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How do I become a teacher?

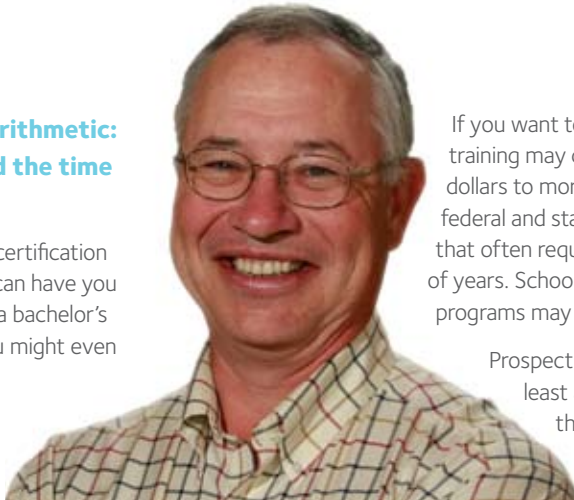
You can start with some simple arithmetic: Calculate whether you can afford the time and money involved to train.

Across the country, accelerated teacher certification programs—typically based in colleges—can have you teaching in one or two years if you have a bachelor's degree. Depending on your flexibility, you might even be able to keep your full- or part-time job while earning your credentials.

Wylie Schwieder, right, jumped on the fast track through EducateVA, a program of the Virginia community college system for career switchers who want to transition to teaching. The former corporate manager, who eventually became a math teacher, appreciated the pace.

"It's easy, and it makes sense," Schwieder says. "It's like dominoes falling into place."

The emergence of accelerated programs is partly related to demographics and an ongoing teacher shortage. More than half of the country's teachers—1.7 million—are boomers who will retire in waves, according to the National Commission on Teaching and America's Future.



If you want to help counterbalance the exodus, the training may cost you anywhere from a few thousand dollars to more than \$15,000. You may qualify for federal and state grants and loan forgiveness programs that often require you to teach for a certain number of years. School districts affiliated with the certification programs may help, too.

Prospective students "should be looking for at least a yearlong program that involves more than half of that time working with students alongside accomplished teachers," advises Thomas Carroll, president of the National Commission on

Teaching and America's Future.

When considering a program, Carroll says, check for how many career changers it has served, how many graduates land in teaching positions, and how much mentoring and coaching it offers.

"If I'm a midcareer changer, [I'd want] a pathway that gives me lots of experience in the kind of classroom I want to teach in," Carroll says.

In other words, training at high-achieving schools is unlikely to orient you for teaching in low-performing ones, where the need is greatest.

PRACTICAL TIPS

Preparing for classroom survival

Most jobs don't prepare you for leading a classroom of 20-plus teenagers or a bunch of 8-year-olds.

While your skills and expertise may transfer to a teaching career, understanding the unique environment of a classroom can be tough.

One of the best ways to figure out whether teaching suits you is to try it out. If you're interested in substitute teaching, find out

about qualifications from your local school district. You may need to have a bachelor's degree and take an aptitude test.

Many volunteer programs can also help you see how you fare in a classroom. Some examples:

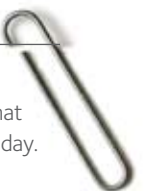
Experience Corps matches older adults with at-risk kids for mentoring and literacy tutoring. experiencecorps.org

Citizen Schools arranges for volunteers to work on school-based projects that draw from the volunteer's field of expertise. citizenschools.org

Principal for a Day programs give community members a chance to see what it's like to be a school administrator for a day. (Check with your local school system.)

Read Across America is a National Education Association yearly event. The March 2 volunteer opportunity, which marks the birthday of children's author Dr. Seuss, encourages visiting schools to read to students.

nea.org/readacross



PROFILE Julie Greene

"I have wonderful colleagues.
I am energized by the students."

JULIE GREENE



After several years as a stay-at-home mom, Julie Greene wanted to get back to paying work. But she didn't want to go back to marketing.

Greene, who had come from a family of teachers, felt discouraged by American students' lagging performance in science and math. So she took her respect for the teaching profession and joy of learning and set out to become a teacher at age 48.

"I did not want a job for which I had to sacrifice time with my daughter," she says. "The corporate world was no longer the right place for me."

Building on mathematics classes she had taken over the years, Greene enrolled in a fast-track certification program at Collin College, outside Dallas. She took classes three days a week for a semester and spent the second semester student teaching at Wakeland High School in Frisco, Texas.

"The student-teaching experience was invaluable," she says. "It was on-the-job training and a great networking opportunity."

Greene earned her certificate in May 2008 and by August joined Wakeland's staff to teach geometry. "Teenagers are frustrating, fun, and inspiring all in one," she says. "Never a dull moment."

Greene says she enjoys the work and appreciates having a paycheck again, even if it's less than what she used to earn. And her schedule matches her daughter's—a huge plus. "I have wonderful colleagues. I am energized by the students," she says. "I believe the students benefit from my knowledge of math and my experience."



INFORMATION

Essential resources

- **U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, Teacher: What Is This Job Like?**
bls.gov/k12/help01.htm
- **American Federation of Teachers, Loan Forgiveness Programs by State**
aft.org/tools4teachers/loan-forgiveness.htm
- **National Center for Alternative Certification, Search for Alternate Routes to Teaching**
teach-now.org
- **EnCorps Teachers Program**
Designed for midlife career changers, this California initiative helps enrollees earn credentials to teach math or science.
encorpsteachers.org
- **American Board for Certification of Teacher Excellence** This organization assists participants with certification in nine states—Florida, Idaho, Mississippi, Missouri, New Hampshire, Pennsylvania, South Carolina, Utah, and Oklahoma—and helps graduates find jobs.
abcte.org
- **Troops to Teachers**
Military personnel may receive financial assistance and coaching to become teachers through this federal program.
proudtoserveagain.com

"I truly believe that second-career teachers are the ones who are going to change the face of public education. These are people who have valuable experience and really want to come back and make a difference."

REBECCA WATERS program manager, EducateVA, a Virginia community college system career-switcher program

42%

of college-educated 24- to 60-year-olds would consider teaching as a second career.

The Woodrow Wilson National Fellowship Foundation