



Reporter

Volume 21, Number 5

June, 2006

SCHOOLS FOR QUALITY EDUCATION, INC.

Public Relations Message

Standards & Poor's Kansas Education Resource Management Study, Phase III: A Synthesis of Highly Effective District Strategies

A review of the first half of the Standard & Poor's Resource management study was presented in the last SQE newsletter. That article outlined the ways highly resource effective school districts add value, organize themselves, and utilize monetary resources.

This second article will address how these same districts effectively manage staffing, time, and programmatic resources. Standard and Poor's identified sixteen districts across the state as being highly resource effective. Small districts earning this designation included Wamego, Vermillion, Stafford, Spearville, Scott County, Rock Creek, Halstead, Hesston, Lincoln, Macksville, Nickerson, and Baldwin City. These districts were singled out in part for their math and reading score improvements in light of their at-risk population and their ability to accomplish greater gains with fewer resources.

Staff Resources

Standard and Poor's recognized that not only is the teaching staff of a district the most important in terms of successful student outcomes, but it also accounts for the largest portion of the budget. For this reason they looked closely at how, what they termed "effective districts", recruit staff members and offer professional development. The distribution of staffing dollars was also investigated.

Highly Resource Effective Districts (HRED) seemed to have more teachers with Masters degrees, but they had fewer full time teachers and a higher percentage of instructional aides. Despite the fewer numbers of teachers, they tend to have

smaller class sizes in all levels, elementary through high school. Standard and Poor's has recognized class sizes in all districts at 16.1 students per teacher and 14.5 students per teacher in HREDs. Professional development is more likely to be offered by district staff verses regional service centers, but districts like Arkansas City and Olathe have invested in academic coaches to lead in this area.

Highly Resource Effective Districts use aggressive recruiting techniques to secure a highly qualified teaching staff. They are likely to actively recruit in numerous states through on-line applications and websites that help applicants gather information about the district. They are also likely to conduct interviews a full year before the educator comes to work for the district. Where the student population is unique as in Geary County, applicants are screened for a philosophical fit to further guarantee success.

Those districts that have more relatively new teachers tend to offer more extensive classroom support designed to develop the proficiencies needed for success. This may include subject content, modeling of good instruction by mentors and/or assisting young teachers with data analysis and curriculum development. Thus, new teachers remain focused on areas of prime importance and have needed assistance readily available. Supplemental support offered in small group instruction by classroom and special education aides can be utilized to help students review material, freeing the classroom teacher to devote quality time to a smaller number of students in a very direct manner. These instructors are inclined to have instructional aides such as wall charts throughout their classrooms to constantly remind them and their students of best practice. Instructional leaders at the building and district level are welcome to visit classes informally.

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Continuously adjusting staffing configurations to meet needs is a hallmark of Highly Resource Effective Districts. This may mean shifting administrative, instructional or student support staff, as well as the manner in which the three work together. How flexible a district is in making such adjustments is indicative of their effectiveness. Administration is more likely to position staff according to their strengths. Instructional leaders are less likely to get bogged down in disciplinary duties.

Professional development is targeted on core objectives based on paths identified by academic assessments and supported by specific program investments. These are embedded in districts' cultures. Although outside trainers and experts are brought in to provide or facilitate learning, staff members are often used for collaborative learning opportunities. In some districts staff development may require educators to formulate their individual leadership development plan requiring participants to move forward by learning through action research on district issues. As district leaders recognize the need for new innovative ideas, educators may be encouraged to attend seminars and workshop with an understanding that they will incorporate new knowledge into classroom practice and share it with staff members. Teachers are also more likely to be given monetary incentives to obtain their Masters degrees.

Time Resources

Highly Resource Effective Districts allocate their time with an eye on student improvement and therefore spend more time on teaching math and reading skills. Their school year is consistently a little longer than less effective districts, with the additional time used for staff development and planning. Their meetings are more focused, at the district and building level, on learning and instruction. Mandatory after school tutoring and summer school is in place in some of the HREDs.

Programmatic Resources

Careful consideration is given to the allocation of program resources in Highly Resource Effective Districts. Any changes in academic programs are made only after a thorough review, and data is considered extensively. New programs under consideration are investigated with equal determination and may be initiated as a pilot before full adoption. Since the number of programs in the district is limited, particular attention is given to the efficiency and effectiveness of each program. As any new program is adopted, major customization occurs to align it with district goals.

All of these features would be ideal for every district in Kansas. With adequate resources and a ready supply of teachers, it is conceivable that all districts could meet these expectations. It is very likely we will be hearing about these goals in future legislation. Our districts would be wise to shift to considering them in their decision-making process and brainstorm ways to overcome barriers in moving toward attaining as many as possible.

Val DeFever
Public Relations Representative

**"NREA: Crossing Into Our Next Century"
98th Annual National Rural Education
Association Convention
October 23-25, 2006
Westin Crown Center Hotel
Kansas City, MO**

Plan now to attend the 98th Annual NREA Convention in Kansas City on October 21-25.

Five outstanding speakers are scheduled:

Keynote

Bill Snyder, Former Football Coach at Kansas State University, Manhattan, Kansas

Awards Luncheon

Buck O'Neil, Baseball's Ambassador, Star of the Negro League and Founder of the Negro League Baseball Museum in Kansas City

General Session II

Doug Geverdt, Social and Demographic Statistician, U.S. Census Bureau, Washington, DC

General Session III

Mary Kusler, Assistant Director of Government Relations, AASA, Arlington, Virginia

General Session IV

Ron Wilson, Poet Lariat, Huck Boyd National Institute for Rural Development, Kansas State University, Manhattan, Kansas

Concurrent session workshops will be presented in four Professional Learning Sessions, with eight workshops per session, on October 23-25, 2006.

The most current version of the 98th Annual Convention Program is available at www.nrea.net.

Rural School Board Member Focus Groups

Dr. Hobart Harmon and Dr. Kai Schafft, Penn State University, are developing a research study entitled, "Superintendent Qualifications Desired by Rural School Board Members." The research team plans to involve the National Rural Education Association (NREA) and the National School Boards Association in this study.

Initially, the research team wants to organize a series of focus groups composed of rural school board members during the 98th Annual NREA Convention in Kansas City on October 23-25. The focus groups will provide information to assist the research team in its efforts to develop the research instrument. Up to four different focus groups may be scheduled during the NREA convention. This exercise will afford rural school board members an excellent opportunity to help shape valuable research on the relationships between rural school board members and rural school superintendents.

Specifically the research team will address: "Superintendent Qualifications Desired by Rural School Board Members". What qualifications and characteristics do board members in rural school districts want when seeking to hire a new superintendent? This session will be facilitated as a discussion forum for board members to reveal what they look for in a superintendent today. Only school board members of a rural district will be invited to participate. This session will be co-sponsored by NREA as part of a national study of rural school district leadership being conducted for the Center on Rural Education and Communities at Penn State University by Dr. Hobart Harmon and Dr. Kai Schafft.

If you are a rural school board member, plan now to attend the NREA convention and participate in a focus group.

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Do Investments in Rural Education Pay Off?

The Economic Research Service brief "Education as a Rural Development Strategy" investigates whether investments in rural education pay off in the short and long term.

In rural counties with a low-skill workforce, wages have drastically declined during the past 20 years, but job growth has remained steady. Research has shown a small but immediate return on investment between school quality and rural employment growth.

Many rural communities improve education but struggle with brain drain. Only 55 percent of college graduates return to rural areas. Rural residents not finishing high school or not going on to college are less likely to leave. However, over the long term, college graduates from rural areas often return to raise families or care for aging relatives, lowering the effects of brain drain.

To learn more, view the brief online at www.ers.usda.gov/AmberWaves/November05/Features/Education.htm.

Reprinted from the NREA Rural Education News, Spring, 2006.

Can Public Schools Affect Economic Development?

KnowledgeWorks 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.

A free report is available at http://www.kwfdn.org/resource_library/. Reprinted from *Rural Policy Matters*.

Mark Your Calendar

October 23-25, 2006
98th Annual NREA Convention
Kansas City, MO
Contact: 405-325-7959
website: <http://www.nrea.net>



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

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