

Abstract
**“Community Colleges and Teacher Education: A Challenging and
Controversial Issue in Higher Education”**

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Across the country, educational and policy leaders are struggling to find solutions to the current teacher shortages. The shortages are especially acute in small rural communities and in certain teaching disciplines. Simultaneously, these same leaders are questioning who should be delivering teacher training and certification programs.

According to a recent feature story in the *Chronicle of Higher Education* (Evelyn, 2002, “at least 20 states are turning to community colleges to help identify and train prospective elementary and secondary-school educators (p.22). Advocates note that community colleges have an excellent track record of providing the first two years of baccalaureate education, impressive minority enrollments are community-based institutions quite accustomed to being responsive to community challenges, such as teacher shortages. Critics question issues of quality and congruence of mission as community colleges enter this arena that has traditionally been the domain of universities.

Research in this area is rather limited and, accepting the challenge to study the issue from the perspective of state policy, the Education Commission of the States has launched a 2002-2003 study. Sources have confirmed that the American Association of Community Colleges plans to issue statement soon that will summarize the discussion of an invited symposium on the topic on community college teacher education. Hudson (2002 & 2000) with the Recruiting New Teachers, Inc. has released recent studies focusing on this issue from the perspective of teacher recruitment.

Floyd and Friedel (2002) released preliminary findings of a Fall 2002 survey of community college state directors in November 2002 during a discussion session at the Association for the Study of Higher Education (ASHE) conference. The purpose of this survey was to ascertain current perceptions and information about teacher education from state community college directors. By November 2002, 32 states had responded. This abstract is a limited summary of the preliminary findings. Their conference proposal paper, with descriptive statistics, is available on the ASHE web site at <http://www.criche.org/ASHEpapers02/main.html>. User name is ASHE papers and the password is sacramento2002 (case sensitive). A paper with further analysis of these data and a discussion of policy and research implications has been written by Dr. Deborah Floyd and Dr. David Walker, Florida Atlantic University. This pre-publication paper is available from Dr. Floyd at DFloyd@Fau.Edu.

Survey Findings

Almost 88% of the state directors indicated that the issue of teacher education is a “hot issue” in their state. Most of those who did not indicate it was “hot” recognized the importance of the issue, but noted that they would not describe the issue as “hot”. Of those noting that the issue is “hot”, about 80% indicated that the impetus for emphasis on this issue was coming from school superintendents, school boards and political leaders. Community college leaders and other

stakeholders, such as parents, business leaders and state officers accounted for about 50% of the responses.

Over 62% of the directors noted that the teacher shortage is a critical issue that is being discussed among state leaders, while over 34% described the issue as important but one that is manageable. None of the directors responded that this is an insignificant issue. One director noted “none of the above” and commented that there is not a teacher shortage at this time, but that the universities believe they have a good grasp on future developments in this area.

One response by community colleges to the teacher education issue has been to implement a “*Community College Baccalaureate Model*” of offering teacher education degrees which are awarded by the community college, not a university. Only 2 states indicated that was occurring. Other approaches to this issue have been the “*University Center Model*” wherein university-sponsored courses and programs are offered on community college campuses. Approximately 25% state directors reported that both 2 and 4-year programs are offered in teacher education on the community college campuses in their state. A third model is the “*Articulation Model*” which is an approach of strengthening articulation of community college and university courses in the specific areas of teacher education. In this survey almost 80% of the states responding indicated that they have transfer agreements with four- year colleges that articulate community college and teacher education programs. Community colleges are engaged in teacher education programming in other ways. Over 62% offer the first two years of an approved teacher education program. Community college state directors noted other ways community colleges are engaged in teacher education issues. For instance, over 18% responded that one or more of their colleges offer an Associate of Applied Arts (AAT) degree in teaching. Over 87% offer early childhood education; over 59% offer para educator programs; 53% have teacher aide programs; and over 34% have special education aid programs. Other areas of emphasis included various forms of certification, such as alternative certification programs in early childhood, general areas of teacher education and programs for “career switchers”.

Ramifications: Policy Issues and Research Questions

The emerging emphasis on community colleges expanding their leadership roles in teacher education is not without controversy. Some believe that teacher education belongs exclusively at the university level, while others emphasize this expanded role as an extension of an egalitarian mission of access. At the heart of the controversy is that reality that some community colleges have adopted the “Baccalaureate Model” and are (or are planning to) award baccalaureate degrees, a role historically reserved for universities and four- year colleges. The “Community College Baccalaureate Model” has gained visibility in recent years, primarily through a new association called the Community College Baccalaureate Association.

There are obvious philosophical and political ramifications to these issues. Questions of inquiry and research are needed as this issue gains political momentum in the states. The most pressing issues may center on the following questions: How real is the teacher education shortage? What empirical evidence exists to support and describe this shortage? Is the shortage in particular fields or regions? What role, if any, should community colleges play in addressing the teacher education shortage? Should community colleges be allowed to offer teacher education baccalaureate degrees in underserved areas (urban and rural)? In high need fields? Are community college students in teacher education programs successfully matriculating into university teacher education programs? What research is needed to ensure that policy makers have empirical evidence to justify decisions regarding teacher education programs at either the community college or university levels?

What is needed is an honest, open and proactive discussion about these issues including policy ramifications and needs for substantive research.

References

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