



Lessons Learned: New Teachers Talk About Their Jobs, Challenges and Long-Range Plans

Issue No. 2

Working Without a Net:
How New Teachers from Three Prominent
Alternate Route Programs Describe Their
First Year on the Job

A Report from the **National Comprehensive Center
for Teacher Quality** and **Public Agenda**



Questionnaire design and analysis in cooperation
with **REL Midwest at Learning Point Associates**

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*Based on research conducted and reported by Jonathan Rochkind,
Amber Ott, John Immerwahr, John Doble and Jean Johnson*

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The alternate route teachers surveyed here are less likely to say that teaching is their lifelong career goal and more likely to plan on leaving classroom teaching in the next two years. Surprisingly, however, nearly half of the alternate route teachers say they are considering another job in education. All in all, nearly two-thirds of the teachers from the three alt-route programs voice a long-term interest in working in education.24

Finding Six: Agreement on ways to improve teachers

Despite their differing experiences as new teachers, both alt-routes and traditionally trained teachers back similar ideas for improving teacher quality.26

Finding Seven: The subtle story on money

All new teachers agree that it is possible to make a decent living as a new teacher, and a majority see raising salaries as a way to improve teachers' performance, though other ideas were seen as considerably more effective. The alt-route teachers from the three programs we interviewed were somewhat more likely to think that not being rewarded for superior performance was a problem, yet as with the traditionally trained teachers, performance pay was toward the bottom of the list as a way to improve the profession.27

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Introduction and background

In the early 1980s, throughout most of the United States, attending a traditional school of education was the only option open to someone who wanted to be a certified public school classroom teacher. At that time, according to statistics gathered by the National Center for Education Information, just eight states offered an alternate route for training and certifying classroom teachers. Today, nearly every state offers an “alternate route” option, and more than 100 different programs are operating nationwide to prepare teachers for the classroom and as a strategy to address teacher shortages by offering additional routes to the teaching profession.¹

These programs often attract college students who want to teach but have not completed education courses during their undergraduate years. They also attract experienced professionals from business, military and other sectors who are drawn to teaching as a second career. Today, programs such as Teach for America, Troops to Teachers and the New Teachers Project, along with dozens of others, are visible and important players in the field of teacher recruitment and training. More than half of public school principals report hiring or working with teachers from alternative route programs; most (55 percent) say that, based on their experience, teachers coming from an alternate route are as good as those from traditional education programs.² According to the National Center for Alternative Certification, about 60,000 new teachers completed some sort of alternative training in 2005–2006.³

How do you define “alternate”?

Even so, there is a healthy policy debate about the merits and drawbacks of both traditional teacher education and certification versus the newer alternatives, along with a growing

dispute over exactly what constitutes an “alternate” path to teaching. Some experts have criticized the philosophy and courses offered in traditional education schools; they see alternate (or alternative) routes as a way to bring into the field highly qualified individuals with fresh ideas.⁴ The National Center for Alternative Certification,⁵ as the name suggests, has been an advocate for a broad array of alternate programs. According to its studies, nearly half of those completing alternate certification programs say they would not have entered teaching had these new avenues not been available to them.⁶ But Chester E. Finn Jr., president of the Thomas B. Fordham Foundation, has voiced concern that the alternate certification movement has been “co-opted and compromised”⁷ by entry into the field of many traditional schools of education. His foundation recently issued a report criticizing many alternate certification programs for lack of selectivity and too many conventional education course requirements.⁸ The National Center for Alternative Certification has also noted the diversity in the

¹ See, for example: National Center for Alternative Certification (teach-now.org/myresults.cfm) and “Alternative Teacher Certification,” Education Week Research Center (edweek.org/re/issues/alternative-teacher-certification).

² “Reality Check 2006,” Public Agenda.

³ Elia Powers, “The State of Alternative Teacher Certification,” *Inside Higher Education*, September 18, 2007.

⁴ See, for example: Fred M. Hess, “Tear Down This Wall: The Case for a Radical Overhaul of Teacher Certification,” Progressive Policy Institute: policy report, November 27, 2001.

⁵ Visit their website at teach-now.org.

⁶ C. Emily Feistritzer, “Profile of Alternate Route Teachers,” National Center for Education Information, 2005.

⁷ Elia Powers, “The State of Alternative Teacher Certification,” *Inside Higher Education*, September 18, 2007.

⁸ Kate Walsh and Sandi Jacobs, “Alternative Certification Isn’t Alternative,” Thomas B. Fordham Institute, September 2007. Available for download at edexcellence.net/foundation/publication/publication.cfm?id=375.

field. It has developed 11 different categories in hopes of providing a classification system of the many different types of programs now in existence.⁹ Researchers at Mathematica Policy Research and Phi Lambda Theta, among others, have also explored the degree to which alternate teacher training and certification have an impact on student learning and on the profession itself.¹⁰ In short, alternate routes are an innovation that is being debated and tested as public education's experience with it continues to expand.¹¹

Certification = minimal skills, but not much more

Among educators, attitudes about traditional training versus alternate routes are mixed. On the one hand, very few principals (18 percent) and superintendents (12 percent) believe that traditional certification provides full assurance that an individual has what it takes to be a good classroom teacher. Most say it guarantees only “a minimum of skills” or “very little.”¹² On the other hand, relatively few teachers, principals or superintendents view alternate routes as a pivotal breakthrough for improving the field. Majorities say better mentoring and professional development once the teacher is in the school are more effective ways to improve teaching, although in reality, these approaches can easily exist alongside either traditional or alternate training paths.¹³

⁹ See “Classification of State Alternate Routes” by the National Center for Alternative Certification (teach-now.org/classification.cfm).

¹⁰ See “Alternative Teacher Certification,” Education Week: Research Center (edweek.org/re/issues/alternative-teacher-certification), for an overview of the key studies and links to research and organizations.

¹¹ While the merits of alternate certification programs continue to be debated in the education community, some also defend traditional routes to teaching. See, for example: Linda Darling-Hammond, “The Research and Rhetoric on Teacher Certification: A Response to ‘Teacher Certification Reconsidered,’” National Commission on Teaching and America's Future, October 15, 2001.

¹² More than half of principals (54 percent) and superintendents (56 percent) say that teacher certification guarantees “only a minimum of skills,” and roughly 3 in 10 (27 percent of principals; 30 percent of superintendents) say that it “guarantees very little.” “Reality Check 2006,” Public Agenda.

¹³ “Reality Check 2006,” Public Agenda, or “Stand by Me,” Public Agenda, 2003.

In “Working Without a Net” we hope to contribute to the growing body of work in this area by gathering detailed observations and experiences of new teachers coming from three alternate paths—Teach for America, Troops to Teachers and the New Teacher Project—and comparing their perspective with those coming into the field from traditional education schools. This exploratory study is a joint project of the National Comprehensive Center for Teacher Quality (NCCTQ) and Public Agenda, a nonprofit, nonpartisan research organization that has conducted numerous opinion studies on public education. The research is distinctive in that it focuses on the experiences of teachers in their very first year on the job; that is, the teachers completed questionnaires for us just months after completing their pre-service training but with some real-life teaching experience under their belts. Because of this, we could ask them specific questions regarding their preparation and the support they are receiving now that they have taken on full-time teaching responsibilities.

The limitations of this research

We believe that what we heard from our new teachers from these three alternate route programs offers important signals for the field. Their views and experiences attest to the strength and promise of the “alt route” movement but also raise questions about the support and mentoring they receive. And although there are intriguing differences between the views of these alt-routes and those of the traditionally trained, the study also raises questions about the number of new teachers left to tackle tough assignments and solve problems with minimal support—regardless of how they entered the field.

Even so, it is essential to emphasize the limitations of the research and its specific characteristics. Our report is essentially based on two separate surveys using virtually identical questionnaires. The questionnaires were administered to:

1. A random sample of 577 traditionally trained first-year teachers working in public schools nationwide. Respondents were asked about their training, and our “traditional” sample includes those who told us that they have a major or minor in education or an M.A. or M.A.T. from a school of education.

2. Lists of first-year teachers from three prominent and well-respected alternate route programs: Teach for America (TFA), the New

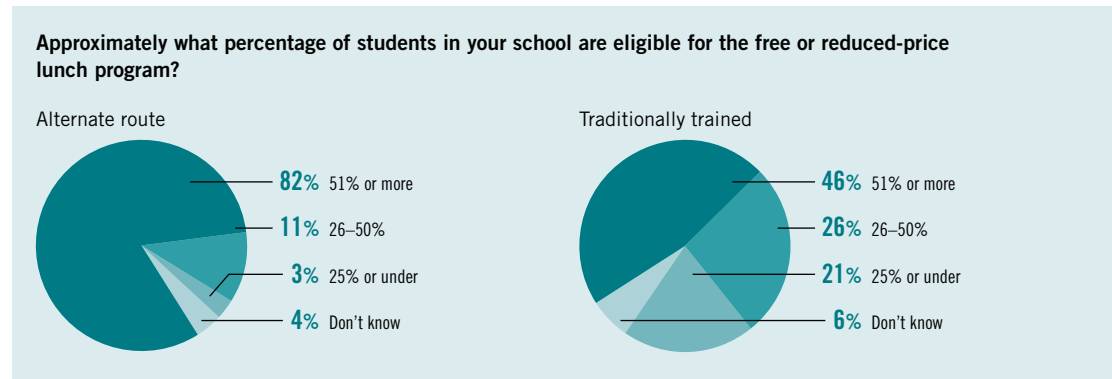
Teachers Project/Baltimore (TNTP) and Troops to Teachers (TTT).¹⁴ This is not a random sample survey, but rather a survey of 224 respondents culled from lists provided by these organizations. At the current time, it is not practical to conduct a random sample survey of new teachers coming into the profession through alternate route programs nationwide.

However, like other organizations that have examined alt-route programs, notably the National Center for Alternative Certification and researchers at SRI International for the Carnegie Corporation of New York,¹⁵ Public Agenda has focused its research on selected programs, in this case, three programs that are well established and often cited as leaders in the field.

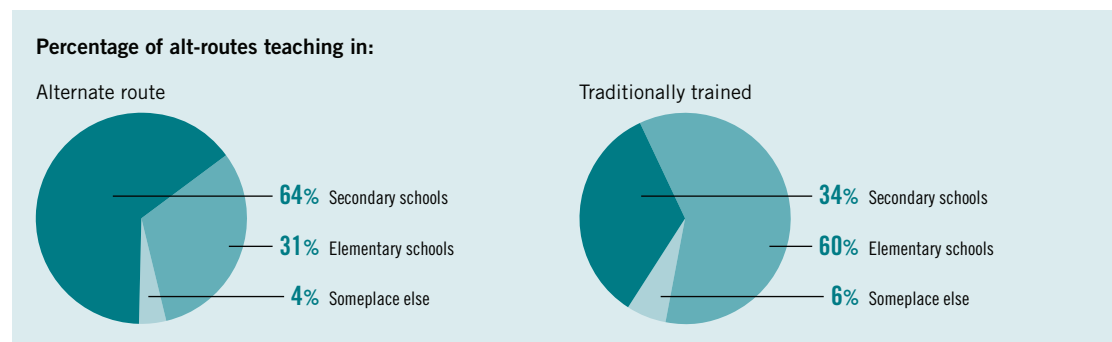
¹⁴ Since Troops to Teachers participants can attend either a traditional school of education or an alternative program, TTT respondents were screened to include only those saying they are completing an alternate certification path.

¹⁵ C. Emily Feistritz, “Profile of Alternate Route Teachers,” National Center for Education Information, 2005 and an SRI study described in Carnegie report, Anne Grosso de Leon, “Alternative Path to Teacher Certification,” *Carnegie Reporter* (Spring 2005).

Intro 1. Most alt-routes are teaching in high-needs schools



Intro 2. Most alt-routes are teaching in secondary schools



Note: Question wording in charts may be slightly edited for space. Full question wording is available in the Selected Survey Results at the end of the report. Percentages may not equal 100 percent due to rounding or the omission of answer categories.

A special group

We recognize that results from this study may not apply to the many diverse alternate programs that now exist throughout the country. They are a varied group, and new adaptations and offshoots seem to be appearing every year.¹⁶ However, the three programs surveyed here are frequently cited and discussed as especially prominent in the field. Over the years, Teach for America alone has supplied nearly 17,000 teachers to public schools nationwide, and at least as a starting point, we believe the experiences and views of teachers in these three programs do provide important food for thought. However, since our alt-route group is not a traditional random sample, it is important to point out some of their key characteristics. Two-thirds of teachers (67 percent) in this alt-route group are teaching in middle school or high school. The vast majority (82 percent) are also teaching in high-needs schools, which we have defined as schools where more than half of students receive free or reduced-price lunch.

¹⁶ Indeed, some say that traditional programs are just as varied; see, for example, Linda Darling-Hammond, Barnett Berry and Amy Thoreson, “Does Teacher Certification Matter? Evaluating the Evidence,” *Educational Evaluation and Policy Analysis*, Spring 2001.

¹⁷ Elite schools are defined as those listed in the top 25 national universities or liberal arts colleges identified by the *U.S. News & World Report* 2008 College Rankings.

¹⁸ Note: Information about these three alt-route programs is drawn from their own literature.

For the rest of this report, we chose to compare only the alternate route sample that are in high-needs schools (184 responses) with only the traditionally trained teachers in high-needs schools (274 responses). Based on our analysis, 1 in 5 of the alt-route teachers in the group surveyed here attended an elite college or university compared with only 1 percent of the traditionally trained teachers in the sample.¹⁷

We have included short descriptions of each of the three alternate route organizations below, along with contact information for them.¹⁸ We would like to take this opportunity to thank these organizations for their cooperation. They were interested in hearing more from their participants now at work in public schools and gracious enough to help us administer our survey to them.

The study also included focus groups or one-on-one interviews with new alt-route teachers and new and student teachers from traditional programs. In addition, researchers interviewed a small group of experts on alternate routes as background to developing the survey and survey sample. Needless to say, conducting a study of this kind presents a number of methodological challenges, and researchers took some time thinking through sampling and definitional issues connected with the survey. These issues are discussed in more detail starting on page 30.

About Teach for America

Teach for America is the national corps of outstanding recent college graduates and professionals of all academic majors, career interests and professional backgrounds who commit two years to teach in urban and rural public schools and become leaders in the effort to expand educational opportunity. Since 1990, TFA has become the nation’s largest provider of teachers for low-income communities.

The organization’s mission is to build the movement to eliminate educational inequity by enlisting our nation’s most promising future leaders in the effort.

In the short run, corps members work relentlessly to ensure that more students growing up today in the country’s lowest-income communities are given the educational opportunities they deserve. In the long run, alumni are a powerful force of leaders working from inside education and from every other sector to effect the fundamental changes needed to ensure that all children have an equal chance in life.

Teach for America
315 West 36th Street
7th Floor
New York, NY 10018
800.832.1230

About Troops to Teachers

Troops to Teachers was originally established in 1994 as a Department of Defense program. The National Defense Authorization Act for fiscal year (FY) 2000 transferred the responsibility for program oversight and funding to the U.S. Department of Education, but its operation was maintained by the Department of Defense. The No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 provides for the continuation of TTT through FY 2008. Under this program, eligible military personnel have the opportunity to pursue a second career in public education.

The goal of this legislation is to help improve American education by providing motivated, experienced and dedicated personnel for the nation's classrooms.

The three main objectives of the program are to:

- Help relieve teacher shortages, especially in the areas of mathematics, the sciences and special education. The retention rate is 85 percent after five years of teaching, while 85 percent of the candidates are males and 43 percent are persons of color;
- Provide positive role models for the nation's public school students; and
- Assist military personnel to successfully transition to teaching as a second career.

Eligible veterans may receive either a stipend of not more than \$5,000 to assist in attaining teacher certification or a \$10,000 incentive grant bonus for participants who teach for three years in a high-needs school. Funding supplements any other GI Bill and other Department of Veterans Affairs benefits.

DANTES-TTT
6490 Saufley Field Road
Pensacola, FL 32509-5243
800.231.6242

About the New Teacher Project

The New Teacher Project is a national non-profit organization dedicated to increasing the number of outstanding individuals who become public school teachers and to creating environments for all educators that maximize their impact on student achievement. TNTP strives to accomplish these goals by creating innovative teacher recruitment and hiring programs, identifying the policy obstacles that school districts face to hiring the best teachers possible, partnering with school districts to optimize their teacher hiring and school staffing functions and developing new and better ways to prepare and certify teachers for high-need schools.

Since 1997, TNTP has recruited, trained, placed and/or certified approximately 28,000 high-quality teachers, worked with over 200 school districts, and established more than 55 programs or initiatives in 26 states. TNTP has also published two major studies on teacher hiring and school staffing in urban areas: *Missed Opportunities: How We Keep High-Quality Teachers Out of Urban Classrooms* (2003) and *Unintended Consequences: The Case for Reforming the Staffing Rules in Urban Teachers Union Contracts* (2005). Among others, TNTP's clients include the school districts of Atlanta, Baltimore, Chicago, Denver, Memphis, Miami, New York, Oakland, Philadelphia and Washington, DC and the states of Louisiana, Texas and Virginia. For more information, please visit tntp.org.

The New Teacher Project
304 Park Avenue South
11th Floor
New York, NY 10010
212.590.2484

Summary and implications

“Working Without a Net” summarizes the experiences of new alt-route teachers who come from Teach for America, Troops to Teachers and the New Teachers Project/Baltimore as they take over their own classrooms in public schools around the country. The results paint a fascinating but unsettling picture of their initiation into the field. Nearly all, the data show, are highly idealistic and motivated, and they have high expectations for their students and colleagues.

Contrary to conventional wisdom, most are not planning a hasty exit from the field of public education. Although just 16 percent say they want to remain classroom teachers, nearly half (48 percent) say they are interested in leaving the classroom for another job in education, meaning that nearly two-thirds from these three programs express an intent to stay in the field.¹⁹

Overall, however, the experiences of teachers from these alt-route programs, as they themselves describe them, are more negative than those of their traditionally trained peers. Part of the difference undoubtedly stems from their more challenging work environments. Yet even when we compare these new alt-route teachers with new traditionally trained teachers also working in high-needs schools, there is a strong and recurrent pattern of more negative responses. For example, these new alt-route teachers are:

- More likely to believe they have been assigned to teach the hardest-to-reach students;

¹⁹ Since Teach for America teachers constitute roughly half the alt-route sample, the relatively low number planning to stay in the classroom may reflect the specific goals of that program. Teach for America asks for a two-year commitment and believes that even though many participants move on to other careers, public schools, the participants and society in general benefit from their teaching experience.

- More likely to give fair or poor ratings to administrators for providing strong instructional leadership or for supporting them on discipline issues;
- More likely to give fair or poor ratings to colleagues and mentors for giving them support and good advice;
- Less likely to say that their cooperating teacher was a good role model;
- Less likely to give their cooperating teacher high marks for providing good advice and guidance in important areas;
- Less likely to say they had enough time working with a real teacher before having their own classroom; and
- More likely to say they plan to leave the profession within the next year or two.

It is hard to look at the results without thinking that the idealism and enthusiasm of too many of these new alt-route teachers are being squandered rather than nurtured. Based on their own evaluations, too many are being asked to tackle some of teaching’s toughest assignments, and they do not believe they are getting the level of support, mentoring or encouragement they need.

What’s behind these differences?

This study cannot provide definitive answers about all alt-route programs or all alt-route teachers everywhere. Some may be receiving more support and a warmer welcome to the teaching profession than the results here suggest. Even more important, this study does not provide a full explanation of why the experiences of our alt-route respondents are so different. It is important to reiterate one key

point: Even when we compare these new alt-route teachers with new traditionally trained teachers working in similar high-needs environments, the alt-routes are more likely to say they are not getting strong support.

Our goal in conducting this study was to hear from the teachers themselves, and on that basis, what we heard raises questions and suggests areas for further discussion. Here are some that may be important:

- Are new alt-routes more likely to teach in the most dysfunctional high-needs schools, while traditionally trained teachers typically teach in better-run high-needs schools or work with less troubled students? Are traditionally trained teachers coming out of local education schools better positioned to choose teaching positions in high-needs schools with more effective leadership?
- Are new alt-route teachers more likely to be placed in schools farther from home? When teachers are assigned to positions in parts of the country that are new to them, do they experience more difficult transitions? Do traditionally trained teachers coming out of local education schools have better networks of support?
- Do alt-routes bring a different set of expectations to teaching? Are they more likely to be critical of their schools, colleagues and administrators because of their educational background or previous experience in the military or other types of work?
- Do they often encounter a less welcoming atmosphere or perhaps some level of resentment from teachers and administrators who

have spent years preparing for the classroom or perhaps attended less prestigious undergraduate programs?

- Do some of the differences stem from the simple fact that many alt-routes have a shorter training period? Are there similar differences among the different types of traditional teacher training programs?

Readers will undoubtedly suggest other hypotheses and bring other insights to the data. NCCTQ is already sharing this data set with other researchers and will continue to analyze and probe the results in the coming year. We hope this study will spur additional research, and we would be pleased to consult with others and share what we have learned in doing this work.

Despite the small scale of this study and its limitations, we believe the results illuminate an important dilemma and challenge for the field. The plight of new teachers wrestling with difficult assignments with limited guidance and minimal mentorship is more pronounced among the alt-routes, but significant numbers of new traditionally trained teachers find themselves in the same predicament. So our question is: Are we willing to create a system that gives new teachers the support that will help them succeed regardless of the route they take to teaching? Or, to use the words of one of the new teachers interviewed for the project, will we continue to treat many of them like “independent contractor[s]” expected to “just manage [their] little society in the classroom”? Their situation deserves a thoughtful response and genuine answers.

Lessons Learned, the NCCTQ/Public Agenda survey of first-year teachers, consists of three reports:

- **Issue No 1: They're Not Little Kids Anymore** compares the views of first-year teachers in high school with those of teachers in elementary schools, high-needs schools and other schools. The report, issued October 2007, is available at publicagenda.org/LessonsLearned1 and at ncctq.org/publications/LessonsLearned1.pdf.
- **Issue No 2: Working Without a Net** reports on the views and experiences of new teachers from three prominent alternate route programs, Teach for America, Troops to Teachers and the New Teachers Project/Baltimore and compares their views with the nationwide sample of first-year traditionally trained teachers.
- **Issue No. 3: Here's Where I Need Help**, which is to be released at a later date, will describe three areas where many new teachers believe they could use more guidance and advice—the challenge of working with diverse classrooms, helping gifted and special-needs students and communicating and working with parents.

Following the release of the reports, the entire data set will be housed at the National Comprehensive Center for Teacher Quality and available to its analysts and other researchers exploring teachers training, recruitment and support issues. All three **Lessons Learned** reports will be available online from both NCCTQ and Public Agenda.

Finding One: Idealism and a strong desire to help

Nearly all new teachers—regardless of their path into the profession—voice a strong belief in the ability of teachers to make a difference in children’s lives, and they offer a number of idealistic reasons for their decision to enter the field. The vast majority are committed to the view that all students can learn. Fully three-quarters (75 percent) of traditionally trained new teachers support the idea that good teachers can help all students learn, even poor or disadvantaged ones whose families are not involved in their education. An even higher number (86 percent) of the new alternate route teachers surveyed here say they support this view.

In fact, the new teachers from the alternate route programs studied here were especially likely to say that being able to help underprivileged children was their main reason for entering the profession. Over 7 in 10 of the teachers from Teach for America, Troops to Teachers and the New Teachers Project/Baltimore give this as their top reason for becoming teachers, compared with 44 percent of the traditionally trained new teachers working in

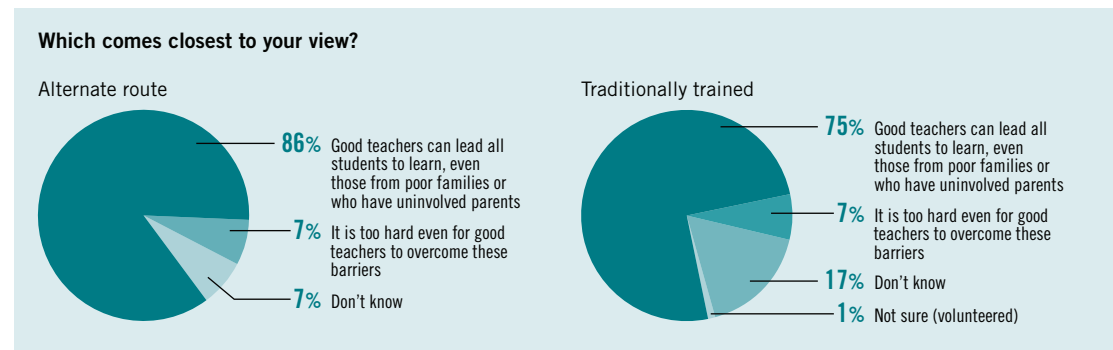
high-needs schools.²⁰ One alt-route teacher interviewed for the project voiced what was a long-standing concern: “I was living in Mount Laurel, New Jersey, at the time, which is a hop, skip and a jump away from Camden. The idea that I could be going to this great school, and yet down the road a couple more miles were all of these failing schools where the kids aren’t getting an education, really bothered me.”

As might be expected, traditionally trained teachers who are not working in high-needs schools are less likely to say that helping underprivileged students was their major reason for teaching. For this group, the most common reason for entering the profession is the desire to teach a subject they love.²¹

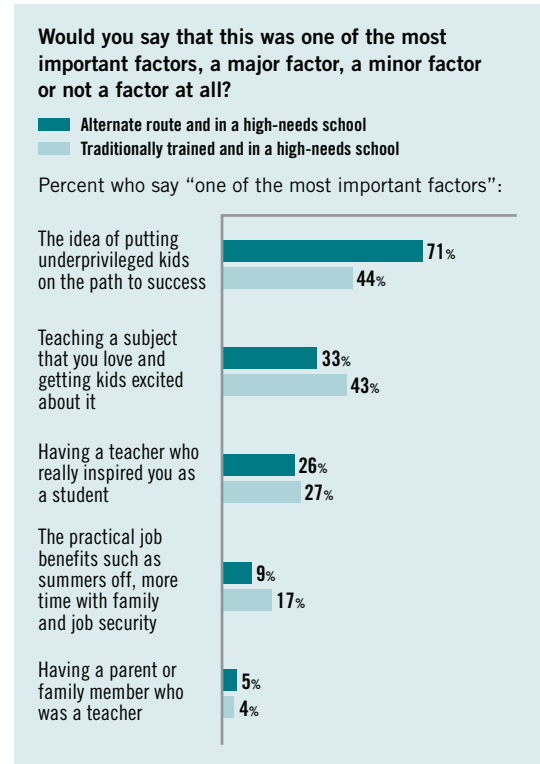
²⁰ Since a much higher percentage of alternate route teachers are placed in high-needs schools, we tried to control for any differences based upon school environment by comparing the views of alternate route teachers working in high-needs schools with those of traditionally trained teachers in high-needs schools. We use the phrase *traditionally trained teachers* to refer only to those working in schools where more than half of the students receive free or reduced-priced lunches.

²¹ For data showing reasons for teaching, please see Full Survey Results on p. 34.

1. A vast majority of new teachers say that good teachers can help all children learn, even disadvantaged ones



2. New alt-route teachers are far more likely to say that wanting to help underprivileged children was one of the most important factors for entering teaching



Finding Two: Day one in the classroom... the most difficult classes and needing more support

Although they come to their jobs with enthusiasm and idealism, large numbers of the alternate route teachers we surveyed voice concerns about their first teaching assignments, and many see problems such as lack of support by administrators and discipline issues with students as the major drawbacks of teaching. Traditionally trained teachers working in high-needs schools and at the secondary level²² report similar problems to some degree, but the issues are more pronounced among the alternate route teachers in the survey. For example, alt-route teachers are much more likely than traditionally trained teachers to say that they have been assigned classes with some of the hardest-to-reach students in the school, while the more experienced teachers are assigned less challenging classes. One new alt-route teacher put it this way: “I think that in a lot of other professions, first-year people are mentored and eased into it. You start them with easy assignments. I think in education, the older teachers have paid their dues, and therefore they teach fewer classes, get the honors classes. If you’re a first-year teacher, you are just muscle almost. I know that’s what we’re here for.” Traditionally trained teachers—even in high-needs schools—are much less likely to feel that their schools have assigned them to the toughest classes. Although majorities of all groups surveyed say that it is “wrong” to place “inexperienced teachers with the hardest-to-reach students,” the numbers questioning this practice are highest among the new alternate route teachers—8 in 10 among the new alt-routes compared with about 7 in 10 among the traditionally trained group.

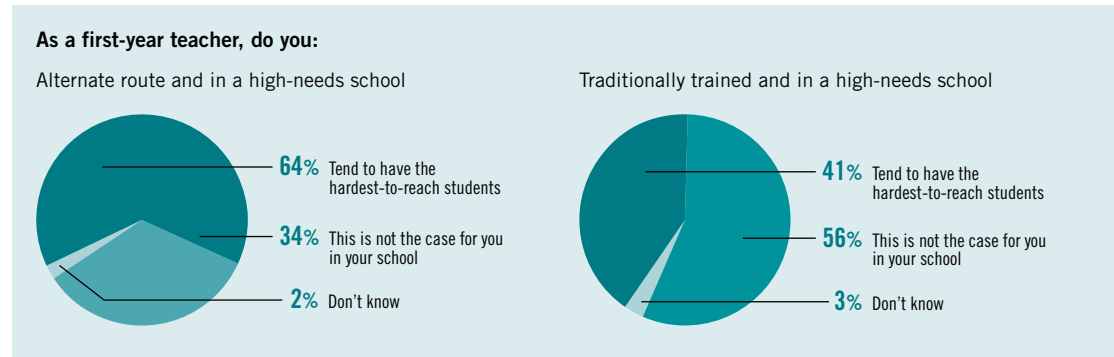
The alt-route group is also more likely to place lack of support from administrators and disci-

pline problems at the very top of the lists of the drawbacks to teaching; these issues are of lesser concern among the traditionally trained teachers. As one alt-route teacher told us: “For me, the worst thing is the administration and the lack of support. I’ll have kids [who] get in fights. I’ll send them to the administration, and they’re back in class in 10 minutes.” More than half (54 percent) of new alt-routes in high-needs schools say “lack of support from administrators” is a major drawback to teaching, compared with just 1 in 5 (20 percent) new teachers who are traditionally trained. Another of our first-year alt-route teachers said: “Teachers have to go it alone, especially in the city. You cannot send a student out of your room. You have to deal with the behavior problem and fill out forms. You know what? I think it’s part of the job. You’re kind of like an independent contractor. You’ve just got to manage your little society in the classroom.”

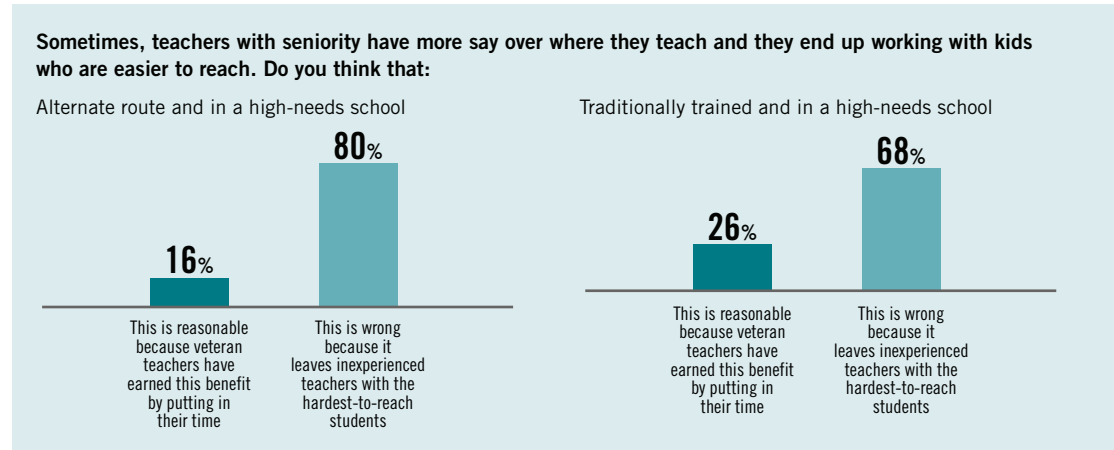
Despite the differing experiences of new alt-route and new traditionally trained teachers, they share many concerns about their jobs. More than 4 in 10 of each group see “testing and not enough freedom to be creative” as a major drawback. As one novice teacher in a traditional program told us, “I think it’s absolutely a matter of testing, taking away too much time. The entire plan and scheduling timeline, at least for English, is catered towards cramming as much in as possible before the standardized test occurs. You are penalized severely if you are not on track, if they come into your classroom and if you’re not on the exact page of what you’re supposed to be on.” On the other hand, neither group sees low pay and limited potential for career growth as the chief drawback to teaching, and very low numbers voice concerns about the lack of prestige in teaching or about their personal safety in their school.

²² Please see “Lessons Learned Issue No. 1: They’re Not Little Kids Anymore: The Special Challenges of New Teachers in High Schools and Middle Schools,” Public Agenda, 2007.

3. Alt-routes are much more likely to feel that they are assigned the hardest-to-reach students



4. Alt-routes are also more likely to think that this practice is unacceptable

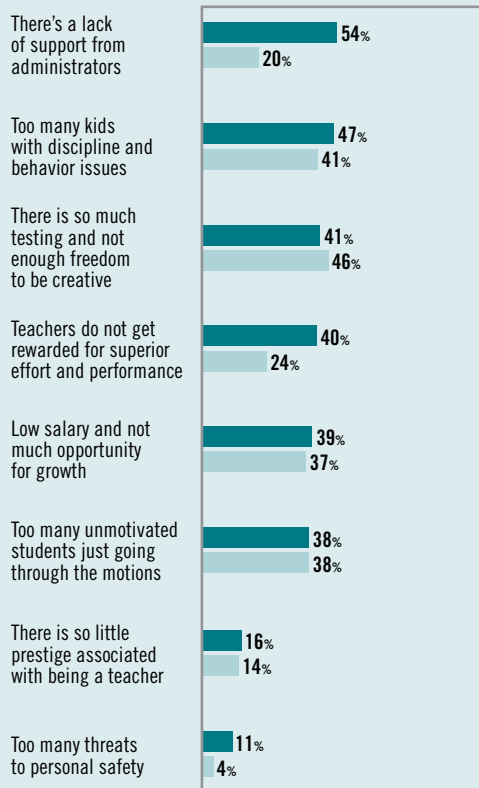


5. For new alt-routes, lack of administrative support and discipline problems are the major drawbacks of teaching; Among new traditionally trained teachers, testing and lack of freedom to be creative tops the list

Based on your personal experience, please tell us whether each of the following is a major drawback, a minor drawback or not a drawback for you.

■ Alternate route and in a high-needs school
■ Traditionally trained and in a high-needs school

Percent who say "major drawback":

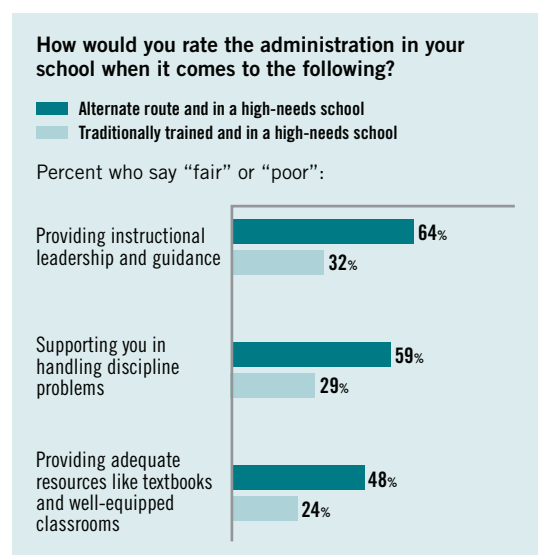


Finding Three: Doing a tough job with minimal backup

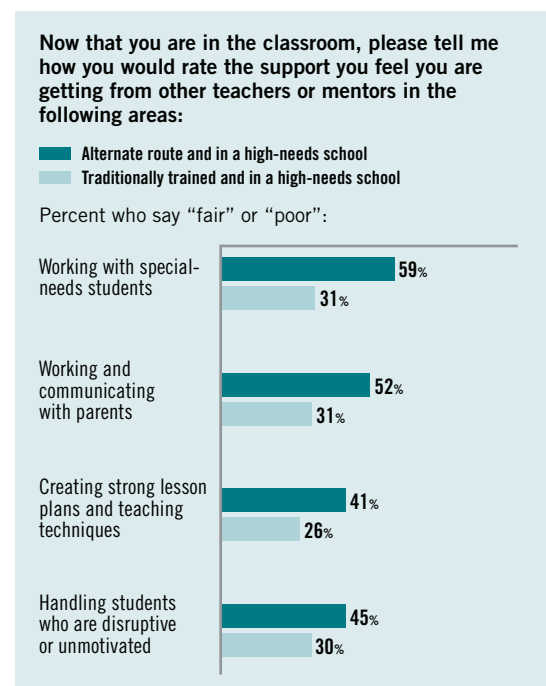
New alt-route teachers report a variety of concerns about administrative functions in their schools as well as concerns about the commitment and collegiality of their fellow teachers. Even when we compare the experiences and judgments of the new alt-routes with those of new traditionally trained teachers working in similar schools, the contrasts are remarkable. New alt-routes in high-needs schools are about twice as likely as the traditionally trained group to give administrators fair or poor marks for instructional leadership (64 percent vs. 32 percent), support on discipline problems (59 percent vs. 29 percent) and providing resources like textbooks and well-equipped classes (48 percent vs. 24 percent). One alt-route teacher commented: “I buy all my cases of paper, because we have no paper at our school. I had

to steal an overhead light bulb from someone else’s overhead to get mine to work. It’s just kind of like a lack of resources and not having an administration that’s supportive.” Another striking difference is the alt-routes’ judgments about the kind of help and feedback they can count on from other, presumably more experienced teaching staff. One new alt-route teacher described her colleagues as outright demoralizing rather than supportive and encouraging: “The days where I feel most like I don’t want to go to work, it’s because of the other teachers in the building. It’s not even the administration. It’s the other teachers in the building who have such a poor attitude toward the students. I can handle my students any day of the week. But I can’t handle you guys. Grow up and take some responsibility.”

6. Alt-routes are considerably more likely to say school leaders don’t provide strong support



7. Alt-routes are also less likely to feel supported by fellow teachers



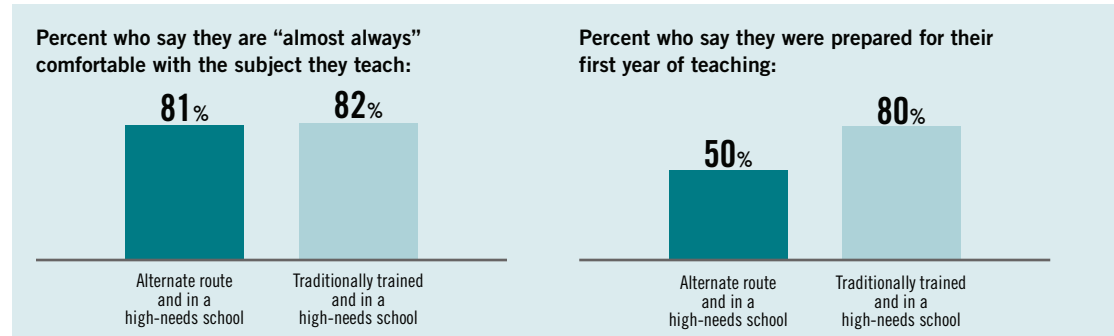
Finding Four: Less satisfied with their preparation and cooperating teachers

Many different kinds of alternate route programs are operating today, and even though our study is confined to three programs, participants in them actually receive training at a variety of institutions and programs nationwide. As a group, however, the alt-route teachers surveyed here say they could have used more time working with a classroom teacher during their preparation period. And while most alt-routes give reasonable marks to the teachers they worked with prior to full-time teaching, their ratings are consistently less positive than the ratings traditionally trained teachers give. It is, of course, reasonable to ask whether alt-route teachers may be applying a different set of standards when they make their judgments, but focus groups and one-on-one interviews suggest that in some cases, at least, the training differences are indisputable. For example, one student teacher in a traditional education school program was enormously enthusiastic about her cooperating teacher: “My cooperating teacher is great. He’s in his late 30s, and he’s really smart. The kids love him, and he loves being there. He’s very willing to help me. He’s helped me put together lesson plans. He’s willing to talk. I’m really excited for him to be my cooperating teacher. He’s probably the best person that I’ve observed so far.” Meanwhile, a new teacher in an alternate route program described a far more dispiriting situation with the more experienced teacher she worked with: “She was supposed to teach math and science, but she said, ‘They can’t do science anyway, so I’m just going to do math. I’m not going to waste my time. I don’t have time to plan. I can’t do this. I can’t do that.’ Her attitude is that the kids are not worth it.” These two comments may exemplify the most positive views

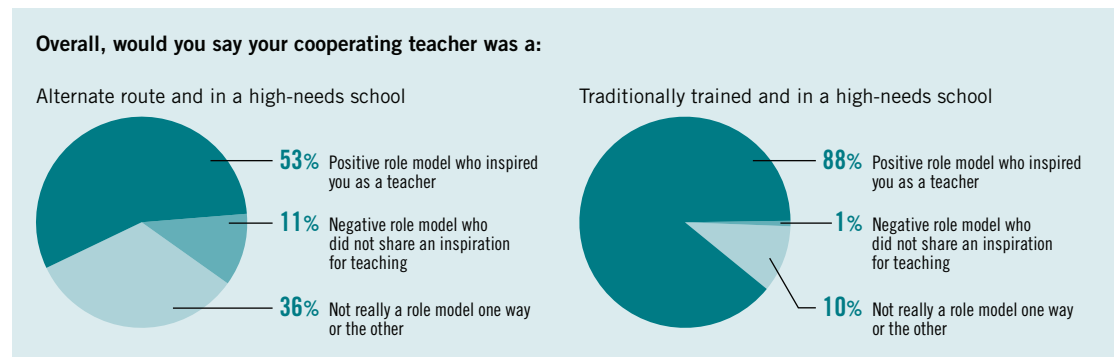
versus the most negative ones, but the survey shows a similar pattern. Less than a quarter (22 percent) of alt-routes in high-needs schools said their cooperating teachers gave them “excellent” feedback on managing the classroom, compared with over half (56 percent) of traditionally trained teachers in high-needs schools. Just over half of the alt-routes said their cooperating teacher was a positive role model, compared with 88 percent among the traditionally trained teachers. In addition, 16 percent of the alt-routes said they did not spend any time at all with a cooperating teacher.

Note that the alt-route teachers are somewhat less confident about the impact they are having on their students. While more than 9 in 10 traditionally trained teachers in high-needs schools say they are confident their students are responding to their teaching most days, only 74 percent of the alt-route teachers say this. Whatever self-questioning they may engage in, however, the vast majority of alt-routes are confident that at least they offer more to their students than do other teachers in their school. One alt-route teacher told us: “I’m teaching all of ninth-grade algebra at my school. I didn’t take a math class since high school. I was a Spanish and anthropology major, and now I am an algebra teacher. The students think I’m a great teacher. They’re like, ‘She’s here every day. She doesn’t send the kids out all the time.’ I could be doing who even knows what in my classroom, but I know I’m way better than some of the other teachers who are watching soap operas in class. I’m glad my students have a teacher who is there and who cares. But I’m sorry, I’m not highly qualified. I don’t know what I’m doing. I really don’t.”

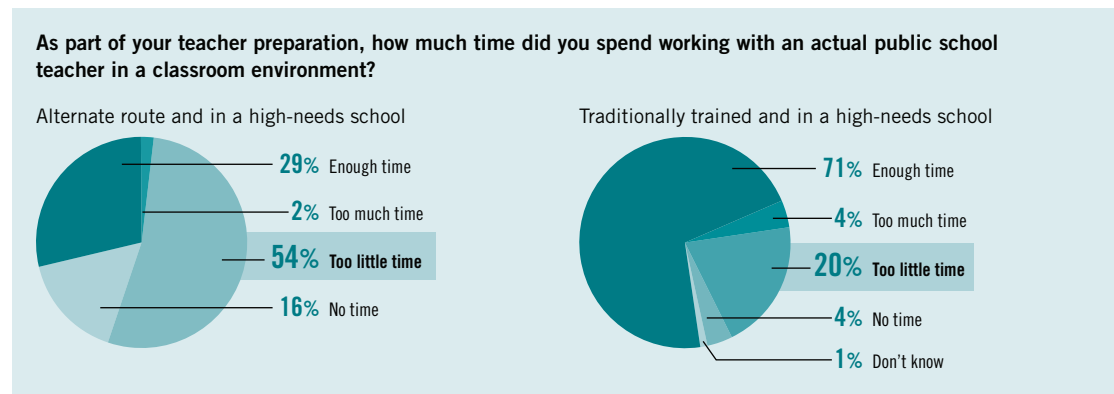
8. A vast majority of all teachers are comfortable teaching the subject, but new alt-route teachers are less likely to say they were prepared for the classroom



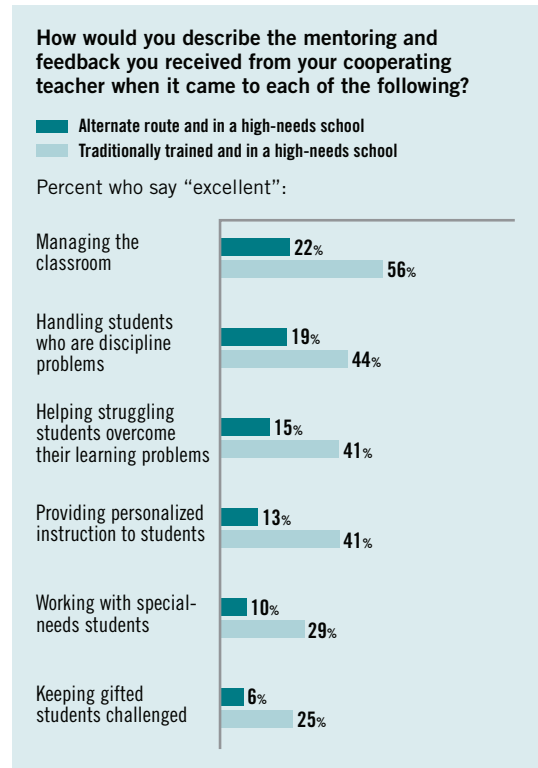
9. New alt-route teachers are less likely to say their cooperating teacher was a positive role model



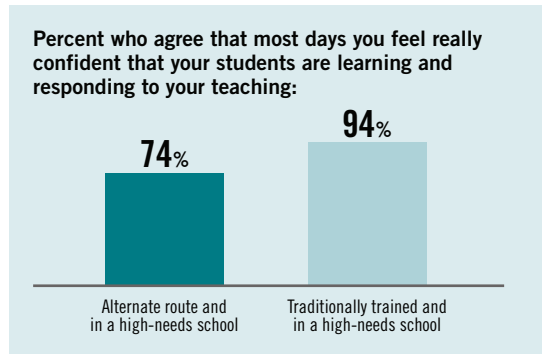
10. Over half of new alt-routes say they did not have enough time working with a classroom teacher during their training



11. Alt-route teachers are less likely to say they received excellent mentoring and feedback from their cooperating teacher



12. Alt-route teachers are a little less likely to say that their students are learning



Finding Five: Aspirations and exit plans

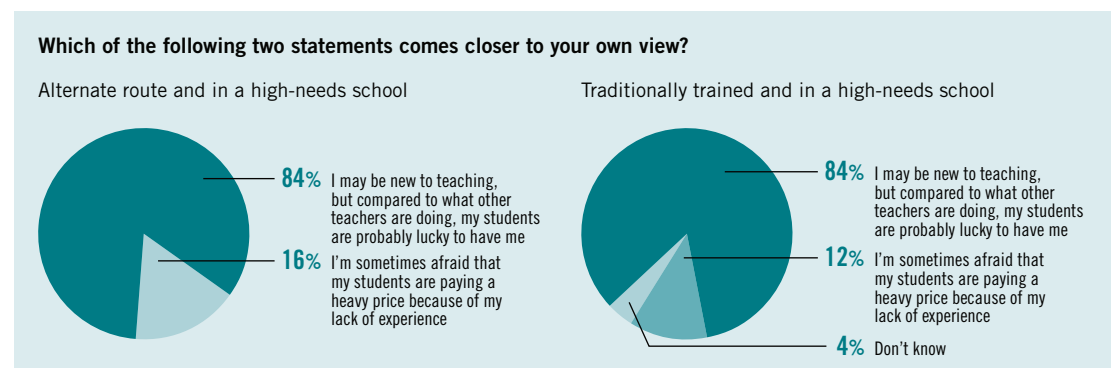
This study asked new teachers from these three alternate route programs about their long-term career plans. Teach for America, specifically asks for a two-year commitment to classroom teaching. TFA's mission centers on the idea that young graduates from the nation's most prestigious colleges and universities can and should be asked to take on the task of teaching in high-needs schools. It believes that the presence of these gifted young people in hard-to-staff schools is an asset for both the students they teach and their personal growth. From TFA's perspective, even though many of their teachers eventually move into other spheres, these individuals gain a deeper understanding of the challenges facing public schools and the importance of supporting and improving them.

Since TFA teachers constitute about half of the respondents, it is probably not surprising that nearly two-thirds of the alt-route group say they plan to leave teaching within the next five years, with one-third saying they plan to leave in the next year or two. In contrast, the traditionally trained teachers are much

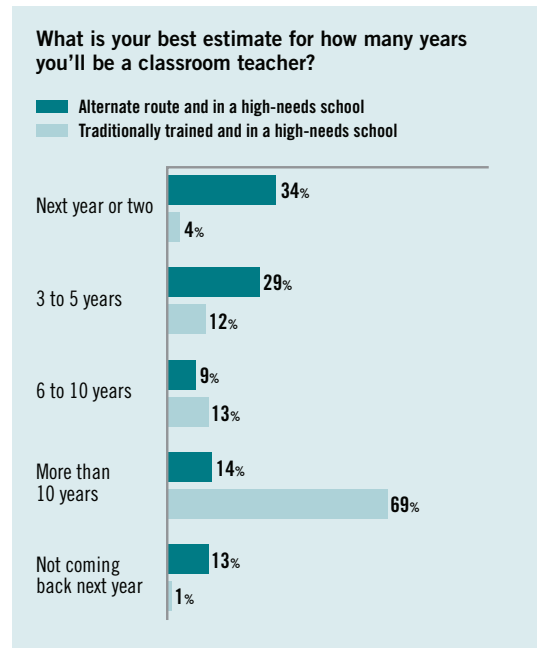
more likely to consider teaching a lifelong career and are nearly three times as likely to say that teaching is exactly what they have always wanted to do. Interestingly, although the majority of the alt-route group plans to leave classroom teaching within five years, nearly half say they are looking at moving into other positions in education.

Regardless of the route they take into teaching, new teachers in high-needs schools are likely to see teaching as a very demanding job that may cause burnout. Nearly half of alt-route teachers and 44 percent of the traditional teachers in high-needs schools say they strongly agree that teaching is "so demanding, it's a wonder that more people don't burn out." One alt-route interviewed offered a glimpse of why this is so: "I don't think I'll stay in education after these two years, honestly. But if I do stay in, I would not mind teaching at a suburban school. I teach first grade. I feel like I'm in a war zone. I get bruises and scratch marks. I get bites. Kids bite me in first grade. Sometimes it's so crazy."

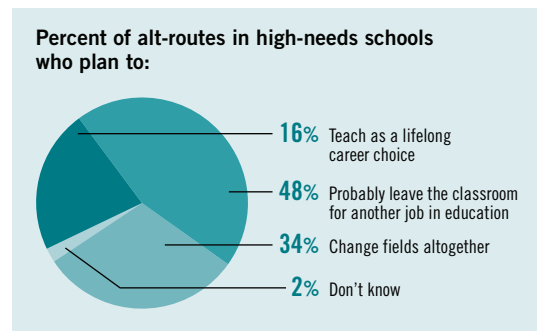
13. New alt-routes do believe they are doing a better job than other teachers in their school, as do first-year teachers from traditional programs



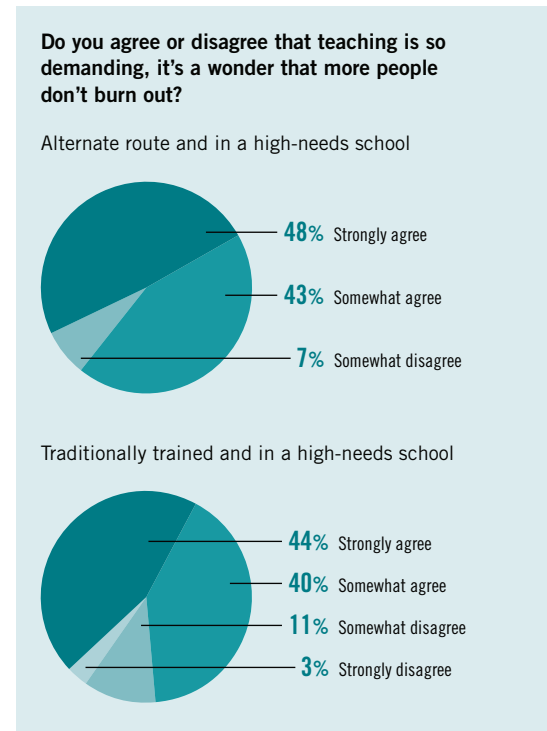
14. Most alt-routes do plan to leave classroom teaching in a few years



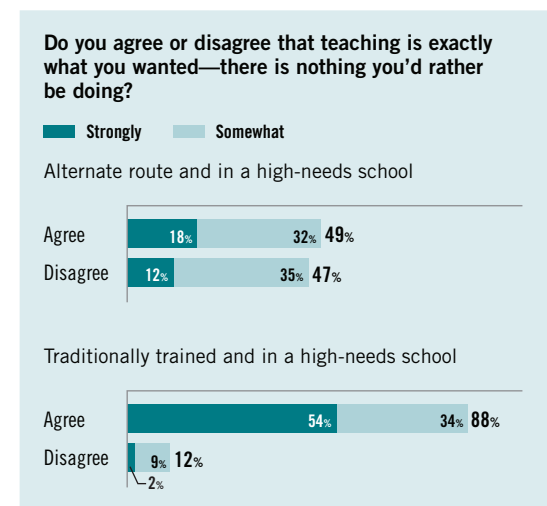
16. Most new alt-routes do not think of teaching as a lifelong career, although almost half say they are thinking of another job in education



15. New alt-routes and traditionally trained teachers in high-needs schools are likely to think that burnout is a major issue for teachers



17. Alt-routes are less likely to say they always wanted to teach

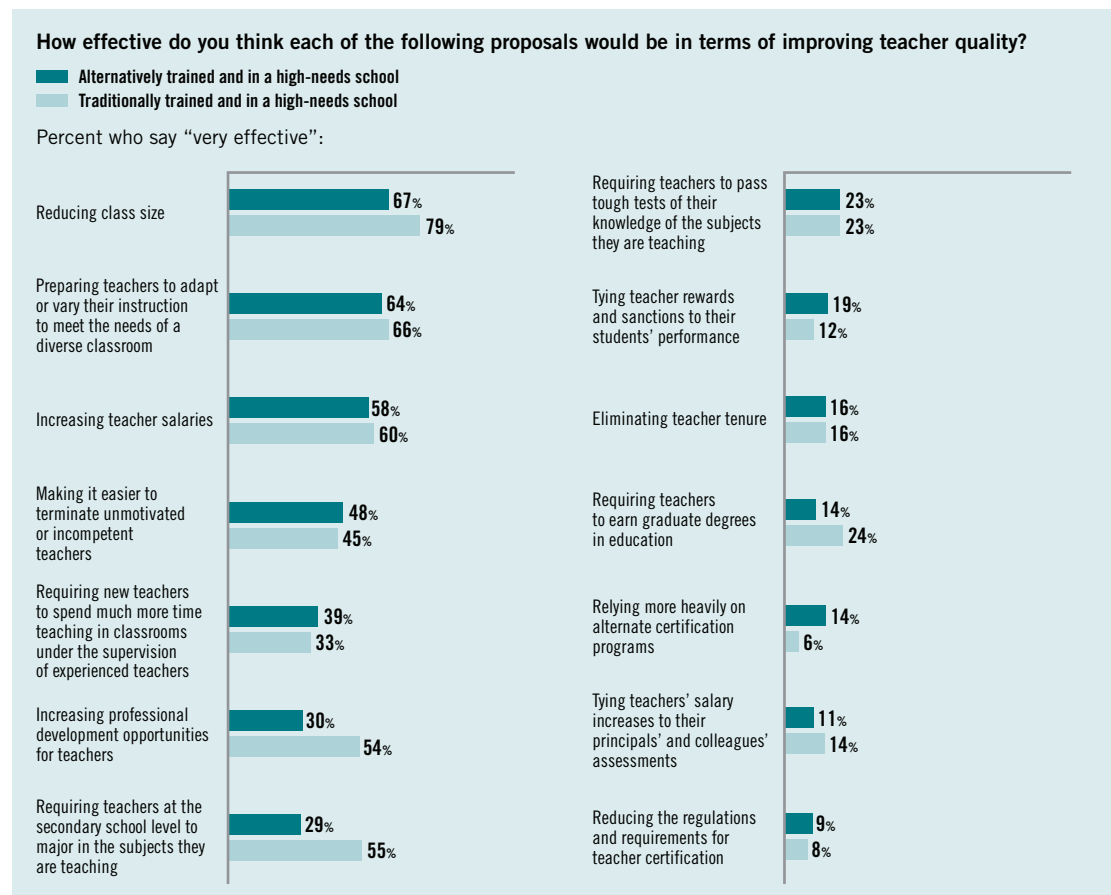


Finding Six: Agreement on ways to improve teachers

Asked for their advice on how to improve teaching, both new alt-route teachers and new traditionally trained teachers look to similar kinds of reforms and improvements. Both groups place smaller class size around the top of their reform wish lists, and there is substantial interest in beefing up preparation to teach in ethnically diverse schools and classrooms.

Regardless of how they came to be teachers, nearly half in high-needs schools say making it easier to terminate unmotivated or incompetent teachers would be a “very effective” way to improve teaching overall. For both groups, reducing certification requirements and relying more on alternate routes is near the bottom of the list for both groups.

18. Similar reforms top both alt-route and traditionally trained teachers’ list of ways to improve teaching



Finding Seven: The subtle story on money

In states and districts nationwide, there are important discussions about the role salary plays in attracting and retaining good teachers, especially for high-needs, hard-to-staff schools. Some districts have made substantial efforts to raise teacher salaries overall. In New York City, for example, a key component of Chancellor Joel Klein's efforts to improve schools has been a 43 percent increase in teacher salaries.²³ Other districts are experimenting with different forms of bonus or incentive pay, especially for teachers who work in more challenging schools or demonstrate exceptional skill in improving student learning. Based on the results from this study, the role money plays in the thinking and decision making of new teachers is complex. In the main, traditionally trained teachers and the teachers from the three alternate route programs studied here have very similar views on salary and merit pay, although there is one intriguing exception.

Overall, about 6 in 10 new teachers (regardless of the path they took into the profession) say it's possible to earn a decent living on a teacher's salary. And neither group sees "low salary and not much opportunity for growth"

as the chief disadvantage of teaching. About 4 in 10 do agree that low salary is a major drawback to teaching, but other issues such as discipline problems and too much testing receive noticeably higher levels of dissatisfaction. Asked about ways to improve the profession, about 6 in 10 of both groups recommend raising teacher salaries, but here again, other ideas such as smaller classes and helping teachers handle diverse classrooms are seen as considerably more effective.

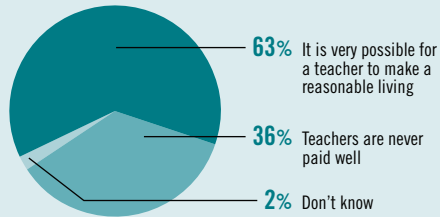
There is one area where the views of the alt-routes in our study do seem to diverge from the views of traditionally trained teachers to some extent. They are somewhat more likely to consider not being rewarded for "superior effort and performance" as a problem—40 percent of the alt-route teachers in our study view this as a major drawback of teaching, compared with just 24 percent of traditionally trained teachers. Yet for both groups, proposals to tie teacher "rewards and sanctions to their students' performance" or "their principals' and colleagues' assessments" come out near the bottom of a list of 14 ideas for improving the profession. Moreover, the vast majority of both the alt-route group surveyed here (71 percent) and the traditionally trained teachers (79 percent) say they would rather work in a school where "administrators gave strong backing and support," compared with a school where they could earn more.

²³ Chancellor Klein recently offered these statistics at NCCITQ's recent What Works Conference in Washington, D.C. Further details are available at: "Mayor Bloomberg Announces Tentative Agreement with the United Federation of Teachers Nearly One Year Before Expiration of Current Contract," PR-388-06, November 8 2006. Available at nyc.gov/html/om/html/2006b/pr388-06.html.

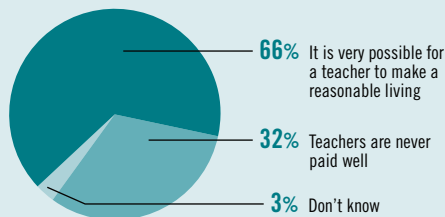
19. Both alt-routes and traditionally trained teachers say it's possible to earn a reasonable living as a teacher

Thinking about the profession of teaching, do you think that the nature of the job means:

Alternate route and in a high-needs school



Traditionally trained and in a high-needs school

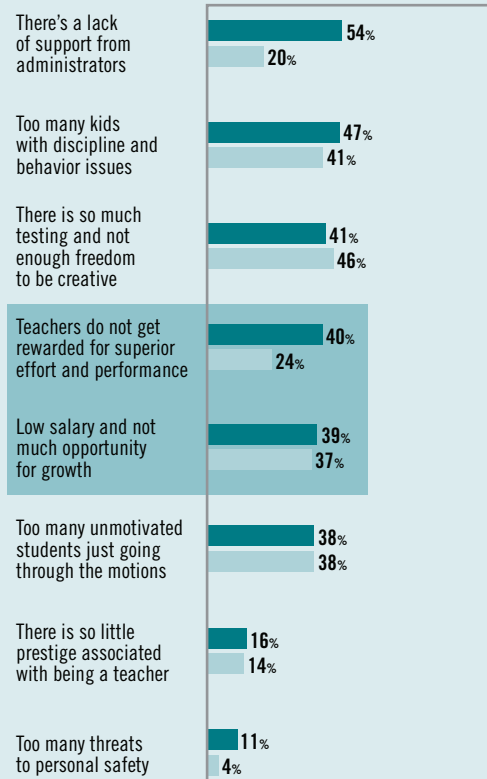


20. While alt-routes and traditionally trained teachers do not differ about their view of salary as a drawback, alt-routes are more likely to say not being rewarded for superior effort is a major drawback

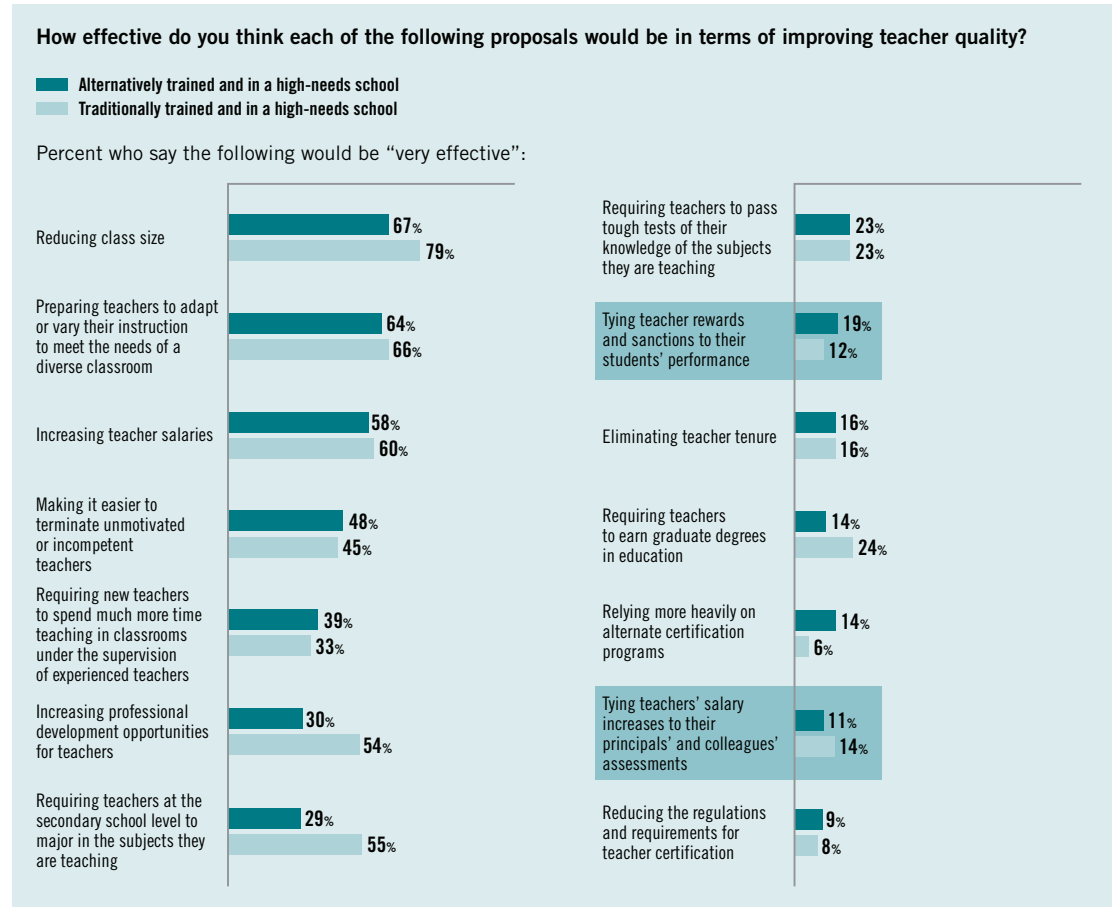
Based on your personal experience, please tell us whether each of the following is a major drawback, a minor drawback or not a drawback for you.

Legend:
■ Alternate route and in a high-needs school
■ Traditionally trained and in a high-needs school

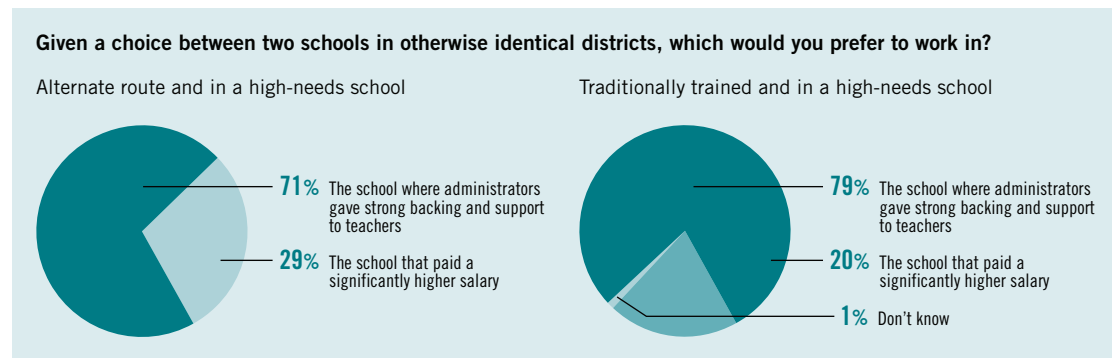
Percent who say the following is a "major drawback":



21. Even so, very few alt-routes see merit pay as a major way to improve the teaching profession, and their ideas for improving teaching rank similarly to those of traditionally trained teachers



22. Alt-route and traditionally trained teachers would both choose schools where they got better support over schools where they could earn more



Methodology

This survey includes interviews with two different samples equaling 865 interviews overall. The first sample, a national representative sample of 641 first-year schoolteachers throughout the continental United States comes from a national list of first-year teachers. This sample was drawn from Market Data Retrieval's (MDR) New Teachers list. MDR,²⁴ a company of Dunn & Bradstreet, is a leading U.S. provider of marketing information and services for the education industry. The sample includes oversamples of teachers in both Midwest and high-needs schools. The final data were weighted to account for the disproportionate sample design. Final results based on this sample are representative of all first-year teachers' in the continental U.S. public schools. For this report, we excluded the responses of 55 teachers who said they took "an alternative certification path" to teaching, as we wanted this sample to represent only traditionally trained teachers. Since most of the findings in this report compare the views teachers serving in high-needs schools, we excluded an additional 34 cases where respondents could not say if their school was a high-needs school or not. Interviews were conducted either by telephone or online. We interviewed 274 traditionally trained teachers working in high-needs schools.

A second sample came from online interviews with 224 teachers pulled from lists of three specific alt-route programs (Teach for America [TFA], the New Teachers Project [TNTP] and Troops to Teachers [TTT]). This alt-route sample was provided by the selected alt-route programs. We again excluded 9 cases where

respondents could not identify their school as high-needs or not. The total number of teachers from this sample serving in high-needs schools is 184.

Data for both samples were collected between March 12 and April 23, 2007.

In designing the survey questions and sample, Public Agenda conducted interviews with leading experts from both university-based schools of education and alternate programs to discuss the sampling frame and the topics to explore in the survey. The National Comprehensive Center for Teacher Quality (NCCTQ), the Farkas-Duffett Research Group and REL-Midwest were consulted further regarding sampling, survey topics and questionnaire design.

The response rate for the general portion of the survey was 29 percent, which is derived as the product of the contact rate (32 percent), the cooperation rate (89 percent) and the completion rate (99 percent). Please note that respondents deemed ineligible because they were not first-year teachers or were no longer teachers were excluded from the survey. Further details on the design, execution and analysis of the survey are discussed on the NCCTQ website, nccctq.org.

The margin of error for the national sample is the largest 95 percent confidence interval for any estimated proportion based on the total sample—the one around 50 percent. For example, the margin of error for the entire sample is ± 3.8 percent. This means that in 95 out of every 100 samples drawn using the same methodology, estimated proportions based on

²⁴ See marketdataretrieval.com/mdrlists.asp.

Table 1: Margins of Error for Key Subgroups

Total sample	n=	
	865	
Total high-needs	458	
Total not high-needs	366	
Total traditional	577	
Total alt-route (from both samples)	288	
Sample used in this report	n=	Margin of error
High-needs and traditional	274	6.0%
High-needs and alt-route (from 3 alt-route programs only)	184	7.2%

the entire sample will be no more than 3.8 percentage points away from their true values in the population. It is important to remember that sampling fluctuations are only one possible source of error in a survey estimate. Other sources, such as respondent selection bias, questionnaire wording and reporting inaccuracy, may contribute additional errors of greater or lesser magnitude. Table 1 shows margins of error for key sample subgroups.

Respondents were asked 111 items. These included screener questions to ensure respondents were first-year teachers, demographic questions to describe the teachers who took part in our survey and closed-ended opinion questions. This questionnaire used a blend of different kinds of questions, some of which tackle similar issues in different ways. Most questions ask the respondents to use a scale (either three or four points) to rate different aspects of their training or experiences teaching and to measure the strength of various beliefs they may have about teaching. The full questionnaire is available at nctq.com and publicagenda.org.

Many of the four-point scales used in this survey are Likert scales, where we ask the degree to which a respondent accepts a particular statement.²⁵ In the report, we often collapse the choices to the nominal level by combining the positive responses together and negative responses together.²⁶ Those interested in seeing the degree to which someone agreed or disagreed with the statement can consult either the Selected Survey Results on page 34 in the report, which break out the strength of acceptance, or the full questionnaire and results at nctq.com and publicagenda.org.

We also used questions in which respondents are asked to choose between two mutually exclusive and balanced statements involving trade-offs. Analyzed in context with other results, these “forced choice” items shed light on respondents’ priorities and avoid the central tendency bias inherent in Likert-style questions. The choices themselves may be artificial, but they typically echo natural language gleaned from qualitative research. This questionnaire reflects the language and expressions used by teachers during focus groups for this project and from previous research with teachers.

For example, one of the questions asked new teachers:

²⁵ R. Likert, “A Technique for the Measurement of Attitudes,” *Archives of Psychology* 140 (1932): 55.

²⁶ Collapsing Likert scales into their nominal components (agree/disagree) is a commonly used technique in public opinion research. After transforming the data, it is subject to chi-square assessments.

Which comes closer to your view?

- *I may be new to teaching, but compared to what other teachers are doing, my students are probably lucky to have me [OR]*
- *I'm sometimes afraid that my students are paying a heavy price because of my lack of experience*

This item is drawn directly from the qualitative research, where a new teacher said in a focus group, “I’m a teacher to these kids. I’m not qualified at all. Yet I’m still possibly better than what could be there. It’s absolutely ridiculous.” Since the other teachers in the focus group agreed with this perspective, we counterbalanced the perspective with the notion that students are lucky to have the new teacher with one that gives an equally reasonable but very different response. In this instance, the presentation of the alternate second viewpoint is intended to test and probe whether this response is strongly held even when positioned against a robust alternate.

In a few instances, the questionnaire contains compound questions combining two seemingly separate concepts. The decision to combine concepts within a single item mirrors the way teachers discuss and couple ideas in focus groups.

For example, one item in our series of questions about potential drawbacks to teaching is the following:

There is so much testing and not enough freedom to be creative.

This item mirrors a comment by a new teacher in a focus group: “I think it’s absolutely a matter of testing taking away too much time ... you are very restricted in the amount of time that you have to try new, creative theories, because you have to get this, this and this in before.”

Obviously, compound items could be asked separately, and other researchers may wish to

break apart these questions and ask separate items—indeed, we invite them to do so. However, we believe these compound items capture authentic and useful information about new teachers’ overall priorities and concerns and are consistent with previous studies conducted by Public Agenda.

The focus groups

Focus groups allow for an in-depth, qualitative exploration of the dynamics underlying the public’s attitudes toward complex issues. Insights from participants in these focus groups were important to the survey design. All focus groups were moderated by Public Agenda senior staff.

Four focus groups were conducted. One was with participants from one of the three alternate route programs included in our survey from the Philadelphia, Pennsylvania region. Two more were also conducted in Philadelphia, one with senior education majors and master’s-plus students from an urban university and one with the same population from a suburban university. The last group was conducted in Chicago, Illinois, with first-year teachers in an urban alt-cert program and with urban master’s-plus students.

Follow-up e-mails

To more fully examine new teachers’ views on student behavior in the classroom and their teacher preparation, seven follow-up questions were sent to survey respondents who offered their e-mail addresses to researchers. Actual quotes were drawn from e-mail responses to give voice to attitudes captured statistically through the surveys.

Questions were as follows:

1. Thinking about your classes last year, how would you rate your students’ overall behavior—excellent, good, fair or poor?
2. Can you give an example of some students’ behavior last year that illustrates the rating you gave above?

3. Last year, what aspect of the job did you feel least prepared for?
4. Can you think of a particular classroom experience that you did not feel prepared for?
5. What was your MAIN reason for becoming a teacher?
6. Now that you have a year of teaching experience, do you think this reason will motivate you to continue teaching? Why or why not?
7. Last year, did you teach in an elementary school, a middle or junior high school or a high school?

Full Survey Results

2	How important was each of the following factors to your decision to go into teaching?	Alternate route and in a high-needs school (n=184)	Traditionally trained and in a high-needs school (n=274)	Traditionally trained and not in a high-needs school (n=262)
	Having a teacher who really inspired you as a student			
	One of the most important factors	26	27	33
	A major factor	33	38	39
	A minor factor	25	21	19
	Not a factor at all	14	14	8
	Don't know	2	–	1
	Having a parent or family member who was a teacher			
	One of the most important factors	5	4	10
	A major factor	11	18	15
	A minor factor	20	15	18
	Not a factor at all	64	62	57
	Don't know	–	1	–
	The idea of putting underprivileged kids on the path to success			
	One of the most important factors	71	44	28
	A major factor	25	45	55
	A minor factor	4	8	14
	Not a factor at all	–	–	1
	Don't know			
	The practical job benefits such as summers off, more time with family and job security			
	One of the most important factors	9	17	10
	A major factor	20	38	38
	A minor factor	46	31	38
	Not a factor at all	25	14	13
	Don't know	–	*	–
	Teaching a subject that you love and getting kids excited about it			
	One of the most important factors	33	43	47
	A major factor	37	44	41
	A minor factor	23	8	10
	Not a factor at all	7	4	2
	Don't know	–	1	–
3	Here are some things that are often considered to be drawbacks to teaching. Based on your personal experience, please tell us whether each is a major drawback, a minor drawback or not a drawback for you:			
	Low salary and not much opportunity for growth			
	Major drawback	39	37	29
	Minor drawback	45	44	47
	Not a drawback	16	19	24
	Don't know	–	–	1

Note: While the survey includes interviews with a nationally representative sample of 641 first-year school teachers and 224 teachers who participated in three alt-route programs (Teach for America, the New Teachers Project and Troops to Teachers), these topline results do not include the responses of respondents who came to teaching through other alternate-route programs or those who did not know the percentage of their students who received free- or reduced-price lunch. Also, there were too few responses of those alt-route teachers not teaching in high-needs schools to reliably compare their views to the other groups, so they are not shown here.

3 (continued) **Here are some things that are often considered to be drawbacks to teaching. Based on your personal experience, please tell us whether each is a major drawback, a minor drawback, or not a drawback for you:**

There is so little prestige associated with being a teacher

	Alternate route and in a high-needs school (n=184)	Traditionally trained and in a high-needs school (n=274)	Traditionally trained and not in a high-needs school (n=262)
Major drawback	16	14	11
Minor drawback	47	36	36
Not a drawback	36	50	53
Don't know	—	*	*

There's a lack of support from administrators

Major drawback	54	20	15
Minor drawback	25	35	38
Not a drawback	21	44	48
Don't know	—	2	—

Teachers do not get rewarded for superior effort and performance

Major drawback	40	24	18
Minor drawback	39	49	50
Not a drawback	21	27	31
Don't know	—	*	1

Too many threats to personal safety

Major drawback	11	4	3
Minor drawback	34	33	25
Not a drawback	55	63	72
Don't know	—	*	—

There is so much testing and not enough freedom to be creative

Major drawback	41	46	43
Minor drawback	43	39	44
Not a drawback	16	13	13
Don't know	—	1	—

Too many kids with discipline and behavior issues

Major drawback	47	41	31
Minor drawback	42	41	49
Not a drawback	11	17	21
Don't know	—	*	—

Too many unmotivated students just going through the motions

Major drawback	38	38	31
Minor drawback	43	43	45
Not a drawback	20	19	24
Don't know	—	*	—

Low salary and not much opportunity for growth

Major drawback	39	37	29
Minor drawback	45	44	47
Not a drawback	16	19	24
Don't know	—	—	1

4 What is your best estimate for how many years you think you'll be a classroom teacher?

Next year or two	34	4	5
3 to 5 years	29	12	12
6 to 10 years	9	13	12
More than 10 years	14	69	70
Not coming back next year	13	1	1
Don't know	2	1	1

	Alternate route and in a high-needs school (n=184)	Traditionally trained and in a high-needs school (n=274)	Traditionally trained and not in a high-needs school (n=262)
5 Do you think of teaching as a lifelong career choice, do you think you'll probably leave the classroom for another job in education, or will you change fields altogether?			
Lifelong career choice	16	60	68
Probably leave the classroom for another job in education	48	30	23
Change fields altogether	34	7	6
Don't know	2	4	3
9 Thinking about the profession of teaching, do you think that the nature of the job means teachers are never well-paid or do you think it is very possible for a teacher to make a reasonable living?			
Teachers are never paid well	36	32	32
It is very possible for a teacher to make a reasonable living	63	66	67
Don't know	2	3	1
11 Given a choice between two schools in otherwise identical districts, would you prefer to work in...			
The school which paid a significantly higher salary	29	20	20
The school where administrators gave strong backing and support	71	79	80
Don't know	–	1	1
13 Do you find that you are almost always comfortable with your knowledge of the subject area you are teaching, or are there too many times when you have to scramble to learn it yourself before you have to teach it?			
Always comfortable	81	82	81
Many times have to scramble	19	16	19
Don't know	–	2	–
17 As part of your teacher preparation, how much time did you spend working with an actual public school teacher in a classroom environment?			
Enough time	29	71	74
Too much time	2	4	2
Too little time	54	20	20
Spent no time	16	4	3
Don't know	–	1	*
19 How would you describe the mentoring and feedback you received from your cooperating teacher (whom you spent the most time with) when it came to each of the following?			
Managing the classroom			
Excellent	22	56	55
Good	39	28	32
Fair	22	10	7
Poor	17	5	4
Don't know	–	1	1
Handling students who are discipline problems			
Excellent	19	44	48
Good	36	34	32
Fair	26	14	15
Poor	17	7	4
Don't know	2	1	1

	Alternate route and in a high-needs school (n=184)	Traditionally trained and in a high-needs school (n=274)	Traditionally trained and not in a high-needs school (n=262)
19 (continued) How would you describe the mentoring and feedback you received from your cooperating teacher (whom you spent the most time with) when it came to each of the following?			
Providing personalized instruction to students			
Excellent	13	41	42
Good	36	36	38
Fair	21	15	14
Poor	30	8	6
Don't know	–	1	1
Helping struggling students overcome their learning problems			
Excellent	15	41	42
Good	23	30	33
Fair	34	21	18
Poor	26	7	7
Don't know	2	1	*
Keeping gifted students challenged			
Excellent	6	25	28
Good	23	32	35
Fair	32	28	23
Poor	36	11	12
Don't know	2	4	2
Working with special-needs students			
Excellent	10	29	32
Good	23	34	33
Fair	27	24	22
Poor	38	9	10
Don't know	2	5	4
20 Overall, would you say your cooperating teacher was a positive role model who helped inspire you as a teacher, a negative role model who did not share an inspiration for teaching, or would you say your cooperating teacher was not really a role model?			
Positive role model	53	88	87
Negative role model	11	1	3
Not really a role model at all	36	10	10
Don't know	–	*	–
23 Overall, looking back, would you say you were prepared or unprepared for this first year of teaching?			
Very prepared	14	42	45
Somewhat prepared	36	37	39
Somewhat unprepared	38	15	13
Very unprepared	9	3	2
Don't know	–	–	–
25 Now that you are in the classroom, please tell me how you would rate the support you feel you are getting from other teachers or mentors in the following areas:			
Creating strong lesson plans and teaching techniques			
Excellent	20	34	35
Good	39	40	42
Fair	23	18	14
Poor	18	7	9
Don't know	–	1	–

	Alternate route and in a high-needs school (n=184)	Traditionally trained and in a high-needs school (n=274)	Traditionally trained and not in a high-needs school (n=262)
25 (continued) Now that you are in the classroom, please tell me how you would rate the support you feel you are getting from other teachers or mentors in the following areas:			
Handling students who are disruptive or unmotivated			
Excellent	20	38	37
Good	36	32	40
Fair	27	21	18
Poor	18	9	5
Don't know	—	*	*
Working and communicating with parents			
Excellent	7	29	38
Good	41	39	43
Fair	29	23	12
Poor	23	8	6
Don't know	—	1	1
Working with special-needs students			
Excellent	13	27	33
Good	29	37	41
Fair	29	23	18
Poor	30	8	8
Don't know	—	5	1
26 Please tell us the extent to which you agree or disagree with the following statements.			
Most days I feel really confident that my students are learning and responding to my teaching			
Strongly agree	28	45	49
Somewhat agree	46	49	44
Somewhat disagree	21	6	6
Strongly disagree	4	*	1
Don't know	2	—	*
Teaching is so demanding, it's a wonder that more people don't burn out			
Strongly agree	48	44	33
Somewhat agree	43	40	43
Somewhat disagree	7	11	19
Strongly disagree	—	3	4
Don't know	2	1	*
Teaching is exactly what I wanted—there is nothing I'd rather be doing			
Strongly agree	18	54	57
Somewhat agree	32	34	33
Somewhat disagree	35	9	9
Strongly disagree	12	2	1
Don't know	4	1	1
27 Which of the following two statements comes closer to your own view?			
I may be new to teaching, but compared to what other teachers are doing, my students are probably lucky to have me	84	84	75
I'm sometimes afraid that my students are paying a heavy price because of my lack of experience	16	12	20
Don't know	—	4	4

	Alternate route and in a high-needs school (n=184)	Traditionally trained and in a high-needs school (n=274)	Traditionally trained and not in a high-needs school (n=262)
28 Which comes closer to your view?			
Good teachers can lead all students to learn, even those from poor families or who have uninvolved parents	86	75	73
It is too hard even for good teachers to overcome these barriers	7	7	9
Not sure	–	1	–
Don't know	7	17	19
29 Sometimes, teachers with seniority have more say over where they teach and they end up working with kids who are easier to reach. Do you think that ...			
This is reasonable because veteran teachers have earned this benefit by putting in their time	16	26	23
This is wrong because it leaves inexperienced teachers with the hardest-to-reach students	80	68	70
Don't know	4	6	6
30 And for you, as a first-year teacher, do you tend to have the hardest-to-reach students, or is this not the case for you in your school?			
Tend to have the hardest-to-reach	64	41	25
Not the case	34	56	74
Don't know	2	3	2
31 How would you rate the administration at your school when it comes to the following?			
Supporting you in handling discipline problems			
Excellent	18	38	55
Good	23	33	23
Fair	29	20	13
Poor	30	9	8
Don't know	–	–	–
Providing adequate resources like textbooks and well-equipped classrooms			
Excellent	25	38	48
Good	27	38	31
Fair	29	14	15
Poor	20	10	6
Don't know	–	*	–
Providing instructional leadership and guidance			
Excellent	13	34	46
Good	24	34	29
Fair	29	22	17
Poor	35	10	7
Don't know	–	–	1
33 How effective do you think each of the following proposals would be in terms of improving teacher quality?			
Requiring new teachers to spend much more time teaching in classrooms under the supervision of experienced teachers			
Very effective	39	33	37
Somewhat effective	39	43	40
Not too effective	18	15	17
Not at all effective	4	8	4
Don't know	2	1	1

33 (continued) How effective do you think each of the following proposals would be in terms of improving teacher quality?	Alternate route and in a high-needs school (n=184)	Traditionally trained and in a high-needs school (n=274)	Traditionally trained and not in a high-needs school (n=262)
Requiring teachers to earn graduate degrees in education			
Very effective	14	24	27
Somewhat effective	34	36	38
Not too effective	34	23	25
Not at all effective	16	16	9
Don't know	2	2	1
Requiring teachers at the secondary school level to major in the subjects they are teaching			
Very effective	29	55	58
Somewhat effective	45	30	34
Not too effective	18	8	6
Not at all effective	7	5	1
Don't know	2	2	1
Eliminating teacher tenure			
Very effective	16	16	8
Somewhat effective	40	29	34
Not too effective	31	26	29
Not at all effective	9	21	24
Don't know	4	8	4
Making it easier to terminate unmotivated or incompetent teachers			
Very effective	48	45	40
Somewhat effective	34	39	45
Not too effective	13	8	11
Not at all effective	4	4	3
Don't know	2	5	1
Requiring teachers to pass tough tests of their knowledge of the subjects they are teaching			
Very effective	23	23	20
Somewhat effective	37	41	44
Not too effective	30	23	20
Not at all effective	9	12	15
Don't know	2	1	1
Increasing teacher salaries			
Very effective	58	60	53
Somewhat effective	33	31	41
Not too effective	5	6	3
Not at all effective	2	2	2
Don't know	2	1	1
Reducing the regulations and requirements for teacher certification			
Very effective	9	8	8
Somewhat effective	20	24	23
Not too effective	47	25	36
Not at all effective	22	41	33
Don't know	2	3	1
Relying more heavily on alternate certification programs			
Very effective	14	6	4
Somewhat effective	54	28	29
Not too effective	27	32	40
Not at all effective	4	25	19
Don't know	2	10	7

33 (continued) How effective do you think each of the following proposals would be in terms of improving teacher quality?	Alternate route and in a high-needs school (n=184)	Traditionally trained and in a high-needs school (n=274)	Traditionally trained and not in a high-needs school (n=262)
Tying teacher rewards and sanctions to their students' performance			
Very effective	19	12	13
Somewhat effective	44	35	27
Not too effective	26	24	29
Not at all effective	9	27	29
Don't know	2	1	1
Tying teachers' salary increases to their principals' and colleagues' assessments			
Very effective	11	14	17
Somewhat effective	33	35	39
Not too effective	36	25	25
Not at all effective	18	25	19
Don't know	2	2	1
Reducing class size			
Very effective	67	79	74
Somewhat effective	25	20	24
Not too effective	5	*	1
Not at all effective	2	1	1
Don't know	2	1	–
Increasing professional development opportunities for teachers			
Very effective	30	54	54
Somewhat effective	46	38	42
Not too effective	16	5	1
Not at all effective	5	2	2
Don't know	2	2	1
Preparing teachers to adapt or vary their instruction to meet the needs of a diverse classroom			
Very effective	64	66	62
Somewhat effective	27	30	34
Not too effective	7	3	2
Not at all effective	–	1	1
Don't know	2	*	1

Characteristics of the sample

	Alt-route sample*	Traditional sample
Gender		
Male	37	20
Female	63	80
Do you teach at ...		
An elementary school	31	60
A middle or junior high school	29	20
A high school	35	14
Someplace else	4	6
Approximately what percentage of students in your school are eligible for the free or reduced-price lunch program?		
25% or under	3	20
26%–50%	11	26
51% or more	82	48
Don't know	4	6
In a typical class, about how many of your students would be classified as having special needs?		
Virtually all	16	9
Most	13	6
Some	35	34
Only a few	30	44
None of your students have special needs	2	5
Don't know	4	2
What is the LAST grade or class that you COMPLETED in school?		
Less than a 4-year college degree	1	2
College graduate (B.S., B.A. or other four-year degree)	23	61
Some post-graduate training or professional schooling after	48	20
Master's, Ph.D. or other higher degree	24	17
Don't know	4	1
What college or university did you receive your undergraduate degree from?		
Elite college or university	31	1
Other	65	97
Refused	4	2
Thinking about the time you were in high school, would you characterize yourself as ...		
An excellent student	60	42
A good student	27	46
A fair student	7	9
A poor student	2	1
Don't know	4	1

* Alt-route figures only include the demographics of the respondents from the Teach for America, the New Teachers Project and Troops to Teachers programs.

Characteristics of the sample (continued)

Are you teaching any subjects that do not match your current certification or area of study?

	Alt-route sample*	Traditional sample
Yes	15	11
No	80	87
Don't know	5	2

Age

20–24	50	43
25–29	13	29
30+	37	27

Ethnicity

White	79	91
Black	16	5
Hispanic	6	3

* Alt-route figures only include the demographics of the respondents from the Teach for America, the New Teachers Project and Troops to Teachers programs.

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About the National Comprehensive Center for Teacher Quality

The National Comprehensive Center for Teacher Quality (NCCTQ) is the premier national resource to which the regional comprehensive assistance centers, states and other education stakeholders turn for strengthening the quality of teaching—especially in high-poverty, low-performing and hard-to-staff schools—and for finding guidance in addressing specific needs, thereby ensuring highly qualified teachers are serving students with special needs.

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About REL Midwest

REL Midwest is part of a federally funded network of 10 regional educational laboratories, and it exists to bring the latest and best research and proven practices to school improvement efforts. Serving the seven states of Illinois, Indiana, Iowa, Michigan, Minnesota, Ohio and Wisconsin, REL Midwest provides policy-makers and practitioners with resources based on the highest-quality evidence as defined by scientifically valid research principles.

REL Midwest's work includes short-term, fast-response applied research and development projects based on annual needs-sensing data as well as studies conducted over a five-year period using randomized controlled trials. A National Laboratory Network website is the primary dissemination vehicle for reports, briefs and other materials issued from each of the 10 regional laboratories. In addition to disseminating resources and information through the national website, REL Midwest will use webcasts, e-mails and stakeholder meetings in its regional communications efforts.

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Founded in 1975 by social scientist and author Daniel Yankelovich and former U.S. Secretary of State Cyrus Vance, Public Agenda works to help the nation's leaders better understand the public's point of view and to help average citizens better understand critical policy issues. Our in-depth research on how citizens think about policy has won praise for its credibility and fairness from elected officials both from political parties and from experts and decision makers across the political spectrum. Our citizen education materials and award-winning website, **publicagenda.org**, offer unbiased information about the challenges the country faces. Twice nominated for the prestigious Webby award for best political site, Public Agenda Online provides comprehensive information on a wide range of policy issues.