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Meeting the Challenge of Rural Pre-K

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Support for publicly funded pre-kindergarten is growing across the nation. In 2007, 36 states allocated additional funds to support pre-k, acting on four decades of research showing that children who attend a high-quality pre-k program achieve better educational outcomes and improve their chances of success in life.ⁱ While these dollars have allowed enrollment in state pre-k programs to grow, providing high-quality, voluntary pre-k to children living in the nation's rural areas poses a particular challenge to policymakers.

According to research from the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES), levels of pre-k access are lower in rural school districts than in either urban or suburban districts.ⁱⁱ Specifically, in 2006, an estimated 2.69 million children between the ages of three and five lived in rural areas, and only half had access to "center-based preschool." These low access levels translate into lower school readiness among rural children. Students in rural districts have been found to be 15 percent less likely to begin kindergarten with key early literacy skills and 50 percent less likely to possess beginning sounds recognition than urban and suburban children. They are also 60 percent more likely to require special education placement than children from non-rural areas.ⁱⁱⁱ

Rural communities face significant obstacles in providing access to the high-quality pre-k programs needed to help mitigate these problems. In addition to limited local tax revenues, many rural areas experience high rates of poverty and a scarcity of qualified teachers. Given these and other challenges, federal investments may be necessary in order for children in rural areas to benefit from the research-proven, lifelong gains offered by high-quality pre-k.

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This paper summarizes the challenges in providing pre-k in rural areas and proposes a new federal investment to improve the availability of high-quality, voluntary pre-k for children living in rural America.

Public Education in Rural Areas: Facts and Challenges

State and federal support for education is critical in rural communities where school districts often lack a sufficient tax base to adequately support K-12 education. The 2006 NCES survey reported that rural public schools receive only 39 percent of their revenue from local funds, while local sources provide 52 and 48 percent of funds for city and suburban schools, respectively. As a result, rural school districts have come to rely on state and federal assistance obtained through legislation and equity litigation. Enrollment levels in rural school districts rose

to 22 percent of the total U.S. student population in 2006, a 15 percent increase from two years before.^{iv}

Ongoing research by the National Institute for Children’s Health and Development has found that pre-k strengthens key early learning skills and can improve performance on standardized tests throughout elementary school. These findings are in line with decades of study into the benefits of early childhood education and with the latest information on children’s early brain development, which indicates that brain capacity forms early in a child’s life and sets the trajectory for skills that are developed later.^v Children who start their school careers in a rich early learning environment are able to benefit most from this crucial developmental period.

The need for federal support for early education has become especially urgent in rural areas where school readiness lags behind and special education-placement rates exceed those in urban and suburban areas. Reducing the need for special education in rural communities serves the dual purpose of improving student achievement and alleviating a significant cost to rural school budgets. The National Research Center on Rural Education Support notes that special and remedial education interventions are beyond the means of rural school boards that are often “plagued with limited resources.”^{vi} Research has demonstrated that participating in high-quality pre-k can reduce the need for these costly interventions. In each of the three longest-running longitudinal pre-k studies, children who received a high-quality pre-k education were 26 to 48 percent less likely to need special interventions later in their school careers.^{vii} These results suggest the potential savings to rural districts that are able to invest in high-quality pre-k as well as the benefits to the children served.

The rising costs of private child care and pre-k present an additional challenge to working families in rural areas, where mothers with children under age six are more likely to work outside the home than are women with children of that age in suburban and urban areas. According to a review of census data conducted by the Carsey Institute, rural mothers with children under age six experience higher employment rates than urban mothers with children of the same age but have higher poverty rates, lower wages, and lower family income.^{viii} In the states with the highest proportional enrollment in rural school districts,^{ix} a parent earning the state median income can expect to spend between 20 and 35 percent of his or her earnings on care for one child; if the parent seeks to enroll an infant and a pre-k-age child in the same year, that percentage rises to between 47 and 86 percent of the median annual income.^x

In many rural communities, Head Start offers the only option for high-quality early education. Many low-income children in rural communities, however, do not qualify for Head Start, and many who do qualify are not currently being served. In 2003-04, the most recent school year for which rural school data are available from the NCES, 21 percent of children younger than five years of age lived between 100 and 185 percent of the federal poverty threshold.^{xi} These statistics indicate that a significant proportion of public school-age students in rural communities live close to poverty but do not meet the income eligibility requirements for Head Start, which limit services to families whose earnings are at or below 130 percent of the poverty threshold.

Rural communities also face serious obstacles in providing adequate facilities for public school students generally. More students from rural communities attend classes in aging buildings than in urban and suburban areas. Many rural school districts cannot afford costly improvements, and studies have found that state governments tend to give priority to

suburban and urban districts in funding renovations and repairs.^{xiii} Federal funding may be necessary in rural areas where local governments are hard-pressed to provide developmentally appropriate settings for pre-k while also maintaining their K-12 facilities.

The National Task Force on Early Childhood Education for Hispanics—comprised of business leaders, advocates, and Members of Congress—noted that the achievement gap separating Hispanic children from their non-Hispanic classmates presents a need for federal involvement in the early stages of their education.^{xiii} All children benefit from participating in high-quality pre-k, but students of limited English proficiency frequently demonstrate gains that exceed those of any other group. Nationwide, nearly half of all English Language Learners (ELLs) reside in rural districts, and in individual states, ELLs account for as much as 36 percent of the rural student populations.^{xiv} In other states, the size of the rural ELL population is relatively small but growing quickly.

The geographic breadth of rural communities presents one of the greatest barriers to educating children. Travel times for students can exceed one hour in a single direction, particularly in school districts that have undergone consolidation.^{xv} These findings reflect the status of school transportation in many rural areas located across the country.

Rural Pre-K: A Federal Responsibility

The federal government has assumed a share of the responsibility for providing public education to specific, enumerated groups of children, including the poorest children assisted by Head Start and Title I of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act

(ESEA) and children with disabilities served through the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act. From rural electrification to support for rural health care clinics, the federal government has played a role in serving U.S. citizens who reside in rural areas. Similarly, the resource challenges posed to states and municipalities in providing early education justifies a new federal investment to expand the availability of high-quality pre-k for children in rural areas.

Such an investment could come in the form of financial incentives that are tied to high program quality standards and designed to help states and local communities move forward in serving rural areas. Effective legislation to support rural pre-k would incorporate the following principles:

- **Formula grants.** Many rural school systems and community organizations lack the staff and administrative capacity to succeed in a competitive application process. For that reason, federal funding for pre-k that requires states to compete for funds and then allows them to create a formula to provide grants to rural providers will ensure that grants are awarded in a manner reflecting the needs of rural districts while maintaining competition on the national level. This method of distributing grant funds preserves the benefits of competition among states and supports rural schools and providers. In order to ensure that providers maintain the quality of their programs, Congress can require that per-child spending levels do not decrease as program enrollment expands in rural areas.
- **Economic incentives.** Studies have shown that the quality of local education opportunities plays an important role in parents' decisions about where to live.^{xvi} As an important part of a high-quality school system, pre-k can help to sustain rural communities by giving families a strong incentive to move into or continue to live in a rural community. As policymakers search for

methods to revitalize rural areas and stimulate rural economic growth, pre-k presents an opportunity to invest in the rural workforce and capitalize on the productive potential of rural communities. The Committee for Economic Development noted that “economic growth analysis has long attributed a key role to labor-force quality. By that widely accepted conclusion, today’s preschool students will become tomorrow’s better-skilled workers.”^{xvii} The relationship between improvements in education and future workforce productivity helps to explain the positive returns to local economies and state budgets derived from investments in high-quality pre-k.^{xviii}

- **Funding formula.** Eleven states and the District of Columbia will fund pre-k through their state school funding formulas in fiscal year 2009.^{xix} Providing funds for pre-k in this manner can help pre-k providers plan for subsequent fiscal years based on firm estimates of future funding levels and can insulate pre-k from annual state budget battles. Congress can reward states that take this financing approach by offering specific incentives such as supplemental grants awarded after basic funding levels for pre-k are established in the school funding formula.
- **Expanded school day.** A new rural pre-k grant can explicitly authorize the use of funds to expand part-day programs to full day and part-week programs to full week. In rural areas, six-hour days, sometimes combined with wraparound child care services, are essential to facilitating participation for families that face long commutes to and from the school or pre-k center. In areas where distance makes participation in a school- or center-based system difficult for many families, the grant can also support alternatives such as services delivered by a licensed in-home provider as long as the same quality standards apply.
- **Building on Head Start.** To reach more children in rural communities, rural pre-k providers can build on the foundation that

Head Start has put in place, especially in those rural communities where Head Start is the only option for high-quality early education. Policies could allow pre-k providers to use new grant funding to serve Head Start and pre-k students using the same facilities and resources. Local providers can be required to demonstrate that these partnerships will not dilute the quality of services to Head Start students. To further ensure quality, these partnerships should be allowed only if enough new funds are available to pay for the pre-k component. To make these partnerships possible, pre-k providers can be allowed to use grant funding in combination with funds from other federal funding sources such as the Child Care and Development Block Grant, the Rural Education Achievement Program, and Title V grants for innovative programs. Such blending of funds serves to maximize the usefulness of all these funding streams at the local level. Within these partnerships, Congress can also address rural children’s health needs by providing federal funding to expand the screening and support services offered by Head Start. According to the National Survey of Children’s Health, less than 46 percent of children in rural areas have access to a “medical home,” a measure defined by the regularity of doctor’s appointments, the availability of preventive care, and the continuity of medical attention received by each child, among other criteria.^{xx} Congress can improve this low level of access by authorizing flexible funding that will enable communities to deliver basic health screenings to children participating in pre-k and Head Start.

- **Transportation.** Federal funding for pre-k in rural communities can include allotments for safe and efficient means of transportation. Safety standards issued in regulations by the Department of Health and Human Services for transportation by Head Start agencies present a useful model for provisions to ensure the safety of pre-k students.^{xxi} Rural pre-k providers should have flexibility in

transportation—whether hiring a private company directly or working in partnership with the school district, local Head Start grantees, or community-based child care centers—so long as they meet DHHS standards. Similarly, rural pre-k providers may require some flexibility in the use of federal funds to offer transportation.

Policymakers should conduct a thorough review of the relevant regulations and insert provisions to expedite a process to waive certain requirements when the provider is able to demonstrate that children’s safety will not be compromised.

- **Facilities.** Congress can help rural communities provide pre-k settings that are both accessible and developmentally appropriate for three and four year olds by enacting legislation similar to the facilities provisions in the Head Start statute. Legislation to support pre-k can allow rural providers to set aside a portion of their funds to obtain necessary facilities.^{xxii} Some states, such as West Virginia, have also transformed abandoned school buildings into pre-k centers, and other states should be encouraged to do the same wherever possible. In order to discourage unnecessary construction, Congress can require that funds applied to facilities draw a state match and that school districts have a role in overseeing any new development.
- **English Language Learners.** The growing presence of ELL students in many rural communities imposes a new demand for teachers who are qualified to meet these students’ specific educational needs and who are familiar with their various cultural backgrounds. Federal funding for rural pre-k should allow providers to use funds to implement programs that benefit students of limited English proficiency. These programs typically involve some amount of instruction in the students’ native language and must, therefore, recruit and train teachers who are capable of teaching in a bilingual setting.^{xxiii}
- **Teacher workforce.** Well-educated pre-k teachers with bachelor’s degrees in early childhood education are a crucial part of a high-quality classroom. In an increasingly competitive market, rural schools are at a disadvantage in recruiting highly qualified teachers.^{xxiv}
 1. **Loan relief.** Congress can adopt policies to compensate for this disadvantage by helping degreed teachers pay off their student loans and receive better compensation in return for agreeing to work in a rural pre-k program. New federal incentives to help current pre-k teachers work toward a bachelor’s degree while continuing to teach can be directed to teachers in rural pre-k programs and offered in tandem with support for institutions of higher education that have the capacity to expand their services to teachers in rural areas.
 2. **Increase the supply of degree programs.** Congress can enact policies to increase the availability of programs that offer high-quality credentials for early childhood educators in rural areas. Federal funds that help colleges and universities serving rural students boost the quality of their early childhood degree programs will help provide more high-quality teachers for rural pre-k classrooms.
 3. **Partnerships and mentoring.** Policies that encourage partnerships between higher education institutions and local pre-k providers can streamline teachers’ transitions to the pre-k workforce from colleges and universities. Research on the recruitment and retention of rural teachers has found that induction and mentoring programs provided through such partnerships play an essential role in meeting the staffing needs of rural schools.^{xxv} The teacher-quality enhancement grant program authorized in

Title II of the Higher Education Act and the Title II grants for teacher training and recruitment in the Elementary and Secondary Education Act provide legislative models that could be emulated to foster partnerships between pre-k providers and higher education institutions.

4. **Articulation agreements.** Efficient articulation agreements between community colleges and four-year higher education institutions are an important part of improving the opportunities for pre-k teachers to obtain bachelor's degrees. In many regions, four-year colleges and universities already offer degree-granting programs in early childhood education but often do not accept credits from community colleges or do so in a piecemeal fashion. Federal legislation can provide grant funding to help states or consortia of higher education institutions create "articulation agreements" that require all parties to accept credits earned toward the same or an equivalent degree at another institution. With articulation agreements that include early childhood education coursework in place, more teachers could obtain full credentials, and school paraprofessionals and child care instructors in rural areas would be more likely to complete training programs.
5. **"Grow Your Own."** Because the most effective teachers are familiar with the communities they serve, Congress can support high-quality pre-k in rural areas by implementing programs that encourage more high-quality teachers to teach in their home communities through grow-your-own programs. These programs help potential teachers obtain full credentials and provide incentives for them to teach in rural schools and early education programs, usually through partnerships between higher education institutions and local education agencies.^{xvi} Effective grow-your-own programs can employ a variety of strategies such as providing scholarships for individuals who agree to teach for a number of years in the school district where they attended high school or offering health benefits, salary enhancements, and/or credits toward enrolling in local colleges and universities for professional development. Programs that concentrate on school paraprofessionals tend to produce significant benefits because they concentrate on practitioners who are likely to remain in the profession for years after receiving their re-training.^{xvii}
6. **Professional Development.** Ongoing professional development for pre-k teachers strengthens program quality and reduces staff turnover rates.^{xviii} By investing in programs that enhance pre-k teachers' skills and encourage teachers to remain in the workforce, Congress can support the components of a high-quality pre-k system in rural communities. Congress can address the shortage of such activities in rural areas^{xxix} by helping higher education institutions expand high-quality mentoring and professional development programs for professional early educators.^{xxx}
7. **Distance learning.** Distance-learning programs hold the potential to expand professional development opportunities available to teachers in rural communities.^{xxxi} According to the most recent data, an estimated 1.5 million students in higher education – one in every 13 – enrolled in at least one distance-learning course during the 1999-2000 school year.^{xxxii} Successful models for Internet-based professional development for pre-k teachers already exist. For instance, the MyTeachingPartner (MTP)^{xxxiii} program, developed at the University of Virginia,

provides intensive web-based coaching for pre-k teachers. Studies have found substantial impacts on children's development of pre-literacy skills in classrooms led by teachers using the MTP system. These findings indicate that online professional development programs can significantly enhance the quality of instruction that pre-k teachers bring to the classroom.^{xxxiv} Federal policy can encourage the use of distance learning among rural pre-k educators by authorizing funds to expand broadband telecommunications in rural areas and to assist providers with the costs of offering professional development to their staff. Funds to support distance-learning programs could be used in conjunction with funding awarded for education technology under Title II, Part D of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act, or funding consolidated through the Rural Education Achievement Program.

- **Supplement, not supplant.** Federal funding to support rural access to pre-k should supplement, not supplant, existing federal, state, and local government support for K-12, Head Start, and child care programs. Pre-k is an important part of a range of services that are available to children through a variety of providers, and new support for pre-k should not entail cuts to other successful programs.

Conclusion

Children in rural America typically attend school in communities with limited resources to support education. Many of these communities also confront geographical challenges in offering the educational opportunities that young children need in order to flourish. These factors contribute to the marked shortage of high-quality pre-k programs in rural areas.

Many states and school districts are working to overcome the challenges to providing rural pre-k, but the federal government has yet to offer support. Rural pre-k constitutes a “high-need” field that, like federal support for children with special needs and those from low-income backgrounds, demands national attention. As states across the country boost funding for pre-k and enrollment levels continue to climb, federal lawmakers should seize the opportunity to ensure that children in rural areas will not be overlooked.

Appendix: Additional Support for Rural Communities

The federal government sponsors a range of programs that support rural education, health, and economic development. Housed mainly in the Departments of Education, Health and Human Services, and Agriculture, these programs attempt to address the specific challenges faced by rural communities. While not all of these programs support pre-k directly, they present an important precedent for legislation tailored to provide pre-k in rural areas.

Department of Education

- Appalachian Regional Commission**
Program: Established in 1965, this program supports several hundred projects throughout the 13 Appalachian states. The Commission awards grants to local communities that are unable to match federal funds with local contributions. Funding may be used to finance workforce education and development programs, expand health care access, and support the development of rural businesses, among other purposes. Although the program continues to exist in federal law, Congress has not provided funding since 2003.^{xxxv}
- Rural and Low-Income School Program:**
 This program awards funding to school districts in rural areas that enroll at least 20 percent of their student populations from families living below the federal poverty threshold. The program provides funding that can be used at the discretion of the school district for purposes including teacher professional development, parental-involvement activities, and programs that address the needs of English Language Learners. Funds may be combined with ESEA Title I funding to provide pre-k for children living in poverty.^{xxxvi} Congress

provided \$86 million for the program in FY08, a 1.7 percent increase over the prior year's funding level.

- Small, Rural School Achievement**
Program: Similar to the Rural and Low-Income School Program, this program awards funding to school districts that qualify on the basis of size rather than percentage of students living in poverty. It, too, allows school districts to combine funds with specified programs authorized in the ESEA to improve teacher quality, provide specialized instruction to English Language Learners, and perform other activities. Funds awarded under this program may also be combined with Title I funding to expand pre-k for children living in poverty.^{xxxvii} For FY08, Congress provided another \$86 million for this program, a 1.7 percent increase over the prior year's funding level.

Department of Agriculture

The U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) sponsors a broad array of programs that support rural economic development through direct grants, guaranteed loan programs, and other forms of assistance to rural businesses and communities. Several USDA programs award funding that can be used directly for pre-k programs.

- USDA Empowerment Zones and Enterprise Communities (EZ/EC):** The Rural Community Empowerment Program was enacted by Congress in 1993 to fund projects within consolidated geographical areas. Within RCEP, the EZ/EC program awards grants and tax incentives to local governments and nonprofits to provide a variety of services to low-income individuals. The EZ/EC program does not feature an explicit income eligibility limit; instead, the program requires that funds be used to serve "disadvantaged" or "low-income" beneficiaries according to the applicant's definition of those terms. According to USDA regulations, EZ/EC funding is available for a range of

purposes, including: achieving or maintaining economic self-support to prevent, reduce, or eliminate dependency, and achieving or maintaining self-sufficiency, including reduction or prevention of dependency. These directives have been successfully interpreted in some communities as authorizing funds for education programs, including early childhood education. For example, the East Central Arkansas Rural Enterprise Community used their EZ/EC funding to fund pre-k for at-risk youth.^{xxxvii}

- **Community Facilities Grant and Loan Programs:** These programs offer grants and subsidized private loans to public and nonprofit entities to construct public facilities. Public-private partnerships, nonprofits, and local governments have used these grants and loans to construct child care facilities in rural areas. To qualify for a grant or guaranteed loan, the area served must maintain a population of fewer than 20,000, and smaller communities receive priority in the distribution of funds. A grant may be used to cover up to 75 percent of the total project cost, and the USDA may insure up to 90 percent of a guaranteed loan. In both the grant and guaranteed loan programs, funds flow directly from the USDA to the applicants rather than through state or local governments.^{xxxviii}

USDA also offers direct loans to rural nonprofits and public entities at below-market interest rates, which can be used to support pre-k. In June 2000, the town of Eagle Grove, Iowa formed a partnership with a community-based child care program to house Head Start, child care, and a pre-k program in one facility, providing a range of early childhood services to its population of 3,700. The partnership was funded in part through a low-interest USDA loan.

Department of Health and Human Services

- **Rural Health Clinics:** This program, established in 1977, supports the provision of medical care in rural communities. Through the Department of Health and Human Services, these clinics receive Medicare and Medicaid payments for doctors, nurses, dietitians, and other health professionals practicing together in rural areas. These joint practices became financially viable after being made eligible for Medicare and Medicaid reimbursements. According to the National Association of Rural Health Clinics, there are now over 3,000 Rural Health Clinics serving more than seven million people in 41 states. The clinics provide a full range of outpatient primary care services to rural beneficiaries with continued support from the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services. Congress provided \$136.7 million for rural health programs in FY08, a 5.8 percent increase over FY07.
- **Head Start:** As the premier nationwide program offering high-quality early education and comprehensive services to children from low-income families, Head Start confronts the challenge of providing access to children in rural areas. Section 648 of the 2007 Improving Head Start for School Readiness Act requires that technical assistance provided to Head Start agencies in rural areas fulfill certain specific criteria to meet the needs of their communities. The Head Start bill instructs the Department of Health and Human Services to “assist Head Start agencies and programs to address the unique needs of programs located in rural communities,” which include:
 1. Removing barriers related to the recruitment and retention of Head Start teachers in rural communities;
 2. Developing innovative and effective models of professional development for improving qualifications and skills of staff living in rural communities;

3. Removing barriers related to outreach efforts to eligible families in rural communities;
4. Removing barriers to parent involvement in Head Start programs in rural communities;
5. Removing barriers to providing home visiting services in rural communities; and
6. Removing barriers to obtaining health screenings for Head Start participants in rural communities.

Congress reduced funding for Head Start in FY08 by \$10.6 million or 1.5 percent from the FY07 level.

Endnotes

ⁱ For examples of the research indicating the benefits of pre-k, see: Belfield, Clive R., Milagros Nores, W. Steven Barnett, and Lawrence Schweinhart. “The High/Scope Perry Preschool Program: Cost-Benefit Analysis Using Data from the Age-40 Followup.” *Journal of Human Resources* 41, no. 1 (2006): 1622-90; Reynolds, Arthur J., Judy A. Temple, Dylan L. Robertson, and Emily A. Mann. “Age 21 Cost-Benefit Analysis of the Title I Chicago Child-Parent Centers.” *Educational Evaluation and Policy Analysis* 24 (2002): 267-303.

ⁱⁱ Provasnik, Stephen et al. *Status of Education in Rural America*. National Center for Education Statistics, 20-21 (July, 2007). In 2006, the population of children ages three through five in the United States was 12,248,290. According to the National Center for Education Statistics, 22 percent of the nation’s public school students attended elementary and secondary school in a rural district. This proportion serves as the basis for our estimate of the population of children ages three through five in rural school districts.

ⁱⁱⁱ Grace, Cathy, Elizabeth F. Shores, et al. *New Clues to Reaching Very Young Children and Families in Rural America*. Zero to Three (2006).

^{iv} Johnson, Jerry and Marty Strange. *Why Rural Matters 2007: The Realities of Rural Education Growth*. Rural School and Community Trust (October, 2007), iii.

^v Phillips, Deborah A. Professor, Department of Psychology, Georgetown University. Testimony before the Committee on Education and Labor, U.S. House of Representatives. 23 January 2008.

^{vi} NRCRES Website, <http://www.nrcres.org/TRI.htm>

^{vii} Belfield, Clive et al. *op cited.* (2006); Reynolds, Arthur J. et al. *op cited.* (2006); Barnett, W. Steven, Leonard N. Masse. “Comparative Benefit-Cost Analysis of the Abecedarian Program and Its Policy Implications.” *Economics of Education Review* 26 (2007): 113-25.

^{viii} Smith, Kristin. “Employment Rates Higher Among Rural Mothers Than Urban Mothers.” Fact Sheet No. 7. University of New Hampshire: The Carsey Institute (Fall, 2007).

^{ix} The seventeen states that comprise the top third of all 50 states in terms of proportional enrollment in rural schools are ME, VT, MS, AL, NC, WV, SD, KY, MT, SC, AR, IA, TN, OK, NH, and KS. Source: U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, Common Core of Data, Public School Universe, 2004-2005.

^x *Parents and the High Price of Child Care: 2007 Update*. National Association of Child Care Research and Referral Agencies (2007).

^{xi} Provasnik, S. et al. *op cited.* (July 2007).

^{xii} McGoll, Ann and Gregory C. Malhoit. *Rural School Facilities: State Policies that Provide Students with an Environment to Promote Learning*. Rural School and Community Trust (2004).

^{xiii} *Para Nuestros Niños: Expanding and Improving Early Education for Hispanics*. National Task Force on Early Childhood Education for Hispanics (March, 2007); National Clearinghouse for English Language Acquisition. (2006). *Rural Education*. Washington, DC: Author. Available at <http://www.ncela.gwu.edu/resabout/rural/index.html>

^{xiv} Johnson, Jerry and Marty Strange. *Op. Cited.*. Rural School and Community Trust (October, 2007).

^{xv}Jimerson, Lorna. *Slow Motion: Traveling by School Bus in Consolidated Districts in West Virginia*. Rural School and Community Trust (March, 2007).

^{xvi}Sandra E. Black, “Do Better Schools Matter? Parental Valuation of Elementary Education,” *Quarterly Journal of Economics* 114 (May 1999): 577-599; David E. Clark and William E. Herrin, “The Impact of Public School Attributes on Home Sale Prices in California,” *Growth and Change* (Summer 2000): 385-407.

^{xvii}*The Economic Promise of Investing In High-Quality Preschool*. Committee for Economic Development, Washington, DC (2006), 4.

^{xviii}For studies on the returns from existing high-quality pre-k programs, and projected returns on expanding access to more three and four year olds, see: Committee for Economic Development, *op. cited*, 2006; Wat, Albert. *Dollars and Sense: A Review of Economic Analyses of Pre-K*. Washington, DC: Pre-K Now (May 2007).

^{xix}ME, MD, NE, OK, TX, VT, WV, WI, CO, DC, KS, MI

^{xx}U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Health Resources and Services Administration, Maternal and Child Health Bureau. *The National Survey of Children's Health 2003*. Rockville, Maryland: U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (2005).

^{xxi}Federal Register, 45 CFR 1310

^{xxii}42 USC 9836(a)

^{xxiii}Laosa, Luis M. and Pat Ainsworth. *Is Public Pre-K Preparing Hispanic Children to Succeed in School?* NIEER Policy Brief (March, 2007).

^{xxiv}*Guiding Rural Schools and Districts: A Research Agenda*. Mid-Continent Research for Education and Learning (2004); for more information about supporting high-quality teachers in rural communities, see *Quality Teachers: Issues, Challenges, and Solutions for North Carolina's Most Overlooked Rural Communities*. Rural School and Community Trust (2007).

^{xxv}See, for example: Hammer, Patricia Cahape, Georgia Hughes, Carla McClure, Cynthia Reeves, and Dawn Salgado. *Rural Teacher Recruitment and Retention Practices: A Review of the Research Literature, National Survey of Rural Superintendents, and Case Studies of Programs in Virginia*. Appalachia Educational Laboratory at Edvantia. (December, 2005).

^{xvi} Wyoming, Georgia, North Dakota, Virginia, and Arizona have all implemented grow-your-own programs at the state or local level to train and retain high-quality teachers. For more information, see Hammer, Patricia C., Georgia Hughes, Carla McClure, et al. *Rural Teacher Recruitment and Retention Practices: A Review of the Research Literature, National Survey of Rural Superintendents, and Case Studies of Programs in Virginia*. Edvantia (December 2005).

^{xvii} Several states have created special incentives to attract high-quality teachers to rural school districts. In North Carolina, the Prezell Robinson Scholars Program recruits students to teach in rural and high-poverty areas by helping them receive training at higher education institutions and obtain state certification. Other states help attract high-quality teachers to rural areas through the Teacher Education and Compensation Helps (TEACH) programs, which provide funding for child care professionals to earn credits toward an associate's or bachelor's degree in early childhood education or a Child Development Associate credential. North Carolina, New Mexico, and Georgia all offer strong examples of TEACH programs that serve rural areas.

^{xviii} cf. Hammer, Patricia C, Georgia Hughes, Carla McClure, et al. *op. cited.* Edvantia (December 2005); Bowman, B.T., Donovan, M.S., & Burns, M.S. *Eager to Learn: Educating Our Preschoolers.* Washington, DC: National Academy Press (2001); Burchinal, M.R., Cryer, D., Clifford, R.M., & Howes, C. "Caregiver Training and Classroom Quality in Child Care Centers." *Applied Developmental Science*, 6, 2-11 (2002); Whitebrook, M., Howes, C., & Phillips, D. *Who Cares? Child Care Teachers and the Quality of Care in America* (Final Report of the National Child Care Staffing Study). Oakland, CA: Child Care Employee Project (1989); Bellum, D., Burton, A., et al. *Inside the Pre-K Classroom: A Study of Staffing and Stability in State-Funded Prekindergarten Programs.* Washington, D.C.: Center for the Child Care Workforce, 2002.

^{xxix} No Child Left Behind Act: *Additional Assistance and Research on Effective Strategies Would Help Small Rural Districts.* U.S. GAO (September 23, 2004). The GAO found that 15 percent of superintendents in small rural school districts reported the shortage of professional development opportunities for teachers as an obstacle in implementing the requirements of NCLB, in comparison to 6 percent of non-rural superintendents.

^{xxx} The Frank Porter Graham Child Development Institute at the University of North Carolina and the Early Childhood Institute at Mississippi State University offer resources for professional development that are available to teachers in rural schools. In Texas, the Children's Learning Institute at the University of Texas provides high-quality mentoring and professional development for pre-k teachers, and in Louisiana, the *Nonpublic Schools Early Childhood Development Program* provides similar services with federal funds from the Temporary Assistance for Needy Families program. Congress can help higher education institutions establish or expand programs like these to help pre-k teachers in rural areas refresh their training and receive a bachelor's degree along with their colleagues in elementary and secondary schools. For more information on the Children's Learning Institute and the Louisiana's *Nonpublic Schools* program, see www.childrenslearninginstitute.org, and www.nsecd.org, respectively.

^{xxxi} Hobbs, Vicki. *The Promise and the Power of Distance Learning in Rural Education.* Rural School and Community Trust (August 2004).

^{xxxii} *Distance Education: Improved Data on Program Costs and Guidelines on Quality Assessments Needed to Inform Federal Policy.* GAO (February, 2004).

^{xxxiii} <http://www.myteachingpartner.net/>

^{xxxiv} Mashburn, Andrew J., and Robert C. Pianta. *Opportunity in Early Education: Improving Teacher-Child Interactions and Child Outcomes*. Unpublished article. University of Virginia: Center for Advanced Study of Teaching and Learning.

^{xxxv} <http://www.ed.gov/programs/ctearc/index.html>

^{xxxvi} <http://www.ed.gov/programs/reaprlisp/index.html>

^{xxxvii} <http://www.ed.gov/programs/reapsrsa/index.html>

^{xxxviii} Communication with Cassandra Lumpkin, Contracting Officer, East Arkansas Enterprise Community. 12/10/2007; Funding for the EZ/EC program is provided through the Social Services Block Grant, which was funded at \$1.7 billion for fiscal year 2008, matching the prior year's funding level. *Budget of the United States Government, Fiscal Year 2008—Appendix*. Office of Management and the Budget (February 2007); http://www.rurdev.usda.gov/rhs/common/non_profit_intro.htm

^{xxxix} http://www.narhc.org/about_us/about_us.php

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Pre-K Now

Pre-K Now collaborates with advocates and policymakers to lead a movement for high-quality, voluntary pre-kindergarten for all three and four year olds. Our vision is a nation in which every child enters kindergarten prepared to succeed.

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