

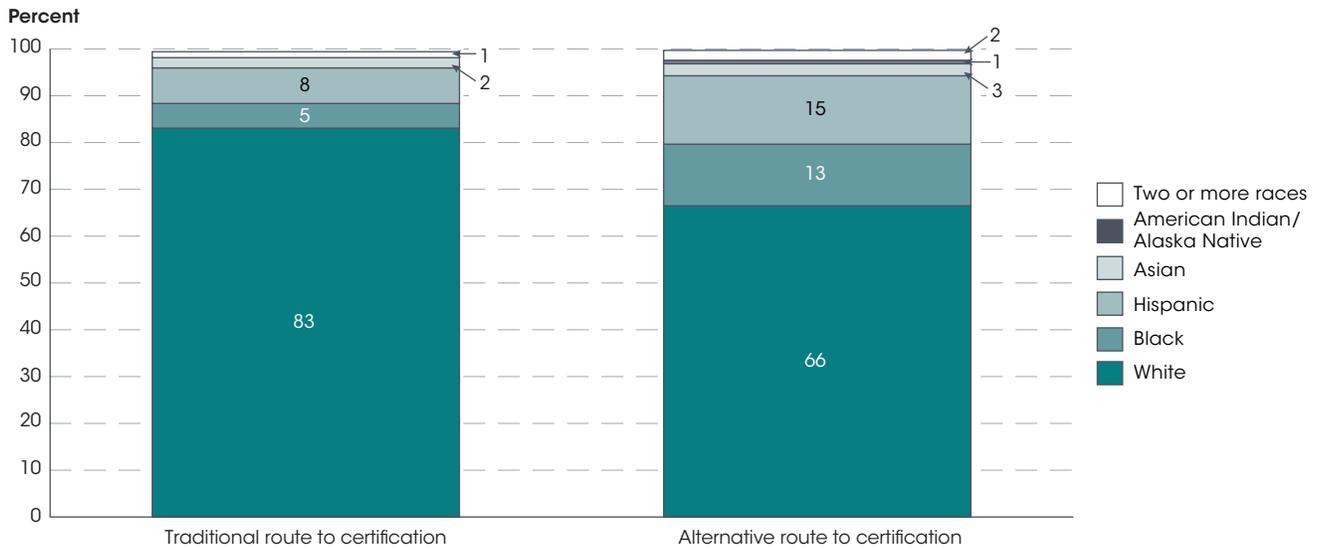
## Characteristics of Public School Teachers Who Completed Alternative Route to Certification Programs

*Approximately 18 percent of public school teachers in 2015–16 had entered teaching through an alternative route to certification program. Compared to those who entered through a traditional route, a higher percentage of alternative route teachers were Black (13 vs. 5 percent), Hispanic (15 vs. 8 percent), of Two or more races (2 vs. 1 percent), and male (32 vs. 22 percent).*

Of the 3.8 million public school teachers working in school year 2015–16, approximately 676,000 (18 percent) had entered teaching through an alternative route to certification program.<sup>1</sup> While the traditional route to certification typically requires the completion of a postsecondary degree in education, many alternative route programs are designed for individuals who have already completed a degree in a different field without teacher education courses.<sup>2</sup> These alternative pathways into the teaching profession may have important implications for the supply of teachers in the labor market, especially in the context of the declining number of bachelor's and master's degrees awarded in education<sup>3</sup> and persistent teacher shortages in certain subjects and categories of schools.<sup>4</sup>

The National Teacher and Principal Survey (NTPS) from the National Center for Education Statistics provides new insights about alternative route teachers in public elementary and secondary schools. This spotlight indicator uses NTPS data to examine the characteristics of teachers who entered teaching through alternative route to certification programs and compares them to those who entered through traditional routes. The indicator also describes the percentage of teachers in various academic subjects and categories of schools who entered teaching through an alternative route.

**Figure 1. Percentage distribution of public elementary and secondary school teachers, by route to certification and race/ethnicity: 2015–16**

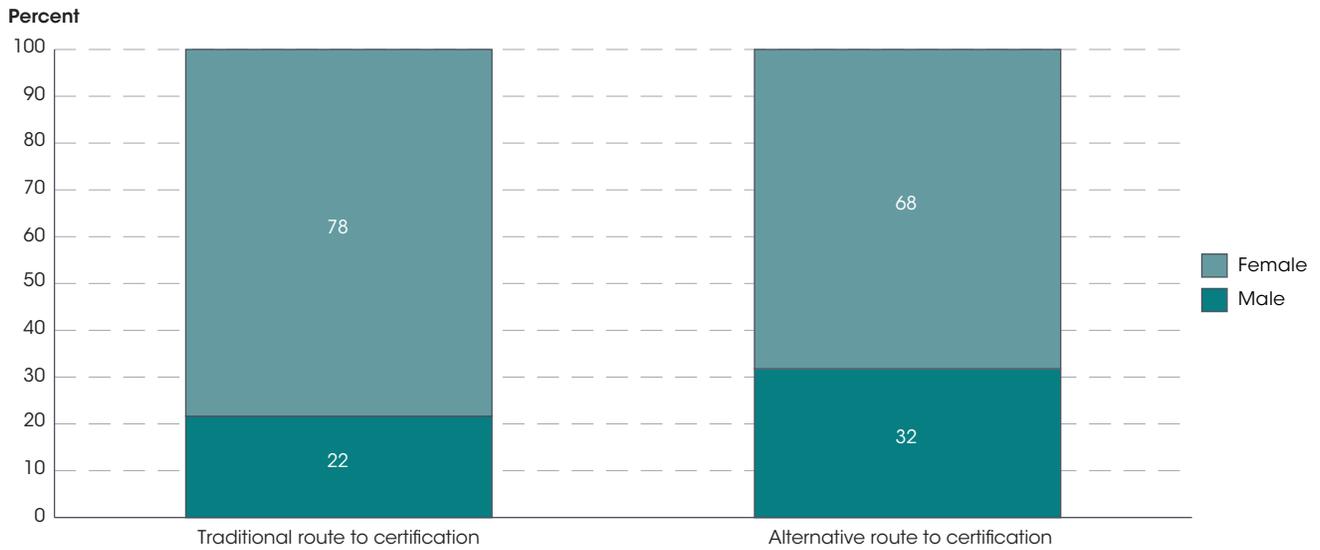


NOTE: Teachers were asked whether they entered teaching through an alternative route to certification program, which is a program that was designed to expedite the transition of nonteachers to a teaching career (for example, a state, district, or university alternative route to certification program). Data are based on a head count of full-time and part-time teachers rather than on the number of full-time-equivalent teachers. Detail may not sum to totals because of rounding. Race categories exclude persons of Hispanic ethnicity. Data for American Indian/Alaska Native teachers who entered teaching through a traditional route and Pacific Islander teachers who entered teaching through traditional and alternative routes round to zero and are not displayed. SOURCE: U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, National Teacher and Principal Survey (NTPS), "Public School Teacher Data File," 2015–16. See *Digest of Education Statistics 2017*, table 209.24.

In 2015–16, the percentage of public school teachers who were members of racial/ethnic minority groups was generally higher among those who had entered teaching through an alternative route to certification than among those who entered through a traditional route. The percentages of alternative route teachers who were Hispanic (15 percent), Black (13 percent), of Two or more races (2 percent), and American Indian/Alaska Native (1 percent) were higher than the percentages for traditional route teachers (8 percent, 5 percent, 1 percent, and less than one-half of 1 percent, respectively). In

contrast, the percentage of teachers who were White was lower among alternative route teachers (66 percent) than among traditional route teachers (83 percent). The percentage of alternative route teachers who were Asian (3 percent) was not measurably different from the percentage of traditional route teachers who were Asian (2 percent). The percentages of teachers who were Pacific Islander and American Indian/Alaska Native were 1 percent or less among both alternative and traditional route teachers.

**Figure 2. Percentage distribution of public elementary and secondary school teachers, by route to certification and sex: 2015–16**



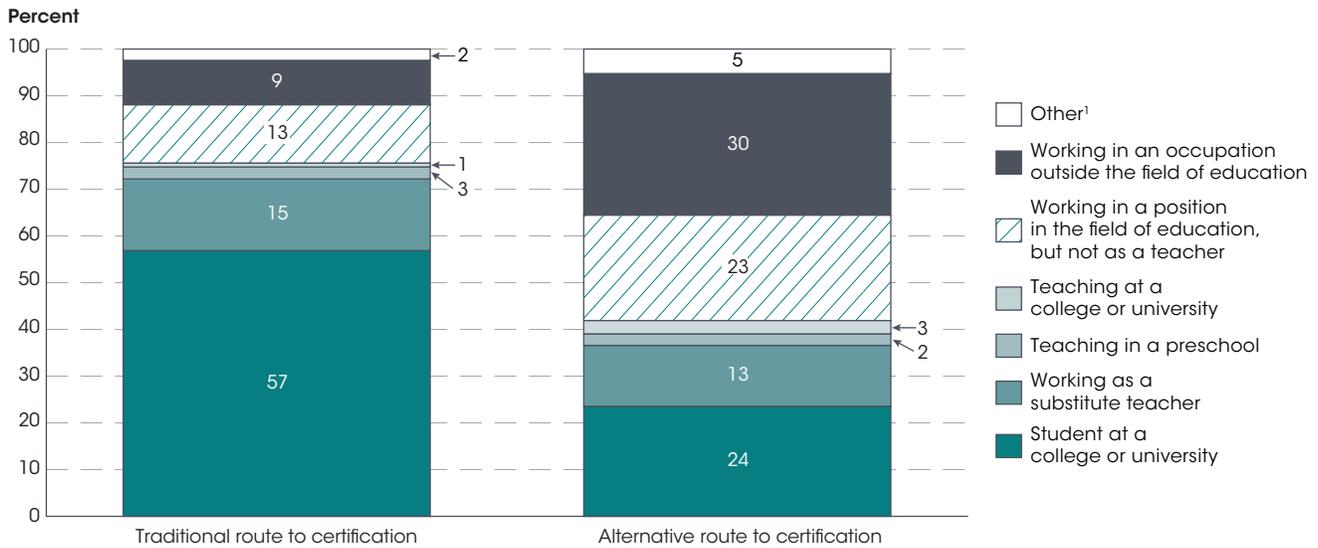
NOTE: Teachers were asked whether they entered teaching through an alternative route to certification program, which is a program that was designed to expedite the transition of nonteachers to a teaching career (for example, a state, district, or university alternative route to certification program). Data are based on a head count of full-time and part-time teachers rather than on the number of full-time-equivalent teachers.

SOURCE: U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, National Teacher and Principal Survey (NTPS), "Public School Teacher Data File," 2015–16. See *Digest of Education Statistics 2017*, table 209.24.

The distribution of teachers by sex also differed between alternative and traditional route teachers in 2015–16. The percentage of teachers who were male was higher

among alternative route teachers (32 percent) than among traditional route teachers (22 percent).

**Figure 3. Percentage distribution of public elementary and secondary school teachers, by route to certification and main activity the year before teaching: 2015–16**

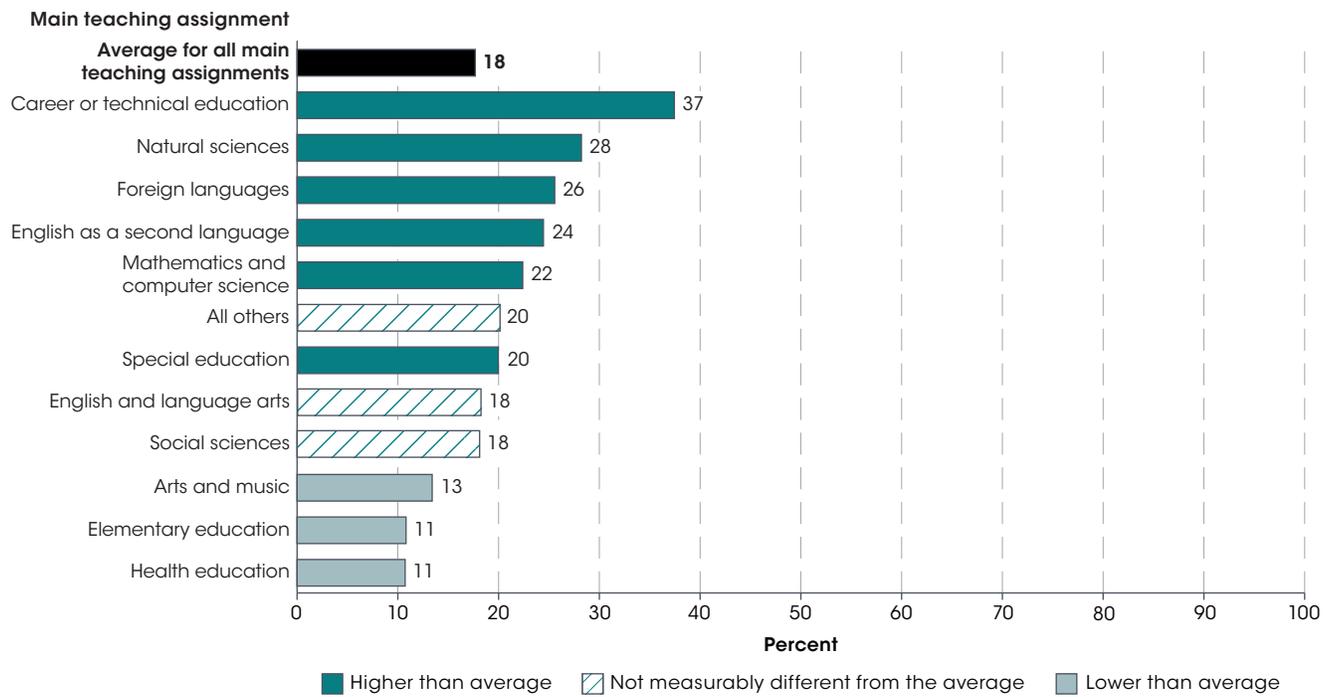


<sup>1</sup> Other includes caring for other family members, military service, unemployed and seeking work, and retired from another job.  
 NOTE: Includes only those teachers whose first year of teaching was between 2011–12 and 2015–16. Teachers were asked whether they entered teaching through an alternative route to certification program, which is a program that was designed to expedite the transition of nonteachers to a teaching career (for example, a state, district, or university alternative route to certification program). Data are based on a head count of full-time and part-time teachers rather than on the number of full-time-equivalent teachers.  
 SOURCE: U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, National Teacher and Principal Survey (NTPS), “Public School Teacher Data File,” 2015–16. See *Digest of Education Statistics 2017*, table 209.24.

Public school teachers’ prior work experiences also differed between those who entered teaching through an alternative route to certification program and those who entered through a traditional route. For teachers whose first year of teaching was between school years 2011–12 and 2015–16, NTPS collected data on their main activity the year before they started teaching. Over half (57 percent) of traditional route teachers were students at a college or university the year before they began teaching, compared to 24 percent of alternative route teachers. A greater percentage of traditional route teachers also reported that they were substitute teachers prior to their first year of teaching (15 percent) than did alternative route teachers (13 percent). In contrast, the following activities were more commonly reported among

alternative route teachers than among traditional route teachers: working in a field outside of education (30 vs. 9 percent), working in education but not as a teacher (23 vs. 13 percent), and teaching at a college or university (3 vs. 1 percent). There was no measurable difference between alternative and traditional route teachers in the percentage who reported teaching in a preschool the year before they began teaching at the K–12 level (2 and 3 percent, respectively). Two percent of traditional route teachers and 5 percent of alternative route teachers reported that their main activity the year before teaching was caring for family members, serving in the military, seeking work while unemployed, or being retired from another job (these four activities are combined as “other” in figure 2).

**Figure 4. Percentage of public elementary and secondary school teachers who had entered teaching through an alternative route to certification program, by main teaching assignment: 2015–16**

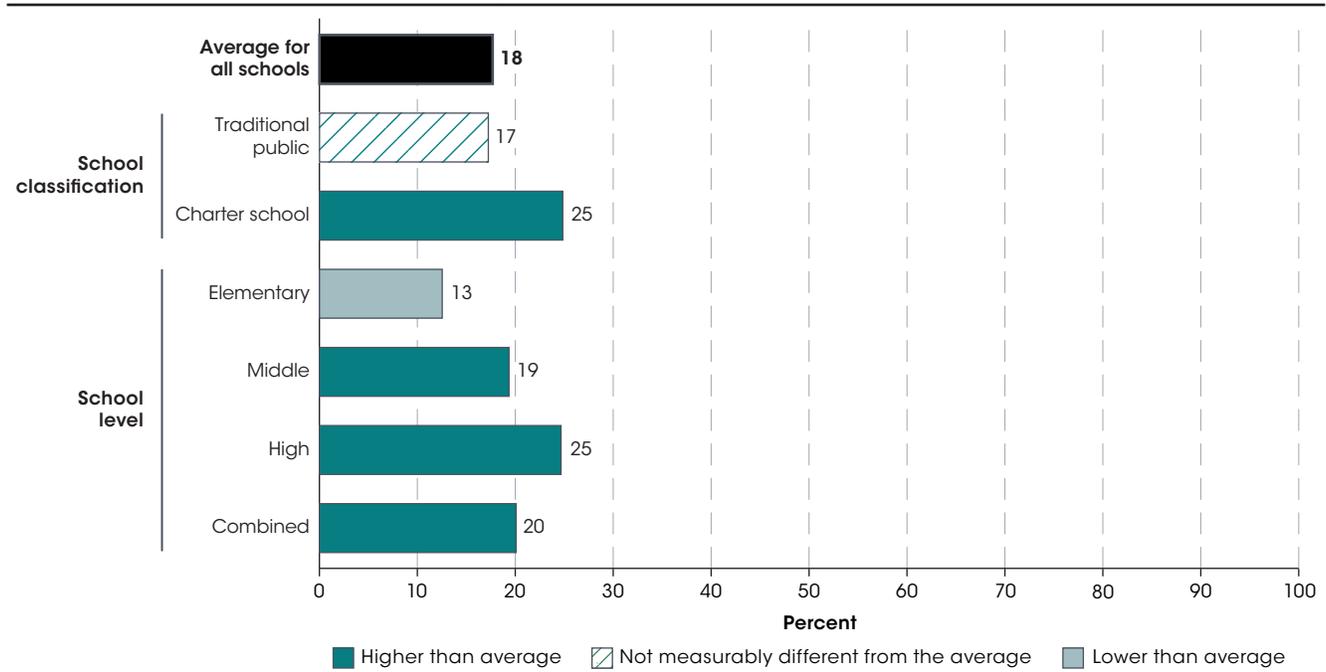


NOTE: Teachers were asked whether they entered teaching through an alternative route to certification program, which is a program that was designed to expedite the transition of nonteachers to a teaching career (for example, a state, district, or university alternative route to certification program). Data are based on a head count of full-time and part-time teachers rather than on the number of full-time-equivalent teachers.  
 SOURCE: U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, National Teacher and Principal Survey (NTPS), "Public School Teacher Data File," 2015–16. See *Digest of Education Statistics 2017*, table 209.24.

Data from NTPS can also be used to examine how the percentage of alternative route teachers varies by subject taught and school characteristics. On average, 18 percent of all public school teachers in 2015–16 reported that they had entered the teaching profession through an alternative route to certification program. The percentage of teachers who entered through an alternative route was higher than average for teachers whose main teaching assignment was career or technical education (37 percent), natural sciences (28 percent), foreign languages (26 percent),

English as a second language (24 percent), mathematics and computer science (22 percent), and special education (20 percent). The percentage of teachers who entered through an alternative route was lower than average for teachers whose main teaching assignment was arts and music (13 percent), elementary education (11 percent), and health education (11 percent). The percentages of English/language arts and social sciences teachers (both 18 percent) who entered through an alternative route were not measurably different from the average.

**Figure 5. Percentage of public elementary and secondary school teachers who had entered teaching through an alternative route to certification program, by school classification and level: 2015–16**

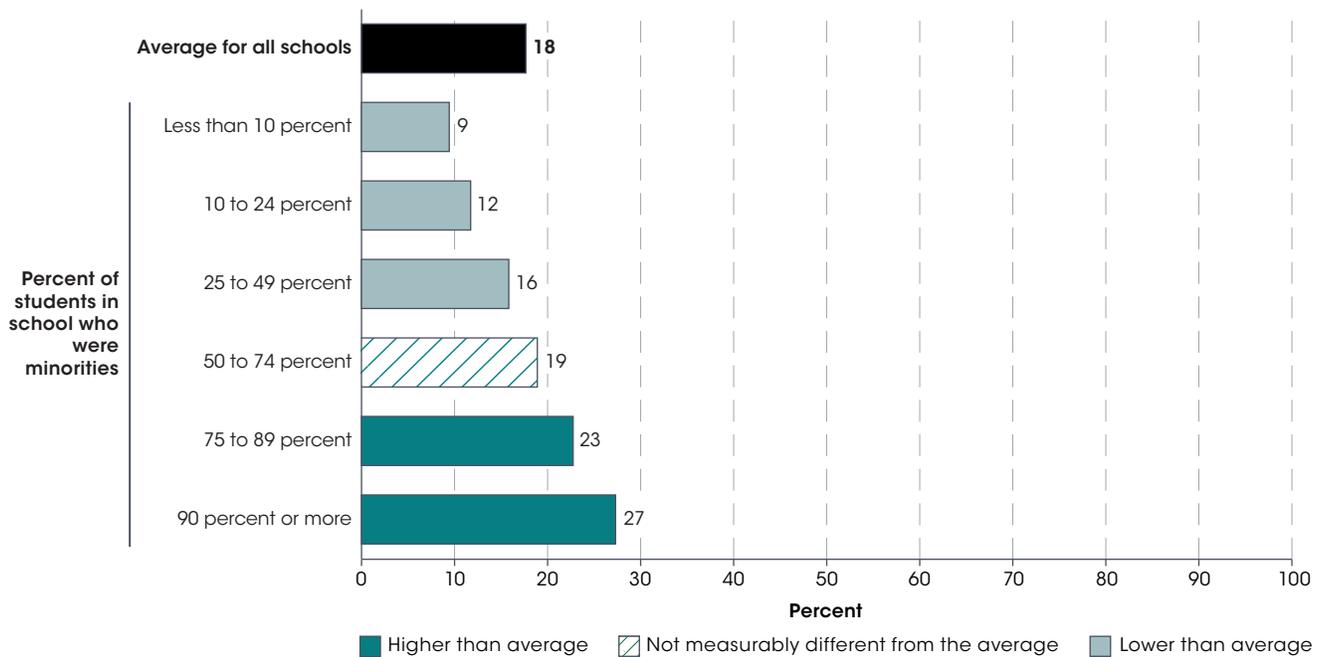


NOTE: Teachers were asked whether they entered teaching through an alternative route to certification program, which is a program that was designed to expedite the transition of nonteachers to a teaching career (for example, a state, district, or university alternative route to certification program). Data are based on a head count of full-time and part-time teachers rather than on the number of full-time-equivalent teachers. SOURCE: U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, National Teacher and Principal Survey (NTPS), "Public School Teacher Data File," 2015–16. See *Digest of Education Statistics 2017*, table 209.24.

In 2015–16, the prevalence of alternative route teachers also varied between charter schools and traditional public schools and among elementary, middle, secondary, and combined schools. The percentage of public school teachers who entered teaching through an alternative route to certification program was higher for charter schools (25 percent) than for traditional public schools

(17 percent). By school level, the percentage of teachers who entered through an alternative route was highest for high schools (25 percent). Lower percentages of teachers at combined elementary and secondary schools (20 percent), middle schools (19 percent), and elementary schools (13 percent) entered through an alternative route to certification program.

**Figure 6. Percentage of public elementary and secondary school teachers who had entered teaching through an alternative route to certification program, by percentage of racial/ethnic minority students in school: 2015–16**

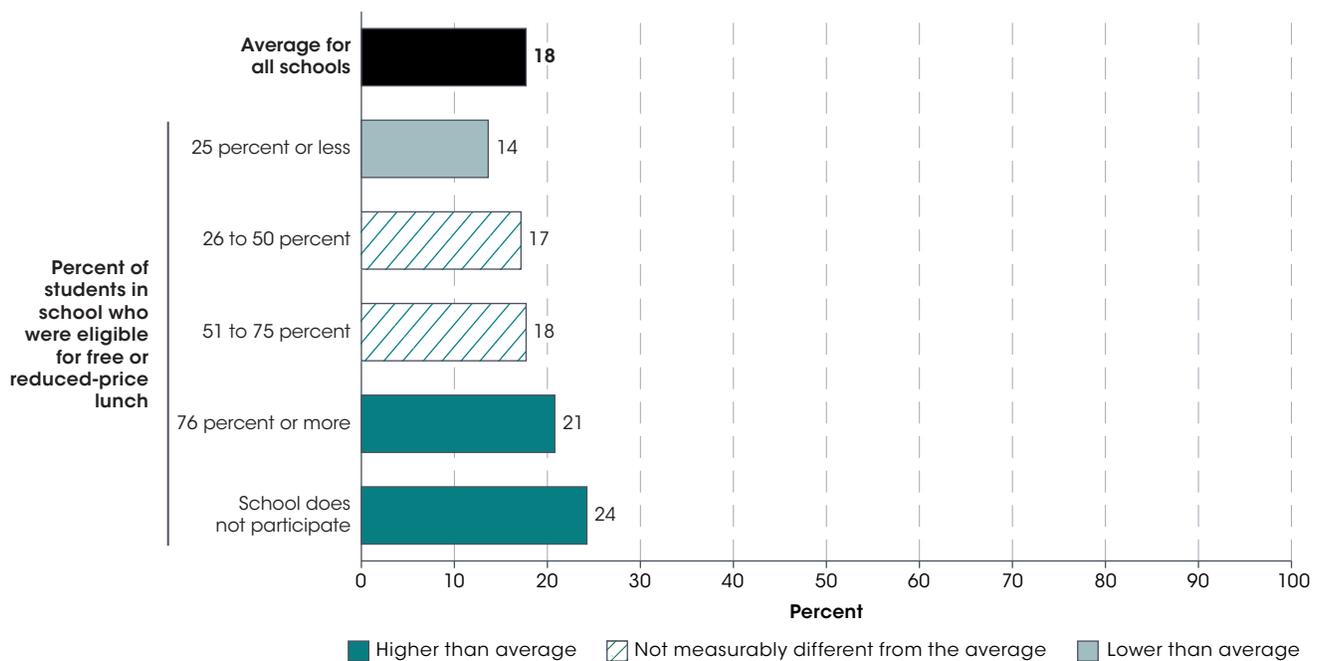


NOTE: Excludes the 7 percent of teachers for whom the percentage of racial/ethnic minority enrollment in the school was not available. Minority enrollment is the combined enrollment of students who are Black, Hispanic, Asian, Pacific Islander, American Indian/Alaska Native, and of Two or more races. Teachers were asked whether they entered teaching through an alternative route to certification program, which is a program that was designed to expedite the transition of nonteachers to a teaching career (for example, a state, district, or university alternative route to certification program). Data are based on a head count of full-time and part-time teachers rather than on the number of full-time-equivalent teachers.  
 SOURCE: U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, National Teacher and Principal Survey (NTPS), "Public School Teacher Data File," 2015–16. See *Digest of Education Statistics 2017*, table 209.24.

In 2015–16, public schools in which at least three-quarters of students were racial/ethnic minorities had percentages of alternative route teachers that were higher than the national average of 18 percent. Among schools with 75 to 89 percent minority enrollment, 23 percent of teachers had entered teaching through an alternative route to certification program. Among schools with 90 percent or more minority enrollment, 27 percent of teachers had entered teaching through an alternative route. In

contrast, the percentages of alternative route teachers were lower than average in schools where less than half of students were minorities, including schools with less than 10 percent minority enrollment (9 percent alternative route teachers), schools with 10 to 24 percent minority enrollment (12 percent alternative route teachers), and schools with 25 to 49 percent minority enrollment (16 percent alternative route teachers).

**Figure 7. Percentage of public elementary and secondary school teachers who had entered teaching through an alternative route to certification program, by percentage of students in school who were eligible for free or reduced-price lunch: 2015–16**



NOTE: For more information on free or reduced-price lunch eligibility and its relationship to poverty, see the *Forum Guide to Alternative Measures of Socioeconomic Status in Education Data Systems*. Teachers were asked whether they entered teaching through an alternative route to certification program, which is a program that was designed to expedite the transition of nonteachers to a teaching career (for example, a state, district, or university alternative route to certification program). Data are based on a head count of full-time and part-time teachers rather than on the number of full-time-equivalent teachers. SOURCE: U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, National Teacher and Principal Survey (NTPS), "Public School Teacher Data File," 2015–16. See *Digest of Education Statistics 2017*, table 209.24.

The percentage of alternative route teachers also varied by school poverty level, as measured using the percentage of students in the school who were eligible for free or reduced-price lunch (FRPL) under the National School Lunch Program. While the FRPL data have a number of limitations, they are a widely used proxy for student poverty.<sup>5</sup> In this indicator, high-poverty schools are defined as public schools where 76 percent or more of the students are eligible for FRPL, and low-poverty schools

are defined as public schools where 25 percent or less of the students are eligible for FRPL. In 2015–16, high-poverty schools had a higher than average percentage of alternative route teachers (21 percent), and low-poverty schools had a lower than average percentage of alternative route teachers (14 percent). Schools that did not participate in the free or reduced-price lunch program also had a higher than average percentage of alternative route teachers (24 percent).

**Endnotes:**

<sup>1</sup> Data are based on a head count of full-time and part-time teachers rather than on the number of full-time-equivalent teachers. All states except Alaska offered alternative route to certification programs in 2015. Program providers varied widely from state to state, including school districts, colleges and universities, and nonprofit and for-profit organizations. For more information, see National Council on Teacher Quality. (2015). *State Policy Yearbook Database: 2015*. Washington, DC: Author. Retrieved February 13, 2018, from <https://www.nctq.org/yearbook/home>.

<sup>2</sup> Woods, J.R. (2016). *Mitigating Teacher Shortages: Alternative Teacher Certification* (Teacher Shortage Series Policy Brief). Denver, CO: Education Commission of the States. Retrieved

February 13, 2018, from <https://www.ecs.org/mitigating-teacher-shortages-alternative-teacher-certification/>.

<sup>3</sup> For more information on the number of degrees awarded in the field of education, see indicators [Undergraduate Degree Fields](#) and [Graduate Degree Fields](#).

<sup>4</sup> Aragon, S. (2016). *Teacher Shortages: What We Know* (Teacher Shortage Series Policy Brief). Denver, CO: Education Commission of the States. Retrieved February 13, 2018, <https://www.ecs.org/teacher-shortages/>.

<sup>5</sup> For more information on eligibility for free or reduced-price lunch and its relationship to poverty, see the *Forum Guide to Alternative Measures of Socioeconomic Status in Education Data Systems*.

**Reference tables:** *Digest of Education Statistics 2017*, table 209.24

**Related indicators and resources:** [Characteristics of Public School Teachers](#); [Teacher Turnover: Stayers, Movers, and Leavers](#) [*web-only*]

**Glossary:** Combined school, Elementary school, Free or reduced-price lunch, National School Lunch Program, Public school or institution, Racial/ethnic group, Secondary school