

Common Routes to Alternative Teaching Certification

Every state has its own routes and certification requirements for those who have a degree in a subject outside of education and are interested in becoming a teacher. In most cases, earning certification through an alternative route will involve completing an approved teacher preparation program. If you are considering out-of-state or online alternative programs, it's important to know that most states require prospective teachers to attend a program that has been approved by that state's teacher licensing or certification board, or by the licensing or certification board in the state where the program is located.

Most alternative routes to certification can be grouped into seven broad categories: certification through a formal alternative teacher preparation program; Transition to Teaching; National Board for Professional Teaching Standards certification; career and technical education certification; emergency and provisional teaching certification; in-district training; and teaching equivalency and portfolio evaluations. These pathways are not available in all states, and each has different qualifications and steps to completion, but they do share commonalities. Though the order of the following steps may change according to the route followed, in nearly all cases, prospective teachers will need to:

1. Complete a teacher preparation program approved by the state in which you will be seeking certification.
2. Apply for a provisional teaching certificate in order to complete supervised teaching.
3. Pass your state's exams for prospective educators.
4. Apply for a full teaching certificate.

As you research becoming a teacher through alternative routes, be sure to check with the board of education for your state for current requirements and limitations. Many states do not issue certain types of teaching certificates to alternative route candidates; for example, [special education](#) and [early childhood education](#) are commonly excluded from alternate route pathways because those who have a bachelor's degree in another subject will not be able to meet the intensive coursework requirements for these endorsements. In addition, some states limit alternative route teachers to teaching only in shortage areas or at certain grade levels, commonly secondary (grades 9-12).

Certification Through a Formal Alternative Teacher Preparation Program

Nearly all states offer approved alternative teaching certification programs (sometimes referred to as university-based programs) that involve postgraduate teacher preparation. Candidates following this route to become a teacher attend a teacher preparation program as would traditional-route educators earning a four-year education degree. The major difference between this option and traditional teacher preparation is that alternative route to teaching candidates are completing preparation after earning a bachelor's degree, as opposed to traditional route candidates who usually complete teacher preparation as part of a bachelor's degree. The most common order of steps to earn certification through a formal alternative teacher preparation program is:

1. Apply to an approved alternative route teacher certification program.
2. Complete the formal coursework required prior to the student teaching experience.
3. Apply for a provisional teaching certificate in order to complete student teaching.
4. Pass your state's exams for prospective educators (note that a growing number of alternative programs may require a passing score on these exams as a condition of admission, which may change the order of the steps).
5. Apply for your professional teaching certificate.

Because candidates pursuing certification through alternative teacher preparation programs—whether online or on campus—already hold undergraduate degrees, many programs are available that lead to the award of a master's degree while qualifying graduates for teacher licensure. [Master's degree programs](#) usually take two years to complete, whereas certificate-only programs can be completed in as little as one year in many states.

Due to the growing acceptance of alternative routes, many schools now offer online alternative teacher certification programs, including widely recognized names such as the University of Saint Francis, Kansas State University, and the University of Tennessee at Martin. Like their on-campus counterparts, online alternative teacher certification programs typically take one to two years to complete if the student already has a bachelor's degree. You can read more about these schools and over 30 online master's programs for new teachers on our [online master's in education guide](#) which features our unique ranking of the top schools offering online teaching programs.

Transition to Teaching

In addition to university-based alternative teacher preparation programs, there are many national and regional transitional alternative certification programs. Three of the largest and best-known national programs are the [American Board for the Certification of Teacher Excellence \(ABCTE\)](#), which offers online alternative preparation programs in the 11 states where it is accepted; [Teach for America](#), which is an alternate route to certification in over 25 states and metro areas; and [TNTP Teaching Fellows](#), which offers programs in eight states and metro areas.

More locally-based programs include the [Academy for Urban School Leadership](#) in Chicago, [New York City Teaching Fellows](#) in New York, the [Arkansas Teacher Corps](#), and the [Mississippi Teacher Corps](#).

These programs differ from university-based preparation programs in two important respects. Firstly, the qualifying coursework is commonly (though not always) offered through the program rather than through a formal university. Secondly, the student teaching experience tends to begin earlier in the program than in a comparable university-based program, often as early as the first semester. For these reasons, such programs are often called residency programs or residency-based programs. Each program may have different steps to complete in order to earn your teaching certificate. In addition, since each state has different guidelines on which programs will be accepted, prospective teachers should be sure to check with their state's current requirements for alternative certification programs before committing to one of these programs.

National Board for Professional Teaching Standards Certification

The [National Board for Professional Teaching Standards \(NBPTS\)](#) is a national, non-profit organization that offers certification for accomplished educators. NBPTS certification is widely respected, and in some cases can be used as an alternative route to teaching. States that incorporate NBPTS certification as a route to teacher licensing include [Alabama](#) and [New Hampshire](#). Where it is recognized, the steps to earning state-level teacher certification via NBPTS certification are:

1. Complete a bachelor's and/or master's degree in education or a teachable subject.
2. Through at least three years of professional teaching experience, build a portfolio evidencing advanced professional teaching skills, which may be done in a private school, college or university, or other educational setting that does not require formal teacher certification.
3. Pass the NBPTS certification exam for your desired certificate area(s) and submit your professional portfolio.
4. Pass any exams required for teacher certification in the state where you wish to teach.
5. Apply for a teaching certificate through the state board of education.

In many states, NBPTS certification does not meet the requirements for an alternative teaching credential but may allow those who hold the certification to advance to a higher-level license. Many states also promote higher pay for NBPTS-certified instructors.

Alternative Certification in Career and Technical Education

Career and technical education, or CTE, is a broad area that covers subjects such as agriculture, business, information technology, and health sciences. Though ["career and technical education teacher"](#) is the preferred term for these educators, in some states they are referred to as vocational, occupational, technical professional, or career tech teachers.

Many states have alternative route to teaching options that allow prospective career and technical education (CTE) teachers to substitute previous experience and education for the typical bachelor's degree requirement. As a result, the common pathway to becoming a CTE teacher through an alternative route differs from other pathways:

1. Earn an associate's or bachelor's degree, or licensure in an approved career and technical education subject (requirements vary widely by subject area).
2. Earn formal work experience in the field to be taught (at least five years is a common requirement).
3. Secure a formal offer of employment from a school district and apply for a provisional CTE certificate.
4. While teaching, complete a teacher preparation program.
5. Pass any exams required by the state to teach in the desired subject(s).
6. Apply for a regular teaching certificate once all requirements attached to the provisional license are met.

Emergency and Provisional Teaching Certificates

Also known as limited teaching certificates or licenses, emergency and provisional certificates are most commonly encountered in states that have severe shortages of teachers in one or more subject areas (frequently [science](#), [math](#), and [English as a second language](#)) or in low-income school districts. These certificates may allow those who have sufficient education and experience and can demonstrate deep knowledge in a content area to teach without completing an alternative teacher preparation program. These types of alternative teaching licenses are generally limited in duration (one school year is common), cannot be renewed, and in most states cannot be used as a pathway to full licensure. However, in states that have [portfolio evaluation](#) or experience equivalency pathways, teaching under this type of certificate may help individuals launch their teaching careers. The steps to earning this type of certificate are commonly:

1. Complete the minimum education required for the subject area (commonly a bachelor's degree).
2. Secure an offer of employment from a school district experiencing a teacher shortage.
3. Have the school district submit a request for an emergency or provisional teaching certificate to the state board of education on your behalf.
4. Complete any additional requirements attached to the certificate issued, such as educator testing.
5. Teach as a provisional educator during the time that the certificate issued is valid.
6. In states that allow the conversion of provisional certificates to regular certificates, pass your state's required exams for educators and earn a recommendation for full licensure from the school district superintendent or other approved official before applying for a regular certificate. You may also be required to complete a professional development plan.

In-District Training Route to Licensure

Though less common than the routes outlined above, some states do have pathways that include teacher training within a school district, or with supplemental coursework in lieu of a full-time teacher preparation program, that lead to an alternative teaching certificate. Individuals may receive a provisional or limited certificate to teach while completing a teaching mentorship and training program. In states that allow this approach, the school district may recommend those who excel in teaching practice and complete the mentorship and training program for full licensure. To earn a teaching certificate via an in-district alternative route, you must typically complete the following steps:

1. Earn a bachelor's degree in the subject you wish to teach or a bachelor's degree that includes the minimum number of semester hours required to teach your desired subject.
2. Apply to an in-district training program and be hired as a provisional or limited educator.
3. Begin supervised teaching as you pursue district-based teacher preparation and/or a formal professional development plan.
4. Pass your state's required exams for your desired certificate area.
5. Once all requirements have been met, apply for a regular teaching license.

[Delaware](#), [Iowa](#), [Kentucky](#), [Maine](#), [Mississippi](#), [New Hampshire](#), [Oklahoma](#), and [South Carolina](#) have variations of this route to licensure.

Teaching Equivalency and Portfolio Evaluations

Alternative routes based on teaching equivalency or portfolio evaluations are not typical but are offered in a select number of states. In states where it is offered, the teaching equivalency pathway allows prospective educators to substitute experience teaching in private or post-secondary schools (in which a teaching license is not usually required) for the usual requirement of completing professional teacher preparation. Those who pursue certification through equivalency typically:

1. Earn a bachelor's degree in their desired subject area (commonly including at least some coursework in education/teaching).
2. Earn teaching experience (three years is a common requirement) in an environment that does not require state teacher certification, such as in a private school, charter school, or college or university.
3. Pass your state's required exams for educators.
4. Apply for a regular teaching certificate.

States that have this option include [Arkansas](#), [Nevada](#), [New Hampshire](#), and [Wisconsin](#).

Portfolio evaluations are a less-common alternative related to teaching equivalency pathways. States that accept portfolio evaluations usually require candidates to demonstrate through teaching experience that they meet state standards for educators without having graduated from a teacher preparation program and submit a written portfolio of work proving subject matter and teaching skills knowledge in alignment with state standards. States with licensure by portfolio evaluation include [Maryland](#), [Minnesota](#), [New Mexico](#), and [Vermont](#). The steps to licensure by portfolio evaluation typically mirror those of the teaching by equivalency route, above, with the added step of submitting a formal portfolio before applying for your teaching certificate.

Information location: <https://www.teachercertificationdegrees.com/alternative/#resources>.