

## Results in Brief:

# Prevalence of Teachers Without Full State Certification and Variation Across Schools and States

December 2016

Across the nation, uncertified teachers represent a very small percentage of the teaching workforce in public elementary and secondary schools. However, research has shown that student access to certified teachers varies across districts within states, across schools within districts, or across classrooms within schools, and that teachers who are not fully certified may be disproportionately assigned to teach students with greater needs. In order to better understand this issue, Congress directed the U.S. Department of Education (in the Managers' Statement accompanying the fiscal year 2016 education appropriations bill) to provide information on the extent to which certain student subgroups are taught by teachers who are not fully certified, including students with disabilities, English learners (ELs), students in rural areas, students from low-income families, and students of color. Because national data on the certification of individual students' teachers are not consistently available, this report uses school-level data on uncertified teachers from the Civil Rights Data Collection (CRDC) for the 2013–14 school year to examine the extent to which *schools with high proportions of certain types of students and schools located in rural and urban areas* have teachers who are not fully certified.

## STUDY QUESTIONS

1. What percentage of teachers is not fully certified — overall and in urban and rural schools, and in schools with high proportions of students of color, students from low-income families, English learners, and students with disabilities?
2. How does the percentage of teachers who are not fully certified vary across schools and states? Are they more prevalent in high-poverty schools; rural schools; urban schools; or schools with high proportions of students of color, English learners, or students with disabilities?
3. What proportion of schools has teachers who are not fully certified? How many have relatively high percentages of such teachers? What proportion of students attends such schools?

## STUDY DESIGN

This report uses school-level data from the CRDC for the 2013–14 school year, together with demographic data from the Common Core of Data (CCD) for the same year, to examine the extent to which *schools with high proportions of certain types of students and schools in rural and urban areas* have teachers who are not fully certified. This report relies on school-level data, rather than the student-level data requested by Congress, because data that link teacher certification data to specific courses and students are not currently available across all states or in comparable specifications. Data from the CRDC include numbers of teachers who are not fully certified, total numbers of teachers, total student enrollment (overall and by race/ethnicity), and enrollment of ELs and students with disabilities. The CRDC data were combined with CCD data on numbers of students eligible for free or reduced-price lunch and school locale codes.

## Highlights

- Although all states employed some teachers who were not fully certified, these teachers made up a small proportion of all teachers (1.7 percent).
- The average percentage of teachers who were not fully certified was 3.1 percent in schools with high proportions of students of color, 2.9 percent in high-poverty schools, 2.9 percent in urban schools, 2.6 percent in schools with high proportions of ELs, 1.8 percent in schools with high proportions of students with disabilities, and 1.0 percent in rural schools.
- In a majority (35) of the states, less than 2 percent of all teachers were not fully certified. However, 14 states had at least one school type in which 5 percent or more of teachers were not fully certified.
- About 15 percent of all schools employed teachers who were not fully certified; in those schools, teachers who were not fully certified usually accounted for less than 15 percent of teachers in the school.
- Approximately 5 percent of all schools had more than 10 percent of teachers who were not fully certified.
- Over three-fourths of all students, overall and for each student subgroup examined, were enrolled in schools with no uncertified teachers. The distribution of students by school percentage of uncertified teachers was similar to the distribution of schools by percentage of uncertified teachers.

## KEY FINDINGS

Across the 50 states and the District of Columbia, 1.7 percent of all teachers were not fully certified. The average percentage of teachers who were not fully certified was 3.1 percent for schools with high proportions of students of color, 2.9 percent each for high-poverty and urban schools, 2.6 percent for schools with high proportions of ELs, 1.8 percent for schools with high proportions of students with disabilities, and 1.0 percent for rural schools (Table 1).

**Table 1. Percentage of uncertified teachers, by school type: 2013–14**

Type of school	Percentage uncertified
All schools	1.7
High-poverty schools	2.9
Schools with 75%+ students of color	3.1
Schools with 20%+ English learners	2.6
Schools with 20%+ students with disabilities	1.8
Urban schools	2.9
Rural schools	1.0

In 35 of the 51 jurisdictions, less than 2 percent of all teachers were not fully certified. Similarly, in a majority of states, less than 2 percent of teachers were not fully certified in rural schools (41 states), schools with high proportions of students with disabilities (36 states), schools with high proportions of ELs (30 states), and high-poverty schools (29 states). The same was not true for states' urban schools (24 states) or schools with high proportions of students of color (22 states).

Teachers who were not fully certified represented 5 percent or more of all teachers in Arizona, Colorado, the District of Columbia, and Montana. More than 10 percent of teachers were not fully certified in Colorado (11 percent) and the District of Columbia (18 percent).

**Table 2. Number of states by percentage of uncertified teachers, overall and by school type: 2013–14**

Type of school	Zero	>0 to <1%	1 to <2%	2 to <5%	5% or more
All schools	0	23	12	12	4
High-poverty schools	2	15	12	17	5
75%+ students of color	5	8	9	19	8
20%+ English learners	2	19	9	14	6
20%+ students with disabilities	1	23	12	8	7
Urban schools	2	16	6	18	9
Rural schools	0	29	12	8	1

Approximately 85 percent of all schools had no uncertified teachers and another 5 percent of schools had more than 10 percent of teachers who were not fully certified (Table 3).

There were similar distributions of uncertified teachers across high-poverty schools, schools with high percentages of students of color, and urban schools. The percentages of schools with no uncertified teachers were 78 percent, 76 percent, and 79 percent, respectively. Furthermore, 8 or 9 percent of schools in each of the three school categories had 10 percent or more of teachers who were not fully certified.

Eighty-two percent of schools with high proportions of ELs and 85 percent of schools with high proportions of students

with disabilities had no uncertified teachers. In 6 percent of schools in both of these categories, 10 percent or more of teachers were not fully certified.

Rural schools were most likely to have no uncertified teachers. Eighty-nine percent of schools had no uncertified teachers and 3 percent of schools had 10 percent or more teachers who were not fully certified.

**Table 3. Percentage distribution of schools by percentage of uncertified teachers, overall and by school type: 2013–14**

Type of school	Zero	>0 to <5%	5 to <10%	10 to <15%	15% or more
All schools	85	7	4	2	3
High-poverty schools	78	8	5	3	5
75%+ students of color	76	9	6	3	6
20%+ English learners	82	8	4	2	4
20%+ students with disabilities	85	6	4	2	4
Urban schools	79	9	4	2	6
Rural schools	89	5	3	1	2

More than three-fourths of students, overall and for each subgroup examined, were enrolled in schools with no uncertified teachers (Table 4). The distribution of students by school percentage of uncertified teachers was similar to the distribution of schools shown in Table 3.

**Table 4. Percentage distribution of students, by school-level percentage of uncertified teachers, overall and by student subgroup: 2013–14**

Student subgroup	Zero	>0 to <5%	5 to <10%	10 to <15%	15% or more
All students	80	12	4	2	2
Students eligible for FRPL	79	12	5	2	3
Students of color	76	13	5	2	3
English learners	79	11	4	2	3
Students with disabilities	80	11	4	2	2
Students in urban schools	77	13	4	2	4
Students in rural schools	85	9	3	1	1

## STUDY LIMITATIONS

Although the congressional requestors had envisioned a study of the extent to which certain subgroups of students are being taught by teachers without full state certification, this report cannot directly address that question because it is based on school-level, rather than student-level, data. In addition, findings that suggest differences in students' access to certified teachers may not mean that student achievement is affected by those differences. For example, rigorous evidence does not indicate that teachers who are enrolled in programs that provide alternative routes to certification are less effective than fully certified teachers. Finally, the available national data on uncertified teachers do not include data on other types of credentials that might be appropriate for staff who provide specialized instruction.

## ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

The complete report is available online at [www2.ed.gov/about/offices/list/opepd/ppss/reports.html](http://www2.ed.gov/about/offices/list/opepd/ppss/reports.html).