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Monday, April 19, 2010

Alternative master's path stirs debate

The state of New York is set to decide on a plan that would allow alternative groups like Teach for America to create their own master's programs for teaching. Amy Scott reports.

TEXT OF STORY

KAI RYSSDAL: There are hundreds of college and university programs out there teaching people how to be teachers. Some of those programs do a fine job. Others don't. So New York state is set to decide tomorrow on a different way: letting alternative groups like Teach for America create their own master's programs.



Teach For America logo
(teachforamerica.org)

From the Marketplace Education Desk, Amy Scott reports.

AMY SCOTT: New York is one of just a handful of states that require teachers to have a master's degree before they can be fully certified.

Timothy Daly with the New Teacher Project says that's created a monopoly for teachers' colleges.

Tomorrow the New York State Board of Regents may vote to chip away at that monopoly by allowing alternative groups like Daly's to offer master's programs.

TIMOTHY DALY: The right to be the exclusive granters of master's degrees, in a state that requires master's degrees, that was a very lucrative right that they're proposing to take away.

But Daly says the New York proposal isn't the answer.

He says it would force any new program to act a lot like the old ones, with heavy coursework and Ph.D. requirements for faculty.

DALY: It's a step in the right direction in terms of making more things possible, but it's not really alternative.

Teach for America sends recent college graduates for two-year teaching stints in some of the country's toughest schools. The group says it may start a master's program. That's got officials from traditional schools of education nervous.

Mary Gresham is dean of the graduate school of education at the University at Buffalo, SUNY. She says teaching colleges are unfairly criticized for favoring theory over practical training.

MARY GRESHAM: Theory certainly plays a role. But it's certainly not the sole source of the expertise that our graduates actually accumulate when they're with us.

Those graduates spend upwards of \$16,000 for a two-year degree program. Alternative teacher certification can cost less than \$4,000.

In New York, I'm Amy Scott for Marketplace.

COMMENTS

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By Jonathan Lovelace
From Milan, MI, 04/19/2010

A very good question to ask is whether these "alternative paths" would be any better than the old way on the problem of grade inflation. The blog of the Center for College Affordability and Productivity recently cited some research showing that the average grade in education programs at some, and I think they said many if not most, colleges is "A." If a program passes most students with As, it's just a meaningless hoop for prospective teachers to jump through, rather than a useful screen to improve the quality of those candidates who end up actually teaching.

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