

# Reporter

Volume 23, Number 1

September, 2007

## SCHOOLS FOR QUALITY EDUCATION, INC.

### Public Relations Message

Interim committees and standing committees have had a busy summer gathering information on a variety of education related subjects. Their recommendations to the Legislature for the 2008 session will be formulated over the next few months. While state funding has already been determined in a general sense for next year, most of the information heard thus far has focused on needs that would require a greater commitment of education dollars.

LEPC and the 2010 Commission are both looking at the possibility of establishing an Early Childhood Agency. A recent post audit has determined that there is very little duplication of services. The 2010 Commission is exploring ways to shuffle some programs around to align them under departments and agencies that might be more appropriate. Both committees have received numerous reports on early childhood brain research and what kinds of services are being received in communities across the state. They have both heard from the Department of Education, Department of Commerce and SRS regarding the programs they all oversee for children zero to five years of age. A new term, "toxic stress" has crept into the conversation. It means we have children who live in a state of stress and anxiety due to their surroundings.

LEPC and the 2010 Commission are also looking into the teacher shortage in Kansas's school districts large, small and in-between. Even our college towns have experienced difficulty in filling some teaching positions as they watch their students being lured out of state to higher paying positions with bigger perks. Along with higher compensation, a need for expanded and continuous training for good leaders in our schools is being recognized. The number of administrators eligible to retire equals classroom teachers proportionately. There have been lively discussions on what is presently being done and what more can be done. The committees have explored ways more quality individuals can be attracted into teaching through scholarships, loan forgiveness programs and other creative incentives.

In addition there has been a good deal of time devoted to special needs populations. LEPC is looking at how best to serve the dyslexic students in our state and recently received an update on a Deaf & Hard of Hearing Student's Bill

of Rights. At the same time a special committee is meeting to make suggestions to the Legislature about early interventions for autistic children. Testimony indicates how educators wrestle with meeting the needs of these special student groups and striking a balance with what needs to be done. All size districts in all parts of the state are challenged first to find qualified staff and then to pay enough to attract them to their community. This has been shared by numerous conferees. Legislators and other committee members have been made acutely aware of the wide range of difficulties.

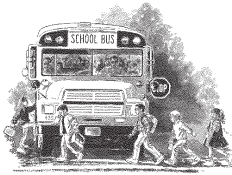
Most recently the Legislative Post Audit Committee received a report from their Post Audit Dept. on Vocational Education. With much of the funding for these programs coming from federal Carl Perkins dollars, the Department of Education is poised and waiting for new guidelines from Washington. At the same time some state policy makers are questioning what kind of programs are covered under the existing vocational education umbrella. Over recent years the focus has shifted to include not only the traditional "shop type classes" but also a broader range of life, family and health oriented classes. About 1% of the state's education dollars or \$34 million go toward vocational education classes. The approximately 15,800 students enrolling in the general life skills and vocational technical classes gain knowledge that will help them become more aware of ways to be better parents and members of society. The technology and trades and industry classes more commonly associated with Vocational Technical education help many students prepare for occupations that don't require a bachelor's degree and may help keep borderline students in high school. As the need in our society has changed it is not surprising that the offerings in this area would also need to adjust. But some legislators have questioned what the state is funding, so in the coming session it is likely that this post audit report will be closely scrutinized.

Interim committee meetings will continue into November, when they will formulate their recommendation to the Legislature. As our special need population has grown and awareness has heightened, it is likely that our educational

*(Continued on page 2)*

(Continued from page 1)

system will be charged to do more. The question remains, Can we find the "qualified" staff needed to do the job and can we afford them if we find them?



Val DeFever  
Public Relations Representative

## Rural Students Score Higher Than Cities, Not Suburbs

A higher percentage of 4th and 8th grade students in rural public schools scored at or above the Proficient level in reading, mathematics and science assessments in 2005 than did public school students in cities, although a lower percentage scored at that level compared to students in suburban schools.

This conclusion is reported in an exhaustive study, the Status of Education in Rural America, undertaken by the National Center for Education Statistics, a division within the U.S. Education Department.

The new NCES system classifies the locale of school districts and schools into one of 23 geographical categories and distinguishes between rural areas that are on the fringe of an urban area, rural areas that are at some distance, and rural areas that are remote. Using this new system, NCES found that in 2003-04 over half of all operating school districts and one-third of all public schools in the United States were in rural areas, but that one-fifth of all public school students were enrolled in rural areas.

Significantly, the NCES study found a higher dropout rate in rural areas than in suburban areas, but a lower rate than in cities. The dropout rate was determined by the percentage of persons not enrolled in school and not having completed high school among 16 to 24-year-olds.

The study found that public school expenditures per student were higher in rural areas in 2003-04 than in any other locale after adjusting for geographic cost differences. Lower teacher-to-student ratios and greater transportation costs would, however, offset some of the greater per-pupil expenditures.

More rural school teachers reported being satisfied with their teaching conditions, but a smaller percentage of rural school teachers than suburban teachers reported being satisfied with their salary. Public school teachers in rural areas earned less, on average, in 2003-04 than their peers in the other locales, even after adjusting for geographic cost differences.

The full 166 page report entitled "Status of Education in Rural America" is available at <http://nces.ed.gov/pubsearch/pubsinfo.asp?pubid=2007040>.

From Organizations Concerned with  
Rural Education (OCRE)

## Congress Should Rectify NCLB Rural Bias

Among the issues Congress should be concerned with when it considers reauthorizing the No Child Left Behind Act in 2007 is the systematic bias against small school districts in the formula used to distribute funds under Title I. That part of the act provided federal support for elementary and secondary schools serving students living in poverty.

That is the assessment of the Rural School and Community Trust.

There are four grant formulas within Title I, and with the advent of NCLB, a significantly larger share of the funds are distributed through two of these four: the so-called "Targeted Grant" that provides relatively more money per eligible student to high-poverty districts in states that do a better job of equalizing the state aid they provide to districts.

Under these two grant programs, a district's authorization is calculated using a "weighted eligibility count" that provides additional weight for each eligible student in districts that have either higher percentages of eligible students or *simply larger numbers* of eligible students.

Whether the poverty percentage or the total of eligible students is used to calculate a given district's funding depends only on which approach gives it a larger share of the funding. If the percentage of eligible students were used, then both large and small districts with the same poverty level would get the same amount *per eligible student*. But when the total number of eligible students is used, large districts gain a substantial per pupil advantage from the weight added to each additional student as the district size increases. In that case, a large district with the same percentage of eligible students as a small district will get substantially more authorization per eligible pupil.

For further analysis of this issue, go to the Rural School and Community Trust's publication titled, "Weighted Grants Skewed Toward Largest Districts: *Per Pupil Funding Varies Sharply by District Size*" at <http://www.ruraledu.org>.

From Organizations Concerned with  
Rural Education (OCRE)



## National Rural Education Advocacy Coalition Elementary and Secondary Education Act

Rural schools are a vital part of the American public education system, serving over 30 percent of the nation's students. The National Rural Education Advocacy Coalition encourages Congress to take into consideration the unique needs of rural schools as one-size-fits-all policy can have devastating effects.

NREAC believes that responsibility for determining educational methods and strategies should lie at the state and local level and therefore **advocates a fundamental transformation of the federal role in education.**

- The focus of the federal role in education should be to improve outcomes for low-income children.
- The function of the federal role in education should be to help states and school districts develop capacity, provide leadership, and provide resources, supplementing and supporting state efforts rather than dictating state and local activities.
- The terms of the basic agreement between school districts and the federal government should be clearer and fairer, taking the form of a contractual agreement with the federal government providing services based on the cost of activities.

**Accountability under ESEA should be focused on students with the highest degrees of poverty.**

- Congress should create a subgroup for students served by Title I programs that would serve as the sole trigger for federal intervention. However, all students should still be assessed and student achievement data should still be disaggregated by subgroups.
- Accountability under Title I should focus on meaningful support to improve schools rather than one-size-fits all sanctions or required set-asides that fail to consider the unique needs and challenges of geographically isolated school districts.
- It's time to find out just how well children, and particularly poor children, in our rural school districts are performing, as has been done for urban districts. Congress should authorize and fund a rural NAEP study.

**Accountability under ESEA must be made more accurate and instructionally useful.**

- States should have the flexibility to use assessment and accountability systems that measure academic progress of individual students and include multiple measures.
- The progress of special education students and English language learners should be measured based on individualized needs, without arbitrary limitations that are difficult to implement in small/rural school districts.

**Collaborative leadership is needed to improve student outcomes.**

- Schools are partners in the efforts to overcome and help mitigate the effects of poverty with other agencies and efforts, such as health care and housing.
- The NREAC reaffirms the important role of parents in ensuring the success for each child and supports parental involvement that encourages and allows district innovation.

**States, not the federal government, should set standards to ensure quality instruction.**

- Federal definitions for teacher quality do not adequately consider the unique teaching circumstances of rural schools and such definitions should remain at the state level.
- Congress should expand the definition of high-need local education agencies in the Higher Education Act to include geographically isolated school districts.
- The NREAC does not support the requirement of voluntary or any other national standards and believes that standards and curriculum should be determined at the local level.

**Funding is critical to the success of federal education programs.**

- Funding should be driven to school districts through formula grants, rather than competitive grants. Formula grants are the only way to ensure that rural districts receive their fair share of assistance.
- Title I resources should be targeted to concentrations of high-poverty students based on percentages. Targeting resources based on raw numbers of students hurts rural schools.
- Funding for rural districts continues to decline but the Rural Education Achievement Program recognizes and helps alleviate the unique challenges of geographically isolated and high-poverty rural districts. Rural school administrators support continued funding for REAP and the current flow of funds directly from the federal government to local districts.

## Mark Your Calendar

November 10-11, 2007  
NREA Rural Research Symposium  
November 12-14, 2007  
NREA Centennial Convention  
Oklahoma City, Oklahoma  
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, Steve Watts  
USD #292 — Wheatland  
785-938-2253

Sec./Treas., Darrin Herl  
USD #292 — Wheatland  
785-673-4213

President-Elect, Dennis Dowell  
USD #482 — Dighton  
620-397-2835

Past-Pres., Glennys Doane  
USD #272 — Waconda  
785-781-4328

Region #1, Larry Lysell  
USD #241 — Wallace Co. Schools  
785-852-4252

Region #2, Jeff Travis  
USD #272 — Waconda  
785-781-4328

Region #3, David Roberts  
USD #224 — Clifton-Clyde  
785-455-3313

Region #4, Jerry Cullen  
USD #220 — Ashland  
620-635-2220

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

Region #6, Julie Lair  
USD #461 — Neodesha  
620-325-2610

Public Relations, Val DeFever  
620-870-9698

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

