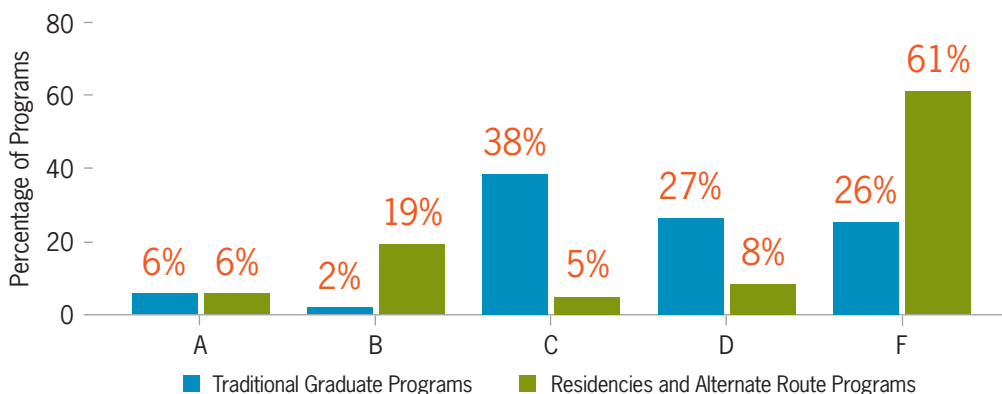
Teachers often say that their clinical experiences were the most important part of their training. Candidates in traditional, university-based, programs spend a semester or more as a student teacher in another teacher's classroom, an experience that — at its best — gives candidates the opportunity to learn how to teach from a “pro.” For their part, alternate route programs include a variety of supervised practice experiences, but we make an important distinction between the two main types. In residency models, (which many argue are not actually an alternate route) teacher candidates work in a mentor teacher's classroom for up to a year. Internships, which we regard as pure alternate routes, quickly plunge participants into the responsibility of guiding their own classroom, sometimes with steady support and sometimes not.

To increase the quality of the clinical experience, programs should, at minimum, take two actions that have been shown to be effective by research.¹ First, programs should play an active role in identifying qualified mentor teachers by collecting meaningful information that allows the programs to confirm the skills of each mentor teacher, instead of leaving their selection entirely in the hands of principals or other school district staff. Mentors should be effective instructors (as measured by evidence of student learning²) and capable mentors of adults. Second, programs should require supervisors to provide candidates with frequent observations accompanied by written feedback.

- 1 Boyd, D., Grossman, P., Lankford, H., Loeb, S., & Wyckoff, J. (2009). Teacher Preparation and Student Achievement. *Educational Evaluation and Policy Analysis*, 30(4), 319-343.
- 2 Positive impact on student learning may be determined by a number of means, including — but not restricted to — standardized test scores. For example, teacher-written tests or portfolios of student work would be acceptable.

How many programs systematically deliver high quality practice and support?

(N=545 traditional graduate programs; N=147 all alternate route programs)



In total, only about six percent of traditional programs earn a grade of “A,” signifying that they make an effort to match their student teachers with strong mentor teachers and that they provide an acceptable frequency of observation and feedback to their candidates. Most programs earn lower grades because they do not play an active role with school districts in verifying the suitability of potential mentor teachers.

Residencies stand out in our analysis, because more than a third earn “A”s for their clinical experience. They do this by providing candidates up to one year of experience in the classroom of a mentor who is a strong instructor and able to mentor adults, and by sending program staff to observe the teachers frequently. In contrast, internships, in which participants quickly become teachers in their own classrooms, almost never provide this type of experience.

Internships run by for-profit companies are particularly lacking. More than 90% earned an F because they systematically fail to provide adequate feedback from program staff and ensure that mentor teachers were qualified. Most of these programs are located in Texas, where they produce a large fraction of the state’s new teachers. We noted similar trends in Texas programs in our [2014 analysis](#) of alternative programs.

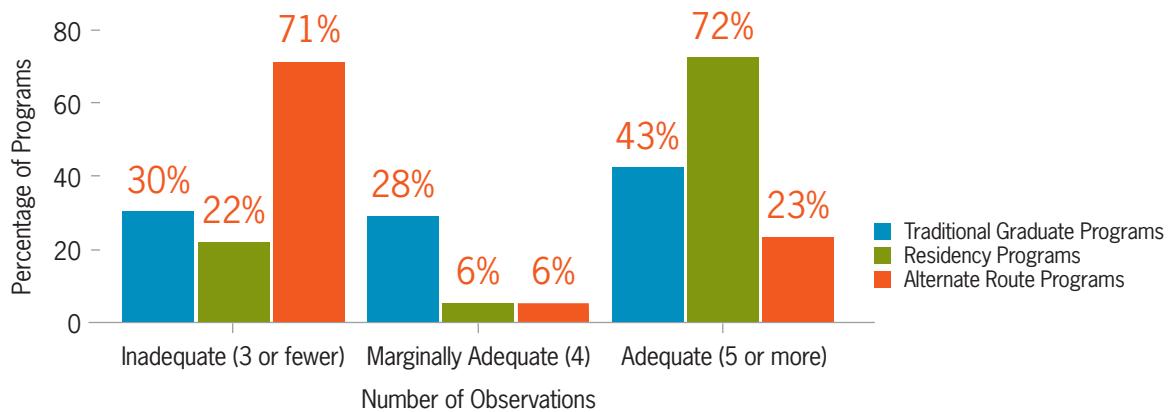
Essential features of a high quality experience

Frequent observations by a university supervisor

Observations allow program supervisors to evaluate teacher candidates’ performance and provide feedback that can lead to improvement. Research finds that when student teachers are observed at least five times by their supervisors over the course of the student teaching placement, they are more effective when they have classrooms of their own. It’s reasonable to think that teachers in alternate route programs also benefit from being observed at least five times. However, we give partial credit to traditional, residency, and alternate route programs that provide four observations. If teacher candidates in alternative programs begin teaching without spending time in another teacher’s classroom, it is particularly important that they are given feedback early in the school year, defined here as within the first 12 weeks. While feedback from mentor teachers is also extremely valuable, there is no research of comparable strength to determine how often mentor teachers should formally observe student teachers, so we only focus on supervisor feedback.

Do programs observe and give feedback to candidates?

(N=545 traditional graduate programs; N=18 residency programs; N=129 alternate route programs)



With regard to feedback, there is a large difference between traditional programs, residencies, and alternate route programs. About 70 percent of traditional graduate programs and residencies require that their supervisors observe their assigned student teachers at least four times and provide them with written feedback based on each observation.

However, the findings are reversed for internships and other types of alternate route programs: More than 70 percent failed to ensure that novice teachers be frequently observed during the crucial first twelve weeks of the school year.

The opportunity to learn from a great mentor teacher

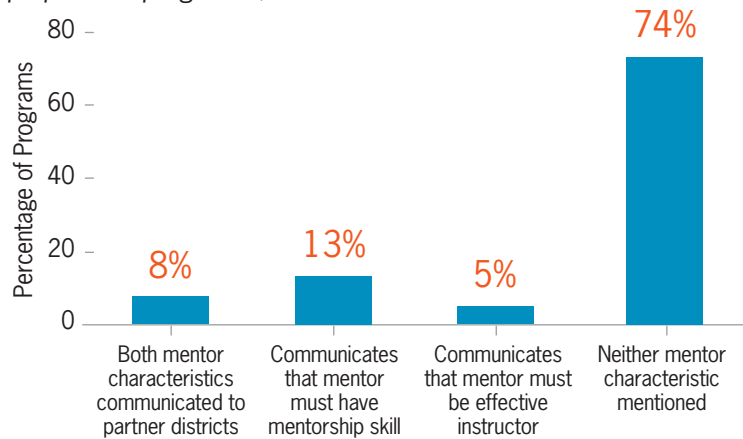
Traditional teacher preparation programs and residencies, with a small number of exceptions, include a clinical experience of a semester or more in which teacher candidates spend full days in a mentor's classroom. Teacher candidates in these programs are therefore guaranteed what we have to assume is adequate time with a mentor. However, traditional programs often do not insist that mentor teachers meet high standards. Residencies do better in this regard, but still have room for improvement.

In contrast, while alternate route programs are more likely than traditional programs to screen mentor teachers to ensure that they have appropriate skills, they struggle to provide sufficient practice. Most are internships in which the mentee and mentor are full-time teachers in their own classrooms, with limited opportunities to see each other teach. To ensure that candidates receive enough guidance, internship programs should include time spent in a mentor's classroom (perhaps during summer school), a period of co-teaching at the beginning of the year, or a combination of the two. We look for least six weeks of time to work under the guidance of another teacher, which we fully acknowledge may not be altogether adequate. However, few programs meet even this low bar.

How many programs ensure that teacher candidates spent time in the classroom of a strong mentor teacher?

Traditional programs

(N=506 graduate teacher preparation programs³)



Only eight percent of traditional graduate programs hold mentor teachers to high standards by telling partner school districts that mentors must be effective instructors and strong mentors. Because partner school districts usually play a large role in mentor selection, it's important for programs to establish a shared understanding of the qualities expected in a mentor, but most traditional programs seem reluctant to use this opportunity to insist that mentor teachers be the best of the best.

State regulations appear to influence requirements that programs set for their mentor teachers: In the eight states whose regulations require that mentor teachers have mentorship skills, 55% of programs ask school partners to be sure that nominated mentors comply with this requirement, compared with 17% of programs in states without the requirement. However, the low level of compliance even in states with regulations shows that many programs ignore state regulations.

Beyond communicating expectations about the qualities mentor teachers should have, teacher prep programs should play an active role in screening mentor teachers to verify that they meet the program's criteria. Only about nine percent of traditional graduate programs collect any meaningful information on each mentor teachers' skills, including about one percent that screen mentor teachers for both their mentorship and instructional skills.⁴

Traditional graduate programs that screen mentor teachers for both mentorship and instructional skill:

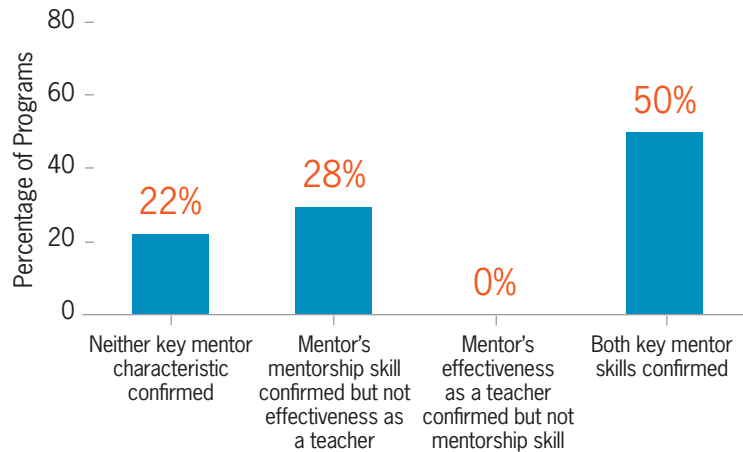
- AZ – Arizona State University
- GA – Berry College
- NY – CUNY – Lehman College
- CA – University of California – Los Angeles
- AK – University of Alaska Fairbanks

3 These data are based on the subset of programs for which we could clearly identify the expectations for mentor teachers that the program communicated to partner school districts.

4 Meaningful information is not restricted to information about a teacher's instructional and mentorship skills. For example, a principal might be asked to comment on a teacher's classroom management or communication skills. However, information on the individual's skills as a teacher, beyond number of years of experience or area of certification, must be obtained.

Residencies

(N=18 programs)



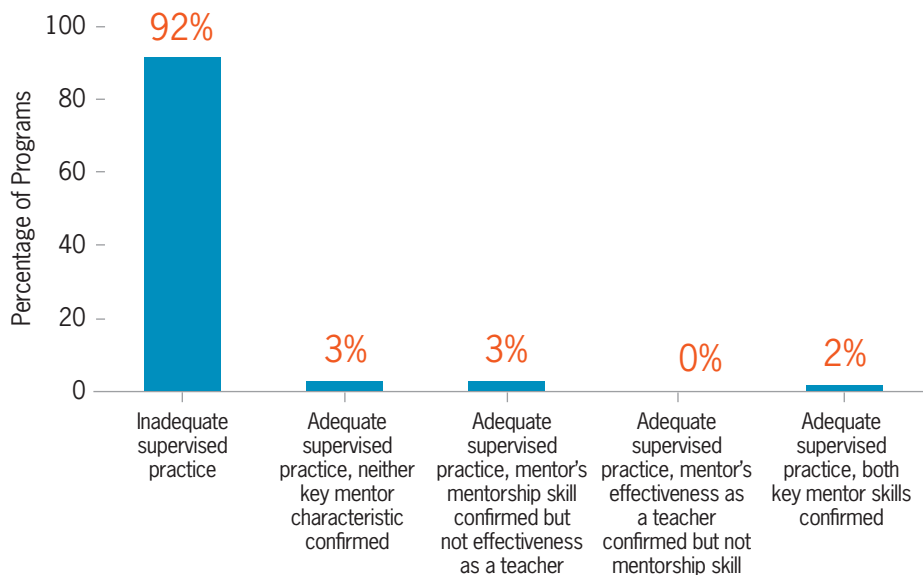
Residencies are often created in partnership with — or by — school districts, making the communication of mentor criteria less one-sided. Our analysis of these programs therefore focuses on whether they screen mentor teachers for their mentorship and instructional skills, an issue that is also important for alternate route programs, regardless of their structure. While residencies are more likely than other types of programs to screen for these two key skill sets, only about half of residencies do.

Residency programs that offer a substantive experience with a strong mentor:

- CA – Aspire Teacher Residency
- CO – Boettcher Teacher Residency
- MA – Boston Teacher Residency
- TN – Memphis Teacher Residency
- NY – Relay Graduate School of Education
- TX – Relay Teaching Residency – Houston
- VA – Richmond Teacher Residency

Alternate route programs

(N=129 programs)



In comparison with residencies, most of which follow a similar structure, the amount and kind of supervised practice provided by alternate route certification programs varies by type. Although about a quarter of alternate route programs screen mentor teachers for both their mentorship skill and effectiveness as teachers, very few arrange for candidates to spend six weeks or more teaching alongside a mentor. Most are internships, in which the mentor's support is limited to meetings during non-instructional hours and the occasional visit to observe the mentee. Only three of the more than 120 internship programs we examined arrange for participants to spend significant time in a mentor's classrooms, in two of the three cases during summer school, before leading their own classrooms.

Alternate route programs that offer a substantive experience with a strong mentor:

- TX – COMPASS: Alternative Certification Teacher Academy of the Dallas Independent School District (ISD)

Comparison with other types of programs and previous years

The findings discussed here for traditional graduate programs are very similar to those we reported for traditional undergraduate programs in the fall of 2016. Traditional graduate and undergraduate programs generally perform similarly on this standard because many institutions use the same methods to recruit mentor teachers and have the same policies on observations for all types of teacher candidates.

The findings for this standard have not changed substantially since we last looked at traditional programs in 2014. Looking only at the 425 elementary and secondary graduate programs we were able to evaluate in both the *2014 Teacher Prep Review* and the current Teacher Prep Review, over a quarter of programs — 26 percent — now score differently on this standard than they did two years ago.⁵ However, these programs were almost evenly split between programs whose score increased and those whose score decreased, resulting in almost no net effect.

Methodology in brief

We examine the observation and evaluation forms that supervisors and cooperating teachers use to give feedback to student teachers. We review a variety of materials used during student teaching and supervised practice including handbooks and observation forms, as well as communications between prep programs and school districts. We look to see how often a supervisor from the prep program is required to observe teacher candidates and give documented feedback during periods when the candidate is instructing the full class. We review whether the program ensures that the teachers in whose classrooms student teachers work are demonstrably effective teachers and are skilled adult mentors. For alternative programs, we also look at whether feedback is provided during a practice experience or in the first twelve weeks as a teacher of record.

To learn more about our evaluation, please see the methodology section of our Standard Books for the [Student Teaching](#) and Supervised Practice standards.

Understanding program grades for Student Teaching (traditional programs) and Supervised Practice (residencies and alternate route programs)

The grading scheme for the two standards is slightly different. The supervised practice standard takes into account whether the teacher candidate spends enough time in the mentor's classroom. The student teaching standard does not.

Student Teaching Standard

- A** There are multiple ways to earn an A but the most common is:
 - Program collects meaningful information on mentor teachers' skills, including determining whether they are effective teachers and/or capable mentors, and requires that student teachers receive at least four observations with feedback by their supervisors.

⁵ Scoring was formerly conducted on a three-point scale, but was converted to a five-point scale for the current edition of the Teacher Prep Review to capture more nuanced information. This change was taken into account when examining the change in program scores.

- B** There are multiple ways to earn a B but the most common is:
 - Program collects meaningful information on mentor teachers' skills but does not determine whether they are both effective teachers and capable mentors; program requires that student teachers receive at least four observations with feedback by their supervisors.
- C** There are multiple ways to earn a C but the most common is:
 - Program collects meaningful information on mentors' skills but does not determine whether they are either effective teachers or capable mentors; program does not require that student teachers receive at least four observations with feedback by their supervisors.
- D** Program does not collect any meaningful information on mentor teachers' skills, but does require that student teachers receive at least four observations with feedback by their supervisors.
- F** Program neither collects meaningful information on mentor teachers' skills nor does it require that student teachers receive at least four observations with feedback by their supervisors.

Supervised Practice Standard (Residencies and alternate route programs)

- A** Program provides a substantive practice experience in the classroom of a mentor teacher who is both a strong mentor and an effective instructor; program staff observe participants at least five times during key periods of instruction.
- B** There are multiple ways to earn a B but the most common is:
 - Program identifies a mentor teacher who is both a strong mentor and an effective instructor; program staff must observe participants at least five times during key periods of instruction. However, the program does not provide a substantive practice experience in the classroom of a mentor teacher.
- C** There are multiple ways to earn a C but the most common is:
 - Program provides a substantive experience in the classroom of a mentor teacher who is a strong mentor but does not verify that the mentor is an effective instructor program staff observe participants only four, not five, times, early in the novice teacher's tenure.
- D** There are multiple ways to earn a D but the most common is:
 - Program identifies a mentor teacher who is both a strong mentor and an effective instructor. However, the program does not provide a substantive experience in the classroom of a mentor teacher and does not require program staff to observe novice teacher more than three times early in the teacher's tenure.
- F** There are multiple ways to earn a F but the most common is:
 - Program identifies a mentor teacher who is deemed to be a strong mentor. However, the program does not confirm that the mentor teacher is an effective instructor, nor does it provide a substantive practice experience, and program staff need not observe the novice teacher more than three times early in the novice teacher's tenure.



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