From Student to Teacher:
How Community College Transfer Students Work toward a Baccalaureate and Teaching Credential

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Introduction

For more than a decade, California’s community colleges have been engaged in efforts to build a cost-effective bridge to teaching credential programs and address anticipated future shortages of educators across multiple grade levels and subject areas. Federal and state investments have bolstered the capacity of colleges to recruit students to the teacher education pathway and support their pursuit of transfer, degree and credential. Today, funding for these efforts are being dramatically reduced as higher education budgets are stripped, leaving many programs struggling to maintain operations. Moreover, the call for new teachers has stalled as K-12 systems also experience significant reductions and, in turn, lay off novice teachers.

What is the forecasted need for teachers? What should the role of community colleges be in future teacher preparation? The California Employment Development Department’s outlook for 2008-2018 projects a strong demand elementary and secondary educator. Other research corroborate these projections (Bland et al, 2010), pointing to the combined impact of a recent decline in the number of future teachers entering the pipeline, expected retirements among an aging teaching corps and the changing demographics among the state’s population. In addition, higher education leaders indicate the need is growing for teachers to fill nontraditional roles. Inside the education sector, expanding opportunities exist in specialties such as orientation and mobility and in curriculum and assessment development. In other sectors like technology, opportunities to provide training and educational services are growing.
In this current context, several educators, policy makers and funders are working to understand how future teachers use community colleges to work toward a baccalaureate and teaching credential and how the supports and partnerships put in place through recent funding initiatives have facilitated students’ movement from community college to university-level programs. Through this reflection, community college practitioners are honing their approach to future teacher preparation and working to strengthen and streamline the way they ready students for transfer in this discipline.

This research brief supplies key findings designed to support this conversation. The research stems from the RP Group’s study of community college students who pursue transfer to baccalaureate-level teacher education and credential programs. This examination explored (1) how students who complete a baccalaureate and teaching credential use the state’s community colleges to prepare for transfer, (2) what factors impact their journey and (3) what opportunities exist for further strengthening teacher education transfer paths.

The RP Group designed this document for those closely engaged in strengthening teacher education pathways in California, including community college and university educators and policy advocates. We present this brief as a work in progress to be finalized after conversations with these stakeholders. We intend for this document to:

- Share information discovered about teacher education transfer through our study
- Promote a dialog about what the findings mean and how they can promote improved transfer in this discipline

This research brief is part of a series of reports that present discipline-specific information from the Student Transfer in Professional Pathways Project (STP3)—an examination of community college transfer in five career-oriented majors including accounting, criminal justice, engineering, nursing and teacher education. It shares results from a quantitative study of nearly 800 transfer students who completed a baccalaureate and teaching credential and a qualitative study that identifies key themes from contact with over 160 students who recently transferred and are pursuing this path.

Funding for California Community College Teacher Pathway Development

For more than a decade, public and private funders have demonstrated an interest in building the capacity of community colleges to contribute to the future teacher pipeline.

The State Chancellor’s Office funded two key initiatives between 1999 and 2010, including the Teacher and Reading Development Partnership (TRDP, 1999-2005) and Teacher Preparation Pipeline (2006-2010, TPP) grants.

TRDP aimed to recruit community college students to the teaching pathway, offer them early field experiences focused on improving elementary students’ reading skills and provide an articulated path to four-year universities.

TPP, an effort of the Governor’s Career Technical Education Pathways and Workforce Development Program (SB70), focused on preparing students to become secondary or community college CTE teachers in math and/or science based CTE industry sectors and career pathways.

In addition, the American Association for Community Colleges, the National Science Foundation, the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching, the Hewlett Foundation and the California Postsecondary Education Commission supported initiatives to build teacher education pathways in California community colleges.
Highlights include the following:

- **Teacher education transfer paths are complex**
  - Complex state credentialing requirements combined with significant variation in how universities approach baccalaureate and credential programs makes it difficult for students to move seamlessly between community colleges and universities.
  - At the same time, the absence of a common and identifiable program of study for teacher preparation across the state’s community colleges make it challenging for students to know how to use the system to prepare for transfer in this discipline.

- **Community college efforts show promise in facilitating students’ navigation of these paths**
  - Survey findings indicate that students who used community college teacher preparation programs and services before transferring were more likely to have a detailed education plan that included teacher preparation coursework, to take major-specific courses at their community college and to earn a certificate or associate’s degree before transferring.

- **Community college transfer students pursuing teacher education represent a diverse population**
  - Analysis of student records showed 30% of transfers who completed a baccalaureate and teaching credential were Latino and 49% of recent transfer students reported being first-generation college-goers in surveys; by contrast, a recent state-by-state examination of teacher workforce diversity conducted by the Center for American Progress (Boser, 2011) found that roughly a quarter of California’s teachers were people of color, including 18% who were Hispanic.

This brief starts with an overview of how the RP Group conducted research on teacher education transfer. We then provide a summary of key findings on how community college transfer students work toward a bachelor’s degree and teaching credential as well as the factors that impact their journey. We also profile how two different community colleges approach supporting students interested in pursuing the teaching profession. We conclude with a series of discussion questions to stimulate reflection on and dialog about how educators and policy advocates might respond to and use the research.
What does this research include?

The RP Group studied students post-transfer, including those currently enrolled in teacher education credential programs and those who successfully achieved a baccalaureate and teaching credential. Six primary research questions drove this portion of our study:

Question 1: Who are transfer students?

Question 2: How do students get on the teacher education transfer path?

Question 3: How do they use the community college system to prepare for transfer?

Question 4: What challenges them along the way?

Question 5: What supports them toward transfer and degree?

Question 6: What happens to students post-transfer?

We explored these questions through the research activities described below.

**Backward mapping the journey of baccalaureate and credential achievers (quantitative data analysis).** The RP Group collaborated with the California Partnership for Achieving Student Success (Cal-PASS) to analyze student records and identify the educational paths taken by 792 transfers who ultimately achieved both a baccalaureate degree and teaching credential between fall 1996 and spring 2009. Fifteen universities were part of this analysis including undergraduate programs at 12 California State Universities (CSUs) and three Universities of California.

Our sample targeted students who completed at least 12 transferable units at a California community college and who had at least two years of university course data available prior to degree completion. The cohort does not include students who already completed a baccalaureate and returned to use the community college system to work toward transfer and completion of teaching credential. We performed analyses of completers’ demographics, time and units to transfer and degree, pre-transfer coursework including their first English and math class, number of community colleges attended, use of support services like financial aid and the impact of these and other factors on time to transfer and degree.

Readers should be advised that analysis was limited to those participating Cal-PASS. While most CSUs take part in this system, a number of public and private universities that are producers of credentialed teachers were not included in this study because they were not Cal-PASS participants at the time the research was performed.

**Documenting the experience of students post-transfer (student surveys and interviews).** To expand on and complement these quantitative findings, the RP Group used two different methods to gather the perspectives of recent transfer students. We targeted students now pursuing their
teaching credential and/or baccalaureate degree at three CSUs; these universities were selected because they were among the largest recipients of teacher education transfer students found in the Cal-PASS database. Approximately 145 students completed surveys.

In addition, we performed follow-up interviews to dig deeper into survey findings; 12 transfer students from two of the participating universities took part in phone interviews. Both the surveys and interviews collectively centered on how participants used community colleges to prepare for transfer; the factors that impacted their transfer experience; and their advice to peers, community colleges and four-year institutions about how to strengthen the preparation and transition of future teacher education transfer students.

Perspectives harvested through these activities highlight themes, illustrate complex experiences and augment quantitative evidence. However, due to their limited nature, these qualitative findings should not be used on their own to draw conclusions or make generalizations about teacher education transfer paths.

What are the key findings?

The following section presents key findings as related to the six research questions (see p. 3-4) explored through this portion of the RP Group’s examination of the teacher education transfer pathway. Where possible, we supply results from all three of the study’s primary research activities (quantitative data analysis, student surveys and student interviews) to answer these questions. However, there may be some questions that are only informed by findings from one or two research activities.

Question 1:
Who are the transfer students?

Quantitative data analysis on the demographics of transfer students who achieved a baccalaureate and teaching credential found the largest percentage of completers were female (80%), white (38%) and Latino (30%). Nearly half of students who completed surveys reported being first-generation college-goers and were most commonly under 30 years of age.

Question 2:
How do students get on the road to transfer in teacher education?

Students universally rated “personal educational goal” and “job/career advancement” as top motivators for pursuing transfer in teacher education in their survey responses. Students also shared in interviews that family members as well as field work opportunities and jobs that introduced them to the world of teaching supplied additional sources of inspiration.
A large majority of survey respondents reported being clearly aware of the opportunity to transfer when enrolling in a community college. However, the point at which students’ chose to pursue a degree in teaching appeared to vary by the type of university program in which they were enrolled. A larger percentage (51%) of those students enrolled in a combined baccalaureate/credential program indicated they chose to pursue a degree related to teaching early in their community college career. Many students (63%) who were enrolled in a post-baccalaureate credential program indicated they chose a teaching major near the end or after leaving the community college system.

Question 3:
How do students use community colleges to prepare for transfer to a teacher education program?

Quantitative data analysis on the educational paths taken by transfer students who ultimately completed a baccalaureate and teaching credential revealed that these learners largely used the community college system to complete general education (GE) coursework. Accordingly, GE classes comprised about two thirds of the total transferrable units completed by these transfer students while enrolled at a community college, followed by science, technology, engineering and math courses (STEM) (23% of transferrable community college units achieved).

Most survey respondents indicated their college offered courses designed specifically for future teachers. Types of courses identified included “math for teachers,” child development and education-related offerings and pediatric first aid and CPR. Among those who reported their college provided such offerings, enrollment in these courses varied by the type of university program students were pursuing as well as according to their use of teacher preparation programs and services pre-transfer. Teacher preparation programs and services can encompass a range of activities and supports, including: transfer advising, career guidance and exploration, field placement experiences, discipline-specific coursework, articulation agreements and transfer arrangements with partner universities, credential test preparation, student club sponsorship and physical space for future teacher to meet with peers and advisers. Those transfer students pursuing a combined baccalaureate/teaching credential program were much more likely to report having enrolled in these courses than those pursuing a post-baccalaureate credential (91% v. 35%). Possibly related, those students who used teacher preparation programs and services pre-transfer were more likely to indicate they took these classes than those who did not use this discipline-specific support (94% v. 52%).

Interestingly, while a majority of students began their journey prepared for college-level English, many placed into math courses below transfer level. While only approximately one third started in below transfer-level English, nearly two thirds took below transfer-level math while attending a community college. Quantitative analysis showed that the vast majority of teacher education transfer students ultimately completed statistics/finite math as their highest math course pre-transfer.

Throughout high school, I worked in afterschool programs or taught preschool, so I always knew I wanted to work in this field.
– CSU Transfer Student
The quantitative data analysis of students’ educational paths also showed that more students earned an associate’s degree before transferring than in three of the other four disciplines studied through this project (with the exception being administration of justice, which was slightly higher). Approximately 57% of students who completed a baccalaureate and teaching credential earned an associate’s degree prior to transfer while 42% did not.

Similarly, 58% of survey respondents reported earning an associate’s degree or certificate before transferring in areas such as liberal arts, child development and early childhood education. Students who said they used teacher preparation programs and services pre-transfer were more likely to earn an associate’s degree or certificate compared to those who did not (74% v. 51%).

Ultimately, quantitative data analysis showed that baccalaureate and teaching credential completers took an average of three years to transfer. Almost half of students took more than two and less than four years to transfer while another 30% percent took four or more. Not surprisingly, the more units students accumulated in the community college system, the longer they took to reach transfer; students who earned 86 or more units took an average of four and a half years to transfer.

**Question 4: What challenges do students encounter along the way?**

When asked about the factors challenging their transfer experience, survey respondents identified the “cost of attending a four-year institution” and “need to work to support self and/or family” as top challenges. Similarly, interview participants indicated economic stresses and financial burdens to be primary barriers to their pursuit of a baccalaureate and teaching credential. At the same time, the quantitative data analysis of students’ educational paths to transfer showed that only 13% of students used financial aid while enrolled in a community college.

Another general theme that emerged from interviews with transferred students focused on strengthening partnerships between community college and university teacher education programs to streamline the transfer process. For example, some students commented on the need for improved dissemination of accurate information about the specific transfer requirements—on the part of both segments. Others noted the need for agreements between feeder community colleges and university teacher education programs to spell out which GE requirements and lower-division major prerequisites will count toward completion of a baccalaureate and/or teaching credential.
Question 5:
What supports teacher education students toward transfer and a degree?

Survey, focus group and interview results across all five disciplines studied through STP3 suggest that a detailed and focused education plan leading to transfer can mitigate guidance and credit transferability challenges encountered by many students. Most teacher education transfer students indicated in their survey responses that they had a plan mapping their journey to transfer. At the same time, students’ experience with education planning appeared to vary by transfer destination and by use of teacher preparation programs and services pre-transfer.

For example, nearly 90% of transfer students attending one combined baccalaureate and teaching credential program indicated in their survey responses that they developed an education plan while enrolled at a community college. Nearly 70% of these students described this plan as “very detailed” and almost 85% said their plans included coursework that would prepare them for a career in teaching. Many (44%) received help with their plan from a teacher preparation program counselor or staff. As one point of comparison, roughly 60% of transfer students attending one post-baccalaureate credential program indicated they developed an education plan before transferring. Just over 45% indicated their plan was “very detailed” and 31% reported it included coursework that would prepare them for a career in teaching. A smaller percentage of these students (11%) received help from a teacher preparation program counselor or staff.

Similarly, survey respondents who reported using teacher preparation programs and services pre-transfer were more likely (when compared to those who did not) to indicate their education plans were detailed (89% v. 50%) and inclusive of community college teacher education courses (89% v. 59%). They were also more likely to report that a teacher preparation program counselor or staff helped them design their plan (78% v. 15%).

Survey results also indicated use of teacher preparation centers and programs at community colleges varied by transfer destination, ranging from 16% to 41%. This difference may be a result of the program type (e.g., more respondents participating in the post-baccalaureate credential program indicated they chose to pursue teaching after leaving the community college system) or the availability and strength of community college teacher preparation programs in the region. That said, a majority (71%) of survey respondents who utilized these services generally rated them as “useful” or “extremely useful.” These respondents indicated they primarily tapped teacher preparation centers and programs for information on transfer, careers in teaching and specific courses as well as to meet others who were interested in the profession. As indicated in prior sections of this brief, students who used these services were also more likely to take community college teacher preparation courses and to complete a degree or certificate before transferring.

Additionally, student interview participants recognized when strong partnerships existed between their community college and transfer destination and noted the positive impact of these relationships on their transfer experience.

Because [my community college] knows my [transfer university] and vice versa, the counselors can help students get through the pipeline quickly and effectively.
– CSU Transfer Student
Finally, several interviewees noted the usefulness of transfer resources such as community college transfer centers and ASSIST.org as well as the positive impact dedicated and inspiring counselors and faculty had on both their transfer planning and motivation.

Question 6: What happens to teacher education students after transfer?

Transfer students from all participating universities generally indicated in their survey responses that the primary drivers for their university selection included access to a program aligned with career/educational goals, affordability and location. Others selected programs for special arrangements that allowed them to expediently achieve their credential.

The credentials and career interests students reported pursuing naturally varied by the type of program offered by their transfer destination. For example, almost all students indicated they were working toward a multi-subject credential (96%) and elementary-level employment (91%) at one university. At another institution, respondents were more evenly split between their pursuit of a single subject (45%) and multi-subject (55%) credential and expressed interest in a range of workplaces (elementary, secondary, special education and preschool). Some interview participants also said they had returned to school to pursue a specialized credential and/or to increase their eligibility for job opportunities in non-traditional settings.

Regardless of the transfer destination or program type, survey respondents largely (89%) reported feeling “equally” to “much more” prepared when compared to classmates in their major who started as freshmen at the university.

Backward mapping students’ path to transfer, degree and credential reveals that students pursuing teacher education took an average of 5.2 years between their first community college enrollment and baccalaureate degree completion—the shortest time to degree when compared to other disciplines studied. That said, one third of students took six or more years to achieve their bachelor’s degree. The majority of teacher education students earned their baccalaureate one to two years after transferring to a university. Unique to teacher education, the number of units students completed while enrolled in the community college system did not correlate to number of units required post-transfer; for example, 37% of students who completed 86 or more transferrable units at the community college earned more than 60 units at the university level. The types of bachelor’s degrees earned by teacher education transfer students included liberal arts, education, English/literature and recreation/fitness.

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I decided to go into teaching towards the end of my junior year. I began to look into getting a teaching credential and completing the [necessary] courses. I selected [this university] for location... and it offered a one-year program where I could start and finish by spring semester.

– CSU Transfer Student
Community College Spotlight: Different Approaches to Building the Teacher Education Pathway

The following examples highlight how colleges have individually and collectively built their capacity to serve future teachers in different ways. These profiles of two institutions and one association demonstrate just some of the many ways community colleges across the state are approaching development of the teacher education transfer pipeline.

Cerritos College – Teacher TRAC Program

The Teacher TRAC Program offers many services, pathways, and opportunities for students interested in teaching. Over 450 students are currently receiving comprehensive services and are part of one of three Teacher TRAC pathways (elementary, secondary, or CTE). Students must apply to and be accepted to Teacher TRAC based on the submission of a short essay, participation in college assessment, their GPA and math and English placement. The program engages participants in the elementary pathway in a structured sequence of courses according to their area of interest that leads to priority junior-level enrollment in CSU Long Beach’s Integrated Teacher Education Program. The success of the program is predicated on a number of important factors, including strong partnerships, articulated curriculum pathways, faculty expertise and commitment, student support services, service learning and fieldwork programs, professional development, leadership experiences and ongoing program evaluations. To date, over 400 students have graduated with an associate’s degree from the program since 2001. The Teacher TRAC Program is committed to the recruitment, development, and preparation of quality teachers. Its goal is being realized as its graduates are retained as teachers who deliver a quality educational experience to their students.

City College of San Francisco (CCSF) – Teacher Prep Center

CCSF’s Teacher Prep Center provides information, resources and advice for students interested in pursuing a teaching career. Housed in the Child Development Department, the center began serving students in 1999 to address the growing need to clarify both alignments and differences between early childhood education career pathways and the preparation required for K-12 teaching. Moreover, the department recognized the growing numbers of transfer students who were beginning their journey toward a teaching career at the community college level.

Today, the Teacher Prep Center, paired with an Early Childhood Professional Development Center, annually offers over 3,000 students an array of resources including a stand-alone physical location, academic advising, links to discipline-specific financial aid and scholarship resources, field work experiences, information on credential and permit requirements, specialized teacher education coursework and CBEST/CSET preparation. The Center engages potential transfer students with its services in a range of ways from training CCSF’s counseling corps on teacher education pathways to including a question on the college’s application designed to identify learners interested in teaching careers. CCSF also works closely with the
local unified school district to recruit both current and recent high school graduates to the pathway through dual enrollment opportunities as well as to offer current college students field experience in K-12 classrooms. Specific recruitment projects exist for future math, science, CTE and youth worker-to-teacher subject areas.

On the other end of the educational continuum, CCSF regularly partners with San Francisco State University (SFSU) to help transition students smoothly to Child and Adolescent and Liberal Studies departments and to subject area content departments (e.g., math, science and English). Collaborations include providing SFSU courses onsite at the college and maintaining articulation agreements that give students a head start upon transfer.

**Association for California Community College Teacher Education Programs (ACCCTEP)**

ACCCTEP represents over 30 community college teacher education programs in California and aims to promote the establishment, advancement and sustainability of quality teacher education in California community colleges as an essential component of higher education. As an extension to the research on teacher education transfer, the RP Group collaborated with ACCCTEP to survey California community colleges about their teacher education programs and services. Survey responses from 28 colleges included the following highlights:

- 73% currently maintain a K-12 teacher education program; 12% have cancelled their programs
- Many colleges are working with extremely limited resources; five respondents indicated they have annual budgets of less than $10,000, while another five indicated they were working with anywhere between $10,000 and $250,000
- Programs offer a range of support for students, with counseling or academic advising, university transfer assistance and field placements being the most frequent services provided
- A vast majority of respondents reported maintaining articulation agreements and recommended transfer patterns with partner universities
- Participants rated affordability and proximity to home as the top reasons they believe students start their journey toward transfer, degree and teaching credential at a community college
How can we make this research work for you and for students?

The RP Group is eager for these findings on the teacher education pathway to support the work of educators and policy advocates interested in increasing students’ transfer access and success. To this end, the following section offers two sets of discussion questions to promote dialog among teacher education stakeholders. One set focuses on how the research reflects your own experience and the other explores how these findings can be used for action, including helping students achieve a baccalaureate and credential and informing efforts to ensure the future teacher pipeline aligns with workforce demand across the state.

How does this research reflect your own experience?

The following questions are designed to help the RP Group ground additional research in inquiries that are of high priority to teacher education stakeholders.

**Discussion Questions:**

- How do the findings align with your experience supporting students in their effort to transfer and complete a baccalaureate and teaching credential?
- What findings are particularly useful? How might you use them?
- What issues seem unresolved? What additional research would be of value to your work?

How can we use this research to improve the teacher education pathway?

This research suggests several possible opportunities for enhancing the efficiency and effectiveness of the teacher education transfer pathway, many of them coming from the “experts”—successful transfer students. Community college and university educators, inter-segmental groups and policy advocates might consider ways to work both independently and collaboratively to explore these points for improvement.

**Discussion Questions:**

- What are the common elements of a strong and effective teacher education pathway program?
- What are some ways that two- and four-year colleges can support and promote the teacher education pathway?
• How can we raise students' awareness earlier about the value and benefits of pursuing a teaching credential?

• In what ways can the teaching profession be diversified to respond to the changing demands for training and learning in the current economic environment?

• Given the impact of teacher preparation programs and services on how students’ use community college to work toward transfer in this discipline, how can community colleges, policymakers and funders work together to ensure these program remain intact and possibly extend to other colleges?

• Given that students rate economic constraints as a top transfer barrier at the same time that analysis shows few students take advantage of financial aid, how can community colleges work to raise students’ awareness and increase their actual usage of the financial resources available to them at their institutions?

For more information...

For more information on the Student Transfer in Professional Pathways Project, visit http://www.rpgroup.org/stp3.html or contact Eva Schiorring, Project Director, eschiорring@rpgroup.org
References


Notes

i Cal-PASS is a voluntary statewide data sharing system to track students transitioning among institutions and segments such as high school to college and community college to university.