



TEACHERS AND TEACHING CONDITIONS

IN RURAL NEW MEXICO

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY:

TEACHERS AND TEACHING CONDITIONS IN RURAL NEW MEXICO

This report identifies 10 areas that present potential challenges for rural schools and the diverse populations in rural schools in New Mexico.

These 10 areas of potential concern are:

1. Challenges Related to Demographics
2. Student Discipline Concerns
3. Teacher Qualifications
4. Ethnicity of Educators Compared to Students
5. Principals' Salary
6. Staffing Patterns
7. Class Size
8. Teacher Shortages and Unfilled Vacancies
9. Professional Development and Perceived Usefulness
10. Incentives for Professional Development

SUMMARY OF KEY FINDINGS

1. Rural schools in New Mexico serve children with high needs who require additional resources, special programs, and expert teachers to be successful learners.

2. There is evidence that rural schools are "hard-to-staff" with highly qualified teachers.

Rural schools tend to have high rates of teacher turnover and out-of-field teaching assignments. Rural schools frequently use substitutes to fill vacancies or assign out-of-field teachers. Neither practice places a qualified teacher in each classroom. Also, there is evidence that teachers in predominantly Hispanic and American Indian rural schools are less educated than state averages.

3. Professional development offered existing teachers is frequently not aligned with their professional needs.

There is a mismatch between the perceived usefulness of professional development and the content of professional development that teachers are offered. In addition, a low percent of rural districts provide incentives to pursue professional development, such as offering stipends, increased pay, or re-certification credit.

4. Class size in rural New Mexico is above average for rural schools nationally.

For the youngest grades and for students with special needs, a class size of 20 may prevent students from obtaining the individual attention they need.

5. The ethnicity gap between students and their educators is large.

The gap may impede students from exposure to teachers with relevant cultural sensitivity and knowledge of their own native languages, and who serve as appropriate role models. The ethnicity gap between teachers and students in predominantly American Indian rural schools is extremely pronounced. In predominantly Hispanic and American Indian schools, the ethnicity gap is very high between principals and students.

6. Salaries for teachers are very equal across districts in New Mexico, but apparently not good enough to attract and retain enough highly qualified teachers in the most difficult-to-staff rural places.

Also, salaries for principals are slightly lower than other locales and may be a barrier to attracting enough competent school leaders to rural schools.

OTHER AREAS OF POTENTIAL CONCERN

Our initial analysis of predominantly Hispanic and predominantly American Indian schools *in all locales* identified additional challenges. We do not know, however, to what extent these are also problems in *rural* areas. Therefore, we suggest that further investigation is indicated in these areas:

1. The extent to which Limited English Proficiency is a challenge in predominantly Hispanic and American Indian rural schools.
2. The extent to which student discipline problems exist and impede learning, as well the effectiveness of current practices and policies in handling these challenges.
3. The extent to which adequate support staff is available to meet student needs, especially in predominantly American Indian rural schools.
4. The incidence of after-school enrichment in predominantly American Indian schools.
5. A possible "technology divide" in predominantly American Indian schools.

POLICY OPTIONS TO IMPROVE CONDITIONS IN RURAL NEW MEXICO SCHOOLS

Based on our investigation, we offer the following policy suggestions:

1. Increase the number and types of programs to increase recruitment and retention of highly qualified teachers for rural poor schools, including schools with predominantly Hispanic and American Indian populations.
2. Offer substantial pay increases to teachers who accept positions in "difficult-to-staff" rural places.
3. Provide additional state aid to districts in difficult-to-staff locations to raise salaries for administrators.
4. Fully align ongoing professional development with actual needs of rural teachers.
5. Audit the support services and staff available in rural schools, especially in predominantly American Indian and Hispanic schools, to ensure that students' needs are being met by professional staff.
6. Consider reducing class size for the youngest grades below the present mandate of 20, especially in schools with high percentages of children with special needs such as high poverty, and high percentages of English language learners.
7. Fully implement and fund technology infrastructure programs, especially for predominantly American Indian schools.
8. Make the incentives for National Board certification permanent.

INTRODUCTION

New Mexico is one of the poorest and most rural states in the country.

Over one-third of all schools in New Mexico are located in rural areas. And 58% of all students in New Mexico are eligible for free and reduced lunch. In rural areas, the percent of students in poverty is even higher (67%). New Mexico is tied with Arizona as having the greatest percentage of rural children living below poverty levels.

In addition, New Mexico is an extremely diverse state. White students are a minority. Students of color comprise 66% of the total student population. Almost 52% of all New Mexican students are Hispanic and over 11% are American Indians.

New Mexico is second in the nation in the percent of students of color in rural schools (Hawaii is first). Over 70% of rural students are non-white. Many of these students do not speak English as their primary language. These factors add another layer of challenge for rural schools.

With such a significant rural, poor and diverse population, it is crucial that education reform efforts recognize and focus on the unique challenges in rural New Mexico schools. This report is designed to aid that process by identifying factors related to teachers and teaching conditions that can be improved, when necessary, by thoughtful policies.

We looked at over 100 indicators covering the characteristics of rural students, teachers, and principals in rural schools and teacher professional development practices. In this report, we selectively present data that indicates a potential area of concern.

A Caution

Since much of data used in this report is from the School and Staffing Surveys (SASS), 1999-2000, it is several years old. In the rapidly changing field of K-12 education, this alone is a reason to interpret this data with caution.

We also know that in the past few years, New Mexico has embarked on a focused campaign to improve education for rural students. This includes the establishment of a Rural School Division within the Department of Education. In addition, we know that New Mexico is committed to improving Indian education. Any impact from these recent initiatives is not reflected in this report, except for some of the latest teacher data.

Areas of Potential Concern

Our investigation identified 10 areas that present potential challenges for rural schools and the diverse populations in rural schools. Though actual conditions might have changed since the data was collected, these areas should be investigated further. The data we collected should provide a baseline of rural conditions and stimulate discussion. Readers should compare this data with the current realities of rural New Mexico, gauge how much progress has been met and help set directions for future reform.

These 10 areas of potential concern are:

1. Challenges Related to Demographics
2. Student Discipline Concerns
3. Teacher Qualifications
4. Ethnicity of Educators Compared to Students
5. Principals' Salary
6. Staffing Patterns
7. Class Size
8. Teacher Shortages and Unfilled Vacancies
9. Professional Development and Perceived Usefulness
10. Incentives for Professional Development

I. CHALLENGES RELATED TO DEMOGRAPHICS

Ruralness

About one-third of all schools in New Mexico are located in rural areas. These schools enroll over 19% of all New Mexico students. A very large percent (45.4%) of rural schools in New Mexico are suffering from declining enrollment.

Ruralness	New Mexico	USA
Percent of population that is rural	25.0	21.0
Percent of public schools in rural areas Common Core of Data (CCD), 2001-2002)	33.4%	30.4
Percent of students enrolled in rural schools (CCD, 2001-2002)	19.3	20.9
Percentage of rural schools with declining enrollments of at least 10%	45.4	37.9

Characteristics of Rural Students

Compared to national rural averages, rural schools in New Mexico serve student populations with twice as much poverty, over three times as many minorities and over seven times as many students with Limited English Proficiency.

Rural Student Characteristics	New Mexico		U.S. Rural
	Rural	Non-rural	
Student poverty (% of students eligible for Free and Reduced Lunch)	67.0% (CCD, 2002-03, by school)	55.6%	35.2
Minority enrollment	70.4%	65.5%	22.2
Hispanic student population	48.4%	52.5%	6.1
American Indian	20.6	9.0	2.3
African-American student population	2.4	3.2	9.4
Migrant student population	.78	.57	1.2
Special Education Students (% with Individual Education Plans) ¹	21.0 (<i>Estimate only.</i> CCD 2002-03, by district)	19.9	14.3%
Students with Limited English Proficiency (LEP)	17.9 (<i>Estimate only.</i> CCD 2002-03, by district)	20.0	2.5%

¹ Data on the numbers of students in special education (i.e., students with Individual Learning Plans), and students with Limited English Proficiency (or English Language Learners) is available in the Common Core of Data only by district. District locale is not very accurate and does not fully account for all rural schools and students.

Poverty in Rural Diverse Schools

Poverty rates for rural schools that are predominantly Hispanic or American Indian are even higher.

New Mexico			
	Predominantly Hispanic Rural Schools ²	Predominantly American Indian Rural Schools	All Schools
Student Poverty	76.2%	75.2%	56.6

2. STUDENT DISCIPLINE CONCERNS

Most of the identified problems in rural New Mexico schools are common to those in rural schools nationwide. However, there are some differences. Both rural and non-rural principals rate “poverty” as their number one problem, and cite this far more frequently than do principals across the country.

In addition, “student health” was identified in both rural and non-rural schools as a significant problem in New Mexico, but is not common in the national sample. Lastly, a disturbing 31.6% of rural principals indicated that “physical conflict” was an issue.

Behavior and Discipline	New Mexico		U.S. Rural
	Rural	Non-rural	
Top Five Student Discipline Issues	1. Poverty (86.8%) 2. Unprepared students (78.9%) 3. Lack of Parent Involvement (71.1%)	1. Poverty (70.7%) 2. Unprepared students (65.9%) 3. Lack of Parent Involvement (58.5%)	1. Unprepared Students (66%) 2. Lack of Parent Involvement (58%)
From Principals' Perspective (% of principals who rated this as a Serious or Moderate problem)	4. Student Absenteeism (47.4%) 5. Student Apathy (44.7%)	4. Student Absenteeism (52.0%) 5. Tardiness (46.3%)	3. Student Apathy (54%) 4. Poverty (48%) 5. Student Absenteeism (47%)
Other identified problems (Rated as Serious or Moderate by 25% or more of principals)	6-7. (tied) Student Health Tardiness (34.2%) 8-9. (tied) Drug Abuse Physical Conflict (31.6%)	6. Student Health (39.0%) 7. Student Apathy (35.0%) 8. Teacher Absenteeism (32.0%)	6-7. (tied) Alcohol use (46%) Disrespect (46%) 8. Drug Abuse (37%) 9. Tardiness (36%)

3. TEACHER QUALIFICATIONS

Rural teachers in New Mexico are slightly more likely to have a Masters degree as compared to the national rural average. However, a higher percentage of non-rural teachers in New Mexico have Masters degrees. Reflecting the national trends, there is a higher incidence of out-of-field teacher assignments in rural areas of New Mexico than in non-rural areas. And teacher turnover is higher in rural districts than in non-rural districts.

² "Predominantly Hispanic rural schools" in this report are defined as rural schools with ≥ 50% Hispanic enrollment. Similarly, "predominantly American Indian rural schools" are defined as rural schools with ≥ 50% American Indian enrollment. We defined "rural" as schools in communities with <2,500 residents. This is defined in the Common Core of Data as locale codes 7 and 8.

Teachers in predominantly Hispanic and American Indian rural schools are less likely to hold a Masters degree than New Mexico averages. Both groups of schools have a notably higher rate of out-of-field teaching assignments. Teachers in predominantly Hispanic rural schools tend to have less experience than teachers in other schools in New Mexico.

Teachers' Qualifications	New Mexico		U.S. Rural
	Rural	Non-rural	
% teachers with Masters degree	38.6	44.2	36.6
% with Masters 2002-03 New Mexico Public Education Department (PED)	39.8	36.9	--
"Out-of-field" assignments (% of teachers who were assigned to teach classes in <u>other</u> field in addition to main teaching field)	24.1	17.1	25.0
Teacher turn-over rate (% of staff who are newly hired--by number of staff--not FTE)	18.7	14.3	11.8
Teaching Experience	12.14 years	12.13	13.4
Teaching Experience (2002-03, New Mexico PED)	12.3	11.8	--
Last minute hires (% of new teachers who were hired during the summer)	34.6	30.4	35.6

Teachers' Qualifications	New Mexico		
	Predominantly Hispanic Rural Schools	Predominantly American Indian Rural Schools	All Schools
% teachers with Bachelors degree	97.8%	97.5%	99.1
% teachers with Masters degree	37.0	30	43.0
"Out-of-field" assignments (% of teachers who were assigned to teach classes in <u>other</u> field in addition to main teaching field)	28.3	22.5	18.7
Teaching Experience	10.28 years	12.35 years	12.13 years

4. ETHNICITY OF EDUCATORS COMPARED TO STUDENTS

Teacher Ethnicity

In general, there is a large racial gap between teachers in New Mexico and the students they serve. This ethnicity gap (the difference between percentage of minority students and the percentage of minority teachers) for the entire state is 34.2%, compared to a national average of 18.6%. Rural districts in New Mexico tend to have less of a racial gap than non-rural schools, though it is still twice as high as the average for all rural districts nationally.

This ethnicity gap is especially pronounced in schools that are predominantly American Indian.

Teachers	New Mexico		U.S. Rural
	Rural	Non-rural	
Ethnicity Discrepancy between students and teachers (% minority students minus % minority teachers)	21.1	36.4	10.5

Teachers	New Mexico		
	Predominantly Hispanic Rural Schools	Predominantly American Indian Rural Schools	All Schools
Ethnicity Discrepancy between students and teachers (% minority students minus % minority teachers)	20.0%	65.0%	34.2%

Ethnicity of Principals

The large ethnicity gap seen with teachers is also true with principals in New Mexico. These gaps are large when compared with the national situation and are evident in all locales.

Principals	New Mexico		U.S. Rural
	Rural	Non-rural	
Ethnicity Gap—between students and principals (% minority students minus % minority principals)	56.8	59.2	12.9

5. PROFESSIONAL SALARIES

Teachers' Salary

There is very little variation in teacher salary among locales in New Mexico. Last year, the state mandated a minimum salary of \$30,000 for Tier I teachers (beginning salary), which is reflected in the comparisons below. More experienced teachers can make slightly more in non-rural districts, though the differences are small.

Teachers' Salary	New Mexico		U.S. Rural
	Rural	Non-rural	
Starting Salary SASS, 1999-2000	\$25,505	\$25,466	\$23,353
Starting Salary New Mexico PED, 2002-03	\$30,282	\$30,608	--
Mid-Career Salary (Masters + 15 yrs. experience) New Mexico PED, 2002-03	\$40,480	\$41,240	--

Principals' Salary

Principals in non-rural schools in New Mexico earn almost \$2,000 more than colleagues in rural schools. This salary differential appears to have diminished over the past few years.

Principals' Salary	New Mexico		U.S. Rural
	Rural	Non-rural	
Salary SASS, 1999-2000	\$52,375	\$55,720	\$56,688
Principal Salary New Mexico PED, 2002-03	\$57,399	\$59,296	--

6. STAFFING PATTERNS

Staffing patterns in rural schools are similar to the rural national averages, except there are more classroom aides in New Mexico. However, rural schools in New Mexico have fewer aides and assistants as compared to non-rural schools in New Mexico, due presumably to their smaller size.

Staffing Patterns	New Mexico		US Rural
	Rural	Non-rural	
School level administrators (# of principals, assistant principals per school building)	1.11	2.00	1.31
Other administrators (# of curriculum specialists, library media specialists, school counselors etc.)	1.68	2.94	1.88
Support staff (# of nurses, speech therapists, social workers etc.)	1.25	2.13	.97
Aides and assistants (# of library, Special Education, Title I, bilingual/ESL, kindergarten aides etc.)	4.56	6.53	2.97

7. CLASS SIZE

Class sizes in rural New Mexico schools tend to be 10% higher than the national rural averages. In predominantly American Indian schools, average class sizes are even larger. With an average class size of almost 23, they are about 13% larger than the rest of New Mexico.

Class Size	New Mexico		U.S. Rural
	Rural	Non-rural	
Average Class Size	20.38	20.17	18.40

Class Size	New Mexico		
	Predominantly Hispanic Rural Schools	Predominantly American Indian Rural Schools	All Schools
Average Class Size	21.09	22.93	20.22

8. TEACHER SHORTAGES AND UNFILLED VACANCIES

Only 80% of rural schools in New Mexico reported being able to fill vacancies with qualified teachers. Though slightly higher than national rural averages, this lags behind the rate for non-rural New Mexico districts. The most common strategy for dealing with unfilled positions in both rural and non-rural districts is to hire substitutes, followed by assigning a teacher from another subject or grade-level.

Filling Vacancies	New Mexico		U.S. Rural
	Rural	Non-rural	
Teaching Vacancies Hired qualified teacher (% of schools that had vacancy and hired qualified teacher)	80.6	93.0	78.1
Difficult subject areas for filling teacher vacancies: Top 5 areas in order ("Very Difficult" or "Could not fill")	1. Special Education 2. Music/Art 3. Physical Science 4. ESL 5. Math	1. Special Education 2. ESL 3. Computer Science 4. Math 5. Music/Art	1. Special Education 2. Math 3. Computer Science 4. Music/Art 5. Foreign Language
If unfilled vacancy, cancelled class (% of schools that used this strategy)	11.1	6.1	5.0
If unfilled vacancy, increased class sizes	13.9	15.7	12.1
If unfilled vacancy, added to another's teaching load	11.1	13.0	10.2
If unfilled vacancy, assigned teacher from another subject/level	22.2	20.0	10.3
If unfilled vacancy, assigned administrator	0.0	6.1	3.9
If unfilled vacancy, used substitute	41.7	41.7	20.2

9. PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT AND PERCEIVED USEFULNESS

The two sets of data below indicate that there is a mismatch between the content of professional development offered teachers, and the professional development found most useful to teachers.

Specifically, the most useful professional development for rural teachers is an in-depth study of the content area in which they teach. This was only the fifth most common subject of professional development and less than half the teachers participated in this activity.

One of the least useful professional development topics was in standards, which was one of the most common areas.

These relationships are not straightforward and are slightly different for Hispanic and American Indian rural schools.

Professional Development Content Areas

Rural New Mexico teachers are most likely to undertake professional development activities whose content relates to technology, state or local academic standards, and teaching methods, and least likely to focus on discipline or IEP training. Less than half of New Mexico's teachers undertake an in-depth study of the content area they teach.

Professional development in predominantly Hispanic schools mainly follows the statewide patterns. However in predominantly American Indian rural schools, more teachers participate in professional development in technology, LEP, and assessment than the average for New Mexico.

Professional Development Content Areas	New Mexico		U.S. Rural
	Rural	Non-rural	
In-depth study of content area of teaching assignment (% of teachers who participated in this professional development in this area)	46.6	47.6	50.7
State/local standards	62.7	62.9	66.1
Teaching methods	59.3	67.1	67.1
Instructional technology	72.0	62.6	71.4
Assessment	44.9	48.2	57.7
Discipline	32.2	37.6	40.0
IEP training	36.4	34.0	33.5
LEP training	49.4	43.1	10.1

Professional Development Content Areas	New Mexico		
	Predominantly Hispanic Rural Schools	Predominantly American Indian Rural Schools	All Schools
In-depth study of content area of teaching assignment	47.5	60.0	47.4
State/local standards	67.5	70.0	62.9
Teaching methods	60.0	63.3	65.3
Instructional technology	55.0	90.0	64.9
Assessment	47.5	66.7	47.7
Discipline	35.0	30.0	36.3
IEP training	35.1	33.3	34.6
LEP training	32.1	77.8	44.7

Usefulness of Activity from Teachers' Perspective

Of those who participated in such activities, rural New Mexico teachers were most likely to rate in-depth study in the content area they teach as "useful" or "very useful" professional development. Professional development in assessment was rated as "useful" least often. About half the teachers in rural New Mexico rated their professional development overall as "useful."

In predominantly Hispanic rural schools in New Mexico, professional development in technology was most often rated as "useful" followed by teaching methods and in-depth study of the content area. In predominantly American Indian schools, professional development offering in-depth content studies was most useful. Professional development in standards was least often rated as useful.

Usefulness of Activity from Teachers' Perspective	New Mexico		U.S. Rural
	Rural	Non-rural	
In-depth study of content area of teaching assignment (% indicating professional development was Useful or Very Useful--top 2 categories)	69.1	60.7	70.4
Standards	44.6	48.1	55.2
Teaching methods	57.2	61.1	58.3
Technology	64.7	61.3	65.3
Assessment	34.0	50.2	50.5
Discipline	44.7	56.0	51.9
Overall usefulness (% indicating that all professional development of last 12 months was Useful or Very Useful)	50.0	52.9	43.5

Usefulness of Activity from Teachers' Perspective	New Mexico		
	Predominantly Hispanic Rural Schools	Predominantly American Indian Rural Schools	All Schools
In-depth study of content area of teaching assignment (% indicating professional development was Useful or Very Useful)	57.9	72.2	62.7
Standards	51.8	28.5	47.3
Teaching methods	58.3	63.1	60.3
Technology	72.8	66.6	62.2
Assessment	26.3	40.0	46.6
Discipline	57.2	44.4	53.6
Overall usefulness (% indicating that all professional development of last 12 months was Useful or Very Useful)	55.0	53.4	52.2

10. INCENTIVES FOR PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Rural New Mexico teachers reported they were most likely to receive stipends as incentives to complete professional development activities, and least likely to receive increased pay. Their experience here generally mirrors that of non-rural New Mexico teachers. Rural teachers nationally were more than two times as likely as their colleagues in New Mexico to receive re-certification credit for professional development.

In predominantly Hispanic rural schools, teachers were more likely to receive re-certification credit for professional development as compared to other New Mexico schools. The reverse occurs in predominantly American Indian rural schools.

Incentives	New Mexico		U.S. Rural
	Rural	Non-rural	
Incentives – National Board Certification (% of districts that offer financial incentive or higher step on salary scale. SASS, 1999-2000)	0.0	14.3	10.2
Stipends for professional development completion	36.4	41.3	46.7
Reward or recognition for professional development	27.1	14.7	20.0
Increase pay for professional development completion	9.3	12.6	13.7
Re-certification credit for professional development	17.8	20.0	44.0

Incentives	New Mexico		
	Predominantly Hispanic Rural Schools	Predominantly American Indian Rural Schools	All Schools
Stipends for professional development completion	40.0	50.0	40.2
Reward or recognition for professional development	30.0	33.3	17.7
Increase pay for professional development completion	7.5	16.7	11.8
Re-certification credit for professional development	25.0	16.7	19.5

SUMMARY: CHALLENGES FOR RURAL SCHOOLS IN NEW MEXICO

1. Rural schools in New Mexico serve children with high needs.

Students in rural areas are characterized by very high poverty rates, higher than average special education designation, and very high percentages of students with Limited English Proficiency. In addition, principals report significant problems related to student health and physical conflicts among the student body.

Over three-quarters of all students in predominantly Hispanic and American Indian rural schools qualify for free and reduced lunch. This poverty rate is even higher than the all-student rural averages.

We know that children with high needs require additional resources, special programs, and expert teachers to be successful learners.

2. There is evidence that rural schools are "hard-to-staff" with highly qualified teachers.

Rural schools tend to have high rates of teacher turnover and out-of-field teaching assignments. Rural schools frequently use substitutes to fill vacancies or assign an out-of-field teacher. Neither practice places a qualified teacher in each classroom.

There is evidence that teachers in predominantly Hispanic and American Indian rural schools are less educated than state averages. In addition, there is a higher incidence of out-of-field teacher assignment in these schools.

3. Professional development offered existing teachers is frequently not aligned with their professional needs.

There is a mismatch between the perceived usefulness of professional development and the content of professional development that teachers are offered. Less than half of teachers were engaged in in-depth study of the content area they teach, though this was rated as most useful.³

In addition, a low percent of rural districts offered incentives to pursue professional development, such as offering stipends, increased pay or re-certification credit. The lack of incentives for National Board certification may restrict veteran teachers from this vehicle of professional growth.

4. Class size in rural New Mexico is above average for rural schools nationally.

For the youngest grades and for students with special needs, a class size of 20 may prevent students from obtaining the individual attention they need.

5. The ethnicity gap between students and their educators is large.

The gap may impede students from exposure to teachers with relevant cultural sensitivity, knowledge of their own native languages, and who serve as appropriate role models.

The ethnicity gap between teachers and students in predominantly American Indian rural schools is extremely pronounced. In predominantly Hispanic and American Indian schools, the ethnicity gap is very high between principals and students.

6. Salaries for teachers are very equal across districts in New Mexico, but apparently not good enough to attract and retain enough teachers in the most difficult-to-staff rural places.

Also salaries for principals are slightly lower than other locales and may be a barrier to attracting enough competent school leaders to rural schools.

OTHER AREAS OF POTENTIAL CONCERN

Our initial analysis of predominantly Hispanic and predominantly American Indian schools *in all locales* identified additional challenges. We do not know, however, to what extent these are also problems in *rural* areas, since our sample of rural Hispanic and Indian schools is much smaller.

Therefore, we suggest that further investigation is indicated in these areas:

1. Limited English Proficiency (LEP). To what degree does LEP present challenges in predominantly Hispanic and American Indian rural schools?

2. Discipline issues. Additional discipline problems were identified in predominantly Hispanic and/or American Indian schools. These problems include:

- Teacher absenteeism in predominantly Hispanic and American Indian schools
- High dropout rates in predominantly Hispanic schools
- Lack of respect for teachers in predominantly American Indian schools

³ SASS data also indicated that a very low percent of rural teachers participated in university-based coursework. This data was not included in this report, but may indicate a lack of accessibility for rural educators.

To what degree are these problems in rural Hispanic and rural American Indian schools?

3. Support Staff. In predominantly American Indian schools *in all locales*, there are fewer support staff (such as nurses, social workers) per building than other locales, in spite of identified problems like student health, that might require services by these professionals.

Is this a problem in rural locations?

4. After-school enrichment. The incidence of after-school enrichment in predominantly American Indian schools *in all locales* is significantly lower than in other New Mexico schools.

Is this the situation in predominantly American Indian *rural* schools?

5. Technology. In predominantly American Indian schools, there is evidence of a technology divide. These schools have fewer computers per classroom and less connectivity with the Internet.

Is adequate technology available in all rural schools?

POLICY OPTIONS TO IMPROVE CONDITIONS IN RURAL NEW MEXICO SCHOOLS

As discussed in the introduction, New Mexico is already committed to improving education for rural schools. We realize that many of the challenges and problems identified in this report are already recognized and are presently being addressed through various state policies.

Some of the suggestions below, therefore, may be redundant with present state efforts. However, we believe the results of this investigation highlight the critical nature of problems in rural schools and deserve attention in any case.

Thus, within this context we offer the following policy suggestions:

- 1. Increase the number and types of programs to increase recruitment and retention of highly qualified teachers for rural poor schools, including schools with predominantly Hispanic and American Indian populations.**

A variety of strategies have been used in other states with good results (See Mississippi's Critical Teacher Shortage acts.) "Grow-your-own" programs should be particularly effective in reducing the ethnicity gap and increasing retention. Programs to improve recruitment and retention might include the following:

- "Grow your own" programs targeting rural students to pursue teaching.
- Financial incentives, including low-interest mortgages, loan repayments, and relocation reimbursement, for teaching economically disadvantaged and rural populations.
- Scholarships for qualified para-educators to obtain teaching certification.
- Incentives for higher education to place student teachers in rural districts.

- 2. Offer substantial pay increases to teachers who accept positions in "difficult-to-staff" rural places.**

A number of criteria can be developed to define these districts such as remoteness, high teacher turnover rates, high rates of out-of-field assignments, and high poverty.

- 3. Provide additional state aid to districts in difficult-to-staff locations to raise salaries for administrators.**

- 4. Fully align ongoing professional development with actual needs of rural teachers.**

This alignment should begin with a survey of teachers to determine their professional needs and evaluate what types of professional development are found most useful. Since remoteness may restrict access to quality professional development, the use of technology to provide professional development should be considered.

- 5. Audit the support services and staff available in rural schools, especially in predominantly American Indian and Hispanic schools, to ensure that students' needs are being met by professional staff.**

- 6. Consider reducing class size for the youngest grades below the present mandate of twenty, especially in schools with high percentages of children with special needs such as high poverty, and high percentages of English language learners.**

- 7. Fully implement and fund technology infrastructure programs, especially for predominantly American Indian schools.**

- 8. Make the incentives for National Board certification permanent.**