

# Induction Insights



## Supporting Special Education Teachers–Teacher Educators [TEII-4]

# Alternative Route Special Education Certification Programs

## An Opportunity for School-University Partnerships

### *Briefly...*

*The number of individuals seeking special education certification through alternative routes is increasing nationwide.*

*Partnerships between districts and institutions of higher education can enhance success of such programs. Learn more about developing partnerships that are responsive to these preservice teachers' needs.*

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:

- **Preservice teacher curriculum content.** Curriculum content should be substantive, rigorous, and based on current state-approved criteria that lead to certification in special education. Delivery requires creativity, because ARC candidates usually are working in schools, balancing family responsibilities, and completing coursework. In many ARC partnerships, instruction is delivered through a mix of university coursework, district-sponsored professional development, and in some cases by using distance education technology. Partners should determine who will take the lead in developing the curriculum for each course, workshop, seminar, etc.
- **Mentors and supervision.** ARC programs make substantial use of on-site supervision and mentoring by incorporating both university supervisors and building-based coaches. Many partnerships rely on mentors from within the school district as well as teacher education mentors and/or supervisors. Partners should determine how mentors will be selected, as well as the training they will receive. Some partnerships may provide a course or seminar to familiarize mentors with adult learning, classroom processes, and clinical supervision.

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.

## ◎◎ Sightings

### Funding—A Key Issue

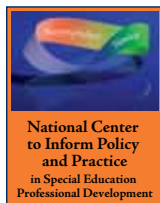
When external (state and/or federal) dollars are available, partners often are more willing to work together. About 57 percent of ARC programs receive some form of state funding for start-up costs; about 40 percent of start-up costs are borne exclusively by districts. In some cases, funds are available to support candidates (e.g., tuition, scholarships for books). When external funding ends, however, many programs may not continue.



**Learn More.** This Brief summarizes select findings from a comprehensive review of the literature:

Rosenberg, M. S., Brownell, M., McCray, E. D., deBettencourt, L. U., Leko, M., & Long, S. (2009). *Development and sustainability of school-university partnerships in special education teacher preparation: A critical review of the literature.* (NCIPP Doc. No. RS-3). Gainesville, FL: University of Florida, National Center to Inform Policy and Practice in Special Education Professional Development (NCIPP).

It is available on the NCIPP website at [www.ncipp.org](http://www.ncipp.org).



This Brief is part of a series designed to help special education teachers during their initial years in the profession. The National Center to Inform Policy and Practice in Special Education Professional Development (NCIPP) is funded by the Office of Special Education Programs (OSEP) of the U.S. Department of Education (cooperative agreement # H325Q070002). Bonnie Jones is the OSEP Project Officer. Opinions expressed herein do not necessarily reflect the views of the U.S. Department of Education. NCIPP aims to inform special education policy and practice by examining and recommending those policies and practices that improve the retention and quality of beginning special education teachers. There are no copyright restrictions on this document; however, please use proper citation. The Briefs were produced by Warger, Eavy and Associates.

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