Rural Education and ESEA Reauthorization

U.S. Senate Rural Education Caucus
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Marty Strange
Policy Director
Rural School and Community Trust
Some basic facts about rural education in the United States.

The “rural preference” in the Investing in Innovation grant competition.

The bias against small districts in the Title I formula.
Rural School Enrollment Growing

- Why Rural Matters 2007 (04-05 data)
  - 9,974,462 students in rural schools
- Why Rural Matters 2009 (06-07 data)
  - 10,572,790 students in rural schools
- Latest count is over 11,200,000 (08-09 data)
Averages Do Not Mean Much in Rural Education

Percentage of rural minority students: 22.2%
   NM 81.6%    VT 2.6%

Percentage of rural student poverty: 40.6%
   NM  81.3%    CT 7.2%

Percentage of rural mobility: 12.8%
   AZ 20.9%    PA 9.0%
Poverty Rates Vary Even Among “High Poverty” Rural States

Percent Rural Students in Poverty*

- US
- Alabama
- West Virginia
- Kentucky
- South Carolina
- Oklahoma
- Arkansas
- Mississippi
- Louisiana
- New Mexico

*as measured by the percentage of students qualifying for federally subsidized meals
Rural high school graduation rate: 69.2%

SC  52.3%  NE  93.9
Rural 900 Districts:

1. Districts designated as locale 32, 33, 41, 42, 43.
2. 900 highest poverty districts (approximately 10% of all rural and small town districts)

2008-2009 Facts:

1. Serve about 1.3 million school-aged children
2. 37% are disadvantaged based on Title I definitions
3. 59% are children of color (28% African-American, 23% Hispanic, 8% Native)
Regional Clusters of High-Poverty Rural Districts
Some Realities about Rural Education

1. Some of the largest rural student populations are in populous urban states where rural people constitute a small demographic – and political - - minority.

2. In some of these large urban states with large numbers but small percentages of rural students, the rural population is not as socio-economically challenged as it is in many smaller, more rural states.

3. The highest concentrations of rural poverty and minority students are in small rural states where rural people are a demographic majority or a large minority.
What effect did “Rural Competitive Preference “ have on i3 competition?

Our report was prompted by some curious claims.
We give competitive preference to applications for projects that would implement innovative practices, strategies, or programs that are designed to focus on the unique challenges of high-need students in schools within a rural LEA (as defined in this notice) and address the particular challenges faced by students in these schools. To meet this priority, applications must include practices, strategies, or programs that are designed to improve student achievement or student growth, close achievement gaps, decrease dropout rates, increase high school graduation rates, or improve teacher and principal effectiveness in one or more rural LEAs (emphasis supplied).
We Searched for: “Authentically Rural” i3 Proposals

- Based on innovations that are expressly applicable in rural settings
- Clearly focused on rural schools, not appendages of urban projects.
- Serving high-needs rural schools.
We do not challenge the results of the i3 competition or question whether the highly rated proposals should have been awarded grants.

Concern: Whether the rural preference claim was well made and well evaluated. Did it serve a useful purpose by improving the effectiveness of i3 as a program to encourage innovation in high-needs rural schools?
The innovation -- designed to meet unique rural challenges?
The extent of rural participation – substantial or incidental?
The substance of the claim – well defined plan or vague assurance?
The money – Are rural LEAs official partners, or passive recipients?
The review – Due diligence: Did readers give careful attention to the CRP standard and explain the basis for points awarded?
## RP Claims by Grant Category

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>No. Proposals Submitted</th>
<th>No. Proposals Making the RP Claim</th>
<th>No. Proposals Not Making RP Claim</th>
<th>Percent Making RP Claim</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Scale-up</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>68.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Validation</td>
<td>355</td>
<td>181</td>
<td>174</td>
<td>51.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Development</td>
<td>1,324</td>
<td>458</td>
<td>866</td>
<td>34.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>1,698</strong></td>
<td><strong>652</strong></td>
<td><strong>1,046</strong></td>
<td><strong>38.4%</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
## Probability of Success

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>No. Making the Claim That Were Highly Rated</th>
<th>No. Not Making the Claim That Were Highly Rated</th>
<th>Probability of Success if Making the Claim</th>
<th>Probability of Success if Not Making the Claim</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Scale-up</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>30.8%</td>
<td>0.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Validation</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>4.4%</td>
<td>4.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Development</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>1.5%</td>
<td>2.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>2.9%</td>
<td>2.9%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
No more than 4 can claim rural origin. Three of these are the only three projects that will operate entirely in rural schools.

4 with urban origins have some previous rural usage (not necessarily adaptation to unique rural challenges).

11 have no evidence of prior use in, or adaptation to, rural settings.
Most proposals present no clear intent to adapt the innovation to unique rural challenges.

Fidelity to intervention model is sometimes mandated by research design – one size fits all.

Only one proposal includes in its evaluation design any attempt to determine if the innovation is suitable for adaptation to rural context.
Zero Rural Adaptation

- Half the proposals address neither the adaptability to rural schools nor the internal and external validity of the evidence supporting use of the innovation in a rural context.

- These applicants assume, without discussion or acknowledgement of the merits of the issue, that an innovation whose origin and prior use are entirely urban (or suburban) will work just fine in a rural setting.
Two projects will operate exclusively in high-needs rural settings.
Six projects clearly have “minimal” rural effort (less than 5%)

Many of the rest contained plans so vague as to make any estimate of the rural effort nothing more than a guess.
- Four projects have “substantial” rural effort (but not necessarily high needs) (25-75% total effort).
- Four projects had “moderate” rural effort (5-25%)
- Three projects did not include enough information to hazard even a guess.

We could identify by name 150 rural LEAs. 77% of these are part of three projects. Most identify 1-8. Some only say rural districts “to be named later.”
19 applicants received a total of 78 RCP points, average = 4.1. 68% of possible points awarded.

- Average raw score gain of 1.37 points.
- 1 proposal received no points. 18 received one or more point from two or more readers).
- Over half the readers (29 of 57) awarded the maximum of 2 points.
Three readers of the same proposal:

Reader 1: The applicant is "attentive to the way rural schools' needs would differ from urban and suburban schools" -- but does not say what those differences are or how the project would address them and awarded two points anyway.

Reader 2: The project "specifically addresses the needs" of rural schools -- but does not say in what way and awarded only one point.

Reader 3: Gave zero points commenting that the rural preference was “not addressed” by the applicant, despite the same reader having observed earlier in a comment on another scoring criteria that the project addresses the need of "supportive, collaborative professional development that is often missing in rural schools."
Rudderless Readers

For most experts in education, challenges in rural education are generally viewed as similar to those in urban education, and probably not as daunting.

For many readers, the mere fact that the proposal met the bare minimum requirement that at least one rural school district be served was enough to earn points.

And there was no scoring rubric that gave any uniform guidance to readers about how to assess the rural claim.
Only three “authentically rural” proposals.

Found more proposals that are:

- Of urban origin and design
- Centered in urban institutions or organizations
- Serving primarily urban schools
- Reflecting little thought about rural context
- Involving little more than enough rural participation to justify making the rural claim.
Many of these applicants were simply **taking advantage** of the rules of the game. And the referees were ill-prepared to call fouls.
Four Factors Undermine Rural Preference

1. Low threshold of effort required to qualify for rural points.
2. Double bonus points available for simply extending an urban project into a single rural LEA.
3. Lack of a scoring rubric to guide readers in determining whether a project was designed to meet unique challenges of high-needs students in rural schools.
4. Frequent low level of reader due diligence in awarding points.
Alternative Approach: Level the Playing Field and Focus on Innovation

- Set aside funds for a rural innovation competition.
- Focus on acutely rural challenges.
- Give priority to applications from high-needs rural districts or collaborations composed of majority high-needs rural districts.
- Provide prior support – technical assistance, research support, proposal writing.
- Search for what is working in rural, high-needs districts – “innovations that have no name.”
Rural Innovation Hampered by Lack of Research

Rural education is in a virtual desert when it comes to research. Very little attention to the unique challenges of rural education. Or to the kinds of innovations that may be in use now.

Congress should consider establishing an office within ED to focus on rural education research and policy to:

1. Document and assess indigenous innovations
2. Encourage research into innovations that address challenges.
3. Expand and spread the expertise needed to evaluate proposals for rural education innovation
4. Evaluate the impact of public policies on rural education.
There are actually four grant formulas within Title I.

- Basic
- Concentration
- Targeted
- Education Finance Incentive (EFIG)

Each district may be eligible for one to four of these grants. But all grants are combined into one.
Dividing the Title I Pie.

- Each formula calculates the percentage of the total nationwide funding that each district is entitled to receive.

- Since the total is a fixed amount appropriated by Congress, any provision in the formula that gives more to some districts, takes away from all other districts.
Weighting Student Count

Not all disadvantaged children are counted equally.

A “weighting system” artificially inflates the eligible student count under Targeted and EFIG grants by counting some Title I students more than once.

Objective: Send more money per Title I student to districts with “high concentrations” of poverty.
Perverse Effect of Weighting System as Designed:

- Favors a few very large districts, no matter how low the student poverty rate
- Disfavors smaller districts, no matter how high their poverty rate.
Two weighting systems are used to weight student count in each district.

- **Percentage Weighting** – based on percentage of students in a district who are Title I eligible.
- **Number Weighting** -- based on the number of Title I eligible students in a district.

Whichever system inflates the student count more for a district is the system used for that district in the Title I formula.
**Weighting Brackets Based on Percentage of Students Who Are Title I Eligible**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Percentage of School Age Children Who Are Title I Eligible</th>
<th>Weight Given Each Student in Bracket</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Up to 15.58</td>
<td>1.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15.59-22.11</td>
<td>1.75</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>22.12-30.16</td>
<td>2.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>30.17-38.24</td>
<td>3.25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>38.25 and up</td>
<td>4.00</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### Weighting Brackets Based on Number of Title I Students

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Number of Title I Eligible School Age Children</th>
<th>Weight Given Each Student in Bracket</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1-691</td>
<td>1.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>692-2,262</td>
<td>1.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2,263-7,851</td>
<td>2.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7,852-35,514</td>
<td>2.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>35,515 and up</td>
<td>3.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
## Impact of Number Weighting on Districts Separated into Poverty Groupings (CRS data 08-09)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>All Districts</th>
<th>Total Title I Students</th>
<th>Title I Eligibility Rate</th>
<th>Gain (Loss) Due to Number Weighting</th>
<th>Gain (Loss) Per Title I Student</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Very High Poverty</td>
<td>2,216,853</td>
<td>34.9%</td>
<td>($33,984,200)</td>
<td>-$15.33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High Poverty</td>
<td>2,224,983</td>
<td>25.6%</td>
<td>$24,105,000</td>
<td>$10.83</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Low Poverty</td>
<td>2,231,829</td>
<td>18.1%</td>
<td>$49,436,100</td>
<td>$22.15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Very Low Poverty</td>
<td>2,212,120</td>
<td>10.2%</td>
<td>$10,550,000</td>
<td>$4.77</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
# Very High Poverty Districts
## Separated Into Size Groupings
(CRS data 08-09)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Very High Poverty Districts</th>
<th>Total Title I Students</th>
<th>Title I Eligibility Rate</th>
<th>Gain (Loss) Due to Number Weighting</th>
<th>Gain (Loss) Per Title I Student</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Col. 1</td>
<td>Col. 2</td>
<td>Col. 3</td>
<td>Col. 5</td>
<td>Col. 6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Very Large</td>
<td>553,779</td>
<td>33.5%</td>
<td>$78,404,200</td>
<td>$141.58</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Large</td>
<td>559,135</td>
<td>34.2%</td>
<td>$15,375,800</td>
<td>$27.50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Small</td>
<td>549,732</td>
<td>36.3%</td>
<td>-$64,390,200</td>
<td>-$117.13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Very Small</td>
<td>554,207</td>
<td>35.6%</td>
<td>-$63,374,000</td>
<td>-$114.35</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Very Low Poverty Districts
Separated into Size Groupings

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Very Low Poverty Districts</th>
<th>Total Title I Students</th>
<th>Title I Eligibility Rate</th>
<th>Gain (Loss) Due to Number Weighting</th>
<th>Gain (Loss) Per Title I Student</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Col. 1</td>
<td>Col. 2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Very Large</td>
<td>553,779</td>
<td>11.3%</td>
<td>$82,520,500</td>
<td>$149.65</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Large</td>
<td>559,135</td>
<td>10.6%</td>
<td>$23,318,500</td>
<td>$42.10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Small</td>
<td>549,732</td>
<td>9.7%</td>
<td>-$42,795,500</td>
<td>-$77.26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Very Small</td>
<td>554,207</td>
<td>9.3%</td>
<td>-$52,493,500</td>
<td>-$94.95</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Two simple correlations between:

1. The difference between a district’s allocation share under Basic Grant (unweighted) and its share under Targeted Grant (weighted)

And, for number weighting:

2a. The number of Title I students in district = .871

And for percentage weighting:

2b. The percentage of Title I students in district = .077

The number of Title I students far more closely correlated to allocation share than is the percentage of Title I students.

In practical terms, there is really only one weighting system – number weighting.
Statewide Per Pupil Expenditure

- Supposed to account for the geographic differences in cost of education.

- Probably a better measure of differences in the fiscal capacity and public support for education.
High Poverty Rural Districts Are in Low-Spending States

- 12 states spent over $11,000 per pupil on a statewide average in 2008-09.
  Only three -- Alaska, Maine, and Vermont -- have any Rural 900 LEAs. Collectively, less than 1% of all Rural 900 Title I students.

- 14 states spent less than $8,000 per pupil on a statewide average in 2008-09.
  All but one of these states have Rural 900 LEAs. Collectively, 59% of all Rural 900 Title I students.
Three Take-Aways

1. Rural education is more varied and complex than many think it is.
2. The role of competition in rural school innovation can be better served than it was under Round 1 of i3.
3. Title I formula reform is badly needed if high-poverty rural schools are to be treated equitably.
Thank you.

Marty Strange, Policy Director
Rural School and Community Trust

www.ruraledu.org
www.formulafairness.com
(802) 728-4383
marty.strange@comcast.net