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## **CEN Announces \$1M Grant to Rural HOPE from Thoma Foundation**

***Thoma Foundation grant will assist CEN in its goal to transform rural education, reaching 60 rural ISDs by 2026.***

**Roscoe, Texas** -- The Carl & Marilyn Thoma Foundation has announced a \$1 million grant to Collegiate Edu-Nation (CEN) to support learning and development for rural school districts across Texas. The grant will increase face-to-face and virtual training options for rural teachers and administrators in the CEN Network across the state. The training and support will provide the tools, strategies, and resources for network rural districts to successfully implement the P-20 model leading to college degrees and certifications for all students. The Thoma Foundation's grant helps CEN achieve almost 50% of the overall goal for Rural HOPE's initial three-year, \$7.3M campaign launched in February 2022.

Based in Santa Fe, NM, and Chicago, IL, the Carl & Marilyn Thoma Foundation lends and exhibits artworks and provides grants to support pivotal initiatives in the arts and rural education. Carl D. Thoma is the founder and a managing partner of Thoma Bravo, a private equity firm with offices in Chicago, San Francisco, and Miami. Marilyn J. Thoma is an active art collector with a background in marketing and brand management who has served on the boards of many art institutions and nonprofit organizations. With significant contributions to the arts through loans, fellowships, grants, and exhibitions, the Thoma Foundation has recently expanded support to rural education in Texas, Oklahoma, New Mexico, and Arizona. The Foundation has pledged more than \$4 million to rural education initiatives since expanding its focus in late 2020.

"CEN has a strong history of providing pathways for rural students to educational and employment opportunities. This grant aligns with the Foundation's new focus on rural secondary and postsecondary education," states Holly Harrison, Director of the Thoma Foundation. "It is a pleasure to partner with CEN to provide the necessary tools to enhance and support the growing network of high-performing rural school districts."

In rural Texas, 1.2 million children under age 18 experience disproportionately higher poverty rates and lower educational achievement. According to Commit Partnership, the current level of post-secondary attainment for the 2009 8th grade cohort was only 23% (by age 24). More alarming, only 13% of rural sector students achieved those post-secondary degrees. This lack of education translates to \$111 billion in lost human capital to Texas.

CEN aims to change the course of rural education's current path by providing pathways for rural Texas students to attain regionally relevant, living wage jobs and to break the cycle of generational poverty. The HOPE project will provide **High-wage/high-demand Occupation Pathways for Each** rural Texas student by implementing the Rural P-20 System Model in schools. This model makes it possible for students to earn a college degree, industry-based certifications, and work-based learning experience with minimal debt.

This model has proven effective in established CEN districts with roughly 90% of CEN rural high school students earning an associate degree and industry-based certification. In comparison, less than 23% of Texas students generally



earn any degree or industry-recognized certification after high school. CEN credits this achievement to their support system that empowers the associate degree graduates to complete their university degrees two to four years later. Through partnerships with regional university systems, CEN schools maximize university degrees in the students' home zip code with zero student debt.

“We have seen the P-20 model open up opportunities that were once thought impossible for rural Texas students,” said Dr. Kim Alexander, CEN CEO. “As educators with roots in rural Texas, it’s our responsibility to ensure that rural schools are equipped with tools empowering students to achieve their highest potential. At CEN, we believe that ‘All Means All’ and through the Rural HOPE Project, we will accelerate our mission to help every single young person achieve a life of choice and impact.”

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CEN is a nonprofit 501 (c)(3) corporation based in Roscoe in West Texas that has member school districts located throughout rural Texas. CEN plans to spread strategically across every region in Texas and work with students in rural West Virginia and Pennsylvania.

Collegiate Edu Nation – **edu-nation.org** – is a proven strategy founded because of the belief in the potential of every single young person to achieve a life of choice and impact. The core philosophy is “**All means all.**” Every student in each CEN district will have the same opportunity to match top opportunities for educational attainment and community development with the students’ high aspirations.