



Reporter

Volume 20, Number 4

February-2005

SCHOOLS FOR QUALITY EDUCATION, INC.

2005-2006 NREA Mini-Grant Program

Any rural K-12 classroom teacher whose school or community is served by a local Rural Electric Cooperative, or whose students' homes are served by a local Rural Electric Cooperative may apply for these mini-grants. Ask your school administrators the name of the provider for electricity to your school. Then contact the provider and ask if it is a Rural Electric Cooperative.

There will be ten mini-grants of \$500 each to be expended during the 2005-2006 school year for student-based projects. Each Mini-Grant will be funded at the beginning of the 2005-2006 school year.

Projects are to feature student investigation of some aspect of the science of energy or electricity, and should meet the needs (and curiosity) of your students. You may want to study the local geology (as it relates to energy), or the history of hydroelectric generation in your community, or alternative sources of energy for the next generation. The project should be limited only by the imagination of your students and the resources available.

Judging criteria will include:

1. a project design that demonstrates cooperation between the students, teachers, and the community;
2. appropriateness for age and grade levels;
3. a project design that encourages a high level of student involvement;
4. a project design that indicates coordination with the local Rural Electric Cooperative;
5. a project design that focuses on student learning;
6. overall quality of the grant application and adherence to grant guidelines.

To apply, submit a 1-2 page proposal describing what you and your students will investigate that addresses each of the six criteria listed above. All entries must be postmarked by **May 1, 2006**.

The proposal should include the following information:

- the name and address of your school district;
- the name and address of the school district treasurer;
- the name, school address, phone number, and e-mail address of the participating teacher(s);
- the summer address and phone number for the participating teacher(s);
- the grade level(s) and size of participating class or classes;
- the name, address, phone number, and contact person of your Rural Electric Cooperative;
- a budget detailing expenditures of at least \$500;
- a copy of the letter you sent to the manager of the local Rural Electrical Cooperative reporting that you have submitted your grant application to the 2005-2006 NREA Mini-Grant Program;
- estimated timeline for your project during 2005-2006 school year (when will you do what?).

All applications will be screened by the NREA Teacher Activities Committee to select fifteen finalists. The National Rural Electric Association will select the ten winners from the fifteen finalists.

Proposal entries should be mailed to:
NREA Mini-Grant Program
c/o Dr. Patricia Cruzeiro
University of Nebraska at Kearney--COE
Building B104
1615 West 24th Street
Kearney, NE 68849

Along with the proposal, mini-grant winners must submit a written final report on their project. These reports should be mailed to the NREA Mini-Grant Program, 820 Van Vleet Oval, Room 227, Norman, OK 73019 by March 1, 2006.



Public Relations Message



More money, redistribution of existing funds or more accountability — what does the Supreme Court ruling really mean the legislature needs to do? Policymaking entities and their various political factions have their individual opinions on what must be accomplished by April 12 to appease the court. From the first day of the session there have been rumblings about a “Wisconsin Plan” (<http://www.dpi.state.wi.us/dpi/dfm/sfms/Kansas.html>) with the implication that it would solve many of our problems. In the end, it turned out to actually be a data gathering system that fourteen dedicated staffers of the Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction (School Finance Service section) created over a four-year period. Kansas’s legislators saw a presentation by its director, David Carlson, at one of their national meetings. They invited him to come to Kansas to make a presentation to the House and Senate Education committees. There may be features of the Wisconsin program, known as SAFR (pronounced “sapphire”) that could help not only the legislature but also the general public pinpoint where all our education dollars are and therefore quite possibly proved the cost analysis that the courts has asked for. This particular system requires a designated person in each of Wisconsin’s 426 school districts to key in 800 to 1000 line items. Bringing all the districts on board required a good deal of in-service as well as a hotline staffed by two full time School Finance Service staff members. All districts initially completed submitting their data within two weeks of the deadline. The fact that the next year’s funding depended on its completion served as a strong incentive. Among the perks of the filing method is that the state agency can then file federal reports for the local districts. SAFR is user friendly giving a variety of number crunching capabilities to policymakers and the general public.

In visiting with staff at the Kansas Department of Education, I found we are already collecting much of the same data that Wisconsin is gathering. It is basically available to the general public if they have some computer savvy and the patience to retrieve it. Crunching it just the way you want it can be a challenge though. With the constant need to upgrade technology, it must be frustrating to our state team that additional funding requests in recent years have fallen short in this area and

this year’s rosier expectation is possibly getting two thirds of the \$175,000 requested to upgrade the department’s technology.

As we are a third of the way through the session each chamber and their respective education committees are approaching the court’s mandate somewhat differently. Both are trying to figure out what districts truly need. A reporting system that seems more accessible could provide pertinent data. Other areas of focus that remain are defining suitability, reviewing all the various weightings and finding a way to provide oversight. Many of these have been topics of interim studies from year to year, but unfortunately the members of the various committees were not necessarily on the interims. The House subcommittees of the Select School Finance Committee have been studying suitability as well as the make up and mission of the oversight committee. There continues to be a broad range of ideas of where all of this needs to go.

On the other hand, the whole of the Senate Education Committee has tackled the whole project and input has been sought among the Senate body as a whole. The end result is that Senate Education came out with their plan on February 8. The three-year finance package boosts BSAPP while doing away with vocational education weighting. It also phases in increased weightings in pegged areas of need: at-risk, bilingual, and special education while allowing local districts to increase their LOB’s incrementally, for a total of 5% over the same three year period. Funding the first year doesn’t appear to be from ongoing sources. The following two years may come from increased sales tax revenue and possible increases in income and sales tax. It is far too early to hang our hat on anything, but at this point it is good that the discussion has begun.

Val DeFever
Public Relations Representative





Letter from the President



I would like each of you to review Mark Tallman's article, "School Finance: Votes in the 2004 Legislative Session Reflects Regional Differences". It was in the Fall 2004 issue of KASB Kansas School Board Journal. Essentially it says that Western Kansas legislators voted against taking money from Eastern Kansas last session when they voted against the Kassebaum-Neighbor school finance plan. I talked to Mark and he said it was ok to copy the article and send to anyone; it's not copyrighted. I bet plenty of Western Kansas people gladly accept CRP (Conservation Reserve Program) payments, LDPs (Loan Deficiency Payments) and drought assistance when it's available. Philosophically and practically speaking, we should be willing to do the same for schools. If you can invest one dollar and get two or three dollars back why wouldn't you do it. Talk to your legislators.

I'm from an Eastern Kansas school district. We're 3A, 650 kids, \$4.3 million in budget, no industry but agriculture, no car dealers, no full service grocery store, one grain elevator (Beachner Grain), employ 50 teachers and 30 other people, keep our spare dollars in the local bank, use a local gas station to service our buses and 52 employees live in the district. Only one patron family makes its entire living farming; nearly every family has two people working to make ends meet; 99% blue collar patrons. Did I just describe your home district? I bet I did. Our school is very important to our community. We have 70% or more of our kids in extra-curricular activities; our attendance in high school averages 97%; skipping school means no practice; no practice means no playing time. Even the private schools find much value in extracurricular activities. Our ACT scores meet (and usually beat) the Kansas averages; Kansas always beats the National average.

The two people at the local gas station, the seven people at the local auto body shop and the eight people at our two bank branches and the dozen bus drivers all appreciate the district business.

Low enrollment weighting keeps us alive. There is no other way to say it. Once again, talk to your legislators, have your banker talk to the legislators, and have a bus driver or garage mechanic talk to a legislator.

Currently, schools are funded by 21% income tax, 39% by sales tax and 40% by property taxes. It's

time to get that closer to 33% each. We don't want a court-appointed special master to address school funding; that's why we elect legislators. That's part of the homework and testing that goes with being a legislator. Please don't fail this test.

I have two daughters teaching Special Education, one eighth grade and the other high school. One of them has a student who has been in foster homes since the age of two. There is something wrong with that picture.

Once again, talk to your legislators. Encourage them to vote for their local patrons' interest, not for the interests of someone living in Wichita or some other big city.

Thanks, I know I am preaching to the choir; let's try to make the choir bigger. I hope no one out west feels singled out by my letter. Eastern rural districts are in the same boat; just a little closer to the money.

Lester P. Wuertz, SQE President
USD #288- Central Heights
Richmond, KS

Can Public Schools Affect Economic Development?

Knowledge Works Foundation has published a review of the existing research on the relationship between schools and economic development. *Public Schools and Economic Development: What the Research Shows* finds that since schools are an important contributor to our economy, education should be viewed as an investment rather than a service that governments provide. The report argues that, as an investment, we must closely examine the inputs of high-quality schools that will realize not only the academic achievement outcomes that we so avidly seek, but also the economic outcomes that are consistently identified as a top priority by American citizens.

The results of the report parallel studies that show that when rural communities lose their schools to consolidation, the impact can be devastating on the local economy.

Read the report for free at http://www.kwfdn.org/ProgramAreas/Facilities/weiss_book.pdf.

(From *Rural Policy Matters*, Vol. 6 No. 8)

Calendar

October 23-24, 2005
27th Annual Rural & Small
Schools Conference
Manhattan, KS
Contact: 785-532-5886

November 5-9, 2005
97th Annual NREA Convention
Tucson, AZ
Contact: 405-325-7959
website <http://www.nrea.net>

Contact: 785-532-5886 or go to our
website at <http://coe.ksu.edu/sqe>.



SQE Executive Board

President, Lester P. Wuertz
USD #288 — Central Heights
785-835-6298

Sec./Treas., Mike Folks
USD #288 — Richmond
785-869-3455

President-Elect, Glennys Doane
USD #272 — Waconda
785-781-4328

Past-Pres., Doug Malay
USD #208 — WaKeeney
785-743-2145

Region #1, Robert Scheib
USD #208 — WaKeeney
785-743-2145

Region #2, Gena Stanley
USD #399 - Paradise
785-885-4843

Region #3, Larry Geil
USD #488 — Axtell
785-736-2304

Region #4, Deanne Alexander
USD #381 — Spearville
620-385-2676

Region #5, Paul Kendall
USD #424 — Mullinville
620-548-2521

Region #6, Thomas Alstrom
USD #398 — Peabody-Burns
620-983-2198

Public Relations, Val DeFever

Exec. Sec., Barbara Havlicek
785-532-5886

Schools for Quality Education
124 Bluemont Hall
Kansas State University
Manhattan, KS 66506
(785) 532-5886

Nonprofit Organization
U.S. POSTAGE
PAID
Permit #525
Manhattan, Kansas 66502

Kansas State University
Schools for Quality Education
Bluemont Hall
Manhattan, Kansas 66506

