



Reporter

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SCHOOLS FOR QUALITY EDUCATION, INC.

Public Relations Message

Teacher Work Condition Survey Results

With the spotlight of No Child Left Behind shining on education it is obvious that a well-qualified teacher makes the biggest difference in whether a child receives the kind of education every child in our country needs. With fewer and fewer would-be teachers graduating from our colleges and the looming promise of more acute teacher shortages as baby boomers look to retire in the coming decade, there doesn't seem to be much hope of finding the number of highly qualified teachers needed. This projected shortage is no doubt the challenge that prompted the Center for Teaching Quality in Chapel Hill, North Carolina, to conduct a survey on Teacher Working Conditions. This past spring such a survey was conducted throughout five states (Kansas, Arizona, North Carolina, Nevada and Ohio) to determine what both classroom teachers and principals pinpointed as the biggest issues in teacher retention. The study, sponsored by a grant from The National Governor's Association, The National Education Association, and the Kansas National Education Association received a stunning 53% response rate in Kansas, with 21,000 educators weighing in. In other participating states the response rate varied from 70% (7,500 educators responding) in Arizona, 65% (75,000 respondents) in North Carolina, 49% in Clark County Nevada (over 8,000 respondents). Ohio piloted this survey in 2005 and conducted a voluntary survey in 2006 and received input from about 40% of 13,000 educators. The Kansas data is available district by district at www.kansastwc.org.

The Kansas survey used validated core questions developed by KNEA, USA, KSDE, as well as other stakeholders. As an on-line survey it was available

to all licensed school-based educators. Each participant was given a code to ensure their responses were linked to their school district. Work is still being done to connect the results to the outcomes in those districts. For now the basic information presents an interesting picture of the view from the classroom vs. the view from the administrative offices. With AYP a top concern these perceptions are worth noting.

Recently, the results of the Kansas version of this study were presented to the Legislative Educational Planning Committee. The group of legislators was told that eighty-six percent of Kansas teachers express the desire to stay where they are, while seven percent would be interested in teaching somewhere else and another seven percent would like to leave the profession. Although the number thinking of leaving is not particularly high, each teacher who leaves after just a few years cost the state up to \$11,000. With approximately 40,000 teachers in our state that figures to be around 2,800 educators for approximately \$30,800,000 cost to the state. The frequent turn over of teachers also plays havoc on the effectiveness of the educational process. Collaboration between teachers who have an established working relationship is more effective than one that often changes. Schools where student-teacher relationships and expectations must be forged anew see the affect on student academic performance. Although turn over is common in many professions it is two to three percent higher in education.

The in depth survey looked at many areas of concern. Almost two-thirds of the teachers who responded to the Kansas survey felt there's an atmosphere of trust and mutual respect and that their school leadership communicates clear expectations

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to students and parents. Slightly less felt comfortable raising issues and concerns that were important to them and saw the school leadership as being effective. But a resounding 87% (about the same number who want to stay in the classroom) felt that the faculty was committed to helping every student learn.

When presented with questions directed at levels of teacher empowerment almost 2/3 felt that teachers were allowed to take steps to solve problems and were trusted to make sound professional decisions, while one half thought their faculties had effective processes in place to move forward with group decision-making and problem solving. However, a much fewer number saw teachers centrally involved in decision making about educational issues.

As responses from teachers and administrators were broken down it became apparent that these two groups viewed twenty aspects of working conditions, empowerment, and leadership very differently. Consistently administrators felt things were vastly better than their teachers did. A spread of between thirty to forty percent difference was not unusual in state-wide statistics. As frustrating as this discrepancy is, it can also be helpful for administrators and board members to review the results by accessing their district, school by school at Kansastwc@org and find ways to communicate more with their staff to narrow the gaps.

Val DeFever
Public Relations Representative



Focus Group for Rural School Board Members

Dr. Hobart Harmon and Dr. Kai Schafft, Penn State University, want to conduct a focus group 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 a research instrument for a study entitled, "Superintendent Qualifications Desired by Rural School Board Members."

This focus group 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.

School board members are encouraged to attend the NREA Convention and one of the focus groups scheduled at 11:00 a.m. on Monday, October 23 or at 2:00 p.m. on Tuesday, October 24. Specifically, the focus group 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. School board members from rural school districts 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.

A Case Study of a School District's Information Technology Rural Development Initiative

by K. Schafft, T. Alter, and J. Bridger

New research from Penn State University draws on interactional community theory to analyze the relationship between information technology and local development through a case study of a geographically isolated and economically disadvantaged rural school district. This district has used state-of-the-art information technology infrastructure in a broad-based community and economic development effort. The researchers assessed community outcomes across three dimensions: educational improvement, community identity, and economic development. They found that there has been significant positive effects on the first two dimensions, but economic impacts have been far less pronounced, raising questions about telecommunications technology as the new catalyst for rural economic revitalization.

(From the *Journal of Research in Rural Education*, 2006, 21(8). For the complete article go to the following website: <http://www.umaine.edu/jrre/21-8.pdf>)

Recruiting and Retaining High-Quality Teachers in Rural Areas

In attempts to attract and keep highly qualified teachers, rural school districts face unique challenges such as geographic and cultural isolation, salaries that are generally lower than those offered elsewhere, and multiple certification requirements in smaller schools where teachers must teach multiple grades or subjects. No Child Left Behind may exacerbate the problem by increasing the competition for highly qualified teachers. This Policy Brief examines the issue from a policy perspective, suggests strategies school districts can use to address the problem, and recommends actions for policymakers: improve incentives for teaching in hard-to-staff rural schools, promote improved recruitment and hiring practices, require and finance comprehensive induction programs, support efforts to nurture local talent, foster greater collaboration among public school systems and postsecondary institutions, create avenues for greater community involvement in hiring and keeping teachers, and support high-quality research on rural education issues.

This policy brief is available in PDF format from Edvantia at <http://www.edvantia.org/publications/searchresults.cfm?§ion=publications&area=search>. Type Carla Thomas McClure in the "Search by Author" section and highlight the title.

Why Small Works — A New Report From Rural Trust

We know small schools work...but why?

A new report by the Rural Trust explores the research evidence that helps answer this question. The report, *The Hobbit Effect: Why Small Works in Public Schools*, reveals ten common attributes of small schools that have been found to have a positive impact on students. Among these beneficial elements are: greater participation in extra-curricular activities, increased school safety, smaller class size, and wider grade-span configuration.

Though the report covers a variety of attributes, most of the positive impact from these elements stem from the close interpersonal relationships that characterize small schools. These close relationships are beneficial to students' social and emotional health, and lead to increased academic learning. In addition, close interrelationships have a positive impact on teacher morale and job satisfaction.

This report is intended to provide research-based information for citizens in rural communities who believe, as the Rural Trust does, that every child has the right to attend a good public school, close to home. It can be downloaded for free at: www.ruraledu.org/hobbiteffect.

*Reprinted from Rural Policy Matters
September 2006*

"NREA: Crossing Into Our Next Century"

**National Rural Education
Research Symposium
October 21-22, 2006
and
98th Annual NREA Convention
October 23-25, 2006**

**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 Gevert, 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.

Mark Your Calendar

October 21-25, 2006
Rural Research Symposium
October 23-25, 2006
98th Annual NREA Convention
Kansas City, MO
Contact: 405-325-7959
website: <http://www.nrea.net>

SQE Essay Contest

The Schools for Quality Education annual Essay Contest has been suspended for the 2006 year. It will be reactivated in 2007.

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

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