This chapter discusses the evolving role of the community college in teacher education from the standpoint of state policy issues.

The Role of State Postsecondary Education Policy in Supporting Teacher Education at the Community College

Tricia Coulter and Edward Crowe

To ensure that our nation’s children have the competent teachers they need, long-range and comprehensive efforts focused on teacher education are needed at the state level. Although local colleges and universities are trying hard to increase enrollment in teacher preparation programs and to revise curricula to ensure quality in the programs they offer, state-level coordination is needed to bring the K–12 and higher education sectors together to prepare and retain sufficient numbers of competent, classroom-ready teachers.

In this chapter we provide an overview of the structure and authority of state higher education agencies, concentrating on their role in academic, funding, and information system policies and practices. We then touch on the key state policy issues; decisions about these issues affect the manner in which and extent to which community colleges are involved in addressing teacher quality issues in the state, specifically through the structure and function of preparation programs. Finally, we suggest ways that states can encourage greater cross-system collaboration among K–12 schools, community colleges, and universities to promote systemic solutions to the related crises of teacher supply and teaching quality in the United States.

Role of State Higher Education Agencies

Every state system of postsecondary education includes an agency with responsibility for the governance or coordination of the institutions making up the system. The primary coordination function of a postsecondary
education agency is to ensure that the operations of the postsecondary institutions for which it is responsible are aligned with each other and with the priorities of the state. This coordination function is carried out both through formal structures and through such informal processes as networks and associations, as well as through legislative action (for a more detailed discussion of state postsecondary coordination and governance, see McGuinness, 1997). Examples of specific responsibility areas are outlined in the following sections.

**State Planning.** A primary function of state agencies, statewide postsecondary education planning traditionally took the form of long-range or master plans. Increasingly, however, state planning for postsecondary education is taking the form of strategic plans. Often created by a group of education, business, and community leaders empanelled for this purpose, strategic plans tend to be more responsive to the public agenda and priorities than were long-range or master plans. This shift to strategic planning for postsecondary education also reflects a general movement of postsecondary education toward being a more market-driven enterprise, acknowledging competition from educational entities outside the traditional realm.

**Academic Policies.** The creation and implementation of academic policies is of primary importance in any higher education system. Each state agency has a system whereby academic policies are created, reviewed, and implemented. When it comes to teacher education issues, academic policies are expected to address the teacher shortage in this country. It is the postsecondary education agencies that create or implement policies offering students alternative routes for entrance into teacher preparation programs, that determine which institutions will take responsibility for various levels of teacher education, and that decide on content and accountability processes for the quality of teacher education programs in general. Therefore these agencies are also involved in shaping professional development programs to address the requirements for the “highly qualified” educators defined in the federal No Child Left Behind Act.

Issues of institutional mission are also relevant to the teacher quality policy arena. In particular, state postsecondary agencies often have statutory authority to set or change the recognized mission of a higher education institution. Permission to offer doctoral programs or to evolve to a research-oriented mission (the lack of such a mission has been suggested by some critics as one reason for the relegation of teacher preparation to a less important status on many university campuses) often lies within the authority of state higher education agencies. Similarly, in states where community colleges seek to offer baccalaureate degrees in teacher education, the higher education agency (and sometimes the state legislature) must review and approve this step.

**Data, Reporting, and Accountability.** Another primary function of a state postsecondary education agency is the maintenance of statewide information or data systems. Critics have pointed out that state data and
information systems are woefully inadequate to the task of gathering relevant statistics on the status of teaching in a state. As a result, it is argued, states do a poor job holding programs accountable for their quality or for the performance of their graduates who become teachers. For instance, both the recent Education Trust (2002) report on the federal Title II teacher quality report card, *Interpret with Caution*, and the Title II report published by the U.S. Department of Education (2002), *Meeting the Highly Qualified Teachers Challenge: The Secretary’s Annual Report on Teacher Quality*, address the issue of state policy on teacher quality.

**Funding Policies.** The allocation of resources is a clear and straightforward manifestation of a state’s priorities. One of the pressing issues in improving teacher preparation in the United States is the extent to which teacher training is supported as an intensive clinical activity, with college or university faculty involvement in school settings to supervise practicing teachers. This clinical function has significant funding implications. The cost of training new teachers can be an important policy matter, especially if state officials recognize that high teacher turnover, with the attendant need to train replacements for those who leave after a year or two, imposes endless and repetitive high costs as a result of churning teachers through the K–12 system.

**K–16 Role and Partnerships.** Rather than dealing with a student’s persistence and progress once enrolled in an institution of higher education, postsecondary education agencies are now involved in a number of K–16 initiatives and partnerships in order to create seamless articulation from high school into higher education. The preparation of teachers is best approached as a K–16 issue. In the words of the Carnegie Corporation’s Teachers for a New Era program, “education should be understood as an academically taught clinical practice profession, requiring close cooperation between colleges of education and actual practicing schools” (Carnegie Corporation, 2002). Additionally, there is a K–16 emphasis specific to teacher education programs in ensuring that the subject matter content of teacher preparation programs is aligned with K–12 content standards.

**Key State Policy Issues**

Several key state policy issues arise naturally as states work to find ways to address the teacher shortage and to improve teacher preparation programs. As mentioned earlier, how states and state agencies of higher education respond to these issues directly affects the manner in which and extent to which community colleges are involved in teacher preparation. Although certain issues will be particular to a given state, a number of issues are of universal importance. Several of these are discussed here.

**Role and Mission Designation Responsibilities.** Intrinsically involved with a state higher education agency’s role in state planning for education is the approval of the roles and missions of the institutions within
the system. Institutional mission statements serve to clarify the distinct role of each institution in the context of the system as a whole and of the education-related goals and priorities of the state. With their responsibility to approve these mission statements, state higher education agencies must ensure that the educational needs of the state are being met and at the same time ensure that the mission of one institution does not infringe upon the mission of another. Concerns over this type of “mission creep” are not just territorial; expanding the mission of one institution means that it can offer additional programs, and these might have serious repercussions on enrollments and resource allocation systemwide.

Specific to teacher education programs are concerns among state policymakers about teacher shortages and the speed with which traditional university-based teacher preparation programs are willing to improve their own quality. The expansion of teacher preparation into community colleges is one way to address these concerns. State higher education agency responses vary from altering or expanding current community colleges offerings for articulation and transfer to allowing community colleges to offer a bachelor’s degree in teacher education (these examples will be further discussed later).

In addition to being responsive to the needs of the state, state higher education agencies need to be responsive to the needs of their institutions. The creation or expansion of programs requires resources. If new resources are not available, the instigation of new programs requires a reallocation of existing, finite resources. This issue is particularly relevant given the financial constraints and retrenchment that the states are currently facing. Also, offering teacher preparation program options outside of four-year institutions may initially affect enrollment in those institutions’ programs. This is an important consideration because enrollment is used as a measure of academic program accountability. The counterargument is that an increase in teacher preparation program options will not produce a redistribution of students because the students enrolling in the newer options will be mostly those who would not have enrolled at any institution otherwise.

**Program Approval Criteria and Procedures.** Because an institution’s mission statement serves as a template by which the appropriateness of new and existing programs is judged, expansion of an institution’s mission statement is directly related to program approval. The process for establishing new programs can be quite involved. Petitions for program approval usually must include estimates of initial and sustained financial and other resource requirements, identification of potential sources of funding, estimates of potential revenue generated by the program, and a determination of the need for the program, the proposed enrollment rates, and the potential impact on programs or enrollments at other institutions.

As mentioned previously, changes and expansions in the teacher preparation offerings at community colleges are one way in which state agencies of higher education are attempting to meet the challenge of increasing the
supply of teachers and the quality of teacher education programs. Two types of efforts are briefly discussed in the following sections:

**Offering B.A. Degrees in Teacher Education at Community Colleges.** Both Florida and Nevada have authorized a community college in their states to offer bachelor’s degrees in teacher education, and other two-year colleges are expected to follow suit (Evelyn, 2002). This is an ambitious response to teacher supply and quality concerns, and obtaining approval for this type of program may be challenging. Prior to granting approval, state agencies of higher education must consider a number of issues, such as the additional faculty and resources that will be required to implement the program, the impact the program would have on other institutions in the state, and the overall sustainability of the program.

**Changing Articulation and Transfer Policies.** Articulation and transfer policies define the ease with which students enter institutions or move between them in pursuit of their educational goals. Changes in articulation and transfer policies often take the form of altering or expanding courses or two-year degrees offered at the community college. This issue is of particular relevance to community colleges involved in teacher education that do not offer a self-contained four-year program. State higher education agencies often approve clearly designated 2+2 programs, in which an individual community college or a group of such colleges enters into an agreement with a four-year institution about transferability of courses. In Maryland this has taken the form of offering a new type of two-year degree, an associate degree in teaching (see Chapter Four). This allows students who successfully complete this degree to get full credit for their work at the community college upon enrolling in a teacher preparation program at a four-year institution (Evelyn, 2002). Some states even have 2+2+2 programs, reaching down into high school for recruitment into teacher education programs (Waiwaihole and Boswell, 2001).

A number of issues need to be considered by a state higher education agency in determining how best to use community colleges in teacher preparation. One such issue involves resources. Depending on the specific institutions involved, it may be less resource intensive to change course offerings at a community college in order to establish a 2+2 program than to create a bachelor’s degree program at that college or to make the necessary changes at a four-year college to accommodate increased enrollment. Another issue is cost and convenience for the students. Course costs at a community college are usually lower than those at a four-year institution. Additionally, a community college may be more geographically accessible for students or, in keeping with these colleges’ responsiveness to the community, may offer courses at more convenient times.

**Accreditation Issues.** Of additional concern for state higher education agencies relative to articulation and transfer policies are issues of accreditation. Teacher education accreditation agencies have strict procedures and criteria that must be met and need to be considered in establishing appropriate
articulation and transfer policies. The institution graduating the student is held responsible for the quality of the educational experiences. For 2+2 type programs, this means the four-year institution. For this reason there needs to be a rigorous system in place for judging the appropriateness and quality of any courses a student wishes to transfer for academic credit into the teacher education program from which he or she intends to graduate.

Articulation, coordination, and accreditation issues argue strongly for close alignment in teacher preparation activities between the two-year and four-year institutions in a state. Just as arts and sciences faculty and education faculty on the university campus must work closely together to ensure effective teacher preparation, the same working relationships are essential in states where significant numbers of teachers begin their postsecondary education on the two-year campus. In the accountability era, where university programs are held responsible for licensure pass rates of their program graduates in subject matter and other areas, it would seem a matter of enlightened self-interest to recognize that cross-campus alignment and collaboration are productive activities. But just as arts and sciences collaboration with education on the campus is a struggle rather than the norm, successful collaboration across campuses or among systems of higher education in a state is challenging.

The current federal emphasis on developing alternative routes to certification and streamlining the system by which individuals from other fields can become certified as teachers also must be considered in establishing articulation and transfer policies. This emphasis may now require that policies be put in place allowing students to receive credit for a wider range and diversity of experience than has previously been the case. With schools, school districts, not-for-profit, and for-profit organizations all playing significant roles in “alternate pathways” for training new teachers, the pressure is mounting on two- and four-year institutions of higher education to move faster in providing solutions to the challenge of producing high-quality teachers.

Challenges and Opportunities in Teacher Quality Policy Development

On the issue of teacher quality, crises of one kind or another generally characterize the state policy environment. These crises take several forms:

- Overall shortages of K–12 classroom teachers
- Teacher shortages in subject areas such as math, science, foreign languages, special education, and ESL
- Local teacher shortages in urban or rural districts
- Too few minority teachers, especially given the demographic composition of the K–12 student population
- Concerns about teacher quality and preparation program quality
High teacher turnover, particularly of new teachers, which is often attributed to problems with program quality, lack of effective mentoring and induction, problems in school working conditions, and the attractiveness of other employment options.

A familiar response to the teacher shortage crisis in many states is to lower standards by weakening entry or exit criteria for preparation programs, reducing licensure test cut scores, or using various backdoor strategies to exempt teacher candidates from licensure or certification standards. Thus, in more than one state, it is possible to work as a teacher on a “temporary certificate” until one is ready to retire. Such situations reflect a clear abdication of responsibility by the state for the improvement of teacher preparation, and this needs to be addressed by state agencies of higher education.

What can states do? The challenges surrounding the supply, retention, and quality of teachers are highly visible and thus create opportunities for state higher education agencies to use the policy levers described earlier to help craft effective solutions. In fact, the authors believe the time is ripe for these agencies to *initiate* policy to meet compelling state needs.

**System Alignment.** In states where significant numbers of teachers begin their postsecondary education at two-year colleges, there are several critical system alignment issues that often need attention. Quality preparation programs build on subject matter knowledge by focusing on teaching skills, clinical practice skills, and the ability to use technology effectively. Maintaining this focus requires coordination and interaction among faculty engaged in all aspects of the program. In 2+2 programs, community college faculty need to collaborate closely with university faculty to be sure students are acquiring both subject content knowledge and teaching skills in those subjects. In four-year programs, at either a community college or a university, arts and sciences faculty should collaborate closely with education faculty to ensure the same thing.

Additionally, preparation programs are held accountable for the subject matter knowledge of their graduates, through licensure test results and assessments of the K-12 classroom performance of new teachers. Usually the results of such assessments are distributed to the institution from which the student graduated, with the intention of providing feedback mechanisms about the effectiveness of the preparation program. However, this intention may fail when some or all of the academic content training is acquired by the student at another institution. In the case of a 2+2 program, close alignment between the two- and four-year institutions involved allows both institutions to use this type of feedback to increase accountability and as a tool for improving the preparation program as a whole.

However, state agencies of higher education should not focus just on alignment within their own system. States should also do more to align their K-12 student learning standards with the standards they have for new
teachers, taking steps to ensure that coursework and other preparation pro-
gram requirements specifically address each of the standards. This requires
statewide K–16 partnerships and local partnerships that include community
colleges, universities with teacher preparation programs, and the
schools that both sets of institutions hope to serve. This ensures that all pro-
grams and institutions that have a role in preparing new teachers design
their curriculum around the needs and high achievement goals of K–12
schools. State higher education agencies have the capacity and visibility to
convene K–16 groups for this purpose.

Academic Policy Initiatives. Articulation and transfer policies have
seen lots of activity in state higher education systems. In most states stu-
dents now have more opportunities to receive full credit for their work at
one institution when they transfer to another college or university, espe-
cially in the public sector. But the evolution of such new approaches to
teacher preparation as community college–based alternative certification
programs and associate or even bachelor’s degrees in teacher education is
likely to put increased stress on existing articulation and transfer policies.
This may be particularly true in states where the de facto status of the com-
munity college as a major force in the state’s teacher preparation system
(because of the sheer numbers of students who start at the two-year college
before going on to complete a teacher preparation degree at a university) is
given explicit recognition through specialized associate degree programs,
state and federal accountability mechanisms, or standards alignment efforts.

Alternative Pathways to Teaching. The proliferation of alternate cer-
tification programs across the country is creating vast networks of new
providers. Community colleges have many advantages in offering nontra-
ditional pathways to full state licensure as practicing teachers. Their com-
munity location and local funding ties, connections with (and in some cases
historical origins in) K–12 schools, and geographical proximity to urban or
rural districts with teacher shortages all may serve as advantages in certain
places around the country. The challenge for state policymakers is to work
with new and emerging program providers to make sure they are held to
the same high standards of quality that the traditional programs are
expected to meet. This means, in particular, that community colleges and
state higher education agencies must think through the methods that alter-
native programs can use to give prospective teachers a sophisticated under-
standing of child development and scientific knowledge about the ways
children learn and grow.

Accreditation and Accountability. If we are to make progress away
from acting with the crisis mentality resulting from the teacher shortage and
instead are to build state policy on the notion of high-quality preparation
and effective teacher retention strategies, states and others will need to
address evidence-based program accreditation and accountability. All
providers and all program completers should be held to the same high stan-
dards regardless of the type of institution through which the program is
provided. And in the era of the federal Title II Higher Education Act (HEA) report card for teacher quality and the promise of high-quality teaching embodied in the No Child Left Behind Act of 2002, the data resources and program review policies of state higher education agencies can be effective tools to promote the goal of high-quality teaching for every child.

**Funding Policies and Incentives.** Preparing teachers is, among other things, a clinical practice activity. College and university faculty cannot prepare new teachers with the clinical skills and classroom management strategies needed for their success unless resources are allocated to support a faculty presence in the schools. This fact has implications for the ways institutions of higher education are funded to deliver teacher preparation courses or programs. It also has consequences for the ways these campuses allocate the resources they get. State higher education agencies can assess the current capacity of state funding formulas to provide these resources and can work with institutions to help them budget for strong and effective clinical programs. This is important in all education programs, but it should receive particular attention in the alternate pathways programs where students start with academic content knowledge but need to learn how to teach their subjects successfully to real-world students.

**Conclusion**

This is a time of ferment and change in all aspects of teacher preparation in the United States. Numerous initiatives and experiments are underway to fix real or perceived problems in recruiting, preparing, supporting, and holding accountable all new teachers and the programs that prepare them. The fundamental fact, though, is that the new teacher supply will never match the demand unless we stem the tide of teacher turnover. Community colleges and state higher education policymakers can help all those involved in our teacher preparation “system” to rethink current approaches to supply-and-demand policies. One of the key challenges is getting state systems of education and higher education to think and act as systems, instead of operating as discrete sets of institutional players with well-defended barriers to collaboration. Community colleges are playing important roles in the provision of new teachers. Working with state higher education systems in innovative ways, institutions will find the opportunity exists to act together in order to ensure that every child in the United States has a caring, qualified, and competent teacher. It is long past time to make good on that promise.

**References**

TRICIA COULTER is a policy analyst with State Higher Education Executive Officers (SHEEO) and works primarily with teacher quality and K–16 policy issues and initiatives.

EDWARD CROWE is a consultant on teacher quality and K–16 policy issues for SHEEO and other organizations, including the National Commission on Teaching and America’s Future, the Southeast Center on Teaching Quality, and the Carnegie Corporation of New York.