SPECIAL INFORMATION ITEM

The SERVE Center at the University of North Carolina at Greensboro (SERVE)

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

SERVE is an educational research, development, dissemination, evaluation, and technical assistance center. Its mission is to foster empowered, information-rich educational systems by finding and translating the best current knowledge, generating new knowledge, and partnering with stakeholders to identify and apply best evidence to practice. SERVE’s work advances teaching and learning excellence in the prekindergarten through 12th grade education community.

Since its inception in 1990, SERVE has been awarded over $200 million in contracts and grants. It has successfully managed 14 major awards including four consecutive contracts for the Regional Educational Laboratory for the Southeast (REL-SE) funded by the Institute of Education Sciences (IES) at the US Department of Education (USED) and four awards from USED for the National Center for Homeless Education (NCHE). In addition, SERVE past awards include a five-year Technology Grant for Coordinating Teaching and Learning in Migrant Communities, three consecutive contracts as the Eisenhower Consortium for Mathematics and Science Education for the Southeast, and two consecutive Regional Technology in Education Consortium grants.

SERVE currently has contracts to provide educational services at both the regional and national levels. At the regional level, the REL-SE supports local and state education agencies in the six southeastern states (Alabama, Florida, Georgia, Mississippi, North Carolina, and South Carolina) with research and technical assistance. Highlights of the current REL-SE five-year, $37 million contract are listed below.

- Connected nearly 11,000 practitioners, administrators, and policymakers through reports, briefs, and conference presentations to the most expert researchers and the best research available on educational issues like dropout prevention and adolescent literacy.

- Disseminated 10,493 copies of its Issues and Answers (I&A) reports, which inform educators about topics important to the region such as African-American student achievement and high school improvement.

- Operated an Evidence-Based Education (EBE) request desk and prepared over 550 customized, written responses to educator questions, many of which have been broadly disseminated to other stakeholders.

- Coordinated two IES-approved, large-scale, randomized controlled trials (RCTs) evaluating education interventions in Alabama and Mississippi described below:
The Effectiveness of a Program to Accelerate Vocabulary Development in Kindergarten (Vocab)—Mississippi. The Mississippi K-PAVE study is a random assignment evaluation of the impact of Kindergarten PAVEd for Success (K-PAVE), an intervention designed to promote kindergarten students’ vocabulary development through frequent, interactive book reading, explicit vocabulary instruction, and teacher-child conversations built around enhanced use of vocabulary. The study is being conducted in 35 school districts in and around the Mississippi Delta region.

The Effectiveness of the Alabama Math, Science, and Technology Initiative (AMSTI)—Alabama. The AMSTI study is an experimental evaluation of a state initiative to improve student achievement in mathematics and science through the provision of comprehensive professional development, in-school coaching and supports, and distribution of technology and instructional materials. The experiment is being conducted in 82 Alabama schools that were randomly assigned to treatment and control groups.

At the national level, SERVE operates the National Center for Homeless Education (NCHE), USED’s technical assistance and information dissemination center in the area of homeless education. NCHE uses state-of-the-art technology for web communication and online professional development and for supporting state coordinators of homeless education, local program coordinators, educators, parents, and advocates in all 50 states and in 15,000 school districts. Each month, NCHE documents over 16,000 visits to its website, 600 participants in webinars, and 300 calls to its toll-free helpline. NCHE disseminates over 100,000 homeless awareness posters upon request each year.

While much of SERVE’s work consists of regional-level REL-SE activities and national-level NCHE activities, SERVE also conducts evaluations under contracts with federal, state, and local education agencies. Examples of SERVE’s contract work include evaluations of the Winston-Salem/Forsyth County Magnet Program in North Carolina, the Guilford County School teacher incentive program (Mission Possible), and the USED-funded Bridges to Early Learning Project in South Carolina. Recently, SERVE began collaborations with the Friday Institute for Educational Innovation, North Carolina State University, and SAS Institute on several technology in education evaluations. In addition to evaluation contracts, SERVE has a $2.8 million, four-year grant from IES and other sponsors to conduct research on Early College High Schools and high school reform.

SERVE actively promotes workplace diversity and has a staff of 55 employees; four of those are permanently located within state departments of education. Eighty percent of professional employees hold graduate degrees. Fifty percent of the staff have been with SERVE for five years or more, indicating the commitment of SERVE staff to the work of supporting school improvement.