Needs of Texas Rural Schools

A Presentation to the School Finance Commission of Texas
March 19, 2018
A Comparison With Other States

Rural School and Community Trust
2015-16

Data from National Center for Educational Statistics
Texas

At nearly 610,000 total students, Texas has the nation's largest rural student enrollment. Rural poverty rates are higher than average, as are the percentage of minority students and the percentage of English language learners. Instructional spending per pupil is very low, and funding is among the most inequitable in the nation. Although NAEP scores hover around the median, Texas has high graduation rates among rural students both in general and among minorities and those living in poverty. Rural Texan students are more likely than their counterparts in other states to enroll in AP courses, but less likely to take the ACT or SAT.
TEXAS - At nearly 610,000 total students, Texas has the nation's largest rural student enrollment. Rural poverty rates are higher than averages, as are the percentage of minority students and the percentage of English language learners. Instructional spending per pupil is very low, and funding is among the most inequitable in the nation. Although NAEP scores hover around the median, Texas has high graduation rates among rural students, both in general and among minorities and those living in poverty. Rural Texas students are more likely than their counterparts in other states to enroll in an AP course, but less likely to take the ACT or SAT.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Importance</th>
<th>Notable</th>
<th>Important</th>
<th>Very Important</th>
<th>Crucial</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>TX Rank*</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>128</td>
<td>231</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**GAUGE 1: Number of rural students**
- Total: 610,000
- US median: 94,986

**GAUGE 2: Student and Family Diversity**
- TX Rank* 12

**GAUGE 3: Educational Policy Context**
- TX Rank* 12

**GAUGE 4: Educational Outcomes**
- TX Rank* 12

**GAUGE 5: College Readiness**
- TX Rank* 12

* A rank of 1 is most crucial or most urgent.
TEA Data from Snapshots

- Teacher and Administrator Salaries Lowest in State
- Teacher Turnover Rate (20.4) is second highest among school groupings
- Lowest Dropout Rate (.6)
- Second Highest Attendance Rate (96.1)
- Highest Graduation Rate (96.7)
Performance and Diseconomy of Scale in Texas School Districts.  
Dr. Richard Hooker  1996

- The districts with the highest rate of attendance had the lowest enrollment
- The districts with the lowest dropout rate had the lowest enrollment
- The smaller the school the more likely a student will participate in extra-curricular activities; and participation in the life of the school decreases alienation from the school
- The cost, on a per pupil basis, to operate a school increases as the size of the school decreases
Some Cost Factors

- Rurality adds to the cost of nearly all goods and services
- Student transportation costs are high
- Diseconomy of Scale
- Staff turnover
  - a. Distance traveled
  - b. Housing shortage
  - c. Salary
Consolidation Is Not the Answer

- Transportation costs increase and students must ride long distances to school
- Reams of research on the issue show no cost savings
- Students are limited to participation in extra-curricular activities
- Consolidation is an economic issue in that a school closure usually means the total demise of rural towns
- State policy is to create more small schools i.e. charters
Most Pressing Needs of Rural Schools

- Recruitment and Retention of Teachers
- Meeting the needs of English Language Learners
Small and Mid-Size School Adjustment Should be Continued

- Small School Adjustment has been invaluable in assisting our rural schools
- The Legislature has recognized those differences and has removed the “small by choice” adjustment with a plan to phase in the entire adjustment in 6 years.
- Those rural schools who have been excluded need that help now to meet the critical areas they face
A Final Point

- The policy of closing so-called failing schools should be reviewed.
- School districts ordered to be closed are almost without exception located in low socioeconomic areas and have limited financial resources.
- The state should set aside a pool of money for grants to be used to assist those schools based on financial condition.
- One need look no further than the Premont ISD in South Texas for an effective model.