

North Carolina Education News
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North Carolina Increases Access to the Highest Quality Pre-K Program in the Nation

Pre-k funding increases, despite legislative opposition

North Carolina's lawmakers sent mixed messages to the state's families and children about the importance of pre-kindergarten according to "Votes Count: Legislative Action on Pre-K Fiscal Year 2008," a national report released today by Pre-K Now. The annual state-by-state analysis of legislative support for pre-k highlights policymakers' failure to increase funding for *More at Four* despite previous support of the program. By executive order, pre-k expansion funding was ultimately granted and lawmakers approved legislation that ensures eligibility for children of military personnel.

"We're delighted that military-connected children will now be able to attend North Carolina's top-rated program," said Libby Doggett, executive director for Pre-K Now. "But it is concerning that the governor had to add funding on his own instead of getting full support from the legislature as in years past."

North Carolina is one of 36 states – including eight anticipating enrollment-based budget growth – that increased funding for pre-k, a number that breaks last year's record of 34, and far exceeds the FY05 record of 15. The *More at Four* program was designated in 2007 as one of only two state programs to meet all 10 quality benchmarks tracked by the National Institute for Early Education Research. A total of 528 million new dollars will allow at least 88,000 more children to attend pre-k. Seven states are now providing or phasing in pre-k for all children and three states moved to fully fund pre-k for all eligible at-risk children.

Additional report findings include:

- An increase of \$56 million will allow an additional 10,000 children to attend *More at Four*;
- A total of \$4.8 billion state dollars will be spent nationally on pre-k in FY08—a \$2 billion increase in three years;
- Iowa and Pennsylvania had the highest increases at 241 and 135 percent, respectively; and
- Ten states still do not have pre-k programs, resulting in more than 500,000 children without access to quality, state-funded pre-k settings that have been proven to help all children.

A PDF of the report can be accessed at:

www.preknow.org/documents/legislative_report_Sept2007.pdf

In North Carolina, Low Rural Student Achievement Linked to Resources, Challenges

North Carolina's rural schools produce some of the worst student achievement outcomes in the country, and its rural schools face an uphill battle to reverse that trend. That is because they serve a student population with some of the severest socio-economic challenges in the country, and they operate with less money than rural schools in other states. These realities help rank North Carolina fourth in the U.S. in need of rural education attention and improvement, according to multiple criteria used in the 2007 edition of *Why Rural Matters*, the fourth report in a biennial research series from the Rural School and Community Trust. The reports provide essential information on the condition of rural education in the 50 states. North Carolina is one of only two states to rank in the top ten on both absolute and percentage rural student enrollment. More than 45% of all North Carolina's students—over 600,000—attend rural schools. However, less than 3% attend schools in small districts and rural schools and districts are the second largest in the nation. Schools serve an impoverished and diverse student population—almost half of all rural students are eligible for free or reduced meals, and the state has the third largest rural minority student population in the nation. Per pupil instructional expenditures are among the lowest in the U.S., and reading scores on the National Assessment of Educational Progress are also among the nation's lowest. Fewer than 64 of every 100 students earn a high school diploma in four years—better than only five other states.

A biennial report issued by the Rural School and Community Trust uncovered new trends and challenges facing rural educators. Overall, enrollment in rural schools is up by 15%—a reversal of the year-over-year declines these communities have seen. While overall enrollment is on the rise the most startling data revealed in the new report, *Why Rural Matters 2007*, is the 55% increase in rural minority students, with some states experiencing increases of over 100%.

Why Rural Matters 2007: The Realities of Rural Education Growth also serves as a reminder that many rural schools continue to face a number of challenges, including high poverty levels, low student achievement, low teacher salaries and uneven distribution of Title I funds.

In *Why Rural Matters 2007*, the Rural Trust uses the Rural Education Priority Gauge to assess and rank the overall performance of rural schools in all states. Based on an in-depth analysis comprised of 23 equally weighted indicators, the report prioritizes the needs of rural schools using five gauges: (1) importance of rural education, (2) socioeconomic challenges, (3) student diversity, (4) policy context, and (5) educational outcomes. The higher the ranking on a gauge, the more important, or the more urgent rural education matters are in that state. While no single state appeared at the top of each list, Mississippi, Alabama, Arizona, and North Carolina all scored the highest in at least four gauges.

By applying the Rural Education Priority Gauge, the report cites that the priority states where rural schools produce the worst student achievement outcomes also face an uphill battle to reverse that trend.

Most priority states serve student populations with the severest socio-economic challenges—especially high poverty levels—and they operate with less money than rural schools in other states. Those states are located in four rural education regions: the *Southwest* (Arizona, Oklahoma, New Mexico, and Texas), the *Southeast* (North Carolina, South Carolina, Florida, and Georgia), the *Mid-South Delta* (Mississippi, Alabama, and Louisiana), and *Appalachia* (Kentucky and Tennessee).

Specific findings and trends discussed in *Why Rural Matters 2007* include:

- Poorer and more diverse rural communities generate the lowest NAEP scores in the country. The 12 states with the lowest average NAEP scores also have high socioeconomic challenges and high student diversity (Alabama, Arizona, Arkansas, Georgia, Hawaii, Louisiana, Mississippi, Nevada, New Mexico, Oklahoma, Tennessee, and West Virginia).
- Rural graduation rates are below 70% in ten states, most of which are in the Southeast: Alabama, Alaska, Arizona, Delaware, Florida, Georgia, Mississippi, North Carolina, South Carolina, and Tennessee. South Carolina leads the nation with the lowest rate at 55%. Some states with the highest overall graduation rates—Nebraska, South Dakota, Iowa, Utah, Wyoming—also had the largest “graduation gaps” between white and minority students, with the graduation rate for minorities

between 50-60%.

- Recruiting and retaining high quality teachers is an acute challenge for rural schools. Teacher salaries are lowest in the 13 states through the nation's heartland (North Dakota, South Dakota, Missouri, Oklahoma, Arkansas, Mississippi, Alabama, Nebraska, Tennessee, Montana, Louisiana, Iowa, and Kansas).
- Between 2002-03 and 2004-05, enrollment in schools located in communities of fewer than 2,500 increased by 1,339,000 (or 15%). Enrollment for schools in communities of greater than 2,500 decreased by over 738,000 students—a 2% decrease—during the same time period. While declining enrollment remains a significant factor in some rural school districts, this represents a reversal of fortunes for rural schools overall.
- The population of rural English Language Learner (ELL) students is also sizable and growing. Rural ELL enrollment in the U.S. has increased dramatically in recent decades, more than doubling in the 15-year period between 1989-90 and 2004-05—a rate of increase more than seven times higher than the rate of increase for total student enrollment.
- Southern states have the lowest per pupil instructional expenditures. Nearly 50% of all ELL students live in rural communities in this region where states are ill-equipped to serve these students and where schools face some of the most severe socioeconomic challenges.

In the report, the Rural Trust offers some policy considerations to help improve the outlook for rural education, including:

- Keep schools small. Research shows there are academic benefits for students attending small schools in small districts. Congress and state legislators should find ways to replicate advantages of large-scale systems without losing the intimacy, accountability, and cost-effective educational strategy of small schools.
- Concentrate resources in high poverty areas. The cost of teaching low-income children rises disproportionately as the poverty rate increases; more student support per pupil in schools with high poverty rates is needed.
- Maximize rural school effectiveness and efficiency with technology. Distance learning has been proven to be effective in meeting needs of rural communities. Additional financial and policy assistance is needed to develop and maintain

adequate technology infrastructure, interlocal cooperation, and program coordination to support distance learning among clusters of schools.

The 2007 edition of *Why Rural Matters* is the fourth report in a biennial research series from the Rural School and Community Trust, but it is not a longitudinal study. Rather it is a snapshot of rural education using a changing set of indicators that reveal the complexity and diversity of rural education. The reports provide essential information on the condition of rural education in the 50 states.

The full text:

http://files.ruraledu.org/wrm07/press/why_rural_matters_press_release.pdf

Teacher Credentials and Student Achievement in High School

In this study the authors use data on statewide end-of-course tests in North Carolina to examine the relationship between teacher credentials and student achievement at the high school level. The availability of test scores in multiple subjects for each student permits us to estimate a model with student fixed effects, which helps minimize any bias associated with the non-random distribution of teachers and students among classrooms within schools. The authors find compelling evidence that teacher credentials affect student achievement in systematic ways and that the magnitudes are large enough to be policy relevant. As a result, the uneven distribution of teacher credentials by race and socio-economic status of high school students--a pattern the authors also document--contributes to achievement gaps in high school.

View the working paper PDF:

http://www.caldercenter.org/PDF/1001104_Teacher_Credentials_HighSchool.pdf

Howard Lee, North Carolina State Board Chair, Receives National Education Award

Howard Lee, chairman of the North Carolina State Board of Education, is being awarded the Distinguished Service Award by the National Association of State Boards of Education (NASBE). The award is annually given to a state board of education member in recognition of outstanding service to public education.

“As chairman of the state board for the past four years, Howard Lee has become the face of the State Board at conferences, schools, and with individuals across North Carolina. His communication and collaboration skills combined with his contacts and experience in the legislature have made Howard Lee one of the most effective and influential educational leaders in North Carolina,” said Brenda Welburn, NASBE Executive Director.

Howard Lee joined the North Carolina State Board of Education in May 2003, where he was unanimously elected on his first day as Board Chairman. Mr. Lee’s prior years in the North Carolina General Assembly and as a former Mayor of Chapel Hill and state agency secretary had earned him a reputation as a fair-minded statesman, as one who set and accomplished goals, and as a staunch friend of education. Since that time, he has been a tireless leader of an involved citizen board that has faced many education issues head on.

During his tenure as Chairman, Mr. Lee and the North Carolina State Board have seen the adoption of policies on increasing high school graduation requirements, defining academic rigor, relevance, and relationships; parent and family involvement; anti-harassment and bullying; and healthy, active children.

North Carolina Schools Back in Session with a Better Music Curriculum

Continuing their mission to support music education, NOTION Music has donated 80 copies of NOTION, its professional music composition and performance software, to North Carolina schools and colleges.

The contribution, valued at approximately \$50,000, has been distributed to the local schools over the last few months and will continue through September. Most schools have requested the software to help support the music department which, in most cases, is working within constraints of a low-budget. The North Carolina schools benefiting from NOTION's donation include:

- Bennett College, Greensboro
- Cary Christian School, Cary
- Eastern Guilford High School, Gibsonville
- Holly Springs High School, Holly Springs
- Moss Street Elementary School, Reidsville
- Page Street Elementary School, Troy
- South Granville High School, Creedmoor
- Winston-Salem State University, Winston-Salem

NOTION software combines the best players, the finest instruments and the latest recording technology. It was developed by recording the instrumental sounds of London Symphony Orchestra at the legendary Abbey Road Studios. NOTION Music makes software that is used by professional and aspiring musicians around the world allowing anyone, anywhere to write, record and play music as if working with a full ensemble of musicians.

NOTION Music previously donated over 300 copies of software to schools across the country this year, in hopes of improving music education. To nominate a school, please send an email to: **notionmusic@fleishman.com**.