

# A new pathway for ESPs to become teachers

By Dr. Robert Goodman

Educational support professionals (ESPs) have a proven track record of working well with students, inspiring and motivating them. However, there are far too many cases in which there is no practical way for an ESP to move into the role of a teacher.

At a time when New Jersey needs many more teachers, especially teachers of science and mathematics, we need to create pathways for those who love working with children to become teachers. This was partly accomplished when the New Jersey Department of Education recently approved the New Jersey Center for Teaching and Learning (NJCTL) to offer eight new alternate route programs that lead to initial certification in physics, chemistry, biology or mathematics.

Four of these programs follow the “traditional” alternate route, which require a degree (or 30 credits) in the subject and a GPA of at least 3.0. While these programs open the door to many prospective teachers, they do not meet the needs of people whose GPA falls below that minimum or who did not major in science or mathematics.

## Shortage area alternate route programs

The other four programs are designated as shortage area alternate routes. These programs take a revolutionary approach that opens opportunities to become a science or mathematics teacher to anyone with a bachelor’s degree in any subject, with any GPA. That means that a person’s choice of major, or the GPA they earned from a bachelor’s degree they may have earned long ago, need no longer hold them back.

NJCTL also has options for ESPs who would like to become teachers but do not yet have a bachelor’s degree. NJCTL has partners that provide fast, inexpensive pathways to earn a bachelor’s degree online, opening ESP

access to NJCTL shortage area alternate route programs.

These shortage area alternate route programs are modeled after NJCTL’s successful add-on endorsement programs. Those programs have made NJCTL a national leader in producing new science and mathematics teachers—425 in the last decade.

NJCTL add-on endorsement programs have proven successful in teaching current teachers of any subject the content of science and mathematics and how to teach it. The courses in those programs are all completely online and asynchronous, so candidates can start anytime and proceed at their own pace. They assume no prior knowledge of the new subject area; everything teachers need to know is taught within the program.

The courses in these add-on endorsement programs are just what is needed in the new shortage area alternate route programs. Marrying together existing shortage area regulations and these proven courses led to this new approach to alternate route.

## How it works

Candidates take online, asynchronous coursework to learn the subject and pass the required Praxis exams. Their GPA in this 15+ credit post-baccalaureate program replaces the GPA from their bachelor’s degree, so if they earn a 3.0 or better, that former GPA obstacle has been eliminated.

Then, they get their certificate of eligibility (CE) and take the NJCTL teaching methods course to meet the requirement for a 50-hour preservice course, while looking for a job. Once they pass that course and have a job, they enter the classroom.

All the work they did to earn the CE counts toward their remaining required 350 hours, which they complete with additional asynchronous, online courses to learn how to teach their subject at the Advanced Placement level. They are teaching—and earning the salary and benefits of a teacher—while completing the program.

Upon completing their program, they are also awarded a Master of Science in Teaching and Learning (MSTL)

*(continues on Page 34)*

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# Meet two ESPs on the path to becoming teachers

## Robert Kershenblatt

*Robert Kershenblatt is paraprofessional in a fifth-grade classroom in Galloway Township Public Schools. He is enrolled in the Shortage-Area Alternate Route Mathematics program. He loves his district and hopes to be able to teach middle school math next school year. He has his certificate of eligibility for the elementary level, but he never converted it to a provisional. He started his first class with NJCTL in September—he was the first to enroll in an NJCTL alternate route program. He writes:*

Even as adults, we need a little encouragement sometimes. That's what I found so striking about NJCTL. There is so much support. Everyone is quick to answer questions, and there is clear communication about what is expected and what I need to do to succeed. It feels like everyone is rooting for me.

I enjoy the challenge of learning new problem-solving methods. I now think about math completely differently. Not only am I mastering the content, but I am discovering new ways to present it to students.

When I first started, I was worried about what kind of student I would be. But I realized that being a student is very fulfilling at this stage in life. I am much more focused on what I want to achieve, and this program is helping me get there.

Growing up, I never really enjoyed math and just slogged through it. I think struggling students could benefit from my non-math background. I can empathize with them because I struggled with it myself. I love teaching, and I am excited to apply my newly acquired skills.

I've been a classroom assistant in elementary school for many years, but I also tutor for middle and high school students. Becoming math certified opens up so many options for me in my education career.

This program is excellent for people who haven't been in the learning game for a while. Online learning

is new to me, but the NJCTL instructors were there to help until I got comfortable with the process. I like that I can complete the courses at my own pace and take control of the learning environment.

## Debra Steinbrecher

*Debra Steinbrecher is a paraprofessional in an Early Childhood Center in Camden. She had been a nurse outside of public education. She enrolled in the NJCTL Shortage-Area Alternate Route Biology program at the end of January. The Camden Education Fund is paying 80% of the costs and the Camden City school district is paying the other 20%. She writes:*

My background is in nursing. I knew I wanted to teach, but I didn't know which way to go. I wanted to work with an older group of students to share my interest in science and show them possible career paths. I was so happy to find this program.

When I first began, I thought, "Can I do this? It's been so long since I've been in school." But I'm interested in biology, and once I started, I knew this is where I wanted to be.

I really like how the courses are laid out, and how the information is broken down. All the sessions are bite-sized, so you can take it in a little at a time. I love that you can take quizzes to ensure you know the material before moving on. You never feel like you are doing it all on your own.

I am the type of learner who prefers hearing a lesson rather than reading exclusively on my own. With this program, I can listen to the videos and take notes. I can play them back anytime and take quizzes to test my understanding.

Definitely check out NJCTL. I have taken part in other programs where you are doing a lot of reading, and you feel like you are all on your own. Not with NJCTL. Everyone has been helpful, and I never feel uncomfortable asking questions.

degree in their chosen subject (Note: The MSTL Biology is pending approval). NJCTL is licensed by the Office of the Secretary of Higher Education and is currently seeking accreditation.

The science programs are 37 credits, and the mathematics program is 38 credits. Due to NJCTL's low tuition rate of \$180 per graduate credit, the science programs, with master's degrees, cost \$6,660. The mathematics program, with a master's degree, costs \$6,840.

NJEA members receive a 20% discount, reducing the tuition rate to \$144 per credit and the program costs to \$5,328 for certification with an MSTL degree in a science and \$5,472 for certification with an MSTL degree in mathematics.

NJCTL can keep its tuition rates low because of NJEA's support and a commitment to focusing spending on improving courses and programs, nothing else. As a nonprofit online institution, NJCTL does not need to own facilities, have sports teams, pay for landscaping and maintenance, or any of the overhead that is typical for a brick and mortar institution. Consequently, all of NJCTL's spending is focused on programs to place more teachers in more classrooms. 🏠

The New Jersey Center for Teaching and Learning (NJCTL) is a nonprofit organization that provides a simple, scalable solution for our nation's STEM teacher shortage and the social injustice that comes from depriving underserved students access to STEM education.

NJCTL was founded in 2006 by NJEA. To learn more, visit [njctl.org](http://njctl.org).

## ESPs

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