

Teacher Certification in Canada An Examination of Current Requirements and Possible Reforms

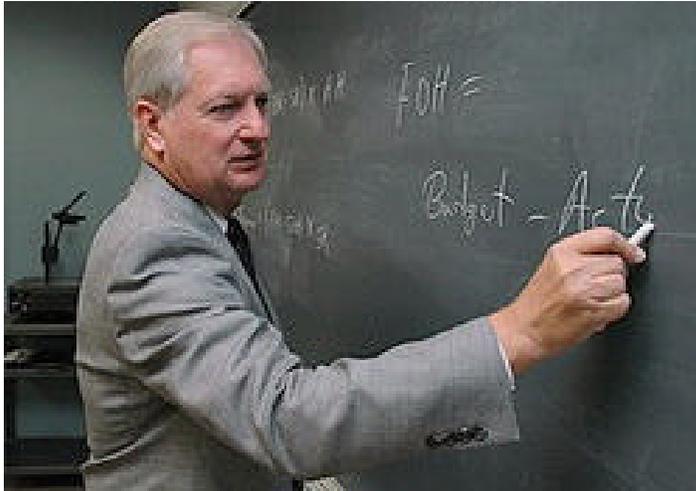
By Dennis Owens
Senior Policy Analyst

Executive Summary

- Provincial teacher certification requirements are relatively uniform across the country—they all require teachers to have undergone a teacher education program at a university or college.
- Manitoba, along with other provinces, is facing a teacher shortage—particularly in specialty subject areas such as mathematics and science. Due to a large number of impending retirements, this situation will likely become worse.
- Research indicates that teacher education programs make little difference in the educational effectiveness of a teacher.
- Over 40 states have implemented alternative certification models. Alternatively certified teachers generally have lower attrition rates, stronger academic backgrounds and more extensive work experience than traditional teacher education graduates.
- Alternative certification programs have made it possible to staff schools with a larger representation of visible minority teachers.
- New Jersey has implemented a complete reform of its teacher certification system. All teachers are required to have a bachelor's degree, pass the National Teachers Exam in their subject area, and complete a mentor-guided, school-based practicum. These regulations apply both to traditionally educated and alternatively certified teachers.
- No emergency teaching credentials have been issued in New Jersey since 1985. In addition, teachers are not required to teach outside of their specialty fields.
- Manitoba should implement a teacher certification system based upon the New Jersey model.

Introduction

In order to acquire a teaching position in a Canadian school, teachers must be certified by the relevant Department of Education. The requirements for certification vary only slightly across the country. Most notably, all provinces require any prospective candidates for teacher certification to have graduated from an education program offered by a university or college. This requirement is not unique to Canada—an education degree has been a long-standing requirement for teacher certification in the United States, as well.



However, a large number of school districts and state governments in the U.S. have begun to question the legitimacy of this long-standing orthodoxy. Over the past two decades, over 40 states have passed laws that allow teachers to be hired using avenues of “alternative certification.” Rather than requiring all teachers to go through a

lengthy college program, alternative certification allows school boards to hire otherwise qualified, well-educated individuals for teaching positions—particularly in shortage and specialty areas.

Since many Canadian school divisions have experienced difficulty in recruiting qualified teachers, we should consider implementing aspects of alternative certification in Canada. Making requirements for teacher certification less restrictive would certainly increase the possible supply of teachers.

Current Certification Requirements

The requirements for teacher certification are quite similar across Canada. All provinces and territories require prospective teachers to complete four or five years of university and to have at least one academic year of training (30 credit hours) in education.¹

Under an agreement reached by the Council of Ministers of Education in Canada, a teacher granted certification by one province is generally eligible for certification in another province. Additional coursework may be required in areas in which the individual is deemed insufficiently prepared by the receiving province.²

The following chart shows the specific requirements of each province and territory.

Requirements for Permanent Certification

Province or Territory	Teacher Education Coursework Required	Years of University Education Required	Years of Teaching Experience Required
British Columbia ³	Yes	Four*	None
Alberta ⁴	Yes	Four	Two**
Saskatchewan ⁵	Yes	Four	None
Manitoba ⁶	Yes	Five***	None
Ontario ⁷	Yes	Four	None
Quebec ⁸	Yes	Four	None
New Brunswick ⁹	Yes	Five***	None
Nova Scotia ¹⁰	Yes	Five***	None
Prince Edward Island ¹¹	Yes	Five***	None
Newfoundland/Labrador ¹²	Yes	Four	None
Yukon ^{13****}	Yes	Four	None
Northwest Territories ¹⁴	Yes	Four	None
Nunavut ¹⁵	Yes	Four	None*****

* Five years of university are required for a professional certificate

** An interim professional certificate is granted to candidates without teaching experience.

*** Applies to education graduates from within the province.

**** Teachers must complete one full course in Yukon studies (this may be done anytime within the first two years of teaching)

***** Certification needs to be renewed once every five years.

History of Teacher Certification

In 19th century North America, local schools originally had jurisdiction over teacher certification. They were allowed to hire anyone that they wished and set whatever requirements they felt were appropriate. Generally speaking, urban school districts had higher educational requirements than rural districts.¹⁶

By the late 1800s, governments began to set out more stringent requirements for prospective teachers. Normal schools were established, followed by teacher colleges, and eventually by the integration of these colleges into regular universities.¹⁷ While teacher education originated in Manitoba in 1882, the bachelor of education degree did not become a pre-requisite requirement for certification until 1986.¹⁸ A number of active teachers in Manitoba still lack B.Ed. degrees, although this number is gradually decreasing.



Problems with Certification Requirements

As noted above, the current requirements for teacher certification focus on all teachers graduating from an approved form of teacher education prior to being hired by a school division. This system created a number of problems:

1) *Many school divisions are experiencing difficulty in recruiting certified teachers—particularly in hard-to-staff regions and in specific subject specialty areas.*¹⁹

While there is *not* an overall shortage of teacher graduates from teacher education programs, there *is* a shortage of math and science majors who choose to enrol in teacher education programs. The reason for this is simple. Graduates from math and science programs at public universities have more lucrative career opportunities than graduates in English or history. While universities experience little difficulty in recruiting the latter into teacher training programs, it is considerably more difficult to convince math and science majors to spend two years in a teacher training program when they already have many other better-paying career opportunities. This ultimately has had the effect of forcing other certified teachers to teach outside of their specialty area.

2) *A large percentage of active teachers are at or near retirement age. This will likely exacerbate the emerging specialty teacher shortage.*²⁰



A substantial majority of teachers are over the age of 40. The largest single five-year age range of teachers is between the ages of 50-54, representing approximately one-fifth of the teaching force. Average retirement ages have also been steadily coming down. While most teachers retired at age 58 or 59 in 1985, that had decreased to 56 or 57 by 2000.²¹ Because a significant

number of teachers are approaching those ages, existing issues of replacement are likely to become even more substantial.

3) *The evidence indicates that receiving formal teacher education prior to being hired by a school division makes little difference in terms of teaching performance.*^{22 23}

For example, data from the National Educational Longitudinal Study in 1988 shows teachers with a B.A. in education actually had a statistically significant negative correlation on the math scores of high school math students. In contrast, teachers who held a B.A. and M.A. in mathematics, as opposed to education, had a positive impact upon student achievement in math.²⁴ This indicates that subject matter specialization is more important in teacher training than education courses.

Alternative Certification

In the United States, about 40 states have alternative certification programs in place, and approximately 125,000 American teachers have been certified by alternative means since 1985.²⁵ Alternative certification programs require prospective teachers to have a university or college degree in the field in which they wish to teach. In addition, these teachers are required to take extensive course work during their first year of teaching and are provided with guidance from an assigned mentor teacher.²⁶

The average alternatively certified teacher tends to have substantial professional work experience, has a well-rounded education and is older than graduates of teacher education programs.²⁷ Because of this, school districts have been making much wider use of their talents. Alternative certification has also made it possible for schools substantially to increase the representation of minority groups in their teaching staffs.²⁸



Research also indicates that alternatively certified teachers are more likely to remain within the teaching profession than traditionally educated teachers. In the Los Angeles Unified City School District, 40% of all first-year traditionally educated teachers leave teaching at the end of that year—as compared with only 20% of alternatively certified teachers.²⁹ In other words, alternative certification is not used as simply a temporary, emergency measure in most states. Rather, it is an excellent source of long-term career teachers.

New Jersey's Alternative Certification Model^{30 31}

The reforms which have taken place in New Jersey over the past two decades serve as an example of how alternative certification can be implemented successfully.

In 1978, the New Jersey state legislature created the Commission to Study Teacher Preparation Programs (CSTPP) in order to evaluate the effectiveness of teacher certification requirements. The Commission discovered that teacher education programs were filled with poorly designed courses that had little or nothing to do with effective teaching. Moreover, due to the large number of "hybrid" courses offered (i.e. math for elementary teachers, etc.) teacher education graduates were able to complete college or university degrees without taking any substantive liberal arts or science courses. These findings led to new regulations on teacher education programs.

Future teachers were then required to complete at least 60 credit hours of liberal arts and science courses, complete a major in a standard liberal arts

or science field and have practice teaching experience in the classroom. These changes had the effect of redefining teacher education to focus on subject matter preparation and an internship in the classroom rather than on education pedagogy courses.

In 1984, the state redefined its teacher certification requirements. From that point on, teachers had to satisfy three conditions in order to become certified:

- Acquire a baccalaureate degree in the field in which they planned to teach;
- Pass the relevant subject test of the National Teachers Exam; and
- Complete a mentor-assisted, school-based internship.

These requirements were not designed simply as an alternative route for certification. They were standards which were required of *all* prospective teachers. The only difference between traditionally educated teacher graduates and alternatively certified graduates was the timing of their internship—teacher education graduates completed it while in college while alternatively certified graduates completed it during their first year of teaching.³²

Initially, only alternatively certified teachers were officially classified as provisional teachers during their first year. However, due to the higher attrition rates of traditionally prepared teachers, it was decided to make all



first-year teachers provisional teachers. This had the effect of increasing mentor support for traditionally prepared as well as alternatively certified teachers. It also further reduced the distinctions between these two classes of teachers.

Over 450 out of 570 school districts in New Jersey have opted to hire alternatively certified teachers, a figure that is up from 246 districts ten years earlier. In addition, alternatively certified applicants had higher test scores on the National Teachers Exam than traditionally educated teachers and had lower attrition rates in their first and second years of teaching.

Some have claimed that alternative certification is just another form of emergency credentialing. But it should be noted that New Jersey has not issued a single emergency teaching certificate since 1985. It also does not have any teachers teaching outside of their subject field, a significant contrast with other jurisdictions. Alternative certification in New Jersey has effectively eliminated teacher shortages—even in specialty areas.

Conclusion

Manitoba, along with other Canadian provinces, is facing a significant teacher shortage—particularly in specialty areas such as math and science. Our provincial government is faced with a choice. We can continue to go the route of requiring teachers to teach outside their specialty areas because an insufficient number of math and science majors choose to go through a two year B.Ed. program. Or we can follow New Jersey's model and open up the teaching job market to well-educated individuals who have a substantial amount of preparation in their subject area.

Teacher Certification

Alternative certification is not about lowering standards for teachers. Rather, it is about ensuring that the standards we choose to utilize are relevant to learning in the classroom. Manitoba would do well to create a certification model similar to that of New Jersey.

About the Author



Dennis Owens is the Frontier's Senior Policy Analyst. A descendent of homesteaders near Portage la Prairie, he graduated from the University of Winnipeg in 1970 with a Bachelor of Arts in English and Political Science. Over a 20-year career in the transportation business, he rose to the position of operations manager of a Winnipeg-based firm. Since then he has researched and written about Canadian public policy issues for a variety of organizations including the Manitoba Taxpayers Association and the Prairie Centre. His specialties at the Frontier Centre include municipal issues, public education, healthcare and aboriginal policy. His frequent exposure in electronic and print media has included a regular commentary on CBC radio and articles printed in the *Wall Street Journal* and the *National Post*.

Footnotes

¹ Canadian Teachers Federation, *Teaching in Canada*, available at www.ctf-fce.ca/E/teaching.htm

² Council of Ministers of Education, Canada, *Labour Mobility Chapter of the Agreement on Internal Trade/Teaching Profession*

³ British Columbia College of Teachers, *College Bylaws*, available at www.bcct.ca/documents/bylaws02.pdf

⁴ Department of Learning, Government of Alberta, *Requirements for Teacher Certification in Alberta*, available at www.learning.gov.ab.ca/k_12/teaching/certification/

⁵ Saskatchewan Teachers Federation, *Teacher Certification in Saskatchewan, 2002*, available at www.stf.sk.ca/prof_growth/pdf/teacher_certification.pdf

⁶ Manitoba Education and Youth, *Teacher Certification in Manitoba*, available at www.edu.gov.mb.ca/ks4/profcert/pdf_docs/kit_eng.pdf

⁷ Ontario College of Teachers, *Thinking About Becoming a Teacher?*, available at www.oct.ca/en/collegepublications/pdf/becoming.pdf

⁸ Government of Québec, *Terms and Conditions for Obtaining a Québec Teaching Licence*, available at www.meq.gouv.qc.ca/dftps/interieur/aut_ens_info_a.htm

⁹ New Brunswick Teachers Association, *Information on Teacher Certification in New Brunswick*, available

at www.nbta.ca/teacher_certification/info.pdf

¹⁰ Department of Education, Nova Scotia, *Teacher Certification*, available at certification.ednet.ns.ca/

¹¹ Prince Edward Island: Department of Education, *Teacher Certification*, available at www.edu.pe.ca/registrar

¹² Department of Education, Government of Newfoundland and Labrador, available at www.nlta.nf.ca/html_files/html_pages/archives/certftn.html

¹³ Government of Yukon, Department of Education, *Yukon Teacher Certification Information*, available at www.gov.yk.ca/depts/education/psb/certification.html

¹⁴ Government of the Northwest Territories, Education, Culture & Employment, *NWT Teaching Certificates*, available at www.learnnet.nt.ca

¹⁵ Department of Education, Nunavut, *Nunavut Teacher Certification*, available at www.gov.nu.ca/education/eng/certification

¹⁶ David Angus, *Professionalism and the Public Good: A Brief History of Teacher Certification*, Thomas B. Fordham Foundation: 2001, available at www.edexcellence.net/library/angus/angus.pdf

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ University of Manitoba, *General Calendar*

¹⁹ Edward Hickcox, "Teacher Supply and Demand: Forecasting the Weather is Easier," *Educator's Notebook*, Vol. 12, No. 2, February, 2001.

²⁰ Manitoba Teachers' Society, *The Teaching Force in Manitoba: Recruitment and Retention*, January, 2002.

²¹ Ibid.

²² Naomi Schaefer, *Traditional and Alternative Certification: A View From the Trenches*, Thomas B. Fordham Foundation, available at www.edexcellence.net/better/schaef.pdf

²³ Dan Goldhaber and Dominic Brewer, *Teacher Licensing and Student Achievement*, Thomas B. Fordham Foundation, available at www.edexcellence.net/better/goldhab.pdf

²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵ Vicky Dill, *Can Teachers Be Found and Certified to Teach Students At-Risk?*, Haberman Educational Foundation, available at www.altcert.org/research.asp?article=part2&page=research

²⁶ Ibid.

²⁷ Ibid.

²⁸ Ibid.

²⁹ Michael Kwiatkowski, *Debating Alternative Teacher Certification: A Trial by Achievement*, Thomas B. Nordham Foundation, available at www.edexcellence.net/better/tchrs/15.htm

³⁰ Leo Klagholz, *Growing Better Teachers in the Garden State: New Jersey's "Alternate Route" to Teacher Certification*. Thomas B. Nordham Foundation, 2000, available at www.edexcellence.net/library/newjersey/new%20jersey.html

³¹ Dr. Leo Klagholz was the original architect of the reforms to New Jersey's certification system. All information in this section comes from his report cited above.

³² Alternatively certified graduates were also required to take 200 hours of instruction during their first year of teaching.