ASU partners with community colleges to bring 3-year teaching degrees to rural Arizona

Launch events at Gila Community College and Arizona Western College highlight new pathways to bachelor's degrees, state teacher certification

By Anna Cearley-Rivas, ASU News
October 29, 2026

Arizona State University is expanding access to teaching careers in rural Arizona through new partnerships with Gila Community College and Arizona Western College.

The partnerships will allow students to pursue three-year bachelor's degrees in elementary education or special education while remaining in their local communities. Students can earn their degree in less time while completing the coursework and classroom preparation required for Arizona teacher certification.

The new pathways build on ASU's introduction of three-year bachelor's degrees earlier this year — the first such degrees offered by a public university in the United States.

"Future educators should be able to easily access high-quality programs that work for their needs," said Carole Basile, dean of ASU's Mary Lou Fulton College for Teaching and Learning Innovation. "These new programs reflect years of redesigning educator preparation so more students can pursue meaningful careers in education through ASU's high-quality preparation."

Upcoming launch events

Gila Community College: Oct. 30 | 8:30–11 a.m. | RSVP here

Arizona Western College: Nov. 16 | 8–9 a.m. | RSVP here

To mark the launch of the pathways, the Mary Lou Fulton College will join Gila Community College for an event Oct. 30 and Arizona Western College for an event Nov. 16.

Building pathways in local communities

Leaders from ASU and Gila Community College will gather Oct. 30 to introduce the new degree pathways and discuss opportunities for students in the region.

The event will feature Basile; Nicole Thompson, vice dean of the Mary Lou Fulton College; and Janice Lawhorn, president of Gila Community College. After the presentation, attendees can join smaller sessions to learn about the degree options, teacher certification requirements and the application process.

“I am grateful for Arizona State University’s leadership in creating this accelerated pathway, and Gila Community College is proud to partner in expanding it to rural Arizona,” Lawhorn said.

“This three-year education degree offers a practical, affordable route into the teaching profession, and it reflects exactly the kind of innovation our communities need. Together, we are opening doors for students, strengthening the educator pipeline and supporting the future of our local schools.”

ASU and Arizona Western College will hold a second launch event Nov. 16 in Yuma, where leaders from both institutions will discuss the partnership and the opportunities it creates for aspiring educators in southwestern Arizona.

“It is an honor to be part of work that transforms lives through education,” said Reetika Dhawan, president of Arizona Western College. “Together, Arizona Western College and Arizona State University are creating a seamless pathway with the new three-year bachelor’s degrees that empowers aspiring educators to earn their bachelor’s degree while meeting the growing workforce needs of our region.”

(Video: {https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Vk1Y7KI-Sl0&list=PLNrrxHpJhC8l6rR-ECcVc…})

Preparing teachers for Arizona communities

The partnerships come as Arizona schools continue to face growing demand for qualified educators, particularly in rural areas.

ASU’s three-year bachelor’s degrees offer two options: elementary education and special education. Both programs prepare students for careers in the classroom through practical teaching experiences and meet Arizona’s academic and clinical preparation requirements for teacher certification.

The programs are available online and through in-person learning options, giving students flexibility in how they pursue their degrees. Completion time varies based on enrollment status, transfer credits and other individual factors.

This story originally appeared on ASU News.

Main image



Outreach events are being held at Gila Community College and Arizona Western College to connect with students about the three-year education degree pathways offered through ASU's Mary Lou Fulton College for Teaching and Learning Innovation. ASU photo