BRIDGING PATHWAYS:
Enhancing Educator Preparation Through Community College Partnerships
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Community college transfer students play a pivotal role in enhancing the diversity and richness of educator preparation programs, constituting over 50% of completers at colleges of education in Houston and reflecting a growing trend nationwide. It’s imperative to understand the demographic composition, assets, and challenges of transfer students to tailor support systems effectively, considering factors such as age, ethnicity, credit accumulation, work status, and income status. However, recent findings underscore the challenges faced by transfer students, particularly in completing their bachelor’s degrees after transitioning from community colleges. A report from the Community College Research Center and Aspen Institute revealed that only 45% of Texas students transferring to four-year colleges earn a bachelor’s degree within six years, with even lower completion rates among Black and adult students.

Recognizing the urgent need to strengthen pathways for future educators, US PREP is establishing regional collaboratives known as Educator Preparation Partnership Pathways. This initiative aims to create collaborative structures between school districts, community colleges, and educator preparation programs. The initiative is currently launching in the following regions, with plans for expansion in El Paso and San Antonio:

- **Houston:** This collaborative brings together five prestigious educator preparation programs and seven community colleges, including the University of Houston, University of Houston Downtown, Prairie View A & M, Sam Houston State, and University of Houston Victoria, along with Houston Community College, Wharton College, San Jacinto College, Lone Star College, Lee College, Alvin College, and Blinn College.
- **Waco:** The partnership includes Texas Tech University, Tarleton State University, McLennan Community College, Waco ISD, La Vega ISD, and Lorena ISD.
- **Fort Worth:** The Fort Worth partnership comprises Texas Tech University, Tarleton State University, Fort Worth ISD, and Tarrant County College.

Central to this effort is addressing the barriers that hinder students from accessing and progressing through clear pathways for those interested in education careers. Educator Preparation Partnership Pathways aims to facilitate this by establishing coordinated articulation agreements, providing comprehensive information about education careers and programs, enhancing advising structures, and offering robust support systems to ensure candidates successfully complete their degrees and secure employment in schools where they trained. Moreover, as these organizations develop clear pathways, they are also laying the groundwork for implementing Federal Teacher Apprentice-
These models have the potential to make high-quality preparation more accessible by allowing candidates to progress through certification by completing paid clinical experiences, including but not limited to yearlong residencies.

Despite commendable efforts by community colleges and four-year institutions to improve transfer success, many students still find navigating the transfer process challenging. Data indicates that most students don’t have access to adequate assistance, leading to confusion over complex articulation agreements and website information. Education Trust, US PREP and Education Policy Initiative at Carolina (EPIC) collaborated with the University of Houston (UH) College of Education to conduct a survey in 2022 among candidates in their last two years of their bachelor's degree. The survey focused on enrollment information, transfer status, credit hours earned/transferred, factors influencing college choice, barriers to success, and readiness for college courses. Of the surveyed candidates, 56.4% were transfers from a community college.

When asked about the factors influencing their decision to start at a two-year community college, the majority (87%) cited affordability, while 63% noted proximity to home and 49% cited ability to work while in school, reinforcing the opportunity to align coursework with paid clinical experiences. Nearly all (96%) of community college transfer students reported that they intended to transfer to a four-year institution upon entering their community college. Moreover, over three-quarters (77%) of the community college transfers indicated that they intended to major in teacher education before transferring to UH. However, 76.7% of the survey participants completed an Associates of Arts (AA) degree rather than an Associates of Arts in Teaching (AAT), resulting in significant credit loss when transferring to a teaching degree program. This has implications for tuition costs and the time required to complete a degree.

After analyzing the data from the survey, EPIC concluded that collaborative endeavors between community colleges and educator preparation programs are essential to provide the requisite support and guidance for aspiring educators. To address the challenges highlighted in the survey data, these institutions must work together to streamline the transfer process, ensure clearer articulation agreements, and provide more accessible and comprehensive advising and support services for transfer candidates. Additionally, efforts should be made to raise awareness among students about the importance of seeking assistance early in their academic journey to facilitate a smoother transition to four-year institutions and ultimately

Influencing Factors for Two-Year Community College

2022 Survey of Teacher Candidates in Last 2 Years of Bachelor’s Degree

- **45%** Affordability
- **25%** Proximity to Home
- **15%** Ability to Work While in School

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2. https://www.apprenticeship.gov/educators
into the teaching profession. By working collaboratively, these institutions can better support students in achieving their academic and career goals in education.

**Educator Preparation Partnership Pathways** is committed to addressing these challenges through various strategic initiatives, including:

- Establishing sustainable partnerships between community colleges and universities to ensure seamless transfer processes and provide support systems for transfer students.
- Establishing clear articulation agreements between community colleges and universities for smooth credit transfers.
- Promoting credentials and certifications in the education field, such as the Associate of Arts in Teaching (AAT), to encourage community college transfers.
- Improving advising structures for transfer students in order to streamline the transfer process and ensure students are well-informed about their options.
- Understanding legislative initiatives such as House Bill 8, focusing on outcomes-based funding for community colleges, to help programs maximize resources and align with state priorities.
- Promoting structured paid apprenticeship and residency programs to enhance accessibility and readiness of aspiring educators for the classroom. Most students need to work and they are working jobs that are not in the education field. Apprenticeship helps to solve for this to augment the financial burden candidates face.
- Providing affordability and accessibility, ensuring candidates have extensive paid clinical experiences throughout their teacher preparation program that culminate in a yearlong residency, through affordable, low cost tuition, financial support (Apprenticeship) and scholarships for transfer candidates.
- Increasing awareness and recruitment by actively promoting pathways for community college transfer candidates through targeted recruitment strategies.
- Highlighting success stories of educators who started in community colleges to inspire future transfer candidates.

Community college transfer students are a vital resource for educator preparation programs, enriching them with local talent, diversity, and unique perspectives. To fully harness this potential, it is crucial to prioritize concerted efforts to recruit and support these candidates. By implementing the proposed calls to action, educator preparation programs can not only enhance the diversity and quality of their candidate pool but also contribute significantly to the improvement of the education system and society at large. The inclusion of community college transfers brings a richness and depth to educator preparation programs that cannot be replicated through traditional pathways alone. These students often bring diverse life experiences, perspectives, and a strong commitment to their communities, making them invaluable assets to the education field.

Moreover, supporting community college transfers aligns with demand for well-prepared teachers. By ensuring that prospective teachers have clear pathways and robust support systems, we not only fulfill our duty to provide equal educational opportunities but also empower individuals to reach their full potential and contribute meaningfully to society.