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Your Question: Generally, you were interested in strategies states have used to recruit teachers to rural areas. Specifically, you were interested in strategies states are using to reduce shortages of special education teachers and specialized instructional support staff.

Our Response: The response below is broken into two sections: 1.) recruiting teachers to rural areas and 2.) recruiting special education teachers and specialized instructional support staff to rural areas. Program, state, and research examples are provided in each section.

Recruiting Teachers to Rural Areas

[Research](#) has found consistent staffing problems in rural schools, including a persistent gap between the qualifications of teachers in rural and urban schools. Rural communities face limitations in recruiting and retaining high-quality teachers for reasons such as: funding issues, limited teacher supply, lack of rigorous training and certification options, and geographic and social isolation.

Much of the substantive work around rural teacher recruitment appears to be happening at the district level, the school level, or in partnerships with teacher preparation programs. State-level policies tend to be based on financial incentives – such as stipends or loan forgiveness programs – to encourage teachers to work in hard-to-staff geographic regions and subject areas.

Below are examples of some recent state policies and partnership programs around rural teacher recruitment and retention strategies plus a few selected research studies and reports on the topic.

State and Program Examples

Colorado

In 2016, the legislature passed [SB16-104](#) creating multiple programs to incentive teachers to work in rural districts, such as establishing a rural education coordinator position in the Department of Higher Education to oversee rural teacher recruitment issues; providing financial incentives for student teachers; providing financial stipends for rural teachers to pursue National Board Certification; and creating teacher cadet programs in rural school districts. (Bill summary available [here](#).)

Minnesota

The legislature approved [HF2749](#) in 2016 with a provision to address rural teacher recruitment. The new grant program provides student teaching stipends for low-income students and grants for licensed teachers who agree to

Additional ECS Resources

- ✓ State Policy Database pages on [Teaching Quality](#), [Certification and Licensure](#), [Alternative Certification](#), [Recruitment and Retention](#), [Recruitment and Retention for At-Risk Schools](#), and [Recruitment and Retention for High Needs Subjects](#)
- ✓ Research Studies Database page on [recruiting and retaining good teachers](#)

teach in a high-needs subject area or geographic region. This includes subject areas or specific regions of the state facing a shortage of teachers. (See Article 25, Section 59, page 491-492 of the bill and page 27 of the [bill summary](#)).

In addition, an interesting report from the Minnesota Department of Education, *Teacher Supply and Demand*, found that rural districts in Minnesota had a very difficult time attracting teachers and had some of the highest use of license variances. (Report available on the Department of Education's [website](#); scroll down to "Teacher Supply and Demand Report".)

Mississippi

Mississippi offers a [loan repayment program](#) for teachers with an alternate route license who teach in a shortage subject area or geographic area, receiving \$3,000 annually for up to four years. In addition, the [Teacher Fellowship Program](#) is for teachers in geographical shortage areas. Participants receive a housing and moving assistance; the program covers tuition and book costs for those accepted into an approved graduate program.

Teacher Preparation Program Partnerships: Teacher Quality Partnership Grants

The U.S. Department of Education's [Teacher Quality Partnership \(TQP\) Grant Program](#) provides grants to promote partnerships between teacher preparation programs and high-needs districts and schools, including those in rural areas. In addition, TQP [recently announced](#) an additional grant program specific to tribal and rural communities. Below are two examples of rural-focused grantee programs.

- **Kansas:** [Preparing Educators in Rural Kansas](#). This program is a partnership with MidAmerica Nazarene University (MNU), Southwest Plains Regional Service Center, and several schools. One of the program's goals is to place student teachers from MNU in rural western Kansas and to provide high-quality and meaningful professional development to teachers.
- **Iowa:** [Iowa Teacher Quality Partnership](#). This program is a partnership between, among others, the University of Northern Iowa, the Iowa Department of Education, and a number of schools. Prior to beginning their student teaching, pre-service teachers in this program spend three to five days in a partner school classroom. The schools are in rural areas and students live with a family from the school district.

"STEM Goes Rural" at Purdue University

The ["STEM Goes Rural"](#) fellowship program through Purdue University helps individuals transition to a career teaching in the STEM fields in rural secondary schools. Fellows receive stipends and support as they transition to classroom teaching from their professional fields.

Selected Research and Resources

Research around the issue of rural teacher recruitment is wide and varied. Below we highlight a just a few of the available reports and studies on this topic, including a few key takeaways.

- [Preparing Teachers to Teach in Rural Schools](#), REL Central, 2008: This report describes how nine teacher preparation programs prepare their graduates for teaching positions in rural communities. The authors identified five beneficial programs components and identified nine institutions that use them. Three of the identified universities plus one tribal college offered special education programs designed to prepare teachers for rural positions.

- [Rural Teacher Recruitment and Retention: Review of the Research Literature, National Survey of Rural Superintendents, and Case Studies of Programs in Virginia](#), Patricia Cahape Hammer et al. (2004): This report is a literature review of research and practice literature on rural teacher recruitment and retention. The authors include an overview of rural-specific challenges and national, state, and district teacher recruitment and retention strategies (pg. 3-5). The “Promising Practices” section is of particular interest, as it includes a number of examples, including interesting and innovative recruitment strategies and partnership programs (pg. 5-11). Although this report was published over a decade ago, many of the challenges and practices presented are still relevant.
- [Recruiting and Retaining High-Quality Teachers in Rural Areas](#), David H. Monk (2007): In this report, the author discusses different attributes of rural communities and rural education sector and if simply raising rural educators’ salaries is enough to recruit and retain an adequate rural teaching force.
- The Rural Opportunities Strategies Consortium of Idaho provides strategies to attract high-quality teachers to rural areas in the two reports [The Supply and Demand for Rural Teachers](#) (2015) and [Boosting Idaho Rural Students’ College Prospects by Expanding Access to Great Teaching](#) (2015). Some of the suggested strategies include: public relations campaigns, alternative certification, financial incentives, job-sharing and distance education programs, and grow your own programs.
- [Recruiting and Retaining Rural Educators: Challenges and Strategies](#), Rhonda Barton (2012): This piece is a nice high-level overview of the issue of recruiting and retaining teachers for rural areas.

Recruiting Special Education Teachers and Specialized Instructional Support Staff to Rural Areas

Recruiting and retaining qualified special education personnel remains a problem for most states and districts, and the problem is exacerbated in rural areas. Special education teachers in rural areas often [face distinctive challenges](#), like social or professional isolation and being asked to work across a wide variety of student needs and disability categories, sometimes outside of their training or expertise. Conversely, some rural special education providers [express satisfaction](#) in their profession because of the close-knit relationships in their schools and communities.

Education communities are trying to address the issue of recruiting and retaining rural special education teachers through “grow your own” programs, online programs, and in partnerships with higher education institutions. Many of the efforts to address this need are happening through teacher preparation programs.

State and Program Examples

Grow Your Own Programs

Researchers have concluded that a powerful way to address the chronic shortage of special education personnel is to identify, recruit, train, and support individuals from the local area. [This 2012 report](#) by the [Personnel Improvement Center](#) highlights Grow Your Own Programs in **Arizona**, **South Carolina**, and **Utah**. Direct links to the programs in each state can be accessed below:

- **Arizona:** [Future Educators Association/Educators Rising](#); [Paraprofessional Tuition Assistance Grant](#)
- **South Carolina:** [Teacher Cadets](#); [Project CREATE](#) (See also [this 2014 study](#) on Project CREATE.)
- **Utah:** [Paraeducator to Special Education Teacher Program Partnerships](#)

Common themes present in successful grow your own programs are listed on pages 9 and 10 and include: providing leadership at the state, district, and higher education instruction levels; developing program infrastructure that clearly articulates the roles and responsibilities of collaborative partners; establishing personal relationships with local special education and human resource directors; involving universities and/or community colleges in all stages of the development and implementation of Grow Your Own programs securing district support for Grow Your Own program participants (in the form of mentoring, release time, and/or funding for textbooks and laptops); and tracking and disseminating program outcome data.

Online Programs

As noted in [this study](#), higher education programs are not always accessible to teachers in rural areas because problems “related to budget, distance, and time can make it both difficult and impractical for them to attend college.” This poses recruitment and retention problems (e.g. when potential teacher candidates have limited certification options, for instance, or when provisionally certified teachers have limited access to professional development opportunities or cannot complete their coursework requirements). Some teacher preparation programs are using online programs to address these issues.

- **Nebraska:** [This 2009 report](#) highlights creative strategies employed by the **University of Nebraska at Kearney** to certify rural teachers in special education through online course formats.
- **Hawaii:** The [University of Hawaii at Manoa](#) received a [grant](#) from the U.S. Department of Education to prepare special education teachers to work in rural areas of the state, with the first cohort beginning their training in 2016. The program has robust online offerings and was [highlighted recently](#) by Cabinet Report.

State and Higher Education Institution Programs

- **North Dakota and Minnesota:** The **University of North Dakota** offers a two-year [Special Education Resident Teacher program](#) with a goal of attracting and keeping teachers in rural schools in North Dakota and western Minnesota. The university maintains partnerships with multiples school districts and special education units throughout the region. Students are admitted to a graduate program in special education and complete a two-year internship in rural districts.
- **Montana:** **Montana’s Office of Public Instruction** offers a [Special Education Endorsement](#) to licensed teachers in school districts unable to recruit a fully certified special education teacher. To receive the endorsement, applicants must commit to the following: complete a special education endorsement through a participating institution within three years (stipend provided); work with a mentor; and teach special education in the state for at least two years.
- **Utah:** [This 2001](#) report highlights a program at **Utah State University** to train special education teachers in rural communities. Students are recruited from local rural communities, complete coursework through distance education, and receive field-based training in the communities where they live by trained supervisors. Although it isn’t clear if this program still exists, it is an example of a robust partnership between a university and rural communities.

Selected Research and Resources

Although resources around the issue of recruiting and retaining special education teachers for rural areas is somewhat limited, below are a few research reports and other resources that may be of some use to you.

- [Keeping Quality Teachers: The Art of Retaining General and Special Education Teachers](#), Northeast Regional Resource Center at WestEd and University of the State of New York (2004): Although not specific to rural areas, this publication provides a robust discussion about teacher retention strategies for general and special education teachers. The report is broken into five sections covering a number of areas, including: working conditions, administrators' roles, induction and mentoring programs, and partnerships between schools and higher education.
- [Issues in Special Education Teacher Recruitment, Retention and Professional Development: Considerations in Supporting Rural Teachers](#), Ann B. Berry et al. (2011): The authors of this study surveyed a number of special education administrators and teachers to get an overall picture of special education recruitment and retention issues and the professional development needs of rural special educators. (Also see this [2013 companion piece](#) by the same authors.)
- [Issues in Special Education Teacher Recruitment, Retention, and Professional Development: Considerations in Supporting Rural Teachers](#), Ann B. Berry et al. (2012): In this study the authors point to a particular need for rural special education teachers to receive specific types of pre-service and in-service teacher training. Although the report is behind a pay wall, this [article](#) from Education Week provides an overview.
- [Rural Special Education Quarterly](#) is a journal devoted to topics around providing special education services in rural settings.