The majority of Alternative Route Certification (ARC) programs are designed to fill personnel needs in either a certain discipline (e.g., special education teachers) or in specific geographic areas (e.g., rural, urban). ARC programs provide access to a teaching credential by circumventing traditional preservice preparation. In general, ARC programs tend to differ from traditional programs in the following ways:

- **Length and structure of the program.** The No Child Left Behind Act encourages ARC programs to reduce the number of credits or hours required to attain a credential. ARC programs are more heavily field-based and are staffed by a greater proportion of school-based personnel.

- **Delivery mode.** ARC programs often are offered where candidates work and on-line through distance education technologies.

- **Candidate population.** ARC programs are designed to expand the pool of prospective teachers (e.g., older, more ethnically diverse, males, career changers, etc.).

Partnerships between higher education teacher preparation faculty and school faculty can enhance the efficacy of ARC programs. In fact, there is some evidence that more ARC candidates who participate in programs characterized by strong partnerships tend to remain in special education positions than do those candidates who participate in stand-alone district-sponsored programs. In general, they report feeling prepared to teach, and principals give them high marks. Read on to learn more about the challenges and opportunities associated with ARC partnerships.

**Characteristics of Special Education ARC Program Partnerships**

ARC programs typically require both teacher educators and school faculty to change the way teacher training is conducted (e.g., selection of interns, selection of mentors, etc.). Also, ARC programs may necessitate a change in how each partner performs traditional functions. For example, teacher education programs might recruit students from a different pool of applicants (e.g., culturally diverse, older, etc.). Districts might hire special education teachers through different processes.

Special education ARC partnerships require joint collaboration and planning in a number of core programmatic areas, including:
Collaborative program design takes time and effort. There are numerous conceptual and practical challenges that require trust and good faith negotiations. The needs and self-interests of all partners should be understood and addressed. For example, university faculty members often bring theoretical and research-based perspectives to the partnership that may not always be present in school-based decision making. On the other hand, school district partners typically bring knowledge of the community, school, and students. These two perspectives must be integrated, not only to ensure a strong program, but also to acknowledge the contributions of all partners to the relationship.

Making Time—Key to Partnership Success

Partnerships around ARC programs take considerable time, effort, flexibility, consensus building, and political acumen. For many districts, the strongest motivation to become involved in a partnership comes from a critical shortage in the number and quality of special education teachers. Institutions of higher education may form partnerships to increase the numbers of students in their teacher preparation programs. These factors may not overcome the time required to develop partnerships, however.

Partners must spend time making the partnership work. Frequent discussions (e.g., monthly meetings, advisory board meetings, etc.) can help partners deal with specific aspects of the program (e.g., selecting key personnel, designing courses, solving problems, dealing with technology glitches if using distance learning, etc.).

Time also may be needed to overcome past or current areas of mistrust and conflict. It takes time to build trust, assign responsibility, and establish expectations. Partnership success requires overcoming mistrust, addressing mutual needs, and developing mechanisms for accomplishing shared goals.