

Who Wants to be a Teacher?

APM Reports Transcript

## Billboard

**Alex Baumhardt:** From American public media...

**Kristin Lipe:** I never thought we'd get to the point to where we didn't have people banging our doors down to come and teach.

Even before the coronavirus pandemic, many schools in the U.S. were struggling to find teachers.

**Richard Ingersoll:** It's really not the case that we produce too few teachers, it's that we lose too many.

**Desiree Carver-Thomas:** Nine out of 10 teachers hired are hired to replace a teacher who has left the profession.

**Ingersoll:** You can bring in hundreds of thousands of new people, but if they don't stick around, you won't solve the problem.

**Jannet Roman:** I don't think that after this year, I will continue to teach in my district.

All this churn means more classrooms are headed up by beginner teachers, substitute teachers, emergency teachers. And teachers from new, for-profit teacher training companies.

**Dave Saba:** We went into Alabama because they called us and they said, "We need help, you know, can you come help us recruit more teachers?"

Coming up, "Who Wants to be a Teacher?" from APM Reports. First, this news.

## Part 1

**Lipe:** Hi guys, keep going. You're good. You look so beautiful and sparkly today. Your hair looks so pretty today. How are you, ladybug? You can have a hug, yes.

It's Wednesday morning at Ranchwood Elementary school in Yukon, Oklahoma. Principal Kristin Lipe is walking the halls.

**Lipe:** And as we're walking through, I have seniors from the class of 2021 that have come back to visit their elementary school today, and so they're out in the hallways and visiting with their former teachers as we speak.

It's the last week of school, the end of May, and it's a tradition for graduating seniors to come back and visit their elementary school. So, the class of 2021 comes back to see the little desks they used to sit at and the teachers they still remember. Kristin Lipe passes some of the seniors in the hall.

**Lipe:** What's the best school? Ranchwood!

Ranchwood is in a suburb of Oklahoma City, and it's the kind of place teachers want to teach. It's got above-average test scores and small classes. Kristin Lipe's been principal here for 20 years. In the past, she says she didn't have any trouble hiring. But this year she's got a problem. Five people are retiring and she's worried about replacing them.

**Lipe:** I'll tell you; I've been doing this a long time. And I never thought I would, we'd get to the point to where we didn't have people banging our doors down to come and teach.

It's a huge problem in Oklahoma: Not enough people want to be teachers.

**Lipe:** Used to be we were so selective, we got to choose who we wanted and send the rest to other schools. Now we are out searching our community, other surrounding communities. I'm always thinking who is out there, when I do have a position come open, Who am I going out to snatch and grab?

One thing the state is doing is letting districts hire people on "emergency certificates." That means they can hire people to teach who don't have a four-year degree in education or a teaching certificate.

A decade ago, Oklahoma issued 32 emergency teaching certifications for the whole state, for an entire school year.

And then the number exploded.

**News clip:** Districts across the state continue to say that they're having an increasingly hard time finding teachers to fill many positions.

**News clip:** Emergency certifications allow someone without formal training to step into the classroom and teach.

**News clip:** A teacher can get to teach with only a bachelor's degree. They don't have to have any training in how to be a teacher. They don't have to have a content background.

**News clip:** The use of emergency certified teachers has become a new normal for Oklahoma schools.

**News clip:** Last year more than 3,000 emergency certificates were issued in Oklahoma.

From 32 a year, to more than 3,000. The certificates are good for two years, but just this last fall, the governor approved a measure allowing people to continue teaching on them indefinitely as long as their school district proves they have no other option. There are thousands of people teaching in Oklahoma schools with emergency certificates.

(Music)

One reason for the teacher shortage is that colleges of education in Oklahoma aren't turning out as many newly minted education majors. Over the last decade in Oklahoma, the number of

people training to become teachers has dropped by 80 percent. But part of the problem is that people who do go into teaching don't stay.

Teacher turnover's especially high in Oklahoma.

Recently, the state's been losing about 10% of its public-school teachers every single year. And as teachers keep quitting, and schools keep replacing them, that's meant changes in WHO is teaching now. And it's not just Oklahoma.

**Ingersoll:** there's been so much hiring that there's just larger and larger numbers of beginners.

Richard Ingersoll is a professor of education and sociology at the University of Pennsylvania Graduate School of Education. He studies America's teaching force.

**Ingersoll:** the modal The most common teacher in the late 1980s, was a 15-year veteran. And then you had -- some teachers had less than 15 years experience and some teachers had more. Today, the modal The most common teacher is someone in their first year.

(Theme music)

This is an APM Reports documentary, Who Wants to be a Teacher? I'm Alex Baumhardt.

Over the next hour, we'll be looking at what's happening in many American schools that's leading so many teachers to quit. And what that means for schools - and for students - and for teachers. The constant churn costs schools a lot of money. It forces kids to make do with substitute teachers, inexperienced teachers, emergency teachers. And it's opened the door for a new kind of business: For-profit companies that offer online training programs to people who want to become teachers but who don't want to spend the time and the money to get an education degree. We'll look at one for-profit company that has placed thousands of new teachers in classrooms - and ask whether that's been good or bad for students.

When I started looking into teacher shortages, here's something that surprised me: The problem isn't that the United States isn't producing enough teachers. Some STATES aren't producing enough, especially teachers who can teach specific subjects like math or teach special education. But nationally, teacher preparation programs are turning out plenty of people. The main problem is, once many of them become teachers, they don't stay.

Nearly half of them will leave within their first five years on the job according to Ingersoll.

The exit rate for teachers in the United States is about double what it is in countries like Canada and Finland. Exit rates for new teachers in the U.S. are about on par with exit rates for new police officers and are even higher than exit rates for nurses - two high pressure, high stakes jobs that teaching is often compared to.

One reason is that the job is tough - and of course in 2020, it got even tougher.

**Roman:** This is Jannet, Today is August 6, and we are hosting our save our schools protest and march to demand that the Washoe County School District does not open schools yet.

Jannet Roman is 27, and an English teacher at Sparks High School in Reno, Nevada. She made this recording in the summer of 2020, before school started in Reno. Teachers were demanding that schools stay closed - to help prevent the spread of the coronavirus.

**Roman:** Wait, wait, before it's too late!" Save our schools!

She and I checked in periodically over the last year. When school started in the middle of August 2020, she told me the teachers lost their battle to teach remotely. They had to go back to their buildings.

**Roman:** it's been just a little over a month now about five weeks that we've been back in school. However, we've only had one full week of school where we were in class every day. Because of the fires from Northern California, you know, bringing in the smoke into northern Nevada, we've had a ton of smoke days. So, all last week, we were doing distance learning, because the smoke is so bad in northern Nevada.

Roman taught from the apartment she shares with her husband. The distance learning was challenging. Sparks High, where she teaches, is a Title 1 school. More than half of the students qualify for free and reduced lunch - which is another way of saying that a lot of the students come from low-income families. Almost a quarter of the students are English Language Learners.

**Roman:** truly, my students have been amazing, I feel honored to have them as students and there is a lot that my students are facing.

Roman says many of her students live in multi-generational homes and are the children of frontline workers.

**Roman:** they are facing a lot of issues outside of school from being houseless to struggling to afford Wi Fi. So, to be able to have this community that we've built in our classroom really has been wonderful.

Sparks is the kind of school that tends to have trouble keeping teachers; Nationwide, shortages are most pervasive in high poverty urban schools, and in rural schools.

In December, Jannet said that staffing was a growing concern at Sparks. Throughout the year at Sparks, a few teachers left, some retired early, and many more were out sick or were tending to sick family members.

**Roman:** we don't have the staffing capacity in our schools ... so that has been a huge issue in Washoe County. and right now, our state is actually going to allow substitutes to

substitute teach without a college degree so as long as you have a high school degree, they're allowing people to sign up to become a substitute.

Nearing the end of 2020, Nevada was short so many teachers that the governor did indeed allow people to work as substitute teachers with just a high school diploma. The applicants just had to pass a background check. And it wasn't just Nevada. Several other states did this too.

**Roman:** Right, put a warm body in there. But what about the learning?

(Music)

**Roman:** You know, what about the gains that our students should be making? You know, will they be making those gains?

Jannet Roman's experience at Sparks stuck out to me because she's in her fourth year. So, she's nearing the end of that five-year window, after which almost half of the teachers who started, are gone. And she's sort of the archetype of the teacher a school district should do anything to keep. She's what researchers would consider a "high quality teacher." She has a university degree in education. She's certified at the state level and in her subject area and she wanted, specifically, to teach in Washoe County.

**Roman:** I teach in the community in which I grew up. So, it's really personal for me to give my students the best education that I can, and to make sure that they are safe.

But as the school year drew to a close, she told me she was thinking about leaving.

**Roman:** I don't think that after this year, I will continue to teach in my district, which breaks my heart I love teaching. I'm passionate about teaching. It's, I feel like it's my calling, but I want to do but at what cost you know what, at what cost? I don't know it's just it feels like it definitely is making me reconsider.

(Music)

**Carver-Thomas:** There's too many teachers leaving the profession, and not enough new teachers coming in to replace them.

That's Desiree Carver-Thomas. She's a Researcher and Policy Analyst at the Learning Policy Institute, a nonprofit organization that researches education issues.

**Carver-Thomas:** So nine out of 10 teachers hired are hired to replace a teacher who has left the profession. And most of those teachers aren't leaving to retire.

And Carver-Thomas told me something that surprised me. She studied teacher turnover, and she found that the main reason teachers quit isn't how hard the job is, and it isn't low pay.

**Carver-Thomas:** the main one is administrative support. That's one of the biggest predictors of teacher turnover, when a teacher doesn't find their administrator supportive or encouraging.

Teachers talk about wanting to be taken seriously and be seen as professionals - wanting to have a voice in how their school is run. But they also want help - they want their principal to have their back with parents or when discipline issues arise. And to support their professional development.

**Carver-Thomas:** The second thing is that preparation matters. So teachers who receive the least pre-service preparation, they leave at two to three times the rate of those who received the most comprehensive preparation. And their turnover rates are especially high when they teach in school serving more students from low-income families and students of color.

Teacher preparation has changed in a lot of ways in the United States during the last 30 years -- Most teachers still come from college teacher training programs -- but fewer people are enrolling in these programs. Especially over the last decade.

And many people interested in teaching are choosing from the growing number of alternative pathways into the profession. Some of which provide less of what Desiree Carver-Thomas calls pre-service preparation. Like time student teaching under a veteran teacher in a classroom. We'll talk more about all these new teacher pipelines later in the hour. But sticking with why teachers leave...

**Carver-Thomas:** the last thing we found was that teachers and districts with the lowest salary ranges, they're more likely to leave their positions than teachers in the best paying districts.

Unsurprisingly - Pay.

(Music)

Between 1999 and 2017, Teacher pay declined in 28 states. In Arizona, Colorado, Indiana, Michigan and North Carolina, the decline has been steeper - teacher wages are down 10 to 15 percent.

Emma Garcia is an economist at the Economic Policy Institute - It's a left-leaning think tank - And she's studied teacher pay and teacher professionalization.

She says schools may be saving money by paying less -- but then they're spending money when they have to replace the teachers who leave.

**Emma Garcia:** We know that filling a teaching vacancy is very costly for the school districts, it costs about \$20,000 to fill in a vacancy to find that replacement. So through excessive attrition, we are deviating resources that could be used for a more effective

purposes. So it is costly for the students. It is costly for the teachers, but it is also costly for the education system overall, to be dealing with this crisis in the teacher labor markets.

(Music)

Estimates for the total annual cost of teacher turnover are about \$8 billion a year.

This kind of churn has gotten worse in recent years - but it has existed in many schools for decades. One reason is that the response from policymakers tends to be to treat teacher shortages as an emergency -- and to see a simple answer: recruit more teachers. Almost every presidential administration since Eisenhower has proposed some new plan to make more teachers.

**Richard Nixon:** The universities and schools for teacher training should intensify their recruitment

**George Bush:** Alternative certification and intense recruiting campaign

**Bill Clinton:** Today, I'm announcing the first ever national online teacher recruitment Clearinghouse.

But Richard Ingersoll says the politicians who are trying to fix shortages by minting more and more teachers are looking at the problem wrong.

**Ingersoll:** It's really not the case that we produce too few teachers, it's that we lose too many. In other words, the problem simply can't be solved by recruiting more people into teaching. That's been the conventional prescription for decades.

Ingersoll says there were more than enough people training to become teachers in the last 30 years. More than we needed. And even as states and districts HAVE intensified their recruitment, shortages persist.

**Ingersoll:** In other words, you can bring in hundreds of 1000s of new people, but if they don't stick around, you won't solve the problem and you'll have lost your investment. And I'm still puzzled to this day. Why? Why the durability and resilience of the conventional wisdom regarding teacher shortages when it just it's a wrong diagnosis, and it hasn't solved the problem.

(Music)

Many researchers like Richard Ingersoll will illustrate how we got here - to a huge workforce with more beginners and high turnover - by painting an image of a hose and a leaky bucket of water.

The bucket is schools. The teachers are water and the holes in the bucket represent all the reasons teachers are leaving. Rather than closing up the holes, we keep trying to crank up the amount of water blasting out of the hose.

Today, teachers with 10 or fewer years of experience constitute over half of the teaching force.

Just after the school year ended in Reno, Nevada, I talked again to teacher Jannet Roman. She's the four-year veteran who told me she was thinking about leaving.

**Roman:** I never thought that, you know, four years into my profession, I would be considering leaving.

But in June, she told me she had decided to give the district another chance. Stick it out a little longer. This past year, a lot of teachers said in surveys that they wanted to quit - but so far, the teacher exodus doesn't seem to be worse than it was before the pandemic. Quit rates among teachers tend to decline in turbulent economic times - but the next few years will be more telling. Roman says she wants to continue to advocate for her colleagues and her students, and to keep working in the community she grew up in. But she says this year made it a close call.

**Roman:** I absolutely love the community that I teach in, and this is the community that I grew up in, and I'm fortunate to be able to come back and give back to my community. So I it would be difficult for me to have to leave. However, this is the first year that I have considered it.

Coming up: in the early 2000s, Texas responded to teacher shortages by letting private companies train teachers. And the industry grew. Fast.

**Dave Saba:** we could be in 25 states tomorrow. I could be in 40 with a little bit more work. And, you know, and then all 50 states at some point in time.

You're listening to Who Wants to Be a Teacher from APM Reports.

We have more about this story on our web site – APM Reports dot org. And we have more about the struggle to keep diverse teachers - and why it's so hard to measure teacher quality - on our podcast, Educate. You can also explore our archive of education documentaries.

Support for APM Reports comes from Lumina Foundation and the Spencer Foundation.

More in a moment. This is APM, American Public Media.

## **Part 2**

From American Public Media, this is Who Wants to Be Teacher? A documentary from APM Reports. I'm Alex Baumhardt.

**Ju Gray:** a lot of people think that in order to become a teacher, you have to get an undergraduate degree in education, you do not.

This is Ju Gray. She's a teacher in Texas and this is from one of her Vlogs on YouTube.

**Gray:** I'm excited to do this video because so many people have been asking me about this, my process and how I became a teacher. I went through an alternative program route.

As an undergrad, she studied English at the University of New Orleans. She wanted to be a writer, still does, but she struggled to find work right out of college and needed some stability. She saw teaching as a way to have that for a little while. She made that video in 2018, three years ago. It has more than 40,000 views now.

**Gray:** In Texas, there are so many alternative programs. And the alternative program that I went through is Texas Teachers of Tomorrow. I applied online...

Texas Teachers of Tomorrow started as A+ Texas Teachers in 2002. It became Texas Teachers of Tomorrow in 2005. Since then, at least 48,000 people have enrolled in their online, for-profit program. And today, it's the single largest teacher training program in the state of Texas by enrollment.

And now, they're reaching beyond Texas.

(Music)

Texas Teachers of Tomorrow has become Teachers of Tomorrow and expanded into eight other states. In recent years, it's become the largest teacher training program by enrollment in the United States. Bigger than any education program at any college or university. Far bigger than nonprofit organizations like Teach for America.

It's one of a growing number of companies founded in recent years whose business model is to train people quickly and get them into a classroom - and make a profit doing it.

We wanted to know more about the kind of training the for-profits offer ... and whether they've been a good thing or a bad thing for schools and for students. We were especially curious about the biggest one, the one that makes the others look tiny: Texas Teachers of Tomorrow.

(Music)

When Ju Gray finished the Texas Teachers of Tomorrow program and started looking for work, there were a lot of job openings. Overall, Texas schools lose about 30,000 teachers every year. That means more than 10 percent of their teacher workforce either leaves their school or exits the profession entirely each year. I talked with Gray about finding her first teaching job.

**Gray:** I applied to two schools that were literally five minutes from where I was living. And they called me instantly and I got hired. I got; I think it was like about a week a week process I applied. I got the interview. And then the same week, I got hired. So it was very fast.

She'd moved to Houston on a whim, she says, and she wanted to get started teaching fast.

**Gray:** Oh, yes. It's been a crazy ride.

**Baumhardt:** If Texas teachers hadn't been there, there hadn't been an option to do it at a fast pace on your own? Do you think you would have gone back to college for a degree in education?

**Gray:** No, I would not have I would not.

**Baumhardt:** So you might not even have tried teaching?

**Gray:** Nope. If it was not this accessible and easy, I would not have done it. I wouldn't have

Texas Teachers of Tomorrow was really accessible. She completed the required 150 hours of coursework online in a month and a half.

**Gray:** what I always tell people is that it is literally on your pace. So if you want to stay up all night, like I did, you can —

(Music)

To get into the program, you have to submit your transcripts from undergrad, showing you kept at least a 2.5 GPA. You apply online and pay \$295 to get started. Once you've got your account set up, you can get started on that 150 hours of online classes. The courses are made up of videos and discussion boards and slide presentations. There's no live teaching so you can do it whenever... like Ju Gray did. On top of that, you have to do 30 hours of field-based experience - which means watching a teacher do their work in the classroom. You can do that in a real classroom, but you don't have to.

**Gray:** I did it online. So I did one Maybe like a half day in person. And then the rest I did online, I was fortunate to do them online.

Once you've completed these parts of the program, you can get a teaching job. You start leading a classroom right away.

This first year of teaching is called your "intern year," and you're officially still on probation. But you're fully in charge of the classroom. A coach from Texas Teachers comes at least five times throughout the year to observe and give feedback.

**That 30 hours of field-based experience is less than you would be required to do if you went to the University of Texas at Austin and got a traditional education degree. Students at the university co-teach for a full semester under the guidance of a veteran teacher and complete 45 hours of in-class observation and internships before graduating.**

**Charles Martinez:** If we set the standard in our College of Ed that our students would have 30 hours of pre-service experience, we shouldn't be here.

That's Charles Martinez. He's the dean at the college of education at UT Austin.

**Martinez:** And that's just an experience requirement. It says nothing about the kind of experience we Whether you need to be observed whether you're supposed to get feedback, those are not required by certification, just that you did it.

During that intern year, Texas Teachers of Tomorrow students also have to complete 120 more hours of online classes and projects. And take state certification and content area tests if they're going to teach specific subjects. And it's during that year when Texas Teachers of Tomorrow makes its real money. They'll take \$4,300 total of that first year's wages, bit by bit through paychecks over a ten-month period. Graduates in the end pay only those costs - the upfront registration cost of \$295, the \$4,300 in the first year, and any testing and certification fees from the state. This is a fraction of what it would cost to go to a university and get a bachelor's or master's degree in education. A university program could take years, at tens of thousands of dollars a year.

Ju Gray said the course work was challenging, but it was that intern year that was toughest.

She says it was one of the most difficult years of her teaching career.

**Gray:** Oh my god horrible. I hated it. Honestly. If I'm being very transparent, I hated it. I love my students; I've always been a person who believes my top priority is the kids. And so my connection with the students were great. However, the environment was not.

She says she didn't feel like she had enough support from administrators or in the classroom. She also felt overwhelmed by all the paperwork and record keeping required, all the meetings before, after and between classes. But she went to teach at a high school the next year, and she loved it.

(Music)

She's sort of fallen in love with teaching, and she seems to be good at it. She says even at the end of this last Coronavirus year, her students scored among the highest in her school on the state's standardized test called "STAAR."

**Gray:** And now that I have that skill and I've, in a sense polished it and got some experience, I wanna see where I can bring this skill to the next level somewhere else.

By the end of this last year, teaching remotely under coronavirus, she decided to take a different job working in her school district, but as an instructional specialist. Part of that job is working with teachers on areas they struggle with and helping to improve their instruction. She won't be in the classroom anymore, So her district will have to find someone to replace her.

Ju Gray says the Texas Teachers of Tomorrow program did prepare her in many ways.

**Gray:** The program, the program trained me in a sense of, I guess, behind the scenes, but I don't think anything will actually prepare you for the classroom, except for maybe substitute teaching, or getting their hands on experience that face to face, in person experience. You know, every classroom is different. Every student demographic is

different, and every day is different, you know, you may have kids that have a good day, and then you're expecting that to always be the same. And that's not the case, right? The next Monday, it could be a horrible day. So, I don't think any training necessarily prepares you for that it's hands on.

Texas Teachers of Tomorrow was founded with people like Ju Gray in mind.

(Music)

A politically connected businessman named Vernon Reaser started the company as A+ Texas Teachers with teacher Kathy Schreiber-Clark. In the early 2000s, Reaser had been working with school districts and lobbying at the Texas capitol around issues related to teacher pay and school conditions. He was well aware of the teacher shortages in the state, and he had an idea for a business: Make it easier for people to switch their career to teaching. Find a way for people to become teachers without having to go back to college to get a teaching degree.

Here's Reaser in a video on YouTube.

**Vernon Reaser YouTube:** Alternative certification for teachers is able to prospect the entire population of the state that meets the requirements. So we have a broader base of people age ranges, backgrounds, diversity, geographic location, and these folks are most of them, it's their second career.

Reaser's a man of many hats. Besides running Teachers of Tomorrow, he's been a member of the Texas Association of Realtors and the Independent Cattlemen's Association. He ran for the Texas house in 1998 as a Democrat and lost. But he's been a fairly large donor to Republican governors Rick Perry and Greg Abbot - he's donated more than 170-thousand dollars to each of their campaigns over the years. Perry appointed Reaser to the Texas State Board of Regents in 2013.

**Reaser YouTube:** We opened up Texas teachers, and my partner Kathy and I started from nothing and and now 15 years later, we're the largest provider of teachers in the state of Texas with over 50% of all the teacher production in the industry.

Texas has a lot of alternative teacher training programs - everything from the for-profits to the non-profits to the teacher residency programs to programs run by school districts themselves. If you look at all the people who go through those alternative programs, at least half come through Reaser's program.

**Reaser YouTube:** we really essentially invented this modern streamlined certification process.

It's a business that would not have been allowed 20 years ago.

What set the stage for companies like these was policymakers trying to find ways to create more teachers. Turning up the hose filling the leaky bucket.

(Music)

Back in the 1980s, reports started coming out about how there wouldn't be enough teachers to support the growing student population in the United States. Eight states decided to open up their rules about who could train teachers. They allowed school districts and colleges and non-profits to create alternative training pathways. People wouldn't have to get a traditional education degree. They could get their practical experience on the job while they took some mandatory courses and tests throughout the school year. Some colleges and districts teamed up to offer residency programs, that let people earn a master's in education while they taught.

By 2010, 48 states and Washington, D.C. had some type of alternative route to teacher education and certification, and they were creating thousands more teachers than before.

But only one state allowed for-profit teacher training companies - unaffiliated with any institution of higher ed - to operate. And that was Texas.

**Ed Fuller:** I personally argued against that.

This is Ed Fuller. He's now a professor of education at Penn State. But back in the early 2000s, he was Director of Research at the Texas state board for educator certification. When the state government was considering allowing for-profit companies in Texas to enter the teacher training realm, he pushed back.

**Fuller:** Said we already have the least qualified, least prepared teachers assigned to teach the students who need the most prepared and most qualified teachers. And I argued it was just going to exacerbate the achievement gap that already existed in Texas.

The reason Fuller believed this would happen is that teacher turnover was already highest at high poverty schools, that mostly served students of color. Those schools had the most open positions to fill every year, and they were often forced to hire a disproportionate number of teachers who had not done a lot of training.

And that was a problem because one of the greatest indicators of whether or not a new teacher will stick around for very long, is how much pre-service training they've had. Especially how many hours they've spent student teaching before heading up a classroom on their own. And now the state was gonna allow businesses into the alternative teacher training realm.

**Fuller:** I called into question whether, you know, the, the way they had set up alternative certification was going to help students or harm students, and in my estimation, it appeared to me that it was the system that they created was problematic, particularly for those students, students living in poverty and students of color.

Ed Fuller warned the Texas Legislature that adding for-profit certification programs to the already large number of alternative certification programs would create more teachers, but not necessarily solve the shortage problem because people coming through these pathways didn't

tend to stay as long as people coming through the colleges of education. He also warned that the for-profits would grow fast and be hard to regulate.

**Fuller:** The really scary thing about that is so the entire Texas education system then relies on one teacher preparation program, right, and you better hope that it's really good.

In spite of Ed Fuller's warnings, in 2002, the state gave for-profit teacher training companies permission to operate. Shortly afterwards, A+ Texas Teachers set up shop. And then it set about growing.

**Oklahoma committee meeting:** Mr. Dave Saba from teachers for tomorrow. You are recognized.

Dave Saba became the chief development officer at the company in 2016 and immediately got to work expanding into other states. Here's Saba in September of 2019 making a pitch to the Oklahoma legislature.

**Saba from meeting:** So I reached out to representative LePack back last year during the session, because I had seen so many articles about the emergency certification problem here in Oklahoma. And I just felt like there was something we could do. I'm Dave Saba. I'm the chief Development Officer at teachers of tomorrow, my job is to go out and meet with states and see if we have a solution that might meet their needs.

In 2015, Texas Teachers of Tomorrow got financial backing from a private capital firm called Gauge Capital. When Saba came on in 2016, they started expanding, successfully lobbying politicians in eight other states to allow private, for-profit teacher training companies like his. Most of these states have issues with chronic teacher shortages.

**Saba:** philosophically, you know, we were just 100% focused on Texas, and now we have this national focus. And so creating a national brand from a Texas brand was, you know, a huge shift in in 2016.

(Music)

Which is what brought Saba to Oklahoma. As we mentioned earlier in the hour, teacher shortages are particularly bad there. Saba says he and Reaser knew they could replicate the Texas Teachers model in other states that needed teachers. After all, they'd already recruited and trained tens of thousands of new teachers in Texas.

**Saba:** And we've been very successful at that, you know, we have, you know, we went into Alabama, because they called us, and they said, We need help, you know, can you come help us recruit more teachers? And so, we're in Alabama right now.

Once they're in a state, they invest in large scale advertising and recruitment.

**Saba:** It's this constant, you know, marketing, as well as coaching, to get all those people into teaching, get the right people into teaching, and then matching them with the districts and that has just driven our steady growth.

They become Michigan Teachers of Tomorrow and Nevada Teachers of Tomorrow and North Carolina Teachers of Tomorrow. Most of these states they've expanded into in just the last four years.

**Saba:** We were able to open up that funnel, find everybody that's even remotely interested in teaching. And then even if you decide you don't want to teach that this year, we're gonna keep talking to you next year, and the year after that the year after that until it's right for you, in your life to become a teacher.

One thing he has to pitch to states as well, is that he won't compromise their overall teacher quality.

**Saba:** I usually I just whittle away those arguments, you know, the arguments have always been, you know, these aren't quality teachers, they're not going to stay in there. There was a large study done by the University of Texas, which looked at over 300,000 reading scores, 200,000 math scores, basically found that there was no difference, statistically, what they really said was, there's so much variation within programs, you can't tell variation between programs. And I'm totally upfront with that. But, you know, the marketing side of that says, Look, there's no difference in their teachers, from a student achievement perspective than my teachers.

I wanted to have a look at the study David Saba was citing - and I had some other numbers questions, too.

(Music)

So I enlisted the help of my colleague, Will Craft. He's a data reporter. And we spent months digging into a bunch of questions. We wanted to know how big Texas Teachers of Tomorrow has become - how many schools their teachers were in. We wanted to know whether or not the program was effective. And we wanted to know how the teachers that come out of it, compare to teachers who go through university programs. We looked at the 120 plus programs that train teachers in Texas. Some non-profit, some for-profit, some at colleges and universities. Will and I filed data requests, and crunched numbers.

**Will Craft:** Texas Teachers is huge, and they are everywhere. Urban schools, rural schools, suburban schools. Everyone has teachers who have graduated from the program. We got hiring data from the state for just one year - so the 2017-18 school year.

(Music)

**Baumhardt:** And what we found was that Texas Teachers made up 27 percent of all the newly hired teachers in the state that year.

**Craft:** They are producing a massive number of teachers far more than the other programs. Literally five times larger than the second largest teacher preparation program in the state.

**Baumhardt:** When Texas allowed for profit teacher training, a whole bunch of new companies popped up like iTeach Texas and teacherbuilder.com and Web-Centric Alternative Certification Program or WCACP for short. Most are entirely or almost entirely online. iTeach was also one of the first in Texas, and is now in five other states plus D.C.

**Craft:** We were curious about that study Dave Saba talked about -- the one from the University of Texas where they looked at all those reading and math scores and found graduates of Texas Teachers of Tomorrow weren't much better or worse than any others. -- we wanted to know more about it, so we talked to one of the researchers behind it. Her name is Jane Lincove.

**Jane Lincove:** I'm an Associate Professor of Public Policy at the University of Maryland, Baltimore County.

**Craft:** But back in 2010 she was working with a few researchers at the University of Texas. They wanted to know how much teacher quality varied across all those teacher preparation programs in the state. She and her team looked at standardized test scores of students in Texas and tried to see if there was a connection between their math and reading test scores and how the teacher was trained.

**Lincove:** Mostly, what we found was that there were not distinct differences in student test scores based on the type of teacher prep program that the teacher went to.

**Craft:** They found so much variation among all 120 programs, they couldn't say that all the for-profit online programs were really much better or much worse than the traditional university programs when it comes to teacher quality.

**Baumhardt:** Michael Marder has also spent time with this question. He's a physics professor at the UT Austin and he runs a program called UTeach there. They steer STEM majors into teaching tracks. In his study Marder looked at different standardized tests than Lincove did. He looked at ninth graders' algebra 1 and biology scores, and whether they were taught by people who'd come through universities, or through any other alternative certification program.

**Marder:** If I compare not individual programs, but certification pathways, standard University preparation, as opposed to alternative certification, there is a difference.

**Craft:** A small difference, but it was there. He says the students showed more progress on their math scores when they were taught by university-trained teachers. On average, they gained one to two months more learning over the course of a year than students whose teachers came in on any other pathway.

(Music)

**Craft:** And there was another thing Marder found. Lincove found it, too - and so have loads of other researchers. When they look at the impacts of teacher training programs on schools, they find some programs produce people who will stay with teaching longer.

**Baumhardt:** And that's good. Because losing a bunch of teachers after year one or year two or year three is expensive for schools. They end up investing in training teachers who leave, and they have to spend more money on recruitment. It's bad for the overall school climate to have so much inconsistency and it's bad for kids who end up with a lot of brand-new teachers during their k12 education. Ideally, all kids have the opportunity to be taught by people who have been doing it for a while. Research shows most teachers get better over time. Especially in those first 5 years.

**Jonah Rockoff:** It's been found in many other places. teaching experience matters.

**Baumhardt:** This is economist Jonah Rockoff, from Columbia University. He's studied teacher quality and the impacts of teacher effectiveness.

**Rockoff:** Rookie teachers are just much less effective on average, than teachers who've been practicing for five, six years.

**Baumhardt:** So it's important for schools to try to hang onto their teachers.

**Craft:** We looked at several years of data in Texas and found teachers who came from alternative training programs have a worse retention rate than teachers with traditional college degrees in education. You can see this especially if you look at how many people drop out after their first and second year of teaching. About 12 percent of the traditional, college trained teachers in Texas quit after their second year on the job. About 21% of the teachers who trained in alternative programs quit after their second year.

**Baumhardt:** Some of this could be because when you lower the barriers to entry, it's easier to get out if you don't like it. If you have to pay off a university teaching degree you may stick with the job longer.

But Texas is drawing on more and more teachers who don't come from university education programs. Today, more than a third of all teachers in Texas come through alternative certification programs.

**Craft:** In the 2017/2018 school year more than a quarter of all new teachers in Texas came through this single for-profit company - Texas Teachers of Tomorrow.

**Baumhardt:** School administrators told us it's a relief to have this source for teachers - but they wish they didn't have so many openings to begin with. Will and I talked with Javier Villareal. He's chief hiring officer in the Aldine Independent School District in North Houston. He's in charge of staffing 82 schools.

**Javier Villarreal:** we compete with Houston ISD, which is right next door, and then other surrounding school districts. It's so competitive, it's becoming more and more difficult every year.

**Craft:** He says all of the new programs, like Teachers of Tomorrow, have improved a bad situation.

**Villarreal:** you know, the universities will also tell you that there's not enough students currently in the ed programs, you know, so they're not graduating enough students with from the College of Education, teacher certificates, to fill all the vacancies.

**Baumhardt:** But it's still a bad situation. It would be even harder to find teachers without the alternative and for-profit programs, but they haven't solved his shortages.

**Villarreal:** I have to ask myself, when I asked my team, what's you know, what's the difference between talent and acquisition in recruiting, you know, recruiting, you're just going to put a warm body in there. And you know, to fill the vacancy for that moment. But talent acquisition is you're going to invest in the in the person, you're going to get the top person for the job, you're going to retain them,

**Craft:** The student body at Aldine is majority Hispanic and nearly 40 percent of students are enrolled in bilingual and English Language Learning programs.

**Villarreal:** getting certified bilingual teachers, is the biggest need at the elementary level, because there's just not enough candidates out there. And I will say, in my colleagues and other districts, we're constantly talking about that.

**Baumhardt:** He says he also needs English Language Arts Teachers, math teachers and science teachers. And the university programs are not meeting that need. Every year, Texas Teachers of Tomorrow sends him a list of people from their program who could get started at Aldine ISD immediately.

**Villarreal:** so the list that Texas teacher sends us is basically these are, these are people who have passed a content test and who have met our minimum eligible requirements. And then if they interview in the interview, well, we can offer them a position. Again, I will say, in my opinion the EPP or Texas Teachers is more of recruiting than talent acquisition. And so although we're blessed that there's these programs and the recruitment part they're doing, we have to take it a step further and dig deeper.

**Baumhardt:** What all this means is that the district Villarreal works for, Aldine, is breaking in a lot of new teachers every year. Often people with no classroom experience.

(Music)

These people are brand new. They're still in training and for many of them, it's arguably their worst year teaching. Very few people start out really hot as a teacher. There's all kinds of lesson planning and classroom management and rules and requirements they need to learn to navigate.

**Craft:** So when high poverty schools are forced to dip into this teacher candidate pool over and over again, they're forced to hire a lot of those new teachers, still working it all out. Over time, those teachers might become just as good as anyone else. But they may not stay at schools like Villareal's, even if they don't leave teaching altogether.

**Baumhardt:** The more tenure you have as a teacher, the easier it is to choose where you want to go teach. A lot of those experienced teachers don't choose to teach in high poverty schools. These are schools that also disproportionately serve students of color. And today, Students of color in the U.S. are four times as likely to be assigned uncertified teachers as their white peers.

**Craft:** More teachers are coming through these alternative programs, fewer through ed programs at colleges - but Dave Saba at teachers of tomorrow, says his company is bringing in typically older students who have had life experiences and careers before the classroom.

**Baumhardt:** and they're bringing in way more diverse teacher candidates than many of the colleges of education in Texas. Teachers of Tomorrow says more than 40 percent of their enrollees are non-white. It's part of his pitch to states.

**Saba:** And then I add in and layer in look, you have a problem with diversity. Ohio right now produces 80% white teachers, only 20% that are of diverse backgrounds. We're bringing 46% that identify as nonwhite to our teachers.

**Baumhardt:** Today, more Hispanic and Black teacher candidates come through alternative teacher training pathways than traditional colleges of education. But in many areas, they're getting hired into the most high needs schools with already high teacher turnover. Nationally, teachers of color are two to three times more likely than white teachers to end up in those schools. And teachers of color end up quitting at double the rate of white teachers.

**Craft:** In the last few decades, the number of Black, Hispanic and Asian teachers has grown, in large part because of recruitment programs and all these new teacher training pathways. But because of that high quit rate, those teachers still only make up 20 percent of the workforce while nearly 50 percent of students in the U.S. are Black, Hispanic or Asian according to U.S. Census Bureau data.

(Music)

**Baumhardt:** All kids are better served by having diverse teachers. And a lot of research shows that kids of color tend to perform better having even just one teacher of color in their school career. Black students especially are more likely to be referred to gifted and talented programs, to graduate, and to take a college entrance exam when they've had even just a single school year with a Black teacher.

When Will and I talked with Charles Martinez, the Dean at UT Austin, he told us diversifying enrollment at the university is something they're working on. He says enrollment in just the last year has gone up substantially among Black and Latino students.

**Martinez:** We also saw a 90 percent increase in our Latino Latina students enrolled in the College of Ed. An 86 percent increase in first generation students who chose to come here. That was just last year from the year before.

**Craft:** He says the college of education has consistently had more Black and Latino students than the university writ large, but it's still not fully reflective of the state's student population.

**Martinez:** There's things we need to all learn about alternative certifications, and certainly their diversity is something we need to attend to, when you constrain the pathways to the profession, you run the risk of lowering the diversity, and admissions policies at institutions of higher ed, can very much interact and create some of those, you know, those bottlenecks in the pipeline.

**Baumhardt:** But like Saba, he doesn't see his university competing with Teachers of Tomorrow for those students, or any students.

**Martinez:** We're not in competition with them. I mean, it's not it's not how I think about what we do.

**Craft:** He says the massive growth of the for-profits, which is truly the growth of Texas Teachers of Tomorrow, has proven to be a double-edged sword in the fight to address teacher shortages. Without them...

**Martinez:** We'd have a worse teacher shortage; we would have much higher class sizes. But, you know, the, the moment would also be a call to the shortage. By elevating the professions by investing in salaries by investing in training, when we have a physician shortage All hands go on deck. It drives prestige, it drives state investments. It has just not happened in education. We devalue what educators do so profoundly, that we're willing to let this other thing happen, which is have the void filled by for profit, alt-cert.

(Music)

We can't solve it alone. But you bet the state could approach this problem in a very different way, by elevating the professions by investing in salaries, by investing in training and professional development, by creating more investments in higher ed to make it affordable to be a teacher, or to maybe pay for all of it. Those are all things we could choose to do. We've not and maybe we've not had to because we have this other way in right now to calm the waters by bodies in classrooms.

**Baumhardt:** As long as there is that need for more teachers in classrooms Teachers of Tomorrow has an opportunity to grow. Dave Saba, the Chief Development Officer at Teachers of

Tomorrow, says their expansion plans involve looking at states where there is a small but growing number of people choosing alternative certification.

**Saba:** we could be in 25 states tomorrow. I could be in 40 with a little bit more work. And, you know, and then all 50 states at some point in time.

**Martinez:** This does look like, you know, kind of a momentum building moment.

**Craft:** Charles Martinez, the dean at UT Austin, expects programs like Teachers of Tomorrow to keep growing.

**Martinez:** The for-profits are agile, they know how to market they, once they once they enter this fray, and then again, the needs on the ground for school leaders to get folks in classrooms, no matter how much they work on, getting the highest quality folks, the pipelines are not full enough, and they're going to have to dip in. So there'll be there'll be demand in all these places.

(Music)

**Craft:** So far, Teachers of Tomorrow is in nine states, including Texas. Martinez says if other states open themselves up to for-profit teacher training companies, they should know their teacher workforce could begin to look like Texas' does.

**Baumhardt:** With more than a third of new teachers coming through alternative programs, most of those through this one company. Lots of teachers staying for just a year or a few years - then leaving and creating new vacancies. And lots of brand-new teachers, struggling through their first years in the classroom.

(Music)

You've been listening to Who Wants to Be a Teacher? — a documentary from APM Reports.

It was reported and produced by a team that includes Will Craft, Chris Julin, Sabby Robinson, Will Callan and me, Alex Baumhardt. The editor is Catherine Winter. Fact checker Betsy Towner-Levine. Mixing by Craig Thorson. The APM Reports team includes Sasha Aslanian, Emily Hanford and Chris Peak. The Managing Director & Editor in Chief of APM Reports is Chris Worthington. Special thanks to Robby Korth at State Impact Oklahoma.

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Support for this program comes from Lumina Foundation and the Spencer Foundation.

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