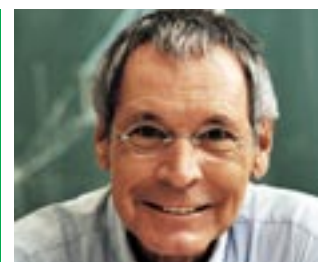




Preparing teachers to teach in rural schools



Institute of Education Sciences
U.S. Department of Education



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Summary

July 2008

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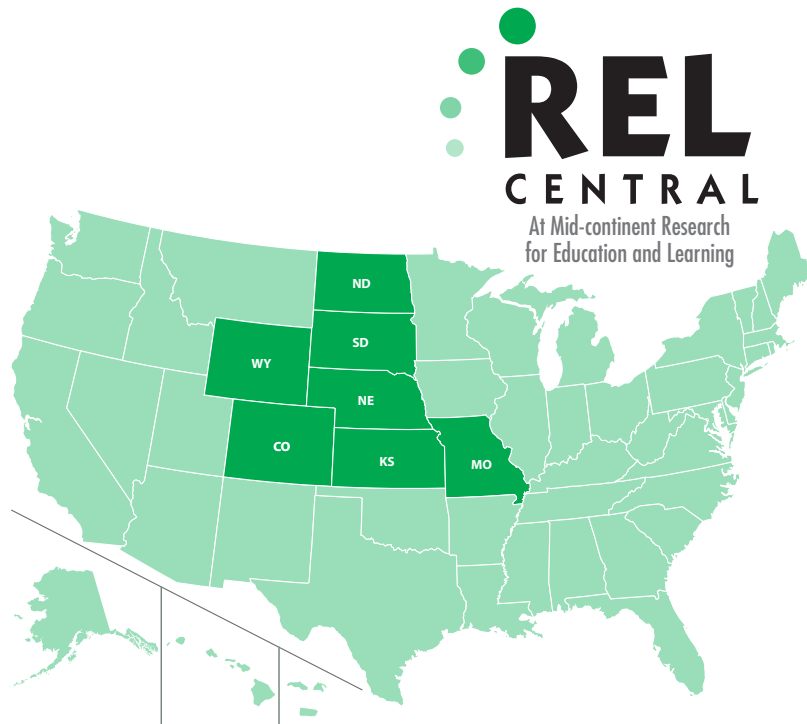
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This report is available on the regional educational laboratory web site at <http://ies.ed.gov/ncee/edlabs>.

Preparing teachers to teach in rural schools

The Central Region states have greater percentages of rural students and schools than the U.S. average. This report describes how nine teacher preparation programs in the region prepare their graduates for teaching positions in rural settings.

Rural schools face difficulties recruiting and retaining a qualified teacher workforce. Potential contributing factors include social and collegial isolation, low salaries, multiple grade or subject teaching assignments, and lack of familiarity with rural schools and communities. Together, these challenges can discourage teachers from accepting rural positions or cause them to leave rural settings after teaching there for only a short time.

While the shortage of qualified teachers in rural areas is not a new phenomenon, the passage of the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 brought an added sense of urgency. Teachers not qualified in each content area they teach are now required to seek the necessary credentials if they are to continue teaching in those content areas. And in many rural areas it is difficult to find the coursework to meet the No Child Left Behind Act’s “highly qualified teacher” requirement.

The Central Region has greater percentages of rural students and schools than the U.S.

average, so it is critical to determine how teacher preparation programs in the region are preparing their graduates for positions in rural settings—and whether these programs offer other ways to alleviate the teacher shortages in rural areas, such as convenient access to their programs for prospective teachers living (and possibly working) in rural communities.

This project addresses the following research question:

- What do rural teacher preparation programs in the Central Region do to prepare teachers for teaching in rural settings?

Based on a review of related articles, the Central Regional Educational Laboratory identified five promising program components to prepare teachers for teaching in rural settings: providing options for prospective teachers to become certified in multiple certification areas, promoting access to teacher preparation and professional development through distance learning opportunities and courses in rural communities, focusing on recruiting to teaching individuals who already reside in rural areas, offering practice-teaching opportunities in rural communities, and offering courses for prospective teachers focused on issues related to teaching in rural communities.

The researchers then identified nine educational institutions that used at least three of the five approaches thought to foster recruitment and retention of teachers in rural areas. The researchers conducted in-depth interviews with teacher educators at each of these institutions to provide detailed descriptions of how the nine institutions implemented the five approaches. From open-ended probing during these interviews three main strategies emerged: using technology for professional development, forging partnerships between universities that credential teachers and rural community colleges, and individualizing programs to meet a prospective teacher's specific needs for certification.

The following are the main findings of the study:

- Of 120 institutions in the Central Region that offer teacher preparation, only 17 confirmed a rural program emphasis, and only 9 have three or more of the components.
- Three of the nine programs offer options for teachers to receive multiple certifications.
- Seven of the nine programs offer online courses and four offer courses at more accessible community college campuses. Four of the nine programs recruit students from rural communities.
- Two of the nine programs actively seek student teaching placements in rural schools (however, seven of the nine are based in rural areas and naturally have access to rural school placements).

Rural schools in the Central Region face critical teacher shortages in three content areas: math and science, English as a second language, and special education. In math and science two of the nine universities offered programs that encouraged prospective rural teachers to pursue degrees with this focus. For English as a second language three universities offered programs with a rural focus. Finally, in special education three universities and a tribal college offer programs designed to prepare teachers for rural positions.

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