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ABSTRACT

This brief examines problems staffing rural schools and discusses the importance of teacher education in producing effective reading teachers. Over 31 percent of public schools are in rural areas, comprising over 49 percent of public school systems. Rural districts have difficulty recruiting teachers because they generally have lower salaries, they often neighbor wealthier areas, and teaching is a low-wage profession. Research shows that teacher salaries are 11-17 percent lower in rural schools nationwide. Contrary to the belief that the cost of living is lower in rural areas, research shows that it is more expensive to live in poor communities, where quality of life is less of an incentive. Many rural communities have no suitable local housing, and teachers must maintain reliable cars in areas without public transportation. A 3-year study of eight exemplary teacher education programs for teaching reading found that they shared characteristics reflecting International Reading Association and National Council for Accreditation of Teacher Education standards. Recent graduates of the programs produced students who made larger gains than students taught by comparison group teachers and experienced teachers. Programs that produced effective teachers had sufficient and appropriately allocated resources and shared a strong sense of institutional autonomy. Assessment at all levels was one important program component. (SM)

Shortchanging Rural Teachers

July 2003

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1

Shortchanging Rural Teachers

This policy brief focuses on the concrete problems remote communities face in staffing schools with quality teachers who will stay and make a difference. In an increasingly competitive teacher labor market, new approaches to paying teachers will be required to ensure that the students in these communities receive the instruction they deserve.

Key Findings

- According to the 1999-2000 *Schools and Staffing Survey*, new, average, and veteran teacher salaries are 11-17% lower in rural schools nationwide.
- In 29 states, experienced non-rural teachers earn \$4,000 more than their rural colleagues. This group even includes several states with statewide salary schedules, such as North Carolina, Kentucky, and Connecticut, since local districts are permitted to supplement these funds.
- Contrary to the popular excuse that the cost of living is much lower in rural areas, the author cites research that states it is more expensive to lure teachers to poor communities, where quality of life is less of an incentive. Many rural areas have no suitable local housing, and teachers must maintain a reliable car in areas without public transportation.

Methods, Issues, and Implications

- Over 31% of public schools are in rural areas, and they serve more than eight million students (21% of all students). Rural districts make up over 49% of public school systems.
- Rural schools face a “triple whammy” in recruiting teachers: teaching is a low-wage profession, rural states generally have lower salary ranges, and rural schools often neighbor wealthier suburbs or cities.
- The author suggests that federal subsidies may be necessary to equalize salaries for rural teachers, although it could cost \$1.6 billion (\$201 per rural student).
- The report expresses concern that, depending on the states’ dispersement priorities, federal *No Child Left Behind* funds may not make a difference for needy rural schools.

Jimerson, L. (2003). *The competitive disadvantage: Teacher compensation in rural America*. Rural Trust Policy Brief Series on Rural Education. Washington, DC: The Rural School and Community Trust. Available: http://www.ruraledu.org/docs/Teacher_Pay.pdf

Teacher Salary Schedules—FY 2000

National Average Salaries			
Salaries	All Districts	Non-rural Districts	Rural Districts
Beginning*	\$25,898	\$26,895	\$24,170
Average	\$32,371	\$33,838	\$29,828
Highest*	\$43,791	\$46,271	\$39,487

Note: Average beginning salary is based on attainment of a BA + 0 years experience; highest salary is based on attainment of MA + 20 years experience.

Data from the 1999-2000 *Schools and Staffing Survey*, US Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics

Teaching Educators to Teach Reading Effectively: How Teacher Education Really Matters

A three-year, multi-method study of eight exemplary teacher education programs for teaching reading found that they share characteristics that reflect International Reading Association (IRA) and National Council for Accreditation of Teacher Education (NCATE) standards for preparation. This report is unique in that it both describes key components of quality preparation *and* follows through to show that graduates are more successful at delivering instruction and getting solid achievement results with students.

Key Findings

- Recent graduates of the eight programs produced students who made larger gains than students taught by a comparison group of new teachers *and* a group of experienced teachers. Graduates of the exemplary programs provided a higher quality and greater diversity of reading materials, and their students were more engaged in reading.

continued on page 2...

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for Teaching Quality

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continued from page 1...

- The teacher education programs that produced effective new teachers had sufficient and appropriately allocated resources to fulfill their missions. They advocate for fair funding within their institutions, leverage resources and make creative use of them, and target resources to the critical features of quality teacher education. This is significant because teacher education has traditionally been known to serve as a “cash cow” within universities, where teacher preparation receives less funding per student than other professional programs and produces many more graduates.

“We have become open to a lot more data sources, and we have become a lot more systematic about studying ourselves.”

-A faculty member at the University of Texas at San Antonio

- Programs that were successful in preparing teachers for literacy shared a strong sense of institutional autonomy from both their colleges and universities and adapted to the schools with which they collaborate. University of Texas’ program, for instance, operated on the public school schedule, rather than the university calendar. At the same time, however, the programs consistently resist pressures from schools and districts to teach their students how to teach reading with one particular curricular package or program used in the schools. These programs seek to develop highly skilled reading teachers who can adapt instruction for a wide variety of students.
- Assessment “at all levels” is important for programs preparing teachers strong in reading instruction. These systems continually evaluate their candidates (from admission until graduation), courses, and the programs themselves to ensure that goals are met.

Methods, Issues, and Implications

- Researchers followed 101 recent graduates of the eight programs in their classrooms for three years. For comparison, they concurrently followed other new and veteran certified teachers. Data collection included in-depth interviews, teaching observations, and student achievement tests of participants’ pupils.
- An expert panel chose the diverse group of eight exemplary programs from a pool of 28 applicants. Site visits and group meetings of representatives from the programs contributed to an analysis of critical features.

The Programs

- Florida International University
- Hunter College
- Indiana University at Bloomington and Indianapolis
- Norfolk State University in Virginia
- The University of Nevada at Reno
- The University of Sioux Falls
- The University of Texas at Austin
- The University of Texas at San Antonio

National Commission on Excellence in Elementary Teacher Preparation for Reading Instruction. (2003). *Prepared to make a difference: Research evidence on how some of America’s best college programs prepare teachers for reading*. Newark, Delaware: International Reading Association.

“As much as I’m invested in the teacher preparation, I have to make sure the schools are ready for our students. I spend time in the schools and investing in the teachers so that the schools are ready for my undergraduates.... It is always about caring for them so that they, in turn, can care for our students.”

-A faculty member at the University of Sioux Falls

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