The Drive for Teacher Quality:  
The Role of Community Colleges

Cheri St. Arnauld, Ed.D.  
Special thanks to Archana Agrawal, Researcher  
NACCTEP Member Profile Survey

The mandate is simple: a highly qualified teacher for every classroom. The quality of a teacher is a quintessential determinate in a child’s academic success, which ultimately impacts the economic foundation of this country. Over the past decade, there has been tremendous pressure to produce more and better teachers. To date, most of the nation has been successful in recruiting new teachers for classrooms, yet shortages still exist in specific content areas such as mathematics and science, as well as special education and second language learners. Community colleges have moved to the forefront, offering expanded programs in teacher preparation and licensure.

Myths about Community Colleges in Teacher Education

As community colleges begin to emerge as a solution to the teacher quality and shortage issue, many myths and misperceptions arise about the role of the community college in teacher education. The five most common myths—reprinted from the NACCTEP Web site—are answered here.

1. Community colleges do not play a role in the preparation of teachers.

Community colleges have always played a critical role in teacher preparation by providing the foundation for upper-division coursework. In recent years, community colleges have expanded their programs in the field of teacher education to provide additional options for preparing future teachers. In addition to offering the first two years of requirements for a baccalaureate degree, community colleges have added coordinated programs for transfer, new-certificate and associate-degree programs, and augmented support services, all of which have increased student access to and completion of teacher preparation programs. Community colleges have the capacity to increase the diversity of the teaching force.

Cheri St. Arnauld is Executive Director of the National Association of Community College Teacher Education Programs.
2. Community college teacher education programs have been in existence for only a few years.
While many community colleges have just recently started teacher education programs, some programs have been around for a decade or more—providing a foundation for new and developing programs and making use of technology, student experience, and content knowledge.
Source: American Association of Community Colleges (http://www.aacc.nche.edu)

3. Community college faculty do not have adequate academic preparation or backgrounds to teach future teachers.
Community college faculty are represented at each degree level. In 1997, nearly two-thirds of full-time faculty in public community colleges had a master's degree, and about one-fifth a doctoral degree. Some community colleges have moved to hiring teachers with K–12 experience.
As long as the community college continues to provide a variety of educational services, including developmental, collegiate, vocational, and community education, the academic backgrounds of the faculty are likely to continue to span the entire educational and vocational spectrum. Community college faculty are primarily rewarded for the quality of the teaching and learning in their classrooms rather than for research and publishing; they are experts in the teaching and learning process.
Source: American Association of Community Colleges (http://www.aacc.nche.edu) Paper: Public Community College Faculty

4. Teacher preparation in community colleges is less rigorous than in four-year colleges, and therefore community colleges prepare less-qualified teachers.
Students who transfer from community colleges to four-year institutions perform academically at the same level as students who began at the four-year campuses. Faculty at four-year institutions report that education transfer students are often better prepared than those who started as freshmen, in part because their community college preparation gave them direct preservice experience.

5. Only a very small percentage of teacher education students attend community colleges.

Studies have shown that more than 50 percent of teachers attended a community college for at least part of their education. As of 2002, roughly 20 percent of teachers began their careers in community college. It is estimated that four out of ten teachers in the United States have completed some or all of their math and science course work at a community college.


National Association of Community College Teacher Education Programs

There is no better time than now for community colleges to come together, share information, speak with a common voice, and be treated as equal partners with universities in the preparation of future teachers. The formation of the National Association of Community College Teacher Education Programs (NACCTEP) solidified this concept and leadership role. As a result, community colleges are now invited to participate when legislation and policy decisions are developed and implemented around the critical issues facing education.

History

NACCTEP was created in 2001 to support the burgeoning community college teacher education program. Community colleges throughout the country were supportive of a new association that would advocate for their increased role in teacher education. Fifty founding community colleges, the League for Innovation in the Community College, and the American Association of Community Colleges all responded in partnership to identifying the framework of the organization.

Mission and Goals

The mission of NACCTEP is to promote the role of the community college in the recruitment, preparation, retention, and renewal of diverse pre-K–12
teachers and to advance quality teacher education programs in the community college. The association has four specific goals:

1. Advocating for and representing at the national level the interests of community colleges in teacher preparation
2. Promoting programs, services, and activities to enhance the role and effectiveness of community college teacher education programs, including professional development for preservice and in-service pre-K–12 teachers and community college teacher educators
3. Providing connections among community college professionals and others interested in teacher preparation
4. Providing resources for models of teacher education programs for community colleges involved in teacher preparation

Executive Board
NACCTEP has a ten-member executive board from around the country and includes a new student board member each year. This year’s board represents the following states: Arizona, California, Michigan, New York, Georgia, Florida, Virginia, and Texas.

Membership
The association opened for membership in 2002 and currently has 470 members representing forty states. Interest and membership in the association has grown at an astounding rate.

Member Benefits
Currently the association offers several benefits for its members. Quarterly newsletters are sent updating members on association news. A monthly Policy Brief is distributed online, informing members of statewide policies and legislative concerns that impact teacher preparation. A quarterly special edition Policy Brief is also published, which provides members with an in-depth look at specific topics. To date, special edition Briefs have focused on accreditation, accountability, and the baccalaureate in the community college. NACCTEP offers a national scholarship program awarding five scholarships per year, with $1,000 toward degree completion. A consultant pool is available to colleges who would like to have support and advice from those working in the field. In addition, a Member Learning eXchange is available online to share models of teacher preparation programs with other members. Lastly, NACCTEP offers a national conference each year to share model programs, practices, policies, and partnerships.
Membership Profile

NACCTEP conducts a research study each year to identify teacher education programs offered by its member institutions. Out of NACCTEP’s current membership, 49 of the 160 community colleges and four community college districts/systems—equaling more than 30 percent of NACCTEP’s membership—responded to the survey. Results allowed NACCTEP to formulate some general conclusions regarding the profile of teacher preparation and early childhood education programs, student enrollment, and issues that community colleges are currently facing.

Highlights from the 2004–2005 NACCTEP Profile Survey include the following:

- The total number of early childhood education students enrolled in the responding colleges and systems equaled 17,369, and the total number of teacher education students enrolled equaled 26,561.
- Ninety-one percent of members indicate that enrollment increased over the previous two years; 3.8 percent say it has stayed the same, whereas the same percentage say it has decreased.
- Sixty percent of members indicate they have a statewide Associate in Arts transfer degree specific to teacher education.
- Seventy-one percent of members offer dual credit, and 69.8 percent offer concurrent credit.
- More than 50 percent of members offer early childhood education, elementary education, secondary education, and paraprofessional programs.
- Most early childhood and teacher education students were females, ages 21–40.
- Eight-nine percent of the institutions indicate that they collaborate with local P–12 schools. Of these, 94.0 percent collaborate with teachers, 66.0 percent with superintendents, 86.8 percent with administrators, 58.5 percent with curriculum specialists, and 45.3 percent with others.
- Seventy-nine percent of members offer professional development to teachers mostly in technology, mathematics, and science.
- Members indicate that they are currently facing a wide variety of issues, most of which could be categorized into the following groups: articulation and transfer, recruitment and retention, lack of funding and faculty, marketing, legislation and regulations, lack of data, and future teacher issues.
Role of Community Colleges in Teacher Education

Community colleges are definitely emerging as a viable and credible resource for recruiting and preparing future teachers.

In the fall of 2000, more than six million students were enrolled in community colleges (American Association of Community Colleges 2000). Further research shows that more than half of all university graduates begin their education at a community college. In addition, large numbers of current teachers started out in community colleges. Community colleges may provide the only technology training and most of the general content area courses future teachers will receive. A recent Education Commission of the States policy brief states that four out of ten teachers have in some cases completed almost all of their math and science courses at community colleges (Shkodriani 2004b).

Community colleges are geographically located and better situated to recruit a variety of students from their respective communities. According to a study completed in May 2000 by Recruiting New Teachers (RNT), in cooperation with the National Partnership for Excellence and Accountability in Teaching (NPEAT), 45 percent of first-time undergraduates attend public community colleges. A growing portion of the six million students currently enrolled in community colleges are low-income, minority, and first-generation students (students whose parents’ highest degree is high school). In addition, the study found that 5.5 percent of all community college freshmen were interested in teaching elementary education, and 3.5 percent were interested in teaching secondary education. These statistics indicate that there is a potential population of over 500,000 students entering teaching. This is an excellent recruitment ground for new teachers. Therefore, policy makers, colleges, and universities should focus on increasing the opportunities for these students to prepare, transfer, and successfully complete the pipeline in quality teacher education programs. Recruitment efforts should include not only the number of students enrolled in courses but also student persistence and completion.

Community colleges are teaching colleges; their mission is teaching and learning. This provides an excellent opportunity to model good teaching strategies for preservice teachers. If community colleges offer all content-area instruction to future elementary teachers, then community colleges must consider the highly qualified aspects that will best prepare students for classroom instruction and accountability.

Across the country, individual community college faculty members, in specific content areas, are working together to offer subject instruction to
students—including future teachers—in different ways, modeling the kinds of instructional strategies that K–12 teachers are expected to use when they become teachers. Faculty are modeling inquiry-based instruction, immersed technology programs, the use of real-time data to support math and science instruction, as well as problem-based learning and Socratic discussion.

Programs at community colleges must align with state and national standards to ensure the quality of their teacher education programs. Current “crash course” teacher preparation programs or emergency certification programs leave an ill-prepared workforce in the nation’s classrooms. Researchers have recently studied the characteristics of effective teachers, and this has generated a rich knowledge base that is the framework for quality, standards-based teacher preparation programs. The conversation among community colleges must move from one of preparing highly qualified teachers to one of preparing highly effective teachers.

Finally, community colleges provide opportunities for flexible program delivery to meet the changing demands of college students. They are entrepreneurial, respond quickly to the needs of the community and schools, and have strong partnerships with their K–12 school districts, which make them perfect recruiting grounds for future teachers.

**Current Programs and Trends in Teacher Preparation at Community Colleges**

So, what do community college teacher preparation programs look like?

Community colleges are already broadly involved in teacher education and are placing an increased emphasis on preparing new teachers and paraprofessionals and offering professional development. They are known for their ability to be responsive to the needs of the community and local schools. While some university programs are being criticized for their focus on research and philosophies that do not necessarily support the current needs of K–12 schools, community colleges are often counted on to offer programs in flexible, cost-effective ways. Harvard Graduate School’s Dr. Ellen Lagemann stated in a recent address, “I suspect professors of teacher education teach what they know, which may or may not include cutting-edge research about instruction.”

Many quality teacher preparation programs have emerged from community colleges, and many articulated programs are growing between high schools, community colleges, and universities. The majority are 2+2+2 programs, or partnerships that include high school programs, community colleges preparing students for the first two years of lower division courses, followed by transfer
to universities for upper division courses. However, teacher education students often find that systems are lacking for aligning courses across institutions, and that not all courses transfer because of problems with course equivalencies. Because most institutions have different general education requirements, credits can be lost or classes have to be repeated, making it take longer to graduate (Coble 2002).

Teacher education majors who start their education at a community college want assurance that they will not lose credits when they transfer. Articulation, or alignment, is the heart of the high school to community college to university process. When this articulation doesn’t happen or, worse, opposes one another, it can harm students and ultimately affect the quality of education.

Some states have developed a statewide Associate in Arts in Teacher Education degree to better align systemic pathways for all community colleges and universities in the state. It generally consists of a block of sixty undergraduate courses that transfer completely to all upper division institutions in the state. As students move from institution to institution, they will be assured of the alignment of courses for transfer and quality seamless services.

Many of these programs offer introductory teacher education course work and generally some observation or service-learning components as well. Some colleges offer Grow Your Own programs, which are agreements between colleges and school districts that draw on teacher aides and support staff in local school districts, supporting them through the teacher pipeline. These students often go back to their original districts, where they are guaranteed interviews and often jobs.

Many programs start at the high school level, where courses, some field experience, and in some cases a full curriculum are offered, which all transfer to the community college. Early college placement tests are offered at the sophomore and junior year of high school to help students better prepare for college courses. These solid 2+2+2 articulated programs offer quality teacher preparation and are currently being measured for teacher effectiveness and student success.

A university model also exists in which partnership programs are established with local universities to offer junior and senior level courses and programs for education majors on the community college campus. This is the fastest-growing model for providing baccalaureate access at the community college. Often these programs exist due to geographic need, student demand, and other programmatic issues. With this model, students benefit from having a broad range of offerings located in a convenient location.
Alternative Routes

Interest among some states in providing alternative routes to preparing and certifying teachers is also growing. Currently, forty-seven states offer approved alternative routes to the classroom (U.S. Department of Education 2004). People from all professions are coming forward with an interest in teaching. These alternative certification routes help people from various backgrounds pursue careers in teaching.

The most dramatic change has been toward people recareering and beginning their preparation to teach later in life and later in their academic careers. Several community colleges in many states offer post-baccalaureate certification for mid-career changers, and endorsement courses and programs for current teachers. These programs are set up in a variety of models to best suit individual colleges and communities, with some providing intensive training for four weeks in the summer. Courses are developed sequentially to provide course work and school practicum experience together, so participants build on each skill before moving to the next curriculum topic.

Some community colleges have also started to offer baccalaureate degrees in education. The rationale for community colleges to add baccalaureate degrees to their offerings can be explained from both a societal perspective and an institutional perspective. From a societal perspective, a key factor is meeting the need for a baccalaureate educated workforce. Insofar as community college students experience barriers that limit baccalaureate attainment, the opportunity for them to complete their baccalaureate at the community college could likely increase their income and their contributions to society. Eight states currently offer the baccalaureate at the community college; however, only four states offer degrees in teacher education. They are:

- Nevada
- Florida
- Utah
- New Mexico

New programs and partnerships are being created across the nation to attempt to fill the pipeline for potential new teachers.

Teacher Retention

Community colleges can also play a role in retaining teachers. The teacher shortage is affected by how many teachers are lost each year. Approximately 60 percent of those trained to be teachers move directly into teaching jobs, and of those, only 50–60 percent will still be teaching five years after entering
the profession. The nation is struggling to retain teachers who are the most talented in their subject area and faces difficulty retaining teachers currently in the field. Coupled with a large number of retirements, staffing difficulties are associated with inadequate salaries; student discipline; student motivation; and, in high poverty urban schools, lack of opportunities for advancement, and environments perceived as unsafe (Bracey & Molnar 2003). Teacher candidates need high-quality, practical training in their courses and continued support once employed. Induction programs, or continued institutional support, are also offered by community colleges that offer teacher licensure programs.

College faculty and K–12 teachers have programs offering professional development opportunities—especially in the summer—for current teachers. The strongest of these programs have been in the areas of math and science.

Further opportunities include training courses for substitute teachers, which enable the community college to help with the substitute-teacher crisis. Courses address issues important to substitute teaching and include both a practicum and hands-on applications of concepts.

Community colleges also provide a variety of training courses and programs for early childhood educators. The broadest definition of early childhood refers to all care and teaching of children from birth through age eight, and includes serving their families. Many states are adopting new teaching certificates for early childhood educators, which typically include kindergarten through third grade.

Continuing education in all areas leading to endorsements or special certification can also support teacher retention. This usually consists of documenting that teachers have completed additional hours in a specialized subject area beyond degree requirements. Some of these programs are aligned with specific school districts focused on teacher development in areas such as reading and second language learners.

**NACCTEP Leadership**

NACCTEP provides national leadership for the challenges facing community colleges in teacher education. The Education Commission of the States identified significant challenges facing community colleges desiring to offer teacher education. These include the following:

- University programs typically hold all accountability for teacher education.
The National Council for Accreditation of Teacher Education (NCATE) and the Teacher Education Accreditation Council (TEAC) charters currently apply only to four-year degree programs.

- The transfer of pre-professional courses is limited at best and nonexistent in some states.
- There is limited sharing among community colleges, and most initiatives are localized between school districts, colleges, and universities.

NACCTEP influences each of these areas by acting as a clearinghouse for community colleges involved in teacher preparation, as well as consulting and mentoring states that are moving to align efforts and pathways statewide. Ensuring a quality teacher education career pathway can only strengthen a state’s ability to prepare quality teachers for the K–12 classroom.

NACCTEP plays a critical role in teacher education by offering to share best practices for multiple approaches to teacher training. Currently, there is limited opportunity for educators within community colleges to collaborate and network in sharing innovative approaches to teacher training. Efforts are underway to develop programs and partnerships at local levels that can be shared to leverage the resources and time needed to develop quality, standards-based programs. The Member Learning eXchange, found on the NACCTEP Web site, was designed for this purpose.

NACCTEP supports teacher retention by advocating to state departments of education and local school districts to accept community college course work as quality professional development and to build awareness for the role of community college in teacher education. Endorsement options and ongoing continued education for teachers is critical, yet reimbursement or movement on salary schedules will often not include community college course work.

NACCTEP serves as an information center for current policy issues surrounding the role of community college in teacher education. There are several policy options that can provide systemic reform within the area of teacher education. One is improving the transfer and articulation process within states. The May 2000 RNT study found that students in teacher preparation programs transfer at twice the rate of the national average of standard transfer students to four-year institutions. According to Education Commission of the States, other options for policy consideration include:

- Providing university courses on community college campuses
- Developing or expanding distance-learning opportunities
- Providing more courses in education that will transfer to four-year institutions

The Role of Community Colleges
• Offering post-baccalaureate programs on community college campuses
• Developing joint admission agreements with universities

NACCTEP takes the lead on policy issues and serves as a mentor for states and colleges as they shape their respective programs. The association also provides the voice for quality and effective teaching and learning and is partnering with other institutions and agencies both to develop standards for preparation in the first two years and to discuss the issues of accreditation and accountability.

Recommendations

The nation’s capability to provide quality education for all children is being threatened by a current teacher shortage and an impending teacher-distribution issue. The predictions over the past two decades of a teacher-shortage crisis created tremendous pressure to produce both more and better teachers. So far, the nation has been somewhat successful in recruiting teachers due to increased enrollment in teacher preparation programs and the expansion of alternative routes to certification. However, shortages remain in the high-demand fields of special education, mathematics, science, and bilingual/ESL; in certain areas of the country (western, southwestern, and southeastern states); and in urban, low-income, minority schools and remote rural schools.

One of the most important questions now facing community colleges is, How can we provide highly effective instruction to preservice teachers so that they become highly effective teachers in all content areas? And, how do we know if we have succeeded?

Survey results indicate that the NACCTEP member colleges are facing many of the same issues other community colleges are confronted with regarding teacher education programs. Relatively common is the interest in learning how other community colleges are assessing the efficacy of their teacher education programs and, in particular, measuring the quality of the mathematics, science, and special education teachers they are producing. Other issues include, but are not limited to, recruitment/retention, articulation/transfer, collaboration with four-year institutions and other community colleges, funding, and policy issues. Working together on a state level to alleviate these issues and support the identification of several career pathways for teacher education students can alleviate some of the tension currently existing between institutions.
NACCTEP is also developing partnerships with the American Association of Community Colleges (AACC) and the American Mathematical Association of Two-Year Colleges (AMATYC) to develop a research agenda for community colleges to assess the efficacy of their programs, especially in math and science.

There are many opportunities for NACCTEP to work with its members in regard to these issues as well as to provide additional services and support. Results of the survey indicate that members are interested in best practices regarding program models; successes in various states; sharing of state and institutional program agreements; and knowing what other teacher education programs are doing with regard to funding, recruitment, and articulation. Members are also interested in learning how other programs attract paraprofessionals (particularly bilingual paraprofessionals) and how other programs are structured and delivered. NACCTEP has the ability to provide data and research on these issues, as well as recruitment models and materials for minority and rural populations. Through information, consulting, and our national conferences, the message to our NACCTEP members continues to be: Develop a culture of evidence. It is important for states to understand the work developing at the community college regarding teacher preparation.

As state leaders think about whether or not they are supporting the community colleges in their state, please reflect on the words of Mark Milliron, vice president, Education Practice, SAS: “Consider many ‘best’ ways, not just one.”

References


