



Reporter

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SCHOOLS FOR QUALITY EDUCATION, INC.

Equity and Diversity of Quality Learning Opportunities in Rural and Small Schools Division I Winning Essay

Frank Allbritten
USD #332 — Cunningham

A famous guitarist once said he prefers playing small venues because you can feel the music in your organs. In other words, an intimate atmosphere makes it easier to connect with an audience. If you try to hug 10,000 people at once, you fail; if you hug each person one by one, you will get a response. This theory proves true not only for concerts, but for education as well.

In order for a school to thrive, it requires a strong base. Last year, 95 students attended Cunningham High School. Some shared the same last name, some didn't; either way, we were all family. This type of unity in a school provides the foundation needed for a valuable and productive learning experience.

At a large school, it is nearly impossible to secure one-on-one time with teachers or other faculty members. Ambitious athletes try out for sports, but those who do not make the cut are forced to abstain from these activities. A student here at Cunningham High, however, can talk to a teacher at almost any time. If they want to participate in a sport or sports, they are strongly encouraged to do so and are almost completely guaranteed a spot on the roster.

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*(Doug Malay, SQE President
and Frank Allbritten,
USD #322 - Cunningham)*

Congratulations SQE Essay Contest Winners

Winners have been announced for this year's Schools for Quality Education Essay Contest. Val DeFever, chairperson for the contest, reported that winners were selected from over 85 entries. These entries were submitted from nine SQE member school districts throughout the state. "Equity and Diversity in Rural Education" was the title for this year's essays. Scholarship checks and plaques were presented to these winners at the joint SQE and 26th Annual Rural and Small Schools Conference Banquet on November 14, 2004. Thanks to all schools submitting entries. Please announce these winners to your participating students.

Division I **10th - 12th Grades**

- 1st** — Frank Allbritten
USD #332 — Cunningham
- 2nd** — Jessica Boone
USD #366 — Woodson County
- 3rd** — Andrea Stegman
USD #381 — Spearville

Division II **7th - 9th Grades**

- 1st** — Kira Hart
USD #220 — Ashland
- 2nd** — Aaron Goodnight
USD #220 — Ashland
- 3rd** — Lauren Adelhardt
USD #332 — Cunningham



Public Relations Message

The Legislative Education Planning Committee made a number of recommendations at their final interim meeting November 22nd and 23rd. This was a culmination of wide-range hearings and discussion sessions held throughout this past summer and fall. Topics of discussion included; a broad spectrum of special education issues, the student self-medication law, foster care placement considerations, National Board Certified teacher changes and ways to make schools more efficient and accountable. While specific suggestions for legislative action were forthcoming in regard to these topics, LEPC was inclined to recommend continued work on the part of other agencies in other areas.

Special Education funding was under close scrutiny as the committee considered the "hybrid" funding method used in Missouri; garnering not less than 50% funding based on student need (teachers count) and not more than 50% funding based on total student population within a district. Interestingly enough Missouri is under court order to increase their spending on early childhood programs for special needs students. Advantages and disadvantages were lined out with clear indication of those who would benefit and those who would not. Testimony from the leadership of special education directors and large school districts balanced out these pluses and minuses. In the course of the testimony it was noted that a large number of states, all using differing approaches to special education funding, were all looking at other options and that some were presently in litigation. At regular intervals a few committee members suggested the need for more accountability to insure against "over identification". Senator Umbarger asked members of the group if they had ever sat through a student placement hearing and proceeded to give an overview of the event while Senator Oleen noted that very few parents want their child to be identified as a special needs child. Furthermore she pointed out that the only way a district could make money through "over identification" would be if no services were provided to the child. It was agreed that this was an unlikely scenario. Finally it was suggested that the emphasis on over identification was one way of directing attention away from the thornier issue of the need for additional funding. Although Kansas falls slightly below the national average on incidence of special education service needs, concern was expressed over the wide range of incidence from district to district (6%-30%). The committee recommended that funding under the existing formula be increased and that changing the existing formula be con-

sidered. Most immediately the committee would ask that funding be raised to 88% of remaining cost.

During the course of the LEPC interims the challenges presented by foster care children and their particular special education needs, specifically in our smaller communities, were studied. In a SRS presentation it became apparent that the ability of the receiving school district to meet the child's needs fell behind the department's desire to keep the child close to his/her family and find a host family who could best meet the child's need. Senator Vratil encouraged SRS not to confuse the responsibility of the district to provide, with their being readily able to provide, for the special needs of foster children. A variety of charts presented by legislative research outlined where foster children were placed throughout the state in regards to the total enrollment, and the at-risk population, on a percentage basis. With each chart the top twenty school districts were identified. The final spread indicated clearly that smaller districts had a disproportionate number of foster care children, with only three districts (of the top 20) having an FTE of over 1,1886. The committee recommended that SRS consider educational needs when placing a child.

The sunset of K.S.A.2004 Supp.72-8252 regarding student self-medication while at school claimed the committee's attention during several of their meetings. These sessions highlighted the challenges our districts face in safeguarding students with special medical needs. The bill, that presently allows a degree of self-medication, is due to sunset in 2005 thus requiring renewed consideration in the coming session. The committee is recommending some basic clean up, to potentially free districts from undue responsibility, while allowing somewhat younger students to demonstrate ability to self-medicate. At the same time it would require a written treatment plan for managing asthma or anaphylaxis episodes. Additionally, it would require parents to complete and submit written documentation and provide the school with back-up medication for their child.

The committee continues to recognize the value of having teachers attain National Board Certification. Due to changes in the cost of applying and pursuing this designation, it was recommended that legislation be proposed to boost the states' monetary commitment to cover roughly one half of the recent increases. This would mean paying an additional \$100 toward initial

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These students are the ones who will have the experiences and memories to learn from and use now and later in life.

The numerous learning opportunities do not end there, however. Most schools offer their students the option of participating in clubs that help the community. Pep Club, for example, is responsible for aiding and supporting athletic programs. Since the clubs at rural and small schools generally have fewer members than clubs at larger schools, students are able to take charge and have a greater impact on the activities and decisions made within their club. Also, this allows students to participate in as many clubs as they wish, giving them a healthy overview of all the clubs in which they hold an interest.

There's no question that equity is alive and well in the majority of rural and small schools. The diversity of these opportunities, however, can be restricting. Students of rural and small schools are blessed with the chance to participate in whatever activities they choose; the variety of these activities in comparison to those of larger schools, however, is considerably less. Where almost all small and rural schools offer such major sports as football, volleyball, and basketball, hardly any offer sports or activities that are deemed irregular.

Despite this setback, many students would still not exchange their ability to participate in the activities offered for the chance to have more options. Growing up in such a warm, tight-knit community, the attendants of small and rural schools may not realize how vital their contributions to their communities really are. The leadership they must assume and the effort they are required to put forth, however, will prepare them for the responsibilities of the future and arm them with the skill it takes to succeed in the 21st century.



G. Kent Stewart, Awards Chairperson and Melvin Ormiston, Superintendent, USD #322 - Cunningham



G. Kent Stewart, Awards Chairperson and Martha Rogge, High Plains Educational Cooperative Board Member, Sublette, KS

Congratulations to Rural Education Award Winners

Awards were presented by G. Kent Stewart, Awards Chairperson, at the 26th Annual Rural and Small Schools Conference on November 14, 2004 to the following individuals for outstanding contributions to rural education and small schools in Kansas.

Kansas Rural Education Service Award

Martha Rogge
High Plains Educational Cooperative
Sublette, KS

Kansas Rural Education Outstanding Administrator Award

Melvin R. Ormiston
Superintendent
USD #332 — Cunningham

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attainment. The new consideration of renewal was discussed, as a number of those who were in the first wave of teachers to become Nationally Board Certified are now eligible for renewal. The renewal fee is \$500. It was agreed that the state should encourage this "next step". The teacher is still paying about 54% of the certification costs.

In their final interim meeting the Legislative Educational Planning Committee received an overview of the Governor's proposal to make Kansas schools more efficient and accountable. The Director of the Division of the Budget and Secretary of Administration, Duane Goossen, talked with the committee about the intent and the time-line for the Standards & Poors study of Kansas schools. The Kaufman Foundation will pay for the study, which is designed to inform policymakers, the public and our schools. It is being embarked upon due to the wide range of spending in general administration, building administration, operations and maintenance and instruction from district to district even within the same size range. The study is intended to identify best practices and be used to assist with self-improvement. It was noted that in many instances the wide differences in spending could be due to coding issues from district to district, but the study would help identify those situations and standardize these practices. Dale Dennis informed the committee that the department of education would be coming out with a two page summary to assist schools with ways to report many areas more uniformly.

Val DeFever
Public Relations Representative

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