

FULL PREPARATION FOR ALL TEACHERS: MENTORING IN ALTERNATE PREPARATION PROGRAMS

For every teacher who walks in front of a classroom, the stakes are high. Whether a veteran teacher or a recent graduate from an undergraduate program, every lesson that a teacher prepares and delivers will impact student achievement. Nevertheless, our most novice teachers continue to struggle considerably upon entering the workforce, including those who teach in high-needs schools and communities.¹ To address this issue, **roughly half of all teachers in Louisiana are being prepared, as of this fall, through an undergraduate program that now includes a yearlong teaching residency alongside an expert mentor.**² By 2019, all undergraduate candidates will be prepared in this fashion. As a result, students will receive instruction from teachers who have had substantial time to practice under the tutelage of a mentor teacher and, therefore, are well-prepared to meet their students' needs on day one of their first year.

Louisiana made its commitment to yearlong teacher preparation residencies in 2014, because research shows that structured support from and practice with a strong mentor teacher has a significant impact on teacher success and student growth. After analyzing 15 empirical studies on induction programs, researchers from the University of Pennsylvania and the University of California, Santa Cruz found that "overall, the studies... provide empirical support for the claim that induction for beginning teachers, and teacher mentoring programs in particular, have a positive impact" on retention, classroom practices, and student achievement.³



1 Louisiana [High-Needs Schools for Quality Rating System](#)

2 Louisiana [Bulletin 746 - Louisiana Standards for State Certification of School Personnel](#)

3 Ingersoll, R. M., & Strong, M. (2011). The Impact of Induction and Mentoring Programs for Beginning Teachers: A Critical Review of the Research. *Review of Educational Research*, 81(2), 201-233. Retrieved from https://repository.upenn.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1127&context=gse_pubs

“ALTERNATE” PREPARATION PROGRAMS IN LOUISIANA

While research has shown the importance of mentoring, 50 percent of aspiring educators in Louisiana complete post-baccalaureate or “alternate” certification training programs that include minimal training with an expert mentor. These aspiring educators hold an undergraduate degree in majors outside of education and complete their teacher preparation program while serving as a lead teacher.

Current policy requires these alternate certification candidates to have a school-based mentor; however, mentoring practices for alternate certification teachers vary statewide.⁴ In most cases, candidates do not have dedicated time to practice—or even to meet—with their mentors. This results in first-year teachers who have had minimal practice and who are, therefore, more likely to struggle in their first year. This is detrimental to student learning.

Additionally, research shows that alternate certification candidates who do not have sufficient support have high rates of attrition during the first few years of their career. An article from The Hechinger Report on teacher preparation in New York suggests that “a lack of targeted support for teachers as they start their careers is a major contributing factor to why 23 percent of New York City public-school teachers leave the classroom in their first two years,” and also suggests that “when we fail to tap into the talents and insights already within our schools, teachers struggle in isolation and leave the profession at high rates each year.”⁵

We see this trend play out in Louisiana as well: almost 20 percent of teachers prepared through alternate certification routes leave the profession after only two years, compared to only 12 percent of teachers prepared through undergraduate routes.⁶

In short, the immediate transition to teaching afforded through alternate preparation programs meets school systems’ short-term staffing needs but leads to teacher workforce instability.

Shifting to a paid, full-year residency model for alternate certification teachers before they assume teaching responsibilities would be prohibitively expensive for schools, as resident salaries would be an additive cost. A community of eight rural school systems in Louisiana is tackling this challenge by piloting cost-neutral models of post-baccalaureate preparation that include extensive time throughout the year to practice with a trained mentor teacher.

INNOVATIVE APPROACHES TO IMPROVING THE “ALTERNATE” MODEL

In September 2017, the Louisiana Department of Education released [Access to Full Preparation For Teachers in Rural Communities](#), a report highlighting the unique challenges of preparing teachers to teach in rural communities. Additional time for mentoring was one area of further exploration noted in the report. In response to this report, the Department released a [request for applications](#) in October 2017, seeking school systems committed to piloting innovative approaches to post-baccalaureate preparation. The Department received 24 applications for this grant opportunity.

The City of Bogalusa, Cameron Parish, Grant Parish, JS Clark Leadership Academy, Morehouse Parish, Pointe Coupee Parish, Richland Parish, and West Carroll Parish received funding to cover participation costs to pilot their preparation models during the 2018-2019 school year.⁷ In August 2018, the pilots began supporting 38 alternate certification candidates who teach in 16 schools across rural Louisiana.

While each pilot program is unique, on average, these pilots include structured practice and mentoring for one period per day, every day, during the entire school year. This means that candidates have multiple opportunities to meet and work with their mentor each week, whereas many other alternate candidates may see their mentors four times⁸ during the entire school year.

In fact, the pilots increase the amount of practice these teachers typically receive by 350 percent.

4 Louisiana Bulletin 996 - [Louisiana Standards for State Certification of School Personnel](#)

5 Maxwell, C. (2018). Teacher Voice: 'I was quickly overwhelmed' - The Case for Mentoring New Instructors. Retrieved from <https://hechingerreport.org/teacher-voice-i-was-quickly-overwhelmed-the-case-for-mentoring-new-instructors/>

6 Percentages calculated from 2017 EOY Profile for Educational Personnel (PEP) data

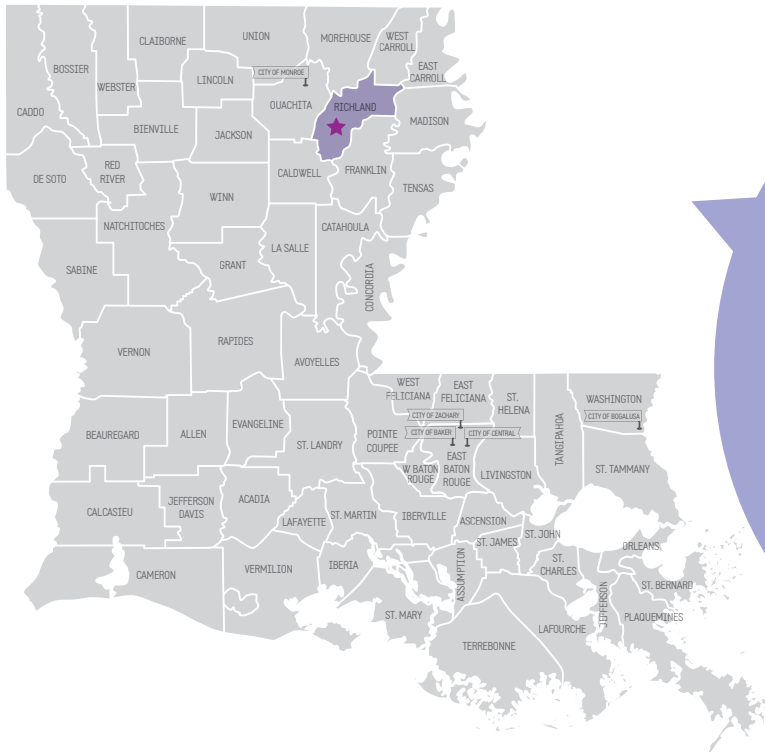
7 Participation costs include, but are not limited to, travel for pilot convenings, stipends for mentor teachers, PRAXIS preparation, and stipends for alternate certification candidates to attend their preparation program.

8 Louisiana [Bulletin 996 - Standards for Approval of Teacher and/or Educational Leader Preparation Programs](#)

These structured opportunities make this preparation experience substantially more supportive than current policy requires.⁹

Below are case studies detailing the work of three piloting school systems. While each school system continues to track the progress of the post-baccalaureate preparation models, including their candidates' impact on student achievement, their efforts, thus far, offer insight into how adjusted schedules and staffing plans can provide significantly more time to practice and strengthen alternate certification candidates' preparation.

CASE STUDY: RICHLAND



Number of pilot school sites: **6**
Number of trained mentors: **5**
Number of alternate certification candidates: **10**
Teacher preparation provider partner(s):
TNTP & University of Louisiana at Monroe (ULM)
Time for structured mentoring:
Ranges from 1 period weekly to 1 period daily, depending on candidates' needs

In Richland Parish, ten alternate certification candidates across six schools are benefiting from increased time to practice with an expert mentor. Richland has embarked on a school system-wide strategy for supporting alternate certification candidates by creating seven Lead Coach positions - two school system-based and five school-based - to mentor their candidates. These expert teachers stepped into a leadership role in which they spend three to four hours each day teaching in their own classrooms and the remainder with their alternate certification mentees. During this time, they co-teach, observe, provide feedback, and collaboratively plan. While this required creative scheduling by the school principals, it allows the mentors to have protected time during the school day to support and develop their alternate certification candidates.

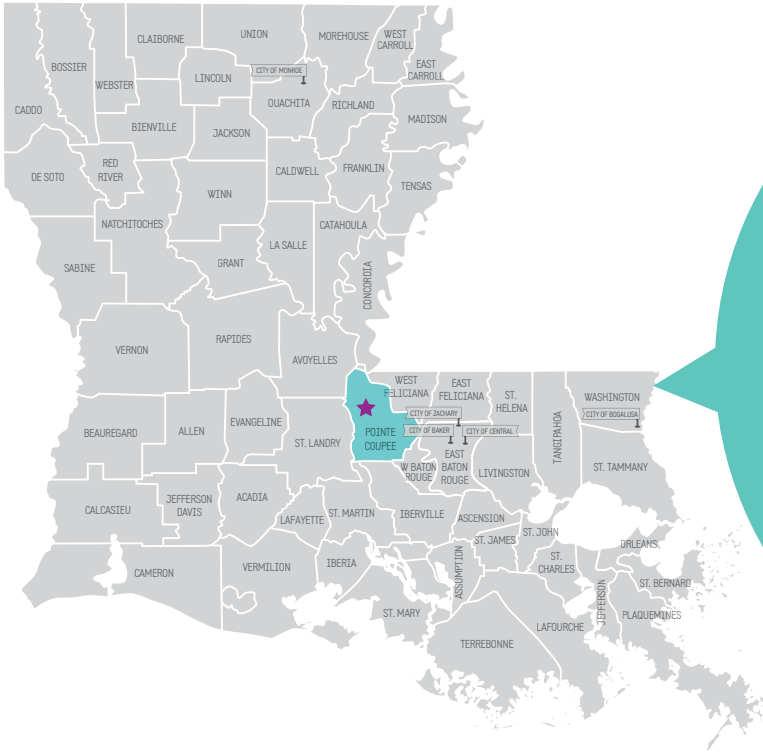
One mentor says, *"I wish I had the mentoring experiences that my candidates get. I have seen the power of this co-teaching experience. I was not expecting my candidate to do so well so fast, but she has."*

Candidates also appreciate the additional support: *"I honestly don't think that there is anything more that my school system could do for me. I have an amazing coach that co-teaches with me the last two hours of the day. Her help has been invaluable."*¹⁰

⁹ Reported by pilot school systems at the beginning of the school year.

¹⁰ Fall 2018 Implementation Survey: Believe and Prepare Rural Communities Grant (October 2018)

CASE STUDY: POINTE COUPEE



Number of pilot school sites: **2**
Number of trained mentors: **3**
Number of alternate certification candidates: **5**
Teacher preparation provider partner(s):
Louisiana Resource Center for Educators (LRCE)
Time for structured mentoring: **2 periods daily**

In Pointe Coupee's two pilot schools, collaboration among their five alternate certification candidates, as well as the mentor and mentee pairs, has played a key role in sustained growth for their candidates. To ensure adequate time for collaboration among mentors and their alternate certification candidates, Pointe Coupee reorganized staffing assignments in schools and adjusted the teaching schedule. For example, instead of lead teaching for eight periods each day, mentor teachers lead teach for four periods, co-teach with each mentee for one period, and collaboratively plan with all three mentees for one period. The school system has also ensured that the alternate certification candidates have mutual planning periods so that school administrators can provide instructional support during this time, especially in mathematics, and for other new teachers to also receive supports from a mentor teacher.

"The post-baccalaureate education program is beneficial because we have a chance to lay a foundation to develop and nurture our future educators. A formal program like this has allowed us to address critical needs while providing opportunities to collaborate and share knowledge from all parties. This program helps define a partnership between our experienced teachers and those who are just beginning their careers."

~Mentor, Pointe Coupee

CASE STUDY: BOGALUSA



Number of pilot school sites: **1**
Number of trained mentors: **1**
Number of alternate certification candidates: **2**
Teacher preparation provider partner(s):
Southeastern Louisiana University & iTeachLouisiana
Time for structured mentoring: **2 periods daily, plus 40 annual hours after school**

In Bogalusa's pilot school, a mentor teacher spends the morning as a lead teacher at her home school and spends the afternoon at the alternate certification candidates' school co-teaching and debriefing with her two candidates. Each day, the mentor co-teaches an hour block with each candidate, followed by a joint half-hour debrief. Candidates and their mentor have forty-five minutes weekly after school to collaboratively plan lessons.

The mentor, ***"[ensures] that both mentees follow through with [her] suggestions of modeled classroom techniques, routines, and procedures," and the candidates appreciate the support. As one candidate stated, "it is a big help and relief when my mentor shows up [... I am] glad I have the person I have for this program."***¹¹

To implement their pilot, Bogalusa had to work across departments at the school system and school levels to reduce the number of periods that the mentor lead teaches each day. The school system accomplished this in two ways: (1) increasing class sizes (to a maximum of 27 students) to reduce the number of sections needed per prep period; and (2) shifting staff from overstaffed schools to the mentor's school. In addition to recognizing the benefit of providing candidates with more time to practice, school system leaders have indicated a positive shift in their recruitment efforts as a result of the pilots, stating,

"During a recent recruitment event, we noticed an increased level of interest in new teachers wanting to teach in Bogalusa as a result of strengthening our mentoring program at the pilot school and throughout the school system."

11 Fall 2018 Implementation Survey: Believe and Prepare Rural Communities Grant (October 2018)

MOVING FORWARD

In October 2018, the Department surveyed participating alternate certification candidates, mentors, and school system leaders to assess the progress of each pilot. The survey was developed in partnership with the pilot's national partner, Education Resource Strategies (ERS), a non-profit organization with expertise in school system resource allocation. While there was overwhelming support for increased mentoring, alternate certification candidates expressed a desire for more time to co-teach with their mentors, and mentors expressed a desire for more time to observe their candidates to strengthen the preparation experience of new teachers.

A recent report by Bellwether Education Partners suggests that “teacher preparation improvement efforts need to stop assuming that all teachers can be fully ready on their first day and instead focus on how to restructure teacher training and initial employment so that a wider range of candidates can become effective teachers.” The report points to practice opportunities where “candidates receive the bulk of their training...under the guidance of an effective, experienced mentor teacher” as “a promising [solution]...to ensure quality teaching at scale.”¹²

The pilot mentoring and co-teaching models in rural Louisiana are promising models of how to increase mentoring and improve preparation for aspiring teachers in alternate certification pathways. Moving forward, the Department will continue to examine the impact of each pilot, including the impact of increased mentoring. Through this investigation, Louisiana will identify practices that could be scaled statewide, through policy and tools.

Louisiana needs more educators, especially those who are fully prepared on day one. Louisiana's alternate preparation pilots demonstrate that these two requirements no longer have to compete for school systems' time, money, or resources.



¹² LiBetti, A. & Trinidad, J. (2018). Trading Coursework for Classroom: Realizing the Potential of Teacher Residencies. Bellwether Education Partners. Retrieved from https://bellwethereducation.org/sites/default/files/TeacherResidencies_Bellwether.pdf