

Family and Consumer Sciences Secondary School Programs: National Survey Shows Continued Demand for FCS Teachers

A national survey of secondary family and consumer sciences (FCS) programs from 2010–2012 academic years indicates that 3,427,601 students were enrolled in FCS classes and were taught by 27,894 FCS teachers. These numbers show a decline in enrollment and teachers over the past 10 years (Werhan & Way, 2006). However, FCS secondary programs continue to be offered in all 50 states plus the District of Columbia. The shortage of highly qualified FCS secondary teachers is reported to be a concern in 50% of states reporting.

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Family and consumer sciences (FCS) as a secondary curriculum area has been in existence in public schools in the United States since as early as the mid-1800s. Originally called *domestic economy*, the name was changed to *home economics* early in the 20th century, and in 1994, *family and consumer sciences* was adopted as the name for the profession (Andrews, 1912; Vincenti, 1997). Internationally, *home economics* is still the preferred name for the profession.

Data, over time, for the numbers of students and teachers involved in secondary FCS programs were consolidated by East (1980) and indicated that between 1915 and 1959, the number of girls enrolled in those programs rose dramatically from 17% of girls taking courses to almost 50% of all girls taking home economics courses. These data were collected from government reports prepared by “specialists” in home economics in the Department of Education at the federal level. The report from 1959 was the last federally supported data collection effort published for FCS; there is no longer a national position that serves the profession.

The next published national data collection occurred in 2006, which was facilitated by the National Coalition for Family and Consumer Sciences Education, comprised of representatives from the major FCS organizations supporting secondary FCS: American Association of Family & Consumer Sciences

(AAFCS), Association of Career and Technical Education (ACTE)–FCS Division, and Family and Consumer Sciences Education Association (FCSEA). Werhan and Way (2006) reported that during the 2002–2003 academic year, there were 5.5 million students taking FCS courses, which were taught by 37,500 FCS teachers. When comparing these numbers to the number of students in public schools, similar percentages of students participated in FCS courses as did in 1959; however, there was greater gender equity in 2002–2003 and many of those enrolled in FCS coursework were engaged for shorter durations than they were in the 1950s.

A survey was conducted between 2012 and 2013 to determine the changes in the status of FCS programs over the last 10 years. The purpose of this study was to gather current information by state to (a) determine the number of secondary students enrolled in an FCS course, (b) identify the gender of students taking FCS courses, (c) determine the number of FCS teachers employed and needed, (d) ascertain the changes in teacher and student numbers since the last data collection, and (e) identify U.S. states that offer FCS curriculum at the secondary level.

METHODOLOGY

Beginning in June 2012, a survey was sent via email to all members of the National Association of State Administrators of Family and Consumer Sciences (NASAFACS), an affiliate of the ACTE, FCS Division. Multiple electronic requests were sent in order to facilitate the collection of the data. Additional assistance was provided by AAFCS, which supported the study by supplying names of FCS leaders in states that had not responded. During the AAFCS Affiliate Leadership Workshop in October 2012, additional leads for relevant data were pursued. After one year of inquiries, responses from 94% of states (including the District of Columbia) were obtained and compiled from (a) State administrators assigned to FCS, (b) Career-Technical Education data collectors, (c) FCS state leaders.

The requested data were to be drawn from 2010–2011 and 2011–2012 academic years. Due to the broad reporting of data points, the data for

the two academic years were averaged for this report. States that were able to produce complete sets of data from the 2006 survey as well as this survey were used to draw conclusions regarding changes in gender distribution at the middle school and high school levels. States that were able to produce complete sets of data for this survey were used to provide a number to extrapolate missing data from states that had incomplete data sets (i.e., complete data states in this survey have a ratio of 1:124 teacher to student). This ratio was used when states provided student data but not teacher data, as well as the converse. If a state provided teacher data and high school student data, but could not provide numbers for their middle school programs, the 1:124 extrapolations were used for student totals. Many of the state officials who reported data indicated it was an estimate, although the numbers were specific down to the ones place. Data that were reported by FCS state leaders used conservative estimates in order to not inflate the numbers.

RESULTS

Student Enrollment

Student enrollment averages during the 2010–2011 and 2011–2012 academic years in FCS secondary programs were just under 3.5 million (see Table 1). This indicates enrollment in programs has gone down 38% over the last 10 years. Based on the comparisons of states with robust data from the 2006 study as well as this study, proportions of male to female students have remained constant with middle school populations being evenly divided between genders and 35% to 65% male to female ratio at the high school level. Many states reported that although they have middle school FCS programs, no data are collected from those programs.

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Table 1. Secondary Family and Consumer Sciences Teachers and Students: Mean 2010–2012

STATES REPORTING	NUMBER OF TEACHERS	NUMBER OF STUDENTS	FCS TEACHER EMPLOYMENT OUTLOOK
Alabama	470 ^a	75,000 ^a	No Data Provided
Alaska	No Data Provided	No Data Provided	No Data Provided
Arizona	450 ^a	22,000 ^a	Current Shortage
Arkansas	466 ^a	68,563	Future Shortage
California	1,195 ^a	151,403 ^a	Current Shortage
Colorado	298 ^a	36,943 ^b	Future Shortage
Connecticut	7 ^b	919	No Data Provided
Delaware	51	9,871	Future Shortage
DC	3 ^a	300 ^a	Poor Job Market
Florida	1,114 ^b	138,192 ^a	No Data Provided
Georgia	887 ^a	109,988 ^b	Fair Job Market
Hawaii	165	10,389	Current Shortage
Idaho	175 ^a	22,891 ^a	Current Shortage
Illinois	1,058	131,192 ^b	No Data Provided
Indiana	1,134	159,095 ^a	Current Shortage
Iowa	620 ^a	83,648 ^a	Current Shortage
Kansas	1,695	35,347 ^a	Current Shortage
Kentucky	333	48,747 ^a	Current Shortage
Louisiana	250 ^a	31,000 ^b	No Data Provided
Maine	76 ^a	9,424 ^b	No Data Provided
Maryland	No Data Provided	No Data Provided	No Data Provided
Massachusetts	200 ^a	24,800 ^b	No Data Provided
Michigan	85 ^a	10,540 ^b	Poor Job Market
Minnesota	518 ^a	64,232 ^b	No Data Provided
Mississippi	250 ^a	72,000 ^a	Current Shortage
Missouri	639 ^a	91,678 ^a	Supply/Demand Stable
Montana	145	9,099	Current Shortage
Nebraska	409	50,716 ^b	Current Shortage
Nevada	134	13,989	Future Shortage
New Hampshire	No Data Provided	No Data Provided	No Data Provided
New Jersey	28 ^b	3,486	No Data Provided
New Mexico	285	29,185	No Data Provided
New York	1,013	145,140	Supply/Demand Stable
North Carolina	1,303	131,801	Current Shortage
North Dakota	178 ^a	9,280 ^a	Current Shortage
Ohio	1,373 ^b	170,205	Current Shortage
Oklahoma	434 ^a	68,275 ^a	Current Shortage
Oregon	0	0	No Data Provided
Pennsylvania	1,712	407,641	Fair Job Market
Rhode Island	44	6,155	Current Shortage
South Carolina	350 ^a	21,360	Current Shortage
South Dakota	103 ^a	9,787	Future Shortage
Tennessee	514 ^a	63,730 ^a	Supply/Demand Stable
Texas	3,624	219,809	Current Shortage
Utah	504	152,810	Supply/Demand Stable
Vermont	90	11,160 ^b	Current Shortage
Virginia	944	128,565	No Data Provided
Washington	570 ^a	119,007	Current Shortage
West Virginia	194 ^b	24,102	Current Shortage
Wisconsin	1,748 ^a	216,690 ^b	Supply/Demand Stable
Wyoming	60	7,440 ^b	No Data Provided
Totals	27,894	3,427,601	
^a Estimated by state contact			
^b Extrapolated using a teacher to student ratio of 1:124			

Teacher Availability

As shown in Table 1, results indicate during the academic years considered, just under 28,000 FCS teachers were employed to teach in the content area. This number has decreased 26% over the past 10 years. Compared to the 2006 published data, fewer states report a shortage (current or anticipated) of FCS licensed teachers, but half of all states continue to have an issue with hiring adequate numbers of highly qualified FCS teachers.

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Although the overall number of students and teachers has decreased over the past 10 years, all 50 states continue to offer FCS courses at the secondary level as determined by survey response or by information posted on state department websites regarding FCS programs. Table 1 identifies states that participated in the survey in some manner, even if they could not supply data. States that did not respond to the survey or did not provide data are not included by any data extrapolation. Thus, the total numbers reported by this survey would be slightly under-representative of the actual totals.

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SUMMARY AND IMPLICATIONS

Although the “bring back home economics” message was prominent in social media and the general news media this past year, it is clear that FCS programs continue to thrive throughout the U. S. Numbers of students in FCS programs and corresponding teachers are down; however, this could be anticipated with continued focus on “core” academic offerings and assessment being used as key indicators of school success as well as imperative for school funding. Additionally, some states report that the transition to Career Pathways has

left FCS struggling to find its place within the career technical curriculum, despite the natural fit of FCS competencies within many pathways.

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Lack of (or closing of) FCS teacher preparation programs and low numbers in the remaining programs have left a very small pool of potential FCS teachers to fill the job openings. Many respondents indicated that the inability to hire highly qualified FCS teachers has forced districts to make the hard decision to either close a program or hire teachers who are not fully prepared for the scope of work of FCS teachers. With a hearty job market for FCS teachers, many who have not gone through a traditional FCS teacher education program are seeking out these jobs. Entering the FCS teacher pool through alternative methods could bring in professionals with a depth of knowledge in a particular FCS content area, which would be highly valued; however, in some states, once given a license to teach FCS, this alternatively licensed teacher would be credentialed to teach the breadth of content without having taken the additional academic coursework. An additional alternative route into the profession is via testing. A highly qualified teacher in one content area where the job market can be very competitive (e.g., elementary education or social studies) could take the licensure exam for FCS content and upon passing, would be issued a license to teach FCS. The rigor of some of these exams has been denounced for many years by teacher educators. Even if a highly reliable FCS content exam was adopted by states for licensure purposes or a specific content specialist was hired, essential elements of FCS education would be missing. The lack of pedagogy of experiential learning using the holistic and integrative perspectives of FCS content when applied to individuals, families,

and communities as well as the co-curricular youth leadership aspects of FCS would be lacking and would diminish the power of the curriculum. Most would agree that simply having FCS programs in place is not a meaningful goal; rather, providing secondary students access to high quality FCS secondary programs is the ultimate outcome desired.

In many cases, those assigned the responsibility to oversee FCS programs/curriculum at the state level are hampered by a lack of access to state data or told that knowing the number of teachers/students in their program area is “not a priority.”

As with the study published by Werhan and Way (2006), the unavailability of reliable and complete data for FCS programs is greatly disturbing. No improvement in this area has occurred over the last 10 years despite the national preoccupation with data. In many cases, those assigned the responsibility to oversee FCS programs/curriculum at the state level are hampered by a lack of access to state data or told that knowing the number of teachers/students in their program area is “not a priority” and the request would limit their ability to gather other types of data. Additionally, many states with middle school programs do not collect any data for those programs. With a national push to show

reliable accountability measures for all academic programs, including FCS, how can we hope to reach that difficult goal when some states do not have FCS curriculum leadership or the leadership is over-extended, and basic data about FCS teachers and students is inaccessible—or not even collected?

Since the 1800s, FCS has continued to evolve to meet societal needs with fluctuating support of the community, the school district, state administration, and federal legislation. Today, as we face a nationwide obesity crisis as well as turbulent economic conditions, the need for essential life skills in financial literacy, nutrition—and indeed all areas of FCS—is as strong as it was in the early days of home economics. And that is the message behind the “bring back home ec” movement that seems to be forming. With the groundswell of support for FCS content and the soaring employment prospects for FCS educators, this may be the time to redouble the efforts of the profession to support FCS secondary education and quality teacher preparation.

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