

# Reporter

Volume 20, Number 6

May-2005

**SCHOOLS FOR QUALITY EDUCATION, INC.**

## Public Relations Message

In the wake of the school finance lawsuit ruling by District Court Judge Terry Bullock it became increasingly apparent that small schools must tell their story if they were to have a place at the funding table. A number of small school districts banded together and hired a lawyer to draft an Amicus brief. In the ensuing months the Supreme Court has ruled that school funding in Kansas is inadequate and inequitable. The legislature's response, HB 2247, is now being scrutinized and awaiting the court's judgement. As soon as HB2247 passed both houses, representatives of small rural schools (including many members of SQE) decided there was a need to explain how the bill would affect the 205 small districts of the 301 school districts in the state. The following areas of concerns were brought forward.

The bill makes significant changes in the funding formula prior to any approved analysis of what it costs to educate children in various parts of the state or in small, mid-sized or large school districts. (The informal study done by the Department of Education was not held up as an example to be used as a reference.)

The rolling back of low enrollment weighting clearly is an example of small schools losing ground at a crucial time, as our schools struggle to meet the demands of No Child Left Behind. Their concern of a growing "opportunity gap" is very real. Rural areas can have a difficult time attracting quality teachers to their schools. HB2247 includes a cost of living weighting that will further aggravate the wage disparity between large and small districts that already exists.

The Supreme Court's January 3rd ruling addressed equity issues but did nothing in regard to local sales tax advantages enjoyed by a number of large and mid-sized districts, even though they clearly add to the disparity of school funding. Several portions of the bill were obviously a political ploy to garner

Johnson County votes including local districts ability to raise their local option budget by 5% over the next 3 years. The Amicus cited the fact that this was likely to be used by the wealthiest districts. It further explained that rural districts with broad geographic reach but diminished pupil population density might appear to have inordinate wealth, but in fact do not. Such factors would affect the small district's ability to raise their LOB as well as their eligibility for supplemental general state aid. This limits low enrollment districts, further creating "most striking legal incongruity" and points out there is no correlation between policy and the actual cost of providing a suitable education.

The supplement's conclusion states, "Essential to educational policy is that there not be a class of winners and losers, but rather an assemblage comprised solely of winners — the school children of this State. Accordingly, these *amicus* do not and have not, approached the educational financial policies with which this court is grappling to the exclusion of all others. Partly this is a practical approach- as a group, low enrollment districts do not have the financial resources of the larger district to fund extensive (and expensive) litigation, much less the finances to fund data collection needed to support a sustained challenge of SDFQPA inequities. Rather, the approach is mostly ideological — low enrollment school districts view themselves as merely a component of a sophisticated and complex formula- and instead of spending their limited resources on litigation they, as a group have focused on education.

However, it is critical that no child be left behind during the ongoing analysis of actual costs. Accordingly, these *amicus* low enrollment school districts ask this Court to: (1) retain jurisdiction over this case; (2) periodically evaluate whether the 2010 Commission established by HB227 draw objective fact-based

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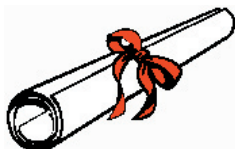
## **NREA Position Paper Summary Rural School Consolidation Report**

- ❖ The educational and financial results of state mandated school district consolidations do not meet legislated expectations.
- ❖ There is no “ideal” size for schools or districts.
- ❖ “Size” does not guarantee success – effective schools come in all sizes.
- ❖ Smaller districts have higher achievement, affective and social outcomes.
- ❖ The larger a district becomes, the more resources are devoted to secondary or non-essential activities.
- ❖ Local school officials should be wary of merging several smaller elementary schools, at least if the goal is improved performance.
- ❖ After a school closure, out migration, population decline, and neighborhood deterioration are set in motion, and support for public education diminishes.
- ❖ There is not solid foundation for the belief that eliminating school districts will improve education, enhance cost-effectiveness or promote equality.
- ❖ Students from low income areas have better achievement in small schools.

NREA Consolidation Task Force  
Joe Bard, Pennsylvania; Clark Gardener,  
Nebraska; Regi Wieland, Kansas

Adopted by the National Rural  
Education Association  
Executive Committee  
April 1, 2005

The NREA RURAL SCHOOL CONSOLIDATION  
REPORT is reprinted at [www.nrea.net](http://www.nrea.net).



(continued from page 1)

conclusions with regard to actual educational costs and makes rational determinations regarding the various weightings (and particularly for these *amicus* the low enrollment weighting); perhaps most importantly- (3) force the Legislature to take action consistent with the 2010 Commission findings and its constitutional obligation to “make suitable provision for finance of all public schools of this State.”

*Val DeFever*  
*Public Relations Representative*

### **Call for Presentations “Celebrate the Best in Rural and Small Schools” 27th Annual Rural & Small Schools Conference October 23-24, 2005 Holiday Inn Manhattan, KS**

You are invited to help us celebrate the best in rural education and small schools by submitting a proposal by June 14, 2005. Emphasis should be given to:

- No Child Left Behind (NCLB) and issues for rural and small schools
- Successful cross-district cooperative agreements and restructuring efforts
- Technology integration for increased learning
- Classroom strategies designed to increase student achievement, especially in reading and mathematics
- Assessment of student learning and meeting NCLB standards
- Successful strategies for managing student enrollment/size changes
- Recruitment and retention of teachers and administrators in rural areas
- Leadership for achieving quality education in rural schools and communities

More information can be obtained from the Center for Rural Education and Small Schools website at <http://coe.ksu.edu/cress/>, by phone (785-532-5886) or by fax (785-532-7304).

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## Study Yields First-Ever Data on K-12 Distance Education

Eighty percent of public school districts said that offering courses that are not currently available at their schools is one of the most important reasons for having distance education, according to a new report that provides the first national data on distance learning in public K-12 schools.

*Distance Education Courses for Public Elementary and Secondary School Students: 2002-03*, released this month by the U.S. Department of Education's National Center for Education Statistics (NCES), showed that approximately one-third of public school districts — an estimated 5,500 — had students enrolled in distance education courses in 2002-03.

In this study, "distance education" refers to courses taken for credit and offered to elementary and secondary school students in a school district where the teachers and students are in different locations.

Other key findings from the survey include:

- A greater proportion of districts with students enrolled in distance education courses are located in rural areas than in suburban or urban areas (46% compared with 28 and 23%, respectively).
- Among all public schools with students enrolled in distance education, 76% were high schools; 15% were combined or ungraded schools; 7% were middle or junior high schools; and 2% were elementary schools.
- There were an estimated 45,300 enrollments in Advanced Placement or college-level courses offered through distance education. This represents 14% of the total enrollments in distance education.

For a copy of the report, visit [www.nces.ed.gov/pubsearch/pubsinfo.asp?pubid=2005010](http://www.nces.ed.gov/pubsearch/pubsinfo.asp?pubid=2005010), or call the Department's publications center toll-free at 877-433-7827, while supplies last.

*The Achiever*  
U.S. Department of Education  
March 15, 2005, Vol. 4, No. 5

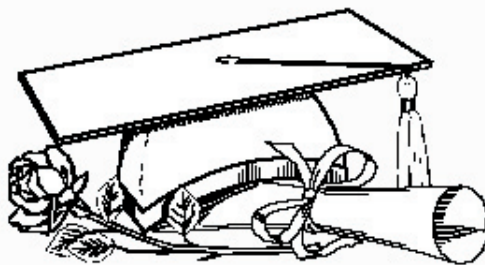


## The Role of Education: Promoting the Economic and Social Vitality of Rural America

This special report issued in partnership with the USDA Economic Research Service and the Rural School and Community Trust explores the connections between rural education and local community well-being. The report includes three sections: Education, Human Capital, and the Local Economy; Links between Rural Schools & Communities; and Creating Successful Rural Schools and Students. Each section includes several articles and provides descriptive information, research data, and examples of promising programs.

This publication is available online at: <http://srcd.msstate.edu/publications/ruraleducation.pdf>.

*Southern Rural Development Center*  
January 2005  
*The Rural School and Community Trust*  
Winter 2005



## Brochure on Rural Children Demographics Available

A brochure from the Rural Families Data Center of the Population Reference Bureau provides an overview of the social, economic, and demographic characteristics of the 14 million children who live in rural America. The organization recognizes that children in rural America face significant educational, social, and economic challenges, just as their urban counterparts do; yet policymakers have focused primarily on improving conditions for families living in cities.

The brochure is available at <http://www.prb.org/rfdcenter/AmericasRuralChildbroch.pdf>.

*The Rural School and Community Trust*  
November 2004

## 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>.

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