

Alternate Route to Certification for School Employees: Frequently Asked Questions

Can I remain employed as a school employee while I complete requirements for a special education endorsement, or other endorsement, in an alternate route program?

Candidates earning an endorsement in special education, or other areas, are able to remain employed, while meeting all requirements of an alternate route to certification program. Revised Code of Washington (RCW 28A.660) authorizes teacher preparation programs to offer a certification pathway to support school employees, specifically paraeducators and instructional assistants. *However, candidates should have the support of the district, usually the building principal, for enrolling and completing an alternate route program.* In addition, student teaching responsibilities include independent teaching for at least four to eight weeks in the middle of the school year. The length of independent teaching is collaboratively decided by the mentor and field supervisor, and is dependent on context, prior experience, and other factors. A few districts require candidates take a leave of absence during the four to eight weeks of independent teaching experience to avoid violating classified staff contracts.

Is there a particular classroom preference? Can I work across classrooms, such as general education, inclusion and resource?

Placement in resource rooms or inclusion classrooms are typical and present few, if any obstacles, for fulfilling all student teaching responsibilities while remaining employed as a school employee, whether paraeducator or instructional assistant. Assignment to multiple classrooms also presents few obstacles. However, there are coursework assignments and internship-based assessments which require consistency. For example, one of the required assessments, edTPA, involves teaching a set of several lessons to the same group of students.

Also, the following requirements must be satisfied for placement whether a candidate is enrolled in an alternate route program or traditional program:

- Supervised student teaching placements must include opportunities for candidates to plan lessons, provide instruction, and assess student learning; student teaching placements must include opportunities to differentiate curricula and reflect on practice;

- Supervised student teaching placements must provide opportunities for candidates to work in schools with diverse student populations;

- Mentor teachers must be willing to work with student teachers;

- Mentor teachers are instructional leaders, collaboratively identified by school administrators;

- Mentor teachers must be fully certificated school personnel and have a minimum of three years of professional experience in the role they are supervising.

Some of my work as a paraeducator or instructional assistant occurs with small groups of students outside of a classroom. For example, I have two students in my group with IEPs. Is this a problem?

Work with small groups outside of a classroom does not present obstacles toward meeting requirements for certification. However, a portion of the school week should be spent under the supervision of mentor teachers.

How does an alternate route program compare to a traditional teacher preparation program for school employees?

One way to understand alternate route teacher preparation for school employees is through the concept of *emerging professional educator*. Many school employees are in the best position to become teachers. They already know and do many of the things certified teachers know and do. The difference is that school employees enrolled in alternate route programs have committed to earning certification *and they have the support of their administration*. School employees enrolled in alternate route programs receive additional development while fulfilling their current employment responsibilities. They increase their knowledge and skill in the context of existing work with students.