



Reporter

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SCHOOLS FOR QUALITY EDUCATION, INC.

New Report Finds Significant Benefits of Distance Learning in Rural Education

For less than the cost of a beginning teachers' salary, a rural district can offer its students a challenging curriculum and support professional development for its teachers. In a new report from the Rural School and Community Trust, *The Promise and the Power of Distance Learning in Rural Education*, Vicki Hobbs explains how the benefits of distance learning, and in particular two-way interactive television (I-TV), can far outweigh the costs — allowing the small, rural schools that educate one-third of our nation's children to retain the assets associated with their small size, while overcoming curricular limitations.

When compared to the costs of consolidation (new facilities, increased transportation and administrative costs, higher dropout rates, etc.), the relatively minor costs of implementing I-TV across districts makes distance learning a significantly more practical alternative. Additionally, as rural schools face challenges beyond consolidation, including providing comprehensive curricula; recruiting, retaining, and adequately paying teachers; and meeting the requirements of No Child Left Behind, I-TV allows them to remain viable and reach their full potential. Concerns about student learning in distance learning environments are unfounded; research shows that students in a distance learning environment learn just as well as traditionally taught students.

The report discusses the characteristics of major distance learning technologies and their impact on rural schools, with a special focus on I-TV and the barriers to its implementation, cost models, and consortium development. The report argues that distance learning is a strategy that must be

pursued, and pursued well. With all of its advantages, I-TV can clearly be relevant beyond rural areas; urban and suburban schools can also benefit from the technology. With that in mind, the policy brief calls for the adoption of enlightened distance learning policies and guidelines at the state and local levels.

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SQE Annual Meeting and Banquet November 14, 2004

Holiday Inn Holidome
530 Richards Road
Manhattan, KS

12:30 - SQE Board of Directors Meeting

2:30 - Legislative Panel

(See Val DeFever's column on page 2 for more details)

4:00 - SQE Annual Meeting and Election

*5:00 - Social Hour

*6:00 - Banquet

Speaker: Larry Hatteberg

KAKE TV National Award
Winning "Hatteberg's People"
TV Series

SQE Essay Contest Winners

*(co-hosted with the 26th Annual Rural and Small Schools Conference)

(Detailed meeting and banquet information will be sent to SQE member districts)

Call (785) 532-5886 for reservations or additional information



Public Relations Message



The past four months, nine members of the Senate and fourteen member of the House have been reviewing the existing funding formula and exploring ways to improve it. They were further instructed to look at what would constitute a "suitable" education, consider the structure and need of of the various weightings within today's formula, and explore ways to establish a building based budget.

Due to suggestions made by Judge Bullock and a long held belief by some legislators that defining a "suitable" education would give clarity to the legislature's responsibility to the children of Kansas, the committee has visited this topic regularly. Legislative research staff presented information regarding what is deemed "suitable" by a variety of other states. The array of requirements was interesting and certainly made one wonder if these states determined funding based on their expansive lists. State Board of Education member, Sue Gamble, provided an overview of the State Board's requirements under QPA and accompanying Quality Indicators. Many of these components were shared with the Legislative Education Committees prior to the Augenblick and Myer study and can be found in part in that piece. Conferees suggested that all one would have to do to determine what could be considered a "suitable" education is look at current laws and mandates already established by the legislature. To date, it appears there remain differing views on what a "suitable" education is as well as whether defining it will truly assist or box the legislature into a corner. Either way the discussion is bound to continue.

For many years our formula has been described as "broken". The various weightings have been viewed and reviewed. The Select Committee reviewed them yet again, asking many pertinent questions to more fully understand the rational behind the existence of each one. Legislative research staff and Dale Dennis teamed up on the presentation.

Particular attention was given to the bi-lingual and "at-risk" weighting factors. Five school districts shared their challenges and resulting programs regarding the influx of large numbers of English as a Second Language students. Staff informed the committee that our at-risk popularion has grown from 30% in 1989 to 65% during this past school year. Legislators questioned how students are identified for free lunches. Dale Dennis told the committee that although Kansas has seen a dramatic increase in

the area, other states have seen a greater increase and as a result we will see a decrease of several million dollars in "at-risk" — Title I funding in the next few years.

There was discussion on low enrollment weight and previously proposed legislation to alter it was examined, but no action was taken.

The committee had been charged with looking at ways to initiate some form of building based budgets. A new proposed bill would include building site councils in the process, and encouraging them to submit budget suggestions to the local school board. At least one district in the state is presently using such a model. Comments indicated that this might not work in some districts as they have difficulty finding people willing to serve on their site councils. No action was taken on the proposal.

The Select Committee is scheduled to continue their studies on November 8 and 9 with a possibility for additional meetings in December.

Members of the committee who have a large number of small schools are being invited to participate on a panel to discuss the various aspects addressed during the interim. You are encouraged to come hear their views and concerns, Sunday, November 14th at the SQE annual meeting in Manhattan.

*Val DeFever
Public Relations Representative*

Books for Rural Children

The Libri Foundation is a nationwide nonprofit organization that donates up to \$700 per award in high-quality, hardcover children's books to small, rural public libraries in the United States through its Books for Children program. The books donated through the Books for Children program are used for storytelling, after-school programs, summer reading programs, teacher check-out and curriculum support, early childhood development programs, school projects, and just to provide children with a "good read." Applicants' Friends of Library programs or other local initiatives are expected to contribute up to \$350 toward the project, which the Libri Foundation will match on a 2-to-1 ratio. The foundation awards grants three times a year. Application deadlines are March 15, July 15, and December 15. <http://www.librifoundation.org/>

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I-TV can help small and rural schools capitalize on their primary asset — small size — even as it provides equity in educational opportunity. As Hobbs writes, "It is by far more educationally and economically rational and a socially preferred alternative to school or district consolidation."

Copies of the report are available as a free PDF download from the Rural Trust's website at www.ruraledu.org or by requesting a hard copy at info@ruraledu.org. Contacts: Vicki Hobbs (573-445-4920).

26th Annual Rural & Small Schools Conference

November 14-15, 2004
Holiday Inn Holidome
Manhattan, KS

Featured Speakers:

Donald L. Kussmaul
President of American Association of School Administrators (AASA)
Superintendent, East Dubuque Unit School District #119
East Dubuque, IL

Terri Schwartzbeck
AASA Policy Analyst
Arlington, VA

Bob Mooneyham, National Rural Education Executive Director
University of Oklahoma
Norman, OK

Larry Hatteberg, KAKE TV
National award-winning "Hatteberg's People" TV Series, Author of best-selling book, "Larry Hatteberg's Kansas People", Wichita, KS

Andy Tompkins
Commissioner of Education
Kansas State Department of Education
Topeka, KS

Dale Dennis
Deputy Commissioner of Education
Kansas State Department of Education
Topeka, KS

Small High Schools That Flourish: Rural Context, Case Studies and Resources

Professional opinion about small schools is changing. It is now widely recognized that, compared with larger schools, small schools are more productive and effective. Students make more rapid progress toward graduation, they are more satisfied, fewer drop out, and they behave better. All of these benefits are especially true for disadvantaged students.

Yet, in many rural parts of the country, public officials and professional educators continue to believe small schools are inefficient and ineffective. Rural communities have seen this way of thinking result in closed schools, angry residents, and long bus rides for many students.

Today, about a quarter of U.S. high schools remain small (i.e., with fewer than 400 students in grades 9-12). This book discusses the general status of small rural high schools in the United States and why we should care about them. It then takes a closer look at four particular schools - all located in communities of very modest means — that were nevertheless flourishing institutions. Discover the vision, worldview, and local initiative evident in these schools and their rural communities.

Small High Schools That Flourish provides guidance to administrators and policymakers who would like to keep their small high schools but must grapple with problems of funding, outmigration, personnel shortages, and curriculum standards and accountability. A detailed resource section provides links to helpful organizations and publications to aid educators and community members in maintaining and improving their small high schools.

Order on-line from AEL at www.ael.org.
ISBN 1-8916-7706-3.



Calendar

November 14, 2004
SQE Legislative Panel,
Annual Meeting, and Banquet
Manhattan, KS
Contact: 785-532-5886

November 14-15, 2004
26th Annual Rural & Small
Schools Conference
Manhattan, KS
Contact: 785-532-5886

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



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