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# **BOOSTING IDAHO RURAL STUDENTS' COLLEGE PROSPECTS BY EXPANDING ACCESS TO GREAT TEACHING**

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J.A. and KATHRYN  
**ALBERTSON FAMILY**  
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## • ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS •

The Rural Opportunities Consortium of Idaho (ROCI) was launched by the J.A. and Kathryn Albertson Family Foundation of Boise, Idaho during the summer of 2013. Since then, Bellwether Education Partners and a task force of experts led by Dr. Paul T. Hill have been working to foster a better understanding of the issues that affect rural education, inform policy discussions, and bring attention to the unique needs and circumstances of rural school children. The task force has published a series of papers on issues such as migration, technology, human capital, and economic development. A second series of papers, published in summer 2015, will focus on post-secondary transitions and challenges. Papers are posted online at [www.rociidaho.com/research-publications](http://www.rociidaho.com/research-publications).

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## ABOUT ROCI • RURAL OPPORTUNITIES CONSORTIUM OF IDAHO



ROCI brings together some of the nation’s best thinkers to conduct research on the challenges of rural education and identify innovations, programs, and models to address them. This effort informs a national body of work on rural education and explores implications for increasing the educational attainment and economic competitiveness of Idahoans and Americans.

## ABOUT J.A. AND KATHRYN ALBERTSON FAMILY FOUNDATION



The J.A. and Kathryn Albertson Family Foundation is a Boise-based, private family foundation committed to the vision of limitless learning for all Idahoans. Since 1997, the J.A. and Kathryn Albertson Family Foundation has invested almost \$700 million in Idaho. The J.A. and Kathryn Albertson Family Foundation honors the legacy of Joe and Kathryn Albertson, founders of Albertsons grocery store, however it is not affiliated with Albertsons LLC. Grant-making is by invitation only. For more information, visit [jkaf.org](http://jkaf.org).

## ABOUT BELLWETHER EDUCATION PARTNERS



Bellwether Education Partners is a nonprofit dedicated to helping education organizations—in the public, private, and nonprofit sectors—become more effective in their work and achieve dramatic results, especially for high-need students. To do this, Bellwether provides a unique combination of exceptional thinking, talent, and hands-on strategic support.

## • INTRODUCTION: THE PROBLEM •

The quality of education in Idaho's rural schools, which serve more than a third of its students, has a significant impact on the state's economic vitality and the vibrancy of its many rural communities. Of the state's 115 public school districts, 87 percent meet the definition of rural. These rural districts contain 36 percent of Idaho's students and 40 percent of its teachers. In Idaho, the statewide high school graduation rate is 84 percent while the college enrollment rate is 59 percent.<sup>1</sup> In rural schools, these rates are even lower—80 percent and 51 percent respectively.<sup>2</sup>

**Although overall degree production at Idaho colleges and universities increased 30 percent from 2010 to 2013, only 42 percent of Idaho citizens in the 25–34 age range had postsecondary degrees. In rural communities, college-completion rates are even lower.**

College success rates are lower still. In 2010, the Idaho State Board of Education set a goal that 60 percent of Idaho citizens between the ages of 25 and 34 would have a postsecondary degree or certificate by the year 2020.<sup>3</sup> Although overall degree production at Idaho colleges and universities increased 30 percent from 2010 to 2013, only 42 percent of Idaho citizens in the 25–34 age range had completed at least one postsecondary program.<sup>4</sup> In rural communities, college attainment is even lower.

While many factors contribute to low rural college-going and success rates in Idaho, a critical one is the lack of rigorous coursework necessary to prepare students for success in college and careers. One key to addressing that deficiency is to give rural students increased access to high-quality teaching, especially in courses that lie along the path to college.

This paper examines the challenges in providing rural students with great teaching and identifies several approaches that Idaho could use to increase rural access to highly effective instruction. We propose that through a combination of grow-your-own preparation programs, customized teacher recruitment strategies, innovative approaches to extending the reach of excellent teachers, and blended online and in-person methods for training them, Idaho can improve teacher quality in college-access courses.

## • WHY DO TOO FEW RURAL STUDENTS GO ON TO AND SUCCEED IN COLLEGE? •

Research flags many factors as contributors to low college enrollment rates from rural schools nationwide. The presence of a college-going culture varies from community to community based on local context and industry. Many rural areas have experienced population decreases and job losses due to changes in traditional industry, such as family farming.<sup>5</sup> Students living in poverty and migrant farm families have high mobility, making it difficult for them to complete high school courses, leading to lower readiness and aspirations for college enrollment.<sup>6</sup> In addition, parents of students in rural communities are less likely than urban parents to have a college degree, which is a predictor of college enrollment for high school students.<sup>7</sup> Research on Idaho finds much the same set of explanations, along with financial constraints on families and a lack of counseling and support services.<sup>8</sup>

**In a survey performed by the Idaho State Legislature, 41 percent of students polled felt that academic preparedness was a challenge they faced when making decisions about pursuing postsecondary education.**

The courses students take in high school also contribute to academic preparation and students' ability to enroll and succeed in college.<sup>9</sup> National research points to limited access to Advanced Placement and comparable courses as a significant reason that rural schools face difficulties in preparing students for college.<sup>10</sup> Idaho students face much the same set of challenges.

In a survey performed by the state legislature, 41 percent of students polled felt that academic preparedness was a challenge they faced when making decisions about pursuing postsecondary education.<sup>11</sup>



## • THE IMPORTANCE OF COLLEGE GATEWAY COURSEWORK •

When taught by well-qualified instructors, college-access courses prepare students for success in postsecondary settings through a high-level curriculum aligned with college expectations.<sup>12</sup> The American College Testing (ACT) center has identified some of these courses, which are necessary to meet “college readiness benchmarks”—the minimum score needed on an ACT subject-area exam to predict at least a 50 percent chance of the student obtaining a B or higher in the corresponding college course.<sup>13</sup>

Students who take the following courses in high school are more likely to meet college-readiness benchmarks:

- **English:** Four years of English coursework. Sixty-seven percent of students who completed four years of English met the ACT English Benchmark, versus only 41 percent of students who completed fewer than four years of English.<sup>14</sup>
- **Math:** Three or more years, including Algebra I, Geometry, Algebra II, and another advanced class. Sixty-nine percent of students who completed these courses met the Mathematics Benchmark, compared to only eight percent who completed less than three years of math.<sup>15</sup>
- **Science:** Three years of science, including Biology, Chemistry, and Physics. Forty-seven percent of students who completed three years of science met the Science Benchmark, compared to 13 percent who completed less than three years of science coursework.<sup>16</sup>

- **Social Sciences [ACT Reading]:** Three or more years of social sciences, including American History and American Government. Fifty-nine percent of students who took four years of social sciences met the Reading Benchmark, compared to 44 percent of students who completed three years of social sciences and 40 percent of students who took less than three years.<sup>17</sup>

There are other courses that increase the likelihood of success in college.<sup>18</sup> Advanced Placement courses offer a college-level curriculum in a variety of subjects, enabling students to build the knowledge and skills needed for postsecondary success. Additionally, students may earn college credits after passing an Advanced Placement exam.

Similarly, dual credit programs are another way to provide advanced courses that prepare high school students for college success. Dual credit programs allow students to enroll in higher education courses during high school and experience college-level rigor, as well as earn credits toward a college degree. High school students may access dual credit courses at their high school, a nearby college, or through a distance learning option. A recent ACT study found that students entering college with dual credit courses were more likely to be successful in college, earning higher grades in their courses and completing a bachelor's degree on time.<sup>19</sup>

## • TOO FEW RURAL IDAHO STUDENTS GET THE COURSES THEY NEED •

Rural students in Idaho lack access to these advanced opportunities. In 2012-13, less than five percent of Idaho students statewide enrolled in dual credit courses.<sup>20</sup> The following year, in 2014, only around 20 percent of the state's high schools offered Advanced Placement courses.<sup>21</sup>

**Only 34 percent of the 8,095 Idaho students who took the ACT exam in 2014 met all four of the ACT college-readiness benchmarks in English, Algebra, Social Sciences, and Biology.**

The result is a lack of college preparedness among Idaho's rural high school students. Only 34 percent of the 8,095 Idaho students who took the ACT exam in 2014 met all four of the ACT college-readiness benchmarks in English, Algebra, Social Sciences, and Biology.<sup>22</sup> Further, Idaho set a goal for 60 percent of high school students to achieve a score of 500 or better on all three sections

of the Scholastic Achievement Test (SAT). The rationale behind the goal is that a score of 500 or better indicates a student will be prepared to enroll in postsecondary education.<sup>23</sup> However, in 2014, only 17.8 percent of 11th grade students in Idaho scored 500 or above on all three sections of the SAT.<sup>24</sup> Given that rural Idaho students are more than 30 percent of the student population, it is unlikely that they performed better than the state average.

Although Idaho state policies require the same courses for both high school graduation and college admission, and those courses are consistent with the minimum ACT college-readiness standards explained above, Idaho data indicate these courses alone do not prepare students for the rigor of college courses. Of the 58 percent of Idaho students who enroll in college, approximately 40 percent of students have to take a remedial course to fill a skills gap before enrolling in credit-bearing courses. And because students need remediation, they take longer to graduate from college, which requires additional perseverance and costs more money.<sup>25</sup>

## • TEACHER QUALITY: A SIGNIFICANT FACTOR IN IDAHO STUDENTS' ACADEMIC PREPAREDNESS FOR COLLEGE •

Rigorous college-access courses require knowledgeable and skilled teachers.<sup>26</sup> Studies consistently show that of all in-school factors, teacher effectiveness has the greatest impact on student learning.<sup>27</sup> While much of this research focuses on the elementary and middle grades, teacher quality also makes a large difference for high school students. In a study of Chicago 9th graders, researchers found that teacher quality influences student achievement in math.<sup>28</sup> A RAND Education study found that “high-quality [high school] teachers have important indirect effects on student achievement beyond their immediate subject area.”<sup>29</sup> This means that a high-quality English Language Arts teacher positively affects the math achievement of high school students, and vice versa.<sup>30</sup> High-quality teachers are necessary for Idaho to raise high school achievement, prepare students to succeed in college, and increase earning potential—contributing to local and state economies.

## • CHALLENGES IN RECRUITING AND RETAINING TEACHERS IN RURAL SCHOOLS •

Ideally, we would have data on teacher effectiveness that could be used to directly examine rural Idaho students' access to high-quality teachers. The state is currently implementing a framework for teacher evaluation that includes multiple measures of teacher practice and student growth, measured by formative assessments and end-of-year examinations. School districts will report to the state an overall teacher rating of "unsatisfactory," "basic," "proficient," or "distinguished." But at this stage, Idaho does not have teacher effectiveness data available publicly.

Without this information, we turn to the national and Idaho-specific research on the challenges of providing rural students with access to great teaching. The limited supply of teachers living in rural communities, lack of rigorous training and certification options, and geographic and social isolation make it difficult to recruit and retain high-quality teachers in rural schools.<sup>31</sup>

Looking at the current teacher talent pool, we see that there are differences in the academic preparation of rural and urban teachers. Data indicate that fewer rural teachers attended selective colleges and obtained master's degrees.<sup>32</sup> Gibbs found that when compared to peers in urban areas, teachers in rural areas are only about half as likely to have graduated from a top-ranked college or university.<sup>33</sup> In Idaho, only five percent of rural teachers graduated from a selective college, and only 25 percent have a master's degree.

## LIMITED SUPPLY OF TEACHERS

Small populations in rural communities and low overall student enrollment numbers make it difficult for rural high schools to hire teachers with specific content knowledge and training; often, teachers have to teach multiple courses.<sup>34</sup> A limited teacher supply can require one person to teach, for example, varying levels of science such as earth science, biology, chemistry, and physics, making it unrealistic to expect that the teacher would be trained and knowledgeable in all content areas. As Player found, rural schools are more likely than urban or suburban schools to have a vacancy in a math or science position. Idaho administrators report having difficulty finding qualified teachers for open teaching positions, especially in special education, math, and science.<sup>35</sup> Forty-four percent of superintendents and 29 percent of principals reported that the applicant pool for teachers is too small for open teaching

**The supply problem is recursive. Fewer college graduates living in rural communities means, in turn, fewer potential teachers in rural communities, which creates the need to recruit more teachers from suburban and urban areas.**

positions. Administrators also reported that the quality of the applicant pool varies widely by position type.

The supply problem is recursive. Fewer college graduates living in rural communities means, in turn, fewer potential teachers in rural communities, which creates the need to recruit more teachers from suburban and urban areas.<sup>36</sup>

## LACK OF RIGOROUS TRAINING AND CERTIFICATION OPTIONS

As discussed above, teachers in rural communities tend to have lower educational attainment levels than suburban areas, suggesting that they may not have the depth of training and expertise necessary to teach more advanced college-access courses effectively.<sup>37</sup> The rural and smallest schools in the country have a below-average share of highly trained teachers.<sup>38</sup> For example, Monk found that science teachers in rural schools were less likely than their urban counterparts to have graduate degrees, and more likely to have majored in education with less coursework in science and math courses.<sup>39</sup>

**Idaho principals and superintendents would like to see new teachers with multiple certifications and endorsements. District leaders indicated that teachers with multiple endorsements are needed to fill multiple part-time positions or hard-to-fill full-time positions.**

When asked about the degree to which new Idaho teachers are prepared to teach, 40 percent of Idaho principals and superintendents responded, “Some are prepared, others are not.”<sup>40</sup> Further, Idaho principals and superintendents would like to see new teachers with multiple certifications and endorsements. District leaders indicated that teachers with multiple endorsements are needed to fill multiple part-time positions or hard-to-fill full-time positions. One administrator

stated, “I need teachers who can teach chemistry, physical science, and math.”

Job-embedded professional development and support are also essential in initiatives such as digital instruction for college-access courses, which require implementation with fidelity in order to work well.<sup>41</sup> Often, rural teachers have less access to professional training opportunities because of their distance from major universities and training providers.<sup>42</sup> Moreover, it is not cost effective for districts to bring specific, tailored training opportunities to rural communities for one or two teachers. While it may be possible to access professional development opportunities provided in suburban and urban areas, they are often not tailored for rural educators, and multiple adjustments are needed to make the training relevant to a rural teacher’s classroom.<sup>43</sup> Finally, rural teachers were the least likely of all teachers to have participated in professional development related to strategies dealing with English-language learner (ELL) students.<sup>44</sup>

## DIFFICULTY RECRUITING TO RURAL COMMUNITIES

Teachers tend to choose schools in communities near their hometown, perpetuating the limited supply of teachers in small rural communities.<sup>45</sup> Beasley finds a strong correlation between location of teaching position and location of hometown, high school, or college attended.<sup>46</sup> Arnold also indicates that teachers in rural communities may feel more disconnected and isolated, leading to weak professional learning and decreased motivation.<sup>47</sup> Idaho school administrators identify the remoteness of rural locations as a challenge in recruiting new teachers and teachers from suburban and urban areas: Fifty percent of Idaho superintendents and 29 percent of principals report that location in a remote or rural area is a significant recruitment challenge.<sup>48</sup>



Lower salaries also make it more difficult to recruit and retain high-quality teachers in rural Idaho. School leaders list salary as the top challenge in recruitment of new teachers to rural Idaho, especially with more competitive salaries in nearby suburban districts and surrounding states.<sup>49</sup>

**Forty-two of Idaho's rural districts border another state, creating greater competition for the limited supply of teachers.**

Exacerbating the problem, 42 of Idaho's rural districts border another state, creating greater competition for the limited supply of teachers.<sup>50</sup> Teachers in Idaho's rural communities may be lured to nearby suburban communities that offer more opportunities for professional learning, social interaction, and

increased pay. One administrator noted, "We are a rural district with the majority of teachers commuting approximately 60 miles per day. The district had to make salary cuts to meet its budget. It is hard to entice teachers to commute when [they] can make the same amount [closer to home]."<sup>51</sup>

## • POTENTIAL SOLUTIONS •

Rural communities require unique recruitment and development strategies and innovative ways to extend the reach of excellent teachers, so that more rural students receive rigorous college-preparation instruction. The following strategies are by no means quick fixes; effective implementation will require concerted efforts by the state, school districts, and teachers. In some areas, the state is already making strides toward improving teacher quality, and further leveraging these efforts will help move the dial on college access and success.

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### STRATEGIES FOR IMPROVING TEACHER QUALITY IN RURAL IDAHO:

- 1 Grow your own teachers from within communities
  - 2 Recruit teachers more effectively to work in rural communities
  - 3 Extend the reach of already excellent teachers to more rural students
  - 4 Train rural teachers more effectively to teach college-access courses
-

## GROW YOUR OWN TEACHERS

To expand the pool of excellent teachers in rural communities, one approach is to “grow your own” teachers by identifying people who are committed to living in and serving the community and preparing them to teach. Rural communities have a potential supply of teachers with paraprofessionals working in schools, and with service-oriented people such as military and Peace Corps members who grew up in and want to return to the community.

**Idaho currently operates a Grow Your Own Teacher scholarship program to encourage ESL and Native American teachers to work in high-need areas, and this program could potentially expand to include teachers certified to teach college-access courses in rural schools.**

Districts may provide these individuals with incentives such as training and certification opportunities and financial support to pursue teaching licensure in college-access courses.<sup>52</sup> Idaho currently operates a Grow Your Own Teacher scholarship program to encourage ESL and Native American teachers to work in high-need areas, and this program could potentially expand to include teachers certified to teach college-access courses in rural schools.<sup>53</sup>

Grow-your-own programs can be delivered through a combination of distance learning courses offered by teacher preparation programs and institutions of higher education, and district-provided on-site coaching and mentoring—giving teachers greater access to high-quality training and the opportunity to work and live in their home community.

Teachers in rural communities can also play a role in increasing the future talent pool by encouraging students who excel in college-access courses to pursue careers in teaching.<sup>54</sup> School districts can further support the development of an internal pipeline of future teachers by providing high school students with exposure to the teaching profession through teaching internships and mentoring programs.

## IDAHO'S POSTSECONDARY COMPLETION INITIATIVE

### • Bright Spot •

The Idaho State Board of Education recently made recommendations for the Postsecondary Completion Initiative to impact teacher preparation and effectiveness. The initiative creates a career ladder for teachers through leadership, credentialing, and accountability based on performance. Teachers will also have mentoring, ongoing job-embedded professional learning, and site-based collaboration among teachers and instructional leaders. The state passed legislation to create a teacher career ladder and increase the starting salary for Idaho teachers beginning in 2019.

Alternative certification programs can play a role in facilitating such grow-your-own strategies. Although the quality of programs varies, alternate routes have generally been found to produce teachers as effective as those that graduate from traditional programs<sup>55</sup>—yet Idaho rural schools employ fewer alternatively certified teachers than the average remote rural school.<sup>56</sup>

## RECRUIT TEACHERS TO WORK IN RURAL COMMUNITIES

Recruiting teachers who live elsewhere to work in rural districts can be challenging, but some strategies have been identified as promising for attracting teachers to rural schools. While research in this area is limited, two small studies of high-poverty, high-performing rural schools found that teacher recruitment and retention was an important factor in the success of the schools. Rural districts in these studies worked with local colleges and universities to place candidates in open positions, involved teachers in the hiring process, provided numerous professional development opportunities, deployed teachers based on their instructional styles and strengths, and provided a supportive teaching environment.<sup>57</sup>

### *Marketing Rural Teaching Opportunities*

A strong marketing strategy that highlights the strengths of the school district can help attract new candidates. Rural districts may attract teachers by publicizing the advantages of teaching in rural locations, such as smaller class sizes, lower student-teacher ratios, and

**Rural districts may attract teachers by publicizing the advantages of teaching in rural schools, such as smaller class sizes, lower student-teacher ratios, and lower stress levels.**

lower stress levels.<sup>58</sup> This has the potential to draw experienced teachers from urban and suburban settings who are ready for a change, and new teachers who are not interested in working in larger urban and suburban settings. A well-designed website will show the climate and culture of the school and the surrounding community.

And a clear statement of the school's vision for teachers and students and its leadership philosophy, along with student and teacher testimonials, can draw teachers with the same values and beliefs in education.<sup>59</sup>

### ***Offering Financial Incentives for Teaching in Rural Schools***

Financial incentives, if well designed, can be effective in drawing teachers to hard-to-staff schools such as those in rural areas.<sup>60</sup> Offering short-term financial incentives may draw new and experienced teachers from other rural or suburban settings. Additionally, while in these communities, teachers-in-training or temporary teachers on special assignment may find a new home. If not, they have still added value to the community for the short time they were there, and the pipeline of short-term teachers allows for a continuous influx of new energy and enthusiasm in rural education.

Offering longer-term financial incentives can provide more enduring access to great teachers for rural students. Higher base salaries or sustained incentive pay, however, are challenging for any district, and especially for cash-strapped districts (like many rural ones). Higher salaries are possible, however, if districts redesign staffing structures to free funds for this purpose—a topic explored below in the section on extending the reach of excellent teachers.

### ***Providing Professional Community and Support for Rural Teachers***

Although rural districts often have very limited financial resources, a variety of non-financial incentives can be offered, such as leadership opportunities, professional development, and professional learning networks. Providing opportunities for professional learning that are job-embedded, collaborative, and content-focused throughout the academic year has an immediate and lasting impact on teaching practice, thus improving student outcomes. Enriching the professional culture of the school district not only helps in the retention of the best teachers, but also attracts new teachers to the district. Part of building a positive professional culture involves developing communities of practice, wherein teachers have the opportunity to improve through shared learning and by creating a common vision of teaching and learning.<sup>61</sup> Further developing professional learning communities, through technology-based teacher networks, can help reduce isolation within rural communities by allowing teachers to connect with colleagues teaching similar college-access courses in other schools and districts.<sup>62</sup>

Ongoing induction programs for teachers that include mentoring, planning time, and social activities also contribute to recruitment and retention.<sup>63</sup> This kind of support helps new teachers adjust to the school mission, goals, and philosophy. It may also help foster self-confidence and encourages teachers to stay with the district and profession. In addition, effective mentoring allows new and current teachers to expand their knowledge base and improve their teaching practice.<sup>64</sup> As with higher pay, these supports may be easier to sustain if embedded in revamped staffing structures that place new teachers onto teams led by highly effective peers, enabling daily (rather than occasional) observation, feedback, and support.

## EXTEND THE REACH OF EXCELLENT TEACHERS TO MORE RURAL STUDENTS

In the end, increasing the number of teachers living and working in rural communities will not be sufficient to ensure that every student has access to high-quality instruction in college-access courses. Rural school districts need to extend the reach of excellent teachers both within and outside of the district. Several new staffing strategies, including multi-classroom leadership, time-technology swaps, and remote instruction, could allow rural schools to dramatically increase the number of students receiving high-quality instruction even as the supply of great teachers remains limited.<sup>65</sup>

***Multi-classroom leadership allows a lead teacher to be responsible for the quality of instruction in multiple classrooms and schools, thus providing more students access to excellent instruction and giving greater support to new and developing teachers.***

In a rural district, multi-classroom leadership might mean an excellent teacher supports a team of teachers in different buildings, dividing their time among buildings. It may include providing direct instruction to students; modeling for, observing, and coaching teachers; and facilitating the remote collaboration of a network of teachers. This model allows the excellent teacher to increase the effectiveness of all teachers in college-access courses.

***Time-technology swaps allow excellent teachers to teach multiple college-access courses, using technology and paraprofessional-supervised learning to reach more students.***

Time-technology swaps could be used in rural schools to supplement teacher-led instruction with online or digital learning during one or two hours of the school day. This swap provides excellent teachers with time to provide direct instruction to other students and to gain preparation time. While one group of students is engaged in online or digital learning with a trained facilitator, such as a paraprofessional, the teacher is freed to provide instruction to another group of students, to plan and prepare, or to provide coaching and support to other teachers, thereby reaching more students.

***Remote instruction allows excellent teachers to teach college-access courses in rural schools without being physically present.***

When not enough excellent teachers are available in person, remote teaching options allow students to access excellent instruction through a variety of synchronous and asynchronous digital learning formats, such as video recording of lessons, live streaming and two-way video conferencing, and online courses. Students in rural schools could access high-quality college-access courses being taught in other rural schools in the district, or in other districts across geographic settings.

### IDAHO EDUCATION NETWORK AND IDAHO DIGITAL LEARNING ACADEMY

• Bright Spot •

The Idaho Education Network (IEN) is a private, high-speed network that connects K-12 schools to broadband Internet. It provides this support and other resources without impacting the school budget. The IEN also provides video conferencing equipment. There is some connectivity through higher education facilities as well. The IEN was created to provide students with equal access to modern learning tools. Students use the IEN to take high school and college-level courses, including Advanced Placement courses. In 2014, the IEN operated in 127 school districts with 39 teachers offering courses.

The Idaho Digital Learning Academy (IDLA) offers more than 150 online courses, including Advanced Placement and dual-credit courses, and complements the IEN by offering online blended-learning courses. Rural students may use these courses when they are not offered in their district. Highly qualified Idaho teachers administer courses and receive training, instructional leadership, and mentoring. The IDLA has served 65,000 students since inception.

As noted in Hassel and Dean's 2014 ROCl report *Technology and Rural Education*, there are significant challenges with implementing high-quality remote teaching, but Idaho has a few bright spots that can be leveraged for a wider impact and to increase the number of college-access courses led by excellent teachers.<sup>66</sup>

## TRAIN AND CERTIFY RURAL TEACHERS TO TEACH COLLEGE-ACCESS COURSES

In a recent survey, Idaho principals and superintendents stated that they would like to see more teachers with multiple certifications or endorsements fill hard-to-staff positions, such as math and science roles.<sup>67</sup> In order to reach the goal of increasing the number of students in rural schools who take rigorous college-access courses, districts need to ensure that teachers have adequate training to deliver these high-level courses.

Rural school districts could pay for or offer incentives for teachers to become multi-content-certified in courses such as physics, calculus, and their Advanced Placement counterparts. Partnering with higher education institutions or other professional organizations to offer distance learning or online certification courses to teachers would enable more teachers to become certified in hard-to-staff positions. In addition, districts could provide job-embedded coaching, modeling, feedback, and support to teachers on site as they implement what they learn in online courses.

### DOCEŌ CENTERS OF INNOVATION AND LEARNING

#### • Bright Spot •

The J.A. and Kathryn Albertson Family Foundation awarded a \$5 million grant to establish DoceŌ Centers of Innovation and Learning at the University of Idaho and Northwest Nazarene University. The University of Idaho program works with rural K-12 teachers and staff to provide training in new technology, along with professional development to help teachers become facilitators in the classroom with problem- and project-based knowledge, which helps students develop higher-order thinking skills. The University of Idaho has also created an online teaching endorsement through which teachers receive 20 hours of training to receive certification by the state as online teachers. Though the program is going well, teachers need to share information more often and more consistently.

The Northwest Nazarene University DoceŌ Center focuses on teacher preparation on four levels: the undergraduate teacher-preparation program, in which faculty model technology and personalized learning; online master's degree programs; preparing administrators to encourage their staff to further their education; and online bachelor's degrees to attract students in rural areas to the education profession. The Center also offers a number of professional development opportunities for rural teachers around personalized and blended learning.



## • RECOMMENDATIONS •

To increase the college-attendance and -completion rates of their rural high school students, states like Idaho will need to adopt multiple strategies. Given the importance of rigorous college gateway coursework for both college attendance and success, however, policymakers must make it a priority to increase rural students' access to high-quality coursework in this category. To achieve that aim, a key focus of policy must be on increasing students' access to highly effective teaching in these courses.

By investing in grow-your-own teacher-development programs, engaging in more effective recruitment strategies, revamping staffing structures to “extend the reach” of the inevitably limited number of great teachers, and improving training and certification, Idaho and other states with significant rural student populations can make great strides toward giving all rural students access to great teachers on their path to college.

Several actors can play important roles in advancing these strategies. Here, we address how state, district, and philanthropic leaders can contribute.

### GROW YOUR OWN

- **State leaders** can create a process to approve local or statewide grow-your-own pipelines run by districts, higher education institutions, or nonprofits. With rigorous upfront approval processes and ongoing monitoring based on the effectiveness of teachers “grown” through these programs, the state can help open up new sources of teacher supply while maintaining a high bar for quality.

- **District leaders** are in the best position to know the needs of their schools and drive the design of grow-your-own programs, whether run in-house or in partnership with higher education institutions or nonprofits. Districts can also lead the way on encouraging talented high school students to consider teaching as a career.
- **Philanthropy** can invest in the start-up of promising grow-your-own initiatives, evaluations of their effectiveness, and scaling of effective programs to other localities. While these programs ultimately need to be self-sustaining on regular K-12 and higher education funding streams, this start-up and scale-up capital is critical to create high-quality programs that can then be sustained with public funds.

## MORE EFFECTIVE RECRUITMENT

Improving recruitment has two components: more effective *marketing* of rural opportunities and *improving the attractiveness of the rural teaching profession*. Here, we focus on marketing, with the next two subsections focused on attractiveness.

- **State leaders** can consider state-level marketing efforts that could benefit rural districts broadly. These could involve both actual marketing at the state level (e.g., advertising or social media campaigns promoting rural teaching opportunities) and the creation of materials, data, and other resources that districts could use in their own recruitment efforts, rather than having to reinvent the wheel (e.g., quality-of-life data; market research on graduating college students' career interests and look-fors in their first jobs). Collaboration between state-level business recruitment offices and teacher recruitment offices could be fruitful.
- **District leaders** are on the front lines of recruitment. They can invest in deep knowledge of their local areas in an effort to draw out the best "selling points" for prospective teachers. They also can identify champions among their current teaching force, especially early-career teachers who have made the decision to teach in rural schools and can speak passionately about the opportunity to their peers.
- **Philanthropy** can invest in these efforts, especially state-level initiatives that have a high potential for leverage for use in multiple settings.

## EXTEND THE REACH OF EXCELLENT TEACHERS

- **State leaders** face the challenge that school design is largely a local matter and not something that is ideally dictated from the state level. Nevertheless, states can play a critical role in three respects. First, they can set an ambitious statewide goal for reaching students with excellent teachers (e.g., 80 percent of students reached in the core subjects within three years) and then monitor and report progress toward that goal. Second, they can invest state funds (or state-controlled federal resources) in the transition costs districts may face in shifting to new models, such as design work and technology acquisition. The Texas Education Agency, for example, has provided funding and technical assistance to districts, including rural districts, to revamp their staffing models in ways that increase students' access to top teachers. Other useful state investments include creating the infrastructure for schools to share teachers in hard-to-staff subjects for remote teaching. Third, they can clear away barriers in state policy to extending teachers' reach and paying teachers extra for reaching more students.<sup>68</sup>
- **District leaders** are well positioned to advance changes in school design to extend great teachers' reach. They can select schools to pilot new designs, and then make the systems-level changes needed to pay excellent teachers more for taking on additional responsibilities, free funds to make higher pay sustainable, and alter selection and evaluation processes to allow for new teacher roles.
- **Philanthropy** can help districts and schools make transitions to new roles and school designs. While it may be tempting for funders to bankroll pay supplements for teacher leaders, such an approach creates the risk that new roles will last only as long as the grants do. A focus on transitioning to new approaches that are affordable using recurring dollars represents philanthropy's best investment.

## MORE EFFECTIVE TRAINING AND CERTIFICATION

- **State leaders.** State policies can help rural schools meet students' needs by, for example, opening opportunities for teachers to become certified in multiple domains, improving reciprocity with other states, and generally focusing licensure and re-licensure requirements on high-impact activities and performance assessments rather than on accumulation of credits.
- **District leaders.** Districts that identify teachers within their system as highly effective in college-access courses can capitalize on that prowess by funding them to expand their certification into other areas. This allows such teachers to more flexibly meet students' needs and help other teachers in a wider range of areas.
- **Philanthropy.** Philanthropy can invest in the start-up and scale-up of promising new training and certification programs that are specifically designed to meet unique rural needs, such as the Doceõ Centers of Innovation and Learning mentioned in the previous "Bright Spots" sidebar. Grants focused on creating sustainable programs that do not require ongoing philanthropy offer the best return on investment.

While no silver-bullet strategy will give rural students universal access to excellent teachers in college gateway classes, the suite of proposals outlined in this report could make a significant difference. Concerted efforts by state, district, and philanthropic leaders, in partnership with higher education institutions and other actors, have the potential to meet this important need for students in rural areas across the country.

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