

## Eastern Shore Superintendents

### Position Paper #5: **Rural Area Students and No Child Left Behind**

The Eastern Shore superintendents urge legislative and state agency recognition of the unique challenges faced by rural schools that significantly impact their capacity to meet the demands of the No Child Left Behind Legislation.

A 2003 study by the U.S. Government Accountability Office, the nonpartisan investigative arm of Congress, concluded that “Small, isolated rural schools face much greater challenges in meeting the requirements of the federal No Child Left Behind law than do schools in urban, suburban, or even rural districts with larger enrollments.” Specific conditions and challenges for rural schools and their resultant needs are:

1. Children in rural schools are more likely to be poor and unhealthy, carrying social and emotional burdens as profound as the more commonly assumed and targeted urban child and facing academic hurdles unknown to the typical suburban middle class child.

*Therefore: rural schools must be funded for intensive, high quality preschool instruction and intervention. The Eastern Shore superintendents support additional state funding for early childhood, family-based programs and services like Family Support Centers, Judy Centers, Home Instruction Program for Pre-school Youngsters (HIPPY), and Even Start.*

2. Over one-half of rural children living in poverty are members of a minority group.

*Therefore: rural schools must be granted adequate time to close the gap and freed from the double jeopardy penalty of multiple subgroup membership counts for AYP purposes. The Eastern Shore superintendents support Maryland’s effort to convince US Department of Education to limit AYP calculations to one category of subgroup for each child rather than multiple ones.*

3. Increased expectations and standards typically require the most progress from the students with the farthest to go. Without extra help and extra time, such a requirement may not be realistic or fair. Tutoring as required by No Child Left Behind for students in schools failing to meet AYP is difficult for rural schools because students ride buses that cannot accommodate differing schedules and parents do not have the means to provide transportation. The conundrum of a rural county is that without

transportation students of poverty are disenfranchised from extended-day, all-year programs: hence those who need the program most are least served.

*Therefore: rural schools must be granted flexibility in providing intervention services to struggling students.*

4. Low salaries and isolation effect rural schools' ability to recruit and retain qualified teachers. The average rural teacher makes only 86 cents for every dollar earned by his or her urban and suburban counterparts.

*Therefore: rural schools must be accorded recognition and flexibility in federal regulations regarding highly qualified teachers. Eastern Shore superintendents endorse state efforts toward a common salary scale supported through legislation and equitable funding.*

5. Rural teachers cannot take time off for professional development because there are often no qualified substitutes available or the distance to training sites is untenable.

*Therefore: federal and state training requirements must assume and utilize a wide range of professional development formats to allow rural school staff equal access to continuous improvement of their capacity to increase student growth and achievement.*

6. Rural administrative staff members must assume multiple roles carrying a workload equivalent to many employees in larger districts/counties.

*Therefore: state agency demands and expectations for products, processes, and participation must be modified for rural schools without diminishing representative voice.*

7. Small rural districts do not have other schools their students can attend and therefore cannot offer students the option of transferring to a higher performing public school if their school fails to meet annual proficiency goals or meet No Child Left Behind requirements.

*Therefore, federal and state agencies must recognize this parental option as unrealistic in rural areas.*

8. Rural schools serve over 40 percent of our nation's students, but receive only 22 percent of federal education funding.

*Therefore, federal funding must accompany federal mandates if all children are to have equitable opportunities for success.*

9. Technology can be a major means to equitable opportunity but rural schools are frequently unable to budget beyond baseline equipment and

access. The E-Rate, which provides access to telecommunications and technology for schools and libraries at discounted rates, is of particular importance to rural schools dealing with geographic isolation.

*Therefore, federal and state funding for technology initiatives designed and proven to impact student achievement should continue rather than decrease and be accessible with technical assistance for acquisition, implementation, and evaluation. The Eastern Shore superintendents support state and professional organizations' work with Congress and federal agencies to preserve and strengthen the E-Rate program.*

10. Serving children and families of poverty presents unique challenges in the classroom requiring constant well- coordinated interagency cooperation and collaboration

*Therefore, Eastern Shore superintendents support the creation of school-based health/wellness centers in order to facilitate collaboration and the coordination of services. The state is encouraged to support school-based centers and take whatever steps necessary to assure that all school systems receive the maximum level of Medicaid reimbursement to support those needed services*

The Eastern Shore of Maryland remains predominantly rural with many poor families enrolling children in public schools. If our nation and Maryland truly intend to leave “no child behind”, including rural children of poverty, then it is critical that the problems of the rural Eastern Shore of Maryland be understood and that a commitment be made to do whatever it takes to meet the basic and unique needs of rural children.