

Urgency of Educator Development in Family and Consumer Sciences

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Abstract: This paper discusses the urgent need for educator development in Family and Consumer Sciences (FCS) education. It explores FCS teacher shortages, curriculum transformation, aligning FCS with STEM, Career Technical Education, and innovative workforce development credentialing. The authors suggest comprehensive recruitment strategies and policy support to strengthen the FCS educator pipeline. Voices from current educators affirm the profession's value, emphasizing its role in equipping students with essential personal and workforce skills.

Keywords: Teacher Shortage, Family and Consumer Science, Workforce Development

Introduction

Family and consumer sciences (FCS) originated from the early 20th-century home economics movement, focusing on home and family management through scientific principles (Stage & Vincenti, 1997). Over time the field has evolved. In the 1990s, the American Association of Family and Consumer Sciences (AAFCS) renamed the profession to reflect its broader, more inclusive scope. Once seen as gender-specific, FCS now encompasses the art and science of practical living and working in a complex world (AAFCS, n.d.).

FCS education is a crucial part of K-12 education, supporting personal and workforce development. It prepares students with life skills, career readiness, and knowledge in various areas like child development, financial literacy, nutrition, and family dynamics (AAFCS, n.d.; Brown, 2020; Graves, 2024; Mosenson, & Fox, 2011). However, like other education disciplines, FCS education is facing a critical shortage of highly qualified secondary educators. Through a literature review, this paper reviews the shortages, barriers in FCS education, and outlines actionable strategies to strengthen the FCS teacher pipeline. The paper explores how teacher preparation programs can integrate emerging workforce skills, promote diverse career paths, and advocate for supportive policies to ensure the sustainability and growth of FCS education.

Literature Review

The FCS Educator Shortage: Systemic Causes and Consequences

Highly qualified educators are essential to students' success. Over the past 25 years, school districts have been challenged with recruiting and retaining quality teachers especially in underserved districts (Carver-Thomas et al., 2021). Teacher turnover, whether due to retirement

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or career changes, remains a key driver of the persistent demand for new educators and the difficulty schools face in filling vacancies with qualified personnel.

Nationally, approximately 45% of teachers leave the profession within their first five years (Ingersoll et al., 2019). Even though this statistic is not specific to FCS, it reflects a universal problem that is impacting all K-12 education. The shortage of qualified FCS teachers has become a pressing issue nationwide, limiting K-12 schools' capacity to deliver comprehensive academic, workforce, and life-skills education (Werhan, 2013). As it relates specifically to FCS many attribute the widespread shortage to the reduction of FCS teacher preparation programs and declining enrollment in FCS majors (Hagan, 2024).

Due to the shortage, districts increasingly assign FCS courses to teachers lacking appropriate training, which compromises the quality and relevance of instruction. Reassigning FCS courses to teachers without a background in the subject area often weakens the integrated academic and workforce connections that define effective FCS programs; thus, hindering students' success (Miller, 2024).

This shortage has far-reaching consequences. Without a robust FCS teacher workforce, schools might struggle to maintain programs created to align with skill development and workforce readiness. Unfortunately, students lose access to critical instruction in areas such as nutrition, financial literacy, and career preparation—subjects that are vital to contemporary education but often underrepresented elsewhere in the curriculum.

Another contributing factor to teacher shortage in FCS is the perception that it is a gender specific profession, thus eliminating males from pursuing it as a career option. Due to its historical underpinnings as Home Economics, FCS is often viewed as a female-only profession. This lingering perception poses challenges in recruiting and retaining male educators (Werhan, 2010). Recruiting men into FCS education could challenge outdated gender norms and promote a more inclusive and contemporary view of the profession.

Revitalizing the FCS Teacher Education Curriculum

Although research on specific strategies to address the FCS teacher education shortage is scarce, there are general strategies that teacher preparation programs can implement to attract students to FCS education programs, thereby improving the pipeline of FCS teachers entering secondary school systems. Revitalizing the FCS teacher education curriculum is essential for preparing FCS educators who can respond to the contemporary changes in secondary education classrooms. FCS teacher preparation programs must continue to emphasize the importance of offering a dynamic curriculum. Offering opportunities for project-based and service learning, while infusing digital literacy throughout the curricula, are practical approaches teacher education programs can implement to recruit new students (Brown, 2020; Graves, 2024; Martinez, 2022; Mosenson & Fox, 2011).

Project-Based Learning (PBL)

The Buck Institute for Education: Project Based Learning Works (PBLWorks) defines project-based learning as "a teaching method in which students learn by actively engaging in real-world and personally meaningful projects (Buck Institute for Education, n.d.). Integrating PBL into FCS teacher education programs can assist teacher candidates with learning how to apply theory directly to designing and leading PBL units for their future classes. It equips future educators with tools to foster critical thinking, collaboration, and real-world problem-solving (See

et al., 2020). Integrating PBLs within the FCS education curriculum also models best practices for preservice teachers since PBL is a predictor of success in K-12 education (Kingston, 2018).

Service Learning

Service-learning bridges the gap between classroom content and societal needs, fostering reflective practice and civic responsibility (Resch & Schrittester, 2023). Many universities have specific offices on campus designed for service-learning projects. FCS education students can engage in those projects to better equip themselves with a broader understanding of the social, business, and family services available to their future students. Service-learning projects can ensure that FCS education students remain connected to the true essence of the FCS profession, which is serving individuals, families, and communities (Ramsey & Swafford, 2024).

Digital Literacy

Training students to use digital tools and platforms ensures that future educators are knowledgeable about technological advances in their disciplines and are skillful in how to use them to adapt to changing learning environments and student needs (Gumus, 2022). In FCS teacher preparation programs, introducing preservice teachers to digital tools—such as virtual simulations, online budgeting software, and collaborative platforms—can assist them with learning how to use similar technologies in their classrooms. AAFCS professional development materials endorse integrating learning management systems, virtual simulations, and collaborative online tools into lesson design, thereby advancing students' digital literacy and information management skills (AAFCS, n.d.).

Aligning FCS Education with STEM and Workforce Development

Another multifaceted strategy that FCS teacher education programs can implement is aligning FCS programs with other highly visible careers and workforce readiness initiatives such as STEM, Career and Technical Education (CTE), and credentialing pathways (Graves, 2024; Vail, 2022; Taylor-O'Reilly, 2019). FCS naturally aligns with these careers and highlighting that alignment could contribute to attracting a diverse student population.

FCS and STEM

FCS education has focused on scientific skills needed for successful living (Drelinger, 2021; Ramsey & Swafford, 2023; White et al., 2015). Science is the foundation of understanding home safety, sanitation, nutrition, child development, and wellness. Likewise, math skills are heavily used in FCS concentrations such as nutrition, consumer economics, financial planning, hospitality, and community living (Randel et al., 2017). Family and consumer sciences professionals must emphasize that the knowledge and skills gained in FCS courses are vital to individual, family, and community well-being (Ramsey & Swafford, 2023), particularly for students aiming to integrate human-centered principles into the STEM profession.

FCS and CTE

The National Association of State Administrators for Family and Consumer Sciences (NASAFACS) created the "Framework for FCS in CTE,". NASAFACS designed the framework as a guide to providing high-quality FCS programs in secondary schools (NASAFACS, n.d). The framework guides local and state CTE administrators to use their FCS programs to support students' readiness for high-skill, high-wage, and in-demand careers that meet local economic and

regional workforce demands (NASAFACS, n.d.). Due to its association with CTE, FCS educators have an opportunity to help connect middle and high school students to careers from sixteen career clusters and over 79 career pathways (Association for Career and Technical Education [ACTE], n.d.). By raising awareness of the interconnectedness of FCS and CTE, teacher preparation programs can attract future FCS educators interested in helping middle and high school students enter professions that are both technical and socially impactful (Graves, 2024; Vail, 2022).

FCS and Alternative Credentialing

Integrating credentialing opportunities such as digital badges, micro-credentials, and graduate certificates can further enhance the attractiveness of FCS education programs (Vail, 2022). These credentials validate specific competencies and provide tangible evidence of career readiness to future employers (Mah, 2016). For example, due to the closing of many FCS education preparation programs, FCS programs can collaborate with teacher preparation programs by combining a bachelor's degree in FCS with a graduate teaching certificate aligned to state certification requirements. This type of institutional alignment between the two academic programs can create a streamlined path into the teaching profession (Vail, 2022). Moreover, digital badges in areas like workplace communication or family dynamics can motivate students and document their achievements in ways that resonate with both employers and academic institutions (Gallagher, 2016; Vail, 2022).

Marketing, Messaging, and Partnerships in FCS Education

FCS professionals, including FCS faculty in higher education, must work diligently to rebrand the profession to reflect its modern contributions to wellness, sustainability, and economic empowerment. Many prospective educators are unaware of the diverse career opportunities FCS offers. As with any teacher preparation discipline, students are likely to enter teacher preparation programs when they have a clearer vision of the career trajectories and professional growth prospects (Hagan, 2024).

To create effective marketing and messaging about FCS education, colleges should leverage nationally developed resources like the “Say Yes to FCS” initiative and the FCS Marketing Playbook developed by the Family and Consumer Sciences Education Association (FCSEA, n.d.). FCSEA offers marketing strategies that reposition FCS as a forward-looking, career-building field. The organization offers pre-populated graphics, social media templates, videos, and messaging frameworks that teacher preparation programs can adapt to their universities and local communities (FCSEA). Showcasing FCS student success stories, FCS alum impact, and regional workforce data helps reinforce the return on investment of FCS programs and positions FCS education as a dynamic discipline with real-world applications (FCSEA).

Likewise, establishing recruitment partnerships with K-12 school districts and industries is equally valuable. Hagan (2024) highlights that collaborative efforts between teacher education programs and local districts help identify and mentor potential candidates early, providing them with clear pathways into FCS education. Other partnership agreements, such as dual enrollment, teacher cadet programs, and industry-sponsored internships, can expose high school and college students early to the value and versatility of teacher education programs (Center for Educator Recruitment, Retention, and Advancement [CERRA], n.d.). These types of partnerships not only strengthen the educator pipeline but also ensure that teacher preparation remains aligned with workforce demands.

Policy Advocacy in FCS Education

Advocacy for FCS education is crucial for securing funding and support that enables the field to advance student success in both secondary and post-secondary educational settings. Effective advocacy by FCS professionals can increase visibility of FCS programs, influence legislation, and enrich the quality of life for individuals, families, and communities (AAFCS, n.d.; Colins & Worthy, 2024). University leadership should be aware of the challenges facing teaching education programs and leverage their positions to influence public policy and funding for teacher preparation programs at all levels of government. Programs can collaborate with professional organizations like AAFCS and the Association for Career and Technical Education (ACTE), and Family, Career, and Community Leaders of America (FCCLA) to promote legislation that supports CTE funding, teacher certification pathways, and curriculum development.

Voices from the Field: FCS Educators Experiences

The authors of this article reached out to current FCS educators and FCS education preservice teachers, asking them questions about what attracted them to the profession and what retains them as FCS educators. The respondents' responses overwhelmingly have a shared theme of variability in teaching, love for the profession, and the internal rewards of seeing students succeed. Participants were selected through professional networks and responded to open-ended questions via email. Some of their direct quotes are included. H.S. Educator 1: "Any time I consider departing, I meet exceptional students who want/need to know more and discover the endless possibilities at their fingertips." Pre-service Teacher 1: "I stay in FCS education because I genuinely love it. Every day is different and a new opportunity to learn something, to try something I've never tried before". H.S. Educator 2: "The main thing that attracted me to the FCS education discipline was the cooking aspect, yet I slowly learned that I enjoyed the entire aspect of FCS." H.S. Educator 3: "The main thing that keeps me in the field is the students. I like to see students learning to work together, building those important interpersonal relationships to problem solve, create connections, and enjoy their teamwork."

Conclusion

This paper has examined the urgent need for educator development in Family and Consumer Sciences, highlighting the discipline's evolving role in equipping students with essential life and workforce skills. The findings underscore a critical shortage of qualified FCS educators, driven by declining enrollment in teacher preparation programs, limited public awareness, and systemic barriers such as gender stereotypes and credentialing challenges. To address these issues, the authors recommend revitalizing FCS curricula through interdisciplinary approaches; aligning FCS education with other career pathways; and leveraging digital tools to enhance teaching and learning.

Strategic marketing, inclusive recruitment efforts, and institutional partnerships are also essential to attract a diverse pool of future educators. The authors emphasize the importance of policy advocacy and institutional support to sustain and expand FCS programs. Voices from current educators affirm the personal and professional rewards of teaching in this field, reinforcing the value of investing in FCS educator development. Strengthening the FCS educator pipeline is not only vital for preserving the discipline but also for preparing students to navigate complex societal challenges. By modernizing teacher preparation, fostering inclusive recruitment, and

advocating for systemic support, stakeholders can ensure that FCS education continues to empower individuals, families, and communities in the 21st Century.

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