

Bridges to Teaching: A Transition to Teaching Grant, 2007-2008

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EA08-169-04

At a Glance

The Bridges to Teaching: A Transition to Teaching project is a five-year grant to the Dallas Independent School District's Alternative Certification Department of \$1.25M authorized in September, 2006, under Title II, Part C, Subpart 1, Chapter B of the *Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965*, as amended by the *No Child Left Behind Act of 2001*. The purpose of the program is to recruit, prepare, and retain highly qualified teacher candidates for teaching a minimum of three years in the district in the difficult to staff areas of mathematics, science, and bilingual education.

The district has a bilingual program in Spanish and English in most elementary schools. To help staff the program, the Alternative Certification (AC) program recruits potential teachers in Mexico, Puerto Rico, and throughout the United States. Those recruits whose native language is Spanish take a competency exam in English by telephoning a computer.

The purpose of the evaluation of the Bridges to Teaching (BTT) alternative certification project was to compare the classroom effectiveness indices (CEIs) of the district's BTT interns, AC interns from other institutions, and traditionally certified teachers for the math, science, and bilingual programs by subject area and by school level. The purpose was to assess whether the types of support provided by the program positively impact participants' classroom effectiveness and teacher retention.

The district recruits beginning teachers from colleges and universities. These beginning teachers receive their certifications through traditional means, based on their college courses and student teaching. Some of these institutions, as well as other districts offer alternative certification programs. In school year 2007-2008, the BTT program recruited and trained its first cohort of 157 interns. One hundred thirty-seven were assigned to math classes, 59 to science classes, and 68 to bilingual classes. Thirty-six bilingual teachers were in math classes and two were in science classes. The group included 377 first year teachers in tested math, science, and bilingual subjects, of which 137 were

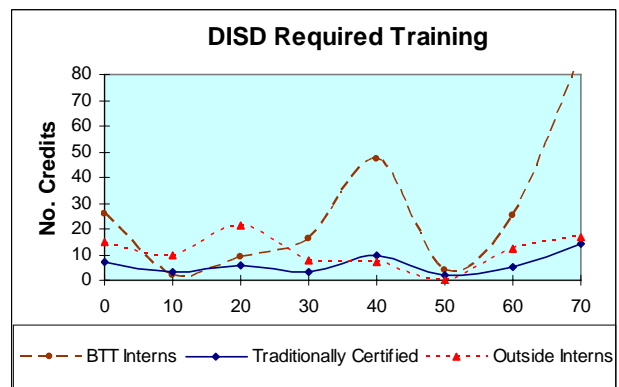
BTT interns. One year of data was used in the analyses.

Alternative Certification Support

Alternative certification interns received training mandated and provided directly by the Alternative Certification Department. This training is intended to equal that of traditionally certified teachers from colleges and universities.

District Required Support

As district required support, beginning teachers, as well as AC interns, must earn 63 credits of professional development. Traditionally certified beginning teachers may also have a mentor, but they must pay a fee for the service. At least 17 percent of traditionally-certified teachers participated in the mentoring program.



Records of the Professional Development Department suggested that no beginning teacher or AC intern met the district required support of 63 hours of professional development. More AC interns completed more training than did the traditionally certified teachers. The following analyses included all teachers and AC interns in the programs under study.

Effectiveness of DISD Alternative Certification Interns

At the district level, standardized CEI scores range from 0 to 100, with a mean of 50 and a standard deviation of 10 (variance of 100). Beginning teachers might be expected to score on the lower

half of the scale, and that is what we found for the three groups of traditionally certified, outside AC teachers and BTT AC teachers in these schools. Further, we found no difference in the CEIs of BTT interns, outside AC interns, and traditionally certified beginning teachers in the math and science programs. All of the bilingual first year teachers were from the BTT program and so there were no comparisons to be made.

The variance was very large in all categories analyzed. For example, the range and mean of math CEI scores for the 137 BTT interns was 20.8 to 78.2 with mean of 48.0, for the seventy-seven outside AC interns, 31.1 – 70.6 with mean of 46.8, and for the forty-five traditionally certified teachers, 20.5 – 68.1 with mean of 46.4. An analysis of variance (ANOVA) produced a result of no statistically detectible difference in the three groups.

The range of science CEI scores was 30.0 – 76.1 with mean of 48.7 for the fifty-nine BTT interns, 36.7 – 56.7 with mean 47.6 for the fifteen outside AC interns, and 38.1 – 62.1 with mean 48.4 for the six traditionally certified teachers. An analysis of variance (ANOVA) produced a result of no statistically detectible difference in the three groups.

No outside AC interns or traditionally certified teachers were in the sample of first year teachers in the tested bilingual classes. The range of CEI scores for the sixty-eight BTT interns was 22.3 – 71.2.

As no BTT interns were assigned to middle or high schools no analyses were conducted at those grade levels. At the elementary level, an analysis of variance (ANOVA) produced a result of no statistically detectible difference in the three groups.

AC interns (both district and outside) take additional training as a substitute for the college courses traditionally certified teachers take. As described above, the BTT interns also participate in more district staff development than the other groups. The result is that the BTT interns are indistinguishable from traditional teachers, which is the goal of alternative certification.

Retention Rates

As part of their participation in the Bridges to Teaching program, interns must agree to remain with the district for 3 years. This requirement creates challenges for recruitment. In math, science, and bilingual programs, the attainable retention rate of BTT interns for the second year was 91.4%, 81.5%

for outside AC interns, and 86.3% for traditionally certified teachers.

Recommendations

One could speculate that the reason for such wide variances in all groups was teaching inexperience in the groups. Since this grant covers a five year period, it would be interesting to use this study as a starting point for a longitudinal study and to compare possible improvements in CEI scores and in retention over the 5-year period.