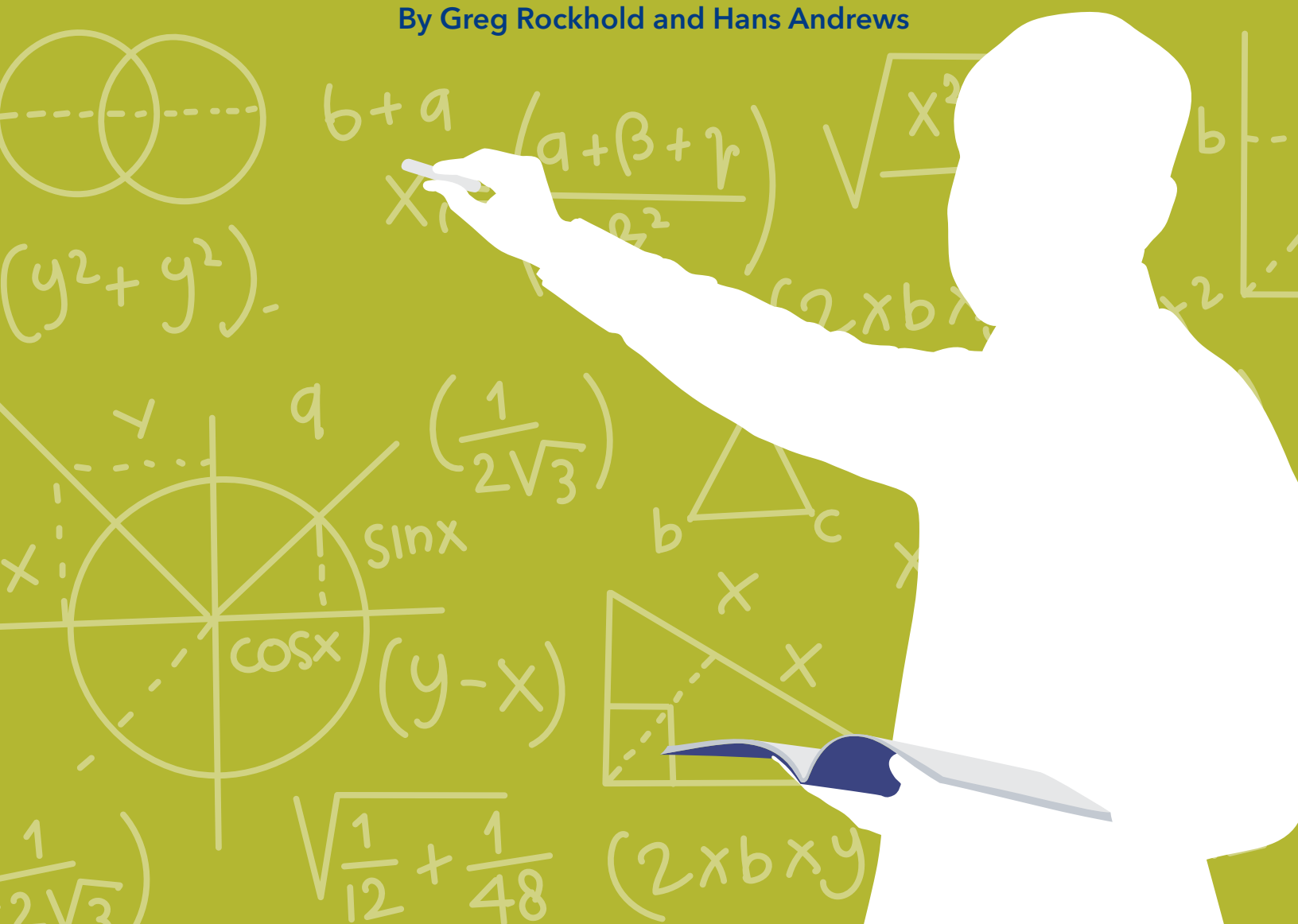


The K-12 Teacher Shortage Tsunami -

an Important Challenge for Community Colleges

A shortage of teachers in all 50 states is a dire problem.
Community colleges can help fill the void.

By Greg Rockhold and Hans Andrews



Tsunamis and the field of teaching today

A shortage of teachers in K-12 schools has been a mainstay of American schools for the past century — but the shortfall continues to grow over time, and certain characteristics can be likened to those of a tsunami: Tsunami waves can move inland as quickly as jet planes, at over 500 miles per hour, and yet from a distance, they can be perceived by onlookers as slow moving and unthreatening.

Many who are reading this may not even be aware of the significance of the current teacher shortage — and yet 62 percent of parents have discouraged their children from becoming teachers, according to PDK International's 2022 Public Attitudes Toward Public Schools poll.

In the U.S. alone, nearly 300,000 teaching jobs went unfilled going into the 2022-23 school year, according to the National Education Association. The states with the most significant number of unfilled positions were:

- Alaska: Over 1,100 openings out of 7,400 positions
- Arizona: Some 9,600 openings
- California: Over 100,000 positions were not filled by fully qualified teachers
- Florida: Vacancies doubled in the past two years, with 5,300 openings as of January 2023.
- Minnesota: A reported 84 percent of its schools had openings
- New Mexico: A report stated 1,344 vacancies
- Nevada: The need was 1,400 teachers

The shortages appear in every state to greater or lesser degrees.

And the reality may be even more dire than the above figures suggest, as reported shortages may underestimate the true dearth of qualified teachers. Many teachers have volunteered or have been assigned additional classes to teach one or two hours daily, more than their full load, which may have the effect of artificially inflating the actual numbers.

The existing teacher pipeline is shrinking

As CBS News reported this July, “five decades ago, the U.S. was training an army of college students to become teachers, with one in every five bachelor's degrees earned in the field of education. That guaranteed a steady pipeline of educators entering the profession, a vital resource for schools around the country, and for the economy as a whole.” But newly released data from the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) show that “as the population of college students has increased by 150% since 1970, the number of bachelor's degrees in education has plummeted by almost 50% — a steeper drop than that for English, literature, and foreign language majors... Meanwhile, schools in all 50 states report teacher shortages in at least one subject area last year, according to the Brookings Institution.”

The decade from 2010 through 2019 saw 340,000 fewer students preparing themselves to enter the teaching field, even as the U.S. population rose from 309.3 million to 328.3 million over the same

period. At least 50 percent declines in such students were recorded in the nine states of Pennsylvania, Oklahoma, Ohio, New York, New Jersey, Michigan, Indiana, Illinois, and California. Similar shortages have been recorded in most other states during this same period.

The university and four-year college pipelines for teachers relied on for earlier decades have dramatically declined, contributing to a sizeable share of these shortages. While there are still nearly 1,300 teacher-education programs that create qualified educators for our schools, over 60 programs have been dropped in recent years, and the demand for such education continues to dwindle. Enrollments in many are now down to questionable numbers for continuing.

Diversity in teacher preparation has also been shrinking

NCES data show that Black student enrollment in teacher-education programs has dropped by over 15,000 since 2010. Latino enrollments have also shrunk. The 2018 registrations stood at 7 percent for Black students and 9 percent for Latino students. The NCES also reports that “in schools where the majority of students were not white, the majority of teachers were white.”

A way out of the teacher shortage tsunami

The United States has a pipeline waiting to assist in overcoming this education tsunami. It is the nearly 1,200 community and technical colleges strategically located in all areas of the country.

As readers of this magazine know, community colleges are geographically close to nearly every community nationwide. As a result, they have been able to fill many educational gaps that present themselves. For example, a significant shortage of baccalaureate degree nurses (BSNs) over the past decade created a staffing crisis at hospitals throughout the country. Community colleges primarily award associate degrees and often are prohibited from operating bachelor's degree programs. However, when asked and when allowed by state legislation, several states started to see these shortages decrease with the advent of community and technical colleges being approved to offer this degree.

The Community College Baccalaureate Association (CCBA) serves “as a leading resource for institutions seeking to redefine their higher education practices and offerings...to promote affordable access to community college baccalaureate degrees as a means of closing the nation's racial, ethnic, and economic gaps.” As discussed above, there is a longstanding and growing gap between available teaching jobs and qualified teachers. Community colleges can bridge this gap.

Community and technical colleges have begun to form a new 'pipeline'

Several states have supported their school districts by approving new teacher preparation pipelines. The first, and in our opinion the best, overall program that has been developed to date is in the state of Florida. Most of its community colleges are now involved with one to several

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areas of teacher preparation. Several offer four to seven programs. Several of the smaller colleges offer one each. The number and type of teacher programs offered reflect the need within the service areas of each of the colleges.

Washington is another state that has approved having some of its community colleges offer bachelor's in education programs. The programs and the number of colleges approved to date for each of the programs are:

- Early Childhood Education (4)
- Elementary Education (1)
- Professional Technical Teacher Preparation (1)
- Teacher Education (7)

Virginia introduced legislation to allow its community college system support preparing bachelor's degree teachers. However, it was temporarily put aside as a funding source was not assigned to the proposal.

The Rural Education Association in Colorado also has discussions underway on how it can get the state's community colleges involved.

Community and technical colleges are ready and need approval now

The teacher shortage crisis is widespread in every one of the 50 states. However, community and technical colleges have shown their readiness and ability to quickly approve, promote, and enroll students in their service areas. More states will find the same readiness as they move to approve bachelor's in education programs in their state community college systems.

While teacher pay gaps and an overall decline in the perceived value of education contribute to diminishing enrollments into education degree programs — and these issues need to be addressed as well — another reason is that some potentially excellent teachers may feel the return on investment for an expensive university degree program is too low to warrant pursuit of a teaching degree.

The students enrolling through community and technical colleges will find they will much better be able to afford to attend. In many cases, they will also need financial support to cover tuition, fees, travel, and expenses in running a home and supporting a family. Finding more affordable teacher preparation programs near their

homes can further improve affordability and accessibility for those who may be on the fence about whether to pursue teaching. Many adult students who would be available if the programs were available in their community college district would enroll.

Community colleges also can appeal to those who are most active within their communities to pursue teaching in the spirit of community service in a way that most four-year colleges and universities cannot. This, too, would have the effect of drawing more diverse individuals from within communities, from inner city, rural, and suburban community college service areas alike, improving representation and giving more students local role models.

The time has come for community and technical colleges to be empowered to prepare teachers for the K-12 school systems within their communities. This would have a transformative effect throughout the country.

The hundreds of thousands of young students in classes without fully qualified and trained teachers should not continue to have to wait.



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