

The CCB Perspective

A concise look at the research and issues shaping community college baccalaureate degrees

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Community College Bachelor's Degrees in Teacher Education

Community colleges are taking on a growing role in preparing K-12 teachers, helping to address a shortage that disproportionately affects rural and urban communities. CCB teacher education programs are concentrated in fields with the most acute shortages and producing graduates whose racial and ethnic backgrounds more closely reflect the students they are preparing to teach than the nation's current teacher workforce.

The United States faces a persistent shortage of qualified teachers in elementary and secondary education. The Learning Policy Institute defines teacher shortages on two dimensions: (a) the number of unfilled teaching positions, and (b) the number of teachers not fully certified for their teaching positions. Using this definition, the Institute's data show 48 states, plus the District of Columbia (DC), employ an estimated 365,967 teachers who are not fully certified to teach, plus 31 states report 45,582 vacant positions. Special education teachers are needed in 45 states, science teachers in 41 states, and math teachers in 40 states, with 48 states reporting shortages in one or more of these three areas. Elementary education, language arts, and career and technical education (CTE) also show concerning shortfalls.

Teaching shortages are also not distributed evenly. Schools in rural and urban communities are most likely to employ teachers who are underprepared, inexperienced, and working out of their field. Rural, high-poverty schools struggle most to hire qualified teachers, but both urban and rural schools report high turnover rates. Turnover in schools with the largest concentrations of students of color and low-income students is 35–37% higher than at schools with the smallest concentrations of these students.

Community colleges have long contributed to teacher preparation across the U.S., with almost 40% of university teacher education majors having transferred from community colleges. These transfer students are “far more racially and ethnically diverse than their peers at 4-year institutions... [and] older and more likely to be financially independent and to have their own families” (American Association of Colleges for Teacher Education (ACCTE), 2022, p. 11). While transfer remains an important pathway, community college baccalaureate (CCB) advocates recommend more community colleges offer affordable teacher education bachelor's degree programs themselves, particularly to serve district residents who can help fill vacancies in local schools.

Growth of CCB Teacher Education Programs

Using national CCB program inventories and new data on CCB programs approved in 2026, we find a steady increase in CCB teacher education programs in the U.S.^[1] By 2026, 15 states had authorized one or more CCB teacher education programs since 1998-99, with over half of these programs approved between 2016-17 and 2025-26 (Figure 1).

Across the 15 states authorizing CCB degrees in education, 68 community colleges offer a total of 112 teacher education programs, representing 13% of all CCBs in the U.S. Among the earliest of states to adopt CCBs in education, Florida's colleges offer half of all CCB teacher education programs in the country. Other states have replicated Florida's model when their regional contexts are similar, but it is important to note key differences in Florida when compared to other states. For example, the majority of Florida's teacher education programs are located in non-rural serving colleges,^[2] which is not the case for most other states that confer education bachelor's degrees. Quite the opposite, rural-serving community college districts dominate CCB teacher education degrees approved in 11 other states, where addressing rural teacher shortages has been key to the approval of these programs.

[1] The data in this section are based on three national CCB program inventories: Still Growing (Meza & Vo, 2026); Watch Them Grow (CCBA & Bragg & Associates, 2024); and Mapping the Community College Baccalaureate (Love et al., 2021), plus CCB programs approved since December 2025. All education programs are identified by Classification of Instructional Programs (CIP) code 13, using the Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System (IPEDS).

[2] The rural-serving designation is informed by scholarship of the Alliance for Research on Rural Colleges (ARRC).

CCB teacher education programs tilt toward preparing early childhood and elementary grade teachers, with 45 of these programs offered by nearly half of all 15 states (Figure 2). One-third of the 15 states also offer 22 secondary teaching programs in subject-specific fields, such as mathematics and science, and one-third of all 15 states offer 19 general teacher education programs. Also, 27% of all 15 states offer 19 programs in special and exceptional education, and 27% offer 8 programs in other fields, such as middle school and agricultural education.

Figure 1. CCB Teacher Preparation Program Expansion from 1998 to 2026

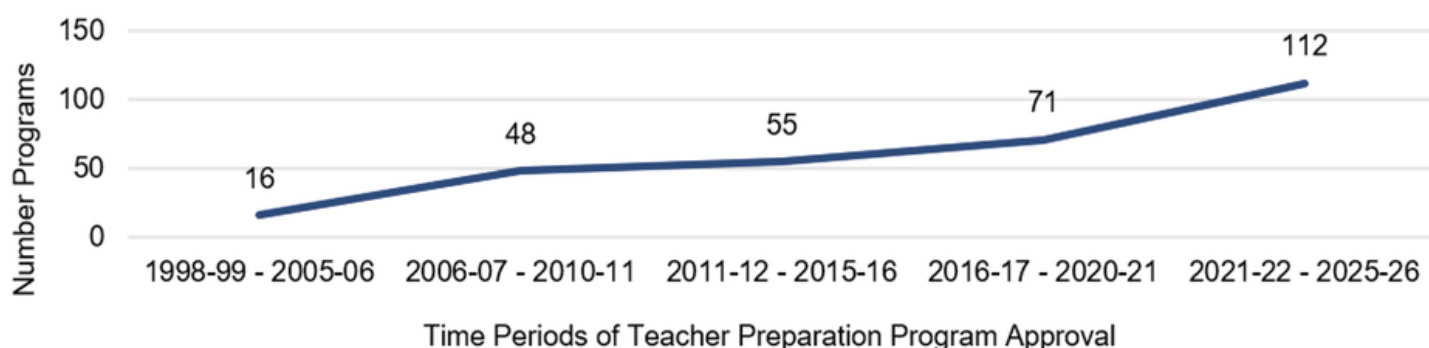
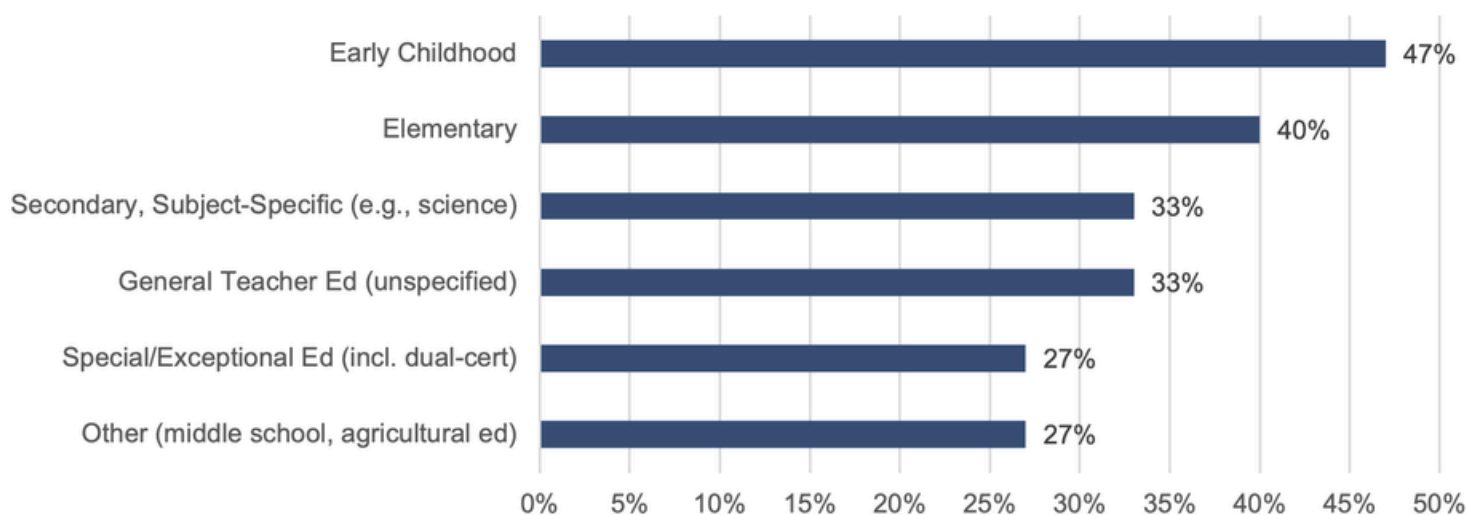


Figure 2. Percentage of Fifteen States Approving CCB Teacher Education Programs by Instructional Field



Source: Data on CCB teacher education programs are derived from *Still Growing* (Meza & Vo, 2026), supplemented with newer data on CCBs approving these programs since January 1, 2026.

CCB Teacher Education Graduate Numbers and Demographics

Recalling the increase in CCB education programs shown in Figure 1, there is also an increasing number of CCB teacher education graduates, with just under 1,300 teachers graduating in 2023-24. While there has been a sizeable, 30% increase in these graduates, from 990 in 2020 to 1,299 in 2024, these numbers lag where they will be in a few years when new programs begin to graduate students.^[3] At the time of this report, 39 new CCB teacher education programs have no graduates yet. When students in these programs finish, we estimate the number of CCB teacher education graduates will rise to about 2,000 a year, based on an annual average of 15 graduates per program. Admittedly, these numbers are modest relative to the scale of the nation's teacher shortage, but the increased role of community colleges in preparing K-12 teachers is clear.

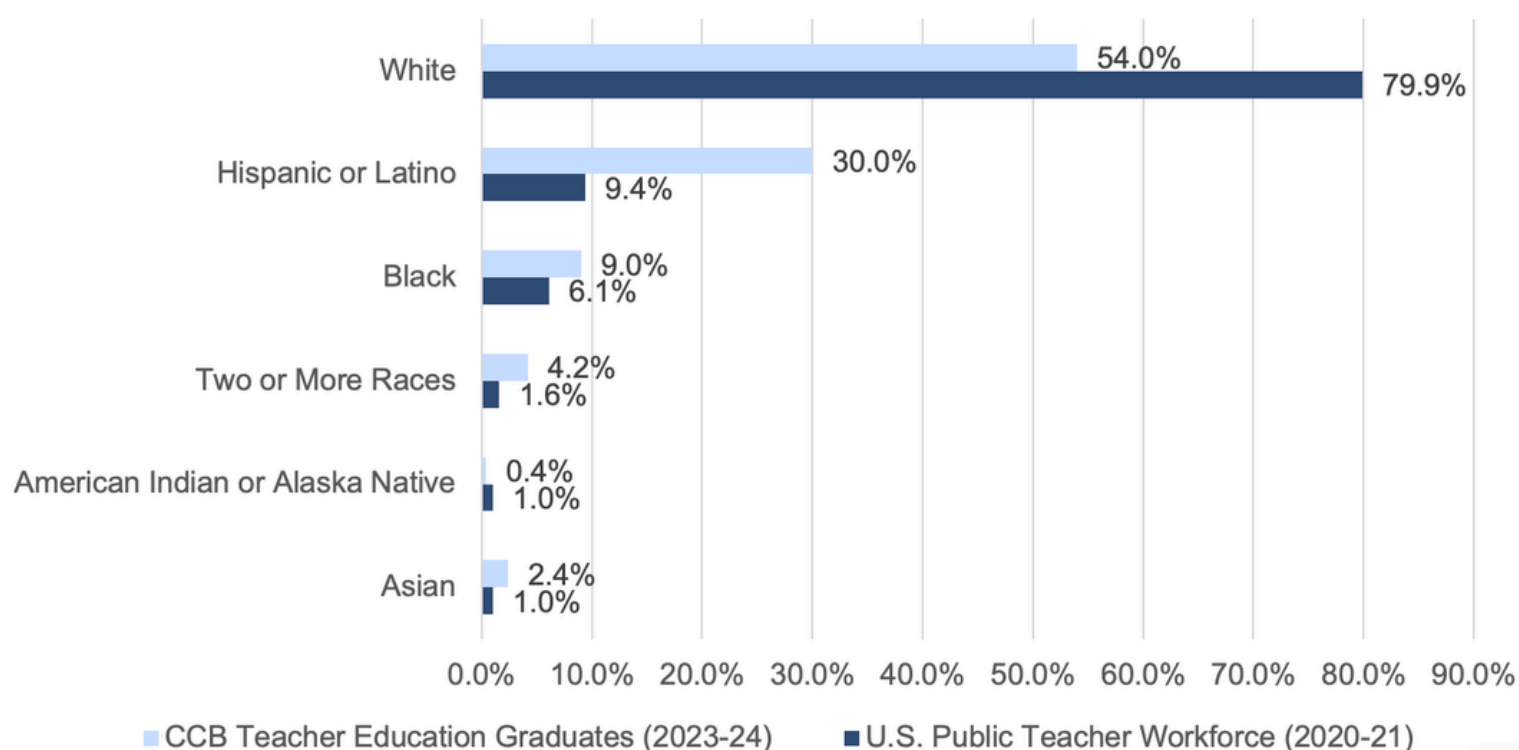
CCB programs emphasize recruiting teacher education majors from wide ranging backgrounds to meet student needs, recognizing that the nation's teaching workforce is majority white (at about 80%), not nearly as racially and ethnically diverse as the nation's K-12 enrollment. However, data shows the race and ethnicity of CCB teacher education graduates are more comparable to that of K-12 learners, with 54% of CCB graduates identifying as white, 30% identifying as Hispanic/Latino, 9% as Black, 4.2% as two or more races, 0.4% as American Indian/Alaska Native, and 2.4% as Asian (Figure 3). Importantly, the greater diversity among CCB teacher education graduates bodes well for student outcomes: Research shows that where the race and ethnicity of K-12 teachers and students are more similar, students demonstrate higher rates of high school graduation and college enrollment.

While no data are known to exist on the age of CCB teacher education graduates nationwide, data on Washington CCB education students show a large percentage are beyond the traditional college age. In this state, 72% of students enrolling in CCB teacher education programs are 25 and over, with 57% over the age of 30.^[4] Compared to university teacher education programs, which tend to focus on recruiting recent high school graduates, community colleges attract older students who can draw on their prior learning and life experiences to teach K-12 students. Further, when prepared to teach in their own districts, CCB graduates can help address local teacher shortages.

[3] Unless indicated otherwise, we studied CCB education graduates, including student characteristics, using the federal Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System (IPEDS).

[4] Data from the Washington State Board of Community and Technical Colleges (SBCTC) was used to describe the age of CCB education students and graduates.

Figure 3. Race/Ethnicity of CCB Education Graduates Compared to U.S. Public Elementary and Secondary School Teachers



Source: Data on CCB education program graduates are derived from *Still Growing* (Meza & Vo, 2026), and K-12 teacher workforce data are derived from *Characteristics of 2020-21 Public and Private K 12 School Teachers in the United States: Results from the National Teacher and Principal Survey (First Look, NCES 2022-113), Table A-1. U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics.*

The gender of CCB education graduates is comparable to the gender of K-12 teachers in the national teaching workforce, at about 80% female. Broken down by the elementary and secondary level, 92% of CCB graduates teaching early childhood, elementary, and special education are female, whereas 67% of these graduates teaching subject-specific secondary courses are female, also closely emulating gender in the national teaching workforce.

Conclusion

Community colleges are taking on a growing role in preparing K-12 teachers, helping to address a teacher shortage that disproportionately affects rural and urban communities with increasingly diverse school-age populations. What began as a few state approvals in the late 1990s has grown to 112 teacher education programs across 15 states, with projected graduate numbers reaching 2,000 when nearly 40 new teacher preparation programs come online in the next few years. These programs are concentrated in fields with the most acute shortages, including early childhood, elementary, special education, and secondary science and mathematics, and are producing graduates whose race and ethnicity more closely reflect the students they are preparing to teach than the nation's current teacher workforce.

More research is needed to understand how community colleges work to equip teachers for varied teaching assignments, as well as how CCB-degreed teachers perform in K-12 schools. Whether CCB teacher education graduates fill positions in schools experiencing teacher shortages is also an important question that needs to be addressed. However, these early findings help to paint a promising picture of the potential CCB teacher education programs can have moving forward.

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The CCB Perspective is a tabloid covering key research and issues shaping community college baccalaureate degrees. It is produced by Debra D. Bragg (Bragg & Associates), Elizabeth Meza (University of Washington), and Colleen Pawlicki (Troy Street Professional Services). To submit an issue, contact Elizabeth Meza at emeza@uw.edu.