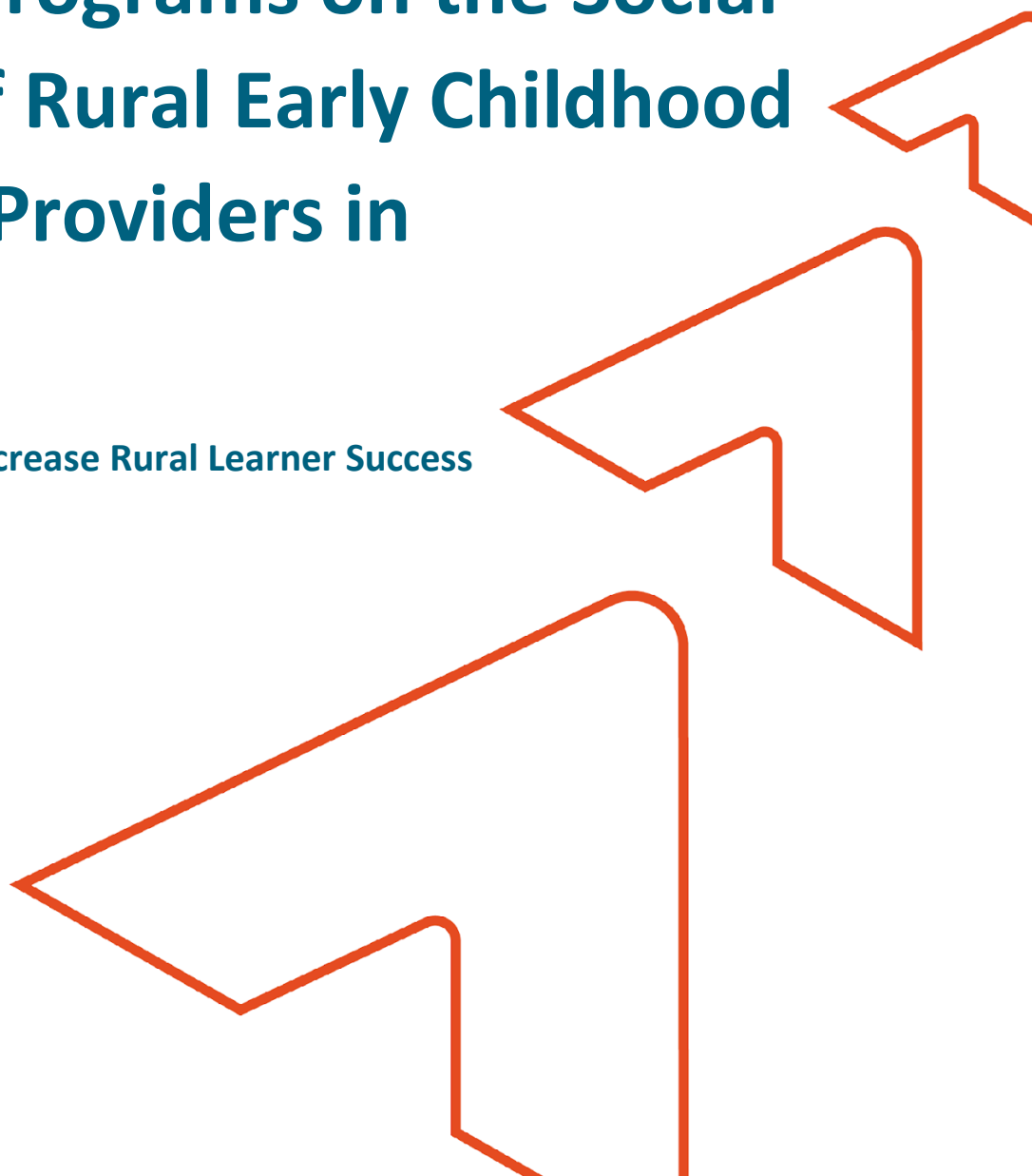


Project Summary

Exploring the Effectiveness of Skills Training and Wage-Based Incentive Programs on the Social Mobility of Rural Early Childhood Education Providers in Tennessee

Building Evidence to Increase Rural Learner Success



Exploring the Effectiveness of Skills Training and Wage-Based Incentive Programs on the Social Mobility of Rural Early Childhood Education Providers in Tennessee

Digital Promise Global | Washington, D.C.

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The TECTA program demonstrates that when we invest in the social mobility of rural ECE providers, we don't just improve individual careers. We stabilize the foundational workforce that supports our entire community.

– Digital Promise

Project Overview

This project examined the effectiveness of the Tennessee Early Childhood Training Alliance (TECTA) in supporting early childhood education (ECE) providers, with a specific focus on rural communities and marginalized groups in Tennessee. Specifically, the study explored the impact of skills training and wage-based incentive programs on the social mobility of rural ECE providers in Tennessee, with a focus on their lived experiences with upskilling. By analyzing program participation data from 2013 to 2022 and conducting focus groups with service providers and administrators, the research examined the benefits of TECTA, the systemic challenges faced by rural learners, and the program's role in fostering social and economic mobility.

Research Objectives Achieved

1. Determined whether rural TECTA participants progress through education pathways differently than their urban counterparts, including examining differences by race and ethnicity.
2. Assessed the extent to which the TECTA program achieved its intended goals and impacted the ECE field across rural regions of Tennessee.
3. Examined the degree to which TECTA promoted economic and social mobility for low-wage ECE providers in rural communities.
4. Explored ECE providers' perceptions of the potential return on investment (ROI) for TECTA's upskilling opportunities.

Research Methodology

This study employed a multilevel, mixed-methods design to capture the experiences of 2,284 TECTA participants and program administrators. Researchers analyzed quantitative data on program enrollment, engagement, retention, and degree attainment data from 2013 to 2022 using summary statistics, regression analysis, and cumulative link mixed models to compare outcomes between rural and urban participants. Between February and April 2024, the

team conducted five focus groups with 80 service providers and one with eight TECTA administrators, and double-coded transcripts using thematic analysis to identify themes related to barriers, benefits, and identity.

Key Findings

- More than one third of TECTA participants lived in rural counties (36%). Rural and urban learners completed degrees at similar rates and within similar timeframes.
- Because TECTA offers tuition-free education, many participants were able to enroll in and complete degrees they otherwise could not afford. Stipends provided to some students further supported their success.
- Participation in TECTA (for more than 50% of participants) led to bonuses and raises, demonstrating an ROI for many ECE providers.
- Rural TECTA participants often faced challenges such as long, costly commutes and unreliable internet and technology access.
- Flexible learning options—such as Flex Lessons and online course delivery—were critical in supporting student success.

Implications and Recommendations for Policy and Practice

- Offering tuition-free education and stipends can significantly increase enrollment and program completion for ECE providers in initiatives like TECTA.
- Providing wraparound supports—such as affordable onsite childcare, internet hotspots, technology training, language assistance, and access to mental health resources—can help ECE providers succeed in programs like TECTA.
- Direct outreach to childcare centers in rural areas and providing training in local community centers or libraries can boost participation and completion rates for rural ECE providers.
- Implementing mentorship programs and promoting knowledge transfer from experienced ECE providers to newer staff can enhance confidence and professional growth.
- To attract and retain talent in the ECE field, competitive compensation packages should be offered. Fair and competitive pay improves job satisfaction and reduces turnover and the associated costs.

Resources

For more information on this project, please see:

- [Adult Education is Ensuring Quality Early Childhood Education for All](#) (2025)
- [From Childcare to Educare: Inspiring Change in Early Childhood Education for Rural Tennessee](#) (2024)
- [How Inspiring Equity for Early Childhood Educators can Change the Trajectory of a Nation](#) (2024)
- [How Centering the Voices of Early Childhood Educators in Rural Communities Can Promote Equity](#) (2024)
- [Are Early Childhood Training and Skill-building Accessible in Rural Communities?](#) (2023)